

ORCHESTRATION TECHNIQUES

Melodic Doubling: an attempt at a typology...

REINFORCEMENT

traditional “comprehensive” doubling for bolstering, security and to an extent for volume

This sort of traditional doubling creates a homogenous sound whose purpose is to reinforce a melodic element between instrumental families (particularly winds and strings) and, in larger tuttis, to “bind” the orchestra together. A good example would be the prototypical flute (or oboe) doubling of the first violin melody, a technique you get in the Mozart symphonies. (Perhaps not as common in *La mer*.)

DYNAMIC

doubling to heighten “presence” (unison) or “depth/thickness” (8ve) or to enhance a swell or crescendo (cumulative/additive)

In essence this means to “orchestrate the crescendo” by adding instruments: either more of the same instrument (e.g., going from solo to a2, or adding vlnI to vlnII) adding different instruments (particularly instruments which are naturally louder). All of this is enhanced by adding doublings of the 8ve above or below to add *breadth* (especially true, e.g., of string divisi). This is effective both in gradual large crescendos and even more so in creating small rapid swells and other dynamic envelopes that would be difficult to produce solely in a single instrument or section without excessive or exaggerated playing.

COLORISTIC

for timbral character or to create a unique composite sound quality (unison) or spectrum (octaves/fifths)

Instruments are combined to produce a blended, hybrid sound, a unique color that is set off from the orchestra. Timbral combinations that are particularly effective involve pairs of instruments that are quite contrasting, either in register or sound color, e.g., a wind + (muted) brass; solo string + glock; etc.). To ensure the distinctiveness of the sound, the more instruments you combine, the more contrast should exist between them in color, register, etc.. The more instruments combined, the less distinctive the amalgam will likely be.

EMPHASIS

doubling of a fragment/segment/note of a melody to create local emphasis, accent or to highlight a registral connection or compound melody

Might be thought of as an “orchestrational accent,” an added (unis or 8ve) doubling of one *part* of a melody (even one note) can serve to bring attention or to enhance some other kind of accent: e.g., contour, registral, dynamic (e.g., sfz), agogic, rhythmic, etc. (Overlaps to an extent with dynamic doubling above.)

SHARING THE WORK

enabling a quick, tiring or demanding part by breaking it up among several similar instruments

A “trading-off” of a figure or gesture, either for ease of execution (if it is a particularly tricky or risky phrase), or for variety and interest in the parts (if it is a particularly repetitive pattern) .

DOVETAILING

elision of melodic content for color change or to pass through large register

Enables a seamless “hand-off” of melodic material, when the end of one instrumental line is elided with beginning of another. It is typically done at the unison, but an octave hand-off can also create the illusion of continuity. (Is also typically used in combination with **sharing the work**, above.)

COMPOSITE

each participant given a particular sonic role or instrumental idiom; each voice functions differently (attack, sustain, decay, animate, rhythmacize, color) to contribute to an overall sound

Perhaps the most interesting use of doubling, where each instrument or section plays essentially the same material but with a different rhythmic/articulative/dynamic realization, each within its own contrasting idiom. May involve any combination of different surface elements: sustained vs. staccato vs. rests vs. animated vs. embellished vs. registrally displaced, etc.

SHADOWING

"inexact" doubling to create an amorphous texture or a blurring of melodic effect, echo, heterophony

A particularly rhythmic version of **composite** above, where the doubling involves rhythmic delays and staggering in each part, or combinations of different oscillating figures that creates an indistinct quality. The melody may take on the character of a "thickened line."

STRUCTURAL

alternating/passing between/overlapping instruments one to another to highlight form, shape, phrasing, antiphonal effect, registral contrast

Doubling can be used to "parse" a melodic line into phrases or to mark cadences or repetitions, in order to clarify structural elements (consequent phrases, "call-and-response" effects, formal returns, interpolations in the melody, or the effect of interruption)

STRING DIVISI

As the largest homogeneous section, the strings are particularly favorable to doubling, both between and within instrumental sections. The most common doubling is 8ve doubling between vlnI and vlnII (particularly when vlnI gets high), or 8ve doubling within a 2-part divisi in any of the string parts. Note that, in addition to dividing each section in half to double, one may also call for half of the section (only) to play. Given a large enough section, multi-part divisi is also possible. When a tutti calls for strings to cut through the texture, often (8ve) doubling will involve vlnI+vlnII+vla (even +vc).