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The ‘Subject Supposed to Expect’: Expectation, Detection and the Enjoyment of Music Analysis

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Abstract

When talking about music, particularly classical music, we frequently describe musical events in terms of expectation and fulfilment. I begin by exploring how this expectation is described and located in music theory. To do this I look at twentieth century writers such as Eugene Narmour and Leonard Meyer before moving onto David Huron’s (2006) monograph *Sweet Anticipation*. I then look at the relationship between expectation, detective narratives and music theory using Edward Cone’s detailed attempt to relate the experience of listening to music to detective fiction. Taking Cone’s ideas, I use that to demonstrate the existence of a particular variant of Slavoj Žižek’s “subject supposed to believe”, an absent subject who enables belief to operate. In this case, it is a “subject supposed to expect” who allows us to structure and mediate our enjoyment of music. I identify three specific instances of this figure: in the historical enjoyment of music, in the enjoyment of the composer, and in the enjoyment of the idea that musical structure enacts an abstraction of desire. In each case I show how these function in ways that intersect with further concepts of Lacanian theory as explicated by Žižek, such as the Ego-Ideal and the master signifier.

Key Words: Slavoj Žižek; Music Analysis; Subjectivity

Expectation and fulfilment

Expectation is often invoked in writing on music that attempts to explain the relationships between different parts of a piece of music, especially in the context of established conventions. This is such a commonplace of musical writing, academic or otherwise, that it can be found as frequently in programmes for classical concerts, as in academic research. So, to begin, here are three examples that demonstrate this way of describing the act of listening:

One would normally expect off-tonic recapitulations starting on vi to begin in minor, but Beethoven provided an engaging variant in the first movement of his Piano Sonata in F, Op. 10, No. 2 (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006: 271)

[The opening melody of the Andante from Brahms' First Symphony] begins with a beautiful four-bar phrase which one would expect to be continued in equally quiet and regular strains; but, as will be seen, the continuation is impassioned and expansive. (Tovey 1935: 89)

[At the end of 'Der Abschied' from Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*] exotic scales ascend through a tritone up to E, slower in each instance, and whole tone ambiguity suffuses the harmony. The onset of C major is hardly to be expected [...] (Hefling 2000: 115)

These are not intended to be a representative sample, but rather to show how this idea of expectation operates across a range of musical features in a variety of contexts. The features described are equally broad and range from dynamics and phrase structure to more expansive considerations of tonal orientation or genre and history. Equally as important, they also demonstrate the longevity and consistency of this style of writing.

However, it begs the question: where is this expectation, who is the "one" who "would expect"? To begin answering this, I will examine two

models for expectation in music. In the first case, there is an implied goal, where the music is assessed in terms of how it reaches, delays or avoids this expected end point. The second model is that of detective fiction, where the ending of the musical work in some way resolves some earlier musical instability. Looking at the features of these models indicates that there is an expectant figure that is analogous to Žižek's "subject supposed to believe": a "subject supposed to expect". To conclude I will look at how this figure operates in musical theorising, from listeners to composers, and how it intersects with such important Lacanian concepts as the *Ego-Ideal* and the master signifier.

Expectation and music theory

In the 1950s, the psychological study of music was becoming increasingly influential in music theory itself. This can be seen in the expectation-based theories of Leonard Meyer and subsequently Eugene Narmour, which emphasise the mental processes of expectation¹. Here, psychological models of expectation become the source of the emotional effects of listening to music:

Affect or emotion-felt is aroused when an expectation – a tendency to respond – activated by the musical stimulus situation, is temporarily inhibited or permanently blocked. (Meyer 1956: 31)

Though this particular strand of music theory has never completely disappeared, David Huron's recent book *Sweet Anticipation* (2006) explicitly aligns him with those earlier writers and returns its claims into the mainstream of music theory. Huron theorises about the moments leading up to the point at which music is heard and immediately afterwards, and believes that the psychological studies that he and others have carried out show how the effect of music is based on expectation:

With regard to expectation, I have proposed two phenomena that tend to evoke pleasure. First, I have suggested that accurate predictions are rewarded through the prediction effect. [...] Second, I have suggested that negatively valenced feelings can form a backdrop against which positively valenced feelings seem even more positive. This phenomenon

of contrastive valence occurs in two general circumstances. When events are surprising, the surprise evokes an initially negative limbic response, which in some circumstances can be displaced by subsequent reactive or appraisal responses that are more positive. When events are fully expected, the feeling of anticipation evokes a somewhat negative preparatory tension, which is often displaced by subsequent positive feelings arising from the prediction effect. (Huron 2006: 366-7)

As this extract shows though, there are notable changes from earlier theorists. Huron accepts a larger role for representation in terms of music's "emotive power" (2) and he allows prediction as great a role as inhibition or "blocking" in generating emotional content. He also brings an empirical component to his theorising by demonstrating correlations between statistics on the occurrence of musical features like notes or melodic shapes and the perceptions of listeners.²

The innocence and experience of the expectant listener

This model then, requires, or at least implies, an involved listener whose knowledge informs their more immediate and innocent responses. Meyer is quite clear that this listener is an informed listener who is capable of bringing a range of expectations dependent on the context of their listening:

The experienced listener will, for example, bring a very different set of habit responses into play if he is about to hear a sonata movement by Stravinsky from those which will be activated if he is about to hear a sonata by Schubert. (Meyer 1956: 59)

Meyer is clearly describing members of a body of listeners who exist. However, Huron is attempting to use empirical evidence of conscious and unconscious responses to support his position, and this leads him to conclude that "experienced listeners are far from perfect in learning to form accurate expectations about music" (2006: 98). As such, his ideal listener is an abstraction from a group of listeners in a particular musical culture.

Real listeners are imperfect listeners [...] [The] musical goals of expectation are very different. [...] From a musical point of view, it does not matter if experienced listeners form inaccurate expectations about future events. It is only important that individual listeners form broadly similar expectations under the same musical conditions. If you don't have a group of listeners who respond in a broadly similar fashion, then you can't create a musical culture – at least not one based on the psychology of expectation. [...] I am [...] observing that psychological conformity is a prerequisite if a composer wishes individual listeners to hear a musical work in broadly similar ways. (Huron 2006: 98, 390)

What is common to Meyer and Huron, though, is that in both cases the listener must know enough to expect in an informed way whilst also being naïve enough to respond appropriately.³ This opposition between experience and innocence can also be found in other references to musical expectation. Donald Tovey, whose programme note I quoted earlier, sees his musical analyses as narratives that “trace through time the process that the naïve listener experiences” (Dale 2003: 180-181). However, as Joseph Kerman noted, there is still “the suspicion that the naïve listener has at least a pass degree from Oxford University” (Kerman 1977: 175).

Repetition and innocence

Perhaps more complicated than modelling experience is the maintenance of innocence, especially since the repeatability of musical enjoyment is one of its most notable features. As Fred Everett Maus notes, “given that suspense seems to depend on ignorance, how is it possible for someone to enjoy, repeatedly, a piece of fiction or music that depends on surprise and suspense?” (Maus 1997: 298). However, Leonard Meyer was aware of exactly the same problem:

[Suppose] a listener knows a work thoroughly, remembering the unexpected and the improbable as accurately as the expected and probable [...] Under these circumstances, will the listener find rehearing the work a rewarding experience? (Meyer 1994: 49)

Meyer notes that if the answer is “Yes”, then the theories he is proposing “must be mistaken.” Huron though, is much more relaxed on this issue. He is happy to accept the pleasure of repetition in a way that earlier theorists such as Meyer could not. There are a number of reasons for this, such as his acceptance of the pleasure of accurate prediction and an approach that is not dismissive of musical cultures based on the appreciation of recorded music. More importantly, Huron’s psychological model responds to this issue by describing schematic expectations that remain operative on a different level to experiential knowledge (what Huron terms veridical expectations). So even when repeated listening tells us that a particular dominant is about to lead to a deceptive cadence, our schematic expectations, based on the relative frequency of perfect cadences, still give the deceptive cadence a sense of surprise (Huron 2006: 225-227).

Narratives of detection

Another form of expectation that is found in music theory is the comparison of formal close to detective or whodunnit narratives. Unlike psychological theories of expectation, however, there has been no attempt to codify this in detail. Nevertheless, as the quotes that follow demonstrate, examples of this can be found over a wide range of time (Eco’s quote originates from 1962), particularly in discussions of tonal closure:

The structure of a traditional narrative can be compared to that of a “tonal” composition in music. Its most extreme example is that of the detective story. Here, everything starts within the context of an established order: a paradigmatic series of ethical relationships rationally administered by the law. Something disrupts this order: a crime [...] [the detective] discovers the real causes of the crime [...] After which the culprit is punished and order is re-established. (Eco 1989: 146)

That a hierarchy of formal closure may be fundamentally discontinuous is suggested by an analogy to literary closure. Consider the case of a generic murder mystery. (Caplin 2004: 65)

Finally [...] some commonsense reasons why Mozart's codas matter. We all know that what bothers us most about a difficult conversation is not how it begins but how it ends. And our enjoyment of a detective story is largely conditioned by not knowing 'who dunnit' until the final pages. (Cavett-Dunsby 1988: 47)

These examples all relate detective narratives to expectation on a large-scale formal level. In that respect, this comparison implicitly endorses Jonathan Culler's point about detective stories that "[it] is only at the level of solution that coherence is required: everything deviant and suspicious must be explained by the resolution which produces the key to the 'real' pattern" (Culler 1975: 148). This expectation is that there will be the formal arrival of content towards the close that will retrospectively provide coherence to the form and content which preceded it.

However, when looked at more closely, this comparison is more complex. Cavett-Dunsby (1988: 47) sees the coda as the moment of revelation of "who dunnit", whereas Caplin sees the activity of the coda as analogous to the point *after* the criminal has been identified, when the fate of the criminal becomes apparent and glorification of the detective occurs (2004: 99). The simplicity of the analogy to detective story form does not demonstrate a consensus, but actually serves to smooth over conflicting conceptions of the location and nature of formal closure in music.

However, it is in considering the relationship between (classical) music and the detective story that one of the most interesting attempts to attend to the problematic issue of expectation and rehearing can be found. Edward Cone (1977), when considering Brahms's Intermezzo Op.118 No. 1, concerns himself with "three readings" of a piece of music or a detective story. The "First Reading" is that of the uninformed reader, who takes each event as it happens. In the "Second Reading", the reader is aware of the underlying chronological story and how it relates to the narrative story. Through this they apprehend the revelation of "an object abstracted from or inferred from the work of art", where it "ceases to be a reading" and becomes "the pure contemplation of structure" (557). However, the Third Reading is a return to linearity

and “aims at enjoyment”. In this reading, the reader has an “intentional ‘forgetting’” to “[suppress] from consciousness those elements meant to be concealed” in order to “replace naïve pleasure with intelligent and informed appreciation.” He describes it as follows:

In the Third reading there is a double trajectory. Thought moves simultaneously on two levels, one fully conscious and one at least partly suppressed. The primary, open level is once more that of experience, as the reader follows the actual narration; but this time he is in a position fully to enjoy the journey [...] He cannot fully suppress what he already knows [...] but he tries to ratiocinate what he knows in such a way as to make the path of experience as vivid and as exciting as possible. (Cone 1977: 558)

The subject supposed to expect

Fred Everett Maus produced a thoroughgoing critique of the effectiveness of Cone’s analogy between musical and literary suspense (Maus 1988: 295-297). However, Cone’s “Third Reading” clearly shows how conceptions of musical expectation attempt to draw together the oppositions between innocence and experience and enjoyment and contemplation. In that sense, I agree with Cone that the expectant listener in music theory is related to subjective reflection on a number of levels. However, I find this act of self-suppression on the part of the listener themselves unconvincing. As such, I agree with Maus when he points out the problems with the listener’s “self-deception” saying that Cone “[seems] to evoke a rather strenuous, unpleasant, distracting mental activity” (296).

However, instead of this suppressive act, I see this instead as the assumption of an expectant persona. I use assumption in both the sense that the expectant persona is assumed to exist and also that the persona must be subjectively assumed. In that sense this persona has a number of similarities with the “subject supposed to believe” as described by Slavoj Žižek:

[Some] beliefs always seem to function “at a distance”: in order for the belief to function, there *has to be* some ultimate guarantor of it, yet this

guarantor is always deferred, displaced, never present in *persona*. [...] The point, of course, is that this other subject who directly believes needs not exist for the belief to be operative: it is enough precisely to presuppose his existence, i.e. to believe in it, either in the guise of the primitive other or in the guise of the impersonal "one" ("one believes...") (Žižek 2008: 139f.)

This subject relates to what Žižek describes as the referential rather than subjective nature of certain types of belief, where we act not in accordance with how we believe, but in how a notional subject believes. For example, we know that money is a piece of metal or paper that has a specific structural role in capitalist society, but we behave as if it has particular inherent properties. Effectively the belief operates structurally rather than subjectively. Perhaps the best way to show how this relates to the current discussion is to take Žižek's description of the "subject supposed to believe" and directly convert it to a "subject supposed to expect":

[Some] [expectations] always seem to function "at a distance": in order for the [expectation] to function, there *has to be* some ultimate guarantor of it, yet this guarantor is always deferred, displaced, never present in *persona*. [...] The point, of course, is that this other subject who directly [expects] needs not exist for the [expectation] to be operative: it is enough precisely to presuppose his existence, i.e. to believe in [the expectation], either in the guise of the primitive other or in the guise of the impersonal "one" ("one [expects]...")

Here, Žižek's deferred, displaced guarantor has an analogous role to Meyer's "experienced listener" or Huron's abstracted listener. In addition, the opposition that Žižek describes at the end of this quotation also mirrors the opposition of knowledge and innocence of the expectant listener. The subject supposed to expect combines the naivety of the primitive other with the knowledge of the impersonal one. In this sense, it is noteworthy that two of the quotes I began this essay with make this same gesture towards what "one would expect".

However, to return to Cone, what is interesting is that he situates enjoyment in the "First" and "Third" readings. In Cone's terms, the subject supposed to expect exists at the level of the "Third" reading, at

the level of what might be termed “musicological” listening. So to finish, I want to look at how the “subject supposed to expect” enables the enjoyment of musicological listening to take place. To be clear, I am not attempting to describe how one does or does not “really” listen to or enjoy music. Rather, I am addressing the way that expectation-based music theory specifies the knowledge and the limitations of a “subject supposed to expect” so that through that subject we can enjoy the intersection of the music and its analysis. What is striking though is how these examples relate to some key Lacanian concepts.

The historical “subject supposed to expect” and the enjoyment of shocking music

It was recently the centenary of the premiere of the *Rite of Spring*, and musicians involved in performing the *Rite* were routinely asked how they dealt with the difficulty of maintaining shock in the face of such familiar music. Even when scepticism about the notional authenticity of the rioter’s shock is admitted, its mythological status was still invoked. There is an implicit admission here that the *Rite* has indeed lost its ability to shock directly (if indeed it ever did), but that this notion of shock is still central to our enjoyment of it. However, these constant references to that initial performance and the audience’s reaction are effectively an attempt to create a subject supposed to expect. When listening to this music whilst assuming a “subject supposed to expect” who is driven to appalled rioting we can again enjoy the shock of the music mediated through their disgusted response.⁴

Of course, this is a recurrent feature of the appreciation of music in other genres, especially at key historical points. Conventional pop music, for example, has its own historical canon of “scandal concerts”. It is possible, for example, to conclude that the “subject supposed to expect” made at least two visits to the Manchester Free Trade Hall, the first in 1966 to see Bob Dylan and then later in 1976 to see the Sex Pistols.

This historical “subject supposed to expect” recently appeared in a more detailed guise in Vasili Byros’s (2012) assessment of historical responses to the opening of Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony. Byros uses some core ideas of Meyer’s theories to create models of tonal expectation that explain different responses to this particular piece of music. Using the expectations expressed in a review from 1807 and comparing them to later responses, he identifies three types of response to the opening. These three responses initially appear in 1807, 1857 and 1930, and he details how the expectations of these responses relate to the occurrence and use of musical formulae at these points in history (288). These historically-located “subjects supposed to expect” then enable the theorist to assume different sets of expectations and so enjoy the most famous C sharp in classical music from a variety of vantage points.

The composer’s “subject supposed to expect”

For my second point, I want to return to detective stories. George Grella notes that the revelation in a detective story is often not directly derivable from the content as provided:

It seems clear, however, that although the puzzle is central to the detective novel, it does not in fact provide the chief source of appeal; the reader generally cannot solve it by the detective's means, and thus derives his chief pleasure not from duplicating but from observing the mastermind's work. [...] The novels do not so much challenge human ingenuity as display it to its furthest limits. The reader does not share the detective's ability, rather he marvels at it. (Grella 1970: 32)

It is worth looking at this in the context of the earlier quotes from Eco, Caplin and Cavett-Dunsby where they talk about the compositional problems which composers solve. In a detective novel, the puzzle, detective and author are relatively distinct, but music theory frequently tangles up these positions, especially when talking about the way that composers resolve musical problems. If the composer is solving problems inherent to the musical content, then the composer is like the detective here, except that they have also set the musical puzzle that

they subsequently solve. This splitting of roles in the figure of the composer can also be seen when Meyer talks about the way that the composer's internalised audience allows him to become "self-conscious and objective":

It is precisely because he is continually taking the attitude of the listener that the composer becomes aware and conscious of his own self, his ego, in the process of creation. In this process of differentiation between himself as composer and himself as audience, the composer becomes self-conscious and objective. (Meyer 1956: 41)

Meyer is right that composers are incredibly aware of their audiences, such as when Mozart speaks about the effect of his music on different listeners:

There are passages here and there that only connoisseurs can fully appreciate – yet the common listener will find them satisfying as well, although without knowing why. (Spaethling 2000: 336f.)

Music analysts (including myself) are often drawn to the writings of composers, particularly examples like this where they speak about the effects they intend to create. As in this case, though, Mozart is speaking about his own "subject supposed to expect". Mozart has a clear idea of his audience and their abilities, and no doubt this is based on his experiences. But there is still an element of idealisation present. From the perspective of music theory, however, using a composer's assessment of their audience means that what looks like an analysis of effect can actually be an analysis of production. In Nattiez's terms it is *poetic* rather than *aesthetic* (Nattiez 1987/1990: 10-16). But in detective novel terms, the composer does not just provide the mystery and the solution, but the marvelling reader as well.

However, this internal conception of the audience that Meyer is referring to (and that Mozart exemplifies) has a specific structure within Lacanian theory. In the "Sublime Object of Ideology" Žižek describes the relationship between "imaginary and symbolic identification":

The relation between imaginary and symbolic identification – between the ideal ego [*Idealich*] and the ego-ideal [*Ich-Ideal*] – is [...] that between 'constituted' and 'constitutive' identification: to put it simply, imaginary

identification is identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be', and symbolic identification, identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love (2008b: 116).

Here then, we can see that Mozart is writing his music for a symbolic "connoisseur", the "*Ich-Ideal*" so that he (or his *Idealich*) can be an appreciated, or as Žižek might say, loved. It is possible to object that Mozart's connoisseurs did exist. However, Mozart is clearly speaking of ones he is imagining, ones that (unlike "real" connoisseurs) are destined to truly appreciate his intentions. From our modern perspective, there is a kind of Hegelian "positing the presuppositions" present here as well. There are far more connoisseurs of Mozart today than in his own time and perhaps that is because Mozart assumed that they were always already there.

The musical architecture of desire and the 'master signifier' of expectation-based music analysis

There is another gaze that observes in music a perfect "subject supposed to expect" and that is in literary theory. In literary criticism, certainly in the middle of the last century, there are repeated examples of the idea that form is related to expectation, frustration and fulfilment. In such cases, the example of music is used to demonstrate a more formal and "purer" mechanism of expectation when compared to literature. Here Kenneth Burke and Barbara Herrnstein Smith begin by relating literary form to some form of expectation or desire and then use a musical example as a kind of purified model of this in practice.

[Form] is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite. This satisfaction – so complicated is the human mechanism – at times involves a temporary set of frustrations, but in the end these frustrations prove to be simply a more involved kind of satisfaction, and furthermore serve to make the satisfaction of fulfilment more intense. [...]

Music, then, fitted less than any other art for imparting information, deals minutely in frustration and fulfilments of desire, and for that reason more often gives us those curves of emotion which, because they are natural, can bear repetition without loss. (Burke 1968: 31, 36)

[The] occurrence of the terminal event is a confirmation of expectations that have been established by the structure of the sequence and is usually distinctly gratifying. [...] When we hear a piece of music in which the continual presence of structural principles yields the [promise of eventual resolution], our pleasure derives largely from the tensions created by the local deferments of resolution and evasions of expectation. (Smith 1968: 2)

This can even be related to the idea of music as detective fiction, since detective fiction is a literary form that is often seen as simple and archetypal. However, for Burke, this formal purity explains why music can stand repetition more than the other arts:

One reason why music can stand repetition so much more sturdily than correspondingly good prose is that music, of all the arts is by its nature least suited to the psychology of information, and has remained closer to the psychology of form. Here form cannot atrophy. (Burke 1968: 34)

On the face of it, this is much like the Schopenhauerian conception of music as some kind of phenomenal enactment of the structure of the world's underlying noumenal desire. However, there is none of the excess found in Schopenhauer's conception of music as representing the will. As Žižek notes:

It was Schopenhauer who claimed that music brings us into contact with the Ding an sich: it renders directly the drive of the life substance that words can only signify. For that reason, music "seizes" the subject in the Real of his or her being, by-passing the detour of meaning: in music, we hear what we cannot see, the vibrating life force beneath the flow of *Vorstellungen*. Žižek (2012: 670)

Žižek's point about Schopenhauer is a key one that he makes in a number of works, but it is particularly notable for being one of the few times Žižek refers to Schopenhauer's ideas at all. Admittedly, Žižek is using Schopenhauer to exemplify a certain strand of nineteenth-century Romantic thought, but Hegel's thought on music is rarely mentioned by

Žižek, which is striking given how much he writes about music. But perhaps that is because Hegel's position is surprisingly close to that of Burke and Smith. For example, take this oft-quoted example from Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*:

On this account what alone is fitted for expression in music is the object-free inner life, abstract subjectivity as such. This is our entirely empty self, the self without any further content. Consequently the chief task of music consists in making resound, not the objective world itself, but, on the contrary, the manner in which the inmost self is moved to the depths of its personality and conscious soul.

[...]

Music, on the contrary, as we have seen more than once, has for such an object only the element of the subjective itself, whereby the inner life therefore coincides with itself and it reverts into itself in its expression which is feeling's song. Music is spirit, or the soul which resounds directly on its own account and feels satisfaction in its perception of itself. But as a fine art it at once acquires, from the spirit's point of view, a summons to bridle the emotions themselves as well as their expression, so that there is no being carried away into a bacchanalian rage or whirling tumult of passions, or a resting in the distraction of despair, but on the contrary an abiding peace and freedom in the outpouring of emotion whether in jubilant delight or the deepest grief. (Hegel 1886: un-paginated)

Here we have an idea of subjectivity experiencing subjectivity without being affected with a subjective experience. Thus music has the topology of enjoyment, but at a distance. However, it is worth considering this in the context of Burke's comments on music's repeatability and instead inverting its suppositions. What if the repeatability of music were less related to abstract depictions of subjectivity and desire, than to the direct experience of the drive? This would instead make of musical experience a directly traumatic event, where we replace repeatability with a "compulsion to repeat". What is left is something akin to how Žižek describes the Lacanian concept of the "fundamental fantasy". So, rather than a distant and noble apprehension of abstract subjectivity, instead the subject is emptied of content:

The Freudian point regarding fundamental fantasy would be that each subject, female or male, possesses such a 'factor' which regulates his or her desire: 'a woman, viewed from behind, on her hand and knees' was the Wolf Man's factor... There is nothing uplifting about our awareness of this 'factor': such awareness can never be subjectivized; it is uncanny - even horrifying - since it somehow 'depossesses' the subject, reducing her or him to a puppet-like level 'beyond dignity and freedom' (Žižek 2008: 8).

Thus there is an empty subjectivity present, as Hegel describes, but it is the subject's own. However, this aspect of musical listening could be kept at bay by a pure figure freed from this monstrous repetition as they only ever hear the music once. This is, of course, the "subject supposed to expect". In that figure, the discourse of musical expectation protects us against the "compulsion to repeat" and instead suppresses that enjoyment, allowing it to emerge as the surplus enjoyment of music theory. That then, is the enjoyment found at Cone's "Third Level".

Since this surplus enjoyment emerges out of an enjoyment prohibited by the "law" of music theory, this leads to one final Lacanian concept. For Lacan, all discourses make sense through reference to a master signifier whose emptiness allows the production of meaning through relation to it. As Žižek notes:

[The] quasi-transcendental master signifier that guarantees the consistency of the big Other—is ultimately a fake, an empty signifier without a signified. Suffice it to recall how a community functions: the master signifier that guarantees the community's consistency is a signifier whose signified is an enigma for the members themselves—nobody really knows what it means, but each of them somehow presupposes that others know it, that it has to mean "the real thing," and so they use it all the time. (Žižek 2002/2005: 304-05)

In this essay I have looked at the long history in music theory of expectation. "Expectation" can be seen to have many of the qualities of the "master signifier" described by Žižek. The concept is indeed used "all the time" in music theory, despite an existence which is somewhat

obscure and if attended to, idealised or abstracted. In this final reading, the “subject supposed to expect” does not just provide a support for the enjoyment of expectation-based music theory. In fact, it is a side effect of the empty signifier which enables it even to be possible.

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Notes

¹ It's interesting to note that Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff's work on their 'Generative Theory' is often bracketed with the work of Meyer and Narmour, for example by Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis (2015). However, Lerdahl and Jackendoff's 'The Generative Theory of Tonal Music' (1983) itself is very circumspect on the subject of expectation. Later, Lerdahl (2001:5) explicitly disavowed the idea that their theory relates to the linear experience of music, instead stating that 'the theory provides structural descriptions not for how the music is heard as it unfolds in time but for the final state of a listener's understanding.'

² This essay is not intended as a critique of the content of Huron's theorising, but rather to critically examine models of musical expectation. Of course, the

arguments presented here could be used in support of such a critique, but this essay on its own is not substantial enough for that particular task. However, William Benjamin's (2007) review article, which is a succinct assessment of Huron's work on its own terms, provides an excellent starting point.

³ As I noted above, Lerdahl and Jackendoff are not theorising about perception as a temporal process. However, it is notable that they share common issues and critiques with expectation-based theory because of a similar emphasis on the 'experienced listener' (see Nielsen 42-43).

⁴ This example is particularly notable given Žižek's (2014b) comments comparing Schoenberg and Stravinsky: 'I am against Stravinsky, for Schoenberg. I think that when we get a breakthrough in art, like with Schoenberg, we always get then accompanying it, a figure like Stravinsky. Renormalising the breakthrough. Cutting off the subversive edge of the breakthrough.' In the context of this article, this is particularly apparent, as there is no equivalent debate about recuperating the shock of Schoenberg's music for a modern audience. And given that Žižek was talking about '*Erwartung*' in particular, Schoenberg's title is even more resonant.