

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **THREE-PART COUNTERPOINT**

Now that you have developed a sufficient level of proficiency in handling two-part counterpoint and have applied your skills to writing short pieces in two-part form and have created some two-part inventions, it is time to add one more voice to the texture. In doing so, it is necessary to make a very quick excursion through a species-like series of exercises, starting with the basic First Species. In this preliminary discipline, we consider all three parts to be chord tones only, just as we did with two-part writing. Unlike the more restricted principles of four-part writing, three-part music allows more freedom in doubling and spacing.

#### **ROOT POSITION**

1. Don't double the leading tone (nothing new here)
2. Provide root, third, and fifth, or
3. Doubled root and third
4. Do not omit the third

#### **FIRST INVERSION**

1. All three tones
2. Doubled root and third
3. Doubled third and root
4. Third and doubled fifth (no root!)
5. Fifth and doubled third (no root)
6. Do not omit the third
7. Do not double the leading tone

#### **SECOND INVERSION**

1. All three tones
2. Two fifths and third (no root)
3. Fifth and two thirds (no root - rare)

#### **SEVENTH CHORDS**

1. Omit the 5th
2. With the <sup>o</sup>7th chord, omit the 5th or the 3rd

As for spacing, from time to time it is perfectly all right to exceed an octave between the upper two parts. The range is the same as for two parts: to C above the treble clef staff and C below the bass clef, with possible rare excursions just beyond these limits. Take, for example, the following bass line, written in three-part harmony in First Species, demonstrates some of the principles set forth above:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Key of D

I vii<sup>°</sup><sub>6</sub> I<sub>6</sub> IV<sub>6</sub> V<sub>6</sub> V vi V/vi vi<sub>6</sub> vi I<sub>4</sub> V<sub>7</sub> I

(vi?) A: ii

The distribution of chord tones in each chord are as follows:

- |                           |                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Two roots and a third  | 8. Root, third, fifth              |
| 2. Root third, fifth      | 9. Root, third, fifth              |
| 3. Root, third, fifth     | 10. Root and two thirds            |
| 4. Two thirds and a fifth | 11. Third and two fifths (no root) |
| 5. Root, third, fifth     | 12. Root, third, seventh           |
| 6. Root, third, fifth     | 13. Two roots and a third          |
| 7. Root and two thirds    |                                    |

Note also the spacing between the upper two parts on chord number 10 and the omission of the fifth in the Dominant 7th chord of chord number 12.

Writing in three-part harmony is actually much easier than four-part writing, once you are fully aware of your options; the lines have more room to move around in. Here is another example, this time in G Minor:

Key of gm

i vii<sup>°</sup><sub>4/3</sub> i<sub>6</sub> iv<sub>6</sub> i<sub>4/3</sub> vii<sup>°</sup><sub>6/V</sub> V<sub>6</sub> V V/iv — iv iv<sub>6</sub> I<sub>4</sub> V<sub>7</sub> I

Bb: ii<sub>6</sub>

Take note of the distribution of tones in these chords. The next step is to embellish such a progression with chord tone skips and nonharmonic tones. In a disciplined, progressive approach, let us establish a simple 1:1 progression, and then expand it, first with a second species approach, then a third species, and finally a mixed species realization.

In Second Species, the object is to keep a steady flow of two pitches per beat, distributed as desired. In the two examples of Third Species, the first maintains a flow of three pitches per beat, the second a flow of four pitches per beat. The last version represents the kind of goal we wish to achieve in handling three-part counterpoint, where the choice of durations is free, and tied chord tones, suspensions and retardations are added to the repertoire of nonharmonic tones.

This discipline mandates that in every instance, the original chord tones of the 1:1 progression will be found somewhere within each beat of the elaborated versions. The next five examples should clarify:

(A)

Key of *dm* i i<sub>6</sub> iv V i<sub>6</sub> V/V V<sub>6</sub> V<sub>7</sub> I

(B)

(C)

(D)



(E)



Another progressive elaboration of a simple 1:1 progression is shown in the next five examples in B Flat Major. A thorough analysis is recommended.

(A)



(B)



(C)



**D**

**E**

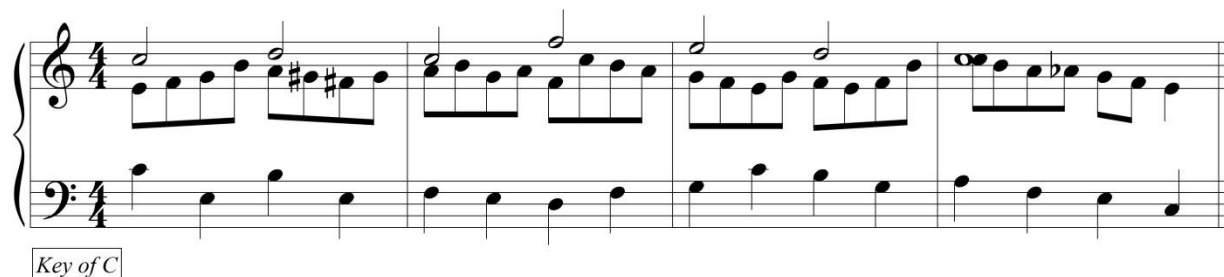
After some practice with three parts, you may find that it is not so big a step from two-part to three-part writing.

One of the strongest forms of discipline in three-part writing is a strict durational relationship among the three parts, whereby one part is written in, say, half notes all the way, another part in quarter notes all the way, and the third part in eighth notes all the way. Occasional ties between eighth notes or quarter notes are permissible. There are six possible ways of laying out such an exercise, all of which can be effective:

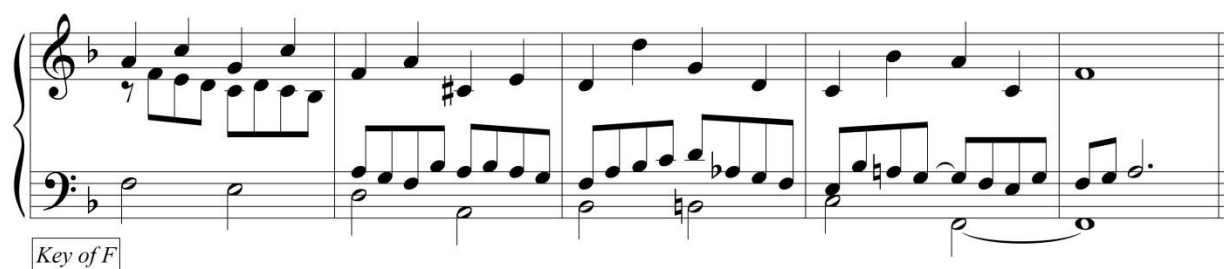
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Top Part:	Slow	Slow	Medium	Medium	Fast	Fast
Middle Part:	Fast	Medium	Fast	Slow	Medium	Slow
Bottom Part:	Medium	Fast	Slow	Fast	Slow	Medium

Exercises of this nature are quite challenging and provide an excellent way of improving your technique. Four examples are given on the next page, using the assignment of parts as shown in Nos. 1, 3, 4, and 5 above. Note that repeated tones are either tied as chord tones or as suspensions. The student will do well to analyze the harmonies, as well as the nonharmonic tones of these examples. Imposing the restraints of this type of exercise upon yourself will hone your technique such that you will have that much more resource at your disposal as you go back to writing in free counterpoint. Always remember the vital role that harmony must perform, and that your writing should support, not obscure, the intended harmony.

The next step, then, will be to take a look at imitation in three-part counterpoint in the form of canon, and finally, the challenge of coming to grips with the ultimate goal of this book – to give you the instruction in writing fugues in three part counterpoint.



Key of C



Key of F



Key of G



Key of *dm*