

VI. Texture, Timbre, and Attention

1. music has many goals

songwriters want:

- emotional self-expression
- expressive accuracy
- continuity of style
- variety within style
- originality
- grabbing attention
- keeping attention

modern listeners are distracted

attention is precious

key idea:

great music captures and sustains attention

2. listeners become accustomed to sounds

the longer a sound remains unchanged

the less attention it receives

people adapt to timbre

even great sounds lose impact through repetition

key idea:

familiarity weakens attention

3. timbral variety keeps listeners engaged

one way to maintain interest:

introduce new sounds

examples:

- strings enter
- synth appears
- background vocals return
- guitar tone changes

new timbres immediately attract attention

key idea:

new sounds create fresh emotional responses

4. removing sounds can be even more powerful

sometimes subtraction is stronger than addition

examples:

- drop the drums
- remove the bass
- eliminate a texture

absence creates awareness

when the sound returns

its effect is renewed

key idea:

silence and absence are compositional tools

5. intensity comes from many sources

music becomes more intense through:

- thicker texture
- louder dynamics

- increased rhythmic density
- wider pitch range
- tempo changes
- meter changes
- timbral changes
- harmonic tension

all these elements interact

key idea:

intensity is multidimensional

6. the seven elements should work together

don't ask:

"how do I make this louder?"

ask:

"which elements can increase intensity?"

examples:

- faster rhythms
- larger pitch range
- thicker texture
- brighter timbres
- more dissonance

key idea:

all seven elements contribute to expression

7. pitch range affects emotion

important questions:

- where is the highest note?
- why does it occur there?

- where is the lowest note?
- what emotional effect do they have?

extreme pitches naturally attract attention

key idea:

pitch range creates drama

8. reserve important notes

don't reveal everything immediately

save new pitches for important moments

when a previously unheard note appears

it feels significant

Hess calls this "pitch virginity"

key idea:

novelty has power

9. reserve harmonic functions too

new harmonic colors become stronger when delayed

don't use every possibility immediately

save unusual functions for:

- climaxes
- transitions
- emotional peaks

key idea:

restraint increases impact

10. melodic contour matters

ask:

- does the melody rise?
- descend?
- leap?
- remain stable?

different contours create different emotions

contour contributes as much as the notes themselves

key idea:

shape creates expression

11. timbral variety must serve the music

novelty alone is not enough

adding sounds merely to be different has little value

every change should support:

- emotion
- structure
- climax
- contrast

key idea:

variety without purpose is distraction

12. unusual harmonies can work

intervals like seconds may sound harsh in theory

but context changes everything

examples:

- cluster chords
- second-based harmony
- dissonance used expressively

the ear responds to context more than labels

key idea:

there are no bad sounds

only bad contexts

13. study emotional effects

listen to music and ask:

- what emotion do I feel?
- why do I feel it?
- which elements create that effect?

then work backwards

analyze:

- melody
- harmony
- rhythm
- texture
- timbre
- dynamics
- form

key idea:

emotion can be reverse engineered

14. variation creates endless possibilities

the same material can produce many results

examples:

- Bach's Goldberg Variations
- concept albums
- recurring themes

great music often comes from transforming existing ideas

key idea:

variation creates depth

15. begin with the end in mind

know where the music is heading

plan:

- climaxes
- transitions
- important arrivals

work backwards from the destination

key idea:

architecture comes before details

bottom line

this section is really saying:

- attention fades when sounds remain unchanged
- timbre is one of the strongest ways to regain attention
- removing sounds can be more powerful than adding them
- intensity comes from many elements working together
- pitch range contributes to drama
- novelty should be reserved for important moments
- contour affects emotion
- context determines whether sounds work
- emotional effects can be analyzed

- variation creates depth

and most importantly:

great songwriting is not just choosing notes

it's controlling attention