Species Counterpoint: Three Voices

Let's head back to Species I again, but add a third voice!

Uh... do we have to?

Relax... it actually helps us see how this all relates to the four-voice chorale style of our man Bach...

In general, the rules for melodies and counterpoint are the same for Species I in two voices.

We still need to use only consonant intervals between each upper voice and the bass...

But the interval between the upper two voices can be dissonant... it can even be a tritone!

The chords created should be triads. You can form incomplete triads occasionally by having a doubled root and a third, but avoid having open fifths except on the first or last chord.

Technically, the triads must be major and minor in root position and first inversion, and diminished triads in first inversion only.

But if you follow the rules above about consonant and dissonant intervals, it prevents you from using the wrong inversion!

As with two-voice counterpoint, parallel perfect intervals are forbidden between any voices!

And perfect intervals still need to be approached with care: you still can't go wrong with contrary, stepwise motion!

Avoiding parallel perfect intervals and second inversion triads? Keeping diminished triads in first inversion? These are all fantastic ideas!

However, in three voices, perfect intervals can also be approached with both voices moving in the same direction if the top voice moves by step, and if the third voice moves in contrary motion with the others.

Use them, Bach! Use them like the wind!

The chords created should be triads. You can form incomplete triads occasionally by having a doubled root and a third, but avoid having open fifths except on the first or last chord.

Technically, the triads must be major and minor in root position and first inversion, and diminished triads in first inversion only.

But if you follow the rules above about consonant and dissonant intervals, it prevents you from using the wrong inversion!

As with two-voice counterpoint, parallel perfect intervals are forbidden between any voices!

And perfect intervals still need to be approached with care: you still can't go wrong with contrary, stepwise motion!

Avoiding parallel perfect intervals and second inversion triads? Keeping diminished triads in first inversion? These are all fantastic ideas!

However, in three voices, perfect intervals can also be approached with both voices moving in the same direction if the top voice moves by step, and if the third voice moves in contrary motion with the others.

Use them, Bach! Use them like the wind!

Species Counterpoint: Three Voices

Let's head back to Species I again, but add a third voice!

Uh... do we have to?

Relax... it actually helps us see how this all relates to the four-voice chorale style of our man Bach...

In general, the rules for melodies and counterpoint are the same for Species I in two voices.

We still need to use only consonant intervals between each upper voice and the bass...

But the interval between the upper two voices can be dissonant... it can even be a tritone!

The chords created should be triads. You can form incomplete triads occasionally by having a doubled root and a third, but avoid having open fifths except on the first or last chord.

Technically, the triads must be major and minor in root position and first inversion, and diminished triads in first inversion only.

But if you follow the rules above about consonant and dissonant intervals, it prevents you from using the wrong inversion!

As with two-voice counterpoint, parallel perfect intervals are forbidden between any voices!

And perfect intervals still need to be approached with care: you still can't go wrong with contrary, stepwise motion!

Avoiding parallel perfect intervals and second inversion triads? Keeping diminished triads in first inversion? These are all fantastic ideas!

However, in three voices, perfect intervals can also be approached with both voices moving in the same direction if the top voice moves by step, and if the third voice moves in contrary motion with the others.

Use them, Bach! Use them like the wind!

Species Counterpoint: Three Voices

Let's head back to Species I again, but add a third voice!

Uh... do we have to?

Relax... it actually helps us see how this all relates to the four-voice chorale style of our man Bach...

In general, the rules for melodies and counterpoint are the same for Species I in two voices.

We still need to use only consonant intervals between each upper voice and the bass...

But the interval between the upper two voices can be dissonant... it can even be a tritone!

The chords created should be triads. You can form incomplete triads occasionally by having a doubled root and a third, but avoid having open fifths except on the first or last chord.

Technically, the triads must be major and minor in root position and first inversion, and diminished triads in first inversion only.

But if you follow the rules above about consonant and dissonant intervals, it prevents you from using the wrong inversion!

As with two-voice counterpoint, parallel perfect intervals are forbidden between any voices!

And perfect intervals still need to be approached with care: you still can't go wrong with contrary, stepwise motion!

Avoiding parallel perfect intervals and second inversion triads? Keeping diminished triads in first inversion? These are all fantastic ideas!

However, in three voices, perfect intervals can also be approached with both voices moving in the same direction if the top voice moves by step, and if the third voice moves in contrary motion with the others.

Use them, Bach! Use them like the wind!