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## **Music Theory for the Church Musician: Analysis or Paralysis? Narrative Can Help**

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- I. Introduction – Working knowledge of music theory/analysis is essential for informed and sensitive music-making by church musicians. Stumbling blocks—Where to start? Lack of time.
- II. Narrative approach to analysis can help organize our observations about the music and provide coherence to them. What is a “narrative approach” to music analysis?
  - A. Looking for the musical “story-line,” “plot” of musical “events” in order to establish meaningful connections between diverse musical elements. Caution—this doesn’t mean finding literary “stories” in the music we study; rather it involves seeing the connections between purely musical elements, and how they work together to give meaning to the work.
  - B. Leonard Meyer’s “Expectation/Realization (Resolution)” model. Musical sound events can be evaluated in terms of being expected or unexpected based on stylistic norms. Musical events (whether small or large-scale) set up expectations for certain things to follow (“resolutions”) based either on external environmental factors (cultural), or internal factors arising from the piece itself (as set up by the composer). Example of former: musical scale continuation (play **do** up to **ti**), expected “standard” chord progressions (play **I-IV-V-I**), and formal structures (**ABA**). Peter Kivy quote: “It is part of the composer’s craft to play with the formal and syntactical expectations of the listener; and it is part of the listener’s pleasure to become involved in this play.” (*Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*, p. 74)
  - C. When an “expectation” does not lead directly to a “resolution”, a “delay” has occurred leading to frustration and tension. Our anticipation of the eventual “resolution” is heightened with the result that we become “emotionally involved.” We play a “hypothesis game” with the music, trying to predict what is coming next. This may be both conscious and unconscious.
  - D. Surprise – Abrupt, unexpected change of a musical element. Ambiguity - suspense created by our ignorance of clearly defined path to a goal.

### III. Strategies/Topics for Music Theory Analysis

- A. Composers often “pack” the **presentation of initial material** of a piece with significant details which can be developed later on in their piece. These details can be quite varied: rhythmic motives, melodic motives, harmonic progression, texture (number of voices and relation of various voices to each other), thematic material (in whole or in part), types of scales, implied connection with text perhaps through text painting. Carefully observe and consider how a particular piece begins, then look for connections throughout the piece.  
**Hypothesize!**
- B. **Repetition** is the lifeblood of musical thought, but it must be employed carefully! Repetition occurs both on the “micro” level as well as on the “macro” level. All of the elements listed above in A. can be **repeated**, or may be **modified** in some way so that the “new” statement maintains a relationship to the initial statement. Examples of “modification” are: transposition, slight change of melodic pattern, expansion of range/register, change of rhythmic pattern, change of metric placement, reharmonization, alteration of texture, application of contrapuntal devices (imitation, canon, augmentation, diminution, etc.).
- C. **Repetition** on the “macro” level involves the “return” of musical material (themes, sections of music, etc.) to create **musical forms**, such as **ABA, ABACA, ABACABA, ABCBA**, etc.
- D. The composer’s task is to strike a balance between **unity and diversity**, between the wise use of **repetition** to assist in remembering important material, and the use of **contrast** to provide variety and dynamism. Too much repetition risks a response of boredom on the part of the hearer, too much variety risks “losing” the listener’s attention and ability to process material. In this case the musical events will be unintelligible and chaotic to the listener struggling to remain attentive to the music.
- E. **Modulation** involves the establishment of a new key (or tonal center). Pieces often feature modulation either at the local level, or on a more global level as a means of providing variety. Typical modulations occur to closely related keys (keys whose signatures differ from the original key by only one sharp or flat) in music of the Baroque period. Music of the Classical and Romantic periods explored modulations to foreign keys. The use of **modulation** is important in the delineation of **musical form** (global level) since different sections of a piece may be set in contrasting keys. **In most Western music, the departure from the original key (home key) sets up the expectation of an eventual return to it.** This provides a sense of movement and dynamism to the piece. A multi-movement work, such as a symphony, features an entire movement (often the second) in a contrasting key, thus setting up the return to the home key in later movements.
- F. In some music recognizable **themes** (melodies) may be present. These should be studied, and their locations throughout the work noted, along with any modifications. In church music these themes may be hymn-tune melodies or other **cantus firmus** (preexistent melody) quotations.

IV. Analysis of “**Psalm 46**” (from *Psalm Set*) by John Ferguson. (Augsburg Fortress 11-10748)  
SATB and Organ. **Play “Psalm 46” in its entirety, CD – Minnesota Voices, Track 13.**

A. Presentation of Initial Material.

- 1) Opening rhythmic/melodic motive in **organ, m. 1 fanfare motive**, derived from opening motive of chorale **A Mighty Fortress** with repeated notes and descending fourth leap.
- 2) Opening melodic motive of **choir** entrance in octaves, **m. 6-8**, features **upper neighbor tone** motion. Both organ motive and choral entrances begin with an **upbeat** (similar gesture, but not identical durations).

B. How are these elements (#1 and #2 above) used and developed?

- 1) In organ part, **m. 1-3**, imitative treatment of **fanfare motive** using rhythmic diminution.
- 2) In organ part, **m. 4**, this rhythmic motive of m. 2-3, is combined with **upper neighbor tone** motion. This foreshadows the larger scale **upper neighbor tone** motion in the choral entrance, **m. 6-8**.
- 3) Thus, **m. 1-8** comprise two phrases—the first an introduction by the organ, and the second the choral introductory phrase.

C. What happens next? By the application of **repetition**, the **organ introduction** (m. 1-6) returns in **m. 9-14**. And a **varied repetition** of the **initial choral entrance** is heard in **m. 14-17**. Together **m. 1-17** exhibit an **a b a' b'** phrase structure for **Section A**.

- 1) However, notice there is a slight **modification** in **m. 13** where, compared with the corresponding m. 5, in the eighth note triplets an extra group has been added on beat two, so that the contour of on-the-beat notes creates an **upper neighbor tone** motion in both right and left hands: RH=G-A-G, and LH=E-F#-E.
- 2) Note the independence of the voices, especially the bass line (which might be heard to suggest the first part of the second phrase of **A Mighty Fortress**).
- 3) The similarity of the opening two phrases of the choral part nicely mirrors the parallel structure of the opening two verses of the psalm text: “The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our Refuge.” This parallel construction is typical of Hebrew poetry in the psalms.

D. **Section B (m. 17-34)** offers many **contrasts** to the first section, but some elements are also maintained from the first section.

- 1) The organ accompaniment features an **ostinato** in the left hand and pedal parts; but note that the left hand figure has a variant of the **upper neighbor tone** motion, now incorporating repeated notes.
- 2) Against this backdrop, the right hand plays the melody of the **chorale, A Mighty Fortress!** And note well, it is “harmonized” in parallel fourths (see m. 1 with its descending fourth leap). In **m. 20-32** two phrases of the **chorale** are presented.
- 3) Perhaps in an effort to avoid boredom, the composer modifies the left hand eighth-note pattern of the **ostinato** in this section. In **m. 24-27** the initial statement is transposed up a M2, and then in **m. 28-31** its range expands to a third, etc.

- 4) Meanwhile, in **m. 19-27** the choral parts enter successively with a **canon** between tenor and soprano at the octave one measure apart, and likewise the bass and alto one measure apart. Since the two melodies are nearly identical, the listener's attention is drawn to the staggered entrances (five total entrances in two measures including the **cantus firmus chorale** in the organ-right hand).
- E. **Section B' (m. 35-50)** functions essentially as a **varied repetition** of m. 17-34 with a move toward a half cadence in D major in m. 51-52.
- 1) The **chorale cantus firmus** phrases three and four in the organ part, right hand are a repetition of phrases one and two heard in the previous section.
  - 2) In like manner, the material in choir and organ parts in this section (**m. 35-50**) is similar to that employed in the previous section (m. 17-34).
  - 3) While a **canon** is maintained between the tenor and soprano in **m. 35-41**, the bass and alto begin imitatively, and then become independent.
  - 4) A return to unison (and later octave) writing in the soprano and alto (**m. 42-49**) is reminiscent of the opening choral phrase (m. 6-8).
- F. The opening choral phrase (m. 6-8) is now inserted in the manner of a **refrain (m. 52-55)** which leads to **Section C (m. 55-87)**. Measure 55 marks the first significant **modulation** in the piece to **b minor** (the key of the relative minor).
- 1) Note the strong effect of parallel fifths (S/A, T/B) in the declamatory phrase "The Lord of hosts is with us."
  - 2) The left hand of the organ part introduces a new **ostinato** in parallel fourths (**m. 55 ff**).
  - 3) The choral parts in this phrase (**m. 55-60**) create a sense of agitation through their use of repeated eighth notes and **neighbor tone** figures. Bass and alto have descending NT figures; tenor and soprano have ascending NT figures.
  - 4) **Section C (m. 55-87)** exhibits a continuous flow of brief musical ideas; the **chorale cantus firmus** in the organ and **choral phrases** sometimes overlap each other (see m. 67-68, 71-72).
  - 5) This section may derive its formal character noted above from that of the chorale itself: two initial phrases which are repeated followed by a series of shorter phrases loosely linked together.
- G. **Section D (m. 87-96)**, provides dramatic **contrast** to all that has gone before. It is highly expressive of the text, "Be still and know that I am God." Note—this may be interpreted (in Leonard Meyer's terms) as a "surprise" (both musically and textually).
- 1) There is a much slower tempo in this section, and the six-voice choral texture is rich in sonority. The women's voices utilize parallel triadic harmonies over the resonant, static G major harmony repeated in the men's voices. Note that **both upper and lower neighbor tone** motion is effectively used in the women's melodies.
  - 2) When the organ finally enters at the end of the choral phrase it plays slowly arpeggiated sustained chords in the lower parts while a solo melody floats freely above.
- H. **Section E (m. 96-100)** introduces a final phrase of new text and returns us solidly back to the **home key** of **D major**. Note the declamatory nature of this phrase and the repeated D in the men's voices which anchors the tonality.

- I. The **final section, Section A (m. 100-117)**, is a **repetition** of the opening of the piece, **m. 1-17**. The concluding phrase heard on the organ, **m. 117-123**, is a **repetition** of the opening **organ introduction, m. 1-6**.
- 1) The final choral phrase, **m. 114-117**, is slightly modified (as compared to m. 14-17) to present a stronger final cadence in the choral part.
  - 2) Structurally, the composer seems to follow the lead of the Psalm text which treats verses 7 and 11 as a recurring “refrain.” In a similar fashion, John Ferguson has set this **“refrain” verse** to be stated at the beginning of the piece (**m. 6-17**), in the middle shortened to only one phrase (**m. 52-55**), and at the end (**m.106-117**).
- V. Analysis of **“Gravement” movement (from *Pièce d’Orgue*)**, BWV 572, by Johann Sebastian Bach. (Bärenreiter ed., Vol. 7, p. 130.) Organ.
- A. This is the middle movement from a continuous three-movement work for organ. The tempo indications for each movement are: 1) Très vitement, 2) Gravement, and 3) Lentement.
  - B. This movement illustrates well both Leonard Meyer’s **“Expectation/Realization” model** as well as the possible benefits gained from use of the **“narrative approach”** to music analysis.
  - C. Texture and General Style of the movement. The piece employs full, five-voice polyphonic texture throughout this movement. The long melodic lines feature numerous dissonances and suspensions (known as *durezza e ligature* style).
- Play sections of “Gravement” (2<sup>nd</sup> movement), CD 1090 (New Ideas in Weimar), Track 14. Begin at 1:27 to 3:04 [p. 1 of score] then 6:35-7:45 [p. 4 of score].**
- D. This movement possesses a remarkable forward motion and continuity due to the employment of **delaying techniques** which override the expected harmonic resolutions. This movement uses **deceptive cadences (V-vi)** or **deceptive progressions** within the phrase to **avoid closure** and **extend the harmonic motion**. This creates tension and heightened expectation of eventual resolution (Leonard Meyer’s Expectation/Realization model).
- 1) First encountered in **m. 6-7** where the progression **V-vi** prevents closure (**V-I cadence** is expected here). Note the change of direction in the bass and soprano lines after this progression.
  - 2) After a move to the key of the dominant (D major), another **deceptive progression** occurs in **m. 12-13** which **delays** the expected **V-I cadence**.
  - 3) The first **authentic cadence (V-I)** doesn’t occur in this movement until **m. 20-21**, and then it confirms the key of the dominant (D major).

- 4) The next **authentic cadence** occurs in **m. 30-31** in the key of b minor, the relative minor of the dominant.
  - 5) The first **authentic cadence** in the **home key** (G major) is not reached until **m. 40**.
  - 6) At the return of the **home key** (G major) near the end of the movement, a **deceptive cadence** in **m. 129-130** initiates a **long, two-octave ascent in the bass line** (from D2 up to D4), which is the **climactic point** of the movement.
  - 7) This **bass line ascent** is halted by an octave leap down and another **deceptive cadence** in **m. 143-144**. From this point on the **bass line descends** until a **pedal point** is reached on D2 in **m. 148**.
  - 8) A **deceptive cadence** (V-viio/V) in **m. 156-157** abruptly concludes this *Gravement* movement **without achieving an authentic cadence in the home key!** Talk about surprises. This totally unexpected event has the effect of **avoiding closure** and propels us into the final movement of the work, where presumably **closure will ultimately occur**.
- E. A **narrative approach** to analysis might suggest that the melodic writing in the outer voices (soprano and bass) is a structural element. **There is a strong tendency to employ contrary motion in the outer voices, with each voice moving by step.**
- 1) The initial statement in **m. 1-7** has a **soprano descent of an octave** matched to a **bass ascent of a 6<sup>th</sup>**, **both moving by step**.
  - 2) Immediately after the cadence in D major, **m. 21**, Bach recalls the opening statement with a **soprano descent of an octave** (F#5 to F#4), while the **bass has an ascent of a 4<sup>th</sup>** (D3 to G3).
  - 3) After the authentic cadence in the home key (G major), **m. 40**, Bach reverses the direction of his outer melodic lines; **soprano ascent of a 5<sup>th</sup> vs. bass descent of almost an octave** (half step shy) in **m. 40-44**.
  - 4) The **soprano descent** is increased to a dim. 12th, A5 down to D#4 in **m. 53-67**, culminating in a cadence in the key of the relative minor (E minor). In fact, during this **soprano descent**, two authentic cadences take place in this key. Meanwhile, the **bass line ascends up a 7th**, in **m. 48-54** (again, not quite an octave).
  - 5) At this point, we can make the **hypothesis** that the **goal of this movement is to have the bass line ascend a full octave by step**.

- 6) An **ascending stepwise bass line** in whole notes begun in **m. 90** (A2 up to G#3) almost makes it up the full octave to A3, but abruptly leaps down an augmented fifth in **m. 97**. Interestingly, this occurs right at the point of the Golden Section (.618 x 157 total measures = m. 97!)
- 7) The **bass line** finally completes its **octave ascent** in the climactic place, **m. 129-143**. In fact, **in overachieving fashion this ascent is a full two octaves**, D2 up to D4. This occurs in the **home key** of G major.
- 8) After this dramatic **bass line ascent**, as the tension and anticipation steadily increase, a powerful **deceptive cadence** in **m.143-144** avoids **closure** and sets up a lengthy **descending bass line back down to the low D2**, the initial note in the previous ascending bass line. So in a sense we have come full circle. This D is sustained as a **pedal point** for nine measures, resolving **deceptively to C# and avoiding the expected authentic cadence in the home key (G major)** in **m. 156-157**.
- 9) Meanwhile the **soprano line** in **m. 132-144** has maintained an essentially **stepwise descending line** (interrupted by occasional octave displacements) **in contrary motion to the bass line**. Thus the relationship between soprano and bass lines set up in the initial measures is still maintained at the conclusion of the movement—all that has changed is the “fulfillment” of the **bass line’s** having finally reached the **goal of extending upwards a full octave** (actually **two octaves!**). In these measures the **soprano line has descended a full two octaves while the bass line has ascended a full two octaves**.

F. In conclusion, the analysis of J. S. Bach’s *Gravement* movement (from *Pièce d’Orgue*) demonstrates that **deceptive cadences and progressions** are employed strategically to **extend the harmonic motion**, thus creating tension and suspense. This type of observation is consistent with Leonard Meyer’s Expectation/Realization model. At the same time, a case can be made that there is a tendency for **soprano and bass lines to move stepwise in contrary motion**. Furthermore, the unfolding of the **bass line** suggests that the **compositional goal of this movement is to have the bass line ascend a full octave by step**. This observation is consistent with a narrative approach to analysis.

G. **As it turns out, both of these aspects of this composition are related to each other.** The bass line striving to reach its goal of an octave ascent is shaped by a deceptive progression which creates an opportunity for a change of direction in the bass line (m. 1-7). At other times, the deceptive progression is part of the continuing bass line ascent (m. 10-15). The powerful effect of the bass line ascending a full two octaves is reinforced by the soprano line constantly moving in contrary motion to it (m.129-143). And this is followed by the strategically placed strong deceptive progression (m. 143-144) which propels the harmonic motion even further, providing a decisive change of direction to the bass line.