



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Musical Time

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Mid-October is a very pleasant time to hold a conference in Portugal, coming as it does in a period when those of us from more northerly latitudes are beginning to wonder if we will ever feel the warmth of the sun again, and the conference in question, ‘Interdisciplinary Approaches to Musical Time’, provided much nourishment as well as intrigue for the intellectually curious. The second international ‘Música Analítica’ conference, held at the Universidade de Coimbra, was the brainchild of José Oliveira Martins and Richard Cohn and served to open a dialogue between the numerous strands of intellectual enquiry into the disparate, sometimes confusing but ever fascinating relationships between music and time. This was a conference truly marked by disciplinary plurality: music theory, historical musicology, ethnomusicology, philosophy, classics, psychology, neuroscience, mathematics and computer science, with everything in between and much beyond, were represented. Three keynote and seven plenary speakers were invited, and papers from nearly fifty delegates were heard in the three days. Eighteenth-century topics were explicitly represented by just a handful of presentations, but there was enough in the conference to suggest the importance of this historical period for changing conceptions of musical time in the West.

With such an array of ideas and approaches, an attendee might be forgiven for entertaining a mild feeling of bewilderment in trying to put everything together and give a coherent picture of the riches on offer. In one sense such an attempt would seem to go beyond one of the most productive points of the gathering: to bring together a remarkably varied and complementary range of expertise in the hope that unexpected sparks might flicker across some of the newly created proximities, establishing profitable connections for future research. On the other hand, there are several prominent threads that can be traced across the conference as a whole.

One of the focal points, returned to in many of the papers and conversations, was the primal significance accorded to rhythm and metre in trying to understand musical time. In part this might reflect the strong presence of empirical and theoretical approaches and the methodological orientation of these towards such parameters, though even here there was a conspicuously wide range of perspectives on offer. These elements were foregrounded in two of the three absorbing keynote addresses – Nori Jacoby (Max-Planck-Institut für empirische Ästhetik), with ‘Around the World in 30 Beats: Universal Constraints on Rhythm Revealed by Large-Scale Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Rhythm Priors’, and Tosca Lynch (eMousikē, www.emousike.com), with ‘“Shaping the Flow”: Ancient Greek Rhythm and the Movement of the Voice’. These elements were also present, beyond a number of the main conference papers, in at least four of the seven plenary talks: Anne Danielsen (Universitetet i Oslo), ‘Beat Bins, Asynchronies and Muddy Sounds: Shaping Micro-Time in Grooves’; Richard Cohn (Yale University), ‘Historicizing Non-Isochrony’; Jessica Grahn (Western University), ‘Causal Investigations of Motor Areas in Rhythm and Timing Perception Using Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation’; and Martin Clayton (Durham University), ‘Theory, Empiricism and Ethnographic Research in Musical Rhythm’.

This concentration was salutary for those, like me, who expend more scholarly effort on thinking about higher-order musical–temporal constructions that are strongly mediated through cultural exposure and norms in a given musical repertory. These might include expectations concerning order and continuity, harmony and tonality, thematic structure and form. Conversely, many of the complex means by which music can convey different conceptions and experiences of time seem less amenable to direct empirical study, being more interpretative, discursive and often philosophical. This was illustrated, in their different ways, by two of the other plenary talks, ‘Music, Immortality, and the Soul’ from Dean Rickles (University of Sydney), and my own ‘Music, Theories of Time, and Interpretation’ (Benedict Taylor, University of Edinburgh), alongside several conference papers. The challenges of modelling the complexities of time perception were in fact explicitly raised in the remaining plenary talk by Michelle Phillips (Royal Northern College of Music), ‘Modelling the Unmodellable: The Complexities of Experience of Duration during Music Listening’.

As with any conference based on running parallel sessions, a delegate has to choose which papers to see and which to miss – sadly, even in a gathering dedicated to time, the combined scholarly expertise still proved insufficient to allow a delegate to be in two places at the same moment – so the following account is inevitably going to be partial. In what follows I will focus on the few papers explicitly treating eighteenth-century music and place them in a broader context of historically situated approaches to musical time.

The very first paper in the main part of the conference, delivered by Antonio Grande (Conservatorio di Musica Giuseppe Verdi, Milan), in fact featured substantial eighteenth-century musical content. Entitled ‘Assemblage, Emergence and Coding as New Musical Parameters’, this was very much a ‘meta’ theoretical contribution, aiming to develop new music-analytical techniques. As the title suggests, Grande drew heavily on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and brought up familiar Viennese classical exemplars to illustrate the theory created.

The two most explicitly ‘eighteenth-century’ papers were likewise heard on the opening day. Owing to the tragic events that had just occurred in Israel, Barak Schossberger and Yoel Greenberg (both Hebrew University of Jerusalem) were unable to travel to Portugal, but they did at least manage to present their work by video link. (Unfortunately, there were a few other delegates who were also unable to attend, resulting in a number of the conference’s scheduled papers going unrepresented.) Their ‘A Synchronic Blind Spot: The Medial Moment and the Binary-Ternary Transformation of Sonata Form’ built on the work showcased in Greenberg’s striking recent study *How Sonata Forms: A Bottom-Up Approach to Musical Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022) in using a large corpus of eighteenth-century sonata-form movements from Italian- and German-speaking territories to chart larger shifts in formal preferences over the course of the century. The larger picture that emerged reinforced the message in the earlier book: the ‘medial return’ of the opening theme following the double bar in earlier eighteenth-century binary forms was gradually phased out over several decades, while there was a growth around the same time of the ‘double return’ about sixty to seventy per cent of the way through a movement, familiar to us from the notion of the sonata-form recapitulation. This imposed a tripartite thematic design on the original binary structure. The implications for listening expectations are noteworthy: while an earlier eighteenth-century listener could be pretty certain about what would happen after the double bar, about thirty to forty per cent of the way through a movement, by the start of the nineteenth century almost anything – or at least rather a lot of options – was conceivable. The future at this point became less predictable.

The other paper dedicated to an eighteenth-century topic was given by Katherine Walker (Hobart and William Smith Colleges). In “Out of the Narrow Bonds” of Time: Reframing Haydn’s Monothematic Sonata Forms’ she offered a new perspective on some of Haydn’s so-called monothematic sonata-form expositions by drawing on Friedrich Schiller’s aesthetic theories of the 1790s. These theories are hardly unfamiliar interpretative lenses for musical hermeneutics, but they

have probably not often been applied to Haydn before. Schiller's distinction between formal and sensory drives and their synthesis in the 'play drive' was combined with a Caplinian form-functional analytical approach to explain the way in which Haydn made aesthetic capital out of the duality between motion and stasis. The expositions from the opening movements of the quartets Op. 64 No. 6 and Op. 20 No. 5 were examined; however, there was no time to hear the last intended example from Op. 33 No. 1, which might have been especially salient.

A number of other papers used a similar mixture of analysis and hermeneutics, drawing on music theory, cultural and social history, and philosophy in varying degrees, but ranging over a wider historical span. One of the finest analytical contributions was from Catello Gallotti (Conservatorio di Salerno), 'Conflicting Temporalities and Expressive Trajectory in Schumann's "Widmung", Op. 25/1', which moved expertly between the theoretical (including form-functional and Schenkerian methods) and the textual in the service of elucidating Schumann's well-known song. Towards the other end of the spectrum, Nathan Martin (University of Michigan) offered speculative philosophical aesthetics in 'Some Paradoxes of Musical Temporality', linking Aquinas's enigmatic idea of aeviternity – the mode of existence of angels, lying in a sense between human time and God's eternity – to the temporal being not just of musical works but of certain events within them (exemplified in the familiar Beethovenian archetype of Op. 2 No. 1). The notion of aeviternity has sometimes been discussed before in accounts of musical time, but the introduction of angels and scholastic philosophy certainly created a stimulating counterpoint to the papers on experimental psychology and neuroscience.

Cultural and social time – and how this is reflected in the text and music of familiar operatic works – was the focus in turn of Nicholas Phillips (Oxford Brookes University), 'Bridging Cultural Time Zones: The Treatment of Time in Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*', and Konstantin Zenkin (Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory), 'The Forms of Mythological Time in Music and Musical Drama'. Daniel Moreira (Universidade de Coimbra) turned the discussion from opera to film in his "Films Are Like Music": Repetition as a Marker of Musicality in David Lynch's Screen Work', revealing a topic with rich potential. The links between contemporaneous philosophical ideas of time and aesthetic trends were treated perceptively in the paper from Elena Rovenko (Université de Strasbourg), "La peur de la symétrie": Irregularity of Artistic Time in French Music and Visual Art of the Fin de Siècle Era', while the link with Bergsonian philosophy was approached more analytically by Tian-Yan Feng (University of Edinburgh) in his 'Temporality, Philosophical Time, and Compositional Approach in Igor Stravinsky's Works: The Case of Symphony in C'.

The brief account above is an overview of some of the more musicologically oriented papers presented. Of course, as outlined earlier, one of the central purposes of the conference was to forge new links and provoke new directions from the conjunction of different disciplinary perspectives. A final plenary session served to sum up the provisional findings of the conference as a whole. While it would no doubt have been overambitious to expect an immediate answer to long-standing questions on the topic of time and music or to bring all disciplines represented into line, one practical outcome that arose from all the varied discussions over the three days was the idea of taking forward and developing a curriculum for an interdisciplinary course dedicated to music and time, in the belief that giving future students access to a multitude of perspectives may allow them to create new synergies.

Benedict Taylor is Reader in Music at the University of Edinburgh. His publications include *The Melody of Time: Music and Temporality in the Romantic Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), *Music, Subjectivity, and Schumann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) and, as editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). He is co-editor of *Music & Letters* and general editor of Cambridge University Press's 'Music in Context' series.