

COMPOSITION PROJECT: College Fight Song Chorus

Overview

This semester you will draw upon your knowledge of various musical features (e.g., phrase structure, harmony, motives, and underlying voiceleading) to compose an original college fight song chorus. The final version of the project (both a score and a recording) will be due on the last day of class, but prior to that time you will receive feedback on multiple components. Also, many of your regular homework assignments during the semester will directly address various aspects of the composition project.

You are not required to set your composition using notation software (such as Finale, Sibelius, NoteAbility, or MuseScore), but doing this from the outset might save time overall because you'll be able to add accompaniment and make revisions without recopying everything. Lyrics are optional; if you decide to include lyrics, please make sure they are in good taste.

On April 14-18, you will have an individual appointment to discuss your in-progress composition. However, you are always welcome to schedule additional meetings outside of class for help writing or revising your melody and/or accompaniment. As you work on this project, it's imperative that you engage your ears! A fight song that defies typical expectations or is overly complicated isn't likely to be successful.

Please notice that the class website includes links to many college fight songs. We will be looking at a variety of popular examples in class, but additional listening on your own will contribute to your sense of the genre's style and will ultimately improve your own composition.

Projects will be performed live or recorded in advance and played back in class.

Installment #1 — due April 4

You will turn in two components:

1. A melody that exhibits many of the expected characteristics of a college fight song chorus.
2. A list of these typical characteristics that your fight song melody exemplifies. (Our class will collectively create a list of common features in Assignment #30, due April 1.)

Please explain any features that aren't immediately obvious. For instance, the key and meter are obvious. A unifying motive, however, should be specified — and if this motive appears on an underlying level as well as the musical surface, that is certainly worth pointing out.

Lyrics are completely optional. If you do include lyrics, make sure they'd be rated "G."

Installment #2 — due April 11

You will turn in three components:

1. Your fight song melody from the first installment, revised if necessary.
2. A basic keyboard-style accompaniment that conveys the underlying harmony. (Perhaps you will want to add features such as neighboring chords later, but they aren't needed now.) This accompaniment should reflect standard common-practice harmony and voice leading.
3. A stylistic bass line that reflects your harmonic plan and sounds good with the melody. Occasional embellishing tones would be appropriate. (Reminder: arpeggiation $\frac{6}{4}$ chords are extremely common in all kinds of marches.)

Optional: you may also wish to turn in a more elaborate accompaniment with passing and neighboring chords. If your ear prompts you to write chromatic chords you cannot yet identify, I will be glad to help you.

Please align all three required components on four staves, with the melody on top, the bass line on the bottom, and the background harmony in the middle. An example (which you will recognize as the beginning of the “Notre Dame Victory March”) is provided below.

Important note: in this draft, the harmony is an abstraction showing how the voiceleading works. (That's why there's no rhythmic activity in this part.) It's fine if there are parallel unisons/octaves, doubled tendency tones, etc. shown between the harmony and either the melody or the bass line at this point. However, forbidden parallels, unresolved tendency tones, etc. within the harmony are not okay. Also, the melody and the bass line must work well together as a pair: avoid forbidden parallels, unpleasant clashes, etc.

The image displays a musical score for the beginning of the "Notre Dame Victory March" on four staves. The top staff contains the melody in treble clef, featuring a series of eighth and quarter notes. The second staff shows the background harmony in treble clef, with chords represented by vertical lines and horizontal arcs indicating voice leading. The third staff shows the bass line in bass clef, with notes that complement the melody. The fourth staff is empty. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C).

Individual Appointments — April 14-18

You will sign up for a 15-minute appointment to discuss your in-progress composition and receive individual feedback and advice. Please remember that you are welcome to schedule additional meetings with me and/or submit revised drafts for feedback. However, I make no guarantees that I will have time to look through a draft submitted less than a day before the final version is due.

Final Draft — due April 25

You will turn in two (optionally three) components:

1. A PDF of your fight song melody (separate from the accompaniment, so the whole class can read it from the projection screen), preferably note-processed (or at least neatly handwritten). Please also bring a hard copy to class so we can sing your song together!
2. A PDF of the melody and accompaniment together in a condensed score format, preferably note-processed (or at least neatly handwritten). This will include your bass line from the second installment (revised if necessary) and a rhythmically lively version of the upper voices, perhaps including some embellishment. Please align the required components correctly on three staves, as shown below. Helpful hints:
 - Inner voices in marches tend to emphasize offbeats (as illustrated below).
 - One voice of the accompaniment might duplicate the vocal melody (as illustrated below) or they might all be independent, but the accompaniment doesn't normally go back and forth between these two options.



3. Optional: a digital audio file (e.g., MP3) of your fight song in one of the following formats:
 - A MIDI realization of both the melody and the accompaniment, converted to MP3 or another similar format
 - Your performance of the melody (either sung or performed on an instrument) plus a MIDI realization of the accompaniment, converted to MP3 or another similar format. I would recommend using multi-track audio editing software to layer and align the parts. There are many good choices, including:
 - Audacity — <https://www.audacityteam.org>
 - Ocenaudio — <https://www.ocenaudio.com/en/startpage>
 - GarageBand (Mac only) — <https://www.apple.com/uk/mac/garageband>
 - BandLab (PC only) — <https://www.bandlab.com/products/cakewalk>
 - A digital audio recording of a “live” performance of both melody and accompaniment, either recorded in one take or recorded separately and aligned using multi-track audio editing software. You are welcome to enlist the help of other performers.

Extra credit will be given for performances with a live component: one point for the second option above, and three for the third option. (Because of grade weightings, that's equivalent to an extra 5% or 15% on a regular homework assignment or quiz.) Recordings must be submitted electronically at least one hour before class.