

REVIEW OF *THE ART OF POST-TONAL ANALYSIS: THIRTY-THREE GRAPHIC MUSIC ANALYSES* BY JOSEPH N. STRAUS, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022.

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THE APPETIZER

AUTHOR OF *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* (2016), Joseph Straus has gifted post-tonal pedagogues with this compendium that complements many of the concepts and analyses in his popular textbook. While there are a few resources for post-tonal courses on the market,¹ this text is unique in its assemblage of self-contained analytical vignettes, brought to life through multimedia. This last element—multimedia integration—makes the text particularly appropriate for use in the classroom.

With this text, Straus invites us to take part in an “all-you-can-eat buffet” (vii). This is an apt metaphor not just in terms of the flexibility afforded to the reader with how they might go about navigating the text, but also in terms of who might find this offering valuable. In addition to the instructor and/or interested individuals who are new to post-tonal repertoires, experienced post-tonal instructors and enthusiasts are likely to find novel analytical perspectives in this text. As is usually the case with a real-life buffet, there is something for everyone.

THE ENTRÉE

This text is made up of two components: the printed book (which I accessed electronically) and the analytical videos (which can be accessed here: www.oup.com/

www.theartofposttonalanalysis.com/). In terms of how the two components work together, Straus makes clear that the analytical videos “are not a mere supplement to the printed book; rather, the book you hold in your hands should be understood as a static version of the dynamic analytical process that unfolds dramatically in these videos” (vii). Because of this, I approached the text in a few ways: reading the book first, followed by watching the videos; watching the videos first, followed by reading the book; and finally, watching the videos while referencing the book. I found the last method—watching the videos while referencing the book—to be the most helpful since I was able to pause and rewind the video while scanning the printed text.² There are no major differences between the two sources, aside from some additional commentary in the videos for animations not realizable in the printed format.

In terms of the order in which the text should be read, Straus encourages the reader to “graze and browse. [The book] is not designed to be read through: there is no narrative arc (the organization is strictly chronological) and no graduation of difficulty. Rather, each analysis is designed to be self-contained” (vii). In general, within each of the individual lessons there is a sense that the analysis progresses in terms of difficulty and abstraction, beginning with an overview of the piece being discussed, highlighting some initial points of entry, followed by extensive analytical remarks and detailed diagrams, and concluding with insights

¹ These include Roig-Francolí’s *Understanding Post-Tonal Music* (2021), Lambert’s *Basic Post-Tonal Theory and Analysis* (2018), and Kostka and Santa’s *Materials and Techniques of Post-Tonal Music* (2018).

² The media player, as far as I was able to determine, was not closed-caption enabled.

that had been uncovered along the way.

The thirty-three analyses contained in this collection focus on works as early as 1909 (Chapter 1: Arnold Schoenberg's *Piano Pieces*, Op. 11, No. 1) to as recent as 2016 (Chapter 33: Suzanne Farrini's "Unico spirito" from *Dolce la morte*). These analyses also span a wide selection of genres, including solo instrumental works (such as Chapter 25: Kaija Saariaho's *Papillons* for solo cello, No. 3; and Chapter 16: Hale Smith's *Three Brevities for Solo Flute*, No. 2), chamber works (such as Chapter 10: Ruth Crawford Seeger's *String Quartet*, first movement; and Chapter 24: Shulamit Ran's *Soliloquy* for violin, cello, and piano), and choral works and opera (such as Chapter 15: Louise Talma's "La Corona" from *Holy Sonnets*; and Chapter 29: Thomas Adès's *The Tempest*, Act III, Scene 5), just to name a few. Straus states that the analyses focus on a relatively short span of music, or whole pieces that are quite short (vii), such as Igor Stravinsky's *Fanfare for a New Theatre* (Chapter 18)—a little over a minute in duration—to under thirty measures from Caroline Shaw's *Valencia* for string quartet (Chapter 31). Likewise, the analytical videos are fairly concise, most standing around twelve minutes in duration—the shortest being slightly over six minutes (Chapter 6: Arnold Schoenberg's *Five Piano Pieces*, Op. 23, No. 3), and the longest being close to thirty minutes (Chapter 22: Tania León's *Rituál*).

In terms of methodology, Straus makes clear that, "Although I deal in passing with character, affect, text setting, rhythm, and form, the primary focus of these analyses is pitch, including intervals, motives, collections, melody, harmony, and voice leading" (vii). It is worth noting that Straus does not develop new methodologies in this text but, rather, blends a set-theory framework with a transformational approach. He states:

My approach could be loosely described as transformational. I am interested in seeing how musical ideas (shapes, intervals, motives) grow, change, and effloresce. When music ideas are obviously dissimilar and possibly in conflict, I am interested in teasing out subtle points of connection between them. Above all, I am interested in creating rich networks of relatedness, allowing our musical minds and musical ears to lead each other along some of the many enjoyable pathways through this challenging and beautiful music. (vii)

In this way, the text treads similar analytical grounds to David Lewin's *Musical Form and Transformation: Four Analytical Essays* (2011). Likewise, the transformational approach shapes the discussion of musical detail as unfolding in layers, piecing together foregrounded materials in order to further explore their relationships at deeper levels. This can be observed, for example, in the analyses of Béla Bartók's String Quartet No. 3, *Prima parte* (Chapter 7) and in Anton Webern's "Wie bin ich froh!" from *Three Songs*, Op. 25, No. 1 (Chapter 11). In the Bartók, Straus discusses how the opening three note motive (A \sharp –B \sharp –A) in the violin line is

interlinked to the subsequent melodic material through variations of $\langle +2, -3 \rangle$ intervallic relationships. Then, he demonstrates how this $\langle +2, -3 \rangle$ relationship is composed out over the whole melodic phrase of the violin, anchored by the longest rhythmic values present and transposed down a half-step (A–B–G \sharp). Similarly, in "Wie bin ich froh!" he discusses how the intervallic makeup $\langle -3, +11 \rangle$ of the vocal line's opening three note motive (G–E–D \sharp) represents an intervallic composing out over the first few measures of the voice's first pitch (G), lowest pitch (B), and highest pitch (G \sharp). In these examples and others, Straus invites the reader not only to listen to surface-level motivic organization but also to abstract their listening deeper into the musical structure in order to uncover the insightful connections he has threaded together.

THE TRIMMINGS

The biggest strength of this text is the analytical videos. Hearty congratulations are in order to Straus for providing great breadth and depth of analytical insight and to Timothy Mastic for accomplishing the herculean task of fitting it all into expertly curated audio-visual media. If someone chooses to only read the book without watching the videos they would still find the experience enriching, however, they would be missing out on the opportunity to experience the analyses in this engaging, multimedia fashion. Straus mentions Carl Schachter's *The Art of Tonal Analysis: Twelve Lessons in Schenkerian Theory* (2016) as the inspiration for the pedagogical framing: "In writing these analyses, I imagine I am teaching these pieces to a class of undergraduate or graduate students, seated at the piano, pointing at [the] score, playing and listening as we go" (vii). The videos bring this scenario to life; from them, one feels transported to a classroom in which Straus is narrating and playing material at the keyboard. In this way, the videos help surmount certain visual limitations of the two-dimensional page in rendering complicated diagrams. For example, in the discussion of Elisabeth Lutyens's *Two Bagatelles*, Op. 48, No. 1 (Chapter 17), the network annotations for the trichords (O14) and (O37) are tightly overlapped, and some of the boxed-over pitch material can be difficult to parse visually from the static print. While the use of multiple color-coding schemes on the scores and diagrammed materials helps with navigating the commentary, in most cases I found it easier to follow the video as the diagrams were constructed in real time. Straus's verbal guidance through the musical examples and diagrams is closely coupled to everything that is presented visually and aurally, lessening the burden on the reader to interpret or audiate some of the more abstract material.

Along with his verbal remarks, Straus is careful not just to state what can be observed in the score but also

to play it, sometimes in a reduced form to aid the listener. I was particularly fond of the use of recomposition in the analysis of Igor Stravinsky's *Three Pieces* for string quartet, No. 2 (Chapter 5), in which Straus reduced about twenty measures of musical material into a simple, tonal, six-measure phrase, concluding: "In relation to the hypothetical prototype, Stravinsky's actual composition is a radical transformation. In its antagonistic relationship to the formal and harmonic norms of traditional tonality, static textural blocks and formal fragmentation replace goal-oriented coherent tonal progressions" (25).

In many cases, Straus elegantly relates the analysis to the work's narrative. In the analysis of Tan Dun's *Inter-course of Fire and Water* for solo cello (Chapter 23), Straus begins with a discussion of small form segmentation, progresses to RI-chains, and concludes with the interplay of hexachords: "And while the A music is pure water, the B and C musics witness interpenetration of natural and sharp hexachords—a musical evocation of the intercourse of fire and water" (131). In this way, Straus zooms out analytically, connecting his surface-level segmentation to the broader form and its relation to the meaning of the piece. Another example of this appears in the analysis of Alban Berg's "Schlafend trägt man mich" from *Four Songs*, Op. 2, No. 2 (Chapter 3), which covers in great detail the first four opening measures of the song. The analysis begins with a discussion about how the opening chordal material comprises set-class (0268). Straus maps this material onto a diagram relating the appearances of the set-class to different whole-tone collections, concluding that the "progression carries us away from home, through a journey that takes in all possible forms of the chord, and finally carries us back home—a subtle and effective reflection of the text" (13). This interpretation is further enriched with a consideration of melodic material:

The initial Cb is felt as an appoggiatura [...]. It does not belong to the sounding form of (0268), unlike most of the melody notes, and it seems to resolve to Bb. The same is heard at the end of the line and over the course of the whole melody. In this hearing, Bb as a melody tone, like the first chord as a harmony, represents the homeland toward which the music moves. (14)

As a student, I found that remarks such as these grounded the analysis and affirmed its relevance.

THE SALAD

A weakness I occasionally encountered throughout this text was the blur between concrete and abstract ways of listening. By this I mean differentiating within Straus's analytical remarks between what can be aurally perceived versus what is meant to be structurally or even metaphorically understood. For example, early on in the analysis of

Schoenberg's *Piano Pieces*, Op. 11, No. 1 (Chapter 1), Straus states: "Each note in the large-scale registral statement is associated with a small scale-statement of the same type of trichord, (014). [...] In that way, we can hear the resonance of the opening three-note melody extending across the passage and downward into the accompanying lines and chords" (2). Straus goes on to add: "We can hear further resonance with the opening three-note melody if we consider the possibility that it might be varied intervallically without losing its basic identity" (3). The use of "resonance" here warrants clarification: Straus is detailing a structural projection of the (014) trichord—perhaps a metaphorical resonance—but if he intends an aural perception, I would have appreciated more teasing out as to how one might hear this resonance. Another example of this can be observed in the analysis of Aaron Copland's *Piano Variations* (Chapter 8), with the focus on the appearance of triads (37–38). In mm. 8–10, Straus points towards the abstract appearances of a G \sharp -major triad and C-minor triad, both of which require selective retroactive listening. (This interpretation is, however, assisted with Straus realizing the full harmonies at the keyboard.) Here again though, one gets the sense that these clear-cut presentations are not so simple aurally, given that they also overlap quite a bit, so we get only a whiff of their presence. Some further clarification here as to how one can better manifest the conceptual connections aurally would strengthen Straus's presentation.

While a text like this has the space to go into very detailed descriptions of the musical landscape, there were a few times where the blow-by-blow account seemed not to add much to the broader analytical argument other than to serve as a cataloguing. This was the case in the analysis of Tania León's *Rituál* (Chapter 22). Straus begins by clearly and effectively dividing up the core musical material but then proceeds to give a measure-by-measure account of how the material is being treated metrically. The goal of this approach seems to be to chart how the rhythmic energy grows from the less to the more frenetic, coinciding with how the pitch material shifts metrically throughout four phrases (mm. 14–50). By the end of the discussion, I was hoping to have the detailed metrical diagrams organized and synthesized into a more holistic metrical framework but was left wanting in this regard. The diagrams effectively demonstrate what occurs at the measure level, but there is potential for a diagram that encapsulates the whole section, or for a compilation of the individual diagrams into a single score.

Despite these examples, the reader's placement of trust in following the analyses to their conclusions is hardly mishandled, as Straus generally provides summative, satisfactory conclusions. In addition to the Berg (Chapter 3) and Tan Dun (Chapter 23) examples discussed pre-

viously, others include the first movement of Ruth Crawford Seeger's *String Quartet* (Chapter 10), with the image of the three seemingly distinct melodic lines as engaged in a "family argument" (49), and how we achieve a "moment of historical and stylistic reconciliation" (160) within the ending chorale of Sofia Gubaidulina's *Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H* (Chapter 28).

THE DESSERT

Given the text's pedagogical nature, I will close by considering how to incorporate the text in the classroom. The analytical videos possess monumental potential as an appealing entry point for students, supplemented with material from the printed book as needed. The videos streamline the need for students to realize the music on their own—sometimes an additional burden with regard to already complicated subject matter—since the videos easily and readily engage the reader in hearing the analyses in real-time. Depending on the lesson, the whole video or portions of the video may be assigned with directed questions to focus students' attention. While the emphasis on pitch organization in these analyses may seem like a shortcoming, despite Straus's intention regarding this emphasis, other musical parameters (rhythm, texture, timbre, dynamics, articulation, etc., which Straus mentions but does not always detail) can be addressed proactively. Students can explore, discuss, and analyze these parameters more deeply, either to support the narrated interpretation or to suggest alternatives. I would, however, caution against using these lessons as ends in themselves, to be covered without dis-

cussion or criticism. Rather, since many of the analyses are confined to opening sections, it seems more fruitful to use each as a starting point for navigating the rest of the piece.

Finally, those who engage this text without pedagogical intentions but, rather, for the pleasure of analysis itself will find Straus's work enriching. He has placed great care into both selecting previously underappreciated works that provide opportunities for compelling interpretative arguments and reexamining familiar works through a fresh lens. Straus's cuisine metaphor remains apt: even though the selection for the "all-you-can-eat buffet" is predetermined and may be limited in some regards, there is something for everyone—from the novice post-tonal instructor to the experienced analyst—to enjoy.

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