

Module 5- Form in Music

Form refers to the layout of a piece of music from beginning to end. It is the structure of themes, rhythms, patterns and other musical concepts that form the design of a musical selection. Form can be easy to hear in short and/or repetitive pieces common to one's own culture. In longer and culturally foreign works the form can be difficult to recognize without prior understanding and analysis. This is because musical forms are varied in their construction and not limited to any one element of music as a point of emphasis. The building blocks of form can be melodies, rhythms, chord progressions, instrumentation, timbres, dynamics, and lyrics. Composers use repetition, contrast, variation, growth, and decline to create expectation and to develop these building blocks.

Forms are tied to the aesthetics of the cultures that create them. The form of the music can follow strictly laid out ceremony like in the Roman Catholic Mass or it can be symbolic of larger cultural and social formations like the polyphonic, cyclical forms found in Indonesian gamelan. Forms can be the products of evolution to a genre over time. This is evident in modern popular aesthetics that value the short length of a piece. The modern length of a pop song is a direct result of the limitations placed on longer jazz, blues, and ragtime works in the early twentieth century by early recording equipment. Ten-inch records could only hold between three to five minutes of music on a side (without having to compress the grooves, thus diminishing quality). The change to a form over time is also evident in the evolution of Medieval and Renaissance dance suites into multi-movement forms that eventually became the sonata cycle form used to structure symphonies, string quartets, sonatas, and concertos in the eighteenth century. Enjoyment of these genres is tied to developing an aesthetic for appreciation of how a composer utilizes form to create a work.

Perhaps the opposite of the "Classical" decorum that manifests in the formal emphasis is the "Free Jazz" movement that began in the late 1950's. This genre of music was spearheaded by black Americans at a time when segregation and racial inequality in parts of America were the norm. The civil-rights movement challenged the established norms. Free-jazz musicians challenged the melodic, rhythmic, formal, and harmonic norms of established practice in jazz. In pure "free jazz" it is possible that the musicians are not familiar with each other, that the ensemble is a unconventional mix of instruments, and that the musicians completely improvise all aspects of the music. This is one of the few genres of music in which musicians have liberty to completely "make it up on the spot".

Improvisation is an important aspect of many musical genres. Because the **improvisation** is generally a spontaneous composition of material that is appropriate within the context scholars are shying away from calling improvisation "making it up on the spot". It is appropriate to call it composing in the moment.

In most genres of jazz (and other music), musicians use freedom to spontaneously put together pre-conceived/practiced musical ideas (improvise). These ideas are arranged over pre-conceived forms utilizing specific scales. The harmonies and rhythms are also standardized. In standard jazz genres like big band swing the improvised aspect of the performance is limited to shorter melodic

solos “over the form”. These solos are small features within a complex arrangement of sounds that requires most musicians to read the music while performing. In bebop and more contemporary jazz “combo” settings musicians generally have more freedom to improvise longer solos and develop ideas.

There is much debate over the definition of **jazz**. Historically it is a style of music that originated at the beginning of the 20th century in African American communities in the United States from a confluence of African and European music traditions. Some say that it is a historical genre that relies heavily on improvisation over swinging rhythms and blues progressions. Others say that jazz is alive and well in any musician who wants to express themselves through melodic improvisation over American style rhythms and chord progressions. Whichever the case; the key aesthetic value for jazz is expression through improvisation of melody. To a lesser extent this is also the case with other American genres of music. Improvised solos are expected in traditional blues, gospel, psychedelic rock, jam-band, salsa, and country based genres like old time and blue grass. In hip-hop freestyling the rapper improvises poetry rhythmically over rhythmic ostinatos called “instrumentals”.

There are many cultures around the globe that share an aesthetic preference for music in which some aspect of the piece is improvised. In Ewe drumming of West Africa master drummers improvise patterns in response to the form and to the dancers. In Indian and Middle Eastern music the subtle development of the scale (raga/maqam) through improvisation is a feature of much music. To do this with passion and artistry (soul) is the goal of many musicians. Compositions can last over an hour when the performances are inspired.

In the European “classical” tradition modern audiences associate the legendary composers (Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, etc...) with compositions that they wrote on paper. These compositions happened previous to performance. Modern audiences of Western Art music know that each time they hear these compositions (masterworks) they will not include improvisation. What “classical” music fans value are differences in interpretation. This could be different tempos, dynamics, timbres, or subtle variations in expression brought out by conductors or musicians. To those with a “taste” for this music these variations are what give it life. Aesthetes form preferences based upon their experience with differing interpretations of the art. The untrained ear tends to claim, “it all sounds the same”. This sameness might also be a reflection of the lack of improvisation in Western Art music at the beginning of the 21st century. For much of the history of Western Art music composers were also performers. Many wrote pieces to feature themselves on an instrument. It is documented that Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and others were master improvisers. Some would even duel on their instrument (much like battling in hip-hop music and dance or cutting heads in jazz). Imagine attending a symphony concert that included a musical duel.

Repetition, variation, and contrast

As listeners we recognize the repetition musical ideas. When musicians structure a form they utilize repetition of melodies, rhythms, chord progressions,

and metric cycles to create organization units. Small musical ideas that are developed and repeated throughout a piece are called motives. A highly recognizable example of a motive used in Western Art Music is the “three-shorts and a long” motive that is heard at the beginning of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5. If a motive is repeated continuously it is referred to as an ostinato. Themes are generally longer (or more substantial) than motives. **Themes** are melodies or rhythms that are repeated or varied throughout a musical work.

Ostinato based form

Sometimes entire pieces of music are based upon the repetition of one ostinato. This is the case in several traditional African genres such as Gnawa music of North Africa. Gnawa music contains repetitive chanting that accompanies religious trance and can be performed for hours. This same repetitive ostinato is heard in religious chanting of mantras in many religious traditions. In India, Kirtan is a form of chant and prayer utilized by Hindus, Sikhs, and some Buddhists. In a Kirtan performance call and response form is used over ostinatos to create the form. In **Call and Response** a musical leader sings or plays a line of music and the chorus (ensemble) of musicians responds in unison. In Kirtan and in Griot traditions of West Africa the leader tells historical and religious stories in the call. The variation of the stories satisfies the need for contrast in these traditions. In European traditions ostinato forms were often based on repetitive bass lines (ground bass) and chord progressions (chaconne). Notable among these works is the Baroque Cannon in D by Johann Pachelbel. This piece can often be heard at processional ceremonies like weddings. Melodic variation is often used to create contrast in European works.

More often it is the case that sections of a larger work utilize ostinatos. In pop music a repeated ostinato is often referred to as a riff. In jazz and Latin music it might be called a vamp. In Indian music it is called a lahara. In African drumming it is simply a rhythm that musicians perform until a master drummer signals the switch to a new section. Minimalism is a Western Art music movement of the late twentieth century in which composers utilized simple repeated patterns to build larger works. Some of the most famous minimalist composers are the Americans Philip Glass, Steve Reich and John Adams. Glass and Reich both acknowledge the influence of ostinato based forms found in Indian and African music.

Cyclic forms

When the section that repeats is longer than an ostinato then the form is considered to be cyclic. Like ostinatos the cycles that are repeated can be melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic. Repeated melodies create the traditional liuban and baban forms of the traditional Chinese folk music called Jiangnan Sizhu. Two primary cycle lengths are used for many of the works. These cycles are melodies of 60 or 64 beats in length (Thrasher, 1989). Musicians perform the melody over and over. Each time musicians are expected to embellish the melodies and add their own personal treatments. This is referred to as “adding flowers”.

This cyclical melodic form is akin to the strophic forms of Western music. **Strophic** refers to a form in which musical elements remain (largely) the same with each repetition of a section while some element or lyrics change. It is often the case that the only changing aspect for each strophe is the lyric. This is the case many traditional corridos of Mexico and America. In such works each section of music repeats the same melody, harmony, and rhythm under the changing lyrics.

In many jazz pieces a recurring chord progression serves as the foundation of the piece. One of the most common chord progressions utilized in jazz is the twelve-bar blues progression. Each time through the chord progression is referred to as a chorus. A typical jazz arrangement would have a written melody called “the head” played over first chorus. After the head is performed the musicians will decide on an order for melodic and rhythmic solos in the following choruses. When performing live, the soloists are free to keep going as long as they want. The piece typically then ends with another performance of the head. **Figure 1** illustrates this cyclical form in Joe “King” Oliver’s piece *West End Blues* as it appears in the famous recording made by Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five on June 28, 1928. Introductions like Armstrong’s opening trumpet solo, and codas (outros), are superfluous additions to the form.

Figure 1: *West End Blues* cyclic 12 bar blues form

Intro-	Blues progression: Chorus 1	Blues progression: Chorus 2	Blues progression: Chorus 3	Blues progression: Chorus 4	Blues progression: Chorus 5
Solo Trumpet	Head Polyphonic presentation of the written melody on trumpet with counter melodies played on clarinet and trombone	Trombone Solo: Improvised melodic solo	Vocal and Clarinet solo: Call and response style improvised solo by Armstrong scat singing with clarinet	Piano Solo: Improvised melodic solo in right hand with left hand harmonic accompaniment	Head Armstrong departs from replaying the written melody, instead improvising along with clarinet and trombone

Sectional forms

Sectional forms happen when the musical piece contains multiple, identifiable sections. Sometimes these sections are completely different and do not repeat. It is often that a piece of music will return to one section. This creates a sense of expectation fulfilled within the music.

Sectional forms with cycles

Gamelan

Layered cycles that change in differing sections of a piece are a feature of several Asian musical genres. Sometimes the pieces will have an introduction section before the cycles begin. In Javanese Gamelan there are both rhythmic and melodic cycles at the core of the form. In ketawang (16 beat cycle) works each gong cycle constitutes the repeating form of the piece. Cyclical melodies of varying lengths and speeds are layered on top of the gong cycle. The kendhang drum guides players by signaling changes over the constant gong cycle.

Arabic Music

In much Egyptian (Arabic) music sections of music are often repeated as many times as the performer chooses. In traditional performances the melodies (maqam) are varied and expanded through improvisation in each cycle. The ultimate aesthetic goal is to bring about state of emotional excitement or ecstasy. The effort to explore and heighten an emotion through music is notable. This practice results in performances where it is common for one piece to last over an hour. Oum Kulthum is a famous Egyptian singer that is revered for her emotive impact. She performed with an orchestra (takht) filled with virtuoso musicians. She was favored for her traditional Arabic presentation at a time when Western influences and aesthetics were challenged in Egypt. Much music that she performed has become part of a canon of Arabic music. One of the songs that she popularized is titled *Ana Fi Intizarak*. In this piece there are several sections that build for over thirty minutes as Kulthum increases the emotion. The formal arrangement of these sections is complex because it is based upon the poem that is being sung. Occasionally the piece returns to an instrumental chorus that is heard at the introduction. The musicologist, composer, performer, and Arabic scholar David Marcus wrote in an email to the author:

“In terms of lyrics and emotion, *Ana Fi Intizarak's* singer is getting more and more distressed in each verse, as she waits and imagines each footstep to be the arrival of her lover, who never comes. It's as if she is slowly going crazy, and then each Ya Reyt chorus ("I wish I had never fallen in love!") releases the energy. The song is in Egyptian Colloquial (or Spoken) Arabic, as opposed to Formal (or Classical) Arabic.” (Marcus, 2017)

The cyclic form allowed Kulthum to customize each performance extending or contracting the length of works based upon the emotional content, audience response and creativity.

Hindustani Music

In Hindustani musical traditions improvisatory explorations of ragas and talas travel through formal sections that come together in the badhat form. The form contains a series of guideposts that facilitate virtuosic performance resulting

from years of study and practice. The overall badhat form is a gradual crescendo of intensity that peaks at the end of the work. Musicians grow the “raga” or scale according to traditions combined with their own creativity. They build the intensity of the music over the cyclical tala. In music where there is no melody/only tala the percussion is accompanied by a melodic cycle called a lahara.

There are several sections that offer guideposts within badhat form. The first is the alap. The alap section serves as an introduction to the notes of the raga that is being performed. This offers the audience the opportunity to hear principal notes, motives, and extra-musical ideas (such as mood=rasa) that will be used throughout the piece. The alap section is identifiable because it is a melodic improvisation (with drone) that has no steady background pulse.

Jor is a transitional section that facilitates the move from the alap to the main melody section known as gat. In the jor the melodic instrument becomes more rhythmically active by adding a pulse. This is part of the overall buildup of intensity that happens in badhat form.

The gat section contains the main melody(s) of the performance. This melody serves as a foundation for melodic and rhythmic improvisation throughout the gat section. The gat is performed over a tala (rhythmic mode) and is accompanied by the percussion instrument (usually tabla).

Jhala is an intense section that serves as a musical climax and ending. In the jhala musicians often alternate playing melodic/fretted strings with the fixed pitch/drone strings on the instrument. This serves both to intensify rhythm and to reinforce the primary note of the rag called sa (to which the drone strings are tuned). Jhalas happen at the end of the performance but they can also exist at the ending of the jor before the tala begins.

In a typical performance the growth of the raga through the badhat form can progress for half an hour. The beginning is calm and slow and the end is a fiery display of virtuosic ability. The growth that happens from the slow beginning to the virtuosic and fast ending is often compared to the growth of a plant from seed to flower. The performance of a raga is devotional and is seen not only as musical but also spiritual practice, with the ultimate goal being Nada Brahma (“the sound of God”). (Bakan 2012, 135)

Sectional forms in pop music

When analyzing the form of pop music the terms verse, chorus, and bridge are often utilized. These terms each represent contrasting sections of the music. In many pop and folk genres the melody that is heard in the chorus is considered to be the main melody or “hook” of the piece. Often the verses have lyrics that tell a story and the chorus expresses the emotion. If the verse and chorus repeat with only lyric alteration then they can be considered one section and the form can be called strophic. When the bridge sections offers contrast to the verse and chorus it often creates a form called standard song form. Figure 2 illustrates how this form is often utilized in popular music.

Figure 2: Song Form

	A		A		B	A or A'		
Intro	Verse	Chorus	Verse	Chorus	Bridge	Verse	Chorus	Coda
optional	narrative	"hook"	narrative	"hook"	Contrasting material-possible modulation	Sometimes verse is skipped for return to the "hook"		optional

A simple form that is often used to describe the structure of melodies is called binary form. In binary form the tune has two distinct sections. Examples of binary melodies are the pieces *Turkey in the Straw*, *Yankee Doodle* and *Greensleeves*. These pieces show the contrast of the A section and the B section. This contrast often is both melodic and harmonic.

Figure 3: Sample Binary Form

A Section	B Section
tonic chord	dominant chord

Western art music sectional forms

In Western music realization of formal markers (often identifiable melody) is a highly valued aesthetic. Listeners are often aware of the design of complex forms and thus listen for how composers' use the form to create a work of art. They listen for the development and variation of melodic themes and motives. In many genres the listeners even listen for the expected tempos and harmonic progressions. Through awareness of form a greater understanding of Western art music can be realized.

Arguably the most important of the Western art forms is a multi-movement form called the **sonata cycle**. Sonata cycles came into vogue as a form in the Classical style period (1750-1820). It was at this point that composers established many of the genres that we hear in modern concert halls. The four genres that utilize the sonata cycle are the sonata, the concerto, the string quartet, and the symphony. Because they all use the sonata cycle they typically have a fast (allegro) first movement, a slow second movement, and a fast closing movement. The sonata and concerto only have these three movements while string quartets and symphonies also have a fourth movement, a dance (minuet and trio) inserted between the slow movement and the closing fast movement. Pauses often happen between movements in the performance these genres. In these pauses musicians and audience members adjust and prepare for the next movement. In the 20th century it became standard not to applaud between movements, instead saving applause until the end of the entire work.

Symphonies are works for orchestras (also know as symphony orchestras or philharmonic orchestras) that are composed using the four-movement sonata cycle form. String quartets use the same form as a symphony but are written for an instrumentation of two violins, a viola, and a 'cello (string quartet). Concertos and sonatas are written using the three-movement cycle. A concerto is a work for solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra. The term sonata can be confusing because of its many related uses. The genre called sonata has many historical variations but it is generally considered to be a work for a solo instrument (or instrument with piano accompaniment) that is composed using the sonata cycle three movement fast-slow-fast structure. As mentioned above the second use of the term sonata is in the form called sonata cycle. The third use is in the term sonata-allegro form. This refers to the form of the first movement of the sonata cycle.

Figure 4: Sonata cycle= used in sonatas,

Movement 1: Allegro=fast tempo Sonata form	Movement 2: Slow tempo Often theme and variations/ rondo form	Movement 3: Minuet and Trio Dance in 3 Does not appear in sonata or concerto	Movement 4: Fast Sonata Rondo or Sonata Form
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In the sonata-allegro (first movement) form composers use three melodies as the source material for building the piece. These melodies are called themes. Theme one is the most important theme in the piece. The first step in listening to sonata form is to recognize theme one and to listen for each appearance of it. There are three main sections of Sonata-allegro form called the exposition, development and recapitulation. In the exposition the three themes are presented (exposed). The first theme will be in the tonic key area. For example: In Symphony No. 1 in C major the first theme will be written in C major. A transition sections follows in which the music modulates (changes key area) to a relative key. For example: In Symphony No. 1 in C major theme two might be in the dominant key area of G major. The closing theme will be in the same key as theme 2. Expositions are repeated.

The development section of sonata-allegro form contains the least amount of established structure. In this section the composer may present themes out of order, fragment themes, sequence themes, or develop them in other ways. The ultimate goal of the development is to set up the cadence from back to tonic for the return of theme 1 in the recapitulation. The recapitulation is another presentation of the themes from the exposition in the same order. The main difference is that all themes will be presented in the tonic key area.

Figure 5: Sonata-allegro form

I n t r o	Exposition	Development	Recapitulation	C o d a	
	Theme 1= tonic		Develops motives and themes presented in the exposition.		Theme 1= tonic
	transition/modulation		Ends with cadence from V to I that reestablishes tonic key for recapitulation		transition/no modulation
	Theme 2= contrasting key area				Theme 2= tonic
	Closing theme= contrasting key area		Closing theme= tonic		

Like all other forms discussed there can also be an introduction and/or a coda. In codas, composers wrap up the piece by emphasizing the tonic chord (home chord). This is done by drawing out cadential material. A cadence is a resting point provided by the harmonic progression. The strongest cadences in tonal music are V-I (dominant to tonic). Tonal centers or key areas are important parts of the sonata forms. All movements are expected to begin and end in a tonic key. The harmonic path away from the tonic is also determined by the sonata form. See figure 4 for a map of sonata-allegro form. Classically trained musicians and enthusiasts spend much time analyzing music to identify each formal marker.

Programmatic Form

In movies, video games, television shows, epic folk tales and other genres music is composed to support a story. Often the forms used for the music will be directly related to the story. Composers who score films are often asked to create customized accompaniment that follows the action on screen. If the composer wants to create music that identifies or supports characters, themes, or actions then they might compose a musical theme that is representative. One needs only to hear the *Imperial March* from the *Star Wars* movies to get a visual image of Darth Vader. This is because when John Williams scored these films he utilized the concept of "leitmotif" that had been used in opera for a century. "Leitmotif" is a term that Wagner used to describe themes that represent characters, ideas, or other objects in his music dramas (operas).

Within an opera, cantata, oratorio or other Western Art genres that have a narrative and involve singing it is common to have three acts that each include arias, recitative, and chorus pieces. Arias are the "hit songs" of the opera and may be composed for solo, duos, or groups of singers. In the aria the emotions of the character are often revealed and expounded upon. Imagine the emotional release song in any Disney movie. This is akin to opera arias. Recitative advances the plot between these arias. Usually arias have some sort of repetitive sectional form.

Recitatives are often non-repetitive because they follow the text. If no organizational units or repetitive structures are present in the music then the form is called **through-composed**.

Analyzing form:

1. Does the music have a preconceived form or is it improvised?
2. Is the form of the music a section that repeats over and over?
3. Is the form established for the genre?
4. Do you notice any repetitive formal markers?

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