

CHAPTER ONE

TWO-PART COUNTERPOINT IN FIRST SPECIES (1:1)

What is counterpoint? Counterpoint is the art of combining melodies; each part has its own specific melodic and rhythmic shape, while together they form sensible harmony. An effective way to approach the technique of combining two voices such that they make equally good sense both melodically and harmonically is by the so-called "species" method. This is a very systematic way to develop basic technique in handling two voices contrapuntally and is described as follows:

FIRST SPECIES (1:1): Both parts change pitch simultaneously. At this stage, both parts consist only of chord tones. Consider that we are dealing here with two-part harmony, with only the "soprano" and "bass" parts to deal with. All the basic principles of tonal harmony apply; the harmony is implied, or deduced, from the two parts. Rhythm is kept maximally simple (both parts moving in quarter notes, for example), since the main task is learning how to combine pitches in both parts to produce independently interesting melodic lines. Rhythmic interest will be introduced much later (see Fourth Species below). No octave leaps or repeated tones are permitted at this time. Also, rests are avoided in this and in the Species that follow. Rests are a vital part of any musical discourse, but for the purposes of developing our basic technique, we avoid them in Species work.

SECOND SPECIES (2:1): One part changes pitch twice as often as the other part. In exercises you are given a line—for instance in quarter notes—and you are required to add the other part in continuous eighth notes. The durational relationship is always 2:1. Chord tone skips and nonharmonic tones are introduced, with the exception of tied tones (suspensions and retardations) and pedal tones. Repeated tones are not permitted except as part of an Anticipation formation, but occasional octave leaps, because they are so important in music, are usable. The usual procedure is for the textbook to supply you with a given line (either upper or lower), and you are asked to add the second part in continuous, twice-as-fast note values.

THIRD SPECIES (3:1, 4:1, 6:1, etc.): One part moves three times as fast (3:1), four times as fast (4:1), etc. Now it is possible to outline complete triads and even seventh chords in the faster-moving part. Nonharmonic tones are the same as in Second Species.

FOURTH SPECIES: Traditionally, this Species uses only tied tones in a continuous syncopated relationship between the two parts, but we have modified the approach to include not only tied tones (as chord tones, suspensions and retardations), but also to open up our work into free counterpoint, with varied rhythmic activity shared between both parts. Features of all the previous Species are brought into play, the intended result being examples that begin to resemble two-part writing as seen in Bach. Mastery in handling two voices in the above-described manner will prepare the student fully for the next phase, which is to apply the acquired techniques to specific musical forms.

RANGE. While the study of harmony is based upon vocal ranges as the nucleus of the discipline, the general range of the keyboard as it was in the Baroque era will be our point of reference. The usable range will be from the C below the bass clef staff to the C above the treble clef staff—a span of four octaves. Occasional excursions slightly above or below these limits are certainly allowed. The distance between the two parts is virtually unrestricted, but continuous extremes of distance should be avoided. Parts should not cross, however.

Getting started in First Species requires a firm recall of the basic principles learned in diatonic harmony, among which are a good sense of harmonic progression, workable melodic intervals, and shaping a reasonably good melody. The following Guidelines contain a great deal of material that will take considerable time incorporating into your work, but each of them is important and necessary to achieve good results. Each of the points in the following Guidelines will be discussed in turn.

GUIDELINES FOR FIRST SPECIES (1:1) IN TWO-PART COUNTERPOINT

1. Usable harmonic intervals: 3rds, 6ths, P5, octaves, unisons, and A4 and D5 if treated properly (to be discussed later). Unisons must be approached and left by contrary motion.
2. Don't use these harmonic intervals: 2nds, P4, 7ths, and 9ths, A5, A6, A7.
3. Usable melodic intervals: major and minor 2nds, 3rds and 6ths; P4, P5, D5 and D7.
4. Avoid all augmented melodic intervals. [Exceptions will be dealt with later.]
5. Use 3rds and 6ths (as harmonic intervals) much more frequently than other intervals.
6. Avoid parallel 5ths and octaves. [P5 to D5 is OK, but D5 to P5 is not good.]

7. Avoid exposed 5ths and octaves (also called hidden, covered, or direct).
8. Be aware of the value of contrary motion, although similar motion is also usable.
9. Don't use more than three (or four if unavoidable) parallel 3rds or 6ths in a row, since too much parallel motion reduces the melodic independence of each part.
10. Begin and end with a strong sense of the tonic key; and don't double the momentary LT of any secondary dominant or secondary leading tone chord.
11. Both parts should have a distinct melodic shape. Strive for a single high point in the upper part. This is also good advice for the lower part. In most of your beginning exercises, one part will be given, but later on you will be asked to furnish both parts.
12. Do not let the parts cross or overlap.
13. Do not use repeated notes; and avoid the leap of an octave at this time.
14. Establish good harmonic progressions.
15. The lower part should be considered as the fundamental bass line.
16. Strive for a good balance between stepwise motion and skips.
17. Large leaps should, in the main, be followed by a change of direction. There are interesting exceptions to this rule, however.
18. Two or more skips in the same direction should encompass pitches that are all, or part of, a triad, or dominant 7th, or supertonic seventh chord.
19. In general, two skips in the same direction should be followed by a change of direction.
20. Always be aware of the natural tone tendencies of the scale degrees of your key.
21. Secondary dominants are usable and treated as momentary excursions into closely related regions. The same is true for secondary leading tone chords.
22. Modulations are achieved by common chord connection or by way of chromatic inflection.
23. Modulation is confined to keys closely related to the tonic key.

is an exposed octave on beat two. The rise of a minor 6th in the bottom part should be followed by a change of direction, but instead it continues upward.

Measure 3: There is an exposed 5th on beat two. The first three notes in the top part are awkward, since these two skips in the same direction don't form all or part of a triad (or Dom. 7th or Supertonic 7th chord). There is an A4 in the bottom part, and it is followed by an octave leap, which we are to avoid in First Species. Furthermore, an octave leap of the LT is the weakest kind. The melodic shape of the bottom part is poor; there is no stepwise motion, and the result is far too angular.

Measure 4: The cadence has parallel octaves. The two skips in the same direction in the top part are O.K. since the pitches outline the tonic triad.

One more example, this one in B Flat Major, will illustrate other points:

Key of Bb

1 2 3 4

3 6 °5 3 3 3 3 3 8 6 6 3 8 A4 6

I ii⁶ V^{6/5} I IV IV⁶ V V⁶ I V⁶ IV⁶ IV V V^{4/2} I⁶
(vii^o) (I⁴)

Measure 1: The diminished 5th (melodic) in the bass is good. The harmonic interval of a diminished 5th outlines either a V^{6/5} chord or vii^o in root position. In two and three part writing, the vii^o chord in root position is usable. The similar motion over the bar line to measure 2 is acceptable.

Measure 2: the drop of a sixth followed by a downward motion interval of a 2nd seems contrary to the rules (change direction after a large leap), but this particular move was favored by Bach and may be found in most of his works! The contrary motion 3rds, beats 1 and 2, open the door to more successive 3rds. Parallel 3rds broken up by contrary motion 3rds insure independent melodic contours. In such cases, more than 4 successive 3rds may be used.

Measure 3: the similar motion of the first 3 beats is quite acceptable. Notice the progression V⁶ - IV⁶, where the LT moves down by step; this is a good progression in major keys. In minor keys, an A2 will result in the bass line if you move to iv⁶ (as a minor triad), so be cautious with this progression.

Measure 4: The harmonic interval of an A4 should be analyzed as V 4/2. The example ends on I₆—the necessary resolution of V 4/2; in two-part writing, the final tonic chord occasionally ends in first inversion in this manner.

ROMAN NUMERAL ANALYSIS IN TWO PARTS IN 1:1. Unlike four-part harmony, where full triads and 7th chords are usually presented and are therefore fairly easily analyzed, two-part harmony—which is what, in fact, we are dealing with in First Species—is considerably more difficult to analyze. There may be as little as one pitch only, and no more than two pitches per chord from which to deduce the harmony. We must now take into consideration the context of the music, to be more aware of the character of the progressions in order to make intelligent analyses of the harmony. Before moving on, play the following examples and do your best to absorb the principles conveyed:

Key of *am* i V⁶ i vii^o₆ i⁶ iv V V⁴₂ i⁶ VII III⁶ iv⁶ ii^o₆ V i
(V⁶)

Key of *F* I V⁶ IV⁶ I⁴₃ IV V vi V I V⁶ vi ii I V I⁶
(iii⁶) (vii^o₆)

CHROMATICISM IN 1:1 COUNTERPOINT

Thus far we have been concerned with counterpoint employing only diatonic harmony. The next step is to incorporate chromatic harmonies, principally secondary dominants and secondary leading tone chords—and this will include inversions as well. And when we then add to this the possibility of modulating to closely related keys, the

horizons expand considerably. Be sure to review your secondary dominant, secondary leading tone chords (including 7th chords), and modulation to closely related keys before coming to grips with the following material³.

The inclusion of accidentals in our music increases the possibility of more awkward melodic intervals as well as objectionable cross relations. And remember that when you introduce a secondary chord, it should be resolved properly; don't make the mistake of simply ignoring its intended function. Try to avoid the following errors in your work:

Key of G vi V⁶/ii ii Key of C I V⁴₂/IV IV I V⁴₂/IV IV⁶ Key of gm iv⁶ V⁶/iv iv⁶

Key of D vi vii^o/vi I Key of C I V/ii ii⁶ ii V⁴₂/V I⁶ ii V⁴₂/V V⁶

In Example A, the cross relation from triad to triad is objectionable. The same holds true for Example E. In Example B, neither LT nor the 7th of the dominant seventh chord is resolved. See the correct version that follows. Avoid all Doubled LTs as seen in Example C. Example D demonstrates a lack of awareness of resolution tendencies of secondary chords. The chord should resolve to vi⁶ or vi, not I. Another senseless resolution of a secondary dominant is seen in Example F. Pay attention to the resolution of 7ths!

³ See Chapters One, Two, and Three of the author's Harmony and Theory, Part 2, (Hal Leonard)

All of these admonitions were part of your studies in harmony, so they shouldn't strike you as all that new. Before attempting to do the Exercises for this chapter, study the examples below, and review the Guidelines thoroughly. It will take some time to assimilate all of them, so give it time and patience! The move to Second Species is a big one; proficiency in First Species will prepare you well for what is to come.

A

Key of *g*m i V i⁶ vii^o₆ i V⁴₂/iv iv⁶ iv V vii^o₆/V V⁶ vii^o₆ i
 (V⁴₂)

B

Key of *D* I vii^o₆ I⁶ vi V⁴₂/ii ii⁶ I⁶ ii V V⁶₅/vi vi IV V⁶₅/V V V⁶ vii^o₆ I
 (vii^o₆/ii)

C

Key of *F* I V I ii V⁴₂/V V⁶ vi V⁶/vi vi ii I⁶ ii⁶ V⁶₅/V V I
 (vii^o₆)

D

Key of *e*m i V⁶ i iv⁶ V V⁴₂ V⁶/iv V/VII VII⁶ III iv V V⁶₅ i