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"Musical Form"

The Melodic Phrase

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Melody may be considered from a historical and anthropological as well as from a purely musical point of view. A comprehensive study of the subject would necessarily include such far-ranging topics as the melodic art of early civilizations and contemporary, so-called primitive societies, Byzantine and Gregorian chant, medieval popular song, the classical traditions of China, India, and other Eastern civilizations, seventeenth-century monody, folk songs of many lands, instrumental and vocal melody of the classical and romantic eras, operatic aria and *arioso*, declamatory style in opera from Monteverdi through Debussy, Schoenberg's *Sprechgesang*, and so forth. In this review, however, only a few of the more important aspects of the subject will be considered, with reference primarily to music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is hoped that this introductory study will suggest the procedures and provide the tools for analyzing melodies of any period, in any style.¹

VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MELODY

It is customary to distinguish between vocal and instrumental melody. But most instrumental melody shows in some way its derivation from vocal melody which antedates even the earliest musical instruments. Instruments were invented to produce sounds that the human voice could not create. Thus, there are instruments that have the capacity to exceed the range of male and female voices; execute wide leaps that are difficult or impossible for the human voice; produce a variety of tone colors or produce several tones at the same time; and play long lines without the interruption of breath pauses. Vocal melody is generally characterized by a rather limited range, small and relatively infrequent leaps, little color or dynamic contrast, and frequent breathing points.

In prehistory, vocal melody probably developed as a form of emotionally inflected speech. Melody has been associated with words since earliest times, and wordless vocalization has always been a rather rare phenomenon. Thus it is not surprising to find that some of the characteristics of melody are derived from speech, and that some of the melodic forms are related to the forms of prose and poetry.

¹ For a discussion of melody, see the article in *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, edited by Willi Apel, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970).

Music for more than one executant was performed by voices and/or instruments interchangeably before the Renaissance. In this period instruments and performance techniques became more highly developed and distinctive instrumental genres made their first appearance. This was accompanied by the development of a variety of notational styles for keyboard and fretted instruments; these were quite different from the notation for vocal music, which was also used for wind and unfretted stringed instruments.

Cross-fertilization of vocal and instrumental styles which began in the seventeenth century reached a high point in the music of Bach, whose instrumental melodies frequently seem vocal, but whose vocal writing suggests an instrumental style. Mozart's universally applicable melodic style may be observed in such diverse works as operatic arias, violin concertos, and piano sonatas. The florid vocal style of Bellini is echoed in the highly decorative keyboard melodies of Chopin, and Paganini's violin virtuosity is mirrored in the piano pyrotechnics of Liszt.

POETRY, PROSE, AND MUSIC

There is a free-flowing rhythm in prose that is not found in poetry. Poetry employs meter, an underlying pattern of strong and weak pulses over which the text is superimposed. Music may have the free rhythmic flow of prose, or it may be conceived with a metrical foundation. Most music is metrically oriented. Gregorian chant, however, employs the freer rhythms of prose (see Example 3.2a).

The differences between prose rhythm and poetic rhythm may be seen very clearly by comparing the two texts in Example 3.1. Example 3.1a, a prose text, is drawn from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; 3.1b from the opening of his *Sonnet 65*. Both are extended sentences; both have contrasting short and long clauses, well punctuated by commas. The prose example contains many changes of pace and accent, and the repetition of several words (*her* and *it*, particularly). The four lines from the sonnet are in iambic pentameter; in every line except the first there are rhythms that oppose the underlying meter. The rhyme scheme, the repetition of *nor*, and the internal rhyme of line 4 are unifying factors.

Example 3.1 Prose rhythm vs. poetic rhythm.

(a) Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.

Since his Majesty went into the field I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all the while in a most fast sleep.

(b) Shakespeare, *Sonnet 65*.²

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,

² Lines 2, 3, and 4 of the text are given a double analysis in which the upper scansion shows the meter, the lower scansion the rhythm.

How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

The two settings of "Kyrie eleison" that follow show similar contrast in the handling of rhythm. The plainsong melody, Example 3.2a, is rhythmically free and completely nonmetrical. In the second melody, from Bach's *Mass in B minor*, Example 3.2b, the rhythm is superimposed on a meter of alternating strong and weak pulses. It may be observed that in 3.2a the last three pitches are the same, in mirror image, as the first three; and that in 3.2b the three long notes at the beginning are balanced by the three at the end. Both melodies have an arch shape, and both begin and end on the tonic or key center. Breathing points are indicated by the editorial addition of commas.

Example 3.2 Nonmetrical and metrical rhythm in music.

(a) Gregorian "Kyrie" (excerpt).



(b) "Kyrie" theme from Bach's *Mass in B minor*.



The derivation of musical meter from poetic meter is clearly revealed in the persistence of such concepts as duple and triple meter; strong and weak pulses; the measure, which corresponds to the poetic foot; counterrhythms and accents; and the distinction between half and full closes or *cadences*.³

Poetic meter existed for many centuries before it was adapted to musical needs in the Middle Ages. The gradual development of musical notation led to further refinements and complexities that had not been needed in the notation of poetry. Thus music employs special signs to indicate meter, tempo, accent, rhythmic ratios and proportions, measure, and so forth.

THE SENTENCE AND THE MUSICAL PHRASE

Language is not a random flow of undifferentiated words; words must be grouped together to form sentences. The sentence is composed of words that have different functions; some words are nouns, others are verbs, or adjectives. Some of these elements are structurally indispensable, others are optional, decorative, dependent. Every sentence must have a subject and a predicate; an adjective must modify a noun or a pronoun, and may not stand alone.

Music is also a combination of elements that have differentiated functions. Music has its own special kind of grammar and syntax. Successive tones may be grouped to form

³ See Chapter 4 for a full discussion of cadences.

a *musical phrase* having a sense of completion and unity similar to that found in a verbal sentence. Some tones, like the verbal subject and predicate, are essential to the musical structure; others are decorative. Suspensions, appoggiaturas, neighboring tones and similar decorations cannot stand alone without resolution any more than an adjective may stand without a noun or pronoun. Musical phrases may be simple or complex; a short musical idea may be expanded by a variety of means, such as parenthetical insertions, or extensions at the beginning or the end. The following examples illustrate these parallels.

Example 3.3

Sentences and musical phrases compared.

(a) A short, complete statement in words: Rome is the capital of Italy.

In music:



(b) The same, with decorative elements added in words: Ancient Rome is the capital of romantic Italy.

In music:



(c) Expansion of the same, with internal extension in words: Ancient Rome, the mecca of all tourists, is the capital of romantic Italy.

In music:



(d) Two simple statements joined to make a large one in words: Rome is the capital of Italy. It is a fascinating city.

In music:



Rome, the capital of Italy, is a fascinating city.



(e) Terminal extension in words: Rome, mecca of tourists, is the capital of romantic Italy, and cradle of Western civilization.

In music:



(f) Repetition for emphasis in words: Rome, Rome, Rome!—the word alone conjures up images of ancient temples, visions of Renaissance art, and the specter of today's traffic on the Via Veneto.

In music:



MOTIVIC AND NONMOTIVIC MELODIES

In Chapter 2, several instances of melodic phrases in which motives were used as building blocks were examined. Not all melodies are of this type, however. Long, non-motivic melodies are perhaps just as common, and are most frequently found in slow movements of a lyrical or contemplative nature. Illustrations may be found in Examples 5.4, 5.8, 7.5 (mm. 1-8), 7.7 (mm. 1-4), 7.11, and 24.2 (the principal theme).

THE RHYTHMIC STRUCTURE OF PHRASES

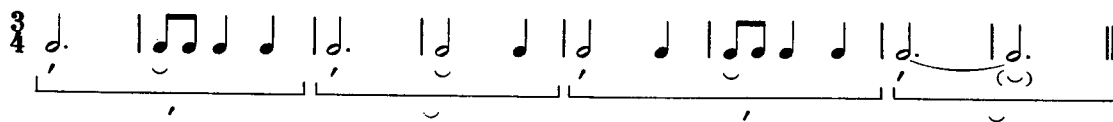
It must be recognized that rhythm exists on several hierarchical levels. Thus, in 3/4 meter the first beat is strong, the second and third beats are weak. In a slow tempo, if beats 2-3 are subdivided, all the beats are accented relative to the fractions, thus: ONE-and-TWO-and-THREE-and. In a fast tempo, 3/4 may sound like 12/4 if the measures are in groups of four, and only every fourth downbeat will seem truly accented. Example 3.4 illustrates the manner in which measures are grouped to form pulsation on a larger scale.

Example 3.4 The rhythmic grouping of measures in the phrase.

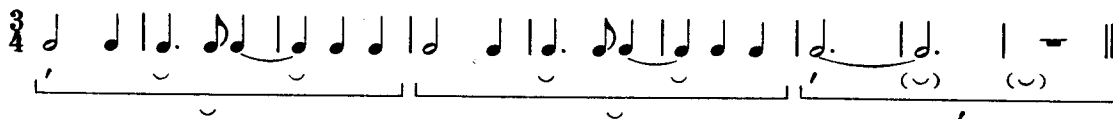
(a) Iambic grouping (v/) on two levels.



(b) Trochaic grouping (ˊ ˘) on two levels.⁴



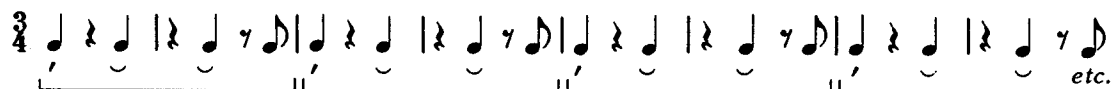
(c) Dactylic grouping (ˊ ˘ ˘) on one level, anapaestic (˘ ˘ ˊ) on another.



It follows that melodic phrases should be studied in the light of their manifold rhythmic properties. The barline is frequently irrelevant to the rhythmic structure and may even be misleading, as in the case of the second theme of the third movement of Schumann's *Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra*. It is written in 3/4 but sounds as though it is in 3/2.

Example 3.5

Rhythm of the second theme. Schumann's *Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra*, iii.



PHRASE LENGTH DETERMINANTS

It is frequently difficult to identify melodic phrase endings, or to successfully write them in extended exercises or short compositions. It will be useful, then, to consider briefly some of the ingredients or factors that help to provide the sense of cadence that marks the end of a melodic phrase. These include: (a) a long note, especially one that follows several shorter notes (Example 2.1 is a good illustration; an exception, caused by the word setting, may be found in Example 3.2b—note the quick breath that must be taken before the last quarter note of m. 2); (b) a restful (rather than an active) scale degree; (c) largely stepwise motion to the cadence, followed perhaps by a leap to provide a natural break or cesura; (d) the close of a symmetrical repetition; (e) the need for a breath (in music with text); (f) implicit or explicit harmonic resolution.⁵

A composer may wish the seams or musical joints to be somewhat concealed or inconspicuous. To that end, various devices may be used to continue the motion at a cadence, instead of stopping it,⁶ or adjacent phrases may be connected by the device of *elision* or overlapping.⁷

Phrases in polyphonic music frequently are more difficult to identify than phrases in homophonic music because in the former the several melodies tend not to come to a cadence simultaneously. In the latter, however, where there is only a single melodic

⁴ The larger grouping may also be heard as iambic.

⁵ In Example 19.10 compare the implicit imperfect authentic cadence on the first beat of m. 3 with the explicit perfect authentic cadence on the first beat of m. 17.

⁶ This is the so-called covered cadence.

⁷ See Example 3.6.

line, the supporting harmony moves to a cadence simultaneously with the melody. For illustrations of melodic phrases that do not necessarily coincide with harmonic cadences see:

Example 17.1g, where the cadences occur as follows: the upper voice in m. 5, the middle voice in m. 6, and the bass voice in m. 8 because of the *canonic imitation*

Example 17.3, where the cadence in the upper voice occurs in m. 4, the lower voice in m. 5

Chapter 17, Exercise 1, where the upper line comes to a cadence in mm. 5, 8, 11, 16, and 22; the middle line in mm. 4, 7, 10, 15, 18, 21

Example 19.3

Example 20.12b

Occasionally phrases will have extensions at the beginning or at the end and it may be difficult to decide whether or not they are integral parts of the phrase. In MS, K. 284, i, for example,⁸ m. 22 may be considered as (a) preceding the phrase that appears to begin in m. 23, (b) an anacrusis (upbeat) and therefore a part of the phrase, or (c) an extension of the previous phrase which moved to cadence in m. 21.

Extensions designed to continue the momentum and bridge the gap between phrases are frequently tagged on to the end of a phrase. They may be found in the melody line (see Example 5.7, m. 4), or in the accompaniment (see Example 4.7, m. 187).

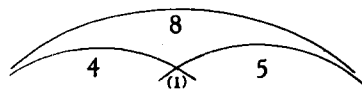
The length of a phrase is easily measured if it begins on the first beat of one measure and ends on the last beat of another, as in Examples 7.1a and 7.7. If a phrase ends on the first, second, or third beat of its fourth measure, the phrase is still considered to be four measures long rather than three plus a fraction.

The counting problem is magnified if there is an elision or overlapping of phrases, or if the phrase begins in the second half of a measure and ends in the first half of a later measure. In the first instance, the elided measure should be counted twice, that is, both as m. 4 of the first phrase and as m. 1 of the second phrase, with the result that $4 + 5 = 8$ rather than 9! In the second case, the measures must be considered as units in which the beats are grouped as 3-4 | 1-2 rather than | 1-2-3-4 |. These structures may be diagrammed in the following manner.

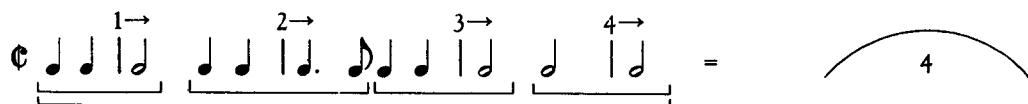
Example 3.6

Diagrams of phrases.

(a) Where elision is involved.



(b) Where a four-measure phrase begins on an upbeat and ends on a downbeat.



⁸ Example 5.9.

It follows from the diagrams that the first full or complete measure is considered m. 1.

Another practical problem in measure counting occurs where there are first and second endings. The two endings are alternates and not played in succession; therefore the first and second endings have identical measure numbers. (See Example 21.4, m. 8.)

A double bar occurring in the middle of a measure should not be confused with a regular barline, and does not affect the counting of measures. Such a double bar may be used to make formal sections stand out more clearly (BS, 22, ii, m. 12), to effect a formal repetition (Example 21.1), or may be used at a change of meter, key signature, or tempo (Example 21.6, m. 173).

Cadenzas that ignore the indicated meter create a problem of another kind. In BS, 27/1, iii (Adagio con espressione), m. 26, there is a dotted half note in the left hand properly occupying the full measure, but the right hand is supposed to play notes that add up to $9\frac{3}{4}$ beats!

Further experience in analysis will disclose additional problems. But it should also provide further know-how in problem solving.

SUGGESTED EXERCISES

1. Identify the melodic phrases in the soprano line of BWTC, Volume 1, *Prelude no. 6*. On what notes do the phrases end? Justify your decisions.
2. Analyze in similar fashion the soprano line in BWTC, Volume 1, *Prelude no. 19*, and *Fugues nos. 2 and 3*.
3. Analyze the rhythmic structure of the opening eight measures of BS, 2/2, ii. Show the rhythm within the measure and the relationship between the weak and the strong measures within the phrase. Analyze in similar fashion the Rondo movement, mm. 1-16, which immediately follows it.
4. Does the first phrase of BS, 2/3, ii end in m. 2, 3, 4, 8, 10 or 11? Give your reasons for accepting the one you choose, and for rejecting each of the others.
5. In the following movement, BS, 2/3, iii, does the first phrase end in m. 3, 4, or 8? Explain.
6. Identify and discuss the opening melodic phrases in BS, 7, i-iv. Identify the factors that may be considered phrase length determinants.
7. In BS, 7, i, is m. 25 a point of cadence? Explain.
8. In MS, K. 310, i, where does one expect the first phrase to end? What does it *not* end in m. 5? What happens in m. 9? In movement iii, how many melodic phrases are there in the section that runs from mm. 1-28? What elements weaken the cadences in these measures?
9. Analyze one movement of a Mozart piano sonata thoroughly; identify all the melodic phrases. Discuss the use of extensions, phrase lengths, cadences, elisions, symmetrical vs. asymmetrical internal structure, repetition, sequence, motive usage, deliberate ambiguities, and so forth.
10. Compose several short passages based on selected materials derived from one or more of the Mozart or Beethoven sonatas. These should illustrate some of the procedures discussed in this chapter. Analyses should accompany each exercise.