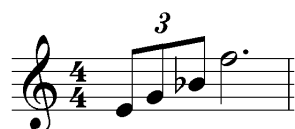


FREE CHROMATICISM

A lot of modern music is composed in a loose atonal style, which is not defined by a clear set of pitches (unlike 12-tone or whole-tone music). To give the music cohesion, a composer will often invent one or more “intervallic cells”, which act as seeds for generating more music. An intervallic cell is simply a unit of music which gives the music its character. It can be used at any pitch, and can be manipulated freely.

Here is an example. Let’s say the composer begins with this “intervallic cell”. First, we need to define what is actually happening musically. There is a rising triplet, which is built of two minor thirds, so it is a diminished triad. This is followed by a leap of a perfect 5th, to a sustained note.



In order to use this cell as a springboard to create new ideas, the composer would alter some aspects of it, while ensuring that other aspects remain sufficiently similar so that the ear can recognise they are connected. Some possible adaptations could be:



- The direction is reversed, and the starting note changed.
- The diminished triplet figure is repeated, and a falling perfect 5th occurs between each triplet (e.g. Ab-Db). (Note that Db-E is the same as C#-E).
- Perfect 5ths are used instead of the minor 3rds, in the triplet figure.
- The rhythm is reduced to crotchets (quarter notes), and the directional movement of the diminished triad and perfect 5th are altered.

Play through each of these examples on the piano, and think about which elements seem to provide more “glue” for connecting these musical units. The last example (d) is the hardest to link back to the original, because it is rhythmically **and** directionally different.

The more aspects you change, the less similar the units will be. You may choose to develop units organically – changing one aspect at a time until the original idea is very distant. This is fine, but you would need to return to original idea eventually, in order to give your composition a coherent form. You could create a circular form (moving through the circle of 5ths, for example), or a mirror-image form, which arrives at its furthest point in the middle of the piece, then takes the opposite route back to the start. There are many creative possibilities!

Some composers who wrote in this looser modern style are Francis Poulenc, Malcom Arnold, Lennox Berkeley, Germaine Tailleferre and John Ireland (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BU41-f7UDAA>).