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Response to Professor Morse's Open Letter

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ABSTRACT: Professor Morse's "Open Letter" in the last issue of *MTO* (3.3, May 1997) exhibits much thought and deserves careful reading, although Killam disagrees with many of Morse's conclusions. The terms "sex" and "gender" are conflated by Morse, but Killam's original article oversimplifies and ignores the complex implications of these terms for music and its analysis. Killam's "Response" questions possible intermingling of theorists' analytical methodology uncertainties, with theorists' anxieties toward music written by women and toward new music in general.

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[1] Lee Rothfarb, General Editor of *MTO*, has graciously offered me space for a response to Professor Morse's open letter published in *MTO* 3.3. I thank Professor Morse for his willingness to allow my response to appear one issue later and for the time he took to write his letter. I have received a number of private supportive emails from other theorists, but Morse has been the only person willing to offer a public, and fairly negative response. Our small professional community (in contrast to the size of the American Psychological Association, for example) carries different possibilities for long-term animosities when we theorists disagree. I find Morse's objection to my article well within the boundaries of good-natured professional disagreement; I hope that our colleagues have similar reactions. Because the space offered me is for an "essay-like" response, not another article, I will discuss Morse's points according to their numbering in *MTO* 3.3, and suggest that readers have a copy of his writing at hand as they read my response.

[2] Regarding Morse's [1]: "Rather than...escalate the anger which so plainly inspired the piece..." I have no sense of having written the article in anger. I try not to assign emotions to others until they have first proclaimed them, thus observing parameters of reciprocal feminist discourse. Those who know both me and my writings know that when I write or speak in anger, I use a tone in which I am explicit about such anger. When I try to recall my emotions when writing the *MTO* article, I remember more a sense of amused exasperation with theorists whom David Lewin describes as "old silverbacks." His uses the term to portray theorists who sit around waiting to be groomed by their graduate students. His definition is not gendered, so women theorists can be old silverbacks as well as men. Indeed if his description is used as a metaphor, "old silverbacks" are defined by their

attitudes rather than their ages. Might these attitudes include theorists who cling grimly to syllabi that could be improved by updating and expansion? There are theorists who would rather fight than switch, to quote an old cigarette commercial.

[3] Regarding Morse's [2]: "I was neither outraged nor shocked by what you wrote, but only saddened..." As indicated in the previous paragraph, I was not writing to shock or outrage, but to inform and offer alternatives. Morse is certainly entitled to feel sad; I wish he had given a more detailed explanation for his sadness? "--I learned nothing from what you said." I assume that Morse has additional references of women composers, which I asked to be supplied to the readership, since I acknowledged in paragraph [28] of my original article the need for expansion of the article's information. Professor Morse, will you please supply your references to us?

[4] Morse's [2] continued: "Finally, the use of scholarly discourse for 'political' provocation is near to a hallmark of our age." This has a longer tradition than just "our age." At least in part, Socrates drank hemlock prescribed by his culture and Hypatia's flesh was scraped from her bones by early Christians due to the political provocations of their scholarly discourse. Was either of them so naive as to have considered their scholarly discourse as apolitical? (I prefer to remain a music theorist; my kids are explicit in their lack of desire for a martyr/mother.)

[5] Regarding Morse's [3]: "...the weariness of all-too-familiar harassment," I am unsure why Morse considers himself harassed. The four theorists whose books motivated my article did not respond with charges of harassment when I contacted them well before submitting my original article with a synopsis of what I intended to write, offered them space to respond, and gave them the opportunity to read the finished manuscript before I submitted it. If Morse considers himself harassed--his [1] reads, "I cannot find another way to reply than personally"--I wish he had been more explicit in defining his sense of harassment.

[6] Morse's [4]: "Give a reader or listener no room for creative response ..." This charge perplexes me. Paragraphs [18], [19], [20], [21], [23], [28], and [30], among others, ask for reader response. These questions were phrased so that responses of any sort could be offered as creative.

[7] Morse's [5]: "You can hardly have expected a measured, pipe-smoking discussion..." Here we agree. I spent several years learning aural neuroanatomy with Professor Earl Schubert of Stanford Medical School. Unless newer measurements have arisen, human behavior most associated with early deafness is tobacco use. I anguish as I record so many nicotine addicted, hard-of-hearing folk musicians through their clouds of pipe, cigar or cigarette smoke. "Pipe-smoking discussion" isn't measured: it's self-destructive.

[8] Morse's [5]: "I am not convinced that these anthologists have willfully neglected women composers." Nor am I; nor are they. I thought the general point of my article was that the exclusion of women composers from anthologies or texts was not deliberately planned by anyone. With all good intentions, women composers have been excluded from consideration by music theorists, in contrast to publications such as *Early Music America* 3.1 (Spring 1997), where much of the issue is devoted to early music written by women. History and English literature have devoted consideration to women's work in those fields; musicology and men musicologists have for years researched women composers and their music. As an example, my classmate, Professor Stewart Carter, wrote his 1981 dissertation on the music of Isabella Leonarda. I can think of no equivalent theory dissertation by a man on music written by a woman composer. Perhaps someone can enlighten us.

[9] Morse's [5], further: He uses the term "gender" where I think the term "sex" would be more accurate. Sex is generally defined by chromosomal identification, while gender is defined at least in part by the complex interaction of culture and sex. To minimize space, I collapsed sex-gender terms in my article. I wish I had clarified this at its beginning, especially in view of public reports now emerging on long-term reconsideration of Money's sex/gender work at Johns Hopkins University. I chose women composers who at some point in their lives publicly identified themselves as women, no matter what their public or private gender role complexities. I omitted discussion of self-identified gay and lesbian composers as well as composers who may have presented one identity

to certain groups and other identities to others.

[10] The complexities of sex/gender have been neglected too often by music theorists. In particular, in setting texts, composers ought to pay greater theoretical attention to sex/gender. For example, my undergraduate analysis classes grapple with whether Schubert's possible gay identity would provide any additional theoretical meaning in his setting of "Doppelgänger." They consider Clara and Robert Schumann's decision to publish lieder written individually by each of them under Robert's name, and invite their colleagues to guess which of them had written which lied. But these are perhaps issues for future research.

[11] Morse's [8]: His choice of words is interesting: "attacking," "complaint," "denouncing," "weary." There is an analogy in *Humanities* 18.1, (May/June, 1997), 8-9, 41-48, in "The Paradox of Biography," by Pulitzer Prize winner Joan D. Hedrick (for her biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe), where she quotes one of her critics and gives her reaction: "'Here is a very good book, full of anecdote, well-written, thoroughly researched. ... Why, then, is it so irritating? Why does the reader feel like hurling it across the room?' He complained, 'The men in the story hardly register at all. ... The book belongs entirely to spirited women...' He's right. The book belongs to the women and putting them in the center was a conscious political choice. But I didn't announce it or defend it; I simply did it, leaving this poor fellow no recourse to rational argument" (p. 48).

[12] Do Morse's concerns parallel those of Hedrick's critic? Is he uncomfortable with my concentration on women composers, their music, its analysis and addition to basic theory studies? To me, reasons for inclusion of history, literature and music written by women into our studies are self-evident: they write good stuff. Musicians like to play interesting music; some music written by women is in the performance canon. Over forty years ago, I learned Cecile Chaminade's "Flute Concertino," not because it was written by a woman but because every young flutist learned it. When I was auditioning for conservatory, the problem was how *not* to hear it, wafting as it did from every flutist's practice room.

[13] Morse's [8]: asks, "If music analysis is a specific, coherent procedure, what contributions to it does the factor of composer gender offer?" With regard to his initial "if" clause: have we actually decided on specific coherent procedures for music analysis? Is that not the framework for much current analysis? For example, for any given piece, what are the advantages of analyzing it as Boulanger, Schenker or Schoenberg did, as Babbitt or Forte or Lewin does? To what extent do their analytical procedures complement or conflict with one another? How do they provide us with better understanding of music, no matter by whom it is written? Until theorists agree on the first clause, I will assume that the second, "the factor of composer gender," may offer something valuable, even central. We will learn after more of us have analyzed music written by women.

[14] Morse's [8] comments on McClary's "attempts": What is the effect of McClary's being a musicologist, with a Ph.D. in musicology, currently chairing Musicology at UCLA? She has employed some theoretical methodology in her work, most of which stands central in the decades-old tradition of feminist musicology. Use of some music theory methodology is characteristic of most musicologists, as is musicological methodology's use by theorists. Do we wish to recollapse the musicology and music theory disciplines in the United States into one? This was the case previously until about the time that musicology engaged with feminism and poststructuralism, drawn from its sister disciplines of literature, history and art. There are advantages to separation or recombination. Until the latter is decided on by all of our organizations, it seems reasonable that music theorists recognize McClary as a musicologist, and apply theoretical critiques of feminist music theory more to those of us who are trained, credentialed and employed as feminist music theorists. (And if you can find such an individual I would certainly like to talk with him or her as to how I and others might attain the same status.)

[15] Morse's [10]: "proto-soviet musicologists" are outside of my knowledge. Does this refer to some of the ethnomusicologists who built heavily on materialism, such as Charles Seegar in his later days? "... One's sacrosanct individuality... the principle of identity itself." This seems extremely Eurocentric and phallogocratic. European composers influenced by gamelan, such as Debussy, and the complexities of African drumming and its long influence on U.S. music are old news. Successful

compositions throughout the twentieth century by both women and men composers, such as Oliveros, Reich, Monk, Glass, and others, build around the reciprocal submersion of individual into group and group support of individual. What music of the past half-century (written post-1947) do you enjoy and play the most frequently, and get most excited about its analysis? What are the relationships of individual to group in music that you most prefer from this period?

[16] Morse's [11] final paragraph: "Although without anger, I took what you said personally..." Great! What music by women composers have you personally been analyzing, performing and teaching that you think I should have included in my first article? "You present a version of scholarly conversation...deeply troublesome...since it sets so little store by fairness and openness...so much on its own rhetorical privilege." Professor Morse is certainly entitled to his opinion, and I defend his right to hold it, but now I am the one who does not understand. Perhaps he, or someone who does understand, could explain the basis for this opinion? "...Your assurances that the coming generations vastly outdo you in radicalism is depressing beyond words." How is that? Perhaps he is referring to my statement in paragraph [28]: "Our students are ahead of their teachers now, and we might well run to catch up with them"? When has this not been the case, with students straining at conventions imposed? When one of my students says, "Yeah, I'm programming the Musgrave again but you know how it is--you need something conservative that all the judges know on a master's recital." Does this really "sacrifice on the altar of political intransigence...a sense of music of both women and men?" Or is this evidence of exciting new music performed by new generations, who choose to know how the analytical skills we teach them can help them be better creators and interpreters of music--music originated by people who identify themselves as various sexes, genders, races, ethnicities, whatever? Do we as theorists choose to assume responsibility for ignoring characteristics in our analyses that composers consider central to their lives?

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