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The Sonata

Franz Joseph Haydn composed over 150 works for the keyboard including approximately 60 keyboard sonatas. The word “sonata” was first used as the title of any piece to be “sounded” (played on a musical instrument). A short sonata was called a sonatina, which is discussed in the next unit.

By the late 1700s, the sonata had become a more formal composition, usually containing three or four contrasting movements, of which the form of the first movement was the most strict. The examples below show opening measures from each movement of Haydn’s familiar *Piano Sonata in C Major*, Hob. XVI: 35, L. 48.

First Movement: Sonata-allegro form in three parts:

The musical score shows the first eight measures of the first movement. The right hand starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing a series of eighth notes with fingerings 1, 2, 2, 4. The dynamic changes to *fz* (forzando) in measure 3. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and single notes. The piece concludes with a forte (*f*) dynamic in measure 8.

1. *Exposition*—In this section, the themes of the movement are “exposed” or stated. The first or main theme is in the key of the movement (called the tonic key). The second or secondary theme is usually in the key a fifth higher (called the dominant key). The key signature is not usually changed, but accidentals are used to show the new key. This section often ends with a *coda*. If the *coda* is very short, it is called a *codetta*.
2. *Development*—In this section, the themes can be altered or used however the composer wishes. Free reign is given to the composer’s imagination.
3. *Recapitulation*—This section contains a restatement of the themes. The main theme appears again in the tonic key, and the second theme follows in the tonic key as well. The movement may close with a *coda* or *codetta*.

Second Movement:

The musical score shows the first four measures of the second movement, marked *Adagio* (♩ = ca. 66). The right hand begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic, playing a melodic line with fingerings 4, 1, 1, 5. The dynamic changes to piano (*p*) in measure 3. The left hand plays a simple harmonic accompaniment. The movement ends with a fermata in measure 4.

The second movement of a sonata or sonatina may be in a different key than the first movement. Sometimes it is in the relative minor key. The second movement is almost always in a slower tempo than the first movement, and is often written in a simple ABA form, called “three-part song form.”

Third Movement:

The musical score shows the first eight measures of the third movement, marked *Allegro* (♩ = ca. 184). The right hand starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing a rhythmic pattern with fingerings 3, 3. The dynamic changes to forte (*f*) in measure 3. The left hand provides a simple accompaniment. The movement concludes with a double bar line in measure 8.

The last movement of a sonata or sonatina is often in rondo form, a form characterized by the return of the first theme. In its simplest form, it would be the same as ternary form (ABA). Often it is a five-part form (ABACA) but can continue with more returning themes.