

Musical analysis, lesson 2: The Phrase and Its Content

The content of the phrase, its meter, melody line, rhythmic structure, and tempo all unite to establish the character or individuality of the music. And in the combination produced by these factors the music attains its relative degree of originality.

The Meter establishes the pulse–succession, marked off by accents. The Melody is the line of beauty, the distinctive tune. The Rhythm is the relative tone lengths that give the melody its characteristic motion; and finally, the Tempo is the degree of speed at which the music moves. Even a portion of melody as short as a phrase must exhibit these factors so completely that the phrase itself makes a definite impression. Let us examine closely a phrase of the Mozart Theme in A (KV 331):

Mozart, KV 331, theme



We see at once that the rhythm of the first measure is exactly repeated in the second:



Figure 2

The third and fourth measures appear to be different. But we can take the rhythmic figure of the first measure and subdivide it into two portions



Figure 3

This second portion is the basis of measures three and four.

Such a group as in Figure 2 is generally referred to as a Motive. (Motive from movere [Latin], meaning to move.)

A Motive is a short figure so constructed rhythmically that it is capable of various alterations that are practical as melodic tendency or progression. Frequently a motive is long enough (as in the case under our observation) to be divided. The divisions are then referred to as Motive Members. Thus: the complete motive is shown in Figure 2, the Motive Members in Figure 3

A motive may be varied in many ways in its service as the basis of a phrase or of a longer group.

1. It may be repeated at a higher or lower scale degree:



Figure 4

2. It may be exactly repeated:



Figure 5

3. Its intervals may be expanded:



Figure 6

4. or contracted:



Figure 7

5. The motive may be inverted (as to direction):



Figure 8

6. The note values may be augmented or decreased:



Figure 9

The student should take a simple motive and by various applications of it, compose melodies, always aiming to preserve the original figure (wholly or in part) and to produce a pleasing rhythmical result. By way of illustration, the above quoted motif from Mozart may be thus expressed as a phrase:



Figure 10

The following motives may be taken for practice, together with others of the student's own invention:



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

Questions

Study the Poor Orphan from Robert Schumann and answer the questions below.

1 *Langsam.* **The Poor Orphan**

The image displays the first 26 measures of the piano piece 'The Poor Orphan' by Robert Schumann. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time. It is divided into five systems of music. The first system (measures 1-5) is marked 'Langsam.' and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 6-11) is marked 'Langsamer.' and features a more complex texture with sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand. The third system (measures 12-18) is marked 'Im Tempo.' and shows a return to a more rhythmic, eighth-note pattern. The fourth system (measures 19-25) is marked 'Langsamer.' and 'Im Tempo.', indicating a change in tempo and dynamics. The fifth system (measures 26) concludes the piece with a final cadence.

1. What is the key?
2. The length of the first phrase?
3. How many phrases constitute the entire piece?
4. Which phrases are more or less alike?
5. How long is the first complete motive, of the upper voice?
6. Describe all derivations of the motive.
7. What cadence form is found at the fourth measure? At the eighth?
8. Name the key in measure twelve.
9. Is the title a definite image, or the suggestion of a mood ?

This lesson is a more or less modification of Tapper's First Year Analysis –Musical Form– and has been typeset with MC Musiceditor 6.0.7
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