

The very basics of ritornello analysis

The classic analysis is

Wilhelm Fischer. "Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Wiener klassischen Stils." *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 3 (1915): 24-84.

Fischer distinguished two kinds of melodies in Baroque ritornellos.

1. Liedtypus (song type). These are periodic antecedent-consequent structures. An example from a Bach cantata aria:

Liedtypus Melody: BWV 77/5 (Trumpet)



[Example from Stephen Crist, "Aria forms in the vocal works of J. S. Bach, 1714-24" (PhD diss. Brandeis Univ., 1988), 113.]

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2. Fortspinnungstypus. These are usually three-part structures. The middle portion is a sequential “spinning out” called the “Fortspinnung.” The ritornello typically opens with a key-defining segment known as the “Vordersatz” and closes with cadential material known as the “Epilog.”

An example from a Vivaldi concerto, a work presumably known to J. S. Bach. (The segment labeled “A” is the Vordersatz; “B” is the Fortspinnung. The identity of the Epilog is a matter of analytical choice.)

Example 18.1: Opening ritornello of Vivaldi’s Concerto in A Minor, Op. 3, No. 6, first movement

The musical score is for the opening ritornello of Vivaldi's Concerto in A Minor, Op. 3, No. 6, first movement. It is written in A minor, 3/4 time. The score is divided into four systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Solo Violin, Violins I & II, Violas, and Cellos, Basses, and Continuo. The second system continues the instrumental parts. The third system includes figured bass notation for the continuo part. The fourth system includes a 'Solo' marking for the violin part. The score is divided into sections labeled A, B, C, and C'.

[Example from J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A history of Western music*, 7th edn. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 427.]

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