



Lesson #2: Chromaticism

OVERVIEW

A lesson for students to learn to identify chromaticism used in musical composition and to apply it in creating an original variation of a familiar tune.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will:

1. define chromaticism.
2. apply knowledge about chromaticism to create a variation on a familiar tune.

DESCRIPTION OF LESSON

In *Deep Dish*, composer James M. Stephenson uses the chromatic scale starting on concert Ab as the pitch set used to create the piece. Extensive chromaticism is used throughout the piece. Students will define chromaticism, analyze an example of chromaticism applied to a familiar tune, and then compose their own variation of a different familiar tune.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

1. Chromaticism background handout.
2. Assignment sheet.

PROCESS

1. Read through background handout together.
2. Students compose an original variation of a familiar tune on the Chromaticism Assignment sheet.

CHROMATICISM

You may have noticed that one of the challenges of performing *Deep Dish* by James Stephenson is that in addition to notes affected by the key signature, there are many accidentals included in all the parts (except for the non-pitched percussion parts.) The pitches the composer used to create the piece come from the chromatic scale starting on the concert pitch Ab.

Deep Dish is an example of the use of **chromaticism** by a composer to create a piece of music. A piece is considered to contain chromaticism if chromatic notes are added among the notes of a diatonic (major or minor) scale to create the melodies and harmonies or the entire piece is based on a chromatic scale. A chromatic note is a pitch that is not a part of the scale based on the key signature and is written with an accidental attached to it. For example, in the following measure, the G# is a chromatic note because it is not a part of the scale indicated by the key signature.



Here are two examples of a familiar tune that demonstrate how chromaticism can be used to alter or “decorate” a melody to create a variation. They are written in both treble and bass clef to match whichever instrument you play. Play and compare both versions of the tune.

Version #1: Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star



Version #2: Twinkle, Twinkle Variation



Even with the chromatic pitches added to the melody, can you still hear that the variation is based on *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*? Recognizing the tune that is the basis of a variation is an important characteristic.

ASSESSMENT

WRITE YOUR OWN VARIATION

Now you will have chance to **use chromaticism** to write your own variation of a well-known tune. Play the following tune on your instrument several times to really become familiar with it. Experiment with **adding additional chromatic notes** to the tune. When you like the sound of your new version of the tune, write it down on the staff paper that is provided. Make sure you play the tune and write your variation using the clef that matches your instrument. Remember that the point of the assignment is to demonstrate that you understand chromaticism in creating your variation, so there should be many accidentals (written in sharps and flats) appearing in your final tune!

Treble Clef Instruments:



Bass Clef Instruments:



Name: _____

Staff paper for Treble Clef Instruments:



Staff Paper for Bass Clef Instruments:

