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## Analyzing Analyses: Towards a Reconciliation of Schenkerism and Riemannism

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

Looking at the field of music theory today, there are many reasons to question whether the theoretical and methodological border between the Anglo-American Schenkerism and the Continental-European *Funktionstheorie*-tradition should continue to stand. Firstly, the mere fact that two ‘paradigms’ – two remarkably different ways of answering questions about harmony and tonality – exist simultaneously should always call for academic scrutiny. Secondly, a better mediation between the paradigms is desirable in an increasingly globalized field.

Previous comparative studies (e.g. Silberman 1949; Federhofer 1981; 1989; Christensen 1982; Redmann 1996) tend to overlook or de-emphasize the crucial difference between, on the one hand, Schenker’s and Riemann’s theories – their own writings – and, on the other hand, the analytical traditions they gave rise to. These shortcomings leave pertinent questions about the long-standing methodological border unanswered: What are the analytical practices in the two traditions, and what consequences do they have for the reading of a musical work?

#### Aims and repertoire studied

Taking Johannes Brahms’ Intermezzo in B minor, Op. 119, no. 1 (1893) as a point of departure, this paper examines how Schenkerian and Riemannian traditions have produced different analyses of this music, and it asks how assumptions made within the theories influence interpretations and understandings of the music – and whether they are compatible. Several analyses of the piece will be discussed, but special attention will be given to the analyses by Allen Cadwallader (Cadwallader 1982; 1983), representing the Schenkerian viewpoint, and Jens Rasmussen (Rasmussen 2011), representing the Riemannian. ‘Riemannian’ should be understood here as the post-Riemannian, monistic *Funktionstheorie*, henceforth referred to as functional theory and functional analysis.

The aim of the paper, then, is to suggest a reconciliation of traditions that takes as its starting point not the writings of Schenker and Riemann, but analytic practices emanating in the two traditions.

#### Methods

In what is essentially an analysis of analyses, the Brahms analyses are examined individually and in comparison with each other. Discrepancies and congruities between the methods and their analytical results – and the implications hereof – are discussed and a synthetic reading of the Intermezzo is suggested.

#### Implications

All of the reviewed Schenkerian analyses agree on the *Urlinie* of the Intermezzo: The *Kopftön* is 5, the first note of the Inter-

mezzo, and it is prolonged until the structural descent occurs in the very last bars. However, the analyses put different emphasis on the significance of the opening bars’ motive *f#-a-g-f#* to the entire piece. This motive is at the core of Cadwallader’s analysis: He argues that it is repeated on different structural levels in all parts of the Intermezzo, and he points to this as a ‘powerful unifying factor that integrates the structural levels as well as the successive formal units of the piece’ (Cadwallader 1983, 7).

Two aspects of Cadwallader’s analysis are particularly interesting in the current comparison with functional analyses: Firstly, Cadwallader criticizes analyses that focus only on the harmony of the opening bars. Stating that the progression is a straightforward sequence of descending fifths, he denies any harmonic ambiguity and points to the Schenkerian distinction between surface details and structural significance. Though functional analysts agree that the progression can be understood as a sequence of descending fifths, they do not consider the ambiguity an insignificant surface detail. The second aspect is Cadwallader’s assertion, that the key of D major in the Intermezzo’s B-part is a consequence of the mentioned motive: ‘[I]t is, of course, the reharmonization of the untransposed basic motive that “determines” the choice of key, not just the fact that it is a typical secondary key area for B minor’ (Cadwallader 1982, 36).

Several functional analyses – as well as fundamental bass and Roman numeral analyses – focus almost exclusively on the opening bars and the harmonic ambiguity created by the chain of descending thirds and sustained tones. Ultimately most analysts read the progression as a sequence of descending fifths. The only ones to seriously question this progression are Jonathan Dunsby (1981) and Stefan Rohringer (2013). They both argue that this sequence cannot be demonstrated in any systematic way, or that it entails an inconsistency in the level of reduction. The reason is, amongst other things, the uneven metrical distribution of the chords in the sequence. Most notable is the metrical emphasis on the fourth chord, D major.

Jens Rasmussen, who has done a functional analysis of the Intermezzo (Rasmussen 2011, 186-7 and 255-6), makes a point of this emphasis on D major. It is not only underlined metrically, but also harmonically with a short secondary cadence. In other words, there is a short but significant tonal inflection of D major very early in this B minor phrase. This tonal inflection is explicated several times: The dominant ending the first phrase resolves to a diad with the tones *d* and *f#* – the common tones of B minor and D major – and the sudden move to the key of D major in the B-part puts additional emphasis on the T-Tp (*Tonikaparallel*) relationship. Like Cadwallader, then, Rasmussen argues that the secondary key area of D major – insignificant in itself – is indeed significant to this piece, as the T-Tp relationship is explicated both harmonically and tonally.

The comparison illustrates both differences and similarities in the analytical approaches. An obvious discrepancy is

that not a single functional analysis shows the basic motive *f#-a-g-f#*. The reason is simple: Functional analysis is not a method of melodic analysis. Simple as it may be, this explanation also points to one of *the* most fundamental differences between the two traditions: The different conceptions of melody's relation to harmony. In a functional analysis there may be some relevant interrelation between melody and harmony that is taken into account, but as such, melody is considered an interrelated but distinct musical parameter. Contrary to this, the concept of *Auskomponierung* of vertical entities is a basic tenet in Schenkerian theory that puts melodic motion at the very core of harmony. Another fundamental difference is the two methods' handling of the foreground harmonic activity. 'Chord labeling' is often criticized by Schenkerians, while the careful and detailed account of harmony at the micro level is considered valuable in the functional tradition.

There are also similarities between the Schenkerian and the functional analyses of the Intermezzo. Both methods notice a focus on the B minor-D major relationship. The question arises, therefore, if it is possible (and not least relevant) to create a synthesis of the two analyses. There may be several ways to do this. One possibility is to take the Schenkerian foreground analysis as a starting point, and to ascribe functional symbols to this level (see Fig.1).

This method underlines the constant oscillation between B minor and D major, as well as other brief or extended tonal inflections that arise in the piece. Contrary to Schenkerian discourse, I do not find this chord-to-chord analysis incompatible with the hierarchic system of Schenkerian theory, in that it simply adds another and more detailed foreground level before proceeding to further reductions. Put in Schenkerian terms, then, surface details can be harmonic events at one level and contrapuntal events at another. Just like the basic motive, first presented at the surface, can acquire a work-specific significance, so can surface harmonies.

The 'Functional-Schenkerian' analysis shows both local tonal inflections, their hierarchy in the long-range progressions and its convergence with the concealed motive. The approach, tentative as it is, does not seek to be a 'universal' one; it simply underlines the methods' compatibility.

## Keywords

Musical epistemology; harmony; common practice tonality; structure; analytical theory; Schenker; Riemann

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Fig. 1. 'Functional-Schenkerian' analysis of Brahms' Op. 119/1, bars 1-8.