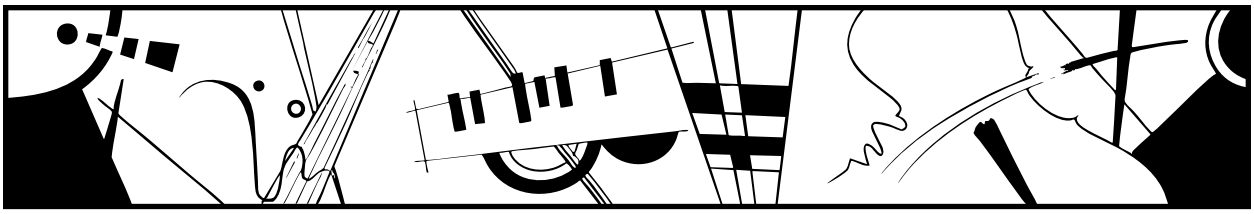

# Music Theory Southeast 2025 Annual Meeting

## Abstracts

### Collection–Chord Interactions in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Kashchey the Immortal*

**Jeff Yunek** (Kennesaw State University)

In criticizing Wagner's leitmotifs, Rimsky writes: "Can one clearly distinguish […] where C speaks to A about B or B and C discuss A?" This raises the question: did Rimsky innovate a leitmotif system that musically distinguishes the speaker from the subject? To answer this question, I reference: 1) the Russian practice of distinguishing human and supernatural characters with diatonic and special collections and (2) Rimsky's distinction between Wagner's rhythmic-melodic *leitmotifs* and his original idea of *leit-harmonies*. This scholarship suggests that collections and chords play a significant role in identifying characters in Rimsky's operas. As a case study, I analyzed collection–chord interactions in Rimsky's *Kashchey the Immortal* and found: 1) each character was associated with specific diatonic or special collections based on whether they were a human or supernatural character, (2) each character's opening aria associated them with at least one diatonic triad and one chromatic chord, and (3) later arias maintained each singer's *collection* while referencing other character's *chords* when they were featured in the lyrics. Accordingly, I suggest that the singers in this opera are indicated by their associated collections, whereas the subjects of the aria are indicated by their associated chords.

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### Adventures in Functional Space: An Expanded Map of Harmonic Function

**John Bayne** (Washington University in St. Louis)

Theories of harmonic function usually fall into content and context-based theories. The former theorizes function in terms of similarity to prototypical triads, generally the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords. The latter categorizes chords into functions based on their movement to and from other harmonies. While context-based theories provide insightful methods for tracking how chords behave, why chords behave this way cannot be fully explained without some reference to their scale-degree content. Previous content-based approaches have also left a gap, as they do not present a space for

chromatic chords that includes precise placement for the degree of similarity to a prototype.

To fill this gap, I provide an expanded space of functional similarity for minor and major triads in tonal classical music. Single applications of P, L, and R generate the first level of similarity to a prototype, and compound operations, such as PL and PLP, produce the second and third levels of functional similarity. The theory presented possesses both theoretical and analytical advantages. In addition to refining the criteria by which harmonies belong in a given function class, the space also provides great power to deal with functional, but highly chromatic textures, excavating both functional coherency and expressive flexibility.

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The Transition that Grows: Expanding Romantic Frameworks with the Anticipatory Transition

**Luis Matos-Tovar** (Florida State University)

This paper expands the Anticipatory Transition (ATR) framework (Matos-Tovar 2023) by introducing a new methodological approach in 19th-century sonatas. The ATR adopts both dialogic and processual ideas to form, and analyzes musical elements such as melody and rhythm within the Transition module and identifies them as a main theme in later modules. Hepokoski and Darcy (2006), Hepokoski (2021), and Caplin (1998, 2010) raise discussions about the difficulty of Romantic formenlehre. Moortele (2013), Horton (2017), and Richards (2013) address issues of structural identification for the Romantic period.

Schenker's "linkage technique" connects musical elements between passages, serving as a foundation for the ATR (1980). The ATR incorporates the concept of processual form and the idea of "retrospective reinterpretation" (Schmalfeldt 2011; Carro 2020). Consequently, the ATR identifies musical characteristics within the expositions Transition. This methodology offers two original avenues in analysis; the first being a *copy-and-paste*, then a *spun-out*, and I propose an *alter-and-paste* ATR.

Focusing on compositions by Charles V. Alkan, Felix Mendelssohn, and Clara Wieck-Schumann, musical content within the transition module of some of their sonata-allegro movements unfolds into new melodies in subsequent modules. The alter-and-paste ATR is situated alongside the two initial avenues of methodology. Furthermore, the broadening scope of this work expands from within a single movement unto multiple movements as demonstrated in the C. Schumann Piano Sonata. These analytical findings establish an intertextual connection that promotes a sense of unity across a sonata.

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Pattern Recognition and Music Theory Ability

**Nancy Rogers** (Florida State University)

Music theory teachers often observe that students who report difficulty learning mathematics also find music theory challenging, and researchers typically report positive correlations between mathematical and musical abilities. The specific nature of a math/

music link is unclear, however, and the association is likely not causal. Rather, shared etiological factors probably underlie success in both fields.

The original experiment I will present relies on something akin to subitization — the ability to immediately and accurately determine quantity without actually counting. Upon briefly glimpsing both randomly and geometrically arranged dots, participants were asked to indicate their quantity. All participants performed significantly better when dots were arranged in geometric patterns, but this improvement was smallest for participants with low aptitude for music theory and greatest for participants with high aptitude for music theory. This suggests that the oft-cited math/music connection is more likely attributable to pattern recognition than to a general sense of numbers as quantities. I will discuss some practical pedagogical implications of these results.

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Criterion-Referenced Grading vs. Flipped-Classroom Format vs. Visual Voice-Leading Cues: Which Undergraduate Music Theory Teaching Technique Actually Worked?
**Robert T. Kelley** (Lander University)

Undergraduate music theory coursework is an obstacle to graduation for many music majors. Music theorists have tried a variety of techniques to improve student success, but the relative benefits of different teaching strategies in the music theory classroom have not been rigorously studied. This study evaluates the effectiveness of different pedagogical interventions in sophomore music theory courses. After years of lecture-format teaching with a weighted-average grading system, I attempted to reach failing students by implementing several teaching strategies over several years, including criterion-referenced grading, visual voice leading cues, a flipped classroom, and specifications grading. I conducted an analysis of final exam data from students taught with these various techniques across a ten-year period to see which of these changes had the greatest impact on student success. The results indicate that the flipped classroom format, combined with specifications grading, was the most effective strategy in improving student performance in harmonic analysis and part writing. These findings advocate for further investigation and wider adoption of active learning and alternative grading methodologies in music theory pedagogy.

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Destined Music: Soundtrack as Story in *Black Myth: Wukong*
**Ruixue Hu** (Eastman School of Music)

*Black Myth: Wukong* (2024, hereafter *BMW*) is the first Chinese AAA game. Echoing the protagonist's name, "the Destined One," I argue that *BMW*'s soundtrack manifests a tripartite "destined" implication. First, addressing interpretive controversies over *BMW*'s narrative, I present a musical-dramatic analysis of its soundtrack, revealing how *BMW*'s hidden storylines are musically conveyed. Through fragmented storytelling, *BMW* presents a tale of confronting destiny through the revival of Wukong, an iconic Chinese superhero. To fully restore Wukong, the player must defeat the secret boss, Erlang, who is unlocked by defeating five optional bosses. Showcasing techniques such as motivic subsets, leitmotivic synthesis, and thematic apotheosis, I reveal how the music for Erlang

and his preliminary bosses retrospectively suggests an intertwined destiny between Erlang and the player. I then discuss *BMW*'s popularity among Chinese players by examining its engagement with the soundtrack of the 1986 TV series *Journey to the West* (hereafter *JTTW*) through lenses of intertextuality and collective memory. Examining both soundtracks' intercultural synthesis of eclectic musical elements, I illustrate how *JTTW* and *BMW* absorbed and transformed non-Chinese elements into their "Chineseness" (Xiang 2023). Reflecting on China's social-economic progress since the Chinese Economic Reform, I argue that *BMW*'s intercultural soundtrack is destined through contemporary China's rethinking of its cosmopolitan cultural identity.

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Music's Role in Signifying the Progression of Difficulty in Survival Roguelike and Sandbox Adventure Games

**Brian Junttila** (Florida State University)

In survival roguelike and sandbox video games, players progress to achieve a goal imposed by the game or themselves. Regions become more difficult upon advancing, necessitating changes in musical design to relay this shift to the player. Many authors have elucidated signifiers for individual environments, like the winter topic (Lavengood & Williams (2023)), soaring topic (Atkinson (2019)), and god-slayer trope (Yee (2020)), which assist in connecting similar areas of disparate games through musical meaning. Musical signifiers that connect diverse worlds of topics *within* a single game have received little attention. This presentation argues that the progression of these games' difficulty is associated with changes of signification in environmental music. To show this, each track from a game is assigned a rating correlating to its region's difficulty, and upon analyzing all tracks in a single rating, a set of signifiers forms, helpful to compare different ratings. To elucidate those signifiers, I adopt Frymoyer's (2007) hierarchy of characteristics that organizes signifiers as essential, frequent, stylistically particular, or idiosyncratic. Changes of musical features *between* ratings receive the most focus as signifiers of increasing musical difficulty and grant the player knowledge on how the music is embracing the game's progression.

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Battle Against a Machine: A Computer-Aided Analysis of Motif and Meter in *EarthBound*

**Drake Eshleman** (Indiana University)

Video game soundtracks prior to CD quality audio were encoded in game data and contain hundreds of individual audio musical cues, and therefore seem to be rich candidates for computational corpus analysis. This potential is obstructed by the difficulty of obtaining these soundtracks' original data and the lack of official transcriptions. In this paper, I perform a computational analysis of the soundtrack of *Earthbound* (1995) for the Super Nintendo, using an accurate fan transcription of the game's music encoded for study within the Python module music21. I argue that the soundtrack's unconventional use of meter and prevalence of certain melodic motifs inform narrative and situate the soundtrack as explicitly transgressive within both its genre and early video game music more broadly. Through this analysis, I aim to

encourage similar computational research on early video game soundtracks and reframe the value of fan materials in analytical research.

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Hypermetric Ambiguity: Between Scores and Recordings
**Armin Akhavian** (Florida State University)

Music theorists often disagree on the hypermeter of a passage due to conflicting cues on the musical surface. In such cases, the weight attributed to these cues may differ, leading to different interpretations. While much existing scholarship on hypermeter in common-practice music focuses solely on score analysis, this paper investigates hypermeter through a dual lens: score-based analysis and recorded performances. I argue that although performers are often not explicitly concerned with analytical readings, their interpretive decisions may suggest specific hypermetric hearings that influence listeners' perceptions.

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Of Stream Merging and Gap Filling: A Theory of Metric Perception in Arvo Pärt
**Laura Casti** (Northwestern University)

Since Christopher Hasty's influential *Meter as Rhythm* (1997), other theories have emerged to elucidate metric perception in real-time listening; most notably, Danuta Mirka's dynamic model of meter (2009) and James Sullivan's (2023) two extensions of her model to the post-tonal repertoire. Yet, these theories did not clarify (1) the different salience and resilience of implied pulses across silences and (2) the emergence of composite meter from stream merging.

In my paper, I address these lacunae by deploying two of Pärt's choral works (*Salve Regina* and *The Deer's Cry*) as case studies. Regarding (1), I draw on David Temperley's (2001) Contrapuntal Preference Rules (CPRs) to identify streams that will likely merge, also deploying timbre, articulation, and dynamics as further criteria. Building on Poudrier and Repp (2013) I propose that whenever streams with merging potential display the same pulse at their lowest metrical level, a long duration in one stream will likely be "filled" by the faster-moving pulses in another stream. Regarding (2), I contend that whenever the listener's mind fails to find regularity through projection, it will either rely upon familiar projective durations (Hasty's "judgment of equality," JoE) or generate "dynamic attending" (DA) pulses (Jones, 2019) to bridge the longer "gaps."

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The "Academic Fanfare": Topics and Tropes Within Campus Comedies
**Albert Wheeler** (Florida State University)

In his influential text, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (1980), Ratner recognizes the fanfare topic as being present throughout eighteenth-century high and low culture, connecting it to the hunt and military topics. After this delineation, Ratner further adds "furnished material for humor" to the meaning of hunt and military figures. He provides two examples: Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Haydn's E-flat major Piano Sonata Hob XVI:52.

For this paper, I categorize a new subtype of fanfare, which I label "academic fanfare." The "academic fanfare" is a composition that represents institutions and their communities' values combined with fanfare signifiers in the form of fight songs, alma mater, and drinking songs. I locate this fanfare in Brahms's *Academic Festival Overture* Op.80. While this fanfare is noble, the competent listener would recognize the melody as "Wir hatten gebauet ein stattliches Haus," a local drinking song of those attending the University of Breslau, highlighting a comedic quality. Finally, I examine "academic fanfare" in campus comedies, a subgenre of a film set on a college campus usually involving the chaos intertwined with fraternities/sororities. To the listener, the fanfare signifies the nobility of the University before the comedic plot begins.

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Race, Bias, and Musical Identity in Burleigh's "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors"
**Jess Forgione** (Michigan State University)

Based on a Walt Whitman poem, Harry T. Burleigh's "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" (1915) portrays an encounter between a Union soldier and an African-American woman. I synthesize analysis of persona after Cone (1974), topics and semiotics after Agawu (1991) and Floyd (1995), and Signifyin(g) after Maxile (2008) to examine the musical identities of the characters. Looking at the ways these musical signs interact with one another, I argue that "Ethiopia" portrays the Union soldier's impression of the woman. Connecting this to real-world issues of racial bias, I propose that Burleigh's musical treatment of the characters in "Ethiopia" reflects this inequality, where those in certain minority groups (like the African-American woman) are initially judged according to stereotypes.

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Listening To See: Voice and Agency in Jeremy Dutcher's "Sakomawit"
**Judith Ofcarcik** (James Madison University)

Jeremy Dutcher's song "Sakomawit" from the album *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa* raises complex issues of voice, agency and authorship. Throughout the album Dutcher, a Wolastoqiyik member of the Tobique First Nation, and producer BUFFLO sample wax-cylinder recordings of Maliseet songs held in a Canadian archive. Theories of agency can address components of voice, but they also seek to situate agency outside of an actual human performer/composer. This can simplify the analytical process, especially when artists collaborate (as is often the case in popular music), but what of situations in which it feels important to highlight the actual people involved beyond simply acknowledging their authorship? In this presentation, I explore three primary voices—the sample, Dutcher, and BUFFLO—and trace how they emerge and interact throughout the piece.

By "voice" I refer to the sounding presence of a real or imagined source, similar but not identical to agents and personas. Analyzing voice allows us to better see the actual creators and acknowledge their work, rather than attributing it to an imaginary actor. This re-insertion of the actual, historical creator as an intentional participant in the creative process is particularly important when creators belong to populations that are often overlooked or suppressed. Alongside this analysis, I explore how to ethically

incorporate my own (white settler colonial) voice by following the guidelines suggested by Hardman (2022), privileging the Indigenous voices who created the song, engaging in self-reflection, and presenting my analysis graphically. This last is accomplished through a crankie box, a novel way of engaging listeners.

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*L'étrangeté du son*: Deconstructed Voices in Gérard Grisey's Student Works
**Nathan Cobb** (Shenandoah Conservatory)

Gérard Grisey is widely recognized as an early innovator of French spectralism, a practice closely linked with emerging research in psychoacoustics and spectrographic analysis (Cagney 2024). Less well-known is how Grisey's interest in acoustics was partly spurred by his study of phonetics and interest in composing for the human voice. This paper examines unpublished student works and reference books from Grisey's personal library at the Paul Sacher Foundation to complicate the narrative that spectralism developed primarily from a scientific engagement with the acoustic properties of sound (Grisey 1982). It suggests that the human voice was central to Grisey's early compositional work, both theoretically, as a frame for acoustic principles, and aesthetically, as a source of affective resonance, especially in nonlinguistic contexts. By tracing Grisey's early fascination with the human voice, this paper uncovers a novel facet of the spectral aesthetic (Morrison 2022), in which composers explore the boundaries of humanism by pushing on the limits of vocal mimesis—defining the human through the exploration of the incomprehensible, the extra-human, the "*étrangeté du son*" (Grisey 1993).

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Voice-Leading and Lane-Splitting: Microtonal Pantriadicism in Transformational Space
**Cameron Gwynn** (Florida State University)

Many models of pitch-class space are continuous, either implicitly (some spaces in Tymoczko 2011) or explicitly (Callender, Quinn, and Tymoczko 2008). Most scholarship treats pitch-class continuity in these spaces as a consequence of other processes, or else it is primarily concerned with identifying individual points between twelve-tone equal tempered (12-TET) labels. Some authors have described transformational phenomena outside the 12-TET universe, but these are often teleological systems working within a single subset of the microtonal continuum, as in Jonathan Wild's 2014 article on Vicentino's 31-tone system. In this paper, I describe three *Microtonal-Class Transformations* (MCTs) and apply them to a continuous triadic space derived from voice-leading properties.

To depict these transformations on major and minor triads in continuous space, I place them in *voice-leading zones* following Cohn (1998 and 2012), which are numbered according to the sum of a triad's members modulo 12. Constructing this space in 12-TET results in an arrangement of triads isomorphic to Douthett's "Cube-Dance" (Douthett and Steinbach 1998), so doing so in a continuous pitch-class space—with enharmonic and octave equivalence—readily allows for the superposition of Cube-Dance or any microtonal transposition thereof.

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Families of Set Classes Arising from a Cellular Automaton in Mod-12 and Other Modular Spaces

**Evan Jones** (Florida State University)

Set-class 4-28(0369) can generate set-class 8-28(0134679t) in several ways: via complementation, via transpositional combination, or via a newly recognized transformation related to Lewin's use of binary numbers to express "changes of state" in music by Babbitt. Given a circle of binary values showing 4-28 on a necklace of 1's and 0's, we can compute the intervals between adjacent binary values and express them in the form of a new necklace. This transformation implements the cellular automaton known as "Rule 90" within a modular space. Transforming all 224 set classes in this way yields seven separate families of interconnected set classes that have not been discussed in the literature; four of the seven reach a central a foursome of set classes generating each other in a little loop, while one reaches a central twosome of set classes, and the other two each reach single endpoint (8-28 and the null set, respectively). Exploring non-mod-12 binary circles—relevant to the study of diatonic chords, rhythms in various meters, etc.—reveals familial structures that are totally different from the mod-12 case. In the opening of Ligeti's *Lux aeterna*, the occurrence of sets from different mod-12 families coincides with the relative durations of distinct verticalities.

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Navigating Boundaries Between Music and Mathematics in David Lewin's *GMIT*

**Robert L. Wells** (University of Mary Washington)

David Lewin's generalized interval system (GIS) and transformational theories have profoundly impacted the music-theoretic discipline since the publication of *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (1987), inspiring wide-ranging analytical and theoretical studies. While the mathematical underpinnings of Lewin's theories are well known, Hook (2007; 2023), Hall (2009), and Tymoczko (2009) have noted Lewin's frequent departures in *GMIT* from standard mathematical writing, often blurring the boundaries between music and mathematics. While Wells (2017) attempted to differentiate between Lewin's "music-forward" and "math-forward" writing in *GMIT*, this study was limited to Chapter 2, emphasizing Lewin's "failed" generalized interval system for rhythmic durations.

To characterize Lewin's mathematical music-theoretic writing in *GMIT* more fully, the current paper will investigate the relationships between Lewin's musical and mathematical thinking in *GMIT* writ large. Namely, while Wells (2017) argues that Lewin's musical intuitions guide his early GIS examples, the current paper argues that *GMIT* contains numerous situations where either (a) Lewin's mathematical formalities drive his musical interpretations, or (b) Lewin's perspective freely oscillates between "math-forward" and "music-forward" orientations. Having probed the complex, shifting boundaries between music and mathematics in *GMIT*, the paper will consider whether Lewin's music-theoretic ideas could be simplified via abandonment of abstract mathematics altogether.

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Spiritual Transformations in Two Songs by Sunn O)))
**Guy Capuzzo** (University of North Carolina Greensboro)

Owing to its compelling fusion of heavy metal, spectralism, and sub-bass drones, the music of the guitar duo Sunn O))) (pronounced "sun") has attracted significant academic attention. Two Sunn O))) songs bring many of the topics in the scholarly literature into focus: "Alice," an instrumental homage to jazz pianist/harpist Alice Coltrane, and "Kannon 2," whose lyrics recount a miracle performed by the gender-shifting Buddhist deity Kannon (a.k.a. Guanyin). In both songs, Sunn O))) mobilize expressive strategies to convey stories about these figures. I argue that these songs depict spiritual transformations through musical and lyrical means: Coltrane undergoes a transformation; Kannon executes one.

The analysis of "Alice" proceeds from the band's description of the song as "a transformation of sound and timbre through a series of instruments." Distinct timbral/instrumental combinations allegorize stages of Coltrane's life, culminating in her spiritual transformation into a guru who reached *sannyasa*. In "Kannon 2," Aliza Shvarts observes a near-palindromic arrangement of lyrics and interprets the wordless music in the center as the locus of Kannon's miracle: transforming hell into paradise. However, Kannon's transformation occurs amid mixed musical signals; I explore the extent to which they can and should be reconciled.

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Force Image Schemata, Conceptual Metaphors, and Narrative in Rage Against the Machine's Self-Titled Debut Album
**Dickie Lee** (University of Georgia)

This talk examines the narratological role of FORCE image schemata and conceptual metaphors in Rage Against the Machine's debut album (1992). Using image schema theory, it explores how preconceptual image schemata shape conceptual metaphors related to music-as-political power. This approach reveals a hermeneutic process that starts with embodied meaning and leads to cross-domain mapping, frame shifting, and conceptual blending. Rage Against the Machine's music is often seen as a form of resistance, and an image-schematic approach shows how this belief manifests musically as narratives in their style. This analysis bridges the gap between image schemata and popular music—bringing hermeneutics and formalism closer together—and emphasizes how claims of narrativity in popular music historicize musical interpretation, enhancing its cultural relevance. By integrating hermeneutics, narrative theory, and image schema theory, we can uncover deeper insights into musical meaning that is not necessarily dependent on only looking at lyrics and harmony. This approach not only enriches our understanding of specific genres of music but also offers a reflective lens on our cultural identity and current societal position.

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(Non) Semper Idem: Some Challenges to "All er Nuthin'" Approaches to Methodology, Hierarchy, Register, and Cadence
**Michael Buchler** (Florida State University)

“Semper Idem sed non eodem modo:” Heinrich Schenker famously affixed his Latin motto to each of his publications. “Always the same, but not in the same way” indeed encapsulates a central tenet of his analytical framework: that however different a piece is, it will (assuming it is a “masterpiece,” of course) fall into one of two (arguably three) background structures. These structures, themselves elaborations of the divine Chord of Nature, form the basis of a very deep musical hierarchy posited by Schenker: one which places considerable emphasis on stepwise motion, register, and cadential formula. Suzannah Clark, Matthew Brown, Philip Ewell, and many others have pointed to the naturalistic, mythological, and/or religious entailments embedded within Schenker’s method. I imagine a more secular prolongational analysis that foregrounds the foreground and lays aside deep hierarchies and their concomitant sacraments in favor of greater methodological flexibility and wider musical relevance.