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Melodic Design (pitch-focus melody)

Following are various important aspects of melody with an attempt at categorization. The questions are meant to help you think through issues relating to that aspect. There are no right or wrong answers.

Function of note:

Goal

Beginning or Ending

Motion

Ornamental (inflection)

Does this note represent an important point of arrival?

Does it move me toward a goal?

Does it only act as decoration to more important notes?

Types of pitch mvt:

Step

Skip

Register change

What proportion of your melody moves by step? By skip?

Are ascending or descending lines sometimes graced with interruptions?

If the register changes, are you leaving any unfinished business to resume later?

Are long series of steps compensated by proportionally-weighted skips?

Pitch class mvt:

Chromatic

Irregular step

Thirds (augmented steps)

Larger

What harmonic outlines are implied by the melody alone?

Duration:

Very short to very long

Are the durations mostly the same length, or do they differ quite a bit?

Does the duration support the function and context of the note?

Does your overall rhythmic treatment vary at any time during the melodic span?

Dynamic

Very soft to very loud

How does the note's function change with the dynamic?

Relationship to Harmony:

Consonant

Diatonic (may be stagnant)

Overtone (may be “dissonant” but without the need of resolution)

Dissonant

Chromatic (may need resolution)

Overtone (may be “consonant” but with potential for resolution)

What is the balance between consonance and dissonance?

What is the range of dissonance and/or consonance?

Are dissonances and consonances used to move the melody and/or harmony forward?

Resolutions:

Change of Harmony

Change of Melodic Pitch

Step

Skip

Register Change

No resolution

So any one pitch will be some combination of the above. For example, a note may be:

A soft dissonant-overtone goal pitch with very long duration approached by skip and resolved by register change.

A consonant motion pitch approached and left by step with medium-short duration.

When writing a melody, explore the relationship of any given note to all of the above parameters. Changing one parameter may have a drastic (and hopefully pleasing) effect on the overall melody.

Other considerations:

Contour: Up, down, arch, inverted arch

Both on phrase level and on multi-phrase level

How does harmony reinforce or undercut the goal orientation of the melody?