

Metrical Dissonance in Krebs

Q1) Pages 22-61 present the theoretical framework and underlying concept of "metrical dissonance." A number of terms are defined; of particular importance are the concepts of grouping dissonance vs. displacement dissonance, direct vs. indirect dissonance, and surface-level vs. subliminal dissonance. Explain these three distinctions.

Central to Krebs's notion of metrical consonance and metrical dissonance is the concept of multiple interacting layers of motion. These layers arise from the "regular recurrence of musical events," such as phenomenal accents (23). Krebs categorizes these layers by the ways in which they group together equally-spaced pulses. Metrical consonance arises when one layer is an integer-multiple of the other and both layers have coincident phases (30). All other situations are metrical dissonance.

If two layers group together a number of pulses such that neither layer is an integer-multiple of the other, then the layers inherently have different periods from one another; Krebs calls this situation *grouping dissonance*, since the differing number of pulses "grouped" together are the source of the metrical conflict (31). The periods of each layer will necessarily create recurring points in time where the layers are coincident, equal to the least common multiple of the cardinalities of each layer. Thus, the layers constantly shift in and out of phase over the progression of the music, this constant shift creating a palindromic pattern of musical durations.

Krebs's other category of metrical dissonance is termed displacement dissonance. As opposed to the case of different groups of pulses between layers, displacement dissonance treats situations where each layer contains the same number of pulses. The layers thus have the exact same periods. The phases of each layer, though, are now what differs. Because of these factors, layers in displacement dissonance will never coincide; instead, they will be permanently shifted in relation to one another by some constant offset.

Both grouping dissonance and displacement dissonance occur when two or more layers of motion are laid over top of another during a section of music. The layers in these dissonances are in direct conflict with one another and thus create what Krebs's consequently calls direct dissonance (45). Direct dissonances therefore arise from conflicting patterns of rhythm happening at the same time.

Dissonances can also arise from conflicting patterns of rhythm being "juxtaposed" against each other instead of "superimposed." In other words, metrical dissonance occurs when changing from one rhythmic pattern to another, neither pattern occurring simultaneously but rather in succession. Krebs terms this situation indirect dissonance (45). Indirect dissonance can result from juxtaposing two metrical consonant sections of music next to each other, from moving out of a metrically consonant area into a metrically dissonant section (and vice versa), or when going between two different metrically dissonant areas. Any change in rhythmic pattern, therefore, causes indirect dissonance. Since indirect dissonance occurs when changing between two different parts of the music and not within a well-defined section, the exact duration of this indirect dissonance is difficult to completely quantify and most probably varies from listener to listener as well as with the level of difference between the two metrically-dissimilar musical passages.

The categories of dissonances previously discussed can all be considered dissonances that make themselves known to the listener via obvious rhythmic conflicts that appear on the surface of the music. Therefore, Krebs calls these conflicts surface-level dissonances, a higher-level category that embraces many types of dissonances. Surface-level dissonances inherently

require two or more layers of motion to exist in the music, these layers existing either side-by-side or at the same time.

Krebs posits a contrasting type of dissonance, one that often manifests itself when only a single layer of motion is apparent and any indirect dissonance has faded into the background. This apparent single-layer dissonance, which Krebs calls subliminal dissonance, derives from a conflict with the implied metrical layer determined by the notated meter of the piece. Thus, a seemingly metrically consonant passage can be in subliminal grouping or subliminal displacement dissonance with the notated meter, the notated meter itself being the requisite second layer of motion. In terms of performance practice, Krebs feels that a performer should give emphasis or realize any subliminal dissonance that emanates from conflicts between the notated meter and the phase or period of the music's phrase structure. Such subliminal dissonance can, of course, appear at the very beginning of the piece, only to be resolved sometime later in the work, and/or it may crop up during the course of the music.

Q2) Chapter 8 presents a series of analyses. Read the analysis of [the first movement from Schumann's Third Symphony] (pp. 236-243). In 1 or 2 paragraphs, outline what you see as the most significant points that he is making about the movement (giving specific examples).

The underlying premise behind Harald Krebs's analysis of the first movement from Schumann's Third Symphony is that metrical dissonances established in the opening bars of the piece act as pseudo-motivic rhythmic kernels to shape the course of the movement. These metrical dissonances in the opening stem from a basic three-against-two rhythm, although Krebs calls it a G6/4 to reflect the main instantiation of this dissonance on the surface of the music (237). His "G6/4" notation reflects both direct dissonances between groups of six 1/8th notes and groups of four 1/8th notes (such as in bars 11-14 between the violins/flutes and low strings respectively) as well as indirect dissonances, such as the one occurring between bars 6 and 7 when the theme transforms from a half-note grouping into a dotted-half-note grouping. Moreover, the initial grouping of melody into half-notes creates a subliminal G6/4 dissonance with the notated meter of the work. Krebs also points out that this G6/4 dissonance acts in concert with the fundamental D6+4 dissonance, at which Schumann is already hinting by bars 19-20 through the offset of the basses from the upper parts of the orchestra.

As mentioned, this G6/4 dissonance further engenders an entire "family" of related dissonances (236). Even in the opening bars, a G36/24 dissonance can be seen to arise from the way in which both a four-bar and six-bar hypermeter seem to be superimposed upon one another, the former created by changes of harmony while the latter realized by the indirect dissonance of bar 7 (238). Schumann plays with other G36/24 as well as G3/2 dissonances (augmentations and diminutions of the primary G6/4 pattern) throughout the development section of the movement. Also, grouping and displacement dissonances begin to intersect in this development, such as in mm. 351-54 where "D6+4 is counterpointed by G3/2" (241). Therefore, grouping, displacement, direct, indirect, surface-level, and subliminal dissonances all make an appearance in this movement, these dissonances centered on the core of three-versus-two that Schumann sets up at the beginning of the work.

Q3) Discuss Krebs's views on rhythm and meter in the context of the Schachter/L&J consensus. Does Krebs's view conflict with this consensus in significant ways? Or is he building on it? Or is he simply addressing different issues?

By viewing the pulse as a basic metrical building block for a piece of music, Krebs falls in line with the Schachter/L&J consensus. Krebs is comfortable separating meter from grouping; he is not inclined to somehow merge the two into one unified whole as Cooper & Meyer or Hasty endeavor. Many of Krebs's concepts, in fact, have clear parallels in the writing of L&J, such as discussions of periods and phases in phrase structure with respect to meter. Especially when talking about subliminal dissonance, Krebs seems to evoke the theories of L&J in his concern over how the surface-level accents and groupings differ from the notated meter of the piece.

But Krebs also moves beyond topics addressed in L&J or Schachter. While the "consensus" view (at least in our readings) seemed to be mostly concerned with the structures of phrases and how they relate to one another, Krebs looks at rhythmic structures within phrases, too. Certainly, with his term "indirect" dissonance, Krebs is also interested in differences between phrases, but he relates such differences to those found inside the phrase. To achieve this analogy, Krebs associates two separate phrases with two separate voices in a single phrase. Krebs calls these voices "layers of motion." By investigating and giving theoretical tools to describe conflicts within a phrase, Krebs has built on the consensus, although he has necessarily done so by examining new issues. Thus, Krebs has created a system that takes the premises of Schachter/L&J and has fleshed it out with a labeling scheme and a method for describing local, relative, and long-scale metrical dissonance.

WORKS CITED

Krebs, Harald. *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.