

Chapter 9: On the Sections and Caesuras of Musical Rhetoric

1. This theory on incisions, which one also calls distinctiones, interpunctationes, posituras, etc., is the most essential in the whole art of composing melody, and is called diastolica in Greek; however, it is so neglected that hitherto only the smallest rule has been given thereupon or the slightest instruction; indeed, one does not even find it in the most recent musical dictionaries.
2. Some years ago a great German poet thought he had made the unique discovery that music is almost exactly the same in this regard as rhetoric. How amazing! Musical masters, especially those who want to and should instruct others in composition, should really be ashamed that they have been so negligent with these things: for though here and there one or another of them may have come upon salutary thoughts, purely from common sense: the good gentlemen have as yet remained only on the periphery and have not been able to penetrate to the central point, much less bring the thing to its proper technical form, neither overtly nor covertly.
3. Now in order to redress this deficiency as well as many others, even to some extent, we must go to the trouble to take up beloved grammar in a certain way, as well as esteemed rhetoric and worthy poetry: for without having the pertinent information on these fine disciplines in particular, one undertakes the work unaware of other endeavors, quite unprepared and virtually in vain.
5. Every idea, be it verbal or written, consists then in certain word-phrases, or periods; but every such phrase also consists in smaller caesuras up to the close with a period. A whole structure or paragraph is developed from such phrases, and from various of these paragraphs a main part or a chapter is finally developed. That very briefly is the stepwise outline or climax of all that which can really be spoken, written, sung, or played.
6. In melody, as in musical speech, we usually employ only one paragraph at a time, a whole structure and section, which commonly forms the bounds of an aria, and, as stated, must consist of and join together at least two different smaller sentences or short statements. Though occasionally there is an exception in pedagogy, if clarity requires it.
9. A period however, which we describe as a word-phrase in classifying it, is a brief statement which includes a complete idea or an entire verbal concept. Whatever does not do this but contains less is not a period, no sentence; and that which does more is a paragraph, section, or structure, which can consist of several periods, and by all rights should.
14. The concept of a period obliges me not to make a formal close in the melody before the sentence is finished. But the concept of a paragraph prohibits me from using a full cadence anywhere except at the end. Both cadences are formal: but the first is not full.

80. As now in the whole of nature and all creation not a single body can be properly understood without analysis: thus I want always to be the first who analyzes a melody and examines its parts in an orderly way. A little minuet is to serve first as an example here, so that everyone may see what such a little thing consists of, when it is not a monster....

81. If a melody of a minuet is only sixteen measures long ..., then it will have at least some commas, a semicolon, a few colons, and a few periods in its make-up. Many a person would scarcely think that; yet it is true.

82. At some places, if the melody is of the proper type, one can even clearly perceive the emphasis; not to mention the accents, question marks, etc., which are not lacking. The geometric relationship as well as the arithmetic are indispensable for melodies filled with motion, and gives them the proper measure and form. In the minuet here we want to show such an example, which can serve as a model for analysis of all the others.

83. Here now is a complete melodic paragraph (Paragraphus) of 16 measures, which become 48 if one performs them completely. This paragraph consists of two simple phrases or periods, which, like the following caesuras, are increased by a third of the whole, through repetition, and are marked with three points () under its final notes; though the conclusion of the whole, as the final period, is indicated with the sign

84. In this paragraph there is not only a colon or member; but also a semicolon, or half member: Which one can recognize by their usual signs set under the notes. One also encounters three commas, which become nine, and which are indicated with the familiar little comma. But the threefold emphasis has been indicated with just that many asterisks. The geometric proportion is 4 here, as always with good dance melodies, and there are this many little crosses as indicators. The rhythms of the first and second measures are used again in the fifth and sixth. The other ones, stated later in the ninth and tenth measures, are heard again immediately in the eleventh and twelfth, wherefrom arithmetic uniformity springs. And that is the entire analysis in eight parts: The first determines the 2 periods; The second the colon; The third a semicolon; The fourth the 9 commas; The fifth the emphasis; The sixth the geometric; The seventh the arithmetic proportion; and finally the eighth the final cadence.

Joseph Riepel, *Anfangsgründe zur musicalischen Setzkunst*, Sämtliche Schriften zur Musiktheorie, vol. 1, ed. Thomas Emmerig. Vienna-Cologne-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1996, 21. [1755]

Teacher: Now, tell me, do you have ideas and thoughts in your head, in order to put them down on paper?

Student: Oh, sure, if I could only provide a bass for them.

Teacher: You should be able learn that from me in a single day. But I first want to know whether you have adequate knowledge of the proper organization of melody. For whoever wants to build houses must have the materials for the job.

Student: I would very soon like to compose several French dances, or so-called Menuets, in order to show you my skill.

Teacher: Well, it is no great honor to compose Menuets, but is, on the other hand, certainly diligent. However, since in its execution **a Menuet is no different than a concerto, an aria, or a symphony**, which you will see clearly in a few days, let us begin very modestly and carefully in order to achieve something larger and more praiseworthy from it.

Student: In my opinion there is nothing easier in the world than to compose a Menuet. Indeed I ventured to quickly write out a full dozen of them, one after the other.

Præc. Nun sage mir, hast du gute Einfälle und Gedanken im Kopfe, um solche zu Papiere zu bringen?

Disc. Ach ja, wenn ich nur den Baß darzu machen könnte.

Præc. Das sollst du in einem einzigen Tage von mir lernen. Jedoch will ich erstlich wissen, ob du eine hinlängliche Erkenntniß hast von der ordentlichen Eintheilung des Gesanges. Denn wer Häuser bauen will, muß die Materialien dazu haben.

Disc. Ich will also geschwind etliche Französische Tänze, oder sogenannte *Menuets* aufsetzen, um dir meine Fertigkeit zu zeigen.

Præc. Es ist zwar keine grosse Ehre, *Menuets* zu componiren, sondern eines theils wohl gar gewissenhaft. Da aber **ein Menuet**, der Ausführung nach, **nichts anders ist als ein Concert, eine Arie, oder Simphonie**; welches du in etlichen Tagen ganz klar sehen wirst; also wollen wir immer ganz klein und verächtlich damit anfangen, um nur bloß was grösseres und lobwürdigeres daraus zu erlangen.

Disc. Nach meinem Erachten ist auf der Welt nichts leichter zu componiren als ein *Menuet*; ja ich getraute mir flugs ein ganzes Duzend nacheinander herzuschreiben.

Johann Georg Sulzer, "Phrase," *General Theory of the Fine Arts* [*Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*], vol. 2 (1774), 35-36.

Phrase [Einschnitt]. The names that are attached to the larger and smaller segments of a melody are, up to now, still somewhat indefinite. We speak of periods [Perioden], sections [Abschnitten], phrases [Einschnitten], rhythms [Rhythmen], caesuras [Cäsuren], etc., in a way such that the same word occasionally has two meanings, or two different words occasionally have the same meaning. In this work, we will call those main segments of a melody that begin with a new tone and end with a perfect cadence Periods or Sections. They will be discussed in a separate article (cf. "Period"). The smaller segments that generally constitute the period, and are generally called rhythms, we will call Phrases. The smaller segments, brought about by brief pauses in the middle of phrases, we will call Caesuras. According to this nomenclature, a melody consists of periods, periods of phrases, [and] the phrases (when they are not simple) of caesuras.

Phrases in a melody [Gesang] are what the verse is in poetry. Each consists of a short series of exactly ordered tones, which the ear can group together and grasp at once as an indivisible segment. They must be designed such that there is no stop at any tone, nor a feeling of a pause, until we reach the last tone, at which the ear feels a noticeable break [Abfall].

Both [of these characteristics, perceptual immediacy and melodic continuity] are achieved by avoiding perfect consonances in the melody and triads in the harmony in the middle of the segment, at whose end, though, a small pause is made apparent by means of such consonances, or the triad, or also by means of cadences.

Since a phrase must be grasped at once as a single segment, it cannot exceed, therefore, a certain length; for at its end, its beginning must not yet be extinguished from our ear. In poetry, the longest verse is six feet because it was noticed that the ear cannot grasp any more feet at one time. The longest phrases of a melody are five, at most seven, measures long, and in this [latter] case they must have caesuras, just as do longer verses [in poetry]. The shortest verses have two feet, and the shortest phrases have two measures. Just as a series of many such short verses would soon become monotonous, however, so a melody of such short phrases would have no appeal. Those of four measures are the most common and best. We can also make them three measures long. If they are to sound good, though, two segments of three measures should always be linked so that, as phrases of six measures, they are felt as having a caesura in the middle. These [six-measure phrases] are suitable for triple meters.

Insofar as we consider merely the pleasant sound of the melody, phrases of equal length throughout the melody are the best. And such is the case in all dance melodies. Where some special expression of feeling is to be achieved, individual phrases that are longer or shorter than otherwise in the piece have a good effect.

Some foresight is required in order to design a melody so that, with respect to rhythmic arrangement, the ear is never offended. A comprehensive discussion about this would be too vast for this work and can rightly be passed over here since this matter has recently been more thoroughly discussed by a master of the art, to whom I refer the musical amateur.*

* Johann Phillip Kirnberger, *The Art of Strict Musical Composition*, 403-17.

Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *The Art of Strict Musical Composition*, trans. David Beach and Jurgen Thym. New Haven-London: Yale Univ. Press, 1982. *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*. Berlin-Königsberg, 1776-79, rep. Hildesheim: Olms, 1968.

from vol. 2, part 1, chap. 4 (page nos. in square brackets refer to the translation and Olms reprint, respectively)

On "Rhythm," defined as "a phrase or segment"

[403/137] The flow of the melody is divided into larger or smaller phrases [*Sätze*] by the rhythm...each of these phrases has its special meaning, like phrases in speech. ... [404] Anyone with an average ear will have noticed that the greatest power of melody comes from rhythm. It unites both the melody and the harmony of several measures into a single phrase that is immediately grasped by the ear; and several small phrases are again combined as a larger unit to form a complete sentence with a rest point at its end, which allows us to comprehend these individual phrases as a unit.

[404/138] In speech one comprehends the meaning only at the end of a sentence and is more or less satisfied by it depending on whether this meaning establishes a more or less complete statement. The same is true in music. Not until a succession of connected notes reaches a point of rest at which the ear is somewhat satisfied does it comprehend these notes as a small unit; before this, the ear perceives no meaning and is anxious to understand what this succession of notes really wants to say. However, if a noticeable break does occur after a moderately long succession of connected notes, which provides the ear with a small rest point and concludes the meaning of the phrase, then the ear combines all these notes into a comprehensible unit. This break or rest point can be achieved either by a complete cadence or simply by a melodic close with a restful harmony, without a close in the bass.

[405/138] The musical statement that is complete and ends with a formal cadence we will call a *section* [*Abschnitt*] or *period* [*Periode*]; but the incomplete one that ends only with a melodic break or a satisfying harmony we will call a *phrase* [*Einschnitt*] or a *rhythmic unit* [*Rhythmus*]. One can easily understand that every good melody must consist of various periods and these in turn of several phrases.

[405/139] A musical period, then, is a succession of connected notes that concludes with a complete or formal cadence. ... A series of such periods, none of which but the last closes in the main [406] key, forms a single composition.

[416/151] Everthing that I have said to this point about rhythm concerns its external and somewhat mechanical nature. Now I must say something about its internal nature. [152] The invention of a single melodic unit or phrase which is an intelligible statement from the language of sentiments and which produces in the sensitive listener the frame of mind that has generated it is simply a work of genius and cannot be taught. [417] ...since the entire rhythmic character of a piece is generally more the result of a refined sensitivity than a definite theory, I advise young composers to play diligently through the works of the greatest masters in order to acquire the feeling for this important aspect of composition.

Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon*. Frankfurt, 1802; rep. Hildesheim: Olms, 1964. [ML108 K6 1964]

Period

A coined word which is borrowed from rhetoric and designates the unification of different phrases (*Sätze*), i.e. of different, individual melodic segments which designate a complete thought [*Sinn*] through their unification, and represents an idea, or rather the expression of a feeling [*Empfindung*], to a certain degree of completeness. Just as in an oration a period ends with a perfect resting point of the mind, which we indicate in writing with a dot, in music the period must close with the most perfect resting point of the mind, which we call a cadence. People do not seem to be completely of one opinion about this definition of the period, for often many only call a period such a segment of an entire composition which indicates a complete thought, and which we call a sentence in language.

The deficiency of this correspondence [between language and music] may arise because, in part, even in an elaborated oration we often use a single sentence in a period, which in music occurs only in very short pieces, as for example in songs or dances; and may arise also in part because in an elaborated oration many periods are connected in series, but in music in the case of an elaborated piece only few cadences tend to be made in comparison with an oration.

In the present work, the word period is always used to designate a segment of a piece that ends with a cadence.

Period Construction

Indicates the larger or smaller number of phrases that are unified in a period, and also the manner in which that unification occurs. In music, in period construction, besides the interior continuity of the individual phrases pertaining to the material or to the expression of feelings, one must take into account

1. the rhythmic character of the phrases to be connected;
2. the interpunctual character of the phrases to be connected, the character of their concluding formulas, a) to what extent they have a more or less noticeable resting point of the mind, and b) to what extent the use of special types of such concluding formulas make a satisfying or unsatisfying impression on our feelings; and
3. the different manners of linking several individual phrases into one single phrase

Everything relevant to this subject, insofar as the objective of the present work allows, is to be found in the article Phrase (*Absatz*)

I have attempted to provide more extensive instruction on period construction in the third part of my *Guide to Composition*.

Kurzgefasstes Handwörterbuch der Musik. Leipzig, 1807; rep. Hildesheim: Olms, 1981 [ML100 K63 1981]

Period

We designate with this word a connection of different phrases or melodic segments which in themselves embody a complete meaning, and by means of their connection and their relationship to one another express an ideal in a certain degree of completeness. The completeness of the idea that is supposed to be portrayed in a period necessitates that every period must end with a perfect cadence. However, in music we are not yet of one opinion, for many also call one such single segment of a piece a period, which segment merely designates a complete meaning, and which in language we call a sentence. In this dictionary, the word period is used in the meaning given first.

Period Construction

Designates the manner in which individual phrases are united to become a complete period.

In composition, besides taking account of the internal relationship that the phrases to be united have, we must also take account of the following matters which concern the external form, namely:

- 1) a certain similarity in the number of measures and the similar movement of the stress points of the meter of the phrases to be united in a period, i.e. in the language of art, the rhythm;
- 2) the interpunctual character of the phrases, that is, the character of their concluding formulas; and
3. the manner of uniting two or more phrases into the form of a single phrase, or the drawing together of phrases.

Instruction on period construction can be found in the second and third parts of my *Introductory Essay on Composition*.