

So Ya Wanna Make Some Music

Well, what is music?

"organization of time with sound" (typical masters oral exam answer)
(some clarifications and circular definitions)

'the science or art of creating pleasing, expressive or intelligible combinations of tones' (dictionary definition)

How do I create it?

To create music, just organize time with sound in a pleasing, expressive, or at least an intelligible way. If the music is for yourself, there are no rules except the ones you establish. However, If you want your music to be pleasing, expressive, or intelligible to others in your culture or sub-culture, you should manipulate the elements of music according to the established practices of that group bending or breaking *only a few rules at a time* to keep it interesting.

Elements of Music? What are those?

The commonly accepted elements of music are: **Rhythm, Melody, Harmony, and Form.**

Other aspects of music often called elements are: **Texture, Timbre, Dynamics, Style, and Expression.**

Other extra-musical aspects which can be manipulated are: **Text , Album cover, Performance environment, Audience mood,** etc.

O.K., so how do I manipulate them?

Following are some typical Western music practices or "rules" applied to the most commonly accepted musical elements. 99% of music you hear follows these rules!

RHYTHM-- Rhythm gives music its sense of forward momentum and its lateral dimension.

Music is always superimposed over a steady repetitive pulse .

Pulse can speed up or slow down but must do so smoothly and not very often.

Speed of pulse must be between 60 and 120 beats per minute for individual beat perception

Speed of pulse affects emotional reaction

Pulses are always grouped in four's (ok, usually) or three's (sometimes) .

Repetitive rhythmic patterns occur over the pulse.

Rhythmic patterns always bear a simple multiple relationship to the pulse.

Rhythmic patterns often occur in groups of 4 (sometimes feels like 3 + 1).

Rhythmic patterns are often contained in the melody line.

Patterns usually fall into poetic meter groupings.

MELODY--Melody gives music its identity and its up/down dimension.

Melodies are monophonic (one note at a time).

Melodies usually are played above middle C and have an 8va range.

Melody pulse groups are usually grouped into groups of 4s. and 4 x 4's.

Melodies have linear shape overall and in small sections.

Melodies use mostly conjunct intervals and some small skips.

Melodies imply common harmonic changes. (See below)

Melodies are built on a scale-- usually diatonic.

Melodies end on the principal note of the scale (the tonic).

Melodies usually begin on a tonic chord tone.

Melodies often contain repetitive fragments (motives).

Melodies relate simply to the pulse, meter, and rhythmic patterns of the music.

These groups often have question answer form or a 4 + 4 + 8 form..
Sometimes melodies start on the off-beat.

HARMONY--Harmony means more than one tone playing at once. It gives music depth.

Harmony is created by playing two or more notes (usually 3) each three scale notes apart. (These are called chords)

Harmony can also be implied by arpeggiated or patterned sequences of chord tones.

Harmony is based on a diatonic scale.

The lowest tone of the chord stacked in three note intervals functions as the 'root.'
(When a chord is inverted, the original root is still the root.)

A sense of forward harmonic momentum is generated when the root of successive chords moves down 5 scale tones, down 3 scale tones, or up 1 scale tone. Other root movements generate a feeling of backward movement and are much less common.

A sense of finality or repose is generated when root movement lands on the first degree of the scale. This sense is particularly strong when the root movement was down a fifth.

Harmonic movement is usually slower than melodic movement-- often much slower.

FORM--Form is how the other elements are combined to give a piece a sense of completeness.

Music is divided into sections by cadences, where root movement moves V - I.
(Sometimes this movement can be I - V or V VI or even IV - I.)

Sections are most often 4 measures long.

Larger sections are most often 4 sections long.

Repetition of sections and large sections gives music unity and completeness.

These large sections are often grouped into whole pieces following traditional patterns:

A B A (Three-part form)	A A2 A3 A4 (Strophic form)
ABACADA(Rondo)	A B A2 B A3 B (Verse and chorus)
ABCBA (Bridge form)	

These are not the only rules/guidelines. Try to discover more. Nor are these absolute. Try to create your own rules like Schoenberg or Cage. That's the real fun of music!