
SchenkerGUIDE

SchenkerGUIDE is an accessible overview of Heinrich Schenker's complex but fascinating approach to the analysis of tonal music. It builds on the widely used website www.SchenkerGUIDE.com, which has been offering straightforward explanations of Schenkerian analysis to undergraduate students since 2001.

Divided into four parts, *SchenkerGUIDE* offers a step-by-step method to help students tackle Schenkerian analysis:

- Part I sets out the main features of Schenker's theory and its underlying concepts.
- Part II outlines a unique and detailed working method to help students get started on the process of analysis.
- Part III puts some of these ideas into practice by exploring the basics of a Schenkerian approach to form, register, motives and dramatic structure.
- Part IV provides a series of exercises from the simple to the more sophisticated, along with hints and tips for their completion.

Tom Pankhurst is Senior Lecturer at Liverpool Hope University. His research interests include the tonal music of the twentieth century and semiotic approaches to tonality.

SchenkerGUIDE

A Brief Handbook and Website
for Schenkerian Analysis

Tom Pankhurst

Liverpool Hope University, UK

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Visit the www.SchenkerGUIDE.com website for more exercises, a range of hints and tips, a searchable glossary plus an extensive bibliography.

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Preface

The basic principles of Schenkerian analysis are quite simple, but starting an analysis can nevertheless be a daunting prospect for undergraduates new to the subject. Although students can usually understand analyses and the theories behind them relatively quickly, it can often take longer to develop practical skills. The complexity of a Schenkerian analysis inevitably reflects that of the music it explores, but I have found that offering a step-by-step approach allows students to begin their own analytical work with greater confidence and accuracy.

I originally established SchenkerGUIDE.com as a quick reference tool for my students, but due to the power of internet search engines it has developed into a resource that attracts thousands of international visitors per month. This handbook has the same goal of offering a concise and accessible overview of Schenker's complex but fascinating approach to musical analysis alongside a step-by-step method for getting started.

The book is suitable for instructors who need a short and readable text to support their own pedagogy at undergraduate level or as a complement to some of the fine textbooks already on the shelves, such as Forte and Gilbert's *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* (Forte and Gilbert 1982) or Cadwallader and Gagné's *Analysis of Tonal Music* (Cadwallader and Gagné 1998). A detailed explanation of my suggested four-stage method lies at the heart of SchenkerGUIDE, around which I have added an overview of Schenkerian theory, some more detailed case studies and a series of graded exercises.

In order to get the most out of SchenkerGUIDE, students will need to be familiar with the basic analysis of tonal harmony with Roman numeral labels (and preferably figured bass). Some knowledge of the principles of counterpoint is advised but not presumed; while students may well not have taken species counterpoint, some experience of voice-leading through writing chorales in the style of Bach (or similar exercises) would be very helpful. Finally, some basic knowledge of Classical form is called upon in the later chapters.

This handbook is intended to be used in conjunction with the original www.SchenkerGUIDE.com website, which offers some further simple exercises, some hints and tips on presenting analyses on various music publishing packages and an extensive bibliography. It is also linked to the Routledge companion website on which can be found some further supporting materials for instructors, including powerpoints. The URL for the website is: www.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415973984.

My thanks go to David Fanning who originally suggested I produce a short guide to Schenkerian analysis for students and who has offered invaluable advice and assistance in the course of writing. The enthusiasm and occasional resistance of students in Liverpool, Manchester and Helsinki have helped to shape this book, as have the staff with whom I have worked on analysis courses and the many people who have given words of advice and encouragement on the basis of having used my website. Eero Tarasti's generous encouragement and support has also had a profound effect on my work on this project. I owe a debt of gratitude to the reviewers of this book whose comments and advice at various stages of its genesis crucially affected its final form, and to my editor, Constance Ditzel, for her excellent advice and perseverance on this project. I am also indebted to Denny Tek at Routledge, and Amanda Crook and Susan Leaper at Florence Production, for expertly guiding this book through the production process. Thanks also to Chris, Jo and Linda, who helped proofread the final draft. Finally, I am grateful for the love and support of my wife Rachael, who ultimately brought this project to fruition.

Tom Pankhurst

Part I

An overview of Schenkerian analysis

An introduction to the concepts of Schenkerian analysis

Analysis, one way or another, is an integral part of musical life. On a purely practical level, sight-reading or memorizing music would be impossible if we were not able to identify simple patterns and their repetition. Our response to music as listeners is also analytical in this broad sense: we cannot help but compare melodic, rhythmic and textural ideas to those we have already heard—either in the piece at hand, or in other works with which we are familiar. The moment we move beyond an unreflective, moment-by-moment apprehension of music, whether as performers or listeners, we have entered the realm of analysis.

Up until about 1800 the description and explanation of this practical analytical understanding of music was most often found in treatises on such topics as counterpoint, figured bass, harmony, and embellishment. Analysis was, in other words, primarily a tool for explaining how to write or perform music. In the nineteenth century, however, scholars became much more interested in music of previous eras, and analysis increasingly played a part in the attempt to understand the essence of, for example, Bach or Palestrina. Most of the areas of analytical interest that developed during this period still persist today: studies of form and genre; explorations of the creative process, particularly through composers' sketchbooks; theories of harmony and counterpoint; and, finally, various attempts to describe musical works in terms of their "meaning." It is not, however, until around the turn of the twentieth century that scholars started to do the really detailed, comprehensive and systematic work characteristic of formal music analysis.

Heinrich Schenker is in many ways the high priest of twentieth-century music analysis; there are not many scholars who have managed to gain as wide an acceptance for such a novel and ambitious theory. Schenker, who was born in 1868 in Galicia (now part of Poland but then ruled by Austria), initially went to Vienna to study law but eventually enrolled at the music conservatory, where he studied, among other things, composition with Anton Bruckner. He earned his living primarily as an accompanist, teacher, and music critic, and his analytical and theoretical interests grew out of these other activities.

Schenker's writings

The most widely read of Schenker's theoretical works is *Free Composition*, the final volume of a series of books called *New Musical Theories and Fantasies*. The first in this series, published in 1906, offered a fresh perspective on harmonic theory, while the second two discussed the theory and practice of the strict (or species) counterpoint that is still taught in some universities. *Free Composition* (published in 1935) aimed to show that freely composed music was still essentially based on the principles of strict counterpoint; the way in which Schenker brings together harmonic and contrapuntal theory is one of his major contributions to music analysis. As the title of the series suggests, however, Schenker's work is as imaginative and visionary (even mystical) as it is technical. Those not familiar with Schenker sometimes caricature him as interested only in reducing music to simplistic abstract structures; it is all too easy to get this impression from *Free Composition*, which was compiled in relative haste towards the end of his life. We get a much better picture of how he puts his ideas into practice from his other two major series of analytical publications, *Der Tonwille* (which translates as something like "the will of the tone") and *The Masterwork in Music*.

Schenker focuses on the music of a fairly small number of Baroque, Classical and Romantic composers, from Bach through Beethoven to Brahms. His approach to this repertoire is encapsulated in a motto inscribed at the beginning of several of his most influential works: *Semper idem sed non eodem modo* (always the same but not in the same way). In this light, Schenker's theories can be understood as a development of the simple observation that a highly restricted set of elementary tonal building blocks (scales, triads etc.) gives rise to apparently limitless possibilities. Among other things, his analyses show how tonal compositions can be seen as the elaboration of a small number of basic patterns; it is by understanding these patterns that we can begin to identify what is distinctive about a given piece.

Heinrich Schenker's work is original and fascinating—it offers profound insights into the way tonal music works. Schenkerian analysis is, however, controversial, and those who have developed it since Schenker's death in 1935 have done so in a wide variety of different ways. In this short guide to Schenkerian analysis, I have presented its main ideas as concisely and simply as possible. I have also tried to anticipate some obvious objections to Schenker's ideas, occasionally discussing the problems and advantages of particular aspects of his approach. Analysis, like performance, is ultimately

an interpretative act—it invites its readers to hear a piece of music in a particular way. Whereas Schenker lived at a time when knowledge tended to be presented as absolute truth, we tend today to view it as somewhat more provisional. The task for a student of Schenker is to be open to understanding music the way that he suggests, but at the same time keeping critical faculties intact and alert. The reward is a language for articulating musicality that no other theory offers so richly. Pursued in the right spirit, it can be a revelation.

Schenkerian analysis: some key ideas

Schenker shows that although tonal music is richly complex, it can be understood as the elaboration of simple structures that lie beneath the surface; it is this essentially simple idea of music as the art of elaboration that lies at the heart of Schenkerian analysis. Improvised embellishment has historically occupied a much more important position in classical music making than it does today. Central to realizing a keyboard accompaniment, ornamenting the vocal part of a Baroque aria, or extemporizing a virtuosic cadenza is the ability to improvise around a melody or a series of chords. In praising the “improvizatory long-range vision”¹ of the composers he particularly admired, Schenker explicitly links improvisation and composition, believing that the successful practice of both of these arts is rooted in an understanding that goes beyond the surface in order to grasp the large-scale structures of a piece of music.

In cases where there is a clearly established or pre-existing melody, the recognition of composed embellishment is an important part of the listening experience; this is the case in, for example, cantus firmus masses, Baroque arias, or virtuosic concert preludes. Schenkerian theory, however, suggests that there is always a simpler idea lurking under the surface of tonal music, even when it is not explicit in this way. The idea of music as elaboration is the starting point for the next chapter, in which the main features of Schenkerian theory are outlined. The remainder of the current chapter offers a brief informal introduction to some of the ideas that underpin Schenkerian thought.

A good analogy for the way in which Schenker suggests music works can be found in language. We process the sounds of speech by (only half-consciously) organizing them into meaningful units. No one who knows English would read or hear the following two sentences (the first two of John Steinbeck’s *The Moon is Down*) as an unconnected series of vowels and consonants; understanding language involves forming relationships between its separate units:

By ten-forty-five it was all over. The town was occupied, the defenders defeated.

At the most basic level, syllables are grouped into words, but many of those words are themselves dependent on being grouped with others for their meaning. For example, the definite article at the beginning of Steinbeck's second sentence ('the') only fully makes sense when related to the noun that it precedes ('town'). An immediate analogy in tonal music can be seen in Example 1.1b, Mozart's first variation on "Ah vous dirais-je maman" (familiar to English-speaking children as "Twinkle, twinkle little star"). The neighbor notes marked with asterisks in the first measure do not make sense in the language of tonal music unless they are understood in relation to the C that they embellish; they do not make sense on their own because they do not fit with the C major harmony.

Returning to Steinbeck's opening sentences, there are points at which the prose could not be stopped without seeming incomplete (e.g. "By forty-five it . . ."). The grammatical groupings that we establish as we read

Example 1.1 (a) Mozart, Variations in C ("Ah vous dirais-je maman"), K. 265, Theme;
(b) Variation I

Note: Allen Cadwallader and David Gagné offer a slightly different analysis of this passage as an example of species counterpoint in *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach* (Cadwallader and Gagné 1998: 39).

The image displays a musical score for two parts of Mozart's "Ah vous dirais-je maman". Part (a) is the theme, and part (b) is Variation I. Both are in C major and 2/4 time. The score is written in grand staff notation (treble and bass clefs). Part (a) consists of four measures. Part (b) consists of four measures, with the first measure containing four asterisks above the notes D, E, F, and G in the treble clef, indicating neighbor notes. The score concludes with a double bar line.

or listen to language create a continuity of expectation. If a potential group of syllables or words is left unfinished, then this continuity is broken and a tension is introduced. This works on many different levels, from the surface grammar to larger-scale meaning. Although the first sentence is grammatically complete, it nevertheless creates a tension by telling us that something was over and raising the question of what that something might be. The tension created by this incomplete information is resolved by the second sentence, in which we are informed that the subject of the first sentence is the occupation of a town. The two sentences together still leave a larger-scale tension unresolved: we wonder what will happen in the town next, and whether the defeat of the defenders is a lasting one.

There are two main underlying concepts here: first, that groups of syllables and words form meaningful units; second, that those units form tensions not only within each sentence but also from one sentence, or even paragraph, to the next. Both these ideas are important to Schenker's understanding of tonal music. In the same way that we group syllables into words, most listeners will subconsciously hear the right hand of the first measure of Example 1.1 as a group of notes organized around C. In the same way, the second measure consists of a group of neighbor notes organized around G.

Just as we moved beyond the immediate grammatical groupings of Steinbeck's opening sentences in order to explore the dynamics of the larger-scale expectations it creates, so Example 1.2 attempts to show in an informal way how we might analyze Mozart's theme (and therefore also his variation) into larger groups.

Looking first at mm. 4 to 8, I have used beams and stems to group the notes in these four measures together as a descending series of passing notes from G to C. Just as stopping midway through a sentence can produce a sense of incompleteness, so stopping after the F or the D, for example, would create a similar tension of expectation.

One reason for the sense of incompleteness may simply be knowledge of how this nursery rhyme is supposed to go. According to Schenkerian theory, however, there is a more fundamental reason why stopping after the F or

Example 1.2 "Ah vous dirais-je maman," melodic analysis

The musical score for Example 1.2 is presented in 2/4 time. The treble staff shows a melodic line starting on G4, moving through A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The bass staff shows a supporting line starting on C3, moving through D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Annotations above the treble staff include "skip from C to G" with a bracket over the first two notes, "neighbornote (or auxiliary) to G" with a bracket over the third and fourth notes, and "stepwise descent from G to C" with a long bracket over the entire melodic line. Roman numerals are placed below the bass staff: C:I, (IV), I, V, VI, II, V, I.

D has this effect. Example 1.2 is in C major, and the second part of the phrase (mm. 4–8) begins and ends on the tonic (I) of this key. The passing-note progression from G to C makes sense as a unit because it begins and ends on a tonic chord. From a Schenkerian point of view, the passing notes in between are an elaboration of this tonic harmony. If you stop on F or D the embellishment of the tonic is incomplete and this is what creates the tension that binds the notes together.

The comparison between this musical extract and my Steinbeck example is quite close in that stopping at some points creates less of a tension than others. If you break off after “The town was occupied” (leaving out “the defenders defeated”) it makes grammatical sense but offers less information. A comparable musical effect might be created by stopping the second part of the phrase of Example 1.2 after the first E in m. 6: there is still a complete meaningful unit that begins and ends on the tonic chord of C even though the phrase is incomplete. The first four measures of the theme also make up a complete musical unit: first a leap from C to G and then an upper neighbor note to that G. Again, finishing on the neighbor note in m. 3 would create a tension, a sense of incompleteness.

One final analogy can be drawn between linguistic and musical structures. I have already suggested that Steinbeck’s first sentence sets up a tension that is then resolved by the sentence that follows. The way in which *musical* tensions are set up and resolved is very different, but the first four measures of Example 1.2 likewise introduce a tension that is resolved in the eighth. Schenker suggests that melodies that do not finish on the first degree of the scale (the tonic note) sound less final or closed than ones that do (an idea we shall return to later). He argues that finishing on any other degree of the scale will prevent the sense of complete closure. If this is true, the second half of Example 1.2 sounds closed because it ends on scale degree 1 (C) but the first half of the tune (up to the G on the first beat of m. 4) does not. In that case, the lack of complete closure in the first half creates a tension that is resolved in the second. The analogy of the tension of expectation followed by resolution is rather looser, but the principle is not so very different.

Schenker extends this insight in his later work to show how the sort of structure shown in Example 1.2 spans whole movements and pieces, and this sort of insight is what makes Schenker’s work both fascinating and problematic: fascinating, because his analyses offer a way of discussing otherwise elusive notions about the shape and direction of phrases; problematic, because there is a tendency to ignore other factors such as rhythm, texture and dynamics.

It is easy to see why top-rank musicians such as the pianist Murray Perahia and the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler have found Schenker’s ideas attractive. Players and conductors are often concerned about the long-term shape of the pieces they play, and Schenkerian analysis offers a way of

analyzing this aspect of music. It is equally easy to understand why others have been hostile to an analytical technique that seems to rely on simplifying musical works in order to expose less interesting underlying patterns. You will doubtless encounter arguments both for and against Schenkerian analysis, the value of which you can assess for yourself, but it is important to make your judgment on two separate but related criteria: first, whether Schenkerian analysis successfully addresses the questions it asks; and, second, whether those questions are worth asking in the first place.

An overview of the basics

Music and elaboration

Schenker understands music as an art of elaboration, a point of view that is easiest to appreciate in a theme and variations, as we saw in the previous chapter. Example 2.1 shows the beginning of Beethoven's variations on "God save the King" (or "My Country, 'Tis of Thee"). Starting at the top (Example 2.1a), Beethoven's first variation on this theme adds a number of embellishments, some of which are labeled.

In the first measure of Example 2.1a, Beethoven decorates the melody with a neighbor (or auxiliary) note, which adds an unaccented B in between the first two C naturals of the original theme. A similar figure can be seen at the beginning of the third measure. The appoggiatura at the end of the same measure is more striking: Beethoven leaps to an accented G that descends onto the F that it elaborates. The arpeggiation at the end of the second measure is, on the other hand, a relatively discreet embellishment in which the melody leaps from the original D natural to a note from the same chord (G major) before continuing.

It is possible to understand a theme and variation as two layers: the theme (Example 2.1b) is a simpler layer on top of which the embellishments of the variation (Example 2.1a) are built. One of Schenker's most important ideas is that even the most complex tonal music is layered in this way; the relationship between a theme and variation is not a special case but a particularly clear example of a more general principle.

This general principle can be seen by comparing the theme in Example 2.1b with the Example 2.1c, which is a simplification of this melody. The theme's various embellishments can be understood as being built on top of the simplified version in Example 2.1c. The basic method of Schenkerian analysis is to understand tonal music as the embellishment of hypothetical layers beneath the surface. A dissonant note such as the first E of m. 5 of the theme, for example, can easily be identified as an appoggiatura embellishment of the following D. In the simplified version of the melody in Example 2.1c, the embellishing E is therefore omitted. As it happens, the original

Example 2.1 Beethoven, Seven Variations on the National Song “God save the King” (or “My Country, ’Tis of Thee”): (a) Variation I; (b) Theme; (c) and (d) Analytic reductions

Neighbor Appogg. Neighbor Appogg.

a) Var. 1

Neighbor Passing note Neighbor Passing note Appogg. Passing note

b) Theme

C: I (II) V I VI (IV) VI II V I

c)

d)

melody of “God Save the King” does not include the E either—Beethoven has begun to elaborate his theme before he has even started the variations.

Not all analytical decisions, however, are just a matter of identifying dissonant notes. In the first measure of the theme, for example, although neither C nor D are dissonant, the D is identified as a neighbor note. One important factor in coming to the decision that D embellishes the C (rather than the other way around) is that the most structurally significant harmony in m. 1 is the C major tonic (I) with which it starts. In looking for an underlying melody it therefore makes sense to focus on the C, as D is not part of this main harmony (as well as being rhythmically less prominent).

This analytical decision produces the lone C in the first measure of Example 2.2c—the D on the final beat (along with its associated harmonic support of II) is omitted from the simplified theme because it is understood as an

elaboration. This does not, however, mean that D is less important than C any more than the variation is less important than the theme; the aim of this sort of analysis is to explore the basic structure of the music.

The neighbor note in the third measure of the theme may also be understood as an elaboration of the more prominent and harmonically significant E, but the second, fourth and fifth measures introduce another form of embellishment. In m. 2, the B and D are connected by a passing note C that is dissonant with the main dominant (V) harmony; like the neighbor note in the previous measure, this embellishment is therefore omitted in the Example 2.1c. A Schenkerian analysis, however, aims to show the simplest possible structures upon which the elaborations of music are based, and because B and D are both part of the same dominant harmony, it is possible to boil down m. 2 even further, as shown in Example 2.1d. The rationale behind representing this measure as a D rather than a B is explored in detail in both this and later chapters, but one of the reasons for this decision is that the D makes a smoother and simpler connection between the first and third measures than B, which would involve a leap of a fourth up to the E in m. 3.

Whereas “God save the King” is demonstrably the starting point for Beethoven’s set of variations, the further simplifications of Examples 2.2c and 2.2d are only hypothetical. What they reveal, however, is the underlying shape of this well known melody, which turns out to be an arch from C to E to C. A Schenkerian analysis aims to imagine the complexities of tonal music as elaborations of simpler layers beneath the surface of the music. Just as a harmonic or formal analysis deepens our knowledge, so delving beneath the surface of a piece of music in this way ultimately increases our understanding both of its larger-scale shape and its intricate details.

Compound melody

Melodic embellishment is often discussed in relation to a single melody—in the previous example, the top voice of the piano texture. However, a melodic line can also suggest several voices, as shown in the extracts below from one of Bach’s violin partitas; these intricate solo works, like the cello suites, are able to conjure up a melody, a bass line and sometimes several inner parts. A single melodic line that implies several voices in this way is known as a compound melody.

At the opening of this Chaconne, Bach asks the solo violin to triple stop in order to produce three simultaneous voices. In the bracketed section of Example 2.2a, however, although the violin is now only double stopping (two notes at the same time) the music implies the three voices shown on the lower staff. Bach achieves this effect in the last measure by skipping between the two upper voices in sixteenth notes instead of playing them simultaneously. At the end of the previous measure, Bach decorates a skip between the G and E of the upper two voices with passing notes.

Later on in the Chaconne, the violin plays a more complicated compound melody, in which a single melodic line of sixteenth notes suggests several voices as shown in Example 2.2b. Here the relationship between the figuration and the notional three or four voices is a little less straightforward, but no less important for that—the two measures shown clearly outline a chordal progression from II to V to I in G minor.

Just as the embellishment that is typical of variations turns out to be an important feature of music in general, the implication of several voices in Bach's solo string music demonstrates a musical principle that is found in a wide range of circumstances. The Alberti bass in the left hand of Example 2.3 offers an example of a basic compound melody in a piano piece by Mozart. This single line of sixteenth notes can be simplified, as shown in Example 2.3b, into a series of triads. Understood from this point of view, the Alberti bass skips between the three implied voices of a much simpler chorale-like texture.

The right hand of Example 2.3 works in a similar way to the left hand in that it moves between notes from the same two triads; the way in which it does so, however, is much freer. In the first two beats, the melody leaps up from B \flat to D, but from there a turn and two passing notes (E \flat and E) connect to a downwards leap from F to C. Whereas the left hand gives more or less equal prominence to the three implied voices, the right hand emphasizes some notes more than others.

Example 2.2 J. S. Bach, Partita No. 2 in D minor for Violin Solo, BWV 1004, Chaconne:
(a) Mm. 1–3; (b) Mm. 42–3

a)

Violin

three-voice structure

b) 42

Violin

g: II# V I