

Writing a Basic Classical Melody

Tempo

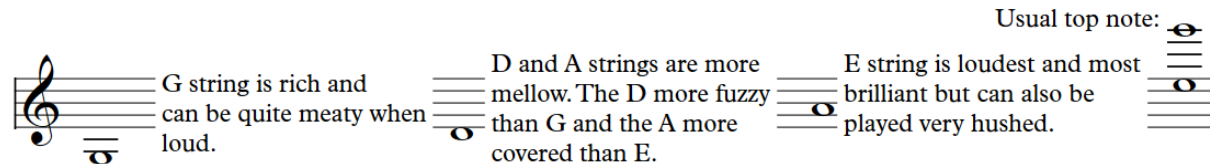
Think about the tempo – what character is your melody going to have? Avoid the boring old Sibelius default of mm. 100.


- *Presto* (very fast – ca. 140-170)
- *Allegro* (lively – ca. 120-145) NB ca. 2 beats per second
- *Moderato* (moderately – ca. 90-115)
- *Andante* (walking pace – ca. 75-105)
- *Adagio* (slow and stately – ca. 60-80) NB ca. 1 beat per second
- *Largo* (broadly – ca. 41-60)

Instrumentation

You need to get used to writing for specific forces. What are the highest and lowest practical notes? What does your chosen instrument sound like in different ranges? Information is given for violin and flute below – the ranges for other orchestral instruments can be found in the handbook

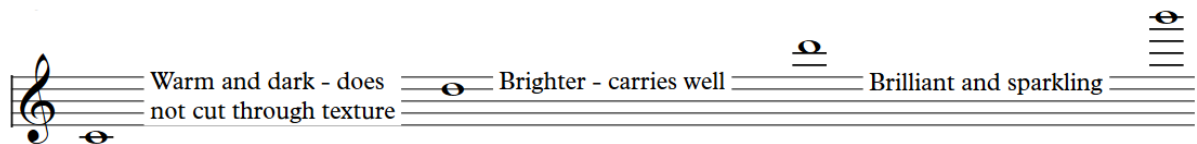
Violin



Usual top note: 

G string is rich and can be quite meaty when loud. D and A strings are more mellow. The D more fuzzy than G and the A more covered than E. E string is loudest and most brilliant but can also be played very hushed.

Flute



Warm and dark - does not cut through texture. Brighter - carries well. Brilliant and sparkling.

Repetition and Structure

A standard classical theme is accessible and memorable because it includes lots of repetition, with just enough change and contrast to keep it interesting. Three common theme structures are shown below. The numbers of bars in square brackets show typical lengths but these can be varied.

Sentence	<i>Presentation</i> – the basic melodic idea (often includes a repetition) [4 bars] <i>Fragmentation</i> – sequential repetition of a fragment [2 bars] <i>Cadence</i> – a generic perfect or imperfect cadence [2 bars]
Period	<i>Antecedent</i> – basic melodic idea [2 bars] followed by contrasting idea ending with imperfect cadence [2bars] <i>Consequent</i> – repetition of idea above [2 bars] followed by repetition of contrasting idea ending with perfect cadence [2 bars]
Small Ternary	<i>Exposition</i> – a <i>Period</i> as above but can optionally modulate to perf. cadence in dominant at end of consequent [8 bars] <i>Contrasting middle</i> – looser construction, often based on a sequence and or a standing on the dominant [4 bars] <i>Recapitulation</i> – typically the consequent phrase from the <i>Exposition</i> , but it must end with a perfect cadence in the tonic [4 bars]

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Endings and cadences

Clear and convincing cadences are a vital part of the classical melody – each section of your melody must end on a cadence. Keep in mind the following points.

Cadences will be stronger and more emphatic if ...

- they land on the first beat of the bar
- they finish on the root note of the final chord
- they are in root position
- the arrival note lasts longer than previous rhythms / chords
- the harmonic rhythm often speeds up into cadences

The following cadential progressions are particularly common:

- ii6(/5) – V – I
- V6/4 – 5/3 – I (cadential 6/4 often preceded by ii6)
- ii – V (often with cadential 6/4)
- I – V (often with cadential 6/4)

Dynamics and articulation

Dynamics and articulation are really important – they help establish the character of your melody. The example below gives a sense of the level of detail you need to include. Students tend not to put in enough of the two and three notes slurs that give Classical melodies their characteristic shaping. The boxed text tells you how to input the various dynamics and articulations in Sibelius.

Tie: on numeric keypad (enter)

Slur: S then spacebar to move along (or select notes to be slurred)

Violin



Dynamics: CTRL + E then right click for menu

Articulations: staccato (as well as accent and marcato) on numeric keypad

5








Hairpins: Cresc. = H /
Descresc. = SHIFT + H

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Melodic embellishment

In the WCT tradition all **dissonant** notes must be treated very carefully. Arpeggiations simply skip between notes of the chord and can be used freely – they are **consonant**. All notes that are NOT part of the harmony MUST follow one of the patterns outlined below.

Dissonances resolved by step

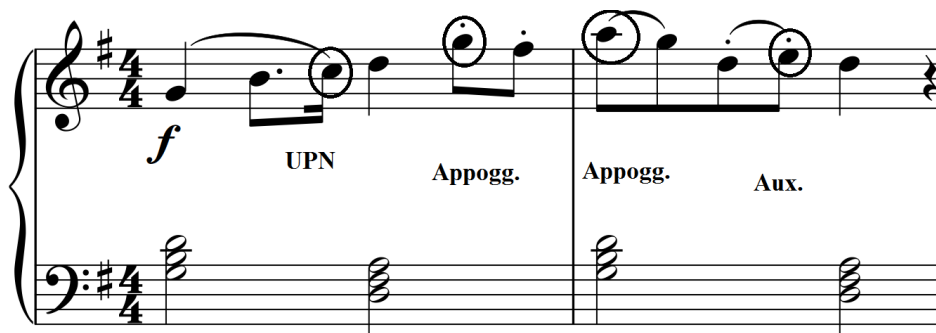
Unaccented		Accented		
Steps away from note of chord and back	Moves by step between notes of chord	Moves by step between notes of chord	Prepared (same note before)	Not prepared (leap before)
Auxilliary* (Aux.)	Unacc. Passing (UPN)	Acc. Passing (APN)	Suspension (Susp.)	Appoggiatura (Appogg.)
				

Dissonances not resolved by step (unaccented)

Approached by step and quitted by leap	Echappé	
Approached by step and quitted onto same note	Anticipation	

* occasionally auxiliary notes are accented

When you are writing a melody you must (at least to start off with) label your chords and if necessary write out the component notes so that you are clear exactly what is dissonant and what is consonant.



I	V	I	V
D	A	D	A
B	F#	B	F#
G	D	G	D

The two most common mistakes are:

- Dissonances left by leap (only the Echappé should do this)
- Unaccented dissonances approached by leap

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Some conventions in Classical melody

- Melodies tend not to be too angular (i.e. lots of apparently arbitrary leaping) unless the composer is trying to achieve a specific effect – large leaps that are not balanced by a leap or steps in the opposite direction are quite rare
- Phrases tend to be based on regular units of 2 and 4 bars (which does not mean there cannot be interpolations)
- Melodies use lots of repetition including exact repeats, sequences and the repetition and development of motifs
- The norm is for relatively simple and repetitive rhythms (in particular don't use excessively syncopated rhythms that obscure the basic meter)
- Prominent augmented and diminished intervals are rare

Keys and Modulation

Composers in the Western Classical Tradition tend to restrict modulations to a small group of closely related keys. The closely related keys for C major are shown below. If a piece moves into one of these keys for an extended period then the closely related keys for that key as a tonic may also come into play. As shown below, it is also common for pieces to move into the parallel tonic minor and then use those closely related keys as well.

