

# NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF MUSIC THEORISTS

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## TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL MEETING THE NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF MUSIC THEORISTS TUFTS UNIVERSITY MARCH 30-31, 2007

### *Program Abstracts*

#### **Friday afternoon, March 30**

#### **Session I: Brahms**

#### **Clare Sher Ling Eng (Yale University): Being AND Becoming: Rhythmic Function Analysis Applied to Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody*, Op. 53**

The application of organicist metaphors to discussions of rhythm is difficult because rhythmic motives are not typically accorded the same degree of transformative plasticity as are pitch-based ones. Analyses centered on rhythm and meter have also focused on networks of metric states instead of transformations between them. This paper explores a process-based approach as a complement to such analyses that allows the discussion of motivic progression of rhythm in a musical passage.

Rhythmic functions are used to model the being and becoming of musical moments in Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody*, a piece often described as being organically unified in analyses. Using 3 classes of actions—repetition, proportional change in duration and addition of material—this method shows how small motives can be propagated to create longer spans, and how complex passages may be interpreted as resulting from the interaction of different functional series. More generally, the method also demonstrates how rhythm can be dynamically transformed into form. By acting as enabling connectives between the musical before and after, rhythmic functions engender a conception of rhythm and meter that allows it to become more compatible with discussions of pitch-based motivic development in repertoire that invites the use of organicist metaphors.

## **Carissa Reddick (University of Connecticut): Mediant Key Schemes and Deep-Level Chromaticism in Three Brahms Chamber Works**

A hallmark of Brahms's style, and of nineteenth-century music in general, is movement between third-related keys. One type of mediant relationship, minor tonic to its relative major, is a convention of sonata-form expositions in minor mode. In several of his sonata-form movements, however, Brahms exploits mediant relationships that depart from "normal" sonata key schemes. This paper examines the ramifications of these unusual key schemes on linear structure, and the resultant structure's interaction with the sonata form principle, in the first movements of three of the composer's chamber works: the Piano Trio opus 8 (in its revised version of 1889), the Piano Quintet opus 34 (1862), and the String Quintet opus 88 (1882).

All three of these movements exhibit an uninterrupted linear structure with a *Kopft* on  $\hat{5}$ . The key schemes of these movements by Brahms, however, prohibit the subordinate theme from prolonging  $\hat{5}$  at the deep middleground level. Therefore, the subordinate theme group in each of the movements prolongs an upper neighbor to the *Kopft*. Because of the chromatic nature of Brahms's style, this upper neighbor is prolonged in both of its modal variants: a half-step above  $\hat{5}$  ( $\ominus\hat{6}$ ) and a whole step above  $\hat{5}$  ( $\ominus\hat{6}$ ). The prolongation of both variants injects the deep middleground structure with chromaticism that is not present in an uninterrupted sonata-form movement with a standard key scheme. This paper draws on previous work, especially Roger Graybill's exploration of Brahms's three-key expositions, Boyd Pomeroy's ideas on formal fusion, and Peter H. Smith's theories of form and "dimensional noncongruence."

## **Session II: The Early Twentieth Century**

### **Ian Bates (Yale University): Structural Implications of Motive and Mode in Vaughan Williams' *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'***

Traditionally, discussions of Vaughan Williams' *Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"* have treated the work primarily as a series of individual variations on the famous tune, with Variant 5 seen to function as a recapitulation of the Theme. This paper argues that the processes of motivic and modal variation are more systematic than previously recognized. Throughout the Theme and Variants 1-4, motivic variation is cumulative, while modal events participate in an Aeolian-Dorian-Mixolydian trajectory that systematically undermines the work's tonic B-natural. In Variant 5, the path of motivic and modal variation seen in all of the foregoing material is retraced, identifying the final variant as not only a recapitulation but also a summary of previous events, and the Dorian and Mixolydian modes are transferred to B, resolving the previous undermining of the work's tonic. In addition, there is a high degree of similarity between certain of the *Five Variants* and actual folksong variants collected by the composer. In light of the systematic nature of the motivic and modal variation observed in the work, it seems possible that the composer was exploring one way in which certain extant "variants" of the tune might have evolved.

## **Gordon Root (SUNY Fredonia): The Gedanke as a Metaphoric Dimension in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg**

Using Schoenberg's writings on the *Gedanke* as a foundation, this study offers a model that illuminates the interaction of text and music in Schoenberg's works. Since the composer often portrayed this interaction in metaphoric terms, this paper begins with a brief examination of contemporary metaphor theory. Following Sternberg's conception of metaphor (1979), the *Gedanke* is interpreted as a shared dimension which houses a set of common attributes between text and music. Applied to Schoenberg's opera *Moses and Aaron*, the composer's own description of the *Gedanke*, as "the inconceivability of God" becomes the focal point. This theme is explored in the opening *Grundgestalt* which features a quasi-circular design pairing the first and last trichords of the row together.

In Act II, a variation on this *Gestalt* pairs the first and last tetrachords as follows: (BCABb, EDEbDb, GFF#G#). In turn, this nearly literal chromatic scale is explored as a metaphor for God's elemental power, while the chromatic scale itself is interpreted as the fundamental expression of circularity in mod 12 pitch-class space. Far from being an isolated expressive device, however, circularity as a metaphor for God seems to have formed a consistent thread throughout Schoenberg's sacred works. In fact, the chromatic scale is put to similar use during the Enlightenment Scene of *Die Jakobsleiter* (1917). In conclusion, this conception of the chromatic scale as the omnipresent foundation of the twelve-tone method, and, more importantly, as a metaphor for God as the source of all things is explored as a *meta-Gedanke* uniting all of Schoenberg's twelve-tone works.

## **Mark McFarland (Georgia State University): Early Silent Film and Cone's Theory of Stratification, Interlock and Synthesis**

Cone's formal theory explains both the musical coherence of certain works while also accounting for their disjunctions. The concept of interlock is not universally accepted: the separate fragments of a musical line, some argue, may link together to form a series of related excerpts, but they do not create an unbroken continuity. This paper questions whether an unbroken continuity is necessary and suggests that this structure is borrowed from early silent film.

Although the first films were composed of an unbroken shot and represented an unbroken continuity, they were soon outmoded by the development of cinematic montage. Montage permitted complex plots to be conveyed by cutting between the various storylines, creating an illusion of development that is viewed as a single continuous event. This is the organization accounted for by Cone's theory.

Debussy claimed that the renewal of music was only possible through the application of cinematic techniques. This paper suggests that he began this process in the prelude "Ondine." While the separate fragments of "Ondine" may not create an unbroken continuity, this misses the point. Just as an unbroken continuity is neither necessary nor desirable in films that feature montage, the same is true for musical works these films inspire.

**Saturday morning, March 31**

## **Polyphony**

### **Panayotis Mavromatis (New York University – The Steinhardt School): Middleground Patterns of Modal Polyphony: A Schenkerian Exploration of Psalm-Tone Tonalities**

The present study applies Schenkerian techniques to a specific manifestation of modal polyphonic practice, namely so-called *psalm-tone tonalities*. These tonalities are represented by modally ordered keyboard compositions of the late Renaissance and early Baroque that are associated with the *alternatim* performance of the Psalms and the Magnificat. The significance of this repertory in the context of this study is twofold. First, psalm-tone tonalities have been recognized to provide an important link between modal and tonal practice. Second, psalm-tone based compositions form concrete realizations of the modes they represent, through the use of pre-existing plainchant material; they are thus a natural place to look for tonal patterns that may characterize each mode in particular, and modal practice in general. In this paper we will show that such patterns characterizing psalm-tone tonalities indeed exist and originate from the direct presence of the plainchant material in the simplest psalm-tone forms (versets, *fabordons*, short preludes, intonations). Once so established, however, these patterns can be present even in more elaborate forms (toccatas, long preludes, *ricercares*, *tientos*) where the psalm tone melody need not be explicitly quoted. The paper outlines our analytical approach through a series of representative examples of the aforementioned genres. Our results indicate how Schenkerian theory may help shape our understanding of polyphonic modal practice, highlighting aspects of the transition into major/minor tonality.

### **Bruno Gingras (McGill University): Telescoped Harmonies and Ambiguous Simultaneities: A Case for a ‘Diagonal’ Dimension in Baroque Contrapuntal Music**

For analytical purposes, music theorists often conveniently assume a dichotomy between the “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions of music. However, some musical situations arise in which these dimensions cannot be so easily disentangled. In his article “Simultaneity Structures and Harmonic Functions in Tonal Music,” Joel Lester presented several musical passages in which the harmonic function of a simultaneity cannot be explained without taking into account the content of nearby chords. Indeed, an awareness of the “diagonal” dimension is necessary for an understanding of several passages of Baroque contrapuntal music. Through an analysis of excerpts from Bach’s Prelude in E flat major for organ (BWV 552), the “Dorian” fugue (BWV 538), the Contrapunctus I from *Die Kunst der Fuge*, and Handel’s G minor Fugue (HWV 605), this paper shows how conflicting harmonic meanings may be resolved both by grouping together non-simultaneous tones and by dissociating simultaneous tones that belong to two different harmonies. These passages, which usually rely heavily on motivic repetition, emphasize the linear aspect of voice-leading while at the same time obfuscating the underlying harmonic progressions, thereby favoring a mode of perception in which each voice is heard separately instead of being fused into a chordal entity. The fondness of Baroque composers for such effects might be explained by their capacity to evoke powerful musical tensions for the listeners, while

providing them with the aesthetic enjoyment of solving the “harmonic puzzles” that they present.

### **Brent Auerbach (University of Massachusetts, Amherst): Tiered Polyphony as a Signal of Motivic Primacy in the Piano Music of Johannes Brahms**

Tiered polyphony is defined as a special type of texture in which multiple voices express independent melodic material at proportional speeds. Common in Bach in the context of trio sonatas and chorale preludes, tiered polyphony also appears fairly regularly in Brahms’s music. When it does occur, the effect of the polyphony is quite striking: passages exhibiting this texture give off an aura of extreme drive and inexorability. In Brahms’s tiered polyphony, usually one line of the texture serves as a guide rail following a chromatic path, another exhibits the surface-melodic pitch cells unique to the piece at hand, and additional voices act as filler.

One of the engines driving tiered polyphony is the proportional rhythm. The other is the motivic content, which provides tension as it pulls at the harmonic fabric of common-practice tonal composition. This paper will examine three piano works by Brahms employing tiered polyphony, the two Rhapsodies, op. 79 and the Scherzo from the op. 5 sonata. For all three works, the paper will examine how the unique motivic shapes lead to idiosyncratic harmonic syntax. For the Scherzo, a deeper, deconstructive view of pitch-cells will point in a new direction for the understanding the nature of motive itself in Brahms.

## **Saturday afternoon, March 31**

### **Theory and Perception**

#### **Richard Randall (University of Massachusetts, Amherst): Understanding Hybridity: Comparing Geometric Models of Tonal Hierarchy**

The impact and influence of music-perception and cognition research on contemporary music theory is undeniable. Empirical data (representing how we *actually* hear and understand music) and theories (proposing how we *might* or *could* hear and understand music) have merged into hybrid systems. Hybrid systems are a delicate balance between narrowly focused empirical experimental data and highly generalized models. One such system is Fred Lerdahl’s Tonal Pitch Space Model (*TPS*). The *TPS* model approximates the cognitive perceptual relation between chords by providing a combinatorial procedural for computing the distance value between two arbitrary chords. The procedure the employed by the *TPS* model is informed by experimental data and plausible hypotheses about how we perceive tonal relations. Every hybrid model must have a descriptive influence. This paper compares the *TPS* model with a “source-like” descriptive model and clearly shows the costs and compromises involved in hybridization. The comparison is achieved using a unique similarity measure developed especially for the *TPS* model that responds directly to its geometric properties.

## **Robert Hasegawa (Harvard University): Interval as Ratio in Contemporary Music: James Tenney's 'Harmonic Space'**

Since the beginning of Western music theory, two ways of conceptualizing interval have shared an uneasy coexistence—one model conceives of intervals as ratios, emphasizing pure tunings and acoustical relationships, while the other model conceives of intervals as distances, focusing on relative sizes and abstract geometries. In recent years, theorists have tended to focus on the distance model at the expense of the ratio model—pitch-class set theory, for example, defines interval as a mathematical distance, but is silent on the actual sonic properties of each interval.

Drawing on concepts proposed by the composer and theorist James Tenney (1934-2006), I argue that an updated version of the ratio model of interval can offer a fresh look at harmony and pitch structure in many contemporary and twentieth-century compositions. Using Tenney's composition *Koan* (in two versions, for solo violin and for string quartet) as an example, I explore his ideas of interval as ratio, harmonic space, and perceptual tolerance. Since these ideas are based on innate aspects of aural cognition, I suggest that they can be extended to provide analytical tools for music in a variety of styles, by composers as diverse as Schoenberg, Scriabin, Ligeti, and Grisey.

## **Christopher Stover (University of Washington): A New Approach to the Conceptualization of Rhythmic Spaces in Diasporic African Music**

This paper examines excerpts of performances from several diasporic African musical communities, including folkloric and modern music from two Cuban rumba traditions, the traditional Shona music of Zimbabwe, Thomas Mapfumo's reinterpretation of that music in his seminal Chimurenga music from the 1970s, the *maracatú* of northeastern Brazil, and American jazz. The first part of the paper will examine the results of the superimposition of two rhythmic conceptions: what happens when, say, a duple and triple metric subdivision are felt simultaneously, and how a performer must come to terms with the metric instability that results. Most importantly, it will describe how a performer must actually be prepared to occupy not only these two metric spaces but also *the space in between and around them*. The second part will explore the more dicey issue that has been variously referred to as groove, swing, feel, pocket, *balanço*; that is, the elasticity with which a performer in these various styles treats the beat: stretching it, condensing it, playing ahead of or behind it: in other words, all of the issues involving these bodies of music that make transcription such a complicated and controversial endeavor. Ultimately it will propose a new definition of rhythmic space, one which regards beat as a measurable span of time rather than a single point around which other events are measured.