

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### DOUBLE COUNTERPOINT

Double Counterpoint is a process whereby a passage already written in two-part counterpoint is subjected to a particular kind of manipulation: the original lines change places and registers – the top part is transposed down to become the bottom part, and the bottom part is transposed up to become the top part. This kind of treatment is extremely common in 18<sup>th</sup> Century music and has its important place in all periods and styles. There are three kinds of double counterpoint: 1) double counterpoint at the octave, 2) at the 12<sup>th</sup>, and 3) at the 10<sup>th</sup>. The first of these – double counterpoint at the octave – is what composers used far more often than the other two types.

DOUBLE COUNTERPOINT AT THE OCTAVE. Both lines retain their original starting pitches. Example A below demonstrates:

(A)

Original:

Becomes:

Key of C

Notice that the original intervals are all inverted such that original 3rds become 6<sup>ths</sup>, 4<sup>ths</sup> become 5<sup>ths</sup>, etc. This is of course familiar to the student from the study of fundamentals involving interval inversion. Double counterpoint at the octave is very easy to accomplish; everything works out very well in all instances except one very important matter: in your original counterpoint, you must avoid a principal beat chord tone perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. This is necessary because that particular perfect 5<sup>th</sup> will become a principal beat chord tone perfect 4<sup>th</sup>, which must be avoided, as we have already learned. Note also that suspensions in the original become perfectly good suspensions after the parts have exchanged places. Happily, the easiest way is the most-used way by composers; once you understand the process, the rest is rather simple. For a quick glimpse at the resultant inversions, make the following pattern of numbers:

Original intervals:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Become:	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DOUBLE COUNTERPOINT AT THE 12<sup>TH</sup>. Far more difficult (but seldom used) is the process of double counterpoint at the 12<sup>th</sup>. The parts exchange registers as in double counterpoint at the octave, but one of parts does **not** retain its original pitch; instead it is transposed to the interval of a 12<sup>th</sup> (a compound 5<sup>th</sup>). The resultant intervals are:

Original intervals:	2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Become:	4 3 2 8 7 6 5

Notice that 3rds become 3rds; this will allow for plenty of 3rds in the original counterpoint, since they will become 3rds after inverting. But notice now that 6ths become **7ths**. This informs us that parallel 6ths cannot be used, since they will become parallel 7ths. This is an error very often committed by students, so be on your guard! The best way to work out a double counterpoint at the 12<sup>th</sup> is to write both versions more or less at the same time. Waste no time in finding out what your original will be like after being inverted! Write a few notes in two-part counterpoint, then immediately, directly below, work out the resultant counterpoint. Example B below demonstrates:

(B)

Key of am

5 6 3 5 4-3 3 2 3 4-5 3 8 3 etc.

8 7 3 8 2-3 3 4 3 9-8 3 5 3 etc.

Again, there are suspensions that are good in both versions. Reviewing the interval conversion pattern, we see that an original 2 – 3 suspension becomes a 9 – 8 (and vice versa). And a 7 – 6 suspension becomes a 4 – 5 suspension (and vice versa). This will be fine if the 5<sup>th</sup> is a diminished 5<sup>th</sup>. If the student follows the previous guidelines, double counterpoint at the 12<sup>th</sup> should be manageable.

DOUBLE COUNTERPOINT AT THE 10<sup>TH</sup>. The last type of double counterpoint, at the 10<sup>th</sup>, is the least often encountered and the most difficult to achieve successfully. Let us look at the interval conversion pattern:

Original intervals:	2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Become:	9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Note that original 3rds become octaves and vice versa, while original 6ths become 5ths, and vice versa. This tells us that parallel (or contrary motion) 3rds or 6ths may NOT be used; they can only be used one at a time. It is this severe restriction that makes double counterpoint at the 10<sup>th</sup> so difficult. It is absolutely necessary to compare the resultant with the original as you work out your counterpoint, just as was recommended for double counterpoint at the 12<sup>th</sup>. Examples of this type of double counterpoint are very rare in the music of Bach and his contemporaries, and quite understandably so. Study the example below for guidelines:

Original:

Becomes:

Once you have written a passage that will successfully work in double counterpoint at the octave, the resultant passage may be used at any time LATER in a piece, either in the original key, or transposed to another, closely related key. In analyzing a contrapuntal work of Bach, for instance, you will find this taking place very frequently, demonstrating a fundamental economy in the use of musical materials. In the inventions and fugues of Bach, a great portion of the unifying process is due to the application of double counterpoint in one way or another.

Take as an example the following passage, which was written with the intention of applying double counterpoint to it and using it later in another key. The original key is C Major. The resultant is in D Minor (a closely related key), which might be found somewhere in the composition later on. Here is the original:

Key of C

Becomes (later in the piece):

Key of dm

The key signature is still C Major but the passage is in d minor using accidentals as needed. This is extremely common in Bach's (and all other composer's) music!

Notice that in the later version, in D Minor, there is no change of key signature from the original C Major. This is quite typical, and should be kept in mind in all of the pieces written in this style. Also, notice the use of secondary dominants here and there. They are always waiting to be used to make a passage sound more convincing and interesting.

Double counterpoint procedures should be indicated in any analysis of inventions or fugues, as they form an integral part of the structure of such pieces and provide a very powerful unifying element to these compositions. Use these devices as you write *your* invention and *your* fugue!