Part-Writing: The Horizontal Rules
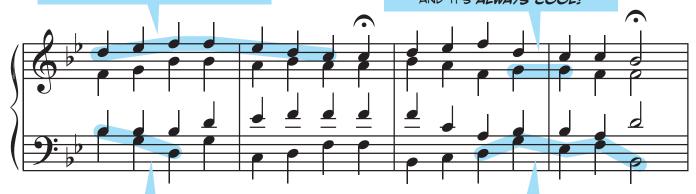
THE **SUPREME GOAL** OF PART-WRITING IS **GOOD VOICE LEADING...** MAKING EACH INDIVIDUAL VOICE PART **EASY TO SING** BY AVOIDING **AWKWARD INTERVALS** OR **LARGE LEAPS!**

BEFORE WE GET TO THE SPECIFIC **DOS** AND **DON'TS,** LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT SOME **IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS** OF FOUR-VOICE PART-WRITING:

NOTE HOW EACH VOICE MOVES AS **LITTLE** AS **POSSIBLE,** GOING TO THE **NEAREST CHORD TONE** IN EACH SUBSEQUENT CHORD!

IN SOME CASES, THE VOICE CAN SIMPLY STAY ON THE **SAME NOTE.** THIS IS CALLED **KEEPING THE COMMON TONE,** AND IT'S **ALWAYS COOL!**

IT'S COMMON FOR THE BASS TO MOVE IN THE **OPPOSITE DIRECTION** OF THE **UPPER THREE VOICES.** THIS IS CALLED **CONTRARY MOTION** AND IT HELPS MAINTAIN **VOICE INDEPENDENCE.**

THE BASS LINE, SINCE IT PROVIDES THE **FOUNDATION** OF THE **HARMONY** IN EACH CHORD, TENDS TO INCLUDE **LARGER LEAPS** THAN THE OTHER THREE VOICES, BUT THAT'S OKAY.

VOICE INDEPENDENCE?

FOUR-VOICE HARMONY IS A FORM OF **COUNTERPOINT,** WHICH IS THE COMBINATION OF **MORE THAN ONE MELODY** PLAYED SIMULTANEOUSLY. IN COUNTERPOINT, EACH VOICE IS **EQUALLY IMPORTANT;** NO VOICE IS GIVEN A ROLE OF ACCOMPANIMENT TO ANOTHER VOICE.
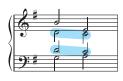
IN COUNTERPOINT, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR EACH VOICE TO BE **INDEPENDENT;** THAT IS, NO TWO VOICES SHOULD BE DOING THE **EXACT SAME THING.** IF TWO (OR MORE) VOICES WERE MOVING IN **PARALLEL,** THE **RICHNESS** OF THE **TEXTURE** WOULD BE **REDUCED.**

AS A RESULT, COMMON PRACTICE COMPOSERS WERE **VERY CONSISTENT** IN AVOIDING TWO OR MORE VOICES THAT MOVED IN **PARALLEL PERFECT OCTAVES, PARALLEL PERFECT FIFTHS,** OR **PARALLEL PERFECT UNISONS!**

THERE ARE ALSO A FEW OTHER RULES THAT APPLY TO THIS STYLE:

WHEN YOU HAVE THE **LEADING TONE** IN AN **OUTER VOICE** (SOPRANO OR BASS) IT MUST RESOLVE TO THE **TONIC** IN THE NEXT CHORD.

YOU MAY NOT MOVE **ANY** VOICE BY AN INTERVAL OF AN **AUGMENTED SECOND** OR AN **AUGMENTED FOURTH.**

PARALLEL OCTAVES!

PARALLEL FIFTHS!

PARALLEL UNISONS!

THE **GOOD NEWS:** YOU CAN AVOID ALL THREE OF THESE BY DOING THE FOLLOWING **WHENEVER POSSIBLE:**

1. KEEP THE COMMON TONE!
2. MOVE TO THE NEAREST CHORD TONE!
3. USE CONTRARY MOTION!