

REVIEWS



BOOKS

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WILLIAM E. CAPLIN, JAMES HEPOKOSKI AND JAMES WEBSTER, ED. PIETER BERGÉ
MUSICAL FORM, FORMS & FORMENLEHRE: THREE METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS
Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009
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A decade ago three left-wing political philosophers collaborated on a landmark book project entitled *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000). Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek all shared a philosophical heritage (Hegel, Marx, Lacan) and, even if the implications they drew for contemporary strategy differed widely, their politics shared sufficient common ground that they were able to forge a measure of solidarity. The collaborative book took to new levels of intensity a debate in which the three had already been engaging in their independent publications throughout the 1990s. Comprising three ‘rounds’ of essays, this format allowed the thinkers to respond directly to issues raised or criticisms levelled in earlier rounds and to offer clarification to their respondents; the project thereby enabled these three thinkers to tease out their theoretical differences with greater clarity and refinement.

Musical Form, Forms & Formenlehre is music theory’s answer to *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. Here three Anglophone scholars who have already made significant contributions to the music-theoretical literature go head to head on a number of key issues. In both cases, the genre, as it seeks to harness the dynamism of face-to-face exchange for the medium of print, offers fascinating insights into the institutional nature of dialogue itself, while there are striking parallels across the two disciplines that highlight much about the production of academic discourse.

There are also crucial differences. The music-theory version is at once more collegial and more protectionist. Unlike the post-Marxist philosopher, the gentlemanly music theorist tends to fight with his gloves on: as the editor observes, the remarks are ‘cast in a style that ranges from the gently critical to the overtly polemical’ (15), but there is none of the outright acrimony with which Laclau and Žižek’s exchanges are beset. In fact, the present book arguably marks an important step towards a more constructive and integrative engagement with James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy’s Sonata Theory compared with the somewhat frosty reception with which it was initially greeted. (Although it was developed over many years, Sonata Theory obtained its definitive form with the publication of Hepokoski and Darcy’s *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). As a barometer of the reception, see Paul Wingfield’s assault in *Music Analysis* 27/1 (2008), 137–177, and Matthew Riley’s suspicions in *Music & Letters* 89/4 (2008), 590–598; Celia Hurwitz-Keefe’s review in this journal (6/2 (2009), 251–254) contains more balanced circumspection.)

At the same time, the format adopted in *Musical Form* tends to encourage a greater sense of intellectual ownership and with it the need to defend the integrity of a particular theoretical outlook. In contrast to the philosophers’ free-for-all, each of the music-theoretical ‘rounds’ is given over to the presentation of a particular theorist’s position, before the two opposing scholars respond and the originating theorist is finally



given a chance to address the responses. William Caplin opens with an attempt to give a more rigorous conceptual underpinning to the notion of formal function theorized in his *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Hepokoski similarly gives an introduction to and an analytical demonstration of the central impulse behind Sonata Theory, namely the notion of dialogic form as a ‘deeper sense of form . . . produced . . . through a dialogue with an intricate and subtle network of piece-appropriate norms and guidelines’ (72). James Webster rounds off the book with a description of his analytical methodology of multivalence, which independently analyses musical parameters such as harmony, rhythm and dynamics so as to piece together an image of musical form out of the combination and non-congruence of these different strands. The result is that, as each theory or method is put under the spotlight, the differences between the three theorists’ basic assumptions come sharply into focus.

Whilst the editor is adamant that the book does not aim for consensus, it strikes me that the project has no less a programmatic purpose than a critical one – and this is what sets its contribution apart from the many reviews of Caplin and Hepokoski’s existing monoliths. There would appear to be an aspiration, most readily recognizable in Caplin’s comments, to move towards a collaborative endeavour in determining what the future *Formenlehre* might look like. Like *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, the three-way debate is an exercise in taking stock of the current theoretical landscape so as to clear the ground for a more compelling theory of musical form to take shape. What remains unclear by the end of the book is whether such an ambition is best achieved through an essentially antagonistic or a collaborative discourse: will the New Music Theory be found in the gaps between theorists or will it be founded on the slender fragments upon which they can agree?

Much else about the new *Formenlehre* remains hazy too. Webster’s contribution casts doubt as to whether it should even take the form of a generalized *theory* at all. While Laclau and Žižek squabble over the conceptual analysis of capitalism and hegemony, Butler repeatedly recalls the debate to the question of practical strategy; for her, the political subject is something to be produced and performed as much as it is to be theorized. Similarly, Webster, who alone of the three has never aspired to devise his own theory of form, makes the case for the particulars of analytical praxis over universals of theoretical abstraction. Caplin and Hepokoski, by contrast, are the defenders of Big Theory: the former contends that Webster’s method does rely on an implicit theoretical construct, while the latter’s position is that analysis needs theory if it is to be more than description. One should, of course, add that such dichotomies are unsustainable, as Webster ably demonstrates elsewhere in his discussion of *Form* (structure) and *Formung* (process).

Caplin’s argument throughout is that the three authors are actually often in agreement at the level of analytical method. He rightly flags those issues of *theoretical* disagreement, for one finds there the most thought-provoking moments in the book and the horizons for future debate. Like *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, the present volume acquires its coherence when situated within the larger body of theoretical work developed by Caplin, Hepokoski and Webster over the last ten years or so and its vibrant critical reception. It is unsurprising, therefore, that much of what is in contention here is already familiar. Both Caplin and Hepokoski make cross-claims that the other’s theory is excessively inflexible or restrictive in its taxonomical preoccupations. In much the same way that Žižek faces an Oedipal struggle to distance himself from his mentor Laclau, Hepokoski has always sought to find the decisive gap which will separate *Elements of Sonata Theory* from its competitor published eight years earlier. The battle lines are drawn around two interrelated issues: the distinction between function and type, and the location of the EEC (essential expositional closure).

Since the publication of *Classical Form* Caplin has sought consistently to isolate function from other formal dimensions, separating it from type, grouping structure and thematic content, as well as syntax from rhetoric and cadence-*qua*-ending from punctuation-*qua*-stop. On this occasion, he distinguishes between function and type on account of their temporality: the former is fundamentally temporal in character, whilst the latter, in its abstract generalized form, is not. Webster and Hepokoski join forces in upbraiding Caplin for



his rigid opposition, but also, more forcefully, for his simplistic conception of musical temporality based upon Kofi Agawu's beginning–middle–end paradigm.

This question of temporality opens immediately onto the issue of locating the EEC. Caplin's position has its own consistent logic: a theme is defined as that which ends in a cadence; the closing portion of an exposition after the subordinate themes has a post-cadential (after-the-end) function; there is nothing from a form-functional perspective to distinguish a so-called closing *theme* from a subordinate theme; only if the closing portion is limited to codettas rather than themes can a difference be maintained between ending and after-the-end; therefore the EEC comes with the PAC (perfect authentic cadence) at the end of the last subordinate theme. Hepokoski and Darcy, on the other hand, follow William Rothstein in granting EEC status to the first PAC in the secondary key, though they do devote a chapter to the ways in which the EEC may be deferred by the persistence of S-type material beyond this PAC so as to reopen the purported EEC. Both Wingfield and Michael Spitzer (*Beethoven Forum* 14/2 (2007), 150–178) argue that this suggests a greater degree of convergence in practice. The fact that this issue is raised once again in the present volume suggests, however, that it is important to insist upon the difference at a theoretical level. By locating the source of the divergence, one is, furthermore, able to return to the issues of temporality and of the function/type distinction.

From a linguist's point of view, Caplin's model of temporality would seem impoverished to the extent that it accounts for only one of the dimensions present in the temporal constitution of the verb. Formal function is essentially concerned with *aspect*: that dimension of the verbal system that shows the degree to which the event referred to has been actualized – that is, whether it is still at its beginning, in the middle of its duration or even in its aftermath (Caplin's post-cadential function). Webster's criticism of Caplin's temporal model is that it does not allow for the multi-levelled character of music's various temporal dispositions. Perhaps this concern could be addressed by considering other ways in which musical form produces time, comparable with verbal tense and mood. Insofar as the three authors describe formal type as a means of ordering or locating events within a larger time span, type seems most related to the concept of tense. Thinking of function and type in this way permits one to begin exploring the interrelationship between them – though this issue remains unexplored in the book. Moreover, mood, which in verbal construction is able to differentiate between reality and mere possibility, provides a framework for pursuing the disagreement over the EEC. The difference between Caplin and Hepokoski is concerned with how one experiences each PAC in the secondary key as it comes along: whether it is an EEC-as-possibility, to exist in reality only retrospectively, or whether it really exists as the EEC, only to be transformed into mere possibility afterwards. To the extent that musical form thus hinges on negotiating the gap between the possible and the actual, the philosophers and the music theorists are arguing about the same thing: contingency.

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ANTHONY R. DELDONNA AND PIERPAOLO POLZONETTI, EDS
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY OPERA
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Developments in the understanding of eighteenth-century opera over the past quarter century have been profound and far-reaching. Drawing back from a near-sighted preoccupation with a small number of canonical works, music historians have begun to appreciate the extent to which individual operas inhabited