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Sonata, Sonatina, and Concerto

Overview

The focus of this chapter is sonata form. We consider the roles of melody and harmony in shaping a sonata-form movement, and observe how sonata form changed from the Classical to the Romantic era. We also examine two related forms: sonatina and concerto.

Repertoire

Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Sonata in C Major, Op. 53 (*Waldstein*), mvt. 1

Muzio Clementi, Sonatina in C Major, Op. 36, No. 1, mvt. 1

Joseph Haydn, Concerto for Corno di caccia in D Major, mvt. 1

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Piano Sonata in G Major, K. 283, mvt. 1

Outline

Sonatas and sonata form

Classical sonata form

- The first large section: Exposition
- The second large section: Development and recapitulation

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- Key areas and the organization of the exposition
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- Concerto form

Performing and listening to sonata-form movements

Sonatas and Sonata Form

The term **sonata** technically refers to a composition for instruments, yet its meaning has changed over time. In the Classical and Romantic eras, a sonata is a multimovement composition for piano, or piano and solo instrument, usually in three or four movements. The first is almost always in **sonata form**, sometimes called **sonata-allegro form** after the standard tempo marking for such movements; the second is usually slow; and the last movement (third or fourth) may be in rondo, sonata, or sonata-rondo form. Though first movements of symphonies, string quartets, and other chamber pieces may also be cast in a sonata form, in this chapter we will focus on the sonata-form movement for piano.

There are several Baroque compositions called “sonata” in the anthology—these include works consisting of a prelude followed by a series of movements (often binary forms) for a small group of instruments, such as the Corelli Sonata in D Minor and Trio Sonata in A Minor. In form and style, though, they are quite different from what came to be known in the Classical era as sonata form.

Classical Sonata Form

🎧 Listen to the entire first movement (*Allegro*) of Mozart’s three-movement Sonata in G Major, while following the score in your anthology. Think about the overall formal organization, and listen for cadences, which often mark the end of formal divisions; indicate in the score where you hear sections beginning or ending. Label any material that reappears later in the movement, and write the measure numbers of where you first heard these themes or motives. As you read this chapter, keep your score and recording at hand to see and hear each new element under discussion.

While you were listening, you may have noticed some musical clues to the movement’s formal boundaries. One obvious clue is the repeat signs—at measure 53 to indicate a repeat of measures 1–53, and at the end to indicate a repeat of 54–120. The movement seems to resemble a large-scale continuous rounded binary form.

The First Large Section: Exposition

The first section in a sonata-form movement (here, mm. 1–53) is called the exposition.

🎯 **KEY CONCEPT** In the **exposition**, themes and motives for the entire movement are “exposed” for the first time. Its structure is in three parts: (1) opening material in the tonic key; (2) a modulatory passage that leads to a second key; and (3) new material in the second key, leading to a strong cadence (“expositional closure”) in that key.

This exposition’s first phrase (Example 32.1) is a sentence (2+2+6) that establishes the key of G major; with its triple meter and Alberti bass, it may be invoking a minuet musical topic. The second half of the phrase (mm. 5–10) is extended beyond the expected cadence in measure 8, with scalar flourishes in the right hand that lead to a PAC in measure 10. This second half is then repeated with slight variations, bringing the opening idea to its conclusion in measure 16.

EXAMPLE 32.1: Mozart, Piano Sonata in G Major, mvt. 1, mm. 1–16 🎧

First theme group (FTG)

The musical score for Example 32.1 shows the first theme group (FTG) of Mozart's Piano Sonata in G Major, first movement, measures 1 through 16. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written for piano (p) and includes dynamics such as *p*, *fp*, and *f*. The first phrase (measures 1-6) is labeled 'Sentence' and the second phrase (measures 7-16) is labeled 'Repetition'. A repeat sign is shown at measure 53. The score ends with a PAC (Perfect Authentic Cadence) at measure 16.

In sonata form, this opening musical idea in the tonic is often called the **first theme (FT)**, or **primary theme (P or PT)**. We prefer **first theme group (FTG)**, which indicates that the section may consist of more than one thematic idea (as it does here), but expresses the tonic key throughout. Another possible term, “first tonal area” (FTA) focuses on the harmonic scheme.

The next significant cadence comes in measure 22 (Example 32.2). This cadence could be interpreted as a HC preceded by a secondary dominant (a tonicized half cadence), but the music continues in the new key of D major, as evidenced by the consistent presence of C# in the following measures and by cadences in D through measure 53. Measures 16–22 therefore have a transitional and modulatory function.

EXAMPLE 32.2: Mozart sonata, mm. 16–22**Transition (TR)**

musical score for measures 16–22 of a Mozart sonata. The score is in 3/4 time, key of G major. Measures 16–19 show a melodic sequence in the right hand with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measures 20–22 continue the sequence, ending with a half cadence in G major (V) and a medial caesura. The bass line provides harmonic support with chords and single notes.

KEY CONCEPT Transitions (TR) lead from the first theme group to a cadence that prepares a second key area. They are usually sequential and modulatory, and may express an increase in momentum and volume as they lead to the second key area. The end of the transition may be marked by an abrupt silence, called a **medial caesura** (MC—“caesura” means “pause”), sometimes preceded by a dramatic chord or octave leap. If there is a medial caesura, it divides the exposition into two parts; if there is none, the section can be called a “continuous exposition.”

Transitions that incorporate motives from the first theme are called **dependent transitions**, while those that introduce new material are **independent transitions**. Mozart’s transition is independent and consists of two short melodic sequences—measures 16–19 and 19–21—with a modulation at the end of the second and a medial caesura in measure 22.

With a dependent transition, it may be difficult to decide where the first theme group ends and the transition begins—after all, they use the same thematic material. Listen for tonal function: if the passage sounds like it is leaving the tonic key, it is transitional. Independent transitions can be identified by the change in melodic material and by sequential activity, even when the modulation is delayed until the very end.

Measures 23–53, in the key of D major, constitute the second tonal area, or second theme group. (Other possible terms include “secondary theme” (S) or “subordinate theme.”)

KEY CONCEPT The second theme group (STG) typically divides into a number of themes that may seem unrelated, except for the fact that they are in a single key: usually the dominant or, in minor keys, the relative major. Once an authentic cadence in the secondary key is reached, the tonal goal of the STG is complete, although closing material (or a closing theme) may follow.

The first and second theme groups *always* contrast in key, and may present themes with contrasting moods. In some early sonata-form movements, particularly those of Haydn, the first and second themes are quite similar, differing primarily in their keys; sonatas like this are called “monothematic.”

SUMMARY

The first large section of a major-key sonata form (the exposition) usually has two main parts, defined primarily by their key relationship:

- The first theme group expresses the tonic and the second theme group (most often) the dominant.
- The first theme group is usually shorter than the second, and the second may be divided into several thematic units.
- The transition section modulates between the two groups and may end with a medial caesura.

Mozart’s second theme group is a good illustration of how several short thematic ideas—some stable melodies, others more transitional in nature—can work together in a single unified key area. Measures 23–31 present a syncopated lyrical melody that is clearly in D major. The first phrase of this theme, 23–26 (Example 32.3), ends with a half cadence; then the phrase is repeated and varied in 27–30, also ending with a HC.

EXAMPLE 32.3: Mozart sonata, mm. 23–26**Second theme group (STG)**

musical score for measures 23–26 of a Mozart sonata. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. Measures 23–26 show a syncopated lyrical melody in the right hand with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melody ends with a half cadence (HC) in D major. The bass line provides harmonic support with chords and single notes.

Measures 31–34 (Example 32.4) exhibit a transitional character because of the repeated motive and secondary leading-tone chords, but they do not modulate. A second melodic idea follows, still in D major (35–38); and 38–43 are a varied repetition of 33–38. With the substantial PAC in D in measure 43 (repeated from m. 38), the STG's tonal motion is complete.

EXAMPLE 32.4: Mozart sonata, mm. 31–38

Second theme group (continued)

Measures 43–44, based on a motive from the transition (mm. 16–18), then connect to a final theme in 45–51 (Example 32.5). Some analysts consider a new idea at the end of the exposition, following a PAC in the second key, a **closing theme (CT)**; others call it another subsection within the STG. We will refer to it as a CT, understanding it as part of the STG.

EXAMPLE 32.5: Mozart sonata, mm. 45–51

Closing theme (CT)

In sonata-form movements of the late Romantic era, the closing theme may appear in a third key area, and may include more than one distinct melody. In that case, it may be called the “third theme group,” “closing theme group,” or simply “closing group.” In this movement, the theme in measures 45–47 and 48–51 is reminiscent of the syncopated melody of 23–31, making a connection back to the beginning of the D major key area (compare Examples 32.3 and 32.5).

Finally, measures 51–53 form a codetta that extends and repeats the cadence in D major.

EXAMPLE 32.6: Mozart sonata, mm. 51–53

Codetta

Although this exposition is similar to a continuous binary-form first section in its key areas, it is much longer and includes transitional passages and a codetta. In addition, it features harmonically stable areas in each key.

KEY CONCEPT Classical-era sonata-form expositions are usually repeated, and generally consist of the following sections:

First theme group	Transition	Second theme group (optional codetta)
Major key: I	Modulates to V	V (may include a closing theme, still in V)
Minor key: i	Modulates to III (or v)	III (or v) (may include a closing theme in the same key)

The Second Large Section: Development and Recapitulation

When you analyze the second large section of a sonata form, it's helpful to begin by identifying the return of the opening material. Listen again to the Mozart movement while following the score. Listen in particular for the return of the first and second theme groups (including the closing theme) in the second section; this return of earlier material is another similarity between sonata form and rounded binary form, but the way the two forms treat the returning material differs.

Recapitulation: Return of the Opening Material The return of the exposition in the second large section is called the recapitulation (meaning

“return to the head,” or beginning). When the exposition’s music returns, however (compare measures 1–53 with 71–120), some changes are customary.

KEY CONCEPT The recapitulation traditionally presents *all* of the exposition materials in the tonic key. The first theme group, already in the tonic in the exposition, can usually be restated in the recapitulation with little alteration. The second theme group, and closing theme if present, are usually transposed to the tonic. Since the transition no longer needs to modulate, it is altered to stay in the tonic.

Example 32.7 shows the return of the FTG in Mozart’s sonata. Compare this passage with the FTG in the exposition (mm. 1–16).

EXAMPLE 32.7: Mozart sonata, mm. 72–83

Recapitulation

The first four measures of the first theme group return unchanged in the recapitulation, but the second half (4–10 in the exposition) has been replaced with a variant; this passage, based on the opening material, tonicizes A minor (ii) by means of its secondary dominant (represented by the G#s).

The transition from the first to the second theme group, which modulates in the exposition, is usually modified in the recapitulation to stay in the original key. In this case, however, the transition passages are identical (compare mm. 16–22 with 83–89). Recall that in the exposition, the end of the transition could have been analyzed as a HC with V tonicized, except that the movement continued in the key of D. Here, the cadence *is* treated as a THC—there is no modulation—and the movement continues in the tonic key, G. Perhaps, in retrospect, the changes to the second phrase of the first theme (mm. 75–83) were intended to balance the reappearance of the transition exactly as before.

Since the second theme group and codetta (if any) are usually transposed from the key of the dominant (in the exposition) to the original tonic for the recapitulation, we would expect measures 90–120, corresponding to 23–53, to appear in G major—and they do. We also make note of the return of the substantial PAC that confirmed the second key in the exposition (mm. 42–43); this cadence in the recapitulation (109–110), now in G, confirms the triumph of the original tonic.

Try it #1

Compare the components of the second theme in the recapitulation with those in the exposition. What has been transposed up? What has been transposed down? Has anything been changed other than by transposition?

Development: Harmonic Instability In a rounded binary form, we would expect the beginning of the second large section to display harmonic instability through a modulation or through sequences that touch on different keys; the same is true for Classical-era sonata-form movements.

KEY CONCEPT The beginning of the second large section in a sonata-form movement is called the **development**, because in sonatas by Beethoven and later Romantic-era composers it was devoted to the development and exploration of motives and themes from the exposition. Developments are marked by harmonic instability and sequential motion, and end on the dominant to prepare the recapitulation’s tonic return.

A close examination of measures 54–62 (Example 32.8) reveals few connections to the motives of the exposition. Instead, the dominant (D major) is prolonged through its own dominant, A major (hence the C#s). Mozart’s “development,” typical for sonata-form movements of the early Classical era, is in essence an expanded version of the same type of harmonic instability and sequential material that would be found in a rounded binary form.

EXAMPLE 32.8: Mozart sonata, mm. 54–62**Development (excerpt)**

The Retransition At the conclusion of the development section, a few measures perform a special task: preparing for the recapitulation. This part of the development, the **retransition**, sets up the return of the first theme harmonically—by establishing and often prolonging the V7 chord of the tonic key. The retransition also sets the mood for the first theme's return. In some sonata-form movements, it builds tension, making the listener anticipate the first theme's triumphant return; in others, it sets up the first theme's return almost as a surprise. Other dramatic roles for the retransition are possible, but its harmonic function is consistent: to establish the dominant seventh chord of the tonic key.

In Mozart's sonata, the retransition features a long dominant pedal, extending from measure 62 to 68 (Example 32.9). This rearticulated pedal point, with a melodic sequence above it, builds tension but does not immediately connect to the return of the first theme. Instead, Mozart inserts two ascending pentachords (68–70), each ending with a brief rest, as if to say, "Not yet, not yet." Finally, in 70–71, a descending scalar pattern brings back the first theme.

EXAMPLE 32.9: Mozart sonata, mm. 62–73**Retransition**

Listen to this retransition in several different performances: in some, the pianist will slow measures 68 and 69 noticeably, perhaps extending the rests, to heighten the anticipation; in others, he or she maintains a consistent tempo throughout.

SUMMARY

The second large section of Classical-era sonata-form movements includes the development and recapitulation sections; it is usually repeated, and may end with a coda.

Development sections may explore thematic material from the exposition or may simply represent an area of harmonic instability. In early sonata forms, the development section is usually brief compared with the exposition and recapitulation.

Overall, typical Classical-era sonata forms consist of the following sections:

: Exposition			: : Development			Recapitulation			:
FTG	TR	STG (CT)	DEV	ReTR	FTG	TR	STG (codetta)*		
(MC)									
I	V	V of	I	I					
i	III	tonic key	i	i					

*optional