

Music Theory

Dowland, Duarte & Chromaticism

BY JOHN DUARTE

MY LAST COLUMN addressed the hexachord's role in John Dowland's chromatic harmony. Now let's turn our attention to a few examples from my own music.

Ex. 1's focus is on the contrast between the diatonic melody and the descending chromatic bass line instead of on a harmonic progression. Tune your low *E* to *D* and play it slowly. When looking at a new score, Brahms often ignored the middle parts, feeling that the top and bottom were most important. Test this theory by playing Ex. 1's top and bottom only. While Ex. 1 really isn't contrapuntal music, Ex. 2 is. The upper two lines contain chromatic movement and are offset, producing some strongly dissonant clashes that could only be analyzed with difficulty (and little profit).

Ex. 3 through Ex. 5 join Dowland's music with mine. The work is in the form of variations on Dowland's "Melancholy Galliard." In the finale's opening (Ex. 3), the first part of the original tune is set against measure 2's rising chromatic hexachord (shown with a bracket), taken from "Farewell Fancy." Also note the partial entry in measure 4.

Another brief quotation appears in Ex. 4's lowest voice. Compare Ex. 4's bass line with Ex. 3's top part. In Ex. 4 the seventh and eighth notes (*C#* and *E*) have a longer duration than they do in Ex. 3. When a part reappears with longer time values, it is said to be "augmented" or has undergone "augmentation"; when it's shortened, it's "diminished" or has undergone "diminution."

Ex. 5a's middle line is a diminished version of the top part. Ex. 5b and Ex. 5c isolate

the lines so you can see this more clearly. In Ex. 5a the strongly chromatic lower parts create an exotic succession of chords, which ends on the remote triad of *Em*. Such a passage grows out of a basic idea, not a preconceived harmonic progression. If you try to add chord symbols to Ex. 5a, you'll probably realize that composition is more concerned with hitting on an idea and seeing where it leads than pouring notes into a fixed form or harmonic formula. The same could be said about free jazz. But with more traditional forms—12-bar blues, say—there's a basic mold, even though there are many variants. If an idea is strong enough, even a highly unconventional result will be convincing. ■



Author/educator John Duarte is one of the world's foremost composers for classical guitar, and his works have been performed by Andres Segovia, John Williams, Alexandre Lagoya, and many others.

Ex. 1

Lento

Ex. 2

Allegro

Ex. 3

♩ = 88

Ex. 4



Ex. 5a



Ex. 5b



Ex. 5c



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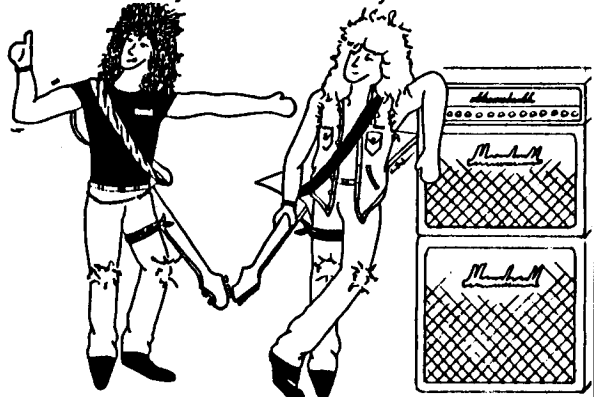
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