

The Phrase

Part Two: Rhythmic Structure

Phrase Length

- How long is a phrase? What are some of the limits on phrase length?
- In vocal music and music for brass and woodwinds, it is limited by breath capacity
- In other instrumental music, melodies are often conceived in the same manner as vocal music in terms of length
- This is roughly four measures of music in a moderate tempo (in 4/4 or 3/4 time)

Duple Phrase Lengths

- Four measure phrases act as the norm, but there are many exceptions
- Music in a slow tempo might have two-measure phrases
- Music in a fast tempo might have eight-measure phrases
- There is a favoring of *duple* phrase lengths
- Some theorists relate this preference for duple to the human heartbeat or the bilateral symmetry of the human body

Regular and Irregular (*asymmetrical*)

- Two-, four-, and eight-measure phrases have *regular* phrase lengths
- Phrases of other lengths are called *irregular* phrases (five, six, ...)
- Phrases that have an odd number of measures (three, five, seven...) may also be called *asymmetrical*

Phrase Extensions

- Sometimes these irregular phrase lengths are created by *phrase extension*
- A four-measure *basic phrase* might become a five-measure *extended phrase*
- It is often possible to rewrite an *extended phrase* to show its underlying *basic phrase*
- These extensions can take place at the end of a phrase, in the middle, or at the beginning

Internal Repetitions

- Phrase extensions can be caused by *internal repetitions*
- These repetitions may either be exact or varied (perhaps transposed)
- Internal repetitions can be omitted without harming the phrase
- Two-measure internal repetitions are the most common, extending a four-measure basic phrase to six measures

Parenthesis

- Phrases can be extended by parenthesis, with the inclusion of a parenthetical statement that isn't necessary to the rest of the phrase

The Prefix

- Phrases can occasionally be extended by adding a prefix before the melody begins
- These prefixes often take the form of an accompanimental "vamp" that sets the stage for the melody

The Suffix

- Phrases are most commonly extended by adding a suffix at the end
- Often this extension strengthens the final cadence, making it more emphatic
- In a "cadence-altering suffix" the initial cadence type is altered in the phrase extension

For next time

- Download and complete homework 4 on phrase extensions for Friday
- Download practice sheet for skills test I on triad identification (FRIDAY)