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Music 100A, Fall 2005

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chapters 2-3 (pp. 15-74)

CHAPTER 2

Melody and Counterpoint

Schenkerian analysis examines the interrelationships among melody, counterpoint, and harmony in the *structure* of tonal music. "Structure" in this sense may refer to the makeup and character of one aspect of a composition—such as melody—or to the complete fabric of the composition as established by melody, counterpoint, and harmony in combination.

In this chapter, we shall examine aspects of single-line melody in relation to major and minor keys, and summarize some basic principles associated with the combination of two or more melodic lines as illustrated in species counterpoint. In Chapter 3 we will consider bass lines and harmonic structures, and harmonic prolongation. These chapters will put familiar material in a new perspective and will introduce a variety of Schenkerian analytical concepts.

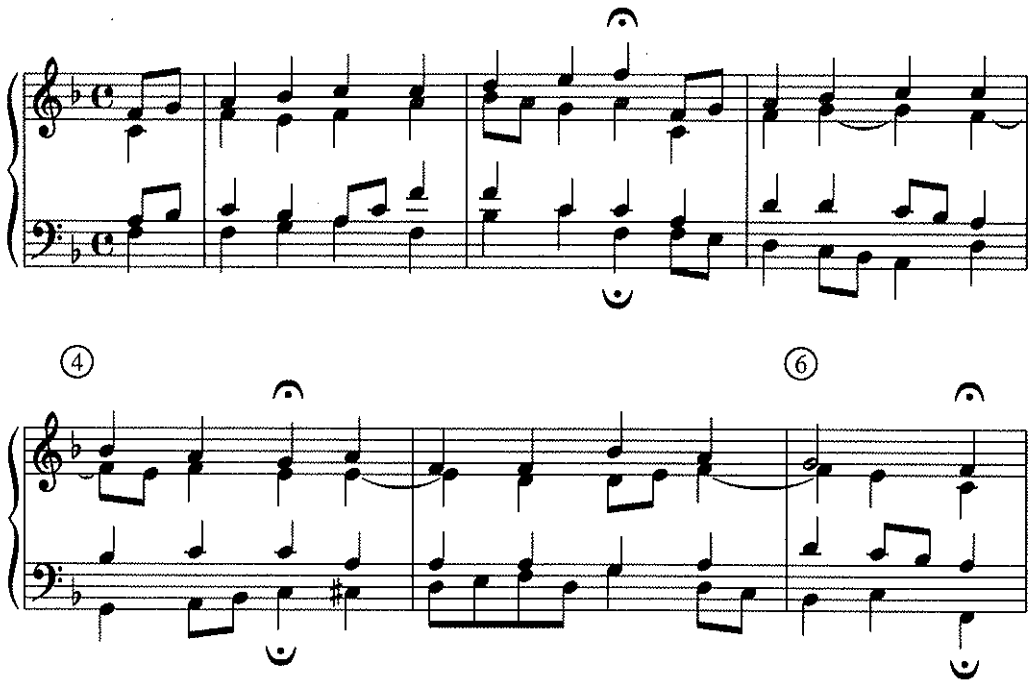
MELODY

The literature of tonal music contains an extraordinary variety and diversity of melodies. Yet each has been influenced and shaped in various ways by inherent characteristics of the tonal system. We shall begin by considering the ways in which essential features of the major and minor modes govern selected melodies from the literature.

Example 2.1 presents the first three phrases from a setting of the chorale melody "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort" by J. S. Bach. In the opening phrase,

EXAMPLE 2.1:

J. S. Bach, "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort," bars 1–6



the melody outlines an F-major scale which is highlighted by the regular rhythm and chordal support.

Although the soprano melody in this phrase is entirely stepwise, the tones are related to one another in a dynamic manner. Between the tonic notes that begin and end the scale, the other tones of the tonic triad are emphasized by metrical position (A and C) and repetition (C). In the upbeat figure, scale degree $\hat{2}$ (G) connects $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{3}$ as a nonharmonic passing tone.[1] The relative instability of this tone enhances the forward movement to A. Scale degree $\hat{4}$ (B♭) likewise connects $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{5}$ and is harmonized by VII^6, which is less stable than the tonic chords it connects. In bar 2, the final three soprano notes of the first phrase are strongly directed to the tonic, with the half step between $\hat{7}$ and $\hat{8}$ creating a definitive arrival on the tonic note in conjunction with the supporting cadential motion in the bass.

In purely melodic terms, the major scale is a configuration of tones where each note is in unique relation to the other notes in the scale because of the characteristic pattern of whole and half steps. (In this sense it is fundamentally different in nature from the chromatic and whole-tone scales, where all the notes of the scale are equidistant.) The tones of the major scale thus exist in dynamic relation to one another. Scale degrees $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, $\hat{5}$, and $\hat{8}$, tones belonging to the tonic triad, tend to sound relatively stable compared to the other notes of the scale. The half step between $\hat{7}$ and $\hat{8}$ gives the leading tone its strong tendency to move to the tonic. Scale degree $\hat{2}$, though a whole step

above the tonic, may also be active in the direction of the tonic, and is sometimes called the *descending leading tone.* The tritone (the augmented fourth or the diminished fifth) formed by the combination of $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{7}$ is often called a "key-defining" interval, since any particular augmented fourth or diminished fifth occurs in only one major key, and its resolution by half steps to $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{3}$ clearly identifies the tonic of that major key. Thus you can see how the major scale embodies a diverse network of potential relationships.[2]

The second phrase of the chorale melody begins like the first, though it is harmonized differently. After outlining the tonic triad and reaching scale degree $\hat{5}$ the melody changes direction and descends to $\hat{2}$. Approached from above and supported by V of a half cadence, the supertonic note is active in the direction of the tonic and does not sound conclusive. Consequently the listener is left with an expectation that the melody will later resolve to $\hat{1}$.

Scale degree $\hat{2}$, therefore, may be active in the direction of $\hat{3}$, or it may function as the descending leading tone, strongly directed to the tonic even though the interval between the two tones is a whole step. The tendency of this tone is, of course, determined by the context.

Notice that the melody in Example 2.1 comprises mostly stepwise motion. In both vocal and instrumental tonal music, stepwise motion provides the greatest possible continuity in a melody. Schenker used the term *melodic fluency* to describe the balance and poise that a stepwise line can provide. A melody consisting entirely of stepwise motion, however, could quickly become dull and monotonous. The judicious use of leaps therefore becomes necessary to provide variety.[3]

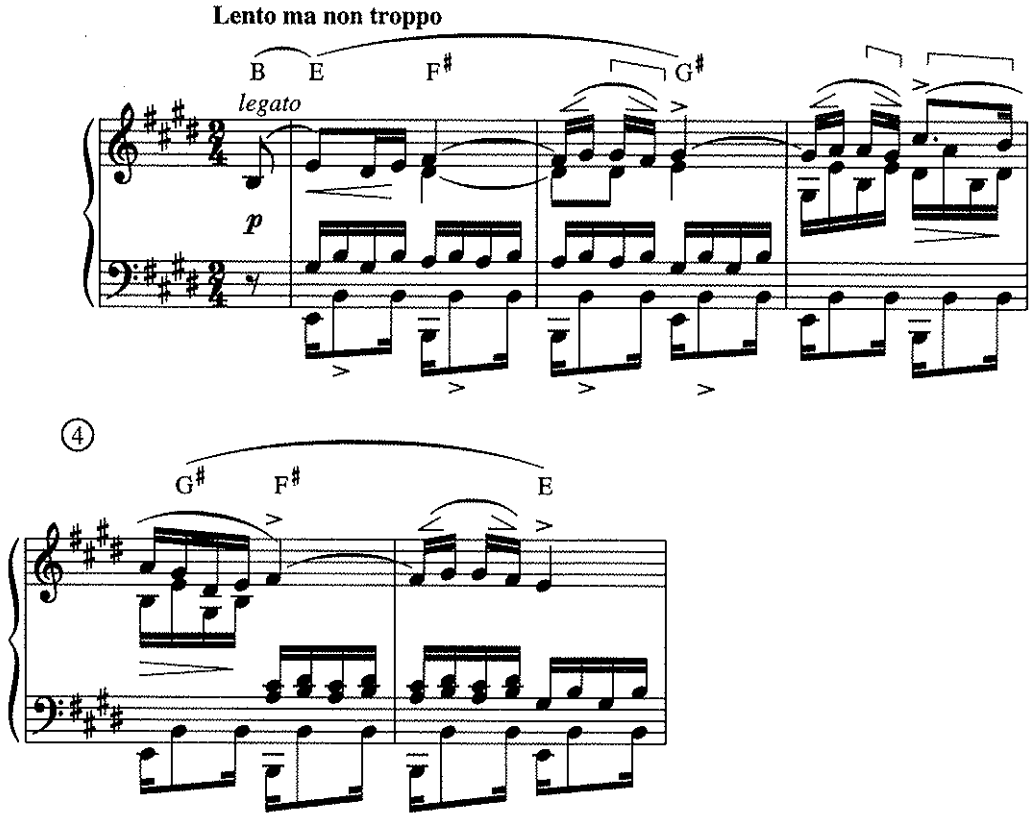
In contrast to the stepwise motion of the first two phrases, the third phrase contains two leaps before a stepwise descent to the tonic. The initial descending leap from A to F provides the expected tonic note. It is, however, supported by VI and consequently does not resolve the melodic (and harmonic) tension of the previous half cadence. The second leap ascends from F to B♭, creating the space of a fourth that is then filled in by descending motion. The descending and ascending leaps and subsequent stepwise motion create a balanced effect, combining melodic variety and continuity.

The final four notes of the melody also complete the descent left unfulfilled in the previous phrase, and provide local closure to this portion of the chorale melody. Notice how the descending motion contrasts with the rising motion of the opening bars. In tonal melodies, falling motion is typically associated with a release of tension and with closure, while rising motion conveys a sense of growing intensity, as if in opposition to gravity. Supported by both II^6_5 and V in the cadence, the descending leading tone is expanded to a half note—the only half note in the example. The greater length emphasizes the tone, and provides one final element of delay before the tonic note appears at the cadence.

The opening of Chopin's Etude, Op. 10, No. 3, is presented in Example 2.2. The shape of this beautiful melody outlines a symmetrical arch from the E at the beginning (with the preceding upbeat) to the E at the end. Certain tones stand out within this overall pattern because of length, rhythmic position, and other factors. In bars 1–2 the tones E, F♯, and G♯ are heard as

EXAMPLE 2.2:

Chopin, Etude, Op. 10, No. 3, bars 1–5 with analytical interpretation



primary, with neighbor figures decorating but not fundamentally altering this stepwise ascent. Notice that the extended tones F♯ and G♯ occur on the second beat and are tied over to the following downbeat, creating a syncopation reinforced by the notated accents. (These syncopations highlight the tones in conjunction with the supporting harmonies, which are also syncopated.)

In bar 2, the G♯ neighbor note on the first beat anticipates the longer G♯ on the second beat. Accordingly, when the neighbor figure recurs a step higher on the first beat of bar 3, the neighbor tone A suggests that this tone will again follow on the second beat. Instead, the gradual, serene progression of the melody is altered: a leap to C♯ occurs in place of the expected A, shifting it (as an accented passing tone) to the downbeat of bar 4. In bar 4, A is followed by G♯. The stepwise motion of the large-scale melodic arch, however, is interrupted by a descending leap of a fourth to D♯, which balances the ascending fourth G♯–C♯ in bar 3. The tones F♯ and E in bars 4–5, emphasized through duration as in bars 1–2, conclude the essentially stepwise melodic arch.

This melody thus combines continuity and variety in an extraordinary way, by outlining the tonic triad. Beginning with the upbeat tone B, the mel-

ody moves through E to G♯, ultimately returning to E. The third motions E–G♯ and G♯–E are filled in with F♯ so that stepwise motion is introduced into the line. This continuity is interrupted by the leap to C♯: the resulting gap in the melody is filled in by the following sixteenth-note passage that cascades from the melody's high point. Both the melodic and harmonic motion are accelerated at this climactic moment, augmenting the rhythmic irregularity of this five-bar phrase.[4]

In contrast to the consonant support of F♯ in bar 1 and G♯ in bar 2, C♯ (bar 3) functions as an appoggiatura, resolving to B over the V^7 chord. Thus Chopin further intensifies the climactic tone by setting it as a dissonance. In a beautiful motivic relationship, this C♯ and the B that follows create a rhythmic augmentation of the preceding neighbor figures G♯–F♯ (bar 2) and A–G♯ (bar 3) as indicated by brackets. The C♯ is also associated with F♯ in bar 1 and G♯ in bar 2 by its position in the bar, and by its relatively long duration.

Beginning with the figure E–D♯–E in bar 1, we have seen that neighbor motions elaborate the principal tones of the melody. We may consequently distinguish between two aspects: the accented and harmonically supported principal tones, and the embellishing figures. (For example, notice that the melody in bar 4, first beat, echoes the neighbor figures in bars 3 and 1.) This line therefore embodies both consistency and variety as it unfolds. The tones of the tonic triad serve as the melodic framework, with the arrival on the tonic in bar 5 creating a definitive goal of the melodic motion.

Chopin's melody will serve to illustrate the meaning of the term *structural level.* The melody as heard, note for note, represents what we may call the musical surface (or *surface level*). By distinguishing between those tones on the musical surface that are primary, and between those that are tones of figuration, we have established a new level of melodic coherence distinct from the surface. That is, we have observed connections among tones that are not immediately consecutive (such as the motion E–F♯–G♯ in bars 1–2). Two structural levels are thereby distinguished: the surface level that contains all tones, and a second, more *reduced* level that includes the principal tones only, without embellishing figuration. As we shall see, such connections can also occur over broader spans of music, on various *levels of structure.*[5]

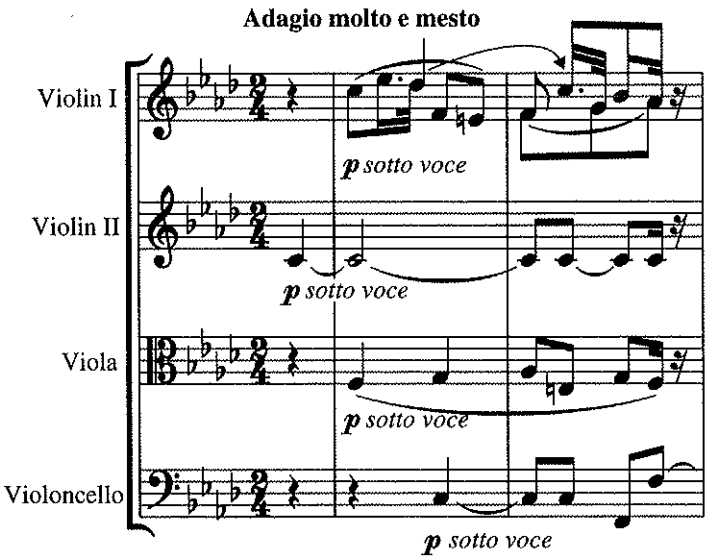
The striking melody that begins the third movement of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 59, No. 1, illustrates some of the ways in which melodies in the minor mode may differ from those in major (Example 2.3). Following the initial C in the first violin, the leap to E♭ and descent to D♭ suggest that downward motion will follow—as it does with the descent to F and E♮.[6]

Beethoven's setting of this part of the melody creates a dramatic, almost eerie effect. Following the solo C in the second violin on the upbeat, the C in the first violin enters an octave higher, with the Cs forming an open fifth with the viola. Both the subsequent tones E♭ and D♭ are heard as dissonant with the open fifth below; the melody then leaps to F, another dissonant tone, before moving to E natural (the consonant third of the dominant chord).

This poignant melodic and harmonic tension is resolved in the second bar. The tones F and C resolve the preceding E♮ and D♭, respectively. In other words, the D♭, left "hanging" in bar 1, resolves to C in the proper register

EXAMPLE 2.3:

Beethoven, String Quartet, Op. 59, No. 1, III, bars 1–2 with analytical interpretation



only in bar 2. The tendency of flat $\hat{6}$ to resolve to $\hat{5}$ is strong; the listener will expect to hear a resolution even after several intervening notes. The leap from F to C, and the subsequent leaps that converge on A♭, balance the melodic disjunction of bar 1. During the course of the contracting leaps, two distinct melodic strands are formed in bar 2, both converging on A♭: C–B♭–A♭ and F–G–A♭ (the added beams in the example clarify these relationships).

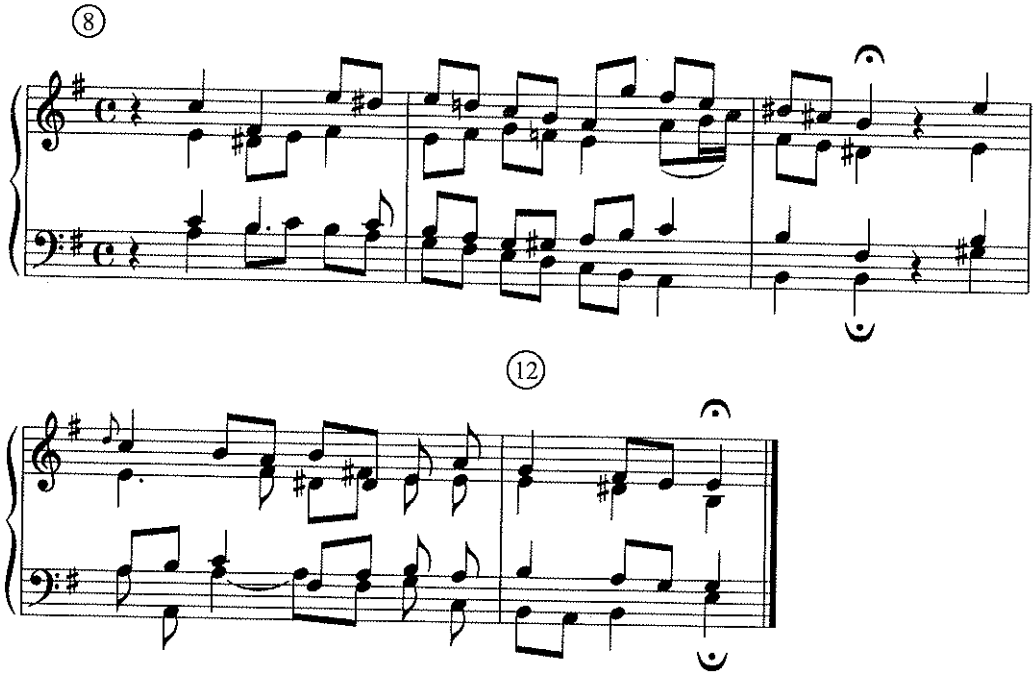
In our discussion of melodic fluency we noted that leaps are typically combined with stepwise motion for the sake of variety. This is particularly true of melodies conceived for instruments such as the violin, which can perform many leaps with little difficulty. Yet, as Beethoven's passage illustrates, a series of leaps may be related through underlying stepwise patterns.

The centrality of the mediant, A♭, as the concluding focal point of this melody highlights this most characteristic tone of the minor mode. The three scale degrees that differ between the major and natural minor scales—$\hat{3}$, $\hat{6}$, and $\hat{7}$—create many dissimilarities between the major and minor modes. The quality (major or minor) of the third between tonic and mediant—and the resulting quality of the tonic triad—is of course the most striking, and invariable, difference. Many other contrasts between major and minor will be explored as we proceed.[7]

Example 2.4 presents the last two phrases from Bach's harmonization of the chorale melody "Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille." In the first two bars of the excerpt, the soprano line employs chromatic alterations that are customary in minor, using raised $\hat{7}$ to return to the tonic in the neighbor figure E–D♯–E, and reverting to natural $\hat{7}$ in the stepwise descent from the tonic (E–A). In the descent that follows (bar 9), however, the tones D♯ and C♯ are used

EXAMPLE 2.4:

J. S. Bach, "Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille," bars 8–12



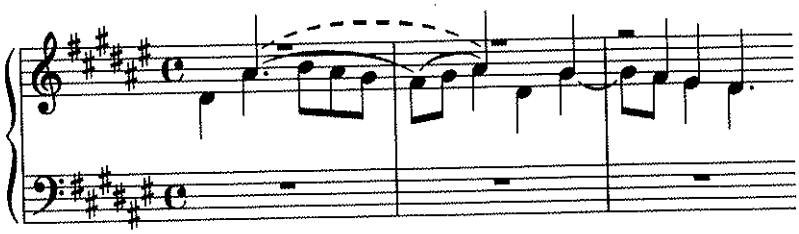
before the goal tone B. The reason for this form of the scale becomes clear when the harmonic support is considered. Both D♯ and B are supported by dominant chords in the half cadence; consequently, the tones of the descent from F♯ must be in agreement with the forthcoming B-major triad.

The tension of the half cadence is not resolved by the subsequent E-major chord; complete resolution occurs only with the tonic chord of the perfect authentic cadence. During this final phrase the melody descends through an octave (embellished with leaps), now with the natural forms of $\hat{7}$ (as an appoggiatura) and $\hat{6}$. Notice that between the tonic notes that begin and end the phrase, scale degree $\hat{5}$ (B) is emphasized through repetition, through metric placement (beat 3), and by the leap away from B (beat 3), while $\hat{3}$ (G) is highlighted on the downbeat of the final bar. Once again, the leaps do not disrupt the overall stepwise motion of the descending line. For example, the leap in bar 11 isolates B momentarily, but this detour merely postpones the unifying, stepwise relationship to A on the final eighth of the bar.

The structural association of tones that are not immediately adjacent can also be seen in Example 2.5. In this fugue subject by Bach, an initial leap of a fifth from D♯ to A♯ creates melodic tension that is balanced by subsequent motion in the opposite direction. Before the descent takes place, however, A♯ is decorated by its upper neighbor B and by a descending and an ascending motion that returns to A♯. These intervening figures expand and embellish, but do not fundamentally interrupt, the overall shape of the melody indicated by the stems placed on the music. When a tone (like the A♯ in bars 1–2)

EXAMPLE 2.5:

J. S. Bach, Fugue in D♯ minor (*WTC* I), subject, bars 1–3 with analytical interpretation



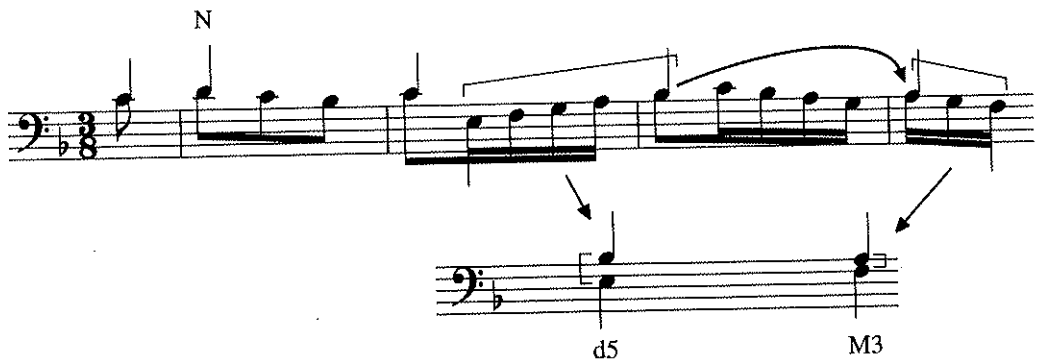
remains active in its context, even though other tones may intervene, that tone is said to be *prolonged.* The broken slur in the example indicates this *melodic prolongation.* Chords can be expanded in similar ways: *chord prolongation* will be discussed in the next chapter.

Example 2.6 presents another fugue subject from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier.* The first part of the subject circles around C ($\hat{5}$), which is decorated by upper and lower neighbor figures. The subsequent leap to $\hat{7}$ creates a temporary gap in the line that is filled by the subsequent rising stepwise motion. This motion reaches $\hat{4}$ on the next downbeat, a tone which is highlighted both by its longer duration relative to the sixteenth notes before and after it, and by its accented metrical position. A final group of sixteenth notes begins on C (an upper neighbor to B♭) and leads to A at the conclusion of the subject. Once more a melodically fluent line—C–B♭–A, expanded by the neighbor tone D—forms the "backbone" or structural foundation of the melody and provides overall coherence and direction.

The dynamic quality of this subject is enhanced by an additional, more subtle element: the rising motion from E to B♭ ($\hat{7}$ to $\hat{4}$) in bars 2–3 outlines the interval of the diminished fifth. (The notes that begin and end motions

EXAMPLE 2.6:

J. S. Bach, Fugue in F major (*WTC* I), subject, bars 1–4 with analytical interpretation

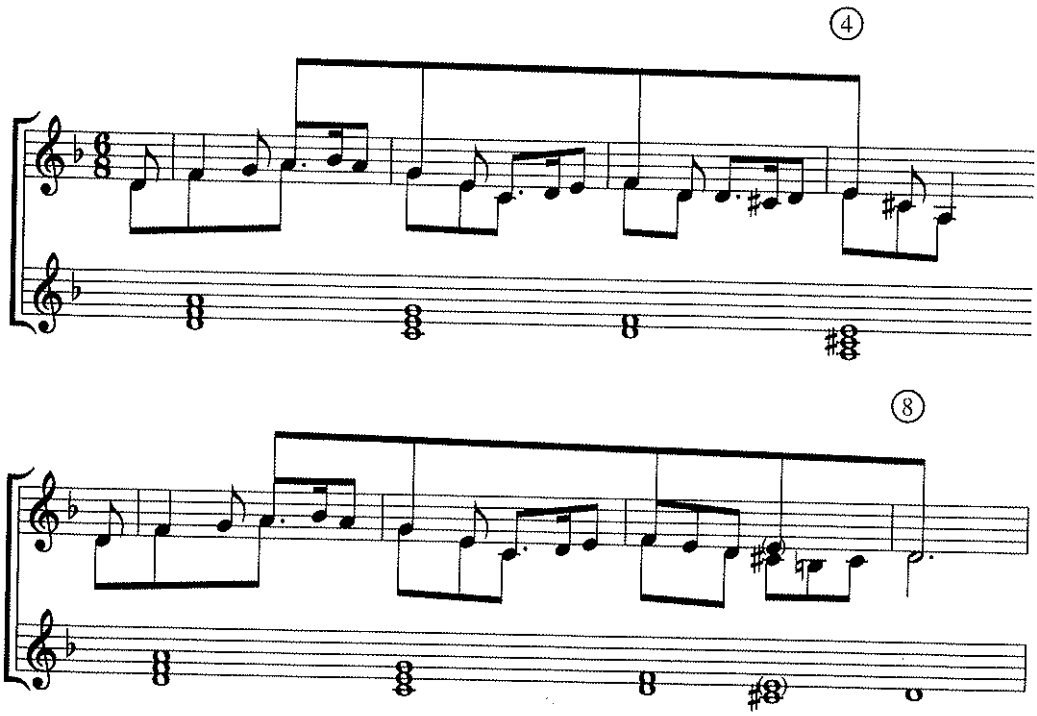


frequently stand out more than the tones in between.) The tension created by this interval is not released until bar 4, where the expected resolution of the diminished fifth to a major third is provided by the tones A and F at the end of the subject. (The subject proper ends on A, with F forming part of the countersubject that follows.) In a sense two "voices" may be perceived in this apparent single-line subject. As indicated in the second part of Example 2.6, the progression of a diminished fifth to a major third is embedded in the melodic flow. A melody that articulates two or more distinct voices, such as this fugue subject, is called a *polyphonic melody.* Frequently the alternation of two or more voices may become a primary compositional idea, as in the familiar tune "Greensleeves" (Example 2.7).

The melody begins with an arpeggiated ascent, partly filled in, through the notes of the tonic triad D–F–A. The climax tone A (embellished with an upper neighbor) initiates a stepwise top-voice descent, as indicated by the long stems and connecting beam. Each of these principal melodic notes is embellished in various ways, often through additional arpeggiations. If each arpeggiation were played as a block chord, the lower notes would be heard as inner tones, or voices, of the chord. Because the melody is written so that it can be sung by one person or played by a single-line melodic instrument, the chords or harmonies it suggests are incorporated into the melodic line itself.

EXAMPLE 2.7:

"Greensleeves" with analytical interpretation



Once again we see a polyphonic melody, where distinct voices are incorporated into a single melodic line. The partial structural descent in bars 1–4 (A–G–F–E), and the complete descent to the tonic in bars 5–8 indicated by the beams, provide large-scale continuity and direction, as in the fugue subjects.

In bar 7 the tone F is not followed by E (in the descent of the "framework"), but by the leading tone C♯ (on beat 2). The effect of melodic fluency is so strong that Schenker regarded the leading tone in contexts such as this a *substitute* for scale degree $\hat{2}$, which would, if actually present, produce a completely stepwise descending line. In the first phrase of the melody, the motion A–G–F did in fact lead to E, supported by V. In this second phrase E is still suggested—in part *because of* the substitution of C♯—as the simplest and most usual connection between the F and the D, and by analogy with the preceding phrase. Parentheses, as in bar 7 of the example, are used by Schenkerian analysts to indicate suggested or "implied" notes.[8]

A single line can unite different voices that are widely separated, as in Example 2.8, the opening of the Prelude from J. S. Bach's Suite No. 1 for unaccompanied cello. In this work the degree of separation is extreme, as it is in much of Bach's music for unaccompanied instruments. However, melodic partitions of this type occur frequently—especially in music for solo instruments, where a single line may outline two, three, or more independent polyphonic lines. Having considered some basic characteristics of single melodic lines, we shall now explore further aspects of melody as revealed in the combination of two or more parts in species counterpoint.

EXAMPLE 2.8:

J. S. Bach, Suite No. 1 for Unaccompanied Cello, Prelude, bars 1–4 with harmonic representation