

## Melodic Construction

A melodic line is an expressive unit of musical meaning. Like spoken language, a melody “makes sense” by introducing an idea, elaborating upon it and then concluding it. Indeed, melodic lines are said to move in phrases, or sentences, as in language. Where a verbal phrase has internal clauses, a melodic line has internal subphrases. Language may use forms of development, such as description (adjectives and adverbs) in ways that are similar to those of motivic variation or development in music.

Example

### Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Consider the simple melody “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”

Sing “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”.

What other music uses this melody?

(Haydn “Surprise” Symphony; Bah, Bah, Black Sheep; The Alphabet Song; Ah, Je Vous Dirais, Maman, etc.)

Questions for the class. [Looking at the BLM (with no analysis on it)]

What is the musical form of this melody? Why?

What elements of this melody are repeated? Which change?

What is the phrase structure of this melody?

What is the relevance of the final pitches in each phrase?

What is the motivic structure of this melody? Why?

Is this a melodic line, or a series of broken chords? Why?

What is the implied harmony of this melody? Why?

### Constructing Your Harmony

1. Begin simply: use one triad per bar. You may repeat triads if you wish.

1. Harmonic outline. With your triads, create a logical 4, 8 bar chord progression before beginning your melody. Many Classical progressions begin on the I chord and “progress” to the V chord by bar 4. Often bar 5 begins on V and “progresses” back to I.

2. Phrase Structure: the standard is four bars. Most chord progressions, regardless of genre, are structured in the following manner:

a) Pitch Centre: progression should establish a pitch centre.

b) Tension and Release: The interest in your progression will depend on how you generate harmonic tension and resolution, such as through dissonance and consonance or the use of the unfamiliar and the familiar. The sense of “resolution” depends on context. If you use very consonant harmonies, then the slightest dissonance will be noticed. Yet if you use many dissonant triads (or unfamiliar), anything less dissonant (or familiar) will feel “resolved.” Major triads are the most resolved and both diminished and augmented triads seem unresolved.

c) Contrast: Your progression should move from your initial pitch centre and come to rest at another pitch centre.

d) Resolution: Finally, your phrase will return to its initial pitch centre.

3. Harmonic Rhythm: do all the chords use the same durations? Is there an increase in harmonic change in the points of tension?

### **Constructing Your Melody**

1. Listen to your harmonic progression several times. Does a melodic line suggest itself to you?
2. A melody usually has an overall curve that ascends to an upper resting point in the first (questioning or antecedent) phrase, and then descends again, often to the initial pitch, in the second (answering or consequent) phrase.
3. Mixture of steps and skips: a melody would be rather awkward if it was made up of nothing but skips and leaps, and yet, it would be rather bland if it was made up of nothing but smooth, stepwise motion. Therefore, the successful melody has characteristic pitch motives (steps and skips) as well as rhythmic motives (repeating rhythmic figures).

In Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, the same rhythmic motive is used in every phrase, each time with a different effect. It is not necessary to have many motives, but to use a few wisely.