

Composition Workshop Assignment #2: Modeling

Compose a short song, or even just a fragment of a song that is modeled after (“inspired by”) some component of another, pre-existing song/composition. It can be as short as a single phrase (perhaps you can use your idea again for a subsequent and longer assignment), or it can be as long as the various sections of the modeled-after piece.

The idea here is to derive ONE component of your exercise from a separate piece of music, but NOT have your whole piece/song sound like it is merely plagiarized. When taking “inspiration” from some aspect of another work, try to make your result sound at least somewhat original, meaning that you’ll need to modify whatever component you’re modeling to a medium degree. At the same time (and for the sake of this assignment), try to make what you come up with sound similar enough to the original model so that the rest of us can easily recognize the relationship.

Also, please send-early, or bring in a recording of the piece you’re modeling so the rest of us can hear the connection.

Components to consider for modeling could be:

- A melody (or fragment)
- A chord progression (or fragment)
- A melody and chord combination
- A bass line
- A solo line (guitar solo, trumpet solo, etc.)
- A rhythm
- An accompaniment pattern

It would be best not to model too many components, because then it will just sound like copying. Make sure the component of the song you are modeling is rather conspicuous. Your result should sound like it was “inspired” by the initial example, as opposed to it merely sounding like a “remake” if it.

*If you are having trouble fleshing something out based merely on one idea from another song/composition, go ahead and collect ideas from multiple sources. Model one part of your exercise after one example and model another part of your exercise after something entirely different. Take one idea from a classical piece and another from a rock-n-roll song.

The goal of this assignment is to exploit some pre-existing elements (one or many) so that you do not feel that you are composing from scratch—which can feel overwhelming. Copying and then modifying elements from other works is a very legitimate and safe way to venture into new territory.

Some examples of this process are:

- Chopin’s *E Minor Prelude* → Radiohead’s *Exit Music for a Movie* (just the opening melodic motif)
- John Field’s *Nocturne No. 8* → Chopin’s *Eb Nocturne, Op. 9, No. 2* (similar left hand style and opening melodic leap)
- Huey Lewis’ *I Want a New Drug* → Ray Parker Jr.’s *Gostbusters* theme song (same chord progression and rhythm)
- Boston’s *More Than a Feeling* → Nirvana’s *Smells like Teen Spirit* (both choruses use the same guitar rhythm, but not the same chords)