Assignment 15: Introduction to Sonata-Allegro Form

1) Read the first 2½ pages of the attached handout (up until **II. Theme and variations**).
2) Listen to a recording of the first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in G major, K. 283 **without the score**.
3) Read MGTA pp. 663-673 (scans will be on website).
4) If you did not already do so in the course of the reading, listen to the movement again while following the score (in your anthology, or find it on imslp.org).
5) In the space below, explain what the "K" number in K. 283 means. Ask any music dictionary or Dr. Google.

THE CLASSICAL FORMS

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Most classical instrumental pieces are in 3 or 4 movements, with the outer movements fast and one of the middle movements slow. The individual movements themselves conform to a small number of very standard patterns—in fact, the four forms described below probably account for 90% of classical pieces.

You can group the four basic classical forms into two categories: theme and variations and minuet/trio forms are both based on concatenating rounded binary forms; sonata and rondo, by contrast, feature longer and more complicated developmental principles. You can think of sonata form as featuring an *expansion* of rounded binary.

I. Sonata form (often called **Sonata-Allegro** or sometimes **First-Movement form** to distinguish this single-movement form from the multi-movement scheme described above). You've basically already learned Sonata form—it's an expanded version of rounded binary form. Like rounded binary form, the sonata form has three parts that are grouped into two units, each of which is typically repeated.

‖: A :‖ ‖: B A' :‖

The opening A section is called the *exposition*. It sets out the main themes of the piece. It begins in the tonic, with a strong, memorable theme or themes; there is then a second or third phrase that quickly modulates to a closely related key: in major, this is usually the dominant; in minor, it is usually the relative major, or possibly the minor dominant. (In the nineteenth century, following Beethoven, composers begin to experiment with a wider range of secondary keys, often related by third to the opening key.) It then presents a second, memorable theme., which is often repeated. Some more themes follow, perhaps less memorable, with (perhaps) a memorable theme before the cadence in the new key that ends the exposition.

The B section is called the *development*. It visits a variety of new key areas, reusing the themes of the opening section. One very often finds sequences here. The development typically ends with a half cadence on V, preparing for the return of the A section.

The A' section is called the *recapitulation*. It repeats the exposition *but without the modulation*. The music stays in the tonic key the entire time. In this sense, it can be said to "solve" the "problem" posed by the exposition—rectifying the fact that the original A section ended up in the wrong key.*

A. The exposition. The exposition itself can be broken down into several sections.

		cadence? ⇓	*half cadence (real pause)* ⇓	*possible elided cadences* ⇓ ⇓ ⇓	*full cadence (pause)* ⇓
	First Theme	Transition	Second Theme Group	Closing theme
Major:	I	I→V	V	V
Minor:	I	i→III	III	III

* Actually it's a little more complicated than that. The recap often features a modulatory passage at the end of the first theme that makes a sort of U-turn and ends up back where it started. The composer Schönberg referred to this aptly as the "modulation from the tonic to the tonic". This non-modulating modulation serves to dramatize the fact that the second theme group is now in the original key.

The opening section, from the first theme to the end of the transition, is very flexible. It often involves two phrases: a strong memorable first phrase, and a second, transitional phrase that modulates to the new key. The opening section almost always ends in a half cadence, usually in the new key. However, it is entirely possible to have an opening section that does not modulate—a half cadence in the old key leads immediately to a second theme in the dominant. See #2, below.

There are many possibilities for this opening section, however. For example:

1. A standard pattern is to begin with a strong, memorable phrase whose cadence is *elided*—that is, the cadence of the first phrase does "double duty" as the beginning of the transitional phrase. The transitional phrase then begins with the opening material, but takes it in a new direction, modulating to a new key. (See, for example, the Mozart A minor piano sonata.)

1a. Alternatively, you can begin with a strong memorable phrase that ends in a half cadence. The second phrase starts similarly to the first, but modulates to the new key, ending in a half cadence of that key. (Mozart G minor symphony, no. 40, first movement.)

2. Sometimes the opening theme does not modulate, and there is no separate transition. The second theme simply starts in the new key. (The first phrase is just extended, ending on a half cadence.) The three Mozart D major sonatas follow this pattern, as does the Mozart C major Sonata no. 10.

3. The opening phrase can reach a full cadence on the tonic. The transitional phrase then starts with new, contrasting material that makes the modulation happen. Cf. the Mozart G major piano sonata.

Many other patterns are possible. In almost every case, the opening section ends with a brief pause, to signal that the music is about to go somewhere new. This is sometimes called the "medial caesura."

The **second theme** represents the next big event in the sonata form. It is usually memorable and melodic. Sometimes it contrasts strikingly with the opening theme. Sometimes it reuses ideas from the opening theme; Haydn particularly does this often. The second theme often consists in a number of smaller phrases, which is why people sometimes call it the *second group* or *second theme area*. Usually the motion does not stop during the second theme—cadences are elided, the goal being to keep the music going until the end of the exposition.

Very often composers recall the opening music, or the opening key, somewhere during the second theme. Often this is done quite subtly. Watch for it.

Finally, the exposition ends sometimes ends with a **closing theme** signaling that we're about to finish. Usually, this closing music is memorable but light in character. Often it comes right after a very decisive cadence near the end of the exposition, having the character of a coda.

A key point is that there are at least three different ways to conceive of sonata form: (1) in terms of *key relations;* (2) in terms of *themes*; and (3) in terms of *cadences*. These three aspects of music work together to create a rich background of expectations, against which composers operate—sometimes confirming the expectations, sometimes working against them.

B. The development. The development reuses the musical ideas of the exposition. It is typically full of sequences, built out of the expositional material, and cycling through a variety of keys, avoiding the keys of the exposition. There are very few rules. Major-key sonatas often feature

minor keys in the development (particularly ii and vi). The development ends modulates back to the tonic and ends on a half cadence in the tonic key—thus setting up the recapitulation.

The development rarely involves new themes, though this occasionally happens. Beethoven did this in his third symphony and it was considered striking. However, antecedents can be found in the work of earlier composers.

Mozart's developments (and, to a lesser extent, Haydn and Beethoven's) often begin with a switch to the parallel minor of the most recent key. They also often feature *ascending-fifth* sequences near the start of the development. (These developmental sequences are different from those found in the exposition, with their unit of repetition being longer—4 measures, often, rather than just two chords.) Descending fifths come closer to the end of the development. Also keep your eyes out for a passage that settles strongly in some secondary key, often vi in a major-key development.

C. The recapitulation. The recapitulation (recap) often repeats the opening material very closely. Its main job is to present the second theme area in the home tonic key. Sometimes material is eliminated, sometimes it is reordered. (A reasonably common thing to do is bring back the opening theme after the second theme; at least one Mozart sonata does that [find it!].) Typically it repeats the exposition closely, with only a few measures altered to keep the second theme in the tonic key. It is always interesting to look at what changes in a sonata recapitulation. Ask yourself what the composer changed, what stayed the same, what got eliminated, and what got transposed.

The subdominant often makes an appearance in the recapitulation, especially in major keys. To see why, note that the exposition of a major key sonata modulates up by fifth, from tonic to dominant. If, in the recapitulation, you get to the subdominant, then you can reuse this modulation up by fifth—now modulating from subdominant up to tonic, rather than from tonic up to dominant.

Ia. Slow movement sonata form. Slow movements are sometimes in an abbreviated sonata form that has no development.

II. Theme and variations. The theme and variations form is a repetitive form. A passage of music (the "theme") is stated. It is then repeated a number of times, embellished each time. Usually the harmonies stay relatively fixed, though they may be embellished somewhat. Often the melodic outline of the original theme is discernable, though sometimes it can be hard to find.

Symbolically, the theme and variations form can be written AA'A"A"' (etc.)

Abstractly, this is the form of a lot of jazz compositions, which also often feature a simple repeating chord pattern. In jazz, soloists improvise over the repeating chord pattern; in the classical theme-and-variations form, the composer varies the theme.

In classical music, the theme is a rounded binary form of the sort you studied last semester: an 8-measure first phrase (A) that modulates to the dominant; a 4- or 8-measure middle section (B), and a return of the original A section, altered now so as to end in the tonic.

Rounded binary form: ||: A :|| ||: B A' :||

Theme and variations often tend to accelerate as the movement goes on, using faster and faster note values. This helps to give a kind of progressive quality to an otherwise static form.

In general the variations are all in the same key. However, there is usually a variation in the parallel major or minor. There is also often an adagio ("slow") variation as well. Sometimes there are "double variations" forms that alternate between variations on two different themes.

III. Minuet-and-trio or Scherzo-and-trio. This form developed from dance music. A "minuet" is a kind of mid-tempo dance. The minuet-and-trio is usually in ¾ time; the scherzo-and-trio can be in ¾ or 2/4. The word "scherzo" means joke. As you might imagine, these movements are often light or humorous in character.

Like the theme and variations, these forms are built out of the rounded binary form. They begin with a first rounded binary form (the minuet or scherzo), progress to a second rounded binary form (the trio), and end by repeating the original rounded binary form. In this last section, the individual repeats of the rounded binary form are often omitted.

MINUET OR SCHERZO	**TRIO**	**MINUET OR SCHERZO** *(usually **w/out** repeats)*
‖: A :‖ ‖: B A' :‖	‖: A :‖ ‖: B A' :‖	‖ A ‖ ‖ B A' ‖
$\mathcal{A}$	$\mathcal{B}$	$\mathcal{A}$

IV. Rondo. Rondos typically appear as the last movement of a classical piece. They are typically light, fast, and celebratory in character. The form of a rondo is **ABACA …**

A recurring **A** section (the Rondo theme) alternates with *episodes* containing other musical material (B, C, D, …), usually in other keys. In general Rondos are non-developmental: the later sections do not reuse or transform the material of the earlier sections. Nor are the repeats of the A section substantially altered, though they may sometimes be shortened. The typical Classical rondo is ABACA and is sometimes called *simple rondo* or *five-part rondo* form.

There is a hybrid of sonata and rondo form called *sonata-rondo* or *seven-part rondo* form. Here, the B section, initially in a closely related key, returns in the original key:

expo.	*dev*	*recap.*	
AB	**AC**	**AB'**	**A**

Interestingly, there are rondos in which each section is a rounded binary form. See, for example, the last movement of Haydn's D major piano sonata #37 (or #50, in some editions.)

V. Other forms. Not every classical movement is in one of the above forms, though most are. Slow movements in particular tend to depart from these templates. In general, use your judgment. If you can't fit something into one of the preceding forms, it probably doesn't belong.