## CHAPTER FIVE IMITATION AND CANON

Unity in music is achieved through various approaches to the concept of <u>repetition</u>. We have seen how sequences can provide unity by way of the transposed repetition of a series of notes. While sequences involve some form of repetition <u>in the same part</u>, Imitation is the repetition of a passage by <u>another voice</u> – the <u>other</u> part in two-part counterpoint. Imitation and Sequence are the two most powerfully unifying procedures in Baroque music – and Bach's writings in particular. They play a vital role in all pieces of the period and are especially evident in the Inventions and Fugues.

<u>THE INTERVAL OF IMITATION</u>. The most common interval of imitation is the octave, as seen in Example A:



In fact, however, imitation might occur at <u>any</u> – usually diatonic – interval. Next to the octave, the 5th and 4th are the most often used (Example B below):



With imitation at the octave, the imitating part plays precisely the same melodic intervals as the part it is imitating, but with imitation at intervals <u>other</u> than the octave (5th, 4th, 6th, 3rd, etc.), we need be only concerned with the <u>general</u> melodic intervals, rather than the specific intervals.

Countless works by Bach begin imitatively, mostly with imitation at the octave (for works other than fugues). When it comes to the beginnings of fugues, the imitation is regularly at the 5th above or 4th below. It is time now to introduce excerpts from Bach. All of the following are from pieces that begin with imitation at the octave (Example A):

EXCERPTS FROM J. S. BACH KEYBOARD COMPOSITIONS





Such examples could go on indefinitely. Imitation at the octave may occur <u>anywhere</u> in a piece. All manner of variety is found in terms of the length of the imitation and the metrical distance between the first note of the "leader" and the first note of the "follower" (these terms will be used in the discussion of Canon, which follows shortly).

The excerpts below (Example B) are also from Bach; they demonstrate the process of imitation at the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> – the next most common intervals of imitation after the octave:





Notice how, in the G Major example above, Bach slips from imitation at the 4th to imitation at the 5th. The change takes place where the top part leaps an octave, whereas the bottom part leaps up only a 7th (to the dominant 7th), widening the interval of imitation by a step from a 4th to a 5th. These kinds of maneuvers are common in his music. The examples given above are mere drops in an ocean of similar examples we could find in Bach. The use of sequence and imitation form the backbone of contrapuntally written compositions.

IMITATION IN CONTRARY MOTION. All of the excerpts thus far show imitation where the following voice maintains an identical melodic contour to the leading voice. Imitation in contrary motion allows the follower to proceed in the <u>opposite direction</u> from the leader – general interval for general interval. Example C demonstrates:



Example C above is taken from Bach's Fugue No.4 in D Minor from Book 1 of the Well Tempered Klavier. Example D shows a most unusual approach to imitation in contrary motion, where the follower appears only <u>one half of a beat</u> after the leader (!), producing a highly syncopated result. The excerpt is from the Invention No. 6 in E Major. This relationship is repeated several times during this work.



Actual imitation in contrary motion is relatively rare in the style, but the concept of contrary motion in itself is extremely important and is found significantly throughout Bach's works. Once a musical statement is established and impressed upon the ear of the listener, it can be used later in the musical discourse <u>in its mirrored form</u>—in contrary motion. The mirrored form may begin on any desired pitch. A simple and clear example is the principal motive of the C Major Invention, which Bach uses in its mirrored form just about as often as the original (Example E). Other instances from Bach follow (Examples F, G, H):





Contrary motion in this sense is applicable at <u>any</u> time in a work. It, like other devices we have examined, helps to provide unity and coherence to a piece. When you are asked to write your own compositions, by all means, keep in mind the advantages of using contrary motion!

MODIFICATIONS OF A MUSICAL SHAPE (MOTIVE). Repetition, sequence, imitation in similar and contrary motion—all these lend unity and coherence to music. Melodic unity may still be maintained when the basic shape is <u>altered</u> to some extent by 1) changing one or more of its melodic intervals, and/or 2) changing the duration of one or more of the notes. These two processes, either singly or in combination, are responsible for most of the many forms of melodic variety that may be applied to a given melodic shape—so-called "Motive Development". Rest assured, we will examine these processes in greater detail in later chapters.

FREE IMITATION AND STRICT IMITATION. In Free Imitation there is freedom in the imitative process, whereby the melodic intervals of the leader are not always maintained, interval for interval, in the imitating part. <u>Harmonic</u> considerations are primarily responsible for these modifications of the intervallic progress of the follower. To be sure, these changes are kept minor enough such that the impression of actual imitation is still felt by the listener, whether the imitation be in similar or contrary motion. Strict imitation, when maintained consistently between the two parts, moves us into the realm of Canon. Canon, meaning "Law" in Latin is an apt term for the process of strict imitation between leader and follower. A true canon is a piece consisting entirely of strict imitation throughout, except for the cadence measure(s). Canons as actual pieces in the literature are relatively rare, but the <u>canonic process</u> is what is so vital in contrapuntal music. Bach's works are cemented with usually brief passages that employ imitation, either strict (canonic) or free.

We have been dealing in this chapter with the extremely important concept of imitation, but you have received no instruction as to <u>how</u> to write music containing imitation, strict or otherwise. The most coherent method of instruction in this regard is the study of Canon, which fully deserves its own chapter. If you can master the writing of canons, you will have little trouble with imitation in general. However, be sure to review thoroughly the material in this chapter before moving ahead to Chapter Six.