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The Triumph of Timelessness Over Time in Hindemith's "Turandot Scherzo" from Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber

GENE ANDERSON

Ι

Hindemith's title of his four-movement von Weber suite of 1943 poses a problem. The composer's characteristic reticence about his sources delayed their documentation for some twenty years, whereupon it was found that the *Symphonic Metamorphosis* was based, not only on themes, but on complete pieces.¹ Rather than "thematic transformation," the "metamorphosis" of the title would thus be more accurately regarded as "recomposition," in which changes of tone system, timbre, harmony, rhythm, and form, in addition to the melody itself, transform every level and component of the original composition's structure.² This study attempts to demonstrate how Hindemith achieves such a metamorphosis in the "Turandot Scherzo" through a compositional process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, with, as a catalyzing agent, rhythm or the manipulation of time.

The metamorphosis of the Turandot theme began long before Hindemith's attraction to it. Initially von Weber borrowed the melody from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique* of 1768 for his aborted *Overtura Chinesa* of 1804, which he revised and expanded five years later into incidental music for Schiller's drama, *Turandot*, hence its name. Rousseau, in turn, had taken the tune from the third volume of Jean-Baptiste du Halde's *Description géographique, historique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise* of 1735, in which it was included with five other "Chinese airs" sent to the Jesuit scholar by Catholic missionaries.³

Example 1 tabulates the four relevant versions of the Turandot melody, with Hindemith's transposed up a major second to facilitate comparison. The original air's most conspicuous harmonic and formal characteristics comprise a pentatonic tone system (G-A-B-D-E-G) and a division into three unequal phrases of 4, 5½, and 3½ bars (labeled respectively A, B1, and B2). By accident or design Rousseau's minor but not

¹Luther Noss, *Paul Hindemith in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1989), 120. The sources are traced in an article by Wilfried Brennecke, "Die Metamorphosen-Werke von Richard Strauss und Paul Hindemith," *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* 103/4 (1963), 199-208. See also John Fenton, "Hindemith's Symphonic Metamorphoses," *Music Teacher* (February, 1978), 19-21.

² See also Gene Anderson, "Musical Metamorphoses in Hindemith's 'March' from the Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber," Journal of Band Research, 30/1 (Fall, 1994), 1-10.

³A modern transcription of the melodies and an English translation of du Halde's text appear in Frank Harrison, *Time*, *Place and Music: An Anthology of Ethnomusicological Observation c. 1550 to c. 1800* (Amsterdam: Frits Knuf, 1973), 161-66, 207-08; a critique of Rousseau's transcription and the tune's original Chinese notation appear in Jean-Benjamin de Laborde's *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, I (Paris, 1780), 145-147. See also Kii-Ming Lo, "In Search of a Chinese Melody: Tracing the Source of Weber's *Musik zu Turandot*, Op. 37," *Tradition and Its Future in Music, Report of the Fourth Symposium of the International Musicological Society* (Osaka: Mita, 1991), 511-20.



insignificant changes "modernized" the tune by eliminating the dotted rhythm in the first half of bar 3, possibly to mirror the rhythm of the second half, and by introducing, in the same bar, a sixth note, F, into the pentatonic tone system, suggesting the Mixolydian mode. Von Weber's provision of a key signature modernized the melody further by implying a tone system of G Major with an altered seventh rather than Mixolydian, whose modal character he further eroded or eliminated entirely in subsequent variations. Hindemith extended the tune's evolution into the twentieth century by combining symmetry of form—the repeated A section plus B1 and B2 make four phrases of almost equal length—with a chromatic tone system resulting from a mixture of the Mixolydian and Locrian modes (see Example 2).⁴

Example 2



Π

The dialectic of Hegelian metaphysics is suggested by much of Hindemith's music, which, it may be said, begins with a statement of a problem or thesis, continues with a contradiction of the problem or antithesis, and concludes with a resolution of the problem, or synthesis. The thesis of the "Turandot Scherzo" is presented in the Introduction (bars 1-27)—a series of intonations by the chimes of the first four notes of the Turandot theme (F-D-C-A) alternating with separately orchestrated phrases of the theme itself over a string pedal. A percussion transition into the body of the piece, corresponding to von Weber's drum introduction to the *Turandot Overture*, concludes the section.

A striking aspect of the Introduction is its atmosphere of timelessness, evoked both

⁴The anomalous G^{\sharp} and E^{\dagger} of bar 3 and the A of bar 9 should probably be regarded as modifications of rather than departures from Mixolydian—the G^{\sharp} and E^{\dagger} as part of an applied dominant and the A as the lowered third of an altered tonic.

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programmatically, by the changing tempi and indeterminate fermatas over an arhythmic drone, and metaphorically, by a disguised transformation of natural accent within the percussion transition— three overlapping sets of thirteen beats beginning alternately on 4 and 2 within the measure. Rather than extending to the beginning of the Variation Section (at the 2/2 time signature), the percussion transition overlaps it by two bars, uniting the two portions of the piece like imbricated masonry (see Example 3).

Example 3



Time, though, rather than timelessness seems the focus of the Variation Section. Here the disjunct phrases of the Turandot theme from the Introduction are united, propelled by a driving inflexible tempo, varied by timbre rather than by key, and embellished by two distinct and increasingly complex accompaniments—one evolving into trills and the other into triplets (see Example 4). Written in triple counterpoint, with the melody sometimes above, below, or between the two accompaniments, the variations exhibit an impressive display of polyphonic writing. Even more notably, Hindemith's intricate orchestration allows every instrument the theme at least once while assigning most others, in addition, the two accompaniments, sometimes moving between two or all three levels

Example 4



HINDEMITH'S "TURANDOT SCHERZO"

in the same variation, as with the strings in Variation 6 (see Table 1).

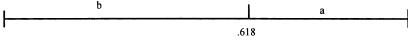
The Variation Section concludes in bar 147 on a climactic D major triad, which dissolves into "timeless" meandering triplets from Accompaniment 2. These, in turn, serve as a transition into the Fugato Section at measure 160, overlapping its entrance like its percussion prototype of bars 22-29. The D major triad is the most structurally significant portion of the piece. It falls, or seems designed to fall, exactly in the center of the "Turandot Scherzo," a hypothesis supported by dividing Hindemith's suggested tempo markings into the number of quarter or half notes contained in the piece and dividing again by 2.⁵ The midpoint also marks the beginning of Hindemith's departure from his von Weber model, whose form he had thus far adopted (see Table 2). Thereafter relationships based on the golden section rather than additive ones dominate "Turandot Scherzo," with the most prominent structural events—the woodwind entry in the Fugato at bar 206 (as distinct from the transitional woodwind passage at bar 204), the Coda at bar 279, and the Recapitulation at bar 245—occurring at the golden section (GS) of their respective portions (see Table 3).⁶

Besides its structural function, the D major triad serves even more significant antithetical functions integral to the principles underlying the work's construction by challenging F as the tonic and by representing the ultimate contrast to the preceding counterpoint with its harmonic unity, stability, and simultaneity. As for Hindemith's choice of D itself as an antithetical tonic, one should probably dismiss its traditional relationship to F, since associations of major and relative minor are nowhere else evident in the piece. Its selection most likely stemmed from the ambiguity of tonic exhibited in the Turandot theme itself, whose first bar can be heard equally in F major or D Minor. While the second bar affirms D as tonic, F gradually reassumes supremacy thereafter, exhibiting in microcosm the tonal plan of the work.

Yet in addition to its several inimical features, the D Major triad also offers a few less contrary. Assuming assimilation of Hindemith's ostensible method of thesis-antithesis-synthesis by this point in the piece, the chord fixes the listener's location in the movement by its temporal and harmonic significance. One knows, too, when the music

⁵This results in 0.82 minutes (49 seconds) for the Introduction (108/132) + 5.81 minutes (5 minutes and 49 seconds) for the rest of the movement (558/96, including the 8 extra beats from 3/2 bars) for a total of 6.63 minutes (6 minutes and 38 seconds), whose midpoint is 3.315 minutes (3 minutes and 19 seconds). The D major triad comes at bar 119 of the Variations, having consumed 2.48 minutes (238/96) or 2 minutes and 29 seconds, which when added to the length of the Introduction of 0.82 minutes (49 seconds) equals 3.30 minutes or 3 minutes and 18 seconds.

⁶The golden section, or GS, can be illustrated by the division of a line in which the ratio of smaller to the larger equals the ratio of the larger to the whole (a/b = b/a+b). The GS of a line 1 unit long falls mathematically at .618..., an irrational number:



Fibonacci ratios, whose higher adjacent numbers (2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, etc.) approximate ever more closely the GS, are evident in the phrase structure of the fugato theme (2:3) and can be traced to the Turandot melody itself, whose structural asymmetry might be partially explained by the occurrence of B2 very near the GS (5:8) of the final 9 bars. For an introduction of the GS in music and proportional analysis in general, see Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1983). Concerning proportional structure in Hindemith, although not treating *Symphonic Metamorphosis* specifically, see analyses in David Neumeyer, *The Music of Paul Hindemith* (New Haven: Yale University, 1986) and the same author's "Tonal, Formal, and Proportional Design in Hindemith's Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 9 (1987), 93-116.

Section		Theme/Int	roducti	on		Variat	ion 1	
Phrase	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Melody	fl	pic/cl	fl	cl	vcl/cb	vla/vcl	vcl/cb	vl/vla
Accom -1	str	fl		pic/fl	ww	ww	ww	ww
2	SUL		str			cb		cb

Table 1 Instrumentation of "Turandot Scherzo" Variations

s		Varia	tion 2			Varia	tion 3	
P	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
м	ob/cl	fl/ob/ bcl/bsn	ob	fl/ bcl/bsn	hn	tpt	hn/bcl	hn/tpt
1	vl 1	vl 1-2	vl 1	vl 1-2	ww	ww	ww	ww
2	vcl/cb	vla/ vcl/cb	vcl/cb	vla/ vcl/cb	bsn/ vcl/cb	vl/ vcl/cb	bsn/ vcl/cb	bsn/vl/ vcl/cb

s		Varia	tion 4		1	Varia	tion 5	
Р	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
м	hn/trb	trb	hn/trb	trb	vl/vla	vl/vla	vl/vla	vl/vla
1	ww	ww	ww	ww	hn 1-2	hn 1-4	hn 3-4	hn 1-4
2	vcl	vla	vcl	vla	cl/bcl	fl/ob	cl/bcl	fl/ob

s		Varia	tion 6			Varia	tion 7	
P	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
м	str	bsn/hn/ trb/tb	str	bsn/hn/ trb/tb	tpt	hn	tpt	hn
1	hn/tpt	ww	hn/tpt	str	ww	ww	ww	ww
2	ww	str	ww	ww	str	str	str	str

2	
Table	

Turandot Overture: Formal Scheme

Section Intro Theme	Intro	Theme					Varis	Variations					Coda
Subsection				2 trans	trans	3	3 trans	4	trans	5	trans	و	
Measure		ъ	5 19	32 45	45	56 69	69	74	87	87 91	109	113	126
Timbre drs	drs	pic	vl	pic vl ww/vl	ens	ens vl/vcl ens	ens	c1/bsn	ens	ens vl/ob	drs	MM	ens
Tone System		W	Mixolydian	u		Ð		q		Eh/G		Mix	υ
Dynamics		۵.	đđ	pp ff pp ff ff p ff p	ff	p ff p	ff	ф,	££	ff ff/p	đđ	~	££
Tempo						alle	allegro moderato	erato					

al Scheme
Forma
Sections:
Variation
_
and
Introduction
-
Scherzo
"Turandot

Section	Introduction	ion				Vari	Variations				Transition
Subsection	theme	trans	1	7	£	4	2	و	2	Cadence	
Measure	1	22	28	45	62	79	96	113	130	147	151
Timbre	Timbre fl/pic/cl perc low str ww hn/tpt hn/trb high str str/br tpt/hn	perc	low str	MM	hn/tpt	hn/trb	high str	str/br	tpt/hn	ens	٧l
Tone System				F Mixol	F Mixolydian/Locrian	ocrian				٩	
Dynamics	۵.	шĘ	mf p/mp	mf		£			££		decresc.
Tempo	moderato accel	accel			lebhaft	(half n	lebhaft (half note = 96)			tenuto	tenuto a tempo

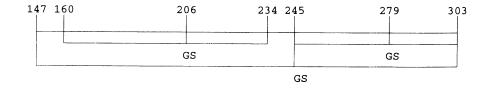


Table 3 Golden Proportions in "Turandot Scherzo"

will end (in 3 minutes and 18 seconds if Hindemith's tempi and proportions are strictly observed) and suspects how—by the reassertion of F as an unequivocal tonic of a simplified, if not major, tone system and by a resolution of the time/timelessness conflict posed by the Introduction and expanded by the Variation Section.

III

Despite the pervasive polyphony of the Variation Section, its greater focus is timbral display. The focus of the Fugato Section shifts decidedly to counterpoint, accompanied by several additional antitheses: (1) instead of F as a continuous tone center, the section presents a statement of the subject on virtually every pitch of the chromatic scale; (2) instead of the entire theme, the fugato subject is a foreshortened derivative enlivened by some jazzy syncopation—the thematic metamorphosis promised by the title; (3) instead of the theme's inherent modal ambiguity, the fugato subject is couched in unequivocal minor; and (4) instead of the entire orchestra, the brass and woodwind sections are employed independently. In addition, Hindemith often uses the first two measures of the subject (x) separately from the third (y) and combines repetitions or sequences of each to make structures like xxy or xyy (see Example 5).

Like the variations the fugato begins softly and simply, accumulating textural and dynamic complexity as it proceeds (see Table 4). It opens traditionally with a four-voice exposition followed by an episode based on a rhythmic motive of x. For the rest of the fugato, however, the subject is constantly present either in full, extended, or abbreviated form, while subsequent episodes, instead of eschewing the subject, serve rather to develop or extend it. Paralleling the different accompaniments in the Variation Section are several strict countersubjects (Cs1, Cs2, and Cs3), of which the first two appear in the brass portion (see Example 6) and the third in the woodwind portion. The final exposition, in which identically harmonized and accompanied versions of the subject are stated by successive woodwind families on a series of descending minor thirds en route to the tonic F, crowns the contrapuntal complexity (see Example 7).

Formal Scheme	
Furandot Scherzo " Fugato Section:	

Table 4

Section						Fuç	Fugato (brass)	.ass)				
Subsection		Exposition	tion		Episode	ធ	Exposition	ų	Episode	ដ	Exposition	_
Measure 160	160	163	167	170	173	178	181	183	185	188	190	192
Subject trb	trb	цц	tpt	tр		hn/trb	hn/trb tpt/hn hn/trb	hn/trb		tpt/trb	tpt/trb tpt/trb	trb/tb
Key	£4	υ	A	ţu,	rhythmic	Ab	9 3	A	extension	Ab	٩Þ	υ
Countersubject 1		trb	ਸ਼		motive	tЪ	tb	tb	of y	ťb	ţ	দ
Countersubject 2					from x	ų	trb			臣	trb	
Countersubject 3												
Dynamics	mf	Δ.	Jm	u .	đ		mf		f/p	mf	£	cresc.
Tempo					ī	lebhaft (half note = 96)	(half n	ote = 9(6)			

S						Fugato (woodwind)	oodwind)			
ŝ	Episode	Expos.	Transition		Exposition		Episode		Exposition	
Σ	195	201	204	206	209	213	216	225	228	231
Sub	rhythmically	tpt/hn	rhythmically tpt/hn f1/c1/bsn/cbsn	Ehn	qo	bc1/Ehn	rhythmically ob/Ehn pic/fl/cl cl/bcl	ob/Ehn	pic/fl/cl	cl/bcl
×	altered	1 21	٩	•	C#	Bþ	altered	BI	Ab	£4
Cs1	extension of trb	trb				psn	extension of			
Cs2	x in timpani						x with Cs3	f1	qo	fl/pic
Ca3				f1/bsn	fl/bsn fl/cl/bsn fl/ob/cl	fl/ob/cl		c1/bc1	cl/bcl cl/bcl	cl/ob
D	ff		٩		"T		f		mf	
H					lebhaft	aft				
								percuss	percussion retransition	nsition

HINDEMITH'S "TURANDOT SCHERZO"



Example 6



Pertinent to this study's premise, the Fugato Section may be said to represent a heightened rigidity of time relationships—other than a canon, little can be more temporally restrictive than a fugue with its orderly and relatively predictable procession of subjects, countersubjects, expositions, and episodes—while simultaneously foreshad-owing the rhythmic disruption to follow in four places: (1) towards the end of the brass portion where the timpani repeats a seven-beat pattern of the x motive in bars 195-200 (see Example 8); (2) at the comparable location in the woodwind portion (bars 216-222) where the x motive makes 4 abortive entries on beat 4 rather than 2 before righting itself again by means of stretto in bar 223; (3) in the final exposition (bars 225-234) where a variant of Cs2 occurs in hemiola (see Example 7); and (4) in the fugue subject itself, where accented weak beats are the rule. Finally, not to be overlooked are the golden section relationships with their irrational proportions that govern the second half of the piece, contributing their own abstract, intuitive, and intangible sensation of timelessness to the proceedings.











Functioning as the antithetical B portion or Development of this quasi sonata form, the Fugato Section gives way to the Recapitulation announced in bar 234 by the percussion transition from the Introduction, which begins almost imperceptibly before the end of the fugato much as it ended imperceptibly after the beginning of the variations. Complicating its overlapping $3\frac{1}{4}$ -bar pattern are two additional patterns of 4 bars in the chimes and 3 bars in the timpani (later shortened to $2\frac{1}{2}$ bars), whose repetitions are reminiscent of the varying cycles of the talea and color in an isorhythmic motet (see Example 9).

The Recapitulation synthesizes by simplifying. Reduced to only one phrase, the theme begins in the low strings as before. But instead of a new orchestration for every variation, the original instruments continue with the theme to be joined by additional ones in Variations 4-7. Paraphrases of their originals, accompaniments 1 and 2 undergo the same procedure of additive orchestration as the theme (see Table 5). A simplified theme is couched in a simplified tone system, F Mixolydian, although retaining the original's implied tonicization of the mediant (see Example 10).

There is evidence, however, of a more fundamental synthesis. Hindemith's rhythmic disruption of the fourth bar of the Recapitulation theme (the 3/2 bar) begins to relate the "time-bound" Variation and Fugato Sections to the "timeless" Transition Sections. Even more significantly, the D major triad from the middle of the piece, considered to represent the polar opposite of a modal system on F, is modified at its comparable location in the Recapitulation (bar 274) to a D¹ major triad, embracing F as its third.



The final and most complete syntheses await the Coda. As the percussion instruments begin once more a variation of their disjunct cyclic rhythms from the retransition (see Example 9), the rest of orchestra abandons the Turandot theme to the timpani, with which it collaborates in a separate $2\frac{3}{4}$ -bar rhythmic pattern (two bars of 2/2 plus one bar of 3/4). The orchestra's stuttered quarter-note chords summarize the tonal and timbral journey of the movement, departing from an ensemble F major triad and passing through combinations of increasing dissonance and varied orchestration involving all pitches of the combined Mixolydian and Locrian tone systems (see Example 11). Upon the return to the F major triad in the woodwinds (bar 288), timbre and key are thereafter ultimately reduced to reiterated Fs in the solo piccolo. Meanwhile the already abbreviated theme in the timpani is diminished to its first four pitches while the ostinato of the same pitches in augmentation by the chimes begins to break up—first by syncopation, then by rests before the winds' quiet conclusion on an F major chord.

Thus is the orchestra timbrally and rhythmically united for the first time. The percussion instruments, virtually banished from the wind portions to transitions between them earlier in the piece, exert an evolving and eventually overpowering complexity of rhythm that obscures, overturns, and finally destroys the natural accent promoted by the rest of the ensemble. They are the victors in this aural conflict; their timelessness vanquishing time—portraying in art much more effectively than in words the ageless appeal of an ancient Chinese air.

Example 10





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 Table 5

 "Turandot Scherzo" Recapitulation and Coda: Formal Scheme

Section	Section Retransition				Vé	Variations				Coda
Subsection		Ъ	7	з	4	5	9	7	cadence	
Measure	234	246	250	254	258	262	266	270	274	280
Theme	Theme chimes/timp		vc1/cb		Ŧ	+vla	+vl2/cbsn +vl1/tb	+vll/tb		percussion
			cl/bsn1	cl/bsn1 +Ehn/bc1 +ob +pic/f1	qo+	+pic/fl	+bsn2	in2	ensemble	
Accom-2					tpt1	tpt1 +hn1-2	+hn3-4 +tpt2/trb	+tpt2/trb		
Tone System	Tone System F pentatonic			£4	F Mixolydian	dian			٩D	F pentatonic
Dynamics p	p P D	ሲ	đu	mf			f		ff	decresc. pp
Tempo				١٤	ebha f t	lebhaft (half note = 96)	:e = 96)			