

Sonata Form of Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 in Bb Major, 1st Mvt.

The traditional form of the symphony pioneered by classical-era composers such as Haydn and Mozart involves a four movement construction: the first movement is generally in sonata form, the second a slow adagio or andante, the third a minuet or scherzo often in 3, and the fourth usually a rondo or sonata-rondo. As far as Beethoven's 4th symphony is concerned, the 1st movement is undeniably composed in the sonata form. In addition to identifying the overall form and harmonic structure of the movement, I will examine in depth a portion of the second thematic area in the exposition and how its harmonies and dynamics firmly establish the piece in the key of F major and successfully cause the listener to completely forget the original key of Bb major.

The typical sonata is composed in four distinct parts with the option of two additional sections. The composer could, for instance, begin the sonata with a slow introduction, a preview if you will, to acquaint the listener with snippets of thematic material which will be elaborated upon and reiterated in the rest of the piece. The ending of the optional introduction marks the beginning of the mandatory exposition. The exposition consists of a first area of thematic material in the tonic key, a transitional period which takes the music to a new key, a second area of thematic material in the new key, and a closing section wrapping up the music in the new key so to speak. Following the exposition is a developmental section which explores new themes and new key areas. The re-transition sets up the recapitulation of the exposition with alterations in the transition, second theme area, and closing sections. These alterations, according to *The Classical Style* by Charles Rosen are absolutely necessary; "[t]here is always a reinterpretation of the exposition after the return to the tonic"¹ Finally, an optional coda can follow the end of the

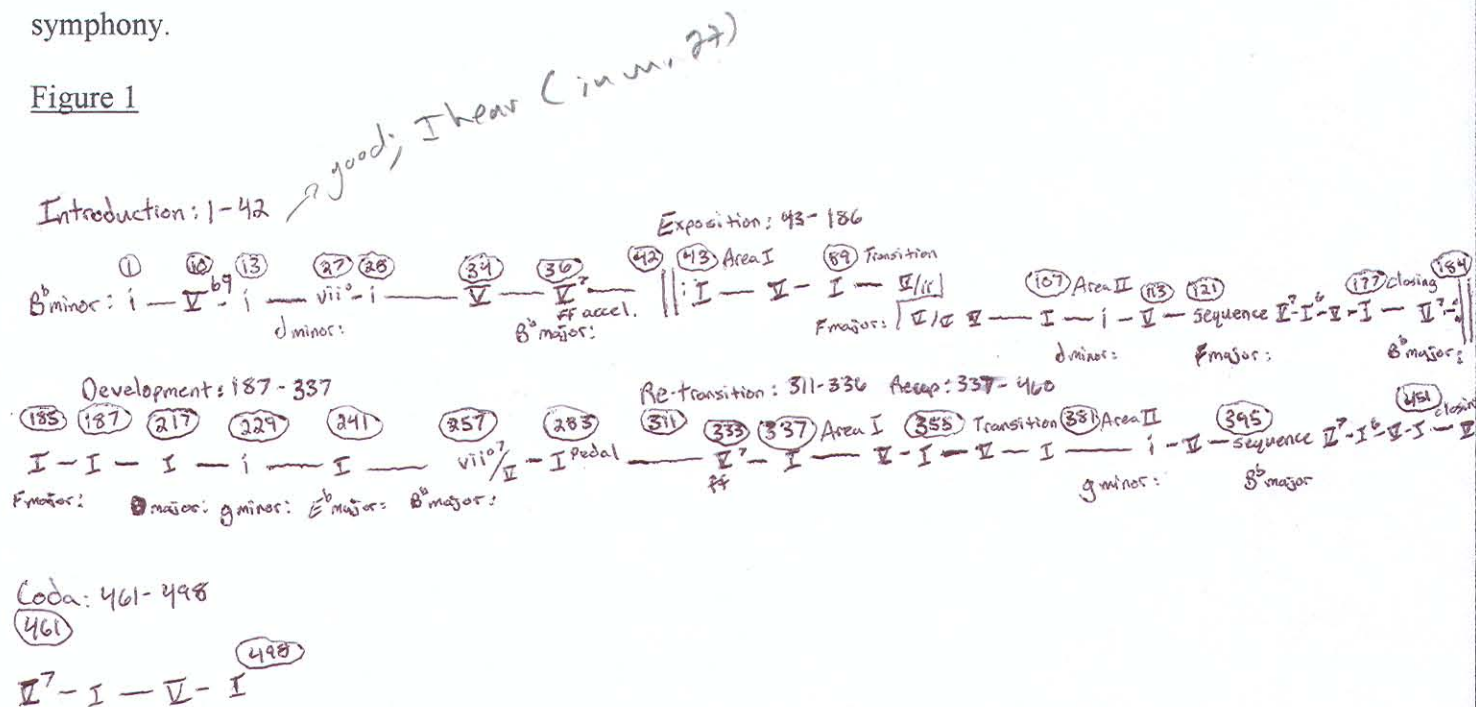
¹ Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

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Figure 1



As you can see, Beethoven decided to include a slow, quiet introduction for this particular movement which, oddly enough, explores Bb minor among other minor sonorities. The F7b9 chord in measures 10-12 is particularly exquisite, which is re-iterated 12 measures later one half step higher (F#7b9). However, while the F7b9 resolves to Bb minor, the F#7b9 resolves unexpectedly to a G7 chord, which begins a chain of dominants and dominant substitutions finally settling on the dominant of D minor. To set up the exposition, Beethoven takes the A major sonority (functioning as the dominant of iii in the key of Bb major) and transforms it into a monster F7 chord on the downbeat of measure 27. This first fortissimo chord

coupled with an accelerando, launches the piece into the main theme of Area I in Bb major. After negotiating various dominant and pre-dominant sonorities, the music begins its transition to Area II in measure 89, which culminates in a C7 chord acting as the dominant of the new key F major. Area II, which begins in measure 107, marks a new theme stated in the bassoon and oboe. However, the music seems to stay in F major for a fleeting moment before a large A7 chord functioning as the dominant of D minor. This particular section leading up to an F major chord in first inversion (measures 121-132) is the section I will examine in depth, along with its reiteration in the re/capitulation. Measure 177 begins the closing section of the exposition, which thoroughly establishes the music in the key of F major. This F major sonority is then turned into an F7 chord to set up a repeat of the entire exposition.

The Development begins after the repeat in measure 187 and moves the piece through the keys of D major, G minor, Eb major, and finally a large Bb pedal sonority in the re-transition (measure 311) to set up the re/capitulation in measure 337. This mimics the exposition fairly closely except for the fact that the transition prepares Area II in the same key rather than modulating. The same passage that occurred in the exposition happens again in measures 395-409 and will be examined along with its first iteration. From here, the music arrives at the closing section of the recapitulation in measure 451.

Instead of ending the piece right where the exposition ended, however, Beethoven marks a substantial coda with a fortissimo F7 chord in measure 461 and heightens the excitement of the end of the piece with multiple V-I motions in Bb major. The recapitulation, together with the coda, serves to wrap up the piece, so to speak, firmly in Bb major, an essential ingredient to sonata form and classical music in general. As Charles Rosen states

[t]his firm area of final stability is an essential part of the classical style, as vital to

4

it as the dramatic tension that precedes it; its proportions are vital, too, and they are demanded by the articulated nature of the form and required for the balance and symmetry central to the expression (Rosen 74).

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True to Rosen's view on essential elements of classical style, the recapitulation and coda are extremely vital to the sonata form by resolving all the tensions put forth by the development, both of which are nearly the same length, achieving the symmetry and balance he mentions.

Harmonically speaking, all the exposition section in a sonata is required to do is modulate to the dominant or its substitute; how this modulation is accomplished is totally up to the composer with respect to the work in question.² Beethoven successfully modulates to F major to begin Area II of the exposition, yet only after four measures he modulates away from F major to D minor in measure 111 and spends a full 8 measures outlining an A7 chord. Below is a simplified transcription of this peculiar modulation.

Figure 2 Beethoven, Symphony No. 4 in Bb major, first movement mm. 107-120

Handwritten musical notation for measures 107-120 of Beethoven's Symphony No. 4. The notation shows a piano introduction in F major (I) transitioning to D minor (i) at measure 111, followed by an A7 dominant complex (V 5/3) for 8 measures. Measure numbers 107-110 are circled above the staff, and 113-120 are circled below. A handwritten '1st class' is written to the right.

Measure 111 marks a tonal move to the submediant with two measures of a D minor triad followed by 8 measures of an A7 dominant complex ending on the downbeat of measure 121. I believe the entire purpose of arriving at Area II in F major and immediately moving to D minor

² Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

is to fully eradicate any remnant of Bb major the listener might pick up on. While D minor is by no means a remote key of Bb major, the process of modulating from Bb major to F major to D minor gives the impression that D minor is as far away as one can get from Bb major. Beethoven has effectively boggled his listeners' minds and evaded their expectations.

Beethoven doesn't stop there. A phenomenal sequence played only by the strings in octaves begins in measure 121 and whirls through seven different implied key areas before culminating in a powerful C7 chord resolving to a first-inversion F major chord in measure 135.

Figure 3 Beethoven, Symphony No. 4 in Bb major, first movement mm. 121-135

Handwritten notes on the right side of the score: "one could get further away, but the point is good. Beethoven may be thinking in 3rds: Bb - F - D"

would anything be gained with leaving the sequence as vii°/IV; I/i; vi/II?

As shown above, the repeated material of the sequence is three measures in length. Each iteration begins with an implied subtonic chord or an implied leading tone chord (depending on the mode of the key area), moves to an implied tonic chord, and drops to an implied submediant chord, setting up a repetition of the pattern in a new key in the second half of the sequential material. Interestingly enough, the key areas and implied chords coincide with the key areas of the F major scale; the sequence itself even travels up the F major scale. For example, the first note of the sequence, A, functions as a leading tone to the next note, Bb, corresponding with an A diminished leading-tone chord resolving to a Bb major triad, vii°/IV → IV in F major. The

fabulous

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Figure 4 Beethoven, Symphony No. 4 in Bb major, first movement mm. 395-409

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In conclusion, the first movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 in Bb major is undoubtedly in sonata form, complying architecturally with all the requirements of said form.

including the optional extras of a slow introduction and a coda. Additionally, the material found at the beginning of Area II in the exposition and the recapitulation is a microcosm of the large-scale form of the piece. Area II introduces tonic, modulates, whirls around the tonal universe, and finally ends up back at the tonic. The same occurs on a large scale over the whole movement: the exposition introduces tonic, modulates, the entire development explores the tonal universe, and the recapitulation finally ends the piece happily where it started.