

Hierarchical Structure in Music Theory *before* Schenker

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Abstract

Schenker's view of hierarchy of structural levels (*Schichten*) has become a core of music theory nowadays. His fervent supporters in Anglo-American tradition, as well as those the least involved with his teaching, agree that the major achievement of Schenker is his understanding of the layered hierarchical structure of a musical work. It remains to be proved, however, that Schenker was the first to introduce hierarchy into music theory and that the theory before Schenker lacked such understanding. This article is intended to show that classical European theory before Schenker had much to offer in this area.

Musical work is a larger category than the voice-leading paradigm. Emotions of the listeners, intentions of the composer, aspects of historic evolution of a piece in performing practice, heterogeneous multiplicity of form, thematic structure, interaction of harmony and meter, contrapuntal and linear effects, are indispensable components of what is musical work as a whole.

The list of hierarchical structures, used in music theory before Schenker, is extensive. However, the author of graphic analysis managed to restore the interest of theorists in the idea of hierarchy and that was, undoubtedly, his significant contribution.