

Paul Hindemith
The Craft of
musical composition

Book 2: Exercises
in two-part writing

SCHOTT
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PAUL HINDEMITH

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Musical Composition

Book II

Exercises in
Two-part Writing

English Translation by
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SCHOTT

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PREFACE

In this book I follow the theoretical part (Book I) of my textbook with the first eleven chapters of the practical part. They deal only with two-voice setting*, but this narrow field of work is treated here in a more detailed and thorough manner than has been the case in other books. Although the training in understanding and applying tonal phenomena, especially the harmonic, can be but insufficiently developed with the aid of only two voices, nevertheless the two-voice exercises, with their easily surveyed tone-material, with their limited possibilities of tonal motion and combination, give the best opportunity for understanding the hidden principles and activating forces of tone-setting itself. Let it not be said that it is too soon to acquaint a student, at this point of his ability, with the principles of tone-setting, since these are difficult to comprehend and are not on the surface. This is just the time to direct his attention to a broad perspective. Later on, his thinking and feeling are too readily entwined with the richness of the auditory material and the numerous rules for its use.

My experience has been that the early realization of these activating forces will easily prevent the formation of those "dead points" which one finds in the work of any advanced student. This frequently is not the case if, later, we have to go back to these necessary first principles. Only the teacher or student who, after an extended trial, is convinced of the weakness of the order which is here maintained could raise a valid objection. This, however, would not be possible for him, even after a thorough use of the present exercise book, for how could he, after these earlier exercises, give a final judgment on a similar procedure through the entire tonal domain! I ask him to trust my experience of many years, and to believe that nothing has been written in this book without trial and verification in actual instruction.

Until I can find time to complete the continuation of this book, with instruction in the higher, polyphonic art of tone-setting, those who desire to use the two-voice exercises in their teaching are thus forced to use them as complementing the usual instruction; or else, after working them

* The German word *Satz*, which means composition, particularly in its more detailed and technical aspects (harmony, counterpoint, etc.) has been rendered throughout this volume by its English cognate: "setting".—*Translator*.

through, to find a connection with the practice of harmony and counterpoint. This is entirely possible. When this work is completed, the present exercises will be found to have served as foundation for all settings. They address themselves to the beginner, from whom no knowledge of older methods is expected. It is, therefore, not necessary, before attacking the work-material here offered, to practice harmonic or contrapuntal studies. However, a thorough pre-schooling in the elementary theory of music and in the rudiments of ear-training is presupposed; in addition, complete clearness as to intervals and the structure of the simplest three- and more-voice chords must exist. In spite of a readily understandable presentation, and an easily surveyed order of procedure—each of the eleven chapters sets forth the particular material needed, and contains a detailed description of the work-procedure, with some model examples—a beginner would still find it difficult to labor through it without any help whatever.

The book counts on the explanatory activity of the teacher, who should adapt the material to the needs of the individual student. For the teacher the division into numbered rules and problems should in no sense be a hindrance in his work; instead he should find therein the challenge to create new work-material, as elaboration of that already presented. In this respect no limit is set to his creative gift. Should he prefer to instruct the pupil on the basis of traditional tone-setting methods, he will be able to use the technical helps here given as well as if he were to explore tonal domains which have not yet revealed themselves in any practical way to him or to his pupils. He will notice that he retains complete freedom in the forming of an independent style of writing (which is definitely not the case with the older methods); that he is in no way forced to move in a predetermined stylistic direction—a concern of which I heard frequently after the publication of the theoretical part (Volume I) of this work; but that, instead, he receives an aid which he can apply to the solution of technical and stylistic problems of any kind whatever. In this connection, a valuable aid can be found in the pre-study of the first volume, the theoretical part, especially if he desires to acquaint the pupil with the proofs of the statements made in the course of the work. This, however, is not absolutely necessary, since the main principles of the first volume, in so far as they directly affect the practical work, occur again in the description of the material and in the work-procedures of this exercise book, where they are adapted to other aims.

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Exercises in Two-part Writing

CHAPTER I

Construction of the Simplest One-Voice Melodic Patterns

The pupil connects a few tones to make a linear pattern in which the melodic element appears with the least possible admixture of metric and harmonic elements. In these very modest tone-successions he is to learn the effects of melody. For the time being the examples are practically free of all expression. The material with which he works is so scant, and the field of application is so narrow, that the results can be neither artistic nor impressive. These are purely laboratory studies, which do not occur in practical music as independent melodies because it is neither possible nor desirable to separate melodic lines constantly from the influence of rhythm and harmony. At the same time, these apparently very insignificant patterns must be considered the germ-cells of even the most complicated melodies.

In external appearance such melodies correspond approximately to the *cantus firmi* used in contrapuntal exercises. However, whereas the *cantus firmus* serves as a meagre pattern for the exercises of the beginner, and, in this form, has no significance for the later practical art of writing of the accomplished musician, the tone-successions in these exercises are constructed according to the most rigid demands of pure melody. And they are retained later—although in somewhat changed form—as support and basic form of all writing.

A. Work-Material

1. Our work-material consists of the twelve half-tones of the chromatic scale, which we use not merely in the single octave range given in Figure 1,

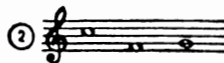


but also beginning at any desired pitch and extending throughout the ranges of the human voices. The limiting of work-material to the diatonic major or minor scale, or to the old church modes—as has been done in textbooks up to the present time—would, it is true, materially simplify

the exercises of the student in his first attempts at writing; but he would then have to pay a high price for this deceptive gain. Experience shows, again and again, how difficult it is for even the most talented and instinctively sure musicians to leave a beaten track which, though at first scarcely noticed, yet later markedly restricts the free, forward urge. But they must leave it in order to know all the manifold directions which to some extent the free, broad art of writing has always followed, and to some extent it has learned to follow in the last decades. Without a knowledge of these directions, we can scarcely imagine entering the innermost regions of artistic composition. The beginner, accordingly, shall make his first swimming attempts in the freely flowing stream of chromatic richness.

This does not mean freedom in grouping the tones into daring clusters of auditory novelty. We shall, instead, begin our very first attempts within clearly marked borders, the narrowness of which exceeds the demands of even the most confirmed defenders of a strict academic *cantus firmus* style. In this elementary period, in which the tonal motion is severely restricted, the student notices chromaticism only to the extent that from any first tone a greater number of other tones is available than would be the case with the older instruction methods. But the greater choice need not trouble him—a series of rules will prevent this. He will neither be smothered by an overabundance of material nor be lost in an open sea. Only in the course of considerable advancement will he more and more freely enjoy the advantages offered by the chromatic tone-supply.

2. In the first exercises we consider metre and note values only in so far as change of tones and uniform progression within an exercise depend upon them. We shall use only whole notes, omitting metre signatures and bar-lines.



The whole note here serves for a tone of any desired duration, without metrical relationship. Within an exercise, all notes are given a uniform duration, a value which we shall take as approximately the time of two to three pulse-beats. At this tempo no single tone can separate itself from other tones by longer or shorter duration; it cannot become superordinated or subordinated; and we have an opportunity to sense and understand each tone and each tone-progression in its full significance. In such an arrangement rhythmic energy has the least possible influence on the

pattern of the melody; it is restricted to fixing the boundaries among the various parts of the melody. Since an element as important as rhythm is thus ignored, it is obvious that dynamics and other aids to expression are entirely eliminated. They have no meaning for the essential progressions in sound and in motion with which we are exclusively concerned in these tonal settings.

3. The attention of the beginner will be so occupied with what happens in this unfamiliar field—which will considerably tax his reasoning—that it would be unwise to burden him with extraneous difficulties which do not affect the content of the present exercises. Every teacher knows the struggles which the learner undergoes in coping for the first time with the various clefs. Through wrong training we have arrived at a point where a C-clef (to say nothing of several C-clefs simultaneously used) offers a serious obstacle even to capable students. Deplorable and worthy of condemnation as this condition is, we must nevertheless take it into consideration. Accordingly, we shall write all two-part exercises in the two most familiar clefs: violin (treble) and bass, and shall reserve the use of the remaining clefs for later three-part writing.

4. We shall write the two-part exercises exclusively for pairs of the four voices: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Moreover, they should be written so that the student can sing them without difficulty. Female students, therefore, should write in the treble clef, for soprano and alto; male students, in the bass clef or in the tenor form of the treble clef (indicated with an 8). Not until later (beginning with Chapter II) are the students permitted to write for voices of other ranges than their own; but even then they should always concern themselves with the living sound, by utilizing the vocal abilities (mostly rather scant) of their classmates or those of the teacher; they should never merely write notes on paper. The exercises are to be sung without text, on “la-la” or some similar neutral syllable. Text is introduced into the work in only the last two chapters. The final proof of the value of what has been written is always determined by singing each exercise.

B. Work-Procedure

A melody consists of tone-steps and tone-skips, in so far as the purely melodic activity of the interval progression is concerned, apart from its rhythmic and harmonic contents. The pitch distance between two auditory points which embraces just the distance of a major or a minor second is

perceived as a *tone-step*; all pitch distances exceeding this, beginning with the minor third, are covered by means of *skips*. It is possible to construct highly contrasting melodic lines in which long extents of melody consist only of steps or only of skips. These, however, do not belong to the most desirable forms of melodic expression; instead, such forms are found rather in those instances in which steps and skips are combined. In such cases their rich tensional peculiarities are mixed in an intelligent manner, and unite in regard to form, sound, and content to produce a single total effect. This order, caused and developed by the inner nature of the single tone, and influenced by training, experience, and personal taste, rules even in the smallest, self-sufficient melodic patterns which we are about to construct. Attention to the following regulations will lead us toward this goal.

RULE 1.

The pitch range of any one voice of an exercise should embrace approximately one octave.



The word “approximately” means that this range is not to be retained too conscientiously. When a larger range seems urgently necessary, the octave range may, as an exception, be extended. By restricting the pitch-range, we prevent the use of larger melodic curves, which, as valuable means of expression in the grand style, would tend to destroy the simple clarity to which our exercises are directed. This is most satisfactory when the least amount of expression is introduced. Moreover, the limited pitch-range assures the possibility of singing by the pupil.

RULE 2.

No binding regulation can be given for the length of the exercises. The student will notice, however, that consideration of all the given regulations will itself insure exercises of approximately uniform length. Fewer than seven tones can scarcely awaken the feeling of melodic development; with double this number the frequently necessary return to a tone already present would result in a certain monotony.

RULE 3.

The first note is the same as the last note. By returning at the end to the tone of beginning, we give the hearer the feeling of formal and tonal rounding-off and completeness.

RULE 4.

The direction of melodic motion should be changed after four tones, at the most, in order to avoid too pronounced an ascent or descent of the tone-line.

RULE 5.

Only the tones here given may precede the final tone:

its second (major or minor) from below or above,

its third (major or minor) from above,

its fourth from below,

its fifth from above.



All others weaken its closing effect.

EXERCISE 1

Construct in whole notes, without bar-lines, several melodies which are restricted to the given regulations and which you can sing without difficulty. What is difficult to sing, cannot be correct! Keep on improving your work until you are thoroughly satisfied with it.

The student should train himself never to proceed until he has fully understood all that serves as preparation for the exercise, and until he has solved the problem itself.

EXERCISE 2

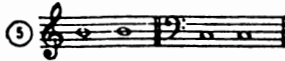
See if the results of Exercise 1 reveal points which are touched upon in the following rules, and, if so, remember these points.

Our melodies should form their curves in even, regular, quiet progression. This demands that all tonal sub-grouping within a melody which might retard the steady flow should be eliminated. If, for example, a tone or a tone-group were given emphasis through its duration value or through its close connection with other tones, such an accent in the tonal environment would disturb the even melodic flow. Such devices are intentionally used in styles of writing less restricted than the one here employed.

The following instructions apply to such disturbing factors:

RULE 6.

Immediate repetition of a tone is prohibited.



If a tone sounds immediately a second time, without relief from other intervening tones, its position is strengthened in relation to the other tones. Such emphasis hinders the flow of the melody.

Even the return to a tone after the interposition of a different tone tends to base the melody too strongly on the tone that is repeated.



The group: tone—auxiliary-tone—tone is therefore to be avoided in the earliest exercises. The danger of too strong a grouping around a tone appearing several times naturally diminishes as the tones between a tone and its repetition increase in number.

RULE 7.

Avoid broken chords. Several successive tones must not form a tone-group which can be perceived as a broken triad.



Such tone-groups would, through their compactness, focus the attention on the chord unit and would thus devalue the surrounding tones. Steady melodic progression also would be disturbed.

With only two tones the chord feeling is not definitely awakened, although the interval of a major or a minor third already clearly suggests it. At least three tones are necessary to decide the exact chord. The most striking examples of broken chords are those containing an augmented fourth or a diminished fifth; these, especially, are to be avoided.



The designation tritone, strictly speaking, applies only to the augmented fourth (embracing three successive whole steps); for the diminished fifth there is no special term. The word tritone, for the sake of simplicity, I use to include both intervals.

Groups such as those in Figure 8a, consisting of three tones, are not considered triads in the sense of our musical terminology. Later on (in the



more complicated three-voice setting) we shall use them as independent tone-combinations, but they do not meet the conditions demanded at the beginning of Rule 7 ("broken triad" in its narrow sense), so they may here be used in their broken (melodic) form:



The chordal effect of broken triads and of tritone chords can be materially weakened by the use of intervening tones making seconds with the chord tones; but it cannot be entirely eliminated by this means.



We cannot give an exact rule which would enable the student to determine, unequivocally, the disturbing or the favorable character of such broken-chord figures. In judging such tone-groups he must rely on his ear, more so than at other times. If, in spite of the insertion, the ear hears the tonal grouping as a retardation of the melodic flow, the grouping should be given up. If, on the other hand, the melodic urge of a tone-line is sufficiently strong to carry along the melody and thus overcome the chord

figure with its intervening tones, such figures (though in other cases they are of doubtful value) may then be used.

RULE 8.

Avoid sequences (repetition of the same note-patterns at different pitch levels).



Sequences also create melodic units. Even when the first pattern of a sequence is constructed entirely in accordance with the rules, its repetition at a higher or lower pitch-level will emphasize for the listener the pattern rather than the separate tones.

The smallest of all sequences, the repetition of a two-tone pattern at



another pitch, is not disturbing so long as it is not repeated more than once, and so long as it does not give the exercise an obvious metrical feeling. Frequently, however, a sequence by inversion is disturbing, especially when the sequential pattern contains a skip.



When I say "frequently" this means that even in these smallest exercises rules and regulations are not to be applied without thought. There will always be instances in which taste will decide between two equally correct solutions; in certain instances, even, preference may be given to a not entirely correct form over a strictly correct form. The student will do well, however, not to rely too often on this statement! He will notice, in any case, that the rules and instructions are to restrict him only to the extent to which they are needed to reach the exactness and clearness which are constantly demanded. No rule exists which functions with uniform validity throughout a course of study; instead, it must always be adapted to the particular demands of a specific case. The directions given are, therefore, in the following exercises, already broadened according to need; they will at times be replaced by others, or even declared simply invalid.

The preceding rules guarantee, to a certain degree, the smooth flow of the melody by prohibiting the use of retarding tone-groups. However, they