

Chapter 25: A B A' Form (with compound A)

Mendelssohn Song without Words in E, op.67 no.6

Mendelssohn created the genre of the “Song without Words.” Virtually all of them were written for solo piano and cast in three-part “song” form. Mendelssohn published a total of 36 Songs without Words for solo piano in six volumes, each containing six pieces. The first book appeared in 1832, and the last volume came out in 1845. The Song without Words in E major examined here is the last piece of the sixth and final volume. After the composer’s death in 1847, two more volumes of six pieces each were gathered up and published posthumously.

Mendelssohn’s Song without Words in E major begins with a brief three-bar introduction, which helps clarify that the melody begins on an upbeat bar. This rhythmic anomaly occurs throughout, and will have a bearing on analyzing the piece. The A section is cast as a parallel period with an expanded consequent phrase that modulates to the dominant key of B major. Graph the two phrases of the parallel period, showing how the consequent ends – to borrow Tovey’s distinction – in rather than on the key of B major.



Template 25.1



Template 25.2

Having established the dominant key at the end of the A section, Mendelssohn leads to the key of G-sharp minor for the central B section. Make a graphic analysis that shows how he initially tonicizes this key.



Template 25.3

With the arrival in the key of G-sharp minor, show how Mendelssohn expands this key, leading to what appears to be a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ at measure 55.



Template 25.4

Although G-sharp minor is intimated as the principal key of the central B section, Mendelssohn avoids making a true cadence. How does Mendelssohn get back to the tonic at the return of the A' section in measure 61?

Upon returning to the home key of E major, Mendelssohn repeats the antecedent phrase of the beginning (bars 4–11) verbatim. At bar 68, however, instead of supporting the melody with a root-position V^7 , he writes a $V^{\frac{4}{2}}$. This leads into an outright recomposition of the expected consequent phrase. Make an analysis of this final phrase that leads to the final cadence in the A' section.



Template 25.5

Following the cadence in the tonic at bar 91, Mendelssohn writes a poignant coda over a tonic pedal. Graph the final echo of theme over bars 91–99, showing its implied harmonic progression.



Template 25.6

Having analyzed the different sections of this miniature masterpiece, how might you consider the tonal meaning of the central B section. Consider the function of G-sharp minor in light of how Mendelssohn brings in the return of the tonic in the final A' section. Make a middleground graph showing the tonal structure of the piece as a whole.

Schubert Impromptu in G-flat, D.899 no.3

The G-flat Impromptu begins with an eight-bar parallel period, pairing an antecedent phrase which leads to a half-cadence on V, and a consequent that completes the tonal motion by ending with a perfect authentic cadence on the tonic. Often, an initial period will be followed by a contrasting section that leads to a return to the opening period, creating a mini *a b a* form. In this Impromptu, however, there is no return back to the opening period. The eight-bar phrase that follows end with a perfect authentic cadence in the tonic and concludes the opening G-flat section. This second phrase is immediately repeated, with slight variations, extending the A section by another eight measures. Although made up of 24 bars in total, the A section derives from two distinct eight-bar units, which combine together in binary (*a b*) form.

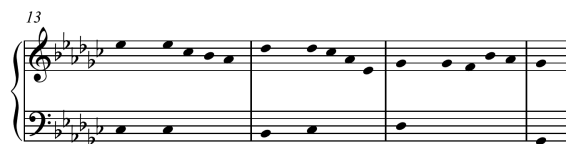
Having established that the A section in Schubert's G-flat Impromptu is in binary (*a b*) form, analyze the initial eight-bar parallel period.



Template 25.7

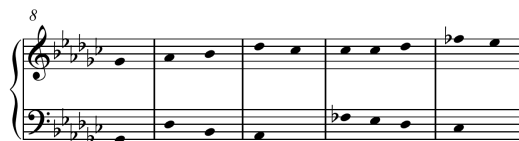
Unlike the tonal structure of the *a* part (bars 1-8), which articulates a straightforward parallel period, the tonal structure of the *b* part (bars 9-16) is less clear-cut. Like the *a* part, the *b* part is eight measures long, and is subdivided into two four-bar phrases. Bars 9-12 articulate what appears to be a rising sequence, which leads from D-flat major to C-flat major. The C-flat major harmony in bar 12 is extended into the beginning of bar 13, and leads into the final cadence that brings the A section to a close.

Before examining the first four measures of the *b* part, analyze the final cadence, which begins with the expansion of C-flat major over bars 13–14.



Template 25.8

Having established that the C-flat major chord in bar 13 initiates the final cadence that closes the A section, we are now in a position to analyze the first four measures of this *b* part.



Template 25.9

Having made foreground analyses of three units of the first 16 measures, make a middleground graph of the entire opening A section.

The central section of the G-flat Impromptu expands the key of E-flat minor, the submediant in G-flat major. Although the B section begins decisively in E-flat minor, the first phrase avoids making a cadence. Instead of closing on the tonic at bar 28, the E-flat minor passage begins anew. The same occurs in bar 31; but instead of starting over from the beginning of the phrase, bar 30 is repeated with the diatonic II^6 altered to $\flat\text{II}^6$, the Neapolitan-sixth chord with $\flat\hat{2}$. Instead of making a cadence, however, Schubert deflects the tonal motion to C-flat major, the submediant key in the central section's E-flat minor. Analyze the beginning of the central B section in E-flat minor in bar 25 up until the cadence in C-flat major at bar 35. Show the different attempts at a cadence in E-flat minor, and how the deflection to C-flat major is achieved.



Template 25.10

Having established the key of C-flat major in bar 35, there is a five-measure extension which sounds like a codetta. Graph these bars in the context of C-flat major.



Template 25.11

At bar 40, a new idea begins on a diminished-seventh chord in $\frac{4}{3}$ position over A-flat. This passage leads to a cadence in E-flat major at bar 51. What is the meaning of the harmony in bar 40, and how does it function in the context of the main key of the B section. Where does the unexpected turn to the major mode occur?



Template 25.12

Following the cadence in E-flat major at bar 51, there is a four-bar transition back to the piece's original key of G-flat major. Show how this motion from E-flat major to G-flat major is realized.



Template 25.13

Following the return of the second A section at bar 55, the Impromptu's final cadence in G-flat major occurs in bar 74, and we arrive at the coda. At bar 79, Schubert dispenses with the original key signature of six flats, and leads to a G-minor $\frac{6}{8}$ chord at the beginning of bar 80. Immediately afterward the G-flat key signature is restored and the music continues to a cadence in the tonic key. In the context of G-flat major, the unusual G-minor chord represents an enharmonic spelling – and more comprehensible notation – of an A-double flat minor chord. How does this harmony fit into the coda?



Template 25.14

Having analyzed the different portions of the G-flat Impromptu separately, make an analysis of the entire work, framing it as a single *Ursatz* structure.