

Music 232

Root Position Part Writing

These notes are a distillation of Kostka/Payne's Tonal Harmony. They are in no way a substitute for reading and working through the actual text book.

Overview

- Three- and four-part textures
- Roots a 4th/5th apart
- Roots a 3rd/6th apart
- Roots a 2nd/7th apart
- Instrumental transposition

I. General Considerations

- A. Four-part textures (in root position)
 1. all chord members are usually present; a final tonic chord might omit the 5th and triple the root
 2. the root is usually doubled
 3. the leading tone is almost never doubled
- B. Three-part textures (in root position)
 1. the 5th of the triad may be omitted
 2. an incomplete triad will double the root
- C. If a root position chord is repeated, the upper voices (above the bass) might arpeggiate or exchange pitches

II. Roots that move by 5ths (4ths)—one common tone

- A. Four-part textures
 1. one tone will be common to both chords and that tone may remain in the same voice. The remaining voices move by step.
 2. the three upper voices can move by similar motion no greater than a 3rd
 3. if the leading tone is in an inner voice, it does not need to directly resolve; the voice above it can fulfill the resolution (down), known as a *frustrated leading tone*
- B. Three-part textures
 1. there are no set conventions
 2. smooth voice leading trumps complete chords

III. Roots that move by 3rds (6ths)—two common tones

- A. Four-part textures
 1. if the first chord has a doubled root, two upper voices can remain stationary and the remaining voice moves by step
- B. Three-part textures
 1. the possibilities are more diverse
 2. do not omit the 5th of the second chord if ascending a 3rd (it may make the second chord sound like an inverted chord with a different root)

IV. Roots that move by 2nds (7ths)—no common tones

- A. Four-part textures
 1. if the root is doubled in the first chord, the upper voices will usually move contrary to the bass
- B. In the deceptive progression (V-vi/VI)
 1. the leading tone will move parallel with the bass (up to the tonic) and the other voices will move down, resulting in a doubled 3rd of the vi/VI chord
 2. if the leading tone is in an inner voice in a major key, it can move down and be resolved by the voice above it
- C. Three-part textures
 1. going from a complete chord to a chord with a doubled root (no 5th) is the smoothest

Questions to Consider

In four-part textures:

- what note in a root position triad is usually doubled?
- what note is almost never doubled and why?

In three-part textures:

- what note in a root position triad is usually omitted?
- what note is usually doubled?

What is meant by "root position part writing with roots a 4th (or 5th) apart"?

What does it mean to keep/maintain a *common tone*?

How many tones are common between roots that are:

a 4th/5th apart?

a 3rd/6th apart?

a 2nd/7th apart?

Is it acceptable not to maintain a common tone (or tones) when there indeed is a common tone (or two) between chords?

When can a leading tone not follow its usual tendency?