Analyzing the Music of Living Composers (and Others)

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Edited by

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PREFACE

In March of 2010, a rather unique scholarly meeting was held in Eugene, Oregon under the auspices of the West Coast Conference of Music Theory and Analysis. Our stated purpose was to focus on applying traditional musicanalytic techniques, as well as new, innovative techniques, to describing the music of composers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In any era, recently-composed music is often the most difficult to understand—and that difficulty increases greatly in our own era, when such a wide variety of musical styles are practiced and even combined. Our goal was to take steps toward making music of our time a bit less impenetrable for our colleagues, students and other listeners by showing how it follows, varies, and sometimes controverts the organizational schemes of older music. As is often the case with our meetings, our call for papers was open to a broad range of topics so there are chapters analyzing music of older eras as well, which, as it turns out, throw light on the analysis of recent music in unexpected ways. Therefore, like our previous proceedings volume published with Cambridge Scholars, Musical Currents from the Left Coast (2008), this book "contains what may be understood as a snapshot, from one vantage point at least, of the present state of North American research in music theory and analysis." It also will be useful to musicologists, music analysts, and performers of the repertoire considered, as well as interested amateurs.

In the introduction to *Musical Currents from the Left Coast*, Bruce Quaglia and I commented on how the studies contained in it "present a cross-section of thought at a particular instant that then reflects a network of trajectories, and suggests possible developments and outcomes." This new volume has its own trajectories, and we anticipate that it will give rise to its own developments and outcomes, but, to a much larger degree than *Musical Currents*, these very well could include responses from living composers in the language of music. Thus the book's contribution to our art could go well beyond enhancing the fields of music theory and musicology.

PART I:

PROCESS IN THE MUSIC OF LIVING COMPOSERS

INTRODUCTION TO PART I

Part I explores "Process in the Music of Living Composers." It opens with Brent Yorgason's exploration of compositional procedures in Michael Torke's *Telephone Book*, which range from techniques derived from minimalism to cyclical patterns of Stravinsky, Brahmsian motivic transformations, the harmonic and rhythmic language of jazz, and melodic riffs derived from rock and pop. Yorgason explains how Torke speeds up and combines musical processes to create momentum, and he asserts that Torke's profusion of as well as treatment of these processes reflects postminimalism.

The recurring theme of motivic transformation, now understood through the lens of Schoenberg's theoretical work, also forms the basis for Andrew Gades's study of Joan Tower's *Purple Rhapsody*. Gades not only describes the motivic processes that give the work coherence, but accounts for the unique roles they play within different formal sections of the work. After identifying the motivic "seeds," Gades examines how motivic deployment articulates formal divisions throughout *Purple Rhapsody*. His essay considers other form-delineating elements, such as pitch collection, tempo, texture, and timbre. Gades also describes Tower's gradual transformation of rhythmic and melodic motives as a means of lending coherence to *Purple Rhapsody*, and he explains how the main theme's dual character—both static and dynamic—is paralleled at multiple levels of the piece to generate drama and long-range momentum.

The focus then turns to Arvo Pärt's music, as Erik Heine investigates the processes that generate the early *tintinnabuli* work *Arbos*. Relying on the composer's own comments put forth in Paul Hillier's *Arvo Pärt*, Heine defines and illustrates the *tintinnabuli* method as being based on a diatonic melody voice (M-voice) and a *tintinnabuli* voice (T-voice), which is always a note of the tonic triad; he points out that in relation to the melody voice, the T-voice can assume different positions such as above or below and first or second position. Heine then goes on to show how the narrative portrayed by the triple mensuration canon in *Arbos* has continued to set that work apart from Pärt's other *tintinnabuli* compositions.

Part I concludes by introducing readers to the musical language of the Belgian composer Willem Ceuleers, whose steadily growing output thus far includes over 780 works. In addition to relaying the composer's own

remarks about decisions made prior to and throughout the compositional process, Timothy Pack demonstrates Ceuleers' skill and stylistic breadth by examining four works: *Stabat sancta Maria*, op. 655; *Requiem*, op. 735; *Cantata voor zondag Trinitatis*, op. 610; and *Orgelmis voor het Heilig Hart van Jezus*, op. 688. Pack explains how Ceuleers masterfully incorporates an extensive array of styles spanning the last eight centuries and cutting across several genres, including vocal and purely instrumental. Pack's essay shows how Ceuleers uses each earlier style as one of many compositional parameters for creating, in his own musical language and in his own meta-style, a new work for today's listeners to enjoy.

—Tim S. Pack

CHAPTER ONE

MAKING THE MOST OF MINIMALISM: MULTIPLE SIMULTANEOUS PROCESSES IN TORKE'S TELEPHONE BOOK

BRENT YORGASON

In the classic minimalist compositions of the 1970s, the gradual playing-out of clearly audible musical processes was a central feature. Minimalist composers such as Philip Glass, La Monte Young, and Steve Reich developed a number of techniques for working with musical processes such as phasing, the subtle shifting of metric accents, and additive and subtractive patterns. Post-minimalist composers incorporated many of these processive techniques into their own compositional styles, but did not adopt the aesthetic or the style of minimalism. Unlike early minimalism, which typically features hypnotic repetitions and slowly-paced changes within a single ongoing process, post-minimalistic music normally features more rapid changes in style, less repetition of musical ideas, and the simultaneous use of multiple processes.

All of these characteristics can be seen in Michael Torke's *Telephone Book*, a three-movement work for chamber ensemble that includes "The Yellow Pages," "The Blue Pages," and "The White Pages." Torke is one of those rare individuals who literally hears colors in music, a condition known as synesthesia. In discussing this piece, Torke mentions that he has always heard the key of G major as "a darkish, burnt yellow." Therefore, "The Yellow Pages" is written in G major. For similar reasons, he uses two sharps for "The Blue Pages" and no sharps or flats for "The White Pages."

Telephone Book uses a number of musical processes derived from minimalism, but employs them in post-minimalistic ways, by (1) speeding up the processes used, (2) using processes in simultaneous combination, and (3) combining minimalist processes with other compositional styles and techniques, such as the cyclical patterns of Stravinsky, Brahmsian

motivic transformations, the harmonic and rhythmic language of jazz, and melodic riffs that are derived from rock and pop music. The result is a work with a constantly evolving, restlessly optimistic, dance-like musical surface that is supported by layers of logical processes. Unlike classic minimalism, our attention as listeners is not necessarily drawn to the underlying processes, since there are many interesting melodic and rhythmic ideas decorating the surface. However, upon reflection, these processes are not very far from the surface, and listeners can follow along with them fairly easily, even when multiple processes occur simultaneously.

"The Yellow Pages" begins by introducing a handful of repeating patterns that will permeate the work. The first of these is a pattern of ascending fifths in the violin (see Example 1-1). A one-measure ostinato pattern (taken from the bass line of a song by Chaka Khan) then enters in the cello in m. 5 (see Example 1-2). An important contour motive, which can be represented as $[0\ 1\ 0\ /\ 0\ 1\ 2]$, is also introduced in m. 5, passed back and forth between the overlapping piano and violin patterns (see Example 1-3). One additional two-measure pattern, shared by the flute and clarinet, begins in m. 7 (see Example 1-4). In its initial form it is only active near the barline. After the introduction of these basic patterns, the process of systematically altering the patterns begins.



Example 1-1, "Yellow Pages," violin pattern, m. 4 Copyright © 1995 by Adjustable Music. Bill Holab Music, Sole Agent. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.



Example 1-2, "Yellow Pages," ostinato pattern, m. 5



Example 1-3, "Yellow Pages," [0 1 0 / 0 1 2] contour motive in violin and piano patterns, m. 5 $\,$



Example 1-4, "Yellow Pages," initial woodwind pattern, m. 7

The process from which "The Yellow Pages" derives its name occurs in the opening section of the work, and also reappears in each of the other movements. This is a process that Torke calls "static transposition" (see Table 1-1).⁵ For each two bars of music in this section, a sharp is added in the order of the circle of fifths. However, none of the patterns are actually transposed. Each pattern retains the same note names, adding accidentals only when required by the process. For example, in mm. 11-12, the first sharp, C#, is added. Here, the patterns continue as they did before, but all of the Cs are replaced by C#s. The next accidental in the circle of fifths, G#, is substituted for all of the Gs in mm. 13-14, and so on, continuing around the circle. Example 1-5 provides the first few phases (mm. 9-16) of this substitutional process for the ostinato part in the cello.

Measures	Pitch	Co	llect	ion					Key	Other Processes
9-10		G	A	В	С	D	Е	F#	G major	Additive/Subtractive
11-12		G	A	\mathbf{B}	C#	D	E	F#		+3 notes / -C
13-14		G#	A	В	C#	D	E	F#		+2 notes / -G
15-16		G#	A	В	C#	D#	E	F#		+1 note / -D
17-18		G#	A#	В	C#	D#	E	F#	g# minor	+2 notes / -A
19-20		G#	A#	В	C#	D^{\sharp}	E#	F#		+1 note / -E
		A۶	В	C	D	Е	F	G۶	enharmonic respelling	
21-22		Ab	В	C	D	Е	F	$G\flat$		+1 note / -B
23-24		A۶	В	C	$\mathbf{D}\flat$	E^{\flat}	F	G	A♭ major	+2 notes / -F
25-26		A۶	В	C	D	E^{\flat}	F	G		+2 notes
27-28		Α	В	C	D	ЕЬ	F	G		+2 notes
29-30		A	В	C	D	E	F	G		
31-32		A	В	C	D	E	F	G	a minor	
33-34		A	В	C	D	E	F#	G	pitches of G major	
35–38	G	A	В	C	D	E	F#		G major	

bold = changed pitch

Table 1-1, Static transposition in "The Yellow Pages," mm. 9-38⁶



Example 1-5, "Yellow Pages," ostinato pattern, mm. 9-16

As this slow transpositional process continues, the listener will experience a gradual series of tonal transformations: G major is eventually replaced by G# minor, which changes into G# major (enharmonically respelled as Ab major), and so on. When the pitches of G major are regained in m. 33 (after having gone through the entire circle of fifths), Torke terminates the process by going directly back to G major, shifting all of the parts down a major second. This return firmly reestablishes the home key and has a framing effect on the section as a whole.⁷

The composer compares this slow transpositional process to the process of thumbing through the yellow pages in a telephone book, with the categories of phone numbers changing slowly from "Automobile Wrecking" to "Aviation Consultants" to "Awnings and Canopies." Although Torke's metaphor is evocative, it is not entirely apt, since in thumbing through the yellow pages, only the initial letter or letters remain the same—all of the other letters change rather unpredictably. This is not very descriptive of the process in this piece, wherein only one pitch changes at a time.

A more fitting metaphor, in my opinion, is the word game called a "Laddergram" or a "Word Chain," which involves changing one word into another by altering only one letter at a time (see Figure 1-1). For example, to change MILK into PAIL, we could use the series MILK - SILK - SILL - PILL - PALL - PAIL. To change MICE into RATS, we can use the series MICE - RICE - RACE - RATE - RATS. Although not completely systematic, this type of transformation is much more representative of the type of process that occurs in "The Yellow Pages."

MICE to RATS
MICE
RICE
RACE
RATE
RATS

Figure 1-1, Sample "Laddergrams" or "Word Chains"

This process of "static transposition" is simultaneously combined with two other processes in this passage (see Figure 1-2). The first of these is an additive process in the woodwinds. At each repetition of the two-measure pattern, a few additional notes are added, replacing rests in the previous instance (see the last column in Table 1-1). By m. 29, the pattern has reached its final state (as illustrated in Example 1-6), having been transformed from a few syncopated phrases in the background to an elaborately designed, flowing melody that is very much in the foreground.

The process occurring in the violin part is opposite that of the woodwinds—for each two measures of music, a note is subtracted from its pattern. This subtracted note always corresponds to the pitch being altered in the other parts (see Table 1-1). For example, in m. 11, C# is the added pitch; at this point, all Cs are eliminated from the violin pattern. In m. 13, all Gs are removed, and so on. The previously prominent violin part thus

becomes progressively sketchier until it disappears entirely (see Example 1-7). The simultaneous combination of these three processes—static transposition, the additive woodwind process, and the subtractive violin process—gives the listener plenty to attend to. It may not be possible to hear all of these changes taking place in a single hearing.

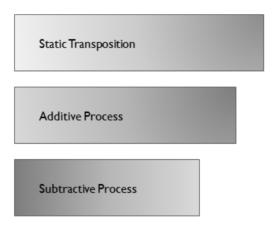


Figure 1-2, Simultaneous processes in "The Yellow Pages," mm. 9-38



Example 1-6, "Yellow Pages," initial and final woodwind patterns, mm. 9-10 / 29-30



Example 1-7, "Yellow Pages," initial and final violin patterns, mm. 9-10 / 25-26

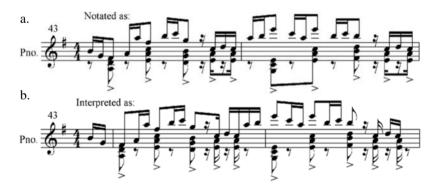
The two-measure pattern that was developed by the woodwinds in this first section (see Example 1-6 above) is taken directly by the piano at letter B (see Example 1-8), effectively linking the sections and creating a sense of continuity. The texture in this section is monophonic, with the complete melodic line given only to the piano. The other parts pass pieces of the melody back and forth between themselves. The effect is somewhat pointillistic in the upper parts, although smoothly supported by the full melodic line of the piano.

A thinning process takes place in this section, which allows an offbeat accent to emerge strongly, leading to the perception of a shifted downbeat. This gradual process of shifting begins with the addition of a series of offbeat chords in m. 43 (see Example 1-9a). In the next two-measure unit, the upper voices drop the melodic line and align themselves with the syncopated chords. It is at or near this point that the sense of downbeat changes, with the perceived downbeat shifting one-half of a beat to the right, coinciding with the beginning of the syncopated chordal pattern.

Because of the regularity and strength of the accented offbeats, the sixteenth-sixteenth-eighth pattern in the piano is easily reinterpreted as eighth-sixteenth-sixteenth (see Example 1-9b). This perceived shift of downbeat is further strengthened by the complete disappearance of the melody at m. 47 and confirmed by the entry of the ostinato pattern on the *offbeat* rather than on the notated downbeat in m. 51. I typically find it very hard *not* to shift my metric focus to the offbeats when I listen to this passage.



Example 1-8, "Yellow Pages," beginning of the second section, m. 39



Example 1-9, Emergence of a shifted downbeat in "The Yellow Pages," m.43



Example 1-10, Alternating meters section in "The Yellow Pages," m. 56

In the next section (at letter C) a process of alternation begins between the real (notated) downbeat and the "perceived" downbeat (see Example 1-10). The first such occurrence catches the listener off guard (in m. 56); here, the downbeat of the familiar ostinato pattern seems to have arrived "too soon." Example 1-10 illustrates how certain notes have been omitted and inserted in order to create the effect of shifting between a measure of 7/8 and a measure of 9/8. As quirky as this metric scheme may be, its alternating pattern continues to underlie the work for the next thirty-six measures.

Accompanying the ostinato in the right hand of the piano are the syncopated chords derived from the previous section, clearly outlining the contour pattern $[0\ 1\ 0\ /\ 0\ 1\ 2]$ (see Example 1-11).



Example 1-11, Successive levels of elaboration in "The Yellow Pages," mm. 55-69

This pattern, which remained in the background in the first section, now moves to the forefront. When the violin is added in m. 59, its line is a simple embellishment of this pattern in the piano (see the violin part in Example 1-11). The entry of the clarinet in m. 63 in turn embellishes the violin line. And the flute enters in m. 67 with an elaboration of the clarinet part. The process of creating successive levels of elaboration of a single idea establishes a high degree of unity between the parts when they are all combined at m. 67.

Even before these parts are combined, a new process has begun in the cello and piano: a cyclic harmonic process similar to the one used in the opening section. But instead of motion by fifths every two measures, this section involves harmonic motion downward by a third every four measures. It begins by moving from G major to E major in m. 63, to C major in m. 67, then to A major, F Major, D major, and B major, arriving at G major again in m. 87. This process differs from the previous one in that the ostinato pattern *does* modulate to the keys in the cycle. But as the cello and left-hand piano move through a series of third-related keys, the other parts once again remain stationary, preserving their note names while incorporating the required accidentals. Thus, their relationship to the tonal center given by the ostinato is constantly changing. As the harmonic sequence continues, a canon ensues at letter D (mm. 71-90 in the score), with successive canonic entries in the piano, violin, clarinet, and flute.

The character of the music beginning at letter E (m. 91) is much more developmental. Once again, the monophonic piano melody is taken from the idea that was developed by the woodwinds in the previous section, and the upper voices pass pieces of the melody back and forth. But there is also another process that begins here. The four upper parts begin to move within the narrow confines of repeating motivic cells. The range of each cell is only three pitches. For example, in m. 91 (see Example 1-12), the pitches A B C are used by the flute, D E F by the clarinet, and B C D by the violin and cello. 10 These motivic patterns are all derived from the monophonic melody in the piano and proceed at different speeds in each voice. Each pattern consists of four notes in the contour pattern [1 0 1 2]. This contour can be understood as a contraction of the original [0 1 0 / 0 1 2] pattern.

At letter F (m. 103), repetitions of this motivic cell appear in hierarchical augmentation levels, with the cello and flute patterns lasting roughly one measure, the violin two measures, the clarinet four measures and the left-hand piano in the low register lasting eight measures (see Figure 1-3). At the same time, a shifting process is taking place, with each repeating pattern dropping its final pitch.



Example 1-12, Repeating motivic cells, each with a [1 0 1 2] contour motive, in "The Yellow Pages," m. 91 $\,$

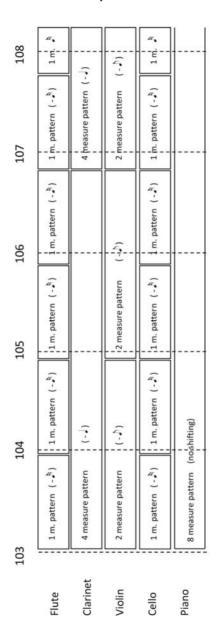


Figure 1-3, Shifting hierarchical layers in "The Yellow Pages," mm. 103-08

For example, the melodic idea in the flute omits its final sixteenth note, shifting the beginning of each repetition to the left by one sixteenth (see Example 1-13). Similarly, the cello part shifts one sixteenth to the left on each repetition, the violin shifts one eighth to the left, and the clarinet shifts one quarter to the left. As Figure 1-3 illustrates, all of the parts (except for the steady piano part), slowly begin to drift away from the barline. Although there is clearly some temporal coordination between the upper shifting voices (which are aligned at their beginnings), the overall aural effect is that things never quite line up the same. At the end of each eight-measure unit, a fragment of the ostinato idea from the opening section interjects and the process of shifting layers begins anew. Elements from the opening section continue to appear throughout this developmental section, hinting at an eventual return. ¹¹



Example 1-13, Shifting rhythmic patterns in "The Yellow Pages," m. 106



Example 1-14, Embedded piano melody in the upper parts, "The Yellow Pages," m. 149

The expected return arrives in m. 143 with a fortissimo statement of the woodwind pattern from the opening section (m. 35) in vigorous rhythms and a full texture, accompanied by a decisive return to G as the tonal center. This woodwind pattern is also embedded within the contrapuntally conceived upper lines at letter I. This becomes especially apparent in m. 149, where the full woodwind melody is played by the piano, and each of its notes is doubled somewhere in the upper parts (see Example 1-14).

A subtractive process begins to take place in m. 153. The melody here is rhythmically sparser, comparable to the state of the woodwind melody in m. 21. In m. 157, the melody is comparable to the version at m. 15, and the melody in m. 161 is the same as the woodwind pattern in its initial state in m. 7. Thus, instead of starting with an abbreviated pattern and building up to a full melody, as in the opening section, this passage pursues the reverse process, beginning with the full pattern and reducing it to its initial abbreviated form. These successive reductions of the melody continue to be embedded within the contrapuntal lines of the upper parts, which become less and less active as the section progresses.



Example 1-15, Closing theme in "The Yellow Pages," m. 159

Throughout this process of reduction, a new idea has been emerging—a slow descending line that acts as a closing theme (see Example 1-15). It began in the cello in m. 147 and reaches its final form in m. 159, where it is reinforced by the violin. As the upper lines wither away, this closing theme does not diminish in strength. By m. 163, only two ideas remain: the new closing theme in the strings and the initial woodwind pattern in the piano and winds. The transition to the final section at letter J (in m. 167) is quite smooth. The woodwind pattern is retained in the flute and clarinet (see Example 1-4), the cello comes in with the ostinato (Example 1-2), and the piano returns to its initial accompaniment pattern (Example 1-3). The violin carries over the descending closing theme, which is combined nicely with this opening material.

When Torke composed the second and third movements of *Telephone Book* ten years after writing "The Yellow Pages," he returned to the idea of static transposition in combination with other processes. In the composer's note in the score, he states that "each movement explores a slightly different application of this treatment." ¹² I would now like to

briefly examine this "slightly different application" of the process of static transposition in these two latter movements.

Most of the second movement, "The Blue Pages," (which is written in a decisively bluesy style) involves a single set of simultaneous processes, once again combining static transposition with additive and subtractive rhythmic processes (See Figure 1-4). But here, only some of the parts remain static (keeping the same letter names) while the others participate in a harmonic sequence. And rather than adding and subtracting pitches within a unit of unvarying length (such as the two-measure units in "The Yellow Pages"), here Torke allows his basic units to expand and contract.

"The Blue Pages" constantly alternates between two contrasting ideas. The first is the principal melody—a bluesy theme, made up of two phrases, which at each repetition is one measure shorter in length. Torke shortens it by removing one beat from the beginning and end of each of its two phrases (see Example 1-16). The second idea is a freely-swinging transitional theme, which at each repetition is one measure longer. He lengthens it by adding two beats of music to the beginning and to the end (see Example 1-17). Thus, these two themes expand or contract progressively from their middles.

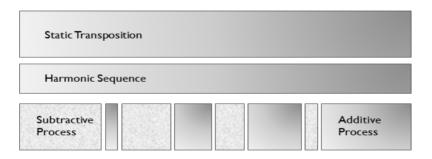
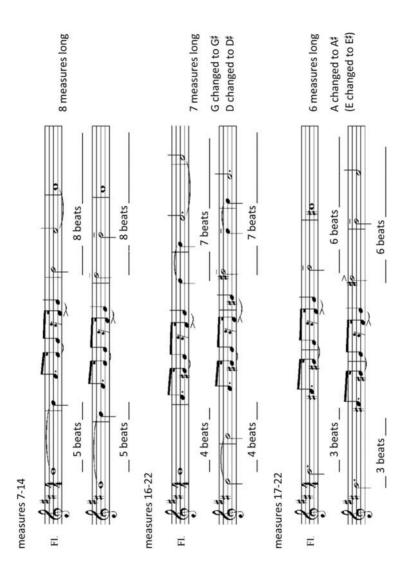


Figure 1-4, Simultaneous processes in "The Blue Pages," mm. 7-73



Example 1-16, Initial transformations of the bluesy main theme in "The Blue Pages," mm. 7-22.

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