CHAPTER 7

Texture and Textural Reduction

TOPICS

Texture
Density
Range
Monophonic Texture
Polyphonic Texture
Homophonic Texture
Homorhythmic Texture
Primary Melody (PM)
Secondary Melody (SM)
Parallel Supporting Melody (PSM)
Static Support (SS)
Harmonic and Rhythmic Support (HRS)
Harmonic Support (HS)
Rhythmic Support (RS)
Textural Reduction

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

The sound of music is the direct result of the instruments and voices the composer employs and the way they are combined. Instruments and voices are like primary colors blended together to create the many hues that give music its beautiful surface. Although a detailed study of the characteristics and properties of instruments goes beyond the scope of this book, it is important for you to understand certain fundamental facts about sound and texture.

Texture

The term *texture* refers to the way the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic materials are woven together in a composition. It is a general term that is often used rather loosely to describe the vertical aspects of music. Since changes of texture often mark formal divisions in music and textural matters often complicate harmonic analysis, it is important that we deal with texture in a more specific way. Texture is often described in terms of density and range. Although these are good descriptive terms, they are less useful analytically than the more precise description of texture types that you will learn in this chapter.

Density

The *density* of texture is often described as "thick," consisting of many voices or parts, and "thin," consisting of few voices. An example of thin texture is shown in Figure 7.1, and you will find an example of thick texture in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.1

Haydn: Sonata in G Major, Hob. XVI:11, III, mm. 25–29.

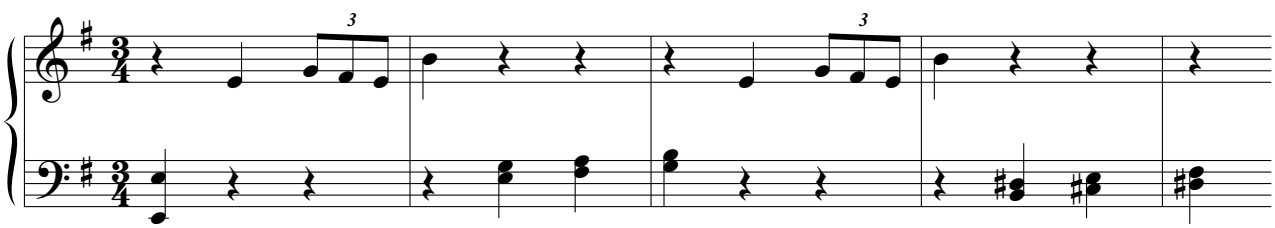
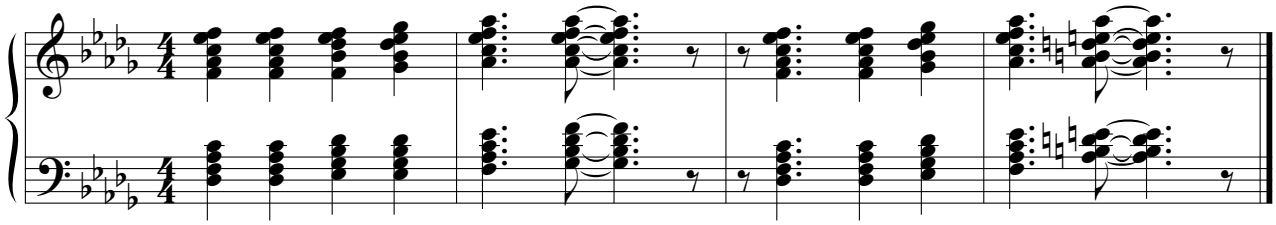


Figure 7.2

Billy Taylor: *Taylor Made Piano*, p. 158, Example B.



Range

The *range* of a texture is often described as "wide" or "narrow," depending on the interval between the lowest and highest tones. Wide range is shown in Figure 7.3. Narrow range is shown in Figure 7.4.

Figure 7.3

Berlioz: Agnus Dei from *Grande messe des morts* (Requiem), op. 5, no. 10, mm. 69–76.

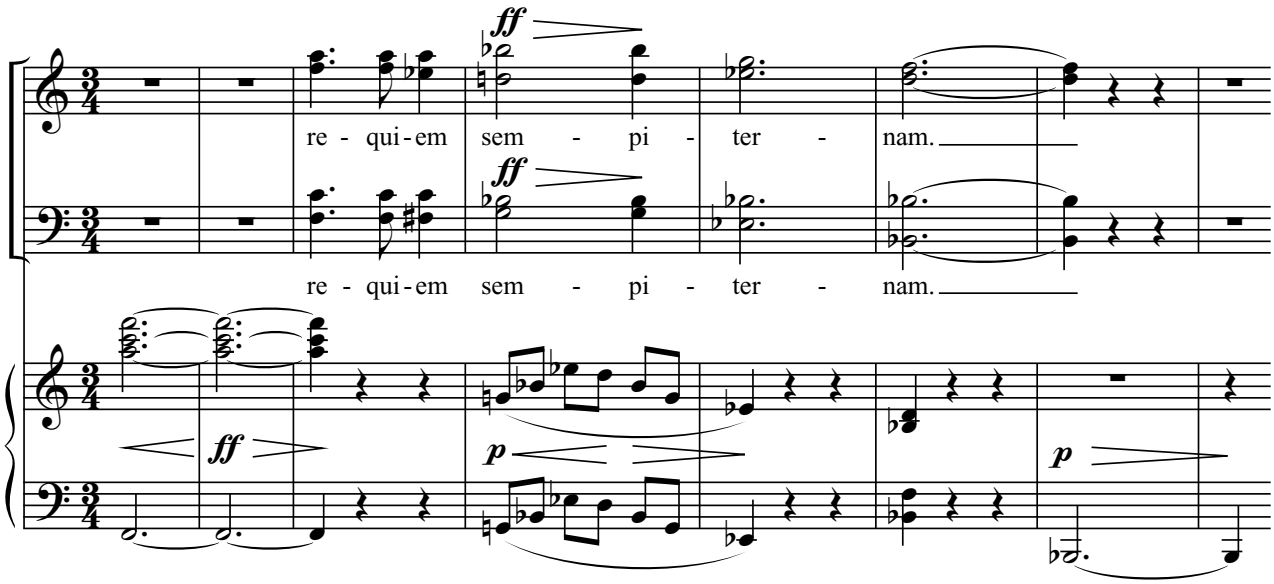
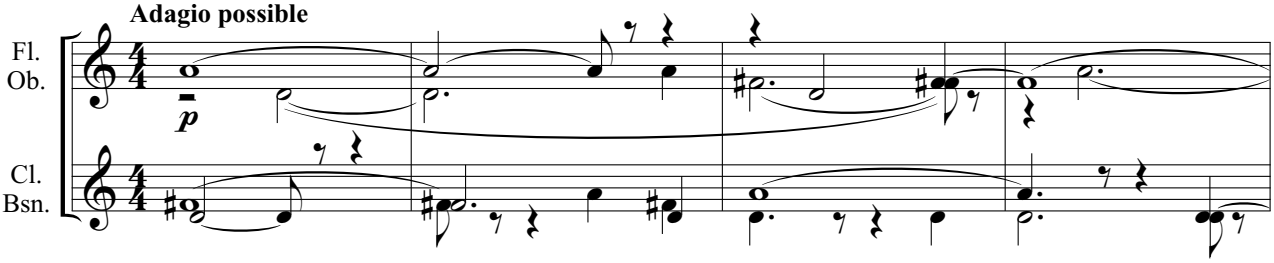


Figure 7.4

Elliott Carter: Eight Etudes and a Fantasy for Woodwind Quartet, III, mm. 1–4.



Texture Types

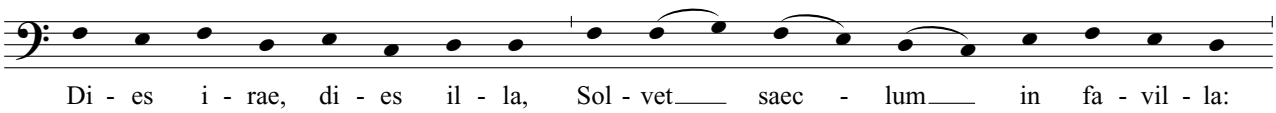
Although density and range are usually described in relative terms, the description of texture type is much more precise. A number of texture types occur from time to time, but the most common are monophonic, polyphonic, homophonic, and homorhythmic.

Monophonic Texture

Monophonic texture is the simplest texture type in music, consisting of a single melodic line, as shown in Figure 7.5.

Figure 7.5

Sequence: "Dies Irae."



Monophonic textures can be expanded by doubling in octaves or at other intervals. Octave doubling occurs in Figure 7.6, and doubling at other intervals, also called parallelism, is shown in Figure 7.7.

Figure 7.6

Sousa: *Washington Post March*, mm. 1–5.

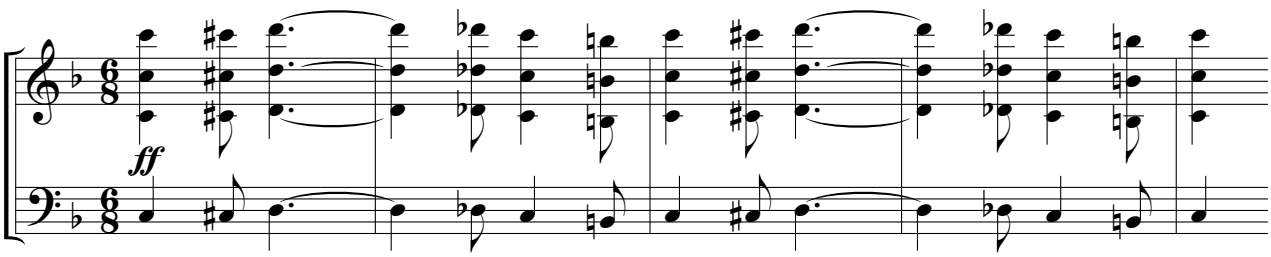
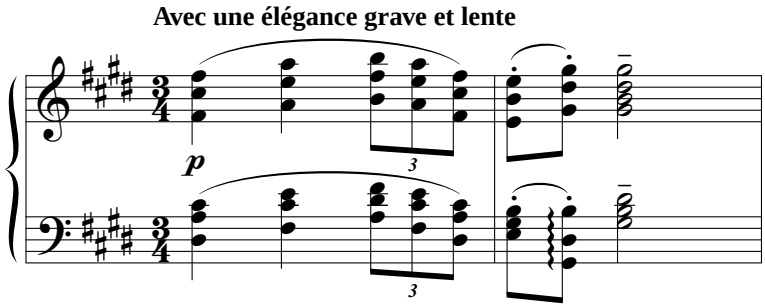


Figure 7.7

Debussy: Sarabande from *Pour le Piano* (For the Piano), mm. 1–2.



Polyphonic Texture

Polyphonic textures consist of two or more lines moving independently or in imitation with each other. Figure 7.8 shows two independent lines. Figure 7.9 shows two lines in imitation.

Figure 7.8

Bach: Invention no. 5 in E-flat Major, BWV 776, mm. 1–2.

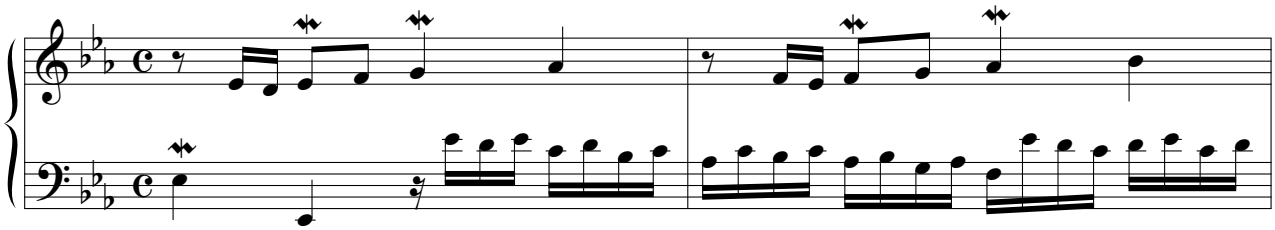
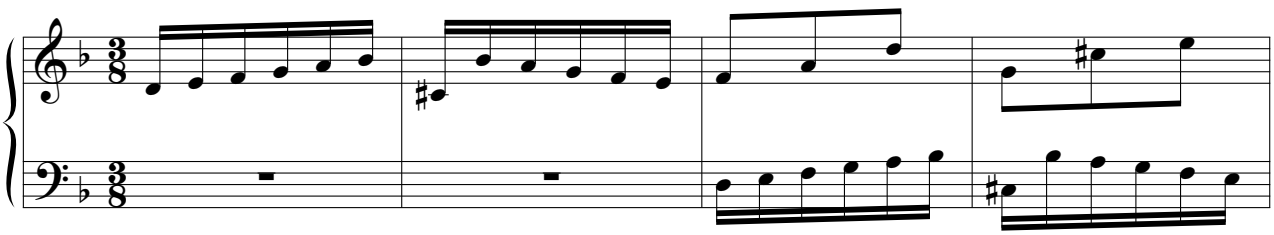


Figure 7.9

Bach: Invention no. 4 in D Minor, BWV 775, mm. 1–4.



The various lines may be similar or contrasting in character. Lines with similar rhythmic values and contour appear in Figure 7.10. Lines with contrasting rhythmic values and contour appear in Figure 7.11.

Figure 7.10

Josquin des Prez: *Tu Solus Qui Facis Mirabilia* (You Alone Perform Such Wonders), mm. 35–38.

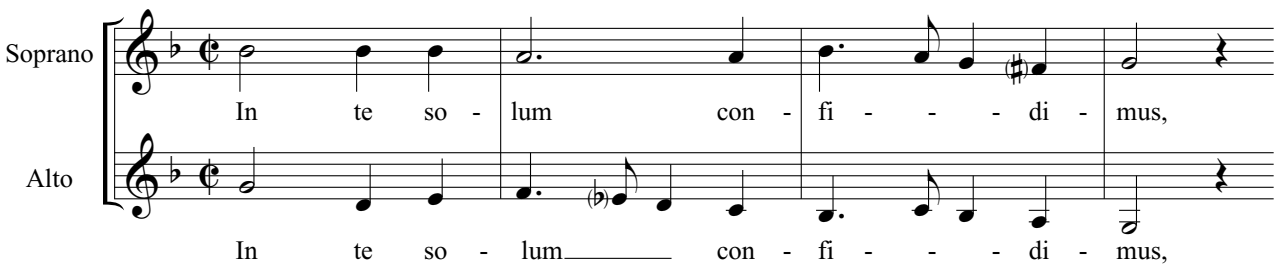
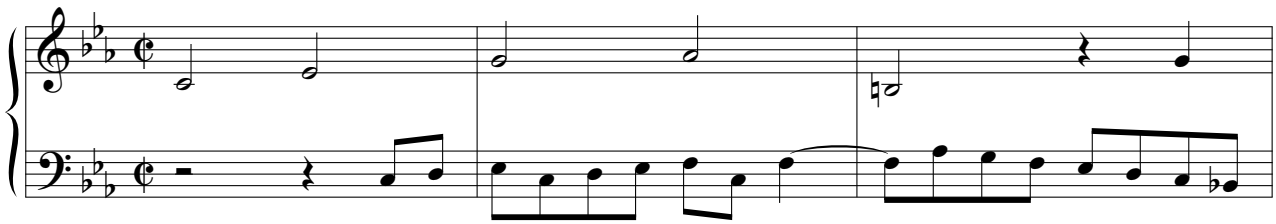


Figure 7.11

Bach: *Fuga Canonica* from *The Musical Offering*, BWV 1079, mm. 1–3.

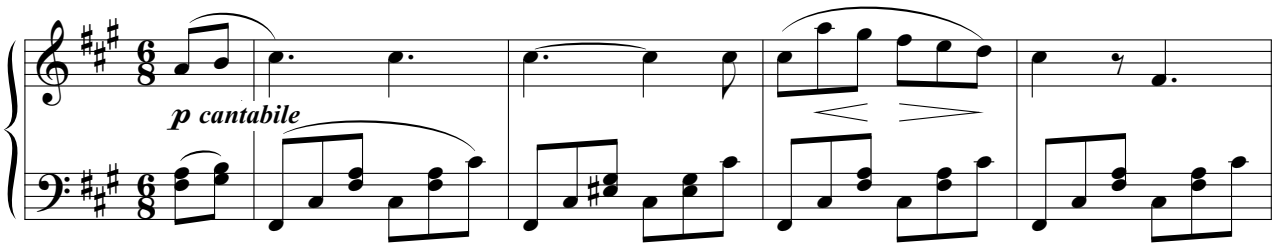


Homophonic Texture

The most common texture in Western music is *homophonic texture*, which is made up of a melody and an accompaniment. The accompaniment provides rhythmic and harmonic support for the melody.

Figure 7.12

Mendelssohn: *Songs Without Words* op. 30, no. 6, mm. 7–10.



The rhythmic and harmonic supporting functions may be combined in the same material, or separate parts may be assigned to each function. Rhythmic and harmonic support are combined in Figure 7.13. Separate harmonic support is shown in Figure 7.14.

Figure 7.13

Schumann: "Ich Grolle Nicht" ("I Bear No Grudge") from *Dichterliebe*, op. 48, no. 7, mm. 1–4.

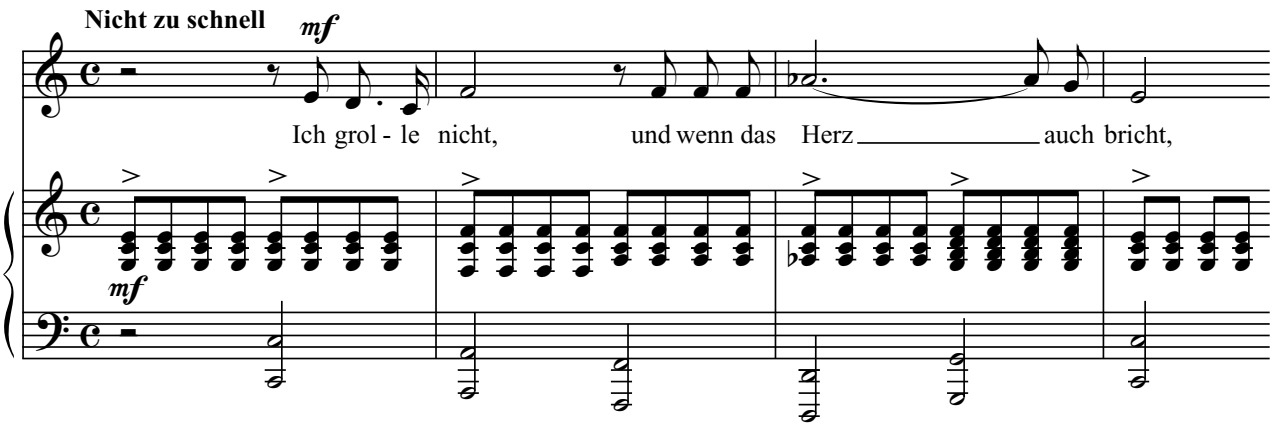
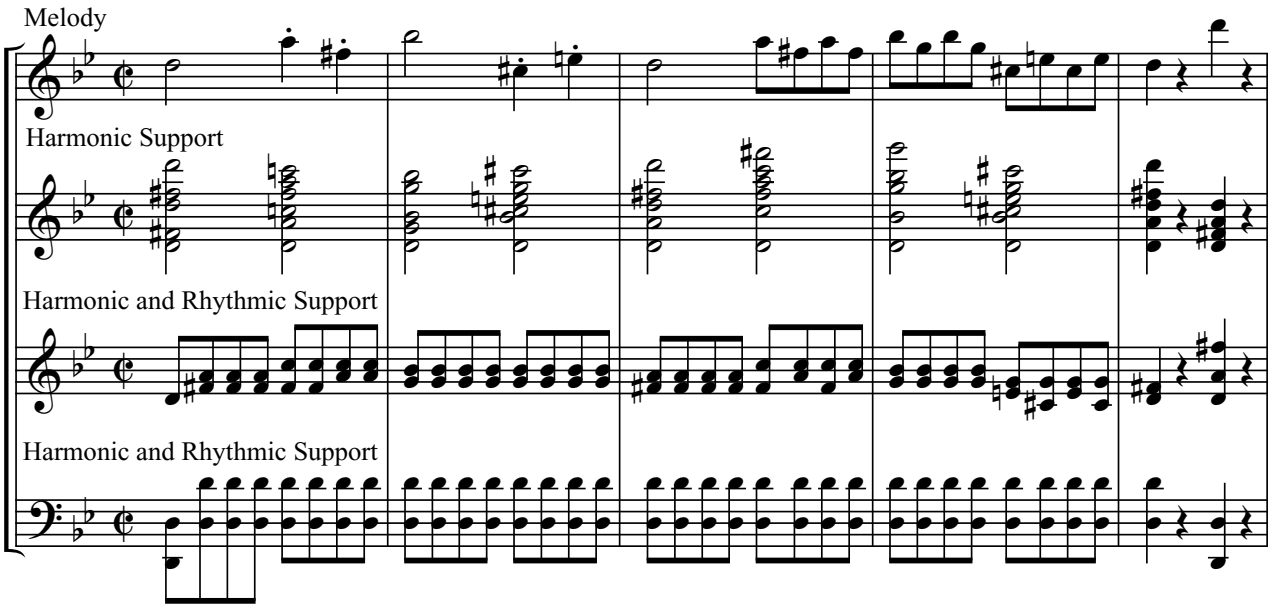


Figure 7.14

Mozart: Symphony no. 40 in G Minor, K. 550, I: Molto Allegro, mm. 221–225.

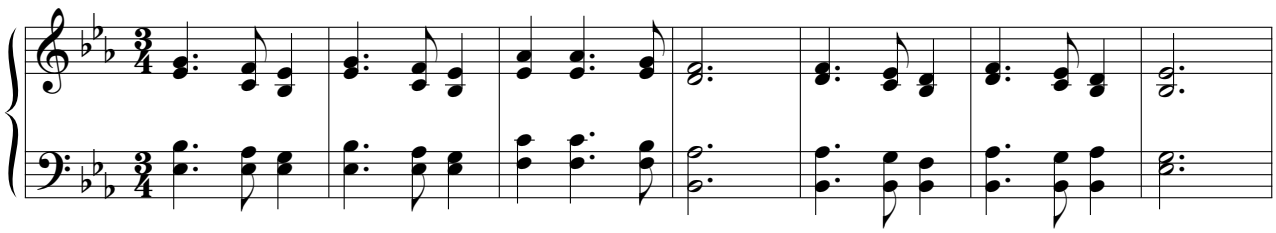


Homorhythmic Texture

Homorhythmic texture is a texture with similar rhythmic material in all parts. This texture is often referred to as "hymn style," "chordal homophony," or "chordal texture," depending on the presence or absence of melodic material (Figure 7.15).

Figure 7.15

Owens: "Freely, Freely," mm. 26–32.



History

During each period in the history of music, composers employed distinctive textural features. We can generally state that a distinguishing texture type predominates each era.

The characteristic texture type of the Renaissance period is polyphonic texture. Since harmony was largely described in terms of the relationship of voices, it is natural that a texture of multiple voices would be the result. Renaissance composers placed great value on the independence of lines, although they used imitation at the beginning of most phrases. The textures were of moderate range and seldom very dense (see Josquin des Prez: *Tu Solus Qui Facis Mirabilia*, page 148).

The rise of the figured-bass concept, which is basically an accompaniment technique, signaled the beginning of interest in homophonic texture in the baroque period. Both poly-

phonic and homophonic textures were used, but seldom in the same composition or movement. Textures in the baroque period were generally denser than those of the Renaissance period, and the rise of instrumental music allowed for wider ranges (see Bach: Invention no. 4 and Invention no. 5, page 148).

During the classical period, homophony became the standard texture, and composers engaged in much greater contrast of range and density than in the baroque period (see Mozart: Symphony in G minor, page 150).

The romantic period maintained the predominance of homophonic texture, but with increased range and density (see Schumann: "Ich grolle nicht" from *Dichterliebe*, page 149). Textures in the romantic period became more complex and often shifted suddenly for emotional effect (see Berlioz: "Agnus Dei," from *Grande messe des morts*, page 146).

Composers of the post-romantic period generally maintained the textures that the romantic period composers used, but with the impressionists, texture took on new significance. Many impressionist works depended heavily on texture for their effect (see Debussy: Sarabande from *Pour le Piano*, page 147). Typical texture types of the impressionistic period are expanded monophonic texture (parallelism) and homophonic texture.

In the twentieth century, no "typical" texture type has prevailed. Constant texture change characterizes many styles. Composers who choose to imitate the styles of previous periods (in neoclassicism, for example) typically imitate the textures as well. In other styles, the fabric of music explodes into small fragments and textural continuity breaks down.

Popular music is nearly all homophonic texture. Much of jazz is also homophonic (see Billy Taylor: *Taylor Made Piano*, page 146). However, the simultaneous improvisations of some jazz musicians creates true polyphony, with considerable independence of line.

APPLICATIONS

You can use both aural and visual assessments to identify texture types. The analysis and reduction of individual elements provide the means for evaluating textures accurately.

Analysis of Texture

The analysis of texture involves a process of recognizing and labeling the primary elements of the texture, as well as the identification of texture type. The textural elements are primary melody (PM), secondary melody (SM), parallel supporting melody (PSM), static support (SS), harmonic support (HS), rhythmic support (RS), and harmonic and rhythmic support (HRS).

Primary Melody (PM)

Primary melodies (PM) are the most important lines in a musical texture. In homophonic textures, there is usually only one primary melody (Figure 7.16), but in polyphonic textures, where the lines are of equal importance, there may be several primary melodies (Figure 7.17).

Figure 7.16

Mendelssohn: *Songs Without Words* op. 30, no. 6, mm. 7–10.

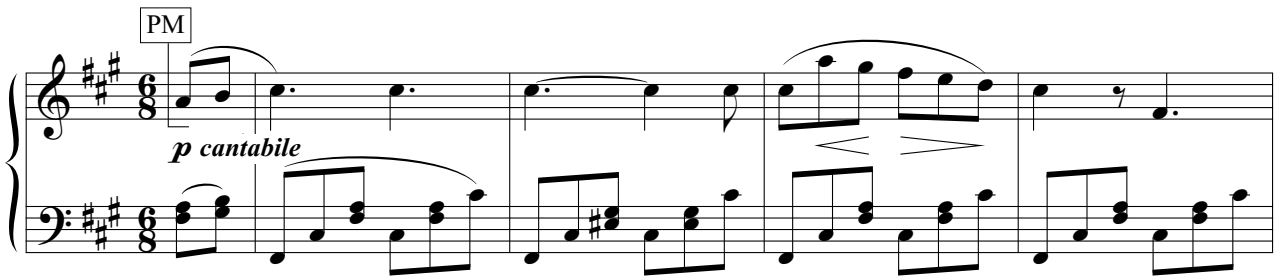
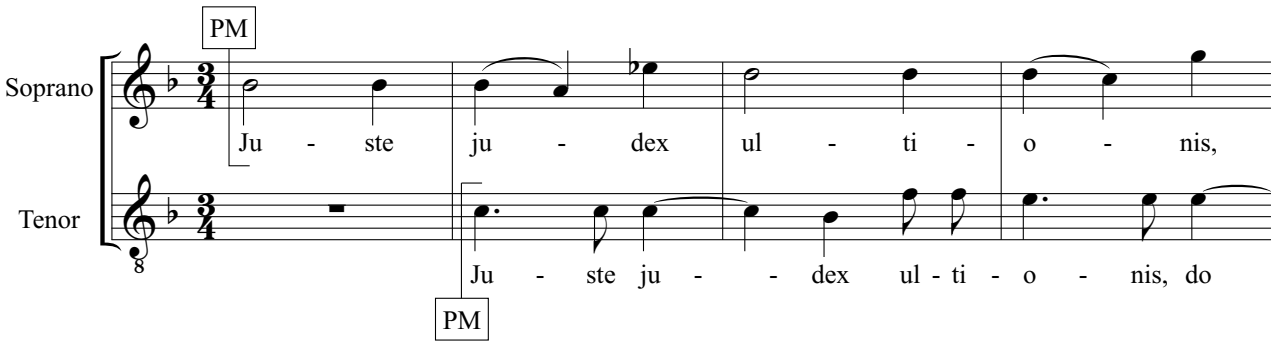


Figure 7.17

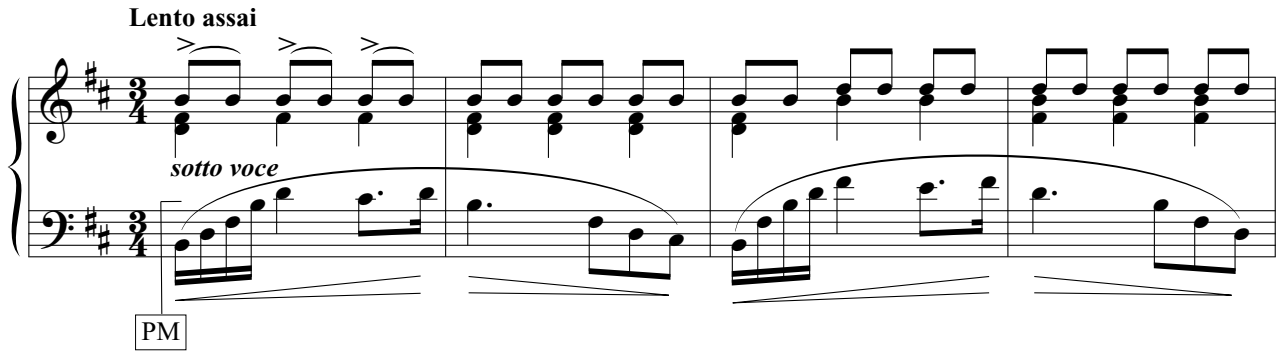
Mozart: *Recordare* from Requiem in D Minor, K. 626, mm. 54–57.



Although the primary melody frequently occurs as the highest part in a composition, it can reside in other positions. The primary melody in Figure 7.18 appears as the lowest-sounding voice.

Figure 7.18

Chopin: Prelude no. 6 in B Minor, op. 28, mm. 1–4.

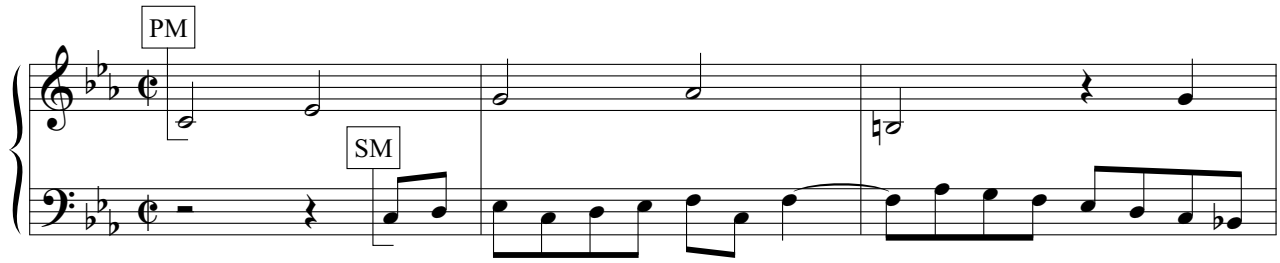


Secondary Melody (SM)

Other melodic lines that are not equal in significance to the primary melody are called *secondary melodies (SM)*.

Figure 7.19

Bach: *Fuga Canonica* from *The Musical Offering*, BWV 1079, mm. 1–3.



The process of deciding whether a melody is primary or secondary requires musical judgment, and there are differences of opinion. Performers indicate their understanding of the relative importance of melodies by how they choose to balance the parts or by the lines they choose to bring out. Thus the decision about primary and secondary melody is crucial to music interpretation.

Parallel Supporting Melody (PSM)

Parallel supporting melodies (PSM) are melodies that are similar in contour to a primary melody (Figure 7.20) or secondary melody (Figure 7.21). They often maintain a constant interval relationship with the melody they support.

Figure 7.20

Debussy: Sarabande from *Pour le Piano* (For the Piano), mm. 1–2.

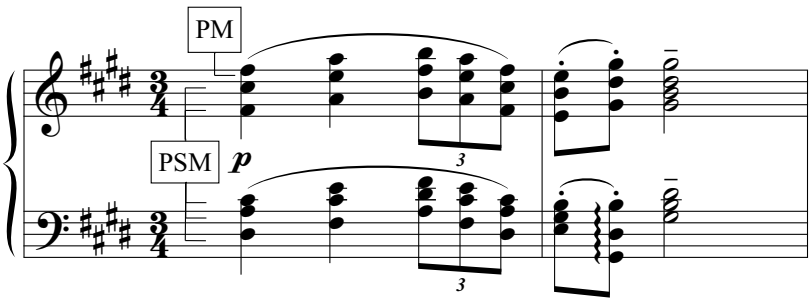
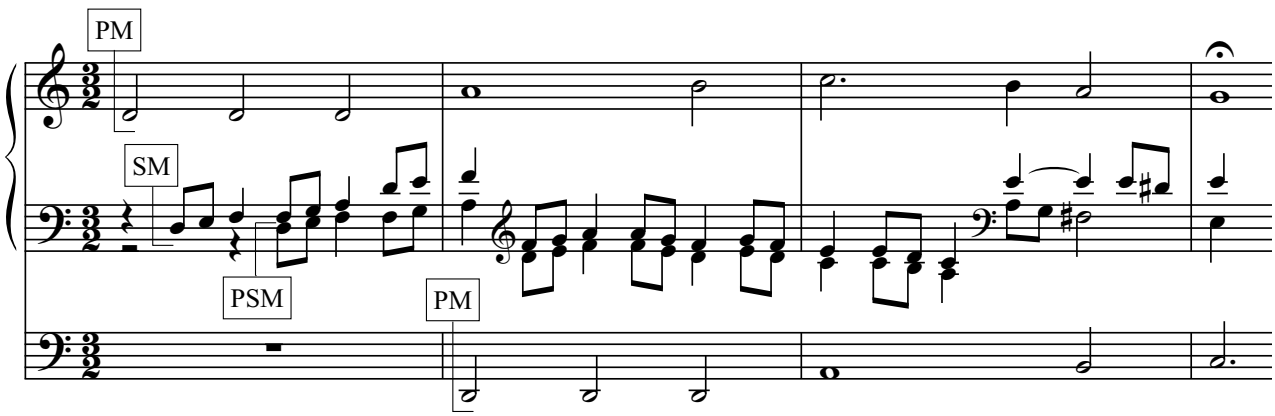


Figure 7.21

Bach: Chorale Prelude on "Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag" from *Orgelbüchlein*, BWV 629, mm. 1–4.



Static Support (SS)

Static supporting (SS) parts are of two types: (1) sustained tones or chords, which are often pedal tones (Figure 7.22), and (2) repeated melodic and rhythmic figures or ostinati (Figure 7.23).

Figure 7.22

Bach: Fugue no. 2 in C Minor from *The Well-Tempered Clavier,* Book I, BWV 847, mm. 29–31.

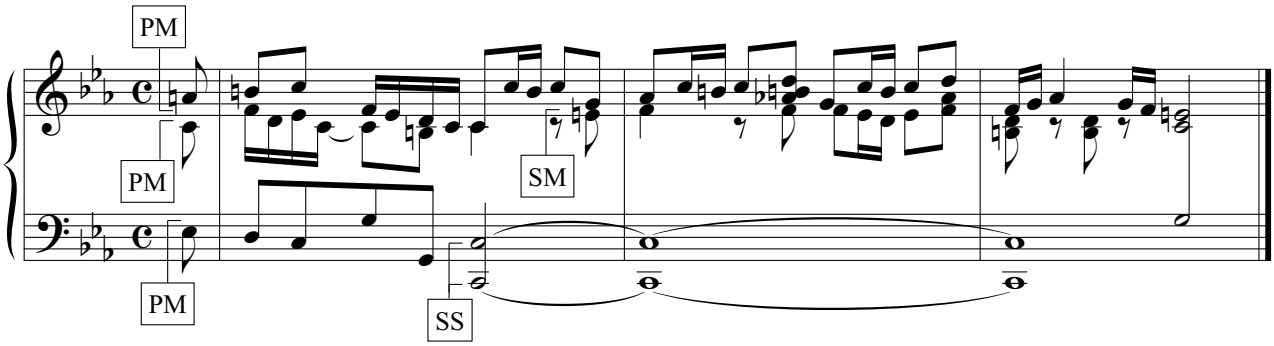
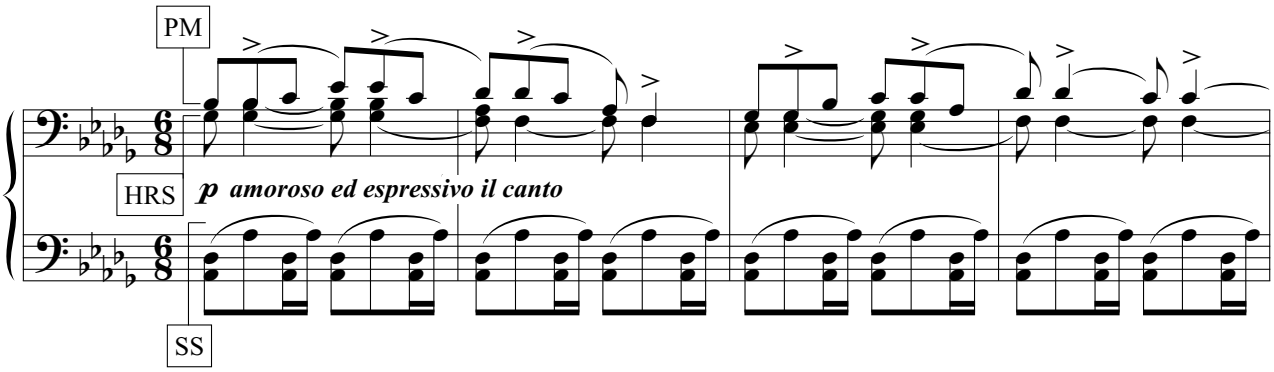


Figure 7.23

Borodin: *Serenade* from *Petite Suite*, mm. 7–10.



Harmonic and Rhythmic Support (HRS)

As we discussed in the definition of homophonic texture, harmonic and rhythmic elements are often combined in the same textural elements. Such elements are labeled as *harmonic and rhythmic support (HRS)*. If these support functions are separated, they are labeled as *harmonic support (HS)* or *rhythmic support (RS)* as follows.

Figure 7.24

Mendelssohn: *Songs Without Words* op. 30, no. 6, mm. 7–10.

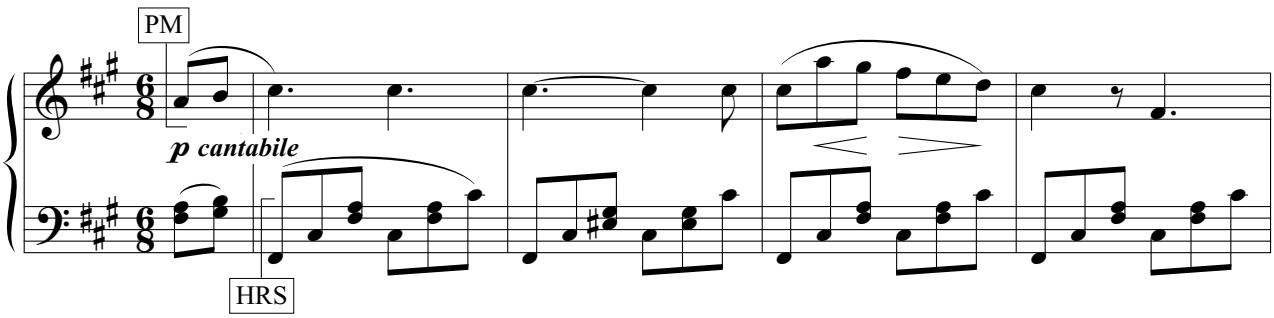
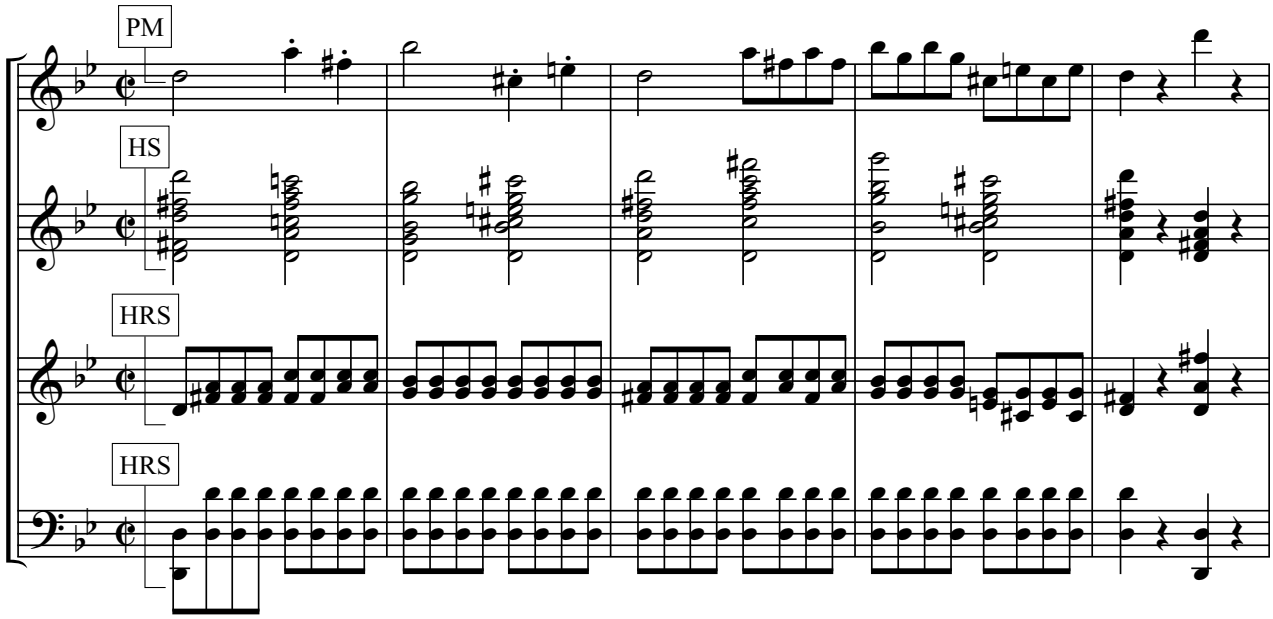


Figure 7.25

Mozart: Symphony no. 40 in G Minor, K. 550, I: Molto Allegro, mm. 221–225.

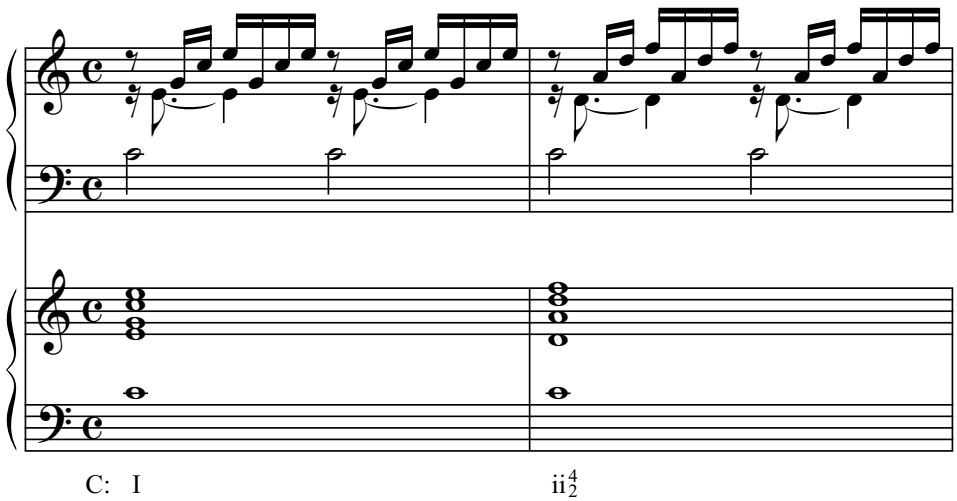


Textural Reduction

When harmonic and rhythmic support functions are combined, it is often difficult to gain a clear understanding of the harmony. However, you can resolve the problem by removing the rhythmic materials from the texture and writing the result as block chords. The following example has been reduced to clarify the harmony and embedded voice leading (see Chapter 9).

Figure 7.26

Bach: Prelude no. 1 in C Major from *The Well-Tempered Clavier,* Book I, BWV 846, mm. 1–2.

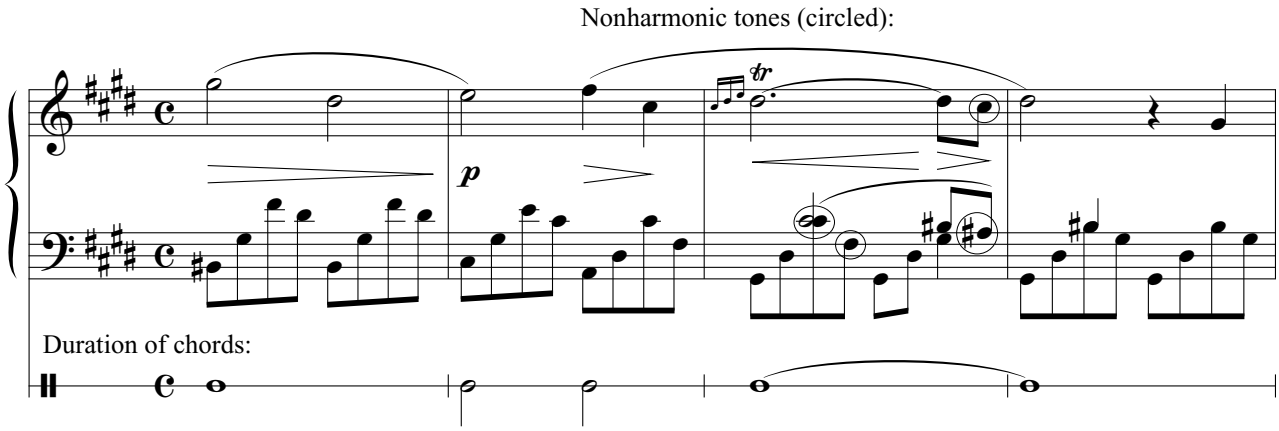


With practice you will be able to see the chords in accompaniment textures without writing reductions, but this skill can be developed and improved by practice in writing

block chords. To write a reduction, first determine the duration of each chord by playing or listening to the example in Figure 7.27. Since nonharmonic tones may appear within accompaniment figures, you will need to be alert for tones that do not seem to be part of the surrounding harmony.

Figure 7.27

Chopin: Nocturne in C-sharp Minor, op. post., mm. 9–12.



Now write the pitches of the chords in the order they appear using note values to show the duration of each chord. Maintain the original register of the chord pitches even though the rhythmic elements may have changed to reflect the harmonic rhythm.

Figure 7.28

Chopin: Nocturne in C-sharp Minor, op. post., mm. 9–12.