Jokes, as every good joke teller knows, depend on expectation and . . . timing. Moreover, those expectations depend on knowing your audience or to put it another way, require the joke teller and his/her interlocutors to have common linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds. In other words, jokes depend on knowledge of both syntax and style. It should come as no surprise, then, that Leonard Meyer loved a good joke, and my own memories of Lenny are peppered with the many jokes we exchanged over the years.

And thus it is also no surprise that after bursting on the academic scene in 1956 with *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Leonard’s next book, written with Grosvenor Cooper, was *The Rhythmic Structure of Music* (1960). Just as *Emotion and Meaning* was and remains a landmark work in the study of musical expression and style, “RSM” was and remains a watershed work in the study of rhythm and meter. That is to say, “timing.”

Comparatively little work had been done in rhythmic theory and analysis in the 20th century prior to Cooper and Meyer’s text. Ernst Kurth had engaged in both wide-ranging music analysis (in his 1925 book on Bruckner) and a theory of musical motion as psychic motion (in his *Musikpsychologie* of 1931), though it is not clear if Meyer knew of Kurth’s work. Alfred Lorenz, whose work Meyer did know, had analyzed rhythm and form in the music of Wagner (in his *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner* of 1925). Meyer also drew on the work of Curt Sachs, who in his *Rhythm and Tempo* of 1953 gave a historical and cross-cultural study of
universals in rhythmic structure, especially the notion of “tempo giusto.” Around the time RSM appeared, rhythmic analysis was dominated by the writings of composers like Boulez, Stockhausen, and Babbitt, and those writings chiefly served as exegeses on their compositional practices.

RSM’s chief contribution was that it gave a thorough and rigorous account of the hierarchical nature of musical rhythm:

As a piece of music unfolds, its rhythmic structure is perceived not as a series of discrete independent units strung together in a mechanical, additive way like beads, but as an organic process in which smaller rhythmic motives, while possessing a shape and structure of their own, also function as integral parts of a larger rhythmic organization. (p. 2)

Somewhat notoriously (though following in the footsteps of Lorenz and Kurth), RSM extended accounts of rhythm structure from the foreground to the highest levels of form, most notably in its analysis of the first movement of Beethoven’s Eighth Symphony as a giant anapest (a weak-weak-strong figure). Meyer later admitted that he and Cooper went too far in doing this (see Meyer, 1991, p. 250). But the limits of rhythm—where rhythm ends and form begins—was and remains a problem, along with the limits of meter and hypermeter. RSM also engaged with the nature of accent (famously defined “an event that is marked for consciousness in some way,” pp. 7-8), the inter-relationship between rhythm and meter, and the way our knowledge of musical styles and genres affect our experience of particular passages and pieces. In short, it set the table for subsequent work in the theory and analysis of rhythm that followed in the remainder of the twentieth century.

In 1984 I had finished a master’s thesis on the phenomenology of rhythm, with Jonathan Kramer at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Kramer had just finished the manuscript for The Time of Music (which appeared in 1988), and to his credit Jonathan insisted I leave the nest and further my studies elsewhere. The options for doctoral study in rhythmic theory and analysis in 1984 were limited. Edward T. Cone (who had written on rhythm in his Musical Form and Musical Performance of 1968) was semi-retired at Princeton. Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s GTTM had just come out (though my copy was already dog eared by that point), but Lerdahl and Jackendoff were not at the same institution: Jackendoff was at Brandeis, and Lerdahl was at Columbia, but the rest of Columbia’s current music theory nucleus was not in place (Kramer moved to Columbia several years later).

Carl Schachter was at Mannes/CUNY, but I was not of a Schenkerian bent.

And so, chiefly on account of The Rhythmic Structure of Music I went to Penn, and thus my fate was sealed. Since the mid 1980s, the study of rhythm and meter in both music theory and in psychology has flourished. Most encouragingly has been the profitable cross-pollinations between the two disciplines, and I am pleased that my own work has made a modest contribution in that interdisciplinary arena. Lenny understood that art is created under various constraints, some given by nature, others by culture, and this turned into my life’s work, the study of the perceptual and cognitive constraints on musical meter.

Lenny was also keenly aware that works of art are contingent facts—they are peculiar and particular, and thus one cannot turn the analysis and/or criticism of artworks into a science. But science has much to say about how artworks work, how they are shaped, and how they are understood. History has much to say as well, which is to say, the cultural context in which artworks appear and are understood. Leonard Meyer was a humanist in the truest sense of the word. By applying science—whether it was statistics and information theory, or psychology, or acoustics—to musical phenomena, we gain a greater sense of what it means to be human, and a deeper appreciation for the wonders of our imagination.