

Melody

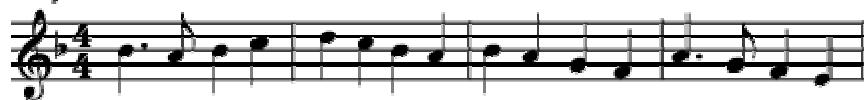
Melody, along with rhythm and harmony, is one of the three fundamental elements of music. A note is a sound with a particular pitch and duration. If you string a series of notes together, one after the other, you have a melody. But the melody of a piece of music isn't just any string of notes. It's the notes that catch your ear as you listen; the line that sounds most important is the melody.

A melody that stays on the same pitch gets boring pretty quickly. As the melody progresses, the pitches may go up or down slowly or quickly. One can picture a line that goes up steeply when the melody suddenly jumps to a much higher note, or that goes down slowly when the melody gently falls. Such a line gives the contour or shape of the melodic line.

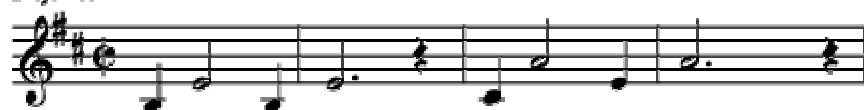
Melodic Motion

We use some terms to describe how a melody goes up and down. A melody that rises and falls slowly, with only small pitch changes between one note and the next, is **conjunct**. One may also speak of such a melody in terms of step-wise motion, since most of the intervals in the melody are half or whole steps or are part of a scale. A melody that rises and falls quickly, with large intervals between one note and the next, is a **disjunct** melody. One may also speak of "leaps" in the melody. Many melodies are a mixture of conjunct and disjunct motion.

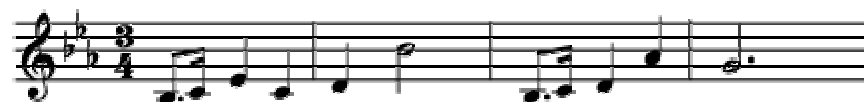
Conjunct



Disjunct



Mixed



Melodic Phrases

Melodies are often described as being made up of phrases. A musical **phrase** is actually a lot like a grammatical phrase. A phrase in a sentence is a group of words that make sense together and express a definite idea, but the phrase is not a complete sentence by itself. A melodic phrase is a group of notes that make sense together and express a definite melodic "idea", but it takes more than one phrase to make a complete melody. A phrase ends when it reaches a cadence.

A **cadence** is any place in a piece of music that has the feel of an ending point. This can be either a strong, definite stopping point, such as the end of the piece, but it also refers to the "temporary resting-place" pauses that indicate the end of a phrase. One of the most fundamental "rules" is that the final cadence ends on the tonic. In the Western tradition, the melody will normally end on some note of the tonic chord triad, and a melody ending on the tonic will give a stronger (more final-sounding) cadence than one ending on the third or fifth of the chord.