Melody Writing

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RCM Sparks is the Royal College of Music's learning and participation programme.
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In this section we will explore putting a melody to your lyrics and fitting it over your chords or RCM Song-Writing Track Maker backing track.

Fitting your lyrics over the chords:

A really good way to get the rhythm for your song is to chant the lyrics, until you find a way you like.

Here are some top tips for fitting the lyrics over your chords or backing track:

1. Try starting just before or after the accompaniment starts. Click to listen to **Happy by Pharrell Williams**. He starts singing just after the track starts playing, which sounds really cool.

2. Leave gaps in between some of your lyrics. Silence can be very effective in a song. Click to listen to **Count On Me by Bruno Mars** and hear how he leaves spaces in between the words and lines of his song.

3. What are the important words in your line? Can you make them stand out in some way? Make them longer, or speak them over the music in a place where the music is strong, like the first beat of each bar.

Writing over the Backing Tracks:

In the RCM Song-Writing Track Maker tool you are able to create your own backing track for your song using different styles of music, instruments, and all sorts of other things.

Do you know which structure you chose for your song?

Have you got your lyrics written down?

Starting to write your melody:

Play your backing music (either you playing or the **RCM Song-Writing Track-Maker track**) a few times.

Listen to where the changes happen – can you tell when it goes from a Verse Section to a Chorus Section?

Try speaking your lyrics over the backing music – do they fit? Do you need to miss some words or leave some gaps?

Experiment with different ways of saying your line – you can change the rhythm – the length of the notes – to make your song more interesting.

Once you have spoken your lyrics...

- Try starting with the first line of the Chorus - can you sing that so that it sounds really memorable?

- Try to match the sound of the music to the feeling you want – is it powerful, sad, uplifting, angry, happy?

- Think about taking your melody up and down in pitch – give the lines some shape. If the lyrics are about things growing, or getting more exciting, then maybe the pitch should go up too?

- Sometimes verses have fewer big leaps in them than choruses, and move to next door notes instead.

- It always sounds good to have lots of repetition in your melody, but try to make your sections (verse, chorus, pre-chorus) sound different.

Melody:

Writing a good melody is often just about using a very simple set of notes.

A good way to start is to use a Pentatonic scale.

Here are the pentatonic notes for the following keys:

C Major: C D E G A
F Major: F G A C D
E Minor: E G A B D
G Minor: G B♭ C D F

Play the first chord of your song and then try singing or skatting (nonsense words like lalala or shooby doo) over the top. Try to use the notes from the pentatonic scale or any notes that sound good to you.

Try picking two very close notes and just wiggling between them:

C D C D C D C or **A G A G A G A G**

Sometimes a melody only moves a few notes up and down – this is totally fine, and a good way to make a nice simple tune.

Now try leaping up or down from one note to a much higher or lower note:

C   G or **D   A**

Sometimes you might want to leap up with your voice to show emotion or passion.

Look at this lyric:

It's easy in spring to feel alive! On the word 'alive' you could leap up with your voice to show the energy of the word. This technique of the music following the meaning of the words is called 'word-painting'.

Top tips for writing melodies:

- Sing what sounds good to you – remember this is your song, and there is no right or wrong answer!

- Sing where it feels comfortable for your voice.

- Think about which words are important and you want to highlight with your melody – should you sing some words high because they are important?

- Think about leaving some gaps in between words or ideas – you don't have to sing constantly.