

Lecture 5: Form

October 3, 2016

What is Form?

“The constructive or organizing element in music. Form might be defined simply as what forms have in common, reflecting the fact that an organizing impulse is at the heart of any compositional enterprise, from the most modest to the most ambitious.”

– Oxford Music Online, article on “Form”

Elements that determine Form:

1. Repetition

- A) Melodies
- B) Motives
- C) Textures
- D) Harmonic structures

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2. Closure:

- A) Use of consonance and dissonance
- B) Cadence
- C) Melodic descent

Phrase Structure

How do repetition and closure work together to help us sense musical form?

Phrase – a unit of musical materials articulated by a cadence or some other type of closure

[“Ah vous dirai-je, Maman”](#) – French folk song (1761)

Two-Part Forms

Binary – a form in two sections, often contrasting in key, texture and/or musical content. (AB or AA')

Rounded binary – a binary form featuring a return of part of the A section at the end of the piece (ABa)

Theme and Variations

A form in which certain elements of a short piece of music serve as the foundation for a series of musical elaborations and/or reworkings.

Mozart – [Variations on “Ah vous dirais je maman”](#) K. 265/300e
(1781/2)

Ternary Form

Ternary – a form featuring two contrasting sections. The first section is repeated in its entirety as the closing section of the piece (ABA or ABA')

Chopin – [Waltz No. 7 in C sharp Minor Op. 64 No. 2](#)

Difficulties in Determining Form

Is it rounded binary or is it ternary?

Theoretical terminology of form points towards the general. What composers do always points towards the individual and particular. Sometimes it's tricky trying to fit pieces of music into the boxes we make for them.

Claude Debussy – Voiles from Preludes Bk. 1:



Sonata Form

Example of a more complicated form used to make longer works, particularly during the classical era (approx. 1750-1827). Popularized by Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Joseph Haydn and many others.

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Exposition: Two sets of thematic material are presented in contrasting keys.

Development: The material from the Exposition is developed freely or new material is introduced.

Recapitulation: The two sets of thematic material from the Exposition are reiterated but this time both in the home key (tonic).

L. v. Beethoven, Symphony No. 5, First Mvmt.:



Rondo

A form featuring repetitions of an A section separated by a variety of contrasting materials. (ABACA....A)

In a Rondo, unlike in a ritornello, the A section always comes back in the same key.

François Couperin, *Les Baricades Mistérieuses* (1716-17)



Ritornello Form

A form based on marked textural contrasts in which a recurring theme, the *ritornello*, is repeated numerous times in different keys and separated by episodes.

concerto – a larger composition in which one or more soloists play with and against a larger orchestra.

concerto grosso – a type of concerto that pits a small group of soloists (such as two violins with basso continuo) against a full orchestra

solo concerto – a type of concerto where a single soloist (plus basso continuo) is contrasted with the whole orchestra

Antonio Vivaldi, Violin Concerto, Op.8, No.1, First movement, “Spring”



Another Variation Form

Ground Bass – a repeated bass line over which a variety of harmonies and musical ideas can be shaped.

Passacaglia – a theme and variation form where a ground bass serves as the foundation for the variations.

Mass - music composed to highlight various texts used in the mass service of the Roman Catholic church.

J. S. Bach – ‘Crucifixus’ from the Mass in B minor:



Two Vocal Forms

Strophic – a vocal form, involving text, in which each verse is set to the same music.

Franz Schubert – [An die Musik](#) (1817):

Through-composed – a vocal form in which the music is freely composed to accompany the text.

Schubert – Der Erlkönig (1815-21):

