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Dancing a Minuet with Haydn via Koch: A New Approach to a Familiar Project

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Dancing a Minuet with Haydn via Koch: A New Approach to a Familiar Project

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Abstract

Our essay develops a historically-informed approach to the undergraduate minuet composition project, based on the second volume of Heinrich Christoph Koch's *Introductory Essay on composition* (1787). In that text, Koch details how an aspiring composer might first compose a basic, unembellished minuet (what we call model form) and then, through techniques of phrase expansion, develop a more stylistically sophisticated composition (what we call elaborated form). Crucially, while Koch composes some of the text's musical examples himself, many examples are drawn from works by Joseph Haydn. Thus, Koch teaches students to compose through analysis and imitation of works by a major living composer from his own time—one whose music is performed regularly by many small and large ensembles at colleges and universities today.

I. Introduction

As Nancy Rogers [notes](#) and anecdotal investigation confirms, the minuet style-composition project is a widespread pedagogical tool in undergraduate theory curricula.¹ The benefits of such an assignment are many, including "the opportunity [for students] to showcase their ever-increasing knowledge of harmony, voice leading, meter, phrase structure, and form while addressing skills such as motivic development and the generation of musical momentum"²—a position shared by organizations such as

¹ Nancy Rogers, "Modernizing the Minuet Composition Project," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 27 (2013): 71-72.

² Rogers, 71.

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the National Association of Schools of Music ([NASM](#))³ and the College Music Society ([CMS](#)).⁴ Rogers traces the pedagogical tradition of minuet composition to Joseph Riepel's *Fundamentals of Music Composition* (1752–1765), which presents a dialogue between a student and a teacher in which the teacher gradually and laboriously corrects a student's initial, unstylistic draft. Stefan Eckert (2005) [offers](#) a modern approach to the Riepel-inspired minuet project and argues that "the use of historical models and sources [...] provides a number of advantages," including "historical distance," which "helps students to set aside their own preferences and engage with the past."⁵

One issue raised by both Rogers and Eckert concerns the ability of students to internalize an increasingly-unfamiliar musical idiom—the mid- to late-eighteenth-century *galant* minuet—well enough to craft stylistically competent examples.⁶ For Rogers, the problem is so acute that she abandons the minuet project altogether in favor of the more familiar, contemporary genre of the college fight song. Eckert seems to dismiss the problem, arguing that lack of stylistic knowledge will result in a certain freedom, whereby students merely has to compare their work to a specific model and set aside their own preferences.⁷

³ For curricula leading to a professional undergraduate degree in music, NASM guidelines state that "[s]tudents must acquire a rudimentary capacity to create original or derivative music. It is the prerogative of each institution to develop specific requirements regarding written, electronic, or improvisatory forms and methods. These may include but are not limited to the creation of original compositions or improvisations, variations or improvisations on existing materials, experimentation with various sound sources, the imitation of musical styles, and manipulating the common elements in non-traditional ways. Institutional requirements should help students gain a basic understanding of how to work freely and cogently with musical materials in various composition-based activities, particularly those most associated with the major field" ([NASM Handbook 2019-2020](#), 103).

⁴ The Report of the Taskforce on the Undergraduate Music Major (commonly known as the "CMS Manifesto") encourages significant increases in activities such as improvisation and composition, including style-specific model compositions (2014, 17-18).

⁵ Stefan Eckert, "So You Want to Write A Minuet?"—Historical Perspectives in Teaching Music Theory, *Music Theory Online* 11/2 (2005): para 3.

⁶ Janet Bourne (2017) [develops a project](#) for using model minuet composition to engage with broader community. One bar of success for the project is how well students are able to internalize Mozart's minuet procedures and style.

⁷ Eckert, para. 3. An interesting ancillary issue concerns Riepel's instructions themselves. For example, as quoted by Eckert, Riepel's *Praeceptor's* dictum that "A composition, and especially a minuet, should always consist of an even number of bars," and that "Each part should consist of no more than eight bars" results in very square minuets, somewhat divorced from the mature practice of composers in the High Classical Style (para. 4). Eckert, for instance, teaches Mozart K. 1-9, in conjunction with the project. However, many minuets in the style exhibit techniques of elaboration and phrase expansion which don't conform to Riepel's rather conservative principles.

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Our essay offers a solution via the work of Heinrich Christoph Koch, who, in the second volume of his *Introductory Essay on Composition* (1787) lays out how an aspiring composer might first compose a basic, unembellished minuet (what we call *model form*) and then, through techniques of phrase expansion, develop a more stylistically sophisticated composition (what we call *elaborated form*).⁸ Crucially, while Koch composes some of the text’s musical examples himself, many examples are drawn from works by Joseph Haydn. Thus, unlike Riepel, Koch teaches students to compose through analysis and imitation of works by a major living composer from his own time—one whose music is performed regularly by many small and large ensembles at colleges and universities today.

In the first part of this study, we discuss model form in minuets from Haydn’s early symphonies from the perspective of Koch’s theory. We then review two composite examples based on student examples of model form composed in Spring 2020⁹ according to our instructions derived from Koch’s approach.¹⁰ In Part II, we demonstrate how the model forms in Part I can be expanded through Koch’s instructions to elaborated forms, referring to representative minuets from Haydn’s later symphonies. Our goal is to demonstrate a historically-informed approach to a familiar theory assignment, one that blends close analysis of Haydn’s symphonic minuets, engagement with historical sources, and model composition.

II. Model Form

Figure 1, adapted from Nathan John Martin, displays what we call *model form*—a simple, unelaborated formal plan derived from Koch’s instructions for minuet composition.¹¹

⁸ Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Introductory Essay on Composition: The Mechanical Rules of Melody, Sections 3 and 4*, translated by Nancy Kovaleff Baker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁹ All students in the course were second-semester freshman music majors.

¹⁰ In our procedure, our work is indebted to Nathan John Martin (2019), who demonstrates how, following Koch, one might turn a minuet into a full-fledged sonata exposition. Such an advanced application of Koch’s theory could be applicable to upper level analysis or model composition courses. We choose to focus here on the minuet model composition project because of its ubiquity in American theory classrooms and because, as outlined below, it is adaptable to a variety of institutions, curricula, and student experience levels.

¹¹ Nathan John Martin, “Form,” in *The Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia*, edited by Caryl Clark and Sarah Day-O’Connell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 126.

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(transformed to a I-phrase) comprise the minuet’s second half. Differences between Koch’s approach as exemplified in his Example 229 and that of most contemporary theory texts are: 1) Koch is interested in the combination of 4-bar phrases rather than eight-bar periods—a focus that allows for easier elaboration later on; 2) Koch’s example would be classified as “simple binary” whereas most textbooks stress rounded binary (or “small ternary”) forms because of their relationship to the Type-3 sonata, and 3) the first half of Koch’s Haydn example does not modulate (a so-called “sectional binary”) while most texts stress the prevalence of modulating forms (“continuous binary”).¹³

But how common are model forms in Haydn’s oeuvre? Consider the first halves of the minuets from Symphonies Nos. 18 and 20 respectively.¹⁴ The [minuet from Symphony No. 18 \(score\)](#) presents a 4-bar I-phrase followed by a new, motivically-related I-phrase. The first I-phrase uses only tonic and dominant harmonies. [Symphony No. 20’s minuet \(score\)](#) presents a 4-bar V-phrase which repeats as a 4-bar I-phrase. Haydn composes both phrases with only tonic and dominant harmonies.

One of the advantages of a minuet composition project based on Koch’s model form is that it can be assigned early on in the student’s undergraduate career. There is no need to wait until the second or even third semester of undergraduate training, when small forms and modulation are introduced. Instead, students can begin composing in their first semester of undergraduate study, as long as they have discussed authentic and half cadences, several basic tonic expansions and prolongations, and melodic shape. Early and frequent exposure to low-stakes composition assignments helps students to better absorb the particular features of the musical style being modeled, and prepares for larger, capstone projects later.

Instructions are adaptable, and for the first part of a model form minuet an assignment could be something as simple as the following:

¹³ See Steven G. Laitz, *The Complete Musician*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 485-486, 490-492; Miguel A. Roig-Francolí, *Harmony in Context*, 2nd edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 502, 504, 519-52.

¹⁴ For our purposes, we will consider the first halves only, but the same principles may be applied to the second halves.

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Step 1) On a sheet of staff paper, create 8 bars of 3/4 time in your favorite major key (other than C major).

Step 2) Compose a 4-bar melodic idea that is primarily stepwise with triadic leaps and that concludes with either an authentic cadence (I-phrase) or half cadence (V-phrase)

Step 3) Repeat your 4-bar melodic idea. Again, you may conclude either with an authentic cadence (I-phrase) or half cadence (V-phrase). (A variation would allow for students to either repeat their 4-bar idea from Step 2 or compose a new idea, yielding a contrasting structure.)

Step 4) Compose an accompanying bass line that employs contrary motion and makes use of the tonic expansions we have discussed in class.¹⁵

In Spring 2020 we gave the following slightly expanded instructions to a class of second-semester freshman undergraduate music majors:

Model Form (without elaboration)

- 1) Create 16 bars of a grand staff (treble + bass clef) in 3/4 time. Select a major key.
- 2) Compose a 4-bar I-phrase (ending on tonic) or V-phrase (ending with a HC) using the tonic expansions we've discussed in class.
- 3) Compose a new 4-bar phrase, or repeat your 4-bar phrase from step 2. End it either as a I-phrase (ending on tonic) or a V-phrase (ending with a HC or modulating to V). [Note: you may choose either cadential option, regardless of your phrase in step 2.]
- 4) Choose whether you will compose a simple (proceed to 4a) or rounded binary (proceed to 4d):

¹⁵ Of course, Step 4 in particular and these instructions in general may be altered at will based on the progress of the course and the intent of the assignment.

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- 4a) For simple: Compose a new 4-bar I-phrase or V-phrase, unrelated to your first 2 phrases.
- 4b) Repeat your phrase from step 4a and conclude it as a I-phrase (since this is the end of the piece, it should end on I) or compose a new 4-bar I-phrase.
- 4c) For rounded: Compose a 4-bar V-phrase that includes a sequence or V-pedal underneath an elaboration of one of your melodic ideas from the first half.
- 4d) Repeat your phrase from step 2, but rewrite (if necessary) to form a I-phrase.
- 5) (optional) You now have a 2-voice framework. If you would like to add inner voices, do so now.

Due to the structure of the course, we needed to relate Koch's procedure to commonly-used binary form terminology; however, this may not be necessary in all situations. Examples 2 and 3 are minuets composed by the authors which illustrate common stylistic trends and errors found in the student minuets.

Student J begins with a 4-bar I-phrase followed by another closely-related 4-bar I-phrase. Phrase 3 is a 4-bar V-phrase which employs a V-pedal. Phrase 4 recapitulates Phrase 2. Errors of style or voice-leading are marked, but these are relatively minimal, and could be easily corrected in a later draft.

Student Q begins with two 4-bar V phrases. For Phrase 3, similar to Student J, Student Q employs a V-pedal before a concluding 4-bar I-phrase. Student Q's work contains a few more voice-leading issues than Student J, but again, these could easily be corrected by the student in a later draft.

Interestingly, none of our students claimed any significant familiarity with Haydn's music before undertaking the project, yet all students captured something of that style in their model compositions based on Koch's instructions and the examples from Haydn's symphonies discussed above.

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Example 2: "Student J," *Minuet in G major*, with Roman numeral analysis and labeled errors.

Tempo di Minuetto

mf

G: I V^{6/5} I I V^{6/5}

B4 or G4 in soprano preferred.

7 I V I V V^{6/4} bVI V

// Octaves

13

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Example 3: "Student Q," *Minuet in F major*, with Roman numeral analysis and labeled errors.

Calmly; Tempo di Minuetto

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a minuet in F major. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system (measures 1-6) is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 7-12) includes annotations: "IAC works better here" above measure 9, "IAC or PAC here" below measure 7, "// strong beat parallels" below measures 9-10, and "//parallels" below measures 11-12. The third system (measures 13-16) concludes the piece. Roman numeral analysis is provided below the notes for each measure.

System 1 (Measures 1-6):
 F: I V I

System 2 (Measures 7-12):
 V⁽⁷⁾ V I V I V
 IAC or PAC here // strong beat parallels //parallels

System 3 (Measures 13-16):
 I I V⁽⁷⁾ I

By participating in composition activities based on Koch's model form, supplemented with additional examples from Haydn, students can compose immediately, engage with central common-practice repertoire, and learn through practice how Haydn's contemporaries conceptualized composition, phrase structure, and the minuet form.

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III. Elaborated Form

As explained, the minuet model proposed by Koch was merely that: a model with set structures (e.g., I-phrase, V-phrase). For students at a beginning level learning to write a minuet aiming to synthesize melodic, harmonic, and basic stylistic characteristics of the late 18th century, the assignment presented above will work well. However, we know that Haydn's own minuets are more often elaborated when viewed from formal and harmonic perspectives. Thus, for more advanced undergraduate students, such as those in an upper-level form and analysis class, or even graduate students in a tonal analysis or tonal composition course, Haydn's elaborated minuets that play with model norms serve as excellent archetypes for how one can create pieces that move beyond Koch's model and utilize more creative compositional techniques. In fact, many theory textbooks already include examples of Haydn minuets to illustrate such formal and harmonic structures.

In keeping with our historically-influenced approach to model composition, which we believe would help students find deeper meaning in the project as participants in a historical tradition, we refer back to Koch's views on the minuet and the ways in which it can be elaborated. In particular, the length of the first reprise in each minuet varies throughout Haydn's symphonies, from the "squarer" ones that conform to Koch's 16-bar (4+4+4+4) model, to those that are shorter (usually between 10-14 bars) and even some that extend past 16 bars. To assist students with their creative efforts, we employ two main sources: Koch's examples and writings from his *Introductory Essay on Composition* and the aforementioned step-by-step plan distilled from Koch by Martin.

The elaboration techniques used to vary the 8-bar opening reprise used by Haydn would likely be discussed in a standard form class and can be applied to a model composition. Such modifications as *internal expansions*, *diminutions*, *sequences*, *cadential extensions*, etc., are common procedures found in wide swaths of Haydn's music. For that reason, allowing students to engage with the historical precedent in Koch's writings provides context for "gray area" examples and explanations for their existence. Yet instead of bombarding students with the terms just mentioned, we suggest beginning with Koch's much simpler term "repetition" that invites students into understanding the concept immediately.

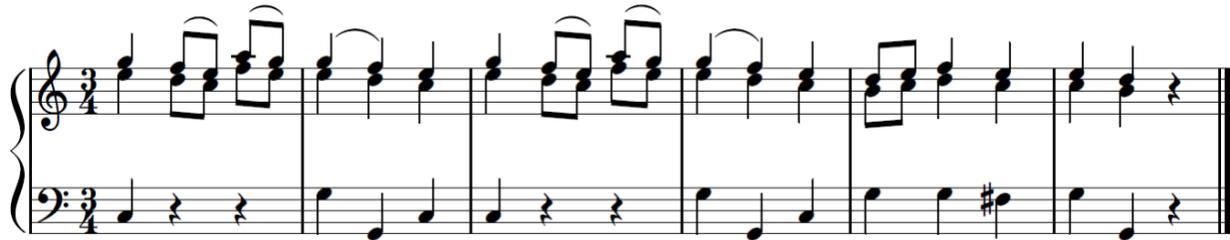
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Example 4 shows Koch's example 295, which presents a simple repetition.

Example 4: Koch, Example 295 (p. 130)



Bars 3-4 repeat bars 1-2 literally, and could be excised to jump to bars 5-6 where Koch ends the phrase with a half cadence. Students may ponder why a composer would repeat the same bars back to back, but the instructor could explain that Haydn often varies the dynamics and instrumentation within the repetition, resulting in an echo effect. In this case, the overall phrase, lasting 6 bars, conforms to Koch's basic structural model with its first cadence, but stretches the overall length of the phrase. As the examples and analyses of phrase elaboration and extension continue in his text, Koch recommends specific guidelines that would assist students when composing their own pieces. For instance (distilled from Koch's chapter "The Use of Melodic Means of Extension"):

- 1) When a phrase in which a repetition is to be made has no incomplete incises (cuts), the first, second, or third bar can be repeated without any restriction.¹⁶
- 2) Far more often the first phrase stands entirely alone in its uneven rhythmic condition.¹⁷
- 3) Still more usual in practice, especially in instrumental pieces, is the case that when the first segment has been extended, the second segment of the phrase of the segment is also extended (see Example 5).¹⁸ [[Belcher Example 5 here](#)]

¹⁶ Koch, 131. It may be helpful for instructors to explain or "translate" Koch's instructions for words like "incise" and "segment" by using his examples, or consulting other appropriate sources.

¹⁷ Koch, 133.

¹⁸ Koch, 139.

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Example 5: adapted from Koch, Example 318 (p. 139).



These excerpts and guidelines provide students with steps and stylistic ways to extend their phrases, supported by numerous illustrative examples. With this background in mind, and knowing that Koch drew upon Haydn's music extensively in his writings (especially in the chapter referenced here), instructors can turn to examples by Haydn for analysis before students embark on composing their own pieces.

We have chosen examples from three Haydn symphonies written around the same time as Koch's book that illuminate formal elements of Koch's writings clearly. The first is the minuet from [Symphony No. 90 in C major](#) (1788; [score](#)). We focus on just the 14-bar first half.

The first phrase begins as Koch suggests in the model, with a four-bar phrase that concludes on an IAC. Immediately following this phrase, though, the next four bars divide into a 2+2 fanfare-like statement (orchestrated in the winds) that prolongs the tonic chord. This section can be used to show how Haydn builds expectations through the use of repetition and prolongation. When the full orchestra reenters at bar 9, Haydn plays further with phrase extensions, and inserts two "extra" bars at bars 11-12 that outline a IV-V progression, and create a strong pull toward the resolution in the last two bars. The instructor can then point out how bars 11-12 could be excised, and one would be left with a Kochian 4-bar model phrase (modulating to V); yet Haydn's version adds variety by its simple use of repetition.

Another example, the minuet from [Symphony No. 92 in G major](#), the "Oxford" Symphony (1789; [score](#)), presents students with a 12-bar first reprise. Similar to the previous example, this minuet contains another set of "extra" bars that echo Koch's comments about repetition, but with additional points of interest. As in the C-major symphony, the first phrase consists of a lilting tune in G major, ending as expected on an IAC in bar 4. Haydn then inserts two bars that create another cadence in bars 5-6, with a $ii_6 - V_6/5$ of $V - V$, thus adding a half cadence before the opening tune returns in bar

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7. This insertion not only demonstrates to students another way to structure a phrase, but also illuminates the impact of two different types of cadences, all within the same phrase (IAC + HC), both of which are permitted in this style. When the main melody returns, confirming the parallel period, Haydn again inserts additional bars that do not materially affect the progression or the overall direction of the phrase. For instance, it is possible to move from bars 7-8 to bars 11-12 and skip the intervening two bars, but students should observe that the phrase modulates to V, and that Haydn adds bars 9-10 as a way to bring in the dominant's leading tone (C-sharp) earlier, as well as provide more attraction toward the cadence. Additionally, from a melodic perspective, Haydn inverts the main melody in those two bars, borrowing the scalar idea from the viola/bassoon parts earlier in the period, thus strengthening the section's unity. In short, the instructor can highlight the following main concepts for students to consider in their own pieces: the extended two bars (5-6) at the end of the first phrase that lead from an IAC to a HC, as well as the "extra" inserted two bars that heighten the modulation to V. Even with the elaborations, the example still follows Koch's basic model.

A final analytical example comes from [Symphony No. 88 in G](#) (1787; [score](#)). This minuet presents students with numerous challenges, as well as excellent topics for class discussion, and demonstrates Haydn's formal ingenuity at its finest. The movement begins simply in G major with a catchy melody in bars 1-2 that suggests a straightforward path, but quickly veers course in ways that move beyond the two examples previously discussed. The remainder of the first reprise consists of sequential phrases, a modulation to the dominant with a strong cadence in bars 9-10, and then four additional bars of echo statements between oboes and strings. Given the 14-bar framework, as well as the lack of the standard first phrase ending on a half or imperfect authentic cadence, one of the most effective ways for students to understand this example could be through leading questions and discussion points. For example, the instructor could pose the following:

- The only PAC in this first reprise happens at bars 9-10 in D major (V). How does Haydn arrive there considering the unexpected and irregular number of bars? (Remember that cadences usually occur at bars 4 and 8.)

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- True or false (and then discuss): This entire reprise can be seen as one phrase from bars 1-10, followed by a cadential extension.
- Can you divide bars 1-10 into phrases or subphrases? If not, how can you explain the phrasal structure?
- If a typical period lasts 8 or 16 bars, what elaborative techniques account for the unusual length of this reprise?

These leading questions will focus students' attention on Haydn's expansion of Koch's model, as well as introduce his creative stretching of phrase norms that go beyond the examples shown earlier. If particularly advanced students wish to model their own minuets on Symphony No. 88, they should focus on the use of sequence (as an expansion technique), as well as target the use of applied chords to heighten harmonic tension and help extend the harmonic motion. Above all, what should be stressed is how Haydn makes these deviations from Koch's model sound so effortless because of good voice leading and strong initial melodic themes that allow for further development.

IV. Conclusion

This essay has addressed the value of model composition for theory courses, in this case the minuet, based on a historically-influenced approach. Rogers points out that "to a budding eighteenth-century musician, the minuet was an ideal point of departure: because its conventions were extremely familiar, composition teachers could easily address issues of style and taste."¹⁹ Even though, as acknowledged above, she argues that the minuet may not be the most effective way to reach today's students, we still believe there is value in examining and writing the minuet because doing so distills and synthesizes much of what students have learned in their music theory study up to the usual date of the assignment. Furthermore, using Haydn's symphonic minuets as compositional examples affords students the opportunity to engage with orchestral repertoire, Haydn's creative and groundbreaking modifications to standard formal schemes, as well as formal and phrasal terminology

¹⁹ Rogers, 72.

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and concepts that will attain greater significance in later theory courses. Finally, studying Haydn and Koch together allows students to see how composers and theorists interacted in a contemporary historical period; instead of us always looking back at the past, where theory followed practice (often much later), this historical model composition allows students to step back into the late 18th century and examine contemporary theory and practice in a meaningful way that helps propel student understanding and leave them with a tangible product from that study.

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