

Melody: Characteristics, Writing, and Listening

As we've learned, intervals do not occur in isolation; rather, they are simply the stuff of all music. Beethoven employs streams of melodic intervals to create the haunting melody of the opening of his String Quartet in Exercise 3.10. Further, he uses this same series of intervals again and again, first as the source of the melody in the second violin, then in the entrances of viola, and, finally, cello. At the same time, Beethoven has also vertically combined each line's melodic intervals to create first two, then three, and finally four voices moving simultaneously against one another. Such a process, whereby one or more melodies are combined, is called *counterpoint*, and the vertical pillars that result are called *harmonies*. This process will be the focus of the rest of this book.

Before we delve into the world of counterpoint and harmony, we will first apply our knowledge of key, scale, and interval to writing and hearing single-line melodies. Example 3.20 contains numerous short melodic excerpts from a wide variety of music that spans the last 1,000 years. The examples are drawn from both vocal music (including both solo song and opera) and instrumental music (ranging from solo piano to full orchestra). Listen to the short melodic excerpts with the following questions in mind.

1. Are they in a key? If so how do you know?
2. Do the melodies have a shape or contour? You might want to trace the general flow of each melody, "connecting the dots" with a pencil.
3. What sorts of melodic intervals occur between pitches? Do the composers prefer some intervals more than others?
4. Are there accented events in the melodies, that is, events that draw your attention, such as leaps, chromaticism, and longer durations? If so, are these events isolated, or does the composer prepare them in some way?

EXAMPLE 3.20

A. Wipo, *Victimae pachali laudes* (c. 1020)



B. Byzantine chant (c. 1200)



C. Guillaume Costeley "Allon, gay, gay" (c. 1575)

Al - lon, gay, gay, gay Ber - ge - res, Al - lon, gay, al - lon, gay, soy - ez le - ge - res, Suy - vez moi.