

DISTINGUISHED RESIDENCY IN MUSIC THEORY

“Harmonizing the Uncanny: A Study of Symbolism in Triadic Progression”



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Wednesday, April 10, 2019, 6:15 p.m.
419 Music Practice Building

Free and open to the public.

ABSTRACT

In triadic music, chromatic deviations from tonal function can offer effective means for illustrating fantasy, magic, or psychological escapism. Studies by Richard Cohn, Scott Murphy, and others identify art- and film-music examples ranging from Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* to John Williams’ *Star Wars* that connect particular types of progression with descriptions of uncanny or supernatural phenomena. This paper expands our understanding of the technique by exploring these associations in contemporary popular music. Surveying a wide range of songs from the past 60 years, this paper explores three different methodologies: (1) tracking a specific progression type across a wide range of artists and styles, (2) tracking a range of chromatic progressions across the work of a single artist, and (3) taking a statistical, corpus study approach, using the 740 songs in the McGill Billboard Corpus to represent the genre. The results of the study suggest that a given progression’s potential for uncanny text painting relates to its position within a phrase as well as its familiarity within the given syntax. Furthermore, compared to film music, the extra-musical associations in popular music appear to be just as potent but less specific. voice homorhythmy in order to achieve a more parametrically- and stylistically-diverse curriculum.

BIO

David Forrest serves as Associate Professor of Music Theory at Texas Tech University. He has presented research across Europe and the United States, predominantly on popular music, music theory pedagogy, and the music of Benjamin Britten. Dr. Forrest’s work has been published in several journals including *Music Theory Spectrum*, *Music Theory Online*, and *College Music Symposium*. He serves as lead editor and contributing author to the newly published book, *Essays on Benjamin Britten from a Centenary Symposium* from Cambridge Scholars Publishing and is currently authoring a chapter on the music of Kate Bush for the Routledge *Handbook on Women’s Work in Music*.

