



Gamut: Online Journal of the Music Theory Society of the Mid-Atlantic

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 3

July 2009

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Recommended Citation

Gopinath, Sumanth (2009) "Diversity, Music, Theory, and the Neoliberal Academy," *Gamut: Online Journal of the Music Theory Society of the Mid-Atlantic*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/gamut/vol2/iss1/3>

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DIVERSITY, MUSIC THEORY, AND THE NEOLIBERAL ACADEMY*

SUMANTH GOPINATH

I. QUALIFYING EXAM AND RACIAL DIFFERENCE

It was 8:00 a.m. on a Wednesday morning, late in August of 2000. I, like the two other graduate-student theorists in my cohort in Yale University's Department of Music, had just picked up the "tonal" part of my qualifying exam, for which I was to produce a Schenkerian sketch of a piece and write a short paper explaining the analytic decisions I'd made. I was to choose one of two pieces: a Schumann impromptu on a theme by Clara Wieck, op. 5/3 (1833), or a Brahms song, "Der Gang zum Liebchen" [The Path to the Beloved], op. 48/1 (1859–62). I selected the Brahms song (reproduced in the Appendix), the simpler piece, believing that it would give me more time to produce a better sketch and explanatory essay. *Bad idea #1.*

At that time, qualifying exams were still based solely on the shibboleths of the Yale music theory Ph.D. program in its heyday: Schenker, set theory/post-tonal theory, and history of theory.¹ Had I then fully appreciated the significance of the qualifying exam as an initiatory

* I would like to thank Kofi Agawu, David Damschroder, Matthew McDonald, and Ken Suzuki for their helpful comments and suggestions on aspects of this paper.

¹ For an authoritative treatment of this development and its underappreciated debt to the theoretical and institutional legacy of Paul Hindemith, see Allen Forte, "Paul Hindemith's Contribution to Music Theory in the United States," *Journal of Music Theory* 42/1 (1998): 1–14. In the mid-to-late 1990s, Patrick McCreless noted that "Until recently, music theory graduate programs have centered wholly on theory-based analysis and still provide extensive training in Schenkerian analysis of tonal music and in some version of pitch-class set theory and twelve-tone theory for atonal and twelve-tone music, respectively" (McCreless, "Rethinking Contemporary Music Theory," in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997], 18). This was still certainly the case in the late 1990s and early 2000s at Yale. Some of the priorities of the new field of American music theory were set out in Allen Forte's programmatic essay, "Schenker's Conception of Musical Structure," *Journal of Music Theory* 3/1 (1959): 1–30; these included

ritual confirming an academic discipline's common sense, I might have approached the exam somewhat differently. Instead, I blithely proceeded to produce a sketch, which seemed relatively straightforward and required only one major decision: what to do about the main descent. In this two-strophe song in two sentential phrases (in which each phrase is followed by the piano repeating the sentential continuation without the voice), $\hat{5}$ was clearly prominent on the surface of the music, and a reasonably normative sketch was certainly conceivable, the outlines of which might be as shown in Figure 1. But as I kept thinking about the piece, I noticed the compound nature of its melody, and began to explore this single-mindedly, producing a three-part harmonic reduction revealing the descent to be in an *inner* voice, beginning on $\hat{3}$. The lines associated with $\hat{5}$, on the other hand, were now part of an upper-voice structure (Figure 2). *Bad idea #2*. Part of what was attractive about this rather unorthodox solution was that it did not require $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{3}$ of the *Urlinie* to be harmonized by the same structural bass note ($\hat{4}$).² While such a harmonization is perfectly legitimate according to Schenkerian practice, I found it unsatisfying, much in the way that Joel Lester critiqued the standard convention of using $\hat{5}$ in the bass to support both $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{2}$ in the *Urlinie*.³ In any case, this solution appeared to satisfy concerns primarily of my own making. And yet, had I ceased there and explained my decision making in painstaking detail, perhaps things would have turned out fine.

“constructing a theory of rhythm for tonal music” (20), “determining the sources and development of triadic tonality” (21), “gaining information about compositional technique” (22), “improving theory instruction,” and “understanding the structure of problematic modern works” (25).

² In the sketch provided here, $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{3}$ are actually harmonized by different notes in the bass (A and C \sharp , respectively), but at a middleground level, C \sharp is understood as a consonant skip prolonging the IV⁽⁷⁾ (or V⁽⁷⁾/VII) harmony.

³ See Joel Lester, “Articulation of Tonal Structures as a Criterion for Analytic Choices,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 1 (1979): 67–79; David Beach, “The Cadential Six-Four as Support for Scale-Degree Three of the Fundamental Line,” *Journal of Music Theory* 34/1 (1990): 81–99; and Joel Lester, “Reply to David Beach,” *Journal of Music Theory* 36/1 (1992): 199–207.

FIGURE 1. A hypothetical 5-line in an outer-voice reduction of the song

FIGURE 2. A 3-line interpretation of the song, based on a three-voice reduction

FIGURE 3. The song's topics: guitar/harp arpeggiations (mm. 1–4) and waltz (mm. 12–16)

FIGURE 4. Similar figuration in Chopin's C#-minor waltz, op. 64/2 (1847), mm. 33–36

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's C#-minor waltz, op. 64/2, measures 33–36. The score is in 3/4 time and C# minor. The upper staff (treble clef) features a melodic line with a 'Piu mosso' tempo marking. The lower staff (bass clef) features a rhythmic accompaniment with arpeggiated figures. Pedal markings (Ped.) and asterisks (*) are placed below the bass staff to indicate specific rhythmic patterns.

But instead of agonizing over and justifying my analytic decisions, I started to notice some interesting things going on in the piece from a semiotic perspective. *Bad idea #3.* First of all, I was struck by the topical contrast between the limpid, harp- or guitar-like arpeggiations in the first phrase and the waltz topic in the second phrase; see Figure 3. The waltz section additionally reminded me of the arpeggiated figuration and tempo increase of Chopin's C#-minor waltz, op. 64/2 (1847), with Brahms shifting the metrical emphasis of the upper-neighbor figure by placing it on beat three instead of beat one; see Figure 4.⁴

I then focused on the text (shown in Figure 5), noticing the male narrative subject's anxious tone and fears that his love (from whom he is separated and to whom he is hastily returning) will be abducted. The text began to clarify some of the topical references in the music. The simple arpeggiated texture was now clearly a nocturnal, moonlight topic—a variant of what

⁴ A. Craig Bell notes the “Slavonic dance rhythm and Chopinesque *arpeggiando* accompaniment” in the song, but does not specify more precisely to which topics he’s referring (Bell, *The Lieder of Brahms* [Darley, UK: The Grian-aig Press, 1979], 54). Anthony Burton also notes the “Chopin-like waltz in the piano part,” in the liner notes to *Brahms: Lieder*, Thomas Allen, baritone, and Geoffrey Parsons, piano (CD recording, Virgin Classics, VC 7 91130-2), [12]. Brahms set the same Bohemian folk poem (see below) on another occasion as a vocal quartet with piano in E \flat major, op. 31/3, which Michael Musgrave notes is the source of Brahms’s *Waltz*, op. 39/5, “*grazioso*” (Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994], 46–47). Noting that op. 48/1 is marked “*con grazia*,” is also in $\frac{3}{4}$, and similarly uses waltz material, we might surmise that Brahms had a general affective and social world in mind with respect to this poem. (Admittedly, the earlier setting is without a stereotypical waltz accompaniment, and its sound-world is oftentimes reminiscent of the last of the early *Ballades*, op. 10, crossed with a mostly homophonic, even hymnal vocal setting reminiscent of his works for chorus and orchestra. Indeed, the op. 31 setting evokes little of the narrative subject’s anxiety, as found in the later solo song.)

FIGURE 5. Text of song
(trad. Bohemian; German trans. Josef Wenzig, English trans. my own)

Es glänzt der Mond nieder, ich sollte doch wieder zu meinem Liebchen, wie mag es ihr gehn?	The moon shone down, I should hurry back To my sweetheart, How is she doing?
Ach weh, sie verzaget und klaget, und klaget, dass sie mich nimmer im Leben wird sehn!	Alas, she is losing hope And laments and laments That she will never see me Again while she lives!
Es ging der Mond unter, ich eilte doch munter, und eilte, dass keiner mein Liebchen entführt.	The moon went down, I hurried quickly, And hurried, so that no one Would carry off my sweetheart.
Ihr Täubchen, o girret, ihr Lüftchen, o schwirret dass keiner mein Liebchen mein Liebchen entführt!	Coo, you doves, Whirr, you breezes, So that no one will Carry off my sweetheart, my sweetheart!

Michael Cherlin has recently described as the “flowing” subcategory of moonlight topics.⁵ Likewise, the *animato* waltz material seemed to reflect the narrative subject’s anxiety, with the accelerated swirling of the waltz material taking on a phantasmagorical quality. The shift from moonlight setting to hurried agitation moved the text from a spatial to a temporal orientation, depicting the protagonist’s increasing anxiety. And yet, one could also read this poem critically. Its appeal to an urban *Bürger* like Brahms might have had something to do with a Victorian-era fantasy of rural or premodern gender relations, in which the fragility and eminent “abductibility” of the female beloved requires the immediate attention of the absent male protagonist.

⁵ Michael Cherlin, “*Mondestrunken*: Schoenberg’s Intoxicating Moonlight,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory, Baltimore, November 2007. Brahms himself uses this type of ascending, (quasi-)compound-subdivided arpeggios in his songs to figure variously the flowing of tears (“Die Kränze,” op. 46/1), gazing at springs and clouds (“Von waldbekränzter Höhe werf ich den heissen Blick,” op. 57/1), rays of light (“Strahlt zuweilen auch ein mildes Licht,” op. 57/6), opening one’s eyes to the peacefulness of the ocean (“Auf dem See,” op. 59/2), and climbing a mountain and seeing the sun shine (“An die Tauben,” op. 63/4); and sometimes it appears as transitional or fill material.

But there is even more to the story here, and the musical topics and voice leading both play a role in this particular narrative. The phantasmagorical movement associated with the waltz (a wildly popular, bourgeois dance form whose sometimes overt displays of sexuality were discussed throughout Europe within a longstanding public moral discourse)⁶ might tell us something more specific about the protagonist's fears regarding his beloved. We might imagine a latent narrative parallel to the protagonist's manifest narrative, in which his beloved—who initially inhabits a poeticized, non-urban fantasy-space of nature (under moonlight)—is relocated to an urban, bourgeois space of sexual possibility. A class-based reading might posit the narrator's fear of his beloved's potential escape from peasant rurality (as figured through the song's use of a Bohemian “folk” poem, of a type that Brahms frequently set in his *Lieder*), or even escape from a rural-to-urban migrant sociality, into the orbit of the bourgeois class itself, whether through finding a new, more prosperous suitor (a positive outcome), or through the world of urban prostitution with which Brahms was intimately familiar (a negative outcome). In this interpretation, then, we might productively misread the notion of *Entführung* (abduction), so prominent in the poem, as *Verführung* (temptation), in what would appear to be an unconscious patriarchal critique of autonomous female class mobility (through the specter of degradation, even degeneracy).

Seduced by the activity of hermeneutics, I eagerly marshaled the analytical task of my qualifying exam in the service of a Marxist-feminist interpretation of the Brahms song. I was even able to connect the voice leading of the piece to my interpretation: the steady upward drift

⁶ Here, I refer in part to personal conversations with James Hepokoski, in regards to his own work on the waltz as a socio-cultural and musical form. Also see Andrew Lamb, “Waltz (i),” in *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29881> (accessed 6 April 2009); and Francesca Draughon, “Dance of Decadence: Class, Gender, and Modernity in the Scherzo of Mahler's Ninth Symphony,” *Journal of Musicology* 20/3 (2003): 388–413.

of the vocal part, which dips downward mainly at phrase endings, seemed to be a mimetic depiction of the protagonist reining in his beloved. Being so taken with my interpretation, I did not bother to interrogate my assumptions regarding the Schenkerian sketch in preparation for the following week's oral defense. *Bad idea #4*. After I'd introduced myself and chatted a bit with the randomly assigned committee, its highest-ranking member greeted me by uttering the phrase, "I thought you were going to be more confrontational." Not seeing myself as confrontational at all, I was puzzled and didn't know how to react. To my surprise, I soon faced a great deal of criticism from the three committee members, some of whom found my interpretation to be interesting but not to the point, and at least one of whom seemed mildly offended by it. As to the Schenker sketch itself, they understandably took issue with the $\hat{3}$ -line reading and voice-leading reductions, despite what I believed to be my fairly logical reasoning. Feeling chastened, I soon found myself in the rather unusual position of being unable to speak at length about my work, let alone defend it—a bad sign in an oral exam, in which silence effectively equates with failure. I ended up failing that exam, and was the only person to do so that year. Duly embarrassed, I embarked on further studies in Schenkerian analysis, retook the exam, and finally passed it in December of that year.

Having told this story to many of my friends, I have spent a great deal of time pondering what it meant for me personally at the time, and what it might suggest more broadly about the Yale Music Department and field of music theory. On the one hand, the most obvious reading of the scenario was that I'd simply made an error of judgment—both in my sketch and with my foray into interpretation. On the other hand, the very fact that I chose to pursue such an interpretation at the very moment I was to demonstrate mastery of my putative field reveals the extent to which my identification with music theory in its established form was problematic. If there was

any aspect of music theory I did identify with, it was music semiotics—a field that had little relevance to my qualifying exam.⁷ In one sense, then, this story is one of intra-disciplinary conflict, one in which the representatives of established analytic methods served as gatekeepers to the field of music theory, while my own tentative efforts in musical hermeneutics inadvertently challenged the legitimacy of the exam itself.

And yet, this is not the whole story. For it seems clear to me that race was an inextricable factor—but not in the way one might expect. Certainly, the disciplinary smackdown by three older white men of one younger brown man could be easily read in crudely raciological terms, but I believe that would be an inaccurate assessment of the situation. I do think race mattered here, but as part of a complex story in which allegiances to newer or emergent disciplinary methodologies were linked closely to my self-conscious identity as a nascent scholar and an “outsider” to the field. Three factors might be identified that influenced my self-perception as an outsider and/or my interest in musical meaning, which seemed to be linked in my mind: (1) the role of graduate-student unionization, in which my self-appointed position as union representative of the Music Department led me to position myself as somewhat outside the department politically and socially; (2) a certain “leadership gap” in the theory program, given that the senior-most theorists, Allen Forte and Robert Morgan, were on the verge of retiring, leaving only one senior music theorist, Patrick McCreless, and a senior musicologist with

⁷ It actually did have relevance to the “history of theory” section of the exam, however. In a question posed by Robert Morgan on the evaluation of the novelty of the New Musicology, I emphasized the degree to which music theorists had asked interpretive questions for many years, with those later musicologists often paying homage to their predecessors. Edward Cone’s well-known article on the last of Schubert’s *Moments Musicaux* (D. 780, no. 6 in A \flat) is perhaps the most important example here (see Cone, “Schubert’s Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics,” *19th Century Music* 5/3 [1982]: 233–41). Lawrence Kramer expounds at length upon Cone’s interpretation of the Schubert composition in *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17–28.

significantly theoretical leanings, James Hepokoski—both of whom were of a younger generation and new to the Department, and whose methodological openness and preoccupations with cultural theory and hermeneutics left a lasting mark on all the members of my class; and (3) despite the fact that my class was unusual in being significantly—in fact, by majority—non-white, and that its white members were unusually sympathetic to Otherness in various ways, it seemed that I was the only graduate student in the department at the time invested in exploring issues of race and musical meaning as the central focus of my dissertation research. As a result of my own personal preoccupations with race and personal identity, and with the encouragement of Michael Veal—the only ethnomusicologist on the faculty at the time—as well as several faculty members in the American Studies and African-American Studies Departments, I proposed a dissertation topic on race and musical meaning whose historical and musicological orientation risked positioning me outside the bounds of music theory proper.⁸

II. DIVERSITY IN MUSIC THEORY

If the foregoing story has any relevance to broader considerations of diversity in the academy, it is in the lesson that a scholar's ethno-racial identity and research seem to be related in complex, not always easy-to-discern ways. Such realities pose troublesome questions to traditionalists who would like diversity, seen as a good for its own sake, to increase by merely maintaining the status quo as a research agenda, as well as to essentialists who believe that scholars of color will, by and large, represent their identity positions in their work.⁹ Keeping in

⁸ Sumanth Gopinath, "Contraband Children: The Politics of Race and Liberation in the Music of Steve Reich, 1965–1966" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2005). I should emphasize, however, that Robert Morgan was also very supportive of my interests—in fact, it was his suggestion that a seminar paper on race in Steve Reich's music, written for his twentieth-century theory and aesthetics course, serve as the basis for my dissertation.

⁹ These positions in current academic debates on diversity—that of diversity as good for its own sake vs. diversity as a means of transforming knowledge—are still rehearsed with regularity. For example, see John T. Rose,

mind a certain dialectic of identity and research, of *being* and *action*, I'd like to consider the following four points, two regarding the composition of the membership of the Society for Music Theory (SMT), and two considering the mental labor on which the field is based.¹⁰

1. Given that the SMT seems to be the least ethnically diverse of the disciplinary triumvirate of American music studies (i.e., theory, musicology, ethnomusicology), it is perfectly understandable that there is a continuing sense of urgency around the subject of diversity in the organization. And yet, as the primary vehicle for voicing such concerns within the society, should the SMT Diversity Committee understand diversity primarily through race and ethnicity? Past committee members have advocated for a widening of this definition, and the current one appears to be a compromise between ethno-racial diversity and diversity writ large. The present mission statement of the committee reads: "The SMT Committee on Diversity seeks to promote diversity—of race, of culture, of values, and of points of view—within the Society."¹¹ We should keep in mind that, were we to expand our definition of diversity, we should in no way intend that these different forms of identity somehow compete with or compensate for one another; an expansion of the notion of diversity would ideally increase the field's accessibility and accelerate the diversification of its composition.

2. Members of the Diversity Committee have found it difficult to obtain information regarding "diversity" (however it might be defined) in the SMT, though it appears this will be

Letter to the Editor [in response to Jennifer Delton, "Why Diversity for Diversity's Sake Won't Work," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54/5 (28 September 2007): B32], *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54/10 (2 November 2007): B21.

¹⁰ My argument here draws rather loosely from both Hegel's dialectic of being and becoming, and from arguments on identity treating determinism and decisionism as important oppositions. Two versions of the latter include Werner Sollors's notion of *consent* and *descent* in ethnic identity, and Edward W. Said's concepts of *filiation* and *affiliation* as relevant to understanding the act of criticism (see Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1986], especially 3–19; and Said, "Secular Criticism," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983]: 1–30, especially 15–17).

¹¹ From the SMT "Committee on Diversity" web page, <http://societymusictheory.org/administration/committees/diversity> (accessed 25 February 2009).

rectified shortly. But a much wider project of data collection is necessary.¹² Specifically, we need much more data on the ethnic identities of present and future music theorists, so that we can understand the backgrounds of undergraduates seeking to pursue theory professionally, as well as the backgrounds of those already in music theory as graduate students, and tenure-track and tenured faculty. Such data would allow us to get a sense of attrition rates for scholars of color and other minority status groups, in order to determine whether or not there is a “pipeline” problem within the field.

But such data would need to be supplemented by qualitative information, like interviews, oral histories, and case studies. Consider the following case from the discipline of musicology. Kenneth (or Ken) Suzuki was a graduate student in music history at Yale University in the late 1970s.¹³ Ken, a Japanese-American raised in Hawaii, did some remarkable work on intertextual relationships in Brahms’s music, in part by relying on Brahms’s intimate knowledge of Beethoven’s sketches (which was facilitated by Brahms’s friendship with Gustav Nottebohm).¹⁴ Personal circumstances ultimately led Ken to withdraw from the graduate program in music history and he soon began working in the Yale University library system. Shortly thereafter, Ken became involved in the clerical workers’ unionization drive (leading to the formation of HERE Local 34, which was certified in 1983); he now works with the Yale unions full-time.¹⁵ In his

¹² Indeed, as of January 2009, the SMT Diversity Committee (of which I am presently a member) is beginning to pursue collecting this sort of information in a more comprehensive manner. For more information, see Jeannie Ma Guerrero’s foreword to this collection of essays.

¹³ Although Ken was in the music history program, he notes that his work was “informed by the kinds of issues and methods that concerned music theorists at Yale” and that he did classwork in music theory (including Schenkerian analysis). Personal communication, 15 March 2009.

¹⁴ See Karl Geiringer, “Brahms as a Musicologist.” *Musical Quarterly* 69/4 (1983): 463–70. Marie Rule, a student of William Kinderman at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, appears to be pursuing work similar to Suzuki’s in her present dissertation project, “Johannes Brahms, Gustav Nottebohm, and the Structural Chain of Thirds.”

¹⁵ HERE is the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union.

words, the union “changed my life,” and he now looks back on his years in graduate school with wistful detachment, though he does keep up with Brahms scholarship and more recently has become interested in Hawaiian music. Now, it is not clear to me that Ken faced—or believes he felt—discrimination while in graduate school, or that this had anything to do with his withdrawal from the program. Nor can any simple conclusions be drawn from a single case; the issue needs to be understood in the aggregate. Were there analogous cases in music theory graduate programs? If so, and if they were viewed collectively, what would the historical picture of diversity in American music theory look like as a result?

3. It might seem, however, that ethno-racial diversity is not a necessary condition for the diversification of our field’s scholarly pursuits, judging from the transformation of research in the field over the past ten to fifteen years. Several prominent senior theorists, including past SMT president Thomas Christensen and current president William Caplin, have marveled in bewilderment at the field’s growing diversity. Christensen pondered in 2001: “with all its many cross currents and undertows is music theory still a truly unified and organic discipline?”¹⁶ He then claimed to identify a cohesive, if flexible “main stream” in music theory whose capacity for “self-regulation and renewal” are not in doubt. But what if the field’s diversity is merely characteristic of the crisis in knowledge production in the wake of the 1960s, a crisis that for American music theory was set in motion by the New Musicology?¹⁷ In such a context, is Christensen’s

¹⁶ Thomas Christensen, “From the President,” *Society for Music Theory Newsletter* 24/2 (2001), 4.

¹⁷ See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The End of the World As We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). The quasi-religious market fundamentalism of marginalist or neoclassical economics is apparently one exception to this tendency: though most of the tenets of orthodox economics have been critiqued by economists, the heterodox tendency within the field in the U.S. is so marginal that it has had little impact on the day-to-day purveying of orthodox economics as ideology. However, the 2008 economic crisis, which has helped to create the possibility of a mainstream revival of Keynesianism, might perhaps make a dent in the dismal science’s present disciplinary consensus. On the disciplinary crisis of musicology and the 1960s, see my essay, “The Social Movement in the New Musicology and Marxist Music Studies,” in *Interdisciplinary*

notion of the field's mainstream and its self-regulation a repressive one, in which a forced, *de facto* unity ultimately will be visited upon those who don't follow that stream?¹⁸ Perhaps we should read the growing presence of SMT members in the publications and conferences of other music subdisciplines and societies (i.e., American Musicological Society, Society for Ethnomusicology, Society for American Music, International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Society for Music Perception and Cognition, etc.) as proto-*defections* rather than as mere instances of cross-disciplinary diplomacy or dialogue. Indeed, if Christensen noted as long ago as 2000, in the wake of the "Musical Intersections" mega-conference in Toronto, that the presence of sophisticated music-theoretical concepts in other music-studies fields has become "mundane,"¹⁹ it does beg the question as to why, except out of inertia or economic imperatives, these societies still remain separate entities. Should we instead imagine a time when none of the existing subdisciplines determines and oversees research agendas, a time when these subfields would ultimately converge into a single music-studies organization? Perhaps such an arrangement, in which SMT still retained some autonomy, would ameliorate the concerns outlined more recently by William Caplin in his presidential comments, particularly the problem of "insuring . . . adequate adjudication by the many committees charged with selecting articles for publication, papers for presentation, and projects for awards and subventions" and to which we might also add refereeing in tenure and promotion cases.²⁰ And perhaps we might see such new alignments effectively taking shape in the interdisciplinary work of younger scholars and in graduate programs across the country that are tentatively moving beyond disciplinary tracks.

Studies in Musicology 5, "New Musicology," ed. Maciej Jablonski (Poznań, Poland: Poznań University Press, 2006): 73–96; and Phil Ford, "Appreciation Without Apologies," *College Music Symposium* 46 (2006): 31–44.

¹⁸ Thomas Christensen, "From the President," *Society for Music Theory Newsletter* 24/2 (2001), 4.

¹⁹ Thomas Christensen, "From the President," *Society for Music Theory Newsletter* 24/1 (2001), 2.

²⁰ William Caplin, "From the President," *Society for Music Theory Newsletter* 30/2 (2007), 3.

4. And yet, diversification in the area of knowledge is still doubtlessly needed. In looking at the composition of current research in the field, representation is perhaps the weakest in terms of our repertoires of focus. We are still locked into predominantly European and North American repertoires (primarily art music, increasingly popular music)—a fact that has been mentioned many times both within and outside the field. Despite the pioneering work of several theorists, Western music remains at the intellectual and especially pedagogical core of American music theory.²¹ Although there are a few exceptions, their efforts have not trickled down into the pedagogical practice of our field. Given that most of the theorizing of the musics of the non-Western world still takes place under the purview of ethnomusicology proper, and that music theorists are presently most familiar with Western art and popular musics, what would be the most practical way of imagining a globalized curriculum, one that would speak to students with more diverse backgrounds and mediate between historical-survey superficiality and stylistic myopia, while avoiding the problems of a “universalist” approach and teaching “world music theory”?²²

Perhaps one solution would be to focus on tonal harmony, that great colonizing force of modernity allied, in its different but related forms, to the projects of European expansion and imperialism over the course of five hundred years.²³ What would theory pedagogy look like were

²¹ Within work on African music, one may think of admirable efforts by Kofi Agawu, Willie Anku, Jeff Pressing, Jay Rahn, Martin Scherzinger, and Ruth Stone, among others. For more (including an extensive list of references), see Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xiii–xiv, and 241–57. A striking example of an attempt to combine ethnomusicology and Western music theory can be found in Jonathan Stock, “The Application of Schenkerian Analysis to Ethnomusicology: Problems and Possibilities,” *Music Analysis* 12/2 (1993): 215–40.

²² And here I disagree with YouYoung Kang’s defense of teaching traditional music theory, which seems willfully exclusionist to me given the present realities of globalization and stylistic diversification. See Kang, “Defending Music Theory in a Multicultural Curriculum,” *College Music Symposium* 46 (2006): 43–63.

²³ For an excellent treatment of this concept, see Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 1–22, especially 6–10. Geoffrey Baker, in his history of early-colonial “harmony” (including the spread of both European musical practices and European societal domination) in Cuzco, Peru, offers a sage warning to students of Western music in the colonies. “If musical notation may be included among the tools of empire, however, it is far from clear that European musical culture as a whole should be bracketed with History and Literature when considering the relations between

we to arrive at a global understanding of harmony? We might focus instead on different *regimes* of tonal-harmonic universalization, from (to grossly oversimplify here) the proto-tonal spread of Renaissance polyphony into the Western hemisphere, to the Lutheran-hymnal model that supplanted it particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the global spread of military brass bands and string-band musics that led to the formation of jazz and other Western-hemispheric dance band musics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to more recent imaginings of tonal harmony through an (even more) African-American-inflected pop/rock model.²⁴ In such a pedagogy, only four models of polyphony would be necessary, all of which exist presently, in some form or other, in theory programs: Renaissance counterpoint, Lutheran hymnody (which is essentially what we teach presently), jazz harmony, and pop/rock harmony; naturally, all of these models would need to be broadened to include the globally variegated forms of hymn styles, jazz-influenced styles, and pop/rock styles. The focus on harmony from a global perspective would both delimit the pedagogical task to a significant degree while allowing for a relatively uniform curriculum capable of accommodating a wide variety of musics selected in accordance with the availability of scores, transcriptions, and

native peoples and Europeans in colonial Latin America. To a large extent, it was indigenous elites who enabled the propagation of European music in the hemisphere. Unlike literature and history, disseminated through writing or printing, music required constant recreation through performance and could not therefore be maintained as a tool for domination by a small European elite. Native participation was essential to the consolidation of European music in a way it never was for literature or history: the written word could be imposed, but harmony could not” (Baker, *Imposing Harmony: Music and Society in Colonial Cuzco* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 248.

²⁴ The global practices of electronic dance musics and hip-hop, which often rely on unpitched ambient sounds and detuned sonic layers, might be understood both as continuing the radical harmonic-syntactical fragmentations of pop/rock harmony *and* as being potentially “post-harmonic” (though certainly not atonal or non-centric). In regards to the latter, one might argue that their sample- and collage-based syntaxes are capable of subsuming pitch-structural practices of such a wide variety so as to make harmonicity an expressive *choice* rather than a structural *necessity*. See Walter Everett, “Making Sense of Rock’s Tonal Systems,” *Music Theory Online* 10/4 (2004), http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.w_everett_frames.html; and Adam Krims, “The Hip-Hop Sublime as a Form of Commodification,” in *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics*, ed. Regula Qureshi (New York: Routledge, 2002): 63–78, especially 68–69.

recordings, and with the abilities and knowledge bases of individual instructors. This focus would also allow for an honest self-representation of the colonizing and homogenizing ideological force of Western harmony, while providing a framework within which to demonstrate hidden or unconscious resistance and self-conscious opposition to the Western frameworks themselves (through modifications, critical adoption, or outright rejection). We should remind ourselves, of course, that such a perspective would not obviate the need for courses in theories of non-Western musics, particularly the many repertoires whose structural foundations are radically different from those rooted in variants of tonal-harmonic practices. But, when operating in tandem, such courses could provide a complementary curriculum of exactly the sort that students would need in order to make sense of (and perhaps perform) a wide assortment of hybrid musical practices (of which Bollywood film music is one of many examples).

III. DIVERSITY IN THE NEOLIBERAL ACADEMY

The foregoing considerations of music theory pedagogy takes us to the heart of the bigger problems at stake when considering diversity's role in the capitalist university. For it is pedagogy that, in Patrick McCreless's terms, makes music theory a "growth industry." The bread and butter of music theory employment continues to be something that, while under attack in some contexts, still exists in stable form (especially at conservatories, perhaps less so at liberal arts colleges as YouYoung Kang has demonstrated).²⁵ Thus, even if the discipline seems in disarray research-wise, undergraduate music theory pedagogy is unlikely to disappear anytime soon, a fact that ironically provides the greatest rationale for the research-driven SMT.

²⁵ McCreless, "Rethinking Contemporary Music Theory," 33; Kang, "Defending Music Theory in a Multicultural Curriculum."

Even if the field of music theory successfully manages the problem of diversity in the midst of its own dissolution and potential reconstitution—that is, even if we get *darker*—what would that mean in the context of the present-day academy? Despite the documented rise in faculty of color across the country, universities are battling with increased intensity over the rising exchange value of melanin content in their efforts to demonstrate compliance with the now-longstanding dictates of diversity and accessibility. These marketplace battles involve big bucks: in 2005, Columbia University spent \$15 million on an initiative to hire more faculty of color, in an effort to improve on its already impressive figure of 20% nonwhite faculty.²⁶ Wealthier institutions, it appears, have the upper hand in diversifying their faculties—an assumption borne out by the efforts of elite institutions to “buy” diversity by luring renowned scholars of color with large salaries and generous perks like reduced teaching loads.²⁷ Clearly, this latter situation was not the intention of those activists who fought for “affirmative action.”

But beyond the creation of a special faculty-of-color market, the broader trend of the corporatization and neoliberalization of universities should be of greater concern to us all. Specifically, it is well known that the humanities do not fare well under new university budget models that prioritize each individual unit’s economic contribution to the whole. It may be true that there are two forms of capital on which a university runs: the cultural capital of *prestige*, enshrined both in reputations and in consumer-report evaluations like the *U.S. News and World Report* yearly rankings, and *financial income*, drawn from tuition payments, public and private research grants, patents, returns on investments, alumni donations, and, for public schools, the residue of budgetary allocations by state legislatures. But like most humanistic disciplines, music

²⁶ Ben Gose, “The Professoriate is Increasingly Diverse, but That Didn’t Happen by Accident.” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54/5 (28 September 2007): B1.

²⁷ Gose, “The Professoriate is Increasingly Diverse.”

theory has few prospects for drawing financial income independently, and so the most it can do is contribute to the prestige of the university—a rather unlikely prospect, given the historical combination of pedagogy and research that has served to marginalize the field as a site of intellectual production.²⁸

Music theory, then, promises not to fare particularly well under the neoliberal university system, which, according to Michael Denning, comprises a shift in the balance of forces between for-profit, state-funded, and religious- or other trustee-based education institutions in favor of profit making to some degree. Perhaps the most important historical marker of this shift was the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which allowed for publicly funded research to be patented and licensed for income by universities themselves. This shift has impacted the American university in at least four ways, each of which has become a major area of scholarly research by committed researchers opposed to neoliberal education: (1) the corporatization of its administrative practices, (2) the casualization of its labor force, (3) its new racial dynamics in the post-affirmative action era, and (4) its relationship to the community in which it is located.²⁹

It is hard to disagree with Cary Nelson's and Stephen Watt's claim that labor casualization is the U.S. academy's "most serious crisis."³⁰ Briefly put, casualization involves transforming relatively secure, full-time jobs into relatively insecure part-time jobs, resulting in a

²⁸ See McCreless, "Rethinking Contemporary Music Theory," 38–39. On prestige (a product of "excellence," which is itself greatly underspecified) in the university system, see Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), as well as Kevin Korsyn's comments on the subject in *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20–21.

²⁹ See Michael Denning, "The Lineaments and Contradictions of the Neoliberal University System," *Work & Culture* 2005/2 (2005), http://research.yale.edu/laborculture/documents/denning_lineaments_WC.pdf.

³⁰ Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt, *Office Hours: Activism and Change in the Academy* (New York: Routledge 2004), 29. For a useful critique, however, of ahistorical understandings of crisis to describe the present condition of the academy, as well as of restorationist dreams of the U.S. university system's postwar "golden age," see Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, "The Academic Speed-Up," *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 2/2 (1999), <http://www.cust.educ.ubc.ca/workplace/issue4/harneymoten.html>.

major cost savings on behalf of employers, in part because part-time jobs don't usually require employers to pay health benefits to employees, and because part-time jobs are typically justified by employer and employee as being temporary and supplementary, not jobs on which careers are built. The life of an adjunct is not pretty: they are routinely paid \$2000 per course, which adds up to just \$20,000 for two semesters at an extremely demanding 5–5 teaching load, without benefits or job security of any kind.³¹

The corporatization of the university and the casualization of academic labor did not happen overnight, and it took place in part because again and again tenured academics were willing metaphorically to sell their younger colleagues and graduate students down the river, as well as to give up the time-consuming burdens of faculty governance, in exchange for better salaries and more time for research. According to Nelson and Watt, academics have found themselves in a position of severely diminished institutional and bargaining power partly through the rise of academic individualism, which is marked by the figure of the “entrepreneurial faculty member,”³² and through a concomitant political apathy. Consequently, academics will need to organize collectively in different ways to ensure that universities remain spaces for academic freedom and job security, and that such freedom and security are extended to all members of the university community including adjunct faculty, graduate students, and university staff workers. Part of that collective organizing will certainly involve unionization battles, and the SMT has the

³¹ At such pay rates, adjunct faculty also rarely receive administrative support, such as offices, computers, photocopying costs, etc. Though this per-course rate may not seem especially low, a recent report notes that the average cost of an adjunct-taught course is \$1800, as opposed to \$8000 for full-time, tenure-track faculty members. The same report also mentions one adjunct faculty member who teaches “six to nine courses a semester (at about \$2,000 a course)” for a yearly income of \$25,000-\$30,000. See Kim Clark, “Does It Matter That Your Professor Is Part-Time?”, *U.S. News & World Report* (17 November 2008), <http://www.usnews.com/articles/education/2008/11/07/does-it-matter-that-your-professor-is-part-time.html>.

³² Nelson and Watt, *Office Hours*, 33.

capacity, like any other professional organization, to intervene at least on principle and affirm (or reaffirm) the rights of academics to form unions if they choose to do so.

And therein lies another reason for prioritizing unionization rights: because they will, in the aggregate, aid marginalized faculty of color. For it is well known that the lower one looks on the academic totem pole, the more diverse the faculty tends to be. Certainly this trend is well documented in the academy generally; some of the most diverse groups of faculty teach at community colleges or in part-time, adjunct positions, in part as a result of a pipeline problem (minorities earn 24% of all masters' degrees but 21% of all Ph.D.s).³³ The present ratio of tenure/tenure-track to non-tenure track faculty within music theory is not known to me, but with Joelle Welling and Cynthia Gonzales noting that roughly 20% of theory faculty were adjunct or part-time in the 1980s to late 1990s, excluding graduate students, we are probably talking about a sizable number of music theorists, likely including minorities, who could more easily pursue or consider pursuing research-oriented careers if their teaching burdens and economic insecurities were relieved.³⁴

Additionally, if collective politics might aid in increasing faculty diversity, the reverse may be true as well: that increased faculty diversity would aid in academic collective politics. A perhaps unexpected benefit in prioritizing faculty diversity, particularly with respect to underprivileged ethno-racial minority groups, is that they are statistically more likely to be politically engaged and much more likely to be interested in projects of academic community building, such

³³ Gose, "The Professoriate is Increasingly Diverse."

³⁴ Joelle Welling and Cynthia Gonzales, "The Music Theory Job Market from 1985–86 through 1997–98," *College Music Symposium* 39 (1999): 107–23. In contrast to professional music theorists, a large number of these individuals would seem to comprise the collective body of "music theory teachers," in the terminology of McCreless ("Rethinking Contemporary Music Theory," 41). In his estimation, in the late 1990s these teachers were doing quite well economically, but this may no longer be the case.

as using research to affect public policy or mentoring minority students—that is, to use their authority as academics for the betterment of their ethno-racial communities, of vulnerable academic populations more broadly, and of the university’s host community.³⁵

If increasing diversity in music theory is a good thing for its own sake, for the sake of increasing intellectual perspectives, and for increasing faculty political consciousness in the self-interest of academics as a whole, then we in the SMT have plenty of reasons for justifying diversification as the right thing to do, even if we seem to have a hard time figuring out how to do it. But the bigger question might be: why should underprivileged minorities join the SMT and pursue academic careers in music theory? Even if the field transforms intellectually into a more welcoming space for underprivileged minorities and other populations, the state of the academy in the humanities at present is so precarious that perhaps the most ethical thing to do would be to sound a warning and advise all comers to turn back while they still can. In order to avoid asking people of color to join—and thereby to diversify ornamentally—the crew of a sinking ship, we must take responsibility and begin the hard work of organizing to transform the academy into the intellectually and economically democratic space that it can and should be.

³⁵ See Stephen Cole and Elinor Barber, *Increasing Faculty Diversity: The Occupational Choices of High-Achieving Minority Students*, with Melissa Bolyard and Annulla Linders (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 140, 142–44. I want to make clear that I understand the reality of faculty-of-color activism as *historical*—i.e., due to the traditions and experiences of political struggle of persons of color—rather than normative. That is to say, I would not want such an argument to play into the tendency for faculty of color to disproportionately assume the burden of various kinds of public and university-based service work—a tendency that is frequently exploited by university administrators and faculty. Indeed, without this caveat, the argument becomes rather problematic.

APPENDIX

SCORE OF BRAHMS, SIEBEN LIEDER, OP. 48 (1859–62):

NO. 1, “DER GANG ZUM LIEBCHEN” [THE PATH TO THE BELOVED]

Con grazia

Singstimme

1. Es glänzt der Mond nie - der, ich soll - te doch wie - der zu mei - nem

Pianoforte

p

Lieb - chen, wie mag es ihr gehn?

animato

Ach weh, sie ver -

animato

p

za - get und kla - get, und kla - get, daß sie mich nim - mer im

Le - - ben wird sehn!

(Tempo I)

2. Es ging der Mond un - ter, ich eil - te doch mun - ter, und

p

Red.

eil - - te, daß kei - ner mein Lieb - chen ent - führt.

animato
Ihr

animato
p

Täub - chen, o gir - ret, ihr Lüft - chen, o schwir - ret, daß kei - ner mein

Lieb - chen, mein Lieb - chen ent - führt!
Deutsch v. Jos. Wenzig.

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of a special forum titled "Ethnic Diversity in Music Theory: Voices from the Field." It begins with a narrative description of the author's qualifying exam in tonal analysis for the Ph.D. program in music theory at Yale University. During the exam, which he failed, the author produced a hermeneutic interpretation of Brahms's song "Der Gang zum Liebchen," op. 48/1. The author then uses this experience as a point of departure from which to reflect upon issues of racial/ethnic diversity within Anglo-American music theory. Navigating between racial

essentialism and race-blind universalism, the author offers critiques of statements by the Society for Music Theory (SMT) Diversity Committee, of official statements by the SMT leadership on diversity, and of the primarily Western musical orientation of current theory pedagogy. The article ends by situating academic diversity issues within the economic structure of the neoliberal university.



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This article uploaded to the [Gamut](#) site on 1 July 2009.