

Write The Melody To The Lyric

When it comes to writing melodies for your lyric, there are many approaches you can take, but to make sure the tune fits the words, considering the natural stresses in the lyric and the contours of speech will be very helpful.

In this example, we can see that the significant notes in the melody match the stressed syllables:

I could **feel** at the **time**
There was **no way** of **knowing**
Fallen **leaves** in the **night**
Who can **say** where they're **blowing**

ta ta TUM ta ta TUM

As **free** as the **wind**
Hopefully learning
Why the **sea** on the **tide**
Has **no way** of **turning**

TUM ta ta TUM ta

More than **this**, **there** is **nothing**.
More than **this**, **tell** me **one** thing
More than **this**, **there** is **nothing**

TUM ta. TUM, TUM ta TUM

It was **fun** for a **while**
There was **no way** of **knowing**
Like a **dream** in the **night**
Who can **say where** we're **going**
No **care** in **the world**
Maybe I'm learning
Why the sea on the...

More than **this**, **there** is **nothing**.
More than **this**, **tell** me **one** thing
More than **this**, **there** is **nothing**

TUM ta. TUM, TUM ta TUM

Meters that begin with a stressed accent - TUMta, TUMtata - are called falling rhythms. Those that begin with the unstressed accent - taTUM, tataTUM are called rising rhythms.

There needs to be enough variation in your stress patterns to create a natural conversational feel and to avoid a robotic quality. But there needs to be enough repetition to create pattern and coherence.

Take a lyric you have not already written a melody for, or a lyric you're open to rewriting, or the sample lyric provided.

Identify the stressed syllables. Work out what the ratio is for falling to rising rhythms - do you typically gravitate to one?

Say the lines out loud to yourself, exaggerating as if you needed to make them audible to someone far away. What natural variation in speech is there?

Draw the natural variation as a diagram to depict where the speech rises and falls.

Now exaggerate that, using the stressed syllables as the point where that contour is delineated. If it rises, like 'I could feel', 'feel' is the highest point of the rise. Do this without chords first, using a scale, but when you add chords these stressed notes are more likely to be chord tones.

It's important for this exercise that you do this with pen and paper first, before testing the ideas against the guitar or keyboard.

If you could talk I would love to listen

You've been a fortress and you've been a prison

Seen seasons come and seen them go

Keeping secrets that I'd like to know

Write two possible melodies for this. Think of the melodies as being made up of short phrases that fit each line. The stress patterns are not identical in each line, so you won't want to repeat the same melodic phrase four times. Try this:

Phrase 1

Phrase 2

Phrase 3 similar to phrase 1, adjusted for stresses

Phrase 4 similar to phrase 2, adjusted for stresses.

Now try

Phrase 1

Phrase 2 similar to phrase 1 modified as necessary

Phrase 3

Phrase 4 similar to phrase 3 modified as necessary

And

Phrase 1

Phrase 2

Phrase 3 similar to phrase 1

Phrase 4

Where nothing is written - assume you are writing a new phrase, or varied phrase.

You can also choose to intersperse lines like this:

Phrase 1 - melody has a contour.

Phrase 2 - melody is flatter, but rhythmic.

Phrase 3 - melody has a contour, potentially similar to phrase 1

Phrase 4 - Repeat similar contour, change the contour, or have the melody stay on one or two notes.