

Po-govori • Post-scripts

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When is a musette not a musette? A response to Robert S. Hatten

Kdaj musette ni musette? Odgovor Robertu S. Hattnu

In the *Musicological Annual* (*Muzikološki zbornik*) vol. 41, no. 1 (2005), Robert Hatten presented a survey of some salient points in the literature on the semiology of music ("Four Semiotic Approaches to Musical meaning: Markedness, Topics, Tropes and Gesture", [further as *Hatten MZ*]). Rather than remaining on the level of a bibliographic survey, Hatten offered a challenging account of his own, by now substantial, contribution to this manner of approaching the thorny question of meaning in music. His first music example comes from the finale of Beethoven's Piano Sonata op. 101, and, considering that he had already used this example in his previous writings, it is to be adduced that in the wider scheme of his argument it represents something of an essential test-case, an example so clear and persuasive as to offer to his readers an unequivocal proof of its relevance to the cause he argues.¹ One is reminded here of the status the first prelude from Bach's *Wohltemperiertes Klavier*, or the first eight bars of Mozart's Sonata KV331 have in various accounts of Schenkerian analysis. Hatten's declared aim is to avoid the allegedly hermetic nature of "abstract" methods of analysis and to broaden analytical procedures in order to incorporate into them a wider system of reference; in his own words: "[E]xpressive motivations help explain the function and the coherence of unusual compositional choices by showing how their expressive effects support a plausible dramatic form" (*Hatten 1994*, p. 92).

¹ Previous discussions of this excerpt from Beethoven's op. 101 are to be found in: Robert Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind., 1994), pp. 92-109 [further as *Hatten 1994*] and Robert Hatten, 'Metaphor in Music', in E. Tarasti (ed.), *Musical Signification. Essays in the Semiotic Theory and Analysis* (Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1995), p. 381-385.

His choice of the example from Beethoven's op. 101 is occasioned by his intention to establish the existence of a "dramatic form" by pursuing and mapping what he sees as an interaction of tropes relating to the topics loaded with meaning. As he himself states, the idea of the topics is derived from Leonard Ratner's classification of textural and motivic types in Classical music.² In Beethoven's op. 101 these topics are thus labelled by Hatten as the "fanfare", "learned style" and "pastoral musette" and are to be found exemplified in bars 33-40 of the last movement.³ The gist of his argument is this: in bars 33-36 we encounter topics of fanfare combined with the learned style, while in bars 37-40 the pastoral musette represents a "topical contrast of the pastoral with the tragic" (Hatten 1994, p. 92). The interchange between the right and left hand of the motifs characterised by the upward run of four semiquavers qualifies the bars in which they appear to be classed as being in the learned style since they presumably suggest an interchange of identical material between polyphonic voices of something resembling an old-fashioned instrumental recercare. I shall go along with this only in order to retain a concept which would help me to link my prose with Hatten's terminology, though I cannot see why I should not propose an alternative and call this an "echo" topic. However, in that case the whole narrative proposed by Hatten would be seriously undermined and the story of Beethoven's putative intentions would have to be re-drafted along different lines.

Hatten's starting topic (which I would prefer to call "domain") is allegedly contrasted by something which is very different from the opening domain, and its associated meaning represented by the learned style: starting in bar 37 (with the upbeat in bar 36), Hatten suggests, we are transported from the world of the quasi-recercare to the world of a quasi-pastoral fragment characterised by a drone suggesting an Arcadian bagpipe, hence his choice of the term "musette". This, I suggest, is difficult to sustain. While a careful scrutiny of the visual elements of the score – the distribution of the motifs in the former case, the calming of the bass line in the latter – might ostensibly link these elements to two different external reference points imagined by an analyst – in reality the flow of music, experienced by both the performer and the listener, strongly stresses the continuity of these areas. Hatten's aim is to supersede the formalist barrenness of a grammatical analysis so that in my attempt to criticise his procedure I am laying myself open to charges of being an unreformed Schenkerian formalist. In order to avoid type-casting, I shall avoid Schenkerian terminology wherever possible while retaining the crucial concept of voice leading.

Whatever the direction of melodic moves on the micro-level, the tendency of the melodic movement in bars 33-36 is a downwards one. This direction is first encountered on the micro-level in the move from the high *c-sharp* in bar 33 to the *b* in bar 34, thus initiating a progression resting on the stressed beat of each bar. A pattern is thus established and sequentially repeated, outlining on the medium macro-level a downward progression: *c-sharp, b, a, g-sharp, f-sharp* (marked 3-2-1-7-6 in my Ex. 1). This is a powerful feature and its individuality (alternatively "its character" or "its identity") is

² Leonard G. Ratner, 'Topical Content in Mozart's Keyboard Sonatas', *Early Music*, 19 (1991), pp. 615-619.

³ Hatten uses a different numbering (his bar 11 is my bar 33). I follow the numbering given in Beethoven, *Klaviersonaten. Urtext*, ed. B. A. Wallner, Henle Verlag.

stronger than any possible implication of learnedness, which is a descriptive term referring to a context essentially existing quite outside the momentary listening experience. We now come to Hatten's musette: a new identity has to be established and it is sought in the pedal point of the left hand, the reiterated *e*. Does it mean that our attention is now completely switched from the progress hitherto prevalent in the right hand, and that now, through the engagement of some perceptual filter, we minimize the significance of the continuing movement in the right hand? There is nothing particularly "musettish" in the right hand, bars 36-40, yet in the scheme imposed by Hatten the individuality of the right hand has to be suppressed in order that the feeble reiterated *e* gains in structural and hence descriptive or denotative importance. This simply cannot stand. Beethoven does indeed play with our expectation and our perception of musical time and space, and gives us in the guise of a developing variation both a development and a variation of the relentless downward progression encountered in bars 33-36. The scale descent from *c-sharp* (end of bar 36) to *f-sharp* (beginning of bar 37) presents a promise that the sequential descent will continue. However, Beethoven delays it, suspends the movement of the bass, for which he needs the sustained *e* in the left hand in order to extend the time through which the *f-sharp* continues its downward move (achieved through the deceptive upward movement) which is brought to a close in the high *f-sharp* moving to *e*, both pitches for that reason marked by pauses in bar 40. The alleged musette is supposed to provide a contrast to the previous learned style but it is a contrast in a specifically rhetorical sense, and founded not on the division but on the continuity of sense which binds bars 33-40 into a whole.

Hatten himself hints at a possibility that the study of gesture may be of help in approaching the issue of musical meaning: "Gestural events are *affectively loaded*, providing information about the gesturer (whether witting or unwitting) [...]" (*Hatten MZ*, p. 14). I suggest that if we do need to anchor the material with which Beethoven operates within some wider human experience, then a reference to rhetoric and to the orators as the practitioners of it may come in useful. Orators depended on their mastery of the variation in the speed of delivery, on the use of longer or shorter words, longer or shorter phrases, and I propose that Beethoven treats us to a display of a rhetorical mode of delivery, not a consciously adopted one, but relying on a deep-level interaction of language and music. Rather than accepting labels such as the "learned style" or "musette" I would be tempted to seek parallels in numerous instances from classical as well as later poetic sources where shorter bursts of a word or two lead towards a longer phrase, establishing both a contrast and a continuum, the two in a dialectical relationship with each other. A Renaissance music theorist might have readily resorted to a comparison between poetry and music, and, appearing hopelessly old-fashioned I am tempted to draw attention to Venus's words to Cupid from Virgil, *Aeneid* I.664-66:

nate, meae vires, mea magna potentia, solus,
nate, patris summi qui tela Typhoëa temnis,
ad te confugio et supplex tua numina posco.⁴

⁴ "My son, my sole strength, my effectual might - my son, who scornest the Titan bolts of our sovereign Father - to thee I come for succour, and, suppliant, implore thy deity!" English translation from: Virgil, *The Aeneid*, tr. John Jackson (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1921), pp. 126-127.

In a miniature we find here a language-based model which finds its echo in Beethoven's procedure: several short invocations (motives in bars 33-36) are contrasted by a sweep in lines 665-666, with only a hint of a break at the end of line 666.

In bars 33-36 the orator Beethoven is addressing his audience in several short bursts, even single words, accompanied no doubt by several short moves of a powerfully clenched fist. Having captured the full attention of his listeners, he can now switch to a smoother clause (bars 37-40), accompanied by a broader, reassuring sweep of the imaginary hand, pausing a moment (bar 40) before returning to a more agitated mode of delivery, with which to bring this particular section of his oration to a close (bars 41-48), but for which there is no direct equivalent in Virgil. Centrally symmetrical pattern is a model of construction less likely to be successful in the discursive medium of language, and therefore less likely to be found as self-sufficient in poetry where the conceptual sense has to be reckoned with in addition to the rhythmic properties of the oratory, whereas in music such repetition is entirely tenable. Virgil needs just the gradual lengthening in order to achieve an effect. Beethoven, on the other hand, dependent on formal procedures which give coherence to a system otherwise lacking referential meaning, is likely to stress the reiterative nature of the opening of our Virgil archetype by returning to its equivalent in bar 41. In terms of the overall musical structure bars 41-48 cannot be left out of the picture, as they seem to have been left by Hatten, since on the macro-level they present the consequent to the antecedent of bars 33-40. In the antecedent (bars 33-40) we witness an ornamented pattern whose contour rests on the segment of a major sixth (*c sharp* – *e*, marked 3-2-1-7-6-5! in the music example, bridging the gap forced by Hatten), elaborated through octave displacement, just as in oratory a simple idea is extended through troping or reiteration. In the consequent (bars 41-48, marked 8-7-5-4-3-2-1) a complete octave outline provides a closely related pattern, now firmly anchored between the two appearances of the tonic *a*: it commences with an upper neighbour-note (*b*) in bar 41 and settles on a reiterated tonic (*a*), the latter both in a low and in a high register (bars 46-48).⁵ If we were consistent with Hatten's proposed model, the reiterated tonic would have to be proclaimed an "inverted musette", since bars 45-48 invert the texture of bars 37-40, though such description would totally obscure the rhetorical process which is much clearer when the account of the structure is freed from the unhelpful imposition of topical labels.

In semiological quarters formal analysis and voice-leading are often charged with the sin of imposing *a priori* schemes on the music being analyzed, thereby reducing compositional processes containing otherwise unique elements to a universal outline – Schenker's *Urfinie*, say. I hope I have shown that in spite of retaining a fundamental belief in the directedness of melodic movement one need not become enslaved by any notions of an *a priori* system, while my rhetorical paradigm allows me to assess formal procedures as if they were language-derived, but without charging them

⁵ In order not to make this into a prolonged analytical study, I have deliberately skirted round the issue of the status of the third degree (*c-sharp*) in the descent. Properly speaking, it is deflected into the middle voice and then prolonged (bars 46-48) thus showing a case of skilful variation in the structuring of the consequent, when compared to the voice-leading in the antecedent.

with the task of presenting the content of the narration. Setting out, as Hatten does, to interpret the events in a sonata in terms of topical labels is in itself an instance of an *a priori* interpretation since it is founded on an analyst's ability to conjure up narrative parallels and project one mode of thinking onto the material which in its actual sounding does not establish any clear semantic rules enabling such interpretation. One would have to be able to form a distinct and strong impression of some "learnedness" emanating as a potent characteristics of a few bars of music and an equally strong, if not even more potent, property of "musetteness" in the bars that follow, acting as a recognizable contrast to each other, in order to endorse Hatten's narrative interpretation.

Rhetoric, on the other hand, is a manner of presenting the flow of the articulating processes within formal patterns, yet without depending on a derivation from the content of the narrative. Rhetoric thus bridges the distinction which otherwise exists between the referential poetry or prose and the non-referential music, it removes the hermetic aura of music and offers a much more promising method of exploring the secrets of musical meaning.

Example 1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata op. 101, last movement, bars 32-48.