

Twelve Lessons in Schenkerian Theory: A Comprehensive Guide to Schenkerian Analysis

Schenkerian theory is one of the most important and influential approaches to music theory and analysis. It was developed by Heinrich Schenker, an Austrian music theorist and composer, in the early 20th century.

Schenkerian theory is based on the idea that all music can be understood as a series of nested layers of structure, from the smallest details to the largest overall form. By analyzing the structure of a piece of music, Schenkerian analysts can gain insights into its harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic relationships.



The Art of Tonal Analysis: Twelve Lessons in Schenkerian Theory (Oxford Handbooks) by Mariusz Kozak

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

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The Oxford Handbook of Schenkerian Theory is a comprehensive guide to Schenkerian analysis. It contains twelve lessons that cover all of the essential concepts of Schenkerian theory. This article provides a summary

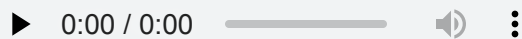
of each of these lessons, along with detailed explanations, examples, and exercises.

Lesson 1: Structural Hearing

The first lesson in Schenkerian theory is structural hearing. Structural hearing is the ability to hear the underlying structure of a piece of music. This involves being able to identify the different layers of structure, from the smallest details to the largest overall form. Structural hearing is a skill that takes time and practice to develop, but it is essential for understanding Schenkerian analysis.

Example

Listen to the following excerpt from Mozart's Piano Sonata in C major, K. 545. Can you identify the different layers of structure in this excerpt?



The following Schenkerian graph shows the different layers of structure in the Mozart excerpt:

莫扎特钢琴奏鸣曲
-sonata poplataicmp

Sonate 16 in C major

Sonata facile

W. A. Mozart
K. 546

Allegro

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As you can see from the graph, the excerpt is structured in a series of nested layers. The smallest layer is the foreground, which consists of the individual notes of the melody. The next layer is the middleground, which consists of the harmonic progressions that support the melody. The largest layer is the background, which consists of the overall form of the piece.

Schenkerian analysis involves identifying these different layers of structure and understanding how they relate to each other.

Lesson 2: Ursatz

The second lesson in Schenkerian theory is the Ursatz. The Ursatz is the fundamental structure of a piece of music. It is the underlying harmonic framework that supports all of the other layers of structure. The Ursatz is often represented by a Schenkerian graph, which is a diagram that shows the harmonic relationships between the different notes in a piece of music.

Example

The following Schenkerian graph shows the Ursatz of the Mozart excerpt:

Sonata No. 16
in C Major
K. 545

Allegro

cresc.

legito

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

1

As you can see from the graph, the Ursatz of the Mozart excerpt is a simple descending bass line from C to G. This bass line supports the harmonic progressions in the middleground and the melody in the foreground.

Lesson 3: Background Structure

The third lesson in Schenkerian theory is the background structure. The background structure is the largest layer of structure in a piece of music. It consists of the overall form of the piece, as well as the most important harmonic progressions. The background structure is often represented by a Schenkerian graph, which shows the harmonic relationships between the different sections of a piece of music.

Example

The following Schenkerian graph shows the background structure of the Mozart excerpt:

莫扎特行板钢琴曲
-mozart pop16facile.mp3

Sonate 16 in C major

Sonata facile

W. A. Mozart
K. 546

Allegro

mp

p

f

mp

mp

mp

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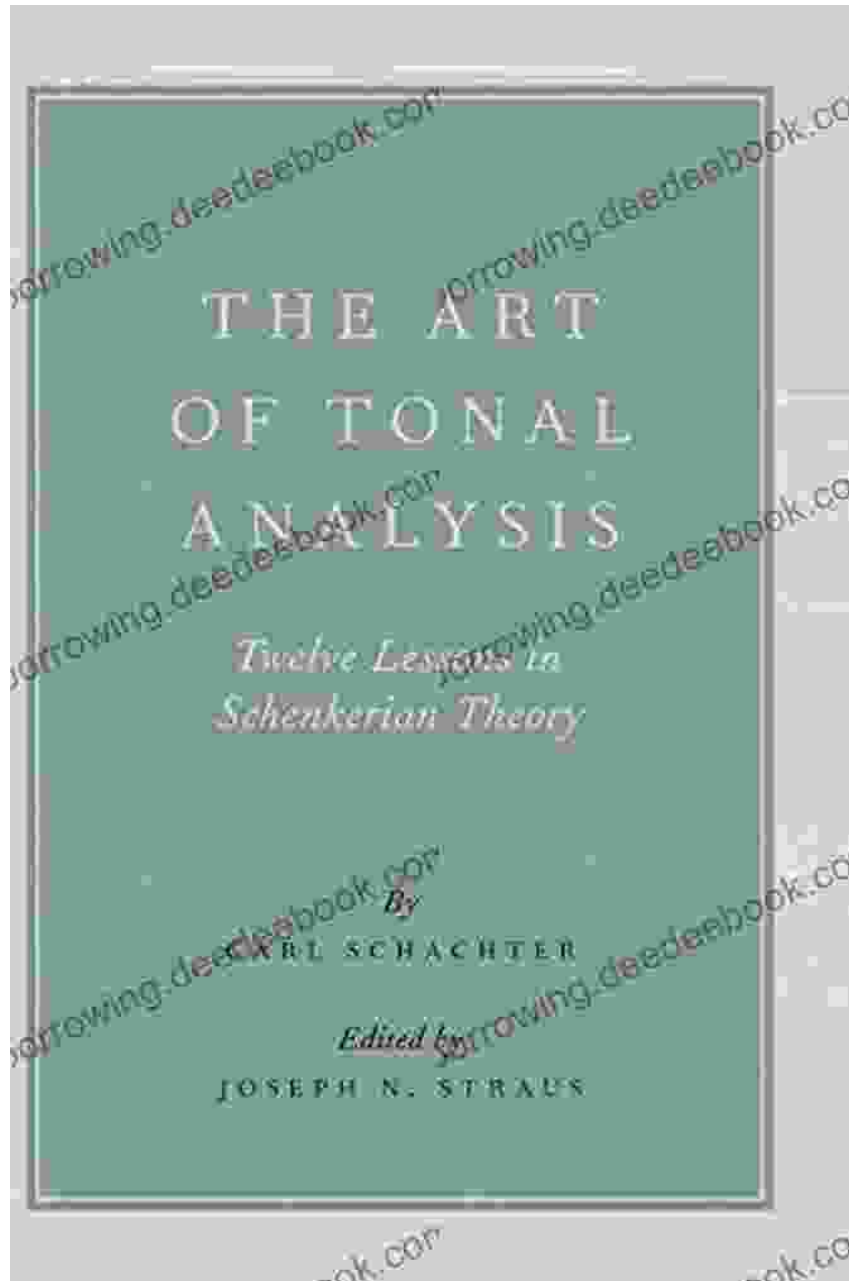
As you can see from the graph, the background structure of the Mozart excerpt is a simple binary form. The first section is in the key of C major and the second section is in the key of G major. The two sections are connected by a harmonic progression that moves from C major to G major.

Lesson 4: Diminution

The fourth lesson in Schenkerian theory is diminution. Diminution is the process of reducing a melodic or harmonic figure to its simplest form. This is often done by removing embellishments and other non-essential notes. Diminution can be used to identify the underlying structure of a piece of music.

Example

The following example shows a melody in its original form and in its diminished form:



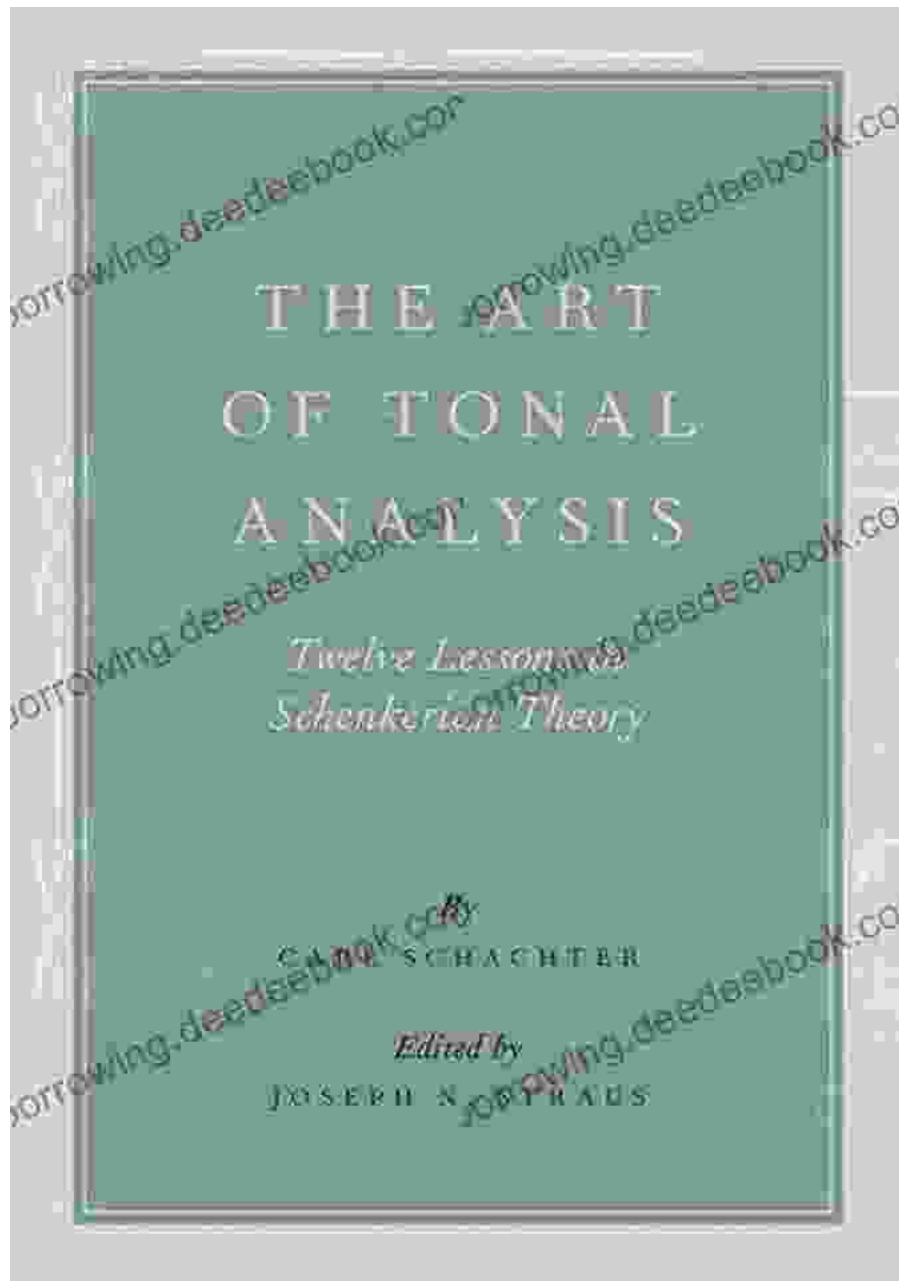
As you can see from the example, the diminished form of the melody is much simpler than the original form. This is because the embellishments and non-essential notes have been removed. The diminished form of the melody still retains the essential structure of the original melody, but it is easier to see the underlying harmonic relationships.

Lesson 5: Elaboration

The fifth lesson in Schenkerian theory is elaboration. Elaboration is the opposite of diminution. It is the process of adding embellishments and other non-essential notes to a melodic or harmonic figure. Elaboration can be used to make a piece of music more interesting and complex.

Example

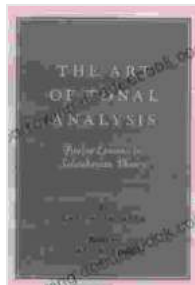
The following example shows a melody in its original form and in its elaborated form:



As you can see from the example, the elaborated form of the melody is much more complex than the original form. This is because embellishments and non-essential notes have been added. The elaborated form of the melody still retains the essential structure of the original melody, but it is more interesting and complex.

Lesson 6: Prolongation

The sixth lesson in Schenkerian theory is prolongation. Prolongation is the process of extending a melodic or harmonic figure over time. This can be done by repeating the figure, or by



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