

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 must 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. 

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 orders	stretto orders
<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 (treble, alto, and bass clefs) with six measures. The notes are: Measure 1: Bass clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Treble clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 2: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 3: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 4: Empty (episode). Measure 5: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 6: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Labels below the staves: S A S episode relative S episode 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 (treble, alto, and bass clefs) with six measures. The notes are: Measure 1: Bass clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Treble clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 2: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 3: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 4: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 5: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Measure 6: Treble clef has a subject (S) on the second line; Bass clef has an answer (A) on the first line. Labels below the staves: S A S episode relative A + A episode A A S + A in four-bar stretto in two-bar stretto.

Task 7.3.2—Plan fugues incorporating the stretti you have found for the [subjects in Sets Five and Seven](#) (please use manuscript paper and pencil for this task).

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.

Musical notation system 1, measures 1-6. The system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a bass clef staff in the middle, and another bass clef staff at the bottom. The top staff contains whole rests for all six measures. The middle staff begins with a whole rest in measure 1, followed by a half note G2 in measure 2, and then eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3 in measures 3-6. The bottom staff contains whole rests for all six measures.

Musical notation system 2, measures 7-14. The system consists of three staves. The top staff has whole rests for measures 7-10, followed by a half note G3 in measure 11, a half note A3 in measure 12, and eighth notes B3, C4, D4, E4 in measure 13, and a half note F4 in measure 14. The middle staff contains eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3 in measures 7-10, eighth notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3 in measures 11-12, eighth notes B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4 in measures 13-14, and eighth notes C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4 in measures 15-18. The bottom staff contains whole rests for all measures.

Musical notation system 3, measures 15-22. The system consists of three staves. The top staff contains eighth notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4 in measures 15-18, eighth notes A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4 in measures 19-22, and eighth notes D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3 in measures 23-26. The middle staff contains eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3 in measures 15-18, eighth notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3 in measures 19-22, and eighth notes B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4 in measures 23-26. The bottom staff contains whole rests for all measures.

Musical notation system 4, measures 23-30. The system consists of three staves. The top staff contains eighth notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4 in measures 23-26, eighth notes A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4 in measures 27-30, and eighth notes D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3 in measures 31-34. The middle staff contains eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3 in measures 23-26, eighth notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3 in measures 27-30, and eighth notes B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4 in measures 31-34. The bottom staff contains whole rests for all measures.

Musical notation system 5, measures 31-38. The system consists of three staves. The top staff contains eighth notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4 in measures 31-34, eighth notes A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4 in measures 35-38, and eighth notes D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3 in measures 39-42. The middle staff contains eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3 in measures 31-34, eighth notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3 in measures 35-38, and eighth notes B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4 in measures 39-42. The bottom staff contains whole rests for all measures.

Musical notation system 6, measures 39-46. The system consists of three staves. The top staff contains eighth notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4 in measures 39-42, eighth notes A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4 in measures 43-46, and eighth notes D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3 in measures 47-50. The middle staff contains eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3 in measures 39-42, eighth notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3 in measures 43-46, and eighth notes B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4 in measures 47-50. The bottom staff contains whole rests for all measures.

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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, except that chromatic as well as diatonic melodic semitones are permitted.

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

	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3
Set Five			
Set Seven			