

Formal Function in the Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Alberti

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Introduction

The extent to which the keyboard sonatas of Domenico Alberti foreshadow classical sonata form is highly debated. Several authors have noted Alberti's frequent use of rounded binary form, which clearly points toward the formal organization of sonatas by the high-classical composers,¹ and some have deemed his work unfit for comparison due to its lack of developmental procedures.² Although these competing ideas seem irreconcilable, they do have something in common: the absence of an analysis that ventures beyond overarching formal generalizations. Such an approach ignores the unique structural fabric that constitutes each composition and fails to recognize that, although similarities can be found between various works, the formal independence of individual pieces must not be underestimated. On the contrary, a form-functional approach in the manner of William Caplin not only allows us to retain particular features that contribute to the individual character of a given work, but also permits us to place each piece within a general framework in order to determine its place amidst a repertoire of formal commonalities.

When we analyze Alberti's keyboard music with a form-functional approach, a more detailed account of its relationship to classical sonata form emerges. The music embodies many of the formal processes and types later used by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven and, in many respects, represents a more compact version of sonata form, as cultivated by those later

¹ See, for example, Daniel Freeman, "Johann Christian Bach and the Early Classical Italian Masters," in *Eighteenth-Century Keyboard Music*, ed. Robert Marshall, 241 (New York: Routledge, 2003).

² William Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 184.

composers.³ Perhaps most remarkable is that the boundaries between formal functions are often clearly delineated, indicating that the composer was developing a structure based on the semantic nature of various musical passages.⁴ The limited scope of development sections, however, reveals that Alberti's formal concepts were not entirely akin to those of the high Viennese classical composers.

Several examples will illustrate the aforementioned similarities and differences in order to devise a more accurate way of understanding how Alberti's concept of formal processes compares to those of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. First, however, the surface-level features identified by several authors in the past must be reevaluated and placed in the context of a form-functional approach.

An Overview of the Existing Literature

The present literature on the keyboard music of Domenico Alberti (ca.1710-40) is limited in both quantity and scope. While bibliographical issues and questions of authorship have received a fair amount of attention, the treatment of the music itself has been cursory at best. The resulting insufficiencies can be attributed to analyses that focus only on surface-level details. As the inner-workings of individual compositions are rarely (if ever) addressed, the merit of the assertions regarding Alberti's significance in the history of Western classical music must be seriously questioned.

³ The terms "formal processes" and "formal types" refer to those outlined in William Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 9.

⁴ In this context, the word "semantic" is used to indicate meaning in terms of formal function. More specifically, it relates to Alberti's logical use of three sorts of functions: initiating, medial, closing.

The vast majority of published Alberti scholarship devotes considerable attention to the accompanimental pattern now adorned with the composer's name. Scholars' preoccupation with the *Alberti bass* is evident in much of the literature, and many detractors have criticized the composer for using it excessively.⁵ Somewhat curious, however, is the lack of consensus amongst theorists and historians as to what the Alberti bass actually entails. While some scholars restrict the definition to a four-note oscillating pattern (and its modified six-note form) that preserves a particular succession of notes in a broken triad—lowest, highest, middle, highest—others maintain a looser definition that allows for several common variants. To further complicate matters, debate concerning the origins of the formulaic bass pattern has led some to believe that Alberti merely popularized it. For example, Glenn Burdette's account of the Alberti bass in eighteenth-century harp treatises reveals that the figure “developed out of a tradition of improvised accompaniment using broken chords in either hand or both hands.”⁶ Nonetheless, most scholars consider it to be an important achievement particular to the composer himself, regardless of its exact origins.⁷

The significance of the Alberti bass to Classic-style keyboard music is widely recognized in the existing literature. Broken-chord accompaniment, in general, is considered to have originated in response to the appearance of non-sustaining keyboard instruments; the new figurations provided a means by which composers could prolong a single harmony in an idiomatic fashion.⁸ With respect to the Alberti bass in particular, scholars have noted two

⁵ Guy Marco, “The Alberti Bass before Alberti,” *The Music Review* 20 (1959): 103.

⁶ Glenn Burdette, “A Thorough Harping on Alberti,” *Music Research Forum* 4 (1989): 8.

⁷ The Alberti bass was not commonly used until the 1750s, several years following Alberti's death. See, for example, Freeman, “Johann Christian Bach,” 273.

⁸ See, for example, *Ibid*, 97.

principle advantages: its ability to activate unobtrusively a slow harmonic rhythm is ideal in supporting the singing-allegro style typical of *galant* music, and its characteristic oscillating pattern is said to render the voice-leading of the individual strands more salient.⁹ Undoubtedly an important innovation, it is striking how little emphasis is placed on the formal role of this surface-level stylistic trait.

The only subject in the present scholarship that rivals the attention given to the Alberti bass is a mid-century scandal involving Alberti's contemporary, Giuseppe Jozzi. Although the subject seems more suited to a music history paper, it is of paramount significance here due to the question it raises concerning authorship. Charles Burney gives the first account in his *General History of Music*:

Jozzi, besides being an opera singer, was...a celebrated performer on the harpsichord; and executed at his benefit [concert, in 1745, at Hickford's Room] several of Alberti's lessons, which he passed for his own, with a neatness and precision that were quite new in England at the time.¹⁰

Claiming the sonatas as original works, Jozzi published them under his name that same year. The sonatas were finally attributed to Domenico Alberti in 1748 and published as *VIII Sonate per cembalo di Domenico Alberti* by John Walsh in London. Thus, Jozzi was seen as a fraud and Alberti benefitted from the publicity. This account was virtually unchallenged until 1978 when Barry Cooper came across evidence suggesting that Jozzi had not, in fact, plagiarized the entire set of sonatas. The modified version of the story asserts that Jozzi had composed dance-like second movements to accompany five of Alberti's one-movement sonatas and had added a two-

⁹ See, for example, Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era*, 181.

¹⁰ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4 vols. (London 1776-89), iii. p. 568.

movement work of his own.¹¹ Cooper's evidence has since been accepted by scholars and incorporated into the Alberti literature.¹²

Several of music theorist Wilhelm Wörmann's conclusions regarding Alberti's sonatas have come into question in light of this new evidence. First, the assumption that Alberti consistently wrote two-movement sonatas remains largely unjustified, since the majority of sonatas comprising Op.1 are now considered to be single-movement works.¹³ Moreover, Wörmann's conclusion that Alberti must have written around 72 movements for keyboard is likely untrue; this projection was based on La Borde's *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, which states that Alberti had written 36 [two-movement, for Wörmann] sonatas.¹⁴ As the first movements of Alberti's sonatas are thought to be of genuine authorship, and as they are generally considered to relate most closely to sonata form, Cooper's findings reveal that the composer resorted to this type of organization more frequently than previously thought.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Cooper's work does not offer significant insight into the specific formal organization of particular works.

In fact, the discussion of form in the literature rarely exceeds a superficial letter-name analysis that denotes the respective themes in each section of a presumed binary structure.

¹¹ Barry Cooper, "Alberti and Jozzi: Another View," *The Music Review* 39 (1978): 161.

¹² See, for example, Daniel Hertz, *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style, 1720-1780* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), 251.

¹³ The sonatas that constitute Op.1 were originally published by the Italian composer Giuseppe Jozzi as original compositions. Responding to this perceived act of plagiarism, publisher John Walsh issued the same sonatas and attributed them to Domenico Alberti. The latter publication is what we now refer to as Alberti's Op.1. See Cooper, "Alberti and Jozzi," 165, and Hertz, *Music in European Capitals*, 250-51.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Wörmann, "Die Klaviersonate Domenico Albertis," *Acta Musicologica* 27, no. 3 (1955).

¹⁵ This is because we no longer consider many of the second movements (not in sonata form) to be authentic. See Michael Talbot, "Domenico Alberti," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: MacMillan Publishers Ltd., 2001), 1:303-04.

Newman, for example, notes that a transposed version of the principle theme (a) is often stated at the beginning of the longer second section and frequently leads to modulations. This tendency to simply restate material in new keys leads him to conclude that Alberti's music lacks developmental procedures and is far too static in nature (e.g. the lack of clear contrasting ideas) to be considered as an approximation of sonata form.¹⁶ A related observation is made by Wörmann, who notes the lack of continuation material following Alberti's short-winded initial ideas.¹⁷ Newman attributes this problem to the new type of bass, which results in an "unadulteratedly homophonic texture...[that] makes poor soil for the motivic process that still was Alberti's only sure means of continuation."¹⁸ This characteristic stasis is recognized on another level by Daniel Freeman, who identifies a technique where composers simply repeat a given unit, often as a substitute for sequential repetition ("extension"). The most prominent occurrence of this technique, according to Freeman, occurs at the end of each repeated section of the binary form, which emphasizes important tonal goals and foreshadows the "immense codas found in later eighteenth-century music."¹⁹

With respect to the overall form, most scholars recognize a two-part structure in which the latter section features a full recapitulation of the opening section's motives. Freeman further distinguishes between this layout and the so-called "rhyming" scheme, where only the second half of the opening section is recapitulated.²⁰ When considering Alberti's influence on the development of sonata form, scholars are fairly divided, so it is difficult to draw conclusions

¹⁶ Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era*, 184.

¹⁷ Wilhelm Wörmann, "Die Klaviersonate Domenico Albertis."

¹⁸ Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era*, 183.

¹⁹ Freeman, "Johann Christian Bach," 240.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 241.

from the present literature in this respect; only general, and often superficial, remarks have been made to support the various positions. No study to date provides the detailed discussion of form-functional units necessary to determine better Alberti's historical significance in this matter.

Surface-Level Features

A close examination reveals the importance of superficial gestures and clarifies their role as an integral part of the formal process. Three such features appear with enough consistency to warrant a more in-depth discussion: the Alberti bass, the Romanesca, and the Prinner.²¹

Alberti Bass

As seen earlier, the Alberti bass is generally understood to provide a method by which a single harmony may be prolonged both idiomatically and unobtrusively, while the voice-leading of individual strands is represented with the utmost clarity. The identified roles of the formulaic bass pattern are accurate enough, but all fail to describe its purpose with respect to formal function. As the Alberti bass allows one *actively* to prolong a single harmony, it is quite suitable for an initiating function. The fundamental unit of initiating function—the basic idea—is generally marked by harmonic stasis, characteristic melodic material, and a sense of melodic “opening up.”²² In conjunction with these features, the inconspicuous nature of the Alberti bass allows the melodic profile to remain prominent, while its active figuration ensures that the slow harmonic rhythm does not thwart the momentum of the passage.

²¹ The latter two features are schemata defined in Robert Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 25-60. An brief explanation of each will follow.

²² Caplin, *Classical Form*, 37.

It does not seem, however, that the value of the Alberti bass in expressing initiating function was realized by Alberti. Although many of his keyboard works begin with this accompaniment figuration, it is usually extended throughout the movement, thus precluding any discussion of its purpose with respect to a beginning function (Example 1.1). It is significant, however, that later composers—most notably Mozart—developed this form-functional aspect of the Alberti bass (Example 1.2), which undoubtedly has its roots in the Italian composer's music; even though Alberti rarely used the typical bass figuration to distinguish initiating function from medial function, he often used it to express other formal boundaries.²³

The most salient use of Alberti bass in conjunction with the expression of formal function concerns texture. Freeman notes this relationship in a somewhat superficial way: “the strategic introduction of its [Alberti bass] rhythmic busyness could signal and enhance the sense of harmonic movement accompanying the modulation to the dominant during the first repeated section of binary form.”²⁴ While he acknowledges the use of textural change to highlight an important tonal event, he does not consider the situation in a form-functional context. Often, the new texture provided by the Alberti bass coincides with the commencement of a new formal unit (Example 1.3). This usage is prominent in the music of both Alberti and later composers and represents the most typical way in which the accompaniment pattern is used to delineate the confines of formal entities.

²³ The use of Alberti bass in the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven is much more complex than is suggested here; however, its use in conjunction with initiating function is present, especially in the music of Mozart.

²⁴ Freeman, “Johann Christian Bach,” 237.

Example 1.1 *Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in G, WörA VI, i, 1-4*

R=1/2N

Presentation

Continuation

Example 1.1 - An Alberti bass supports the initiating function (presentation) and continues into the territory of medial function (continuation). Like many main themes in the pre-classical era, cadential function is omitted; however, it is worth noting that Alberti writes a conventional melodic descent, which could easily be supported by a cadential progression (I⁶-II⁶-V^{6/4-5/3}-I). In this instance, the formulaic bass pattern does not reflect any particular formal function, since it is used continuously throughout the movement. For similar examples, see WörA X:1, WörA XI:1, WörA XIII:2, WörA XIV:1, WörA XV:1, and K.545:ii.

Example 1.2 *Mozart, Piano Sonata in C, K. 545, i, 1-7*

Compound basic idea

Continuation

Example 1.2 - An immediate change in texture at measure 5 contributes to a clear distinction between medial function (continuation) and initiating function (c.b.i.). For similar examples, including those that employ a variant on the Alberti bass, see K.283:i, K.332:i, and K.575:i.

Example 1.3 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in C, WörA III, i, 5-9

R=1/2N

Continuation

TRANSITION
Presentation

b.i. b.i. PAC

Dominant Arrival

Example 1.3 - The continuation function of the main theme (measures 3-4) is repeated verbatim and leads to a perfect authentic cadence to close the formal unit. Although not shown in its entirety here, the whole of opening theme is supported by Alberti bass, only yielding to a new figuration at the onset of the transition. As is typical of the Italian composer, Alberti leaves the modulation to the last measure of the transition. The pivot chord (VI⁶ in C) functions as II⁶ in G major and leads to a dominant arrival—due to the presence of the seventh—in the new key.

The Romanesca

Characterized by a descending third sequence with passing chords, the Romanesca often serves as an initiating function.²⁵ As the functional interpretation of the sequence sees a prolongation of tonic harmony via substitute chords,²⁶ the schema is appropriate at the beginning of a composition—one of the primary goals of main theme function is to express the tonic of the home key.²⁷ Often, a composer will harmonize the third scale degree in the bass with a I⁶ chord instead of a III chord; this weakens the destabilizing element of sequential harmony without interrupting the prolongation of tonic harmony (Example 1.4). In one exceptional case, Alberti

²⁵ Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style*, 46.

²⁶ Caplin, *Classical Form*, 31.

²⁷ Galant composers' use of the Romanesca as an initiating function marks an important deviation from the later classical style where sequences are confined to medial function. As sequences often serve to destabilize harmony, it is quite possible that classical composers did not consider them fit for initiating function, which is generally defined by harmonic stability.

builds the entire main theme on an overarching descending third sequence (Example 1.5). This practice was fairly common, as is demonstrated by its presence in the works of contemporary composers, such as Benedetto Marcello (Example 1.6).

Example 1.4 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in F, WörA II, i, 1-3

R=1/2N

MAIN THEME

Example 1.4 - The basic idea is built over a Romanesca, leading to a cadential progression that is repeated. Occupying five real measures, the main theme is asymmetrical and quite unusual as far as the keyboard music of Alberti is concerned. Measure 2 appears to be a repetition of the basic idea; however, the mid-measure perfect authentic cadence hampers this interpretation. This example is, perhaps, not conducive to an interpretation involving a two-measure (real measures) fundamental unit.

Example 1.5 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in A, WörA V, ii, 1-6

R=1/2N

MAIN THEME

Compound basic idea

Example 1.5 - Every aspect of the main theme is supported by a Romanesca, with the exception of the final chord in measure 2 and the lead-in, which serves to regain the opening register. The fact that R=1/2N becomes obvious in measure 6, where a truncated version of the original lead-in introduces the transition (clearly a downbeat). One unusual feature that results from the overarching Romanesca is the lack of delineation between the basic idea and

the contrasting idea. A typical instance of the schema would break the sequence at the beginning of the contrasting idea; however, as this expectation is deceived, the half-measure sequential units seem to prevail over the larger ones (i.e. b.i. and c.i.). The perceived grouping structure is thus rendered ambiguous. It is also worth noting that Alberti could have cadenced at measure 6 by writing an E in the bass on the final beat of the previous measure, but instead opted to close the main theme without a cadence—a typical feature of the galant style.

Example 1.6 Marcello, Keyboard Sonata in C, iii, 1-2

R=1/2N
MAIN THEME

Romanesca IAC

Example 1.6 - The most common manifestation of the Romanesca in the galant style is presented here, combining the stepwise and leaping variants of the sequence. The four real measures presented here encompass the entirety of the main theme and exemplify the compact structure typical of music from this period.

The Prinner

Defined by a stepwise melodic descent through scale degrees 6-5-4-3, over a bass in parallel thirds (i.e. 4-3-2-1), the Prinner often functions as a riposte.²⁸ In the keyboard music of Alberti, transition function often employs a modulating Prinner; however, contrary to Marcello (Example 1.7), Alberti's construction rarely includes a cadential progression to confirm the new key (Example 1.8).²⁹

Although Alberti frequently employs the Prinner in conjunction with a particular formal function—usually transition—his use of the device seems at times haphazard. In the sonata in Bb major (WörA XII:1), for example, the overabundance of the schema results in a rather nebulous expression of the various formal functions.

²⁸ Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style*, 51.

²⁹ The first movement of the sonata in G major, WörA I, contains a modulating Prinner that leads to a clear half cadence at the end of the transition section (m.10); however, this work is now attributed to Giuseppe Jozzi. See Cooper, "Alberti and Jozzi," 39.

Example 1.7 Marcello, Keyboard Sonata in C, ii, 7-14

TRANSITION

Modulating Prinner (from C to G) PAC

Example 1.7 - The transition begins with a modulating Prinner that leads to I in G major (note the F# in measure 9). This continuation-like passage then yields to something more cadential—IV first moves to V and then jumps back down to a I⁶, which begins the ensuing cadential progression.

Example 1.8 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in F, WörA II, ii, 5-10

TRANSITION

model sequence sequence

F: 6 5 4 C: 6 5 4 SUB. THEME

Prinner (with B natural) Modulating Prinner (from F to C)

Example 1.8 - Model sequence technique, supported by two Pringers (one modulating), establishes the subordinate key of C major. As no cadence marks the end of the transition and the new key is achieved via descending parallel tenths, the sense of modulation is quite weak. It is worth noticing the B natural in measure 7, which suggests that the modulation is already underway and that the boundary between Pringers is not as clearly defined as one might think.

Many of the examples given so far represent extreme cases of formal transparency and cloudiness with respect to the use of schemata; however, in most cases, this relationship is expressed with a degree of clarity that lies somewhere in between. As a complement to the discussion above, surface-level features will be identified and addressed on a case-by-case basis in subsequent examples.

Formal Functions

When comparing the music of Alberti to that of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, several obvious similarities in formal function are found in the exposition. The most remarkable aspect

of Alberti's music, however, lies in his clear expression of the boundaries between functions. One might argue that his failure to maintain these clear distinctions throughout the recapitulation, where functions are often fused together, represents a formal deficiency; however, this phenomenon is perhaps better understood as a feature remnant of the Baroque era, where the development of materials was an ongoing process that did not cease until the final cadence. An examination of the three principle sections of sonata form (exposition, development, and recapitulation), along with their constituent parts, will serve to demonstrate the relatively clear expression of formal function in Alberti's keyboard works.

Exposition

As already mentioned, the functional boundaries within Alberti's exposition sections are generally expressed with a substantial degree of clarity. The majority of exceptions can be attributed to formal fusion, which can occur between the main theme and transition, or the transition and subordinate theme. Contributing to the clarity of functional expression is Alberti's tendency to maintain the relationship between tight-knit and loose-knit organization as practiced by the Viennese classical composers. In general, main themes express a more tight-knit construction than either the transition or the subordinate theme. Not surprisingly, the latter two functions often display loosening techniques akin to those used by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. With respect to theme types, Alberti's often resemble those found in the high classical period.

Main Theme

Typically, Alberti's main themes are either four or eight real measures in length, with no consistent use of a closing cadence. As a result, archetypal manifestations of the sentence and

period rarely appear, and the small ternary is completely absent from the composer's formal repertoire. The four-measure main theme is actually quite rare in Alberti's work (Example 1.9), even though a quick glance at the music might seem to indicate otherwise. The reason for this potential deception is due to the composer's general disregard for notation that reflects the listener's perception. In fact, the majority of Alberti's keyboard sonatas are best understood when one real measure is interpreted to equal half of a notated one ($R=1/2N$).³⁰ As a result, many of the main themes that appear to be four measures long are actually experienced as eight-measure units (see Example 1.1 above). Although the full eight-measure main theme is a typical feature of Alberti's keyboard works, it occurs less frequently in the music of his contemporaries, who wrote a plethora of four-measure themes.³¹

Example 1.9 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in F, WörA IX, i, 1-4

$R=1/2N$

The musical score for Example 1.9 is presented in two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The piece is divided into two sections: 'MAIN THEME' (measures 1-4) and 'TRANSITION' (measures 5-8).
 - **Main Theme (measures 1-4):** Measure 1 contains a 'b.i.' (beginning idea) with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 2 contains a 'c.i.' (concluding idea) with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 3 repeats the 'b.i.' from measure 1. Measure 4 concludes with a 'PAC' (perfect authentic cadence).
 - **Transition (measures 5-8):** Measure 5 begins with a 'b.i. (from MT)'. Measure 6 contains a 'c.i.' with a sextuplet of eighth notes. Measure 7 contains a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 8 concludes with a 'HC' (half cadence).

Example 1.9 - This rare example of a four-measure main theme (note that $R=1/2N$) is reminiscent of a single consequent phrase; however it cannot be interpreted as such due to the absence of an antecedent. The basic idea comprises two repeated units³² and leads to a contrasting idea that ends with a perfect authentic cadence. Although the basic idea is repeated in measure 3, it is reinterpreted as the beginning of the transition upon reaching the half cadence at measure 4.³³ A more complex instance of this formal logic may be observed in the first movement of Beethoven's Op.49/1 sonata, where the composer writes a half cadence in the place analogous to Alberti's perfect authentic cadence. The clearly defined large-scale antecedent in the former creates a greater sense of anticipation than the former, which has already attained full closure by the end of measure 2.

³⁰ The presence of mid-measure cadences is often an indication that $R=1/2N$.

³¹ See, for example, Marcello sonatas II, iii; III, ii (with a two-measure extension), iii; IV, i; and V, iii.

³² For an example in later literature, see Beethoven, Op.14/2, i.

³³ See also WörA VI, i, 5-8, and WörA VIII, i, 3-4.

Aside from the rare occurrence of a four-measure theme, most main themes in Alberti's keyboard music are constructed as variants on a fundamental eight-measure unit, which often resembles the theme types used by the high classical composers. The most common variant involves extension technique, where the composer simply restates one of the two four-measure units that constitute the theme (Example 1.10). The reasoning behind this type of repetition is difficult to determine; however, it may be a way of broadening compact structures within a stylistic idiom that values balance and symmetry. This process is usually quite brief, involving just a single repetition of a relatively small unit. In one particular case, however, Alberti takes the notion of literal repetition to the extreme by repeating the entire main theme an octave lower (Example 1.11).

As the examples thus far indicate, the main themes in Alberti's keyboard works that closely resemble those used by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven usually employ a sentence-like structure. In fact, a clear expression of periodic function is rarely, if ever, found in this music. For instance, example 1.5 lacks the cadential progressions that are essential to the period, and example 1.9 falls an entire phrase short of expressing this theme type. Often, when main themes do begin with a unit that is periodic in nature, Alberti simply repeats it, sometimes even twice (Example 1.12). In cases such as this, the functionality of the constituent units is quite unclear. This is where Wörmann's observation with respect to the lack of continuation material most likely comes from.³⁴ All that can be said is that, collectively, the repeated units serve as main theme function.

³⁴ Wilhelm Wörmann, "Die Klaviersonate Domenico Albertis."

Example 1.10 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in F, WörA IX, ii, 1-6

R=1/2N

MAIN THEME (sentence)

Presentation

Continuation frag.

b.i. b.i. frag.

continuation repeated

PAC PAC

Example 1.10 - Following a remarkably clear expression of the sentence theme type, Alberti simply restates the continuation phrase. Although it is difficult to determine why he repeats the latter four-measure unit of the sentence, the procedure may simply be a way of lengthening the rather short-winded main theme in order to gain a broader scope. Perhaps more interesting is that Alberti uses the same extension technique at the analogous cadential passage of the fused transition-subordinate theme. This results in a symmetrical 6+6 grouping between the formal units in question. For similar examples, see WörA III, i; and WörA X, ii (sentence with repetition of a two-measure unit).

Example 1.11 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in E^b, WörA XII, ii, 1-14

MAIN THEME

Compound basic idea

Consequent (failed)

b.i. c.i. b.i. c.i.

HC HC

main theme repeated (8vb)

Example 1.11 - One might be inclined to treat measure 2 as an extension and interpret the first three measures as the basic idea; however, by analogy with measures 6-7, measure 3 is best interpreted as a truncated contrasting idea that only fully materializes at the end of the phrase. This is one of the very few instances of an internally asymmetrical theme, as opposed to those adorned with extension technique, where the symmetrical integrity of the basic eight-measure unit is retained. The normative eight-measure c.b.i. + consequent hybrid theme, frequently employed by high classical composers, is hinted at here, but not fully realized. The half cadence at the end fails to deliver the strong sense of closure (i.e. a perfect authentic cadence) generally associated with the consequent.

Various uses of extension technique and eight-measure units dominate the Italian composer's main themes; however, cases of compound themes and compression technique are occasionally found (Example 1.13). One generalization that can be made is that classical theme types without symmetrical deviations (i.e. extension, expansion, compression, and interpolation) are never found in the Alberti literature.

Example 1.12 Alberti, *Keyboard Sonata in B^b, WörA XIV, i, 1-6*

R=1/2N

MAIN THEME

Compound basic idea

Example 1.12 - The first two measures form a compound basic idea, which is then repeated twice. No cadence signals the end of the main theme; however, following continuous melodic activity, the two-measure rest in measure 6 can be seen to compensate for the absence of cadential closure. Although this interpretation treats the opening four-measure (real) phrase as the potential beginning of a period-like structure, one might also consider the ensuing transition (not shown here) to fulfill the expected continuation of a large-scale presentation (with three repetitions of the basic idea). In this particular case, continuation function seems imminent due to a significant amount of repetition; the lack of cadential closure also encourages the latter reading. Regardless, this example raises the

question of how much weight one can place on the presence of cadences in determining formal function in galant music.³⁵

Example 1.13 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in E^b, WörA XIII, i, 1-6

R=1/2N

MAIN THEME

Presentation

Compound basic idea

Compound basic idea

The musical score for Example 1.13 is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled 'Presentation', shows four measures of music. Each measure contains a compound basic idea (b.i.) and a continuation (c.i.). The second system, labeled 'Continuation', shows the continuation of the theme, which is compressed and arrives soundly on the downbeat of measure 7 (elision). A box labeled 'PAC' with a downward arrow indicates the end of the presentation.

Example 1.13 - A compound basic idea is repeated to form a large-scale presentation. This is answered by a compressed continuation—note the increase in harmonic rhythm—that first evades a perfect authentic cadence on the downbeat of measure 6 and then arrives soundly on the downbeat of measure 7 (elision). The overall form is, thus, a compound sentence with a compressed continuation.³⁶

Transition

In many of Alberti's sonata expositions, transitions have a clearly defined beginning and end. Often, however, the boundaries of this function are unclear due to instances of formal fusion that occur between the transition and the subordinate theme. The tonal implications engendered by this type of organization are of particular interest because the arrival of the subordinate key is often shifted from the beginning of the subordinate theme to the end of the exposition (Example 1.14). This shift significantly reduces the element of dramatization that is, according to Charles

³⁵ The main theme of the second movement also consists of three repetitions of a basic idea, suggesting that Alberti was, on some level, aiming for continuity between movements.

³⁶ Even though the piece is in E^b major, the key signature contains only two flats.

Rosen, a central aesthetic goal of the classical sonata.³⁷ As will be seen later, the small stature of the development sections also hampers the dramatic possibilities of sonata form—an integral part of the later classical style.³⁸

Example 1.14 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in F, WörA IX, ii, 7-12

R=1/2N

TRANSITION → SUB. THEME

Sentence
Presentation

Continuation
frag.

b.i. b.i.

E.C.P.

IAC PAC

Example 1.14 - This sentence-like structure sees the fusion of transition and subordinate theme functions—the modulation to C represents the former, and the perfect authentic cadence in the subordinate key represents the latter. After arriving at an IAC, Alberti repeats the cadential unit—supported by an expanded cadential progression—and reserves the strongest cadence for the end. Although this type of expansion technique is prominent in the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, formal fusion and modulation within the final cadential progression are not. For a more complicated case, where transition function is fused with the first of two subordinate themes, see WörA V, ii.

An examination of Alberti's keyboard works reveals a strong predilection for the modulating transition. Unlike the later classical composers, however, modulation and the ensuing half cadence (or dominant arrival) in the subordinate key generally occur within a single measure (Example 1.15). It is thus evident that Alberti was organizing his compositions in ways

³⁷ Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988).

³⁸ Features that limit the dramatic possibilities of sonata form might account, in part, for why Alberti's music sounds so different from that of the First Viennese School.

comparable to the high classical period, while compressing the various form-functional units in order to match the concise stature of galant forms. Standard instances of non-modulating transitions, which usually end with a half cadence in the home key, also occur (Example 1.16).

Example 1.15 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in C, WörA III, i, 7-9

R=1/2N

TRANSITION

The musical score for Example 1.15 shows a transition in C major. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff has two measures of a basic idea (b.i.) and a third measure ending with a half cadence (HC). The bass staff has two measures of a basic idea (b.i.) and a third measure of a half cadence (HC).

Example 1.15 - This short-lived transition begins with a basic idea that is immediately repeated, leaving only one measure in which to modulate and cadence. Alberti moves to a VI⁶ chord on the downbeat of measure 9—a substitute for the I chord that occurs on the downbeat of the previous two measures—which is reinterpreted as II⁶ in G major. This then moves to V for a half cadence in G. Since the majority of the transition is rooted firmly in the home key and the modulation and cadence take place so suddenly, the passage has a rather abrupt quality to it. That said, it is worth noting how Alberti subtly introduces the F[#] at the beginning of the transition, which somewhat softens the move to the subordinate key.

Example 1.16 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in G, WörA VI, i, 5-9

R=1/2N

TRANSITION (Sentence)

The musical score for Example 1.16 shows a transition in G major structured as a sentence. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff has a Presentation (P) and a Subordinate Theme (SUB. THEME) section. The bass staff has a Continuation (C) section. The score is divided into three measures: Presentation, Continuation, and Subordinate Theme. The Continuation section is marked 'frag.' and the Subordinate Theme section is marked 'b.i.'

Example 1.16 - The transition is structured as an archetypal sentence, using a slight variant on the basic idea from the main theme (see example 1.1). A mid-measure IAC in D major confirms the interpretation R=1/2N and brings

the transition to a close. A one-measure (real) introduction precedes the beginning of the subordinate theme, which is also a variant on the basic idea from the main theme. Note Alberti's use of I^6 in measure 9—rather than I —to enhance the loose-knit construction of the subordinate theme. For a case where half-cadential arrival elides with the beginning of the subordinate theme, see WörA XIV, i.

Many of the examples above demonstrate the normative clarity with which transition function is expressed in Alberti's keyboard works. Nevertheless, instances where the distinction between main theme and transition is expressed in an extremely subtle manner do exist. In a similar vein, there are a handful of examples where the delineation between the functions in question is virtually undetectable. The prominence of main themes that do not close with a cadence, and the presence of continuation function in both main themes and transitions, account partially for hazy functional boundaries (Example 1.17).

Example 1.17 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in F, WörA II, ii, 1-14

Example 1.17 - A two-measure basic idea is repeated, creating a clear presentation phrase. What follows, however, is fairly ambiguous. In terms of formal function, it could easily represent either continuation or transition function (after all, continuation is a characteristic feature of transition). Furthermore, because the modulation occurs via a series of parallel tenths (modulating Prinner), the sense that measure 9 is actually an arrival in the new key is fairly weak. As such, one might easily hear it as an arrival on V of F , suggesting a sentence-like structure. If this interpretation were followed, one would be forced to choose between two scenarios: the absence of transition function or the existence of main-theme-transition fusion. N.B. Once again, Alberti makes use of several loosening devices in the subordinate theme: he begins with model-sequence technique on a I^6 chord, both weakening the underlying tonic prolongation and suggesting that the theme begins with continuation function.

style, which sees a complete repetition of the subordinate theme, including all cadences (Example 1.19). It seems that Alberti was reluctant to loosen the initiating function of the subordinate theme, as is frequently done in later classical music via an additional repetition of the basic idea or a single repetition of the presentation phrase. He does, however, occasionally weaken the sense of tonic prolongation at the beginning of presentation phrases (see examples 1.16 and 1.17 above).

Framing Functions

Thematic introduction is very rare in Alberti's keyboard music, and when it is present, the formal situation is often ambiguous. Post-cadential function is a fairly common feature of this music. In most cases, a single codetta is repeated (Example 1.20) or an arpeggiation of the final harmony takes place, dissipating the energy of the drive to the cadence (Example 1.21).

Example 1.20 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in A, WörA V, ii, 18-21

R=1/2N

SUB. THEME #2 (cont.)

The musical score for Example 1.20 is in A major, 2/4 time. It shows the continuation of the subordinate theme. The first two measures of the codetta are marked with a bracket labeled 'codetta'. The third measure is marked with a bracket labeled 'evaded cadence'. The fourth measure is marked with a bracket labeled 'PAC'. The bass line consists of a simple harmonic accompaniment.

Example 1.20 - Following a perfect authentic cadence, which ends the second subordinate theme, Alberti writes a two-measure (real) codetta. As this is supported by a cadential progression, an evaded cadence is experienced on the downbeat of measure 20. A single repetition of the codetta leads to a perfect authentic cadence to close out the exposition. For a similar example, see also WörA IV, i.

Example 1.21 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in Eb, WörA XIII, ii, 28-31

The musical score for Example 1.21 is in E-flat major, 2/4 time. It shows two codettas, each marked with a bracket labeled 'codetta'. The third measure is marked with a bracket labeled 'arpeggiation'. The fourth measure is marked with a bracket labeled 'PAC'. The bass line consists of a simple harmonic accompaniment.

Example 1.21 - A short codetta is repeated, leading to a perfect authentic cadence. This is very similar to the previous example, with the exception that a descending arpeggio adorns the final tonic chord.

Development and Recapitulation

Due to this music's origin in binary structure, it is useful to treat development and recapitulation sections together. While a much more extensive study of these sections could be undertaken, a few general observations can be made that shed some light on their construction in Alberti's keyboard works. Perhaps most immediately obvious, is that the vast majority of development sections begin with a restatement of the entire main theme in the subordinate key. While what follows can take several different paths, this fact alone is often very useful in determining, by analogy, the boundaries of the main theme in the exposition section. Regardless of the direction taken following the restatement of the main theme, the ensuing material contains developmental procedures of some kind. It may be noted here that core technique is rarely, if ever, found, which also precludes any discussion of a pre-core. In some instances where model-sequence technique is fairly prevalent, one might invoke the notion of a pseudo-core.

One possibility, found quite often in the music of Marcello, places the beginning of the recapitulation immediately after a statement of the main theme in the subordinate key. Tonally speaking, the dominant version of the main theme represents the development in its entirety. In order to compensate for this short-lived section, the transition is often expanded in the recapitulation. This alteration allows developmental procedures to take place within the recapitulation section, most often in the transition (Example 1.22). This is somewhat reminiscent of Rosen's notion of a secondary development.

Contrary to the above example, several development sections are more expansive despite using a similar initiating technique. Often, following a statement of the main theme in the

subordinate key, the same material will be stated again in the home key; however, rather than beginning the recapitulation, the theme is later understood as a false recapitulation. In this case, it does not function as a return to the tonic of the home key, but rather as an intermediate stage on the way to the subdominant region (or a substitute thereof). This usually leads to another statement of the main theme, which does signal the onset of the recapitulation (Example 1.23).

Example 1.22 Marcello, Keyboard Sonata in C, iii, 17-39

R=1/2N

The musical score is divided into several sections with the following annotations:

- DEVELOPMENT? M.T. (in V)**: The first section, marked with a bracket, shows the main theme in the dominant key.
- RECAPITULATION M.T. (in I)**: The second section, also bracketed, shows the main theme in the tonic key.
- TRANSITION**: The section following the recapitulation, containing a **Prinner** and a **model** figure.
- seq.**: Two sequential passages marked with brackets and 'seq.'.
- HC**: A box labeled 'HC' (Home Key) is placed above the end of the transition.
- V6/5**: A box labeled 'V6/5' is placed above the end of the transition.
- I [V6/5] → IV [V6/5] → V**: Harmonic progression labels below the first part of the transition.
- SUB. THEME**: The section following the transition, containing a **Prinner** and a **PAC (elided)** box.
- PAC**: A box labeled 'PAC' is placed at the end of the piece.

Example 1.22 - As the development (tonally speaking) consists of a mere four real measures, one might wonder whether it can even be considered to fulfill this function. In terms of the development sections of later Viennese classical composers, the answer is no. Rather, the section is more reminiscent of the tour of keys model used by composers in the baroque era. Even so, the exploration of a single key can hardly be called a “tour”. The absence of any extensive developmental procedures here does, however, influence the recapitulation, where transition function is expanded considerably compared to its counterpart in the exposition. The first three measures of the transition encompass a Prinner, suggesting that they represent continuation function. This leads to a half cadence, after which Alberti composes a sections based on model-sequence technique. An ensuing string of Priners leading to the commencement of subordinate theme suggest further continuation. The subordinate theme is sounded in the tonic, representing a near exact transposition of its earlier manifestation. For an example of development-recapitulation fusion that omits the return of the main theme in the tonic, see Alberti WörA III, i.

Example 1.23 Alberti, Keyboard Sonata in F, WörA IX, i, 11-17

R=1/2N

DEVELOPMENT

The musical score for Example 1.23 is presented in three systems. The first system shows the Main Theme (M.T.) in V (F major) and M.T. in I (F major). The second system shows a continuation of the M.T. in I, with a 'model' and 'seq.' (sequence) section. The third system shows the M.T. in I again, with a 'ii' (supertonic) chord and a 'MAIN THEME b.i.' (beginning in the tonic) section. A half cadence (HC) is marked at the end of the development section, leading to the recapitulation. The key signature changes from F major to D minor (IV) at the end of the development section.

Example 1.23 - Here, the first return of the main theme in the home key is an example of false recapitulation. Instead of functioning as a stable return to the tonic, it leads to the relative minor of the subdominant region (ii). Note how Alberti eventually does tonicize IV at the end of the sequence, leading to a half cadence that marks the end of the development. Continuation function characterizes the majority of the development section, with the exception of the two statements of main theme material at the beginning. As they are not analogous to core material, and as the absence of a true core pervades any discussion of pre-core technique, a comprehensive theory of formal function needs to find a new way of categorizing development structures with this type of organization. The recapitulation proceeds in the same fashion as the exposition with the following exceptions: transition function is eliminated, and the subordinate theme is tonally and melodically varied.

Closing Remarks

An examination of Alberti's works for keyboard reveals a close kinship with the later forms of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in many respects. In particular, the Italian's music often demonstrates a clear expression of formal function, with several examples of theme types later employed by the First Viennese School. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Alberti regularly makes use of eight-measure main themes and writes fairly extensive subordinate themes that employ many of the symmetrical deviations described by William Caplin in his book on classical form. Substantial differences appear as well, particularly with regards to development sections. These are usually quite small in scope and often remain functionally ambiguous (i.e. development-recapitulation fusion). As such, the fact that sonata form has its roots in a binary structure is often quite transparent in this music.

Although the above discussion is relatively small in scope compared to what a comprehensive study of form in Alberti's music would entail, it may be helpful in reworking the catalogue prepared by Wörmann some 50 years ago. For example, a better understanding of how Alberti expresses formal function could provide an answer to the question of authorship raised by Barry Cooper, with respect to the so-called Op.1 sonatas. This would also help determine the authenticity of manuscripts attributed to the Italian composer since the publication of Wörmann's catalogue. In any case, the literature cited in this essay alone testifies to the fact that Domenico Alberti clearly foreshadowed sonata form as used by composers in later eras.

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