

Sonata Form and Haydn's Op. 76, No. 2

While the vast majority of sonata form examples closely follow the structure outlined in sonata theory, there are some that are more deformed and difficult to analyze. Even so, if the basic outline of sonata form can be drawn, then there is no need to trouble over naming a different form. The first movement of Joseph Haydn's String Quartet in D minor, Op. 76, No. 2, does not afford that luxury, for it is far too individualistic to fit into the expected structure of sonata form.

A problem begins immediately in the section following the primary theme in the exposition, a place that would normally be termed the transition. Here, starting in m. 13, a new key area is presented at once with no help from a modulation, although it is the same key that will end the exposition. There is no apparent cadence in that key, and certainly no medial caesura, until a PAC in m. 50, which is clearly the beginning of a closing section. There is a hopeful moment in m. 32 where an S-theme may have developed, but material from the false-transition quickly reappears several measures later, giving the impression that the transition has still not concluded. Given the lack of transition to a secondary theme, the exposition would be better described as having three parts, a primary theme, a contrasting middle, and a closing section.

The development does not appear to deviate as much as the exposition. Most of the material deals with the quintal theme from the first few measures of the piece. Eventually, there is a clear instance of retransition to the recapitulation in m. 95. The recapitulation only follows the first theme of the exposition for six measures before going to more transition-like material.

There are brief snippets of the false-transition material throughout, but presented in a very surprising and contrasting manner. The most unusual section occurs after the end of the recapitulation in m. 138, where most sonata form movements would have certainly ended. The following music is completely supplementary and could perhaps be considered a coda, though it is certainly not a common fixture to first movement form.