Hasty's Reaction to the "Consensus"

Q1: In chapter 1, Hasty presents a general critique of the contemporary view of rhythm and meter. What are the main points he is making on pp. 3-10?

A central point for Hasty is that most studies of temporal patterns in music rely on disrupting the dynamic, linear flow of time by fixing events into a static map. Hasty feels, though, that making numerical quantizations of musical events does not completely capture the effervescent nature of music and thus does not completely model what we are hearing. For this reason, Hasty reminds us that "rhythms remains such a problematic concept for music theory and analysis" (4).

Hasty also takes issue with the clear distinction some theorists have made between meter and rhythm. Partially, his complaint stems from the definitions of rhythm and meter themselves. If meter is that which is regular yet abstract in a piece of music, then rhythm must therefore be that which is irregular and concrete, something which "plays with or even against meter" (4). But Hasty would prefer to view meter as the foundation for rhythm, the former merely one aspect of the latter.

He reacts as well to the musical adoption of concepts from the scientific realm (hinting thus at L&J), which, while they may have been successful for scientific purposes, seem to him less well adapted for musical explanations. Hasty particularly finds the view of music as "periodic" to be problematic. Ironically, he evokes a scientific analogy to show how "rhythm" as a term in the biological sciences is not something overlaid on top of periodicity but is rather a different type of periodicity, one that, while being fairly ordered and regular, is slightly unstable and subject to change.

Finally, Hasty evokes the notion of cycles to help model our notion of musical time. One strength of a cyclic model for music is that cycles do not rely on the representation of time as a forward motion, a representation for which Hasty already expressed distrust. Furthermore, cycles allow for unique and differentiated points within themselves, as opposed to some homogenous progression of beats. Hasty reminds us, though, that cycles are also inherently regular and repetitive entities, which bring "temporal flux under our control" via this "collapsing of past, present, and future" (10).

Q2: In chapter 4, Hasty reviews the rhythmic theories of Cone, Cooper & Meyer, and L&J. Focus on the critique of L&J (pp. 56-58); what, in Hasty's view, is the main problem with their theory?

Hasty admits a dissatisfaction with L&J's theories, harkening back to complaints made by William Benjamin as Hasty sees L&J's view of meter as fairly bland. L&J, according to Hasty, have removed "something of the mobile character" of meter with their methodology (57). More specifically, Hasty seems to want to allow meter to create or invoke tonal motions, a quality that does not exist in L&J's grid-like conception of meter. All the other components of L&J's theory involve tonal motion except for meter. Thus, in Hasty's summary of L&J's viewpoint, meter is "inherently discontinuous," something that contrasts the "dynamic continuity of tonal relations" (58); and as a corollary, since L&J allow for meter to be described quantitatively, Hasty reasons that tonal motions, as a distinct quality from meter, can then not be a measured quantity in the theories of L&J (58).

Q3: On pp. 154-167, Hasty applies his approach in analyses of two Bach cello suite movements. Describe his analytical approach; what sets it apart from previous approaches that we have studied? Give some specific examples of analytical points that he makes about the two pieces. Do you find his approach convincing and/or useful? Could his analytical observations be captured just as well by other approaches?

In his two Bach cello suite examples, Hasty provides contrasting opening measures from different Courante movements that, while being notated in the same meter (3/4), contain metrically contrasting aspects as well. The main distinction between these two opening measures is their underlying tonal motion, as the first example (in C major) arpeggiates a single chord whereas the second example (in E*b* major) includes a tonic-predominant-dominant harmonic progression. In his Example 10.9 on page 163, Hasty shows how the E*b* courante opening implies a gesture of "long-short/short-long", i.e. a half-note followed by a quarter note in bar 1. This observation reminds one of Schachter's "tonal rhythm" as well as similar concepts of Rothstein derived from Schenker.

Hasty uses both examples to show how our conception of meter and of where the barline stands is highly dependent not only on this tonal motion but also on events that follow it. It is not until the arrival of a second measure, or even a third, that "projections" of an initial measure will allow us to grasp not only the time signature, but the particular way this time signature manifests itself in the piece. Hasty goes to great lengths to recompose the first measure of the C major Courante into a variety of common time meters in his Example 10.7. His point through this exercise is to prove how strong the 3/4 meter persists as a result of the melodic and harmonic motion of the cello line despite the notated meter, the apparent 3/4 meter only being contradicted once further measures are heard. The conclusion, according to Hasty, is that our conception of meter is indeterminate, subject to change, and dependent on the rhythms (both tonal and accentual) of the music in question.

While Hasty's conclusions are perhaps valid for a perceptual approach to analysis, his main points seem fairly self-evident. Particularly from a standpoint of the theory of composition, it would be moot to say that tonal rhythm determines meter, for how can one be sure that the meter itself has not determined the tonal rhythm? Further, it also seems overly speculative and questionably useful to say, in reference to the C major Courante, that "the first measure is in many ways less connected to the last phrase of the first section than it was to the ending of the Allemande" simply because the binary form modulates to the dominant at the double-bar.

Finally, the methods of L&J would show similar conclusions concerning these few bars by Bach, but would show those conclusions in a more efficient and simpler way. By grouping each bar into a local-level unit, the L&J method could easily display how grouping (here predicated on harmonic motion and melodic contour) neatly mirrors the notated meter. Thus, L&J could represent our hearing of each measure as aligned with the time signature. In fact, L&J could also represent situations where the harmonic motion and melodic grouping may be in strong conflict with the meter, a situation that Hasty does not appear to consider or have a viable solution for explaining. Thus, despite his protests that "the metrical cannot be detached from the whole of the musical experience as process" (166), Hasty suffers from a tendency to allow for overly open-ended definitions of rhythm and meter, thereby unable to take advantage of clear and distinct separations of the interactive aspects of musical rhythm.

WORKS CITED

Hasty, Christopher. *Meter as Rhythm*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.