

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Megan Kaes Long. *Hearing Homophony: Tonal Expectation at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century***

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**E-book reviewed by Tim Daly**

A consistent problem in the analysis of changing musical technique is the temptation to apply anachronistic methods simply because they are well understood, or to measure the nascent style with tools designed for the mature form. This is especially the case when considering the development of tonal harmony, where the use of harmonic analysis well suited to common-practice music runs the risk of seeing earlier technique as an imperfect realisation of the later style: all roads lead to Beethoven! *Hearing Homophony* by Megan Kaes Long seeks to avoid this snare by taking a strictly circumscribed body of repertoire from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and examining it through the lens of expectation. In doing so, she demonstrates how the combined effect of this repertoire's typical features conspires to produce an expectation of tonal resolution, even if this resolution is not yet completely functional in harmonic terms.

Long's chosen repertoire is the partsong, *balletti* and *canzonette* of the last two decades of the sixteenth century, as well as the English and German equivalents that took their inspiration from these Italian forms. Not everyone will find these pieces intrinsically fascinating. The pieces are typically short, repetitive, almost entirely homophonic and full of *fa la la*; Thomas Morley's famous *Now Is the Month of Maying* is among the more complex pieces considered. The simplicity of the music is, however, a necessary part of Long's process: small-scale, simple

works make possible the systemic description of their formal conventions and the consequent analysis of their effect. Attempting a similar analysis of the more contrapuntal writing that existed alongside the *balletti* would require an act of interpretation to produce a vertically-aligned reduction, where the chosen repertoire provides this as part of its basic structure. Choosing this repertoire then cuts a layer of complication from the analysis while also making it easier to see the effect of extra-musical considerations on the partsong organisation.

Analysis of music does not require music theory, and examination of tonality need not depend on harmony. Long canvasses the difficulties of a purely harmonic approach in her opening chapter at the same time as she establishes a connection with the scholars of musical expectation travelling in the footsteps of Leonard Meyer. Following Meyer and drawing on David Huron's more recent work, Long's approach explicitly prioritises rhythm and metre over pitch. This emphasis recalls the importance of rhythm in Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff's *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, and suggests that it is these rhythmic factors that allow the development of complex, functional harmony, even though such harmonic syntax is not a prominent feature of this repertoire. The cognitive analysis of music that results from considering expectation makes it possible to identify the structures around which tonality coalesced.

Long's demonstration that early tonality is built on these non-tonal structures is perhaps the most enlightening aspect of the book. Chapter by chapter, Long describes a series of factors that shape these partsongs until a complete framework is ready for colouring. First, the dance rhythms associated with *balletti* create a regularity that induces expectation; then the metrical regularity of the Italian verse-forms adds another layer. Next, Long examines the relationship between the phrases built on these verses and considers the way they relate to one another. The rhetorical impulse towards providing a consequent for each antecedent and answering opening with closure finally allows an explicitly tonal examination of the relationship between 'tonic' and 'dominant' cadences. The development of this system of expectation and the ways different composers exploited it are expertly traced.

If Italian music is Long's point of departure, she also provides detailed consideration of English and German equivalents, with Thomas Morley and Hans Leo Hassler as the principal representatives. These derivative repertoires show how local culture and particularly habits of text setting moulded the musical forms that resulted. Morley's grouping of phrases to impose a further level of regularity and consequent expectation on the partsong forms a notable contrast with Italian practice, while in Germany the influence of *Bar* form and a different attitude to the concept of translation produced further variants. These variations, however, serve mainly to underline the unifying principles of the collected repertoire, and Long's archetypes are sufficiently well established that her discussion of an eccentric composition of Hassler establishes that the piece is a deliberate variation from the norm, rather than a challenge to the norm itself.

The final chapter provides the only substantial consideration of music outside the chosen repertoire through its discussion of early sixteenth-century *frottole*, French *musique mesurée* of the 1580s and early polyphonic settings of the Lutheran chorales. The *frottole* establish that a number of the defining features of the later *balletti* and *canzonette* were present around the beginning of the century and thus argue the need for a much broader discussion of the origins of tonal organisation. *Musique mesurée* and the chorales, on the other hand, suggest that even apparently subtle differences in the formal structures of these pieces produce different tonal

priorities. Of particular interest is the implication that it is the function of these forms that contribute their influence. Chorales and *frottole*, like the later partsongs, were written to be accessible, either to enthusiastic amateurs or to church congregations, where *musique mesurée* was the practice-led research of the musically sophisticated. It is no surprise, then, that the more popular forms played a greater role in shaping musical expectation.

What readers find lacking in *Hearing Homophony* will reflect the interests they bring to the book. Specialists in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries might want a greater discussion of the *balletti* in their broader context: how did this simple homophonic repertoire live alongside the contrapuntal chromaticism of Marenzio, Gesualdo and others? Students of common-practice music may wish for an account of how the basic tonal principles at work here developed into functional harmony. As someone whose primary interest lies in earlier contrapuntal music, I miss an account of the connection between Long's tonal framework and fifteenth-century counterpoint, the more so given that the compatibility of counterpoint and tonality is established when discussing the *frottole*. To focus on the fact that *Hearing Homophony* does not answer all questions, however, would be to miss Long's point; the book is not the story of the development of tonality from its beginning to its maturity. The examination of earlier sixteenth-century repertoire is simply an example of how this analysis might be expanded. Instead, Long provides a snapshot of one variety of tonality at a particular stage of its early development. The book provides one piece of a puzzle: it requires other pieces to build the large-scale picture while also making those other pieces easier to identify and place.

#### **About the Author**

Tim Daly is a Melbourne-based musicologist, lecturer, and performer. His research focuses on counterpoint and compositional process in fifteenth-century music.