

Everyday Counterpoint

While writing in a “contrapuntal style” had its apex in the Renaissance, many styles of music have incorporated counterpoint—sometimes obviously, sometimes with subtlety, sometimes perhaps unconsciously.

Beyond the common practice styles that employ counterpoint overtly, it is worth examining examples of less formal and even non-notated music to see how counterpoint is incorporated in different ways and to see how it is still a viable way to approach composition.

In class we will look at (or just listen to) a variety of examples that feature counterpoint in one way or another. For now, delve into your own music collection and see if you can find an example or two that feature counterpoint in some manner. The counterpoint could be between instruments, within a single instrument (like the left and right hands of a piano), between two (or more) voices, or between a voice and instrument. Any combination is possible.

As a guide, check out the accompanying example from The Rolling Stones’ *Satisfaction*. The interaction of the main guitar riff and the accompanying bass line form a contrapuntal relationship. The example has been crafted to emphasize this relationship—and the accompanying score excerpt also emphasizes this component of the music. It’s true that in this example the bass line takes a subordinate role to the guitar’s, and that the riff does not evolve as a line, which minimizes the sense of counterpoint, but for that brief moment, the two lines do combine into something greater than the sum of their parts.