

**Thursday,
September 27, 2012
3:15-5 p.m. in U73**

Guest lecture in the seminar series
**Topics in the Aesthetics of
Music and Sound**

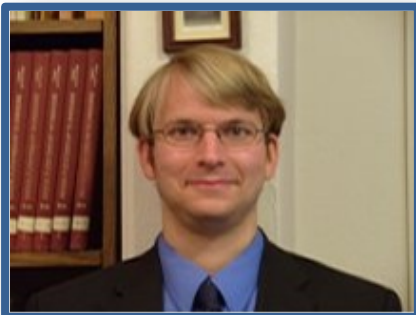
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Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture* as an Example of How Semiotics Can Inform Hermeneutics

Daniel John Carroll, BA

Graduate Teaching Assistant, School of Music, Boston University.
(Via Skype)



The literature on the narrative potential of instrumental musical compositions (those without a written text) encompasses a wide spectrum between the extreme formalists who believe that such works do not have any semantic nature at all but are purely “tonally moving forms,” and those who posit that they can indeed be interpreted for their underlying narrative structures which convey not only a plot in musical language, but even implicit ideological endorsements. As for the ability for music to fulfill the latter condition, the two main modes of

interpretation are semiotics, which generally focuses on the individual musical gestures as they can be said to be signs in a signifier-signified relationship, and hermeneutics, which generally entails the discernment of larger narrative schemes that encompass the entire composition.

While many musicologists not unjustifiably lament the inherent complexity of many semiotic systems that are applied to musical works, it seems that their consideration is very beneficial to the hermeneutic enterprise involving the entire composition. A comparatively simple way of discerning the signifying capacity of individual musical gestures is employing the principle of “mapping” in space, a method described by semioticians as the way the notation of the gesture itself conveys the impression of the object or idea it purports to signify. For this presentation, I shall discuss the *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture* by Tchaikovsky, both in terms of its entirety and in terms of many notable specific musical gestures, with respect to how this tendency for musical-visual “mapping” contributes to a clearer and more tenable understanding of the underlying themes of internal and interpersonal conflict and resolution within the work as they are applied from Shakespeare’s play.

ALL ARE WELCOME! 