

NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF MUSIC THEORISTS

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**TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING
THE NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF MUSIC THEORISTS
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT - STORRS
APRIL 16-17, 2010**

Abstracts

Friday afternoon, April 16

1:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Pitch, Program, and Gender: Deborah Stein (NEC), chair

“I have tried to capture you...”: Rethinking the “Alma” Theme in Mahler’s Sixth Symphony
Seth Monahan (Eastman School of Music)

Since the 1940s, Mahler’s Sixth Symphony has been transmitted with an informal “domestic” program centered on several claims first made in Alma Mahler’s *Erinnerungen*. In the work, she writes, Gustav meant to depict their children (in the Scherzo), himself (in the Finale), and finally her, in the first movement’s swooning secondary theme. Whether this was actually Mahler’s intention, we can never know. But given the well-known credibility gap of Alma’s reports—and considering the lack of corroborating evidence—it is surprising how widely critics have taken Alma at face value, and allowed her program to become a permanent fixture of the work’s reception.

My contention is that Alma’s comments have led to skewed hearings of the opening movement, and that a close examination of the “Alma” theme itself—and especially the narrative it unfolds—calls into question any image of the theme as a straightforward or heartfelt nuptial portrait. I begin by illuminating grotesque, parodistic, and even caricaturistically “feminine” aspects of the theme’s construction and presentation. I then show how over the course of the movement, Mahler first proposes an idealized fantasy-version of the theme, then brings back the original version only to saddle it with a glaring sonata malfunction, and finally, after symbolically exiling its most grotesque elements, finally settles on a triumphant but decidedly “masculinized,” martial derivative. In closing, I propose several possible alternate “domestic” readings, ones that link the above narrative to the documented ambivalence and dissatisfaction pervading Mahler’s marriage at the time.

Schoenberg’s “Lockung”: The Questionable Eb Major Chord, *Schwebende Tonalität*, and Text-Music Relationships
Cynthia I. Gonzales (Texas State University)

Arnold Schoenberg twice selected *Lockung*, op. 6, no. 7 (1905) to model *schwebende Tonalität*, a term variously translated as “fluctuating tonality” and “suspended tonality.” In the 1911 *Theory of Harmony* Schoenberg declared that the song “expresses E-flat major tonality without once in the course of the piece giving an E-flat major triad in such a way that one could regard it as a pure tonic. The one time it does appear, it has a tendency, at least, toward the subdominant.” By the time *Structural Functions of Harmony* is issued in the 1940s, Schoenberg abandons his earlier assessment of *Lockung* and asserts “that the tonic, E-flat, does not appear throughout the whole piece.”

My analysis clarifies Schoenberg’s avoidance of tonic and his use of *schwebende Tonalität* to

project the narrative in the poem. The singular E-flat major triad -- the sonority Schoenberg initially acknowledges yet later denies -- occurs in m. 50, only 15 measures before the song concludes. It is preceded by its dominant and signifies the end of a chase described in the poem *Lockung*. Previous statements of the V7-of-E-flat resolve atypically or dissipate into harmonic ambiguity, thereby avoiding harmonic closure and extending the chase. *Schwebende Tonalität* also depicts the chase: the accompaniment establishes one tonal area, but flees to another when the melody enters.

“Something above Gender”: Webern’s *Two Songs, Op. 8 on Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke*
Julie Pedneault (University of Ottawa)

This paper addresses issues of gender in Webern’s *Two Songs, Op. 8 on Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke*. I conduct close analyses in light of the composer’s views on gender and music as articulated in his *The Path to the New Music*, his personal circumstances at the time of the songs’ composition, and Rilke’s literary influence. I explore how Webern’s treatment of the chromatic collection reflects Rilke’s concept of “intransitive love” as set out in *The Notebooks for Anna Agazzi*—the source of the Op. 8 texts—and I argue that his fractured, self-referential motivic treatment expresses concepts of gender that sublimate binaries into an angelic “higher” gender (Webern, 1963). Webern’s *Rilkelieder*, I maintain, construct an angelic persona that is heir to the category David Lewin calls “the transcendent woman’s voice.” In response to Rilkean intransitive love, the composer cultivated a technique I call intransitive chromaticism, which entails voice-driven, forward-moving chromatic configurations that make dramatic use of the vocal tessitura and unfold according to strategies of aggregate and subaggregate completion, without, however, coalescing into anything as “transitive” as referential collections or motives. To conclude, I assess the position of the Op. 8 songs in Webern’s oeuvre: with this work, the composer’s conception of the chromatic collection shifted from the scalar to the aggregate, prefiguring aspects of his twelve-tone technique.

3:45 pm – 5:15 pm

Compositional Contexts and Subjectivity: Ève Poudrier (Yale), chair

Aesthetics and Subjectivity in *Le Marteau sans Maître*
Emily Adamowicz (University of Western Ontario)

The majority of analyses of *Le marteau sans maître* undoubtedly focus on its organizational procedures. Analysts have been concerned primarily with how Boulez generates pre-compositional material and how that material relates to the musical surface rather than why certain material was selected. In response to what was perceived as a general loosening of serial techniques in *Le Marteau sans maître*, Winick and Wentzel attempted to account for Boulez’ serial orderings while unveiling the logic behind his ‘unpredictable gestures’ and deviations. Additionally, Koblyakov, Heinemann, and Losada endeavored to illuminate Boulez’ multiplication processes left obscure in his writings. But despite the volume of research dedicated to unveiling objective aspects of *Le Marteau*, no single effort has addressed the subjective aspects of the work. In response, I investigate subjectivity as it manifests itself in three areas: 1) ‘partial isomorphism’ and its relationship to ‘local indiscipline’; 2) the defective series; and 3) aesthetic goals derived from the poetry of René Char. I argue that *Le Marteau sans maître*, rather than revealing a pure, relational objectivity, expresses a profound engagement with subjective aspects of composition.

Three Post-Tonal Phrase Processes: Symmetry, Departure/Return, and Directed Parametric Change
Patricia Howland (City University of New York)

The challenging, systematic post-tonal repertoire of the postwar period has often seemed unapproachable from the standpoint of musical form. Unlike music of the prewar period, these works tend to avoid the traditional musical rhetoric of phrases and other formal structures. In this paper I will

show that, despite its apparently resistant nature, this music can be meaningfully heard and discussed in terms of perceptible formal design. Post-tonal form is created by relationships among parameters such as density, texture, contour, and dynamics. A “phrase” in this context may be defined as a formal unit characterized by initiation, coherence, and closure. Coherence in many post-tonal phrases is achieved by means of an audible parametric process that unfolds during the course of the phrase, and closure in these cases is brought about by the completion of the process. The paper will discuss and illustrate three such processes, drawing on examples from the music of Babbitt, Stockhausen, and Carter.

Saturday morning, April 17

9:00 am – 10:30 am

Musical Spaces: Ian Quinn (Yale), chair

Contour Vector Space

Rob Schultz (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

Upon initial glance, contour space (c-space) appears to be a decidedly impoverished musical habitat. Indeed, “a pitch-space consisting of elements arranged from low to high disregarding the exact intervals between the elements” (Morris 1987, 340) inherently lacks many of the defining features that make music recognizable as such. A significant corpus of theoretical and analytical studies, however, has nevertheless emerged, proving the study of musical contour to exhibit a surprising degree of sophistication and complexity.

The bulk of this research has focused primarily on equivalence-class and similarity relations, thus yielding a multitude of compelling methods for relating two or more contours with one another, but no concrete means of situating them within a larger c-space framework. The various contour vectors introduced by Michael Friedmann (1985), however, in fact provide fertile ground for developing the tools with which to do so. The goal of this paper is to execute this task by applying techniques developed in musical transformation theory to Friedmann’s contour vectors to generate contour vector spaces (cv-spaces). The paper then cites two crucial weaknesses of the methodology—its inability to account for repeated notes and the lack of inter-cardinality communication—and constructs new cv-spaces that rectify these points. Finally, it deploys these new cv-spaces in analyses of the main secondary theme from the first movement of Johannes Brahms’s String Sextet in B flat, Op. 18 and the opening section of Pierre Boulez’s *Messagesquise* (1976) in order to illustrate how cv-spaces can inform and enhance our understanding of these, and no doubt numerous other musical passages.

Scalar Transposition, Fractional Pitch Classes, and Harmonic Sequences

Jason D. Yust (University of Alabama)

A crucial feature of geometrical music theory, as represented by the work of Dmitri Tymoczko and others on voice-leading spaces, is the treatment of pitch as a continuum rather than a discrete set. The original reason for using continuous spaces was to represent the notion of distance accurately, but it also introduces the possibility of fractional, non-integer, pitch-class values. In this paper I show how fractional pitch-class values can be useful and meaningful—without necessarily looking to music with an extended pitch gamut—in the context of a treatment of the voice-leading patterns of harmonic sequences.

Certain common harmonic sequences involve the repeated application of a single efficient voice-leading pattern to a single chord-type. The rotation in position (or *scalar transposition*) induced by the voice leading determines the length of the sequence. Common sequences that involve chords of similar, but not precisely equivalent types, can be represented by a voice leading or a single underlying set-class type by using fractional pitch-class values and rounding each to the nearest semitone. Values in sevenths of a semitone define various diatonic sequences, or diatonic sequences with shades of chromaticism. Aspects of late tonal and early non-tonal practice, such as Liszt’s sequences and

Messiaen's modal progressions, suggest patterns using halves or thirds of semitones, or irrational values. The approach is closely related to recent work of Jack Douthett on filtered point symmetry.

10:30 pm – 12:00 pm ***Analytic Approaches to Rachmaninoff: David Kopp (BU), chair***

Linear Fragmentation and Sequential Repetition in Rachmaninoff's Orchestral Music
Stephen Gosden (Yale University)

The theoretical literature on the music of Sergei Rachmaninoff is small but slowly growing; however, its rhythmic dimension remains largely unexamined, as most authors tend to focus primarily or even exclusively on its harmonic and linear-contrapuntal features. Even those who deal with questions of form, expression, and meaning tend to neglect this crucial musical parameter. In this paper I begin to fill this methodological lacuna by exploring the interaction between pitch and rhythm in a specific hyper-rhythmic gesture that occurs in many of Rachmaninoff's early and middle-period orchestral works, a gesture that involves three complementary processes: a melodic-harmonic process of sequential repetition, a rhythmic process of fragmentation, and a formal/expressive process of intensification leading to a moment of climax. Significantly, the rhythmic fragmentation in this gesture often arises from grouping structures with successively shorter units that have a linear (e.g. 4:3:2:1) rather than exponential (e.g. 4:2:1) relationship. I discuss the ramifications of this for the question of hypermeter by drawing on the work of William Benjamin (1984), whose perspective on the interaction between meter, grouping, and accent sheds light on the expressive potential for such procedures. Furthermore, for each of my examples I discuss motivic and thematic processes that contribute to this gesture's formal and expressive trajectory.

The Structure(s) and the Expressive Trajectory of Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*
Blair Johnston (Indiana University)

The harmonic vocabulary of Rachmaninoff's late Russian and exile compositions (1909–1940) may be understood as an amalgam of well-defined components drawn from the Western common practice and Russian traditions: expanded functional tonal syntax, "fantastic" equal-interval chromatic structures, and modal structures both familiar (diatonic modes, the acoustic collection) and unfamiliar (peremennost, nega).

I argue that the components have clear rhetorical associations; that components are consistently associated with certain locations in form; and that acknowledging the interactions of components contributes to an understanding of expressive trajectory and large-scale organization, and—especially—to exegesis of climax events in the late Russian and exile works.

Drawing on chromatic and modal theory, theories of tonal tension and climax, and Hepokoski's deformation-oriented approach to the interpretation of Postromantic form, I present the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43 as a case study. The result: steps toward a more general theory of hyperdissonance in Postromantic music that may aid the interpretation of crunchy harmonic events and formal problems that resist explanation in conventional tonal and Formenlehre terms.

Saturday afternoon, April 17

3:15 pm – 4:45 pm ***Schubert and Schumann: Janet Schmalfeldt (Tufts), chair***

Schubert's *Drei Klavierstücke*, D. 946 Nos. 1 and 2, and the Case of the "Missing" C Section
René Rusch Daley (McGill University)

Schubert's *Drei Klavierstücke*, D. 946 (c. 1828, pub. 1868), raise numerous questions with regards to their compositional genesis and editorial processes. Most peculiar is Schubert's omission of an entire C section in A-flat major/minor of what was originally to be a five-part rondo form, A–B–A–C–A,

in the first piece. Several music scholars have noted this revision in their respective discussions of the Klavierstücke and have acknowledged Brahms's role as the anonymous editor of these pieces, yet why Schubert crossed out this entire section in the autograph remains unanswered.

Focusing my discussion on the first two Klavierstücke, since both occur within the same autograph and are believed to have been written consecutively, this paper will propose that the major revision carried out by Schubert in the first piece is a consequence of the opening refrain, and that the second piece provides a window into understanding why Schubert may have omitted the C section in the first one. I will argue that, even though the first two Klavierstücke originally shared a similar tonal and formal plan, Schubert's treatment of mixture in the respective opening refrains may have caused him to opt instead for a three-part ternary form for the first piece and a five-part rondo form for the second. The paper will suggest that, unlike the first piece, the second piece's use of mixture on the musical surface of the refrain is echoed in the tonal plan of the entire movement, providing a more compelling case for the appearance of a second episode in A-flat. In addition to demonstrating how the use of mixture in the respective refrains may have led Schubert to revise the formal plan of the first piece, this paper will also show how particular motives on the foreground and middleground levels in the contrasting sections respond to the use of mixture established in the respective refrains.

The Emperor's New Triplets: Using "Impossible Rhythms" to Express Metrical Coherence in Schumann's *Des Abends*, Op. 12 No. 1
Ira Braus (Hartt School, University of Hartford)

Virtually all recordings of *Des Abends*, ca. 1910 to the present, share one characteristic: they perform the piece in 3/8, though it is written in 2/8. While writers on this topic have long concurred that any performance of the work is *a priori* metrically ambiguous, few have ventured to explain why. By way of remedying this deficit, my paper will address the following questions:

- (1) What structural mechanisms of *Des Abends* force us to hear/play its meter ambiguously?
- (2) Does "ambiguous" metrical execution affect perception of the work's large form?
- (3) Is it feasible to hear *and* play the work in its written meter?
- (4) What insights, structural and otherwise, might emerge from an intersubjectively *metrical* performance of the work?

The final part of the paper offers a methodology for executing the meter as written using "impossible rhythms," see Julian Hook's 2008 **SMT** paper. Hook characterizes "impossible rhythms" as a keyboard notation in which "... duplets in one voice occur against triplets in another, and the second duplet shares its notehead with a third triplet, a logical impossibility, as the former note should fall halfway through the beat, the latter two-thirds of the way." This idea combined with my exploitation of a patent "impossibility" in the triplet notation of *Des Abends* will inform the above methodology and a live performance of the work .

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