

NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF MUSIC THEORISTS

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**TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING
THE NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF MUSIC THEORISTS
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
APRIL 4-5, 2008**

Abstracts

Friday afternoon, April 4

2:00-4:15

Liszt, Wagner, and the Turn of the Twentieth Century

- “Sentential patterns and sentence projection in some of Liszt’s Weimar symphonic poems”
Steven Vande Moortele (University of Leuven and McGill University)

Analytical studies of the music of Franz Liszt generally focus either on its harmonic organization or its large-scale form. The question, however of the syntactic organization of themes and other units at the same hierarchical level has seldom been asked. The present paper asks exactly this question. Drawing upon categories from William Caplin’s *Classical Form* and Matthew BaileyShea’s work on syntactic structures in Wagner, it explores the limits and possibilities of a *Formenlehre* approach when applied to music from the mid-nineteenth century.

It will be shown that the most common syntactic structure in Liszt’s symphonic poems is a variant of the theme type that in (post-)Schoenbergian *Formenlehre* is known as the sentence. The paper will focus on the internal organization of the opening unit (the model) of the sentential pattern, distinguishing between five different types of models: simple basic ideas, compound basic ideas, complex models, double basic ideas, and nested sentences. Special attention is given to the last two categories. Both the double basic idea and the nested sentence exemplify one of the most typical strategies Liszt deploys to shape his music in general: the projection of the formal organization of a hierarchically lower onto a hierarchically higher level in the form.

- “The *Tristan* Progression as an Energetic Voice-Leading Paradigm: A Study in *Kinetic Displacement Intervals* (KDIs)”
Seth Monahan (Yale University)

This study explores the connections between voice-leading, musical gesture, and psychodynamic processes in several passages from *Tristan und Isolde*. Taking a broad cue from Ernst Kurth, it asks what might be gained by bracketing questions of chord identity and structure, to focus instead on the voice-leading that produces and interconnects them. Striving for a holistic image of gesture, voice-leading, and stage action, the study examines the *energetic voice-leading gestalts* that govern medium-length musical spans (8-16 bars), asking how these emergent gestalts both impart musical continuity and mirror the psychological states of the drama’s characters.

Part I lays the study’s theoretical foundations, arguing that in the context of certain kinetic gestalts, pitch-class relationships can be heard to embody kinetic vectors similar to those of pitches moving through a space imbued with vertical coordinates. The basic unit of measurement here is the *kinetic displacement interval*, or KDI, which gauges the kind and intensity of voice-leading displacement from one tertian verticality to another. Part II examines an energetic voice-leading paradigm manifested in *Tristan*’s opening progression, which couples upward-striving pitch-space motion with efficient voice-leading that pulls inexorably “downward.” I then explore deformational instances of this energetic paradigm in several texted examples from Act III.

- “The Five Harmonic Practices: A Model of Harmonic Ambiguity in *Fin-de-Siècle* Works”
Benjamin K. Wadsworth (Eastman School of Music)

Works of Schoenberg and his circle from the *fin-de-siècle* may be considered “transitional” since their harmonic structures are frequently ambiguous. These works fluctuate between three basic states: tonal (consonant triads and stepwise voice-leading), interval-cyclic (2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-cycle harmonies and odd-interval voice-leading), and so-called “atonal” (closely-spaced and widely-spaced sets with diverse intervallic content). Analysts tend to regard these works as either tonal or atonal, either denying their transitional status (Headlam 1996), or examining only fragmentary passages, leaving aside questions of large-scale ambiguity and unity (Forte 1978). This paper, however, explores ambiguous situations by adapting the “tonal problem” approach of Schoenberg (Schoenberg 1995). As applied by Schoenberg to tonal works, this method describes fluctuations between a normative diatonic tonality (balance) and non-normative chromatic keys (imbalance). As adapted to transitional works, the approach describes fluctuations between tonal and atonal *structures*, from which a pure or mixed state may be selected as normative (i.e., balanced) for a work. Towards this end, this paper proposes a continuum of five Harmonic Practices ranging from tonality to “atonality,” and applies the method to Schoenberg’s Op. 9 *Kammersymphonie*, Berg’s Lied Op. 2, no. 2, and Schoenberg’s Piano Piece Op. 11, no. 1. Despite their apparent leanings towards tonal or atonal structure, this method depicts each work as a continuous, goal-directed motion towards expectations of a final balanced state.

4:30 pm – 6:00 pm

Brahms

- “Aksak Meter and the Hungarian Style in Brahms’ *Variations on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 21, No. 2”
Anna Gawboy (Yale University)

The *Variations on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 21 no. 2 (1856) was Brahms’s first major exploration of the *stil hongrois*, and its large-scale structure resonates with variation procedures of Beethoven. This paper investigates how metric modulation contributes to a topical shift from the Hungarian style to a classical Viennese sound and considers its generic and interpretive possibilities.

First, I present differences between western symmetrical hypermeter and the Turkish-influenced 7-beat aksak meter of Brahms’ Hungarian theme, with a special focus on the latter’s non-recursive aspects. I then describe the metrical shift that occurs at Variation 9 and how it contributes to a carefully worked-out temporal scheme for the entire piece.

My paper concludes with a re-evaluation of Brahms’ use of the Hungarian topos in Op. 21 no. 2. I propose that, despite allusions to Beethoven’s WoO. 80, the topical shifts in Brahms’s piece could also be heard as a reference to the *Lassan-Friska* pairing typical of the Hungarian *Czárdás*. However, the gradual disappearance of classic *Lassan*-style ‘hungarianisms’ and the symmetricalization of the ‘folksy’ aksak meter in Op. 21 no. 2 has interesting speculative hermeneutic implications, especially considering Joseph Joachim’s conservative views regarding his homeland’s relationship to Austria.

- “The Three-Key Trimodular Block in Schubert and Brahms’ Sonata Expositions”
Graham Hunt (University of Texas at Arlington)

Sonata-form expositions typically articulate two key areas, with the secondary theme, and the second key area, often announced by what Hepokoski and Darcy define as a “medial caesura” (MC). A specialized form arises when two medial caesurae appear in the middle of the exposition: the “trimodular block” (TMB). More unusual still are expositions in which these two medial caesurae articulate three key areas, a form I will call the “three-key trimodular block.” Franz Schubert utilized this form in several of his sonata-form expositions, and appears to have influenced Johannes Brahms, who also adopted this unusual

phenomenon in some of his early and late compositions. Hepokoski and Darcy's trimodular block idea allows us to critically re-appraise this unusual form by exploring the pieces' interactions with generic conventions. This paper will explore the three-key trimodular block form in works by Schubert and Brahms, as well as the rare 18th-century examples of this form in Mozart, Beethoven, and Cherubini. The tonal structure of the pieces will also be considered in conjunction with the trimodular block. Hepokoski and Darcy's landmark publication *Elements of Sonata Theory* briefly mentions this formal phenomenon but leaves the subject tantalizingly open to further study, which this paper will undertake.

Saturday morning, April 5

9:00 am – 11:15 am

Twentieth Century

- “Boolean Music Theory and Analysis”
Wayne Alpern (Mannes College of Music)

David Lewin's stature as a theorist derives not only from the sophistication of his insights, but the elegance of his methodology. In “Generalizing Interval Systems for Babbitt's Lists, and for Schoenberg's String Trio,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 17/1 (Spring 1995): 81-118, Lewin uses Boolean algebra to generate a novel analytic tool. This paper explores Boolean concepts, illustrates Lewin's pioneering applications, and develops further analytic extensions.

Boolean algebra is a binary or mod 2 numerical system consisting of two elements or bits, 0 and 1, useful for modeling any musical parameter reducible to an on-off or “light switch” format. Composite timbral states and their transformations can be reduced to binary codes. Lewin's Boolean analysis reveals that although Babbitt adheres to his aesthetic principle of parametric exhaustion through unique instrumental combinations generating maximum timbral diversity, the music nonetheless encodes a significant degree of timbral order through transformational redundancy on hierarchical levels.

Lewin's Boolean apparatus can be extended to the realm of timbral voice leading. Reconfiguring horizontal binaries as vertical stacks reveals previously concealed linear relationships between successive elements of composite sonic states and better conveys a sense of temporality through a two-dimensional Boolean matrix. Additional concepts such as Boolean operators, Boolean equivalency bit-classes, and Boolean bit-class networks are derived and applied. Augmented by these theoretical elaborations of Lewin's seminal insight, Boolean analysis unveils even greater structure beneath the kaleidoscopic surface of Babbitt's complex music.

- “A Disconcerting Striving for Cheerfulness: Ambiguities, Failures, and Cover-ups in Shostakovich's Sixth Quartet, Mvt. 1”
Denise Elshoff (The Ohio State University)

Despite its cheerful exterior and Classical features, Sarah Reichardt (2003) and Judith Kuhn (2005) have demonstrated that Shostakovich's Sixth Quartet is riddled with conflicts that ultimately prove irreconcilable. My analysis is concerned primarily with how the first movement acquires and escapes these conflicts and with the structural purposes and ramifications of tonal, formal, and cadential problems. I argue that the movement exploits common-practice tonal procedures to build harmonic and formal expectations, only to deny these expectations to clarify its contextual design and for the sake of comic irony. Deceptively simple, the movement asks to be heard in three perspectives: as bright and tuneful; as filled with structural failures and uncertainties; and as coherently organized by motivic networks. Although these interpretations are incompatible and thus cannot be heard at once, the ambiguous nature of the music allows us to freely choose and rotate between dissimilar, yet equally viable, interpretive modes.

- “Formal Development in Elliott Carter’s Fifth String Quartet: Large Scale Metric Tensions and the Embedded Tempo”

John Aylward (Brandeis University and Tufts University)

My paper discusses how Elliott Carter creates an innovative formal structure in his *Fifth String Quartet* through use of a device I call the embedded tempo. While many theorists have examined Carter’s work through the linear connections made through metric modulations, this type of analysis only allows comparison and contrast between sections articulated by those modulations. My analytic approach looks at the multiplicities of tempi ever-present in Carter’s narrative, which create sophisticated metric tensions as ongoing processes in a given piece. Using the *Fifth String Quartet* as an example, I will show how Carter uses the embedded tempo, in conjunction with harmonic contrasts, to articulate a large scale formal design.

The truly innovative element to Carter’s embedded tempo is that it does not overtly create metric modulations. Rather, it is a constant tempo in the background of his work against which other metric developments are measured. The sense of background static tempo is what heightens Carter’s surface modulations, by putting them into stark contrast with fundamental rhythms. Throughout Carter’s *Fifth String Quartet*, we hear embedded tempi, which provide a metric background that motivates, and helps articulate, the form of the work.

11:30 pm – 1:00 pm

History of Theory

- “Generally Duruttisque: Harmonic Generations and Transformations”

Jeffrey Levenberg (New England Conservatory)

The forgotten French composer-theorist Camille Durutte (1803-1881) provides a valuable historical precedent for David Lewin’s *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (and the subsequent neo-Riemannian theories). Durutte’s obscurity -- he was shunned by his contemporary Parisians -- perhaps resulted from far-fetched musical laws derived from physiological science and Wronskian metaphysics. However, his ambitious “generative law of all possible chords”—an algebraically generalized labyrinth forged upon harmonic dualism—and the ensuing chordal transformations therein warrant the consideration of present-day music theorists. Indeed Durutte’s two texts, *Esthétique Musicale* (1855) and *Résumé Élémentaire de la Technie Harmonique* (1876), may serve among the origins for paleo-transformation theory inquiries.

- "French Theory in the Age of Reason: Some Missing Links in the Evolution of the Major-Minor System"

Julie Pedneault (McGill University)

Despite recent literature on the genealogy of the twenty-four-key tonal system, the innovative contributions of “pre-Rameauian” French writers remain inadequately acknowledged. This paper illuminates the theoretical tenets presented in Jean Rousseau’s 1683 treatise—the first to replace modal and psalm-tone-tonality taxonomy with a major-minor nomenclature—and their evolution in writings by Delair, Saint-Lambert, Campion, and others. I show that these theorists developed original ways of formulating notions of key and mode, classifying the ever-growing body of keys, and systematizing their signatures. This attempt at rationalization markedly distinguishes French theorists from their Italian and German contemporaries.

First, I argue that their endeavors to organize key signatures reflect concern for a logical tonal system. While the tonal space delineated in foreign treatises often freely mixed and matched tonics and signatures, French writers offered rationales for incomplete signatures, eventually eliminating them entirely. Second, these theorists effected important conceptual shifts in theorizing mode. After Rousseau defined mode as exclusively mediant-dependent, later writers expanded the concept of *cordes essentielles* to formulate a definition of mode that encompassed all scale degrees. Finally, French theorists developed a

core of seven keys that diverges from foreign octonary, psalm-tone-tonality derived key-systems—thus tracing a distinct path toward fully-fledged, twenty-four-key tonality.

Saturday afternoon, April 5

2:30 pm – 4:30

Panel Discussion: Riemann's Offspring

- Richard Cohn (Yale University)
- Daniel Harrison (Yale University)
- David Kopp (Boston University)

Program Committee

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