Prolongation in the Choral Music of Benjamin Britten

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ABSTRACT

While many theorists have applied Schenker's theory of prolongation to post-tonal music, such studies have met with fierce criticism. Much of the debate over post-tonal prolongation has focused on the non-triadic music of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Berg, Webern, Bartók and others. Less has been said about *triadic* post-tonal music. Because triadic post-tonal music borrows techniques from both tonal and post-tonal traditions, it fits comfortably into neither category. Based on the current state of research, it is not entirely clear where triadic post-tonal music fits into the debate over prolongation.

Britten's triadic post-tonal music presents special challenges for prolongational analysis. On the one hand, the surface of Britten's music is predominantly triadic. This makes prolongational analysis tempting. However, Britten's music also features many hallmarks of post-tonality including non-functional harmony and free alterations of diatonic and non-diatonic scalar material. In addition, horizontal motion, both at the surface level and at deeper levels, is often governed by symmetrical divisions of pitch space. These post-tonal aspects contribute to a sense of tonal ambiguity that is a hallmark of Britten's style. This dissertation contributes two observations about prolongational studies of Britten's music. First, an acceptance of the prolongational potential of symmetrical interval cycles is essential to discovering Britten's structural

levels. Second, while prolongational analysis reveals underlying counterpoint in music from a wide range of styles, with Britten, prolongational analysis reveals a frequent lack of middleground counterpoint. Rather than two independent parts, all parts are dependent on the structurally superior melody. This realization invites a comparison between Britten's music and Medieval organum. As with organum, it is often most profitable to look first at Britten's melody and consider all other voices, including the bass, as subordinate parallel harmonizations of the melody.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation will explore the theoretical concerns surrounding prolongation in post-tonal music and specific issues pertaining to prolongational approaches to Britten's music. Chapters 2-4 include analyses of a capella choral pieces. This specific genre allows for an application of the current thesis within a unified texture. In Chapter 2, the top voice in *Rosa Mystica* is controlled by a background minor-third cycle. Chapter 3 shows how, in *O Deus, Ego Amo Te*, middleground minor-third and whole-tone cycles prolong a background minor-third cycle. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the A section of *Hymn to St. Cecilia* where major-third cycles govern middleground prolongation of the initial tonic area. The *War Requiem* represents an amalgamation of each of these techniques in a comparatively rich texture. Chapter 5 explores

the most representative passages of the *War Requiem* and concludes by applying the current thesis to one of the most texturally dense passages in the piece.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While many theorists have applied Schenker's theory of prolongation to post-tonal music,¹ such studies have met with fierce criticism.² Much of the debate over post-tonal prolongation has focused on the non-triadic music of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Berg, Webern, Bartók and others. Less has been said about triadic post-tonal music. Because triadic post-tonal music borrows techniques from both tonal and post-tonal traditions, it fits comfortably into neither category. Based on the current state of research, it is not entirely clear where triadic post-tonal music fits into the debate over prolongation.

Britten's triadic post-tonal music presents special challenges for prolongational analysis. On the one hand, the surface of Britten's music is predominantly triadic. This makes prolongational analysis tempting. However, Britten's music also features many hallmarks of post-tonality including non-functional harmony and free alterations of diatonic and non-diatonic scalar material. In addition, horizontal motion, both at the surface level and at deeper levels, is often governed by symmetrical divisions of pitch space. These post-tonal aspects contribute to a sense of tonal ambiguity that is a hallmark of Britten's style. This dissertation contributes two observations about prolongational studies of Britten's music. First, an acceptance of the prolongational potential of symmetrical interval cycles is essential to discovering Britten's structural levels. Second,

¹ For a thorough evaluative survey of research into post-tonal prolongation up to 1983 see Baker 1983. Notable examples since 1983 include Lerdahl 1989; Baker 1990; Pearsall 1991; Morrison 1991; Brown 1993; Rupprecht 1996.

² Perle 1962; Baker 1983; Straus 1987; For further discussion see also Larson 1997; Lerdahl 1997; Straus 1997.

while prolongational analysis reveals underlying counterpoint in music from a wide range of styles, with Britten, prolongational analysis reveals a frequent lack of middleground counterpoint. Rather than two independent parts, all parts are dependent on the structurally superior melody. This realization invites a comparison between Britten's music and Medieval organum. As with organum, it is often most profitable to look first at Britten's melody and consider all other voices, including the bass, as subordinate parallel harmonizations of the melody.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation will explore the theoretical concerns surrounding prolongation in post-tonal music and specific issues pertaining to prolongational approaches to Britten's music. The remaining chapters will explore the thesis through the analysis of representative works. I begin the dissertation by examining three of Britten's early pieces and conclude with an analysis of the *War Requiem*. Each of these pieces contains a top voice harmonized by surface-level triads that prolong symmetrical interval cycles. These cycles, in turn, prolong pitches and structures that help establish centrality. In each of these pieces the "bass voice" is often shown to be structurally subordinate to the melody.

Chapters 2-4 include analyses of a capella choral pieces. This specific genre allows for an application of the current thesis within a unified texture. In Chapter 2, the top voice in *Rosa Mystica* is controlled by a background minor-third cycle. Chapter 3 shows how, in *O Deus, Ego Amo Te*, middleground minor-third and whole-tone cycles prolong a background minor-third cycle. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the A section

of *Hymn to St. Cecilia* where major-third cycles govern middleground prolongation of the initial tonic area. The *War Requiem* represents an amalgamation of each of these techniques in a comparatively rich texture. Chapter 5 explores the most representative passages of the *War Requiem* and concludes by applying the current thesis to one of the most texturally dense passages in the piece.

Prolongation in Triadic Post-Tonal Music: Theoretical Issues

While prolongation in triadic post-tonal music is largely uncharted territory, the debate over non-triadic prolongation has yielded valuable insights. In his influential 1987 article, “The Problem of Prolongation in Post-Tonal Music,” Joseph Straus lays out four conditions of prolongation. Straus’s conditions state that in order for prolongation to occur, there must be (1) a consistent distinction between consonance and dissonance, (2) a hierarchy of scale-degrees, (3) a clear distinction between embellishment tones and structural tones, and (4) a clear distinction between vertical and horizontal pitch organization.³ Straus further claims that post-tonal music fails to meet these conditions and therefore cannot be said to exhibit prolongation.

Instead of prolongation, Straus suggests an associational model for describing the middleground structure of post-tonal music. A brief description of the associational model follows:

³ Straus 1987, 2-5. For some notable exceptions to Straus’s conditions see Larson 1997. In response, Straus relaxed the rigidity of his conditions and suggested a more reciprocal relationship between consonance and prolongation, see Straus 1997.

Given three musical events X, Y, and Z, an associational model is content merely to assert some connection between X and Z without commenting one way or another about Y. Assertions of this type are relatively easy to justify and provide the only reliable basis for describing post-tonal middlegrounds.⁴

Fred Lerdahl lists ten salience conditions that he claims contribute to prolongation. By his own admission, Lerdahl's use of the term prolongation is more general than the strict Schenkerian sense used here and by Straus. So while Lerdahl's salience conditions may not be sufficient to account for Schenkerian prolongation, they do provide useful criteria for applying Straus's associational model. These salience conditions are given below. A pitch may be considered salient if it is

- a) attacked within the region
- b) in a relatively strong metrical position
- c) relatively loud
- d) relatively prominent timbrally
- e) in an extreme (high or low) registral position
- f) relatively dense
- g) relatively long in duration
- h) relatively important motivically
- i) next to a relatively large grouping boundary
- j) parallel to a choice made elsewhere in the analysis⁵

Some authors have suggested that unlike tonal music, each post-tonal composition projects its own unique fundamental structure. George Perle writes:

There are no precompositional principles that comparably regulate simultaneity and progression in atonal music. The 'rightness' of a particular note depends not upon its possible containment within a pre-established harmonic unit, as it does in tonality, but upon larger compositional factors whose meaning must be discovered within the work itself.⁶

⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

⁵ Lerdahl 1989, 65-87.

⁶ Perle 1996, 157.

Perle consciously avoids the term “prolongation” when discussing post-tonal music. Instead he borrows the term “reflexive reference” from the study of twentieth-century poetry. This term suggests that the meaning of words is dependent on their relationship with other words in the poem, irrespective of their absolute meaning. Edward Pearsall echoes this idea of piece-specific background structures when he says that “each atonal composition may be understood to generate its own structural foundation.”⁷ He further counters Straus’s voice-leading condition by stating that “if each atonal composition generates its own organic structural material, then it seems likely that each atonal composition may also generate its own voice-leading characteristics and harmonic background.”⁸

Unfortunately, none of the above research addresses triadic post-tonal music. In fact, many authors make either an implicit or explicit association between tertian harmony and tonality. Ernst Oster makes this association when criticizing Roy Travis’s prolongational analyses of post-tonal music:

In *non-triadic* music we will occasionally find lines and simple progressions that resemble certain lines and progressions in *tonal* music. However, in tonal music, their deepest meaning and their very existence originate from the triad which they help to ‘unfold through time’ and which they interpret in an endless variety of ways. If the basic premise, this originating principle of tonal music, is lost in non-triadic music, any apparent similarity between *tonal* and *non-triadic* music cannot be considered a true analogy.⁹ [emphasis added]

⁷ Pearsall 1991, 348.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁹ Oster 1960, 96.

Straus implies a similar association: “There is no reason to assume that *triadic* music is uniquely capable of distinguishing consonance from dissonance...but the most significant *post-tonal* music does not seem to do so.”¹⁰[emphasis added] Like Oster, Straus sets up an opposition between triadic music and post-tonal music. This opposition is useful for Straus to make his points about the nature of prolongation. But my interest lies with music that includes both a triadic surface and post-tonal elements. Both Straus and Baker describe such tonal/post-tonal hybrids as “borderline” pieces between two opposing worlds. I propose that these hybrids represent a larger, more significant body of music than the term “borderline” suggests. Triadic post-tonality includes music from composers such as Ravel, Prokofiev, Copland, and Bernstein, and popular styles such as film music.

While James Baker begins a Schenkerian analysis of a post-tonal work with the question, “In what way is this piece tonal?”¹¹ I begin my analyses of Britten with the question: “In what way does this piece emphasize a pitch center?” This broader question allows for tonal procedures as one of several techniques for achieving centricity and is imperative if we are to employ the theory of prolongation to understand the pitch structure in Britten’s music.

¹⁰ Straus 1987, 4.

¹¹ Baker 1983, 168.

Prolongation in Britten: A Review of Previous Schenkerian Analyses of Britten

Britten's triadic post-tonal music presents special challenges for prolongational analysis. While analysts can no doubt find isolated instances of tonal cadences in Britten's music, the vast majority of Britten's harmonic progressions are nonfunctional. Pitch collections in Britten's music include free alterations of diatonic and non-diatonic scalar material. Much of Britten's music can be seen to center around two conflicting pitches. Philip Rupprecht describes this tonal ambiguity as a common feature of Britten's musical language: "the clarity of a single tonic is blurred, most often by the presence within the texture of a second focal pitch, undermining the possibility of unequivocal tonal priority within motions at the phrase level, and over wider spans."¹² These aspects create a sense of tonal ambiguity that is a trademark of Britten's style. The central problem faced by analysts of Britten's music is his persistent use of the triad. This basic element of tonal music makes Britten's works resistant to post-tonal analytic approaches. Rupprecht sums up this problem clearly:

If Britten's works could simply be called "post-tonal" (a term that seems incontrovertibly correct for, say, Boulez or Carter) then there might be no "tonality problem" – hypothetical analysis of a post-tonal Britten would present no danger of confusion with linear analysis of tonal music, for it would be clear from the musical materials that any common-practice sense of key was long gone. In reality, of course, Britten's musical language, with its frequent reference to triadic consonance, constantly reminds us of a sound world that is self evidently "tonal." It is this residual triadicity – a historicist component to the harmonic vocabulary – that makes linear analysis so difficult in Britten's case.¹³

¹² Rupprecht 1996, 311.

¹³ Rupprecht 1993, 77.

Analysts have generally taken one of three approaches to relating Britten's music to Schenkerian analysis. The first approach is to employ traditional Schenkerian analysis, highlighting the tonal aspects of the music and consequently downplaying the post-tonal aspects.¹⁴ A second approach is to reject Schenkerian analysis as ill-suited for describing Britten's music.¹⁵ A third approach is to employ a modified Schenkerian analysis. Rupprecht's tonal stratification model eloquently synthesizes the rigors of Schenkerian analysis with the multivalent complexity of Britten's compositional technique.¹⁶

Tonal stratification describes how registrally distinct layers of music, called strata, can each display their own tonal identity. The combination of these conflicting layers is part of what gives Britten's music its sense of complexity and conflict.¹⁷ Britten uses this technique of musical conflict to great effect in his dramatic works. Characters in Britten's operas and other dramatic works are often set in texturally and tonally distinct strata. Each stratum can be seen to emphasize its own focal pitch. This emphasis can be achieved by tonal or post-tonal means. The musical definition of each stratum

¹⁴ See for instance Whittall 1971, Travis 1987, Mark 1994 and 1995.

¹⁵ Peter Evans 1979 and Phillip Brett 2006 avoid Schenkerian entanglements by focusing on thematic content and using non-Schenkerian terms to describe tonal structure.

¹⁶ Rupprecht 1993, 1996 and 2001.

¹⁷ Rupprecht is careful to distance his theory from the theory of polytonality, a term he feels is too often used to avoid the rigors of analyzing difficult passages in Britten's music. Tonal stratification, by contrast to the polytonality of Milhaud, relies in part on specific textural associations with distinct tonal processes. Tonal stratification is also concerned with exactly how conflicting focal pitches relate to each other and to the dramatic content of the work in question. For more see Rupprecht 1993, 54-59.

contributes both to the identity of the characters in question as well as their relationship to characters and situations set in other strata.¹⁸

While tonal stratification gives insight into a large percentage of Britten's output, Britten also wrote a significant amount of music that can be seen to follow a different prolongational model. Tonal stratification relies, in part, on a texturally rich musical surface. Chapters 2-4 of this dissertation are devoted to pieces for a capella choir where texture is largely uniform. In addition to the limited pitch and timbral range of an unaccompanied vocal group, the pieces I have selected for analysis feature a high degree of homophony. In Chapter 5, I show how the prolongational models developed for texturally uniform pieces also apply to one of Britten's most texturally rich pieces, the *War Requiem*.

Interval Cycles and Pattern Completion

The approach to Britten's music taken here was formed in response to the debate cited above. Following Perle, Rupprecht, and Pearsall, my analyses are primarily concerned with revealing piece-specific structure. Therefore I take a modified-Schenkerian approach with the goal of illustrating the structure of a given piece, whether or not that structure is consistent with tonal norms. At the same time, I consciously strive to be as consistent with Straus's conditions as possible. My most significant break with

¹⁸ Rupprecht 1993 and 1996 explore these associations in Britten's operas and concert works including *War Requiem*. Lundergan 1998 similarly explores the relationships between the roles of distinct performing groups and their musical material in *War Requiem*.

Straus's conditions is the acceptance of whole-tone, minor-third, major-third, and tritone interval cycles as prolongational devices.

Lundergan points out that symmetrical interval cycles pervade Britten's musical structure:

Britten is one of many twentieth-century composers to make use of cyclic-interval formations...In the absence of traditional tonal hierarchy, cyclic formations can serve as a primary means of pitch organization. In local contexts, they can provide temporary tonal stability; on a larger scale, they may serve to define an overall tonal center through the establishment of an axis of symmetry, while still permitting the theoretical equality of the twelve semitones of the chromatic scale.¹⁹

Foreground and middleground interval cycles are often associated with the music of Bartók. Paul Wilson's analyses of Bartók reveal these cycles as significant structural devices. Wilson's analyses are supported by the fact that the completion and interruption of these cycles corresponds with formally and rhetorically significant points in the music. As I will show, similar correspondence occurs in Britten's music.²⁰ Rather than describing these cycles in terms of prolongation, Wilson describes Bartók's projected cycles by following Straus's associational model.²¹ However, in Britten's music we find an environment where interval cycles do more than simply associate pitches, they actually *prolong* pitches. In Wilson's analysis of Bartók, interval cycles are shown to organize pitch both vertically and horizontally. But vertical sonorities in Britten are

¹⁹ Lundergan 1998, 9.

²⁰ For an analysis of the structure and symbolism of interval cycles in Britten's *War Requiem*, see Lundergan 1998.

²¹ Wilson 1992. Heinzelmann 1998 explores the interaction between interval cycles and diatonic material at various structural levels in the music of Ravel. Like Wilson, Heinzelmann stops short of claiming that these cycles exhibit Schenkerian prolongation.

predominantly major and minor triads. Interval cycles in Britten's music, by contrast, occur most often as horizontal phenomena. Therefore, in terms of prolongation, these cycles find analogy with stepwise motion. Both are accepted as horizontal prolongational devices but denied vertical consonance. This distinction satisfies Straus's condition that there be "a clear distinction between vertical and horizontal pitch organization."

Analyzing interval cycles as prolonging pitches is not without precedent.²² Take, for a tonal example, Salzer and Schachter's discussion of the opening of the *Sanctus* in Schubert's *Mass in E^b*. Salzer and Schachter's prolongational graph is reproduced in my Example 1.1.

Example [1.1] illustrates a chromatic technique widely used by composers of the nineteenth century. The bass of measures 1-7 extends the E flat tonic by means of a series of descending major thirds, E flat-C flat-(B natural)-G-E flat. The underlying motion is clearly a descending octave...Subdividing an octave into equal (or enharmonically equivalent) intervals creates a pervasively chromatic tonal environment. Thus although it might seem plausible to explain the C flat of measure 3 as a substitution for C natural, the evidence of our ears does not confirm such a theoretical construct. We register the equal intervallic progressions without referring them to a supposed diatonic original. This temporary lack of a diatonic frame of reference creates, as it were, a suspension of tonal gravity...Note the whole-tone scale in the bass resulting from passing whole steps within the major thirds.²³

²² For examples of foreground interval cycles in the works of Ravel, see Kablisch 1990 and Heinzelmann 1998; For Bartók, see Wilson 1992; For Bartók and Debussy, see Antokoletz 2004. Bribitzer-Stull 2006 includes an exhaustive list of composers from C.P.E. Bach to Stravinsky who employ specifically the A^b-C-E collection within a diatonic background structure.

²³ Salzer and Schachter 1969, 215.

Example 1.1 – Quoted from Salzer and Schachter 1969, 218.

In this example, Salzer and Schachter describe how an interval cycle can be employed to prolong the tonic pitch at the foreground level.²⁴ In fact, in the final quoted sentence above, Salzer and Schachter note how the major-third cycle is itself prolonged by a whole-tone scale, suggesting the theoretical possibility that even interval cycles can be prolonged by other interval cycles.

The symmetry of interval cycles poses a theoretical impediment to scale-degree hierarchy, one of Straus's four conditions of prolongation. However, context can imbue symmetrical collections with a perceived hierarchy. Example 1.2 gives a simple example of this claim. In a musical vacuum, the C3₀ cycle (C-E^b-F[#]-A) has no hierarchy.²⁵

²⁴ Salzer and Schachter 1969 also analyze minor-third and major-third cycles in pieces by Chopin and Wagner, 215-219.

²⁵ Throughout this dissertation, I will use George Perle's nomenclature to refer to interval cycles. The letter C designates a cycle. The number that follows the letter C indicates the interval of transposition that generates the cycle, measured in semitones. C2, therefore, refers to a whole-tone scale. C3 refers to a cycle of minor thirds. The subscript number at the end identifies the specific cycle by naming one pitch class contained in the cycle. Pitch class C is designated as 0, C[#] as 1, D as 2 and so on. C3₀, then, refers to

Because of the perfect symmetry between set members, no single member can be isolated as hierarchically superior, neither conceptually nor perceptually. However, if a harmonic presentation of the $C3_0$ cycle is followed in music by a G major triad, then we traditionally single out $F^\sharp$ as the hierarchically superior pitch of the $(C-E^\flat-F^\sharp-A)$ collection. Similarly, if the $C3_0$ cycle is followed by a $D^\flat$ minor triad, then C is singled out as the hierarchically superior pitch of the $C3_0$ cycle.

Example 1.2 – Contextual hierarchy of $C3_0$

Similarly the $C4_3$ cycle ($E^\flat$ -G-B) has no inherent hierarchy, but in the $E^\flat$ Major context of Schubert's *Mass* cited above, Salzer and Schachter ably describe how the $C4_3$ cycle can be employed to prolong $E^\flat$. According to Salzer and Schachter it is exactly the symmetry of the progression that allows us to disregard the lack of diatonicism, replacing the tonal norm with a predictable pattern that completes itself as a division of the octave. Therefore the symmetry of the progression does not impede a sense of prolonged $E^\flat$, rather the symmetry of the cycle is a vital component of the prolongation of the single cycle-member $E^\flat$. In the context of the Schubert excerpt, a listener would be hard-pressed to hear $C^\flat$ or G as hierarchically equal or superior to $E^\flat$. Temporary hierarchical

the cycle C, $E^\flat$, $G^\flat$, A, whereas $C3_1$ refers to $C^\sharp$, E, G, $A^\sharp$. For consistency, the subscript number will refer to the pitch class with the lowest numerical value.

confusion may arise in the midst of the cycle. Salzer and Schachter refer to this phenomenon as a “suspension of tonal gravity.” But once the cycle is complete, the superiority of E $\flat$ is clear.

We can think of Britten’s music as taking the kind of logic found in the Schubert example to extremes. Where Schubert employs the major-third cycle to prolong the initial tonic of a phrase that is couched in a common-practice tonal environment, Britten projects the cyclic procedure to encompass entire phrases, phrase groups, formal sections and, in some cases, whole pieces. The effect is a more frequent and longer-lasting feeling of “suspended tonal gravity.” As a result of their pervasive presence, my analyses allow for interval cycles to function as prolongational devices across all hierarchical levels.

An important distinction should be made here. Robert Morgan’s 1976 article, “Dissonant Prolongation: Theoretical and Compositional Precedents,” describes the prolongation of dissonant structures such as augmented triads and diminished seventh chords. Morgan is careful to say that he uses the term prolongation to mean “the horizontal unfolding of an interval or chord.” Baker and Straus both criticize the concept of prolonged dissonance for arbitrarily equating tonal and post-tonal techniques. As opposed to Morgan’s prolonged dissonances, I describe similar phenomena as interval cycles. In my analyses, these cycles prolong individual pitches, not harmonies. Therefore when I say that, for example, the melody in *Rosa Mystica* is governed by a deep-level minor-third cycle, I am not claiming that the melody prolongs a diminished seventh chord, but rather that the pitches prolonged by foreground and middleground

events belong to an ordered cycle of minor-third intervals. While this cycle reinforces a single pitch, it does not necessarily represent the unfolding of a dissonant structure.

As the following analyses will show, Britten's use of particular cycles within a single piece invites the application of Straus's voice-leading principle of pattern completion. Under pattern completion,

a certain unordered collection or set of notes (generally a tetrachord) is established as a structural norm for the composition, pervading the surface of the music (both melodic and harmonic) and governing the tonal motion at all structural levels.²⁶

Straus uses this definition of pattern completion to describe voice-leading in Stravinsky. In Britten's music we can use a more restrictive definition of pattern completion. In my analyses of Britten, the sets of notes that comprise the completed patterns are *strictly* ordered members of either (02468T), (0369), (048), or (06). Also, as mentioned above, these cycles are taken as prolongational only when used horizontally and are not considered vertical consonances. With deference to Straus's well-ordered definition I submit a revision for application to Britten. According to pattern completion in Britten's music,

one or more *ordered* collections of pitches *which conform to a symmetrical interval cycle* is established as a structural norm for the composition, pervading the *melodic* surface of the music and governing the tonal motion at *one or more* structural levels.

As with Stravinskian pattern completion, repetition of the governing pattern in Britten creates a familiarity. This familiarity creates a sound world where subsequent sounding

²⁶ Straus 1982, 106.

of part of the pattern creates expectation for the completion of the pattern such that “the arrival of the missing note will bring with it a sense of cadence or of structural arrival.”²⁷

In Britten, this expectation often replaces or complements tonal expectations. Similar to Stravinsky’s use of pattern completion, Britten is able to use interval-cycle completion to create directionality, cadential arrival, and tonal centrality.²⁸

This point is where my analyses diverge, conceptually, from others who have studied interval cycles in Britten.²⁹ Citing the symmetry of the tritone cycle, C-F#-C, Lundergan denies directionality in Britten’s use of the cycle in the *War Requiem*:

The two poles of the tritone are equivalent and so cannot establish a hierarchical relationship. Therefore, though Britten frequently uses the tritone as a local focus of pitch organization, the effect is a static balance rather than the dynamic synthesis of the traditional tonal process of departure and return.³⁰

On the contrary, I suggest that it is exactly the manner in which Britten uses the tritone and other symmetrical cycles, exploiting the expectations of pattern completion, that imbues these otherwise static cycles with a dynamic sense of departure and return. As all of the works analyzed in this dissertation are composed for voices, I will also explore how Britten exploits the sense of expectation to comment on the text of each piece.

Twentieth-Century Organum

Accepting interval cycles as prolongational devices allows for an interesting observation: Britten’s texturally unified pieces feature a frequent *lack* of middleground

²⁷ *Ibid*, 106-107.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 107.

²⁹ Most notably Lundergan 1991 and Antokoletz 1992.

³⁰ Lundergan 1991, 121.

counterpoint. Rather than two independent parts, all parts can be seen as dependent on the structurally superior melody. This realization invites comparisons between Britten's music and Medieval organum. These comparisons manifest themselves in two ways. First, extensive parallel motion of thirds, fourths, fifths, octaves and complete triads can be seen across structural levels in Britten's music. This sweeping use of parallelism challenges the common-practice definition of contrapuntal independence between voices. The lack of contrapuntal independence is one of the fundamental distinctions between Medieval organum and common-practice polyphony. Second, many passages of Britten's work can be shown to employ a drone bass, above which all other parts subordinate themselves to the melody. This drone may be present on the surface or revealed through analysis to govern middleground structure.

Felix Salzer's discussion of twelfth-century organum offers a useful model for describing middleground structure in Britten's music.³¹ In his discussion of prolongation in "sustained-tone style" organum, Salzer uses an example from the St. Martial School, *Benedicamus Domino*. The score and Salzer's foreground graph are reproduced in my Example 1.3. While organum represents the earliest form of notated polyphony in Western music, Salzer is hesitant to describe the counterpoint in this example as truly independent:

From a purely visual and descriptive point of view, one might deduce that the two voice parts in [Example 1.3] had reached their greatest possible independence.

³¹ Salzer 1952, 266-268. John Koslovsky has shed new light on Salzer's analysis of Medieval organum in his presentation "Primare Klangformen, Linearität, oder Auskomponierung?: The analysis of Medieval polyphony and the critique of musicology in the early work of Felix Salzer." given at AMS/SMT Nashville, Nov. 8, 2008.

Careful listening, however, proves that this independence is just a rhythmic one which has no bearing on the fact that the two voices show an astonishing degree of correlation and a common structural purpose.³²

Example 1.3(a) – *Benedicamus Domino* from the School of St. Martial, 12th century, quoted from *Structural Hearing* by Felix Salzer

Example 1.3(b) – Salzer's foreground graph

Notice in Salzer's graph how, until the last note, the lower voice sustains a static pitch D while the upper voice elaborates the D by outlining the D minor triad. Therefore the lower voice does not represent an independent voice in counterpoint with the melody but rather a static reinforcement of the fundamental melodic pitch. At the middleground level the lower voice is little more than a tonic drone. The following analyses will reveal similar middlegrounds in phrases and entire formal sections of Britten's music.

³² Salzer 1952, 267.

CHAPTER II

ROSA MYSTICA

Background of Ad majorem Dei gloriam

In 1939, as war broke out in Europe, Britten and his partner, Peter Pears, fled to North America. Many scholars see this visit as a time of maturation for the young composer.³³ Britten's compositional output during his tours of Canada and the United States included some of his most profound pieces (*Sonata Romantica*, *Young Apollo*, *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, *Les Illuminations*, *Violin Concerto*, *Diversions for Piano*, the *First String Quartet*, *Paul Bunyan*, *Sinfonia da Requiem*) as well as some frustrations.³⁴ He abandoned a clarinet concerto for Benny Goodman and an orchestral work for Georg Szell.³⁵ American critics and audiences were erratic in their acceptance of Britten. He experienced depression and periods of compositional block. A lesser known work that Britten composed during this time is a setting of poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins for a capella choir. Britten titled the work *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*, abbreviated A.M.D.G. Britten himself never saw the publication of this work. U.S. Customs prohibited Britten from bringing home several of his manuscripts. Britten's American hosts, the family of Dr. William Mayer, kept the manuscripts until 1976 when, upon Britten's death, they became the property of the British Museum.³⁶ After Pears' death in 1986, the two estates were legally joined under the Britten-Pears Foundation

³³ Marcades 1999, 32.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 32-33.

³⁵ Oliver 1996, 84.

³⁶ Marcades 1999, 35.

which has overseen the publication of a sizable number of Britten's previously unknown works including A.M.D.G. (1939) and Britten's only other setting of Hopkins, *The World of the Spirit* (1938).³⁷

Analysis of Rosa Mystica

Rosa Mystica is the second movement from A.M.D.G. The form of the piece is a kind of expanded ternary: it features two varied repetitions of the A section before the music moves on to the B section. The piece closes with a final A section, resulting in an AAABA form. The most salient feature of the piece is the pedal-pitch A. This pitch is usually set in dialogue between two sections of the choir. The composite result of the dialogue is a rhythmic ostinato that persists through each of the A sections. The A sections also feature extensive motion in parallel thirds. This motion outlines triads and seventh chords above and below the pedal A. As we will see, the A sections are where the organum analogy holds true (they are characterized by almost exclusively parallel motion in the upper voices against a bass pedal), while the B section features a bass voice in counterpoint with the melody.

The first two phrases of the piece are analyzed in Example 2.1. In the first phrase, found in measures 9-14, the melody prolongs the pitch A through the unfolding pattern B $\flat$ -G-F-A. The second phrase, measures 14-19, sequences the first phrase up a diatonic third to prolong the pitch C. The elongated stems describe the middleground motion from A up a minor third to C. Meanwhile the tenor and bass voice exchange the A-

³⁷ Marcades 1999, 29.

ostinato. This ostinato is represented on the foreground graph by a single down-stemmed pitch. The tenor and bass voices are not in counterpoint with each other or with the treble voices. Similar to Salzer's graph of the lower voice in the St. Martial organum example (Example 1.3), the tenor/bass ostinato can best be described as a stable reinforcement of the pitch center.

In the Gar-dens of God, Gar-dens, of God, the day-light di-vine day-light di-vine, Find me a place by thee, place by thee, Mo-ther of mine,

The Rose is a My - ste-ry, where is it found? Is it an - y-thing true? Does it grow up - on ground?

Mother of mine, Mo-ther of mine, Mother of mine, Mo-ther of mine, Find me a place by thee, Mother of mine. Mother of mine. Mo-ther of mine, Find me a place by thee,

N

Example 2.1 – *Rosa Mystica*, reduction above foreground graph of mm. 1-19

Example 2.2 shows an analysis of the third phrase of the piece, found in measures 20-28. The notes with upward stems (E in m. 20, G in m. 21, F in m. 22, E $\flat$ in m. 24, D $\flat$ in m. 26, and C in m. 28) are each members of the local implied triad and each is highlighted by a number of salience conditions. These salience conditions include strong metrical position, relatively long duration, and motivic importance. The top voice C in measure 28 is prolonged by a descending linear progression of a fifth from the G in measure 21. The tenor and bass continue their drone A.

The image displays a musical score for measures 20-28. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "It was made of earth's mould, but it went from men's eyes, And it's place is a se-cret, and shut in the skies." The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with a drone A. A "circle of fifths" graph is shown below the piano staff, illustrating the descending linear progression of a fifth from G in measure 21 to C in measure 28.

Example 2.2 – Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 20-28

As is typical with Britten's style, phrase-level tonality in this piece is often ambiguous. Example 2.2 illustrates this ambiguity. While Britten begins this phrase with a circle-of-fifths sequence as shown in Example 2.2, he denies any fifth movement at the cadence. There are several possible tonal interpretations. First, the phrase could be analyzed as centering on the pitch A. The phrase begins and ends on incomplete A-minor

triads and the pedal A in the bass and tenor voices could be heard as a tonic pedal. The E $\flat$ and D $\flat$ pitches, however, in the descending linear progression are not diatonic to either A major or A minor. The linear progression from G to C might suggest an F-minor scale. Combined with the pedal A natural, one could make the case for a modally rich F center. However the pitch F is missing from the final measure of the phrase. A case could also be made for D as the tonal center. D minor harmony receives agogic accent in measures 22-23; the pedal pitch A could be heard as a dominant pedal, though it never resolves.

If we broaden our scope, we see how these three phrases compose the larger formal section. Example 2.3 shows a prolongational graph of the entire A section, mm. 1-28. Notice how the first phrase, measures 9-14, prolongs the pitch A while the second and third phrases, measures 14-20 and 20-28, respectively, prolong the pitch C. Therefore, in the broadest sense, the A section elaborates a deep-level minor third ascent from A to C. This melodic minor-third motion is reinforced in microcosm at the point of motion in measures 27-28. In the analysis that follows I will recognize this deep-level minor third motion as the first step through a structural C3₀ cycle. Notice again that throughout the A section, there is no counterpoint in the traditional sense. The pedal A more closely resembles the sustained tenor of twelfth-century organum than it does a common-practice style bass voice.³⁸

³⁸ Here I am using the Medieval sense of the word “tenor” which refers to a fixed pitch above which new melodies were composed.

Example 2.3 - Prolongational graph of the entire A section, mm. 1-28

In measures 29-67 the A section repeats with new text. A prolongational graph of the second A section, not shown here, would be identical to Example 2.3. An abbreviated A section begins in measure 68. Example 2.4 analyzes this section. This time the tenor and bass voices move in parallel thirds while the soprano and alto assume the pedal A. To show this exchange the graph transposes the tenor and bass voices up an octave. Notice how the melody begins with the familiar move from the A in measure 68 to the C in measure 72. The melody then continues the $C3_0$ cycle by sequencing this material up and cadencing on E^b . This tritone ascent from A to E^b is filled in with a partial octatonic scale. This scale is highlighted by the upward-stemmed pitches: A, B^b , C, D^b , E^b .

Mo-ther of mine, Mo-ther of mine, ... - - - I shall keep time with thee, I shall keep time with thee, Mo-ther of mine, ... - - - I shall keep

Tell me the name now, ... tell me its name: ... The heart guesses ea - si-ly, is it the same? ...

C3₀: A C E_b

Example 2.4 - Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 68-80

Measures 81-98 are analyzed in Example 2.5. In this transitional section, the tenor and alto voices assume the A ostinato while the soprano and bass exhibit the first glimpse of counterpoint. All voices ultimately prolong the pitch center A. This section contains two phrases, the first in measures 85-89, the second in measures 90-94. In each phrase, the outer voices embellish their octave As by neighbor motion to the third G-B. The G in the bass is prolonged by arpeggiation. In the upper voice, the soprano motion F-E is interpreted as a superimposed inner voice. The melodic B is prolonged by its own upper neighbor, C. At the surface level, the outer voices feature contrary motion that wedges towards A. In terms of salience conditions, A is emphasized in both voices by repetition, relatively long durations, and strong metrical position. The soprano and bass voices begin and end both of these phrases on A thereby giving A further emphasis due to its proximity to grouping boundaries.

Example 2.5 displays a musical score for a piece, showing measures 81-98. The score is presented in two systems, each with a piano (piano) and vocal (voice) part. The piano part is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The vocal part is in G major and 4/4 time. The lyrics are: "time with thee, I shall keep time with thee, I shall keep Ma-ry, the Vir - gin, well the heart knows, I shall keep I shall keep time with thee, Ma-ry, the Vir - gin, well the heart knows, time with thee, She is the My - - - ste-ry, she is that Rose. Mother of mine. I shall keep time with thee, Mo-ther of mine". The piano part includes a reduction and foreground graph of measures 81-98, showing the harmonic structure and fingering (8, (7) (6) (5) (3) (6) 3 8). The vocal part includes a reduction and foreground graph of measures 81-98, showing the melodic structure and fingering (8, (7) (6) (5) (3) (6) 3 8).

Example 2.5 - Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 81-98

The B section of the piece, reduced and analyzed in Example 2.6, is markedly different from the A sections. The rhythmic drive of the A sections gives way to a strictly homophonic texture marked *piu lento*. Also the pedal A and accompanying rhythmic ostinato which have asserted themselves without rest for 99 measures are now

silent. These musical changes signify a rhetorical change in the text. In his “musico-poetic analysis” of the piece, Michael Marcades notes that in the B section, “the text shifts from the declamatory to the interrogatory.”³⁹

[illegible]

Example 2.6 – Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 99-133

³⁹ Marcades 1999, 129.

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and piano piece, labeled "Example 2.6. Continued". The score is divided into two systems. The top system shows a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The vocal line begins at measure 121 with the lyrics "Who? It could be but One: Christ Jesus, our Lord, her God and her Son...". The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support. Below the piano part, a harmonic analysis is provided: $C^b = B$ [v/v], $E9$ v^9 , and (A) (I) . The bottom system shows a continuation of the piano part, with measures 121 and 127 marked. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with a large interval of a minor third between the two lines.

Example 2.6. Continued

Similar to the previous A section, the melody progresses by minor thirds from A (m. 99) to C (m. 106) to E^b (m. 111). However, here in the B section, this motion is stripped of the embellishment of the A sections. There are no intervening neighbor tones, passing tones or consonant skips. Each melodic pitch is prolonged through simple repetition. The harmonic progression supporting each melodic pitch alternates between triads and larger tertian stacks (seventh and ninth chords). The E^b in measure 111 is prolonged by C^b major harmony. Britten further prolongs the E^b by repeating the C^b major chord, then transposing it down an octave in measures 115-117 with more repetition. This harmonic repetition sets repetitions of the text. The question “Who can her Rose be?” is finally reduced to one repeated word, “Who?” To set the answer to the question, Britten takes the final steps through the $C3_0$ cycle. In the first part of the answer, “It could be but One,” Britten moves the melody to $F^\sharp$ on the word “One.” The

second part of the answer is “Christ Jesus, our Lord, her God and her Son.” This entire sentence is set to declamatory octave A’s, simultaneously solving the mystery posed in the opening text and completing the C3₀ cycle that has been building across each previous section.

The bass motion in this section amplifies the sense of arrival on A. Without the pedal A of the previous sections, the bass now moves in counterpoint with the melody. In measure 111, the bass line begins to function tonally. From C♭ the bass moves enharmonically up by fourth and then down by fifth to outline a functional cadence on A in measure 127. This cadence is described by the Roman numeral analysis below measures 122-127. In this way, Britten supports the completion of the melodic C3₀ cycle with a functional cadence. By combining the tonal and post-tonal aspects of the work in this way Britten creates an effective climax for the entire piece.

The piece closes with a final A section. The first half of this closing section (measures 134-153) is analyzed in Example 2.7. The pitch content of this section is similar to the first section A. The counterpoint of the B section gives way to the familiar organum-style middleground of the A sections.

Tempo I tranquillo

(Son.) In the Gar-dens of God, Day-light di-vine, Shew me thy Son, Mo-ther, Son, Mo-ther, Mo-ther of mine,

Does it smell sweet, too, in that ho-ly place? Sweet un-to God, and the sweetness is grace;

Example 2.7 - Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 134-153

The most significant difference between the closing section and previous A sections is found in measures 154 to the end, reduced and analyzed in Example 2.8. Here, Britten temporarily abandons his drone-style bass in favor of a lower voice in counterpoint with the melody. In measures 155-169 the basses and tenors use the rhythmic ostinato figure of the organum-type passages to move in contrary motion against the melody in a scalar passage that spans the A octave. Before completing the octave transfer, however, measures 162-168 feature a prolongation of A $\flat$. The voice-leading graph interprets this A $\flat$ as its enharmonic equivalent, G $\sharp$, suggesting that it

functions as the leading tone to the tonic, A. The basses sing the rhythmic ostinato on A $\flat$ while the tenors prolong the A $\flat$ with another ascending octave scalar passage. In measure 167 the altos join the ostinato on A $\flat$ before all voices return to the pedal A natural in measure 168. The piece ends on the A pedal ostinato figure with which it began.

154 162

The breath of it bathes the great heaven a-bove, In grace that is cha-rity, grace that is love.

Shew me thy Son, O Mo-ther of mine, ... Mo-ther of mine.

166

To thy breast, thy breast To thy breast, to thy glo-ry divine glo-ry divine Draw me by cha-rity, Mo-ther of mine Mo-ther of mine, Mo-ther Mo-ther of mine.

mine To thy breast, thy breast To thy breast, to thy glo-ry divine glo-ry divine Draw me by cha-rity, Mo-ther of mine Mo-ther of mine, Mo-ther Mo-ther of mine.

Example 2.8 - Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 154-180

The deep middleground graph for the entire piece is shown in Example 2.9. Formal sections are delineated by double bar lines. First, consider the melody. Notice how each formal section begins a progression through the $C3_0$ cycle. As the piece develops, each section gets progressively further along the cycle until the cycle is finally completed in the B section, measures 99-127. The background $C3_0$ cycle ultimately prolongs the pitch center, A. Now consider the bass. For the first 82 measures of the piece, there is no lower voice in counterpoint with the melody. Rather, the melody is accompanied by a drone pitch A, set to a rhythmic ostinato that travels between pairs of sections in the choir. This drone is represented on the graph by the stem-down pitches in measures 1-80. The lack of counterpoint in these measures is represented by the empty lower staff. The transitional section at measure 83 features the first contrary motion in the piece. While this motion is surface-level, the significance of the arrival of counterpoint is shown on this graph by the arrival of a pitch on the lower staff. The B section, measures 99-127, features the first deep-level bass motion. As discussed above, this motion culminates with a functional $V/V-V^9-I$ progression that supports the completion of the melodic $C3_0$ cycle. The brief recurrence of organum-style writing in the final A section is represented by the down-stemmed A in the upper staff of measure 152. In this graph, the C^b in measure 111 and the A^b in measure 162 have both been enharmonically respelled to describe tonal function.

Example 2.9 – Deep middleground prolongational graph of the entire movement

The text reinforces this reading. As discussed, the first three A sections feature incomplete trips through the $C3_0$ cycle over a static, pedal bass. These sections set text that asks questions about the nature of the mysterious Rose. The first instance of outer-voice counterpoint, measures 83-98 (Example 2.5), reveals the identity of the Rose to be the Virgin Mary. The B section, measures 99-133 (Example 2.6), begins with questions about the Rose's "Blossom." It is at the point of cyclic *and* functional cadence, the octave As in measure 127-133, that Britten sets the text which reveals the identity of the Blossom, Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ The cadence in measures 124-127, then, simultaneously resolves the piece's tonal, post-tonal, and textual goals.

Example 2.10 graphs the background of *Rosa Mystica*. A $C3_0$ -governed melody is placed above a bass line that alternates between drone-style reinforcement and tonal function. While the $C3_0$ cycle that governs the melody represents a break with strict tonality, the cycle does serve to prolong the central pitch of the piece. By accepting these

⁴⁰ Marcades 1999 discusses how Britten's setting relates to Hopkins' poetry, 118-119. For further discussion of Hopkins' poetry and theology, see MacKenzie 1981, 1990.

interval cycles as prolongational devices, we begin to get a clearer picture of Britten's compositional process. For Britten, traditional tonality is simply one of several techniques for unifying the pitch domain of a given piece. Symmetrical interval cycles offer another, equally persuasive unifying device. Just as tonal and post-tonal elements are combined at the foreground level, Example 2.9 illustrates how pre-tonal polyphony, tonal harmonic function, and a post-tonal interval cycle govern the deepest level of prolongation.

C₃₀: A C E^b F[#] A
 1 9 14 80 83 124 127

A: (organum-style) I V/V V I

Example 2.10 – Background graph of *Rosa Mystica*

CHAPTER III

O DEUS EGO AMO TE

Conventional tonality is all but abandoned in *O Deus, Ego Amo Te*, the fifth movement of A.M.D.G. This piece is saturated with symmetrical interval cycles at all levels of prolongation. Surface level triads harmonize foreground whole-tone cycles and minor-third cycles, which, in turn, ultimately prolong a deep-level minor-third cycle that governs prolongation across the entire movement. While the surface of this piece is triadic, the harmonic progressions are not tonally functional. In the absence of functional harmony, interval-cycle completion offers the primary device for establishing harmonic progression and cadence in the pitch dimension.⁴¹ These nonfunctional progressions are emphasized by the clear, homophonic, root-position presentation of most chords. The organum analogy plays out differently in this piece. While there is no drone bass, the middleground and background are strictly governed by parallel motion, a hallmark of surface-level motion in Medieval organum.

To negotiate the metric irregularities of the text, Britten labels this movement *senza misura*. In his analysis of the piece, Michael Marcades uses the text, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, and melody to devise a four-section formal analysis as shown in Example 3.1.⁴² The piece is divided into four sections labeled A-D. Each section is further divided into two phrases. In Example 3.1, each phrase is labeled with the

⁴¹ Interval-cycle completion is similar to pattern completion as described in Straus 1982.

⁴² Marcades 1999, 135.

appropriate measure numbers. This formal design offers a convenient frame for discussing prolongational issues.

Example 3.1 – Formal map of *O Deus, Ego Amo Te*, adapted from Marcades 1999, 135.

Example 3.2 provides an analysis of the A section. First, consider the melody. Example 3.2(b) shows that in the first phrase, measures 1-4, the melody is governed by an ascending minor-third cycle. The melody begins on A and travels halfway through the $C3_0$ cycle to cadence on the tritone-related $E\flat$. In the second phrase, measures 5-7, the melody returns to the pitch A by way of a half-trip through the $C2_1$ cycle. The common subset of these two cycles is the tritone cycle $C6_3$. Example 3.2(c) shows how the $C6_3$ cycle governs the melody in this A section at the middleground level. Like the melody, the bass motion in the first phrase (mm. 1-4) is governed by an ascending minor-third cycle. The bass begins on F and travels halfway through the $C3_2$ cycle to cadence in measure 3 on its tritone partner, $C\flat$. Also like the melody, the bass takes the second phrase, measures 5-7, to return to its opening pitch. But where the melody returned by

way of the C2₁ cycle, the bass voice uses members of the C2₁ cycle to embellish the F# in measure 5, the E in measure 6, and the A in measure 7. The subservient role of the C2₁ cycle in the bass is established in large part by the relationship between the pitch pairs B-F# (m. 5), A-E (m. 6), G-A (m. 6-7) and the semantic structure of the text. According to Marcades' outline of the text, these pitch pairs set separate lines of poetry.⁴³ Each line is declamatory, placing the semantic resolution at the end of the line. Within each line the semantic resolution coincides with movement to the second pitch of each pitch pair. The graph illustrates this relationship by adding structural weight to the second pitch of each pair. At the middleground level, the E in measure 6 is taken as the lower neighbor to the final F with the F# in measure 5 and the A in measure 7 filling subservient roles. The following analysis will show how the tritone-governed structure of this opening section is eventually composed out across the entire piece.

⁴³ Marcades 1999, 132.

O God, I love Thee, I love thee, I love thee Not out of hope of heav'n for me nor fearing not to love and be in the e-ver-last-ing burn-ing.

Example 3.2(a) - Reduction of *O Deus, Ego Amo Te*, A section, mm. 1-7

C3₀: A C E_b C₂₁: E_b=D_# C_# B A

C3₂: F A_b C_b C₂₁: C_b=B A G F

Example 3.2(b) - Foreground graph

C6₃: A E_b A

C6₅: F C_b F

Example 3.2(c) - Middleground graph

Example 3.2 typifies how the organum model applies to this piece. Notice the strict parallel motion in all voices in measures 1-4, shown in Example 3.2(a). The bass moves in parallel fifths with the tenor, parallel octaves with the alto, and parallel major thirds with the soprano. While this surface-level parallel motion between all parts is

abandoned in the second phrase, Example 3.2(c) shows how the middleground parallel major-third motion of the outer voices is maintained. Also notice how the voicing of each of the chords in the first phrase is identical to the voicing of the B major, A major, G major, and F major chords in the second phrase (mm. 5-7). This recurrent chord voicing gives another surface-level hint at the deeper-level codependence of the parts that replaces the true sense of contrapuntal independence found in most tonal music.

The B section, reduced and analyzed in Example 3.3, repeats and expands the pitch content of the A section. The B section opens with the same parallel ascending minor-third cycles in all parts as opened the A section. These cycles are found in measures 8-10. Also like the A section, the melody follows the minor-third ascent with a whole-tone descent. However, rather than cadencing on the opening pitch A, this time the melody descends through the $C2_1$ cycle to cadence on G in measure 15. In the next phrase the melody completes its descent through the $C2_1$ cycle to cadence on $E\flat$ in measure 17. This cadence is extended through repetition in measures 17-19. In the melody, the graph shows how this repetition prolongs the $E\flat$ through its upper whole-tone neighbor, F. Looking across measures 10-19, the melody travels the entire $C2_1$ cycle from the high $E\flat$ in measure 10 to the low $E\flat$ in measures 17-19. The dotted slur above the staff shows how this descending whole-tone cycle prolongs the pitch $E\flat$. In the bass voice, the pitch content of measures 11-14 is identical to measures 5-7 in the A section. However, the semantic units in measures 11-14 have been shifted in relationship to the pitch sequence creating new pitch pairs: $F\sharp$ -A (m. 11), E-G (m.13), A-F (m. 14). This

new text setting places semantic weight on the members of the $C2_1$ cycle. The graph represents this relationship: the members of the $C2_1$ cycle are now embellished by consonant skips. This prolongational realignment highlights the codependence of the vocal parts discussed in Example 3.2. Notice how each of the stem-down pitches in the bass voice of measures 11-15 (B, A, G, F, E^b) is harmonized by the same chord voicing as the chords of measures 8-10, and those discussed above in Example 3.2.

8

Thou, thou, thou, my Je - - - sus, af - ter

C3₀: A C E_b

C3₂: F A_b C_b

11

me, Didst reach thine arms out dy-ing, For my sake suff-er'dst nail and lance, Mocked and marred count-e-nance, Sorrows passing num-ber,

C2₁: E_b=D_# C_# B A G

C2₁: C_b=B A G F E_b

16

Sweat and care and cum-ber, Yea and death, and this for me, And thou couldst see me sin-ning:

(C2₁): F E_b (F) E_b (F) E_b

C3₂: F A_b C_b (A_b) C_b (A_b) C_b

Example 3.3 - Reduction and foreground graph of B section, mm. 8-19

The bass rides the $C2_1$ cycle from the B in measure 11 to the cadence on $E\flat$ in measure 15. The slur connecting these two pitches represents how $E\flat$ prolongs B by way of the $C2_1$ cycle. In the next phrase, measure 16-19, the bass steps back up to F and then takes a half trip through the familiar $C3_2$ cycle to cadence on $C\flat$ in measure 17. The slur connecting the F in measure 16 to the $C\flat$ in measure 17 represents how F prolongs $C\flat$ by way of the $C3_2$ cycle. Like the melody, the bass in measures 17-19 is embellished by brief steps backward in its cycle. Looking across measures 10-19, the bass employs both the $C2_1$ and $C3_2$ cycles to move from the $C\flat$ in measure 10 to the $C\flat$ in measures 17. The dotted slur below the staff shows how these cycles prolong the pitch $C\flat$. Notice how each of the $C\flat$ s is harmonized by the familiar chord voicing discussed above.

Example 3.4 shows a middleground graph of sections A and B. The two sections are divided on the graph by a double bar line. The brackets above and below the staff denote which cycles describe the given pitch sequence. Notice that within each bracket, each of the given cycle's intervening members is presented in either ascending or descending order with no instances of skips within a cycle. Also notice that, with the exception of the bass voice $C2_1$ cycle in measures 10-15, the first and last pitches of each cycle are related by either six or twelve semitones, representing an unbroken trip or half-trip through the denoted cycle. The fact that these cycles are presented so deliberately contributes to their strength as prolongational agents. Notice also the extensive use of parallel third motion between the outer voices. All stemmed pitches in this graph form major thirds with their corresponding stemmed pitches in the other voice.

The image shows a musical score for measures 1-19, divided into two systems. The top system contains measures 1-10, and the bottom system contains measures 11-19. The score is written for piano, with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. Above the treble staff, chord labels are placed: $C3_0$ (measures 1-3), $C2_1$ (measures 4-7), $C3_0$ (measures 8-10), and $C2_1$ (measures 11-17). Below the bass staff, chord labels are placed: $C3_2$ (measures 1-3), $C6_5$ (measures 4-7), $C3_2$ (measures 8-10), $C2_1$ (measures 11-17), and $C3_2$ (measures 18-19). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). The measures are numbered 1 through 17, with measure 18 being a repeat of measure 17 and measure 19 being a final cadence.

Example 3.4 – Middleground graph of the A and B sections, measures 1-19

Section C is reduced and graphed in Example 3.5. Similar to sections A and B, section C opens with the vocal parts set in the familiar chord voicing and moving in parallel motion by minor thirds. The soprano begins on D $\sharp$, the enharmonic equivalent to the prolonged E $\flat$ from the previous phrase, and moves immediately to F $\sharp$. This F $\sharp$ is prolonged by a full trip through the $C3_0$ cycle and reinforced by the cadence in measure 22. Similarly, the bass begins this section on the pitch B, the enharmonic equivalent to the prolonged C $\flat$ from the previous phrase, and prolongs the next step in the $C3_2$ cycle, D, by a full trip through the cycle reinforced by the cadence in measure 22. Therefore middleground motion in this phrase moves from D $\sharp$ to F $\sharp$ in the melody and from B to D in the bass. Consider the minor-third cycles in measures 20-22 as a single harmonic

cycle. This cycle begins on B major in measure 20 and takes a one-and-a-quarter trip through the C₃₂ cycle to cadence on D major in measure 22. This incomplete cycle creates a strong expectation of F major, the next step in the cycle, the harmonic center of the piece. However in the following phrase, measures 23-25, Britten interrupts the minor-third cycle by moving from D major to C major, then D major to A major, then D major to E major, as if searching for the resolution to the C₃₂ cycle begun in measure 20. This motion paints the text. The incomplete C₃₂ cycle sets the question “Then I, why should not I love Thee, Jesus so much in love with me?” The three false completions of the cycle set three false answers to the question, “Not for heaven’s sake, not to be out of hell by loving Thee, not for any gains I see.” As I will show in the examples below, this incomplete cycle is finally resolved in the final measure on the word “Amen.”

20

Then I, why should not I love thee, Jesu, so much in love with me? Not for heaven's sake not to be Out of hell by lov-ing thee; Not for an-y gains I see;

C3₀: D# F# A C D# F#

C3₂: B D F A $\flat$ B D

cycle interruption

cycle interruption

Example 3.5 - Reduction and foreground graph of C section, mm. 20-25

Example 3.6 shows a middleground graph of sections A, B and C. Similar to Example 3.4, double-bar lines denote formal sections. The brackets in Example 3.6(a) show how foreground activity is governed by tritone, minor-third, and whole-tone cycles. These cycles function to prolong the stemmed notes in the graph. Example 3.6(b) shows the same graph with middleground motion highlighted by the note names above and below the staff. These note names reveal that the stemmed notes of the graph form their own middleground minor-third cycles. These cycles are each one step shy of completion. This incomplete motion at the middleground level creates expectation for the closing section of the piece.

Example 3.6(a) – Foreground cycles in A, B, and C sections, measures 1-25

Example 3.6(b) - Middleground cycles

Marcades divides the closing section into two phrases. The first of these phrases, found in measures 26-31, is reduced and graphed in Example 3.7. This phrase is the least like any other in the piece: there is no cyclic motion at the foreground, this is the only phrase that breaks with strict four-part homophony, and this is the only phrase that includes non-triadic harmony. The phrase begins on the same D major harmony that was

searching for resolution in the previous phrase and cadences in measure 29 on a second inversion E^b Major chord. The cadence is extended by two passages that break with the prevalent homophonic texture. Britten uses this contrasting section to draw attention to the central question of the poem.⁴⁴ First, in measures 29-30, the tenors ask, “What must I love thee, Lord, for then?” The sopranos answer in measure 31 with “For being my king and God.” These two passages move the E^b harmony to B^bm^{11} , the only non-triadic phrase ending in the piece. Structurally, the graph interprets the tenor and soprano passages as inner voices at the middleground level.

26

But just the way that thou didst me I do love and I will love thee: For being my king and God.

What must I love thee, Lord, for then?

cycle interruption

cycle interruption

Example 3.7 - Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 26-31

⁴⁴ Britten fans unfamiliar with A.M.D.G. will notice a similarity between the solo passages in mm. 29-31 and the cadenza-like figures near the end of *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, rehearsal numbers 23-27

The final phrase of the piece is reduced and graphed in Example 3.8. Octave E $\flat$ s serve as incomplete neighbors to the melodic pitch F $\sharp$ and bass pitch D. These pitches pick up the D major harmony that is still searching for cycle completion. Both voices then proceed through their familiar minor-third cycles, with the inner voices filling out the familiar chord voicing,⁴⁵ to cadence ultimately on the pitch-classes which began the piece thereby completing the interrupted cycle begun in measure 20 and confirming an F major centrality. These cadence pitches are each one octave higher than the opening pitches (measure 1). This displacement is then offset by a two-octave leap down to the chord that ends the piece. By closing the piece on these minor-third cycles that have governed so much motion throughout the piece, Britten asserts the cycles' role as unifying elements. Also by using the harmonic minor-third cycle as the piece's "Amen," both literally and figuratively, Britten asserts the minor-third cycle as a substitute for tonal harmonic motion.

⁴⁵ The spacing of the final D-major and F-major chords is adjusted to account for the extreme range.

32

A - - - - - men. A - men.

C30: Eb F# A C Eb F# A

8 3 3 3 3 3 (3)

C32: D F Ab Cb D F

Example 3.8 - Reduction and foreground graph of m.32

Example 3.9 gives a middleground graph of the entire D section. The brackets above and below the graph denote the contrasting material in measures 27-31 as an interruption in the cyclical structure of the piece. As mentioned above, this interruption functions rhetorically to bring attention to the central lines of text. Notice, then the association between the D-F# dyad on either side of the interruption in measures 27 and 32.

Example 3.9 - Middleground graph of D section, mm. 26-32

Example 3.10 graphs the entire movement. Example 3.10(a) describes how middleground motion is prolonged by tritone, minor-third, and whole-tone cycles. Notice the extensive parallel major thirds between the melodic and bass cycles. Notice also the interruptions in the cyclic structure in measures 27-31. Example 3.10(b) shows how the middleground motion is itself governed by its own minor-third cycles. The interruption in measures 27-31 can be understood as a delay in the resolution of the piece's cyclical goals. Example 3.10(c) graphs the deep background of the entire piece and shows how the middleground minor-third cycles prolong background tritone cycles. Each of the bass pitches in Example 3.10(c) is the root of a local triad. Similarly, each of the soprano pitches is the third of a local triad. Therefore the background of the piece is governed harmonically by parallel major triads. Where Medieval organum moves in parallel octaves and fifths, this piece modernizes the harmony by moving in complete parallel major triads. Compare Examples 3.10(a) and (c). Notice how the same minor-third

cycles that open the A, B, and C sections and close the D section ($C3_0$ in the melody and $C3_2$ in the bass) also govern the background motion of the entire piece. In the absence of tonal harmonic progression, the minor-third and tritone cycles serve as unifying elements for this piece and the prevalent device for establishing pitch centricity.

3 3 3 (3) (3) 3 3 3 3 (3) (3) (3) (3) (8) (6) 3 3 3 (3) (3) (3) 3 3 3 (6) (8) 3 (3) (3) (3) 3 3

Example 3.10(a) – Middleground graph of *O Deus, Ego Amo Te*

C3₀: A C E $\flat$ F $\sharp$ A

The musical score for C3₀ is written on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The treble staff contains a melodic line with notes A, C, and E $\flat$ in the first measure, followed by a double bar line, then F $\sharp$ in the second measure, and A in the third measure. The bass staff contains a bass line with notes A, C, and E $\flat$ in the first measure, followed by a double bar line, then F $\sharp$ in the second measure, and A in the third measure. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3 above the treble staff notes and 3, 3, 3 below the bass staff notes. Measure numbers 1, 20, and 32 are marked above the treble staff.

C3₂: F A $\flat$ C $\flat$ D F

The musical score for C3₂ is written on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The treble staff contains a melodic line with notes F, A $\flat$, and C $\flat$ in the first measure, followed by a double bar line, then D in the second measure, and F in the third measure. The bass staff contains a bass line with notes F, A $\flat$, and C $\flat$ in the first measure, followed by a double bar line, then D in the second measure, and F in the third measure. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3 above the treble staff notes and 3, 3, 3 below the bass staff notes. Measure numbers 1, 20, and 32 are marked above the treble staff.

Example 3.10(b) – Deep middleground

C₆₃: A E $\flat$ A
C₃₀: A C E $\flat$ F $\sharp$ A
1 2 3 20 32

C₃₂: F A $\flat$ C $\flat$ D F
C₆₅: F C $\flat$ F

Example 3.10(c) – Background

CHAPTER IV

HYMN TO ST. CECILIA, OP. 27

Background

Hymn to St. Cecilia, Op. 27 was composed in 1942 aboard the MS *Axel Johnson* on the return voyage from the United States. The conditions of the trip were dismal and treacherous, considering the constant threat of German U-boats. Britten “alleviate[d] the boredom”⁴⁶ by composing this and *A Ceremony of Carols, Op. 28*. *St. Cecilia* is dedicated to his American host, Elizabeth Mayer. The 254-measure piece is composed for a capella, SSATB choir and is a setting of three poems by Britten’s collaborator and political mentor, W. H. Auden. Each of the three Auden poems is set to contrasting music. Britten transitions between the three poems by ending each with the same prayer to St. Cecilia. The first occurrence of this prayer-setting is reduced in Example 4.1. The prayer invokes the ritualistic mood of the piece. Notice the chant-like, unison recitation of the invocation. As the following analysis will show, the middleground of the entire A section can be heard as a composing out of this prayer.

⁴⁶ Britten in a letter to Elizabeth Mayer, May 4, 1942. Mitchell and Reed 1991, pg 1037-8.

56 *ppp mezza voce, smooth*

Bless-ed Ce-ci-lia, ap-pear in vi-sions To all mu-si-cians, ap-pear and in-spire:

62 *pp*

Trans-la-ted Daughter, come down and startle Com-posing mor-tals with im-mor-tal fire.

Example 4.1 – Reduction of mm. 56-67

Analysis

The A section of *Hymn to St. Cecilia* (mm. 1-55) offers an example of a relatively conventional use of a prolonged interval cycle.⁴⁷ Surface level triads and foreground tonal motion prolong a C4₀ cycle that, in turn, prolongs the initial tonic area in preparation for a tonal close. The A section of the piece sets the first of the three Auden poems. This A section and the piece as a whole are centered around E major.

For an example of foreground prolongation, consider the opening phrase, reduced in Example 4.2. Example 4.2 shows a prolongational graph above a piano reduction of the music. The pitch E is taken as the prolonged pitch in both the melody and bass. Both

⁴⁷ For similar examples of foreground interval cycles in the works of Schubert, Chopin, and Wagner, see Salzer and Schachter 1969, 215-219; In Ravel see Kablisch 1990 and Heinzelmann 1998; For Bartók see Wilson 1992; For Bartók and Debussy see Antokoletz 2004; For an exhaustive list of composers from C.P.E. Bach to Stravinsky who employ specifically the A^b-C-E collection, see Bribitzer-Stull 2006.

melody and bass lines begin and end this phrase on pitch-class E. Each of these Es is supported harmonically by E major triads. The middleground counterpoint in this phrase is graphed by the notes with elongated stems. The melodic pitch F in measure 4 is taken as an octave-displaced upper neighbor to the prolonged Es. Similarly, the bass pitch D in measure 4 is taken as a lower neighbor to the prolonged bass Es. The cadence on E major in measure 5 is approached by the dominant B⁷ chord. The inversion of this B⁷ chord is slightly problematic. Since the bass moves directly from the subdominant pitch A to the tonic E, this cadence feels both authentic and plagal. While the cadence label may be up for debate, the finality of the cadence and the E centricity are clear. Notice how both the melody and bass begin with falling thirds motion prolonged by consonant skips. This motion is set in parallel octaves, rhythmically offset on the upbeat of each measure. This parallel motion is reminiscent of Medieval organum and contributes to the ritualistic mood of the text. As the following analysis will show, this parallel octave motion governs both foreground and middleground counterpoint. While the interaction of the outer voices in this example places it beyond the counterpoint associated with common-practice tonality, the harmonies at the phrase boundaries here as well as the relatively conventional harmonic progression firmly establish E as a tonal center.

1 5

In a gar - den sha - dy this ho - ly la - dy With rev - rent cadence and sub - tle psalm,

In a gar - den sha - dy ho - ly la - dy,

Function: I $\flat$ VI IV $\text{ii}^7/\flat$ VI V/ $\flat$ VI $\text{V}_2^?$ I

N

8 (3) 8 (8) 8 (8) 3 8 (9) 9 8

N

Example 4.2 - Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 1-5

The prolongation in this graph is consistent with Straus's four conditions. The triadic nature of this example provides consistent distinction between consonance and dissonance, between embellishing tones and structural tones, and between vertical and horizontal pitch organization. Concerning Straus's scale-degree condition, E is the central pitch and is therefore taken as the most structurally significant. In both voices the pitch E also meets many of Lerdahl's salience conditions including metrical position, relatively long duration, motivic importance and adjacency to a relatively large grouping boundary. Choosing E as structurally significant is also parallel to analytic choices made elsewhere in the piece, as will be shown in the next example.

The second phrase of the piece, found in measures 6-11, is reduced in Example 4.3. Again, the prolongational graph is above the reduction. This phrase is similar to the first phrase. The pitch content of the melody is identical to the first phrase, but in the bass, the descending thirds motion has been extended to facilitate an authentic cadence in C major. The elongated stems show the E prolonged in the melody by the neighbor tone F in measure 9 while the bass moves from E in measure 6 to C in measure 11 by way of a D passing tone in measure 10.

The image displays a musical score for Example 4.3, which is a reduction and foreground graph of measures 6-11. The score is presented in two systems. The top system shows a piano reduction with a treble and bass staff. The lyrics are: "Like a black swan as death Pour'd forth her song in perfect calm: _". The bottom system shows a foreground graph with a treble and bass staff. The graph includes a prolongational line above the treble staff and a rhythmic line below the bass staff. The rhythmic values are: 8, (3), 8, (8), 8, (8), 8, (4), 3 (4) (5) 3, 3. The function labels are: I, bVI, IV, C: ii⁶, N, 5/3, V, I.

Like a black swan as death Pour'd forth her song in perfect calm: _

Function: I bVI IV C: ii⁶ 5/3 V I

8 (3) 8 (8) 8 (8) 8 (4) 3 (4) (5) 3 3

Example 4.3 – Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 6-11

If we broaden our scope we can see how these two phrases relate to each other and how they contribute to middleground prolongation. Example 4.4 shows a middleground graph of the first two phrases (mm. 1-11). The octaves in the bass voice have been normalized to more clearly show horizontal motion. Notice how, at this middleground level, the bass moves from pitch-class E to pitch-class C. As I will show, this prolonged major third motion will eventually be realized as the first step through a middleground $C4_0$ cycle.

Example 4.4 – Middleground graph of mm. 1-11

The third phrase of the piece is reduced and graphed in Example 4.5. The E $\flat$ s and B $\flat$ s in measure 14 of the reduction have been respelled as D $\sharp$ s and A $\sharp$ s, respectively, in the graph to more clearly show the familiar falling thirds motion. The cadence on A $\flat$ Major is approached by falling fifth motion in the bass voice. However, instead of dominant harmony, the dominant bass pitch, E $\flat$, is accompanied by submediant harmony. Therefore, in direct contrast to the cadence in measure five which featured authentic harmonic motion with plagal bass motion, this cadence in measures 18-19 features

authentic bass motion with non-authentic harmonic motion. Harmonic progression through the rest of the example is stretched beyond tonal function. Roman numeral analysis is therefore absent. Peter Evans uses this passage to describe *St. Cecilia* as exhibiting a “dual harmonic scheme: [in which] the two strata (close position triads of the women’s voices; tenor-bass canto fermo) can diverge and yet effortlessly achieve unanimity.”⁴⁸ Elongated stems describe middleground motion. The melodic pitch E is prolonged by a lower neighbor D# in measure 14. Similarly the bass pitch C is prolonged by a lower neighbor B in measure 15. The last three measures of the example describe middleground parallel motion down a major third: E to C in the top voice, C to A^b in the bass voice.

11

And by o-cean's mar-gin she Con-struct-ed an or-gan to en-lar-ge her prayer, —
calm: By o-cean's mar-gin she Con-struct-ed an or-gan for prayer, —

C F# / C# Eb / Bb B+M7 / F# Gbm7 / F# A/E CM7 F Ab: V E? I

non-functional

N

3 (6) 8 (8) 8 (8) (7) (3) 4 6 3 (3) (+4) 3

Example 4.5 – Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 11-19

⁴⁸ Evans 1979, 85.

Example 4.6 shows a middleground graph of the first three phrases, measures 1-19. Notice how the bass continues its middleground descent through the $C4_0$ cycle by moving from the initial E to the C in measure 11 and then to the A^b in measure 19. Notice also that the melody has begun its own descent through the same $C4_0$ cycle by moving from the initial E to the C in measure 19.

$C4_0$: E C

mm. 1 4 5 9 10 11 14 15 17 19

8 (3) 8 (3) 3 (3) 3 3

$C4_0$: E C A^b

Example 4.6 – Middleground graph of mm. 1-19

The fourth phrase of the piece is reduced and analyzed in Example 4.7. This phrase features a high concentration of foreground interval-cycle prolongation. The familiar descending thirds motive in the bass has been altered to outline the $C4_3$ cycle. This cycle prolongs the pitch E^b . The melody features an *ascending* third motive that outlines the $C3_0$ cycle. In measure 23 the top voice skips up to F while the $C3_0$ cycle continues in the inner voice. While the treble voices in measures 21-23 are organized into major triads, the foreign bass notes and irregular root progression work against clear

tonal function. The extended cadence in measures 24-29, however, suggests an expansion of A^b tonality. In measures 25-29, the treble voices sustain an E^b major triad while the tenor and bass voices conclude the phrase with a functional cadence on E^b .

The image displays a musical score for measures 19-29, featuring a piano accompaniment and vocal lines. The score is annotated with harmonic reduction and a foreground graph.

Measures 19-24: The piano part shows a sequence of chords: A^b , A^b/B^b , B , $B/F^\sharp$, F/G , Dm^7 , $A^b: I^6$, and V . The vocal lines include the lyrics: "And notes tremendous from her great engine Thun-der'd out on the Ro-man air." The reduction is labeled "non-functional".

Measures 25-29: The piano part shows a sequence of chords: $C3_0: C$, E^b , $F^\sharp$, A , C , and E^b . The vocal lines include the lyrics: "thun-der'd out, thun-der'd one the Ro-man air." The reduction is labeled $A^b: I$, V/V , and V .

Foreground Graph: The foreground graph shows the pitch contours of the vocal lines. The treble voice sustains an E^b major triad (C, E^b , $F^\sharp$) while the tenor and bass voices conclude the phrase with a functional cadence on E^b .

Example 4.7 – Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 19-29

The transition that follows continues to expand A^b tonality. This section is reduced in Example 4.8. The Roman numeral analysis below the staff describes how Britten uses harmony to expand A^b tonality. The elongated stems in the voice-leading graph describe how the pitch E^b is prolonged in both the melody and bass voice through measure 37. At measure 38, dominant E^b harmony moves to tonic A^b. In measures 38-43, the melody continues to prolong the pitch E^b while the bass and inner voices expand A^b major harmony through arpeggiation. The most prominent inner voice motion is described by the stem-down pitches in the upper staff of the graph. In measure 44, the melody skips up to the tonic pitch A^b.

29

Blonde A-phro-di-te rose up ex-cited, Mov'd to delight by the me-lo-dy, White as an orchid she rode quite naked, In an

air.

Ab: V

V_{sub6}

V_{sub6}

36

oy-ster shell on top of the sea; At sounds so en-tran-cing the an-gels

V

I

40

dah-cing Came out of their trance in to time a-gain, cing the an-gels dan-cing Came in-to time,

Example 4.8 – Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 29-44

The middleground prolongation of the music discussed in this and the previous examples is graphed in Example 4.9. The melodic pitch G in measure 25 prolongs the pitch C from the previous phrase by consonant skip. The melodic E $\flat$ that is prolonged throughout the transition section (mm. 30-43) prolongs the A $\flat$ goal in measure 44, also by consonant skip. Similarly, the prolonged E $\flat$ in the bass in measures 25-37 functions as a middleground dominant to A $\flat$. Across the graph, notice how both the melody and bass voices outline the C $_4$ cycle (E – C – A $\flat$). A $\flat$ tonality is prolonged for roughly twice as many measures as either E or C tonality. This temporal expansion of A $\flat$ creates expectation of cycle completion.

C₄₀: E C A^b

The musical score consists of two staves, Treble and Bass clef. The Treble staff has notes at mm. 1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 25, 30, 38, and 44. The Bass staff has notes at mm. 8, (3), 8, (3), 3, (3), 3, 3, (3), (8), 8, and (6). Above the Treble staff are labels C₄₀: E, C, and A^b. Below the Bass staff are labels C₄₀: E, C, and A^b.

Example 4.9 – Middleground graph of mm. 1-44

This cycle completion occurs in measure 45, which begins the climactic phrase of the A section. This phrase is reduced and analyzed in Example 4.10. The initial

downbeat of the phrase (measure 45) establishes E in the bass and E in the melody, harmonized by an E major triad. This middleground motion to E in both voices completes the C₄ cycles that have been building across the previous 44 measures. This final phrase of the A section also features the tonal close to the entire section. The bass begins the phrase in measures 45-48 by descending through the familiar falling thirds motion. In measures 49-50 Britten inverts the falling third motion in the bass to arpeggiate submediant harmony in preparation for a tonal cadence in measures 51-52. Meanwhile the top voice E in measure 45 is taken as the beginning of a deep-level *ascending* third progression. In measures 46-49, the melody prolongs the pitch E by echoing the A^b(G[#])-F[#]-E motion that completed the C₄ cycle in measure 44-45. The cadential melodic motion of the entire A section, E-F[#]-G[#] in measures 51-52, then, is a tonally harmonized retrogression of the figure that completed the C₄ cycle. This economic use of material establishes aural connections between the tonal and post-tonal processes present in the fundamental structure of this work.

44

And a - round the wick-ed in Hell's a - bys - ses The huge flame flick - - -

time, In Hell's a - - - bys - ses The huge flame

C4₀: A^b = G[#] E

C4₀: E

E: I

49

er'd and eas'd their pain, eas'd their pain. flick - - - er'd and eas'd their pain, eas'd their pain, their pain

vi⁷ IV₅⁶ V¹¹ I

Example 4.10 – Reduction and foreground graph of mm. 44-55

Example 4.11 graphs the entire A section. The C4₀ cycles in the melody and bass function at the deepest level to prolong the initial tonic in preparation for a tonal conclusion. The expansion of the penultimate member of the cycle, A^b, creates expectation of cycle completion. This completion, which occurs in measure 45,

introduces the ascending fundamental line and contributes to an effective climax to the entire section.

C₄₀: E C A^b E

mm. 1 4 5 9 10 11 14 15 17 19 25 30 38 44 45 51 52

8 (3) 8 (3) 3 (3) 3 3 (3) (8) 8 (6) 8 3 5 3

C₄₀: E C A^b E

I V I

Example 4.11 – Deep middleground graph of mm. 1-55

Notice that the two C₄₀ cycles in Example 4.11 create rhythmically displaced parallel octaves between the melody and bass voices. These offset parallel octaves mimic the rhythmically displaced parallel octaves present in the foreground of each phrase. Example 4.12 clarifies this comparison by placing the foreground graph of the second phrase, found in measures 6-11, directly above the background of the entire A section (mm. 1-55). Both graphs begin with rhythmically offset parallel motion between the outer voices and end with a tonal cadence. By composing his phrase-level design out to the larger formal section, Britten unifies the A section and delineates it from the music that follows. The A section is followed by the first invocation to St. Cecilia (reduced in

Example 4.1) and a contrasting B section marked “Lively.” The pattern of monophony followed by counterpoint echoes the same pattern in the *Rosa Mystica*, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Example 4.12(a) - Foreground graph of mm. 6-11

Example 4.12(b) - Background graph of A section (mm. 1-55)

CHAPTER V

WAR REQUIEM, OP. 66

The previous three chapters have dealt exclusively with a capella choral works. This highly specific genre has provided me with the opportunity to discuss prolongational issues as they relate to music that has a high degree of textural uniformity. Such pieces resist Rupprecht's tonal stratification model which relies on textural diversity. By contrast, textural variety is a fundamental component of the *War Requiem*: it calls for enormous performing forces (including full orchestra with extended percussion, chamber orchestra, full chorus, boy's choir, soprano, tenor and baritone soloists, and two conductors) divided into three spatially separate performing groups. These three groups divide the overall texture into distinct musical planes that exhibit a high degree of musical and dramatic contrast.⁴⁹ The piece also features an amalgamation of Britten's compositional techniques to date. Section 1 of this chapter gives a short introduction to the piece. Section 2 briefly reviews the current research as it relates to my approach. Section 3 applies my approach to passages from the *War Requiem* and reconciles my approach with existing research.

Background of the War Requiem

The *War Requiem* premiered May 30, 1962 to celebrate the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral. The original Gothic building had been destroyed by the

⁴⁹ Rupprecht 1993, 238; Evans 1979, 451.

German Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain.⁵⁰ Rather than remove the remnants of the Medieval structure, Basil Spence, architect of the new building, chose to build the new cathedral adjacent to the ruins, leaving the charred, broken walls of the ancient church as a symbolic reminder of conflict. The combined affect of the old destroyed walls and the new vibrant building symbolizes Coventry Cathedral's international ministry of reconciliation. The commission offered Britten an opportunity to produce a large-scale choral work that would express many of his passions about war and about organized religion's role in promoting war.⁵¹

Britten's choice of libretto is analogous to the postmodern style of the architecture. Britten chose to combine the text of the ancient Requiem Mass with the modern anti-war poetry of Wilfred Owen.⁵² Owen, one of Britain's most famous World War I poets, was killed one week before the Armistice. Owen's biting commentary on the inhumanity of war appealed to Britten's deeply held pacifism.⁵³ Britten's juxtaposition of the two texts offers another level of commentary on war and religious practice. For example, in the *Offertorium* movement, Britten uses Owen's "Parable of the Old Man and the Young" to comment on the liturgical text. The liturgy includes an invocation of God's promise to save Abraham and his seed. Against this standard text Britten sets Owen's retelling of the story of Abraham and Isaac for tenor and baritone

⁵⁰ Cooke 1996, 21.

⁵¹ MacDonald 1997, v.

⁵² Rupprecht 2001 characterizes Owen's poems in the *War Requiem* as tropes, inserted into the extant liturgy, 191. In addition to my observations about organum-like middlegrounds in this piece, Rupprecht's trope analogy adds another allusion to ancient musical tradition.

⁵³ It was Britten's declaration as a conscientious objector that led to his flight to North America in 1939.

solo. In Owen's version, when the angel tells Abraham to sacrifice the Ram of Pride instead of his son, Abraham ignores God's command: "But the old man would not so, but slew his son, - And half the seed of Europe, one by one."⁵⁴

Britten composed the *War Requiem* specifically for the musical space of Coventry Cathedral. As mentioned above, the score calls for a large performing force divided into three distinct groups or planes. The full orchestra, chorus and soprano solo are given the bulk of the Latin text. The chamber orchestra and tenor and baritone solos, under a second conductor, are given Owen's English poetry. A boys' choir, divided into two parts, sing the Latin hymns. The boys' choir is intended to sound distant. Therefore the score suggests that they be accompanied by a portable organ or harmonium and set offstage.

Current Research on the War Requiem

Adding to the textural complexity of the work is the wide variety of compositional techniques Britten employs in the *War Requiem*. The score includes both overt and subtle allusions to choral-orchestral masterworks of the past as well as an amalgamation of Britten's own varied compositional techniques for concert, stage and film, including quotes from some of his previous works.⁵⁵ As suggested by the text assignments, the different performing groups play specific dramatic roles in the work.

⁵⁴ See Examples 5.10-5.16 below for an analysis of this section of music.

⁵⁵ The subject of musical influences on Britten's score has been well-documented by a host of researchers. The score's debt to Verdi's *Requiem* is explored by Boyd 1968. The score's references to Mozart, Beethoven, Berg and other works by Britten are documented in Evans 1979; Lundergan 1991; Antokoletz 1992; Rupprecht 1993; Cooke 1996.

Britten highlights these roles by assigning different types of music based on those roles.⁵⁶

Edward Lundergan describes how the spectrum of compositional techniques ranges from tonal to post-tonal.

Pitch structures in the *War Requiem* may be seen on a continuum ranging from purely symmetrical cyclic formations to entirely asymmetrical diatonic formations, with gradations of mixed formations between the two... The music of the battlefield is dominated by diatonic and quasi-diatonic scales and harmonic structures... The purest examples of cyclic-interval structures are found in the music of the boys' choir. The text given to the boys... are concerned with prayer and supplication. The music is distant both literally and metaphorically from the battlefield music of the large chorus and orchestra.⁵⁷

The range of analytical techniques applied to the *War Requiem* is as wide as the range of compositional techniques Britten employed. Below are a pair of contradictory opinions that can serve as an example of the variety of analytical conclusions about the work.

The tonal structures on which the music of the *Requiem* is based are clearly defined... Highly chromatic passages... remain isolated incidents, decorating rather than subverting an overall tonal framework solidly founded on clear tonal centres.

Mervyn Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*⁵⁸

In the [*War Requiem*] tonalities are perpetually collapsing, harmonic resolutions are continually postponed, and the rare moments of unambiguous diatonicism tend to represent fear or grief rather than repose.

Arnold Whittall, "Tonal Instability in Britten's *War Requiem*"⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Rupprecht 1993 describes how Britten employs this technique in other works.

⁵⁷ Lundergan 1998, 10.

⁵⁸ Cooke 1996, 55.

⁵⁹ Whittall 1963, 201.

While tonal function is present on the small scale, tonal explanations of the entire score face many analytic challenges.⁶⁰ Several recent authors have pointed to inversional symmetry as an over-arching system for long-range organization of pitch space.⁶¹

Rupprecht's application of his tonal stratification model to the first movement of the *War Requiem* eloquently synthesizes the rigors of Schenkerian analysis with the multivalent complexity of Britten's compositional technique.⁶²

The aim of this chapter is to enrich and reinforce previous research by applying my interval-cycle prolongation and organum models. Several of the authors above have noted that the *War Requiem* employs a wealth of interval-cycle-derived structures.⁶³ By accepting these structures as prolongational agents, as my approach does, these previous analyses are given more depth and aural validity. While Rupprecht's tonal stratification model effectively describes the interaction between conflicting musical elements in the *War Requiem*, the organum model discussed in the previous chapters can be seen to govern the foreground and middleground of individual planes and contribute to the ancient sound of particular passages.

⁶⁰ A representative example of these challenges is the F major triad on which the first, second and final movements end. Peter Evans 1979 describes the closing harmony saying, "this cannot be regarded as the 'outcome' in a long-term (or even notably logical) sense of each of the three movements which cadence in this way," 452. Arnold Whittall 1963, who makes a case for a D-minor center for the first movement says, "Even after many hearings, there is an element of surprise about this chord. It does not represent a resolution of all the tensions of the work," 204.

⁶¹ Lundergan 1991, Antokoletz 1992, and Rupprecht 1993 make compelling cases for an A-axis around which the pitch content of motives and entire sections of music are organized.

⁶² Rupprecht 1993, 1996, 2001.

⁶³ Most notably Lundergan 1991, 1998 and Antokoletz 1992.

Analyses

This section will analyze passages of the *War Requiem* in order to explore the compositional use of interval cycles as prolongational devices and of strict parallelism in a large-scale, texturally diverse piece as well as reconcile the analytic approach taken here with existing analytical research. Part A highlights moments of surface-level organum. Part B illustrates how the organum model can govern middleground structure. Part C explores how Britten elaborates the organum model by composing the drone out into an ostinato. Finally, Part D explores how this analytical approach applies to one of the most texturally dense sections of the *War Requiem*.

Surface level allusions to organum

In his book, *Britten: War Requiem*, Mervyn Cooke compares several passages with Medieval organum. He interprets these moments as Britten's commentary on the text.

Successions of parallel fourths or fifths reminiscent of medieval organum invade the music for soprano, choir and full orchestra at those moments when Britten wishes to emphasize the remoteness and historical inappropriateness of the religious concepts expressed.⁶⁴

Cooke does not take a prolongational approach. Rather his organum analogies are based on observation of surface-level parallel-fifth and parallel-fourth motion. Obvious examples can be found at the close of each fugal section of the *Offertorium*. The second of these is reduced in Example 5.1. Notice the strict parallel-fifth motion between

⁶⁴ Cooke 1996, 56.

women's voices and between men's voices. The upper register instruments, represented on the upper staff of the orchestral reduction move predominantly in parallel fifths as do the lower instruments. For another surface-level allusion to organum, notice the pedal bass in the final seven bars.

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The top system shows a vocal line in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. The lyrics are "Quam o-lim A-bra-hae pro-mi-si-sti, et se-mi-ni e-jus." The vocal line is written in a single staff. Below it is a piano accompaniment, also in G major and 6/8 time, consisting of two staves. The piano part features a prominent pedal bass in the final seven bars, which is a continuous low-frequency note. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 5.

Example 5.1 – Reduction of Rehearsal 83 to end of *Offertorium*

Drone-style organum

In addition to the surface-level references to organum cited by Cooke, prolongational analysis reveals how the organum analogy also describes middleground structure in certain passages. The next analysis (Examples 5.2-5.4) features a middleground with a drone-bass, similar to *Rosa Mystica* (Chapter 2) and analogous to Salzer's graph of the twelfth-century St. Martial piece, *Benedicamus Domino* (Example 1.3). As the analysis will show, interval cycles play an important role in the prolongational graphs.

Examples 5.2-5.4 include reductions and prolongational graphs of the opening of the *Sanctus* movement. Lundergan says that this section of music "contains the greatest concentration of cyclic-interval relationships in the entire *Requiem*."⁶⁵ The melody on the top staff is presented as a soprano solo and the bottom staff represents pitched percussion instruments.⁶⁶ Throughout Example 5.2 the percussion plays a pedal F# in octaves. The soprano line exemplifies Britten's post-tonal triadicism. In measures 5-6, the soprano descends through a complete whole-tone scale (C2₀), denoted by the stem-up pitches in the foreground graph.⁶⁷ This descent is harmonized by arpeggiated major triads. The percussion part in Example 5.2 is analogous to the lower voice in drone-style organum. Both are static while the top voice elaborates the static pitch with motion.

⁶⁵ Lundergan 1991, 186. Lundergan 1991, 186-187 and Antokoletz 1992, 514-515 go into great detail about the many interlocking interval cycles and symmetrical collections that can be seen in this section of music. In this chapter I will focus exclusively on those cycles that contribute to a sense of prolongation.

⁶⁶ The percussion instruments in this passage include vibraphone, antique cymbals, glockenspiel, and bells. Cooke cites that this instrumentation was directly influenced by Britten's experience with the Balinese gamelan. Cooke 1996, 54 and 70.

⁶⁷ Britten's score does not include measure numbers. I have numbered the measures of the *Sanctus* for convenience. My measure 7 corresponds with Britten's rehearsal 84.

While the harmonic language of the St. Martial example (Example 1.3) is D Dorian, Britten's harmonic language is a whole-tone scale harmonized with major triads.

Example 5.2(a) – Reduction of *Sanctus*, mm. 1-6

Example 5.2(b) – Foreground graph

Edward Lundergan describes the music in Example 5.2 as the opening antecedent phrase of the *Sanctus*.⁶⁸ The corresponding consequent phrase is reduced and graphed in Example 5.3. The first two motives in the soprano outline tritone motion from B# to F#. The third iteration expands this motion through major triad arpeggiation. Where the arpeggios in Example 5.2 elaborate C₂₀ motion to the F# major triad, the arpeggios in Example 5.3 elaborate C₃₀ motion to the F# major triad. The brackets below the top staff show how each upper voice stemmed note serves both as the fifth of one triad and the

⁶⁸ Lundergan 1991, 120-124. Lundergan bases the antecedent-consequent analogy on the tritone polarity between the central pitches of each phrase, F# and C, respectively.

third of the next. At the middleground, the soprano in Example 5.3 moves up a tritone from B# to F#. This motion is enharmonically identical to the motion in the percussion.

Example 5.3(a) – Reduction of *Sanctus*, mm. 7-13

Example 5.3(b) – Foreground graph

Example 5.4 is a middleground graph of Examples 5.2 and 5.3. The B#s in the soprano have been respelled as C naturals to emphasize the parallel motion between the soprano and the percussion. The brackets above the staff show how middleground motion is prolonged by C2₀ and C3₀ cycles. The middleground motion of both parts prolongs the F#-C tritone, a structural interval throughout the *War Requiem*.⁶⁹ The percussion in these examples does not represent a voice in counterpoint with the melody. Similar to the lower voice in the St. Martial example (Example 1.3), the percussion part can best be described as a stable reinforcement of the middleground melodic motion.

⁶⁹ Lundergan 1991, 1998; Antokoletz 1992; Rupprecht 1993; Cooke 1996.

Example 5.4 – Middleground graph of *Sanctus*, mm. 1-13

Drone composed out into ostinato

In the next two analyses, Examples 5.5-5.9, a drone-bass at the middleground level is composed out into a bass ostinato pattern. While this makes for a more varied surface than the twelfth-century St. Martial example, the middleground structure is similar.

Consider an excerpt from the *Agnus Dei*, reduced and graphed in Example 5.5. The strings, represented on the lower staff in the reduction, play a unison ostinato that outlines B minor and C major triads.⁷⁰ Example 5.5(c) shows how, at the middleground, the string ostinato serves to prolong a middleground static pitch B. Meanwhile the melody, sung by tenor solo, stretches the first measure of the string ostinato over five measures in mm. 3-7, ultimately prolonging F# by outlining the B minor triad.

As exemplified in the *Sanctus*, the tritone, particularly the F#-C tritone, serves as an important structural and motivic interval throughout the *War Requiem*. The asterisks

⁷⁰ Evans, Cooke and Lundergan cite how this ostinato is conceptually derived from the F#-C tritone. In this setting, these authors agree that the ostinato suggests an alternation between B minor tonic and the Neapolitan C major. Evans 1979, 452-3; Cooke 1996, 71-72; Lundergan 1991, 191.

in Example 5.5(a) highlight the motivic role of the F $\sharp$ -C tritone in this passage. The string ostinato pattern is conceptually derived from the F $\sharp$ -C tritone. F $\sharp$ and C serve as downbeat pitches. Meanwhile, the five-note ascending pattern in measure 2 is a literal inversion of the descending pattern in measure 1. Also, the first vocal phrase (mm. 3-6) features a nested repetition of the F $\sharp$ -C tritone. However, in this passage, the tritone does not play a significant role in prolongation. The triadic nature of the ostinato's two five-note patterns disrupts a prolongational interpretation of the tritone. Also, since the ostinato does not change at the end of the vocal phrase in measure 6, there is no sense of harmonic cadence to support the completion of the vocal tritone.

Example 5.5(a) – Reduction of *Agnus Dei*, mm.1-12

Example 5.5(b) - Foreground graph

Example 5.5(c) - Middleground graph

The *Benedictus* is a 42-measure section of the *Sanctus* movement scored for soprano solo and woodwinds in dialogue with the full chorus and strings. Similar to the end of the *Offertorium* reduced in Example 5.1, the surface of the *Benedictus* features

extensive parallel fourths and fifths.⁷¹ Prolongational analysis of this section reveals that the parallelism goes beyond the surface and can be seen to govern middleground structure as well. The melody of the *Benedictus* is consistently harmonized with parallel fifths. Below this activity, the piano, double bass and bassoon play a pizzicato walking bass figure.

The following analysis will consider the first half of the *Benedictus*, found in mm. 77-97.⁷² The soprano solo takes the melody while the chorus responds with a repeated motive. This motive is reduced and analyzed in Example 5.6. Notice the parallel fifths and parallel octaves in the chorus and strings, outlining voice-leading motion reminiscent of a double leading-tone cadence in D major. The walking bass prolongs the pitch A by consonant skip from E and leaps up to fill in the third of the D-major triad.

⁷¹ Cooke cites the *Benedictus* section as the “most obvious” example of organum-like parallel fourths and parallel fifths: Cooke 1996, 56.

⁷² Measure 76 corresponds to rehearsal number 89.

chorus, strings

Be - ne - di - ctus.

piano, D.B., Bsn.

Example 5.6(a) – Reduction of choral motive from *Benedictus*, mm.79, beat 3 - 80, beat 1

5 5 5

D Major

Example 5.6(b) - Foreground graph

This choral motive serves as the primary idea out of which Britten spins the *Benedictus* melody. Example 5.7 shows how the soprano and woodwinds expand the choral motive and lead the music to a cadence on the dominant substitute, B major. Example 5.7 begins with the same double leading-tone motion followed by a passage of descending parallel major triads. This expansion is followed by the familiar choral response. Notice the dual role of the walking bass. At each of the double leading-tone moments, the bass prolongs the pitch A with a consonant skip from E. In between the two double leading-tone moments, the walking bass fills a subordinate role, filling in the thirds of each major triad.⁷³

⁷³ Evans 1979 also notes this dual role: “The crude parallel fifths are converted into sixth chords by the bass whenever it can escape from its cadential role,” 461

Example 5.7(a) – Reduction of *Benedictus*, mm.85, beat 3 – 88, beat 1

Example 5.7(b) - Foreground graph

Example 5.8 reduces and graphs the entire first half of the *Benedictus*. The choral motive occurs five times as indicated on the score by the “chorus and strings” designation (mm. 79-80, 82-83, 87-88, 90-91, and 96-97). The soprano and woodwinds expand this motive first with neighbor motion to E major in measures 77-79, then with motion to F# major in measure 82. In each of these measures, the walking bass plays an E-A ostinato before leaping up to fill in the third of each triad. Measures 83-87 feature the expansion discussed in Example 5.7. The asterisks in measures 87 and 88 highlight how the B major triad on which the soprano cadences is picked up in measure 88 after the interruption of the choral motive. Measures 88-91 feature a descending stepwise sequence. When the walking bass figure is in its upper register it fills in the major third

of the parallel-fifth motion in the soprano and woodwinds. In measures 89 and 90, the walking bass touches the low register E to prolong the E-A ostinato pattern that culminates in measure 91. This sequential passage is repeated and expanded in mm. 91-97. The walking bass continues its dual role by moving in parallel motion in its upper register while prolonging the E-A ostinato in its lower register. The parallel major triads ultimately embellish the structurally superior melody.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Evans 1979 also notes how the “upper lines [are] controlled by the soprano.,” 461.

The image displays a musical score for the 'Benedictus' section, measures 77-97. It features a vocal line (soprano + W. IV.) and a piano accompaniment (chorus + Str.). The key signature is D major (two sharps). The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: 'Be-ne-di-ctus, be-ne-di-ctus Be-ne-di-ctus. qui ve-nit in no-mi-ne, Be-ne-di-ctus. in no-mi-ne Do-mi-ni in no-mi-ne Do-mi-ni Be-ne-di-ctus. Be-ne-di-ctus qui ve-nit, Be-ne-di-ctus. qui ve-nit in no-mi-ne Do-mi-ni, Be-ne-di-ctus.'

The piano part includes triad reductions for the first system (measures 77-84) and the second system (measures 85-92). The triads are: D, (D) E, (D) E, D, (D) E, (D) F#, D. The second system includes asterisks (*) above measures 88 and 90, indicating specific harmonic features.

The piano part also includes a reduction for the third system (measures 93-97). The triads are: D, B, F#, A, E, G, D, C, D, E, G#, B, D.

Example 5.8 – *Benedictus* mm. 77-97, reduction above foreground graph

Example 5.9 shows a middleground graph of measures 77-97. The asterisks highlight the recurrent choral motive. On this graph the E-A ostinato has been raised two octaves and is interpreted as a middleground prolongation of a static pitch A. Similar to the twelfth-century organum, the “bass voice” functions as a middleground tonic drone, reinforcing the prolonged melodic pitch. Meanwhile the melody outlines the A-major triad.

Example 5.9 – *Benedictus* mm. 77-97 middleground

In the *Benedictus* we can see several analogies with Medieval organum. The surface of the music features extensive parallel fifths. In addition, the dual role of the bass voice reveals two middleground organum analogies. First, the E-A ostinato fulfills the role of drone, similar to the St. Martial piece, Example 1.3 (as well as middleground graphs of *Agnus Dei*, Example 5.5; *Sanctus*, Example 5.4; and *Rosa Mystica*, Example 2.3). Second, the parallel major triads, controlled by the melody and filled by the

walking bass part's upper register, resemble the extensive parallel major triads of *O Deus*, Example 3.10.

Tonal ambiguity is one of the hallmarks of Britten's style and the *Benedictus* offers a good example. A case could be made for hearing this section in A major. The analysis in Examples 5.8 and 5.9 shows the pitch A to be structurally superior. The bass sustains A at the middleground while the melody outlines the A major triad. The E-A ostinato can be heard as motion from dominant to tonic. This bass motion is often accompanied by melodic neighbor motion from A to its leading tone, G#, and back to A. The A-D-A dyad marked in Example 5.8 as a D in parentheses could be heard as an A^{sus} chord. The motion to E major in measures 79-80, then, would be heard as a motion to dominant harmony. Also, the *Benedictus* section is sandwiched between two D major *Hosanna* sections. Therefore an A-major reading of the *Benedictus* would suggest its role in the large form as a dominant-area B section. D major can also be heard as tonic. The most prevalent surface-level harmony is D major, the recurrent choral motive embellishes D major by way of double leading tones, and D major harmony frames the significant formal boundaries in the *Benedictus*. The prolongation of the pitch A can be heard as an over-emphasis of the fifth scale degree, a typical Britten technique for obscuring tonic. Peter Evans underscores the dual hearing by claiming that the E-A bass pattern is a V-I cadence in A while the melodic lines feature a "steady pull towards IV."⁷⁵ Whittall's analysis is equally ambiguous. After asserting the D major center of the

⁷⁵ Evans 1979, 461.

preceding *Hosanna*, Whittall describes the *Benedictus* by saying “the key signature of two sharps remains for the *Benedictus*, although a chromatic bass line helps to produce a much less stable effect.”⁷⁶ Adding to the tonal ambiguity are the B major cadences at measures 85 and 87. This motion is the most significant break with bass’s E-A ostinato pattern. An A-major reading of the passage would interpret this harmonic motion as a dominant substitute. A D-major reading would note the chromatic mediant relationship between D major and the cadence chord B major. In either case, the B major cadences represent a degree of ambiguity. A third case could be made for an E major hearing. The soprano’s opening gesture in measures 77-78 cadences on E major, and the lowest pitch throughout the passage is E. The accompanying bass motion of E to A to G# could be heard as an arpeggiated E major triad with the chord fifth, B, displaced by the A on the downbeat of 78. While both A major and D major hearings of this passage would confirm the prolongational graphs in Examples 5.8 and 5.9, an E major hearing would demand a different interpretation.

Extreme textural density

The goal of this chapter is to apply the analytical approach developed for texturally uniform pieces to the texturally diverse *War Requiem*. This final analysis will involve one of the most texturally dense moments in the piece: the penultimate section of the *Offertorium*. For most of the *War Requiem*, the three performing groups avoid direct interaction. In the first movement, for example, the three groups take turns, never

⁷⁶ Whittall 1963, 203.

sounding together.⁷⁷ The following analysis involves one of the few instances where different groups, or planes, sound simultaneously. In the preceding section, the tenor and baritone soloists present the *revised* story of Abraham and Isaac described in Section I of this chapter (i.e. Owen's version). In the section of music analyzed below, Britten sets repetitions of Owen's final line of poetry, "And half the seed of Europe, one by one," against the liturgical prayer, "Hostias et preces tibi Domine," which calls on God to fulfill the promise he made to save Abraham and his descendents from death.⁷⁸ Owen's poetry is set for the soloists and chamber orchestra. The liturgical prayer is set for the boys' choirs and organ (or harmonium), placed offstage so as to sound distant. The spatially separated performing groups are set in different tempi. The score gives explicit instructions that there should be no temporal alignment between the two groups. Example 5.10 shows a reduction of the beginning of this section. Notice the tempo markings and the non-alignment of bar lines between the two groups.

⁷⁷ Rupprecht compares this process to the film effect of montage. Rupprecht 1993, 237, 248-256.

⁷⁸ Literal translation of the liturgical prayer: "Sacrifices and prayers of praise, O Lord, we offer to thee. Receive them, Lord, on behalf of those souls we commemorate this day. Grant them, O Lord, to pass from death unto life, which once thou promised to Abraham and to his seed." Jeffers 1988, 78-79.

77 Marchlike (slower than main tempo, $\text{♩} = 60$)

Boys

Organ (or Harmonium)

T

Bar.

Cham. Orch.

And half the seed of Eu - rope, one by one,

And half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one,

Repeat this bar ad lib. until entry of Soloists and Chamber Orchestra is heard.

Ho - sti -

half the seed of Eur - ope, one by

half the seed of Eur - ope, one by

as et pre - ces ti - bi Do - mi - ne lau - dis of - fe - ri

one,

one,

Example 5.10 – Reduction of *Offertorium*, rehearsal 77

I will begin my analysis by considering the two musical planes separately. The boys' choirs and organ compose the upper plane while the chamber orchestra, tenor and baritone soloists compose the lower plane. In the upper plane the two boys' choirs sing in unison while the organ plays an ostinato pattern. An excerpt of the organ ostinato is presented in Example 5.11. The right hand plays a sustained E^b/C dyad while the left-hand pattern decorates this dyad with an alternating C[#]-D pattern. The left-hand alternation continues irrespective of meter changes. In the foreground graph, the sustained nature of the right-hand dyad makes it more salient while the alternation of the left-hand pattern is heard as an alternation of neighbor tones to the sustained right-hand dyad. To show this relationship more clearly I respelled the E^b as a D[#] in the graph. The reason for choosing this specific respelling will be made clear below. A composite of all the pitch-classes in the ostinato yields the set class (0123). Therefore the embellishing tones can be described as filling in the pitch-class space between the structural ic 3 in the right hand.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Lundergan 1998, 11.

The image displays musical notation and a foreground graph for an organ ostinato. The top section, labeled "Organ (or Harmonium)", consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 6/8. It features a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, each tied across two measures. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, showing a bass line with notes F#3, G3, A3, and B3, also tied across two measures. The bottom section, labeled "Foreground graph", is a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. It shows a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, and C5. Above the first two notes (G4 and A4) is the label "(02)", and above the last two notes (B4 and C5) is the label "(02)". Below the first three notes (G4, A4, and B4) is the label "(0123)".

Example 5.11 – Excerpt and foreground graph of organ ostinato

The boys' melody is graphed in Example 5.12. While Lundergan does not explicitly discuss this passage in terms of prolongation, he does note the cyclical structure of the melody: "The entire melodic line of the boys' choir is a diatonic elaboration of C3₀, descending from C through A and F# to D#."⁸⁰ The melodic shape of measures 9-10, with its consonant skips down a third and neighbor motion on weak beats, describes most of the melody. This basic pattern prolongs the pitch C in measures 9-10, B in measure 11-13, A in measures 24-28, and F# in measure 29-33.⁸¹ The organ ostinato, not shown in this example, continues throughout.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 11.

⁸¹ For the sake of discussion I have added measure numbers to this section. Britten's score does not include measure numbers for several reasons. One reason is that this section explicitly allows for vamping to ensure the right sequence of events in a section of the piece where two spatially separated performing groups are moving in different meters and tempi. Example 5.10 shows how the bar lines in this section do not align between the boys choir group and the chamber orchestra group. My numbering for this section designates rehearsal 77 as measure 1 and assumes a strict adherence to the score with no ad lib.

9 Ho-sti-as et pre-ces ti-bi Do-mi-ne lau-dis of-fe-ri-mus: tu su-sci-pe pro a-ni-ma-bus il-lis,

12

15

18 qua-rum ho-di-e me-mo-ri-am fa-ci-mus, me-mo-ri-am fa-ci-mus:

20

23

24 fac-e-as, Do-mi-ne, de-mor-te tran-si-re ad vi-tam.

27

29

32 Quam o-lim A-bra-hae pro-mi-si-sti et se-mi-ni e-jus.

Example 5.12 – Foreground graph of boys part

Example 5.13 shows a middleground graph of the entire upper plane. Stem-up pitches represent the boys melody. Notice how each middleground descent through the C3₀ cycle is prepared by anticipatory foreground motion. (Mm. 9-10 anticipate mm. 11-17; mm. 21-25 anticipate 26-28; mm. 28-31 anticipate 32-33.) Stem-down pitches represent the organ ostinato. Notice how both parts serve to prolong the C/D# dyad.

Where the organ fills in the dyad chromatically (see Example 5.11), the boys' part composes the dyad out by way of the $C3_0$ cycle.⁸² Similar to the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* examples discussed above (Examples 5.2-5.5), the organ part in Example 5.13 is not in counterpoint with the boys' melody. Rather, the organ represents a static reinforcement of the deep melodic structure of this passage.

Example 5.13 – Middleground of boys/organ plane

Example 5.14 reduces and graphs the foreground of the lower plane. This plane is composed of tenor and baritone soloists and the chamber orchestra. This lower plane features two surface-level allusions to organum. First, the chamber orchestra plays only short E major triads that punctuate each of the vocal statements. The first of these E major chords, at rehearsal 77, is prepared by ascending fourth motion from B implying V-I motion. Therefore the orchestra's prolongational contribution to this section is a pedal E, represented by open note head below the staff. The second surface-level allusion to organum is the strict parallel fourths between the two voice parts. Similar to the parallel octaves in *Hymn to St. Cecilia* (Chapter 4), the parallel motion between tenor

⁸² Lundergan 1998, 11.

and bass soloists is rhythmically displaced yet audible at the middleground. The graph takes the tenor line as the melody and interprets the baritone as a subordinate, parallel harmonization of the melody.

As with the boys' part discussed above, the melody of this lower plane employs an economic use of motives. Consider the tenor part in measures 1-4.⁸³ The pitch E is prolonged first by consonant skip to and from B. The return from B is filled in by steps (mm. 1-2). The second half of this phrase (mm. 2-4) prolongs E by third progressions to and from G. The baritone sings the same shape beginning on the dominant-related pitch B. Subsequent phrases mimic this melodic shape. The second phrase, found in mm. 6-9, inverts the first phrase with slight alteration in measure 8. The third phrase, mm. 11-15, transposes the first phrase down a step and breaks it up with a fermata measure. Measures 17-24 feature the most varied version of the initial phrase.

⁸³ Similar to the upper plane examples above, I have added measure numbers to this section. Due to the tempo independence of the two performing groups, the measure numbers for the duet/chamber orchestra group do not align with the boys choir/organ group. My numbering for this section designates rehearsal 77 as measure 1 and assumes a strict adherence to the score with no ad lib.

77

T And half the seed of Eu - rope, one by one,

Bar. And half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one,

Cham. Orch.

Graph

6 half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one,

Bar. half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one,

Cham. Orch.

Graph

Example 5.14 – Reduction and foreground graph of duet/chamber orchestra

11 14

T half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one,

Bar. half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one,

Cham. Orch.

Graph

17 20 23

T half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one, one by one.

Bar. half the seed of Eur - ope, one by one, one by one.

Cham. Orch.

Graph

Example 5.14. Continued

Example 5.15 graphs the middleground motion of the two soloists. Taken in isolation, the stem-up pitches of the tenor solo would describe a conventional E-major upper-voice. The lower parallel-fourth motion of the baritone, while shown to be subordinate by the down stems, contradicts a simple E-major reading. The rhythmically displaced parallel-fourth motion that characterizes this passage continues from measure 1

through measure 19. Measures 20-23 offer the first instance of contrapuntal independence between the tenor and baritone voices. In measure 20 the perfect fourth collapses to a major second, with the tenor singing the dominant pitch B and the baritone the subdominant A. In measure 23 the interval collapses to a unison tonic E.

Example 5.15 – Middleground graph of tenor and bass solos

Both planes are graphed together in Example 5.16. Due to the unsynchronized nature of this section of music, vertical alignment in this graph is approximate. Measure numbers between the staves do not align. Measure numbers are included in this graph for reference to previous graphs. The governing C-D# dyad of upper plane conflicts with the governing E-centric modality of lower plane. Dramatically, the lower plane sets the line of poetry that brings the ancient Abraham story to the immediate and tragic present. Meanwhile the upper plane sets the ritual plea for peace. Therefore the musical conflict between the planes symbolizes the dramatic conflict between war and religion that is central to the pacifist message of the *War Requiem*.⁸⁴ A monotonal reading of the entire texture might make the case for hearing the prolonged C3₀ cycle as a composed-out

⁸⁴ More examples of this type of dramatic conflict between textural strata are explored in Rupprecht 1993 and 1996.

leading-tone seventh chord of E major. However this hearing rests on shaky ground. First, the duet concludes *before* the conclusion of the boys' choir music, denying a tonal resolution of the diminished sonority. In fact, just before rehearsal 79, the score calls for the organ ostinato to continue after the final statement from the lower plane and even to overlap ("dying away") the movement-concluding G-major fugue in the choir and full orchestra. Secondly, the obstinacy of each plane's distinct compositional process, reinforced by the two groups' timbral, temporal and physical separation, resists any sense of resolution between the two groups. In this passage, conflict and ambiguity are more central to Britten's musical and political goals than choosing a governing tonality to which all music resolves.

Example 5.16 – Background graph of both planes

The preceding analysis describes how, even in moments of extreme textural density, the prolonged interval-cycle model and organum model still apply. The Latin hymn and Owen poetry are set in musically distinct planes. These planes emphasize

conflicting tonal centers as well as discrete tonal processes. The upper plane is governed by a $C3_0$ cycle while the lower plane prolongs the E major triad. However, both planes independently express an organum-like middleground.

Conclusion

Britten's unique language resists many conventional analytic techniques. Most tonal descriptions of Britten's music include as many disclaimers about tonal terminology as they do concrete observations. The analyses presented in this dissertation aim to highlight two features of prolongation in Britten's music. First, symmetrical interval cycles are not only prevalent across structural layers in Britten's music, but they also contribute to prolongation and pitch centrality. The completion of background cycles in *Rosa Mystica*, *O Deus* and *Hymn to St. Cecilia* help delineate the form by offering a sense of expectation and climax in the pitch domain. The small-scale repetition of those cycles in *Rosa Mystica* and *O Deus* further define the form by creating a sense of closure. By correlating these moments of musical expectation, climax, and closure with corresponding elements in the poetry he sets, Britten is able to use cycle completion to paint the text as well. Unlike similar cycles in the music of Bartok, the cycles in Britten's music are supported harmonically by triads and can therefore be seen as prolongational rather than merely associational. In the preceding chapters, whole-tone cycles were shown to govern prolongation in *O Deus*, *Ego Amo Te* (Examples 3.2-3.4, 3.6, 3.10) and *Sanctus* (Examples 5.2, 5.4). Minor-third cycles were shown to govern structure in *Rosa Mystica* (Examples 2.4, 2.6, 2.9, 2.10), *O Deus* (Examples 3.2-3.6, 3.8-3.10), *Hymn to St.*

Cecilia (Example 4.7), *Sanctus* (Examples 5.3, 5.4) and *Offertorium* (Examples 5.12, 5.13, 5.16). Major-third cycles were shown to govern background structure in *Hymn to St. Cecilia* (Examples 4.6, 4.7, 4.9-4.12). Also, tritone cycles were shown to govern structure in *O Deus* (Examples 3.2, 3.4, 3.6, 3.10).

The second feature of Britten's music that this study has revealed is a similarity between the music's prolongational structure and the structure of Medieval organum. Parallelism of fourths, fifths, octaves and complete triads were shown in *O Deus* (Examples 3.2-3.6, 3.8-3.10), *Hymn to St. Cecilia* (Examples 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.12) and throughout the *War Requiem* (Examples 5.1, 5.5-5.8, 5.14, 5.15). Also, organum-style drone basses were seen in the middlegrounds of *Rosa Mystica* (Examples 2.9, 2.10), *Sanctus* (Examples 5.2-5.4), *Agnus Dei* (Example 5.5), *Benedictus* (Examples 5.6-5.9) and *Offertorium* (Examples 5.1, 5.11, 5.13, 5.14, 5.16).

At Britten's funeral service, Leslie Brown commented that, "trying to describe [Britten's] music is like trying to trap sunlight in a string bag."⁸⁵ While it would be a disservice to sum up Britten's prolific career in the limited scope of this dissertation, perhaps interval-cycle prolongation and the middleground organum models can shed some light on Britten's compositional process.

⁸⁵Kennedy 1993, 109.

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