



Analysis of Schoenberg's "Three Piano Pieces" Music Features — Taking Op.11.No.2 as an Example

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Abstract: The 20th century has experienced two world wars, the economic crisis, social conflicts, conflicts intensified, causing changes in social psychology, resulting in more tension, anxiety and other emotions. The rapid development of science and technology has affected all aspects of life, making the composer more innovative and different, the individualism fully developed, and the music style enriched. This article will analyze Schoenberg's "three piano pieces" OP.11.NO.2 from the aspects of theme development, chords and intervals, and scale sets, so as to deeply understand the composing techniques of Schoenberg's expressionist music.

Keywords: Schoenberg, theme development, chord, pitch-class set

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the melody concepts of many composers have shown significant changes, and each composer has his own unique understanding of melody. (Jia Guangchen, 2024) The development of music culture is characterized by some outstanding composers who break through the tradition, experiment and explore new means of composition, and open up a new path for music art. For example, Schoenberg, an expressionist, broke the tonal music and created the atonal music. 'Three Piano Pieces' is a model of Schoenberg's first batch of free atonal works. The author will take the work Op.11.No.2 as an example, try to use simple and popular words to analyze this piano sketch, so as to further understand the music of the 20th century.

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) is one of the most influential composers in the 20th century, and he is also a teacher and theorist. Through his creation, teaching and writing, with him as the center, a real school-expressionist music has been formed. Expressionism, as a modern school, emerged in Germany and Austria on the eve of the First World War. It first appeared in the fields of painting, art and so on, and then extended to the field of music. Expressionism emphasizes the subjective characteristics of art and the subjective sensibility of artistic expression. The original elements of art should be the inner nature of the subject. Expressionism, together with the popular ideas of evolutionism, mysticism and symbolism at the end of the century, became the theoretical source of various modern arts including expressionism. (Zhang Lingwei, 2024)

2. Music analysis

Three Piano Pieces Op.11 is Schoenberg's first free atonal work, but from the perspective of music analysis, the music ontology of this work is still inherited and developed on the basis of nineteenth-century tonal music. (Lu Yan, 2023) 'Free atonality', also known as 'atonality', began in the early 20th century. It refers to a pitch relationship system based on semitones, each of which has the same status and meaning. Its characteristic is to avoid the emergence of tonality centers. (Chen Jinchuan, 2022) In this work, the composer's exploration and treatment of motivation, theme, harmony, musical form and other aspects show its uniqueness and creativity, with the characteristics of expressionism. Next, I will take the second of the 'three piano pieces' as an example for analysis.

2.1 The development of theme materials

A work in the absence of tonality, the theme is the only structural force. The music can be roughly divided into three parts: the presentation part (Sections 1-13), the middle part (Sections 13-55), and the reproduction part (Sections 55-66). In this music, the double music technique is adopted, and the whole song is developed from motivation 1 and motivation 2. (as shown in Figure 1)

Structure	Exposition		Middle part						Recapitulation
Phrase	a	a1	b	c	d				a3
Bar number	9	4	6	9	d	d1	d2	d3	12
					4	5	12	6	

Figure 1. Curved structure diagram

Motivation 1 is composed of ‘ #F-A-B-D ’, which has a distinct oriental pentatonic color ; motivation 2 is composed of ‘ #G-C-A-bD-bE ’, which has obvious western melody color. The whole song develops through the comparison and evolution of these two motivations. (as shown in figure 2)The development of 4-13 section music is roughly based on a section as a motivation unit. It is characterized by the combination of progressive and jumping in the horizontal progress, the combination of harmony and discordant intervals, and the gradual expansion of single tone into intervals and chords.

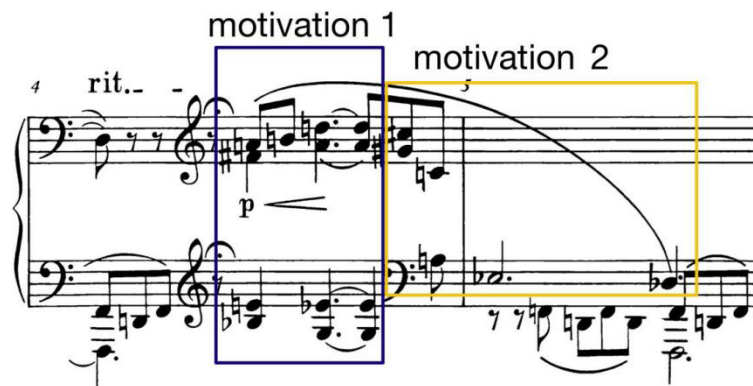


Figure 2. Two motives

The presentation part can be roughly divided into two phrases, a phrase (Sections 1-9) a1 phrase (Sections 10-13). In these two phrases, the theme motivation appears repeatedly, and the music is developed by means of modulus, time reduction and expansion, expansion, variation and so on. For example, the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10 th and 11 th sections all use the theme materials of motivation 1 and motivation 2 to develop the melody. After the 9th section, the two beats began to go in the opposite direction of the left and right hands, expanding the sound area and increasing the tension of the music. In the third section, the notes of the semitone are independent of each other, breaking the tonality of the left hand, and traveling the five notes in the semitone ‘ bla-re-do-bmi-bre ’.

The middle part enters from the 13 th section, which can be roughly divided into three phrases. The b phrase is from the 13 th section to the 19 th section ; the c phrase is from section 20-28 ; the d phrase is from verses 29-55. The b phrase is composed of 6 sections, which is a parallel phrase of the a phrase, but the difference is that this time the melody part comes out first and then the texture accompaniment, breaking the original inertia and inherent thinking, and increasing the interest of the music. The melody of the 16th section enters from the weak beat, and the development of the rhythm type such as segmentation and attachment makes the development of the melody part gradually not controlled by the beat. The 17 th verse melody began the half-scale, breaking the tonality to make the music develop in the direction of atonality. Sections 18-19 develop the theme materials of Sections 16-17 to the second mode, but add a melody part to the inner voice to enrich the sound effect and increase the power of the music. From the 20th section, began to enter the c-sentence, which still used the theme material to develop the melody alternately appearing in the left and right hands, and used the techniques of molding and unfolding to develop. The left hand voice of ‘ s 23rd section should change from the 24th section, but the change is delayed by a beat. This phenomenon is called asynchronous change sound, also known as the use of ‘ lingering sound ’.

The reproduction part enters from the 55 th section. The left hand restores the fixed rhythm type at the beginning of the music, while the right hand delays the reproduction, and then expands the two sections. The fixed rhythm of the left hand creates a sense of step, which also increases the tension of the music and gives the audience a familiar feeling again. In this section, the development of melody adopts continuous upward mode, which increases the power of music. The 61-62 section is the reproduction of the changes in the motivation of the 4-5 section. In the 65-66 section is the last appearance of the theme fragmentation, so that the whole song is concentrated and unified, using the method of expanding the theme and superimposing the theme to form the whole song.

In this work, the traditional tonality factors always run through it and are hidden in the melody. In the second work, the whole song is always running through the d minor. The theme motivation at the beginning presents the continuous maintenance of the three continuous sounds of the low part and the F of the large character group. Although the whole work is trying to break the tradition and move towards atonality, it retains the texture form of traditional chords, such as ‘ Molding, Cannon ‘ lamp, and even follows the traditional structure form in the form structure. (Li Dalong, 2022)

2.2 The use of chords and intervals

The role of chords generally has two points, one is the color function, such as the brightness of the big three chords ; the tenderness of the minor triad ; the mystery and tension of increasing and decreasing chords. In addition, the second function is the dynamic function. Different chords have different driving forces. What kind of chord connection method is adopted determines what kind of sound effect. Good harmony connection can promote the development of music, otherwise there will be a lack of harmony power and a sense of stagnation and obstruction. In this piece of music, the composer uses a large number of additions and subtractions of chords and intervals to increase the tension of the music and create a sound effect that is out of tonality. In addition to the motivation throughout the whole song, there are three other factors that play an important role : the large seven-degree interval, the addition of three chords, and the four-fifth-degree structural chords.

In the 9-13 section of the presentation section, a large number of large seven-degree intervals appear. For example, the first beat of the 9th section appears to increase the seven chords, and then the large seven and the increase of the three chords appear one after another. The emergence of these chords increases the tension and dissonance of the music.

The 16-19 section of the middle section also uses a lot of seven degrees and two degrees. The strong sound effect and the discordant sound also increase the conflict of the music and deepen the drama of the music. At the same time, the uncoordinated second-degree and seventh-degree intervals, the extensive use of triple chords and major seventh chords, and the rhythm of irregular rhythm beats all show the development of Schoenberg’s music to atonality. The use of 19 left hand down five degrees increased the tension of the music. There are a large number of non-three-degree superimposed chords in the music. For example, in the 27th section, the third-level tone 2 of the chord goes to the fourth-level tone 3, forming a hanging chord. It breaks the three-degree superimposed chord structure and increases the color and audibility of music.

The second-degree and seventh-degree intervals of the whole song occupy a prominent position, which increases the tension of music. At the same time, various third-degree and fourth-degree chords are interspersed in the middle, breaking the development of traditional applications to atonal music.

3. Pitch-class set

From the perspective of sound level set, the central materials of Op.11.No.2 are F, D and bD, which belong to the set of 3-3 in Alan Ford ‘s set table [0,1,4].The central materials of the first one are B, # G and G, which also belong to the set of 3-3, and the second one is only the displacement development of the first one. In the third work, this set still exists. At the beginning, the right hand voices C, # C, and E, but there is no central position to speak of. The three-tone core motivation, the seven-degree, the three-degree chord, the four-degree and five-degree chords are unified and run through the whole song with the melody harmony factor, which compensates the structural force lost after giving up the traditional tonality. The use of the scale set makes the whole song unified and concentrated, increasing the sense of closeness of the work.

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