

Form 2: Motives

Author, Roy Ernst

Repetition in music is important. Without it, music would not have feeling or meaning. It also makes music memorable. In this lesson, you will find repetition in the form of motives and sequences. Other aspects of repetition will be considered in later lessons.

Motives and Sequences

A motive is a short melodic or rhythmic pattern that is repeated in the music. If a motive is repeated on different pitch levels, the repetition is called a sequence.

Motives and sequences give coherence to music. When you start listening for them, you will be surprised at how often you hear the same pattern. They also make it much easier to remember the music. There will often be more than one motive in a piece of music.

In the music below, motives are marked with an “m.” For more than one motive, you could mark them “m1,” “m2” and so forth.

America the Beautiful

Katherine Lee Bates. lyrics
Samuel A. Ward, music

m1 ?

5

11

O beau - ti - ful for spa - cious skies, for am - ber waves of grain, for
pur - ple moun-tain maj - es-ties a - bove the fruit-ed plain! A - mer - i-ca, A - mer - i-ca, God
shed his grace on thee, and crown thy good with broth - er-hood from sea to shi - ning sea!

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal melody for the first system of 'America the Beautiful'. It is written on a single staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody starts on a whole note G4, followed by a dotted half note F#4, and then a series of eighth and quarter notes. A dashed slur labeled 'm1' covers the first four measures, and another dashed slur labeled '?' covers the next four measures. The lyrics are written below the staff, with line numbers 5 and 11 indicating the start of new lines of music.

America the Beautiful

Katherine Lee Bates. lyrics
Samuel A. Ward, music

m1 ?

8

6

12

O beau - ti - ful for spa-cious skies, for am-ber waves of grain, for pur - ple moun-tain
maj - es-ties a - bove the fruit-ed plain! A - mer - i-ca, A - mer - i-ca, God shed his grace on
thee, and crown thy good with broth - er-hood from sea to shi - ning sea!

Detailed description: This block contains the bass line for the second system of 'America the Beautiful'. It is written on a single staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody starts on a whole note G3, followed by a dotted half note F#3, and then a series of eighth and quarter notes. A dashed slur labeled 'm1' covers the first four measures, and another dashed slur labeled '?' covers the next four measures. The lyrics are written below the staff, with line numbers 8, 6, and 12 indicating the start of new lines of music.

Sometimes it may be hard for you to decide if a group of notes is a motive or not. For instance, in the example above you could choose to think of the 5 quarter-notes followed by a dotted half-note as a motive, but I choose not to do so because it is long and not rhythmically distinctive. It's okay if you prefer to think of it as a motive. Don't spend any time worrying about it. The important thing is that you recognize that it could be and that it is a repetitive factor.

Assignment

How many times is the m1 motive (rhythm pattern) repeated in the song?

How many times is the “?” section repeated?

What else is in the song that is not m1 or “?” ?

Play “America the Beautiful” and think about the motives you are playing.

Look for motives in two or more pieces that you are playing and mark them to see how often they are repeated. When you have done that, you have completed this lesson.



Go to YouTube and listen to recordings of “Strike Up the Band” by George Gershwin played by The United States Marine Band. Notice the repetition of motives played in sequence. The basic melody is in A A’ B A form. With the second repetition of A at a higher pitch level than the first A. This is followed by a middle section, also based on sequences, before returning to the first melody. This is developed into a larger composition by adding sections, but motives will be heard throughout.