

The beginning of Haydn's Oxford Symphony: a two players game.

In 1788–89 Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) composed the three symphonies nos. 90, 91 and 92 for the Parisian musical society Concert de la Loge Olympique. Symphony 92 was played and conducted by Haydn in July 1791 at the conferring of Haydn's Honorary Doctorate of Music by Oxford University.

"A more wonderful composition never was heard", wrote the Morning Chronicle. "The applause given to Haydn, who conducted this admirable effort of his genius, was enthusiastic; but the merit of the work, in the opinion of all musicians present, exceeded all praise."

This so called 'Oxford' symphony represents indeed the culmination of Haydn's symphonic skills. It is one of an entirely different order, both intellectually and from the point of view of technique and composition. The first movement is especially significant: the first 82 bars ('exposition' in the 19th century concept 'sonataform') is an excellent illustration of a –what I always call– 'economic way of composing'. I will try to show this in the following.

1. The players of the game.

A cadence (Latin *cadentia*, "a falling") is a melodic–harmonic formula that concludes a phrase, section, or piece of music. Cadences give phrases a distinctive ending that can, for example, indicate to the listener whether the piece is to be continued or concluded. An analogy may be made with punctuation, with some weaker cadences acting as commas that indicate a pause or momentary rest, while a stronger cadence acts as a period that signals the end of the phrase. A cadence is labeled more or less "weak" or "strong" depending on the sense of finality it creates.

Parts of a cadence are more or less definite melodic formulas, also called *clausulae* (from Latin *clausula*), consisting of three tones, of which the first tone is variable. A well-known example is the 'discant *clausula*' as a succession of first tone–leading tone–first tone (1–7–1; in G major: G–F sharp–G) and the 'bass *clausula*' with the last two tones as a falling fifth: fifth tone–first tone (5–1; in G major: G–C). The cadence in G major of figure 1 is within modal–tonal music the normal form of a cadence, with the discant *clausula* in the highest voice and the bass *clausula* in the lowest voice. It can be labeled as the 'strongest' cadence, acting as a period.

Figure 1: the normal and strongest cadence

The musical score for Figure 1 is presented in four staves. The top three staves are in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The top staff is labeled "discant clausula" and contains the notes G4, F#4, G4. The second staff contains the notes G4, F#4, G4. The third staff contains the notes G4, F#4, G4. The bottom staff is labeled "bass clausula" and contains the notes G2, C3, G2. The notes are marked with ^ and numbers 1, 7, 1 for the discant clausula and 1, 5, 1 for the bass clausula.

Note that from a melodic point of view the leading tone F sharp has a strong drive to the first tone G (or – in other words– the first tone G is defined by the leading tone F sharp). Note also that in this case the leading tone is part of the dominant (V) and that the first tone is part of the tonic (I).

The drive of the leading tone is so strong that you can easily modulate from G major to D major by introducing the leading tone C sharp of D major as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 2: modulation from G major to D major

G: I _____ V _____ I D: V I

Note that the drive to D major completely disappears when c'' sharp in the highest voice of bar 4 is replaced by c'' natural.

These key defining qualities are the main features of the players of the game:

- player 1: the first tone G (as part of I) and the leading tone F sharp (as part of V), defending field G major
- player 2: the first tone D (as part of I) and the leading tone C sharp (as part of V), defending field D major.

The game can start: player 1 against player 2 or G major against D major or tonic key against dominant key.

2. The game.

The figures 3–7 show the stages of the game of the first 82 bars of the first movement of Haydn's Oxford Symphony. It is presented as an annotated two part reduction with harmonic information (Roman numerals below the lowest stave) and melodic information about the first tone and leading tone of G major and D major (1 and 7 with caret, between the staves).

Note that the first tone and leading tone can be 'hidden', i.e. they can be transferred to inner voices or they can be implied (which is of course always a matter of interpretation...).

Figure 3: the game

The musical score consists of three systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef), in 3/4 time and G major. The notes are as follows:

- System 1 (bars 1-8): Treble clef has a dotted quarter note G in every bar. Bass clef has a dotted quarter note G in every bar. Harmonic analysis below: G: I (bars 1-3), IV (bar 4), V (bars 5-8). Fingerings: Treble clef has ^ 1 (bar 1), ^ 7 (bar 4), ^ 7 (bar 8). Bass clef has ^ 1 (bar 1), ^ 7 (bar 4), ^ 7 (bar 8).
- System 2 (bars 9-16): Treble clef has a dotted quarter note G in every bar. Bass clef has a dotted quarter note G in every bar. Harmonic analysis below: I (bars 9-11), V (bar 12), (V) (bar 13), V (bar 14), I(minor) (bar 15), (V) (bar 16). Fingerings: Treble clef has ^ 1 (bar 9), ^ 7 (bar 12), # (bar 13), ^ 7 (bar 14), ^ 1 (bar 15), ^ 1 (bar 16). Bass clef has ^ 1 (bar 9), ^ 7 (bar 12), # (bar 13), ^ 7 (bar 14), ^ 1 (bar 15), ^ 1 (bar 16). A note above bar 13 says "(C sharp: new 7 drive to D)". A note above bar 16 says "(new 7)".
- System 3 (bars 17-24): Treble clef has a dotted quarter note G in every bar. Bass clef has a dotted quarter note G in every bar. Harmonic analysis below: (V) (bars 17-20), V (bars 21-24). Fingerings: Treble clef has ^ 1 (bar 17), ^ 7 (bar 21). Bass clef has ^ 1 (bar 17), ^ 7 (bar 21).

The first 8 bars define G major clearly with a sort of oscillating first tone G (I) and leading tone F sharp (V). The first tone G becomes part of a Italian sixth (bar 13 and 16), which acts as a secondary or applied dominant (V) to V in G major.

Note that the C sharp has a strong drive to tone D (i.e. D major), which could be expected in bar 21. However, bar 21 introduces completely unexpected the minor seventh, C natural, as part of V in G major (such irregular progression is called an 'ellipsis').

Figure 4: the game (continued)

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

33 34 35 36 37 38 39

G: I V I V I IV V I

I V I V I V I D: V I V I V I

modulation via C sharp to D major

Again, G major is clearly defined, in the same way. However, bar 37 shows what was missing in bar 21: a cadence in D major, repeated three times. C sharp is now part of the dominant seventh of D major and functions as a new leading tone, defining the first tone D.

Figure 5: the game (continued)

40 41 42 43 44 45 46

I in D major > V in G major I

After the three cadences in D major, the vital tone C sharp is modified to C natural; result: back to G major with tone F sharp as a leading tone.

Figure 6: the game (continued)

48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55

modulation to D major

G: VI D: I IV

56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66

D minor elements D major

V (d: I VIb IVb V) D: I

From bar 48 a stepwise, descending line reaches its goal in bar 54: D major (note the stressing function of the dominant chords: A major and the A dominant seventh). Then, five bars with dominant function in D major (bar 56 – 60) result in a short, however surprising D minor section (bar 61 – 63), that ends in D major.

Figure 7 shows – after a descending unison passage (bar 66 – 69) which can be interpreted as a horizontalized seventh chord of II – the concluding and clear definition of D major with a dominant role for the leading tone (C sharp) and the first tone (tone D).

Figure 7: the game (continued)

67 68 69 70 71

D: I V I V

72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82

I II6 V I II6 V I V I V I V I V I

3. Concluding remarks.

The foregoing figures demonstrate the clear construction of the first 82 bars from the first movement of Haydn's Oxford Symphony. The harmonic organization is basic, consisting merely of tonic and dominant chords from G major or D major. The underlying melodic organization is also basic: it can be defined in terms of first tone and leading tone of G major or D major as part of I or V. The 82 bars represent in an easy way a discussion between G major and D major, or as you like, a two players game, each player defending his own tonal region. Winner is the D major player.

The way Haydn elaborate these basic harmonic and melodic structures is really astonishing. Figure 8 shows the first 12 bars of the Oxford Symphony, which is – pars pro toto – an very nice example of Haydn's craftsmanship.

Figure 8: the first 12 bars as an example of Haydn's ingenious elaboration techniques.

The image displays a musical score for the first 12 bars of Haydn's Oxford Symphony, marked 'Adagio'. The score includes parts for Flauto, Obol, Fagotti, Corni in G (Sol), Trombe in C (Do), Timpani in G D (Sol Re), Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso. Below the score, a harmonic analysis is provided, showing the sequence of chords: I — IV V —. A second analysis for the string parts (Vl.I, Vl.II, Via., Vlc., Ch.) shows: V — * I * I — V, where * indicates an appoggiatura. A measure number '10' is visible at the bottom of the string parts.