Recent Sonata Theory and the Performance of Early Nineteenth-Century Guitar Sonatas

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The power of sonata form lies in its ability to create long-range structural cogency. How this is achieved within the specific medium of the early 19th-century guitar sonata is the subject of this paper. I investigate the nature of sonata form through two competing yet complementary modern theories, Hepokoski/Darcy\textsuperscript{1} and William Caplin,\textsuperscript{2} and investigate the potential for these theories to interact with the interpretative decision making processes of the performer. The discussion draws from the repertory of early 19th-century guitar sonatas—a corpus of more than 160 works—most of which remain unplayed and unstudied.\textsuperscript{3} Although this remains a somewhat arcane repertoire, there are principles at play that have broader applicability. This research also resists certain long-held assumptions with regard to the limitations of the guitar as an instrument, demonstrating that even the comparatively lesser-note composers for this instrumental were capable of writing surprisingly expressive music.\textsuperscript{4} Moreover, understandings of sonata form have too often been predicated on a narrow band of repertoire representing Viennese high classicism, not adequately accounting for the diversity of practice. As Stanley Yates demonstrates, guitar sonatas can be understood in relation to regional and temporal differences in sonata styles.\textsuperscript{5} While they perpetuate idiomatic guitar textures, they are also strongly influenced by contemporaneous keyboard and orchestral idioms. Normative conventions and their

\begin{itemize}
\item 1 James A. Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, \textit{Elements of Sonata Theory : Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata} (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
\item 3 Many sonatas have recently become available to scholars due to recently digitized historic collections such as the Boije, Birkett-Smith, and Hudleston. The view that the guitar sonata in the early 19th century was relatively uncommon prevails: see, for instance, Rattanai Bampenyou, "A Performance Guitar to the Multi-Movement Guitar Sonatas of Fernando Sor and Mauro Giuliani" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2012), 2–3. However, my research demonstrates greater prevalence than hitherto documented, with more than 160 sonatas identified, including more than forty which are arguably in the grand manner.
\end{itemize}
resistance play a key part in this discussion, but the conventions discussed are primarily those germane to aspects of sonata form that arguably transcend the idiomatic differences between instruments.

Rather than analysis providing all the answers, in this study analytical insight and performance intuition feed into each other in a deepening spiral of growing conviction.\(^6\) Any tension arising from either naïve intuition or misleading analysis is a site of particular interest.\(^7\) One such conflict would be the rigid insistence by some Schenkerians that the fundamental descent must occur at the final cadence of a piece, however insignificant it might appear at the foreground level. Ultimately, I strive for the kind of "structurally-informed performance" articulated by Narmour and Berry,\(^8\) while also heeding Cook's warning against the mire of analytical dogma,\(^9\) noting that (as Cook intimates) analysis is ultimately also an interpretative act.\(^10\)

The theories of William Caplin\(^11\) are closely aligned with performance concerns in their application of functional labels to micro-level phrase structuring,\(^12\) which in turn has implication for multiple performance decisions, including character, dynamics, dynamics, performance intention, and more.

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7 An example of this approach is Matthew Brown, Explaining Tonality: Schenkerian Theory and Beyond, Eastman Studies in Music (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005). Brown's work is important in the way in which he has brought great systematic rigour to Schenkerian analysis. However, in practice he is fundamentally uninterested in the performer's intuition. As a student of Schenker, I diligently followed such analytical axioms (suppressing my intuition), while simultaneously conscious of an unsatisfying disjunction that I longed to resolve. I recall completing a Schenkerian analysis of the entire first movement of Beethoven's Op 53 Sonata ("Waldstein") for a postgraduate seminar and feeling that the most significant structural descent of the urlinie should occur at the climax of the work—prior to the coda—and not in the final closing gesture of the work (where I was told, it must occur). Intuitively, I yearned for the work's rhetorical climax to align with the point of contrapuntal closure, and secretly felt that it should.


10 Cook refers to analysis as "performative:" see Ibid., 255ff.


articulations, fingerings, and so on. Hepokoski/Darcy’s theories of sonata form (henceforth to be referred as "HD sonata theory") are essentially concerned with questions of norms and deformations. Since performers must also navigate similar issues in manipulating the expectations of the audience, HD sonata theory is especially relevant.

HD sonata theory argues for the ubiquitous applicability of "generally obligatory cadences," or more expansively, the "recognition and interpretation of expressive/dramatic trajectories toward" these cadences. In particular, these are the "medial caesura" and the "essential expositional closure," which define the boundaries between zones, as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** A diagram of the exposition sonata form according to Hepokoski/Darcy, where P=primary theme zone; TR=transition; MC=medial caesura; and EEC=Essential expositional closure, defined as the “the first satisfactory PAC [perfect authentic cadence]” that occurs within S and that proceeds onward to differing material”

Also significant are the associated processes of "energy gain." For instance, the archetypal dramatic trajectory towards the medial caesura could be likened to the lights of a pedestrian crossing: green (walk), flashing (run), and red (stop). My first encounter with these concepts was somewhat of an epiphany. How had such far-reaching insights

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14 Ibid., 13.


16 In English terminology, a PAC is equivalent to a V-I cadence with ‘closed’ voice leading (which means root position chords and melodic closure on the tonic). It signals the conclusion of a musical period.

been overlooked? Of course, they had not. Rather, such concepts are rooted in 18th century theory but were suppressed by 19th century models privileging thematic contrast, and thus distorting the theoretical legacy.

My discussion is framed by five pivotal questions that attempt to connect the dots between structural analysis and performance decisions:

1. How should the performer differentiate the thematic material of the primary and secondary zones?
2. How might the performer understand and express the syntactic relations and contrasts of character between motives and phrases?
3. How should the medial caesura be shaped by the performer?
4. Where does the essential expositional closure lie, and does it align with the exposition’s natural climax?
5. How should the performer respond to significant structural deformations?

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Question 1: How should the performer differentiate the thematic material of the primary and secondary zones?

Some degree of contrast between the primary and secondary zones is arguably normative, and was infamously outlined by Marx in gendered terms. As a starting point, I attempt to classify the primary and secondary material according to categories identified by HD sonata theory (although other more rigorous semiotic investigations of historically-relevant musical "topics" and "tropes" could be used). In the Sonate Op. 21 No.1 (1810?) by Ferdinando Carulli (1770–1841), for instance, the primary material begins the work with what HD sonata theory describe as a "motto, emblem, or head-motive" (see Figure 2), and which could be characterised as assertive, even pompous. Similar beginnings are found in many early guitar sonatas; they help establish the tonality, and often exploit octaves, full chords, or arpeggios. Such gestures originate with the clichés of early symphonic writing, and the guitar in this period is often treated like an orchestra in miniature. In contrast, the opening thematic material of the secondary zone fits HD sonata theory's sub-type of "the bustling, staccato, energetically gallant, or jauntily self-confident S [secondary theme]" (see Figure 3), which could also be loosely associated with feminine archetypes in Italian bel canto opera.

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22 A first publication date of 1810 is suggested by Mario Torta, Catalago tematico della opera di Ferdinando Carulli, Vol. 1: Opere 1–120 (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana Editrice, 1993), 78.

23 Born in Naples, Carulli moved to Paris in 1808, establishing himself as a leading pedagogue, guitar performer and composer. As a virtuoso, he was somewhat overshadowed by the arrival of Fernando Sor in 1813, but in many ways Carulli’s extensive catalogue (more than 365 works involving guitar) helped to define a new level of idiomatic guitar virtuosity. He made one of the most significant contributions to the development of the guitar sonata, with more than 40 works in this style (of varying lengths, labelled either sonatines, sonates, or grande sonates). His sonatas primarily reflect the influence of the Italian overture, although we also see the influence of the Viennese style with more complex motivic fortspinnung beginning to manifest itself in the developments of his more substantial sonatas.

24 Hepokoski and Darcy, Elements of Sonata Theory, 87.

25 Such as the "premier coup d’archet" in the Mannheim school, and the music of Stamitz.


27 The relevance of bel canto opera to the early 19th century guitar, its style, and performance practices has been widely discussed in the literature. See, for instance: Adrian Charles Walter, "The Early Nineteenth Century Guitar: An Interpretive Context for the Contemporary Performer" (PhD diss., Charles Darwin University, 2008); Harold Gretton, "Historically-Informed Interpretation: A Process in Relation to the Deuxième Grande Sonate Op.25 for Solo Guitar by Fernando Sor" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2019).
This clarification of the musical character of these themes empowers the performer, who is better placed to make detailed decisions with regard to dynamic, timbre, and articulation. While Carulli clarifies the dynamics for us (forte at the opening, piano for the secondary theme), there are many details missing. In line with the suggested pompous character, a slight over-dotting might also be warranted for the "motto" (Figure 2). On the other hand, the ascending scale in the "self-confident S [secondary theme]" could be played slightly staccato, for lightness and energy, in keeping with the character sub-type derived from Hepokoski and Darcy (Figure 3).

**Question 2: How might the performer understand and express the syntactic relations and contrasts of character between motives and phrases?**

While the contrasts of thematic character inherent within the primary zone itself may seem self-evident, becoming consciously aware of their subtleties can only be beneficial to the performer, who then is better able to enunciate the syntactic structures in a more meaningful way—whether questioning, unresolved, or completing. Even a simple example, like Carulli’s *Sonate* Op. 21 No.1 in A, displays a level of complexity (with

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29 Ibid.
compound antecedent and consequent phrase groups), as illustrated in Figure 4 below.\textsuperscript{30} Table 1 shows multiple layers of analytical and descriptive terminology: (1) those according to HD sonata theory; (2) according to Caplin; (3) suggested interpretive descriptors; and (4) subsequently suggested performance considerations. Interpreting musical gestures according to historic evidence, or empirically-grounded semiotics (along the lines of Hatten)\textsuperscript{31} is an intriguing prospect, but presenting evidence to justify the interpretations made here is beyond the scope of this present discussion. Regardless, following the precedent of Schmalfeldt (and others) I suggest that the intuitive responses of a performer should not be entirely discredited, particularly when interacting with analytical understandings.\textsuperscript{32}

Note that HD sonata theory uses numerals with decimals (e.g. $P^{1.1}$, $P^{1.2}$, $P^{2.1}$, $P^{2.2}$), where $P$ indicates the theme’s location within the primary theme zone, a numeral after the dot represents a particular motive or theme, and the numeral before the dot indicates the motive’s position vis-à-vis the period structure (a notch upwards to 2 only occurs following a PAC, or perfect authentic cadence, signalling the end of one period and the beginning of another). On the other hand, Caplin’s thematic labels primarily emphasize the syntactic structural role of musical themes: basic, contrasting, and cadential.

Table 1. The phrase structures of the primary zone, Carulli's Sonate Op. 21, No.1 in A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase group</th>
<th>Antecedent group (defined by HC)</th>
<th>Consequent group (defined by PAC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars</td>
<td>1–4</td>
<td>5–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata Theory Label</td>
<td>P1.1 Motto</td>
<td>P1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caplin terminology</td>
<td>Basic idea (bi)</td>
<td>Contrasting idea (ci)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other interpretive descriptor</td>
<td>Assertive/her</td>
<td>Tip-toeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance considerations</td>
<td>Forte, over-dotted</td>
<td>Pianissimo, staccato</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{30} This shows a parallel period consisting of a compound antecedent and consequent of three phrases each (an irregular number, since phrase groups are more commonly multiples of 2). It is "parallel" in that the consequent phrases are derived from the antecedent phrases.

\textsuperscript{31} Hatten, \textit{Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes}.

Question 3: How should the medial caesura be shaped by the performer?

In the case of Carulli’s *Sonate* Op. 21 No.1, the drive to a climactic medial caesura is obvious. In the case of the *Gran sonata eroica* Op. 150 (1840) by Mauro Giuliani (1781–1829) (Figure 5), there are no marked dynamics, and a creative interpreter might consider shaping a softer medial caesura because of the gentle music to follow. However, HD sonata theory suggest that the default option should be an energy gain with crescendo driving towards the medial caesura, unless there are musical clues to the contrary. Arguably, this energy spills over here into the caesura-filled space with the urgency of the dotted rhythm on the repeated Bs. Some early 19th-century guitar works, such as those by Molitor and Diabelli (See Figure 10 and Figure 11) demonstrate the

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33 Carulli, Trois sonates.

34 However, this is not always the case. In some instances (such as Carulli’s *Gran sonate* op.16 in C), a MC can be defined, but thwarted by non-appearance of convincing secondary material (sonata theory speaks of potential secondary material disintegrating to *fortspinnung*, then entering the closing zone prematurely).

35 Originally from Bisceglie in Southern Italy, Mauro Giuliani worked in Vienna from 1806–19, where he established himself as a leading figure of international renown (unrivalled, except perhaps by Fernando Sor). Giuliani composed more than 151 opus numbers, although his sonatas are more limited in number than Carulli (five sonatas, plus several other works such as overtures, employing clear sonata form). Like Carulli, they display a balance between the Italian overture (and bel canto style), and the influence of Viennese classicism.
embellishment of the medial caesura with ornamentation, quasi-cadenza. Here, the caesura space in Giuliani’s *Gran sonata eroica* becomes the site of a surprising modulatory interpolation,\(^{36}\) subverting the arrival of the dominant\(^{37}\) by a momentary sojourn in C major. The performer is afforded extraordinary license to create an air of surprise, of freedom, and fantasy—before the music begins "a tempo" as the lyrical theme of the secondary zone emerges.

![Figure 5. An excerpt from Giuliani’s *Gran sonata eroica*, Op. 150, showing the lead up to the medial caesura (fermata), with energy gain (from the second line) and “caesura fill” interpolation (lines 5-6)\(^{38}\)](image)

On the other hand, the *Grosse sonate* Op. 7 (1836) by Simon Molitor (1766–1848)\(^{39}\) is an example of a medial caesura that is a clearly-defined anti-climax (fourth line, 36 That this is an interpolation can be easily confirmed by trialling performance that simply moves from the medial caesura chord to the beginning of the last bar of the example shown (where the secondary zone properly begins).

37 Articulated by the half-cadence medial caesura, despite the minor mode inflection in the penultimate bar preceding the medial caesura.

third bar, Figure 6), or what HD sonata theory terms the "de-energizing transition."\(^{40}\) Such an instance raises the potential for the performer to express, through dynamics (as marked), the surprise at this turn of events.

![Figure 6. A de-energizing transition leads to an anticlimactic medial caesura (last line, third bar), in Molitor’s Gross sonate Op. 7 in Am, first movement\(^{41}\)](image)

**Question 4: Where does the essential expositional closure lie, and does it align with the exposition’s natural climax?**

One might assume that the essential expositional closure should align with the natural climax of the exposition. However, HD sonata theory warns against this assumption, seemingly suppressing the performer’s instinct in obeisance to an abstract theoretical idea. Whereas the medial caesura is typically a grand gesture accompanied by an energy gain and dramatic pause, the essential expositional closure may not necessarily reflect this pattern. It is defined as the "first satisfactory PAC\(^{42}\) that proceeds onward to differing material."\(^{43}\) As such, it does delineate a point in which the music rhetorically shifts gear: however, it is not necessarily always "when the themes stop and the codettas begin."\(^{44}\)

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\(^{39}\) Active in Vienna before and during the dominance of Giuliani, Molitor had a more diverse career, active both as a violinist, guitarist, composer, and conductor (and also some time working as a military clerk), with a compositional output that also includes concerti for violin and clarinet, piano music, and chamber works. He produced five known guitar sonatas, each substantial and significant examples. The Grosse sonate Op. 7 is especially significant because of its extensive performance practice annotations.

\(^{40}\) Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 116.


\(^{42}\) PAC=perfect authentic cadence; in English terminology, a V–I cadence with "closed" voice leading signalling the conclusion of a period.

\(^{43}\) Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 120.

\(^{44}\) The quote comes from Ibid., 121, which is paraphrasing the position of Caplin, *Classical Form* (a position with which Hepokoski/Darcy do not agree).
although that is typically the case. Nor is the essential expositional closure necessarily the climactic cadence of the exposition. The closure attained can be deemed to be "essential"\(^{45}\) without necessarily being "fully satisfying."\(^{46}\) HD sonata theory thus warns against making judgements based on presumptions on what an essential expositional closure should "feel" like (echoing the sentiments of the Schenkerians).

In Carulli’s *Grande sonate* in C\(^{47}\) (Figure 7), for example, the essential expositional closure is delineated by a clear perfect authentic cadence where the lyrical secondary themes stops, and is followed by a series of energy-gaining cadential modules that push towards a grander rhetorical climax, one that intuition might deem the true point of essential closure.\(^{48}\) This is an archetypal pattern in many early guitar sonatas. Like a medial caesura, it is followed by a sense of space, and then an episode of much gentler music.

There is a certain inconsistency in the approach of HD sonata theory in that while the medial caesura is preceded by energy gain, the essential expositional closure is typically *followed* by energy gain. From the point of view of the performer, it is arguably the later climactic arrival that provides the true sense of "essential closure."

\(^{45}\) Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 123.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 124.

\(^{47}\) This *Grande sonate* is not catalogued in Torta, so the opus number and the date of first publication have not yet been traced. See footnote 49 for further information on this edition.

\(^{48}\) The MC is delineated in the fourth bar, and a lyrical theme opens the secondary zone (bar 5). This theme cadences to a PAC somewhat prematurely in the fourth measure of the fourth line (ostensibly the EEC) piano. Here, the music shifts gear, taking off with a virtuosic flurry of idiomatic material that builds, through its energy gain, towards a much more climactic cadence in the third last line (presumably with an implied obligatory trill). Following this climactic cadence, the music switches gears again, becoming much more gentle and subdued (despite no marked dynamic). Finally, some peremptory cadential gestures bring the exposition to a satisfying yet somewhat ambiguous end (at least, dynamically speaking).
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Figure 7. The end of the secondary zone, the theoretical essential expositional closure (EEC) (fourth line), followed by the closing zone (with energy gain), and a climactic cadence (third last line), in Carulli’s *Grande sonate* in C⁴⁹

**Question 5:** How should the performer respond to significant structural deformations? Of particular interest for performance are off-key recapitulations. For instance, Giuliani’s *Gran Sonata eroica* (1840)⁵⁰ commences the recapitulation with a somewhat disguised version of the primary material in the flat submediant, C major (Figure 8).⁵¹ From an

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⁵⁰ Giuliani, *Gran sonata eroica*.

⁵¹ Extended sojourns to the flat submediant have been shown by Richard Taruskin to be a favoured early Romantic device, particularly in the music of Schubert (a contemporary of Giuliani in Vienna): see Richard
analytical point of view this is problematic, but not simply because it is in the wrong key. Rather it is because the key is only corrected with the appearance of the secondary theme (S). If this C major section represents the true recapitulation, then the modified syntactical/rhetorical gestures of the medial caesura (see Figure 9) closely resembles a retransition (which weakens this interpretation). On the other hand, if the return of S (the secondary theme) is the true recapitulation, then the entire work becomes a "type 2" sonata (meaning, the recapitulatory rotation commences with the development).

From the performer’s perspective, all that matters, arguably, is that a surprising deformation has occurred, which should be associated with a surprising execution in performance (perhaps a dream-like, soft approach).

Figure 8. The end of the development and the beginning of the recapitulation (third line) in the wrong key (flat submediant) in Giuliani's Gran sonata eroica

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Taruskin, The Oxford History of Western Music, vol.3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 94–95. Another possible precedent for Giuliani is Rossini (who is a clearly established influence on Giuliani’s bel canto guitar idiom). The same modulation occurs at the recapitulation in the overture to La Cenerentola (for which Giuliani made a guitar version).

In passing, we could note that Cone and Rosen were incorrect in suggesting that wrong-key presentations of primary material demand a "corrected" version in the tonic. HD sonata theory insists that this principal applies only to secondary material. See Edward T. Cone, Musical Form and Musical Performance, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 76–77. See also Charles Rosen, Sonata Forms, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1988), 25, 287. Both Cone and Rosen are cited in Hepokoski and Darcy, Elements of Sonata Theory, 242–43.

For a definition of "type 2" sonata, see Hepokoski and Darcy, Elements of Sonata Theory, 353ff.

Giuliani, Gran sonata eroica.
Similarly, Simon Molitor’s impressive *Grosse sonate* Op. 7 (1836)\(^{56}\) in A minor begins the recapitulation in the key of the subtonic G minor, then G major (see second and third systems of Figure 10) while the secondary material goes to the tonic major (A major), such that the piece ends on a triumphant note (final system). Molitor provides the performer with an intriguing clue to navigating this surprising turn of events, indicating that the beginning of the recapitulation (second system) should be executed quietly (and even more so with the entry of G major in the third system), reflecting the element of surprise associated with a non-standard key at this point in the sonata.

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\(^{55}\) Ibid.

Figure 10. The surprising wrong-key recapitulation (second and third systems), with a pianissimo dynamic, in Molitor's *Grosse sonate Op. 7*\(^{57}\)

Another example is the apparent wrong-key entry of the Recapitulation (on the supertonic) in the Sonata in F, Op. 29 No.3 (1807)\(^{58}\) by Anton Diabelli (1781–1858),\(^{59}\) which commences with the secondary theme (m. 59, Figure 11), dispensing altogether with the primary material. This is a clear example of the "type 2" sonata, therefore, as the rotation commences in the development space.\(^{60}\) However, such an interpretation overlooks the clear "rhetoric" of retransition on display, and does not negate the fact that the deformation must be corrected several bars later with the reiteration of the secondary material in the tonic (m.72). Arguably, the performer’s role in the case of Diabelli is to pretend that there is nothing unusual about this recapitulation (at least, at first), before finally giving the game away when the music shifts dramatically into *fortspinnung*, energy gain, and a sudden tonal shift. A dramatic caesura is reached which

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\(^{59}\) Diabelli is especially interesting as he is one of the few guitar composers who has written extensively for other instruments (another is Sor). More than most, his guitar works (including three sonatas) do not rely heavily on clichéd textures and are able to sustain intricate motivic development within the resources of the instrument. His guitar sonatas are arguably representative of his sonata writing more generally, not just his adaptation of sonata form to the guitar.

\(^{60}\) See footnote 53.
is then elaborated with a written-out cadenza marked "a piacere" (as with the Molitor example above), further heightening the moment of return to the tonic key.

Figure 11. The off-key recapitulation, commencing with S (secondary theme) in Diabelli’s Sonata in F, Op. 29 No.3⁶¹

In conclusion, these observations merely scratch the surface with regard to the way in which these new sonata theories can provide insights relevant to performance. These include the ways that analysis can (1) clarify aspects of the semantic character of motives and themes (suggesting localized performance details); (2) clarify syntactic structures between motives and themes (aiding with dramatic pacing and contour); (3) reveal processes of energy gain and energy dissipation associated with obligatory structural cadences (suggesting appropriate shaping); and (4) uncover structural deformations (that arguably are associated with moments of surprise or drama). This paper has attempted to model a way in which analysis empowers performance decisions, yet retains no inherent superiority. While I am not, by any means, suggesting that there is

only ONE correct interpretation, my experience of the process of performance and analysis is one of deepening conviction, which ultimately leads towards a more compelling musical performance. One goal here is for analysis to reclaim its relevance: as stated by Hepokoski and Darcy, "the best analytical system is the one that seeks to reawaken or re-energize the latent drama, power, wit, and wonder within individual compositions."62

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