

## Theories of Sonata Form: A Brief History

### Common dialectical oppositions or analytical contradictions in theories of sonata form

two-part	vs.	three-part
harmonic	vs.	thematic
contrapuntal	vs.	periodic
masterworks	vs.	common practice
classical	vs.	baroque, classical, romantic
historically-informed	vs.	analytically-informed
conformational	vs.	generative

### Hepokoski and Darcy's four main contemporary trends in the conception of sonata form

- 1) "eclectic analytical writing"  
(Donald Tovey, Joseph Kerman, Charles Rosen)  
• Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York, 1980)
- 2) "'historical-evidentiary-empirical' concerns"  
(William S. Newman, Jan LaRue, Eugene K. Wolf, Leonard Ratner)  
• Leonard Ratner, *Classical Music* (New York, 1980)
- 3) "linear-contrapuntal views"  
(Heinrich Schenker, William Rothstein, et al)  
• Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition* (Vienna, 1935)
- 4) emphasis on "motivic growth from small musical cells" and "identification of phrase-shapes"  
(Arnold Schoenberg, Rudolph Réti, Hans Keller, Erwin Ratz, William E. Caplin)  
• William E. Caplin, *Classical Form* (Oxford, 1998)

### Scott Burnham's historical divisions of theories on form (particularly sonata form)

Late 1700s:                      Phrase, form and rhetoric  
(Heinrich Christoph Koch)

Early 1800s:                      Theme and development  
(Anton Reicha, A.B. Marx)

Mid 1800s – Mid 1900s:      The functional logic of organic form  
(Johann Christian Lobe, Hugo Riemann, Arnold Schoenberg, Erwin Ratz)

Mid 1900s:                      Challenges to *Formenlehre*  
(Donald Tovey, Heinrich Schenker)

Mid 1900s – Late 1900s:      Recuperations of *Formenlehre*  
(Leonard Ratner)

### **A. B. Marx as first theorist to coin the phrase "sonata form" and cast it as a ternary design**

- Adolph Bernhard Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (Leipzig, 1841)

*Satz*: 1) (ling.) sentence, clause; 2) principle, tenet, theorem; 3) (music) movement; 4) set

*Gang*: 1) walk, errand, way, visit; 2) course; 3) action, operation; 4) corridor, hallway

HS = *Hauptsatz* (Main *Satz*), SS = *Seitensatz* (Side *Satz*), Sz = *Schlussatz* (Closing *Satz*)

First Rondo:	HS–G–HS	desire for more variety
Second Rondo:	HS–SS–G–HS	desire for more balance
Third Rondo:	HS–SS1–G / HS–SS2–G / HS	unity requires final SS1
Fourth Rondo:	HS–SS1–G / HS–SS2–G / HS–SS1	HS is repeated too much
Fifth Rondo:	HS–SS1–G–Sz / SS2–G / HS–SS1–G–Sz	SS2 is deleted for further unity
Sonatina:	HS–SS–G–Sz / HS–SS–G–Sz	two-part form is less significant
Sonata:	HS–SS1–G–Sz / (2nd part) / HS–SS1–G–Sz	<i>Ruhe-Bewegung-Ruhe</i> (rest - motion - rest)

– Marx viewed sonata as the pinnacle of evolution in instrumental musical forms

### **Thematic approach and the codification of the "textbook" view of sonata form**

- Anton Reicha, *Traité de haute composition musicale* (Paris, 1824)

"Except for a few small and unimportant details, sonata form will be for all eternity what Czerny said it was." – Charles Rosen

- Carl Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*, (London, 1848)

"The first part must contain:

- 1) The principle subject.
- 2) Its continuation or amplification, together with a modulation to the nearest related key.
- 3) The middle subject in this new key.
- 4) A new continuation of this middle subject.
- 5) A final melody, after which the first part thus closes in the new key, in order that the repetition of the same may follow unconstrainedly."

### **Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York, 1980)**

"There are no rules whatsoever for the number or distribution of themes in sonata form." – Donald Tovey, "Sonata Forms," *The Main Street of Music and Other Essays*

- strong praise for masterworks, focused on the classical period
- sonata as stylistically and structurally derived from many genres, particularly concerto and aria
- sonata as process, impossible to formulize
- harmonic approach to the sonata: the "large-scale dissonance" requiring resolution

### **Leonard Ratner, *Classical Music* (New York, 1980)**

- strongly criticized the bi-thematic view of sonata form
  - cites long list of poly- and monothematic sonatas
  - cites bi-thematic sonatas that lack contrast between the themes
  - points out the developmental material occurs in expositions and vice versa
- draws from a wealth of theoretical treatises contemporary to classical-era composers:
  - Georg Joseph Vogler, *Mannheimische Tonschule* (Mannheim, 1778)
  - Georg Simon Löhlein, *Georg Simon Löhleins Clavier-Schule* (Leipzig, 1781-2)
  - Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* (Leipzig, 1782-93)
  - Johann Gottlieb Portmann, *Leichtes Lehrbuch der Harmonie* (Darmstadt, 1789)
  - August F. C. Kollmann, *Essay on Practical Musical Composition* (London, 1796)
  - Francesco Galeazzi, *Elementi teorico-pratici di musica* (Rome, 1796)
  - Jérôme-Joseph de Momigny, *Cours complet d'harmonie et de composition* (Paris, 1806)
- sonata as a two-part form, each of which is divided further into two parts; harmonic approach:  
I – V ∴ X – I (in major)
- "The bipartite conception was retained well into the 19th-century, being held by:"
  - Anton Reicha, *Traité de haute composition musicale* (Paris, 1824)
  - Alexander Choron, *Manuel complet de musique* (Paris, 1838)
  - Johann Christian Lobe, *Lehrbuch der musikalische Composition* (Leipzig, 1850-67)

### **Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition* (Vienna, 1935)**

#### **William E. Caplin, *Classical Form* (Oxford, 1998)**

- drawn from the *Formenlehre* tradition of the early 20th-century
  - Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (London, 1967)
  - Erwin Ratz, *Einführung in die musikalische Formenlehre* (Vienna, 1973)
- based on music of a single style
- emphasizes the role of local harmonic progressions as a determinant of form
- clearly distinguishes formal function from grouping structure
- minimizes motivitic content as a criterion of formal function
- establishes strict formal categories but applies them flexibly in analysis
- not a comprehensive account of "form" in music
- does not include 18th-century and early 19th-century accounts of form
- empirical and descriptive, not deductive and prescriptive

#### The "Fallacy of Hierarchic Uniformity"

- the "tacit and usually unconscious assumption that the same forces and processes which order and articulate one hierarchic level are operative, are equally effective, and function in the same fashion in the structuring of all levels." – Leonard Meyer

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