Coherence in Grieg's Folkevise

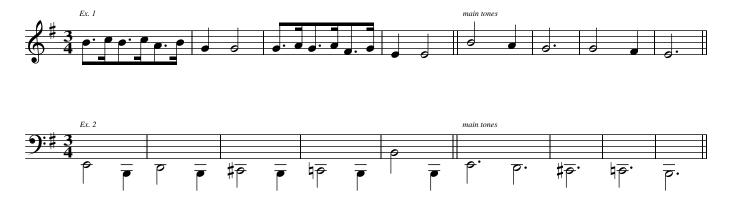
Folkevise (Folk Song), Op. 38 No. 2 by Edvard Grieg, written in 1883, is a beautiful and lyrical piano miniature that reflects Grieg's deep connection to Norwegian folk traditions. Part of his Lyric Pieces collection, this work captures the simplicity, warmth, and charm of a traditional Norwegian folk 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.

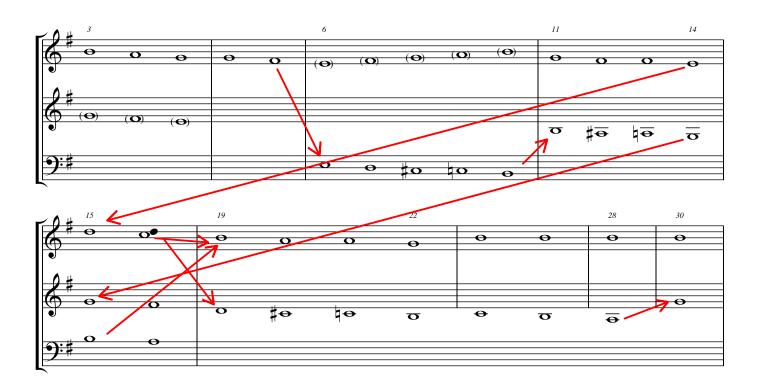
I should emphasize that identifying the main tones is primarily an aural process, grounded in listening rather than theoretical analysis. That said, in many modal and tonal compositions, the main tones often form meaningful, stereotypical relationships with one another. These relationships are historically 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 Folkevise.



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



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:



So, two lines: 1 - 14 and 11 - 30.

It is fascinating to see how this analysis method uncovers a clear and easily understandable structure within a playful piece like Folkevise. Despite its simplicity and charm, the melody of Folkevise reveals an underlying coherence that may not be immediately apparent. By stripping away the ornamentation and focusing on the core tones, we gain insight into the piece's architectural foundation. This method highlights the elegance of Grieg's composition, demonstrating how even in lighter, more accessible works, a solid structural framework supports the musical expression.

2. Folkevise

Volksweise - Folk-song

