

# WEBINAR: Teaching Sonata Form

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# Challenges and Goals

- Teach the essentials of sonata form
  - *Exposition*
  - *Development*
  - *Recapitulation*
- Hear the form in actual works
- Apply the form to future listening

# Form in general: What is form?

Form is a way of ordering things.

The form of a speech = the order in which a speaker presents a series of ideas.

The form of a musical work or movement = the order in which a composer “says” things, that is, the order in which s/he presents a series of musical ideas (themes).

# Why form?

In literature, a conventional form is a framework for telling a story. The contents may vary, but the framework, the sequence of events, remain constant and predictable.

Example: The Who-Done-It Mystery (e.g., Sherlock Holmes)

We always have (typically in this order):

- A crime.

- An investigator.

- Clues.

- Suspects.

- A solution.

The content of each of mystery is always different, but the outline remains essentially the same. And if we know the form, we can better appreciate how the author has used it. Variation, rondo, and sonata form all work in much the same way: the outline of each is predictable, but the content is always different.

# Basic Principles of Form in General:

## Only three possibilities

- |               |   |    |                 |
|---------------|---|----|-----------------|
| 1. Repetition | A | A  | Hello. Hello    |
| 2. Variation  | A | A' | Hello. Hi       |
| 3. Contrast   | A | B  | Hello. Goodbye. |

## Teaching form: Moving from the simpler to more complicated

- Sonata form = the most complex of musical forms.
- No reason to start with first movements (usually in sonata form!)
- Move from simple to increasingly complex forms. Begin with variations (A A' A'' A''' etc.), move to ternary (A B A), rondo (A B A C A etc.). Include the concepts of modulation and contrasting keys along the way.

# Rounded binary form

Rounded binary form = a good springboard for teaching sonata form.

|: 1<sup>st</sup> reprise                      :|: 2<sup>nd</sup> reprise                      :|

|  
prominent return of  
opening theme about  
mid-way through 2<sup>nd</sup>  
reprise

# Rounded binary form: minuets

Minuet proper = First rounded binary form unit

Trio = Second rounded binary form unit

*Musical Example:* Haydn, Symphony no. 43 in E-flat Major (“Mercury”), minuet proper (0:55)

- 1<sup>st</sup> reprise begins with opening theme; repeat begins at 0:10.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> reprise (beginning at 0:20) features a prominent return of opening theme about halfway through (at 0:41). (Repeat of 2<sup>nd</sup> reprise excluded here for reasons of time.)

→ Emphasize in class the **repeats of each half** and **the prominence of the moment of return in the second reprise.**

# Again: Why form?

In literature, a conventional form is a framework for telling a story. The contents may vary, but the framework, the sequence of events, remain constant and predictable. **This helps authors and readers alike.**

Example: The Who-Done-It Mystery (e.g., Sherlock Holmes)

**The same holds true for musical forms:** even though the content of each is unique, the outlines remain essentially the same. And if we know the form, we can better follow its progression and appreciate how the author has applied it. Variation, rondo, and sonata form all work in much the same way: the outline of each is predictable, but the content is always different. **This helps composers and listeners alike.**

# Why sonata form?

Sonata form is a conventional framework that allows composers to tell a musical “story.” And because the framework—the sequence of events—is fairly predictable, it also makes it easier for listeners to follow that “story.”

There are three sections in any sonata-form movement:

**1) Exposition.** Introduces the themes (“characters”) and keys (“locations”).

Primary key area: the tonic

Secondary key area: the closely related key

**2) Development.** Takes the themes (“characters”) through various complications and avoids the tonic (the “home” key).

**3) Recapitulation.** Brings all the characters back home and resolves the “plot” of the movement.

→ We can analyze film version of *The Wizard of Oz* as a story told in sonata form...

# *The Wizard of Oz: Exposition*



**Location:** The farm. Home. The “tonic” or “home” key.

**Characters:** Dorothy, the three farmhands.



...and (later, but still at home) Miss Gulch.

# *The Wizard of Oz*: Exposition (cont'd.)



Dorothy resolves to leave the farm and somewhere else far away (“Somewhere Over the Rainbow”). She sets out to a new location (= transition, the modulation to a new tonal area).



## *The Wizard of Oz*: Exposition (cont'd.)



That new location is down the road, where she meets Professor Marvel, the fortune-teller. This new character corresponds to a new “theme.”

The story has now moved to a new place: away from home, no longer on the farm (the tonic key), but at the same time not all that far away (the related secondary key).

# *The Wizard of Oz: Development*



Most of the film takes place “over the rainbow,” in Munchkin Land and in the Land of Oz. The characters from the Exposition, though transformed, are all still recognizable from when we first met them. They are different, yet still recognizably the same. But we are definitely not in the tonic key (the farm) anymore.

# *The Wizard of Oz*: Recapitulation



Once back home (the tonic key), all the major characters return in their original form. Even Professor Marvel appears, though we had not seen him on the farm before. As in a sonata-form movement, all the major characters (themes) are presented in the original location (the tonic key).

# Summary: The *Wizard of Oz* as a story told in sonata form

Sonata Form	Musical "Drama"	<i>The Wizard of Oz</i>
Exposition	The themes of the movement are "exposed" to us.	In the opening black-and-white section, we meet all the major characters of the story.
Tonic	Theme(s) are presented in the tonic, the "home" key.	Dorothy at home on her farm; we meet the farmhands and the dreaded Miss Gulch.
→ modulates to	→ modulates to	→ runs away from home
Secondary key area	A new theme or themes are presented in a key area that is not the tonic, away from the "home" key.	Away from home, Dorothy meets a new character, Professor Marvel.
Development	Harmonically unstable. Themes are transformed so that they are different from how we first heard them, yet are recognizably the same.	The film turns to color, and all the characters are transformed: Miss Gulch has become the Wicked Witch of the West; the farmhands are now the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, and the Lion; and Professor Marvel has turned into the Wizard of Oz.
Recapitulation	Return to the "home" key of the tonic. All themes heard in the exposition are now presented in the tonic.	Dorothy returns to Kansas and the film returns to black-and-white. The characters of the opening scene (even Professor Marvel, whom Dorothy had met away from home) all reappear in their original form and visit at her bedside.

# Hearing sonata form: Exercises and evaluation

Exercise: Have students (working either individually or in small groups) record the timings of the events they know they will hear in a sonata-form movement. Use a template (see next slide).

Suggested sample pieces:

- Johann Christian Bach, Keyboard Sonata in D Major, Op. 5, no. 2, first movement.
- Haydn, Symphony no. 13 in D Major, first movement.
- Beethoven, Symphony no. 5 in C minor, first movement.

# Template for exercises in listening to sonata-form movements

Event	Timing
Exposition	
First theme in tonic	
Transition (modulation to a new key)	
Second theme in related key area	
Exposition repeat	
First theme in tonic	
Transition (modulation to a new key)	
Second theme in related key area	
Development	
Recapitulation	
First theme in tonic	
Transition (but altered so as to stay in the same key)	
Second theme now in tonic	

# Johann Christian Bach: Sonata in D Major, Op. 5, no. 2 (1766) Exposition (1:15)

Event	Timing
Exposition	
First theme in tonic	0:00
Transition (modulation to a new key)	0:15
Second theme in related key area	0:33
Exposition repeat	
First theme in tonic	
Transition (modulation to a new key)	
Second theme in related key area	
Development	
Recapitulation	
First theme in tonic	
Transition (but altered so as to stay in the same key)	
Second theme now in tonic	

# Johann Christian Bach: Sonata in D Major, Op. 5, no. 2 (1766) Development and Recapitulation (2:05)

Event	Timing
Exposition	
First theme in tonic	0:00
Transition (modulation to a new key)	0:15
Second theme in related key area	0:33
Exposition repeat	
First theme in tonic	1:16
Transition (modulation to a new key)	1:30
Second theme in related key area	1:48
Development	2:32
Recapitulation	
First theme in tonic	3:25
Transition (but altered so as to stay in the same key)	3:40
Second theme now in tonic	3:53

# Recapitulation: Teaching Sonata Form

- Emphasize the *purpose* of musical form and forms in general: they help both composers and listeners by providing a recognizable framework for presenting a series of events.
- Move from *simpler forms* (Variation, ABA) to *more complicated ones* (rondo) before tackling sonata form.
- Use in-class *exercises* (group or individual) with *event/timing templates* to help students monitor whether or not they are hearing the elements of sonata form.
- Repeat with as many pieces as time will allow, or create out-of-class assignments. The more sonata-form movements students hear, the more recognizable its outlines will become.