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## sonata form.

A term that refers not to the form of a whole **SONATA**, as might be expected, but to the typical form of one movement of a sonata, more especially the first movement. To avoid this anomaly the terms 'first-movement form' or 'sonata-allegro form' have sometimes been substituted, but they too are inaccurate, because the form referred to is not confined either to first movements or to allegros.

Sonata form is principally associated with the Classical period (c.1770–1820), when it was ubiquitous, but it was developing before that time and was used for long afterwards. It occurs most regularly in the first movement of a sonata, a multi-movement chamber work (such as a trio, quartet, or quintet), or a symphony. It is also often found in the other movements of such works, or in such single-movement pieces as an **OVERTURE**, **TONE-POEM**, or **CHARACTER PIECE**, and it influenced many other genres including the **CONCERTO** and the **ARIA**. Fugues, mass movements, anthems, and orchestral 'storms' were often constructed in sonata form during the height of its fashion, and even the famous 'Representation of Chaos' in Haydn's oratorio *The Creation* betrays its influence. It would be difficult to explain why this particular formula proved so durable in such widely differing contexts.

Sonata form comprises a two-key tonal structure in three main sections. Section 1, the **EXPOSITION**, generally presents all the thematic material of the movement, opening with one theme, or group of themes, in the tonic key. The first (or principal) theme of the first group is also known as the 'first subject'. The exposition then moves, often by means of a modulatory section called a transition or bridge passage, to a second theme or group of themes in a contrasting key. The first (or principal) theme of the second group is also known as the 'second subject'. The key of the second group is usually the dominant for movements in the major and the relative major for movements in the minor, though other keys may be used. For example, in the 19th

century it became quite common to use the mediant as the second main key area. The exposition generally closes with a codetta, a short and sometimes reiterated cadential figure in the key of the second group. A double bar, usually with repeat marks, signifies the close of the first main section.

The second section, the **DEVELOPMENT**, exploits the thematic material of the exposition, though new thematic material may be presented. These themes are often broken down into their motivic components, which are freely juxtaposed and developed. The section is tonally unstable, exploring a wide variety of keys by means of harmonic sequence and other modulatory devices. It leads most usually to the dominant chord of the principal key, in preparation for the recapitulation, the third section.

The recapitulation marks the return to the tonic key and also a return to the thematic material of the exposition. It repeats most of the themes of the exposition in the same order, but here the second group remains in the tonic key. This means that if there was a transition between the first and second groups it must now be tonally adjusted so that the modulation of the exposition is not effected. And if the movement is in a minor key, the second theme group, formerly in the relative major, may be recapitulated either in the tonic major (as usually in Haydn's works) or in the tonic minor, with necessary modification (Mozart's preference). After all the material of the exposition has been recapitulated and a decisive cadence has been heard in the tonic key, there is sometimes a double bar indicating a repeat from the beginning of the development section. A coda may conclude the movement. It follows the cadence and double bar (if any). Codas vary in length from a few bars of cadence confirmation to the large section, with new musical ideas, often found in mature works of Beethoven. The first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in G major op. 14 no. 2 provides an example of the form (Table 1; Exx. 1–6).

Although many sonata form movements follow the plan outlined above, it must be stressed that it is by no means a rigid compositional formula. Thematic and tonal elements may become separated so that, for example, a recapitulation could start with the 'right' theme in the 'wrong' key (Mozart's Piano Sonata K545 recapitulates the first subject in the subdominant, a device often used by Schubert); conversely it may start with the 'wrong' theme in the 'right' key (Mozart's Piano Sonata K311/284c recapitulates the second theme group before the reappearance of the first subject). The exposition is sometimes preceded by an introduction, which is often in a slower tempo than the rest of the movement.