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02 November 2006

An Analysis of the First Movement of Mozart's K.465 in Relation to the Idea of Rhetoric and Oration

I. Introduction

While there are several analytical studies of the famous introduction to Mozart's Dissonant Quartet K.465, few of these studies elaborate on the relevance of this introduction to the rest of the first movement. Yet, if we are to follow the idea of music as rhetoric as propounded by Enlightenment writers with regards to instrumental music, the most natural and crucial follow-up analysis would be to see how the ideas in this extraordinary introduction are stated and elaborated upon in the rest of the piece. An notable exception to this is Mark Evan Bonds, who did indeed do a brief analysis of K.465 in his book. Yet, not only is it extremely brief, it also seems to miss the main idea of the piece itself, which rather weakens this example in his argument for the idea of *rhetoric* in classical music.

To remedy this analytical defect, we will first briefly discuss and define this idea of rhetoric which we are trying to measure K.465 against. We will then engage in a detailed analysis of the first movement of K.465, and find out whether these ideas also apply to K.465.

II. The Idea of Rhetoric in Instrumental Music

Koch wrote in his Musikalisches Lexikon of 1802 that rhetoric is “the name given by some teachers of music to that body of knowledge belonging to composition by which individual melodic sections are united into a whole, according to a definite purpose” (qtd. in Bonds 53), or, as later other writers put it, “unity in variety” (Bonds 98). Indeed, as Bonds notes, rhetoric in most 18th century

writings is closely tied to “broader conceptual issues of large-scale form” (Bonds 53).

And in this issue of large-scale form, the Hauptsatz occupies a dominant position. Kirnberger defines Hauptsatz as “a period within a musical work that incorporates the expression and the whole essence of the melody” (qtd. in Bonds 94). The implications of this idea of a Hauptsatz seems twofold. On one hand, it supports the idea of “unity in variety”, which Bonds calls “one of the most important aesthetic doctrines of the eighteenth century” (Bonds 98). On the other hand, it also supports to a certain extent the idea of music as oration,¹ in the sense that the Hauptsatz can be seen as the thesis of the oration; and since “ideas ... flow out of the Hauptsatz” (Marpurg, qtd. in Bonds 102), the rest of the piece can also conceivably be paralleled with the rest of the oration, all of which is in some sort of relation to the Hauptsatz. More specifically, Mattheson argues that an entire musical work “must observe the same six parts that are normally prescribed for the orator, namely: the *introduction*, the *narration*, the *proposition*, the *proof*, the *refutation*, and the *closing*, otherwise known as: Exordium, Narratio, Propositio, Confirmatio, Confutatio, and Peroratio” (Bonds 85-86). Here we must note the dichotomy between the general (“unity in variety”) and the specific (structure of an oration). Yet this is surely far from a black and white situation; rather, it can be seen as a spectrum, with the general at one end, and the specific at the other end.

It is indeed from this vantage point of rhetoric that we approach the analysis of K.465, to confirm, first, whether the piece conforms to the idea of rhetoric at all, and if it does, the degree to which it conforms with the specific in the idea of rhetoric. However, as Bonds notes, “one's evaluation of the

¹ Bonds notes that Mattheson “calls the musicalwork a Klangrede, an oration in notes” (Bonds 85).

relationship among thematic ideas in any individual work or movement depends largely upon one's broader belief in (or skepticism toward) the very legitimacy of such connections" (Bonds 101). I will not pretend that I am completely neutral on this subject, but will instead allow the analysis to speak for itself.

III. The Idea²

Bonds notes that there are two motifs, which he calls motifs "a" and "b",³ that are expanded upon and varied throughout the movement, yet he fails to note the crucial importance of the relationship between the two motifs on the entire piece. Indeed, if there is one Idea that governs the entire movement, it would be this relationship, and not the two motifs themselves. This is not to say that the two motifs are trivial (they are not), but rather that the two motifs are themselves merely manifestations, rather than the essence of, this Idea.

The most obvious manifestation of this Idea is indeed quite direct: the amount of sheer contrast between the introduction and the movement proper is astounding. Not only do we emerge from dissonance into consonance, minor into major, but there is also a peculiar change from a $\frac{3}{4}$ meter to common time. This wealth of contrasts between even the general sense of the introduction and the movement proper should give hints as to the identity of this fundamental Idea that Mozart attempts to expound in this movement (if not the entire work). As Simon Keefe points out, the analogy of "darkness to light" is a common description of the contrast between the introduction and the movement proper in

² While Kirnberger notes that "the Hauptsatz is generally called the 'theme'" (Bonds 94), we will use the word *Idea* as a synonym for the Hauptsatz in the following analysis to avoid confusion.

³ According to Bonds, motif "a" is a "descending line", and "b" an "ascending line" (Bonds 102-103). Note that for the purposes of this analysis the rhythm of the motif will not be considered, in order to concentrate on the motif, and avoid an overly broad scope of discussion.

secondary literature (90). It is also, however, a metaphor that seems to fit with the Idea very well.

It is also in the context of this contrast between darkness and light that we can fully understand the relationship between Bonds's two motifs. Indeed, to even say that there are two motifs that govern the piece would be to completely miss the point, for there is only one motif. What Bonds calls the “b” motif is the antithesis of the “a” motif: not only is it technically the retrograde or inversion of “a”, it is treated as an antithesis throughout the movement, as we shall see shortly. And it is precisely this that determines the entire structure of the piece, rendering the notion of analyzing the piece in terms of sonata form superficial, and only useful insofar as it gives us the most general sense of structure.

It must also be noted that this motif itself is not arbitrary. It is, insofar as the Idea is concerned, the best motif. For in both this Idea and its corresponding motif, we see religious/philosophical influences on music. In many western religions (not the least of which being Christianity), we see many instances of dualism: for example, heaven vs. hell, light vs. darkness. Another parallel in this dualism would be ascent vs. descent, and the idea of the ascent to heaven (or the light) and the descent to hell (or darkness). When we realize this, the reason for the choice of this particular motif (and its antithesis) on which to expound the Idea becomes obvious.

IV. The Introduction of K.465

Now that we have a general sense of the Idea that drives this piece, it is necessary to find out how this idea structures the entire piece, and we will begin this task by examining the introduction itself. Due to the popularity of this introduction with music theorists, there are a variety of excellent analysis of the

harmonic implications and cross-relations in the introduction.⁴ However, this is not the style of analysis that we will take, since we are interested more in the motivic aspect of the introduction.⁵

Bonds, among many other writers, noted the usage of the descending motif in the chromatic cello line from m. 1 to m. 12.⁶ However, there is another layer in the music that is at least as important; and this would be the lines of the three other instruments. Indeed, all of them start with a short version of the descending motif, followed immediately by the ascending motif, which not only neatly ends that particular phrase, but also lays out the Idea. Even the cello itself alternates between the descending and ascending motifs: immediately after the ending a long exposition of the descending motif on m. 12, the ascending motif is introduced in m. 13, only to be contradicted again one bar later by the descending motif. During this time, the other instruments have not been idle; the dense polyphony is chalk full of alternating statements of both ascending and descending motifs, mostly in a strong chromatic version of the motifs. All this comes to a temporary halt on m. 16, where the music enters into a limbo-like state, until a heavily modified diatonic version of the ascending motif appears in the cello in m. 19. Yet another version of the ascending motif appears in both violins a bar later (m. 20), and which also brings the

⁴ Here I refer the reader to William DeFotis, "Rehearings: Mozart, Quartet in C, K. 465." *19th Century Music* 6.1 (1982): 31-38, and Simon P. Keefe, "An Integrated 'Dissonance': Mozart's 'Haydn' Quartets and the Slow Introduction of K.465." *Mozart-Jahrbuch 2002* (2002): 87-103.

⁵ A clarification of the exact meanings of the "ascending" and "descending" motifs is in order. It is more accurate to call them the ascending and descending variations of the motif, but is inconvenient here due to the wordiness, and so "ascending motif" and "descending motif" are used instead, even though it is really the same motif. Also, both mean a scalar line (the strong version being chromatic and the weaker diatonic), and does not include arpeggios, unless it is a clear variation of some version of the motif (ex. the arpeggiated variation of the version of the ascending motif stated in the first theme, which is used in the development section). The exclusion of normal arpeggios is due to the fact that they are common as harmonic accompaniment during that period.

⁶ The score used is from the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*.

introduction to a close. We can see in this introduction a very clear presentation of the fundamental Idea that governs the entire piece, namely the juxtaposition of ascent and descent, or in a broader sense light and darkness.

Another interesting way to analyze the effect of this passage with regards to the idea of rhetoric is presented by Keefe. Since this introduction would be the equivalent to the exordium in an oratorio, Keefe quotes Cicero as distinguishing between two types of exordium: the direct principium, and the indirect insinuatio. The introduction would be an exemplary model for the insinuatio approach, since “the voices creep in quietly one by one, gradually and almost imperceptibly increasing the number of parts from one to two, three, four, with unobtrusive subjects avoiding large leaps or faster rhythms” (Kierkendale, qtd. in Keefe 99), which is exactly the description of insinuatio in music.⁷ Both methods of analysis agree that this introduction can be strongly paralleled to the exordium in an oration.

V. The Exposition of K.465

What can be called the “first theme” of K.465 is essentially many repetitions of a diatonic version⁸ of the ascending motif strung together. This also dictates the general sense of the entire section of music until the entrance of the “theme” in the dominant at m. 56; here the ascending motif dominates completely, although there are a few statements of the descending motif (see the nice alteration in the violins between the ascending and descending motifs from the second half of m. 35 to m. 37⁹). Even the

⁷ The whole paragraph prior to this footnote is a summary of Keefe's argument on p.99.

⁸ By “diatonic”, I mean a scale in which no two adjacent intervals are both semitones, and by “chromatic”, everything else.

⁹ One should note here the use of piano with the descending motif and sforzando with the ascending motif, suggesting the dominance of the ascending motif. This will be reversed in the second theme, as we shall see shortly.

transition, starting at m. 44 with the cello, is dominated mostly by the ascending motif, though it does introduce what Bonds call the “not terribly significant variation of a previous idea” (103). While perhaps being not terribly significant, it does contribute to another weak “two voice”¹⁰ variation of the ascending motif that will be introduced later on in the second theme.

The second theme starts on m. 56 with a noisy and bold statement of the thesis in the first violin, to be immediately followed by the weak “two voice” variation of the ascending motif. This version of the ascending motif is rather hesitant; it is not as self-affirming as other versions especially in this context since not only is it not a straight scalar line, it is also played mostly piano, in contrast to the descending motif, which is played forte.¹¹ The harmonic progression that accompanies it from m. 60 to m. 67 is also quite unstable, with the movement around the circle of fifths. This destabilization of what was a stable ascending motif can be seen as a reaction to the bold entry (or reentry, if the Introduction is included) of the descending motif itself. This opposition of descending and ascending motifs does not get resolved in this portion of the second thematic area; instead, the “limbo” music comes back for one measure at m. 72, functioning similar to an introduction to the second half of the second thematic area.

The second half of the second thematic area starts, motivically, on the second half of m. 73. While this might at first seem to not be in any way a splitting point structurally (and may still not be; m. 72 seems like a much better splitting point), it is motivically of crucial importance; a strong chromatic version of the descending motif is almost simultaneously introduced in all four instruments. This is also,

¹⁰ “Two voice” because it can be seen as two ascending motifs a third apart compressed into one line.

¹¹ As noted before, this is a reverse of what happened in the first theme (see footnote 9 above).

of course, the first introduction of the chromatic descending motif since the Introduction itself. And the significance of this is not lost on the rest of the exposition; almost immediately after this chromatic descending motif entrance,¹² there are statements of the descending motif everywhere (and uninterrupted too), until m. 86. This is similar to the dominance of the ascending motif in the first thematic area; here it is the descending motif asserting its dominance over the ascending motif.

This dominance of the descending motif, however, is broken by the same instrument that originally introduced it, in m. 87, with a sweeping forte statement of the ascending motif that spans more than 2 octaves. As can be expected, the music enters “limbo”¹³ again for three measures afterwards (m. 88-91), while cadencing strongly on G. After the cadence (m. 91), we enter a section that can be called the “closing theme”, since in this section the descending and ascending motifs are synthesized. We see a return of the same variation of the ascending motif used in the first theme, but this time, due to the contrast with previous statements of the ascending motif in the second thematic area, seem not as assertive: not only is it played piano, it also uses plain eighth notes, in contrast to the triplet eighths or sixteenths used in the second thematic area for statements of both the ascending and descending motifs. Also note that the descending motif comes back and alternates with the ascending motif a few bars into the section, breaking whatever dominance the ascending motif had left (if it had any in this section at all). This culminates in the section-climax at m. 103, when both ascending and descending motifs are stated together, with two instruments playing each, a perfect synthesis. Note also the poignant A-flat in the

¹² There is indeed one bar of “limbo” music (m. 76) right after the statement of the chromatic descending motif, but this can easily be seen as a phrasing requirement.

¹³ This, unlike the previous “limbo”, does not use the “limbo” idea from the Introduction, but it does have the same sense of “hovering”, with minimal (line-wise, not harmony-wise) sense of direction.

cello; not only does it seem like an echo of the A-natural/A-flat cross-relation in the Introduction (there is a high A-natural in the first violin the 8th note directly before), it also further highlights the importance of this section-climax.

VI. The Development

The “development” section of K.465 starts on m. 107 and ends on m. 154. Interestingly, the entire section can be called a retransition in the sense that one of its main purposes is to transition from the synthesis back to the ascending motif dominated first theme. Indeed, amid all the “limbo-like” ideas and harmonic instability, we only see statements of the ascending motif, both the first theme version of it, and an arpeggiated variation of that version, with not a single statement of the descending motif.¹⁴ This section, in the oration schema, can be seen as something similar to the proof; something to reassert the dominance of the ascending motif.

VII. The Recapitulation

The recapitulation starts in m. 155, and mainly follows the setup of the exposition. However, like all recapitulations in sonatas, there are changes, and it is these changes that we will concern ourselves with in this section, especially changes affecting the motifs.

The main changes in the recapitulation are not directly related to the motifs; they are mainly concerned with the enrichment of harmonic texture (doubled lines, increased polyphony). However, the transition is mostly cut out (except for the cadence at the end), rather than transposed or modified, which

¹⁴ There are some arpeggiated downward movement at the end, but they are not directly related (as a variation) to any version of the descending motif, and can be seen in this context as an aesthetic way of closing the development section: it sets up a little contrast so that the return of the first theme sounds “fresh”.

considerably lessens the juxtaposition of the ascending and descending motifs. Its absence also lessens the expectation of the second thematic area since there is no prolonged buildup. Of course, the fact that the descending motif (i.e. second thematic area) comes back in the tonic key also contributes to this.

The beginning of the coda (which starts on m. 227) is the same as the development section, which may well be intentional: to make it seem like there is a repeat. However, it quickly veers away, into what seems almost like a summary of the development, with prolonged harmonic instability for the first 5 bars (along with statements of a fairly strong semi-chromatic version of the ascending motif, and some “limbo” music), followed by a strong cadence in the tonic (m. 235). Then we have what can be seen as a celebration of the dominance of the ascending motif over the descending motif (or light over darkness), with multiple forte statements of the arpeggiated version of the ascending motif that was used in the development section. Yet, the ending is of synthesis; note, in m. 241 to m. 244, that even though the most immediately notable line is the first violin playing the ascending motif, both the second violin and viola play the descending motif in half notes.

VIII. Relationship of Analysis to the Idea of Rhetoric

After this analysis, the relationship of K.465 to the idea of rhetoric should be clear. Indeed, one can even call K.465 an exemplary example of the idea of rhetoric; the coherence of the music, motivically speaking, is stunning. It is also with this analysis that we may conclude, not only that ideas in the rest of the piece “[flow] out of the Hauptsatz [or Idea]” (Bonds 102), but that it does so to the point that the Idea itself dictates the form, rather than follow it. Also to be noted here is the fact that, even though the piece does not follow the oration schema exactly, it does have the main elements of it: the exordium/narratio

(introduction), propositio (first theme), confirmatio (development section¹⁵), confutatio (second theme), and the peroratio (synthesis, i.e. coda).

One may well say, after reading this analysis, that the idea being postulated as the main Hauptsatz of the piece is too general; indeed, scales of all sorts can be seen in many, perhaps most, classical pieces. In defense, I will draw attention to the amount of scalar motion in this piece, and the position in the structure of the movement that they occupy. Both what can be called the “first” and “second” themes are heavily scalar; the first being a series ascending scales strung together, and the second being a strong (loud) and long descending scale followed by a “timid” ascending response. While scales are indeed commonly used during the classical period, few works exhibit such strict scalar motion in their very themes; for example, none of the other five Haydn Quartets¹⁶ have such strictly scalar themes, especially with such clear scalar contrast (ascending vs. descending) between the first and second themes.

Circumstantial evidence, especially seemingly common ones, cannot prove the intention of the composer, but when enough point to the same source, it is impossible for us to ignore it completely. Indeed, it can even be asked whether it is necessary to prove intention; for, as Mattheson puts it, “experienced masters proceed in an orderly manner, even when they do not think about it” (qtd. in Bonds 87).

¹⁵ The development section can be seen as related to the proof (confirmatio) in the sense that it reasserts the dominance of the first theme, after it was displaced by the second in the second thematic area.

¹⁶ K.387, 421 (K⁶.417b), 428 (K⁶.421b), 458, and 464.

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