

Part-Writing: The Vertical Rules

TO BEST UNDERSTAND HOW COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD COMPOSERS WROTE MUSIC, WE ARE GOING TO LEARN HOW TO *WRITE MUSIC* USING THEIR MUSICAL STYLE.



IT'S *WRONG* TO THINK THESE WERE "RULES" FOR THE COMPOSERS... THEY WERE JUST WRITING WHAT *SOUNDED GOOD* TO THEM.

SO THE PATTERNS WE SEE IN THEIR MUSIC, THE THINGS THEY CONSISTENTLY *DID* OR *DIDN'T DO*, ARE GOING TO BECOME "RULES" FOR US IN OUR WRITING.

NOR SHOULD WE TREAT THESE AS RULES FOR WRITING MUSIC IN *GENERAL*... EACH STYLE OF WRITING HAS ITS *OWN* SET OF PATTERNS, AND THUS ITS OWN "RULEBOOK." AS A COMPOSER, YOU GET TO WRITE *YOUR OWN RULES* FOR YOUR OWN STYLE!

WE'RE GOING TO START WITH THE *VERTICAL RULES*... THAT IS, THE RULES THAT PERTAIN TO BUILDING A *SINGLE CHORD* IN *FOUR-VOICE HARMONY*.

FIRST, THE DISTANCE BETWEEN *SOPRANO AND ALTO* AND BETWEEN *ALTO AND TENOR* MUST BE AN *OCTAVE OR LESS*.

THE TENOR AND BASS CAN BE AS *FAR APART* AS YOU WANT!

SECOND, THE VOICES MUST BE KEPT IN THEIR *PROPER ORDER*; FOR EXAMPLE, THE *TENOR* SHOULDN'T BE *HIGHER* THAN THE *ALTO*. (BACH DID THIS NOW AND THEN, BUT IT WAS ONLY WHEN HE WANTED TO INCORPORATE SOME *SPECIAL MELODIC SHAPES*.)

THIRD, SINCE WE HAVE *FOUR VOICES* AND ONLY *THREE NOTES* IN A *TRIAD*, ONE OF THE NOTES SHOULD BE *DOUBLED*. FOR TRIADS IN *ROOT POSITION*, WE TYPICALLY DOUBLE THE *ROOT* OF THE CHORD UNLESS FORCED (BY OTHER RULES) TO DO OTHERWISE.

LASTLY, EACH VOICE SHOULD STAY IN ITS *RANGE*. THESE ARE *CONSERVATIVE* RANGES FOR *MODERN SINGERS*, BUT REMEMBER THAT BACH'S CHORALES WERE REALLY WRITTEN FOR *AMATEURS*: THE *COMMON PEOPLE* WHO ATTENDED *CHURCH* IN *LEIPZIG*!