

# Improvisatory counterpoint

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CS 275B/Mus 254  
Stanford University

# Counterpoint overview

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- Various methods governing the combination of voices in a polyphonic work
- Main approaches
  - Note against note (*punctus contra punctum*), usually called “sixteenth-century” or “species” counterpoint
  - Palestrina counterpoint (also from the 16<sup>th</sup> century)
  - “Free” counterpoint (also “18<sup>th</sup>-century”)
- Highly rule-driven
- Originally required a pre-existing melody
  - *Cantus firmus* (later “tenor”)

# Work of Bill Schottstaedt (ccrma)

- Autc

Counterpoint

Cantus Firmus

Second Species

Cantus Firmus

6

Third Species

Cantus Firmus

5

8

75

\*\*aug4 at a cadence point is OK.

# Work of Thomas Noll (tnoll.org)

Third Species

Cantus Firmus

5

8

4<sup>th</sup> species

67

75

\*\*aug4 at a cadence point is OK.

# Work of Thomas Noll (tnoll.org)

Third Species

Cantus Firmus

5

8

An example of the contour of a nota cambiata figure

The contour of a double-neighbour figure including a legal leap from a dissonance

4<sup>th</sup> species

67

75

\*\*aug4 at a cadence point is OK.

# Fifth species

Fifth Species

Cantus Firmus

16<sup>th</sup>-century practice  
as codified  
In the 18<sup>th</sup> century

6

- As a neighbour-note figure (a stepwise connection between two instances of the same (consonant) note may be used if and only if the middle note is also a consonance).

A quaver neighbour note figure

6 3 6 7 6 5 6 5 1

## 8<sup>th</sup>-note rules

- As passing notes that connect two consonant notes an interval of a fourth apart (rarely used).

A step wise quaver figure

6 3 6 7 6 5 6 7 6 3 6 7 6 5 6 7

# Musical realities: 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries

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- Consonance and dissonance
- Differentiation of vocal and instrumental rules
- Growing rhythmic independence between parts
- Increasing use of canons and fugues
- Substitution (Protestant cultures) of chorale melodies for *cantus firmi* (Catholic cultures)
- Elaboration of chorale melodies in chorale preludes

# Consonance and dissonance

## Two-Voice Analysis

Vincentino: *Classica musica* Vol. 4

5 6 8 2 3 3 5 3 5 3 2 8 7 5 4 3 5 4 3 3 3 3 8 6 5

## Three-Voice Analysis

Robert Ke lley

A Ec - ce Do-mi-rum nos - ter cum vir-tu - te ve - ni - et

T Ec - ce Do-mi-rum nos - ter cum vir-tu - te ve - ni - et

B Ec - ce Do-mi-rum nos - ter cum vir-tu - te ve - ni - et

5 6 3 5 6 3 8 5 3 2 3 8 2 3 3 6 3 2 3 3 5 4 8 6 7 3 3 6 5 8 7 3 8 7 6 5 3 3 5 6 6 6 3 2 3 3 5 4 8 6 7 3 3 6 5 3 3



# Intervals weighted

repeated notes acceptable only in texted work

Mix of perfect/imperfect consonances is good. Abstract exercise can't show stylistic treatment of rhythm/duration.

c.f.

Voices too far apart

c.f.

Uncorrected leap!



# Canons and Fugues

The image shows a musical score for a canon in G major, 4/4 time. It features three voices: Tenor (Subject), Alto (Answer), and Tenor. The lyrics are in German and describe the 'strongest castle' as God, the 'good defense', and 'faith'.

**TEN. Subject**  
Ein' fe - - - - - ste Burg ist un - ser

**ALTO Answer**  
Ein' fe - - - - - ste Burg ist un - ser Gott,

**TEN.**  
Gott, ein' gu - te Wehr und Waf -

# Chorale cantata

Ob., Tript. ← Chorale tune

S.  
A. - - fen, ein fe - ste Burg — — — ist un - ser Gott, ein

T. Wehr — — — und Waf - - - fen; ein

B. Waf - - - - - fen,

Wehr — — — — — und Waf - fen, ein gu - te

Double bass, organ pedals ← Chorale tune

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It features a soprano (S.), tenor (T.), and bass (B.) vocal line, with instrumental parts for Oboe and Trumpet (Ob., Tript.), Double Bass, and Organ Pedals. The lyrics are in German. The instrumental parts play a chorale tune, which is also indicated by arrows and the text 'Chorale tune'.

# Keyboard fugue

The image displays a musical score for a keyboard fugue, consisting of four systems of two staves each. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is common time (C). The score is written in a standard musical notation style, with treble and bass clefs. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with a treble staff starting on a whole note D and a bass staff starting with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The second system begins at measure 7, the third at measure 12, and the fourth at measure 17. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines in both hands, characteristic of a fugue.

# Chorale variations (keyboard)



Dominik Hoernel  
(U. Karlsruhe)

# Hoernel, cont.

A musical score for piano in 4/4 time, consisting of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff features a complex, rhythmic melody with many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes, often appearing in groups of four or six. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment with quarter and eighth notes, including some chords. The piece is written in a key with one sharp (F#), likely D major or A minor. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines.