

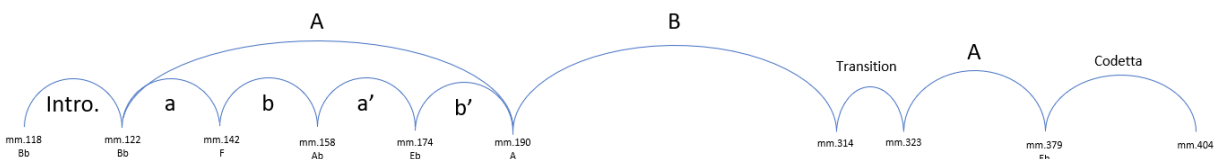
Alex Pipkins

## Observations on Modern Techniques of Philip Sparke

Philip Sparke, an English composer hailing from London born in 1951, uses innovative harmonic and melodic content within his works. In Sparke's *Dance Movements*, Movement II, "Molto Vivo (for the Woodwinds)", Sparke provides a simple large ternary form, but includes modern harmony and melody. Within this work, I will be delving into how Sparke uses a large ternary form, specifically the elements that create this form, and explain the significance as they relate to modern works. While delving into harmony, I will observe the many key areas of the A section and explore the dense chord structure of the B section. Melodically, this work is quite straightforward, although some exceptions arise with looking at the long oboe lines in the B section of the movement. The ever-changing time signatures will also be discussed, as they too serve a purpose in describing Sparke's work as modern. Sparke's *Dance Movements* provide listeners with many opportunities to explore a contemporary composition that leaves an audience with great satisfaction. Movement II does this by using a simple overall form while providing the listener with many contemporary surface level techniques.

Large Ternary Diagram for Philip Sparke's *Dance Movements*, Movement II, "for the Woodwinds."

Note: Movement I is measures 1-117.



Firstly, I begin by examining the large ternary form, as it is one of the simpler elements of Sparke's work. His large ternary is quite straightforward, as seen in the form diagram. It is a simple A B A form ending with a codetta, as this is only a movement of a larger work. This

ternary form is quite common, as it presents the easiest method in understanding both to an audience and to a composer. To begin with analysis, the A section is comprised of a double binary and lasts from mm. 122-190. This double binary includes a total of four key areas and provides memorable motifs that Sparke uses to convey his dance-like ideas. Observing the a motif (mm.122-142), Sparke uses three measures of 2/2 time followed by a 3/4 measure and presents the first dance-like motif.

Example 1, a Motif in B-flat. mm. 122-125



The a section is set around the center of Bb, and has many features suggesting the mixolydian mode. The b section shortly follows, modulating to the center of F, also suggesting the mixolydian mode. This modulation is a direct modulation, as there is a cadence in Bb, then an immediate change to F bringing in the b motif. This section stays in 2/2 and features a simpler rhythmic pattern. The constant eighth note melodic content features octave leaps and melodic thirds in the mixolydian mode.

Example 2, b Motif in F. mm. 142-145



The prime forms of a and b feature the same melodic content, just in more voices, and are placed in different key areas. The a' section begins in Ab major and is directly modulated to from b. Another feature of a' is the combination of the a and b motives, which will be touched upon later. The b' section contains all the same features as b, except that it is in Eb major and contains more dense scoring and slight changes in accompanimental figures. This A section comprises a

large portion of the dance-like material that Sparke uses in this movement, making a lively section to be contrasted by something “slower”, such as the B section. While not changing a tempo, the B section includes more lyrical content and has no changes in tonal center until the transition back to A. The first long phrase that arises, which is displayed by example 3, is constructed of an incredibly long, flowing melody in the oboe underlined by arpeggios in the piano and glockenspiel.

Example 3. Reduced score of oboe melody with harmonic analysis. mm. 192-219

Oboe

192 198 200 206 208 214

AM GM Fm<sup>#9</sup> GM AM

The harmony that Sparke uses in this section does not follow traditional tonal function, but yields smooth voice leading and contemporary, jazz-like harmonic textures. The long flowing melody originally in the oboe continues to arise throughout different voices throughout the B section eventually bringing us back to the A section. There is a small transition between the B and A section in which the a motif is used with different centers. Sparke then places scalar motion in the flute and piccolo to bring the center back to Eb. The codetta, following the second A section, remains in Eb until the end of the movement and includes both a and b material. This large ternary form that Sparke provides elements of contemporary compositions, but remains a simple form that can be followed quite easily.

Moving onto the more complex surface features of this movement by Sparke, the harmonic nature of the movement holds many modern features. In the A section, the mixolydian mode is present, that is a major mode with the absence of the leading tone. This absence of the leading tone yields less harmonic dissonance, which creates a brighter texture. Key areas are

shown through triads in the flutes and piccolo and Sparke ends his melodies on the key center. The melody ending on a key center can be seen in both the a and b material, as shown in example 1 and 2. This modal texture is accompanied by a swift change in key center, as each part of the double binary in A is within a different tonal center. This rapid change in tonal center is not out of order to the ear, as their relations are not so distant. The a and b sections are a perfect fourth relation and a/b and a'/b' are a major second relation. This slight downward motion is apparent and gives a modern sound, yet does not yield dissatisfaction. The direct modulations, separated by a rest, function well together and enhance the sound of the A section. Another point of complex harmony arises in the B section. The accompanimental figures that are with the long, flowing oboe melody at the start provide an introduction to the complex harmonies that Sparke uses. In example 3, the harmonic “progression” is shown, using nonfunctional harmonic motion and even added chord tones to give a more complex sound and maintains a floaty texture.

Example 3. Reduced score of oboe melody with harmonic analysis. mm. 192-219

Oboe

192 198 200 206 208 214

AM GM Fm#+9 GM AM

This harmonic motion is outlined throughout the B section, and gives the section a modern, jazzy flavor.

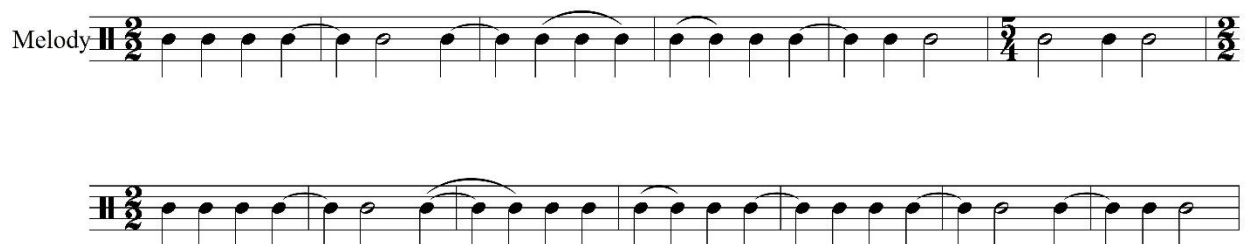
Observing further topics, the other surface level element is that of melody. Sparke uses many time changes to provide uneven pulse and generate interesting rhythmic patterns. The a section, as seen in example 1, is a syncopated melody that follows a pattern of three measures of 2/2 and one measure of 3/4. This uneven dance that is missing its final half-beat provides an uneven pulse, giving the “dance” a complex nature. Sparke continues to provide interesting ideas with the a’ section, synthesizing his a and b motif, as seen in example 4. The a material is taken over by the low group while the upper voices pass the b material. Sparke’s choice of melodic flavor gives a dense, modern texture to his melodic content. Further rhythmic interest can be found within the B section. In Example 5, Sparke inserts a 5/4 measure which gives this dance a further offset.

Example 4, Motivic Overlap of a and b material. mm158-159



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Example 5. Rhythmic content of B material. mm 265-277



The phrase in Example 5 also shows an irregular phrase pattern, such as a 13 bar phrase, which is uncommon in a dance. But, it would seem that this would be more dance-like than an actual dance, leaving room for such qualities. Sparke’s use of complex melodic content shows even further modern shapes despite such simple large forms, and supplement his work.

Sparke's *Dance Movements*, movement II. Molto Vivo (for the Woodwinds) provides many examples of a contemporary composer using simple large form supplemented with complex surface level elements such as harmony and melody. The large form, being less apparent, gives the work connectivity and overall flow. The complexity of the work, however, is shown quite immediately using irregular rhythm and dense, jazz-like harmony. The pairing of these elements creates innovative sounds that give Philip Sparke's music a modern flavor to be enjoyed by many in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.