SCORECLUB

CRAFT *of* COMPOSITION 1

COURSE CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

How to use this course

Remember. It is your job and responsibility to follow the practice steps given. These are proven to provide the best results. It requires effort, but there are no shortcuts to true fluency.

Just like there are no shortcuts to building speed in scales on the piano, or building physical strength or speed or any physical ability, there are no shortcuts or tricks to master composition.

You must learn it well, and put in the time, through diligent repetition.

LESSON 1

In this lesson we start to get a sense of what craftsmanship is in composition, focusing on two part writing in binary form. Also covers a standard piano figure.

This is a lesson on the foundation of composition craft. There are many concepts in here to consider and use that are more far-reaching than may at first appear. We are starting with clean and simple writing, which, although may seem easier, can actually be quite challenging.

Example, Carl Czerny Op.453, No.2

- Grand staff
- Positioning of the tempo
- How to think of dynamics
- Basic phrase structure: Period = antecedent + consequent
- Simple binary form
- Cadences in formal structure
- How phrases function within the binary form
- Contrast, departure, tension, return
- Harmony in establishing contrast in B section
- How to write binary form, simple chart
- Motivic construction and use
- Melodic contour to create tension and direction towards a tonic
- How to do harmonic analysis with music in two voices: hearing in larger groups
- Considering intervals: a simple structure to follow- perfect intervals on the outside (5ths, 8ves) and imperfect consonance (3rds, 6ths, 10ths) on the inside
- Long range voice-exchange
- Piano figure: parallel 10ths and pedal tone
- Considering where your highest note is to shape a piece

"Writing cleanly and simply with good craftsmanship is the mark of a good composer."

"Thinking of motivic contour is more important than exact intervals."

LESSON 2

This lesson is centered around what you can do with block chords. We also look at rounded binary form and continue to reinforce phrase structure and proper use of motivic materials, among many other subjects touched. All these lessons are very dense, so the best thing for you to do is to take it one model piece at a time, making sure to get very familiar with all the elements of structure and craft demonstrated in the piece for you to use in your practice pieces.

Example 1, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.823, No.5

This lesson centers around three-part chords and simple melodic writing, but of course along with many elements of compositional structure and craft.

These three-note chords are beautiful and effective, and you will make use of those in your writing throughout your composition career. They sound beautiful on the piano but also will become a staple of your orchestral writing in the future, perfect for all instrumental choirs and all registers. Airy and open in the high registers and resonant in the low registers.

- Phrase structure: parallel period
- Rounded binary form
- Motivic construction and use
- How the B section creates contrast, tension
- Using A material in B section
- Phrase contour in B section creating contrast
- Building anticipation in third phrase
- Rounded binary writing guide
- Three-part voicings
- Long range voice exchange (passing chords)
- Considering intervals
- Adding notes to the dominant (four notes)
- How to take the simple writing covered in the lesson to make it completely usable for your everyday writing
- How to use the three voice chords in lower register for a rich, beautiful sound
- Using the structure with added rhythmic complexity

Example 2, Carl Czerny Op.823, No,18

Three-part voicings with added rhythmic activity and complexity in the RH. Builds on the previous example.

- Understanding tempo markings
- What makes the music easy to sight-read: straight scales and arpeggios, repeated notes
- Phrase structure: period
- Consequent phrase developing secondary material from antecedent
- Sequencing & guide tones to lead to cadence
- Three-part voicings
- How to consider the entire melodic line in a measure when writing chord voicings
- Resolving leading tone in the melodic line
- Adding rhythmic variety to the LH chords

"Dynamics are not a volume control but an attitude."

Example 3, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.599, No21

Three voice block chords in LH, with melody above. This piece is in waltz tempo and style. 32 measures. The LH repeated chords is an effective and pianistic accompaniment device not often used by novice composers. It is also a very effective orchestration pattern, which shows:

- Parallel period
- Simple binary form
- B section build-up of tension in antecedent phrase
- How the final phrase of B section leads towards the final tonic
- When it's OK to double the third of tonic chord
- How to consider passing tones over repeating chords: as if it was sustained
- RH and LH are in some ways like two separate layers, but also consider each other
- Tip: When hands join rhythmically, they can be considered to complete each other
- Played in minor, softer and slower, poignant and dramatic

"Context is important when considering dynamics, it's never just a volume knob."

"Make use of your material. Do a lot with a little!"

LESSON 3

The essential guide to basic dynamics and articulations. The information here comes directly from musicians. It's not just textbook stuff. Although centered around the piano, the information conveyed will transfer to most instruments.

With this lesson you will develop a solid foundation to fine tune your writing of articulations and use them with confidence.

- Considering tempo and style when interpreting articulations.
- How the interpretation of dynamic markings is affected by musical style and expression markings.
- An overview of dynamics and what they mean
- Legato
- Understanding the simple detached notation and how musicians will interpret and shape the notes depending on the provided musical context: dynamics, tempo, musical style and expression markings
- Considering the physical aspect of playing when interpreting articulations. (For example, repeated notes require a re-attack that will create a break between notes. This need not be notated, simplifying the notation.)
- Staccato. The basic definition
- How context affects staccato performance
- Staccatissimo, confusion with the textbook marking. Musician recommendations to avoid confusion.
- Accents. The standard accent and definition
- How context affects the performance of the accent
- Strong accent, issues with the definition and usage
- Musician recommendations for accent: use only the main accent
- Note contour of the accented note
- Tenuto
- Staccato combined with accents, tenuto
- Slur to staccato figure
- Portato. Slurred staccato

It is common for composers to have even more combinations of articulations, but the reality is that often musicians don't even know what to do with them. What you see in this lesson will generally be all you need.

"You can do a lot with piano and forte."

"Musicians are not machines."

LESSON 4

Parallel thirds and sixths in melodic writing. These will be referred to as doubled notes.

Example 1, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.599, No.21

This is the same music as the third piece in lesson 2, but with the melodic doubling in thirds from Czerny's original. This is an example of parallel thirds above repeated block chords.

We also start adding more articulations based on lesson 3. Make sure to pay close attention to their performance and notation.

- Understanding the sound and use of parallel thirds and sixths. "Thickening"
- Reasons to use parallel thirds and sixths
- How and when to pick one or the other
- When to use doubled notes or single notes to support formal structure

Example 2, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.139, No.7

This one is to show the use of melodic notes doubled in parallel sixths. This also develops the concept of three-note chord voicings from lesson 2, as well as four-note voicings.

- The sound of parallel sixths
- Reasons to choose them
- How they create complete three-note or four-note voicings if considered in combination with the LH notes

Example 3, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.823, No.32

In this example both parallel thirds and sixths are now used, considering why one over the other and how to structure it. It is also the first example in 6/8.

- Describing the style of the 6/8 meter
- Considering how both hands complete each other into a full voicing even if independent
- How the thirds and sixths are used to both follow phrase structure and harmonies
- How phrase contour affects dynamics in interpretation
- Accompaniment in B section that drives towards final cadence

Example 4, Carl Czerny Op.139, No.16

Example of using both melodic parallel sixths and thirds in a slower tempo and more expressive musical style, compared to the more active previous examples.

- Simple binary
- Example of very well controlled use of thirds and sixths that makes sense within the form
- Use of rests in accompaniment
- LH contrapuntal style writing that gives direction to the writing

Example 5, Carl Czerny Op.823, No.43

Use of parallel thirds and sixths in some parts of the music only, resulting in a more three-voice chorale style.

- Writing in voices, using separate stems, in RH only

LESSON 5

Proper use of arpeggiated accompaniments.

- Arpeggiated patterns often come from broken block chords, with the same voicing and voice leading.
- Think in groups, not note by note.

Example 1, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.139, No.5

This example makes use of the broken chord accompaniment, and building on previous concepts.

- Showing voice-leading with arpeggiation
- Practice by reverse engineering arpeggiated accompaniments into block chords
- Voicings continue the same practices as what we saw with block chords
- Considering the intervallic relationship between RH and LH at important points in the measure
- Marking of *legato* to make for cleaner notation
- Slurs as phrase marks
- Phrase shape and repeated notes, performer's perspective
- Parallel period
- Rounded binary form
- Arpeggiated chords as broken block chords
- Interval between RH and LH at important points in the measure
- Considering the use of the third on tonic chord
- Discussing phrase marks
- Placing the use of melodic parallel thirds with good compositional design
- B section starting on the tonic harmony
- Motivic development technique: filling in notes
- Harmonic variation shown, for a less classical sound
- Minor version demonstrated

"Think like a musician when writing music for musicians."

Example 2, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.599, No.34

Arpeggiated accompaniment with RH using doubled thirds and sixth, with the meter in 6/8.

- Discussion on interpretation of notes without any markings, based on the musical context
- Another look at arpeggiation as broken block chords, including how the RH interacts with the LH notes
- Parallel period
- Simple binary form
- Motivic design discussed
- B section motive as a development of the A motive inverted
- The accompaniment rising to follow the form

Example 3, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.823, No.47

Arpeggiated pattern continues with the addition of sustained notes. The melodic writing expands in range and activity, with more complex use of slur and detached note groupings. It is also the goal of these lessons to expand your writing abilities and ideas, and here the melodic writing is worth a look.

- Double stemmed notes for held notes in arpeggiated pattern. How this is notated and what it sounds like
- Wide range writing for a fluid style
- Accompaniment jumps register down for the final phrase to come back up. Good design

LESSON 6

Building the arpeggiation concept more and introducing ternary form.

Example 1, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.453, No.18

This example makes use of triplets in the accompaniment to show how it is different than 6/8 time and introduces ternary form.

- When arpeggiated triplets are a better choice than 6/8, and what it says to musicians
- Using simile
- D.C. al Fine and Fine, how to read it
- Ternary form
- Figuration over arpeggiated accompaniments, dealing with dissonance: when it's OK, when it's not
- Motivic development using neighbour tone figure
- Sequencing
- Descending line leading to cadence
- Increasing rhythmic
- Motivic development using inversion
- Sequences getting shorter to push to cadence
- Guide tones at start of measures leading towards tonic

Example 2, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.453, No.6

Alberti bass is introduced.

- Defining the Alberti bass and how it is used
- More examples of voicings between two hands with arpeggiated Alberti bass
- Discussing performance of staccato in classical style
- Portato example
- Ternary form
- A look at dissonant figuration in melodic line over Alberti bass
- *"A is home, B is the departure, the tension, the conflict that then brings us back home, to A"*

Example 2b, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.453, No.6

The same as the previous example, but with the return to A written out with the addition of a Coda.

- Introducing the coda
- The role of the coda

Example 3, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.139, No.23

A dramatic and lyrical musical example using the Alberti bass, with a sustained first note.

- The Alberti bass with sustained first note
- Ternary form
- Should you have repeat signs? Some thoughts
- A look at some voicings
- Accented figuration: part of this minor lyrical classical style
- Some examples of the use of natural, harmonic and melodic minor
- Dissonant chromatic figuration

LESSON 7

A short lesson with two more advanced and satisfying examples of arpeggiation.

Example 1, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.261, No.52

Two-handed arpeggiation for piano. Also applies to harp.

- Considering the performance. Musicians are not machines and will not play like robots
- Playing as block chords
- Aspects of notation and use of rests in this type of writing
- When to use crescendo or dimiminuendo: when it is a longer-range dynamic change

Voice-leading is the logical movement of voices. This is more important than straining to hold common tones or stepwise movement.

Example 2, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.139, No.15

Arpeggiation and melodic line combined in the right hand. A typical piano pattern.

- Ternary form
- Short B section with a single dominant chord

LESSON 8

Broken chord accompaniment patterns, but not arpeggiated.

Example 1, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.453, No.8

The waltz pattern bass-chord-chord.

- Considering voicing and voice-leading same as previous examples
- Considering the use and performance of the slurs and staccato markings
- Descending line to cadence
- Using secondary material from the A section as primary material for the B section
- A version in minor key

Example 2, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.139, No.6

A waltz type bass-chord-chord pattern with the first note sustained.

- Notation considerations of the note-chord-chord pattern with first note sustained
- Considering motivic contour. How contour affects how a musician will phrase
- B section with the same material as A on dominant. *"Same, but different.*
- Using block chords to punctuate
- Version in minor
- Using melodic minor with scale passage over the dominant chord

"How to perform your music can be in the notes themselves and their contour, it may not require any more than that. No need to clutter the page."

Example 3, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.599, No.22

Broken chord patten in 2/4. A version detached, and a version with first note sustained.

- More complex use of slurs and staccato and phrasing, supporting the function of the musical elements
- Simple binary form

Example 4, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.823, No.46

Chord-note broken chord pattern in 3/4. Examples both detached and with sustained notes.

- Accompaniment in second phrase that creates a break from the first material to support the form and set up a rise up to the final cadence

"Direction in music is an important part of craftsmanship in composition."

Example 5, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.823, No.66

Broken-chord accompaniment in two parts, with varied rhythms in lower voice, building on the previous example.

- Melodic line beaming observations: showing musical grouping
- Turn figure with chromatic lower neighbour

LESSON 9

A look at piano chords.

- Four part writing still applies, in chorale or keyboard style
- How to add notes to chords in keyboard style. An introduction to adding notes, more options covered in the examples below

Example 1, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.453, No.38

Chorale style writing for piano.

- Considering stem direction when writing chorale style for piano: when to group voices with one stem, and when to split the stems
- Homorythmic: same rhythm
- Adding extra voice: adding an extra tonic, following SATB doubling principle
- Beam breaks for musical groupings that inform the phrasing

Example 2, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.599, No.35

Example with keyboard style RH and single note LH.

- Doubling the root in 5 note voicing
- Full chord suspension
- Moving from two to three note chords in the RH. How to make this musically motivated
- Horn fifths explained

Example 3, Carl Czerny Op.599, No.10

Big two hand chords for piano, beyond four voices.

- Considering outer voices to drive the voicings
- Most doublings are fine, but not the leading tone on a dominant
- Voice-leading builds on SATB writing

Example 4, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.139, No.30

A combination of RH keyboard style chords, double thirds, horn fifths with the use of a dotted rhythm.

- Beaming to show musical groupings
- Increasing rhythmic activity towards final cadence
- Horn fifths
- Chords with wide gap between hands
- Low chords voiced opposite to the harmonic series to create a low, thick and percussive sound
- Detached note articulation
- Minor funeral march version

"Knowing the reason behind rules helps you control them to get the effect you want."

Example 5, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.823, No.52

Full two-hand cords used to punctuate a cadence.

Example 6, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.823, No.25

RH keyboard style block chords over LH broken chord accompaniment, also varying the number of tones in the RH from four voice chords to single notes.

Example 7, adapted from Carl Czerny Op.599, No.41

A mix of chordal writing in a beautiful and sweet moderato.

- Parallel thirds and sixths
- Call and answer phrases
- Waltz pattern hinted at briefly, with sustained lower voice
- Chorale style, four part, with stems connected
- Keyboard style
- Three-voice chords, chorale style
- Building a crescendo with lines in contrary motion