

Practical Rules

FOR

Learning Composition

Translated from a Work intitled

GRADUS AD PARNASSUM

Written Originally in Latin by

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late chief Composer to

The Roman Emperor CHARLES VI

*NB: this Work has received the Approbation of
the best & most approved Masters in the Kingdom.*

CHAPTER I

Of Counterpoint, in the Composition in 2 Parts.

Counterpoint is divided into **simple** and **figurative**. The former is a kind of Composition in 2 or more parts, wherein the Notes in the different parts are of the same value, and is called plain or simple from being Note against Note in Concords only. We may choose the Subject either from our own Fancy or from a Church Tune; in the latter Case the Subject is called in Italian **Canto fermo**.

In **figurative Counterpoint** the Notes in the different parts may be of different value, and Concords intermixed with Discords. When the Canto fermo or Subject is placed in the Lower Parts, it is called in Italian **Contrapunto sopra il soggetto**; and if in the Upper Parts, **Contrapunto sotto il soggetto**.

Before we proceed, the following General Rules in Composition will be necessary to be observed with regard to the different motions in Music: viz. the Regular, Contrary and Oblique.

- 1 The **Contrary** and **Oblique** may be used in any Progression: but the **Similar**, only when we proceed from a perfect Concord to an imperfect, or from an imperfect to an imperfect: in the Sense only the 8th and 5th are deemed perfect Concords, but the 3rd and 6th imperfect.

The reason why the Similar motion in the Progression from a perfect and imperfect Concord to a perfect is not allowed of, is, to avoid the wrong progression of successive Fifths and Eights, whether open or hidden; the last may be discovered by the intermediate Notes contained with the Spaces, as may be seen in the following Example.

Hidden Fifths Hidden Eights

- 2 We must avoid proceeding to an Eight or Unison by a Skip, that is when the Lower Part ascends one degree and the upper descends by a Skip though it be in the contrary motion.

- 3 An imperfect Concord is to be used preferably to a perfect, as the former is more harmonious than the Latter.
- 4 The Notes must be conformable to the nature of the Key.
- 5 The Inharmonic Relation in **Mi** against **Fa** is to be avoided as much as Possible.
- 6 Regularity, Variety and good Melody must continually be kept in View.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Counterpoint' and 'Canto fermo'. The bottom staff is labeled 'Canto fermo' and 'Counterpoint'. Both staves are in 3/2 time and contain a sequence of notes that illustrate the relationship between counterpoint and canto fermo.

In **Triple Time** when one note is set against three, the middlemost note may be Discord, provided it be in a gradual progression.

The image shows a musical example in 3/2 time. The top staff has a treble clef and the bottom staff has a bass clef. The notes in the top staff are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The notes in the bottom staff are: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. This illustrates a gradual progression of notes.

The Third Counterpoint.

Is a kind of Composition where four Crotchets are set against one Semibreve. Here it must be observed, that when five Crotchets follow one another gradually either rising or falling, the first, third and fifth note are to be Concords, and the second and fourth Discords. see Ex. 1. But this is not always the Case, as sometimes the second and fourth note may be Concords, and the third a Discord by way of filling up the space of a third. see Ex. 2. To explain which more fully we will reduce those Examples to their original form Ex. 3. which will show them to be regular Transitions. There is still another kind of Transition which is when we proceed from a Discord to a Concord by a Skip, and is called in Italian **Nota Cambiata**, see Ex. 4. This Skip of a Third from the second to the third note should properly have been made from the first to the second note, in which Case the second note would have been a Sixth or a Concord. see Ex. 5. If one was to fill up this Space of the Third, it would appear as follows see Ex. 6. But as Quavers are not to be used in this Style of Composition, the former Example is thought to be preferable. It still remains to be observed, that if Canto fermo is in the lower part the last Bar but one must be regulated as in Ex. 7. but if in the upper part, according to the Ex. 8.

The image shows eight examples of counterpoint and canto fermo, labeled Ex. 1 through Ex. 8. Ex. 1, 2, and 3 are in 3/2 time. Ex. 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are in 4/2 time. Ex. 8 is labeled 'Canto fermo' in both the upper and lower parts. The examples illustrate various transitions and progressions of notes.

Note

The Flats are used in this Example for sake of avoiding the inharmonic Relation of the Triton, which may be practised on any similar occasion, not only with Flats, but also with Sharps

Example

Canto fermo

Canto fermo

The Fourth Counterpoint.

Is a kind of Composition of two Minims to a Semibreve, where Syncopation of Notes chiefly is introduced. **Syncopation** may be either of Concords or Discords. If of Concords, both the accented and unaccented Part of the Measure are Concords as may be see Ex. 1. But if of Discords, the unaccented note is to be Concord and the next accented note Discord, see Ex. 2. As in the preceding Counterpoints Discords were used only by way of Transition from Concord to Concord; so in this kind of Counterpoint they bear a chief part in the Harmony, and as such must resolve into the next succeeding Concord by falling one Degree, as in the last Example.

Ex. 1

Ex. 2

Syncopation

Of

Concords

Discords

If the Canto fermo is in the lower Part, the Second resolves into the Unison, the Fourth into the Third, the Seventh into the Sixth and the Ninth into the Eight. see Ex. 1. and it is to be observed, that Discords in reality are used only as Retardations of Concords, which plainly appears from those Examples where the same Retardations used before are omitted.

Ex. 1

We cannot for this reason pass from the Unison into the Second nor from the Eighth to the Ninth by way of Syncopation, as in that Case either two Unisons or two Eights would immediately follow one another, which is discovered in those Examples where Syncopations are omitted.

Ex. Bad Bad

If the Canto fermo is in the upper part, then the Second resolves into the Third, the Fourth into the Fifth, the Seventh into the Eighth, and the Ninth into the Tenth.

The following Rules concerning this Counterpoint in particular, are to be observed.

1st If the Canto fermo is in the lower part, the Seventh resolving into the Sixth, is to be used in the last Bar but one. But if in the upper part, the Second which resolves into the Third and passes afterwards into the unison.

2nd Syncopation is to be introduced in every Bar, as often as possible, and as far as is consistent with regular Progression, Variety and Melody.

Syncopations may still be introduced in a different manner, as will be shown in the following Ex. 1. where instead of the usual Mark of Syncopation a point is added to the Note in order to give a brisker motion to the Air or Song, which way of Syncopation is properly to be used in the Counterpoint next following. Besides this two more different ways may be used as in the Ex. 2. or in Ex. 3. where it is to be observed, that Quavers in such a Case only can be used on the second and fourth Crotchet of the

