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Author(s): Hugh Collins Rice

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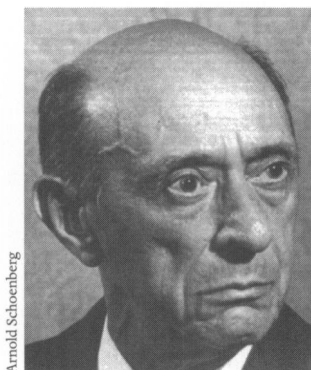
## THE INTERACTION OF FORM AND MATERIAL IN SCHOENBERG'S KLAVIERSTÜCK OP. 33B

Hugh Collins Rice

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**Abstract:** The least familiar of Schoenberg's piano pieces, op.33b nevertheless can be seen to illuminate the crucial relationship between material and form. Ostensibly a simple ABABA pattern, the form has a multi-faceted character, whose second half performs a different role from the first and even suggests a different style of musical utterance. The opening material is pianistically awkward and though its formal returns suggest different possibilities, it is the strange and beautiful passage at bar 46 which does most to alter the trajectory of the later stages of the piece. Although this passage sits outside the form, it has a role in the broader narrative of the piece and many of its characteristics are taken up in the coda of the work. The developing sense of a more fluent pianism provides a counterpoise to the ABABA shape and the awkwardness of the opening becomes part of the dialogue between form and material.

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Arnold Schoenberg

Schoenberg's *Klavierstück* op. 33b is a piece which has always seemed to exist in the shadows. Whereas Schoenberg's other sets of piano pieces (opp.11,19, 23 and 25) can quite reasonably be seen as landmark events in the development of his musical language, the two pieces that make up op. 33 do not signify any stylistic or methodological turning point. But while op. 33a has frequently been discussed (including in two notable articles in this journal<sup>1</sup>) and is often cited as an exemplar of Schoenberg's serial method,<sup>2</sup> op. 33b remains comparatively little discussed.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for the relative neglect of op. 33b are perhaps clear: it uses only a single set of combinatorial series forms (P, I5 and their retrogrades) and thus from a technical perspective the piece can seem austere, even limited. The absence of a network of row transpositions and also of clear sonata-form implications removes two important areas from analytical and critical discussion of Schoenberg's serial music. The piece also seems to be the least grateful of Schoenberg's piano pieces to perform;<sup>4</sup> while it certainly contains great riches, these can be hard to project.

The purpose of this article is not simply to shine a light into one of the gloomier corners of Schoenberg's output, but in doing so to suggest how some of the challenges of this piece illuminate that crucial interaction in Schoenberg's serial music of row, musical material and form.

<sup>1</sup> Nachum Schoffman, 'Schoenberg op. 33a Revisited', *Tempo* 146 (September 1983), pp. 31–42; Kathryn Bailey, 'Schoenberg's Piano Sonata', *Tempo* Vol. 57 No. 224 (April 2003), pp. 16–21.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 322–333, is one of many examples.

<sup>3</sup> Two notable exceptions are, Michael L. Friedmann, 'Motive, Meter and Row: Conflicting Imperatives to the Performer in Schoenberg's *Klavierstück* op. 33b', *Ex Tempore* 8 (1995), pp. 29–49, and Brian Alegant, 'Unveiling Schoenberg's op. 33b', *Music Theory Spectrum* 18/2 (Autumn 1996), pp.143–166.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to the pianist Pina Napolitano for insights about the performance of the piece.

Despite the clear differences in serial method and overall shape between the two op. 33 pieces, there are unsurprisingly also a number of similarities. Superficially the clearest of these similarities is that each piece is built from two distinct thematic materials. But whereas op. 33a can quite reasonably be viewed in sonata-form terms, op. 33b is more easily described as an ABABA form (see Fig.1). The two types of material are defined by contrast of metre (2/4 & 6/8), of dynamic ('A' material always *p/pp*, 'B' material *mf* or louder) and row partitioning (tetrachords and trichords).<sup>5</sup> However, while this rondo-like shape is in some senses clear, the form can, and perhaps must, be interpreted in a number of different ways and is far from straightforward. There is a strongly articulated binary division at bar 31, whose first half is a single developmental sweep culminating in a climax. The second theme (B) is presented not so much as a thematic contrast but as an integral part of the build-up to this climax, and the continuity of this passage makes a mockery of any more sectional view of the form. The returns of the A material, in addition, suggest an arch shape, with A' being a significant development of the initial A section, and A''' providing a truncated, but nevertheless recapitulatory, statement.

Fig.1: Overall form

Bar		Tempo/Metre	Dynamic	Comments	Binary	Arch
1–10	A	<i>Mässig Langsam</i> 2/4 ( <i>poco rit</i> )	<i>p/pp</i>	Sentence. RH <i>cantabile</i> LH <i>dolce</i> (dotted rhythms)		Statement
10–11		<i>poco scherzando</i>	<i>p</i>	Punctuating gesture – dotted rhythms		
12–20	A'	( <i>accel... drängend</i> )	<i>p cresc f</i> <i>p cresc f</i>	RH <i>cantabile</i> LH <i>dolce</i> (dotted rhythms), becomes transitional in function, leading into the next section		
21–28	B	6/8 <i>Etwas rascher</i>	<i>f</i> <i>p</i>			
28–31		<i>Etwas breiter allargando, rit</i>	<i>f</i> <i>dim</i>	Climax (and registral high point, D# b.29)		
32–45	A''	<i>Tempo I</i> 2/4 <i>rit...ruhig</i>	<i>p</i> <i>pp</i> <i>cresc</i>	Development and expansion of opening sentence. RH <i>cantabile</i> , now more continuous, but using different tetrachord partition- ing of series LH <i>dolce</i> (dotted rhythms)		Development
46–51		<i>rit</i>	<i>pp</i> <i>dim</i>	<i>Passage of 3-part counterpoint.</i> ( $\text{♩}$ register) fragmentation and link		
52–56	B'	<i>Etwas langsamer</i> 6/8 <i>rit</i>	<i>mf</i> <i>p</i>			
57–60	A'''	4/8	<i>p</i>	RH <i>cantabile</i> LH dotted rhythms, then hands swap roles. Returns to opening partitioning of series		Recapitulation
61–68	Coda	<i>poco rit</i>	<i>dim</i>	Final cadence patterns ( $\text{♩}$ register) final note = lowest in piece		

<sup>5</sup> This is a further connexion with op. 33a, which similarly distinguishes between its two thematic materials through the use of tetrachordal and trichordal partitionings of the series.

One consequence of the way the form is projected is that while the two statements of the B material are identifiably the same music, their formal context and therefore their role is very different. The first B section is part of the dynamic growth of the first half of the piece, emerging seamlessly from a crescendo and acceleration; it grows directly from the preceding music. In contrast the B' of the second half is more set apart, and instead of being the culmination of an acceleration is marked *Etwas langsamer* and almost seems to interrupt the flow of the music towards its conclusion. The second half of the piece, thus, appears to change direction. The role of material in the piece is fluid and interacts with the form, and the form itself is much more than the alternation of two themes which the alphabetic scheme implies. It is, of course, possible to see a level of sonata-form thinking here, but to try and wrap the piece up neatly as another 'serial sonata' is to miss the interesting formal tensions which contribute so much to the musical narrative.

Such multiple interpretations of form certainly add richness to the ABABA shape, but the most characteristic aspect of the process is Schoenberg's ability to combine significant formal returns with a teleology, or more linear musical narrative.<sup>6</sup> Thus the dynamic sweep of the first part is answered by a much less sure dynamic trajectory in the second – but one which not only projects towards a resolution, but also combines development with thematic return, and perhaps even more importantly suggests the possibility of a new type of musical utterance. If this new type of utterance – a more continuous and unified pianistic style – is ultimately suggested rather than completely fulfilled, it is still an important part of the structural narrative from climax to conclusion, which forms the second half of the piece.

More detailed discussion of the work will focus on three main areas: first the projection of the opening material through its network of formal returns, second the rather strange but beautiful passage (b. 44–9) which seems to stand outside the form, and third the conclusion of the work.

The opening A section is a sentence,<sup>7</sup> but the core material is in the initial 2+2 bar period-like structure, which occurs at the very opening – see Ex. 1a. It is these opening bars which define the formal returns. Several factors are clearly important about this material, including the tetrachordal partitioning of the series as well as the rhythmic and pitch contour shapes. This is also material which is texturally and metrically difficult – what is the performer to make of the designations *cantabile* and *dolce*? They seem to suggest different voicings for the two materials, but the left hand *dolce* marking seems almost facetious – the writing here is not pianistic (it is perhaps more suited for Schoenberg's own instrument, the cello), and its awkwardness seems to belie any sense of *dolce*! There is in addition the rhythmic and metric ambiguity of this opening, which never settles into the written metre.<sup>8</sup> The net result is an opening material which is difficult to grasp, despite its clear structure: these four bars are a fragile material and neither fully formed, nor indeed completely idiomatic.

This can be seen clearly in comparison with the other main structural statements of this material – A' (b. 32) and A'' (b. 57), shown in Ex. 1b and Ex. 1c. A' is a clear return (articulated and audible) of the opening texture, including the *cantabile* and *dolce* designations of the two hands. As at the opening, the right hand partitions the series using order num-

<sup>6</sup> Similar issues were touched on in my previous article 'Serial Expression in Schoenberg's Violin Concerto, op. 36', *Tempo* Vol. 63 No. 247 (January 2009), pp. 38–44.

<sup>7</sup> Both Friedmann and Alegant (op. cit.) make this point.

<sup>8</sup> Friedmann explores the metrical implications of the material in some detail.

bers 1,2,7,8 as the main melodic pitches, but as the series form is now a retrograde, the tetrachord has a different pitch-class content [0146]. This passage also relates thematically with the opening by inverting its melodic contour. The main alteration, though, is that this passage achieves a sense of linear continuity, using the whole row to decorate the principal melodic pitches. The texture, while clearly related to the opening, has lost some of its fragility and there is also a simpler rhythmic continuity, particularly in the right hand, which sits within the written metre. This impulse towards a more sustained melodic linearity and greater pianism is important to the overall shape of the piece.

Example 1a: Bars 1–5

Example 1b: Bars 32–36

Example 1c: Bars 57–60

The final statement of this material, A'', is in some ways a retreat from the more continuous melodic structure of A' and returns to the opening pitch partitioning and shorter melodic gestures. The texture is not that of the fragile opening but is thickened by the simultaneous use of series forms P and I5. Metrically the passage is more stable and the *cantabile* and *dolce* designations are also dropped, perhaps suggesting that the contrapuntal distinction between the hands is no longer such an important part of the presentation of this material. The implication

is that the texture is a more unified entity, or at the very least moving in that direction. After two bars the melodic line is transferred to the bass and the hands swap roles. This change of register is structurally significant.

The formal role of this A material is interesting: it clearly articulates the form and seems to propose a melodic style with an accompaniment texture, even if that is never fully achieved. However its first presentation is provisional and awkward and its final statement seems to move towards a resolution of the two strands without being particularly sustained in its melodic dimension. It comes closest to a clear statement of melody at bar 32, but even here the *cantabile* and *dolce* markings continue to suggest a strong contrapuntal distinction between the two hands. In contrast the B material doesn't ever suggest such a melodic basis; the trichordal partitioning of the series generates a dense motivic texture which never is, or implies it will become, melody and accompaniment. But there is also another strand to the musical narrative which both questions and enhances the relationship between form and material.

The passage at bar 46, shown in Ex. 2 and labelled '3-part counterpoint' in Fig.1, is not formally articulated and seems to sit outside the main form scheme. Friedmann goes so far as to call it an 'insert',<sup>9</sup> but while it is not strongly articulated, this passage is distinctive in the context of the whole piece. If the opening of the work suggests a pianistic awkwardness, here is a passage altogether more elegant and even invoking a Brahmsian topic, with layered, melodically organized lines and more natural opportunities for pianistic voicing. The nature of its counterpoint also seems distinctive. The opening deals with separated materials, and their difference – as indicated by the markings *cantabile* and *dolce* – is important, whereas in this passage a more classical contrapuntal voicing is apparent. If the opening implies a form of melody and accompaniment, this is an altogether more equal form of counterpoint where everything is thematic. Although it clearly links with the A material in a very general way, having a slower-moving melodic voice at the top of the texture and a quiet dynamic, the whole structure of the passage is different from any other part of the piece. The top part uses the first hexachord of the row, not a tetrachordal or trichordal partitioning. The passage is also distinctive in register: it is entirely in the treble clef and sits largely in a register above middle C; it is the longest passage of the piece in the treble register.<sup>10</sup> This is a large melodic outpouring (if dynamically and formally an understated one), and as Ex. 2 shows it takes three whole bars for the first hexachord of each series to unfold.

Example 2: Bars 46–49

The musical score for Example 2, Bars 46–49, is presented in two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time. The first hexachord (bars 46-48) is marked with a 'P' and 'pp' (pianissimo). The second hexachord (bars 49-51) is marked with a 'P' and 'pp'. The score includes fingerings (1-6) and articulation marks (accents, slurs). A bracket at the bottom labels the first hexachord and the second hexachord.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> The only other, but shorter, passage is, interestingly, the *scherzando* interruption in b. 10–11 which also sits outside the main form as shown in fig.1

If continued in this manner with the second hexachord (not an unreasonable expectation), it would make a six-bar melodic statement, which would be the longest in the piece. But Schoenberg does not do this. Instead the second hexachord is despatched in *less* than one bar and the melodic flow disintegrates (an effect not unlike the *scherzando* punctuation of the first page), eventually being replaced by the second theme B' at bar 52. What we have here is a glimpse of a different melodic (and pianistic) world,<sup>11</sup> but not a completed melodic statement. Although this material is in one sense different and outside the principal formal argument, the raw material is *not* new. Not only does it have a serial relationship with the rest of the piece but there are also explicit motivic connexions – the clearest of these is shown in Exx.3a and 3b. However, while this passage sits outside the form it is not without a role in the broader narrative of the piece, as becomes clear when looking at the coda.



Example 3a: RH b.21 (B material)



Example 3b: RH b.46 (3-part counterpoint)



Example 3c: RH b.64 (coda)

There is no doubt that the coda provides resolution at a number of different levels. Ex.4 shows how it uses a very stable partitioning of the series, and the repetition of the tetrachord A G# C D at the same pitch level, gradually augmenting in rhythmic values, becomes a potent cadential figure. Alegant's analysis makes much of the function of partitioning and this [0146] tetrachord is related not only to Ex.1b but is convincingly seen as part of a resolution of the partitioning strategies across the whole piece. Both Alegant and Friedmann also point out that the final chord uses the same [0237] tetrachord as the first melodic motif of bar 1. But this is not the only way in which the piece provides a convincing sense of resolution. Perhaps the clearest is through register: the coda exists entirely in a bass clef register below middle C. This is the immediate effect of the registral change of the melodic line in bar 59 shown in Ex.1c, but it mirrors the treble register of the three-part counterpoint passage of Ex.2 and it is significant that these two are the only extended passages to be defined in register to this extent. This registral descent reaches its lowest point with the final left hand note of the piece, a strategic registral boundary which surely mirrors and balances the ascent to the highest note of the piece in bar 29 at the climax of the work and the end of the first half of the piece. Register is thus used to articulate this binary division but also to reinforce the psychology of the structure, whose first half is an upward sweep and second a settling to a more grounded conclusion. Resolution is also achieved texturally; the very stable contrapuntal patterning, repeating and slowing, of the final five bars seems to make a clear reference to the pianistic style and even motivic shapes of the three-part counterpoint passage – see Exx. 3b & 3c. Unlike Ex. 2, where the flow was truncated by the almost unseemly haste in which the second hexachord was despatched, here the repetition and slowing makes for a balanced use of the hexachords entirely appropriate for the close of the piece and generating a sense of completion.

<sup>11</sup> Alegant op. cit., p. 163 (footnote) connects the serial procedure and texture of this passage with the recapitulation of the first movement of the Piano Concerto op. 42, which not only confirms this as an important 'type' of serial melodic texture for Schoenberg but also serves to show how in another context it does attain a more complete and sustained formal role.

The musical score for Example 4: Coda, bars 61–68, is presented in two systems. The first system contains two staves. The upper staff features a series of chords and single notes with fingerings 5, 6, 11, 12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10. The lower staff has fingerings 2, 3, 1, 7, 9, 8, 4. A 'P' (piano) marking is present. The second system also has two staves. The upper staff is marked 'poco rit.' and has fingerings 5, 6, 11, 12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10. The lower staff has fingerings 5, 6, 11, 12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10. A 'P' (piano) marking is present. The system is divided into a 'First Hexachord' and a 'Second Hexachord'.

Example 4: Coda, bars 61–68

There is a genuine complexity to the form of this short work. The most intriguing part is surely the mysterious passage of counterpoint at bar 46. It offers a glimpse of a transfigured melodic world, which is not fully established before the music moves from that moment of potential transformation, back into the form and ultimately to resolution in the coda. It is at this point that the performer can develop a more intuitive relationship with the material and this passage seems to be part of a wider musical journey from the awkward and fragile opening to a more sustained melodic and pianistic language. It gives the structural circularity of the ABABA form a linear focus – a sense of the transformational potential of the material contained within a closed form.

The resulting sense of quest and the relationship between series and melodic presentation is also present in op. 33a, where the initial chordal material eventually yields a melodic line in a final page, which is like an epiphany of the basic material of the piece. In op. 33a this epiphany takes place *within* the (sonata) form as a truncated recapitulation, but in op. 33b the manifestation of the material hinges around a passage (b. 43–6) which is formally more ambiguous and has even been seen as an ‘insert’. Op. 33b is in many ways the more difficult piece to grasp but in both pieces there is a strong sense of musical journey, in which Schoenberg is able to bring formal return and teleological narrative into a structural relation. For *Alegant*, op. 33b is an adventure of compositional strategy, where the limited row use required Schoenberg ‘to dig deeper into the resources of the twelve-tone system’,<sup>12</sup> but the adventure goes way beyond that of serial manipulation and into a much broader sense of the musical material and the form. This may be a challenging and neglected work, but its intrinsic awkwardness is itself an eloquent expression of a composer wrestling with the way material and form interrelate.

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<sup>12</sup> Op cit., p. 166.