

Establishing a Motive

ClarinetFest® 2001
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Good morning, and welcome to "Establishing a Motive," a presentation in which I will demonstrate a few ways in which music theory and analysis can be brought out of the classroom and into the clarinet studio and practice room. We will touch upon some ways in which theory and analysis can be used to help the student make informed decisions about using dynamics and rubato in producing musical, expressive phrase shaping. We will also see how some standard analytical concepts can be used to help students improve in the area of accuracy. Part of my methodology involves discovery; thus, I am providing salient excerpts from a number of pieces in the handout, but not much in the way of pre-analyzed examples. We'll be doing some of the analysis during this morning's presentation.

Let us begin by considering roughly the first page of Willson Osborne's *Rhapsody for Clarinet*, a work frequently studied by college undergraduates and one that I make a special point to assign to students with whom I wish to address the issue of expression in terms of rubato and dynamic shaping. As I play the first part of the piece please consider what you hear motivically, with a particular focus on how the composer approaches relatively long notes and the ends of phrases.

[PLAY FIRST PAGE] You might have noticed that a vast majority of the longer notes, particularly those that sound like primary or secondary phrase endings are approached by either a half-step descent or a whole-step ascent, with most of the structurally important ones being the half-step descents. In fact, consider the half-steps you hear in the opening phrase. **[PLAY OPENING PHRASE]** Note that the first melodic arch ends in measure two with a half-step descent and that the phrasette, for want of a better term, that follows begins with the B-flat to A half-step.

Let us listen to the second phrase, beginning in the middle of measure five, to see how Osborne continues his treatment of the descending half-step motive. **[PLAY SECOND PHRASE]** You might notice, especially as you consider the several E-flats that seem to move to Ds, that sometimes the motive involves contiguous notes, as it had in the first phrase, but that now Osborne uses it on a slightly more middleground level. Listen again. **[PLAY SECOND PHRASE]** Do you hear, for example, how the E-flat starting on beat three of measure eight-at the end of the second line-moves to the D on the downbeat of measure nine? As students first recognize the two-note motive and then start to see it and hear it expanded over the slightly longer term, in other words with either one or two other notes intervening, they begin to think in a more musically sophisticated way. Of course, we think in terms of local level and middleground and background connections in music theory, particularly when we do Schenkerian analysis, or really any type of reductive analysis. Our students who are studying a concept like this in an advanced theory class will benefit from having an example that truly fits the fingers. Frequently students find it even more meaningful to have examples literally at hand-to play on the clarinet-than to simply study visually in a theory textbook.

Now, let's think about how we might specifically use the two-note, descending half-step motive to influence our rhythmic and dynamic shaping of the phrases in the Osborne. In traditional tonal

music we probably think about applying dynamic shading to this interval when it occurs between fa and mi, or scale-steps four and three, at a V7-I cadence. Consider the clarinet's key of F major [**PLAY F MAJOR TRIAD, TWO OCTAVES**]. Note the resolution of the fa to mi as I play the V7-I cadence-I'll be ending the V7 chord on Fa, the high B-flat, resolving to A. [**PLAY C7 ARPEGGIO TWO OCTAVES UP TO B-FLAT, RESOLVING TO A, THEN END ON F**]. How do we generally ask students to interpret dynamically this type of cadence? Of course, unless the composer or editor asks us to do otherwise, we probably interpret this as an example of tension and relaxation: tension, or dynamic emphasis, on the relatively dissonant V7 chord - it does, after all, contain a tritone - with dynamic relaxation on the tonic chord [**PLAY CADENCE AGAIN**]. The use of dynamic shaping based on consonance and dissonance or tension and relaxation can be found many places, from eighteenth-century treatises by C.P.E. Bach and Quantz, to the early twentieth-century work of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze to contemporary rhythm and blues performances of the V7-I turnaround in a twelve-bar blues. In fact, really try to relive in your memories the great emphasis blues bands place on those V7s at the turnarounds.

What would happen if we were to use this concept in the Osborne, giving durational and dynamic stress to the upper note of the motive? Listen. [**PLAY ROUGHLY FIRST PAGE**] Now, I don't mean to suggest that this is the only way to interpret the piece. What I do suggest is that we have just given the student a handle, something to grab ahold of, in trying to follow the very first instruction Willson Osborne gives in the piece, to play rhapsodically-in other words to go beyond his very explicit tempo, rubato, and dynamic directions. We have done so by merging theory and practice. Incidentally, we might expand on this a bit by asking students to consider different ways of emphasizing the upper notes-should they crescendo into them, how does it work if the tension is achieved by means of an immediate, almost accent-like emphasis? Consideration of questions like these can lead quite naturally into further discussion of performance traditions with respect to dynamic interpretation.

Let's assume for a moment that when we teach some new concept students will better pick it up if they study several reinforcing pieces. We might, then, want our student who is "doing" semi-tone descents to work on the first of Schumann's Fantasy Pieces. The melody at the start of the movement is full of these motives. [**PLAY OPENING OF THE FIRST MOVEMENT**]. Returning to our use of tension and relaxation as we interpret the half-step motive, we find that the student has to start incorporating another aspect of musical analysis: that of meter. Note that some of the upper notes in the two-note, half-step groups are metrically weak while others are strong. The student then will have to make some decisions, thinking about such questions as which aspect of the music is most important within the context of this piece, the general tendency to treat a Fa-Mi-sounding motive with tension followed by relaxation, or the tendency to place dynamic stress on downbeat notes. With my background as a theorist and clarinetist-my doctorate is actually in theory-I frequently will introduce my music major students to the concept of preference rules found in Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff's linguistic-theory-based book *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* when they study this movement. Again, by introducing these concepts and the various possibilities, we encourage our students to make interpretive decisions based not just on the "do it this way because I say to do it this way" approach but, rather, based on sound theoretical concepts that they, as true musicians, ought to be applying on a regular basis.

Getting back to our treatment of half-step motives, the third movement of the Schumann also makes for interesting study. Consider for a moment the very opening, as shown at the bottom of page 2 in your handout. **[PLAY OPENING]** Here, of course, Schumann bases his rocket-like figure primarily on pairs of ascending half-steps. If we consider the way in which we typically treat the melodic cadential figure Ti-Do, or scale step seven moving up to tonic, we generally stress the lower note of these two-note motives. Doing so here, while applying the concept of greater stress on metrically stronger notes, leads to small, foreground dynamic changes on contiguous notes *within* an overall crescendo into the first downbeat on which we play. **[PLAY OPENING AGAIN]** Again, this requires that the student do some analysis and some decision making, and the merging of theory and practice may be a very real and daunting challenge for some of us, but I believe that it leads to better results than the "do it this way because I say to" approach. You all know the old saying "you can give a person a fish and they eat for a day, but teach them to fish and they eat for a lifetime."

Another theoretical concept upon which I'll only have time to touch briefly is that of octave reduction, something that is done quite frequently in Schenkerian theory. One of the more difficult opening melodic figures for my students seems to be the start of the second *Fantasy Piece*. Consider the register changes and such things as voicing and air pressure adjustments that need to be done in order to achieve good melodic connection. **[PLAY OPENING]** Probably because I am so used to this concept from my work in theory I frequently ask students who have trouble with this phrase to try some registral reduction. Consider the altered version of the passage as shown in your hand out. Note that the entire phrase is now within one register, that the largest interval in the phrase is now a major sixth (as opposed to a minor ninth), and that, overall, it is much closer to being a "typical" melody, with more small intervals than large ones. **[PLAY ALTERED PHRASE]** No, we're not going to rewrite Schumann for performance! What we are going to do is to hold up this easier version of the melody as a model. Theoretically, our student should have an easier time making a nicely shaped phrase with good connections when they play the altered version. They can then produce in the practice room a model for the kind of shaping and connections they hope to achieve with the skip-filled, real version of the phrase **[PLAY ALTERED PHRASE FOLLOWED BY ORIGINAL VERSION]** .

Another theoretical concept that I would like to introduce is that of the polyphonic melody-in other words, a melody that implies a multi-voiced texture. Consider for a moment Baermann's Op. 63, No. 6 etude, two excerpts from which are shown at the top of the third page of your handout. I will cite this as an example, but there are many, many that you will easily find in the etude, solo, and chamber repertoire. In fact, I'm currently working on the Brahms *Trio*, and would point you toward its third movement as having several clear examples. Here is the opening of the etude, which you might recognize **[PLAY OPENING]** . When I have assigned this Baermann etude I have noticed that a fair number of students, especially junior high aged students, have particular problems with the passage shown in the second line of the example, measures 41-44 of the etude. Well, it is filled with skips, isn't it? Or is it? When I've asked students what they see when they look at this passage analytically, many, even some of the ones who clearly have difficulty playing it accurately, claim to see two ascending scalar passages, one starting on low B and the other starting on open G. Once a student can see the music in this way, I'll ask them to play each line, with its correct rhythm. The low melody **[PLAY]** and the upper melody **[PLAY]** . Then, just to really stress the polyphonic nature of the passage, we will play

the lines together, perhaps in an unison rhythm of quarter notes, with me taking the lower notes and student taking the upper, and then again with the parts reversed. Students easily hear the resulting parallel sixths as being very consonant, and therefore, in their minds, very duet like. When we've done this, I then ask the student to play both parts of the duet the way the composer wrote it **[PLAY PHRASE]** . Without fail, students who have had trouble in the lesson studio or claim to have had trouble in the practice room with passages like this play them much better after going through this process. Now think about what we haven't done in the example I just cited. We haven't woodshedded, right? We've taken the passage apart analytically, looked at it a different way, which was reinforced by playing the constituent parts, and then we've put it back together. This teaching technique is one of the best examples of which I know that illustrates the way in which thinking and then playing analytically can lead to immediate improvements in the area of accuracy. Is it magic? No, it is a simple, proven fact of learning theory and information theory that generally most of us can process two simple things better than one complex thing. I might also refer you to one of Anthony Gigliotti's columns several issues back in *The Clarinet* magazine in which he stresses how much more efficient analytical practicing is than woodshedding.

Just how far, though, can we take this idea of seeing single-line music polyphonically? Consider the opening of the second movement of Telemann's *Fantasia No. 6* for solo flute, a piece I regularly assign to clarinetists and saxophonists for the very reason we are looking at it here today. **[PLAY PART]** . I'm going to ask you a rhetorical question: What is the form of this piece? Well, I'll tell you that essentially it is a two-voice fugue. What happens at the start of a fugue? We have an exposition, right-that consists of the subject and the answer. Here's the subject. **[PLAY]** Can anyone find the answer? Is the answer usually in the same key as the subject? Well here's the answer. **[PLAY]** Note that the answer, as you just heard it, is found in its entirety. In order to find it, however, one does have to deal with some other notes that mask it a bit. If I tell you that the answer begins in measure three on beat four on the eighth-note A, can you trace the rest of it? It takes a little doing because of the "extra" notes, which really represent a continuation of the first "voice" to enter. Remember, though, if our students have been looking for motives on foreground and middleground levels in pieces like the Osborne and thinking about skip-filled music possibly being based on this notion of polyphony for a single-voice instrument, they will have had some initial practice, and, with some gentle guidance, will be able to find the answer or any of the later statements of the subject, some of which are equally veiled on paper. Yes, this piece has all the essential components of a fully formed fugue: exposition, middle entries, episodes, even some stretto. That's why I frequently use this piece with my music majors who are studying fugue in their history and literature class. Of course, finding something like this is fine, but doesn't it also possibly have some performance implications? Well, Telemann and Jean-Pierre Rampal, the editor of the International Music Company edition I usually use with students, don't give the player much in the way of dynamic directions. Couldn't our student who finds the subject and answer at the beginning, the overlapping entrances of the subject-in other words, stretto, in measures 15-18, and all the rest, possibly make some educated decisions about which of these many notes are more structurally important and achieve a higher level of musicality by doing some subtle dynamic and rhythmic shaping? Yes, I think they can. Could this possibly make the piece easier to play? Based on what we saw in the Baermann etude, I'd say "yes." Does study of this piece provide a way for the clarinet student to get into a fugue in a way studying the score of and listening to a recording of an organist playing a Bach fugue

simply can't do? Again, yes. As I play the movement, you might go through the score and see how many fugue-related analytical details you can fill in. **[PLAY MOVEMENT]**

Well, we've looked at some piece-specific motives in the Osborne *Rhapsody* and the *Schumann Fantasy Pieces* and the way in which one specific, simple motive might be used as a point of departure for students as they make decisions about dynamics and rubato. Much more importantly we've begun thinking about using musical analysis as a serious, ongoing process in our playing and in our teaching. Remember, this can have practical benefits in terms of being able to play skip-filled technical passages more easily. And it builds the student's overall musicianship in ways that viewing music education as a set of discrete, unrelated streams of courses simply cannot do. Hopefully I've whetted your appetites and suggested a few areas in which you can start to encourage your own students to establish a motive. Thank you!

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RHAPSODY
for Clarinet (B-flat)

Clarinet (B-flat)

WILLSON OSBORNE

Rhapsodically ($\text{♩} = 60$) *sof.*
p *più p*

incalzando ($\text{♩} = 80$) *poco ritmato*
mf

a tempo ($\text{♩} = 80$)
pp

incalzando ($\text{♩} = 100$) *ed agitato*
poco f *poco slentando*

a tempo *movendo* *poco riten.*
mp leggiero

poco più mosso ($\text{♩} = 72$)
mp cantabile *poco*

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Schumann – Fantasy Piece No. 1
(some half-step descents boxed)

Schumann – Fantasy Piece No. 2

Schumann – Fantasy Piece No. 2
(with octave reductions)

Schumann – Fantasy Piece No. 3
(added dynamics above notes)

Baermann Etude, Op. 63, No. 6
(measures 1-4 and 41-44)

Two staves of musical notation in treble clef, 2/4 time signature. The first staff contains measures 1-4, and the second staff contains measures 41-44. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests and dynamic markings.

Telemann – *Fantasia No. 6*, second movement

Allegro

A single staff of musical notation in treble clef, 3/4 time signature. The piece is marked 'Allegro' and begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns such as eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as trills and slurs. Measure numbers 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26, and 29 are indicated at the start of their respective lines. The piece concludes with a final measure.