

## Composing Theme and Variations Guide

### Preparation

1. Create a score with 2 pianos. The first piano will play your composition. The second piano will be your 'guide stave'.
2. Copy your chosen chord progression (including letter names and roman numerals) from the worksheet onto your guide stave.
3. Repeat this chord progression a number of times (each repetition represents one variation). Your composition will be based on this chord progression.

### Compose the Melody of your Theme

1. On the treble (right hand) piano stave, compose a melody.
2. On beats 1 and 3 of each bar, use a note from the guide chords.
3. Move mainly by step, creating scales in long arch shapes.
4. Use distinctive rhythmic motifs.
5. Repeat motifs as sequences (higher/lower in pitch).
6. Repeat motifs in antecedent and consequent (call and answer) phrases.
7. When the chord pattern repeats, the melody should repeat.

### Compose the Accompaniment of your Theme

1. On the bass (left hand) piano stave, compose an accompaniment. It should closely follow the bass line of the guide chords.
2. On beat 1 of each bar use the bass note from the guide chords.
3. After this, use notes mainly from the chord.
4. Use a pattern which repeats every bar, such as an arpeggio, broken chord, alberti bass or 'um-cha' stride bass pattern.
5. Note: most chords will be in root position. If the GUIDE CHORD is in root position, keep YOUR CHORD in root position. (i.e. in a CEG chord, the bass note should be C).

### Develop the Theme Texture

1. Look at example theme and variations by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Rachmaninov found [here](#). Sometimes these composers use two part textures. However, their textures are normally 3-part or more.
2. Consider developing your texture by adding a second line of music (known as a 'second voice') to the treble stave. (Select a bar and press 'L' to create a lower voice).
3. The second voice should fill in the 'missing' harmony, using mainly notes from the chord in simple rhythms. (If the 3rd of the chord is missing [E in CEG] it should fill in this note first).
4. When the melody is simple (crotchets, quavers) the second voice can move in parallel 3rds and 6ths (avoid parallel 4ths and 5ths)
5. When the melody is more complex (quavers, semi-quavers), the second voice should remain simple (minims).

### Compose Variations

1. Compose each variation following EXACTLY THE SAME METHOD as you used to compose your theme.
2. Beneath each variation, copy EXACTLY THE SAME CHORD PROGRESSION (including letter names and roman numerals) from the worksheet onto your guide stave.
3. For each variation, compose a melody and accompaniment following EXACTLY THE SAME METHOD as you used to compose the melody and accompaniment of your theme.
4. WITHIN each variation there should be UNITY. Each variation should be unified by a distinctive, recurring motif or texture.
5. BETWEEN each variation there should be CONTRAST. Each variation must use a distinctive motif or texture which CONTRASTS with the variations before and after it.

### Techniques for Composing Variations

To compose each variation, consider using one of the following models. Use a different model for each variation.

#### 1. Repeat the accompaniment, compose a new melody

Repeat the accompaniment from your theme or from another variation. Above this, compose a new melody with a new, distinctive, recurring, motif, moving mainly **by step**. A new, recurring **dotted, triplet, dactyl** (long-short-short) or **anapest** (short-short-long) rhythmic motif, using quavers and/or semiquavers, will make your melody distinctive.

## 2. Repeat the melody, compose a new accompaniment

Repeat the melody from your theme or from another variation. Beneath this, compose a new accompaniment with a new, distinctive recurring motif and texture. It should closely follow the bass line of the guide chords. On beat 1 of each bar use the bass note from the guide chords. After this, use notes mainly from the chord. Use a distinctive pattern which repeats every bar, such as an **arpeggio**, **broken chord**, **alberti bass** or 'um-cha-cha' **stride bass** pattern.

## 3. Invert the melody and accompaniment

Repeat the melody from your theme or from another variation on the **bass stave**. Compose a new accompaniment on the **treble stave**. The **melody alone** should be copied to the bass stave (without a second voice or accompaniment) and transposed to a suitable octave (Ctrl down). On the treble stave, compose a new accompaniment, using a distinctive pattern which repeats every bar, such as an **arpeggio**, **broken chord** or **alberti** pattern.

## 4. Antiphony between left and right hands

Compose a variation in which the musical line is 'passed' between the left and right hands in antiphony: whilst the left hand plays, the right hand rests and vice versa. Use scale and arpeggio patterns which ascend in the left hand and descend in the right hand, creating a single line of music.

## 5. Scales in moto perpetuo

'Moto perpetuo' means 'constantly moving'. On the treble or bass stave, compose a melody line from **continuous quaver**, **triplet** or **semiquaver scales**. Combine **major**, **minor** and **chromatic** scales to arrive at a note from the chord on beat 1 of each bar. Accompany the melody with a light accompaniment (such as a single staccato chord on the first and last beats of each bar, separated by rests).

## 6. Treble block chords with bass broken chord accompaniment

Copy the block chords from your guide stave onto your treble stave. Repeat these chords in a simple, repeating, rhythmic pattern. When repeated, rearrange each chord, placing a different note at the top (e.g. CGE becomes ECG). Accompany these block chords with broken chords on the bass stave.

## 7. Modulation\*

- Repeat your guide chords on the guide stave and transpose them to a new, related key. To modulate to the tonic minor, change the key signature and remove/add accidentals as required (shortcut: shift, select all, arrow up, arrow down). To modulate to the dominant, subdominant or relative minor keys, select and transpose the chords, including the key signature. In minor keys, remember to **raise the 7th**.

- Use any of the techniques above to compose a variation on this new chord pattern. Use the **harmonic minor** to compose chords (raised 7th) and **melodic minor** (raised 6th and 7th ascending, normal 6th and 7th descending) where possible to compose melodies, avoiding augmented intervals.

- To modulate from one key to another, you will need to modify the end of each chord progression. Use a 'pivot chord' (a chord which belongs to both keys) followed by the dominant chord of the new key. This, in turn, will lead to the new tonic chord.

## 8. Reharmonisation\*

If the melody of your theme is very distinctive, consider repeating and reharmonising it to create a variation. Consider reharmonising the theme with non-functional, non-diatonic, dissonant harmony. Use many extended chords, chromatic chords and added note chords to help you to avoid functional progressions.

\*Extension tasks