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**FANTASIA QUASI UNA SONATA
IMPROVISATION ON SONATA PLATFORM AS A FORM-SHAPING PRINCIPLE IN THE
FANTASIES OF CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH¹**

Sonata form, which early Classicist composers used in their works for keyboard instruments (harpsichord, clavichord), is mostly considered to be, under the influence of an evolutionary consideration of musical forms, a transitional phase between the Baroque binary form and the Vienna Classicists' sonata form. Unlike today, composers of the mid-18th century, judging by the titles of sheet music collections of the time ('For Experts and Enthusiasts', 'For Ladies') and according to the practice of writing their works down only if and when they were to be published,² considered sonatas as didactical compositions and works for amateurs and home performing. Hence the composers, improvised within the sonata form in their public appearances, enabling them to display their virtuosity to the utmost. Such treatment of a harpsichord or clavichord sonata – as an improvisation on a sonata platform – was completely customary in the 18th century, since these were performed in concerts as interludes between the main numbers such as a symphony,³ or an aria from a current opera, etc.

Of course, sonata-ness was not the norm (in the sense of the subsequently well-established sonata form), but a part of 18th-century musical grammar. In that sense, sonata form, being based on harmonic functional thinking, could be unequivocally considered as a platform which enabled various compositional-technical procedures of its realization to be understood.⁴ If *exposition of an important statement in a non-tonic key, and then repeating that statement in the tonic key or applying a gesture which brings that statement into a relation with the tonic key before the end of the movement*⁵ is taken as a fundamental characteristic of that principle, then the main *communicational* task of the improviser is to unambiguously present those tonic-relating *gestures*. Hereby, onwards the stress will be put on the analysis of realization of the task through improvisation, in Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's written

¹ Term paper on Music History – Early Classicism. Mentor: Ivana Perković Radak, PhD. Academic year 2006/07.

² It is known that Mozart also wrote his sonatas down only for publishing purposes. Cf. Alfred Ajnštajn, *Mocart* [Alfred Einstein, *Mozart*], trans. Vladimir Karlič, Belgrade, Nolit, 1991, 75.

³ Symphonies of that time were often performed with continuo; hence the harpsichordist was usually both the conductor and the composer. It was considered desirable to open a concert by improvising a piece which would lead the audience into the main number. Rosen states that Haydn, at the premiere of his London symphonies, accompanied the orchestra and conducted from behind the harpsichord. [Čarls Rozen, *Klasični stil* [Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style*], trans. Branka Lalić and Ivan Stefanović, Nolit, Belgrade, 1979, 239–240.]

⁴ Cf. Ivana Stamatović, 'Sonatni oblik i sonatni princip', in: Mirjana Živković (ed), *Muzička teorija i analiza I: zbornik katedre za teorijske predmete*, Beograd, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti u Beogradu, 2004, 103.

⁵ Ibid.

(published) fantasies, in the light of his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*⁶ and the texts of his contemporaries.

Realization of formal principles

Given the above mentioned performance practice, and pursuant to Rosen's claim that in the 18th century the terms 'fantasy' and 'sonata' were often used interchangeably,⁷ a closer investigation into the realization of sonata principle in the published sonatas of C. P. E. Bach is crucial for the formal analysis of improvised fantasies. They are characterized by tonal rather than thematic contrast and the key scheme of the exposition is ordinary (from the tonic towards the dominant, or towards the parallel if the main key is minor). However, the thematic plan of the sonatas often consists of a pronounced, self-contained main subject and contrasting fragmentary section in the dominant (or parallel) key. C. P. E. Bach often builds the exposition from a single leading motive, using variation technique, whereas a pronounced self-contained second subject is rare in his sonatas. Having in mind that the technique of building a section (and often an entire movement) by transforming a single thematic core had often been used by Baroque composers to improvise preludes, fantasies, and even fugues, it is conceivable, judging by the melodic structure and texture of certain sonatas, that this technique was used by C. P. E. Bach as well.⁸

The majority of the sonatas have a symmetric exposition. The main key section ends with a half cadence (rarely with a full dominant key cadence) roughly halfway through the exposition, and is followed by a section in the dominant key, which is established at the end of the exposition. The key scheme of the development and recapitulation is reversed. What was the main key material is now exposed in the dominant (or parallel) key, extended by digressions into other keys, and concluded by a full cadence in the dominant key or a half cadence in the main key, after which the material previously exposed in the dominant key is now, naturally, recapitulated in the main key.

However, the structure of development sections of certain sonata movements, particularly those based on a single theme, where the texture of the entire movement is often one and the same throughout (i.e., based on an ostinato rhythmic figure which is transformed melodically by spontaneous distribution of thematic material through adjunct keys, but frequently more remote ones as well), points toward the improvisational techniques of a fantasy. In the monothematic sonatas, the section recapitulated in the main key is most often reduced to a few bars, where the absence of an expressive subject evokes the

⁶ Trans. William J. Mitchell, London, Eulenburg Books, 1974.

⁷ Čarls Rozen [Charles Rosen], op. cit., 33.

⁸ As an example we can take the Finale of Sonata in G minor W. 62/18, *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Great Keyboard Sonatas, Series II, Sonata in G minor, Presto*, New York, Dover Publications Inc., 1985, 0-486-24854-2, pp. 40–41.

description of an improvised form's ending given in the essay.⁹ Conversely, in the sonatas with prominent thematic contrast, both subjects could be recapitulated entirely.

*Semantification of gestures*¹⁰

By comparing written sonatas with the examples of harmonic progressions given in the *Essay*, it can be concluded that what is crucial to the consideration of the compositional technique of C. P. E. Bach's sonatas are the statements on the harmonic tissue of an improvised piece, given in the work.

Thanks to the development of homophony, the art of improvisation became, among other things, the dominant way for performers to present their technical skills, and was theoretically and practically governed by figured bass. Namely, the establishment of figured bass in the 17th century, as a 'ciphered' bass line with improvised chords, led to the new vertical approach to ornamentation, as opposed to the earlier linear one: the ornament gradually produces harmonic implications, i.e., affects the sound of a chord. Hereby, figured bass was both theory and practice: theory because *the numbers* showed the harmonic basis of the work, and practice because *the numbers* were a performing guide and a framework for improvisation.¹¹

In C. P. E. Bach's opinion, improvisation with metric divisions demands knowledge of compositional technique, whereas non-measured improvising requires only command of harmony. It can be assumed, therefore, that by the knowledge of compositional technique the author probably means realization of some formal principle(s), since the other parameters (melody, harmony, texture) do not allow for a clear distinction between a fantasy and a sonata. This supports the assumption that C. P. E. Bach composed both types of works by improvisation (measured sections can be found in the fantasies, as well as non-measured ones in the sonatas). He further emphasizes that a good composer need not be a good improviser, while good improvisers could have success in composing,¹² by which he probably meant a successful rendering of an improvisation. Namely, if a *free* improvisation means the absence of any established formal principle, it will be potentially 'comprehensible' to the improviser personally or, if some technical feat is prominent while improvising, to a narrow circle of connoisseurs. On the other hand, the author stresses that the basic principle of improvisation is inducing emotions and calling forth the affections. The means of realization of those principles and, more importantly for the purposes of this text, of the formal principles being often identical, it can be assumed that today's formalized perception

⁹ Cf. C. Ph. E. Bach, op. cit., 430–445.

¹⁰ The term *gesture* here designates a compositional-technical procedure which is aimed towards bringing forth a certain formal principle. For example, the recapitulation of sonata form is clearly a gesture by which the sonata principle in the movement is realized. Of course, the gestures allow for various interpretations, depending on the analytical protocol. Cf. Robert Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert*, Indiana University Press, 2004, 35–52.

¹¹ Peter Rummenh ller, *Glazbena pretklasika [Die musikalische Vorklassik]*, trans. Sead Muhamedagić, Hrvatsko muzikološko društvo, Zagreb, 2004, 71.

¹² Cf. C. Ph. E. Bach, op. cit., 430–445.

of an improvised work was comprehensible to C. P. E. Bach and his contemporaries through rhetorical metaphors, i.e., the theory of affections.

In other words, the recognition and understanding of musical gestures while improvising, (i.e., their being directed by a formal principle as an expected turn of events), *stirs the emotions* of the listeners, (i.e. fulfils the conditions of the musical grammar, the recognition of the form). In the case of C. P. E. Bach and his contemporaries, sonata logic (as explained) was obviously expected in every work, including an improvised fantasy. If his techniques are understood in this manner, the particulars of a fantasy, as stated in the *Essay*, are definitely one of the essential issues dealt with in this paper.

For an improvisation without a strict meter, C. P. E. Bach recommends modulating to a greater number of keys than in a composed work or a measured improvisation. If an improvisation is time-limited, he believes that overly remote keys should not be employed, because the lack of time would prevent the return to the main key. He advises that the main key should not be abandoned too early and that it should be exposed for a sufficient period of time at the end. Depending on the performer's abilities, the harmonic progression will follow the ascending and descending scale, with a few semitones interpolated, or with the natural or changed order of the degrees and chords played flat or broken.

When modulating after the 'initial bass note',¹³ as stated in the *Essay*, any chord can be used, but the modulation must be prepared, hence the new key must be reached without 'crudeness'.¹⁴ For reaching remote keys, he recommends a diminished seventh chord with enharmonic changes, though he points out that chromatic type chords must follow a uniform harmonic rhythm. He thinks that for a modulation to happen, it suffices for the leading note to be placed in the bass or some other voice.¹⁵ Although those rules developed into regular types of modulation in later periods, the *Essay* does not explain unexpected digressions to other keys nor appearances of secondary chords treated non-functionally. In that context, what is important is the interpretation of a modulation not only as a means, but as a quality of the key change. Hereby, the manner of modulation, along with the relationship between the keys, was considered by C. P. E. Bach an important expressive element of an improvisation.¹⁶ The author emphasizes that it is wrong to follow the circle of fourths or fifths, although he often does so in the developments of his sonatas. Judging by theoretic considerations regarding the harmony, and having in mind the key scheme

¹³ That probably means the bass note of the secondary chord used for modulation. Cf. *Ibid.*, 438.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 438.

¹⁵ Certain examples from the *Essay* could be used to explain, for example, some of Liszt's harmonic progressions. Cf. Susan Wollenberg, 'Es lebe die Ordnung und Betriebsamkeit! Was hilft das beste Herz ohne jene', 'A New Look at Fantasia Elements in the Keyboard Sonatas of C. Ph. E. Bach', *Eighteenth Century Music* 4/1, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 119–128.

¹⁶ Cf. Richard Kramer, 'The New Modulation of the 1770s: C. P. E. Bach in Theory, Criticism and Practise', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 38/3, 1985, 554–555.

of C. P. E. Bach's works, it is clear that he advocated equal temperament, not only of keyboard instruments, but also of strings and wind instruments.¹⁷

The advice of C. P. E. Bach was certainly immensely important for his contemporaries and followers. Also, the function of realization of that advice is almost impossible to determine without knowing his statements. In other words, his comments are both compositional guidelines and analytic generalizations.¹⁸ If the musical gestures C. P. E. Bach talks about are compared with those in the sonatas and fantasies, some conclusions can be made about the postulates upon which his improvisatory art is based, but which were not (and some could not have been) mentioned in 18th-century theoretical treatises. In the following analyses an attempt has been made, using the stated analytical protocols, to present formal platforms of his improvised fantasies.

Sonata-ness of musical tissue can be clearly recognized in all three analyzed fantasies. However, the fantasies in *D major* and *F major* were analyzed side by side, because their smaller proportions do not call up associations to a sonata cycle, unlike the C major fantasy, which surpasses them both in length and structural complexity. Hence in the *D major* fantasy, which is included in the improvisation chapter of the *Essay* edition referred to in this paper,¹⁹ at the number 1 in the Example 1, in the beginning and at the end of the piece, we notice the same type of texture and static tonic harmony. The persistent tonic and tonic pedal, with the, even here unavoidable, Mixolydian digression, resolves the dissonance of previously exposed keys and rounds the work off tonally. In a similar manner, a prominent development principle as the predominant building technique determines the formal principle of the *F major fantasy*, while the improviser achieves the peak of tension by a sudden cessation of the development and an abrupt return to the main key. The section following the reaffirmation of the main key has the role of a recapitulation, which, although extremely shortened and without the expected associations to the initial thematic material (since there was no pronounced thematic material to begin with), breaks the continuity of the development, accentuates the domination of *F major* and assures the recognition of the movement's formal logic, i.e., the dominant affection, that is to say 'main subject'.

In the *D major fantasy*, from the moment marked by number 2 in Example 1, the modulation into the dominant *A major* begins, which in the sonata form would fulfil the role of the bridge and the second subject, and that is confirmed by the similar texture at the beginning and end of the fantasy. The tonal instability of the section delimited in the example by the sign 'X' and the number 6 evokes a development section, and the similarity of the section around number 7 with the section around number 2 points to the preparing of a 'recapitulation'. In the *F major fantasy*, analogous to the example in the *Essay*, the main subject section contains perpetual melodic improvisations in broken chords and runs, while unlike the *D*

¹⁷ His orchestral works do not fall far behind the works for keyboard instruments when it comes to harmonic diversity. Cf. Matthew Head, 'Fantasy in the Instrumental Music of C. Ph. E. Bach', (diss.) Yale University, 1995, 54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁹ In fact, five sonatas and a few fantasies, which do not appear in the current edition, had been included with the earlier editions of the *Essay*.

major fantasy, written out without metric divisions, the contrast between the subjects is achieved by switching to a measured musical pattern, which begins in the dominant key. There we can notice that an improvisation's rhythmic component is of great structural significance to C. P. E. Bach. Namely, in the fantasy from the *Essay* the cadence of the second subject's 'dominant key' is completely clear, but that is not the case in the F major fantasy. Therefore, the activation of the rhythmic component, whose function is to delimit those two segments, compensates for the tonal 'weakness' of this boundary. In the second subject section, C. P. E. Bach insists on improvised ornaments in the melody, accentuating the *important* notes by leaps, an effective improvisational tool also noted in the *Essay*.²⁰ Thanks to the unstable harmonic texture, the second subject section grows into the development section, where C. P. E. Bach demonstrates not only virtuosity, but also the ability to improvise chord progressions far more complex than those which dominated the musical thinking of his time (the example of a progression).

The coordination of musical layers and components in both analyzed fantasies clearly corresponds to the characteristics of early Classical sonata form, especially if we have in mind the foregoing analysis of its concept, based upon tonal, but not thematic contrast.

C major fantasy

Significant in both proportion and content, the *C major fantasy* is one of the most important testimonies to C. P. E. Bach's improvisational art. This work was published in 'Sammlung für Kenner und Liebhaber' [Collection for Connoisseurs and Enthusiasts] in 1784, when Haydn was 52 years old, Mozart 28, and Beethoven 14. However, in this fantasy we can recognize and intimate the elements of Haydn's *Sturm und Drang* digressions, Mozart's *C minor fantasy* and Beethoven's Opus 27, but also much later works, such as Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* or Liszt's *B minor sonata*.

C. P. E. Bach in this improvisation shows his ability to assimilate prescriptive norms of early Classical musical and unite them in a firm entity. Thus, in this work two basic constructive principles can be seen: architectonic and evolutionary. The former is obvious in the alternating of two different types of improvisatory logic. Thematicism and sequences of broken chords, characteristic of C. P. E. Bach, from the beginning of the piece through a *transition* of sorts, lead to the Allegretto of almost Haydnian melodic texture, opposed to the harmonic progressions of the sensitive style. These two sections, whose beginnings are in a *C major – E minor* opposition, can also represent the first and the second subjects of a sonata form (the relationship of the keys is not disputable if we have in mind the harmonic language and genre in question), if we understand the entire sonata as a one-movement work, but also as the first and the second movements of a sonata cycle, given their *movement*-like scope and structure.

²⁰ Cf. C. Ph. E. Bach, op. cit., 430–445.

C. P. E. Bach's improvisatory logic in this fantasy, especially in the development section, reflects his ability to plan an improvisational tissue (*architectonic moment*), both with respect to harmony (the modulating logic and plateaus foreshadow Beethoven's development sections) and the succession of thematic opponents. Namely, although it is not often the case in fantasies (nor in sonatas), the author confronts two pronounced thematic elements in this work. However, since it is a fantasy, he does not linger in structurally stable subjects, but presents entire blocks of thematic improvisation, their affections, and also various styles of his time: the Baroque development of the main motif and the textural transparency of his contemporaries. Thus C. P. E. Bach presents himself as an improviser whose work transcends the styles of the time and who, thanks to his skills, stands out in the given moment (let us not forget that this music was created 'before the eyes' of the audience), both as a traditionalist and a reformer.

After the development, the composer restores the dominance of the basic improvisatory logic in the recapitulation by developing the initial theme once more, but in the opposite direction, i.e., towards the tonic, in which the piece ends. The ending is peculiar due to the late establishment of the main key, which contradicts the statements in the *Essay*,²¹ so the conclusion remains unconvincing. However, this technique could be justified by *the surprise effect*, which C. P. E. Bach often used in his fantasies, achieving it by unexpected endings and unexpected cadences (Example 2, C. P. E. Bach, Sonata W. 65–46 in *E major*, First movement, last four bars).

Conclusion

Although an improvised composition (fantasy) by its very nature is not governed by relations of harmonic planes (but by the will of the performer), it is absolutely certain that sonata thinking dominates C. P. E. Bach's fantasies. Analyzing his fantasies, we can notice many improvisatory elements described in the *Essay* and represented within tonal processes of a certain formal principle.

Highly esteemed by Charles Burney and other music writers and theoreticians of the 18th and 19th centuries,²² the written and/or published fantasies of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach not only attest to the legendary improvisations of this great musician, but also represent significant didactic literature, both for a pianist and an improviser. Although the author in the improvisation chapter of the *Essay* does not mention whether or how an improvisation could affect the contents of a sonata form, the published fantasies and, indirectly, the texts written by him and his contemporaries attest to the mutual permeation of what are aesthetic viewpoints and compositional techniques. C. P. E. Bach's attitude towards composing, such as can be gathered from his texts, leaves the impression that his guidelines for

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 430–445.

²² Cf. Eugene Helm, 'The "Hamlet" Fantasy and the Literary Element in C. Ph. E. Bach's Music', *The Musical Quarterly*, 58/II, 1972, 277.

improvising a fantasy are also valid, to a great extent, when writing a sonata. If, after all the suppositions reached in this paper, one analyzed the influence of C. P. E. Bach's fantasies on his followers, then the expected result would be that this kind of practice led to the subsequent creation of a sonata *quasi una fantasia*.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

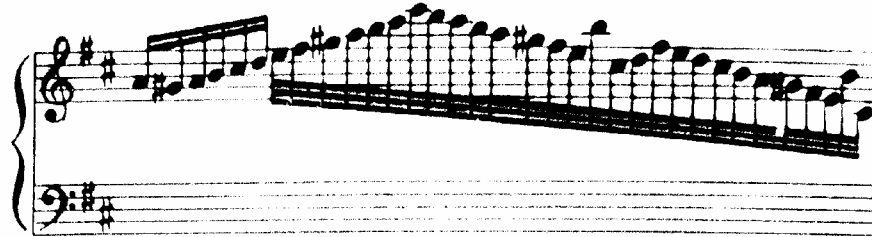
Example 1

Figure 480
Allegro

(1.)
D:(I)

arpeggio

\bar{V}^1 I⁶ IV K₁ V⁷ I p f (2.)
D^{IV} A^{VII} V⁷



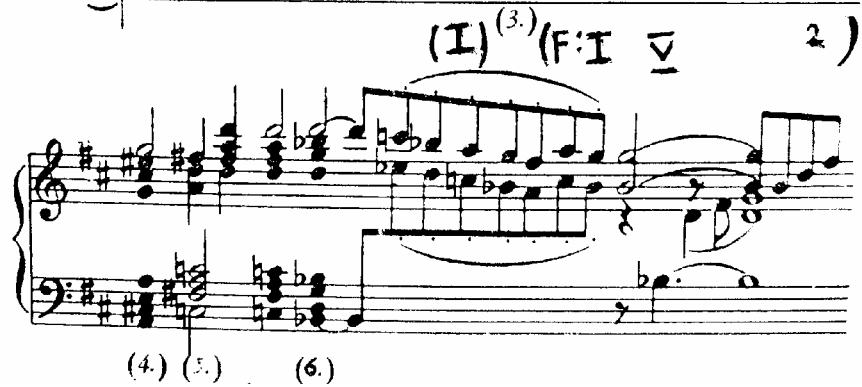
The first system of musical notation consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains a complex melodic line with many notes, some of which are beamed together. The bass staff contains a few notes, including a low octave G.



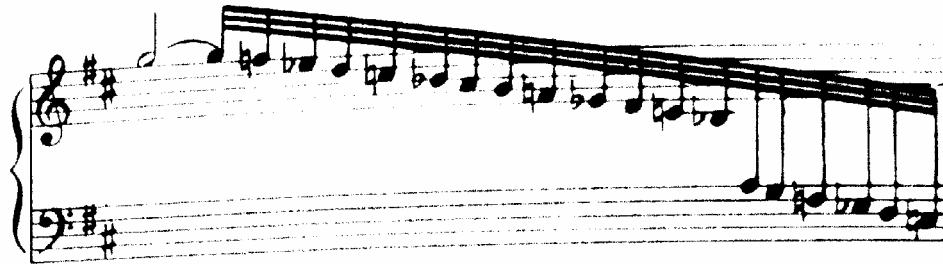
The second system of musical notation includes the word "arpeggio" written above the treble staff. The treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note and a half note. The bass staff has a quarter note and a half note. Below the bass staff, there are guitar-style fretting instructions: "I" under the first measure, "(X)" under the second measure, and "VII V DD" under the third measure.



The third system of musical notation shows a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains a descending melodic line with many notes. The bass staff contains a few notes, including a low octave G.



The fourth system of musical notation includes guitar-style fretting instructions: "(I) (3.) (F:I V 2)" written above the treble staff. The treble staff has a complex melodic line with many notes. The bass staff has a few notes. Below the bass staff, there are measure numbers: "(4.)", "(5.)", and "(6.)".

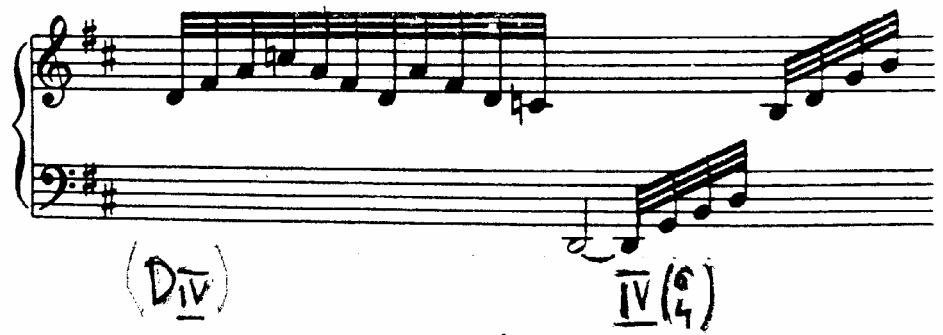


arpeggio



(7)

D: $\text{VII}^{\flat}_7 - \text{V}^{\flat}_6 - \text{V}^{\flat}_2 - \text{I} - \text{IV} - \text{VII}^{\flat}_7 - \text{K}^{\flat}_6 - \text{V}^{\flat}_7 - \text{I}$



(D IV)

$\text{IV}^{\flat}(4)$

arpeggio



(1.)

Example 2

Allegro

The musical score for Example 2 is presented in a grand staff format, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The time signature is 3/2, and the key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The piece is marked 'Allegro'. The score is divided into four measures. In the first measure, the treble staff has a whole rest, while the bass staff has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure features a half note chord in the treble staff (F#4, C#5) and a half note G4 in the bass staff. The third measure contains a half note chord in the treble staff (F#4, C#5) and a half note G4 in the bass staff. The fourth measure shows a half note chord in the treble staff (F#4, C#5) and a half note G4 in the bass staff. The score concludes with a double bar line.