

Chapter 5

Third Edition

Basic Twelve-Tone Operations

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Introduction to Post-Tonal

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Twelve-Tone Series

Until now, we have discussed music largely in terms of *unordered* sets of pitch classes. In what follows, we will concentrate on *ordered* sets, which we will call *series*. A series is a line, not a set, of pitch classes. A pitch-class set retains its identity no matter how its pitch classes are ordered. In a series, however, the pitch classes occur in a particular order; the identity of the series changes if the order changes.

A series can be any length, but by far the most common is a series consisting of all twelve pitch classes. A series of twelve different pitch classes is sometimes called a *set* (a usage we will avoid because of the possibility of confusion with unordered pitch-class sets) or *row*. Music that uses such a series as its basic, referential structure is known as *twelve-tone music*.

A twelve-tone series plays many musical roles in twelve-tone music. In some ways it is like a theme, a recognizable "tune" that recurs in various ways throughout a piece. In some ways it is like a scale, the basic referential collection from which harmonies and melodies are drawn. In some ways it is a repository of motives, a large design within which are embedded numerous smaller designs. But it plays a more fundamental role in twelve-tone music than theme, scale, or motive play in tonal music. In tonal music, the scales and even to some extent the themes and motives are part of the common property of the prevailing musical style. From piece to piece and from composer to composer, a great deal of musical material is shared. Tonal music is relatively communal. In twelve-tone music, however, relatively little is shared from piece to piece or composer to composer; virtually no two pieces use the same series. Twelve-tone music is thus relatively contextual. The series is the source of structural relations in a twelve-tone piece: from the immediate surface to the deepest structural level, the series shapes the music.

