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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2026-2871> and Howell, Tim (2016)
Imagined Structures: Creative Approaches towards Teaching
Musical Analysis. In: Haddon, Liz and Burnard, Pamela, (eds.)
Creative Teaching for Creative Learning in Higher Academic Music
Education. London, Routledge, pp. 153-167

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Imagined structures: creative approaches for musical analysis

Mark Hutchinson and Tim Howell

Music analysis can be quite a troublesome subject within university-level music teaching. Some students gravitate to it naturally and get a lot out of it from the very beginning; others struggle to engage with it, finding its technical challenges taxing but also experiencing difficulties in relating it to the rest of their musical activities. Analysis is often seen as a kind of musical ‘All-Bran’ – undoubtedly very worthwhile, and good for overall well-being, but often rather unpleasant and difficult to swallow (definitely an acquired taste). Indeed, sometimes it can seem well-nigh indigestible. We argue here that this difficulty arises above all from a problem of epistemology, the tendency to view analysis as distinct from other musical activities, a musical ‘science’ that requires a different set of skills. No rigid separation can be made between analytical practice and analytical teaching in this regard: teaching analysis creatively necessarily means teaching creative analysis – where ‘creative’ here is taken in its literal sense as ‘involving an act of creation’. This is the basis of the viewpoint outlined here.

For Tim Howell, joining the academic staff of the Department of Music at the University of York, UK in 1986, the strong emphasis on practical activities – especially performance and composition – presented a particular challenge: how to make analysis approachable and useful to students. For his part, Mark Hutchinson was naturally drawn towards this field as an undergraduate at York in 2005; yet he has also encountered, throughout his time as a PhD student as well as in his teaching thereafter, students who feel that their analytical skills are inadequate. What is striking is just how this sense of inadequacy is perceived. The most frequent comment about music analysis made by students is that they would really like to understand it better, and they feel it would benefit their overall musicianship, but they’re ‘just not very good at it’. And this is a feeling that has persisted for many,

even though the UK A-level courses and ABRSM theory exams that many students have taken will already have introduced them to the basics of analytical thought.¹

This situation is a classic example of the way in which particular conceptions of knowledge can lead to very different kinds of teaching. Pamela Burnard (2012) notes that the concept of musical creativity has often been treated as if it were something monolithic, bound up with the ideal of the composer-hero, when in reality there is a vast field of different musical ‘creativities’, varied acts of creation and re-creation arising as social and cultural systems interact with individual preferences and talents. The same is true of the ideas underpinning the teaching of theory and analysis: these are often bound up with a monolithic concept of musical knowledge as an objective ‘science’, with little recognition of the mediated character of all music. As a result, students often measure their analytical abilities against a formulaic and unyielding standard, emphasising the absorption and regurgitation of prefabricated musical ‘facts’. Yet, on the contrary, the academic field of music analysis is increasingly dominated by approaches which place *emphasis* on creativity and fresh connections above strict adherence to pre-established theoretical frameworks.² Encouraging students to think about music theory and analysis in new, more flexible ways thus not only helps help them to see the skills they already have and how they can develop them; it also prepares them for further academic study.

The vision: creative musical analysis

The idea of ‘creative’ musical analysis may at first seem rather unlikely. Creativity in music is most often associated with the act of composition and the (arguably,

¹ A-levels are the most common qualification in the UK (with the exception of Scotland) for students leaving education aged 18, or preparing to go to university. Although syllabuses vary by exam board, an A-level in Music generally includes an introduction to music theory and analysis. The ABRSM (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music), an international exam board offering a range of independent musical qualifications, administers a number of music theory examinations which form many pupils’ first systematic experience of music theory and analysis.

² See for example Guck, 2006; Dubiel, 2004; and Samson, 1999.

somewhat re-creative) activity of performance. But as soon as composers and performers begin to *think* about their artistic endeavours they are, at a most fundamental level, starting to analyse. If musical analysis is to be appreciated and valued as a creative process within an active and practical community of musicians it must, first and foremost, be seen to have relevance. The common denominator for performers, composers and (analytical) thinkers is the listening process: all musicians engage with the perception of sound. Analysis therefore must have direct connections with the listening process – it is a quest for understanding – and its starting point should be an instinctive and emotional reaction to hearing a piece of music. From this subjective, collective experience, trying to rationalise that response, outlining the compositional means that engender these effects, is what *musical* analysis aims to achieve. This of course implies a thought process that is essentially interpretative, rather than definitive; it offers a particular listening strategy which, despite gathering evidence to support its particular view, is merely one amongst many. Just as a single piece of music may be subject to a variety of interpretations in performance (indeed, that diversity is positively welcomed), so too is any open-minded analytical discussion. It also has a productively cyclic quality – analytical observations feed back into the listening process – as we may hear additional qualities upon re-listening.

‘Creative musical analysis’, as it is defined here, thus involves a reconfiguration of the relationships between the different elements of musical activity, as illustrated in Figure 1. In the ‘closed’ perspective shown in Figure 1a), all forms of musical activity are seen in terms of a single, fixed musical work (or, in the case of music theory, a fixed set of musical patterns deriving from such works): behaviours such as composition, performance or analysis are seen as active, in that they involve some degree of conscious decision-making and/or interpretation, whilst the process of hearing a work (for an audience-member) or initially learning it (for a

performer) is more about passive absorption.³ Even putatively active behaviours are in this model subject to the limitations imposed by the view of the musical work as fixed, above all by the intention of the composer or a scientific conception of the ‘rules’ of a musical language. By contrast, Figure 1b) shows an ‘open’ perspective: here, the focus is not on any fixed product but rather on a collection of interacting *processes*, each of which is equally active and equally capable of creating something new. The arrows illustrate the cyclical relationships that connect each kind of musical activity: composers are informed in their work by their own listening and performance; performers use their listening and analytical reflections to generate fresh interpretations; listeners, responding to their own analytical or compositional work, are empowered to hear music in new ways.

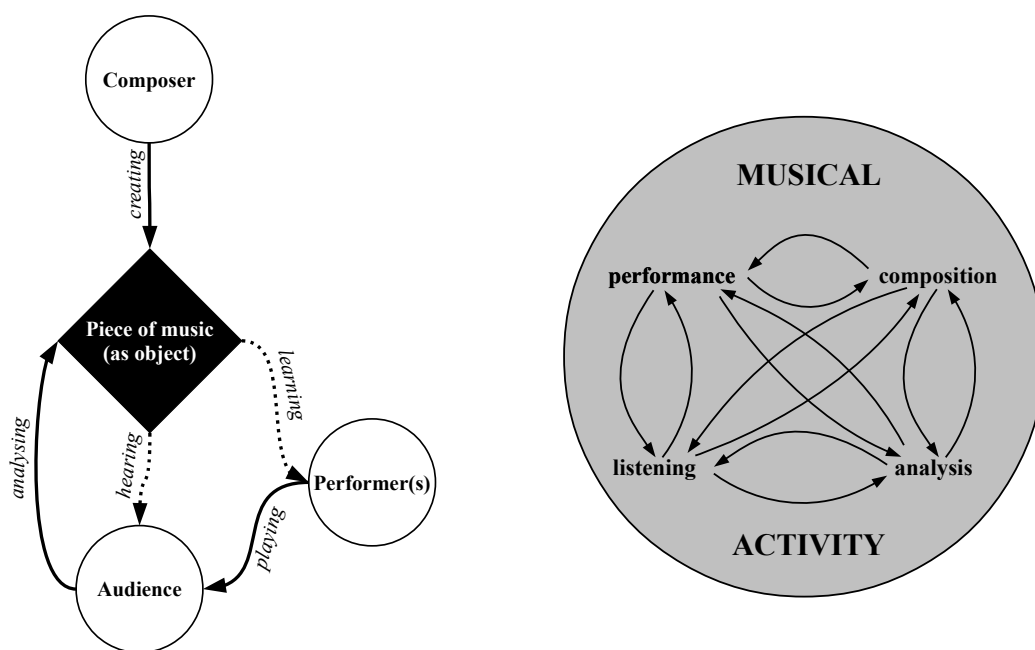


Figure 1. a) closed and b) open models of musical activity.
Dotted and solid connectors indicate passive and active engagement respectively.

³ A more extreme version of this viewpoint might consider even the composer to be a purely passive receptacle of inspiration, as in Stravinsky's famous claim that 'I am the vessel through which *Le Sacre [du printemps]* passed' (Stravinsky & Craft, 1962: 147–8).

Analysis is about asking questions. It transforms the potentially passive process of listening into something highly active. Students are asked to move beyond compositional details and relate them to a whole, to develop critical awareness, to engage with a process of understanding. Nicholas Cook puts it as follows:

It is at undergraduate and college level, not as an instrument of advanced research, that analysis seems to me to have its most vital role to play in today's musical culture. It has this role because the ability to set aside details and 'see' large-scale connections appropriate to the particular musical context, which is what analysis encourages, is an essential part of the musician's way of perceiving musical sound.' (Cook, 1987: 232)

Facing the indigestible: student expectations

The model of 'creative musical analysis' outlined above is rather distant from the expectations of many undergraduate students. The perception of analytical topics as worthy but rather unpleasant remains remarkably persistent. Historically, there have been two main factors that account for the 'difficulty' that some students experience when analysing music at University. (Interestingly enough, they both persist and have done so for some considerable time.) A perception that 'analysis' is description: a detailed, painful, blow-by-blow inventory of the succession of events that make up a piece of music – nothing more than a running commentary. This is, and stubbornly remains, the most common experience that students have endured before starting a degree. They find this to be incredibly boring for one simple reason: it is boring! At the other end of the spectrum is a rather dauntingly academic approach: the Schenkerians, Set-theoreticians and Semioticians (to select the most alliterative of their number). These adopt a quasi-scientific manner, publishing treatises of charts and tables in an overwhelming array of technical data; all this is painstakingly couched in language of alienating complexity. So you have a straight choice: analysis

can be boring or bewildering. The teaching of creative musical analysis must address issues of tedium and alienation: it needs to be enlightening.

At the beginning of an introductory analysis course which has been running for several years at York, students are asked how they would define analysis. A few representative examples give a flavour of their responses; for them, analysis means:

To look into the different components of a piece to see how they fit together and make the piece work as a whole.

The study and critique of music from an objective point of view.

The breaking down of a piece of music and looking at the way it has been written, in order to gain a greater understanding of the music.

Going through the record of responses from the last few years, there is a striking consistency about the definitions students come up with. They return overwhelmingly to a few central principles. Firstly, analysis is all about *segmentation*. It involves taking pieces of music and 'splitting them up' into their constituent parts. This might mean marking out the main 'sections' of a piece, or it could mean taking individual musical elements such as harmony, rhythm, melody, or instrumentation and describing each in isolation. Secondly, analysis is a kind of *second-hand composition*. It serves as a way of reconstructing the compositional process of a piece, possibly with the intent of understanding the composer better or of justifying the status of the resultant work within a canon of 'masterpieces' (by showing how it is innovative or ahead of its time). Thirdly, and most tellingly, analysis is seen as offering the possibility of *rational, objective understanding* beyond any other kind of musical engagement: students repeatedly talk about explaining 'how the music works', gaining a 'deeper understanding', and almost always define analysis as 'detailed study' first and foremost.

These features, and especially the last, give us a hint of the kind of perspectives that might underpin these definitions. Underneath them all is the assumption that analysis is a kind of musical 'science', which offers clear-cut answers that go beyond the perceived subjectivity of normal performance and composition: it allows you to understand the basic building blocks of which pieces

are made, and the processes by which these units interact and develop. There's an underlying idea that unless you can break up a piece into all its constituent elements and show how they work at an abstract level, you don't really understand it 'properly', even if you can play it beautifully or listen to it appreciatively and enthusiastically. And the flip side is the assumption that once you can trace all these internal relationships, then you *do* 'understand' the piece, and you don't really need to do anything else – perhaps not even listen to it anymore.

Frameworks, classifications, recipe books?

These perceptions of analysis don't come from out of nowhere, of course – they often carry over very easily from students' study prior to university. A lot of early engagement with analysis – through theory grades and A-level work – can be described as the acquisition of a framework of objective knowledge about 'the rules of music' in various eras. This might involve discussions of the 'grammar' of music – cadences, phrase-structure, and other ways of segmenting a piece; it might involve a kind of musical 'taxonomy' – using particular stylistic features to categorise pieces by period or genre; and it might even involve elements of composition such as pastiche, so long as these serve primarily to demonstrate and reinforce students' understanding of the analytical rules. All these facets of analysis are important and should not be denigrated; they are crucial elements in developing general musical awareness. But they are all at the level of technique – what we might call analytical 'craft'; although they are very useful tools for thinking about music, they carry with them a particular viewpoint of the purpose, method and limits of analytical thought. The implication is that 'being good at analysis' is above all about absorbing a large collection of musical 'facts' which we can then retrieve and apply on demand.

But by this definition it is also quite clear why so many students might feel both that they 'ought to' be good at analysis, but also that they 'just aren't'. On the one hand, portraying music theory as a kind of science makes its mastery very

desirable for a conscientious student: after all, who wouldn't want to feel that they 'really understand' the pieces they play in a verifiable, objective way? It is thus not surprising that a student might feel that they are somehow 'inadequate' when they cannot produce a comprehensive harmonic analysis of a Chopin prelude, even though they can play it beautifully or listen to it with deep engagement. On the other hand, analytical skills can appear unattainable (or at least, impractical to attain) because this viewpoint places them as something quite disconnected from day-to-day musical activity, and requiring a completely different approach to learning.

It is perhaps this sense of separation between analysis and other kinds of musical activity that is the most problematic aspect of this viewpoint. If one of the primary intentions of the university experience is to encourage a more *integrated* and critical approach to knowledge, then this must have a knock-on effect here. In many ways, it would be easy to structure an introductory analysis course primarily as a kind of 'recipe book' of different techniques to be acquired – each of which could be listed clearly as SMART⁴ learning outcomes, and explicitly assessed at the close of the course. There is certainly no shortage of different analytical techniques which could be seen as fodder for this, each with its own vocabulary, appropriate repertoire, collection of techniques and set of 'rules' to which we might expect pieces to conform. But taken by itself, this kind of 'recipe' approach leaves little room for creativity except in the narrowest possible sense – the kind of creativity required to make a piece fit neatly into a particular analytical framework.

A problem of epistemology

At root, it seems that that these problems are specifically related to the *kinds* of knowledge that students expect analysis to produce. As Nicholas Cook has pointed out, any claim to present some kind of knowledge or truth about music is necessarily

⁴ 'SMART' is acronym used to enumerate aspects of successful objectives within management and education: they must be *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant* and *Time-bound*. See, for example, Skrbic and Burrows (2015).

underpinned by a particular epistemology – a particular view of ‘what sort of truth it aspires to’ (Cook, 2002: 78). The trouble is that the viewpoint of analysis held by many students, as primarily a repository of objective ‘facts’ about music, links it to a category of truth which is fundamentally about reproducing existing data, rather than about creating new experiences or responses. This marks it out as something quite different from most other musical arenas, where ‘hard’ facts about performance technique or compositional methods are always counterbalanced by issues of expression, inspiration, and instinct in ways that open up possibilities for fresh acts of artistic creation. In other words, it ignores the interpretative qualities of other musical activities. This problem is very aptly summed up by another student’s rather wry (and very creative!) definition:

Analysis is akin to performing an autopsy on a murder victim, and then reconstructing the corpse with complete precision.

Finding fresh approaches to the teaching of music analysis means first of all expanding our conception of what it is that analysis can tell us, and how we might go about doing it. Where student views of analysis (as outlined below) tend to emphasise its status as a process of dissection, parasitic on other musical activities, a view of it as creative – that is, serving to create new experiences and artistic responses – allows it to be rehabilitated within the wider community of musical activity.

Analysis in practice: listening, questioning, exploring

Two short analytical case studies will help to explore how this might work out in practice. The first is based around a few bars of a short piece of recent classical music, a study entitled ‘Arc-en-ciel’ from the first book of piano études by the Hungarian composer György Ligeti (1923–2006). Contemporary music can be a very useful arena to explore some of these issues, because it often challenges existing analytical frameworks anyway, so there’s perhaps less temptation to settle for rigidly factual models of musical knowledge – it can force us to rethink what we are

actually trying to do when we ‘do’ analysis. It is useful to see what happens here when we take a rational, segmentation-based analytical approach to its logical extreme and look just at the opening of the score (Ex. 1).

Andante con eleganza, with swing, ♩ ca. 84 *)

p dolce, con tenerezza, sempre legato, molto espressivo

con ped.

molto espr.

sub. p *poco cresc.* *- - - sub. p* *cresc.* *- - - mf*

Ex. 1: Ligeti, ‘Arc-en-ciel’, bars 1–6

Trying to get some straightforward analytical ‘facts’ from this piece is a bit like trying to nail jelly to the wall. We could begin by taking individual elements in turn. Starting with rhythm, we might try and establish the underlying metre, and the basic unit of pulsation; but that doesn’t work – the dotted barlines suggest that each hand has its own metre, and it’s hard to tell whether the pulse is in semiquavers, quavers or crotchets (or even dotted crotchets). Or we could try and split it into melodic phrases: the slurs at the start help at first, but quite quickly it starts getting blurry again (and it’s also difficult to tell what’s melody and what’s

accompaniment). Or we could look at the harmony; but again, on sight, we can't even take the basic step of categorising this piece as tonal or atonal – it seems to be full of triadic material, but it's all piled together seemingly haphazardly, with no clear cadences or sense of harmonic syntax. (We could sidestep this by calling it 'non-functional harmony', but that's just putting a name to an absence – it just makes us feel better about our inability to tell what's going on by giving us a word to describe the situation.) So essentially, we seem to be stuck.

If we take a step back though, and rid ourselves of the necessity to begin by building up clear analytical 'facts', we find other ways of approaching this work, particularly those that focus on our experience of it as listeners. We could start by thinking about the title, which is 'Arc-en-ciel' – the French term for rainbow. Before even hearing this piece, this evokes a certain character. Rainbows are colourful but evanescent, and perhaps bittersweet (since they come from the combination of sun and rain). They are awe-inspiring, but in a very different way from vast or terrifying natural events such as thunderstorms or earthquakes. Their effect is much more delicate, but they are still miraculous in the way they seem to defy gravity and come from nowhere. So we now have a collection of expectations that might inform our experience of this piece. The next thing to do is to listen to the music, and see if this gives any further clarity.⁵

Listening to this opening, it fits with several of these expectations – it does seem bittersweet, delicate and evanescent, shimmeringly coloured, and somehow 'weightless'. So there are certain very distinctive expressive qualities it conjures up which invite further exploration. Analysis can help in this process. Going back to our previous observations, several which seemed frustratingly ambiguous at the time now fit very well. The difficulty of rhythmic segmentation actually demonstrates a carefully-achieved sense of continuity here: the very slow tempo means that it is

⁵ Those seeking a recommended recording are directed towards Pierre-Laurent Aimard's superlative performance on Sony Classics (SK 62308). A snippet of this recording was included in the original conference paper upon which this chapter is based; the awestruck silence that followed the extract confirmed, for us, the importance of listening as the basis of all analysis.

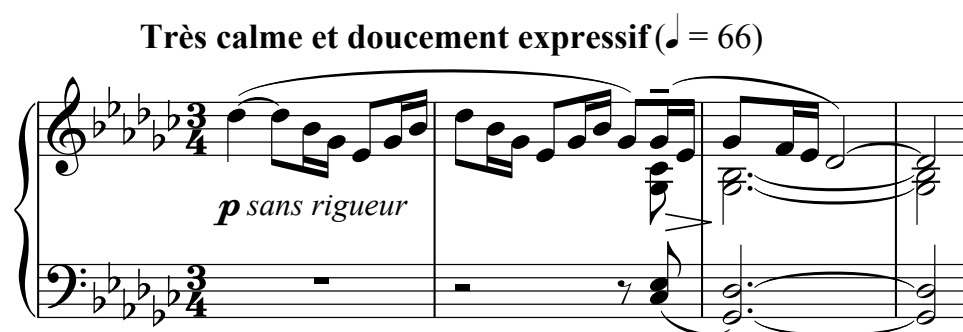
always unclear whether semiquavers or quavers constitute the basic pulse, and the different metres of the two hands mean that we are constantly caught in a kind of slow-motion cross-rhythm – this sense of suspended time is a large factor in the feeling of weightlessness that is present in this opening. The ambiguity of the harmonies produces a similar effect: each hand moves constantly between different triadic sonorities, so that we as listeners find ourselves constantly having to reorientate our expectations of what's coming next. There is very rarely any clear sense of key, but equally, it never becomes so dissonant that we can only hear it in purely atonal terms (although listeners are likely to find that their experiences vary in this respect). Instead, it presents a constant shuffling between keys – as if we were traversing the harmonic spectrum in the same shimmering, unstable way that a rainbow traverses the colour spectrum.

This train of thought could be continued for some time, but hopefully the purpose of the example is clear by now. Once we shift our mindset from one which is focussed upon fact-finding to one which is based upon questioning and reflecting upon our experience, details of the piece which were previously seen as obstacles become meaningful and important parts of its character, and there is a sense that the analytical work we do begins to relate more clearly to other aspects of our musical activity. Thinking in this way can actually help us to enjoy this piece more, and it is clear too that a performer could benefit from some of these insights as they think about what elements they might emphasise in playing the piece. It should be stressed, of course, that there is nothing 'certain' about this analysis: there has been no definitive explanation of 'how this music works', and indeed it is quite likely that some readers will find their own listening experience totally at odds (in one respect or another) with that just described, and may consequently disagree with some of the details that have been drawn out. But that is the point – we *cannot* build a conclusive 'explanation' for a piece like this, and there is no real reason why we should try to. But what analysis *is* really good at is helping us to ask meaningful

questions about our own experience, and to connect that experience with the other things we do as musicians.

Rehabilitating analysis: Debussy and Brahms

A further case study of a short piano piece by Debussy (with reference to another by Brahms) illustrates ways in which this approach could be developed further, allowing more traditional analytical vocabulary – which has often been associated with ‘indigestible’ views of the subject – to be rehabilitated as an integral part of this fruitful questioning process. It also helps us to clarify the sometimes problematic boundaries between description and analysis in university music teaching. Debussy’s prelude ‘La fille aux cheveux de lin’ is a small-scale, self-contained musical structure – but typically not one that adheres to any traditional formal prototype. (Space only permits an overview here, but you are encouraged to track down a score and listen or play through the piece at this point.) Segmenting naturally into phrases allows immediate observations of the extent to which this succession of elements stems from the compositional potential of its initial statement.



Ex. 2: Debussy, ‘La fille aux cheveux de lin’, opening

Ex. 2 shows that the opening gesture and the simple pentatonicism of its first four pitches offers harmonic ambiguity between possible G[♭] major or E[♭] minor triads, with the rhythmic shaping and metrical stress of this arpeggiation favouring G[♭] as the prevailing centre. The plagal cadence is remarkably affirmative in this regard, begging the fundamental question of any analysis: why? By noting that its C[♭]-major sonority is merely an extension of the descending-thirds sequence so far, now

presented simultaneously, with horizontal continuity manifest here as vertical colour, the cadence is merely a further stage in a process of intervallic unfolding. It also establishes a basic principle: harmony emerges from linear considerations and is not governed by traditional functional logic.

By placing these observations alongside another piano work that derives its materials from descending thirds chains – but in a totally different way – the value of analytical commentary in the service of historical and stylistic awareness is evident. Ex. 3 shows the opening four-bar phrase of Brahms' Intermezzo in B minor (Op. 119, No. 1 of 1892). Despite the blurred sound world of overlapping chains of thirds, the underlying harmonic succession (shown in the reduction here) is a cycle of fifths: B – E – A – D – G – C# – F#. Indeed, given all the attendant ground-bass (*passacaglia*) associations that so interested Brahms at this time, this sequence has resonances with music from the Baroque era, so a range of historical and stylistic issues come into play. More immediately, though, the harmonic language is functional and goal-directed in its organisation.

Adagio

B E A D G C# F#

**Ex. 3: Brahms, Intermezzo in B minor, Op. 119, no. 1, opening,
with reduction of cycle of fifths harmonies**

Returning to the Debussy, we now have a greater appreciation of his novel harmonic construction – concepts of ‘colour’ rather than function and tonal/harmonic ambiguity – while understanding that it has a logic all of its own. It is possible to follow through each phrase of the piece in turn (some 10 of them in total), demonstrating how each exploration builds upon features of its predecessor in a process of variation and growth that culminates in the climax (of bars 21–23), a moment identified in any instinctive response to the piece as significantly striking. Although there is insufficient space to follow through all the detail here, just a couple of larger points will help to draw things together. The idea of harmonic divergence – the establishment of centres that stand in contrast to the prevailing G \natural major of the piece – is worth outlining. Through class discussion that collects detailed observations of the content of each phrase, encouraging students to engage directly with the process, a consensus emerges: an emphasis on E \natural major in bar 6 (a return to G \natural by the end of phrase III perhaps confirming a point of formal articulation by way of recurrence). The next contrasting centre is that C \natural major (bar 16) with all its associations from the generative plagal cadence of the opening, setting up the notion of correspondences between local- and large-scale events. The climax point of the piece offers a (somewhat modal) cadential assertion of A \natural major (bars 22–23), after a considerable degree of E \natural (dominant) preparation (over bars 19–21).

Enough description – though this is information-gathering that any group can engage with when asked to outline the events of the piece as they unfold. For many students, of course, this kind of detailed observation is what they consider ‘analysis’ to be. Having collected that information through student input, ensuring some kind of engagement in the process, making sense of this activity is a crucial next step. It can be almost revelatory for students simply to stand back and take stock, not merely noting what has happened and how, but asking: *why*? This full sequence of cadentially established centres is as follows: G \natural (bar 3) – E \natural (bar 6) – C \natural (bar 16) – A \natural (bars 22 and 23). By playing these tonal centres as a succession of notes on the

keyboard (and you are encouraged to do this for yourself!) their origin is immediately (and aurally) apparent. As a transposed version of the opening melodic shape – a gesture shown to be the generator of successive events – we can see, hear, understand and imagine its large-scale, structural ramifications.

The idea that analytical discovery can generate a new perspective on the music in question emerges forcefully here. Engaging with creative analysis reveals ‘the meaning of the obvious’ by deriving it from what is hidden. An obvious, surface, melodic chain of thirds gains meaning when we realise that it is being subtly projected – hidden – in terms of a background sequence of harmonic centres. By understanding how one such pattern is derived from the other, our immediate and instinctive reactions, that ‘La fille aux cheveux de lin’ is a satisfying, coherent and well-constructed piano piece – and one that moves to a point of climax in a particularly effective and affecting manner – can be rationalised and understood. (For those who like to take things to a more theoretical level, that point of climax – in terms of the tonal resolution of the piece – is at the Golden Section of the work.)⁶ The final stages of the piece, after its climactic focal point, retrace this sequence of thirds in order to return to the G \natural tonic.

What next? Strategies for creative teaching

In closing, it is useful to consider some of the more general implications this kind of attitude might have for developing students’ understanding of music analysis as a fundamentally creative activity and the ways in which this understanding might feed fruitfully into other important topics within university music studies. There is no simple ‘solution’ to the issues discussed here, of course; nonetheless, there are important consequences from our suggestion that creative analytical teaching

⁶ The piece is 39 bars in length, so the point of GS would be $39 \times 0.618 = \text{bar } 24.1$ (the moment when the opening material makes a significant formal return); however, the tonal resolution of the piece – a final cadence into G \natural major – occurs at bar 36 (the last three bars merely decorate this gesture). The GS of 36 (36×0.618) is bar 22.2 – the exact moment of the A \natural major climax, reaffirmed in bar 23.

necessarily involves rethinking the role of creativity *within* analysis. Creative techniques for teaching are not enough; what is needed are approaches that help students to develop their own creative practices. A starting-point for these approaches is provided by the numerous principles of creativity outlined by Robert Sternberg and Wendy Williams in their book *How to Develop Student Creativity* (1996); four of their principles are particularly relevant in this context.

The first principle they give is to *model creativity*. This demonstrates the role that can still be played by quite traditional lecture formats in teaching of this kind. Since students beginning their university careers tend to have quite a constrained idea of the practice of analysis, if we just give them more techniques and then send them off to practice them, we are likely to find that they continue to apply these techniques in a narrow way, continuing and reinforcing their prior understanding of analysis as a kind of ‘dissection’ rather than a potential act of fresh artistic creation. It is not enough simply to tell them that they should try and be ‘creative’ in using methods; we need to show them how the cyclic creativity outlined above works in practice. One helpful approach is to demonstrate analytical techniques not only using pieces which ‘work’ very easily with them (as in the Debussy example above) – the kinds of archetypal set works one might come across in an A-level textbook – but also deliberately choosing some problematic pieces to talk about, such as the Ligeti case study discussed earlier. This gives the opportunity for lecturers to model the ways that these pieces might force us to think beyond any specific analytical method.

Another important principle is to *tolerate ambiguity*. This is something that came across very clearly in the Ligeti case study; it seemed impossible to avoid ambiguous answers when approaching the piece analytically, and yet this ambiguity ended up telling us a lot about the aural effect of the piece, and how this might fit with some of the resonances of the title. One (perhaps somewhat cruel) way to help students think about this is to set them unanswerable questions. One session on

'Arc-en-ciel' involved students being split into buzz-groups to discuss different features of the piece; one group was asked to decide whether it was in 6/8 or 3/4, with the result a minor argument, because one student thought it was clearly in 3/4 and another was adamant it wasn't. Further discussion of this situation, as a class, provided a good opportunity to talk about how this ambiguous feature of the piece might actually tell us something important in its own right.

Connected with this is the idea that creativity involves *questioning assumptions*. It is important for students to recognise as early as possible that any theoretical construct they learn is only a structured set of metaphors for understanding music in a particular way – if it doesn't fit well with a particular piece of music, it is open to being challenged, altered, or rejected. One way of putting this into practice is to set up conflicts between selected pieces and particular analytical frameworks. For example, students might spend a session thinking about what it means to state that a piece is 'tonal', by looking at a work such as Howard Skempton's *Lento*, which is made entirely of triads, but contains no functional cadences and none of the other trappings we would associate with the 'syntax' of tonality. The result of this is that we are forced to question the assumption that something which sounds like it has triads in must therefore be tonal (or, indeed, to question our assumption that 'tonality' is a single, clearly-defined phenomenon at all). Even the Debussy case study, despite the 'traditional' sounding surface of this music – or indeed, maybe because of it – raises issues of ambiguity (of form, tonality, harmony and texture).

Sternberg and Williams also encourage us to *cross-fertilise ideas* in our teaching, by making connections between different subjects and disciplines. Again, within music theory and analysis, the obvious application of this is to make connections with performance and with composition, and there are lots of ways we might do this. Ever since Berry (1989), there has been a recognised sub-discipline of 'analysis and performance' with music analytical/theoretical circles, and a burgeoning literature on the subject has followed on from this. A significant part of

that trend is Nicholas Cook's perceptive account of the whole analysis-performance area within a new-musicological agenda (see Cook, 1999), which summarises these issues well. In fact, he makes reference to a chapter by Tim Howell (1992), which drew on the direct experience of working in the Music Department at the University of York which specialises in practical music making, and rather brings us back to where we started. Cook highlights the following:

in Howell's words, 'The role of analysis in this context is one of raising possibilities rather than providing solutions' (1992: 709). Yet another way of saying the same thing is that analysis contributes as process not as product which is why, as Howell says, 'Reading someone else's analysis is almost the equivalent of asking them to practice on your behalf' (702). (Cook, 1999: 249)

The other growth area of creative musical analysis is that of composition and contemporary music, a field in which both authors are actively engaged.⁷ In relation to repertoire where listener instinct does not always result in understanding – where the demands of a modernist idiom challenge our perceptions – the value of adopting a more imaginative approach seems especially relevant, as the Ligeti example earlier demonstrated. In a music department like that at the University of York, with its particular emphasis on new music (both in terms of composition and performance), students who are less than familiar with this musical language, which may lack the immediacy of impact associated with traditional repertoire, can find analytical enquiry to be really useful. In any case, within analytical teaching it is important to encourage students to think about how the things they are learning might *affect* their own performance, listening or composition. It is important to realise that this is a reciprocal relationship, of course: the visceral appeal of learning a new work for performance can often lead to a desire to get a better analytical grip upon it, to gain a broader perspective on instinctive engagement – and this often suggests extra possibilities for performance, in a kind of virtuous circle. And the same could be said of composition, or, indeed, of the basic act of listening.

⁷ See, for example, Hutchinson (in press) and Howell (2011).

To conclude, then, analysis need not be perceived as musical ‘All-Bran’, even if that may have been students’ experience of it prior to their time at university. In reality, it is something that can emerge naturally out of other kinds of musical engagement, and can interact with them very profitably too. By encouraging students to think through the mindset that underpins analytical work, rather than simply giving them toolkit of ‘techniques’, we open the door for an approach that values analysis as a fresh act of creation that interacts cyclically with other disciplines such as performance and composition. In this way, analysis stops being an esoteric health food and becomes simply another part of a balanced musical diet.

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