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Gjerdingen's Schemata Re-Examined

ABSTRACT

Background

Gjerdingen (2007) offers a limited set of schemata for the extended galant style (1720–1780), based on research in music theory, history, and cognition. Gjerdingen considers both historical repertoires and Neapolitan pedagogies, alongside treatises on figured bass and composition. Gjerdingen's theory is a compelling and impressive explanatory model for the galant style and the related high-classical style, at least to my analytical ears: It is laudable that his work allows to describe complete mid-eighteenth-century pieces as a succession of one galant schema after another. Moreover, the schemata illuminate the ways in which the sometimes ornate eighteenth-century 'bebop' of the high-classical style relies on galant models. In addition, research on the tradition of partimenti (e.g., Sanguinetti 2012) reveals that Neapolitan trainees manipulated brief schema-sized chunks that were concatenated in partimento templates. Yet the relations between historical pedagogies and Gjerdingen's proposed galant schemata are not straightforward, but rather leave room for further exploration. Moreover, Gjerdingen's claim that these were historical cognitive schemata is audacious and raises important epistemic questions: Do the schemata truly represent aspects of musical communication? Are they historical mental representations? Is the ability to detect schemata in a piece merely an example of circular reasoning, validating the schemata while relying on them as a given set of patterns in the process of analysis? Are the schemata imposed on the repertoire by theorists and analysts? Holtmeier (2011, 321) has already directed charges of circularity and reductionism at Gjerdingen, asserting that 'all harmonic explanatory systems rely heavily upon reductionist abstraction at this fundamental analytical level'. Is it therefore possible to avoid this vicious circle? Is it possible to preserve the richness of Gjerdingen's multi-featured prototypes and microhistories, while examining underlying rules and principles?

Aims and Repertoire Studied

The circularity problem in Schenkerian music theory has been raised by Narmour (1977). Brown (2005) responds that Schenkerian principles and prototypes emerge from underlying contrapuntal principles, which expert composers internalized through their training. While the details differ considerably, the present inquiry is inspired by Brown. I examine the relations between galant schemata and the Rule of the Octave (hereafter RO). Since the RO was featured in virtually every figured-bass and partimento treatise in the period (Christensen 1992; Holtmeier 2007; Byros 2009; Sanguinetti 2012), I assume that it constituted part of the internalized knowledge of eighteenth-century keyboardists and composers, or, if you will, a cognitive schema. My inquiry examines in detail the relations

between Gjerdingen's set of galant schemata, the RO, as well as invertible counterpoint.

Methods

I discuss the significance of invertible counterpoint to the repertoire of schemata discussed in Gjerdingen (2007), which suggests certain redefinitions of the schemata and their framework of paired, core-tone bearing voices (cf. e.g. Holtmeier 2007; Menke 2014). In addition, I explore the central role of the appellative consonance (Fétis 1844; Cafiero 2001; Sanguinetti 2005; Holtmeier 2007) or $\hat{4}-\hat{7}$ tritone resolution, which is a recurrent kernel in ten of Gjerdingen's schemata, as well as in schemata proposed by Byros (2009) and Rice (2015). I proceed to compare the schemata with the RO. I focus only on the RO-based schemata proposed by Gjerdingen, not on sequences based on assigning identical figured-bass symbols to various scale degrees (Sanguinetti 2012). The former group of schemata has an intimate connection to the RO. Let us note that the RO associates scale degrees in the bass with figured-bass sonorities; the schemata associate bass scale degrees with soprano scale degrees as well as figured-bass sonorities. The harmonies associated with the schemata largely overlap with the RO, with the notable exception of two schemata of early origins, the Prinner and Romanesca. These considerations suggest that the schemata and the RO encapsulate different aspects of idiomatic knowledge that are closely related yet distinct. I reconstruct the schemata as soprano responses to input from the RO. This reveals a tightly constrained grammar for generating skeletal soprano lines. This reconstruction process suggests certain strings that are absent from the system of Gjerdingen's schemata and from the style, though they are consistent with the grammatical behaviour of underlying skeletal strings proposed here.

Implications

The fact that potential grammatical strings are absent from the schemata suggests the workings of top-down formal constraints, which pre-empt the local generation of certain skeletons. This relates Gjerdingen's work to formal function (Caplin 1998) from a novel angle. The formal aspect of the schemata has been dealt with recently (e.g. by Caplin 2015; Byros 2015), and my inquiry illuminates additional aspects of global galant musical organization. The ability to reconstruct the schemata as responses to RO segments sheds new light on the generation of idiomatic skeletons, which are likely to be the central feature of Gjerdingen's galant schemata. This seems to be the case even though the schemata are multi-parametric and acquired through exposure to a host of exemplars with multiple features (Gjerdingen and Bourne 2015). Thus, my inquiry proposes a new view of the generation of 18th century skeletal frameworks. I conclude by presenting an analysis of the opening phrase of Mozart's aria 'Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön' from *The Magic Flute* as an interaction between

Gjerdingen's phrase schemata and the sentence prototype as defined in Caplin (1998). This further demonstrates the network of top-down and bottom-up factors in the processing of galant schemata and their formal organisation (Byros 2015). The resultant skeleton of core scale-degrees in Mozart's phrase creates an analytical rabbit-duck problem, and stresses the way in which Mozart realises or subverts the schematic expectations associated with the sentence prototype, the Prinner, and a related surface formula (Rom 2009). A considerably expanded version of this research project has been published by the *Journal of Music Theory* (Rabinovitch 2018).

Keywords

Figured Bass, Partimenti, Historical Pedagogies, Musical Form.

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