

7.3 Stretto

Subjects may sometimes be designed to allow an entry to commence while the preceding entry is still in progress. These entries thus overlap in the manner of a canon, and form what is called a **stretto**.

To be workable, a stretto need not necessarily consist of self-sufficient, two-voice counterpoint. Rather, it may include Fourths in consonant positions (such as crotchet 1, minim 1 **not** tied from the preceding bar, or minim 2 tied to the following bar). Such a stretto may be assigned to the two upper voices of a fugue, and its consonant Fourths supported by free counterpoint (or even a pedal point) in the lowest voice.

Conversely, a stretto that **does** consist of self-sufficient, two-voice counterpoint may be assigned to any two of the three voices.

A given subject might be capable of one, two, or more different strettos, and discovering them is simply a matter of trial and error. First, try these possibilities at distances of two, four or six bars, placing the latter entry above and/or below the former entry:

a subject followed in stretto by a subject
a subject followed in stretto by an answer
an answer followed in stretto by a subject

If none of these seems to work, try changing the latter entry's first note to a minim 2.

With tonal subjects, you can also try this possibility:

an answer followed in stretto by an answer

Three strettos discovered by this method are shown below. The first two include Fourths in consonant positions (marked with an asterisk) and thus need support from a third, lower voice. The last one, however, consists of self-sufficient counterpoint, and may be assigned to the lowest voice plus either of the higher voices.

(Note that these strettos depend on a slight contrapuntal license, since they all involve the resolution of a suspended dissonance on crotchet 2.)

Four-bar stretto at the lower Octave (or Fifteenth):

Two-bar stretto at the upper Fifth (or Twelfth):

Two-bar stretto at the lower Eleventh (or Eighteenth):

Task 7.3.1 – The **subjects** in Set Five have potential strettos at four or six bars' distance; those in Set Seven at two bars' distance. Find the strettos.

The effect of stretto is climactic, and should therefore be unleashed later rather than earlier in the fugue.

A stretto frequently dictates which voices may participate in it, and requires those voices to enter in a particular order. That order therefore has to be observed by all three voices from the very start of the exposition, so that the allocation of entries to voices can continue in strict rotation when the stretto is finally reached. Thus, though a stretto may directly involve only a couple of entries in the final section, it indirectly governs the fugue's entire scheme of entries.

For these reasons, a stretto fugue must be planned in reverse.

(a) First, plan your final section to incorporate an advantageous disposition of the stretto. Remember that during the stretto the voices should occupy more widely dispersed ranges than during the exposition (reasonable limits for an instrumental fugue are C and c''').

- A stretto at the Fourth or Fifth with consonant Fourths is best allocated to the two upper voices within the first and second Octaves above c'.
- A contrapuntally self-sufficient stretto is best allocated to the two outer voices at the Fifteenth, Eighteenth or Nineteenth.

(b) Next, plan the exposition, bearing in mind that here too you must observe the ordering of voices that you have already decided upon for the stretto. In other words, if the middle voice is going to be followed by the highest voice in the stretto, then the middle voice must also be directly followed by the highest voice in the exposition (or, if the middle voice enters last, in the middle section).

The exposition orders possible for every stretto order are given in the following table, in which *l* = lowest voice, *m* = middle voice and *h* = highest voice:

exposition order	stretto order
<i>l-m-h, m-h-l</i>	<i>l-m, m-h</i>
<i>m-l-h</i>	<i>l-h</i>
<i>h-m-l, m-l-h</i>	<i>h-m, m-l</i>
<i>m-h-l</i>	<i>h-l</i>

(Note that the exposition orders *l-h-m* and *h-l-m* are unacceptable because the first two entries must be delivered by voices that are **adjacent**.)

Each of the stretto orders involving adjacent voices admits two possible exposition orders. In these cases, try to select an exposition order that assigns voices to subjects and answers differently from your stretto (remember that all three-voice expositions consist of, or commence with, subject–answer–subject).

For example, if you are dealing with a *m-h* subject–answer stretto (in which *m* has the subject), choose a *l-m-h* exposition (in which *m* has the answer).

Similarly, if dealing with a *m-h* answer–subject stretto (in which *m* has the answer), choose a *m-h-l* exposition (in which *m* has one of the subjects).

A *l-h* or *h-l* subject–answer stretto will automatically **reverse** the answer–subject allocation of its corresponding exposition, which is, of course, desirable. A *l-h* or *h-l* answer–subject stretto, however, will unavoidably **repeat** the answer–subject allocation of its corresponding exposition, which is, of course, undesirable.

In the latter case, therefore, to ensure that no subject or answer recurs in the same location, the *l* entry of the exposition should be placed an Octave lower in the stretto, and the *h* entry an Octave higher.

(c) Once you have determined your exposition order, you may schedule further entries in strict rotation among the voices until linking up with the stretto. You may distribute those entries between the fugue's three sections in various ways: apart from allocating one or more entries to the middle section, you may supplement the exposition with a 'redundant' answer, or add an entry or entries to the final section prior to the stretto.

Remember:

only in the exposition do subjects and answers have to be strictly alternated
 the middle section's entries should be subjects or answers in the **relative** key
 the final section's entries should be subjects or answers in the **home** key

The following plan builds up to the second of the two-bar strettos shown above (with the interval between the entries expanded from an Eleventh to an Eighteenth). Between the *m-h-l* exposition and the *h-l* stretto in the final section, only a single middle entry by *m* is needed to maintain strict rotation of entries among the voices. Note also that *h* has an answer in the exposition and a subject in the final section, while *l* has a subject in the exposition and an answer in the final section:

The diagram shows a three-staff musical score with treble, alto, and bass clefs. It is divided into six measures. The first measure contains a subject (S) in the bass and an answer (A) in the treble. The second measure contains an answer (A) in the bass and a subject (S) in the treble. The third measure is an empty 'episode'. The fourth measure contains a subject (S) in the bass, labeled as 'relative S'. The fifth measure is another empty 'episode'. The sixth measure contains a subject (S) in the bass and an answer (A) in the treble, labeled as 'S + A in two-bar stretto'.

The following, alternative plan additionally incorporates a four-bar stretto not shown above (with consonant Fourths supported by *l*). This stretto is placed in the middle section, so that the more climactic two-bar stretto can be reserved for the final section:

The diagram shows a three-staff musical score with treble, alto, and bass clefs, divided into six measures. The first measure contains a subject (S) in the bass and an answer (A) in the treble. The second measure contains an answer (A) in the bass and a subject (S) in the treble. The third measure is an empty 'episode'. The fourth measure contains a subject (S) in the bass and an answer (A) in the treble, labeled as 'relative A + A in four-bar stretto'. The fifth measure is another empty 'episode'. The sixth measure contains an answer (A) in the bass and a subject (S) in the treble, labeled as 'A A S + A in two-bar stretto'.

Task 7.3.2—Plan fugues incorporating the strettos you have found for the [subjects in Sets Five and Seven](#).

The second of the two above plans is worked out below. The potential for stretto does not guarantee that a subject will be interesting on its own; indeed, the opposite is often the case, and is so here. This fugue's need for more flavour is therefore satisfied by a chromatic countersubject, which spices up the non-stretto entries.

First system of musical notation, measures 1-6. The system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, and two bass clef staves below it. The music is in common time (C). The treble staff contains whole rests for the first six measures. The middle bass staff begins with a whole note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3. The bottom bass staff contains whole rests for the first six measures.

Second system of musical notation, measures 7-14. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff has whole rests for measures 7-10, then a half note G3 in measure 11, a half note A3 in measure 12, and a half note B3 in measure 13. The middle bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 7-10, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 11-14. The bottom bass staff contains whole rests for all measures.

Third system of musical notation, measures 15-22. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff contains quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 15-18, followed by quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 19-22. The middle bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 15-18, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 19-22. The bottom bass staff contains whole rests for all measures.

Fourth system of musical notation, measures 23-30. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff contains quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 23-26, followed by quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 27-30. The middle bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 23-26, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 27-30. The bottom bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 23-26, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 27-30.

Fifth system of musical notation, measures 31-38. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff contains quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 31-34, followed by quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 35-38. The middle bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 31-34, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 35-38. The bottom bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 31-34, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 35-38.

Sixth system of musical notation, measures 39-46. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff contains quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 39-42, followed by quarter notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4 in measures 43-46. The middle bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 39-42, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 43-46. The bottom bass staff contains quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 39-42, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, and F3 in measures 43-46.

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- The countersubject sounds in its entirety against the non-stretto entries, but gives way to free counterpoint during stretto entries.
- The contrapuntal treatment of chromatic melody is identical to that of diatonic melody.

Task 7.3.3—Compose your stretto fugues on the [subjects](#) from Set Five and Set Seven.