Unfoldings, By Carl Schachter. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Review by David Gagné

Carl Schachter has been a pivotal figure in Schenkerian studies, both in the United States and abroad, and his unique gifts as a music theorist and teacher are widely recognized. The musical community therefore owes a threefold debt of gratitude to Professor Schachter, to editor Joseph N. Straus, and to Oxford University Press for gathering together Schachter's major essays in one book. *Unfoldings* also includes an enlightening dialogue between the author and the editor. The contents of *Unfoldings* are significant and, while discussed in detail below, I believe that they can be best appreciated by considering the context in which his research developed.

In 1950, when Schachter began to study at the Mannes Music School (now Mannes College of Music), few Americans outside the Mannes community were familiar with Schenker's theories. In 1931, Hans Weisse had been invited by the Mannes family to come to the School to teach composition, theory, and analysis; he remained on the faculty until his untimely death in 1940. Weisse, who had begun his studies with Schenker around 1912, and who taught both Felix Salzer and William J. Mitchell, was the first to teach linear analysis in an American music school, thereby initiating the long tradition of Schenkerian studies at Mannes. It is notable that, in 1932, Schenker's *Five Graphic Music Analyses* was simultaneously published in Vienna by Universal Edition and in New York by the Mannes School.[1] Salzer, who took over Weisse's position, created an integrated theory, analysis, and ear training

[1]Heinrich Schenker, *Fünf Urlinie-Tafeln* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1932); *Five analyses in sketchform* (New York: David Mannes Music School, 1932); reprinted as *Five Graphic Music Analyses*, with a new introduction and glossary by Felix Salzer (New York: Dover Publications, 1969). The book is generally known in English by the title of the 1969 edition.

curriculum at Mannes, a curriculum that continues to be remarkable for its intensity and breadth. Carl Schachter majored in conducting as an undergraduate student; his studies included the course in Schenkerian analysis with Salzer. During this time he also studied piano privately with Isabelle Vengerova.

He was hired to teach at Mannes while still a student, and remained on the faculty after graduation. There, during the 1950s and 1960's, he had the opportunity to develop as a theorist and teacher in an atmosphere that was ideally suited to his nature and talents. Other Schenkerians who had studied in Europe and who had come or returned to the United States, including Ernst Oster and William J. Mitchell, were associated with Mannes and became personal friends of Schachter's. His collaboration with Felix Salzer as the co-author of *Counterpoint in Composition* represents a high point of this period in his career.[2]

Saul Novack, who had studied with Salzer, joined the Queens College faculty in 1952. Over the next two decades he was instrumental in building an expanding music theory program. He brought both Salzer and (in 1971) Schachter to Queens. Together with Roger Kamien and Charles Burkhart (who also studied with Salzer), these individuals formed a remarkable group of Schenkerian scholars at Queens College and at the newly-established Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.

During this time Schachter wrote *Harmony and Voice Leading* in collaboration with pianist and Mannes faculty member Edward Aldwell.[3] Though harmony books by Mitchell and Allen Forte had already introduced a Schenkerian perspective,[4] Aldwell and Schachter's text was unique in several ways: (1) the extent to which it incorporated Schenkerian principles; (2) its organization

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[2]Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition: The Study of Voice Leading* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969; reprint, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

[3]Edward Aldwell and Carl Schachter, *Harmony and Voice Leading* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, 1979; 2nd ed., 1989).

[4]William J. Mitchell, *Elementary Harmony* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939; 2nd ed., 1948); Allen Forte, *Tonal Harmony in Concept and Practice* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962).

according to harmonic functions—for example, the exploration of many possibilities for tonic and dominant-function chords both in root position and in inversion before introducing subdominant and supertonic chords; (3) the depth and breadth of information presented; (4) the emphasis on examples from the literature, which begin each chapter. Because of the success and wide adoption of the book, Schenkerian theoretical principles such as prolongation, composing out, and distinctions between primary "harmonic" chords and voice-leading or contrapuntal chords were introduced to large numbers of teachers and students. It is fair to say that this book has affected the way that harmony is taught in many colleges and universities in the United States and abroad, changing pedagogical concepts and practices that had been established for decades, and influencing most subsequent harmony texts. With *Counterpoint in Composition* and *Harmony and Voice Leading*, Schachter established himself as one of the most important music theory pedagogues of the century.

This side of Schachter's work is of course well known. Much of Schachter's scholarly work was published after *Harmony and Voice Leading*, and was nurtured under a special set of circumstances in the 1970s and 1980s. A particular group of students came to Mannes for advanced study of theory and musicianship after completing undergraduate music programs in other schools. Since Mannes had not yet established a M.A. degree in theory, it awarded them a Postgraduate Diploma. While on the faculty at Queens College, Schachter continued to teach at Mannes part-time, maintaining the link between the two schools that had begun with Salzer. Accordingly many of these individuals, as well as others who had been undergraduate students at Mannes, went to Queens College for the M.A. in theory, and to the CUNY Graduate Center for the Ph.D. Together with others who had done their undergraduate work at Queens, they established a large and talented body of graduate students, many of whom are leading Schenkerian scholars today. This situation provided Carl Schachter with an ideal environment in which to teach and pursue research.[5]

[5]In the interest of full disclosure, I should add that I was a member of this group. After receiving a B.A. from Columbia, I completed a Postgraduate

Schachter's students were devoted to him, not only because of his scholarly and musical excellence, but also because of his personal qualities, including his abundant warmth and humanity. The decision to begin *Unfoldings* with "A Dialogue Between Author and Editor" was an inspired one, for as we are introduced to Carl Schachter the scholar and teacher, we also begin to know him as an individual.

The deep concern for students that is evident to all who study with him is reflected in many thoughtful remarks about pedagogy. He stresses the value of Schenkerian analysis "to get a better hearing and understanding of specific pieces of music, to improve one's musical skills, and to learn about the structure of the tonal system at large" (6). However he cautions against an overly theoretical approach with beginning students: "...at the early stages I'd rely as much as possible on the students' intuitive musicality and knowledge of voice-leading and harmony" (6). He alludes to the importance of connections between theory and history, as well the sketch and manuscript study that Schenker considered so important.

The integrity and clarity of his thought are everywhere in evidence. His approach is fundamentally straightforward and grounded in the musical text. Responding to a question about the teaching of some technical points, Schachter says: "I try not to get the students in the habit of looking for a specific device, but rather to respond to the music and try to derive from the music what seems to be a proper understanding" (5).

Schachter's approach is consistent but flexible. He places himself within the central Schenkerian tradition, yet readily disagrees with some of Schenker's readings and theoretical ideas. Various points of disagreement are discussed in the essays included in the book, notably in Chapter 5, "Analysis by Key: Another Look at Modulation." While his graphs are generally consistent with traditional practices, he states that "I much prefer diversity to uniformity in graphing, except for pedagogical purposes in the beginning stages of study. Schenker's own graphs are so expressive

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Diploma in theory at Mannes, followed by a M.A. degree at Queens College and a Ph.D. at the CUNY Graduate Center.

partly because he used his graphic symbols so freely" (10). Schachter's view of motive in relation to harmony and voice-leading is also flexible: a motive may change its structure to conform with the harmony, as in Chopin's Fantasy, op. 49 (Chapter 11), or the harmony may change its focus in conformity with a motivic idea, as in an unpublished reading by Ernst Oster of Brahms' Intermezzo in A Minor, op. 118, no. 1, that Schachter cites in the "Dialogue" (9).

Perhaps the statement that best summarizes his philosophy is this: "I think one searches for the reading that will encompass all of the important aspects of the piece in a satisfactory way" (12). Yet he cautions: "there's no end to such a search," and characteristically notes that a student may be the one to point out a shortcoming in an analysis (12). Schachter frequently takes as his starting point unusual features of a composition, highlighting distinctive aspects whether in rhythm, chromaticism, form, design, text-music relations in a vocal work, or extra-musical associations. The analysis frequently develops from such observations: "I also feel that not trying to achieve something more than just mere correctness or plausibility weakens one's work as an analyst" (12).

In the "Dialogue" Schachter notes:

> When I wrote in the second of my articles on rhythm that the rhythmic reduction that Schenker did in his analysis of Beethoven's Op. 2, No. 1, was an aspect of his work that hardly anybody knows, I was being quite accurate. It wouldn't be accurate now....The whole field of rhythm has opened up wonderfully in the last fifteen years or so (7).

Schachter's own work unquestionably has a great deal to do with this change. Part I of *Unfoldings* comprises the three landmark articles on rhythm that originally appeared in successive volumes of *The Music Forum*.[6] These articles present an entirely new way to analyze rhythm on different structural levels that may well, as Straus suggests, represent "arguably Schachter's most important and original work" (3).

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[6]The rhythm articles originally appeared in Felix Salzer, ed., *The Music Forum* 4, 5, and 6/1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, 1980, and 1987).

The first article begins with a discussion of Schenker's treatment of rhythm, and of some fundamental issues, including relations between rhythm and tonal events, structural levels, and form. Characteristically, the role of perception in analysis is emphasized: "...learning to analyze means learning to hear in depth; a good analysis is always verifiable by the educated ear" (19). Following a survey and critique of some other writings about rhythm, the chapter concludes with an exposition of Schachter's own ideas about rhythmic analysis. His concern here is the nature of rhythm and its relations with structure, design, and tonal stability, as illustrated in various examples.

In the second chapter, "Durational Reduction," Schachter develops the ideas that were presented in Chapter 1. He also introduces an original method for analyzing rhythm and meter on various structural levels that are represented in graphic form. Bar lines are used to demarcate associated groups of measures, referred to as hypermeasures.[7] Because a hypermeasure is predicated on a metrical/rhythmic grouping, it does not necessarily coincide with a tonal unit. Various kinds of hypermeasure expansions and contractions which can occur may be normalized on higher levels, just as foreground registral displacements or oblique outer-voice relationships may be reinterpreted on the middleground level of a voice-leading graph.

Schachter recommends that a tonal graph be done first, then a rhythmic graph. A comparison between the two can lead to extraordinary insights, as in the *Allegretto* movement from Beethoven's Sonata, op. 14, no.1 (65-70, Ex. 2.9-2.11). Conflicts between tonal and durational groupings both on foreground and deeper levels can be explored and represented with accuracy and clarity. Interrelationships are also illuminated: in Chopin's Prelude in G Major, op. 28, no. 3, for example, "the tonal rhythm concealed in the figuration of the opening gradually evolves into a purely durational pattern" (61). Schachter recommends using rhythmic graphs together with voice-leading graphs "where they

[7]This term was introduced by Edward T. Cone in *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: Norton, 1968), 79-80.

reveal important features of the piece more clearly than other methods would" (76).

The third chapter, "Aspects of Meter," considers the nature of pulse and metrical accents over spans of various lengths. The tools and concepts introduced in earlier chapters are developed in relation to an illuminating series of examples. Syncopated time spans, alternative and conflicting metrical patterns, incommensurable levels, and the transformation of metrical structures such as expansions are some of the topics included in this final chapter of Schachter's celebrated study of rhythm.

Part II consists of four essays that address aspects of Schenkerian theory. Chapter 4, "Either/Or," formulates a problem that every analyst must regularly encounter: in a situation where two (or more) analytical solutions are possible, which should be chosen? This question is addressed in the context of the tonal system and its normative characteristics. Motivic and design elements are central concerns, as in Chopin's Mazurka, op. 33, no. 1, in which motivic implications of the upper line result in an interpretation of an overarching tonic harmony in measures 2-6—a passage that could otherwise admit a different harmonic interpretation (123-26, Ex. 4.3). In addition to problems of harmonic interpretation, locating boundaries of prolongational spans is frequently problematic. Deciding whether a return to tonic harmony is apparent or real, determining the location of formal divisions, and evaluating the role of such divisions are among problems that are discussed in this chapter.

Schachter takes issue with Schenker's reading of Mozart's Piano Concerto K. 491, second movement (128-30, Ex. 4.6). Schenker shows two large cadences in the rondo form, I-VI-V-I and I-IV-V-I, before the structural I-V-I cadences in the third section. Schachter finds this reading viable, but regards it as less than completely satisfying because of motivic, harmonic, and other links that connect the two sections. He proposes a different reading in which Schenker's two large cadences form a single extended progression, an interpretation that is closer to his experience of the music.

"Either/Or" concludes with a section entitled "Both/And" which suggests that, rather than choosing one alternative, an analysis can embrace double meanings and transformations. This conceptual juxtaposition illustrates the flexibility and absence of dogma in Schachter's thought. "How important it is not to reify a theoretical construct....Otherwise we run the risk of becoming imprisoned in our vocabularies and ways of thinking; without vigilance on our part, these can all too easily block our access to the music we wish to make our own" (132).

Probably few aspects of Schenkerian theory have been as misunderstood by the general musical community as modulation. Indeed, Schachter regards Schenker's own writings on this subject to be somewhat problematic. In Chapter 5, "Analysis by Key: Another Look at Modulation," he seeks to clarify the meaning of secondary key areas on different levels of structure. The tonic triad is seen as a matrix, the source of the fundamental structure. Through the process of composing out (*Auskomponierung*), secondary tonics may arise through modulation that become temporary matrices. The boundaries of prolongational spans may be difficult to distinguish, for they "need not coincide with the often indistinct boundaries of a key area, nor need those of either coincide with those of a form section." (138) Moreover, the word "tonic" can represent quite different kinds of musical circumstances, including situations in which neither the tonic chord nor the tonic note are present—as in Schubert's Sonata, D. 845, third movement, bars 29-36, which suggest a resolution to F minor that does not occur (139-40, Ex. 5.6). Like passages of "roving harmony" which lack any distinct or abiding tonal focus, such progressions tend to occur at or near the musical foreground level. Tonicizations may be contradicted by voice-leading continuity: frequently, for example, a local V has a different long-range function. Schachter cites as an example the A-major chord that ends the development of Beethoven's "Spring" Sonata, op. 24, that is heard initially as V of D minor. "But the magical effect of the recapitulation depends on the motion down a third from A major to the home tonic F, on the concomitant chromatic

adjustment of C♯ to C, and on the way the melodic line that grows out of the A major prepares the return of the tonic theme" (142).

A central concern in this chapter is the distinction between two types of modulations. The first type arises primarily through voice leading or the expansion of a harmony as an "illusory key." The second occurs on higher levels of structure as a prolongation of notes of the fundamental line or of a structural neighbor note, often including a replicated *Ursatz* structure. This type of modulation can lead to relatively self-contained formal sections, as in ternary form, or in the secondary key area of sonata form. In such cases, Schachter believes: "...one is perfectly justified in speaking of structural modulations and in viewing the key sense as arising at a level considerably prior to the foreground. In my view Schenker weakens his treatment of form by his unwillingness to regard any key change as more than an epiphenomenon" (151). The chapter concludes with a sample analysis of the aria "Voi che sapete" from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* that illustrates the balance of moment-by-moment and global perspectives embodied here, and indeed in all of Schachter's work (151-57, Ex. 5.11-5.16).

Chapter 6, "The Triad as Place and Action," is also concerned with the tonic triad as matrix or field, underlying an entire piece, within which melodic, contrapuntal, and harmonic actions occur on various prolongational levels. Several examples illustrate the great variety of tonal actions that can occur within the comprehensive stability of the tonic triad. In Chopin's E-Minor Prelude, op. 28, no. 4, a root-position tonic chord is not heard until the end of the work (162-65, Ex. 6.1-6.2). Schachter suggests a programmatic interpretation in which this structural feature and the Prelude's motivic design create a profoundly tragic quality. Mendelssohn's "Song without Words" in G Major, op. 62, no. 1, also begins with a fleeting tonic chord (165-70, Ex. 6.3-6.7). As revealed in Schachter's superb analysis, the piece is characterized by astonishing tonal flux and rhythmic instability, with true completion and resolution coming only at the end. In the fourth movement of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, the chapter's final example, an elaborate, naturalistic program is depicted through dramatic middleground- and foreground-level tonal contrasts that

create a complex, unusual structure (170-82, Ex. 6.8-6.11). These examples illustrate the diversity that occurs in particular works through the expanded fields of the prolongational levels: "To a large extent the tonal actions over time are what create the local color. The actions, of course, will constantly modify the milieu, but a core of perceived stability will abide through these changes" (162).

I should like to offer my own "Either/Or" (or "Both/And") observation: an alternative to Schachter's analysis of Chopin's E-Minor prelude. The work's antecedent-consequent phrase structure creates an internal division; the antecedent phrase ends on V7 with the top-voice on F-sharp. However, the structure as represented in Example 6.2 (166) is essentially undivided, as indicated by the dotted slur from the primary tone B in bar 1 to the return of B in bar 13. In this interpretation of the first phrase, the top voice descends from the fifth to the third of the tonic triad, B-A-G (with G in the bass in bar 13, at the beginning of the consequent phrase). Certainly structure and form do not necessarily coincide. And Schachter's reason for not reading interruption here is a good one: in the antecedent phrase, $\hat{3}$ is conspicuously absent in the top voice.

I believe that a different interpretation is possible. Following the descent from B, the repeated F$^{\sharp}$s over V7 in bars 10-12 strongly suggest that the phrase concludes with interruption. However, a fully stepwise descent through G is precluded by the G$^{\sharp}$–A motion in bars 8-9—with A supported in bar 9 by a supertonic chord that could not support G—and the subsequent direct motion to F$^{\sharp}$ and V in bar 10. When F$^{\sharp}$ is seen as the goal of the top-voice descent, the phrase takes on a new aspect: the repeated A-F$^{\sharp}$ motions seem especially poignant, even plaintive, in the absence of G. When we finally hear the G in bar 12 (not shown in Example 6.2) it comes as a poetic revelation: though an accented passing tone, its position on the downbeat of the last bar of the phrase creates an expressive emphasis of the hitherto absent tone. Here an analytical choice presents itself. The G in bar 12 could be read as an unsupported structural tone that completes the descent to F$^{\sharp}$. Or, in a more exceptional interpretation, it could be read as a figuration tone that only hints at completion of the first branch of the interruption. In

the consequent phrase, G is heard expressively in the two-line register in bars 16 and 17, and in the tenor in bars 21-23. Thus the delay or absence of structural G in the antecedent phrase is amply compensated for in the consequent phrase in this extraordinary work.[8]

The appearance of the English translation of *Free Composition* in 1979 made Schenker's most important work more widely accessible, thereby changing the field of music theory in the United States and abroad. The final chapter in Part III, "A Commentary on Schenker's *Free Composition*," originally appeared in 1981.[9] This review-article offers a brilliant and authoritative introduction to the translation. Schachter notes that, notwithstanding the immense value and significance of its ideas, *Free Composition* requires such explication "because some of these ideas are conveyed in language of an almost Delphic compression and obscurity" (184). He begins with a discussion of the book's organization, then proceeds to consider basic concepts such as composing out, the theory of structural levels, and linear processes in the bass and the upper voices. His discussion provides clear and illuminating perspectives on background, middleground, and foreground aspects of Schenker's text. It is indispensable for students of Schenker's approach.

The last four chapters are devoted to analyses of individual works. Chapters 8 and 9 explore relations between text and music, while Chapters 10 and 11 present extended analyses of two works: Bach's Fugue in B♭ Major from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I, and Chopin's Fantasy, op. 49. These chapters illustrate the profound musicality and theoretical insight for which Carl Schachter is so widely known, and which have established his reputation as one of the greatest living music theorists. His extraordinary sensitivity to the structure and style of tonal music, clear and succinct mode of expression, and breadth of culture have

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[8] My interpretation is consistent with that proposed by Justin London and Ronald Rodman in their article, "Musical Genre and Schenkerian Analysis," *Journal of Music Theory* 42/1 (1998): 101-124.

[9] *Journal of Music Theory* 25, no. 1 (1981): 115-42.

served as a model for generations of music students and for musicians in general.

As graduate students at Queens College and the CUNY Graduate Center, we looked forward eagerly to the next Schachter seminar, whether in rhythm, chromaticism, source study, or some other topic. There, many of the ideas and analyses that are to be found in the pages of *Unfoldings* were presented and discussed. I think that for him, as well as for us, those classes were inspiring.

Those who have heard Carl Schachter present a lecture, usually delivered without notes, have experienced first hand his immense knowledge of Schenkerian theory and musical literature. Equally notable is the inspiring way in which he is able to relate music with human feelings and experience. His profoundly humanistic approach to theory and analysis is evident in his mannered yet informal style with its eloquence and clarity, abundant use of literary quotations, and wit. While his analytical approach is grounded in Schenker's work, Schachter takes a fresh and often skeptical look at theories by Schenker and others. He strongly cautions against making theory an absolute to which music is expected to conform; rather, he follows the more difficult course of seeking to understand a piece on its own terms.

Most of all, perhaps, it is Schachter's musical sensitivity and imagination that touch his students, listeners, and readers. I know of no better example than his words at the end of his article "Chopin's Fantasy, Op. 49: The Two-Key Scheme," the final article in *Unfoldings*. Following his discussion of the struggle between the opening key of F minor and A♭ major, Schachter characterizes the ultimate victory of A♭ as triumphant. But he concludes by writing that "...the Fantasy mocks any attempt to force its musical narrative—fraught though it is with human feeling—into a story of victory over death or tragedy and triumph. For in the end there is neither tragedy nor triumph, but only the unfathomable magic of a dream....its elements dissolving into nothingness just when we think we have finally grasped their meaning" (287). It is through passages such as these, as well as all the other aspects of his work, that Schachter has changed the way that tonal theorists think about music.