

The Teaching of Harmony and Composition in the French Conservatoire in the Nineteenth Century: the Importance and Influence of Reicha and Fétis

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In 1818 Antoine Reicha was appointed teacher of counterpoint at the École Royale de Musique et de Déclamation. He was joined in 1821 by F-J. Fétis. At the time of their appointment each of these two composers brought to the École an established reputation as a teacher and a philosophy of teaching well considered, though the ideas and the musical repertoire which each called upon in his teaching differed from that of the other and of the teachers of composition of longstanding whom they joined at the École.

Reicha and Fétis are rarely discussed in the same context. Fétis, from Belgium, a former pupil of the Paris Conservatoire¹ who returned there as a teacher after working as an organist and schoolteacher elsewhere in France, was thoroughly steeped in the theoretical tradition of that country; the older and more travelled Reicha, educated in Bonn alongside his contemporary Beethoven and acquainted with Haydn during his years in Vienna, had direct experience of the musical traditions not only of Paris, but also of these two other important European centers. Reicha's compositions have survived alongside his theoretical writings whereas those of Fétis have been largely forgotten. His legacy consists of a wealth of critical writings and essays in musical history not confined to the music of western Europe, a comprehensive biographical dictionary, and an essay which is generally regarded as the first to document the history of harmonic theory. Reicha's writings on harmony and composition are characterised by an absence of dogma and a practical approach; those of Fétis owe even the ordering of their content to the theory of tonal relationships which their author developed.

The presence of these two teachers at the École led to a division of the populace into two camps—one loyal to Reicha and one to Fétis. While dispute over the retention of the modal system in the

¹In 1816 the École Royale de Musique et de Déclamation succeeded the Conservatoire de Musique, founded in 1795.

study of counterpoint constituted one of the factors which led to this polarization of opinion, it was undoubtedly fueled by the jealousy towards Reicha exercised by Cherubini, teacher of composition throughout the years of the Conservatoire and director of the École from 1822². It is important that the existence of this well-documented rift, involving conflict between the traditional teaching of Fétis and the modernizing of a musical language by Reicha, not be allowed to mask the similarities of purpose which are displayed in the pedagogical writings of the two.

Despite differences in teaching approach, personality, and vocation, both Reicha and Fétis possessed attributes characteristic of men of their age: both were well read in philosophy and mathematics; they were so devoted to the exercise of logic and order that they produced teaching manuals in which learning in music was sequenced to an unprecedented degree; they were prepared to identify with a new intellectual order to the extent that they broke the fetters of obsolete theory. Such qualities enabled them to fulfil a seminal role in a France which demanded fast and effective education for its populace, and it is not surprising that the theory and pedagogy which they separately developed served as the foundation for a generation of teachers which followed them. It is in the context of the developing pedagogy of the French conservatoire that this article examines the writings of Reicha and Fétis intended for the teaching of harmony and some of the elementary texts written by their successors which they directly influence.

By the time the two composers arrived at the École, pedagogic clarity in the teaching of harmony was already well established through the use of Catel's *Traité d'Harmonie*. Since the founding of the Conservatoire in 1795, only authorized teaching materials had been allowed in its classes; in his *Traité Complet de la Théorie et de la Pratique de l'Harmonie* Fétis testifies that Catel's text—the first official publication for the teaching of composition which gained approval in 1802—quickly achieved popularity, and that it remained in use up until 1815 (Fétis, 1844: 244, 246).³ As the content and layout of the *Traité* influenced Reicha and Fétis, I will refer to it later within the

²For accounts of the Conservatoire rivalries see Wangermée, 1951: 34-36 and Emmanuel, 1937: 48.

³Reicha's *Cours de Composition Musicale ou Traité Complet et Raisonné d'Harmonie Pratique* first appeared around the following year, 1816.

context of their writings. For present purposes, let us note that the spirit of pedagogical clarity in which Catel's work was conceived had suited well the educational ideals of post-revolutionary France; the work had fulfilled admirably the requirement for precision and simplicity contained in the brief followed by the commission which approved it (see Catel, 1802: Preface; Pierre, 1900: 96, document of 29th. August 1794).

A concern for effective pedagogy is demonstrated in the writings of A.E.M Grétry, also published during the early years of the Conservatoire. Grétry advocated a teaching method which did not contradict the natural musical inclinations of the pupil; aware of the need to motivate his pupils, he often used tunes already known to them as material for exercises (Grétry, 1797 vol. 3: 385-392). The title of his *Méthode Simple pour Apprendre à Préluder en Peu de Temps avec toutes les Ressources de l'Harmonie* (1802) foreshadows that of Fétis' *Méthode Élémentaire et Abrégée d'Harmonie et d'Accompagnement suivie d'exercices ... par l'étude desquels les Amateurs pourront arriver promptement à accompagner la basse chiffrée et la partition* (1823). The *raison d'être* of these two volumes—to lead the reader along the most direct path to successful practical employment of harmony—was to become that of scores of elementary textbooks which appeared in France subsequent to the publication of Fétis' several instruction manuals for the use of students and amateurs.

With regard to elementary teaching, Fétis held views essentially similar to those of the older Grétry: he advocated using popular songs for music reading and harmonization so that a pupil might be led from the known to the unknown; the elementary teaching methods which he commended were those which contained "the least precepts and the most exercises, because one learns quicker and better by practice than by reflection". When he wrote that the place of analysis was to reinforce knowledge already experienced [*la méthode d'analyse n'est bonne que pour résumer de connaissances acquises*] he echoed the sentiments of Grétry, who in his *memoires* pointed out that the great theorists were composers before they wrote their treatises, and warned of what he called the "misuse of science," the danger of allowing respect for harmonic theory [*science harmonique*] to overshadow musical language to the extent that the integrity of the latter is destroyed (Fétis, 1830: 36; Grétry, 1797 vol. 3: 194-196).

The words of Fétis quoted above are from an article in his *Revue Musicale* penned in August 1830, a year in which France was committing itself to a huge expansion in the provision of free education for its populace. In this article Fétis presents his vision of a music education to complement the teaching of literacy and numeracy to all. A freelance musician and teacher practised in the teaching of his subject at elementary as well as advanced levels, Fétis was deeply concerned with both the nature of music education and the dissemination of musical knowledge; alongside discourse on the aesthetics and theory of music, these matters are given ample coverage in his *Revue Musicale* and are often treated in articles he wrote for the *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*.⁴ His publications include elementary instruction manuals as well as treatises designed for students at advanced stages of the study of composition; in this respect his output differs from that of Reicha, who found no cause to write a book on the rudiments of music. At the close of his review of the second edition of Reicha's *Traité de Mélodie* for *Revue Musicale*, when countering the suggestion that a more talented composer of melodies than Reicha might have been better qualified to write such a volume, Fétis demonstrates a true appreciation of the gifted teacher and reveals his premise that a necessary quality of the teacher of composition is the ability to analyze the practice of composition: "the genius who is always occupied with producing has not the requisite qualities for analyzing the mechanism of his production...the ability to analyze is a rather rare gift of nature and is not the inevitable corollary of other qualities of the mind" (Fétis, 1832: 307).

For Fétis it was essential not only to analyze the artifact—a practice which undoubtedly enabled him to realize his ideal of teaching through the provision of exercises and examples—but also to undertake the exhaustive evaluation of compositional theories which led him to the formulation of his own. It has been said that he had read over eight hundred tracts on music (Arlin, 1972/3: 114). His reading was not confined to the area of music theory: his knowledge of philosophy was extensive, and he had studied mathematics for several years in the hope that this would assist him to gain insight into theory (Nichols, 1972/3: 122). Underlying

⁴The *Revue Musicale* was Fétis's own journal, begun in 1827. In 1835 it was subsumed into the *Gazette Musicale de Paris*, for which Fétis was one of several distinguished editors.

his statement that the object of his *Traité Complet* is “to expose both the processes [*procédés*] of art and the facts of science” (1844: 4) is the belief that the functions of creator and theorist are distinct. These functions are defined at the opening of the work:

To organize sounds into relationships which develop sensations and ideas more or less animated...exalted...pleasing, more or less capable of realizing the views of the artist, is the object of art; to discover the laws of these relationships, is that of science (1844: 1).

When Grétry spoke in his *Mémoires* of “science” he undoubtedly had in mind the mathematical proofs of harmonic relationships characteristic of eighteenth-century theory and Rameau’s rules of chord succession; he may well also have been thinking of the cumbersome lists of hypothetical chords produced for students of harmony to which he later referred as “antique scaffolding” and which he and Catel set out to simplify (Grétry, 1802: Preface; see also Catel, 1802: Preface). His publication of 1802, a teaching method for “preluding” (keyboard improvisation), embodies a tension between the inclusion and non-inclusion of the theory which had traditionally been taught in classes of composition in France: to render it accessible to the young amateur, all chord types are seen as emanating from either the *accord parfait* or the seventh chord, yet the *basse fondamentale* is retained as a validator of correct chord construction.⁵ Catel’s *Traité*, published in the same year, was a single volume in which theoretical exposition is integrated into a practical harmony. Mathematical demonstration of the origin of chords and chord classification are similarly simplified for the benefit of the pupil. Catel’s work can be distinguished from the manuals produced by his predecessors in France in that his material is conveyed through concise verbal explanations accompanied by examples of compositional practice substantial both in number and length.⁶ In the Preface to the third edition of his *Traité Complet*, Fétis compared the abstract systematising of Rameau to the empirical approach of Catel; neither satisfied his need for a coherent science which corroborated analysis of his art (Preface to the third edition of *Traité Complet* p. vi quoted in Wangermée, 1951: 47-48). Unable to

⁵In the *Institut National de Musique*, the precursor of the Conservatoire founded in 1793, composition was taught separately as theory and practice (see Pierre, 1900: 108-109).

⁶For a discussion of the harmony treatises in circulation in France during the years immediately preceding the adoption of that of Catel, see Geay, 1999.

embrace a theory divorced from practice, he invented a “science” which he claimed was “freed from hypotheses” (Fétis, 1844: 4). In his biography of Fétis, Wangermée has pointed out that the theory set out in the *Traité Complet* is very much a product of the Romantic Age in which it was conceived, since it constitutes essentially a “reflection on his art” (Wangermée, 1951: 47-48).

Fétis’ “science,” his theory of *tonalité*, has been given ample coverage in the course of discussions on music theory of the nineteenth century. To deal in depth with the theory, its antecedents, and the formulations—such as those of Schenker—to which it may be regarded as a forerunner, is not an object of this article; discussion will be confined to those of Fétis’ precepts which were transmitted either through his own pedagogy or through that of his followers.⁷ One of these precepts is that each degree of the major and minor scale performs a discrete function within the scale; a corollary is that the chord based on any particular scale degree as root has its own particular affective quality:

Each note of a scale, having a particular character and fulfilling a special function in music, is accompanied by a harmony analogous to this character and this function. The collection of the harmonies belonging to each degree of the scale determines the [*tonalité*] (Fétis, 1844: 3).

The tonic chord possesses the quality of absolute repose. Chords on the fourth, fifth and sixth degrees possess a secondary degree of repose in accordance with their use as the terminal chords at cadence points. The chord of the dominant seventh, possessing no sense of repose but rather a dissonant tritone, fulfills a crucial function—that of setting into relief the terminal chord of a cadence through the attraction exerted by the seventh degree of the scale for the note a semitone above and by the fourth degree for the note a semitone below in major (1844: 14-22, 37 and 251).

The role which Fétis assigned to the dominant seventh chord and his acknowledgement of a hierarchical order of cadence points provide clues to the sources of his analytical activity: the symmetrically-phrased operatic arias popular in the Paris of his day, and the Viennese symphonic and choral movements which exhibit periodicity of structure and in which dominant prolongations

⁷The origins of some of Fétis’ terms and concepts are traced in Simms, 1975.

form an essential component of the musical discourse. The same musical sources gave rise to the extensive pedagogical writings of Reicha, for whom it was as imperative to articulate the principles of phrase structure as it was to demonstrate harmonic relationships. Though Fétis does not allocate space in his writings on harmony to what Reicha calls “the theory of rhythm; that of points of repose or cadences...the science of periods and of their connection” (1814: 9), that he was aware of eighteenth-century writings on the musical period is demonstrated in the review of Reicha’s *Traité de Mélodie* previously cited, and his ongoing attempt to define rhythm and meter is exemplified in articles for *Revue et Gazette Musicale*.⁸ Such concerns inevitably played a part in the formulation of his theory of *tonalité*.

As the distances between scale degrees constitute the building-blocks of both melody and harmony, the definition of each type of interval is essential to Fétis; as chords possess affective qualities, so do intervals. This is why a relatively long section at the beginning of the *Traité* is devoted not only to naming intervals—a procedure deemed to be necessary by most nineteenth-century writers of textbooks on musical rudiments—but also to describing their individual characteristics (1844: 5-22). In this, Fétis follows his teacher, Rey, whose *Exposition* begins with a treatment of the various intervals which is not a mere taxonomy but emphasizes the difference in quality between consonant and dissonant intervals, and in this context speaks of the resolution of dissonance. Later, demonstrating how chords are connected, Rey states that leading notes attract [*appellent*] tonics and the fourth degree of the scale the third (Rey, c.1807: 6-22, 31).⁹ Fétis begins his *Méthode Élémentaire* with a similar account of what he calls the “theory” of intervals, at the end of which he states that the pleasurable effect produced by a series of consonant intervals and the converse effect of dissonant intervals is felt more or less acutely to the extent that the ear is trained to accept these effects. A sense of harmony is similarly acquired through the practice of accompaniment from figured

⁸See, for example, his *Philosophie de la Musique* serialised during 21st. March-11th. April 1852.

⁹Fétis labels the intervals of the augmented fourth and diminished fifth *consonnances appellatives* (see especially 1844: 8-9). Simms traces the origin of the term to the writings of Choron and Catel. It is, however, likely that in speaking of the tritone in this way Fétis simply followed his own teacher, Rey.

bass (1823: 7-8). In other words, the ear is to accustom itself to the conventions of a musical language in which particular sound combinations produce particular effects on the listener who, if not possessed with innate ability to appreciate them, must be trained to do so. The same principle underlies the teaching of Reicha, who spoke of this musical language as a “code” (see below, discussion of Reicha, 1816-18 p.7 footnote).

Though Fétis’ *Méthode Élémentaire* predates his *Traité*, it is built soundly on principles which its author was to elaborate in his later work. The pupil is to learn a tonal language through correct practice of it; the theory of *tonalité*, being founded on chord usage rather than on abstract rules, explains correct practice. Fétis had only to order the contents of his manual in a sequential manner and the pupil would learn quickly and effectively—in five or six months, he suggests (1823: 26). In this respect he had a precedent in the publications of Catel and Grétry, which teach their reader the simplest triadic combinations before introducing chords of greater complexity that require careful resolution. Fétis, however, goes a step further than his predecessors, and infinitely further than his own teacher, Rey, who in his *Exposition* introduces complex chords of the ninth and eleventh before explaining correct handling of the dominant seventh. He teaches only those chords *in common usage*. Whereas Catel presents the *accord parfait* on all degrees of the scale (Catel, 1802: 10), Fétis presents it on the tonic, fourth, fifth and sixth degrees where it will produce the effect of repose, and its second inversion on bass notes tonic and dominant only because it is most often used in these contexts.

The name Antoine Reicha has perhaps been cited as often in connection with the most famous of his pupils, Berlioz, Gounod, Franck, and Liszt, as with his music and theoretical writings. His classes at the Conservatoire may be compared with those of Messiaen in the mid-twentieth century; they attracted colleagues as well as students, and their influence extended through his pupils to composers of subsequent generations. Soon after his arrival in Paris, established musicians such as the composer and violinist J. P. Rode, the oboist G. Vogt and the violinist F. A. Habeneck took lessons with him (Vysloulil, 1970: 30 and footnote 37; Emmanuel, 1937: 36-37). Reicha’s compositional techniques have been identified in the works of Berlioz, and it has been pointed out that his conception of musical form underpinned the theoretical writings of d’Indy written as late as 1902 (Ramaut, 1999: 333-4; 332 footnote 5). Some

of Reicha's distinguished pupils penned testimonies to his teaching which demonstrate that it fulfilled the ideals of the Conservatoire teachers of the early nineteenth century. Berlioz, who portrayed Reicha as a conscientious teacher dedicated to facilitating the progress of his students and described his teaching of counterpoint as remarkable in its clarity, claimed that Reicha taught him a lot in a short time and using few words (Berlioz, 1870: 45-46); Adolphe Adam wrote in his memoirs that Reicha covered as much counterpoint in one year as did his colleague, Eler, in five (Adam, 1857, quoted in Emmanuel, 1937: 31).

Though Reicha was born in Prague in 1770, he relinquished his Czech language and culture as early as his eleventh year. It was while playing in the orchestra of the Elector of Cologne in Bonn alongside Beethoven, his direct contemporary, that he developed a passion for composing and began reading mathematics, literature, and philosophy. In his autobiography, Reicha claimed at this time to have studied the treatises on composition available in Germany. Referring to his studies at the University of Bonn, he spoke particularly of his progress in algebra, to which he attributed that fostering in his intellect of a propensity for the analytical which contributed to his later understanding of composition and the development of his pedagogy. He also mentioned scrutiny of the works of Handel, Haydn and Mozart (Vysloulil, 1970: 14,16). Reading science, mathematics, and philosophy was to constitute Reicha's chief diversion from the study, teaching, and composition of music through the remainder of his life and catalyzed the logical sequencing of ideas to which he committed himself when compiling his theoretical writings. An extract from his autobiography tells of the concerns which occupied him in Hamburg during the last few years of the eighteenth century:

... I began seriously to reflect on composition, on its nature, the way in which it is taught and the real ease with which its language can be wrongly used [*la grande facilité d'abuser de ses moyens*]. The study of algebra rendered my intellect analytical; I took a dislike to everything which was not clear. In this category were included all the works which I had read on harmony and composition. On this subject I wanted to find a rational system which could as far as possible satisfy the intellect. Over at least twenty years

I applied myself to this with the greatest diligence. I entirely reformed the manner of teaching my art and I managed to save my students years, it being this which established my reputation as one of the best teachers of composition in Europe...(Vysloulil, 1970: 18)

In 1799, while visiting Paris, Reicha made the acquaintance of several distinguished French musicians who were associated with the Conservatoire. Amongst these was Grétry and also Gossec, an Inspector of the Conservatoire and member of the commission responsible for the approval of Catel's *Traite*.¹⁰ It is inconceivable that Reicha did not at this time speak with these officials of the pedagogic issues which were occupying their thoughts as well as his own: the achievement of a new pedagogy founded on rational theory, displaying the utmost clarity of presentation and capable of facilitating learning in a minimum amount of time.

In 1808, after several years living in Vienna where he made the acquaintance of Haydn, Reicha returned to Paris to settle among musicians he regarded as his friends and with whom he felt a natural affinity.¹¹ It is undeniable that Reicha helped Parisians understand the Viennese classical tradition; certainly the Viennese style is encapsulated and amply illustrated in his theoretical writings, especially in the *Traité de Haute Composition Musicale* (1824) where the treatment of thematic material, for example, relates to the sonata-form movements of Haydn, Mozart and their contemporaries. The *Traité de Mélodie* (1814), however, contains an abundance of models from France and Italy, and in his theoretical writings Reicha did not neglect the music of former epochs. His biographer, Maurice Emmanuel, has pointed out that, between 1800 and 1815, the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart occupied a central place in the concerts given by the orchestra of the Conservatoire, which also performed three of Beethoven's symphonies during the same period. One of the factors that contributed to the success of

¹⁰Gossec's own treatise on harmony, which dates from the early 1790s, is discussed in Geay, 1999.

¹¹Ramaut sees Reicha as occupying a key role in the musical society of that city: he was received into a society imbued with the educational ideals of the French revolution; his "solid intellectual personality coupled with a brilliant precision of writing" satisfied the French musical society of the Restoration (Ramaut, 1999: 335).

Reicha's teaching must have been its relevance to a style of music to which his pupils were attracted and to which they had already been amply exposed. At a time when, as Emmanuel alleges, teaching of composition favored the style of popular French opera, Reicha's students would have been deeply impressed by his eclecticism, would have devoured hungrily his examples taken from the music of, amongst others, Bach—not particularly favored by others of the Conservatoire teachers of composition (Emmanuel, 1937: 33-35).

Though Reicha thought of his *Traité de Mélodie* (1814), the *Cours de Composition Musicale ou Traité Complet et Raisonné d'Harmonie Pratique* (1816-18) and the *Traité de Haute Composition Musicale* (1824) together as representing his teaching of composition, the *Cours de Composition Musicale* is a self-contained manual comparable, for example, with Koch's *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* (1782-93) and sufficiently comprehensive to treat all areas of the subject thought to be necessary in a course of composition in Reicha's day. It can be distinguished from the treatises on composition of Reicha's predecessors on account of its examples, which in their length—some are complete pieces—and in the range of textures represented, far exceed those in any of the theoretical writings which its author is likely to have encountered during his formative years.

Reicha claimed that the popularity of the *Cours* was due "to the clarity with which the rules are presented, to the number of new subjects, important to make known, which were omitted in all preceding treatises on harmony, to the order in which the content is presented, and finally to the anticipated arguments which have necessitated the discussions which accompany each chapter" (Vysloulil, 1970: 30). To this list he might have added the commitment which he expressed in the work's preface to the treatment of modern music. Though in this connection Reicha criticized other published works on harmony and composition, he did not in the *Cours* refer to any of these by name. In the *Traité de Mélodie* he referred to the teaching of harmony of the German theorists Marpurg and Kirnberger, and of Albrechtsberger whom he encountered in Vienna. Though he made no reference to the work of his French contemporaries, however, the influence of Catel's *Traité* on Reicha's *Cours* cannot be overlooked.

Reicha's opinion on the usefulness of traditional theory is very similar to that of Catel, and is summarized in the following statement, in which the theory of vibrating bodies favoured by Rameau and his followers is referred to as Acoustics [*l'Acoustique*]:

Practical composition goes infinitely further than Acoustics; the first is concerned with an infinite quantity of possibilities [*moyens*] which the second does not explain at all and cannot so much as explain; it follows that the rules of practical composition form a code which, simultaneously, our auditory organ, feeling, intellect and the experience of several centuries have ratified; it is because of this that the treatises on composition do not agree on Acoustics which belongs rather to physics than to music (Reicha, 1816-18 p. 7 footnote).

Later, he likens arguments over the origin of chords to those of the etymologists over the origin of words; these may as well be abandoned if the usage of the chords or words is understood. Reicha's set of thirteen chords from which all others are derived is highly reminiscent of Catel's set of eight which make up *harmonie simple*, and is placed correspondingly at the outset of the *Cours*, preceded only by a few preliminaries. Of the thirteen chords, nine are formed from the resources contained within the major and minor scales, and the remaining four by chromatic alteration of these.¹² After stating that this fund of available harmonies may be supplemented by inversions of the same chords, with characteristic realism Reicha provides a list of those chords—in root position or in inversion—which are actually in common usage. He uses the *basse fondamentale* rather in the manner of Grétry, as a validator of correct root progressions, especially in the case of resolution of dissonant chords but concedes that there are exceptions to his rules where “nature requires us to observe other conditions” (1816-18 p. 9 footnote).

¹²It was the inconsistency demonstrated in Reicha's compilation of the thirteen “prime” chords which incurred the scorn of Fétis toward the theory of his colleague.

Reicha's chief legacies in the *Cours de Composition Musicale* can best be understood if the *Traité de Mélodie* is considered alongside it. This remarkable volume—not the first to set out a theory of rhythm within melody—is amply illustrated with examples from the repertoire which Reicha's students would have played and heard. Using motifs, phrases and periods, its author specifies model structures built on the principle of symmetry. Such an organization of the musical period, reliant on “the power of the rhythm” (Reicha, 1814: 14) is associated with a hierarchy of cadence points which distinguish the individual units of melody from another. It was thus necessary that the author's subsequent work on harmony, the *Cours de Composition*, appropriate cadences to their position within the phrase or the period; mere lists of the available cadences typical of Catel and his predecessors were inadequate. In the *Cours*, Reicha teaches that the end of a period is defined by a perfect cadence, both chords in root position; a phrase of which the sense is incomplete can end in an imperfect or an interrupted cadence. Chords belonging to cadences and other harmonies are provided with a context: chords in inversion, for example, may be used to good effect during the course of a phrase, and especially after intermediate cadences (Reicha, 1816-18: 13-14). Moreover, the same chord may appear in different contexts, as in the passage in Figure 1. This example, typical of Reicha's propensity to write complete pieces in illustration of a principle, shows the diminished chord fulfilling different functions: within cadence formulae completely different from one another, as part of a progression effecting a modulation, and in the course of a chord sequence [*marche régulière*].

Formule de cadence parfaite

Formule de demi-cadence

Marche régulière en La

Marche régulière

en Si mineur

Modulation de

Si mineur en Fa mineur

L'emploi de l'accord diminué est partout marqué d'une (x)

Figure 1. Reicha, Cours de Composition Musicale, 1816-18: 33

Allusions to the language of rhetoric permeate Reicha's writings, particularly the *Traité de Mélodie*. In the *Cours* Reicha set out to provide an exposé of the music of his day as if it were a language; he speaks of this "modern music" in the Preface when he says that "in [this] one must avoid frigid calculations and, on the contrary, only place ideas, feeling, taste, effects, melody, variety, realistic representation in imitative music etc." (Reicha, 1816-18: Preface). Consequently, he goes further than to define harmonic function; on occasions he suggests the expressive significance of a harmonic progression. For example, interrupted cadences not only punctuate the musical discourse, they maintain the listener's attention and give energy to the phrase which follows (Reicha, 1816-18: 14). Not all dissonant chords have the same effect. The diminished chord shown in Figure 1 has a "soft" effect, in comparison with which the second chord of Figure 2—containing a harsh major seventh—sounds hard. Reicha says that the charm of the sequence in Figure 2 lies in the progressive reduction in dissonance which takes place until the tonic chord is reached: the hard-sounding major seventh chord (m. 2) resolves onto a seventh chord containing a diminished fifth and minor seventh, of which the effect is "softer" (bar 3). Through the dominant seventh (m. 4), the sequence ends with a point of repose on the tonic.

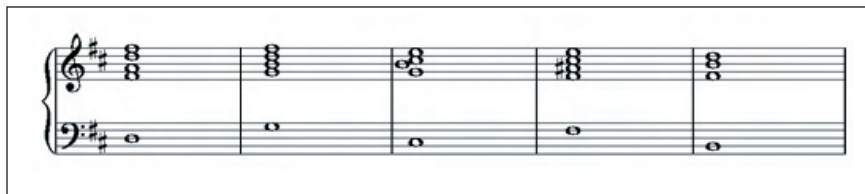


Figure 2. Reicha, *Cours de Composition Musicale*, 1816-18: 38

The *Cours de Composition Musicale* is divided into three sections. The first and shortest presents the available harmonic resources, and the third is largely concerned with counterpoint and instrumentation. The second and longest section provides a very thorough exposition of the ways in which harmonies are treated within a variety of textures, and of non-essential notes of all kinds. What is dealt with here is, in fact, all which Schenker was later to define as constituting the foreground surface of music. In this respect, Reicha's *Cours* may again be compared with Catel's

Traité which, in its large section devoted to elaboration of *harmonie simple* and its examples of bass progressions which are successively elaborated, pays considerable attention to the composing-out of basic harmonic structures (Catel, 1802: 19-33, 41-52).

The theoretical preoccupations of Fétis and Reicha, as well as the commitment to effective pedagogy well established at the Conservatoire, are evident in the elementary texts of two writers of the subsequent generation: J. G. Kastner and H.-R. Colet. Kastner, holder of a degree in philosophy from his native city of Strasbourg, was, like Reicha, from an early age an avid reader of theoretical texts on music. In his *Grammaire Musicale*, approved for use in the Conservatoire in 1837, he wrote that he had achieved continuity and progression [*enchaînement et progression*] in the ordering of content—a lifelong preoccupation of Reicha, whom he met in the latter's last year of life (Kastner, 1837: Preface p. 3). Colet, teacher of harmony and counterpoint at the Conservatoire where he had been a pupil of Reicha, took great pains to treat each area of his subject as thoroughly as possible before taking his reader on to the next stage of learning. His *Conseils à mes Élèves, ou Traité élémentaire d'harmonie* (1847) is remarkable for its aural basis; its author demands that the student not only play on the keyboard and write scale degrees, intervals and chords but also master their aural recognition; a teacher using his text must possess not only a sound understanding but also the ability to improvise fluently.

Kastner shares Reicha's concern with the function of harmony within the musical phrase. In book 3 of his *Grammaire*, that which deals with harmony, he introduces the concept of musical discourse being divided by means of modulations and cadence points into sections [*coupes*], phrases and periods, before embarking upon any detailed explanation of chords and their use (1837: 146-148). In the Preface to the volume, he recommends Reicha's *Traité de Mélodie*. Though to a modern reader Kastner's text appears obscure on account of its adherence to eighteenth-century concepts of fifth-related chord successions, descriptions of the affective qualities of chords in relation to the phrase betray a nineteenth-century viewpoint. Consonant triads are chords of repose; in inversion they do not possess the same degree of "energy" nor, conversely, the same degree of "calm" as in root position. The minor form of a plagal cadence used in a major passage can "temper the energy"; varying cadence chords and their positions produces effects which offset the definitive quality of a final cadence (1837: 148-154, 204-207).

That Kastner and Colet continued the Conservatoire tradition of harmony teaching begun by Catel is evident from the priority assigned in the texts discussed above to contrapuntal elaboration of harmony. Kastner introduces unessential notes of all kinds and suspensions even before dealing with the chord of the dominant seventh. In his discussion of suspensions, the use of the term *accord simple* for the chord which the suspension decorates is derived from Catel's *harmonie simple*.¹³ When he writes a passage to illustrate the use of the dominant seventh, he follows it with another in which notes are held over from one chord to the next as suspensions—a procedure reminiscent of that adopted by Catel in his *Traité*, whereby an example which uses straightforward harmony and homophonic texture is succeeded by others in which the same harmonies are subjected to progressively complex elaboration. (Kastner, 1837: 176, 182; see, for example, Catel, 1802: 39-40). Colet, like Kastner, teaches unessential notes—though not suspensions—before dealing with the dominant seventh chord. Throughout the discussion on chords in the *Conseils*, the student is taught to consider them as a source of melody as well as of harmony, to create melodies from individual chords and from chord progressions. It is in this context that Colet uses Reicha's term *dessin mélodique*, whereas Kastner, like Reicha on occasions, speaks of a *figure* (Colet, 1847: 65; Kastner, 1837: 161).

Colet shares Kastner's concern to explain the hierarchy of cadence-points which defines the phrasing of a melody; interestingly, he recommends that the student find examples through analyzing melodies written for the theater (1847: 96-99). His teaching, like that of Reicha, is founded on music popular in his day. The theory which underlies it bears the unmistakable hallmarks of the theory of Fétis: the importance assigned to the tritone formed between the fourth and seventh degrees of the scale in defining *tonalité*, and to the functions of the degrees of the scale relative to one another. When Colet speaks in the Preface to his *Conseils* of the necessity of knowing the "theory of intervals" he echoes the words of Fétis at the end of the Introduction to his *Méthode*. He goes infinitely further than Fétis, however, both in the development of such a theory and

¹³In Catel's theory, *harmonie simple* includes all chords which do not require preparation. *Harmonie composée* is derived from this by the prolongation of notes from one chord into the next. Kastner shows awareness of this theory when he states at the end of his treatment of suspensions that this section leads naturally to the discussion of dissonant seventh chords.

in its presentation, and fifty-nine pages out of a total two hundred in this elementary text on harmony are devoted to explaining how intervals both sound and function.

Colet attributes to each interval one or more affective qualities: the sixth conveys gentleness; a succession of thirds is pretty; the augmented sixth is dramatic; the tritone is very expressive; and the diminished seventh may either be sad and calm, or spirited and passionate. The student must learn to recognize each interval aurally, not in isolation but within the context of a key, not only because intervals may be distinguished from one another accurately only when the key is named--an augmented sixth from a minor seventh, for example, but also because intervals of the same name taken on different scale degrees both sound different and have different functions. The augmented fourth formed by the sixth degree of a minor scale and the second sounding above it is different from that formed between fourth degree and seventh which defines the key; the minor sixth formed between G and E♭ sounds melancholy when heard in the key of C minor, joyful or brilliant in the key of E♭ major.

Colet's classification of intervals by quality is much more than the invention of a system of prompts to aid the student in their identification; it is an attempt to codify the elements of tonal language. Since chords are made up of intervals, Colet reasons that, if the student knows how to handle the latter, he can go on to deal correctly with the former. The affective power of chords, which Reicha had begun to identify, is transferred to their constituent intervals, and the system of *tonalité* defined by Fétis provides the domain within which they function.

Two elementary instruction manuals which appeared during the 1860s allot considerable space to cadences and to the division of melody into phrases and periods. P. E. Wolff's *Cours Élémentaire Pratique et Théorique à l'usage des Pianistes* (1867), reminiscent of manuals on the art of preluding from the turn of the century in its provision of chord progressions of increasing complexity which the student is to learn in all keys at the keyboard, contains a very thorough coverage of unessential notes reminiscent of that in Reicha's *Cours*. B. Rahn's *L'Harmonie Popularisée* (1865-6), an early correspondence course first published as a series of articles under the heading *Journal de Composition Musicale*, claims in its extended title to teach the student to *Preluder, Improviser, Composer, Transposer, Accompanier, Analyser*. A remarkable and barely surpassed example

of strategic planning, the course teaches a musical language in easy stages—basic harmony alongside accompaniment styles and melodic elaboration; motivic development alongside phrase structure. The author acknowledges that the theory of Fétis underpins his teaching of harmony. To render it accessible to his readers, he couches it in prose as lightweight as that in the following passage:

It is necessary correctly to account for the role which is played by chords within the scale. The seven chords belonging to one scale form...a little society, a little monarchy, of which the tonic chord is the supreme chief. This supreme chief, concerting with his first minister, the chord of the dominant seventh, governs his subjects, his subordinates... the five other chords of the scale (Rahn, 1865-6: 76).

The need for an effective pedagogy to cater to the new social order which established itself in France after the revolution provided the impetus for a rapid growth of teaching methodologies. By the mid-nineteenth century the logical ordering of content and clarity of explanation which Reicha and Fétis had demonstrated in their writing was being widely emulated. The followers of these two chose to transmit both Reicha's concern for the function of harmonies within the phrase, and for the inter-relationship of melody, and harmony and the theoretical assumptions of Fétis—either because these were appropriate to the musical style which they sought to convey, or because, being concerned more to provide effective teaching than to reinvent theory, they were content to borrow from Conservatoire teachers whose reputation was well established.

The teachers of the early decades of the Conservatoire were faced with devising courses in composition which would be accessible to practical musicians who might never become theoreticians, based on theory which would stand up to scrutiny in the hands of scholars. Inheriting hypothesis and pedagogy related to modal counterpoint, an obsolete musical language, they devised both a theory which dealt with the music of the day and instruction which conveyed as clearly as possible the principles which governed its construction. Over the past three decades teachers of music have needed to address the challenge of catering for students of differing aspirations and needs within the same composition class. They have taught aspiring conservatory students alongside band players and those whose interest is in criticism and philosophical

speculation. Like Reicha and Fétis, they have done so in a climate in which a well-worked musical language—that of functional tonality—has been supplanted by new kinds of musical organisation, and in dealing with the plethora of musical languages which are represented in the music of today they have taken up a challenge which most probably outweighs that taken up by Reicha and Fétis, albeit in a society which has rejected dogma more easily than that of the nineteenth century.

Catel's and Reicha's publications are distinguished from those of their eighteenth-century predecessors by substantial inclusion of musical examples. Reicha himself wrote many, but also called upon the works of a variety of composers of both his own and previous generations. His teaching depended not only upon theoretical explanation but also, heavily, upon the provision of models of compositional practice. This "exemplar" approach to compositional teaching survived in the teachings of d'Indy at the turn of the century¹⁴ and formed the basis of some of the better teaching of composition in England during the same period such as that of Stanford.¹⁵ It continues to be favored today at all levels of teaching. It forms the basis of much of the material for teachers in UK schools published to support the teaching of the current National Curriculum for Music for England, and is generally regarded by British school inspectors as representing highly effective practice. Popular textbooks for the teaching of tonal harmony in universities such as the Kostka and Payne *Tonal Harmony* (2000) published in the USA, and Nicholas Cook's *Analysis Through Composition* (1996) published in the UK¹⁶ rely heavily on models from appropriate musical literature.

Nowadays in universities in the UK, as in the USA, tonal theory is commonly addressed through Schenker studies, for which there is no shortage of excellent texts.¹⁷ Though most of these introduce Schenker's theories as a reduction process, Schenkerian

¹⁴D'Indy's *Cours de Composition Musicale* began life as a series of classes delivered at the Conservatoire at the end of the nineteenth century.

¹⁵Charles Villiers Stanford's *Musical Composition* was published in 1911.

¹⁶Cook's text teaches tonal harmony through exercises of the kind which were worked by students during the Classical period.

¹⁷Among these may be mentioned Allen Cadwallader and David Gagné (1998) *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

principles can easily be demonstrated through provision of skeleton progressions (both contrapuntal and harmonic) which may be elaborated and worked out by a student. Such a process is akin to the practice of preluding which formed part of the curriculum for Practical Harmony during the early days of the Conservatoire, and if we concede that the fundamental harmonies as defined by Schenker are essentially those defined by Fétis, we can understand music education today as part of a continuum in which a flourish of activity in the Paris Conservatoire in the early nineteenth century acted as an important catalyst.

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