

HARMONY - 1 BASICS/ROOT POSITIONS

STYLE

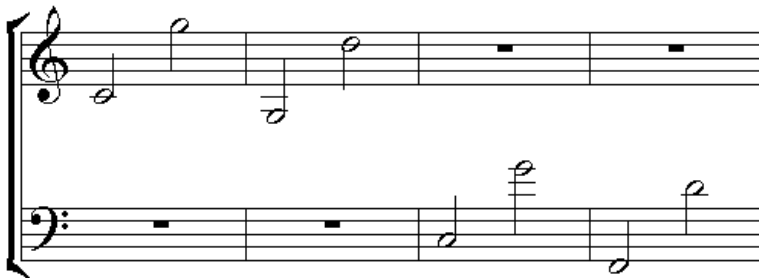
We begin learning what could be called hymn-tune style, i.e. 4-part harmony for voices, virtually one chord per note. No better way has been found as a beginning, but please be clear that as soon as this is mastered, we do all in our power to avoid it, in favour of something more enterprising and elegant. For although all rules can be broken, we need to learn what it is we are breaking (not to mention why...).

Remember the GOLDEN rule:

TREBLE AND BASS ON THEIR OWN FIRST. Only when these are passed OK should you proceed to filling in the inner parts.

RANGES, MOVEMENT, SPACING

For normal purposes stick to these ranges: Sop C-G, Alto G-D, Tenor C-G, Bass F-D.



No voice should ever move any augmented interval, any compound interval (more than an octave) or any major seventh. Particularly watch for the augmented 2nd in the minor key.

Parts should not cross (e.g. Ten. higher than Alto)



or overlap (e.g. present Tenor note higher than previous Alto note).



However, any amount of overlapping is permitted when repeating the same chord in a new position. (So are consecutives, etc..(see below, Parallelism); it's like you are making a fresh start at this point.)



No two parts should be separated by more than an octave, except the Tenor and Bass (they frequently are, with good effect.) Break this rule and the chord breaks in two, also.

WHAT CHORDS TO USE

Some chords are edged tools, and need a little care (III, VII). Others are "bread-and-butter" and should predominate. The 3 Primary Triads (I, IV, V) are basic because they define the key clearly. Actually IV is used a bit less than V and I, which are virtually sufficient to define the key. The secondary triads: VI can be regarded as a substitute for I and ancillary to it (it has two notes in common); II, likewise stands in for IV, and III for V. However, overuse of these chords does NOT define the key so well, and in fact suggests a mode rather than a key. So secondary chords should appear less often than primary.

CHORD PROGRESSIONS

It matters what order the chords appear in. Some progressions, though possible, are not smooth and suggest poor technique. The following progressions are good, and recommended:

Bass rising a 2nd, falling a 3rd, any 4th or 5th. (We are talking about root positions here; there are more possibilities when inversions become involved.) So, avoiding III and VII for now, we have the following as good: I-II, IV-V, V-VI, then I-VI, VI-IV, IV-II. Lastly I-V, V-I, I-IV, IV-I, II-V (but hardly V-II because leading note could not rise a step). These are bad or at the very least not recommended to learners: V-IV, II-I (because falling a step). But VI-V is effective (there had to be an exception somewhere!) The rising 3rds VI-I, IV-VI, II-IV are actually possible, but only strong to weak rhythmically. This is because the second chord will always sound weaker than the first, so this had better coincide with the rhythm, not cut across it and thus nullify it. (For the same reason we have a rule never to repeat the same chord weak to strong, which again would aurally shift the barline. For some reason I have never understood, you ARE allowed to do it at the beginning of a piece - to my mind the worst possible place because here you are trying to ESTABLISH the rhythm!)

So... slinging a few chords together, here are some viable chord progressions:

I-VI-IV-V-I I-IV-II-V-VI IV-V-VI (care needed here) I-II-V-VI-IV and there will be others.

However, in the minor key II is a diminished chord and is not much used in root position. You must double its 3rd because the other two notes make a discord (dim 5th).

[Appendix on the use of III]

Use it sparingly. It is best preceded and followed by chords which have at least one note in common. It goes nicely to VI (Bass rising a 4th is good) - see The Old Hundredth. So don't use it next to II or IV. However there is one exceptional use permitted: I - III - IV - V to harmonise the descending major scale; this has become something of a cliché. In the minor key III is an augmented chord (double its 3rd, see rule 6 in next section). It should be prepared by V and should always be followed by VI.

DOUBLING

Because we have 3 notes per chord and 4 voices, something must be doubled every time.

Rule 1. NEVER double the leading note

Rule 2. Normally don't double a major 3rd. Learn the exceptions, don't invent them.

Rule 3. You don't HAVE to have a 5th every time. Sometimes 3 roots and one 3rd.

Rule 4. Don't omit the 3rd unless a deliberately bare effect is needed.

Rule 5 You may double a minor 3rd. In the progression V-VI (major key) you SHOULD double the 3rd. In the same progression (minor key) you must even double the major 3rd, to avoid other trouble.

(N.B. see the difference between say doubling E in I (C major) - this is a sensitive note and its emphasis would suggest the wrong tonic - and doubling the C in V-VI in C minor - here we are doubling the existing tonic note and thus helping to define the key.)

Rule 6 Don't double any note which is involved in a discord. Thus in VII we have to double the 3rd because the other two notes make a diminished 5th. In III in the minor (if you ever use it), again the 3rd because the other two make an augmented 5th. In the dominant 7th (which I hope you will soon freely use) we can't double the 3rd or the 7th. [By the

way, lots of mysteries will evaporate if you realise that V, V7 and VII are varieties of each other and obey more or less the same rules.]

PARALLELISM

Even in this simple style we are aiming at independence of movement (i.e. our first tentative step towards counterpoint) so we avoid parallelism, i.e. the melody dragging chords around with it which simply shadow it wherever it goes. Such thickening is equivalent to organ mutation stops and does not supply independent parts. Thus between ANY TWO PARTS we are forbidden parallel consecutive unisons or 8ves (which obviously merge into one part) and 5ths (not so obvious but still true) 4ths between the bass and any other part (OK between upper parts) but we are allowed consecutive 3rds, as we are now far enough up the harmonic series to avoid merging. [The reasoning here is deep in acoustic theory, and in most cases a major 3rd will follow a minor 3rd or vice versa, so it's not the same interval.] The best way to avoid forbidden consecutives is simple: let the parts move to the nearest note, and if the nearest note is the same pitch, so much the better. [IF ALL BEGINNERS STUCK TO THIS, THEY WOULD AVOID MOST ERRORS.] So all the progressions a 4th or 5th apart should be easy to write. It's harder to deal with stepwise motion. Let's take the two worst offenders: IV-V and V-VI. The secret here is: when the bass moves a step in root position, let all the other parts move in the opposite direction. In IV-V (key C) let the parts go thus:



But if the treble is given as A - B, take more care. You cannot make them all fall, so at least make the remaining two fall:



Ten. C - G (NOT C-B or C-D!!)



In other words, because the outer parts HAVE to rise, the other two should fall, to avoid parallelism.

Now V-VI:



thus doubling the 3rd as explained above.

Now for the trap. If you want to write VI-V, start with the doubled 3rd and reverse the above progression. Otherwise trouble.

One more exception: If the given soprano moves Dominant to Tonic (at the end!), you are allowed consecutives with the bass, because you are bound to do the same there. But do it in contrary motion! DON'T make Bass go Leading note to Tonic (see next section.)



EXPOSED 5THS & OCTAVES

A nasty rule this, and it has caught many a student out (and some great composers). The rule runs as follows (and you should memorise it word for word). "If the two outer parts move to a perfect 5th or octave by similar motion, then the top part should move by step, otherwise an exposed 5th or octave occurs." [The reasoning behind this is rather obscure, and has been explained thus: Suppose you have treble G-C (up) and Bass B-C. then it is supposed that we "hear" the treble as G-a-b-C, thus producing the consecutives at the last moment.



Not very convincing because the same ought to be true if you exchange the parts. But the fact remains that it does seem to throw the resulting 8ve into undue prominence.] Haydn not only gets away with it in his Austrian Hymn (end of 2nd phrase) but breaks two other rules in the process. But then, as he said, "The rules are my very obedient humble servants." Meanwhile, we aren't Haydn. Or Bach. So conform, please.

Note well that this rule applies only to the treble and bass (which are normally written first before the other two anyway.)

CADENCES

A cadence is a phrase ending, whether permanent ("Full Close") or temporary ("Half Close"). A cadence is identified partly by its rhythmic structure, partly by its position in the piece, and partly by its harmonies. A sequence of two basic chords is required to make a satisfactory cadence:

Perfect Cadence: V - I

Plagal Cadence: IV - I

Imperfect Cadence: Anything - V (I -V, II -V, IV -V, VI -V)

Interrupted Cadence: V - anything but I. (though there's little choice but VI at this stage).

Use of the cadences:

Perfect: to end virtually all pieces, or to end a main section. Sounds finished.

Plagal: Also at the end, also sounds finished. Very often used after a Perfect Cadence, as an extra bit of finality. For that reason (and another obvious one) is also known as the "Amen" Cadence.

Imperfect: Used at the end of *subsidiary* phrases. Sounds unfinished.

Interrupted: Used to avoid the finality of a Perfect Cadence. Sounds unfinished. Sometimes known as the "Surprise Cadence" because after V the ear expects I.