

François Couperin's *La Flore* (5th Ordre): Motivic Replication, Approach to III, and Analytic Methodology

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Abstract

When I first played François Couperin's keyboard miniature *La Flore*, it immediately struck me as beautiful, restrained, and austere. This article comments on the following aspects of the piece: (1) a persistent motive and its interaction with the piece's structure; (2) how the opening measures both set up this motive and are echoed in the closing measures; (3) the somewhat circuitous route to the mediant; (4) the coda; and (5) the potential awkwardness of integrating the motive, which moves from scale degrees $\hat{5}$ up to $\hat{8}$ and back again, within an Urlinie structure which descends to $\hat{1}$. To this end, I will also look at an unpublished 2016 reading by Charles Burkhart which incorporates David Neumeier's ideas of the ascending Urlinie and the three-voice Ursatz (Neumeier 1987a and b).

When I first played François Couperin's keyboard miniature *La Flore*, it immediately struck me, and still does, as beautiful, restrained, and austere, suffused by a subdued clarity, like that of an intricate but distant landscape. Channan Willner has suggested that, small as it is, its influence in particular (beyond that of Couperin in general) can be observed in works by such later 18th- and 19th-century composers as Joseph Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Johannes Brahms (Willner 2006). This article will comment on the following aspects of the piece: (1) a persistent motive and its interaction with the piece's structure; (2) how the opening measures both set up this motive and relate to the closing measures; (3) the somewhat circuitous route to the mediant; (4) the coda; and (5) the potential awkwardness of integrating the motive, which moves from scale degrees $\hat{5}$ up to $\hat{8}$ and back again, within an Urlinie structure which descends to $\hat{1}$. To that end, I will also look at an unpublished reading by Charles Burkhart which incorporates David Neumeier's ideas of the ascending Urlinie and the three-voice Ursatz (Neumeier 1987a and b).

The Motive

Upon repeated playings of *La Flore* I became aware of a curious sense of monotony, perhaps of *déjà vu* – a sense of seeing the same signs flash by on the highway, even as the landscape of the piece kept changing. This sense, I am convinced, derives from a persistently repeated motive, replicated on multiple levels, shown in bracketed capital letters above the music in Example 1: E-F \sharp -G-(F \sharp -G \sharp)-A-G-F \flat -E. This motive inhabits the upper tetrachord

of the A minor scale. It appears in different harmonic contexts, but is pitch-specific – always in the 4-octave register, and always in the right hand. It also contains some built-in chromaticism: ascending, F \sharp moves to G (and sometimes to G \sharp ; thence to A); descending, F \flat moves to E. As shown in the brackets above the staves, the motive occurs in mm. 3–5, on a somewhat larger level in 3–8, in 8–11, 19–22, and 23–26.

In addition, a case can be made for an overarching version of the motive that embraces the individual instances and covers almost the entire piece. Example 2, a middleground sketch, shows this macro version and how it interacts with the piece's structure. Here the expansion is one-sided – the ascent from E to A (mm. 3–25) is greatly enlarged, but the descent to E is not (mm. 25–26). From E, retained all the way from the initial E Kopfton in m. 3, I read a quick Urlinie descent in mm. 26–27. Briefly put, I also read the overall bass arpeggiation as I-III-V-I. To do so, however, I somewhat devalue the I6 chords in mm. 21 and 25, seeing them not only as local tonics but, in a larger sense, as the result of a 5-6 motion from III in m. 19.

In a sense, as shown in Example 3, the motive is prepared in the first three measures by a series of unfoldings in the right hand: in the top voice, C-A, G \sharp -B, A; answered by E-C, B-E, C in the middle voice. The top line of this initial gesture descends a third between C5 and A4 (mm. 1–2), and the answering gesture descends a third between E4 and C4 (mm. 2–3), leaving a gap of a perfect fourth between A4 and E4. This gap is then neatly filled in by the motive, which moves up (E-F \sharp -G \sharp -A) and

Example 1. F. Couperin, *La Flore*: Motivic replications.

Gracieusement,

La Flore.

[E F# G A G F E] F

[E F# G A G F E]

7

12

19

25

31

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8141

Example 2. Middleground sketch with large-scale motive.

Example 3. Mm. 1–3: Unfoldings and filled-in E4-A4 gap.

down (A-G \flat -F \flat -E) between E4 and A5. Thus the initial two measures create a space for the motive, which is then plugged into it.

Route to III

Please turn to Example 4, my foreground sketch of *La Flore*.

The first tonal goal of *La Flore* is the mediant. III is definitively reached in m. 19, but the route is not particularly straightforward. For one thing, although the first section ends at the double bar

(m. 8) with a firm Phrygian cadence, there is a slight motion or feint towards III before that. Much of the first appearance of the motive is taken up with the G major chord, prolonged from mm. 4 to 6, which functions as VII. But it seems to me that, initially, the VII chord increasingly takes on the color of V/III. G major starts in m. 4; C major 6 is introduced (in passing, as it were) at the beginning of m. 5, followed by VII6-I of C major in m. 5, suggesting a mini-tonicization of III. When the G major chord returns at the beginning of m. 6, it sounds to me

Example 4. Foreground sketch.

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with measure numbers in circles above the staff:

- System 1:** Measures 1, 4, 8, 11, 13. Chord annotations below the staff: I, VII, IV, 6 , $V^{\frac{5}{2}}$, $\frac{7}{2}$, $\frac{6}{4}$, $\frac{5}{13}$, V/III. A note below the staff reads: "V/III? Maybe.....not."
- System 2:** Measures 13, 15, 19, 21, 23, 25. Chord annotations below the staff: V, III, 5 --- 6 , (I), V, (I).
- System 3 (Coda):** Measures 26, 27, 31, 31, 35. Chord annotations below the staff: V, (II⁶ V) I, IV $\frac{5}{2}$, I, (II)V, I.

The score includes a treble and bass clef, with various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs. Dotted lines and arrows indicate specific analytical connections between notes and chords.

rather like V of III, and I almost expect the passage to continue to a cadence in C major, as in Example 5. The A minor chord in m. 7 that actually follows (Example 4) comes as a bit of a jolt, wrenching the music from my hypothetical modulation into III back to an actual Phrygian cadence in the tonic key of A minor.

In m. 8 (second ending) the motive recurs, this time moving from the major V at the double bar to a minor V7 during which treble $G\flat_4$ is quickly raised back to $G\sharp_4$ (m. 9), so that the chord appears to function as a dominant seventh of Am – and does, in a way, but the Am in m. 10 is merely a neighboring $6/4$ that immediately descends to $5/3$ over a dominant pedal. A slightly more stable A minor is reached (m. 11) only via a sort of plagal motion from a D minor 6 chord dissonated by right-hand embellishing tones $G/C\sharp$, which then resolve inward to F/D as the bass of the D minor chord moves from F to D. The highly dissonated D minor 6 chord is one of the more dramatic moments in this otherwise rather elegantly restrained piece. I hear the stronger Am in m. 11 less as a real return to the structural tonic than as the upper fifth of D7 (m. 12), which then resolves to G major (over a long G pedal point), which in its turn functions as the dominant of III. III is approached via an auxiliary cadence, and finally and definitively arrives in m. 19. Thus the initial feint towards a cadence on III in mm. 4–6 is abandoned, followed by a second and far more assertive attempt in mm. 12–19, which successfully cadences on III in m. 19.

Mm. 19–27

Beginning in m. 19, then again in m. 23, the motive is stated twice more. Although it begins (as previously in mm. 8–10) in V minor ($G\flat_4$ quickly moving to $G\sharp_4$), I read the I_6 to which it resolves as the more prominent harmony, and thus the passage as basically local tonic prolongation. This section (mm. 19–27) is somewhat like a parallel period, the antecedent (mm. 19–23) ending in a half cadence and consequent (mm. 23–27) ending in a full cadence. However, in a still larger sense, I see the I_6 as a result of a 5-6 motion from III, which is why I've put parentheses around it (see the foreground sketch, Example 4, mm. 19–21). After the motive descends to E4 in m. 22 and again (repeated) in m. 26, the line continues its descent, the first time to $F\sharp_3$ (under a retained B3)

and the second time to A. As mentioned, I take the Urlinie descent at the end of the consequent phrase. As such, however, it is rather precipitous, and definitely needs the subsequent coda to afterwards confirm and anchor it in place.

Coda (mm. 27–36)

The coda consists of four measures that first appear as mm. 27–31, and are immediately repeated as 31–35, with an overlap at the very beginning of m. 31.

The coda is somewhat nostalgic, referring back to both the three-measure introduction and to the motive itself. As shown in Example 6, it begins with the same unfolded thirds as the introduction (mm. 1–2), but unfolded backwards, so to speak (mm. 27–28, 31–32). That is, whereas the introduction (top line) begins with C/A $G\sharp/B$ A, the coda (bottom line) begins with A/C B/ $G\sharp$ A. So the coda begins by recalling the gesture from the first measures of the piece, but in reverse.

At the same time, though (see Example 7), the coda is also reminiscent of the motive (especially as stated in mm. 19–23 and 23–26), but transposed down a perfect fifth from the range of the Am upper tetrachord (E4 up to A4) to the lower pentachord (A3 up to E4). Because the transformation of the motive in the coda (mm. 27–31, 31–34) now fills the space of a fifth rather than a fourth, it has been extended upwards by a whole step to E4. That is, just as the motive (m. 19 and following) begins by tracing the line E- $F\sharp$ -G-($G\sharp$)-A, the coda (middle line) begins with its transposition A-B-C- $C\sharp$ -D, but then proceeds up to E (and back down again to A). In a sense, because of their different ranges in the A minor scale, the usual version of the motive could be regarded as plagal, and its reminiscence in the coda as authentic.

In mm. 29 and 33 (see Example 4), IV is emphasized (supporting treble D2), both by duration and, more importantly, by its startling major quality, which is so much brighter and fresher than the expected D minor. So I feel that the D major chord should be lingered over a bit in performance. The major third, $F\sharp_3$, clashes almost immediately afterwards with its cross-relation F_4 , adding a nice dissonant *frisson*. I can't help but feel that the $F\sharp$ is somehow reminiscent of the $F\sharp$ from the original motive's ascent; and that the following F_4 likewise is an echo from the original motive's descent.

Example 5. Mm. 4–8: Hypothetical ending on III.

Example 6. Coda, mm. 27–28, 31–32: Unfoldings, compared to mm. 1–2.

C-----A G#-B A
C-A G#-B unfoldings

A---C B-----G# A---C B
4th extended to 5th (up and down)
A-C B-G# unfoldings

Example 7. Coda, mm. 31–35: Motive, transposed and expanded from a 4th to a 5th.

E F# G F# G# A G F E
4th (E-A-E)

A---C B-----G# A---C B C# D E D C B A
(up and down)
4th extended to 5th (A-E-A)

Design and structure: Charles Burkhart's graph

A key issue in the analysis of *La Flore* is the interaction of structure (in the Schenkerian sense) and motive. This last is so insistent that it really can't be ignored. Because the motive moves between E and the A above (specifically, from E4 to A4), but the Urlinie (if read from $\hat{5}$) descends from E to the A below, the two inhabit different regions of the A minor scale. In a sense, it could be said that the Urlinie is authentic and the motive is plagal: the motive resides *above* the Urlinie. A corollary of this is that the $\hat{5}$ Kopfton isn't very involved in the motive aside from its first and last notes, but tends to remain fairly static until the Urlinie's descent in mm. 26–27. Reading the piece from $\hat{3}$ doesn't alleviate that situation; it just makes it worse. Of course, it isn't necessary that Kopfton be intimately involved in the details of the foreground; but it's nice if it is more involved in the action, so to speak.

Charles Burkhart's reading of *La Flore* (Example 8) addresses this problem by better integrating the Urlinie with the motive.¹ It does this by replacing Schenker's traditional descending Urlinie forms with the ascending Urlinie $\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{7}-\hat{8}$, most notably introduced by David Neumeyer (1987a). He also adopts Neumeyer's idea of adding a structural middle voice to Schenker's two-voice Ursatz models (Neumeyer 1987b).

As shown in Level A, the background, Burkhart's rising Urlinie – E-F \sharp -G-G \sharp -A – consists of the rising part of the motive, over bass A-C-E-A (I-III-V-I), with C-B-A in the middle voice. In the first three measures, as shown in Level B, C5 arpeggiates down to C4, but then moves into the inner voice – E4 takes over as the Kopfton (the initial and lowest tone of the rising treble Urlinie). Mm. 3–19 are taken up with the modulation to III, the Urlinie proceeding through F \sharp to G as the harmony moves from V/III to III.

Perhaps the most consequential difference between Burkhart's and my readings lie in his view of mm. 20–27, which we both see as the end

of the structure (Burkhart's reading is shown in Example 8; mine in Example 4). The passage, in my view, is a modified parallel period: an antecedent followed by a consequent phrase, each four bars long, the first ending on a half-cadence and the second on a PAC. I read the first phrase (mm. 19–23) essentially as I6-V, with I6 as an outgrowth of III via 5-6). I6, although present in m. 19, arrives most strongly in m. 21. The consequent (mm. 23–27) is similar; the I6 in m. 23 is even weaker, and could be viewed as a passing harmony within V. Again, I6 arrives most strongly two measures later in m. 25, and the cadence is a PAC. Thus I read the passage essentially as tonic prolongation, but within a larger III-V-I motion (I6 as transformed III).

Burkhart's reading is very different. Although he too sees the larger structure as III-V-I, mm. 20–26 – which I read as tonic prolongation – he reads as dominant prolongation. He retains G \sharp /E throughout, only resolving to A/A (the end of the structure) in m. 27, a reading which perfectly conforms to the last two notes of the "rising Urlinie" model.² Thus he doesn't see the passage as a parallel period, as I do, because for him the previous arrivals from G \sharp to A (my I6 chords) in mm. 20–21 and 24–25 are only apparent – dissonant neighbor 6/4 chords over a retained dominant pedal. Treble G \sharp doesn't resolve to A (except for m. 27). On the contrary, A is the upper neighbor of G \sharp . Our readings of the passage are diametrically opposite, "through the looking glass" readings. Burkhart's reading, depending on Neumeyer's rising Urlinie model, does an excellent job of "saving the appearances." I find it quite convincing, except for one thing – I myself find it quite difficult to hear the passage in this way. I read the passage basically as tonic prolongation, with G-G \sharp resolving to A in m. 21 and again in m. 25. That is, I hear A as a goal and resolution of G \sharp , not as an accented neighbor.³ But it is crucial to Burkhart's reading to hear this passage as dominant prolongation; otherwise, what is to prevent Urlinie G \sharp from reaching the goal A prematurely in m. 21 or m. 25?

¹ Burkhart's graph, from an email correspondence on *La Flore* from Summer 2016, is used by permission.

² X/Y=X over Y, usually treble over bass.

³ One reason I do so is because I place considerably more weight than Burkhart on the A minor 6 chord in m. 21, which I derive from the C major chord in m. 19 via a 5-6: the bass leap C4-C3 in m. 19 registrally and accentually connects to the opposite leap C3-C4 two bars later in m. 21.

Example 8. Charles Burkhardt's sketch.

Couperin, La Flore (ordre V) c. Burkhardt, 2016 ①

1 3 5 11 12 13 14 20 24 27

3 8 12 13 15 19

19 20 24 26 27

Conclusion

This paper has been an investigation into some of the aspects of *La Flore* that contribute to making it such a beautiful, elegant, and yet (in some ways) strangely static piece: the pervasive motive, operative on different levels; the circuitous route to the mediant; and the reminiscent nature of the coda. In addition, it

has highlighted how an oft-discussed theoretical topic – the interaction of motive and structure – operates in this specific piece and how it engages somewhat different Schenkerian methodologies: my reading from \hat{S} and Charles Burkhart's more unconventional reading incorporating David Neumeyer's "Ascending Urlinie" model.

References

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François Couperini „La Flore”: motiiviline replikatsioon, III astme käsitus ja analüütiline metodoloogia

Stephen Slottow

Selles artiklis käsitletakse François Couperini klavessiiniminiatuuri „La Flore” järgnevaid aspekte: (1) teost püsivalt läbiv motiiv ja selle suhe teose struktuuriga; (2) avataktide funktsioon nimetatud motiivi ülesehitamisel ja nende taktide suhe lõputaktidega; (3) ebatavaline „ringjas” liikumine mediant; (4) kooda ning (5) laadi viiendalt kaheksandale astmele ja sealt tagasi liikuva motiivi problemaatiline ühendumine esimesele astmele laskuva *Urlinie*'ga. Lõpetuseks vaatlen ka Charles Burkharti avaldamata analüüsi, mis peegeldab David Neumeyeri käibeletoodud tõusva *Urlinie* ja kolmest häälest moodustuva fundamentaalse häältejuhtimisstruktuuri ideid.

Korduvalt miniatuuri „La Flore” mängides sain ma teadlikuks kummalisest *déjà vu* tundest. Olen kindel, et see tunne on põhjustatud pidevalt korduvast motiivist, mille replikatsioonid avalduvad erinevatel struktuuritasanditel ja mille helid – *e-fis-g-(fis-gis)-a-g-f-e* – olen ma näites 1 muusika kohal sulgudes suurtähtedega ära toonud. See motiiv hõlmab a-moll helirea ülemist tetrahordi. See ilmneb küll erinevates harmoonilistes kontekstides, kuid helikõrguslik aspekt jääb muutumatuks – see kõlab alati esimeses oktavis ja paremas käes. Selles sisaldub ka väike kromatism: tõusvana väljendub see helijärgnevusena *fis-g-(gis-a)*, laskuvana aga *f-e*. Lisaks sellele võib leida motiivivariandi, mis sellisena artikleerib kogu teost, vt. näide 2. Mainitud variandi puhul on laiendatud ainult motiivi esimene pool – tõus helilt *e* helile *a* hõlmab takte 3–25, samas kui laskumine tagasi helile *e* ainult takte 25–26. Nimetatud helilt *e*, mis on alates taktist 3 püsiva kvindiliini (*Urlinie*) katusheli (*Kopfton*), algab lühike laskumine toonikasse, hõlmates takte 26–27. Lühidalt öelduna käsitan ma ka struktuurilist bassiliini siin liikumisena I-III-V-I. Nõnda toimides vähendan ma mõnevõrra I_6 tähtsust taktides 21 ja 25, sest ei vaatle nimetatud harmooniaid mitte ainult lokaalsete toonikafunktsioonide esindajatena, vaid laiemalt ka kui 19. taktis III astmelt alguse saava 5-6 liikumise tulemusena tekkivaid harmooniaid.

Nagu näitest 3 ilmneb, on motiiv teatavas mõttes ette valmistatud esimeses kolmes taktis ilmneva parema käe lahti rulluvates (*unfolding*) figuurides: ülähääle figuurile *c-a, gis-h, a* vastab keskmises hääles figuur *e-c, h-e, c*. Selle algse figuuri struktuuriline ülähääle kujutab endast laskuvat tertsiiliini teise oktavi helist *c* esimese oktavi helile *a* (taktid 1–2) ja sellele vastava figuuri struktuuriline hääle laskuvat tertsiiliini esimese oktavi helilt *e* esimese oktavi helile *c* (taktid 2–3). Sellisena sisaldab see tühja, n.-ö. täitmata kvarti helide a^1 ja e^1 vahel. See tühik on järgnevates taktides sobivalt täidetud juba eespool mainitud motiiviga, mis üles liikudes hõlmab helisid *e-fis-gis-a* ja alla liikudes helisid *a-g-f-e*. Seega loovad kaks algustakti otsekui motiivi jaoks ruumi, mille motiiv siis omakorda täidab.

„La Flore” esimeseks sihiks on jõudmine mediantharmoniale (III). Selleni jõutakse taktis 19, kuid teekond sinna pole just sirgjooneline. Kuigi esimene vormiosa lõpeb taktis 8 tugevalt artikleeritud früügia kadentsiga (s.t. poolkadentsiga a-mollis, teose põhihelistikus), markeerib juba liikumine esimese osa lõpudominandini õrnalt III astme harmooniat taktides 4–6, kus loomuliku VII astme harmoonia (põhihelistikus vaadelduna) omandab kõrvaldominandi (V/III) värvingu ja seda nii tugevalt, et ma peaaegu et ootan selle lõigu jätkumist kadentsiga C-duuris, nagu demonstreerib näide 5. Selle asemel saabuv a-moll dominant (näide 4) mõjub seetõttu pisut ebalevana. Valmistatuna ette abikadentsi poolt, saabub III lõpuks, nagu öeldud, taktis 19.

Alates taktist 19 ja 23 kõlab motiiv veel kaks korda. Ma interpreteerin siin I_6 , millesse motiiv laheneb, kui lokaalselt tugevaimat harmooniat ja seetõttu kogu lõiku toonika prolongatsioonina. Seda lõiku (taktid 19–27) võib mõista omalaadse paralleelperioodina, mille eellause (taktid 19–23) lõpeb poolkadentsi ning järellause (taktid 23–27) täiskadentsiga. Laiemas kontekstis vaatlen ma I_6 aga mediantilt (III) alguse saava 5-6 liikumise tulemusel tekkiva harmooniana. Nagu juba mainitud, käsitlen ma *Urlinie* lõpliku laskumisena (*final descent*) järellause lõppu. Sellisena on see aga mõnevõrra ootamatu ja kiirustav ning vajab seetõttu järgnevat koodat, mis *Urlinie* laskumise kui vormilise sulgumise piisavalt ankurdaks.

Kooda moodustub nelja takti pikkusest materjalist, mis ilmub esmalt taktides 27–31 ja mida kohe korratakse taktides 31–35. Kooda on mõnevõrra nostalgiline ning selles viidatakse nii kolmetaktilisele sissejuhatusele kui ka teost läbivale motiivile (näited 6 ja 7).

Pala „La Flore” analüüsi põhiteemaks on schenkerlikult mõistetud struktuuri ja motiivi omavahelised suhted. Kuna motiiv liigub helide e^1 ja a^1 vahel, aga *Urlinie* laskub helilt e^1 helile a , hõlmavad need a-moll helirea erinevaid regioone: motiiv justkui hõljuks *Urlinie* kohal. Heli e^1 kaudu on *Urlinie* motiiviga küll seotud, kuid näib sellest hoolimata säilitavat oma staatilise loomuse kuni laskumiseni taktides 26–27.

Charles Burkharti analüüs palast „La Flore” (näide 8) proovib *Urlinie*’t ja motiivi omavahel tugevamalt seostada, asendades Schenkeri traditsioonilise laskuva *Urlinie* tõusva *Urlinie*’ga (♩–♩–♩), mille sellisena käis esmalt välja David Neumeyer (1987a). Samuti rakendab Burkhart oma analüüsis Neumeyeri ideed struktuuralsest keskmisest häälest, mille ta lisab Schenkeri kahehäälele *Ursatz*’ile (Neumeyer 1987b). Nõnda tõlgendatuna hõlmavad nii „tõusev *Urlinie*” kui ka motiiv mõlemad a-moll helirea ülemise tetrahordi. Selle tulemusena interpreteerib Burkhart takte 20–27 toonika prolongatsioonina, samas kui mina käsitan neid dominandi prolongatsioonina.