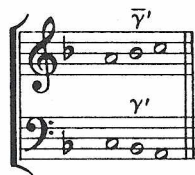
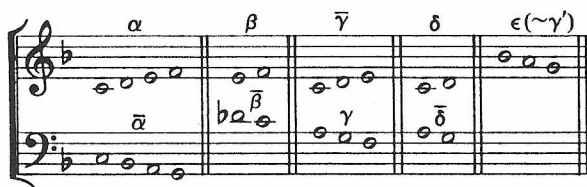


Middleground Motives in the Adagietto of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, by Allen Forte. *19th Century Music*, VIII/2 (Fall 1984, pp. 153-163)

Summary prepared for Gilbert Kaplan by A.F. February 25, 1991

This essay explores the role of the musical motive in the *Adagietto*. Although musicians normally think of the motive as a salient feature of the surface of a composition, which, of course, it always is, deeper analysis of Mahler's *Adagietto* reveals that certain basic motivic forms (displayed in Ex. 2 of the article and reproduced below) also occur over spans of music longer than those formed by adjacent notes. In the article, these large-scale melodic configurations are called "middleground motives," as distinct from the surface or "foreground" motives.¹



Thus, the third-space C in bar 5, precisely at the end of the second occurrence of what in the article is called the alpha motive, serves both as the end of that motive and also as the beginning of an expanded form of the inversion of that motive (called alpha bar) which concludes on second-line G within the dominant harmony in bar 10. This is summarized below.

Motive alpha inverted: beamed notes C-Bb-A-G



Motive epsilon: beamed notes Bb-A-G

The main portion of the article consists of a detailed explanation--using analytical sketches written in a special music notation-- of the various ways in which the "middleground" forms of the basic motives emerge and the influence which they exert upon the organization of the music, for example, in relation to moments of climax, such as the high A-G

appoggiatura in bar 43, and in relation to points at which sections are completed or begun, as at bar 60.

If, indeed, the Adagietto is a love letter from Gustav to Alma, the composer is conveying the depth of his feelings in more than one way: the expressive motives on the very surface of the music from moment to moment are replicated in larger forms of the same motives throughout.²

Finally, it seems likely that this important aspect of Mahler's Adagietto is to be found in much of his other music, especially in the slow movements of the orchestral music and in the songs. -- E.g., the opening of

the second of the Kinderstücken,
"Nun seh' ich wohl,..."

Footnotes

¹ The terms middleground and foreground are borrowed from Heinrich Schenker's theory of structural levels.

² In the very opening music of the Adagietto the discrepancy between the autograph in NYPL and the published score (shown below) provides convincing evidence that Mahler was concerned about the motivic content of his music up to the last moment. In the final version he introduced what in the article is designated motive epsilon (the descending motion from B^b to G) by changing a single note (G becomes B^b), an extraordinary revision and one that can be better understood, I feel, in the context of the detailed analysis of the motivic structure of the piece presented by this article.

Manuscript of full score, NYPL



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