Writing 2 Variations

Variations are repetitions of your original theme with alterations to give it a different style and flavor. Simply adjusting rhythms isn't enough, you need to change it insomuch as it now has a completely different feeling about it.

MOZART'S EXAMPLE

https://youtu.be/hCKBl-TpRzc

The video, albeit a fake performance of the piece (the YouTuber slows performances down for video recording, uses a MIDI piano, and then speeds it up to the proper tempo so you can't see his mistakes), provides a visual representation of the variations that can be quite helpful. This video is referenced throughout these notes. The sheet music will be available in the Discord.

A great example of variations where each variation has a different flavor is Mozart's 12 Variations on "Ah vous dirai-je, maman" K. 265, known to many simple as the "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", "Baa Baa Black Sheep", "The Alphabet Song", "Ang Munting Bituin", "Estrellita" among many other titles and lyrics around the world.

For each of the strategies for variations, I will refer back to this composition for examples of those strategies. However for your assignment, you will be "Mr. Windsor's Super Basic Theme" as shown on the page attached.

OVERWHELMING LIST OF OPTIONS AVAILABLE

There are hundreds, maybe thousands of strategies you can use for creating variations. For this assignment, keep it simple. Choose one main strategy for each Variation, and work from there. **Do not try to do too much in one variation**. For this assignment, **keep it simple**.

STRATEGY – MELODIC ORNAMENTATION

This strategy is used by all musicians as a way of adding character or intrigue to a melody. While Mozart used it to create variations, even modern vocalists like Beyoncé and Ed Sheeran use them to add emotion to a song. There are three basic ornaments used by composers. They include *passing tones*, *neighbouring tones* and *escape tones*.

Passing tones are notes used to get you from one note to a different note. A basic example of a passing tone is in Figure 1, and a more elaborate version is in Figure 2.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Neighbouring tones are a great melodic ornamentation when dealing with repeating notes, as you leave to a neighbour to come back, as in Figure 3. You can also create "turns", which are neighbouring tones going both up and then down before arriving at the next pitch in the theme, as in Figure 4.
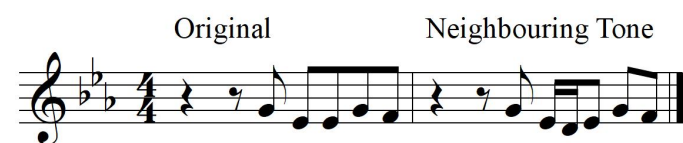

Figure 1

Figure 2

Escape tones are pitches that escape the regular melody by going outside the intervals in the melody. An example of an escape tone down is in Figure 5 and a type of escape tone called an "appoggiatura" is shown in Figure 6, where the escape tone is placed on a major pulse as opposed to as a "pickup" to a thematic pulse.
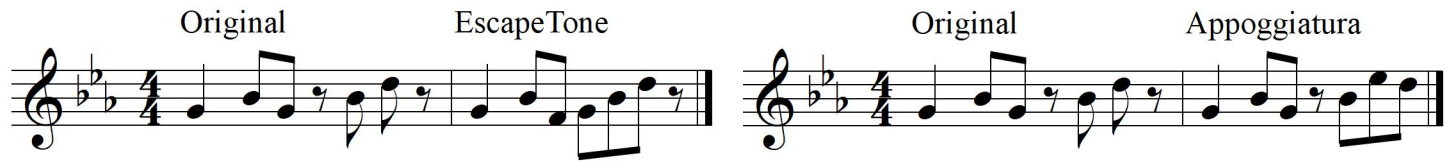

Figure 4

Figure 3

An example of a good deal of melodic ornamentation is shown in Variation 1 (located at 1:01 in the video) of Mozart's 12 Variations on "Ah vous dirai-je, Maman". Mozart also composed melodic ornamentation on the bass line in Variation 2 (located at 1:55 in the video), showing that the melody is not the only thing that can experience variations.

STRATEGY – RHYTHMIC STYLE CHANGES

Rhythmic variations of either increasing complexity or decreasing complexity (adding sixteenth notes or turning quarter notes into half notes) are **not Variations**. They are simply tools used for creating the theme. To do a full variation using rhythmic changes, you need something substantial, like a full style, tempo, or even time signature change.

Variations by Style and Tempo

Style and Tempo markings such as "Adagio", "Moderato", or "Allegro" should first appear on the original theme. You can use Chapter 23 of Breezin' Thru Theory for ideas on what terms you could choose. In your variations, ask your performers to shift styles entirely. You can use traditional style markings like those used in Chapter 23, or you can use something more explicit, like "March", "Swing", or "Pedantic" (meaning heavy-footed). You can also adjust the style by way of altering articualtions and dynamics; change staccato passages to legato or vice versa, add accents where there were none before. To make a variation based on Style and Tempo, follow the checklist below to get yourself going

- ❑ First, duplicate the original theme (in pencil, or on a computer where you can edit things like in Flat.io)
- ❑ Consider what style and tempo you want. Write in the style marking and tempo marking.
- ❑ Add whatever articulations and dynamics you need to get closer to the style you want.
- ❑ Consider melodic ornamentations and maybe even rhythmic changes to make sure it matches your style of choice.

As an example, Mozart doesn't really use a style or tempo variation much until Variation 3 (located at 2:43 in the video) where he intentionally focusses on staccatos, or Variation 4 which is more of a March style. In Mozart's original score, neither of these style markings are written like "Moderato" would appear at the beginning of a piece. The first time Mozart actually explicitly tells the performer to change styles is in Variation 11 (located at 9:21 in the video), which he purposefully marks as "Adagio", slowing the piece down to almost half the speed.

Variations by Time Signature

Time Signature is an even more drastic adjustment. Your piece of music does not need to stay in the same time signature as your original theme. You can switch to 4-4, 6-8, 3-4, or even 5-4 time if you wanted to. The key challenge in doing so is maintaining the theme authentically. Mozart does this well in his 3rd and 4th Variations (starting at 2:43 and 3:35 respectively) by switching his original theme (which was in 2-4 time) into 6-8 time (although, if you look at the original composition, he simply wrote them as triplets). Figure 7 is an example of Mr. Windsor's original theme shifted to 3-4 time.

Figure 5

STRATEGY – KEY, MODE, AND VOICINGS

Your variations need not stay in the same *key signature* as they were originally written for. You can take a whole variation and move it to another relative key. For example, you can take a piece written in C Major and write a variation in it's dominant or subdominant keys (C Major's dominant is G Major, as shown in the circle of fifths moving clockwise; it's sub-dominant is F Major, found moving counter-clockwise). A circle of fifths has been provided to help you determine relative key signatures.

Alternatively, you can switch *modes* of the piece; from Major to minor, or vice versa. For example, Mozart's original theme was written in C Major, but for Variation 8 (located at 6:42 in the video) he switches it to c minor. He chose to keep the starting pitch and use a new key signature (the same as E-Flat Major). Mozart could have also simply chosen to transpose the whole theme to C Major's relative a minor, and it would have had a similar effect. He puts it back into C Major to finish other variations.

Voicings are also a different strategy (although we will not use them for this assignment), including switching which voice performs the theme, and which performs the bass and chord structure. A good example is Variation 6 (starting at 5:11 in the video), but not for the entire variation. Variation 6 begins with the "A Section" of the theme in the same voice as always, but in the "B Section" (first time found at 5:26 n the video), he shifts it into the baritone voice (largely played by the thumb of the left hand).
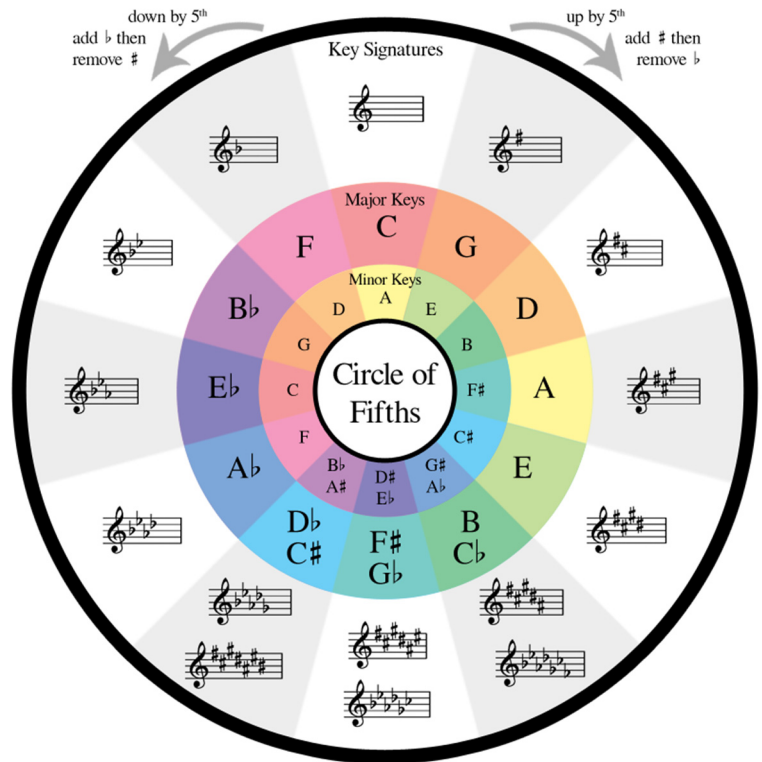
Employing This Strategy

❑ First decide if you're changing the Key, the Mode, or the Voicing (for this assignment, Key or Mode only)
❑ You will need to transpose the entire theme to the new key or mode. It basically looks like your sequencing the entire theme.
  ❑ Once transposed, you may realize that this melody has some notes that don't fit on your instrument. Consider shifting those notes from one octave to another, but not in a way that makes those notes feel like they don't belong.
❑ Consider if this requires you to make a change to the Style or the Tempo to make this variation work, or if adding any articulations, dynamics, or even melodic ornamentations will complete the job.

THE ASSIGNMENT – MAKING 2 VARIATIONS ON MR. WINDSOR'S THEME

Your assignment is to create 2 variations based on the theme provided by Mr. Windsor for your instrument. Your variations must include the following;

1. One variation based on Melodic Ornamentation
2. One variation based on *either* Style and Tempo changes *or* Key or Mode changes.

You can complete this assignment either in Flat.io and get a **Private Shareable Link** to save in this assignment in **Opus**, or you can complete this assignment on paper and hand it in directly (or take photos and upload to Opus).

Mr. Windsor's Theme

Score