

## Musical Forms (Classical Period to the Present)

**Motive** – a very small melodic and/or rhythmic cell used in various permutations (augmentation, inversion, diminution, retrograde, etc.) to generate related melodic material.

**Phrase** – a complete musical thought or sentence similar to a phrase in typical language sentence structure, punctuated by a cadence.

**Cadence** – a pause or elongated resting point at the end a phrase. Cadences can be conclusive or final, or open-ended (suggesting more to come, as in the presentation of a question); cadences can be clearly presented simultaneously in all voices or more understated and defined by only some (but not all) voices.

**Theme** – an integral phrase or group of phrases that strongly define the character of an entire piece or movement.

**Movement** – an extended piece that is actually part of a much larger composition (such as a symphony). Movements (of a larger composition) are often related directly or indirectly to each other, but are contrasting in key and tempo. However, movements are frequently omitted during a performance or sometimes performed as stand-alone pieces due to various performance issues and concerns. Movements are generally separated with a formal “break” in a performance, but are sometimes joined together by transitory musical passages, creating a seamless “break” between them.

**Through-Composed** – typically utilized in the Baroque Period, a piece whose form is never repeated but more or less a continuous flow of ideas from beginning to end.

**Binary Form** – A piece that is divided into two distinguishable sections that are contrasting in character, melody, key, orchestration, or tempo, etc., and usually signified by A-B in a formal analysis.

**Ternary Form** – A piece that is divided into three distinguishable sections that are contrasting in character, melody, key, orchestration, or tempo, etc.; typically a ternary form’s final section represents a return to the opening section (signified by A-B-A and sometimes referred to as arch type construction).

**Rounded Binary Form** – A piece constructed in three sections but separated and broken into only two repeated parts during a performance (signified ||: A :||: B-A :||). Sometimes one or both of the repeated sections are omitted during a performance for various considerations, actually transforming the “rounded” structural character into a true ternary design.

**Minuet** – A popular dance form in triple meter, usually composed in an extended ternary structure. The middle section is often referred to as the “trio” section because it traditionally featured three prominent voices with accompaniment.

**Aria** – a lyrical and emotional song featuring one to three voices, usually in binary or ternary construction, and part of a larger dramatic work such as an Opera or Oratorio. Arias are frequently performed in concerts out of context of the larger parental work.

**Da Capo Aria** – an aria constructed in typical ternary form (A-B-A).

**Fugue** – a polyphonic, imitative work beginning with a simple theme in one voice (called the subject) and later echoed in a different voice and often on a different starting pitch (called the answer). While the answer is performed the subject continues in contrapuntal fashion (then called the countersubject). This expository section moves to a developmental section (called an episode). This entire process may be repeated with new themes/subjects (creating new expositions followed by new episodes). A fugue usually ends with various voices stating thematic material at noticeably closer time intervals (called a “stretto”) increasing its emotional/climactic impact

**Introduction** – a smaller section of a larger work obviously serving as an introductory passage to the first theme.

**Transition** – a smaller section of a larger work that is migratory in character, smoothly moving between contrasting sections or themes.

**Coda** – a closing section of a larger work.

**Cadenza** – usually performed before the coda or at the end of a development section in a concerto, this is a freely performed improvisatory moment in which the solo performer imaginatively “plays” with various thematic material. Originally improvised, it has become common practice to perform prepared cadenzas. Sometimes cadenzas are omitted entirely as they do not significantly alter the overall structure and design of the work.

**Rondo** – a lively dance style piece in duple meter and constructed in either 5 parts (A-B-A-C-A) or a longer version in 7 parts (A-B-A-C-A-B-A).

**Orchestral Suite** – a set of 4-5 contrasting dance-type movements for orchestral ensembles.

**Opera** – a staged dramatic work in 1-3 acts based on a libretto (story line) and containing solo arias, choruses, recitatives, and orchestral interludes (ritornellos). The drama is acted, and all performing parts are sung. Operas were essentially in three styles, seria (based on an emotionally charged, serious story line) and buffa (based on a comedic farce and lighter in character); a third type of opera, the German based singspiel, contained spoken dialogue. The buffa and singspiel style became the forerunner of the modern-day light opera and musical.

**Oratorio** – often of a religious nature, this is essentially a non-staged opera.

**Cantata** – a large religious work intended for Protestant/Lutheran church services, containing 6 – 8 movements and containing a chorale or hymn tune that was intended to be sung by the congregation during the cantata performance.

**Mass** – a large work originally for chorus but often with orchestral accompaniment, intended to serve the sacrament of Christ in a Catholic Church service. It is based on 5 moments or more (Kyrie, Gloria,

Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) that are fixed and unchanging (called the ordinary) interspersed with several changing pieces (called the proper, which included functional movements such as an introit, benedictus, etc.).

**Concerto** – a large work featuring a soloist and usually in three contrasting movements; the first movement is typically based on a fast, sonata-allegro form, the second is based on a slower binary, ternary form or minuet, and the last movement is based on a rondo. Concertos may or may not utilize a solo cadenza near the end of each movement.

**Sonata** – generally a three-movement form for instrument with accompaniment or smaller ensembles; similar to a concerto but without a featured soloist and the use of cadenzas.

**Sonata-Allegro Form** – a standard design/structure consisting of an exposition (containing a masculine theme in the tonal area of the tonic as well as a contrasting feminine theme in a different but related tonal area), a development section, and a recapitulation (comprised of a restatement of the opening themes in the tonal area of the prevailing tonic key). This construction usually became the basis for first movements of larger works such as symphonies, sonatas, concertos, and quartets.

**Quartet, Quintet, etc.** – essentially a sonata for a chamber ensemble; usually in 4 movements (similar to a sonata but with an added minuet as a third movement).

**Scherzo** – a fast, playful piece, usually in triple meter and often replacing the typical minuet movement of a symphony.

**Symphony** – A large work for orchestra, usually in four movements: Fast (sonata-allegro form), Slow (ternary or binary form but sometimes a theme with variations), Minuet, and Rondo.

**Song, Art Song** – a solo vocal work of dramatic nature to be performed in a chamber setting, usually with piano accompaniment.

**Cycle** – a series of contrasting solo instrumental pieces or vocal songs, each piece being composed in one of twelve major and/or relative minor keys (totaling 12 or 24 pieces).

**Overture** – originally intended as an introduction to a larger work such as an opera or oratorio, it was often treated by composers as a separate orchestral entity ideal for the opening of a concert or formal ceremony. The French style overture made use of long and short rhythms (dotted rhythms).

**Theme and Variations** – A piece consisting of a clearly stated theme followed by contrasting variations of that theme, often set in separate movements.

THERE ARE ALWAYS EXCEPTIONS AND ARTISTIC COMPOSTIONAL FREEDOMS APPLIED TO ALL OF THE ABOVE FORMS!