

In a strophic song, phrase contrasts are rooted in melodic contour differences. In binary form, the melodies of the two sections always are different, too. It's a matter of degree. In binary form, the melodies are very different, involving other components of music as you found in examining "Yankee Doodle." Binary songs usually are longer than strophic songs, necessitating a desire for change not only in melodic direction, but in other characteristics as well. The contrasts prevent monotony. It's like life. Every so often, you need a change. The two sections of a binary song typically are of approximately equal length providing symmetry, but each section has a unique homogeneity of musical characteristics. The whole has a balance of unity and variety.

So, to identify a binary song, you must listen for changes in several musical components. These differences will alert you to the start of a new section. Most binary songs contain contrasts in a combination of the following musical characteristics.

Pitch: A generally high-pitched section often is balanced by a low-pitched section. Sometimes melodic direction is contrasted. That is, one section might contain mostly ascending melodic lines and the other section descending one. A change in the preponderance of steps, leaps and/or repeated tones also could constitute a contrast.

Melodic rhythm: The tones in one section could be primarily long while the tones in the other section are mostly short. Even and uneven rhythms also are frequently contrasted.

Tempo: One section could be fast and the other section could be slow. In this case, the melodies of the sections also will be different, but the tempo change probably will be a more obvious clue that a new section has begun.

Meter: Occasionally, one section will be in duple meter and the other in triple.

Dynamics: Loud and quiet can be contrasted. Again, the melodies of the two sections will be different, but a sudden change in dynamics will get your attention and will contribute to the overall effect of the contrast.

Phrase length: A series of short phrases can punctuate the beginning of a "B" section. Inversely, a long phrase following a series of short phrases will present a distinct contrast.

Tone color: A topic change and/or changes in any other musical characteristic(s) could necessitate a change in vocal tone color. Keep this in mind as you perform binary songs. Also, instrumental pieces sometimes are in binary form. In these cases, a dramatic change in the instruments playing could be an indication that the "B" section has begun.

As you know, binary form also can be called "A B" form. **Verse and refrain** is another label frequently applied. The "A" section is the verse and the "B" section is the refrain or the chorus. "Yankee Doodle" again will serve as an example. You could go on to sing another verse. Here are the words to the second verse.

Father and I went down to camp, Along with Captain Gooding;

There we saw the men and boys, As thick as hasty pudding.

As in strophic form, the melody of the verse is the same for each repetition. Only the words change. In the refrain/chorus section, both the melody and the words are repeated. A refrain/chorus is a section of a song containing the exact repetition of both melody and words. It is sung following every verse.

Be careful, however, of jumping to the conclusion that every song with a verse and refrain is in binary form. That is not the case. Most songs with a verse and a refrain are in binary form, but not all. The melodies and other components in the two sections of a song must be different for the song to be in binary form. Occasionally in a verse-and-refrain song, the melody of the verse is identical to the melody of the refrain. "This Land is Your Land" is an example. If your class is divided in half and one half sings the verse(s) while the other half sings the refrain, you will hear a unison melody. Although this song has several verses and a refrain, it is not in binary form. This is an exception to the rule, however. The vast majority of songs containing verses and a refrain are in binary form. In a song book, the word "refrain" usually is printed over the staff where the refrain begins. Sometimes, but less frequently, the word "verse" is printed over the staff at the beginning of the song.

Besides the words "refrain" and "verse" included in the score, there is another notational device that you might see that will alert you to binary form. Although this indication is not used exclusively in binary songs and its