

Experience *and* Consciousness: Enhancing the Notion of Musical Understanding¹

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SUMMARY: Disagreeing with Jerrold Levinson's claim that being conscious of broad-span musical form is not essential to understanding music, I will argue that our awareness of musical architecture is significant to achieve comprehension. I will show that the experiential model is not incompatible with the analytic model. My main goal is to show that these two models can be reconciled through the identification of a broader notion of understanding. After accomplishing this reconciliation by means of my new conception, I will close the paper by discussing some reasons to accept an enhancing notion of musical understanding that includes *levels* and *degrees* of understanding.

KEY WORDS: Concatenationism, cognitive abilities, levels, degrees.

Introduction

Jerrold Levinson's central argument in *Music in the Moment* (1997) is that fundamental musical understanding can be achieved through the experience of listening to music in a certain way: specifically, in a *concatenationist* way; that is, listening to individual bits of a musical piece on the small-scale—just a few bars perhaps—and connecting present ones with previous and future ones. Levinson's concatenationism is erected against the traditional view, which holds that conscious awareness of broad-span musical form and of large-scale structural relationships is essential to understanding music.² Despite his disagreement with this view, in order to explore the *possibility* that the organization of a musical piece on the large-scale, even if not an object of perception in itself, somehow

¹ I am grateful to Jerrold Levinson for helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay. I am also grateful to the referees of the Journal *Crítica* for providing valuable comments that improved this paper.

² As applied to the arts, "form", in general, is an important concept that refers to the shape, arrangement, relationship, or organization of the various elements. In music, the elements of form are rhythm, pitch and melody, dynamics, tone color, and texture. A musical work, such as a symphony, is formed or organized by means of repetitions of some of these elements and by contrasts among them. In this work, I refer to "form" when I say musical architecture, global form or large-scale musical structure. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that "*a* form" or "*musical* forms" refer to one of many standardized formal patterns, conventionally expressed by letter diagrams such as A B A and that are known as *da capo* form, fugue, sonata form, minuet form, theme and variations, rondo, among others (see Kerman 2000, pp. 39–41).

affects the listener's experience or helps achieve understanding, Levinson sets himself to qualify his own concatenationism in order to take large-scale characteristics into account. After exploring this modified view, Levinson concludes that intellectual apprehension and awareness of global form can only contribute to musical understanding to a relatively minor degree, not in any significant way.

My goal in this paper is to explore the possibility of enhancing the general notion of musical understanding³ by considering two proposals which, if adopted, would lead to a reconciliation of those who claim that understanding is primarily achieved by the experience of listening and those who claim that understanding is primarily achieved through analysis and awareness of musical architecture, global form, and large-scale musical structure. I will argue that these two views about musical understanding are not mutually exclusive and will show a way in which both viewpoints can be reconciled. In fact, the awareness of musical form is not negligible in achieving musical understanding as Levinson supposes. On the contrary, it significantly enhances our musical understanding. As we will see below, this expanded notion of understanding is perfectly compatible with Levinson's qualified concatenationism.

This essay has three sections: (1) in order to provide the most important aspects for the debate of the problem of musical understanding, I will outline central differences of the two views. (2) I will take Levinson's argument in *Music in the Moment* as an example of experiential model. I will explain his conception of musical understanding, and point out the main features of his concatenationism. (3) I will argue for my proposals to broaden the

³ Despite the fact that the notion of musical understanding can be applied to any musical genre, all musical examples in this work will be referred to tonal classical music or concert music, as we know it in the Western tradition. I do this in order to avoid the common fallacy of a number of authors that pick operas or other type of music associated to a text and supposedly analyze the musical qualities by themselves, while in reality they only attend to the narrative content provided by the text.

notion of musical understanding, and I will show that Levinson's qualified concatenationism is compatible with the enhanced understanding that I present.

1. Two Perspectives on Musical Understanding

The problem posed by musical understanding has been discussed by philosophers of music such as Roger Scruton, Jerrold Levinson, Stephen Davies, Peter Kivy, Malcolm Budd and Mark DeBellis (a musicologist). The core of the problem can be seen by examining the two primary opposing positions: on the one hand, those who accept the necessity of an analytical capacity, conceptual and technical knowledge, and a consciousness of the musical structure as a necessary condition to understand music, on the other, those who argue that musical experience is a sufficient condition for achieving understanding through repeated listening whereby the dynamic musical forms and internal connections between the musical parts are intuitively detected, registered, and responded to.

In this section, I will present those two perspectives stated more carefully. I will call these two positions the analytic model and the experiential model, respectively. Relying on C. Koopman and S. Davies (2001, pp. 266–68), I will now list some of the main differences between these two models, considering them in their purest form.

Global vs. Local Focus: According to the analytic model, musical understanding is achieved by grasping the structural components of a musical work. A complete “view” of the work results from the identification of its parts, assuming they remain static and are not affected by the flow of time. On the contrary, experiential model, the musical process is grasped through a dynamic experience of music, which is apprehended as it happens in time through our ability to organize the various tones we listen to sequentially. The listener

reacts to a continual flow of events with a flow of corresponding responses.

Reflective vs. Unreflective Listening: The analytic model depends on the listener having a reflective awareness of the work's form, on an intellectual approach to the work, and on his response being articulated propositionally. The experiential model does not look for such awareness since it considers it to be unnecessary. The listener's experience is sufficient to achieve musical understanding.

Cognitive vs. Cognitive-Affective Bond: The analytic model is purely cognitive because it involves complex, intellectual mental processes, whereas the experiential model involves a cognitive-affective bond: In order to grasp a musical piece, the listener has to feel the musical progression. If the listeners lack the experience of feeling and listening to the musical sequences in tension and relaxation, they cannot understand the piece.

External vs. Internal Perspective: In the analytic model, the listener's perspective is distanced from the musical work—the work is viewed from the outside. The listener in the experiential model is required to be involved with the work in order to understand it from the inside through an experience that involves him “empathically” with the musical piece.

Coherence of the Whole vs. Coherence of Parts in Connection: On the analytic model, the listener is aware of connections (e.g., oppositions, elaborations, and reductions) that he detects in the musical score and can determine the coherence of a piece by means of the conventions of a certain style. In contrast, in the experiential model the listener grasps the music as a process that develops organically, in which each part is only tied to the previous one. In this way, the perception of the coherence of the piece is derived from the organic connection of its parts.

For a more concrete view of these positions, the musicologist Mark DeBellis may serve as a

representative for the analytic model and Jerrold Levinson as one for the experiential model.⁴ DeBellis's central argument in *Music and Conceptualization* (1995, especially chapters 2 and 3) is that untrained listeners cannot follow a piece of music, its development and its fundamental structure. Hence, their experience of music is ineffable. This is supposed to imply an impoverishment of their understanding in comparison to trained listeners, who know how to conceptualize sounds in theoretical and technical terms. From the analytic perspective, knowledge and awareness of the musical structure is a necessary condition for understanding music. In contrast, Levinson maintains that in order to understand music, it is necessary to have a particular experience of listening. For the important thing on the experiential model is not *what* is listened to (i.e., what aspect of the overall structure), but *how* one listens; how unity and organization are perceived; the way in which a person listens to tones organized in a tonal system; how one appreciates and imaginatively participates in music; how one relates the preceding parts and anticipates the future ones. In sum, what matters is how we, as Roger Scruton says, transform our experience into an exercise, a practice, a habit (*see* Scruton 1997, Ch. 2).

2. Levinson's Concatenationism and Qualified Concatenationism

The principal argument offered by Jerrold Levinson in *Music in the Moment*,⁵ is that a *basic* musical understanding is achieved in the experience of listening to music in a certain way. In particular, listening to individual bits of a musical piece, on a small-scale, and in the present time; i.e., aurally connecting present with previous and future bits, and where the

⁴ See also P. Kivy, 2001, pp. 183–217. To see reply to criticisms towards experiential model: J. Levinson, 1999, pp. 485–94, and S. Davies, 2007, pp. 25–79 who compares and criticizes both, DeBellis and Levinson.

⁵ An argument which may be traced basically to Edmund Gurney's music theory (*The Power of the Sound*, 1880).

decisive factor is the act of listening, when, in the exposition and repetition of a given piece, the listener responds to music. That is, when the listener follows and "makes sense" —i.e., connects present parts with previous and future ones—, reproduces —i.e., hums, whistles, sings, dances, etc.—, appreciates —i.e., perceives with attention—, esteems, and values the work, she understands it.⁶ Levinson writes,

If basic musical understanding can be identified with a locally synthetic rather than a globally synoptic manner of hearing, then it is conceivable that with musical compositions, even complicated and lengthy ones, we miss nothing crucial by staying, as it were, in the moment, following the development of events in real time, engaging in no conscious mental activity of wider scope that has the whole or some extended portion of it as object. Of course it is rare that activity of that sort is entirely absent, but the point is that its contribution to basic understanding may be nil. (Levinson 1997, p. 29)

It is important to be clear that by the adjective 'basic' in the phrase "basic musical understanding", Levinson means to convey that such understanding is essential to any apprehension of music, fundamental to any further musical understanding, and central to worthwhile musical experience of any kind. He does not mean to suggest that the understanding is simple, elementary, or rudimentary (*cf.* Levinson 1997a, p. 33).

To exemplify the above view, take the famous opening motif of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67:  It seems that the listeners do not need to be aware that the first movement is an *Allegro con brio* nor do they require consciousness of the Sonata Form structure of the whole movement, which is dominated by this rhythmic motif, in order to achieve basic understanding. Neither do they

⁶ The notion of musical understanding that Levinson (1996) maintains is closely related to music appreciation. Comprehension and appreciation cannot be divorced. To understand a musical work it is necessary to listen to it with a certain appreciation and enjoyment. For a position that doubts the felicity of the marriage between musical understanding and musical appreciation, see S. Davies (2007).

need to know that this motif forms the first theme in the exposition, initiates the bridge, appears as a subdued background to the lyrical and contrasting second theme, and emerges again in the cadence material. The listeners are not expected to be aware of things that could be observed in the score, like expansions of the motif in the development section, etc. In order to achieve a basic music understanding, they do not need to provide a technical explanation or conceptual description of exposition, development, or recapitulation as a large temporal span of the first movement. For Levinson, the listeners may achieve musical understanding if they are simply able to reproduce afterwards —hum, whistle, sing— the aforementioned motif. The listeners should be able to follow and recognize the motif as it undergoes numerous transformations throughout not only the first movement but the whole symphony, so that it would “make sense” to them. Most importantly, perhaps, the listeners should be able to perceive the intrinsic drama and emotional content that is conveyed by this simple motif in an astonishingly concise expression, which enables the composer to sustain high levels of tension based on different transformations of the motif.

For Levinson, the fundamental thing is for the listener to detect and register the musical notes in the present and to perceive, through a constant and repeated audition, their interconnection, order and coherence, and to successively *quasi-hear* portions of a composition. Quasi-hearing, for Levinson, is “*seeming* to hear a span of music while strictly hearing, or aurally registering, just one element of it” (1997, p. 15, emphasis added). Quasi-hearing, claims Levinson, does not depend upon any conscious effort to keep before the mind the sound just heard, since an aural surrounding to the notes currently sounding constitutes itself automatically. The ear apprehends, vividly, in a musical unit that which goes beyond the sound “really” heard. Levinson’s concept of musical understanding, employable by the “ordinary” or “common” listener, stands in opposition to the analytic

model, which traditionally argues for the need for a “learned” understanding only attainable by those with a trained ear, by those who can explain or describe the musical phenomena in terms of theoretical concepts, formal schemes, architectonical diagrams or synoptic representations.

In the later chapters of *Music in the Moment*, Levinson develops what he calls a *qualified concatenationism*, which is an attempt to challenge his initial argument that listening is sufficient for understanding by making room for the awareness of the large-scale musical form to play an important role in understanding and in affecting the listener’s experience. Of possible ways to qualify his concatenationism, Levinson writes,

Five possible grounds of qualification were addressed: (a) architectonic awareness’s enhancement of the perceived impressiveness of individual bits; (b) architectonic awareness’s enhancement of the perceived cogency of transitions between bits; (c) architectonic awareness’s facilitation of quasi-hearing; (d) architectonic awareness’s role in the perception of higher-order aesthetic properties; and (e) architectonic awareness’s role as a source of distinct musical satisfactions, ones [which Levinson] characterize[s] as intellectual.” (Levinson 2006a, p. 506)

The first three grounds for qualification—(a), (b), (c)—are focused on the possible contribution of awareness of the architectonical form to the achievement of *basic* musical understanding. The last two—(d) and (e)—are focused on the direct role that might be played by such awareness in musical experience and understanding; i.e., of musical understanding of a more than basic sort (*see* Levinson 1999, p. 487). After exploring these qualifications and offering his qualified concatenationism, Levinson concludes that awareness of large-scale musical architecture only contributes to basic musical understanding in a small degree, and facilitates, but not in an important way, more-than-

basic understanding.⁷ Of this conclusion, he writes,

But the plain truth is that to appreciate any music of substance, the thing to do is listen to it, over and over again. [...] Of course to experience the content of the music correctly, to respond to a piece as the piece it musicohistorically is, one must also have listened to and digested a lot of other music, in particular, that which forms the generative background to the piece in question. Still, *listening* is the key [...]. Contemplation of formal patterns, apprehension of spatial wholes, intellectual grasp of large-scale structural relations are of an entirely different, and lesser, order of importance. One can readily forgo them and still have entrée to the essential. (Levinson 1997, p. 174–5)

3. Supplementing Levinson’s Notion of Musical Understanding

There are two principal problems with Levinson’s view: one concern his notion of musical understanding and the other is in regard to his concatenationism as a method of hearing. His notion of musical understanding is too narrow, and, although he provides a number of reasons to adopt his concatenationism as a plausible way to achieve a basic musical understanding, I will argue that any suitable listening technique must incorporate at least some aspects of the analytical model. Thus, the consequence of my proposals will be to bring about a broadening of the notion of musical understanding. I suggest that,

1. The *sense* of “understanding” used by both the experiential and analytic model must be clarified (Section 3.2.1.). This clarification will allow us to see that the models are complementary, not mutually exclusive, as our consciousness and capacity of analysis enhance our experience and enjoyment. (Section 3.2.2.)
2. Rather than insisting that the listener either achieves full musical understanding or none at all, it should be agreed that there are different *levels* and *degrees* of understanding that depend on many factors, such as the listener’s mental

⁷ For an elaboration of the possibilities of qualified concatenationism and specific examples of each one of them, see Levinson, 1997, chapters 5–8.

abilities and the time invested in listening (Section 3.3.)

As the notion of musical understanding is widened, we are able to prevent the seemingly inescapable dichotomy between the experiential model and the analytic model by resolving the disputes between them. I claim that both sides can agree on the usefulness of more precise definitions of different conceptions of musical understanding, and that my expansion of the notion of musical understanding is also an *enhancement*. My proposals, therefore, offer a better conception of musical understanding and provide a viable reconciliation between opposing views.

3.1 Problems with Levinson's Notion of Understanding

Primarily, it is important to notice that there are at least three reasons to accept Levinson's concatenationist thesis: first, music is clearly listened to through time. It makes sense, then, that a musical work can be understood if listened to in time; the human ear can only grasp a piece if listened to in the present, moment by moment after all. Second, it is not even possible to perceptually apprehend a musical work in its totality. The human ear cannot apprehend "the whole" of a work or its large-scale architecture. It can only "build" the whole bit by bit. Third, because Levinson seems to be right when he claims that because music is internally synthesizable (by means of quasi-hearing), it is possible for the listener to "seemingly" apprehend the whole of a musical work, albeit progressively and never all-at-once.

Notwithstanding Levinson's intention of qualifying his simple concatenationism, I find a number of problems with his argument:

- (a) As already mentioned, his notion of understanding is too narrow because

Levinson *a priori* excludes awareness, knowledge, explanation, and description as necessary conditions for understanding music.

(b) He commits himself to a false dichotomy between the analytic model and the experiential model, since, for him, only the latter is conducive to a basic musical understanding.

(c) He fails to acknowledge that in order to enhance *how* one listens, it is important to know *what* one listens to. Our analytical capacity, conceptual and technical knowledge, and consciousness of *what* is listened to is non-negligible and plays a relevant role.

3.2 First Proposal: a Notion of Understanding Compatible with Concatenationism

3.2.1 Do the Experiential and Analytic Model Use the Same Definition of Understanding?

Surprisingly, Levinson does not offer a definition of “understanding”. If, as he states, musical understanding is not about formal analysis of a work, nor is it achieved through awareness of large-scale musical form, nor when the hearers are able to offer a causal explanation of the musical phenomenon or describe technically and conceptually that which they hear, what sense of “understanding” are we talking about?

If understanding is achieved only through listening in a certain way, then analysis, awareness of the large-scale musical form, and the ability to explain and describe are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for musical understanding. If awareness of the large-scale musical forms only minimally contributes to understanding, then we can be almost certain that understanding is not related to notions such as discernment, intelligence, or reason. On the contrary, the only decisive aspect of such an understanding is *how* we hear music—how we register certain aspects of the music and respond to them. Hence,

basic musical understanding is a species of knowing *how*, or procedural knowledge, not knowledge *that*, or propositional knowledge.

Another distinction useful in discussions about musical understanding is between *what* to know and *how* to know (see Davies 1994, pp. 337–40). As I have mentioned, the former consists in a propositional knowledge, e.g., knowing that the tonic of Beethoven Symphony No. 3, Op. 55 *Eroica* is E flat major. Whereas the latter consists rather in the listeners' demonstrable abilities, e.g., how they are able to listen to and register how music unfolds in time and find expressivity, coherence, and unity in a piece (see Levinson 1997, p. 30). These experiences display many abilities of the listener: aural perception, detection of repetitions, anticipation and prediction, among others. Knowing how the music goes on, or “moves”, is a way of listening in a concatenationist way rather than with the goal of finding true propositions about the music.

The problem with the dichotomy presented by Levinson is that it does not acknowledge that both of these concepts are related: it is difficult to know *how* if we do not start by knowing *what*. We always start by knowing *what* an object is, and the way of knowing it or *how* to know it then strongly depends on that first knowledge.

Take, for instance, the third movement of Brahms' Violin Concerto in D, Op. 77, *allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace*. Having precise information would certainly enhance our experience of following, reproducing and appreciating the piece—things we are meant to be doing on a concatenationist listening. Joseph Kerman's precise description clarifies my meaning: “[g]iocoso means ‘jolly’, that first theme in this rondo, A, has a lilt recalling the spirited gipsy fiddling that was popular in nineteenth-century in Vienna. The solo violin plays the theme (and much else in the movement) in *double stops*, that is, in

chords produced by bowing two violin strings simultaneously. Hard to do well, this makes a brilliant effect when done by a virtuoso” (Kerman 2000, p. 296). Numerous additional examples could easily be mentioned, such as, knowing that Berlioz’s *Symphony Fantastique* is based on an *idée fixe*, which appears transfigured in each of the five movements of the symphony; the central part of the second movement of Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony is structured as a dramatic fugue; and so on. It is not obvious that a concatenationist listener could derive this relevant information that certainly enhances the musical understanding of the pieces simply by listening in the moment.

Would it not be wise to offer a definition of basic musical understanding and clarify in what sense it is being used? In every area of philosophy, we are constantly trying to distinguish between kinds of understanding: e.g., it is not the same thing to understand a text, a human experience, a historical event, a logical formula, a fact or a causal relationship. In each of logic, epistemology and hermeneutics, the technical term *understanding* is generally used, but the uses often have subtle different senses. These differing senses are useful here, and I will borrow a few German terms to pick them out in what follows.

Let us consider different senses of “understanding” that might be called, *Verstehen*, *Verstand* and *Erklärung*.⁸ *Verstehen* refers to the meaning of experience and alludes to a kind of grasping, as opposed to the understanding offered by the scientific explanatory method. *Verstand* means essentially intelligence, reason or judgment. And *Erklärung* refers

⁸ A number of traditions and authors who deal with the notion of “understanding” and “comprehension” stress their different uses. See, for instance, K. O. Apel and G. Wamke, 1984, *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental Pragmatic Perspective*, MIT Press, Cambridge, G. H. Von Wright, 2004, *Explanation and Understanding*, Cornell University Press, NY. Husserl uses *Verstehen* in his account of phenomenology as understanding the “lifeworld” or the things which we experienced (he took the term from Kant, as well as W. Dilthey and H.G. Gadamer) and Kant uses *Verstand* as a sense of understanding in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

to explanation and is considered to be a way of apprehending objects because it suggests a kind of illustration of concepts in order to make them more understandable. Given these different senses of “understanding”, the analytic model may be divided in two: if by “understanding” we mean *Verstand*, then the focus would be on understanding achieved through analysis, awareness and knowledge; if, on the other hand, we mean “understanding” in its *Erklärung* sense, then the understanding achieved when the hearer is able to give explanations of the musical form or of the structural coherence of the work is of the utmost importance. If we now suppose that the experiential model and basic musical understanding refer to *Verstehen*, while the analytic model and the understanding achieved in the explanation of the musical structure refer to *Verstand* and *Erklärung*, then there would be no place for any misunderstanding. Each model would refer to a different *and complementary* meaning of the term, understanding. Thus, we can disentangle the dispute between those who claim that understanding is reached through analysis and awareness of the musical form and those who claim that understanding is reached through the mere experience of listening.

It is reasonable to infer that Levinson is thinking about the kind of understanding captured by *Verstehen*, since he emphasizes that understanding is achieved by apprehending; that is, in the experience of listening to music in a concatenationist way. However, he does not see that his basic musical understanding simply does not compete with understanding on the analytic model because different senses of “understanding” are in play.

Levinson has suggested⁹ that these distinctions do not resolve the dispute because each of the parties already recognizes that there are different senses, meanings, or kinds of

⁹ Personal communication.

understanding involved, but disagree as to (a) their relative importance, and (b) their degree of dependence/independence of each other. However, I believe that this acknowledgement of different senses of understanding has not been clearly explained in the literature. Neither Levinson nor DeBellis—again, as representative thinkers of each camp—manifestly recognize different kinds of understanding as such. Thus, I disagree with point (a) because even Levinson, with his *qualified concatenationism*, concludes that awareness of large-scale musical architecture contributes to basic musical understanding only in a small degree, and facilitates it, but not in an important way. Levinson practically excludes any contribution of the analytic model in his account of musical understanding: it makes no significant difference whether we say that the importance of awareness and an intellectual approach is irrelevant in order to achieve understanding or that it is relevant in such a minor degree. Both assessments imply that awareness is practically irrelevant.

The same objection applies to point (b): for supporters of the experiential model, the recognition of the degree of dependence on analysis in the reaching of understanding is negligible. In fact, Levinson means to show that it is clearly independent from the process of reaching musical understanding. According to my view, however, when a listener hears music in a concatenationist way, it is desirable and useful for him to have knowledge of musical theory, technical vocabulary, awareness of musical forms, etc. in order to enhance his musical understanding and articulate more accurately his experience.

In short, if we assume that Levinson primarily uses this limited sense of understanding, it is unnecessary for him to reject the analytic model view because it is compatible with his own view. Basic musical understanding would constitute only one specific “type” of understanding.

3.2.2. Why is it Useful to Find a Sense of Understanding Compatible with Concatenationism?

Another way to look for a sense or meaning of “understanding” compatible with concatenationism is by treating it as a correspondence between the experiential sphere and the cognitive sphere; i.e., by allowing for reconciliation between both views presented.¹⁰

To broaden the notion of musical understanding, making the analytic and experiential models complementary, we must accept that, included in the mental abilities of the hearer, are those held to be important by the analytic model; i.e., categorization, conceptualization, analytical evaluation, description, etc. In the framework of a basic musical understanding, then, it would be essential to allow for these abilities' being important. Even if we do not consider them sufficient, we have to admit that knowledge, awareness, and other abilities are relevant to understanding music, and are more closely linked to experience of listening than Levinson thinks.

At this point, it is important to make two observations. First, let us not claim that Levinson already holds a compromise view between the experiential model and the analytic model simply because his view refers to a cognitive-affective bond. Levinson only acknowledges that the experience of listening implies a relation between that which we perceive, attend to, imagine, and that which we sense, enjoy, appreciate. It is also important to notice that he allows only for certain cognitive abilities to play a role in the reception of music. For example, he does not consider crucial some of the abilities Roger Scruton does

¹⁰ I am aware that it might be objected that my argument implies the necessity and sufficiency of the analytic model for achieving basic musical understanding. Even though that is not so, it could be asked if my proposals do not invalidate at least the concatenationist view. In what follows, I will show that it would not only not be invalidated, that it would be usefully broadened.

(1997 and 1974). He does not allow the abilities of describing—at least metaphorically—or explicitly locating certain elements in organization to play much of a role. The next quotations illustrate these points:

Those who propose the ability to offer descriptions of music as prerequisite to basic musical understanding make two mistakes: first, the representations in terms of which music is grasped may be not articulate in nature; second, even if they were, being able to access them after listening so as to produce descriptions of the music would at most be evidential, but neither necessary nor sufficient, for having had a hearing experience of the right sort (Levinson 1997, x–xi).

[T]he point is that gratifying impressions of familiarity, unity-through-change, and the like require no conscious reflection on where or when some musical material was previously encountered, no active appreciation of the pattern of events, thematic or harmonic, as a whole. (Levinson 1997, p. 82).

Qualified concatenationism claims that the intellectual pleasure obtained from apprehending musical form in a large-scale (a) is unnecessary to achieve basic musical understanding because it aims at an object different from that at which basic understanding aims—the experiential model points toward a musical work of art, whereas the analytic model directs listeners at a sound phenomenon open to analysis and explanation; (b) is not comparable with the pleasure obtained in the experience of listening, which of course involves awareness not of global form but of local form (*see* Levinson 1996, pp. 56–66), as well as of the expressive content which results or emerges from evolving form.

We should keep in mind that Levinson distinguishes the pleasure obtained through an intellectual approach to music from the aesthetic pleasure obtained through the experience of listening. I emphasize this because the pleasure obtained in concatenationist listening implies awareness of the individual bits one listens to and what they express; that is, the conjunction of content and form. Still, this does not mean that Levinson accepts the importance of an intellectual approach to music.

In searching for a sense of “understanding” compatible with concatenationism, I have tried to argue for the possibility of the analytic and experiential models complementing, not excluding, one another. Both approaches to music can coexist and give feedback to one another since understanding has to do with perceiving or grasping the meaning of something, but also with conceptualizing and describing how, e.g., musical notes spread in time and how we find or identify their expressiveness.

In support of this position, I propose a few possibilities, but do so while keeping in mind that Levinson is reacting against the views of those who plead for the analytic model; that is, while defending the “common” listener, who has no previous training in the matter and, even so, can achieve musical understanding. Now, my first claim is that even if we are radical supporters of the experiential model, we have to acknowledge and admit the importance of analysis and awareness of form, even in the small-scale, not only to conceptualize, identify, describe, but to follow, link and reproduce the different bits. To follow, link and reproduce, they who listen in the moment need a certain awareness and a more complex mental process to come into play; that is, to *identify* certain notes or individual bits and be able to follow them, the inexperienced listener must essentially hear with an awareness of time and space or of the moment in which the bits go by. What would happen to concatenationism if parts of the analytic model were accepted in order to achieve musical understanding? Would the experiential model cease to be concatenationist? Focusing on the second possibility in what follows, I will try to demonstrate that awareness enhances our experience and, therefore, our musical understanding.

My second claim is that if we accept that the human ear can detect certain elements of the music’s organization or coherence (by means of apprehending the musical relationships of bits on the small-scale and moment by moment, as Levinson proposes), I

believe that the concatenationist method does not prevent the listener from developing a detailed analysis of bits of the musical structure in order to be aware of the technical scope of a work. Likewise, our awareness, knowledge and analysis of the musical form do not subtract anything valuable from our experience. In fact, the listener would not cease to have the experience of listening, or cease to pay attention to and minutely analyze what he listens to at each moment in a concatenationist manner. In this way, he could complement his experience with an analysis and achieve an enriched basic musical understanding.

For instance, any person can experience when sound goes from loud to soft. If a listener were aware of many different gradations that exist in an actual piece of music or passage, though, the experience of the passage would be enriched. If we listen to—in a concatenationist way—the beginning of the Smetana’s Overture to *The Bartered Bride* and reflect on dynamics, we find: 0’00’’: opening outburst, full orchestra, *fortissimo*. 0’11’’: Sudden change to quiet rustling produced by violins, *subito piano*. 0’24’’: Three appearances of a short, gruff bit of music spaced out from one another, each *forte*. 1’14’’: *Crescendo*. 1’19’’: Culmination in a rowdy dance, the polka, *fortissimo again*. 1’22’’: Return to the quiet rustling, *mezzo forte*.¹¹

Our experience of this piece would be enhanced if we were to reflect on concepts and analysis during a concatenationist hearing. Following the last example, having the experience of the music and understanding it has not only to do with its expressivity due to its dynamics, but also with our consciousness, analysis and technical knowledge of those properties that enhance our understanding. In other words, we have good reasons to accept that the experiential and analytical models are compatible, and that their combination

¹¹ J. Kerman develops an interesting analysis of listening to Smetana’s Overture to *The Bartered Bride*, in Kerman, et. al., 2000, p. 4.

results in a more complete musical understanding. That is, first, that the listener has a certain awareness of the notes related with dynamics that he or she listens to in a precise moment. Second, that the listener is able to conceptualize, in a certain way, some individual parts in order to focus on and listen to aspects in progress of various music passages. This listening to the dynamics and analyzing them does not reduce our experience, but on the contrary, strengthens it.

Levinson has objected to my considerations by saying that this would not be basic musical understanding obviously, but rather “higher” or non-basic musical understanding. I agree that mine would be an enhanced notion of musical understanding. Nevertheless, following Levinson’s own thought on the subject, the term 'basic' in "basic musical understanding" such as he defines it does not mean elemental, but rather fundamental for any further understanding: by “the adjective ‘basic’ [...] I mean to convey that such understanding is essential—to any apprehension of music—, fundamental—to any further musical understanding—, and central—to worthwhile experience of any kind—but not that it is simple, or elementary, or rudimentary” (Levinson 1997, p. 33).

Now the question is whether or not my sense of musical understanding is compatible with Levinson’s qualified concatenationism? He reflected on the possibilities of the awareness of the *large-scale* musical form facilitating or contributing to the hearing or quasi-hearing. However, awareness, analysis and technical knowledge of the form in a *small-scale*—note by note or moment by moment—would allow for a legitimate *qualified concatenationism*. I think we have good reasons to admit that the analytic model and the experiential model do complement each other, if we now accept that both possibilities are relevant for a broader musical understanding.

I claim that (1) finding a meaning of musical understanding compatible with

concatenationism may clarify the position that we as listeners, proponents of the analytic model or the experiential model, philosophers or musicologists want to hold, and that because it resolves the false dichotomy between what is and what is not understanding, it is even more worthwhile to do so; (2) adopting the *Verstehen* meaning for the basic musical understanding proposed by Levinson shows a way out of the disputes with the supporters of the analytic model; and (3) using qualified concatenationism as a plausible way of understanding music through analysis, technical knowledge and awareness of the small-scale form significantly complements understanding achieved through experience.

There is no way of proving that the mechanisms employed by the analytic model and the experiential model are as independent in the act of listening as the debate assumes. If I, as a “common” listener, hear constantly and repeatedly the same piece, even though my first approach was without awareness or knowledge of the musical form, after many times, a moment will arrive in which I detect certain aspects of the form—through listening I will be able to deduce certain musical features constitutive of the structure. How much does this contribute to my understanding though?¹² Levinson would say that it is generally very little. Nevertheless, my goal is to enhance basic musical understanding beyond simple temporal order and to show that musical satisfaction with a piece is relevant to our experience of listening to music. I think that as much as we can detect and deduce constitutive elements, our satisfaction in listening to music piece will be greater.

Moreover, I claim that the idea of musical architecture or musical form not only is related with the analytical, but also with experiential model. We can *experience* form through short phrases and by following their repetitions and contrasts, which eventually provide us a microcosm of musical form. Kerman is right when he maintains that a large-

¹² A question raised by Levinson in a personal communication.

scale composition like a symphony is something like a greatly expanded tune, and its form is experienced in basically the same way.

Form in art also has a good deal to do with its emotional quality: it is a mistake to consider form as merely structural or intellectual matter. Think of the little (or big) emotional “click” we get at the end of a limerick, or a sonnet, where the accumulated meanings of the words are summed up with the final rhyme. This is an effect to which form—limerick form or sonnet form—contributes. Similarly, when at the end of a symphony a previously heard melody comes back, with new orchestration and new harmonies, the special feeling this gives us emerges from a flood of memory; we remember the melody from before, in its earlier version. That effect, too, is created by musical form (Kerman 2000, pp. 39–40).

Regardless of whether or not you are an ordinary listener, without knowledge, large-scale form-awareness, or ability in analysis, after constantly and repeatedly listening, it is impossible not to go through cognitive processes which involve mental representations of the music. Even though such representations are not directly observable, we *infer* their existence and nature until we notice them, hear them, memorize them and reproduce them. Finally, there is not an explicit divorce between the technical and the non-technical in music—between the form and the features of the form. The simple act of constantly and repeatedly listening will eventually produce knowledge of the structural and technical features of the music and of its global form.¹³ As Sloboda argues, evidence suggests that listeners without musical training do have an implicit knowledge of that which musicologists can talk about explicitly (1997, p. 3).

3.3 Second Proposal: Accepting Levels and Degrees of Musical Understanding

If the false dichotomy between the experiential model and the analytic model is removed,

¹³ For an interesting discussion about a right listener’s background of knowledge and practice, see J. Levinson, 1990. See also P. Kivy 1990, S. Davies 1994, and R. Scruton 1997, all of which include extended discussion of this topic.

several shades of understanding can be now appreciated. It is possible to see that there is not only one way of understanding music, but rather there are several levels, degrees and aspects of understanding. My second proposal is that inside one basic musical understanding there is room to distinguish between levels and degrees of understanding.

Why would distinguishing levels and degrees of understanding within basic musical understanding be plausible? Levinson himself sheds light on this when (a) he argues that the hearer's abilities to follow and reproduce are a compelling sign of musical understanding and can be obtained through an attentive act of—concatenationist—listening; and (b) when he observes that basic musical understanding can be achieved when the hearer listens to a musical piece closely and repeatedly; i.e., when the hearer positions himself in the right music-historical space and listens with attention, constancy and repetition to a piece until he becomes very familiar with it. From this, I infer that levels and degrees of understanding can be explained as follows:

(a) One aspect of a listener's understanding accords with his mental abilities; e.g., *ceteris paribus* understanding is not the same with a hearer who identifies the instruments in Smetana's Overture and the different tone colors at each moment, as with a hearer who hardly distinguishes between string instruments. These listeners both achieve understanding, but at different *levels*.

Consider another section of *The Bartered Bride* Overture as heard by a listener who can differentiate instrumental tone colors. He or she will listen to the passage and experience the music's flow with the tone color changing every five seconds or so and the theme changing suddenly when it is played by different instruments, each with its own characteristic tone color. The listener would hear something like, at 2'59" there are three

drum strokes and an outburst: timpani, then massed woodwinds. 3'04": Part 2 of the outburst theme—massed string instruments, timpani. 3'09": Quiet rustling, violins playing together. 3'11": The theme, four spurts of music, violas. 3'16": Theme again, this time carried by a clarinet. 3'21": Third theme, two flutes. 3'26": Theme, fourth time: oboe with a bassoon below. 3'40": So many instruments are playing that tone colors are hard to distinguish (see Kerman 2000, p. 5). Here we have a different level of understanding than that achievable by someone who cannot distinguish between tone colors.

(b) Another aspect of a listener's understanding accords with the time and constancy spent in hearing; e.g., *ceteris paribus* understanding is not the same for a hearer who attentively listens to Bruckner's Eighth Symphony twice a week for a year and for one who listens to it twice in a year. Both of them can achieve a basic musical understanding, but different *degrees* of it.

In this respect also, every time we hear the symphony, we find different properties and qualities of the musical work. Our ear becomes more acute and sophisticated and we understand the piece to a more complex degree. For example, the listeners can identify the accompaniment of *tremolando* strings in the scherzo, pulsating string chords in D flat, over which violins have an expressive hymn-like theme in the adagio. Alternatively, more generally they notice the themes to which a movement returns, phrase repetitions, as well as apprehending the theme's articulation.

We can justify the proposal for identifying different levels of understanding as follows:¹⁴ We know that concatenationist listening implies attention to the musical present, but there are other elemental aspects to which the hearer must pay attention. In order to

¹⁴ See (Davies 2007, pp. 25–79).

understand, the hearer should be able to: *distinguish* music from non-musical noise or from sounds unconnected with the piece; *recognize* when a piece is beginning and when it is coming to a close, so that they can tell when a performance breaks down or stops unexpectedly; *recognize* repetitions, where and when they occur, and be able to *identify* the earlier themes even if the repetition is not exact; *register* the waxing and waning of musical tension and movement and the expressive character of the music; *predict* how the music will continue and *distinguish* between an unanticipated but appropriate continuation and a performance blunder; *experience* the music as unfolding in a “logical” way. Most of these capacities can be characterized in a concatenationist way. Hence, it is not possible to believe that every listener has the same ability to listen to music. So, although it would be difficult or impossible to exactly measure and quantitatively determine someone’s level of musical understanding, we can accept that not everybody achieves the same basic musical understanding, even if we are listening to music in a concatenationist way.

As for the time and effort spent listening, (b), Levinson sheds light on the possibility of identifying degrees of understanding. If he does not make this suggestion explicitly, he at least implies it when he emphasizes the importance of listening closely and repeatedly to a music piece. How long must one listen before achieving basic musical understanding? It depends on many factors. For example (differing from Levinson) Davies correctly emphasizes the importance of the preparation of the appreciative musical listener, which cannot rest alone with what he can grasp unreflectively, simply by attending to music. He also stresses that, in order to reach a deeper understanding, the hearer needs certain information—some idea of the course of music history, genres and styles, etc. (Davies

2007, pp. 25–79).¹⁵

It is not easy to reach consensus as to when the hearer achieves a certain degree of understanding, how to measure the degree of understanding achieved, or what exactly is a degree. I accept this difficulty, as it is also difficult to determine somebody's knowledge of music, or how well listeners can analyze a work. Nevertheless, I still think that we can admit knowledge as well as degrees, and that we can regard as an important variable to enhanced musical understanding the time that the hearer devotes to listening—even though listening twice as many times certainly does not guarantee twice the understanding.

Musical understanding is not the same for everybody: there are different levels and degrees of understanding since listeners apprehend different “parts of musical meaning” according to their abilities of listening and the time they spend on it. One of these parts is related to the purely internal connections of the music, its kinetic and dynamic content, and the other part has to do with the expressive elements of the music, its emotional and dramatic content.¹⁶ In this sense, basic musical understanding permits a grasp of both musical movement and extramusical expression. In such a way, basic musical understanding is correlative with basic musical meaning.

Finally, let me suggest that qualified concatenationism considered as a tool for listening and achieving a basic musical understanding, can do the work that an intellectual approach requires: we can know, analyze and be aware of the small-scale form, and we can infer the large-scale form from this. Qualified concatenationism also answers the requirements of levels and degrees of musical understanding, and it would be possible to achieve basic musical understanding notwithstanding the mental states in which we

¹⁵ Levinson calls a listener's background formation in his “Musical Literacy”, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Levinson (1997, p. 34) supports this idea from the argument of Roger Scruton: “Notes on the Meaning of Music” (1993).

approach a work, or what purposes we pursue by listening to it. The full details of how qualified concatenationism can pull this off, however, must be postponed to a later work.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have agreed that the idea of concatenationism is a very convincing way of hearing music. Drawing on a qualified version of concatenationism, I explored the possibility of expanding the notion of musical understanding by means of two proposals which led to a resolution of the disagreement between those who claim that understanding is achieved by the experience of listening and those who claim that understanding is achieved through analysis and awareness of musical architecture or large-scale musical structure. I argued that there is no real dichotomy between the experiential model and the analytic model, and I showed a way in which aware and analytical understanding can not only complement our experience of music, but also allow us to enhance this understanding.

The new view that I presented in this paper not only captures important parts of what both models originally had in mind, but also gives a more accurate picture of the process of listening with understanding. “Understanding” implies a complicated mix of the three senses that I explained (*Verstehen*, *Verstand* and *Erklärung*), and neither the analytic nor the experiential model had recognized this. Given that, the three aspects of “understanding” are there and are important for basic musical understanding; both the development of complex mental processes, including the conscious effort to connect fragments of music and the repeated listening can contribute to increase our understanding.

Thus, in order to broaden Levinson’s notion of music understanding, I proposed that levels and degrees of understanding could be defined in reference to mental abilities, and to the time and dedication spent in hearing, respectively. Regarding these points,

Levinson's qualified concatenationism, besides being a very useful way of listening to music and experiencing it, is already compatible with the enhanced understanding that I have presented.

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