

First-Species Counterpoint

We already know that one melodic tone most often moves to another in the smoothest manner: by step or by third. By extension, when we combine two voices, we must consider not only the intervallic movement *within* an individual voice, but also the intervals formed *between* the two voices. Example 4.5 presents an example of first-species counterpoint. The horizontal (melodic) intervals formed within each line are marked above the upper voice and below the lower voice. The vertical (harmonic) intervals formed between the two lines are labeled between the lines. All compound intervals are reduced to their simple forms (e.g., a tenth is labeled as a third). The direction and resulting shape, or contour, of each voice is traced by straight lines that appear between the pitches.

EXAMPLE 4.5

The musical notation for Example 4.5 consists of two staves, upper and lower, with a brace on the left. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. Melodic intervals are labeled above the upper staff and below the lower staff. Harmonic intervals are labeled between the two staves. The intervals are as follows:

Melodic Interval (Upper)	Melodic Interval (Lower)	Harmonic Interval
2	2	5
3	3	3
2	2	3
2	4	3
2	2	6
2	2	8
2	3	3
2	2	6
2	2	8

We'll begin our analysis of Example 4.5 by examining individual lines, and then we'll address the ways the lines combine.

1. Each line moves primarily by step (major and minor seconds); leaps are restricted to small intervals (mostly thirds and a single fourth).
2. Each line's contour is varied such that the direction changes after every pitch or two.
3. The combination of lines produces only consonant harmonic intervals, most of which are imperfect (thirds and sixths). The example begins and ends with perfect consonances, and there is only one perfect consonance within the example (an octave). Notice that there are no perfect fourths; they are very unstable in two-voice counterpoint and considered to be a dissonance.
4. The two melodies rarely move in the same direction; rather, each melody maintains its own independence.

Consonant harmonic intervals (P8, P5, and M and m thirds and 6ths, and P1) are the only intervals permitted in first-species counterpoint. The perfect fourth may not be used. Melodic lines must be melodic and independent of one another, yet they must work together, creating only consonant intervals. The source of successful counterpoint is the contrapuntal motion that results from the combined play of voices, to which we now turn.