A Wagnerian *Ursatz*; or, Was Wagner a Background Composer After All?

by

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Heinrich Schenker's antipathy towards the music of Richard Wagner is well known. However, some of the references to Wagner's music in Schenker's earlier writings are far from disrespectful in tone. For example, in Book I of *Counterpoint* (1910), Schenker remarks about a passage from *Das Rheingold*: "Such lovely fruit of the composing-out of scale degrees!"[1] Several pages later, he comments approvingly upon a chromatic passage from *Tristan und Isolde*.[2] Yet in his later works we find the theorist railing against "Wagner's inability to achieve

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[1]Heinrich Schenker, *Counterpoint*, trans. John Rothgeb and Jürgen Thym, ed. John Rothgeb (New York: Schirmer Books, 1987), I:151.

[2]Ibid., I:169.

diminutions like those of the masters"[3] and "his overemphasis on the musical foreground due to theatrical requirements."[4] This suggests that Schenker's negative stance towards Wagner is connected with his formulation of the *Ursatz* theory. Perhaps because he could not discern this fundamental structure in Wagner's music, Schenker concluded that "Wagner is no background composer!"[5]

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[3]Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 106. Schenker is lamenting "the decline of diminution," and finds that, although "Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Chopin still revealed a genius for diminution, . . . their followers and imitators could equal neither the older nor the younger masters." He then goes on to berate the seer of Bayreuth: "Wagner's inability to achieve diminutions like those of the masters made it necessary for him to turn away from diminution, and, in the service of drama, to make expressiveness, indeed overexpressiveness, the guiding principle of music. His very helplessness with respect to purely musical diminution appealed to the musical world, which likewise prefers to stay clear of all hidden relationships."

[4]Heinrich Schenker, "Organic Structure in Sonata Form," trans. Orin Grossman, in *Readings in Schenkerian Analysis and Other Approaches*, ed. Maury Yeston (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 52. Towards the close of this article (which first appeared in *Das Meisterwerk in der Music* [Jahrbuch 2] [Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1926], 45–54), Schenker deplores the demise of the improvisational genius manifested in, for example, Beethoven's late string quartets and symphonies. "When the era of the masters had past (sic), there followed talents without the gift of improvisation, who could no longer attain sonata form. . . .The talents strove after melodies and sudden effects." He then turns to his favorite whipping boy: "After this there developed a misconception fostered by Wagner. To be sure his leitmotiv technique was in accord with a world used to categorizing melodies. On the other hand, because of his overemphasis on the musical foreground (Wagner was no background composer!) due to theatrical requirements, he introduced a heaviness which previously had not existed at all in music. People imagined that they heard a similar heaviness also in the improvisational works of the masters. The desire strongly arose to escape from this heaviness. They clamored for 'melody'!"

[5]Ibid. (see note 4 above for the complete quote). Obviously it is impossible to prove that Schenker disliked Wagner's music because he could find no

For the most part, Wagner scholars and Schenkerian theorists appear to have tacitly agreed that the complete Schenkerian model is inapplicable to Wagnerian opera. The Wagnerians have developed alternative analytical strategies, such as the "double tonic complex," and "associative" and "expressive" tonality.[6] The Schenkerians, on the other hand, have generally confined their analyses of Wagner's music to relatively brief instrumental

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evidence that the composer was concerned with elaborating fundamental structures. However, the fact that Schenker's criticism of Wagner became most vitriolic at precisely the point when he had established his theory of the *Ursatz* on a firm footing strongly supports this hypothesis. Although Schenker first used the term "*Ursatz*" in 1923 (*Der Tonwille* No. 5) to refer to a contrapuntal setting of the *Urlinie*, it was not until 1925–26 (*Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, Jahrb. 1–2) that he began to realize that the *Ursatz* was connected at the deepest level to the principles of counterpoint. See William Pastille, "The Development of the *Ursatz* in Schenker's Published Works," in *Trends in Schenkerian Research*, ed. Allen Cadwallader (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 71–85.

[6]See Robert Bailey, "The Structure of the *Ring* and its Evolution," in *19th-Century Music* 1 (1977):48–61 for an explanation of these concepts. Bailey developed Dika Newlin's notion of "progressive tonality" (in which a piece or movement begins in one key but ends in another) into his far more sophisticated concept of "directional tonality," which features an interplay between two different tonal centers, both of which can function as tonic (the so-called "double tonic complex," for a further explication of which see Bailey's essay "An Analytical Study of the Sketches and Drafts," in Richard Wagner, *Prelude and Transfiguration from "Tristan und Isolde,"* ed. Robert Bailey [New York: Norton, 1985], 113–46). Bailey's theory offered an attractive alternative to those who found Schenker's concept of monotonality inadequate to cope with the complexities of much nineteenth-century music; it was embraced and developed further by Bailey's students William Kinderman ("Dramatic Recapitulation in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*," *19th-Century Music* 4 [1980-81]:101-112; "Wagner's *Parsifal*: Musical Form and the Drama of Redemption," *Journal of Musicology* 4 [1986]:431–46) and Patrick McCreless (*Wagner's "Siegfried": Its Drama, History, and Music* [Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982]).

passages, the *Tristan* Prelude being a perennial favorite.[7] But was Wagner incapable of achieving large-scale tonal coherence through the composing-out of a fundamental structure? Does his texted dramatic music really lack an *Urlinie*? Must the creator of the *Ring* rank as a "foreground composer" and a "musical miniaturist?"

A Schenkerian analysis of the first tonal episode of *Das Rheingold* (Alberich's wooing of the Rhinedaughters) refutes these allegations. A closed tonal unit as long or longer than many of the masterpieces analyzed by Schenker, this episode displays a clear $\hat{3}$-line *Ursatz*. The following essay demonstrates how Wagner composes out this structure at the later levels, employing complex diminutions and deep-level motives. The unfolding of this tonal structure is correlated with both the formal design and the dramatic development of the episode. Finally, a few comments are offered regarding the possible relevance of this study for future Wagnerian research.

The Episode as a Whole

When Wagner began the complete draft (*Gesamtentwurf*) of *Das Rheingold* on 1 November 1853, it marked his return to

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[7]See, for example, Donald Mitchell, "The *Tristan* Prelude: Techniques and Structure," in *The Music Forum*, Vol. 1, ed. William J. Mitchell and Felix Salzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 163–203; and Allen Forte, "New Approaches to the Linear Analysis of Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 41 (1988):315–48.

operatic composition after a hiatus of almost five years.[8] During this interval, he had written little music but a great deal of argumentative prose, as well as the poem of the *Ring*.[9] *Das Rheingold* signified Wagner's definitive break with the operatic conventions whose presence can still be felt even in such a progressive work as *Lohengrin*, and the change from the *Endreim* of his earlier libretti to the *Stabreim* of the *Ring* poem exerted an enormous influence upon his musical phraseology. In addition, the whole question of dramatic-musical form, and the role of tonality in articulating this form, had to be reconsidered. Because *Das Rheingold* is such a watershed in Wagner's compositional output (and in the history of music in general), it seems appropriate to take the opening of Scene 1 as the subject of this investigation.

Scene 1 stands outside the time frame of the rest of the drama, and functions as a prologue to the story of the gods. As such, it constitutes a relatively self-contained unit, a complete

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[8]Wagner completed the full score of *Lohengrin* on 28 April 1848. Sometime around August 1850 he sketched some music for *Siegfrieds Tod* (the original version of *Götterdämmerung*) and during Spring 1851 he did the same for *Der junge Siegfried* (the original version of *Siegfried*). However, sustained musical work on the *Ring* did not commence until 1 November 1853, when he began the complete draft (*Gesamtentwurf*) of *Das Rheingold*.

[9]In early October 1848 Wagner drafted a prose "scenario" in which he outlined his entire reconstruction of the Nibelung myth. The poem of *Siegfrieds Tod* was completed in November, and almost immediately revised. *Der junge Siegfried* was drafted in Spring 1851, and the poems of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* took shape between October 1851 and November 1852. Wagner then extensively revised *Siegfrieds Tod* and *Der junge Siegfried* (November–December 1852), and issued the entire *Ring* poem privately in February 1853. Meanwhile, he had completed (among other essays) the lengthy *Oper und Drama* and *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* in January 1851 and August 1851 respectively.

tragedy in miniature. As outlined in Table 1, this scene is organized symmetrically: two tonally-closed dramatic units (Episodes 1 and 2) are flanked by an orchestral Prelude and Postlude, and separated by a modulatory transition, the latter serving as accompaniment to a pantomime. Scene 1 is thus tonally open, as it does not end in the key in which it began; it is also harmonically open, for while the Prelude's famous E♭ major triad is ultimately understood as a tonic, the Postlude prolongs an unresolved dominant.[10] By concluding Scene 1 on the dominant of the relative minor of its opening key, Wagner creates an effect of unresolved tragedy.

Episode 1, the focus of our study, contains four distinct dramatic phases; see Table 2. As Wagner set this segment of his poem to music, he correlated these four phases with the musical processes of statement, contrast, interpolation, and return. The whole suggests a ternary (ABA′) design with a lengthy digression or interpolation (X) separating the contrasting section (B) from the recapitulation (A′).

A closed tonal unit in E♭ major, this episode displays an *Ursatz* of the type shown in Example 1: the fundamental line $\hat{3}$-$\hat{2}$-$\hat{1}$ is supported by the bass arpeggiation I-V-I. However, as Example 2 shows, the motion from I to V is broken by the third-divider iii; this mediant gives continuing support to $\hat{3}$, and allows an inner

[10]I consider the Postlude to end in m. 743, on an unresolved (and, in a Schenkerian sense, "interrupted") V^7/C minor. The following statement of the "Renunciation of Love" theme ("Etwas langsamer") begins the first orchestral interlude (mm. 744–68), which carries the listener from the depths of the Rhine to the heights of Valhalla.

Table 1. Structure of *Das Rheingold* Scene 1

Measure	Section	Dramatic Content	Key
1	Prelude	The depths of the Rhine.	E♭
137	Episode 1	Alberich Woos the Rhinedaughters.	E♭
448	Transistion	Alberich chases the Rhinedaughters.	E♭ → V/C
514	Episode 2	Alberich renounces love and steals the gold.	C → c
716	Postlude	Darkness in the depths.	V/c

Table 2. Structure of Episode 1

Measure	Dramatic Phase	Musical Process	Section
137	1. The Rhinedaughters appear and sport with one another.	Statement	A
182	2. Alberich appears and declares his amorous intentions.	Contrast	B
231	3. Alberich woos each of the sisters, and is thrice rejected.	Interpolation	X
421	4. The Rhinedaughters mock Alberich.	Return	A'

voice to anticipate the third of V. As indicated, Wagner employs both the diatonic minor and the chromatically-altered major form of the mediant. Example 1 thus represents the tonal background of Episode 1, while Example 2 represents the first level of the tonal middleground, abbreviated as Mg^1.

A linear-harmonic interruption expands this structure as shown in Example 3, which displays the second level of the tonal middleground (Mg^2). This correlates with the formal structure as follows: Sections A and B move from $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{3}}$ through $\underset{\text{iii}}{\hat{3}}$ to $\underset{\text{V}}{\hat{2}}$, the dividing dominant. The interpolation (X) begins again on $\hat{3}$, but backs up harmonically only as far as III (substituting the major mediant for the minor); it leads a second time to $\underset{\text{V}}{\hat{2}}$, which finally resolves to $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{1}}$ at the beginning of Section A′.[11] Three other com-

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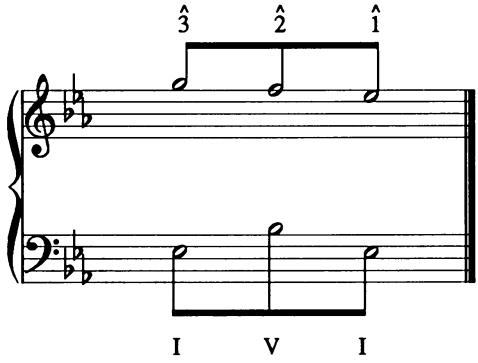
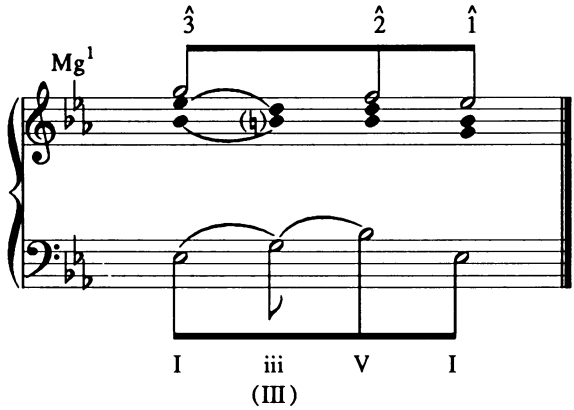
[11]The second branch of the resultant interruption structure $\left(\begin{matrix}\hat{3}\text{-}\hat{2}\text{-}\hat{1}\\ \text{III-V-I}\end{matrix}\right)$ may be considered a sort of huge "auxiliary cadence" (see *Free Composition*, pp. 88–90, as well as note 20 below). It is also possible to read the passage as a non-interrupted structure, in which the $\underset{\text{III}}{\hat{3}}$ of m. 277 functions at a deeper level than the $\underset{\text{iii}}{\hat{3}}$ of m. 182. By this alternate reading, the $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{3}}$ of m. 137 moves through the $\underset{\text{III}}{\hat{3}}$ of m. 277 to the $\underset{\text{V}}{\hat{2}}$ of m. 412, resolving to $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{1}}$ at m. 421; the $\underset{\text{iii}}{\hat{3}}$ of m. 182 and the $\underset{\text{V}}{\hat{2}}$ of m. 212 are subordinate to (and function to expand) the initial $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{3}}$. Yet another reading might view the Interpolation (X) as a musical as well as a dramatic parenthesis between the $\underset{\text{V}}{\hat{2}}$ of m. 212 and the $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{1}}$ of m. 421. Although I prefer the interruption reading, the alternatives are certainly plausible, and I am grateful to Professor David Beach for drawing them to my attention.

Example 1. Episode 1: Tonal background



Example 2. Episode 1: First level of tonal middleground



plications warrant attention: first, Section A moves from the initial tonic to an applied divider, or backwards-relating dominant, creating a subordinate $\underset{\text{I–V}}{\hat{3}\text{–}\hat{2}}$ progression; second, the interpolation (X) connects III and V with a passing IV; and third, Section A′ replicates the fundamental structure on a subordinate level. The relationship between Sections A and A′ is strengthened by the fact that A′ resumes and finishes the subordinate progression which A left incomplete; in other words, Sections A and A′ stand in an antecedent-consequent relationship, and together represent the $\underset{\text{I–V}}{\hat{3}\text{–}\hat{2}} \,\|\, \underset{\text{I–V–I}}{\hat{3}\text{–}\hat{2}\text{–}\hat{1}}$ interruption scheme on a lower structural level.

Section A

In Section A (mm. 137–65), nineteen short lines of verse group into four stanzas, each of which forms the basis of a musical phrase; the resultant phrase structure is displayed in Example 4.[12] In Phrase 1, Woglinde sings a carefree song to the waves; in Phrase 2, Wellgunde appears and the two mermaids chase each other; in Phrase 3, Flosshilde appears; and in Phrase 4, this somewhat more circumspect sister warns the others to guard the gold better.

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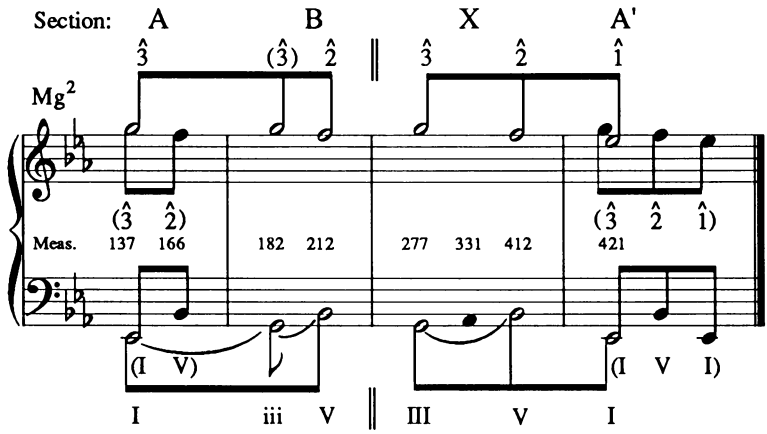
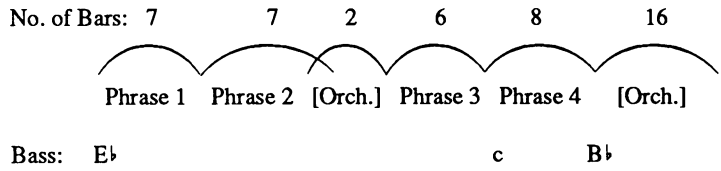
[12]The reader is urged to consult an orchestral or a piano-vocal score while reading the remainder of this article. Because pagination differs widely among various editions, references to the music are made by measure number. The reader must therefore number his/her score from m. 137 (Woglinde's vocal entrance: "Weia! Waga! . . .") to m. 447 (the measure preceding Alberich's "Wie in den Gliedern . . .").

Example 3. Episode 1: Second level of tonal middleground



Example 4. Section A: Phrase Structure



The reader will recall that, on the second level of the tonal middleground (Mg^2), Section A moves from the initial tonic to an applied divider (a backwards-relating dominant generated by a bass unfolding of the perfect fifth in the tonic chord), and that this creates a subordinate $\frac{\hat{3}-\hat{2}}{I-V}$ progression (Example 3). Example 5.a shows that, on a slightly later middleground level (Mg^3), the root of the dominant (B♭) is preceded by its upper neighbor (c); this neighbor supports a C minor triad which functions as pre-dominant harmony between I and V. The bass of Example 5.a (E♭-c-B♭) is, in fact, the same bassline which Wagner sketched in the complete draft, long before he added the harmonic complications graphed in Example 5.b.[13] However, the progression $\frac{\hat{3}---\hat{2}}{I-vi-V}$ carries with it

[13]See fol. 1^r of the *Gesamtentwurf* (WWV 86A Musik II). Measures 137–57 of this draft contain merely the bass note E♭ and an occasional suggestion of the harmony; measures 158–65 contain somewhat more in the way of harmonic elaboration. However, most of the complications graphed in Example 5.b were added during the scoring, which Wagner began on 1 February 1854.

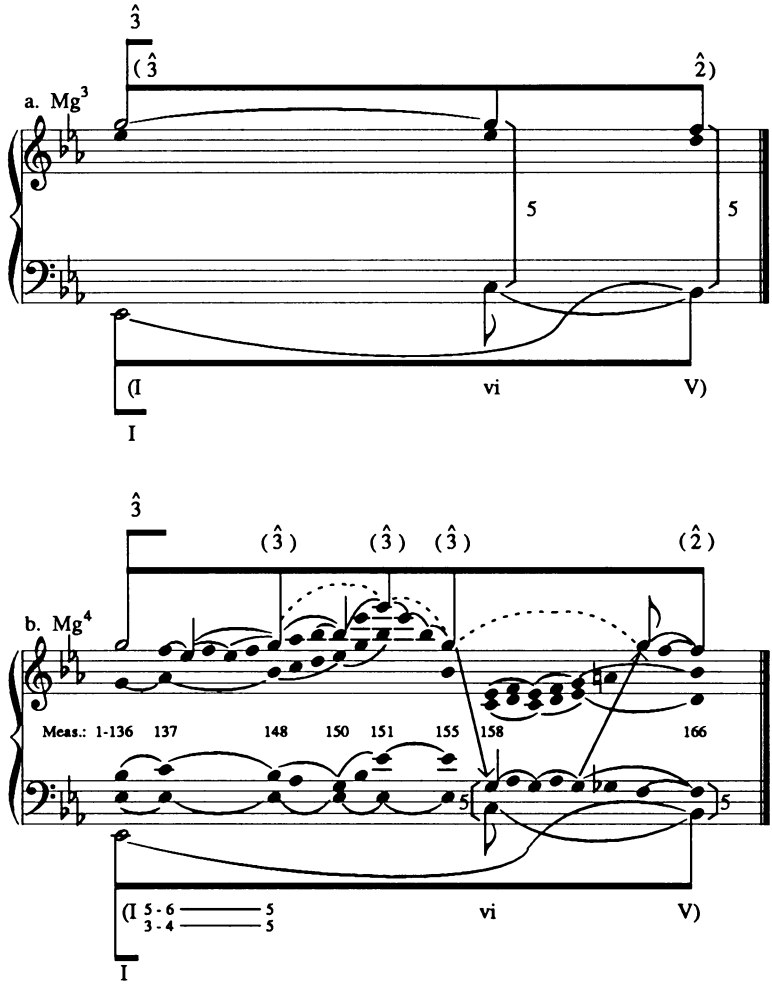
the threat of parallel fifths between the outer voices; these parallels $\begin{pmatrix} g^2\text{-}f^2 \\ c\text{-}B\flat \end{pmatrix}$ are eliminated at a later middleground level.

On this later level (Mg^4; see Example 5.b), the initial tonic is expanded by neighboring and passing motion, as well as by a descant arpeggiation which couples the primary tone g^2 with its upper octave g^3. The submediant is also expanded by passing and neighboring motion, and its resolution to V is intensified through two chromatic passing tones ($a\natural^1$ and $g\flat$). During this expansion of vi, the primary tone g^2 is transferred from the descant to the tenor and back, while the parallel fifths created by its resolution are broken up in both voices through anticipations.

Ample evidence exists to support the identification of g^2 as the primary tone of Episode 1. If this episode were analyzed in isolation, it would be considered to begin with an initial ascent (*Anstieg*) from $e\flat^2$ to g^2 (mm. 137–48). However, $\hat{3}$ is so clearly projected by the Prelude that it makes sense to consider the $\underset{I}{\hat{3}}$ of the first 136 measures as the point of departure rather than the $\underset{I}{\hat{3}}$ of m. 148; the latter is heard more as a confirmation of $\underset{I}{\hat{3}}$ than as its initial statement. In an earlier article, I have discussed the multi-functional role which the Prelude plays in the context of the opera.[14] In addition to the functions enumerated in this article, the

[14]Warren Darcy, "*Creatio ex nihilo*: the Genesis, Structure, and Meaning of the *Rheingold* Prelude," in *19th-Century Music* 13 (1989):79–100.

Example 5. Section A: Successive middleground levels

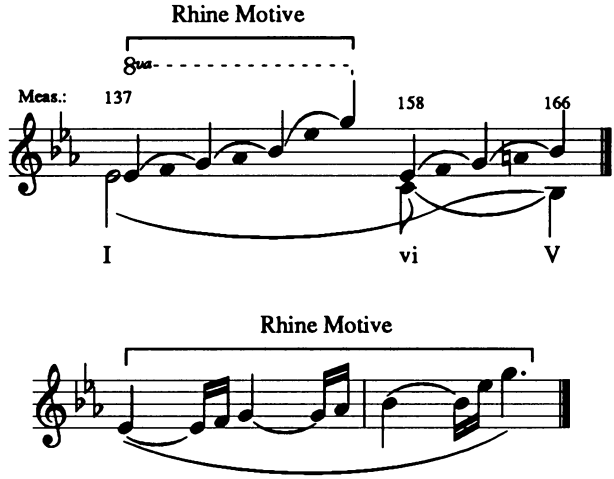


Prelude fulfills yet another: it unambiguously establishes $\hat{3}$ as the primary tone of Episode 1.

The middleground structure displayed in Example 5.b relates to the musical surface as follows: The initial $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{3}}$ is composed-out by the Prelude (mm. 1–136). The $\frac{5-6}{3-4}$ neighboring motion begins at Woglinde's vocal entrance (m. 137); despite its striking effect, this $\frac{6}{4}$ sonority functions less as a true subdominant (as "IV^6_4") than as a linear expansion of the tonic. As we will see, this interpretation is confirmed by the beginning of Section A′, where the passage is recapitulated following an extensive dominant preparation; the "$\text{A}\flat^6_4$ chord" clearly stands for the E♭ tonic. The celebrated harmonic contrast at m. 137 is therefore not so much one of tonic vs. subdominant as of $\frac{5}{3}$ vs. $\frac{6}{4}$ position; this "plagally inflected tonic" (if one may so term it) functions henceforth in the opera as a referential sonority associated with the Rhinedaughters.

The initial ascent to g^2 occurs during the second phrase (Woglinde's appearance: mm. 144–51). At m. 148, all lines resolve to pitches of the $\text{E}\flat^5_3$ chord for the first time since the Prelude; these lines keep moving during the remainder of Phrase 2, filling in an arpeggiation of the triad with passing tones (mm. 148–50). At m. 150 the orchestra confirms the resolution (and continues the triadic arpeggiation) by restating the two-bar Rhine motive; this produces the g^2–g^3 octave coupling shown by the first dotted slur in Example 5.b. Example 6 reveals a hidden motivic connection: the descant line $e\flat^2$–f^2–g^2–$a\flat^2$–$b\flat^2$–$e\flat^3$–g^3 that spans the first two phrases is identical to the Rhine motive!

Example 6. Pitch motive vs. rhythmic motive



Phrase 3 (Flosshilde's entrance: mm. 152–57) arpeggiates the E♭ triad vocally and instrumentally: woodwinds sequence the last three notes of the Rhine motive downwards through the triad, reversing the previous octave coupling, while Wellgunde continues the vocal emphasis upon $\hat{3}$. However, the E♭ chord no longer serves as mere sonority (as it did in the Prelude), but as a functional tonic from which a tonal departure may now be made.

This departure occurs during Phrase 4 (mm. 158–65). To underscore Flosshilde's warning about the gold, Wagner emphasizes the dark color of the C minor chord—the first real harmonic change thus far—through double-reed sonorities and a lower range. Although this chord functions locally as pre-dominant harmony between I and V (approaching the dominant through its upper neighbor), it also forecasts a large-scale tonal move to C minor, the key in which Alberich will renounce love and steal the gold. The primary tone (g^2) is transferred to the English horn two octaves lower (g); neighboring and passing motion lead to a respacing of the triad with doubled fifth (m. 162), after which g^1 moves through $a\natural^1$ to $b\flat^1$ while the lower-octave g descends chromatically to f. This voice-leading tonicizes V with a surface applied dominant. As Example 6 shows, the rising inner voice $e\flat^1$–f^1–g^1–$a\natural^1$–$b\flat^1$ represents a chromatic alteration of the first five pitches of the Rhine motive. The difference between the appearances of this motive at the musical surface and its deeper-level manifestations would correspond to the difference between what David Beach has

called "rhythmic motives" and "pitch motives."[15] Traditionally, much Wagnerian analysis has been overly preoccupied with rhythmic motives (the so-called *Leitmotive*); perhaps the investigation of deeper-level pitch motives (and their relationship to foreground rhythmic motives) would prove a more fruitful line of inquiry.

The decisive arrival at V is clinched by the following orchestral statement, a transposition of the Prelude's sixteen-bar Rhine theme to the level of the dominant (mm. 166–81). During the last four bars of this transitional passage, contrabass octave pizzicatti pull B♭ down through A♮ to G. The gradual accumulation of awkward grace-notes, coupled with the downward pull from B♭ major to G minor, creates a gradual tonal darkening; the listener senses Alberich's presence long before the dwarf becomes visible. The descending bass move B♭–A♮–G is a literal retrograde of the g^1–$a\natural^1$–$b\flat^1$ line which a moment earlier thrust the music towards B♭; in other words, Alberich has managed to negate the Rhinedaughters' joyful tonicization of the dominant by inflecting towards the darker waters of the mediant.

Section B

Section B, the dramatic/musical contrast (mm. 182–230), revolves around Alberich's three addresses to the Rhinedaughters, punctuated by the sisters' comments. First, Alberich calls to the

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[15]David Beach, "Schenkerian Theory," in *Music Theory Spectrum* 11 (1989):6–7.

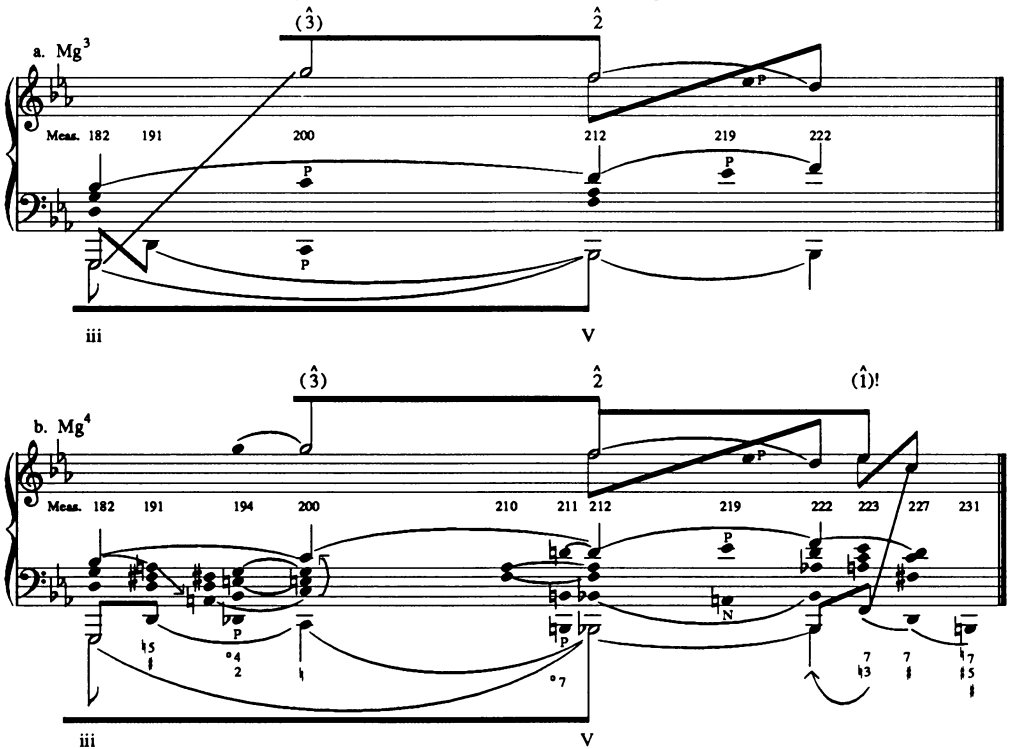
Rhinedaughters in a phrase which moves harmonically from i to v of G minor (mm. 185–91); the sisters' parenthetical response (mm. 192–93) extends this half cadence through $\frac{5-6-5}{3-4-3}$ neighboring motion. As the mermaids dive deeper in order to investigate, the bass descends from D through D♭ (m. 194) to C (m. 198), culminating in an apparent half cadence (V^{6-5}_{4-3}) in F minor (mm. 198–201). Alberich accepts this new tonal level, and addresses the nixies a second time, a whole step lower than before (mm. 202ff.). At the conclusion of his second address, the bass moves from C through B♮$_1$ (m. 211) to B♭$_1$ (m. 212); this lowers the tonal level yet another whole step and marks a return to the dominant of E♭, an important structural event articulated by Wellgunde and Woglinde's parenthetical questions (mm. 211–13). Alberich again accepts the sisters' new tonal offering, but darkens the modality, and begins his third address over V/E♭ <u>minor</u> (mm. 214 ff.). Flosshilde, however, insists upon the <u>major</u> mode. Her final line ("der Feind ist verliebt!") cadences vocally b♭^{1}–e♭^{2}, implying resolution to the tonic; however, the deceptive harmonic progression at "ver–<u>liebt</u>!" (m. 223) deflects the music away from this tonic. The sisters decide to postpone the resolution to E♭, in order to toy with Alberich.

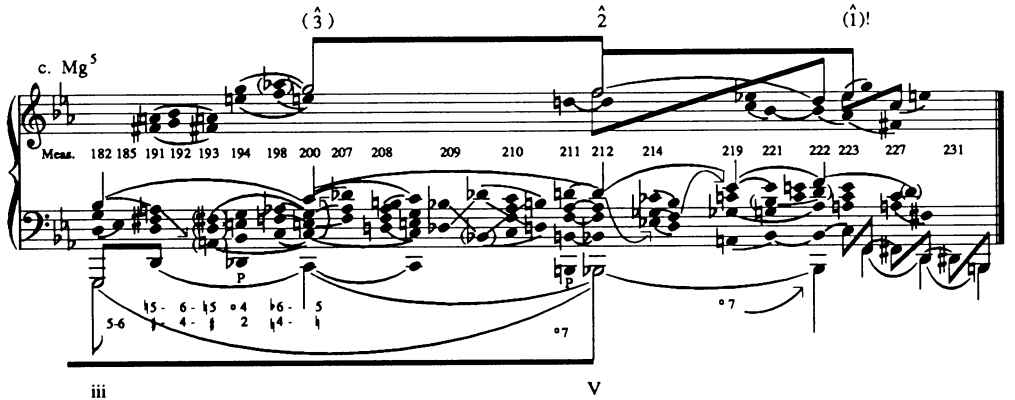
How are we to understand the tonal structure of Section B? Alberich's three addresses are apparently oriented around the keys of G, F, and E♭ minor. Is this an example of what Robert Bailey would call an "expressive" tonal descent? Hardly, for there is no convincing dramatic reason why the tonal levels should descend; indeed, Alberich's rising passion might rather suggest an <u>ascent</u>.

It seems more profitable to consider two facts: first, that these three tonal areas are represented primarily by their dominants, and second, that the roots of these dominants participate in a chromatic bass descent from D to B♭^{1}. In other words, Wagner is here working out a large-scale progression from a tonicized mediant (G) to an active dominant (B♭) within the key of E♭ major. The pedal B♭ underlying Alberich's third address (mm. 214ff.) sounds like a dominant preparation following a period of increased harmonic activity, and prepares the listener for some sort of tonal (and perhaps even thematic) recapitulation. But at this point the sisters elect specifically not to recapitulate; rather, they deflect the tonality away from E♭ in order to sport with the Nibelung. The resolution to E♭ is indefinitely postponed.

The reader will recall (Example 3) that Section B displayed a $\underset{\text{iii}-\text{V}}{(\hat{3})-\hat{2}}$ progression at the second middleground level (Mg^2). Examples 7.a–c represent successively later middleground levels (Mg^3, Mg^4, and Mg^5 respectively). On Mg^3 (Example 7.a), the unfolded fifth of iii (D) is connected with the root of V (B♭$_1$) through a passing tone (C). Meanwhile, an inner voice arpeggiates the harmonic goal (V), filling in this arpeggiation with passing tones to produce a dominant transposition of the first five notes of the Rhine motive (b♭–c^1–d^1–e♭^{1}–f^1). The primary tone $\hat{3}$ does not reappear in its proper register (g^2) until m. 200, but the diagonal line indicates that this $\hat{3}$ belongs conceptually with the initial low bass G$_1$. The resolution to $\hat{2}$ is prolonged with a typical descant

Example 7. Section B: Successive middleground levels




(3̂)
2̂
(1̂)!
c. Mg5
Meas. 182 185 191 192 193 194 198 200 207 208 209 210 211 212 214 219 221 222 223 227 231
p
p
5-6
°7
°7
iii
V

unfolding, whose passing-tone ($e\flat^2$) is counterpointed against one in the inner voice ($e\flat^1$).

On Mg^4 (Example 7.b), the unfolded fifth of iii supports an applied divider, or backwards-relating dominant (m. 191), while the passing $\begin{matrix}c^1\\C\end{matrix}$ octave supports a major $\frac{5}{3}$ triad (m. 200). The V/iii and C_3^5 harmonies are connected chromatically by a passing diminished seventh chord, as are the C_3^5 and the structural V on $B\flat$. The double passing tones within the prolongation of $\hat{2}\begin{pmatrix}e\flat^2\\e\flat^1\end{pmatrix}$ are counterpointed by a chromatic lower neighbor ($A\natural$). Finally, at the point of interruption, V resolves deceptively to a backwards-relating applied dominant (V^7/V) which undermines the melodic resolution $\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$; as the descant unfolds an interval of this chord, the bass arpeggiates by descending minor thirds to $B\natural_1$, the first important tone of the next section.

Example 7.c displays the voice-leading complications of Mg^5. The V/iii chord is expanded by $\frac{5\text{–}6\text{–}5}{3\text{–}4\text{–}3}$ neighboring motion, while the C_3^5 chord is approached through a cadential $\frac{6\text{–}5}{4\text{–}3}$ situation. The C_3^5 is then expanded through upper and lower neighbor motion, while its connection with the structural V^7 is elaborated through chromatic voice exchanges. The V^7 itself is expanded through chromatic neighboring and passing motion (creating at one point an applied diminished seventh chord), while the chords based upon the descending third motion (F–D–$B\natural_1$) are unfolded in the bass.

Example 7.c may be compared directly with the orchestral score; all the pitches displayed occur in register except those

enclosed within parentheses. The following conclusions may be drawn: First, the apparent succession of descending tonalities (G minor–F minor–E♭ minor/major) is illusory; although the initial expansion of iii may be heard locally as i–V in G minor, the C_3^5 chord is a purely passing event, and has nothing to do with the key of F minor. The descending bass motion D–(D♭)–C–(B♮$_1$)–B♭$_1$ is clearly sketched out in the complete draft, demonstrating that this large-scale passing motion formed part of Wagner's initial conception. Second, the general avoidance of the upper register in both voice and orchestra highlights the pitches g^2 and f^2 when they do occur, emphasizing the fundamental $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$ linear progression. Third, the overall $\underset{\text{iii–V}}{(\hat{3})\text{–}\hat{2}}$ motion strongly implies resolution to $\underset{\text{I}}{\hat{1}}$, which will not occur until Section A′; although Flosshilde supplies scale-degree $\hat{1}$ (m. 223: "ver-liebt!"), the expected tonic chord fails to materialize. Thus the structural interruption is dramatically motivated: Flosshilde's deceptive resolution sets in motion a long tonal digression during which the Rhinedaughters will sport with Alberich. This digression will travel back though G, the major mediant, in order finally to regain V/E♭.

The Interpolation (Section X)

Space limitations forbid an extensive discussion of the interpolation, the most complex and extended section of the entire episode. It should be said, however, that this interpolation features one of Wagner's most important formal procedures: cyclic

structure. The threefold cycle is articulated by the dramatic action: Alberich woos each of the three Rhinedaughters in turn, and is thrice rejected. However, although each of the three cycles contains the same dramatic sequence, each represents a poetic/musical expansion over the previous one; such expansion in the service of dramatic intensification is characteristic of Wagner's cyclic designs.[16]

Because the tonal structure of the interpolation cannot be understood out of context, Example 8 displays a more elaborate version of the middleground (Mg^3) of the entire episode. Whereas Sections A and B moved from I (E♭) through iii (G) to V (B♭), the interpolation backs up to III (G major) and passes through IV (A♭) to regain the active V on B♭. However, III is approached through a series of descending fifths (A–D–G), and its dominant is prolonged by upper and lower neighbor motion (D–E–D–C–D); the A♭ functions locally as $V^7/D♭$, and is prolonged by a symmetrical progression of major-minor seventh chords ($A♭^7$–$D♭^7$–$B♭^7$–$D♭^7$–$A♭^7$); and the regained dominant is intensified through an applied chord ($V^{♭9}_7/V$). Thus A♭ functions less as a true subdominant than as a composed-out passing tone between III and V; its transitional nature is underscored by the surface seventh chord it supports.

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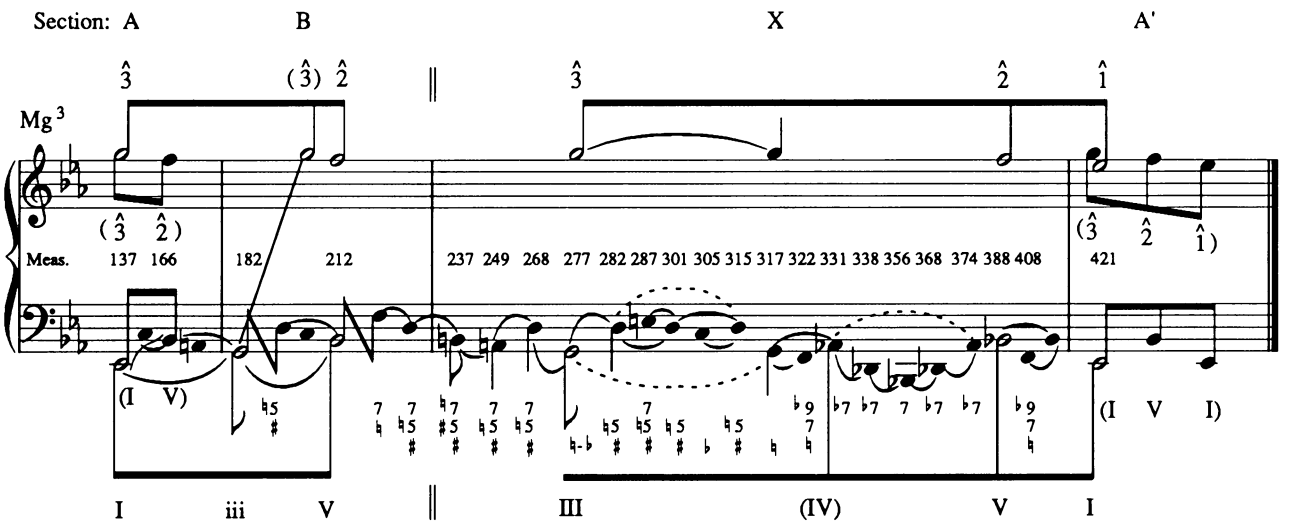
[16]A prominent exception is the Norns scene which opens *Götterdämmerung*. This is a tri-cyclic structure, in which each Norn in turn recounts past, present, and future events involving Wotan (Cycle 1), Loge (Cycle 2), and the ring (Cycle 3). However, both the second and third cycles are compressed rather than expanded, so that the cycles grow successively shorter; this mirrors the Norns' growing anxiety, which works itself up to a fevered pitch and culminates in the breaking of their rope.

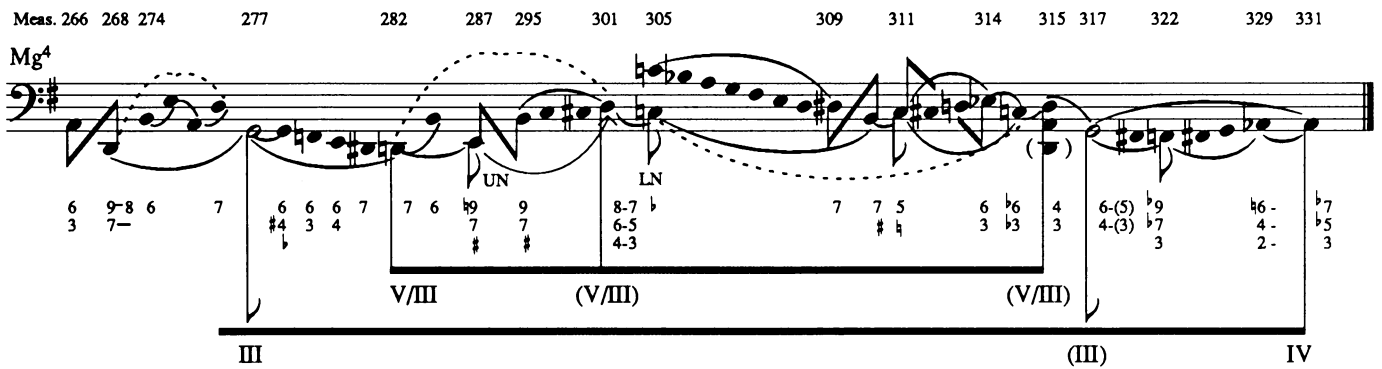
This tonal structure correlates with the cyclic design as follows: Cycle 1 (the wooing of Woglinde: mm. 231ff.) passes from V^7/E minor to V^7/D minor; Cycle 2 (the wooing of Wellgunde: mm. 266 ff.) resolves V^7/G to the tonicized III before inflecting to minor and neighboring its dominant. Thus the initial dominant on B, heard locally as V^7/E minor, is understood in retrospect as an upper neighbor to the first member of the descending fifth progression, which itself forms a tonal anacrusis to G. Cycle III (the wooing of Flosshilde: mm. 331ff.) pulls G up to A♭ and, after prolonging it with the symmetrical progression of seventh chords, moves on to the B♭ dominant preparation. This regains the interrupted $\underset{V}{\hat{2}}$ from the end of Section B, whose resolution to $\underset{I}{\hat{1}}$ coincides with a thematic/tonal reprise (Section A′: mm. 421ff.). Before leaving this section, the reader is referred to Example 9, which displays the Mg^4 complications of Cycle 2 (the wooing of Wellgunde); especially noteworthy here is the lengthy prolongation of V/III, which itself functions to expand the mediant.[17]

[17]The reader may have noticed that the interpolation (Section X) is longer than the three main sections (A, B, and A^1) combined. The ramifications of this for an understanding of Wagnerian formal process cannot be explored here. However, it may be admitted that a digression of such length and complexity certainly poses a threat to the formal integrity of the episode; the fact that the latter does not simply disintegrate is due largely to the clarity of the underlying tonal structure.

Example 8. Episode 1: Third level of tonal middleground



Example 9. Cycle No. 2 of Interpolation: Fourth level of tonal middleground

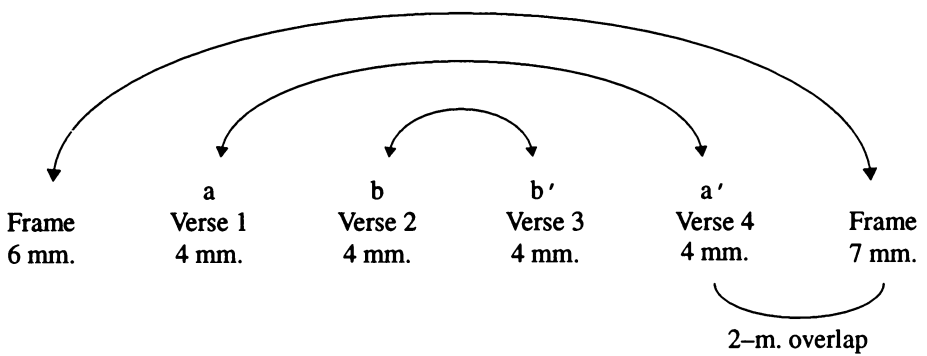


Section A′

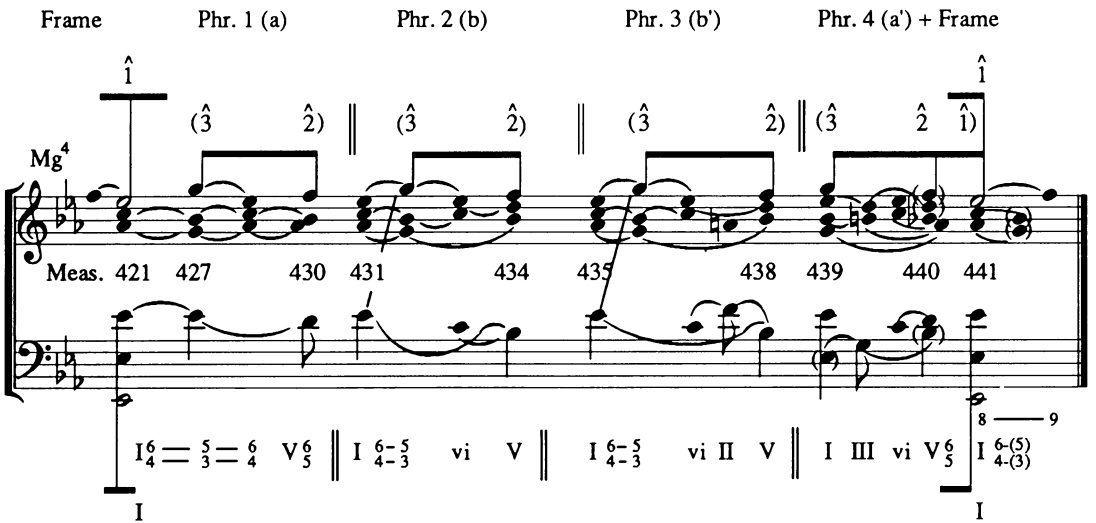
Section A′, the first concerted passage in the opera, is a vocal trio during which the sisters mock Alberich's unsuccessful wooing (mm. 421–76). Its internal formal design is symmetrical; Wagner shaped the four vocal phrases so that the fourth resembles the first, and the third is almost identical to the second (see Example 10). He extended this symmetry by framing these four phrases with an orchestral statement of the "Weia-waga" melody over the Rhinedaughters' referential $\frac{6}{4}$ sonority; this unmistakeable reference to the scene's opening melodic/harmonic situation is what creates the impression of a musical recapitulation.

The harmonic organization graphed in Example 11 deserves comment despite its simplicity. The entire reprise represents the resolution of the interrupted $\underset{V}{\hat{2}}$ to $\underset{I}{\hat{1}}$; although it internally replicates the $\underset{I\text{-}V\text{-}I}{\hat{3}\text{-}\hat{2}\text{-}\hat{1}}$ fundamental structure, this replication is clearly subordinate to the overall $\underset{I}{\hat{1}}$. In both the opening and the closing frames, scale-degree $\hat{1}$ is stressed melodically, but supported by the Rhinedaughters' referential $\frac{6}{4}$ sonority; this suggests the structural importance of scale-degree $\hat{1}$ without emphasizing it harmonically. Wagner thus manages to prevent total closure by weakening the tonic emphasis, facilitated by the lack of a strong low bass and the relatively light scoring. The final f^2 (mm. 446–47) does not resolve to $e\flat^2$, although the complete draft shows that Wagner originally

Example 10: Section A^1: Phrase Structure



Example 11. Section A': Fourth level of tonal middleground



intended this;[18] rather, it is frozen in place until the abrupt disruption which signals the beginning of the following interlude.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to refute Schenker's charge that Wagner was incapable of composing-out a fundamental structure over a long period of time by means of complex diminutions. It has tried to suggest that the complete Schenkerian model is more applicable to Wagner's texted dramatic music than has generally been recognized, and that the tonal events on all levels can be meaningfully related to the drama. Not only is the fundamental line clearly articulated (usually in the vocal parts) at crucial places, but, as Schenker would have agreed, the composing-out of the bass arpeggiation cannot be correctly interpreted without considering its contrapuntal relationship to this fundamental line.[19] Furthermore, recognizing certain characteristically Wagnerian prolongations

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[18]See fol. 4[r] of the *Gesamtentwurf*. Wagner originally resolved the f^2 to $e\flat^2$ in m. 446, then changed his mind and notated an unresolved f^2 for mm. 446–47.

[19]While discussing "linear progressions in the bass," Schenker recommends studying the bass motions in works by J. S. Bach and other masters, "at first leaving out the question of fundamental line while seeking to ascertain the logic of the bass. In the final analysis, of course, the true situation can be determined only by a study of the contrapuntal relationship of the bass with the soprano" (*Free Composition*, p. 75). This is a corollary of his earlier statement (p. 11) that "neither the fundamental line nor the bass arpeggiation can stand alone. Only when acting together, when unified in a contrapuntal structure, do they produce art." In other words, a bass line by itself may be interpreted in any of a number of ways; only when viewed in its contrapuntal relationship to the composing-out of the fundamental line can its arpeggiation be meaningfully interpreted.

should aid against misinterpreting the tonal logic of the composer's extended structures; in particular, it should help guard against invoking illusory foreground "keys" in those places where the bass note, not the implied tonal center, is the determining factor.

However—and this is important—the present study does not mean to imply that the Schenkerian model is the only analytical weapon needed to stalk the structural complexities of Wagnerian opera. Obviously other tools are required for those passages which are not organized around a single tonal center, including the background levels of entire scenes and acts.[20] Wagner clearly used other methods of tonal organization when his dramatic purposes demanded them, but this does not imply a limitation of compositional ability—in fact, it suggests just the opposite. It is the analyst's task to determine why Wagner did not always write as Schenker would have wished him to—when he was obviously capable of doing so.

It may seem ironic—almost perversely so—that Schenker unwittingly supplied Wagner scholars with the key most likely to unlock the secret of tonal and harmonic organization in the

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[20]It is at these levels that the concept of the "double tonic complex" may possess some validity. Even there, however, we should be wary of mechanically invoking it until we have at least tried a Schenkerian approach. In my opinion, many examples of "tonal pairing" are really large-scale instances of what Schenker called the "auxiliary cadence" (*Free Composition*, pp. 88–90); that is, a background progression which begins harmonically with something other than the tonic (e.g., III–V–i in minor). Even the concluding duet of *Siegfried* Act III, which seems to work out the tonal pairing of C major and E major, ultimately absorbs the latter key into a huge background arpeggiation of C (I–III–V–I) spanning 45 minutes! Far from being "no background composer," Wagner may well have been one of the greatest background composers of all time.

composer's works. But is this really so strange? Perhaps not. In fact, it would be much more surprising if one of the greatest musical minds of this century could not help us understand one of the greatest musical minds of the last.