

Adding an accompaniment to your composition

This worksheet is designed as a follow-up to 'How to make your composition more rhythmically interesting', in which you will have experimented with developing a series of melodic variations on a melody you have composed.

In the previous worksheet, I used a Norwegian hymn melody, *Syng ein song or hjartans grunn* (Sing a song for the sake of the heart), as example material. Here, I have provided a working of this melody in the form of a chorale and variations for the church organ to give you a concrete example of what can be achieved with a little imagination. This information, however, is not task-based; instead I have provided a series of workings of the melody and explained in detail what decisions were made concerning figuration and harmony, thereby providing you with a impetus when writing works of a similar nature or extending the tasks required earlier.

Example 1

Theme

This is a plain harmonization of the melody, seven phrases in length, using a basic tonic-dominant approach. For the theme, it is often best to state the melody in a simple, unadorned manner, since the listener really needs to hear this before progressing onto a set of variations in which the accompaniment or the melody is subjected to alteration. To give the music a sense of minor versus major, which is often found in Norwegian folk melodies, there are a couple of places where I have juxtaposed two distinct modalities with brief transitory modulations (bars 3 – 4, 13 – 14). These are highlighted in the harmonic description below:

Bar 1.1 – 1.2: e minor moving to b minor 7 (Chord V7). You might be forgiven for thinking that this is, in fact, Chord 7, but I have omitted the root to give the music more of a modal feeling. Bar 1.4: a minor.

Bar 2: a cadential progression outlining Chords V-I-V (the last two forming an imperfect cadence).

Bars 3 – 4 (second phrase): Begins on the same chord as the end of the final phrase, Chord V, moving to Chord I on the second beat, which becomes Chord VI of G major, followed by Chord Vb. This in turn becomes Chord III in e minor, which is finalized with a perfect cadence in that key. You might see this transitory modulation instead as two secondary chords in e minor (VII and III), but this would have meant the use of a d-sharp. Being a diminished chord, this would most likely be followed by Chord I, which would have also been the natural choice for the following beat as well, the use of which would have a weak harmonic progression.

Bars 5 – 8: The third and fourth phrases see a clear shift to the dominant key of b minor; starting in D major we have a progression of I – IVb – V – II – I – V – I (first phrase); I – IV – Vb – Vc (without the root, but not VII for the same reasons stated earlier) – II (which acts as the pivot to b minor, becoming Chord VI) – V – I.

Bars 9 – 10: A simple progression in D major: IV – VI – Vb – I – II – V – I.

Bars 11 – 12: nearly an exact copy of the melody of the preceding two bars, I have begun it this time in D major, this time taking it to a Phrygian cadence (Chords IVb – V in b minor), the modulation occurring at bar 12-1, where Chord II becomes IV in b minor and its immediate repeat in first inversion providing the first note of the cadence.

Bars 13 – 14: Again a transitory modulation to give a feeling of modality, with a brief modulation to G major: beginning on the dominant chord of the tonic key of e minor (V) it progresses to I, which becomes VI of G major, V – I – VI (still G major, but now becoming Chord I of e minor) before a full close in e minor.

Variation 1 - Basse danse

This is a form of music found commonly in baroque French and German keyboard suites in which rhythmic and/or melodic interest occurs in the bass, with the melody occurring in a higher part. In this instance, it has been achieved quite simply, since the harmonies I chose are used again, the figuration in the bass basically outlining the harmonic progressions.

1. Melody

The melody has also been varied somewhat in that some of the simple crotchet movement has been changed to dotted- crotchet – quaver movements. Note however, that this has not occurred throughout, since cadential progressions revert to the original rhythms. This is done to keep a larger sense of unity with the theme. Note also that this dotted- crotchet – quaver movement occurs more frequently in the second half of the variation, since here I have made two rhythmic units, the second a repeat of the first, to give the music a sense of cohesion and belonging.

2. Bass figuration

Essentially, I wanted the bass to have an interesting, punchy figuration that is made up of quavers and quaver rests, punctuated at phrase ends with a little faster movement. In each case, the bass essentially outlines the melody's harmonic structure.

Variation 2 –Branle

A branle is a sixteenth-century dance that originated in France. Here I have attempted to disturb the sense of movement by including bars of differing lengths, as well as including upbeats to each phrase. The melody (with the exception of one note) is represented throughout this somewhat full texture (see Example 2, where it is marked with a cross). Sometimes, to increase the rhythmic disturbance, I have

displaced a melody note by taking it back one beat to make it form an anacrusis to a phrase.

Example 2

I have also altered the harmonies considerably, this time not relying on the usual rules of harmonic progression. Instead, I have used parallel shifts between chords and keys, since the music is an attempt to simulate the modal shifts often found in renaissance and early baroque music.

A brief description of these is outlined below:

Bar/beat	What happens
1.1	As in the theme, an e minor chord is used to establish the tonality, but this time, it is followed immediately with a
1.2	chords of C major and D major, with the third of the D chord being suspended to the next beat.
1.3	the resolution of the G from the previous beat, unaharmonized in the first instance, but on the second quaver, becoming the third of a D major 7 chord. This is an unrelated chord, but has been used to provide a sense of parallel modality that often occurs in pastiche early music. A d-sharp in the bass would alleviate this sense of modality and emphasise the e-minor key, which is where it resolves at beat 4.
1.4	Note that I have held over the A in the tenor to act as a 4-3 suspension, which I have decorated with a semiquaver turn.
2.1	Here I have launched onto an F-sharp major chord, with the melody note suspended from the beat before, again causing parallel harmonies that instantly resolve onto
2.2	e minor and C-sharp in its first inversion, a diminished triad that resolves on the next beat
2.3	to D major with a resolution in the second half of the beat of the melody, again acting as a 4-3 suspension.
2.4	An anacrusis of the melody, beginning here half a beat earlier than expected and harmonised with a B major chord, it being Chord V7 of e minor.
3.1	With a displaced melody, parallel harmonies are put into force, e minor – D major
3.2	G major – F-sharp diminished (1 st inversion) which takes the music to
3.3	a new key centre of G major, the expected resolution of the previous chord. Thus, we have Chord Ib, which is immediately followed by Chord IV
3.4	and V with the melody again a 4-3 suspension.
4.1	A truncated bar with a surprise element, in that the music has slipped in parallel motion to an E major chord that is decorated with a 4-3 suspension in the tenor. This is not the second part of an interrupted cadence, since the E major chord cannot be seen as Chord VI of G major. However, it has been composed to make that parallel with earlier forms of

	keyboard writing.
4.3	Here the upbeat is not part of the melody, but is used to keep a sense of continuity with the overall rhythmic movement of the variation. The A major chord acts as a dominant upbeat to the next phrase, which has been begun in
5.1	D major, but with a sudden parallel shift to
5.2	C major and G major
5.3	F major (the harmony offset by half a beat)
5.4	G major with a decorated 4-3 suspension in the tenor.
6.1	D major, with a decorated 4-3 suspension in the tenor, the turn that follows incorporating two melody notes.
6.2	E major, with a decorated 4-3 suspension in the tenor. Here, the melody note has been placed in the alto and emphasised with the rising passing notes in the alto.
6.3	Another 4-3 suspension in the alto, forming an A major chord before an
6.4	anacrusis melody note (again displaced to the previous beat to that in the theme).
7.1-7.4	More parallel harmonic shifts: E major / D major // A major / C-sharp major // B major / E major // F-sharp major, with the, by now, expected 4-3 suspension in the soprano. At the same time that this resolves, an unprepared 7 th is placed in the tenor, which is resolved in the plagal cadence this chord forms with
8.1-8.2	the B major chord, the 7 th of the previous chord becoming the first note of a 4-3 suspension. Note that this bar is also truncated to three beats.
8.3	Anacrusis and rhythmically displaced melody note, which acts as a dominant to the
9.1	e minor chord
9.2	A major / b-minor (+ 4-3 suspension)
9.3.2	G major
9.4	A major with a 4-3 suspension.
10.1	D major with a 4-3 suspension. Note that this suspension has been used as a constant feature throughout this variation. Since this often occurs at cadences, the soprano in bar 9.4 has been tied to the alto on this beat. Note also that this bar is truncated to three beats.
10.3	Anacrusis and rhythmically displaced melody note, based on a chord of G major.
11.1-11.4	Series of chords which play on the 4-3 suspension feature, moving from e minor, to A major (4-3), B major (4-3), e minor (1 st inversion), e minor (1 st inversion and 4-3 suspension).
12.1	The F-sharp major chord with its 4-3 suspension forms the second chord of a cadence in which the parallel aspect of the style is emphasised. Note that this bar is truncated to three.
12.3	Anacrusis and rhythmically displaced melody note, based on a chord of B major, which leads to
13.1.-13.3	A final statement based on parallel movement chords: e

	minor / D major // G major / F-sharp diminished (1 st inversion) // G major / C major // D major with a 4-3 suspension in the soprano
14.1-14.2	E major final chord, decorated with another 4-3 suspension.

As I have said before, this movement has been composed to recreate a style of music, rather than follow the predefined rules we are expected to learn as we progress as composers. It was achieved more through experimentation than anything. The composition process was through the development of a rhythmically interesting treatment of the theme, to which a basic chordal outline was added, with various substitute chords tried before the final harmonic scheme was achieved. After this, passing notes were included, as well as the ever-present 4-3 suspension.

Variation 3 – Fughetta

A very short fughetta, this variation takes the concept of overlapping entries a manner much favoured by baroque composers.

We need to examine this in a little more detail. Take a look at example three, which I have put onto two staves to make it easier for you to read.

Example 3

1. The theme (or subject) is taken from the first two bars of the chorale melody, which I have marked with an 'S'. This appears first in the alto, and then two bars later in the tenor.
2. A one-bar countersubject has been added in the second bar in the soprano which has, roughly the same musical outline as the theme. When the subject appears in the tenor, the same countersubject has been added in the appropriate place in the bass.

Thus, we have two entries of the subject in the first four bars, and two similar countersubjects, which also remind us of the theme.

3. In bar 4, more musical material has been added; not based on material from the chorale melody, it was chosen for convenience's sake in that it outlines the harmony. This becomes a motif for the next two bars, in which the subject has now been dropped ; instead, bars 4 and 5 use this motif to outline the following progressions: e minor / a minor (bar 5) // D major (bar 6.1-6.2). It then rests on a chord of G major. You will notice from this progression that I have gone through a cycle of 5ths, the use of which has been described in previous worksheets in this series as a means of modulation, which in this case takes the music easily from e minor to C major.
4. The final three bars act as a coda that is based on the notes of the subject. The harmonies here are C major in bar 7 (Chord VI), followed by an extended cadence, using a standard passing 6/4 – 5/3 cadential formula with a decorated 4-3 suspension in the tenor of bar 9.

Variation 4 – Toccatina

Like variation 2, this has been written freely, playing with the harmonies outlined in the first bar of the chorale over long pedal notes (bars 1-11). The harmonies here are quite self explanatory, but it is worth noting that, apart from the first two bars, the following nine contain no material derived from either the chorale melody or its harmony. The sequence is built around a series of rhythmic units, chosen for their syncopated effect, which are repeated until the long pedal dominant note from bar 8.

After this, the first four notes are introduced in the soprano in augmentation over a series of chords that move freely to yet another dominant chord in bar 19. Again, the chords have been arbitrarily chosen for their effect, rather than for a sequential harmonic value.

The second section is similarly structured. This time, the figuration is calmer, and a series of parallel chords based on the opening of the chorale melody, this time pointing to a major mode. Note here, however, that although a series of major and augmented chords are employed, the music is neither firmly in the major or the minor. Again, these were chosen for effect rather than for any intrinsic harmonic value. It is worth noting that the progression between bars 26 and 28 was written to juxtapose the major and the minor: F-sharp minor gives way to B major (26-27) before a sudden slip onto the subdominant chord (a minor at bar 28) and an extended dominant, in which another sideways slip onto an a minor chord (over the pedal F-sharp) occurs before the final chord of B major anticipates the return to the tonic for the final section.

This begins with a solo melisma, marked ‘accelerando’, which although based on chorale material, is nothing more than a means of returning to a decorated dominant chord (bb. 36-37) before a final statement in block chords that once again allude to the theme occurs. Note in the final bar, the use of a Picardy 3rd, that is the inclusion of a major rather than a minor third. This was chosen to give the listener the impression of a finished work: the use of another minor third in the e minor chord could easily herald the onset of another variation.

To recapitulate, we have four different treatments of the chorale theme, some more formally worked out in terms of harmony and figuration than others. Most of these came initially from improvisations, but in each case, much thought went into planning the variation before their composition. In this case, developing an interesting harmonic progression was also of importance, since I did not want to rely on the same harmonies for each variation. This would have made the whole piece not only uninteresting to listen to, but not much fun to write.

It has to be admitted that many of these harmonies came from experimentation and only the theme, and first and third variations came from any formal harmonic rules, that is, those I had to learn when going through the same process you are at the moment. For the remaining variations, I developed a clear idea of its style before

experimenting with different chord relationships, which were all done not in an academic manner, looking at key structures and correlations between one key and another, but by sitting at a piano and working out what sounds good and where! These were then carefully worked so that they fitted into my concept of the variation. You will remember that in variation two, the branle, there was an ever-present 4-3 suspension. This came as a fluke, but I rather liked the manner in which it arrested the movement of the music and so built it into the texture at each cadence.