



The Joy of Composing

with Fredrik Holm

Task 4: Learning from the masters – part 1

In this task, you will learn to play a famous piece of film music (“Comptine d’un Autre Etè” from *Amelie*). You will then be asked to notate a short composition based on the same compositional ideas.

Step 1. Learn to play the piece – at least the first couple of lines.

Step 2. Make sure you understand this bit of theory:

The piece is in the key of E-minor. The notes of the (natural) E-minor scale are: E, F#, G, A, B, C, D.

The first chord is an E-minor chord. It starts on the first note of the scale: E. To find the other notes in the chord just add every other note in the scale: EGB.

The next chord is a G-major: GBD. However, this is not how it is played in the song, which is: DGB. It is the same chord but the notes have been swapped around.

A chord in which the order of the notes has been changed is called an **inversion**. Inversions are really useful as they enable you to change only one note at a time when moving from chord to chord. Inversions also help to create a better and more interesting sound.

The notes of an E-minor chord are EGB. If you play them in the order of GBE (i.e. moving the E from left to right), you have what’s called the **first inversion**. BEG (again moving the first note last) produces the **second inversion**. If the chord is NOT inverted, it is said to be in **root position**.



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Now, back to your piece.

These are the ideas used for the left hand:

1. The first four bars are repeated throughout the whole song.
2. The chords change at the beginning of every bar.
3. The same pattern is used for all chords.

The basic chords in this song are E-minor (EGB), G-major (GBD), B-minor (BDF#) and D-major (DF#A). The second and third chords are inverted so the chords read EGB, DGB, DF#B and DF#A.

Step 3. Now, let's write your own inversions. Leave the E-minor chord as it is (EGB) and then make up your own inversions of the other chords.

For example: Below, I start with E-minor (EGB) and then keep the G-major chord in root position, i.e. not inverted (GBD). I put the B-minor chord in second inversion (F#BD) and the D-major chord in first inversion (F#AD). This means that the positions of the chords do not move up and down the keyboard too much, which normally creates a better sound.

E-minor root, EGB G-major root, GBD B-minor 2nd inv. F#,B,D D-major 1st inv. F#,A,D

Write down your chords on the staff using the bass clef.

Step 4. Now, make up your own pattern. This pattern will be used for all your other chords throughout the song.

I chose to play the first chord using this pattern: E E G E E B E.

Once you have chosen your pattern, transfer it to the other chords, and write down your finished pattern based on your inversions. This forms the start of the piece. These four bars are repeated in the left hand for the rest of the song.



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Now, let's have a look at the ideas used in the melody.



1. For the first three bars the rhythm is the same. Then there is a slight change in the fourth bar.
2. The third bar is very similar to the first, but the notes have changed slightly to work better with the chord.
3. The melody starts on the third note of the scale (G) in the first bar and then on the second note (F#) in the following bars.
4. The melody mainly uses steps, with just a few leaps.

Step 5. Let's apply these ideas to your melody.

First, create a new one-bar rhythm to use for your first three bars.

We are in four beats in the bar so make sure your rhythm adds up. If you struggle, please use my rhythm or ask for help.

This is my rhythm:



Using your new rhythm, start on the third note of the scale (G) and create a melody that mostly uses steps up or down. If you make a leap, make sure you jump to a chord note.

My melody will be:



Step 6. For your second bar of melody, use the same rhythm and come up with a slightly different melody that starts on the second note in the scale (F#).



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Step 7. For your third bar of melody, write something similar to your first bar, but start on the second note of the scale (F#).

Step 8. For your fourth bar of melody, make up a different but very simple rhythm and create a melody using the chord notes for this bar. (DF#A)

So, in steps 5-8 you have written four bars of melody based on the principles of the song.

My example looks like this:



My melody sort of works, but I made a big mistake...

I didn't try it out! To become a great composer, you need to play your music and use your ear until you are happy with what you have created.

Here is my example of steps 1–8:

Notice that even though I used the same chords as the original and started the melody on the same note in each bar, it sounds different.

Step 9. Come up with another four bars of melody. Don't change the notes of the left hand. This time you can be more adventurous. Please



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don't make my mistake: use your ears and don't give up until you find something you like. I suggest you stick to the scale and the chords.

Write down your piece. You could also record it.