

Piece 6 'Valse', applying a germinal motive

'Valse' (piece 6) from 'Fantasia' of Oscar van Hemel (1892–1981), shows how to make melodies out of one small musical idea, so called germinal motive. That is, a germinal motive leads to several melodies, which are moulded in such way that they get just the expression a composer needs. In fact, we have several melodies which can be explained in terms of one motive: melodies of one family!

'Valse' is a small piece. So Van Hemel's use of this idea is limited. However, it will be shown that his application of the idea is quite instructive.

1. Building a three part model.

Step 1: the basic model

Study the following example: a tonic pedal point in the lowest voice and a stepwise, descending line in the upper voice.

Example 1a: basic model, two part (pedal point and line)

Musical notation for Example 1a: basic model, two part (pedal point and line). The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two staves. The upper staff (treble clef) shows a descending line of four quarter notes: G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff (bass clef) shows a tonic pedal point of four quarter notes: G2, G2, G2, G2. A slur connects the notes in the lower staff. A '4' is written above the final measure of the upper staff.

Step 2: the basic model, three part

To make it three part, we add a middle voice in parallel motion at the interval of a perfect fourth. So, consecutive fourths between inner and upper voice.

Example 1b: the basic model, three part

Musical notation for Example 1b: the basic model, three part. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two staves. The upper staff (treble clef) shows a descending line of four quarter notes: G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff (bass clef) shows a tonic pedal point of four quarter notes: G2, G2, G2, G2. A middle voice is added in the upper staff, starting on D4 and descending stepwise: D4, C4, B3, A3. A slur connects the notes in the lower staff. A '4' is written above the final measure of the upper staff.

Step 3: the basic model, elaborated

Parallel motion results in a predictable music. One or more small deviations from strict parallel motion can have musically interesting effects. Van Hemel applies only one deviation by an exchange of two notes in the inner voice. The new inner voice is then: E–D–B–C.

Example 1c: three part basic model, modified inner voice

Musical notation for Example 1c: three part basic model, modified inner voice. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two staves. The upper staff (treble clef) shows a descending line of four quarter notes: G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff (bass clef) shows a tonic pedal point of four quarter notes: G2, G2, G2, G2. A middle voice is added in the upper staff, starting on D4 and descending stepwise: D4, C4, B3, A3. A slur connects the notes in the lower staff. A '4' is written above the final measure of the upper staff.

Step 4: the basic model, two part again

Van Hemel makes by a special rhythmical organization the inner voice to the main line. Meanwhile, the three part model has been reduced into a two part.

Example 1d: three part basic model 3, modified inner voice

Step 5: the basic model, finishing touch

The final version is a nice rhythmical interplay between upper and lower voice. The upper voice is melodically elaborated by neighbour and passing tones and rhythmically by a dotted figure. The lower voice not only imitates the dotted figure, but also presents a melodic figure that seems to be the key to Van Hemel's melodic organization.

Example 1e: the basic model, final version

2. Excurs: the trichord as germinal motive

When we listen to the lowest voice of example 1e, some sort of repetition will be noticed. Building blocks are the intervals second and third. Melody A is the original one and melody B the modified one. Melody C is the complete pitch-structure, that reveals hidden, sequential, three note patterns.

Example 2a: trichord patterns as basic melodic structure

The last tone A (between brackets) is borrowed from the following melody and interpreted as a common tone. This interpretation can be defended by analytical practices in the eighteenth century. However, one can say that due to the fact that the tone A is omnipresent and also starting point of the melodic figure in bar 4 (see example 1e) this interpretation is not necessary.

Melody C can be seen as a combination of two trichords (three-note pitch structures) that have the interval second and third in common. The second trichord is a variation or better, a transposed permutation of the first.

By the way, such trichords are universal: they appear basic structures in many melodies, for example in Gregorian chant and old folk songs.

Example 2b: a trichord combined with a permutation

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. It is divided into two sections. The first section, labeled 'Main trichord', contains three notes: G4, A4, and B4. The second section, labeled 'Permutation (transposed)', contains three notes: E4, F4, and G4. The notes are represented by black dots on the staff lines.

Trichords are easily subject to permutation. The result of permutation is recognizable patterns that are members of one family. Examples:

Example 2c: all permutations of the main trichord

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. It contains six groups of three notes, each separated by a double bar line. Above each group are numbers indicating fingerings. The groups and their fingerings are: 1 2 3, 1 3 2, 2 1 3, 2 3 1, 3 1 2, and 3 2 1. The notes are G4, A4, and B4 in each group, but their order varies according to the fingering sequence.

These patterns can be varied in other, more complex ways such as inversion (I) and retrograde (R) procedures. Examples.

Example 2d: complex variations of of the main trichord

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. It is divided into seven sections by double bar lines. The first section is labeled 'Main trichord' and contains G4, A4, B4. The following sections are labeled 'I', 'R of I', 'I', 'R of I', 'I', and 'R of I'. Each section contains three notes representing the main trichord in its respective variation: inversion (I) and retrograde (R) of the inversion (R of I).

The main trichord can be seen as germinal motive, i.e. as point of explanation of melodic organization. The next section gives a melodic analysis from this point of view.

3. Melodic analysis of 'Valse'

The form of 'Valse' is A–B–A. Each section is built by two 16 bar phrases (antecedent–consequent). The more detailed form can be described as (A1+A2) – (B1+B2) – (A1+A2).

The basic melody of A1 is as follows, where the marks refer to trichord forms.

Example 3a: basic melody of A1

The final version of this basic melody of A1 is created by applying neighbour and passing tones:

Example 3b: basic melody of A1

The melody of A2 is similar (moves only to tonic A).

In B1 the melody is in the lowest voice. The following example shows its basic form.

Example 3c: basic melody of B1

The relation with the melody of the bass in A1 will be evident:

- a trichord after an ascending fifth (see bracket in example 3c)
- 2 bar pre- and post-extension by repetition: fifth at the beginning and the third at the end

Example 3d: A1, lowest voice

The basic melody of B1 is elaborated with neighbour tones.

Example 3e: final version of B1

The melody of B2 has a different follow-up, which familiar (look at example 3b). The marks indicate trichord forms.

Example 3f: final version of B2

4. Section B: melodic-harmonic analysis.

Section A is two-part: all ingredients are already mentioned. Section B is mainly three- or four-part. The left hand, playing the lowest voice, has the main melody. The right hand has 'chords', making section B different from section A. However, thorough listening makes clear that section B is in fact two part made more colourfull by some chordal activity. This section can be analyzed form different points of view. First, the most easiest way; B1 with the basic melody in the upper voice, built by variants of our trichord.

Example 4a: basic model B1

The following analysis is maybe better: the melody starting (like the bass in Section A1 with the interval fifth) with the inner voice F#

Example 4b: alternative basic model B1

The trichord C#-B-G# in the lowest voice is accompanied by the variant C#-B-D# in the upper voice, that is connected with its retrograde form D#-B-C# (D# is common tone).

B2 starts as B1 but has a different subphrase, which has to do with our trichord.

Example 4c: basic model B2

Musical score for Example 4c: basic model B2. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The right hand part consists of a sequence of chords, with fret numbers 0 and 0x indicated above the notes. The left hand part provides a rhythmic accompaniment using eighth and quarter notes.

The 'chords' are based on triads. One exception: a chord based on the trichord. It would have been nice when Van Hemel had applied this idea of trichord verticalization more often.

The working out of Section B is lighthearted: the right hand playing in each bar after a rest, sometimes three-part, sometimes two- or one-part.

Example 4d: section B

Musical score for Example 4d: section B. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It is divided into two systems. The right hand part consists of chords with rests, and the left hand part provides a rhythmic accompaniment using eighth and quarter notes.

3. Final version A-B-A

The final version is made by assembling the Section A to a Section B, both slightly modified.
Note Van Hemel's performing indications (e.g. dynamics, articulation), that also stress the difference between Section A and Section B.

Valse

Grazioso

The musical score consists of six systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system is marked **Grazioso** and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble and *pp* in the bass. The second system includes a *poco rit.* instruction. The third system is marked **Tempo primo** and features an *espressivo* marking in the bass. The fourth system continues with *mf* dynamics. The fifth system returns to *pp* dynamics. The sixth system concludes with a *poco rit.* instruction. The score uses various dynamic markings: *p*, *pp*, *mf*, and *espressivo*. It also includes articulation marks such as accents and slurs.

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