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A Pentadimensional Analysis of the Theme "The Man I Love" by George Gershwin

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Abstract: *Objective.* Considered by American musicologist David Schiff as "seminal" to Rhapsody in Blue, the song The Man I Love is emblematic of George Gershwin's creation. The Man I Love has benefited from exceptional performances, such as Ella Fitzgerald's, accompanied by the symphony orchestra, or the composer's rubato piano version. Although the work has been carefully analyzed[2] so far, the aim of our research is to explore new dimensions through musicological analysis. This article is part of our doctoral approach.
Method. The analysis of this work with the structure of AABA includes five working methods. The first two methods are instrumental reductions, the third correlates the trison with the triangle formed on the guitar fretboard by joining the finger contact points, the next correlates the trison with the triangle in the Paleoriemanian tonal network, and the last is based on the Neo-Riemannian method with third-party progressions, alternating a major triad with a minor one on the patternof the London double-decker bus.
The *results* of our research are shown in the attached figures 1-7.
Conclusion. The Neo-Riemannian transformational theory is, to our best knowledge, still unused in our country, so it may be of particular interest as the first translation into Romanian. We hope that our work can provide a positive impact on contemporary analytical discourse on Gershwinian work.

Keywords: reductions, triangles, tonal grid, tonal bus.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Neo-Riemannian theory has become very popular in U.S. music academies, especially within PhD studies. Like formal music theory, it helps the performer assimilate sound material faster and deeper. These reasons led me to use modern theoretical concepts in my modest doctoral project.

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[2] David Schiff (2009), *Gershwin – Rhapsody in Blue*, Cambridge University Press, New York, retrieved from www.cambridge.org.

A brief insight into Gershwin's work reveals that the composer's work has been extensively researched, particularly by musicologists David Schiff, Steven E. Gilbert, and Ryan Raul Bañagale. Deepening this research, I am trying to apply and even adapt the concepts presented there.

2. Formal analysis

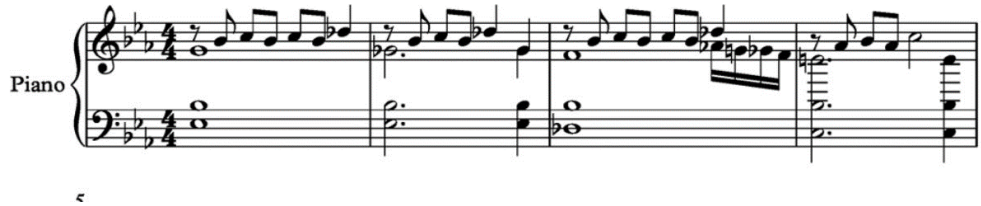
The structure of *The Man I Love* is that of a **tetrapartite lied** with repetition due to voltas one and two, as follows:

A	A1	B	A
(a 4 m.) (a1 4m.)	**(av 4 m.) (a1v 4 m.)**	**(b 4 m.) (b1 4 m.)**	**(a 4 m.) (a cad. 4 m.)**

Fig. 1 Structure of the work

to which is added an introduction of four measures with a harmonic character that has the role of creating the atmosphere and preparing, starting from the sixth step, C-Eb-Gol, which reminds of the minor dominant, the chord of the first step, Eb.

In the introduction, along with the chords in values of fourths, the values of octaves with dots followed by sixteenths are foreshadowed, which will constitute, by replacing the first octave with a dot, with a pause (thus foreshadowing an anacrustic character) the metro-rhythmic cell of a measure in dialogue with itself but in a dynamic version (second measure), which will be the basis of the entire melodic discourse - the rhythm of the discant. We notice that, in the second measure, the rhythmic formula is varied by omission, the fourth being replaced by two, for reasons of motivic construction that require a quasi-conclusive character at the level of a two-measure micro-phrase, which constitutes a rhythmic-melodic cell that will repeat itself continuously, based on the second and third oscillation.[3]



[3] George Gershwin (1982), *The Man I Love*, Warner-Bros. Music Corp Edizioni Musicali Radio Record, Milano, Italy, pp. 29-30.

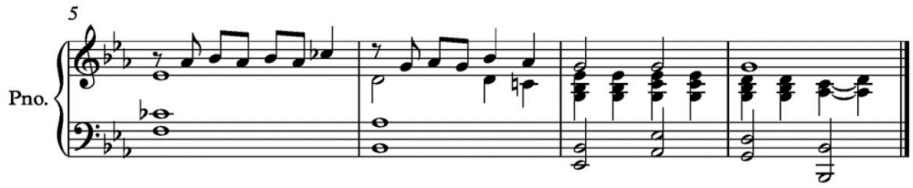


Fig. 2 G. Gershwin, *The Man I Love,* part A, reduction for the piano, mm. 1-8.

In figure 2, which illustrates our piano reduction, we can also note that in the third measure the dynamism is done by adding a group of sixteenths to the alto voice, on beat four.

3. Pentadimensional analysis

The first analytical dimension of the song *The Man I Love* is the piano reduction of the original score[4], presented in figure 2. The piano reduction is a technically, rhythmically and harmonically simplified study version, which has the advantage of being able to be performed even by amateur musicians, in music therapy programs, for example.

To achieve the reduction of the score, ciphers for the harmonies are needed. The notation % means the repetition of the previous chord in the same measure, ø means half-diminished chord, and the Δ sign means major chord with a major seventh. In figure 3, the reduction with ciphers for harmonies is done for the piano score in figure 2.

Mib % / Mibm % / Sibm/Reb % / Do^{7} %

$Fa^{ø}$ % / Sib % / Mib $Lab^{Δ}$ / Solm $Sib^{7,9}$

Fig. 3 G. Gershwin, *The Man I Love,* part A1, harmonic cipher.

If for the piano reduction we chose the first A of the piece, for the guitar reduction we decided to analyze the third A, in order to highlight a technical artifice specific to the instrument, and create a dynamic scordatura by lowering the sixth string by a semitone in the ninth measure. Here is what the harmonic guitar cipher looks like:

Mib % / Mibm % / Sibm/Reb % / Do^{7} % $Fa^{ø}$ % / Sib % / Mib^{Δ}Lab^{Δ} / Solm $Sib^{7,9}$/Mib Sib^{7}/Fa / M͡ı Mib

Fig. 4 G. Gershwin, *The Man I Love,* part A3, harmonic cipher.

[4] George Gershwin, *The Man I Love*, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

So, the second dimension is the reduction for the guitar, a more difficult approach than for the piano because, in a maximum number of six simultaneously intoned sounds, relevant parts of the melodic and bass lines, respectively, must be integrated with the harmonic texture.

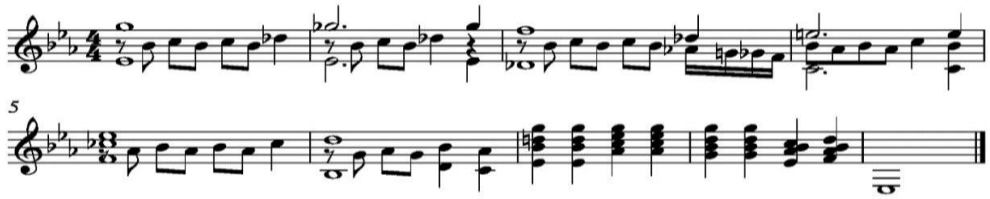


Fig. 5 G. Gershwin, *The Man I Love*, part A3, version for guitar, mm. 1-9

The third dimension follows, which consists in applying the Pythagorean principle of transforming the intoned trisons on the guitar into triangles formed on the guitar fretboard by joining the points of contact of the fingers with the instrument. Thus, points C and C' represent the note C; E and E' correspond to the note Mi; and G and G' to Sol (Fig. 6)[5].

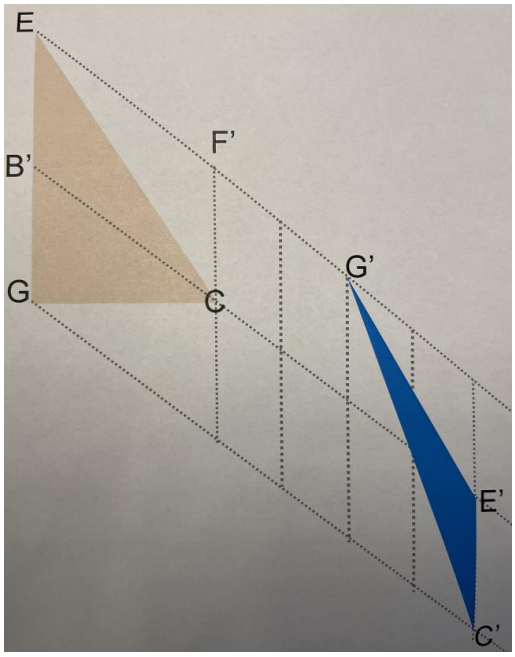


Fig. 6 Construction principle of the triangles corresponding to triads on the guitar fingerboard

[5] The complete correspondence is: C = Do, D = Re, E = Mi, F = Fa; G = Sol; A = La; B = Si.

Applying this concept to the theme of *The Man I Love* is illustrated in figure 7. It is worh mentioning that we used guitar reduction as a benchmark, because it has only one fret.

We notice that in the first measure we have the triad E-flat major to which corresponds, on the guitar fingerboard, the triangle formed by Sol on the first string, E-flat on the second string and B-flat on the third string. In the second measure, Sol is replaced by G flat and the triad becomes E-flat minor, etc.

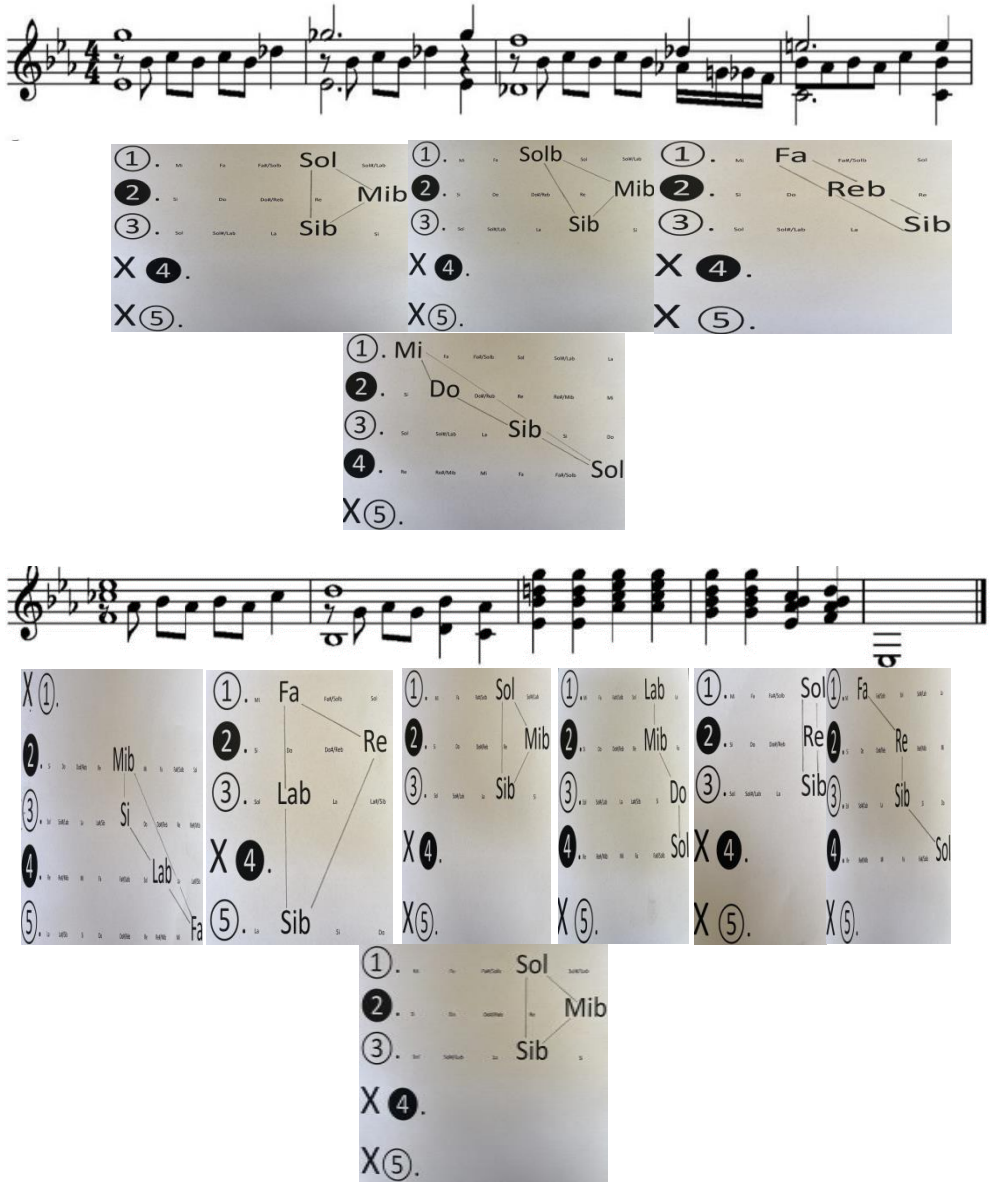


Fig. 7 Construction of the triangles corresponding to the trisons for part A of the theme *The Man I Love* on the guitar fingerboard

The fourth dimension consists of constructing tonal vectors on the texture of triangles in the Riemanian tonal lattice.[6]For *The Man I Love*, we build the triangle Mib – Sol – Sib which we indicate with 1, then the triangle Mib – Solb – Sib which we indicate with 2 and so on. Then we draw the tonal vector from triangle 1 to triangle 2 and so on. We note that measures 7 and 8 each have two triads, so we used the notations 7a, 7b and 8a and 8b respectively.

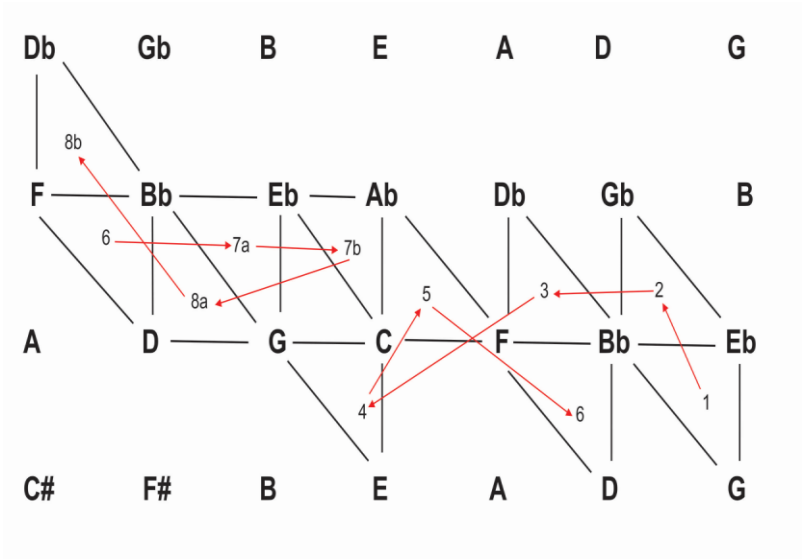


Fig. 8 Grid drawn tonal vectors for the track *The Man I Love*[7]

The last dimension is Nicholas Meeùs' *Omnibus* analysis which consists of constructing vectors on a graph with overlapping horizontal lines representing alternate major and minor chords at third intervals. Just as the Riemann tonal lattice can be transposed from the plane onto the sphere or the torus, the Meèus omnibus can also be transposed onto a cylinder.

Figure 9 shows the tonal vectors and the relationships between the points: P means the parallel triad, R means the relative triad, and L the leading tone triad[8]. For the second measure of *The Man I Love* theme, I initially chose the enharmonic triad of E flat minor, namely D sharp minor, as it is closer to the origin of the chart, 11 positions from C major.

In the next step, we built a number of positions in the lower part and removed unnecessary positions in the upper part. We thus arrived at the construction in figure 10, which has two advantages: it is more compact and does not use enharmonicity.

[6] *Tonnetz* in German, in the original.
[7] Complete correspondence is: C = Do, D = Re, E = Mi, F = Fa; G = Sol; A = La; B = Si.
[8] *Leading tone* in the original.

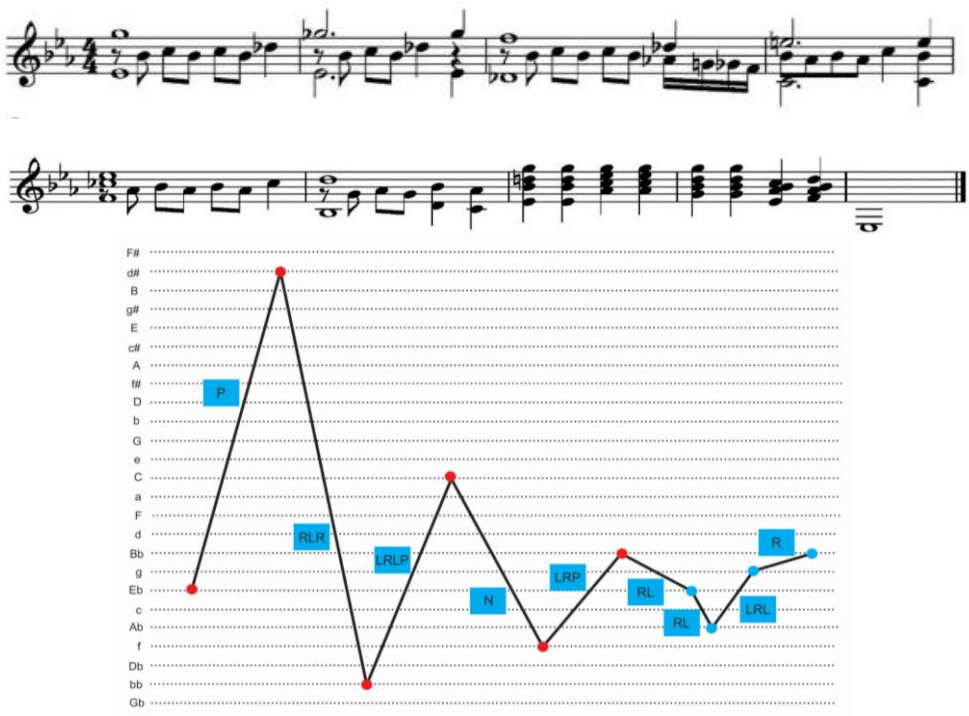


Fig. 9 *Omnibus* analysis of *The Man I Love*, version 1

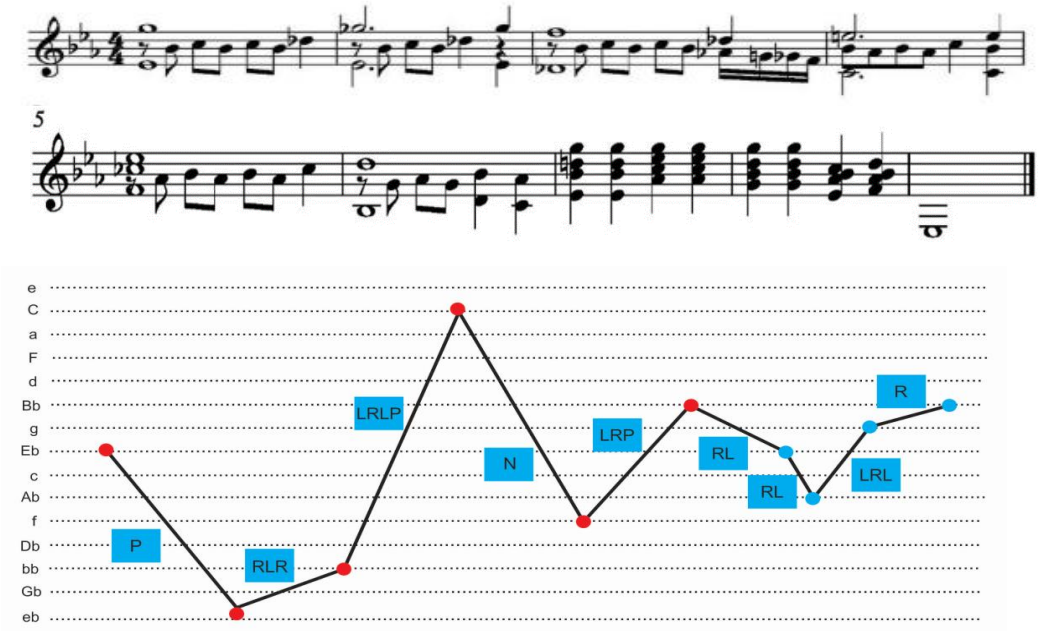


Fig. 10 *Omnibus* analysisof*The Man I Love*, version 2

This work intends to be a tribute, as well, anticipating the centenary of *Rhapsody in Blue*, George Gershwin's masterpiece, for which *The Man I Love* is a musical precursor. Figure 11 compares the 1924 *Aeolian Concert Hall* poster withthe promotional material for the tricolor rhapsody composed by Peter Boyer and performed by Jeffrey Biegel on the piano.

Fig. 11 with the1924[9] poster and the upcoming poster for 2024[10]

4. Conclusions and future directions

This transformational perspective offers particular value, both through novelty and through integrating the musical score with the graphics.

We hope that our paper will encourage the contemporary analytical discourse devoted to the music of George Gershwin.

As a future direction, we are in the process of applying the Meèus paradigm to two themes by Freddie Mercury. A comparison between the current research and the next one will be part of the multidimensional analysis from the third doctoral report.

Taking into account the fact that any interval can be covered by a sequence of RLP relations, we believe that this method can be widely used in modern musicology.

[9] The Syncopated Times, Feb. 12, 2019, p. 1.
[10] https://propulsivemusic.com, accessed on 10.12.2023, 10:12.

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