The Simpfonie according to Riepel

ABSTRACT

Background

Joseph Riepel’s *Anfangsgründe zur musikalischen Setzkunst* [Fundamentals of Musical Composition], published mostly between 1752 and 1768, contains some of the most detailed discussions of the Simpfonie along with a great number of examples and several complete movements. While the opening two chapters contain the most explicit references and examples, the discussion of the Simpfonie continues throughout the remaining eight chapters and provides us significant insight into Riepel’s eighteenth century compositional workshop.

Riepel’s often-quoted statement that “[…] a minuet, in its execution, is nothing but a concerto, an aria, or a Simpfonie […]” (Riepel 1752, 1), has frequently been linked to Leonard Ratner’s famous I – V : II : X – I : III structure (Ratner 1980, 209–216), which can be seen as representing the large-scale harmonic plan of classical sonata form and indeed of most tonal compositions. Yet this conceptual stance has not provided a productive relationship between small and large-scale forms beyond simply additive approaches.

Concerning the relationship between minuet and concerto, I have demonstrated (Eckert 2005 and 2013) how the sectional nature of the mid-eighteenth-century concerto, that is, “each Tutti and Solo of the concerto can literally be considered a minuet, which is expanded or shortened and varied by means of *ars combinatoria*” (Eckert 2005, 25). Indeed, after instructing the student in how to write minuets (Riepel 1752, 1–22), Riepel’s teacher, the *Præeceptor*, not only turns first to the concerto and aria when discussing larger compositions, but he also identifies several musical examples simultaneously as minuets and tuttis of a concerto or aria. Similarly, an analysis of Riepel’s violin concertos, especially their first movements (Eckert 2013), demonstrates that the individual tutti and solo sections can be interpreted as a series of modified minuets. However, symphonies do not share the same sectional structure with concertos and arias, and moving from minuet to symphonies requires a more differentiated approach.

In her study *The Early Symphony*, Marie Louise Göllner brings together a wide range of eighteenth-century sources and discusses Riepel’s *Anfangsgründe* as an important source. Unfortunately, instead of engaging with his discussion of the Simpfonie, Göllner judges Riepel’s ideas in hindsight against recent research. Drawing on Gjerdingen’s Galant schemata and topic theory while highlighting musical function, this paper provides a hands-on reading of Riepel’s discussion of the Simpfonie from the standpoint of a practice that rests on musical conventions based on the combination and manipulation of pre-existent models and patterns.

Aims and repertoire studied

Unlike Göllner, I am not interested in making claims about the Symphony. I am purposefully adopting Riepel’s spelling, Simpfonie, to indicate that my concern to is to highlight the This paper provides a close reading of Riepel’s discussion of the Simpfonie within all chapters of the Anfangsgründe. It highlights the compositional instructions and demonstrates the wide range of concerns related to the mid-eighteenth century Simpfonie.

Methods

Throughout the Anfangsgründe, Riepel treats the Simpfonie as synonymous with large-scale musical structure, addressing melodic relationships, metric expectations, performance aspects and most importantly, phrase relationships. As a result, this paper not only addresses Riepel’s mid-eighteenth century conception of the Simpfonie, but it also provides insight into a moment in the history of music analysis.

Keywords

- melody
- form
- instrumental music
- musical praxis
- structure

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