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The *Svago*: Methodological Reflections on a Schema in Solfeggi by Leonardo Leo (1694-1744)

ABSTRACT

Background

Historische Satzlehre — dealing with historical modes of musical knowledge transfer and the reconstruction of artisanal knowledge needed to improvise and compose in historical styles —, form-functional theory, sonata theory, schema and topic theory all aim to reconstruct musical form and meaning against the backdrop of normative options and constraints inherent in particular repertoires. My research on Neapolitan music from the early 18th century is informed by these approaches and aims at informing them, in widening their empirical base towards a repertoire that is generally accepted to be important for the development of ‘classical style’, but is in many of its details still *terra incognita*. Some of the methodological problems in investigating this repertoire concern the selection, definition, and categorization of ‘objects’ that deserve special attention. This paper identifies a scale degree schema (Temperley 2006) that frequently encounters in solfeggi by Leonardo Leo and that I term *Svago*.

Aims and Repertoire Studied

The solfeggi of Leo and his contemporaries were written for the training of their pupils. But instead of being simple exercises, they are elaborate compositions. What makes those compositions a promising object of study is the pragmatic context out of which they arose: As ‘music for musicians’ that helped to prepare them to produce (sing, play, improvise, and compose) music intended for public performance (like arias, sonatas, and symphonies), solfeggi can be supposed to mirror musical conventions of their time in a condensed fashion.

Among the many manuscript sources that contain solfeggi by Leo, *D-DI 2460-K-500* ([50] *Solfeggi del Sig. Leonardo Leo*); accessible on <<https://imslp.org>>, accessed 20/05/2023) is of special importance because it contains his ‘Greatest Hits’ in the sense of pieces with the greatest dissemination in other solfeggio collections, as a comparison of many such sources has shown (Aerts 2022). So its content may be considered as representative of posterity’s idea of a solfeggio by Leo.

About one third of the solfeggi in this collection is in three parts, ‘part’ meaning here a formal segment ending with a perfect authentic cadence and/or sounding between such a cadence and a recapitulation (a simple or double return). With the exception of one solfeggio in one single part, the remaining pieces are in two or four parts.

Methods

Leo’s short tonicizations of the dominant of the local key that I call *Svago* typically occur within the run-up to the perfect authentic cadence ending one of these parts, after lower-level

cadences that are the goal of a modulating phrase within those parts. The term ‘*Svago*’ refers to the effect of momentary distraction and subsequent (re)focus on the cadential goal, and was chosen in the spirit of the terminology of Riepel (1755) and Gjerdingen (2007). There are 30 instances of the *Svago* in *D-DI 2460-K-500*. The paper discusses in detail some of these instances, e.g. (Example 1)



Ex. 1. *D-DI 2460-K-500* No. 27

The proposed definition seeks to include the properties of each of these instances (Figure 1)

Svago (it.): distraction

④ ⑤ ④ ③

Formal function:

• Medial function in a pre-cadential **zordy** the penultima of a structural cadence moment.

Preparation:

• Bass: ①, ③ or ⑥; rarely ④.

Scope:

Fig. 1. Definition of the *Svago*

The scale degree succession will be accompanied according to the principles of *beste Lage*. The accompanying voice(s) can therefore be left aside in the definition. *Beste Lage* refers to the idea of an ‘optimal’ counterpoint between the outer voices in 18th century *stile moderno* music, as hinted at by Emanuel Aloys Förster, among others (Förster 1818, 1; Holtmeier *et al.* 2013). One important aspect of this idea is the restrictive and form-articulating use of perfect consonant intervals. On accented beats, these are used at a beginning or at an ending, or they are prepared by syncopation, as if they were dissonances. Another aspect is the pursuit of articulating chords and schemata with just the outer voices (or in a two-voice texture) as plainly as possible (e.g. a 6/5 chord above a leading tone is articulated by a diminished fifth). Against the background of this principle, a top or a bass voice can be said to imply at least one ‘optimal’ complement.

On the other hand, the formal function as described is considered as a crucial part of the definition: schemata with a similar structure but different function (see for instance Fedele Fenaroli’s ‘axiom’ to put an augmented fourth on a first scale

degree descending by step, Fenaroli 1775, 6) do not give the impression of a composer ‘doing the same thing once again’.

The paper closes with a discussion of other examples to further explore the problems of demarcation and categorization, among them J. S. Bach, *Double Violin Concerto* BWV 1043, iii, bars 18–21. Here, the G \sharp in the melody is a raised 4th scale degree that tonicizes the following A $_2$. A diatonic 4th scale degree following this A $_2$ is implied. However, the A $_2$ acts as the penultima of the cadence (*clausula altizans* in a *cadenza doppia*, see Menke 2011) already. Therefore, the tonicization of the dominant is not used here in a medial function.

Implications

Among the most fascinating aspects in 18th century music are the strategies used to postpone a promised goal. I consider the *Svago* one such strategy, brought to my consciousness by studying Leo’s solfeggi, maybe in quite the same way as one of Leo’s pupils would have become familiar with this particular ‘move’. A reconstruction of the history of the schema needs further investigation.

Keywords

Form, Style, Analytical Theory, Counterpoint, Musical Pedagogy.

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