

American March Form

Model Composers:

John Philip Sousa
 Henry Fillmore
 Karl H. King (circus music)
 Scott Joplin (rags)
 Kenneth Alford (British)

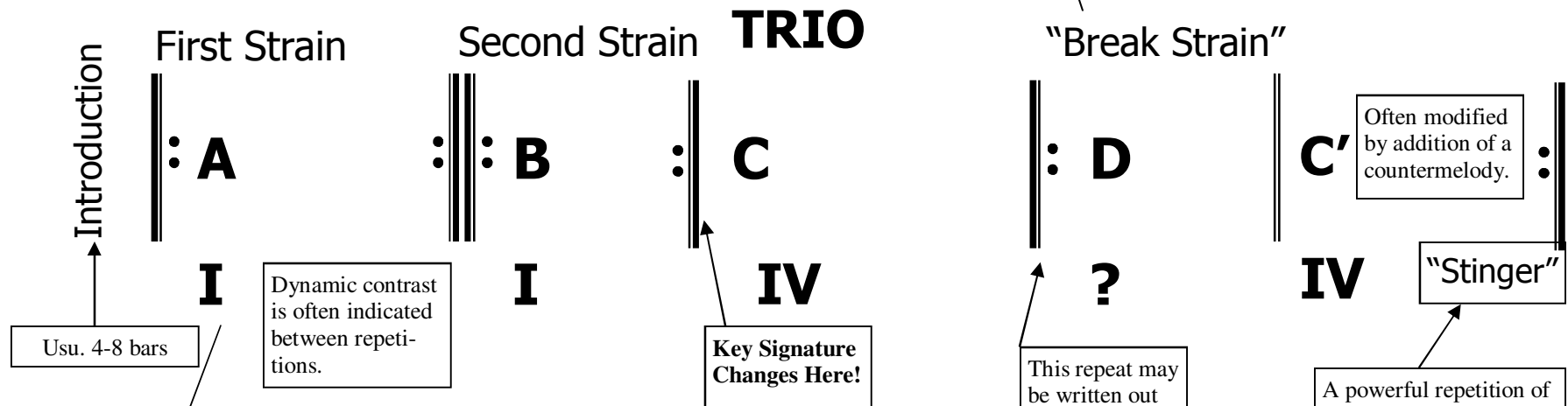
Many European marches (especially concert pieces) feature an A-B-A form, but American military marches prefer a tonally open structure as appears below. This form was most popular between ca. 1860 and 1925, with some composers continuing to write in the form throughout the twentieth century.

All sections are harmonically closed, except the "break strain," which is often quite ambiguous, employing sequential harmonies, but always leading back to IV.

Sections tend to be of equal length, except for the introduction, which is much shorter.

Keys: C major and flat keys with no more than four flats are most common for band; Joplin's piano rags employ some sharp keys, as do orchestral versions of Sousa's marches. Nearly all marches in this form "add a flat" to the key signature at the Trio.

Time signatures: 6/8, 2/4 and "cut time" appear almost exclusively. A march in 4/4 is not likely to follow this form.



Analytical Conundrum—is the home key at the beginning or the end of the piece?

Variations:

1. First strain in minor (2nd strain in III, Trio adds a flat and is in major; example: Sousa, *The Gladiator*)
2. Trio adds a sharp (rare)
3. Trio stays in the same key (rare)
4. Meter change at trio (example: Sousa, *El Capitan*)
5. Extra or missing strains (between A and C or missing break strain, example: Bagley, *National Emblem*)