

Music 231

Free Counterpoint, Two Parts

New Material

- Applying species concepts in different note values
- Cantus changes voice

Free counterpoint can be viewed as two or more fifth-species lines against one another, without a cantus firmus. In fact, as we will see, the fifth-species lines act as a cantus for each other. To understand how this is possible, let's look at first, second, third, and fourth species in a slightly different way.

We can agree that, in so far as the notes relate to each other*, all four examples below are identical.

The image displays four musical examples arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each example consists of two staves, one in treble clef and one in bass clef, with a 3/4 time signature. The notes in all examples are: Treble (G4, A4, B4, C5) and Bass (G3, A3, B3, C4). The examples illustrate different rhythmic groupings: 1. Treble: quarter, quarter, quarter; Bass: quarter, quarter, quarter. 2. Treble: quarter, quarter, quarter; Bass: quarter, quarter, quarter. 3. Treble: quarter, quarter, quarter; Bass: quarter, quarter, quarter. 4. Treble: quarter, quarter, quarter; Bass: quarter, quarter, quarter.

*This is an important point. There is no doubt that in the context of other music, the note values would factor into how we perceive meter, and therefore how we perceive consonance vs. dissonance, etc.

Therefore, we can view each example as first-species counterpoint because it is **one note against one note**. It does not matter, in fact, which line is the cantus and which is the counterpoint.

Similarly, we can understand second species counterpoint to be two notes against one, and third species to be four notes against one. The perception of the suspensions of fourth species is slightly different. Instead of X notes against X notes, we are more influenced by the accent pattern: unaccented preparation, accented suspension, unaccented resolution.

When combining two fifth-species lines, the longer note acts like the cantus to the shorter notes and the corresponding species (two through four) applies. When the durations in both parts are the same, the correspondence is to first species. Once a passage has been understood in terms of the correct species, all that is left is to be certain that you follow the rules of that species.

The only difference between the lines written here and those of strict fifth species will be in the area of rhythm:

1. Two syncopation patterns will be permitted **if they properly follow the accent pattern of suspensions**
 - quarter -- half -- quarter
 - eighth -- quarter -- eighth
2. Groups of four eighth notes (but no more than four) will be permitted, starting on an accented beat.

In the following example, notice how the function of the cantus firmus is passed between the voices (always the longer values) and how the analysis reflects the standard species. Where no species is indicated, first species is assumed. Notice also the use of smaller syncopation values to create suspensions (bar 3) and the group of four eighth notes (bar 4).

Also note:

1. Momentary voice crossing is allowed (the downbeat of measure three)
2. A suspension may have a change of bass on the resolution as long as the interval is consonant
3. Ties may be used with more flexibility as long as the basic 4th species principle is maintained that notes tie to notes of equal or lesser value. You may tie a whole note to a quarter note, but NOT a quarter note to a whole note.

Please note: the information on this page has been supplied by Dr. Ronald Caltabiano

Free Counterpoint Example

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1 3 4 5 8 6 5 6 7 6 6 6 8 6 5 3 4 6 8 6 5 6 3 2 3 1

*

New rhythms

} short-long-short:
syncopation used to
create suspensions

Eighth notes

} in groups of 4,
starting on a strong beat

in pairs on
beats 2 and/or 4

- Can be disjunct



Other...

- Notes can be repeated on occasion
- Voices can cross on occasion
- Tie to/from other note values
as long as you tie to a note of equal
or lesser value

Another example and practice problems

The first example consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains four measures of music. Above the staff, intervals are labeled: '2nd' over the first two notes, '5th' over the next two notes, and '2nd' over the final two notes. Below the staff, the figures are: 5 6 5 4, 6 3 4 5, 6 5 7 6 6 6, and 6 3 5 6 3 4 5 6. The letters 'JK' are written at the end of the staff. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains four measures of music. Below it, intervals are labeled: '* 4th' under the first two notes, '3rd (DN)' under the next two notes, '1st' under the next two notes, and '3rd' under the final two notes.

The second example also consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains four measures of music. Above the staff, intervals are labeled: '3rd (DN)' over the first two notes, '1st' over the next two notes, '1st' over the next two notes, and '3rd (DN)' over the final two notes. Below the staff, the figures are: 8 5 2 3 4, 3 2 4 3 3, 3 3, 3 4 6 5, 6 7 5 6, and 8. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains four measures of music. Below it, intervals are labeled: '* 4th' under the first two notes, '5th' under the next two notes, and '3rd (NC)' under the final two notes.

* This example shows how the syncopated short-long-short pattern () can make the preparation and resolution phases of a suspension against two long () values in the other voice. This will be possible when in the syncopated line, the long note is followed by a STEP DOWN.

Practice writing suspensions and 3rd species figures in the empty measures

The exercise consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains four measures of music. Above the staff, intervals are labeled: '7-6 sus' over the first two notes, '4-3 sus' over the next two notes, '4-3 sus' over the next two notes, and 'NC' over the final two notes. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains four measures of music. Below the staff, intervals are labeled: '9-10 sus' under the first two notes and 'DN' under the next two notes. The last two measures of the lower staff are empty.