

Counterpoint – A Die-Hard Stick-In-the-Mud or Indispensable? Continuities and Transformations of a Compositional Discipline

5 – 7 October 2018
Hochschule für Künste Bremen

Congress guidance:
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Call for papers

That a distinct subdomain of music theory becomes, for the first time, the topic of an annual GMTH congress is not just due to a newly awakened and widespread interest in counterpoint. Counterpoint is, as a curricular subject, integrated within more general courses such as “music theory” or “Satzlehre” at many conservatories and universities and is now seldom taught as an independent subject. The term, however, remains indispensable in music-theoretical discourse. In recent decades, counterpoint has attracted attention to the same degree as harmony was modified through the re-examination of tonal music. The timeliness of counterpoint is, last but not least, reflected in recent textbooks that use the term in their titles, but place it in various stylistic contexts. The intention of the congress is to gain insight into as many analytical, methodical and historical aspects as possible that relate to counterpoint, as well as to determine the current positioning of curricular goals and viewpoints of the subject area. These objectives will be pursued in three themes as well as free topics:

Theme 1: Systematic-Methodical Implications of Teaching Counterpoint

Keynote: Peter Schubert (Montreal)

This theme may be approached via definitions of, demarcations from or containments within the curricular subject as well as the compositional category “counterpoint”. Problems and benefits of the separation from other curricular subjects may be illuminated, just as the question of whether the recourse to historical models could replace traditional sub-disciplines of music theory. How much of the traditional discipline may be embedded in new, specific 20th century theories (such as Schenkerian, “Tonfeld-” or Pitch Class Set Analysis) is also a worthwhile topic. These systematic clarifications are closely related to teaching approaches and methods. The relevance of counterpoint for the education of today’s students is to be questioned, just as its place in the post-secondary curriculum. The choice between teaching characteristics of specific styles or teaching fundamental phenomena of Western music touches upon the question about a rather historical or a rather systematic orientation. In this theme we shall also explore specific curricular aspects, such as improvisation, singing and the use of electronic media in teaching counterpoint.

Proposed topics

- Counterpoint and polyphony
- Counterpoint as a sub-discipline of music theory
- Counterpoint and harmony as entities of musical analysis
- The doctrine of Fugue
- Principles of the Canon
- Double counterpoint
- Counterpoint in secondary and post-secondary teaching
- Methods of teaching counterpoint
- The timeliness of the “discipline”
- Which styles can be regarded – and for what reasons – as contrapuntal?

Theme 2: Historical, Social and Aesthetic Contexts

Keynote: Dörte Schmidt (Berlin)

In this theme we will examine the history of the teaching of counterpoint. Contents and problems of particular textbooks shall be discussed, as well as continuity of teaching materials, paradigm shifts and controversies. Social and cultural-historical issues are also important factors: Based on what reasons and under which conditions did certain individuals influence the development of the subject? Which institutions are linked to specific teaching traditions? What region-specific differences exist regarding course contents and teaching methods.

Regarding aesthetics, the significance of counterpoint in various time periods should be considered. Examples include the reasons for the reconsideration of the Palestrina style (before and) after Johann Joseph Fux, the problematic proximity of counterpoint to the academicism of the 19th century, the importance of the discipline in such different phenomena as the philosophy of new music of the 1950s and 1960s and the historically informed performance practice. Reflective contributions on counterpoint-related debates in journalism as well as in works by musically literate writers such as E. T. A. Hoffmann or Thomas Mann are also worthy of discussion.

Proposed Topics:

- History of Teaching Counterpoint
- The Method by J. J. Fux and its Aftermath
- The Reception of J. S. Bach as a Polyphonist
- The Cecilian Movement
- Fugue Aesthetics in the 19th Century
- Counterpoint in the Context of the Dissolution of Major-Minor-Tonality
- The Significance of Counterpoint in the Thought Processes of Contemporary Composers

Theme 3: Counterpoint in Composition

Keynote: Cornelius Schwehr (Freiburg)

The topics within this theme are interdependencies between compositional practice and teaching counterpoint, as they have been existing since their Medieval origins. The notion of counterpoint as an embodiment of a mandatory craftsmanship has existed since the 18th century, as has its role as a basis for compositional mastery. If and to what extent polyphonic writing can vouch for a high compositional standard should be verified by analytical studies. The reconsideration of counterpoint in the 20th and 21st centuries can also be examined as the starting point for historical reinterpretations and for forward-thinking musical developments. Of further interest is to what extent polyphonic techniques, schemata and sounds have found their way into forms of popular music and how they are being developed further. In addition to such proposals, analytically oriented studies that deal with aspects of the main conference topic are welcome under this theme.

Proposed Topics:

- Techniques of the Treatment of the *cantus firmus*
- The Art of Canon
- Music Before 1600
- Counterpoint in the Baroque era
- Counterpoint versus Galant Style
- Counterpoint and Counterpoint Reception Since the 19th Century
- Counterpoint and Classicism
- Counterpoint and Popular Music
- Counterpoint and Electronic Music

Theme 4: Free section

Formats

Individual presentations = 30 min. paper + 30 min. discussion **or** 20 min. paper + 10 min. discussion. The preferred format must be specified when the abstract is submitted; an allocation of the desired format cannot be guaranteed.

Panels = 90 min. or 120 min. (conceived as a series of papers of variable length, with or without panel discussion). A panel will only be selected in the case of a positive evaluation of all abstracts chosen for the congress program.

Book presentations = 30 min. incl. discussion (accompanying program)

Workshops (accompanying program) – by arrangement; please send your suggestions directly to the conference chairs

Submissions

Individual presentations

- Abstracts (max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces)
- biographical details of the author (max. 1,000 characters incl. spaces)

Panels

- synoptic outline, including titles of all contributions and a timetable [to be submitted by the chair of the panel] (maximum 2,000 characters including spaces)
- biographical details of the panel chair (max. 1,000 characters incl. spaces)
- abstracts of each individual presentation in the section (max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces for each abstract) [to be submitted separately by the author of the abstract with reference to the panel]
- biographical details of each author (max. of 1,000 characters per author) [to be submitted separately by the author of the abstract with reference to the panel]

If, as the chair of a panel, you would like to invite others to participate in your section, you are welcome to do so via the **newsletter** of the GMTH as soon as possible.

The **conference languages** and languages of the abstracts are German and English.

All submissions have to be sent in no later than 15 May 2018 at:

<http://www.gmth.de/veranstaltungen/jahreskongress/beitragsanmeldung.aspx>

Further questions on submissions can be addressed to Florian Edler at:

f.edler@hfk-bremen.de

Conference website: <http://www.gmth.de/veranstaltungen/jahreskongress.aspx>

Contributions will be selected by an international jury by means of an anonymized procedure (double-blind peer review). Applicants will be notified no later than 15 July 2018.

Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie: <http://www.gmth.de>