Brandeis University

Alban Berg:
Analysis and Interpretation

By

Nathaniel Eschler

A Graduate Project

Submitted to Dr. Chafe
at Brandeis University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Music 235b

Waltham, Massachusetts

10/06/05

Lulu: Final Cadences to each act.

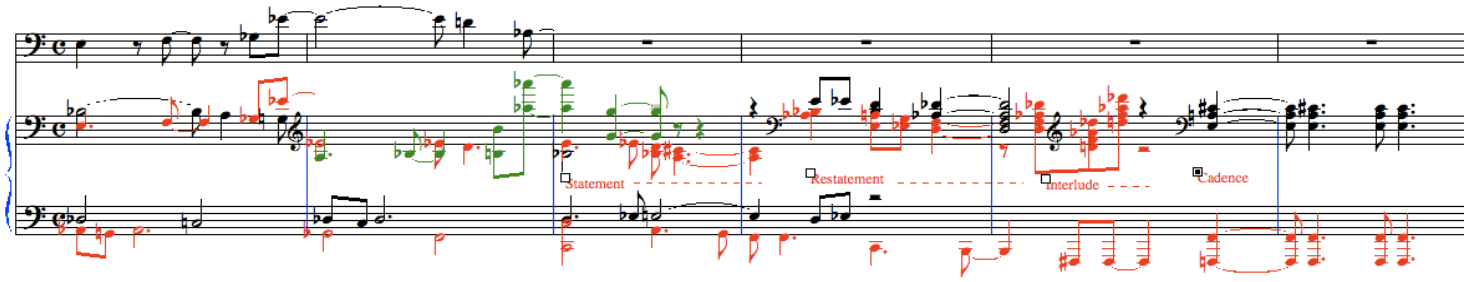
It is folly to suggest that a complete understanding of the cadences to each act of "Lulu" by Alban Berg can be had without a thorough analysis of the entire opera. After all, any music that is linear and connective should demonstrate cause and effect relationships. Of the many questions that would be answered if the whole of the opera is considered is in regards to continuity. How is each act composed so that its final cadence is the first stopping point within its overall structure? In other words, how does the music of each act connect, overlap, and close to single point. While this activity may seem arbitrary and irrelevant, it is not when the size and scope of this composition is considered. "Lulu," which is a setting of Wedekind's two part play, "Earth Spirit", and " Pandora's," stands at around 3800 measures, extending over the period of two hours when performed. How then can any given moment be understood outside of its larger context? Furthermore, it is not coincidence that the music and text are aligned, nor is it coincidental that the pitch material is directly related to the central characters on stage at the time of each cadence. To understand how these three elements (pitch, text, and drama) come together at these important junctures requires more than local level analysis. However, it is the purpose of this paper to say as much as possible, from a limited point of view, of these three endings. Through careful attention to detail, the similarities, differences, and evolutionary characteristics will be scrutinized.

ACT I

Closure of *Act I* occurs on beat four of m. 1360, manifests in the form of a tetrachord containing pitch classes 5, 4, 9, and 2. This sonority comes into focus by way of statement,

varied restatement, and is directly preceded by an interlude-like upbeat. In *example 1A* below the final six bars of *Act I* are given.

Ex. 1 Act I: mm 1356-1351



In referencing Ex. 1A on the downbeat of bar 1358, a four-part chorale like music begins, marked "statement." Here, pitch classes 1, 3, 10 and 5, from the bass up, sound simultaneously. From this point, the chorale then proceeds, shifting in a downward direction toward the same sonority that will eventually close the act (again pitch class' 5, 4, 9, and 2). Here, the sonority emerges linearly out of phase and is metrically weak, as opposed to its recurrence in bar 1360. Of the four voices in this chorale, the soprano is the only one to be repeated, calling attention to the **C#**. Its semitone descent from **E** is altered only rhythmically in the varied restatement.

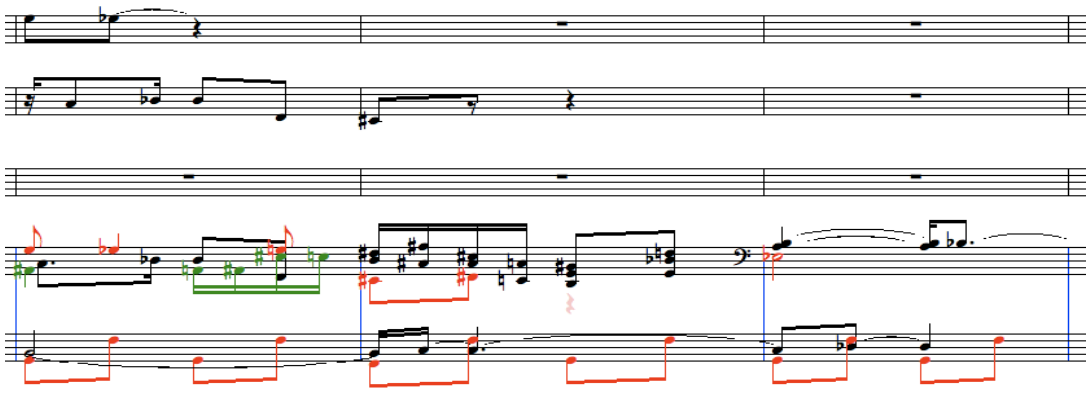
At this point in the discussion, it would be very easy to simply note the similarities and differences between measures 1358 and 1359. For example, the tenor voice begins on **D** both times, but only returns to itself the second time. More importantly, however, it would be helpful to gain a better vantage point of how these materials were assembled.

"Lulu" is a highly contrapuntal piece. It is a work in which there is a series of overlapping substructures. Often, there is counterpoint within the individual layers. The music that affects the cadence in 1360 begins back at bar 1350, where the final structural

elements that end *Act I* emerge. In the low winds, specifically the bassoons and contra bassoon, a musical idea ensues that is focused towards the penultimate cadence/arrival of *Act I*. In terms of description, it is a compound melody in which each line advances a minor third, by semitone, and then oscillates for four bars. Its conclusion occurs on the downbeat of measure 1356.

Of the other linear entities present in this layer, each also has a different destination. There is the musical subgroup present in the strings, departing from beat 2 of measure 1356, and moving through to bar 1358. This line is marked by a halfway point on the downbeat of bar 1354 and an arrival on **C**. In the high winds with the flute doubling the voice, the second group moves through to the downbeat of bar 1355, closing on **B**.

Ex. 2 Act I: mm 1349-1355



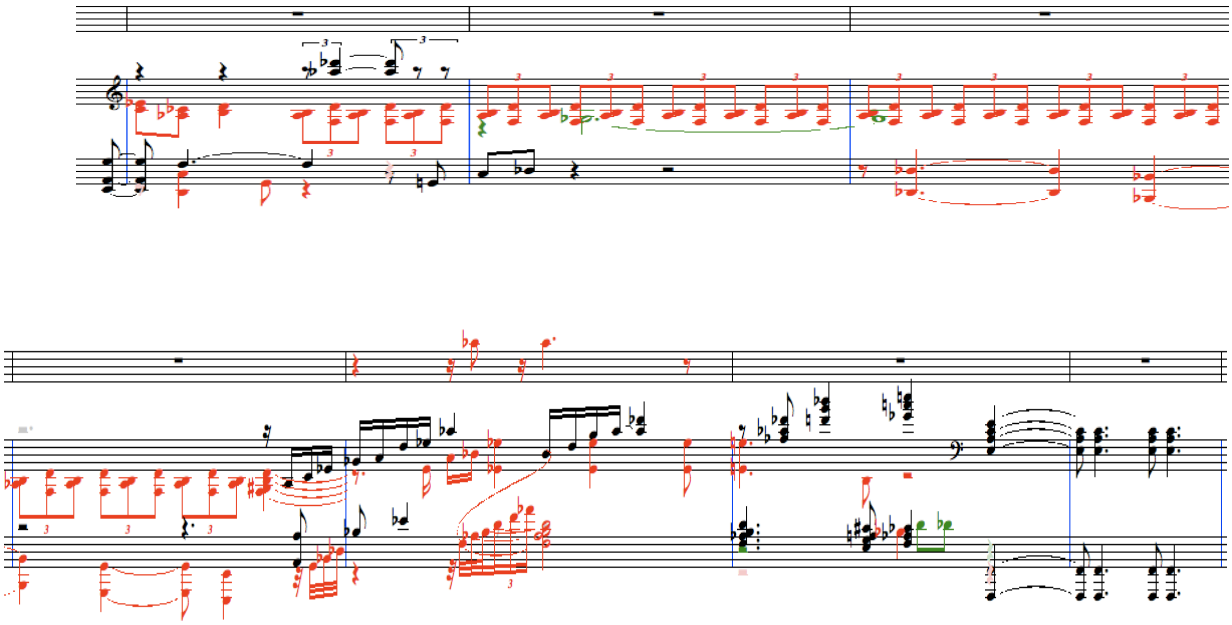
The combination and interaction of these musical ideas is crucial to understanding the tretrachord in measure 1360 as a cadence point. It is because of subgroup one's staggered beginning and the presence of arrival and departure pushing through to the end of the act. In other words the **Bb** is an active pitch, out of the collection, that affects the harmonic stability. As each layer and subgroup runs its course the way is made for an accented vertical arrival. As each element aligns itself, a focal point is created whereby musical contradiction is alleviated.

ACT II

In *Act II*, many of the same issues arise as it concludes in bar 1150. In measure 1144, on the second eighth note triplet on beat three, an oscillating tetrachord begins (0,3,6,9). Above that, the dyad of **A***b* and **D***b* sounds simultaneously with the tetrachord. Already underway, this oscillation is undercut with two separate strands that push the music forward. First of all, Basic Cell 1, starting on **G** ending on **E**, makes a staggered entrance on the *&* of four in bar 1149. Then, sneaking in at *ppp,* the alto sax picks up the **G***b* and sustains it through the oscillation continuing the line on the other side. The second entity begins on pitch class 1 and moves down to **E**. It should be noted that this downward line ends an eighth note before the oscillation breaks. Therefore, **G***b* is the sole proprietor of the music's

continuation past this point. Without the presence of the **G***b* or some other contradictory musical statement, the musical continuity would be broken here. What occurs after the oscillation stops is merely a re articulation of the same sonority. However, this time the sonority occurs as a block chord. Essentially, this layer (labeled three) on beat 4 of 1147 does not advance and, therefore, cannot cadence and thus demonstrate a new beginning despite the textural change.

Ex. 3 Act II: mm 1144-1150



The closing sonority of *Act II* is remarkably similar to that of *Act I*. In the bass, there are octave **F**'s closing the register left open at lines end with octave **E**'s in bar 1147. Above that pitch classes 0, 4, 9 come together with the **E** sounding twice with in the chord. The difference, of course, is in the final sonorities of both *Act I* and *II* being **C** instead of **C#**, with the latter arriving from the former.

Closing to this point are three layers of voice leading. The first layer, which continues from the aforementioned **G***b*, demonstrates three uprisings of basic cell one. Two layers follow in an unbroken chain and the third a beat later. The function of these uprisings is to reintroduce the dyad left isolated in bar 1144, which is then integrated in the first of three parallel tri-chords. These parallel tri-chords in bar 1149 in the upper register represent the second layer of voice leading. As stated previously, this layer is now integrated into one idea with the dyad of **A***b* and **D***b*. This second layer has existed in the upper register as a series of sonorities, last heard at bar 1135. The layer then integrates itself with the third layer at the point of closure beat four of measure 1149.

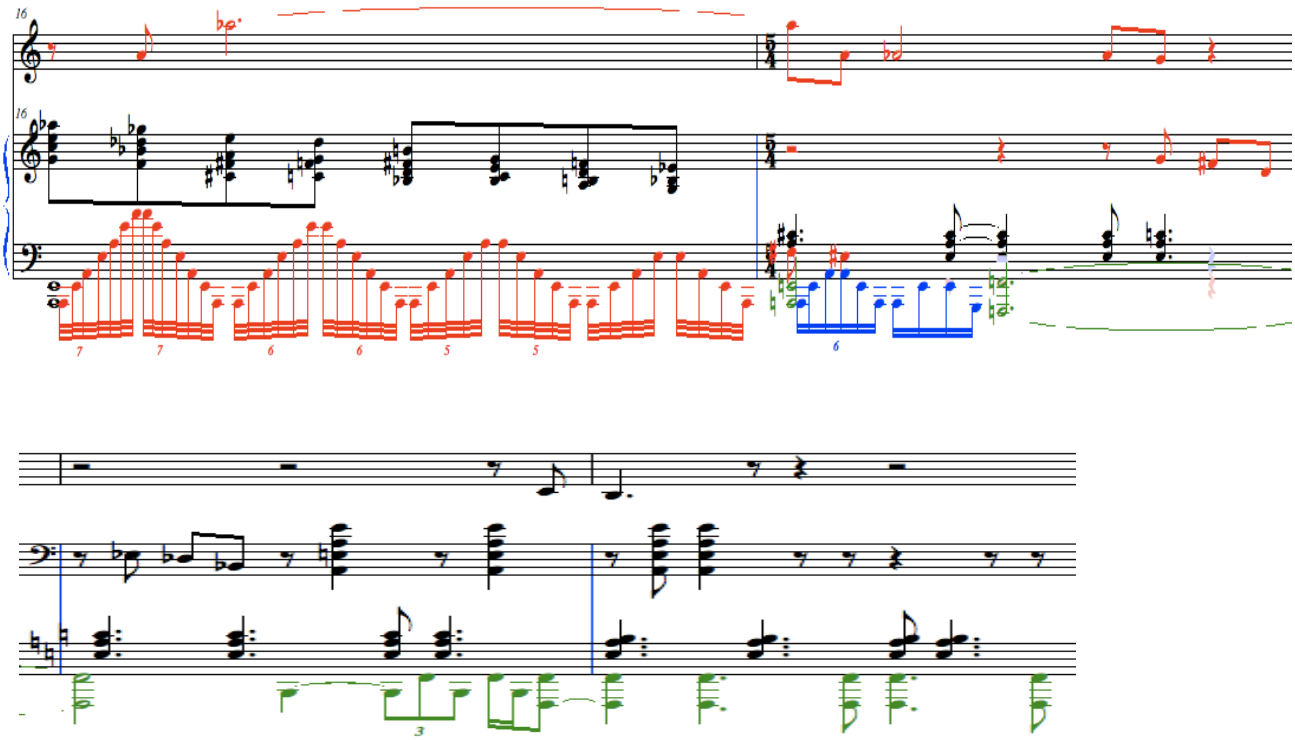
The way in which the three layers converge and close to a single point at the end of *Act II* demonstrates remarkable control by the composer. This control is even further enhanced by the astonishing relationship with the cadence to *Act I*. This relationship shows that with a careful analysis of the entire work, an overriding voice leading is in fact present. With the closing sonorities of *Act II* growing from *Act I*, a profound unity is created. A sense of purpose and large-scale design is as a result imbued to the listener.

ACT III

Act III of "Lulu" by Alban Berg will do nothing to dissuade the audience of anything less than a clear directed path from beginning to end. In bar 1324 the sonority of **F**, **A**, **C#**, **E** returns, pitch classes 5, 9, 2, and 4. This time, the descent does not stop at the **C,** but continues down to the **B** in bar 1326. The weight is placed here in bar 1326 once again because of contrapuntal alignment. The **A** and **C#** arrive on the downbeat of bar 1008. The **F** arrives in the middle of the bar and the **E** slides in on the **and** of beat two.

What distinguishes this cadential formula from the ends of the previous two acts is that the sonority never truly aligns itself vertically. Rhythmically, it remains disjointed, despite the linear completions. The music, as a result, seams unsettled and not completely resolved. The **B** that arrives in 1326 is out of the collection and considered an instability, also giving a sense incompleteness although certainly cadential.

Ex. 4 Act III: mm 1323-1326



The endings generated for each act are attributable to the convergence of multiple ideas to a single point. In each case, this single point has been an expansion from the previous act, giving a distinct unity to this narrative. In review, it will be recalled that each time an **F** in the bass supported an **E** and an **A** with the descent to **C#** in *Act I*, **C#-C** in *Act II*, and **C#--C-B** in *Act III*. The **F**, of course, is prominent as a structural note along with the **E**

and the **A,** producing a portion of a recognizable sonority that becomes part of a cadential formula. This point is, however, where the local level analysis runs into problems explaining why an **F** and not a **G**, for example. As a cadential formula it is only in *Act III* that the sonority generates the beginning of the end or, in other words, the final closing material. In *Act I*, this cadence occurs beginning at bar 1356 and in *Act II* bar 1145. What is obvious is that there is long-range motion towards these pitches that define the sonorities in question. What is not obvious, however, is why and how these specific sonorities take prominence within this piece. There are clues, however, within the local level harmony that lends answers to the question regarding what is stable and what is not.

As the materials generating closure to each act occur, patterns emerge with respect to tension and release. Specifically, sonorities that feature a major or minor triad are more stable, where as sonorities that feature diminished chords and also non-triadic verticality, are composed such that they are unstable. More specifically, cadences, small and large, are built around the major or minor sonority. At the end of *Act I* in bar 1356, as discussed previously, an arrival occurs. An arrival, or elision, means that one idea is ending and another is beginning - a musical contradiction. In bar 1356, on the downbeat, the minor sonority of **C#**, **E**, and **G#** closes the preceding material, while **C** and **B*b*** look toward the next phrase. At the beginnings of the first and second part of the Chorale in bars 1358 and 1359, there is no major or minor sonority present. Although the inclusion of the A*b* in 1358 does not produce a major or minor the **F** does. However as they belong to other music and, as discussed, are still out of phase within the musical fabric, they therefore do not provide a contradiction to this argument - only to the music. Interestingly enough, at the end of each statement of the chorale, a sonority does arrive containing a major or minor sonority.

At the end of *Act II* and *Act III,* similar uses of harmony occur. In *Act II* bar 1144 a new beginning happens. Here there are two elements at play. The first is the oscillating tetra-chord. The second is the fourth dyad in the upper register, scored to the vibraphone. Although one can spell a major triad with the addition of the fourth, **D*b***, **F**, **A*b*** that fourth, because of registration, creates a dissonance. The featured sonority is the fully diminished oscillating triad, which is not cadential, but rather the beginning of the end.

As the music aligns itself into the cadence at bar 1150, paying particular attention to bar 1149, there is another type of oscillation that occurs. A very common musical perpetuator: consonance, dissonance, consonance. In the upper layer there is a motion from a minor sonority through one that is diminished into the final cadence of the act. Here again the tendency of the music is to distinguish the major and or minor sonority from everything else.

At the end of the opera, *Act III,* measure 1326 presents, following the logic just presented, and the logic of the ear, a contradiction. At this point there is a cadence without a major or minor sonority present (see example 4). As stated, this cadence suggests itself as being incomplete or inconclusive. As the step-wise descent **C#** to **B** occurs, the base sonority of this cadential formula remains unchanged. **F**, **A**, **E**. The **B** natural, out of the collection coupled with the lack of a major or minor sonority breaks the pattern of the formula. Of course, breaking a pattern has always been a powerful tool to mark an ending in music. As each piece that is non-tonal defines its own harmony and logic, there are no steadfast rules. Here, the cadential formula with the referential **F** in the bass, together with the alignment of materials, creates the ending. However, the composer's instincts being correct, the disjointed

rhythm of the pitches are necessary because of the instability created by the **B** natural and the lack of a major or minor triadic sonority adds to this incompleteness.