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SECOND-SPECIES COUNTERPOINT

Second-species counterpoint follows most of the rules of first-species counterpoint, but there are two important differences. First, there are two notes in the added voice for each note in the *cantus firmus* — a rhythmic relationship sometimes described as 2:1 counterpoint. Second, harmonic dissonances are allowed under certain circumstances. You will notice that the added voice becomes a little freer overall: leaps are more acceptable, and the range may be expanded a bit if necessary (as long as the counterpoint remains easily singable).

Here are the rules, many of which you will recognize from first-species counterpoint.

1. For every note in the *cantus firmus*, write two notes in the added voice (but see guidelines #14 and #15 — the ending need not be 2:1). Traditionally, the *cantus firmus* uses whole notes (one note per measure) and the added voice moves in half notes until the last measure.
2. The lower voice almost always begins on $\hat{1}$, while the upper voice may begin on $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, or $\hat{5}$. The added voice may begin with a rest worth half the duration of the *cantus firmus*'s first note. If you decide to start with a rest, the first note will still be one of these choices. No rests are allowed in the middle of the exercise.
3. Most intervals between the two voices will be consonant. However, passing tones are allowed on weak beats. No other use of dissonance is acceptable.
4. Beware of perfect intervals! They stand out and therefore require special care.
 - A. Parallel motion between perfect intervals is always illegal.
 - B. Do not approach a perfect interval by similar motion unless the upper voice moves by step (this is referred to as “direct” or “hidden” fifths/octaves). Contrary motion to perfect intervals is acceptable, although we still prefer to hear the higher voice moving by step. Oblique motion to perfect intervals is also acceptable, even if the upper voice leaps.
 - C. Except for the first and last notes, generally avoid perfect consonances (especially octaves) on strong beats. They tend to stick out and undermine the sense of forward motion. Perfect intervals on weak beats are less problematic, although we still tend to prefer imperfect consonances.
 - D. Because strong-beat perfect consonances are especially attention-grabbing, they demand even more care. Do not write parallel fifths and octaves on successive strong beats.
5. Contrary motion is always good. Parallel motion is acceptable, assuming that the interval between the two voices is an imperfect consonance. The added voice will necessarily involve a lot of oblique motion (from strong beats to weak beats), which should cause no problems.
6. Avoid simultaneous leaps in both voices.
7. Never allow the voices to cross. Also avoid overlap (for example, the bass should not go higher than the previous note in the melody).

8. Never repeat a note without intervening notes. Otherwise, you might just as well be writing first-species counterpoint.
9. Although the *cantus firmus* still has a conservative range (generally about a sixth), the added voice is likely to have a range of about an octave or perhaps a tenth.
10. Stepwise motion is desirable, but leaps are also common in second species. If a voice leaps, it is still likely to “balance” the leap with stepwise motion in the opposite direction. The larger the leap, the more important it is to move by step in the opposite direction immediately afterwards. A leap of an octave is allowable, provided that a stepwise change of direction follows. This can be very useful to correct range problems!
11. It is usually better for the added voice to step (rather than leap) into a strong beat.
12. Dissonant leaps are illegal (remember, a *melodic* perfect fourth is considered consonant, and a melodic diminished fourth from $\hat{3}$ to $\uparrow\hat{7}$ in a minor key is acceptable because it is easy to sing). Try not to leap twice in a row, particularly in the same direction. (This is not considered a serious problem if the leaps involve notes that are extremely easy to sing in succession: e.g., $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, and $\hat{5}$.)
13. When writing in a minor key, be sure to raise $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$ when appropriate (i.e., when approaching the tonic). Be careful to avoid the A2 between $\downarrow\hat{6}$ and $\uparrow\hat{7}$. It is generally unwise to leap away from $\hat{7}$ and especially from $\hat{6}$ in the melody.
14. You may use either a 2:1 or a 1:1 rhythmic relationship for the penultimate note of the *cantus firmus*. If the *cantus firmus* is written in whole notes, this means that the next-to-last measure in the added voice may consist of either one whole note or two half notes.
15. Traditionally, both voices end with a long note on $\hat{1}$. More recently, it is considered acceptable for the upper voice to end on $\hat{3}$. The upper voice must approach its final note by step. The lower voice may either approach the final $\hat{1}$ by step or may leap from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$. (A direct octave is acceptable because the upper voice will be moving by step.)

Below is an example of good second-species counterpoint written above a given *cantus firmus*. Passing tones have been marked with a “P.” Notice that all harmonic dissonances are passing tones; however, passing tones are not necessarily dissonant. As long as the line moves by step in the same direction, the motion may be described as “passing” whether or not some notes are dissonant.

The musical score shows two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains the added voice. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains the *cantus firmus*. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is common time (C). The added voice has passing tones marked with "P" above it. The notes in the added voice are: 3, 2, 6, 3, 3, 2, 5, 3, 3, 5, 6, 3, 8, 7, 6, 5, 8. The notes in the cantus firmus are: G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G.