

## BOOK REVIEW

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### **Joseph N. Straus. *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis: Thirty-Three Graphic Music Analyses***

New York: Oxford University Press, 2022

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**Reviewed by Aidan McGartland**

Joseph Straus's *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis* is the apotheosis of his decades-long work in post-tonal theory, and serves as an apt analytical companion to his seminal textbook, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* (4th ed. 2016). Straus displays his mastery of post-tonal analytical artistry throughout. The monograph consists of thirty-three graphic music analyses intuitively laid out, with a pioneering use of colour for further clarity, and complete with a slick video version of each analysis on the companion website. The aim of each analysis is to uncover the structure and form of the music, with an emphasis on pitch organisation, whilst remaining largely free from overarching contextual or theoretical arguments.

Straus has long been a scholar of post-tonal theory and analysis, stemming from his studies under prominent music theorist Allen Forte, who developed set theory in the 1960s to analyse the atonal music of the Second Viennese School. Straus has since greatly extended Forte's work, as well as developing Milton Babbitt's twelve-tone theory and David Lewin's transformational theory; together, these theories represent the three key components of 'post-tonal theory' found throughout *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis*. In addition, Straus emphasises the concepts of 'graphic analysis,' 'recomposition' and a focus on voice leading that can be traced back to the work of Heinrich Schenker. Notably, Straus rejects post-tonal prolongation in seeming agreement with Schenker.

In *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis*, Straus discusses overt compositional techniques that subsequently inform the analysis. Alongside more abstract application of post-tonal theory, he introduces devices such as Ruth Crawford Seeger's 'verse form' (p. 39) and 'heterophony' (p. 44), and the form-inducing extra-musical stimulus of a Valencia orange in Caroline Shaw's *Valencia* (2012) (p. 173). Notably, set theory was not a compositional device for works by the Second Viennese School, but it does nonetheless work as an excellent method for capturing the patterns of intervallically driven free atonality. This is aptly demonstrated in Straus's analysis

of Schoenberg's *Klavierstück*, op. 11, no. 1, that illustrates the repetition and transformation of the 3-3 G-G-sharp-B [014] trichord that governs the structure of the entire movement at both a local and a large-scale level.

Serialism forms a key part of the book, with ten out of thirty-three analyses explicitly examining serialism. Interestingly, serialism is both an abstract music theory and a compositional device. This duality is clearly displayed in the analysis of Stravinsky's *Fanfare for a New Theatre*, that utilises five versions of a single untransposed row, with the typical prime, inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion transformations being used, as well as the addition of Stravinsky's own invention, inversion of retrograde (pp. 90–91). Straus clearly demonstrates the 'antiphonal interaction' between the two trumpet lines in the detailed analysis. Another interesting serial analysis is of American pioneer Louise Talma's 'La Corona' from *Holy Sonnets*, which highlights the relationship between the modernity of the serialism, juxtaposed with the Elizabethan texts and traditional choral textural contrasts of the 'chords' and 'canons' (pp. 71–72). Straus further interprets this juxtaposition as a reflection of the text, contrasting the 'divine chords' with the humanity of 'canons' and tone rows (p. 76).

In his exploration of serial works, Straus includes an analysis of the opening movement of Elisabeth Lutyens's *Two Bagatelles*. This is significant, as Lutyens is a largely forgotten composer both in performance and research, but remains historically important for being a pioneer of serialism and musical modernism in mid-twentieth-century England. Most fascinating is how Straus exposes Lutyens's manipulation of the row to create 'hidden triads' outlined by register. Importantly, after one reads the analysis and listens to the work, these 'hidden triads' become more apparent, making the analysis an important tool for pianists, who could aim to further highlight the hidden triads with dynamics and articulation.

Curiously, throughout the monograph it appears that there is no discussion of integral serialism, perhaps reflecting the emphasis on pitch in post-tonal theory. Furthermore, there are no analyses of works by the postwar hardline modernists, Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen. This reflects the inclusion of Pierre Boulez in earlier editions of Straus's *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*—that includes his serial technique of multiplication—followed by the subsequent removal of Boulez in the fourth edition. Perhaps Straus feels that integral serialism is a relic from the experimental high modernism following the Second World War, and is no longer relevant to the discussion of post-tonality in 2022. Another notable omission is Ernst Krenek, which is surprising given his role in cementing twelve-tone music in North America and writing the first twelve-tone theory textbook, *Studies in Counterpoint: Based on the Twelve-Tone Technique* (1940). One last omission is the lack of any reference to French modernist composers, notably Gérard Grisey, Olivier Messiaen, and Darius Milhaud, who along with Boulez would have all been welcome additions.

Throughout the monograph, Straus uncovers and discusses a number of important traditional tonal and modal elements present in otherwise post-tonal works. Most notable is his discussion of the opening of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, where he examines both the context of the melody in relation to a Russian folk melody, as well as the intervallic composition through set theory (pp. 15–19). As well as highlighting the musical structures, this places Straus in the centerground of the heated exchange about *The Rite of Spring* in the journal *Music Analysis* (1986) between Allen Forte, who undertook a set theory reading of the work, and historical musicologist Richard Taruskin, who advocated for situating it in a Russian

nationalist context. The debate grew into a larger disciplinary controversy about the 'context' of historical musicology versus the 'note-counting' of music theory, which has now largely been resolved with the fusion of 'context' with 'note-counting' in both music theories and music analyses, as demonstrated in *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis*. Furthermore, Straus demonstrates the importance of taking a pluralistic reading—one that includes context—which is especially important when analysing Stravinsky, who was a master of illusion and ambiguity, frequently juxtaposing styles and techniques.

To further analyse triads in a post-tonal context, Straus applies neo-Riemannian theory—the triadic branch of Lewin's transformational theory, derived from Hugo Riemann—to show the relation, distance and transformation between triads. Neo-Riemannian theory is notably employed in the analysis of Suzanne Farrin's 'Unico Spirito' from *Dolce la morte*, where Straus creates an intricate network of triadic transformations, including a Leading-Parallel-Relative cycle and the SLIDE transformation, which are then mapped onto the score and displayed clearly with colour (pp. 188–89).

Beyond triads, Straus also examines other more modal traditional elements, such as octatonic, pentatonic and whole-tone collections that are integrated into the post-tonal analyses as sets. One example is the analysis of Hale Smith's *Three Brevities for Solo Flute*, No. 2, where Straus segments the opening eighteen-note line into four segments that are then used to analyse the rest of the work: a hexatonic collection, a chromatic collection, an octatonic collection and a hybrid collection (p. 79).

Overall, the analyses are firmly rooted in pitch organisation, as post-tonal theory is inherently a theory of pitch. However, there is more room for exploration on how rhythm and especially texture relate to pitch in a post-tonal context. There is also the issue of the lack of accepted large-scale forms in post-tonal theory. In *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis*, this problem is largely solved by utilising shorter works and more local level analyses, but the issue remains of how to analyse large-scale form without the aid of a tonal hierarchy or structural layers.

Accessibility appears to be a key aim of Straus throughout his career, as evident from his variety of widely used textbooks, including the introductory *The Elements of Music* and *The Concise Introduction to Tonal Harmony*, as well as Straus's pioneering work in the field of music disability studies. *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis* is certainly accessible, with clear colour-coded examples, precise language, a 'post-tonal primer,' and a companion website with helpful video versions of the same analyses (pp. 191–207). Further, the field of music theory was rocked by the '#SchenkerGate' scandal of 2020, led by Philip Ewell, who exposed racism and a lack of diversity in the field. According to Ellie Hisama, Straus has always advocated for diversity by arguing to 'teach the canon and to teach outside the canon,' which is certainly evident in *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis*.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Straus is acutely aware of the recent push to rapidly diversify the discipline of music theory, and as a result his text contains works from a diverse array of backgrounds. Of the thirty-three analyses, thirteen are works by women. Also represented are composers from non-European backgrounds, such as Chinese-American composers Chen Yi and Tan Dun, as well as two composers of African descent, Hale Smith and Tania León. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on living composers such as John

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<sup>1</sup> Ellie M. Hisama. "Considering Race and Ethnicity in the Music Theory Classroom," *Norton Guide to Teaching Music Theory*. Rachel Lumsden and Jeffrey Swinkin, eds (New York: Norton, 2018), 252–66, 258.

Adams, Thomas Adès and Kaija Saariaho, linking the modernist canon of the mid-twentieth century—Bartók, Berg, Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Webern—to the present day. Owing to Straus's emphasis on accessibility and inclusion throughout, *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis* is an important resource for advanced secondary, undergraduate and graduate students, as well as educators, researchers and connoisseurs of post-tonal music.

As music analysis is centrally located at the crossroads between composition, performance, theory, context and the experience of listening, *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis* certainly enriches all these experiences, especially as the text allows for informed listening and enhanced engagement with the musical materials of post-tonal music. Perhaps the most important aspect of this monograph is that Straus puts the actual works of music front and centre, and not in a way where the analyses are subordinate to higher levels of music theory and historical issues, whilst engaging with the compositional context of the works. This concentration helps to relieve the paucity of published, in-depth, single-work music analyses, despite the centrality of music analysis in the discipline. With its allusion to Carl Schachter's *The Art of Tonal Analysis* (2016) in the title, Straus has provided its post-tonal equivalent.

#### **About the Author**

Aidan McGartland is a doctoral student in music theory at McGill University, researching tonal and post-tonal theories, with particular interest in the music of Elisabeth Lutyens and Margaret Sutherland.