

# Walter Piston, Practical Theorist

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It hardly seems possible that Walter Piston would be a century old this year. Or even that it was eighteen years ago that he died. It doesn't even seem thirty-four years ago that he retired from teaching, so vivid is the memory of the man himself to many of us. But perhaps even more vivid than our personal memories of Walter Piston, which include his total dedication to his art, his quiet wit, his charm, modesty, generosity, and reserve, even more vivid than these is the legacy of his teaching, which so many of us knew so well and continue to know so well today because of the enduring value of his writings.

Many others have written about his compositions, which after a period of eclipse that was perhaps inevitable, even in Boston, are beginning to emerge again with the vigorous attention that they deserve. But it's the Piston of his four books that I particularly want to speak about today, in part because of our work together on *Harmony*, but also because I so much admire his economical, precise prose style. I suppose that everyone knows that Piston got a certificate in draftsmanship from the Massachusetts Normal Art School in 1916, even before entering Harvard to study music, and that his calligraphic scores were the basis of facsimile editions of many of his works. But I'm willing to hazard the suggestion that Piston might well have been able to make a decent living as a writer even if he had never become a musician.

I might get started by reading from some of Piston's writings, as I will have several occasions to do this afternoon. The following, which is as good as any for the characteristic flavor of his wit, is his 25th Reunion report to the Harvard Class of 1924:

After graduation I spent two years in Paris on the John Knowles Paine Fellowship, studying music and letting myself get impressed with the old world view of life and culture. Those were important years for me, for, besides learning how to waste time profitably, I discovered that I would probably become a composer. Now it is not from choice that one becomes a composer but rather, it seems, one does it in spite of everything and even against one's better judgment. But writing long-haired music is not a way to make a living and so I jumped at the chance offered me to return to Harvard as an assistant instructor in the Music Department. It turned out that I liked teaching very much indeed and found it the best possible occupation for a composer. Teaching

demands clarity in the knowledge of the subject taught and the continual contact with alert and inquisitive young creative minds acts as a preventive against complacency and stodgy self-satisfaction.

I have been at Harvard since 1926 and this year I was appointed to the newly established Walter W. Naumburg Professorship. Needless to say, I feel this to be a very great honor and I am overawed with the responsibility to fill the post in a manner to some degree worthy of those who will succeed me through the years. In the same year, 1948, my third symphony won the Pulitzer Prize in music.

Unfortunately, I cannot relate any thrilling war adventures to match those of my classmates. It is true that I was one of the few allowed out in the dark on Belmont Hill during simulated air attacks. But I am sure the neighbors would have felt somewhat less secure had they known the incompleteness of my technique in civilian defense. At the same time, I do not wish for another war even though I might at last discover how you make those iron hats stay on when you lean forward.

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I speak of Piston as a *practical theorist* because he wasn't a theoretical theorist, if I may use that expression. He was a composer who taught music theory, and practical theory is how to do certain things in music. The theoretical foundation of his writings is functional harmony tracing back through Riemann to Rameau, and filtered through any number of other writers of practical manuals, yes, even Percy Goetschius, later through Foote and Spalding, and eventually to Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger was in fact the dedicatee of Piston's first book, *Principles of Harmonic Analysis*, published in a limited edition by E.C. Schirmer in 1933 and nearly impossible to find for many years until it was reprinted in 1987. The title is suggestive enough of what theory meant to Piston, and indeed I don't know of any other book by anybody that is purely about harmonic analysis. "The purpose of this book," he wrote in the Introduction, "is not to pursue an immediate investigation of contemporary harmonic technique, but to help lay the foundation for this investigation by clarifying accepted theory and showing what the common practice of composers has been." The pedagogical principle is stated even more strongly in the Preface to the first edition of *Harmony*: "If we reflect that theory must follow practice, rarely preceding it except by chance, we must realize that musical theory is not a set of directions for composing music. It is rather the collected and systematized deductions gathered by observing the practice of composers over a long time, and it attempts to set forth what is or has been their common practice. It tells not how music will be written in the future, but how music has been written in the past."

We recognize this as above all a composer's viewpoint. Piston had no interest in the theory of music that could be written, and as little trust in the predictive possibilities of systems as Schoenberg had — which is to say, rather less than either Berg or Webern, but we don't need to get into that here. More to the point, Piston harbored a lively distrust of systematic methods of analysis beyond a certain point. When I remarked to him that I admired the writings of George Perle, whose *Serial Composition and Atonality* I found on Piston's shelves, Piston told me that he very much liked the book himself, because, as he said, "he writes above all about the *music*."

Going back to Piston's first book, I'll spend a minute or two on it simply because it is so little known today. *Principles of Harmonic Analysis* is short, 90 pages in all. The text is terse and spare, most of the space being taken up by well-chosen examples; of the 117 of these in *Principles*, 30 were used again in *Harmony*. There are only four chapters. The first, "Harmonic Material," is organized according to all the different types of chords generated by each scale degree. Thus chords on the tonic, for instance, include the tonic triad, seventh chords including V7 of IV, major and minor V9 of IV, and the diminished triad and diminished seventh chord on the raised tonic, which he labels Vo of II; the tonic triad with raised fifth is thrown in for good measure; only 24 lines of text are needed to discuss eleven examples under the category of roman numeral I.

Chapter 2 is "Contrapuntal Material," 9 pages of classification of nonharmonic tones, and it's interesting that Piston includes the pedal point within this classification, because he moved it out of the chapter on nonharmonic tones in *Harmony*.

Chapter 3 of *Harmonic Analysis*, "Modulation," includes a section on different types of cadences, which became an independent chapter in *Harmony*. At one point he says, "A half cadence may be confused with an authentic cadence denoting a modulation to the key of the dominant, in case the dominant chord in the cadence is preceded by V of V. If the next phrase begins in the original tonic key, one might say it would be pointless to consider a modulation to the dominant key." Piston thus summarizes a significant philosophical problem in a nutshell, but his later treatment of it in *Harmony* was never entirely satisfactory, and I do not flatter myself that I did much better in the fourth and fifth editions. The final chapter of *Harmonic Analysis* is four pages on the twentieth century, in five sections. No examples are given, though 23 works are mentioned. An Appendix gives scores of ten pieces, seven of them complete movements, by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms, and Franck; these are equipped with root analyses, labeled nonharmonic tones, and extensive explanatory footnotes.

All in all, *Principles of Harmonic Analysis* is an excellent small book despite its limited pedagogical application. Even without written exercises, it could still be useful for review. But it was doubtless apparent to Piston even in 1933 that he would eventually have much more to say about harmonic analysis, and this would be the main reason why, eight years later, he brought forth a book that could be used for a year-long course. I'll come back to *Harmony* in a while.

Piston's *Counterpoint* of 1947 is the least well-known of his later books, but it is still durable, still in print, and indeed there exists a published translation into Swedish which I haven't seen. A good friend of mine, a theorist and musicologist, tells me he still regards the Piston counterpoint book as the best counterpoint book he ever saw. But there's no doubt that it's an unusual kind of pedagogy. It presupposes no prior background in strict counterpoint, but rather a background of voice-leading as approached from the study of four-part harmony. The rules of voice-leading are developed almost entirely within the scope of the chapter on two-part counterpoint, and then within the context of sizable illustrations from Bach, Mozart, Handel and Brahms; the paradigms are relatively few and hardly more elaborate than those in Chapter 3 of *Harmony*. In the light of the widespread popularity of teaching sixteenth-century counterpoint at the freshman level that began in the 1960's, I queried Piston about the value of mastering species motions before proceeding to the long melodic line of Bach counterpoint, and especially how it would be helpful to the harmony student, in that problematic

chapter which Piston called "Harmonization of a Given Part," to have a grasp of first-species motion as applied to melody and bass. I'll never forget his reply. "Oh, yes," he said, "that species counterpoint is very valuable. Of course, it's not *music*." This is, of course, only part of what would have been his verdict on counterpoint instruction as it is increasingly valued today. The other part of it would be the evidence of his first two chapters in the counterpoint book, dealing first and foremost with the melodic line, its shape and rhythmic organization, and, in the next two chapters, the harmonic foundation supporting the melodic activity. He writes thus in Chapter 3:

Contrapuntal dissonance is created by melodic nonharmonic tones. ...We may accept the term nonharmonic, since such tones are ordinarily not members of the accompanying harmony, but their purely melodic significance can hardly be overemphasized. As a group they are sometimes called nonessential tones, a characterization which is true only as far as harmony is concerned. Melodically these tones are the opposite of nonessential, often being themselves the distinctive features of individual melodies.

As always, the appeal is to the foreground. How far behind the foreground did Piston peer? I especially liked Examples 20 and 21 in Chapter 1 of *Counterpoint*, a melody from Handel's *Royal Fireworks Music* together with Piston's own derivation of a "fundamental succession" from this melody, which he hedged as follows:

The individual and definitive form of the melody as left by the composer is all-important. It may be of interest to find that two different melodies can be reduced to the same simple scale line, but the value of this as a discovery can be, and often is, greatly overestimated. ...It is important to see that in the process of analysis and simplification we do not destroy or lose sight of those details of a melody which are the essence of its individuality and expressive quality.

When I remarked about this to Piston, "You know, your reduction of that Handel melody is not so far from what Schenker might have done on his way to a middleground," all he did was smile indulgently. On another occasion, after I had proposed a different way of introducing the secondary dominant principle at an earlier stage in *Harmony*, he wrote to me on July 13, 1976: "Sorry I have a distaste for that Musikwissenschaft jargon, like tonicization etc."

If he distrusted Schenker, I would guess that this distrust could only have come from lack of familiarity, although I have no certain knowledge of how well he knew the work of Schenker or any other German theorists. Piston mentioned Josef Yasser once in Music 218, but the only book he suggested that we look at was John Vincent's book on modes, and that was by one of his own students. In Music 218 he got as far as describing Fritz Heinrich Klein's multi-intervallic chords of 1925, but he didn't relate Klein's *Grossmutterakkord* to Alban Berg's all-interval set from the *Lyric Suite*. Nevertheless he knew much earlier that there were a number of these self-retrograding all-interval sets, unlike Berg, who claimed that there was only one. Piston told of having coffee in Hazen's — some of you may remember it in the building which later was torn down to make way for Forbes Plaza — with Nicolas Slonimsky, who was then working on his *Thesaurus of Musical Scales and Patterns*, published in 1947. Slonimsky showed Piston a chart on which he had written out several of these *Mutterakkorde*. At that moment Hindemith came in and joined them, and then, according to Piston, wrote out a few more, saying to Slonimsky, "Here's some you may not have thought of." Of course, Piston told this story in 1960, five

years or so before Bauer-Mengelberg's generalized search for self-retrograding all-interval sets which turned up 1,928 of them.

Piston's *Orchestration* was published in 1955 and I bought it that same year. I still regard it as the best of all texts on the subject, certainly the best in English, and far more practical than the venerable models of Berlioz-Strauss, Widor, or Rimsky-Korsakov. It deals comprehensively with the norms of instrumental usage and has little if any interest in specialized or avant-garde techniques. Above all, Piston's *Orchestration* has set a standard for the systematic analysis of orchestral texture in a way that has not been approached even by the best of the book's competitors. "Analysis of Orchestration" forms a large Part Two of the book. Here is a short paragraph that I have always especially cherished:

A word of warning is sounded against a too pedantic and literal approach to the analysis. One seeks an answer to the question why certain procedures are followed, but, orchestration being an art and not a science, one must ever be prepared to find no good reason. Some questions are never answered. Imperfections may exist even in the works of the masters, and these are worth discovering, but it must not be forgotten that the unaccountable stroke of genius is also a reality. (p. 356)

Piston's *Harmony* was his first full-sized theory text and is still the most popular of his books. When it first appeared in 1941 it had the field virtually to itself, because it was the first American harmony text to include a preponderance of examples from actual music instead of paradigms and formulae. Today, of course, there are many American harmony books, and some of them, such as those by Allen Forte, Joel Lester, and Richard Franko Goldman, are excellent; nearly all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, owe something to Piston's as a model, and only the very idiosyncratic book *Harmonic Practice* by Roger Sessions persists in minimizing illustrative examples from the literature.

When the first edition of *Harmony* was published, I was a year old. The revised edition, which came out seven years later, was barely different from the first. This was what I was trained out of, beginning in 1957 when as a freshman at Harvard I took Music 51 under the expert instruction of Daniel Pinkham, who was a visiting professor that year. I had been urged — no, begged is more like it — by my freshman advisor not to take Music 51, which, he told me, had caused his other advisees to have nervous breakdowns because it was so difficult. Fortunately I waved aside his advice, and I think in retrospect that if I had not been encouraged by what I learned in Music 51 I might very well have not gone into music as a career.

Piston's book served for a repeat exposure when during senior year I took Music 154, advanced harmony, under another unlikely harmony teacher who turned out to be absolutely first-rate — David Hughes. It's only fair to add that Professor Hughes supplemented Piston's text for a few weeks in the spring term with a book that Piston would have decidedly not approved of — Salzer's *Structural Hearing*, which marked my first exposure, through a glass however darkly, to Schenker analysis. But there's no doubt that I was well prepared at Harvard to teach harmony out of Piston's text when I began my teaching career three years later in the fall of 1964 at Reed College, and by that time *Harmony* was in a third edition. This third edition was a more comprehensive revision than the second, and included an entirely new chapter called "Extension of Tonality." We recognize in that chapter a few ideas, such as the extended secondary dominant principle, that Piston had alluded to in his famous Music 218, *Studies in Twentieth-century Music*. He had himself come a good distance since *Principles of*

*Harmonic Analysis*, in which he wrote "the use of such terms as II of IV, III of V, etc., would be stretching the bounds of tonality to perhaps an impossible extreme," for in the third edition of *Harmony* he wrote about a Bach chorale: "The last chord in the second measure from the end, F minor, is obviously here II of IV rather than V of B flat, so that its dominant before it has been given the somewhat awkward but nonetheless accurate designation as V of II of IV." (p. 332)

In the summer of 1975 Claire Brook, Music Editor at W. W. Norton & Company, sent around a questionnaire to various teachers around the country who had been steady users of Piston's *Harmony*, asking for suggestions about possible revisions to be incorporated into a forthcoming fourth edition. I felt the single-page questionnaire to be inadequate to what I wanted to say, and instead I wrote back a nine-page single-space letter, supplemented by three pages of examples. I called for, among many other things, an extensive amplification of Piston's stated principle that "chords are made by moving voices," especially by incorporating more of a species-oriented linear approach to harmony, if that could be done without completely changing the character of the book. I also said that Piston's approach to harmonic progression in the minor mode exclusively through the harmonic minor scale, with the mediant triad exclusively in the augmented form, was not accepted by most of the harmony-teaching community today — indeed, it had been severely criticized in Saul Novack's 1962 review. I included a multitude of other suggestions large and small, apologizing with the remark that only one who loved the book as much as I could dare to be so critical of it. A few weeks later I got a reply from Mrs. Brook thanking me for the care I had lavished on my comprehensive response, and expressing also her eternal gratitude that not many other people were as energetic in their response as I was, and would I be interested in serving as an active collaborator with Mr. Piston on the revision, in view of his advanced years and retirement from active teaching?

I expressed keen interest, but my teaching schedule for the fall semester at the University of New Hampshire had begun again and *Harmony* went on the back burner for several months. When correspondence resumed in March 1976, several things had happened. Kathryn Nason Piston had died in February, and Piston himself, 82 years old, was leading a more isolated life than ever, brushing aside all but the most delicate and tactful efforts by his friends to help him shoulder the burden of her loss. He was finishing up his last composition, the Concerto for String Quartet, Winds, and Percussion, that had been commissioned by the Portland Symphony Orchestra and the Portland String Quartet. Claire Brook visited him in early June, and her next letter to me said, "He allowed that you are probably the *only* ex-student with whom he would be willing to collaborate... I get the feeling that, after a bit of reassurance, he will be willing to place the matter almost entirely in your hands, retaining veto right and various other *droits de seigneur*." In a subsequent letter a month later, Mrs. Brook expressed the hope that a manuscript could be delivered to Norton in June 1977, for publication in March 1978. She had already sent to Piston a copy of my 9-page letter of the previous summer, "so he will have, by the next time you speak with him, the full force of your audacity. I somehow don't think it will faze him in the slightest. As he himself said, he comes from 'tough old Yankee stock.'"

I visited Piston twice at 127 Somerset Street in Belmont during the next two months, and in between I wrote up a sample chapter on harmony and melody, with a variety of examples. Our discussion was far-ranging, but he did manage to show me the pirated Chinese edition of *Harmony* that had been discovered in, of all places, the Chinese library at Harvard, by a visiting student from Taiwan. On October 1 he wrote:

Dear Mark,

Thanks for the typewriter ribbon. Let me know how much I owe for it. I have been studying your comments on Chap. Three — very good. Rather than trying to argue points by letter let me say that when the book comes out (!) you will find some cribs from your expressed thoughts. It is an overstatement to say that I like mine better, because it is not exactly that. I am getting on with the job rather well.

By all means put in my name to the Guggenheim. I know of nobody who deserves it more, though I must add that my batting average is not too high of late. I no longer have cronies on the board, and as you know these things are settled in a certain amount of mystery. Let's hope for the best.

I think it will be great to go to Vienna. Wish I could, too.

Yours,

W. P.

This was after I had visited him before the fall semester began. I asked him if he needed anything, such as, for instance, would he enjoy a couple of lobsters from the New Hampshire seacoast? He declined graciously, but I was concerned, as several others were, about his ability to look after himself. He told me that he was on a diabetic diet, not that he had diabetes but that his physician was concerned that the disease could develop if he didn't watch his diet. He also told me that it was difficult for him to go upstairs, so he had taken to spending nights on the living room couch.

I wrote to him again on October 25, mentioning that I would like to come to see him a week or two after the AMS national meetings, because I was hurriedly preparing to read a paper on November 5. You can read his reply of October 28 in which he announced that he had finished the revision. I wrote him a letter congratulating him and asking to see his manuscript as soon as I could come to visit.

I got back from the Washington meeting on November 7 and expected to call Piston to go to see him later in the week. I will always regret that I didn't do so that very day. He died in his sleep on November 12. At a memorial service on December 6, the Portland Quartet played the Adagio from Piston's Fourth Quartet, Doriot Anthony Dwyer and Luise Vosgerchian played the Flute Sonata, and seven of Piston's friends and former students gave their affectionate recollections.

Meanwhile there now was the question of how to deal with the *Harmony* fourth edition. It had to be shelved until Piston's testamentary situation could be resolved, but this created a serious time bind with the publisher. The new chapter that Piston had written was not released by the executor until May 1977; by that time, W. W. Norton & Company had committed to publishing a fourth edition to go on sale for the 1978-79 academic year. When at last we saw Piston's final revision, we knew that it was not sufficient for a comprehensive new edition. I was asked to get to work at once even without a contract, and so I did; virtually all my work on the fourth edition was completed during the summer of 1977, with some details extending as late as October, when the contract was finally signed by all parties. It was

only at that point that an editorial decision was made to have all the musical examples, new and old, reengraved using a musical typewriter, and this added a lot more work to an already tight schedule. I remember how, in the middle of a busy semester of teaching, I stayed up all night finishing the index and then drove in to Portsmouth to put it on the 7 AM Greyhound bus to New York.

All of Piston's chapters in the third edition underwent some revision for the fourth. Chapter 1 was expanded to include a description of the chromatic scale and the circle of fifths. Chapter 3, traditionally the most difficult chapter in the book, was amplified by a more systematic description of voice-leading rules. I came eventually to agree with Leo Kraft that the rules for the direct octave and fifth are much more closely heeded by theory teachers than by composers, and I would urge teachers to tone these down in class. Chapter 4 is a new chapter which attempts to set in order the confusing idiosyncrasies of the minor mode; the new exercises I wrote for this chapter specifically ask for the ascending or descending forms to be used at particular spots. Chapter 5, "Tonality and Modality," brings in the secondary dominant principle at a far earlier stage than Piston did, ten chapters earlier, in fact; this is to allow for the appearance of the major triad on the minor seventh degree as the dominant of the mediant in minor. I still feel that it is important to acclimatize the student at an early stage to the close kinship of relative major and minor, and especially to the association of these keys in different musical forms from folksongs to sonata movements.

Chapter 7, "Function and Structure of Melody," is the chapter that Piston rejected when I gave it to him in draft, although I hope, naturally enough, that I have rewritten it so comprehensively that he would have approved of it. It owes a lot to his own first two chapters in the counterpoint book, and to his later discussion of motive structure. One novelty is the treatment of polyphonic melody, which necessitated some rudimentary Schenker graphing, but that is kept to a minimum. It is doubtless a disadvantage to have this chapter come directly before Chapter 8, in which nonharmonic tones are discussed systematically, but it's a certainty that at least the concept of passing tone will have been raised in class even before Chapter 8, and in fact I recommend that the two chapters be studied together. As it is, Chapter 8 is still too overloaded and complex; the thoughtful teacher will send students on scavenger hunts for the different types of nonharmonic tones, and devise exercises that address the different types individually. Chapter 10, "Harmonization of a Given Part," or "Harmonization of a Melody," as it is called in the fifth edition, is one of the most heavily revised in the book, to accommodate a large new section called "Contrapuntal Approach: Melody and Bass." Piston's original chord-by-chord approach is kept intact, however, in deference to the many teachers who still swear by it.

In Chapter 14, "Modulation," the concept of intermediate modulation is introduced, a more narrowly-defined version of what Piston originally called "false modulation" in his chapter on the Neapolitan sixth chord. I added a lot to this chapter that I now think of as inescapably stuffy, but I did manage, I think, to provide some provocative examples as well as useful answers to some questions that often come to the surface.

Most of Piston's later chapters have not been changed much. Much of the last chapter of the third edition, "Extension of Tonality," was reincorporated into Chapter 18, a new chapter called "Problems in Harmonic Analysis," together with the concept of dual-function chords, which can be understood as pivot chords without modulation. Another section in this chapter is called "Violations of Rules of Voice Leading," to which I privately give the subtitle, "What You're Supposed to Think When Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven Write Parallel Fifths." Chapter 23, "Nondominant Harmony," includes new



sections on the tonic and subdominant triads with added sixth and the half-diminished seventh chord. In Chapter 27, the traditional analysis of the augmented sixth chords has been completely revised; in the fifth edition, the doubly augmented fourth chord has been given the sobriquet of "Swiss sixth." Chapter 28 has been amplified by an extended discussion of Victor Yellin's omnibus progression, with examples from Schubert to Musorgsky.

The new Part II, "After Common Practice," containing Chapters 29 through 32, comes most directly out of what Piston taught in Music 218, and includes several examples which he showed us in that class, as well as a few from his 1976 chapter draft. The text of virtually all of Part II, however, is mine. Part II was included in response to a widespread demand for coverage of twentieth-century harmonic materials, and Part II is responsible for the major portion of the increased size of the book. Eight years later, when the fifth edition was planned, the publisher asked whether such a big book were warranted. A survey of theory teachers turned up a curious fact: no, very few of them actually taught Part II, and yes, all of them emphatically wanted Part II to remain an integral part of the book. So there it is.

There's no doubt that, because of the rushed schedule, the fourth edition wound up containing a number of things that I thought better of later. Some of these infelicities were pointed out by Christopher Hasty in a long review in the *Journal of Music Theory*, and I dare say that I even agreed with much of that review; but what pleased me most was that Hasty said that all of my revisions had been carried out with the utmost respect for Piston's work. I still believe that to be true, notwithstanding that I am well aware of including a number of things that Piston would probably not have approved individually.

In the fifth edition, most of what I was unhappy with has been cleaned up, and *Harmony* as it stands today ought to be able to survive for a few more years. It has a remarkable breadth of appeal to the community of harmony teachers, for better or worse. One theorist told me that the core of the book is in the Table of Usual Root Progressions in Chapter 3 — the very part that I tell my own students to take with a truckload of salt, but that I don't dare to delete purely because so many long-time users like it. I'm still waiting for comments on the fifth edition's new chapter on musical texture. This is inspired by Piston's orchestration book but it's unique, I think, as an ingredient of harmony books today.

Not everybody likes the revisions, of course. I got quite a few comment cards along the line of "The third edition was just fine! Why is DeVoto mucking it up?" And a somewhat smaller number of comments from old-guard Schenkerians like my good friend Arthur Komar, who wondered why I would want to beat a dead horse. And one professor who said that he could not possibly adopt *Harmony* because it made no mention of the eleven-interval-class system. And an irate letter from someone demanding to know how I could possibly perpetuate such sexist stereotypes as "masculine and feminine cadences." I took the hint, and the fifth edition has "downbeat and upbeat cadences." But I personally feel that nearly everything that I have added to the fourth and fifth editions remains true to Piston's own philosophy and spirit, and I imagine hopefully that if he had lived I could have persuaded him in the long run that, for instance, the real mediant in the minor mode is a major triad, or that the German sixth chord is not a chromatically raised subdominant. I do remember that he admitted, in our discussions, that the augmented-triad form of III in the minor is a very rare bird indeed. But if he had seen my Chapter 4 I'm sure he would have said, justifiably, that I had made too complicated a paradigm for the tonal functions in the minor mode.

The biggest hindrance to the use of Piston's *Harmony* today is that the book is perceived as too difficult. We all know, too, that harmony is being cut back everywhere in the undergraduate curriculum today, and few colleges still require a two-year sequence in harmony for music majors. The tendency everywhere is toward the adoption of books like Ottman's, which I find much too simple-minded in its conceptual treatment of harmony, and much too complex in its analytical notation.

Accordingly I have a complex of answers when people ask me about what I myself see in Piston's *Harmony* as having the most enduring pedagogical value today. It certainly isn't this rule or that one, or this or that sequence of chapters. Most of all, the book is loaded with examples from the literature, from real music, which are of precise application to the text. In the long run this ought to be what holds the student's attention best from first to last. The examples are a reminder, every time one opens the book, of the importance of studying scores. In the concluding remarks to *Harmony*, Piston spoke of what comes after one works one's way through the book. Further course work is important, he said, but analysis of scores was even more so. Here are the concluding words of *Harmony*, from first edition to last:

The writer is aware that what has been outlined briefly in a few sentences amounts to virtually an endless assignment. It is not to be denied that the acquisition of a consummate knowledge of the practice of composers is a lifetime's work. *Ars longa, vita brevis*, but consolation may be derived from the thought that intellectual and artistic rewards are to be had at all stages along the way.