Honors Thesis Proposal

6 May 2013

*Klangfarbenmelodie: The Systematic Use of Timbre In Music*

Description:

In 1911, seminal Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg wrote a music theory text titled *Theory of Harmony* in which he hypothesized that future musical developments might provide a way for composers to organize and systemize timbral usage in music. He called this yet-to-be created process *Klangfarbenmelodie* (tone-color-melody). Up until that point, timbre was used by composers purely on an instinctive level much unlike harmony and melody which is governed by many complex systems. To this day, timbre remains a largely instinctive musical element. In my research, I will explore the question, “is timbre naturally an instinctive element or are there ways that it might become systemized like other musical elements?”

Methodology:

My research methods will consist of analyzing timbre-based music as well as previous research conducted on the topic of timbre and textural systematization. My goal is to build a on the relatively small body of research which exists on this topic and provide a deeper understanding into how the timbre element of music might by systematized or at least maximized through various techniques.

Bibliography:


**Method of Assessment:**

During the research semester, I will be compiling a much larger bibliography and providing a detailed annotation of each source. Weekly meetings/email correspondence will be held with Dr. Harper (my faculty advisor) during which he will assess the relevancy of my sources as it pertains to my research. I will then construct a detailed outline of the paper. At the end of the term, my grade for the course will be determined by the following division: 50% annotated bibliography; 50% Outline.

**Program of Study:**

As a music composition major, I have decided to write an analytical paper on a topic related to music theory which is closely tied to my personal composition interests. Although I could have made my thesis project of a more creative nature (i.e. a musical composition) I decided to take the analysis route as if I was a music theory major. This decision is a tactical one and was made with graduate school applications in mind. Since I will already have a number of compositions anchoring my portfolio by the end of my undergraduate career, using one as my thesis would not do much in the way of enhancing my credibility. However, writing a compelling analytical paper on an interesting theoretical topic would show that my musical abilities go beyond mere creative talent. By writing this paper on timbre in music, I will effectively demonstrate my intellectual and analytical capabilities which, I know for a fact, is a high priority on graduate program committees.