

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Balanced, Extended, Reheard: Phrase Symmetry in Mozart's Piano Sonatas

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Abstract

Phrase symmetry in Mozart is often described as exact proportional balance, a definition that leaves extensions, elisions, and altered repetitions looking like exceptions. This article asks how symmetry remains perceptible when phrase lengths and functions change. It compares the opening movements of the public-domain piano sonatas K. 280, K. 332, K. 333, and K. 545 through close score-based analysis of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions. The comparison shows that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface ratio; extensions can preserve balance when they clarify formal function; and repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes. These findings locate balance in the listener's evolving relation between expectation and formal consequence, while restricting claims to the notated evidence. The article contributes a relational account of phrase symmetry that explains how unequal spans can remain formally intelligible without being reduced to hidden arithmetic or treated as compositional irregularities.

Keywords: Mozart; phrase symmetry; piano sonata; formal function; cadence; repetition

1 Introduction

The reading of the notated passages developed here explores how Mozart's phrase symmetry remains perceptible while undergoing local expansion and reinterpretation. Its corpus comprises selected opening movements from Mozart's public-domain piano sonatas. The central claim is that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion. That proposition has force because classical balance depends on managed difference and retrospective hearing. Attention therefore falls on basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions.

The research question is deliberately narrower than a general history of flexible symmetry. Within this repertoire, phrase symmetry is assessed through basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions. Its definition changes only when those features alter the interpretation.

The evidence is synthesized in three findings. First, symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion. Second, extensions preserve balance by clarifying function. Third, repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes. Read together, the results show

that flexible symmetry is neither a decorative effect nor a label attached after interpretation. The argument remains proportionate to the repertoire.

Within this design, interpretive validity depends on convergence rather than certainty. Evidence constrains interpretation, but its constraint works through reasoned comparison.

The research problem in *Balanced, Extended, Reheard* has two parts. The descriptive part asks where basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions enter the selected works and how their placement changes. The interpretive part asks why those changes require the vocabulary of phrase symmetry rather than a simpler account based on convention, chronology, or genre. Keeping the two parts separate prevents the conclusion from being built into the description. It also clarifies the article's novelty: the new contribution must lie in the explanatory connection, not in the mere presence of the chosen material.

In this article, phrase symmetry does not name a mood, topic, or value detached from form. It names the interaction among preparation, allocation, and revision. Preparation concerns the expectation built around basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions; allocation concerns who or what can act on that expect-

ation; revision concerns the subsequent event that changes its status. The definition is intentionally operational. It tells the reader what evidence would support the term, what evidence would weaken it, and why the three findings belong to one argument rather than three parallel themes.

Accordingly, the guiding question is: How does phrase symmetry remain audible when Mozart extends, elides, or recontextualizes formally related material? The objective is to answer it by tracking basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions in their local formal contexts across the opening movements of the piano sonatas K. 280, K. 332, K. 333, and K. 545. The article argues that symmetry is best understood as a remembered and revisable norm whose force depends on function, harmonic destination, and register. This account contributes a testable explanation of flexible balance rather than treating unequal phrase lengths as isolated anomalies. The sections that follow establish the critical context, define the corpus and method, test the topic-specific propositions, discuss their combined implications, state the evidentiary limits and future research needs, and conclude by answering the question.

The comparison of symmetrical and

expanded phrases is grounded in formal-function theory. Caplin distinguishes initiating, medial, and concluding functions from merely equal phrase lengths [1]. Schmalfeldt's account of formal becoming explains how a passage can acquire a revised function as it unfolds [2].

2 Phrase Symmetry in Mozart's Piano Sonatas

One source is *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 280* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart [3]. One corpus source is *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 332* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart [4]. One corpus source is *Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart [5]. One corpus source is *Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart [6]. The theory of musical expectation provided by Meyer is a foundation for distinguishing the anticipated events from the formal surprise [7]. The tonal grouping theory by Lerdahl and Jackendoff is a basis for describing the phrase-level structure [8]. The theory of interpretive criticism by Kerman is a guide to the transition from the formal analysis to the proportionate argument [9]. The analytical practice theory by Cook is a basis for comparing sources without providing one method as a complete approach [10]. Hatten's account of markedness and musical meaning informs the relation between formal contrast and expressive interpretation [11].

The selected materials comprise selected opening movements from Mozart's public-domain piano sonatas. The scores and analytical observations support contrastive inquiry and are not a statistical sample. Each item offers a distinct configuration of flexible symmetry and permits comparison through the common unit of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions.

The method is formal-functional score analysis supplemented by comparative phrase diagrams expressed verbally rather than as fabricated counts.

The evidentiary scale of Balanced, Extended, Reheard is deliberately local: basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions. The method records position, recurrence, interruption, and outcome before assigning interpretive weight. That order carries weight for the score comparison: a repeated feature may retain its appearance while changing function, whereas a single event at a boundary may redirect the whole sequence. The critical vocabulary is drawn only from scholarship

that bears on the named organizational problem. Claims about intention, reception, or prevalence are withheld unless the cited sources supply that evidence.

Source control is integral to the claim about phrase symmetry. Differences among editions, transcriptions, reproductions, restorations, recordings, or performance documents can alter the very feature being compared. The article therefore treats the version named in each reference as part of the evidence. Where the supplied bibliography does not yet identify that version precisely, the interpretation is provisional at that point; it cannot support a locator-dependent assertion until the author checks the consulted source.

3 Symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion

The first interpretive result can be formulated as follows: symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion. This temporal dimension is essential. The finding therefore concerns organization, not inventory.

Reading across the cases reveals that the pattern operates at more than one scale. The resulting form is recursive. Interpretation advances, but it also returns to revise what seemed settled. This recursive quality explains why flexible symmetry can remain coherent without becoming predictable.

The first proposition is strongest where basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions do more than recur. To count as support for the claim that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion, an occurrence must be prepared by an initial expectation and must alter the result of what follows. Balanced, Extended, Reheard therefore reads recurrence with placement: identical words, sonorities, shapes, gestures, or interface elements may carry different force when their structural position changes. This criterion keeps phrase symmetry tied to sequence instead of treating visibility alone as proof.

The first analytical reference point is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 280*. The reading tests the proposition that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion by restricting attention to basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions. It then identifies

which surrounding relations are necessary for that account.

In Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 280*, the proposition that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion is evaluated through placement, not keyword recurrence. The reading asks what prepares each occurrence of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions, which agent or organizational layer controls it, and what outcome follows. A detail counts as evidence only when its surrounding sequence changes the available judgment. This restriction prevents the case from being reduced to an example chosen after the thesis was formed.

A close reading of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 280* must therefore document the first relevant occurrence of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions, the expectation active at that moment, and the outcome that distinguishes it from background recurrence. The case supports Balanced, Extended, Reheard only if those three points can be located in the consulted version. A general parallel to the other cases is not enough; the passage must show why the proposition about phrase symmetry is necessary to explain its organization.

A second comparison, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 332*, tests the distributive dimension of the argument. Here the governing question is whether extensions preserve balance by clarifying function. This is not read as a defect in reliability.

The case drawn from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 332* changes the scale of comparison. Here phrase symmetry is read through the distribution of access, emphasis, and response among scores. The relevant question is not whether the same surface feature returns, but whether its return gives a different participant, voice, register, or position the capacity to redirect interpretation. That distributive test supplies the pressure behind the claim that extensions preserve balance by clarifying function.

For Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 332*, the principal counter-reading treats the observed distribution as a genre convention with no special bearing on phrase symmetry. The article answers only at the level of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions: it asks whether a transfer of access or emphasis

produces a later effect that convention alone leaves unexplained. If it does not, the second proposition weakens. If it does, the case clarifies how compositional hierarchy becomes an event rather than a static arrangement.

The third case turns to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333 and gives priority to revision over initial recognition. The interpretive test is whether repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes.

The value of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333 is retrospective. Following passages are reread against the first account of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions, allowing the article to distinguish repetition from revision. If the following event merely restates the prior one, the proposition that repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes receives little support. If it changes the status of what the reader, listener, or viewer already encountered, the case makes visible how phrase symmetry acquires formal memory.

Verification in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333 requires two locators: one for the initial treatment of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions and one for the moment that alters its status. The interval between them is analytically important because it determines what can be remembered, foreseen, or misrecognized. Recording both locations prevents the following reading from being projected backward as if it had been available from the start, and it gives the claim about phrase symmetry a visible temporal basis.

The fourth score segment, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545, functions as a resistant comparison.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545 remains in the selection because it resists easy synthesis. Its treatment of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions tests how far the claim that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion can travel before medium, genre, or historical circumstance demands qualification. The comparison does not convert resistance into confirmation. It records which part of the proposition remains, which part contracts, and which supplementary source would be necessary to decide between

rival accounts.

The resistant role of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545 also limits the article's vocabulary. If medium or genre changes the operation of basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions, the comparison names that difference before proposing an analogy. The case may therefore support only part of the claim that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion. Such partial support is informative: it identifies the condition under which phrase symmetry ceases to explain the evidence and marks the point where another historical or organizational account should take over.

4 Extensions preserve balance by clarifying function

The reading of the notated passages further finds that extensions preserve balance by clarifying function. This pattern shifts analysis from isolated form toward distribution. The repertoire repeatedly makes such allocation perceptible.

The second proposition asks who or what receives the force identified in the first. If extensions preserve balance by clarifying function, then position is inseparable from access: a voice, instrument, figure, object, space, or interface option carries weight partly because it can initiate, interrupt, answer, or withhold. Balanced, Extended, Reheard traces this allocation through basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions. The resulting hierarchy is not assumed in advance; it is inferred from the capacity to redirect subsequent action or interpretation, including cases where peripheral placement proves more consequential than organizational centrality.

5 Repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes

The final result argues that repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes. Return, correction, reframing, and delayed consequence are therefore analytical events. They reveal how a work stores a difference and activates it later.

Taken together, the three findings form a sequence of their own. The first identifies a process that directs attention. The second reveals that attention and authority are distributed. The third explains how ensuing events revise that distribution. This sequence supports the central thesis that flexible symmetry is histori-

cally variable and formally organized.

The third proposition is tested retrospectively. For the claim that repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes, subsequent evidence must change the status of something already encountered; simple repetition is insufficient. Balanced, Extended, Reheard therefore rereads prior basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions after each return, correction, re-entry, or altered frame. This backward movement reveals whether the score episode stores a difference and activates it later. Where the prior event remains unaffected, the proposed revision has not occurred and the claim about phrase symmetry loses explanatory force.

6 Discussion: What Phrase Symmetry Changes

The three propositions alter one another. If symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion, then extensions preserve balance by clarifying function cannot be handled as a separate theme; it describes who or what controls the first process. The claim that repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes adds a temporal test, asking whether later events confirm, narrow, or overturn an initial inference. Balanced, Extended, Reheard therefore explains phrase symmetry through ordered dependence rather than a list of recurring devices.

The cases further indicate that classical balance depends on managed difference and retrospective hearing. This result does not depend on universal agreement about every example.

Counter-reading is used here as an analytical control. For the proposition that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion, the strongest alternative is one that explains the same sequence without assigning it the same function. The proposition that extensions preserve balance by clarifying function must then show why distribution, rather than mere recurrence, accounts for the contrast. Finally, repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes is tested by asking what later event would have to be absent for the interpretation to fail. These tests make disagreement about Balanced, Extended, Reheard local and answerable.

The intervention of Balanced, Extended, Reheard is not the discovery of an unnoticed motif. Its contribution is

to specify how phrase symmetry operates when the same feature changes function through sequence. Existing vocabulary can name the relevant elements, yet naming does not explain why one occurrence prepares an inference and another revises it. By keeping basic ideas, continuations, cadential spans, repetitions, extensions, and elisions connected to position and result, the article turns a broad thematic observation into a claim that can be evaluated episode by episode and case by case.

This distinction also changes the status of absence. A missing response, withheld transition, unoccupied space, unrealized cadence, or unnamed agent is not automatically meaningful. It enters the argument only when the surrounding organization creates an expectation that the absence modifies. For Balanced, Extended, Reheard, such negative evidence is judged by the same standard as a visible feature: it must be locatable, connected to sequence, and capable of changing the account of phrase symmetry.

The primary boundary of the claim is that the selected sonata movements cannot represent Mozart's full keyboard output or all eighteenth-century phrase practice. It does not establish reception, intention, prevalence, or causal effect. The absence of those methods is acknowledged rather than disguised.

The value of Balanced, Extended, Reheard lies in its account of attention. Phrase symmetry determines which details become available early, which remain peripheral, and which acquire force only in retrospect. This is a compositional claim with historical consequences,

but it is not a substitute for audience evidence. Its reach is confined to the named scores and to the editorial or documentary versions listed in the references.

7 Conclusion

The research addressed how Mozart's phrase symmetry remains perceptible while undergoing local expansion and reinterpretation. Through structural-functional score analysis supplemented by comparative phrase diagrams expressed verbally rather than as fabricated counts, it argued that symmetry operates as a remembered norm rather than an inflexible surface proportion; that extensions preserve balance by clarifying function; and that repetition changes meaning when harmonic destination or register changes. These claims converge on a relational account of flexible symmetry.

Beyond the individual cases, the findings indicate that classical balance depends on managed difference and retrospective hearing.

The comparison answers the guiding question by showing that phrase symmetry survives alteration when formal function and directed expectation preserve a relation among otherwise unequal spans. The principal contribution is a relational account linking extension, repetition, cadence, and register without converting balance into a fixed numerical scheme. Because exact score locators and performance evidence are unavailable, the result is limited to the cited materials; edition-specific and performance-based comparison is the necessary next step.

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