

Epilogue by the Translator

After having been concerned with music theory for years, I began to realise that I had never seriously submitted the question of what is the real difference between consonance and dissonance. This was all the more surprising since I had already always found that none of the usual theories were suitable to explain this phenomenon. Then in 2010, I started asking people I thought would know the answer, and most of them, like a cousin of mine who was a student of music, gave me one of the common answers that says that it's all about the adaption of the ear that makes us distinguish euphonious sounds from less well-sounding ones. Not satisfied with the answers, I kept searching until I came across a book with the simple but telling title "Die tonale Musik". In this book, I have found a plausible explanation of the difference between consonance and dissonance. There, the distinguishing criterion of these sounds is not seen in the mere quantitative ratios, but in the tonal composition of the sounds. It has been shown that the dissonance is deduced from the consonance, that is, it is placed at a different level of the harmonising. And thereby, it was clear that the above mentioned difference does not depend on any subjective listening habits, but has an objective criterion for it.

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In a similar way, the author's reflection on the dissonance gave the impetus for the creation of this book: In the 1970s, Max Paul Heller's use of the term "*Mischharmonie*" (mixed harmony)¹ for individual dissonances led him to the realisation that *any* difference between the consonance and dissonance is, in substance, based on the harmonic composition of a sound, and not on the associated frequency ratios, which are still used to explain this difference to this day. At this point, already during his studies in Berlin, he was certain for the first time to have discovered an error in reasoning in musicology. Closer analyses of the wrong theories about the dissonance referred him to the common mistakes in the presentation of the relation of harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic determinations of musical forms. Consequently, it became clear to him that a correct explanation of the music has not yet been worked out. In the 1980s, he found out that the harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic determinations are deducible from one another and that they can be put down into a book with eight chapters. At that time, during his activity as teacher, the course of deduction and the later structure of the book had been laid down by early outlines and drafts. But it was not until the end of

¹ "Precisely in the dominant seventh chord ... we see that harmony which we can directly regard as the type of a triad-mixed-harmony [Dreiklangs-Mischharmonie]; ... By its very nature, the dominant seventh chord consists of the tonal upper dominant triad, which the root tone of the subdominant triad, shifted upward by two octaves, has joined ...". (Max Paul Heller, *Die Musik als Geschenk der Natur. Betrachtungen über das wahre Wesen von Dur und Moll, sowie über die Naturgesetze ihrer Harmonik*, Berlin 1930, p. 60)

the 1990s that the author, meanwhile working as a computer scientist, found the time to write the intended book in order to then publish it in the year 2000.

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In the German-speaking area, the book “Die tonale Musik” initially found a certain distribution mainly in Austria. This was largely due to a review in the leading Viennese daily newspaper “Die Presse”. In it, the chief editor of the feuilleton, Wilhelm Sinkovicz, wrote on 17 March 2001 as follows:

“The present book ... develops – easily readable and, for all halfway musical minds, effortlessly comprehensible –, starting from the physical theory of the consonance, a coherent dramaturgy of the sense of beauty; via the question of tonality – how (and from when on) the ear can recognise and match it –, via the modulation, the rhythm – which Sauter derives from the equability of the harmonic sequences –, up to a theory of melody which explains in rare conciseness and clarity the dependence of melodic tensions on harmonic tensions. The book stretches through to basic concepts of motivic and contrapuntal work, by which higher musical forms are only to be formed.

Not only the fact that Sauter does away with cherished and over many hundreds of years uncritically used terms such as that of the “leading tone” may cause confusion, even consternation among many colleagues. This is something Sauter will be able to cope with – because his little book will not find an antipode any time soon. The effort to refute the theses could have been undertaken long ago by those who really know better.”

The last sentence of this review has remained valid to this day; because no attempt has become known to disprove the present theoretical building or even only individual theses. The established musicology has turned away from a basic explanation of musical coherences and only cultivates its pluralism of theories which, regardless of all theoretical contrasts and contradictions, are supposed to be contributions to a common concern and modestly consider themselves mere attempts, approaches, and interpretations. Accordingly, the apologetic reviews base their criticism of the book on the rejection of an in itself consistent theory of music. Typical for this is the review of a Swiss daily newspaper which considers the insistence on a systematic explanation and derivation of the musical categories to be megalomania, and the critique of musicological mistakes to be disrespect and ignorance:

“A merit of the book lies in its comprehensibility in dealing with the complex problem of ‘tonality’ as well as in interesting individual observations on the question of determining consonance and on the relation of harmony and bar. Sauter’s gigantic interpretation claim, however, overshadows such positive approaches and makes the book, in its present form, appear as an absurdity. An absurdity, however, which far surpasses other curiosities of the music book market due to the degree of ignorance underlying it.”¹

¹ Stefan Brandt, Zwerg unter Riesen. Versuch über die Tonalität in der Musik, in: *Basler Zeitung*, 19 February 2002, p. 38.

The fact that his book would not be received everywhere with enthusiasm within musicology, Sauter has already assumed; and, in fact, the above review from Vienna also does contain a corresponding assessment. This has prompted Sauter all the more to drive the critique of the established musicology forward, which he has done in different ways. In the German edition of his book, which underlies the present English edition, he has criticised some theories exemplarily in an annex. However, he has spoken out against the inclusion of this annex into the English edition for two reasons: First, it concerns theories that are less known and interesting in the English-speaking area. Second, this annex turns out, in retrospect, to be a mere preparatory work to a comprehensive critique of the established musicology which Sauter published in 2010 and whose content is best summarised in the polemic blurb of this book:

“Musicology presents itself nowadays with a whole range of disciplines in which special views of music are institutionalised: Music aestheticians translate musical beauty into ideas of a senseful and meaningful order; music theoreticians construct imaginative models of such an order; music psychologists search for cognitive patterns for the explanation of the constructed structures; music sociologists give proof of the structural appropriateness of music for the social need for meaning and mental orientation; music ethnologists gain knowledge about musical order from authentic mysticism and cosmology; music historians substantiate the historically confirmed and indissoluble identity of music and sensemaking. In doing so, every musicologist assumes that his special field or even his special theory makes the crucial contribution to the explanation of the musical phenomena. However, this explanation itself is systematically – and systemically – subordinated to aspects of the cultivation of ideological worldviews and thereby unerringly missed. How far musicology has come in this respect by now, which expectations and requirements it fulfils and which it does not, is something this book wants to provide detailed information about.”¹

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Despite insufficient knowledge of the English language, the author has made an effort to participate in this translation. He answered all questions that arose from the translation work and also tried to make the most in comprehending and checking the English text. Consequently, misunderstandings could be clarified, and difficult to understand passages of the German text could be better formulated for the English edition. Moreover, mistakes were corrected which had only been noticed during the intensive work with the text in the course of the translation. With many expressions and formulations, which are also unusual in the German language because they put new insights into words, I have consulted intensively with the author to find an appropriate translation. The scientific discussion with the author also led to a rephrasing and partial expansion of whole passages, be it in the attempt to achieve a better clarity of the presented arguments,

¹ Franz Sauter, *Die Musikwissenschaft in Forschung und Lehre. Kritik einer bürgerlichen Wissenschaft*, Norderstedt 2010, blurb.

or be it that the author came up with new ideas during the rethinking of the analysis in regard to how the quality of the explication could be improved by useful additions. On the occasion of such text changes, the author repeatedly expressed with satisfaction his belief that the English edition would turn out to be better than the German edition. Changes in relation to the underlying German edition of the book, if not initiated by the author himself, have at least been agreed with him.

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In German musicology there are a few abstract terms which were very useful for the formulation of the present theory, but which are entirely unusual in the English language:

– Under the very abstract category “sound form” (Klangform), things as different as motif, bar, or dissonance can be summarised. This is important because all the sound forms discussed here have an inner connection that is based on a commonality of these sound forms: Their communality lies in their aesthetic character and thus in the fact that their components fit together. More details about this and the logical implications are summarised in the eighth chapter. In this context, the verb “to go well together” is of outstanding importance. The author therefore takes advantage of the fact that this verb can be nominalised in the German language. In English, however, the expression “the going-together of sound forms” (das Zusammenpassen von Klangformen) sounds very unusual.

– About half of the discussed sound forms are “sound combinations” (Zusammenklänge = that which sounds together). Under this abstraction, harmonies can be understood, that is, consonances and dissonances, but also disharmonies. Sound combinations can occur in completely different forms, for example as bar contents or as chords.

– The word “sound” basically stands for the German word “Klang”. In German the word “Klang” is used almost only in the context of music. In the context of language, the word “Laut” is used. In English there is only the word “sound” for both terms. Thus, in this book the word “sound” usually stands for “musical sound”.

– In German, harmonising means either “harmonisieren” (= bringing something into harmony) or “harmonieren” (= having a harmonious relationship). The second is always meant in this book. Because it is proven there that harmony is not something which is only added to a melody by further voices, but rather an immanent relationship which the melody already contains in itself and which is at best modified or specified by further voices. Harmony is a relationship in which the tones ultimately stand because of their sound characteristics. Unfortunately, the English language does not have such an unmistakable word as “harmonieren”.

The author generally tries to use common expressions. But sometimes, it is inevitable for the advancement of science to form new terms. In this view, it

should also be reasonable for the English speaking readers to get to know new terms if they really want to understand the musical aesthetics.

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The German text quotes mainly German-speaking musicologists. If and when the quoted texts are also available in the English language, then, of course, these have been adopted verbatim into this English issue from already translated works. Most quotations, however, had to be translated, whereby I gave additional reproductions of the German original a miss. Anyone who wants to check the correct translation of the quotations can easily do this by a comparison with the German edition “Die tonale Musik”.