

Epilog: Wallace H. Bower, Jr.

Finding The Right Pitch III closes with some personal observations about my teacher, Wallace Henry Bower, Jr., who taught music theory at El Camino College in Torrance, California, from 1968 to 2006. Many will argue justifiably that I should have placed this essay much earlier in the *Finding The Right Pitch* series or at least at the beginning of the present volume. This was, however, an ongoing search for the best way to preserve in book form what was central to Bower's pedagogy based upon a student-teacher relationship that spanned more than three decades.

These reflections could only emerge near the end of a narrative that began for me in the Fall of 1970, in what would become for Bower "the greatest class" he ever had. Subsequently, this class split into two different sections in the second semester, after which he referred to the first class as "one of the two best classes he ever had." It was a highly competitive though affable group, an unusual blend of personalities. I soon took the inherited and perhaps coveted position of page turner for his piano performances and recitals, selected periodically by him from the new arrivals to the music program. I began my individual studies with Bower shortly thereafter.

People who knew Bower invariably referred to him as brilliant *and* funny. Often these descriptions were given in reverse order. Bower was indeed very funny; he loved to laugh. Bower also loved crossword puzzles; he completed the ones in the New York Times in ink. His multilingual vocabulary was impressive. Crossword puzzles and languages were mysteries that had to be solved. And to Bower, music analysis was a puzzle he spent his entire life trying to solve. "The study of harmony is a life long study," he told me when I was eighteen.

His mother was Viennese, his father American. Bower's early comprehension of both English and German led to his passion for languages. He had perfect pitch and knew at least eight languages (English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portugese, modern Greek, and Latin). He earned a Bachelor's degree in languages at Ohio Wesleyan University in 1951, deferring the academic study of music for graduate school. Bower began learning piano at a very young age, doubtless encouraged by his mother, who was a stride pianist.

Bower served in the United States Army from 1951 to 1954, attaining the rank of Sergeant and attending both Army Counter-Intelligence School and Army Language School before being sent to Vienna, Austria. There, while continuing his military service, he became a music and language coach for the Vienna State Opera. With his knowledge of German and residency in Vienna, Bower became familiar with Heinrich Schenker's writings before returning to the United States in 1956 and before beginning his graduate studies in composition at UCLA the following year. Bower taught at California State University, Dominguez Hills, from 1966–1967, before assuming a tenured professorship at El Camino College in 1968.

The application of Schenkerian analysis was an integral component of Bower's classroom experience. Bower preferred the approach to structural analysis put forward by Felix Salzer, Schenker's foremost disciple. Although Bower attended a graduate seminar in music theory in Spring 1960 with a visiting professor Salzer (Music 250), he did not study structural analysis with the theorist. In fact, Bower's paper for Salzer was called "Some Speculations Concerning the Larger Meanings of Harmony," a topic to which the former devoted considerable thought throughout his career.

Early on, Bower recognized the disparity between the description of a chord as a member of a given tonality (that is, its chord nomenclature or grammar) and the meaning of that chord within the larger tonal context, in other words: the disparity between chord grammar and chord significance. He searched for ways to improve the inherent limitations of chord symbols to explain linear operations.

In 1960 (and probably before that), Bower set upon a course that would ultimately lead him to find functional descriptions for local harmonic events, particularly those that form apparent sonorities. It is likely that the seminar in music theory with Salzer in the Spring of 1960 helped to shape Bower's development as a theorist. Bower acquired Salzer's book, *Structural Hearing*, no later than 1958, two years before the seminar, and preferred the latter's graphic notation to that of Schenker's.

The principles of structural analysis informed everything Bower believed and taught about tonal music. As early as the second semester of harmony, he would explain the difference between structure and prolongation to his bewildered but engaged students, introducing them to the principles of graphic notation while many were still learning to read music. He routinely sent them to other schools to continue their studies, equipped with a level of understanding of common practice harmony that approached graduate proficiency.

Bower did not use textbooks to supplement his lectures on musical structure; he did, however, reference anthologies for analysis and theory books for discussions of harmony. He understood that anthologies were essential components of any harmony class, regardless of what examples might or might not be included in any given textbook. Bower rarely referred to the anthology by the name of its author or title when making assignments or when using them to demonstrate a musical operation. Rather, a typical instruction from him would be: "for next time, bring the green book because we're going to use it." He subsequently concluded his instructions by selecting which compositions were to be analyzed in advance. As much as any other harmony teacher, Bower had his own preferences, drawing freely from the available literature.

As compelling as Bower's instruction was, the application of structural analysis does not count among his most significant contributions to the pedagogy of music theory, though he applied it to virtually all of his examinations of the musical literature. Musical structuralism was central to his classroom dynamic; students leaving his class had an interest in and appreciation of the "larger concerns." Bower's own approach to describing apparent chord formations emerged from his keen understanding of structural harmony.

Although the classroom experience with Bower is difficult to duplicate in a book, *Finding The Right Pitch III* provides insight into his pedagogy, taxonomy of extended diatonicism and chromaticism, and nomenclature. The latter includes generic chord descriptions for both real and apparent sonorities. These concepts are integrated into the narrative within the context of structural analysis.

During his graduate studies at UCLA, Bower was that one student in the entire music department who knew more than any of the other graduate students. It did not seem to matter how much someone else advanced because Bower advanced at a much faster pace. Ultimately, from his earliest days in high school until he was gone, Bower was a "go to" guy. His colleagues at El Camino referred to him as the "resident genius."

When I met Bower in 1970, his formation of generic chord nomenclature was entering its maturity, while other theory teachers were clinging to conventional, literal descriptions of harmonic and contrapuntal operations, only slightly more informative than those existing in lead-sheet terminology. These literal descriptions invariably altered the accidentals of the figured bass to accommodate the various key signatures. Throughout the course of its development (from the sixties through the early eighties), Bower's generic chord grammar offered a functional nomenclature that always had at its core, a keen understanding of the background and its harmonic and contrapuntal projections.

While the first two books in this series were intended for a somewhat broader audience without direct reference to the Schenkerian tradition, the goal of the present volume is obviously different, not just because the concepts are more advanced and sometimes accompanied by voice-leading graphs, but also because I have deliberately shaped my explanations in a less distilled manner than in volumes one and two in order to more vividly capture the essence of Bower's overall approach to common practice harmony. In *Finding The Right Pitch III*, the focus narrows to more closely reproduce the intensity and rigor of his thinking.

As suggested above, there are limits to what a book can accomplish in meeting the aforementioned objective. A few notable departures from Bower's pedagogy merit comment here. In the first semester of Bower's harmony class, students learning major and minor key signatures were also expected to understand primary borrowing, including its inherent conflicts with the purely diatonic content.

In other words, Bower taught extended diatonicism from the beginning, with the assumption that the modal borrowing was from the parallel *melodic* minor rather than from the harmonic or natural minor. Students also enclosed borrowed triads in parentheses (and, in second semester, sevenths) to identify and mark the borrowed sonorities. He referenced certain chords that only exist in theory, such as the subtonic triad in minor that takes variable $\sharp 7$ as its chord seventh (a chord that does not yield a downward resolution). Bower termed the augmented-major seventh chord the "great seventh" and the minor-major seventh the "small seventh." I use the more conventional descriptions cited here. Admittedly, the three books in this series constitute a search to find the right balance between what Bower taught and what he equipped me to believe. Bower would have it no other way.

The first two volumes of *Finding The Right Pitch* are directed towards a general readership seeking a guided study of the basics of music theory, distilling concepts that ultimately become central to the narrative of *Finding The Right Pitch III*, wherein Bower's taxonomy, vocabulary, and general tone are employed more explicitly.

The principle of extended diatonicism and the attendant discussion of mixture between major and minor takes its more traditional place in advanced harmony, in *Finding The Right Pitch III*, rather than in the second volume, *Finding The Right Pitch II: A Guide To The Study Of Basic Harmony*, where it would have followed Bower's practice of introducing primary borrowing in beginning harmony. (An edition replicating precisely Bower's schedule would attract a more focused readership.)

Volumes one and two of *Finding The Right Pitch* deal with the fundamental problems of harmony, using harmonic reductions (often in four-voice texture) and depending on external access to music literature for examples. They are study guides in the purest sense. To be sure, without a connection to music literature, such demonstrations amount to little more than "paper progressions," a term and practice Bower exploited throughout his career, both for his own convenience and as an object of criticism.

In his 1960 seminar paper, Bower maintains that paper progressions encourage students to "think only in terms of rhythmically insipid harmony," accompanied by a certain rigid understanding of what are perceived as *rules* for doubling in chords and the voice leading that ensues between them. He criticized the use of these musical abstractions because they "bear no relation to an actual composition." And yet, he also drew upon them for their one valid purpose: "to demonstrate, by diagram, harmonic movement driving *onward to its final goal*" (also from "Some Speculations Concerning the Larger Meanings of Harmony," emphasis mine).

Finding The Right Pitch III retains the overall tone of the previous guides and continues to use reductive progressions and textures as the primary pedagogical device; however, the third volume also incorporates examples from music literature to demonstrate certain harmonic and contrapuntal operations. A comparison of the harmonic adaptation of Chopin's E-Minor Prelude in example 3–36 with the analysis of the score in Chapter 8 telegraphs the limitations of the paper progression. Transposed to c minor, 3–36 is concerned with issues of both generic figured bass and exact figured bass, as well as with relationships between lower-level keys. The early introduction of Chopin's progression in Chapter 3 might be viewed as a primer for the exhaustive analysis of Chopin's actual composition in Chapter 8 (pp. 252–260).

Bower also taught modal transposition of Church modes in first-semester harmony and even in music fundamentals. This series has retained the early introduction of modal key signatures for the same reason Bower placed it early in his sequence of topics: to underscore the necessity of learning major and minor key signatures immediately; for without this skill, students fail, eventually.

Imagine majoring in literature without knowing the alphabet of the language you are attempting to read. The point is that an easy, simplistic beginning to the study of music *theory* fails to instill in the student the sense of urgency that comes from understanding the importance of learning the musical alphabet, the key signatures.

Bower barraged his students with a lot of difficult material and then added more to that; he was intense and demanding. Bower characterized his own approach as “force feeding.” And ultimately, his students became gluttons. Some survived and many did not. But the students who did survive left Bower thinking like a music theorist.

In the early 1970s, a movie called *The Paper Chase*, based upon a novel of the same name, was released and subsequently made into a television series. The story is about the relationship between a young law student and his brilliant, demanding, and virtually impossible to please professor. Students were always on edge with this professor; he was tough and very unforgiving.

The learning experience with Bower was not unlike that depicted in the story. To be sure, Bower was far more gregarious, accessible, and generous with his time than the fictional character in the novel, but the dynamic between teacher and student was similar. It was an extremely exciting period of discovery. In more than thirty-five years, I never left a conversation with Wally without either laughing or learning something; and more often than not, both conditions prevailed.

David B. Nivans, 2016