First and Second Species Counterpoint in the Strict Style.

Glen Halls

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First Species Counterpoint refers to tones struck together, note against note. This is actually a point of departure for rather deep perceptual and aesthetic issues. Bear in mind that as we learn so-called rules of counterpoint, we are really dealing with a rather complex set of decisions and illusions.

I. We have the vertical relationship of one sound to another. This is already phenomenal. Why should this be perceived as two things, two sounds,- why not just one sound. This is very interesting- for a given pair of tones struck together we have at least three categories of information) the nature of the lower sound b) the nature of the higher sound and c) the nature of the relationship between the two.
In the conventional approach to counterpoint we describe the nature of the relationship in terms of classical intervallic consonance:

Perfect consonances are the 8ve, 5th, and unison

Imperfect Consonances are 3rd and 6ths

Dissonances and seconds and sevenths and fourths. (Fourths are contentious)

Now, at an abstract level, perhaps admittedly a crude one, we might suggest three types of relationship between two sounds, let's call them A and B. This might become useful when we look at counterpoint beyond the tonal context.

1. A = B The sounds are, for the most part, equivalent, and thus subject to simplification and perhaps greater subtlety.

2. A < B (or A > B) One part is understood as either simplification of the other. Melody and accompaniment might fit this model.

3. A not equal to B The sounds are, for the most part different. This inherently creates anxiety.

II. We have the position in time of the sound relative to that which precedes and follows it.
3. We have implication, the comparison of a given sound to an ideal version of that sound. This is, in a sense, the basis of tonality and tonal function, to be dealt with later. In the example below, the AE perfect fifth and the GD perfect fifth have entirely different meanings in the C drone context, even though intervallically they are the same.

Rules for First Species Counterpoint. (For two voices)

(note right away we have rules for the note-note relationship, and then other rules which describe situation.)

- Use only perfect and imperfect consonances.

- Use contrary and oblique motion most frequently.

- Use parallel motion in 3rd and sixths, but not more than three in a row.

- Avoid parallel motion in and similar motion to all perfect consonances.

- Avoid every diminished or augmented interval.

- After stepwise movement, try to avoid a skip in the same direction.

- Try not to leap into a perfect consonance.

- Following a 4th leap by step motion in the same direction is poor - Following a 3rd leap by step motion in the same direction is tolerable

- Following a sixth leap by step motion in the same direction is tolerable, but weak.
- The lines ought not be more than a 10th apart, except perhaps for climaxes. (Use discretion)

- Brief voice crossings are fine, but in a two voice context this will sound odd, except at fast tempos.

- If an 8ve leap must be used, follow it with an interval within the 8ve

- Two skips in a row must never exceed an 8ve.

Cadence Formulas. Basically, in the strict style—which takes as its point of departure chant melody, the melodic approach to the end of a phrase is step wise descent. With this in mind the term 'cadence formula' is sometimes used. Basically, it says that there is final motion in one voice by step, final motion in the other voice should be by 1/2 step. Interesting—what really makes a cadence.

( note, strict counterpoint pretty much assumes the modes of the major scale in which the only notable departure from a rh 1 lh 1/2 is the so-called Phrygian, ( or C major taken from E ) which naturally features a rh 1/2 and a lh 1 cadence.
Note, in the so-called minor mode, remembering that this style predates functional harmony, we have some choices. Normally one wishes to preserve the character of the mode, in this case A natural minor or Aeolian. However, staying exclusively in the mode yields only the following 'cadence'.

A. With the CF below, the following solution is not bad.
B. the CF above presents some different challenges. Try some of the options below and evaluate the best solution. In other words, sometimes the perfect solution is not available, so we look for the best solution under the circumstances.

Some thoughts to consider about the whole first species-just consonances? idea.

For 21st century ears could it not be argued that the major 2nd, the minor 7th, the major seventh, and even the tritone, maybe even the minor sixth, are consonant? The question is this- does the use of these intervals create an accent? If so, the ideal of transparency and continuous flow is compromised. Secondly, one might ask if a given interval might be somehow contextualized to be taken as consonant, for example, by placing it in a given 'chord' where all tones are understood as 'chord-tones'. Possible, but we then default to a higher hierarchical level, i.e. is this chord more or less consonant than the next chord, is this chord an accent? Even in Bachstyle free counterpoint minor 7ths and tritones are frequent in the context of 7th and diminished 7th chords. We then recommend certain ways of de-emphasizing the accent inherent in these chords and intervals. We speak of 'preparation', and perhaps of moving off of the offending intervals as soon as possible (unless we really want this accent, this dissonance, as an expressive effect) This will be touched upon again in the chapter and musical examples of free counterpoint.

One final thought. You know, the really cool thing about first species counterpoint, as alluded to at the top, is that we somehow create an illusion of two independent lines, rather than a succession of intervals, and we accomplish this without any rhythmic distinctions. This is why we avoid parallelism, for
example, - because it suggests a single thing, a single line, whereas contrary motion helps with separation into two perceived lines. Also, in this minimalist context events such as leaps and direction changes are very significant and somehow through, perhaps a sense of expectation and realization we create just enough tension and release to give a line momentum.

Second Species Counterpoint

Glen Halls

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Second Species counterpoint is two against one with respect to the cantus firmus. Simply put, if the CF is in whole notes, the second species counterpoint will be in half notes. If the CF is in 8th notes, the second species counterpoint will be in 16th notes. In freer contexts one might still encounter second species relations even though the rhythmic values are rather mixed. For example,

As one line moves twice as fast as the other, perceived separation of two parts is virtually assured. In addition to the ideal of polyphony, strict counterpoint forwards an ideal of transparency- of lack of accent and segmentation, thus a feeling of ease and timelessness. To help maintain this second ideal we have to be very careful about how these faster pitches are treated. (As an aside, in free or Bach-style counterpoint we do not have to be as careful about the faster line. As we see later on, Free counterpoint or 17th century counterpoint as it is sometimes called, takes as its point of departure the
triad. It is about harmonic progression, expressed melodically. One's first responsibility is to convey the harmony.

Second Species in the strict style, then, admits a dissonance: the passing tone. This passing tone is placed on a weak beat, and always fills in a diatonic third. In the strict style the pitches before and after the passing tone must be consonant. (Hint, a quick way to structure a 2nd species line is first to compose a first species solution in which a majority of pitches in the counterpoint are separated by thirds (as opposed to the stepwise ideal of first species counterpoint.) Then fill in with weak beat passing tones)

Now here are some very important rules for second species counterpoint (in the strict style)
- The dissonance (passing tone) may only be placed on the weak beat. (I.e. accented dissonances are to be avoided)
- One ought not initiate a leap from the dissonance. The is strictly a stepwise dissonance resolution situation. Note, the whole point of using the passing tone is to flatten-out leaps- to connect them by line.
- Note: the note on the unstressed beat does not always have to be a dissonant passing tone. A consonant passing tone is possible,

- Are there to be any leaps in second species? Yes, but not too many. We call this the consonant skip. Basically, instead of a dissonant passing tone or consonant passing tone on the weak beat, we leap into another consonance. In the Bach style this is very common, as the weak beat tone will most often be the third tone of triad. However, one should always attempt to move 'across the bar line' or into the next stress, if you will, by step. One might justify a consonant skip as a means of creating stepwise motion over the bar. Note, this stepwise motion should always 'answer' the leap in contrary motion.
- Are neighbor tones allowed? Yes and no. Dissonant neighbor tones are not allowed, consonant neighbor tones are allowed. Really, the only possible instance of a consonant passing tone is the 6-5 or 5-6 interval. Use this only if you cannot find any other solution. Being redundant by nature, it brings any linear momentum you have established to a halt. One exception to this concept however is as follows. One might justify a weak beat consonant passing tone as a pivot- a point in which the linear direction changes.

- Can a weak beat consonance by an 8ve or 5th? Yes, fifths being slightly better.

Do not overuse this weak beat 8ve. It is best reserved as a climax, or point of direction change.

Note, mathematically speaking we can see why weak beat 8ves are to be used sparingly. Texturally speaking we will perceive the change from three discrete pitches in a bar or over a pulse, to two. This is a loss of sonority. We call this 'weak'. This is why we often try to hide this weakness by using it as some other kind of accent, like a high point or direction change.

- Watch our for parallel fifths and 8ves on the strong beats. These are sometimes termed 'Accented' fifths or 8ves.
In fact, one really ought not to use fifths and especially octaves on the strong beat. I wouldn't call it wrong. There may well be some other justification for it, but it would sound like a premature cadence.

- On the contrary, "Hidden" or unaccented fifth and 8ves in consecutive measures is considered desirable and a little bit interesting. However, one ought not to do this more than three times in succession.

  ![Musical Notation]

- Two leaps in a row in the same direction? Only as a kind of registral transfer, followed by stepwise descent. Larger interval should precede the smaller. This would be an unusual situation, necessitated by a large leap like an 8ve in the CF.

  ![Musical Notation]

Some Tips.

There are two ways to fill in a diatonic third in 5th species: a) the passing tone b) the consonant skip-sometimes called a '4th substitution'. You can create a pretty nice line simply mixing up the two of these. Also, some, like FUX, suggest that 4th substitution-as it creates a direction change, is a fair means of concealing accented 8ves.
One last tip: the pros often use an 8ve leap within the same line both as a climax and also a means of spanning an awkward interval, in this case the 7th. Stepwise descent from a weak beat approached by 8ve leap is very common and very effective. Note also in the example below, the VOICES CROSS just before the 8ve leap. Very interesting, very common, and by the book.

Some other rules/conveniences:

a) In the strict style it is allowable to start begin the counterpoint on the unison on the weak beat. (Very similar to the weak beat 8ve discussed above)
Cadences.

By convention, it is permissible to cease the 2 to 1 relationship in the penultimate measure. Expressed in terms of scale degrees the rh counterpoint cadence will always either be 6 7 1 or just 7 1. For a lower counterpoint however, the typical cadence is 5-7 1 ( and 7 1) In the two voice setting in the strict style, a 4th is considered a dissonance, and therefore 6 7 1 or A B C would result in the A-D fourth, and would be considered dissonant.

In the minor mode it is necessary ( an expressive liberty also ) to raise the 6 and the 7 to avoid the augmented second leap.
Wait a minute- is "to avoid the augmented second leap" really a good enough reason to necessitate changing the mode? No, it is not. What is really happening here is that, frankly, the sound—the freshness of the new mode, is pleasing. Secondly, what we really wanted was the G# halfstep to strengthen the cadence. A subjective liberty and a subjective limit.

let us attempt a 2nd species counterpoint above. ( This is a very good example for classroom purposes. Nasty )
Note: the above solutions are not perfect. There may not be a perfect solution.