

Interruption and Contra-Structural Melodic Impulses in Haydn's Rondo Themes

“How right and fair would it be,” queried Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935) in his preface to *Counterpoint* (1910), “[for music historians] to pay attention to the evolution of compositional technique instead of rambling on about *Zeitgeist*?”¹ Such strongly-worded opinions are characteristic of Schenker’s writing, and in recent years many of his controversial beliefs have forced scholars to question the continued relevance and worth of Schenkerian analysis to the present-day study of music. Schenker’s expression of anti-Semitic beliefs has been recognized,² and music theorist Philip A. Ewell recently argued that Schenkerian analysis is part of a “white racial frame” supporting the study of Western art music.³ These arguments have created tension due to the further conflicted context of Schenker’s own identity as an Austrian Jew under the darkening shadow of Socialist Germany, and the continued significance of his contribution to music theory.

This paper does not attempt to provide definitive answers in such a fraught and complex debate. Instead, I analyze the rondo themes of Haydn’s Keyboard Sonatas Hob. XVI: 48 in C major (1789), Hob. XVI: 43 in A-flat major (1783) and Hob. XVI: 49 in E-flat major (1789–1790). In these works, the interruption of the fundamental line, as defined by Schenker, and presence of contra-structural melodic impulses serve to fashion the composer’s personal spirit. The term “contra-structural melodic impulse,” coined by theorist Frank Samarotto, is defined as “motions of the structural upper voice, and, more importantly, the purely melodic connections that may run counter to them, independent of an enclosing harmonic space.”⁴ By combining discussion of the contra-structural melodic impulses and the disparaged *Zeitgeist* of music historians with Schenker’s own analytical techniques, this paper suggests that

¹ Heinrich Schenker, “Author’s Preface,” in *Counterpoint*, ed. John Rothgeb, English translations by John Rothgeb and Jürgen Thyme (New York: Schirmer, 1987), xvii.

² Martin Ebyl, “Heinrich Schenker’s Identities as a German and a Jew,” *Musicologica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (September 2018), [3].

³ Philip A. Ewell, “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame,” *Music Theory Online*, 26 no. 2 (June 2020), paragraph 1.3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.30535/mto.26.2.4>.

⁴ Frank Samarotto, “‘Plays of Opposing Motion:’ Contra-structural Melodic Impulses in Voice-Leading Analysis,” *Music Theory Online* 15, no.2 (June 2009): paragraph 12.

Schenkerian analysis could become a starting-point in gaining a more nuanced understanding of Classical compositions.

Haydn's Musical Witticism

If the term *Zeitgeist* was used by the music historians of Schenker's day to describe the work of a composer as the embodiment of the spirit of an age, then Haydn's personal spirit might be defined by his capacity for musical humour. The frequently playful and mischievous qualities of Haydn's compositions are well-recognized: "a harmless roguery, or what the British call *Humour*, was a dominant feature in Haydn's character...his allegros and rondeaux in particular are often planned to tease the audience by wanton shifts from the seemingly serious to the highest degree of the comic."⁵ Furthermore, "most of the familiar nicknames for his works respond to features that listeners have taken as humorous," including the "Surprise" Symphony and the "Joke" Quartet.⁶ In fact, Haydn's blend of comedy and solemnity earned him criticism from his contemporaries: the music critic Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804) questioned "is not that curious mixture of the noble and the common, the serious and the comic...sometimes of a bad effect?"⁷ Similarly, Johann Christoph Stockhausen criticized "that curious mixture of the comic and the serious, of the trivial and the touching" frequently present in Haydn's compositions.⁸ The comments of these contemporaries highlight the comedic nature present in many of Haydn's works. Therefore, such musical witticisms could be identified as a defining spirit of Haydn's compositions.

In his preface to *Counterpoint*, Schenker questions the emphasis on *Zeitgeist* found in the writings of contemporary music historians: "what is the use, in musical histories...of focusing chiefly on only the extraneous events, when they can never help us understand the art-work itself? Why lavish such care on discussion of the so-called *Zeitgeist*...when that other, more important, care that should be devoted to the works themselves is lacking?"⁹ The source of inspiration for musical works is also questioned: "is it really

⁵ Gretchen Wheelock, *Haydn's Ingenious Jesting With Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humour* (New York, NY: Schirmer Books, 1992), 57.

⁶ Georg Feder and James Webster, "Haydn, (Franz) Joseph," in *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, 2001; online ed., 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.44593>.

⁷ H.C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, vol. 2 *Haydn at Esterháza, 1766–1790* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), 154.

⁸ Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works 2*: 174.

⁹ Schenker, *Counterpoint*, xxiv.

the *Zeitgeist* that is responsible for the production of compositions, or is it, rather, artistic technique that generates them?”¹⁰ This question implies that underlying compositional techniques – such as form and structure – are responsible for the character and spirit of a musical work. This implication is strengthened by Schenker’s 1929 letter to his pupil Felix-Eberhard von Cube, in which he applauds Cube’s “ability to breathe music not in melodic snippets, but in periodic constructions,” and charges his student to “cultivate [this ability] in spite of the *Zeitgeist* that stands opposed to it.”¹¹ Following this implication, it is possible to argue that Haydn’s use of the underlying techniques of interruption and contra-structural melodic impulses in the rondo themes from sonatas Hob. XVI: 43, Hob. XVI: 48 and Hob. XVI: 49 contribute to shaping the humorous spirit of these works.

Schenker and Rondo Forms

Schenker’s examination of form in his magnum opus *Der freie Satz* (1935) is brief. In his discussion of rondo themes, Schenker notes that the five-part rondo is itself a synthesis of two three-part song forms (i.e., ABA and ACA are united to form ABACA).¹² The abbreviation or variation of the rondo theme does not fundamentally impact its importance.¹³ As the nature of this form requires the A section to return multiple times, it usually remains in the tonic key, and Schenker notes it must not be “overburdened with too much inner tension.”¹⁴ Moreover, as the rondo theme returns at the end of the piece, it must contain the final descent of the fundamental line. Thus, the rondo theme becomes a self-contained iteration of the *Ursatz*.

Hob. XVI: 43, Hob XVI: 48 and Interruption of the Fundamental Line

A Schenkerian analysis of the rondo movements in Haydn’s keyboard sonatas Hob. XVI: 43 and Hob. XVI: 48 reveals frequent use of the technique of interruption. The rondo theme from Haydn’s Sonata Hob. XVI: 43 is a textbook demonstration of this technique, as defined by Schenker in sections 95

¹⁰ Schenker, *Counterpoint*, xxiv.

¹¹ Heinrich Schenker, “Handwritten Letter from Schenker to Cube, dated August 10, 1929,” translated by William Drabkin, *Schenker Documents Online*, 2006, accessed November 9, 2021, https://schenkerdocumentsonline.org/documents/correspondence/OJ-5-7a_27.html.

¹² Heinrich Schenker, *Der freie Satz*, translated and edited by Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1935), 141.

¹³ Carl Schacter, “Either/Or,” in *Schenker Studies*, ed. Heidi Siegel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 128.

¹⁴ Schenker, *Der freie Satz*, 141.

to 99 of *Der freie Satz*. This technique builds tension through prolongation, but also conforms to the expectations of the audience because the line audibly descends to the cadence point, as is typical of many musical works. As Schenker explains, interruption of a 5-line is characterized by strong motion toward a point of rest on 2, supported by dominant harmony (as seen in Schenker's Figure 24 from the supplement to *Der freie Satz*, shown in Example 1 below).¹⁵ In the rondo movement from Hob. XVI: 43, the primary tone 5 (E-flat) descends to 2 in measure 3, supported by a first-inversion dominant harmony (see Example 2 below, mm. 1–8). As well, Schenker notes the interruption of the 5–1 line must rest on 5 (evident in the A-flat major theme due to the evident prolongation of 5 through arpeggiation and passing motion, as seen in Example 2). Schenker also notes that the return from 2 to 5 should not involve a cadence.¹⁶ The distinct similarities between Schenker's Figure 24 and the graph of the theme from Hob. XVI: 43 show Haydn's obvious use of the interruption technique.



Example 1: Heinrich Schenker, Figure 24, *Der freie Satz* (1935).

¹⁵ Schenker, *Der freie Satz*, 39.

¹⁶ Schenker, *Der freie Satz*, 39.

Example 2: Haydn, Sonata Hob. XVI: 43, mm. 1–8.

The rondo theme from Hob. XVI: 48 also shows interruption of the fundamental 5-line. The primary tone of this theme is immediately apparent due to the emphasis on 5 (G) as the opening note of the piece, and the prolongation of this tone through arpeggiation and passing motion in opening measures (see Example 3 below, mm. 1–5). In measures 5–6, the fundamental line appears to descend through 4 and 3, landing on 2 supported by V in a half-cadence (m.6). This half-cadence clearly shows 2 is supported by dominant harmony. However, the final descent to 1 does not occur, and the primary tone returns in the second beat of measure 6 (see Example 4 below, mm. 1–6). There is no cadence point between the half-cadence in measure 6 and the return of 5 in the second beat of the same measure. Therefore, the opening measures of Haydn's C major rondo theme conform to the definition of interruption as discussed by Schenker.

Example 3: Haydn, Sonata Hob.XVI:48, mm.1-5.

Example 4: Haydn, Sonata Hob.XVI:48, mm.1-6.

In the return of the A' section at the end of the C major rondo theme (mm.20-30) the interruption present in the first A section does not reoccur. Although the descent to 4 occurs in m.26 (where it is supported by a voice exchange), this tone is prolonged for a relatively long duration (through an unfolding [mm.27-29]) before continuing the descent to 3 (also prolonged by an unfolding); 2 in the

second beat of measure 29; and the final statement of 1 in measure 30 (see Example 5 below, mm.20–30). Although the prolongation of 4 and 3 creates tension, the final descent to 1 conforms to the norms of descent at a cadence point. The underlying structural descent of this line aligns with Schenker's definition of the *Urlinie*.

Example 5: Haydn, Sonata Hob. XVI:48, mm.20–30.

Hob XVI: 49 and Contra-Structural Melodic Impulses

The rondo theme from Haydn's Piano Sonata in E-flat major Hob. XVI:49 uses linear contra-structural melodic impulses to modify the typical downward motion at cadence points. These impulses do not conform to the established expectations of the audience, creating a humorous character. The E-flat major rondo theme is itself structured as a miniature ternary form: the A section (mm.1–8) is followed by a B section (mm.9–16) and a modified A' (mm.17–24). Individual interpretations of the fundamental line in this rondo could determine 3 (G) or 5 (B-flat) as the primary tone. However, 3 becomes a strong candidate for this role due to its emphasis during the first section of the piece: the entirety of the A section can be interpreted as a prolongation of this tone.

The prolongation of the primary tone in Haydn's Hob. XVI: 49 occurs through an initial arpeggiation to the primary tone, 3. In this arpeggiation, E-flat (1) is prolonged through movement to the lower neighbour note (see Example 6 below, mm. 1–4). In the fifth measure of the piece, the introduction

of the surprising B-natural can be interpreted as a chromatic passing motion of the inner voice, moving between the opening B-flat and the C in measure six (see Example 7 below, mm. 1–7). 3 is reached in measure 6, but at the foreground level the line immediately descends to cadence on B-flat. In the B section of the rondo theme, the arpeggiation of B-flat dominant seventh chord supports A-flat, the upper neighbour tone to 3 (measure 8, see Example 8 below, mm. 9–10). These prolongations serve to highlight 3 as the primary tone of the piece.

Handwritten musical notation for Example 6, showing measures 1-4 of Haydn's Sonata Hob. XVI: 49. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a common time signature. The melody in the treble clef is marked with a slur and fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4. The bass clef part shows a whole note chord in the first measure and a half note chord in the second measure. Below the staff, the notes E^b and G are written.

Example 6: Haydn, Sonata Hob. XVI: 49, mm.1-4.

Handwritten musical notation for Example 7, showing measures 1-7 of Haydn's Sonata Hob. XVI: 49. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a common time signature. The melody in the treble clef is marked with a slur and fingerings 4, 5, 6. The bass clef part shows a whole note chord in the first measure and a half note chord in the second measure. Below the staff, the notes E^b, I, 3, 4, 5, 6 are written.

Example 7: Haydn, Sonata Hob.XVI:49, mm.1-7.

Handwritten musical notation for Example 8, showing measures 9-10 of Haydn's Sonata Hob. XVI: 49. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a common time signature. The melody in the treble clef is marked with a slur and fingerings 7, 6. The bass clef part shows a whole note chord in the first measure and a half note chord in the second measure. Below the staff, the notes E^b, 7, 6 are written.

Example 8: Haydn, Sonata Hob.XVI:49, mm. 9-10.

The most remarkable characteristic of this rondo theme is the repeated upward motion at cadence points, both at the half-cadence that signals the end of the B section (m.16) and the final cadence of the theme (m.24). This upward motion can be interpreted as an example of the contra-structural melodic impulse, as this motion occurs in the structural upper voice. Samarotto's discussion of contra-structural melodic impulses also elaborates on the concept of directionality, a distinct aspect of the contra-structural melodic impulse. Directionality occurs when "a significant ascending melodic motion may conflict with the necessity of descent of the fundamental line or some more local linear progression."¹⁷ Typically, cadence points are a location of descent, as the fundamental line descends to its resting point, as discussed above. The contra-structural melodic impulse counters these expectations.

Samarotto also notes that compositionally worked-out cover tones may be examples of directionality.¹⁸ To illustrate this point, the opening measures from the second movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 4 (1757) are analyzed (see Example 9 below, mm. 1–4). As Samarotto notes, the opening measures of this piece clearly demonstrate conflict between the structural and the contra-structural: the unresolved ascent through C-D-E appears to override the descent through B-A-G.¹⁹ Significantly, the "tipping point" of the passage is 6 (E), "one step beyond a true linear progression, and just short of either a resolution to 5 or an ascent to 8."²⁰ The lack of resolution of this 6 is an "unresolved irritant," creating a significant auditory impact on the audience.²¹

¹⁷ Samarotto, "Plays of Opposing Motion," paragraph 15.

¹⁸ Samarotto, "Plays of Opposing Motion," paragraph 15.

¹⁹ Samarotto, "Plays of Opposing Motion," paragraph 11.

²⁰ Samarotto, "Plays of Opposing Motion," paragraph 13.

²¹ Samarotto, "Plays of Opposing Motion," paragraph 13.



Example 9: Haydn, Symphony No. 4, mm.1–4.

Example 10: Haydn, Sonata Hob. XVI: 49, mm. 13–16.

A similar ascending motion and emphasis on 6 occurs in Hob. XVI: 49. The half-cadence in the B section of the rondo theme (m.15) is initially approached by a long descending line (mm. 12–14). However, this line breaks in m.15, with the upper voice ascending to 6 (C). This emphasis on 6 destroys the continuity of the descending melodic line, in a similar manner to the Samarotto’s observation of “tipping point” embodied by 6, discussed above. When the half-cadence resolves (m.16), the resolution appears in a suddenly lower register. To the audience, this implies the cadence belongs to a lower voice. Therefore, the 6 belongs to an ascending stepwise line which remains unresolved (see Example 10 below, mm.13–16).

possible to use Schenker's ideas as a starting point to gain a more nuanced understanding of the compositional techniques and foundational structure underlying Classical works.

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