

Distinguished Lecturers in Music Theory Series



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Bach's Arrow: Temporal Orientation in Meter, Hypermeter, and Form

Tuesday, February 8, 2022
12:45pm EST
Via Zoom

Register for Zoom Webinar at
<https://bit.ly/3nNOvXg>

Informal conversation with graduate
students immediately to follow

Lecture Abstract:

Karol Berger has argued compellingly that the second half of the 18th century saw increasing interest in narrative, linearly directed approaches to form, and that this trend reflected important cultural developments, as emphasis shifted from divine action within a harmonious cosmos to human agency shaping contingent history. In this talk, I will draw on several corpus studies to support the idea that music of the early 18th century does indeed do less to promote temporal orientation than music of the later 18th century – not only with respect to form, but also with respect to meter and the possibility of hearing hypermeter. Johann Sebastian Bach, generally seen as conservative and even behind the times, might appear to fit the bill well as a representative of the earlier 18th century, but I will demonstrate that his music is surprisingly forward looking in anticipating a number of developments of the later 18th century. These include: the use of the full notated measure as the primary frame of reference for meter (as opposed to 18th-century compound meter); prevalence of four-bar phrase construction; and, in a handful of cases, a rotational approach to form (one that contrasted with the ways in which his galant contemporaries were heading down the path that would lead to sonata form). This image of “Bach the Progressive” does not support any notions of Bach influencing future developments, but it does raise the possibility that many 18th-century composers may have been responding to the same style-historical affordances.

Bio:

John Paul Ito is Associate Professor of Music Theory in the School of Music at Carnegie Mellon University. He received an SB in music from MIT, an MM in viola performance from Boston University, and a PhD in music theory from Columbia University. His main areas of research are meter and hypermeter and their connections with cognition, performance, and the history of musical style. He has published in *Bonner Beethoven-Studien*, *The Journal of Musicology*, *The Journal of Music Theory*, and *Music Perception*, and his book *Focal Impulse Theory: Musical Expression, Meter, and the Body* was published in 2021 by Indiana University Press in the series Musical Meaning and Interpretation.