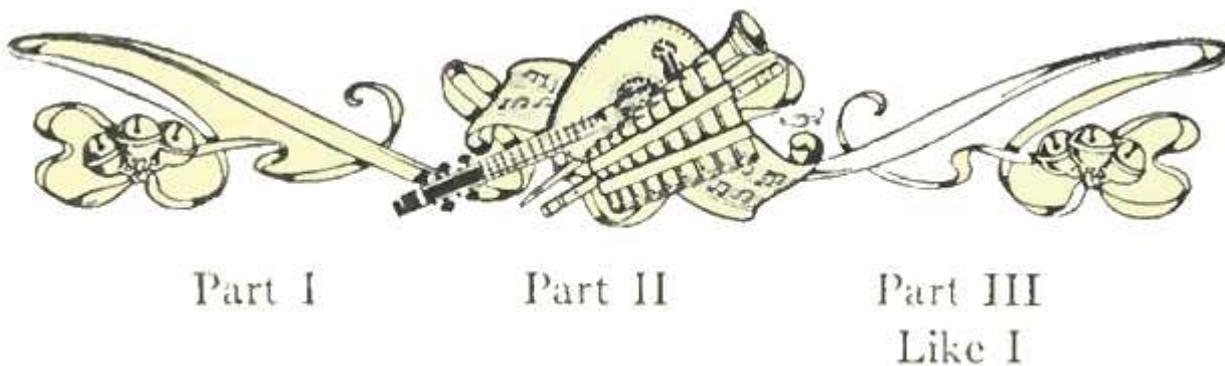


Musical analysis, lesson 6: The ternary form (part 1)

Not alone in music, but in all the arts, the Ternary, or three part, structure is of far more frequent occurrence than is the binary, or two part. The reason for this is, possibly, that it permits a better balance of parts; a relation of motives of which the first and third are alike, and the second in contrast. The following figure will illustrate this:



In all decorative arts there must be the absolute balance and identity between the first and third portions of the figure, for the reason that the eye demands perfect **quantitative** relation. In music, however, this absolute identity (between first and third parts) is not essential, for the ear is satisfied with a **qualitative** relation.

In ternary musical forms, then, we have a first period that is repeated more or less literally as third period, and these two are separated by a middle portion of different motive and design.

A ternary form based on the eight measure period as unit, would consist, then, of these three parts:

1. First period (of two four measure phrases).
2. Second period (of two four measure phrases).
3. Third period (like the first period).

In major keys, the first period may end in the dominant key; but the third period will return to the tonic in its final phrase. The following melody is the simplest illustration of this structure in regular form.

First period

Second period

Third period

In minor keys, the first period may end either in the relative major or in the minor key of the dominant.

Absolutely regular ternary forms are not as common as the irregular. The irregularity may be brought about in several ways, but usually two predominate:

- The middle (second) period is abbreviated.
- The final (third) period is lengthened.

Study: Theme from Beethoven's Tempo di Menuetto (op. 49, no. 2)

(score below)

The first period is regularly constructed of two four measure phrases, and remains in the key of the tonic. The third period is again the first period transposed an octave higher and slightly varied rhythmically in the last measure but one.

Now this identity of key in these two portions of the form, naturally suggests and demands opposing key-color in the middle portion. Examining this, we find that it is not, as it should be regularly, a period but a four measure phrase; and that the key-color is that of E minor (measure nine) moving to the dominant of G major in measure twelve.

The form as a whole may be pictured thus:

|__ a (eight m. period in G) __ ||__ b (four m. phrase) __ ||__ a (eight m. period in G) __ |

The image displays a musical score for the 'Tempo di Menuetto' by Beethoven, consisting of four systems of music. Each system is labeled with a measure number: 1, 5, 11, and 16. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The first system (measures 1-4) shows the beginning of the piece. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the first period. The third system (measures 9-12) represents the middle period, where the key changes to E minor (measures 9-10) and then to G major (measures 11-12). The fourth system (measures 13-16) shows the final period, which is a transposed and slightly varied version of the first period. The score includes both treble and bass staves for each system.

Ternary forms constructed on the eight measure period as a basic unit, are called Small forms as against those constructed upon the sixteen measure period which are the Large ternary. Regularly constructed, the large ternary consists of three periods each of sixteen measures, or a total of forty-eight measures. In taking a new composition for analysis the student should first note its length in measures; next, whether the entire first period is introduced as third part. Forms of apparently twenty-four measures (with first period repeated in third part) are generally small ternary; while those of forty-eight, or thereabouts, are apt to be large ternaries. But in determining the ternary the principal factor is the reappearance of the first period as third, with possible difference of key, and also with possible lengthening through the addition of two or four measures, which added measures are sometimes called Coda. When abbreviation occurs in a ternary form, it is almost entirely confined to the second part of the form.

Tasks and Questions

The student should write as melodies only, at first, regular small and large ternaries:

- I. In major: 1. Small ternary regular, first period ending in the dominant.
2. Small ternary with abbreviated middle part.
3. Small ternary with extended third period.
4. Small ternary with abbreviated second part, and extended third part.

II. In minor:

1. The first period ending in the relative major.
2. The first period ending in the minor key of the dominant.

Apply the same variants to the large ternaries in major and in minor.

Examining carefully the following from the Beethoven Sonatas (scores: www.imslp.org):

Op. 2, No. 1 Minuetto.

Op. 2, No. 2 Scherzo.

Op. 10, No. 2 Allegretto (following the first movement).

Op. 10, No. 3 Minuetto.

Op. 14, No. 1 Allegretto in E minor.

Questions

1. Define the word Ternary.
2. What is the aesthetic purpose of extending the final period ?
3. Why may the middle portion be abbreviated without detriment to the form–balance of the whole?
4. Why is quantitative balance necessary in decorative designs ?
5. What is the minor key of the dominant of a composition in A minor in B minor in C# minor ?
6. Why is an actual, or suggested, change of key necessary in some portion of the ternary form ?

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
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