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Genres and Forms in the Twentieth Century

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Introduction

The twentieth century saw an explosion of innovation in music, especially in the first forty years. Much has been written about the different processes that composers used for determining pitch structures, but less research has been done about the subversion and transformation of form and genre.[1] While these transformations happened to the majority of forms and genres from the Common Practice era, most specifically the Classical and Romantic periods, this article will specifically delve into sonata form and a few of the most used genres, including the sonata, the symphony, the string quartet, and the opera, and will include case studies for each to demonstrate some of the ways in which composers took old forms and genres and adapted them to meet their musical needs.

At the heart of almost all music is the concept of tension and release. The sonata form and all of the genres discussed in this article use this idea on both the small-scale and large-scale. Because of this, there are traditional ways of structuring multi-movement works. For instance, the tonal structure of a Classical symphony is an important driver of the tension/release, since the second and third movements tend to be in different (although closely related) keys than the first, while the fourth returns to the original tonic, making the listener feel like they have returned to the "home" key and resolving the tension. Romantic composers pushed these tonal centers further away from the opening key, and even ended pieces in different keys than that of the original movement. With the dissolution of tonality in the twentieth century, composers had to find other ways to create the sense of drive that was imparted by tonality. One of the solutions that emerged was to take the expectations an audience might have about a certain form or genre (or even music in general), and then subtly or dramatically subvert those expectations. These expectations can be based on large-scale formal events or small-scale musical elements, such as timbre or rhythm. A good example of many different types of subversion is Igor Stravinsky's (1882–1971) ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1913). The piece opens with a subversion of a listener's timbral expectations. The high bassoon line can sound pinched and prone to cracking. This plays with the audience's sense of how an orchestra should sound. A little later in the piece, Stravinsky's jarring rhythms obliterate the sense of meter, with the unpredictability of these rhythms creating tension that keeps the piece moving forward towards the release.

Subversion and the transformation of form and genre became powerful tools not only to rebel against the musical norms of the previous centuries, but to create conflict within the music itself. Each of the composers studied in this article approaches these ideas individually, but the

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[1] Some of this writing was done by the composers themselves; see, for example, Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg: 60th Anniversary Edition*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), and some by influential theorists. One representative example of this is Allen Forte's *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

outcome is always the same: a different and unusual source of tension that moves the piece towards resolution.

Sonata Form

The sonata form in its textbook state has three main parts: exposition, development, and recapitulation.[2] Generally, the exposition has two theme areas in different keys. The conflict generated by this juxtaposition of key areas and thematic materials is intensified in the development section, where a composer could perform a number of operations on the original themes including fragmentation, frequent modulation, imitation, or many others. The recapitulation resolves the tension by presenting all the themes in the original key of the piece. Composers rarely followed this form precisely even in the Classical period, and by the Romantic period composers such as Mahler stretched the definition of this form dramatically. In the twentieth century, the function of the form remained the same even while the means of accomplishing that function varied dramatically. Composers such as Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) used the form fairly conventionally, deviating in terms of tonal structure (Hindemith had his own theory about the relative consonance and dissonance of different chords), but generally keeping the thematic basis the same.[3] Others, such as Anton Webern (1883–1945), took a very different approach (see Case Study 1, below). Regardless of what kind of approach a composer might take to the form, the general purpose remains the same: set up a conflict and resolve it.

Case Study 1: Webern, Symphony Op. 21
Webern was one of the most influential composers of the early twentieth century. His use of the 12-tone technique developed by his teacher, Arnold Schoenberg, was allied with his love of symmetry to create an output of short, yet intricate, compositions. His Symphony Op. 21 (1928) is a poignant example of this. The first movement can be understood as a transformation of the sonata form, although some analysts disagree with this interpretation. Christopher Ballantine writes about the clearly defined sections and musical conflict that typically define sonata form as evidence that Webern was thinking this way.[4] Tsung-Hsien Yang, on the other hand, declares that theorists have forced the movement into the sonata form simply because the piece is called "Symphony," and because the opening row reappears later in the piece.[5] While both arguments have merit, the understanding of the first movement of this composition as a sonata form is quite compelling. In addition to the evidence found in the piece, Webern was no stranger to the sonata. For instance, in 1914 he wrote the first movement of a cello sonata, which was left unfinished. Later, in 1936, he wrote his Variations for Piano Op. 27. Both these pieces feature a very condensed sonata form.[6] The compressed nature of these sonata forms creates a perceptual challenge for the listener. On one hand, it is easier to perceive the form because the sections are shorter. On the other, the lack of clear themes and tonal centers obscure these formal boundaries.

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[2] For more information, see Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988).
[3] Paul Hindemith, *The Craft of Musical Composition* (London: Schott, 1984).
[4] Christopher Ballantine, *Twentieth Century Symphony* (London: D. Dobson, 1983), 194–96.
[5] Tsung-Hsien Yang, "Webern Symphony: Beyond Palindromes and Canons," (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1987), iv.
[6] Kathryn Bailey, *The Twelve-note Music of Anton Webern: Old Forms in a New Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 190.

In the symphony, Webern attempts to address these perceptual issues with his use of canon and symmetry.

The symphony could be seen as approaching sonata form in an unusual and transformative way since the piece is built entirely around canonic imitation and a single tone-row. On the large-scale, Webern conforms to the expectations of the textbook form. There is a repeat sign that partitions the exposition and the development/recapitulation. The development is self-contained, beginning in m. 25 and ending in m. 44. In this section, two inversions of the tone row and two transpositions come together to make a mirror canon. This means that the entrances of each row are set apart from each other, and they all follow the same rhythmic pattern (see example 1). The mirroring happens at m. 35 where the music turns around and is played backward. Despite some oddities, such as the completion of two of the tone rows much later than expected (for example, in m. 36 where the B-flat that completes the P4 row does not appear until after the mirror), and some deviations from the rhythmic pattern, this self-contained structure ends definitively when the listener hears the E5 played again. At that same moment, Webern uses the row that started the piece (P9), giving the impression of a return to the opening material in the original "key."[7] This development is not traditional, but it does fulfill its purpose. Webern takes the idea of canon, presented at the beginning, and develops it into a mirror canon (which will have repercussions in the second movement).

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[7] Tone rows are generally numbered based on their starting pitch, where C = 0, C-sharp = 1, etc., and labeled based on whether they are a transposition of the original row (P), an inversion (I), a retrograde (i.e. played backwards) (R), or a retrograde inversion (RI).

Example 1. Webern, Symphony Op. 21 (1928), development section (reduction).[8]

The opening is the most problematic part for the sonata reading. There should be two theme zones that create tension by employing harmonic and melodic contrast. Instead, Webern presents two canons simultaneously, each consisting of a transposed form and an inverted form of the row. Because no one pitch is more important than any other in this style, Webern turns to melodic, rhythmic, and timbral differentiation to create the necessary conflict. His first canon has a comparatively relaxed rhythm, presenting an average of one pitch per measure and ending in m. 12. Melodically, the row involves extremely large leaps (frequently almost two octaves), which gives it a jagged contour. Timbrally, Webern begins in the French horns, moves to the clarinet and bass clarinet, and ends with the viola and cello. While the timbre changes, it does so at a relatively slow pace. The second canon moves more quickly than the first, starting a measure later, yet still finishing by the first beat of m. 12. It also contains large leaps, although this time an instance of an interval exceeding two octaves exacerbates the perceived jaggedness. Finally, Webern moves this canon from harp to cello to violin, back to harp, then horn, and back to harp again, leaving the listener with a wider array of timbres that are changed every one to three

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[8] The mirror canon continues until m. 44.

notes. In addition, Webern changes the cello from *pizzicato* to *arco* (plucked to bowed), which adds another timbral adjustment. While the melodies of these canons may be based on the same material, the way that Webern sets them presents the listener with two very different effects in counterpoint with one another. This juxtaposition creates the tension that drives the sonata form forward.

The recapitulation begins with the pickup to m. 43 and introduces a pair of canons with the same row relationships as the opening. P9 and I9 are linked as one canon, and I5 and P1 are presented as the second. There are some similarities in the way that Webern sets the rows that recall the opening. For instance, in mm. 43–44, the first voice repeats the F-sharp. This is the same rhythmic gesture that opens the piece, only in diminution (see example 2).[9] There are also significant differences. While there are still large jumps, they are organized so that the listener hears more groupings of a ninth or less, giving this version of the canon a less jagged profile. This is evident in mm. 44 and 45 (see example 2). The timbre is also changed. The row still moves between three instruments, but in the case of P9 they are all string instruments, leading to a more homogenous sound.

Example 2. Webern, Symphony Op. 21. Comparison of the opening and mm.42–45.

The second canon again moves between instruments more frequently than the first, going from harp to violin to French horn, back to harp, then violin, and ending in French horn. However, this canon travels through one fewer instrument than the opening version. As the piece approaches the ending, the second canon continues where the first canon stops, and keeps the same timbre for longer periods of time. The grouping of notes in pairs continues to cut down on the tension of the line (see mm. 49–58 in all voices) until all that is left is monophony in the strings. If the purpose of a recapitulation is to resolve the tension that is created in the exposition, then this example fulfills that purpose, just in an unexpected manner. The two canons share several attributes here, and the more homogenous timbre gives the listener a sense of completeness that was not present in the opening.

This is an unusual sonata form in that it not only is built on one theme (the tone row), but it also presents two conflicting versions of that theme simultaneously, rather than consecutively. The clearly self-contained development section and the adjustments in the presentation of material between the exposition and the recapitulation serve to fulfill the functions of a traditional sonata form in a very untraditional way.

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[9] In m. 2, there is a half note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note. In 43–44, there is a quarter note, an eighth rest, and an eighth note.

Sonata Genre

If the sonata form creates tension through the tonal and thematic conflict generated in the exposition and intensified through the development, a multi-movement piece in the sonata genre has a similar musical goal, realized across several movements rather than within just one. While a piece from the sonata genre does not require a sonata form movement, from the Classical period onwards they usually contained one, often, but not always, as the first movement. The generalized form continues with a slower second movement in a related key, and a fast third movement back in the original key. In the twentieth century, composers generally took one of three approaches to their use of the sonata genre: Neoclassical (and other more traditionalist) composers tended to react to Romanticism by looking backwards to Classical and Baroque models; others use the word in the original sense and preference absolute music over programmatic music; and Postmodern composers combine their own musical preferences with loose interpretations of what the sonata genre is.[10]

From the first group, Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953) and Hindemith stand out as composers who frequently used this genre. Prokofiev wrote ten piano sonatas in addition to sonatas for violin, cello, and flute. Hindemith wrote forty-two sonatas over the course of his career (many for underrepresented instruments). His allegiance to the New Simplicity school of thought is shown in his avoidance of what he saw as the excesses of the Romantic period.[11]

The second group includes pieces such as Stravinsky's Piano Sonata (1924) (which he stated was not related to genre as exemplified in the work of Clementi, Haydn, or Mozart), and Pierre Boulez' (1925–2016) third Piano Sonata (1955–1957).[12] The latter subverts expectations of a sonata by using open form (where a performer picks the order in which certain musical elements occur). This would create a serious problem with a Classical sonata, since the underlying tensions that give the piece its momentum would be destroyed. Boulez overcomes this hurdle with an intricately designed pathway that means that no matter which order a performer plays elements, each section is played once and forms a cohesive whole.[13] In this way mathematics becomes the force behind the structure of the piece, carefully creating tension and release while giving the performer agency within the performance.

The third group of sonatas is the most likely to contain subversion, as that is one of the hallmarks of Post-Modernism. One representative composer is Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998), who juxtaposed various quotations from different stylistic periods in works such as his Violin Sonata No. 2 (1967–68). Rather than using traditional means to create tension, this juxtaposition causes a kind of cognitive dissonance in the listener as they are thrown from one century to another without any preamble.

The three groups create a continuum from traditional use to transformational use, with the Neo-Classical composers at one end and the Post-Modern composers at the other. Despite their

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[10] Thomas Schmidt-Beste, *The Sonata* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 158
[11] Ibid, 162.
[12] Ibid, 165–67.
[13] Ibid, 167.

differences, however, each is using the sonata genre to find musical solutions to the problem of large-scale tension and release.

Case Study 2: Prokofiev, Seventh Piano Sonata

Prokofiev (1891–1953) was a Russian composer who worked in many different forms and genres. Much of his work falls under the general stylistic label of Neoclassicism, which he helped to invent.[14] His Piano Sonata no. 7 is one of his most well-known works, and subverts genre expectations in a number of different ways, particularly in the first movement (A-R Online Music Anthology: http://www.armusicanthology.com/anthology/?music_id=636). This movement not only stretches the definition of tonality to a breaking point (it is nominally in B-flat major), but also the dialectic properties of the sonata form.

The first movement presents fragmented motives that are held together by the thin texture they all share and a sense of metric stability. Even though Prokofiev subverts this meter at times with accents placed on weak beats, for the vast majority of this first section a listener can feel the 6/8 pulse. This stability erodes in the secondary theme zone, where the composer regularly switches between 6/8 and 9/8 and lowers the tempo from the brisk *Allegro inquieto* of the opening to a more placid (but still unsettled) *Andantino*. In addition, he writes in many tempo fluctuations from the quick *ritard* in m. 143 to the long accelerando, which leads into and blurs the beginning of the development. While Prokofiev does occasionally change the meter for the development section, for the most part he leaves it in 6/8. He also is mostly concerned with juxtaposing materials from the opening of the piece, perhaps leading the listener to assume that the primary theme zone has become the more prominent of the two. That assumption is severely challenged by the beginning of the recapitulation, which presents the secondary theme zone first, subverting the listener's expectations. The secondary theme zone has been changed, however, to have much less metric instability, with only two short moments in 6/8. Prokofiev has also adjusted it to more closely reflect the tenor of the opening with more of an emphasis on driving rhythms. This is how the conflict between the first and second theme zones resolves. The second theme zone ultimately acquires sufficient aspects of the primary theme zone to represent both. The primary theme zone does come back, but as it is presented as a coda to the work it provides an explosive ending rather than fulfilling the expectations of sonata form.

The second and third movements (A-R Online Music Anthology: http://www.armusicanthology.com/anthology/?music_id=637 and http://www.armusicanthology.com/anthology/?music_id=638) use form in a more normal way. However, while the second movement starts slowly and melodically (although in the distant key of E Major, a tritone away from the first and third movement's B-flat major), it builds into an intensely chromatic climax before returning to the opening theme. In this movement, Prokofiev plays with the listener's expectations of tonality. By first moving a tritone away from his original key, and then dissolving that key, the composer disrupts the tonal continuity between the movements far more than had been done in previous centuries, where the most common movement was by a fifth or fourth, or, less frequently, a third. The third movement is the most

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[14] Dorothea Redepenning, "Prokofiev, Sergey," in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed 29 September 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22402.

traditional with a toccata-like feel and an arch form. Prokofiev resolves the tension created by the tonal and structural differences between the first and second movements and allows a clearer enunciation of B-flat major both at the beginning and the return of the A section at m. 127. He closes the sonata with a B-flat major scale and arpeggio, thus affirming the key and resolving any remaining tension.

This sonata, like much of Prokofiev's work, takes ideas from the past and transforms and subverts them. On the large scale, the movement from B-flat to E to B-flat again combined with the tonal uncertainty throughout creates a large amount of harmonic tension. The subversions of the norms of sonata form in the first movement contribute to this tension. Prokofiev follows the conventional form and genre structure, yet transforms both enough to serve his purposes in this innovative work.

Case Study 3: Gubaidulina, *Rejoice!* Sonata for Violin and Violoncello
Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931) is a Russian composer known for her use of short, chromatic ideas, and the incorporation and representation of religion in her works. Despite living behind the Iron Curtain for much of her life, Gubaidulina's music often references Western culture in addition to incorporating materials from her native country.[15] The inspiration for *Rejoice!* (1981) comes from two sources. The first is the Western mass, each part of which (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) is represented in one of the five movements.[16] The second comes from the teachings of Grigory Skovoroda, a philosopher who lived in the eighteenth century in what is now Ukraine.[17] These teachings provide the subtitles for the movements ("your joy no man taketh from you," "rejoice with them that do rejoice," "rejoice, rabbi," "and he returned into his house," and "listen to the still small voice within").[18] Because of these two disparate sources of inspiration, the ideas of a Jewish philosopher in a genre derived from Christian liturgy, the piece is a characteristic blend of Russian and Western ideas.

Rejoice!, a sonata for violin and violoncello, contains some expected structural aspects from the sonata genre. For instance, each movement has its own character, creating tension through contrast. What is more unusual and transformative is the fact that each of these movements is based on three motivic ideas from the first movement (see example 3), and functions as a whole like a modified sonata form. The first of the three motives is simply a step down where the first note is shorter than the second. Usually, this is a whole-step, but sometimes Gubaidulina uses a half-step, especially at the end of passages (for instance, m. 30 in the first movement). There is an alternate version of motive A where it steps up, but this is found much less frequently. Motive B is a quintuplet that creates a four-note chromatic cluster. As Gubaidulina develops this motive through the piece it occasionally becomes a sextuplet, and sometimes covers five instead of four

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[15] Valentina Kholopova, "Gubaydulina, Sofiya Asgatovna," in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online* (New York: Oxford University Press), accessed 29 September 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/ article/grove/music/11911.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Laurel Fay, liner notes to *Dmitri Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 15, Op. 144/Sofia Gubaidulina: Rejoice! For Violin and Cello*, Gidon Kremer, Daniel Phillips, Kim Kashkashian, Yo-Yo Ma. Sony Music, CD, 1989.
[18] Ibid.

chromatic pitches. The third motive is simply a *glissando*. The first movement introduces these motives one at a time. The first page of music, around thirty-three measures, is dedicated to the presentation of motive A, interspersed with high harmonics in the violin. The pattern of pitches that Gubaidulina chooses creates two different and opposing harmonic frameworks. The first, created by the harmonics, only uses the notes G-sharp, E, and B. This outlines the E Major triad. The other notes that are derived from motive A follow a pattern from C-sharp to G-sharp that stays within the A Major scale. The line returns to A frequently, which reinforces this tonal impression. The juxtaposition of A Major and E Major in a way hearkens to the requirements for harmonic conflict that are expected in a sonata form.

Example 3. Three generative motives from Gubaidulina's *Rejoice!*

Motive A   Motive B   Motive C

At the end of the first page, the composer presents motive C in the violin and then, in m. 36, in the cello. This leads into the first statement of motive B, which Gubaidulina then juxtaposes with motive C for the rest of the movement. Because of the separation of motives A and B, which are used most often during the entire piece, this movement has the feeling of an expository structure. This feeling is reinforced by the way Gubaidulina develops the motives in the second and third movements, culminating in the fourth (conveniently titled "and he returned into his house") where motives B and C are absent. Motive A is played in the violin against a backdrop of continuous harmonics in the cello. This movement therefore has a strong tie to the first page of the first movement, and functions as a kind of recapitulation.

The fifth movement features all three motives, but with a prevalence of motive B. Gubaidulina features long descents in the cello that create the five note chromatic patterns over a much larger scale (see mm. 4–28 for an example). Other aspects of the first movement are brought back in the fifth, such as the hints of tonality amongst all the chromaticism. The violin starting in m. 81 features major scales one after the other, their tonic notes rising chromatically. Gubaidulina begins with F Major, and moves chromatically all the way to D Major.[19] Finally, at the end of the piece, the A motive reestablishes dominance, punctuated with glissandi.

In terms of the dialectic force of a sonata, this piece ends in a very satisfying way. The return of the much more gentle motive A releases the tension that is built up by the more chromatic and fast-paced motive B. The way that Gubaidulina builds her entire sonata out of three short ideas transforms the genre from the Romantic period with its proliferation of themes into something more concise without sacrificing the dialectic power of the piece.

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[19] From the first movement, then, there is a hidden progression from E and A to D, following the circle of fifths.

Symphony

While traditional symphonic genre pieces share some features of the sonata genre, including tonal structure and general formal expectations, the symphony is likely to have an added movement: the minuet and trio (later the scherzo and trio). This (originally) dance-like movement, usually in triple meter, provides another layer of inherent conflict, this time metric in nature.[20] There is also a larger timbral palette available to composers with an entire orchestra available to them, and by the twentieth century, they were using the instruments in new and sometimes unprecedented ways. For instance, the use of percussion became much more prevalent as the century unfolded. A symphony from the previous centuries would likely have had timpani and perhaps bass drum, snare drum, and cymbals. Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) added a host of innovative timbres such as the sleigh-bells in his Fourth Symphony (1899–1901), and the ominous hammer in his Sixth Symphony (1903–1904). By the time John Corigliano (b. 1938) wrote his First Symphony (1990), the amount of percussion available to a composer had exploded.[21] Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and Stravinsky used instruments outside their usual range in their orchestral works. An example of this is the flute in Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1894) (A-R Music Anthology: http://www.armusicanthology.com/anthology/?music_id=625), which Debussy uses in an unusually low range for the warm and breathy timbre this offers.

In terms of the genre in the twentieth century, it is useful to distinguish between subversion and transformation of structure versus content. Christopher Ballantine, in his book *Twentieth Century Symphony*, makes this distinction, further breaking down the categories into composers who were conservative in their innovation versus those who were more radical.[22] He mentions Webern's Symphony Op. 21 (see Case Study 1) as innovative in both categories.[23] In terms of form, Ballantine considers Webern's two movement piece to be a radical reimagining, writing that within the complex second movement (which is presented as a set of variations), many of the stylistic differences that an audience would expect from a four-movement symphony are present.[24] In terms of content, Ballantine suggests that using a single tone-row for an entire symphony presents a monistic work, rather than approaching the duality that generally marks symphonic writing.[25] Other composers have also made bold strides in the realms of content and structure. For instance, Michael Tippett (1905–1998) created blocks of sound that he juxtaposed to create conflict in his Third Symphony (1970–1972) rather than relying on previous forms or themes. He also makes use of quotation (in this case, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony), and references to popular music (the second movement is set in a blues form). In this way, he too transcends the boundaries of both content and structure.

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[20] There were certainly metric differences in the three movements of the sonata genre, but they were less prescribed.
[21] This piece includes glockenspiel, crotales, vibraphone, xylophone, marimba, two sets of chimes, snare drum, three tom-toms, three roto-toms, field drum, tenor drum, two bass drums, suspended cymbal, tamtam, finger cymbals, three temple blocks, tambourine, anvil, metal plate with hammer, brake drum, triangle, flexatone, police whistle, whip, and ratchet. John Corigliano, *Symphony no. 1 for Orchestra* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1990), 2.
[22] Ballantine, 7.
[23] Ballantine, 112, 194–202.
[24] Ibid, 112.
[25] Ibid, 194.

The symphonic genre is still largely governed by the musical dialog between tension and release. The way that composers realize that duality imbues their music with personality. Webern's condensed and canonic writing gives his symphony a very different aural signature than Tippett's with his juxtaposed blocks of sound and sometimes jarring quotations, yet both symphonies still work on the same principle: that of tension and release.

Case Study 4: Berio, *Sinfonia*
While many symphonies exist in which the composer subverts formal and content expectations, none have interacted with the genre in the same way and with as much personality as Luciano Berio's (1925–2003) *Sinfonia* (1968–69). Written for large orchestra with eight amplified voices, this piece straddles the conventional boundary between Modernism and Postmodernism. While Berio remains concerned with creating aggregates and using pitch structures that preserve intervallic content, he also writes with the self-referentiality, humor, and quotations that are frequently hallmarks of Postmodern work.[26] The most famous part of the piece is the immense third movement, where the scherzo from Mahler's Symphony no. 2 is overlapped in a collage with quotations from many other works, including Debussy's *La Mer*, Ravel's *La Valse*, and Stravinsky's *Agon*. Berio uses this movement to comment on and "analyze" Mahler's work.[27] In addition, he layers quotes from Samuel Beckett's *The Unnameable* and his own writings to pose a question about the purpose of art, which is left unanswered (for the moment). The form of the work is driven partly by Mahler's scherzo, but more by the absence or masking of that scherzo by the other quotations or large chromatic clusters.[28] While this movement is fascinating, and has inspired many analyses, the other movements also have a relationship to both the symphonic genre in general and Mahler's Symphony no. 2 in particular, suggesting that the entire *Sinfonia* is a deconstruction and subversion of the symphony.

The first movement of *Sinfonia* is very different than the third. Berio uses quotations from Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Le cru et le cui*, a Structuralist work that traces the origins of and links between the creation stories of various South American tribes. This movement is marked by re-initializations, where Berio restarts the movement in some way, usually by returning to the opening two chords.[29] These new beginnings could also reference the re-initializations of the Scherzo (the third of five movements) of Mahler's Symphony, where a chromatic line that expands each time it is heard ushers in new versions of the A section. In addition, the chord that Berio uses most frequently during the movement is a C minor triad with a major seventh. While it would be wrong to say that the work is tonal, the constant presence of C minor helps to prepare for and refer to Mahler's Symphony, which is in the same key. Other similarities include Berio's reuse of previously written material in the second movement, where he transforms his previous

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[26] Aggregates are collections of all twelve pitches. Post-serial composers often use unordered aggregates to create the same kind of pitch equality that was appealing to serial composers.
[27] David Osmond-Smith, *Playing on Words: A Guide to Luciano Berio's* Sinfonia (London: Royal Musical Association, 1985), 39. This book contains a thorough examination of all the quotations used in the third movement.
[28] Ibid, 44–45.
[29] Matthew Heap, "Keep Going: Narrative Continuity in Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* AND *Dillinger: An American Oratorio*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 7–10.

work (*O King*), and the opening of the fourth movement. The transformation and use of previous work can be found throughout Mahler's oeuvre, but in this Symphony, the Scherzo is a fleshed-out version of one of Mahler's songs (*Der Fischpredigt*) and the Trio borrows from the Scherzo of Mahler's colleague Hans Rott's Symphony in E Major.[30] The fourth movement of the Mahler begins with the text "O Röschen rot!" ("Oh little red rose") moving from D-flat to E-flat, and finally to F (in D-flat major), and Berio's uses the words "Rose de sang" ("rose of blood") while oscillating between the D-flat and E-flat (the F that completes the gesture appears in the fifth movement). The final movements of both the Berio and Mahler works reincorporate music from the previous movements, with Berio's bringing back the entirety of the second movement and treating it with the same collage techniques as he used with Mahler's Scherzo in the third movement.

Sinfonia follows the dialectic nature of the symphonic genre, but is transformed by the addition of text and musical quotations, which both serve to increase the inherent tension. The climax of the third movement asks what the purpose of art is in a deeply pessimistic way. The fifth movement answers this question by suggesting that art grants immortality.[31] This is musically represented by the revival of material from other movements. It is, perhaps, no surprise that the Mahler work that Berio chose to anchor his piece is subtitled "Resurrection." Berio uses Mahler's composition as a starting point to explore new realms of sound.[32] The structure and ideas that Mahler uses underlie all the movements of *Sinfonia*, but they are employed in an original and transformative way.

String Quartet

As with the symphony and sonata, composers found new ways to transcend the genre of the string quartet in the twentieth century. The struggle to capture the tension and release that was inherently present in the structure of the Classical string quartet is a consuming question. Some composers stuck closely to tradition, while others transformed the genre beyond recognition.

Two representatives of the first group are Elliot Carter (1908–2012) and Elizabeth Machonchy (1907–1994). Machonchy produced thirteen string quartets during her life that start out fairly traditionally and move on to break down some of the formal boundaries of the genre.[33] Her Third Quartet (1938) is in one continuously developing movement where a few ideas presented at the beginning provide the generative material for the rest of the piece.[34] Carter takes on the problem of creating conflict in a couple of different ways. His second string quartet is set in nine sections (four main movements with an introduction and cadenzas) without a break, so the audience really only perceives one large movement. The first way that Carter inserts tension into this structure is through metric modulation, where he provides a rhythm whose length stays constant

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[30] Stephen McClatchie, "Hans Rott, Gustav Mahler and the 'New Symphony': New Evidence for a Pressing Question," *Music and Letters* 81, no. 3 (2000): 396.
[31] Heap, 6.
[32] It could also relate to the si-placate practices from the Renaissance.
[33] Kenneth Gloag, "The String Quartet in the Twentieth Century" in *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, ed. Robin Stowell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 279.
[34] Ibid, 279.

across a tempo change (see example 4).[35] This has the same kind of effect as a pivot chord, smoothing the way through a modulation between one key and another, and just as opposing keys create conflict, so do opposing tempi.

Example 4. Metric modulation.

these two notes have
equal lengths
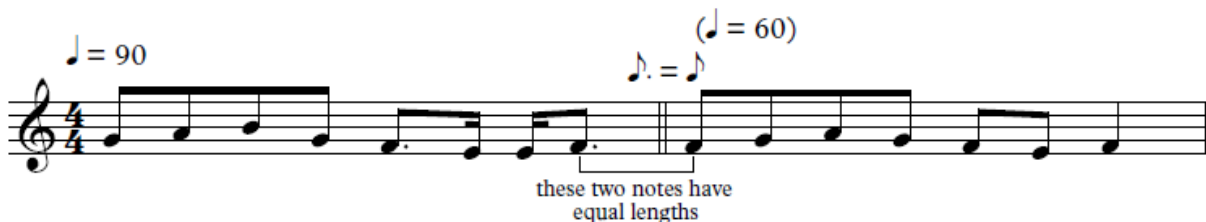
Another way that Carter creates drama in his string quartet is through the use of characterizations for the different instruments. David Schiff calls the first violin "fantastic, ornate, [and] mercurial," while the second violin is "laconic, orderly, [and] sometimes humorous." The viola is "expressive" while the cello is "impetuous."[36] By assigning each instrument a set of intervals, Carter further accentuates the differences in character. The string quartet then imagines these characters in conversation with each other. Just as in a play, drama is generated through the interactions between these instruments. In this way, Carter is able to subvert the form but keep the music moving forward.

Two composers who transform the genre beyond recognition are George Crumb (b. 1929) and Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007). Crumb's string quartet *Black Angels* (1971) consists of thirteen movements. While this is certainly unusual, the timbral aspects of Crumb's work set it apart from other string quartets. One of the most identifiable features of this genre is the fairly homogenous nature of the string instruments. Composers have used techniques such as *pizzicato* and *col legno* to create timbral difference but Crumb takes this idea to a new level.[37] One change he makes is to call for "electric string quartet," which certainly opens up many timbral possibilities. He uses many extended techniques, including playing with thimbles and using a glass rod to create effects on the strings. Finally, he includes percussion instruments for the string players to play. All of these together transform the audience's understanding of what a string quartet should sound like, and the juxtaposition of different timbres builds tension within the piece. Stockhausen's *Helicopter String Quartet* is a stand-alone piece but also a scene from his opera *Mittwoch aus Licht*. In this piece, the four string players are flown in four separate helicopters. They can hear each other through a headset, and are broadcast to the audience on camera and by a microphone in the helicopter and one on the rotors. Stockhausen's concept is that the sound of the rotor as the helicopter flies will mix with the strings, creating a totally new timbre. As with Crumb, Stockhausen uses innovative (perhaps a little audacious) technology to subvert our expectations.

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[35] In Carter's music, the tempo relations can be quite complex, leading to fractional tempi such as 90.3 beats per minute.

[36] Ibid, 308.

[37] *Pizzicato* means to pluck the string and *col legno* means to play with the wood of the bow rather than the hair.

Whether a composer takes a traditional route to the composition of a string quartet, or attempts to transform the genre, as with symphonies and sonatas, they must find a way to create musical tension and release.

Case Study 5: Schoenberg, Second String Quartet
Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) is perhaps best known for his creation of the twelve-tone technique, but earlier in his career he was still pushing the boundaries of tonality and writing in a late-Romantic style. His String Quartet no. 2 (1908) is a transitional piece between his use of tonality and atonality. It starts out with a fairly usual first movement that begins and ends in F-sharp minor, even while it deviates extensively in interior sections. The second movement is also basically tonal and quotes a Viennese popular song, "Ach du lieber Augustin"[38] This quotation is part of a series of what Severine Neff calls "intrusions" into this second movement, where there are three separate and very distinct themes that Schoenberg juxtaposes to create a sense of unease.[39] The introduction of the "Augustin" song into the movement at the end of the trio is particularly shocking because of its simple tonal structure. The effect of this is to highlight the fact that the rest of the movement severely strains the borders of tonality.

Schoenberg continues to undermine both the tonality and even the audience's sense of what a string quartet is in the third movement. The most obvious deviation from the genre norm is the addition of a singer and text to both this movement and the fourth. It is almost as if the introduction of a (played) song in the second movement paves the way for actual singing in the following movements. Schoenberg also continues to break down the sense of tonality. He begins the movement in E-flat minor, but by the time of the climax in m. 58 he uses every chromatic pitch except for C, B-flat, and B-natural (see example 5). This point of maximum dissonance moves to a slightly more consonant chord, containing the pitches G-flat, B-flat, C, E, and G-natural. Schoenberg does not use a dominant-function chord for the rest of the movement, causing upheavals in the audience's perception of consonance and dissonance.

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[38] Severine Neff, "Juxtaposing Popular Music in Schoenberg's Second String Quartet, Op. 10," in *Schoenberg's Chamber Music, Schoenberg's World*, ed. James K. Wright and Alan M. Gillmor (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2009), 65
[39] Ibid, 91.

Example 5. Schoenberg, String Quartet no. 2 (1908). Reduction of mvt. 3, mm.58–59.

This trend away from tonality is fully-realized in the last movement. Here, Schoenberg uses patterns of intervals (sometimes called "intervallic cells," and analyzable with set class theory) to keep any pitch from feeling like tonic. For instance, he creates the aggregate within the first fifteen notes of the piece. He repeats the opening cello gesture, which contains eight unique pitches, in the viola transposed up a perfect fifth. He continues using the complete gesture and fragments of that gesture in different transpositions to give form to the movement. This is the same technique that Schoenberg develops in other pieces from a few years later in his career, including *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). The movement ends with an F-sharp major chord, which completes the tonal arc of the piece, but there is no conventional preparation for this chord. Instead, Schoenberg presents a perfect fifth built on the low D of the cello, with a high G-sharp in the violin.[40] He adds an intervallic pattern that is derived from the opening of the piece to this sonority in both the cello and second violin (see example 6, bracketed notes). By the beginning of m. 154 all twelve chromatic pitches are included with the exception of F/E-sharp. Schoenberg may have omitted this note because it would sound like a leading tone into the key of F-sharp major and throughout this movement he has studiously avoided tonal implications. The shift from late-Romantic tonality in the first movement to interval-based atonality in the last seems shocking on paper, but the way in which Schoenberg handles it, including his use of the very tonal "Augustin" in the second movement, eases the listener into the complete chromatic language of the fourth.

Example 6. Schoenberg, String Quartet no. 2. Reduction of mvt. 4, mm. 152–156.

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[40] There is a correlation between this moment and the climax of the third movement, making long-range connections based on that mediant relationship.

Overall, Schoenberg's Second String Quartet is a masterpiece of subverting and transforming expectations of what a string quartet should be. The inclusion of voice to add dramatic and poetic content and the shift away from tonality within the framework of an F-sharp minor/major tonal structure mark this composition as an important part of Schoenberg's development and the development of the string quartet in general.

Opera

Of all the genres mentioned in this article, opera has the least prescribed formal architecture because of its programmatic nature. It has become somewhat difficult to define due to crossover potential with musical theater and an increase in multimedia elements. Traditional opera tends to have arias, recitatives, and ensemble pieces, and that tradition continues into the twentieth century. As with string quartets, composers fall into two categories here: those who transform the genre while keeping some of the general norms, and those who challenge an audience's expectation of what opera is.

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) is a good representative from the first category. While his opera *Peter Grimes* (1945) skews to the more conservative end of the spectrum, his use of the rhythm of spoken language to subvert the sense of recitative is very surprising. Britten wrote that he wanted to "restore to the musical setting of the English language a brilliance, freedom, and vitality that have been curiously rare since the death of Purcell."[41] His goal was to bring out the inherent musicality of the language, even if that meant using "unnatural stresses."[42] His writing does not have the general declamatory nature of recitative, instead being as tuneful and memorable as the arias. Alban Berg's (1885–1935) *Wozzeck* (1914–22), on the other hand, dispenses with the traditional arias and recitatives of earlier operas, instead casting each scene as a different Common Practice form (including sonata, theme and variations, and fugue).[43] This, along with the extensive use of *leitmotifs*, lends the opera a strong sense of structure that helps the audience navigate the thorny musical language.

A composer from the second category is Philip Glass (b. 1937). He has written several operas, but the most well-known is *Einstein on the Beach*. In this opera, Glass and his collaborator, Robert Wilson (b.1941), eschew traditional narrative to present a series of disjunct scenes where ensemble members make slow, stylized movements to Glass' minimalist score. Another opera that is presented as a collection of juxtaposed set-pieces is Stockhausen's *Mittwoch aus Licht* (*Wednesday from Light*) (1992–98), which is part of an epic seven opera cycle, one for each day of the week. This particular opera features the aforementioned *Helicopter String Quartet* as one of its movements, and has a singing camel as a main character. These two operas work because the music is so cohesive that it guides the audience through the fractured narrative. For instance, in *Einstein on the Beach*, the processes that Glass employs to create his music are clear to the audience and so imbue a kind of order to the proceedings. The use of these processes continues

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[41] Arved Ashby, "*Peter Grimes* and the 'Tuneful Air'" in *Rethinking Britten*, ed. Philip Rupprecht (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64.
[42] Ibid, 64.
[43] Anthony Pople, *The Cambridge Companion to Berg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 148.

in the operas written by minimalist composers, although more recently they tend to be used as an underpinning for the vocal parts. John Adams' (b. 1947) opera *Doctor Atomic* (2005) makes use of minimalist techniques in orchestral interludes, and sometimes as part of the accompaniment, but the vocal lines hew to more traditional melodies.[44] They are more angular than in Romantic opera, but the way the text is set is much closer to that style than to *Einstein on the Beach*.

Case Study 6: Brecht/Weill, ***The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*** **and Stravinsky/Auden,** ***The Rake's Progress***

While Schoenberg inserted a popular folk song into his Second String Quartet, librettist Berthold Brecht (1898–1956) and composer Kurt Weill (1900–1950) frequently incorporated songs composed in popular styles into their operas. The most famous of these is "Mack the Knife" from *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). However, the slightly later *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930) shows a maturing of this style that juxtaposes this kind of popular writing with much more dissonant material to great effect. This opera falls within the first category outlined above. Brecht and Weill are most interested in subverting the opera from within traditional boundaries rather than reinventing the genre.

The second scene of this opera demonstrates the juxtaposition of Modernist dissonance and popular consonance. Opening with a pedal tone in the bass that strongly suggests C major/minor, Weill invokes a kind of polytonality by using a chord that could be read as Fm7 followed by a misspelled B major triad with an added flattened-ninth (a dissonant chord by itself, as shown in example 7). The intersection of these three different and opposing tonalities creates an unsettled opening to the scene. By the time the chorus arrives, Weill has switched to a much more conventional tonality. The bass now agrees with the rest of the orchestra by emphasizing G major, the voice leading creates a chromatic descent often found in musical theater, and the rhythm becomes reminiscent of a German nightclub piece. The voice soars above this accompaniment with a catchy tune and somewhat nonsensical lyrics that provides a startling contrast to the dissonance of the opening.[45] The verse/chorus form of the scene adds to the impression that this is a popular song, but with oddly chosen harmony during the verses. This subverts the audience's expectation of what an opera should be, especially after a fairly standard first scene.

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[44] The aria "Batter my heart three person'd God" that ends Act I of *Doctor Atomic* is a moving example of the intersection of more traditional operatic writing for the voice and minimalist textures in the orchestra.

[45] The words might have been even more nonsensical to early audiences since they were in English whereas the rest of the opera was in German.

Example 7. Weill, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930). Examples of harmony in Scene 2.

On the large-scale level, the second scene along with the kick-line-esque ending to the eleventh scene stand in stark contrast to the nineteenth, which comes near the end of the opera.[46] This scene, where the main character has been sentenced to death, contains some of the most stark music of the piece. The tenor sings against a single accompanying line that never comes to a satisfying cadence that would clarify the key. At the climax of the scene, Weill writes an F minor triad with a B major triad above it, creating a dissonant polychord. These are the same two chords he uses in the opening of the second song (see example 6), which ties the more Modernist aspect of that song together with the basically atonal climax of the opera. In this way, both at the micro- and macrocosmic levels, Weill and Brecht subvert the audience's expectations of what opera should be, veering from music hall songs to Modernist harmony within a few bars and over the course of the entire work.

While Brecht and Weill turn to contemporary music from the popular and concert spheres in *Mahagonny*, Igor Stravinsky and W.H. Auden (1907–1973) reinvent the operas of the past in their work *The Rake's Progress* (1951).[47] Using the story told by a series of eight paintings by William Hogarth (1697–1764) with the same name, which tells of a young man (Tom Rakewell in the opera) who inherits money and loses it all while becoming increasingly debauched. They add a further level of allegory to the tale by creating the character of Nick Shadow, ostensibly a manservant but actually the devil, who leads Tom astray. This opera takes its cues from Classical opera, most notably Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte*, and is considered to be the highpoint of neo-classicism in opera.[48] Some, such as Pierre Boulez, have denigrated this opera. He wrote that "It is basically wrong, simply that. It is wrong because there is a composer who does not know what to do any more."[49] Others, such as Geoffery Chow, suggest that there is more sophistication here than first meets the eye. Chow writes about the work as a "parody" rather than a pastiche, in this case using Massimo Mila's definition of parody as a "rethinking of a past style as…a mask to disguise the secrets of the inner life: to disguise them, not suppress or hide them" rather than "the

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[46] The eleventh scene demonstrates the subversive power of this opera. The music is anthemic and almost requires a kick-line from the choreographer, yet the lyrics tell of how the world will not help you, telling the audience that they can take a beating or they can stand up and beat people themselves. The same principle is at work in "Mack the Knife" where the fun, upbeat song tells the story of a serial killer.

[47] Chester Kallman (1921–1975) was also involved in the creation of the libretto.

[48] Chris Walton, "Neo-Classical Opera" in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 119–20.

[49] Ibid, 121.

burlesque imitation of a style in order to poke fun at serious works."[50] This means that Stravinsky is using the music styles and structure of past operas to provide a framework that he can transform for dramatic purposes. For instance, there are tensions created throughout the work by different subversions of audience expectations. One of these is found in Stravinsky's text setting. Some have criticized Stravinsky's setting of the English language with odd accents and disjointed prosody, but Chris Walton argues that this feature is intended to make the allusions to the eighteenth century seem more pronounced.[51] Another subversion is found in the musical language. Chow argues that the interplay of tonal music, often in the style of Mozart, and atonal (or extremely chromatic) music create a system of oppositions that keep the music fresh. He points to the graveyard scene, where the music switches back and forth based not only on the character, but also on the dramatic action.[52] Tom's music starts out as dense and chromatic but changes to a simple diatonicism when he chooses the card that saves his life, while Nick's music takes the opposite path from simple to complex.[53] Stravinsky's subversions serve to take an old operatic structure and breathe new life into it, revitalizing it for the twentieth century.

Conclusion

As a survey of the ways that composers subverted and transformed form and genre in the twentieth century, this article has necessarily elided some major topics. Art Song in the twentieth century remained as popular as it had been in the nineteenth. Composers like Schoenberg with his *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) and, later in the century, Peter Maxwell Davies (1934–2016) with his *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) redefined what the song cycle could be. Chamber music grew stronger (partly with the adoption of the Pierrot Ensemble), leading to an outpouring of rich yet intimate music.[54] Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* uses innovative rhythmic and pitch techniques to create a new kind of structure based on the perception of time.[55]

Regardless of the form, the challenge that many twentieth century composers had to face was how to replace the tension and release that was the hallmark of common-practice harmony. The solutions they came up with ranged from fairly traditional to wildly innovative and disruptive to the audience's expectations of various forms and genres. From the dissolution of narrative in opera to the reimagining of the sonata form, subversion and transformation occurred on both the small and large-scale in this music, and while some composers still stick with the older traditions, most are forging on into an uncharted musical landscape where tension is generated by shocking juxtapositions, metric and tempo operations, quotation, popular influences, and the use of unusual timbres. The twentieth century may have ended only a few years ago, but the ripples from its experimental and innovative musicians are still affecting new generations of composers and performers.

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[50] Geoffery Chew, "Pastoral and Neoclassicism: A Reinterpretation of Auden's and Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress*" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5, no. 3 (1993): 256.

[51] Walton, 120. Prosody refers to the pattern of accents in language. Composers are usually careful to line up accented syllables with stronger beats.

[52] Chow, 262.

[53] Ibid, 262.

[54] This ensemble is made up of flute, clarinet, piano, violin, cello and, usually, percussion.

[55] Some of these techniques, such as isorhythm, originate in the fourteenth century.

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