

## Chapter 6

from Kent Kennan. *Counterpoint Based on Eighteenth-Century Practice*. Fourth Edition. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

# Two-Voice Exercises (Concluded)

### THREE NOTES AGAINST ONE (3:1)

Example 1 shows excerpts that demonstrate the 3:1 ratio.

Example 1a BACH: *W.T.C.*, Book II, Fugue 6

Example 1b BUXTEHUDE: *Fugue in C Major (Organ)*

Example 1c HANDEL: *Suite No. 3 in D Minor for Harpsichord, Gigue*

The process of writing 3:1 counterpoint is essentially the same as that of writing the 2:1 variety. The chief difference, if one is working from a 1:1 basis, is the fact that with an additional note between beats, the relationship between note patterns and interval span changes. For example, the interval of a 3rd in a basic 1:1 version can be filled in with a passing tone to produce the 2:1 ratio, but it must be treated some other way in converting to 3:1, while the 4th becomes the interval most conveniently filled in with passing tones.

Example 2 shows various possibilities in converting 1:1 successions to 3:1, with the triplet motion in the top voice. The latter involves a different interval span in each case—a 2nd in *a*, a 3rd in *b*, and a 4th in *c*.

Example 2

Similar charts could of course be made for larger intervals and for ascending rather than descending intervals. Furthermore, other counterpoints in the bottom voice would have different harmonic implications and would in turn allow for other melodic patterns in the upper voice. Remember that it is unwise to use too many different patterns in one exercise. This is not to say that the same melodic figure should be repeated from beginning to end, but rather that a greater sense of unity can be gained if there is some economy in the use of figures.

Avoid stepwise motion followed by a leap in the same direction (Examples 3*a* and *b*). Repeated notes are still ruled out, even between the last note of one group of three and the first note of the next group (*c*). In actual music this last arrangement is seldom used except in a sequential pattern. Also to be avoided is the type of line shown at *d*, which turns back over the same notes repeatedly and lacks a sense of direction. Be sure not to leap from nonharmonic tones that should be resolved stepwise (*e*).

## Example 3

As for parallelism in 3:1, the principles discussed in the section on 2:1 apply. A good general rule is to avoid parallel octaves or 5ths between any part of a beat and the first note of the next beat (Example 4).

## Example 4

For purposes of illustration the 1:1 counterpoint from Example 2 in Chapter 4 has been used again in Example 5, as the basis for a satisfactory 3:1 version. Here, again, only the top and bottom voices are intended to sound in the 3:1 version.

## Example 5

It should perhaps be stressed that the writing of 3:1 counterpoint (as of 2:1 and 4:1) need not be approached from a 1:1 basis. Although that method will usually provide a secure foundation for the initial exercises, it involves unnecessary limitations and does not always produce the most imaginative and interesting results.

(3:1 exercises may be done at this point.)

## FOUR NOTES AGAINST ONE (4:1)

The excerpts in Example 6 illustrate the use of the 4:1 relationship in music. Compare *c* with Example 1*b* in Chapter 4, page 36, which stated the same theme in 1:1 fashion.

## Example 6a MOZART: Piano Sonata, K. 498a

Example 6b BACH: *W.T.C.*, Book I, Prelude 5

Example 6c BEETHOVEN: Sonata, Op. 13 (*Pathétique*)

The excerpts in Example 6 give some idea of the number of different melodic patterns possible in 4:1—that is, within the group of four notes. These patterns nearly always consist of chord tones plus nonharmonic tones. While they sometimes involve chord tones alone for a beat or two, a continuous use of that device is generally avoided in counterpoint, since the effect is more that of a succession of broken chords than of a real line.

By way of further illustration, some of the possibilities in a specific situation are shown in Example 7: a 1:1 succession is to be converted to 4:1, with the group of four notes spanning the interval of a perfect 5th in the lower voice.

Example 7



In 4:1 there is a sense of slightly greater weight on the first and third notes of the group of four. Consequently these are frequently harmonic tones, the second and fourth notes being nonharmonic. But other arrangements are possible and quite common. In any case, all four notes of a group generally center around a single harmony; that is, the harmonic rhythm in 4:1 normally involves no more than one chord to a beat. Occasionally the harmony may change once within the beat if necessary, but attempts to imply more than two harmonies to a beat are generally unmusical and awkward.

Patterns to be avoided are shown in Example 8.

Example 8

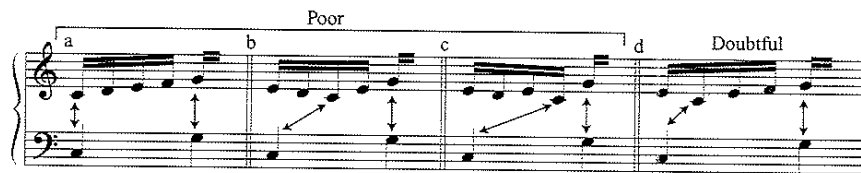


Stepwise motion followed by a leap in the same direction is particularly poor in 4:1, especially when it occurs between the last note of one group and the first note of the next, as in Example 8a. At b a nonharmonic tone which should resolve stepwise leaps instead. The figures at c and d are ruled out in these exercises because of the repetition that would destroy the basic ratio. In actual music, however, they would be acceptable if used in *sequential* fashion—not merely in isolated instances. At e the first note of the second group is anticipated by the third sixteenth note of the preceding beat. This is normally an undesirable arrangement because it detracts from the

freshness and force of the note in question on its second appearance. But, once again, such relationships are sometimes seen in sequential patterns.

Parallel octaves and 5ths between part of one beat and the beginning of the next beat are to be avoided, although those between the *second* note of a group of four and the first note of the next group are the least objectionable and are occasionally seen. Example 9 illustrates this point with parallel octaves.

Example 9



An example of satisfactory 4:1 counterpoint derived from a 1:1 version is illustrated in the following elaboration of Example 2 on page 36.

Example 10



(4:1 exercises may be done at this point.)