

# *The Enjoyment of* **MUSIC**

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SHORTER VERSION

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*Twelfth Edition*

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# Chapter 6

## Musical Form

*"The principal function of form is to advance our understanding. It is the organization of a piece that helps the listener to keep the idea in mind, to follow its development, its growth, its elaboration, its fate."*

—Arnold Schoenberg

### KEY POINTS

- **Form** is the organizing principle in music; its basic elements are repetition, contrast, and variation.
- **Strophic form**, common in songs, features repeated music for each stanza of text. In **through-composed form**, there are no large repeated sections.
- **Binary form (A-B)** and **ternary form (A-B-A)** are basic structures in music.
- A **theme**, a melodic idea in a large-scale work, can be broken into small, component fragments (**motives**). A **sequence** results when a motive is repeated at a different pitch.
- Many cultures use **call-and-response** (or **responsorial**) music, a repetitive style involving a soloist and a group. Some music is created spontaneously in performance, through **improvisation**.
- An **ostinato** is the repetition of a short melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic pattern.
- Large-scale compositions, such as symphonies and sonatas, are divided into sections, or **movements**.

**F**orm refers to a work's structure or shape, the way the elements of a composition have been combined by the composer to make it understandable to the listener. In all the arts, a balance is required between unity and variety, symmetry and asymmetry, activity and rest. Nature too has embodied this balance in the forms of plant and animal life and in what is perhaps the supreme achievement—the human form.

### In His Own Words

“Improvisation is not the expression of accident but rather of the accumulated yearnings, dreams, and wisdom of our very soul.”

—Yehudi Menuhin

### Structure and Design in Music

Music of all cultures mirrors life in its basic elements of **repetition** and **contrast**, the familiar and the new. Repetition fixes the material in our minds and satisfies our need for the familiar, while contrast stimulates our interest and feeds our desire for change. Every kind of musical work, from a nursery rhyme to a symphony, has a conscious structure. One of the most common in vocal music, both popular and classical, is **strophic form**, in which the same melody is repeated with each stanza of the text, as for a folk song or carol (*Silent Night*). In this structure, while the music within a stanza offers some contrast, its repetition binds the song together. The direct opposite of strophic form in a song would be **through-composed form**, where no main section of the music or text is repeated.

One kind of form that falls *between* repetition and contrast is **variation**, where some aspects of the music are altered but the original is still recognizable. You

Variation

hear this formal technique when you listen to a new arrangement of a well-known popular song: the tune is recognizable, but many features of the known version are changed.

While all musical structures are based in one way or another on repetition and contrast, the forms are not fixed molds into which composers pour their material. What makes each piece of music unique is the way the composer adapts a general plan to create a wholly individual combination. And performers sometimes participate in shaping a composition. In works based mostly on **improvisation** (pieces created spontaneously in performance—typical of jazz, rock, and certain non-Western styles), repetition, contrast, and variation all play a role. We will see that in jazz, musicians organize their improvised melodies within a pre-established harmonic pattern, time frame, and melodic outline that is understood by all the performers. And in Indian sitar music (see p. 172), improvisation is a refined and classical art, where the seemingly free and rhapsodic spinning out of the music is tied to a prescribed musical process that results in a lacework of variations. Thus, even pieces created on the spot are balanced by structural principles.



This famous painting by Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *32 Campbell's Soup Cans*, illustrates the reliance of artists on the basic elements of repetition and variation.

## Binary and Ternary Form

Two basic structures are widespread in art and in music. **Binary** (two-part) form is based on a statement and a departure, without a return to the opening section. **Ternary** (three-part) form extends the idea of statement and departure by bringing back the first section. Formal patterns are generally outlined with letters: binary form as **A-B** and ternary form as **A-B-A** (illustrated in the chart on p. 28).

Both two-part and three-part forms are found in short pieces such as songs and dances. The longer ternary form, with its logical symmetry and its balance of the outer sections against the contrasting middle one, constitutes a clear-cut formation that is favored by architects and painters as well as composers.

## The Building Blocks of Form

When a melodic idea is used as a building block in the construction of a larger work, we call it a **theme**. The introduction of a theme and its elaboration are the essence of musical thinking. This process of growth has its parallel in writing, when an idea, a topic sentence, is stated at the beginning of a paragraph and enlarged upon and developed by the author. Just as each sentence leads logically from one to the next, every musical idea takes up where the one before left off and continues convincingly to the next. The expansion of a theme, achieved by varying its melody, rhythm, or harmony, is considered **thematic development**. This is one of the most important techniques in music and requires both imagination and craft on the part of the creator.

Thematic development is generally too complex a process for short pieces, where a simple contrast between sections and modest expansion of material usually supply the necessary continuity. But it's necessary in larger forms of music, where it provides clarity, coherence, and logic.

**Theme**

**Thematic development**

**Sequence****Motive**

Certain procedures help the music flow logically. The simplest is repetition, which may be either exact or varied. Or the idea may be restated at a higher or lower pitch level; this restatement is known as a **sequence**. Within a theme, a small fragment that forms a melodic-rhythmic unit is called a **motive**. Motives are the cells of musical growth, which, when repeated, varied, and combined into new patterns, impart the qualities of evolution and expansion. These musical building blocks can be seen even in simple songs, like the national tune *America* (p. 29). The opening three-note motive ("My country") is repeated in sequence (at a different pitch level) on the words "Sweet land of." A longer melodic idea is treated sequentially in the third line, where the musical phrase "Land where my fathers died" is repeated one note lower on the words "Land of the pilgrim's pride."

Whatever the length or style of a composition, it will show the principles of repetition and contrast, of unity and variety. One formal practice based on repeti-

## Binary and Ternary Form



**Binary form = A-A-B-B: *Greensleeves*** (English folk song)

Statement **A** (repeated with varied final cadences):

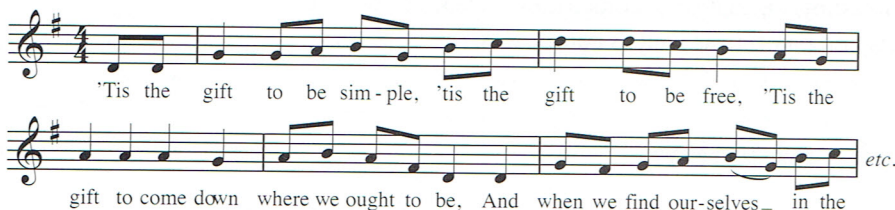


Departure **B** (with different cadences):

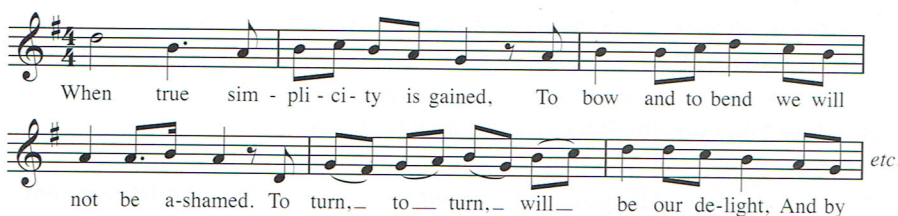


**Ternary form = A-B-A: *Simple Gifts*** (Shaker hymn)

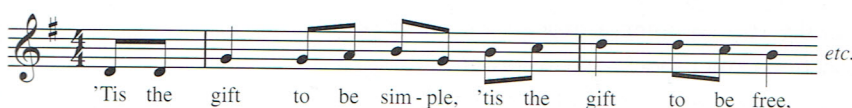
Statement **A** (repeated):



Departure **B** (ending resembles **A** with new text):



Repeated statement **A**:



## Motive and Sequences



*America* (also *God Save the Queen*):



(Brackets show repeated **motives** at different pitch levels, or in **sequences**.)

tion and heard throughout the world is **call and response**, or **responsorial** music. In this style of performance, predominant in early Western church music and also in the music of African, Native American, and African American cultures, a singing leader is imitated or answered by a chorus of followers. This is a typical singing style for spirituals and gospel music, as you will hear in a performance of one of the most famous spirituals of all time, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* (Chapter 50).

Another widely used procedure linked to the principle of repetition is **ostinato**, a short musical pattern—melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic—that is repeated throughout a work or a major section of a piece. One well-known work that uses this technique is the Pachelbel *Canon in D*, in which rich string lines unfold gradually over an ever-present bass pattern. This unifying technique is especially prevalent in popular styles such as blues, jazz, rock, and rap, which rely on repeated harmonies that provide a scaffolding for musical development.

Music composition is an organic form in which the individual notes are bound together within a phrase, the phrases within a theme, the themes within a section, the sections within a **movement** (a complete, comparatively independent division of a large-scale work), and the movements within the work as a whole (like a symphony)—just as a novel binds together the individual words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters into a cohesive whole.



The Gare de Saint-Exupéry, a modern train station in Lyon, France, designed by the Spanish architect **Santiago Calatrava**, shows the importance of symmetrical patterns in architecture.



Musical form

## YOUR TURN TO EXPLORE

Many popular songs are strophic, with repeated music for each new verse. Locate a recording of Madonna's *Like a Virgin*, and listen to it all the way through. There are three verses, each followed by the chorus, "Like a virgin." But after the second verse and chorus, there's a brief interlude of new, contrasting music sung to wordless text. Pick another song, and consider how the basic formal elements of repetition, contrast, and variation figure in its structure. How do these elements affect the listener's experience?

## Musical Expression: Tempo and Dynamics

"Ah, music . . . a magic beyond all we do here!"

—Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster,  
Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

### KEY POINTS

- **Tempo** is the rate of speed, or pace, of the music.
- We use Italian terms to designate musical tempo: some of the most familiar are *allegro* (fast), *moderato* (moderate), *adagio* (quite slow), *accelerando* (speeding up), and *ritardando* (slowing down).
- **Dynamics** describe the volume, or how loud or soft the music is played; Italian terms for dynamics include *forte* (loud) and *piano* (soft).
- Composers indicate tempo and dynamics as a means of expression.

### The Pace of Music

Most Western music has steady beats underlying the movement; whether these occur slowly or rapidly determines the **tempo**, or rate of speed, of the music. Consequently, the flow of music in time involves meter patterns (the grouping and emphasis of the beats) and tempo.

Tempo also carries emotional implications. We hurry our speech in moments of agitation or eagerness. Vigor and gaiety are associated with a brisk speed, just as despair usually demands a slow one. Since music moves in time, its pace is of prime importance, drawing from listeners responses that are both physical and psychological.

Because of the close connection between tempo and mood, tempo markings indicate the character of the music as well as the pace. The markings, along with other indications of expression, are traditionally given in Italian. This practice reflects the domination of Italian music in Europe from around 1600 to 1750, when performance directions were established. Here are some of the most common tempo markings:

*grave*: solemn (very, very slow)  
*largo*: broad (very slow)  
*adagio*: quite slow  
*andante*: a walking pace

*moderato*: moderate  
*allegro*: fast (cheerful)  
*vivace*: lively  
*presto*: very fast

You frequently encounter modifiers such as *molto* (very), *meno* (less), *poco* (a little), and *non troppo* (not too much). Also important are terms indicating a change

### In His Own Words

“Any composition must necessarily possess its unique tempo. . . . A piece of mine can survive almost anything but a wrong or uncertain tempo.”

—Igor Stravinsky



Speed and movement are easily perceived in this photograph of the 2002 Tour de France. Here, the cyclists are racing toward the finish on Paris's famous Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

of tempo, among them *accelerando* (getting faster), *ritardando* (holding back, getting slower), and *a tempo* (in time, or returning to the original pace).

## Loudness and Softness

**Dynamics** denote the volume (degree of loudness or softness) at which music is played. Like tempo, dynamics can affect our emotional response. The main dynamic indications, listed below, are based on the Italian words for soft (*piano*) and loud (*forte*).

*pianissimo* (**pp**): very soft

*piano* (**p**): soft

*mezzo piano* (**mp**): moderately soft

*mezzo forte* (**mf**): moderately loud

*forte* (**f**): loud

*fortissimo* (**ff**): very loud

Directions to change the dynamics, either suddenly or gradually, are also indicated by words or signs:

*crescendo* (<): growing louder

*decrescendo* or *diminuendo* (>): growing softer

## Tempo and Dynamics as Elements of Expression

The composer adds markings for tempo and dynamics to help shape the expressive content of a work. These expression marks increased in number during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when composers tried to make their intentions known ever more precisely; by the early twentieth century, few decisions were left to the performer at all.

### In His Own Words

“Voices, instruments, and all possible sounds—even silence itself—must tend toward one goal, which is expression.”

—C. W. Gluck (1714–1787)

Dynamics in music may be compared to the light and shade in this photograph of the sun shining through a forest of trees.



### Tempo and Dynamics in a Music Score



Beethoven: **Symphony No. 5**, opening:



Tempo: Fast (*Allegro*), with vigor (*con brio*)  
Dynamics: Very loud (*fortissimo*), then soft (*piano*)

If tempo and dynamics are the domain of the composer, what is the role of performers and conductors in interpreting a musical work? Performance directions can be somewhat imprecise—what is loud or fast to one performer may be moderate in volume and tempo to another. Even when composers give precise tempo markings in their scores (the exact number of beats per minute), performers have the final say in choosing a tempo that best delivers the message of the music.



Tempo and dynamics

### YOUR TURN TO EXPLORE

Find a recording of Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, and listen to how it is built on shifting dynamic levels—alternating throughout between soft (*piano*) and loud (*forte*). How does this feature help organize the song? How do changing dynamics contribute to your interest? Choose another song you know, and describe how the musicians make use of dynamics. Are there different volume levels, even levels, gradual increases (*crescendos*), or decreases (*decrescendos*)? How do dynamics affect your experience in this song?