

1-1-1997

Letter To The Editor

David Damschroder

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcollections.lipscomb.edu/jmtp>

Recommended Citation

Damschroder, David (1997) "Letter To The Editor," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*: Vol. 11, Article 8.
Available at: <https://digitalcollections.lipscomb.edu/jmtp/vol11/iss1/8>

This Letter to the Editor is brought to you for free and open access by Carolyn Wilson Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy by an authorized editor of Carolyn Wilson Digital Collections.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From David Damschroder

I read with interest Michael R. Rogers's review of my *Listen and Sing* in Volume Ten of this journal. As anyone who has written a textbook knows, the opinions of instructors are strong and varied. An author can learn from and be swayed by criticism, but ultimately must do what he or she thinks best, based on core insights and values. Instructors who do not intersect sufficiently with an author's perspective have other textbook options.

The editors of this journal have offered me this space to alert its readership to some inaccurate statements contained in the review. The following description is not correct:

Directly underneath almost every sight-singing and dictation melody, for example, are brief written hints about how and what to listen for. These do not constitute a complete analysis but rather direct the student's (and teacher's!) attention to telling details of structure and organization (p. 209).

This inaccuracy would not amount to much, except that Rogers then proceeds to find fault, based on his misconception:

Maybe the students should be 'doing' more of the analytical work and focusing less on 'receiving' a finished product of someone else's mind; maybe these are the kinds of hints that students should be asked to construct on their own during repeated hearings (in the case of dictation) or during repeated score perusals (in the case of singing) rather than being handed the hints in advance for free (p. 210).

I agree wholeheartedly with Rogers and, in fact, have constructed *Listen and Sing* accordingly. Students need some guidance, but not the saturation of having hints for "almost every" exercise. Exactly

half of the Solo Melodies are accompanied by hints (always the odd-numbered exercises, never the even-numbered exercises), while six of every ten Melodic and Harmonic Dictation exercises have hints. The latter ratio is not apparent from a perusal of the text alone, since blank staves are provided for only six of every ten dictations (the six with hints). The others appear in the 252-page *Instructor's Manual*.

I am uncertain whether Rogers acquired the *Instructor's Manual* before writing his review of *Listen and Sing*. I would like to think that he did. He praises the quality of my hints: "These many wonderful pedagogical tips alone are worth the price of the book" (p. 209). Since 294 of these hints appear below empty staves in the text, one might expect that he has viewed the music that they elucidate. And he criticizes some of my dictation choices: "The dictations (both melodic and harmonic) sometimes seem too long to exercise one of the main benefits of the task, development of short-term memory" (p. 213). Length is less a factor of the number of measures than of the musical content, which can be viewed only in the *Instructor's Manual*. Eight measures of sixteenth notes would make for a "longer" exercise than eight measures of half notes. But other evidence suggests that he did not familiarize himself with the *Instructor's Manual*. As noted above, he was unaware of the number of dictation exercises supplied in the *Instructor's Manual*. And one of his criticisms is directly countered by my commentary in the *Instructor's Manual's* eighteen-page introduction. Rogers writes:

Starting pitches and neatly placed bar lines are always (somewhat artificially) provided instead of requiring students to infer tonic, infer length and meter, etc.--all tasks that mimic real-life musical situations (p. 213).

I write:

Empty staves are provided in the text for six of the ten melodic dictation exercises for each chapter. . .For the four supplementary melodies provided in the *Instructor's Manual*, you choose what to tell them before the performance. I recommend that at least the clef and either the key or the first pitch be given (*Instructor's Manual*, vii-viii).

Though the *Instructor's Manual* is not sent automatically when an instructor requests an examination copy of *Listen and Sing*, the Schirmer sales representative who serves Oklahoma, where Rogers teaches, informs me that she does not hesitate to supply one when an instructor requests it. At that time, sales representatives could have been contacted either through Schirmer's Web page or its toll-free number.

Roger's also misrepresents the text's coverage, as follows:

Secondary dominants (in melodic study only, not harmony) are treated in some detail, but only a very few melodies (out of hundreds), and no harmonic progressions, include real examples of key shift (p. 214).

Were this true, my text would be an abysmal failure. Though I may cover modulation less thoroughly than Rogers would like, my treatment of secondary dominants in harmonic contexts is extensive. All of these topics are introduced on pages 305 through 307, where the terms *applied dominant*, *secondary dominant*, *applied leading-tone*, *secondary leading-tone*, *tonicization*, *modulation*, and *pivot chord* appear in bold italic type and are accompanied by chordal examples. It appears that Rogers missed this and missed literally hundreds of harmonic progressions that reinforce these concepts on the remaining 350 pages of the text and in the *Instructor's Manual*.

Finally, Rogers makes the following assertion:

The personalities and flavors of the notes are missing along with any recognition of how changing contexts affect their meaning. . . The teeming inner world of tugs and magnetism that defines tonality is unaccounted for in the flattened-out, nonhierarchical perspective of this text (p. 212).

Frankly, I was anticipating the very opposite criticism from some reviewers: that my outlook is too overtly Schenkerian for my young audience. Instead, I'm accused of being "nonhierarchical." Hierarchical thinking pervades *Listen and Sing*, particularly in its hundreds of hints where I demonstrate how the application of music theory can "enhance artistry and. . . forestall mechanical pitch-manipulation" (*Instructor's Manual*, p. v). As soon as a "changing context" is

introduced (namely, when the dominant is presented as an alternative to tonic in Chapter 2), I demonstrate how context affects scale degrees 7 and 8. I assess “instability” and “stability” and explain how a chord can be “prolonged.” I use the words “subordinating” and “hierarchy” in my commentary, and emphasize (in italics) that “a pitch may fulfill several different functions within a key” (p. 18). Other evidence of my hierarchical perspective can be found in the hints to Solo Melodies 2-7 and 2-9 and Melodic Dictation 2-4 (all of which reveal “associations among nonadjacent pitches”), to cite instances from only the second of the text’s twenty-six chapters.

Criticism is useful to instructors making adoption decisions and to authors contemplating future editions only when it is based on a thorough and accurate assessment of a work. Thus I offer these remarks as a corrective to the review as published in Volume Ten.