

Schumann: Trio in G minor, Op 17 First movement

- is a piece of chamber music, a composition for a small group of instruments . . . duo, trio, quartet, quintet etc;
 - the word chamber taken from the French `chambre` meaning a room . . . a piece intended for performance in a small scale setting rather than a concert hall;
 - this composition by Clara Schumann is a piano trio . . . so, it`s a composition for piano and two `other` instruments (not three pianos!);
 - usually, as in this piece, piano plus violin and cello;
 - most pieces of chamber music from the Classical and Romantic periods were composed in four movements, using the same format as symphonies and sonatas.
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- the first movement of the four movement format has a fast tempo with a sonata form structure;
 - the second movement is the slow movement;
 - the third movement through most of the Classical period would be a minuet and trio - moderate tempo / three crotchet beats to a bar / ternary form . . . A (minuet) B (trio) A (repeat minuet). From the end of the Classical and through the Romantic period however, the third movement is more likely to be a Scherzo (`Joke`) . . . still in 3/4 or perhaps 6/8 time but a quicker tempo and a more light-hearted mood than the rather sedate minuet style;
 - the fourth movement would be another quick movement with a rondo or sonata-rondo (or even another sonata form) structure;
 - Schumann`s G minor Trio has the expected four movements, although unusually the second and third movements are `reversed` . . . such modifications to the standard four movement format are in fact quite common;
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- the first movement Edexcel set work is as expected, in sonata form;
 - sonata form has three main sections: exposition, development and recapitulation;
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- in the **exposition** section, the composer sets out the main themes – beginning with the first theme (or subject) in the tonic, then a bridge passage which links to a second theme (sometimes two or three themes) in a related key, usually the dominant or relative major and the section closes with a codetta (a short `ending` passage) usually in the same key as the second subject;
 - in the **development** section, the composer uses and works with the main themes (or maybe just one of them) modulating through a range of keys, taking phrases and motifs from the themes and transforming them into a continuous, balanced and well constructed exploration of their potential. This is the section in which the composer will (hopefully) demonstrate skill and imagination. (Note . . . a development section is NOT the same as a `stop-start` set of variations.)
 - the **recapitulation** section is basically a repeat of the exposition section, but the bridge passage will be modified so that the second theme reappears in the tonic key (not the related key used in the exposition section), followed by (some or all of) the codetta also in the tonic key and extended into a full coda to bring the movement to a close;

- here is a plan of the whole movement:

	BAR NUMBER	KEY
EXPOSITION	1 – 90	
First subject	1	G minor
Bridge	22	G minor – B flat major
Second subject	45	B flat major
Codetta	69	E flat major – G minor
DEVELOPMENT	91 – 164	
RECAPITULATION	165 – 288	
First subject	165	G minor
Bridge	190	G minor – G major
Second subject	210	G major
Coda	250	G minor

- a clear, Classical use of sonata form . . . the piece was composed in 1846, so not very far removed from the end of the Classical period;
- some further features of this movement . . .
- the use of chromatic melodic lines and harmony eg bars 18 - 19 and 98 - 101 etc / the increasing use of chromaticism is a feature of Romantic music;
- use of tonality - G minor , B flat major and G major are the main key centres (see table above);
- in the exposition section, there are modulations to the dominant (bars 56 - 58) subdominant (bars 37 - 39) but also to other related keys eg F major (bar41 - 43), E flat major (bars 68 - 69) and to more remote keys eg A flat major (bars 49 - 52) and in the development section, F minor (bars 110 - 111 and 121 - 122) / most modulations are confirmed by the use of perfect cadences;

- the increasing use of a wider range of keys is also a feature of Romantic music, although in truth it is possible to find equally (and more) adventurous use of remote keys in Haydn, Mozart and (especially) Beethoven;
- cycle of 5ths (bars 139 - 143); pedals (eg. bars 155 - 164);
- use of instruments - all have a degree of prominence in turn / although the cello is less fully used and has periods doubling the piano bass line (eg. bars 250 - 260) / use of upper register of cello (eg. bars 134 - 138) / and pizzicato (bars 238 - 246);
- violin and cello in imitation (eg bars 53 - 55 and in several passages of the development eg. bars 102 - 138) / violin and cello quite frequently in octaves (eg bars 262 - 276) and in parallel motion (eg bars 17 - 20);
- some (but limited) interaction between violin and piano (eg bars 34 - 39) / no examples of all three instruments being involved in exchanges / dialogue;
- rhythm . . . quaver and crotchet movement predominant / but some contrasting passages of longer note values (eg the second subject) / occasional use of syncopation within bars (eg bars 53 - 55) and across bars (eg the second subject);
- use of texture - mostly homophonic / but with passages of imitation (see `use of instruments` above) sometimes with a canonic feel / and extensive use of countermelody ideas (eg the violin and cello motifs over the second subject in the piano in bars 47 - 73);
- development of material . . . the final 2 bars of the exposition are worked into the opening bars of the development section (bars 91 - 101) and there is extensive exploration of the first two bars on the main subject** (bars 102 - 135 and 149 - 152) and some reference to bar 3 of the main theme (bars 136, 138 and 160).

*** this development is much assisted by the fact that each of the first two bars of the main subject can be harmonised with a single chord, making it very easy to combine them together. Try it yourself, this sort of thing works well enough (something you could easily use in your own composition, of course . . .)*

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures and a fermata over the third measure. The bass staff contains a bass line with a slur over the first two measures and a fermata over the third measure. The second system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment of chords with eighth notes. The bass staff contains a bass line with eighth notes. Both systems end with 'etc'.