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Music and the Major Arcana

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Introduction

Musical themes may be used in conjunction with the Major Arcana as settings for the verses or in conjunction with meditative exercises. There are a number of ways that musical motifs can be assigned to the trumps, and they fall into two broad categories:

1. **Ensemble Systems** associate a distinct unordered group of tones with each trump; these tones can be arranged into melodies in any desired way.
2. **Sequential Systems** either associate a complete melody with each trump, or associate a melodic structure with each trump, which structure may be filled in a variety of ways.

In the following the Ensemble Systems will be presented before the Sequential Systems.

- I. Ensemble Systems
- II. Sequential Systems

I. Ensemble Systems

Ensemble Systems assign a group of tones to each trump. The basic systems are based on *absolute pitch* so, for example, the tones A, B might correspond to one trump and the tones C, D to another. Since distinctions of absolute pitch may be difficult for people without perfect pitch to perceive, I also include *relative pitch* adaptations of the basic systems. These usually involve adding some fixed pitch (e.g. the lowest pitch of the scale) to those corresponding to the trump.

The basic Ensemble Systems may be classed:

- A. Heptagram Systems
- B. Dice Systems
- C. Astragali Systems

A. Heptagram Systems

The Heptagram of the Major Arcana associates two Planets with each trump. (Note that the Fool = 0.Idiot does not appear in the Heptagram and therefore has no corresponding Planets.) In Ancient Greek Esoteric Music Theory tones are associated with the Planets as follows:

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Introduction

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- [A. Heptagram Systems](#)
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A. Heptagram Systems

[The Heptagram of the Major Arcana](#) associates two Planets with each trump. (Note that the Fool = 0. Idiot does not appear in the Heptagram and therefore has no corresponding Planets.) In [Ancient Greek Esoteric Music Theory](#) tones are associated with the Planets as follows:

Moon	Mercury	Venus	Sun	Mars	Jupiter	Saturn
E	F	G	A	B	C	D

From these correspondences we get the [Dichord System](#) and the [Pentachord System](#).

1. Dichord System

Use the two tones associated with the trump. For example, 6.Love connects Moon and Mars: {E, B}; and 8.Victory connects Sun and Mars: {A, B}. These are the tones that would be used (perhaps with repetition) to construct melodies for these trumps.

This absolute pitch systems can be converted to a **relative pitch** by always including a fixed pitch from the scale, such as the base tone (E). Thus for 6.Love we have {E, B} and for 8.Victory {E, A, B}.

Nevertheless, an ensemble of two (or three) tones does not give much scope for melodic construction (although it might be adequate for chant), so we also have the Pentachord System.

2. Pentachord System

We pick the two tones according as in the Dichord System, but *leave them out* of the scale and assign the remaining five tones to the trump. Thus 6.Love is assigned {F, G, A, C, D} and 8.Victory is assigned {E, F, G, C, D}. The pitches assigned to a trump may be repeated in its theme.

B. Dice Systems

Dice Systems are based on the 21 throws of two dice assigned to each of the trumps (except 0.Idiot). There are two varieties of each system, depending on whether the Fire Hexactys or Water Hexactys is used (see [Introduction to Major Arcana](#) for these terms). There are two Dice Systems, the [Hexachord](#) and [Trichord](#).

1. Hexachord System

The Hexachord System is based on assigning each trump one or two tones from a *hexachord* or scale of six tones. For a scale you might use the system of Hypatôn + Mesôn (see [Anc. Gk. Esot. Mus.](#) for these terms):

B	C	D	E	F	G
1	2	3	4	5	6

The tones correspond to the numbers on the dice, so you simply pick tones corresponding the numbers on the dice throw for the trump. For example, since 8.Victory in the Fire Hexactys is 2-4, our tones are C, E. Since 6.Love in Fire is 3-3, its only tone is D.

For a **relative pitch** version, always include some fixed pitch, such as the base tone (B) or the seventh (A).

2. Trichord System

The Trichord System selects five tones (with repetition) from a *trichord*, or scale of three tones, e.g. CEG or EFG. The melody for a trump is some permutation of its five tones.

If a trump's dice roll is M-N (written so that N is greater than or equal to M), then choose M-1 of the lowest tone (of the trichord), N-M of the middle tone, and 6-N of the highest tone. For example, suppose CEG is our scale. Since 8.Victory is 2-4 in the Fire Hexactys, we choose 2-1 = 1 C, 4-2 = 2 Es and 6-4 = 2 Gs. Our melody will be some permutation of CEEGG. Since 6.Love is 3-3, we choose 3-1 = 2 Cs, 3-3 = 0 Es and 6-3 = 3 Gs; thus the melody is a permutation of CCGGG.

For a **relative pitch** version, always include a sixth, fixed pitch (e.g. C).

C. Astragali Systems

The Astragali Systems are based on the 20 throws of three astragali assigned to each of the trumps (except 0.Idiot and 21.World). There are two systems, the [Tetrachord](#) and the [Hexachord](#).

1. Tetrachord System

The Tetrachord System is based directly on the throws, with a different tone being assigned to each face of the astragalus. Thus three (not necessarily distinct) tones are assigned to each trump. Any one of the Tetrachords from [Ancient Greek Esoteric Music Theory](#) may be used as a scale. For example:

1	3	4	6
E	a	b	e
A	B	C	D
a	E	F	G

For example, suppose we use ABCD. Since the astragali roll for 6.Love is 114, we use permutations of AAC for its melody; since 8.Victory is 136, we use permutations of ABD for that trump.

For a **relative pitch** version, always include a fixed pitch, such as the base (A, in our example).

2. Hexachord System

The Hexachord System assigns each trump three distinct tones from a *hexachord*, or scale of six pitches. I will illustrate the method by example.

Suppose our scale is BCDEFG. Write three dashes: ---. Write all the 1s before the first dash, all the 3s between the second and third dash, and so on. For example, 6.Love is 114, which becomes 11--4-, and 8.Victory is 136, which becomes 1-3--6. Write these strings under the notes of the scale and select the notes without dashes. Thus, 6.Love is

B	C	D	E	F	G
1	1	-	-	4	-

which yields BCF, and 8.Victory is

B	C	D	E	F	G
1	-	3	-	-	6

which yields BDG. The melody for the trump is constructed from its three tones in any order and possibly repeated.

For a **relative pitch** version, always include a fixed pitch, such as the base (B, in our example).

II. Sequential Systems

Sequential Systems assign a melody (tone sequence) or melodic structure to each trump. The assignment may be based on throws of dice or astragali:

- [A. Dice Systems](#)
- [B. Astragali Systems](#)

A. Dice Systems

As for the [Ensemble Systems](#), there are two varieties of the Dice Systems depending on whether the Fire or Water Hexactys is used (for examples I will use the Fire correspondences). Since there are only 21 throws of two dice, 0.Idiot does not have a corresponding melody.

The system assigns a sequence of seven notes to each trump. To get the sequence, start with a string of five dashes: - - - - -. Number the spaces between the dashes, including the beginning and end with 1 to 6:

-	-	-	-	-	
1	2	3	4	5	6

Now put Xs in the positions that correspond to the numbers on the dice. For example, for 8.Victory, which is 2-4 in the Fire Hexactys, we get:

-	X	-	-	X	-
1	2	3	4	5	6

For 6.Love, which is 3-3 in Fire, we get:

-	-	XX	-	-	-
---	---	----	---	---	---

1 2 3 4 5 6

Thus the basic pattern for Victory is -X--X-- and that for Love is --XX---. There are several ways the basic pattern can be used as a melodic structure.

The simplest (**Dichord**) is to assign one pitch to the dashes and another pitch to the Xs. Thus Victory might be CECCECC and Love CCEECCC. Alternately (**Trichord**), since there are exactly two Xs, two different pitches could be assigned to them, so Victory might be CECCGCC and Love might be CCBACCC. The five repetitions of a single tone make both of these systems independent of absolute pitch.

Both of these systems produce rather dull melodies, although they might be adequate for chant. For more variety we can assign the same pitch to the two Xs and any other five *distinct* pitches to the dashes (**Hexachord**). Thus for Victory we could have AEDCEFG and for Love ABEEFDC. Because this system uses six distinct pitches, it is essentially independent of absolute pitch.

B. Astragali Systems

These systems assign pitch sequences based on the 20 throws of three astragali (0.Idiot and 21.World do not have corresponding sequences). There are two systems

- [1. Dichord System](#)
- [2. Pentachord System](#)

1. Dichord System

Pick two distinct pitches (e.g. A, B) and write three of each: AAABBB. The trumps are assigned to the 20 different permutations of this 6-note sequence (AABABB, BBBAAB, BABABA, etc.). To get the sequence corresponding to a trump, proceed as follows.

1. However many 1s there are, write that many As, then a B.
2. However many 3s there are, write that many As, then a B.
3. However many 4s there are, write that many As, then a B.
4. However many 6s there are, write that many As.

For example, 114 (Love) becomes AABBAB and 136 (Victory) becomes ABABBA.

For more melodic variety, instead of just two pitches, one may use pitches from two different categories, for example ACE and BDF. Then Love could be ACBDEF and Victory ABCDFE. Note that the Dichord System is essentially independent of absolute pitch.

2. Pentachord System

Choose a scale of five tones, for example ABCDE. Assign to the pitches (in any order) the letter N (for Neutral) and the numbers 1, 3, 4, 6. For example:

A	B	C	D	E
N	1	3	4	6

Classify the trump's roll of three astragali as follows:

1. If it has two or three occurrences of any side S, call it *S-dominant*. For example, 6.Love is 114, which is 1-dominant. Then pick the tones corresponding to its class and its third side. Thus Love is assigned BD (B because it's 1-dominant, D for the side 4). For another example, 14.Diabolos is 666, which is 6-dominant and has 6 for its third side, so it is assigned the sequence EE.
2. If no side is dominant (i.e. all three are distinct), then the trump is called Neutral. For example, 8.Victory is 136, which is Neutral. Assign a Neutral trump the N tone (A in this case) and the tone for the missing side. For example Victory gets the sequence AD: A because it's Neutral and D because the side 4 is missing.

Thus, for each trump we get a sequence of two tones.

For **relative pitch** always begin or end with a fixed pitch of the scale.



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