

Music 231

First Species Counterpoint, Two Parts

These notes are a distillation (with supplements and editorials, in red) of Salzman/Schacter's Counterpoint in Composition. It is in no way a substitute for reading and working through the actual text book.

New Material

- Constructing note-against-note, consonant-only, counterpoint.
- Consonant and dissonant vertical intervals.
- Types of relative motion.

I. Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions: Horizontal is primary.

- A. Apply the same cantus firmus (melodic-writing) rules to the counterpoint line
 1. The counterpoint line is essentially a second cantus firmus

II. Vertical Consonance and Dissonance

- A. Usable (consonant) vertical intervals: P1, M/m3, P5, M/m6, P8, M/m10, P12 (M/m13 is rare and only used in lower counterpoint exercises)
- B. Unusable (dissonant): m2, M2, P4, m7, M7, all augmented and diminished intervals

III. Degrees of Stability of Usable Intervals

- A. P1 (used only at beginning and end of exercises)
- B. P8 (used minimally and with care)
- C. P5 (used more frequently than P8)
- D. Thirds and sixths are used freely

IV. The Perfect Fourth

- A. Dissonant in two parts
- B. Consonant between the upper two of three parts

V. Relative motion

- A. Similar: moving in the same direction by different intervals
- B. Parallel: moving in the same direction by the same number interval
- C. Contrary: moving in opposite directions
- D. Oblique: one voice moves while the other is stationary

VI. Independence of parts

- A. The first-species counterpoint must be linearly independent of the cantus
- B. Kinds of motion, from the most to least independent: contrary, oblique, similar, parallel

VII. Parallel perfect intervals (P1, P5, P8) are not to be used

- A. Voices lose individuality
- B. Parallel P5s imply triads (too much vertical dependence)
- C. Antiparallel perfects are also not used (P1 to P8, P8 to P1, P5 to P12, P12 to P5)

VIII. Perfect intervals approached by similar motion (hidden/direct perfects)

- A. Imply parallel perfects because the ear fills in the melodic skip
- B. Not used in two parts

IX. Parallel consonances (thirds, sixths, tenths)

- A. No more than three or four (with a longer cantus) consecutive parallel consonances
- B. A mixture of similar, parallel, and contrary motion is desirable
- C. Oblique motion is used less often

X. Unisons

- A. Used only at the beginning and end of exercises
- B. When used within an exercise, the forward motion stops

XI. Simultaneous leaps

- A. Generally avoided.
- B. Simultaneous leaps from most to least disruptive:
 - Similar motion involving intervals larger than a fourth
 - Similar motion involving smaller intervals
 - Contrary motion involving intervals larger than a fourth
 - Contrary motion involving smaller intervals

XII. Overlapping of parts is avoided.

- A. Lower voice moves to a tone higher than the preceding tone in the upper voice
- B. Upper voice moves to a tone lower than the preceding tone in the lower voice

XIII. Voice crossing is not used in first-species counterpoint

- A. Not enough motion (or timbre) to clarify movement of parts

XIV. Spacing

- A. Maximum: P12
- B. Usual maximum: M10

XV. Tied notes

- A. Only occasionally used
- B. Never more than twice in an exercise

XVI. Beginning the exercise

- A. When counterpoint is above the cantus firmus the counterpoint can start at: P1 (rare), P8, or P5 above (a P12 is possible, but rare)
- B. When the counterpoint is below the cantus firmus the counterpoint can start at the P1 or P8 below
 - 1. Starting a lower counterpoint with a P5 (an F below a C, for example) confuses the tonality of the cantus

XVII. Climax

- A. An upper counterpoint will climax on a high point
- B. A lower counterpoint can climax on a high point and/or low point

XVIII. Ending the exercise

- A. Acceptable intervals: P1, P8. NB: not P5
- B. The penultimate measure must contain both the leading tone and supertonic
- C. If you start with a P1, end with a P1; if you start with a P8, end with a P8
 - 1. Starting on a P5 (upper counterpoint only) will allow you to end on either a P8 (likely) or P1 (less likely)

XIX. Clefs: use treble and alto or alto and bass**XX. Notation**

- A. Unlike cantus firmus writing, bar lines should be used
- B. All vertical intervals should be labeled – do NOT label the qualities of the intervals

XXI. Procedure of writing

- A. Study and memorize the cantus
- B. Work in your head, and at the piano
- C. Plan the contour and climax of the counterpoint
- D. Conceive of groups of notes at a time
- E. Check at the piano, or have someone else play it for you

Please note: the information on this page has been assembled with the help of Dr. Ronald Caltabiano

First Species Examples

upper counterpoint starts on either tonic (1) or dominant (5)

climax is NOT simultaneous with cantus

counterpoint penultimate note is the leading tone

counterpoint ends on the tonic (1)

Types of relative motion (4):

Contrary: voices move in opposite directions

Oblique: one voice moves, other remains stationary

Similar motion: voices move in same direction, but by different intervals

Parallel motion: voices move in same direction by same interval, maintaining same harmonic interval (in between)

All harmonic intervals are CONSONANT: PP (begin/end), M/m 3rd, P5, M/m6, P8, M/m10, P12, (M/m13 - for bass clef only)

Avoid harmonic dissonances: 2nd, 4th, 7th, 9th, 11th, aug/dim

**No parallel/consecutive unisons/8ves, 5ths/12th (no "parallel perfects") - inhibit independence of parts; they slow down melodic momentum

Max of 3 (maybe 4) imperfect parallel consonances (consecutively)

Bad First Species Examples

parallel 5ths

too many consecutive leaps unprepared unresolved triad

simultaneous leaps in same direction

Direct (aka "hidden") perfect: perfect interval arrived at by similar motion

Direct perfect (8ve)

4 consecutive 6ths (max is 3: applies to 3rds & 6ths)

repeating note pattern narrow contour

leap from/to same note (Bb) - emphasizes unres/unprep leap

penultimate note MUST be a leading tone (raised to B-nat)

no unisons in middle of exercise (at beginning & end is possible for lower cpt)

anti-parallel perfects consecutive perfects by contrary motion

miscellaneous things to avoid

voice crossing

overlap: lower voice moves to a tone higher than the preceding tone in the upper voice

Overlap: upper voice moves to a tone lower than the preceding tone in the lower voice