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Reply to Ryan McClelland's Article "Teaching Phrase Ryhthm through Minuets from Haydn's String Quartets," vol. 20, 2006

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In his article "Teaching Phrase Rhythm through Minuets from Haydn's String Quartets," Ryan McClelland includes an extensive reference to my presentation on hypermeter in chapter 11 of my textbook, *Harmony in Context* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003). I appreciate Prof. McClelland's attention to my work, as well as his own presentation on the pedagogy of phrase rhythm. I would like to provide commentaries to some particular points in his discussion of my chapter 11.

First, a clarification: My use of the accent and unaccent symbols differs substantially from Cooper and Meyer's use of the same symbols. Cooper and Meyer assign accents or unaccents to groups (that is, to time spans), from the lowest to the highest hierarchical levels. At higher levels, patterns of accents and unaccents are assigned to phrases, periods, sections, or complete pieces. I assign accents or unaccents, on the other hand, to time points, not time spans. Notice that my accents or unaccents always correspond with beats (at the metric or hypermetric levels), not with groups or time spans. I chose to use accent and unaccent symbols, as opposed to more neutral points (as Lerdahl and Jackendoff do) or lines (as Kramer does), because my discussion hinges on the difference and independence between metric accents (shown by these symbols), tonal accents, and structural accents. In this context, I find it useful, as I communicate these concepts to students, to be able to characterize metric accents as strong and weak. I certainly had no hidden agenda to use these symbols, as McClelland seems to suggest when he states that "the real motivation for Roig-Francolí's hypermetric notation only becomes apparent several pages later in his discussion of the first eight measures of the third movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony" (p. 10). I appreciate McClelland's attempt at reading my mind to find my "real motivation," but we call this type of thing intentional fallacy. As much as McClelland chooses to focus on the Beethoven example because he disagrees with my hypermetric interpretation, that is only one of many examples (nine, to be exact)

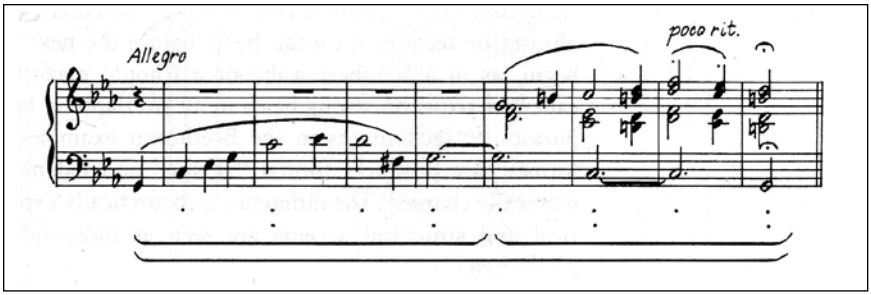
where I use the metric symbols in that chapter, and I fail to see how anyone could interpret that example–to which I devote only eight lines of text–as proof of my "real motivation" to use the symbols.

Second, a correction: My analysis of the opening eight measures of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5, III, is not actually mine, but Lerdahl and Jackendoff's. The issue here is one of the most controversial and discussed matters in the literature on hypermeter, and one that has generated strongly contradictory interpretations among leading rhythm and meter scholars: What is the accentual pattern of a four-measure phrase? Because there are extensive discussions on this matter in several well-known sources, I will not attempt to provide here a summary of the controversy generated by the various answers to this question. I will only say that in a textbook for undergraduates I decided not to take a dogmatic stand on this issue, and, although I stated that "[the strong-weak-strong-weak] pattern is indeed the most standard metric design for four-bar (or eight-bar) phrases" (*Harmony in Context*, p. 358), I did not "hold it as axiomatic that a four-measure hypermeasure begins with a strong beat" (as McClelland does, if I understand him correctly), in following with Lerdahl and Jackendoff's interpretation of four-bar hypermeasures. Indeed, in *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, these authors identify three possible hypotheses for metric accents in a four-bar phrase. Hypothesis A is the strong-weak-strong-weak pattern. Hypothesis B is the weak-strong-weak-strong pattern, and hypothesis C is the strong-weak-weak-strong pattern. After demonstrating that hypothesis C is untenable, Lerdahl and Jackendoff write:

> This leaves hypotheses A and B. In both, structural accent can be regarded as a force independent of meter, expressing the rhythmic energy of pitch structure across grouping structure. A dogmatic preference for either hypothesis would distort the flexible nature of the situation; one or the other–or perhaps something more complicated–pertains in a given instance (p. 32).

Following this statement, they show the opening of Mozart's Sonata K. 331 (their example 2.21a) as an illustration of hypothesis A, and *the opening of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5, III, (example 2.21b, reproduced on the next page) as an illustration of hypothesis B*. In other words, not only do they not interpret this phrase as beginning on a strong beat (as McClelland states in his footnote 12, citing page 34 of

Lerdahl and Jackendoff instead of p. 33, where the example and their discussion can be found), but they actually show it as an example of a hypermeasure beginning on a weak hyperbeat (just the opposite of what McClelland claims they do).



Example 2.21b from Lerdahl and Jackendoff's
A Creative Theory of Tonal Music

By using this example, as Lerdahl and Jackendoff do for the same purpose, I was not only leaving open the possibility (as unusual as it may be) that a hypermeasure may not always and necessarily begin on a strong beat (thus avoiding one of the dogmatic stances that has led to so much controversy), but I was showing one more example of conflicting and independent metric, tonal, and structural accents. Schenker's interpretation of m. 1 as an upbeat (*Free Composition*, figure 146.5) does not conflict with Lerdahl and Jackendoff's interpretation of m. 1 as a metrically weak measure, followed by the metrically strong measure 2. The only issue here is whether the hypermeasure begins on m. 1 (weak) or m. 2 (strong), but this does not change the interesting relationship between metric, tonal, and structural accents in this phrase, and that is in the end what I tried to convey to the student with this and all other examples in this section of my book (titled "Harmony, Rhythm, and Meter: Tonal and Metric Accents").

To summarize: I take issue with McClelland's statement that Lerdahl and Jackendoff interpret the Beethoven phrase as beginning at m. 2 (a metrically strong measure) on their page 34, and I acknowledge my debt to them (as I do in footnote 3 of chapter 11) as the origin of my example showing the hypermeasure in this phrase as beginning on m. 1 (a metrically weak measure), as shown by their example 2.21b on page 33. In any case, I'm fully aware and respectful of Schenker's reading of m. 1 as an upbeat. Because both interpretations read m. 1 as weak and m. 2 as strong, they

are far less conflicting than McClelland suggests. An interpretation reading m. 1 as strong, on the other hand, would seem to be much more problematic and, I should think, musically untenable. In any case, I prefer not to live in a music-theoretical world ruled by axioms and dogmas, but rather in a post-modern theoretical space in which things are not necessarily only black and white. I don't believe there is a single ("true") interpretation for many of the musical problems we face. Indeed, I can equally understand and respect both interpretations of Beethoven's phrase (Schenker's and Lerdahl and Jackendoff's). Much of the beauty of great music so often lies precisely in its capacity to allow multiple interpretations.