

Basic Hints for Structuring a Song from the Heart--Example

1. Play 3-4 pleasing notes in a row (no more than 4!). Play them to a slow beat at first. That is your first "theme," or the "kernel" of the song. Only if you need to, write down your own "scratch" notes.
2. Memorize the theme. Give it a fancy name, such as "A." Close the theme and take a breath.
3. Repeat "A" once. Don't forget to close the theme and breathe. Now you have "AA."
4. Get bored with A. Try another 3-4 note theme (use the same number of notes). It can vary from the first theme by one, two, or three notes, but not all of them at first. Call it "B." Now you have "AAB." Close and breathe. You don't have to memorize "B" unless you want to.
6. Now, this is the tricky part. Try to remember "A" and repeat it, so you have "AABA." This is the first full phrase.
7. By now, you actually have a song, but it's pretty short. So repeat steps 1-6 with themes "C" and "D." You need even more variety, though, to keep your listeners awake. For "C," start on a different note than "A." For "D," shake it up by moving from the bottom three holes to the top three, or if you started near the top three go to the bottom. In other words, jump around a bit. This part sounds hard, but you don't have to memorize the themes in this step. You can "play from the heart," but still stay in rhythm. Also, you don't have to put "C" and "D" in the same order as in the first phrase (see #9 below for example.)
8. Now, repeat "A." If you can reproduce it, fine. If not, approximate it with a little variation, maybe an embellishment or two. If your memory fails, play notes that feel familiar and sound like "A."
9. Repeat the approximation of "A" with another approximation of "A." Then go on to play an approximate "B," "C," "D," or a brand new theme, say, "E." By now you've got something like "AABA/CCDD/AA??" Decide how you want to order and complete the last two themes.
10. To finish, play a theme that closes with the fundamental, preferably on the last beat. You're done!

Some additional tips:

- a. It's all too easy to start your song on the fundamental. Try starting from the top or middle.
- b. Ending the song on the fundamental, however, brings closure. A good ending is "bottom three holes open, then all holes closed." Try to play above the fundamental until you get to the end.
- c. Aim to make your phrases longer than one 3 or 4 note theme. The song will sound less choppy. Do this by developing your breathing and anticipating the next theme.
- d. You can play a little slower at the end of themes and phrases. Don't forget to give yourself time to breathe. Play a long slow note, or a long note followed by a "flip," to end the song.
- e. Get the structure down first. Then, even as you play, shape the phrases with dynamics (loud, soft), timing (acceleration or retardation), and syncopation (varying the accent you place on the basic beat).