Sonata Form

The sonata

- Sonata comes from the Italian *sonare* ("to sound")
- In the sixteenth century, instrumental compositions were called sonatas, to distinguish them from vocal works (*cantatas*) and keyboard pieces (*toccatas*), but none of these early sonatas were in sonata form
- After about 1750, a *sonata* was a composition in three or four movements written for keyboard or for solo instrument (usually with keyboard accompaniment)
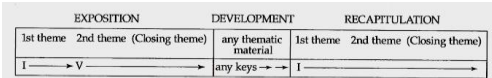- Only some of the movements of these sonatas were in sonata form

Sonata form

- Sonata form is the most significant and widely used formal plan of the classical and romantic period
- Sonata form is normally used in the *first movement* (and frequently in other movements) of sonatas, symphonies, concertos, quartets, etc.
- It is sometimes called sonata-allegro form because the tempo of the first movement is often *allegro*, but it can be found as the basis of movements with other tempos as well

The parts of sonata form

- Sonata form is a ternary form
- In the first part, called the **Exposition**, thematic material is presented in the tonic key and in a second related key
- In the second part, called the **Development**, thematic elements are worked out or *developed*
- In the third part, called the **Recapitulation**, the thematic material from the first part returns, but is stated in the tonic key only

EXPOSITION		DEVELOPMENT	RECAPITULATION	
1st theme	2nd theme (Closing theme)	any thematic material	1st theme	2nd theme (Closing theme)
I ⟶ V ⟶		any keys → →	I	

The Development of Sonata Form

- Sonata form developed out of the continuous binary form dances of the Baroque era
- The first shift towards sonata form was the return of part of A in *rounded binary* forms
- *Ternary forms* then developed out of rounded binary, still within a two-reprise framework
- *Sonata form* is a harmonically continuous two-reprise ternary form that has two main parts within the A section

Repeats in Sonata Form

- You can usually find the beginning of the development section by locating the repeat signs in the score, which divide the piece into two main sections
  - the first half is the exposition
  - the second half is the development and recapitulation
- Originally, these two halves were always repeated, but as pieces became longer, the second repeat was usually omitted
- In performances today, the repeat of the exposition is often omitted as well, unless the exposition is short

The Exposition

- In the exposition, the *primary theme* (or theme group) is first presented in the home key
- A *transition* leads from this theme to the secondary theme
- The *secondary theme* (or theme group) is presented in a related key
  - if the primary theme is in major, the secondary theme is usually in the dominant key
  - If the primary theme is in minor, the secondary theme is either in the relative major or the dominant minor key
- Following the secondary theme, a *closing theme* (or theme group) brings the exposition to an end

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PTSK labels

- We can use the symbols **PTSK** to describe the contents of sonata form movements
- The primary theme is labeled **P** (if there are multiple themes in a *primary theme group*, we label them 1P, 2P, etc.)
- The transition is labeled **T** (or 1T, 2T, etc.)
- The secondary theme is labeled **S** (or 1S, 2S, etc.)
- The closing theme is labeled **K** (or 1K, 2K, etc.)
- Whenever these themes recur in the Development or Recapitulation, we can identify them using the same symbols

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The Primary and Secondary Themes

- The primary and secondary themes in the exposition are typically of a contrasting character
  - The primary theme is often strong and active
  - The secondary theme tends to be more lyrical
- The two themes are sometimes related motivically
- In a *monothematic* sonata, the two themes are the same or very similar, only stated in different keys
- The themes often have their own self-enclosed formal structure (such as a complete period or double period), typically ending in a solid PAC

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The Transition

- Unlike the largely diatonic primary theme, the transition introduces chromaticism and modulation
- Transitions may be based on the motivic material of the primary theme, or they may have a theme of their own
- Transitions may contrast rhythmically, melodically, and dynamically from the themes that they connect and may even be longer than these themes
- There is often a strong point of articulation between the end of the transition and the beginning of the secondary theme—usually a clear half cadence in the secondary key

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The Closing Theme

- After the secondary theme is finished, composers often follow it with a *closing theme* or *closing theme group*
- These closing themes bring a sense of closure to the exposition
- The closing theme group might end with a short *codetta* made up of primarily cadential material
- The final cadence of the exposition might be followed by a pause or it might connect smoothly into the development section

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The Development Section

- In the *development* section, the composer can work out thematic elements in any way that they choose, or even introduce new themes
- There are no tonal or formal constraints on the development section
- The development section is often tonally unstable, passing through a number of keys
- Motives from the exposition are often varied through imitation, sequence, fragmentation and other techniques
- Fugato and imitation are sometimes introduced

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The Retransition

‣ The end of the development, which leads back into the recapitulation, is sometimes referred to as the *retransition*

‣ Composers often strive to highlight this important moment of return (a return of both the home key and of the primary theme)

‣ One method is to "stand on the dominant" for a prolonged period of time (a dominant pedal point), heightening the listener's expectation of a return to the tonic

The Recapitulation

‣ The primary function of the *recapitulation* is to provide the sensation of return, unifying the movement as a whole

‣ In the recapitulation the primary theme and the secondary theme are both restated in the *tonic key*

‣ Although the recapitulation repeats the material from the exposition, it is often compressed

‣ The primary and secondary themes might be shortened, and transitional and closing themes might be omitted entirely

‣ Occasionally, new or varied material can be found in the recapitulation

The Altered Transition

‣ Since the primary and secondary themes are both stated in the tonic in the recapitulation, the transition between these themes does not need to modulate and therefore usually needs to be altered in the recapitulation

‣ The transition may begin the same, but at some point changes usually need to be made so that it does not end up in the wrong key

Variants in the Recapitulation

‣ When the tonic key is minor and the secondary theme is in the relative major, the secondary theme in the recapitulation is often presented in the parallel major rather than in the tonic minor

‣ Occasionally the secondary theme might not be stated in the tonic key, with the tonic coming back only in the coda

‣ In rare instances the primary theme does not return in the tonic key—for instance, Schubert sometimes began his recapitulations in the subdominant key, allowing him to keep the music exactly the same as in the exposition

The Coda

‣ The purpose of a coda is to balance the work as a whole with additional closing material

‣ With short movements, a few extra V-I cadences at the end will create this balance—in longer movements, the coda may become quite extended

‣ Beethoven expanded his codas to such large proportions that they could even be heard as a second development section

‣ Codas can sometimes even present new material, not heard elsewhere in the work

The Introduction

‣ Sonata form movements may begin with an *introduction*

‣ The purpose of the introduction is to put the listener in the proper mood for the exposition

‣ Introductions are not considered to be part of the exposition

‣ In fast movements, introductions are often slow

‣ The introduction is often through-composed, with no clear form of its own

‣ It frequently ends on a half cadence and a pause, answered by the primary theme in the tonic key

Sonatina Form

▸ A *sonatina* is a small sonata

▸ *Sonatina form* is a specific structural plan that is somewhat briefer than sonata form

  ▸ The transition between themes if frequently omitted and the closing theme is either very short or omitted

  ▸ The development section is very short—it is more of a transition than a development

  ▸ Or, the development section might be missing altogether

▸ Sonatina form is sometimes found in the slow second movement of a sonata, where less development is needed

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