

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 **DO'S** 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 NOTE** IN EACH SUBSEQUENT CHORD!

IN SOME CASES, THE VOICE CAN SIMPLY STAY ON THE **SAME NOTE**. THIS IS CALLED **KEEPING THE COMMON NOTE**, 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!**

PARALLEL OCTAVES!

PARALLEL FIFTHS!

PARALLEL UNISONS!

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

WHEN YOU HAVE THE **LEADING NOTE** 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**.

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

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