CHAPTER

1 Melody: Musical Line

"It is the melody which is the charm of music, and it is that which is most difficult to produce. The invention of a fine melody is a work of genius."

—Joseph Haydn

We tend to characterize any musical sound as one that has a perceivable and measurable **pitch**, determined by its **frequency** (number of vibrations per second). This pitch depends on the length or size of a vibrating object. For example, a short string vibrates faster (has a higher frequency) than a long string (which has a lower frequency). This is why a violin sounds higher than a cello: its strings are shorter overall. When a musician places a finger on the string of a violin or cello, the vibrating length of the string is shortened, and the pitch/frequency changes accordingly.

KEY POINTS

- A **melody** is the tune in music.
- Each melody is unique in **contour** (how it moves up and down) and in **range**, or span of pitches.
- An **interval** is the distance between any two pitches. A melody that moves in small, connected intervals is **conjunct**, while one that moves by leaps is **disjunct**.
- The units that make up a melody are **phrases**; phrases end in resting places called **cadences**.
- A melody may be accompanied by a secondary melody, or a **countermelody**.

In the Western tradition, we represent each pitch with a symbol called a **note**, that's placed on a **staff** (five parallel lines; see Appendix I for more on notation). This symbol designates the frequency and the **duration**, or length of time, of the pitch. A pitch also has a certain **volume** (loudness or softness), and a distinct quality known as **tone color**, or **timbre**; this last quality distinguishes voices from instruments, a trumpet from a clarinet.

This apartment building in Vejle, Denmark, called The Wave, was designed by architect **Henning Larsen** to blend in with the surrounding environment of hills and a fjord. Its wavelike shape resembles that heard in many melodies.

A **melody** is a succession of single pitches that we hear as a recognizable whole. We relate to the pitches of a melody in the same way we hear the words of a sentence—not singly but as an entire cohesive thought. We know a good melody when we hear one, and we recognize its power to move us, as do most musical cultures of the world.

Each melody goes up and down in its own distinct way, with one pitch being higher or lower than another; its **range** is the distance between the lowest and highest notes. This span can be very narrow, as in an easy children's song, or very wide, as in some melodies played on an instrument. Although this distance can be measured in the number of notes, we will describe range in approximate terms—narrow, medium, or wide. The **contour** of a melody is its overall shape as it turns upward or downward or remains static. You can visualize a melody as a line graph, resulting in an ascending or descending line, an arch, or a wave (see "Melodic Examples" below).

The distance between any two pitches is called an **interval**. Melodies that move principally by small intervals in a joined, connected manner (like *Joy to the World*) are called **conjunct**, while those that move in larger, disconnected intervals (like *The Star-Spangled Banner*) are described as **disjunct**. A tune's movement need not necessarily remain the same throughout: it may, for example, begin with a small range and conjunct motion and, as it develops, expand its range and become more disjunct.

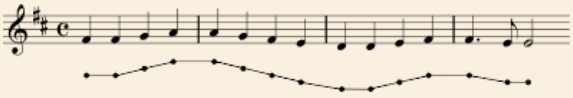
THE STRUCTURE OF MELODY

The component units of a melody are like parts of a sentence. A **phrase** in music, as in language, is a unit of meaning within a larger structure. The phrase ends in a resting place, or **cadence**, which punctuates the music in the same way that a comma or period punctuates a sentence. The cadence may be inconclusive, leaving the impression that more is to come, or it may sound final, giving you the sense that the melody has reached the end. The cadence is where a singer or instrumentalist pauses to draw a breath.

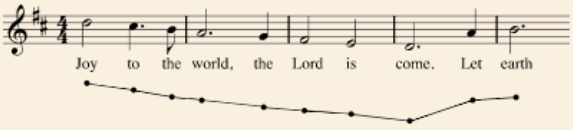
If the melody has words, the text lines and the musical phrases will usually coincide. Consider the well-known hymn *Amazing Grace* (p. 10). Its four phrases, both the text and the music, are of equal length, and the **rhyme scheme** of the text (the way the last syllables in each line rhyme) is a-b-a-b. The first three cadences (at the end of each of the first three phrases) are inconclusive, or incomplete; notice the upward inflection like a question at the end of phrase 2. Phrase 4, with its final downward motion, provides the answer; it gives you a sense of closure.

Melodic Examples

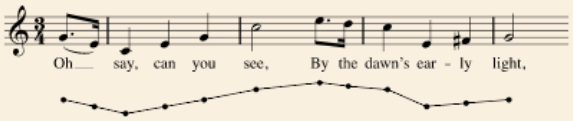
"Ode to Joy" (Beethoven, Symphony No. 9)
Range: narrow (5-note span)
Contour: wavelike
Movement: conjunct



Joy to the World (Christmas carol)
Range: medium (8-note span)
Contour: descending
Movement: conjunct, then a leap

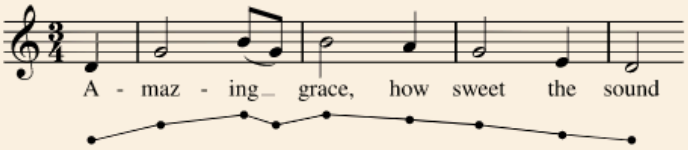


The Star-Spangled Banner (U.S. national anthem)
Range: wide (10-note span)
Contour: wavelike
Movement: disjunct (many wide leaps)

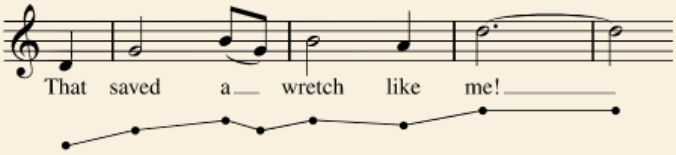


Melodic Phrases and Cadences

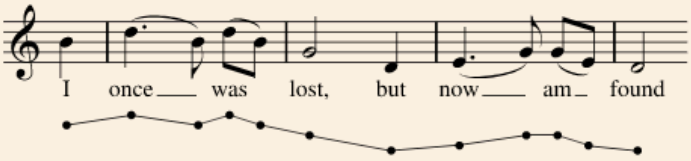
Amazing Grace (traditional hymn)
Four text phrases = four musical phrases
Final cadence at end of verse



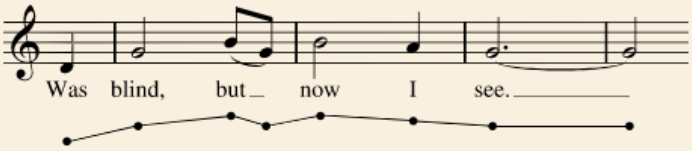
Phrase 1
(incomplete, turns downward)



Phrase 2
(incomplete, upward inflection)



Phrase 3
(incomplete, turns downward)



Phrase 4
(complete, sense of rest)

In order to maintain the listener's interest, a melody must be shaped carefully, either by the composer or by the performer who invents it on the spot. What makes a striking effect is the **climax**, the high point in a melodic line, which usually represents a peak in intensity as well as in range. Sing through, or listen to, *The Star-Spangled Banner* and note its climax in the last stirring phrase, when the line rises to the words "O'er the land of the free."

More complex music can feature several simultaneous melodies. Sometimes the relative importance of one over the other is clear, and the added tune is called a **countermelody** (literally, "against a melody"). You may have heard the high-range countermelody played by the piccolos in the famous *Stars and Stripes Forever* march by John Philip Sousa (Chapter 45). In other styles, each melodic line is of seemingly equal importance. For much of the music we will study, melody is the most basic element of communication between the composer or performer and the listener. It's what we remember, what we whistle and hum.

CHAPTER

2 Rhythm and Meter: Musical Time

"I got rhythm, I got music …"

—Ira Gershwin (1896–1983)

Music is propelled forward by **rhythm**, the movement of music in time. Each individual note has a length, or duration—some long and some short. The basic unit of rhythm is the **beat**, a regular pulse that divides time into equal segments. Some beats are stronger than others; we perceive these as **accented** beats. In much of Western music, these strong beats occur at regular intervals—every other beat, every third beat, every fourth, and so on—and thus we hear groupings of two, three, or four. These organizing patterns are called **meters** and, in notation, are marked off in **measures** (or **bars**). Each measure contains a fixed number of beats, and the first beat in a measure usually receives the strongest accent. Measures are designated with **measure (bar) lines**, regular vertical lines through the staff (on which the music is notated; see Appendix I).

KEY POINTS

- **Rhythm** is what moves music forward in time.
- **Meter,** marked off in **measures** (or **bars**), organizes the **beats** (the basic units) in music.
- Measures often begin with a strong **downbeat**.
- **Simple meters**—duple, triple, and quadruple—are the most common; each beat is divided into two.
- **Compound meters** divide each beat into three rather than two.
- Rhythmic complexities occur with **offbeats, syncopation**, and **polyrhythm**.
- Some music is **nonmetric**, with an obscured pulse.

Meter organizes the flow of rhythm in music. In Western music, its patterns are simple, paralleling the alternating accents heard in poetry. Consider, for example, this well-known stanza by the American poet Robert Frost. Its meter alternates a strong beat with a weak one (this is iambic meter, da DUM, da DUM, da DUM, da DUM). A metrical reading of the poem will bring out the regular pattern of accented (′) and unaccented (¯) syllables:

The woods are love-ly, dark and deep.
But I have prom-is-es to keep,
And miles to go be-fore I sleep,
And miles to go be-fore I sleep.

In His Own Words

"Rhythm and motion, not the element of feeling, are the foundations of musical art."

—Igor Stravinsky

METRICAL PATTERNS

You will hear the regularly recurring patterns of two, three, or four beats in much of the music we will study. As in poetry, these patterns, or meters, depend on regular accents. The first accented beat of each pattern is known as a **downbeat**, referring to the downward stroke of a conductor's hand (see conducting patterns, p. 51). The most basic pattern, known as **duple meter**, alternates a strong downbeat with a weak beat: ONE two, ONE two; or, if you marched it, LEFT right, LEFT right.

The Gothic arches of the Doge's Palace in Venice clearly show duple subdivisions, much like simple meters in music.

Triple meter, another basic pattern, has three beats to a measure—one strong beat and two weak ones (ONE two three). This meter is traditionally associated with dances such as the waltz and the minuet.

Quadruple meter contains four beats to the measure, with a primary accent on the first beat and a secondary accent on the third. Although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish duple and quadruple meter, quadruple meter usually has a broader feeling.

In **simple meters** (simple duple, simple triple, and simple quadruple), the beat is divided into two (ONE-and, two-and; or ONE-and, two-and, three-and). However, in some patterns, the beat is divided into three; these are known as **compound meters**. The most common compound meter is **sextuple meter** (compound duple), which has six beats to the measure, or two main beats that each divides into three (ONE-and-a, TWO-and-a). Marked by a gently flowing effect, this pattern is often found in lullabies and nursery rhymes:

′ – – ′ – – ′ – – ′ – –
Lit-tle Boy Blue, come blow your horn, the
′ – – ′ – – ′ – – ′ – –
sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.

The examples on page 13 illustrate the four basic patterns. Not all pieces begin on a downbeat (beat 1). For example, *Greensleeves,* in sextuple meter, begins with an **upbeat** (beat 6). (Notice that the Frost poem given earlier is in duple meter and begins with an upbeat on "the.")

RHYTHMIC COMPLEXITIES

Composers have devised a number of ways to keep the recurrent accent from becoming monotonous. The most common technique is **syncopation**, a deliberate upsetting of the normal pattern of accents. Instead of falling on the strong beat of the measure, the accent is shifted to a weak beat, or **offbeat** (in between the stronger beats). Syncopation is heard in many kinds of music, and is particularly characteristic of the African American dance rhythms out of which jazz developed. The example opposite illustrates the technique.

Like meter in music, basic repeated patterns can be found in nature, such as in this close-up of a spiral leaf pattern.

Syncopation is only one technique that throws off the regular patterns. A composition may change meters during its course; certain twentieth-century pieces shift meters nearly every measure. Another technique is the simultaneous use of rhythmic patterns that conflict with the underlying beat, such as "two against three" or "three against four"—in a piano piece, for example, the left hand might play two notes to a beat, while the right hand plays three notes to the same beat. This is called **polyrhythm** ("many rhythms") and characterizes some early twentieth-century compositions as well as the music of several world cultures.

Examples of Meters

ˊ = primary accent ˘ = secondary accent ¯ = unaccented beat

Duple meter: ***Ah, vous dirai-je Maman*** (Mozart), same tune as ***Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star***

Accents: ˊ ¯ ˊ ¯ ˊ ¯ ˊ ¯
Twin- kle, twin- kle, lit- tle star
Meter: 1 2 | 1 2 | 1 2 | 1 2

Triple meter: ***America*** (patriotic song)

ˊ ¯ ¯ ˊ ¯ ¯
My coun- try 'tis of thee,
1 2 3 | 1 2 3

ˊ ¯ ¯ ˊ ¯ ¯
Sweet land of li- ber-ty.
1 2 3 | 1 2 3

Quadruple meter: ***Battle Hymn of the Republic*** (Civil War song)

ˊ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˊ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˊ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˊ ¯ ˘ ¯
Glo- ry, glory hal-le-lu- jah! Glo- ry, glory hal-le-lu- jah!
1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4

Sextuple meter: ***Greensleeves*** (English folk song)

¯ ˊ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˊ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˊ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˊ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯
A- las my love, you do me wrong, to cast me off dis- cour- teous- ly,
6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5

Syncopation

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot (African American spiritual):
Try singing or speaking this song in time with a regular beat.
(Note that most words in the first measure fall between the beats.)

Swing low,_____ sweet char- i- ot,____
1 2 | 1 2 |

comin' for to car-ry me home _____
1 2 | 1 2 |

Some music moves without any strong sense of beat or meter. We might say that such a work is **nonmetric** (this is the case in the chants of the early Christian church): the pulse is veiled or weak, with the music moving in a floating rhythm that typifies certain non-Western styles.

Time is a crucial dimension in music. This is the element that binds together the parts within the whole: the notes within the measure and the measure within the phrase. It is therefore the most fundamental element of music.