

COMPLEMENTARITY AS A GENERATOR OF MUSICAL CONTENT IN BERG'S OP. 5
NO. 4 FOR CLARINET AND PIANO

by,

Reuben Allred

10/10/2012

MUTH 5370

COMPLEMENTARITY AS A GENERATOR OF MUSICAL CONTENT IN BERG'S OP. 5
NO. 4 FOR CLARINET AND PIANO

Theodor Adorno claims that the structural concept in the fourth piece of Berg's op. 4 is "the application of the rondo form of the principal of integral development." He adds: "The 'theme' is made up of a chord sustained over four bars in unvarying syncopated rhythm, with a chromatic opposing line in the clarinet: so [sic], no theme at all."¹ His argument is based on the fact that the opening piano sonority returns at m. 11, and yet again at the end of the piece as a "dissolution of the thematic chord."² On the surface this assertion seems quite sound, but the adherence to a rondo idea has a tendency to relegate the remaining "non-thematic" material to a category of lesser importance. I do not believe that this is true. On the contrary, a deeper study of the piece reveals an extremely organic and coherent narrative that grows directly out of the opening interaction between the piano and clarinet.

The ominous piano ostinato that lasts throughout the first four measures of the piece disguises the inherent complexity of its sonority. This pitch class set [01358], member of set class (014580, has several unique properties, many of which are utilized by Berg. One important quality is that it retains four out of five pitch classes at T_4 and at T_8 . Example 1 compares these transpositions in normal order as well as their composite hexachord.

¹ Adorno, Theodor_W. *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*. Trans. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 71.

² Ibid.

