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Chapter 5: The Transition of chords

1. Chord Transitions and Their Functions

When a chord changes to another form during repetition, it's termed as a *chord transition*. This change can involve altering the melody position, the change of the spacing, or both simultaneously.

The change of a melody from one chord tone to another is termed as a chordal melodic position shift. This holds significant importance in the development of the melody, allowing the continuity of melodic and rhythmic movement without altering the chords, thereby avoiding chaotic harmonic progressions caused by excessive chord changes.

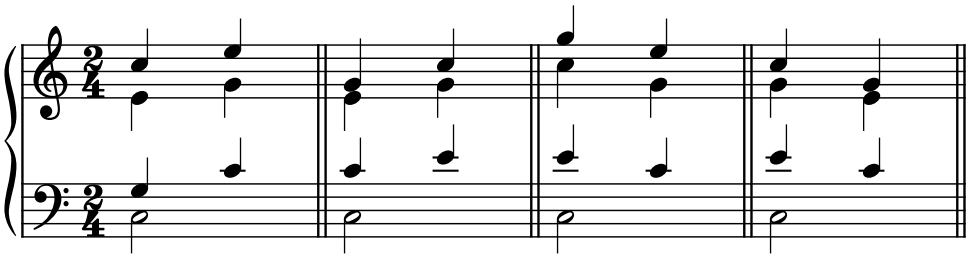
Changes in spacing (from close to open or vice versa) often accompany shifts in melody positions. These alterations in arrangement sometimes serve technical purposes (facilitating connections, adhering to patterns, ensuring smooth voice leading, etc.).

1. Methods of Chord Transition

When the melody progresses by third or fourth, two scenarios can occur:

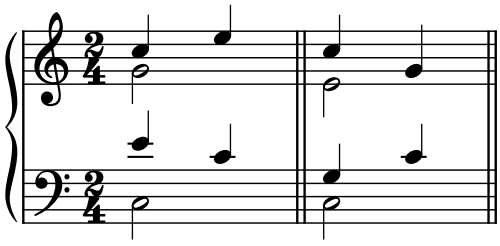
a. The alto and tenor parts shift in the same direction to the nearest chord tone while maintaining the spacing (parallel transition).

Example 5-70



b. The alto remains stationary while the tenor and soprano parts mutually transition in opposite directions (contrary transition).

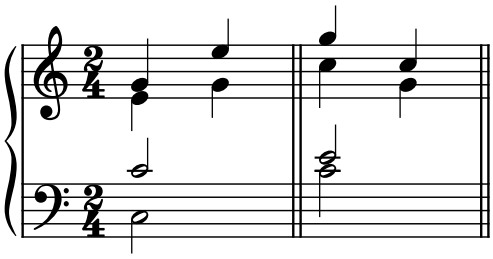
Example 5-71



From the above, it's evident that when the soprano ascends, the spacing shifts from close to open, while a descent results in the opposite change from open to dense.

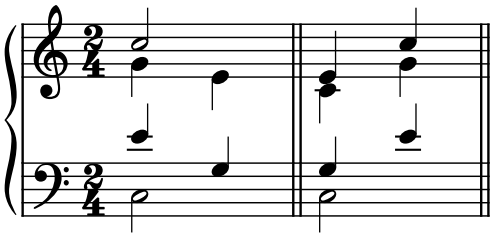
When the melody progresses by fifth or sixth, and the alto progresses in the same direction while the tenor remains stationary, a change in spacing also occurs (oblique transition):

Example 5-72



It's clear that in the latter two scenarios (examples 5-71 and 5-72), two parts undergoing transitions mutually exchange their positions. In example 5-71 (measure 1), the soprano features the previously present **e** note from the tenor, while the **c** note from the soprano moves to the tenor. In example 5-72 (measure 1), the soprano (**g**-**e**) and alto (**e**-**g**) undergo the same exchange.[①]

Example 5-73



2. Practice Guidelines

Earlier, we required that in harmonizing melodies using the harmonic or melodic connection methods with triads in root position, each exercise should maintain a consistent spacing throughout (either close or open). Now, when two different triads are being juxtaposed, it's still not possible to have leaps in all

① When technically necessary, the soprano part can remain stationary while the alto and tenor parts mutually exchange, or even allowing the upper three voices to undergo a 'dual' transition in the same direction.

three upper voices while altering the spacing. However, when two triads of the same quality are juxtaposed, employing chord transition can facilitate melodic leaps while changing the spacing simultaneously.

Before harmonizing the following melodies, an analysis of their structures is necessary:

a. Firstly, identify which thirds progress as transitions within the same triad and which thirds are the result of melodic connections between different triads. (For example, in C major, **f**-**d** might be a melodic connection between S—D, while **c**-**a** could potentially be a chord transition of the subdominant chords or a melodic connection between T—S.)

b. Determine all chord transitions displayed as leaps of a fourth within these melodies.

c. Since ascending leaps of a fifth or sixth necessitate a shift from a close to an open spacing, and descending ones require a shift from an open to a close spacing, it's essential to prepare for such leaps in advance. Typically, before such extensive leaps in the melody, there are third or fourth present. In these progressions, we know that the spacing can remain static, shift from close to open or vice versa. Therefore, this preparation is entirely achievable. If such large interval leaps appear at the beginning, determining the first chord' spacing accordingly becomes crucial.