

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

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PROPOSAL FOR THESIS

MASTER OF MUSIC IN MUSIC THEORY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

DIVISION OF MUSIC HISTORY, THEORY
AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

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I propose to the Major Professor and to the Graduate Academic Degrees Committee (GADCom) a study of the following topic to be conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Music Theory: THE DRAMATIC AND MUSICAL EVOLUTION OF A UNIFYING MOTIVE IN “AUGUST 4, 1964” BY STEVEN STUCKY.

1. Purpose of the Study

In this thesis I will examine the evolution and expansion of one motive in a new historical oratorio by Steven Stucky as it drives towards the musical and dramatic climax in movement 10 and helps create an overall unity within the work. The libretto of this oratorio is dualistic, based on the confluence of two separate events that occurred on August 4th, 1964: the discovery of the bodies of three civil rights workers and the escalation of our involvement in the Vietnam war due to a mistaken belief we had been attacked first. Stucky alternates contrasting musical tableaux to portray the two separate events, one based in the Deep South and the other taking place in the White House. These two events unfold over the course of the piece as the tension builds, culminating in the sixth and final appearance of this motive, which occurs at the climax of the oratorio in movement 10. (A literal return of the music and text from the opening of the oratorio occurs in movement 10 as well.) The form of the oratorio greatly resembles Stucky’s description of Lutoslawski’s Fourth Symphony in which the full development of each musical section is restricted until this “main movement” is reached.¹

¹ Stucky speaks of Lutoslawski’s Fourth Symphony in his article “Lutoslawski in Retrospect” from the Los Angeles Philharmonic Program Book. “A simple example is his [Lutoslawski’s] penchant for beginning a long work with a series of disconnected episodes intended to draw us in as listeners, to engage our attention, but — by continually starting and stopping, or by constantly changing the subject — to frustrate our desire for logical development and emotional expression. Typically such a first movement will give way to a longer, more substantial, more continuous main movement. This is precisely what happens in the Fourth Symphony.” Steven Stucky, “Lutoslawski in Retrospect,” Theodore Presser Company: Los Angeles Philharmonic program book. <http://www.stevenstucky.com/writings.shtml> (accessed July 20, 2009).

This motive, in its first five presentations (as shown in example 1), is musically characterized by an ascending melodic line which is presented initially in movement 2 as the pitches $g^1 - a^1 - b_b^1 - c^2$, belonging to SC (0235) (ultimately heading toward the full statement of $d^1 - f^1 - f^1 - g^1 - a^1 - b_b^1 - c^2 - c^2$ in the fifth appearance of the motive.) The second appearance introduces a new pitch (f^1) to the previous collection, (omitting the c^2 at the top) and the third presentation combines the pitches from both previous occurrences of the motive into $f^1 - g^1 - a^1 - b_b^1 - c^2$ for an expanded statement of the motive. Incidentally, not only do the recurrences of these pitch classes in actual pitch space create a unifying link between the aural presentations of this motive, it is possible that the connection of the pitches $g^1 - a^1 - b_b^1 - c^2$ with SC (0235) or $a^1 - b_b^1 - c^2$ as a subset, SC (013), also creates a level of unity.² The fourth presentation ascends to a d_b^2 and connects with the baritone solo immediately following, which is the part of President Johnson (main character in the drama). I feel that the D_b is intended to delay the appearance of the pitch class D, which appears as a d^1 in the fifth appearance (occurring at the beginning of the motive), $d^1 - f^1 - f^1 - g^1 - a^1 - b_b^1 - c^2 - c^2$. I think that perhaps the D is intended to be the anacrusis for the quotation of *We Shall Overcome* as the gradual expansion of this ascending melodic motive from its first through fifth statement becomes a declamatory statement of “and we shall overcome someday” from the well-known Civil Rights anthem, shown in Example 2. Another musically unifying element found in the first four motivic occurrences includes a preceding sonority belonging to SC (01469), shown as S0, S1 and S2 in example 5 as well as the frequent appearance of Bb major and C major triads among the first five motives, labeled x and y in examples 4 and 6.

² Joseph N. Straus, “The Progress of a Motive in Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*”, *Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 2 (1991): 166. I am using Straus’ argument for fixed pitch-class identity as a unification element as precedent here.

The sixth and final transformation of the motive, shown as example 3, differs from the first five motivic appearances. This motivic statement contains harmonic elements from the previous examples, such as Bb major (specifically found in example 4a and a subset of sonority S1) and major triads in general, contains two pitch classes from the first five motives, such as Bb and C, and interesting enough has the addition of a D pedal (possibly intended to reference the pitch class D from example 5 whose arrival I suspect was initially thwarted by the Db in the fourth motive). The preceding Bb Major triad lasts for three measures preceding the motive, shown and labeled x in example 4a. Furthermore, the retention of pitch-class Bb and ultimately the C, m. 123, along with the series of major triads, belonging to SC (037) all serve to unify these measures with the first five appearances as well as unify this motive with other elements of the oratorio.³

In summary, in the body of this thesis I will discuss these six motivic occurrences, which I believe contain a specific quotation from *We Shall Overcome*. I intend to examine the variations and evolution of this quotation in relation to the overall musical and dramatic content of the oratorio.

2. Literature Review and Applicable Analysis

Looking into Stravinsky's music and accompanying literature, I will be incorporating elements from Joseph Straus' approach in "The Progress of a Motive in Stravinsky's the Rake's Progress" in this study. Straus follows a central invariant musical idea, C-C#, throughout the composition citing this motive as a "source of unity" since "its pitch-class identity remains fixed"⁴. There is a strong parallel here as certain pitches and pitch-classes reoccur in the evolution of Stucky's motive as well, as discussed

³ Beyond the scope of this thesis proposal, further detailed analysis of the alternating string sonority (marked Q in example 3) may reveal harmonic ties to other large sections of the oratorio.

⁴ Straus, 166.

previously. Since the pitches $g^1-a^1-b_b^1-c^2$ a (fully occurring in each of the first five motivic appearances (except the second) belong to SC (0235), it is possible to view SC (0235) as a possible unifying element as well with the second motive including a subset SC (013).

Straus' article includes the analysis of "ambiguous motives" that can be interpreted in either tonal or post-tonal domains as well as structurally "meet and compete" in the middle.⁵ It is in this "nexus", as Straus calls it,⁶ where the main character, President Johnson, and this unifying motive reside much of the time. A fundamental difference here, however, is that while there are a few functional moments (two specific examples are shown in examples 4a and 4b)⁷ and lots of non-functional tonal references (such as major or minor triads) found throughout the oratorio, the primary context in which these tonal references are heard seems to be mostly referential collections, i.e. octatonic, or the use of polytonality as a possible reference to the duality of the libretto itself. In "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky" by Arthur Berger, Berger argues against the term "polytonality" when referential sets are contained within a single collection "i.e. the octatonic scale."⁸ In example 5, all the pitch classes in sonority S1, could be drawn from Oct 1,2. However, with the dualistic nature of the libretto, (the confluence of two separate events), this sonority, S1, which precedes motives one through four (and appears followed by S2 in the second through fourth appearance), could also be viewed as two overlapping major triads with F as a common

⁵ Straus, 167-168.

⁶ Straus, 168.

⁷ The harmonic motion from vi to V/V in the third motive may be a reference to the traditional hymn harmonization of *We Shall Overcome*, shown in example 5a.

⁸ Arthur Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky", *Perspectives of New Music* 2 (1963) p. 22-23.

tone: [Bb, D, F] and [Db, (F), Ab]. Considering polytonality may contribute to a more meaningful analysis overall, particularly since the Bb major triad reoccurs both alone (shown as a I⁶ in example 4a, “x”, example 6: m. 129, example 3: mm. 116-118) and paired with other triads, (S1 from example 5).

The three full measures of a Bb major triad preceding Example 3, the *We Shall Overcome* reference in Bb and the other tonal references, such as the harmonic progressions in example 4a and 4b, all hint at the possible importance of Bb major. Therefore, the motive itself is open to tonal interpretations (some functional but mostly non-functional triadic elements), polytonal implications, interpretations based on atonal pitch-class set theory, and interpretations that relate pitch and pitch-class materials to the octatonic collection. I have included here some specific examples using these methodologies drawn from *August 4, 1964*. Melodically, the pitch-class collection from the first appearance of the motive, [G, A, Bb, C] could be considered a subset of Oct 0,1 in example 1, or could be viewed as belonging to SC (0235).⁹ This melody can also be viewed as a reference to Bb major, scale degrees 6-7-1-2 or as scale degrees 1-2-3-4 in G minor, the relative minor of Bb, which shows a possible connection to the g minor tonality found extensively in the opening measures of movement 1, shown in Example 7, which reappear throughout the oratorio.¹⁰

Harmonically, S0 as well as S1 and S2 (shown in example 5) can be mapped onto an octatonic collection as well as viewed polytonally. Removing this motive from the

⁹ Straus’ approach in *The Rake’s Progress* also includes the use of octatonic derivatives, employed frequently by Stavinsky and found in this oratorio, p. 168.

¹⁰ Further exploration is needed on the possible relative relationship or relative triadic transformation between the g minor appearances in movement 1 and 10 and Bb major. The a-flat minor 7th chord from these same sections of music, although a neighboring sonority on the surface, may prove to be related to the appearance of the A-flat major triad in example 6 as a possible parallel triadic transformation. (Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, p. 161.)

post-tonal context of this octatonic sonority for a moment, in mm. 92-93 a moment of functional tonality emerges from S0 and coalesces into a brief harmonic progression, shown in example 4a, $V^4_2 - I^6 - V/V$ in Bb. In the oratorio, this motive occurs just after President Johnson remembers a moment in the past where he visited a poor family in Appalachia and right before the following chorus statement “I think continually of those who were truly great.”¹¹ It is possible Stucky is using this functional harmonic progression to reference the past on two levels: the characters of the drama (Johnson and the Chorus) looking back in the past and the evocation of memories of a past musical heritage for the listener.¹² A similar harmonic progression occurs in the third appearance of the motive with vi in place of the I6 from the first appearance, a possible reference to the traditional harmonization of *We Shall Overcome*, shown in example 2.

Insofar as it creates a stronger argument for isolation and analysis of this motive, literature that sets precedents for defining a motive will be consulted. In “What’s in a Motive? Schoenberg and Schenker Reconsidered” Pieter C. van den Toorn discusses motive and its definition, mentioning uses such as “developing variations” which may be particularly applicable to the motive at hand,¹³ as the initial motive belonging to SC (0235) is expanded and varied. He also analyzes elements within a work that contribute to the recognizability of the motive as a separate entity.¹⁴ In *August 4, 1964*, sonorities that precede the first four motives (S0 and subsequent transpositions, S1 and S2), shown in example 5), recurring pitches and pitch-classes in the motive itself (as shown in

¹¹ A setting of Stephen Spender’s poem, “I Think Continually of Those Who Were Truly Great”

¹² Chandler Carter, “Stravinsky’s “Special Sense”: The Rhetorical Use of Tonality in “The Rake’s Progress”, *Music Theory Spectrum* 19 (1997). On page 60, Carter references Paul Griffiths and Donald Mitchell in suggesting that Stravinsky’s tonal references were an intentional reference to the past.

¹³ Pieter C. van den Toorn, “What’s in a Motive? Schoenberg and Schenker Reconsidered”, *Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 3 (1996) 371.

¹⁴ Van den Toorn, 370-399.

example 1), recurring harmonic elements (such as SC (037) on the pitch-class level (Bb major and C major (shown as x and y in examples 4, 5, and 6), prominent horn entrances following each motive (except for the fourth) and an ascending musical contour expressed initially as contour segment CSEG <0 1 2 3>¹⁵ all help mark this motive as a distinct entity and make its subsequent returns easy to hear.

Also subordinate to my main approach, references to other oratorios as found in *The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, or literature about any of those oratorios may be drawn upon for comparison if found to be relevant. Some examples given by Smither of twentieth century oratorios that may be drawn upon for comparison to *August 4, 1964* are Stravinsky's *Oedipus rex* (1927) for pitch organization and octatonic derivatives, and Wynton Marsalis' *Blood on the Fields* (1994) which treats the issue of slavery in America with both text and music by Marsalis.¹⁶ One tonal interpretation of August 4, 1964 might refer to jazz-type harmonies, which abound in *Blood on the Fields*. There is also the potential connection of a similar musical or dramatic treatment of the civil rights issue with the slavery element to be uncovered in further research.

Two works also based on historical subjects, like August 4, 1964, treat the atrocities of WWII: Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* (1941) and Penderecki *Dies irae: Oratorio in Memory of Those Murdered at Auchwitz*. Either of these may have parallels since *August 4, 1964* draws upon historical events and the escalation of the

¹⁵ Straus, in *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, uses a contour segment, or CSEG, to parallel a series of notes using numbers to show the relative placement of the pitches, expressed as a musical contour, within the musical segment. The number 0 shows the first pitch in the series of notes being described is the lowest pitch of the four, with 3 being the highest pitch and the final note in the musical fragment, 99-102.

¹⁶ The libretto for *August 4, 1964* was adapted by Gene Scheer and drawn from the President's daily diary, news reports, historical documents and personal mementos.¹⁶ Theodore Presser Company.
<http://www.stevenstucky.com/pr091808.shtml>.

Vietnam War.¹⁷ For a greater insight into the composer's point of view and possible influences I may also refer to his analyses and comments found in *Lutoslawski and His Music* (written by Steven Stucky) as well as other articles or reviews written by and about the composer.

3. *The Main Idea and its Subordinate Elements in the Thesis*

- *Analysis of the Six Motivic Reoccurrences*

In the main body of the thesis, all six motivic appearances will be discussed both individually and collectively in terms of melody, harmony, rhythm,¹⁸ and dramatic context (surrounding text in the libretto) using a wide variety of methodologies. Methodologies used will include, as stated previously, tonal interpretations (some functional but mostly non-functional triadic elements), polytonality expressing the conflicts and/or dualism within the libretto, interpretations based on atonal pitch-class set theory, and interpretations that relate pitch and pitch-class materials to interval cycles and their relations, like the octatonic collection.

- *The Motive and its Evolution*

The evolution of the six motivic occurrences will also be a primary focus beginning with the transformation of the first five into *We Shall Overcome*. The sixth and final transformation of the motive is more subtly derived from harmonic ideas seen in the first five appearances of the motive and combined with a more complex sonority marked as Q in example 3, perhaps bringing together harmonic elements from the rest of the oratorio but beyond the scope of this proposal. Coinciding with the climax of the

¹⁷ Smither, 638-642.

¹⁸ Although not discussed in this proposal, the rhythms of the first few motivic appearances evolve into the *We Shall Overcome* reference along with the pitch content, (a general glance at example 1 will reveal a metrical displacement of the statement in the fifth appearance occurring in the first two statements).

oratorio, these harmonic elements may potentially reveal, with further analysis, structural elements within the oratorio as a whole, or may be part of a larger scale harmonic development. It will be interesting to see how these isolated harmonic ideas relate to the whole. When directly applicable to the meaning or understanding of the motive, larger connections to the oratorio as a whole may also be revealed with further analysis, such as the G minor/Bb major relationship and Ab minor to Ab major transformation, both mentioned earlier in this proposal.

- Historical Uses of SC (0235) and Octatonic Connections

Since pitch collections belonging to SC (0235) might be viewed as a unifying presence in the first five appearances of the motive, to serve as background to further support my approach, uses of these sonorities that have been interpreted as belonging to SC (0235) in the twentieth century may yield further insight into the oratorio, particularly when used by composers that heavily influenced Stucky's compositional style. In a look at Bartok, for example, SC (0235), a subset of Oct 0,1, if viewed as a transpositional dyad¹⁹ might reveal mapping connections that relate to other musical elements within the oratorio as explored in "Bartok's Octatonic Strategies: A Motivic Approach" written by Richard Cohn. For instance, in the first appearance of the motive, the motivic tetrachord G-A-Bb-C, belonging to SC (0235), could be seen as two dyads G-A and Bb-C with the same intervallic content. The G as bottom note in the dyad maps onto Bb at T3. Since a connection between G minor and Bb major has already been noticed, this approach could prove to be useful if applied further. Further Stravinsky resources may reveal other

¹⁹ Richard Cohn, "Bartok's Octatonic Strategies: A Motivic Approach", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 2 (1991) 264-265.

applicable usages of collections of pitch classes that map onto the octatonic collection, such as SC (0235) and SC (037).

In conclusion, one difficulty of this thesis will be creating as solid a case for the connection of the sixth motive to the first five as I hope to achieve for the connection of examples 1-5 themselves. I suspect that further analysis over time will yield more evidence to support my initial conclusion that mm. 119-123 in movement 10 are not only a harmonic realization of pitches from the first five motives belonging to set class (037), but are also further unifying the oratorio by bringing together harmonic triads and seventh chords from elsewhere in the piece, movement 1 and 10 in particular.²⁰ The lack of other literature on this oratorio, due to its recent premiere, or of other Stucky works could be problematic; however, there are many approaches to post-tonal analysis available (particularly on Stravinsky, Bartok, Lutoslawski, and other influences of Stucky) that I am able to interact with in the current literature.

4. Research Tasks

Both the composer and librettist are presumably reachable if the need for an interview or clarification arises during further research. A detailed score analysis, review of applicable literature, search for other sources of knowledge on Stucky's music through resources such as SMT, examination of literature and works by composers known to have been influential as well as the writing of the main body of the thesis will be conducted through the spring semester of 2010 with the expected completion of the thesis in Fall 2010.

²⁰ The alternating sonority played by strings contains a G minor triad within its overall pitch collection and is immediately followed in m. 120 by a Bb major triad.

Appendix A: Proposed Outline of Thesis

Chapter 1

Pgs. 1-5: August 4, 1964, a general overview of the oratorio

Chapter 2

Pgs. 6-10: SC (0235) and its historical significance (its unifying presence in examples 1, 3, 4, and 5 in this work)

Chapter 3

Pgs. 11-20: SC (0235) and its initial appearance in movement two

Chapter 4

Pgs. 21-45: The four reoccurrences of the motive in movement five, the evolution into “We Shall Overcome”.

Chapter 5

Pgs. 45-60: The transformation of the motive from example 6 into the climax of the work

Chapter 6

Pgs. 61-65: Conclusions

Pgs. 65-70: Final Thoughts

Example 1

The Motivic Evolution into “We Shall Overcome”:

1st appearance: Movement 2, mm. 92-94, g¹-c²



“(and we shall) *overcome some*-(day)”

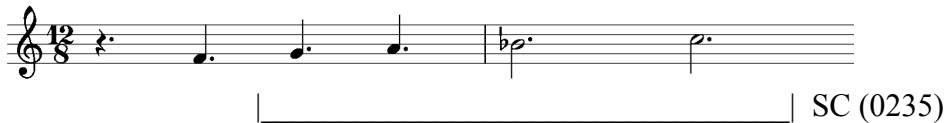
2nd appearance: Movement 5, mm. 2-4, f¹-b_b²



“(and we) *shall overcome* (someday)”

3rd appearance: Movement 5, mm. 18-21, f¹-c²

(1st appearance pitches + 2nd appearance pitches = expanded statement of motive)



“(and we) *shall overcome some* (day)”

4th appearance: Movement 5, mm. 111-114, f¹-d_b²



“(and we) *shall overcome some* (day?)”

5th appearance: Movement 5, mm. 127-130, d¹-c² and d²-c²



“*and we shall overcome someday*”

Example 2
We Shall Overcome (Civil Rights Anthem)
 The melody in mm. 128-130 in Example 5 = mm. 4 - 7* as taken from
 the United Methodist Hymnal

We Shall Overcome 533

I I⁽⁷⁾ vi V⁶/vi vi V/V* V

*Motion from vi to V/V found also in harmony of example 3

Example 3

The Sixth Appearance, Movement 10: mm. 116-125

A harmonic realization of elements from earlier motives:
major triads, members of SC (037) and recurrence of pitch-classes Bb and C

But it is my con-vic-tion, shared through-out our gov-ern-ment,—

Pitch-Class Bb

D Pedal

3 measures of Bb major (x)

D pedal

D maj

Bb maj

Q

That firm-ness in the right

Pitch-Class C

E maj

C# maj

Ab maj

*Half-step motive, also shown in example 7

Example 4: Brief Moments of Functional Tonality

Example 4a:

Movement 2: mm. 92-94 (first appearance of motive)

Cl. 1 in B \flat
Cl. 2 in B \flat
B. Cl. in B \flat

Bb: V^4_2 I^6 $*\underline{V/V}$

Example 4b:

Movement 5, mm. 19-20 (third appearance of motive)

18 **B**
Johnson
na - tion. —
Br.
W.W.
Bb: V^4_3 $*\underline{vi}$ V/V

*May be a reference to the traditional harmonization of We Shall Overcome, see example 2.

x = Bb major triad, y = C major triad

Example 5: The Preceding Sonorities

$S_0 = [E, 2, 4, 7, 8]$, belonging to SC (01469) These pitch collections also map onto Oct 1,2



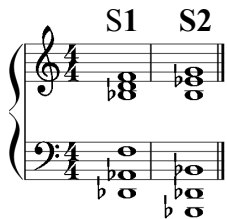
As a polytonal sonority: $[E, G\#, (B)]$ and $[G, (B), D]$

$S_1 = [5, 8, T, 1, 2]$, belonging to SC (01469) This pitch collection maps onto Oct 1,2

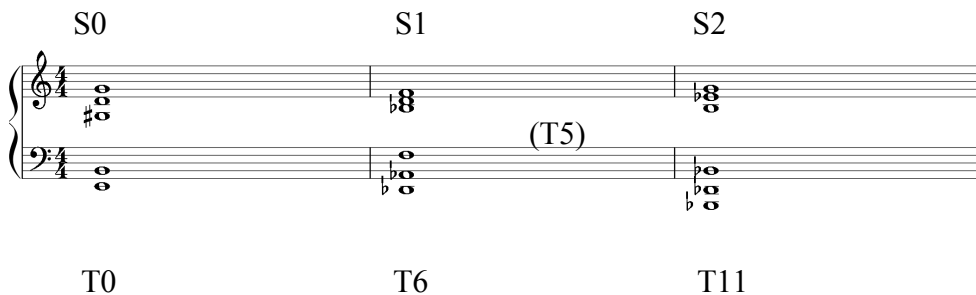
As a polytonal sonority: $[Bb, D, (F)]^*$ and $[Db, (F), Ab]$

$S_2 = [T, 1, 3, 6, 7]$, belonging to SC (01469) This pitch collections maps onto Oct 0,1

As a polytonal sonority: $[Eb, G, (Bb)]$ and $[Gb, (Bb), Db]$



Transpositions of S_0



$* = x$

$() =$ indicates common tone

Example 6 **The Fifth Appearance of the Unifying Motive,** **Movement 5: mm. 127-130**

Harmonization of this motive finishes with the same major triads as the first appearance of the motive, shown in example 4a

x = a Bb major triad
y = a C major triad

Largo maestoso (♩ = 56)

f

jus - tice.

Br.

ff

Chaney

129

L

ff

f

"I don't have a price."

Johnson

And we shall o - ver - come. We shall o - ver -

p (accomp.)

x y

"I don't have a price."

A.

ff

pp sub.

f

pp

pp

Str.

Hr., EH, Vc.

Example 7

G minor, Ab minor and the Half Step Motive

Movement 1: mm. 1-8

AUGUST 4, 1964

Libretto adapted by
Gene Scheer

Music by
Steven Stucky

1. The Saddest Moment
Soprano, Mezzo soprano, Tenor, Chorus, Orchestra

Largamente (♩ = 60) (Tempo I)

Mrs. Chaney (Soprano)

Piano

G minor

It was the

G minor Ab minor

Chaney

sad - dest mo - ment of my life, it was the

Hr.

mf

G minor

*Examples of the Half-Step Motive

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