CHAPTER 6

Melodic Organization

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

This chapter discusses the organization of melodic thought and the ways in which musical units are combined into larger and larger sections. In much the same way as written language is made meaningful through the grouping of sentences and paragraphs, melody is grouped into convenient and meaningful units or sections.

The Motive

A *motive* (or *motif*) is a short, recurring figure that appears throughout a composition or section of music. It is considered to be the germinating cell or organic unit that unifies a larger expanse of music. Distinctive melodic and/or rhythmic patterns form the underlying structure of a motive.

Melodic Motive

A *melodic motive* is a repeated pitch pattern. It usually recurs accompanied by the same or a similar rhythmic pattern.

Figure 6.1

Rimsky-Korsakoff: *Scheherazade,* op. 35, II, mm. 26–30.

Rameau: "Guerriers, suivez l'Amour" from *Dardanus,* act I, scene III, mm. 1–5.

J. Revaux and C. François: "My Way," mm. 55–58.

Lalo: *Concerto Russe,* op. 29, I, mm. 74–79.

Rhythmic Motive

A recurring rhythmic pattern in a piece of music is called a *rhythmic motive.* Although melodic motives typically contain rhythmic motives, in many cases rhythmic motives function independently of melodic patterns, as the examples in Figure 6.2 illustrate.

Figure 6.2

British Folk Song.

J. Revaux and C. François: "My Way," mm. 55–58.

Copland: *Appalachian Spring,* mm. 80–82.

Rhythmic Motive   Rhythmic Motive Repeated   Rhythmic Motive Repeated

Rhythmic motives not associated with melodic motives also commonly appear as the motives in accompaniment figures. Accompaniments typically include a limited number of rhythmic motives that are repeated with only slight variation. This lack of rhythmic variety helps subordinate the accompaniment to the melody.

Figure 6.3

Mendelssohn: *Songs Without Words* op. 62, no. 1, mm. 1–2.

Andante espressivo

Rhythmic Motive   Rhythmic Motive Repeated   Rhythmic Motive Repeated   Rhythmic Motive Repeated   Rhythmic Motive Repeated

Chopin: Mazurka in G Minor, op. 67, no. 2, mm. 1–4.

Cantabile

Rhythmic Motive   Rhythmic Motive Repeated   Rhythmic Motive Repeated   Rhythmic Motive Repeated

Sequence

A *sequence* is the immediate restatement of a melodic motive or longer figure in the same instrumental or vocal part at a higher or lower pitch. Each separate unit of the sequence forms a segment. The sequence is one of the most common basic methods of melodic

elaboration found in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The following list describes some characteristics of sequences:

1. A sequence requires at least two segments.
2. Most sequences contain no more than three or four segments.
3. Sequences usually have only one direction—the segments succeed each other at continuingly higher pitches or continuingly lower pitches.
4. Sequence segments usually continue by the same interval distance. As an example, if the first segment begins on C and the next starts with E, then the remainder of the segments will continue in thirds.

Real Sequence

A *real sequence* contains continuing segments that are exact transpositions of the first segment. Every tone is transposed at exactly the same intervallic distance.

Figure 6.4

Beethoven: Symphony no. 9 in D Minor, op. 125, IV: Prestissimo, mm. 1–4.

Tonal Sequence

A *tonal sequence* accommodates the diatonic scale, so that only diatonic notes of the scale are used. This means that the transposition of the segments may not be exact. In Figure 6.5, note that in some segments, the half-step and whole-step patterns of the first segment are not reproduced exactly.

Figure 6.5

Sibelius: Symphony no. 5 in E-flat Major, op. 82, I, mm. 114–119.

Tchaikovsky: Symphony no. 5 in E Minor, op. 64, I, mm. 1–6.

Modified Sequence

In a *modified sequence* some of the segments may be decorated or embellished in a way that does not destroy their original character.

Figure 6.6

C. P. E. Bach: Sonata for Violin and Piano.

False Sequence

A *false sequence* repeats part of a figure and states the remainder in sequence—a mixture of sequence and repetition.

Figure 6.7

Beethoven: Trio in B-flat Major for Piano, Clarinet or Violin, and Cello, op. 11, II: Adagio, mm. 1–4.

Schubert: Symphony no. 5 in B-flat Major, D. 485, I, mm. 5–8.

Phrase

A *phrase* is a substantial musical thought usually ending with a harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic cadence. The presence of a cadence distinguishes a phrase from a motive. Phrases are frequently four measures long, but may be longer or shorter. A phrase presents a complete (though sometimes dependent) musical thought.

Figure 6.8

Haydn: Symphony no. 102 in B-flat Major, IV: Finale, mm. 1–4.

Phrase Member   Phrases frequently contain slight melodic interruptions and thus divide into two *phrase members*. Phrase members are sufficiently separated, usually by a longer note value or rest, to distinguish them as individual units. Sometimes the second phrase member is either a repetition or a sequence of the first; however, it is just as often contrasting.

Figure 6.9

Angerer: *Berchtoldsgaden Musick,* "Kindersinfonie" ("Children's Symphony"), I, mm. 22–25.

Haydn: Trio no. 1 in G Major for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Hob. XV:25, III, mm. 1–4.

Mozart: Sonata in D Major, K. 284, I, mm. 1–4.

Under certain conditions, phrase members may be nearly indistinguishable from phrases themselves, with only the tempo serving as the deciding factor. We might interpret Figure 6.10 as two phrases at a slow tempo because of the clear rhythmic cadence, but because there is no harmonic cadence in measure 2, we hear the passage as a four-measure phrase.

Figure 6.10

Mozart: Sonata in C Major, K. 309, II, mm. 1–4.

Period

Two adjacent phrases may combine to form a *period* if:

1. The second phrase ends with a strong cadence—usually perfect authentic. Closure (finality) must be achieved at the end of the second phrase.

2. The first phrase ends with a weaker cadence than the second. A half cadence is common at the end of the first phrase.

3. The two phrases bear some musical relationship to each other. Often, they will create a "question–answer" effect called *antecedent–consequent*. The first phrase acts as the antecedent (question) and the second phrase as the consequent (answer).

Parallel Period

Two adjacent phrases form a *parallel period* if they both begin in the same manner. The two phrases may be nearly identical except for the cadences, or they may only be similar for a measure or two.

Figure 6.11

Foster: "Camptown Races," mm. 1–8.

Folk Song: "Cockles and Mussels."

In Figure 6.12, only the three final notes of the second phrase are different from the first. The three differing pitches of the second phrase are necessary to accommodate the stronger perfect authentic cadence.

Figure 6.12

Schubert: Impromptu op. 90, no. 1, D. 899, mm. 2–9.

Contrasting Period

A *contrasting period* results when the two phrases are not similar in melodic content. The second (consequent) phrase may be different because of a change in the melodic contour or the inclusion of a dissimilar rhythmic figure, or it may simply differ in the lack of reference to material contained in the first phrase.

Figure 6.13

Folk Song: "The Ash Grove," mm. 1–8.

Phrase 1

Half Cad.

F: V

Phrase 2 (Contrasting to Phrase 1 in both pitch and rhythm)

Perfect Authentic Cad.

V   I

Three-Phase Period   Although most periods are composed of just two phrases, those of three and more do occur. The *three-phrase period* may be organized as A A B (antecedent, antecedent, consequent) or A B B (antecedent, consequent, consequent). Whatever the relationship, the third phrase must end with a stronger cadence than either of the first two.

Figure 6.14

Haydn: Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI:49, I, mm. 1–12.

Phrase 1 (a)

Half Cadence

Allegro

E♭:   IV^6 V$^4_3$

Double Period (Four-Phrase Period)

Sometimes known as the *four-phrase period,* the *double period* allows for a variety of phrase relationships. However, the same principle that governs two-phrase periods applies here as well: the fourth phrase must bring the period to closure and should be at least as strong as any of the other three.

Figure 6.15

Mozart: Sonata in C Major, K. 309, II, mm. 1–16.

Phrase 3 (a′)

Imperfect Authentic Cad.

V^7 I

Phrase 4 (b′)

Perfect Authentic Cad.

V^7 I

Repeated Phrases

Repeated phrases, whether identical or modified, are not typically regarded as period structures because the second phrase is not dependent on the first. Thus the antecedent–consequent concept does not apply. Figure 6.16 illustrates a modified repeated second phrase and a perfect authentic cadence as the completion of both phrases.

Figure 6.16

Herbert: "Gypsy Love Song" from *The Fortune Teller,* mm. 20–27.

Phrase 1

Perfect Authentic Cadence

B♭:   V   I

Phrase 2 (Modified Repeated)

Perfect Authentic Cadence

V   I

Nonperiod Construction

Sometimes a series of phrases, some of which may be unrelated or lacking closure, do not arrange themselves conveniently into periods. Terms for such groupings range from "phrase groups" or "phrase chains" to "dissimilar phrases" or "dissolved periods." For purposes of analysis here, these nonperiod combinations can be called *dissimilar phrases.*

Modification of the Phrase

Composers often seek to modify a phrase in one way or another, sometimes to lengthen it and sometimes to provide other forms of variety.

Phrase Extension

An *extended phrase* is one whose length has been increased through the elongation of some part of it. Figures 6.17 through 6.20 illustrate both sequence and repetition as devices to extend a phrase. Phrases may be extended by a few beats or up to twice their normal length. The extensions may be near the beginning, in the middle, or near the cadence.

Beginning Extension

Phrases may be extended near the beginning by repeating or sequencing a few opening tones. Note that the following phrase would be complete without the bracketed section.

Figure 6.17

Haydn: Symphony no. 104 in D Major, III, mm. 53–58.
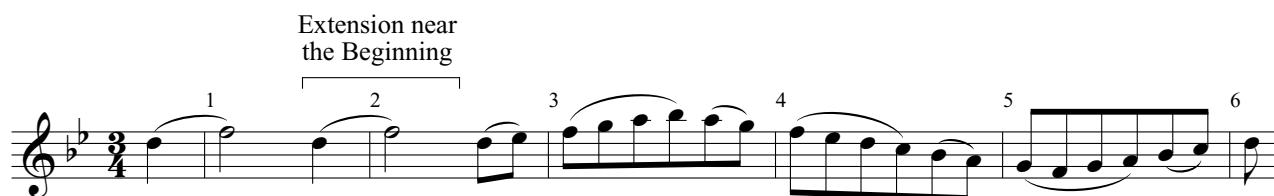
Internal Extension

A small melodic group may be repeated in the middle of the phrase to extend its length. The following phrase would be shorter, but nonetheless complete, without the extension.

Figure 6.18

Haydn: Symphony no. 101 in D Major ("Clock"), I, mm. 24–28.
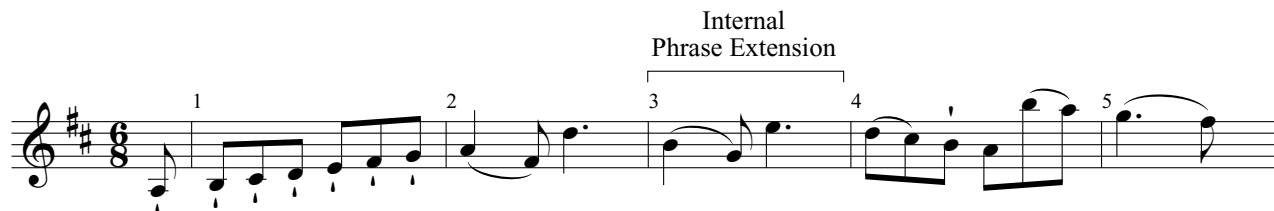
Cadential Extension

Elaborating or repeating a cadence, a cadence figure, or individual cadence chords is an effective way in which to extend a phrase. The following phrase would be complete without the cadential extension.

Figure 6.19

Mendelssohn: *Songs Without Words* op. 85, no. 6, mm. 64–69.

Although extending a phrase adds to the overall length, some phrases are longer than others simply by design and not by extension:

Figure 6.20

Haydn: Symphony no. 95 in C Minor, III, mm. 13–18.

Change of Mode

Phrases are sometimes modified by a *change of mode* from major to parallel minor or vice versa.

Figure 6.21

Smetana: "The Moldau" from *My Country,* mm. 40–43 and 333–336.

Measures 40–43 (E minor)

Measures 333–336 (E major)

Melodic Structure

Up to this point, the discussion has centered on the organization of melody into units such as motives, phrases, and periods. The following section focuses on the nature of melody itself.

We do not yet clearly understand many aspects of melody. For example, why is the first movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" (op. 27, no. 2) so well known when the sonatas preceding and following it are relatively unfamiliar to large audiences? Despite our inability to fully explain the nature of melody, we can gain much information by investigating a number of melodies to see what they have in common.

If you examine a large number of tonal melodies, a number of similarities emerge.

General Characteristics

1. Most tonal melodies contain a climax tone. A *climax tone* is the highest stressed pitch of a phrase or other unit. Usually the climax tone is reached only once, but it can appear with reiterations of the pitch and with embellishments. In Figure 6.22, the climax tone is D-flat and occurs only once.
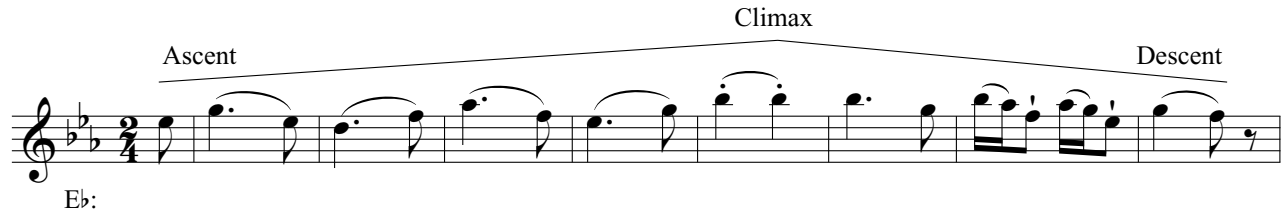
Figure 6.22

Mahler: "Urlicht" from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn,* mm. 3–7.

2. Most phrases contain an *ascent* to and *descent* from the climax tone. Although fluctuations in the prevailing direction are a common occurrence, you should consider the overall direction when assessing the ascent and descent.
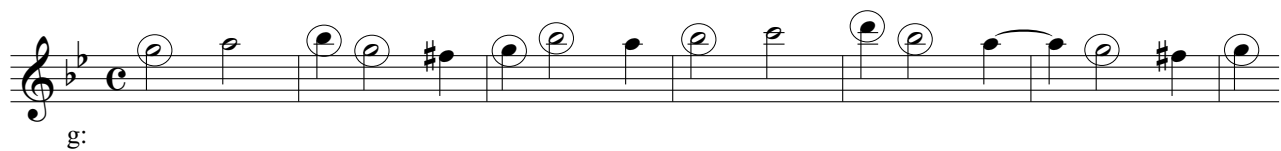
Figure 6.23

Beethoven: Symphony no. 3 in E-flat Major ("Eroica"), op. 55, IV: Finale, mm. 76–83.

3. Many melodic phrases contain significantly placed pitches of the tonic triad (scale degrees $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, and $\hat{5}$) that are important in shaping the entire phrase. Tonic triad pitches are circled in Figure 6.24.

Figure 6.24

Corelli: Concerto Grosso in G Minor, op. 6, no. 8, II: Allegro, mm. 1–7.

4. Scale pitches $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ often conclude those phrases that end with the tonic pitch. The chorale melody in Figure 6.25 is a simple example of scale degrees $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ completing a phrase.

Figure 6.25

"Christ lag in Todesbanden" ("Christ Lay in the Bonds of Death"), mm. 1–2.
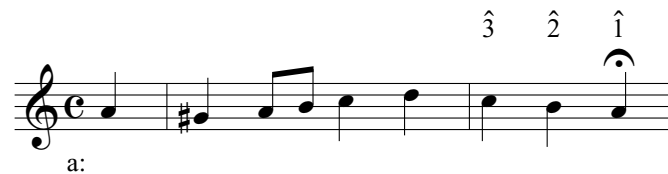
Figure 6.26 does not end with scale degrees $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ because the phrase concludes with a half cadence—the final pitch, F, is a part of the V chord but not a part of the I chord that would be necessary for a perfect authentic cadence.

Figure 6.26

Beethoven: Symphony no. 3 in E-flat Major ("Eroica"), op. 55, IV: Finale, mm. 76–83.

In Figure 6.27 the $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ progression is distributed over two phrases, a fairly common event. The first phrase ends before it reaches the tonic, then the second phrase repeats the $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ progression before concluding on the tonic.

Figure 6.27

Bach: "Aus meines Herzens Grunde" ("From the Depths of My Heart"), BWV 269, mm. 1–7.

History

The idea of the four-bar phrase, so common in the mid- to late-seventeenth century, developed gradually during the late Renaissance period. Although examples of fairly strict phrasing can be found, Figure 6.28 is representative of the period. The phrase endings occur in measures 2, 6, and 8—far from the balanced and regular phrase structure of later periods.

Figure 6.28

Morley: "Nancie" from *The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book,* mm. 1–8.

The development of phrase and period construction advanced rapidly during the years 1600 to 1675, and by the latter half of the baroque period, phrase structure was quite regular. Figure 6.29 illustrates contrasting period construction.

Figure 6.29

Purcell: "Chaconne" from *King Arthur,* Z. 628, mm. 81–88.

The classical period, represented by the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, is perhaps the culmination of formal phrase construction. Many of the examples in this chapter were drawn from music of this period.

Although the highly formal style of the classical period began to fade from 1800 to about 1830, the romantic period maintained the basic elements of phrase and period construction.

As functional harmony and strict key-oriented tonality gradually diminished in importance with the onset of post-romanticism and impressionism, so did the earlier ideas concerning phrase relationships. Nevertheless, we can still detect phrase and period construction in the works of composers of this period.

In the wide range of new musical styles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the musical phrase, although stylistically much changed from its progenitors of the baroque period, is still a dominant influence in music.

Phrase construction in American popular music is influenced by the phrase lengths and organizational traditions established centuries ago. Note the strict four-bar phrases in Figure 6.30, a song from the 1950s that has remained popular for decades.

Figure 6.30

John R. Cash: "I Walk the Line," Verse 1.

Jazz, up to about 1945, had regular phrase structures, but with the rise of Charlie Parker and other noted improvisers of that period, irregular and unbalanced phrases become more fashionable.