

**EXPANDING THE CANON IN UNDERGRADUATE THEORY:
ALTERNATIVES TO BACH'S CHORALES**

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I BACH'S CHORALES

In 1750, J.S. Bach died. At the same moment began the canonization of Bach's chorales. At the time of his death, very little of Bach's music had been published. C.P.E. Bach and J.P. Kirnberger, determining that J.S. had been unjustly neglected by the world at large, set about publishing some of his more accessible music, in particular his brilliant harmonizations of familiar and not so familiar chorales. What was the result of their work? A collection of 371 expressive harmonizations of melodies, laden with theological and cultural implications, as they had been performed by a small, highly trained corps of musicians at St. Thomas Kirche, a mecca of orthodox Lutheranism. Many of the preexisting chorale melodies are overtly or quasi modal, and their origins are partly sacred, partly secular, partly traditional, partly "contemporary". Each harmonization was composed in relation a specific verse of a German hymn-text, and in connection with a specific cantata and liturgical occasion. Performance would have included the entire professional orchestra and chorus, with or without the congregation joining on the melody.

I am the last person to criticize these works (actually second last; Lori Burns is the last, and we eagerly await the fruits of her research in her forthcoming book on Bach's modal chorales). After all, in contrast to their context specific origins, they seem to possess a universality in their inner integrity that transcends their origins, like so much else of Bach's music. They indeed deserve pride of place in our curricula in the sense that we see

in them the distilled thought of perhaps the greatest exponent of tonal music.

But Bach's chorales have intrinsic limitations too. Although their harmonic style embraces a wide range of chromatic techniques, the melodies themselves are only infrequently chromatic. Therefore chromatic elements are generally confined to the lower three parts, which themselves are often more complex than typical four-part harmony. In addition, by the manner of their presentation in theory books, which is almost always without the original text, much less an English rendering, harmony classes have no means of ascertaining the expressive purpose of the chromatic elements that play such a characteristic part in Bach's style. Thus it is all the more remarkable that under such a delimiting set of constraints, C.P.E. Bach's and Kirnberger's publication of these 371 pieces was so successful that to this day, 250 years later, the chorales of Bach continue to form the central and prime object of study in the field of harmony. Indeed, some harmony texts never extend beyond Bach's chorales, considering them to be the sum of knowledge in tonal harmony.

II EXPANDING OUR DISCIPLINE

I expect that it is old news, even to the most conservative-minded of us, that for some time we have been expanding the scope of our discipline far beyond the positivist methodology that formed the backbone of musicological research from the post-war years through the 1970's. It will come as no surprise to me if one of the results of this trend will be that we will no longer produce modern-day equivalents of Grout or Reese, quintessential musical positivists and towering giants in their fields. Today's musicologists and theorists need to be informed about a much wider social, cultural, and intellectual context. Thus we are spending more time thinking about what we do and how we do it, and less time doing it. This is to an extent healthy and proper; at least it is a necessary counterbalance to the overly positivistic trends that are sometimes reflected in bibliography for its own sake, or manuscript studies in abstractum, or the enumeration of pitch-class sets in atonal works. One need only scan the

titles of recent articles and books for a few moments to glean the incredible breadth of perspective which our discipline has adopted as it embraces gender, politics, economics and linguistics for example, as well as their varied methodologies and agendas. While this may occasionally come at the expense of commensurate expertise, surely this is the means by which new modes of thought develop. But is theory pedagogy keeping pace, or even recognizing the existence of these trends in any tangible way?

III POPULAR MUSIC

I sense the need at this time to expand the horizons of the study of harmony so as to be able to provide direct connections with the many recent and popular genres that have retained a fairly traditional harmonic basis. While there is also room for a broader selection of materials from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, popular hymnody being one convenient and fertile source--albeit tainted at present by its connotations of a Christian hegemony--I refer here particularly to genres such as Ragtime, Broadway, contemporary popular and folk music, and some Jazz idioms. The reason that these genres ought to be brought into the classroom is by no means to legitimize them. They need no patronizing blessing of the academy, having already secured their places in the ears of the world. On the contrary, the purpose is to legitimize traditional music theory in the context of an evolving cultural milieu. And it is my contention that within these genres excellent and highly artistic examples of standard harmonic practice can be demonstrated, which by no means break down our established concepts of tonal harmony, but rather strengthen them by reaffirming their predominance throughout a broad range of genres.

No doubt, most current harmony texts do go beyond Bach chorales, and typically include examples from the Viennese masters and from a handful of top-rank canonized composers of the nineteenth century. But even Aldwell and Schachter's text, one of the most highly regarded, goes no further than single examples by Ravel, Strauss, and Wolf. Other texts are similar. The most adventurous example in the Forte-Gilbert *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* is the "Love Theme" from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and*

Juliet! Please note however that I am not advocating here the incorporation of twentieth century techniques in tonal harmony classes, but rather of reference to extra-canonical works in the teaching of standard topics of harmony and theory.

I ask the question whether it is desirable to maintain the monopoly of "Bach and the boys" in the pedagogy of harmony--I only single out Bach's chorales as an extreme example of how historical circumstances have determined our current practice. My main point is that it is possible to introduce the same essential content, which might include diatonic triads, dominant sevenths, modulation through pivot chords, mixture, augmented and Neapolitan sixths, common-tone diminished sevenths, and enharmonics, but with a substantially broadened repertoire that include styles and musics "other" than the western classical tradition. Ragtime frequently contains exemplary uses of augmented sixths and common-tone diminished sevenths, within regular metrical groupings for example. Broadway show tunes often contain excellent examples of felicitous modulation to related keys and secondary dominants, as well as good examples of ninths, elevenths and thirteenths. Music of the popular "top 40" variety similarly shows creative uses of enharmonicism, mixture, and neighbour-chord functions from time to time. Some Jazz examples are instructive of chains of diatonic sevenths. Although pieces in all these repertoires are often comparatively modest in their usage of tonal idioms, such simplicity should not be mistaken for poverty. The quality of these pieces can be such that they can command our attention and rightfully take their places beside the generally acknowledged masterworks.

I present today just one example, which I hope will illustrate that the music to be found in "other" repertoires admirably address common issues in traditional harmonic practice; a page of the refrain from Noel Coward's 1928 musical, *A Room With A View*. I will highlight some of its features briefly, features which could easily be pointed out and discussed in an undergraduate harmony class: (1) a dominant ninth with raised fifth in m.1, the A-sharp resolving in the upper part of m. 2.; (2) an interesting succession of passing notes in m. 2 that create illusory chords; (3) a

dominant with raised fifth--again--in. m. 3; (4) an arpeggio 6/4 in m. 4; (5) m. 5 continues the stepwise descent begun in the lower part, but now opposing the initial A-sharp of mm. 1 and 3 with its enharmonic equivalent, B-flat, and beginning the generation of a series of parallel tenths that will lead to the cadence; (6) at. m. 6, the II chord, embellished with another semitone descent, A-flat-G; (7), mm. 7-8 are a highly decorated perfect cadence which includes a dominant ninth, a minor ninth as a passing chromatic descent, a thirteenth, a 4-3 suspension, and finally a substitution of the melodic note of resolution with the leading note. The little harmonic progression that concludes m. 8 neatly summarises the chromatic activity of the previous phrase, using B-flat and D-flat, the enharmonic equivalent of C-sharp. As you can see, the second phrase traces the same course, but concludes with a typical leaping resolution of the dominant thirteenth and reduces the tension at this point by a diatonic filler that nevertheless points-up the piquant F-sharp leading note featured in the previous cadence. The whole of course forms a two-phrase period.

I include a Schenkerian graph as a means of capturing the masterful tonal coherence of the passage, and also as a way of indicating how the complete, 32-bar refrain works out a traditional interruption structure, shown on the second line of the graph. The graph also indicates several motivic and voice-leading features that add to the integrity of the whole, in particular the various transformations of the upper-neighbour motive, D-E-D, which, first involved in surface activity, becomes the structural basis of the developmental third phrase, and again appears as a substitution in the final phrase, four measures before the end. Now, I am by no means the first to utilize Schenkerian techniques in the elucidation of non traditional repertoire. Felix Salzer pioneered that idea in the context of pre- and post-tonal music some forty years ago. That is not the point. My point in providing a Schenkerian graph here is to support the integrity of the composition in conventional theoretical terms, just as one might do with a canonical piece of Mozart or Beethoven.

By integrating repertoire such as this in our basic undergraduate theory and harmony curricula, we can begin to bridge the great gulf fixed

between our beloved traditions of music theory on the one hand, and on the other hand modern experience of the vast world of music around us. As a means of securing such bridges, a practical expedient is to introduce each theoretical concept with a canonical example, and then to continue with an "other" example that reinforces the concept, thereby linking those distant worlds through shared characteristics. At the same, time, by illuminating technical similarities, we naturally become more aware of stylistic differences that help to define the various genres around us.

IV COPYRIGHT

As pernicious as the barrier of tradition may be in expanding the canon along lines such as these (or at least providing it with links to the outside world), the barrier of legal ownership of popular materials may be more difficult. However, while procurement of rights to use and reproduce some of these materials may seem a most unrewarding task, this in itself is no intellectual defense for ignoring these genres. It is our responsibility as bearers and transmitters of the knowledge of harmony to ensure its continued relevance by making the necessary efforts to acquire whatever rights we need to use these materials for educational purposes. At least the basic ragtime repertoire and some Broadway is now in the public domain and also widely available in Dover and other anthologies, yet it remains a daunting task to assemble sufficient materials to sustain a full exposition of the possibilities within a two-, three-, or four-year undergraduate theory curriculum. Perhaps some enterprising young theorist will take up the challenge to produce a new anthology of popular music excerpts organized according to topics of concern to the pedagogy of music theory!

V CONCLUSION

In the long run, expansion of the canon of theory pedagogy is essential to the continued relevance of music theory in an ever growing and diversifying culture. Paradoxically, I see expansion as the best means for defending the values that the traditional canon represents. A defensive posture of retrenchment will not reconcile our desire for a traditional

knowledge-base with mounting pressures within and without the academy to recognize and address breadth and diversity. The proper response is a new synthesis that upholds our accepted values but embraces the alternatives. In the context of broadening values it is appropriate that core harmony courses begin to address these "other" musics head-on, rather than allowing them to become ghettoized and perhaps patronized as peripheral domains fit only for special interest and elective courses. "Other" genres can provide good models for the demonstration of traditional techniques of tonal harmony, while at the same time forging more immediate connections between the "ideal" world of music theory, as represented by Bach's chorales, and the "real" world of daily music making in the population at large. I am confident that this may be done without sacrificing our traditional content and methodology which can thereby continue in its goal of the elucidation of a highly structured and systematic approach to understanding the materials that make up our great heritage of tonal music.

THE END

5 4 3 (2) (1) 5 4 3 (2) (1)

N

10 10 10 10 10 10 10

V I II V I V I II V I

5 N 4 3 2 || 5 N (4) (3) 2 (1) N

NB!

9 10 10 10 10 10 10

I IV V I D+: II VII [I] G+: V I II V I



A Room with a View

from
COCHRAN'S 1928 REVUE

Allegretto non troppo

p

1. I've been cherishing through the perishing win-ter nights and days, A fun-ny lit-tle
2. I'm so practi-cal I'd maketac-ti-cal er-rors as your wife, I'd try to set your

phrase that means _____ Such a lot to me that you've got to be
life to rights. _____ I'm up-set a bit for I get a bit

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with me heart and soul For on you the whole thing leans. _____
 diz - zy now and then Fol - low - ing the men - tal flights _____

Won't you kind - ly tell me what you're driv - ing at, _____ What con - clu -
 Come with me and leave be - hind the noi - sy crowds, _____ Sun - light shines

- sion you're ar - riv - ing at? _____ Please don't turn a - way or my dream will stay
 - for us a - bove the clouds. _____ My eyes glistened too while I listened to

hid - den out of sight A - mong a lot of might - have - beens. *rit.*
 all the things you said, I'm glad I've got a head for heights. *rit.*

REFRAIN

A Room with a View, and you, and no one to wor-ry us,
View, and you, and no one to give ad-vice,

no one to hur-ry us through this dream we've found. We'll gaze at the
That sounds a par-a-dise few could fail to choose. With fin-gers en-

sky, and try to guess what it's all a-bout, then we will fig-ure out
-twined we'll find re-lief from the preachers who al-ways be-seech us to

why the world is round. We'll be as hap-py and con-
mind our P's and Q's. We'll watch the whole world pass be-

-tent-ed as birds up-on a tree High a-bove the moun-tains and
 -fore us while we are sit - ting still, Lean-ing on our own win - dow

sea. _____ We'll bill_ and we'll coo - ooo - oo And
 sill. _____ We'll bill_ and we'll coo - ooo - oo And

sor - row will nev - er come, Oh, will it ev - er come true _____ our room with a
 may - be a stork will bring this, that and t'other thing to _____ our room with a

view? A Room with a view.

