

EDITORIAL



In the inaugural issue of this journal James Webster offered us a thoughtful meditation on the hoary, and seemingly intractable, problem of configuring the eighteenth century so that it might constitute an intelligible subject of musicological research ('The Eighteenth Century as a Music-Historical Period?', *Eighteenth-Century Music* 1/1 (2004), 47–60). Clearly, we have come a long way from the time when eighteenth-century music was oriented almost exclusively around the grand Olympian peaks of High Baroque and Viennese Classical styles. If these dominating polarities have not entirely disappeared from our view, they certainly seem to loom far less large in our remapped musical landscape. Indeed, I can think of no other century in music history whose stylistic contours have been so dramatically redrawn as those of the eighteenth century. Of course we would err in the other direction by depicting – to continue my geographical metaphor – only a flattened, homogeneous musical landscape in the eighteenth century, covered with galant-type foliage nurtured in the hothouse of Italian opera buffa. As Webster has convincingly argued, there are still major protruberances jutting out from the first and final thirds of the century that need somehow to be taken into account in our surveys. Still, there is no question that the revised topographies little resemble the one we learned (and still might teach) from our textbooks. Some major tectonic shifts have taken place in eighteenth-century musical studies, even if those shifts have yet to settle down fully into any figuration that enjoys consensus among music historians.

For one group of music scholars with whom I have long been associated, the issue of 1750 as a dominating caesura in music history has never posed such a menacing problem. Music theorists have long been accustomed to looking at the music of the early eighteenth century using many of the same analytic lenses through which they view the 'classical' music of the late eighteenth century (and, admittedly, also music of the nineteenth century – though perhaps to a lesser degree, as I will argue below). It isn't that my colleagues are really so dim-sighted and oblivious to differences in style, texture or genre among musical compositions – rather, it is that we theorists are often drawn to those aspects of musical structure that remain stable and uniform across time, that provide a contiguous foundation lying beneath the diverse musical surfaces (invoking another structural metaphor popular with music analysts).

Certainly there are some legitimate grounds for justifying this approach in respect of the eighteenth century. For, above any other empirical quality one might identify, the eighteenth century was the century of harmonic major/minor tonality. From its consolidation in late seventeenth-century Italian instrumental music through to Viennese classicism (Webster's 'First Viennese modernism') there was a relatively stable harmonic-functional syntax employed and exploited by composers that shows remarkable unity. This is why it was not really so anachronistic for Schenker in his many essays to place his reductions of Bach's voice leading alongside analyses of music by Haydn and Mozart and early Beethoven, alighting on one or the other in no particular order or with seemingly little consideration of style, genre or chronology. (For Schenker, as we know, tonality was a universal and timeless law of musical coherence, and it could make its appearance at any particular time or place, depending only upon the genius of the composer.) But even without having to accept Schenker's bristling dogmatism, analysts today still rely largely upon the eighteenth-century repertoire to stock their pedagogical cupboard, whether to teach voice leading via Bach's chorales, functional harmony with a Haydn minuet or form through an early Beethoven sonata movement.

Of course, if we use tonality as a criterion for circumscribing the eighteenth century, we would somehow need to account for the tonal music we find subsequently in the nineteenth (to say nothing of the music of



our own day). Yet already in the second quarter of that century, astute observers of the musical scene recognized that the kinds of tonality used by some contemporaneous composers often differed in significant ways from that found in the previous one. Fétis, who called this kind of decadent tonality ‘pluritonique’, found its seeds already present in the more chromaticized passages of Mozart. But it had become pathological and fatal, Fétis thought, by the time of his own generation, as heard in the music of Berlioz, Liszt and, above all, Wagner (music which he characterized as ‘omnitonique’). Yes, there were composers such as Chopin and Brahms who arguably avoided the ills of the new German school (significantly, both prided themselves on their understanding of and debt to eighteenth-century music.) But as a useful heuristic, to consider a harmonic tonality that is circumscribed by a long eighteenth century may not perhaps be as myopic as it might first seem.

It is not only in the question of tonality that music theorists have come to treat the eighteenth century more holistically than their historical counterparts. In the venerable discipline of form, theorists have traced the roots of the ‘sonata principle’ (to invoke Edward Cone’s apt phrase) back from the masterworks of Haydn and C. P. E. Bach to the earliest binary dance movements from the late seventeenth century. Classical sonata form, far from being a unique and autonomous genre created *sui generis* by a few inspired composers at mid-century, now seems to have been part of an almost seamless continuum involving a tonal strategy that can be followed from the beginning of the eighteenth century to its end (and again, not as easily into the nineteenth century, where orthodox ‘sonata form’ more often serves as a token of classical pedigree, an ossified mould into which tonal and melodic materials are poured rather than the dynamic, tonal process that Leonard Ratner has taught us to hear in eighteenth-century music).

But analysis can expand the eighteenth century forward, too. The *Figurenlehre* that seemed to dominate the analysis of baroque music in the earlier twentieth century has been shown, in well known studies by Leonard Ratner, Wendy Allanbrook, Elaine Sisman and Kofi Agawu, to have remained vibrant up to the end of the eighteenth century. While perhaps lacking the hermeneutic richness they possessed for baroque composers, the panoply of topics, tropes and signs available to late eighteenth-century composers none the less provided possibilities for remarkable semantic enrichment.

Even in the discipline of the history of music theory, we seem to be finding more unity than difference in the eighteenth century. Robert Gjerdingen’s current research on *partimento* exercises (by which keyboardists learned to extemporize harmonies above figured and unfigured basses) has uncovered an unbroken pedagogical tradition that began in the late seventeenth century and extended well into the first quarter of the nineteenth (and beyond, at least in the French conservatoire). In my own work on Rameau’s music theory, I have attempted to show how the *basse fondamentale* served as a unifying grammar of tonal music for the eighteenth century, regardless of national or stylistic orientation. (Indeed, some of the most pedagogically effective examples of fundamental-bass analysis came from theorists outside of Rameau’s Parisian orbit, including Kirnberger’s analyses of Bach’s fugues and Logier’s analyses of Haydn’s symphonies.) Finally, in a remarkable recent study, a young German musicologist has attempted to show how aspects of early eighteenth-century harmonic and cadence theory originating in France can be brought into fruitful alignment (if with some scrapes and squeaks) with the melodic and phrase theories of German writers from the second half of the century, suturing again two theoretical cultures separated both chronologically and geographically (Markus Waldura, *Von Rameau und Riepel zu Koch: Zum Zusammenhang zwischen theoretischem Ansatz, Kadenzlehre und Periodenbegriff in der Musiktheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2002)).

This is not to claim that the agenda of music theorists when it comes to the eighteenth century is just one of homogenization and equalization. The tools of music theory can be turned to the analysis of rather narrowly circumscribed questions of musical style or genre. To take only some random samples of recent analysis concerning individual compositional styles, we find fascinating studies of Bach’s strategy of composing out and elaborating ‘parallel-section constructions’, harmonic rhythm and phrasing in Handel’s music, and issues of syntactical parataxis by which to measure empirically those elusive qualities of wit and irony in Haydn’s instrumental music. (See Joel Lester, ‘Heightening Levels of Activity and J. S. Bach’s



Parallel-Section Constructions', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54/1 (2001), 49–96; Channan Willner, 'Sequential Expansion and Handelian Phrase Rhythm', in *Schenker Studies II*, ed. Carl Schachter and Hedi Siegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 192–221; Peter A. Hoyt, 'The "False Recapitulation" and the Conventions of Sonata Form', PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1999.) Such examples could be multiplied endlessly. My point, I hope, is a clear one: music theory offers a number of finely honed analytic tools and fruitful perspectives that can be of great use to us in our ongoing project of resurveying the music of the eighteenth century.

Johann Forkel, the source of some of our most astute testimony on matters musical from the eighteenth century, already recognized the value of bringing music theory to the aid of writing music history. In a small pamphlet he penned in 1777 laying out a programme of musical study for Göttingen University, where he was employed as an organist, Forkel argued that music theory must be an essential component of any progressive music curriculum (*Über die Theorie der Musik* (Göttingen, 1777)). What is truly unusual about Forkel's position, though, is the surprisingly modern way in which he understood music theory. No longer just a mathematical science of interval measurement and tuning, theory was now to be understood as a more humanistic discipline, one that encompassed components of musical grammar, rhetoric and criticism (the latter category including what we would today call music analysis). (Forkel's pamphlet was reprinted in Carl Friedrich Cramer, *Magazin der Musik* 1 (1783), 855–912.) For Forkel, music theory assumed a prestigious role in any music history, since it was only through analysis that one could deduce the 'musical logic' which guided the evolution of musical style.

In short, music theorists and music historians should be natural partners in the field of eighteenth-century music. But why am I preaching? This is already the norm, it seems, for many of us. Most of the historians whose work I have just mentioned already apply sophisticated analytical tools within their studies. In many respects, the disciplinary boundary separating history and theory among music scholars engaged in research on the eighteenth century seems more porous and fragile than for any other period of music I can think of. Still, I would not want to eradicate completely the distinction between music theory and history, no more than we would wish to efface all distinctions between baroque and classical styles in the eighteenth century. A certain productive tension should always exist between the two. To invoke a favourite Enlightenment trope, it takes two to engage in a conversation.

This journal has been created precisely to offer a forum for such conversations. Fortunately for us, this conversation seems already to be well underway, one in which historians and theorists alike participate. So while I would hardly advocate a position of smugness on our part, I do think eighteenth-century music scholars can take some satisfaction in knowing that we might have a thing or two yet to teach our colleagues.

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