

Melodic Contour

Melodic Motion

Conjunct motion = small changes in pitch/distance between notes. Step-wise or scalar motion = moving by tones/semitones.

Disjunct motion = notes ascend/descend quickly, with large leaps/jumps between them.

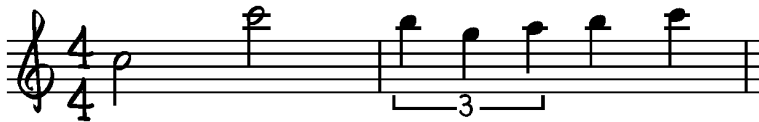
Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' provides an example of a melody using conjunct motion:



Many melodies have a mixture of conjunct and disjunct motion. (Good vocal melodies tend to have disjunct motion).

It is common to balance disjunct motion with conjunct motion in the opposite direction. For example, an ascending leap of a 5th, followed by descending step-wise motion.

Check out the beginning of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow':



Class assignment

1. How would you describe the melodic motion of the 3 melodies?
2. Do they jump quickly from high to low (disjunct motion), or do they move to notes that are not very much higher or lower (conjunct motion)?
3. Write a melody using primarily conjunct motion.
4. Write a melody using primarily disjunct motion.

Melodic Contour

An effective melody needs shape or direction.

The contour/shape of a melody can be represented with a line - from this you can see the melody ascending and descending, the speed with which this happens over time and how sharply the melody rises and falls.

Looking at the melody as it is **written on the staff** will give you a good idea of the shape of this line but you can also **hear it** as you listen to the music.

For songs, the most common contour is a large curve, with the high part of the curve towards the end. That high point is called the “**climactic point**”.

Common tendencies for climactic points:

- Highest note of the melody (not always)
- A note that is held longer than most other notes of the song
- Harmonised with the tonic chord
- Placement – start of chorus (verse-chorus songs), or 2nd half of verse (verse only songs)
- After this point melody descends and resolves at a lower pitch
- Can have more than one climactic point in a song

Listening examples

Like a Bridge over Troubled Water (climactic point at start of chorus)

Hey Jude (Beatles - @2:50 “LET her under your skin”, then “OH” after “better, better, better”)

Class assignment 1

- a. Listen to the 3 melodies and draw the melodic contour.
- b. Compare with the contour you get when joining the notes on the staff.
- c. Is there a clear climactic point in these 3 melodies?

Class assignment 2

Write an 8-bar melody following a re-determined melodic contour.