

Technique 5

Fifteen Techniques for Varying the Motive

Melody is created from a sequence of motives. Applying one or more of these fifteen techniques to a motive will keep the melody interesting.

1. Repetition

The most fundamental of the compositional techniques is the simple repeat. Review *Frere Jacques*. The tune is four motives each repeated once to produce eight measures of music. The repetition is literal. No changes are made to the original motives.

A typical blues song repeats the same motive three times and then concludes with a new motive. Many pop songs employ repetition extensively.

Here's an example of repetition from the Big Band era. Glenn Miller's *In The Mood*.



This tune is a clear example of literal repetition. In fact the “melody” of the A part of the tune is simply four measures of a D chord played as an arpeggio. Then, two measures of a G chord played the same way. Two more measures of the D chord. Then A part concludes with an A chord played as an arpeggio and a concluding repeat of the first motive. Not much to this tune. Yet it was a hit in its day and continues to please audiences. Repetition works!

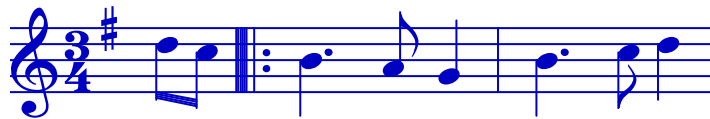
2. Sequence.

When a motive is repeated at a higher or lower pitch, it's called a “sequence“. Here is an example of a piece from J. S. Bach's Anna Magdalena Bach's Notebook. It was turned into a pop song in the 1960's titled *Love's Concerto*.



Here is a sequencing example from the Irish waltz *South Wind*. The full lead sheet is in the appendix.

First appearance of the motive with ascending ending



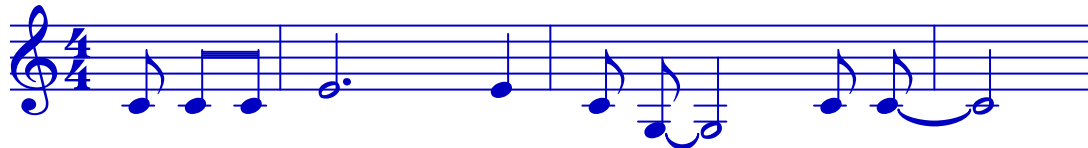
Second appearance of the motive with descending ending



3. Interval Change

In this form of motive variation, the general rhythmic pattern of the motive is preserved, but the relationship between the intervals is changed. Interval change is not the same as sequence. In the sequence the *exact* motive is repeated beginning on a different pitch.

Here's an example using a blues tune called *It Makes a Long Time Man Feel Bad*. Note how the motive remains the same, but the intervals change within the motive.



It makes a long time ma - n feel bad.



It makes a long time ma - n feel bad

In the first statement of the motive the interval associated with the words “a long” is a major 3rd. In the second statement of the motive the interval associated with those same words is a minor 3rd pitched a 5th above the first statement of the motive. The interval associated with the word “man” is also changed. In the first statement of the motive the interval is a descending 4th. The second time the interval is a descending 5th.

4. Fragmentation

If the motive is repeated over and over and over, the listener can get bored. One technique is to break up the motive into its component germs and repeat a germ rather than the entire motive.

Here is an example using Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho.

Motive appears in first two measures 2nd measure germ repeated in measures 3 & 4

Josh - u - a fought the bat tle of Jer - i - cho Jer - i - cho Jer - i - cho

5. Extension

An extension repeats the entire motive and adds a segment containing either new material or a repetition or sequence of a fragment. Here is an example from Mozart's opera the *Abduction from the Seraglio*. This melody is generally known as the *Turkish Rondo*. If you have studied piano for more than two years, you probably slogged through this one!

Motive Sequence of motive Extension of the motive.....

The extension technique appears in the dance tune *Ook Pick Waltz*.

Line 1: The motive is established.

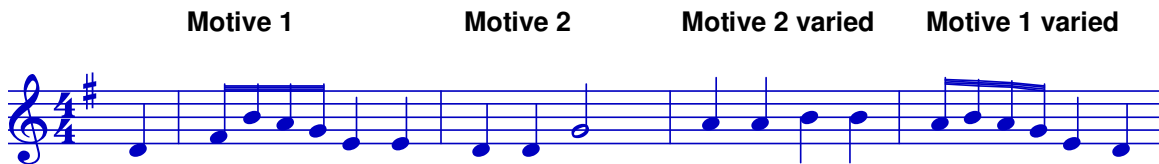
The motive is repeated and sequenced throughout the A and B parts of the tune. Look at the measures 24 and 25 of line 6. These two measures are an extension. Measures 22 and 23 are the opening motive. But measures 24 and 25 are an extension of the motive.

Line 6: The extension

.....The motive..... The Extension

9. Intversion

In this technique germs or fragments of the motive appear in different order. Here is an example from the fiddle tune Arkansas Traveler.



10. Ornamentation

The technique of ornamentation embellishes selected tones within the repeated motive. At times the ornaments are true instrumental embellishments. At other times the ornamentation is filler material added to the motive.

11. Rhythm Change. The technique of change the rhythm of a motive is more difficult than one might first expect. The technique is not used frequently. The general approach is to keep the length of the motive constant while either changing the time values of the notes or adding repetitions of existing notes with shorter time values. This technique is most commonly found in jazz.

12. Augmentation. This technique lengthens the time values of a motive. The effect is to extend or broaden the rhythmic sense of a piece. Usually the original rhythm is cut in half. Sometimes augmentation is done in polyrhythmic manner. It can get very complex, but it can be very effective.

13. Expansion. Lengthening of the motive is accomplished in expansion by adding new material in the middle of the motive. It is easy to confuse expansion and extension. They are two side of the same coin. Expand – as in expansion – means to add to the *core* of the material. Extend – as in to make longer – means to add to the *end* of the piece.

14. Contraction. Exactly the opposite of expansion. Contraction shortens a motive by deleting a fragment from the middle of the motive.

15. Thinning. Exactly the opposite of ornamentation. Thinning deletes certain notes while the over-all length of a motive remains unchanged. The effect of thinning is to remove all clutter from a piece. It is a minimalist approach used to present only the essential contour of a motive. The technique is most effective when a complex motive is established and then thinned.

Practice Identifying Techniques to Alter Motives

Look through your favorite music and attempt to find examples of these techniques. As you develop skills to see these techniques you will enhance the pallet from which you write motives, modify them and create melodies.