

BASS-SOPRANO COUNTERPOINT

Note vs. note

- 1) In general, tonal musical textures unfold along a framework of two principal lines, a soprano and bass. While these two lines preserve a degree of independence, they also both combine to imply together a coherent and well-directed harmonic progression.
- 2) In the following examples, the bass and soprano move for the most part at the same time in **note-vs.-note counterpoint**. (Except for #2, which is a special case, these are not complete pieces.)

1. *ant.* *[cons.]*

i *V*

2.

I *V* *I*

3. *ant.* *[cons.]*

I *V*

4.

c#: i *E(=III):V* *I*

5. *ant.* *[cons.]*

I [!] V

6. *ant.* *cons.*

I V V I

7. *ant.* *cons.*

I₆ [!] V V I

8. *ant.* *[cons.]*

I 7! V

Notice some **features of each individual line:**

- 3) each moves **within the range of an octave**;
- 4) there are **no diminished or augmented intervals**;
- 5) each line **mixes leaps and steps**;
- 6) each is for the most part **diatonic**.

The bass and soprano together

- 7) create intervals that are **consonant** [major/minor (thirds/)fourths and sixths, perfect fifths and octaves];
- 8) **are never farther apart than three octaves** (the lines may somewhat exceed the actual vocal ranges);
- 9) do not create **long chains** of (thirds/)fourths or sixths;
- 10) **do not approach perfect fifths/octaves in parallel motion**;
- 11) approach **perfect fifths/octaves in similar motion only by step in the soprano**;

- 12) **mix perfect consonances** [fifths, octaves] **and imperfect consonances** [(thirds/)/tenths, sixths];
- 13) **leap together in the same direction only infrequently;**
- 14) **maintain some distance from each other** (to leave room for the voices between them);
- 15) move for the most part in **uniform rhythmic values**, or patterns of values;
- 16) **begin** (except for #7) **on a root-position tonic chord**, and **end on a root-position tonic or dominant chord**.
- 17) Notice also
 - ♦ **repeated units** (including **sequences**);
 - ♦ **voice exchanges**; and
 - ♦ **how each line responds to itself as it unfolds**, filling in spaces it creates and continuing “promised” movement.

Introduction of dissonance

- 18) Notes in chords or in intervals that create **dissonance**—in other words, they are **relatively unstable**—connect **by step** with notes before and/or after them that create **consonance**, and are **relatively stable**. The dissonant members of chords or intervals depend on the preceding and/or following consonances for their musical meaning.

Passing tones

- 19) **Passing tones**—motion from and toward—carry the line from one consonant tone to another, as marked in Examples 9 and 10.

9.

10.