

CHAPTER SEVEN

WRITING SHORT PIECES IN TWO-PART FORM

Before we undertake the challenge of analyzing and writing two-part inventions (Chapter Eight), let us first examine another very popular musical form that is perhaps not quite so demanding of our technical and creative resources. In fact, the musical literature is extremely rich in examples of Two-Part form (also called Binary form)—far more so than inventions. So we shall be working in a very useful and practical form that has been looked upon with great favor by Bach, his predecessors, his contemporaries, and the composers of the Classical and Romantic Periods.

The form is easy to grasp: it is divided into two sections (A and B), each of which is repeated in its entirety. The repeats are effected either by 1) double bar repeats, or 2) by the use of 1st and 2nd endings. [1st endings help to achieve a smooth return to the beginning of the section to be repeated.]

The overall harmonic schemes of Two-Part form are all-important. In the great majority of examples of this form, the following harmonic structures are observed:

FOR MAJOR KEYS: once the tonic key has been established convincingly, the music heads toward the dominant key, and the A Section concludes with an authentic cadence in the dominant key. Secondary chords and other altered chords might be included along the way. After the repeat of the A section (with or without 1st and 2nd endings), the music moves into the B section. The B section most often begins in the dominant key (where the A section ended), but very soon makes a move to one of the other closely related keys to the original tonic—often by way of a sequence. A clear entry into this new key is effected, the modulation achieved either by common chord or chromatic inflection. This is followed by a gradual re-entry into the original tonic key, again frequently by way of a sequence, and the piece concludes with a solid authentic cadence. The B section is then repeated (with or without 1st and 2nd endings).

The form may simply be charted as | A :|: B :|.

Quite often, toward the latter part of the B section, there is a return to thematic material from the A Section, with or without some variation in its treatment. This is indicated by | A :|: B A':|, and it is referred to as "Rounded Binary" or "Incipient Three-Part" form.

Longer pieces in Two-Part form will include excursions, in the B Section, into more than one other closely related key before making the final return to the tonic key.

FOR MINOR KEYS: all of the foregoing procedures are identical except for one very important difference: there is a modulation to the relative major at the end of the A section (instead of the dominant key). And the beginning of the B section will therefore frequently continue the relative major.

Now let us look at a short piece by Bach, a Menuet from his French Suite No. 4 in E Flat Major. Play it at the keyboard and take note of the comments that follow:

1. The A section is 8 measures long. The move to B Flat Major begins in m. 6, concluding with a Perfect Authentic Cadence (PAC) in m. 8A and again in m. 8B (2nd ending).

2. The B section begins with the B Flat Major chord, which functions as V of Eb and takes us momentarily back to the tonic key. In m. 11 there is a modulation to F Minor, with a LT Authentic cadence in F Minor in M. 13. This represents the obligatory closely related key in the B section.

3. The return to E Flat Major is seen in m. 13, and another PAC (m 16A and 16B) ends the piece in the tonic key.

4. In m. 3 and 4 the bass line imitates the melody of m. 1 and 2 at the octave.

5. The right Hand (RH) pattern of m. 1 is reflected in M. 3, 5, 6, 12, and in m. 13 in contrary motion.

6. Notice how frequently Bach employs the pattern of beats 2 and 3 of m. 1 (RH) in beats 2 and 3 of later measures. Slight changes of interval do not weaken the connection.
7. There is a similarity between the LH of m.3 and m.7.
8. There is a 2-measure modified Sequence in the RH of m. 9-12.
9. There is a Model and Sequence in the LH of m.15 and 16A.
10. There is a similarity between the RH of m. 1 and the LH of m. 5. (Leave out the weak portions of beats 2 and 3 in m. 1 and compare.)
11. There is a similar connection between the LH of m. 3 and the LH of m. 13. (Leave out the weak beats of beats 1, 2, and 3 of m. 3 and compare.)
12. Notice these similarities: m. 2 (LH), m. 4 (LH), m.7 (RH), and m. 10 (LH).
13. Notice the first three notes in the LH of m. 3, 8A, and 8B.
14. Notice the ascending direction of the first three notes of m. 1 (LH,RH), m. 3, 5 (LH,RH), m. 6 (RH), 8A and 8B (LH), 9 (LH,RH), 11 (LH, RH), and 12 (LH).
15. There are no rests in this piece.
16. Notice the placement of all the double bar repeat signs.
17. The use of 1st endings in both the A and B sections makes a smooth transition back to the repeat of the sections.

As simple as this work appears to be, there are indeed many aspects of it which help to bind the work together into a unified whole. One must never forget the importance of establishing a fine melodic line. Work hard to create memorable melodies, while still maintaining a good sense of counterpoint and clear, logical harmonies.

The next piece is another Menuet movement from one of the French Suites by Bach—No. 3 in C Minor. Perhaps you will notice that neither this one nor the previous example have any suspensions! Be that as it may, there is much to observe in the counterpoint and in the form that will be of value in your own endeavors to write in this form. Most prominent in the melodic treatment is the large upward leap followed by stepwise motion downward. Since this is written in a minor key, the goal of the A section is to culminate in a modulation to the relative major—E Flat Major. Bach explores but one other closely related key in the B Section: F Minor. A sequence immediately follows the cadence in F Minor which takes us back nicely to the tonic C Minor. The high point of the entire work is the B natural (the LT of C Minor). The form is straight Two-Part form, with no hint of Rounded Binary. Unlike the previous example, the B section here is considerably longer than the A section. This is the more usual case, as the remaining examples in the text will bear out. Play this Menuet, carefully taking note of the features mentioned above, as well as the comments that follow the example.

①

A C' B B

C A' B B

⑤

D A' tr 1. 2.

A' E

⑨

A A' A'

C A'

⑬

D' A'

+4 C A'

⑰

D D

MODEL SEQUENCE I

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piece in C minor. The first system, starting at measure 21, shows a descending sequence of eighth notes in the right hand, labeled 'D' and 'SEQUENCE II'. The second system, starting at measure 25, features a wavy line in the right hand and various intervals labeled 'A'', 'A', 'C', '+4', '+2', and 'C' in both hands. The third system, starting at measure 29, shows intervals 'D', 'A'', 'C', and 'E' in the right hand and 'C' in the left hand.

Practically all of the thematic, motivic material of this movement is derived from the first 5 measures, as the bracketed figures indicate. Figure A is treated with liberal changes of interval, but the basic shape is nonetheless perceivable throughout the work. Figure C appears less often. Its use in contrary motion is confined to measure two (RH). The only sequence in the piece is an important, extensive one, two measures in length and carried out twice following the Model. It moves down by step, taking the music back to the region of the tonic C Minor. Most of the counterpoint is Second Species technique. Notice the augmented 4ths and the augmented 2nd (bracketed), employed during a given harmony. This is the correct way to bring these intervals into the picture! Notice how Bach uses the ascending melodic minor scale in a descending line (Ms. 4, 14, 21, 25). Measure 28 is interesting in that the apparent cross relation between the upper part's A Flat, is followed by the lower part's A Natural. This combination of harmonic minor scale (upper part) and ascending melodic minor (lower part) works nicely, since both parts are following the logical pathway of their respective scales; the effect is not harsh at all. Somewhat curious is Bach's choice of the simple double bar repeat at the end of the B section, whereas he used 1st and 2nd endings in Part A. Perhaps he wanted the abrupt effect of moving from a clear C minor cadence back to the E Flat Major of the beginning of the B Section's repeat (m. 9). This could easily have been smoothed out with a little

transition in a 1st ending, but his choosing not to do so has to be accepted as deliberate.

These two Bach examples should be studied diligently as preparation for your own contrapuntal work in Two-Part form. Four more examples follow, all written by the author for his students in counterpoint at California State University, Northridge. Below is a brief description of each of them. Detailed analyses of examples A and B are shown after each of them. The student should study examples C and D and search for the kinds of unifying elements in A and B.

EXAMPLE A: G MAJOR

The A section modulates to D Major as required. The B section explores more than one closely related key to G Major. Suspensions play an important role. The emphasis here is on free counterpoint, with a good balance of rhythmic activity shared between the two parts.

EXAMPLE B: D MINOR

The A section modulates to the relative major. Specific rhythmic/melodic figures are a key factor. The B section explores only one closely related key to D Minor, and fairly extensively. This piece is written in rounded binary form.

EXAMPLE C: D MAJOR

Written in 6/8 meter, the notes are written with a non-stop flow of eighth notes all the way through. This could be a good exercise in expansion from straight eighth note movement to one in which considerable sixteenth note movement could be added in both parts at appropriate places. The A section modulates to A Major, and the B section touches upon several closely related key regions without any very definite cadences in any of them. This is a good example of the process of moving through cadences without disrupting the flow. Bach's music is rich in examples of this nature.

EXAMPLE D: G MINOR

This example is included because it demonstrates that the modulation in the A section of a piece in a minor key sometimes moves to the dominant key – in this case, D Minor. [As a matter of fact, in some cases – usually very simple pieces – the A section ends in no modulation at all, but merely a half cadence in the tonic key!]

EXAMPLE A

Musical score for Example A, a 24-measure piece in G major and 2/4 time. The score is written for piano and features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piece begins with a *mf* dynamic marking. The melody starts with a quarter rest in measure 1, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The piece concludes with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking in measure 20 and a repeat sign in measure 21, leading to two endings. The first ending (measures 21-22) leads back to the beginning, while the second ending (measures 22-23) concludes the piece with a final cadence. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4.

1. The closely related keys to G Major are e, b, D, a, and C. The A section uses no imitation or any very strongly-related rhythmic figures, except beat two of m.2 and beat 2 of m. 5. The 8th note tied over the middle of the measure to a 16th note is an important factor (it occurs seven times during the piece). The move to the dominant key, D Major begins in m. 4 with the introduction of the LT of D.

2. Once the modulation to D Major is accomplished, Part B begins with a quick return to G Major. The music seems to be headed toward C Major in m. 10, but this is only a secondary dominant (V7/IV) - IV). The real goal is A Minor, which is entered into in m. 11 and cadences in m. 13.

3. Notice the similarity of the RH in m.1-3 and m.10-12. The figure of a 32nd note followed by two 16th notes (introduced in m. 2) is brought into the picture in m. 11, and again in m. 13, 14, 15, and lastly in m. 21.

4. M. 13 is a Model for two sequences (which move down by step) and are shaped to lead into the region of E Minor – another closely related key to G Major. The music moves rapidly through the cadence in E Minor in m. 18. Measure 18 is a Model for another sequence, also moving down a second, and leads back to tonic G Major.

5. 1st and 2nd endings are used in both sections, each time helping to lead nicely back to the beginning of the repeat. Notice the addition of more voices in the final two beats of the piece; this is not uncommon in pieces in two-part counterpoint – to end with a richer harmony by adding more parts.

6. Several suspensions – seven altogether – are included, both upper and lower voice formations.

7. Notice the unique rhythm of the final cadence. It is typical of Bach and his contemporaries to save a particular rhythm for the cadences, and this rhythm may recur in several cadences in the course of the work.

8. The melody has two identical high points – the A above the staff – but they are widely enough separated so as not to give the impression of an upper limit to the melody.

EXAMPLE B

The musical score for Example B is presented in six systems, each consisting of a treble and a bass staff. The time signature is 6/8. The score is labeled with circled numbers 1, 4, 8, 12, 15, and 18. Various melodic and harmonic patterns are indicated by letters and lettered primes (A, B, C, C', D, D', A').

- System 1:** Treble staff contains patterns A and A. Bass staff contains patterns B and C.
- System 4:** Treble staff contains patterns B' and A. Bass staff contains patterns C' and D. Includes first ending (1.)
- System 8:** Treble staff contains patterns A and C'. Bass staff contains patterns C' and C'.
- System 12:** Treble staff contains patterns C and D'. Bass staff contains patterns D' and D'.
- System 15:** Treble staff contains patterns C' and A. Bass staff contains patterns C' and A. Includes a trill in the treble staff.
- System 18:** Treble staff contains patterns A and A'. Bass staff contains patterns C and C'. Includes first ending (1.) and second ending (2.).

1. The closely related keys to D Minor are F, C, a, Bb and g. The A Section modulates as expected to F Major, touching upon the region of the dominant, C Major, by way of a secondary dominant in measure 4.

2. Figure A functions significantly throughout the entire work. The first four notes of figure B are the mirror of Figure A. Figure C, featuring the scalewise descent of five notes, is important to the unity of the work.

3. Sequences abound, almost all of them moving down a step (m. 3-4, m. 5, m. 11-13, m. 14). Sequences that move in a different direction are seen in m. 14 (down a 3rd), m. 16 (down a 5th) and m. 17 beat 2 to m. 18 beat 1 (up a step). The sequence in m. 3-4 is repeated, transposed, in m. 11-12.

4. The considerably longer B section touches upon several regions by way of secondary dominants, but the principal modulation is to G Minor. The return to the tonic key is effected in measure 14 and remains in the tonic key through to the final cadence.

5. The form is Rounded Binary, since there is a brief return to the beginning of the A section commencing in measure 17; as short as this reference to material from the A section may be, the analysis would still be Rounded Binary.

6. The high point of the work is the high E in m. 15. The trill in m.16 furthers the sense of climax prior to that brief return to the beginning in m. 17.

7. A very strong feature of this work is the large number of suspensions; there are in all 14 suspensions—all of them upper voice suspensions. The student will benefit from finding them and analyzing the interval structure of each.

8. The closing measure adds two extra voices to the chords, as may often occur in such pieces.

9. Notice the two instances of the upward leap of a 9th (m. 3 and m. 12), analyzed in both cases as transposed neighbor tones.

EXAMPLE C

1 Allegretto

6

8a 1.

8b 2.

10

15

20

24a 1.

24b 2.

EXAMPLE D

① Allegretto

mp

⑤

⑨

1. 10a

2. 10b

pp

⑫

cresc.

mp

⑬

mf

17 *poco rit.* *a tempo*

mp

21

25

cresc. *f*

29 *rit.* 1. 31a 2. 31b

mf *mf*