



## Music Theory and Analysis in France and Belgium

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ABSTRACT: The organizers of the forthcoming Fourth European Congress for Music Analysis decided to devote one of its sessions to European traditions and usages concerning theory and analysis. Some of my ideas on this topic are developed, with special reference to societies for analysis, journals, music education, and the reception of Schenker in France.

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### 1. Introduction

[1.1] Theory and analysis have known a fast development in Continental Europe during the last twenty years. Yet, for many reasons, the situation here remains quite different from what it is in English speaking countries. After the Third European Congress for Music Analysis in Montpellier in 1995, Jonathan Cross commented on this situation in the Bulletin of the SMA (the British Society for Music Analysis) for May 1995. His comments led the organizers of the forthcoming Fourth European Congress (see below) to devote one of its sessions to discussing European traditions and usages. The present note stems from my own reflection in this context—and I claim sole responsibility for what follows. I will begin with considerations of the recent history of analysis and musicology, before turning to more fundamental matters.

[1.2] The recent development of analytical studies in Continental Europe owes much to the personality of Celestin Deliege, who founded the class of analysis in the Royal Conservatoire in Liege (Belgium). He was the first to seriously report on Schenkerian analysis in his *Fondements de la musique tonale* (Paris, 1984). Deliege is fully aware of the dramatic change that Schenkerian analysis was bound to mean for the discipline. He rightly claimed that theory should become descriptive rather than prescriptive, insisting at the same time that, beyond the level of mere description, analysis should reach to the inner

structure of the work. But Deliege also claimed the need to transcend orthodox Schenkerism and advocated a “post-schenkerian” analysis influenced, among others, by Lerdahl and Jackendoff.

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## 2. European Societies and the European Congresses for Music Analysis

[2.1] Another important figure in the development of a modern analytical activity in France and Europe is Pierre-Marie Sgard, the founder of the French Societe d’Analyse Musicale. The story is unusual because Sgard is not a musician, but a financial analyst, and he wanted the Societe d’Analyse Musicale to be organized like the one for financial analysis in which he was active. The project sounded odd to many of us, but it certainly pushed us in directions which we may not have taken otherwise and which proved fruitful. Sgard foresaw the building up of a European network of Societies for Music Analysis and, to this aim, called the First European Congress for Music Analysis in Colmar (France) in 1989. He intended it to be reserved to formally constituted societies for music analysis, and his call indeed was instrumental in the creation of such societies in Great Britain, Belgium, Italy and Spain. The French Society since considered it its duty to foster the creation of societies and has been active to this effect in Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal. The idea of a Federation of Societies has been in the air since Colmar, although with limited consequence up to now. The present reflection on European traditions and usages aims among others at an inventory of our differences, in the hope to promote further exchanges.

[2.2] It was decided in Colmar that a European congress should be called every two years, a program to which we have almost been able to hold. The second Congress was held in Trento (Italy) in 1991, with a wider international participation than in Colmar, especially from Eastern European countries where we met with yet other musicological traditions with which we will have to cope in the future. The French invited the Third Congress in Montpellier in 1995, and the Fourth one is foreseen in Corfu (Greece) at Easter 1998. Its motto, “Towards an analytical musicology,” is intended to stress a European will to develop analysis within the science of music at large, rather than as an autonomous approach opposed to the historical one. We want the term “musicology” (and the discipline itself) to remain as comprehensive as possible, as is its German counterpart, *Musikwissenschaft*.

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## 3. Journals

[3.1] Pierre-Marie Sgard also was the founder, in 1985, of the quarterly journal *Analyse musicale*, which soon became the main scientific journal on music in French. The story ended rather sadly, because Sgard’s purposes eventually proved incompatible with the usages of the musical and musicological community, but the journal had produced 32 issues by 1993, with quite a few important contributions. It helped (re-)creating redactional habits among musicologists and musicians who for too long had been faced with a starving editorial activity. After *Analyse musicale* ceased its activity, its editorial board decided the creation of a new journal with similar aims, *Musurgia* (the name *Analyse musicale* being unavailable). After slow beginnings, the journal seems to have found its rhythm; it will publish its 11th issue in July 1997.

[3.2] In Belgium, I created in 1988 a little quarterly journal, *Fascicules d’Analyse Musicale*, with the aim of helping students and young musicians trying themselves to writing and publishing. Although cheaply produced and inexpensive, it too proved able to publish interesting contributions. The production (entirely hand made, from the photocopying to the mailing) was time consuming, however, and I was compelled to stop in 1991 after 16 issues.

[3.3] Other journals in French do exist, of course, but none as specifically devoted to theory and analysis as *Musurgia*. Several short-lived journals have been devoted to contemporary music. One notable exception is *Les Cahiers du CIREM* (Centre International de Recherches en Esthetique Musicale), still alive and well after some twelve years.

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## 4. Music Education

[4.1] The situation of musical analysis in Continental Europe must be understood in consideration of the situation of musical education. I refer more specifically to the existence of two educational regimes, the Conservatory and the University. This situation seems to prevail throughout most of Continental Europe. Performing musicians learn their skills in a Conservatory,

while music teachers and researchers (we tend to call them “musicologists,” independently of whether they work on historical or theoretical matters) normally choose a University. Even if Conservatories today tend to develop curricula in theory and even if Universities expect from their students a good practice of music, the approaches to the discipline are different. From an administrative point of view also, in France and in Belgium, the two types of institutions are quite distant from each other : the Conservatories depend from the Ministry of Culture, the Universities from that of Education. All this results in some tension, although in France at least the situation is improving. Several students are following classes in both institutions.

[4.2] In Conservatories, theory formerly was considered an unavoidable nuisance, especially by the instrument teachers who had rather seen their students practice scales all day long. Things are now changing very fast. The Paris Conservatoire National, especially, developed a full curriculum of theory (I am less aware of the situation in the other French Conservatoire National, in Lyons). Much of the teaching, however, remains based on a relation Master/Disciple which belongs to a venerable tradition. This must have been very much the situation in Olivier Messiaen’s class of analysis, the model of which was taken over by several of his students. It is not necessarily unsatisfactory in itself, but it often results in a lack of critical attitude with respect to methodology. The teacher proposes his own method (not necessarily a bad one), but subjects it neither to evaluation, nor to comparisons. As a result, in some classes of analysis, the major theoretical traditions (e.g. Riemann or Schenker) are never discussed and probably remain unknown. Analysis often reduces to an exercise in musical description (a “guided tour” of the work; see Leopold Mannes’s Introduction to Felix Salzer’s *Structural Hearing*). Classes of analysis in the conservatories, it is true, busy themselves mainly with modern and contemporary music which, from a methodological point of view, cannot be treated in the same way as tonal music.

[4.3] The music curriculum in French universities is rather recent : while classes in music history existed before, the first departments of music appeared only after the Parisian events of 1968. The interest for theory and analysis has been real from the beginnings, due mainly to the personality of Jacques Chailley, and of Serge Gut who followed him in the Sorbonne, but many of the other teachers had been formed as historians, so that theoretical and analytical studies were slow to develop. Chailley and Gut (and others) have been influential, though, and the situation appears now to be reversing, the younger generation showing a growing interest for these matters. The approach often is methodological—musicians formed in the conservatories complain, at times rightly, that universitarians are more preoccupied with justifying their methods than with performing analyses. Another important point, however, is that French musicologists always have had a strong historical formation, and none of us today is ready to accept a music theory that would be divorced from history. The curriculum also includes classes on the history of theory. For the analysis of tonal music, in universities as in the conservatories, the prevailing method is primarily based on roman numeral harmonic analysis. MTO readers who know Wason’s book (*Viennese Harmonic Theory from Albrechtsberger to Schenker and Schoenberg*, UMI, 1985) will be aware that this method is of Viennese origin. It does not correspond to the French 19th-century tradition and it is unclear to me, at this point, how it came to influence France and Belgium. In late 19th and early 20th century, at any rate, Vincent d’Indy and Francois-Auguste Gevaert had tried, with limited success, to introduce in France and Belgium the Riemannian functional analysis which remains at the basis of the education to theory in German speaking and in several Eastern countries.

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## 5. The Reception of Schenker

[5.1] The history of the reception of Schenkerian theory in France and Belgium is characteristic. As mentioned above, Celestin Deliege was the first to really draw attention to Schenker (earlier attempts having been rather deficient). His *Fondements de la musique tonale* (1984) is a complex work, too difficult perhaps to have been really influential, but it certainly shook up many of us. Although French students are not very good at foreign languages (and Schenker himself, of course, is no easy reading), several Master degrees and Doctoral dissertations devoted to Schenkerian analysis have been written in the late 80’s and early 90’s, among others under the direction of Serge Gut (I stress this in tribute to his openness of mind). I published my French translation of *Der freie Satz* (*Free Composition*) in 1993, and Schenker analysis is taught since in several French universities.

[5.2] The resistance against Schenker remains strong, however. Serge Gut, for instance, published in the last issue of the *Revue de Musicologie* very good reviews of my Schenker translation and of my *Heinrich Schenker: Une introduction*, but he accompanied them with an article on what he dubbed “Schenkeromania,” in which he complains against some real or

supposed excesses of Schenker's theories. Gut has the advantage over several of his French colleagues to be fluent in German. He is a very good knower and an active advocate of Riemann's theories and he has a first hand knowledge of Schenker. One reason of his criticism is a common misunderstanding of Schenker's purpose, a failure to realize that Schenker's analyses are not always inductive. (Gut argues against the fact that Schenker, in his analysis of BWV 940 in *Das Meisterwerk* I,99, deduces a fundamental line that is a diatonic, Aeolian minor scale, while the piece, Gut claims, really is in harmonic or melodic minor. In this, Gut is right, of course, but he fails to understand Schenker's point which, in this case, is more theoretical than analytic in the modern sense.) But Gut's criticism also results, I believe, from a rejection of an aggressiveness of Schenkerian theories (especially, I am sorry to have to say, in some of their American formulations): adopting an eclectic point of view that I think characteristic of our universities, and in view of his own commitment to Riemann's theories, Gut cannot admit that Schenkerian analysis should be adopted *instead* of other theories—and I fully agree with him on this point.

[5.3] Jacques Chailley evidences an even stronger rejection of Schenker's theories. A disciple of Maurice Emmanuel, he has busied himself with a lasting reflection on a "musical philology," the inner functioning of the musical language. He developed an evolutionary theory according to which the recognition of intervals as consonances followed the order of the harmonics : the fifth in the middle ages, the thirds in the Renaissance, the dominant seventh in the Baroque, etc. More important for the present discussion, he published in 1951 a *Traite historique d'analyse musicale* (2nd edition as *Traite historique d'analyse harmonique*, 1977), several principles of which (e.g. concerning analysis by reduction, or harmonic degrees) were similar to some expressed by Schenker. Schenker was unknown by then: none of his writings had been translated in any language by 1951; even the 2nd German edition of *Der freie Satz* did not exist. When Schenkerian theory began to be proposed in France, Chailley rightly resented that ideas that he had advocated since such a long time now came to be presented as novel.

[5.4] The rejection of Schenker is mainly due to a distrust for anything resembling totalitarian orthodoxy. (It may be worth noting that Forte's set theory, which we viewed as another orthodoxy, met with a similar suspicion in Colmar in 1989. The dispute has left interesting traces in *Analyse musicale*.) And even although my own presentation of Schenkerian theories to the French readership has been rather orthodox (or so I believe), I myself would be quite opposed to any formalized Schenkerian orthodoxy, which I would consider utterly foreign to his own ideas. As mentioned above, Schenkerian analysis now is taught in several universities, both in France and in Belgium, but it is always confronted to other approaches. For sure, we will not form a generation of Schenkerians as in the United States. I trust that my colleagues, like myself, teach a critical reading of Schenker, and I believe that a different, more contrasted image of Schenker might develop here in Europe.

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## 6. Semiology

[6.1] In his report on the Montpellier Congress to which I alluded at the outset, Jonathan Cross writes: "Just as Americans seem to burst into life at the mere mention of their favorite pitch class sets [ . . . ], so French hearts beat collectively faster at the very thought of *le niveau neutre*." The tripartition theory of Jean Molino and Jean-Jacques Nattiez indeed has been with us since its initial presentation in Nattiez' *Fondements d'une semiologie de la musique* and in Molino's "Fait musical et semiologie de la musique" (in *Musique en jeu* 17), both in 1975. To those less familiar with the theory, I remind that Molino rightly claimed that, rather than wondering about the meaning of music, one should consider the three stages of its existence, production ("poiesis"), reception ("esthesis") with the "neutral level" (the work—whatever that is) in between. The claim obviously is in favor of a semiology of communication against one of signification. The history of semiology as a whole is an oscillation between these two tendencies. As to the tripartition theory itself, its ubiquity merely results from its evidence, which I think confines to triviality.

[6.2] My purpose here is not to discuss Molino's tripartition, however, but to acknowledge that semiology has been present in European musicological thinking ever since 1975. Eero Tarasti's research project on Musical Signification extended the reflection far beyond the European borders, but his group includes a post-Greimasian tendency which, I believe, remains quite typically French, in inspiration at least. Greimas attempted a description of a "structural semantics," a formalized semantics that would be based on an inner logic rather than on a relation to the outer world. The idea of a non-referential semantics must be appealing to musicians, of course, and Greimas's "semiotic square" has been taken by some as a guide for the analysis of music.

[6.3] Closer to the structuralist tradition, a seminary held at the University of Paris Sorbonne under the title *Musique et style*, in collaboration between the Department of Music and that of French language, has been discussing music among others from a semiotic point of view for three years now. Two volumes of the acts have been published and a third one is in preparation. And this is but one among several activities in this field in France.

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## 7. Conclusion

[7.1] Jonathan Cross wrote (ibid.) that “nearly all the major developments in theory and analysis since the Second World War have come from the USA.” This, in a way, probably is true, but perhaps only partly so. Certainly, important theoretical and analytical traditions have developed in Europe, which should not be overwhelmed by the American industry. The main case in point is Riemann’s theory, which has known important developments and modernizations after his death in 1919 but which remains actively ignored in the English speaking countries (e.g. in the *New Grove*)—and, to say the truth, in France as well. Carl Dahlhaus, or Jacques Chailley, are first rank theoreticians and they are not the only ones.

[7.2] If the matter is considered from a higher point of view, however, what strikes me most is the lack of exchange between our traditions, both within Europe itself and between Europe and the other parts of the world. I have seen foreign students led to complete misunderstanding in Paris merely because their theoretical presuppositions were different from those of their teacher, without that any of them realized the problem. Despite such important means as RISM or, today, the Internet, I am not sure that the French literature on theory and analysis is known abroad, and I know by personal experience that the literature in English, German, Italian and Spanish, to mention only a few languages, is almost completely ignored in France. (Belgium is better in this respect as the country, miniature as it is, has three official languages.) If the present note can help bringing some change to this situation, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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