

Grade Seven

Music Theory

Complete Course & Exercises

PREVIEW

(ABRSM Syllabus)

Preview

This is a preview document and does not contain the whole music theory course, but a selection of lessons and exercises for your perusal.

If you have any questions prior to purchasing, please email info@mymusictheory.com

Preview

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION QUESTION

Question two in the grade 7 music theory exam asks you to reconstruct a piece from the given harmonic outline of a real piece of music. This question usually asks you to reconstruct a **Bach chorale**, but not always. You could also find keyboard piece from the early Classical era, for example by Haydn, or even by a lesser-known composer such as Kuhlau.

Late Baroque and early Classical music followed very strict rules regarding harmony. You will remember from grade 6 that there are rules about which notes can follow each other (known as “voice-leading”), which intervals may not follow each other, and which notes in a chord must or cannot be doubled. When you write out your reconstruction, it goes without saying that you have to **obey the rules of harmony**.

On top of this, you will also be assessed on how well you convey the **style** of the era in question. Although it’s impossible to reconstruct a piece of music and end up with the exact same composition that the composer wrote originally, your reconstruction should sound as though it **could have been written** by that composer in that era.

The Harmonic Outline

If you take any piece of music and strip out the **melodic decoration**, you are left with a row of chords. Your task is to put some melodic decoration back in, so that it sounds like a real piece of music again.

Here is the beginning of Chorale no.1 from J.S. Bach’s “371 Harmonized Chorales”.

Here is the same piece, with the melodic decoration removed. Compare the two carefully.

You will be given an outline like this, and will attempt to make something like the first version.

Types of Embellishment

There are several kinds of melodic decoration or embellishment we can consider:

- Passing notes
- Auxiliary notes
- Suspensions
- Changing notes
- Auxiliary harmony notes

We will look at each of these in detail in the following lessons.

Keeping in Style

Look again at Chorale No.1 and its outline. Notice that:

- The soprano line is not altered very much.*
A chorale is hymn tune. Bach took the religious songs which were well known by the Lutheran church congregations of his day, and he harmonized them. Sometimes he harmonized the same hymn in several different ways. The important thing to understand is that the **melody** needs to remain mostly the same, otherwise the hymn would not be recognizable. A tiny bit of embellishment is all right, however.
- Not every chord is embellished.*
Melodic decoration has to be added with moderation. You can safely aim to embellish about 75% of the chorale. Chords with a **pause** symbol are **not decorated**.
- No more than two parts are decorated simultaneously.*
Actually, Bach frequently simultaneously decorated all four-parts of the harmony, but then again, he is the undisputed master of Chorale harmonization. Until you are better than Bach, it is advisable to keep most of your melodic decoration to **one part at a time**, and to decorate two simultaneous parts very rarely and with great caution.

Getting Top Marks

The ABRSM awards the highest marks for reconstructions which follow the rules of harmony, keep to the correct style and which:

- Avoid clashing harmonies. Clashing harmonies are not the same as dissonances. Dissonances are governed by the rules of harmony and are encouraged, whereas clashes are just painful. (We'll explain about clashes later).
- Use rhythmic motifs consistently. You might find that outline you have been given includes a few bars with fancy, twiddly bits using semiquavers (sixteenth notes). It is wise to include a moderate amount of your own embellishments using the same rhythm.

Plan of Action

These are the steps you will need to follow. Each step is explained in detail in the next lessons.

1. Go through the piece and add some **passing notes**. (See lesson 2).
2. Go through it once more and add some **suspensions**. (See lesson 3).
3. Go through it again and add some **auxiliary notes**. (See lesson 4).
4. Go through it again and add some **changing notes**. (See lesson 5).
5. Check how many chords you have decorated. If you have done about 75%, it will be enough. If not, add some more.
6. Look carefully at the parts of the answer given by the ABRSM. If there are any unusual rhythms (i.e. something which is not a plain crotchet (quarter note) or pair of quavers (eighth notes)), make sure that the same rhythms occur in your own reconstructed part too.
7. Check one last time looking for problems, such as consecutive 5ths or clashing harmonies.

1. INTRODUCTION - EXERCISES

Answer **True** or **False** to these statements.

1. Question 2 in the grade 7 music theory exam asks you to reconstruct a piece of music from any musical era.
2. You will be given a harmonic outline, and will have to make it sound like a real piece of music.
3. It's important to show your creativity as a composer and try to use contemporary techniques.
4. It's ok to change the given chords if you think you can write something which sounds better.
5. It's a good idea to re-use some of the existing rhythms of the piece.
6. You should only use one type of melodic decoration throughout, to be consistent.
7. You don't have to decorate every chord.
8. Chords marked with a pause should not be decorated.
9. The soprano line in a chorale should be decorated as much as possible.
10. The rules of harmony don't apply in this question.

1. INTRODUCTION - ANSWERS

Answer **True** or **False** to these statements.

1. False. It will only be from the late Baroque or early Classical era.
2. True.
3. False. It's important to write in the style of the piece.
4. False. You must use the provided harmonic outline.
5. True.
6. False. You should use a variety of types of melodic decoration.
7. True. Around 75-80% is a good target.
8. True.
9. False. The soprano line in a chorale should be decorated as **little** as possible.
10. False. The rules of harmony **do** apply in this question.