

Written for The Canadian Musician.

Simple Counterpoint.

HOW TO WRITE IT.

A series of articles especially intended for musical students.

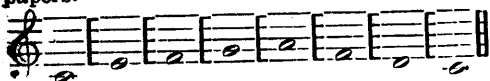
(Paper No. 5.)

The system of figuration entered according to Act of Parliament, 1894, in the Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, Canada.

THE FIRST SPECIES.

As the ordinary rules for writing simple counterpoint have been laid down over and over again in the text books of the great authorities on the subject, it would be but tedious to repeat them once more here. It is taken for granted that the student is well grounded in harmony (at least up to chords of the ninth and suspensions), and, as suggested in our introductory remarks, that he has by him Dr. Bridge's excellent little primer, or some other accepted standard work on Counterpoint. Instead, therefore, of laying down the law as to what has not to be done, the practical side of the question will be taken up, viz., what has to be done and how to do it, special attention being given to those pitfalls into which the ordinary novice so often stumbles.

With this end in view the following Canto Fermo has been chosen for writing examples in the major key, and although of necessity a short one it will answer the purpose of these papers:—



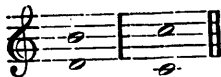
The usual method of procedure in the study of counterpoint is to commence with the first species in two parts, then proceeding to the second, third, fourth and fifth species in succession, all in two parts; after which the same ground is again gone over in three parts, and then again in four parts; this is followed by combining two, or at the most three, of the species with the C. F. and then the important question of writing three florid parts against the C. F. is taken up, finally proceeding to five, six, seven and eight parts all in the first species, or with one or more parts in the fifth, and with this accomplished the study of simple counterpoint is completed.

The above is the method adopted by Albrechtsberger, Cherubini, and more recently by Ebenezer Prout; other plans, however, have been suggested notably those of Richter and Macfarren. E. F. Richter, professor of harmony, etc., at the Conservatorium of Music, Leipzig, has attempted to revolutionize the study of counterpoint, by amalgamating the second and fourth into one species, and omitting altogether the fifth, also by commencing with four parts at first, then proceeding backwards, as it were, to three and two parts, and afterwards on to five, six, seven and eight parts; florid counterpoint is treated of in conjunction with a rhythmical Canto Fermo or chorale. The plan advocated by the late Sir G. A. Macfarren, professor of music at the University of Cambridge, is that of taking each of the species successively in two, three, four and even five parts before proceeding to the next; and, remembering the necessity of constructing counterpoint on a harmonic basis, this method

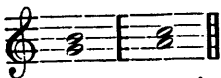
has always appealed to the writer as being more feasible than the older method which obtained, when music was in its infancy and harmony, as a separate study practically unknown.

The first exercise for the student to attack is ON ADDING A COUNTERPOINT ABOVE A GIVEN CANTO FERMO.

However paradoxical it may appear it is often advisable to begin at the end, that is to say to decide upon the cadence at first; taking the Canto Fermo as given above, the best cadence is:—



Of course the lowest part, though written on the treble staff, must always be regarded as the bass. Before commencing an exercise it is often well to inspect the Canto Fermo, in order to see if there is any point which calls for special attention; in the present case the fourth and fifth measures, V—VI, suggest the interrupted cadence and may be harmonized as follows:—



Having therefore decided on the cadence, and a landing stage, as it were, in the middle of the exercise, it is now time to think of starting at the beginning. For the purpose of saving space, the examples will be written in short score, but the student is advised to write his exercises in open score and so become familiar with the proper Alto and Tenor clefs.

The first note C suggests the Tonic chord, but E must not be chosen for the treble, as it is a rule to commence with a perfect interval, either the fifth or the octave; in this case either G or C may be chosen, the next note perhaps will decide on which of the two is the better. The second note E must be treated as the first inversion of the Tonic chord, and here again either G or C may be chosen. If G be taken for the first measure, then C in the second will be in similar motion, C in the first and G in the second will produce a much bolder effect, not that there is much objection to similar motion between the notes of the same chord. The student might reasonably ask whether two C's or two G's would be objectionable, and that immediately raises a question over which contrapuntal authorities seem agreed to differ.* The natural conclusion at which one would arrive from a perusal of the leading works on counterpoint is, that the immediate repetition

* ALBRECHTSBERGER. "The counterpoint in two part composition should not continue stationary during more than three bars." Rule 10.

BRIDGE. "The immediate repetition of a note is forbidden in all species except the first." Page 8, Par. 31.

CHERUBINI. "These examples are in conformity with the rules of strict counterpoint of the first order." They contain repeated notes. Ex. 29, 30, page 11.

FUX. Two examples quoted and sanctioned by Ouseley contain repeated notes. Ouseley, page 10.

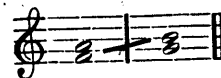
MACFARREN. "To repeat or continue a note for two bars or more is not melody but monotone, and therefore most undesirable in counterpoint of two parts." Page 19, par. 51.

PROUT. "It is always weak to repeat the same note in one of the extreme parts of the harmony—the treble and the bass—especially in the bass." Page 22, par. 24.

RICHTER. "The bass must never remain stationary, except for some special object, such as the preparation of a discord." Rule 5, page 18. No mention is made of the upper part.

of a note though not absolutely wrong is certainly inexpedient, especially in the bass.

The third note, F, IV preceeding V, must bear a chord of the $\frac{5}{3}$ and not a common chord, and here again the choice appears at first to lay between two notes, A and D, but a little thought will show that there is only one this time, the D; for, as the following measure has been decided upon, if A were chosen, there would then result the following progression:—



a progression forbidden by every master of counterpoint on account of the false relation of the tritone between the F in the first chord and the B in the other. The student might reasonably now point out that the same false relation would be present if D were chosen, and indeed this is true, but the bad effect is not present; this is accounted for by the skip from D to B in the next chord; again two major thirds moving by the step of a major second, as in this case, are forbidden; two major thirds moving by the step of a minor second are not at all objectionable.

There now only remains the sixth note F, but it is a note of importance, following VI and preceeding II, it may bear either a $\frac{5}{3}$ or a $\frac{6}{4}$ chord, so that there are three notes A, C and D from which to choose; D is objectionable, as there would then be a repetition of the melody in the third and fourth measures, this is unadvisable and especially so in such a short Canto Fermo; C is also objectionable, both on account of the C in the previous measure and in as much as it is a perfect interval, the imperfect intervals are undoubtedly preferable to modern ears, although the custom of commencing with a fifth in the upper part is still permissible; there then remains the A, and this is quite satisfactory, a succession of more than three thirds however would be forbidden. The exercise, now completed, is as follows;—



The student should not rest satisfied with writing one correct counterpoint only to a Canto Fermo, let him attempt a second, and even a third, thereby he will gain a greater command of the contrapuntal resources at his disposal, and a quicker conception of the possibilities of the art.

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[To be Continued.]

The Composer's Limitations.

As a composer has only twenty-five semitones or musical units with which to construct his melodies,—a melody rarely exceeding the compass of two octaves,—it follows, as mathematics will show, that the possible combinations of these units are absolutely limited, and that therefore coincidences and repetitions of combinations are, sooner or later, not only probable, but scientifically inevitable.—BERNARD DE KOVEN.