

bIBLIOTECA
dIGITAL

MÚSICA/MUSICOLOGÍA Y COLONIALISMO

MÚSICA/MUSICOLOGIA E COLONIALISMO
MUSIC/OLOGY AND COLONIALISM

COORDINADOR: CORIÚN AHARONIÁN

CDM

CENTRO NACIONAL DE DOCUMENTACIÓN MUSICAL
LAURO AYESTARÁN

mec

MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN Y CULTURA

Condiciones de uso

1. El contenido de este documento electrónico, accesible en el sitio del *Centro Nacional de Documentación Musical Lauro Ayestarán*, CDM (Montevideo, Uruguay), es una publicación del propio CDM, proveniente de su labor de investigación o de un evento organizado por él.

2. Su uso se inscribe en el marco de la ley n° 9.739 del 17 de diciembre de 1937, modificada por la Ley n° 17.616 del 10 de enero de 2003:

- el uso no comercial de sus contenidos es libre y gratuito en el respeto de la legislación vigente, y en particular de la mención de la fuente.

- el uso comercial de sus contenidos está sometido a un acuerdo escrito que se deberá pedir al CDM. Se entiende por uso comercial la venta de sus contenidos en forma de productos elaborados o de servicios, sea total o parcial. En todos casos se deberá mantener la mención de la fuente y el derecho de autor.

3. Los documentos del sitio del CDM son propiedad del Centro Nacional de Documentación Musical Lauro Ayestarán, salvo

mención contraria, en los términos definidos por la ley.

4. Las condiciones de uso de los contenidos del sitio del CDM son reguladas por la ley uruguaya. En caso de uso no comercial o comercial en otro país, corresponde al usuario la responsabilidad de verificar la conformidad de su proyecto con la ley de ese país.

5. El usuario se compromete a respetar las presentes condiciones de uso así como la legislación vigente, en particular en cuanto a la propiedad intelectual. En caso de no respeto de estas disposiciones, el usuario será pasible de lo previsto por la Ley n° 9.739 y su modificación por la Ley n° 17.616 del 10 de enero de 2003.

CDM

Centro Nacional de Documentación Musical Lauro Ayestarán

www.cdm.gub.uy

correo electrónico: info@cdm.gub.uy

1ª edición, 2011.

Edición digital, 2014.

© 2011, Centro Nacional de Documentación Musical Lauro Ayestarán.

© 2011, los autores.

Impreso en el Uruguay.

ISBN 978-9974-36-184-3 (edición impresa)

Centro Nacional de Documentación Musical Lauro Ayestarán

Avenida Luis P. Ponce 1347 / 505 - 11300 Montevideo, Uruguay. Teléfono +598 27099494.

Philip Tagg

DOMINANTS AND DOMINANCE

A VIDEO CONTRIBUTION TO DISCUSSIONS IN MONTEVIDEO ABOUT MUSICOLOGY AND COLONIALISM

Written synthesis of the video presentation.
See the DVD attached to this book.

*Síntesis escrita de la presentación en video.
Véase el DVD adjunto a este libro.*

I sincerely regret that I have been unable, for personal reasons, to be in Montevideo. I hope that my presentation will not be interpreted as a sort of Deus ex machina intervention because although the machina part of it is undeniable, I categorically refute anything relating to deity! On the contrary: this mode of presentation simply seemed the least bad alternative under the circumstances. Besides, with this video contribution I can integrate music examples and visual illustration with the verbal presentation of information and ideas that is customary in conference situations. I would like to wish all participants every success in Montevideo in getting to grips with the neglected but extremely important topic of musicology and colonialism.

This presentation is based on parts of a book I recently published online – **Everyday Tonality** – which I wrote at the request of Franco Fabbrì. Franco had shown me an Italian textbook on music theory and said: “*Look, Philip, this is all my students have to go by*”. Like equivalents in other languages, that textbook dealt only with certain tonal elements of European art music, paying particular attention to conventional notions of harmony within that tradition.

The problem with such books is obvious for anyone studying popular music: explaining something as common as the “La Bamba” chord loop

(as in “La Bamba”, “Guantanamera”, “Hang On Sloopy”, “Wild Thing”, “Pata Pata”, “Twist & Shout” etc.) in terms of tonic, subdominant and dominant is, I think, about as productive as using the physics of combustion to explain how computers work. And yet many music scholars are still at the same game, some of them even applying Schenkerian notions of dominant-tonic (V-I) directionality to modal configurations in which the existence of dominant and subdominant is at best questionable and where the identity of a single tonic is taken as read. The assumption seems to be that concepts developed to explain the particularities of musical narrative associated with a minority of people during a very short period of the smallest continent’s history are automatically applicable to all polyphonic music at all times everywhere. Such an assumption is not only false, it can in my opinion also be considered colonialist, classist and undemocratic. That’s why this presentation is called **Dominants and Dominance**.

You might think I’m trying to equate dominants and V-I cadences with colonialist dominance. Let me assure you: there is nothing intrinsically colonialist about a dominant chord as such nor about harmonic movement between I and V.

I’ve only had time in my presentation to deal with a few examples of rather obvious incongruity when concepts developed to explain one very particular type of tonality [V-I] are applied to musics that quite clearly follow very different premises of tertial harmony.

I should ideally also have mentioned other problems, for example the confused notion of tonality itself in conventional musicology, or our discipline’s bizarre use of concepts like “polyphony”, “functional” harmony and so on. I haven’t even mentioned the serious problems of conventional musicology’s graphocentrism and our subject’s relative lack of theory about timbre, metricity, vocal persona, sonic mis-en-scène and other parameters of musical expression that are of primary importance in many types of popular music.

Despite these omissions, I hope the incongruities of cadence nomenclature that I’ve presented will encourage colleagues to help create a less ethnocentric, less class-centric, less colonialist type of musicology. Perhaps the idea of bimodal reversibility may be helpful, perhaps not: I am

expecting a photocopy of Carlos Vega's complete **Fraseología** very soon and hope to find some guidance there.

Two things are certain: [1] it's pointless trying to force the conceptual grid of conventional harmony lessons wholesale on to music that conventional harmony experts have spent countless lifetimes avoiding or trivialising. [2] If we don't take steps to theorise and codify the everyday musical practices of the music made and used by the majority of the people on this planet we will be contributing to the continued disempowerment of that majority. We should, I believe instead, take popular culture, including music, seriously enough so that the ability to theorise and explain music in rational terms no longer remains the private domain of a privileged minority.