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The Chord Project / Comparative Harmony Classification

MARK ALBURGER

The old Mark Twain tale has it that "I am reading a three-volume German novel." What, pray tell is it about? "I don't know yet." Whaddya mean, you don't know? "Well, the verbs don't come along until Volume Three."

Relatedly from a harmonic standpoint, much has been written about the ends of musical phrases and compositions, but less on beginnings. Is this a bias stemming back to German linguistic idiosyncrasies? Where does one start harmonically, particularly if the end goal is not necessarily a grandiose Schenkerian V I?

To approach this question, I began a modestly mad investigation of chord movement (notice the avoidance of the word "progression," as there may be no such thing as progress in life, the universe, and music), somewhat along the lines of the Solfege Project [21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, 9/03].

On the one hand, while there are only 12 pitches in traditional western even temperament, there are considerably many more chords. On the other, if a sense of modality/tonality is to be maintained (and, after all these years, the majority of music still certainly seems to indicate such), the choices clearly run along certain lines.

In any case, once again some organizing principles seemed to be needed, as investigations were charted.

Minor chords (with b3) are always listed before major chords (n3)

Chords built on any of the twelve pitches are always named chromatically as follows, respectively in m and M:

i bii ii iii iv #iv v bvi vii vi
I bII II bIII III IV #IV V bVI VI bVII VII

Note this abandons some traditional terminology, such as secondary dominants, neapolitan 6ths, and augmented 6ths (the latter in some instances respelled)

Conventional and non-conventional symbols are utilized, in the following order:

io diminished triad
i minor triad
i2 third-inversion minor seventh
iadd2 minor triad with an added second degree (assuming the tone is adjacent to root, if 8va this will be classified more traditionally as a 9th)
i-3 minor triad lacking a 3rd degree, but heard as a minor triad nonetheless, given context (while this unfortunate symbol denotes in other systems a diminished situation, here, since we already have the o for that function, it utilized over the nongrammatical and space-consuming "no")
iadd3 adding a M3 ("natural 3") to a minor triad - the blues/Stravinskian classic clash usage
i43 second-inversion minor 7th
i-5 minor triad lacking a 5th degree
i6 first-inversion minor triad
iadd6 a sixth added to a minor triad (traditionally considered a first-inversion 7th chord -- 65 -- the more recent popular usage seems more appropriate in many contexts
i64 second-inversion minor triad
i65 first-inversion minor 7th
i7 diminished 7th
iho7 half-diminished 7th
i7 minor 7th
I major triad
Iadd4 adding a 4th to a major triad (if within triad - if 8va this is better considered a 13th)
Isus4 the suspended 4th degree replacing 3
I7 dominant 7th (sometimes without dominant function, of course)
IM7 major 7th (reduced from the space hungry "Maj")
I+ augmented triad

Additionally, the following may be found at any time:

() isolating one concept among several -- e.g. I(-5)7 would be a dominant 7th lacking a fifth degree.
/ denoting a bitonal situation one chord "over" another.

Chord movements of "i bii," listed before "i bII," "i ii," "i II," etc., and so on through initial six chords.

Immediate repetition of a chord is ignored, as are any revoicings without bass movement, as in traditional harmonic conceptions.

All rhythmic values are ignored.

The assignation of chord relationships was somewhat subjective -- as sometimes "local" tonal arrangements seemed to trump long-range conceptions.

The investigated compositions seem an even more subjective collection than the solfege melodies, and were simply among the works readily at hand. The list is less cross-cultural, ranging through centuries of music history.

Given all this, it is perhaps no surprise that in the collection, most music begins on i and I, and yes, Major is major, and there are statistically fewer minor compositions. Common chords following I are variants and inversions of I, plus ii, II, iii, IV, V, V7, viio, and vii. i is often followed by bII, iv, v, V, bVI, bVII. I7, ii, IV, V, V7, and vi also begin -- IV, V, and V7 often immediately "looping back" to I. And again, there's still plenty of unrealized possibilities out there!
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<td>Verdi</td>
<td>Fiddler on the Roof: Rich Man</td>
<td>I</td>
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<td>Gershwin</td>
<td>Embraceable You</td>
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<td>Nichols</td>
<td>We've Only Just Begun</td>
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<td>Haydn</td>
<td>Creation: Heavens Are Telling</td>
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<td>Mendelssohn</td>
<td>Symphony No. 4: 1</td>
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<td>Bock</td>
<td>For Children: Quasi Adagio</td>
<td>I</td>
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Weill
Three Penny: Useless Song
iad6d V vi iad6d vo ivad6d

Alburger
Henry Miller: Suicide Song
iad6d v9 iim7/bVI iim9 ib v9

Weill
September Song
iad6d bVI6 I II43 ivad6d V7

Ager
Ain’t She Sweet
iad6d bVI7 V7 I bVI7 V7

Alburger
Bald Soprano: Overture (Theme 1)
ivad6d bVII(add6)M7 bV1(+add6)M7 iad6b6

Alburger
Mice and Men: III Tartsong H
iad6d VII(sus4)7 iad6d VII(sus4)7 iad6d VII(sus4)7

Bernstein
Candide: Glimpse and Gay
i64 biio V(-3)? I64 biio V(-3)?

Alburger
Henry Miller: June’s Song
I(add6)M7, IV(add24)M7 I7(add6)M7

Stravinsky
Histoire: Music to Scene 2
I(sus6)M7 V-5

Beatles
Helter Skelter
I7 iad6d iv7 bVI9 biII I

Simon
Bridge Over Troubled (Chorus)
I7 I(add2) V #ii65 I64 III(add4)7

Alburger
Passion: Where Would You Have
I7 bVlad2(+5) I65

Beatles
Yer Blues
17 IV I bII V V7

Beethoven
Symphony No. 1: I (Intro)
I7 IV V7 vi I7 V

Stravinsky
Petrouchka
I7 IVadd6 I65 IVadd6 I65 IVadd6

Alburger
Out on the Porch: Family Myth
I7 IV7 I7 V7 IV7 IV7

Hefni
Batman
I7 IV7 I7 V7 IV7 I7

Bern/Pink/Case
Sweet Georgia Brown (Local)
I7 IV7 bVI7 bVI5+7 bVI bVI7

Stravinsky
Rite of Spring: Dance of Youths
I7/bII

Police
Mother
I7m9 IV7m9 I7m9 IV7m9 IV7m9

Schwartz
Godspell
IM7 ii2 IM7 ii2 IVM7 iii

Alburger
Mice and Men: III Geo & Slim
IM7 II7 iii7 #IV7 I7 II7

Chicago
Colour My World
IM7 iii IV VII9 biII7M7 VIIM7

Bowie
Fame
19 IV9 I9 IV9 I9

Alburger
Henry Miller: Egypt
IM9 bIII7M7 VII9(-3-7) IM9 bIII7M7 VII9(-3-7)

Alburger
Bald Soprano
IM9 Vadd2 IM9 VM9 IM9 VM9

Pink Floyd
Great Gig in the Sky
Iii IVadd4# I IV6 vi7 ii9

Green
Body and Soul
ii V(sus4)? V7 I V(+5)+7 I

Beatles
And I Love Her
ii vi ii vi ii vi

Briussa
Doctor Doolittle: Talk to the Ann ii
bVII V IV bviiv V

Borodin
Polovtsian Dance
ii2 vio61-3-5 I ii2 I

Alburger
Out on the Porch: Creole Banjo
ii6 VII6 ii6 VII6 II6 VII6

Youmans
Tea for Two
ii7 V7 ii7 V7 IM7 Iad6d

Alburger
Henry Miller: Idea Song
II-3/iaddb 2 III-3/vaddb2 II-3/iaddb2

Menotti
Amahl: From Far Away
biII i biII i biII i

Reich
Telemann
biI(sus6)?(add4)7

Warren
Jeepers Creepers
Ii6 V7 iii65 iad6d V7 V9

Stravinsky
Firebird: Finale (Molto Pes)
ii64 IV6 I64 ii64 ii6 iv64

Bernstein
Candide: I Am Easily Assimil (Ch)
i IV V7 i iv V7 i

Bernstein
Candide: I Am Easily Assimil (V)
i7 i iv7 I vi I7

Sherman
Mary Poppins: Let's Go Fly (Ch)
IV I biioo V7 ii7 V7

Sherman
Mary Poppins: I Love to Laugh
IV I IV vi IV I

Harrison
Something (Tag)
IV7 III V VI IV III

Doors
Light My Fire (Chorus)
I4 V I IV V I

Starer
Sketches: Shades of Blue
I(-3)-7 V(add6b6) vi VII(adadd6) I iiuss4

Lewis-Rose
Blueberry Hill
I1add6 Iad6d V7 Iad6d IVadd6 Iad6d

Satie
Gymnopedie No. 1
I1VM7 IM7 IM7 IM7 IM7 IM7 IM7 IM7

Alburger
Bald Soprano: Headcold
IVM9 Iadd2 IM9 IM9 IVM9 IVM9 IM9

Bacharach
What the World Needs Now
I7 i7 IV7 VI7 V7 VI7

Stravinsky
Petrouchka: Russian Dance
V(add2)7 iad6d V(add2)7 Iad6d

Beethoven
Bagatelle: "Far Elise"
V(-3)-7 i V V(-3)-7 i

Bernstein
West Side Story: Somewhere
V6 V7 I7 IV ii7 V65

Hupfeld
As Time Goes By
V(add6)7 ii7 V7 v V7

Alburger
Henry Miller: June's Song
V(add6)M7 IV(add24)M7 I(add6)M7

Gershwin
Strike Up the Band
V7 I Iad6d I biio7 V7

Sherman
Mary Poppins: Let's Go Fly (V)
V7 I IM7 Iad6d I+ I

Willson
Music Man: Till There Was You
V7 I biio ii7 ivad6d I

Willson
Music Man: 76 Trombones
V7 I biIII7 V7 biio7 V7

Willson
Music Man: Goodnight My Some
V7 I iii7 biioV7 IV

Chopin
Prelude in A Major
V7 I V I V7 I

W.A. Mozart
Symphony No. 41: III Trio
V7 I V65 I V V7

Porter
Anything Goes
V7 I V7 I vi I7

Bart
Oliver: As Long As He Needs Me V7
IM7 Iad6d IM7 Iad6d IM7

Bernstein
West Side Story: I Feel Pretty
V+ V+ I V+ I

Bart
Oliver: Consider Yourself
V+7 I V7 #i0 i7

V. Williams
Symphony No. 7: I (Revealed)
biV vi biII I iii V

Poulenc
Double Piano Concerto: II (Th 2)
bVII(-5)? IV/VI-35 V(-3)? bIII6 iv(-5)IV35

Bolivia
El Condor Pasa (Alt Int)
vi I vi I vi IV

Alburger
Bald Soprano: XVI What Is It
vi I64 IV6 I64add6 IV I6

Howard
Fly Me to the Moon
vi ii7 V7 IM7 IV IV

Beatles
She Loves You
vi I7 IV I vi i7

Beatles
Come Together (Chorus)
vi IV V(add4)7 I7

Mussorgsky
Pictures: Promenade
vi V6 vi V iii V

Alburger
Bald Soprano: VII How Do You
vi VII I v65 IVadd6 Vadd26

Prince
Take Me With You (Chorus)
vim7 VII-3add69 Vadd6 I

Thomas
Spinning Wheel
V7 I7 V7 I7

Bern/Pink/Case
Sweet Georgia Brown (Actual)
V7 II7 V7 V(+5)+7 I7 V7
July 4

Alban Berg's *Lulu.* National Theater, Munich, Germany. "[David Aldan] has reset it in a nightmarish corner of American suburbia in or around the 1950's" [Jeremy Eichler, The New York Times, 7/7/04].


July 7


July 9

Kurt Masur, with Wynton Marsalis, conducts the Boston Symphony and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, in Marsalis's *All Rise,* opening the Tanglewood Festival. Lenox, MA. "All Rise, written for combined jazz and classical orchestras . . . had its premiere a the New York Philharmonic in 1999. It's great when an orchestra commissions an evening-length work, rather than a 10-minute one, from a living composer [how can you commission one from a dead one? - ed.]. It's great when the people who first championed the piece continue to support and perform it after its premiere . . . And it's great to see symphony orchestras trying to reach out and open themselves up to other traditions. . . . But works of art are also measured by their content. And for all the great, evident aspirations . . . it was (like so many state encounters) a rather one-sided discussion. When the jazz orchestra had a chance to show its stuff -- as it did for long stretches, particularly in the last 4 of the work's 12 movements -- the piece came alive. But when the regular orchestra and chorus entered the picture, they did so rather stiffly, articulating little bursts of not-very-meaningful sound (. . . Marsalis almost certainly had help with his orchestration . . .). The classical artists came off as awkward and even nerdy, despite Mr. Masur's best efforts to cast off his aura of gravitas and to groove. The overall message was subversive, especially in the hallowed classical groves of Tanglewood: a jazz ensemble is cooler than a symphony orchestra" [Anne Midgette, The New York Times, 7/13/04].

July 10

*Bang on a Can Summer Institute.* Phil Kline's *Zippo Songs.* Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA.

Rafael Frhbeck de Burgos conducts the Boston Symphony in Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Concerto for the Left Hand,* with Leon Fleisher. Tanglewood Festival, Lenox, MA.

July 11

Boston Symphony in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 1.* Tanglewood Festival, Lenox, MA.

July 13

Elton John, with Renee Fleming and musicians from the Royal Academy of Music, the Juilliard School, and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, in a scholarship concert benefiting the latter two institutions. Radio City Music Hall, New York, NY. "A harpist plays an arpeggio. An additional 98 orchestra members sit in the bleachers above the stage, waiting their turn. A 62-member choir bides its time. A rock band is set up below them. And there sits a man at a piano, singing, 'I need you to turn to when I lose control / You're my guardian angel who keeps out the cold.' Who but Elton John could get away with this nonsense? . . . This was not a night devoted to musical understatement: as Sir Elton barreled through his catalog, he was shameless and bombastic and -- for the most part -- irresistible. Sir Elton turns his piano ballads into athletic displays, pounding the keys and bellowing the lyrics . . . . [i]'Have Mercy on the Criminal . . . . After many of the songs he gave himself a standing ovation, pacing the stage triumphantly. In his own weird way Sir Elton is one of our most macho pop stars. Many songs benefited from the orchestral treatment, or at any rate didn't suffer too much from it . . . . The hall seemed to be full of casual fans, and Sir Elton played enough of his big hits to keep them happy, although he skipped 'Bennie and the Jets.' (Too bad: imagine the 62 singers lifting their voices as one and crying out, 'Bennie! Bennie! Bennie! And the Jets!') He also played a new song, 'Freaks in Love,' from an album he said was due out in November. 'We're on the outside looking in, a couple of freaks in love,' he crooned, over a leisurely 6/8 beat. Some of the slower songs were loud and tiresome: there were a few moments when one longed to toss a hair dryer into the bathos and end it all. But by the time he returned for an encore, singing a furious, choir-enhanced version of 'Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me,' there was nothing to be done but sit there and admire the spectacle. The finale was 'Your Song,' an ear-busting duet with Renee Fleming. 'I know it's not much, but it's the best I can do,' she sang to him, and who could root against a couple this ridiculous?" [Kelefa Sanneh, The New York Times, 7/15/04].


July 16


In 2000 he told Daily Yomiuri, a Tokyo newspaper, that one reason he devoted his life to movie music was because he had a taste for 'certain middle-class comforts.' The other reason was apparent in his exuberant oeuvre: 'I loved drama, and I loved the movies' [Douglas Martin, The New York Times, 7/23/04].

Lincoln Center Festival. Paul D. Miller (DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid) in *Transmetropolitan*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "[T]hey looked even better on screen than onstage. . . . The concert itself was pretty great, too, even if it didn't look quite as good as the concert video" [Kelefa Sanneh, The New York Times, 7/23/04].

July 21

Death of Illinois Jacquet, of a heart attack, at 81. New York, NY. "[He was] an influential tenor-saxophone star who bridged swing and rhythm and blues and persevered as a big band leader into his early 80's. . . . Only a handful of instrumental solos in jazz have inspired anyone beyond a small coterie of musicians and rabid fans to memorize them; one of them is 'Flying Home,' a lusty, brick-throwing [!] solo by the 19-year-old Mr. Jacquet (pronounced Ja-KETT, but often rendered as JACK-et by his friends). Recorded on the first take in 1942, with Lionel Hampton's orchestra, his 80-second solo . . . was carefully structured, building its energy precipitously and cresting on a single note, repeated 12 times in a row. The tune became a national hit, and was demanded of Mr. Jacquet night after night. He left the band less than two years later, pleading physical exhaustion. 'Sometimes you have to quit to save your life,' he said in an interview much later with Texas Monthly magazine. 'I looked in the mirror and said, 'You're dying, and Hampton is getting rich' . . . 'Flying Home' established Mr. Jacquet as a house-rocker, honking low notes and wailing in the highest, or altissimo, register; he climbed two and a half octaves above the tenor saxophone's normal range by using overtones. . . . Jacquet earned the nickname the Beast because of intemperate playing, but also because he tended not to suffer fools gladly. . . . Jacquet received an honorary doctorate for musical arts from the Juilliard School . . . on May 21" [Ben Ratliff, The New York Times, 7/23/04].

Lincoln Center Festival. Stephen Sondheim's *The Frogs* (after Aristophanes), with Nathan Lane. Vivian Beaumont Theater, New York, NY. "I am forced to concede that what should have been a zesty, airy soufflé is a soggy, lumpy batter that never shows the slightest signs of rising" [Ben Brantley, The New York Times, 7/23/04].

July 22

In recent years he sometimes collaborated [computationally] with his son Joel . . . includ[ing] *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996). . . . Goldsmith composed orchestral pieces and conducted symphony orchestras around the world, including the Royal Philharmonic . . . . He also taught . . . composition at the University of Southern California. He told the Glasgow newspaper that one reason he devoted his life to movie music was because he had a taste for 'certain middle-class comforts.' The other reason was apparent in his exuberant oeuvre: 'I loved drama, and I loved the movies' [Douglas Martin, The New York Times, 7/23/04].
July 23

Devo plays its first public New York concert since the 80's. Central Park Summer Stage, New York, NY. "Devo... started as an art project, turned into a cult band and had its moment as a pop novelty hit maker with 'Whip It' in 1980. Its songs use constricted structures to foster both tension and comedy, as when Mark Mothersbaugh proclaims, 'I've got an uncontrollable urge,' to music that's strictly under control. The tunes are built on stiff, jerky rhythms that somehow hint at funk anyway. Before MTV existed, Devo understood the power of building an image through video. And before words like 'branding' became music-business staples, Devo had its own logo and mock-corporate image. The band satirized commercial claims that products were constantly new and improved by setting out its own doctrine of de-evolution: that human intelligence is rapidly declining. Early in its career Devo recorded a rhythmically displaced version of the Rolling Stones' own complaint about commercials, 'Satisfaction.' Yet while Devo has sporadically disbanded and regrouped over the last decade, Mr. Mothersbaugh and two other members have been writing music for commercials and soundtracks. On July 22 Devo performed elsewhere in Central Park at a corporate-sponsored event. July 23's concert was partly a vigorous nostalgia trip, with a set of the band's most familiar songs and Devo's members wearing their matching yellow jumpsuits and red 'energy dome' hats, which look like inverted flowerpots. As always, the group members called their audience 'spuds.' . . . Hearing Devo now made clearer how much the band was a product of the 1970's -- 'Mongoloid,' about a happy corporate drone, could have been a Ramones song if not for Mr. Mothersbaugh's swooping keyboard part -- and how thoroughly the band warped its basic garage-band riffs and synthesizer licks, often bending them into odd meters. Yet what now comes through . . . just as much as their cleverness, is the rancor behind the jokes: the smoldering annoyance that a generation later, corporate brainwashing and de-evolution only seem to be accelerating" [Jon Pareles, The New York Times, 7/26/04].


July 24

Lincoln Center Festival. John Tavener's seven-hour musical vigil The Veil of the Temple. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "No one can accuse the Lincoln Center Festival of timidity . . . The performance of this self-consciously mystical work for a chorus of 120, vocal soloists, organ, brass and percussion ensembles, Tibetan horn, temple bowls and Indian harmonium, began at 10:30pm on July 24 . . . and ended with no intermissions, close to 5:30am [the next morning].
Comment

By the Numbers

Salaries of Music Directors

$2,280,000  Lorin Maazel, New York Philharmonic
$2,140,000  Daniel Barenboim, Chicago Symphony
$1,470,000  Michael Tilson Thomas, SF Symphony
$1,240,000  Esa-Pekka Salonen, LA Philharmonic
$551,719   Andrew Litton, Dallas Symphony
$505,615   Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony

Items

Who knew? All those philosophers and scientists and theoreticians and composers who believed in the ancient notion of a Music of the Spheres were onto something. There is such a music, and it's the note of B flat.

Or so scientists told us a few months ago when they announced that the Perseus galaxy cluster, 250 light years from our little planet, was emitting that note, or a series of those notes, which "appear as pressure waves roiling and spreading as a result of outbursts from a supermassive black hole," in the words of Dennis Overbye, a science reporter for The New York Times.

The notes have a period of oscillation of 10 million years, which makes them "the lowest note in the universe." So said Dr. Andrew Fabian, an X-ray astronomer at Cambridge University in England and the leader of the team that discovered the note.

Since the black-hole B flat is 57 octaves lower than middle C, it cannot be heard, thus only questionably qualifying as a pitch.

As a digression, I thought of the California composer Terry Riley. Mr. Riley, always something of a cosmic mystic, who won his first fame in 1964 with his composition In C, which has been endlessly recorded and played, in part because it's so beautiful and in part because it's so ingenious: a series of simple melodic figures that any group of any kind of instrumentalists may play according to certain simple rules, setting up a dappled tapestry of sound.

Mr. Riley's most recent piece attests to his fascination with the cosmos. It's called Sun Rings, and although lavishly praised on the West Coast (the Kronos Quartet performs it), it hasn't yet made it to our benighted Eastern outback. Sun Rings is based on "space sounds" recorded by Dr. Don Gurnett of the University of Iowa. One wonders idly if B-flat plays any special role. To judge from In C, Mr. Riley is a C man.

Tables ascribing emotional characteristics to keys have poured out over the centuries back to the ancient Greeks. The most complete compendium of these descriptions was compiled by Dr. Rita Steblin in a book published by the University of Rochester Press and titled A History of Key Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries, although she ranges far earlier and later than that.

The descriptions were always highly subjective, but those in Dr. Steblin's book for B flat major (let's try to keep this reasonably simple, avoiding B flat minor [and the modes]) generally call it a happy key. "Magnificent and joyful," as per one early French source. "Noble," thought another Frenchman. "Condescending greatness mixed with venerable seriousness," said a late-18th-century German. "Cheerful love, clear conscience, hope, aspirations for a better world," wrote another. "Tender, soft, sweet, love, charm, grace," according to an Italian [typical key for brass instruments? -ed.].

If we listen to these sages, a B flat universe is not such a bad place to be. And if we buy into August Gathy, a Frenchman who wrote in 1835, the key relates to "noble womanliness," too. Maybe there's something to Erda or Gaia, after all. Check out www.gaiaconsort.com, a site devoted to "music for freethinking pagans, humanists, psychedelics, visionaries, wiccans, mystics." perhaps Mr. Riley already has.

Before we reluctantly leave the concept of keys, here is a highly selective list of well-known compositions in B flat major; make of them what you will: Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Piano Sonata and Symphony No. 4, Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 2, Haydn's Symphonies Nos. 98 and 102, Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5, Schubert's Symphony No. 5, Schumann's Symphony No. 1.

The universe has not yet been detected as emitting music in any key or mode. It is just steadily (and very slowly) singing the note of B flat, over and over. What song did the Sirens sing? What note? What key? We await further word from our intrepid scientists, ears cocked to the cosmos.

John Rockwell
The New York Times
1/30/04
"Alice Flaherty . . . aims to provide new insights about writer's block, metaphor, hypergraphia (the maniacal desire to write) and what is variously referred to as creativity, genius, (divine) inspiration and the Muse.  There is even a subchapter deconstructing religious visions and, by extension, God . . . .  
Her thesis is that if once the urge to write (in the creative, not the perfunctory, sense) was attributed to psychological, ineffable or supernatural causes, it should now be linked more strictly to conditions of the brain, to neuroscience (Flaherty is a neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital).  
'Researchers will soon be able to see which patterns of brain activity underlie creativity,' she asserts.  Data showing that writers and poets are, respectively, 10 and 40 times more likely to be manic-depressive than the general population leads Flaherty to speculate that 'the neurobiology of mood and the limbic drive to write may be equally or more important [in determining who becomes a writer] than the purely cognitive skills taught in most writing courses.'  
She has seen this in herself.  After giving birth to premature twin boys who died, Flaherty suffered from a major postpartum depression that resulted in hypergraphia: 'For the next four months I ricocheted daily between euphoria and terror. . . . I wrote during meetings, I wrote when I should have been doing experiments, I wrote when I could have been with friends or family.  The sight of a computer keyboard or a blank page gave me the same rush that drug addicts get from seeing their freebasing paraphernalia.'  This experience prompted her to uncover a connection between hypergraphia and epileptic seizures, which she calls a 'window on brain states that selectively affect creativity.'  
In studying epilepsy she discerns that it has similarities to manic depression, and a survey of the lives of authors (Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Coleridge, et al.) who suffered from one or the other confirms this for her. . . .  
'Mental illness is not completely separable from sanity.  There is a sense in which mental illness is awfully like sanity -- only much, much more so.'  'We write to escape our prisons.'"  
[Marc Smirnoff, San Francisco Chronicle, 1/18/04].