

**Society of Fellows Postdoctoral Appointment  
Research Proposal**

**I. Title:** Musical Structure in Western Music as a Sonic Image of Socio-economic History

**II. Goals:**

- 1) To develop a methodology that will eliminate the boundary between music analysis and socio-economic history.
- 2) To apply the methodology in a way that will reveal the interior music structure as a sonic image of that history.

I would like to be able to answer questions such as “Why did the first flowering of polyphony occur in 12<sup>th</sup> century France and not somewhere else in some other era, for instance, ancient Greece or China?” or “Why did tonality collapse around 1910 and not a hundred years earlier?”

**III. Illustrative Statement:** In the most general sense, the answer is that the historical development of musical form and content is the sonic image of the history of capitalist development. One finds that the birth of commercial capitalism in the 11<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe roughly coincides with the first flowering of polyphony in the Notre Dame School. If one can assume that the coincidence between these two developments, each of paramount importance to the history of the West in its own realm, is meaningful, then the question becomes what is the relationship between them? According to Braudel, the medieval European merchant was distinguished from his medieval Chinese or Indian counterpart by his relative autonomy; in the empires, accumulation occurred only under the auspices of the state. Therefore, one could conclude that the pastoral societies had only one voice whereas the emerging capitalist society introduced a second voice (the duplum), and

then other voices, the addition of which created a harmony that reflected the complexification of socio-economic relations as they underwent further change.

The introduction of polyphony reflected the new socio-economic reality while at the same time its performance celebrated and reconciled its audience to the new social order. Thus one could say that music, which is a sonic image of the relations of production, is itself also factor of production, albeit one that is not subject to quantification. I propose to apply this general model to a detailed analysis of the development of the contrapuntal identity of voices, rhythmic structure, and pitch relations.

Having indicated, in the most general terms, the direction of the proposed research for the earliest period of Western Music that shows a marked differentiation from other musics, I would like to sketch out, in greater depth, the approach toward the terminus of the investigation, the modern and post-modern periods. If the idea that certain economic forces produce specific musical structures has been unexplored, the idea that those forces condition the development of political systems is by now a cliché of historical inquiry. When economies are predominantly national, they produce nation-states. When, either because international trade as a percentage of GDP crosses a certain threshold, or as a result of the international character of production, there ceases to be any difference between domestic and international trade, the nation-states become globalized, or subsumed within what Hardt and Negri call Empire. Because musical structure also reflects the economic forces, it follows that it reflects the political structure as well.

Musically, globalization, which now seems to be in a decisive phase, is represented by the progressive chromaticization of (or introduction of 'foreign' notes into) the tonal-functional structures that were identified with the nation-state. The stereotypical chord

progressions of the Baroque, with their emphasis on the 'home' key were the musical image of the mercantilist national policies of Colbert in France and Mun in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the century that followed. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the explosive increase in foreign trade was musically mirrored by an increasing integration of 'foreign' (chromatic) areas within the home key to the point where it sometimes becomes difficult to tell which key is home and which is 'alien'.

As this process intensified and the chromatic infiltration progressed from the key to the triad itself, resulting either in free atonality or bitonality, tonality broke down. Fundamentally dependent upon the discrete opposition of harmonic areas in an essentially diatonic universe, it was incapable of representing the ever-stronger forces of early 20<sup>th</sup> century globalization. With the *Rite of Spring*, 'foreign' tones were integrated into the harmonic landscape to the point where 'remote' harmonies were superimposed, but not so far as to be fully integrated into a new dynamic surface. Rather, they project the static conflict of imperialist nation-states whose political structure has become anachronistic, a conflict that was all too faithfully realized by the holocaust of WWI.

The object, then, of the proposed study is to develop the principles of musical representation of economic activity in as much detail as is reasonable. To do that, of course, one must identify the essential economic forces as well as the generic musical attributes during the various style periods (although it is certainly not necessary to adhere to any preconceived periodization.) The final, and most problematic, step is to make some connection between the two. As a result of the seeming incompatibility of the evidence between the economic and musical realms, i.e. production statistics and a musical score, it might seem that the only evaluative criterion would be a sense of poetic rectitude.

However, I think this problem could be overcome by comparisons across time and space to insure that an argument would not apply where conditions are different, and would apply where they are basically the same. Obviously, there are many obstacles to be overcome. Nevertheless, with intense study, and especially with the fructifying impetus from the inevitable negative critiques, I believe that an economic theory of musical structure will open a new vista of the transdisciplinary integration of musical, economic, and social analysis.

© 2004 Dana Richardson