

## Music 232

### Voice Leading

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

- The melodic line
- Four-part notation
- Motion between chords
- Parallel motion

#### I. Voice Leading (according to K/P)

A. VOICE LEADING: the way chord progressions are produced by the motions of individual musical lines (i.e. counterpoint)

#### II. The Melodic Line – see example 5-1 for examples

- A. Rhythm: should be simple with durations equal or larger than the duration of the beat. The final note should be on a strong beat
- B. Harmony: chords tones only
- C. Contour: mostly conjunct interesting shape, but clear with a single focal point (climax)
- D. Leaps:
1. avoid augmented intervals, 7ths, 9ths and higher
  2. diminished intervals ok if resolved by step in the opposite direction
  3. resolve leaps greater than a P4
  4. Small consecutive leaps in the same direction are ok if they outline a triad
- E. Tendency tones:
1. leading tone resolves up to the tonic; exceptions are the 1-7-6-5 melody line, or when the leading tone is in the alto or tenor and resolved by an adjacent upper voice
  2. scale degree 4 usually goes to scale degree 3 (not as strict as the leading tone tendency)

#### III. Notating chords on the grand staff

- A. Four-part textures, SATB
1. top voices (soprano or tenor) stems up
  2. bottom voices (alto or bass) stems down
- B. Can represent a reduced score

#### IV. Voicing

- A. How the chord is distributed in space (see example 5-7)
1. CLOSE STRUCTURE: less than an octave between the soprano and tenor
  2. OPEN STRUCTURE: an octave or more between the soprano and tenor
- B. Voice crossing: no voice crossing with the outer voices, but occasional crossing of the inner voices is possible to avoid more severe voice-leading problems
- C. Spacing:
1. adjacent upper parts (but NOT the bass) should be within an octave of each other
  2. between the tenor and the bass more than an octave is fine
  3. Range: Soprano C-G; Alto G-D; Tenor C-G; Bass E-C

#### V. Moving from chord to chord

- A. Parallel motion
1. no parallel perfects
  2. no anti-parallel perfects
- B. Unequal fifths
1. P5 to  $\text{^}5$  or  $\text{^}5$  to P5: ok unless  $\text{^}5$  to P5 is with the bass and another voice
- C. Hidden/Direct perfects
2. forbidden if only between the outer voices
  3. ok with an outer voice and an inner voice, or just with inner voices
  4. ok in outer voices if the soprano moves by step
  5. generally easier to have in instrumental textures

## Questions to consider

Define *voice leading* (*part writing*)

Comment on the following characteristics of the basic melodic line:

Rhythm

Harmony

Contour

What are the usual procedures for melodic leaps?

What are the usual tendency tones and what are their tendencies?

What is the difference between a *full score* and *reduced score*?

Define *voicing*

Define *close structures* vs. *open structures*

Define *unequal 5ths*

Define a *direct* 5<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>ve</sup> in three- or more part textures

## *MELODIES AND VOICE LEADING*

On a basic level, we often separate music into two components as far as pitches are concerned. *Harmony*, as we have learned, deals with multiple pitches heard at the same time. *Melody*, the other component, consists of single pitches heard one at a time (one after the other). In addition, these single pitches will incorporate a rhythmic component, meaning that the length of the note values might vary. In its traditional manifestation, however, a melody will be primarily concerned with *voice leading*.

Voice leading is the way in which a melody is guided so that from one note to the next, the line is very singable and user-friendly for the voice. The term *voice leading* originated from the practice of writing vocal music, especially in the context of it being choral music in the church. In this sense, the melody (the voice) was led from note to note in a manner that was “natural” for the voice. An extreme example of a “natural” melody line would be something along the line of a children’s song: *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, or *Three Blind Mice*, where the lines do not cover a very wide range, skip registers very much, or make large leaps.

## *CONJUNCT AND DISJUNCT MOTION*

This type of approach to voice leading did not just mean that a melody would move in simple, small steps (the easiest thing for the voice to do). Good traditional voice leading was careful to combine certain kinds of leaps with smaller stepwise/scale-like melodic motion. The terms for these two basic types of melodic motion are *conjunct* (small, stepwise) and *disjunct* (leaping, non-scalar). Good voice leading, then, carefully combines conjunct and disjunct melodic motion. This makes the line smooth and un-jagged, but with enough variety in its overall contour to keep it interesting and engaging. *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, for example, is not that interesting because it has no leaps in it (no disjunct motion). *Three Blind Mice* is a little more elaborate because the second part of the tune has a nice, conspicuous leap in it (of a perfect 4<sup>th</sup>).

## VOICE LEADING “RULES”

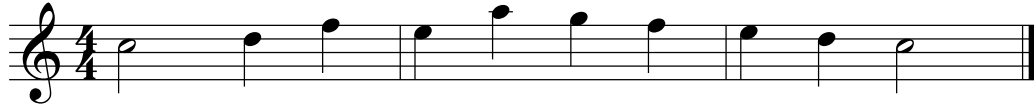
The aesthetic ideal of typical (read “good”) voice leading was to create a line that was singable, forward-moving, directed, and with variety incorporated into it. Simple melody/voice lines, like the kind we would find in a portion of a renaissance choral piece, or a Bach adhered to a number of rules or tendencies that served this model. These rules and tendencies helped ensure that these ideals were fulfilled.

Here is a list of very basic rules for diatonic voice leading. Remember that the “rules” of traditional voice leading were just an elaborate scheme of tendencies that were used over and over again, which established a long-standing “classical” stylistic consistency. These tendencies ensured that the melody lines were easy to sing and that they had a sense of continuity (not choppy or leap-heavy), direction (logical motion), variety and contour.

- Beginning:** Begin on the tonic or dominant (5<sup>th</sup>) and usually on a strong beat
- Ending:** End on the tonic (on a strong beat), which should be immediately preceded by the leading tone (even in minor) or the supertonic (the 2<sup>nd</sup> scale degree); this allows for a smooth, gentle finish
- Key:** Limited to the diatonic notes of a particular key (for now...)
- Shape:** Usually arch shaped with a single, high climax note on a strong beat
- Range:** Maximum of a 10<sup>th</sup>, minimum of a 5<sup>th</sup> per phrase
- Leaps:** Large leaps should be preceded and followed by motion in the opposite direction of the leap, except at the very beginning, where the leap need not be preceded by stepwise motion—basically, the leap makes a gap in the texture, then the gap gets filled in
- Note Values:** Mostly quarter notes with longer values reserved for the beginning or end areas (long note values in the middle will impede the needed sense of motion)
- Variety:** The line should mostly consist of conjunct motion (steps) with some disjunct motion (leaps) to add variety
- Repetition:** Avoid repeating tones or groups of tones which could hinder the sense of forward-motion
- Length:** For the time being (and for the sake of convenience), melodies (i.e. a melodic phrase) should average three or four measures in length

## VOICE LEADING EXAMPLES

These first two short examples below represent typical, good voice leading:



- Each has an interesting arch-like shape, a single climax note and a good balance of conjunct and disjunct motion that provides variety

These next two shorter examples have many errors and do not serve the ideals of good voice leading:



- The above line has two climax notes, too many leaps in a row (a choppy line) and a very rough finish in the final large leap from the E down to the G



- This melody has a smooth shape and a good climax, but there is no variety of direction and not a single leap

## MORE EXAMPLES

Below is a longer, perfectly fine example of good voice leading:



- The line has a nice arch shape, but with some variety-providing changes of direction
- There is a balance of conjunct and disjunct motion
- There is a single climax note
- All the large leaps are properly prepared and resolved
- While there is a longer note value in the middle, there is only one and it serves to divide the larger phrase into two “sub-phrases”

Below is a melody full of errors:



1. There are two leaps in a row without any preparation or resolution: this disrupts the sense of flow and continuity
2. A group of tones (D, C) is immediately repeated, which impedes the sense of forward motion
3. The climax note is the leading tone, which makes the line feel like it should continue upward to the tonic
4. The leap from the B down to the F is an augmented 4<sup>th</sup> (a forbidden leap – just listen to it!)
5. There is a large leap to the last note, which makes for a somewhat harsh, bumpy landing