

## *Contents*

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Acknowledgments IX

Introduction XI

Forms and compositional procedures at the period of their initial use in music history XVII

### *Section 1 Units of structure*

- I The figure, motive, and semi-phrase 3
- II The cadence 10
- III The phrase 22
- IV Irregular phrases 28
- V The period or sentence form 37
- VI Enlargements and combinations of period forms 47

### *Section 2 Song forms*

- VII Song forms in general and auxiliary members 57
- VIII The two-part song form 64
- IX The three-part song form 69
- X Expansions of the three-part song form and irregular part or group forms 75

### *Section 3 Single-movement forms*

- XI Song form with trio 81
- XII Rondo forms 85
- XIII Variation form 92
- XIV The sonatine form 100
- XV The sonata-allegro form 103

Section 4 *Contrapuntal forms*

- XVI Contrapuntal techniques 121
- XVII Imitative contrapuntal forms  
Canon—invention—fugue 127
- XVIII Ostinato forms  
Ground motive—ground bass—passacaglia—chaconne 139
- XIX Other single-movement forms  
Toccatà—chorale prelude 146

Section 5 *Multi-movement  
and multi-sectional forms*

- XX The sonata as a whole—cyclic treatment 151
- XXI The suite 156
- XXII Concerto types  
Concerto grosso—solo concerto 161
- XXIII The overture 166
- XXIV Free forms and program music 169

Section 6 *Vocal types*

- XXV Sacred vocal types 177
- XXVI Secular vocal types 188

Section 7 *Past forms and recent trends*

- XXVII Forms in music before 1600 199
- XXVIII The twentieth century to 1950 209
- XXIX The twentieth century from 1950—The New Music 227
- XXX The function of form and the creative process in music 244

Definitions 257

Contents of *Anthology of Musical Forms* 265

Bibliography 271

Index 279

## The figure, motive, and semi-phrase

The *figure* is the smallest unit of construction in music. Consisting of at least one characteristic rhythm and one characteristic interval, it may include as few as two tones or as many as twelve. Usually, however, the mind tends to subdivide the units beyond approximately eight tones. The following passage (from the first movement of Beethoven's *Sonata*, Op. 31, No. 3) may be considered a single unit; but particularly in this case because of the meter and moderate tempo, and because the third group of four notes is the contrary motion of the second group, there is a tendency to hear this as divided into three figures:



However, a group such as the following would be considered as a single figure:

EX 2

Tchaikovsky,  
*Symphony*  
No. 6

**Allegro non troppo**



The term *motive* is occasionally used as synonymous with *figure*; on the other hand, a distinction is sometimes made between the *figure* as an accompaniment or pattern unit (as in etudes or Baroque keyboard works) and the *motive* as a thematic particle. The objections to using *motive* instead of, or as synonymous with, *figure* are: (a) the *motive* as a thematic portion may consist of two or three figures,

Footnote: Section I is considered a prerequisite for proper understanding of analysis and style. In the event, however, one desires to approach the song forms (Section II) more quickly, the materials on units of structure may be presented to the class in summarized form.

## *The suite*

**T**he *suite* is an instrumental form consisting of an optional number of movements. The two basic types are the Baroque suite (c. 1650-1750) and the modern suite of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### *The Baroque suite*

The Baroque suite, known also as *partita* in Germany and Italy, *lessons* in England, and *ordres* in France, is a collection of dance movements ranging generally in number from three to twelve. A suite by Chambonnières (c. 1650) contains twenty-eight dances. Most suites, however, consist of from four to eight movements.

The origin of the Baroque suite may be found in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice of grouping dances by pairs. These were respectively in duple and triple meter, the second dance being a varied version of the first. The pavane-galliard and passamezzo-saltarello were thus combined. The grouping of three or more dances in a series is illustrated in lute collections of the early sixteenth century, among which is the French publication of P. Attaignant (1529).

Most important in establishing the specific dances of the early suite was J. J. Froberger (1616-67). In his works, the allemande, courante, and sarabande are used with the gigue added as an optional dance before or after the courante. In a posthumous publication of his works (1693), a Dutch publisher placed the gigue at the end of the suite. Works by Schein, Scheidt, Krieger, and Pachelbel are also of importance in the development of this form.

Bach's six French suites, six English suites, and six partitas utilize the series allemande—courante—sarabande—optional dances—gigue. The optional dances, mostly French, include minuet, bourrée, gavotte, passepied, polonaise, rigaudon, air, etc. The English suites and partitas begin with a prelude which uses the form of invention, toccata, or, as in the *English Suite No. 4*, French overture. A *double* following a dance is a variation characterized by a running pattern.