

HARMONY - 3 /DECORATIONS

Most music does NOT consist of a string of chords, one to each melody note. Any or all of your four parts can be decorated, i.e. have inessential notes. This rather academic term is used to distinguish from "essential" i.e. part of the chord. When a note is not part of a chord it is "inessential". More commonly, we talk about harmony notes versus passing notes. But passing notes are but one of several categories we need to study.

1) PASSING NOTES are inessential notes that lie stepwise between two harmony notes. Usually we fill in the leap of a 3rd with the intervening note:



so the soprano would have two quavers to the bass's one crotchet. We can also fill in the leap of a 4th with two successive passing notes:



by adjusting the rhythm.

You can approach a passing note from the resolution note thus C D C or C B C; then it is called an auxiliary note. You can follow one by the other: CDCBC producing a Turn, or CBCDC, an Inverted Turn.



There is also a cool figure called the Nota Cambiata: CDBC which is obviously an abridged Turn.



However all these are unaccented passing notes, i.e. they must be placed on weak beats.

2) ACCENTED PASSING NOTES.

When the passing note falls on the beat we have to obey a rule: "You must not sound an accented discord against its own resolution, except in the bass." In other words, the D must not be struck with a simultaneous C in the tenor, say. The reason is that the D stands in place of, and is equivalent to C.



Good Poor

I don't think anybody knows why it's a different matter when the bass has it, but it is so:



Good

is perfectly acceptable.

Now, why do we call the above D a passing note? Well, we shouldn't, unless the preceding note was E. Then it is an *accented passing note*. If it is approached by leap (say from G below) then it is called an *appoggiatura*. If it is approached from the same note (D) then it is called a *suspension*. (Suspensions are often tied.) If it is approached from C below, then it is an *accented auxiliary note*. But to all types the above discord rule applies strictly. (The term *appoggiatura* is often applied indiscriminately to all types.)

One should use both types of passing note freely. The unaccented variety produces a smooth, bland effect; the discordant variety (best in the top part) more adventure, interest, drama even. Practise using them for a while, before going on to the remaining types. Your music should now be more interesting, as we work a little closer to true counterpoint (the essence of which is really to have a different rhythm in every part.) So mix the rhythms now. Where there is a repeated note, consider using a longer note value or tie instead. Where a quaver appears, perhaps you could have a dotted crotchet before it, and so on. The only trouble with liberal use of passing notes is that your melodies may lack leaps. Good melodies are a judicious mixture of steps and leaps, so keep an eye out for that. It's no longer enough to avoid consecutives and other errors; we must look horizontally also, to make effective melodic parts. (Not always possible in the inner voices.)

PARALLEL PASSING NOTES

Two parts can effectively use passing notes simultaneously. In this case they should either move in parallel 3rds or 6ths, or cross the same passing note in opposite directions (an 8ve apart).



Or



CHROMATIC PASSING NOTES

When you are happy with the above, try some chromatic decorations (not too many or it could get sentimental or gauche):



Provided these don't achieve a modulation (in which case they would be essential rather than decorative) we stay in the same key. After all, chromatic means coloured, and that's what we achieve. Again, these go nicely in parallel, but both parts should move the same interval. E.g.:



NOT



which would confuse the key.

HARMONIC OR MELODIC MINOR?

This could be an appropriate point to tackle this vexed question. It all revolves round the desire to avoid the augmented 2nd when you pass from 6th to 7th degree of the minor scale or vice versa. Actually there is little need to avoid it in instrumental music. Voices are supposed to find it difficult. But perhaps it is more a matter of what sounds smoothest...

Step 1: Decide whether the two notes (6th and 7th) are both *harmony* notes, both *passing* notes, or *one* harmony, the *other* passing.

Step 2: If both are the same, **IN THE SAME PART**, then use melodic form according to direction, even if this results in an altered chord. E.g. in A minor:

I b IV? V I

giving a funny-looking chord IV

or

I V? IV b I b

Giving a new form of V.

But both these slightly bizarre procedures are normally avoided by having the 6th in one voice and the 7th in another:

So that we can keep to the *harmonic minor scale*, which is the basic true key.

Step 3: If one is a harmony note, the other a passing note, then the *harmony* note decides. Use the harmonic minor form (obvious really) and the other note must take the melodic form to agree with the harmony note. To make that clearer:

or

You see? Even though this may give you the ascending form of the melodic actually falling, or the descending form actually rising. What you can't do is something like this:



because this is harmonic nonsense (IV with sharpened 3rd going to I.) You can only use IV with sharpened 3rd if it is followed by V with its (normally) sharpened 3rd. Likewise V with flattened 3rd is only viable when followed by IV with its (normally) flat 3rd. (Not that we would follow IV by V...)

Hope that this is all clear!

RISING RESOLUTIONS

Accented non-essential notes resolve a step on to a harmony note. Most often they fall, but can they rise? Yes, but please observe two points:

- If the note rises a semitone on to a concord, no problem.
- If the note rises a tone, don't let it be the only one; have another part in parallel 3rds or 6ths rising diatonically. So the rule is: "Don't rise a TONE on your OWN." Examples:



Is rough.



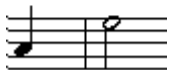
are good. Note, Either alto OR tenor OR both can have the appoggiatura here.

MORE DECORATION TYPES

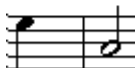
- Échappée: Move a step then leap in the opposite direction:



b) Anticipation: Get to the next note early (on a weak beat):



and the cliché:



at a cadence.

Even a passing note can be anticipated:



3 Resolving on a new chord

Accented non-essential notes (appoggiaturas, suspensions, accented passing notes, accented auxiliary notes) all obey the discord rule, yes? "Don't sound the discord against its own resolution, except in the bass". But did you know that at the moment of resolution, a new chord may be used, as long as the discord resolves on to part of it? Simple example:



and so on.