Soprano-Bass Counterpoint and Harmonization

HOMEWORK Q & A
Take questions on K/P Ex. 8-1 C 1-8. The Q & A session should have the feel of an in-class exercise. If time allows, work on exercises 9-12 for extra practice.

REVIEW
1. Soprano-Bass Counterpoint {K/P Ch. 8, pp. 122-126}
   ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION. Using K/P Example 8-17 (p. 124; reproduced below in Example 1), review the term soprano-bass counterpoint and the terms given in bold type below.

Example 1. K/P Example 8-17: J.S. Bach, Chorale No. 102, mm. 20-22 (final phrase)

To get the discussion started, ask the students: “How is the outer-voice framework related to first species counterpoint?” In support of this discussion, read (out loud) and discuss following two quotes from theorist Michael R. Rogers’ book Teaching Approaches in Music Theory and review the bulleted terms that follow: 2

“All tonal music is contrapuntal in that it is generated by a constant lining-up between the top and bottom voices (soprano/bass polarity) whose sense of action and pause depends on the adjustments of consonance and dissonance.” 3

“Two tonal pieces…of widely different textures or styles can be reduced to controlling outer voices and understood through identical techniques of voice leading and procedures of rhythmic alignment.”

– Michael R. Rogers, Teaching Approaches in Music Theory

• Counterpoint – “the combining of relatively independent musical lines.”

• Voice independence – “each line in a contrapuntal texture [has] its own unique [pitch] contour and rhythm.

• Contrapuntal relationships “are governed by certain voice-leading conventions…and by conventions of harmonic progressions.”

– Kostka and Payne, Tonal Harmony

1 Try to get as many students as possible participating in the discussion.
2 Quotations are from K/P 2008, Ch. 5-8.
4 Ibid., 64-66.
NEW MATERIAL

2. Harmonization

Today’s in-class exercises are designed to serve models for all future in-class part writing exercises.

IN-CLASS EXERCISE 1

Harmonize K/P Example 8-17 (the example we just discussed). Put the example on the board and work interactively with the students to harmonize the example. Use the following step-by-step approach:

2.1 First, sing the B. Second, sing the S. Third, sing the S-B counterpoint (i.e. S & B together). (Be sure to provide support at the piano as necessary.)

2.2 Analyze the S-B counterpoint

2.21 Discuss the pitch contour of the melody (S) and bass (B) lines

2.22 Discuss the relative voice motions in the S-B counterpoint:

P, S, C, O, or Static (see Example 1 above for the answers)  

2.23 Analyze the S-B interval progression (again, see Example 1 above).  

2.3 Harmonize K/P Example 8-17

2.31 Provide a RNA (more than solution is possible) & CA

2.32 Fill in the A & T

To simplify matters, harmonize the pickup bar last. In K/P Ch. 8 we are limited to the use of root position and first inversion triads. Discuss the options for harmonization at each beat. It is suggested that you work the phrase backwards. The bass line and phrase model clearly imply the pickup harmony must be a first-inversion tonic triad. (A first inversion tonic triad has been substituted for the more usual, and stable, root position tonic triad.) For fun, compare the class’s harmonization to J.S. Bach’s harmonization given below in Example 2.

Example 2. J. S. Bach, Chorale No. 102, mm. 20-22

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5 K/P 2013, 125.

6 Relative voice motions are introduced in K/P Ch. 5 (p. 74). In 4-voice settings, static motions will occur from time to time (especially when there is a change of harmony).

7 In 4-voice settings, perfect consonances (like the 8 on) may be used in the middle of the phrase.

8 When harmonizing a phrase, it is often useful work the phrase backwards from the cadence. For example, what chords fit the 2-voice counterpoint at cadence? Working backwards, we see that the cadence is obviously a PAC (B: 5-1; S: 2-1). We also notice that the S-B interval G2–B4 on the downbeat of m. 21 implies I, and S-B interval D3–A4 implies V; etc.
3. **Composing the Soprano**

IN-CLASS EXERCISE 2

Compose a 4-voice chorale-style melody (i.e. soprano line) for the figured-bass in Example 3.

**Example 3.** Figured bass from J.S. Bach, Chorale 26, mm. 1-2

Before you begin writing, sing the B in order to get a “feel” for the harmony. Be sure to discuss its “tonal journey” and pitch contour.

*Working interactively at the board…*

1. Provide a RNA with supporting CA (see Ex 4).

2. **Compose the S** (being sure to leave room for the A & T to be inserted later). Sing the S (in significant chunks) as you write it. Discuss options for continuation at each step along the way.

3. When finished, sing the S-B counterpoint. *Notice how the harmony is implied even without the A & T being explicitly present.*

4. Compare/contrast your S with J.S. Bach’s S (see Ex. 4). They need NOT be similar, but it sure is fun to compare your work with Bach’s.

5. If time allows, fill in the A & T.

**Example 4.** J. S. Bach’s SATB setting of the figured bass in Example 3 (above)
Some compositional advice

If you run into a problem while composing the S, it is often easier to start over (e.g. to choose a new starting note) than to try to solve the problem you have encountered.

Erasing is part of composing! Get used to the process of trying ideas, erasing them when you encounter a problem, and trying other ideas. Composition is often a process of trial and error.

As you sing J. S. Bach’s choral lines, be sure to notice how tonally directed they often are: e.g., an outline of a tonic triad at the beginning of the phrase, a stepwise journey from 1 to 5 at the beginning of the phrase, linear motion like 3–2–1 at cadence, etc.

Stepwise motion is often the norm in the soprano. It makes the soprano part easy to sing and remember, and more importantly, unequivocally defines the key for the listener.

As you gain more compositional experience, you will be able to see problems coming down the road and consequently avoid them. Until then, use a trial and error or discovery learning approach and try to have fun doing it.

READING
Finish reading K/P Ch. 8.

HOMEWORK
Worksheet 8-2: Composing the Soprano
A RNA key is available to students on the course website under Lesson 17.