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Striking Approaches to Galant Recapitulations

ABSTRACT

Background

Development sections stereotypically conclude with a sustained dominant harmony. This helps powerfully prepare for the ensuing double return at the start of the recapitulation, which forms a dramatic apex of the movement. Many commentators suggest that in many works the dominant harmony at the end of the development connects with the tonic of the local key of V found at the end of the exposition, thereby establishing part of a large I–V–I that frames the entire movement. Indeed, since such a framework is frequently assumed as standard, it is often further claimed that a I–V–I framework should be regarded as the tonal basis for even those sonata-form movements whose recapitulation is preceded immediately by V/vi (see, for instance, Cadwallader and Gagné 2007, 337–40; and Beach 1983, 28).

Yet a number of movements from the Galant era take advantage of a far wider net of harmonic possibilities for approaching the recapitulation, some of which call into question whether large-scale tonic-dominant polarity can be fairly understood to underpin the work's large structure. Theorists from the second half of the eighteenth century noted that a movement's middle section (analogous to what today is called the development) typically ends with a cadence in a key such as ii, iii, or vi. Although they mentioned that in most cases a brief bridge passage leads from this cadence back to the home key, such a bridge section clearly was regarded as optional (Riepel 1755, 92; Koch 1793, 309; see also Budday 1983, 164). This is reflected in music of the time, in which many recapitulations immediately follow a perfect cadence in the key of vi or iii. Such a strategy arguably gives rise to what Ratner (1980, 48) refers to as a 'solar'— as opposed to 'polar'— tonal framework, and some more recent studies have explored the tonal and structural implications of these and related non-dominant endings of development sections (for instance, see Petty 1999; Webster 2004, 138–45; and Neuwirth 2009).

However, extensive survey of music from the Galant era reveals the presence of recapitulations immediately preceded not only by chords such as V, V/vi, vi, and iii, but also by I, i, ii, V/ii (!), III, V/iii, IV, V/IV (!), V/V (!), v, and vii. Instances of this may be found in music by many composers, including C.P.E. Bach, W.F. Bach, G. Brunetti, C. Cannabich, J.A. Hasse, J. Haydn, A. Luchesi, N. Jomelli, F.A.D. Philidor, G.M. Rutini, G.C. Wagenseil, and E.F. Wolf. In some cases these section-ending harmonies appear as the final chord of a cadence, followed directly by the recapitulation; other times the harmony in question is the final chord of the retransition. Sometimes this harmony is followed by a short melodic link leading to the first chord of the recapitulation; sometimes it is followed by a rest; and sometimes it is followed immediately by the first harmony of the recapitulation, with no break in between. These strategies yield unusual chord successions —

such as ii–I or V/iii–I — at the crucial formal juncture that links the development to the recapitulation. As a result, in many of these instances the formal and tonal climax seems to arise in the middle of the recapitulation rather than at its beginning, thereby colouring the sense of the narrative and formal layout of the entire movement.

Aims and repertoire studied

Examining these alternate harmonic approaches to the recapitulation broadens our understanding of the tonal and formal options employed by composers during the Galant era. Since the resulting odd chord successions appear at such a pivotal moment in the form, this in turn prompts reconsideration of how to best understand and characterize the larger tonal and narrative structures that frame Galant sonata-form movements.

Methods

This investigation proceeds from a corpus study, followed by speculations regarding the large tonal and narrative impact of non-dominant harmonic approaches to the recapitulation.

Implications

Appreciation of these strategies for approaching the recapitulation allows for a deeper understanding of the variety of formal and tonal practices found during the Galant style. Many of the structures that result from these strategies depart from commonly assumed tonal paradigms that are based on large-scale tonic-dominant polarity, and they also depart from standard formal/narrative paradigms that take the point of recapitulation as the natural moment for a movement's climax. The prevalence of non-dominant tonal approaches to the recapitulation thereby encourages a rethinking of what tonal and narrative structures should be regarded as normative for Galant sonata-form movements, which in turn promotes consideration of the possible influence of such structures on music of later styles.

Keywords

Harmony, form, common-practice tonality

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