



16th Century (Species) Counterpoint

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What is counterpoint?

- Two independent melodic voices that when combined create harmony either in...
 - Homophony (melodies have same rhythm)



- Polyphony (melodies have different rhythms)



Cantus Firmus

- A melody over (or under) which we will write a second melody to create counterpoint
- Remember to leave it as is! (*firmus*)
 - If the intervals don't work out, you must change the contrapuntal line, not the cantus firmus
- Do all of this in C major (keep it simple)

Let the rules begin!

- CANTUS FIRMUS (fixed melody)
 - Always written in whole notes, usually 8–12 notes long
 - Always begins on $\hat{1}$ and ends with $\hat{2}$ resolving to $\hat{1}$
 - *hint* fill in the first and last two measures first
 - Has single high (or low) point
 - Mostly stepwise motion
- CONTRARY MOTION — moving opposite direction, up or down

Leaps

- Must be ($\leq 5^{\text{th}}$) unless P8 or rare m6 upward
- Leaps are often filled in/counterbalanced by scale in contrary stepwise motion (leap up, step down)
- 2 consecutive leaps are only OK if outlining a major or minor triad, never more than 2 in a row
- NEVER leap a TRITONE! (or you'll conjure the devil...)
- Leaping P4 — contrary stepwise motion before OR after
- Leaping P5 — contrary stepwise motion before AND after
- Leaping 3rd — not as strict, contrary motion good, but not required

First Species

- Melody written above/below CF is also in whole notes
- Start on C or G if above CF, on C only if below
- End on $\hat{7}$ to $\hat{1}$
- Only consonant intervals allowed between voices (harmonic)
 - unison, 3^{rds}, perfect 5th, 6^{ths}, and octaves
 - NO P4 — it's dissonant!
 - No TRITONE (+4/ $^{\circ}$ 5)
- Never use two 5ths or 8ves consecutively!
 - These are called parallel 5ths and octaves and they will haunt you for years to come.
- Strings of 3rds and 6ths ok, but more than 3 in a row gets boring...
- Unison only allowed on first and last notes, never in the middle (8 ok)
- Approach perfect intervals (U, 5+8) by contrary motion, with at least one voice moving stepwise.
- Never let the voices cross / overlap from one note to the next.