Establishing the Elements of Music Groundwork

Now that you have learned about the instruments of music and several famous composers, you are ready to start your training on how to listen to music. You will do this by learning about the elements of music.

I have selected 6 elements of music that will help you learn the basic principles of how to listen to music. I have decided to split the 6 elements into two tours.

In this first tour, you will discover three elements of music that constitute the backbone of any musical work. These three elements are: melody, rhythm, and harmony.

Comic Relief from the Elements of Music

A guy walks into a pet store wanting a parrot. The store clerk shows him two beautiful ones out on the floor. "This one's $5,000 and the other is $10,000." the clerk said. "Wow! What does the $5,000 one do?" "This parrot can sing every aria Mozart ever wrote." "And the other?" said the customer. "This one can sing Wagner's entire Ring opera cycle.

There's another one in the back room for $30,000." "Holy moly! What does that one do?" "Nothing that I can tell, but the other two parrots call him 'Maestro'."

Melody Overture

Melody is one of the main elements of music. I believe that it is the most memorable of all the musical elements. Why is this? Well, just remember a pesky little melody in your mind that won’t go away and you will agree with me.

Engaging the Past

The term melody comes from the Greek words melos and aoidein. The word melos means song and the word aoidein means to sing. The combination of both words translates to something like ‘to sing a song’.

Some early Greek melodies are based on musical theoretical works of ancient major Greek writers such as Aristoxenos, Quintilianus, and Aristotle.

On the other hand, The Bible has many references to the use of music and melodies. Jewish scholars indicate that their synagogue melodies are of great antiquity as well.
This Jewish musical tradition is part of the Ashkenazic tradition of melodies from the Sinai.

**Semantic Issues**

In essence, the modern violin is one of the oldest stringed instruments. Presumably, the word violin derives from the Latin word *vitula*. Other sources claim that the word violin means small viola.

Existing pre-Classical instruments hint the current look of the modern violin. Today’s quality instruments still follow the same traditions that luthiers or instrument makers followed in the old times.

**Melody Rationale**

Believe it or not, there are two views of melody. One view is a simple view and the other view encompasses a broader view that assumes that melody has a cultural overtone.

The first view is the simple view that melody is defined as a succession of pitches that happen consecutively.

The second and more extended view defines melody as the aesthetic product of a given succession of pitches in musical time, implying rhythmically ordered movement from pitch to pitch.

What does this mean? It means that melodies have cultural overtones.

The aesthetic product of a melody refers to the way different cultures perceive a melody.

A melody may suggest different images or responses for different listening ears.

**Cultural Melody**

A melody from Bosnia has a very important meaning for Bosnians but probably means nothing for somebody from Nashville, Tennessee.

Play the audio clip below, listen to it, and try to think about why a Bosnian would respond to it differently than someone from another part of the world. The song is sung by Bosnian ladies that have reached an age where they can date.
This is why I insist that melodies carry cultural weight. Their value is regional.

Obviously, there are universal melodies that everyone recognizes and enjoys, such as “Happy Birthday”. That is why people say that music is a universal language.

**Unraveling Melody**

By design, a good composer takes time in developing his melodies. This will make the audience remember and recognize it every time that they listen to it.

If you look at the graph to the right, you will see that this musical line has several parts that encompass the whole melodic idea.

The highest point is called the climax and is the most important part of any melody. At the end, it comes to a rest or to a resolution.

Just like a good story, a good melody has a beginning, a plot and an ending.

Some melodies can have as little as 4 pitches or notes. Some of the most sophisticated melodies may have 20 or more notes.

**Pitch Rationale**

Pitch is the perceived highness or lowness of a musical sound as heard by your listening ears.

Pitch is defined as the predominant frequency in a sound, and this same frequency has its own unique rate of vibration.

Pitches are represented within the highness or lowness of a musical sound. This wide spectrum of notes is also referred to as range.

Individual pitches are represented by the vibrations per second which, in turn, creates a fundamental frequency of sound.

**Pitch**

A melody is composed of pitch or notes. These pitches have physical frequencies attached to them. Each musical note has a specific physical vibration frequency.
When you play a violin string, the string is set in motion. This string vibrates at a certain speed. The speed of vibration is what determines the resulting note or notes. This is why I believe music affects our senses.

Remember that music is all about vibrations or physical frequencies.

In the graph you can see different waves that represent a diversity of sound colors in terms of pitch range.

**Getting Into Color**

When you listen to a sound you are actually listening to a physical frequency that has its own unique sound qualities.

The musical frequency of sound grants each note a musical color. This musical color is described as the characteristic sound of each note.

A musical scale contains several notes. These notes form a chromatic scale.

**Color and Pitch**

There are 12 pitches in the chromatic scale. A chromatic scale is a scale that contains the 12 different pitches or shades within the musical palette. A chromatic scale is also known as a cycle.

The graphic shows a chromatic scale that starts in C and travels through all the different color shades within the sound spectrum.

The reason why we see 13 notes is because the scale returns to C at the beginning of the next cycle then another cycle at a higher range. In reality, there are only 12 unique notes, or pitches.

The cycle allows me to introduce the concept of an octave. An octave is defined as and interval that is the distance between one note and itself, either one full cycle up, or a full cycle down.

This is how we recognize one note and its relationship with the same note at both higher and lower range.

The octave contains 12 chromatic pitches and all the letters of the musical alphabet: C, D, E, F, G, A, B. Note that in the first graphic the octave is represented in its different forms.
You can create an octave when you repeat the starting letter. For example, if a C note is repeated at a full cycle up, then the octave is recreated at a higher range.

This C sound is the eighth letter or note as described above. You can also see a representation of this in the graphic.

**Frequency**

Frequency is the acoustical vibration of any musical sound. Here you can see the graphical representation of the low and high waves of sound.

This vibration is measured in Hertz, which is a unit of frequency equivalent to one cycle per second.

But hertz is not a crucial element to enjoy music, although I find this to be a fascinating fact since it explains to me why music has so much power over people.

Hertz is more than just beautiful sounds. It is a combination of science and emotions. That is probably why music has magic powers over people.

**Frequency and Waves**

Slower moving waves produce lower pitched sounds and faster moving waves produce higher pitched sounds.

People have different preferences regarding the sounds of music. Some like low register sounds such as the ones produced by the bass instruments. Others enjoy high register sounds such as the ones produced by the violin.

But it can also work the other way around. As an interesting fact, a deaf person is only able to listen and recognize low register sounds. The middle and high registers are completely unavailable to them.

**Components of Melody**

Next, I will present the three main components of a melody. These are: contour or shape, range, and scales. We will explain each one in detail throughout the next slides.
Melodic Shape

A melodic shape is the overall line in a score of music that moves upwards, falls, arches, undulates, or moves in characteristic ways. The graphic to the right shows melodic shape.

If you were to thread a line to connect all the notes, you could see the unique shape of the melody. This is what I call the shape of the melody.

Within this shape there are at least two types of motions, conjunct and disjunct.

Take notice in the example how the movement of the notes is mostly by steps.

Types of Melody

Conjunct melody is a melodic shape that allows for a smoother and more consonant melody.

Disjunct melodic motion creates dissonant sounds, and therefore is less appealing to people who favor more consonant sounds.

Personally have a high tolerance for dissonance. I enjoy the sense of mystery and drama that dissonant sounds create.

As you can see from the circled portion of the graphic, melodic motion that is disjunct, uses leaps. Notice how the melody jumps from one note to the next. This creates a sense of expectation and suspense.

Some people may not like dissonant sounds associated with disjunct melodies.

A good example of dissonant sounds is the music written for scary movies. This type of sound adds to the plot since it reflects what is happening on the screen.

Range

Melodies have a unique and particular range. A range is a series of notes that occupies a certain space within the spectrum of pitches that the human ear can listen to and understand.

Please remember that there are sounds below and above the sound palette which we can not perceive.
Sub sounds and ultra-sounds are sounds that fall outside the boundaries of the human sound palette such as the sub sounds made by some marine creatures or the ultra-sound made by a dog whistle.

The great composers intuitively know the sounds that are most effective to create moods or paint emotions through their music.

This knowledge is most definitively a gift that we in turn appreciate by listening to musical masterpieces.

Some primitive melodies have a range of two notes. This is not unusual for some cultures. Some oriental cultures base their music on a pentatonic system.

Pentatonic systems use only five notes. On the other hand, a more sophisticated melody such as the soprano solo in the "Kyrie Eleison" of Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* has a range of two octaves or 16 notes.

**Intervals**

To recognize melodies, we must also understand about the power of intervals. An interval is the distance between any two notes or any two sounds.

The minor second interval is an example of a tension charged sound. Minor second intervals build to attention-grabbing moments, such as music in horror movies. On the other hand, the sound of a perfect fifth or an octave is more consonant and less taxing to the ears.

The example to the right shows two types of intervals, the half step interval and the whole step interval.

By looking at the keyboard, we see that a half step interval is the distance between one key and the key immediately next to it.

A whole step interval is equal to two half steps. Therefore, one must move two keys up or down in order to have a whole step.

The most common types of intervals, for the purpose of this class, are represented in the graphic. Each one paints a vivid coloration of musical sounds.
Scales

In musically sophisticated cultures, scales are formally recognized as systems of tones from which melodies can be built.

The example to the right shows the different types of scales that can be created by altering the individual notes within the scale.

This alteration provides a different mood, or flavor, for each individual scale and their corresponding and available melodies.

Scales and Tonality

Earlier, we talked about the concept of the octave. The sound of the octave is part of the system of music in western civilization.

The octave is part of the major/minor system of music that results in tonality. Tonality is the collection of notes from which melodies are built upon.

The lack of familiarity with other systems of tonality is perhaps one of the reasons why we are so prompt to dismiss music from other cultures.

As mentioned earlier, some cultures use as little as two notes while others use microtonal systems, which may have more than the 12 notes of the chromatic scale, which is the system of music from western civilization.

Concepts on Tonality

Middle Eastern music is a microtonal system that uses tones that are not part of our musical culture.

To the right, you can see the gravitational attraction box graphic that includes elements such as scales and harmony that are an important part of tonality.

Notes that belong to the gravitational field are considered consonant to the piece.

Notes outside the gravitational field will create tension that is resolved by going back to the consonant tones or notes.
**Formula for a Major Scale**

Here is the formula to build a major scale:  \( \text{WW } \frac{1}{2} \text{WW } \frac{1}{2} \)

W (whole) and \( \frac{1}{2} \) (half) refers to the interval distances.

This formula generates a major scale by following the formula interval steps. If you have to build a C major scale, you must start with the C note on the keyboard and then follow the formula.

This formula will remain constant for each time that you have to build a major scale.

**Formula for a Minor Scale**

Here is the formula to build a minor scale:  \( W \frac{1}{2} \text{WW } \frac{1}{2} \text{WW} \)

Minor scales are built using the same steps as major scales. However, notice that the formula to build minor scales is slightly different from the formula to build a major scale.

The resulting notes reflect a sound that is darker and more melancholic.

This formula will remain constant for each time that you have to build a minor scale.

**What is a Song?**

As we come to the end of this lesson, I would like to introduce the concept of the song, which encompasses all of the elements of melody that were covered in this lesson.

The word song probably originated from the French word *Chanson*.

A song is a combination of melody and lyrics. In this format, the human voice has the role of conveying the meaning of a song through lyrics.

**This Is a Song**

Songs often express profound sentiments, as their lyrics carry significant messages that when combined with music could create a very powerful statement.
If a song has a formula, you could probably express it this way: $\text{Song} = \text{melody} + \text{lyrics}$.

Because of this intrinsic characteristic, songs make you feel a thought.

This thought starts in the composer’s or lyricist’s mind and ends in the listener’s ears and hearts.

**Conclusion**

In this lecture we learned that melody is defined as a succession of pitches that happen consecutively.

We also learned about all of the components of melody.

You should now be able to recognize a melody and its components anytime you listen to music.
Comic Relief from the Elements of Music

Two rhythm guys were walking across the park when one said, “Hey, where did you get such a great set of maracas?” The second guy replied, “Well, I was walking along yesterday minding my own business when a beautiful woman walked up to me carrying a nice set of maracas in her hands. She threw the maracas to the ground, took off all her clothes and said, “Take what you want.”

The second guy nodded approvingly, “Good choice; the clothes probably wouldn’t have fit.”

Rhythm Overture

Rhythm is the element of music that helps to convey human emotions. Its power lies in the fact that it is present in every aspect of our lives such as the way we do things, the way we walk, and the way we breathe.

Rhythm is an element that is not unique to music. Other artists need rhythm as well. Dancers and poets need to have a great sense of rhythm and flow; without those elements, a dance routine would look stiff and unnatural, and a poem would read as insincere and tedious.

After completing this tour, you will be able to:
- Identify rhythm and its uses
- Identify the components of rhythm

Rhythm Rationale

Rhythm is defined as an ordered flow of music through time and space.

What does that mean? Well, from a practical point of view, rhythm is the musical execution of patterns of sounds and silence within a measured timeframe.

Unraveling Rhythm

Sounds and silence produce the beat of music, which in turn results in Rhythm.

Combinations of sounds and silence create different rhythm patterns. This is why music from different cultures sounds so uniquely different.
Also, the combination of beats in music adds excitement through the tension and release of any particular rhythm.

**Engaging the Past**

The origin of rhythm can be traced back to natural and everyday sounds created by prehistoric cavemen.

I think that cavemen produced their primitive rhythmic patterns as they worked on their stone tools or as they pounded seeds and roots to create their meals.

Certainly, rhythm is not entirely a caveman creation. Natural sounds, such as thunder, rain, wind, and tree leaves among many others, surely contributed to the development of rhythm as we know it today.

**Inside Rhythm**

Throughout this lecture, you will learn about the main elements that make up rhythm.

The most important elements of rhythm include:
- Beat/Pulse
- Meter
- Tempo
- Accents
- Syncopation

**Pulse Rationale**

A pulse (also known as beat) is a unit division of musical time. This division is similar to the body's steady pulse, or heartbeat.

Pulse is the most basic element of rhythm. It is the heartbeat of music. It is not the rhythm itself. It only provides the pulse of music. Pulse is the regular occurrence of rhythm in time. You have clapped to the music, right? Well that is the pulse!!

A pulse requires steady and reoccurring rhythm patterns. Just like dancing, pulse requires a physical response.

So when I listen to people say: “Hey I love that beat!”...it makes little sense to me. Pulse is not interesting at all. What is interesting is what goes on inside the pulse, which is the rhythm itself.
**Pulse**

During composing, performing, or listening to music, one is aware of a periodic succession of beats. This is particularly important for composers and arrangers, musicians and music listeners in general.

As a musician, my perception of the pulse of music allows me to be very effective in the performance and presentation of any piece of music.

In the picture, the rhythm figures are divided or subdivided.

The whole note is the longer duration shown on this graph. It plays for four beats. Once you play a whole note, it has to sound for four beats.

A whole note is equal to two half notes. This means that a half note sounds for two beats. Because two beats plus two beats is equal to four beats, two half notes equal one whole note.

If you continue moving down this graphic, then you will see how a whole note is equal to four quarter notes.

A quarter note sounds for one beat. Again, one beat plus one beat plus one beat plus another beat is equal to four beats which is why one whole note is equal to four quarter notes.

**Meter Rationale**

The second element of rhythm is meter.

Meter is defined as the organization of beats into regular groups.

These regular groups are contained within the measures. Measures have a fixed number of beats as pointed out by the graphic to the right. You can find the meter indicator in the meter section at the beginning of the composition.

Look at the example to see that the measure has a meter of 3/4 which means that there are three beats in this measure. Sure enough, there are three quarter notes in the example.
Meter Basics

The following are the most common meters in music.

Notice that at the beginning of each measure, there is a fraction number. The upper number means the amount of beats per measure.

Please note that Common time is the same as 4/4 and Cut time is the same as 2/2. Now allow me to explain some of this music nomenclature to you.

If the upper number is four, then there will be four beats in any particular combination of notes. If the upper number is two, then there will be two beats in any particular combination of notes.

The lower number refers to the unit that receives the beats.

If the lower number is 4, that means that the unit that receives the beat is a quarter note.

If the lower number is 8, that means that the unit that receives the beat is an eighth note.

If the fraction number is a 6 over 8, then this means that the piece has six beats and each unit receiving a beat is an eighth note.

A meter could be classified as either a single or compound meter.

Common Single Meters

Single meters are the most basic and most heavily used meters in music.

A single meter uses beats that are not divided.

The most common single meters are 2 over 4, 3 over 4 and 4 over 4.

A single meter means that each beat will get a quarter note.
Common Compound Meters

A compound meter uses beats that are divided.

Here are the most common compound meters for the purpose of this class.

Notice that 6 over 8, 9 over 8 and 12 over 8 are the most common compound meters.

Again, this means that it is either 6 beats, or 9 beats, or 12 beats and each beat is going to be an eight note.

Tempo Rationale

Before you can read music from a music sheet, also known as a music score, you should know how fast or how slow to play it.

Tempo is defined as the pace of the beat of the music. The tempo marking instructs the performer about the playing speed of the music.

Indicators placed at the beginning of the music score inform the composer about the score’s tempo.

Italian composers coined the terms associated with tempo. These are used commonly by composers around the world.

Aside from Italian, other languages are used in classical music as well. But, as a general rule, Italian is the language mostly used to communicate musical indications.

Tempo Whatchamacallits

Musicians and music teachers all over are dependant on one very important tool that allows them to be precise with their tempi.

This tool is called the metronome, and is used by musicians to measure the speed of the beats of music. The newest ones use digital technology.

I personally believe that digital metronomes are extremely precise, and should especially be used if one wants to play at the correct tempo as specified by the composer.

Also, as a music educator, I use the metronome to teach my students the nuances of tempo changes, and consistent use of tempo and rhythm.


**Tempo Markings**

The most common tempi used by musicians are displayed below.

Please familiarize yourself with these terms and their translations from Italian to English, since they will be used to assess your understanding of tempo indicators.

**Tempo Indicators**

- Adagio: Slow, leisurely
- Largo: slow, stately
- Moderato: moderate time
- Andante: Walking pace
- Allegretto: slightly slower than allegro
- Allegro: lively, fast
- Vivace: quick, lively
- Presto: very quick

**Metronome Markings**

In addition to tempo indicators, there are metronome markings. These markings help the performer decide how fast or how slow a composer wants them to perform their piece. You can find these markings at the beginning of the piece, and every time that the composer changes the tempo.

**Accent Rationale**

Accent is the emphasis placed on a note. Accent tells whether a note is performed louder or longer than another note.

In grammar, an accent places an emphasis on a word. In music, an accent places an emphasis on a musical note or a beat.

Some of the most commonly used accent markings change the interpretation of musical phrases.

Look at how the accents are marked on top of the notes that have to be emphasized. These little marks are meant for performers to place a small weight on selected notes.

For instance, the last accent mark in the graphic to the right will make the accented note longer that the other ones.
The Effect of Accents

Accents affect the meter by displacing beats, creating a sensation that we are listening to a different meter. This beat displacement affects the performance of a music score that uses accents.

Syncopation Rationale

Syncopation is the last element of rhythm.

Syncopation is the displacement of regular accents associated with a given metrical patterns.

This adds anticipation, pleasure, and thrill to the music being played. It is used quite often in popular music such as jazz, Latin jazz, rock and roll, and many other popular styles of music.

The picture shows a simple example of syncopation. Notice how the music continues through the bar lines.

Syncopation and Swing

A form of syncopation is found in swing rhythm. This is rhythm that is off-centered and uneven. Swing rhythm is a way of playing music that sounds differently from the way that it is notated.

This does not necessarily mean bad rhythm. This is actually done with a purpose. Jazz musicians will not play exactly what is written but will approximate the rhythm to what is written on the page. Jazz has its own unique sound because musicians swing the notes.

The musicians involved understand how much swing could be used in any particular piece. While swinging, musicians must keep in mind the style, period, and the place of presentation.

Classical musicians are more strict, and only play what is on the page. This is because classical composers such as Mozart wrote exactly what they wanted to be played.
Notating Rhythm

Rhythm is an element of music which is defined as an ordered flow of music through time and space. Composers write rhythm following rules of musical notation.

Music is an abstract art made concrete by notation. The process of creating music starts by actually listening to it in one’s minds. Musical notation is a system of transferring these ideas to paper so that others can play their music.

Observe the different symbols in the chart that are used to notate rhythm.

The notes on the left side illustrate notes that make sound, while the rests on the right side illustrate silence marks.

It is this combination of sound and silence signs which allows composers to put rhythm on paper. It actually becomes rhythm once it is played or performed.

Types of Rhythm

Free rhythm is very easy to listen in Shakuhachi music. This is a style of Japanese ceremonial music that uses silence as part of the music to create a sense of tranquility in the listener's mind.

In free rhythm, there are no strict downbeats. The pulse of music occurrence is less predictable and more relaxed.

A strict downbeat implies that the rhythm element is secondary to the music.

In the free rhythm style of Shakuhachi music, silence is as important as sound.

In the Shakuhachi tradition, music is guided by the breath of the performer. Free rhythm has a similarity with traditional Japanese painting. Take a look at his example. It reflects the music and the feeling of relaxation and calmness.

Conclusion

In this lecture we learned that rhythm is defined as an ordered flow of music through time and space.

We also learned about all of the components of rhythm.

You will are now able to recognize rhythm and its components anytime you listen to music.
Comic Relief from the Elements of Music

Two men were at a bar and one said, "Hey, I had my IQ checked and it was 175, The other responded "That's a coincidence so is mine, what do you do for a living?" "I'm a physicist." was the reply. Again came "that's a coincidence so am I."

This was overheard at a nearby table and these two compared IQ's at 160 and were surprised that they were both brain surgeons.

At another nearby table one man grievedly said to the other "Did you hear that? I had my IQ checked and it was only 52." The other said, rather enthusiastically, "Wow, that's some coincidence. We have the same IQ. Hey, so, what instrument do you play?"

Harmony Overture

In this tour, you will learn about harmony and its components.

It is my opinion that the language of music encourages the development and enhancement of our cognitive, social, physical and emotional skills. Harmony takes us in a sensorial journey that enriches our sensitivity and high regard for beautiful music.

After completing this tour, you will be able to identify harmony and identify the components of harmony.

Harmony Rationale

Harmony is defined as the interaction of three or more tones that sound simultaneously.

Notice that I said three or more tones. Remember that two tones played simultaneously is an interval.

Harmony vs. Melody

There is an important difference between harmony and melody.

Melody usually has the theme of the music piece, and is made up of single notes that are played consecutively.
On the other hand, the main role of harmony is to provide support for a melody. This is done by playing blocks of notes known as chords that are played simultaneously.

The characteristics of the chords of harmony provide the vertical aspect of music. Harmony ultimately contributes to the unity of any musical work.

**Feelings of Harmony**

Harmony is responsible for how a melody makes you feel. I am sure you have heard a performance of the national anthem right before any special occasion. Even though it is presented against diverse harmonic backgrounds and rhythms, it is still the same old national anthem. No matter how odd or unusual the harmony is, you can always identify the lyrics and the melody that goes with it.

Harmony gives music its three dimensional aspect since it involves many notes that serve as a musical support for melodies.

**Engaging the Past**

Let's take a brief look at the history of harmony.

Harmony took some of its roots from early types of music, such as Plainchant. This was a religious form of music that was most commonly sung during medieval times.

The main sponsor of the arts at the time was the church, and the chief form of music was the plainchant. This type of music was used by the church to emphasize certain moments during the mass.

The eventual development of the plainchant led to the adoption of a harmonic musical platform that eventually was used by all types of music.

Plainchant is also known as monophony, as it uses one musical line. A musical line is also known as a voice, even though it doesn’t imply that it has to be sung by a singer.

Monophonic music is music with one line of music. It could be sung by a large choir. Even if all the singers are singing, and they are singing the same melody, then the musical texture is called monophonic.

Somewhere around the year 900, early polyphony developed by accident when children’s voices were added to the musical service.

Bear in mind that women were prohibited from singing in church. So, children provided the higher range of voices for the Plainchants.
Five hundred years later, around the 1400’s, musicians began to experiment with new vocal sounds, and three voices became the norm for early polyphony.

By 1500's, the use of four-voice parts became common. This is the beginning of modern harmony as we know it today.

**Unraveling Harmony**

Harmony refers to the way that chords are constructed and how they follow each other in a composition.

Look at the example and see how each chord follows each other. When several chords follow each other, they combine to create a chord progression.

Some chord progressions are very common, and are used frequently to establish a sense of stability in the music.

**Chord Rationale**

Chords are an important part of harmony. Chords are defined as a group of notes sounding together. The notes that belong to a chord are played all at once.

Notes that line up vertically on the music score create chords.

Of course, chords define harmony, but it is a combination of chords that defines tonality, also known as a tonal center. Tonality is the harmonic universe in which the notes of a piece revolve around.

**Unraveling Chords**

Chords result from the different voices of polyphony. In a way, chords can be like several melodies stacked together in a vertical way.

The meaning of polyphony comes from two words. Poly meaning many, and phony meaning sounds.

**Chords and Improvisation**

Chord symbols, during the Baroque musical period, to replace the middle, or inner voices of music.
With the advent of jazz during the 20th century, there was a revival of the earlier techniques of chord symbols and improvisation.

Musicians were given the basic skeleton of music and they provided the missing notes. This led to an increase use of improvisatory techniques that characterized the music of the Baroque period and that defined the spirit of jazz.

Improvisation is the main concept behind Jazz.

**Chords Accompaniment Example**

The graphic to the right is an example of a music score that features a vocal line with piano accompaniment.

Notice the numbers written at the lower end of the score. This is known as the *basso continuo* and is part of the improvisational technique that I mentioned earlier regarding jazz improvisation.

These numbers tell the pianist how the chord is built. This information allows the pianist to provide the missing notes so that they can create their own version of the accompaniment.

This technique requires extensive training. It is not easy to do since one has to read all the parts and think of adding or creating new notes to the piece being performed.

**Broken Chords**

Broken chords are another way of playing a chord. They have the same characteristics of a regular chord, but they are played differently.

Instead of a block of sound, like the regular chords, its tones are played one after another creating an arpeggio-like form of a chord.

Arpeggio is another way to describe broken chords. This is the Italian word used to refer to broken chords.

**Tonality**

In regards to musical tonal center, there are two possibilities: music is either tonal or atonal.
Basically, tonality is the center of gravity which exerts influence over the notes of a piece of music. This means that a musical work that is considered tonal will draw upon the notes within its tonal pool.

Just like our universe, some planets are closer to the sun than others. If you think of tonality as the sun, then you might imagine that some notes will be more tonal than others.

Tonality is a musical system that establishes a relationship between the melodies and the harmonies of composition through the use of a tonal center.

Keep in mind that a tonal center is that universe in which the sun is tonality and the planets are the notes.

Some notes are going to be more tonal than others just like some planets are going to be closer to the sun than other planets.

Tonality and atonality bring about the concept of tension and release in music.

The greatest composers recognized this as a significant concept in order to imitate the nuances of life. Remember that music imitates life, just like any art. The composers that best understand this concept are the ones that appeal the most to their audience.

There are audiences that are not particularly fond of tension in music. Perhaps, you are like that: perhaps you are not like that.

But by being aware of the concept of tonality then you can search within yourself to be able to recognize why you like certain types of music.

**Chords and Tonality**

Chords produce a variety of colors for composers to choose from. Not all composers like to write consonant or tonal music.

As a matter of fact, music just like anything else needs a dose of tension to be interesting. The tension is most probably in the lyrical part, in the rhythm, or perhaps in the harmony.

It is important to recognize how composers integrate musical tension to their compositions.
**Chord Progression**

Also, remember that chords that are strung together form a chord progression. This example shows you a very simple chord progression that gives you a sense of musical stability because of its nature of conclusion or finality.

This is one of the main features of the western civilization system of music.

**What about Tonality?**

A consonant use of harmony implies a chord combination that is stable and restful.

Moreover, this implies that it is pleasant to the listener's ears.

It is possible that what is tonal or atonal also depends on the listener’s personal musical taste. But, technically, these concepts are well defined. Although, I feel that personal preference is part of the appreciation for tonality.

The music that we like is probably dissonant to our parents. And that is because times always change. The music of the baroque is less dissonant that the music of Marilyn Manson.

**Dissonance**

On the contrary, dissonance provides unrest and tension to a piece of music. This creates a feeling of drama, suspense, and surprise.

You have sensed the power of music when you are watching a scary movie, and all of a sudden BANG there is a crazy chord or a crazy, deviant melody that makes what is happening on the screen even scarier.

However, for some people those dissonant moments in the music create excitement and pleasure. I know that some of us get a kick of those frightening moments when you know that something bad is going to happen.

You just don’t know when and suddenly…. well, you get the idea!
Atonality Rationale

In general, harmony creates a set of expectations. It stirs up people's emotions.

Harmony has changed through time, and we can see how composers took harmony to a breaking point at the end of the 19t century. In the search of new ideas, composers came across the use of atonal motifs that opened the door for atonality.

Atonality does not have a clear tonal center or progression. Any note is handled in a particular way to fit the purpose at hand. Atonality has a very striking effect on the listener.

But just like anything else, too much spicing is not good. A good dose of atonality will stir you anticipation and you expectation about any style of music.

Free Tonal Association

Remember that atonality lacks a tonal system or a key center. The use of atonal elements implies dissonant results in the music. Keep in mind that this is true for any of the arts.

Free tonal association is another way of referring to atonality. The concept of the center of the universe does not apply to atonal music. Musically, every tone is used for its qualities and for the picture that the composer is trying to paint with the sounds of music available to him.

Conclusion

In this lecture we learned that harmony is defined as the interaction of three or more tones that sound simultaneously.

We also learned about all of the components of harmony.

You should now be able to recognize a harmony and its components anytime you listen to music.