

UNDERSTANDING MUSICAL FORM

Musical *form* is a way of organizing or structuring music.

Composers of sonatas and sonatinas (little sonatas) have written hundreds of pieces with new and different themes (melodies). However, composers usually used only a few musical forms over and over to give structure to their compositions. Imagine a baker baking hundreds of different cakes, but always using the same set of cake pans. Similarly, a composer can create many different pieces using a single musical form.

The following forms are common in early-level classical sonatinas. You and your teacher may wish to refer to this page as you study the sonatinas in this book.

Binary (2-part) form or AB form

The simplest musical form is one section of music followed by another: **section A** followed by **section B**. Each section usually has a repeat sign.

This 2-part (binary) form can be shown like this:

||: A :||: B :||

Rounded binary form

This is still 2-part form, but with an interesting feature. In rounded binary form, the theme from section **A** returns *within* the **B** section. It can be shown like this:

||: A :||: B (A) :||

Ternary (3-part) form or ABA form

Ternary means 3-parts: **section A**, **section B**, and the return of **section A**. Ternary form is common in slow, lyric second movements. This 3-part form can be shown like this:

A B A

Teacher's Note:

Sonata-allegro form only applies to longer, more advanced sonatinas. Consequently, it is not introduced until Book 2 of this sonatina series.

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