Tutorial 2B: Melodic Shapes

Welcome! In this tutorial you'll learn how to:

1. Strengthen your interval skills
2. Explore ranges and neighborhoods
3. Get variety in contours
4. Use effective melodic fills

Enjoy the learning, and see you at the harbor ...

Other Level 2 Tutorials

2A: More Scales
2C: Swing Rhythms
2D: Three and Four
2E: Embellishments
2F: Melodic Development
2H: Tune Forms
2K: Preparing Concert Material

▶ Exploring melodic shapes can be a rewarding experience. To prepare for this, you'll need strong interval skills. Then your ideas can soar as your sense of melodic direction improves and matures.

Part 1 – Strengthening Interval Skills

Important: In order to make the most of melodic shapes in your solos, you will need strong interval hearing and playing skills.

A) How do I strengthen my interval skills?

*Two of the most basic ways to hear and play intervals accurately are:

1) Play familiar tunes by ear

2) Play familiar tunes in different keys

B) How do I learn to play tunes by ear? MORE

1. Start easy – pick a tune or part of a tune that is mostly stepwise in melody (for example, "This Old Man").

2. Sing or hum the melody once to be sure you're hearing it correctly.

3. Find a note in the melody that represents the root of the key. (The root of "This Old Man" comes after the halfway point and again at the very last note.)

4. Hum the root note and find where it is on your instrument. If the root is in a difficult key (lots of sharps or flats), move the root to a nearby easy key and then re-sing the melody around the new root.

5. Determine how the starting note relates to the root note of the key. (The starting note of This Old Man is the 5th of the key, a fifth above the root note.)

6. Play the tune slowly, seeing the shape of the melody. If necessary, disregard quicker rhythms until the intervals are secure.

7. When you miss an interval, find out if you overshot it or undershot it. Re-sing that part of the tune if needed.

8. Play the tune with the correct rhythms and intervals, at a faster tempo each time, until you can confidently play it by ear.

▶ **TRY IT –** Using the steps listed above, play "Yankee Doodle" or another easy tune by ear, as slowly needed to get the intervals right. Then play any other familiar tune by ear at a moderate to fast tempo, with all the correct rhythms.

(Part 1 – Strengthening Interval Skills)

C) How do I play familiar tunes in different keys?

• Play the tune in each of the 12 keys, starting in C and going up chromatically.

• Play the tune in each of the 12 keys, starting in C and going around the circle of 4ths.

• Choose only the harder keys, such as those with more than two flats or sharps.

Always keep the key signature in mind, and relate the notes and intervals back to the home key as you go.

▶ **TRY IT –** Use any of the suggestions above to play an easy tune in all 12 keys.

Part 2 – Ranges and Neighborhoods

A) What are ranges?

*It's a spectrum of notes from low to high. You need to *see* the overall range of several octaves in your mind's eye as you improvise. It's easier to do that if you play the keyboard, because higher notes are physically to the right, lower notes to the left. But if you're a horn player (like me) it's a little different.

*Here's how I approach range: I visualize a treble clef with five lines spaced a little wider apart than they would look on paper (this helps me give more "room" to the notes). Then I either climb or jump between lines and spaces. This visual approach makes me pay attention to how high I am on the staff and where I've just been.

It also discourages me from climbing up and down monotonously.

B) What are neighborhoods?

*A *neighborhood* is the group of pitches close to the pitch you're playing. Each neighborhood has its own feeling (flavor, color, temperature, or however you like to describe it).

*To create effective contours, you need to "feel" the neighborhood you're in, and leave the neighborhood when it makes sense. This may be *sooner* or *later* than you would out of habit.

(Part 2 – Ranges and Neighborhoods)

*With practice, you'll enjoy each neighborhood visit, brief or lengthy, and you'll combine interesting rhythms and expressions with neighborhood pitches.

C) Why are ranges and neighborhoods important?

*Some players get locked into a "sine wave" approach in solos, constantly going up and down a scale, usually by the same amounts and lengths. Although this may feel natural and easy, it's also boring.

*Instead of constantly "climbing the stairs" between lower and higher ranges, you need to sometimes linger in the "neighborhood" of pitches where you are.

► **TRY IT –** Play a flexible scale in any key, mostly eighth-notes. See a pitch neighborhood and linger in it with interesting rhythms.

D) What is "switching ranges" all about?

*When you suddenly switch ranges, it can add energy to your solo and break the monotony. Whether you've played many or few notes in a range, switching to a new range can be refreshing.

E) How do I switch ranges?

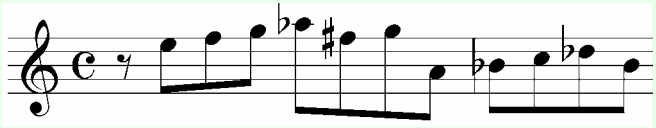
• Use flattened (narrower) contours in each range to set them apart (see *Flattening Contours* below).

• Use motifs that flow (more eighth-notes).

• Put a wide distance between ranges (5th thru 9th).

• Make a quick switch; don't pause between ranges.

Range 1 ---------- Range 2 ----------



► **TRY IT –** Switch ranges using 2 motifs of 4 eighth-notes each. Jump up or down a fifth. Then jump up or down a sixth. Then switch ranges using 2 motifs of 6 eighth-notes each. Jump up or down a seventh.

Part 3 – Getting Variety in Contours

A) How do I get good variety in contours? MORE

- Vary ascending, descending, and mixed contours.
- Make ascending contours go higher to build tension.
- Reverse a contour sooner than you would.
- Make a contour steeper by playing wider intervals.
- Take a contour farther up or down than you normally would.

*As you vary contours, try to fool your listeners (and maybe yourself) about 50% of the time as to which way your contour will go. This keeps interest in your solo; the listener can predict your contour sometimes, but not always.

*You can control the pitch energy in your solos by choosing when & how far to skip up or down in pitch.

▶ **TRY IT –** Basic: Using a flexible scale, reverse the contours in different places than you're used to. Medium: Extend some contours into the lower range, some into the higher range. Practice Pages

B) What is a flattened contour and how do I use it?

*It has a narrow range of pitches from high to low points.

1) Stop during a phrase, then continue in that same neighborhood.

2) Play smaller intervals in a neighborhood, such as half-steps or whole steps.

3) Repeat pitches (see below).

4) Hold pitches (see below).

C) When should I repeat notes?

*To avoid the up/down monotony of contours, especially if active tones are repeated. For variety, repeat pitches with *unequal rhythmic values* or *different articulations*.

*Even two repeated pitches can have a refreshing effect on a contour. But don't get into the habit of repeating the same note at the end of a phrase; that can be annoying.

D) What about held notes?

"Held" pitches are longer notes (dotted-quarters, half-notes, dotted-half-notes, etc.) in the middle of phrases. They're like a flat line surrounded by rising and falling lines. When held notes are color tones, their tension increases.

(Part 3 – Getting Variety in Contours)

- **TRY IT –** Write or play a melody and flatten its contour, using method #2 above. Then use method #3, then #4.

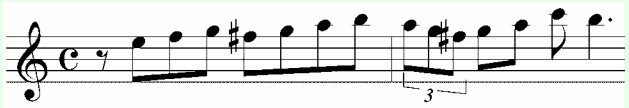
E) What about the outer ranges?

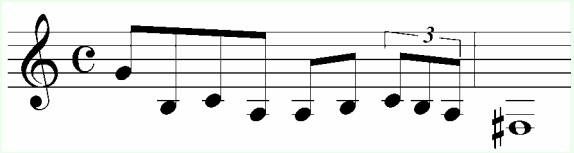
The "outer" ranges are the notes that are near the top or bottom practical limit on your instrument. Here are some suggestions on using outer ranges effectively:

1) Practice to increase your high and low ranges so they're more comfortable and reliable for you. Hum or whistle notes before playing them so you hear them accurately.

2) Approach the extreme ranges by steps, then by arpeggios, then by wider skips.

3) To extend your visit into a high or low range, flatten the contour by using repeated or held pitches, or use stepwise or chromatic motion:

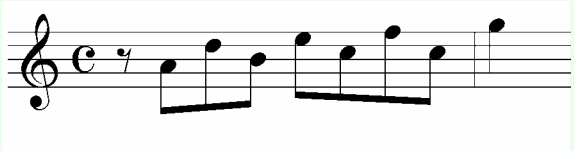




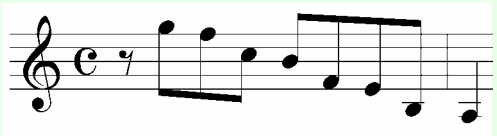
- **TRY IT –** Write a melody; flatten its contour using method #1 in *The Outer Ranges*. Then use method #2, then #3.

F) What is an offset contour?

*Most contours start on the beat and repeat every two or four notes. For variety, you can use an *offset* contour, a 2- or 4-note contour that starts *off* the beat. Offset contours add rhythmic energy to your melodies. The contour begins at a change of direction or a change in interval.

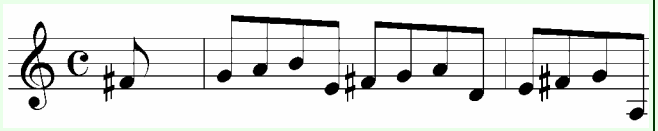


2-note ascending offset contour

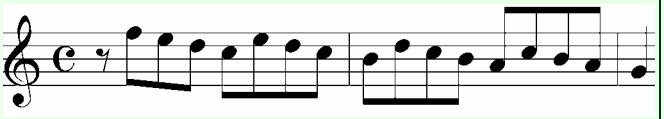


2-note descending offset contour

(Part 3 – Getting Variety in Contours)



4-note ascending offset contour



4-note descending offset contour

- **TRY IT –** Basic: Write a 2-note offset contour, descending, on the "and" of beat 1. Medium: Write a 4-note offset contour, descending, on the "and" of beat 4. Challenge: Write an 8-note offbeat contour, ascending, on the "and" of beat 3.

Part 4 – Using Melodic Fills

A) How do melodic fills work?

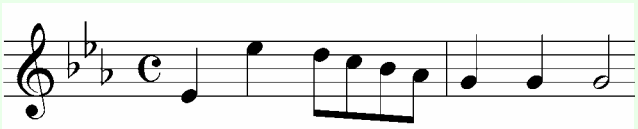
*You can release the tension in an interval skip by *filling* the interval (playing the in-between notes after the skip).

*A fill can be *partial*, *complete, delayed*, or *winding*. Filled notes usually go in the *opposite* direction from the skip.

B) What are partial and complete fills?

*A complete fill will fill in all the notes of a skip;

*A partial fill will fill in only some of them. "The Christmas Song" starts with an octave skip *up*, from low Eb to high Eb, then uses a partial fill. The fill notes go down from D to G. For a *complete* fill, the F must also be filled in.



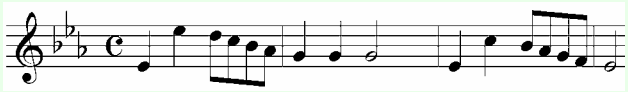
- **TRY IT –** Basic: Going up from C, fill a 5th, major 6th, and major 7th. Then in any key, skip up or down a major 7th and fill in the opposite direction. Medium: Start on any note, skip any wide interval, and fill in the same or opposite direction.

(Part 4 – Using Melodic Fills)

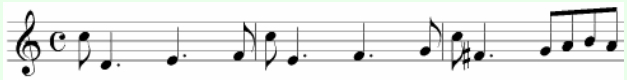
C) What are delayed fills?

*A delayed fill adds one or more notes missing in a partial fill.

*In "The Christmas Song," the skip down from Eb to Eb is only partly filled (no F). The next skip goes from Eb up to C; this skip *is* completely filled, even the F. The F then sounds like a *delayed* fill note, because it was skipped in the first interval and included in the second interval.



You can also combine partial fills to produce delayed fill notes, as long as each new partial fill covers at least one new note that wasn't in the first partial fill:

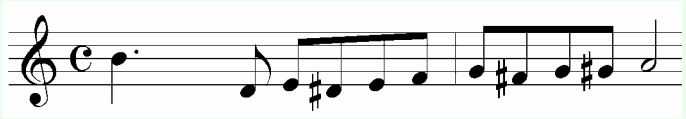


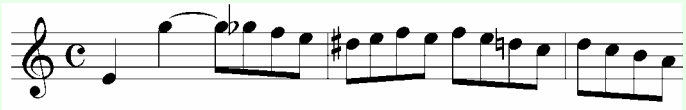
▶ **TRY IT –** Use a delayed fill for a skip of a 5th. Then use skips of 6ths & 7ths.

D) What are winding fills?

*The fill notes alternately descend *and* ascend, usually stepwise. This releases or builds pitch energy more slowly than by using a strictly descending or ascending fill.

*A winding fill can be partial or complete, and it can stretch out as long as it's interesting.





▶ **TRY IT –** Choose any wide interval in a key, then use a winding fill in opposite direction.

That's all for Tutorial 2B!

Next is the Quiz – to get started, go to the next page.

QUIZ ~ 2B: Melodic Shapes

Click on the letter for the best answer for each question. You'll hear a C Maj6 arpeggio if you're right. If you miss 2 or less, you pass the Tutorial!

Or, click Back  to review the Tutorial before taking the Quiz.

1) Usually, the fill with the most chromatic notes is:

A) complete B) delayed C) winding D) partial

2) Offset contours usually

A) start on beats 1 1/2 or 4 1/2 B) are in groups of 2 or 4 C) both of these D) neither of these

3) A delayed fill must also include a

A) partial fill B) complete fill C) winding fill D) none of these

4) Repeated notes are best:

A) at the end of a phrase B) if done often C) if their length is varied D) if they are in the middle range

5) A flattened contour

A) needs to be in an outer range B) has more notes than a regular contour C) covers fewer pitches D) all of these

6) A "held" note should usually be

A) a color tone B) longer than a quarter note C) both of these D) neither of these

7) Which is part of switching ranges?

A) increasing dynamics B) using a small break interval C) using a flowing line D) flattened contours

8) A neighborhood is a group of pitches closest to:

A) the pitch you're playing B) an outer range C) a sine wave D) available color tones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