

A STUDY OF NEOCLASSICAL ELEMENTS IN ERNST KRENEK'S *GEORGE  
WASHINGTON VARIATIONS*, OP. 120

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The purpose of this study is to explore neoclassical elements present in Krenek's *George Washington Variations*. By identifying the stylistic features associated with the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the study will examine Krenek's application of his neoclassical tendencies. Key neoclassical elements include musical form and structure, key relationships, melody and harmony, and chromaticism. Since at this time there is little research on Krenek's piano works, and none on the *George Washington Variations*, the result of this examination provides pianists and instructors with historically constructive information about Krenek's musical style, as well as a deeper understanding of Krenek's Neoclassicism in his *George Washington Variations*.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

In his *oeuvre*, Austrian-American composer Ernst Krenek (1900–1991) experimented with various styles such as neoromanticism, dodecaphony, jazz, and electronic music; as such, his compositional output is heterogeneous. He is also widely recognized as one of the leading neoclassical composers of the twentieth century. Krenek composed at least six works that are undisputedly in neoclassical style, and his contribution to Neoclassicism offers a unique compositional perspective. Krenek's *George Washington Variations*, Op. 120 (1950) is an important piano work that possesses significant elements of Neoclassicism: in the main theme and each of the variations, Krenek combines traditional forms with an expanded tonal language characteristic of his neoclassical impulse.

The purpose of this study is to explore neoclassical elements present in Krenek's *George Washington Variations*. By identifying the stylistic features associated with the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the study will examine Krenek's application of his neoclassical tendencies. Key neoclassical elements include musical form and structure, key relationships, melody and harmony, and chromaticism. Since at this time there is little research on Krenek's piano works, and none on the *George Washington Variations*, the result of this examination provides pianists and instructors with historically constructive information about Krenek's musical style, as well as a deeper understanding of Krenek's Neoclassicism in his *George Washington Variations*.



## 1.2 Compositional Influences on Krenek

Ernst Krenek was born in Vienna, Austria in 1900. His most influential teacher was Franz Schreker, an Austrian composer and conductor who would later be appointed director of the National Academy of Music in Berlin. Krenek began studying composition with Schreker in 1916 at the Vienna Academy of Music. Schreker was a creative instructor who liked to innovate. Even though his music featured no contrapuntal writing, his teaching focused on the study of counterpoint based on Johann Sebastian Bach and Max Reger. Schreker wanted to teach his students how to create new sonorities through novel applications of dominant seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords. With regard to this new application of chords, Krenek states:

The musical idiom of Wagner was better than that of Haydn or Beethoven, because he dared to use more dissonant chords and delay their resolutions more ingeniously; that songs by Hugo Wolf were better than those by Franz Schubert for similar reasons, which made them more communicative for the modern mind, and so forth. From all this it followed that we were trained to go on in the same spirit, discover new dissonances, and disguise the facts of tonality more cleverly.<sup>1</sup>

During his stay in Berlin, Krenek became involved with German musical culture and established good relationships with various renowned musicians such as Ferruccio Busoni, Artur Schnabel, and Herman Scherchen. It was also during this time that Krenek composed many works that included canons, fugues, and double fugues. The most relevant are: *Double Fugue for piano* (1918), *Violin Sonata No.1* (1919), *Piano Sonata No.1* (1919), *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1945), and *Serenade for Clarinet, Violin, Viola and Cello* (1919). These works were written in the spirit of post-Romantic German polyphony, and are flavored with impressionistic devices of French and Italian origin.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Krenek, *Horizons Circled: Reflections on my Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 20.

In the early 1920s, Krenek wrote numerous atonal works, the most important of which are his *Symphony* No. 2 (1922), *Symphony* No. 3 (1923), three string quartets (1921, 1921, and 1922), his *Piano Concerto* No. 1 (1923), and *Symphonic Music for Nine Instruments* (1922).

Writing in a different style, the *String Quartet* No. 1, Op. 6 (1921) was Krenek's first atonal work. The work reveals the influence of Béla Bartók in the presence of syncopated rhythms, percussive attacks, zither-like strumming effects, numerous ostinato passages for cello, and the teasing hints of familiar triads offset by flintily dissonant suspensions.<sup>3</sup> Krenek's *String Quartet* No. 2 (1921) was even more dissonant and radical than his first string quartet. Krenek's most important work from this early period was his *Symphony* No. 2, Op. 12 (1922), a long work with a slow introduction.

Around 1924, Krenek visited Paris and was stunned by the city. He was absorbed by the elegance, joy, and simplicity of French music. Krenek called it "unerhört"—unprecedented, scandalous, and exorbitant.<sup>4</sup> Krenek not only became acquainted with French music, but also allied himself with important figures like Stravinsky and *Les Six*. French music had a great impact on Krenek's music, which developed into having a more idiomatic approach. His compositional processes in turn became more practical, as the composer strove to produce more entertaining music. In response to Stravinsky's music, Krenek adopted Neoclassicism, though he would not write in this musical style for long; most of Krenek's neoclassical works were composed between 1924 and 1928, and his most important contributions from this time are the *Concerto Grosso* No. 2 (1924), and the *Concertino for Flute, Violin, Harpsichord and Strings* (1924).

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<sup>3</sup> John L. *The Man and His. Stewart, Ernst Krenek Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Krenek, Letter from Ernst Krenek to Paul Bekker, December 14, 1924 (Bekker papers, LC).

Following this neoclassicist trend, Krenek began writing in a neo-romantic style, while also employing jazz idioms. The opera *Jonny Spielt Auf* (1925) was a significant work with which Krenek returned to tonality and incorporated, in a novel fashion, the use of jazz idioms in an opera. Because of its public success, the opera was performed more than one hundred times and later translated into eighteen languages.

Krenek's neoromanticism was influenced by Schubert's vocal music. The study of Schubert's songs with Eduard Erdmann, a Baltic composer and pianist, increased Krenek's interest in Schubert's music. Krenek absorbed many of his compositional traits: the unexpected transposing of notes up an octave, the displacement of accents and altering of rhythms, the jumps to remote keys followed by nimble returns to the tonal centers, the unforeseeable movements between major and minor modes, and the asymmetrical phrases.<sup>5</sup> By studying how Schubert achieved balance without symmetry, Krenek learned "what counted, what was necessary."<sup>6</sup> Krenek had examined Schubert's music earlier during his studies, and by this point he was ready to apply Schubert's compositional processes to his own music.

Despite the fact that the twelve-tone system had become extremely popular since the beginning of the twentieth century, Krenek began to experiment with dodecaphony in his compositions only in the late 1920s. He first used the system in his song cycle *Gesänge des Späten Jahres* (1931). His interest in using the technique led him to become close friends with composers from the Viennese school of twelve-tone music such as Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg. Between 1930 and 1942, Krenek composed many works that employed the twelve-tone system. These include the opera *Karl V* (1931–33), his *String Quartet* No. 6 (1936) and the *Piano Variations* (1937).

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<sup>5</sup> Ernst Krenek, "Self-Analysis" in *New Mexico Quarterly* 23. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953), 8.

<sup>6</sup> John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 99.

Krenek first visited the United States in 1937 and was visiting again the following year, but could not return home due to the unstable situation in Europe. Despite being a popular musician in Europe, Krenek had a difficult time finding a teaching position in the United States. His first job was at Vassar College in New York (1939–42), teaching music in a liberal arts department. Despite the fact that his students were not music majors, Krenek focused his teaching on composition, particularly the twelve-tone system. After his teaching experience in Vassar, Krenek became head of the music department at Hamline University, in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Although the music department at Hamline was small, Krenek was able to continue his development as a composer. As a lecturer and visiting professor, Krenek traveled around the United States; he gave master classes at universities in Michigan, Wisconsin, and New Mexico, as well as UCLA, and Chicago Musical College.

One of the major works he wrote after emigrating was *Lamentatio Jeremiae Prophetae* (1941–42), for choir and capella. Here, Krenek employed “rotation technique,” which he developed himself. It was the solution to a self-imposed problem, namely, to integrate certain principles of the twelve-note techniques with those of ancient modality<sup>7</sup>; however, the work was also influenced by Renaissance music. In 1950, at a time when Krenek was composing only twelve-tone works, he unexpectedly wrote a work in neoclassical style, the *George Washington Variations*, Op. 120. It was a commissioned work requested by Los Angeles businessman Morris Moline. Moline asked Krenek to compose an intermediate piano piece for his daughter Miriam Moline, and, as such, the work is dedicated to her. The Molines were so pleased with the *George Washington Variations* that they later asked Krenek to compose a full piano concerto; this would later become Krenek’s *Fourth Piano Concerto*, Op. 123.

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Nathan Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 32.

Krenek was granted American citizenship in 1945, and for the next ten years, he explored writing dodecaphonic compositions. In 1955, Krenek became interested in electronic music, and began working in an electronic music studio. The experience allowed Krenek to develop a total serial idiom. His later works included many experimental pieces, many of which combined electronic music and serialism. In 1960, his serial idioms became associated with aleatoric music. Krenek settled down in Palm Springs, California in 1966, where he spent the rest of his life. The compositions in his later years were focused on both the twelve-tone system and total serial techniques.

Ernst Krenek was not only an important twentieth century composer, but was also a writer, creating the libretto for his operas, vocal works, and dramas. He authored a number of books: *Here and Now* (1939), *Studies in Counterpoint* (1940), *Self-Analysis* (1948), *Johannes Ockeghem* (1953), *Exploring Music* (1966), and *Horizons Circled: Reflections on my Music* (1974).

Though his musical outlook and background were based on Viennese training, Krenek's life reveals an inclination to adopt and adapt to new methods of composition; as a result of these tendencies, his works reflect various musical idioms of the twentieth century. After the 1920s Krenek composed in a number of musical styles. The *George Washington Variations* were written in 1950, when Krenek was already an experienced composer. This can be perceived through the complexity of the musical language— a combination of eighteenth and twentieth century styles, which nonetheless is coherent in terms of structural and harmonic relationships.

## CHAPTER II

### KRENEK AND NEOCLASSICISM

#### 2.1 Musical Neoclassicism

Neoclassicism, as a musical trend that developed in the period between World War I and World War II, evoked the compositional style of the eighteenth century in terms of musical form, genres, and instrumentation; it also included other concepts of “classicism” such as restrained emotions, clear harmony, and balanced phrasing. Musicologist Scott Messing describes Neoclassicism as a combination of two distinct approaches: one refers to the use of clarity, simplicity, objectivity and purity, while the other involves modeling works on great masterworks from the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Messing states:

At the same time that this historical past (classicism) was codified, however, there developed an adversarial view of it as stultifying and inhibitive, encouraging artists to be self-consciously and deliberately unfettered to their heritage. It is precisely this tension between order and freedom, continuity and innovation, and tradition and novelty that existed around the turn of the century that incited the first appearances of the term neoclassicism.<sup>9</sup>

Neoclassicism originated in France and later spread to Germany, the United States and Spain. The French and German schools, in particular, greatly contributed to the development of the neoclassical movement.

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<sup>8</sup> Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music from the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1988), 75.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv–xv.

## 2.2 Influences on Krenek's Neoclassicism

While traveling in France in the 1920s, Krenek was strongly influenced by French Neoclassicism and became interested in the prevailing spirit of parody in Paris.<sup>10</sup> In his book, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music*, John L. Stewart notes the variety of French neoclassical influences that Krenek absorbed:

The Opera-Comique and l'Odéon; of Rolland's comedy *Dr. Knock*; of vaudeville and revues; of the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, Picasso's set, Fokine's choreography; of the music of Stravinsky and Les Six; and of the spectacles over which hovered the spirit of Jean Cocteau, the Ultimate Acrobat and Dissembler.<sup>11</sup>

Krenek's strongest musical influence derived from the work of Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), which emphasized “tonality moving into and out of polytonality, the development of a single theme, dance and march rhythms, the use of small ensembles emphasizing woodwinds, a return to the concerto grosso, [...] and an anti-Romantic treatment.”<sup>12</sup> Stravinsky, a prominent Russian composer of the twentieth century, is also regarded as a leading figure of Neoclassicism. He expressed an interest in French Neoclassicism in a 1915 interview with Carl Van Vechten where he spoke of his opposition to Impressionism and aimed at a “straightforward expression in its simplest form” in his compositions.<sup>13</sup> Stravinsky admired Eric Satie's economy of style and used it in works such as *The Five Fingers* or *Waltz in Three Easy Pieces*. Many French critics praised his new approach to musical objectivity, which presented straightforward expression in combination with jazz and ragtime. In 1922, Ernest Ansermet stated:

Stravinsky is simplifying his style more and more, reducing it to the most common direct and frank elements, recalling the most exceptional forms without losing any of the new-found freshness in his manner of expression.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 54.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Kellner, ed. *The Letters of Carl Van Vechten* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1987), 92–93.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, eds. *A History of Western Music* (New York: Norton, 1996), 724.

Stravinsky began adopting neoclassical traits in 1919 with the composition of *Pulcinella*. This work would strongly influence Krenek's Neoclassicism, which consisted of exploring traditional musical forms and styles, combining themes with twentieth century musical techniques, and writing them in simple, balanced, and economic musical terms.

In 1924, Krenek heard a live performance of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* and his *Piano Concerto* (the premiere performance in Winterthur) that increased his interest in Stravinsky and his neoclassical works. Upon hearing *Pulcinella*, Krenek remarked that it was "an exhilarating experience,"<sup>15</sup> and after hearing Stravinsky's *Piano Concerto*, Krenek wrote to Paul Bekker that Stravinsky's Neoclassicism had made an "almost terrifying, astonishing, and elementary impression" on him.<sup>16</sup>

*Les Six*, a group of French composers who were referred to as neoclassicists because they praised Satie's simplicity, and were connected with Diaghilev, Cocteau, and Stravinsky, also inspired Krenek's Neoclassical ideas. They composed in a style similar to Stravinsky's music, though they did not use musical elements from the Classical era. Although Krenek's Neoclassicism was not strongly influenced by *Les Six*, his encounters with Milhaud, Honegger, and Poulenc were of decisive significance for him in understanding new musical ideas related to Neoclassicism.

Krenek's encounters with French musicians motivated him to develop a new musical approach. According to a letter that Krenek wrote to Bekker, Bekker stated:

In that city, art occupied a wholly different position from that to which he was accustomed. Each day he had seen and heard things that, had they been performed in Frankfurt, would have disgusted him. He was convinced, as he put it, "that my absolutism will slowly but surely be cured."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 54.

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Krenek, Letter from Ernst Krenek to Paul Bekker, December 14, 1924 (Bekker papers, LC).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



Important contemporary figures, such as *Les Six* and Stravinsky influenced Krenek to develop a new artistic outlook, one that possessed wholly different musical aspects from that to which he was accustomed. Krenek was able to capture the prevailing French characteristics of parody, simplicity, and clarity. In particular, Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* had an impact on both Krenek's development of musical idioms and his neoclassical musical perspective. In absorbing these influences, Krenek tried to write in a style similar to the neoclassical music of Stravinsky and *Les Six*. As he recounted in later years,

My impression of France caused a complete about-face in my artistic outlook... I was fascinated by what appeared to me the happy equilibrium, perfect poise, grace, elegance, and clarity which I thought I perceived in French music of that period, as well as in the relations of French musicians with their public. I decided that the tenets, which I had followed so far in writing "modern" music, were totally wrong. Music, according to my new philosophy, had to fit the well-defined demands of the community for which it was written; it had to be useful, entertaining, practical.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.3 Characteristics of Krenek's Neoclassicism

The *George Washington Variations*, composed in 1950, is of importance in that it is Krenek's only neoclassical work for solo piano. Although Krenek's musical language at that time focused on the application of the twelve-tone technique, he returned to his earlier neoclassical style for this work. Krenek had not written anything in a neoclassical style since the late 1920s, so this return to Neoclassicism for a single work was unexpected. Miriam Moline (the dedicatee of the composition), who later on would become a professional pianist, was a teenager at the time of the commission. It is possible that Krenek made the choice of a more traditional and approachable language because of her age.

The *George Washington Variations* share a similar form and structure with Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, as both feature traditional harmonic progressions and musical structure as well as the

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<sup>18</sup> George Sherman Dickinson, letter to Krenek, February 8, 1939; Krenek Archive, UCSD.

use of eighteenth century musical forms. Krenek borrowed the tune of “Washington’s Grand March” and “Martial Cotillion” from an 1800 manuscript book belonging to the Euterpean Society of Hartford.<sup>19</sup> Although the composer of this military march tune is unknown, it originally came from George Washington's time period and was first published in 1796 with the title “New President's March.” It was soon reprinted as “President’s New March;” “General Washington March,” “Washington's New March,” “Washington's March,” and finally the title settled into “Washington's Grand March.”<sup>20</sup>

Krenek also adopted Stravinsky’s simplicity, objectivity, straightforward expression, and active rhythms. Stravinsky’s works for wind instruments influenced Krenek’s writing, as he tried to recreate a similar timbre in “Battle Music,” “Washington’s Grand March,” and “Martial Cotillion.”

Krenek’s unique neoclassical idiom is characterized in this work mainly through the use of an expanded tonality and an enriched harmonic progressions. The dissonances create a high degree of chromaticism and generate a number of ambiguous harmonic progressions. The traditional forms of the eighteenth century are manifested in titles such as “Elegy,” “Canon,” and “Sarabande;” these musical forms are transformed by Krenek’s modern compositional language. Krenek also explores creative ways to successfully merge traditional and modern processes. He achieves this by establishing a vague tonal center and developing traditional forms through modern musical techniques.

Krenek’s neoclassical period is relatively short compared to the time he spent pursuing other musical styles. Before meeting Stravinsky in Paris in late 1924, Krenek had written few

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<sup>19</sup> Ernst Krenek, *George Washington Variations*, Op.120 (New York: Southern Music Publishing Company, Inc., 1950), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Francis E. Abernethy, *Between the Cracks of History: Essays on Teaching and Illustrating Folklore* (Denton: University of North Texas, 1997), 122.

works that reflected Neoclassicism or tonal music. He embraced traditional tonal music by applying counterpoint and Bachian polyphony in his music before he was influenced by Neoclassicism. This musical style in the early twentieth century came about as a result of Schreker's discipline, which emphasized the use of counterpoint and extended tonality. Krenek composed *Serenade* in 1919, a student work written in a late Romantic idiom that presented a traditional tonal structure (Post-romantic German polyphony) and combined it with a modern musical approach. As Stewart points out, this "itself had certain neoclassical features, even though that idiom had not yet come into being."<sup>21</sup>

During his neoclassical period, Krenek composed his *Concerto Grosso* No. 2, Op. 25 (1924). This work was particularly influenced by Stravinsky, as Krenek introduced a Baroque musical form and texture, although the harmonic language he used was atonal. A similar direction was taken in his *Symphony* No.2, where traditional idioms waft through atonality. Krenek presents extreme dissonance between the instruments in eighteenth century prototypes. Another neoclassical work in Krenek's catalogue is the *Concertino for Flute, Violin, Harpsichord and String Orchestra*, Op. 27, composed in late 1924. The musical form in all five movements is very traditional, and, like the *Concerto Grosso*, the harmonic language sounds atonal.

Krenek drew upon a wide variety of musical sources for material in his three neoclassical compositions modeled on Stravinsky's works: *Drei lustige Marsche*, Op. 44 (1926), *Potpourri fur Orchester*, Op. 54 (1927), and *Kleine Sinfonie*, Op. 58 (1928). Writing these works helped him become acquainted with the compositional practices found in contemporary French Neoclassicism, which consistently focused on simplicity, objectivity and elegance.

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<sup>21</sup> John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 57.

Krenek's Neoclassicism featured traditional musical forms (sonata, fugues, variations, and suite), exuded a French spirit (simplicity, elegance, and happy equilibrium)<sup>22</sup> and expanded tonality (variety of modes, mixing major and minor modes, and tonal melody and atonal accompaniment). Although Krenek tried to emulate traditional musical styles in his neoclassical pieces, these were not simply an imitation of eighteenth century music, but rather, progressive music of the twentieth century, which he developed in his own musical style. Krenek described his progressive Neoclassicism as presenting an extended harmonic progression, developing dissonant sounds and the free use of chromaticism. Krenek stated, "neoclassical music is not just imitated by the traditional musical styles in new creation but is treated as pleasing and attractive relics of a better age."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 56

<sup>23</sup> Ernst Krenek, *Horizons Circled: Reflections on my Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 22.

CHAPTER III  
ANALYSIS OF NEOCLASSICAL ELEMENTS  
IN *GEORGE WASHINGTON VARIATIONS*, OP. 120

The main musical components to be discussed are: 1) musical form and structure, 2) key relationships, 3) melody and harmony, and 4) chromaticism.

### 3.1 Musical Form and Structure

In this work, Krenek's use of classical formal structures has been manipulated to fit neoclassical procedures. The *George Washington Variations* consist of a theme and six continuous variations, each one bearing its own descriptive title, as shown in Figure 3.1. These titles feature names related to traditional classical music genres such as march, sarabande, elegy, and canon.

Figure 3.1. Descriptive Titles of *George Washington's Variations*

1. "Washington's Grand March"
2. "The same, elaborated upon"
3. "Battle Music"
4. "Elegy"
5. "The Chase (a canon)"
6. "Sarabande"
7. "Grand Finale, with the Martial Cotillion"

In eighteenth century variation writing, the theme generally consisted of a binary form in which the B section was often longer than the A section. Both sections were repeated (||:A:||: B:||). By contrast, the *George Washington Variations* theme presents a short, simple, and balanced melody with a block chord accompaniment. The theme is eighteen measures long with no repeat signs. "Washington's Grand March" theme is divided into a sectional binary form: A with an extension, and B, as shown in Example 3.1. The A section opens in G major, and stays in the tonic key.

Krenek extends the A section, which closes using a perfect cadence: V–I. The B section starts in the relative minor key (E minor) and returns to the tonic key of G major by way of another perfect cadence (V–I). The overall musical form (A: I–I, B: vi–I) is considerably similar to traditional binary form, which consists of A: I–I :||B: V–I. The result is two balanced periods, each consisting of two four-bar phrases: A is from measures 1–10 with a short extension (mm. 8–10) and B is from mm. 11–18 (see Figure 3.2).

Example 3.1. “Washington’s Grand March,” Musical Form in mm. 1–18

**George Washington Variations**

ERNST KRENEK  
(1950)

The musical score is for "George Washington Variations" by Ernst Krenek (1950). It is in 4/4 time and G major. The score is divided into four systems. The first system shows Phrase 1 (measures 1-4) and Phrase 2 (measures 5-8), with a box labeled 'A' under measures 1-4. The second system continues Phrase 2 (measures 9-12) and includes an 'EXTENSION' (measures 13-14). The third system shows Phrase 1 (measures 15-18) and Phrase 2 (measures 19-22), with a box labeled 'B' under measures 15-18. The fourth system continues Phrase 2 (measures 23-26). Key signatures and dynamics are indicated throughout.

Figure 3.2. The Overall Musical Organization of “Washington’s Grand March”

A	+	Extension	B
I – I		V – I	vi – I (V – I)
		G	E minor – G

Krenek establishes the active theme of “Washington’s Grand March” for the entire variation by juxtaposing an exuberant mood to the march music with a sad tune to a slow eighteenth century dance. The second variation, titled “The same, elaborated upon,” has the same musical form as the theme. This notwithstanding, Krenek employs different compositional devices, but still evokes eighteenth century writing through the use of Alberti basses, diatonic scales, trills, and mordents. In “Battle Music,” Krenek maintains the same musical energy as in “Washington’s Grand March,” which imitates percussive sounds and wind instrument color; thematic elements are repeated constantly from the A and B sections. As a result, the musical form in “Battle Music” is extended: A, B, A', B'. The first A and B follow a similar musical form as that of “Washington’s Grand March.” In exchange, A' and B' contain a number of complex rhythms and unstable sonorities that generate dissonance and ambiguous tonal center, establishing the melody in tonality and the accompaniment in unrelated harmonization.

In “Elegy,” Krenek presents a somber tone, as the variation has a mournful, lamenting, and melancholic character. In terms of the form, the structure is rather loose: Krenek uses only thematic elements from the B section, as seen in Example 3.2. Unlike the musical characteristics of “Washington’s Grand March,” Krenek alters the sonorous qualities and the compositional techniques in “Elegy.” The sound of the march is reconstructed through a complex polyphonic texture and a higher degree of chromaticism in the thirty measures of “Elegy.” Each musical line moves independently with different rhythmic patterns, which create complex harmonies against each other.

Example 3.2. “Washington’s Grand March,” mm. 10 –12 and “Elegy,” mm. 1–2

**E minor**

**Thematic element of B section**  
*Washington's Grand March*

**G minor**

**Thematic element of B section**  
*Elegy*

In the variation entitled “The Chase (a canon),” Krenek follows traditional canonic writing technique: the *dux* (leader) in the right hand starts with an E major scale and moves to the left hand; the *comes* (follower) then imitates the same interval of the *dux* on beat four of measure 3. Although these two voices play independent melodic lines, the *dux* follows a standard harmonic progression: E major and F-sharp minor. Unlike the tonality in the right hand, the eighth notes (A-sharp, A, C-sharp, F-sharp, C-sharp, B-sharp, and D-sharp) in the left hand in measures 2-3 create an unrelated key center in the right hand, which manifests itself through an unfunctional harmonization . These two individual lines generate a clash between the diminished fifth (A-sharp/E), perfect fifth (A/E), diminished seventh (C-sharp/B), minor third (F-sharp/A), perfect fourth (C-sharp/F-sharp), and diminished seventh (B-sharp/A). Vertically, the eighth notes in the left hand enrich the E major tonality which is clearly articulated in the right hand, as shown in Example 3.3.



Example 3.3. “The Chase (a canon),” mm. 1–5

Krenek also employs melodic inversion, another procedure derived from eighteenth century canonic writing. Whenever the initial melody goes up by a particular interval, the imitative melody goes down by that same interval, and vice-versa, as shown in Example 3.4. It was common practice for neoclassical composers to adopt imitative counterpoint, a musical technique used by musicians from earlier generations. For example, Stravinsky, the precursor of Neoclassicism, often used eighteenth century counterpoint in his neoclassical works.

Example 3.4. “The Chase (a canon),” mm.11–14

In the next variation, Krenek writes a sarabande, a slow dance in binary form that was often included in Baroque suites. Krenek’s “Sarabande” is redolent of eighteenth century

examples in the sense that it begins with a slow tempo in triple meter. However, the loose structure makes the musical form ambiguous. Krenek's tonal structure is also vague as he uses dissonant harmonies and chromatic lines, a procedure that deviates from the one used in traditional musical form. The independent melodic lines in the polyphonic texture of "Sarabande" are very similar to those found in contrapuntal writing; this serves to expand the thick texture and the range of sounds.

Krenek concludes the *George Washington Variations* with the tune of "Martial Cotillion," which dates back to 1800. The cotillion is a French dance from the eighteenth century, characterized by being in a quick tempo in 2/4 or 6/8, and having complex rhythms. This final variation begins with a fast tempo in 4/4. Here, Krenek adapted the original "Martial Cotillion" by using various musical compositional techniques: blocked chord progressions, persistent chromatic lines, a brass-type instrumental timbre, a large musical range, a simple musical texture of the eighteenth century, and a complex polyphonic texture between the two hands. The closing theme of "Martial Cotillion" is also juxtaposed with the thematic elements (A and B) of "Washington's Grand March." By combining these two themes in the final variation, Krenek finishes "*George Washington Variations*" in a tonal sonority with functional harmonization in G major, which creates tonal reminiscences.

### 3.2 Key Relationships

In the theme of "Washington's Grand March," Krenek uses mediant relationships, which generally include relative major and minor keys. This is reminiscent of traditional harmonic progressions that were used in the eighteenth century. The A and B sections in the theme can be divided by the submediant relationship (the sixth scale degree of G, which is E minor). Krenek employs traditional key relationships in "Washington's Grand March," and "The same,

elaborated upon,” as shown in Figure 3.3 below. This contrasts with “Battle Music,” where Krenek’s tonal relationships are not characteristic of the classical era. In “Battle Music,” “Elegy,” “The Chase,” and “Sarabande,” as well as the beginning of the “Grand Finale, with the Martial Cotillion,” Krenek combines modern tonal relationships with traditional musical form. Unstable key relationships and complex harmonic progressions create unrelated keys and ambiguous submediant relationships.

Figure 3.3. Key Relationships in the *George Washington Variations*

No. 1 “Washington’s Grand March”	G major I	E minor vi	G major I
No. 2 “The same, elaborated upon”	G major I	E minor vi	G major I
No. 3 “Battle Music”	G major I	E-flat major bVI	G major I
No. 4 “Elegy”	G minor i		E major VI
No. 5 “The Chase (a canon)”	E major VI		E flat bVI
No. 6 “Sarabande”	G minor i		unclear expanding tonality
No.7 “Grand Finale, with Martial Cotillion”	..... unclear	G major I	E major VI G major I (I–vi–I)

G major is the tonal center in most of the *George Washington Variations*, and the reason for this is that this key appears to be established both at the beginning and at the end of most of the variations. For example, “Washington’s Grand March” begins in the tonic chord of G major. The theme sets up a tonic–submediant–tonic progression (I–vi–I = G major–E minor–G major) in G major. Krenek follows a similar process in the first variation, where key relationships are also used in a traditional manner.

In addition to employing these standard models, Krenek also emphasizes E-flat (flat VI) instead of E to present a submediant relationship. The E-flat is a chromatic tone borrowed from the G minor scale, the parallel minor key of G major. As the sixth scale degree of G minor, the E-flat becomes a prominent harmonic and melodic tone, expanding to a more adventurous harmonic region. In the third variation, “Battle Music,” for example, Krenek chromaticizes the tonic–submediant–tonic progression, modulating to E-flat major rather than E: I-flat VI–I = G major–E-flat major–G major.

The key relationship in “Elegy” fits a G minor scheme, an appropriate choice to express the dark, gloomy and sad nature of this piece. Although the three notes articulate the G minor key in the first measure, the chromaticism and ambiguous harmonic progression with complex textures blur the tonality of G minor until the E major appears at the end of this variation. Krenek expands the tonality via the submediant chord, an E major chord (VI in G minor) that is maintained until the end of “The Chase (a canon),” the next variation. The extended tonality from “Elegy” finally ends with D-sharp (E-flat = flat VI) at the end of “The Chase.”

Figure 3.4. The Submediant Relationship between “Elegy” and “The Chase”

“Elegy”	End of “Elegy,” start of “The Chase”	End of “The Chase”
i/G minor	VI (E major)	bVI (D-sharp)

The “Sarabande” begins in the tonic key, G minor, but Krenek avoids going back to the tonic or another relative key at the end of this variation. The absence of functional tonality and the obscure tonal center emphasize the loose harmonic progressions and the juxtaposition of complex textures with traditional musical form. “Sarabande” seems to end with an A major chord (C-sharp and E in the right hand/ A in the left hand), but a cluster-like chord in the left

hand, which creates unrelated harmonization with the right hand, avoids a clear articulation of an A major tonality.

The “Grand Finale, with the Martial Cotillion,” begins with a cluster-like chord and a very simple melody. The continued reoccurrence of F-sharps or G-flats symbolize a transformation back to tonality, seen by way of the tonic–submediant–tonic progression in G major that had originally appeared in the theme of “Washington’s Grand March.” A more general picture of the key relationships in the *George Washington Variations* can be seen in Figure 3.5, where traditional tonality expands through two submediant relationships: bVI and VI.

Figure 3.5. Overall Key Relationships in *George Washington Variations*

Theme (No. 1) +(No. 2)	No. 3/No. 4/No. 5/No. 6	Finale (No. 7)
I	bVI –i – VI	I
G major	Repetition of Submediant	G major

### 3.3 Melody and Harmony

The tonal melodic line supported by the complex and ambiguous harmonies is an additional element of Krenek’s neoclassical style. Even though a sense of pervasive chromaticism permeates through both the melody and harmonic progressions, Krenek’s use of a catchy tune appears with the following dissonant intervals: seconds, seventh, augmented, and diminished intervals. As shown in Example 3.5, Krenek outlines various unrelated chords below the simple and tonal melody: C augmented, E-flat minor, and E minor. In measures 22–24, the melodic line appears to be tonal, but the dissonant intervals in vertical complex harmonies create a blurred sense of tonality. Complex vertical structures are less important in Neoclassical music, and while these structures are not the main focal point, they serve to support tonal melodies and produce an expanded tonality and an enrichment of tonality. Expanded and enriched tonality

delays structural resolutions by utilizing complex rhythm, increasing chromaticism, and decreasing functional harmonization.

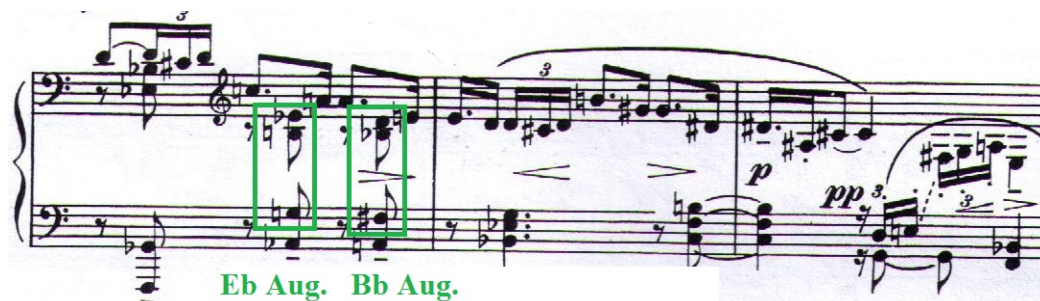
Example 3.5. *Battle Music*, measures 22–24

The image displays a musical score for measures 22–24 of *Battle Music*. The score is written for two staves: the upper staff is labeled "like trumpets" and the lower staff is labeled "percussive". The upper staff features a melodic line with various intervals and accidentals, while the lower staff provides a complex harmonic accompaniment. A red rectangular box highlights the upper staff, and a green rectangular box highlights the lower staff. Below the lower staff, the following chords are identified: C Aug., Ebm, Em, C Aug., Am, and G# half diminished 7th.

A more identifiable example occurs in “Sarabande.” Here, Krenek presents a series of extremely complex harmonic lines between the melody and the accompaniment; these move independently to each other in contrapuntal fashion, creating an ambiguous and obscure tonal center. The melodic line is tonal, but the accompaniment of the left hand presents unrelated chords to those of the tonality suggested by the melody. The sense of dissonance does not resolve until the end of this variation; even the last measure of “Sarabande” does not appear to be a resolution, as it finishes with the tension of the dissonant chord. Although neoclassical composers used diverse harmonies between the melody and accompaniment to create color or produce clashes in complex musical lines, Krenek uses it as a device to create an expanded and enriched tonality. In measure 29, Krenek outlines each line that moves in unrelated keys and different harmonizations. The combination of the separate triads creates severe dissonant chords that are not related to the melody. The melody of the right hand outlines an A minor triad. The two chords that appear below A minor, which are E-flat augmented (E-flat, G, B), and B-flat augmented (F-sharp, B-flat, D) produce unrelated harmonizations and dissonant sonorities.

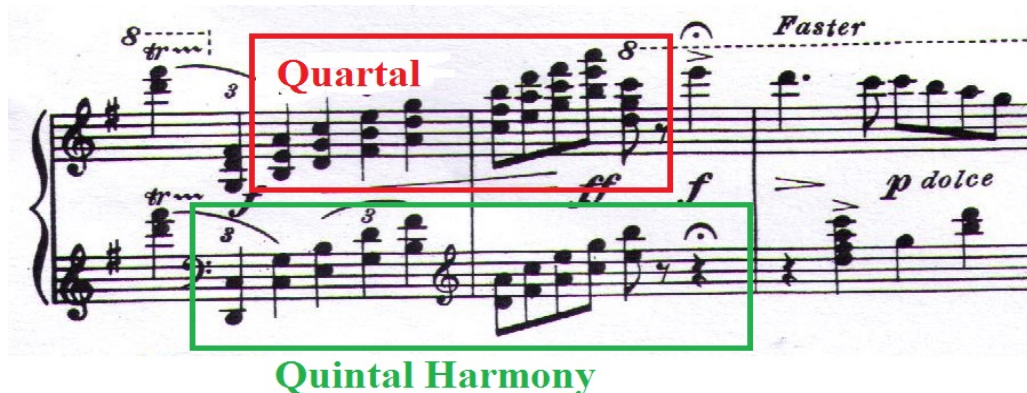


Example 3.6. Sarabande, measures 29–32.



Krenek utilizes quartal and quintal harmonies in a simple melody in order to produce a blurred tonal center. Measures 65 and 66 of Example 3.7 are firmly in G major; these feature parallel blocked chords outlining an interval of a fourth in the right hand and an interval of a fifth in the left hand below the top notes. The top voice in the right hands produces an accent in thirds (A, C, E, G, B, D, F, A) through blocked quartal and quintal chords. Even though the tonic is G major, Krenek avoids the use of functional chords and creates a sense of tonal ambiguity.

Example 3.7. Grand Finale, with the Martial Cotillion, mm. 65–66



## CHAPTER IV

### CHROMATICISM

Krenek utilizes chromaticism as a hallmark of his Neoclassicism. He expands traditional diatonic harmony into chromatic harmony, and then into free chromaticism. Chromatic harmonies, which generally appear vertically encompassing all voices, create a long and free chromatic movement, which flow freely in all voices. This musical process is often used in the neoclassical works of Stravinsky. In the *George Washington Variations*, Krenek begins with a traditional diatonic progression in the theme of “Washington’s Grand March.” The bass line ( $\hat{1}\hat{7}\hat{6}\hat{5} = G-F\text{-sharp}-E-D-G$ ), shown in measures 1 and 3 of Example 4.1, outlines a diatonic harmonic progression and supports a diatonic ascent in G major ( $\hat{1}\hat{2}\hat{3}\hat{4}\hat{5} = G-A-B-C-D$ ) in the melody. The harmonic progression of the bass line is by all means traditional: I–(ii6)–V–I – (VI)–V–I).

Example 4.1. “Washington’s Grand March,” Diatonic Harmony, mm. 1–3

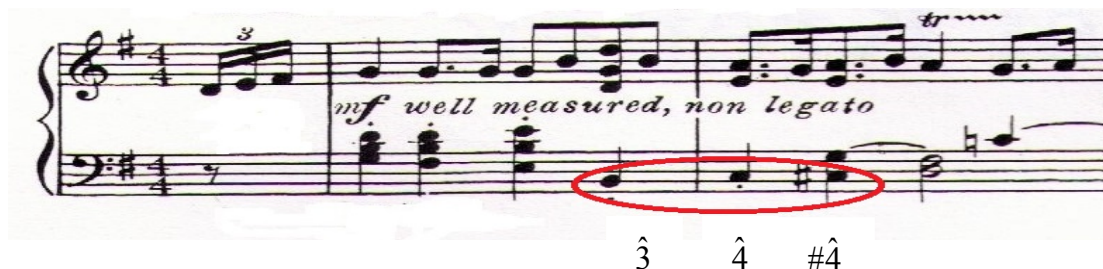
The musical score for Example 4.1 shows measures 1-3 of "Washington's Grand March". The bass line is circled in green and labeled with Roman numerals: I, ii6, V, (VI), V, I. The melody is circled in red. The score includes dynamic markings: *mf*, *well measured, non legato*, *p*, and *mf*. A blue arrow points from the first measure to the second, and another blue arrow points from the third measure to the fourth.

A short chromatic bass line is then juxtaposed in contrary motion, which creates expanded descending and ascending lines. As shown in Example 4.2, the ascending chromatic phrase (B, C and C-sharp /  $\hat{3} - \hat{4} - \#\hat{4}$ ) in this variation appears in the bass line in measures 1 and



2. Another descending chromatic line, the short bass line (E, D-sharp and D /  $\hat{6}-\#6-\hat{5}$ ) also appears in measures 11 and 13 of “Washington’s Grand March” (see Example 4.3).

Example 4.2. “Washington’s Grand March,” Ascending Short Bass Line, mm. 1–2



Example 4.3. “Washington’s Grand March,” Descending Short Bass Line, mm. 11–13



The diatonic ascent in G major ( $\hat{1}\hat{2}\hat{3}\hat{4}\hat{5} = G-A-B-C-D$ ) in the melody, as seen in “Washington’s Grand March,” is developed into an expanded chromatic melody ( $\hat{1} - (\#1) - (\hat{2}) - \hat{3} - \hat{4} - \#4 - \hat{5}$ ) in “Battle Music” (see Example 4.4).

The grace note in the right hand emphasizes a clear tonal center of G major. The ascending melodic line in the right hand ( $\hat{1} - (\#1) - (\hat{2}) - \hat{3} - \hat{4} - \#4 - \hat{5}$ ) creates a much longer expanded chromatic phrase. “Washington’s Grand March” foreshadows the use of expanded chromaticism ( $\hat{1} - \#7 - \hat{7} - \hat{6} - b6 - \hat{5}$ ), which is used as a device to create alternative chromatic descending lines (see Example 4.4). The descending bass line in the left hand ( $\hat{1} - (\#7) - \hat{7} - \hat{6} - (\#5) - b6 - \hat{5}$ ) forms an expanded harmonic progression to support the

ascending phrase, which is still within the tonal center. These two paired scale degrees create an augmented sixth chord, which expands outward to the dominant when combined vertically. As the most important scale degrees for initiating chromaticism, Kreněk utilizes the contrary motion of  $\hat{6} \flat \hat{5}$  against  $\hat{4} \# \hat{4} \hat{5}$  and creates expanded chromaticism by way of a mirror symmetrical structure ( $\hat{1} - (\# \hat{7}) - \hat{7} - \hat{6} - (\# \hat{5}) - \flat \hat{6} - \hat{5}$  against  $\hat{1} - (\# \hat{1}) - (\hat{2}) - \hat{3} - \hat{4} - \# \hat{4} - \hat{5}$ ).

Example 4.4. “Battle Music,” Expanded Chromaticism, mm. 1–5

$\hat{1} \text{ G}$   $\# \hat{1}$

**3. Battle Music**  
The same tempo

$\hat{1}$   $\hat{2}$   $\hat{3}$   $\hat{4}$   $\# \hat{4}$   $\hat{5}$   $\hat{6}$   $\hat{7}$

$\text{D}\# (\text{Eb}) \# \hat{5}$   $\text{Eb} \flat \hat{6}$   $\text{D} \hat{5}$

An important neoclassical feature in this piece relates to Kreněk’s use of the flat sixth scale degree (E-flat) to connect more traditional tonalities and diatonic writing with modern chromaticism. The tone E-flat often serves multiple roles, which can be shown in Example 4.5; in this instance, E-flat major is temporarily emphasized as part of a deceptive cadence. The E-flat

in the bass also catalyzes a long chromatic descent, which justifies a series of non-diatonic harmonies.

Example 4.5. “Battle Music,” Deceptive Cadence and Chromatic Descending Line, mm. 11–17

The musical score for "Battle Music" (mm. 11–17) is presented in three systems. The first system shows the piano part with a chromatic descending line in the bass, annotated with "poco rit.", "A little sustained (♩ = 84)", "f", "mf", "do not", "f like", "V5", "bVI", "Eb-D", "6", "7", "f", "accel.", "previous tempo", "B-Bb", "A", "Ab", "G", "f", "espr.", and "7". The second system shows the brass part with a chromatic ascending line, annotated with "brass", "6", "7", "f", "accel.", "previous tempo", "B-Bb", "A", "Ab", "G", "f", "espr.", and "7". The third system shows the woodwind part with a chromatic descending line, annotated with "f", "espr.", "7", "f", "accel.", "previous tempo", "B-Bb", "A", "Ab", "G", "f", "espr.", and "7".

The chromatic contrary motion from the augmented sixth chord becomes free chromaticism through the expansion of the chromatic phrases. The use of free chromaticism within traditional forms and key areas is a prominent neoclassical feature in this work. For example, in “Elegy,” a melancholic melody and the two notes of G and B-flat are suggestive of a ‘traditional’ G minor variation approach, which expresses sadness in its slow tempo. The chromatic bass evokes lamentation, which depicts tragedy or sorrow. The short ascending and descending chromatic lines become free chromaticism, which appears in every part throughout the variation. The frequent chromatic lines, which combine with blocked chords, complex rhythms, and thick textures, increase progressively through the course of this variation. The chromaticism in the lower part of the right hand (G–F-sharp–F–E–E-flat–D–C-sharp–C–B–A), as shown in Example 4.6, moves to the lower staff (A–A-flat–G–F-sharp–F) as a chromatic bass line develops.



Another example of this occurs in “Elegy,” where the lower line of the right hand (B-flat–A) in measure 3 moves to the top line of the left hand (A-flat–G–F-sharp–F–E–E-flat), and then turns back to the lower line of the right hand (E–E-flat–D–C-sharp–C–B–B-flat).

Example 4.6. “Elegy,” Free Chromaticism, mm. 1–7

**4. Elegy**  
Not too fast, though with agitation and intensity (♩ = 54)

**Chromaticism in upper and lower voices**

**Free Chromaticism moving from the middle voice to the lower voice**

In “Sarabande,” which is another slow variation, Krenek produces an abundance of chromaticism, which moves freely in all voices. As shown in Example 4.7, Krenek outlines the long chromatic line with a complex musical texture of four or five voice lines. Within the polyphonic texture, the descending chromatic line moving from the voice of the right hand to the voice of the left hand (Bb, A, Ab, G, F#, F, E, Eb, E) combines with the alternating major and minor tonality. In the measure 41 and 42, the right hand contains the duality of B-flat and B-natural in the long descending chromatic line which alternates between G minor and G major. Although the chromatic line is in the tonality, the complex texture and the ambiguous harmonic progression create an unclear tonal center.

Example 4.7. *Sarabande*, Free Chromaticism, mm. 41–48.



Krenek presents an extensive amount of free chromaticism through several measures while creating a bridge between tonality and neotonicity. It appears between the lower voice part and the top voice part in the *Grand Finale*, with the *Martial Cotillion* emphasizing F-sharp, the leading tone of G major. The chord cluster of the mysterious bell sound at the beginning of this variation produces an exotic sound, in addition to the long chromaticism between the two hands in a G major tonality.

Example 4.8. “Grand Finale, with the Martial Cotillion,” Long Free Chromaticism, mm. 1–8

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Grand Finale, with the Martial Cotillion'. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble and bass staff. The second system also has a treble and bass staff. Red boxes are used to highlight specific chromatic passages in both the upper and lower voices of both systems. Dynamics like 'pp' and 'no ped.' are marked throughout the score. Notes F#, F, and G are labeled below the staves.

The contrary motion, which first appeared in the theme, is reasserted chromatically through the use of the augmented sixth chord, which in turn serves as the basis for a continuously more complex chromaticism throughout the variations. Thus, Krenek's transformation of diatonic harmony into a freer modern chromaticism through the use of augmented sixth harmonies successfully bridges the gap between eighteenth century tonality and twentieth century neo-classicism.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Krenek's music has been infrequently performed in the concert hall and is rather unfamiliar to musicians. In particular, few pianists are aware of the existence of Krenek's piano music, probably due to the limited references on this subject matter. In the article "Self-Analysis," Krenek states the following reason as to why his music is not as well known:

During the last ten years I have been working on a detailed account of my life. So far, I have covered the early phases of my career; but even if I succeed in bringing it up to date, publication of the complete account will have to be postponed for usual reason of contemporary reference. As each section is completed, it is turned over to the Library of Congress with the understanding that the entire work will be made available to the public after a suitable lapse of time. The decision to prepare so comprehensive a report on my life implies my belief that its contents may be of some interest of future students of music history. If my name at present were as "famous" as that of a few other living composers [...] I would assume that my work, and thus also my person, would undoubtedly interest posterity. [...] My intention is to show why I think that my work will be more important of a future generation than it seems to be to the contemporary world at large.<sup>24</sup>

A practitioner of many musical styles, Krenek was able to advance his Neoclassicism in a progressive and successful direction through his subsequent compositional development despite the fact that his musical background and outlook were based on Viennese origins. Krenek's *George Washington Variations* contain a series of important neoclassical stylistic traits that highlight the importance of this trend among other compositional twentieth century idioms.

The *George Washington Variations*, Op. 120 (1950), is Krenek's only neoclassical work for solo piano. It is interesting to note that it was composed in a French neoclassical idiom, and after his early neoclassical works from the 1920s. Krenek's Neoclassicism integrates earlier

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<sup>24</sup> Ernst Krenek, "Self-Analysis" in *New Mexico Quarterly* 23. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953), 5.

musical idioms of the eighteenth century with several modern compositional techniques. However, unlike his earlier works in this style, which were composed during the early studies of his neoclassical experimentation, Krenek applied multiple musical techniques that were influenced by various musicians he had met during his time in France. In addition, Krenek became an American citizen in 1945 (he was born in Austria), and in this work he demonstrates his ardent patriotism by way of a tribute to the first American president, George Washington. Krenek pays homage to his newly adopted country by using two eighteenth century tunes upon which this set of variations is based: *Washington Grand March* and *Martial Cotillion*.

In a large sense, Krenek produces in *George Washington Variations* a combination of two different musical languages, those of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Juxtaposing clarity and ambiguity, the work features traditional theme and variation structure, but with numerous theatrical effects throughout. In addition, the thematic lines that delay tonal resolutions create tension in harmonic progressions. In terms of the traditional structure, two polarities between consonance and dissonance create mediant key relationships, such as #VI or bVI. The use of expanded tonality is disguised through the appearance of tonal melodies with atonal accompaniment, the high degree of chromaticism and the use of quintal and quartal harmonies.

The *George Washington Variations* may be considered Krenek's most mature neoclassical work as it is both his final work in this style and the only neoclassical piano work of his lifelong achievement. I hope that this study may provide a better understanding of Krenek's Neoclassicism and serve as a guide for pianists, teachers, and scholars, fostering a greater awareness of Krenek's rich output.



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