

Preface

This thin volume is the product of analytic work accomplished during a year of almost complete isolation from colleagues, friends and relatives forced on us by the global pandemic. Each of us had to deal with this harsh reality in our own way to keep our minds busy and thereby to stave off boredom and potential depression. My solution was to engage in a favorite activity, listening to and studying chamber music of the nineteenth century. I intentionally began my investigation with the music of Felix Mendelssohn, a composer I have always felt is unjustly underrepresented in the analytical literature. I had recently written about the finales from the two piano trios, so I turned to the string quartets, settling on the Sixth, op. 80, in F Minor for my first project. I was attracted to this work not only by the passion of the music but also by the fact that it tells a story. In part it is an outpouring of the composer's grief over the death of his sister, Fanny Hensel, but also, I believe, a tribute to her. This study became the first of the three chapters in this book. Next, I focused on the chamber music of Robert Schumann, settling eventually on his monumental Piano Quintet, op. 44. This is a compelling and engaging work, and, like the Mendelssohn, it projects a narrative, particularly in the final movement, the first half of which I have described as a dialogue among three distinct personalities. Finally, I turned to a successor to the Schumann work, the Piano Quintet in F Minor, op. 34, of Johannes Brahms, one of my absolute favorite works of the nineteenth century. Brahms's references to E Minor in the latter part of the quintet suggest a hidden reference or narrative, but what that may be is not at all clear. Eventually, I decided to present these three studies in this order – Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms – that is, in the order in which they were written. There is, in fact, a clear progression across the three studies, each successive work being more complex than the preceding one, offering increasingly greater challenges to the analyst. This arrangement also provides a sense of tonal symmetry, since the Mendelssohn and Brahms works are written in the same key, F Minor, and they share a common important motivic idea, the neighbor-note figure C–D^b–C.

This volume is unique in at least three respects. First, it presents the only complete Schenkerian-based study of these three compositions. It is much more common in general that published articles will deal with a particular movement but not an entire multi-movement work. Second, it contains detailed Schenkerian graphs of all twelve movements, which should be of interest to all those who want to learn more about Schenker's conception of musical structure and its application. Finally, this volume deals in part with repertoire rarely represented in the Schenkerian literature. While Brahms's music deservedly receives a fair amount of attention, Schenkerian analyses of major works by Mendelssohn and Schumann are scarce.

Music analysis is idiosyncratic in nature, a very personal pursuit to discover the inner workings of an individual composition. Sometimes we are rediscovering what others have

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found before, but for us it is an entirely new and exciting experience. Each of us brings to this process a unique mixture of what we have learned and observed over the years, as well as our acquired analytical biases. No matter how thorough our approach, the result is never as comprehensive as our intent. In this regard, I am often surprised, sometimes pleasantly so, by the observations of others who approached music differently than I. That is, I realize the analyses presented here do not tell us everything that can or should be said about these three works. The analyses are my personal observations and, in some instances, my speculation about the meaning of events. Having said that, I hope all musicians who are attracted to these works will find value in what I have written. Some of my commentary is technical, that is, concerned with matters of voice leading and supported by numerous Schenkerian graphs, but there is also considerable space devoted to issues of formal organization, use of motives and, where appropriate, programmatic matters.

Those well versed in Schenkerian theory and analysis will have little difficulty understanding my graphs and accompanying explanations, but this will be more challenging for those with only a passing acquaintance with this analytical approach. It is certainly beyond the scope of this volume to offer a comprehensive introduction to the topic, but the following walk-through one of the analytic graphs from this book may be of some help. Reproduced below is the initial portion of Example 1-2, a detailed graph of the voice-leading structure of bars 1–61 from the first movement of Mendelssohn’s String Quartet in F Minor.

9 23 27

A basic tenet of Schenker’s theory is that music consists of multiple levels of structure unfolding simultaneously over the course of a composition, and the intent in analytic graphs is that these levels are clearly reflected in the notation employed. The deepest level of melodic motion and its basic support are notated in this example by half notes, and

the melodic pitches at this level are further designated by scale-degree numbers with carets above. This graph shows that the initial melodic tone C ($\hat{3}$) is prolonged at this level until it descends through B^b to A^b at the cadence in bars 60–61. More immediate levels of structure are then indicated by quarter notes, eighth notes and finally notes without stems, and slurs are used to delineate levels of prolongation. In this instance the primary tone $\hat{3}$ is initially prolonged in theme 1a by its upper neighbor (notated as an eighth note to indicate that it exists at a lower level than the note it decorates), delineated by a slur, and the continuation shows that this initial pattern is embedded within a replica of this motion from theme 1a across 1b to a varied repetition of 1a, indicated by the larger slur. The primary tone is further prolonged by a descending fifth (theme 1c), then, beginning in bar 53 (theme 2) as an unstable pitch, finally resolving to B^b and A^b in conjunction with the modulation to A^b (III) at bar 61.¹ If you now look ahead to Example 1-4, you can see how this motion is represented in a deeper-level graph.

The three chamber works examined in this volume were written during the mid-nineteenth century, the Brahms somewhat later than the other two, and they share a common musical language, though with clear differences in style. In a certain sense the Mendelssohn stands apart, being the only one of the three written for string quartet, while the Schumann and Brahms invite comparison, being scored for string quartet plus piano. But each of these is a unique work of art, each special in its own way. The common thread throughout this volume is the use of Schenkerian concepts (along with complementary approaches) to reveal at least some of their inner workings, perhaps even some of their secrets.

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¹ The numbers between the staves indicate the hypermetric groupings, which begin with an upbeat measure.

Notational matters

A. Notation of Harmony

You will notice in the ensuing material that I employ a system of indicating major chords with upper-case Roman numerals and minor chords with lower-case ones, though I am well aware that most of my colleagues follow Schenker by indicating all chords with upper-case numerals. I find the system I use to be more flexible and more communicative.

I am also in the habit of indicating an applied or secondary dominant (or dominant substitute, e.g. o_7) in square brackets. For example $[V] V$ rather than $II\#-V$, though on occasion you will encounter $II\#$ on my graphs.

I indicate augmented sixth chords by $+6$, e.g. iv^{+6} .

B. Notation of Pitch

I will follow the system employed by the Acoustical Society of America, where middle C is C_4 .

C. Graphic Notation

It has been my habit for years to provide foreground graphs with bar lines for major portions of a work. (When you encounter an empty bar, it means that the content of that bar is a repetition or a varied repetition of the previous bar.) The advantage of this practice is that the graphs are easy to follow, but the disadvantage is that it is not always possible to show longer-range connections. So my summary examples are middleground/background graphs where greater liberty is taken, for example, in the notation of octave placement to clarify my interpretation of the structure.

Chapter I

Mendelssohn, string quartet no. 6, op. 80, in f minor: In remembrance Fanny Hensel

Felix Mendelssohn began the composition of his final quartet in July-August of 1847 while on retreat in Switzerland, and it was completed in September after his return to Leipzig. Scholars generally agree that this work, the last major work the composer would complete before his death in November, represents the outpouring of Felix's grief over the death of his sister, Fanny Hensel, in May. This loss had such an effect on Felix that he was reported to have temporarily stopped composing, instead finding solace in his paintings, producing several landscapes of the Interlaken area. Eventually he would return to composition to find a way to express his grief in music, the result being the op. 80 quartet. The Mendelssohn scholar, R. Larry Todd, provides the following general description.

The string quartet in F Minor, op. 80, drafted during the final Swiss sojourn and cast in the composer's most dissonant, disjunct style, is laden with grief over Fanny... The outer movements are in an unrelenting, dynamic, agitated style, with driving tremolos, wide leaps, and forays into the high register. The tender slow movement, placed as the penultimate third movement, seems to reminisce about the intimate, lyrical style of Fanny's lieder, while the second movement, propelled by jarring syncopations, is a macabre scherzo such as Felix imagined his sister might have composed.^{1,2}

The quartet is unified by a recurring motive C–D^b–C that pervades different levels of the structure, the one exception being the third movement, which offers a semblance of a respite from the general tone of the work. As we shall see, the quartet is also unified by an underlying narrative pertaining to Fanny, as suggested by the subtitle of this chapter. That is, this work is more closely connected to Fanny than just an outpouring of Felix's grief. It has already been noted that the second movement represents the composer's imagination of how his sister might have written it. Though we will touch on programmatic matters several times in the following pages, consider for a moment the two sudden digressions in the exposition of the first movement (bars 73–76 and 82–85), which ever-so-briefly suggest ^bII and ^bVI, respectively, in the local key. What is their meaning? From a structural perspective they are parenthetical digressions, delaying the progress of the tonal motion to the dominant of A^b (III). But that hardly explains why they are there and what they represent. They are intrusions, sudden recollections of his sister or happier times past,

1 As stated by the composer in a letter to Sebastian Hensel. See *Felix Mendelssohn: A Life in Letters*, ed. R. Elvers, trans. C. Tomlinson, 381.

2 Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn*, 350–51.

much like what happens to all of us when a sudden recollection intrudes on our thought process.

Mendelssohn's treatment of sonata form in this work represents a break from his earlier quartets, which are decidedly "classical" in their design. We could debate at great length whether or not there is a classical model for sonata form, but we all have a basic plan in mind against which we measure variants. Mendelssohn's earlier works, for example the first movement of the third quartet, op. 44, no. 1, is a clear example of the procedures inherent in this model, but the outer movements of op. 80 deviate from it in several respects, e.g., the overlapping of major sections and the reversal of order of presentation of thematic material in the recapitulation. This raises the matter of terminology to be employed here. Terminology can be confusing. For example, most formalists identify the recapitulation as beginning with the return of the main theme, no matter in what key, while Schenkerians normally identify the recapitulation commencing with the return to the tonic. The confusion arises from the use of the same term to describe, on the one hand, a formal event, and, on the other, a tonal event. We can avoid the confusion by referring to the formal return and the tonal return if the situation requires it. Often they occur simultaneously (the classical model), but there are wonderful examples where they do not.

The following discussion of each movement is divided into two parts, the first dealing with form and related matters, including the narrative, and the second focusing more on voice leading and structural issues.

I. Allegro vivace assai

An outline of the formal-tonal design of the movement is provided in Table 1-1. This chart identifies three components of the first theme area. The first of these (1a) is the tremolo phrase that establishes not only the general tone of the movement but also the key and primary tone (ζ). This phrase has the character of an introduction, but as the movement progresses it becomes clear that it is an integral component of the discourse. The 1b idea that follows is characterized by the leap of a diminished seventh from D^b , the pervasive upper neighbor of the primary tone, down to $E\sharp$. This harmony (o7) appears frequently at important junctures in this movement as a substitute for the dominant. This is followed by a varied restatement of the initial tremolo phrase, creating a mini a-b-a' structure that leads to a third idea (1c) of an entirely different character from the preceding agitated material. It is interesting that this new lyrical idea is derived rhythmically from 1b, as shown in Example 1-1. It is a four-bar idea that is repeated in varied form twice, the second time extended to lead to the dominant of A^b (III).

The second theme – a clear contrast to the agitated character of the 1a and 1b ideas – is notable in two respects: first, the bass of the entire phrase is a dominant pedal until the resolution to the perfect authentic cadence in the new key at bar 61; and second, the "melodic" line above consists primarily of arpeggios extending the six-four until its reso-

MENDELSSOHN, STRING QUARTET NO. 6, OP. 80, IN F MINOR

TABLE 1-1. MENDELSSOHN (I): CHART OF FORMAL/TONAL DESIGN

EXPOSITION		
Theme 1		
1a	1-9	f: i-V
1b	9-15	o7
1a'	15-23	i-i6
1c and cont.	23-41	i6-iv-V-i
Trans.	41-53	i → V7 of III
Theme 2		
init. statement	53-61	A ^b : V-I
rep. and cont.	61-86	I-ii-V
Closing idea	86-95	→ V7
DEVELOPMENT		
1a	96-110	→ V7 of c minor (v)
1b dev.	110-118	c: o7-i6
	118-141	C7-A7-D-g6-f6-E ^b
	141-161	e ^b ... G ^b
Retrans.(1a)	161-172	f: o7
RECAPITULATION		
Theme 1c	172-190	f: i6-V-i
Trans.	190-212	i-V
Theme 2 and cont.	213-240	F: I
Closing idea	241-252	I-V7
Bridge (1a)	252-258	f: o7
Theme 1a	259-266	i-iv
Theme 1b	266-290	V-i
Coda [Presto]	290-323	I-ii-V-i

MENDELSSOHN, STRING QUARTET NO. 6, OP. 80, IN F MINOR

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled '1b' and has a dynamic marking of *sf*. It begins with a dotted quarter note on G4, followed by an eighth note on A4, then a descending eighth-note scale: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The bottom staff is labeled '1c' and has a dynamic marking of *p*. It begins with a dotted quarter note on G4, followed by an eighth note on A4, then a descending eighth-note scale: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Both staves are in F minor (three flats) and 2/4 time.

Example 1-1. Mendelssohn (I): Comparison of themes 1b and 1c

lution to five-three in the penultimate bar. The significance of this idea to our narrative will become apparent when it appears in the recapitulation. Here, in the continuation of this idea, elements of the minor mode, first F^b , then later C^b , creep into the dialogue, darkening the brighter mood. It is into this context that the two brief disruptions referred to earlier, which may very well represent sudden recollections of Fanny, are inserted into the discourse. The second of these leads to a closing idea, beginning in bar 86, that returns us to the lyricism and relative calm reminiscent of the 1c idea. Still there is a sense of urgency created by the increased insistence on V_7 in the key of A^b with its prominent D^b . In fact, the exposition ends suddenly with this harmony, interrupted abruptly by the intrusion of the opening tremolo idea and the negative sense it conveys. From a theoretical perspective we must concern ourselves with the eventual resolution of the dissonant D^b . Equally important we must consider the meaning of the abrupt abandonment of this dissonance. Had Felix wanted to pose a rhetorical “why?”, for example, he might have followed the hanging dissonance by a grand pause. Rather the point seems to be the intrusion of dark thoughts into the calm offered by this repetitive lilting tune.

The sudden intrusion of the tremolo idea signals the beginning of the development section, the remainder of which is based almost entirely on the contrapuntal treatment of the 1b idea with its characteristic dotted rhythm and descending wide leap. The initial phrase of this passage (bars 110–118) is divided into two parts: imitative statements of the 1b motive (4 bars, 07 of v) and four bars extending the resolution of the 07 to a C minor harmony in first inversion. The repetition of this phrase begins from a C_7 chord (V_7), but the continuation leads through a number of chords, arriving eventually at an E^b chord in bar 141 to initiate a passage leading to the climax of the movement at the high B^b and the 07 chord at bar 161.³ Here the return of the tremolo idea functions locally as a retransition, not as the beginning of the recapitulation, with the characteristic 07 substituting for the dominant, one result of which is the restatement of the D^b left unresolved at the very end of the exposition. A secondary advantage of the 07 is that it allows Mendelssohn to slide almost unnoticed into the recapitulation (second half of bar 172) with a statement of the 1c idea, which begins from a weak position of the tonic harmony. The effect of this is a

³ Mendelssohn returns to this high B^b (*ff*) in the coda (bar 317) just prior to the final cadence.

subtle overlapping of sections.⁴ There is not a strong return to tonic harmony until the perfect authentic cadence at bar 190.

Following the cadence in bar 190, there is a transitional passage leading to theme 2, this time in F major. This is the focal point of the recapitulation, and now we can grasp the significance of Mendelssohn's choice of F Minor/Major for this work as well as the characteristics of the theme itself with its pedal point on F and melodic emphasis on A. It is a tribute to his sister: Fanny. This time the continuation to the closing phrase contains only one, not two disruptions. This closing idea leads us back to F minor and subsequent statements of themes 1a and 1b followed by a *presto* coda (bars 290–323).⁵ There can be various reasons for Mendelssohn's choice to save statements of 1a and 1b for the end of the movement. From a purely practical perspective their statement earlier following a development largely devoted to 1b and a retransition based on 1a might not have been appropriate. Whatever the reason, the result is that the focus falls first on the tribute to Fanny while the movement closes with the strong statements expressing his grief.

An interpretation of the voice-leading structure of this movement is offered in Examples 1-2 to 1-5. With the exception of Example 1-4, these are foreground graphs with bar lines included for ease in following the interpretation, and on occasion a group of bars are left blank, indicating that the content is a varied repetition of the preceding material. Also, there are places where entire passages have been omitted if the content is not necessary to follow the longer-range connections. Finally, you will note that the hypermetric organization, which is predominantly quadruple, is indicated between the staves, and brackets are employed to indicate parenthetical phrase insertions.

Example 1-2 is a graph of the exposition. The initial phrase establishes the primary tone C₅ ($\hat{\zeta}$), which is prolonged locally by its upper neighbor D^b and then D₄ at the final approach to the cadence on V.⁶ This phrase is preceded by an upbeat measure, which is notated as (1) in the hypermeter to indicate the potential for hearing this and the following bar as successive downbeat measures, a feature that emerges later in the movement. The following 1b idea features D^b, the upper neighbor of $\hat{\zeta}$, in several octaves, most notably in the upper octave, which is picked up in the final bars of the next phrase, the varied statement of the tremolo idea (1a). This is followed by the initial statement of 1c, the main feature of which is the descending fifth from C₅. Repetitions of this idea, the second of which is expanded by an internal insertion delaying arrival at the cadence, are not shown in

4 A different interpretation of this passage is given by Erez Rapoport in *The Smoothing Over of Formal Junctures as a Style Element in Mendelssohn's Instrumental Music*, Ex. 3.20 (p. 176). Curiously Rapoport identifies the beginning of the recapitulation at bar 167, which falls within a prolonged dominant / 07 chord.

5 An earlier example that comes to mind where the statement of ideas is reversed in the recapitulation is Schubert's *Quartettsatz*, D. 703, of 1820.

6 A note about notation: Since the primary emphasis on C₅ falls at the cadence, it might make sense to notate the establishment of $\hat{\zeta}$ over V at the cadence rather than earlier, as indicated in Example 1-2.

Example 1-2. Regarding the motive C–D^b–C, it is represented here in different octaves and both locally and across longer spans. Note the expression of this idea in the bass, supporting the harmonic progression iv6–V, for example in bars 24–26, as well as in the top voice.

As noted in the preceding discussion of form, the main features of the second theme are the bass pedal point on E^b, the dominant of A^b (III), above which the top part descends, primarily through arpeggiation, from C6. The repetition of the four-bar idea eventually resolves the six-four to five-three in the lower octave, leading the fundamental line through B^b₄ (4̂) to A^b₄ (3̂) at the cadence on A^b. This structural feature – the motion of the fundamental line to 3̂ at the cadence within the second key area – is a common paradigm with sonata movements in the minor mode. The most important feature of the continuation is the reintroduction of D^b₅, first in bar 71, then later in bars 86–87 following the two interruptive insertions. Not shown is the following closing idea, which stresses this pitch. The fact that Mendelssohn chooses to end the exposition abruptly with this dissonant seventh, rudely interrupted by the tremolo idea, is certainly noteworthy. This dissonance demands resolution, but we will have to wait for some time for this to be resolved satisfactorily.

Example 1-3 is a graph of the development section as related to the final gesture of the exposition and the initial statement of 1c at the beginning of the recapitulation. The initial voice leading involves the process of reaching over or overlapping, where the resolutions of dissonant sevenths are clearly implied, though not explicitly stated, at least in the same voice or octave. These resolutions are supplied in parentheses. So the dissonant D^b₅ at the end of the exposition resolves in the immediate context to an implied C₅ over the o7 of ii harmony in the local key (bar 101), above which E^b₅ is introduced, which resolves to an implied D^b over a B^b (bar 104), above which F₅ is introduced... In this case F6, the dissonant seventh of the G7 chord (V7 of C Minor), is resolved – after the introduction of the 1b idea – following its transfer to the bass. This process then continues until B^b₆ is reached, first associated with an E^b harmony, then three measures later with a B^b chord (iv), which is prolonged over the following eight measures before the bass arpeggiates through ^bII to the diminished seventh chord at the beginning of the retransition (bar 161). At two important junctures along the way (bars 112–113 and 141–142) there are successive downbeat measures in the hypermetric structure. In addition, note the existence of conflicting hypermetric groups in bars 129–142, the prevailing pattern below and the conflicting one (violin 1) above, a conflict that is finally resolved at bar 142. Returning now to the retransition, it prolongs the o7 chord as substitute for the dominant. This allows Mendelssohn to reintroduce the dissonant D^b and to progress almost unnoticed to a statement of 1c, which, at least in retrospect, signals a return – a weak return – to the tonic.

Example 1-4 provides an overview of the movement to the tonic return. The first theme in the exposition is shown to descend a fifth prolonging C₅ (5̂), and the second theme leads the primary line through B^b₄ (4̂) to A^b₄ (3̂) at the cadence on III. Our expectation is that this will lead eventually to 2̂ / V in the retransition. The exposition then ends with V7 in the key of A^b. The graph of the development section omits the initial steps in the