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ISE599

April 1, 2004

Summary review: Some Extensions of the Concepts of Metrical Consonance and Dissonance

Krebs, H

This paper mainly describes various methods for labeling rhythmic patterns in order to analyze the structure of musical pieces. Krebs redefines Maury Yeston's ideas of metrical consonance and dissonance and uses his methods of labeling pieces in order to determine if metrical consonance exists or not. The author initially presents basic examples where the ideas of "levels" are used and then illustrates through much more complex examples how different types of dissonances can be combined and arranged in a given piece.

Using Yeston's work as a starting point, the author presents his own definitions for consonance and dissonance with respect to meter. Yeston used the idea of strata or different "levels" to describe the composition of meter in his definition of metrical consonance. According to Yeston, metrical dissonance is dependant on the arithmetic relationship between the different levels present. However, Krebs argues that it is rather the alignment of these so-called levels that should be used in distinguishing consonance and dissonance. He states that within a piece there are pulse levels (the fastest level) and also there exists one or more interpretative levels which are slower in terms of meter. Thus, one type of dissonance exists if the pulse level and any of the interpretive levels are not aligned. In other words the timing of the notes within the different levels does not match up in time. On the other hand, if two levels are such that each attack of a level coincides with the attack of every faster level, then metrical consonance exists for that time period. Furthermore, there are two different types of consonances, namely direct and indirect. With indirect consonance, an interpretive level may stop after some period, but still may be perceived by the listener. The author then expounds on the different types of dissonances, A and B. Type A is simply when interpretative levels of different cardinalities are present and conflict. Type B occurs where the cardinalities of the interpretive levels are the same however they are unaligned.

With these definitions of consonance and dissonance, the author exposes in many different pieces how they are arranged. For example, a piece may contain a consonant collection followed by a dissonant collection. The most interesting idea involved the consonance-dissonance-consonance pattern that is analogous to neighboring/passing notes found in pitch theory. Essentially, a dissonance collection may be surrounded by two consonance collection, much like a neighboring note surrounded by similar tones. It is here that we can see a possible link of metrical structure to pitch structure, something the author hints at towards the end of the paper. It would be interesting to see what kind of relationship exists between structures in rhythm and pitch.

Many of the Krebs' ideas are notable, however he needs to do a better job explaining them. I had a hard time determining how some of the levels in a piece were labeled and he even seemed inconsistent with his definitions of cardinalities. Also, he was very vague about what perspective he was coming from in terms of consonance or dissonance. Is this piece merely structurally dissonant (on paper that is) or does it *sound*

dissonant (from the listener's perspective)? I got the impression that he was coming from more of a theoretical approach rather than the listener's perspective but it was unclear. Surely, one can argue that all of the dissonant examples he gave sound consonant when simply listened to.