

Musical analysis, lesson 5: The two-part song form (the binary)

Neither the phrase nor the period is sufficiently long to convey but a brief expression. Comparing the period, as a complete form, with the first movement of a sonata, we realize that it is only as music is built up into larger and apparently more complex structures that it can convey a wellrounded and sustained meaning.

The smaller units that we have been considering, particularly the period, become the basis for form extension. In simple musical forms two periods may be employed to constitute a complete composition. With proper unity and variety such a combination of two periods is called a Two-Part Song Form, or a Binary Form. If the phrases are short (four measures) the entire form is called a Small Binary. If the phrases are long (eight measures) the form is known as a Large Binary.

Regularly constructed, therefore, the small binary will consist of sixteen measures, and the large binary of thirty-two. Thus:

Small Binary

(Four measure phrase) + (Four measure phrase) = Period 1

(Four measure phrase) + (Four measure phrase) = Period 2

Large Binary

(Eight measure phrase) + (Eight measure phrase) = Period 1

(Eight measure phrase) + (Eight measure phrase) = Period 2

In order that two periods may be united into a single and complete form, they must contain something in common. That is to say, the choice and union of any two periods (even in the same key and meter) would not constitute a well-balanced binary.

The necessary balance must be found **in the phrase succession**. A common form of binary is that in which this identity (or general sequence of phrases) is found:



By this diagram is meant, that in melodic content, the first, second, and fourth phrases are more or less the same, while the third phrase (b) is in contrast. The following melody illustrates this:

Andante
Phrase A
Phrase A
Phrase B
Phrase A

The binary may, again, take this phrase sequence:

| _____ a _____ || _____ b _____ | Cadence in the dominant
| _____ a _____ || _____ b _____ | Cadence in the tonic

In this form the two periods are substantially the same in melodic content, but of contrasting cadences.

The student should not fail to note that a period repeated, even with rhythmical variations (harmonic content and cadences remaining the same), does not constitute a binary.

While there are other varieties of binary form, the two mentioned are by far the more common. The binary is by no means as frequent as the ternary, in the music of the best composers. Yet the student will have little difficulty in recognizing it. The principal factors to keep in mind are (1) the presence of four phrases, (2) some degree of unity and variety between the phrases.

Occasionally the binary is extended. The first selection of the companion volume (Mozart: Theme in A, KV 331) illustrates this. The phrase balance is properly:

| _____ a (4 m.) _____ || _____ a (4 m.) _____ |
| _____ b (4 m.) _____ || _____ a (6 m.) _____ |

Abbreviations of this form (through the shortening of a phrase) are probably non-existent, because the form is so short that any elimination can only result in destroying the total unity.

Study: Beethoven Sonata op. 2, no. 2 Largo appassionato

(first nineteen measures only: score next page).

The first phrase is of four measures, and ends in a half-cadence on the dominant. The second phrase of four measures ends on a perfect authentic cadence in the key of the tonic. These two phrases are of similar melodic and rhythmic structure.

The third phrase of entirely new material is of four measures. The final measure merges into the return of the first phrase in measure thirteen. This (fourth) phrase is extended to seven measures and concludes on the tonic of D major. This extended binary may be expressed thus:

| _____ a (4 m.) _____ || _____ a (4 m.) _____ |
| _____ b (4 m.) _____ || _____ a (7 m.) _____ |

Largo appassionato.
tenuto sempre

5
staccato sempre

11
tr *tenuto* *sf* *sf*

16
staccato *sf* *ff* *p* *p*

Study: Mozart, Andante (theme) in D Major, KV 331, 3.

(score next page).

1. Compare phrases one and two (measures one to four with five to eight).
2. To what extent are they identical? Is similarity more prevalent than identity?
3. Compare in like manner, phrase four with phrase one, and with phrase two.
4. Note the structure of phrase three. Is it of entirely new matter?
5. Name the cadences.
6. What modulations occur?
7. Note the motive inversion in measure five from measure one (the descending eighths as against the ascending).
8. And in measure ten the presence of this same rhythm of four eighths descending.
9. Note the rests before the entrance of the fourth phrase. How many are total number of measures?

TEMA.

6

11

This lesson is a modification of Tapper's First Year Analysis –Musical Form– and has been typeset with MC Musiceditor 6.0.8 (www.mcmusiceditor.com – www.bestmusicteacher.com)
