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Ernst Křenek’s Second Piano Sonata The Embodiment of his Stabilization Period

Andrew Ramos
Andrew.Ramos@Colorado.EDU

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Ernst Křenek’s Second Piano Sonata  
The Embodiment of his Stabilization Period  
by  
Andrew Ramos  
B.M., University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, 2013  
M.M., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2015

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Andrew Cooperstock
Dr. Andrew Cooperstock

Dr. David Korevaar

Dr. Carlo Caballero

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above-mentioned discipline.
Abstract

Ramos, Andrew (D.M.A., College of Music)
Ernst Křenek’s Second Piano Sonata: The Embodiment of his Stabilization Period
Thesis directed by Dr. Andrew Cooperstock

Ernst Křenek (1900-1991) was an Austrian composer. He resided in various places throughout Europe, until he emigrated to the United States in 1938. In the U.S., he taught and lectured at various universities. Today, he is remembered for his association with The Second Viennese School. Krenek is also known for his completion of Schubert’s Reliquie piano sonata and his editing of movements of Mahler’s 10th symphony.

Krenek’s views on music changed throughout his life. His long lifespan exposed him to a variety of musical perspectives. He grappled with ideas such as music’s function or “appropriate” aesthetics; at times he contradicted his own previously held beliefs. Krenek believed “systems come and systems go; since none is inherent in the material, composers select whatever system is needed to solve the problems presented by their expressive aims.”¹

In the 1920s, Krenek had three stylistic shifts. From 1916 to 1921, he studied with Franz Schreker, a famous opera composer and teacher. Krenek’s music from this period used late-Romantic harmonic language. In 1921, Krenek left Schreker’s tutelage. From then on, he experimented with various styles, particularly with Expressionism. In 1924, Krenek travelled to Paris, which would be a turning point in his musical style, culminating in his third period. He called the years from 1925 to 1929 a “stabilization period”;² his music became freer, combining various styles with great appeal for audiences.


Krenek’s musical style can be traced through a study of his piano works. “Since composing his opus one . . . he turned to the piano again and again when he was moved to test a new stylistic or technical idea.”³ This paper will focus on Krenek’s Second Sonata, and how it is representative of his stabilization period.

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Introduction

Ernst Křenek (1900-1991)⁴ was an Austrian composer, born in Vienna. He resided in different places throughout Europe, including Berlin and Switzerland. Seeking relief from persecution by the Nazi party, he emigrated to the United States in 1938.⁵ In the U.S., he taught composition at both Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, N.Y) and Hamline University (St. Paul, Minnesota). He also appeared as a guest lecturer at various other universities. Today, he is remembered for his association with The Second Viennese School.⁶ Krenek is also known for his completion of Schubert’s Reliquie piano sonata and his editing of movements of Mahler’s 10⁰ Symphony.

Krenek gained initial popularity with the premier of his first string quartet. The success of this work led to a contract with Universal Edition. Krenek’s opera Jonny spielt auf, composed in 1926 and staged in Leipzig in 1927, brought him international fame. This work made heavy use of jazz idioms. It was also recognized for its plot, which incorporated political commentary, raising “questions about the social and artistic ramifications of populism.”⁷ Krenek’s renown afforded him the luxury of hearing his compositions performed promptly after their completion. However, despite his popularity in certain areas, Krenek’s music is seldom heard today.⁸

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⁴ According to Grove Music Online (accessed Dec 10, 2015), after 1945 Krenek preferred his name to be spelled Krenek instead of Křenek. As all literature available uses this spelling, this paper will as well.

⁵ While Krenek was not Jewish, the Nazi party labelled him as a Jewish composer.

⁶ Of The Second Viennese School, Krenek only knew Webern and Berg. He stated in his book, Horizon Circled, that the two composers taught him little about composing with the 12-tone technique. Krenek noted that he taught himself the technique through study of scores. His association with The Second Viennese School by various sources is likely superficial. The association is more a result of the shared use of a compositional technique.


⁸ Krenek’s music is popular in Palm Desert, CA where the composer settled towards the end of his life. The Waring International Piano Competition held there biennially awards a prize for the best performance of a work by Krenek.
Krenek’s views on music shifted throughout his life.9 His long lifespan exposed him to a variety of musical perspectives. At times he contradicted his own previously held beliefs. Krenek believed “systems come and systems go” and “composers select whatever system is needed to solve the problems presented by their expressive aims.”10 He grappled with ideas such as music’s function or “acceptable” aesthetics. Krenek’s compositions span multiple styles representative of the 20th century, from neoclassicism to jazz, atonality, and serialism. Krenek’s musical style can be traced through a study of his piano works. Whenever he wanted to test new ideas, he turned to the piano.11 Krenek stated, “In looking over my piano music to date, I have the impression, that when I wanted to express personal, subjective musical ideas, colorfully depicted, I generally used the piano. The piano always seems to inspire me to have ideas which inherently have a certain rambling improvisational character.”12

During the 1920s, Krenek had three stylistic shifts. From 1916 to 1921, his first period, he studied with Franz Schreker (1878-1934), a famous opera composer and teacher in Vienna. Schreker encouraged Krenek to further expand tonality through counterpoint. Like Schreker, Krenek’s music from this period used highly chromatic post-Romantic harmonic language. In 1921, Krenek left Schreker’s tutelage, beginning a second period. From then on, he experimented with various styles, particularly with Expressionist ideas that he encountered while

9 We can see this in Krenek’s many writings. From these documents, which includes letters, lectures, and articles, we can discern Krenek’s thoughts on his music, music in general, and some of the major influences on his works. Looking back, he acknowledged that hindsight is 20/20 and biased. “Events are too transient and their reporting too subjective. There are too many viewpoints, including the prejudice of the historian himself.” Quotation from Ernst Krenek, with contributions by John L. Stewart, and Will Ogdon, Horizons Circled: Reflections on My Music (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 17.


he was in Berlin. In 1924, Krenek travelled to Paris, which would be a turning point in his musical style, culminating in his third period. He called the years from 1925 to 1929 his “stabilization period.”13 During these years his music became freer, combining various styles with great appeal for audiences. Piano works from this decade include his first two sonatas, *Frühe Lieder für Gesang und Klavier*, op. 9, and *A Little Suite*, op. 13a.

This paper will discuss Krenek’s compositional style from 1916 to 1929 through the lens of his piano works. Primarily, it will show how Krenek’s second Sonata (1928) is representative of his stabilization period. According to Krenek, this exciting sonata exemplified his ideals and is a clear example of his style at the time.14 To understand the importance of the sonata, we will first discuss his compositional styles in the years just preceding its composition.

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13 Ernst Křenek, *Music: Here and Now*, trans. Barthold Fles (New York: Russell & Russell, 1939), 86. It’s worth noting that aside from his “stabilization period,” these periods were not overtly designated by Krenek himself. While discussing these periods is useful to trace Krenek’s style, it can become easy to generalize. These three periods fail to capture the fluid nature of a composer’s style, as we will see.

Early Influences

Krenek was well educated. Though his family was poor, he studied at a private institution instead of a public school; this was a result of his father’s position: his father was an officer, and it was expected that the children of officers received a good education.\textsuperscript{15} Krenek studied French at the age of eight, already knowing German and Czech. His high school provided an education with emphasis on classical literature. Krenek graduated from high school in March 1919.

Krenek’s first instrument was the piano; he began lessons when he entered primary school, at age six. Krenek composed his first piece in 1911, a song with piano accompaniment for his mother’s birthday. By the age of 12, he could play piano transcriptions of operas. Krenek was also a good sight-reader.\textsuperscript{16}

Krenek began studying composition with Franz Schreker at the Vienna Academy of Music from 1916. Schreker moved to Berlin in 1921 and encouraged Krenek to follow him. Krenek’s family’s economic situation made supporting a move to Berlin difficult. Nonetheless, Krenek eventually decided to make the move.\textsuperscript{17} While in Berlin, Krenek met many people who would significantly influence his views on music, including Hermann Scherchen, Eduard Erdmann, Artur Schnabel, Ernst Georg Wolff, and Theodor Adorno.\textsuperscript{18} Krenek’s rise to fame was bolstered by musicologist Dr. Georg Schünemann, whom he met in Berlin. Schünemann introduced musicians he liked to his influential friends. It was through him that Krenek was able

\textsuperscript{15} Stewart, 8.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 8-9.

\textsuperscript{17} Ernst Krenek, with contributions by John Stewart and Will Ogdon, \textit{Horizons Circled: Reflections on My Music} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 21.

\textsuperscript{18} Stewart, 45 and 51.
to make his way into the salons of the wealthy.\textsuperscript{19} The most significant of these influences will be further explored in the following discussions of each period.

\textsuperscript{19} Stewart, 27-28.
Period One: 1916-1921 Studies with Schreker

Franz Schreker strongly influenced Krenek’s late teens and early twenties. In 1916, Krenek’s then piano teacher, Fridolin Baluff, who taught at the Kaiser Music School, “decided that he had taught Krenek all he could and urged the young man to go to someone more advanced.”

Krenek’s first preference was to study with Arnold Schoenberg, but the latter had already been called up for military service the previous year. Thus, Krenek began lessons with his second choice, Schreker, who was at the height of his fame as an opera composer at the time.

Schreker was interested in furthering tonality, following in the footsteps of Wagner. He encouraged a “unique strangeness [that] had to be free of straightforward, obvious, and popular elements.”

In his teaching, Schreker also emphasized counterpoint. By using counterpoint, composers could explore new harmonic resolutions and voice leadings.

Krenek’s First Sonata (1919) shows the influence of his studies with Schreker. This work has “post-Impressionist sentiment and ebullient pyrotechnics.” As expected of students of Schreker, the sonata is tonal, but features unexpected chord progressions. In mm. 10-12 of the first movement shown in Example 1a, “strange” chord progressions are generated through independent voice leading. The D-major chord on beat one of m. 10 resolves to a G9 chord. This

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20 Stewart, 15.


23 Stewart, 15-16. Stewart further contends that this is ironic because Schreker’s own music made little use of counterpoint. This is an overstatement, as operas such as *Der singende Teufel* and *Irrelohe* are particularly known for their use of counterpoint.

24 Other piano works from this period that could be further explored include Krenek’s op.1a, *Doppelfuge* (unpublished), op. 1b, *Tanzstudie*, and his op. 5, four Sonatinas (unpublished).

25 Stewart, 260.
resolves to an A half-diminished chord on beat 2 of m. 11. Following is a G-sharp half-diminished chord on the downbeat of m. 12. Example 1b is a reduction of the passage to three voices. The reduction removes Krenek’s use of octave displacement. Primarily, it shows the stepwise motion of the bass voice, further demonstrating Krenek’s focus on counterpoint. As these chords are generated through independent voice leading, Krenek weaves through surprising harmonic movement. On the other hand, mm. 13-14 feature a “traditional” I64 – V7 – I cadence in E-flat. The cadence provides a clear sense of tonality. This unique harmonic movement that disguises tonality shows Schreker’s influence.

Example 1a: Krenek, sonata no. 1, mvt. 1, mm. 10-15.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example1a.png}
\caption{Example 1a: Krenek, sonata no. 1, mvt. 1, mm. 10-15.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{26} Ernst Krenek, \textit{Sämtliche Klaviersonaten} (Universal Edition, 1921).
Eventually, Krenek became dissatisfied with Schreker’s teaching approach. Schreker taught little music history, reflecting his disdain for the curriculum taught at universities and conservatories. He instructed without recordings to listen to and without scores to study;\(^27\) history was restricted to “abstract descriptions of styles and endless lists of composers’ names whose music [they] never heard nor saw.”\(^28\) Schreker trained his students to explore more dissonance, and to hide tonality further. He taught that Wagner was better than Haydn because he used more dissonance and delayed resolutions more cleverly; this was the type of progress Schreker encouraged his students to strive for. The accepted range of exploration was defined by the music of Debussy, Reger, Richard Strauss, and Scriabin.\(^29\) These composers’ works were viewed as progressive, yet not shocking or absurd.\(^30\) It is easy to imagine that as a young composer eager to “spread his wings,” Krenek felt inhibited.

\(^{27}\) While the statement that Schreker taught without recordings to listen to may be true, it is worth pointing out that at the time recordings were used much less.

\(^{28}\) Ernst Krenek, Horizons Circled: Reflections on My Music, 19.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{30}\) Tregear, 4.
Admittedly, Krenek’s thoughts of Schreker reflect some bias; his dissatisfaction is evident in his critical description of Schreker’s teaching approach. Biographer Christopher Hailey asserts that Schreker was not a dogmatic instructor. Schreker apparently encouraged creativity, a stark contrast to the rigid ideology Krenek depicted.31

Dissatisfaction with Schreker’s teaching also stemmed from Krenek’s desire to explore Expressionism. Krenek was especially unhappy with Schreker’s “avoidance of the most conspicuous signifier of musical expressionism, so called ‘free atonality.’”32 When Krenek was in Berlin, he experimented with the radical and new ideas he encountered. While he did follow Schreker to Berlin, Krenek was already frustrated with Schreker before he left Vienna. On “October 18, 1920, [Krenek wrote to his parents] to say that perhaps he ought to study with Schoenberg.”33 At age 20, Krenek left the tutelage of Schreker in 1921.


32 Tregear, 7.

33 Stewart, 29.
Period Two: 1921-1924 Expressionism

Expressionism influenced Krenek’s first years on his own as a composer. He enjoyed Expressionist plays such as those by his friend Fritz Demuth. In letters to his parents he praised the music of “Max Reger, Bruckner’s fourth and eighth symphonies, a quartet (almost certainly the Second) and a suite by Bartók, whom he would later acknowledge as an especially powerful influence at this time, and Schoenberg’s Kammersymphonie (Chamber symphony), Drei Klavierstücke . . . and Pierrot Lunaire.” Krenek became judgmental of Schreker’s “outdated” music and began writing atonal music.

Krenek also was influenced by a text titled Grundlagen des Linearen Kontrapunkts by Ernst Kurth. Kurth advocated “linear autonomy” over traditional harmony. While it turned out that Kurth was not a proponent of “modernism,” Krenek used Kurth’s ideal as further justification for “free atonalism.” He rationalized that if linear counterpoint yielded harmonic structure in tonal works, the same would be true in atonal works. Some of Krenek’s writings later in life explained his use of atonal material more trivially. He wrote that in the early 1920s he used atonal material because of its “radical” nature. As a young composer he wanted to be as cutting-edge as possible. Atonality then, was simply attractive to the young Krenek.

One of Krenek’s earliest explorations of atonality is a set of songs completed in 1922, his op. 9. The first page of no. 1 is shown in Example 2. The texts are based on poems by his friend

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34 John L. Stewart described Demuth as an “Expressionist would-be playwright much influenced by the works of Ernst Toller.”

35 Stewart, 29. Stewart paraphrases Krenek’s letter.

36 Ibid.

37 Tregear, 9.

38 Ernst Křenek, Music: Here and Now, 85-86.
Gerd Hans Goering. In the first song there is imitation between the vocal and piano lines, albeit with different rhythms. After m. 5, the voice and piano lines no longer share material. The independence of the lines highlights the value Krenek placed on counterpoint. The sparseness of the piano part is a notable contrast from his previous works, which featured thick Romantic textures. This music shows Krenek’s rejection of late-Romanticism.\(^{39}\)

The date of the composition of this work shows that Krenek was influenced by Expressionism before he left Schreker. The songs were composed from October 1921 through February 1922, thus overlapping with his studies with Schreker.

Other works show the overlap of the influences of Expressionism and his former teacher. One of Krenek’s first works after leaving Schreker is his op. 13a, *A Little Suite*, composed in

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January 1922, only a month after setting out on his own.\footnote{Another work of this period that is not atonal is his First Piano Concerto, op. 18.} In this suite, Schreker’s ideals still appear. Despite his desire to explore atonality, this work was relevant enough in Krenek’s eyes to be published.

The Sarabande from the Suite is shown in Example 3. As in his first period, Krenek uses extended and altered chords, with surprising harmonic resolutions and voice leading.\footnote{The brackets in this example show a row that Krenek manipulates. The second bracket is a quasi retrograde of the first bracket (a few elements are missing or out of order). The third bracket is a rhythmic variation of the first. The fourth is a rhythmic variation of the second. This treatment of the row foreshadows Krenek’s approach to 12-tone compositions later in his life.} On beat one of m. 1 is a B-flat-dominant chord which resolves to E-flat. From here on, the chords are less obvious. On beat three is a B-flat-dominant chord (or a C-flat-diminished7 chord depending on how you hear the right-hand melody line). This should resolve to an E-flat-major chord on the downbeat of m. 2. In the left hand this occurs, but voice leading in the right hand creates a C-diminished chord instead, until its resolution on the upbeat. This chord leads to an F-major chord on beat two, which sounds like a dominant. The left hand moves to G-flat on beat three and resolves down a perfect fifth to C-flat in the next measure. The right hand resolves the F-major dominant chord to B-flat minor. However, because of the left hand’s note, the resolution to B-flat minor feels like a suspension to the A-flat-minor chord on the upbeat. Beats two and three of m. 3 sound like a B-flat-dominant harmony with various non-chord tones. The dominant resolves properly to E-flat in measure four. This independent voice leading produces unexpected harmonic movement and hides but does not eschew tonality, as Schreker encouraged.
Example 3: Krenek, op. 13a, Sarabande.\textsuperscript{43}

Period Three: 1925-1929 Stabilization

After his exploration of Expressionism, however, is a period that lasts from 1925-1929. In this period, Krenek’s musical style moves away from atonality. He was influenced by many things, including discussions with Erdmann, his travels, and new ideas about the purpose of music. Krenek called these years his “stabilization period.” From here on, Krenek no longer followed trends, and instead focused on expressing his ideas. Rather than following one ideology or another, as he had in previous years, Krenek selected materials that best suited his expressive aims.

When exploring new styles, Krenek was open-minded. He believed that the only justification of a technique was its results. In 1924, Krenek travelled to Paris. This trip strongly influenced Krenek’s outlook on music. He heard the music of composers such as Stravinsky, Honegger, Poulenc, and Milhaud. Krenek never explicitly indicated what specific pieces he heard in Paris. However, based on the jazz-influenced pieces he composed after 1924, it stands to reason he heard the above-mentioned composers’ jazz-influenced works. Specifically, Krenek was particularly drawn to Darius Milhaud. Krenek was impressed by the composer’s ability to

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44 Ernst Křenek, *Music: Here and Now*, 86.

45 Ibid., 86.


At the time, Krenek also became inspired by the artwork of Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka; his association of these artists with Paris is notably peculiar.
create passages with minimal material, but still with great variety.\textsuperscript{48} He found Milhaud’s use of polytonality to be charmingly ambiguous.\textsuperscript{49}

The trip to Paris made Krenek more aware of his growing dissatisfaction with his own music and the scant appeal atonality had for his audiences. He came to believe that atonal music lacked sufficient variety and convincing harmonic structure.\textsuperscript{50} Thus he returned to the impressionistic techniques and tonal colors of his former teacher.\textsuperscript{51} These, combined with jazz idioms, came together in his musical style of this period.

The Second Sonata exemplifies the above described changes in Krenek’s music. The work was composed in 1928, towards the end of Krenek’s stabilization period. Measures 6-9, shown in Example 4, provide an example of an impressionist technique. Here, the chords express non-tertian based harmonies. The right-hand chords begin as octaves, harmonized with a perfect fifth below the top voice. The chords sequence down by whole-step. In m. 8 the octaves continue, now harmonized by perfect fourths below the top voice. In the left hand, the chords are more easily understood with lead sheet symbols. For example, the first chord is F-minor/G-flat. In this passage, Krenek planes the chords of both hands, descending and resolving to a quartal chord. This line serves as a colorful transition to the next phrase.


\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. 32-34. In addition to describing his thoughts on Milhaud’s music, Krenek also writes at length about Milhaud’s personality. Krenek is particularly drawn to Milhaud’s “love of fun.” His depiction of Milhaud’s “good, warm, and sincere” personality influenced his own thoughts on how he should live his life as a composer. Also see Ernst Krenek, \textit{Horizons Circled: Reflections on My Music}, 24-25.

\textsuperscript{50} Tregear, 26.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 16.
Example 4: Krenek, Sonata no. 2, mvt. 1, mm. 6-9.\textsuperscript{52}

The opening of the sonata further shows the tonal language described above. Example 5 shows this through the use of extended/altered chords. The opening arpeggiates two whole-tone collections. The rolled chords are colorful harmonies, not bound by functional tonality. The rolled chord in m. 1 is E-flat\textsuperscript{7} (add sharp9 and sharp11).\textsuperscript{53} This resolves down by half-step, to the rolled D9 chord found in mm. 2. C7 in m. 3 follows. The first sense of functional tonality is the resolution of this chord in m. 4 to F7. However, this resolution to F7 further obscures the sense of tonic. The phrase climaxes on A-flat7/E-flat (add flat9 and 13), found in m. 5.\textsuperscript{54} The harmonies color the melody, as opposed to the other way around. The melody itself emulates the improvisatory nature of jazz. One can sense tonality; however, it is not clear, as the chords do not follow traditional progressions.

\textsuperscript{52} Ernst Krenek, \textit{Sämtliche Klaviersonaten}.

\textsuperscript{53} This chord can be viewed as a different tonality in each hand. The right hand has D major-minor\textsuperscript{7} over the left’s E-flat major-minor\textsuperscript{7}. This view of the chord is more pianistic. It is simpler to think of two harmonies, rather than an extended/altered chord. Based on his admiration of Milhaud’s use of polytonality, it is reasonable to speculate that Krenek thought of these chords in this manner.

\textsuperscript{54} This chord can be viewed as D minor over an A-flat major-minor\textsuperscript{7}. See previous footnote.
Example 5: Krenek, Sonata no. 2, mvt. 1, mm. 1-5.\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example5.png}
\end{figure}

In addition to the tonal music he heard in Paris, Krenek was also influenced by the Parisian composers’ approaches to music.\textsuperscript{56} In a letter to his friend Bekker, Krenek wrote: “I believe that my sojourn in Paris will have a wholly decisive significance for me. [The Parisians] understand what we never knew or have long forgotten: [how] to live.”\textsuperscript{57} Krenek was so compelled that he became convinced that his “absolutism” would be cured.\textsuperscript{58} By absolutism,

\textsuperscript{55} Ernst Krenek, \textit{Sämtliche Klaviersonaten}.

\textsuperscript{56} It would be too strong to assume that only tonal music existed in Paris. The popularity of tonal music though, could be seen in the large number of jazz clubs that appeared in Paris in the 20s.

\textsuperscript{57} Ernst, Krenek, letter to Bekker, December 14, 1924; Can be found in the Bekker papers in the Library of Congress. Also see John Stewart, “The Composer Views His Time,” in \textit{Horizons Circled: Reflections on My Music}, 105-106. Krenek was fond of Les Six’s “whimsical manner” and their belief that music should be “delightful.” He specifically enjoyed Cocteau’s works for their “playful tone and lack of pedantry.”

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
Krenek meant his desire to be as progressive as possible, and his “indifference toward, or even willful attempts to affront, the general listener.”

Looking back in his old age, Krenek described that he found the music of Les Six “seemingly carefree, unspeculative, [and] straightforward.” He wrote:

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 the 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.

Thus, Krenek’s stabilization period becomes defined by his desire to consider his audience. He felt that the idea of composing for oneself is “so stupid and feeble, that it’s hardly worth repeating it.” Krenek was critical of his own music and that of his contemporaries since it did not “reach” audiences. Their music appealed only to those “who have reached the same stage of musical sophistication. It has become a game that is only interesting to those who know the rules. It has neither the capacity nor the inclination to address itself to the uninitiated community.”

Krenek elaborated further:

Most performances of new music take place in an atmosphere dominated by specialists … These specialists do not go to an art-work for a total emotional experience; they are interested in the demonstration of new materials, new principles of composition, procedures, methods. The broader application of such achievements to a large number of subjects worth writing and presenting interests

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59 Stewart, 55.


62 Jay, 105.

them less than the unique experimental demonstration of the invention. This creates a danger of a radicalization that will accelerate continuously.⁶⁴

Krenek strive to make his music for understandable to the public. Consider the climax of the first movement of the Second Sonata, beginning in m. 84, shown in Example 6. Here the chords are relatively simple; G-flat-major harmonies are colored by neighbor-tones in the melody. The tempo is pulled back to Largamente. Fortissimo dynamics and lush textures also contribute to a climactic moment that is relatively simple for the public to appreciate.

Example 6: Krenek, Sonata no. 2, mvt. 1, mm. 84-87.⁶⁵

Consideration for the listener is also found in the Sonata’s third movement, “a quick rondo that begins with a fugato that alternates with two enthusiastic-sentimental themes and

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⁶⁵ Ernst Krenek, Sämtliche Klaviersonaten.
serves as the coda.” The coda to the third movement is an exciting climax, as the tempo increases to *presto* and the dynamics reach *fff*, as shown in Example 7. Ending in an exciting manner again reflects consideration for the public, who more often than not appreciate a fiery ending over a subdued cadence.

**Example 7:** Krenek, Sonata no. 2, mvt. 3, mm. 107-112

**Jazz**

Consideration for the audience also led to jazz idioms in Krenek’s music. Krenek became acquainted with jazz as a result of his friendship with Erdmann, who introduced him to Schnabel. Through records brought back from concert tours in the United States, Schnabel showed Krenek the music of Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Vincent Youmans. The music of these composers passed for jazz among Europeans, whose understanding of jazz in the 1920’s in Germany

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66 Ernst Krenek, *Sämtliche Klaviersonaten*, 53

67 Ibid.
differed from a contemporary understanding. In that time, a number of dance bands originating from both Europe and from the United States appeared in Germany and called themselves jazz bands, though they instead played American dance music. Krenek felt that even the unauthentic European version of jazz was suitable and relevant to the needs of the common folk. As the public’s favorite pieces never grow old, and the progress championed by composers does not affect the love for these works, Krenek took a liking to the “clean, crisp, clear-cut, unsentimental, [and] objective music” he found in jazz.

While Krenek saw jazz as a means to reach audiences, he also viewed jazz as progressive, providing new material through jazz rhythms, colorful harmonies, and melodic figuration. Looking back, Krenek noted that many composers used jazz as a means of “regeneration,” and that he was among them. Thus, jazz music provided interesting listening for the “elite,” yet still was enjoyable for the general public, a so-called “assimilation of high and low art.”

The Second Sonata further reflects Krenek’s approach to considering his audiences through its use of jazz idioms. According to Stewart, the sonata is “filled with dash and gaiety.

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68 Stewart, 31.
69 Jay, 101.
73 Ernst Křenek, Music: Here and Now, 258.
74 He means to say he used jazz as a means to create new material.
75 Ernst Křenek, Music: Here and Now, 257.
76 Ibid., 258.
and [it] never fails to please."\textsuperscript{77} In this piece Krenek focused both on exploring new concepts (jazz idioms) and composing with the audience’s enjoyment in mind.

Measures 15-24 of the first movement of the sonata, shown in Example 8, provide an example of Krenek’s jazz language. Listeners might have been both shocked and excited by the surprising chord choices but were assured that by the end of a phrase they would reach a harmonic position in a fundamental key. Thus, these wild moves away from home keys, balanced out by regular periods convey a sense of excitement.\textsuperscript{78} The exciting chords interested the average listener, whereas the complex voice leading intrigued the learned listener. Thus, Krenek’s tonal language appealed to both groups, “[bridging] the problematic gap between composer and audience.”\textsuperscript{79}

The accompaniment in this passage consists of extended/altered chords. In mm. 15-16 the right-hand chords seem to act as non-chord tones against the left-hand’s G-major sonority, gradually moving toward more consonance. Measure 17 has the first chord that can be labelled with lead sheet symbols, a G13 chord; measure 18 is simpler, a G (add 9) chord. These G13 and G (add 9) chords are created through smooth voice leading in the middle voices. The lower part of the right-hand in m. 18 sequences down a whole-step in m. 19, generating an F (add9) chord. In m. 20, the “alto” voice is independent, creating both a major-major seventh and a major-minor seventh. On the downbeat of m. 21 is a B-flat-major chord, which moves to an E-diminished seventh chord for beats two and three. In m. 22 there is an F-major chord, which resolves to an E-minor chord, serving as a tritone substitution (for B major), a chord progression that became popular in jazz.

\textsuperscript{77} Stewart, 260.
\textsuperscript{78} Ernst Křenek, \textit{Music: Here and Now}, 255 and 259.
\textsuperscript{79} Jay, 100.
The trio of the second movement showcases “jazzy” rhythms. In m. 44, shown in Example 9, the rhythm of the right hand is syncopated. The accents are placed on upbeats. Meanwhile, the left hand has an accent on the somewhat strong beat three. In the next measure however, the accent is on the “weak” beat two. The cadence on E-flat major is immediately followed by a scherzo reply in the left hand. This passage appropriates the style of a foxtrot. Allusion to so-called “popular music” definitely appealed to the public.

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80 Ernst Krenek, *Sämtliche Klaviersonaten*. 
Krenek turned to jazz for two other reasons. First, it was a symbol of freedom from the political and economic struggles in Europe, especially Germany. Jazz was viewed “as progressive and American, [and was associated] with ideas of youth, power, originality, directness, and vitality.” Secondly, Krenek’s turning to jazz signified a freedom to make his own compositional choices. Adopting a romanticized view espoused by nineteenth-century authors, Krenek saw America as a land of “uninhibited freedom.” In the 1920s jazz composers stood out from “serious composers,” as they were willing to experiment and be daring, especially with using surprising chords for effect. This freedom appealed to Krenek, and is reflected in the material he chose.

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81 Ernst Krenek, Sämtliche Klaviersonaten.
82 Tregear, 28.
83 Ernst Křenek, Music: Here and Now, 258.
85 Ernst Křenek, Music: Here and Now, 254.
Schubert’s Influence

During the stabilization period, Krenek’s music was also influenced by Schubert. Erdmann, an advocate of modernism, introduced Krenek to Schubert’s early Romanticism. Erdmann believed that “every note [needed to] be defensible on grounds of formal necessity,” and that Schubert was the master of this. This ideology was one of the influences that gradually pulled Krenek away from his initial period of atonality. Krenek’s appreciation of Schubert’s Lieder grew, with regards to its “subtlety and infinite variety of … purely musical construction.” Together, Krenek and Erdmann explored Schubert’s Lieder, closely examining how they were constructed.

Krenek was particularly inspired by Schubert’s manipulation of material. He found Schubert’s music to be conventional regarding melody and meter. Yet, he was particularly interested in the variety of Schubert’s music with these “simple” materials.

Using repetition with variation, Schubert would subject melodic lines of singular ease and grace to a profusion of possibilities, ranging from a maneuver as delicate as transferring a single note an octave higher or placing an accent that had not been present in the first appearance to introducing violent harmonic leaps that seemed to transcend all principles of cadencing yet managed in the end to resolve themselves back to a tonal center. Schubert’s seemingly inexhaustible capacity for inventing such variations gave his music vitality and plasticity that have never been surpassed. ‘From this we can best learn that highest vitality, which is

86 Stewart contends that the Second Sonata reflects the influence of Stravinsky. Krenek likely heard music from Stravinsky’s Neoclassicism period, which began around the early 1920s. Like Stravinsky, Krenek utilized traditional forms; he used a march for the second movement, and a quasi fugue for the third movement.


88 Stewart 30: However, this sets the stage for his second period of 12-tone compositions in the 1930s. Stewart 98: “Paradoxically, Erdmann, far from proposing a return to tonality, had encouraged him to explore atonality. But Erdmann … insisted that music was autonomous and must be understood and judged according to its own inherent principles.” Also see Stewart 40.

89 Ernst Krenek, interview by John L. Stewart, Palm Springs, January 12, 1972.

90 Ibid.
constant variability and subtest delicacy of expression [achieved by] the greatest economy of means."91

Thus, Schubert’s music inspired Krenek to experiment with variation. In the same way that Schubert was innovative with the materials he had, Krenek tried to do the same. He composed as if he were “inventing” tonality.92 As shown earlier, this mindset results in Krenek returning to Schreker’s approach to tonality. By exploring new harmonic movement through counterpoint, Krenek could view tonality afresh.

Krenek wrote that Schubert’s music influenced the second and third movements of his second Sonata.93 The march of the second movement is specifically influenced by Schubert’s Military Marches. An example of the type of variations in Schubert’s music can be seen in his op. 51, no. 1, mm. 20 through 32. The passage begins in D major. In m. 24, is an implied ii chord, E minor. In mm. 26 and 27, the D sharp is removed from the figuration, and two note slurs and sf’s are added, emphasizing G. This pitch becomes solfege syllable “sol,” acting as a dominant to C major. Measures 28 through 32 tonicize C major with alternating I-V progressions. Thus, the minute variations on a figuration enable a modulation to the distant C major. This passage is shown in Example 10.


92 Stewart, 99 summarizing: Ernst Krenek, an untitled, unpublished commentary on Karl V in the Krenek Archive, Vienna City Library.

93 Ernst Krenek, Sämtliche Klaviersonaten, 53.
Example 10: Schubert, op. 51 no. 1, mm. 20-32, secondo part.\textsuperscript{94}

This variation concept was applied in the second movement of the second Sonata. Example 11a shows its opening 8 measures. The chord progression leads to a cadence in m. 5 on F major. Mm. 32-36, shown in Example 11b, recapitulate the opening. However, in the final beat of m. 33 the alto voice moves early, which causes a new chord progression. Krenek weaves through and tonicizes G-flat minor followed by E-flat minor. Instead of a cadence on F major as before, this passage cadences on an unexpected B-flat minor. While B-flat minor is not exactly a distant key, one can clearly see the idea of minor variations leading to modulations to unexpected keys. The seemingly random chord progression is generated through voice leading. The idea of Krenek approaching tonality as if he were “inventing” it is clear.

Example 11A: Krenek, Sonata no. 2, mvt. 2 mm. 1-8 & 11B: mm. 31-36.\textsuperscript{95}

A: Opening

\begin{equation*}
\textit{Alla marcia, energico}
\end{equation*}

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}

B: Recapitulation

\begin{equation*}
\textit{Alla marcia, energico}
\end{equation*}

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{95} Ernst Krenek, \textit{S"amtliche Klavier sonaten}. 
The most significant aspect of Krenek’s stabilization period is his free use of various styles. Works of this period, such as Der Sprung and Zwingburg, showcase Krenek’s ability to synthesize impressionist, diatonic, and atonal worlds. In his program notes for Zwingburg, Krenek described his approach to choosing his materials:

No devotion to a single principle, be it of a harmonic or a contrapuntal kind, lies in the structure, because the idea in composing has been, on the contrary, to devote the handling of all resources to the utmost clarification of the dramatic events. The intention is to make the inner nature of the action as clear as possible to the audience … I certainly have not been limited by any principle signified by such catch-words as ‘tonal,’ ‘atonal,’ ‘linear,’ or the like.

The Second Sonata, one of the two piano works of the period, epitomizes this approach to selecting material. There are moments of functional tonality, moments of jazz, moments of atonality, and moments of counterpoint. Krenek freely selected what stylistic material he decided was appropriate for his expressive aims, no longer guided by “trends.” This stabilization period showcases Krenek’s growth into a mature composer.

In the next decade, Krenek would return to the 12-tone technique. Some works are pedagogical and suitable even for children, while others are in a “learned style” and approachable by only ambitious musicians. In 1939, he also wrote his own manual on composing with the 12-tone technique. Krenek’s op. 83 and his Third Sonata are examples of works that showcase his approach to the compositional technique.

96 Describing an eclectic mixture of styles with the phrase “stabilization” is perhaps somewhat ironic. While it could be argued that this amalgamation of ideas shows indecisiveness, the term more accurately describes Krenek’s acceptance of various styles.

97 Tregear, 15.


99 The other piece is op. 39, Five Piano Pieces. Krenek makes similar stylistic choices in this opus.
Conclusion

Krenek’s first decade as a composer features three contrasting periods: his studies with Schreker (1916-1921), his Expressionist period (1922-1924), and his “stabilization period” (1925-1929). These overlap somewhat, and traits from one are often found in others. While these attributes could be traced through his most popular works, his piano pieces provide a medium that can be used to easily survey this development of his musical style.

Krenek’s style in the final period of the decade is a synthesis of the elements most important to him from each ideology. Composed at the peak of this stretch of his life, Krenek’s Second Sonata exemplified this style. There are moments of counterpoint, atonality, jazz idioms, and variation techniques inspired by Schubert. At this point Krenek freed himself from the need to follow trends and instead simply expressed himself. For the first time in his life he made his own path.

The various perspectives in Krenek’s music make it interesting to trace his stylistic development through his life. More examination needs to be done to truly comprehend his music, especially from his early years. Few recordings of his music exist to date, which might offer musicians the chance to discover his beautiful and intriguing works with minimal bias. Ambitious musicians will surely be rewarded for exploring this goldmine of music.
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Scores

