

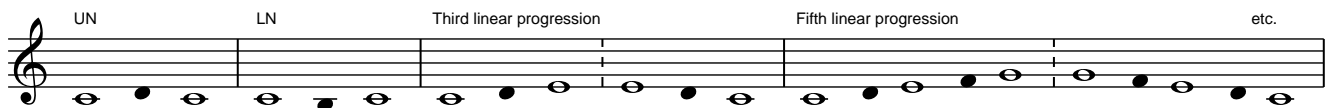
Recomposing Gubaidulina's Prelude no. 3 for cello solo (1974)

From 1965 through the 1980s, the Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931) experimented with new timbres. Fascinating are her 'Ten Preludes' (1974, revised 1999) for cello solo. The original title was 'Ten Etudes'. However, Gubaidulina changed this to 'Preludes' to avoid the traditional associations with mechanical exercises. Maybe, she refers to the prelude-idea of J.S. Bach: improvisatory in nature, however, working out one musical idea.

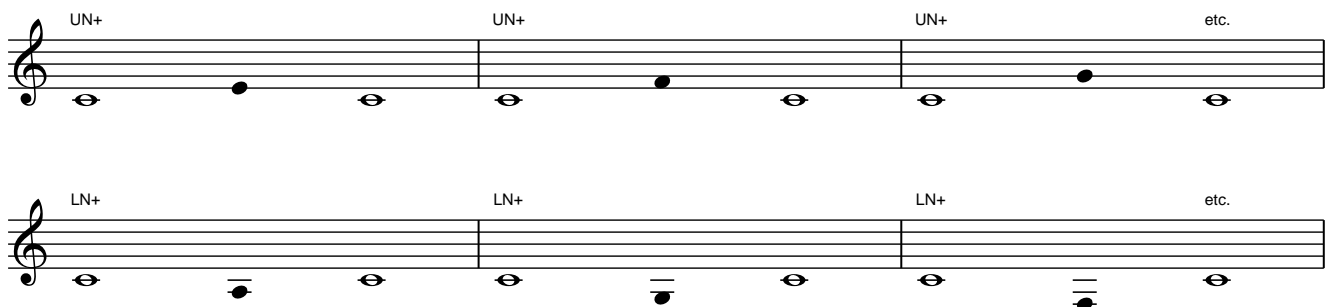
Gubaidulina's Prelude no. 3 is a piece about basic melodic models, that explain both the structural melodic organization and the melodic diminutions. To be clear, we define first our melodic models.

1. Basic melodic models

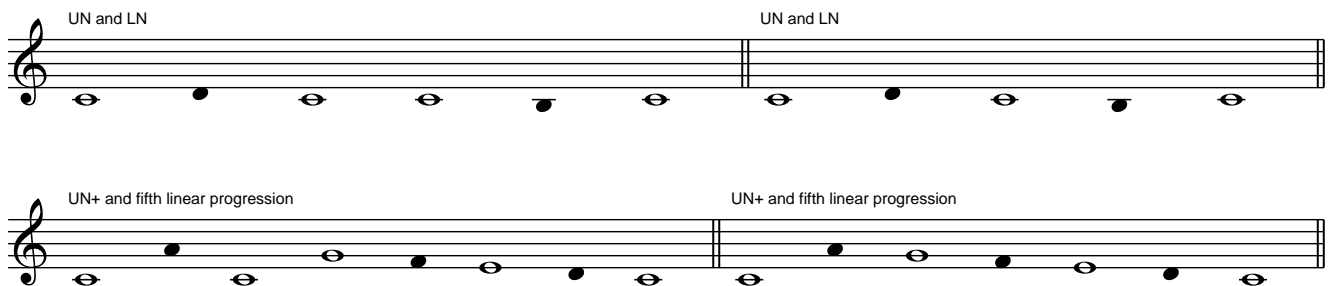
We discern in tonal and church modal music the upper neighbour model (UN), the lower neighbour model (LN) and linear progression like the third and fifth linear progression (defined by the interval between the lowest and the highest tone).



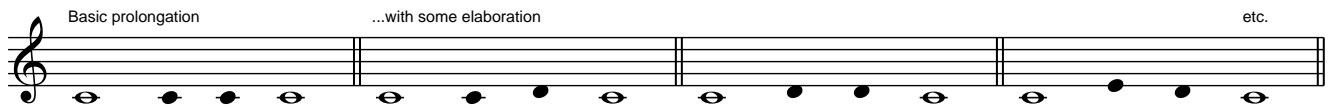
In our opinion we can extend the traditional UN and LN definition into UN+ and LN+:



In this definition is the interval relation between the main tone and the second tone of UN+ and LN+ greater than a second. All models can be combined into new melodic models, whether or not omitting (common) tones. Two examples:



All the previous examples show an elaboration of the main tone C or -in other words- a prolongation of the main tone C. To make it clear: the most basic prolongation of the main tone C is repeating it. However, to make such a repetition musically more interesting one could use other tones than the main tone. Example:



In modal or atonal music, we can apply this way of thinking -although tones do have other relationships than in tonal and church modal music. So we have to listen carefully to the tone-relation-choices of a composer. Recomposing Gubaidulina's Prelude no. 3 for cello solo will demonstrate this.

2. Recomposing steps

In a few steps we'll try to grasp the basic structure of Gubaidulina's Prelude no. 3.

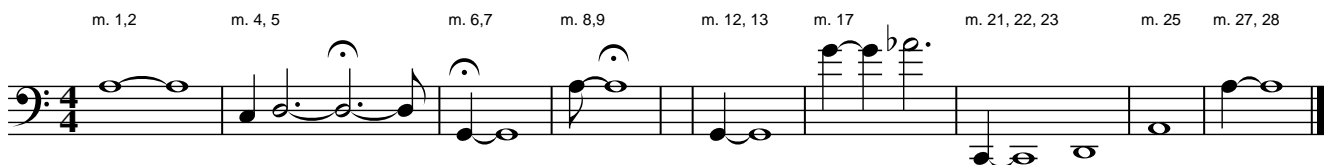
2.1. Step 1: finding the main tone (if any)

The first observation is that the 28 measure piece starts with an A and ends with an A. In addition, in measure 9 there is a musical stop: a long tone A with a fermata. In measure 25 -immediately before the end- a long tone A is written. In short: tone A is prolonged and we can easily conclude that tone A is the main tone, that defines the melodic structure.

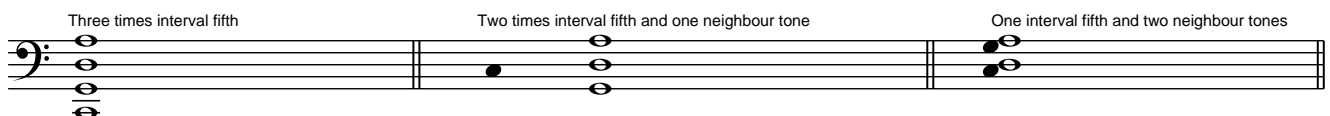


2.2. Step 2: finding large scale embellishing tones of the main tone A

We now can investigate how tone A is embellished or elaborated or prolonged. Again we use a macro-level view. We select tones with a relative long duration (whether or not with a fermata), assuming that they function as goals. It would be nice if these tones are repeated, making our analysis more convincing. The result:



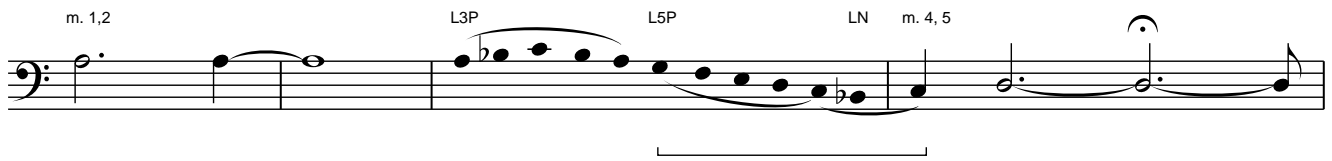
In short: three juxtaposed fifths as basic structure or better two juxtaposed fifths with neighbour tones or still better one interval fifth with two neighbour tones. Notice that we see G-Ab in m. 17 as a slight modification of G-A.



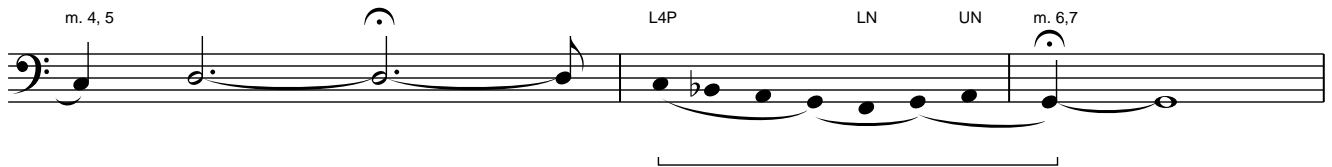
To understand the last option (one interval fifth D-A with two neighbour tones C-G) you have to notice the technique of register change or octave change of tones. This technique is as old as the hills: already applied in the first medieval organum compositions. The most important advantage of this technique is creating musical space for diminutions.

2.3. Step 3: how is the main tone A connected to its embellishing tones?

Now we'll investigate how main A and its embellishing tones are connected. We try to be concise in describing these connections using tone G, C, D and A as central tones.



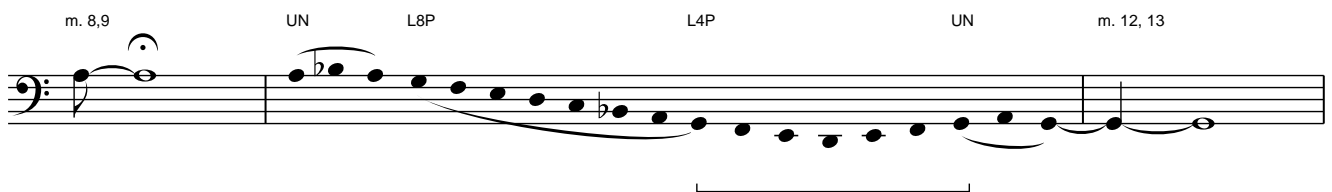
Used melodic models: linear third and fifth progression (L3P, L5P) and lower neighbour tone model (LN)



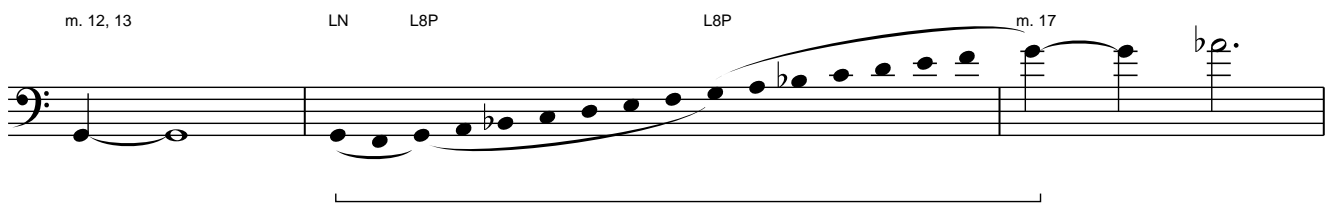
Used melodic models: linear fourth progression (L4P) and lower and upper neighbour tone model (LN, UN)



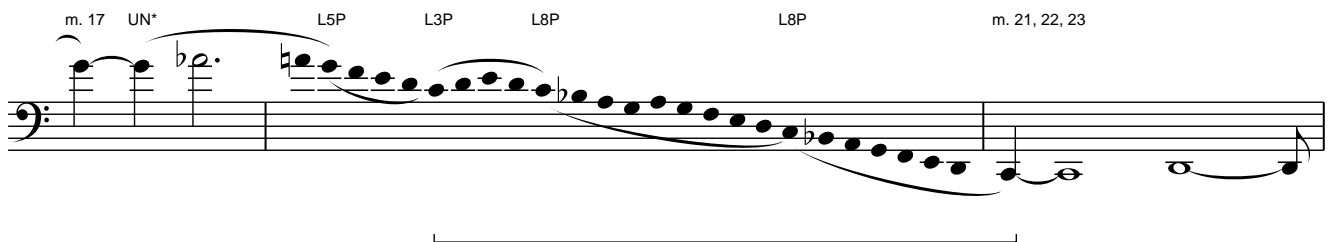
Used melodic model: linear eight progression (L8P)



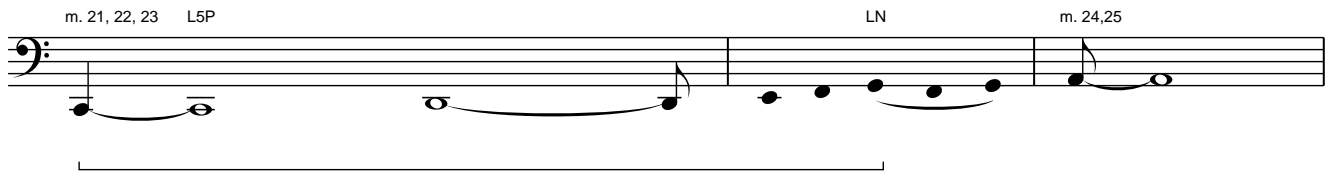
Used melodic model: upper neighbour tone model (UN) and linear fourth and eight progression (L4P, L8P)



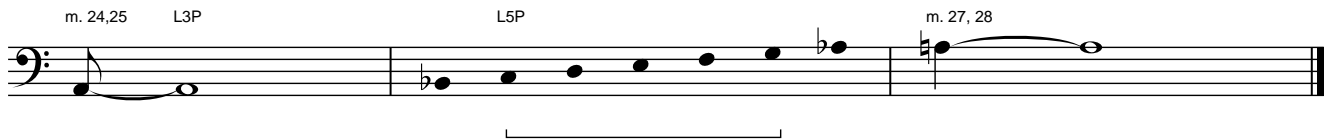
Used melodic model: lower neighbour tone model (LN) and two times a linear eight progression (L8P)



Used melodic model: upper neighbour tone model (UN*), a linear fifth and third progression (L5P, L3P) and two times a linear eight progression (L8P)



Used melodic model: a linear fifth (L5P) and a lower neighbour tone model (LN)



Used melodic model: a linear third and fifth (L3P, L5P); the Ab is seen as an embellishing tone of A (like an appoggiatura). By the way, one could object to this analysis: m24-28 is an appendix, prolonging tone A with a linear eight progression. That is also ok for me.

3. Conclusion

If the basic melodic structure is the interval fifth D-A, embellished with with two neighbour tones C-G, then the previous analysis shows that Gubaidulina's embellishing strategy is primarily focussed on the neighbour tones C and G. Often we see that embellishing tone G implies embellishing the interval C-G or G-C. It means that some of the previous analyses can have an alternative. Nevertheless the interval second is common to all diminutions, that can be described by neighbourtone models and linear progressions.

This analysis was about pitch organization. A rhythmical analysis of all diminutions make clear that Gubaidulina confined herself to basic figures, mainly built of eight and quarter notes and eighth-note tuplets. The result is a speech like melody, where rhythmical figures work as glue than als motives.

About the author:

Reinier Maliepaard, psychologist, software engineer, organist and teacher at the ArtEZ Conservatorium Netherlands (music theory and music history). This article has been typeset with his free and open source MC Musiceditor 8.5.0 (www.mcmusiceditor.com - www.bestmusicteacher.com)