

2B or not 2B

Matthew Brown

It is a great honor for me to jot down a few words about Bob Wason and his remarkable career at the Eastman School of Music. Over the past three decades, Bob has had an extraordinary impact on theory instruction at Eastman. That influence has been felt on students at every level, from those starting freshman theory to those finishing Ph.D. dissertations. His strengths are, of course, enormous. Bob has an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of music theory, especially of 19th-century German harmonic theory and jazz theory, and has most areas of pre-tonal, tonal, and post-tonal theory at his fingertips. Students have also benefitted immensely from his classes in model composition and advanced keyboard skills.

Since my arrival at Eastman in 1986, I have had the good fortune to work with Bob on numerous projects. In fact, we have worked together on everything from team teaching freshman theory and co-advising Ph.D. dissertations to overhauling the graduate curriculum and co-authoring a book review. Bob is a great collaborator. Much of the time, he is cool, calm, and collected: a model of academic even-handedness and diplomacy. But there are times when he speaks with extraordinary passion and conviction. Above all, Bob is always suspicious of over-regulation and is always keen to shave away any unnecessary bureaucracy. He is a free spirit, a true child of the sixties. They don't make them like him any more!

Bob has, of course, had a profound effect on what it has meant for me to be a music theorist. He always reminds me of two points. First, there is the need to sharpen our understanding of music theory of the present with a thorough understanding of music theory of the past. Bob even advocates this idea view at the undergraduate level. When we taught Freshman theory, he not only approached works, such as the 15th-century English hymn "Beata Dei genitrix" and Fux's *Gradus ad parnassum*, from a historical perspective, but he would also interpret and even criticize them in light of more recent research.

Bob's second point is that it is always important to erase the line between theory and practice. Given his background in composing and performing music, he has always tried to ground his abstract theoretical speculations about music with concrete practical applications. Such values are, of course, central to the mission of the Eastman School of Music and are encapsulated in his essay "Musica practica: music theory as pedagogy." It is testimony to Bob's outstanding reputation in the field that this essay is published in one of the most significant books of the last decade: *The Cambridge History of Music Theory* (2002).

Bob's points about balancing past with present and theory with practice have provided an important impetus for this issue of *Intégral*. The first point is reflected in the fact that three of the papers deal with 18th-century music and three deal with jazz. The second point is reflected in the fact that, in one way or another, the papers all address the issue of improvisation. In view of Bob's special interests, this seemed to be a perfect theme for the papers, all the more so because, with the exception of myself, the authors are all his former students. I would like to thank them personally for their contributions to this issue and for making this project so enjoyable. And I would like to thank Bob for making my time at Eastman such a profitable one. I am also looking forward to more card games, wine tastings, and to see the infamous pencil costume...Damett!