



Musical Form of a Typical American March

Introduction
First Strain (repeated)
Second Strain (repeated)
Trio
Break Strain (the Fight)
Coda (the Recap)

Most marches begin with an Introduction. The introduction is four, eight, or sixteen measures long. The Introduction sets the mood of the music.

The different sections in a march are called Strains. Each strain contains one main melody. There are usually three different strains plus a contrasting section called the Trio.

The First Strain of a march is the main melody. Being the main idea usually means that people recognize the march by this first melody. The First Strain is usually eight or sixteen measures long with four measure phrases. These short, eight or sixteen measures want to be heard again. So, repeating the first strain is a standard practice. There are two differences between the first time through it and the second time. Often, the second time through is played at a different dynamic level or will be played by different instruments. Then, to go along with the main melody, a composer will sometimes add a different melody called a counter melody that plays at the same time. Writing counter melodies is a special skill that most great composers have. We call this compositional technique “counter-point” (point against point).

The Second Strain of a march is usually sixteen measures long. This new strain introduces a second melody to the listeners. Many times the composer will choose to have the second melody played softer for contrast.

The next part of a typical, American style march is the Trio. The Trio is the featured melody of the March. We can identify this section by listening for two things:

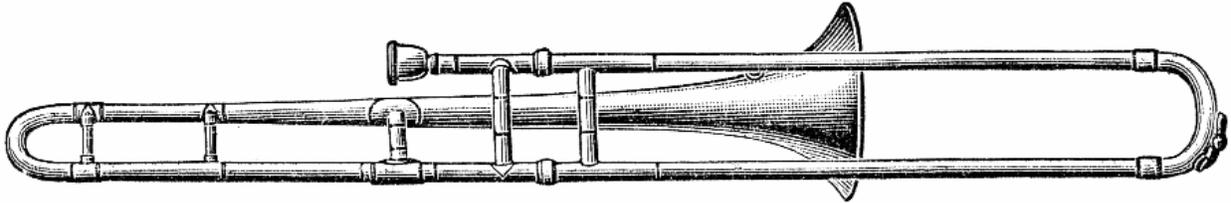
- 1) a key change (usually adding one flat to the key signature), and
- 2) an immediate or abrupt change in volume from loud to soft by the entire band.

The Trio section is usually thirty-two measures long.

The Break Strain comes next. Marches have a “raucous” part that we call the break strain or “The Fight”. Old-school musicians will sometimes refer to the Break Strain as “The Dogfight”

in reference to aerial fighter-plane battles. The purpose of the Break Strain is to break up the march between the Trio and Coda sections. The Break Strain always produces an excitement for a listener and musician alike.

Lastly, a march will conclude with a Coda or “Recap” section that wraps up and returns the audience to a final rendition of the Trio theme with occasional modifications.



John Philip Sousa is a very well known name in the music world. Called the March King, Sousa composed some of the most famous Marches. His marches are performed worldwide. Sousa was a superb composer of melodies which put him in a class all by himself. A foreign diplomat once remarked, “A band that can play a Sousa March well, is a good band”! Of the over 120 marches Sousa wrote, the most recognizable one is “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” the national march of the United States of America.

Here is a list of famous march composers. Their marches continue to give enjoyment to performers and audiences alike.

John Philip Sousa 1854 – 1932

Edward Elgar 1857 – 1934

Karl King 1891 – 1971

Julius Fucik 1872 – 1916

Henry Fillmore 1881 -1956

Kenneth Alford 1881 -1945

Jamie Texidor 1884 – 1957

Fred Jewell 1875 – 1936

Samuel Barber 1910 – 1981

John Williams 1932 –



In closing, the musical form of a march is not a difficult concept to understand. If we listen to our music and know its structure, it can be very rewarding.

B♭ Trumpet 1

Excellence

March

Dedicated to National Homeschool Music Ensembles

Donald S. Dobrosky Sr.
& Isaac A. Weiss

March tempo **Introduction:**

First Strain:

5

f *precisely* *mf*

9 B♭ Tpt. 1

sub. p

19

f *sub. mf*

29

sub. p *f*

37

7 7

Second Strain:

53 solo - Hn. cues
(also in T. Sax.)

f *tutti*
mp *lightly*

61

69 *tacet* 2nd time

Trio:

2 2 1.

p

Break Strain:

85 2. 2 2 2

f *molto marcato* *ff* *fff*

103

tacet 1st time

99 3

ff

Recap / Coda:

111 1. 2 2.