

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine selected quarter-tone works by four composers: Easley Blackwood, Alois Hába, Charles Ives, and Ivan Wyschnegradsky. In the works under consideration, I show how each composer employs quarter tones to extend traditional models of harmony, counterpoint, tonal syntax, and prolongation.

Chapter 1 considers fundamentals of music theory such as pitch names, enharmonic equivalence, intervals, chords, and scales, and proposes notational conventions and terminology for discussing quarter-tone music. Chapter 2 considers counterpoint and dissonance treatment in Blackwood's *24 notes: Moderato*. Chapter 3 shows that traditional consonant triads and allusions to tonality are important components of Hába's *Suite für vier Posaunen im Vierteltonsystem*, op. 72. Chapter 4 shows that Ives's *Three Quarter-Tone Pieces* display stylistic features that often appear in his more conventional works. Chapter 5 explores the characteristics of Wyschnegradsky's diatonicized chromatic scale (or DC-scale) and shows how he uses it in *24 Préludes dans l'échelle chromatique diatonisée à 13 sons* to create tonic prolongations. Chapter 6 further explores properties of the DC-scale and reveals parallels between chords derived from it and neo-Riemannian transformational theory.

Foreword

Most readers will be unfamiliar with how quarter tones sound and will likely lack a convenient way to play through the various musical examples in this dissertation. For this reason, an electronic version of this dissertation is available on the World Wide Web, at <http://www.tierceron.com/diss/>. Interested readers are invited to visit this site and listen to playable versions of many of my musical examples.

If, for some reason, the URL listed above becomes invalid (i.e., your web browser reports a 404 error, or the domain tierceron.com ceases to exist), the dissertation website should be easy to locate by searching for “Myles Skinner” in any of the major web search engines such as Google.com or Ask.com.

Preface

I first became interested in quarter tones seventeen years ago, during Grade 13 (known as “OAC” at the time in Ontario), my final year of high school. Our school bands used to compete at local music festivals, and it was at one of these competitions that I heard a rival band perform Charles Ives’s “Country Band March.” Their spirited performance made me laugh out loud, and learning that this raucous march had been composed by an insurance salesman made it seem all the more humorous. (Yes, I had a puerile sense of humour when I was in high school. This is a perfectly normal state-of-mind for the adolescent male.) This band performance was my first exposure to “difficult” twentieth-century music; in fact, I had never seriously listened to any “classical” music composed after the nineteenth century.

OAC music students were required to research and present a survey of the works of their choice of any twentieth-century composer. I chose Ives. My peers, (Rolls every last one of them!), chose “safe” composers such as Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, John Rutter, and Andrew Lloyd Webber. There were no projects on Schoenberg, Webern, Boulez, or Stockhausen.

Poor Stravinsky was represented only by his neo-classical works. I took Ives's challenge to "stretch my ears" seriously, and so in my survey of his music, I sought out the most difficult and unusual music I could find. It was during this research that I came across the "Three Quarter-Tone Pieces" for two pianos. At first, the music sounded to me as though it were being played on a single, out-of-tune piano, but after many listenings, I began to recognize new harmonies in the opening chords of the third movement *Chorale*.

I wanted to learn more about how quarter tones might fit into the models of traditional harmony and counterpoint that I had learned at The Royal Conservatory of Music, but the only information that my high school music teacher could locate was a short entry in a pocket musical dictionary that mentioned Alois Hába. After months of searching through local public libraries, I had found no books about quarter tones, only short encyclopaedia articles. I did track down Hába's treatise (I knew no German at the time), but found the musical examples disappointing. It turned out that the best way to learn about quarter-tone music was to look at actual quarter-tone compositions.

Today, there is a wealth of information available about microtonal music, largely thanks to the Internet. There are many web sites dedicated to microtonal music that include the following: the Encyclopedia of Microtonal

Music Theory, a valuable technical resource, with numerous articles about the mathematical and acoustical properties of microtonal music;¹ the Making Microtonal Music website, hosting a useful list of links to microtonal composers' web sites, as well as software tools for microtonal composers;² and the American Festival of Microtonal Music, which commissions and performs microtonal works for its annual concert series.³ However, even with such extensive online information, there is still very little written about the role of microtones in the context of traditional models of harmony, counterpoint, and tonal syntax—all issues I explore in this dissertation. In a way, then, I consider this dissertation to be a first attempt at writing the book I was unable to find more than fifteen years ago.

¹ Joe Monzo, ed. *Encyclopedia of Microtonal Music* <<http://tonalsoft.com/enc/encyclopedia.aspx>> [20 August 2006].

² John Szanto, webmaster. *Making Microtonal Music* <<http://www.microtonal.org>> [20 August 2006].

³ *American Festival of Microtonal Music* <<http://www.afmm.org>> [20 August 2006].