

Introduction to Part-Writing

AS WE LOOK AHEAD, WE'RE CONFRONTED WITH AN **UGLY TRUTH**:

THERE IS **A LOT** OF MUSIC IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD THAT IS WORTH STUDYING...

MUCH MORE THAN WE CAN HOPE TO COVER IN THE SPAN OF A FEW SEMESTERS.

SINCE WE CAN'T COVER IT ALL, WE HAVE TO CHOOSE A **SPECIFIC MUSICAL LANGUAGE** TO STUDY IN DEPTH.

LET'S START BY NARROWING THINGS DOWN TO THE **COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD**.



THE COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD IS THE MUSIC OF THE **BAROQUE, CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC ERAS** IN **EUROPE AND AMERICA**. THE NAME COMES FROM THE FACT THAT MOST COMPOSERS USED A **COMMON MUSICAL LANGUAGE** DURING THIS TIME.

IT'S ESPECIALLY WORTH STUDYING BECAUSE MOST OF THE PIECES COMMONLY PERFORMED IN CONCERT ARE FROM THIS PERIOD...

BUT THERE IS A **TON** OF COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD MUSIC... MORE THAN WE CAN HOPE TO COVER. IS THERE A **REPRESENTATIVE STYLE** WE CAN SINK OUR ACADEMIC TEETH INTO?

...AND THE LANGUAGE FORMS THE BASIS FOR THE MOST **POPULAR** MUSICAL STYLES TODAY.

FOUR-VOICE CHORALE WRITING IS A GOOD STYLE TO STUDY FOR **SEVERAL REASONS**:

CHORALES HAVE A FAST **HARMONIC RHYTHM**, ALLOWING FOR A LARGER NUMBER OF CHORDS PER EXERCISE.

A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD MUSIC CAN BE EASILY REDUCED TO **FOUR-VOICE COUNTERPOINT**.

THE **CANTATAS OF J.S. BACH** PROVIDE US WITH A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF CONSISTENTLY-WRITTEN FOUR-VOICE CHORALES.

ONE OF THE CHANGES TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH PROPOSED BY **MARTIN LUTHER** WAS TO ALLOW MEMBERS OF THE **CONGREGATION** TO PARTICIPATE IN THE **SINGING OF THE LITURGY**.

OF COURSE, LUTHER WAS BRANDED A **HERETIC** FOR HIS PROPOSALS, AND BEGAN HIS **OWN** CHURCH IN WHICH TO IMPLEMENT HIS IDEAS.



MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER, **J.S. BACH** WAS APPOINTED MUSICAL DIRECTOR AT THE **ST. THOMAS CHURCH** IN **LEIPZIG, GERMANY** AND, IN THE SPIRIT OF LUTHER, WROTE **FIVE YEARS'** WORTH OF **LITURGICAL MUSIC**.

EACH OF THESE WORKS, CALLED **CANTATAS**, WERE BUILT AROUND A **HYMN MELODY** HARMONIZED IN **FOUR PARTS** FOR CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.



BY ANALYZING BACH'S CANTATAS, WE CAN CONSTRUCT A **SET OF "RULES"** FOR WRITING IN FOUR-VOICE COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD MUSICAL STYLE, ALLOWING US TO STUDY IT IN DEPTH.