

The terms of structuralist and post-structuralist theory have been widely debated within the field of music analysis in recent years. However, very few analyses have attempted to address the musical works which seem most obviously to escape the categories of conventional analysis: the repertoire of large orchestral works of the turn of the century. This first book-length study of its kind uses a semiotic theory of signification in order to investigate different types of musical communication. Musical meaning is defined on several levels: from structures immanent to the work, through narrative alongside other contemporary non-musical texts. Ideas from Eco, Barthes and Derrida are deployed within the context of close analysis of the score in order to unite specifically analytical insights with cultural hermeneutics. This book is a contribution both to the 'New Musicology' and to Mahler studies in general.

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0521602831 - Mahler's Sixth Symphony: A Study in Musical Semiotics - Robert Samuels

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A STUDY IN MUSICAL SEMIOTICS

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THIS IS FOR ALISON

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Ian Bent</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	xv
1 Music, theory and signification	1
2 Motive as sign: an analysis of the Andante	18
3 Coding of musical form: the Finale	64
4 Genre and presupposition in the Mahlerian scherzo	91
5 Musical narrative and the suicide of the symphony	133
6 Coda	166
<i>Bibliography</i>	168
<i>Index</i>	173

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 inquiry, and with certain kinds of historical inquiry. 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 theories 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 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 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.

The very notion of a semiotic analysis of Mahler's Sixth Symphony seems a contradiction in terms. How could a work in four such mighty movements, a work so extensive and so massive in its sonic fabric, yield up its secrets to a method that we associate with single lines and tiny time-spans? The answer lies in both the character of the analysis and the nature of the overall enterprise.

As to the analysis: to be sure, the apparatus commonly associated with semiotics – segmental arrays, tables of occurrences, paradigmatic indices, parallel music examples, and the like – is to be found here. And yet the reader is never overwhelmed by them, for Samuels communicates by other means as well. For a start, he uses motivic music examples, voice-leading graphs, and form-analytical tables, though not in order to dilute or popularize his semiotic method, nor yet to engage in 'multiple methodologies', but always to deepen and intensify the semiotic reading itself. More to the point, he constructs a sustained verbal discourse that leads irresistibly from beginning to end of the volume, through five highly differentiated yet intimately interlinked chapters, engaging with each of the salient issues of this problematic musical structure in turn and bringing all of them forward to his conclusion.

Samuels' analysis reaches steadily outwards as it proceeds. It takes particular musical events and looks at them within a series of ever larger contexts: their immediate surroundings, the broader settings of section, movement and symphony, the Mahlerian symphonic output as a whole, the stock of material that constituted musical consciousness at Mahler's time, and the totality of contemporaneous extramusical consciousness. In technical terms, it looks at events 'intratextually', and then 'intertextually' in increasing orbits of reference, ultimately situating the work within 'cultural intertexts'. The outcome is a narrative analysis of the Sixth Symphony which does not (to use Samuels' words) 'claim to have discovered

Mahler's intended "programme" for the symphony, nor even an unconscious programme latent within the musical text and waiting to be discovered'.

As to the nature of the enterprise: Robert Samuels' discourse takes the reader on a voyage of discovery that goes beyond Mahler's music to explore the signifying power of music itself, grappling with such fascinating and troublesome concepts as the personal musical language-pattern distinctive to a given composer (idiolect), genre in music, irony, parody, cliché and kitsch in music, and the capacity of music to carry multiplicity of meaning (polysemy). It treats musical works as texts, and sees them as located within the network of relationships that constitutes all cultural products. In the course of the journey, it enlarges the domain of musical semiotics, situating narrative within it as one of its 'codes'. With its stylish prose and its many eloquent descriptions of music, it makes an adventurous read.

Ian Bent

PREFACE

This book has been a very long time in the making. The debts, both personal and professional, to which it bears witness can neither be adequately repaid or enumerated. Those who have commented on the ideas or text of individual chapters include Kofi Agawu, Andrew Brown, Geoffrey Chew, Jonathan Dunsby, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Alan Street, Alastair Williams and John Williamson. I also owe thanks to Paul and Christine Banks; Henri-Louis de La Grange and the Bibliothèque Gustav Mahler, Paris; Stephen Watson of Skate Press, Cambridge, for the creation of the font for the rhythmic notation within the text; and all my colleagues at Lancaster University.

Three people above all others have, however, ensured that this labour has finally come to its end. The first is the supervisor of the doctoral dissertation from which this book sprang, Derrick Puffett, whose encouragement and acutely perceptive comments were constant throughout the time I was his student. The second is Anthony Pople, who has not only commented on the text, but has also, as my Head of Department, greatly helped me to assign to it the time needed for its completion. Lastly, of course, I cannot begin to describe the part played by Alison over the years that we have both lived with this project. Without her, the best of what follows would not have been written at all.