

CHAPTER III MELODY AND THEME

Melody as Invention

For many German theorists of the 18th century, following Mattheson's lead, melody was clearly the most important consideration.¹ It constituted the first element in the process of composition and accordingly demanded the most creative effort on the part of the composer. Melody was regarded as the only part of the work which was truly inventive; once it was in place the rest could be added according to the rules which the theorists provided. This emphasis is, of course, once again reflective of the primary importance of vocal music, in which the text and the affect which it expressed served as the basis for the melody. Thus the Germans still designated all melody as 'Gesang', and instrumental music, as we have seen, was long regarded as an imitation of vocal music and thus secondary to it. The importance of melody was also, however, a reaction to the more contrapuntally conceived instrumental music of the Baroque. And the symphony, as one of the newest and least regulated genres, was regarded as a particularly suitable vehicle for the new type of melody. In contrasting the new symphonies with the older ones (both still in their function as introductory pieces) Scheibe thus writes (*Critischer Musicus*, Vol. II, pp. 305 ff.):

Die Melodie war nicht so frey, nicht so natürlich und folglich auch nicht so lebhaft und fließend. Man sahe darinn mehr auf eine starke und vollständige harmonische Ausarbeitung. Sie waren daher auch künstlicher und mühsamer zu verfertigen. Bey diesen Eigenschaften aber konnten sie unmöglich auch den Affect besitzen, der hingegen den jetzigen Sinfonien eigen ist [...] Und so waren denn ihre Sinfonien mit Contrapunten, Fugen, Canonen und andern künstlichen Nachahmungen durchflochten [...] Man betrachte hingegen die Sinfonien in ihrer jetzigen Gestalt [...] Da man einer fließenden, einer ausdrückenden und leb-

[In the older symphonies] the melody was not as free, not as natural and therefore not as lively and flowing. [Composers] were more concerned with a forceful and thorough working-out of the harmony,² and as a result [the symphonies] required more artifice and were more difficult to construct. Because of these characteristics, however, they could not possibly possess the affect which is such an integral feature of the newer symphonies [...] And so [the older] symphonies were beset with counterpoint, fugues, canons and other artful imitations. Let us turn our attention to the symphonies in their present form, on the other hand. Since one encounters

¹ For the opposite view, based on Rameau and the primacy of harmony, see below, pp. 114 ff.

² 'Ausarbeitung'; for the use of this term as part of the compositional process see below, chapter VI.

haften Melodie folget, die allein aus der Natur entspringet, so zeigen sich weit andere und weit angenehmere Wirkungen [...] Man kann also aus unsern Sinfonien die Treflichkeit der Melodie auf eine ganz besondere Art einsehen. Sie ist es, welche dieselben schön, rührend, nachdrücklich und erhaben macht. Sie ist es, wodurch wir den Zuhörern ohne Worte und ohne weitere Erklärung dasjenige im Voraus entdecken und vorstellen, was sie nachdem ausführlicher und deutlicher erblicken. Die Melodie ist es also, wodurch man allerley Affecten und Leidenschaften erregen und ausdrücken kann.

a flowing, expressive and lively melody which originates solely in nature, there emerge entirely different and much more attractive effects [...] In our symphonies, then, one can observe the excellence of the melody with particular clarity. It is the melody which makes these works attractive, expressive, memorable and noble. Through it we can, without words and without further explanation, prepare the listeners for what will follow in more complete and more explicit form. It is the melody, then, through which we can excite and express all different types of affects and passions.

This view of a new kind of melody is expressed in almost every treatise of the 18th century. Perhaps more than any other feature, it determined the theorists' approach to composition, and it lingered on in their writings long after the composers themselves had expanded their horizon to include many different aspects. Because of this emphasis it is rare to find an example within theoretical works which consists of more than a single voice. Harmony was here regarded as implicit in the melody, and all the problems of articulation and phrasing could be illustrated within the one voice.

Theme as Central Idea

'Gesang', or melody, however, was a neutral term applied to the main voice of an entire composition. The concept of a theme as a memorable and distinctive melodic entity, and consequently its designation as well, remained separate, becoming important for the structure of an instrumental work only in the later part of the century. Much more central to the instructive methods of the theorists was the additive process described so well in the 1750s by Riepel, in which smaller melodic units of equal importance were combined to form larger phrases and ultimately the entire work, a genuine 'ars combinatoria'. Much of Riepel's instruction is devoted to the different ways in which these units, designated according to the number of measures they contain (see above, chapter II), can be expanded, repeated or altered, that is, they are basically neutral elements which can be changed at will and can be combined in any order which suits the composer.

In his chapter on the formation of a melody in his treatise of 1739 Mattheson had similarly advocated combining brief motifs in different ways. He here provides one of the few 18th-century attempts to describe and explain the process of

inventing a melody and hence of the beginning phase of composition (*Capellmeister*, p. 122):

Das erste, was bey einer musicalischen Erfindung in Betracht gezogen wird, bestehet [...] in diesen dreien Dingen: Thema, Modus, Tactus; d. i. Haupt=Satz, Ton=Art, Zeitmaasse.

Three main things are necessary [...] to musical invention: Thema, Modus and Tactus, that is, a main theme, key and measure.

Whereas the last two are simple to determine, the first, i. e. the theme, requires both talent and experience. In attempting to give rules and suggestions for inventing such a theme, Mattheson proceeds, as usual, from grammar and rhetoric, comparing melody to the text of a speaker. He follows with an interesting suggestion for the invention of a musical theme (p. 122):

Bey dem Themate oder Haupt=Sätze [...] müssen gewisse besondere Formeln im Vorrath seyn, die auf allgemeine Vorträge angewandt werden können. Das ist zu sagen: Der Setzer muß an Modulationen, kleinen Wendungen, geschickten Fälln, angenehmen Gängen und Sprüngen [...] etwas gesammelt haben [...] und aus denselben einen an einander hängenden Satz machen [...]

For the 'Themate' or 'Haupt-Satz' [a composer] must have certain specific formulae in stock, which can be employed in various ways [...] i. e. melodic turns, brief figures, skillful cadences and pleasing runs and leaps [...] and from these he can fashion a unified theme ('Satz') [...]

He then presents an example to demonstrate how brief motifs can be joined together.³ Mattheson further suggests (p. 123) that the amateur composer should assemble a collection of these elements, either in written form or simply in his memory. These components constitute a kind of common reserve from which any composer can draw, and the skill of the individual is demonstrated in the way in which they are combined.

In fact the idea of a main theme, and thus the name as well, was in the earlier 18th century still applied mainly to contrapuntal works, such as the canon and the fugue. Thus in his earlier treatise of 1713 Mattheson, referring to vocal music, still equated 'Thema' with 'Subject', "sung by one voice after another", and in 1732 Walther defined 'Thema' as "a 'Satz' for a fugue".

The concept of a main theme in the non-contrapuntal genres assumes new importance in the treatises of the mid-century. As instrumental music, and the symphony, in particular, became more independent of vocal genres, the problem arose of providing the listener with an adequate means of orientation, a function

³ The examples can be found in Fred Ritzel, *Die Entwicklung der »Sonatenform« im musikalischen Schrifttum des 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 30.

previously fulfilled by the text. The simple additive method of smaller units found in the earlier symphonies (e. g. those by Sammartini and other Italians) was clearly inadequate as movements expanded in length. For this practice the most likely model would have been the ritornello of the concerto, where several brief and clearly differentiated motifs formed the framing structure and could be repeated in different keys and different combinations between the various solo passages as well. Composers may well have turned to the concerto as their model for inventing distinctive themes which could function as structural points of reference through repetition within the given system of keys in the Allegro movements of the symphony.

One of the earliest authors to emphasize the importance of a single central idea is Charles Avison in *An Essay on Musical Expression*, still using, however, the terminology derived from the fugue (2nd edition, 1753, pp. 24 f.):

As in Painting [...] there is a principal Figure [...] so, in the greater Kinds of musical Composition, there is a principal or leading *Subject*, or Succession of Notes, which ought to prevail, and be heard through the whole Composition; and to which, both the Air and the Harmony of the other Parts ought to be in like Manner referred and subordinate.

Rousseau gives a similar definition of 'Sujet', one which is typical as well of the German authors' view of the main theme as the true creative element of a work (*Dictionnaire*, p. 455):

[...] c'est la partie principale du Dessin, l'idée qui sert de fondement à toutes les autres [...] Toutes les autres parties ne demandent que de l'art & du travail; celle-ci seule dépend du génie, & c'est en elle que consiste l'invention.

'Sujet'—the principal part of the design, the idea which serves as the foundation of all the others [...] All other parts require only skill and effort; only this one depends on genius and it is here that creativity is expressed.

Main Theme versus Secondary Ideas

The presence of a main theme, however, in turn presupposes other contrasting or secondary ideas, and although the theorists proposed various possibilities for the definition and differentiation of these themes, they never did reach a common viewpoint. They do, however, refer consistently to such ideas in the plural, i. e. various secondary themes are introduced to support or interrupt the single main theme. The idea of one principal second or lyric theme used to counterbalance the first main theme was never clearly stated, although its presence as contrast is acknowledged by several writers, including Koch (see below, pp. 57 ff.).

The concept of a single main theme plus various secondary ideas can be found as early as Scheibe, but, typically for the 18th century, it is applied to all musical

works. In the first part of his *Critischer Musicus* from 1738, Scheibe states unequivocally (Vol. I, p. 60):

In allen musicalischen Stücken ist ein Hauptsatz nöthig, woraus die ganze Folge desselben unumgänglich entstehen muß. Das übrige ist nur allein die Ausarbeitung, und gehöret zur Schreibart.

Every musical work must have a main theme ('Hauptsatz') from which the rest of the work evolves. The remainder is nothing more than an elaboration and is determined by the style.⁴

In his description of the chamber symphony he goes further by differentiating between main and secondary themes (Vol. II, pp. 331 f.):

Man fängt also mit der Haupterfindung an, und verfolget sie mit verschiedenen theils daraus fließenden, theils damit verknüpften Nebensätzen, bis man zu einer andern und gewissen Thonart gelanget, in welcher man einen Schluß machen kann [...] Den zweieten Theil fängt man hierauf wieder mit der Haupterfindung an.

You begin therefore with the main invention ('Haupterfindung') and follow this with different secondary ideas ('Nebensätze'), some flowing out of the former and some joined to it, until you arrive at the new specified key in which you can cadence [...] The second main section begins again with the main invention.

Note that the secondary ideas are not described as contrasting with but rather as related to the main theme and that he uses a more neutral description rather than the term, 'theme' (for the entire quote see below, chapter V).

Riepel compares the composer to a preacher who must develop his sermon around a central theme (*Anfangsgründe*, Vol. II, p. 76):

Disc. [...] Mein Herz sagt aber, ein Componist müsse so beym Thema bleiben, wie ein Prediger bey dem Evangelio.

Disc. But I feel that a composer must adhere to his theme like a preacher to the Gospel.

Praec. Der Meister ist eben auch immer bey dem Thema geblieben. Ein Prediger kann ja das Evangelium nicht immer wiederholen und vorlesen; sondern er muß es auslegen. Er macht eben Uebergänge oder transitiones &c. Er hat nebst dem Satz aufs allerwenigste noch einen Gegensatz.

Praec. [referring to example] The master did indeed stay with his theme. A preacher can't simply repeat or read aloud the passage from the Gospel; rather he must interpret it. He adds transitions, and so on. In addition to the main passage he has at least one contrasting idea.

In his musical instruction, however, Riepel reserves the word 'Theme' mainly as a term for the first Tutti of the concerto (Vol. II, pp. 94 ff.), contrasting the 'Thema' or 'Anfangs-Tutti' or even 'Thema-Tutti' with the middle and concluding Tutti on the one hand and with the Solo sections on the other. In his discussion of the different possibilities of varying a symphony allegro (Vol. II, pp. 72 ff., esp. 76

⁴ 'Schreibart'; for the meaning of this term see above, chapter I, pp. 15 f.

and 83), he also occasionally refers to “the theme”, but the concept is never developed explicitly as part of his instruction. In general he employs a much more neutral terminology centered around his small melodic measure-units and the ‘Clausuln’, or brief rhythmic figures, which can be repeated at will (see above, chapter II).

Probably because of the primary association of ‘Theme’ and ‘Subject’ with the fugue, these terms were not generally adopted by German theorists as the designation for the main melodic idea of other instrumental works until the later 18th century. As a result a variety of designations, many of them neutral descriptions, can be found. Once again the comparison with grammar and rhetoric, and thus vocal music, proved decisive. The words most frequently used became ‘Idee’, ‘Gedanke’ and especially ‘Periode’ and ‘Satz’, all referring to a complete thought which ended in some kind of cadence.

The repetition of a main theme as a unifying element and as a means of orientation for the listener in instrumental works became acute in the symphonies of the 1760s and 1770s, and this is reflected in the treatises of the same time. Following Scheibe the distinction between a single main theme and various secondary ideas becomes important in the descriptions of melody. This is generally still applied to all musical categories, however, vocal as well as instrumental.

In his review of some piano sonatas by Johann Georg Nicolai, Marpurge is particularly critical of the number (too many) and nature (too brief) of the themes, and his recommendations reflect some, for the time, very new ideas (*Kritische Briefe*, Vol. II, p. 161):⁵

In jedem Tonstück muß doch unstreitig so etwas seyn, was unter dem übrigen ein wenig hervorraget. Dieses etwas, es mag nun sogleich zum Anfange, in der ersten Sectionalzeile, oder in der zweyten vorkommen, nenne ich den Hauptsatz, der durch Wiederholungen, Versetzungen, Nachahmungen und Zergliederungen bearbeitet werden muß. Die daraus auf verschiedne Art entstehenden Passagen dienen dazu, die Einheit des Tonstückes mit zu erhalten. Wenn man den Hauptsatz, oder die daraus fließenden Gedanken, nach einem gemachten vernünftigen Plan, mit einem neuen Nebengedanken abwechselt, und diesen ebenfalls wie den vorhergehenden, in gehörigem Ver-

In every musical work, as we all know, there must be some element which stands out a little from the others. This, whether it comes right at the beginning in the first phrase (‘Sectionalzeile’), or not until the second, is what I call the main theme (‘Hauptsatz’) which must form the basis for repetition, modulation, imitation and dissection. The passages which thus emerge in different ways serve to preserve the unity of the work. If you alternate the main theme, or the various ideas which come out of it, with a newly formed secondary thought (‘Nebengedanke’) in a well-planned manner and work with it similarly, the connection between main and secondary themes and their

⁵ Letter of 7 Nov. 1761, Vol. II, pp. 160–162, with reference to Sonata No. 1 in E-flat Major from *Six Parties sur le Clavecin composées par Jean George Nicolai*, Leipzig 1760.

hältnisse, bearbeitet: so entspringet aus dieser Verbindung des Hauptsatzes mit dem Nebensatz, und der sowohl aus diesem als jenen entspringenden Theile, die gewissermassen so viele neue Sätze in ihrer Art sind, die Mannigfaltigkeit eines Tonstückes.

The French author, François Jean Chastellux, as translated by Hiller, refers again to the importance of a main theme and its repetition as a kind of anchor for the listener and the inner justification for repeats in the binary form (Hiller, *Wöchentliche Nachrichten*, Vol. IV, p. 83):

Ich frage sie [...] ob endlich ein schön erfundenes und schön ausgeführtes Thema nicht das Höchste dieser Kunst ist? Es liegt ein unwidersprechlicher Beweis, daß der Gesang das Vornehmste bey der Musik, und ein von den Worten unabhängiger Theil derselben ist, darinne, daß man ihn allemal wieder findet, wenn auch die Musik von diesen Worten getrennt ist, und daß er sogar zuweilen dabey gewinnt, weil er reiner und regelmäßiger wird. Man wähle sich eine Sonate, eine Symphonie, eine Tanzmelodie; wird man darinn nicht allemal einen Hauptgedanken, einen bestimmten singenden Ausdruck, eine musikalische Periode finden? Das Vergnügen der Musik aber hängt so sehr von dem Reize ab, welchen das Gehör empfindet, wenn es die Uebereinstimmung und das Ganze dieses musikalischen Ausdrucks faßt, daß der Componist einer Symphonie, der keine andre Regeln als seine Einbildungskraft hat, seinem Thema allemal einen sehr eingeschränkten Umfang giebt, und sich allemal bemüht, uns dasselbe viermal hören zu lassen. Man muß nicht glauben, daß es bloß der Gebrauch so mit sich bringe, den ersten und zweyten Theil eines Allegro oder Andante zweymal zu spielen. Das erstemal, wenn einer von diesen Theilen gespielt wird, begnügt sich das Ohr, mit demselben Bekanntschaft zu machen; das zweytemal kennt sie ihn schon, und genießt ihn. Da aber der zweyte Theil des Satzes in einer Symphonie nichts anders

derivative parts—which are, so to speak, new in their own way—will produce the diversity of a musical work.

Is not a well-invented and well-developed theme the greatest part of this art? There is definitive proof that the melody is the noblest part of music and that it is independent of the words, for it is present even when it is removed from the words and, in fact, then often profits by becoming purer and more regular. If you take a sonata, a symphony or a dance melody, do you not always find a main thought, a certain singing expression, a musical period? The pleasure in the music is, however, so dependent on the attraction which the ear experiences when it comprehends the agreement and the entirety of the musical expression that the composer of a symphony, who knows no rules beyond his own imagination, should keep his Theme to a modest length and make sure that it is heard four times. It is namely not simply a matter of custom that the first and second sections of an Allegro or Andante are played twice. When one of these sections is played for the first time, the ear must be content with making its acquaintance; the second time it is already familiar and can be enjoyed. Since, furthermore, the second section of a movement of a symphony is nothing more than the repetition and imitation of the first, the listener has the further pleasure of recognizing the melody which he has heard before and of following it in another context.

ist, als die Wiederholung und die Nachahmung des ersten Theils; so hat der Zuhörer auch noch das Vergnügen, den Gesang, den er gehört hat, wiederzufinden, und ihm in einer andern Modulation zu folgen.

Attempts to Form a Hierarchy

In the Dictionary which Hiller distributed among the issues of his *Wöchentliche Nachrichten*, this idea is carried one step further. An attempt is made to distinguish among various types of ideas (in his terminology, 'Gedanken') and—rather unsuccessfully—to determine in more detail how often each of them may be presented (Vol. III, pp. 303, 313 and 340):

Gedanken, musikalische, sind kleine Theile einer Melodie, die doch einen Verstand haben müssen. Man theilt sie in Haupt= Neben= und Verbindungsgedanken [...] Im 2/4 Tact kann ein Gedanke aus 2, 3, 4 Tacten bestehen. Man nennet sie alsdenn einen Zweyer, Dreyer, Vierer. Größerer Tactordnungen bedient man sich nicht gern, weil man sie nicht gut behalten kann [...] (p. 303). Wenn nur einer oder wenn auch mehrere Hauptgedanken in einer Melodie enthalten sind, so muß der einzige öfter, als alle übrige, von den mehrern aber einer so oft, als der andere, doch öfter, als alle übrige Nebengedanken vorkommen. Der Hauptgedanke ist das Vorzüglichste der Melodie; er muß deswegen in allen Perioden derselben wohl angebracht seyn, weil sich eben hieraus erkennen läßt, daß die Perioden zusammen gehören, und weil die Einheit der Melodie dadurch bestimmt wird (p. 313).

Nebengedanken müssen in einer Melodie nicht so oft vorkommen, als der Hauptgedanke. Sie sind dem letztern allemal untergeordnet [...] Unter vier Nebengedanken z. E. kann der erste, wenn er der wichtigste ist, 5mal, der zweyete, als minder wichtig, 4mal

Musical Ideas are small parts of a melody which, however, form an entity. They are differentiated into main, secondary, and connecting ideas [...] In 2/4 meter an Idea can consist of 2, 3, 4 measures. We call them accordingly 'Zweyer', 'Dreyer', 'Vierer'.⁶ We prefer not to use longer units, because they are difficult to remember [...]

When a single main idea is found in a melody, it must occur more frequently than any of the others, and if several are found, each of them must occur as often as the others, yet more often than any of the secondary ideas. The main idea is the most important feature of the melody; it must therefore be included in all of its parts (Periods) as the sign that these belong together and as the agent of unity in the melody.

Secondary ideas must not occur as often as the main idea in a melody. They are always of less importance [...] Of four secondary ideas, for example, the first, if it is the most important, can be presented five times, the second, as less important, four times, the

⁶ Regarding these measure units, derived from Riepel, see above, chapter II.

der dritte 3 und der vierte 2mal vorkommen. Der 5te muß also vom Hauptgedanken am weitesten entfernt und am mindesten beträchtlich seyn. Die Verbindungsgedanken finden nur einmal in einer Melodie statt; alle Arten also von Nebengedanken können doch wenigstens öfter, als diese angebracht werden (p. 340).

third three and the fourth two times. The fifth must be the farthest removed from the main idea and carry the least weight. Connecting ideas occur only once in the melody; all types of secondary ideas occur at least more often than these.

This idea of a strict hierarchy was almost certainly derived once again from vocal music, namely from the opera seria, where the number of arias allotted each character, i. e. singer, was determined according to his or her relative importance. Although the basic principle of one main idea and various secondary ideas, repeated in different keys, forms an important compositional technique in the instrumental works of the Early Classic composers, it was obviously not possible to regulate the process as rigidly as this theorist proposed. More important in the works themselves is the differentiation between themes and figuration, as in the following example from a symphony by Haydn's Viennese contemporary Leopold Hoffmann (Ex. 2).⁷ Chastellux's emphasis on the importance of repeating the sections as a means of acquainting the listener with the main theme, on the other hand, may well be reflected in the works themselves, since many early Allegro movements call for a repeat of both halves of the binary form.

Ex. 2 (beginning): Leopold Hofmann, Symphony in D Major,
D 2 (1767 or earlier), 1st. mvt., mm. 21–27.

⁷ Listed in the Breitkopf catalogue of 1767; modern edition by G. Cook Kimball in Barry Brook's series, *The Symphony B VII*, No. 7, pp. 123–134.

Ex. 2 (continued).

First Theme as Main Theme

The difficulty of establishing a hierarchy of thematic ideas seems also to have been acknowledged by the theorists of the 1770s and 1780s, who abandoned the attempt to determine a precise relationship among the various ideas of a movement. By now the term ‘Theme’ is associated specifically with the beginning phrase of a movement and discussed as a kind of ‘*primus inter pares*’, i. e., as the first and most important of several main ideas. This applies, furthermore, to both instrumental and vocal music. And, although the attractiveness of sudden changes and contrasts is often emphasized (see below, Sulzer and Daube), the idea of a single sentiment, incorporated in the main theme, and supported by various secondary ideas, remains dominant.

Sulzer’s dictionary, for example, adopts neither the different categories advocated by Hiller’s author nor his instructions regarding their relative frequency. He describes only a main theme, or ‘*Hauptsatz*’ which may be accompanied by ‘*Zwischensätze*’. These, however, are not really comparable to the former writer’s secondary themes, which have a weight and an order of their own, but are rather clearly subservient to the main theme. They “usually occur during the brief pauses or on longer held notes of the main theme, serving to clarify its sentiment,”⁸ i. e. they are often in an inner voice.

⁸ *Allgemeine Theorie*, 1778, Vol. II, p. 325: “Diese Zwischensätze kommen insgemein auf die kleinen Ruhepunkte, oder auf etwas anhaltende Töne des Hauptsatzes, und müssen die Empfindung näher und genauer bezeichnen.” Most of the articles on music in Sulzer’s dictionary were written by Kirnberger. See above, chapter II.

He thus defines the 'Hauptsatz' of a musical work (*Allgemeine Theorie*, 1778, Vol. II, p. 323) as:

[...] eine Periode, welche den Ausdruck und das ganze Wesen der Melodie in sich begreift, und nicht nur gleich anfangs vorkömmt, sondern durch das ganze Tonstück ofte, in verschiedenen Tönen, und mit verschiedenen Veränderungen, wiederholt wird. Der Hauptsatz wird insgemein das Thema genannt.

[...] a Period which contains the expression and the entire essence of the melody within itself. It occurs not only right at the beginning but is repeated several times throughout the entire piece in different keys and with different variations. It is generally called the Theme.

The author (Kirnberger) continues by emphasizing the similarity of all musical genres in this regard (*Allgemeine Theorie*, 1778, Vol. II, p. 324):

Daher ist die Form der meisten in der heutigen Musik üblichen Tonstücke entstanden, der Concerte, der Symphonien, Arien, Duette, Trio, Fugen u. a. Sie kommen alle darin überein, daß in einem Haupttheile nur eine kurze, dem Ausdruck der Empfindung angemessene Periode, als der Hauptsatz zum Grund gelegt wird; daß dieser Hauptsatz durch kleinere Zwischengedanken, die sich zu ihm schicken, unterstützt, oder auch unterbrochen wird; daß der Hauptsatz mit diesen Zwischengedanken in verschiedenen Harmonien und Tonarten, und auch mit kleinen melodischen Veränderungen, die dem Hauptausdruck angemessen sind, so ofte wiederholt wird, bis das Gemüth des Zuhörers hinlänglich von der Empfindung eingenommen ist, und dieselbe gleichsam von allen Seiten her bekommen hat.

And thus has resulted the Form of most of the modern categories of music, such as the Concertos, Symphonies, Arias, Duets and Trios, Fugues, and so on. They all have in common that one brief Period, appropriate to the expression of the sentiment, forms the basis of a main section as its principal idea; that this main idea is supported, or even interrupted, by smaller secondary ideas which can be adapted to it; that the main idea is repeated with its secondary ideas in different harmonies and in different keys and also with minor melodic variants suitable to the main expression until the spirit of the listener is sufficiently captured by that sentiment, having been exposed to it from all sides, as it were.

Here again the influence of rhetoric as applied to a sermon is very evident. The listener is important. The main theme must embody the dominant sentiment and this is further clarified and expanded by means of secondary ideas, repetitions and modulations. Although the description remains general, it does stress the desirability of presenting the thematic material in different keys and with harmonic and melodic variations. The author then goes on to discuss the ideal length of a main theme, again primarily as a means of orientation for the listener (*Allgemeine Theorie*, 1778, Vol. II, pp. 324 f.):

Der Hauptsatz muß eine gewisse Länge haben: ist er zu kurz, so verträgt er die nöthi-

The main theme must have a certain length: if it is too short, it will not lend itself to the

gen Veränderungen und die zu den Wiederholungen erforderliche Mannigfaltigkeit der Wendungen nicht; ist er zu lang, so bleibt er im Ganzen nicht deutlich genug im Gedächtniß. Er kann also in geschwinder Bewegung nicht wol unter zwey, und in langsamer Bewegung nicht wol über vier Takte seyn [...] Bey längern Hauptsätzen, die aus mehreren kleinen Einschnitten bestehen, muß [der Tonsetzer] sehr sorgfältig seyn, den genauesten Zusammenhang darin zu beobachten, damit der Hauptsatz eine wahre Einheit habe und nicht aus zwey andern zusammengesetzt sey: man muß keinen Schluß darin fühlen, bis er ganz vorge-tragen ist.

necessary variants and to the diversity of figures demanded by the repetitions; and if it is too long, it will not be easily enough remembered. In a fast tempo it should encompass at least two measures, and in a slower tempo not more than four [...] With longer themes, consisting of several small parts ('Einschnitte'), the composer must take care to observe the strictest continuity to ensure that the main theme is a true unit and not merely the sum of two separate parts; there must be no marked ending until it has been completely presented.

Emphasizing that the invention of a proper theme thus demands not only genius but also experience and knowledge on the part of the composer (see below for the various steps involved), the author concludes by pointing out the lack of any real treatment of this important aspect of music in the theoretical works. Only Mattheson had made any serious attempt to approach the subject, albeit, he feels, without much success, and there is only one really effective way to learn (*Allgemeine Theorie*, 1778, Vol. II, p. 325):

Es würde von großem Nutzen seyn, wenn ein feiner Kenner aus den Tonstücken der größten Meister die schönsten Hauptsätze aufsuchen, und darin das, was der Kunst und dem Geschmack zugehört, anzeigen und entwikeln würde. Denn in Sachen, worüber man keine bestimmte Regeln geben kann, dienen vollkommene Beyspiele anstatt der Regeln.

It would be extremely helpful if someone knowledgeable would pick out the best themes from the works of the greatest Masters and would then demonstrate which part of them is free invention and which dependent on taste and knowledge. For in matters which permit no clear rules, exemplary models must serve in their place.

Daube (1773) restricts the word 'theme' to the beginning theme ('Anfangsthema'), showing in an example how it can be transposed into related keys.⁹ His main emphasis as far as the larger works, such as symphonies and concertos, are concerned is "the alternation between the lyric and the brilliant" (*Der musicalische Dilettant*, p. 81) and the importance of the sudden and unexpected, without any specific reference to themes as the embodiment of these contrasts. With regard to repetition, the composer must take care (pp. 81 f.):

⁹ See Snook-Luther, *Daube*, Vol. II, p. 661.

daß, wo eine brillante Passage im ersten Theile ist hingezetzt worden, sie auch im zweyten Theile vorkommen soll: und so ist es gleichfalls mit dem Singbaren beschaffen. Keine Passage darf im ersten Theil erscheinen, die nicht auch im zweyten, obgleich in eine andre Tonart versetzt, angebracht werde. Soll aber ein Gedanke nicht in beyden Theilen gehört werden, so ist es allzeit besser, er komme erst im zweyten Theil vor, doch muß er dennoch daselbst wiederholt werden. Eine Passage, die nur ein einzigesmal vorkömmt, ist sehr selten gut.

In a later part of the same treatise, Daube further pursues the ideas of variation and dissection as ways of presenting the theme and thus lengthening the movement without resorting to exact repetition on the one hand or to a confusing array of different ideas on the other (*Der musicalische Dilettant*, p. 162):

Dergleichen Veränderung und Zertheilung eines melodischen Gliedes dienet sehr zur Fortsetzung einer ganzen Melodie [...] Ist das melodische Glied lang; so kann man es etlichemale zerlegen, und jeden Theil besonders durchführen [...] Das Hauptthema einer Sinphonie, oder eines Konzerts mag solchergestalt ausgesucht werden, daß die Zergliederung nachgehends allerley Abwechslungen, sowohl in der Melodie als Harmonie, machen könne, deren einige zwey= drey= und mehrstimmig erscheinen dürfen. Durch welche Einstreuung viel schönes bewirkt werden kann, wenn insonderheit die starke Abwechslung des Forte und Piano darunter gehöret wird. Diese Manier giebt also eine Anweisung, wie man das Aufsuchen verschiedener Gedanken in der Komposition entbehren, und doch artige Abwechslungen der Melodie und Harmonie anstellen könne, wodurch die Wirkung der Musik befördert wird.

that a brilliant passage in the first section should occur at the same place in the second section, and the same applies to a lyric part. No passage should occur in the first section which is not repeated in the second, albeit in a different key. And if an idea is not to be heard in both sections, then it is better to introduce it in the second section, but even then it must be repeated. A passage which occurs only once is seldom satisfactory.

This type of variation and dissection of a melodic segment is very useful to the continuation of a movement [...] If the segment is long, it can be divided into several parts and each of these developed separately [...] The main theme of a symphony or a concerto may be constituted in such a manner that its subsequent division can produce all kinds of variations in the melody as well as in the harmony, of which some may be for two, three or more voices. And their introduction produces many attractive moments, in particular the frequent alternation between forte and piano. By this process, then, it is possible to avoid the multiplication of different ideas in a composition and still produce many variations in the melody and harmony, thereby heightening the effect of the music.

This description actually comes very close to the kind of techniques being used by the more “modern” composers, and by Haydn in particular, in the 1760s and 1770s.

Unfortunately this new direction was not pursued in the subsequent works of the theorists. Although they continue to mention a main theme, they do not explore

its special characteristics or define the different possibilities of its presentation. Generally the entire question of its formation and function is avoided by terming it “the product of genius”. Thus Koch, still dependent on the more practical approach of Riepel, is far more concerned with the combination and variation of basically equal melodic units than he is with the idea of a central theme. His main mention of the latter occurs in Vol. II of the *Versuch* (1787) as a footnote to his discussion of the different parts of the melody (pp. 347 f.):

Unter den verschiedenen Absätzen einer Melodie enthält gemeinlich der erste derselben den Hauptgedanken, das ist denjenigen, der gleichsam die Empfindung bestimmt, welche das Ganze erwecken soll, und dieser wird das Thema oder der Hauptsatz genennet, die übrigen Absätze aber, die gleichsam die verschiedenen Aeusserungen dieser Empfindung darstellen, kann man billig, weil sie in der Ausführung auf verschiedene Art zergliedert werden, Zergliederungssätze nennen. Weil aber sowohl diese als jene weder in Ansehung des Umfanges, noch in Rücksicht ihrer interpunctischen Formel wesentlich verschieden sind, so haben wir nicht nöthig, von dieser besondern Eintheilung in diesem Abschnitte Gebrauch zu machen.

Among the different phrases ('Absätze') of a melody the first generally contains the main thought, that is, that which determines the sentiment of the entire work, and this is called the 'Thema' or the 'Hauptsatz'. The other phrases, which, as it were, represent the different expressions of this sentiment, can simply be called dissection phrases ('Zergliederungssätze') since they are dissected in various ways in the working-out of the composition.¹⁰ Since, however, neither of these is substantially different with regard to its length or its cadences, it is not necessary to discuss them separately at this point.

In his discussion of the different instrumental genres in Book III (1793!), Koch seems to distance himself even further from the idea of a main theme, generally referring simply to melodic units in the plural ('melodische Theile') and to their respective cadences in relationship to the tonal structure. Thus in the beginning Allegro of a symphony the first section presents the main melodic ideas ('die melodischen Hauptsätze'), and the second may begin with the 'Theme' or with another main melodic unit or, in modern symphonies, such as those of Haydn and Dittersdorf, with a segment of one of the themes from the first section. Since the final 'Period' is presented in the main key, it usually begins with the 'Theme' or with another of the main ideas in this key (Vol. III, pp. 304 ff.).¹¹ His more detailed description of the binary form as found in all larger pieces is concerned only with a definition of the main phrases in relation to the tonal and cadential structure

¹⁰ Regarding the meaning and use of the term 'Ausführung' see below, chapter VI.

¹¹ Note the different use of the word 'Period' here as the larger main section rather than as a phrase within that section.

(Vol. III, pp. 341 ff.) and with the manner in which they can be joined together. This rather exhaustive discussion avoids the idea of thematic distinction altogether (for the complete quotation see below, chapter V).

Contrast: Piano/Singing/Lyric Ideas

If most theorists failed to grasp the potential structural significance of a main theme in the realization of the binary form, they remained even more vague concerning the nature of a second theme which could be contrasted with the first in both tonality and expression. This does not mean, however, that they did not occasionally mention the presence of a lyric theme, only that such a theme, as one of several secondary ideas, was not regarded in any structural sense. Accordingly it was also never called 'a second theme'.

In his discussion of a series of symphony movements Riepel singles out just such a theme as a distinguishing element of the fifth of his examples (for further details see chapter VII), discovered only at the last moment by the Pupil, who exclaims (*Anfangsgründe*, Vol. II, p. 85):

Halt! ich hätte bald was vergessen. Er hat zwey *piano* darinnen. Das in der ersten Hälfte gehöret zur Quint G. Das in der andern Hälfte siehet bey nahe dem Monte gleich.

Wait! I had almost overlooked something. He [the composer] has included two 'piano' [passages]. The one in the first half [of the movement] is in the dominant key, but the one in the second half almost appears to be [in the subdominant].

A longer discussion follows between the Master and the Pupil as to the exact form of this four-measure unit and its proper key in the second presentation, namely the tonic, C Major, giving examples of the various possibilities.¹² Although both the lyric nature of the passage and the proper key thus indicate 'a second theme', it is simply called a 'piano' in the treatise, i. e. a contrast to the surrounding forte passages. The disciple's further comments are even more revealing of Riepel's view of such a passage (*Anfangsgründe*, Vol. II, p. 86):

Es ist wahr, es lautet fremd und angenehm. So ein in der andern Hälfte wiederholtes *piano* mag zu einem Allegro einer Simphonie

True, it sounds different and pleasant. A 'piano' of this kind, which is repeated in the second half would seem, however, to be

¹² The tonal difficulty lies in the fact that the melody, which is based on the tonic triad of the dominant key, G Major, when it is first presented, outlines an F Major triad when it recurs in the second half, suggesting the subdominant rather than the tonic. Even though a hint of the subdominant is actually recommended by theorists and is often found in recapitulations of the time, the various revisions here proposed are designed to correct this.

überflüssig genug seyn; zumal da es gleichsam als ein Einschiesel anzusehen ist. Deswegen könnte hin und wieder doch noch ein= und anderer Tact mit piano wiederholet werden. Allein ich habe schon oft wahrgenommen, daß, wenn mehr dergleichen Einschiesel mit piano in einem Allegro zu stehen kommen, die Simphonie dadurch nur gar zu matt und schläfrig wird. Ich will zu Hause etliche Allegro, und nur überall ein piano, ohne es zu wiederholen, hineinmachen; welches ich bald nach dem Anfange; in einem andern Allegro in der Mitte, oder zuletzt vor der Cadenz; oder auch gar nach der Cadenz, und hierauf die Cadenz noch einmal entweder abgekürzt oder verlängert zu setzen gedenke. Mit einem Wort, was mir die Verwechselungskunst immer eingeben wird.

superfluous, since it must be regarded as a kind of insertion ('Einschiebsel'; see below, chapter IV, pp. 76 f.). Thus a measure or so of piano could be repeated every once in a while. I've often observed, however, that if more of these piano insertions are presented in an Allegro movement, the symphony becomes all too weak and languid. I'm going to experiment with this at home, adding a 'piano' without repeating it, at various points of Allegro movements. In one case I'll bring it right after the beginning, in another in the middle, or just before the cadence, perhaps even after the cadence, then repeating the latter in shortened or lengthened form, in a word, making as much use as I can of the art of variation.

This 'piano' unit can thus be presented at any point in the movement, since it represents simply an addition or insertion, brought in for contrast.

In his analysis of a symphony by Peter Winter (see below, chapter VII) Vogler confirms this view as well as the terminology, calling a contrasting passage near the beginning of the Allegro movement 'ein sanfter Sinn' (a mild idea). In this case,¹³ it actually constitutes the second half of the beginning theme, which consists of a unison passage followed by this harmonized part, rather than any kind of independent second theme, and is, accordingly, in the tonic key (*Betrachtungen*, Vol. I, p. 57):

Nach dem Hauptsaze folgt gleich ein sanfter Sinn, der eben dadurch auch gleichsam zum Hauptsaz wird; weil er den Zuhörer gleich einnimt.

After the main theme ('Hauptsaz') there follows immediately 'ein sanfter Sinn', which actually belongs to the main theme, because it affects the listener in the same way.¹⁴

This type of divided theme, consisting of four measures in unison followed by four in harmony, can be found frequently in the early symphonies, as in the following example:¹⁵

¹³ See Jane Stevens, "Georg Joseph Vogler and 'Second Theme' in Sonata Form."

¹⁴ See also Riepel's comment of an example (Vol. III, 1757, p. 35): "Here the four voices discuss among themselves while in unison what kind of full or partial harmony they want to produce subsequently; after which the harmony then really begins" ([H]ier besprechen sich die 4 Stimmen so im Einklange, was für eine volle oder halbvolle Harmonie sie demnach ergreifen wollen; worauf dann die Harmonie wirklich anfängt).

¹⁵ Pierre van Maldere, *Symphony in B-flat, Op. 4/3*, published 1764; modern editions by Adam Carse, *Early Classical Symphonies* [No. 7], London 1938, and, with corrections, by Craig Lister:

Allegro assai

Ex. 3: Pierre van Maldere, *Symphony in B-flat Major, Op. 4/3* (1764), beginning.

When a different lyric theme is later presented in the dominant, Vogler writes, “Now there comes another ‘sanfter Sinn’”, that is, he makes no difference in importance or function between the two ‘lyric ideas’.¹⁶ These attempts at description show clearly that there was no terminology for this type of theme and that it could, as Riepel suggests, occur at any point in an Allegro movement.

The situation is not substantially altered even in the treatises from the later part of the century. Koch, still mainly interested in the way in which the various ‘Sätze’ are combined, writes of the cadences in the first period of the symphony (*Versuch*, Vol. III, pp. 363 f.):

[...] besonders bedienet man sich ihrer in dem Falle mehrentheils mit guter Wirkung, wenn der erste melodische Theil [...] ein erweiterter [...] und etwas rauschender Satz, der folgende aber [...] ein cantabler Satz ist.

We can often bring [two cadences ending on the dominant in the same key] with good effect, when the first melodic unit is an extended [...] and rapidly moving phrase, the following one, in contrast [...] a singing phrase (‘cantabler Satz’).

Daube at least gives some practical suggestions for the instrumentation of this type of theme (*Der musicalische Dilettant*, pp. 126 f.):

In der sechsstimmigen Komposition werden die singenden etwas langsam gehenden melodischen Glieder gemeinlich piano ausgedrückt, wobey die Hörner pausiren [...]. Die [in der achtstimmigen Komposition] dazu kommende zwei Hoboen oder Flöten überkommen auch kleine Soli, mit welchen ein langes Allegro vermischt wird. Diese Soli bestehen meistentheils aus kurzen singenden Passagen, wobey diese zwey blasende Instrumenten größtentheils terzen= oder

In a composition for six parts the singing, somewhat slower moving melodic units (‘Glieder’) are usually set piano, whereby the horns rest [...]. The two oboes or flutes which are added [for an eight-part work] receive brief solo passages, which are mixed into a longer Allegro movement. These solo parts consist usually of brief singing passages, in which the two wind instruments proceed for the most part in thirds or sixths, unless they imitate each other. It also makes for a

Pierre van Maldere: Six symphonies a più strumenti, Opus 4 (Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era 35–36), Madison, Wisconsin, 1990.

¹⁶ For further details, including the use of a similar lyric theme in the 3rd movement of the same symphony, see below, chapter VII.

sextenweise gehen: ausgenommen, wenn sie unter sich certiren sollen. Es macht auch eine gute Wirkung, wenn das melodische Glied so eingetheilet ist, daß die Hörner dazwischen abwechseln, oder gar mit den Hoboen oder Flöten certiren. Wenn nun im vierten oder achten Takt ein unvermuthetes starkes Tutti einfällt; so wird das singende Glied noch mehr dadurch erhoben. Von dieser schönen Art hat man jetziger Zeit bereits viele Sinphonien, die ihren Meistern Ehre machen.

good effect if the melodic unit is divided in such a way that the horns can be brought in during rests or can even enter into dialogue with the oboes or flutes. If an unexpected strong Tutti suddenly breaks in during the fourth or eighth measure, the singing unit is exposed even more. Many symphonies are presently composed in this attractive manner, and they bring their masters great honor.¹⁷

As the examples provided by Vogler and Daube show, these alternative themes can still occur at different points of the movement and are not regulated by any specific harmonic change. They are clearly contrasting ideas which do not carry any structural significance and, in contrast to the beginning, or principal, 'theme', are consistently spoken of in the plural.

¹⁷ For the examples on pp. 128–130, see Snook-Luther, *Daube*, Vol. I, pp. 169 ff. See also Ex. 2 above, pp. 51 f. The interrupting Tutti generally consists of figuration.