

A TEXTBOOK OF MELODY

A Course in Functional Melodic Analysis

BY

DR. JOSEPH SMITS VAN WAESBERGHE

Professor at the Amsterdam Conservatory

Translated from the Dutch by
W. A. G. DOYLE-DAVIDSON

Senior Lecturer in English
Language and Literature in
the University of Leeds,
sometime
Professor of English in the
University of Nijmegen,
Holland

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ARMEN CARAPETYAN PH. D.

Director

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PREFACE

The aim of this book is to attempt an analysis of melodic consciousness, to deduce the laws governing the formation of melodies, and to work out a method by which the application of these laws and the recognition of their use may be learnt.

It is by no means merely an arrangement for didactic purposes of existing books on melody — the number of these, anyhow, can be counted on the fingers¹. In this very limited literature melody is regarded as consisting of three elements, rhythm, form and function, by the last of which is understood the mutual relationship between the different notes of a melody, a relationship which is defined according to the bass notes that support the melody or at least are latent in it. These bass notes, whether actually present or not, are at once both the foundation and the condensed summary of the harmonic development, and as such they give to the notes of the melody their place in the harmonic context, thus indicating their function.

The historian finds it difficult to accept this conception of melodic function. Although at first sight it might seem to suffice for an analysis of Western melodies of the polyphonic period, the historian finds himself faced by such an inexhaustible wealth of melodies of other periods and peoples whose harmonic consciousness can never thus be even satisfactorily indicated, let alone analysed, that he feels himself compelled to make a deeper search into the nature of melodic function. There are wonderful melodies which were never provided by the composers with a harmonic dress and which cannot, indeed, be harmonised satisfactorily according to the traditional rules of Western harmony; it would be to oversimplify — and moreover a very questionable procedure — to attempt to reduce their functions to the tonic, dominant and subdominant relationships which in the West were only discovered many centuries later and elsewhere have not been discovered yet. This is not to deny that modern harmony is an extension of a primary function inherent in musical sounds themselves, yet it would seem to be unjustified to try to explain melodic

¹ The best are W. Woehl, *Melodielehre* (Leipzig, 1923) and P. Goetschius, *Exercises in Melody-Writing* (New York, 1928); cf. P. Hindemith, *Unterweisung im Tonsatz* (*The Craft of Musical Composition*), Mainz 1937 (New York, 1941-43).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

§ 1. General Introduction

Young children pass through various stages of musical development, among which may be distinguished the perception of rhythm, the observation and reproduction of rhythm in sound, and lastly the expression of rhythm in sounds of various pitch. In general it may be said that in childhood the ability develops to recognise groups of notes (short phrases) as units. The conclusion follows that, exceptions apart, children are naturally sensitive to melody. For what else but the very essence of a melody is a structural unit of several notes of different pitch? What is a melody, in the technical sense?

A melody consists of a number of notes of different pitch arranged so as to constitute a unit as regards (external) form and movement and according to the laws of the functional relations existing between them.

This definition requires closer examination.

1. The making of a melody consists in the arranging to form a whole of a variety of elements; that is, it is a "building", a "putting-together". This is expressed in Latin by the verb *componere*, whence is derived our word "to compose". In the Middle Ages melody-making was regarded as the only true composing: a composer was called a *modulator*, that is, a melody-maker, just as the Greeks had already called the art of composition μελοποιία (*melopoía*), "the construction of melodies".

2. The material which is thus given form consists of "a number of notes of different pitch". Consequently we cannot speak of melody unless this material includes at least two notes of different pitch¹.

Seeing that it is a characteristic quality of music to give rise to related variations and seeing that the possibilities of variation offered by two different notes are limited in the extreme, little in the way

¹ With a single note one can make a quite satisfactory *rhythmical* statement but not a *musical* one.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LAWS OF TONAL AFFINITY

§ 1. The functional affinities of two given notes

Note. It was remarked on page 12 that where there are only two notes one can hardly speak of melody in any true sense. The reasons for this will become clear as we proceed: a melody requires particular tonal tensions and contrasts which are only partially obtainable within the range of a second.

A. Recitation technique

1. *Given.* A reciting-tone with the second *above* it as an accentuation tone.

Exercise. Reciting-tone *a*, accentuation-tone *b*.

Note. When words are being set confusion must be avoided with regard to the choice of the syllable with the accentuation-tone. It is better for the exercise to be entirely musical, without words; if a text is taken then it is recommended that it should have some *general* content, e.g. a chorale or Latin text.



Observation. A recitation interrupted by a higher accentuation-tone (the two given tones being the only tonal material) requires normally a return to the reciting-tone. This is particularly noticeable if in the example given above one breaks off suddenly on the accentuation-tone, e.g. of *pó-puli* (better not on *gén-tes*, as in this case the function of the melodic half-close comes into the question).

The ear, hearing a fundamental note as reciting-tone and then becoming aware of a *raised* melodic accent, expects a return, as to a melodic point of repose, to the starting-point, the fundamental note.

the fact that the mediaeval composers, who long remained familiar with the plainsong repertoire, heard these liturgical chants in terms of the functional laws which have been discussed above and then applied these in their polyphonic writing. For the Gregorian cadences are based on the contrasting third or thirds of the fundamental note, namely (in the Dorian mode) on *E - C* against *D*, *G - E - C* against *F - D* or *a - D*.



The result of this in polyphony is obvious: the two-note "chord" on *C* (*C-E*) will in the cadence contrast with *D* in Dorian, *E-G* on *E* with *F* and *D*, and the triad on *C* (*C-E-G*), as well as that on *E* (*E-G-b(b)*) with *D-a* (the third being avoided in the final chord in the Middle Ages). In this way in the polyphonic development we get in the cadences chords which, expressed in terms of degrees of the scale, can be represented by VII - I and II - I. These can also occur in the same way in the Phrygian and Mixolydian modes.

The same rule can be followed in the Lydian mode, except that here we may also have the euphonic deviation of the Lydian mode, which has already been discussed, the result becoming more graceful if, instead of *G-E* as the contrasting-third of *F*, the interval *G-D* is used or

the following progression  = VII - II - I. Here we

have two different functions before the tonic is reached. In the Dorian mode we get the same thing by altering the lower second, thus producing a leading-note (which is natural to the Lydian scale).

The fourth most important mediaeval cadence-form is II - VII - I which results naturally from the preceding. For the Lydian cadence

 can be inverted as follows 

= II - VII - I. In the same way the polyphonic Dorian cadence can be

changed from *Eb-Dd* to  = II - VII - I. Thus the

polyphonic cadences of the period before the application of the V - I principle can be reduced to different arrangements of two and three-note chords in the order VII - I, II - I, VII - II - I and II - VII - I.

A summary of the mediaeval cadences follows. The following are the principal points to be noted:

a. In the interests of euphony the leading-note (*sub-semitonium*) gradually comes into use, together with other euphonic alterations