

Music 11, 7/12/06

More on melodic form

Phrase: a segment of music that is either inconclusive or conclusive. Either way, there is a moment of relative repose, or “rest.”

Period: if two phrases complement each other in such a way that the first phrase is less conclusive and the last phrase is more conclusive, then the two together comprise a *period*.

So how do we measure the relative conclusiveness of a phrase?

We look at the scale degree on which the phrase comes to rest. As we explained earlier in the course, diatonic scale degrees have dynamic relationships with each other. Ending on a scale degree other than one will usually invite a feeling of inconclusiveness. Ending a phrase on scale degree one in the melody will typically have a more conclusive sound. So, the first phrase in a period usually ends on something other than $\hat{1}$ in the melody (commonly $\hat{2}$, $\hat{3}$ or $\hat{5}$). Realizing this in the music and pointing it out is one way of proving that two phrases are complementary and comprise a period.

Motive

A *motive* is a small, distinctive, segment of material that tends to repeat (literally or slightly varied) over the course of a composition. It is memorable in terms of certain parameters, like rhythm, melodic contour, etc. Through repetition, the significance of the motive usually emerges—we remember certain aspects of the motive, and then re-realize how the motive is presented differently. Sometimes the process is a slow change, over much time in a musical composition, and other times, the motive is repeated a lot and with comparatively little variation in a small musical work.

More on Motive tomorrow:

Test #2 today.