

Reinforcing Weak Expository Midpoints Using Extra-Formal Insertions

Title Slide

Welcome everyone. Thank you for coming to my paper. I suggest downloading the handout for this presentation. While I'll be projecting piano reductions of portions of the pieces I discuss today, I find it easier to understand the nuances of Boccherini's musical language with a full score, which I have provided in the handout.

Luigi Boccherini's first set of string quartets, opus 2, was published in 1761, when the composer was about eighteen years old. Despite his young age, Boccherini was already an accomplished cello virtuoso and had performed in Italy, France, and Austria. He had studied at his home in Lucca as well as in Rome, and would soon arrive in Spain, where he would spend the rest of his life. Boccherini's earliest known set of quartets reflect these experiences and contain some early hallmarks of his style.

This paper explores an early method used by Boccherini in two of the movements of opus 2 to create and then recover from instability at the exposition's midpoint. This method relies on problematizing the first half of the exposition by somehow concealing or obscuring the identity of the transition until, and perhaps even beyond, the transition's concluding cadence. The effect is disorienting. After the transition, a standing on the dominant in the secondary key enters and acts as a stabilizing force. A secondary theme follows and concludes the exposition with a perfect authentic cadence in the secondary key. Two of the slow movements from opus 2 use this method. These are the second movements of the String Quartet in C Minor, G. 159 and the String Quartet in E Major, G. 163.

Thus far, I have only found this method employed in a few early works by the composer. While several later compositions by Boccherini include instability at the exposition's midpoint, they arrive at this effect through different compositional methods. This suggests that Boccherini was

experimenting with form and expectation in these earlier works to produce his desired effect, but abandoned this specific method in favor of others. I have some ideas as to why this may be that I will explore during my conclusion. **CLICK.**

[Slide 2: Roadmap] The remainder of the paper is divided into three parts. First, I provide a brief overview of Type 2 sonata form, which both of these movements use, and offer some specifics on Boccherini's realizations of this form. The lion's share of the paper examines the two movements cited above, focusing mostly on their expositions. Finally, I end with a discussion of why Boccherini may have abandoned this method of problematizing the exposition. **CLICK.**

[Slide 3: Type 2] The Type 2 sonata form uses the same exposition as the more familiar Type 3 or textbook sonata form. It's second half is what makes it unique. Instead of cycling through a development followed by a full recapitulation of the exposition's material, the Type 2's second half begins with a development section that is often based on motives from the primary theme and transition. The transition may return measure-for-measure (or nearly so) as a retransition. The Type 2 form concludes with the return of the secondary and closing themes in the tonic key.

Boccherini uses Type 2 sonata forms for both longer and shorter movements. **CLICK.** The secondary themes of these movements frequently consist of a repeated phrase ending with a perfect authentic cadence in the secondary theme. **CLICK.** Particularly in his early works, Boccherini rarely uses a closing theme. **CLICK.** During the form's second half, Boccherini's development sections sometimes consist of a near-exact repetition of the primary theme and transition, albeit transposed to a different key. **CLICK.** The tonal resolutions of Boccherini's Type 2 movements rarely feature any significant changes from their expositional versions, save transposition to the tonic.

And now, with a better understanding of the Type 2 form and some of Boccherini's frequent or infrequent applications to the form, let's turn to the movements from his early quartets. **CLICK.**

[Slide 4: G159 Intro]. We'll start with the second movement of the String Quartet in C Minor, G.

159. I'll be projecting a diagram of the form here and, in later slides, a piano reduction of some parts of the movement, but I encourage you to also examine the full score of the piece, found in Appendix 1 of the handout.

CLICK. [Slide 5: G159 Expos] Example 2, found on the screen as well as in the handout, summarizes the exposition's events. The exposition of this movement includes a transition based so closely on the movement's primary theme that it fails to effectively prepare the arrival of a half cadence in the dominant at its conclusion. The shared melody appears in the cello during the primary theme and in the first violin during the transition. The primary theme, in measures 1 through 8, establishes the tonic, E-flat major, but concludes with an inverted dominant. The weaker conclusion here suggests that what follows will be a continuation of the primary theme. The next passage, which we eventually understand as a transition begins at measure 9 and concludes at measure 16. This passage transposes the material from the primary theme to the dominant and moves the melody from the cello to the first violin. The repetition of the primary theme's material makes the function of the transition difficult, if not impossible, to discern before the half cadence in the dominant that concludes it. The transition here fails to diverge from the primary theme, giving the impression that measures 9–16 form a continuation of the primary theme. The arrival of the half cadence in the dominant at measure sixteen is disorienting. We're forced to reinterpret what came before in light of this event, unsure of how we reached our present location. Let's listen to the exposition. **Click. PLAY. [with Expos arrival: TR-Click, SOTD-Click, S-Click]**

CLICK. [Slide 6: G. 159 PRedux] The brief prolongation of the secondary key's dominant in measures 17–20 responds to the transition's inability to communicate its own function and the consequential lack of preparation for the secondary key. These measures also create a temporal space between the transition and the secondary theme within which one begins to understand measures 9–16 as the transition and not a continuation of the primary theme. Most of the inserted

phrase oscillates between the dominant and a cadential six-four until the final beat of measure 19, when the bass line descends to an A-natural, inverting the dominant before the new tonic's arrival in the next bar. The onset of the secondary theme coincides with that arrival. The secondary theme consists of a repeated nine-bar phrase that ends with a Perfect authentic cadence in the secondary key. **CLICK**

[SL7: G159 R2] This insertion returns during the second half of the movement, now transposed to the home key. At the end of the development, a retransition leads to the home key. Following a half cadence in c minor, the mediant, at m. 43, Boccherini uses a Fonte progression in measures 44 through 51 to modulate to E-flat major. The retransition ends at measure 55 with a half cadence in the tonic.

At this point, the material originally heard before the secondary theme in the exposition returns in the tonic at measure 56. The standing on the dominant, now occurring over a B-flat major harmony, performs a somewhat different function at this junction. In the exposition, these measures allowed us to reorient ourselves following a transition incognito. The retransition during the movement's second half wears no such disguises. The Fonte progression and motion to the half cadence at measure 55 make the function of the retransition clear and further orientation is unnecessary. Instead, the standing on the dominant in measures 5 through 58 acts as an introduction to the secondary theme. Though associated with uncertainty during the exposition, by the second half of the movement this phrase has become familiar. **CLICK**

[SL8: G163 Title] The second movement of G. 163 employs two standings on the dominant, each with a specific, separate function. Appendix 2 at the end of the handout provides the score to this movement, while Example 3 gives an overview of the exposition. **CLICK**

[SL9 G163 Expos] Measures one through eight establish the tonic key, A major, with a four-bar prolongation of the tonic triad. Beginning at measure 5, the harmonic rhythm and, for that

matter, the surface rhythm, become more rapid. A half cadence at measure 8 in the tonic key followed by a gap in all voices suggests the end of the transition, but, like the half cadence in the second movement of G. 159, this seems premature (albeit for different reasons). The next phrase, the first of two standings on the dominant, will eventually convince us that the half cadence at measure eight acts as the gateway to the second half of the exposition, but the miniature proportions in play here as well as the limited markers of formal function present in measures one through eight create a sense at first that the cadence at measure eight occurs “too soon.” Once again Boccherini deploys a standing-on-the dominant to bridge the gap between this proposed medial caesura and the beginning of the secondary theme. Let’s listen to this exposition. **PLAY. [CLICK. With Expos arrivals: TR-Click, SOTD-Click, S-Click]**

CLICK. [SL10: ExposPR] There are important differences between this and the example from G. 159. First, the standing on the dominant in measures nine through twelve of this movement is the same length as both the primary theme and the transition. Recall that in G. 159 this was not the case—the standing on the dominant there was significantly shorter than either of those two sections.

A second difference lies in the conclusion of this phrase. Our previous example concluded with a root-position tonic chord in the secondary key and was elided with the onset of the secondary theme. This phrase ends on an inverted tonic in the new key and is followed by a gap in all voices. Rather than proceeding directly to the secondary theme, measures thirteen through sixteen present a second standing on the dominant. **CLICK.**

[SL11: G163 R2] Like the second movement of G. 159, the second movement of G. 163 uses the Type 2 sonata form. Unlike the previous example, however, the development section here does not consist of fragments or suggestions of previous themes and motives, but instead repeats

the first eight bars of the exposition in the dominant, E major. This occurs in measures 25 through 32. The development, if we can call it such, concludes with a half cadence in E major.

CLICK. The standing on the dominant from the exposition arrives in measure 33. Measures 33 through 36 repeat the original standing on the dominant, now transposed to the tonic, A major. Measure 36 concludes with a first-inversion tonic chord. At this point, one expects to hear the second standing on the dominant from the exposition that we originally heard in measures 13 through 16 and which there acted as an introduction to the secondary theme. That, however, is not what happens. **CLICK.** Instead, Boccherini repeats the material found in measures 33 through 36, now transposed to the subdominant. The transposition concludes in measure 40 with a subdominant chord. **CLICK.** An additional four-bar passage that ends with a dominant chord in the home key follows in measures 41 through 44. **CLICK.** At measure 45, the introduction to the secondary theme returns, transposed to the home key. The remainder of the movement consists of the tonal resolution of this passage and the secondary theme.

At first glance—and even at second and third glance if I am honest—Boccherini's choice to include measures 37 through 44, the repetition of the first standing on the dominant and the return to tonic that follows it, seems strange and perhaps even ill-advised. After all, measures 33 through 36 set up the tonal resolution nicely. At the end of measure 36 we are at a point analogous to measure 12 of the exposition. Why confuse the matter with these added measures?

I argue that measures 37 through 44 create and resolve much-needed tension during the second half of the movement. Compared with the exposition, the development has been highly predictable. By the time we reach measure 36, the second half of the movement has consisted entirely of a repetition of the exposition. And while the novelty of this material, coupled with the uncertainty of the key change created tension during the exposition, that is not the case here.

Measures 37 through 40 create uncertainty surrounding the key and the arrival of the tonal resolution. Measures 41 through 44 ferry us back to the tonic key, but do so by using a halting, hesitating rhythm shared in all voices. The effect here is almost comical—the movement in this passage is like that of a child or pet who, having been caught somewhere they shouldn't be, decides that their best option for escape is to back slowly out of your line of vision (often while staring directly at you). **CLICK. [SL12: Conclusions Title]**

While I've not yet found a later composition that duplicates the circumstances found in either G. 159 or G. 163, Boccherini uses post-medial cadence, pre-secondary theme passages throughout his work. **CLICK. [SL13: Later Stuff]** Other examples may be found in the second movement of his String Trio in A Major, G. 79 and the first movement of his String Quartet in A Major, G. 213. The string trio uses an unexpected passage in the minor dominant following the end of the transition, which prepares for a secondary theme in the major dominant. Similar passages occur in other works by Boccherini and the works of other contemporaneous composers including Domenico Scarlatti, Carlos Seixas, and Joseph Haydn.

CLICK. The later string quartet includes a harmonically unstable insertion after a strong medial caesura. Although this passage is in the secondary key, it and other examples like it feature unexpected harmonies and harmonic syntax. Instead of being a strong start to the secondary theme, such passages create uncertainty.

These and other later examples invert the process seen in the examples from opus 2: rather than acting as an orienting force in the exposition, later, similarly-located passages in Boccherini's works tend to create chaos from order and act as a disorienting force in their respective expositions.

This suggests that Boccherini may have abandoned this earlier practice of problematizing the exposition's first half in favor of using a more stable exposition and problematizing the midpoint with an unexpected element. It is also, in my opinion, the more efficient route to take if one's end

goal is disorientation at the exposition's midpoint. It is far easier to compose a more usual primary theme, transition, and secondary theme and then to insert something unexpected into that ready-made form than to alter that form.

The motivations behind Boccherini's use of the standings on the dominant in his early works will remain unknown, but it is my hope that continued research on Boccherini's work and on the compositional practices of early- and mid-eighteenth century composers will show how the passages discussed here relate to past and future uses.

CLICK. [SL14: Thank you]

Thank you for coming to my paper. I look forward to seeing everyone at the conference.