Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy

Volume 36 Article 1

1-1-2022

Either/Neither/Both: Teaching Formal Ambiguity in the Undergraduate Theory Core

Aaron Grant

Joan Huguet

Either/Neither/Both:[1] Teaching Formal Ambiguity In The Undergraduate Theory Core

BY AARON GRANT AND JOAN HUGUET

Introduction

Large-scale form is an exciting milestone in the undergraduate music theory curriculum, as students can finally engage with the compositional logic behind entire movements rather than being limited to sections or phrases. However, this unit also presents several new challenges for both students and instructors. First, units on large-scale form typically require students to have some familiarity with the stylistic norms of eighteenth-century music. As today's students are often unfamiliar with classical music, units about form must now perform double duty, teaching the style in addition to formal norms. In addition, the discipline of *Formenlehre* has become increasingly complex in recent decades, providing ever-more detailed and often competing taxonomies and systems for analysis.[2] Finally, large-scale form offers logistical challenges, as instructors must not only figure out how to discuss a ten-minute sonata movement in a single class session, but also grapple with issues of ever-expanding curriculum and often-shrinking theory cores.[3] As such, it is all too

1 Our reader will, of course, recognize that our title is a play on Carl Schachter's seminal article "Either/Or." Like Schachter, we hope to encourage an analytical approach that reflects the variety, ambiguity, and subtlety possible in all music. See Schachter (1990).

2 At this moment, it will be helpful to clarify our position on bringing these recent theories of *Formenlehre* into the classroom. We believe that it is possible to teach more challenging repertoire, such as the pieces we discuss in this article, without comprehensively introducing our students to the theories described in Caplin (1996) and Hepokoski and Darcy (2006). As such, while our terminology and approach clearly draws from both theories, we try to keep our terminology relatively agnostic. However, throughout our discussion we have provided explanatory footnotes for the instructor who might be interested in considering how our analyses relate to the broader theoretical discourse on sonata form.

3 Of course, this is less urgent if the majority of students will have the opportunity to engage with *Formenlehre* more deeply in an upper-level form and analysis class. Monahan (2011) engages at length with the possibilities afforded for discussing formal ambiguity when teaching Sonata Theory in an upper-level theory elective. However, this is not the case at our two institutions, where sophomore-level core theory often provides students' only exposure to this topic.

tempting to choose the most straightforward and unambiguous examples of sonata and sonata-rondo form to analyze with students, the "warhorses" of Theory 3. But we must ask: what do our students lose when they believe that every sonata-form movement behaves just like K. 333?

Indeed, these pedagogical choices too often lead students to conclude that common-practice music fits into tidy boxes and that musical forms are a set of rigid rules composers somehow knew to follow, rather than a set of fluid, socially-shared norms that can be engaged with or thwarted in many ways. The consequences of this attitude can be severe: if students feel that they are mechanistically applying labels, learning formal types becomes not only uninteresting but also unmusical. Apathy, though, represents only part of the problem. If students never confront formally challenging music in the theory classroom, they are ill-equipped to understand the music they perform.

We therefore advocate for another approach, employing inquiry-based learning to explore the intriguing messiness of formally ambiguous pieces *immediately after* learning the basics of large-scale forms.[4] Ambiguous pieces allow students not only to gain practice applying formal terminology, but also to critically engage with what these terms mean, as well as to confront the idea that formal labels might not always neatly align with actual music. For the instructor, however, this creates the challenge of identifying a relatively concise repertoire that meaningfully departs from yet engages with Classical norms, while still being accessible to students who know only the basics of *Formenlehre*.

In this article, we discuss how we incorporate this principle into our own core classes. We consider four pieces that offer provocative extensions of sonata or sonata-rondo form, while still being accessible to a second-year undergraduate: Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E Major, op. 109, mvt. 1; Joseph Boulogne's String Quartet in C Minor op. 1, no. 4, mvt. 1; Franz Schubert's Octet in F Major, D. 803, mvt. 1; and Beethoven's Piano Sonata in F-sharp Major, op. 78, mvt. 2. For each, we give detailed lesson plans and discussion questions that can immediately slot into any sonata-form unit. Each lesson invites students to describe why each piece does or does not correspond to formal prototypes. In particular, we ask them to consider how the non-alignment of musical parameters (harmony, form, cadence, rhetoric, thematic construction, and texture) can create formally ambiguous moments at

4 For an introduction to the use of inquiry-based learning in the music theory classroom, see Shaffer (2013).

various levels.[5] A central tenet of our methodology is to encourage students to move beyond a taxonomic approach, acknowledging that interpreting formal structure can be an open-ended and subjective process.

Why Musical Ambiguity?

Before delving into the lesson plans themselves, let us consider two questions: what do we mean by ambiguity, and why should we consider it in the core theory curriculum? We agree with William Thomson's definition of ambiguity: moments where certain musical parameters suggest one reading, but other parameters suggest another equally plausible reading.[6] As such, any discussion of ambiguity in the classroom requires students to isolate and compare each separate parameter that participates in determining a piece's form.

This process of breaking down a piece of music into its components and deciding how each parameter supports or undermines a given formal reading has many pedagogical benefits. Kofi Agawu claims that in order to perceive an event or set of events as ambiguous, one must not only specify but *justify* the context that enabled that perception.[7] As such, analyzing ambiguous pieces gives students the opportunity to learn how to defend analytical interpretations. Arnold Winold similarly asserts that bringing ambiguity and multiple interpretations into the music theory classroom rather than just giving students easy answers models the problem-solving process for them.[8] Winold's point is echoed by Robert M. Eisinger, who argues that encountering ambiguity teaches students how to deal with complex, real-world problems.[9] In fact, he contends that the ability to confront ambiguity is particularly needed in today's world, in which students have unlimited information available instantaneously at their fingertips.

Michael Rogers states the benefits most plainly. He claims that "when considering alternatives [in music], real thinking is guaranteed to take place" and points out three specific pedagogical advantages to considering ambiguity in the theory classroom. First, music "can *only* be fully comprehended . . . by acknowledging its wealth of

5 In addition to reinforcing sonata-form and sonata-rondo concepts, these pieces also let students confront formal ambiguity in early Romantic and pre-Classical form—something not always possible within the time constraints of a traditional sonata-form unit.

6 Thomson (1983, 3–4).

7 Agawu (1994, 93).

8 Winold (1993, 38–39).

9 Eisinger (2011).

internal contradictions and paradoxes." Second, the ultimate gain of "filtering in" the inherent messiness of ambiguity gives students a "fuller aesthetic experience since such an approach forces them to encounter artistic issues of genuine significance." Finally, digging into questions of either/neither/both allows students to "do theory" instead of simply learning what others have discovered.[10] Rogers's latter two points reflect an observation made by Ken Bain, who states that students take the most ownership for their learning when engaged with questions that they find personally "important, intriguing, or just beautiful."[11] As such, exposing students to ambiguity early and replacing hunt-and-peck labeling with more meaningful and musical questions has the potential to increase intrinsic motivation. What is more, by grappling with music where traditional labels do not perfectly graft onto the piece, students immediately learn that such labels are not universally applicable. This may seem counterintuitive, but this means the analysis of ambiguous pieces allows students to critically engage in discussion about how and why a particular piece functions and what each label means, instead of blindly placing a label that is merely "good enough."

Where is the Recapitulation?: Boulogne's String Quartet in C Minor, op. 1, no. 4, mvt. 1

Identifying the exposition's formal components typically occupies the majority of a core theory sonata-form unit, leaving little time to explore the creative ways in which composers might transform this material in their recapitulations. Emphasizing expositions, though, can lead students to believe that the recapitulations are purely mechanistic. Recomposed recapitulations can offer a wonderful opportunity to explore formal ambiguity. While some feature a clear "double return"[12] and exact reprise of the exposition's thematic layout, many others defy listener expectations through off-tonic beginnings, new material, and thematic omission, reordering, and recomposition. The first movement of Joseph Boulogne's String Quartet in C Minor, Op. 1, no. 4,[13] offers a particularly concise example of a sonata form in which the reprise of the primary theme and the return to the global tonic occur at different

10 Michael Rogers (1990, 140). Lynne Rogers (2017) further describes how the process of asking good questions can help students not only to hone their analytical skills, but also to improve their class discussions, presentations, and analytical writing assignments.

11 Bain (2011, 18).

12 Webster (2001, 23–68). For a critique of this term, see Hepokoski and Darcy (2006, 343–45 and 365–69).

13 For more information on Boulogne, see in particular Banat (1990 and 2006).

points in the second half of the two-repeat structure. This piece thus asks students to consider whether harmonic or thematic criteria are more important when identifying the moment of recapitulation—or, perhaps even to question whether the movement possesses a recapitulation at all.[14]

Step 1: Analyzing the Exposition

Due to its straightforward parsing, Boulogne's exposition may be assigned as either pre-class preparation or as an in-class review of exposition formal functions depending on class period length and student skill and engagement level. [15]

- In either scenario, students should annotate a score with cadences, key areas, and thematic units. Preparing an annotated score such as this will allow for the easy identification of correspondence bars, an important first step when analyzing recapitulations.
- Then, go over the analysis with students. Boulogne's periodic primary theme material stretches from m. 1 through m. 9. A non-modulating transition follows in mm. 10–20, concluding with a HC MC in the tonic key. After the medial caesura, a periodic secondary theme begins in m. 21 with motives clearly drawn from the transition. Once the secondary theme achieves cadential closure in m. 40, an eight-measure closing section concludes the exposition.

Step 2: Where is the recapitulation?

Once analysis of the exposition is completed, the remainder of the class session can focus on unpacking the ambiguous second half of the movement. For this portion of the lesson, we divide the students into four groups and ask them to complete the following tasks:

- This portion of the lesson begins similarly to the first, as we ask students to annotate a score of the second half of the piece with cadences, key areas, and thematic units. In addition, we request that students compare this material to the exposition and mark identical or closely analogous material with correspondence bars.

14 For those well-versed in Sonata Theory, this is a clear Type 2 sonata form. See Hepokoski and Darcy (2006, 353–87) for more information on Type 2 sonatas. However, no textbook to our knowledge discusses this type of sonata-form design. While students do not need to understand the nuances of "Type 2" as a theoretical construct, they are very capable of appreciating the analytical challenge posed by such a piece.

15 Because the exposition is so straightforward, this piece slots in nicely after an introductory look at sonata forms with one or two other movements from the same op. 1 set: Boulogne's String Quartet op. 1, no. 1 (mvt. 1) and the String Quartet op. 1, no. 5 (mvt. 1).

- Then, we circulate two form charts of the entire piece (see Examples 1 and 2). The first places the recapitulation at m. 49, emphasizing the clear second rotation of themes that stretches from the repeat signs to the end of the piece (albeit with a highly recomposed TR and S). On the other hand, the second places the recapitulation at the tonal crux of the movement: in m. 76 after the i: HC MC a measure prior.
- Next, we assign each group to do one of the following: 1) defend *only one* of the readings; 2) make a case that *either* reading is equally correct; or 3) make a case that *neither* reading is correct. In the last case, students must either claim there is no recapitulation or put forth a better reading.

Step 3: Take-Home Points

After each group presents the strengths and weaknesses of their assigned interpretation, the class might agree about how to interpret the misalignment of this piece's harmonic and formal features—or they might not! This uncertainty is at the heart of this lesson: its pedagogical goal is not to conclusively decide whether or not Boulogne's sonata has a recapitulation, but to engage with the ways in which hearing the tension between this piece and standard models of sonata form can enrich our listening and performance.

Example 1

Boulogne, String Quartet No. 1, op. 1, no. 4, Formal Option #1.

Example 2

Boulogne, String Quartet No. 1, op. 1, no. 4, Formal Option #2.

Sonata Form vs. Sonata Style: Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E Major, op. 109, no. 1

Distinguishing between sonata form and sonata style can be a complex distinction for students to make in the theory core classroom, but it is essential to understanding the evolution of musical forms. Our next example differs from the previous one in that it does not ask students to make an either/neither/both decision about a piece's formal identity, but instead to grapple with an unambiguously sonata-form movement that nonetheless does not *sound like* a typical Classical sonata. The first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E Major, op. 109, offers an unusually compact sonata form, asking students to think about how formal and harmonic functions can express themselves outside of the relatively expansive lengths of the late Classical and early Romantic sonata movement.

This piece can be taught at any point after introducing the standard sonata form, preferably including examples from the early Beethoven repertoire such as the first movement of the Sonata in F Minor, op. 2, no. 1, the Sonata in E-flat Major, op. 7, or the Sonata in G Major, op. 14, no. 2. Before our in-class analysis session of op. 109, we ask students to listen to it twice, once without score and once with score, and then to mark key areas, cadences, and formal sections. For their initial encounter, we hide the piece title and composer from students, providing a score and recording with identifying information redacted on our learning management system. Because of the extreme register shifts throughout the piece, remind students to be mindful of clef changes in order to avoid unpleasant surprises in class.

Step 1: Stylistic Features

We begin the analysis session by asking students to discuss the piece's style in small groups. Even such a basic question as "What does the piece sound like?" can lead to important observations.

- For example, a student will often suggest that the movement sounds like a Baroque figuration prelude: a form which our students know well, having written one in Theory 2.
- Conversely, pianists in particular will often grasp onto the stylistic parallels between this piece and early Impressionist piano works (see, for example, *Jeux d'eau* by Ravel and "Jardins sous la pluie" by Debussy).
- What will students not guess? Beethoven. This opens the door for a discussion of the non-linearity of musical style, musical influence, and the ways in which the canon has not only emphasized selected composers, but also particular narratives about their "typical" musical styles.

We then ask students to identify those features of the work that seem stylistically significant to them. Answers here often include texture, register, abrupt tempo shifts, and the frequent return of the initial harmonic sequence. Note that all these answers, significantly, have little to do with the form of the work, driving home the importance of so-called "secondary" parameters in establishing our understanding of a given piece.[16]

Step 2: Analyzing the Exposition

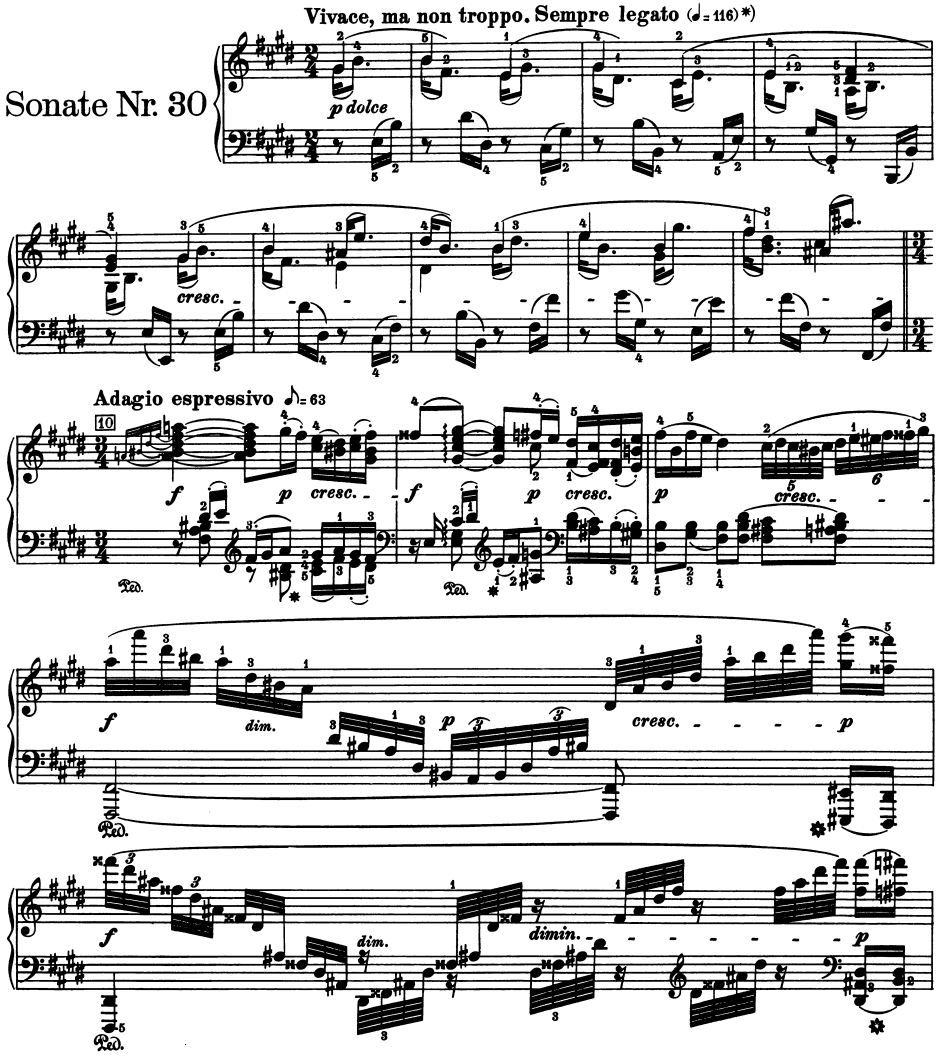
Next, we ask the students to consider the first 15 measures of the piece, provided in Example 3—at this point, of course, still not using the word exposition. What cadences, themes, or harmonic arrivals can they identify?

- A I: IAC in measure 4 provides the first cadential closure of the movement.
- Then, a restart of the original sequential theme seems to signal a parallel period, but instead leads to a thwarted arrival on V/V in mm. 11–12.
- Measures 13–15 then offer a recomposition of mm. 11–12, concluding with a cadential gesture implying a V:PAC in mm. 14–15.[17]

Only at this point do we use the word exposition, asking students to consider whether it is possible to apply sonata-form terminology to the first 15 measures of this movement in their small groups. After they hypothesize about where each section of the exposition might begin, students are asked to evaluate them in light of the standard definitions for a primary theme, transition, and secondary theme. What is the evidence for or against using these terms to analyze this piece?

16 The term "secondary parameters" comes from Leonard Meyer. Meyer suggests that there are two types of musical parameters: primary and secondary. On the distinction, he writes: "The primary parameters of tonal music-melody, harmony, and rhythm-are syntactic. That is, they establish explicit functional relationships. . . . Secondary parameters, on the other hand [e.g., ' louder/softer, faster/slower, thicker/thinner, higher/lower'], are statistical in the sense that the relationships to which they give rise are typically ones of degree that can be measured or counted. . . . [T]he syntax of tonal music, like other kinds of syntax, is rule-governed, learned, and conventional. The secondary, statistical parameters, on the other hand, seem able to shape experience with minimal dependence on learned rules and conventions." See Meyer (1989, 209).

17 Here, some students will push back at the idea of a "cadential gesture," correctly recognizing that this ending is much weaker than the familiar Classical PAC. This opens the door for a discussion of attenuated and weak cadential closure in Romantic music. At this point, we often invite the students to consider which musical parameters weaken the closure, as well as to identify other moments in this movement at which cadences are compromised.



Example 3
Beethoven, Piano Sonata in E Major, op. 109, mvt. 1, mm. 1–15.

- Evidence for analyzing this excerpt as an exposition includes its clear primary theme, as well as a series of cadential articulations that follows the standard order for a sonata exposition.[18]
- Students might cite the lack of a true secondary theme, thematic contrast, or a medial caesura as evidence against hearing this music as an exposition.

After this activity, our students are typically fairly equally divided between hearing this passage as an exposition or not.

Step 3: Full-Movement Analysis and the Problem of Proportion

How can analysis of the full movement shed light on the challenges of interpreting its first fifteen measures? We continue by inviting students to listen to the remainder of the movement (see the form chart in Example 4)[19] and identify its large formal divisions.

In particular, we ask our students to consider the following points:

- How does the lack of repeat signs, a common feature of late Classical and Romantic sonata-form movements, complicate formal analysis?
- Does the development (mm. 16–48) function as we expect? Students might note that the development is much longer than the exposition, that it exclusively develops the primary theme, that register and texture continue to be more important than formal articulations, and that the retransition's dominant harmony is very short and inverted.
- Where is the recapitulation, and how does it compare to the exposition? Here, students can employ correspondence bars to discover that these measures make only limited surface-level changes to the exposition's material, thus establishing a standard relationship between the exposition and the recapitulation.
- Where does the coda begin, and what material does it contain? Here, we highlight two features of this formal unit: its unusual length in relation to the movement's exposition and recapitulation, and the presence of a new, chorale-texture theme in mm. 75–86.
- We then invite students to synthesize our analyses of each individual section into an overall interpretation of the movement: is this movement in sonata form? Why or why not?

18 Richards (2012) endorses teaching sonata forms through their order of cadences, an often-helpful framework for students to follow when confronted with large forms for the first time.

19 For those unfamiliar, this diagram uses a double-lined arrow to signify what is known as form-functional "becoming." This symbol signifies "the special case whereby the formal function initially suggested by a musical idea, phrase, or section invites retrospective reinterpretation within the larger formal context" (Schmalfeldt 2011, 9). For an in-depth look at the concept, see also Vande Moortele (2013).

Example 4

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 30, op. 109, mvt. 1, Form Chart.

Step 4: Take-Home Points

In the case of this movement, the either/neither/both question at hand is quite straightforward: either it is in sonata form, or it is a nonstandard form, operating outside of typical Classical practices. While this question might seem facile to those of us who are versed in *Formenlehre* studies and thus able to conceptually distinguish between form and other musical parameters, such a matter is by no means straightforward for our students. And indeed, this is an important skill for our students to develop: considering pieces as individual and unique works which may or may not conform to the highly structured norms of sonata form prepares them to confront repertoire written in the 250 years since the emergence of the Classical style, as well as to explore and appreciate music in which generic norms—formal or otherwise—are perhaps not quite so clear.

Problematizing Sonata-Rondo Form: Beethoven's Piano Sonata in F-sharp Major, op. 78, mvt. 2

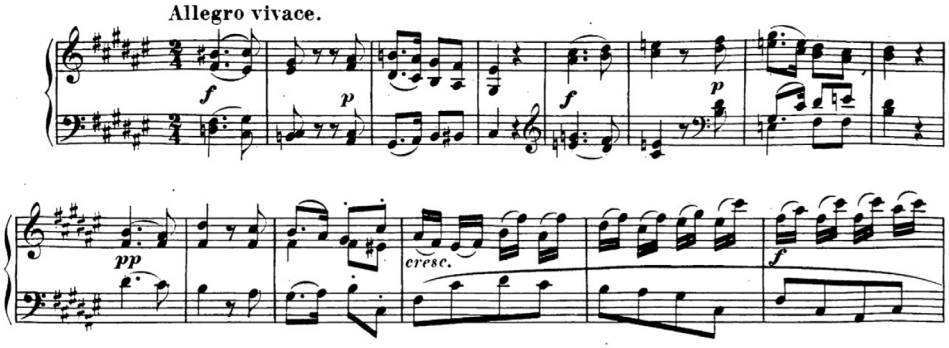
Sonata-rondo form, most often introduced as a variant of first-movement sonata form, offers new opportunities to explore formal ambiguity due to the form's many combinations of sectional rondo and sonata-form prototypes.[20] However, it can be even more difficult to find examples that are suitable for discussion in the undergraduate core classroom, as sonata-rondo's additive structure often makes all but the most straightforward movements even more unwieldy than sonata forms. However, an exception to this exists in the finale of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in F-sharp major, op. 78, a remarkably compact, yet musically rich movement. In contrast to some of our other examples, we do not ask our students to listen to this piece in advance, so that we can gradually introduce it to students in a way that allows them to consider its different thematic units both individually and as a whole.

When designing our Theory 3 courses, we schedule this activity after students have spent a day in class on sonata-rondo form and completed an analysis assignment on a prototypical example of the form. Typically, our examples for this material are the finales of Mozart's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333; Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, op. 7; and Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C Minor, op. 13. Opus 78 offers an interpretation of the form that is clearly in dialogue with both rondo form and the more general principle of rotation, but with an atypical thematic pattern of refrains and episodes. In addition, it presents an unusual harmonic plan that avoids the expected tonic-dominant polarity of the Classical period.

20 For a concise summary of sonata-rondo form, we suggest Caplin (2013, 644–47).

Step 1: The Refrain's Construction

We begin by asking students to listen to only the first twelve measures of the movement, which we have provided in Example 5.



Example 5
Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F-Sharp Major, op. 78, mvt. 2 (mm. 1–14)

- First, we ask students to identify the unusual use of an augmented sixth harmony at the beginning of the theme, thus reinforcing a recent Theory 3 harmonic topic. Why is this a strange initiating chord for a Classical work, and what is the effect of this on listeners?

- Then, we request that they parse the unit into phrases and attempt a small-form analysis. Since the theme is 12 measures, rather than the eight measures typical of a standard sentence or period, students sometimes struggle with this question.[21] If needed, we quickly review the difference between tight-knit and loose-knit construction, and then ask the students what we would need to do to tighten the construction of this theme. After this prompting, a student will generally realize that the middle material is an interpolation.

- This discovery naturally leads us to the next unusual feature of this refrain: its internal, cadentially-confirmed modulation to the key of IV. We remind our students at this point that rondo refrains typically do not modulate, as they normally function as the most stable material of the movement.

- Finally, we ask students to identify the cadences at the end of each phrase. Once they tell us that the theme ends with an IAC, we remind them that rondo themes usually close definitively with a PAC, and that they typically do not elide with the following material.

21 In example 6, we analyze this piece as a continuous period (antecedent in measures 1–4, consequent in mm. 9–12, and an interpolation in measures 5–8). It would also be possible to interpret it as a hybrid form of antecedent–interpolation–continuation, using William Caplin's terminology (see Caplin 1998, 59–70). Both of these interpretations emphasize the highly unusual modulation to the key of IV, while still acknowledging the return to tonic in measure 12.

At this point in the discussion, students are comfortable with the basic harmonic, cadential, and formal aspects of the theme. We then conclude by summarizing the unusual features of this refrain, and we suggest to the students that these features—its unstable opening harmony, its modulation to IV, its abrupt character, and its elided, weak cadential closure—will provide important clues for decoding the remainder of the movement.

Step 2: Overall Thematic and Harmonic Plan

We then listen to the entire movement twice, once without score and once with score (a form chart is provided in Example 6). This is where the movement's short length is particularly valuable: clocking in at approximately three minutes, it allows students to engage with a full piece together in the classroom, without eating up a substantial portion of a class period.

- We then ask students to identify each of the movement's thematic units, using standard letter notation, in small groups. After a few minutes, we return to the large group to create a simple thematic and harmonic chart.[22] Note that at this point in the discussion, we do not ask students to identify the large form of the movement.
- What are the limitations of this thematic plan? Or, to frame it more bluntly, what does the succession of letters ABABCABCA provide us? In order to understand this movement, we must move beyond identification to function.
- We then ask students to consider the role of each of the three units. Which is most stable? Which is least stable? Do all of them function as true themes, or are some of them developmental or transitional in nature?

Through this discussion, they typically arrive at the realization that the B material is more transitional than the A or C material, despite being melodically distinct. Does this material serve as its own thematic unit, or is it transitional? This question has important ramifications for the movement's large form.

22 While constructing their form charts, students will often comment on the unusual subdominant A3 refrain. Of course, an off-tonic refrain or recapitulation is atypical in both sonata and sonata-rondo forms. This might lead some students to suggest a reading of rondo. Yet, this reading is less preferred to sonata-rondo because an episode that originally appeared off-tonic (C1) returns in tonic (C2). As such, this detail does not affect our overall large-scale reading of the piece. That being said, it can lead to fascinating discussions once the students realize that the A1 refrain's local modulation to the subdominant foreshadows the movement's large-scale harmonic plan.

Example 6

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F-Sharp Major, op. 78, mvt. 2

Step 3: Interpreting the Large Form

While clearly in dialogue with the sonata-rondo, the form of this piece is ambiguous, depending on whether we consider this B unit as thematic or transitional. The form diagrams provided in Example 7 present these two options.

- If B is thematic, serving as a rondo episode, the piece is a sonata-rondo variant. This reading emphasizes the rotational aspects of the form, hearing every return of A—even the off-tonic A3—as a refrain.
- If B is non-thematic, then its function differs based on whether it leads to A or to C. When B1 leads back to A, it serves as a rounded-binary digression. When B2 and B3 lead to C, it functions at a higher level as a transition. In this reading, the large-scale form of the piece is a sonata without development.

This leads us to our foundational either/neither/both question for this movement: can a piece have two large-form interpretations? Our pedagogical goal is not to force students to choose, but to embrace the possibility that "neither" and "both" are simultaneously possible for this piece.

If B1 is an Episode...

The movement is a variant of sonata-rondo in which C recapitulates instead of B

Rotation 1			**Rotation 2**			**Rotation 3**			**Rotation 4**
A1	B1		A2	B2	C1	A3	B3	C2	A4
1	12		32	43	57	89	100	116	150
F♯					d♯	B		F♯	
P	*TR ⟹ Weak S*		*P*	*TR*	*Int. Theme*	*P*	*TR*	*"Recap"*	*Coda*

If B1 is the Middle of a Small Ternary...

The movement is a variant of Type 1/slow-movement sonata form

Exposition					**Recapitulation**			**Coda**
P (Small Ternary)		TR	S		P	TR	S	Coda
1	12	32	43	57	89	100	116	150
F♯				d♯	B		F♯	
A1	*(B1)*	*A2*	*B2*	*C1*	*A3*	*B3*	*C2*	*A4*

Example 7

Two Formal Readings of Beethoven, op. 78, mvt. 2

Conflicting Musical Dimensions: Schubert's Octet, D. 803

Theorists of sonata forms have long debated how to analyze three-key expositions, particularly with regard to how to categorize the latter two tonal areas.[23] The first movement of Schubert's Octet, D. 803, differs from our other examples in that it invites students to grapple with an exposition that outlines *three* rather than two tonal centers. This work can pose a significant initial challenge for students, yet one that they can overcome with some guidance. And the challenge is well worth it: three-key expositions were an extremely popular formal strategy in the nineteenth century, and such pieces are mainstays of the performance repertoire for many of our students.

Step 1: Pre-Class Preparation

While perhaps overwhelming at first, the number of possible interpretations of this exposition creates many opportunities for rousing class discussions, particularly when positioning this analysis towards the end of a sonata-form unit. We begin by assigning the following preparatory activities as homework:

- Listen to the exposition of this piece (mm. 19–138).
- Then, label cadences, keys, and small forms on a score.
- Finally, attempt a global analysis of the exposition, and post it to a discussion board on our class LMS.

We tell our students up front that the music after the initial transition will not fit our standard sonata form models. As such, we ask our students to defend their interpretations in a couple of sentences on the discussion board, discussing what specific musical parameters they find themselves responding to in each of the exposition's sections.

Step 2: Setting the Stage

Class can begin, then, by going over students' posted analyses in order to help them come to a neutral understanding of the piece similar to Example 8. Discussion at this time can center on many topics, but we like to steer it towards the musical features of this exposition that make it so difficult to parse, most notably the disjunction between

23 For more information on this debate, see Grant (2022); for broader analytic discussions on three-key expositions, see Hunt (2009 & 2014) and Grant (2018 & 2022).

Example 8

Schubert, Octet in F Major, D. 803, mvt. 1, Form Chart of Exposition.

the rhetorical and tonal trajectories of the exposition and Schubert's idiosyncratic use of cadences. Carefully unpacking these two issues reveals that there are two possible locations at which a secondary theme might begin:

- If we follow the normative tonal plan for a sonata exposition, S-space begins in m. 89 along with the onset of music in the dominant. Yet this music is rhetorically incongruous with that interpretation, as its end-accented, codetta-like music sounds more like a closing theme.
- The section that begins in m. 49 is rhetorically more S-like, with its songlike melody traded among all three instruments. However, this unit not only begins in the key of vi, but also modulates several times, even visiting the key of the global *tonic*! That is manifestly *not* S-like.
- Adding to the confusion is Schubert's use of cadences. According to most sonata-form theories, a V: PAC within a major-mode work nearly always signals an EEC. Yet, there has not been any music in the dominant key up to the first V: PAC in m. 89.

Step 3: Debating Possible Interpretations

As summarized in Example 9, this harmonic-rhetorical disjunction can lead to five possible interpretations of three-key expositions such as the Octet, each of which with particular pros and cons.[24]

- Option 1: The exposition is a two-part form with a two-part subordinate theme.
  - Pro: This option shows how the rhetoric of this exposition nearly follows the rhetorical progression of a typical sonata-form exposition (P-TR-S-C).
  - Con: This interpretation ignores the extremely unusual tonality of S1 and the C-like initiation of the section beginning in m. 89.
- Option 2: The exposition is a two-part form with a two-part closing theme.
  - Pro: This option shows how the rhetoric of this exposition nearly follows the rhetorical progression of a typical sonata-form exposition (P-TR-S-C).
  - Con: This interpretation ignores the extremely unusual tonality of S and processual rhetoric of C1.
- Option 3: The exposition is a two-part form with a two-part transition.
  - Pro: This option nicely fits the exposition into the typical tonal trajectory of a sonata-form exposition (I–V).

24 As described in Hunt (2009) and Hepokoski and Darcy (2006, 171–72), another option for this exposition would be viewing it as a trimodular block (see also Grant (2022) for a critique of this interpretation). While this is a somewhat viable option, we feel that this terminology comes with too much baggage to introduce to a typical undergraduate student.

Option #1: The exposition is a two-part form with a two-part subordinate theme, ignoring the tonality of S[1].

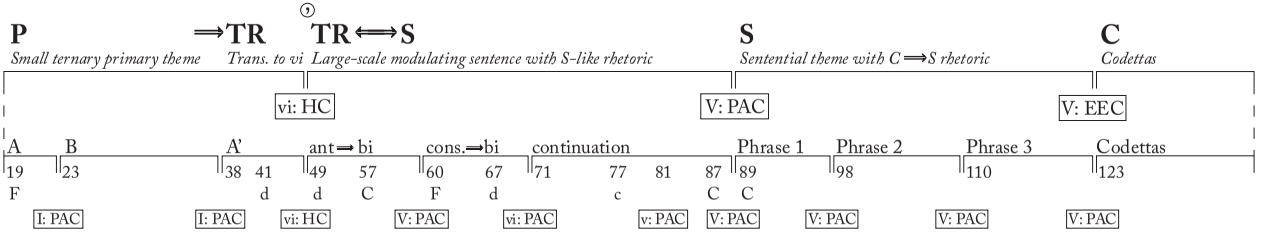
Option #2: The exposition is a two-part form with a two-part closing theme, ignoring the tonality of S and processual rhetoric of C[1].

Option #3: The exposition is a two-part form with a two-part transition, ignoring the rhetoric of TR[2] and S.

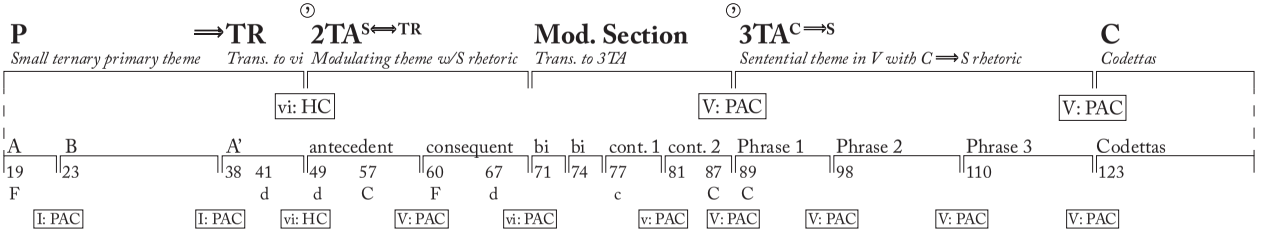
Example 9

Schubert, Octet in F Major, D. 803, mvt. 1, Five Different Interpretations of the Exposition.

Option #4: The exposition is a two-part form with the 2TA functioning as both TR & S, the 3TA an odd S with closing rhetoric.



Option #5: The exposition is a three-part form that does not conform to 18th-century models of sonata-form expositions.
Superscripts represent the modulating tonality of the second tonal area (2TA) and rhetoric of the third tonal area (3TA)



Example 9 (cont'd)
Schubert, Octet in F Major, D. 803, mvt. 1, Five Different Interpretations of the Exposition.

    - Con: This interpretation ignores the S-like rhetoric of TR2 and C-like initiation of S.
- Option 4: The exposition is a two-part form with a 2TA functioning as both TR and S.
    - Pro: This option nicely characterizes the formal function of the music from mm. 49–88.
    - Con: This interpretation ignores the C-like initiation of the material marked S.[25]
- Option 5: The exposition is a three-part form that does not conform to 18th-century models of sonata-form expositions.
    - Pro: This option allows for the idiosyncratic sonata to not be stuffed into an ill-fitting box.
    - Con: One analysis of one piece can hardly justify jettisoning typical sonata terminology entirely. Rather, more work is needed to confirm that other pieces act similarly.

We give all five to our students and have them prepare to defend whichever interpretation aligns most closely with their hearing of the piece. To do so, we:

1. Divide students into groups based on their preferred interpretation
2. Ask the groups to take 5 minutes to discuss their interpretation
3. Have each group present their chosen interpretation and reasoning to the class, as well as respond to feedback from classmates who chose a different option.

Like the other examples, this piece asks students to engage in questions of "either/neither/both," but in a way that introduces them to a significant 19th-century modification of sonata form that has plagued and fascinated scholars and performers. In fact, this analytical debate naturally leads to discussions about the dissemination and development of musical forms in the 19th century, the ways in which theories designed for other repertoires can aid or hamper scholarship, and even the scholarly process itself. Indeed, one of the primary benefits of this class is the way it asks students to get in the mind of the scholar. Throughout the class, students interrogate different interpretations, decide what they like or do not like about each, and come to their own conclusions, while acknowledging that multiple interpretations might be

25 The double arrow in this option indicates a "form-functional situation that is internally dynamic—one that bounces back and forth between conflicting form-functional profiles—but that in the larger scheme is entirely static" Martin and Vande Moortele (2014, 142).

valuable, each for different reasons. In particular, Option 5 gives students the chance to take a leap and make meaningful theoretical claims of their own. To emphasize this point, we follow this class up with a homework assignment that asks students to compare and contrast D. 803 with another of Schubert's three-key expositions, such as the Allegro in A minor, D. 947.

Conclusion

The language that we use in the classroom is powerful. Our word choices help to form the vocabulary that students will use to engage in communication throughout their lives as musicians. In the typical sonata-form lesson plan, students often are taught how to apply labels to various sections of a musical work as if these labels are static, universally applicable entities. While students should certainly be able to identify the standard small and large forms, framing formal analysis in this way can create an inflexible mindset: what happens if a student believes that *every* Classical piece must exactly conform to these textbook prototypes?

In each of the lessons that we have proposed in this article, we aim to show students that words such as either, neither, and both are not a means of hedging or equivocating about challenging repertoire, but that they have an important role to play in formal analysis and music scholarship. In doing so, we hope to steer students away from mechanistic labeling towards a more realistic understanding of the nearly limitless possibilities offered by a flexible approach to musical form.

Bibliography

Agawu, Kofi. 1994. "Ambiguity in Tonal Music: A Preliminary Study." In *Theory, Analysis, and Meaning in Music*. Edited by Anthony Pople. 86–107. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Alegant, Brian. 2008. "Listen Up! Thoughts on iPods, Sonata Form, and Analysis Without Score." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 22: 149–76. https://jmtp.appstate.edu/listen-thoughts-ipods-sonata form-and-analysis-without-score.

Bain, Ken. 2011. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Balter, Marcos. 2020. "His Name is Joseph Boulogne, Not Black Mozart." *The New York Times*. July 22, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/arts/music/black-mozart-joseph-boulogne.html.

Banat, Gabriel. 1990. "Le Chavalier de Saint-Georges, Man of Music and Gentleman-at-Arms: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Prodigy." *Black Music Research Journal* 10, no. 2: 177–212.

———. 2006. *The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the Sword and Bow*. Hillsdale: Pendragon Press.

Bribitzer-Stull, Matthew. 2003. "Contention in the Classroom: Encouraging Debate and Alternate Readings in the Undergraduate Theory Class. *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 17: 21–45.

Caplin, William E. 2009. "What Are Formal Functions?" In *Musical Form, Forms, and Formelehre: Three Methodological Reflections*. Edited by Pieter Bergé. Leuven: Leuven University Press.

———. 2013. *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Eisinger, Robert M. 2011. "Teaching Ambiguity." *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/02/21/teaching-ambiguity.

Eyler, Joshua L. 2018. *How Humans Learn: The Science and Stories Behind Effective College Teaching*. Morganstown: West Virginia University Press.

Gingerich, John M. 2014. *Schubert's Beethoven Project*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Grant, Aaron. 2018. "Schubert's Three-Key Expositions." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester.

———. 2022. "Structure and Variable Formal Function in Schubert's Three-Key Expositions, *Music Theory Spectrum* 44, no. 1.

Green, Douglass. 1979. *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hepokoski, James, and Warren Darcy. 2006. *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Huguet, Joan Campbell. 2015. "Formal Functions and Voice-Leading Structures in Beethoven's Early Sonata-Rondo Finales. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester.

———. 2016. "Thematic Redundancy, Registral Connections, and Formal Expectations in the Finale of Beethoven's Op. 14/1," *Music Theory and Analysis* 3, no. 2: 197–208.

Hunt, Graham. 2009. "The Three-Key Trimodular Block and Its Classical Precedents: Sonata Expositions of Schubert and Brahms." *Intégral* 23: 65–119.

———. 2014. "When Structure and Design Collide: The Three-Key Exposition Revisited." *Music Theory Spectrum* 36: 247–69.

Karpinski, Gary S. 2012. "Ambiguity: Another Listen." *Music Theory Online* 18, no. 3. https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.12.18.3/mto.12.18.3.karpinski.html.

Lang, James M. 2016. *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Mak, Su Yin. 2006. "Schubert's Sonata Forms and the Poetics of the Lyric." *Journal of Musicology* 23, no. 2: 263–306.

———. 2016. "Structural and Form-Functional Ambiguities in the First Movement of Schubert's Octet in F Major, D. 803." In *Explorations in Schenkerian Analysis*. Edited by David Beach and Su Yin Mak. 123–41. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Marston, Nicholas. 1994. *Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E, Op. 109*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Meredith, William. 1985. "The Origins of Beethoven's Op. 109." *The Musical Times* 126, no. 1714. 713–16.

Meyer, Leonard B. 1989. *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Monahan, Seth. 2011. "Sonata Theory in the Undergraduate Classroom." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 25: 63–128. https://jmtp.appstate.edu/sonata-theory-undergraduate-classroom.

———. 2018. "Managing the Big Picture: Adventures in Classical Form." In *The Norton Guide to Teaching Music Theory*, edited by Rachel Lumsden and Jeffrey Swinkin, 26–37. New York: Norton.

Ofcarcik, Judith. 2020. "Multi-Strand Musical Narratives: An Introduction." *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2.

Powell, Hiram Clayton. 1998. "The Extant Sonatas of *Six sonates pour le violon* by Joseph Boulogne 'Le Chevalier' Saint-Georges: A Hybrid Analysis." Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University.

Richards, Mark. 2012. "Teaching Sonata Expositions through their Order of Cadences." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 26: 217–53.

Rogers, Lynne. 2018. "Asking Good Questions: A Way into Analysis and the Analytical Essay." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 31: 93–112.

Rogers, Michael R. 1990. "The Rich Messiness of Music: Teaching Theory in Music with Contradiction and Paradox." *College Music Symposium* 30: 131–41.

———. 2004. *Teaching Approaches in Music Theory: An Overview of Pedagogical Philosophies*. 2nd ed. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rothstein, William. 1989. *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*. New York: Schirmer Books.

Schachter, Carl. 1990. "Either/Or." In *Schenker Studies*, edited by Hedi Siegel. 165–81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Reprinted in *Unfoldings: Essays in Schenkerian Theory and Analysis*. Edited by Joseph N. Straus. 121–33. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Schmalfeldt, Janet. 2011. *In the Process of Becoming: Analytic and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Shaffer, Kris. 2013. "Inquiry-Based Learning." In Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy 1. http://flipcamp.org/engagingstudents/shafferpt3.html.

Thomson, William. 1983. "Formal Ambiguity in Musical Structures." *Music Perception* 1, no. 1: 3–27.

Vande Moortele, Steven. 2013. "In Search of Romantic Form." *Music Analysis* 32, no. 3: 404–31.

Webster, James. 1978 and 1979. "Schubert's Sonata Form and Brahms's First Maturity." *19th-Century Music* 2, no. 1: 18–35 and 3, no. 1: 52–71.

Winold, Arnold. 1993. "Musical Analysis: Purposes, Paradigms, and Problems." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 7: 29–40.