

Composition Workshop Assignment #7: Form

Form: The structure of a composition. The framework. Based on repetition, contrast and variation. (Source: <http://www.music.vt.edu/musicdictionary>)

Understanding the form of a piece is like understanding the architecture of a building: we have an overall sense of the piece's shape and advance knowledge of where (and why) events and sections (similar to rooms in a building) will be. Furthermore, understanding a piece's form can give new meaning to the music and gets us inside the composer's head a little more.

The larger sections of a piece are like the rooms or even floors in a building. The divisions between sections (like walls, for example) are often quite clear. The ending of a section in particular will be marked by a strong cadence (arrival point) and the beginning of the next section will be marked by a new theme or idea, like walking into one room from another where each room is painted and decorated in a different way.

For medium- and some large-sized pieces, sections are often labeled with capital letters (A, B, C, etc). If a section is used a second time in a varied manner (immediately or after other material is presented), it is labeled as a variant or "prime" (A', A'', or A¹, A²).

Assignment

Compose a piece that has a clear and pre-planned formal design that has multiple contrasting sections with one of the sections returning in a modified way, such as :

- A B C A'.

Other formal plans could be symmetrical:

- A B B' A'
- A B C B A'
- A B A'' C A B' A''' (this is known as a *Rondo* form, because the A section keeps returning in between the other sections, like a refrain)

...or mostly linear:

- A B C D E A'

Most importantly, focus on the **contrasts** you can imply between some or all of the sections: different moods, textures, rhythms, tempi, dynamics. Also, for the sake of time, try to make each section not too long, or perhaps make your B, C and other non-A sections shorter just for the sake of experimenting with the process.

If you have the interest, you can make your various sections contrasting (in the ways mentioned above), but also carry a motif through different sections—varying it according to the mood of the section.