A portrait of Malcolm Forsyth, an older man with a white goatee, wearing a white shirt and a dark bow tie. The background is dark purple with faint, glowing musical notation and staff lines. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

MARY I. INGRAHAM  
& ROBERT C. RIVAL,  
EDITORS

REFLECTIONS ON

# MALCOLM FORSYTH

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# Contents

*Figures* ix

*Acknowledgements* xiii

*Prelude* xv

AMANDA FORSYTH

*Introduction* xvii

MARY I. INGRAHAM & ROBERT C. RIVAL

1 Reflections on a Life and Career i

ROBIN ELLIOTT

2 Sonorous Pleasure 17

*Portrait of a Master Orchestrator as Pedagogue*

ALLAN GORDON BELL

3 Remembering and Continuing 23

*Rhapsody for 14 Strings*

RYAN MCCLELLAND

- 4 Finding Inspiration in Canadian Folk Songs 49  
*An Analysis of Three Métis Songs from Saskatchewan*  
ROXANE PREVOST
- 5 Breathing in G 79  
*Harmonic Tension and Repose in the Cello Concerto Electra Rising*  
ROBERT C. RIVAL
- 6 Allusion and Reflection in *Je répondrais...* for Solo Piano 109  
EDWARD JURKOWSKI
- 7 “Here, All Is a Beginning” 129  
*Reflections of Forsyth in A Ballad of Canada*  
MARY I. INGRAHAM
- 8 Interlude 169  
*Reminiscences*  
  
CARL HARE  
TOMMY BANKS  
NORA BUMANIS & JULIA SHAW  
ALLAN GILLILAND  
JOHN MCPHERSON  
FORDYCE C. (DUKE) PIER  
TANYA PROCHAZKA  
RAYFIELD RIDEOUT  
CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR
- 9 A Life Experience 183  
*The Early Orchestral Works*  
KATHY PRIMOS
- 10 Splendour in the Brass 197  
*A Legacy of Brass Music*  
DALE SORENSEN

11 The Choral Music 215

LEONARD RATZLAFF

*Postlude* 231

VALERIE FORSYTH

*List of Works* 233

*Contributors* 241

*Permissions* 247

*Index* 249

# 5

## Breathing in G

*Harmonic Tension and Repose in the Cello Concerto Electra Rising*

ROBERT C. RIVAL

IN EARLY 2004 I harangued a reluctant and recently retired professor of composition into taking me on as a private student.<sup>1</sup> He eventually acquiesced—on one condition: that he could speak his mind. Of course, I exclaimed—but then wondered anxiously what I had signed up for. Distance was no object. Although he lived in Edmonton and I in Montreal, I bought him a telephone with a hands-free headset and mailed him some of my scores. My new teacher, whose music I greatly admired, was the late Malcolm Forsyth.

Although I recall these lessons with fondness, some of Forsyth's comments continue to haunt me to this day. I think often about his critique of one piece in particular, my blandly titled *Overture*, a simple, driving concert-opener heavily influenced by Prokofiev, which I wrote when I was 21. Recently, when a community orchestra requested to perform it, and I discovered that the parts were in disarray, I decided to take the opportunity to make some small revisions in the course of which I came across the copy of the score annotated by Forsyth. On the first few pages he had numbered what he deemed unrelated ideas. Continuing in this manner, by m. 41 he had found an eleventh.

**Allegro con spirito** ♩ = 138

violins, cellos, bassoon

idea no. 1

low strings, low brass

22

idea no. 6

FIGURE 5.1. *Rival, Overture, m. 1 and m. 22.*

During our lesson he had ridiculed as “extravagant” the exposition of so many ideas in such a short span of time. The ideas had character, he conceded, but there were simply too many.

Years later I remain somewhat puzzled by his critique. Consider, for instance, two ideas he labelled as unrelated, nos. 1 (m. 1ff.) and 6 (m. 22ff.): the opening D–F ostinato and the principal theme, respectively (see Figure 5.1). I can only assume that he got a little trigger-happy with his label gun: he must have noticed that no. 6 fills in the minor third in no. 1 with a passing tone. Having studied Forsyth’s style more closely, I now speculate that what he was really saying was that it was a pity I had abandoned the first idea so soon as surely there was much more to be done with the minor third.

I reminisce about my lessons with Forsyth because I believe that a teacher cannot help but reveal something about their own preoccupations in the very comments they make about their student’s work. However open-minded they may be, it seems inevitable that a teacher will ultimately concentrate on those aspects of the craft that they value most.

#### A Composer Obsessed

What, then, do Forsyth’s comments on my *Overture* reveal about his compositional values? I believe they point to his economical style of writing. In the music of Forsyth with which I am familiar nothing is thrown away. He sticks, almost obsessively, with an idea once introduced, as if trying to squeeze from it every bit of potential. This may be a melodic or rhythmic figure, or, very often, a composite gesture.

**I The Spirits**

**SCORE in C**

1 Flutes  
2 (= piccolo)

1 Oboes  
2

Timpani *tacet*

Percussion 1 *G* (glockenspiel) wood sticks  
*ppp 3 Lv.*

Percussion 2 *V* (vibraphone) hard cord  
*ppp Motor OFF*

Piano *th loco*

Harp **SOLO** *motto*

**4**  
**4** Very slow and delicate (♩ = 50)

FIGURE 5.2. Forsyth, Atayoskewin, “The Spirits,” mm. 1–3. Flutes, oboes, percussion, piano, harp.

Consider the opening of the first movement, “The Spirits,” from Forsyth’s most frequently performed orchestral composition, *Atayoskewin: Suite for Orchestra* (1984) (see Figure 5.2). A distinctive gesture, a flurry, is repeated over and over but each time, with only a few exceptions, slightly varied, an approach similar to that taken by Varèse in the opening of *Intégrales*. Once Forsyth discovers a winning idea he sticks with it relentlessly, through subtle variation exposing its every facet. Only when its potential is utterly exhausted does the idea cede to, or develop into, something else.<sup>2</sup>



The image displays six musical excerpts, labeled (i) through (vi), illustrating the motto-tetrachord in Atayoskewin. Excerpts (i) through (iv) are from "The Spirits" and (v) through (vi) are from "The Dream". Each excerpt shows the motto-tetrachord (a four-note scale) in various instruments and contexts, often with triplets and slurs. (i) Flute, Letter A<sup>5</sup>. (ii) Flute, Letter B<sup>11</sup>. (iii) Harp, Letter C. (iv) Clarinet, Bassoon, Trumpet, Letter E<sup>2</sup>. (v) Flute, Letter A<sup>5</sup>. (vi) Flute, Letter C<sup>2</sup>.

FIGURE 5.3a. Prominent occurrences of the motto-tetrachord in Atayoskewin. In “The Spirits”: (i) Letter A<sup>5</sup>; (ii) Letter B<sup>11</sup>; (iii) Letter C; (iv) Letter E<sup>2</sup>. In “The Dream”: (v) Letter A<sup>5</sup>, with the clarinets doubling an octave below, and in relief against the motto in background (see Fig. 5.2); (vi) Letter C<sup>2</sup>, with doubling in oboes and clarinets.

The principle of never letting go extends to motivic unity across the entire work. Forsyth, however, does not simply quote a passage from an earlier movement in a later one, the hallmark of cyclic form, or derive the theme of one movement, or section, from that of another. Rather, *Atayoskewin*’s three contrasting movements, “The Spirits,” “The Dream,” and “The Dance,” are, by the composer’s own admission, unified by the motto-tetrachord that in its simplest form—*step-step-leap*—lies buried in the harp in the work’s opening gesture, discussed above (see Figure 5.2). Other instruments play the motto, too, either truncated or with octave-displaced pitches. Figure 5.3a compiles a few prominent

Very slow; transparent ( $\text{♩} = 44$ )

Vn I  
ppp senza espress

Vn II  
ppp senza espress

Va  
ppp senza espress

Vc  
ppp senza espress

Cb  
ppp senza espress

arco

div

unis

FIGURE 5.3b. Atayoskewin, “The Dream,” mm. 1–4. Strings.

occurrences of the motto, variously transformed, in the work’s first two movements. The degree of thematic unity across movements—atypical in a suite—may escape the ears of the casual listener but becomes obvious once pointed out. Such is the mark of a consummate craftsman: sophistication hidden beneath a veneer of simplicity, Mozart-like.

An inverted form of the motto-tetrachord saturates the dreamy second movement (Figure 5.3b). The strings unfurl it in an unbroken chain that forms a gentle background tapestry; the movement’s closing strains feature the superimposition of the motto, in multiple transformations (not shown). In the last movement the motto serves as the basic building block of the episodes, providing contrast to the jovial, arpeggiated rondo theme: it appears notably in *rectus* and inverted forms simultaneously (see Figure 5.3c).

Forsyth’s economical—or one might say obsessive—tendencies extend into other compositional realms. He is infatuated with ostinato textures of all kinds. Some are static, repeating with no variation whatsoever. As we shall see, the harp has one such ostinato in the first movement of the cello concerto. Others repeat a basic idea but with slight variations. Still others are built up by adding layers, as in the

Handwritten musical score for "The Dance" by Atayoskewin. The score is written on multiple staves, including a grand staff at the top and a piano section at the bottom. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. Dynamics include *f*, *sol*, *large*, *med*, and *ff*. Performance instructions include *trio*, *GD*, and *Ped*. A circled section of the score is highlighted. The number "81" is written in the upper right corner.

FIGURE 5.3c. Atayoskewin, "The Dance," F<sup>3</sup>6.

opening of the second movement, entitled “Mayibuye Afrika!” and marked “scherzo-like, strictly rhythmic,” in which the solo cello finally enters, interrupting the juggernaut at the point at which it becomes intolerable.

#### Obsessed with Harmony

Forsyth’s economical approach is not limited to his manipulation of thematic, rhythmic, and gestural material but extends to the realm of harmony as well.<sup>3</sup> I shall explore this hypothesis through a sustained study of voice leading and harmony in one of the composer’s most beloved works, the cello concerto *Electra Rising* (1995), composed for his daughter, Amanda Forsyth, and winner of the 1998 JUNO Award for Best Classical Composition.

A large-scale, 30-minute work in four movements, *Electra* was premiered by Amanda Forsyth and the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra led by Mario Bernardi in Calgary on November 9, 1995, and again shortly thereafter with the CBC Vancouver Orchestra for its first radio broadcast. Since then Ms. Forsyth has also performed it with the National Arts Centre Orchestra and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, the latter with which she recorded it for CBC Records.<sup>4</sup>

“It’s full of elation,” Ms. Forsyth commented about the finale. “When I play it I feel like I’m flying.”<sup>5</sup> Critics have unanimously shared in her enthusiasm. A review of the premiere noted the finale’s “grandly expansive optimism” and the first movement’s “powerfully nostalgic melodies, set against the constantly shifting patterns and colours of the orchestral accompaniment,”<sup>6</sup> colours variously described as “ethereal”<sup>7</sup> and “tenuous, shimmering.”<sup>8</sup> A CD review in *Gramophone* lauded *Electra* as “a lyrical and sensuously scored work in which echoes of Sibelius and Messiaen merge into a personal language.”<sup>9</sup>

Murray Dineen, writing for the *Ottawa Citizen*, offered a more poetic assessment. “There are at least two striking features of Forsyth’s work,” he observed, “the sense of a constant wind, a lightness, an optimism blowing throughout. Secondly, there is always a sense of mystery, of whispered truths, things seen darkly through a glass, a dark continent filled with human cares and triumphs.”<sup>10</sup> Eric Dawson, the reviewer of

the premiere, noticed these dueling forces as well, drawing attention to the “potent dramatic interplay of tension and repose.”<sup>11</sup>

The contrast between light and dark, between tension and repose, I argue, may be traced, at least to a substantial degree, to Forsyth’s handling of harmony. The harmonic material in *Electra* is concentrated to the point that the outer movements are almost unrelentingly rooted in G. In the first movement, entitled simply “Cadenza” and marked “With gossamer lightness,” the G major triad is preeminent. In the fourth movement, “Paeon,” and marked “Hymn-like; radiant,” various G-centred scales take precedence. In both there is a continual pull away and return to a stable G triad or G scale. Meanwhile, harmonic stability is repeatedly challenged by progressions to remote triads or inflections of scale degrees, and further coloured by chordal extensions and non-chord tones.

#### First Movement: Of Youth and Maturity

Take the opening of the first movement (see Figure 5.4).<sup>12</sup> The orchestra articulates regular 2+1 phrase groups: two bars of a G major triad (the first played tremolo, the second, non-tremolo) followed by one bar of a secondary triad: in turn, E $\flat$  minor, D $\flat$  major, B $\flat$  major, and C $\sharp$  minor. The complete harmonic progression, G–e $\flat$ –G–D $\flat$ –G–B $\flat$ –G–c $\sharp$ , repeats two more times before breaking down. Only one other triad (B $\flat$  minor) ever sounds in the orchestra, and not until the movement’s closing moments, during what we might call its coda (mm. 50ff., Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.5a plots all the orchestral triads across the movement. Each cycle consists of G major triads alternating with four secondary (non-G) triads, numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4. All secondary triads are mediated by G. The G major triad thus dominates the harmonic landscape in the orchestra, and through sheer repetition, establishes G major as the de facto tonic. None of the other triads belongs to the key of G major, the continual alternation between G and remote triads contributing to the movement’s otherworldly aura.

Figure 5.5b plots the six orchestral triads on a cubic lattice of the type used by Dmitri Tymoczko, illustrating graphically the relative

With gossamer lightness

CELLO SOLO

Very freely (♩. = 52) ord. (free) D HM

*ppp flautando*

Piano

*ppp* G

macroharm: G mixo E<sub>b</sub>/E octa

(♩. = 52)

*ppp* G

G maj D<sub>b</sub> D<sub>b</sub>/D "near" octa

flautando *ppp* g<sup>o</sup> → G<sub>b</sub>

G B<sub>b</sub> B<sub>b</sub>+G<sub>b</sub>

G mixo B<sub>b</sub> 13-<sup>b</sup>13

not B!

S T S T S T I

A7

FIGURE 5.4. Electra Rising, mvt. 1, mm. 1–20.

Musical score for guitar, measures 10-19. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It includes a variety of chord voicings and technical markings.

**Measure 10:** Treble clef contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass clef contains a G chord voicing. Chord labels: G, D m m (G mode), c#. Dynamics: *mf*, *f*. Markings: *ord.*, *B<sub>b</sub>*.

**Measure 13:** Treble clef contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass clef contains an Em7 chord voicing. Chord labels: G, Em7, G<sub>13</sub>, F# → F, e<sub>b</sub>, G/A, octa. Dynamics: *pp*, *mf*, *pp*. Markings: *ord.*, *sul pont.*, *chromatic PTs →*, *D# → D*, *c# nm*.

**Measure 16:** Treble clef contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass clef contains a G chord voicing. Chord labels: G, G mixo, G/A, octa, e<sub>b</sub><sup>11</sup>/<sub>m7</sub>. Dynamics: *ppp*. Markings: *ord.*, *sul tasto*, *harp: G mixo (no 5th)*, *E<sub>b</sub>/E octa subset (cf m.3)*.

**Measure 18:** Treble clef contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass clef contains a G chord voicing. Chord labels: G mixo. Dynamics: *ppp*, *mp*, *p*, *mp*. Markings: *sul pont.*, *ord.*.

FIGURE 5.4. Continued.

m. 1 3 4 6 7 9 10 12 13 15 hp.\* hp. hp. hp. **w7** hp. **w8** hp. **w9** hp. **w10**

① e<sup>b</sup> ② D<sup>b</sup> ③ B<sup>b</sup> ④ c<sup>#</sup> ① ② ③ ④ ① ② ③ ④ ① ② ③ ④

G \*hp.=harp playing G mixo \*\*woodwind "showers"

m. 37 39 40 42 43 45 46 50 52 53 55 56 57 58 hp.\*\*\*

① ② "solo" cadenza ④ ⑤ ④ ⑤ ③/⑤

c<sup>#</sup> b<sup>b</sup> c<sup>#</sup> b<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>/b<sup>b</sup>

harp: G mixo -----

\*\*\*playing subset of woodwind "showers" (6 pitches)

**Woodwind "showers"**

**w7** (7 pitch classes)  
m. 27 (fls.)

**w8** (8 pitch classes etc.)  
m. 30 (fls., obs.)

**w9** m. 33 (fls., obs., cls.) & m. 56 (all woodwinds)

**w10** m. 36 (fls., obs., cls.) & m. 42 (all woodwinds)

**w12** (all 12 pitch classes)  
m. 39 (all woodwinds) G!

FIGURE 5.5a. *Electra Rising, mvt. 1. Reduction of orchestral chords and collections.*



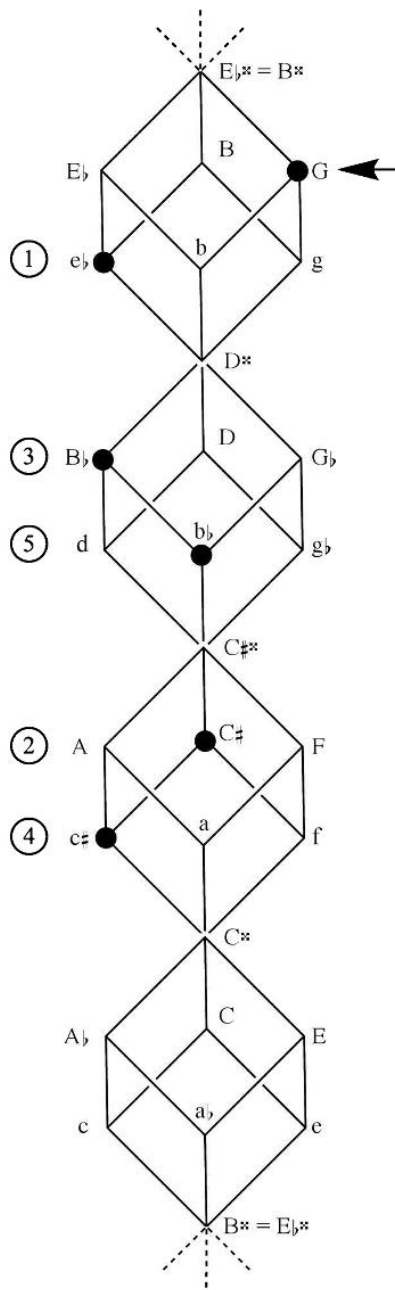
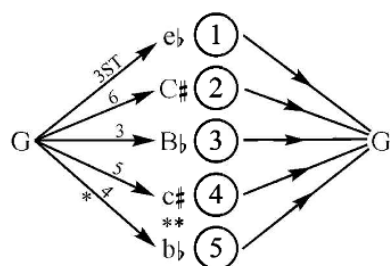


FIGURE 5.5b. Electra Rising, mvt. 1. *Orchestral triads plotted on a cubic lattice.*



\* G→bb featured at climax of 4th mvt.

\*\* c#→bb (3ST) directly (unmediated by G) at end of 1st mvt.

FIGURE 5.5c. *Electra Rising, mvt. 1. Voice-leading size between pairs of triads.*

nearness, in terms of voice leading, between G and the other triads to which it moves.<sup>13</sup> Each edge (line) represents a semitone in voice leading between triads (points). G major and G minor, for instance, differ by just one semitone (B→B $\flat$ ) and are thus connected by a single edge. The shortest path between G major and E $\flat$  minor, the first two orchestral triads, consists of three edges—that is, a total voice leading of three semitones (G, B, D)→(G $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , E $\flat$ ).<sup>14</sup>

Another way to look at these voice-leading relationships is by compiling the total semitonal voice leading between pairs of triads (Figure 5.5c). G and e $\flat$ , for instance, have a total semitonal voice leading of 3, whereas G and C $\sharp$  (D $\flat$ ) have a total voice leading of 6, the maximum possible between any two major or minor triads.

The figure also shows that the harmonic cycle has its own internal rhythm as measured by relative voice leading size. G to e $\flat$  is relatively near (3 semitones); G to D $\flat$  relatively far (6 semitones); G to B $\flat$  (3 semitones) relatively near; G to c $\sharp$  relatively far (5 semitones). The resulting “voice-leading” rhythm—*near-far-near-far*—is a consequence of the changing distances between G and each of the secondary triads, the periodicity of the pattern suggesting a breathing-like effect.

Relative repose versus relative tension is further accentuated by the solo cello line. In mm. 1–2, the cello’s descending figure (the movement’s principal theme) produces, with the orchestra, a G mixolydian

macroharmony (see Figure 5.4). But in m. 3 the cello lingers on A and G, pitches that clash with the underlying shift in the orchestra to E $\flat$  minor, which, in turn, prompts the cello to subsequently inflect its immediately ensuing notes (B, F)  $\rightarrow$  (B $\flat$ , F $\sharp$ ) at which point it (briefly) joins the world of E $\flat$  minor.

The A and G therefore initially function like suspended notes that resolve to B $\flat$  and F $\sharp$ , the latter displaced by an octave. But the cello resists, hangs on to A, E, and G (all from G mixolydian) and introduces C $\sharp$ , thereby shifting its scale to D harmonic major. In m. 4 the cello retains the F $\sharp$  as the orchestra returns to a G major triad, thereby shifting the macroharmony from G mixolydian (mm. 1–2) sharpwards to G major.<sup>15</sup> The subtle harmonic interplay between cello and orchestra in these first several bars establishes a dramatic relationship between the two entities that unfolds over the course of the movement, and indeed, the work as a whole.

The continual relaxation/tension in the harmony may be likened to exhaling/inhaling or muscles relaxing/contracting. Relaxation is associated with G: G *triads* in the orchestra and simpler, diatonic *scales* in the cello. Tension, on the other hand, takes the form of non-G triads in the orchestra and more dissonant macroharmonies: octatonic and “near”-octatonic, polychords, and other denser collections. The resulting macroharmony in m. 3, for instance, is a subset of E $\flat$ /E octatonic—more dissonant, and therefore tense, than the diatonic collections that surround it.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the relaxation/tension found in the alternation of G and non-G triads is echoed in the macroharmonies, understood at the scalar level and filled in by the solo cello.

The various harmonic strands in this movement are transparently differentiated in the orchestration. While the orchestral triads are relegated to the strings (the strings play nothing else), two other strands, the harp and woodwinds, reinforce the strings and solo cello, respectively. Beginning in m. 16, the harp augments the G triad in the strings with a fluttering figure that outlines G mixolydian (D, the fifth scale degree, is absent) thereby colouring the G triad with G mixolydian macroharmony (see Figure 5.4). Only once does the harp linger while the harmony changes to E $\flat$  minor (m. 39, not shown), when, at m. 45

G lyd  
 Very light  
 flautando  
 G mixo — F ac (G mode) —  
 sul pont.  
 pp  
 CT  
 E → E<sub>b</sub>  
 50 ppp C#  
 ord.  
 G mixo  
 D mm  
 CT  
 A  
 G  
 b,  
 G mixo  
 sul tasto  
 G mixo  
 ord.  
 55 C#  
 b,  
 B<sub>7</sub>/b<sub>b</sub>  
 c. 10sec.  
 dim. . . al . . niente  
 58  
 c. 2sec.  
 G  
 c. 8sec.  
 harp harmonics  
 Woodwind (staccato) 7 pitches no {G,B,D}  
 harp plays woodwind shower pitches (first time not G mixo)  
 segue  
 c. 3sec.  
 c. 5sec.

FIGURE 5.6. Electra Rising, mvt. 1, mm. 49–58.

(not shown), the harp replaces the strings entirely, providing the sole G foundation upon which the cello unfurls its “true” cadenza.

“Woodwind showers,” as Forsyth calls them in his program notes, consist of pitches in the winds notated aleatorically: the pitches are specified but not their precise rhythms, and the notes within boxes are to be played with proportional duration and repeated until indicated (see m. 58, Figure 5.6). The showers begin at m. 27 (not shown), always in tandem with the non-G triads in the strings. Figure 5.5a catalogues the pitches contained in each entry (labelled w7, w8, w9, etc.) and shows where these entries occur in the music.

The harp thus stands on the side of relaxation; the winds, on that of relative tension, aligned with the more complex voice of the solo cello. Each successive wind entry brings in a new pair of instruments until all sound at m. 39 (not shown). Furthermore, each entry becomes progressively harmonically dense: initially consisting of just seven notes (w7), each subsequent entry adds another pitch to the “shower” (w8, w9, w10) until the aggregate (w12) sounds at m. 39, skipping an 11-note “shower.” At m. 42 (not shown), a shower extends *over* a G triad for the first time, before evaporating, just as the cello takes up the “true” cadenza.

By this point the harmonic cycle in the orchestral strings has sounded three times (see Figure 5.5a). A fourth cycle, which begins at m. 37, is interrupted by the densest woodwind shower (m. 39), which in turn washes away the string accompaniment entirely. It is as if the solo cello, with the aid of the woodwinds, has finally shed the constraints that the orchestral accompaniment placed upon it. The cello now enjoys the relative freedom of an almost unaccompanied cadenza, which it pursues more or less in F# minor, encumbered by nothing more than a thin, passive sheen in the harp, whose figure is frozen in G mixolydian, its harmonic stasis rendering it impotent, lifeless, devoid of the breathing-like shifts to secondary triads. Something is amiss.

The orchestra is resuscitated in time for the movement’s coda (m. 50ff., Figure 5.6). But the regimented chord progression that had so rigidly defined the movement’s structure until its dissolution by the “solo” cadenza, is now disrupted (see Figure 5.5a). We now learn that

the cycle was not just interrupted; it is broken. For the first time the principal theme is not accompanied by a G triad, instead by a C# minor triad (m. 50). At m. 53 a “new” triad sounds, B $\flat$  minor, that unexpectedly moves *directly* to C# minor (and back again). G not only no longer mediates the secondary triads but also cedes primacy to the latter. In the closing moments of the movement, even the harp, heretofore aligned with the G triad in the strings, is infused with the chromatic pitches of the last woodwind shower, abandoning G mixolydian for the first time. The harp, like the strings, has been brought under the spell of the solo cello.

The drama, as it unfolds over the first movement, may be summed up as follows. At first the solo cello gently pushes against the regimented harmonic progression in the strings. Eventually it breaks free (“solo” cadenza in F# minor), the “regime” reduced to a lifeless G mixolydian shimmer in the harp that no longer guides the cello’s pitches via secondary triads. The orchestra never fully recovers, its strict progression disbanded in the coda. The cello (reinforced by the woodwinds), a restless force throughout, succeeds in disrupting the orchestra (strings and harp), a force of relative repose.

From the perspective of “abstract” instrumental drama, an interpretation along these lines suffices. In this case, however, it is hard to ignore the extra-musical facts. What of the work’s title and all that its reference to Greek mythology implies? Kenneth Winters, in his CD liner notes, reports that “Forsyth has warned us against probing it for Graeco-Freudian connotations. He says he was invoking the Agamemnon/Electra, father/daughter relationship only as a symbol of the close musical relationship that has always existed between himself and Amanda.”<sup>17</sup> We have been warned. But it may be too late: Forsyth let the genie out of the bottle.

*Electra Rising* was not only dedicated to the composer’s daughter but written *for* her and, to some extent, with her collaboration (on the solo part). The work, at the time of this writing, has only ever been played by Ms. Forsyth, perhaps because of how closely—too closely?—it has been associated with the cellist, a connection that statements such as this one by the composer himself have only reinforced: “*Electra Rising*

is Amanda. Amanda is *Electra Rising*. The work fits her like a glove.”<sup>18</sup> Did Forsyth mean that the concerto *as a whole* reflected his daughter’s character, that it was a portrait of her in music? Or did he mean that the solo cello part suited her strengths as a performer? We cannot know for sure, but it seems reasonable to assume that Forsyth meant both. As my purpose here is not biographical but rather to tease out musico-dramatic qualities evoked by this work, let us leave Amanda out of the picture in order to speak, more universally, about the mythical Electra. More to the point, where is Agamemnon?

If Electra’s voice is represented by the solo cello/woodwinds, then the force with which it wrestles, the strings/harp, may be taken as Agamemnon’s voice. Electra—young, impetuous—is the restless force; Agamemnon—old, rooted (in G), stable—the force of repose. Father extends a guiding hand, leads, but faces resistance; daughter (as youth are want to do) challenges and rebels as she searches for her own identity. They come together, they separate. Ultimately—in this movement, at least—the force of rebellion assumes the upper hand, disrupting the status quo. Youth, in its quest for self-discovery along the path to maturity, defies the symbol of maturity itself.

### Third Movement: Brooding and Benevolent Visions

Contrast between harmonic relaxation and tension occurs in the third movement as well. But now the tables are turned. Instead of a general state of repose (G major triads and G diatonic collections) ceding to remote, secondary triads and denser macroharmonies, the reverse takes place: relative dissonance, reinforced by metrical freedom, dissolves into relative consonance and metrical regularity. It is the natural continuation of the first movement, which ended in a state of disquiet.

The solo cello continues its role as the force of harmonic restlessness, now in the form of relatively dissonant chords, while the orchestra occupies purely diatonic space (see Figure 5.7). The movement’s initial [014] trichord “chime” {B $\flat$ , C $\sharp$ , D} (m. 1) generates most of the solo cello’s chords, many of which articulate [0148] (m. 2, m. 9). Diatonic interludes in the orchestral strings restore calm after each of the cello’s tense chordal statements. One imagines visions of a benevolent

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for SOLO CELLO, starting with a 'freely' marking and a tempo of  $(J = 92)$ . It features a section from measure [014] to [0148] with dynamics *ff* and *p*. The middle staff is for Piano, marked *fff* with vibrato for horn, trumpet, and brass, and includes bongoes and violin I parts with a *pp* dynamic and a chord of  $B_b/b_b = [0347]$ . The bottom staff is for strings, marked *pp*. Performance directions include 'Dramatic', 'pizz.', 'rall. . . .', and 'C dia'. A 3-second measure is indicated at the bottom.

FIGURE 5.7. *Electra Rising*, mvt. 3, mm. 1–9.

Agamemnon intruding into the thoughts of an inwards-turned, brooding Electra. The first such interlude (mm. 3–7), for instance, begins in C diatonic then drifts flatwards around the circle of fifths (F diatonic,  $B_b$  diatonic) before swinging back sharpwards (G diatonic, A diatonic) and finally settling back in what we may take as C diatonic on account of the F natural. This type of collection modulation recalls a procedure common in the music of Carl Nielsen.<sup>19</sup>



The movement ends with the  $\{B\flat, C\sharp, D\}$  chime, a trichord with two tones in common with the G minor triad, ensuring efficient voice leading into the finale, which opens with a G major/minor chord (see Figure 5.8).

#### Fourth Movement: Unity

This G/g (major/minor) sonority with which the finale begins was foreshadowed at the end of the first movement (m. 57) by a  $B\flat$  major triad (the cello's low D natural) superimposed on the newly arrived  $B\flat$  minor triad (see Figure 5.6). Now G/g plays a decisive role in setting the harmonic tone of a movement awash in scales that fluctuate around G major (and G lydian) through efficient voice leading (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.9a catalogues the voice leading between various collections in the first 28 bars. With G entrenched as tonic, and G major the mediating scale, semitonal inflections of scale degrees 3, 4, 6, and 7 gently shift the macroharmony to nearby scales. The G major *scale* assumes the dominant role played by the G major *triad* in the first movement.

Figure 5.9b graphs the scales identified in Figures 5.8 and 5.9a on a cubic lattice, extending the music under consideration to m. 71 (not shown in Figure 5.8). Points on the graph connected by an edge (line) represent scales separated by one semitone. Moving from G diatonic to C acoustic, for instance, involves  $B \rightarrow B\flat$ . The graph only shows a portion of seven-note space. Yet the scales present in mm. 1–71 are all bunched closely together illustrating the efficient voice leading among them.

A good deal of the movement is thus literally painted in broad brushstrokes of G diatonic (and nearby) scales (Figure 5.10). At the movement's climax (m. 152ff.) the hymn theme (see m. 9ff., Figure 5.8) is suddenly darkened by transposition to  $B\flat$  minor, recalling the intrusion of the  $B\flat$  minor triad in the coda of the first movement, which there served to disrupt the orderly harmonic cycle. Here, in the closing moments of the finale,  $B\flat$  minor dominates, eclipsing G major in 4+1 phrases: four bars of  $B\flat$  minor for every one bar of G lydian. Whereas the first movement concludes uncertainly, the  $B\flat$  minor triad having worked its dark magic, in the finale the storm clouds are temporary: G reasserts itself forcefully in the coda.



The musical score consists of four systems, each with a piano part (treble and bass clefs) and a horn part (treble clef). The systems are numbered 13, 17, 21, and 25.

- System 13:** The piano part features a melodic line with a circled '13' and a 'PT' annotation. The horn part has a circled '13'. Chord changes are indicated as 'D HM (G mode)' and 'G maj'.
- System 17:** The piano part has a circled '17' and 'N' annotations. The horn part has a circled '17'. The chord is 'G nm'.
- System 21:** The piano part has a circled '21' and 'PT' annotation. The horn part has a circled '21'. Annotations include 'fl.', 'vlas.', and 'G maj'. Chord changes are 'C hm (G mode)' and 'G maj'.
- System 25:** The piano part has a circled '25'. The horn part has a circled '25' and 'hrn' annotation. Chord changes are 'G hm' and 'G HM'.

FIGURE 5.8. Continued.

FIGURE 5.9a. Collection voice leading in *Electra Rising*, mvt. 4, mm. 1–28.

Bar										Collection
1–8	G		B $\flat$	B				D		G/g chord
9–11	G	A		B	C			D		G major (subset)
12–13	G	A		B	C $\sharp$			D		G lydian
13–14	G	A	B $\flat$		C $\sharp$			D	F $\sharp$	D harmonic major (G mode)
15–17	G	A		B	C			D	F $\sharp$	G major
17–21	G	A	B $\flat$		C		D	E $\flat$	F	G natural minor
21–3	G	A $\flat$		B	C		D	E $\flat$	F	C harmonic minor (G mode)
24–7	G	A		B	C		D	E	F $\sharp$	G major
27	G	A	B $\flat$		C		D	E $\flat$	F $\sharp$	G harmonic minor
28	G	A		B	C		D	E $\flat$	F $\sharp$	G harmonic major

Collection voice leading continues in this manner until mm. 71 with G major mediating between the following scales: G dorian, G acoustic, G mixolydian, G melodic minor, D harmonic minor, B $\flat$  acoustic, G natural minor #4 (mm. 56–7).

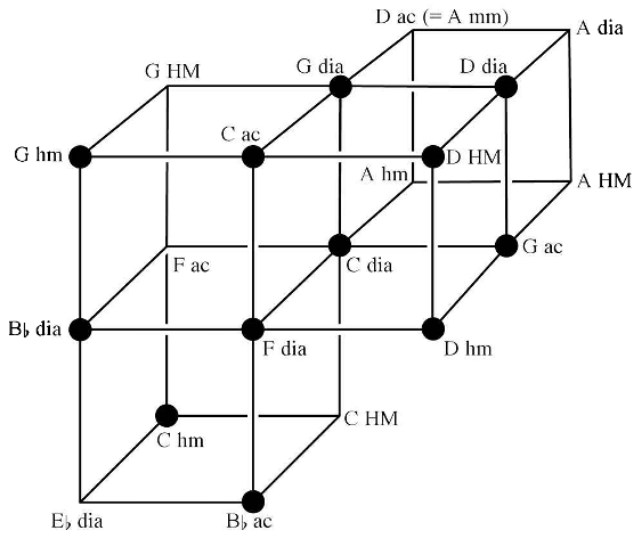


FIGURE 5.9b. All scales (except one) in *Electra Rising*, mvt. 4, mm. 1–71, plotted on a portion of a cubic lattice.

Musical score for "Electra Rising, mvt. 4, mm. 142-68". The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system (mm. 142-143) features a cello part with triplets and a wavy line, and a violin part with a forte (*f*) dynamic and triplets. A "G dia" marking with an arrow points to the start of the second system. The second system (mm. 144-145) features a violin part with a crescendo (*cresc. . .*) and a cello part with triplets and a "vlas" marking.

FIGURE 5.10. Electra Rising, mvt. 4, mm. 142-68.

Musical score for piano, measures 146-153. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features complex piano textures with triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings. Measure 146 has a "G dia" annotation. Measure 148 has "bravura" and "F" annotations. Measure 150 has "ff", "Risoluto", "alla corda", "CT", and "theme" annotations. Measure 153 has "r.h.", "l.h.", and "G, lyd" annotations.

FIGURE 5.10. Continued.

Musical score for piano, measures 157-167. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a "theme" in the right hand and various accompaniment patterns in the left hand. Performance markings include "Stentato", "in tempo", "ff", and "mp". Chord symbols include "A, maj (b=ii)" and "b, minor (b=i)". A "G lyd" (Lydian mode) is indicated in measures 164 and 165. Measure numbers 157, 161, 164, and 167 are circled.

FIGURE 5.10. Continued.

### A Father–Daughter Relationship Dramatized in Music

A tug of war on G occurs in both movements: in the first, at the level of the triad; in the last, at the level of the scale (or collection). The first features an alternation between the central G triad and secondary “flat” triads, coloured in the cello with chordal extensions. The finale, on the other hand, revolves around the G diatonic collection and substitutes, and despite frequent fluctuations in macroharmony, resounds with a great deal more *pure* G. In the first movement (and to a lesser degree in the third), the orchestra and solo cello are at odds with one another, operating in seemingly different worlds, a conflict that is largely resolved in the expression of common purpose in the finale where cello and orchestra contribute to the same, mostly consonant, macroharmonies.

Harmonically, then, the fourth movement not only extends the drama introduced in the first movement from the realm of triad to that of collection, but also provides a resolution. While in the first movement, the solo cello struggles against G and its associated harmonic regime (the G-centred harmonic cycle), in the finale, it wholly merges with G.

In terms of the father–daughter narrative, if the first and third movements document teenage rebellion, and a distancing between father and daughter, in the finale Agamemnon and Electra appear to have achieved a mutual understanding, a sense of common purpose.

Whether one reads *Electra Rising* in (auto)biographical terms, or in the more general psychological terms of a father–daughter coming-of-age story, or—perhaps most prudent of all—as an abstract drama involving opposing yet related entities that overcome their differences through protracted struggle, eventually expressing themselves in common voice, what seems clear is that by its conclusion, Electra, symbolically, has indeed risen.

#### NOTES

1. This is a revised version of a paper the author presented at the Canadian University Music Society Annual Conference, Waterloo, Ontario, June 2, 2012.
2. For another examination of Forsyth’s single-minded treatment of a basic motive, see Edward Jurkowski’s analysis of *Je répondrais...* in this volume.



3. I do not equate a general economy of *material*, expressed in various musical parameters, and which characterizes Forsyth's style, with *motivic* unity. The latter necessarily implies the former—but only with respect to *motive*. A composition may be highly unified via motive yet harmonically diffuse. What concerns me here is Forsyth's extension of the economical principle to the *harmonic* field.
4. Malcolm Forsyth, *Electra Rising: Concerto for Violoncello and Chamber Orchestra*, on *Electra Rising: Music of Malcolm Forsyth*, Amanda Forsyth (cello), Grzegorz Nowak (conductor), Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, CBC Records SMC D 5180, 1997.
5. Steven Mazey, "Making the Cello Sing: Calgary Cellist Amanda Forsyth Plays Father's Concerto at Two NAC Shows," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 29, 1997. Ms. Forsyth titled her next CD, a collection of works for cello and piano by her father, *Soaring with Agamemnon* (Peter Longworth [piano], Marquis Classics 81231, 1998). The album cover features a photo of a young Amanda pretending to fly on the shoulders of her father.
6. Eric Dawson, "Concerto's Premiere Promises Staying Power," *Calgary Herald*, November 10, 1995, D3.
7. "Ten Best," *Edmonton Journal*, January 10, 1997, F1.
8. John Sutherland, "Edmonton Symphony Orchestra / *Electra Rising: Music of Malcolm Forsyth*," *Performing Arts & Entertainment in Canada* 32, no. 1 (1998): 40.
9. Richard Whitehouse, "CD Review: *Electra Rising*," *Gramophone*, February 1998, 105.
10. Murray Dineen, "Bernardi Returns Light-Heartedness to NAC," *Ottawa Citizen*, May 1, 1997.
11. Dawson, "Staying Power."
12. All examples from *Electra Rising* are from the piano reduction.
13. Dmitri Tymoczko, *A Geometry of Music: Harmony and Counterpoint in the Extended Common Practice* (New York: Oxford, 2011).
14. The largest possible path between any two triads on the lattice is six semitones, for example, from G major to C# major (triads whose roots are a tritone apart). Note that by starting at the G major lattice point, one can approach C# major by moving downwards or upwards since the lattice itself is circular (the top point is the same as the bottom point).
15. The "relaxed" harmonies, consisting of various G-centred scales (G mixolydian, G major, D minor melodic [G mode]) are all connected by single semitonal voice leading, like different shades of the same colour.
16. The harmony in m. 3 may also be understood as a seven-note polychord:  $\text{♭}$  in the orchestra against  $\text{A}^7$  in the cello. Polychords are often less complex, however, frequently formed by two triads that share a common pitch. Such is the case in m. 9 where  $\text{B}^{\flat}$  and  $\text{G}^{\flat}$  may be perceived as a  $\text{B}^{\flat}$  triad with extensions  $\sharp 9$  and  $\flat 13$ —that is, a pentachord.

17. Kenneth Winters, liner notes for *Electra Rising*, CBC Records, 1997.
18. Malcolm Forsyth quoted in Winters, liner notes, *Electra Rising*.
19. See Robert Rival, "Flatwards Bound: Defining Harmonic Flavour in Late Nielsen," *Carl Nielsen Studies* 5 (2012): 258–79.