

Dr. James Ogburn – Research Statement

Recently, my research in music theory has focused on domains other than pitch. Although the analysis of pitch provides an excellent basis for discussion of a given musical work, in my own writings this parameter serves as only one facet of the overall discussion. Just as analysts since Rameau have been forced to contend with how a work's identity differs from its notation, the contemporary analyst must address issues outside of pitch and how these relate to the pitch trajectory, in order to account for the structure and impact of a work.

In confronting this task, recent scholars have placed a great deal of emphasis on easily quantifiable domains such as register and absolute interval. Certainly these elements exert significant influence upon the form of a phrase, passage, section or work; however, these are essentially pitch-oriented objects of study. In my own research, by first applying contour theory and other methods to pitch, register, and absolute interval I have created methods for discussing other parameters.

I have developed means of quantifying several parameters in order to establish the contribution of each to the composite structure, as well as to compare these facets to each other in the context of the large form. In my discussion of Lutoslawski's Third Symphony, for example, I identified the source of a nagging dilemma in the work; namely, the unfulfilled aspect of the climax. By discussing the trajectory of five levels of the structure (Pitch, Register, Orchestration/ Timbre, Voice Density, and Rhythm) in the context of their large-scale goals, I was able to demonstrate a complex misalignment between these goals. This discussion greatly enhanced my understanding (and, hopefully, that of my reader) about the form of the work and the "abortive" climax.

I contend that most of the exceptional music of the past has exhibited contradictions between levels of the structure or between these levels and form. For example, at the close of movement III (*allegro molto vivace*) of Tchaikovsky's symphony no. 6, it is no wonder that audiences are compelled to applaud. In addition to overt references to finale within the tradition, at this moment the distinct levels are so unified, explosive, and carefully resolved, that the passage feels irrefutably conclusive. I believe Tchaikovsky intended to deceive the listener with this profound episode as a dramatic, narrative event, with the result that the tragic conclusion is exceedingly breathtaking and poignant. In fact, this work clearly demonstrates how the agreement/disagreement between levels is fundamental to listener expectation, as well as to the composer's subversion of this aspect.

James Joyce once said of his work that he "...put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what [he] meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality." The compulsion of innovative composers to subvert expectation leads to complex, surprising, and rewarding musical works that resist simple interpretation, allowing for continued debate, discussion, and study. By analyzing multiple layers of the musical structure and drawing comparison between their unique trajectories I address works from a *gestalt* viewpoint that greatly enhances our understanding of canonic works. The "enigmas and puzzles" of the great music of the past may never be unraveled and perhaps that is where their beauty lies. In applying my holistic approach, I make my own humble attempt to "pull at the thread."