Hopkin takes a common sense approach in organizing over thirty projects into five chapters covering: idiophones, small percussion instruments, drums, winds, and strings. Each instrument entry offers a brief sociohistorical perspective, a materials/tools list, construction directions, playing suggestions, and ideas for construction variations. Appendices include useful tools and materials resources, bibliographic information, and a short glossary followed by an index. Projects range from a few common ideas, including the "simplest possible xylophone," sideblown and fipple flutes, and bowed psaltery, to more idiosyncratic affairs like the cooler guitar (as in Styrofoam picnic cooler!), ostrich egg ocarina, and bell tree. No lack of imagination here.

The book itself is attractive—with ample diagrams, drawings, charts, lists, and an abundance of photos in color and black-and-white. Though photographic offerings of joyful performers verge on the redundant (how many people do we need to see playing the flute?), it is always preferable to have too many rather than too few visual models for viewing construction detail and performance practice. It is apparent that Hopkin's book is a community affair with every ethnic, gender, and age group pictorially represented. The fashion statement is California eclectic.

On the more technical side, Hopkin's use of industrial materials like PVC pipe and styrofoam for certain projects is appropriate in these times of synthetic chemistry, though, in spite of his best efforts, one can never disguise the industrial function for which these materials were designed. Several wood projects—the rumba box and xylophone, natural trumpet and wooden saxophone, bowed psaltery and angle harp—introduce prospective makers to this most wonderful natural resource. Other suggested ideas use metal: electrical tubing, aluminum discs, "salvaged bell forms," steel rod, and rebar. Then there is always bamboo. Hopkin is master of many materials. The cooler guitar is certainly an ingenious contraption and probably sounds incredible, though if I go through the trouble of making a real fretboard, I think I'd like to attach it to something more attractive than picnic coolers (though it does look a little like a South Indian veena!).

In the final analysis, Hopkin's book is easily one of the best introductory books on instrument making I have seen. His attention to detail is commendable (like adding little carpet scraps to the bottom of the drum stand to keep it from dancing around), and considering this is a craft that wallows in fractions of an inch, he does well in laying out all the measurements using clear and comprehensive formats. The acoustical insights are right on target and, if for no other reason, make this a valuable resource. It is equally appropriate for the music and art studio, science lab, and workshop, and virtually sparkles with enthusiasm and encouragement. Making Simple Musical Instruments should be in every community and school library in the country.

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SPECULATION


The field of music theory and analysis has been going through a period of self-scrutiny lately. This may be due, in part, to the influence of postmodern intellectual currents that have made their way into the discipline from literary criticism and modern continental philosophy. Postmodern celebrations of ambiguity, multiple interpretation, and the pluralism that these approaches can be seen to engender have lately prompted some theorists to question the presence of methodological hegemony in their own field. Public and informal discussions have explored whether there can ever be a "correct" analysis of any particular piece; if one brackets the notion of correctness, for example, is it possible for two analyses of the same piece to be very different—to make contrasting and even
contradictory claims—and yet be seen as complementary?

Alastair Borthwick enters into these issues in his recent music-theoretical study. As introduction, Borthwick puts forward two contradictory instances. In the first, he revisits a question that has been a popular one for at least thirty years among English-speaking analysts: In the analysis of music in the “great German tradition,” is it possible to reconcile Arnold Schoenberg’s motivic brand of analysis with Heinrich Schenker’s reductive one? His other example has been just as omnipresent in music-analytical discourse: To what extent does the contextual atonality of the Second Viennese School retain tonal practice, and to what extent does it abandon it? In both of these instances, the literature is rich with analyses that make viable arguments in favor of one position or another. For Borthwick, the question is: How is it possible to construct a theory that is able to coordinate sometimes radically different analyses, but that is also able to distinguish between complementary and contradictory ones? For Borthwick, “without such a distinction an analysis is in danger of degenerating into subjectivity” (p. 7). What we need is a theory about our theories, and so at the heart of Borthwick’s book lies his notion of the “metatheory.”

Borthwick devotes the first three chapters to considering the issues surrounding this need for a metatheory (including the examples mentioned above); he devotes chapter 4 to a comprehensive and rigorous exposition of the metatheory itself. The following five chapters survey a broad range of musical analyses that serve to illustrate the way the metatheory can be employed in analytical practice; the examples are drawn from across the Western art-music tradition (the earliest comes from Guido d’Arezzo, the most recent is from Michael Tippett). Borthwick includes forty-seven music examples, some of which are quite lengthy and detailed; these are appended after the text proper and encompass some seventy-three pages.

As Borthwick means it, a metatheory is not an all-encompassing general theory of all music; rather, Borthwick’s metatheory “has more in common with an analytical blueprint than a general theory” (p. 12). Borthwick borrows Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s tripartite division of musical phenomena (which Nattiez had borrowed from Jean Molino) into the poietic dimension, the aesthetic dimension, and the neutral level. The poietic dimension has to do with the process of creation of a musical text and the issues surrounding this; the aesthetic dimension is concerned with issues of reception and perception of the text. The neutral level—at least in the way that Borthwick employs it—is a level of analysis that is as close to “objective” as one might be able to get. At the neutral level in the strictest sense, one is not concerned with whether the analytical findings are useful in terms of any particular analytical paradigm; the analyst is concerned only with what the text yields in terms of a logical and rigorous methodology. Borthwick’s metatheory provides just such a methodology to be employed at the neutral level. As indicated above, the heart of Borthwick’s book is the exposition of his metatheory in chapter 4. Borthwick’s metatheory is unfolded carefully and in accordance with the principles of formal logic: terminology in the metatheory is introduced and discussed through formal definitions, and the metatheory is built up through a series of seven axioms. Borthwick’s “analytical blueprint” remains abstract in this discussion, thus permitting its broad application across the wide variety of repertories that he explores in the subsequent chapters.

As might be expected with this kind of close adherence to formal logic, Borthwick’s metatheory would allow for the computer-generation of analytical results; as it turns out, though, cranking even the simplest piece through the machinery of Borthwick’s metatheory will produce more information than most analysts will want—or even need—to deal with. And this, ironically, is precisely where the value of Borthwick’s metatheoretical formulation lies. Borthwick’s work reveals a crucial insight: there are limits to such a strictly logical analysis; without invoking the aesthetic or poietic dimensions, analysis becomes a dry accounting of voluminous data. By reaching the limits of logic, one does not demonstrate that metatheory itself is useless; rather, it demonstrates how it is possible to keep distinct those aspects of our analyses that are based in the empirical observation of the text from those aspects that
are directed by our theoretical model. Such a distinction helps the analyst to avoid being "blinded" by a dominant paradigm, and in so doing making claims that cannot be supported by the text itself; it also allows one to mediate between contrasting analyses, weighing the interpretations against the empirical text. Borthwick's book thus adds an important voice to current and future discussions and reexaminations of music-analytical practice.

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