

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION TO CORELLI'S TONAL AND RHYTHMIC MODELS

“NOTHING COMES FROM NOWHERE” is easily said—and, indeed, being an unassailable truth, is often said. But to explain *how* something comes from somewhere is less easy. In new situations we tend to distort, exaggerate, and suppress; our memory plays games; and in any case we are likely to be blind to the range of forces that shape us and our work (and to our chagrin, others have a way of seeing better than we do). To explain how a paper written over thirty years ago came into being is thus a challenge on many fronts for its author, who will have to allow others to have their say too. By definition, critical and analytical essays distill the time, place, and circumstance of their creation: in this they are just like the works of art they address. And in the case of my “Corelli’s Tonal Models” there are three basic distillations that need to be explained: why the paper emerged in its present form in 1982, why it was written in England, and why it was published in Italy.

In the business world it is often said that a new initiative is the child of a disappointment. So it was here. As a young academic my declared field of research was advanced tonal practice. But, as I moved ever further into waters that were probably as opaque to composers as they were to me, I understood that my growing problem lay with my tenuous grasp of elementary tonal practice: the path to *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, I thought, must surely start from Minuet in G. It must be remembered that this was the late 1960s and early 1970s—a time when we in Europe realized increasingly the extent to which musical thought had been fractured by recent political upheavals. The *Formenlehre* tradition of form, phrase, and motive was still in place (in my case via a future colleague, Hans Keller), but sub-thematic thought (Heinrich Schenker) had slipped to the other side of the Atlantic. (Up to a point, Schenke-

rian teaching had been established in Edinburgh University back in the late 1920s by John Petrie Dunn, an assistant to Donald Francis Tovey.) So it was voice leading we had to first retrieve and then unite with the theory of form (as with much else besides).

Several of us came to the same understanding from different places. For myself, I was mindful of the fruitful visits of Peter Maxwell Davies and Jonathan Harvey to the Music Department of Princeton University, a mecca at the time for “advanced” thinking musicians; I spent time and money importing books, essays, and dissertations from the USA; and through the good agency of Ben Boretz, then editor of *Perspectives of New Music*, I went to Princeton in 1973–1974, where I discussed Bach with Milton Babbitt. (We also discussed advanced serialism, but that was relatively easy!) My sympathies were thus as much with analytically minded composers as they were with analysts; and when, in the UK in the 1970s, I joined the music staff of Reading University, my impulse was always to present music from a “poetical” point of view, to see how it could be generated from the bottom up, or, adapting Babbitt, to “rationally reconstruct” a musical language before rationally reconstructing a representative piece. This has remained my mission, and one I followed in, say, a recent monograph on advanced tonal music, *All the Gods: Benjamin Britten’s Night-piece in Context* (2006).

This back story may help to explain why the title of this paper combines generative context (“Corelli’s Tonal Models”) with representative example (“The Trio Sonata, Op. 3, No. 1”). But it hardly accounts for the choice of composer. After 1945 especially, musicology in British universities found it difficult to accommodate the twin poles of the historical and the systematic (the theoretical) recognized in Europe: history, so went Frank Lloyd Harrison’s

argument of 1959, should so imbue everything that the systematic should not stand freely. This Oxford view is not misguided: my paper too begins by addressing the views of contemporaneous historical experts. But it can be repressive if it finds that the systematic does not necessarily, or even primarily, address an audience of historians. Theorists do like to go their own way. Historians, in their joint capacity as connoisseurs, also create canons for emulation, and in Britain are drawn to the Italian as much as to the German. By imitating the outer style of, say, Palestrina, the student—or so it was claimed for decades—would absorb something of the master's letter and spirit (Britten's first student assignment at the Royal College of Music was to compose a "Palestrina mass"). Purely technical, and hence supra-historical, manuals—Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum*, say—were anathema. As a young academic, I was deputed to promote Corelli for the purity and elegance of his chamber music, along with figured bass and other supporting skills. Corelli was thus not my choice. Yet it was not one I resented. By coincidence, it helped solve my problems with elementary tonal practice, since Corelli's south-European practice so influenced north-European composers, including Sebastian Bach. So it was during the 1970s that I perforce evolved my tonal models, guided by British connoisseurship on the one hand and theory reclaimed from (and advanced by) the USA on the other.

In 1979, for domestic reasons, I moved from Reading to the University of London, where I soon befriended

Pierluigi Petrobelli, later to become Professor of Music at La Sapienza (Rome). When I showed him my work on Corelli, Petrobelli put pressure on me to present it at one of his conferences in Fusignano, Corelli's birthplace outside Bologna, and later publish it (the conference proceedings were duly edited by Sergio Durante and printed by Leo S. Olschki in Florence). The paper was not universally welcomed. "The town" was in the hall for another paper, disliked my technicalities, and staged a mini-Nürnberg riot in the main square that caught the attention of the local media. However, when I repeated the paper at King's College London, the then Professor of Music, Brian Trowell, made the more temperate suggestion that for elementary tonal practice I should go further and compare Corelli and Lully. I regret that I never did. Later, though, believing that music has three primary colours—song (and line), dance (and rhythm), and mimesis (of sounds and phenomena that are neither song nor dance)—I returned to Corelli. I wanted to show the elementary working of rhythmic templates in his dance movements, how pitch could hence be secondary to rhythm, and how rhythmic and tonal models could meaningfully interact in a dance movement by Bach. This paper, "Corelli's Rhythmic Models," remained unpublished until now but is twin to the one reprinted here, and essential for a fuller idea of the composer's language.

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