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WHERE IS MUSICAL ANALYSIS GOING?  
REFLECTIONS ON THE VII EUROMAC

As all readers of the Rivista will already know, the seventh European conference on musical analysis (*VII European Music Analysis Conference* or *VII EuroMac*) took place in Rome last year from 29 September to 2 October, in the Conservatorio di S. Cecilia. The conference, organized by the GATM and directed by Giorgio Sanguinetti, included 197 speeches and eight workshops. All the materials have been summarized in a volume (*Programme and Abstract Book*, Iter Edizioni di Subiaco) edited by Egidio Pozzi and Antonio Cascelli.<sup>1</sup>

On the final day of the conference the organizers had asked the four guest speakers (Bergé, Parncutt, Sanguinetti, Tagg) to answer questions important to raise at a distance of more than twenty years after the first European conference that took place in Colmar in 1989: Where is analysis going? What is its future? Do new perspectives, new repertoires, new theories exist? The various speakers gave us significant clues about what tools might offer us a solution, but the question, obviously, still remains open. It is therefore worth returning to the issue and examining in detail the texts published in the volume of abstracts to understand whether the topics dealt with during the conference might contain further answers to the matter in question. And this is what I intend to do in this article, taking into consideration all the contributions, irrespective of their scientific interest. During the course of Euromac there were, as in all conferences, some good speeches and some of lesser interest, some more traditional and others more innovative, but what I am interested in here are the methodological trends, not the merits of the speeches. A list of topics can be found at the end of the article; first I would like to offer some comments regarding their possible interpretation.

The list is divided into three parts: the first groups together the various musical repertoires covered; this is followed by an extensive and detailed index of the topics; finally there is a short list of the scientific theories that the speakers indicated as a support to their contribution. Regarding the list of repertoires the first interesting point is the remarkable and somewhat incredible recurrence of the name Liszt. But perhaps this can be easily explained by the events recently organized to celebrate the second centenary of his birth of the second and above all the activities arranged especially for the conference by the *Istituto Liszt* in Bologna. And similarly the significant presence of Scelsi compared to other composers of his generation could be put down to the dynamism of the *Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* in Rome. It should be added that in the call for papers there was a specific invitation to deal with “timbre and texture in post-war musical production”, which would explain the presence not only of Scelsi but also of Ligeti, although it should nevertheless be stressed that this invitation was accepted just by some participants, while it was placidly disregarded by others. However, a rather surprising observation, still within this first category, is the fact that the interest of analysis scholars today seems decidedly oriented towards the music of the 20th century. Of the various repertoires covered by the participants, just under a half consisted of music written in the last one hundred years. Not bad at all, certainly, but the fact is particularly remarkable if we consider that in musicology journals (as

well as in concert programmes) the presence of this type of music is generally much lower. In the context of the GATM, however, the fact is not really so surprising since in all the national conferences held in Rimini over the last years contemporary music has always been consistently covered. Nevertheless, this does not prevent us from trying to explain the phenomenon. One might consider that a by no means secondary part of the participants at the conference in Rome was made up of composers or scholars of electroacoustic music. It is plausible to imagine that those following the profession of musicology and ethnomusicology (most often at universities) are usually more interested in investigating historical and cultural events, as is evident from journals in that field, but it is equally plausible to think that those following the career of a musician (most often in conservatories) are more interested in deepening their knowledge of musical structures. On this matter it could be useful to carry out a sociological survey on the professional interests and activities of those belonging to the various societies of European analysis, and if such a survey were to reveal that the percentage of composers exceeds or is equal to that of musicologists, maybe it would come as no great surprise. Of course, the opposition between the two fields of study born in 1977 with the creation of the American Society for Music Theory, is today subsiding and it no longer has the character of ideological struggle that it once had, but the orientations and interests of the scholars are probably still quite divided. A second aspect of the choice of repertory that is rather astonishing is the total absence of the genre “jazz”. It is true that in the call for papers there was no mention of this area (even though the term “Afro-American” music did appear), but we have already mentioned that the presence or absence of suggested topics in the call had a relatively small influence on the proposals that emerged. The only plausible reason is that the circuit of analytical studies, which has always traditionally focused more on the European historical repertories, finds it hard to include other more unusual repertories and that ethnomusicology, jazz and mass music probably have different associative circuits: the field of music studies is often characterized by water-tight compartments with scarce reciprocal communication. Although this fact is a little disappointing, it nevertheless reflects the social distribution of musical tastes and listening habits. But given that music analysis is by nature an ecumenical and all-embracing discipline, the problem mentioned here is of a strictly organizational character, something that the European societies will need to tackle over the coming years, with a view to fostering a broader and more efficient approach to analysis and greater attention to as large a variety of repertories as possible.

Point 2) of the Index has been divided, for the sake of clarity, into three separate sections, marked respectively a), b), c). The quite numerous references in section a) tell us that analysis does not only take into consideration the problem of understanding the logic of the musical structures and their internal mechanisms, but also that of appreciating the underlying processes in their production: the diversity between composition, improvisation, performance, listening, and the investigation of the different oral or written means of musical transmission, has now become a regular part of the field of analysis and of the very concept of music analysis. Naturally, topics such as these were already present before, but in 2011 they appear to have emerged in a particularly evident manner, covering such a vast range of aspects that they can no longer be considered residual or secondary. In other words, it would appear that the boundaries of the discipline are tending to become wider. One of the elements quantitatively more significant in section a) is the analysis of performance. On this matter, we should not undervalue the fact that studies regarding

performance analysis and the body of the performer involve quite innovative methodological aspects: the technical tools for investigating scores employed for music analysis till today were not conceived to examine questions of this type and are not even capable of doing so, to the extent that much literature on the topic has always used intuitive methods more linked to the good sense of the listener than to the scientific needs of the analyst. While it is true that musicologists like Sundberg or Gabrielsson had begun to study some of these aspects scientifically already in the 1970s, their studies, which are now classics in the history of music psychology, have rarely been taken into account in the specific field of analysis. The analysis of performing gestures has, in itself, a much shorter history dating back little more than twenty years and has never become a particularly important area of musicological research. But in the *VII EuroMac* its presence seems to have become quite significant, even though in this case the problems of compatibility with the customary practices of analytical method are still considerable. Similar considerations could be made for listening, an area to which scholars of music cognition have systematically dedicated themselves for several decades. In this field it is noteworthy that reflections on listening have always found their way quite informally into analytical texts: they have nearly always been based on the personal experience of the analyst rather than on systematic studies. For instance, questions such as those regarding perception or memory, which in reality have a determinant role in our ways of listening, never seem to have been given enough attention in the tradition of analysis. On the contrary, the topic was covered by a large number of papers presented in Rome and some of these also dealt with a more specific example of the relations between listening and analysis, that is to say they studied how a composer's way of working might be influenced by his/her expectations of how a work would be listened to. Analysts have probably always been aware of this mechanism, but they have rarely made a specific study on the matter or considered it worthy of interest, whereas scholars of the psychological processes of composition have more than once taken it into consideration, and for some time now have started to study the phenomenon in depth. The distinction between procedures of orality and of writing gave rise to another important topic, well known to ethnomusicologists: the topic which, taking up the linguistic contraposition between "phonetic" and "phonemic", they define in dialectic terms as *etic/emic*. In other words, the musical structures that the west usually considers to be apparently objective (*etic-*) do not coincide with the structures (*emic-*) that can be found in the thought of the "natives" of non-western music. The cultural relativism that this discovery has introduced in the field of analysis was partly touched upon during the conference in the studies dedicated to remote historical repertoires, for example those of the medieval or renaissance periods, but the subject is likely to become more determinant in the future, if we consider the processes of globalization. In fact it has already begun to make a decisive appearance in the sector of music for the "mass market". We were reminded of this, at the end of the conference, in the speech by Philipp Tagg, who pointed out that the analytical terminology devised for classical repertoires is inadequate to describe the new repertoires linked to the recording industry. And it should not be forgotten that cultural relativism immediately gives rise to the opposing problem of identifying what is not relative, or rather what can be thought of as "universal". A recent conference held at the University of Aix en Provence was in fact dedicated to the topic of music universals, a subject that analytical methods have not taken into consideration with due systematicity.

In conclusion the topics listed in section a) challenge the concept of analysis as the scientific study of the scores of western music, based on the theory of the tonal tradition. Improvisation has in recent years developed beyond the classical tonal system, and listening generally follows a large variety of pathways. Substantially, the overall set of clues offered to us by the *EuroMac* reveals how specialists in analysis are now tending to push the limits within which the majority of analytical studies had previously been confined and find spaces that better correspond to the invasion of new musical models with which, willingly or reluctantly, each of us feels he must come to terms.

And so we come to the central issue of the analytic tradition, that is to say the analysis of western tonal musical structures, which is the specific theme of section b) and which, as we can see, is widely covered in the conference. It can immediately be seen that more than a quarter of the entire section is taken up by the definition of macro-form and more especially the notion of "sonata-form". The conference in Rome inherited this topic from the previous *EuroMac* in Freiburg where it had assumed a central position thanks to the presence of William Caplin, James Hepokoski and James Webster, as well as to the five sessions entirely dedicated to the *Formenlehre*. In his final speech Pieter Bergé made a critical examination of the theories circulating among specialists of sonata form. Among other things he expressed his doubts about the possibility of defining a "standard level" of rules based on statistical calculations: as if to say some rules of sonata-form were more important because they are statistically more common in the classical style. He also raised doubts about the hierarchies of importance to be assigned to musical parameters in an analytic context. And he highlighted the subject of modifications to sonata-form beyond the model of Viennese classicism.

The passage between the systems of the rules of the classical era and those of the years of romanticism not only stimulated analysis and reflections among the participants of the conference regarding the adventures undertaken by the post-classical form, but also gave rise to discussions about a problem that is not to be undervalued: despite the tireless and worthy activity analysts have consistently carried out in an attempt to describe musical phenomena within scientifically coherent concepts, the status of musical rules continues to remain often imprecise, since it is not constant in time. The topic of the mobility of styles and of grammars lies at the core of many of the papers mentioned in the two first paragraphs of section b). This could possibly be an important sign of the emergence of a new line of research: the task of analysis, which usually limits itself to the definition of the parametric structures and their reciprocal relations, will have to be extended to cover also the ways and reasons for their transformations. More precisely, the problem could be that of identifying, case by case, the structural aspects that remain stable and those that tend to change. Which in fact is the basic theme underlying the principle of modification to grammars and styles.

Another significant group of contributions dealt with the topic of the analysis of "sonorities", or rather the musical characteristics that, neither during listening nor in the score, can be reduced to "notes". The idea of sonority is more a concept of convenience than a precise notion, and contains a variety of aspects, all covered during the sessions of the conference: for example, it concerns the timbre of the instruments, but also the texture and global sonority produced by the superimposition of lines, not to mention the infinite nuances of vocal sonority and the equally infinite variety of sound spectra. While composers over the centuries, and more especially the

last two centuries, have tried out and offered the listener a veritable wealth of sonic resources, the investigative tools till now employed in analysis are still very far from being able to conceptualize and categorize them. The physics of sound, psychoacoustics and informatics have all provided research tools that analysis in its classic forms certainly did not possess, but we are still lacking a theory that is well codified and sufficiently clear. And this is surely one of the most demanding tasks that music analysis will have to tackle in the coming years.

Finally, one of the most innovative topics covered was the theory of “schemata” or compositional models which was already present in Freiburg in 2007 but has recently acquired fresh impetus now that the ideas of Gjerdingen regarding the *style galant* have had time to spread and to be assimilated. On the last morning of the conference Giorgio Sanguinetti pointed out how the underlying structure (might we call it “deep”?) of an Allemande by Bach consists of the elaboration of elementary patterns that can be found in much music of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and which the Neapolitan ‘maestri’ then systematized and adopted as didactic tools for teaching composition. What strikes me as most interesting is that the theory of compositional models is able to bring to light common schemes that lie at the basis of apparently diverse pieces of music. Deep down, there seems to be something close to Schenker’s idea of the existence of infinite superficial musical structures dissimilar from one another and yet possessing underlying structures that are similar or even identical. It is not hard to predict that this kind of intellectual provocation has unforeseeable developments in store for it, most probably with quite fruitful outcomes.

Naturally the index of topics given below covers a far greater range of topics than I have mentioned here. The items have been placed in decreasing order with respect to their frequency in the texts, something I believe a significant aspect to highlight. However, readers should keep in mind an important detail: the list of topics at the end of this article does not work like a classic “index of names and topics”. In the latter case the general rule is to indicate a name or topic every time it appears on a page of the book. If this were so, I would have had to register twelve references to Bach, not only two, and the mention of Schenker would have been at least double that shown. Instead, I have selected the names and topics that constituted the central theme of the communication, or an important aspect of it, but not those that were mentioned only marginally. Moreover, I should add that it in this introduction it was impossible for me to comment on every topic quoted in the list one by one, so I have chosen just those that in my opinion could be most significant in terms of their novelty and their probable future role in analysis. It goes without saying, however, that every kind of novelty in any form of human activity is not born from nothing, but is a development of what already exists. In summary, the index below offers a complete as possible, and in any case very rich, overview of everything that was said during the conference. Obviously it also includes certain aspects that will assume greater significance in the future, but in most cases it refers to those already solidly established.

Section c) gathers items that do not exactly correspond to the theme of the previous section, that is to say the analysis of musical structures. Among the topics listed in section c) structural parameters play an important part, but they are examined not so much on the basis of their internal logic, but rather on reasons searched for outside of the strict context of the consolidated rules of analysis. The list contains topics such as the interpretation of meaning, the historical conditions of analysis, its perceptual and cognitive aspects. The contributions therefore come from disciplinary sectors other than, but close to, that of music. It should nevertheless be stressed that all the

contributions of this type, given the very nature of EuroMac, were clearly perceived as being “analytic” by those who prepared them. We are once again witnessing an evident tendency to extend the borders of analysis, something which raises a sizeable problem for our discipline: that of its definition. For now it is sufficient for us to say that the idea of analysis is inevitably changing due to the actual transformations taking place in music itself, and this places previous certainties in crisis. Today the concept of analysis is losing a definition that was once more precise and that is now making more room for intuition, and this also explains why a not negligible part of the topics covered in the conference deals with the question of the epistemology of analysis. But the most remarkable thing is that section c) includes by far the highest number of contributions: it thus seems that the new need to define the meaning of analysis is not the outcome of divergent thinking, but actually stems from the way things are, from the internal modifications that the practice of analysis, maybe against its will, is undergoing.

The most notable area found in section c) is made up of papers that try to understand and decipher the “sense” of music, in other words they investigate musical meaning. The sudden burst of interest in this area is remarkable and begs some attempt at explanation. Until a few decades ago analysis (under the influence of the American Society for Music Theory) tended to boast a sort of “scientific purity” which in some ways allowed it to exonerate itself from questions of meaning. Then at the start of the 1990s New Musicology, again coming from the USA, launched the fashion of repudiating scientific purity and also a partial return to the explicative functions of analytical study, reclaiming a glorious tradition of musical criticism which had suffered from some ostracism in the previous decade. There is nothing new in all this: the German school of analysis itself, who had originated the discipline more than a hundred years before, had always believed in the organic intertwining between the function of reconstructing the system of structural rules and that of interpreting their meaning. There is however a difference between the original cohabitation of the two functions and the current situation: in the latter case the relation between analysis and interpretation has become much more explicit and conscious. In the same years in which the American Society for Music Theory had set out its mathematical-scientific idea of analysis, in Europe a discipline (music “semiology” or “semiotics”) was born which laid claim, with equal vigour, to the rights of interpretation, sustaining the idea of a parallel between the communicative functions of music and that of verbal language. The theory of the “sign” was not only applicable to music: the whole of human communication was a “sign”, but as far as music is concerned the main problem was that of defining the difference between musical signs and linguistic signs. The theory of the sign (which had a framework more philosophical than scientific) found it hard to establish itself in the USA, but in recent years its “interpretative” heir was taken on by another discipline, which stems from the highly scientific environment of experimental psychology: the theory of the emotions, applied of course also to music. The almost incredible success of this new discipline in Anglo-Saxon musicology now makes it possible to consider from a different and more mature point of view the relations between structure and interpretation and also to partly use and exploit the heritage of semiotic theories.

In the field of the interpretation of structures, a fair number of abstracts include references to emotional theories, tending to offer motivations that take into account the biological nature of musical meaning, but an even greater number instead mention its socio-cultural roots (also in terms of aesthetic trends) and many refer to its relations with language, rhetoric and narration. The wide interdisciplinary range of

these interpretative keys is symptomatic of the fact that the question of musical meaning, despite being built on more solid bases than in the past, is still in a situation of theoretic uncertainty that assigns to future years the not so simple task of finding less precarious solutions.

Another important area in which different disciplines intersect is that of analysis and historiography. Here a determinant role is played by the legacy of the old German analytic tradition and the American practice of criticism that is some ways linked to it. In these currents of thought the historical description of musical events, their structural analysis and their interpretation had always intertwined to the extent of being considered a single entity: music historiography is still in many cases a unique discipline that also includes the analysis and interpretation of meaning. And traces of this legacy can also be found in the abstracts of our conference. But the historiographic tradition of the conference has other legacies too: for instance the study of music theories of the past. Music theories that deviate from those that are dominant today can represent valuable material for contributions because they remind us that types of music exist that are organized on the basis of a structural approach far from what we are used to. The conference included the analysis of pieces of medieval music, as well as Indian, Tunisian and Sardinian music, all cases that judiciously show us how many of today's analytic models, which we are sometimes inclined to believe generalizable, do not actually refer to the reality of "music" as a whole, but only to that particular type of music that is most familiar to us. However, even without considering music that is far from our reality, it is interesting to note that some presentations at the conference highlighted, even with regards to well known types of music, the existence of particular rules able to explain their structure and that the theorists of the time were well aware of, but that today's theory had forgotten and is only now rediscovering. And this is another significant way of exploiting historic legacies.

It should also be pointed out how historic reconstruction has reinforced the topic of history of styles, which is important for analysis from at least two points of view: the first, already mentioned, concerns the area of "grammars", or systems of rules, where a plausible theory is still lacking with regards the modalities of transformation. The second concerns the processes through which musical structures are transmitted from one stylistic context to another. Such phenomena still tend to be explained by the poorly defined concept of "influence", which is important to point out stylistic similarities, but, if its mechanisms are not well explained, offers little to elucidate the analysis of the phenomenon. Although the conference showed some signs of tackling the issue, this too is one of those areas that the future of analysis will need to work on. Of the countless topics covered in this sector, another area worthy of attention is that regarding aspects that in English or French are sometimes defined as "pedagogic" while in Italian they are instead referred to with terms like "educational", "didactic", or "teaching", depending on the case. The analysts at the conference touch upon or hint at problems of this nature when they speak about methods of teaching composition or the didactic methods of music education. But the question of teaching often finds its way into many different speeches: suffice it to think of the importance assumed by the use of computer aids created to ease the burden of analytical practices.

Over and above its didactic implications, the question of using computer tools was widely covered during the conference. Here again we are dealing with needs arising from relatively recent changes in the musical structures to be analyzed: stemming in particular from the rampant intrusion of electronics and its digital developments in all

sectors of music production. This has brought about wide-ranging consequences and significant changes in the sphere of analysis methods. Clearly, this methodological transition was not, and is still not, simple nor painless. On the contrary, one might even suggest that the multitude and variety of papers dealing with this subject at the conference could be interpreted as a sign of weakness, or rather a symptom of the methodological difficulties that analysis using computers has for some time been unveiling and gradually tackling. And another similar clue could be the number of softwares functional to analysis: a sign that the problem of producing tools easily handled by analysts (and they are the majority) who do not have specific computer competences, has not yet found a widespread and reliable solution. Despite this, one can assume that the undeniable advantages offered in terms of counting and calculation, investigations into the make-up of sound and the ease of handling visual documents, will soon guarantee computer methods and aids a prominent place in the future of music analysis.

In conclusion, we can see that the analytic disciplines, in view of their wide range of functions, are relying increasingly on the support of knowledge deriving from “other” disciplines. On the last day of the conference Richard Parncutt underlined how musicology as a whole is gradually turning into a transdisciplinary field of study. The texts contained in the volume of abstracts confirm this diagnosis. The third section of the Appendix, devoted to the theoretic support used by the authors to validate their research, includes as many as twenty non musical disciplines which have helped to provide a scientific basis to the analysis proposed. All things considered, if we ask ourselves where analysis is going and what we might foresee in its future, our answer, for now, points to the search for a convincing definition of analysis itself.

It is impossible, at present, to give a precise meaning to the term “musical analysis” because music itself, the object of the analysis, is increasingly becoming an unstable and multifaceted phenomenon. On account of its dense network of aims and structures the musical system is an entity of extraordinary complexity and wealth, and a vast amount of knowledge is required in order to understand how it works. If musical analysis is really becoming the seat of this wide variety of knowledge, then it is on the verge of losing the clear and relatively simple identity it had until very recently and still has in terms of the cultural and ideological trends in strong circulation. At present we cannot be sure that these ideologies are in decline or deserve to decline. We can only state that the borders of the discipline seem to be permeable to external areas of knowledge that threaten to undermine the traditional mainstays. The future of analysis probably lies in the hands of this fascinating intellectual adventure. We can only hope that the VIII EuroMac will be able to start to offer more concrete manifestations of what the VII edition seems to have foreshadowed but not yet focalized with sufficient clarity.

## INDEX OF TOPICS PRESENT IN THE VOLUME OF ABSTRACTS

(the numbers in round brackets refer to the page on which the topic appears, those in square brackets indicate the overall quantity of references to the topic)

### **1) Music repertories analyzed**

Avant-garde of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [= 29]  
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 107, 110, 136, 148, 149, 152, 167, 186, 200, 207, 208, 223)  
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 Beethoven [7], Mozart [4], Haydn [2], Leo, Sala, Zingarelli

Baroque era [= 13]  
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## 2) Topics and sub-topics covered in the presentations

(some topics appear more than once, considered from different points of view)

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**3) Theoretic and technical supports for a topic**

Theorists most quoted (in brackets the overall number of quotations)

Schenker [15], Caplin [9], Hepokoski/Darcy [8] Forte [5], Gjerdingen  
[5], Adorno [5], Hatten [4], A.B. Marx [3]

References to other diffuse music theories:

citationism (40, 43, 86, 104, 106)  
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References to techniques adopted in the research

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Occasional references to disciplines collateral to music

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semiology, linguistics, rhetoric (39, 56, 100, 103, 104, 108, 111, 121  
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