

Robert Wason: A Tribute and Dedication

Elizabeth West Marvin

The articles in this volume of *Intégral* share many themes, among them jazz theory and composition, keyboard improvisation, the history of music theory, and Schenkerian perspectives on improvisation and composition. The authors share something too: all were students or colleagues of Robert Wason, to whom this volume is dedicated. Subtle touches in these essays evoke Bob's influence everywhere—Dariusz Terefenko drawing on principles of classical rhetoric to describe Keith Jarrett's improvised prelude, John Koslovsky treating Salzer's writings to thoughtful new translations, James McGowan citing not only Riemann but Kurth, Rameau, and Hegel in an article about jazz harmony, and so on. There are outright signs of Wason's legacy as well, in numerous footnotes and notes of thanks. With this volume, Bob's colleagues, students, and friends thank him for his enormous influence on our research and teaching, his tireless service to the Eastman School of Music, his shaping of its music theory department over nearly 30 years, and his mentoring of young talent. For sharing his musicianship with us and for his contributions to the discipline at large—particularly in jazz studies, history of theory, and analysis and performance—we dedicate this issue.

Bob began his musical life as a composer and jazz musician, influences that color his work to this day. He received degrees from the Hartt School (University of Hartford) and Yale University, and also studied at the University of Vienna and the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna as a Fulbright scholar. His Yale dissertation was published by UMI Research Press (1985) and reprinted by University of Rochester Press (1995) as *Viennese Harmonic Theory from Albrechtsberger to Schenker and Schoenberg*, a widely read and influential volume. Bob returned numerous times to Europe for research and performance opportunities, funded by the Paul Sacher Foundation, an NEH Fellowship for University Teachers, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the DAAD (German Academic Exchange). He lived and worked abroad for a year in Freiburg and at the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel while engaged in

Webern research, and he toured with soprano Valerie Errante for performances of Munich School Lieder in Munich and Kiel. This latter pursuit resulted in a published critical edition of *Selected Songs of the Munich School, 1870-1920* by A-R Editions (2010). Also with Errante, Bob performed songs of Alec Wilder, and wrote CD liner notes, “Alec Wilder and American Song,” that won an ASCAP Deems Taylor Award in 2001 (one of two wins—the other for a liner-note essay on Henry Martin’s “Preludes and Fugues” for Bridge Records, 2005). Bob’s many published articles encompass diverse topics—from analyses of Rzewski, Webern, Stravinsky, May, Thuilles, Wilder, Chopin, and Bach, to contextualization of important theorists and theories of the past, including not only Albrechtberger, Schenker, and Schoenberg, but also Weitzmann, Schalk, Münnich, and Riemann. These publications, together with over 25 music theory and composition doctoral research projects supervised, form a substantial legacy to the next generation of scholars.

Bob’s primary faculty appointments have been at the Hartt School, University of North Texas, and Eastman School of Music, but he has also served as visiting professor at the University at Buffalo, University of British Columbia, and Universität Basel. I have been fortunate to know Bob since he arrived at Eastman in 1983, and to interact with him from the perspective of a student, a musical and research collaborator, and a colleague. My first close experience working with Bob came during the year that Rick Cohn and I served as his teaching assistants for the core undergraduate 20th-century analysis course. Bob led our trio in an intense collaboration, during which time we analyzed numerous works together, discussing them at length in our TA meetings; we explored the theories of Hindemith, Hanson, and Lendvai in addition to Forte, Babbitt, and others, and we created a curriculum for a course that was relatively new to Eastman. This experience had a lasting impact on my teaching and pedagogical writing. As his student, I was enrolled in the history of theory sequence, where Bob modeled the scholar-musician impeccably: with language and translation skills, deep knowledge of the subject matter, the ability to sort through detail to see strands of thought across time, and an obvious engagement with the material and with what it is to be a scholar. My final paper for the course he encouraged me to

develop further; Bob became a co-author and the paper was published as “Hugo Riemann’s *Ideen zu einer Lehre von den Tonvorstellungen*: An Annotated Translation with Introduction” (*Journal of Music Theory* 36/1, 1992). I learned a great deal from this collaboration about scholarly aspects of translation, about providing context, discussing alternative translations for particularly difficult or ambiguous words, and documenting sources and influences.

As faculty colleague some years later, it was my job to create a new aural skills curriculum for the Eastman School. Among my charges was the creation of a year-long course in ear training and sight singing of 20th-century modal, atonal, and serial music to accompany the undergraduate core analysis course. After the course was up and running, Bob asked whether I had considered performing some of this atonal music (after all, I was now teaching the requisite skills). So began an intensely enjoyable, challenging, and fruitful musical partnership, with Bob at the piano and me singing, as we analyzed in real time during our rehearsals, tried out different interpretations, discussed the poetry, and considered our strategies for learning these works. We concentrated on the early Lieder of Anton Webern, primarily the posthumous Dehmel songs, Op. 3, Op. 8, and Op. 12. We developed a lecture-recital for the Music Theory Society of New York State in 1993, which was later invited as a plenary session for the Society for Music Theory (Tallahassee, 1994). As we refined our presentation and added other songs to our repertoire, we took “The Webern Show” on the road to the Peabody Institute, Mt. Holyoke College, the Hartt School, and to Ottawa for an international conference on music in Austria. The script we developed for the lecture-recital eventually was published as “On Preparing Anton Webern’s Early Songs for Performance: A Collaborators’ Dialogue” (*Theory and Practice* 20, 1995).

Robert Wason is a life-long learner. In the time I have known him, he has studied piano, saxophone, and voice with major artist-faculty at the Eastman School; he has performed as soloist, jazz club musician, accompanist, chorister, and chamber musician. He spent a semester as a Bridging Fellow in the University of Rochester’s Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, studying German poetry and literature for his research on Second

Viennese and Munich School Lieder. In connection with his teaching of the 20th-century undergraduate core course at Eastman, he learned and performed the Bartók *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*; for a graduate seminar, he prepared the entire *Well Tempered Clavier*; for History of Theory, he became an expert on temperaments and tunings, and took private lessons in Greek to prepare his own translations. As musician-scholar, he has been an exemplary role model to the students whom he has taught, advised, supervised, and mentored.

I was particularly touched reading Keith Waters' list of legacies that Bob passed on to his students: sensitivity to historical context, clear uncluttered prose, and an eagerness to step outside of disciplinary boundaries and ideas. To that we might add scholarly integrity and a deep practical musicianship that informs each research question. With gratitude, this volume is dedicated to Robert Wason.