

III

THE MOTIVE

EVEN the writing of simple phrases involves the invention and use of motives, though perhaps unconsciously. Consciously used, the motive should produce unity, relationship, coherence, logic, comprehensibility and fluency.

The *motive* generally appears in a characteristic and impressive manner at the beginning of a piece. The features of a motive are intervals and rhythms, combined to produce a memorable shape or contour which usually implies an inherent harmony. Inasmuch as almost every figure within a piece reveals some relationship to it, the basic motive is often considered the 'germ' of the idea. Since it includes elements, at least, of every subsequent musical figure, one could consider it the 'smallest common multiple'. And since it is included in every subsequent figure, it could be considered the 'greatest common factor'.

However, everything depends on its use. Whether a motive be simple or complex, whether it consists of few or many features, the final impression of the piece is not determined by its primary form. Everything depends on its treatment and development.

A motive appears constantly throughout a piece: *it is repeated*. Repetition alone often gives rise to *monotony*. Monotony can only be overcome by *variation*.

Use of the motive requires variation

Variation means change. But changing every feature produces something foreign, incoherent, illogical. It destroys the basic shape of the motive.

Accordingly, variation requires changing some of the less-important features and preserving some of the more-important ones. Preservation of rhythmic features effectively produces coherence (though monotony cannot be avoided without slight changes). For the rest, determining which features are more important depends on the compositional objective. Through substantial changes, a variety of *motive-forms*, adapted to every formal function, can be produced.

Homophonic music can be called the style of 'developing variation'. This means that in the succession of motive-forms produced through variation of the basic motive, there is something which can be compared to development, to growth. But changes of subordinate meaning, which have no special consequences, have only the local effect of an embellishment. Such changes are better termed *variants*.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A MOTIVE

Any rhythmicized succession of notes can be used as a basic motive, but there should not be too many different features.

Rhythmic features may be very simple, even for the main theme of a sonata (Ex. 12a). A symphony can be built on scarcely more complex rhythmic features (Exs. 12b, c, 13). The examples from Beethoven's Fifth symphony consist primarily of note-repetitions, which sometimes contribute distinctive characteristics.

A motive need not contain a great many interval features. The main theme of Brahms's Fourth symphony (Ex. 13), though also containing sixths and octaves, is, as the analysis shows, constructed on a succession of thirds.

Often a contour or shape is significant, although the rhythmic treatment and intervals change. The upward leap in Ex. 12a; the movement up by step in Ex. 16; the upward sweep followed by a return within it which pervades Beethoven's Op. 2/3-IV,¹ illustrate such cases.

Every element or feature of a motive or phrase must be considered to be a motive if it is treated as such, i.e. if it is repeated with or without variation.

TREATMENT AND UTILIZATION OF THE MOTIVE

A motive is used by repetition. The repetition may be exact, modified or developed.

Exact repetitions preserve all features and relationships. Transpositions to a different degree, inversions, retrogrades, diminutions and augmentations are exact repetitions if they preserve strictly the features and note relations (Ex. 14).

Modified repetitions are created through variation. They provide variety and produce new material (motive-forms) for subsequent use.

Some variations, however, are merely local 'variants' and have little or no influence on the continuation.

Variation, it must be remembered, is repetition in which some features are changed and the rest preserved.

All the features of rhythm, interval, harmony and contour are subject to various alterations. Frequently, several methods of variation are applied to several features simultaneously; but such changes must not produce a motive-form too foreign to the basic motive. In the course of a piece, a motive-form may be developed further through subsequent variation. Exs. 15 and 16 are illustrations.

COMMENT ON EXAMPLES

In Exs. 17-29, based solely on a broken chord, some of the methods which can be applied are shown as systematically as is practicable.

¹ References to the literature identified only by opus number apply to Beethoven piano sonatas. Because of their general accessibility, a great many references to them appear in the later chapters.

The *rhythm* is changed:

1. By modifying the length of the notes (Ex. 17).
2. By note repetitions (Exs. 17*h*, *i*, *k*, *l*, *n*).
3. By repetition of certain rhythms (Exs. 17*l*, *m*, 18*e*).
4. By shifting rhythms to different beats (Ex. 23; in particular, compare 23*d* with 23*e*, *f*, *g*).
5. By addition of upbeats (Ex. 22).
6. By changing the metre—a device seldom usable within a piece (Ex. 24).

The *intervals* are changed:

1. By changing the original order or direction of the notes (Ex. 19).
2. By addition or omission of intervals (Ex. 21).
3. By filling up intervals with ancillary¹ notes (Exs. 18, 20 *ff.*).
4. By reduction through omission or condensation (Ex. 21).
5. By repetition of features (Exs. 20*h*, 22*a*, *b*, *d*).
6. By shifting features to other beats (Ex. 23).

The *harmony* is changed:

1. By the use of inversions (Exs. 25*a*, *b*).
2. By additions at the end (Exs. 25 *c-i*).
3. By insertions in the middle (Ex. 26).
4. By substituting a different chord (Exs. 27*a*, *b*, *c*) or succession (Exs. 27*d-i*).

The *melody* is adapted to these changes:

1. By transposition (Ex. 28).
2. By addition of passing harmonies (Ex. 29).
3. By 'semi-contrapuntal' treatment of the accompaniment (Ex. 29).

Such exploration of the resources of variation can be of great assistance in the acquisition of technical skill and the development of a rich inventive faculty.

¹ In order to avoid aesthetically misleading and corrupted terms, *ancillary* will be preferred in referring to the so-called 'embellishing' or 'ornamental' notes of conventional melodic formulas.

Ex. 12

a) Op. 14/1-I

b) Beethoven, Symphony No. 5-I

c) Beethoven, Symphony No. 5-III

Ex. 13

Brahms, Symphony No. 4-I

Ex. 14

a) Inversion, Retrograde, Retrograde Inversion

b) Diminution

c) Augmentation

Ex. 15

a) Motive. Combined with transpositions and change of direction

b)

c) Beethoven, Op. 2/3-II

Ex.16

a) Motive *transposed* *b* *embellished* *a¹* *rhythmical change*

b) Op. 22-III

Menuetto *p* *cresc.* *chain* *a²* *a⁴* *sequence* *a⁴* *b* *sequence* *b* *a⁵* *c¹ (filled in)* *p*

Ex.17

Developing variations of a motive based on a broken chord
Rhythmic changes

Ex.18

Addition of ancillary notes

Ex.19

Changing the original order

Ex.20

Embellishing Ex.19

Ex.21

Reduction, omission, condensation

Ex.22

Addition of upbeats, repetition of features

Ex.23

Shift to other beats

Ex.24

Change of metre

Ex. 25
Adaptation to richer harmony (cf. Ex. 21d)

Ex. 25 consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef. The first system contains four measures labeled a), b), c), and d). The second system contains five measures labeled e), f), g), h), and i). Harmonic symbols are placed below the bass line: 6, 6, 6[?], iii, III, III, vi, VII, 2, ii⁶.

Ex. 26

Ex. 26 consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef. The first system contains four measures labeled a), b), c), and d). The second system contains five measures labeled e), f), g), h), and i). The third system contains four measures labeled j), k), l), and m). Harmonic symbols are placed below the bass line: V₂, IV, vi, iii, ii, I, V₃, I₆, I, IV, V, I, IV, I, I, III₇, IV, I, ii⁶, V, I, IV, ii, I, vi, IV, V, I, III⁶, vi, ii⁶, V.

Ex. 27

Ex. 27 consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef. The first system contains five measures labeled a), b), c), d), and e). The second system contains five measures labeled f), g), h), i), and j). Harmonic symbols are placed below the bass line: vi, VI, iii, vi, III₇, IV, III, IV, I, III₃, VI, ii, V, I₆, vi, VII, iii⁶, I, VI, ii, V₇, vi, ii, vii₇, III.

Ex. 28

Ex. 28 consists of one system of piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. It contains three measures labeled a), b), and c). The text "sequences of Ex. 27f" is written above the first measure. Harmonic symbols are placed below the bass line: III₃, VI, ii, V, I₆, vi, VII, iii⁶, I, VI, ii, V₇, vi, ii, vii₇, III.

Ex. 29

Ex. 29 consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef. The first system contains three measures labeled a), b), and c). The second system contains one measure labeled d). Harmonic symbols are placed below the bass line: III₃, VI, ii, V, I₆, vi, VII, iii⁶, I, VI, ii, V₇, vi, ii, vii₇, III.