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ARNOLD WHITTALL

ALLEN FORTE IN *MUSIC ANALYSIS*

> I have lingered long and hard over 'what Forte is really saying' type statements, concluding that what Forte is really saying is what he says.[1]
>
> 4–16 happens to be a set in *Wozzeck* that represents Marie's fate, and it appears throughout the opera in crucial places . . . . How do I know this? Because I have a lot of experience in analysing *Wozzeck*, so I'm not looking at it as a naïve person. I'm looking at it from experience, just as you would when you analyse a piece . . . . When you start to use an abstract tool like pitch-class set genera, you cannot rule out the human factor and the variability that this entails – I think that's great because it will give your analysis a certain stamp and allows people to discover different things in doing analyses . . . . Analysis is really an educational activity – self-education, and sometimes educating other people.[2]

I

Allen Forte's first article for this journal – 'Foreground Rhythm in Early Twentieth-Century Music' – appeared in October 1983 (Forte 1983). By one of those happy coincidences that bring pleasure to historians, the same issue included a review of 'Forte-Gilbert' – the *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* by Allen Forte and Steven E. Gilbert (Forte and Gilbert 1982) – thereby giving readers a good indication of the formidable versatility that is a Forte trademark.

By 1983 Allen Forte was hardly an unknown quantity, even in the UK, and those who knew his name primarily as the translator of Schoenberg's text in the Schott piano-vocal score of *Moses und Aron* (1956), or as the author of an Introduction for the epoch-making English edition of *Der freie Satz*,[3] would have had the chance to explore a wide range of other publications. *The Structure of Atonal Music* (Forte 1973) had been around for a decade, its extended appendix on *The Harmonic Organization of 'The Rite of Spring'* (Forte 1978a) for five years. His three earlier books had not achieved wide circulation outside America, but the articles on 'Schenker's Conception of Musical Stucture' (Forte 1959) and 'Schoenberg's Creative Evolution: the Path to Atonality' (Forte 1978b) had grabbed academic attention, even in the UK, through the confidence and challenging nature of their judgements, and the controversial clarity of their technical demonstrations.

Forte has never exactly been the music-theory equivalent of Elliott Carter – more honoured in Europe than in his native USA. But, both as a writer and a visiting speaker, he has achieved as much prominence here as any music theorist can reasonably expect. Early reactions to pitch-class set theory in the UK were

as varied as they were in America, though on quite different grounds. The first mention in a book was probably by Jim Samson in *Music in Transition* underlining inherent British pragmatism and practicality with his comment that

> in certain works of Webern . . . Forte may indeed have helped to make audible certain relationships between components which had formerly remained unnoticed. But the unpardonable aspect of his theory is its dismissal of those relationships – conscious or unconscious – which are already audible and significant for the listener. He rejects, for example, Roy Travis's characterization of the final bar of Schoenberg's Op. 19 No. 2 as a 'tonic sonority' on the grounds that 'the triad C–E–G is a non-set'.[4]

Since 1977 there has been plenty of critical commentary on Forte's ideas about the structure of atonal music by British or UK-based authors. But Forte's own thinking has not stood still during the past thirty years. What for Samson was the 'unpardonable' idea of the non-set was soon demoted within Forte's lexicon, as he became more concerned to show how any apparent triads were commonly part of larger and more structurally salient formations, and the non-set does not appear at all in *The Atonal Music of Anton Webern* (Forte 1998). Nevertheless, Forte's comments in *Music Analysis* concerning Will Ogdon's claims for the presence of tonal processes in Schoenberg's Op. 11 No. 1 make clear that he had little sympathy with attempts to see new music quite so directly in terms of the old (Forte 1985). Only later, when the notion of the 'atonal-tonal' genus emerged, would some kind of fusion or interaction seem theoretically viable to one who had begun by theorising the structure of *atonal* music. By then, too, the British resistance to theory, still strong in the mid-1970s, had given way to more constructive attempts to link analysis to theory, if rarely to allow the complete dominance of the former by the latter. The nature and extent of Forte's influence and reception in the UK is a subject for another occasion, but it is worth noting here that it has extended well beyond his relatively early work on Schenker or set theory. For example, Allan F. Moore's handbook on the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* appropriates 'some thoughts from Allen Forte's recent reorientation of Schenkerian methods to accommodate popular music, in particular his refusal to divine an *Ursatz* for the repertory he discusses'.[5]

II

The final paragraph of Forte's first *Music Analysis* article began as follows:

> This study suggests that rhythm in non-tonal music of the early twentieth century is intricately associated with pitch events, just as it is in traditional tonal music. Examination of the rhythmic dimension of the non-tonal work profitably begins with the study of time spans of larger duration, middleground spans, which govern the temporal unfolding of the composition. Refinement of this initial stage of analysis occurs with the study of the ways in which these larger

> spans are organised both with respect to the patterns they project if regarded as independent entities and with respect to the pitch structures which they articulate in manifold ways, both in large and in small. (Forte 1983, p. 267)

The combination of challenging thought and measured language in this conclusion is characteristic. Forte is saying that tonal and non-tonal music share hierarchic attributes: that both diversify a unity. But he is also implicitly challenging the extent of the analogy, against the background of the obvious but crucial factor that no non-tonal nexus set can function precisely as a tonal *Ursatz* functions. Yet the extent to which the structural significance of sets is not to be equated with matters of motivic identity, and development seems to be intimately bound up with the perception that the structural significance of the *Ursatz* exceeds motivic, thematic qualities. 'In some respects the same, but always in different ways' therefore becomes a possible key-phrase when tonal and post-tonal compositions are compared. Here the archetypal Forte quality – to instruct, but at the same time to provoke – is at its clearest. And making students and teachers think productively, even profoundly, can work particularly well when what is provocative in any text is not flagged as such by the writer.

During the 1980s Forte began to attend conferences in the UK, and 'Pitch-Class Set Analysis Today', his paper for the first Music Analysis Conference (KCLMAC 1984), reinforced the 'set as something other than motive' agenda, noting that a 'basic cell' analysis of the first setting from *Pierrot lunaire* 'is effective and interesting as far as it goes, but it does not show the "background" features which govern the movement as a whole' (Forte 1985, p. 51). Nevertheless, the claim that there are ' "background" features', and not just a (single) 'background' is crucial. It turns out that 'the movement is based upon exactly six hexachords . . . together with their complements', and this is the result of that 'top-down segmentation' which, Forte suggests, 'seems to be especially appropriate in the case of Schoenberg's atonal music' (Forte 1985, p. 53).

'Pitch-Class Set Analysis Today' is a classic demonstration of Forte's self-deprecatory irony, extended here to positively British lengths, no doubt in tribute to the specific occasion, and most apparent in his comments on British reviewers of his work (especially Anthony Milner on *The Harmonic Organization of 'The Rite of Spring'*) or on then-current British ideas about atonality. The relaxed nature of Forte's set-theory retrospective in 1984 probably also had something to do with the way the next stage of the theory's evolution was being prepared. But it would take quite a while for the implications of his subsequent blockbuster, 'Pitch-Class Set Genera and the Origin of Modern Harmonic Species' (Forte 1988a), to engage British theorists in any productive way. Meanwhile, there was the more immediate topic of *Music Analysis*, British (born or resident) theorists, and that ever-interesting subject, *The Rite of Spring*.

The July–October 1986 issue of *Music Analysis* saw the notorious exchange between Forte and Richard Taruskin.[6] I will not comment further on this fraught and frequently discussed subject here, not least because later publications by both participants (and others such as Daniel K. L. Chua in the present issue) have done much to refocus the essential debate concerning modality in general and octatonicism in particular as acoustic resources. By the end of the 1980s there had already been plenty of constructive critical consideration of pitch-class set theory in Britain, with attempts to refine its terminology and test its practical analytical consequences: the doctoral dissertations of Anthony Pople and Michael Russ, for example.[7] Meanwhile, Forte's own move into a more generic understanding of post-tonal pitch processes was powerfully demonstrated in one of his most substantial but least noted essays, 'Musorgsky as Modernist' (Forte 1990), a match for his other major forays into the late-nineteenth century of Liszt and Wagner, published in *19th Century Music* and *JAMS* respectively (Forte 1987; 1988b).

III

Forte's understanding of Musorgsky's modernism attaches particular importance to 'musical gestures that are so remote from traditional paradigms of harmony and counterpoint that they confounded not only the composer's contemporaries – hostile as well as friendly – but also confused generations of critics after his untimely demise'. Nevertheless, this 'radically innovative music' requires analysis not just in terms of sets, but of motives, and Forte announces: 'I shall survey the musical motivic material of [*Boris Godunov*], first in terms of pitch-class motives (motives that engage single notes), then in terms of motives or motivic fragments, both "melodic" and "harmonic", that derive from three "source motives"' (Forte 1990, p. 4). Where the eight principal pitch-class motives are concerned, Forte observes that these relate to four pairs of tritonal oppositions which, collectively, generate an octatonic scale. '*Boris Godunov* throughout . . . exhibits strong octatonic characteristics', and 'the octatonic collection serves as a "background" reservoir from which the composer draws pitch-class sets to create special melodic and harmonic structures' (Forte 1990, p. 8). This basic point is reinforced at the end of the article with the comment that 'the composer uses the octatonic collection both as an ordered "scale" and as a reservoir of pitches from which to select his linear materials, with the latter being by far the most common harmonic practice' (Forte 1990, p. 40). And Forte's final analytical demonstration in the Musorgsky essay – given that the music in question has a key signature – is notable for combining voice-leading motions on more than one level with 'atonal' set-class designations. The meaning, appropriately enough, is in the ambiguity, since the continuum of tonal/post-tonal/atonal interacts with the meshed hierarchies and symmetries of octatonicism. This is a paradigm that often concerned Forte from then on, and his publications in *Music Analysis* give a good indication of its significance.

Not much more than a year after the Musorgsky essay came 'Debussy and the Octatonic' (Forte 1991). Since this involved responses to Richard Parks's recent monograph, Forte took the opportunity to orient his analyses of octatonicism around his theory of pitch-class set genera which – as a later comment made clear – was conceived after Parks's rather different theory, even though Forte's 1988 *JMT* article preceded Parks's 1989 monograph, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (published in a Yale University Press series edited by Forte).[8] In a footnote to the Debussy article, Forte states that his theory

> organises the universe of pitch-class sets into related 'families' on the basis of chains of inclusion relations that begin from trichordal 'progenitors'. The result is a collection of twelve genera, each of which has distinctive intervallic properties reflected in the informal names assigned to each. For example, Genus 12 (G12) is called the dia-tonal genus. Its trichordal progenitors are 3–7 (e.g. C–D–F) and 3–11, the common triad. A major purpose of the system of genera is to permit close examination of large-scale harmonic vocabularies, particularly those of early twentieth-century avant-garde composers. (Forte 1991, p. 161)

Forte's theory of genera does not mean that 'atonal' is summarily ejected from his terminology: two of the genera (G1 and G8) are designated 'atonal', two more 'atonal-tonal' (G9 and G10). But the need to allow for interactions of these opposed entities within the world of 'post-tonal' or 'extended-tonal' composition (neither term used by Forte) is notable. For Forte himself, however, the importance of such flexibility is in making it possible to discuss the central role of octatonicism in composers as different as Debussy and Webern.

Forte claims that 'the octatonic is more than an accessory feature in Debussy's music. It has fundamental links with the other harmonic spheres which are so characteristic of his harmonic genius and may, indeed, be regarded as a core referential pitch collection' (Forte 1991, p. 133). This is very similar to comments in the Musorgsky essay, but the Debussy article is very different in form. A wide-ranging survey rather than a close study of a single work, it relies far less on suggestions about motivic content, using more generalised interpretations: for example, in *Pelléas et Mélisande* the pentad 5–28 – a member of octatonic Collection I – is segmented so that 'the whole-tone component of the music (4–25) is associated with Mélisande throughout, while the upper-voice diatonic trichord (3–7) designates Pelléas' (Forte 1991, p. 141). A footnote adds that 'in the absence of a definitive catalogue of motives, the identification here is tentative', and Forte cites two studies of the opera's motivic processes. But in any case it is not seriously suggested that Debussy was in any sense a 'non-thematic' composer. Rather, the technical vocabulary naturally gives most prominence to those 'harmonic species' that thinking of sets – even trichords – in terms of genera encourages. Forte's grand conclusion on Debussy as a whole is that

> octatonic sections almost always occur either at or near the beginning of the work, in transitions, at moments of climax or special tension, and at or near the

> end. That is, they are never relegated to extensional or developmental functions or appended to basic formal units, but are always prominently positioned in the music, which is clearly in accordance with the fundamental role they play across the composer's harmonic spectrum. It seems clear – to me, at least – that the octatonic in Debussy's music always connotes the sublime, the exalted, in contrast to the whole-tone, which represents the indeterminate, and in opposition to the diatonic, which seems always to be a means of expressing the world of the immediate and pictorial. (Forte 1991, p. 153)

The bold progression from technical summary to critical interpretation in those last two sentences is as striking as anything in Forte's work.

IV

Six years after the Debussy article's publication date, Forte attended CUMAC 1997 and participated in the symposium on pitch-class set genera which was a major feature of that event, and whose proceedings were published in the July 1998 issue of *Music Analysis*. Richard Parks was also present, and while neither Debussy nor octatonicism were principal centres of attention, the focus on Berg's song 'Warm die Lüfte' (Op. 2 No. 2) enabled Forte, in an Afterword, to demonstrate the role of octatonic pentachords in the piece, and to reinforce his perception that 'we do well to regard the "octatonic" as a network with multiple connections to other harmonic environments, and not merely as an ordered scalar system'. He also gave a clear indication of why octatonicism matters to him by adding that 'in the familiar interaction of theory and analysis . . . the flexible interpretation of octatonic musical components is apt to remain in the mind and ear of the competent analyst and should lead to the enrichment of a reading'.[9] This practical point fits well with Chris Kennett's conclusion in a essay published as a prelude to the symposium itself:

> the main strengths of generic theory lie in the clear and direct correlation of the stratification of generic profiles with the listener's cognition of complex and many-layered harmonies: a prominent set may be experienced as a bi-triadic aggregate on a surface level, as part of a micro-section of dia-tonal species on a deeper level, and as part of an overall atonal or octatonic context at the same time.[10]

This wish to underline practical issues – the possible analytical, perceptual consequences of a theory – reflects the broader comparison made by Craig Ayrey, the symposium convenor, in his pertinent alignment of the analytical use of set theory, as originally proposed in *The Structure of Atonal Music*, with pitch-class set genera theory:

> The distinctive features of these theories of pc set genera [that is, Parks's as well as Forte's] are their flexible response to style and harmonic system and their reflection of uniqueness, individuality and difference among musical works.

> These features were not entirely absent from Forte (1973), but they have a new prominence in theories of genera. The old-fashioned virtue of universality is preserved (we are still dealing with the universe of pc sets, and with an autonomous theory) but in the generation of associative complexes ('genera') from the twelve trichords, there is a new emphasis on similarity-in-difference: difference in superset context defines difference in harmonic function.[11]

Forte himself, in the later discussion, acknowledged these differences: 'whereas set-complexes show relations among their components in a set-complex matrix, a genera matrix doesn't show this as clearly; it shows inclusion relations of various types. The set-complex is a narrower idea in a sense, but it really does show a different kind of thing from the pitch-class set genera matrix as I understand it'.[12] Jonathan Dunsby added another practical observation to the comparison. Commenting on the special importance of hexachords in pc set analysis, he went on: 'it seems to me that in pc set *genera* theory, although hexachords have by definition lost none of their special *properties*, they have no special *place* in the results of an analysis, and thus there is no danger of them having a special place in the segmentation on which the analysis of the results is based'.[13]

Since the publication of the 1997 symposium, there has not been a flood of the kind of analyses of 'Warm die Lüfte' that aroused such interest then. Nor – and here the comparison with responses to Forte (1973) is marked – has there been much serious critical debate around the topic of pitch-class set genera. Forte's next contribution to *Music Analysis* might at first have seemed a particular surprise; not even a regression from genera to set complexes, but from set theory to serialism. 'Regression' is not the right word, however. 'Olivier Messiaen as Serialist' (Forte 2002a) is the result of strong interest in another composer in thrall to modal symmetry, and especially involved with the delights and opportunities of permutation processes to turn dodecaphony back towards modality – that 'effect of an arbitrary, even chaotic intervallic texture' which, as Forte wryly observes, 'has sometimes been treated roughly in the presumably authoritative critical literature' (Forte 2002a, p. 21). Nevertheless, in Section 2 of *Livre d'orgue*, 'Messiaen's creative impulse is directed towards interrupting the interversional process in order to highlight motivic connections between the rows, thus restoring a measure of unity, and even contradicting to some extent the portrayal of chaos about which we read in the *Traité*' (Forte 2002a, p. 26). In this way, Messiaen 'firmly and explicitly resists adopting the procedures of the Second Viennese School, invoking his characteristically French dread of ennui, especially of the kind engendered by German music!' (Forte 2002a, p. 7). At the same time, however, Messiaen's acknowledgement of the validity of motivic identities suggests a certain commonality of thought between Paris and Vienna. There is also the sense of a degree of resistance to abstraction in the use of serial and set-theoretic techniques to analyse motivic as well as harmonic and higher level linear events, and not to relegate all surface thematic materials to the recycling bin.

V

In his editorial introduction to the July 1998 issue of *Music Analysis*, Anthony Pople lightheartedly floated a comparison between Allen Forte and Lawrence Kramer which was clearly intended, among other things, to reinscribe the principle of Derrick Puffett's 'In Defence of Formalism' editorial[14] by suggesting that the 'new musicology' had limitations of its own:

> Why should it be that when Forte tells us how 'the famous opening melody [of *The Rite of Spring*] presents set 6–32 (the major hexachord), which is . . . the source of many of the diatonic melodic figures that characterize certain parts of the music', this can seem to be essentially 'reductive', whereas when Lawrence Kramer states of Schubert's song 'Die Forelle' that 'the phallocentrism of the interlude is marked by a turn from the tonic to the relative minor; one mode of masculine identity, one ordering of a diatonic pitch collection, replaces another', an enriching interpretation can appear to have been 'constructed'? Is not Kramer, too, pushing or deferring a kind of complexity into the myriad possibilities inherent in his way of working?[15]

Pople also referred to 'the possibility of taking Forte's statement as somehow a *substitute* for the music – and thereby, because more simple, *reductive* – but in contrast of taking Kramer's statement as *additional* to the music, and thereby *constructive* upon it', though he ends by considering elements of 'an underlying convergence' between analytical approaches which share 'a potential for endless deferral'.[16]

Forte's reaction to this can perhaps be abstracted from his 'Thoughts on *Music Analysis*' (Forte 2002b) when, warning that 'here a deplorable conservative and didactic thread enters the discussion, reflecting the writer's Puritan heritage', he states:

> I feel that it is undesirable for a journal that presumably focuses on what is already a large topic, the study of music through the application of analytical techniques and approaches, to extend its domain in such a way as to invoke unfamiliar vocabularies and concepts that many readers find difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend, simply because they are far outside the normal range of experience in musical scholarship. (Forte 2002b, p. 14)

Forte's Puritan heritage is probably more manifest in his prodigious work ethic than in any conservative ideology. Is he not rather that most awkward of customers, a radical who values discipline? No doubt the extent to which he was intellectually formed by war and Cold War should no more be discounted than the extent to which some British analysts were formed by grammar schools. As my first quotation shows, he has put self-education before educating other people, for the excellent reason that the latter can't properly take place without the former. Of course, given the former, the latter becomes more challenging, harder work for the people being educated. They too have to tap into the Puritan heritage, or get left behind, and fail to progress from naïvety to experience.

One of Forte's most revealing metaphors refers to an aspect of his set-theoretic analysis of the first movement from *Pierrot lunaire* as 'about as spontaneous as a cooking lesson on television, in which the instructor shows, step by step, the ingredients and combinations, knowing full well that the completed dish is safely in the oven and ready to be photographed at the end of the programme' (Forte 1985, p. 53). But analyses which exclude spontaneity do not guarantee that, with enhanced understanding, all feeling forever disappears from the experience of the music. As 'a human thing',[17] Forte's aspiration to theoretical and analytical rigour can stimulate a special curiosity about how the music makes one feel as a result. Indeed, it could be that his longstanding concern with the octatonic has been sustained mainly by that sense of the sublime with which he associates it in Debussy. In such ways are the values of the Enlightenment preserved and enhanced.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Dunsby, 'Fortenotes', *Music Analysis*, 17/ii (1998), p. 180.
2. Allen Forte, in Craig Ayrey (ed.), 'Pitch-Class Set Genera: a Symposium': 'Round Table: Response (Allen Forte) and Discussion', *Music Analysis*, 17/ii (1998), p. 229.
3. Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition (Der freie Satz): Volume III of New Musical Theories and Fantasies*, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York and London: Longman, 1979).
4. Jim Samson, *Music in Transition* (London: J. M. Dent, 1977), p. 220.
5. Allan F. Moore, *The Beatles: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 27.
6. 'Letter to the Editor from Richard Taruskin' and 'Letter to the Editor in Reply to Richard Taruskin from Allen Forte', *Music Analysis*, 5/ii–iii (1986), pp. 313–37.
7. Anthony Pople, 'Skryabin and Stravinsky: 1908–1914' (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1984); Michael Russ, 'Four Studies in the Analysis of Post-Tonal Music' (PhD diss., University of Ulster, 1985).
8. Richard S. Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press).
9. Allen Forte, 'Afterword', *Music Analysis*, 17/ii (1998), p. 242.
10. Chris Kennett, 'Segmentation and Focus in Set-Generic Analysis', *Music Analysis*, 17/ii (1998), p. 157.
11. Craig Ayrey, 'Berg's 'Warm die Lüfte' and Pitch-Class Set Genera: A Preliminary Reading', *Music Analysis*, 17/ii (1998), p. 163.
12. Forte, 'Round Table: Response (Allen Forte) and Discussion', p. 231.
13. Dunsby, 'Fortenotes', p. 179.

14. Derrick Puffett, Editorial: 'In Defence of Formalism', *Music Analysis*, 13/i (1994), pp. 3–5.
15. Anthony Pople, Editorial: 'Allez Forte!', *Music Analysis*, 17/ii (1998), p. 124.
16. Pople, 'Allez Forte!', p. 125.
17. Forte quoted in Dunsby, 'Fortenotes', p. 181, n. 6.

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the engagement of an American music theorist with a British journal. *Music Analysis* excludes the word 'theory' from its title to avoid confusion with American journals. But many American theorists have welcomed the alternative it represents, and of these Allen Forte is pre-eminent. His contributions began with Vol. 2/iii (October 1983) and have continued through

to the present issue. As this survey suggests, those contributions which are transcripts of spoken presentations emphasise that analysis is not just abstraction but 'a human thing'. Yet, whether Forte is writing primarily about a topic such as pitch-class set theory or about admired composers – Musorgsky, Debussy, Messiaen – he offers a distinctive blend of general and particular, placing compositional specifics within wider perspectives which invariably stimulate the reader not just to think but to listen, and re-listen.