

CHROMATIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY MUSIC

David Kopp's book develops a model of chromatic chord relations in nineteenth-century music by composers such as Schubert, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms. The emphasis is on explaining chromatic third relations and the pivotal role they play in theory and practice. The book traces conceptions of harmonic system and of chromatic third relations from Rameau through nineteenth-century theorists such as Marx, Hauptmann, and Riemann, to the seminal twentieth-century theorists Schenker and Schoenberg, and on to the present day. Drawing on tenets of nineteenth-century harmonic theory, contemporary transformation theory, and the author's own approach, the book presents a clear and elegant means for characterizing commonly acknowledged but loosely defined elements of chromatic harmony, and integrates them as fully fledged elements into a chromatically based conception of harmonic system. The historical and theoretical argument is supplemented by plentiful analytic examples.

DAVID KOPP is Associate Professor of Music at Boston University and specializes in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music theory. As a pianist, he has made recordings of twentieth-century American music.

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In memory of
LUISE VOSGERCHIAN
extraordinary teacher and mentor

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FOREWORD BY IAN BENT

Theory and analysis are in one sense reciprocals: if analysis opens up a musical structure or style to inspection, inventorying its components, identifying its connective forces, providing a description adequate to some live experience, then theory generalizes from such data, predicting what the analyst will find in other cases within a given structural or stylistic orbit, devising systems by which other works – as yet unwritten – might be generated. Conversely, if theory intuits how musical systems operate, then analysis furnishes feedback to such imaginative intuitions, rendering them more insightful. In this sense, they are like two hemispheres that fit together to form a globe (or cerebrum!), functioning deductively as investigation and abstraction, inductively as hypothesis and verification, and in practice forming a chain of alternating activities.

Professionally, on the other hand, “theory” now denotes a whole subdiscipline of the general field of musicology. Analysis often appears to be a subordinate category within the larger activity of theory. After all, there is theory that does not require analysis. Theorists may engage in building systems or formulating strategies for use by composers; and these almost by definition have no use for analysis. Others may conduct experimental research into the sound-materials of music or the cognitive processes of the human mind, to which analysis may be wholly inappropriate. And on the other hand, historians habitually use analysis as a tool for understanding the classes of compositions – repertoires, “outputs,” “periods,” works, versions, sketches, and so forth – that they study. Professionally, then, our ideal image of twin hemispheres is replaced by an intersection: an area that exists in common between two subdisciplines. Seen from this viewpoint, analysis reciprocates in two directions: with certain kinds of theoretical enquiry, and with certain kinds of historical enquiry. In the former case, analysis has tended to be used in rather orthodox modes, in the latter in a more eclectic fashion; but that does not mean that analysis in the service of theory is necessarily more exact, more “scientific,” than analysis in the service of history.

The above epistemological excursion is by no means irrelevant to the present series. Cambridge Studies in Music Theory and Analysis is intended to present the work of theorists and of analysts. It has been designed to include “pure” theory – that is, theoretical formulation with a minimum of analytical exemplification; “pure”

analysis – that is, practical analysis with a minimum of theoretical underpinning; and writings that fall at points along the spectrum between the two extremes. In these capacities, it aims to illuminate music, as work and as process.

However, theory and analysis are not the exclusive preserves of the present day. As subjects in their own right, they are diachronic. The former is coeval with the very study of music itself, and extends far beyond the confines of Western culture; the latter, defined broadly, has several centuries of past practice. Moreover, they have been dynamic, not static fields throughout their histories. Consequently, studying earlier music through the eyes of its own contemporary theory helps us to escape (when we need to, not that we should make a dogma out of it) from the preconceptions of our own age. Studying earlier analyses does this too, and in a particularly sharply focused way; at the same time it gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate past analytical methods for present purposes, such as is happening currently, for example, with the long-despised methods of hermeneutic analysis of the late nineteenth century. The series thus includes editions and translations of major works of past theory, and also studies in the history of theory.

In the present volume, David Kopp brings recognition at last to a group of harmonic relationships that is of enormous importance in the music of the nineteenth century (and not unknown in music of other centuries, as well). The reader familiar with Schubert's glorious String Quintet in C major need recall only that moment about two minutes into the first movement at which all activity subsides, then the second cello slips down three notes, and we hear – as if transported into some magical new realm – the sublime second subject stated by the two cellos under *pizzicato* violins and viola. That “slip” – from local tonic G major into E-flat major – is one of a class of relationships called “chromatic third (or mediant) relationships” that is a hallmark of the music of Schubert but that arises in the works of many other Romantic composers too, providing some of the most thrilling moments.

David Kopp's illuminating discussion is really three things in one: an account of how theorists from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries have treated third relationships of all sorts, and in particular chromatic ones; a theoretical formulation allowing these relationships to exist in their own right rather than continuing to be thought of as derivatives of “normal” relations; and lastly, a series of analyses of passages in which chromatic third relationships are prominent, including music by Beethoven, Brahms, Chausson, Chopin, Dvořák, Liszt, Schumann, Smetana, Wagner, Wolf, and above all Schubert.

Kopp draws upon an analytical-theoretical method known as “transformational theory” pioneered by David Lewin in the early 1980s, which is itself developed from certain harmonic theories of Hugo Riemann at the end of the nineteenth century, and hence is often referred to as “neo-Riemannian theory.” One of the most fruitful developments in music theory during the past fifty years, this method is now widely practiced, especially in North America. The present book contributes insights and

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elegant formulations to that body of work. At the same time, it offers the reader-listener novel and compelling ways to think about and hear (for they reward brain and ear alike!) the harmonic fabric of much-loved works central to the stage and concert repertory – opera, symphonic and chamber works, solo song, and solo piano works of all genres.

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