

## THE SONATA AND SONATA FORM

Its origin lies in the (early) baroque era. Sonata derives from the verb *sonare* (to sound). In the beginning it concerns an instrumental piece with a vocal piece (cantata) as its counterpart. Cantata derives from the verb *cantare* (to sing).

*“A typical sonata-form movement consists of three main sections, embedded in a two-part tonal structure. The first part of the structure coincides with the first section and is called the ‘exposition’. The second part of the structure comprises the remaining two sections, the ‘development’ and the ‘recapitulation’.”*<sup>1</sup>

The sonata form as a *form type* is a phenomenon that developed in the later part of the classical era. Sonata form is a fluid concept and has developed until the present times.<sup>2</sup>

Other names that are used: first-movement form, sonata allegro form.

Charles Rosen sees the sonata form as a “tonal drama”, shaped by an abstract storyline with a build-up of tension and a denouement, in which a game is being played with:

- Themes and motives
- Keys and chords.

We will discover that phases characterized by stability, completeness and clarity are being alternated with phases characterized by instability, fragmentation/incompleteness and indistinctness.<sup>3</sup>

The roots of the classical sonata form are to be found in the baroque era in the so-called *binary forms*.<sup>4</sup>

## ANALYSIS

We discuss an example by which we gradually build an overall picture by doing general observations and draw attention to specific characteristics of sonata form.

We do this with a sonata by **Ludwig van Beethoven Op. 14. nr. 2**, the first movement.<sup>5</sup>

The three form sections:

1. Exposition: (until bar 61)
2. Development: (bar 63 until the fermata in bar 123)
3. Recapitulation: (bar 124 including upbeat until the end)

## EXPOSITION

The exposition of this sonata form consists of four sections or episodes:

theme 1 – transition – theme 2 – conclusion.

The main key is G major, confirmed in the first eight measures with a complete cadence in measure 5, 6 and 7. Pay attention to the bass notes: (1) (4) (5) (5) (1).

The cadence forms the conclusion of a rounded melodic sentence, divided in two groups of four measures.<sup>6</sup> The chord material confirms the tonality of G major. In general we call a complete (rounded) melodic sentence a *theme*.<sup>7</sup> Within a theme we can distinguish *motives*. This first complete sentence we call the *first theme* (theme 1).

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<sup>1</sup>Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians

<sup>2</sup>Charles Rosen, James Hepokoski/Warren Darcy

<sup>3</sup>Diether de la Motte links this to the musical goals of the composer. He states that exposition and recapitulation have the goal to *convince*, while the development has the goal to *surprise*. Psychologically koppelt dit gegeven aan de muzikale doelen van de componist. Hij stelt dat expositie en reprise als doel hebben te *overtuigen*, terwijl de doorwerking als doel heeft te *verrassen*. Psychologically apt and musically relevant.

<sup>4</sup> See *A History of Western Music* - Grout, Burkholder, Palisca: simple, balanced and rounded binary forms.

<sup>5</sup> We maintain the incorrect measure numbers of the Dover reprint by Heinrich Schenker.

<sup>6</sup> Caplin calls this a *sentence*, the german equivalent is called *Satz*.

<sup>7</sup> Caplin gives a good overview of the evolution of terminology around musical phrasing in his book *Classical Form*...

From measure 7 onwards we enter the so called *transition*. This fragment realizes a *modulation* and develops toward the second tonal area D major and the second theme.

From measure 9 onwards a *new motif* is used of which the most important characteristic is *tone repetition*. This motif is varied immediately (measure 11 and 12), followed by fragment in which *sequence technique* is applied. The sequencing fragments become more and more richly ornamented until there remains a scale fragment in the right hand, of which the last tone is repeated as a stepping stone toward the *second theme*.

During the transition the bass line ascends stepwise to A and remains on A (pedal point)<sup>8</sup>. In this way A as the dominant of D is being marked. In measure 23-25 we hear a clear cadence: V – I in D.

The *second theme* is introduced in measure 25: notable is the use of parallel thirds. Als here we find a (complete) rounded musical sentence of 8 measures, divided in two groups of four. The first half end on the dominant (measure 28), the second half on the tonic (measure 32).

The second tonal area has been reached and will from this moment on be reaffirmed. This section is called *conclusion*.<sup>9</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned before, the development has a different musical goal than exposition or recapitulation. The musical material is treated in a different manner: in general the following approaches are possible:

1. motivic instead of thematic
2. tonally undefined and surprising (“drifting”) instead of clear and confirming, which means more modulating without a clear goal (or with shifting goals). In the end the arrival at the main key will be the conclusion of this form section and the beginning of the recapitulation.
3. accent on chromaticism instead of diatonicism
4. change in role playing between different voice/parts/lines
5. accent on variation and processing of fragments of the themes (motivical development)
6. more change in texture; sometimes contrapuntal techniques, melody also appearing outside the top voice.

In almost all cases it is possible to discern episodes in the development, divided by points of segmentation. The general motto is: “Look what I can do with my musical material!”

## EPISODES

In the following paragraphs we describe pointwise the important events in the several episodes of the development.

### EPISODE 1

Start in G minor, the relative minor of the main key. Material from the first theme, but the theme is not completed, fragments become shorter and shorter. Motif I.1 is being imitated in the form of a dominant seventh chord and leads with a scale passage tot Bb major, the start of episode 2.

### EPISODE 2

Material of the second theme (parallel thirds). The temporary tonic is Bb major the relative of G minor. Here also the theme is not completed and fragmentation occurs, the second half (consequent) deviates: the two thirds C-Eb and B-D are placed against the background of a dominant seventh chord on F (F7). This becomes #IV<sup>0</sup>7 - I 64 - V - en suggests the direction of C minor. Instead of I in C minor we get a sudden VI a deceptive cadence.

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<sup>8</sup> In the eighteenth century we find a pedal point mostly on (1) or (5) of the tonality/key of that moment.

<sup>9</sup> In the literature also different labels are used, for example “codetta”.

The sudden forte of the Ab chord (VI in C minor) is the beginning of episode 3.<sup>10</sup>

### EPISODE 3

Change of roles: variant of motif I.1 in the left hand followed by the combining of an arpeggio (broken chord) and a scale pattern. The arpeggio functions as an accompaniment in the right hand. This is contrary to the beginning of the sonata: melody right, accompaniment left hand. Rhythmically we have constantly “two against three”.

This combination is put in a sequence. The underlying harmonic framework is a chain of dominants which end on a fermata on a Bb7 chord, which functions as the dominant of Eb major. The used chords are: Ab-D7-Gm-C7-Fm-F7-Bb-Bb7 fermata.

### EPISODE 4

Now we get a beautiful musical feint/diversion: it looks like the beginning of the recapitulation. But the key is not G major but Eb major and, the theme is not presented completely. The descending scale pattern is presented in a sequence with a goal tone of D in measure 106.

From this moment onward, everything moves harmonically around D (pedal point in bass) functioning as the dominant of G major. The musical texture changes, the pedal point is replaced in measure 114 by an *Alberti bass* in combination with elements of motif I.1, more and more fragmented until just the ascending second remains. Eventually the leading tone of the dominant of G major is reached (fermata measure 123).

### RECAPITULATION

The recapitulation resembles in general the exposition; there are some important differences:

- theme 1 and theme 2 are presented in the main key G major
- as a consequence of this the transition is adapted; its goal is not modulation anymore, but to connect between theme 1 and 2
- a result of the previous remarks is that (also) the conclusion is presented in the main key of G major. In addition to that there is a Coda in which motif I.1 plays the main part.

The movement ends with a cadence, but one that is not strong or definitive. This is caused by the high register (bass-less so to speak) and the melodic line end on the third of the scale.

This is understandable; we still have two movements to go.

### TONAL STRUCTURE

If we take a look at the pattern of used tonalities/keys we can observe the following pattern:

| |: G major – D – major :| | G minor, after which modulation – leading to G major| |.<sup>11</sup>

Keys that are suggested/implied in the development section:

G minor – Bb major – C minor – Eb major leading tot the dominant of G major.

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<sup>10</sup> General remark about used tonalities/keys (keep the circle of fifths in mind): we move from an area with sharps to an area with flats.

<sup>11</sup> In the description by Graham George: Home – Bright – SOTR – Home. SOTR = Section of Opposite Tonal Relations.