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Motivic Relationships as a Medium for Symbolic Associations in the First Movement of Karel Husa's

Music for Prague 1968

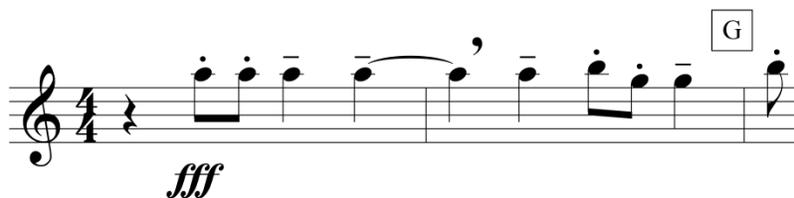
Traumatic events of national upheaval often inspire great shifts in social consciousness and substantive works of art; just as Beethoven's Third Symphony was inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, the avant-garde movement can be read as a reaction against a world scarred by the horrors of World War Two. In August of 1968, thousands of Soviet tanks and soldiers occupied Prague in response to democratic reforms occurring in Czechoslovakia; the occupation was traumatic and the revocation of political and artistic freedoms that followed prompted several artists and musicians to respond creatively. Karel Husa's *Music for Prague 1968* is a dramatic portrait of the composer's home city under siege, and Husa uses several main ideas to unify the composition that have explicitly programmatic associations: a Hussite war song from the fifteenth century that had been a cultural symbol of resistance for the Czech people, a bird call, and bells. The development in the first movement of these primary motives through repetition and transformation powerfully illustrates the horrors of invasion and the hope to finally achieve freedom from foreign oppression. Given the explicitly programmatic inspiration of the work, the symbolic meaning of each motive will be discussed. Although a harmonic analysis exceeds the scope of this paper, harmony and pitch collections will be considered as they relate to motivic associations. In view of the innumerable small motivic manipulations that occur in this piece, every detail will not be analyzed in hope of gaining a view of larger structure and more insightful musical and symbolic connections between motives.

The Hussite war song is the most important melody of *Music for Prague* and serves as the basis for the movement's primary motive group. Husa gives the melody in complete form only at the end of the fourth movement in the powerful unison shown in Example 1.



Example 1. Last score page of movement four. Hussite war song.

By saving the only literal statement for the entire work's triumphant conclusion in movement four, Husa suggests the Czech people's continual hope and an overall cumulative form of the work. This paper, though, is limited to the first movement, and Husa gives the first movement's only unmodified statement to the brass in mm. 74-75. Example 2 shows this statement's significantly truncated form.



Example 2. Trumpet melody in mm. 74-76.

This melody serves as the core for a group of submotives that are derived from it. The first movement is a through-composed series of developments of various rhythmic and melodic submotives derived from that war song. Husa opens this large piece with a hushed solo played by muted timpani. Example 3 shows the distortion of the war song in which the melody's normal pitch sequence of D, E, C is compressed to D, Eb, C#.

Measure	Instrument	Tone sustained	Additional feature
12-13	Fl 2	C#	flutter tongue
15-17	Marimba	E	resolves down to Eb
16-17	Tbn 1	E	flutter tongue
18	chimes	C-Db	
17-18, 21-29	clarinet family	dissonant cloud	
17-20	cl 1	E	emerges from dissonant cloud from the clarinet section in m. 18
19-22	Eb clarinet	D	
19-21	Ob 1	E	
22-26	oboes and EH	E	
22-26	marimba	C#	
27-34	vibraphone	D	
27-28, 30-33	low clarinets	low C	"sonorous"
29-34	oboes, vibraphone	D	
29-34	oboes	C#	
30-31	tubas	Bb, Db	
30-34	baritone	Db	
30-31	marimba	C	
31-32		C#	
32-34		D	
32-34	EH	D	
33-34	A Sax 2	D	quarter tone bends
34	Chimes	D	fff dynamic

Table 1. Chromatic saturation of mm. 12-34 and convergence on D.

Thus, the Adagio section is thoroughly saturated with D and its chromatic neighbors, creating a sonic haze. At its most expanded form, the section encompasses all tones between C and E before the tone D emerges from the high level of saturation at m. 35 to dramatically announce the beginning of a new musical section. This expansion from D out to C and E relates to the motive of a third which will be discussed later in this analysis.

The idea of expansion from D with later convergence is developed dramatically on an even larger scale in first movement's Allegro. After firmly establishing the work's tonal center of D in the introduction and confirming it at the trumpet fanfare in m. 35, the Allegro's first expansion to adjacent semitones is initiated by flutter tonguing from the horns in m. 45. Husa continues to work away from the tone D as the movement develops other ideas. Although there are numerous examples of simultaneously sounding adjacent tones centering around D in the work's middle section, Husa begins to obviously prepare the end at letter G. Here, the woodwinds trill on G#, the tone most distantly related to D, while the brass slowly converge on D. The low brass sound E and C in m. 77 beneath the trumpets articulating the tones C, Eb, and E with machine gun-like precision; the horns join in m 79 on Db and F, and compress with the trombones and baritones into Db and Eb in m. 83. Also in m. 83, the trumpets powerfully declaim the tone D with free and accelerating rhythm. The trombone and baritone slides into D from adjacent tones in mm. 84-87 prepare the final and alarming convergence on D at m. 88 played in unison by the entire band. The importance of the tone D is highlighted by its continued unison in the resolution from the climax, mm. 88-99. The trumpets accentuate the return to D with grace note fanfares in mm. 88-94. The importance of convergence on D from chromatically adjacent tones is also confirmed as an idea in other movements.

The Allegro section is introduced by a terrifying trumpet fanfare shown in Example 4.

C Allegro (♩ = 108-112)

ff brassy

Example 4. mm. 35-38. Trumpet fanfare derived from Hussite war song.

Husa's skilled manipulation of motives contributes to this work's overwhelming emotional affect, and this motto will serve as the basis for the entire Allegro section. This trumpet melody is included in the primary motive group (Hussite war song) because its melodic contour and pitch range (C to Eb) is unmistakably derived from the Hussite war song. Its harmonization also relates to the idea of expansion with later convergence from D as m. 36 beat 1 contains the tones C#, D, and Eb and returns in m. 38 to unison. The horns and low brass repeat the harmonization in mm. 39-40.

The first submotive that the trumpet fanfare generates is the four sixteenth note figure of m. 37. This idea also covers the pitch span of a minor third and forms the melodic and rhythmic basis of the entire allegro section. Its pitches D, Eb, Db, C and revolve around D, the tonal center of the work, and can be expressed together in as the pitch class set (0 1 2 3). There are only a few moments of the Allegro in which some manipulation of this idea is not sounded, and, given its abundance, I will examine only a few of its more significant transformations. The upper woodwinds cry an inverted version in m. 45, and, continuing through the remainder of the allegro segment, Husa seems to present every possible arrangement and manipulation of four adjacent half steps. In m. 47 the trumpets play a distorted version of this submotive in interesting contrary motion, and the trombones play an extremely expanded version of this cell in m. 52 with stretched-out pitch content.

Husa also extends this sixteenth note figure melodically to form more extended phrases. The upper woodwinds play an elongated figure in m. 57; here, the figure also includes the associated pitch Bb which was included in the initial statement of m. 35 by the harmonizing fourth trumpets in m. 36.

The trumpets introduce the motive in stretto in mm. 55-56 and the saxophones continue to develop this rhythmically in mm. 60-65. The trumpets further develop this motive timbreally by a sequence in mm. 65-70 in which each voice of the overlapping texture is playing with a different muted tone. This phrase maintains melodic interest by constantly shifting the submotive's contour and interval of rhythmic displacement between the voices. The woodwinds continue this form of motivic manipulation through m. 75.

Husa derives another idea from the sixteenth note motive which is the interval of a third. This seemingly trite harmonic idea appears prominently throughout the allegro section. It is introduced by the arresting trumpet phrase in mm. 41-43 which features several minor and major thirds melodically; each reach down to a sounding Bb stands out from the phrase's mostly adjacent half steps. Major and minor thirds abound melodically and harmonically in the brass and percussion on score page 15. Husa frequently harmonizes with a third scored extremely low: example in mm. 58-59 in baritone and tuba, again in the horns and low brass in mm. 77-87. The timpani melody in the opening Adagio, spanning a diminished third, can also be viewed as an expansion to a major third when it is dramatically recapitulated in mm. 90-95. The third motive's expansion on a large-scale in mm. 12-33 has already been shown in Table 1 and discussed in this paper.

The sixteenth note idea is further developed rhythmically in a remarkable sequence around the movement's climax. The three tom-toms play the figure in a hocket configuration beginning at m. 76. The trumpets follow in m. 77 with the idea in an accelerating rhythmic structure before they pass it off to the woodwinds in m. 81 who play random triplets, sixteenths, quintuplets, and sextuplets. The trumpets reenter in m. 83 with various perversions of the figure as the tom-toms switch from the sixteenth hocket to a sustained roll. Husa brews a terrifying roar at the movement's climax (m. 88) by gradually accelerating the sixteenth note figure to a frenzied anarchy. This rhythmic tension is then resolved by the mallet percussion and upper woodwinds who gradually slow back down into the closing

Adagio. Thus, Husa skillfully uses the Hussite war song to yield other motivic material, namely the expansion and contraction from the pitch D, the trumpets' sixteenth note figure, and the harmonized third. Indeed, the religious song is serving as the foundation for Husa's vision of Prague under siege.

The second motive group is the bird call. Husa treats this as the "symbol of liberty which the city of Prague has seen only for moments during its thousand years of existence" (Husa 2). Offered most frequently by the piccolo, the motive occurs in the Adagio sections and is defined both by its timbre and characteristic melodic construction. The piece opens tentatively in the piccolo's hollow low register; Husa then spins out a lengthy improvisatory-sounding melody which the flutes continue. The bird call returns poignantly in the piccolo to close the movement.

Another example of motivic transformation is the harmonic permeation by the pitch class set (0123) throughout the bird call; this is also the pitch content of the Allegro's pervasive sixteenth note figure that was introduced by the trumpets in m.37. This harmonic association is used so frequently throughout the bird call that it assumes motivic importance as one of the bird call's defining characteristics. This (0123) motive appears in the piccolo solo of the Adagio often disguised by octave displacement and interpolation, but the pitch content of four neighboring half steps is unmistakable. Measure 5 is its first presentation: the pitches G#, A, G, F# are a transposed version of (0123) pitch set. Husa uses this set again in m. 6 (C#, D#, D, C), and m. 9. Example 5 shows an expanded form occurring in mm. 11-12.



Example 5. Measures 11-12, an expanded version of (0123) motive in the piccolo.



Example 7. Piccolo solo mm. 12-14 developing (F C# D) cell.

This idea is repeated and developed at the same pitch level in the flutes in mm. 24-25 and again in mm. 27-28. In fact, much of melodic contour of the bird call melody is related to this cell. As shown in example 8, the piccolo's opening three notes can be interpreted as inversion of the motive with pitches expanded to (026).



Example 8. Measure 2 in the piccolo. Inversion of (F, C#, D) motive.

The piccolo continues with an inverted version of the (F, C#, D) motive in the first three notes of m. 7; the flutes take the inversion in m. 17 and m. 28-29 (F#, G, Bb). Measure 31 in the flute (F#, F, E) can also be read as a distorted inversion of this motive. The importance of the bird call and the (0123) motives is demonstrated by their prominent placements at the movement's opening and closing. Husa also symbolically links the bird call group to the city of Prague by infusing it with the (0123) set also identified in the sixteenth notes of the trumpet fanfare in m. 37, itself a corruption of the Hussite war song.

The final motive that lends thematic unification and symbolic significance to this work is the bell. Though the chimes only play three times in the first movement, the effect of each entrance is powerful enough to warrant motivic regard. The first strike occurs in m. 34 as a commanding proclamation of the frantic Allegro section. The next occurrence of the bell is at the movement's climax, m. 88; the tension building to this moment is hysterical and the chimes' sounding as the band plays a unison D adds

additional distress. The bell's final toll in m. 99 punctuates the dispersion of terror and transitions back to the feeble piccolo solo of the closing Adagio.

In view of Husa's motivic treatment of three compelling musical ideas, it is clear that the motives are used as vehicles to convey symbolic associations. The timid but hopeful bird call symbolizes peace and liberty that had evaded the city of Prague for centuries. Husa vividly illustrates the bird call using the thin timbre of the piccolo, frequently in a low and hollow register; it is also defined by a characteristic melodic construction often involving quickly repeated notes and a certain (F, C#, D) turning figure. Octave displacement and inversion mask the motivic cohesion that provides musical unity within the motive group, and Husa binds the bird call group to the city of Prague with the (0123) set from the trumpet's corrupted war song. Prague is further depicted as the City of a Hundred Towers through effective use of bells; their tolling is evocative at musically important junctures and heightens the moment's sense of terror and impending doom. Finally, Husa brilliantly utilizes the Hussite war song in a variety of ways. The distressed trumpet fanfare at m. 35 is derived from the religious song and evokes the fear and panic of a military invasion. Husa develops the remainder of the first movement from the four sixteenth notes of that fanfare; they constitute a submotive that is used rhythmically and melodically as a (0123) pitch class set. The figure is extended, inverted, displaced, and presented in stretto through the Allegro. Husa also derives the idea of the interval of a third from the Hussite war song, placing it on the composition's surface with frequent melodic and harmonic constructions; this idea is also expressed in large-scale structures as a chromatic saturation from the pitches C to E. The idea of a third ultimately relates to the motive of an expansion out from the tone D with a later return to that pitch. This expansion and contraction from D is also evident on the surface and in larger structures; the first movement's Allegro can be read in this way. The first movement also contains more literal statements of the Hussite war song. The poignant timpani solo that opens the movement is a collapsed version of this song and it suggests a weak and dominated nation; Husa also dramatically sounds a tiny

excerpt in the first movement at m. 75 which prepares the climax. The war song's triumphant appearance at the piece's very end depicts a determined and unified Czech people overcoming fierce oppression---a vividly illustrated protracted struggle from which a nation will emerge resolute and illustrious.

Work Cited

Husa, Karel. *Music for Prague 1968*. New York: Associated Music, 1969.