

# MELODY

## Introduction

Although sometimes thought to be intuitive and therefore intangible, melody writing is in large part a craft. Some long-held rules are applied to melody, for example having clear shape and a single high point.

## Melodic content

Melodies in the common practice era are made up of two elements: scales and arpeggios. Scales may be of any length and arpeggios may outline any chord.

Motion in one direction (by leap or step) is usually balanced by motion in the opposite direction.

## Good melodies...

- are unified and balanced. They use few elements, and no notes, intervals, or rhythms should be unique to only one part of the melody.
- have moments of motion and moments of relaxation (cadences).
- show a clear direction.

## Melodies often fail if they...

- are static around one or two notes.
- contain large, unresolved leaps (immediately stepping in the opposite direction of the leap "resolves" it)
- have consecutive large leaps that make the line too angular
- have one or more elements that seem to be unrelated to the rest.

## Definitions

### Melody vs. Theme

The word **melody** has a broad definition, and can be applied to any horizontal group of notes that appear in the foreground that make a complete thought (the "tune"). We usually speak of melodies having duration of at least several seconds, with shorter groups of notes referred to as melodic fragments or motives (see below). A **theme** is an open-ended melody - one which is not complete in itself and so used to form larger sections of a piece of music.

### Motive (motif)

A motive (sometimes referred to in the French: *motif*) is a melodic fragment that is repeated or varied to form a full melody, theme, or phrase. Motives are established by continued use; a group of notes that is not repeated is not a motive.

The end of a motive is marked by either 1) its immediate repetition, 2) a rest, or 3) contrasting material. Usually, the repetition of a motive immediately follows its first appearance. Occasionally, contrasting material may forestall the repetition.