

Extrinsic Phrases in the Works of Domenico Scarlatti

This paper concerns the use of the minor mode in the keyboard works of Domenico Scarlatti. Specifically, it examines situations in which a sonata deviates from the likely, and in most cases prepared, secondary key to that key's parallel minor (e.g. shifting from the major dominant to the minor dominant). I identify a set of insertions between the transition and secondary theme in sonata-form movements (near the “crux” according to Ralph Kirkpatrick’s understanding of Scarlatti’s sonata form). These insertions form a part of neither the transition nor the secondary theme and serve to provide an element of modal contrast at the midpoint of the exposition. I call these insertions “modally-contrasting extrinsic phrases.”

Modally-contrasting extrinsic phrases form an important part of Scarlatti’s style. This paper examines several movements that contain such insertions, including his Keyboard Sonatas in E-flat major, K. 51; in B-flat major, K. 332; and in B-flat major, K. 473. In these works, Scarlatti uses an extrinsic phrase (or phrases) to provide modal contrast following the midpoint of the sonatas first part. These extrinsic phrases usually end with a half cadence in the secondary key, allowing the ensuing material to return to the prepared secondary key. A secondary theme follows, concluding with a perfect authentic cadence (PAC) in that key.

In order to better understand extrinsic phrases, this paper also briefly examines an instance of Scarlatti using a minor-mode secondary theme when a major-mode secondary theme is expected. Comparing Scarlatti’s Keyboard Sonata in F Major, K. 276 with the other movements analyzed here provides an illustration of the differences between the use of an extrinsic phrase versus the initiation of a secondary theme.

Recognizing modally-contrasting extrinsic phrases in Scarlatti’s keyboard sonatas provides insight into the composer’s personal style. Extrinsic phrases (both modally-contrasting and those with other functions) form an important part of many of the composer’s keyboard sonatas. Furthermore, his use of these phrases connects him to other composers who used extrinsic phrases in similar ways, including Luigi Boccherini, Gaetano Pugnani, Pierre Gaviniès, and Joseph Haydn.