The Larsen Motive:
a Survey of Motivic Usage in
Libby Larsen's *Corker, Slang,*
and *String Symphony, III*

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Music
Degree
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to my mother, Dr. Sheila M.T. Washington. Thank you for your constant support throughout these two years while I have been obtaining my Master's degree. You have always encouraged me to be myself and follow my dreams, no matter the obstacles or sacrifices. You have done so much for me that I am eternally grateful for. Thank you for your understanding, your sympathetic heart, and for always being my rock when I was crumbling under pressure. All of my fight and strength comes from you. You have always had more confidence in me than I do myself, and your faith in me keeps me going. I am so proud that I am your daughter, and I am thankful to call you mom. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

Libby Larsen presents a rhythmic motive in *Corker* (1977), *Slang* (1994) and "Ferocious Rhythm" from *String Symphony* (1999) as more than a memorable melody or tune. Her rhythmic motive has multiple connections within each piece. It has value and purpose that can be explained through multiple musical parameters. Larsen varies the application of her signature motive in these pieces over a period of 20 years. Its general rhythmic structure is a common thread that links these three works together, but the overall motive is used in individualized ways in each of the pieces.

This thesis will demonstrate that the rhythmic motive (labeled the Larsen Motive in this research) is a portal into understanding Libby Larsen's compositional approaches by exploring the Larsen Motive's local and global impacts on *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm." Pitch-class analysis and musical contour theory assist in understanding the relationships that exist among the occurrences of the motive in these works. This study will show that comprehension of the Larsen Motive is a gateway to understanding her compositional voice.

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Introduction

Libby Larsen's compositional voice exhibits a distinctly individual and American style. Though various aspects of her music are worthy of study, a well-defined rhythmic motive is present in her works, *Corker* for B-flat clarinet and percussion (1977), *Slang* for B-flat clarinet, violin, and piano (1994), and "Ferocious Rhythm," the third movement of *String Symphony* for string orchestra (1999), and it asserts itself as more than a memorable and prominent melodic figure. Its consistent rhythmic pattern connects occurrences of the motive while its migratory pitch and musical contours provide a vantage point for comparative analysis. This motive, here referred to as the "Larsen Motive" (henceforth labeled LM), serves as a listening strategy for these three works by providing a window into understanding her compositional methods (Note: see the LM in Figure 1, Chapter II, p. 9). These three works, composed within a 20-year time frame, are each developed locally by the pervasive LM. As a group, the three works also present an interesting study in observing subtle stylistic changes in Larsen's voice.

This thesis aims to demonstrate that the LM is a portal into understanding Libby Larsen's compositional approaches by exploring its local and global impacts on *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm." Pitch-class analysis and musical contour theory will assist in facilitating this survey of LM usage. This hybrid pitch-class/contour analysis approach presents a distinctive methodology for comprehending the motive's appearances and purposes throughout these compositions. Chapter I begins with a literature review of general scholarship on Libby Larsen, as well as specific resources used in this research. Chapter I also discusses Larsen's compositional influences and how each contributed to forming the LM. Chapter II elaborates on the unique approaches of pitch-class analysis and contour theory used in this thesis, as guided by relevant scholarship. Chapters III, IV, and V present analyses of the LM in *Corker*, *Slang*, and

"Ferocious Rhythm." The conclusion addresses ways this research can be expanded to explore even further relationships.

Chapter I: Review of Relevant Literature

This literature review will discuss the general scope of present scholarship on Libby Larsen, as well as discuss the literature that supports the research of this thesis. This chapter aims to offer insight into the different types of resources that can be found on Larsen, as well provide information on literature that contributes the analyses of *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm." The first section, "General Larsen Literature," discusses various articles, books, and doctoral studies on Larsen's compositional style, influences, contributions to women in music, and certain works. The second section, "Concepts from the Literature Integral to this Thesis," examines several direct influences on Larsen, including cartoon composer Carl Stalling as well as the ever-changing American vernacular. This review of literature is a representation of the scholarship that is written about the composer.

General Larsen Literature

The scholarship on Libby Larsen consists of articles and books on a wide variety of topics such as her compositional style, women in music, and nature. For instance, Denise Von Glahn's chapter on Larsen from her book, *Music and the Skillful Listener: American Women Compose for the Natural World* discusses Larsen's personal relationship with nature and how it greatly influences some of her compositions, namely *Missa Gaia: Mass for the Earth* and *Symphony: Water Music*. While Larsen gathered inspiration from Handel's *Water Music Suite in D major* and Debussy's *La Mer*, she recalled her younger days sailing on Lake Harriet in

Minneapolis while composing the piece.[1] Larsen discusses her sailing experiences with Von Glahn and how she connected with the water and wind, which helped shape her *Water Music*.[2] Karin Pendle's *Women and Music* proposes that Larsen's opera *Frankenstein, the Modern Prometheus,* is a fusion of traditional opera with video and audio technology that contributes to the growing role of creativity in women composers. Pendle's work acknowledges Larsen's synthesis of Mary Shelley's novel and the dilemma of technology.[3] In particular, Larsen's opera explores how technology reduces human beings' intellectual abilities and ambitions, leading to self-alienation within society.[4] Rosemary N. Killam's "Women Working: An Alternative to Gans," embarks on a feminist analysis of Larsen's *Songs from Letters*. Killam gives her own definition of feminist analysis, which includes three concepts: (1) the context of the analysis should be based on current research and on women's experiences, (2) the intention of the analysis should be clear and for practical use, and (3) the analysis acknowledges personal experiences.[5] These three points assist Killam into her study of Larsen's *Songs from Letters* as it intertwines musical analysis, feminist studies, and linguistics.

The studies and analyses of Larsen's music that aim to explore her compositional style and works are bountiful because of the composer's prolificacy. For example, stylistic analyses of Larsen's music are found in Douglas Boyer's dissertation, "The Choral Music of Libby Larsen: An Analytical Study of Style." In his study Boyer investigates Larsen's choral compositional style by analyzing two of her a capella works, *How it Thrills Us* and *Who Cannot Weep, Come*

[1] Denise Von Glahn, "Libby Larsen" in *Music and the Skillful Listener: American Women Compose for the Natural World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 244, 246.

[2] Ibid., 246.

[3] Karin Pendle, "North America since 1920" in *Women & Music: A History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 357.

[4] Ibid., 357.

[5] Rosemary N. Killam, "Women Working: An Alternative to Gans," *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 31, no. 2 (1993): 231-232.

Learn Me. Boyer aims to provide insight into her choral compositional approaches by focusing on the elements of text, form, harmony, melody and rhythm in these two works. He also discusses performance and conducting issues associated with *How it Thrills Us* and *Who Cannot Weep, Learn Me*. Larry Smith's doctoral study "The Choral Music of Libby Larsen and Stephen Paulus: An Examination and Comparison of Styles" is a direct comparative analysis of the two former colleagues' (both attended the University of Minnesota) choral styles in regards to form, text settings, rhythm, harmonic characteristics, voicing, and performance interpretations. Smith's goal is not only to compare and contrast the styles of Larsen and Paulus, but also provide an informative guide for choral musicians, conductors, and educators who intend on choosing works by these two composers.

Concepts from the Literature Integral to this Thesis

The review of the literature reveals two of Libby Larsen's personal inspirations, cartoon composer Carl Stalling and the American vernacular, connect strongly with the present analytical approach to her music. The analyses of the three works, *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm" of *String Symphony* in this study will connect concrete musical observations with Larsen's sources of inspirations described below.

Libby Larsen's unique compositional voice has been influenced in part by popular and film music, which is why she found cartoon music composer Carl Stalling to be highly influential.[6] Stalling was the well-known composer of the music in the Warner Brothers'

[6] Linda R. Moorhouse, "Libby Larsen," from *A Composer's Insight: Thoughts, Analysis, and Commentary on Contemporary Masterpieces for Wind Band*, Vol. 2, ed. Timothy Salzman, (Galesville, MD: Meredith Music Publications, 2003), 57.

"Looney Tunes" cartoons.[7] Larsen places Stalling as one of her great American music inspirations because of "the way in which he constructed compact 'sound bite' scores," which defined "… the influence and development of the media, timing and culture over the past sixty years."[8] Stalling relied heavily on popular songs while composing cartoon music.[9] His humorous and practical personality as a composer made the synthesis of music, animation, and narrative seamless with his use of popular music, therefore establishing the Warner Bros. style.[10] He learned from his prior work as a silent film accompanist to integrate popular songs into his music to enhance the on-screen story, a quality that Larsen greatly admired about Stalling's music.[11]

Larsen's deep-rooted exuberance for American culture likewise shapes her compositions. In her chapter on Libby Larsen in *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music: Nine American Composers*, Tina Milhorn Stallard explains that "Larsen's focus on incorporating American vernacular into her compositions naturally applies to rhythm and melody, yet many of her instrumental works are idea based, incorporating her knack for storytelling and communicating broader concepts, such as the way different audiences embrace the synthesis of traditional performance and contemporary media."[12] Stallard goes on to state that Larsen believes that her music can be "recognized by its rhythm more than anything else."[13] According to Linda Moorhouse, her fascination with rhythms comes from the "rhythms and pitches of

[7] Moorhouse, 57.

[8] Ibid., 57.

[9] Daniel Goldmark, "Carl Stalling and Popular Music in Warner Bros. Cartoons" in *Tunes for 'toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 10.

[10] Daniel Goldmark, "Carl Stalling and Popular Music in Warner Bros. Cartoons" in *Tunes for 'toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11.

[11] Ibid., 10.

[12] Tina Milhorn Stallard, "Libby Larsen," in *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music: Nine American Composers*, ed. Michael K. Slayton, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), 193.

[13] Milhorn Stallard, 193.

spoken American English or vernacular."[14] Moorhouse contends that Larsen continually studies and examines "rhythmic patterns, pitch, tempo, and phrase contour in American spoken English."[15] She carefully observes everyday conversations, and her reflections on these conversations prove to be influential on her compositions. She speaks of the fluidity of our language and how it continues to evolve every day in new ways.[16] Larsen feels that our language has become "…more inflected lately. It's more slighted, curved, and hooked."[17] Larsen believes that the American language is continually becoming more individualistic, with its rhythms, cadences, and inflections, and it is adapting to reflect the ever-changing American culture. The variety and character that Larsen analyzes in American vernacular influences her rhythmic approach, which is impactful on her music.

This review of literature shows the various stylistic and historical perspectives that contribute to scholarship on Larsen. This thesis will also contribute to the scholarship on Larsen because it will demonstrate new methodologies and approaches to analyzing her music, which will be displayed through empirical evidence of the LM in *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm." Having traced her inspirations and background, Chapter II contains a description of the LM as well as an explanation of how pc analysis and music contour theory are uniquely employed to support the LM's usage

[14] Moorhouse, "Libby Larsen" 58.
[15] Ibid., 58.
[16] Ibid., 59.
[17] Jennifer Kelly, "Libby Larsen," in *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 311
.

Chapter II: The Larsen Motive

Deborah Rifkin simply defines a motive as "an ordered progression of pitches that is repeated within and across musical levels."[18] This definition is applicable to a repetitive portion of music, whether it is melodic, thematic, or rhythmic. "The Larsen Motive" is a governing rhythmic motive that occurs pervasively in Libby Larsen's *Corker, Slang,* and the third movement of *String Symphony*, "Ferocious Rhythm." This chapter proposes that pitch-class (pc) analysis and contour theory can assist in revealing aspects of her LM usage by providing basic explanations of the methods themselves and to contextualize their appropriateness of application. First, this chapter will outline the LM's general infrastructure and possible influences. Second, the discussion will identify how pc analysis assists in examining the LM for this thesis. Third, this chapter will offer a basic explanation of contour theory, which will contribute to the forthcoming analyses of the LM. Expounding on these analytical methods will clarify the significance of Larsen's employment of the common motive found in *Corker, Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm," and this will set the foundation for the analyses in Chapters III, IV and V.

The Larsen Motive's Function and Shape

The LM appears in *Corker, Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm" of *String Symphony* as an energetic rhythmic motive. Figure 1 shows a rhythmic representation of the LM: its pitch and contour content will be discussed in Chapters III, IV, and V.

[18] Deborah Rifkin, "A Theory of Motives for Prokofiev's Music," *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 26, no. 2 (2004): 266.
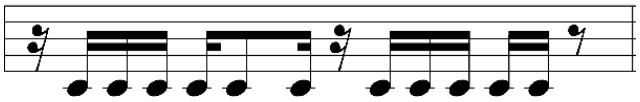


Figure 1. The Larsen Motive: Rhythmic Reduction of the LM in Corker, Slang*, and "*Ferocious Rhythm*."*

Its jagged and choppy disposition helps define its individuality and lends itself well to repetition. The rhythmic structure of the LM is consistent throughout all three works. The nature of the LM's rhythm provides a controlled variable within the analytical framework. It not only acts as a local-level theme to create thematic recognition, but it serves as a global signpost in each piece for comparing long-range pitch and contour relationships.

Libby Larsen's frequent use of the LM may be derived from her admiration for Carl Stalling's recognizable sound bites. His repeatable sounds bites and motives in cartoons influenced the story and characters, which is similar to the LM's function in the three works of this study. It is possible to perceive the LM likewise as a "sound bite" in her music: it influences the character -- notably pitch content, as will be seen the forthcoming chapters -- of the music from the point of each recurrence. The LM reflects Carl Stalling's motives in his music for animation because it influences these compositions by giving each piece a distinct character but retaining an overall consistent musical style.

Larsen's inclination to gradually vary the LM with a consistent repetitive rhythmic framework is perhaps derived from her infatuation with American vernacular. The LM in *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm" share exactly the same syncopated rhythm – analogous

to a common language spoken among a group of people – while each piece contains its own personality or employment of that consistent language. The LM is thus similar to how individuals speaking the same language modify certain phrases according to socio-cultural, geographical, or personalized influences. Indeed, the LM is perhaps a reflection of both musical and cultural influences.

Analyzing the LM Part I: Pitch Class Analysis Used in this Thesis

The use of pc analysis in this examination of Libby Larsen's *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm" is to reveal specific pitch relations among instances of the LM. Pc analysis facilitates the comprehension of the ever-changing pitch collections within the consistent rhythmic structure. Allen Forte states that pc analysis was developed with specific musical repertoire in mind, the atonal music at the beginning of the twentieth century.[19] Forte defends pc analysis as a successful way to contextualize pitch relationships in non-tonal environments, which is a goal for this research regarding the LM's pitch relationships.

With the emphasis on rhythm and motivic independence, pc analysis remains an essential analytical tool when considering post-tonal music. According to Joseph N. Straus, "set theory emerged in response to the motivic and contextual nature of post-tonal music."[20] Straus stresses the importance of motivic individuality involved in set theory. Since Larsen's compositional voice in these three works is highly motivic, pc analysis is an ideal analytical tool to study her music. Straus also states that in the twentieth century, motives became independent and function

[19] Allen Forte, "Pitch-Class Set Analysis Today," Musical Analysis, Vol. 4, no. 1 (1984): 33.
[20] Joseph N. Straus, "A Primer for Atonal Set Theory," *College Music Symposium*, Vol. 31 (1991): 1.

as primary structural determinants, which is the case in *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm."[21] Pc analysis is a flexible technique that enables ways to interpret harmonic relationships without tonal connotations. It presents freedom and creativity; thus the analytical tool reflects the very nature of Larsen's motivic usage. Straus describes set theory as follows:

> Set theory is not a single language, but a community of local dialects and subcultures. It is best understood not as a rigidly prescribed practice, but as an array of flexible tools for discovering and interpreting musical relationships. It should be emphasized that these relationships can and should be enjoyably audible.[22]

This statement by Straus illustrates the unique approach of pc analysis to demonstrate the pitch relationships on the local and global structural levels.

Several prominent theorists have used novel applications of pc analysis. David Lewin employed pc analysis in his analyses of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Klavierstück III* to organize and navigate transformational pitch class networks. [23] His networks showed connections of the broad pc relationships that occur throughout *Klavierstück III,* which is also an objective of the LM analysis. Paul Wilson likewise utilized pc analysis as a tool to theorize on Bartók's complex pitch networks in his "large structure, form and tonal orientation" through analyses of the composer's large instrumental works.[24] Wilson traced pitches over time to reveal how expansive pitch relations can impact formal designs. These scholars took the creative initiative to utilize pc analysis for better understanding of specific theoretical perspectives. This thesis will aspire to accomplish the same goals while analyzing the LM.

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[21] Straus, 1.

[22] Straus, 2.

[23] See David Lewin's *Musical Form and Transformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[24] Paul Wilson, "First Steps toward a Theory" in *The Music of Béla Bartók*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 15.

In the present analyses of Larsen's *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm," pc analysis is applied to the motive's harmonic implications, which contain tonal "spheres."[25] Larsen's music does not contain concrete tonal centers, but she implies pitch centers within her music by outlining triads or focusing on a particular pitch. According to Tina Milhorn Stallard, "Larsen's intention is to create areas of tonality in which color and suggestion are paramount."[26] Larsen composes freely inside the implied tonal areas, supported by intervallic saturation and the usage of pedal points.[27] Larsen creates vertical harmonies that are conceived linearly,[28] but the *linear* harmonic palette of the motive will occupy the focus of this research. The LM's syncopated rhythm places great importance on horizontal pitch elements that Stallard mentions as a characteristic of Larsen's music. Pc analysis will assist in explaining and contextualizing the linear and vertical harmonic relationships present among the LM use in these works.

Analyzing the LM Part II: Contour Analysis Used in this Thesis

Melodic contour is an important aspect of the LM. Tracing the consistently changing melodic contours of the LM within the static rhythmic framework will, like pc analysis, help trace the motive's various shapes and usage in *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm." Therefore, this examination of Larsen's music will also use musical contour theory to study the LM. The following portion of Chapter II discusses how theorists have employed contour theory and how it relates to this research. Since contour theory is a relatively new analytical technique

[25] This thesis uses the term "harmonic" when referring to any pitch content. This term may describe vertical harmonic relations or linear harmonic relations.

[26] Tina Milhorn Stallard, "Libby Larsen," in *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music: Nine American Composers*, ed. Michael K. Slayton, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), 196.

[27] Ibid., 196.

[28] Ibid., 196.

(in this usage approximately 30 years), this section will also provide basic terminology integral to the technique.

Two of the main contributors to the introduction and growth of contour theory are Robert D. Morris and Elizabeth West Marvin. Morris states that musical contour is one of the most general and recognizable aspects of pitch perception.[29] Contour is based on "the listener's grounded ability to hear pitches as relatively higher, equal, or lower without discerning the exact pitches among them," according to Elizabeth West Marvin.[30] With intervallic changes between melodies, the contour can remain invariant.[31] Morris and West Marvin view contour theory as a viable method of local and or global analysis. Morris also believes contour can play "an important structural role in specific compositions or repertoire."[32] More specifically, Morris's work with contour theory involves "contour spaces with its various entities and relations."[33] In his book, *Composition with Pitch-Classes: A Theory of Compositional Design,* Morris defines contour space (c-space) as a category of musical space "consisting of elements arranged from low to high disregarding the exact intervals between the elements."[34] These elements are defined as "c-pitches" (cps), which are ordered from low to high.[35] Morris also emphasizes the importance of musical contour in "New Directions in Theory and Analysis of Musical Contour,"

[29] Robert D. Morris, "New Directions in the Theory and Analysis of Music Contour," Music Theory Spectrum, Vol. 15, no. 2 (1993): 205.

[30] Elizabeth West Marvin and Paul A. Laprade, "Relating Musical Contours: Extensions of a Theory for Contour," *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 31, no. 2 (1987): 226.

[31] Ibid., 225.

[32] Ibid., 226.

[33] Ibid., 226.

[34] Robert D. Morris, "Chapter Two: Pitch Spaces" in *Composition with Pitch-Classes: A Theory of Compositional Design*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 26.

[35] Morris, 26.

which elaborates on the further applications of musical contour theory, and proposes "pc-set segmentations are associated with relations among sets of equivalent contours."[36] He applies this notion in an analysis of Schoenberg's Piano Piece, Op. 19, No. 4.

The analyses in this study of the LM also draw on the specific work of Elizabeth West Marvin and Paul A. Laprade, notably their article, "Relating Musical Contours: Extensions of a Theory of Contour" (1987). The authors consider concepts developed by Morris and give emphasis to contour relations within the musical spaces of compositions. West Marvin and Laprade utilize Morris's terminology and advance the theory further by discussing similarity relations, which provide highly detailed relationships among contour segments, or C-SEGs. They propose a "normal form" for melodic C-SEGs, which is a representation of n distinct c-pitches that are numbered from 0 to (n-1) and are listed in temporal order.[37] This means that the numberings applied to pitches are based on how high or low they are within the musical phrase, disregarding their specific intervallic positions. The LM's appearances in the three works in this study are continually short and only contain minimal, gradual contour changes; the analyses that follow use a simplified version of contour theory, only using its basic labeling approach to identify consistencies and small changes in contour.

The present analyses of the LM's contour are limited to identifying the LM's C-SEGs in normal form. Examples of similar, simple usage of C-SEG contour relations are found in Figures 2a and 2b (page 16). These figures provide two examples from Steve A. Harper's article "Contour and Melodic Structure in Two Homophonic Instrumental Works by Anton Webern," which contextualize C-SEGs in an analytical setting. The examples from Harper's article are

[36] See Robert D. Morris's "New Directions in the Theory and Analysis of Musical Contour" (1993).

[37] Elizabeth West Marvin and Paul A. Laprade, "Relating Musical Contours: Extensions of a Theory for Contour," Journal of Music Theory, Vol. 31, no. 2 (1987): 228.

reductions from specific phrases from the fifth of Webern's *Bagatelles for String Quartet*, Op. 9. Notice how the small two and three pitch C-SEGs are transposed to other versions of themselves. The <01> C-SEG in m. 1 is found again in the last two measures of 2a, while the <021> C-SEG in mm. 2 - 3 is found again in mm. 4-6 of 2a. Harper's reduction shows that precise intervallic relationships are not critical in C-SEG identification, unlike pitch class analysis. The labeling comes from their relative position to the other pitches within the melodic fragment. His Example 4 (shown in Figure 2a) also reveals pitch class transformations between two of the same <01> C-SEGs [i.e. "T7" in "a"].

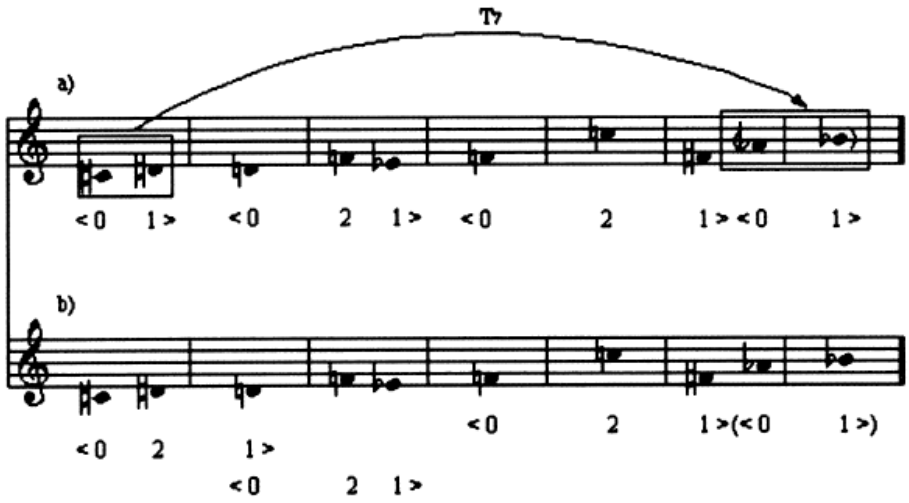


Figure 2a. Example 4 from "Contour and Melodic Structure in Two Homophonic Instrumental Works by Anton Webern." Musical Figure reproduced with kind permission from Steve A. Harper.[38]

[38] Steve A. Harper, "Contour and Melodic Structure in Two Homophonic Instrumental Works by Anton Webern," *College Music Symposium*, Vol. 46 (2006): 109.

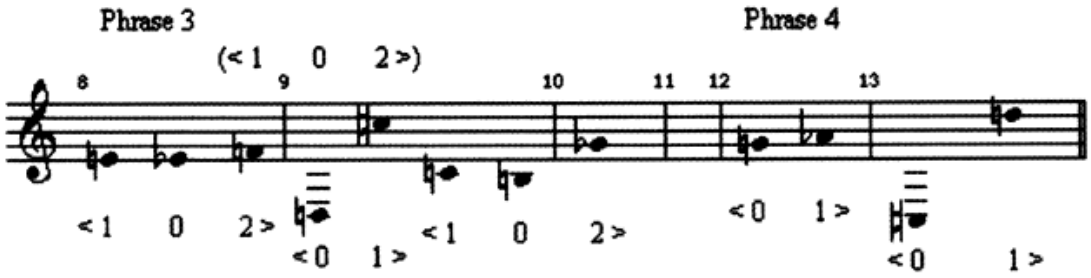


Figure 2b. Example 5 from "Contour and Melodic Structure in Two Homophonic Instrumental Works by Webern"

Musical Figure reproduced with kind permission from Steve A. Harper.[39]

With the basic infrastructure of the LM in place, as well as descriptions of the analytical techniques to study the motive, the study will now turn to the specific investigation of instances of the LM in *Corker*, *Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm."

[39] Harper, 110.

Chapter III

Pitch and Contour Beginnings: *Corker* (1977)

The LM's conception is in *Corker*, a work for B-flat clarinet and percussion. The piece is 212 measures long and approximately 7 minutes in length. It is divided into three sections: A (mm. 1-120), B (mm. 121 – 150, tempo change), and A (mm. 151 - 212). The divisions are based on the motivic material and tempo, and overall with these changes *Corker* can be perceived as having a loose ABA form. It was commissioned by Robert Spring, the Professor of Clarinet at Arizona State University.[40] Larsen describes the work as follows: "My inspiration for the work is drawn from 1940s popular music language, which I love, because the performers are spectacular musicians and because it speaks the rhythms and harmonic language of contemporary American English."[41] Larsen's description clearly conveys she places great importance on rhythm and harmonies in this piece. This chapter provides an analysis of the many instances of the LM in *Corker*. It will examine its pitch content and melodic contour. The analysis will provide a window into Larsen's approach to motivic development, tracing local LM occurrences in effort to draw connections to the motive in the other pieces that will be studied. This model of analysis – relating pitch and contour components over time – will be used again in the forthcoming analyses of *Slang* and "Ferocious Rhythm."

[40] Libby Larsen, "*Corker*: Composer's Notes," http://libbylarsen.com/index.php?contentID=242&profileID=1302&startRange=

[41] Ibid.

Pitch Content and Set Classes

The LM's pitch content is a helpful vantage point when studying her approach to thematic development. *Corker* provides the first appearances of the LM. The LM (see Figure 3) is a simple combination of two set classes: a hexachord 6-z11 (012457) and a pentachord 5-z18 (01457), separated by a sixteenth rest.[42] These two set classes have a superset-subset relationship, as 5-z18 (01457) is a literal subset of 6-z11 (012457). In this piece, the clarinet is the only instrument that plays the motive. The two set classes are the carriers of the pitch content of the LM throughout *Corker*. These set classes are set to a unique rhythmic idea that is present throughout the composition [see Figure 3, labeled Rhythm A (R-A) and Rhythm B (R-B)]. The set classes remain intact, in this order, throughout *Corker*. Larsen's applications of pitch content explore a myriad of harmonic relationships by utilizing fragmentation, subsets, supersets, and sequencing. The motive first appears in m. 51 and is an established point of departure for this analysis.
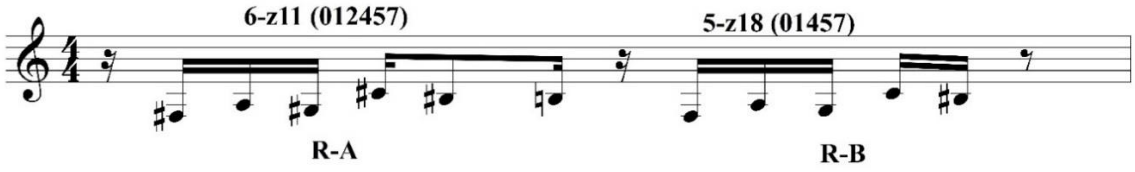


Figure 3. Libby Larsen, Corker*, m. 51.*

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After the presentation of the motive in m. 51, Larsen repeats R-B in mm. 52 - 53 as seen in Figure 4, creating a repetition with one set class. The repetition gives the allusion of a tonal

[42] This thesis uses Forte set classes as the listed in Allen Forte's *The Structure of Atonal Music* (1973).

center of f# minor. The f# minor triad (F#-A-C#) is outlined in these three measures, a local point of revealing Larsen's harmonic choices.
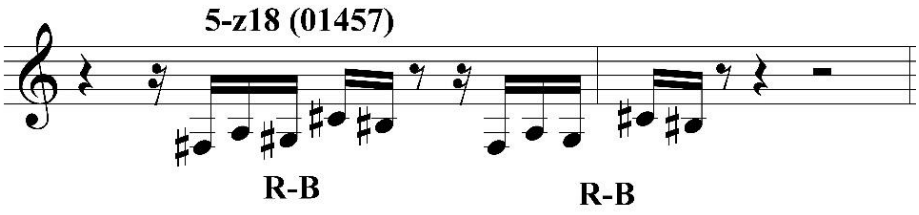


Figure 4. Libby Larsen, Corker*, mm. 52 - 53.*

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The LM returns in m. 72, but as it uses an invariant R-A in its first portion, it changes the pitch content to 5-9 (see Figure 5). This shift in pitch cardinality from mm. 51 - 53 to m. 72 demonstrates how Larsen varies the LM's harmonic content. She achieves thematic variety through pitch content but maintains recognition through rhythmic consistency.
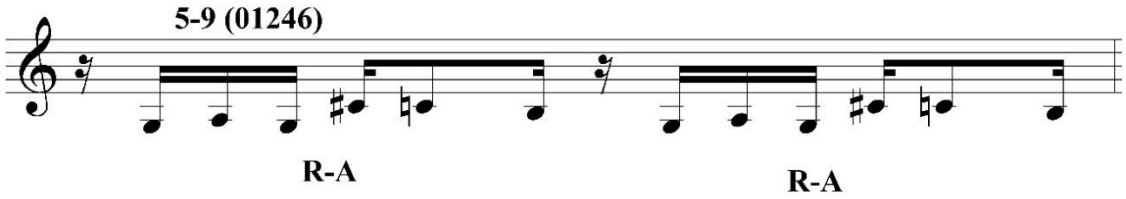


Figure 5. Libby Larsen, Corker*, m. 72.*

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The next instance of the motive is at mm. 104 - 105. Figure 6 illustrates its resemblance to m. 51, though it uses G as the third note instead of G#. When Larsen lowered the G# a semitone to G, it changed the set-class combination to 6-z12 and 5-19. Within this set-class combination is a non-literal subset relationship between them, sharing the tetrachord 4-9 (0167).

This slight alteration still shows the close relations of the LM's pitch content, here with the same five-pitch invariance between R-A and R-B as m. 51.
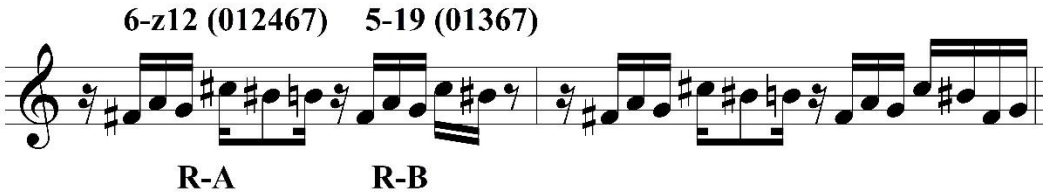


Figure 6. Libby Larsen, Corker, *mm. 104 - 105.*

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The final presentation of the LM in *Corker* occurs in mm. 179 - 181 and 183 (Figure 7) with the set class combination of 6-z43 and 5-20. Measure 183 contains R-A for a brief moment, but remains connected to Larsen's rhythmic scheme. Similar to m. 51, 5-20 (01568) is a literal subset of 6-z43 (012568). This occurrence includes an invariant rhythmic scheme with m. 51 and 104 - 105, but the motive expands further through repetition and overall motivic elongation.
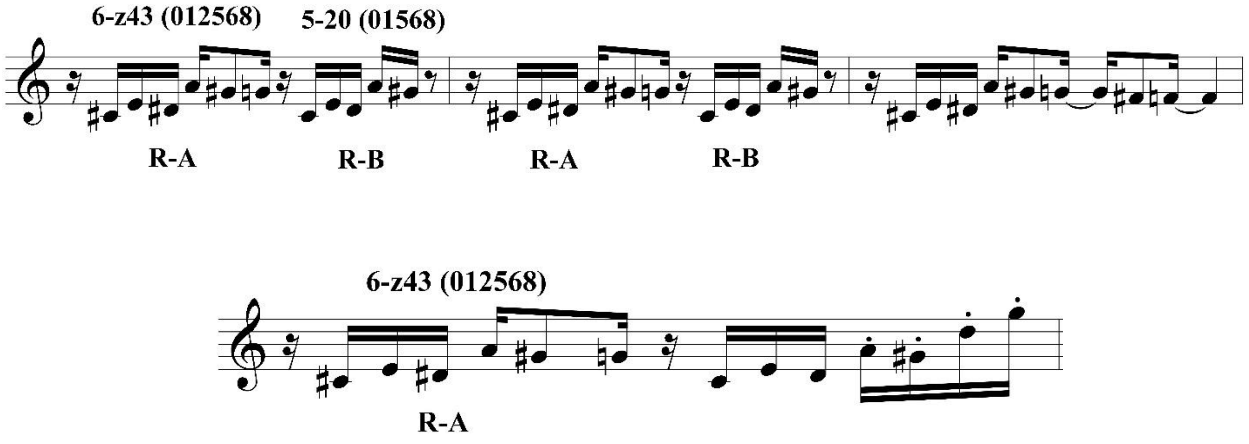


Figure 7. Libby Larsen, Corker, *mm. 179 - 181*, 183

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Another way to contextualize multiple LM relations is through pitch class invariance. Larsen displays consistency in the rhythm, as well a certain pitches that are shared with the previous LM occurrences. The pitches A and C# bind the LM instances in *Corker*. Further invariance can be seen in Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6, sharing the pitches A, B#/C, and C#. The common pitches of A, B, B#/C, and C# connect the LM shown in Figures 3, 5, and 6. Though Larsen's harmonic material changes, the motive is linked by pitch invariance.

Tracing the LM across *Corker* reveals that Larsen uses pitch centers. The progression of tonal centers suggests her motivic sequence as a "functional" harmonic progression of i-bii-i-v. Table 1 displays an in-depth chart that thoroughly explains the LM's pitch centricities within the corresponding set classes. The chart presents the LM's rhythmic sequence, pitch centers and set classes, subset relations, and pitch invariance. The shaded column reveals the digression of the motive in m. 72, as it clearly diverts from the previous LM encounters in mm. 51, and the occurrences after it in mm. 104 and 179. The "chromatic" moment in m. 72, in a quasi-functional sense, corresponds with the break in her pattern of using the LM. In this measure the LM is truncated to only the R-A portion and has no R-B with a fragmented, literal subset relationship of an R-A. By studying the subtle changes in harmonic content it is possible to better contextualize the climactic "chromatic digression" in *Corker*.

Table 1. Pitch Content Chart of the Larsen Motive in Corker.

***Corker*: Pitch Content Relationships of the Larsen Motive**				
Measure	**m. 51**	**m. 72**	**mm. 104 - 105**	**mm. 179 - 181**
Rhythmic Sequence	**R-A, R-B**	**R-A, R-A**	**R-A, R-B**	**R-A, R-B**
***Pitch center:* PC Set**	***f#:* 6-z11, 5-z18**	***g*: 5-9**	***f#:* 6-z12, 5-19**	***c#:* 6-z43, 5-20**
Superset-Subset (if applicable) with prime forms	**R-A: 6-z11 (012457) *Literal* R-B: 5-z18 (01457)**	**R-A: (01246)**	**R-A: 6-z12 (012467) *Non-literal* R-B: 5-19 (01367)**	**R-A: 6-z43 (012568) *Literal* R-B: 5-19 (01568)**
Invariant pitch classes	**All: 9, 1 mm. 72, 104, 179: 9, 11, 0, 1**	**All: 9, 1 mm. 51, 104, 179: 9, 11, 0, 1**	**All: 9, 1 mm. 51, 72, 179: 9, 11, 0, 1**	**All: 9, 1**

Structure through Shape: Contour Relations in Corker

The LM's contour relations contribute to comprehending its application in *Corker*. The shape of the motive in this piece is one of its identifiable characteristics: each occurrence is aurally and visually unique, but connected by the rhythm. As with the pitch content, the LM's contour relations in *Corker* explain its importance as a gateway to exploring Larsen's compositional language.

The first presentation of the motive in *Corker*, m. 51 (Figure 8), employing the LM partitions identified earlier (i.e. R-A, R-B), has C-SEGs of <021543> and <02143>, respectfully. These particular C-SEGs quantify the motive's overall structure within its c-space. The shape of the R-A and R-B divisions mirror the set classes of the LM: the immediate fragmentation from R-B's C-SEG to R-A's C-SEG recalls the superset-subset relationship of 6-z11 and 5-z18.

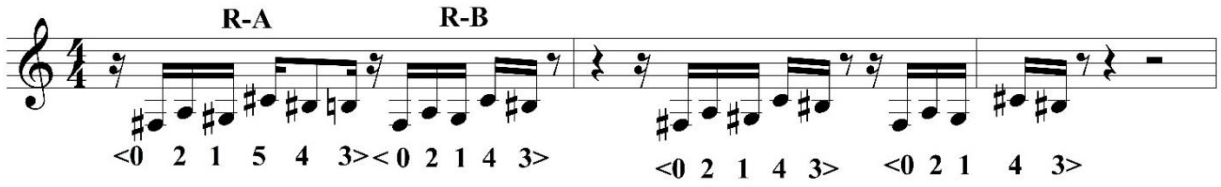


Figure 8. Libby Larsen, Corker, *mm. 51 - 53.*

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Measure 72 varies in motivic contour due to the isolated repetition of R-A with its now slightly altered C-SEG <01432>, as shown in Figure 9. The rhythm of R-A remains unchanged, which makes the contour variation all the more poignant, a reflection of the pitch content of m. 72 (see Figure 5).

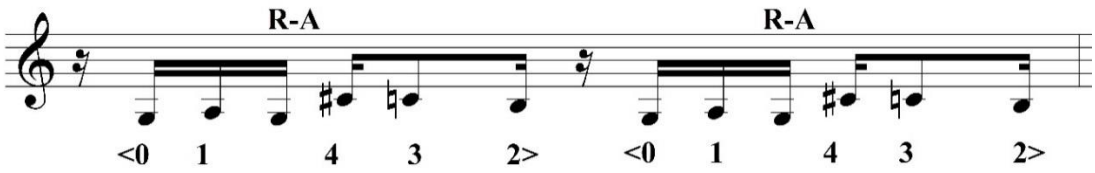


Figure 9. Libby Larsen, Corker, *m. 72.*

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Later in the piece, mm. 104 -105 presents the LM with the same contour relations as mm. 51 - 52. C-SEGs <021543> and <02143> return in these two measures, despite the slight intervallic alterations, as shown in Figure 10. The G natural instead of G# does not change the C-SEG because of the temporal order of the pitches. Its invariant shape and rhythm, regardless of the intervallic and pitch variations, retains thematic recognition despite pitch development.
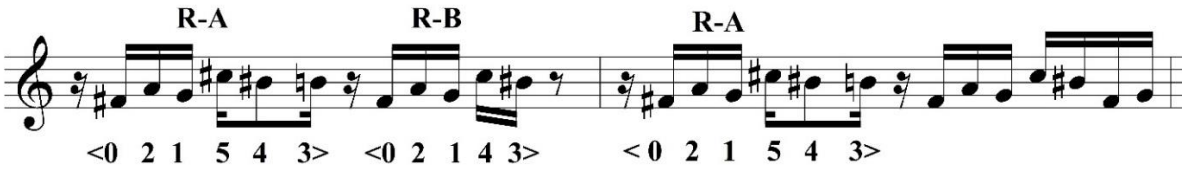


Figure 10. Libby Larsen, Corker, *mm. 104 - 105.*

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Figure 11 presents the LM in mm. 179 - 181 and m. 183, which contain the same C-SEGS as mm. 51 - 52 and mm. 104 - 105, <021543> and <02143>. The invariance of <021543> and <02143> throughout this work shows Larsen's affinity for the motive's consistent melodic structure. Table 2 presents a formal overview of the C-SEGs of the LM in *Corker*. The table shows the C-SEGs for each LM occurrence with its R-A and R-B partitions. Table 2 also contains the C-SEG invariance between the motivic instances in mm. 51, 104 - 105, and 179-

181, which clarifies how Larsen strongly favors this melodic shape. Notice in m. 104 - 105 and 179 -181, the C-SEGs remain invariant throughout the work. As with pitch, m. 72 has no R-B thus has no C-SEG invariance – the only moment in the piece where this happens.
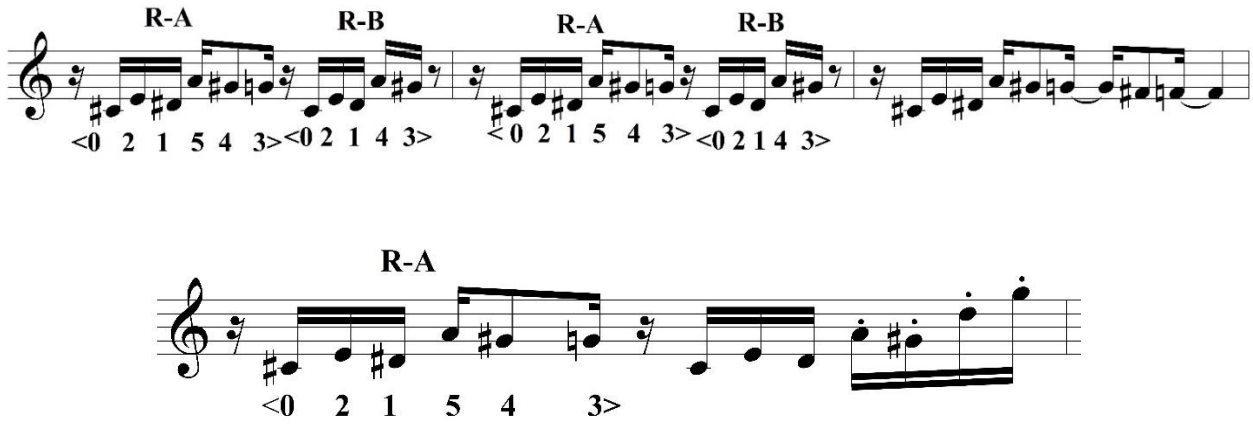


Figure 11. Libby Larsen, Corker*, mm. 179 - 181, 183.*

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Table 2. Contour Relationships of the Larsen Motive in Corker.

***Corker*: Contour Relationships of the Larsen Motive**				
Measures	**m. 51**	**m. 72**	**m. 104 - 105**	**m. 179 - 181**
Rhythmic Sequence	**R-A, R-B**	**R-A, R-A**	**R-A, R-B**	**R-A, R-B**
C-SEGS	**R-A:<021543>** **R-B: <02143>**	**R-A: <01432>**	**R-A: <021543>** **R-B: <02143>**	**R-A: <021543>** **R-B: <02143>**
C-SEG Invariance	**R-A: <021543>** **R-B: <02143>**	**No Invariance**	**Same C-SEGs as m. 51**	**Same C-SEGs as m. 51**

Corker exhibits a clean presentation for the LM and its occurrences to contextualize its pitch and contour relations. The tables provided in this chapter assist in showing motivic connections and digressions that occur within the piece. The number of LM instances (5) may seem brief, but the motive establishes the foundation for this analysis by exploring the pitch and contour relationships. Its repetitive nature in this piece creates motivic recognition that supports its musical value. By tracing the LM's local occurrences in *Corker*, Larsen's motivic development becomes more evident. This analysis of the LM's local application will be used to examine the LM's local and global usage in *Slang* and "Ferocious Rhythm,"

Chapter IV

Diversity through Instrumentation: *Slang* (1994)

Slang is a single movement chamber work for B-flat clarinet, violin, and piano. *Slang* was commissioned by the Verdeher Trio and funded by Michigan State University.[43] The piece premiered on November 6, 1994 at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada.[44] *Slang* is 302 measures long and approximately 13 minutes in length. *Slang* can be formally divided into three sections: A (mm. 1 - 104), A' (mm. 105 - 154), and B (mm. 155 - 302). These divisions can be attributed to motivic usage and stylistic changes (which occur in the last section). Larsen states the title is a reference to the use of "both jazz and boogie slang and twentieth-century 'new music' slang throughout the composition."[45] Her innate fascination with American vernacular and slang generated her interest in what she describes as a developed "lexicon of musical slang."[46] She mentions "the changing musical genres throughout the work give the performers freedom to adapt to each musical language."[47] This chapter will discuss Larsen's use of the LM in *Slang*, a work that constantly varies the way the LM is said, but not what is being said.

This chapter will use the same analytical methods as used in the analysis of *Corker* – pitch-class and contour analysis – to reveal Larsen's variation of the motive through instrumentation changes while the pitch and contour stay the same. In *Corker*, the clarinet is the only voice that plays the LM, while the percussion instruments in the piece provide the rhythmic pulse and energy to support the presentation of the motive. For instance, at the first occurrence of the motive in *Slang*, the clarinet, violin, and piano perform the LM in unison, covering the span

[43] Libby Larsen, *Slang*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.
[44] Ibid., 2.
[45] Ibid., 2.
[46] Ibid., 2.
[47] Ibid., 2.

of four octaves (See Figure12). Throughout the rest of the piece, the clarinet and violin perform the motive multiple times both together and separately, while the piano also has solo moments performing the motive. Larsen continually takes a different approach to saying the same thing. An analogy from American-English slang might be the following progression of expressing a greeting in somewhat recent years: "hello"→ "hey" → "what up." Therefore, it is possible to perceive the LM as a representation of American vernacular in *Slang*.

Harmonic Sustainability: Pitch Content in Slang

As stated above, the pitch content of the motive stays the same for the entire work maximizing 6-z11 and 5-z18. After an introduction (mm. 1 - 44), the first entrance of the LM is in m. 45, making an impactful statement with the clarinet, violin, and piano playing in a texture spread across four octaves (Figure 12). The unison proclamation presents the LM as focal point in this piece. Rhythms R-A and R-B that occurred in *Corker* return in this work. Larsen immediately partitions R-A and R-B of the LM into various fragments throughout mm. 46 - 47, which she did not do in *Corker*. A chief characteristic of *Slang* is a conversational style: unison statements of the LM alternate with "isolated voices," which will be shown later in this chapter.[48]

[48] In this chapter, "isolated voices" is used to describe when one of the instruments (B-flat clarinet, violin, piano) play the LM individually.

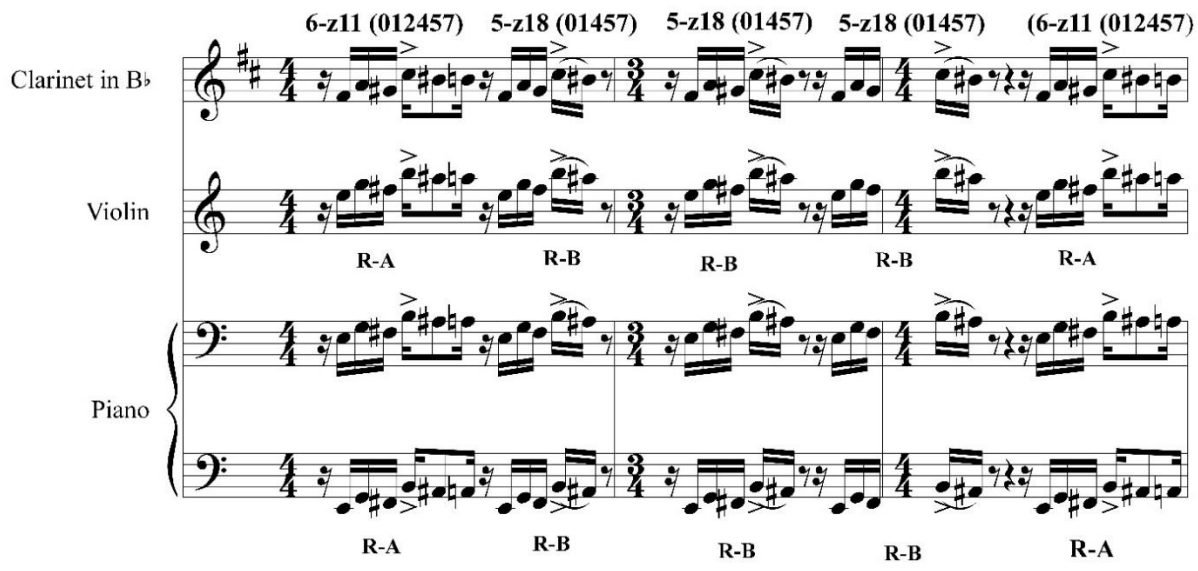


Figure 12. Libby Larsen, Slang, *mm. 45 - 47.*

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Set classes 6-z11 and 5-z18 appear consistently in the work, though Larsen varies the instrumentation and fragments the motive. Figure 13 provides an example: in mm. 50, Larsen has reduced the presentation of the LM down to two voices. The clarinet and violin only have the R-A division of the LM in parallel octaves with set class 6-z11. The LM returns to its full length with both R-A and R-B in mm. 66 - 67, with the same voicing from m. 50.
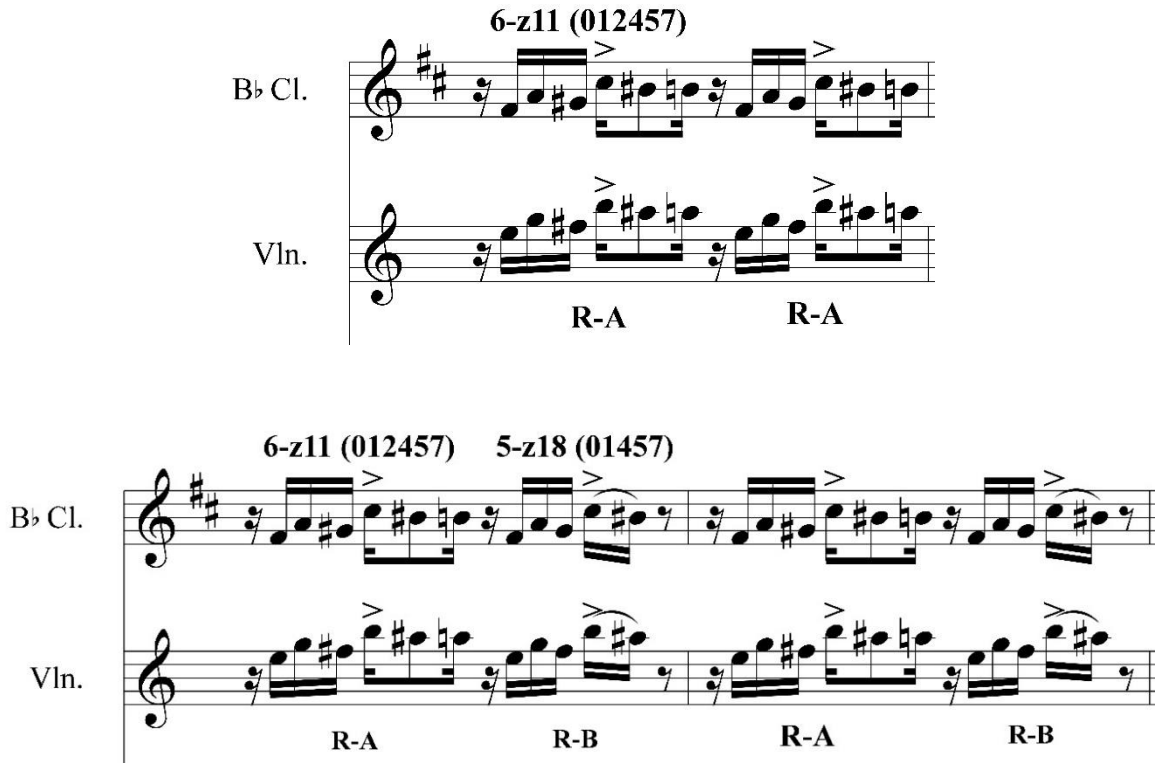


Figure 13. Libby Larsen, Slang*, mm. 50, 66 - 67.*

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Larsen introduces new pitch content to the LM in mm. 77 - 78 when the clarinet and violin play a brief call-and-response before the two instruments play in unison m. 79 (see Figure 14). The rhythm is varied at the end of m. 79, with the division that would normally be R-B. Larsen adds an eighth note where there is normally an eighth rest, but R-B is recognizable. By isolating the two instruments, Larsen introduces the new pitch content with uniquely isolated timbres. Along with this varied instrumentation of the LM, Larsen begins to imply the pitch centric relationships in the piece. Though the LM's first instance in m. 45 was centered on the pitch E, in m. 77 it is transposed up a perfect fifth (or T_7) leaving set classes 6-z11 and 5-z18 intact. The new B-centered pitch center suggests a tonic-dominant, quasi-functional relationship

between instances of the LM. This also recalls the same tonic-dominant relationship found in *Corker*.
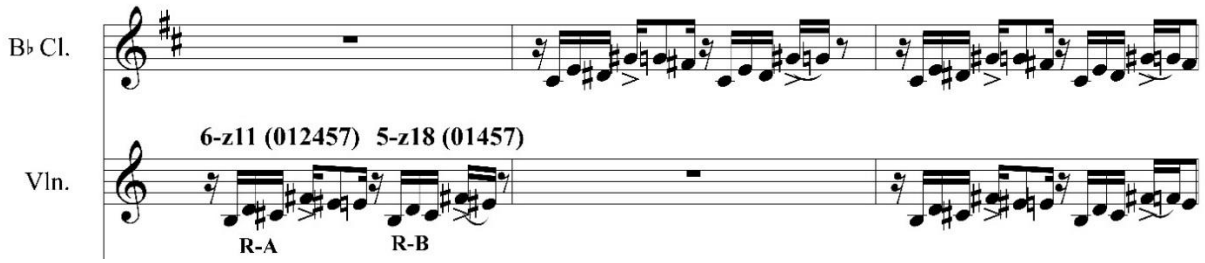


Figure 14. Libby Larsen, Slang, *mm. 77 - 79.*

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The original form of the LM quickly resurfaces in mm. 81 - 82 and 85, evoking the pitch content the E pitch center of the previous presentation. However, the piano now offers the LM by playing it in two octaves in mm. 81 - 82, and one octave doubling in m. 85, as shown in Figure 15.

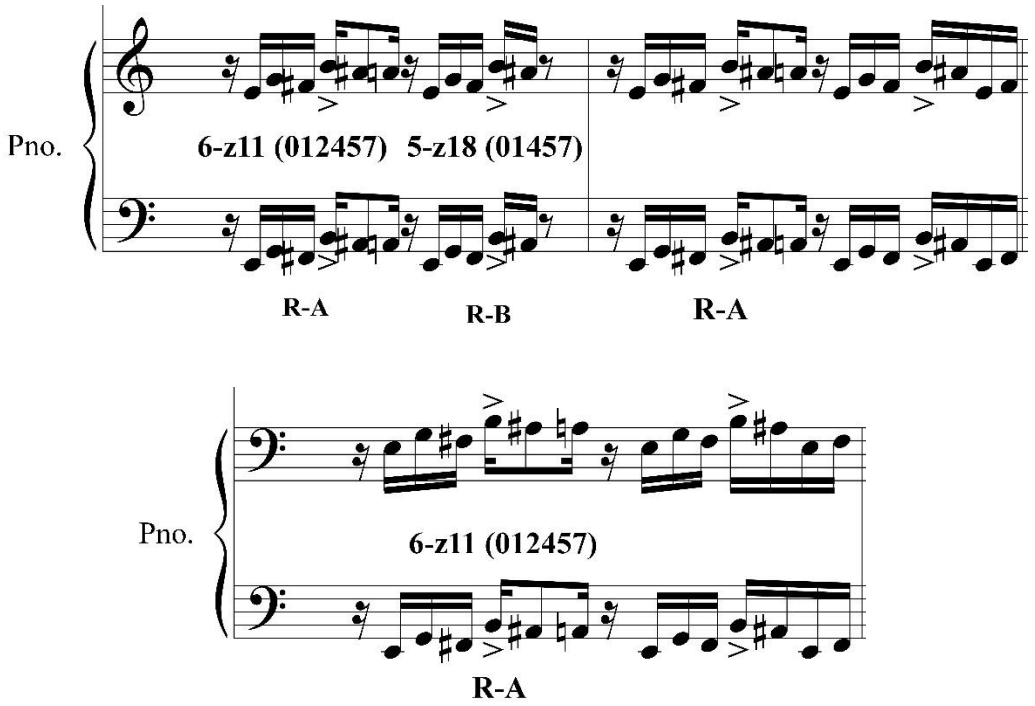


Figure 15. Libby Larsen, Slang, *mm. 81 - 82, 85.*

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The second section of *Slang* (mm. 105 - 154) does not have as many LM occurrences, but the section still functions as a tool for comprehending Larsen's application of it in *Slang*. In mm. 135 - 136, the LM returns in the clarinet with 6-z11 and 5-z18 at the original center of E. For the rest of this section, Larsen uses the LM in either its full context or in R-A and R-B fragments, and in mm. 135 - 136 (Figure 16) she combines the entire motive followed by R-A fragments.

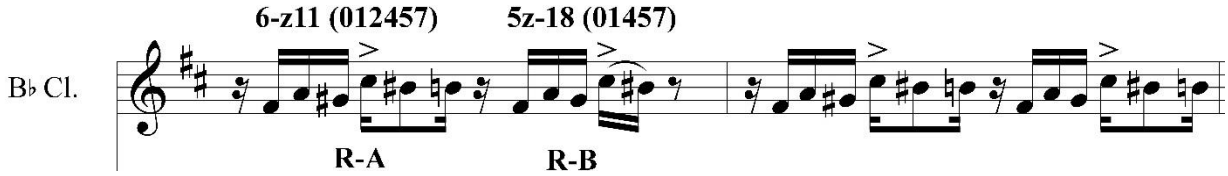


Figure 16. Libby Larsen, Slang*, mm. 135 - 136.*

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Larsen again modifies the presentation of the LM in m. 142 by merging both R-A and R-B together, which is shown in Figure 17. The combined rhythmic partitions of the LM contain the same 6-z11 set class so frequently used in the piece. The violin plays a fusion of both rhythmic partitions of the motive, expressing a slightly altered version of the motive while maintaining 6-z11 and 5-z18. Four measures later in m. 146 (see Figure 18), the clarinet and violin emerge for the final group of occurrences of LM in *Slang*. Larsen merges the previously used pitch centers of E and B, though she maintains 6-z11 and 5-z18 with a T_5 relationship from the pitches of the violin to the clarinet. The clarinet is centered on E, while the LM is centered on B in the violin. The joining of E and B in mm. 146 - 148 is a testament to the LM's instrumental development throughout this work: this important moment of combining of pitch centers does not actually suggest new material, rather, it uses familiar material in a different way – like slang. In the third section of this work (mm. 155 - 302), Larsen presents new material that alternates between fast-paced and boogie, but it still justifies the slang that she aims to express.

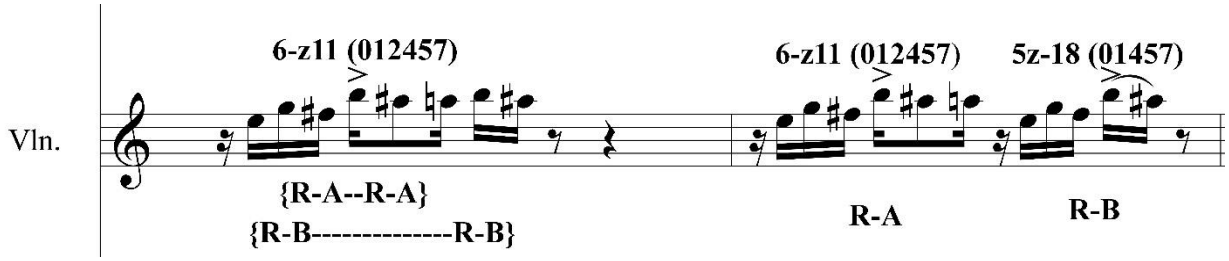


Figure 17. Libby Larsen, Slang*, mm. 142 - 143.*

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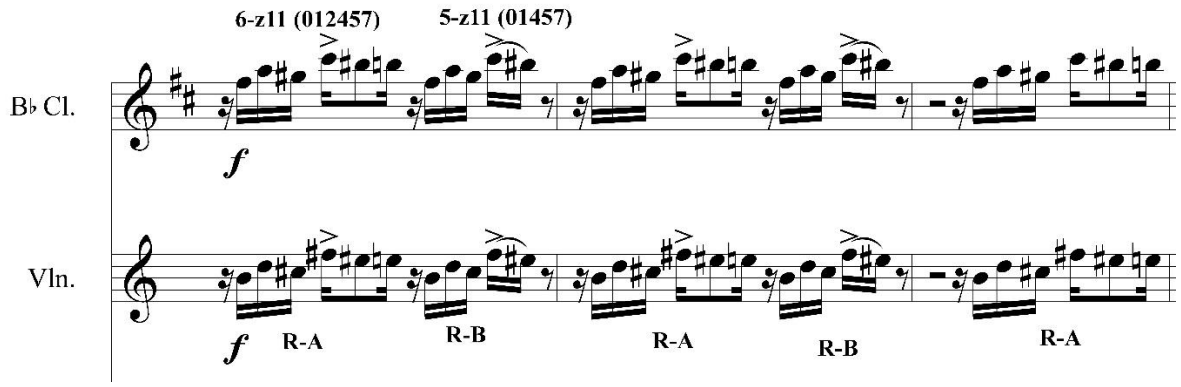


Figure 18. Libby Larsen, Slang*, mm. 146 - 148.*

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Contour Invariance: Contour Relations in Slang

The LM's invariant contour relations assist in revealing that the motivic usage comes through changes in instrumentation, reflecting the similarly consistent harmonic content. Every presentation of the LM contains the C-SEGs <021543>, corresponding to R-A, and <02143>

corresponding to R-B. These particular C-SEGs also represented a majority of the LM occurrences in *Corker*.

The strong introductory statement of the LM that occurs in mm. 45 - 47 establishes the contour and the C-SEGs <021543> and <02143>. Figure 19 shows the contours of LM in mm. 45 - 47. Larsen begins the measure with the full motive, followed by repeating R-B twice, then ending with R-A in m. 47.

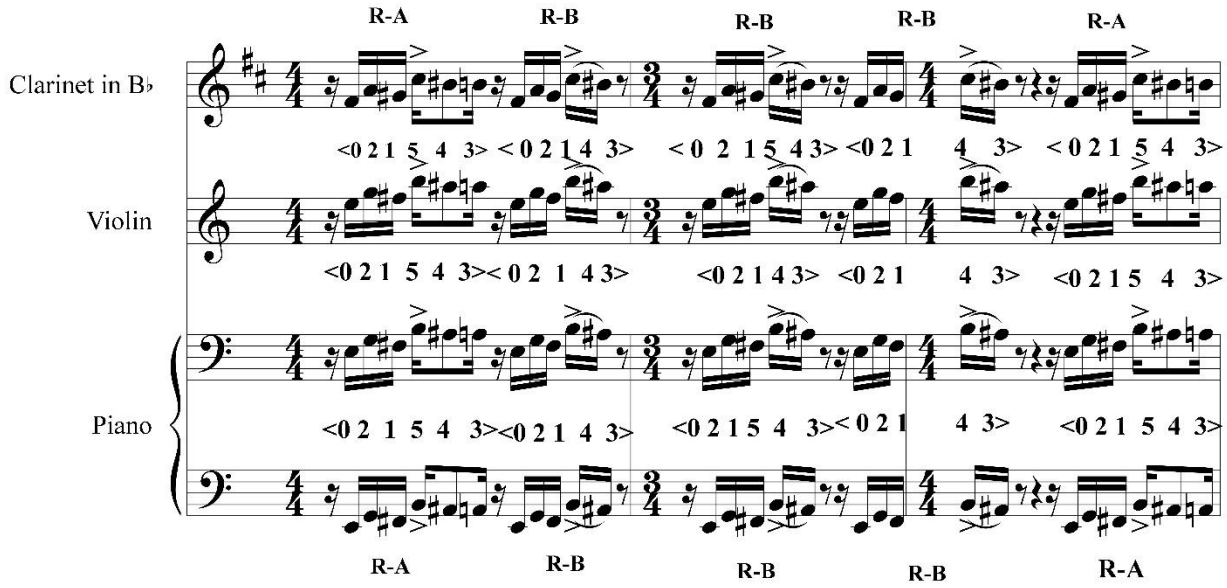


Figure 19. Libby Larsen, Slang, *mm. 45 - 47.*

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Larsen's variable methods of using the LM, e.g. fragmentation, voice isolation, and timbral combinations with the clarinet, violin, and piano, do not affect its contour. Figures 20-25 survey the LM's contour invariance throughout each motivic appearance in *Slang*. The individual presentations each show the LM in its full form, along with repeated rhythmic portions. No matter the rhythmic sequence or pitch content change (see Figures 21 and 25) the consistent contours help the listener focus on the LM's instrumental variety in this piece. Notice that the six figures below utilize four different instrumentations of the LM.

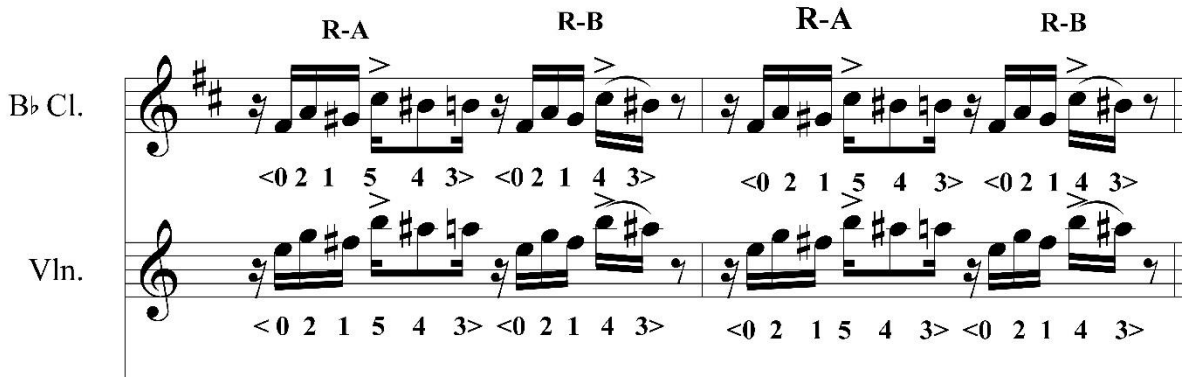


Figure 20. Libby Larsen, Slang, *mm. 66 - 67.*

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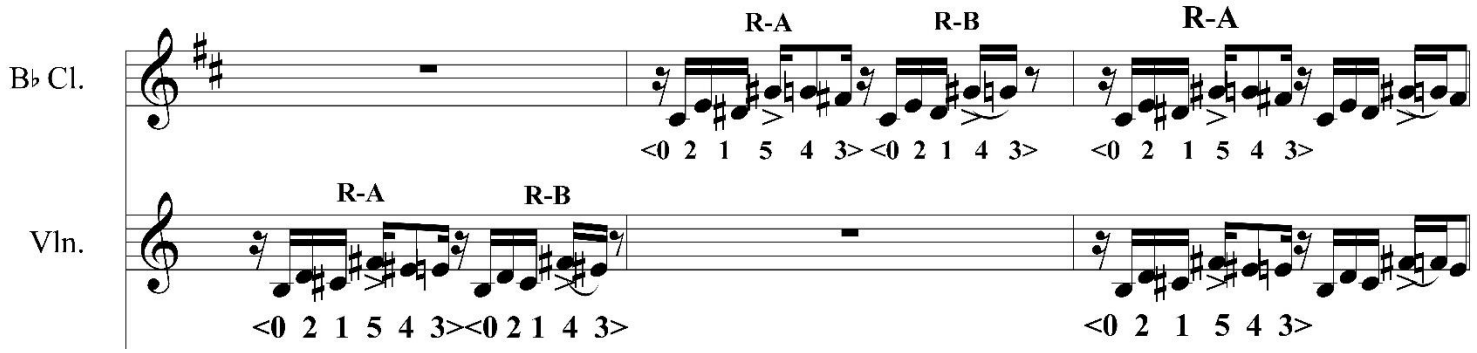


Figure 21. Libby Larsen, Slang*, mm. 77 - 79.*

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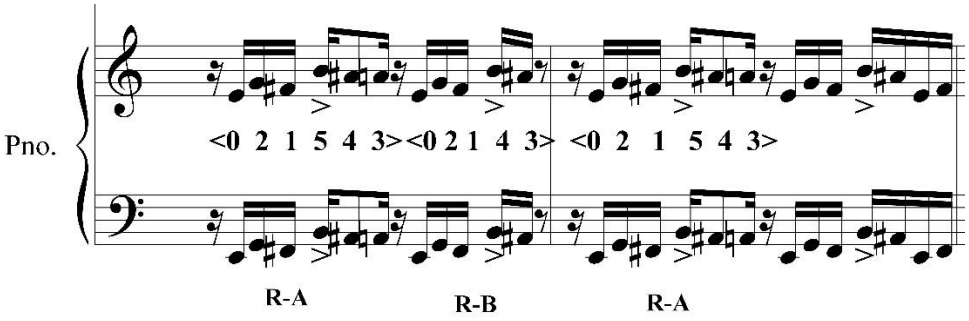


Figure 22. Libby Larsen, Slang*, mm. 81-82.*

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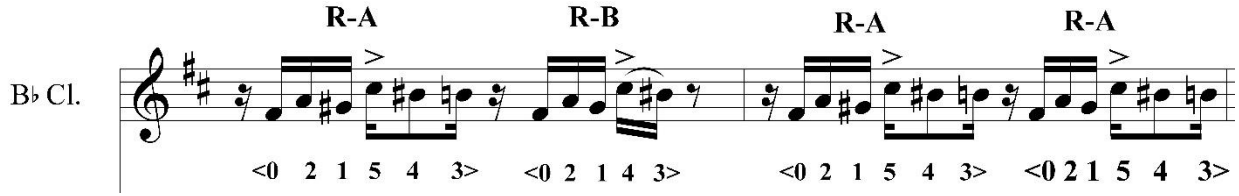


Figure 23. Libby Larsen, Slang, *mm. 135 - 136.*

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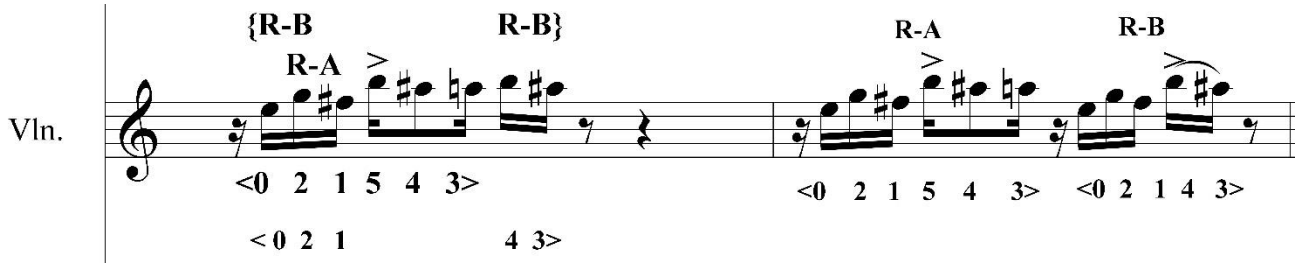


Figure 24. Libby Larsen, Slang, *mm. 142 - 143.*

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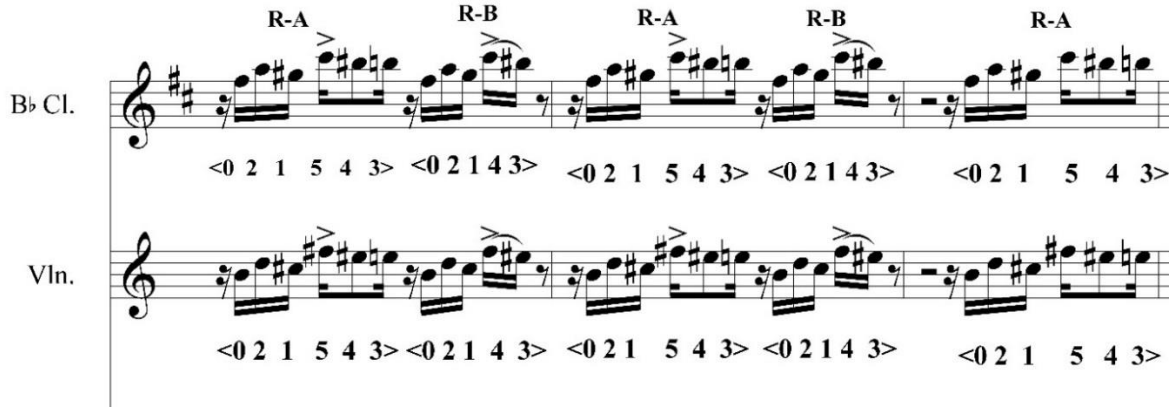


Figure 25. Libby Larsen, Slang*, violin, mm. 146 - 148.*

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The LM's employment in *Slang* demonstrates consistency in pitch content and contour, therefore Larsen applies timbral variety with the clarinet, violin and piano to express her musical language through the motive. This chapter explored the LM locally within this piece while also connecting with its usage in *Corker*, displaying the motive's ability to globally demonstrate Larsen's compositional methods and style. Larsen distributes the LM's inclusive quality in different ways in *Corker* and *Slang*. Chapter V will conclude this analysis of the LM by examining its usage in "Ferocious Rhythm."

Chapter V

Textural Variety: *String Symphony, III: Ferocious Rhythm* (1999)

A compositional trait of Libby Larsen is her intuitive use of pronounced rhythms and energetic pulses, which reveals itself in the third movement of *String Symphony*, "Ferocious Rhythm." Larsen composed *String Symphony* in 1999, 22 years after *Corker* (1977) and five years after *Slang* (1994). The piece was commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra as part of a new series of works, "Centennial Commission."[49] *String Symphony* premiered in Minneapolis as part of the orchestra's centennial celebration in 2003.[50] Larsen states, "The symphony is both a homage to strings and an essay about them."[51] She continues by stating that strings "are supremely lyrical and emotional," but "throughout the twentieth century orchestral compositions have tended to become more rhythmic and percussive and less and less lyrical."[52] *String Symphony* consists of three movements with a total duration of 25 minutes. The first two movements, "Elegance" and Beauty Alone" summarize the lyrical and sonorous characteristics that are synonymous with strings, but the third movement "Ferocious Rhythm" (250 measures and approximately 7.5 minutes)" brings a different personality to *String Symphony* through Larsen's rhythmic intensity and use of the motivic material. Based on the recurring motivic material and consistent ostinati, "Ferocious Rhythm can be considered a work in two large sections, mm. 1 -121, and mm. 122 - 250. The form of this work is not as apparent as those of *Corker* and *Slang*. There are quick style changes, but the tempo and energy remain constant Tina Milhorn Stallard describes the movement as: "Organically grown from the seeds a few fragmented statements in the opening measures, the instruments expound upon these fragments,

[49] Libby Larsen, *String Symphony*, (Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.
[50] Ibid., 2.
[51] Ibid., 2.
[52] Ibid, 2.

heightening the rhythmic tension."[53] The rhythmic tension comes from the texture that Larsen manipulates with the string orchestra.

The focus of this chapter is to explain the LM's textural variety, which will be supported by analyzing its pitch and contour relations. Of the three works in the present study, "Ferocious Rhythm" represents the LM at its highest level of intricacy and diversity of pitch content and musical contour relations. The LM's pitch and contour complexities in this movement of *String Symphony* will show Larsen's local usage (i.e. in "Ferocious") is part of global (i.e. across the three works) expansion of the motive.

Harmonic Layering: Pitch Content in "Ferocious Rhythm"

In contrast to the two previous works in this study, Larsen begins her pervasive motive from a seed of a motivic cell in "Ferocious Rhythm." Throughout this movement it moves through various set classes at a very rapid pace. The first presentation of the LM in "Ferocious Rhythm" is in m. 6. It is an explosive entrance in the violins with the set class 5-2 (Figure 26). It continues to develop in m. 14 (Figure 27), with fragments that foreshadow the full R-A/R-B of the LM. The fragment in m. 22, with the recurring set class 5-2 reflects the R-B division of the motive.

[53] Tina Milhorn Stallard, "Libby Larsen" in *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music: Nine American Composers*, ed. Michael K. Clayton (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 196.

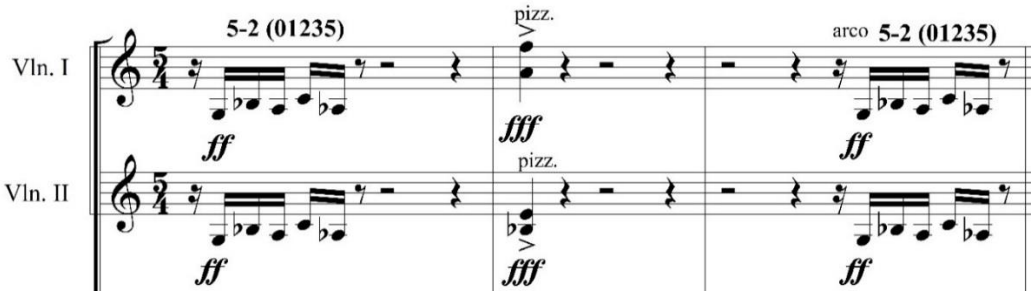


Figure 26. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *mm. 6 - 8.*

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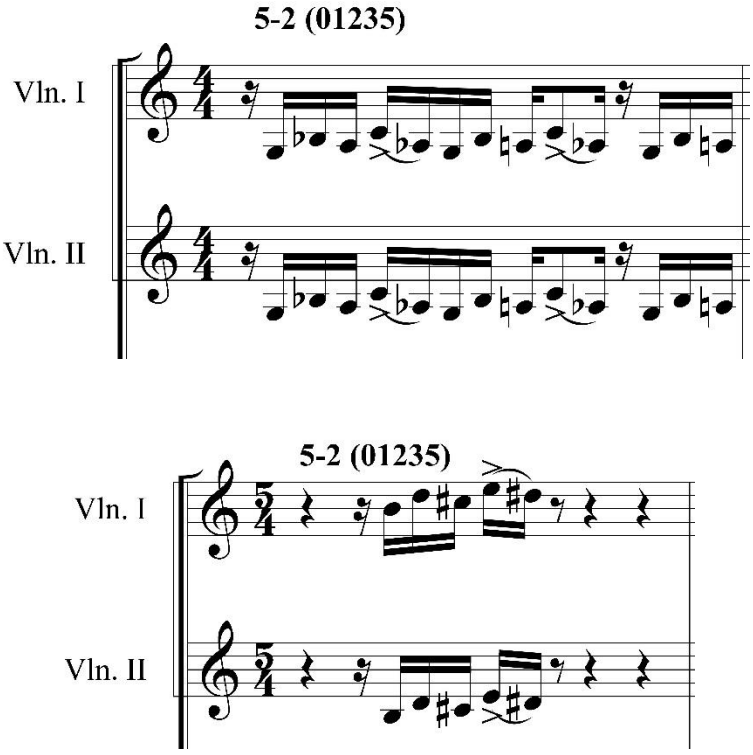


Figure 27. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *mm. 14, 22.*

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Larsen uses texture to slowly unveil her motive. Though it first appeared in a largely monophonic way in mm. 6, 14, and 22, it combines multiple fragments of itself in m. 29 in a two part, canonic manner with the 5-2 set class. Figure 28 illustrates the contrapuntal quality of the LM between the first and second violins in m. 29.
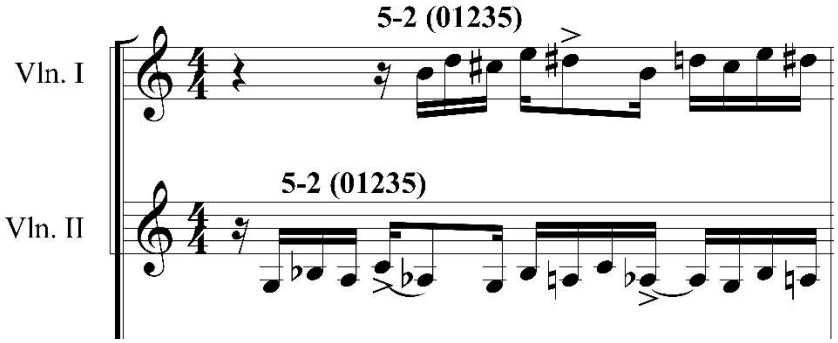


Figure 28. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *m. 29.*

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Larsen finally presents the LM in its full form in mm. 38 - 40 (Figure 29). The set class combination, 6-z11 and 5-z18, which was prominent in both *Corker* and *Slang*, corresponds again with R-A and R-B partitions. Here the LM is harmonized on beats two and four by a tritone. Unlike *Corker*, Larsen intensifies the texture by punctuating the accented portions of the LM in harmony.

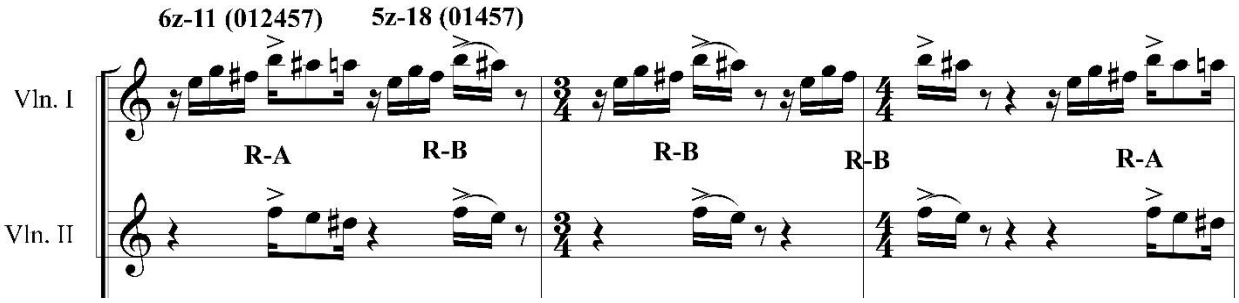


Figure 29. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *mm. 38 - 40.*

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As the piece proceeds, Larsen continues to develop texture through layering and dovetailing. In m. 74 (Figure 30) Larsen creates a series of partnerships within the texture as she gradually dovetails the instruments at each entrance during the melodic ascent of the LM. In m. 74, the LM's pitch content returns to the beginning set class of 5-2. In m. 76, Larsen's fondness for the tritone reappears from m. 38 as the second violins' harmonize the violas through set class 4-2.

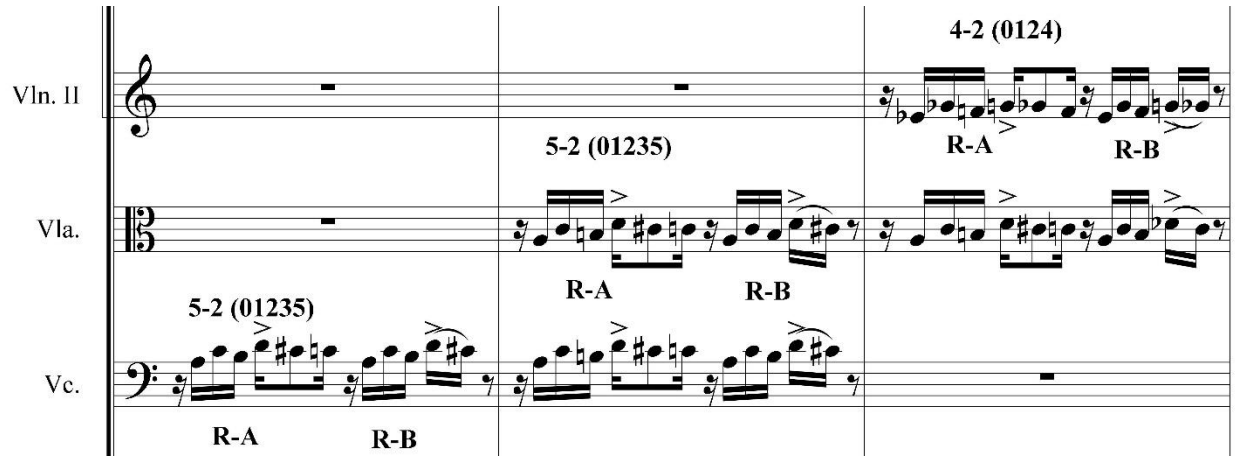


Figure 30. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *mm. 74 - 76.*

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Larsen takes the LM to a more intricate level of textural usage in mm. 117 - 121 (Figure 31). She layers the motive in close proximity across different voices, creating an intensely contrapuntal section of the movement. A nearly identical use of tightly woven, contrapuntal relationships of the LM occurs again in mm. 212 - 215 (Figure 32). Larsen begins the later section with the same pitch content as mm. 117, with the only difference being that the cellos begin this series of LM occurrences rather than the first violins.
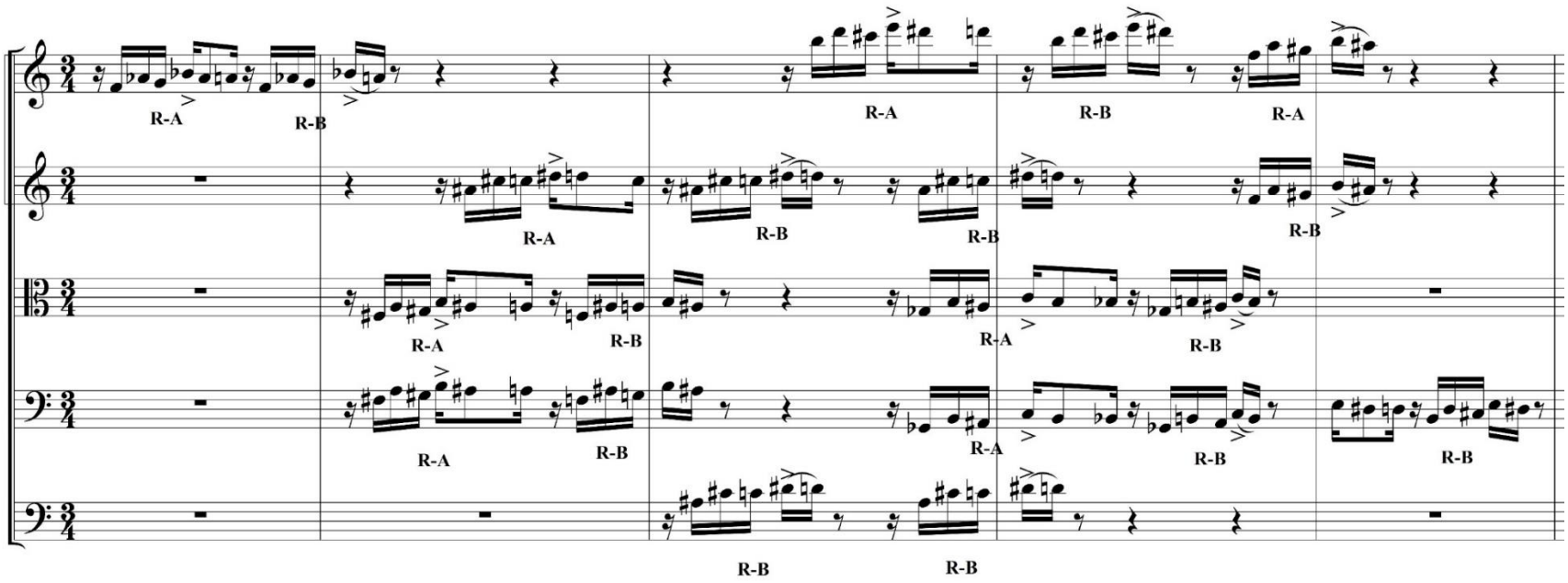


Figure 31. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," string orchestra, mm. 117 - 121.

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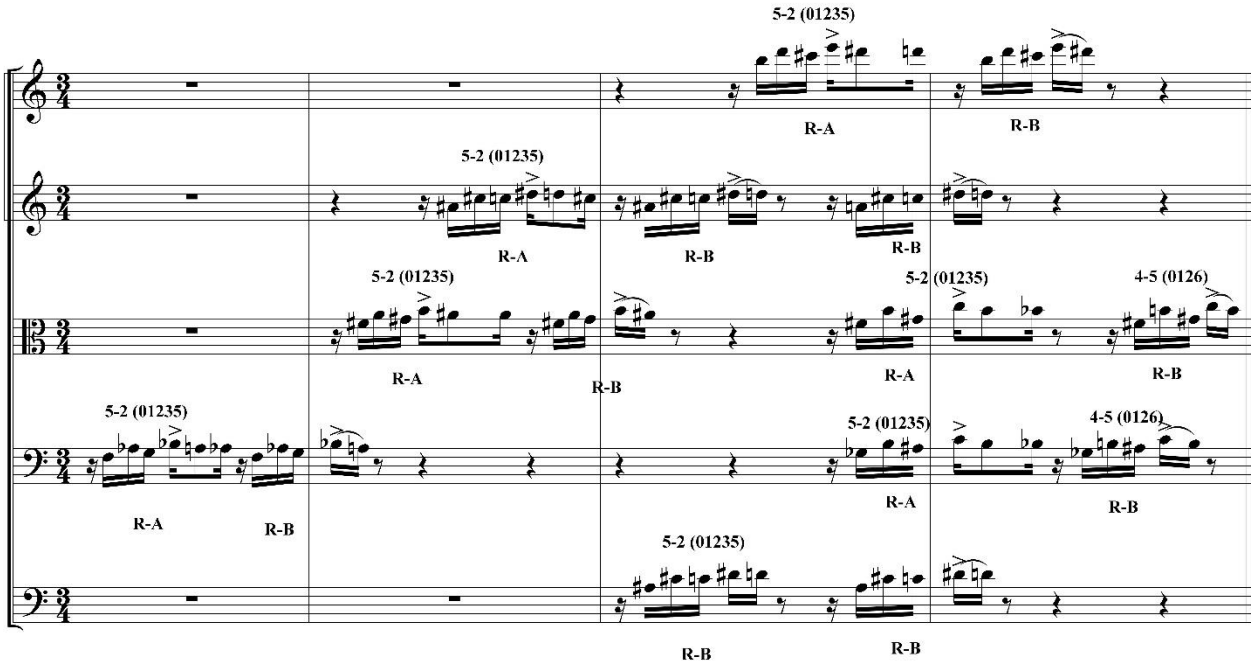


Figure 32. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm" string orchestra, mm. 212 - 215.

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Measures 212 - 215 still contain the same pitch relationships and transpositions as mm. 117 - 121. Set class 5-2 stays consistent until m. 215, where it descends to set class 4-5 in the violas and cellos.

Diversity in Structure: Contour Relations in "Ferocious Rhythm"

The contour relationships vary in "Ferocious Rhythm" in a manner analogous to pitch relationships. The first two presentations of the LM in mm. 6, 14, and 22 share the same C-SEG <03241>. Figures 33 and 34 illustrate the initial motive's gradual monophonic build to its full form (in m. 38).
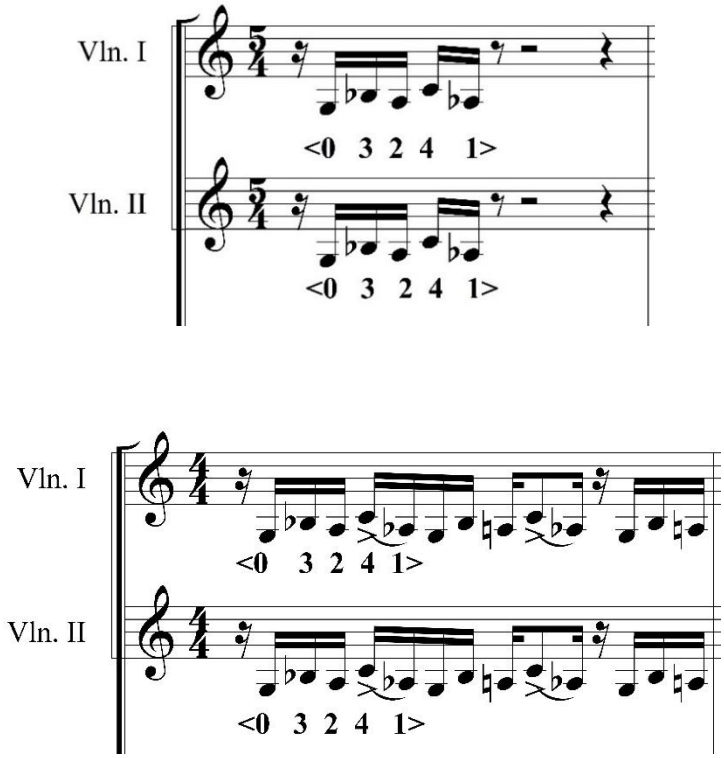


Figure 33. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *mm. 6, 14.*

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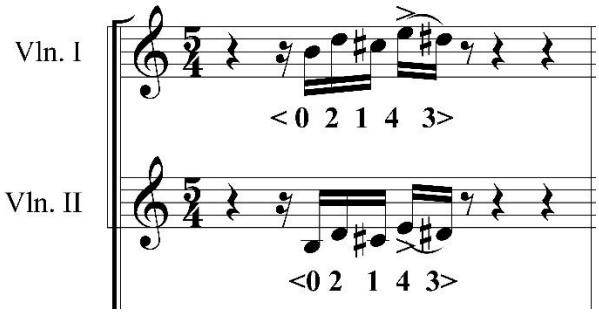


Figure 34. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," m. 22.

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The textural development from monophonic fragments to canonic usage of the LM coincides with a melodic layering not yet seen in this study: two versions of the LM with different C-SEGs appear in stretto. In m. 29 (Figure 35), the first and second violins layer with individual C-SEGs, intensifying the texture. The second violins (starting on G3) have the C-SEG <03241>, and the first violins (starting on B4) respond with the C-SEG <02143>. C-SEG <02143> is recognizable on a global level from the R-B partition of the LM that was analyzed in *Corker* and *Slang*.

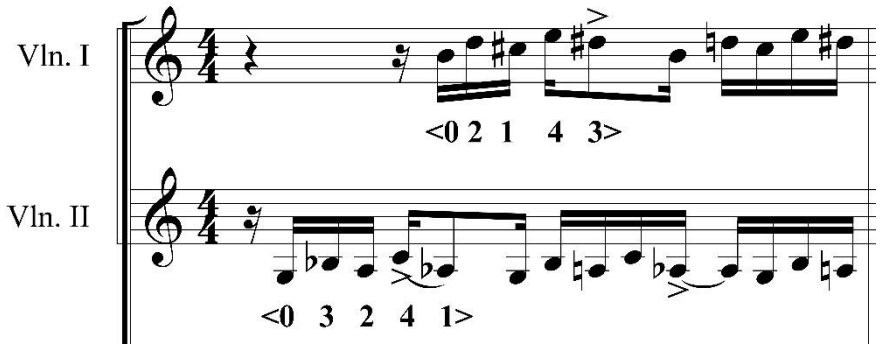


Figure 35. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *m. 29.*

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The gradual expansion of the LM completes itself in mm. 38 - 40 (Figure 36). These measures are the realization of many measures of textural buildup. The R-A and R-B fragments are in their original rhythmic succession and with the same contours found in *Corker* and *Slang*. R-A is represented by the C-SEG <021543> and R-B with <02143>, the same as the other pieces.

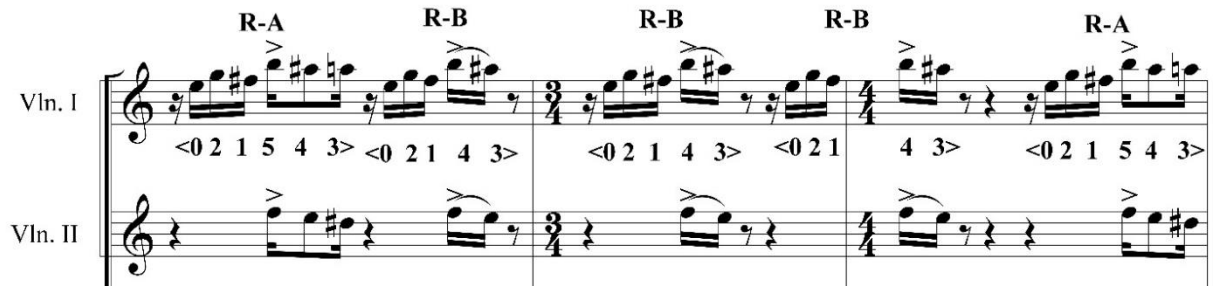


*Figure 36. Libby Larsen, "*Ferocious Rhythm," *mm. 38 - 40.*

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Larsen varies the texture again by employing an intricate dovetailing scheme in mm. 74 – 76, (Figure 37). Just like pitch relations, the LM in mm. 74 - 76 uses catalog of C-SEGs for contour consistency.

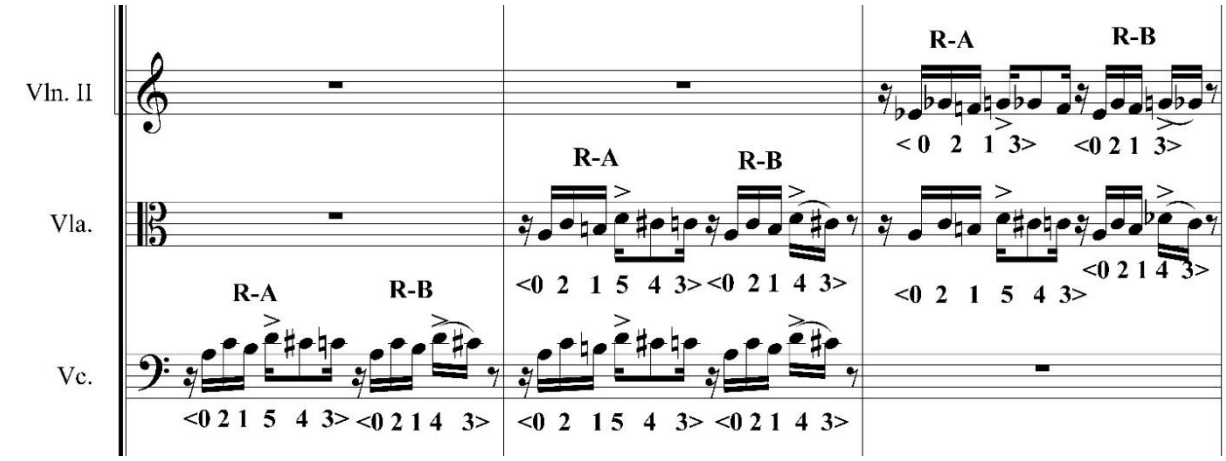


Figure 37. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *mm. 74 - 76.*

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Larsen's complex contrapuntal usage of the motive in mm. 117 - 121 brings a paradoxical notion to its contour: while the motive is intricately layered, its contour remains nearly invariant. The intensely polyphonic texture in mm. 117 - 121 is shown in Figure 38. Each motivic occurrence in each instrument contains the C-SEG <02143>, with the exception of the R-B in the cellos and violas with the C-SEG <0321> in mm. 118 - 119 and 120. The same polyphonic texture with consistent C-SEGs is found in mm. 212 - 215 (Figure 39).
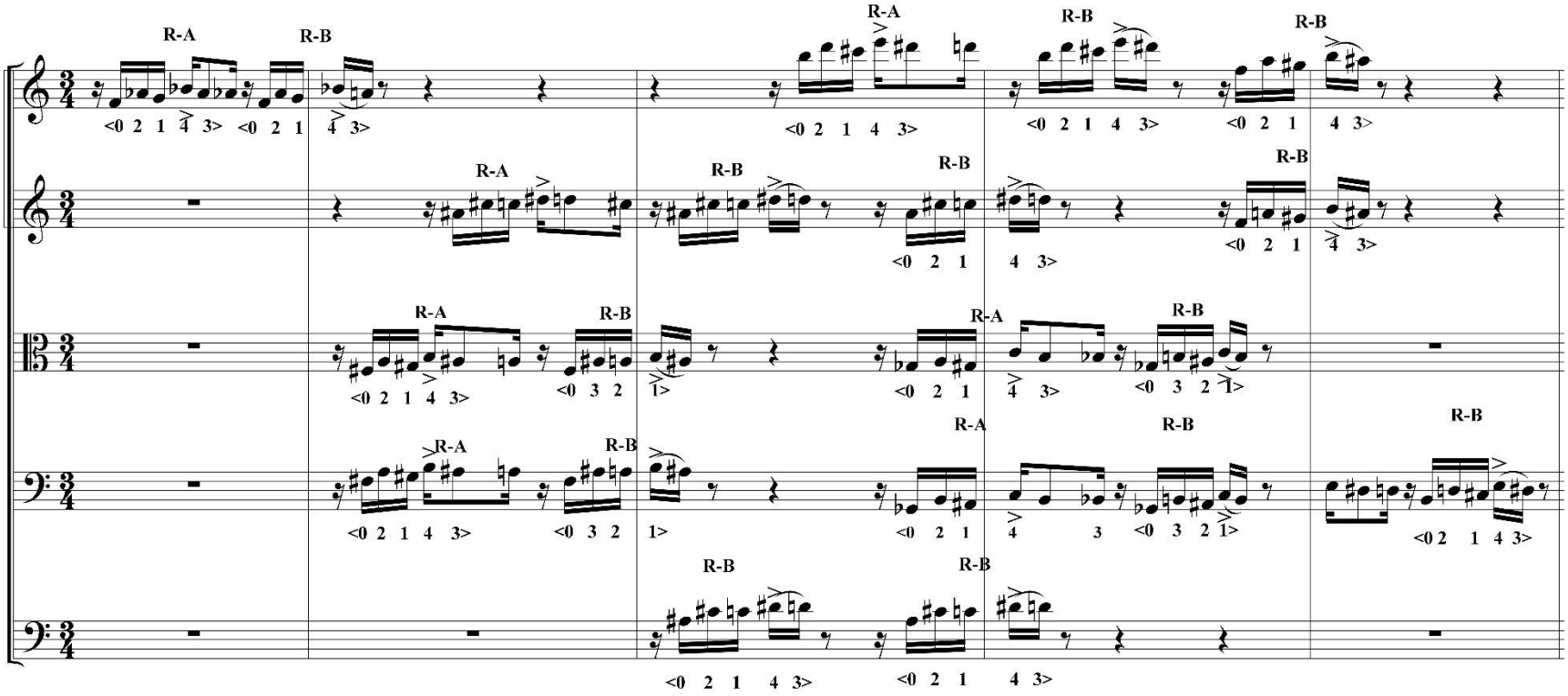


Figure 38. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," *string orchestra, mm. 117 - 121.*

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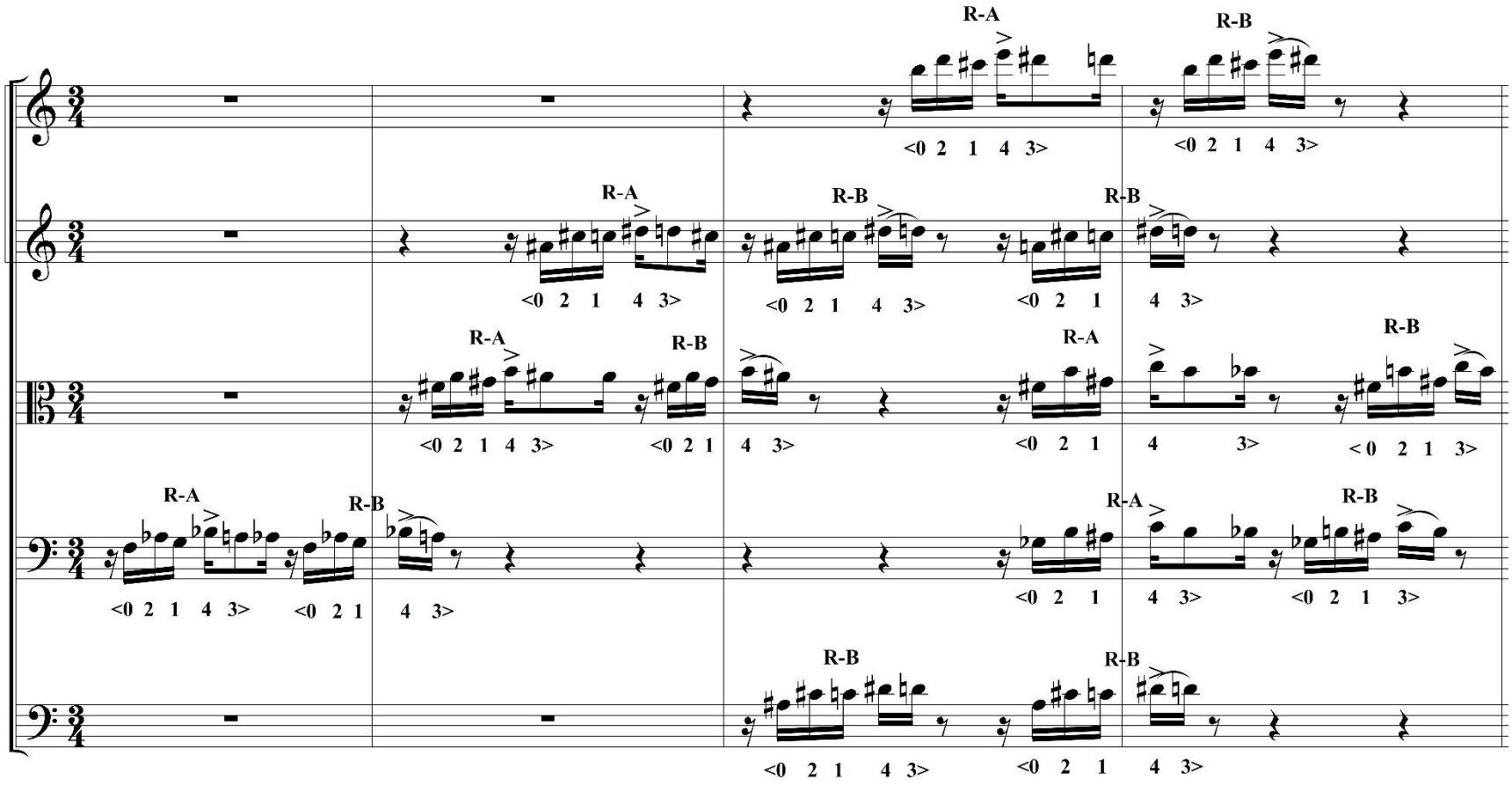


Figure 39. Libby Larsen, "Ferocious Rhythm," string orchestra, mm. 212 - 215.

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Conclusion

The present study has shown that the Larsen Motive in *Corker, Slang* and "Ferocious Rhythm" from *String Symphony* can be used as a tool in understanding Libby Larsen's unique compositional approaches and motivic employment. Using pc analysis and contour theory, this thesis has surveyed the LM's local and global usage and explored how Larsen applied it through pitch center relationships, diversified instrumentation, and textural variety. Each piece showcased how Larsen used the LM to express her musical ideas by incorporating different compositional tools. The LM's prevalence in each work shows how much Larsen values it. The LM allows her to maintain thematic recognition within individual pieces and across multiple works.

This research has the potential to expand based on the foundations set by this thesis. Pitch and contour relationships in coordination with rhythmic cells are a helpful start in contextualizing instances of the LM, but further analysis can be done. Future research on the LM can transition to motivic analyses in other Larsen compositions. The possibility of finding the LM in other works besides *Corker, Slang*, and "Ferocious Rhythm" can advance the study of how it is employed, with pitch and contour relations as part of the analytical formula. An extended component that can be added to the hybrid pc analysis/contour theory methodology used in this research is similarity relations. Robert Morris's SIM relations can be used to measure similarity between the LM's set classes by comparing their interval class vectors.[54] John Rahn's MEMB relation could also be used calculate the number of shared intervals embedded in comparable LM set classes.[55] Since West Marvin and Laprade's CSIM and CEMB functions

[54] See Robert D. Morris's "A Similarity Index for Pitch-Class Sets" (1979-80).
[55] See John Rahn's "Relating Sets" (1979-80).

model after the pitch class similarity relations, further analysis can be achieved in pursuit of finer gradations of both pitch and contour relationships within the LM occurrences. Also, other motives may appear in multiple compositions by Larsen that can contribute to this research, building into a comprehensive case study of her musical voice through motivic application.

Ultimately, the LM is a contemporary example of using a principal motive for musical development, and simultaneously a portal for analytical understanding of the composer's voice.

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Vita

Shelise Nicole Washington is a Master of Music candidate with a concentration in music theory at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Music degree from Murray State University in 2012. At Murray State University, Ms. Washington was highly involved in large and chamber ensembles as a clarinetist, studying with Dr. Scott Locke. Her passion for music theory grew while at MSU, with the tutelage and encouragement of Dr. Mike D'Ambrosio. While working with Dr. D'Ambrosio, Shelise completed her Final Research Project, "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Aaron Copland's *Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra with Harp and Piano*."

At the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Shelise has worked with Dr. Brendan McConville and Dr. Barbara Murphy, who she credits as being a major part of her success and scholastic achievement. Under Dr. McConville's advisement, her thesis, "The Larsen Motive: A Survey of Motivic Usage in Libby Larsen's *Corker*, *Slang*, and *String Symphony, III*" has proven to be successful. Washington's research on Libby Larsen has led her to present at the 2014 Joint Regional Conference of the College Music Society Southern Chapter and Mid-Atlantic Chapter at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and the First Annual THEMUS Graduate Student Conference at Temple University. Shelise Washington is also a music theory graduate teaching assistant at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, teaching undergraduate ear training courses as well as the fundamental music theory course.