



PROJECT MUSE®

Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi (review)

Eleanor Selfridge-Field

Notes, Volume 66, Number 3, March 2010, pp. 542-544 (Review)

Published by Music Library Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.0.0328>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/376383>

involved, highlighting the main points by centering upon a limited number of works, and gathering the rest of his useful, detailed information for hundreds of pieces in suitable appendices. Including this immense number of operas within the main narrative also means exposing oneself unnecessarily to oversights and errors. I may point out but one: Buch states that in *L'arbore di Diana* (Vienna, 1787), the composer Vicente Martín y Soler "limited musical evocations of the supernatural to the ensembles for women's voices" (p. 237). In fact, the score contains a number of occurrences of Buch's "marvelous" and "terrible" topics, specially in the second finale, which includes incantations, storms, pedal points, recitative that interrupts an ensemble, "elegant" heavenly music and so forth. Moreover, I have suggested in the foreword to the modern edition (Madrid: ICCMU, 2001, pp. xxiv–xxv) that this celebrated Italian opera is a major source for Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. A consideration of this proposition might have given a different twist to Buch's definition of that masterpiece: "a kind of ambitious German version of recent *opéra comique* with an oriental fairy-tale text" (pp. 345–46).

Finally, given the wealth of interconnected concepts to which the author resorts, a theoretical discussion of how he understands the semantic functioning of these earmarks would have been desirable. Included here and there are brief explanations of the genre's designators: fantasy, supernatural, marvelous, magic, terrible, and so on. But the relation of these to, for example, the affect of fury or the description of a storm is not made clear, at least for the music of the earlier part of the century. Perhaps more importantly, "genre," "style," "topic" and other analogous categories are apparently used interchangeably and without a methodologically necessary clarification.

In the end, no matter what quibbles one might pose, this book is an indispensable tool for anyone who pretends to understand eighteenth-century music, and the rich insights it offers more than make up for its minor imperfections.

LEONARDO J. WAISMAN

CONICET/ Universidad Nacional de Córdoba,
Argentina

Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi. By Bella Brover-Lubovsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. [xix, 357 p. ISBN 9780253351296. \$44.95.] Music examples, illustrations, bibliography, indexes.

Musicologists who work on repertoires of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often give their own account of pertinent principles of harmonic usage, because standard accounts may not do justice to varied practices that occur within the "tonal period" (from roughly 1690 to 1910). Yet it is tacitly acknowledged that the tonal language of, say, Corelli and the tonal language of Brahms have little in common. The tidy constructs of theorists exist more elegantly in the mind than in the messy terrain of music. Bella Brover-Lubovsky's study explores the messy terrain in a study that is both deeper and broader than its title suggests. She takes generous account of a great range of harmonic theories before, during, and after Vivaldi.

Her *Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi* has many strengths. It is rigorous, systematic, comprehensive, and original. It can be differentiated from studies of earlier repertoires devoted to the emergence of tonality (Lowinsky, Dahlhaus); of modal-tonal relationships (Powers, Judd); and of other Baroque repertoires (McClary, Chafe, Silbiger, Barnett). In contrast to a large body of historically oriented music theory in which one posits a precept, then shows a few pertinent examples to "prove" its validity, Brover-Lubovsky's study is based on the examination of almost all of Vivaldi's available works, currently numbered at 808. This includes substantial quantities of vocal music, some of it still unedited. In contrast to a widely held view that all of Vivaldi's music is written to one formula, she finds endless variety and nuance in his procedures. She does not force the facts to support any one view. Whatever is, is. How well Vivaldi's tonal plans fit any particular theory of eighteenth-century harmony is re-evaluated over and over again.

One of the most fascinating things about the study is its clever juxtaposition of concepts from practical theory manuals of Vivaldi's time and milieu—notably those of

the harpsichordists Francesco Gasparini and Johann David Heinichen—with Vivaldi's own music, in which the harpsichord plays no independent role. The use of practical manuals in the explication of compositional strategies (as opposed to the use of speculative manuals as a framework for composition) is a rare occurrence. The arguments are cogent and generally persuasive. Brover-Lubovsky locates Vivaldi's understanding of tonality closest to the views of Gasparini, as expounded in *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo* (1708). Quite apart from the minutiae of modal-tonal relations, this makes good circumstantial sense: as *maestro di coro* at the Pietà from 1701, it was Gasparini who was responsible for Vivaldi's hire as violin master in 1703, and Gasparini's departure for Rome in 1713 that led to Vivaldi's appointment as his successor. However, because Gasparini's advice is addressed to keyboard players, it has been easy to assume (apparently incorrectly) that it had no particular importance for composers of ensemble music.

Vivaldi's debt to Heinichen is (according to this study) slightly less, but the theory itself is more highly elaborated and synthesizes a broader musical experience than that of Gasparini. Heinichen came to Venice to learn how to compose opera. His *Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung . . . zu vollkommener Erlernung des General-Basses* (Hamburg, 1711) must have gone to press prior to his arrival. He would have encountered Vivaldi and his father in the orchestra at Sant'Angelo, where Heinichen's operas *Le passioni per troppo amore* and *California* were both performed in the winter of 1713. The lackadaisical attitude of the orchestra (who turned up three hours late for one performance) was offered as a rationale for the lack of success of the second work. There would have been no reason to suspect that the name most commonly associated with the formulation of the circle of fifths—Heinichen's—would have been held in any particular esteem by Vivaldi. Yet Brover-Lubovsky shows that in Heinichen's revised text, published in Dresden (1728) under the title *Der General-Bass in der Composition, oder Neue und gründliche Anweisung*, he expanded his view to allow for phenomena he may first have encountered in the music of Vivaldi and other Italian composers. Overall, she finds, Vivaldi's practice

falls closer to Gasparini's model, in which she considers tonal and modal systems to have been synthesized in a particular way.

With respect to both theorists, Brover-Lubovsky recognizes not only point-by-point correspondences between precept (theirs) and practice (Vivaldi's) but, more significantly, she compares the overall set of relationships between major and minor modes, and the kinds of harmonic progressions that can be associated predominantly with one mode, one key, and one mood (as described in an underlying text). By taking their systems as she finds them (and not by way of intermediaries' accounts), she forms a model of tonality that may suit other repertoires of the first half of the eighteenth century but surely does leave little if anything in Vivaldi's practice unmentioned. Obviously it is not possible in a review to do justice to intricate arguments, but the evidence bears out the claims. She calls attention to later theories, such as those of Vallotti, who postulated "harmonic modes" that resulted from the simplification of contrapuntal practice. She has made use of materials rarely consulted by Western scholars, such as treatises on harmony (some from the eighteenth century) circulated in manuscript in Eastern Europe or printed in non-Roman alphabets in Russia and Israel. They all leave their residues in a rich parade of ideas.

A particularly interesting chapter is concerned with the "modal implications of tonal organization," and within it the apparently random variability between modal and tonal key signatures (i.e., between G minor cued by one flat and G minor cued by two). She finds that although both are used throughout Vivaldi's career, the operas and oratorio in which the tonal signature is used are more dramatically intense. She points out that Vivaldi's notation does not in this respect conform to the practice of his contemporaries, except possibly Gasparini's (whose music is significantly less available than Vivaldi's).

Brover-Lubovsky claims that "Vivaldi's active involvement of modal contrasts appears inseparable from his imaginative treatment of structural models of the concertos, choral, and aria movements" (p. 93). According to her, the relationships between phrases, movement sections, and movements are carefully constructed. She

credits Vivaldi with the use of harmonic extensions to call attention to specific texts in his sacred vocal works. That he often avoided (by a variety of different means) returning to the tonic except at the end of a movement is a point made repeatedly. (This is not surprising; it became a hallmark of later music.) Some of Vivaldi's earliest works employ crude harmonic plans incorporating preparations for one key that resolve (unexpectedly) to a different key, for example, the brief Adagio with a cadence to a dominant on E (minor except for the final *tierce de Picardie* alteration), leading to a Sarabande in C major in the Trio Sonata op. 1, no. 3. This does not necessarily refute her point, however, because the opus was published in 1705 but was probably composed prior to Vivaldi's acquaintance with Gasparini and at least three years ahead of Gasparini's treatise. Also, she finds that in his approach to the sonata, Vivaldi often establishes three tonal areas, even in binary movements, and that the order of key regions he passes through is not always predictable.

A series of individual chapters examines Vivaldi's harmonic practice in relation to specific musical devices. The lament bass, for example, is said to produce "equilibrium" between the pursuit of new (musical) goals and the "consolidation of tonal centers" (p. 156). Its use is heavily concentrated in the earlier part of Vivaldi's life (up to 1717). In the harmonic treatment of sequence, Brover-Lubovsky finds an apt application of Eric Chafe's "counter-clockwise" circle of fifths—that is, sequences that move from subdominant to subdominant instead of dominant to dominant. Here, she holds, Gasparini's influence is apparent. Heinichen's influence comes into view in the use of secondary dominant sevenths (as for example the A and G in the sequence Bb-F-A-E-G-D . . . ; p. 183). Vivaldi also at times tightens the C by moving up by fourths or down by thirds (as in the aforementioned Trio Sonata). Contrary to the dismissive view that Vivaldi's cyclical modulations are trite, she claims that they are important contributors to the "whirlpool" of dramatic effects through which he produces a sense of climax. A noteworthy sidelight is the attention she gives to Heinichen's shifting views of modulation between 1711 and 1728 (p. 227).

She views the subject of harmonic function by degree with fresh eyes, noting the occasional absence of a strong concentration on the dominant (e.g., in the *Lauda Jerusalem*, RV 609); the de-emphasis of the dominant, so that although it is present, it recedes to the background; an occasional concentration on the subdominant; an emphasis on the key of the mediant in works in a minor key (one-third of the repertory); and several other tonal plans that show little kinship to the textbook conduct of "tonal music." She holds that tonal structure is somewhat dependent on key choice (pp. 257–62). Her summary statement (p. 276) is that in Vivaldi's music she finds an "intricate quality [to] his tonal space and harmonic syntax."

Throughout, Brover-Lubovsky presents Vivaldi as someone who found his own way through the harmonic labyrinth by exploring every byway but somehow always finding his way out at the other side. She notes how frequently Vivaldi defied what is now the conventional wisdom of theories of harmony by favoring minor modes disproportionately to his contemporaries; by avoiding the tonic except in a final cadence; by employing a variety of "circles" in his modulatory schemes; by thinking outside the box of simple binary (tonic-dominant; major-relative minor) contrasts; and by adapting his practice to the needs of its message. While it is unlikely that readers will agree with every claim she makes, the book is a monument to the variegated "tonal space" that existed before the formal study of "harmony" became a staple of composers' lives.

ELEANOR SELFIDGE-FIELD

Stanford University

The Century of Bach and Mozart: Perspectives on Historiography, Composition, Theory, and Performance. Edited by Sean Gallagher and Thomas Forrest Kelly. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. [xi, 427 p. ISBN 0964031736. \$45.] Music examples, illustrations, index.

On 23–25 September 2005 at Harvard University, a venerable lineup of musicologists, historians, critics, and performers honored Harvard professor Christoph