

Musical analysis, lesson 7: The ternary form (part 2)

The small ternary is usually definite in its adherence to a distinct form structure. In large ternaries, however, it frequently occurs that only the first part is regularly constructed; the second part is free in outline, and the third part may be only briefly reminiscent of the first part.

An example of this freedom of construction is found in the Beethoven Scherzo (bar 1 – 64) from the Sonata Op. 2, No. 3 (the score is attached to the end of this text). The key is C major. The balance of parts as to number of measures is as follows:

Part I. Sixteen measures ending in G major.

Part II. Twenty-three measures (bar 17 – 39).

Part III. Twenty-five measures.

So far as strict mathematical balance in number of measures is concerned, this form is very irregular in Parts II and III. The first period is of sixteen measures, and of two eight measure phrases. The phrases are not melodically identical. They are, however, theoretically rhythmically so much alike that perfect unity is secured and besides this, there is a feeling of progressiveness from the first to the sixteenth measure that brings in the Close in G major with a pronounced effect of climax.

Part II, which could, again, be a sixteen measure period of two eight measure phrases, presents no such structure. Confining itself to the motive of the first period, it proceeds without any suggestion of pause to measure twenty-eight; from which point it continues with a, forte alternation of two groups, each one measure long, to measure thirty-six; from which point, by a skillful use of the motive of the first measure, it merges with Part III.

Part III opens with a regularly constructed phrase of eight measures, which ends this time on the tonic of C major (compare this ending with that of the original first phrase). Then a second phrase of eight measures follows (again totally unlike the corresponding phrase of the first period), and concludes on the C major tonic. From this point to the end, an extension (Coda group) brings the work to a convincing conclusion in C major.

Despite its apparent irregularity as to quantitative structure, this Scherzo is one of the best illustrations of a beautifully balanced ternary. There is an astonishingly continuous unity in the motive structure. The lengthening of the second and third parts is immediately perceived to be necessary to the satisfactory reaching of the climax points; and the return of the first period as third period is sufficiently exact to carry the mind back to the beginning, which is one of the characteristic purposes of this form.

Careful study of this Scherzo will convince the student that the measure balance is of the least importance in form building. Of prime importance appears to be the motive unity and thematic balance.

Occasionally we find types of the Ternary that are miniatures: A–A–B, A–B–B, A–B–A, A–B–C. An A–B–A example is *Träumerei* from Schumann's *Kinderszenen* Op. 15, No. 7 (score as attachment). Its form is clearly articulated:

A: 8 bars (4 + 4)

B: 8 bars (4 + 4)

A: 8 bars (4 + 4)

When we compare this miniature ternary of eight plus eight plus eight with the Beethoven example of sixteen plus twenty–two plus twenty–five, we can appreciate how various may be the arrangement of parts as to number of measures. But we also see the identity that is at the basis of even so widely diversified types: namely, the return of the entire first part as third part. A very small design may present this feature quite as well as a very large one. The essential factor is that the mind of the listener shall be taken back to the impression of the opening period. In decorative designs (wall papers, etc.) the repeat is always literal because the eye demands it; in music, it is either literal or suggestive, because the ear is satisfied with either.

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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Träumerei.

N^o 7.

M.M. ♩ = 100.

p

ritard.

ritard.

ri - tar dan do

p