

## COMPARATIVE ANALYTICAL SYSTEMS: A REVIEW OF THREE BOOKS

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A long tradition of objective scrutiny of competing methodological approaches has existed in various disciplines such as literature and religion. The usual procedure has been to set contrasting (or sometimes merely distinct) value systems side by side for discussion of similarities and differences, strengths and weaknesses. Such a trend has recently evolved in music theory, too, among the current generation of British-trained theorists—particularly with regard to techniques and philosophies of music analysis.

Curiously, this trend does not yet appear to be widespread in this country. The fashion in the United States, instead, has taken a more partisan approach to analysis, often taking the form of strong—or even strident—advocacy of specific analytical procedures or biases while frequently ignoring alternate possibilities for dealing with particular compositions. This difference in the British and American attitude toward analysis can be seen in comparing representative theory journals from each continent. *Music Analysis*, the new (1982) publication from England, generally displays, in my opinion, a wider variety of topics and viewpoints and a greater tolerance for diversity of approach than corresponding journals from this country (e.g., *Journal of Music Theory* or *Music Theory Spectrum*).

This catholicity in attitude has been recently revealed in three new books dealing with comparative analytical systems, written in each case (not surprisingly) by British or British-trained theorists:

Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis*, George Braziller, 1987.

Jonathan Dunsby and Arnold Whittall, *Music Analysis in Theory and Practice*, Yale University Press, 1988.

Ian Bent with William Drabkin, *Analysis*, W. W. Norton, 1987.

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Each book includes discussion of a broad array of varying approaches to musical analysis. In addition, each book sets up its comparisons in different ways, emphasizes (or downplays) particular topics in different combinations, and presents its material with a distinctive style and slant. In short, each book—in comparison to the others—displays its own biases and strengths and weaknesses much like individual analytical systems themselves.

### COOK

I should express my own partiality at the outset for the “Cook book.” I like to call it that for two reasons. First, it has a winsome ring as a shorthand nickname and, more importantly, it symbolizes perhaps the book’s most conspicuous feature: it is cooking—bubbling, percolating, fermenting—with the interaction of ideas about analysis. The Cook book is, in fact, the product of an inventive mind and is a rich source of recipes for thinking about music.

The Cook book is divided into two large sections. Part One on “Analytical Methods” discusses and compares a variety of differing methods of musical analysis. Cook does not simply describe the approaches but examines the belief systems upon which they are based—those underlying tacit assumptions that color our notion of what analysis is and why we do it. The book, then, in a larger sense, is not just about different ways to do analysis but about what analysis itself can consist of. Changing analytical frameworks activates different motivations and imposes different filters on our cognitive and perceptual apparatus so that the goals and results of different systems can become drastically altered. Cook is interested—almost spellbound—by these deeper, more fundamental kinds of differences built into possible definitions of musical analysis. Various systems, according to Cook, are not necessarily better or worse, stronger or weaker, right or wrong, similar or contrasting, but are distinct and unique modes of thought and communication that call into play and grow out of particular attitudes toward the benefits and aims of listening, performing, thinking, composing, researching—and teaching.

The specific systems covered in Part One include traditional methods (of form and Roman-numeral analysis); Schenkerian analysis; psychological approaches (Reti and Meyer); set theory; semiotics; stylistic and ethnomusicological approaches; and a final perceptive summary called “What does musical analysis tell us?” It is in such large sections of probing introspection—a whole chapter on the topic—that the Cook book distinguishes itself from its rivals.

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Part Two ("Worked Examples of Analysis") is in effect practically all this type of reflective journeying as Cook leads the reader through a series of analytical stages (a chapter on "Starting an Analysis" including Schumann, "Auf einer Burg" from *Liederkreis*; Canticle: Song of Simeon; and Britten, "Pan" from *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*) and then through particular kinds of pieces: sonata form (Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 49, No 2, first movement; String Quartet, Op. 18, No. 2, first movement; Symphony No. 5, first movement; Berlioz, *Symphonie Fantastique*, first movement); serial works (Webern, Piano Piece, Op. posth.; Piano Variations, first movement; Stravinsky, *Movements* for piano and orchestra, No. 4; Schoenberg, Piano Piece, Op. 33a); and finally some problem compositions (ones that don't reveal coherence easily through any specific unified analytical approach such as Chopin, *Polonaise-Fantasia*; Schoenberg, *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 19, No. 3; Stockhausen, *Klavierstück III*, *Stimmung*). The effect of reading this material in Part Two, for me, was one of overhearing the thinking process of a master teacher sharing the harvest of his sensitive musical mind and ear. What Cook stresses are not necessarily just final results but the interpretive filters through which sounds and ideas need to be passed for a meaningful analysis to be possible. We learn from his approach not just about the piece under inspection, but about how to apply similar principles to other compositions; this, of course, is exactly what good teaching consists of.

Just what are Cook's suppositions, beliefs, and insights about analysis itself and about the actions that produce it? Cook's strongest prejudice is against "the tendency for analysis to turn into a quasi-scientific discipline in its own right, essentially independent of the practical concerns of musical performance, composition or education" (p. 3). Cook's interest in analysis is not just in describing the technical activity but also in bringing to light the communicative power of music—its ability to move people profoundly through manipulation of precise pitches, durations, timbres, and dynamics. Cook believes that "when you analyze a piece of music you are in effect recreating it for yourself; you end up with the same sense of possession that a composer feels for a piece he has written . . . you develop a kind of intimacy . . . a vivid sense of communicating directly with the masters of the past, which can be one of the most exhilarating experiences that music has to offer" (p. 1).

Cook says that analysis is best done by asking apt questions, dividing a piece into appropriate constituent components, judging the importance of the various relationships between and among components, and deriving the musical effect of all this in varying contexts. Analysis, then, should discover how a piece works. The challenge, of course, is not simply to do the required work for these steps but to properly interpret the significance

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and appropriateness of the various options and results along the way. Cook continues by saying:

It's difficult to imagine that there could be an analytical method that didn't ask questions about these things—about division into sections, about the importance of different relationships, and about the influence of context. But in spite of such unity of purpose, the various methods of analysis are frequently pursued in isolation from each other or, what is worse, in acrimonious rivalry with each other. As often as not an analyst will adopt one method and ignore or denigrate the others: so that you get the motivic analyst, the Schenkerian analyst, the semiotic analyst and so forth. Each applies his particular method to whatever music comes his way, and at its worst the result is the musical equivalent of a sausage machine: whatever goes in comes out neatly packaged and looking just the same. This especially happens when the analyst has come to believe that the purpose of a piece of music is to prove the validity of his analytical method, rather than the purpose of the analytical method being to illuminate the music: in other words, when he has become more interested in the theory than in its practical application. . . . you only have to look through today's specialist analytical journals to realize what a high premium is generally put on the formulation of increasingly precise and sophisticated analytical methods more or less as an end in itself. Over the last twenty years musical analysis has become professionalized: it has become to a large degree the preserve of music analysts rather than, simply, of musicians who happen to analyze (pp. 2-3).

The importance of the practical application of analysis—relevance to composition, performance, listening, teaching—runs like a thread throughout the book. Cook's awareness of the pitfalls and difficulties of the analytical process is in evidence throughout as well:

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... you can't fully understand... music just in terms of how it is heard. You also have to understand... the musical thinking that gave rise to it, and of course it is the job of analysis to uncover what this musical thinking was. This means that music as it appears to the listener and music as it appears to the analyst may not necessarily be quite the same thing. The relationship between the two is one of the most problematic issues in the whole business of musical analysis... (pp. 15-16).

Sometimes the problem is not that a methodology is too weak, but that it's too powerful under certain conditions. The over-precision of Roman-numeral analysis, for example, is acknowledged for passages where tonality is ambiguous or may not have emerged yet: "To assign them [Roman numerals] you already need to have decided on the key, whereas the listener may have made no such decision. This is an example of one of the dangers of Roman letters, which is that they tempt you to say more about the music than you actually mean to" (p. 22).

Schenkerian analysis, for Cook, is one of the most potent analytical tools available for producing *musical* results because when done correctly (i.e., carefully taking into account the significance and relationship of harmonic and rhythmic events), it forces one to think and listen *musically*. Cook's presentation of this system, though, is a balanced one since he is quite willing to share his concerns about grandiose and inexact claims that are sometimes made by fervent advocates and also willing to share his own personal frustrations about paradoxical loops of meaning and definition that often emerge when sorting out one's own thinking:

These are psychological questions [about whether a given pitch is structural or embellishing]: that is, they have to be answered by deciding what one hears in the music and not by staring hard at the score. But the whole idea of deciding 'what one hears' is problematical. After all, I can 'hear' the most preposterous analytical relationships if I choose to; it is a question of deciding what I want to hear. Certainly, I *do* hear the music as directed—it sounds quite different played backwards!—but I *can* hear bars 8-11 as either prolonging a 4 or a 3; I can even alternate between the two. Hence the claim Schenkerian analysts tend to make that their analyses explain in detail just how listeners do, in fact, hear music is really rather dubious. There are two

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points here. First, if Schenkerian analysis explained how people normally hear music, why would it be necessary to learn a new way of hearing music in order to do Schenkerian analysis? (Ever since the publication of Felix Salzer's *Structural Hearing* there has been a lot of emphasis on Schenkerian analysis being a 'way of hearing', a type of analysis that can be done directly from musical sound, given sufficient training). Second, there are a number of difficulties which Eugene Narmour has emphasized and which have to do with the perceptibility of the fundamental structure. I said earlier that you cannot determine what the primary tone is at the beginning of a piece (or even if there is a primary tone at the beginning of it) by considering the beginning in isolation: it is a matter of its relation to the piece as a whole and particularly to the end—that is why I recommended working backwards. But listeners do not work backwards. They cannot know the answer to this question except in retrospect; and the same applies to obligatory register too. In these ways, and more generally in its tendency to ignore ambiguities whereby a given foreground event might be interpreted in different ways, Schenkerian analysis is not a truly credible model of the way listeners normally experience music (p. 57).

In another section Cook defines formal approaches to musical analysis as "any kind of analysis that involves coding music into symbols and deducing the musical structure from the pattern these symbols make" (p. 116). In describing formal approaches Cook says:

. . . whereas Schenkerian analysis uses the *experience* of music as its raw material, formal analysis quite literally analyzes the score. It does so for what formal analysts consider a very good reason, which is that we can make precise and objective statements about musical scores whereas we can only talk about our experience of music in an imprecise and subjective manner. (Boretz makes fun of analytical methods based on concepts such as expectation and surprise by asking what reason we have for considering these reactions more significant than those of another listener who goes to sleep.) (p. 123).

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Cook is fond of making subtle distinctions between analytical activities that are often confused, blurred together, or simply never distinguished because the differences are not noticed; for example, contrasts between: a) intuitive judgements vs. techniques that look very scientific and objective (but may not be); b) structures within individual pieces vs. relations between different pieces (i.e., analysis of musical style); c) discovery *about* music (e.g., historical style) vs. *musical* discovery (something that makes us hear the music differently); d) compositional process (ciphers and secret codes) vs. attending to what you hear; e) using a composition to illuminate a theory vs. using a theory to illuminate a composition (Cook's clear preference).

Some particularly revelatory points are made in the chapter on what analysis can tell us—points that remind us of the frailty of our knowledge and assumptions about the most basic building blocks of music composition, music notation, performance, and listening:

All the principal types of musical analysis . . . are expressed primarily in terms of interval classes such as minor seconds and perfect fifths, whether these are coded graphically, verbally or numerically. But do these interval classes have any psychological reality for the listener? It appears not. This is because, psychologically speaking, there are far more intervallic categories than musical analysts have terms for. Every half decent violinist or singer bends or stretches his minor seconds to different sizes according to the musical context, and all his other intervals too; and he does this not because he has some theory about them, but simply because if he does not do it, the music sounds wrong. A string quartet playing Beethoven or Bartók in strict equal temperament—if such a feat could be managed—would sound intolerable even to the most naive ear. What musicians play and what listeners respond to, then, is not 'minor seconds' but an indefinite number of varying intervals all of which we normally class either in a single pigeonhole (if we are thinking in terms of equal temperament) or in one of two pigeonholes (if we are respecting enharmonic distinctions, say between E-E<sup>b</sup> and E-D<sup>#</sup>).

You may say, what about pianos? But the fact that pianos are tuned in equal temperament does not mean people actually hear each minor second as being the same size in a given musical context. The interval between C and

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F# on a piano, if you think of them as part of a dominant seventh on D, sounds quite different from the same notes as part of a dominant seventh on A<sup>b</sup>; the physical sound is the same, but the psychological response is not.

Now there is nothing wrong with pigeonholes, but we have to remember they are of our own making. The one or two pigeonholes marked 'minor second' do not belong to the psychology of musical perception; they are artifices of musical notation. And useful though pigeonholes of musical notation are for things like performance and memorization, they will not do as the basis of scientific research into how listeners perceive musical intervals. They are simply too broad: they muddle any number of responses together, so that it would be quite impossible to work out what the factors governing these responses might be. Any meaningful work in this area would have to be done on the basis of a far more detailed way of representing musical sound than conventional notation allows. . . .

. . . when musicians use the notation for the purposes it is intended for—when, that is, they *read* it—they supply a great deal of information which is not actually in the score. For example a violinist does not play the notes of the score in the same way that a touch typist types what she (or he) sees. Instead he (or she) reads the notation as music, and his performance is an interpretation of the music as he understands it: an interpretation in which intervals, rhythms and dynamics are given what seem to the performer to be appropriate values. They are not simply executed as a series of instructions in terms of equal-tempered intervals, arithmetically-related durations, and a scale of eight dynamic levels from pianissimo to fortissimo. Consequently when a composer writes down music he is relying heavily on the reader's musical ear and imagination in supplying the precise intervallic, rhythmic and dynamic values that the notation omits, just as he has to contribute sonorous, dramatic and emotional values that cannot possibly be specified in the score.

But none of this happens if you make a strictly 'scientific' analysis of a score—analyzing the distribution of notated intervals in terms of set theory, say, or by means of statistical comparisons. When you do this, you are analyzing the score without actually *reading* it in the sense I have described. This is the musical equivalent of trying to

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analyze Shakespeare by counting the letters on the page and working out the principles governing their distribution. And whereas counting notes or letters can have some applications in the area of comparative stylistics . . . it certainly does not allow you to make musical sense of pieces of music or literary sense of pieces of literature. Consequently, if you analyze a given composition this way, your analysis may be scientific in the sense of having an explicit methodology, but it will not be at all scientific in the sense of having any meaningful or predictable relationship to the music's physical or psychological reality—that is, to the noise it makes or the effect it has on people. Indeed, the more strictly deductive your analysis of the score is, the more directly will it be conditioned by the particular cultural and pragmatic assumptions built into the notation and the less bearing it will have upon the music you actually wanted to find out about.

Now all this may sound like a wholesale indictment of musical analysis as it is generally practised: are not just about all the techniques of analysis I have discussed based on scores? Yes: but it does not necessarily follow from that that they are analyses *of* scores. It is true that a Schenkerian analysis, say, looks as if it were an analysis of the score. But in fact it is not. Rather it is using the score as a convenient, and tolerably adequate, way of talking about the real topic of musical analysis, which is the analyst's (and hopefully his reader's) experience of the music. And investigating the way you experience a piece of music is not something that can be done by means of formal deduction; nobody can prove your statements about what you experience to be right or wrong, true or untrue. However, this does not mean that self-interrogation, which is what I think analysis basically is, has to be an exercise in uncontrolled subjectivity in which anything goes and nothing is ever correct or incorrect, better or worse. Doing a Schenkerian analysis is liked being asked a series of leading questions: at every point you have to say: 'Is this what I hear? Is it what I want to hear?' And though questions like this may have no scientific validity, the responses to which they give rise can certainly be musically valid or invalid. Doing a Schenkerian analysis is like composing in this sense, if no other: you actually have to be musical in order to understand what it is all about (pp. 224-228).

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In Part Two, Cook outlines some general first steps to initiate an analysis: hear the music; observe initial responses to it; notice large-scale repetitions, motivic connections, points of high tension or release, structural breaks, the most striking feature, movement toward goals, etc. These are intended just to get deeper into the music where issues of greater import can be addressed. His basic premise seems to be: "The way we experience a given section of a piece of music depends on the role that section has within the piece as a whole. And that makes a useful definition of what musical analysis is" (p. 259).

A detailed chapter on analyzing pieces in sonata form proposes an analogy between music and the kind of narrative drive found in drama, literature, and opera:

A traditional form, like the sonata, consists essentially of a set of expectations listeners have when hearing a piece. In a sonata the listener expects there to be a move away from the opening tonality to another, and later on a return to the opening tonality. He expects these tonalities to be presented as opposed forces, the opposition between them creating a tension that is resolved in the final return to the home key. And he expects this tonal drama to be projected and clarified by the musical surface with its themes, cadential passages, repetitions and caesuras. In other words a sonata is a kind of plot, functioning rather analogously to the stories on which ancient Greek plays were based—stories that the audience knew beforehand, so that what they were interested in was not *what* the play presented but *how* it was presented. Analyzing a sonata as a sonata, then, means analyzing it in the light of the expectations a contemporary listener might have been assumed to have (p. 262).

Analysis of serial works often overlooks, according to Cook, features that are common to pieces of music in general:

I have carried out tests in which musically qualified listeners made detailed observations of the first movement of Webern's Symphony without becoming aware of its being serially structured at all—simply because they had not been asked to listen out for a serial structure! And the

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observations these listeners did make were the sort of observations that could have been made about many non-serial pieces—of tensional shapes, developmental processes, effects of finality and so forth. It is clear that basic categories of musical experience such as these are as applicable to serial as to non-serial music. And this means that if what you are interested in is how a given piece of serial music is experienced, then its serial structure can only be the starting point for your analysis. As with sonata form, the important thing is not the structure as such, but the use the particular piece you are analyzing makes of that structure (pp. 295-96)

Many of the ideas in this book are expressed in a pithy, common-sense, direct style reminiscent of aphorisms: "If we want to understand phrase structure . . . we should consider the way people actually play the music, which is just as valid a source of information as the score" (p. 310); "Essentially there are two analytical acts: the act of *omission* and the act of *relation*" (p. 16); "Analyzing a piece of music means simplifying it in such a way that it continues to make some kind of sense in its simplified version" (p. 370); " . . . an analysis should not aim to be a carbon-copy of the listener's experience: rather it should simplify, clarify and illuminate it" (p. 229).

A final, and telling, point about readability grows out of these numerous quotes (and, of course, out of reading the whole book): this work is extremely user friendly. The writing style is compelling, forceful, filled with vivid analogies, and even witty—all traits in uncommon supply these days in much scholarly writing about music. I often felt pulled to read on just to see what additional points would be made about an analytical style, problem, or a given piece. In this regard the Cook book persuades us that exciting topics are being discussed in a stimulating way—much like Stephen Gould in writing about science.

Many books that present such a clear exposition of a complex topic do so at the expense of detail and depth. This book, though, never seems watered down. Remarkably, the opposite happens: through allegiance to a lucid writing style (aka thinking style), often hidden pathways are uncovered rather than bypassed. It is to Cook's credit that such a large number of tangential issues can be explored without the book seeming to get off track. Like a good Schenkerian reduction, the relationship between embellishment of key issues and the larger framework is not lost; focus is never sacrificed for elaboration. More importantly, all of these "extra" topics add up to something worthwhile and thought provoking. I would

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have trouble recalling another single music book about analysis that has made me feel so stretched. Almost every page contains a jolt. [I will anticipate with great relish two forthcoming additional books by Cook on related issues: *Musical Analysis and the Listener*, New York: Garland, 1989; and *Music, Imagination, and Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1989.]

In addition, Cook should be commended for a gratifying mix of objective description of the analytical systems themselves and subjective interpretation of their faults and values. The context always makes evident which is which. Beyond its obvious worth as a source of information about musical analysis and a catalyst for re-examining one's own belief system, Cook's book might also be considered as a model and reminder for graduate students and young scholars (maybe even old!) that writing about analysis and perceptive listening—they are almost inseparable here—need not be ponderous and labyrinthine.

### DUNSBY/WHITTALL

*Music Analysis in Theory and Practice* covers similar ground compared to Cook. It is basically an overview of analytical systems in current usage: Schenker, Meyer, set theory, etc. The emphasis, however, is more on describing the features, goals, and assumptions of the individual systems than on comparing or interpreting them. The organization divides the book into four sections: Part I (a brief, but useful, introductory survey of historical background information on analysis); Part II: Aspects of Tonal Analysis; Part III: The Elements of Atonality; and Part IV: From Means to Meaning: Analysis and the Theory of Signs (a study of semiotics).

The nine chapters of Part III (on both free and serialized non-tonal situations) are especially detailed and thorough, providing perhaps a greater variety of different ways to make sense of atonal compositions than would be found in Cook. This part, I feel, is the strongest section of the book and one of special value for students since the emphasis is on supplying a large menu of options for different kinds of pieces or for different possibilities within the same piece.

Another useful section is the large (although not exhaustive) bibliography, which includes most major books and journal articles on analysis. Surprisingly, the Cook book contains no such similar listing although frequent reference is made both within the text and in footnotes to many of the important writings in the field. Cook, in fact, appears to be familiar with just about every source of information about analysis that could be imagined so a bibliography could have been constructed with ease.

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The main difference between Dunsby and Cook has to do more with style and emphasis than subject matter. While well written and articulate, Dunsby is more dry and matter-of-fact and reads like a graduate textbook—i.e., it lacks some of the flair and warm personal style that makes the Cook book so attractive and inviting. Controversies are often mentioned in passing by Dunsby but not always thoroughly explained, whereas in Cook the controversies often turn into the real meat of a chapter. Missing from Dunsby are the frequent and intriguing asides on aesthetics and musical perception found in Cook. *Music Analysis* reports the facts while Cook grapples with questions and problems.

### BENT

This book is a revised and expanded version of the article on “Analysis” in the *New Grove Dictionary*. The scope and intent of this book is somewhat different than either the Cook or Dunsby. It focuses on a historical overview of the evolution of musical analysis rather than on current methods of *doing* analysis. Consequently it treats a much larger number of topics and theorists but each in less detail. Its strengths are measuring influences and establishing contexts within which systems exist. Expansions in the book (compared with the original lengthy article) include developments since 1975, Renaissance diminution theory, figured bass and harmonic theory, 19th-century theory, and set-theory analysis.

Additional enlargements involve updating, expanding, correcting, and rearranging (alphabetical rather than chronological) the bibliography, which is now even more impressive and comprehensive (33 pages). The most important and largest new element is an extensive glossary by William Drabkin (also 33 pages) of terms in current analytical usage (especially ones associated with Schenkerian analysis). Historical or standard items (like cadence) are omitted.

### SUMMARY

All three books now seem, to me, indispensable for teaching any kind of graduate analysis course in comparative methodologies or techniques, although the Bent has an additional role to play as part of a history of theory class. Each one would not necessarily need to be a required text, but knowledge of the different issues raised in each would need to be part of the background that a thoroughly prepared teacher would bring to such a class. For an analysis course in a specific technique (such as Schenkerian reduc-

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tions or set theory) there are, of course, numerous specialty books available for texts, required reading assignments, or teacher preparation.

However, for studying analysis in a larger sense (i.e., as a topic in its own right: its definition, purpose, assumptions, goals, meanings, the different results achieved by doing it different ways), these three books under review are exemplary. It's lucky all three are so well done and useful because no others like them even exist. I find it notable, too, that while covering similar territory and overlapping one another (sometimes in strange configurations), they each contain ideas and facts not found in the others. And it's remarkable also that all three would appear at about the same time after such an extended dearth of material using these comparative approaches (under one cover anyway). Much of the information contained in these books can be found scattered in hundreds of isolated sources. The real accomplishment in each case is the creation of a conceptual framework for it all to exist within a single volume while blending together original interpretations at the same time. These books, both individually and collectively, set a high standard for those who may wish to continue advancing our understanding of the relationships between means and ends in musical analysis.