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## Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTORY

**Melody** may be defined as a succession of musical tones which have been organized into some kind of coherent shape or pattern.

The rhythm of the melody (that is, the kinds of note values it uses, and its tempo) is of paramount concern. In many idioms and styles, the relationship between the melody and the underlying harmonic progression demands an equal amount of attention. While melodies can exist without being related to harmony (for instance: melodies based on *tone-rows*, melodies from a period of history that predated the use of harmony, melodies worked out from principles of modern linear counterpoint, etc.), most melodies which are *songs*, or are related to the song form, show a kinship to harmonic progression. In fact, one of the things which this book will demonstrate is that the quality and nature of a melody is often a result of its relation to the harmony.

Despite considerations of rhythm and harmony, melody enjoys more freedom than any other ingredient in music. In fact, in theory at least, any tone can be followed by any other tone, so that restrictions that are placed on melody are never *laws*, but are **stylistic principles**, which are quite a different consideration. The stylistic principles will differ with the style and idiom of the melody, and they will be concerned only with helping the composer retain the style and idiom within which he is interested in writing. Clearly then, any attempt to lay down standards for an acceptable melody *must take into account the function that the melody is intended to perform*. For an example, it would be useless to try to apply identical standards to:

1. a melody aimed at accompanying lyrics in a popular song style.
2. a melody intended as the theme for a motion picture or television drama.
3. a melody intended to be the basis of an instrumental contrapuntal work.
4. a melody constructed for a specific psychological purpose, such as the portrayal of anger.
5. a melody intended as a jazz *head* (i.e. *theme*).
6. a melody intended as the basic theme of an extended composition.

While there may be some considerations common to all of the above situations, their different purposes will require different technical approaches. For instance, though the use of sequences and imitation is usually desirable in popular songs, it could be undesirable in a contrapuntal melody or in a melody portraying anger. Similarly, where awkward leaps or serial (twelve-tone) melodic techniques would probably be avoided in the popular song, they might be the main material of the line illustrating anger.

A melodic line introduced as the basic *theme* of a composition would require characteristics not necessarily needed in the other examples. For instance, it should be quite simple so that it can be readily fixed in the listener's mind, so that it offers possibility for elaboration.

Furthermore, the sound medium which is being used to produce the melody must be taken into account. It is true that a well-constructed melody will remain so no matter what instrument plays it or what the pitch level is, and it is true that a poorly-constructed melody will not improve at a different pitch level or with a different tone color. However, a melodic line may be more suited to one instrument than to another because of range and technique considerations. For instance, a violinist can handle lines that might be impossible for a trumpet player, and a good popular singer may have difficulty with a line that might present no problems to a good trumpet player.

Therefore, this book will not attempt an all-embracing survey of melody and melodic construction. A study of counterpoint will establish those considerations which are specifically applicable to that area of music (see "Modern Contrapuntal Technique", pub. Kendor) and the manipulation of *rows* can be gained from a study of the *serial* idiom (see "Modern Twelve-Tone Technique", pub. Kendor). What this book *will* attempt to do is make an investigation of:

1. Some Psychological Considerations - an examination of some of the devices that determine the emotional quality of a melody.
2. Some Technical Considerations - an examination of some of the traditional concerns of melodic shape and rhythm.
3. Some Formal Considerations - an examination of *motifs*, *phrases*, *sentences*, and the full *song form*.