

Coherence in Grieg's Folkevis

Folkevis (Folk Song), Op. 38 No. 2 by Edvard Grieg, written in 1883, is a beautiful and lyrical piano miniature that reflects Grieg's deep connection to Norwegian folk traditions. Part of his Lyric Pieces collection, this work captures the simplicity, warmth, and charm of a traditional Norwegian folk melody. Its flowing, song-like quality is enhanced by Grieg's delicate use of harmony, creating a sense of nostalgia and intimacy.

The analysis in this text focuses on the beautiful melody of this piece in ternary aka A-B-A' form, not from the perspective of its motivic structure, but in terms of its main tones. Identifying the main tones involves simplifying the musical texture by removing ornamentation and diminutions to reveal the underlying framework or skeleton. In theory, reversing this process by adding elaboration could reconstruct Grieg's original version.

I should emphasize that identifying the main tones is primarily an aural process, grounded in listening rather than theoretical analysis. That said, in many modal and tonal compositions, the main tones often form meaningful, stereotypical relationships with one another. These relationships are historically legitimized and traditionally determined. Linear progressions, for example, have deep historical roots and often serve as the foundational framework of a melody. Over time, composers have increasingly embellished these progressions, and the nature of this elaboration reflects the stylistic conventions of different periods. Approaching music with this perspective can deepen your understanding of its structure while simultaneously enhancing your listening skills.

Next a fundamental question arises: are there basic, universal stereotypes underlying these melodic elaborations? Indeed, there are. For example, neighbour tones - a timeless melodic device - appear consistently across styles and eras. These simple, decorative figures provide a glimpse into the shared vocabulary of musical structure, bridging historical and stylistic boundaries.

By removing neighbour tones, we can gain a clearer perspective on the underlying structure of the melody. Let's illustrate this with two examples from Folkevis.

Ex. 1



The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The first part of the staff shows the original melody with various ornaments and rhythmic patterns. The second part, separated by a double bar line, shows the 'main tones' as a simplified sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.

Ex. 2



The image shows a musical staff in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The first part of the staff shows the original melody with various ornaments and rhythmic patterns. The second part, separated by a double bar line, shows the 'main tones' as a simplified sequence of notes: G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2.

Let's apply this analytical method to the melody of Folkevis. The annotated score provided in the appendix offers clarity and supports this analysis. The result is as follows:

The image shows two systems of a musical score for Grieg's Folkevis. Each system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff, a middle treble clef staff, and a bass clef staff. The first system is numbered 3, 6, 11, and 14. The second system is numbered 15, 19, 22, 28, and 30. Red arrows are drawn across the staves to trace a linear progression of pitches. The progression starts in the first system, moves from the middle treble staff to the bass staff, then continues through the second system, moving between the treble and bass staves, and finally ending in the middle treble staff.

Note how a line or linear progression can be distributed across multiple voices. When we represent everything in one progression (pitches transposed) , we see the following:

The image shows a single staff of music in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a sequence of notes representing a linear progression. The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2, F#2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1, F#1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0, F#0, E0, D0, C0, B-1, A-1, G-1, F#-1, E-1, D-1, C-1, B-2, A-2, G-2, F#-2, E-2, D-2, C-2, B-3, A-3, G-3, F#-3, E-3, D-3, C-3, B-4, A-4, G-4, F#-4, E-4, D-4, C-4, B-5, A-5, G-5, F#-5, E-5, D-5, C-5, B-6, A-6, G-6, F#-6, E-6, D-6, C-6, B-7, A-7, G-7, F#-7, E-7, D-7, C-7, B-8, A-8, G-8, F#-8, E-8, D-8, C-8, B-9, A-9, G-9, F#-9, E-9, D-9, C-9, B-10, A-10, G-10, F#-10, E-10, D-10, C-10, B-11, A-11, G-11, F#-11, E-11, D-11, C-11, B-12, A-12, G-12, F#-12, E-12, D-12, C-12, B-13, A-13, G-13, F#-13, E-13, D-13, C-13, B-14, A-14, G-14, F#-14, E-14, D-14, C-14, B-15, A-15, G-15, F#-15, E-15, D-15, C-15, B-16, A-16, G-16, F#-16, E-16, D-16, C-16, B-17, A-17, G-17, F#-17, E-17, D-17, C-17, B-18, A-18, G-18, F#-18, E-18, D-18, C-18, B-19, A-19, G-19, F#-19, E-19, D-19, C-19, B-20, A-20, G-20, F#-20, E-20, D-20, C-20, B-21, A-21, G-21, F#-21, E-21, D-21, C-21, B-22, A-22, G-22, F#-22, E-22, D-22, C-22, B-23, A-23, G-23, F#-23, E-23, D-23, C-23, B-24, A-24, G-24, F#-24, E-24, D-24, C-24, B-25, A-25, G-25, F#-25, E-25, D-25, C-25, B-26, A-26, G-26, F#-26, E-26, D-26, C-26, B-27, A-27, G-27, F#-27, E-27, D-27, C-27, B-28, A-28, G-28, F#-28, E-28, D-28, C-28, B-29, A-29, G-29, F#-29, E-29, D-29, C-29, B-30, A-30, G-30, F#-30, E-30, D-30, C-30, B-31, A-31, G-31, F#-31, E-31, D-31, C-31, B-32, A-32, G-32, F#-32, E-32, D-32, C-32, B-33, A-33, G-33, F#-33, E-33, D-33, C-33, B-34, A-34, G-34, F#-34, E-34, D-34, C-34, B-35, A-35, G-35, F#-35, E-35, D-35, C-35, B-36, A-36, G-36, F#-36, E-36, D-36, C-36, B-37, A-37, G-37, F#-37, E-37, D-37, C-37, B-38, A-38, G-38, F#-38, E-38, D-38, C-38, B-39, A-39, G-39, F#-39, E-39, D-39, C-39, B-40, A-40, G-40, F#-40, E-40, D-40, C-40, B-41, A-41, G-41, F#-41, E-41, D-41, C-41, B-42, A-42, G-42, F#-42, E-42, D-42, C-42, B-43, A-43, G-43, F#-43, E-43, D-43, C-43, B-44, A-44, G-44, F#-44, E-44, D-44, 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E-292, D-292, C-292, B-293, A-293, G-293, F#-293, E-

2. Folkevisse

Volkswise - Folk-song

A

Allegro con moto ♩ = 444

Measures 1-4 of section A. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The tempo is Allegro con moto (♩ = 444). The dynamic is *p*. The right hand features a melodic line with a triplet in measure 3 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 4. The left hand provides a bass line with a triplet in measure 1 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 4. Red circles highlight specific notes in both hands.

Measures 5-9 of section A. The music continues in G major and 3/4 time. The dynamic is *cresc.*. The right hand features a melodic line with a triplet in measure 5 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 6. The left hand provides a bass line with a triplet in measure 5 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 6. Red circles highlight specific notes in both hands.

Measures 10-14 of section A. The music continues in G major and 3/4 time. The dynamic is *pp*. The right hand features a melodic line with a triplet in measure 10 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 11. The left hand provides a bass line with a triplet in measure 10 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 11. Red circles highlight specific notes in both hands.

B

Measures 15-18 of section B. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The dynamic is *mf*. The right hand features a melodic line with a triplet in measure 15 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 16. The left hand provides a bass line with a triplet in measure 15 and a 4-measure phrase in measure 16. Red circles highlight specific notes in both hands.

19

sempre cresc.

f

23

dim.

poco

a poco

28

A

rit.

p a tempo

33

cresc.

f

38

p

dimin. e rit.

pp