

CHAPTER 5

Tonality and Systems in the Middle-to-Late Eighteenth Century: The Classical Ideal

I. The Development of the Early Symphony: Vivaldi and the Ripieno Concerto, G. B. Sammartini.

We now turn to a discussion of the development of sonata form, perhaps the most important form, or, more accurately, compositional procedure, of the entire eighteenth century. Its flexibility of design allowed for the greatest variety of expression, second only to the multiplicity of ritornello designs in the concertos of the first decades of the century. Our present concerns are the ways in which the system hexachord, eleven pitch-class areas and the *Primary Chromatic Array* inform sonata procedure. Perhaps the best place to start would be to investigate first the derivation of the early symphony from its immediate predecessor, the ritornello form of the late Baroque concerto.

The symphony evolved from both the early eighteenth-century concerto in ritornello form, and the opera overture, the latter called *sinfonia*. Both of these genres were invariably composed in a three-movement format that alternated fast and slow movements, and especially in the opera *sinfonia*, the last movement tended to be dance-like in character. Regarding the concerto, there were two different types that were influential on the early symphony; these included the concerto grosso proper characterized by a separate solo group, or *concertino*, set against or accompanied by a fuller group, or *ripieno*; and the so-called ripieno concerto (or *concerto a quattro*) for strings alone in which there was no separate concertino group, the full orchestra played both ritornello statements and episodic material throughout the course of the

movement. This latter type of concerto was a specialty of Antonio Vivaldi who often used these pieces as overtures to his numerous operas.¹ Owing to the orchestral nature of the ripieno concerto; that is, the entire string group acts as a body projecting all the thematic material, one can easily see its influence on the emerging symphony. What also makes several of these ripieni concerti of interest to us is the frequent use of the parallel minor, either in the form of a *pianoidée* segment (see Chapter 4 for an explanation of this term) within the opening ritornello tonic statement (RV 158 in A major, 1st mvt.), or in alternating major/minor periods (RV 159 in A major, 3rd mvt.), either option necessitating three- hexachord system modulations.

¹Marc Pincherle seems to have been the first modern musicologist to recognize the importance of Vivaldi as an early symphonist. Pincherle quotes from a letter by Charles de Brosses, who gives a vivid eye-witness account of the music played by the girls at the *Ospedale della Pietà* in Venice where Vivaldi worked off and on as the maestro di concerto: "It [referring to the *Pietà*] is also the first as regards the perfecting of symphonies....They have here a type of music that we do not know in France and that appears to me to be more appropriate than any other for the Jardin de Bourbonne. These are the large concertos in which there is no solo violin." Marc Pincherle, *Vivaldi*, Christopher Hatch, trans. (New York: The Norton Library, 1962): 169. For a fuller discussion of Charles de Brosses' Italian tour of 1739-40 and his *Lettres familières* see Michael Talbot, *Vivaldi* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992). Talbot also describes Vivaldi's ripieni concerti (pp. 127-128), but his musical discussion is limited to only a few stylistic observations.

The opening ritornello of RV 158 in A major is an example of an elaborate multi-segmented theme whose importance lies in the placement of the *pianoidée* right before a series of modulatory Epilog segments (see Ex. 5.1). In this particular example, the switch into the parallel minor, with its consequent shift into a “0” system, signals a structurally significant event within the form: *a harmonic shift* towards the dominant. In effect, the *pianoidée* prepares for a bridge passage², the function of which is allotted to the three Epilog segments that follow. The first Epilog (mm. 13-14) acts as a jumping off point by initiating tonic harmony (V – I), but the final sixteenth-note A in the bass of m. 14 moves contrapuntally up a step to B in m. 15 at the start of the second Epilog (mm. 15-16). The B at the downbeat of m. 15 is sustained as a bass pedal which supports a D#, at once correcting the previous “0” system to that of 3#s, and at the same time acts as V/V, the dominant itself now anchored by the third Epilog (mm. 17-18) constituting the formal cadence in E major. A second ritornello follows immediately in V, strengthening the arrival and extending it into a lengthy harmonic area in its own right. The entire passage, from the *pianoidée* through to the second ritornello statement, foreshadows similar harmonic progressions to the dominant that characterize later sonata form movements.

²We use the term “bridge,” as opposed to “transition,” to mean a passage that connects the first harmonic area to that of the second within the exposition of a sonata form movement. The term “transition” is reserved for connecting passages that link major subdivisions *within* the second key area, such as that occurring between the opening period of the second harmonic area and the closing period.

EXAMPLE 5.1: Vivaldi, Concerto Ripieno in A Major RV 158 (mm. 1-19)

Allegro molto
Ritornello 1
Vordersatz 1

Violini I
Violini II
Viola
Violoncelli
Contrabassi
Cembalo

Vordersatz 2

Fortspinnung

Pianoidée
Cs ↓ "0" system

Early symphonists often used the introduction of the minor third degree in the major mode to signal a shift of system, and, consequently, a motion into a new harmonic area, even using the modal shift to displace the more usual dominant preparation. Consequently, the switch of mode from the tonic major triad to its parallel minor within the first period of the movement, must have been heard as a dissonant harmonic motion requiring at least a temporary resolution, either restoring the original mode of the tonic (as in Vivaldi's non-modulatory ritornello themes that include a *pianoidée*, but still close off in the tonic), or propelling the music on to another

harmonic goal, acting as a bridge of some sort.³ In this manner, a diatonic passage could be dramatically extended; however, the juxtaposition of major and parallel minor triads raised so strong a conflict between the tonic system and its “foreign interloper,” (or “schwarze Gredel” [black Margaret] as Joseph Riepel humorously labels the move into the parallel minor⁴), that its use had to be carefully planned by the composer to avoid mitigating its effect, or to reduce the gesture to a mere cliché.

³A possible reason for hearing the minor third degree as dissonant within the major mode may be owing to the nature of the tonal system itself and its application to acoustical theory. Scalar systems are based, consciously or otherwise, on the reordering of the harmonic partials of the overtone series. A characteristic property of the overtone series is the fact that a compound interval based on a minor third between the fundamental and the fifth partial does not exist; indeed, this chromatic pitch class and its enharmonic equivalent are among the furthest chromatic partials in the series, and are located so far up among the higher partials as to be rendered impractical. Within a purely diatonic passage in the major mode, the introduction of the flat third degree is heard as unsettling since it implies another mode and/or harmonic series, and thereby creates a conflict with the major third degree of the tonic key.

⁴Riepel, *Grundregeln zur Tonordnung insgemein* (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1755). Quoted in Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980): 50.

Several examples exist in the early symphonic literature of bridge material that prepares the second key via the parallel minor, most notably in the works of Giovanni Battista Sammartini (1701-1775), a recognized composer of his day who worked in Milan as “maestro di capella to more than half the churches in that city, for which he furnished masses upon all the great festivals.”⁵ Milan, during the first decades of the eighteenth century was a major center of orchestral production, predating Mannheim’s famous court orchestra later in the century. Austria’s control over Lombardy from 1708 to 1796, and her concomitant encouragement of the musical arts, opera included, was probably the main cultural reason why Milan cultivated an appreciation for orchestral music to the extent that it did.⁶ Both first movements of Sammartini’s symphonies nos. 1 in C (c.1720s) and 3 in D (c. 1730s)⁷ switch to the parallel minor before the

⁵Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, Vol II, 1789 (reprint edition, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1957): 454.

⁶Barthia Churgin, ed., *Giovanni Battista Sammartini: 1700 or 1701-1775, Ten Symphonies*, in *The Symphony: 1720-1840*, ed. Barry S. Brook, Series A, vol. II (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984): xiv-xv. In her introduction, Churgin states that: “The city [Milan] had a strong preference for instrumental music. It boasted many good string players and numerous composers, who provided a rich musical environment for Sammartini’s creative efforts. It is no wonder that Milan was the home of the earliest symphonic school in Europe, brilliantly led by Sammartini” (xv). See also John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650-1815* (Oxford University Press, 2004): 166-169.

⁷For the approximate dates of Sammartini’s early symphonies, see Bathia Churgin, ed., *The Symphonies of G.B. Sammartini*, vol. I (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968): 10-11.

dominant arrival; and, what is quite interesting, the forms of the first movements of these works are radically different in construction. In the earlier C major symphony, the form is closely related to the late Baroque ritornello of the concerto, much in the manner of a concerto ripieno for strings by Vivaldi or Albinoni. Thus the “second harmonic area” turns out to be a repetition of the ritornello theme transposed to the dominant (not unlike the Vivaldi concerto ripieno discussed above). In place of a solo episode leading to the second ritornello statement, the opening ritornello, which clearly cadences on the tonic in m. 16, is extended by four extra measures of alternating minor tonic and major dominant harmony, the last three bars of which are heard over a dominant pedal in the violas (see Ex. 5.2). This passage leads directly into the second ritornello statement in the dominant, the purely melodic F# of the previous bars now acting officially as the leading tone into the new key, even though no V/V harmony supports this pitch.

EXAMPLE 5.2a: Sammartini Symphony in C, 1st movement (mm. 1-20)

Allegro
Ritornello 1
Vordersatz 1
Vordersatz 2
Fortspinnung
Ritornello 2

Pianoidée as Bridge
E♭ ↓ 3♭ system holds through despite F♯
F♯ ↑ "0" system regained in V

What makes this transitional passage so very interesting within the context of the present theory, is that E β , the pitch class that would normally indicate a transposition of systems *down* three fifths to that of C minor, is immediately corrected upwards by the F \sharp , the missing pitch of a 3 β system. The alternation of these two system-shift motivators ends finally (m. 19) with the uncontested F \sharp since no E β follows to shift the system down again.

In effect, the final F# leaves the prevailing "0" system in tact despite the temporary juxtaposition of the minor tonic. For the moment, Sammartini introduces the missing pitch, Eβ, only to prepare for a larger harmonic motion to V, not to modulate systems for any extended period. He chooses to do this via Eβ, not D# (the alternate choice); in fact, most composers throughout the century opt for the flat pitch to indicate the first harmonic move away from the tonic since the enharmonic respelling would create harmonic difficulties that would, in effect, move the harmony in another direction. If Sammartini had chosen D# instead of Eβ he would have implied a motion to iii, E minor, since D# has no voice-leading function that would support the dominant. As in previous concertos discussed in Chapter 4, the move to iii is a distant one in relation to the tonic, being the last note of the tonic hexachord. Usually, the tonicization of iii would act as a climax of the whole movement and would be reserved for a penultimate ritornello. In Sammartini's C major symphony, introducing D# too early would have undercut his eventual motion to iii, a harmonic area of great significance within the movement (see Diagram 5.1). After the second ritornello in V (now complete with an Epilog missing from the opening ritornello), the music suddenly swings into E minor, articulated by a contrasting, more lyrical idea constructed in 4-measure phrase units. In fact, Sammartini's phrasing from the beginning has been in even four-measure phrases (subdivided 2 + 2), a rhythmic consistency quite unlike Vivaldi's (not to say J.S. Bach's) asymmetrical phrase units within his ritornello themes.

Sammartini's style leans much more to the symmetrical phrasing of the emerging *style galant* of the 1730s and 1740s, a style that derived from the even phrasing of the dance and which found its way both into comic opera (Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* of 1733 is a famous

example of its early use in opera), as well as into the Italian keyboard sonata with its close ties to contemporary binary dance forms. Characteristic of the phrasing of the *style galant* is that the second measure of each 2-measure phrase unit replicates the first, on the same pitch level, automatically forming even 2-measure hypermeasures. Sammartini's four-bar phrase groupings remains consistent throughout the movement, lending the contrasting E minor middle section of the movement a lyricism that is almost operatic in its intensity.

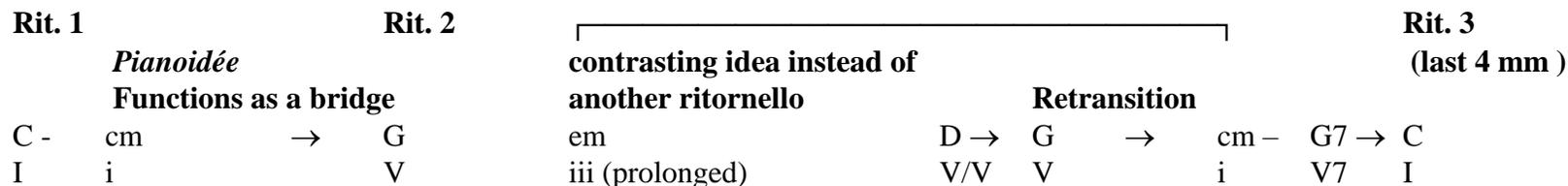


DIAGRAM 5.1. Sammartini, Sinfonia in C, Movement 1 (late 1720s). Vivaldi-influenced, irregular ritornello form.

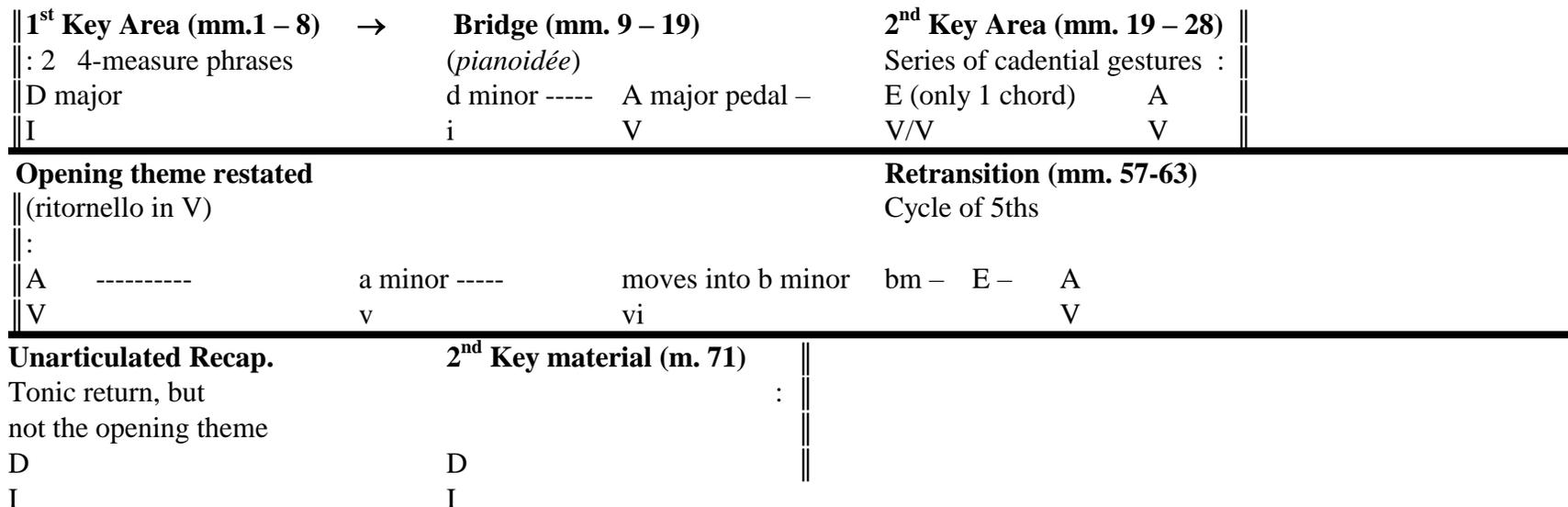


DIAGRAM 5.2. Sammartini, Sinfonia in D, 1st Movement (1740's). Simple binary sonata form based on Italian keyboard models.

Once the E minor harmonic area has been achieved, all the previous Eβs now become D#s, shifting the system up three signatures from “0” to 3#s. From m. 49 to m. 79, D# continuously conflicts with its system complement C₋, throwing the systems back and forth from 3#s to “0” in the manner not unlike that of a development section from a later eighteenth-century sonata form movement. Only in m. 79 is C₋ left uncontested, the “0” system remaining intact until the surprise restatement of the E minor lyrical theme in the tonic minor in m. 98 (see Ex. 5.2b). The previous D#s now revert back to Eβs, shifting the system down once again to that of 3βs. Sammartini brings back the E minor lyrical theme in order to resolve it into the tonic minor, and, simultaneously, resolve the Eβ that originated the harmonic motion into the dominant in the first place. The Eβ first locally resolves down to D at the end of m. 101, but then returns in the next measure where it finally resolves into its diatonic complement, E₋. Lastly, the 3β system itself moves up to the tonic “0” system with the introduction of F# on the second beat of m. 103 as part of an Italian Aβ augmented sixth. Thus the minor tonic itself is resolved into its parallel major at the end of the movement which concludes with a short 4-bar ritornello in the tonic major. Sammartini has created a perfectly balanced structure whereby every dissonant gesture: the tonic minor, Eβ and D# system complements, and the lyrical theme in a “remote” harmonic area, are all restated and then resolved into tonic harmony at the end of the movement. In effect, Sammartini has anticipated Classical developmental techniques by four decades!

EXAMPLE 5.2b: Sammartini Symphony in C, 1st Movement (mm.98 – 112)

The first movement of Sammartini's D major symphony no. 3 is much less convoluted in form and much simpler in harmonic design than the Symphony in C major (see Diagram 5.2), yet the movement is more sophisticated in the management of its transposed systems. Binary in form, the D major symphony shares with its earlier companion a strikingly similar approach to system modulation, albeit couched within a new musical aesthetic: that of the *style galant* of the 1730s and 40s, with its dance-influenced rhythmic patterns, symmetrical phrase groupings and overall diatonic tonal harmonic framework. After an opening 8 m. period (divided into 4 + 4 antecedent/consequent phrases) which ends with an authentic cadence in the tonic, a bridge or transitional passage follows which immediately introduces F_♭, which pitch class throws the D major 2# system down to that of 1_β, the key of the parallel minor. The same thrust into the parallel minor that initiated the modulation to the dominant in the earlier symphony is again seen

here, but with a radical difference. In the earlier symphony Sammartini was deliberately working within a loosely formed ritornello structure, in which the role of the dominant as a harmonic area existed only as a middleground expression of the tonic, equal in harmonic significance and weight to the extended middle section in E minor. However, in the later work, the binary form of the contemporary Italian keyboard sonata that Sammartini adopts, implements a new harmonic background design, based on hierarchal relationships, in which the dominant now becomes a focal point that occupies a deeper level of structure that *outweighs* any other harmonic area within the movement, excepting, of course, the tonic itself. In fact, no other harmonic area, other than the tonic, is granted such prominence. Therefore the arrival at the structural dominant must be sufficiently prepared, both harmonically and rhythmically, for it to have the requisite dramatic strength to sustain it. (In minor mode sonata forms, the relative major plays the same role as that of the dominant, but lacks the inherent dissonant intensity of the latter, a condition often rectified compositionally by later eighteenth-century composers with intense chromaticism, rhythmic displacement, accelerated phrase rhythm, etc.)

As we have seen, within major mode movements, one method of achieving tonal disruption as a dramatic preparation for the arrival of the second key, is to switch to the parallel minor before actually setting up II# as the V/V. In Sammartini's Symphony no. 3, the switch into a 1β system at the start of the bridge (see Ex. 5.3, m. 9), followed by a dominant pedal on A, precedes the structural cadence to V in m. 18. Significantly, the prevailing 1β system dramatically shifts back to 2#s with the introduction of the leading tone to V, G#, on the first beat of m. 17. Thus the correction of the flat system to that of sharps coincides with the emphatic

arrival to the dominant supported by an authentic cadence in that “key” in m. 18. The final 10 measures anchor the dominant in a series of cadential phrases before the entire first section is repeated. Even within this relatively short “exposition,” Sammartini attempts a balanced periodic structure: all three internal subdivisions of the first half of the movement are almost equally subdivided. The opening statement is 8 measures long, the bridge is 10 mm., and the final dominant period is also 10 mm. in length. The relationship of bridge and second key to that of the opening tonic statement is 1:3, a portion maintained in all sonata form movements from Domenico Scarlatti to Beethoven. In order for the dominant to be heard as deeper level harmonic area, it needs several periods to be established as such. This is why, in eighteenth-century sonata form movements, the dominant area is usually subdivided into several periods, each with its own cadential articulation, a compositional procedure that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

EXAMPLE 5.3: Sammartini Symphony in D, 1st Movement (mm.1 – 28)

Allegro

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Basso

9 F3 ↓ 1st system

17 G# ↑ 2nd system

Sammartini opens the second half of his symphony – later inappropriately referred to as “the development” – with a restatement of the opening thematic material in the dominant, perhaps a holdover from ritornello form with its second ritornello in the dominant; this procedure closely follows the Italian binary keyboard forms of the day. He then duplicates the order of events first presented in the first half of the symphony; that is, the dominant statement that begins the second

half now shifts into its parallel minor, a transposition of the “exposition” bridge passage. The transposed bridge, however, veers towards vi (B minor), and the pedal that was originally on A (V) in the first half, is now on B as part of a longer prolongation of the submediant. As it happens, the motion to vi initiates a 5ths cycle that follows the D major hexachord in retrograde: b – e – A – D as a method of returning to the tonic, unarticulated, in m. 63. Typical of keyboard sonata forms during this period, only the exposition bridge material and closing cadential statements are now recapped in the tonic, concluding the movement; the opening statement does not reappear in the tonic since it already has been stated in the dominant at the start of the second half of the movement. What is interesting about the second half of Sammartini’s symphony is that all eleven pitch classes are present except for F_♭, the missing pitch of the 2# system. It would seem, therefore, that Sammartini was particularly careful to maintain the prevailing 2# system throughout the second half of the symphony in order to avoid raising too much dissonance, a condition that would necessitate a much longer recapitulation, one that would resolve all the dissonances raised in both the first and second halves of the movement. The symphony had not yet grown in importance for composers to spend much time on purely developmental procedures since the genre was still considered an introduction, an overture, to the more important work that followed – usually an extended vocal work, either secular or sacred. Only when the symphony came to be regarded as an autonomous genre towards the middle of the century, do we find composers interested in working out (developing) chromatic ideas that would inform the very depths of the compositional process. To that end we must now turn to selected Austrian composers working in the 1740s, 50s and 60s who, along with their German contemporaries in

Mannheim, raise the symphony to the next level of artistic integrity.