

# 12 Variations on “Ah vous dirais-je, maman”

## The Assignment’s Purpose

In earlier years of musical learning, you learned about the basic Elements of Music (rhythm and metre, pitch and melody, tonality and mode). We expand upon that to discuss more details about other Elements of Music; form, articulations and dynamics, and texture.

## A Review of the Basic Elements of Music

### Rhythm and Metre

In rhythm we discuss simple rhythms, complex rhythms, swinging rhythms, and syncopations.

In metre we discuss two different aspects of ; duple or triple meter, and simple or compound meter.

Duple meter – beats are organized in 2s, like in 2-4 time, 4-4 time or cut time.

Triple meter – beats are organized in 3s, like in 3-4 time or 9-8 time.

Simple meter – each beat can be subdivided into halves like in 4-4 time (where we count 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +).

Compound meter – each beat can be subdivided into triplets or combinations (like in 6-8 time we count 1 + a 2 + a, or in 5-4 time we count 1 2 3 4 5)

### Pitch and Melody

In pitch we discuss not only whether or not a note is higher or lower than the other ones, but also the shapes the pitches can make (as if you were connecting the dots of the music).

**QUESTION** – If you connect the dots for the melody of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, how would you describe the resulting shape?



### Tonality and Mode

In tonality we discuss which key signature a piece of music is in. In mode, we discuss whether or not it is in Major mode or Minor mode, sometimes discussed as either “happy” (Major) or “sad” (Minor).

## Now Let’s Talk About The Next Level

### Form

At it’s most basic level, Form discusses the building blocks of music. It starts with a **motif**, a very basic 3-5 note rhythmic melody that ends up being copied throughout the piece of music. In Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, the motif is in the first 2 bars. 2 or more motifs combined can make a theme, which we usually label using **Phrase A**, **Phrase B**, **Phrase C** etc. Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’s Phrase A is the four bars you see above.

**QUESTION** - Listen to Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’s theme by visiting <https://music.ndcfinearts.ca/responding>. How many phrases do you hear in Twinkle Twinkle Little Star? In what order do you hear them (A – B – A, A – B – C – B – A, A – A – B – B, or something else?)

The simplest way to develop a piece of music is to copy it’s theme and change it. This strategy is called “Theme and Variations”. There are many ways someone can change a theme, including altering it’s original meter, rhythm, melody, tonality and mode. This is discussed on the next page.

## Melodic Variations Through Compositional Devices

You should always hear evidence of the original theme, but a composer can use any of the following compositional devices to create a variation.

**Repetition** – repeating the melody, sometimes by the original instrument or voice, and sometimes by other instruments or voices.

**Sequence** – repeating the melody, however it starts on a different pitch (like sliding the whole melody up or down on the paper).

**Retrograde** – playing the melody entirely backwards; the end of the melody moves to the beginning, and the beginning becomes the end.

**Ornamentation** – a way of adding nearby notes (sometimes only a few, sometimes passages with many notes) to add complexity to the melody. As an example, in the original Theme of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, Mozart added a tiny ornamentation to the end of the second time Phrase A was played.

**Inversion** – flipping the melody upside-down. If the melody generally moves in the shape of a hill, then inverting it turns it into a valley shape instead.

**Augmentation and Diminution** – Augmentation makes the melody move more slowly in relation to the tempo. For example, doubling the length of every note. Diminution makes the melody move more quickly, such as changing quarter notes into eighth notes.

**Contrary and Parallel Motion** – Contrary motion is where two instruments or voices move in opposite directions. Parallel motion is where they move in the same direction, even though they aren't the exact same notes.

## Variations Through Articulations and Dynamics

The use of staccatos, legatos, slurs, and accents, as well as the use of piano, mezzo-piano, forte, crescendo and decrescendo can also add significant impact to a Variation.

## Variations Through Texture

There are four words we use to describe texture in music; monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic and heterophonic. The definitions come from the root words. Phonic always means "sound".

Mono – one

Homo – same

Poly – many

Hetero – another

**Monophonic** music is where every person is singing exactly the same (even in the same octave)

**Homophonic** music is where every person is singing the same pitches across a variety of octaves (a bass voice sings the same notes as a soprano voice)

**Polyphonic** is when there is a lot of different notes happening at the same time. They can be Euphonic (good sounds) or Cacophonous (bad sounds) in nature.

**Heterophonic** is when the music is all moving generally in the same direction, but they're not playing the exact same notes. There is another series of notes in addition to the main melody.

## THE ASSIGNMENT

First, answer the questions on the first page. There is one in the Pitch and Melody section, and one in the Form section.

Choose at least 2 different variations on the Theme "Ah Vous Dirais-Je, Maman" as written by Mozart and performed by Lang Lang. The 12 options are available at <https://music.ndcfinearts.ca/responding>

For each variation first identify what variation you are working with. Then discuss the following;

- Were there rhythmic, meter, or tempo adjustments made? What were those changes?
- Were there melodic variations made? Which compositional devices did you notice? Try to get at least 3 listed.
- How did Mozart use articulations, dynamics, and texture to create the variation?

## HOW TO SUBMIT IT

- Submit it in the Google Classroom assignment, if you wish. If you do, still go to Opus and say that you've completed it.
- Do it on a Google Doc file, then add the Share link to the assignment in Opus.
- Do it on paper, then take a photo of it and attach it to the assignment in Opus.

Marks – 25 Total