

Paul Hindemith
Traditional harmony
Book 1



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PAUL HINDEMITH

Paul Hindemith

A Concentrated Course in

Traditional Harmony

*with emphasis on exercises and
a minimum of rules*

Book I

Revised Edition

Part 1



SCHOTT

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PREFACE

Our old friend Harmony, once esteemed the indispensable and unsurpassable teaching method, has had to step down from the pedestal upon which general respect had placed her. This is not so much the fault of the attitude of those students who have never considered harmony study anything but a necessary evil. Rather it is owing to the increasing conviction on the part of many teachers (at last) that while one may follow its rules for a while out of pure respect for tradition, it is well, if one plans to undertake creative or even theoretical tasks of a higher order, to stand on one's own feet. Musical practice has taken paths along which the teaching of harmony could not follow. Principles of construction that embrace only a small fraction of chord possibilities; stylistic limitations; excessive dependence on notation; an insufficient acoustical basis—these are the reasons why the study of harmony is being left behind in the race between musical practice and theoretical instruction. I have written at length on this subject. In *The Craft of Musical Composition* I have devoted hundreds of pages to a criticism of the conventional theory of harmony and suggestions for its improvement, so I may spare myself any extensive discussion of the subject here.

Despite the evident loss of prestige which conventional harmony teaching has suffered, we must still count on it as the most important branch of theory teaching, at least so long as it has not been replaced by any generally recognized, universally adopted, more comprehensive, and altogether better system. And even after the introduction of such a system, it will maintain a high rank as a historic method which once had great importance—no longer a part of the curriculum of the harassed violin or piano student, but all the more important in the education of future theory teachers and music historians.

In both situations—the present one, in which faith in the magic power of the old rules of harmony is fast disappearing, and the future one, in which such rules will have interest only for the backward-glancing and analytical student—hardly anyone will feel a great desire to spend more time in the acquisition of harmonic knowledge than is absolutely necessary. Thus the cardinal principle for instruction in this field must be: give the student the material he needs in condensed form and with constant emphasis on the purely historical basis and only relative practical value of his study of harmony, and then try to make him acquainted with more far-reaching methods of harmony. The instruction should be speedy; but that does not mean that it should be careless. Brevity and thoroughness may very well be combined if one omits mention of things which are uncertain, exceptional, or based purely on stylistic or personal considerations. Fortunately, the situation is not what we would be led to believe by many harmony text-books, which make of harmony a deep and difficult science—almost a secret art. On the contrary, harmony is a simple craft, based on a few rules of thumb derived from facts of history and acoustics—rules simple to learn and apply if they are not obscured by a cloud of pseudo-scientific bombast. It may therefore be presented to the pupil without any difficulty, and in simple concentrated form.

The fact that, despite the need for brief, clear instruction, great thick harmony text-books continue to appear and find their readers is in my opinion not a sign of continual extension and perfection of the method. Harmony, as a theoretical system and as a pedagogic method, has been explored and perfected in every nook and cranny; its material has been gone through, taken apart, and rearranged hundreds of times; with the best will in the world no paths will be discovered that have not been trod. It seems to me rather the prickings of conscience that most musicians seek to allay when they continue to read and study the endless re-groupings and re-publications of the old truths. No one is really satisfied with what he learned long ago in his study of harmony. For one thing, the material was presented to him in unenjoyable form; for another, every other activity seemed more important than theoretical study, which in general has so pitifully little influence on the practical musical accomplishments that have to be learned in the early years. So one buys the latest harmony book, as one has bought others before it, in order finally to make up for what one has missed (usually the intention is the end of the matter!), and thus perhaps at last to discover some of the secrets whose presence more or less every musician suspects behind the curtain of music theory. It is as if one had only to draw this dark curtain aside to behold the mystery of the creative spirit! But no matter how many harmony books one reads, they make no new revelations; and even the greatest minds will not succeed in making any, if by chance they undertake to write a harmony text-book.

“Why this new attempt; then, if, as follows from what has been said, it is just as useless and worthless as all the rest?” The answer to this question is that I am consciously taking this step backwards in full realization of its relative unimportance. Its purpose is not to provide a traditional underpinning for the principles set forth in *The Craft of Musical Composition* which is not necessary, since for the understanding reader tradition is present on every page of that work) but to facilitate the speedy learning mentioned above, and this in as little scholastic a manner as possible, so that a close connection with living music may be continuously felt. It is true that even in this book there are rules enough, but they have been held to the absolute minimum; while on the other hand particular care has been devoted to supplying material for practical work in actual writing. Pieces of music of all sorts and styles (insofar as a style may be represented by the use of a particular set of chordal materials) have been provided in great number, so that a student who works through this collection of problems of all sorts, without having too much in the way of rules drummed into him, will in all probability achieve a better and more thorough knowledge of harmonic work than after plowing through many a heavy, profound, and learned treatise on harmony. No gift whatever for composition is required of the student. Being limited strictly to the technical process of connecting harmonies, this book makes it possible for any musician or music-lover without the slightest creative idea to master the exercises it provides.

It is in the nature of the material that even the most condensed teaching plan must follow approximately the historical development of musical writing, as it was practised in free composition, unregulated by school- book rules. This is true at least to this extent: that the exercises employing simple chord materials correspond to an earlier epoch in the technique of composition, while with increasing mastery of chords, progressions, and tonal relations the student approaches more closely the practice of the last few decades. But since our exercises serve primarily neither historical nor stylistic purposes, this very rough correspondence with the evolution of writing from 1600 to 1900 is fully sufficient. Looking back as we do, from a time in which the materials dealt with are fully known, to a still searching and discovering technique, we can afford to spare ourselves many roundabout ways and side paths that had to be taken by the original seekers and discoverers; in fact, in order to achieve greater mastery of our materials we may stress certain technical procedures and neglect others as compared with the real practice of composers in the past. The historical, physical, and physiological bases of our working procedure are of no consequence here. Those who are interested may look up these things in the appropriate literature. The adducing of explanatory illustrations from musical literature, too, has been sacrificed here; it is the task of the teacher to show the pupil where the models of his work are to be found.

The exercises provided lead the student from the very first steps of harmonic writing to the most advanced contortions of the technique of alteration. For small classes of normally gifted pupils, meeting twice a week, this material should provide one to two years' work. For slow workers for whom there are not enough exercises, the teacher can provide supplementary ones, while gifted students will perhaps gain a considerable facility by working only part of the material given.

The fact that harmony can be taught along these lines has been proved by the class for which and with whose active participation this brief manual was written. In the Yale Music School we went through the material in this book thoroughly in a few weeks. The wish to help other teachers and students who may have felt acutely the need of plentiful and varied exercise material is what has impelled me to publish this book.

Paul Hindemith

*Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut,
January, 1943.*

PREFACE to the
SECOND EDITION

To the author of a harmony book, phrases like "60th Thousand," "20th Edition," "Popular-Priced Reprint," will always sound like some legendary song of the sirens. In general he can be happy if the comparatively few copies of the first printing find buyers without too much trouble. With this prospect in mind, I hardly expected anything more for the present little work than a moderate interest, particularly since it came into being in the first place only as a by-product of more important labors, and had no further purpose than to present to a few teachers and students struggling with similar problems some teaching material that had been found practical. Yet only a year after the first publication a second edition is needed! Whether that fact is due to the nature and arrangement of the book, or present conditions are particularly favorable to the distribution of such a work, or the sales have resulted from mere curiosity: these questions must remain unanswered here. I content myself with wishing the Second Edition good luck, too, as it sets out upon its road.

In the exercises themselves nothing has been changed, except for the elimination of misprints and inaccuracies. In the text, on the other hand, additions have been made: unclear formulations have been improved and additional explanations inserted where necessary.

New Haven, April, 1944

Paul Hindemith.

BOOK 1.

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CHAPTER I

PREPARATORY

1. *Prerequisite:*

Knowledge of

- Major scale
- Minor scale (the different forms)
- Keys, and the circle of fifths
- Accidentals
- Note- and rest-values
- Measure-signatures
- Treble- and bass-clef
- Intervals in all forms

2. *Voices*

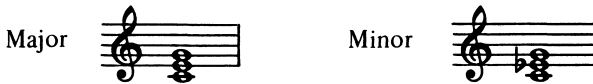
We write for four voices: soprano, alto, tenor, bass.
Their ranges are as follows:



We use two staves, the upper for soprano and alto, the lower for tenor and bass.

3. *Triads*

The material to be used is the triad in its two principal forms:



Names of the tones of the triad;

- Lowest—root
- Middle—third
- Upper—fifth

Triads are named according to their roots, *e.g.*, C major, e minor.

Terminology: capital letters = major (C = C-major triad), small letters = minor (a = a-minor triad)

EXERCISE 1

Play at the keyboard: A, a, C♯, d♭, B♭, b, G♭, f♯.

4. *Doublings*

Distribution of the triad tones among the four voices: one tone must be doubled.

Permissible doublings: root (preferred), or fifth. (No third-doubling)

No crossing of the voices (maintenance of the natural order: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass).

5. *Spacing*

Close position of triads: no tone of the same triad can be inserted between soprano and alto, or alto and tenor.

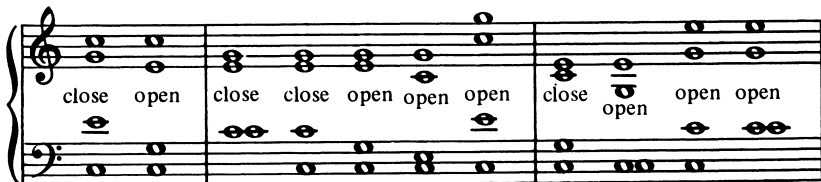


Open position: tones of the same triad can be inserted between soprano and alto, or between alto and tenor.



Distance of the voices: between soprano and alto, or alto and tenor, no more than an octave; between tenor and bass any distance.

Positions determined by the soprano tone: position of the octave, of the fifth, of the third, all close or open.



Position of the Octave

Position of the Fifth

Position of the Third

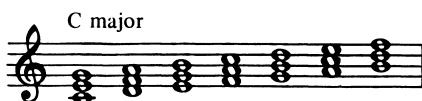
EXERCISE 2

Write the following triads in all possible open and close positions:

D, B \flat , F \sharp , A \flat , G, e, g \sharp , e \flat , f, b.

6. *Triads in the Scale*

Triads can be constructed on all the tones of a scale. Only the scale-tones can be used.

In major: 

In minor
(the harmonic
minor scale
is used) 

The degrees of the scale (and the triads built upon them) are designated by the Roman numerals I–VII.

In major: I, IV, and V are major triads;
II, III, and VI are minor triads;
VII is a diminished triad.

In minor: I and IV are minor triads;
V and VI are major triads;
II and VII are diminished triads;
III is an augmented triad.

Names of the most important scale tones:

I	Tonic
V	Dominant
IV	Subdominant
VII	Leading Tone

The dominant in both modes is a major triad. It contains the leading tone as its third.

EXERCISE 3

Play at the keyboard the following triads in all possible open and close positions:

D I, E \flat , V, F \sharp IV, D \flat II g I, c \sharp VI, a \flat V, b I

CHAPTER II

THE TRIADS OF THE PRINCIPAL HARMONIES

1. *Connection of the principal triads I–V, V–I and I–IV, IV–I.*

Simplest form: Root doubled in both chords, in the octave or unison.

Procedure:

- Write the bass progression from the first to the second chord.
- Complete the first chord.
- Hold over to the second chord the tone common to both chords.
- Lead the two remaining tones of the first chord stepwise to the nearest tones of the second chord.

The image shows a musical score for a piano, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clefs) and three measures. The first measure contains the triads E I and V. The second measure contains the triads bIV and I. The third measure contains the triads Ab, V, and I. The bass line shows a progression from E to bIV to Ab. The treble line shows the completion of the first chord in each measure, with the common tone (E) held over from the first measure to the second, and then moving to the next chord.

E I V b IV I A^b V I

Types of motion:

- Similar motion: Two or more voices move in the same direction.

The image shows a musical score for a piano, consisting of a single staff (treble clef) and three measures. The first measure contains the triads E I and V. The second measure contains the triads bIV and I. The third measure contains the triads Ab, V, and I. The bass line shows a progression from E to bIV to Ab. The treble line shows the completion of the first chord in each measure, with the common tone (E) held over from the first measure to the second, and then moving to the next chord.

- Contrary motion: Two voices move in opposite directions.

The image shows a musical score for a piano, consisting of a single staff (treble clef) and three measures. The first measure contains the triads E I and V. The second measure contains the triads bIV and I. The third measure contains the triads Ab, V, and I. The bass line shows a progression from E to bIV to Ab. The treble line shows the completion of the first chord in each measure, with the common tone (E) held over from the first measure to the second, and then moving to the next chord.

- Oblique motion: One voice remains stationary while another moves.

The image shows a musical score for a piano, consisting of a single staff (treble clef) and three measures. The first measure contains the triads E I and V. The second measure contains the triads bIV and I. The third measure contains the triads Ab, V, and I. The bass line shows a progression from E to bIV to Ab. The treble line shows the completion of the first chord in each measure, with the common tone (E) held over from the first measure to the second, and then moving to the next chord.

EXERCISE 4

Write the following progressions:

A I-V	e I-V
F V-I	f# V-I
B I-IV	c I-IV
E b IV-I	g IV-I

EXERCISE 5

Play the following progressions:

G I-V	c# I-V
B b V-I	f V-I
E b I-IV	a I-IV
D b IV-I	b IV-I

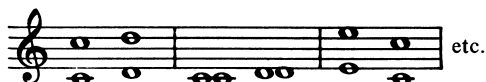
2. *More complicated form of the progressions I-V and I-IV*: first chord with fifth doubled, second chord with either permissible doubling.

Procedure:

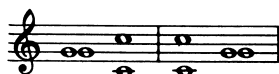
- (a) as above.
- (b) as above.
- (c) If two tones can be held over into the second chord, hold one and lead the other the shortest way (skip of a major or minor third) to the nearest tone of the second chord.
- (d) If no tone can be held over, lead each of the three upper voices the shortest way (stepwise, or by skip not larger than a fourth) to the nearest tone of the second chord.

Rules of voice-leading:

- (a) Avoid leading any two voices in parallel octaves or unisons:



also



(both voices approaching an octave by skip in the same direction.)

- (b) Avoid parallel fifths.



- (c) Skips of all four voices in similar motion are not to be used. Even skips of three voices in the same direction need careful handling. The excessive forward impetus created by such an accumulation of skips can be restrained by keeping one or more voices stationary or leading them in the opposite direction.