

Beyond the Violin: The Piano's Central Role in Grieg's Violin Sonata No. 3

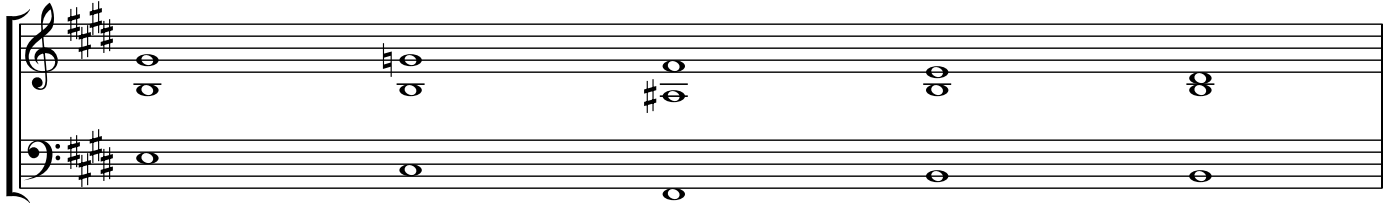
A Study of Bars 45-85 in the Second Movement

In the analysis of a sonata for solo instrument and accompaniment, the focus is often instinctively placed on the solo instrument. This seems natural, as the solo instrument typically carries the most expressive and prominent melodies. However, this approach can be misleading, as the accompaniment -most often the piano- often serves as the true structural cornerstone of the composition. By focusing solely on the solo instrument, one risks overlooking the deeper structural and melodic framework provided by the accompaniment. Analyzing bars 45-85 of the second movement of Edvard Grieg's Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 45 reveals this clearly: the piano part serves as the structural backbone of the piece.

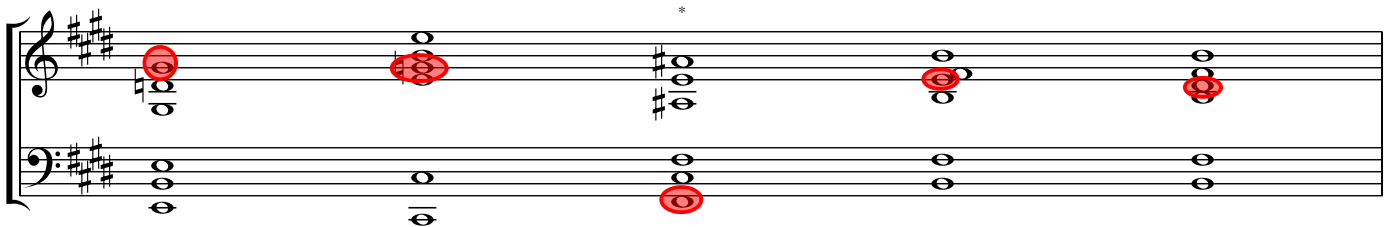
Analysis

Before diving in, let's take a moment to discuss voice leading, as it's essential for understanding this method of analysis. Voice leading refers to how individual musical lines, or voices, move from one chord to another, emphasizing smoothness and coherence. Good voice leading minimizes large leaps, favoring logical and seamless transitions within the harmonic framework. Technically, this often involves stepwise motion or repeated tones, creating a natural flow between tones. It is unmistakable that in the selected measures for analysis in Grieg's Violin Sonata, linear progressions -both uninterrupted and interrupted- and common tones play a significant role. There is however one spot we need to discuss in more detail: it concerns the linear progressions and inner voices in bars 56-60 in the Second Movement of Grieg's Violin Sonata No. 3.

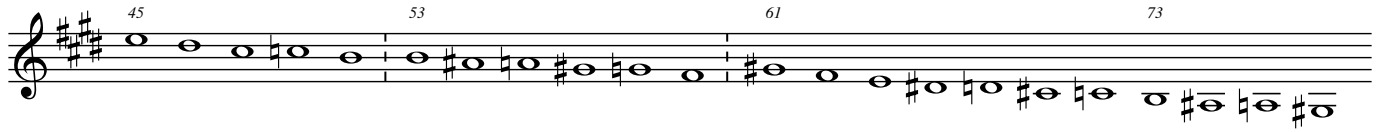
As a traditional scholar, the following setting is what we would typically write (shown here in three parts for clarity):



It simply illustrates a descending line in the upper voice, which remains present in Grieg's elaboration - if you accept that the line can be distributed across different voices:



It's a matter of interpretation: in Grieg's 'springing' elaboration, the F# in the descending line is either transferred to the bass or implied as an inner voice. Based on other observations, I prefer the first option. Notice, too, how common tone E help to bind the 'springing' chords together. Now we have enough key elements to analyze the piece through the lens of linear progressions.. The annotated score in the appendix should provide further clarity.



By omitting the exact pitch and using octave transpositions, the analysis reveals a melodic shift toward a linear octave progression, enriched with chromatic tones. For a thorough analysis, we should focus on neighboring tones and repeated common tones, which act as prolonging elements - or, in other words, as devices that organize time.

Conclusion

Grieg's use of stepwise motion and voice-leading techniques in the piano's voices ensures both continuity and cohesion. The linear progressions act as the glue binding the musical fabric, providing a sense of flow that guides the listener through the movement's lyrical and romantic atmosphere. This approach elevates the interplay between violin and piano, creating an organic and seamless musical experience.

sul D
cantabile
a tempo
p

54

Red. * *Red.* * *Red.* * *Red.* *A* * *Red.*

f *p dolce*
p dolce

63

Red. *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.*

f *pp*
pp

72

Red. *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.*

poco rit. *a tempo* *animato e poco stretto* *cresc.* *più agitato*
p *animato e poco stretto* *cresc.*

81

Red. *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.*

poco rit. *rit.* *molto*
f *poco rit.* *ff* *rit.* *molto*

81

Red. *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.*