Principles of Melodic Interpretation:

Finding Opportunities for Musical Expression

Leslie W. Hicken
Director of Bands
Professor of Music Education
Furman University

- Melody is one of the primary elements found in music from all historical periods.

- How does one explain the fact that one rendition is performed in a sensitive manner, while another performance is uninspired?

- Can musicianship be taught or is it a gift from God?

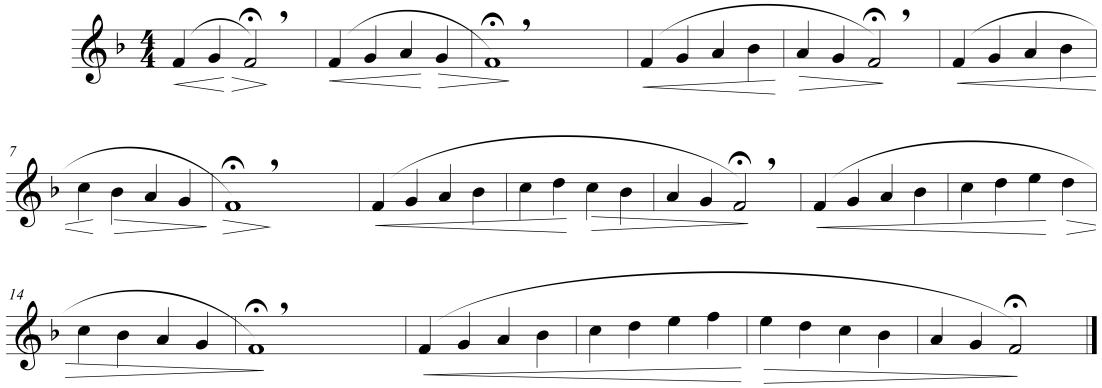
- Is there a way to systematically break down the concept of "artistry" into rules and guidelines that can be formulated into component parts, which can then be subsequently sequenced and taught?

- If we can train our students to interpret the music the same way we do as conductors, we can create a synergistic musical environment in which everyone is contributing to the music-making process.

Principle #1 - Follow the shape of the musical line.

You crescendo when the notes go up in the melody and decrescendo when the pitches go down. We call this *shaping the phrase*.

Example – Returning Scales

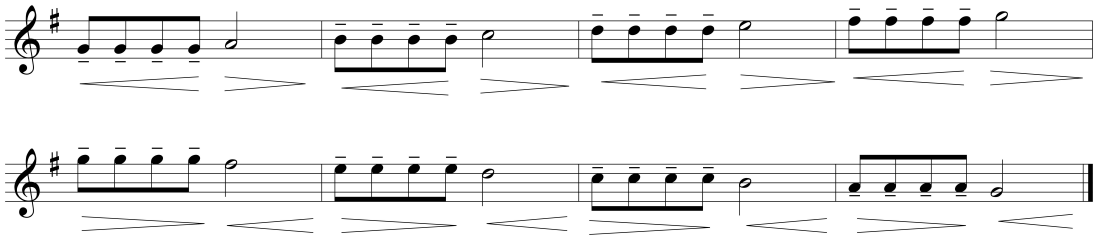


Principle #2 - Melodic sustained tones or repeated notes must not remain static.

They either crescendo or decrescendo.

Bernstein suggests that you delay crescendos as late as possible and perform decrescendos quickly to make them even more compelling.

Example – Repeated and Sustained note exercise

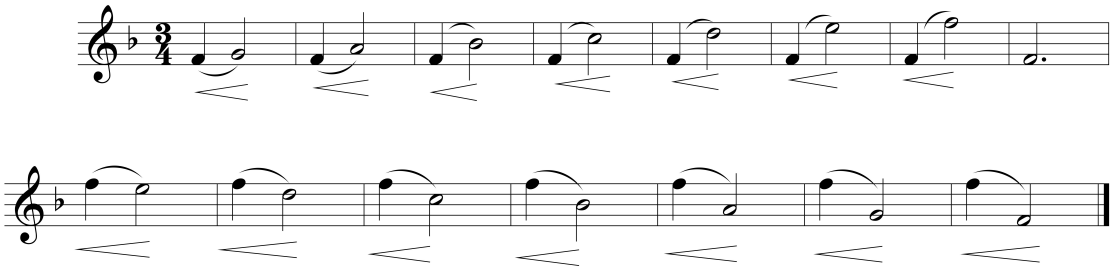


Principle #3 – Emphasize expressive melodic intervals.

The technique used by string players to connect the notes of the interval is called "portamento."

We can connect these notes by increasing the air pressure on the first note and allowing the subsequent note to appear as a result of the airflow.

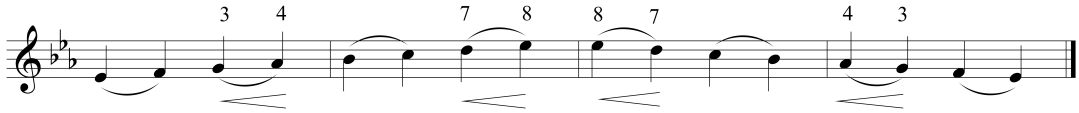
Example – Diatonic Intervals



Principle #4 – Emphasize occurrences of tension and release.

It can first be demonstrated through the natural progression of a major scale. The half steps that occur between the third and fourth, and the seventh and eighth scale degrees are excellent examples of the relationship between dissonance and consonance.

Example – Scale tension and release.



The next step in showing the relationship between *tension and release* is to use a highly dissonant chord that resolves to a tonic triad.

Example – "Crash" chord to Bb major chord.

Group 1	**Group II**	**Group III**	**Group IV**
Violin I	Violin II	Viola	Cello/Bass
Flute I	Flute II	Clarinet III	Bass Clarinet
Oboe I	Oboe II	Tenor Sax	Bassoons
Clarinet I	Clarinet II	Trumpet III	Bari Sax
Alto Sax I	Alto Sax II	Trombone III	Horn IV
Trumpet I	Trumpet II	Horn III	Euphonium
Horn I	Horn II	Xylophone	Tuba
Trombone I	Trombone II		Marimba
Bells	Vibraphone		

The building of a dominant seventh chord that resolves to tonic is a more sophisticated example of the way *tension and release* operates in a musical passage.

Example – Dominant seventh to tonic exercise.

Dominant to Tonic

Group I	C	1 - 2 3 | 4 5 6 7 | 8 - 7 - | - - - - |8 - - - ||
Group II	C	1 - 2 3 | 4 5 6 7 | 8 - 7 6 | 5 4 3 2 |3 - - - ||
Group III	C	1 - 2 3 | 4 5 6 7 | 8 - 7 6 | 5 4 - - |5 - - - ||
Group IV	C	1 - 2 3 | 4 5 6 7 | 8 - 7 6 | 5 - - - |1 - - - ||

Principle #5 – Manipulating sustained and tapered releases.

Compare and contrast the differences between sustaining to the release point and the tapered release.

Example – Four note chorales.

Four Note Chorale

Group I	C	8 - - - | 8 - - - | 7 - - - | 8 - - - ||
Group II	C	3 - - - | 4 - - - | 2 - - - | 3 - - - ||
Group III	C	5 - - - | 6 - - - | 4 - - - | 5 - - - ||
Group IV	C	1 - - - | 2 - - - | 5 - - - | 1 - - - ||

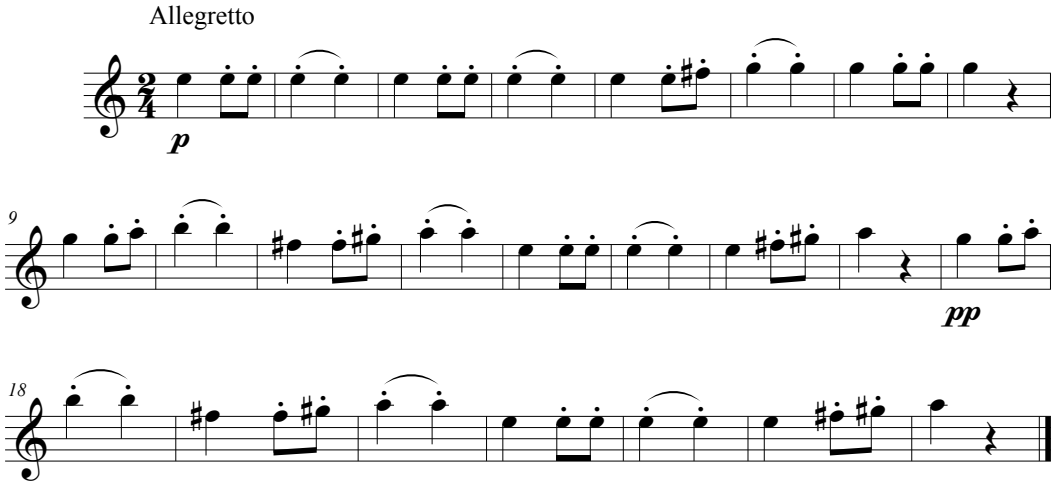
Principle #6 – Manipulating note lengths.

legato
marcato
maestoso
staccato

Example – Appalachian Hymns

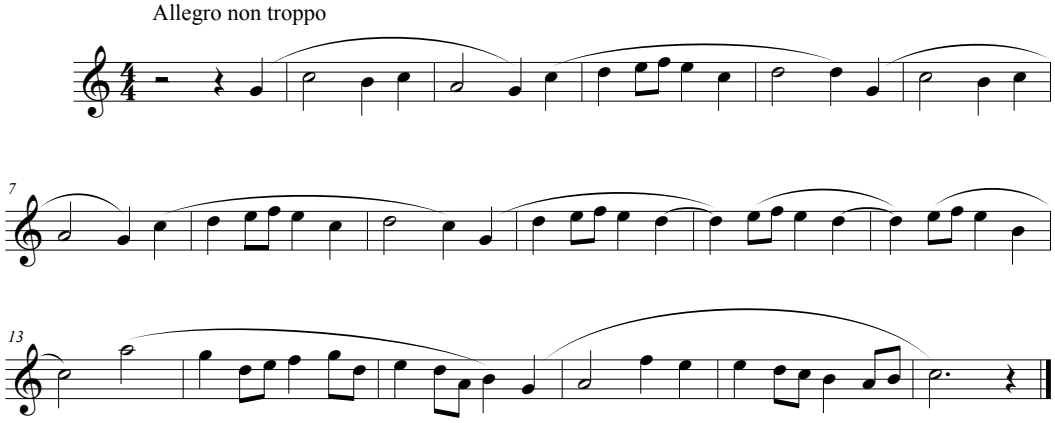
Symphony No. 7, mvt. II

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)



Symphony No. 1, mvt. IV

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)



Leslie W. Hicken, Director of Bands and the Charles E. Daniel Professor of Music, joined the faculty of Furman University in the fall of 1993. Within the music department, his responsibilities include the directorship of the Wind Ensemble, Symphonic Band, and Chamber Winds; professor of music education and instrumental conducting; and Assistant Director with the Marching Band. In addition to his duties at Furman, he is the Artistic Director of the Carolina Youth Symphony, Co-Director of the Poinsett Wind Symphony, Director of the Lakeside Concert Band, and Director for the Furman Music by the Lake Summer Concert Series.

Prior to his appointment at Furman, Hicken was the Director of Bands at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. Previously, Hicken was employed as an instrumental music teacher in the Durham (NC) County School system. He began his musical career serving as a clarinetist in the United States Military Academy Band at West Point, NY.

The Wind Ensemble has performed as a feature ensemble at numerous South Carolina Music Educators Association conferences; Southern Division CBDNA Conferences in Atlanta, GA and twice in Jacksonville, FL; the New York Wind Band Festival at Carnegie Hall; the American Bandmasters Association National

Convention in Charleston, SC; and the Chicago International Music Festival at Symphony Hall in Chicago.

Hicken has received the Outstanding Bandmaster of the Year Award in 2000 and the Outstanding Contributor Award in 2002 from the South Carolina Chapter of Phi Beta Mu. In 2002, he was elected into the American Bandmasters Association. In the spring of 2010, he was inducted into the South Carolina Band Directors Association Hall of Fame. He is Past-President of the South Carolina Band Directors Association and the Southern Division of the College Band Directors National Association. In 2015, he received the Excellence in Teaching Award from the South Carolina Independent Colleges & Universities organization.

He received his Bachelor of Clarinet Performance degree from the Eastman School of Music, a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a Doctorate in Music Education from Indiana University.

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