

USING SCALES TO COMPOSE

Review of vocab:

Scale: a specific ordering of notes that spans an octave

Scale degrees: numbers corresponding to the notes of the scale (ex: scale degree 1, scale degree 2, scale degree 3, etc.)

Tonic: note on which the scale is built (which is scale degree 1, the bottom note)

Scales provide a great resource for composing music. Using the notes of a particular scale means that:

1. the resulting music will have a recognizable mood or effect (for ex: dark, happy, exotic, etc.)
2. the melodies you compose will have a sense of structure and organization, allowing you to create actual themes
3. Any notes from the scale can be combined without clashing, allowing you to create multiple parts (melodies, accompaniments, etc.) that “work” with each other.

Common scales:

- Major scale, such as the C Major scale (C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C)
- Natural minor scale, such as the A natural minor scale (A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A)
- Many others

SO, WHAT DO I DO WITH A SCALE? (ELEMENTS IN A MUSICAL COMPOSITION)

Accompaniment: layer(s) of music that supports the melody in the background. Basic types include:

1. **Drone:** a long, held-out note or notes; often in the low range, often using the tonic and/or scale degree 5.
2. **Fifths:** a pair of two notes whose distance apart spans 5 scale degrees. Most common example: tonic with scale degree 5.
 - a. Playing a slow, repeating pattern of fifths in the middle-lower range can give you a solid harmony part. Example: scale degrees 1/5 – 6/3 – 4/1 – 5/2
3. **Ostinato** (a.k.a. **loop**): a short figure that repeats (loops) continuously
4. **Rhythms:** any rhythmic layer (ex: percussion) that adds to the momentum or “groove” of the melody

Note: Sometimes an accompaniment layer is memorable and strong enough to form a theme on its own. Example: the “Mission Impossible” and “Jaws” themes are both based on a simple ostinato.

Melody: a line of notes producing a specific musical idea; a “tune”

Theme: a type of melody that is structured and simple enough to be remembered by the audience. Examples: the “Star Wars” theme

Counter melody: a second melody that plays along with (or against) the main melody