Improving Student Compositions Using Notation Software

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Improving Student Compositions

Notation software offers many options for assisting student composers.

- Study existing scores
- Manipulate Music
  - Rekey notes
  - Filter/ProcessParts
  - Create Sequences
  - Create Modulations
  - Create Modal Variations
  - Searching for musical materials
  - Search and Replace
  - Entry of quality musical structures
  - Copy and Paste
  - Zooming in and out to study the material
  - More Musical Playback

Improving Student Compositions

What are the difficulties with student compositions?

Are there any common themes/mistakes?

Poll the audience . . .

- Technical Issues - entering notes, student expectations for immediate results.
- Musical Understanding - students need to understand music to write or arrange.

Show arranging issues (Clair de Lune).

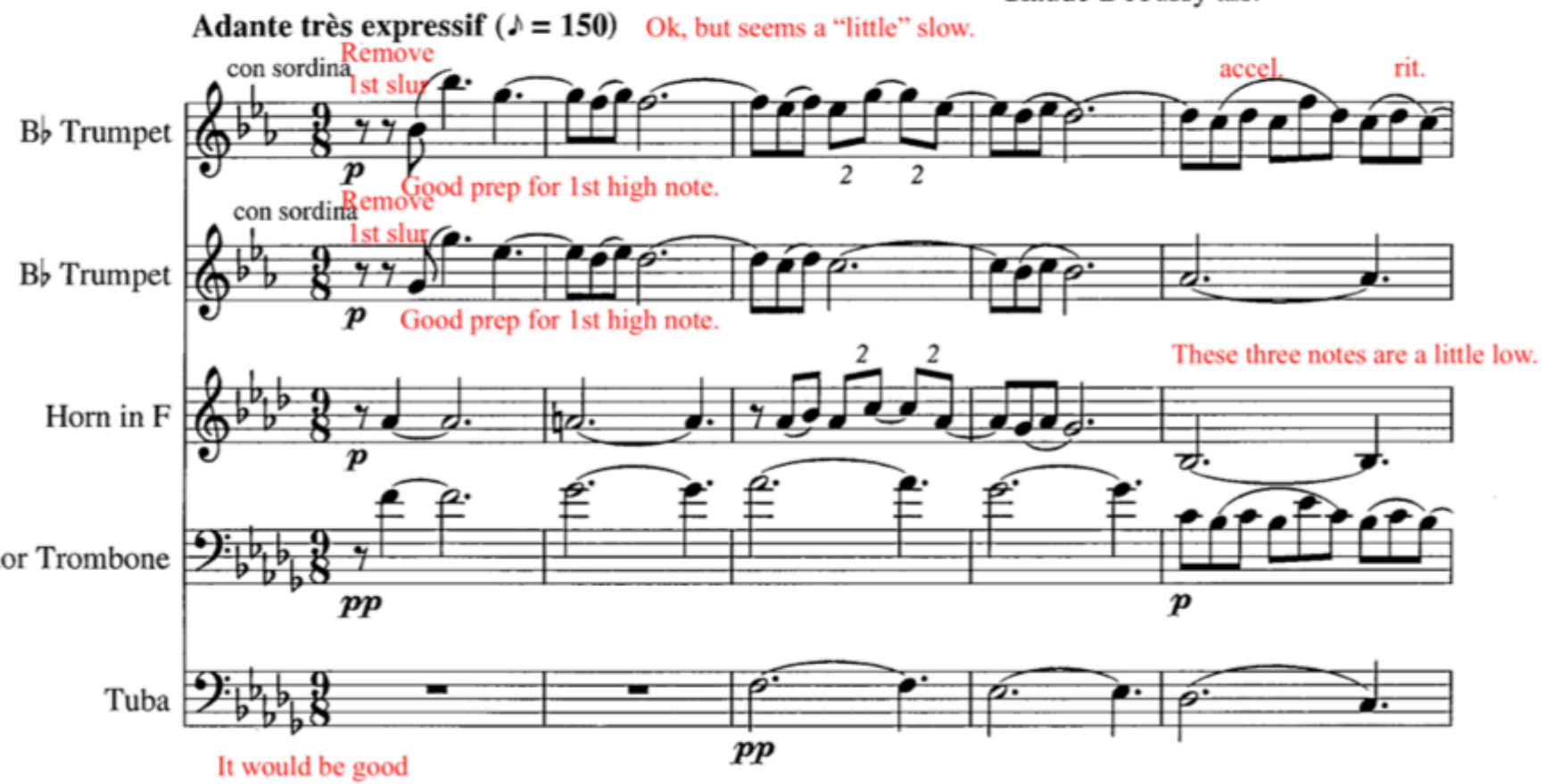
Mutes for the trumpets the entire time?
OK for this excerpt.
M9 (repeat of melody) may be
a good time to remove them.

Lots of opportunities to breathe? Good!
Articulations are nicely done! Good!

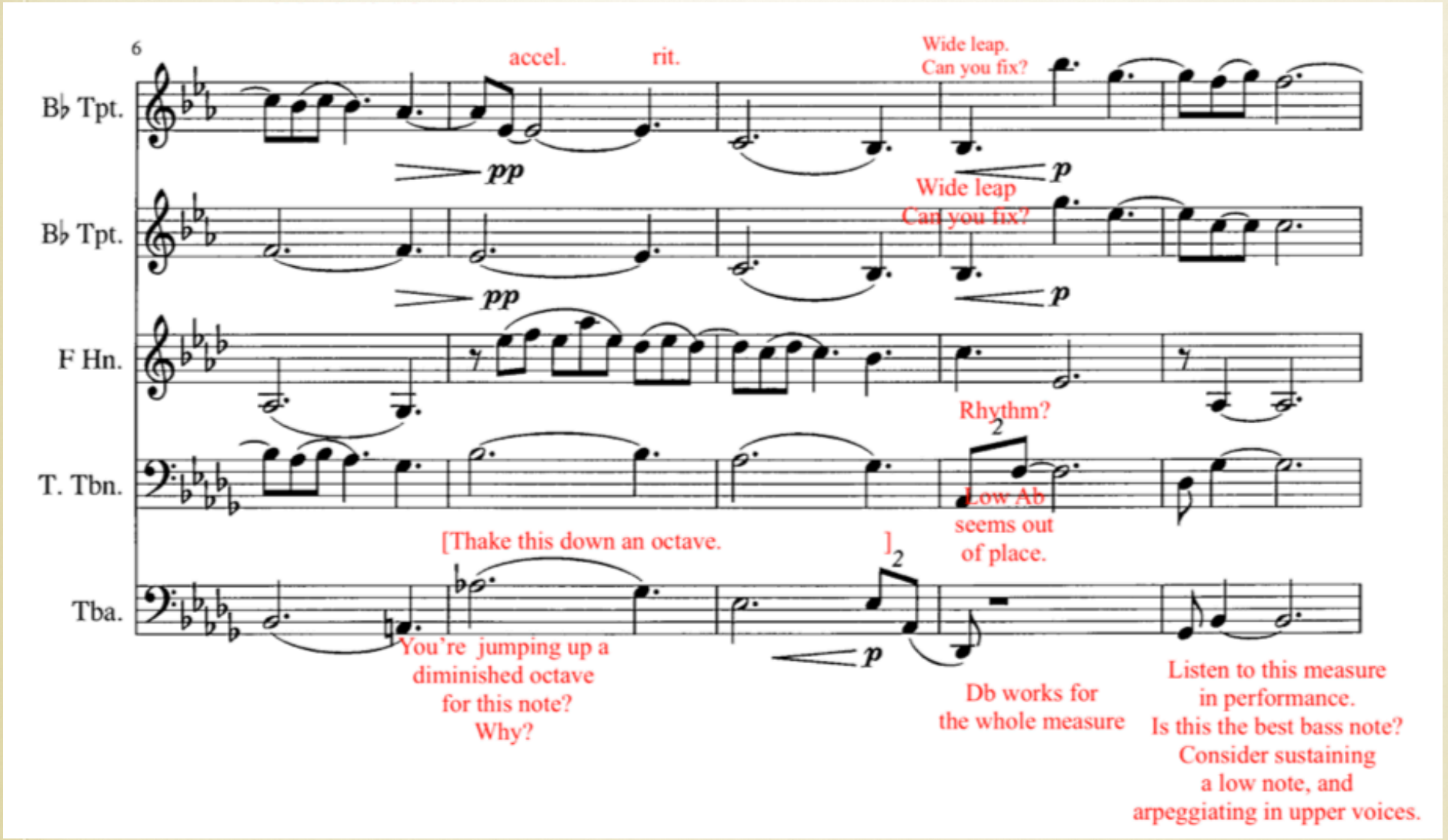
Claire de Lune

for Brass Quintet

Claude Debussy arr.



It would be good
to indicate the
1st entrance is on 2.


6
accel.
rit.
Wide leap.
Can you fix?
B♭ Tpt.
pp
p
Wide leap
Can you fix?
B♭ Tpt.
pp
p
F Hn.
Rhythm?
T. Tbn.
Low Ab
seems out
of place.
[Thake this down an octave.
]
Tba.
You're jumping up a
diminished octave
for this note?
Why?
p
Db works for
the whole measure
Listen to this measure
in performance.
Is this the best bass note?
Consider sustaining
a low note, and
arpeggiating in upper voices.

Improving Student Compositions

Choose a style for the music.

- Will it reflect an existing style or culture or be entirely original? (classical, contemporary, jazz, etc.)
- If yes, listen to music in that style. What are the important musical aspects of that style?

Improving Student Compositions

Give your music a purpose.

Is your music . . .

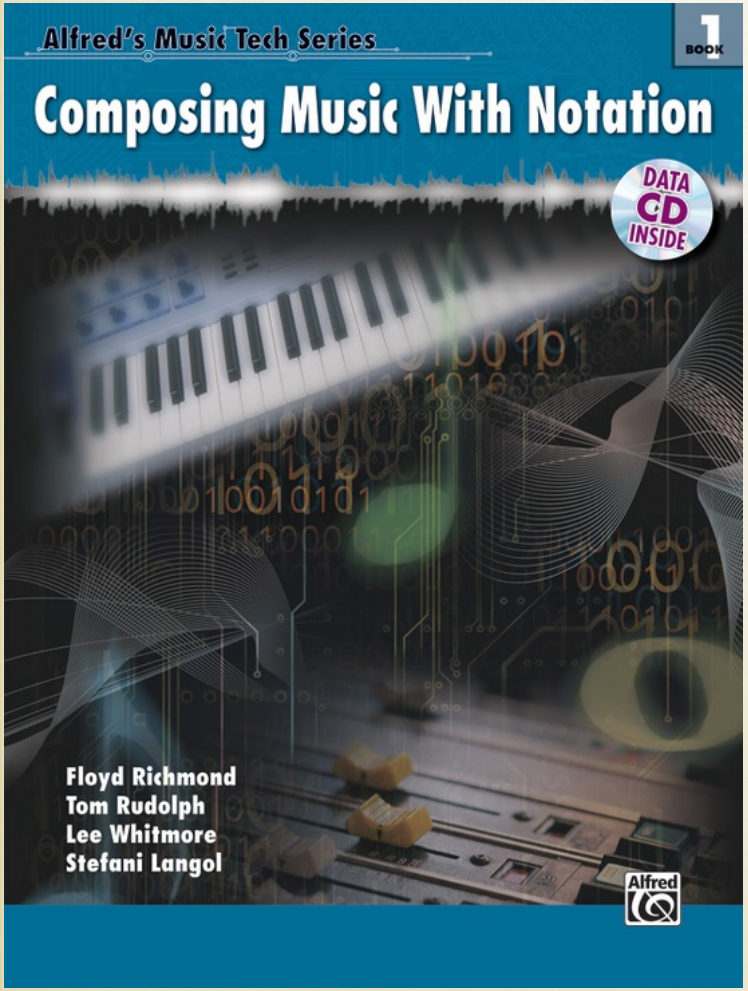
- Background (film or dinner)
- Foreground (focused listening)
- Setting a mood
- Entertainment
- Dance
- Contemplative

Improving Student Compositions

Consider your Audience

- Are they sophisticated or casual listeners.
- What will they expect?

Suggested Composition Activities



Composing Music With Notation
Alfred Music Tech Series, 2007

- Floyd Richmond,
- Tom Rudolph,
- Lee Whitmore,
- Stefani Langol

Click here!.

From the Alfred Book, Composing Music With Notation By Floyd Richmond

Introduction

Unit 1: Entering a Song (Notation, Lyrics, Expressions)

Activity 1.1 Entering a Song by Hand

Activity 1.2 Entering a Song into the Computer

Activity 1.3 Entering Lyrics

Activity 1.4 New Lyrics

Activity 1.5 Copying and Pasting

Activity 1.6 Creating a Three-Part Round

Activity 1.7 Dynamics

Activity 1.8 Gradual Dynamic Changes

Activity 1.9 Tempo

Activity 1.10 Gradual Tempo Changes

Activity 1.11 Instrumentation Changes

Unit 2: Arranging

Activity 2.1 Rebuilding London Bridge

Activity 2.2 Rebuilding Jingle Bells

Activity 2.3 More Building Blocks

Unit 2 Extensions and Supplemental Activities

Unit 3: Composing a Song in a 16-Bar Form

Activity 3.1 Listen to a 16-Bar Song Form

Activity 3.2 Enter the Melody

Activity 3.3 Construct a 16-Bar Song

Activity 3.4 Build a 16-Bar Song from Smaller Building Blocks

Activity 3.5 Compose a 16-Bar Song

Unit 4: Jazz Arranging (Dixieland, Swing, Partner Songs)

Activity 4.1 Enter a Melody

Activity 4.2 Enter a Melody

Activity 4.3 Partner Songs

Activity 4.4 Making a Song "Swing"

Activity 4.5 Adding a Drum Part

Activity 4.6 Adding a Bass Part

Activity 4.7 Create a 12-Bar Blues Harmony

Activity 4.8 12-Bar Blues: Melody

Unit 5: Composing a Song in Theme and Variations Form

Activity 5.1 Listen to Theme and Variations: Melody with a Descant

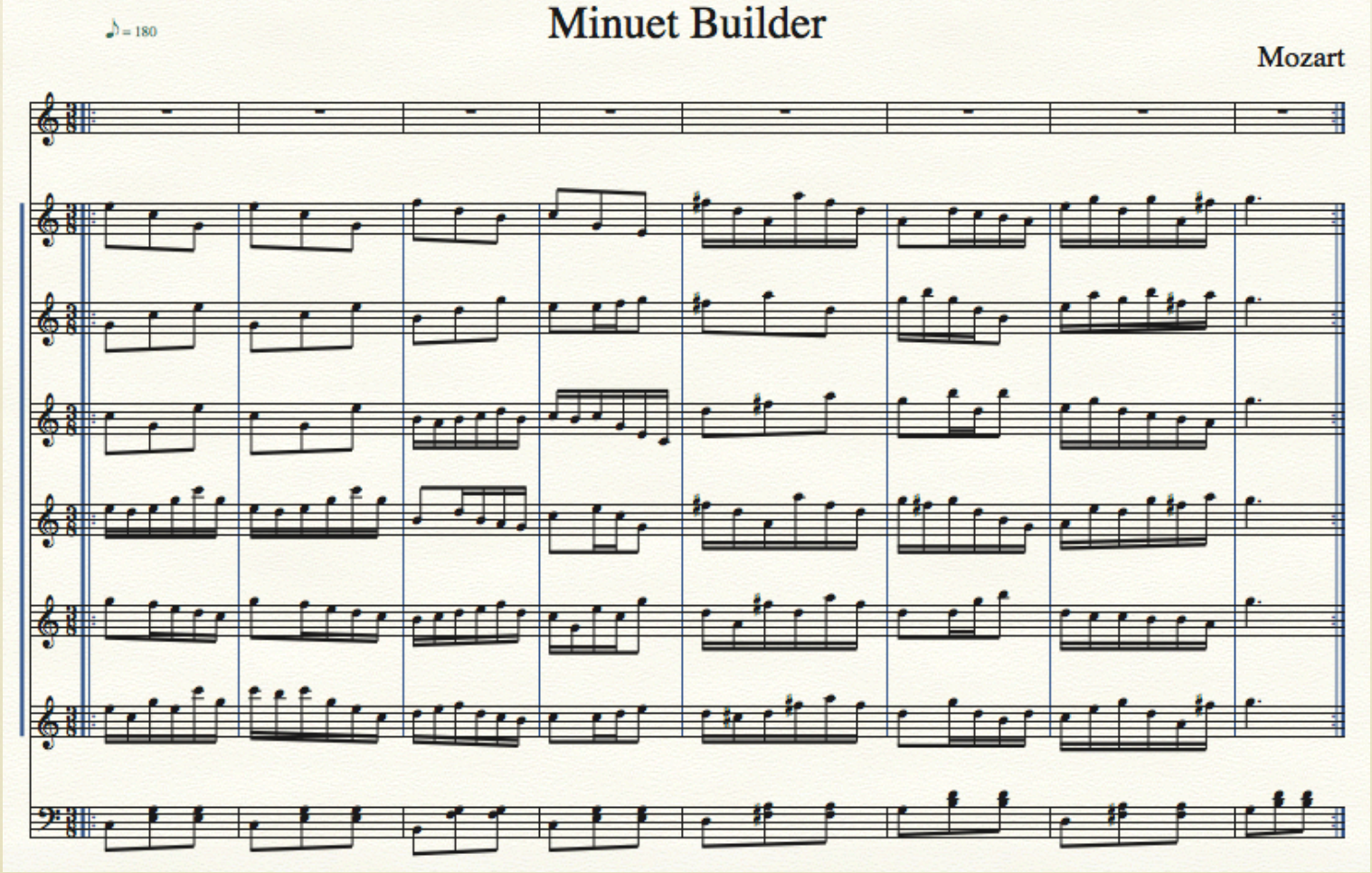
Activity 5.2 Create a Variation: Melody with a Descant

Activity 5.3 Listening to Theme and Variations: Rhythmic Variation

Activity 5.4 Listening to Theme and Variations: Mode Variation

From the Alfred Book, Composing Music With Notation By Floyd Richmond

Construct a minuet by copying one of the six measure below each empty measure into the top staff. Measures may only be copied into the measure directly above them. The bottom line contains the harmony. Do not copy the harmony measures into the melody of the top staff.



Improving Student Compositions

Students often overlook basic principles of music. To improve, we need to teach them the basic elements of music.

- Melody
- Rhythm
- Harmony
- Form
- Expression

Melodic Tips

- Write melodies in an interesting way, so that they are memorable and performable, but not boring
  - Scales sound great, but are too predictable.
  - Include enough stepwise motion for performers and listeners to grasp, with enough leaps for variety.
  - Good melodies must be performable.

Melodic Tips

- Good melodies go somewhere, they have a destination, but don't necessarily go directly there.
  - Occasionally change directions. (Mix the contour: up, down, and same)
  - Respect tendency tones in tonal music (7 up, 4 down - usually)

Melodic Tips

- Structural and formal repetition helps listeners grasp the melody, and variety entertains them.
  - Use even and uneven phrases with forethought.

Melodic Tips

- Write in a consistent tone.
  - Ask melodic questions (and answers).
  - Make melodic statements.
  - Make melodic exclamations.

Melodic Tips

- Consider how the melody fits the harmony, especially the last note of every phrase.
  - Write melodies that enhance the harmonies used (but don't just outline the harmony).
  - Use chord-tones and non-chord tones in balance and appropriately.

Melodic Tips

- Build patterns of expectation and then break them (this applies to all other elements of music).

Melodic Tips

- Write melodies that work well on the instrument which is performing.
  - Avoid extreme ranges
  - Choose keys so the melodies lie in the range of the instrument.
  - Write arpeggios for instruments that can play them easily, but not for instruments that can't
  - For voice, write singable melodies
  - For instruments, write playable melodies
    - Woodwinds, Brass, Strings, Percussion, Keyboard
  - Take advantage of the strengths of the instrument you are writing for
    - Trills
    - Glissandos
    - Bowing
    - Articulations

Melodic Tips

- Don't only use notes from the scale, or over use chromatic notes.
- Use chromatic notes as non-chord tones, and with harmonic intention.

Melodic Tips

- Match the range of the melody to the portion of the song you're writing
  - Verse (lower)
  - Chorus (higher)
  - Bridge (other contrasts)

Rhythmic Tips

- Many of these are parallel to the Melodic Tips.

Rhythmic Tips

- Establish an energetic motion for the song.
- Use a variety of rhythmics.
  - Use increasingly faster rhythms to build energy.
  - Use slower rhythms to wind-down.
  - Change rhythmic motion between phrases, and sections with forethought.
- Use syncopation to establish and break patterns.

Rhythmic Tips

- Write rhythms in an interesting way, so that they are memorable and performable, but not boring
- Straight quarter or eighth notes are too predictable.
- Include enough repetition for performers and listeners to grasp, with enough variety for interest.
- Write rhythms that have a destination, but don't go directly there. Include occasional changes of motion.
- Include enough structural/formal repetition so that listeners can grasp the overall rhythm, and enough variety that their interest is maintained.
- Include even/uneven phrases with forethought.

Rhythmic Tips

- Use a consistent rhythmic tone.
  - Ask rhythmic questions (and answers)
  - Make rhythmic statements
  - Make rhythmic exclamations
- Build patterns of expectation and then break them (this applies to all other elements of music).

Rhythmic Tips

- Occasionally mix triple and duple subdivisions of the beat, or use contrasting meters.
- Write rhythms that work well on the instrument performing.
- Expect your percussionists to be more rhythmically capable and precise than other instruments.

Rhythmic Tips

- Respect the range of each instrument (not all perform as quickly in their low register as in their high)
- Avoid overly complex rhythms (or overly simple rhythms)

Rhythmic Tips

- Take advantage of the strengths of the instruments for which you are writing
  - Rudiments
  - Rolls

Rhythmic Tips

Match the energy of the rhythm to the portion of the song

- Verse (simple, few fills)
- Chorus (more complex, big lead-in fill, more fills)
- Bridge (other contrasts)

Harmonic Tips

- Many of these are parallel to the melodic and rhythmic tips.

Harmonic Tips

- Maintain a consistent harmonic style, but not to the point of boredom.
- Use a variety of major and minor chords, as well as seventh and chromatic chords.
- For tonal music use the harmonic structures to build motion that have always been used, but not too much.

Harmonic Tips

- Write harmonies in an interesting way, so that they are memorable and performable, but not boring.
- Include enough harmonic motion for performers and listeners to grasp, with enough variety for interest.
- Avoid overusing trite progressions I IV V I. Find a way to make them more interesting.
- Write harmonies that have a destination, but don't go directly there. Include occasional changes of direction.
- Respect tendency tones in tonal music (7 up, 4 down - usually)
- Include enough structural/formal repetition that listeners can grasp the harmony, and enough variety that they are entertained.
- Include even/uneven phrases with forethought.

Harmonic Tips

- Write stylistically in the manner in which you are intending.
- Ask harmonic questions (half cadences or deceptive cadences) and answers (Perfect Authentic Cadences)
- Build patterns of expectation and then break them (this applies to all other elements of music).
- Write harmonies that match the melodies used (but don't harmonize every single note).
- Don't use only chord-tones or over-use non-chord tones. Use them with purpose.

Harmonic Tips

- Write harmonic patterns that work well on the instrument which is performing.
  - Write arpeggios for instruments that can play them easily, but not for instruments that can't.
  - Use block chords when needed, and mix them with rhythms as needed.
  - For voice, write singable harmonies
  - For Instruments, write playable harmonies
    - Woodwinds, Brass, Strings, Percussion, Keyboard
  - Take advantage of the harmonic strengths of the instrument you are writing for
    - Double Stops
    - Arpeggios
    - Block Chords

Harmonic Tips

- Don’t only use notes from the scale, or over use chromatic notes, depending on the kind of song that you’re writing.
- Use chromatic notes as non-chord tones, and with harmonic intention.
- Don’t write too thickly for low registers, or too lightly for high registers.

Harmonic Tips

Match the harmony to the portion of the song you're writing

- Verse (Mostly Diatonic, some chromatic possible after establishing the key)
- Chorus (Consider a shift to subdominant or relative major or minor, possibly ending on dominant)
- Bridge (other contrasts)

Formal Tips

- Many of these are parallel to the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic tips.

Formal Tips

- Use a form that is appropriate for the music you are writing.
- Write forms in an interesting way, so that they are memorable, but not boring
- ABA is great, but if it's the only approach used, it is predictable.
- Include enough variety of structure for performers and listeners to grasp, with enough variety for interest.
- Write forms that have a destination, but don't go directly there. Include occasional changes of direction.
- Respect formal structures of pieces in the genre.
- Include enough structural/formal repetition that listeners can grasp the piece, and enough variety that they are entertained.
- Include even/uneven phrases with forethought.

Formal Tips

- Write small structures (phrases) in a way which you are intending.
- Ask formal questions (and answers)
- Make formal statements
- Make formal exclamations
- Build patterns of expectation and then break them (this applies to all other elements of music).
- Write forms that work well on the instrument which is performing.
- Memorizable
- Room to breathe

Formal Tips

Use variations on the predictable forms to build interest, depending on the kind of song that you're writing.
Match formal and melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic structures.

Formal Tips

- Use a form appropriate for the song you're writing (verse (lower), chorus (higher), bridge (other contrasts), etc.).

Expressive Tips

- Many of these are parallel to the melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and formal tips.

Expressive Tips

- Some formulas are effective, but don’t over use them.
- Ravel’s Bolero: start soft, build until very loud, end.
- Symphony: Loud, Soft, Medium, Loud
- Pop Song: Start loud/strong, soft, building, loud, repeat "soft, building, loud,” as desired, and end super big
- Use a variety of expressions for musical interest.

Expressive Tips

- Tempo - gradual and sudden changes, Rubato
- Dynamics - graduate and sudden changes, terraced/textural dynamics
- Timbre - Choose instruments that are able to communicate the desired “feel” of the piece.
- Articulations - Choose articulations that create contrast and interest.

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