

Central Michigan University School of Music

**The Analysis of Arnold Schoenberg's First Piano Piece from His
Three Piano Pieces Op.11**

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Analytical Styles II: 19th – 21th Century

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to clarify how *Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11* is formally and structurally constructed. In order to understand that, Schoenberg's first piece from *Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11* will be analyzed in the framework of set theory. The fact that traditional music analysis methods reach their limits, set theory is the most suitable analysis methodology to investigate Schoenberg's music. Thus, the relationship among pitch class sets in his piano music explores the formal and the structural content of the music.

Keywords: Arnold Schoenberg, Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11, Set theory, Piano music, Post-Tonal Music Analysis.

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In this essay, Arnold Schoenberg's first piece from his *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op. 11 will be investigated. While at the limits of traditional music analysis methods cannot cover Schoenberg's non-tonal music, a new way of analysis approach had emerged: set theory. The aim of this essay is to find relationship among the pitch collections located in the main theme and the rest of the piece. This approach will clarify how musical motives emerged throughout the piece. The order of the essay starts with a very brief information about the piece, then continues with an extensive set theory analysis and the outcome of the analysis over the piece.

Drei Klavierstücke Op.11 is written in 1909 by the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg. This piece is an early atonal work which consist of three movements; *Mässig* (at a moderate speed), *Sehr Langsam* (very slowly) and *Bewegt* (with motion).

First three bars of the music are the principal motif of the piece. There are several ways to analyze the main motif. The second bar of the music, which is indicated with red marking in figure 1, is the most general set of the principal motif (01246). (01246) is the main pitch collection which constitutes the majority of the piece. (0148) is a secondary pitch collection that has a minor effect on the piece. These two collections are supersets for all the tetrachords and septachords found in this essay which are subsets of either (01246) or (0148). Besides, these two pitch collections shares (014) in common and has a huge impact over the piece which will be covered later extensively in this paper.

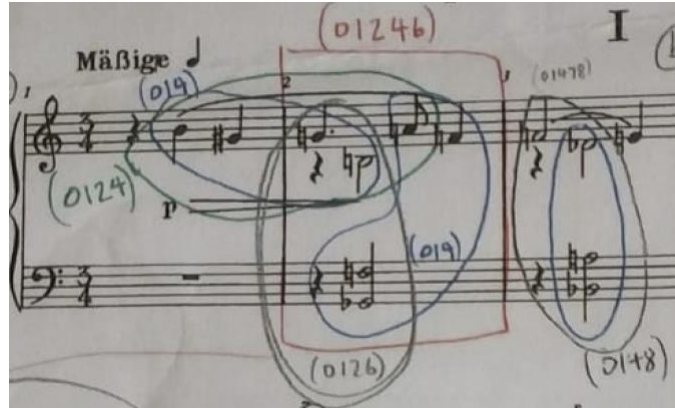


Figure 1: Main theme

Other blue (014), green (0124) and orange (016) markings are the sub-sets of the (01246). While B, G#, G [7,8,11] and Gb, F, A [5,6,9] and Bb, A, Db [9,10,1] sets belong to (014) prime order, B, G#, G, A belongs to (0124). [7,8,11] is the most important smallest note collection. Gb, F, A and Bb, A, Db are the T_{10} and T_2 of the [7,8,11]. Additionally, Gb, F, B, G belongs to (0126) prime order and indicated with black mark in the second bar. On the other hand, this main theme can be also considered as a formation of three (014) as it is seen in figure 2. Hence, B, G#, G and Gb, F, A and Bb, A, Db are (014) and constructs the main theme.

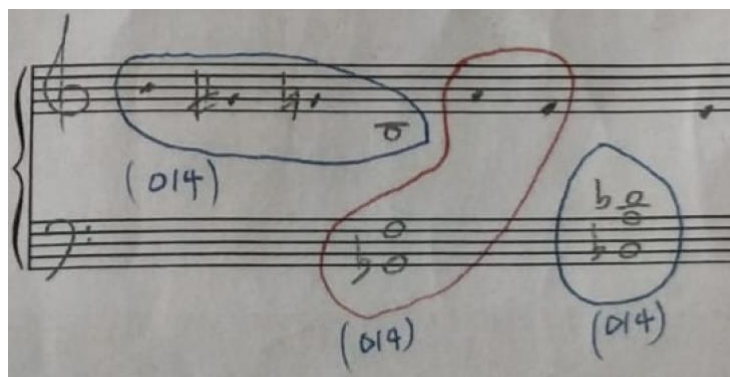


Figure 2: (014) formation

Besides, in a different way of approach, these three bars can also be considered as (014), (015) and (016) which are the subsets of the main theme as demonstrated in figure 3. These three different

ways of approach will help to clarify the rest of the piece in terms of the visibility among the relationships of pitch collections. In the third bar, blue circle indicates (014) and the black circle shows (0148).

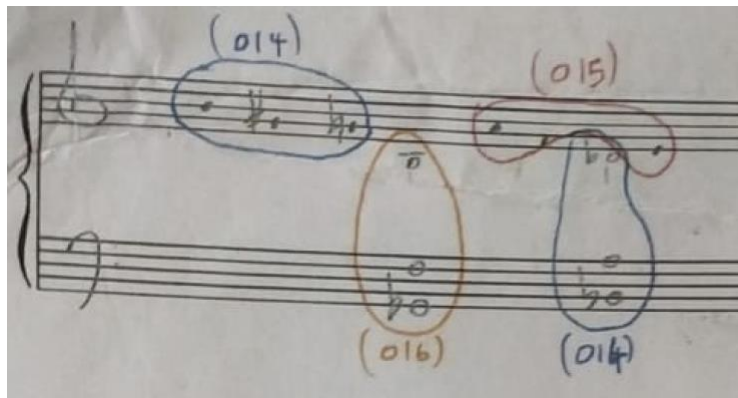


Figure 3: (014), (015) and (016) set groups

In the fourth bar of the piece, there are four different set groups. Orange represents (0126) which came from the main theme located in the second bar. Blue circle is (014) which we will see more frequently throughout the piece. The purple circle is (0148) that is the idea came from the third bar indicated with black circle in figure 1. The green circle is (0124) which the green circle in figure 1 that came from the main theme.

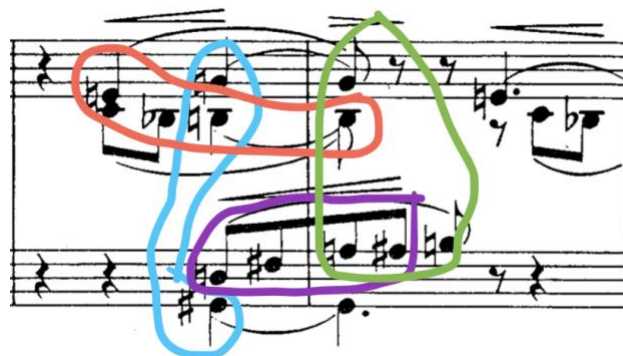


Figure 4: Bar 4 and 5

Additionally, when the left-hand notes considered together in the bar four which is indicated with yellow square, it is belong to (01258) set. Besides, right-hand notes form (01248) which is demonstrated by orange square in figure 5.



Figure 5: Other approach to bar 4

In the bar 6, the blue circle is (014) set which is the important subset of main theme that can be seen in figure 6.



Figure 6: Bar 6

In figure 7, yellow square, C, E, Bb, G and B form (01258) but this time left hand is shifted forward when compared to bar 4. (01248) set comes one bar later this time compared to orange square indicated in figure 5.



Figure 7: Bar 7 to 10

Moreover, in the bars 9, 10 and 11 are the subsets of main theme, that are (026) purple square, (024) green square and (012) brown square. In the bar 11, sum of both subsets purple and brown squares constructs (01246) which came from the main theme located in the second bar of the figure 1.

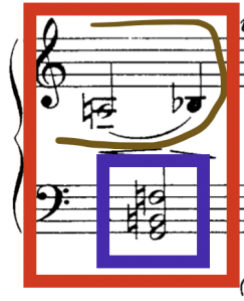


Figure 8: Bar 11

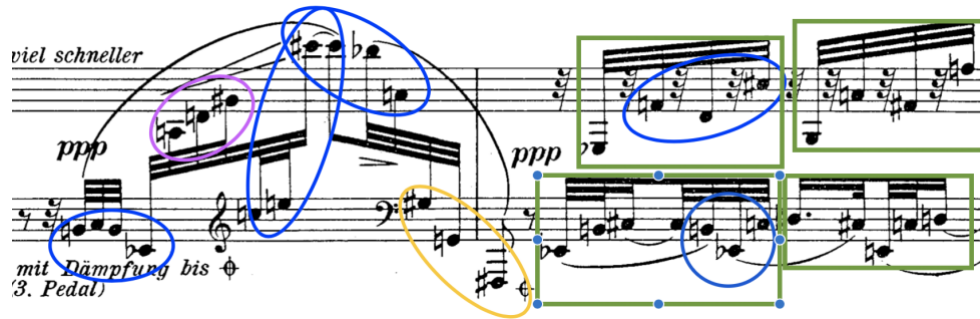


Figure 9: Bar 12 and 13

In figure 9 bar 12 and 13 are located, through these two bars blue circles are (014), they are in order T_4 , T_5 and T_6 of the main [7,8,11] set and green circles are (0124) which are in order T_4 , T_6 , T_5 and T_{10} of the [7,8,9,11], subsets of the main theme. Both the purple circle in bar 12 (016) which is T_3 of the main theme indicated with orange circle and the yellow circle (012) are the subset of principal motif.

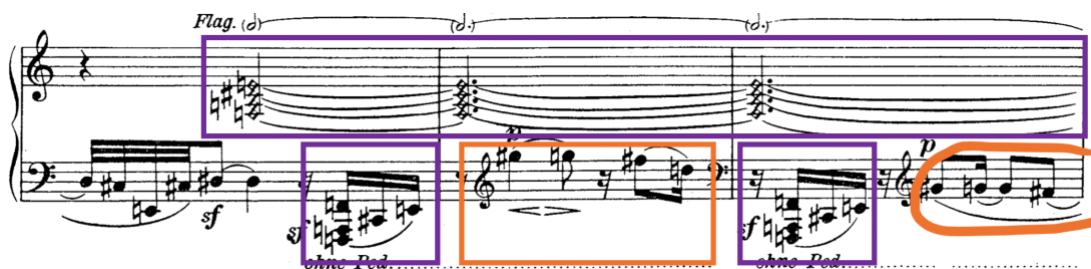


Figure 10: Bar numbers 14,15 and 16

The ringing notes in right-hand at the bars 14, 15 and 16 in the figure 10 are (0148). Also, last beat of the bar 14 and the first beat of the bar 16 are (0148) and all of them are indicated with purple square in figure 10. G#, G, F#, D pitch collection in bar 15 and 16 which are indicated with orange are belong to (0126) set.



Figure 11: Bar numbers 17 to 21

In figure 11, the blue circles are indicating (014) which are T₁ and T₂ of the [7,8,11], yellow circle in the 17th bar Gb, E, Ab are (026) and red circle in 20th bar C, Ab, E are (048). At the same bar the green square constructing (0148) set. All of these subsets are belonging to the main theme.

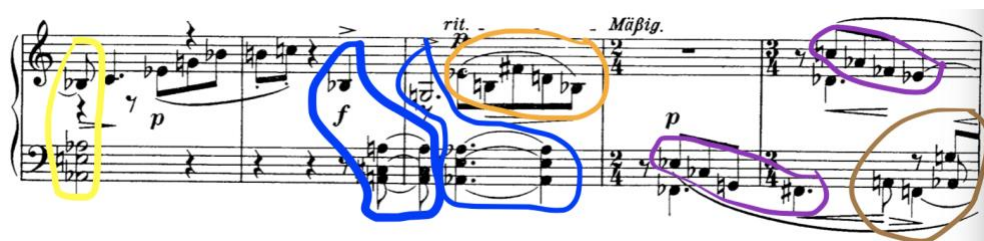


Figure 12: Bars 22 to 26

In figure 12, yellow circle (026), blue circle (014), orange circle (01458), purple circles (0148) and brown circle (0124) are located. The first time (0148) is located at the third bar as [9,10,1,5] is now seen as T4I and T1I at the bar 25 and 26. Brown circle seen at the bar 26 is (0124) and T4I which is the first four notes in the main theme. All of them are subset or combination of the main theme.



Figure 13: Bars 27 to 29

In figure 13, blue circles are (014) T₇, T₂ and T₅ brown circle is (01468), purple circle is (016) and green circle is (0126). Purple is [8,9,2] which came from the main theme and T₃ of the orange circle in figure 3. Green circle comes from the main theme [5,6,7,11] and T₂I. In figure 14, purple circles are indicating (016) which are T₃, T₂I, T₁ and T₀I, blue circles show (014) which are T₅ and T₃ of the first three notes of the piece and brown circle demonstrates (0248).

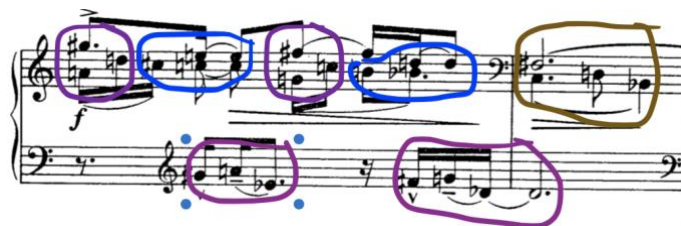


Figure 14: Bars 30 and 31

As it can be seen in figure 15, the development section starts at bar 34. In the development section there are lots of fragmented melodic figures which are consist of (013), (014), (015) and (016). In figure 15, blue circles are (014), green circle is (0126) and red circle belongs to (026) prime form.



Figure 15: Bars 34 to 36



Figure 16: Bars 37 & 38

In figure 16, blue circles are (014) and brown circle indicates (015).



Figure 17: Bars 39 & 40

In figure 17, blue circles are (014), orange circles is (016), yellow circles is (015), purple circles (012) and green circle is (013).



Figure 18: Bars 41 & 42

In figure 18, green circles are (013), yellow circle is (015), blue is (014) and purple circles are (0126).



Figure 19: Bar 43 to 45

In figure 19, blue circles indicate (014) and green circles show (013).



Figure 20: Bar 46 to 48

Blue circles in figure 20 are (014) and yellow circle is (015).



Figure 21: Bar 49 & 50

At the first beat of the bar 49 is (0148) which is indicated with green square in figure 21. Blue circles are (014) and the green circle in the bar 50 is (024).

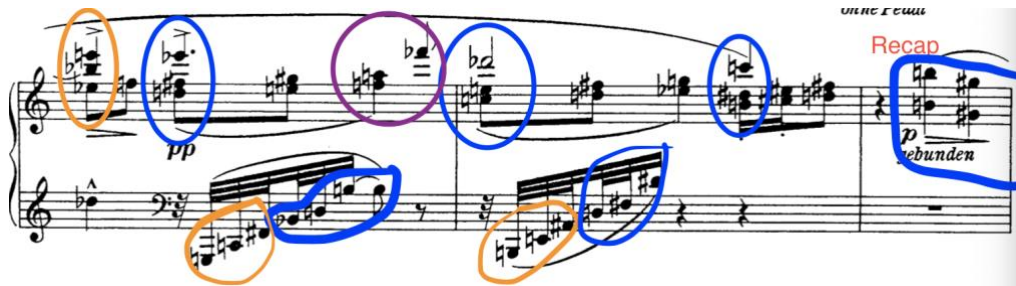


Figure 22: Bar 51 to 53

The orange circles in bar 51 are (016), blue circles are (014) and purple circle is (015). At the bar 53 recapitulation starts.



Figure 23: Bar 56

At the bar 56 the second beat is (0148) which is indicated with green circle in figure 23.



Figure 24: Bar 58

In figure 24, green circle is (0148) and orange circle is (013).

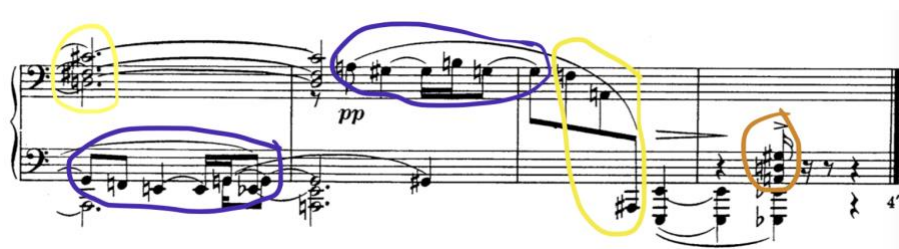


Figure 25: Bar 61 to 64

In figure 25, yellow circles indicate (015), purple circle demonstrates (0124) and orange circle belongs to (016).

To sum up, this set theory analysis shows that the prime form of main theme is the superset of the piece which is (01246). Various subsets of the main theme are used throughout the piece. (012), (014), (016), (024) and (0126) are the subsets that belong to (01246) which constructs the main theme. Moreover, the third bar of the piece (0148) that is mentioned as a secondary superset for the piece, also has an impact on the piece. Besides, as it is mentioned before, even if the main theme considered on (013), (014), (015) and (016) sets, it can be clearly seen that this perception is not far from the (01246) pitch collection. Both of the perceptions are mostly supporting each other, in fact, both have (014) and (016) in common. Therefore, (014) is the most common subset which appears more frequently than others which generates a gravitational pull on the piece. However, it is an undeniable fact that both perspectives, (01246), (0148) and (013), (014), (015) and (016) have a huge impact on the piece. Music is constructed either on different subset combinations of (01246) and (0148) or (013), (014), (015) and (016), music is evolved on transpositions and inversions of these prime forms of pitch collections.