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Review of William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

ABSTRACT: Reviving the *Formenlehre* tradition as taught by Arnold Schoenberg and Erwin Ratz, Caplin attempts to accommodate the method to a specific but stylistically complex repertory: instrumental works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven within the approximate time-span 1780–1810. He strives not only to retain the unambiguous formal distinctions that constitute both the strength and limitation of Schoenberg's *Formenlehre*, but also to fasten them securely to the music of his protagonists: a challenging project that Caplin handles with disquieting aplomb. His demonstration of terminological reform and analytical precision constitutes a noble effort, and despite the Procrustean edge to some of the analyses, there is much in this book that merits notice by scholars concerned with style and compositional technique of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

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[1] William Caplin's new book startles by declaring that "the time is ripe for a new theory of classical music" (p. 3), and surprises even more by its choice of models on which to build: rather than starting from scratch or adapting more recent critical, historical, and analytical research by Charles Rosen, Leonard Ratner, Jan LaRue, and others, Caplin looks back to the *Formenlehre* tradition promulgated by Arnold Schoenberg{1} and his pupil Erwin Ratz{2}.

[2] Progressing from small dimensions to large, and from simple structures to complex, the older discipline attempts to specify the structure and deployment of formal functions in standard instrumental movement-types. Elements examined include the motive, the phrase, and the relationships among phrases within archetypal sentences and periods. Small forms are categorized, and theoretical models are provided for the allocation of theme-types, including main theme, transition, and subordinate group, for rondo, sonata, and other large-scale designs. Fully aware of current scholarly disdain for the ennui of pigeonholing, Caplin nevertheless sees the potential of *Formenlehre*, when suitably modified, for addressing present-day theoretical and analytical concerns.

[3] He adapts the method first of all by limiting the chronological span to be encompassed. In contrast to Schoenberg, whose rules and functional categories applied to a broad historical spectrum, extending at least from Bach to Brahms, Caplin restricts his study to the high-classical repertory: sonatas, trios, quartets, quintets, overtures, concertos, and symphonies composed by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in the years 1780–1810. He then proposes a vast elaboration of Schoenberg's categories in an effort to accommodate compositional diversity without losing the theoretical appeal of plausible generalization. Embarking on this route, he aims to show how instrumental music by the great classical masters does indeed exemplify certain formal archetypes, and that a methodical dissection of the archetypes can furnish suitable tools both for analyzing specific compositions and for drawing historically useful conclusions about style. He thus invites us to ponder afresh the paradox by which the classical masters seemed bent on undermining and transforming formal conventions, even while celebrating their enduring currency.

[4] As Caplin leads us through a bewildering array of hybrids, fusions, transformations, framing and medial functions, failed consequents, post-cadentials, interpolations, expansions, and extensions, an odd disparity becomes apparent between the homely (but functionally precise) terminology and the musical elegance it describes. His anatomy of development sections, for example, isolates such curiosities as transitional introductions, initiating regions, sequenced models, cores, pre-cores, core substitutes, pseudo-cores, and false recapitulations. In trying to comprehend all these subcategories, alternatives, and deviations, the reader is assisted by the clear organization of the text, the detailed explanations and commentaries on illustrative examples, and a helpful glossary that gives thumbnail definitions for many terms with their special, form-functional connotations. Additional help comes from the splendid bibliography, a selective but wide-ranging list of books and articles dealing with theory, analysis, and stylistic criticism pertinent to late 18th- and early 19th-century music.

[5] An ingeniously compact format permits inclusion of an extraordinary wealth of music examples: each occupies a single staff, with novel and copious use of divided stems and octave transposition signs to maximize the representation of separate parts and minimize the use of leger lines. (Readers who wish to study the examples in detail will nevertheless want to have full-size scores at hand: in excerpts that involve textural complexity, much is inevitably lost, and while most of the notation signs are easily legible, the bar numbers are so small and fine that readers with even mild visual impairment may find themselves groping for a magnifying glass.)

[6] Since Caplin aims to direct our attention to functional categories, and not to the inspirations and idiosyncrasies of his protagonists *per se*, it would appear that we are dealing with norms, customs, and rates of occurrence. But perhaps sensing that a frankly quantitative approach might lean too far in the direction of style description rather than theory, he proposes that his categories "represent abstractions based on generalized compositional tendencies in the classical repertory. A category is not necessarily meant to reflect frequency of occurrence in a statistical sense: it is often the case that relatively few instances in the repertory correspond identically to the complete definition of a given category" (p. 4). But by choosing a specific repertory and probing it in close detail, his inquiry inevitably becomes enmeshed with style criticism--and with style criticism's shadowy companion, statistics. At one point, he actually does resort to numbers, telling us that about 10 percent of classical minuets resemble small binary (p. 220). Elsewhere, he relies on an abundance of adverbs, including "mostly," "rarely," "commonly," and "frequently," to give an idea of how often certain functions, patterns, and relationships occur. Given the author's comprehensive knowledge of the music in question, readers may sometimes wish for more use of numbers. For example, we read that "frequently...the composer adds a *coda*" (p. 179), that "sometimes the notation indicates that the coda starts after the double bar lines that instruct the performer to repeat the development and recapitulation together" (p. 181), and that "on occasion, a genuine coda is included in the repeat of the development and recapitulation" (p. 278, n. 8). "Frequently" tells us that codas are common, while "sometimes" and "on occasion" indicate the modest size of specified subcategories within the total number; but this leaves us with the queasy sense that a majority of instances have been left unaccounted for. True, we can infer a relatively large number of codas in movements where there are no repeat signs for the latter part of the movement, but this subcategory is never identified as such.

[7] Coaxing "abstractions based on generalized compositional tendencies" from a collection of masterworks famously packed with novelty is clearly an endeavor fraught with perils, and Caplin usually succeeds in facing them with chilling equanimity. Following his predecessors' example, he places heavy emphasis on harmony as primary determinant of form. Lest there be any doubt, the very opening words of this book proclaim loudly, in 16-point type, Schoenberg's triad of admonitions from *Fundamentals*: "Watch the harmony; watch the root progressions; watch the bass line" (p. 2).

[8] The preoccupation with harmony promotes theoretical stability, but it can also limit our analytical purview if it downplays the often

prominent role of other elements, including register, dynamics, timbre, surface rhythm, and melodic profile. Thus Caplin's broad distinction between "main theme" and "subordinate theme" specifies a tonal hierarchy unequivocally--a subordinate theme is that which occurs in the subordinate key--but it implies exclusion of the possibility that a movement might assign more than subordinate emphasis (on grounds other than tonality) to an exposition theme stated in the dominant or relative major key.

[9] More specifically troublesome is Caplin's elaboration of distinctions drawn by Schoenberg and Ratz between tight-knit and loose organization{3}. Caplin observes that "in the classical repertory, subordinate themes are, with rare exceptions, more loosely organized than their preceding main themes" (p. 97). This makes sense from the vantage point of Caplin's method, which typically labels as "subordinate theme" not only a (possibly tight-knit) contrasting period with its own special consistencies of timbre, dynamics, surface rhythm, and register, but also a diversity of more loosely organized, anticipatory or summarizing functions preceding and following such a theme. Caplin's allowances for exceptions and alternatives notwithstanding, the broad "subordinate theme" category tends to swallow up potentially important distinctions, for example the not unfamiliar option of contrasting an open-ended, expansive primary theme with a stabilizing, closed period in the second key (exemplified in the first movements of Mozart's Piano Concerto in D minor, K. 466, and Haydn's "Reiter" Quartet, Op. 74/3).

[10] Also likely to be swallowed up by Caplin's rather strictly defined categories are the processes of gradual transition and secondary-theme solidification that often characterize classical expositions. In Mozart's Piano Sonata in D, K. 576, first movement, a half cadence in bar 27 places us on a dominant plateau, lifting the music from its tonic underpinnings but scarcely confirming arrival in the new key. The open-ended, sequential figuration that follows, featuring a virtually unbroken stream of sixteenth notes (bars 33-40), climaxes in a trilled cadential flourish, followed by a marked contrast of register that emphasizes the sense of a fresh, contrasting theme in the new key at bar 42. But this is not where Caplin begins the subordinate theme group. Rather, he places it at bar 28. Because the thematic statement of bars 28-41 closes with a full cadence in the dominant, Caplin's theory requires him to designate it as a subordinate theme. Thus the emphatic punctuation in bar 41, no matter how salient rhetorically, merely marks an interior divide within a larger subordinate group.

[11] Not surprisingly, Mozart deletes the material of bars 28-41 from the recapitulation, where establishment of a new key is no longer an issue.

Now, with simple and impeccable logic, the recurrence of the half cadence from bar 27 serves to prepare the contrasting theme first heard at bar 42. But since Caplin's theory commits him to designating bars 28-41 as a first subordinate theme, not merely a dispensable transition, he finds himself explaining the omission in relatively complicated terms: "Mozart begins the subordinate theme of the recapitulation with material from the *second* subordinate theme of the exposition....He does so presumably to avoid a redundant appearance of the main theme's basic idea in the home key, which would arise from using the first subordinate theme" (p. 169).

[12] We confront a similar dilemma in an analysis of Mozart's Violin Concerto in A, K. 219, first movement. Here, the problematical passage spans measures 74-80 in the solo exposition. Appearing after a half cadence in the tonic key, and leading to a half cadence in the dominant, this lightly scored material can readily be heard as an introductory gesture, preparing the featured subordinate-theme entry on the upbeat to bar 81. But Caplin's theory obliges him to disagree: "Following traditional notions of form, some analysts might see the true 'second subject' as beginning in measure 81 because of the catchier tune and because that idea was also found in the opening ritornello (m. 20). But this view ignores the fact that measures 74- 80 reside entirely in the new key. Thus for tonal reasons, as well as phrase-structural ones, this passage is consistent with the definition of a subordinate theme (first part) and should not be regarded as belonging to the transition" (p. 117).

[13] While rejecting the idea of beginning the second-theme function at bar 81, he acknowledges that this material was indeed announced in the opening ritornello. What he omits noting is how that initial appearance of the theme was marked for emphasis: it designated a point of decisive contrast in register, dynamics, texture, and surface rhythm, where the punctuating rest--actually the only strong-beat rest in the entire movement--occurred at virtually the exact midpoint of the ritornello; thus there seems little doubt as to the role of this event in signaling a major landmark in the design. To be sure, bars 74-80 soften the abrupt contrast experienced in the ritornello, but nonetheless it seems easier to hear bar 81 as a major structural articulation than as merely the start of "a second part to this subordinate theme" begun in bar 74.

[14] In contrast to the two examples cited above, where clearly marked cadences guided Caplin's choice (perhaps too unequivocally) of where to place the "subordinate theme" label, expositions whose cadences are less well defined may lead to uncertainty about thematic punctuation. In describing the notoriously ambiguous exposition of Haydn's String Quartet in B minor, Op. 64/2, first movement, Caplin states that "the beginning of this subordinate theme is especially difficult to determine because

little in the way of any rhythmic, textural, or dynamic change helps articulate the boundary between the transition and the subordinate theme. After the transition arrives on the dominant of the subordinate key (downbeat of m. 15), a new melodic idea, featuring a chromatic stepwise descent, prolongs the half cadence by means of another half-cadential progression" (p. 114). In a note to the passage, he observes that "an additional difficulty arises from the question of whether each real measure equals a notated measure or one-half a notated measure" (p. 272, n. 53).

[15] To begin with, the movement in question exemplifies the so-called compound 4/4 measure, frequently encountered in later 18th-century chamber music, in which the metrical impulse is virtually that of 2/4 with every other bar line removed. Thus the fact that a theme begins in the middle of a notated measure should not, in and of itself, cause confusion{4} . Moreover, Haydn marks the entry of the new theme with a change of register in the cello, which leaps up a tenth on the upbeat to beat 3 (i.e., the midbar downbeat). Arguably, in the context of an exceptionally subtle and tonally unsettled exposition, the signals are outstandingly clear at this point: a contrasting melodic figure in the first violin and a register shift in the cello confirm the thematic articulation, while other elements lend continuity and reinforce persisting harmonic tension. The harmony may be unsettled, but the location of the new theme's beginning seems nonetheless unambiguous.

[16] The somewhat disgruntled response of Caplin's theory to the Haydn movement cited above seems at least partially a reaction to the work's undermining an element on which the method depends: a point of unambiguous functional contrast between transition and subordinate theme. But it may also be symptomatic of a tendency to substitute the archetype for the music in question as the point of reference for analytical discussion: the music, not fitting the archetype very well, is judged to be more problematic than it might if viewed in terms of its own environment of expectations and functional nuances.

[17] Absorption with the archetype is most clearly evident in Caplin's treatment of the form he labels *sonata without development*. "If a development is eliminated, then the section following the exposition will seem to function more as a *repetition* than a return. Indeed, the listener hearing the movement for the 'first time' would not necessarily know that the appearance of the main theme following the exposition marks the beginning of a recapitulation (of a sonata without development) and could just as likely believe that the exposition is simply being repeated according to the norms of sonata form" (p. 216).

[18] This statement seems reasonable in the abstract: the archetypal exposition closes with a full cadence, and the ensuing recurrence of the main theme in tonic could therefore signal the start of either a recapitulation or a repeated exposition. But the list of examples that Caplin cites includes few movements that resemble the archetype closely enough to illustrate the ambivalence. For example, in the slow movement of Mozart's String Quartet in C, K. 465, the cadence marking the end of the exposition (bar 39) elides with an intense, six-measure transition whose rising melodic line, motivic repetitions, sustained crescendo, and prolonged harmonic tension leave no doubt as to its function in anticipating a major landmark--the recapitulation--much as we would expect from a retransition after a development section. Two of Caplin's examples from Haydn's quartets stand even further removed from the model: the second movement of Op. 76/4 prohibits any confusion by turning unexpectedly from major to minor in the first measure of the recapitulation; and the second movement of Op. 50/2 appropriates a design familiar from 18th-century operatic practice: ritornello-like passages at the beginning, middle, and end of the movement frame the two main sections (analogous to exposition and recapitulation), each conceived as an embellished violin solo that culminates in a cadential trill. At no time does the possibility of a repeated exposition come into question.

[19] Attesting to the scholarly energy that Caplin has bestowed on this project, an almost overwhelming extravagance of notes accompanies the text--not footnotes, alas, placed in easy viewing range at the bottom of the page, but endnotes, stuffed in the back of the book. Many consist of bibliographical citations, others offer supplementary commentary, and still others list compositions that exemplify functional categories described in the text. Since there are close to 750 of these notes, for less than 250 pages of text, encountering them is a common event on virtually every page, and thus a constant interruption. Fearful of missing something essential, the reader must stop, reach for a bookmark, then begin clawing through the back of the book. Given the irritating necessity of endnote format, it might have been good to incorporate the lists of supplementary examples, and perhaps much of the illuminating commentary, in the text proper.

[20] But ferreting out the notes is a minor annoyance, measured against the value of this book as a clear and uniquely detailed presentation of standard forms and their constituent parts, a compilation of intriguing examples illustrating classical design and function, an up-to-date bibliographical guide, and a source of fresh insight into the accomplishments of the classical masters. Caplin's approach, buttressed by methodological rigor and theoretical detail, makes a persuasive case

for the revival of *Formenlehre* as a pedagogical tool and analytical discipline; but it also underscores the limitations of a method that sometimes enforces Procrustean choices on music that may use convention as much for nuance and ambiguity as for conformity to functional norms.

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