



The Joy of Composing

with Fredrik Holm

Task 5: Learning from the masters – part 2

As in task 4, here you will be asked to learn a new piece and then find ways to write a short composition in the same style.

Please print the link to the sheet music of G. F. Handel's piece called "Passacaglia". The word is Spanish or Italian and means "walking down the street". This piece is based on a four-bar "theme" with a number of variations. The theme is not in the melody but is in the repeated bass line.

Step 1. Learn to play the piece, at least the beginning.

Step 2. Let's analyse the piece before we start to compose:

What techniques has Handel used to create this song?

1. Like in a typical pop song, the same chords are repeated over and over.
2. The chord progression follows a circle of fifths. It starts on A and then continues a fifth down on D. Then it marches on to a G and so on – until we are back to A.
3. This is a theme with variations, and each variation is four bars long.
4. Bars two and three are often a sequence of bar one, meaning they use the same harmonic and melodic pattern, which is played a note lower each time.
4. Handel mainly only uses notes in the right and left hands that are part of the chords. He adds a few notes that are not in the chords, but picks notes that are close to the chord notes.

Step 3. Now, let's get started...

For your first four-bar variation:

1. Use the same left-hand ostinato (repeated pattern) that Handel uses in his piece. Write it down on manuscript paper.
2. Make up one bar of melody using your own rhythm. In this first variation, use only chord notes. (I have written the chord notes above the first line of music below.)
3. Repeat your first bar but start a note down. This creates your sequence.
4. Do the same for your third bar.



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5. For your fourth bar, create a slight variation in your pattern and make it sound like an ending.

This is my example:

Piano

Step 4.

1. For your next four bars, repeat the left-hand pattern but change your time signature. The piece has four beats in the bar, but for this variation choose something else. I will use three beats in the bar for my example.
2. For your melody, use the same rhythm as in your previous pattern but adapt it to the new time signature. Use the chord notes to form your melody but add some adjacent notes (notes next to the chord notes). There are lots of different posh names for these notes, such as **passing notes** that “pass” between two chord notes, and **auxiliary notes** that start on a chord note, go up or down a step and finally return to the first note.



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Here is my example:

Musical notation for Step 5, measures 5-8. The piece is in 3/4 time. The right hand plays a melody of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The left hand plays a simple accompaniment of quarter notes: G3, B2, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The piece ends with a repeat sign and a fermata over the final note.

Step 5. For the next variation, we are going to develop the left hand. Repeat your melody from step 4. Work on making your left hand more interesting. It needs to stick to the chord notes, but passing notes will also work well, such as in Handel's third variation.

Here is my example:

Musical notation for Step 6, measures 9-12. The piece is in 3/4 time. The right hand plays the same melody as in Step 5. The left hand plays a more complex accompaniment with eighth notes and quarter notes: G3, B2, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The piece ends with a repeat sign and a fermata over the final note.

Step 6. For your last four bars (unless you want to make it a longer piece), make up your own variation. Please be inventive with your key signature, rhythm and melody. However, try and make sure the audience can at least vaguely recognise the harmonic pattern (the chords).