

REVIEWS



BOOKS

Eighteenth-Century Music © Cambridge University Press, 2010
doi:10.1017/S1478570610000072

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TONAL SPACE IN THE MUSIC OF ANTONIO VIVALDI

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008

pp. xix + 357, ISBN 978 0 253 35129 6

It is a credit to Indiana University Press that in these straitened times they have supported a book unashamedly not designed for a general public. Yet the project is of much wider significance than might at first appear. Despite the apparent restrictions of the title and the restrained pithiness of the back cover ('Analyzes Antonio Vivaldi's tonal and harmonic language'), this is undoubtedly an ambitious book in its engagement with a whole series of interlocking research questions: the relationship of a complex and multifarious body of work to tonal and modal theory, harmony and tonality as agents of Baroque musical expression, Vivaldi's role in the consolidation of the tonal system at the same time as he imaginatively challenged uniformity, and his reception then and now, across diverse European cultures. Particularly impressive is the range of reference to theory extending from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century and the ease with which the author traverses Vivaldi's entire vocal as well as instrumental repertory – plus much contemporary Italian music besides.

Four sections – an introductory *Estro armonico* followed by Key and Mode, Harmony and Syntax, and Tonal Structure – are framed by a debate about the misunderstanding or lack of appreciation of the variety and subtlety of Vivaldi's music and, by implication, a rehabilitation of his individuality and apparent eccentricity. Central to this argument is the belief that Vivaldi's 'inspirationally erratic' tonal vision and harmonic practices were (by contrast with his other dramatic and structural innovations) neither consistently forward-looking in the sense that they were imitated by his peers, nor fully explicable through the lens of modern tonal analysis. By extension, it was this richly eclectic amalgam that eventually alienated Italian advocates of the latest galant trends as well as adherents of *musica antica*, in a duality of neglect that was not replicated in Germany.

It is an explicit part of the author's approach that compositional practice can be fully understood only against the background of contemporary musical thought, largely as expressed by theoreticians of the day. This raises fundamental and familiar issues about such a relationship, of which Brover-Lubovskiy is obviously acutely aware and which she addresses with some adroit footwork. She does not claim that Vivaldi – notoriously unlearned and not even systematically trained – was post hoc adhering to some handed-down theoretical constructs, but rather that 'Vivaldi, even when spiritedly bypassing such theories, undoubtedly acquired indispensable knowledge in the field of the arrangement of tonal space thanks to his exceptionally strong musical intuition and perceptive absorption of these same conventions' (xviii). Theory influences practice, which in turn begets new theoretical concepts, which themselves impact upon practice. Clearly there is some danger of circularity and mutual reinforcement. The lack of an extensive body of Italian theory addressed directly to Vivaldian composition is one problem. Another is the precise relevance of German theory, assuredly affected by the music of Vivaldi: thus a theorist such as Johann David Heinichen,



introduced initially as an example of Italian influence on German musical thought, is later extensively mined as a source of theoretical reflection, as for example in the discussion (252–256) of relationships between keys that are a second apart. The reader needs to remain on the alert to distinguish these diverse relationships between theory and Vivaldi's own practice.

Brover-Lubovsky introduces the most striking as well as persuasive perspective in her advocacy of the continuing relevance of modal theory, especially an understanding of the psalm-tone-related *tuoni ecclesiastici*. She demonstrates how modally inflected theories of tonal organization were pervasive and long-lasting in eighteenth-century Italy, as exemplified in *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo* (1708) by Francesco Gasparini, Vivaldi's colleague at the Pietà. Of course the persistence of modal thinking alongside the development of tonal structuring is not a new revelation (see the work of Gregory Barnett and Michael Dodds, for example). But Brover-Lubovsky uses her deep knowledge of Italian theory to expound a passionate view of how extensively modal thinking permeated compositional practice itself. Her forceful conclusion is that we should concentrate less on a supposed gap between theory and practice but rather recognize a pluralistic organic development: 'What we perceive as a curious conjunction of modern and archaic elements was no more than an overt manifestation of the state of flux that the conceptualization of tonal space inhabited in the early eighteenth century' (25).

It is assuredly not the author's object to present Vivaldi as some kind of unrecognized reactionary. She fully acknowledges his role in firming up the goal-directed tonal trajectories of the ritornello paradigm, focusing on the role of major/minor mode-switch and Vivaldi's strategies for reducing intermittent tonics to mere passing events. But a background of modal thinking is constantly emphasized as an integral or enriching factor. It informs a revealing section on key characteristics, otherwise enhanced by considerations of tuning, instrumental character and affective clues from texted music. Key relationships, whether in close succession or as part of an overarching structure, are likewise minutely scrutinized according to modal reference, as in the influence of the subdominant direction of the Æolian mode on movements in the minor. A particularly telling example of how Vivaldi extended the concept outside either modal or modern tonal practice is given in Ex. 12.5, where an initial move from A minor to D minor is immediately extended to G minor, the kind of hyper-modalism that lends such characteristic colouration to Vivaldi's music.

Thornier, perhaps, is the question of 'modal' key signatures. The assertion that inconsistencies seem 'strikingly haphazard' (66) leads to the hypothesis that this very diversity might indicate a deliberate selection that is reflected in the music itself. Yet the discussion that follows is decidedly equivocal on this point. If I understand the argument correctly (74–75), it is rare for melodic or harmonic design to be explicitly influenced by the choice of 'modal' over modern key signature; but there are instances where the tonal directions may be so influenced, as in the extraordinary Concerto in E flat major, RV250, where the Lydian two-flat key signature perhaps inspired the central goal of D minor. At the same time, it may be possible to map similarities in groups of works, as for example a commonality of affects or rhythmic devices that distinguishes C minor movements written in Dorian notation with two flats.

This raises an important point of methodology with which many working in this field have struggled: how to handle a diffuse corpus of material stretching across several decades. Only rarely, where dating evidence is unambiguous, does Brover-Lubovsky seek to tackle chronological change (indeed, for the most part she regards Vivaldi's practices as surprisingly constant, despite gradual surface changes in musical idiom). Her standard approach is rather the assemblage of lists of examples together with small case studies and occasional musical illustrations. In the light of the evidence presented I am still not sure that I am persuaded by the C minor bifurcation just mentioned. Sometimes this uncertainty can be mitigated by a more statistical approach. A rare graph (Chart 13.1) demonstrates arrestingly that the dominant is almost uniformly preferred as the first destination in first movements in G major but selected in only half of those in F major, and that in general the dominant is more often favoured in finales than in first movements.

Threaded between these investigations of tonal structure are chapters on harmony, in the modern sense of the term. Once again, the most familiar concepts – the lament bass, the sequence and circle of fifths, cadential syntax – are subjected to wide-ranging and thought-provoking analysis, always stressing imaginative



adaptation and variety: for example, the myriad ways in which chromatic descents are infiltrated into Vivaldian textures and at different speeds. Among several striking observations about Vivaldi's treatment of the Corellian circle of fifths is his role in stretching the concept over a much longer time-frame, with each chord extending to four bars or more; another is his preference for a closed static unit, usually in minor, and remarkable for emancipated part-writing or chromatic variants. One might extrapolate that the circle of fifths is not the characteristic route for the return from submediant to tonic, as is generally supposed (perhaps by a mistaken projection from Mozartean practice).

The narrative is dense with examples, and it would take a lifetime to appreciate fully all the musical references listed, only a fraction of which can be illustrated in music examples – though in fairness the book does include a generous selection. Sometimes the search for modalism leads in what appear to be tenuous directions: are flat sevenths (such as A \flat accidentals in a B flat major context) really evidence of a 'Mixolydian tendency' (86)? The modern listener instinctively hears a tonic chord variant forming a secondary dominant to IV. But perhaps this is indeed a question of my own hearing, which will now need to embrace both the raised and lowered versions of the seventh degree as part of an extended scale. If a book encourages even one reader to listen differently, then that is surely an impact – to use the current jargon – of which any musicologist should be proud.

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Eighteenth-Century Music © Cambridge University Press, 2010
doi:10.1017/S1478570610000084

DAVID J. BUCH

MAGIC FLUTES & ENCHANTED FORESTS: THE SUPERNATURAL IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MUSICAL THEATER

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008

pp. xxvii + 450, ISBN 978 0 226 07809 0 (cloth), 978 0 226 07810 6 (paper)

Magic Flutes & Enchanted Forests: The Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Musical Theater focuses on the eighteenth century's tradition of the 'marvellous' in music drama. The book offers an in-depth discussion of an operatic tradition that has received relatively little attention in current scholarship, thus filling a significant gap in the literature.

In tracing the history of the 'marvellous' as a subject in theatrical music, David Buch takes into account a large number of works from the late seventeenth century up to 1791, the year of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. The works discussed are not confined to opera, but include comedies, pantomimes, ballets and farces. Equally broad is the geographical scope of the study: in order to stress the cosmopolitan nature of the phenomenon and to trace the reciprocal influences of the many traditions involved, Buch discusses fantasy-related genres from France, Italy and German-speaking areas. The enormous range of sources and contexts involved would have intimidated many a scholar, yet Buch manages it well. The appendices provide long lists of works with some supernatural content, clearly showing the extensive evocation of magic and the supernatural in eighteenth-century theatre. In the Introduction Buch discusses a variety of literary sources that have influenced French, Italian and German forms of musical theatre. Tracing the literary origins of the 'marvellous' is certainly a challenging task, as is testified by the wide range of materials that inspired librettists: myths, religious sources, folkloric legends and fairy tales from all over the world.

After this brief overview, Buch provides a more detailed discussion of the subject, beginning with two chapters on French musical theatre ('L'Académie Royale de Musique' and 'Opéra-comique'). In France the