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Source: *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Nov., 1959), pp. 285-292

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of the Yale University Department of Music

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/842854>

Accessed: 14/12/2009 16:36

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THEORY FORUM

RE: THE PROPER NATURE OF A COURSE IN HARMONY

By James Bakst

The many varieties of modern musical practice and the resulting plethora of styles have caused the teaching of harmony to slip its moorings and become a perplexing array of different presentations and methods. An examination of musical curricula in institutions of higher education reveals a diversity of approaches to a basic course in harmony. Courses in harmony are labeled traditional, conservative, classical, diatonic, chromatic, formal, practical, elementary, keyboard, instrumental, and finally, just plain harmony. The result is often confusion in the minds of teachers and students. Teachers realize that the concepts of harmony as a science represent essentials that are independent of the place and time they are studied. The difficulty is to convince students of the value of these essentials in the fulfillment of contemporary musical purposes. Students in harmony courses often doubt the advisability and practicality of studying triadic harmony and rules of voice-leading in the face of contemporary harmonic practices. They learn harmonic rules in the classroom and see the annihilation of these rules in the works of modern composers. A skeptical attitude often results. Students often question the logic of harmonic restraints; they would like to compose harmony and, invariably, they like what they compose — to the utter chagrin of the teacher whose opinion is resented by students.

The problem is to evaluate the nature and function of harmony, to formulate a logical curriculum, and to place a course in harmony in its proper perspective as knowledge, tool, practice, and a training medium in the curriculum of a music student. An analysis and evaluation of harmony may very well lead to the formulation of a course that will be simple and practical, presenting harmony, not as a tonal medium that is fixed and unchangeable, but as a course that achieves the status of educational necessity in the musical curriculum.

We shall address ourselves in turn to the following aspects of the problem: (1) harmony and musical forms; (2) the theory of harmony as an abstraction; (3) harmony, musical logic, and the essential problem of the teaching of harmony; (4) extension of the principle of harmonic abstraction into aspects of tonal media in general; and (5) the logical curriculum for a course in harmony.

Music as an art is the unity of subjective and objective aspects, that is, the unity of tonal media, purpose, idea, expression, and method. Form in any art represents imagery and associational aspects by means and media pertaining to the specific art. A musical composition is musical form. Every musical form is the embodiment of ideational-emotional content by expressive means typical of national or racial cultural values during an historical era. This form is unique, that is, individual, and incapable of being duplicated or repeated. There are as many musical forms as there are compositions. From a theoretical

point of view, form can be described as a contour or outline of tonal elements. This contour is realized by composers as an individual manifestation of musical form. This realization consists of a specific internal organization of tonal media as an embodiment of the composer's idea, purpose, and method.

Harmony is essential to musical form. The continuous harmonic succession, or flow, does not submit itself to prescribed formulas of chord progressions. It reveals itself as a continuous series of different, individual, unique appearances of musical form. Harmony per se is an objective factor in musical composition that becomes a carrier and embodiment of the idea or purpose; that is, its qualities, manifestations, arrangements, and classifications are considered in themselves, without reference to music as an expression of idea, symbol, or purpose. Aesthetically, harmonic architectonic becomes an embodiment of the ideational content and of musical imagery. The richer the ideational content of a composition, the more interesting its form, and the more individual its harmonic structure. For example, the ideational content of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is harmonically revealed differently by Berlioz, Gounod, Tchaikowsky, and Prokofieff. Each of these composers tried to reveal truthfully the content of the drama through appropriate harmonic factors in individual musical forms.

The theory of harmony is an abstraction. Harmony per se is a product of musical thinking and logic. In The Beautiful in Music Hanslick states¹ that "music has no prototype in nature." Whether or not one believes that triads and seventh chords exist in nature, the fact is that harmony, as a science, is a logical means of musical thinking. It could be added that the techniques and color combinations of great painters, the equivalent of harmony in visual arts, hardly exist in nature. There is no impressionistic pointillism of Seurat in nature; the same could be said about the color schemes of Van Gogh. The truth is that the logic of harmonic thinking is inevitably the result of natural acoustical laws. The triad is the first independent harmonic unit formed by the partial tones, in ascending order and graded loudness in relation to the fundamental tone.

The organized unity of musical form includes the concept of musical genres, that is, various manifestations of musical styles. A musical genre represents different types of compositions related by content and specific musical expression evolved during a cultural-historical era. The dances of the baroque suite are characteristic musical genres representing a specific historical-cultural reality. The symphonies of Haydn and Mozart are genres evolved under the influence of social-musical requirements. The songs of Schubert are musical genres of early Romanticism. The symphonies of Beethoven, from the Eroica to the Ninth, are manifold musical genres whose ideational content defies imagination. Impressionistic tendencies are musical genres of form and content. Wagner's music dramas are genres homologous with Western culture in the nineteenth century. Genre is the key to the

1. Eduard Hanslick. The Beautiful in Music, translated from German by Gustav Cohen, edited by Morris Weitz (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 50.

understanding of musical metamorphoses embodying the perceptive imagination of a composer. There is, generally, little distinction in substance between program music and absolute music. Words are powerless, and often meaningless, in describing the content of an instrumental composition.

The above observations enhance the argument that the harmonic structure of a musical composition represents adaptations of the theory of harmony as an abstraction to the needs of a composer. The theory of harmony makes possible a classification of chords, and it clarifies certain norms concerning the movement from chord to chord. Most of the laws in the theory of harmony can be deduced from the natural phenomenon of the overtone series. There are no specific laws or formulas of harmony established by Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Wagner, Brahms, or Tchaikowsky. Their harmonic structures represent adaptations of abstract harmonies to expressions of emotional-associative factors characteristic of their individual styles. In a similar sense, Bach's Well-Tempered Clavichord is not an example of musical abstractions of technical sound-forms. The preludes and fugues represent the achievement of Bach in expressing and embodying emotional-associative factors characteristic of the baroque era.

It is a well-known fact that Chopin was influenced by the heroic imagery of the Polish poet Mickiewicz. In an article describing his meeting with Chopin, Schumann quotes Chopin to the effect that the ballades in g-minor and F-major were inspired by the poetry of Mickiewicz. Attempts have been made to connect the A-flat-major Ballade to Heine's Lorelei. Whatever the pros and cons, there is no doubt that the ballades represent a marvelous adaptation of harmony as an abstract science to Chopin's imaginative representations. The manuscript of Chopin's G-minor Nocturne, Op. 15, bore the inscription "after the presentation of Hamlet." Chopin then crossed out the inscription and added: "let them guess it." The earliest biographers of Chopin pointed out that the Impromptu in F-sharp Major represents the following picture: a young Polish mother bends over the crib of her child and sings a lullaby; the mother falls asleep and dreams of a magic chorus that foretells the future of her child, who will grow up to be a courageous fighter for his country. When one hears the composition, the opening is indeed a lullaby; then follows a choral part, an heroic march, and then indefinite reveries. The reference to one of the greatest musical romantics is appropriate. The harmonies of Chopin are abstractions and technical sound-forms. They serve as carriers of the associative-imaginative content in the musical composition, an objective tool for Chopin's musical thinking.

By contrast, classical composers such as Haydn and Mozart, with their realistic thinking lean towards harmonic concreteness which verges almost on objectivity in the use of elements of harmony. Painting by means of harmonies, that is, representation of imagery by means of sounds, is only of some importance in their styles. Let us recall the attempt to describe lightning by means of sounds in Haydn's Creation. Aesthetically this lightning is feasible only because, during a storm, sharp, strident sounds are possible. The use of abstract chord-structures for tone-painting is conditional in Haydn's Creation because of faulty associations. The "aria of jealousy" in the fourth act of Mozart's Marriage of Figaro where Figaro sings "husbands open your

eyes" is a good example of the use of chords, which in themselves are abstract harmonies, for psychological effects; the flitting melodies and harmonies in the orchestra seem to paint visions of inconstant, deceitful women in Figaro's imagination.

The adaptability of harmony as an abstract science to various aspects discussed can be explained in terms of psychology: hearing is used mainly to apprehend time; the aptitude of hearing to analyze time and tone-qualities in music is based not so much on the properties of hearing as such, as on the character and associations of our mental imagery, and also on aspects of existence of sounds in general in the surrounding immediate reality of our existence.

Musical logic is an abstract process. For example, the sonata-form is aesthetically a logical reflection of dramatic, associational, and imaginative processes of reality. The recapitulation is not a musical device, but a necessity, an abstraction of an associational order. As a design, the sonata-form is an abstraction based on elements of contrast and repetition. The logic of the science of harmony as an abstraction coincides with the science of logic, that is, validity in thought. There is nothing musical in the science of logic. The science of harmony is an abstraction, not a musical expression² Musical thinking, as musical logic, guides the composer's idea. This musical thinking, employing the science of harmony as an abstraction, helps a composer to express an idea or purpose.

The foundations of musical thinking emerge with the organization of definite tone-successions, scales, which make possible the construction of musical forms. Acoustical laws are the foundation of musical scales. The organization of a scale enables music to avoid the disorganization or irregularity of tonal manifestations and allows the development of musical expression from very simple to very complex conceptions. The order of abstract scale-patterns does not nullify the expressive content of music. It actually unifies musical content and subordinates it to the logic of thinking processes. Aesthetically, abstract musical logic is the reflection of musical objectifications of successions of harmonies in tonal formations. The science of harmony is an abstraction of human thinking in general taking place in the realm of music. In dealing with the diatonic scale-system we have tonal series of stable and unstable intervals and chord-functions around a tonic. These series represent musical logic in the shape of patterns of chords, not something peculiar to the inner qualities or character of tones.

A question arises as to why a problem of teaching harmony exists. The answer is that the logical method to teach a course in harmony is not as the practice of harmony, that is, composition, but as the theory of harmony whose laws are deduced from the natural phenomenon of the overtone series. In the former method we are dealing with composition; that is, musical form, and harmony as a manifestation of musical thinking and imagination. This mixes up the science of harmony and musical expression, an impossible problem for a student and unnecessary in a course in harmony. The introduction of a compositional basis

2. The word "expression" is used here in a very broad sense, from the imitation of speech intonations to the most complex imaginative-associative patterns of mental imagery.

into the teaching of harmony invariably involves the problem of the inner conflict between musical expression and musical thinking. Neither the teacher nor the student can solve this. It leads to confusion in the student's grasp of connections of chords. In the latter method, teaching harmony as a theory based on acoustical laws, students learn principles of chord-connections and procedures as musical grammar. This is the essential problem in the teaching of harmony.

Aesthetically, musical expression seeks to subordinate musical logic; conversely, musical logic tries to subordinate expression. In composition the science of harmony as an abstraction controls musical expression. The apparent struggle reaches a balanced solution in the emergence of logical musical expression and imaginatively enriched patterns of harmony. This has been achieved by the great masters of music. To teach this in a harmony course is impossible and unrealistic. It belongs to the domain of musical composition.

The concept of abstractiveness is not peculiar to harmony alone. It belongs to other elements of tonal media, such as rhythm, meter, melody, dynamics, etc. Inasmuch as these elements are always associated with harmony, the theory of harmony as an abstract science becomes the logical basis for a foundation course in harmony.

Rhythm is the qualitative aspect of music. It is the succession of equal and unequal pulsations. From the point of view of expression, rhythm represents momentary manifestations of melodic, harmonic, and polyphonic expressive values. From the abstract point of view, rhythm represents momentary manifestations of melodic, harmonic, and polyphonic logic. For example, the functional aspect of a chord might change on different beats of a measure. The effect of a tonic $\frac{6}{4}$ -chord on a weak pulsation is different from the effect of the chord on a strong pulsation. Changes in rhythm affect the functional aspects of chords. Harmony, melody, and polyphony are inconceivable without rhythm. Music could not exist without rhythm as an expressive value and as an abstraction. For example, the effect of the scherzos in Beethoven's Seventh and Ninth Symphonies depends on the unity of expressive and abstract rhythms: rhythm as an expressive-intensity value is supported by rhythm as abstract logical-rhythmical figures, rhythmical periods, enhancing the logic of the musical form as a whole.

Meter is the quantitative aspect of music. It would be a mistake to regard meter as a purely mechanistic aspect. Meter is the logical ordering of rhythmical manifestations. For example, a $\frac{6}{8}$ measure can be varied rhythmically. Despite this rhythmical variety, all $\frac{6}{8}$ measures in a composition have a common rhythmical foundation in the guise of a steady metrical pattern. The characteristic of rhythm as an expressive value is freedom in the time-successions of pulsations. This is especially notable in rubato tempos and in music of a recitative character. This freedom is practically non-existent in march and dance music. Rhythm as abstraction constantly gravitates to measures, in other words, clearly defined metrical patterns, and periodicity of 2, 4, or 8 bars in sentences or phrases. This phrase-sentence rhythmical periodicity is a logical, abstract manifestation, not a rhythmical expressive value. It is excellently demonstrated by the logic of cadences and cadential aspects in general.

Musical dynamics and tempo also reveal a duality of expression

and abstraction. Gradations in volume, changes in tempo, are not only determined by expressive factors, but also by musical logic and abstract functions of design. This is demonstrated in classical and romantic cadential aspects where the tonic is subjected by logical requirements to manifestations of dynamics and tempo by means of fortissimo and ritenuto.

The duality of expressive and abstract factors is always present in melodies written in the major and minor scales. Aesthetically, a melody in music reveals expressive factors, intervallic relationships, of the human voice. Of course the human voice, intonation, reveals the utmost variety of intervallic relationships. This freedom cannot be realized in melodies because the acoustical logic of scale-construction shuns chaotic intervallic relationships of the human voice. Thus, while the intonational qualities of the human voice lose their freedom in melodies, the melodies find compensation for the loss of this freedom in the abstraction of scale-construction. The stability and instability of intervallic relationships within a scale controls expressive factors in a melody. Modulations are the logical means to enhance tension factors. Certain tones and figures within a melodic contour can become points of stability and instability, gradations of anticipations and consummations, thereby revealing melody as an aspect of musical logic. Analysis of melodies in classical and romantic music will reveal the above aspects. Melodies often combine recitative (expression) and singing-arioso (abstraction) features. This is evident in the melodies of late Beethoven. In Chopin's nocturnes, recitative elements are followed by instrumental melodic characteristics represented by abstract melodic configurations.

In romantic music abstract aspects of melodies assume symbolic significance. An example of this is the opening theme in Liszt's Faust Symphony: the augmented chord is the musical imagery of Faustian doubts and indecisions. The whole-tone scale of the impressionists might be considered in terms of abstractions. The essence of musical impressionism is the subordination of associative-imaginative elements.

The principle of abstraction and logic underlies the polyphony of a fugue and of all imitative devices. Aesthetically, the abstract logic of polyphony bears a comparative resemblance to aspects of baroque culture and world-feeling.

The most successful classical and romantic composers were those which were able to employ the abstract logic of the science of harmony for the enhancement of imaginative-associative elements in music. Conversely, the composers who failed in the above attempts produced harmonic structures consisting of trite cadences, formulas, and specific abstractions of harmonies.

Harmonic theory as an abstraction gives us the foundation of musical symbolism. The peculiar cadences in the first presentation of the theme in the introduction of Richard Strauss' Don Quixote represent symbolically the strange, false thoughts of the hero. The conclusion of Thus Spake Zarathustra is another example of the use of abstract chords for musical symbolism: the riddle of the world that Zarathustra could not solve. Similar examples are in the Alpine Symphony: patterns of abstract chords in the shape of wandering modulations and chromatic changes are examples of conditional musical-harmonic logic

used symbolically.

Finally, is not the science of orchestration an abstraction? The principles of the contrast of timbres, of orchestral groups, of individual instruments — are not these principles abstractions, orchestral logic used for purposes of expression? Just as it is possible to have an unbalanced relationship between expression and the science of harmony, it is possible to have the technique of orchestration outweigh aspects of expression. Berlioz' style is an adequate example of this.

The logical, abstract function of harmony and the teaching of harmonic theory as an abstraction is supported by historical facts. The human ear has reconciled itself to the apparent falseness of the tempered scale for the sake of logical and abstract reasons (freedom of scale-patterns and modulational patterns), not for reasons of expression. This substantiates the conception that the theory of harmony is an abstraction and the teaching of harmony is of necessity a logical process of simple chord connections.

As a science, harmony considers chords in themselves, without reference to musical form as an embodiment of ideational-emotional content. The concepts of this science are essentials independent of place and time they are studied. They represent musical grammar that students should understand and command. The teaching of harmony should be separated from elements of musical composition.

We can now formulate the curriculum of a harmony course based on the ideas discussed. Such a course will dispense with individual expressive-interpretative criteria which are based on compositional considerations. They confuse students.

The course should deal only with fundamental laws of harmony, that is, the theory of harmony (principles and norms) not the practice of harmony, composition. There should be no formulas and laws of chord-progressions which students are required to memorize and duplicate. The human voice naturally guides chord progressions according to the ease with which they can be sung. A chord thereby assumes functional values, that is, the connections of the voices are determined by what precedes and follows a chord.

Acoustical laws revealed in scale-construction are fundamental truths that underlie chord-progressions. The practice of harmony is a practical adaptation of chord-formations in compositional aspects. The injection of creative elements into the course will require constant explanations, justifications, and deviations from adherence to theoretic norms, the essential musical grammar, which students are supposed to learn and master. The practice of harmony has its function in musical analysis where it rightly calls for imagination, receptivity, and understanding of expressive values in musical forms, and the amalgamation of expression and chord abstractions.

The question of where such a course fits in an age of modern harmonic diversities is irrelevant. Any music student must have this foundation, the essentials of literacy in the science of harmony, in order to understand advanced harmonic manifestations.

The melodic materials (bass, soprano) to be harmonized should adhere to utmost simplicity, with a preponderance of scale-patterns. Simple melodies give students greater scope in voice-connections. Moreover, as the class progresses, exemplification of the principles

learned can be demonstrated from the works of the masters in whose style such simple melodic patterns abound.

The following topics will form the content of the course: (1) chord-structure and progression; (2) the major and minor modes including inversions, sevenths chords, secondary dominants, diminished triads, and chord of the added sixth; (3) ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords; (4) altered chords; (5) modulations; (6) figured basses; and (7) elementary analysis of simple chorales and free settings.

An average class can easily cover the material in two terms and gain a good mastery of the discipline. This is possible because the course will avoid speculations and polemics. After a short time of close application and concentration the student will master the subject.

Artificial rigidity which often plagues the study of harmony actually hinders intelligence in students' action and volition. The ideas presented here, based on natural unencumbered voice-connections of chords, embody fundamentals proper to a required course in harmony. The essentials of harmonic knowledge are necessary tools to bridge the gap leading to the understanding of music and its processes. It is harmonic knowledge put to work, not merely worship of this knowledge for its own sake. It substitutes first-hand harmonic experience for rigidity and unrealistic practices. A harmonic curriculum planned in advance and circumscribed with esoteric examples, artificial musts and don'ts, unrealistic formulas is a course of study that may inhibit students' interest. A constructive harmonic curriculum represents what students draw from their own practices. They will realize that the great masters of music set up no laws, or formulas; that the way to learn harmony is for students to draw from their own practices the experience to achieve their purposes in solving harmonic problems. This is a course in harmony in action.

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RE: HARMONIC PROCEDURE IN THE FOURTH QUARTET OF BELA BARTÓK

By Leo Treitler

It is the purpose of this paper to present some observations about the ways in which the music of this quartet is located around specific pitch-areas, and about the relationships that are imposed upon the pitch-groups which assume this central role.

The significance of the tone C as a landmark for the quartet has been repeatedly pointed out.³ I should like first of all to amend this to "C-in-conjunction-with-E," at least as regards some of the critical structural fulcra: the opening two notes of Movement I, before the commencement of the chromatics; the range C-E of the viola's ostinato beginning at m. 14 of Movement I; the range C-E of the chord on beat 2 of m. 26, Movement I; the range C-E of the cadential chord in the final measure of Movement I (the E^b and D^b are appoggiature); the C-E in m. 54 of Movement III, upon which this movement converges as a point

3. See Matyas Seiber, The String Quartets of Bela Bartók, (London: Boosey and Hawkes).