

Anton Reicha (1770-1836)
Traité de mélodie (Paris, 1814)

The work that I looked at for today was Anton Reicha's *Treatise on Melody*. This work was Reicha's first publication in the realm of music theory. I have included Reicha's other theory treatises on the handout, since I think if we want to know the philosophy behind this book, we have to know something about the rest of his work. Firstly, notice that the word "composition" appears in most of Reicha's titles. Reicha was a fairly respected composer during his day, so it's not surprising that he would want to explain techniques of composition through music theory. As a result, we can say that Reicha viewed the role of music theory on some level as a practical discipline. As you can see, the word "practical" shows up in the title of his second book.

Also in the title of this second book, notice the word "Reasoned." The word "Reasoned" here is another big clue into Reicha's views on music theory, I think. In fact, Reicha writes at the end of his *Treatise on Melody*: <quote> Reason, placed at the center of the arts and sciences, is like the sun in the system of the world: it governs progress, and lights the way <endquote>. So, we can also see Reicha as a product of late 18-century thinking (and thus the Enlightenment) in their emphasis of logic and reason.

Before getting too deep into the philosophical underpinning of Reicha's approach, let me first give you an overview of his *Treatise on Melody*. Basically, Reicha's *Treatise on Melody* is a treatise on melodic "phraseology." In other words, Reicha is interested in categorizing how phrases are constructed. Reicha looks at the components of phrases, then how these phrases combine into periods, and then how these periods combine to make the form of a piece of music.

Now, usually when we theorists talk about phrase structure, we talk about it in the context of harmony. In the Laitz textbook, for example, Steve writes <quote> The harmonic motion of tonic - predominant - dominant - optional tonic that guides a phrase from its beginning to its cadence is called the phrase model. <endquote>

But Reicha wants to divorce our notion of phrase from any harmonic conception. If you thumb through the musical examples in this book, you'll see that they are all single lines notated in the treble clef. There is never any harmonic support for these melodies. Now you may be thinking, "Well, harmony and melody – they're just two different ways at looking at the same thing, so Reicha's not telling us anything new." But Reicha is very clear about keeping harmony and melody as separate entities. In his summary he writes <quote> It has been claimed that melody and harmony are only one and the same thing, and that one may not happen without the other. But the assertion of such axioms is devoid of common sense...<endquote>

So how does Reicha prove the conceptual divorce of melody from harmony? Well, take a look at Example A on the back of the handout. I'll just sing that <sing>. Reicha would argue that in this example, we have no harmonic motion – no harmonic goals, implied or otherwise, but yet we have a good sense of phrase – the melodic pattern sets up expectations; we know when the phrase is finished. Reicha attributes our expectations to the symmetry in this fragment. And what contributes to this sense of symmetry are the resting points in the phrase.

Reicha calls these resting points "cadences", but we have to clarify the way Reicha defined the word cadence from our modern usage. We also have to understand the way "cadence" seems to have been defined in Reicha's time. For example, if we look at Rameau's *Treatise on Harmony*, we can see that Rameau defines any motion from dominant to tonic as a perfect cadence (Ex. III.38), even if the bass is not moving by root motion or the melody is not descending by step to scale degree 1.

Reicha, though, develops a system of melodic cadences as distinct from harmonic cadences. Notice in example E, Reicha calls a resting point on scale degree 3 a half cadence. You can also see a similar approach to the term "half cadence" in example H, which shows them in the context of a real melody. Be careful not to look at example H and think, "well, the first cadence is on a B, which is scale degree 2 and thus probably the dominant, so that's a real half cadence, whereas some of the others are just imperfect authentic cadences." Reicha goes on in his book to categorize quarter cadences and three-quarter cadences. These cadences are properties of the melody only and, as Reicha would argue, separate from any harmonic notion.

What makes a half cadence a half cadence is that it comes at the end of a phrase but not at the end of a period. Let's look at this a little more closely, but we have to define one more term. Throughout the *Treatise on Melody*, Reicha talks about the *rhythme* of the phrase. As you can see in examples F - H, Reicha has bracketed sections of the music into separate rhythms. If I may be presentist, I'd like to put Reicha's term "rhythm" into modern terminology: I think Reicha is trying to describe what William Rothstein and others call phrase rhythm. I just want to clarify here that we are not talking about hypermeter, but rather about the structure of the phrase, which interacts and can shift in and out of phase with the hypermeter.

Now take for instance the second measure of example H. Here is a place that later in the treatise Reicha will call a quarter cadence. Hypothetically speaking, we could imagine a harmonic realization that would create a perfect cadence here <play on the piano>, but Reicha argues that it is the phrase rhythm that is more important. Even though there is a point of rest in bar 2, it occurs within a "rhythm," so it can only be a quarter cadence. According to Reicha, this phrase rhythm arises out of a natural desire for symmetry.

Of course, example H has a straightforward 4-measure phrase rhythm, so you may be wondering, then, how Reicha accounts for phrases that do not conform to standards of symmetry. Well, later in the book, Reicha seems to view seven- or five- or three-bar phrase rhythms as either extensions or elisions within a standard four- or eight-bar model.

This emphasis on symmetry has led some modern theorists to criticize Reicha's viewpoints. William Rothstein, for example, writes <quote> Early 19th-century writers such as Anton Reicha...started from premises similar to those of the 18th-century predecessors, but with a somewhat greater emphasis on the presumed virtue of 'symmetry.' Gradually, asymmetrical phrases...came to be looked upon with something resembling moral disapproval...<unquote>.

I think Rothstein is mis-characterizing Reicha a little here, though, for Reicha himself in no way implies that odd-numbered phrase lengths are any less valuable than those that are even-numbered. As proof, the *Treatise on Melody* contains a large selection of musical excerpts, most of which contain odd-numbered phrase lengths. In fact, Reicha's *Treatise on Melody* is one of the first examples of a theory text to include a large number of theoretical analyses of real works. And although Reicha includes excerpts from instrumental music by Haydn and Mozart, most of these excerpts come from Italian opera composers – Sacchini, Piccinni, Zingarelli, Lamparelli, etc. – in other words, composers who wrote melodically driven vocal music – composers who rarely receive mention within modern music theory. So if we are to think about what the "object" of Reicha's study was, we may say that his repertoire perhaps influenced his views of what theory should or should not prioritize.

Let's back away from the text of Reicha's treatise and think a bit more about how these priorities arose. Reicha says in the Preface to his *Treatise on Melody* <quote> For centuries numerous treatises on harmony have been published, but not a single one on melody <endquote>. I think all of us, even today, can sympathize with what Reicha was reacting

against. He was apparently frustrated with the current musical education that taught music as a seemingly endless string of chords. Reicha's solution, somewhat like that of Schenker perhaps, was to focus instead on the linear or horizontal component of music.

To some extent, Reicha the working composer, was therefore trying to reconcile music theory with contemporary musical practice. To understand why such reconciliation was necessary and why Reicha was the person to attempt it, we have to look at some music history. Reicha himself was a fairly cosmopolitan man and lived in a variety of musical centers. His travels brought him into contact with a variety of teachers and composers so he was <quote> (and this is from the translator's intro) well positioned to grasp the profound changes that were taking place in music theory at the turn of the century <endquote>.

What were these "profound changes?" It appears that much of the theory teaching during this era, for better or worse, was focused on counterpoint, fugue, and thoroughbass. Yet these pedagogical methods were remnants of the Baroque era if not earlier; already by 1814 when Reich wrote his *Treatise on Melody*, the Classical period was transitioning into the Romantic period. Reicha, therefore, represented what can potentially be considered a progressive trend toward the expansion of music theory at the beginning of the 19th century. While a teacher at the Paris Conservatory, Reicha taught Berlioz, Liszt, Franck, among others – all composers that failed to make Schenker's short list but composers whom we still value and whom many historians consider perhaps part of a "progressive" movement of the 19th century.

I am setting up, for better or for worse, a characterization of Reicha as progressive mainly in order to contrast him against what at the time was considered a conservative movement at the Paris Conservatory. Theorists such as Cherubini and Fétis were very critical of Reicha's theories, particularly the *Treatise on Melody*. Fétis in particular can be seen as the anti-Reicha. In 1824, Fétis wrote a counterpoint manual as a reaction against Reicha.

Yet this opposition between progressive and conservative is probably tiresome. As a last point, therefore I want to discuss what many historians seem to view as one of Reicha's significant contributions to the history of musical thought. Historians of music theory often point to Reicha's 1826 treatise (his third one) as the first instance of a theory of Sonata Form from a thematic point of view instead of a harmonic one. Reicha calls his form the *grande coupe binaire*, which means literally "large binary division." Yet Reicha introduces the *grande coupe binaire* in the *Treatise on Melody*, which is a book that is obviously very thematically driven. Ironically, however, in his 1814 description, Reicha is quite prescriptive in advising which harmonic areas to use in sonata forms. In his *Treatise on Melody*, Reich writes <quote> If a piece is in a major key, the first part should end in the dominant....Many attempts have been made to end the first part of a large binary form in other keys than that of the dominant, but our feeling has never accepted this. <endquote> Reicha goes on to say that modulations to the dominant are simply easier and more natural, so why bother attempting any other key areas.

So here we perhaps get a taste for some of the limitations of Reicha's practical thinking. Reicha was a good friend of Beethoven (who as we know used keys other than the dominant for second theme areas), but Reicha typically spoke poorly of Beethoven's works. Reicha could not see the potential of "genius" that Schenker was to observe a century later. In fact, Reicha spends a fair amount of discourse in the *Treatise on Melody* differentiating between "genius" and "talent." To Reicha, genius is everywhere. It walks the streets, he says, which perhaps differs from our modern definition. It is only through the application of work, according to Reicha that the genius acquires talent. Making that distinction lets us see Reicha's outlook on music and thus music theory quite clearly: music to Reicha, is as much a science and craft as it is an art.