

# Sonata Form

Sonata form is not a template of what must happen or did happen every time a sonata was written. However, certain things did tend to happen in order to create an extended story using themes and keys.

There are three main sections with transitions that usually happen at specific places. Here's the 3 main sections and thus the big picture:



## The 'Sonata Principle' in Sonata Form

In the Bach preludes and inventions and in minuet and trio, the treasure was typically a brief melodic figure or harmony. In sonata form, there can be an entire treasure chest of melodies/themes/characters first discovered in the secondary key of the exposition that later comes back home in the recap.

So, you can begin to understand where the "sonata principle" gets its name. It is with this form that this compositional principle really takes place on a large scale - the treasure itself is usually longer in duration (a whole melody or group of melodies?) and the treasure doesn't come home until we have first gone through a plethora of keys in the development.

## Analyzing themes:

**Your first task is to go through the exposition - as usual do your harmonic analysis to understand the modulation; but also, tag each new theme with a LaRue symbol**

In a minuet and trio, we used analysis like **a** and **a'** to indicate likeness of thematic material and then **b** to indicate a new contrasting idea.

Again, in a sonata, there is a whole treasure chest of themes. In fact, certain themes and recurring figurations even belong together, making up *theme groups*. A better system of analysis is needed to tag the group name and each individual theme uniquely. One very useful and oft used system was developed by Jan LaRue. With this system, you first go through the exposition and each time a new theme makes its debut, tag it with a unique label. This way, the same labels can later be used when these themes return in the development and recap.

Here's a brief intro to the LaRue labels we'll use:

**P = primary theme group (in tonic key)**

**T = transition theme group (the modulating music)**

**S = secondary theme group (in the secondary key)**

**K = closing theme group**

...there might be more than one P theme, and/or more than one S theme (again it's a theme group). To tag each theme uniquely when it first appears, put a number before the letter.

ex.'s:

**1P = the first theme in the primary group**

**2P = the second theme in the primary group**

**1S = the first theme in the secondary group**

**2S = the second theme in the secondary group**

**3S = the third theme in the secondary group**



**The 'sonata principle' specifically plays out like this: in the exposition, the S theme group is first announced in the secondary key; the S group is the treasure. Then much later in the piece, during the recapitulation, the S group is restated in the home key. Much time has passed between the first statement of S in the exposition and the restatement of S in the recapitulation. This sculpts time in a particular way, and lends itself to a feeling of an extended journey.**

# Sonata Form

## Exposition

Introduces (exposes) the main themes (P, T, S, K).

- within P, T, S, and K, there could be any number of themes (1P, 2P, 3P; 1S, 2S, 3S; 1T, 2T; 1K, 2K)

Modulates to, and ends, in the secondary key.

## Development

Open-ended - no "must-do". However...

- develops themes through variation, fragmentation, counterpoint
- modulates to lots of different keys
- often comes back to secondary key at end
- if long expo, short devel (and vice versa)

## Recapitulation

Usually restates all the main themes, in the home key.

- at least restates S in the home key
  - order of themes in the recap is same as it was in the expo
- Ends in the home key.

Primary theme group  
- in home key

Transition  
- **modulating**

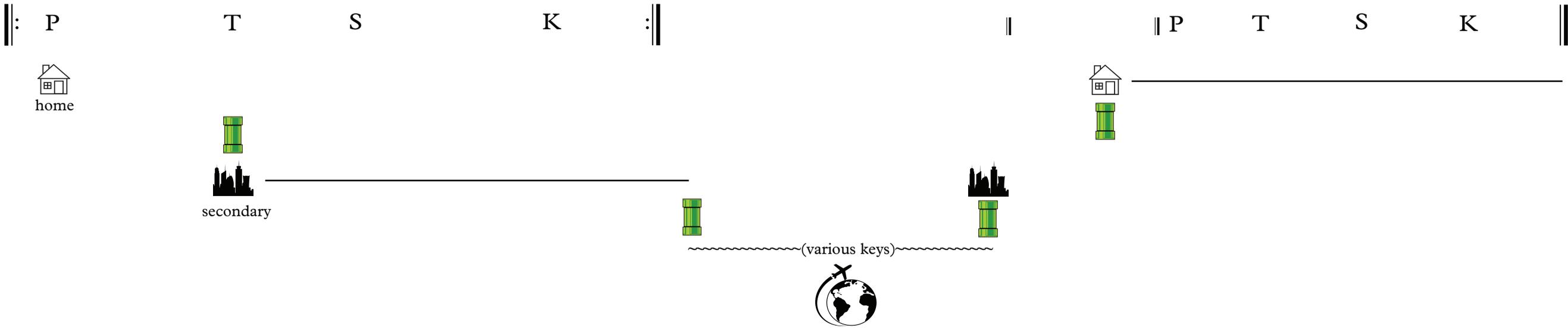
Secondary theme group  
- in secondary key  
- contrasts from P

Closing group  
- bravado  
- often triadic

Retransition  
- the music that  
mods home  
- separate from  
development

Transition  
- **non-  
modulating**

(Coda ?)



## **New material after the Exposition**

It is possible to find a brand new theme or important figuration after the exposition.

If you stumble upon such a thing, it can be labeled with one other useful La Rue symbol: **N**

## Exposition

Label it

Tag your themes (P T S K) - label the number of measures per phrase in square brackets  
develop a system of analysis so themes pop on the page, like a solid oval:

**P** [4]

Label the treasure, **S**, with a poorly drawn diamond or your favorite treasure of choice:



Identify the secondary key and the technique of modulation, just as you have been doing this entire semester.



## Development

Label it

Tag restatements/fragments of your themes (P T S K)  
develop a system of analysis so these pop on the page, like a dotted oval:

**P**

Identify each key you go to (find basslines that obviously point to the new key ( $\hat{5} - \hat{1}$ ) and use your knowledge of new accidentals / what they imply. Once you find the first V- I in the new key, identify techniques of modulation (pivot chord right before the V? - chromatic line in some voice? sequence?).



## Retransition

Label it if it exists. If so, what is the technique of modulation back to the home key?

## Recapitulation

Label it

This is indicated by where P obviously comes back *melodically*, even if not in the home key. That's right, sometimes composers have a recap begin in something other than the home key (no retransition).

Compare and contrast with the exposition: e.g. number of measures per bar:

**P** [6]

Especially observe the transition - in the exposition the transition modulated, but here it cannot - it stays in the home key. How did the composer make it sound like the transition material without modulating?

Coda: once all the themes have been restated in the home key, is there a last hurrah, yay or nay?

## Tips to identify 1T

Identifying 1T in the exposition is very useful. Later in the recapitulation, the composer will often tweak that very material to make a nonmodulating transition - so that S (the treasure) will be in the home key.

Identifying 1T can be a little tricky if you didn't know these tips...

- 1) It usually happens at a *restatement* of a primary theme (right after it or actually during it!).
- 2) *It always involves your modulation* - so what informs you is your harmonic analysis, not as much your melodic analysis. If you spot the modulation itself, that was part of the transition. Get it out of your head that a transition must be new material that sounds like what you think transitions should sound like. It may or may not be a completely separate idea from P. Again, it is the music that modulates to the secondary key.

So here's a scenario you can figure out now:

Say we get a repetition of 1P, and it's an antecedent followed by a *modulating* consequent.

Is the modulating music still part of 1P or is it 1T now?

Now you know: the modulating part belongs to 1T.

It can grow right out of P in this way.

- 3) As usual, if you need further clues, look ahead in the music; look to where 1S enters in the new key. Then ask yourself if the material leading up to that was your transition.

It is possible to have no T whatsoever if P ends on a half cadence in the home key, and then we jump right into the secondary theme group in the secondary key (direct modulation). This is called a "bifocal close", but you don't need to remember that term per se.

## Analyzing the recap

Since a recap is about cycling through the themes of the exposition (and in order), a good analysis of the recap should really be a careful comparison to the exposition.

That is precisely why you took all the time to label these themes and note the number of measures per phrase.

Comparison to the exposition:

### **P**

Does P come back in the home key? (the recap does not have to begin in the home key - an obvious return to P in any key would mark the beginning of the recap)

Does P even come back? (the Sonata Principle only requires that S come back)

Are all the P themes present / unaltered?

### **T**

T in the recap poses one of the biggest challenges to the composer:  
how to create that same sense of transitioning, but without actually modulating.

What is the difference in harmony from the exposition that now keeps us in the home key?

Are all the T themes present / unaltered?

### **S**

The treasure! Here it is - finally announced at home. It is required that these now be restated in the home key.

Is each unaltered?

### **K**

Are all the K themes present / unaltered?

### **coda**

yay or nay?