

MELODIC AND MOTIVIC VARIATION

Melodic/motivic variation is simplistic, yet difficult. The concepts and applications are in some ways obvious and straight forward. The manner in which these techniques are applied, however, can make all the difference between something seeming artful or contrived.

There are many identified techniques used to develop or vary a given melody, motive or melodic fragment. Here are four of the most commonly used:

- *Sequence*—the material is restated at a higher or lower pitch level, literally or with mild modification (see the Bach “Minuet in G”)
- *Rhythm Change*—some or all of the note values are changed so that they are longer or shorter
- *Ornamentation*—additional notes are added to the original “backbone” of notes, usually at faster (shorter) note values, so as not to alter the original rhythmic contour of the line
- *Thinning*—some “less important” (less structural) notes are removed

Any of these techniques may be combined, thus multiplying the ways in which something can be varied just using these four approaches. And while there are many more known techniques, this is a good list to start with for practice purposes.

ASSIGNMENT

Take this melodic fragment from “Over The Rainbow” (or another one of your choice) and apply these variation techniques to it in a tasteful (read: not overdone) way. Do this two or three times in order to explore the variety of possibilities.



Refer to the “Star Wars” variations as models. Leave some space between each variation on your staff paper for easy reading. You may also try other techniques outlined from the “Star Wars” example if you are so inclined...

One suggestion, if you don’t already know this tune, get it in your head and try to hum or sing variations to yourself, rather than just come up with some on paper. The results should be more musical, although whatever you come up with should be worth sharing in class...Have some fun with this!