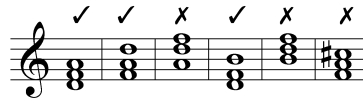


## T251 / Three-part counterpoint: first species

With this species, we return to a basic whole-note against whole-note texture, but now adding counterpoints simultaneously above and below the cantus firmus to create a three-part texture (CF is always the middle voice).

*Vertical dimension.* You can use any major or minor 5/3 or 6/3 chords. Diminished chords can be used only in 6/3 position.

- No 6/4 chords of any quality
- No 5/3 diminished chords
- No augmented chords of any kind



*Sonorities.* Prefer complete triads (each voice with a different pitch class). If that's not possible, aim for 8/3 or 8/6 sonority. An 8/5 ("empty fifths") or 8/1 sonority should only be found at beginning or endings.

*Dissonances.* This is an entirely consonant species. The only adjustment to our two-part way of thinking is that among the upper voices, P4, A4 and d5 are allowed as vertical intervals (the last two only as members of a 6/3 chord).

- A P4 between the bass and any upper voice is still considered a dissonance
- No dissonant suspensions; no seconds or sevenths in the texture.

*Motion between pairs of voices.* As always, avoid parallel 5ths and 8ves. Similar motion into a 5th or 8ve ("hidden" or "direct" fifths/octaves) is allowed, but try not to emphasize such motion.

- Emphasis might arise from both voices leaping into the 5th or 8ve; to soften the effect, try moving the remaining voice by step in contrary motion to the others.

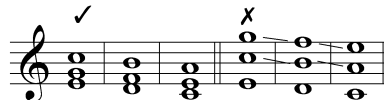
*Horizontal dimension.* As the complexity of the vertical dimension increases, and the number of relationships among voices grows, it becomes correspondingly harder to shape individual lines. But all of the familiar principles that create good lines still hold: strive to uphold them as much as possible.

- Dissonant leaps within a single line are still forbidden!

*Tied notes.* One instance of tied whole-notes is fine in each line.

*Parallel 6/3 chords:* So-called "fauxbourdon" technique, parallel 6/3 chords in series, is fine for 3 or 4 notes.

- Use only with P4 between upper voices—not P5!



*Ficta.* Within the body of the exercise, use a flat as needed to shape a line or sonority (e.g., to avoid a diminished 5/3 or a tritone leap), but avoid raising any notes (this would be cadential ficta, and for now cadences will be given to you).

*Lowest voice.* The lowest voice will probably leap more than the others, especially at cadences; but you're not trying to create compelling "root motion" among successive "chords" (as in tonal music). Rather, you're trying to shape the best *melodic* line possible, given the constraints of finding a good sonority.

- Harmonic function is not a consideration at all.

*Spacing/Range.* Here, all voices are written in a different clef; keep voices close together if possible, and try to avoid using ledger lines. Avoid voice crossing.

*Elaborations.* Once you get comfortable with the basic whole-note texture, the next step can be to elaborate one voice—ornamenting its underlying first-species nature through the second- or fourth-species idioms. Especially at first, avoid dissonant suspensions; consonant syncopations are fine, however. The illustrations below show one such elaboration.

## Examples of three-part counterpoint

Ex. 1a

CF

Ex. 1a is a three-part counterpoint exercise. The top staff (Treble) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6. The middle staff (Bass) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff (Alto) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

*The same example with an elaborated top part (and cadential elaboration for lower part):*

Ex. 1b

CF

Ex. 1b is an elaborated version of Ex. 1a. The top staff (Treble) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6. The middle staff (Bass) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff (Alto) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

*Another example of three-part counterpoint:*

Ex. 2

CF

Ex. 2 is another example of three-part counterpoint. The top staff (Treble) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6. The middle staff (Bass) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff (Alto) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of half notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.