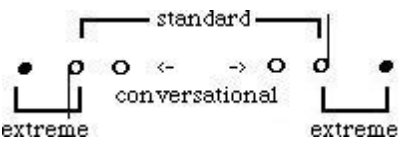


Choral Arranging and Composition

I. Vocal Ranges

The range of a voice can be divided into sub-ranges, each with its particular characteristic and effect on the performer.



Conversational range

A comfortable mid-range which covers about a fifth or sixth, easy to sustain over long periods of time, supports relaxed or low tension moods, sustained use does not promote interest

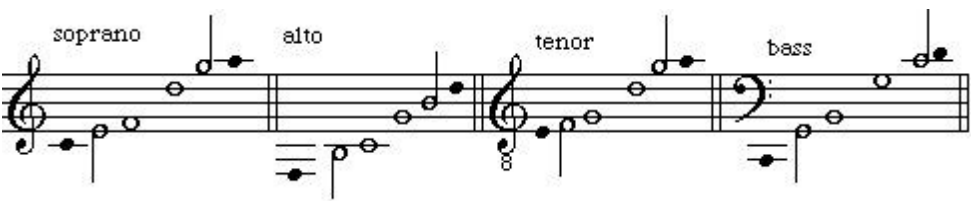
Standard range

Above and below the conversational mid-range, high range supports increased intensity of mood, low range supports decreased intensity of mood, sustained use of a single part of this range does not promote interest

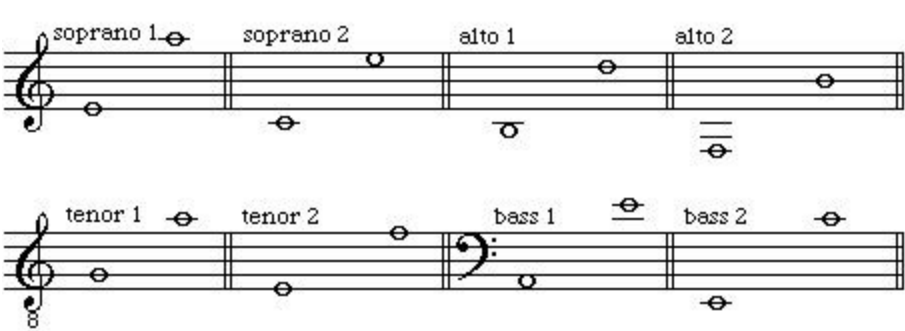
Extreme range

Effective at climaxes and anti-climaxes, constant unrelieved use of an extreme can quickly become wearing to both the singer and the listener.

Voice Ranges



II. Divisi Ranges



III. Effect of different range, spacing, and density configurations.

If the composer or arranger keeps the voices in a continuous tutti within a particular range and spacing pattern over an extended period of time, the listener may lose interest in the music. On the other hand, the listener's interest can be refreshed periodically by doing any or all of the following:

1. Vary the number of voices. Let one or more of the voices rest from time to time. Try different couplings and groupings of voices. For example, make a pair of voices move in more rapid motion than another more sustained voice.
2. Vary the spacing between voices. Change from homogeneous to heterogeneous spacings to make a particular voice stand out.
3. Transfer active lines from part to part.
4. High groupings of voices can support a climax or intense mood.
5. Low groupings of voices can support a mood of serenity and restfulness -- or resignation and sadness.
6. Closely spacing voices in the mid-range (upper voices low, lower voices high) creates a resonant intense effect.
7. Antiphonal effects: dialogs, overlaps between groups of voices (one starts before the other stops; contrasting alternation between groups of voices).
8. Texture control: monorhythmic vs. polyrhythmic, homophonic vs. multi-linear; contrast of types of texture.

Steady State vs. Change

1. Steady state (use of selected elements or tools with no change, addition or subtraction)
2. Gradual, progressive change
3. Abrupt contrast
4. Frequent exchange between two (or more) states
5. Move to a new state then return to the original

Some examples of "states" include high/low, dense/sparse, closed/open, active/inactive, texture type, homogeneous/heterogeneous.

Some Variation Techniques

Texture (see [Texture](#) pages in [Composer's Tools](#)).

for example, change from homogeneous tutti to accompanied solo, feature a small group within the larger group, add new elements each time music is repeated such as additional lines or elaboration, put melody in another voice, double melody in two or more voices, change the type of texture, feature different parts of the choral tessitura.

Harmony

for example, add new colors, change key, change mode, contrast between diatonic modes or between diatonic and chromatic passages.

Rhythm

for example, change relative activity and complexity, add or delete rhythmic layers.

Voice sub-groupings

for example, add enough space between two pairs of voices to produce dichotomy, progressive addition or deletion of voices (density crescendo or diminuendo), other kinds of progressive addition or deletion ("wave," "pyramid," "fan," "parallel sweep"). See **Voice Density Patterns** below.

Voice couplings

pairings, two contrasting pairs, one voice contrasting with the others, faux bourdon, parallelism (chord streams, chord planing), chord-stream counterpoint.

Voice Density Patterns

These patterns can be used to avoid unrelenting use of SATB, to set up contrasts, to create conversation-like exchanges in the choir and so on. The patterns listed below are common but do not rule out unlisted possibilities.

- 2 (SA or TB)
- 3 (SSA or TTB)
- 4 (SSAA, TTBB, SATB)
- 2 + 2 (SA + TB) (SS + AA, TT + BB)
- 3 + 3 (SSA + TTB)
- 3 + 2 (SSA + TB)
- 4 + 2 (SSAA + TB)
- 4 + 3 (SSAA + TTB)
- 4 + 4 (SSAA + TTBB)

More useful ideas for choral writing can be found by visiting **Textures** and other Tools pages.

Notice the effects and long-range plans created by these ideas in selected choral scores and recordings.

COMPOSER'S TOOLS

An Interactive Idea List

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This area is under continuous development. More links will be activated as I complete more pages. Please send [message](#) if you want to make a suggestion or wish to see a particular tool page completed right away.

Some of the pages (indicated by a ) play midi files. To see how to set up your computer for this, go to [Midi Setup](#).

Click on any active link to go to a **Tool Page**.

See [Composers' Rules of Engagement](#)

1. Scale Materials

- Diatonic Modes
- Gapped Scales
- Hybrids
- Symmetrical Scales
 - [Whole Tone](#) 
 - [Octatonic](#) 
- Tonality
- Polytonality
- Polymodality

2. Chords

- [Standard Progressions](#) 
- Modal Progressions
- Extended Tertian Chords
- Modern Common Practice: Jazz Notation
- Chords and Scales
 - [Whole Tone Chords](#) 
 - [Octatonic Chords](#) 
 - Polychords
- Non Tertian Chords
 - Quartal (Quintal) Chords
 - Clusters

3. Rhythm

- Asymmetrical Meter
- Polyrhythm/polymeter
- Ametrical (non meter)
- Syncopation
- Modern Common Practice: Jazz

4. Melody

- [Harmonizing Melody](#)
- [Contour, Continuity and Reduction](#)
- [Motive Variation](#) 

- [Motive, Phrase, Period](#)
- 5. Texture
 - [Choral Writing](#)
 - Chord Streams
 - Chord Stream Polyphony
 - Genres of Texture
 - [Parameters of Texture](#)
- 6. [Index to Traditional Forms](#)
- 7. Twelve-Tone Technique
 - [Set Theory](#)
 - [Twelve-Tone Composition](#)
- 8. Other Techniques
 - Sound Scapes
 - Multimedia (with other art media)
 - Minimalism
- 9. Electronic Techniques
 - Sequencing
 - Digital Recording
 - Composing for Video and Animation
 - Composing for Electronic Multimedia
 - Computer Composition
- 10. [Music-As-System](#)
- 11. [Composers and Nature](#)
- 12. [Affective Message and Structure](#)

Composers' Rules of Engagement

First Rule:

If you want to move, don't stay in one place.

- Music can be static if it (for example) never changes pitch level. **Minimalism** although based on repetition is not static if processes of change are present (as in good examples of this genre).
- Be sensitive to the need for change in your own work. Any process of change, sudden or gradual, can be created with any single composer's tool or combination of tools.

Second Rule:

Sooner or later, you have to consider where your work is going.

- There are several ways to approach a composition.
 - Start with overall planning then start sketching.
 - Sketch first then develop an overall plan that fits your ideas.
 - Note: **Overall Planning** is **always** in the equation. Sketching without thought of structure leads to aimless stream-of-conscious lack of cohesion.

On Thinking about Structure: Today's composer can use traditional formal templates and modern techniques at the same time. While there may be differences in process and style, traditional models and their contemporary analogs have the following in common: **content, form-defining closure, changing tonal centers, textural design, optional linking passages** and optional extensions such as **introductions** and **codas**.

Third Rule:

Avoid the Edifice Complex.

- Do not regard your composition as a magnum opus.
- Learn from but do not be intimidated by the masters of the past.

Fourth Rule:

Give a thought to others involved in the process.

- Remember the performers. Remember the listeners. Stay in touch with both. Put yourself in their place.
- Think about the mechanics of musical communication. (See Music-As-System).

Fifth Rule:

Be your own theorist.

- Vital ideas come from experimentation with raw materials. Re-visit basic elements to discover their pattern possibilities for yourself. [Many of these tools pages are the result of that kind

of inquiry.] Your question should be "What can I do with this?" not "What does the book say to do with this?"

- A vital composition is one in which the composer tests his or her discoveries about the nature of musical materials -- and the nature of music itself, for that matter. Composition is, in short, an application of a composer's theories about music.
- Everything about you goes into your composition. A composition is the sum of everything you know and feel about music -- and life.

Sixth Rule:

Be your own critic.

- As a self-critic, your primary goal is to identify what you are trying to accomplish as a composer. Once you establish this, criticism is a process of judging how effectively you achieved your goals. The final stage of criticism is to decide what to do about an ineffective or unclear passage.
 - Under no circumstances should you judge your work based on how it matches up to the work of others. What is important is your participation in the world of ideas, not how you measure up.
 - Avoid belittling or minimizing your own contribution to the world of ideas. No matter how small, a contribution is a contribution. Do not be carpingly critical of your own effort. Instead, expend your energy experimenting with ideas and writing notes.
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