

REVIEW OF RALPH TUREK, *THE ELEMENTS OF MUSIC*

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A colleague of mine recently related to me that he had been shocked several years ago when asked, on a graduate entrance exam, to perform a harmonic analysis of a passage from a Mozart piano sonata—shocked because in four years of undergraduate theory, he had never learned that harmonic analysis could be applied to anything other than a Bach chorale. Fortunately, the scope of beginning theory classes in this country, as well as of the textbooks used in these classes, is increasing. Piston's inclusion of passages from Wagner and Chopin in *Harmony* and Kraft's incorporation of modified Schenkerian methods in *Gradus* provide notable examples from previous stages in the process.

This broadening of subject material is due in part simply to changing ideas about what "theory" means. But it is also due in part to logistical necessities of teaching undergraduate theory in today's college or university. With ever growing demands from accreditation agencies, state education boards, and general-education committees, music programs are no longer able (assuming they find it desirable) to require four or even three years of theory. The two trends are violently opposed: instructors feel they must teach their students much more than just harmony—forms, counterpoint, twentieth-century techniques, reductive analysis, etc.—and they have less time to do it. Still instructors seem reluctant to let students graduate from a theory program without some solid skills in four-part writing. Thus, recent textbooks for beginning theory courses often emphasize harmony, while including a few chapters on other topics. Kostka and Payne's *Tonal Harmony*, for example, includes chapters on period structure, "levels of harmony," and twentieth-century music.¹ Benward and White's *Music in Theory and Practice* includes chapters on melodic structure, form, Renaissance and Baroque counterpoint, and twentieth-century music.²

Ralph Turek's *The Elements of Music*, provides a third example.³ Turek's goals, as indicated in the preface to the instructor, indicate that the text is intended to fulfill the needs of the modern undergraduate theory program:

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If, at the end of a two-year course of study using this text, students possess a command of essential compositional/analytical skills (including a strong grounding in four-part writing) and have an understanding of the ways in which the various musical elements interact to create form and style, then the goals of this text will have been realized (I, xi).

We must leave aside the question whether these goals are feasible; in many schools it is imperative that the instructors at least try to achieve them. In such a situation, this book is highly appropriate.

One of the great strengths of this text is the abundant use of passages from the literature both as examples in the body of the text and as starting points for exercises. The student is almost always aware of the relationship between the concepts learned and actual music. In Chapter Three, "Scales, Key, Mode and Intervals," Turek implies (the instructor must make the point explicit) that the description of preexisting music is the primary purpose of each conceptual segment of music theory. Major and minor scales, for example, are presented as pitch sources for "most of the music composed in Europe and the United States during the past three hundred years or so" (I, 43). Alterations in the minor scale are to be learned because they occur in actual music; Turek's use of the past tense strengthens the point: "In actual practice, [the natural minor] scale was rarely used without certain alterations" (I, 51).

I would be even more enthusiastic had Turek taken the same empirical approach with rhythm and meter. Showing that the concept of compound meter is necessary for explaining much music that the student knows and loves goes a long way, I have discovered, to mollifying the traditionally negative response to the topic. The introductory chapter on harmony is also uncharacteristically devoid of examples from actual literature, except in the exercises.

After the first four chapters, a passage from actual literature can be found on nearly every page in the body of the text, and on many pages in the exercises. Most of the examples are taken from keyboard literature; occasionally a symphonic passage is found, generally in piano reduction. Examples are used even where not necessary. The student is asked to name the harmonic intervals in a Lassus passage, for instance, just for the sake of extra practice in naming intervals.

Another of the strengths of this text is that by virtue of its layout and of its incorporation of study aids, it facilitates learning the content and it encourages good study habits. The books are bound with plastic rings; they

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may be ragged by the end of two or three semesters, but the pages lie flat on a piano music rack. Every page of text has a wide, 2-1/3" margin for notes. Every chapter is clearly organized with the names of main topics printed in bold in the margins, and principle terms are printed in italics in the body of the text. At the beginning of every chapter is a list of terms to know. For instance chapter 8 of volume I, "Functional Tonality; Principles of Harmonization," begins with the following list:

- arpeggiated six-four chord
- cadential six-four chord
- functional tonality
- harmonic rhythm
- passing six-four chord
- pedal six-four chord
- pre-dominant
- progression
- repetition
- retrogression
- seventh chord
- six-four chord (I, 188)

Interestingly, Turek often leaves out an obvious term. The list at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Voice Leading," for instance, does not include the term "voice leading." A glossary of terms is in the back of each volume. (No entry for "voice leading" exists.) At the end of most chapters (why not all?) is a self-test, the answers for which are found in the back of the volume. Of course, few students will voluntarily take advantage of these aids, but none could use them if they were not present.

For the instructor in a program that requires only two years for some or all of its students, the greatest strength of these volumes is their inclusion of a broad range of topics. Material on melodic structure, including a section on reductive analysis, is included in volume I. Chapters on counterpoint, including a brief introduction to species counterpoint, are included in volume II. Both volumes include chapters on form. Many chapters place compositional techniques in a historical context, and volume II contains in chart form a summary of the historically evolving use of chromatic harmony. Appendices cover such topics as acoustics, instrument transpositions, and jazz harmonies. And volume II includes six chapters on twentieth-century music. Even harmony is treated more broadly than in the past;

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in addition to sections on analysis and figured-bass writing, most chapters on harmony include a section on harmonization of a melody.

The chapters on melody begin right after the chapters on what is commonly called “fundamentals.” Thus, Turek begins his look at living music through the topic of melody. Balance of tension and repose, motivic development, period structure, tonality, and embellishing tones (passing tone, suspension, etc.) are all introduced in the context of melody. The student is not only saved from thinking that “theory” means “harmony”; she is also introduced to some very important foundational ideas in the non-intimidating context of the single line. At this point, the student only needs to know enough harmony to know whether a melodic note fits the current chord (identified by letter name, not roman numeral).

While the material is more accessible (and more valuable) in this form, Turek does not shy away from complicating an issue when necessary. Relative strength of cadences provides a good example. When taught in terms of harmony, cadences usually are said to come in three gradations of strength: a cadence may be a half cadence, an imperfect authentic cadence, or a perfect authentic cadence. While many books mention differences in metrical placement, most label such cadences with sexist terminology (the students generally object to the terms, too) without explaining the value of the concept. Turek steers away from mere exercises in labeling, mentioning several factors that affect the strength of a cadence, and even implies that one listener’s interpretation may differ from another’s (notice the phrases “usually sounds” and “can weaken”):

Between the most and least conclusive sounding cadences lie gradations. Following are some factors that affect the conclusiveness of a cadence.

1. Pitch: The tonic is the most conclusive of all cadence pitches.
2. Harmony: A pitch accompanied by the tonic triad usually sounds more conclusive than one accompanied by another chord.
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3. Metric position: Other factors being equal, a metrically strong cadence pitch sounds more conclusive than a metrically weak cadence pitch.
4. Rhythm: An immediate continuation of rhythmic motion in the melody or continuing motion in the

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accompanying parts can weaken an otherwise conclusive-sounding cadence. (Vol. I, 107-108.)

(Musical examples accompany each of these statements.)

The reduction technique described in chapter 6 is a simplified method in which notes are assigned to one of three levels of importance: structural tones, supporting tones, and embellishing tones. (I object to the use of the word "importance" in this context. Turek himself demonstrates in this chapter that some very different melodies may be based on the same skeleton of structural tones. Thus, the embellishments can be said to be the more important tones in a melody in the sense that they are what distinguishes one melody from another.)

Structural tones, explains Turek, "tend to be":

1. longer and/or metrically stronger than other pitches.
2. more important by virtue of their positions at the beginning or end of a phrase or as the highest or lowest pitch of the phrase.
3. supported by the underlying harmonic structure. (I, 148)

(Note that Turek implies an argument against strict pigeon-holing by the use of the phrase "tend to be.") Supporting tones, says Turek

1. are usually (not always) members of the underlying harmonic structure.
2. are generally longer and stronger than embellishing tones.
3. are sometimes elaborated by an embellishing tone. (I, 148)

Earlier, he explains

Embellishing tones are tones of secondary importance in a melodic line. they are usually not part of the harmonic structure and are therefore called nonchord tones when they appear in a harmonic context. They are usually of short duration and receive little emphasis through pitch and metric placement. They usually create a dissonance [footnote deleted] against a more important pitch in another voice, and they usually resolve by step to a more important pitch in the same voice. (I, 139)

It is very refreshing to read in an undergraduate textbook an explanation of embellishments in which their status as nonchord tones is secondary. When students learn about embellishments in the context of chorale-style harmony, they are lost in a sea of circular reasoning when they later look at piano music or other music of a more complex texture: being able to find nonharmonic tones means being able to know what the prevailing harmonies are, but determining harmonies means being able to distinguish harmonic tones from nonharmonic tones. In the case of even normally complex musical textures, listeners must (intuitively, at least) understand the concept of embellishment before they can hear harmonies. Similarly, the student analyst needs to learn to recognize embellishments before she can analyze harmonies.

Turek notates a melodic reduction using half notes for structural tones, quarter notes for supporting tones, and noteheads for embellishing tones. A prolongation of a single tone is marked with a dotted tie. Step progressions are marked with brackets. (See figure 1.)

The chapters on twentieth-century styles cover mainly music from the first third of this century; the last chapter, "Recent Musical Developments," deals cursorily with indeterminacy, prepared piano, "textural counterpoint" (the term is loosely defined; the example is Penderecki's Threnody), and "unusual effects" (George Crumb). I will hazard the guess, since I would probably have done it the same way, that Turek wanted to treat mainly technical, objective matters, and felt that multiplicative operations and metric modulation were too complicated for sophomores. Chapters 11-13 treat the use of church modes, pentatonic scales, whole-tone scales, synthetic scales, planing, quartal harmony, extended tertian harmony, added-tone harmony, pandiatonicism, bitonality, polymeter, and asymmetric meter through examples from the work of Debussy, Ravel, Ives,

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Stravinsky, and Bartok, and explain these techniques as “logical extensions of traditional practices” (II, 263). The language of this music from the early part of the century is called “non-functional tonality” (II, 249) or “freely-tonal” (II, 285).

Figure 1. Turek’s melodic analysis of J. S. Bach: English Suite No. 3, BWV 808 (Gavotte I). (I, 151)



*Harmonies are indicated by letter name designations.

Chapter 14, “Intervallic Organization,” is actually a very clear 7-page introduction to set theory with a 4-page application of the ideas to the third of Webern’s Fünf Satze für Streich-quartett. The chapter begins with a historical explanation of the atonal or pantonal (both terms are applied) music of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg as a strand of music history separate from that represented by the composers named above, a strand tracing back to the chromatic music of Wagner. The following chapter, “Serial Procedures,” starts with these three Viennese composers, but, as a demonstration of what varied types of music might be written with serial procedures, continues with examples from Stravinsky, Dallapiccola, and Babbitt. While the exercises in these chapters are mainly technical—the student is asked to spell quartal harmonies, identify sets, and build matrices—Turek constantly makes reference to the subjective, bringing up such issues as what aural image a quartal harmony presents and why, why composers might have wanted to use sets to organize their work, and for what kinds of music different rows would be appropriate.

Turek’s progressive bent is revealed in not only the broad scope of the included topics, but in the way he talks about these topics as well. For instance, the augmented-sixth chord is introduced as a sonority formed by melodic tendencies. An example in c minor is given first (the theme from

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Beethoven, Thirty-Two Variations in C Minor). Then Turek notes, "At m. 5, the push toward the dominant is enhanced by the altered tone f-sharp in the upper voice" (II, 70). Later, he adds

Like the Neapolitan sixth chord, the augmented sixth chords are found most often in minor keys at the approach to a cadence, preceding the dominant or the tonic six-four chord. Their nature is linear—that is, they are the result of a chromatic alteration designed to create a strong melodic push toward the dominant.

(A minor criticism: I wish Turek had used a hyphen in the phrase "augmented sixth chord.") Of course, in all practicality, nearly every student needs a step-by-step method for spelling these sonorities as harmonies, a method that, no matter how clear, many will struggle with, and some will never see beyond. Turek does provide such a method, but only on the third page of the section, after providing the student with an example and with a concept of a sound and of a context.

The main problem with this text has to do with the exercises: simply not enough exist. Volume I begins promisingly with several rather large exercises devoted to identifying pitches on a staff. But by chapter 4, "Harmony," the exercises are already too small. For example, the student is given ten sonorities on a grand staff and asked to tell whether they are triads and, if they are, the root and quality of the triad. Three of the sonorities are not triads, so the student is left with only seven to identify; one-hundred would not have been too many. A later exercise presents twenty triads in root position on a single staff for identification by letter name and quality; again, more would have been welcome, and, in any case, with this exercise the student does not receive any more practice in rearranging notes into stacked thirds. No exercises exist at all that ask a student to construct a triad given a key and a roman numeral, although this is the chapter in which roman numerals are introduced.

Workbooks containing supplementary exercises are available for each volume. Turek explains in the introduction to the workbook for volume 1, "Workbook exercises have been designed to complement those of the text by offering subtly different approaches to the theoretical problems" (workbook, I, v). This extra source solves the problem to some extent, but the "subtly different approaches" often make the exercises in the workbook more complicated than the exercises in the textbook, too complicated, in fact, for most students.

For instance, Turek asks students to re-notate in three-four a passage

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originally in five-eight (workbook, I, 12); to name scales in which the three notes of a given trichord appear (workbook, I, 24; the first trichord given is f, b, c-sharp); to write triads of various qualities from a note given as a third or a fifth (workbook, I, 30; the student is asked in the textbook to spell only twenty triads, five of each quality, from a note given as the root); and to determine a key and construct a Neapolitan sixth chord from a given bass note (workbook, II, 19). All of these exercises would be valuable if the student had first been given fifty to one-hundred of the very most basic exercises possible for a given topic: re-notating from three-four to three-two; writing and recognizing complete scales; writing triads of each quality from given roots; and writing and recognizing Neapolitan chords in a given key. The teacher can always create her own supplementary exercises, but then part of the reason for textbooks is to save instructors the trouble.

The first chapter's exercises are well-designed also in that the student can do the first few exercises after reading only a few pages. But for chapter 14, "Rounded Binary and Ternary Forms" (I wonder if some students might not be misled by the absence of the hyphen in this case), the student must read the entire chapter and understand both forms before he can do exercise 1, which asks him to "provide a complete analysis of the following works." The instructions continue:

FORMAL STRUCTURE

Be certain to explain why the piece is a rounded binary and not a ternary form, or vice versa.

MELODIC/RHYTHMIC STRUCTURE

Consider phrase-period structure, large-scale melodic motion, motivic structure, and rhythmic character.

HARMONIC/TONAL STRUCTURE

Be careful to distinguish between modulations and tonicizations.

TEXTURE/ARTICULATION/DYNAMICS

Do not neglect the important part these elements may play in creating the similarity and contrast that defines many forms (I, 308-309).

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Again, the teacher can always alter the directions, using the pieces provided but asking students to perform simpler tasks. But in my experience, departing from the written word where homework instructions are concerned always causes trouble.

A final complaint about the exercises: most chapters are divided into parts designated by capital letters. Many of these chapters have exercises organized in a parallel fashion: assignments for part A, assignments for part B, etc. The individual exercises themselves are designated by letter, also. Thus the instructor is constantly asking students to do part B, exercise A. I hope this confusing system of labeling will change in future editions.

The deficiencies in the exercises do not, in my opinion, outweigh the advantages of the broad range of topics, the study aids, the clear definitions, the progressive explanations, and the abundance of examples from real literature. For the institution that teaches a wide spectrum of topics in a few semesters of a core theory sequence, *The Elements of Music* is highly recommended by this reviewer.

NOTES

¹Stefan Kostka and Dorothy Payne, *Tonal Harmony, With an Introduction to Twentieth-century Music*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1989).

²Bruce Benward and Gary White, *Music in Theory and Practice*, 4th ed., 2 volumes (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1989).

³Ralph Turek, *The Elements of Music: Concepts and Applications*, 2 vols. plus workbooks (New York: Knopf, 1988). References to textbooks are made by volume number and page number. References to workbooks are made using the word "workbook," volume number, and page number.