

Proposing a Historically-Oriented Diminution Curriculum for Baroque Counterpoint Instruction

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There is a significant disparity between the pedagogical materials available for Renaissance counterpoint and those available for Baroque counterpoint. Renaissance counterpoint has the Fuxian modes; sets of detailed, specific rules and guidelines that serve to develop students' technical abilities to write in that idiom before attempting full-length composition. In contrast, Baroque counterpoint generally adds only the standard rules of tonal voice leading and harmony, and some specific formal processes for later imitative forms (particularly fugues). Presently, there is no thorough pedagogical material that serves to develop students' technical abilities to write in the Baroque idiom before moving onto full model composition (which tends to take up most of the average semester of Baroque counterpoint). To address this issue, I have developed a systematic curriculum of diminution exercises, based on historical treatise and compositional sources (primarily Ganassi 1535, Ortiz 1553, van Eyck c.1644-55, and Niedt 1706), which adapts many of the compositional approaches presented or implied in these sources for use in contemporary Baroque counterpoint pedagogy. This curriculum aims to develop technical proficiency with specific musical elements, building toward detailed model compositions: elaboration, figuration, Baroque motive, and texture in general. These are all essential in the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque idiom. The exercises model the composition of variation forms (either solo or homophonic), solo partitas, and, most importantly, several approaches to shorter-form keyboard pieces (Preludes, Inventions, Binary forms, etc.), but can be adapted to a wider variety of forms and processes.