

James Hepokoski
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“You’re the Top.” Well, that’s right! Allen Forte loved that music, the music of Cole Porter, and Allen himself was the top, in so many ways. Allen Forte, pre-eminent music theorist and pathbreaking pioneer in the development of systems of analysis for some of the most complex, challenging, and difficult music ever written—the dissonant high modernism of the first half of the twentieth century: Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Stravinsky, Messiaen and others. As everyone here knows, Allen produced field-changing work with his enormously important book on pitch-class sets from 1973, *The Structure of Atonal Music*; and he offered a lifetime of field-enriching service both to Yale and to the broader promotion of a much-deepened music theory in America—and indeed world-wide.

But with Allen there was also . . . always . . . his love of The Great American Songbook from the first half of the twentieth century, and I’ll return to that side of Allen before too long. For the moment, I’ll say only that that it’s both appropriate and wonderful that we begin this celebration of Allen Forte’s life with smiles, with a dash of Cole Porter’s clever wit, and with his ultra-sophisticated notes of cheeky exuberance. And . . . with Porter’s smart classiness, 1930s and 1940s-style. Classiness above all. Allen would have liked that.

Welcome, friends all, welcome to this Yale-family gathering of colleagues, music scholars, and former Forte students (of which there are many). It is gratifying to come together this afternoon—at Yale—to remember and celebrate a long and productive life. For his was a life that made a difference—a big difference—in so many other lives (in all of our lives) and indeed in the whole way that the scholarly study of music would be newly shaped and developed in the second half of the last century. Everyone here today has been touched, directed, guided, many of us personally, by Allen Forte. Everybody here. And that’s no small achievement. Allen Forte mattered.

Others will specify in more detail his accomplishments in Music Theory—which were huge—but to set the stage for our main speakers, I’d like to zoom out and ask a broader question. What is

it that we honor and admire when we honor and admire the memory of Allen Forte? Certainly we are grateful for the man and his enormous impact on the whole concept of what it means to take up *professionally* the scholarly study of music. But I think that in remembering Allen we can honor even more than that. We honor with him that great generation of music scholars and pioneers of the last century, to whom the current practice of music scholarship owes so much and without whom the work of most of us in this room—as scholars—would be unthinkable.

Allen was one of the foremost figures in what I think of, in rough-and-ready terms—as the second wave of music scholars in the United States—that wave of brilliant consolidators who solidified and more fully professionalized the field of music scholarship. For the United States, the first generation had been the founders of musicological study in America, scholars of the 1930s and 1940s, many of them *émigrés* from a totalitarian Europe—Paul Henry Lang, Alfred Einstein, Manfred Bukofzer, for instance (you know the names), along with many others, including, at Yale, Leo Schrade in the Department of Music, while Paul Hindemith held court at the School of Music. But it was that second generation, the next generation, those who rose to influence in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, who were the ones who put the decisive stamp on academic music scholarship in America, driving toward ever-higher standards, insisting upon rigorous criteria of hard evidence and proof (music scholarship, increasingly, as a science of evidence and explanation), and ever-deeper, more expert considerations of the language of music itself. The giants of the second generation—Strunk, Reese, Mendel, Kerman, dozens of others. . . . the list goes on and on.

And in music theory, we might think, above all, of Milton Babbitt and Allen Forte, opening up new repertoires for close analysis—Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, atonality, serialism, the new music of the 1950s and 1960s—and, with a few hugely important others, reanimating the analytical practice of Heinrich Schenker. Certainly with regard to the dissonant music of the twentieth century, the call in those years was for an increased “scientific,” even mathematical approach to analysis—a call for music-theory specialization carried out with a clarity and precision that analytical practice had not yet known. “Music Theory” in the 1960s and 1970s

was now beginning to define itself as something distinct, something separate—or at least conceptually separable—from the broader field of music scholarship. Music analysis and theory were becoming more complex, more of an insider’s game—and there were rumbles in the Mother Church of Musicology of a potential schism, theorists going one way and music historians (and ethnomusicologists) going another. It was becoming quarrelsome. Times were getting tense.

We all know the story. 1977 was the pivotal year. In musicology Joseph Kerman launched his gadfly journal *19th-Century Music*, opening up doors for an emerging generation of critical music historians. And in music theory—well, the schism *was* being formulated, and Allen, at Yale, was right at the center of it. The formal split happened in mid-November 1977, with not a little amount of acrimony, finger-pointing, charges and counter-charges. This was the founding of the Society for Music Theory, the SMT, as a society with a strongly voiced, emphatically separate identity from the American Musicological Society. And Allen Forte was the SMT’s first president, serving for five years from 1977 to 1982—in effect defining the tone of the Society—with Yale music theory as the pre-eminent place of study.

There it was—the schism—the fork in the road. One way lay the freshly cut path of this new, formalized field of music theory, while the other, more long-trodden path was now that of music history or musicology. (And for those who were so inclined, there was always another side road as well, world music or ethnomusicology.) But in 1977 this new Society for Music Theory, this new claim of a strong disciplinarity in theory, was a huge event.

For its part, large sectors of musicology were stunned by the 1977 secession—this academic split, which has proven to be so consequential in all of our lives. The classic response came from Joseph Kerman, in his own stylized journal, *19th-Century Music*, in 1978. I quote it only in part—and of course Kerman was writing about the impact of Allen on the whole discipline of music

Word reaches us [writes Kerman] . . . that Musicology and Theory have broken up. Th[eory] just moved out on him, we hear [theory as the feminine partner?], leaving the microfiche reader and the pong game, the mortgage on the Schenker

edition, and an old copy of Piston's *Harmony*. Academic couples do have their special problems these days, but one always feels it is a shame when things like this happen to such intelligent people. They had such a contribution to make. . . . One feels sorriest for the kids, of course.

Well, many of us—including myself of course—many of us are the kids—and maybe some of you here today are the grandkids—and somehow, I think, or at least I hope, that we turned out all right.

I was pleased and honored to have known Allen Forte, though for me this came rather late in the game. I came to Yale only in the late 1990s, when much of the original history/theory dust had settled, and a new, rising generation of scholars was reshaping both disciplines (music history and music theory) in very different ways. My own memories of Allen center mostly around my conversations with him about Broadway tunes, Tin Pan Alley, a repertory that he adored, and a repertory that I myself was teaching in a few American music seminars. I knew of course of his trailblazing book of 1995 on American popular song, *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era: 1924-1940*—not only winning the Wallace Berry Award in 1997 but, in effect, legitimizing as never before the close analysis of popular music—and especially the popular music of what had become known as the Great American Songbook—Gershwin, Porter, Kern, Berlin, Rodgers, Arlen. After all, it was the towering figure of Allen Forte, the deviser of pitch-class set theory and the big-game stalker of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Stravinsky, and so on, who had written this landmark study.

So it was mostly in this field of American popular music that I had most of my conversations with Allen Forte. I remember our meeting together in the seminar room at 143 Elm (those horrible speakers!) to listen to John McGlinn's reconstruction of the original production of Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are," the classic song from 1939. Allen and I listening together, and Allen listening, listening . . . seeming to be in paradise itself, Allen listening and savoring with the broadest of broad smiles on his face as the music turned from delicious to ever-more sumptuously delicious. It was a small bond between us, I think, but it was a bond.

And I remember things like Allen's touching—and loving—technical discussion and analysis of, say Harold Arlen's "Over the Rainbow," to which he devoted six pages in his popular-song book—using it as something of a touchstone case and interpretation. The song's upward leap of an octave; its careful setting of the word "rainbow," climbing back up to that octave—Allen loved that—its slow and graceful step-by-step resettling of the high tonic back to the low one, 87654321. For Allen it was clear: this was pure adoration. And so the precise, mathematical analyst of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Stravinsky—and others—was now leading us through "Over the Rainbow." The technical evidence—the analytical evidence—was in and it was time for a verdict. "I conclude," he wrote, "that the entirety of the chorus . . . of *Over the Rainbow* is, to use a time-worn adjective once more, *perfect*." Perfect. Case closed. Victory for Harold Arlen—and victory and encouragement, more broadly, for the scholarly analysis of America's classic popular music, which has now become a growth industry.

For Allen's roots went deep here. In his second book on this music, from 2001, *Listening to Classic American Popular Songs*, Allen alluded to the roots of his interest in such music in his characteristically sophisticated and witty way. I quote (and one can easily imagine Allen's eyes sparkling with these words): "My experience with the classic American popular song extends back to a misspent childhood during which my mother made me play popular music and jazz on the piano. Subsequently I played that music professionally, before seeing the error of my ways and entered the cloistered academic life. This project [from 2001] has allowed me to revisit that earlier phase of my work in music."

Well....revisit it he did—with memorable results—and Allen's contributions here have been enormous, spurring others to follow suit—especially those others of us here in the cloister. For it was this music, classic American popular song, that was in his bones....all the way to the end. What we came to find out was that it was this music that he kept closest to his heart all of those years, and it was the last to leave him.

There is much to honor and remember in the life and work of Allen Forte. We have all been touched by him. Touched in so many different ways. We are grateful. And that's why we're here today. Allen: "You're the Top."