



Week 13:

Symmetry/
Assymetry

Chapter 5

Symmetry/Asymmetry

compositional variables

A number of compositional variables are involved in discerning whether you've created a symmetric or asymmetric section of music:

1. the number of phrases
2. the length of the phrases (how many measures in each phrase)
3. the rhythm of phrases
4. the order of the phrases

the number of phrases

An even number of phrases *of the same length* will produce a balanced section of music. An odd number of phrases of the same length will produce an unbalanced section of music.

For example, two two-measure phrases will produce a balanced structure,

Ex. 5.1

4/4

whereas three two-measure phrases will produce an unbalanced structure.

Ex. 5.2

4/4

Three one-measure phrases (an odd number of phrases of the same length) are unbalanced.

Ex. 5.3

4/4

However, three one-measure phrases would be balanced by an additional group of three one-measure phrases (two groups of three phrases).

Ex. 5.4

4/4

assignment Create four original phrases and then create a second phrase to each as designated.

Ex. 521

correspondence of matched phrases with rhyme

Recognizing matched (or inexactly matched) phrases helps a songwriter find areas where rhyme can be used most effectively.

Ex. 522

Of course, not every matched phrase need produce a corresponding rhyme. This might cause the song to be too predictable.

outer matching

Quite often, a long phrase is followed by two shorter phrases that together equal its phrase length or, conversely, two short phrases are followed by a phrase that equals their combined lengths. If the phrase ending such a section of music is in a balancing position and its rhythms match the rhythms at the end of the phrase or phrases it is balancing, it is called outer matching. *Outer matching* is designated by a letter naming the new phrase followed by a hyphen and letter designating the phrase that is matched. In the following example, the (c) indicates that it is a

different phrase length from either (a) or (b); the (c-b) indicates that the ending of the (c) phrase and the (b) phrase are rhythmically matched; and that the total number of measures in (c) balances (a) + (b).

Ex. 523

(a) $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ I don't be-lieve in ma-gic

(b) $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ but here you are a-gain.

(c-b) $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ You're like a dream - I once had - but I can't re-mem-ber where or when.

matched rhythms

If a rhythm in a phrase is repeated or if a rhythm in one phrase is used in a second phrase (whether or not the second phrase is of the same length), it is referred to as a *matched rhythm*.

Ex. 524

$\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ ♩ ♩♯ ♩♯

Frequently, phrases of unequal length are given ending rhythms that match one another. In those cases, the term *outer rhythmic matching* may be used.

Ex. 525

(a) $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ I don't be-lieve in ma-gic

(b) $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ but here you are a-gain.

inner rhythmic matching

A second phrase may contain an internal rhythm pattern that matches and occurs in a parallel position to an internal rhythm pattern appearing in the first phrase. The name given to this occurrence is *inner rhythmic matching*. Inner rhythmic matching corresponds to areas in the lyric where an inner rhyme may be employed quite effectively.

Ex. 526

(a) $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ You say you're giv - in' all your mon - ey,

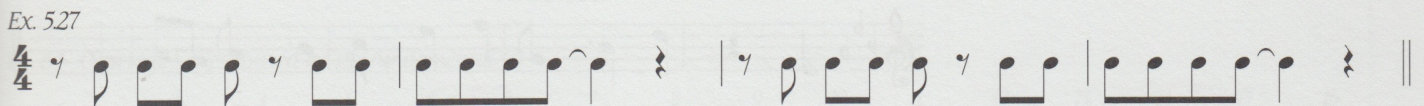
(b) $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ guess you think I'm liv - in' too well. -

Notice that the phrases are not matched; just a rhythm within the phrases is matched. Inner rhythmic matching refers to internal rhythm matching whether or not the total rhythm of the phrases are matched.

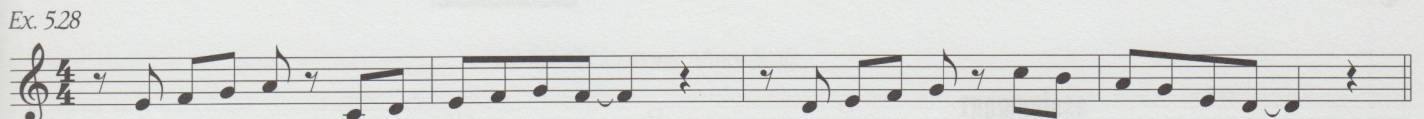
Your ability to perceive matched phrases and matched rhythms, including inner matchings and outer matchings, increases your ability to make informed choices, especially concerning rhymes. If a phrase matches, it invites a rhyme. You then must decide whether you feel a rhyme is necessary, desirable, or appropriate at that given point in the song.

open and closed The terms *open* and *closed* are general terms that can be applied to each of the elements of a song. These terms are especially useful when examining cadential areas where there is some pause or indication of musical punctuation. The element of pitch is very powerful in determining whether a cadential area is open or closed. Stable tones are more likely to sound closed at a cadence than unstable tones. The most stable tone—the tonic of the key—provides the greatest amount of closure. If you have any doubts concerning this, just think of the ending melody note of any song you know; you'll probably hear the tonic.

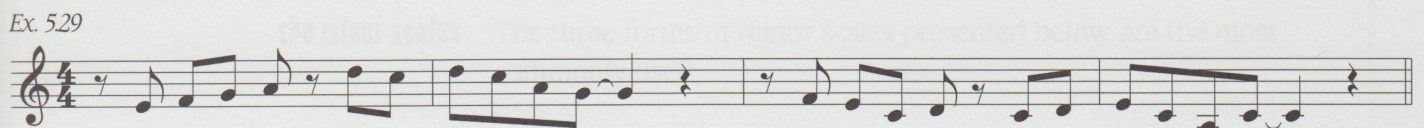
Any symmetric phrase structure will provide closure, e.g., look at the following.



When we combine the element of pitch with the above rhythms, the question of whether the section is open or closed may become difficult to answer. In the example below, the phrase structure is closed; the pitch is open because the last pitch, "D," is unstable in the key of C. The total effect is open or, at least, somewhat open. Obviously, the element of pitch is a very powerful one.



If I were to continue to compose this piece, keeping the same rhythms and phrase structure, it would be possible to complete the section by ending on a stable pitch, thereby completely closing both elements.



exercise Are the following sections open or closed? If open, what compositional variables make the section open: rhythm, pitch or both? If closed, what compositional variables are giving the section a sense of closure: rhythm, pitch, or both?

Ex. 5.30

Moderate rock

1

Moderate flowing tempo

2

Moderate funk (in E Minor)

3

assignment

1. Create an eight-measure section of music that both tonally and rhythmically closes.
2. Create an eight-measure section of music that rhythmically closes but remains tonally open.