

FUNDAMENTALS OF CONDUCTING RENAISSANCE POLYPHONY

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CONDUCTING PRINCIPLES

- Chant-like; group in 2's and 3's
- Begin with feeling of Arsis-Thesis
- Hands independent
- Guide the phrases rather than beat time
- Determine the Tactus
- Cadences are points of repose
- Dovetails are points of energy

Kyrie I Missa Pange lingua a 4 Josquin des Prez 1450-1521

Supertius C1

Altus C3

Tenor C4

Bassus F4

1 2 1 2 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 1 2 3

Ky- ri- lin - e - e - a glori - o - lei-
 Pan - ge gu - a si-

Ky- ri- e e- lei-

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2

TEXT – the starting point

- Textual phrase structure determines musical phrase structure (new text = new music)
- Musical shapes spring from word stresses
- Text painting allows for expressivity (melismas, long notes, suspensions, dissonance, etc.)

MELODY

- Based on Gregorian Chant or chant-like melodies (Byrd Masses)
- Step wise movement is predominant
- Vocal ranges smaller than in later eras
- Text determines melodic shape and stress
 - ◊ Three types of musical stress
 - Agogic – word stress through prolonged duration
 - Syllabic – strong vs. weak syllables, increase and decrease of acoustic energy
 - Tonic – heightened pitch

(Agogic) (Syllabic) (Tonic) (Agogic and Tonic)

Sic - ut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a - qua - rum,

(Palestrina–Sicut cervus, beginning)

(Tonic)

Basso

Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son, e -

(Mozart –Requiem, K626; 'Kyrie')

In Baroque and Baroque inspired music, tonic stresses can be at the LOWEST note of the phrase.

BASIC TEXTURE

- Equal and independent voices
- Imitative or homophonic
- Tenor and Alto parts often interchangeable
- Cadential points determined by two voices

DETERMINING A TEMPO

- What is the note carrying the tactus (pulse)?
- What is the smallest division of the beat?
- What is the text conveying (joy, penitence, reflection)?
- What are the acoustical properties of your space?

DYNAMICS

- Not indicated in the music
 - ◊ Beware of heavily edited music and bar lines
- Very few extremes
 - ◊ Intensity increases or diminishes, without excessive or dramatic *crescendo/decrescendo*
- Moving from or toward a cadence
- Consider the text (again!)

SOUND

- Arch-like; imagine the arched ceiling of a great dome
- Purity of tone
- Singers should match vowels, gesture, dynamic, articulation
- *A cappella* refers to the Sistine Chapel and Palestrina
 - ◊ Doubling instruments are allowed!

COMPOSER CALLING CARDS

Palestrina: Pristine perfection, sometimes accused of lacking emotion

Victoria: heightened emotion, vocal ranges and musical shapes reflect this

Byrd: Internal rhythmic excitement (little bursts of Catholic passion?); mathematical organization

Josquin: Paired voices; the descending third drop; homophonic = solemnity