

Elements of Music

Terms

MUSICAL FORM

Form is the organizing structure of a piece of music. Clues to the form of a piece of music can be found in many different ways; through the phrases of a melody; through the text; through harmonic structure; through the repetition of melodic material or the introduction of new, contrasting material. We use letters (A, B, C) to designate musical divisions of a piece brought about by the above factors.

Strophic form

A design in vocal music made up of several phrases. The same music is used for several verses of text, as in a hymn or a folk song.

Other Song forms

The 12-bar Blues

Defined by text and/or harmonic pattern

The 32-bar song form (AABA)

Defined by the text and/or melodic phrases and harmonic pattern

Binary form

Two-part form: two sections of music (A and B) with each section repeated (AA BB). This form is focused around the idea of *contrast*.

Ternary form

A three-part form featuring a return of the initial music after a contrasting section. Symmetry and balance are achieved through this return: (ABA) The return of the first (A) material may be an exact repeat, or varied in some way. The “Da Capo Aria” is one example of this form.

Variation forms

Chaconne, Passacaglia

Theme and Variation set

Sonata form

A larger scale ABA form with specific key centers for each section

Through-composed form

A structure in which there is no repeat or return of any large-scale musical section. Continuous contrasting sections of music are composed together without repetitions of previous material.