

Hans Mersmann and the Analysis of the New Music²⁹²

Martina Stratilková

The scope of Hans Mersmann's (1891–1971) research was very wide. It ranged from the study of folk song to treatises on classical music, and theoretical texts and considerations about New Music occupied a prominent position in it. Mersmann became an important figure of *Melos*, a journal focusing on New Music, which he headed in the years 1924–1933 as the editor-in-chief.²⁹³ And at the start of the 1920s his attitude towards the theoretical apprehension of musical structure and musical style was formed. In his first study on the phenomenology of music he outlined his view of the structural apprehension of a musical work, which he later presented at the Second Congress for Aesthetics and General Art Theory (held in 1924) and formulated comprehensively in *Angewandte Musikästhetik* in 1926. Mersmann found the main organisational principle of the musical process in *force* and its dynamic transformations occurring within a certain context. Music encompasses *two dimensions* forming a background for there being happening something. The first dimension, which can also be treated as *horizontal* and as *temporality*, has its source in nature and comprises tone, the other, which is *vertical* and leads to *spatiality*, originates in the will of the spiritual being – the composer. The horizontal dimension is expressed by force which performs the motion forwards (centrifugal force), the vertical dimension bestows restrictions upon the pushing flow (centripetal force) and shapes the otherwise boundless stream. Although Mersmann himself conceded that defining the dimension of space in music is more difficult than it is in the case of force, he at least expressed the higher role of negative delineation, which means that the dimension of space is what

²⁹² This article was published under the 2013–2016 project of the Research Support Foundation of the Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc, entitled Phenomenological Analysis of Music (registration number FPVC2013/14).

²⁹³ A number of writings appeared on the topic of New Music in the 1920s, guided mainly by Paul Bekker's book from 1919 (*Neue Musik*).

denies musical force.²⁹⁴ In Mersmann's concept force can be understood as an energy which, in addition to being able to designate weight (as, for example, the force of the tonic), drives the musical flow towards its continuation in the direction of the future and towards greater power. If a place appears in the musical structure which divides the musical flow, reduces its intensity, and makes it regular (for example, cadence, metre, repeated tones, or tones from one harmonic function), the significance of the spatial dimension grows. The individual musical elements also differ in the extent to which they express the force dimension or in which they tend to include the category of space. Melody expresses force to the greatest extent, harmony does so to a lesser extent, and rhythm does it to the smallest extent. This dualism of forces creates tension, which yields in a form-building process.²⁹⁵ As a result Mersmann saw the musical work as the "sum of the functions and forces included in it."²⁹⁶ Mersmann also specified the nature of the force process as "the opposition of the inner tension of expansive and centripetal forces",²⁹⁷ or "the inner tension of a song arising from falling and increasing forces."²⁹⁸ This is because force processes constitute the essence of music, and so phenomenological aesthetics "[...] views the content of music in the sum of its tectonic elements."²⁹⁹ Mersmann offered separate explications of the *individual elements of musical structure*, among which he distinguished the *primary* (melody, harmony, rhythm) and *secondary* (dynamic, agogics, timbre) ones. His main aim became the identification of the tension and force potential that tones bear. For example, in the context of melody he observed the *force potential of individual aspects* of the actual pitch intervals – their size and direction and the extent of their fusion (reminiscent of Stumpf's concept of consonance) – and also the force potential of higher melodic *formations*, which he referred to as units or wholes ("melodic units" and "melodic wholes").³⁰⁰ For example, an ascending melodic line bears a high level of tension, in the same way as large intervals with a low quality of fusion. And so the force moments, which Mersmann called tectonics or *tectonic elements*, *grow to higher levels of division of the course of the musical work*: "The sum of forces [...] is contained in the development of elements in the direction towards form and content."³⁰¹ He believed

²⁹⁴ These concepts are not without difficulties, mainly that of space and its role for the definition of form, as is outlined in Wolfgang Krebs, *Innere Dynamik und Energetik in Ernst Kurths Musiktheorie* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1998), 267–269.

²⁹⁵ Mersmann admitted that to define the vertical dimension is quite harder because of its essentially negative nature – it binds the forces together while turning them backwards.

²⁹⁶ Hans Mersmann, "Zur Phänomenologie der Musik," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 19, Nos. 1–4 (1925): 376.

²⁹⁷ Hans Mersmann, *Angewandte Musikästhetik* (Berlin: Hesse, 1926), 715–716.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 716.

²⁹⁹ Mersmann, "Zur Phänomenologie der Musik," 378.

³⁰⁰ Hans Mersmann, "Versuch einer Phänomenologie der Musik," *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 5, Nos. 4–5 (1922–1923): 231.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

that the phenomenology of music represented an “aesthetics of form”.³⁰² *The relationship of the force and apprehension of form here is highly internal: “The living force is in itself also a living form.”*³⁰³

Mersmann also attempted to take into account the *aspect of unity and integrity* because we should conceive of music, which is the object of our perception, as a whole. The notion of the musical work as organism, encompassing the whole of the work, illustrates this clearly. And accordingly “the goal of analysis is synthesis.”³⁰⁴ And yet Mersmann’s analytical approach is derived from “the analytical grasping of individual unique phenomena and synthetic insight into what is typical.”³⁰⁵ This means that analysis is implemented in *two steps*, of which the first, “preparatory enquiry”,³⁰⁶ should “loosen the forces operating together in the artwork from their penetration and to understand with the highest possible clarity the structure of each of these forces individually.”³⁰⁷ So in addition to the primary and secondary elements, it is tectonic relations, form content, the form process, the content process (outside the tectonic framework), style, and expression which complement the range of individual aspects of the force process in a musical work. And the goal of the analysis then consists of revealing the “total sum of tensions” (“Gesamtspannung”).³⁰⁸ Mersmann then seeks out resources for the expression or formulation of the analysis, which he sees in *graphic depiction*. This naturally relates to music itself as its translation. But of course the advantage of graphic representation is its synthetic character, which corresponds to the aim of musical analysis. But this method of analysis is also hardly without any doubts. Whereas music is a complex of sound qualities and their relations, the resulting categories reduce this richness extensively.³⁰⁹ But one must ask whether in the results of his work Mersmann did not indeed depart from his dynamic standpoint when he created diagrams of standardised courses of a musical work – when, for example, he found a sequence of three tones only quantitatively different from a three-movement sonata, because the reference to direct experience drops rapidly with this.³¹⁰

³⁰² Ibid., 244.

³⁰³ Mersmann, *Angewandte Musikästhetik*, 99.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 713.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 712.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 713.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 713.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 714.

³⁰⁹ And at least for tonal music this focus on the direction of musical movement provides commonalities with Schenkerian analysis. Hermann Beck, aware of some proximity between Mersmann and Schenker, also doubted about the meaningfulness of Mersmann’s analytical approach. Cf. Hermann Beck, *Methoden der Werkanalyse in Musikgeschichte und Gegenwart* (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen, 1976), 208.

³¹⁰ Daniel M. Grimley, who took inspiration in Mersmann’s theory for his analysis of Carl Nielsen’s *Symphony no. 3 (Sinfonia espansiva)*, also raised the objection toward a schematic character of Mersmann’s charts and subjective analytical clues. Daniel M. Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of*

According to Mersmann, analysis constitutes an important part of the comprehensive *evaluation of a musical work*. This is indicated by the name of his work *Angewandte Musikästhetik*, which represents the aesthetic principles of music in their use for a work of music, but so does the study of the *musical aesthetics of value*, in which Mersmann postulates structural complexity as a condition for aesthetic value: “but poorly valued or valueless music conveys only slight incentives which are pronounced in the simplest forms,”³¹¹ and “we usually analyse valuable music.”³¹² And so analysis starts to work closely with evaluation because it should “establish subsequently the felt value.”³¹³ Of course, Mersmann’s uncompromising standpoint also contains functional differentiation because Mersmann illustrates it using examples of so-called *Gebrauchsmusik*. So one must ask which criteria should be applied to this music.³¹⁴ We have no reason to consider all music with a simple structure as being worthless – only that to which the criteria of artistic creativity apply (for example, not to folk music). Then, of course, according to Mersmann, we apply the aspect of complexity – polyphony always has greater value than homophony; in terms of value forms of open development (“Entwicklungsformen,” for example, the rondo) eclipse forms of closed development (“Ablaufsformen”), based on simple repetition – in the same way as the development of motivic-thematic material surpasses a theme that is just repeated. And because “in music analysis the notion of form appears to be the basis,”³¹⁵ in grasping a concrete musical work it is necessary to understand the uniqueness of its form. So in knowing the unique solution of form treatment,³¹⁶ in which Mersmann appreciated August Halm and Ernst Kurth as its forerunners, we come close to its meaning and value. While determining the individual form of a musical work can be quite difficult in case of New Music, it seems to be concluded, that so will be its evaluation. But we should not give up aiming at it.³¹⁷ Here Mersmann denounces sharp criticisms of

Modernism (New York: Boydell, 2010), 119. This somewhat simplistic graphic mode of demonstrations can have its roots in teaching experience with amateurs, which Mersmann had, as he himself is saying with regard to the graphs. On the other hand it is just this circumstance what could make Mersmann sensitive to grasp music as immediately understood in perception. Similar context of teaching experience could also become decisive for other energeticists, as Rothfarb has noted. Cf. Lee Rothfarb, “Energetics,” in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Street Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 927–955, here 947.

³¹¹ Hans Mersmann, “Versuch einer musikalischen Wertästhetik,” *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 17, No. 1 (1935): 34.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, “Trivial Music (Trivialmusik),” in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, ed. Christopher J. Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York – London: Routledge, 2004), 270–271.

³¹⁵ Hans Mersmann, “Zur Geschichte des Formbegriffs,” *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters für 1930* 37 (1931): 32–47, here 46.

³¹⁶ This objective also holds true for classical music of W. A. Mozart, for example. Cf. *ibid.*

³¹⁷ On the basis of the “entirely new developmental highness” in comparison with Bartók’s earlier compositions, Mersmann appreciated Bartók’s third and fourth string quartets, the organic constructivist

New Music, lead by prejudices. Traditional classic music enjoys positive attitudes and quite often this comes from emotional sources and intellectual laziness. It provides us with safety according to its values (the span of positive or negative evaluations is not as wide as with New Music), we are used to it, though argument supporting it may be rather emotional and subjective.³¹⁸ The critics should open their minds for fresh musical experiences and underlay their judgements with analytical insights.

If we return again to the issue of European western music, we see that in the course of history it primarily displays a growth in the internal complexity of musical structure. But further development went in the direction of the individual components of musical structure becoming independent, towards unique and unrepeatable solutions of musical form. In an article published in 1962 Mersmann expressed the opinion that via the concept outlined above of form as the result of the opposing internal forces of a musical work it was possible to analyse the music of the period 1600–1900. It is not possible to include the New Music, which does not merely represent a new style, but which proclaims a new epoch. In the article he then writes about the individual components of musical structure and specifies its transformations in three phases of development in the twentieth century. So is it possible to analytically apprehend the music of the twentieth century only via the characteristics of its individual components? It would appear so. But Mersmann's earlier assertion that the aim of analysis is a synthetic apprehension of musical structure following the understanding of individual components can hardly apply. Moreover, in a book published in 1938, he expanded his assertion about the essence of the musical process in conflict forces to cover music in general: "But even when the grammar of musical language changes, in the end its content remains the same: whether the voices are connected by harmonic function or pure sound, whether the rhythmic tensions are absolute or subject to metre, whether the course of the form is unique or corresponds to fixed laws, music always remains a transforming succession of an increasing and falling, pushing and loosening, compressing and releasing process, an incomparably fragile web of mutually fluctuating forces."³¹⁹

After the publication of Bekker's *Neue Musik* (1919) and the launch of the magazine *Melos*, focusing on contemporary musical work, Mersmann quite naturally tackled questions of a specific nature concerning the New Music, as well as its reception and commensurate means of investigation. He was aware that only a small group were seeking out, creating, and supporting the New Music, because listening to it was demanding and it disappointed the regular expectations of the audience. But he emphasised that it was

practices with regard to thematic process and form. Cf. Hans Mersmann, "Bela Bartoks Drittes und Viertes Streichquartets," *Melos* 8, No. 11 (1929): 483–485.

³¹⁸ It may be added that Mersmann himself could strengthen this tendency by devoting his writings to Mozart or Beethoven, which can be viewed not only as tenets of traditional musicology (dealing with the concept of master work), but also as consequences of the German cultural region, its magnitude and influence. Cf. Lubomír Spurný, "Hábova 'Musik der Freiheit' pohledem německy píšící muzikologie," *Musicologica Brunensia* 44, Nos. 1–2 (2009): 171–182, here 173.

³¹⁹ Hans Mersmann, *Musikhören* (Potsdam: Sanssouci, 1938), 281.

a transitional period because he considered the *New Music to be a historical necessity*, also fulfilled in a comparable manner in other fields of art.³²⁰ In his writings he also presented the aspect of style in the context of the periodisation of music history and he also showed how society's approach to music had developed historically: Beethoven brought the personal standpoint of the composer to musical creation, and the Romantics made it subjective. From Beethoven on there is a constant reduction in the presence of the common (and also social) world, recast into music, and in the New Music this common world reached the most imperceptible dimensions. But music arrived at this state in a logical way ("it also lies in its essence").³²¹ In the 'twenties Mersmann published his work on musical phenomenology and also two books and other short studies on the New Music in which he primarily analysed the musical structural properties of this music.

One key moment in the development of Western European music around 1900 was Impressionism, and in his later work Mersmann stated quite uncompromisingly: "Impressionism is the end."³²² But naturally primarily in relation to the German area, he also described the period 1890–1914 as "dissolution of romantic style."³²³ And he characterised both styles as "separation of forces,"³²⁴ which is also derived from the core properties of the New Music, i.e. from the switch from tonality. But of course Impressionism does not bring with it full atonality, only a release of tonal relations. More than anything else it represents a transitional period, and, according to Mersmann, the force relations in this type of music did not stand much of a chance of having a long lifespan – their expressive possibilities were soon exhausted.

As has already been stated, the first phase of musical analysis consists of the unbinding of the individual aspects (elements) from musical structure and the evaluation of their force characteristics and potential. Over the course of the nineteenth century they acquired ever more individual forms. "Elements were opened towards the ultimate possibilities of delicate expression."³²⁵ But of course the language of the New Music brought "ever greater refinement." In any case the older music was based on the mutual relations between the various aspects of musical structure. Then in the course of musical development these relations underwent a certain evolution in which they became constitutive of music and stabilised in it: "In older music the elements stand in the closest relationships. They are not only relationships of gravity, but primordial bindings." "The elements build an indissoluble unity [...]"³²⁶ In accordance with the contemporary significance of the gestalt approach, the most significant relationship is directed towards the whole. "Every one of the elements is only a function of a common force standing above it and condi-

³²⁰ Hans Mersmann, "Die geistigen Werte der neuen Musik," *Melos* 10, Nos. 8–9 (1931): 266–267.

³²¹ Hans Mersmann, "Musikalische Kulturfragen," *Melos* 1, No. 2 (1920): 42–43.

³²² Mersmann, *Musikhören*, 281.

³²³ Hans Mersmann, *Musik der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1924), 8.

³²⁴ Mersmann, *Musik der Gegenwart*, 8.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

³²⁶ Hans Mersmann, *Die Tonsprache der neuen Musik* (Mainz: Melosverlag, 1928), 11.

tioning it.”³²⁷ But naturally, in the New Music “the relationships between the elements are gradually dissolved and finally deliberately split.” “Every one of the elements stands under its own inherent law.”³²⁸ Musical elements thus escape the original relations, and so in Mersmann’s typology they are attributed the designation *absolute*. And all this can be expressed as a consequence of the switch from tonality: “Tonal music is essentially relative [...]”; “atonal music is essentially absolute.”³²⁹

At this point the following critical question must be asked: how can one meaningfully analyse music if the value of a musical work consists of the unique arrangement of various musical qualities into a meaningful whole? Whereas the artistic value resides in the totality of the individual forces, in the case of *Gebrauchsmusik*, music of a lesser artistic value, very often one parameter is predominant – the melody.³³⁰ For example, Mersmann states that a reduced complexity of music corresponds to its lesser artistic ambitions. How else is it possible to find a whole where the individual elements are absolute, i.e. they are freed of mutual relations? That which is not in music cannot be thought up for it. “And yet it is appropriate to talk primarily of the elements alone as the foundation of the New Music.”³³¹

So what changes fundamentally in the case of the New Music is the *inner correlation of components* which forms the musical style, while form is not affected so strongly by the changes in the musical language. In any case, Mersmann did not fail to show that as a reaction to Schoenberg – the most striking exponent of the New Music – there was a wave of neoclassicism, to some extent a return to the earlier musical styles. Such a development actually corresponded to Mersmann’s expectations – Mersmann emphasised that in the case of Webern, for example, the absolute nature of the melody went so far that it was no longer possible to escalate it.

From the aspect of analysis the fact that the integrity of the musical structure, which could no longer be categorised according to common traits, was broken, was fundamental: “The music of the earlier centuries could be understood from the standpoint of empirical typology. Discoveries which were made concerning the works of Haydn, and established typical significances, were also valid for Mozart, Beethoven, or Schubert. [...] The possibility of typological order in the case of contemporary music is either restricted or entirely missing. Facts which are gathered from an analysis of Schoenberg are scarcely applicable to Bartok, Stravinsky, or Hindemith.”³³² And this state corresponds primarily to the fact that musical elements acquire an absolute character. For example, the relative

³²⁷ Ibid., 11.

³²⁸ Ibid., 12.

³²⁹ Mersmann, *Musik der Gegenwart*, 70.

³³⁰ Hans Mersmann, “Versuch einer musikalischen Wertästhetik,” *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 17, No. 1 (1935): 39.

³³¹ Mersmann, *Die Tonsprache der neuen Musik*, 13.

³³² Hans Mersmann, “A Method for Analysis of New Music,” *International Music Educator M*, No. 6 (1962): 177.

melody of the previous period was replaced by absolute melody, very similarly to how it had worked in older music, where the tonal space performed the function of tonality.³³³

One can deduce the coherence of Mersmann's argument about phenomenological analysis and about New Music from Mersmann's own analytical commentaries. At their centre there is always the analysis of individual elements from the aspect of their force course. The analyses in *Angewandte Ästhetik* (employing examples from folk music, which Mersmann knew thanks to the focus of his dissertation, and otherwise recruiting mainly from the classical and romantic period) and analysis of Haydn's *Sonata in Eb Major* (Hob. XVI: 49), presented in an earlier study introducing musical phenomenology (1923), are particularly instructive. The strong focus on thematic material, its force characteristics, and the further course arising from it in its force profile are evident from the analyses.³³⁴

Although Mersmann mentions the start of the gradual dissolution of the relations between the elements as far back as Beethoven and primarily amongst the Romantics, he asserts that there was a clear turning point in musical resources in the works of Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, and Max Reger. The melodic lines of their compositions lack a pregnancy of contour; he observes "how swinging their curves are, how weak the binding, continuously rising forces are in them."³³⁵ These composers still worked with arched melodic lines, but in them it was evident that: "Melody displays a strong force; it flows without weight, without antagonism and without constructive binds."³³⁶ The further development of this type of melody expressing the untamed Dionysian force³³⁷ culminated in the work of Schoenberg and was taken to its very limit by Webern, in whose works we cannot hear a blooming of the melodic line. Absolute melody and the way it influenced the logic of the musical process are also reflected in the area of *harmony*. Wide intervals in particular must now be understood otherwise, because tonal thought linked them with the functions of harmonies. Mersmann characterised developments in the field of harmony as primarily having two tendencies. One was the increasing value of the purely *sound aspect of harmonies* (on which impressionism was based in an exemplary manner) and the other was the *horizontalisation of harmony* – "escalation of the horizontal."³³⁸ So even when chords follow one another in the musical flow, their force potential focuses on melody – the chord links with the following one via the individual tones and not as an

³³³ Mersmann, *Die Tonsprache der neuen Musik*, 14.

³³⁴ Mersmann developed the notion of a theme and a complex of its relations (Substanzgemeinschaft) which determine the evolution of form. Among later analysts who were equally seeking for thematic cohesion and development in music, we can remind us of Rudolf R  ti with his well-known *The Thematic Process in Music* (1951). Cf. Felix W  rner, "'Thematicism': Geschichte eines analytischen Konzepts in der nordamerikanischen Musiktheorie," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft f  r Musiktheorie* 6, No. 1 (2009): 77–89, here 77–78.

³³⁵ Mersmann, *Musik der Gegenwart*, 9.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

³³⁷ Mersmann, *Angewandte Musik  sthetik*, 158.

³³⁸ Mersmann, *Musik der Gegenwart*, 21.

integral unit. And Mersmann associated the increasing role of timbre, which now must be included amongst the primary elements, with the increasing decline of working out thematic material.³³⁹ Form-building elements are also in decline in *rhythm*, which Mersmann also refers to as absolute, which primarily means not bound by metric structure.

The most important sources for learning about Mersmann's analytical approach applied to the New Music are his analysis of Artur Schnabel's *Sonata for Solo Violin* written in 1919³⁴⁰ and also the analytical notes accompanying his explanation in studies about New Music in general; the characteristics in *Die Tonsprache der Neuen Musik* are of particular value. Primarily on the basis of the analysis of Schnabel's *Sonata*, it can be seen that the interest of Mersmann's deductions lies more than anything else in the analyses of the tectonic course of the shorter sections (in particular themes) rather than in the demonstration of the force process at the level of form. But of course this may be associated with the general characteristic of the New Music, which does not use the traditionally established methods of thematic work and construction of form based on them. For example, the expression of the difference between the theme of the first and fifth movements of Schnabel's sonata, based on the quality of intervals and the direction of melody, seems convincing. It also goes along with higher susceptibility of the melodic element to the analysis of force dynamics. Moreover, music departing from the thematic basis truly appears to abandon its reliable resource of form-building impulses too, which is not actually the case with Schnabel. Despite this, here Mersmann formulates analytical observations on the basis of his energeticist phenomenological concept, presented as a system three years later, and may specify the formal arrangement of the individual movements of the sonata – but not on the basis of the relationship between the individual parts of the development of the thematic material, but by observing the “developmental rhythm of the whole movement.”³⁴¹ In his treatment of the cyclic form in Schnabel's *Sonata* Mersmann identified a pattern reminiscent of the bridge form – the association of the first and fifth movements (applying the form principle of *Entwicklung*) and the second and fourth movements (*Ablauf*sform). At the same time he also designated the theme of the first movement as open – expressing the further development – and of the fifth movement (with the same form type) as closed. So the tectonics of the last movement do not follow the initial quality of the themes from the aspect of force determination. In the analysis Mersmann also asserted a range of elements by which he later characterised New Music (rhythm, “dissolution of all tectonic forces”³⁴²). Analysis should have not stopped with describing individual aspects, it should exceed it toward understanding a form and style. Whereas melody or harmony is to be grasped quite easily in New Music, the same cannot be said about form, which ceases to be understood in immediate experience and

³³⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁴⁰ Hans Mersmann, “Die Sonate für Violine allein von Artur Schnabel,” *Melos* 1, No. 18 (1920): 406–418.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 412.

³⁴² Ibid., 414.

must be acquired through synthesis. And next it is important to qualify the traits of the work according to their originality (individual and typical properties), while within the individual qualities it is possible to specify those, which are typical for contemporary music. The notion of developmental value (“Entwicklungswert”) then contributes to assess this holistic view of tectonics.³⁴³ The fact itself that Mersmann didn’t gave many analyses of contemporary compositions speaks for the conclusion that Mersmann considered analysis of elements the more reliable phase of music analysis of New Music and at the same time he concentrated on the analysis of style features.

Hans Mersmann wrote about the music of various musical periods, and in connection with this and his great knowledge of music theory he developed a concept of musical structure expressed through analytical as well as synthetic terms for the designation of its individual aspects. The unifying concept of this view is *force*, which exists in every structural aspect of its scope of expression. In the case of tonal music based on functions which attract (or repel) the individual tones, Mersmann’s (and Kurth’s before him) force concept is presented quite naturally. But in contrast to this, in the case of New Music, for which the abandoning of tonality is characteristic, there arise doubts as to the analytical use of Mersmann’s “applied aesthetics”, evident mainly in grasping larger wholes. It is also necessary to emphasise that although analytical approaches focusing on atonal music appeared later, none of them gained such renown to apply as a generally functional and sufficient analytical method. From this aspect Mersmann’s analysis is seen as being by no means an outdated and merely historically significant method. Indeed, it may apply as an alternative to the *pitch class set analysis*, in contrast to which it remains close to direct musical experience. But of course Mersmann himself later called the method into question on the basis of the only slightly differentiated glossary for forms of atonal music. It is difficult to point out the individual qualities of a musical work using the term “absolute melody” (harmony, rhythm). Hopes would evidently be high were it possible in the context of the individual musical elements (and their “absolute” nature) to outline the force properties of certain types of processes. This possibility is yet to be evaluated.

Hans Mersmann and the Analysis of the New Music

Abstract

The article deals with the concept of New Music, which in the 1920s involved considerations concerning the fundamentally different character of 20th century music. It focuses on the definition of New Music from its influential proponent, Hans Mersmann, and primarily looks at the relationship of the concept of New Music to Mersmann’s phenomenology

³⁴³ Hans Mersmann, “Die Untersuchung neuerer musikalischer Kunstwerke,” *Melos* 1, No. 14 (1920): 310–313, here 311–313.

based on the notion of musical forces. Whereas with his phenomenologically-based aesthetics Mersmann pursued a practically verifiable application – aesthetics applied to concrete musical works – his definition of musical analysis and theory of musical structure cast doubt on the possibility of analytical exploitation of this applied aesthetics with regard to the music of the 20th century. This uncertainty is confronted with Mersmann's analytical comments on 20th century music.

Hans Mersmann a analýza Nové hudby

Abstrakt

Príspevek sa zaoberá konceptom Nové hudby, ktorý ve dvaciatých letech dvacátého storočia zaštiľoval úvahy o zásadne odlišnom charakteru hudby 20. storočia. Soustredí sa na definíciu Nové hudby u jej výrazného proponenta, Hanse Mersmanna, pričom sleduje predovšetkým vzájomnú väzbu konceptu Nové hudby na Mersmannovu fenomenológiu, založenú na systéme hudobných síl. Zároveň Mersmann sledoval svoju fenomenologicky založenú estetiku prakticky ověřitelné uplatnění – estetiku aplikovanou na konkrétní hudobní díla, jeho definice hudobní analýzy i teorie hudobní struktury zpochybňují možnost hudobně analytického využití této aplikované estetiky na hudbu 20. storočia. Tato pochybnosť je konfrontovaná s Mersmannovými analýzami hudby 20. storočia.

Keywords

Music analysis; force; Hans Mersmann; musical form; New Music; phenomenology of music.

Klíčová slova

Hudobní analýza; síla; Hans Mersmann; hudobní forma; Nová hudba; hudobní fenomenologie.