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# Convergence and Divergence in Peter Mennin's *Canzona*

Gene Anderson

In a brief but perspicacious study of Mennin's music in 1954, Walter Hendl describes the composer as "a consummate craftsman who devotes great attention to the organization of materials."<sup>1</sup> Although Hendl may not have known *Canzona*, which had been premiered in 1951 but not published until the year of his essay, the author's statement could well have been written with Mennin's sole piece for band specifically in mind. Not only is every aspect of *Canzona* integrally related to every other, but the relationships are deployed with a remarkable economy of means.

At first glance, however, variety in *Canzona* seems to overshadow unity. A formal outline reveals no less than six themes distributed among a minimum of nineteen sections of material, each distinguished by a diversity of texture, dynamics, tonality, and instrumentation. Organization of themes into groups and their intentional repetition, though, impose on this multifarious scheme a structure resembling the first movement of a Baroque concerto grosso, in which an opening ritornello or tutti, alternates with soloistic or more lightly scored sections (Table 1).<sup>2</sup> In an interpretive analysis of *Canzona*, Barry Kopetz observes that "virtually all the melodic material in the piece is derived from the

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Hendl, "The Music of Peter Mennin," *The Juilliard Review* 1/1 (Spring, 1954), 18.

<sup>2</sup> The form of *Canzona* combines binary and ternary elements with sectional repetition and variation but defies classification into any of the standard designs. Barry Kopetz ("Peter Mennin's *Canzona*," *The Instrumentalist* 43/6 [January, 1989], 18) avoids assigning a name to the formal structure, but his diagram implies a ternary pattern—"A" (bars 1-55), "B" (bars 56-96), "A" (bars 97-156) and he denotes a "theme one" (bars 12-26) and "theme two" (bars 64-71) in his text. Raeleen Horn ("Band Classics Revisited: *Canzona* by Peter Mennin," *The Instrumentalist* 51/10 [May, 1998], 80) declares the form to be rounded binary (A-B, A1, Codetta) without providing measure numbers or explanations for her divisions. For a concise discussion of *ritornello* structure, see Malcolm Boyd, *Bach: The Brandenburg Concertos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 45-58. I will argue below for a basic two-part structure.

dramatic opening."<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that Kopetz' observation is much too conservative—that *every aspect* of the piece can be traced back to *Canzona's* opening ritornello, particularly to its first three bars.

Part	Section	Theme	Dynamics	Instrumentation	Features
A	1-12	Ritornello-1	<i>ff</i>	brass sax (no ruba), full band	Syncopation, opposition of D-A minor, contrary motion, homorhythmic
	12-26	A1	<i>mf/p</i>	woodwind brass rump	A1 in upper ww and later in lower ww-brass, two accomp. figures
	26-30	A2	<i>mf/p</i>	clar sax bass rump	A2 in clar sax, essentially homorhythmic
	31-36	A3	<i>f</i>	woodwind brass	A3 in fl ob clar cor sax baritone with bn counter melody
	37-41	A2	<i>mf</i>	woodwind basses	A2 in ww with bass percussion accompaniment
	42-44	A3	<i>f</i>	full band less some clar sax	truncated version of bars 31-36
	45-55	A1	<i>ff</i>	woodwind brass	A1 in ob clar sax cor bar, in canon with low ww brass
	56-63	Ritornello-2	<i>ff</i>	full band	extension of motive x from Ritornello-1, homorhythmic
	64-71	B1	<i>mf/pp</i>	upper ww-br rbn	B1 in solo fl ob with clar bn rbn accompaniment
	72-75	B2	<i>fp, cresc.</i>	brass, low woodwind rump	B2 in cor rpb rbn with dynamic changes
	76-88	B1	<i>mf/pp</i>	pic ob sax bar bass	B1 in solo pic ob later joined by solo clar
	89-96	B2	<i>fp, cresc.</i>	clar cor rpb rbn bass	B2 in clar cor rpb rbn, extended
	97-112	A1, A3	<i>f</i>	woodwind brass	augmentation of A1 in low br/ww in canon with sax cor bar, ww counter melody, later combined with A3
	A'	113-117	A2	<i>mf</i>	woodwind basses
118-120		A3	<i>f</i>	full band less some clar sax	same as bars 42-44
121-126		A1	<i>ff</i>	full band	truncated version of bars 45-55
127-135		B1	<i>p</i>	woodwind low brass	augmentation of B1 in ww, cor accompaniment
136-146		A1	<i>f</i>	woodwind brass	A1 canon in low ww br, cor bp counter melody, upper ww accompaniment
147-156		Ritornello-3	<i>ff</i>	full band	similar to bars 56-63 with estimate in upper ww

Table 1. *Canzona* Formal Outline

<sup>3</sup> Kopetz, 19.

The most conspicuous features of Ritornello-1 are its syncopated homorhythmic texture and the mirror-inversion of its upper and lower voices, which seem calculated to project rhythmic and harmonic ambiguity. Hemiola and displaced accents contradict the actual meter, not unequivocally asserted until bar 10, and the contrapuntal voiceleading procedure implies a D minor/A minor bitonality, not resolved in favor of D until the downbeat of bar 12 (Example 1).

Allegro Deciso ♩ = 126

The musical score for Example 1, *Canzona*, bars 1-12, is presented in three systems. The first system (bars 1-4) shows a syncopated homorhythmic texture in the piano part, with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The second system (bars 5-9) continues this texture, with a hemiola pattern in bar 8. The third system (bars 10-12) shows a change in dynamics to piano (*p*) and a resolution of the bitonality to D minor at the end of bar 12.

Example 1. *Canzona*, bars 1-12

Restricting himself to major and minor root-position triads in the upper and lower voices whose combinations yield a series of non-functional sevenths, ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths, Mennin pointedly avoids converging the two voices on a common harmony until the end of the section. This antipathy explains the last beat of bar 4, where strict mirror-inversion of the lower voice with the upper would have produced an F major triad. Conversely, Mennin's other departure from mirror-inversion in bar 10 intensifies important aspects of Ritornello-1—confirmation of the assigned meter, the motivic leap of a third, the conclusion of the section, and the temporary predominance of D minor tonality. Finally, the asymmetrical form of the opening complements its

ambiguity of meter and key; Ritornello-1 divides into two phrases of six and five bars, of which the second is a variation of the first.

Bars 2-3 contain a generating cell that serves as a microcosm of the piece. Permutations of its melodic elements (leap of a third, filled-in third, appoggiatura) furnish the raw materials for the construction of *Canzona's* themes, and its supporting harmonies, as the basis of succeeding ritornelli (see below), propel the piece. All themes begin with rising step-wise motion (usually of a third or fourth) followed by a descending leap (usually of a third) or an appoggiatura. They all include syncopation, and, like the phrase structure of Ritornello-1, all grow organically out of (or are varied repetitions of) an initial statement. Several themes further reflect Ritornello-1's features of inversion (A3), homorhythm (A2 and B2), and parallel triads (A2, B1, and B2) (Example 2).

Example 2. *Canzona* Themes

If Ritornello-1 begets themes in important general respects, specific relationships separate them into families by means of proximity, tonality, and details of organization. The dominant theme in each family (A and B) similarly spawns less extensive offspring which vary little upon repetition. Theme A2, for example, recalls the planed triads in bar 10 from Ritornello-1 but draws its outlined D-F third and basic tonality from A1. It lasts only five bars, and, other than a slight change of instrumentation at bar 37, makes three identical appearances. A3, essentially a three-bar repeated figure, horizontalizes the opening two bass harmonies of Ritornello-1 (D minor to E minor), yet the rhythm and contour

of its upper voice correspond to those of A1, while the lower voice (first appearing as a countermelody in bar 34) inverts A1's first three pitches. Returns of A3 differ only in the presence or absence of its countermelody. Themes B1 and B2, besides sharing a general contour, are bound most closely by their E-flat tonality, a key foreshadowed in bar 10 of *Ritornello-1*. The expansion of *b-2* from four to eight bars upon its second appearance in bar 89 may be for proportional reasons (see n. 4) as well as to enhance its formal importance as a retransition to A1.

The progression from tonal ambiguity to relative certainty in *Ritornello-1* becomes the method by which Mennin establishes tonality in each section of the piece. In the absence of local functional harmonic relationships, the responsibility of defining tonal centers in *Canzona* shifts to the melody from the bass, whose quasi-ostinato or canonic figures serve chiefly to provide rhythmic accompaniment or contrast. Themes of the A family, for example, are constructed of embellished arpeggiations of D minor or A minor triads. Tone systems tend to be modal, usually Phrygian or a variation thereof, with cadences on root-position major triads (bars 26, 31, 37, 42) producing a piquant "Picardy third" effect.

While the A-family themes are built on minor triads, the B-family themes are built on fourths or diminished triads. In B1 the manner and speed in which the fourths are filled differ in the melody and accompaniment, but the procedure concludes with a compelling convergence on a second inversion E-flat major triad. The homorhythmic harmonies of B2, resembling those of A2 without its strict parallelism, support an upper voice that outlines a diminished triad (A-C-E-flat) while their recurrent E-flat "roots" eventually resolve to D on the downbeat of bar 97.

If B1 is more chromatic than any member of the A family, its tonal fluidity is typical. Although one might observe that bars 64-71 begin in C minor and end with a modulation to its relative major, such an observation, at least in the common-practice sense, would be misleading. After concluding *Ritornello-2* and beginning B1, C minor is abandoned as a tonal center. The G on which the melody begins might better qualify as a sectional tonic, but, besides the mixed Phrygian/Dorian tone system, the melody climaxes on an A (bar 69) and concludes on B-flat. Thus the section proceeds from tonal ambiguity to certainty, with the latter

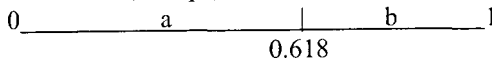
achieved by voice-leading and rhythmic placement (Example 3). "Certainty" is nevertheless short-lived when the process begins anew with the succeeding section. By such or similar means A2 "modulates" to A minor in bars 31 and 42, A3 to B-flat minor in bars 45 and 121, B2 to D minor in bar 97, and A1 to G minor in bar 127. Likewise, the ambiguity-certainty principle is reflected by rhythms: emphasis of the downbeat is consistently avoided within each section until its conclusion, normally heralded by a crescendo.



Example 3. *Canzona*, bars 64-71

A graph of the tonal plan displays the total integration of *Canzona*'s form and content (Example 4). The piece separates into two unequal portions of which the second, Part-A', is a condensed and varied recapitulation of the first, Part-A. B-family themes (bars 64-97 and bars 127-135) therefore function as transitions in their respective segments rather than as more formally prestigious "second themes." The three ritornello statements produce a hemiola effect against the basic binary formal division and render different functions: the first as the introduction, the second as the dynamic climax of Part A, and the third as the coda. Echoing Ritornello-1's asymmetrical division, the unequal segments of A (as bisected by Ritornello-2), and of the piece as a whole further assume proportional significance by their partitions at or near the Golden Section (G. S.).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Known to ancient Greek mathematicians as the "extreme and mean ratio," the G. S. is represented by the division of a line into two unequal segments of which the ratio of the shorter to the longer equals the ratio of the longer to the whole, or  $b/a = a/a + b$ . The division, like  $\pi$ , amounts to an irrational number, 0.618... :



For an introduction to golden proportions in music and their aesthetic implications, see Roy Howat, *Debussy In Proportion* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Example 4. *Canzona* Tonal Plan

Despite the absence of functional harmonic relationships within thematic sections, the sections themselves, as epitomized by their cadences, connect functionally with each other. Taking D as the putative tonic, A2 (bars 12-26) relates to A1 as a half cadence on the dominant and A3 to A2 as a deceptive cadence on the submediant. B1 and B2 have a neapolitan relationship with the tonic in Part A, and B1 a subdominant or plagal relationship with the tonic in Part A'.

In addition to seminal motives, related themes, and layers of integration within and between formal sections and divisions, *Canzona's* overall coherence relies on its fidelity to the process of problem-resolution, in which problems or ambiguities presented at the beginning of a work are examined in the middle and resolved at the end. Of the ambiguities posed in Ritornello-1, those of form, meter, and key are primary, with the latter governing the other two. The opening D ninth is retroactively revealed to be interlocked D and A minor triads as noted above. Preliminary explorations into D and A as competitors for *Canzona's* prevailing tonic end inconclusively (or deceptively) on a remote harmony in bar 45, from which point A1 in canon at the lower fifth (F and B-flat) leads to Ritornello-2. The canon, whose bitonal implications recall those of Ritornello-1, resolves on a B-flat triad in bar 55.

Ritornello-2 opens, significantly, not at the beginning of Ritornello-1, but on the generating cell—the point furthest removed

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University, 1983), 1-10. The G. S. of A occurs at bar 59 ( $96 \times 0.612 = 58.75$ ) or three bars later than the appearance of Ritornello-2. The G. S. of *Canzona*, which lasts 156 measures at an unchanging tempo, occurs almost exactly at bar 97 ( $156 \times 0.618 = 96.4$ ). The reason for *b-2's* expanded second appearance could be the provision of "filler material," thereby allowing the recapitulation to occur at the G. S.



from the initial D/A triads,<sup>5</sup> implying that the search for a resolution must continue. The tonal possibilities inherent in Ritornello-1 as harmonies have been examined as melodies, but neither have achieved dominance. Which will do so is still an open question, a question underscored by the "remote" harmonies on which Ritornello-2 begins.

Meanwhile, up to this point in *Canzona* only tonalities related to D minor (D/A independently and B-flat/F in canon) have been employed melodically. The introduction of C minor and E-flat major which frame the transition (see Example 3), however, reinforce the Phrygian tendencies of A1. Simultaneously their emphasis initiates and perpetuates the secondary process of tonicizing each note of the D Phrygian mode—a procedure completed cadentially on G in bar 127 and melodically on G in canon with D at the upper fifth in bars 137-146.

For the Golden Section to be considered formally significant it must mark structural events of importance, such as the recapitulation in sonata-allegro form. The return of A1 at the G. S. of *Canzona* exceeds by far the criteria for such an event by inaugurating a number of surprises. Not only is the theme's reprise "in the wrong key" by being on A rather than on the D that concludes the previous the section, but it is in canon at the octave, in augmentation, accompanied by a new countermelody in the upper woodwinds, and later joined by A3, all of which makes bars 97-112 the most contrapuntally complex of the piece.

Mennin thus employs the technique of convergence-divergence to articulate *Canzona*'s form, meter, and tonality. This technique, introduced in Ritornello-1 as mirror-inversion, permeates the piece as the method by which the ambiguity-certainty principle operates. As noted above, each section of *Canzona* begins with tonal and rhythmic ambiguity characterized by diverse or competing key centers, scales, or meters. This diversity resolves at the end of a given section by converging on a

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<sup>5</sup> Given the diatonic mirror inversion procedure of Ritornello-1, movement beyond a C major triad in the upper voice and a B minor triad in the lower would have produced D minor and A minor triads respectively—a duplication Mennin apparently wished to avoid—hence "furthest removed" from D/A.

major or minor triad on the downbeat or on a strong beat of the measure that defines the meter.

Resolution of the initial D minor/A minor dichotomy is constantly thwarted throughout the work and reaches a climax at the Golden Section where A1 appears in the "dominant" rather than in the expected "tonic." The following material (bars 113-126), however, corresponds literally (except for instrumentation) to its Part A equivalent, implying a routine recapitulation until bar 127 when the anticipated ritornello fails to appear. Instead, a rhythmically augmented and melodically truncated B1 leads to a statement of A1 on the tonic in canon with the "subdominant."

In the midst of this confusion, Ritornello-3 emerges to ultimately resolve the problems of form, meter, and key presented by Ritornello-1 (Example 5). Beginning in the second half of bar 152, a condensed retrograde of the opening harmonies concludes the piece as it was begun (D-C-B-E-D in the bass) while a powerful rhythmic convergence by the band on a D major seventh confers a decisive resolution to *Canzona's* metric ambiguities. In the composition's most rhythmically complicated passage, conflicting meters between the upper woodwinds and the rest of the band merge on a striking sixteenth and eighth note figure previously relegated to the accompaniment. By combining a D major with an A major triad but eliminating the latter's fifth, Mennin effectively synthesizes the two. The C-sharp, heretofore heard only as the third of the "dominant" is therefore transformed into the seventh of a tonic on D, which is finally allowed to reign in retrospect as the uncontested tonal center of the piece.