© 2014 Reinier Maliepaard: Recomposing Van Hemel's Fantasia

Piece 6 'Valse', applying a germinal motive

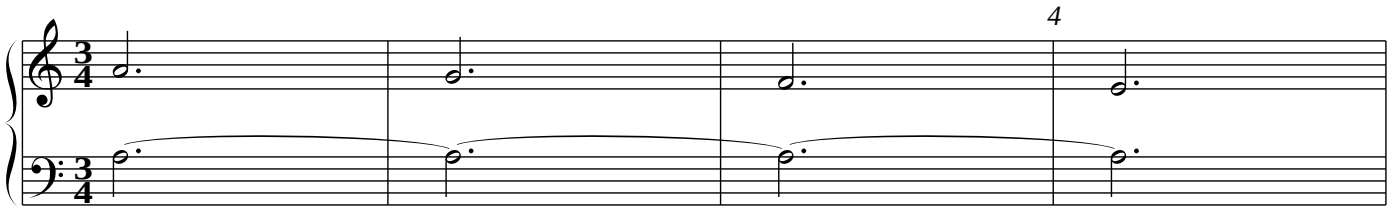
'Valse' (piece 6) from 'Fantasia' of Oscar van Hemel (1892−1981), shows how to make melodies out of one small musical idea, so called germinal motive. That is, a germinal motive leads to several melodies, which are moulded in such way that they get just the expression a composer needs. In fact, we have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

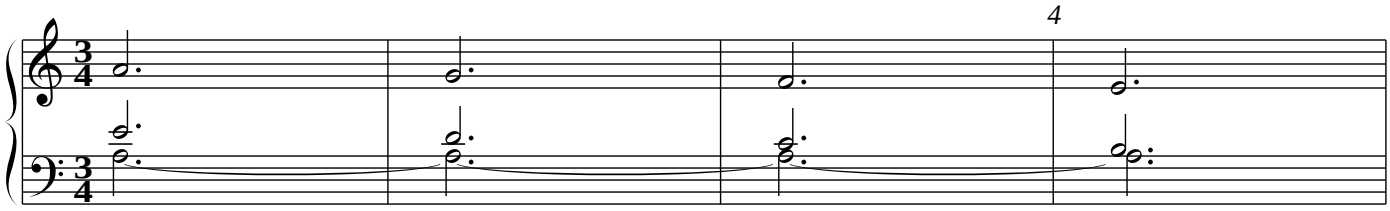
Example 1a: basic model, two part (pedal point and line)



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.

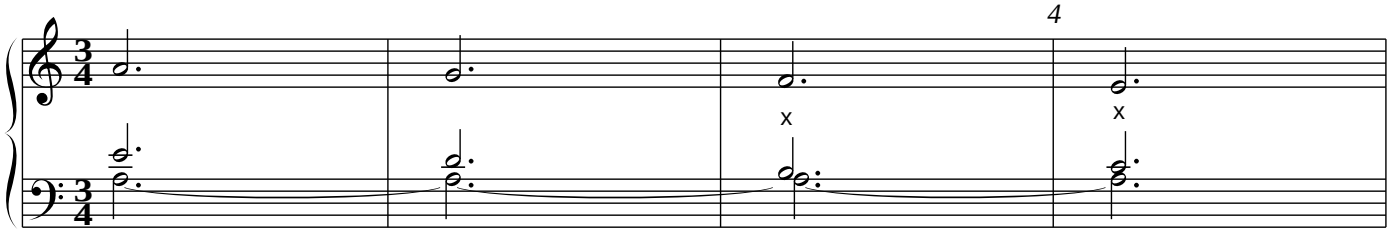
Example 1b: the basic model, three part



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.

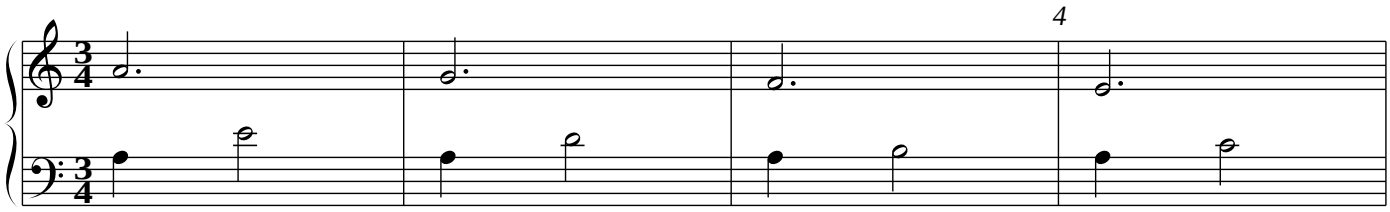
Example 1c: three part basic model, modified inner voice



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.

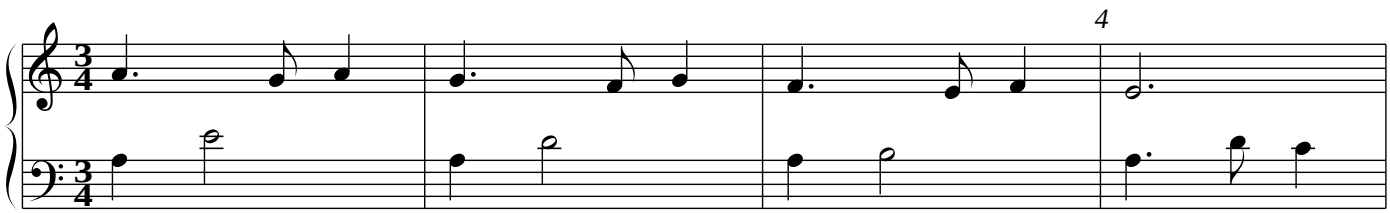
Example 1d: three part basic model 3, modified inner voice



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.

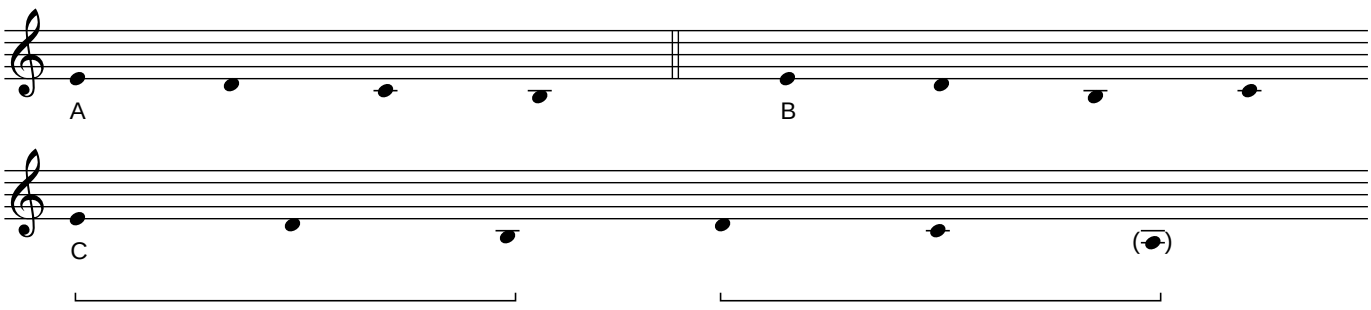
Example 1e: the basic model, final version



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.

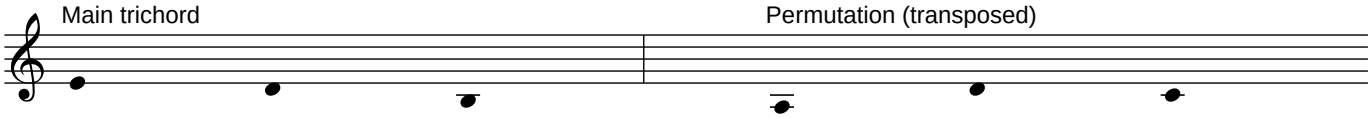
Example 2a: trichord patterns as basic melodic structure



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.

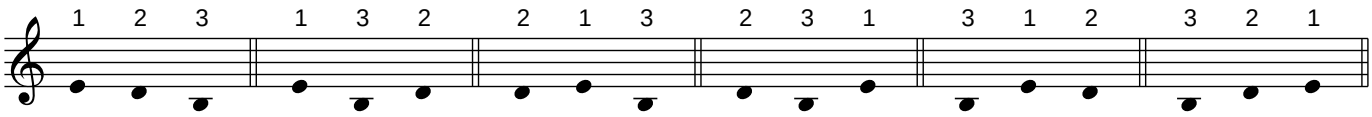
Melody C can be seen as a combination of two trichords (three−note pitch structures) that have the interval second and third in common. The second trichord is a variation or better, a transposed permutation of the first.
By the way, such trichords are universal: they appear basic structures in many melodies, for example in Gregorian chant and old folk songs.

Example 2b: a trichord combined with a permutation



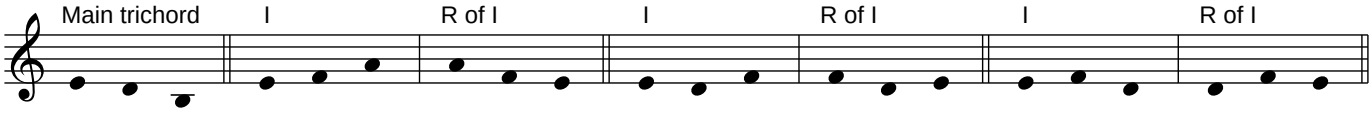
Trichords are easily subject to permutation. The result of permutation is recognizable patterns that are members of one family. Examples:

Example 2c: all permutations of the main trichord



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



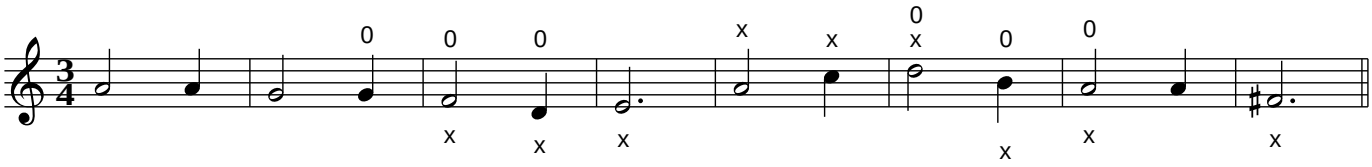
The main trichord can be seen as germinal motive, i.e. as point of explanation of melodic organization.
The next section gives a melodic analysis from this point of view.

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).

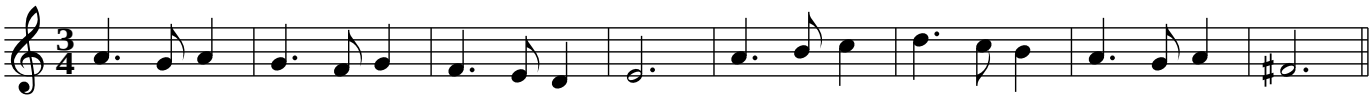
The basic melody of A1 is as follows, where the marks refer to trichord forms.

Example 3a: basic melody of A1



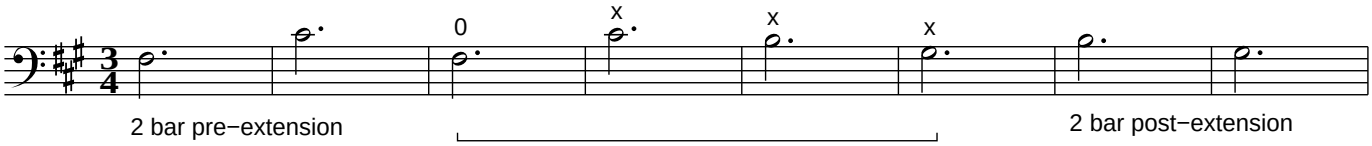
The final version of this basic melody of A1 is created by applying neigbour and passing tones:

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.

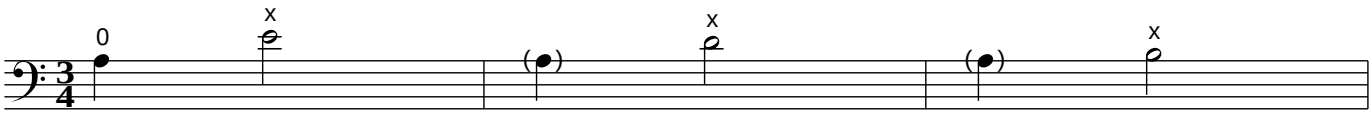
Example 3c: basic melody of B1



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

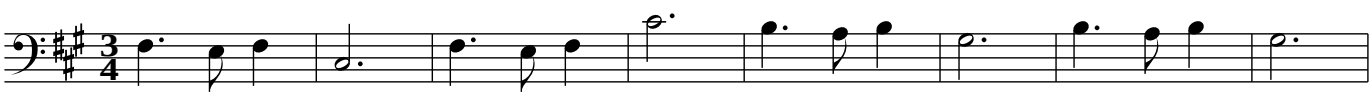
− a trichord after an ascending fifth (see bracket in example 3c)
− 2 bar pre− and post−extension by repetition: fifth at the beginning and the third at the end

Example 3d: A1, lowest voice



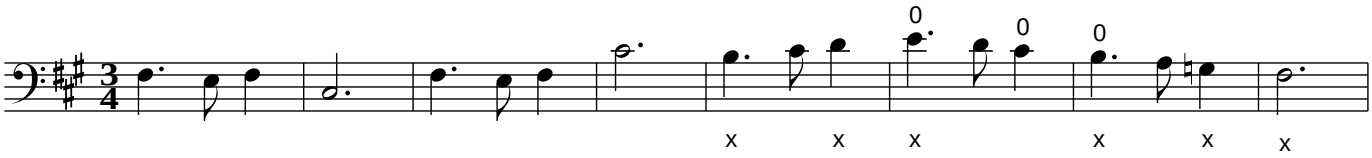
The basic melody of B1 is elaborated with neighbour tones.

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.

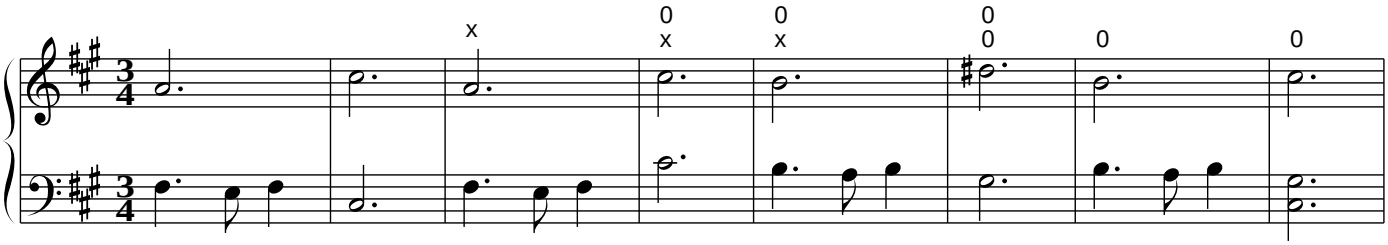
Example 3f: final version of B2



4. Section B: melodic−harmonic analysis.

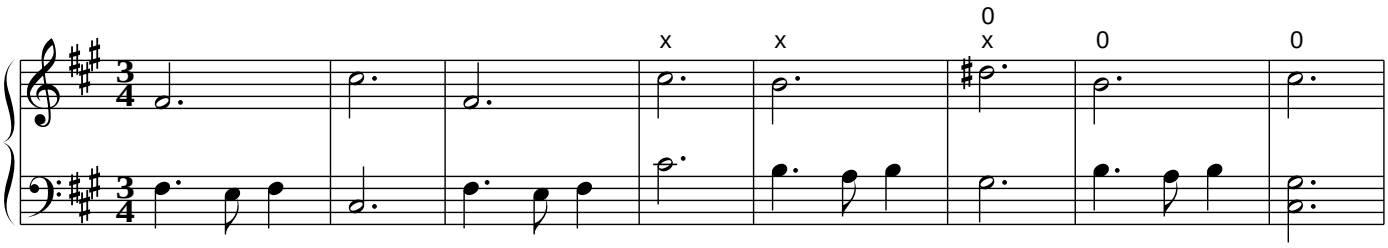
Section A is two−part: all ingredients are already mentioned. Section B is mainly three− or four−part. The left hand, playing the lowest voice, has the main melody. The right hand has 'chords', making section B different from section A. However, thorough listening makes clear that section B is in fact 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#

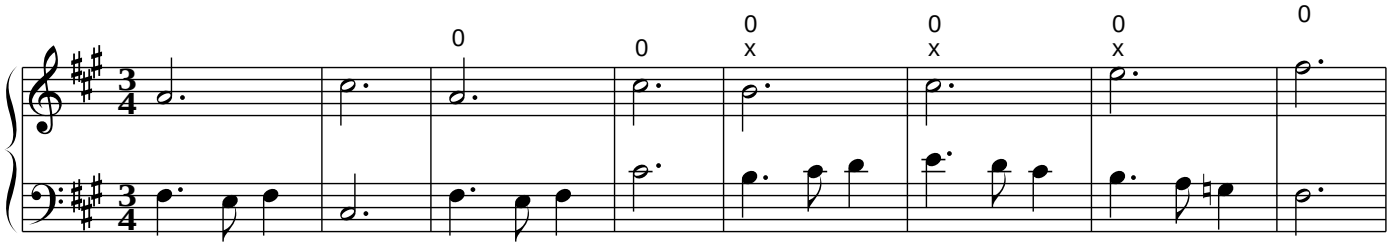
Example 4b: alternative basic model B1



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.

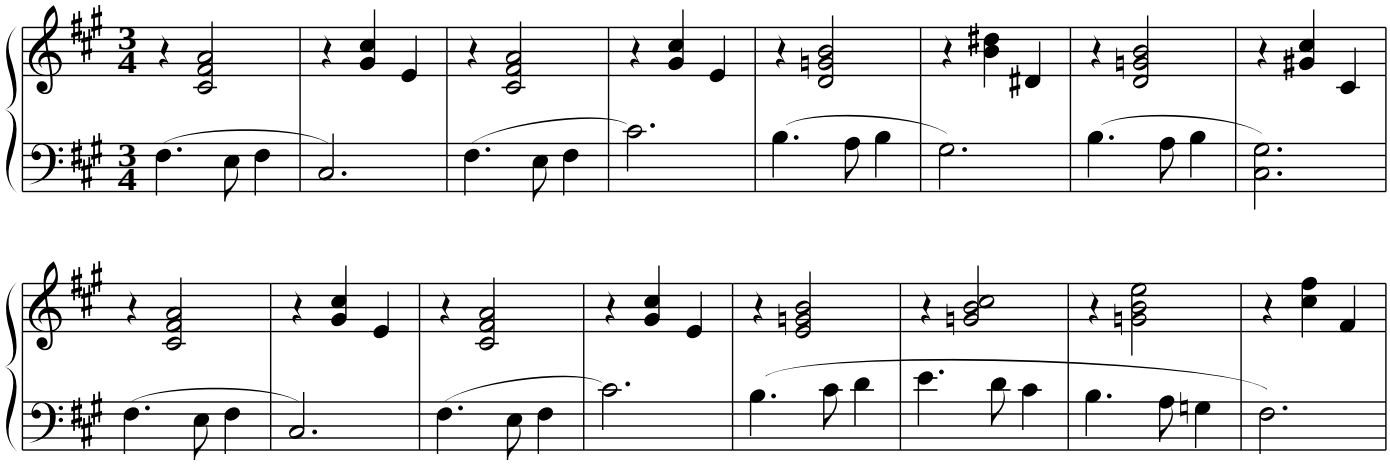
Example 4c: basic model B2



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

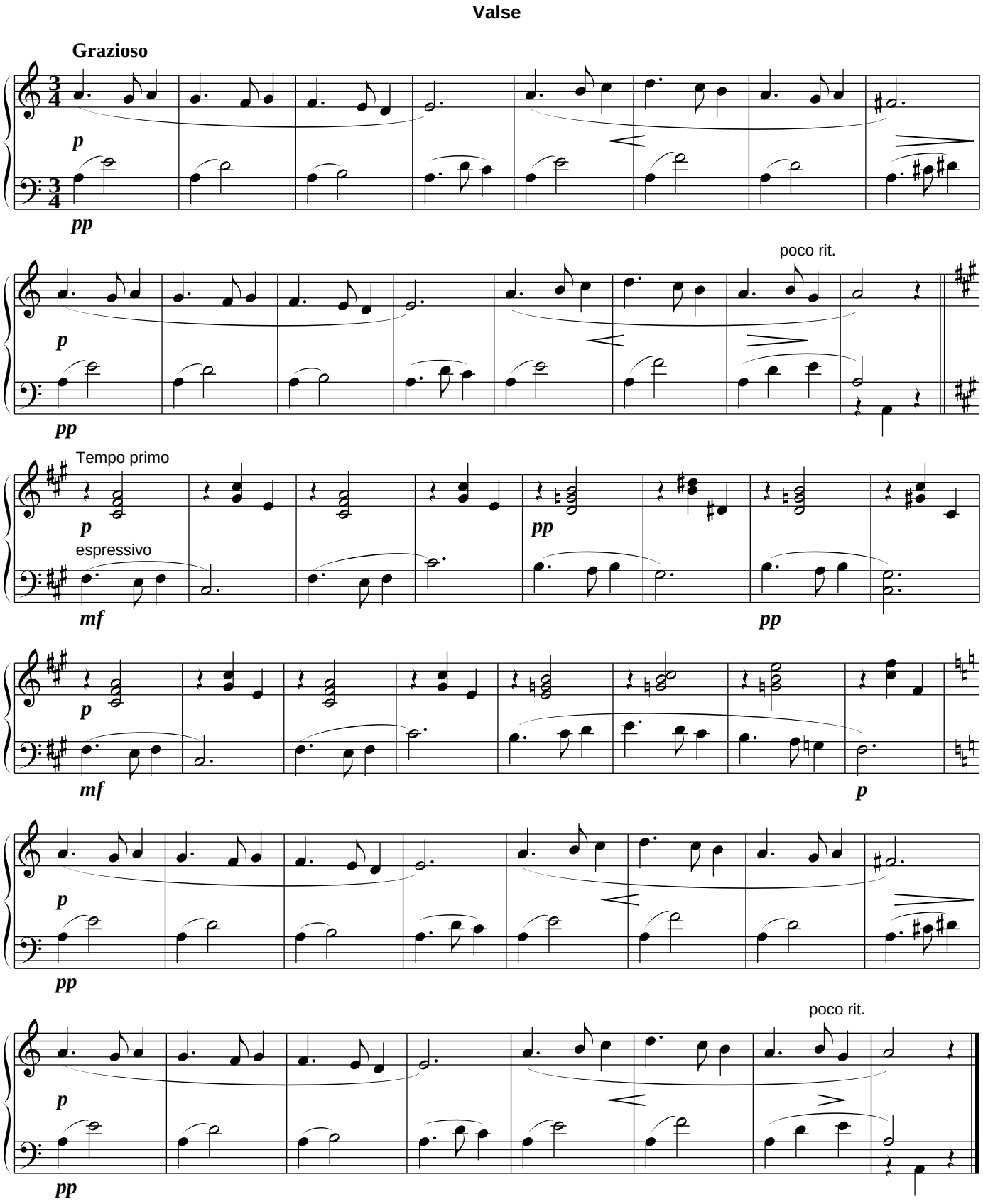
The working out of Section B is lighthearted: the right hand playing in each bar after a rest, sometimes three−part, sometines two− or one−part.

Example 4d: section B



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.



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Reinier Maliepaard, psychologist, software engineer, organist and teacher at the ArtEZ Conservatorium Netherlands (music writing, music theory and music history). Maliepaard is the developer and maintainer of www.bestmusicteacher.com, that has three objectives education − information − inspiration

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