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A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING PART-WRITING PRACTICES OF J. S. BACH'S STYLE OF CHORALE HARMONIZATION

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Abstract

Traditional part-writing approach has focused on the vertical dimension and harmonic progression concepts. While it can be effective, it overlooks the horizontal dimension that is crucial to a more complete understanding of J. S. Bach's style of chorale part-writing practices. This project aims to demonstrate how to incorporate a new approach by singing and analyzing three chorale phrases selected from *J. S. Bach's 371 Harmonized Four-Part Chorales* (Breitkopf edition, 1990).

The first step of this approach asks students to sing, analyze and recognize two-part species counterpoint rules existing between the outer parts of these chorale phrases. Students will sing in solfege (using the movable 'do' system) of the outer parts (Bass and Soprano lines) of the chorales, analyzing the outer parts not in terms of harmonic progression but in the context of counterpoint. Students will then focus on the projection in the horizontal dimension of the division of the scale into the upper tetrachord and lower pentachord, and how they relate to members of the tonic triad.

When students have learned these first two steps, several key points in three-part species counterpoint will be integrated into the traditional concepts of harmonic progression and recognition of cadences will become a third step in the course of study. Harmonic analyses of these chorales are also hierarchically presented according to Schenker's theory, with the Tonic and Dominant forming the tonal axis. In addition, four harmonic progression functions will be identified and incorporated in the harmonic study as: 1) Prolongational, 2) Cadential, 3) Sequential, and 4) Modulatory. Within each type, specific techniques will then be demonstrated through the three selected chorale phrases and they are presented in conjunction with the first two steps.

As a lecturer teaching several of the undergraduate core music theory courses at UCSB, I have noticed a lack of these three steps in the textbooks I have used for the theory courses. It is hoped that this project will result in the adoption of these steps by authors of Schenkerian-based textbooks, or it may be incorporated in the future as a reader format supplement used in conjunction with existing published Aural Skills textbooks.