Elements of Music - Part Six

Four Combinational Operations of Music: Media, Genre, Form, Texture

At the highest "level" of compositional thinking a composer begins a composition with Four areas of composition that must be determined: (1) the instrumental and/or vocal combinations that will be employed (media), (2) the basic model of composition that will be used throughout the work (genre), (3) the large and small sectional units of the composition including in some cases the entire composition (form) and (4) The (texture(s)) of the work.

These areas constitute the Four Combinational Operations of Music. These "operations" are what a composer determines before any specific music making begins. Once these are determined, the work with the Eight Basic Elements and the Three Foundational Procedures begins and the Four Combinational Operations become a "road map" for the composer's general use.

The term medium (pl. media) in music refers to the type of performing ensemble that is selected for a given work. There are three general categories of Western performing ensembles - (1) instrumental, (2) vocal and (3) mixed vocal and instrumental. Under each general category below there are sub-categories.

Below is a list of the general categories and sub-categories of performance media found in Western music: Large ensembles are known appropriately as "large" ensembles while small ensembles are known as "chamber" groups. Music for one solo player (with or without keyboard or guitar accompaniment) is known as "solo literature".

Vocal Media

1. Solo Literature - vocal solo (usually with accompaniment of keyboard or guitar),
2. Chamber Groups - vocal duet, vocal trio, vocal quartet, et al, madrigal groups (4-8 singers),
3. Large Ensembles - chorus.

Instrumental Media

1. Solo Literature - instrumental solo (usually with accompaniment by keyboard or guitar),
2. Chamber Group - string quartet, woodwind quintet, piano trio, small mixed group, jazz combo, rock group (in number of players, not in dynamic effect),
3. Large Ensemble - symphony orchestra, concert or symphonic band, marching band, big jazz band.

Mixed Instrumental and Vocal Media
1. Chamber Group - any small vocal and instrumental combination,

2. Large Ensemble - chorus and orchestra, chorus and band, chorus and jazz band, vocal soloists-chorus-orchestra, et al.

**Genre**

Other than determining the medium or media of a composition, a composer must also determine the genre before the creative work of making music begins. Genre is concerned with the basic model (opera, symphony, ballet, raga, gamelan, et al) of compositional approach that is to be employed in the composition.

Genre is concerned with basic compositional design when considering the Eight Basic Elements and the Three Foundational Procedures. Names exist that have been used over the many centuries to identify all musical genres. Below is a list of the most common genres of music from the history of Western music. A short description of the model of compositional approach accompanies certain genres. Each genre is listed under the general category of milieu. Some genres were more prevalent than others in certain historical musical style periods.

**Instrumental Genres**

1. Dance Piece/Dance Suite/Ballet - Use of rhythm to evoke dancing,

2. Canzona/Ricercare - Contrapuntal in style,

3. Prelude - Improvisational is style,

4. Toccata - Improvisational in style,

5. Passacaglia/Chaconne - A type of variation,

6. Fugue - Strict contrapuntal design,

7. Theme and Variations,

8. Concerto Grosso - Multi-movement work,

9. Sonata - Multi-movement work,

10. Symphony - Multi-movement work,

11. Concerto - Multi-movement work,

12. String Quartet - Multi-movement work,

13. Woodwind Quintet - Multi-movement work,
14. Piano Trio - Multi-movement work,
15. Instrumental Songs or Arrangements - Many pop and jazz pieces are this genre,
16. Character or Mood Piece - Mostly written for solo instruments,
17. March - Short single-movement work.

**Vocal Genres**

Those marked below with an asterisk are mixed instrumental and vocal genres. Any vocal composition without instrumental accompaniment is known as *a cappella* from the Italian term meaning "chapel" - music written for the choir of the chapel; thus, music without instrumental accompaniment.

1. Song - For solo singer with or without accompaniment,
2. Madrigal - Chamber vocal group,
3. Mass - Large or chamber vocal group,
4. Motet - Large or chamber vocal group (instruments occasionally accompany),
5. Chorale/Hymn/Spiritual, Large or chamber vocal group (instruments occasionally accompany),
6. Cantata - Large or chamber vocal group,
7. Opera/Operetta/Broadway Musical,
8. Oratorio,
9. Vocal jazz or pop arrangement.

There are single-movement genres and multi-movement genres. A single-movement composition is complete in itself while a multi-movement genre is a work conceived as a whole but is actually made up of more than one separate piece (or movements). There is usually a short pause in time between movements. Separate movements of a multi-movement work are sometimes related by having common melodic material. This is called a cyclic relation in music.

**Form (Musical Form)**

Form in music refers to large and small sectional patterns resulting from a basic model. There are basic approaches to form in music found in cultures around the world. Throughout a given composition a composer may:

2. Present a melody and continually vary it (A A1 A2 A3 A4 A5 etc.),

3. Present a series of different melodies (A-B-C-D-E-F-G etc.),


5. Present a melody and expand and/or modify it.

A specific musical form implies an overall sectional pattern that is normally associated with it. This association of form and large sectional pattern is the result of hundreds of years of music tradition in the West. Examples of forms in music follow below.

1. Song - A-B; A-B-A (for solo singer with or without accompaniment),


3. Sonata-Allegro - A-B-A (A form that "develops" the beginning melodic "ideas").

**Texture**

If a dictionary were consulted for a definition of the word "texture," the most common usage would be: "the visual or tactile surface characteristics and appearance of something." Qualifiers such as "rough", "smooth", "coarse", "silken", "thin" and "thick" most often accompany the term. Its qualifiers are best applied when describing certain characteristics of textiles. It is also a term used in music; but, as a musical term it suffers from an ambiguity that is unfortunate. "Texture", in music, describes two areas of musical phenomena: (1) melodic and harmonic relationships and (2) the density of the simultaneous layering of different musical components.

The simplest and most traditional use of the term "texture" in music deals with describing melodic and harmonic relationships. Specifically, the term is used commonly to describe the "construction" of music. Three typical "constructions" are

1. a single melodic line (monophony or monophonic texture),

2. two or more melodic lines of equal complexity, and sounding simultaneously (polyphony or polyphonic texture),

3. a single melodic line with an accompaniment of harmony (homophony or homophonic texture).

**Monophony or Monophonic Texture**

Music that is composed of a single line of melody (or a rhythmic line played on a percussion instrument) is said to have monophonic texture. This is the most ancient of musical textures and occurs in present-day musics of many cultures. Unaccompanied song is monophonic in texture. A single musical instrument playing a melody or many instruments playing the same melody is monophonic texture. If a single melodic line is coupled with a contrasting percussion accompaniment of equal complexity the term monophony is inappropriate. The appropriate term for this texture is polyphony.

**Polyphony or Polyphonic Texture**
Music that is composed of two or more lines of melody of relatively equal complexity is said to have **polyphonic texture**. In the music of the West **polyphony** appeared first during the 9th century in the sacred music of the Roman Catholic Church. The craft of combining two or more melodies of equal complexity that occur in music at the same time is known as **counterpoint** (i.e., point against point). Music that has a polyphonic texture is said to be **contrapuntal**.

Melodic lines in a polyphonic texture are complementary to each other and do not "interfere" with each other sonically. Each melodic line in a contrapuntal texture occupies a separate sonic range and their rhythmic activity and linear contours complement each other. If polyphonic lines were to occupy the same range or have rhythmic patterns that were similar, each would lose its complimentary role to the other.

**Homophony or Homophonic Texture**

Music that is composed of an obviously predominant melody, accompanied by harmonic material and/or a clearly less-important melody, is said to have **homophonic texture**. The melodic material of homophony is usually in the uppermost pitch range. Most songs and much instrumental music is composed in this texture. Homophonic texture reflects the classic ideal of simplicity and balance.

**Textures of Non-Western Music**

Many world musics are monophonic in texture, and a few are also polyphonic. A monophonic texture may sound quite complex if the composer employs a rich "palette" of musical timbres. The musics of Africa and Indonesia have the appearance of complex polyphony. Homophony has been used more in the West than in other cultures as Western music has a highly developed harmonic component.

**Other Aspects of Texture**

Considering musical texture in our second broad interpretation (the density of the simultaneous layering of different musical components) it should be noted that music also has a quality of thinness or thickness, transparency or opaqueness. A small ensemble of a few instruments will sound lighter, thinner and much less dense than a large performing group. A vocal group of four singers will produce a more transparent musical effect than a large chorus. Within compositions many changes of density may take place through different combinations of performing forces.

The qualifiers "thin", "thick", "transparent", "opaque", "light" and "dense" are good companions to the term "texture" when describing the effect of relative fullness of musical sound upon the listener not only for Western music but for all world musics.

**Antiphony and Heterophony**

There are two musical "effects" or "techniques" that are often included in discussions of musical texture although they have little to do with what we have included in our discussion of musical texture thus far. These "effects" are known as **antiphony** and **heterophony**, and are encountered occasionally in certain cultures including the cultures of the West.

The term **antiphony** identifies the stereo or quadraphonic effect achieved by placing two or more groups of performers at different locations in a performance space (such as a large church or performing hall). When each antiphonal group alternates its musical material in succeeding phrases this "effect" is known as antiphony or the music is said to be antiphonal. Another term for this technique is **call and response** wherein different
groups of musicians "toss" music back and forth like a tennis ball in a tennis match. This was a very common mode of performance during the Renaissance in Venice at the church of San Marco with its double choir lofts each with its own organ. Since that time many composers have used this dramatic effect in their music often in more modest spatial settings but with the antiphonal effect clearly being a part of the "texture" of the music.

**Heterophony** is an "echo" or "shadow" effect in music, wherein melodic material is played by two or three different performers in very close musical proximity one to the other. One performer plays the basic melody while the other performers "echo" or "shadow" the melody notes by playing slightly after the basic notes. In some heterophonic styles the "shadow" performer not only "echoes" the basic melodic tones, but also ornaments them as well. This musical "effect" is used a great deal in non-Western musics such as in China, Indonesia (Bali, Java, Sumatra), the Middle East (Persian and Arab musics), and in certain parts of Africa.

**Titles of Music Compositions**

Musical compositions are titled; that is, they are identified by a name. Due to the criteria imposed by the "logic" of musical terminology some titles are determined before the composition is begun while others may wait until the composition is finished. Below is a list of criteria by which a composer chooses a title for a composition:

1. Pieces for a ceremony or specific usage are titled for a purpose. Examples - *Mass*, *Cantata*, *Fanfare*, *March*, *Dance*, et al.

2. Pieces using a compositional procedure may be titled by the name of the particular device, Examples - *Theme and Variations*, *Fugue*, *Passacaglia*, *Canon*, *Rondo*, et al.,

3. A piece can be titled for the medium that is performing the composition, Examples - *Symphony*, *String Quartet*, *Woodwind Quintet*, *Piano Trio*, et al.,

4. A piece may be titled for the genre that it represents. Examples - *Concerto Grosso*, *Canzona*, *Toccata*, *Prelude*, *Sonata*, *Hymn*, et al.,

5. Tonality can be added to any of the above. Examples - *Sonata in B flat major*, *Mass in D minor*, et al.,

6. A proper name may be added or substituted for any of the above. Examples - *The Stars and Stripes Forever* (a march,) *The Windmill* (a theme and variations,) *Lord Nelson Mass*, Sonata in D Major (The Nightingale,)

7. Pieces about a person or event may be titled with the proper name of the person or event. Examples - *Aida* (an opera,) *Rodeo* (a ballet,) *Symphony Fantastique* (a dream,) et al.,

8. A series of sonatas, symphonies, string quartets, woodwind quartets may be numbered by order of sequence. Examples - *Sonata No. 5 in G Major*, *Symphony No. 5 in C Minor*, et al.,

9. Compositions may be identified by their opus number. (Opus number is used for some 19th century composers to identify the chronological sequence of groups of compositions by their date of publication. Examples - *Sonata No. 10 in D Major, Op. 26*, et al.

**About Interpretation in Music**
Musicians seldom perform a piece of music exactly the same way during repeated performances, whether the music is notated or played each time from memory. This notion is known as the interpretation of music by the performer and it is this aspect of performance that makes music "come alive" and "breathe" whether the music is Mozart, jazz, salsa, folk or rock. Interpreting music allows performers the opportunity to probe spirituality as a fundamental part of music.

Musicians enjoy the surprise of their interpretation of music. Upon hearing familiar music there are certain expectations as to tempos, dynamics, timbre and other elements of music that listeners anticipate. When performers create surprise in music because of "interpretation," openings to new perspectives about music occur.