Inside Clementi's *Sonatina in C*

Muzio Clementi, Sonatina in C major, Op. 36 No. 1, first movement (Allegro) — a whole sonata plan in 38 bars

Muzio Clementi (1752–1832) was born in Rome and spent almost his whole life in England. He was a star pianist, a famous teacher, a music publisher and a **piano maker**, and his music was written for the new piano rather than the harpsichord, which is why he is sometimes called the "father of the piano." In 1797 he published *Six Progressive Sonatinas*, Op. 36: "progressive" because each one is a little harder than the one before. No. 1 is where generations of pianists start.

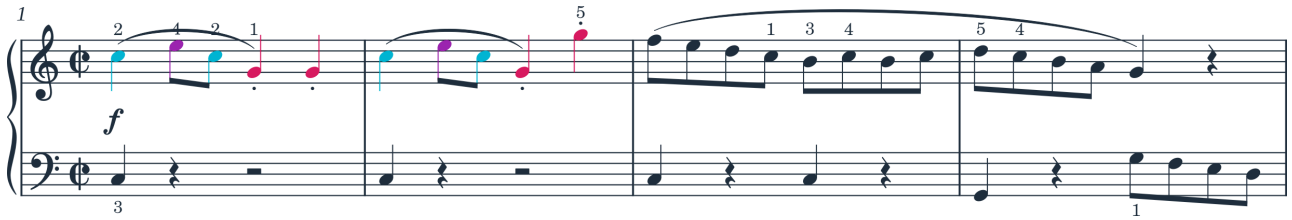
WHAT IS A SONATINA?

A **sonatina** is a little **sonata**: shorter, simpler, but built on the same plan. The first movement tells a three-part story. The **exposition** presents two themes in two different keys. The **development** wanders and builds tension. The **recapitulation** brings the themes back, and this time **both stay in the home key**. A full-size sonata form: Mozart's K. 545, Handout 379.
The plan in general: Handout 395.



Colors show the key: **cyan** = C, the home key; **magenta** = G, its dominant. Every section ends with a clear arrival: the exposition on G, the development on a G chord that waits for home, the recapitulation on C.
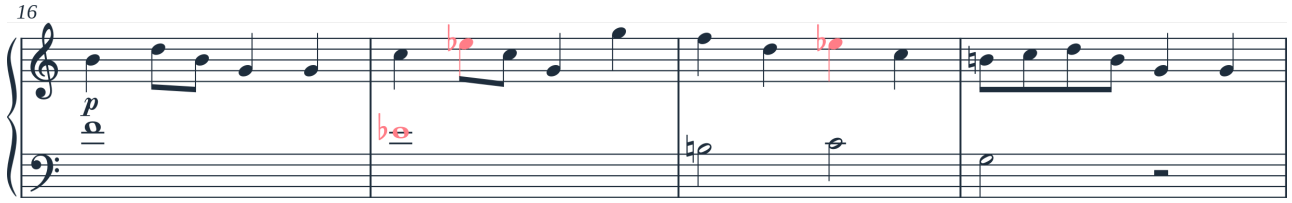
THEME 1 · A BROKEN CHORD



Bars 1–4 with the fingering and marks of the Schirmer edition (L. Köhler, 1904). Chord tones: **C root**, **E 3rd**, **G 5th**.

The theme is just the **C-major chord, broken**: C–E–C–G–G. Bar 2 says it again and jumps up to the high G, and bars 3–4 run down the scale to a pause on G. Notice the marks: the slur joins C to the first G, then the G's are **staccato**. That little lift gives the theme its bounce. Many editions print *Spiritoso* (with spirit) here; Clementi wrote *Allegro*.

THE DEVELOPMENT · A DARKER G



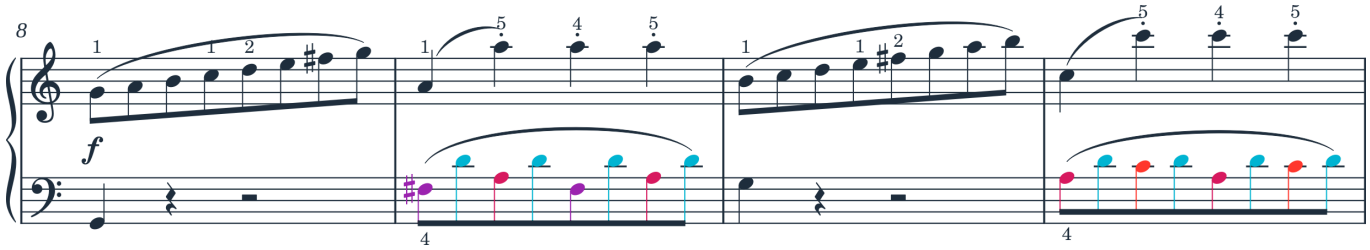
After the double bar the theme's rhythm returns, *piano*, over long left-hand notes. In bar 17 the E♭ (coral: the note that changed) turns C major into C minor for a moment (a borrowed note: Handout 384). The music circles around G until bar 23 and waits there: the listener knows home is near.

LISTEN
Scan to hear the whole movement and the bars on this sheet
tissimo.co/worksheets/clementi-sonatina-op36-no1
Full sheet in our sheet music library:
tissimo.co/sheet-music/sonatina-in-c-major-op-36-no-1-1

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THEME 2 · IN G MAJOR

A scale run and a busy left hand
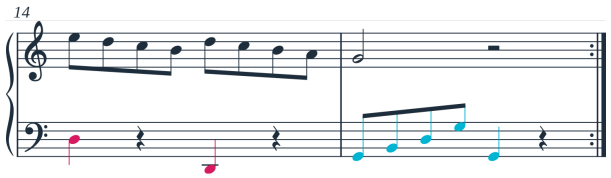


Bar 8 announces the new key with a **G-major scale** straight up the octave (the F♯ tells you it is G major), played *forte* with fingers 1-2-3, thumb under, 1-2-3-4-5. Then the left hand takes over: in bar 9 it breaks a **D**-major chord into a low-top-middle-top pattern, **F♯**–**D**–**A**–**D**, exactly the shape of an **Alberti bass** (Handout 41). In bar 11 a **C** joins in and the chord becomes **D7**, the dominant seventh of G (Handout 212).

CADENCES · V TO I, IN TWO KEYS
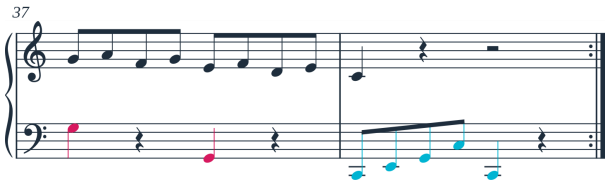
Bars 14–15 · end of the exposition, in G

The left hand drops from **D** (V) to **G** (I): an **authentic cadence** in G major.



Bars 37–38 · the end, in C

The same move, **G** (V) to **C** (I): the piece closes at home (Handout 72).



PRACTICE RECIPE

1. **Map it first.** Mark the three sections in your score: exposition 1–15, development 16–23, recapitulation 24–38. Bars 24–27 repeat bars 1–4 an octave lower, and bars 31–35 repeat 8–12 a fifth lower, so you have less to learn than it looks.
2. **Scales and broken chords on their own.** Play the bar-8 scale in G and the bar-31 scale in C with the same 1-2-3 / 1-2-3-4-5 fingering. Play the left hand of bars 9 and 11 as **blocked chords** first, then broken.
3. **Hands separately, then together slowly.** Keep the left-hand eighths soft and even; the right hand has the tune.
4. **Add the touches:** slurred notes smooth, staccato notes short and light, and the jump from *f* to *p* in bars 4–5 clear.
5. **Steady pulse.** The time signature is cut time, from Clementi's revised edition (the C with a line through it: two half-note beats per bar, Handout 359). Count two big beats per bar and keep the tempo you can hold through the bar-8 run.

TRY IT Play bars 8–12, then bars 31–35. Same fingers, same shapes, but the second time the music is in C. That is the whole idea of a recapitulation, in one minute.

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