

CHAPTER 17

Three-Part (Ternary) Form

TOPICS

Three-Part Form	Auxilliary Members	Bridge
Ternary Form	Rounded Binary Form	Release
Repetitions	Incipient Three-Part Form	Quaternary Form
Expanded Ternary Form	Refrain	

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

This chapter presents one of the most prevalent small homophonic forms in music. Although the two-part examples presented in Chapter 16 were based on similar materials that united the two sections (a characteristic that typifies the form), you will notice that the works in this chapter contain sections with differing, and often contrasting, elements.

Three-Part Form

Three-part form, also called *ternary form*, is a sectional form consisting of three principal parts (A B A) in which each section is a complete musical statement.

Part I	Part II	Part III
A	B	A
Statement	Contrast	Restatement

The A sections of three-part forms are typically closed in formal design (they cadence on the tonic). Three-part forms are found in a wide variety of sizes, from as short as three phrases to movements lasting many minutes. In this chapter, we will concentrate on the smaller examples of this form, but in volume 2, you will discover several larger versions of the ternary design.

An independent, or complete, three-part form at the very lowest level (three-phrase) is somewhat rare. Figure 17.1 is an example of this construction.

Figure 17.1

Schumann: *Kinder-Sonate* no. 1, op. 118, mm. 1–14.

Phrase a

Phrase b

Phrase a

G D G C D g[♯] a D G a (G) D⁷ G
 G: I V⁶ I IV V vii^{o6}/ii ii ii⁶ V I⁶ ii⁶ (I₄⁶) V⁷ I

D A D G A⁷ D A⁷ D A⁷ a^{♯o7} b a^{♯o} b F[♯]
 D: I⁶ V I⁶ IV V⁷ I V⁷ I V⁷ vii^{o7}/_{vi} vi vii^{o6}/_{vi} vi⁶/_{vi} V⁶/_{vi}

e A D D⁷ G D G C D g[♯] a D G a (G) D⁷ G
 ii⁶ V I G: V⁷ I V⁶ I IV V vii^{o6}/ii ii ii⁶ V I⁶ ii⁶ (I₄⁶) V⁷ I

Notice that the first phrase has a cadence on the tonic, which is typical of the closed A section in three-part form.

The three-part form is one of the most prevalent small homophonic forms in the nineteenth century. In the usual pattern, both A sections are at least a period in length. The B as well is usually at least a period in length, although it may sometimes be only a single phrase. Figure 17.2 is a typical example.

Figure 17.2

Chopin: Mazurka in C Major, op. 33, no. 3.

A Phrase a

Simplice 1

1 2 3 4

C: V^7 I V^7 I

Phrase b

5 6 7 8 9

V^7/vi V^7/ii V^7/V V^7

Phrase a **Phrase c**

10 11 12 13 14

I V^7 I ii^7 V^7

B Phrase d

15 16 17 18 19

f

C (I) Ab (I^b) Eb⁷ (V⁷)

Phrase e

20 21 22 23 24

Ab (I) Eb⁷ (V⁷) Ab (I) Eb⁷ (V⁷) Ab (I)

Phrase d'

25 26 27 28 29

Eb⁷ (V⁷) Ab (I) Eb⁷ (V⁷) Ab (I) Eb⁷ (V⁷)

Phrase e' **A**

30 31 32 33

dolce

Ab (I) Eb⁷ (V⁷) Ab (I) G⁷ (V⁷) C (I)

Phrase a Phrase b

34 35 36 37 38

C G⁷ C E⁷ A⁷
 I V⁷ I V⁷/vi V⁷/ii

Phrase a

39 40 41 42 43

D⁷ G⁷ C G⁷
 V⁷/V V⁷ I V⁷

Phrase c

44 45 46 47 48

C d⁷ G⁷ C
 I ii⁷ V⁷ I

Analysis of Mazurka in C Major, op. 33, no. 3 by Chopin

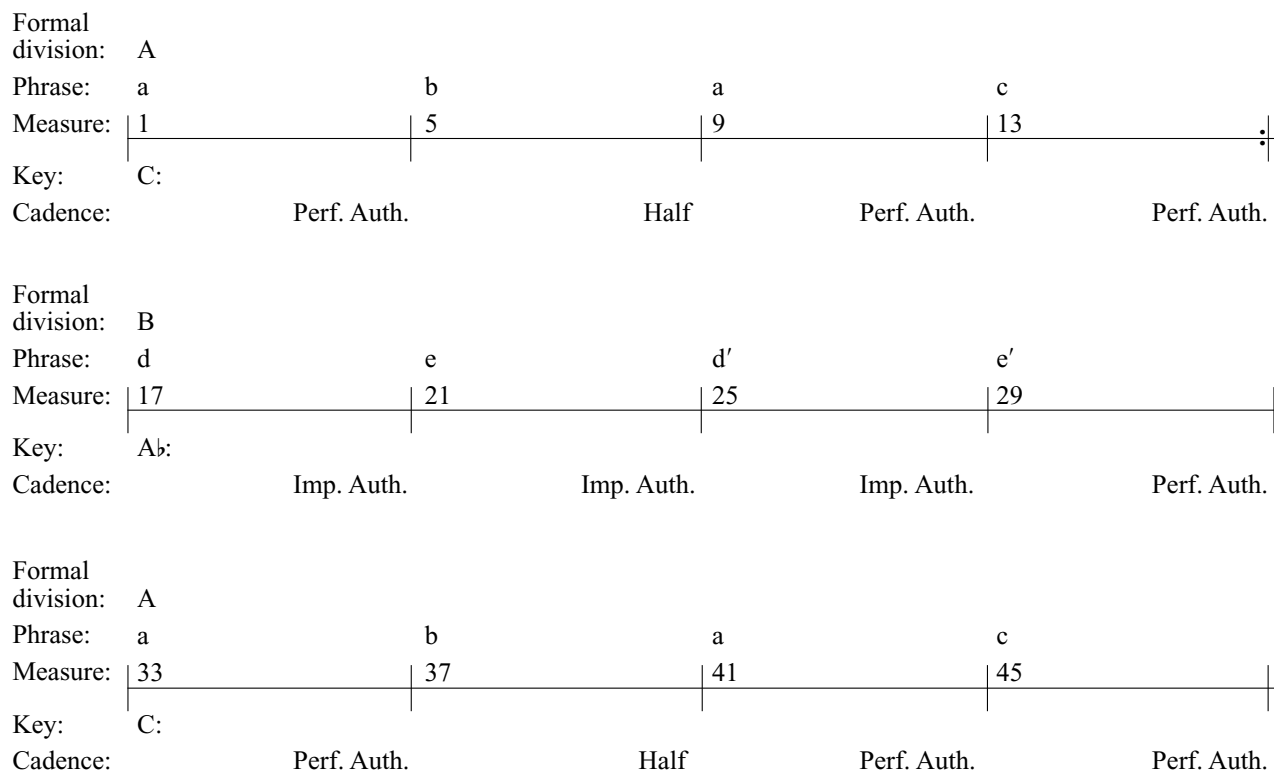


Figure 17.2 clearly illustrates the function of the B part in this form: to provide contrast with the A part and to create a need to return to the A part to complete the pattern. The degree of contrast between the A and B parts varies considerably from composition to composition. In some examples, the thematic material of B may be derived from that of A, resulting in a slight degree of contrast. In other examples, such as the Chopin Mazurka quoted previously, the B part may provide a sharp contrast with A.

Expanded Ternary Form

Repetition

The ternary form may be expanded by the use of *repetitions* of any section. The repeats may be made with double bars and repeat signs, or they may be written out if the composer wants to provide a different setting of the music when repeated. Such compositions are said to be in *expanded ternary form*.

Auxiliary Members

The three-part form may be expanded by the use of *auxiliary members*, such as an introduction to precede the first A, a transition between the sections, or a coda after the final A part that serves to bring the composition to a close.

The following is a list of suggested examples of the expanded three-part form:

- Chopin: Mazurka in A Minor, op. 17, no. 4.
- Chopin: Waltz in D-flat Major, op. 64, no. 1.
- Prokofiev: *Classical Symphony* in D Major, op. 25, III: Gavotte.
- Mendelssohn: *Songs Without Words*, op. 19, no. 3; op. 30, no. 2; op. 30, no. 4; op. 38, no. 4; op. 53, no. 1; op. 53, no. 3; op. 53, no. 5.

Rounded Binary Form

Many short compositions exhibit characteristics of both binary and ternary forms. These works are said to be in *rounded binary* or *incipient three-part form*.

The rounded binary form differs from true binary form in that the first section (A) is repeated (sometimes in part) at the end of the second section, as you can see in Figure 17.3. The rounded binary form differs from true ternary form in that the B section is not a complete section in itself, but is connected with the returning A material.

The rounded binary form was an important precursor of sonata form that prevailed during the classical and romantic periods. Sonata form will be discussed in the second volume of this text.

Figure 17.3

Mozart: Sonata in D Major, K. 284, III: Theme, mm. 1–17.

A Phrase a

1 2 3 4

p *f*

D b e A⁷ D e (D) A

D: I vi ii⁶ V⁷ I ii⁶ (I₄⁶) V

Phrase b

5 6 7 8

D b E⁷ A b (A) E⁷ A

I⁶ A: [vi⁶ ii⁶ V⁷ I ii⁶ (I₄⁶) V⁷ I

B Phrase c

9 10 11 12

p *f* *p*

B⁷ E⁷ A⁷ D G e A⁷ D A g^{#o} (D) A

D: V⁷/ii V⁷/V V⁷ I IV ii V₅⁶ I V⁶ vii^{o6}/V (I₄⁶) V

A' Phrase a'

D b e A D e (D) A⁷ D
 I vi ii⁶ V I ii⁶ (I₄⁶) V⁷ I

Analysis of Sonata in D Major Theme by Mozart

Formal division:	A	B	A'
Phrase:	a	b	c
Measure:	1	5	9
Key:	D:	to A:	D:
Cadence:	Half	Perf. Auth.	Half Perf. Auth.

History

The history of ternary design in Western music can be traced back to the liturgical chants of the early Christian church of the medieval period. The principle is present in chant settings of the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord Have Mercy) and the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God). It also appears in the structure of medieval secular song.

Figure 17.4

Kyrie eleison (in modern notation).

A

8 Ky-ri - e e - - - - - le - i - son

B

8 Chri - - - - ste e - - - - - le - i - son

A

8 Ky-ri - e e - - - - - le - i - son

Josquin des Prez (1440?–1521), in “Faulx d’argent” (Lack of Money), observes the principle of ternary design, as do many composers of the sixteenth-century *chansons*

(songs). The arias found in seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century operas, oratorios, and chamber cantatas utilize the principle in the form of the *da capo* (A B A) aria. In the baroque suite, the ternary design is achieved by alternating two dances, repeating the first after the second—for example, bourrée I, II, I, or minuet I, II, I, resulting in an A B A sequence.

The minuet and trio in the symphonies and chamber music of the classical period are an outgrowth of the baroque dance suite. The minuet and trio, and sonata forms (to be described in volume 2), are the most important examples of ternary design in instrumental music of the classical period. The *da capo* aria, which was established in the baroque period, continued as the best representative of ternary design in vocal music in the classical period.

The basic ternary design persisted through the nineteenth century in the character pieces of Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Brahms, and other composers. It made its way into the twentieth century, notably in the shorter works of Debussy and Bartók.

Many popular songs, particularly from early in the twentieth century, are in a verse and a chorus (*refrain*) form. Most popular songs from the mid-twentieth century consist only of a chorus. The chorus was generally in ternary form with repeated first phrase (a a b a). Typically, it was 32 measures long, divided into four 8-measure phrases. In the following illustrations, each letter indicates an 8-measure phrase.

Common Popular Chorus Forms

a b a a a' b a a a b a' a a' b a''

The b section of the popular song chorus is often called the *bridge* or *release*. The popular chorus form is often referred to as a *quaternary form*, because it usually consists of four phrases.

The 32-bar chorus in ternary design was more prevalent in the popular music of the first half of the twentieth century, and contemporary examples that follow the form in every detail are relatively rare. Many contemporary songs, however, show some similarity to the form. Figure 17.5 is a good example of a contemporary song that is an expanded 32-bar design with the B and A sections repeated in new keys.

Figure 17.5

Webber and Nunn: “Memory” from *Cats*.

Mid - night. Not a sound from the pave - ment. Has the moon lost her mem - 'ry? She is smil - ing a - lone. In the lamp - light the wi - thered leaves col - lect at my feet And the wind be - gins to moan. Mem - 'ry. All a - lone in the

Ami F Emi
 moon - light I can smile at the old days, I was beau - ti - ful then. I re -

Dmi7 Ami7 G7 C
 mem - ber the time I knew what hap - pi - ness was, Let the mem - 'ry live a - gain.

b Emi Emi/F Dmi/F Emi Emi/F Emi C D
 Ev - 'ry street lamp seems to beat a fa - tal - is - tic

G Emi A7 DMA7 G Emi A7
 warn - ing. Some - one mut - ters and a street lamp gut - ters and soon it will be

D a' C Ami
 morn - ing Day - light. I must wait for the sun - rise, I must think of a

F Emi Dmi7
 new life And I must - n't give in. When the dawn comes to - night will be a

Ami G7 C Ab Fmi
 mem - o - ry too And a new day will be - gin.

b' Db Ab Cmi Cmi/Db Bbmidi/Db Cmi Cmi/Db Bbmidi/Db
 Burnt out ends of smok - y days

Cmi Ab Bb7 Eb Cmi7 Fmi7
 the stale cold smell of morn - ing The street lamp dies a - noth - er

B^b7 E^bMA⁷ CMI F⁷ B^b B^b7

night is o - ver, a - noth - er day is dawn - ing.

a'' E^b CMI A^b

Touch me. It's so eas - y to leave me. All a - lone with the mem - 'ry Of my days in the

GMI⁷ FMI⁷ FMI² CMI

sun. If you touch me you'll un - der - stand what hap - pi - ness is. Look a

B^b9sus E^b E^b E^b E^b

new day has be - gun.