

The Music Style and Performance Analysis of the First Movement of Kabalevsky's Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46)

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Abstract: *The Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) stands as a representative work of Soviet composer Kabalevsky. This piece was composed during the 20th century, a time marked by a push to break away from conventions and experiment with the full spectrum of musical possibilities. Nonetheless, the musical style of the piece is a mix of traditional classical sonata form and modern musical expression. The melody is beautifully crafted and infuses modern musical nuances. This article uses this work as an example. By analyzing the creative background and musical writing style of the piece, it explores how to understand the musical performance style and the 20th century music style from the aspects of key touch, pedal, rhythm, speed, and force.*

Keywords: Kabalevsky, Piano Sonata, Piano Performance, 20th Century Music Style.

1. Introduction

Dmitry Borisovich Kabalevsky has composed a total of three piano sonatas, with the most famous being "Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major" (Op.46), which was created in 1946. The melody of this piece is beautiful and the rhythm is crisp. In terms of style, it retains the structural characteristics of classical sonatas while also showcasing the musical features of the 20th century. It is suitable for young people who are just getting into the 20th century music style to practice and perform. To better assist performers in mastering this piece, the author, drawing from his own performance experience, offers the following analysis of the piece's musical style and key performance points.

2. Composers and Works Overview

Kabalevsky was an outstanding composer, music educator, and music theorist in the Soviet Union in the 20th century. Throughout his life, he devoted himself to creating music for young children and cared about their music education. Throughout his life, he produced numerous works across a wide range of genres. He composed not only for the piano, but also for chorus, opera, symphony, and film music. He particularly loved composing music with teenagers as the theme, and his music style was optimistic and cheerful, with lively and vivid melodies, beautiful and pleasant to listen to, much loved by the Soviet people at the time.

Kabalevsky's F Major Third Piano Sonata (Op.46) was composed in 1946, the same year that the Soviet people won their victory in World War II. At this time, the Soviet people were rebuilding their homeland under the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, full of enthusiasm and passion. As a proud Soviet Communist Party member,

Kabalevsky combined the fiery social construction atmosphere of the time with the Soviet people's yearning for peace and a better life, and wrote this work. The work has a lively rhythm and a distinct musical character, reflecting the Soviet people's belief that the anti-Fascist war will eventually win under the leadership of the Communist Party, and praising the great spirit of the Soviet people in bravely fighting against Fascist forces. It also expresses the Soviet people's aspirations for their future life.

3. The Combination of Classical and Modern Music Style

In the 20th century, influenced by a diverse social trend, composers have increasingly innovated their music creation concepts and writing techniques, exploring more possibilities in music. However, some composers also attempt to find a balance in the collision between convention and modern music. Kabalevsky is such a composer. The first movement of his Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) not only retains the structural characteristics of classical sonata form, but also integrates modern musical elements from the aspects of harmony and rhythm, specifically in the following aspects.

3.1 Incorporating Modern Features on the Basis of Classical Sonata Form

On the whole, the form structure of the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) is a typical classical sonata form structure. Whether it is between the three parts of exposition, development and recapitulation, or the internal structure of exposition, development and recapitulation, each part is very distinct, and the tonal layout is also arranged according to the classical sonata form structure. (See Table 1)

Table 1: Music Structure of the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46)

Exposition (1-122)				Development (123-251)			Recapitulation (252-360)			
primary theme	Transition	Secondary theme	Closing theme		Fragments	Re-transition	primary theme	Transition	Secondary theme	Closing theme
1-13	14-48	49-103	104-122	123-203	204-240	240-251	252-263	264-296	297-340	341-360
F	C D G	C	a	F ^b D	^b b b c d ^b e e	g	F	^b A	F	F

Kabalevsky's creations were deeply influenced by the music style of the 20th century. As mentioned in the above section, although the form structure and tonal harmonic layout of Kabalevsky's work still retain the distinctive characteristics of classical sonata form, the actual sound effect brought by its music is full of musical characteristics of the 20th century. The modern musical characteristics of the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) are mainly reflected in two aspects. One is the use of tonality, such as the secondary theme of the first movement, in which Kabalevsky uses C major and its tonic relation c minor simultaneously. Another example is that the main part of the exposition enters the connecting part, Kabalevsky does not predict the tonal conversion, but directly transfers the tonic chord from F major to C major in the chord inversion connection. Besides, in bars 204-240 of the development, the tonality changes frequently, mainly in the second degree, which is different from the third degree of the classical sonata form. The second is the use of harmony. From the perspective of the whole music, triad and seventh chords are mostly used in chords. Different from classical sonatas, this work contains many increased and decreased triads, and bold use of overlapping chords of the second and fourth degrees, which enriches the musical hearing experience with dissonant musical colors.

3.2 The Use of Chromatic Harmony and Melody and the Use of a Large Number of Second Intervals

Since the Romantic era, chromatic melodies and harmonies have frequently been employed in compositions, primarily serving as transitional devices, ornamental elements, and points of emphasis. In the 20th century, the traditional major and minor tone system was disintegrated, and the twelve tones in the tone series were no longer divided into primary and secondary, and their status was regarded as equal by composers, who could write creatively for any tone. Some composers even used a large number of musical materials based on chromatic relationships in their music works, which enriched the color and level of music works. Kabalevsky used many semitones in the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F major (Op. 46). For example, in presentation part, the chord and bass of the low part are semitone descending in the primary theme; As the middle part of the transition part, there are also semitone melody lines; In bar 57-64 of the secondary theme, the bass also presents a semitone descending relationship. Bar 240-251 is the preparation of the genera before entering the reproduction part. It is composed of a number of short phrases with two eighth notes as units, which are progressive in layers with minor second degree relations, strengthening the dynamic sense of the melody.

3.3 Changing Rhythm and Contrasting Intensity and Speed

The rhythm of the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) is varied, which is also one of the musical characteristics of the 20th century. Composers in the 20th century were more free in the use of beats, or alternately using single and compound beats in their writing, or changing the strength and weakness of music with complex rhythmic patterns. Some composers even abandoned the division of bar lines in their writing, and their writing was more imaginative. Kabalevsky's rhythmic changes in this work are more

conservative than those of many 20th-century composers, making it easier for players to grasp. For example, in the theme of the exposition section, Kabalevsky first directly changed the rhythm by changing the beat, from 3/4 to 2/4, followed by a few bars of syncopation, enhancing the sense of momentum of the music. Kabalevsky also used a lot of syncopated rhythm in his works to change the strength of the original beat. For example, the secondary theme of the presentation part and the recapitulation part, and the middle voice part were written with the syncopated rhythm melody, so as to achieve the effect of changing the rhythm from the perspective of hearing.

When writing music works, composers in the 20th century were more daring than their predecessors in the selection of musical registers, aiming to develop the expressive force of instrumental music and create more unique sound effects. Especially in piano works, we can often hear the sound at the extreme registers at both ends of the keyboard. In terms of strength and speed comparison, composers are also very bold to write, with a large contrast from *sff* to *pp*, or a sudden change from extremely strong to extremely weak, and a sudden change from extremely weak to extremely strong, which are reflected in the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F major (Op.46). The pitch area of bar 31-48 in the exposition section has a large span, the melody converges from the two ends to the middle, and then is separated from the farther position to the middle pitch area. In the same bar, the distance of the farthest two notes is from E1 to f3, and the distance of the farthest two notes is from E1 to b3, and the intensity of this passage changes a lot. In just a few bars, the force changed from *f-p-f-p-ff-pp*. From the perspective of the whole piece, the overall dynamic change of the work is also very distinct. The most powerful passages are arranged in the development section, especially in the 240-251 bars, where *sff* is played by several consecutive powerful major chords, and then gradually weakens top, and then quietly returns to the rendition section.

4. Analysis of Key Points of Performance Style

Through the musical text analysis of the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46), we can see that it is a work created in combination with modern composing techniques on the basis of the classical sonata form frame. Therefore, the performer should give consideration to both classical elements and modernist styles when playing, and fully grasp the overall style of the work. The performer can start from the following three aspects.

4.1 The Selection of Touch Keys

On the piano, players can produce different sound effects by using different ways of touching the keys. Therefore, it is of great help for players to correctly interpret the characteristics of music style to find a reasonable way of touching the keys and find the appropriate piano timbre in practice. In the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F major (Op.46), there are various expressions of phrases, including lyric singing phrases and emotional ones. According to the different needs of expression of phrases, we have to choose different ways of touching keys.

For example, the secondary theme of the exposition section is a paragraph composed of lyrical and beautiful melody, and both the high and low parts are composed of long sentences. Under the influence of modern harmony, this paragraph presents a mysterious and airy feeling. Therefore, when playing phrases or passages with similar long lines, fingers should stick to the keys as much as possible, and gradually lower the body power to the fingertips as the melody goes. With the help of the arm, the melody lines will flow. In the development section, there are a large number of phrases composed of jumping notes, which drive the musical mood gradually to warm up and explode. The introduction part of the jumping music phrases is small in intensity. When playing, the fingers need to stick the key and jump quickly, and grasp the direction and structure of the phrases, increasing the explosive power of the fingertips in the step by step, paying attention to the transmission of body power, and carefully listening to whether the tone is concentrated and transparent.

4.2 The Use of Pedal

The pedal is the soul of piano music. The rational use of pedals can increase the level of music, enrich the harmonic color and timbre expression, inject spiritual energy into the music, and also help the performer to correctly express the style characteristics of music works. The interpretation of the musical style of the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) is also dependent on the use of pedals, either to warm the tone, to help connect the harmony, or to emphasize the musical expression.

For example, in the primary theme of the exposition section, the first beat of the first bar of the left hand is a major chord played with arpeggios. In order to ensure the continuity of the main chord harmony in F major, we need to add a pedal to help our fingers connect with a large span. At the same time, the addition of this pedal makes the melody tone gentle and the sound expression of the theme melody more narrating. In bar 4, the harmony changes, which requires us to clearly change the pedals according to the different harmonies. Another example, in the development section, among the many staccato notes, we can step on the pedal on the downbeat and melody at the same time, creating a blunt and continuous musical style feature. On a major chord with great strength, we can press the pedal at the same time as we press the key, and release the pedal at the same time as our finger is off the key, which can create a full and powerful sound effect and make the music reach its climax.

4.3 The Rhythm, Speed, Strength of Grasp

The most significant modern elements in the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F major (Op.46) are also reflected in the changes of rhythm, speed and strength. A good grasp of the style characteristics of these three aspects is conducive to the correct interpretation of the style of this work.

The rhythm of the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) is varied. For example, in the transition part of the exposition part, 3/4 beat and 2/4 beat are repeatedly changed. When playing phrases with different beat numbers,

it is necessary to grasp the beat points of different beats and maintain a uniform rhythm and speed to play phrases. The extensive use of syncopated rhythm is the most typical creative technique of Kabalevsky. In the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 3 in F major (Op.46), many melodic parts and accompanying parts are used in syncopated rhythm. To play the syncopated rhythm of the melodic voice part, the player needs to play the notes clearly and accurately. Since the syncopated rhythm in the accompaniment part is almost placed in the middle part, it is necessary for the player to ensure the accuracy of the rhythm and pay attention to the rationality of the timbre expression. For example, the middle part of the secondary theme is the one that mainly expresses the harmonic color. The player does not need to play it as loudly as the outer part, but only to play it evenly and gently with the rhythm. The left hand of the transition part of the recapitulation part is the repetition of the phrase, and the D-flat tone is the non-harmonic tone, which is repeated constantly in the syncopated rhythm, which is a deliberately dissonant effect created by Kabalevsky. Therefore, when playing this syncopated phrase, when the D-flat note appears in the right hand part, it mainly acts as an accompaniment and does not need to be played prominently, while when the right hand becomes an arpeggio composed of fast semiquaver, the continuous D-flat note in the left hand becomes a melody line, and the fingertips should concentrate their strength and increase and decrease the weight according to the melody of the right hand.

The first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46), with its frequent changes in speed and force, was set by Kabalevsky in order to create a stronger acoustic contrast. In the performance, the player should pay attention to the strength and speed marks on the spectrum, and play the music according to the instructions of the composer. For example, in the last 3 bars before the exposition section enters the theme of the secondary theme, the composer clearly indicates that the speed requirement is "non rit." The intensity change should be weakened, so the performer cannot take it for granted that the speed will be slowed down at the same time, and must strictly follow the wishes of the composer.

5. Summary

Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Major (Op.46) by Soviet composer Kabalevsky is a very valuable piece of 20th century music to play and learn. This work not only reflects Kabalevsky's profound classical music creation skills, but also shows his musical creativity and imagination as a musician in the 20th century. The melody of this work is vivid and lively, and the mood is passionate and striving, and Kabalevsky does not deliberately set too many difficult techniques in technology, which is suitable for young players to learn. When playing this work, we should not only pay attention to the external structure of the traditional classical sonata form, but also pay attention to the sound color of modern music. On this basis, with appropriate pedals, touching keys and respecting the notes of the spectrum, we can fully grasp the playing style of this work and truly appreciate and feel the unique charm of 20th century music.

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