

Handbook of Tonal Counterpoint



by

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PREFACE

This handbook leads the student through the techniques and procedures of tonal counterpoint as exemplified in the works of J. S. Bach. A thorough grasp of tonal harmony is essential before attempting to study this book.¹ There are, however, some aspects of chromatic harmony that do not have to be applied in this study: such chords as the Augmented Sixth and Neapolitan, though possible, are not absolutely essential and are not found that often in the works to be studied, and modulations to distant keys are not used.²

We will be using these: secondary dominants, secondary leading tone chords, modulation to closely related keys, all of the nonharmonic tones, the occasional borrowed chord (mixed mode), all of the usual cadence formations, and all of the basic principles the student has learned in the study of diatonic harmony.

The value of this study reaches far beyond the confines of 18th Century contrapuntal practice. Unlike tonal harmony, which has limited use in later styles of writing, counterpoint embodies many important principles and procedures which may be applied in any musical style. For students of composition who wish to express themselves in a contemporary idiom, this book will fortify them with a large reservoir of principles, procedures and concepts of inestimable value.

A significant departure from the previous format in the study of harmony is the reduction from four voices down to only two parts. At least half of this book is devoted to an examination of two-part writing, culminating in the composition of pieces in two-part form (AB) and two-part inventions. This is followed by counterpoint in three voices, with the ultimate goal of writing fugues in three voices, whether for keyboard, human voices, or three separate instruments.

¹ The author's Harmony and Theory, Parts 1 & 2, (Hal Leonard) for example.

² We will, however, have the occasion, from time to time, to modulate to a key that lies two fifths away in the circle of fifths. In these instances, the tonic key signature will be positioned midway between the two keys in the circle of fifths.