AN IB MICROANALYSIS GUIDE by Mary Jo West (based upon “Guidelines for Style Analysis by Jan LaRue)

Often students do not know what questions to ask when attempting musical analysis. This sheet attempts to provide questions which allow students to identify musical elements and discuss the interrelationship of musical elements. Elements often overlap. I would recommend students highlight or circle what applies to each piece and cross off elements that do not apply. When choosing WHICH questions to answer in their MLI, the student can ask, “Is this significant?” “Does this support my choice of musical links?” “Is this a significant similarity or difference?”

MELODY ANALYSIS

Movement (Look at this from a large dimension perspective rather than analyzing all intervals)
What types of movement predominate?
Describe the movement in terms of conjunct, disjunct, stepwise, skipping, interval leaps, chromatic, active/stable, diatonic, modal, exotic?

Melodic Phrases
How many measures are in each phrase? Is it symmetrical or assymetrical?
Do the phrases consist of an antecedent or consequent? Short motives?
Are the phrases varied, improvised or ornamented? How?
How are the phrases grouped? What does the structure look like? (a + a + b for example)
Does the melody use any types of sequence, repeating large intervals, variation? Countermelodies?
Are there primary or secondary themes?
What provides thematic contrast? How are the themes different?
Is the melody based upon...folksong, chorale, material from another composition, cantus firmus, sound effects, etc?
Is the theme mainly consisting of chords, lyrical phrases, counterpoint?
What is the range and tessitura of the melody?
How would you categorize the impression of the melody? Cantabile (singing), instrumental, vocal...
Is there a balance of climaxes or melodic peaks?
How are the themes developed? Is there a relationship among themes?

Interrelationships
What type of rhythmic accompaniment does the melody have? Alberti bass, block chords, etc
How does the harmony define the melody? For example, types of cadences used
What is the structure of the music? Is it based upon melody, motives, rhythmic activity?
Is there a symmetrical balance of melodic peaks or progressions in sections?

HARMONIC ANALYSIS
Is the harmony primarily major, minor, modal, chromatic, atonal, polytonal, bitonal?
Are the scales used major, minor, pentatonic, modal, whole tone, gypsy, etc?
Does it modulate and where does it modulate? What’s the relationship of the modulations? Close or distant?
Do the modulations create tension or are they merely to provide color?
Apart from the tonic, which keys receive the most attention? How often do the keys change?
What is the harmonic rhythm? How often or when do the chords change? What is the rate of harmonic change?
What is the analysis of the chords, the chord structure or the root movement? Choose a section. Does it utilize drone, pivot points, suspensions, polychords, bitonality, quartal harmony (4ths), etc? Are there any similarities in the way cadences are achieved? Overall harmonic impression, is this “common practice” western harmony or nonfunctional harmony? Are the chords mostly in triads (tertian harmony where chords are built in thirds) or does the harmony use extended chords with sevenths, ninths, etc? Does the piece contain any counterpoint, imitation, canon, fugue/fugato, stretto, augmentation/diminution?

**Interrelationship of Harmony to Form**

Analyzing the harmony can clarify the form. Important indicators to the beginning or end of a section are: changing the key, a change in the harmonic rhythm (above), a change in the complexity of rhythms or a change in levels of dissonance and consonance. Discuss how the harmony contributes to the form.

**FORM ANALYSIS**

Is the form in two parts? Binary form? AB
Is the form in three parts? Ternary form? ABA or Da Capo form? What contrasts in the B section?
Is the overall form in rondo? ABACA, etc with a returning A section
Are there any codas?
Is the form in Sonata form? Exposition, Development, Recapitulation
Are there transitions? Where? What do they bridge? How do they function?
Is the piece through-composed? Or theme and variation?
Does the form not fit any of the above, it may be cyclical.
Does it contain imitation, fugues, counterpoint?
Is the vocal piece strophic? Verse-chorus?
Is the form based upon programmatic factors?

**MEDIUM/DYNAMICS**

What type of ensemble is performing? Which instruments?
What timbres did the style choose to use? Strings, woodwind, brass, percussion, electronic sounds, nonmusical sounds, voice parts, etc
What types of ranges (tessituras) are used? Are ranges forced or extreme?
What amount of contrast is used? Shifts from high to low? Between instrument families?
Is there a gradual change between mixed groupings?
How is the piece orchestrated? What parts are doubled? At what interval?
How are the instruments used? Are the playing techniques extended?
For example, vocal idioms using climactic skips, unusual ranges, falsetto, glottal stops, etc.
Are the strings using pizzicato, double stops? Are brass using mutes, double or triple tonguing?

**DYNAMICS**

What degree of contrast is used? P – f or pp to ff, etc. How often does the composer use contrasts?
How long is the interval between differing dynamic levels?
Are there terraced dynamics? Tapered dynamics?
Where are the most impressive dynamics? How does this contribute to the form?
Do the dynamics change when different melodies are performed?

**TEXTURE**

Is the piece homophonic, homorhythmic, chordal?
Is the piece polyphonic, fugal, contrapuntal?
Is the piece monophonic with one melody line?
What type of accompaniment is present?
Is the accompaniment based upon block chords? Sustained chords? Arpeggiated chords?

**Interrelationships**
How does the change of dynamics contribute to the form?
How does the change of instrumentation affect the form? Does the composer create a singular tone color or a single dynamic level? Are there contrasts between movements? Or are there more contrasts within a single movement?
Are there alternations of changing timbres, dynamics or textures? Does it clarify the phrases? 8 + 8 for example with changing timbre?

**RHYTHMIC ANALYSIS**

Identify the meter: duple, triple, quadruple, simple, compound, mixed meters, polymeters
Identify the tempo: allegro, andante, largo, etc
Does the tempo change? Are there rallentandos, accelerandos, meno mossos, fermata, etc?
Are there rhythmic devices such as syncopation, ostinato, accents?
Is there a rhythmic feel? Can you identify the style? Is it a fusion of styles?

**Interrelationships**
Are the rhythms or layers of rhythm more complicated in certain parts than others? Why?
Are sections marked by greater activity or greater stability of rhythm, melody or harmonic progressions?
Is there a relationship of dynamic changes to rhythmic intensity?
Is there a relationship of dynamic changes to lack of rhythmic intensity? Why?
Is there a connection between a reoccurring melody and a reoccurring rhythm? How does this establish form?

**Text**
What is the relationship of the harmony to the text? Word painting? Changes to major or minor?
What is the influence of the patterns of individual words to rhythm? Has the composer tried to match notes to the stress and syllables of words to make it sound as natural as possible?
Does the word rhythm produce consistent meters that influence the musical meter of the entire piece?
Does the position of the text influence the form?