Concerto information

A little bit of background: the word "concerto" comes from *concertare*, which is both a Latin and an Italian word. The Latin *concertare* means to fight or contend, while the Italian *concertare* means to join together. Think about the way in which a concerto demonstrates both meanings.

Concerti written in the Classical and Romantic periods typically include three movements. The first is often in a special kind of sonata form to be discussed below; the second is frequently ternary, a slow rondo or variations set, and so forth; the third movement frequently is in rondo or sonata-rondo form.

The idea of concerto predates both the Classical period and sonata form: concerti began to be written in the Baroque period, before sonata form even existed. The Baroque concerto (both the solo concerto and the *concerto grosso*) frequently makes use of the *ritornello* idea, in which the orchestra part keeps **returning** (hence, ritornello); there is an alternation of orchestral and solo passages (or, *ripieno* and *concertino*). The diagram below shows this alternation; in it, R represents ritornello (the returning full ensemble) and S represents the solo sections (typically a solo instrument or instruments along with a small accompanying ensemble):

R S R S R S R

The advent of sonata form in the eighteenth century created an **enormous** problem for composers: how was one to reconcile the historically-established alternation of tutti and solo passages with the musical drama inherent in sonata form? The solution was found in a fusion of the *ritornello* idea and sonata form called a sonata form with a **double exposition**. The double exposition is not all that different from a standard exposition with repeats, but in a double exposition the orchestra plays the first exposition and the soloist plays (along with orchestral accompaniment) in the second:

‖: P T S K :‖   becomes: **orchestra**: P T S K then **solo**: P T S K

The next problem was: how could the alternation of tutti and solo continue into the remainder of the movement (the development and recapitulation)? The solution was to insert a brief orchestral tutti before the development. The development became more of a "solo" section, while the recapitulation became a combined tutti/solo. A cadenza followed by a final tutti passage completed the movement. See the diagram below, which shows the correlation of the ritornello/solo alternation with the sonata form with double exposition:

Ritornello 1	Solo 1	Ritorn. 2	Solo 2	Rit. 3/Solo 3		Ritorn. 4
Orch. expos.	Solo expos.	Orch tutti	Development	Recapitulation	Cadenza	Final tutti

Now, **a tonal problem**: it would be a little boring and redundant to have the orchestral **and** the solo expositions **both** include modulations before the second theme group. As a result, the **orchestral exposition** typically **does not modulate**--only the solo exposition does. Here is how it would be carried out in major then minor mode:

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Orch. expos.  Solo expos.
P  T  S  K  P  T  S  K
I --------------- I   → V
i --------------- i   → III
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- **Finding themes:**

     Finding themes becomes more complicated in a concerto. For one thing, there is no repeat sign at the end of the exposition. In addition, there is no modulation in the orchestral exposition, so you can not rely on key alone to help you find themes. The solution: look at (listen to) the **solo exposition** to find the themes--most particularly the transition and the second theme group in the new key. Since the themes are more embellished and virtuosic when they are in the solo instrument, it pays to go back and forth between the solo and the orchestral exposition to confirm your analytical decisions.

- **The development:**

     The development section of a concerto movement functions a lot like the development section of any sonata-form movement: the same aspects of fragmentation, sequence, modulation, and so on still are in effect. The development in a concerto movement usually features the orchestra and soloist trading off from one another--it provides the soloist with an opportunity to show off her/his virtuosity. Two other incidental points:
     The solo exposition may function as an initial "development" (embellishment, at least) of the main themes.
     The orchestral tutti immediately before the development frequently blends smoothly into the development section--the distinction between the two is often subtle.

- **The recapitulation:**

     As shown in the diagram on the previous page, the recapitulation functions as both a tutti and solo. This is as much **formal** in nature as it is instrumental--there are *two* expositions, but there is only *one* recapitulation. What this means is that the recapitulation is a **synthesis** of the two expositions--you will usually find aspects of both expositions present here.

- **The rest:**

     Sooner or later, you hear the music approach a **dramatic** I_4^6 chord and the audience hushes with expectancy. Yes, the **cadenza** has arrived--usually somewhere around the end of the recapitulation. The order of the closing theme, cadenza, and coda (if present) can vary a bit:

     cadenza K **or** cadenza K coda **or** K cadenza coda **or** something else

     As you know, the cadenza shows off the soloist's virtuosity; it usually is not just showy scales and arpeggios, though--it usually is yet another development (or embellishment) of the movement's thematic material.

- **So here is the complete "model"** (remember it is **only** a model):

Ritornello 1	Solo 1	Ritorn. 2	Solo 2	Rit. 3/Solo 3		Ritorn. 4
Orch. expos.	Solo expos.	Orch tutti	Development	Recapitulation	Cad.	Final tutti
P T S K	P T S K	T? K?	Fragments	P T S -----		K/coda
I --------------	I → V ---		--------- → V	I ---------------	I_4^6 → V	I ---------
i --------------	i → III --		--------- → V	i ---------------	i_4^6 → V	i ---------

- **A historical (and stylistic) point:**

     This double exposition "model" (or something closely resembling it) may be found in the first movements of numerous Classical and Romantic period concerti; however, composers continued to struggle to reconcile the solo/orchestra dichotomy with sonata form. Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, and others sometimes **combined** the soloist and orchestra from the very beginning; as a result, there may only be a single exposition which include all of the themes and a modulation.