Georg Benda – Sonatina (G minor from part 5)

What does the title mean?

Sonatina means “small sonata.” It is a shorter and generally simpler type of sonata. This piece comes from Part 5 of Benda’s Sammlung vermischter Clavier- und Gesangstücke, meaning “Collection of miscellaneous keyboard and vocal pieces.”

What keys are in this piece?

The main key is G minor.

Bars 1–8: G minor
Bars 9–18: B ♭ major → G minor
Bars 19–26: G minor
Bars 26–34: G major, with a move to A minor
Bars 35–42: G minor

B ♭ major is the relative major of G minor. G major is the parallel major.

What is the form of the piece?

Rondo form: A–B–A–C–A.

A: bars 1–8
B: bars 9–18
A: bars 19–26
C: bars 26–34
A: bars 35–42

The A section returns throughout the piece. The B and C sections provide contrasting material.

What period does this piece come from?

The Classical period. Georg Benda lived from 1722–1795. This collection was published between 1780 and 1787.

Explain the Classical style

Pitch - short balanced phrases in 2 or 4 bar lengths, often featuring arpeggios or steps and two-note slurs. Emphasis on cadences to outline structure. Chord progressions based on diatonic chords, major/minor tonalities. Use of suspensions but in passing. Broken chords eg Alberti bass.

Duration - use of simple and common time signatures, limited use of syncopation (often as a feature)

Expressive devices - wide range of dynamics, tapered phrasing (eg two-note slurs), range of touch (staccato, legato etc), ornaments which begin above main note

Texture - homophonic, emphasis on melody, accompaniment eg Alberti bass, chords

Tone colour - fortepiano more common than modern piano (extreme dynamics), some pedalling but not a lot and not always marked, clarity of touch (sparkle), light, elegant pieces

Structure - formal structures eg sonata form, theme and variation, rondo, emphasis is on repeating melodic material so that it's remembered. Balanced, symmetrical.

Musical terminology in the score

Andante un poco allegretto – walking speed, a little moderately fast and lively

♩. = ca 52–58 – approximately 52–58 dotted-crotchet beats per minute

p – piano – soft

f – forte – loud

mf – mezzo forte – moderately loud

poco riten. – gradually become a little slower

a tempo – return to the original tempo

tr – trill; rapid alternation between the written note and the note above

diminuendo hairpin – gradually become softer

fermata – hold the note longer than its written value

Acciaccatura - small note before the main note

Mordent - short trill