

Musical analysis, lesson 3: the Period

The Phrase has been defined as a portion of melody (or a complete melody) ending in a cadence of some kind. The phrase may be any length from two measures to many, but the one distinctive fact about it is that it makes a conclusion, comes to a point of rest, more or less satisfactory and complete.

Examining such phrases as are given in Lesson 1, we note that the music begins, moves forward, and rests. It has, in short, a momentum that keeps it going for a time; then the momentum relaxes, to be resumed again in its impulse to reach the concluding point. With increased experience in analysis, the student will note that while phrases may be of any number of measures (within certain limits), the majority are either four measures long, in a moderate tempo, or eight measures long in a quick tempo. These are referred to as regular short phrases (four measures), and regular long phrases (eight measures); while all others (two, three, six, ten, etc.) are denominated irregular phrases.

It will further be observed that the phrase is rarely a complete form. In nearly all instances the phrase is a part (usually one-half) of a larger form called the Period. The Period is a group of two (rarely three) phrases related as Thesis and Antithesis. Referring again to the Theme in A, by Mozart (lesson 1), the first eight measures are a period. This period is of two phrases, each of more or less the same melody but of **CONTRASTING** cadences.

Nota bene

When an eight measure structure consists of a first phrase which is exactly repeated in the second, we have a double phrase and not a period. Note carefully these facts:

1. The two phrases of a period, if substantially alike in melody, will have unlike cadences.
2. Or the two phrases may have unlike melodies.
3. The cadences of two successive phrases are rarely, if ever, identical.

We have seen that phrases may be irregular as to length. As the period is constructed of phrases (generally of two) so it may in turn be irregular as to length. The regular small period is of two phrases, each of four measures:



Figure 1

The regular large period is of two phrases, each of eight measures:



Figure 2

The following are types of irregular periods. The student should examine each example, and state in what the irregularity consists.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Let us have a look at the Theme from the Rondo in D major from Mozart's Sonata KV. 311 (score next page).

The key is D major. The phrases are eight measures each. The first ends in a half cadence (eighth measure), the second in an authentic cadence, perfect (sixteenth measure). The impulse of the music is continuous from measure one to eight inclusive, the apparent cadential point in measure four being passed over without a sensible break or cessation by reason of the continuous motion in the bass.

Such a semi-cadential effect is called a Caesura. The Caesura is a rhythmical end-point in a melody. It should be clearly distinguished from the cadential endpoint.

Rondo from Mozart's Piano Sonata KV. 311

Allegro



The student should reconstruct the phrases written in the previous lesson, and by coordination and amplification, convert them into periods. Write in both the small and large period forms, and in simple rhythmical forms. Thus:

A. The small period



B. The large period



C. The small period of unlike phrases:

The musical notation shows a small period of eight measures in 6/8 time, key of A minor. The first line contains measures 1-4, and the second line contains measures 5-8. Measure numbers 2, 4, 6, and 8 are indicated above the notes. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a final quarter rest in measure 8.

Questions

Haydn, pianosonata no. 35, 3 (score next page)

1. What is the key?
2. What cadence occurs in measure four? In measure eight?
3. Can we name measure one to eight a period? Why?
4. What is the key in measures thirteen to seventeen?
5. What cadence, in measure fourteen?
6. Measure one: What is the root of the chord on the third beat?
7. Measure two: What is the root of the chord on the first beat?
6. Measure seven, first beat: What is the interval F (lowest voice) to G# (upper voice)?
8. Write in close and in open harmony, the V – VI (deceptive) cadence in A minor.
9. Write in the same key, the two forms of imperfect authentic cadence.
10. Measure seven: Why is G natural used in the lowest voice?
11. Why is F sharp used in the third phrase?
12. Determine the total number of phrases in the composition.
13. Which are repeated in identical form?
14. Determine the total number of periods in the composition.

Haydn, pianosonata no. 35, 3

2 4 6 8

10 12

14 16

18 20 22 24

Study targets

The student should make it a point, in all his study of music, to apply the principles of Form as rapidly as he learns them. This trains the observation. Up to this point he has been made acquainted with certain elements that he should note immediately when performing music. These elements are:

1. The motive and its variations.
2. Cadences of all kinds as phrase endings.
3. The Phrase and Period, in regular and irregular lengths.
4. The Caesural pause.
5. The identity of phrases and periods in a composition.
6. Modulation as fixed by cadences.
7. Passing modulation (or suggestion of another key, that is not made permanent).

This lesson is a modification of Tapper's First Year Analysis –Musical Form– and has been typeset with MC Musiceditor 6.0.7 (www.mcmusiceditor.com – www.bestmusicteacher.com)
