
Letters to the Editor

From Michael Graubart

More True Relationships

I blush to record the fact that I have never had any difficulty in hearing the two themes from Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, op.9, shown as Ex.3 (a) and (b), in Mark Doran's perceptive and thorough analysis (*Tempo* 219), as related in exactly the way presented by Mark Doran. That other theorists have had such difficulty in spotting what mattered to Schoenberg in theme (a), namely the coincidence of important notes of the diatonic scale with metric and agogic stresses, and that its second phrase (at the end of the theme's second bar) begins with a cambiata, A#–C, decorating the functional B, can only be attributed to the misguided equation 'Schoenberg = atonality = set theory'. But the Chamber Symphony is not atonal, and it is Mark Doran's insistence that themes have to be considered in their wider, and specifically harmonic, contexts that is even more important than his perceptive motivic analysis. I shall return to this matter, but first I should like to add a couple of observations to Mark Doran's.

The first supplements his footnote 28: not for nothing, either, do the piled-up fourths of the introduction resolve onto a triad of F, albeit F major, not the F minor of theme (b).

The second concerns the D naturals that keep turning up in the triplet motifs of theme (a) and the two bars preceding it. It is all very well thinking of the diminished-seventh chords in bars 1 and 2 of Mark Doran's Ex.5 as rootless dominant minor ninths of E major because they resolve onto E major triads, but those D naturals are, after all, the bass notes of the chords and cannot just be wished away or regarded as unessential. They turn the diminished sevenths into very firmly rooted dominant minor ninths of G. Now a chromatically-modified interrupted cadence whereby a dominant chord of G resolves onto a chord of E major instead of E minor is common enough in music of the 19th century. But what makes this instance structurally significant is that the slow introduction's fourths rest on a bass G, and that the horn's arpeggiation of the fourths at the start of the *Sehr rasch* (beginning with the notes D–G) spans the interval

from D to E \flat , outlining the dominant minor ninth of G. It seems that from the start the complex of keys G–F(major or minor)–E prefigures the keys, the apparently anomalous harmonies and the complementary relationship of themes (a) and (b).

But to turn to *Verklärte Nacht* and to return to the need to relate linear and motivic analyses to the harmonic contexts: in his follow-up letter in *Tempo* 220, Mark Doran proposes a relationship between the cello theme of bar 50 and the violin theme of bar 115 (see Exx.3(b) and 4 on p.28 of *Tempo* 220) that depends on a permutation of the note-orders in the two themes. Are we now to regard the themes as collections within which the ordering *and the functions* of the notes are unimportant?

As it happens, I agree with Mark Doran about the existence of a relationship between the two themes. But he weakens his argument in the first place by insisting, against Andrew Porter,¹ on starting with the first bar of the violin theme of bar 115 (Ex.4) rather than the second – for in the first bar the relationship between the two themes would have to be another, and rather attenuated, example of reversed and postponed antecedent and consequent (Mark Doran does not call it that, but how else to describe a relationship between A#–B and B–A# in this melodic context?); for any kind of direct relationship is so disguised by rhythm and immediate melodic context that it only becomes audible in retrospect after the direct motivic relationship of the decorated version in the second bar has been heard. Indeed, there is a hint of Brahmsian didacticism here: Schoenberg seems to be saying: 'Here is what you may take to be an entirely new idea. But listen to the second bar! Now you can hear that it isn't new at all, and even the first bar was related to what went before.'

But in the second place, and much more importantly, Mark Doran (it is ironic that the

¹ The latter's error in transcribing the theme of bar 50 (see Halli Cauthery's letter in *Tempo* 220) and then basing his analysis on the wrong transcription makes one wonder if he ever heard the piece! Or, to be charitable, did he have the rising minor third and falling sixth (minor, though, not major) of the first viola's theme in bars 29 and 30, to which I shall return (see Ex.G5 below), so much 'in his ear' that he confused the themes?

theme of bar 115 (Ex.4) is again in E major!) neglects his own precept. If the themes of Exx.3(b) and 4 are heard in their harmonic contexts, the true – or truer – relationship, which is not one of reversed and postponed antecedents and consequents, valuable though this concept of Hans Keller's is elsewhere, becomes apparent.



Ex.G1

Ex.G1 shows a simplified, but harmonically complete, sketch of bar 50, transposed as in Mark Doran's Ex.3(b). It is immediately clear that the A# is an appoggiatura – actually a part of a cambiata. Now imagine that the theme of bar 115 (Mark Doran's Ex.4) had been harmonized as in Ex.G2:



Ex.G2

One might hear the $I - V^7; V^7 - I - V^7$ progression in B major (which might plausibly be the implication of a purely linear presentation of the first-violin line) as a delayed antecedent to Ex.G1, though the IV^7 on the third beat of Ex.G1, replacing I, is, perhaps, a little disturbing.

But the violin line is *not* harmonized as in Ex.G2. It is harmonized as in Ex.G3, and in E major:

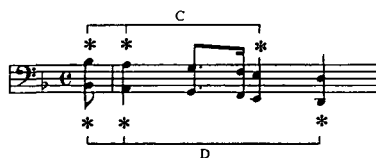


Ex.G1

The E major tonic pedal makes it clear that the diminished-seventh chord above it on the first two beats of each bar is an aggregation of appoggiatura: it resolves to a triad of E, not B. The A# 'points' to its implied resolution, B, and this again becomes aurally explicit at the end of the bar. It is the function of the A# as an appoggiatura that relates Ex.G3 to Ex.G1 – and the relationship is that of parallelism, not the complementary one of antecedent to consequent.

In addition to contexts, harmonic and otherwise, there is something else that an analyst

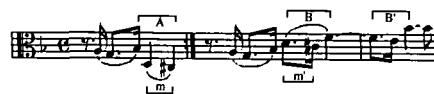
should not ignore (indeed, it is often a clue to something the composer regards as important), namely any apparent anomaly. Why does the opening theme of *Verklärte Nacht* (see Ex.G4) begin with a quaver, unlike all its succeeding motifs, and, indeed, the repetition of the opening phrase, which all begin with *semiquaver* anacruses?



Ex.G4

The answer, it would seem, is that it draws attention to this B \flat as a structurally important note as well as an expressive one;² and this creates a skeleton consisting of a falling minor second followed by a larger falling interval – a fourth if the metric and agogic stress, on E is regarded as the important factor, or a fifth if the D is heard as the significant terminus and lower boundary of the line. The two possible resulting skeletons are shown as C and D in Ex.G4. The fact that the second interval of the skeleton is thus ambiguous allows several motifs and themes to be heard as derived from the theme of Ex.G4 by a variation of the interval, and this provides an alternative derivation of the opening motif of Ex.G3, as well as, for instance, of the important theme of Ex.G6, a second derivation of which is discussed below.

A fascinating example of the developing variation of a motif begins in bar 29; see Ex.G5.



Ex.G5

The rhythmic-motivic derivation of this theme from the dotted foreground motifs of Ex.G4 is obvious; but what is of particular interest is the addition of motif *m*, derived from the falling crotchets of Ex.G4, to the overall B \flat -D ambit of the theme of Ex.G4 to form the three-note motif A of Ex.G5. Motif *m* is then contracted rhythmically, transposed up an octave and treated sequentially. The re-interpretation of the final F in the penultimate bar of Ex.G5 (which is the beginning of the sequential restatement of *m*) as the third note of a new three-note motif B, the

² The theme is heard unharmonized except for a tonic (D) pedal; it is worth recalling that in his classes in strict counterpoint Bruckner apparently taught that the minor sixth was a dissonance that had to resolve to the fifth.

elision marked by the lengthening of the note, allows B and its intervallic variant B' to spawn several further motifs later in the work, including (by the downward octave transposition of its third note) the theme of the *Etwas belebter* (bar 75, Ex.G6), an alternative derivation of which was described above, and (by inversion) the A# – B – E of Ex.G1.



Ex.G6

Finally, and though I generally prefer to leave hermeneutics to the protagonists of the 'New Musicology', here we have an explicitly programmatic, indeed *narrative*, work, so the comparative disregard of the moment of transfiguration by theorists concerned with the motivic and thematic structure of *Verklärte Nacht* is another puzzle. The violin theme beginning in bar 265 (Ex.G7)



Ex.G7

that represents the man's loving acceptance of the woman's unborn child, is not just a radiant diatonic and homophonic contrast to the chromatic turmoil of much of what has gone before. It grows out of a radical yet clearly audible

transformation or transfiguration of motif B in Ex.G5: its retrograde, together with the expansion of the diminished fourth of B into perfect fourths, creates motifs *m''* and *m'''*.

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From Andrew Porter

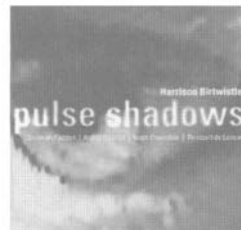
To Halli Cauthery's letter and Mark Doran's reply in *Tempo* 220, let me just add (quoting the latter), 'I am also in complete agreement with Halli Cauthery's criticisms of Andrew Porter's *Verklärte Nacht* analysis' [in the 1957 *Penguin Chamber Music*]. But Doran's phrase 'intuitive awareness' pleased me. Long, long ago, Hans Keller taught us that intuition was a music critic's most trusty tool. Forty-five years ago, writing about *Verklärte Nacht* in days when Schoenberg was a dirty word to many, I stumbled, made a transcription blunder, 'was heedless in my rapture', as Constanze sings in the old *Entführung* translation. I should have been called to account long before.

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