

## Rob's Piano Room - Module 11 - PDF

### Direction and Phrase Lengths

#### Main points

We have learned to make melodies by learning how the notes of a melody relate to the underlying harmony, but we have not yet looked at what makes a melody sound like it is taking us somewhere. It is very possible to make melodies that follow the rules we have used so far but do not sound compelling`

This is difficult to define, but we can at least look at some of the variables involved, and gradually build a sense of how to craft satisfying melodic material

First we are going to take a look at the idea of direction. Does each phrase have a feeling of direction, or a distinct gesture. (In simple terms, is it taking us from up to down, down to up, up then down, or down then up, for example, in a clear way) What we most want to avoid is a melody or melodic fragment that does not have a clear feeling of where it wants to go.

Perhaps phrases will work together in a more subtle way to gradually take the listener up or down.

The use of color notes (specific non-chord tones) and the underlying harmony can have an effect on whether or not a melody feels like it has direction (see the video for examples)

A way of practicing this is to take an opening idea that you feel has some kind of a statement to it, then trying to follow this idea in different ways, taking it to different places. There is no right or wrong answer - it is akin to having a first sentence to a story and trying to think of different places to go with that opening sentence

Another way of honing this is to listen to your favourite music in this way. Does each phrase feel like it has a direction to it? How does it achieve that feeling?

Next let's discuss the idea of phrase lengths. A piece that uses phrases of the same length is in danger of sounding monotonous, much as if you hear someone speak in similar length sentences you may lose interest. A variety of sentence lengths makes it easier for the listener to stay interested, in speech and music. We are going to take a 16 bar form, and split it up in different ways. We will discuss this further in exercise 2 below

#### Exercises

**Ex. 1** Improvise RH melodies on any of our chord progressions from past modules (Perhaps pick one favourite progression to focus on) Start to listen to your phrases, and ask yourself if you feel like you are taking the listener in a particular direction, or if each phrase has some kind of gesture. It is true that these questions can be difficult to quantify, but just asking the question may lead you to think of your melodies in a different way and lead you to different choices. Don't be frustrated by not finding the perfect thing immediately, just keep gently asking yourself these questions and see where it takes you. Again, this is a long term project.

**Ex. 2** take the following 16 bar LH example, and play melodies on top, using the following phrase lengths. A phrase will be defined by the spaces in between, so to be perfectly clear for this exercise, we will put a bit of rest (perhaps only a quarter note) between phrases, and be completely continuous during each phrase.

4 bars // 4 bars // 4 bars // 4 bars  
 4 bars // 4 bars // 2 bars / 2 bars // 4 bars  
 1 bar / 1 bar / 2 bars // 4 bars // 1 bar / 1 bar / 2 bars // 4 bars  
 2 bars / 1 bar / 1 bar // 2 bars // 1 bar / 1 bar // 2 bars / 2 bars // 4 bars

Come up with your own phrasing possibilities  
 Remember, this is just a starting place to become aware of the possibilities of using different phrase lengths.

Sample left hand - 16 bars

Four staves of bass clef music. The first staff contains four measures of quarter notes with triads. The second staff contains four measures of quarter notes with dyads. The third staff contains four measures of quarter notes with triads. The fourth staff contains four measures of quarter notes with dyads, ending with a double bar line.

Example - 1,1,2 / 4 / 2,1,1 / 4

Four systems of piano music. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line with triads. The second system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line with dyads. The third system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line with triads. The fourth system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line with dyads. The melodic lines feature various phrasing patterns as indicated by the example title.