

4.2 Complex Subjects

Up to now, our subjects have consisted entirely of semibreves, and have thus supported the counterpoint in the manner of cantus firmi. It is time, however, to proceed to subjects with shorter note values, which means you will now have to write portions of counterpoint without cantus firmus support.

In species counterpoint exercises, every note of the cantus firmus was consonant, with the result that dissonant notes could occur only in the counterpoint.

From now on in fugue, however, each voice may act as a counterpoint to the other voice, with the result that dissonant notes will occur now in one voice, now in the other, and occasionally in both at once.

To be certain of your fugal counterpoint, you will have to be able to define every note of it either as a consonance or as a specific variety of dissonance. It will help to bear in mind that the following notes are always **consonant**:

All semibreves
All other notes struck at the beginning of the bar
All notes approached by leap
All notes quitted by leap (except the *nota cambiata* and the 'dip' suspension)

Whereas a consonant note may be of any duration, and may be involved in any permitted melodic activity, a dissonant note must still comply with the rules of second, third, fourth or fifth species, for example:

Minim 2 may be a passing note
Crotchets 2, 3 or 4, or any two of those crotchets, may be passing notes
Minim 1 may be dissonant—a suspension—if it is tied from the preceding minim 2 and falls a step to the following minim 2

Task 4.2.1—Copy the following fugue. Circle each dissonant note: if it is a passing note, label it P; if it is a suspension, label it S.

The foregoing fugue additionally illustrates three habits that are worth cultivating:

Make your countersubject as rhythmically independent of the subject as possible
Treat **crotchet 3**—whether it is part of the subject or the countersubject—
as a **passing note**
When a given **minim 1** is tied and falls a step, treat it—if possible—
as a **suspension**

Task 4.2.2—Devise a regular countersubject, in double counterpoint at the Octave, for each of the Set Two subjects.

Task 4.2.3—Plan the entries for two fugues on each subject, one beginning with the upper voice and the other with the lower voice.

Task 4.2.4—Compose your Set Two fugues.

Sometimes, in place of the usual cantus firmus ending, a subject may end with a suspension. In such a case, your countersubject should supply the cantus firmus framework for that suspension. In other words, you should write semibreves against the given minims and tied minims.

When a fugue on this type of subject begins with the upper voice, an alternative form of *inganno* is required which rises, rather than falls, to its concluding Third. Notice how, in the following fugue, an *inganno* of this kind does duty for the second entry's cadence:

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a fugue in B-flat major, 3/4 time. The first system shows the subject in the upper voice (treble clef) and the countersubject in the lower voice (bass clef). The subject begins with a half rest in the bass. The second system shows the subject in the lower voice and the countersubject in the upper voice. The subject ends with a rising *inganno* cadence.

Task 4.2.5—Copy the foregoing fugue. Circle and label the dissonances, as before, and mark the rising *inganno* at the end of the second entry.

Task 4.2.6—Devise a regular countersubject, in double counterpoint at the Octave, for each of the Set Three subjects.

Task 4.2.7—Plan the entries for two fugues on each subject, one beginning with the upper voice and the other with the lower voice.

Task 4.2.8—Compose your Set Three fugues. Be sure to use the rising *inganno* where necessary.

Longer subjects allow for the cultivation of further good habits:

As well as writing minims and crotchets against a given semibreve, you can often profitably write a semibreve against given minims and crotchets
Whenever a minor key presents you with the opportunity, use the melodic minor scale

Task 4.2.9—Copy the foregoing fugue. Number the bars, and label the subjects, the answers, the countersubjects, the codetta and the *inganno*. Notice how, depending on whether the ensuing direction is upwards or downwards, the sixth and seventh scale degrees are raised and lowered in accordance with the melodic minor scales of ‘D’ minor (subjects) and ‘A’ minor (answers).

Task 4.2.10—Compose a fugue with the same subject and countersubject as the fugue you have just copied, but beginning with the upper voice instead.

Task 4.2.11—Devise a regular countersubject, in double counterpoint at the Octave, for each of the Set Four [subjects](#).

Task 4.2.12—Plan the entries for two fugues on each subject, one beginning with the upper voice and the other with the lower voice.

Task 4.2.13—Compose your Set Four fugues.