

In Berg's Piano Sonata, Op. 1, creeping, especially symmetrical creeping, generates a rich but evanescent tonal vocabulary of altered triads, sevenths, and ninths, fourth-chords, and a variety of other harmony. In the opening measures of the sonata (Example 14) the harmony is guided by two lines of minor sevenths, between bass and alto. The initiating pitch of the upper line is B, the structural tone center; it is approached by a reaching-tone C, following a G which remains as the only constant element in the phrase. The upper-octave G is the high point of the phrase, but also the initiating pitch of a descending augmented triad, a whole-tone element which is harmonized, if you like, by the chromatic scale segments beneath it. This opening phrase, slightly more than three measures, defines a substantial portion of the tonal and harmonic basis from which the entire Sonata evolves. Only four bars later (Example 15) the one-to-one pairing of chromatic and whole-tone elements becomes much more explicit, with both whole-tone and chromatic types ascending in measure 7, whole-tone descending in measure 8.

The climax of the first section of the exposition shows Berg's creeping universe enlarged to include something not met with before in his work: quartal harmony. The fourth-chords are initially part of an emerging left-hand harmony with upper elements occasionally added by the right-hand melody, as the example shows. The left-hand line moves downward chromatically, until measure 28, when the fourth-chord creeps into a major triad, then back to an upper fourth-chord arpeggiating to a chord of four perfect fourths; this sonority then creeps differentially in all parts through another whole-tone chord of the dominant-seventh with raised-fifth type; only the G sharp| in the upper voice remains constant, until the cadence in the next phrase (notice the slur between the two staves). The obvious model for Berg's Piano Sonata, harmonically as well as formally, is Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, Op. 9, whose very Grundgestalt is a four-measure-motto consisting of a fourth-chord creeping to a dominant seventh with raised and lowered fifth, creeping to a major triad.