

What is a Melody Outline?

It is essentially a musical puzzle consisting of a series of Chords and a Melody note at the beginning of each bar. Using this framework students learn to create music, while improving their knowledge of chords, rhythm patterns, musical sentences, music theory and developing their personal musical style.

Basic Concepts

- The melody notes and chords in the melody outline cannot be changed.
- Students create a melody, using notes from the given chords - these notes are referred to as **landmarks**.
- Between these landmarks, **fills** are used on weak beats, these fill notes feature in the diatonic or chromatic scale.
- Within the piece students create phrases and musical breaks.
- Always avoid using intervals over an octave within the melody
- The rhythm of the piece is just as important as the melody.
- Always identify the style of the piece early on and study rhythm patterns associated with this genre.
- The title must link to the theme and mood of the piece
- For competition melody outlines - Students can choose the time signature.
- Competition and exam melody out lines have a critique - **READ CAREFULLY**.
- Beginning of the tune: develop the style of the piece and a clear pattern.
- Middle section: is the opportunity for students to create interest and variety.
- Nearing the end: remind listeners of the theme, give them a feeling of familiarity in the melody/rhythm and a sense of going home.

- Use their melody outline to relate to their theory concepts they are learning.
- Allow plenty of time for your student to create their melody outline, especially if there is a submit deadline.

Teaching Melody Outlines

- **First lesson** - treat the melody outline as a technical exercise for example get students to **play chords only**, teach any chords they may not know. Guitar students can practise interesting strum patterns and arpeggio picking. Piano/Keyboard students play chords both hands, inversions, create arpeggio patterns and runs. Always encourage students to play with expression and with feeling and add pedal or beats.
- **Second or third lesson** - Study the key signature and create scale exercises. Identify where the student would like slurs/phrases in the piece. Also study a piece of music they are learning, identify slurs, rhythm patterns, style and compare this to their melody outline. Encourage students to choose a style of their melody outline and listen to music of that genre at home. Students can begin writing the first two phrases using notes in the chords (landmarks).
- **Over time** - slowly the melody outline will begin to develop, encourage students to develop simple rhythm patterns. Remind them they can create repetitive sounds and rise and fall sounds by using a mixture of skips and leaps - **using landmarks**. Any smaller note intervals can be made into **fills**. Add 8va if they prefer the melody to get higher or lower in pitch.
- **Talk about fills** and how they relate to the tonic scale and where they can be used between land mark notes and on weak beats.
- **Introductions and Endings** - Inspire your student by playing a variety of chord progressions from the NZMSM Teachers manual and let them select a couple of chord progressions they

are keen to use and learn. Point out the tonic and dominant chord in the piece and explain why songs use these chords in intros and endings.

- **Study Rhythm together** - discuss different note values found in different types of music. You may notice the rhythm the student plays might be quite different to what they have written. Guide them and extend their knowledge of note values. They may like to use tied notes to lengthen values, thus creating more interesting rhythmic patterns and music pleasing to the ear.
- **Decorate** - as the piece develops encourage students to add rests (adding air in the piece), interesting dynamics for feeling/mood, set a tempo, addition of grace notes, hammer ons and pull offs, 8va, staccato, pauses, rit, bass runs and develop bass patterns for piano, strum patterns for guitar and select voice and accomp style for keyboard.
- **Don't overdo it** - like any art form it can be hard to know when the work/piece of music is completed. Record students performing and listen to their creation together. Encourage them to get feedback from family and friends.
- **As a teacher resist** creating the melody out line for the student - it must be their work...remind yourself you are there to guide. The more ownership and input the student has in developing their melody outline the more commitment they will have in polishing their piece and playing at performance level.

Teaching Melody outlines is fun and a great way to get to know your student's strengths, weakness, character and musical preferences. Give it go!

For more in-depth information check out the articles and examples found in NZMSM Melody Outlines Book.

