

New Directions:

Serialism

Serialism is a form of composition that first began with Arnold Schoenberg in the early 20th Century. It is music composition in its most logical sense, using all 12 notes of the chromatic scale in a specific order.

A serialist piece of music is based upon a tone row (or note row) which is the 12 notes of the chromatic scale arranged by the composer. No notes are repeated in a tone row.

This is then used in various ways to create a complete work.

Create an example tone row:



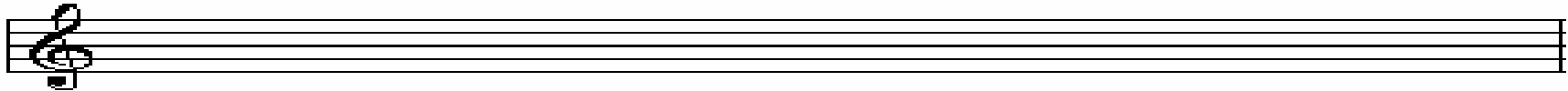
Material Used In A Serialist Composition

A tone row can be used in a number of different ways. Before you begin your composition, you will need to work out the many versions of your tone row.

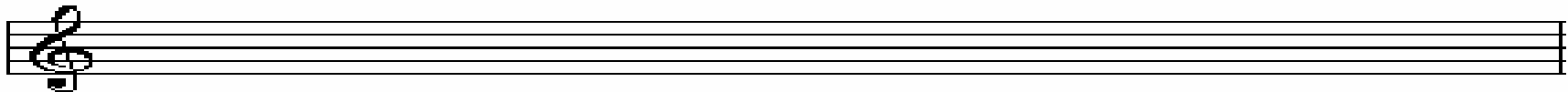
The original version of your tone row is called the Prime Series (labelled P-0).



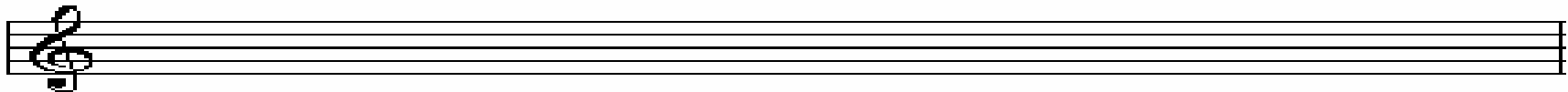
This can be written in RETROGRADE .



It can be INVERTED.

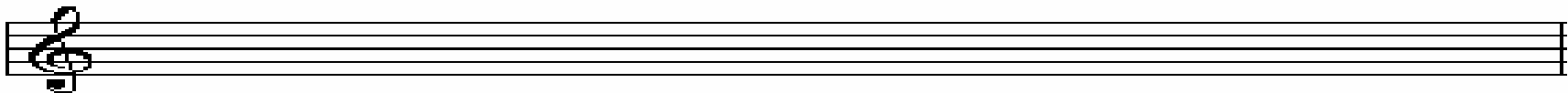


There can be a RETROGRADE INVERSION.



Each of the above versions can then be transposed. They can start on any note, as long as the intervals between the notes of the tone row remain the same. If the prime series is transposed up one semitone, it is labelled P-1. If it is transposed up 5 semitones it is called P-5. (Avoid thinking in terms of 3rds/ 4ths etc, as the music is atonal, so always count intervals by the number of semitones.







Version P-2 of the tone row:



This creates a total of 44 different versions of the prime series that the composition can use.

Creating A Serialist Composition

Once you have the materials with which to start your composition, you need to think about how you are going to create an interesting composition.

-  The tone row is similar to a melody, so it needs to use rhythms. Some serialist composers grouped the notes into **motifs**. The motifs could be characterised by rhythmic figures, or jumps in the tone row.
-  Some serialist composers used regular metre in their composition, while others composed music without a sense of pulse, or one too complex to hear.
-  Chords can be made from a tone row. This is called Verticalisation. The notes in the chord still count as part of the tone row.
-  The music needs to be arranged for the instruments. There are many serialist compositions that are monophonic in texture, and use various versions of the tone row. Works can also be for several instruments, which then allows freedom to create different versions of the tone row playing simultaneously. For example, one part may be playing the prime order, while another plays a retrograde or transposition.
-  The tone row could be obvious, or it could be incorporated into the piece by splitting between parts.
-  Think about the effect you want the composition to have. Some composers using a serialist technique create a 'pointillist' effect, which makes the music sound like continuous pin pricks of sound, with parts overlapping and blending together.

Complete definitions for the following words that are used when discussing serialism. Look them up if you are unsure.

Chromatic _____

Atonal _____

Tonality _____

Tone Row _____

Prime Order _____

Inverted Order _____

Retrograde Order _____

Retrograde inversion Order _____

Transposition _____

Verticalisation _____