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What is really old in the *stile antico* of Johann Joseph Fux?

Karl Gustav Fellerer and others have described the early eighteenth-century *stile antico* idiom primarily as intended replication of historical polyphony, something that has later been questioned by Jen-Yen Chen, who has instead argued that Johann Joseph Fux ‘subtly exploits the powerful mystique associated with Palestrina in order to impart authority to his own understanding of the nature of musical composition’.¹ Since Chen has admirably dealt with the historico-aesthetical, social, and political background of this repertory, *stile antico* instruction as applied to music in freer idioms, as well as Viennese *stile antico* in the second half of the eighteenth century, we will here primarily deal with the early eighteenth-century contrapuntal regulation and repertory itself.² As a broad definition we shall sort under the categories *stylus ecclesiasticus*, *stile antico*, *Moteten-Stil*, and a *cappella-Stil* (labels often applied indirectly out of context) imitative writing observing strict voice-leading rules by composers such as Marc’ Antonio Ziani, Johann Joseph Fux, Antonio Caldara, Matteo Palotta, and others, albeit drawing mainly from examples by Fux. The latter decision is justified by the impact of the *Gradus ad Parnassum*, allowing us to compare the compositional procedure displayed in original works with the principles put forward in the treatise.

We shall consider four groups of source material separately: firstly, contrapuntal sacred music of the sixteenth century (in all styles and idioms); secondly, treatises on counterpoint from the same period; thirdly, original music from early eighteenth-century Vienna in self-consciously historical styles and idioms; and lastly, material such as the *Gradus ad Parnassum*.

¹ Karl-Gustav Fellerer, *Der Palestrinastil und seine Bedeutung in der vokalen Kirchenmusik des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Augsburg, 1929). Jen-Yen Chen, ‘Palestrina and the Influence of “Old” Style in Eighteenth-Century Vienna’, *Journal of Musicological Research* 22/1–2 (2003), 1–44, at 6.

² Chen, ‘Palestrina’ as well as *The Tradition and Ideal of the Stile Antico in Viennese Sacred Music 1740–1800* (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard Univ., 2000) and ‘Fux, Caldara and their Canon Masses as Evidence of Professional Rivalry’, in Thomas Hochradner and Susanne Janes (eds.), *Fux-Forschung: Standpunkte und Perspektiven* (Tutzing, 2008), 77–88.

The points on which eighteenth-century *stile antico* music differs from late sixteenth-century counterpoint could be sorted under three categories, which are, of course, essentially intertwined in the type of counterpoint under consideration. Yet, we shall, for a number of reasons, consider them separately, first taking into account the contour and modal outline of thematic material; secondly, the progression of parts (voice-leading); and thirdly, aspects of modal harmony and voice distribution.

SOGGETTI AND MELODIC CURVATURE

Any surface examination of a broad spectrum of late sixteenth-century ecclesiastical counterpoint (Palestrina, Zoilo, Victoria etc.), will make clear that original thematic material used in imitation is characterised by the following traits:

- predominantly uneven distribution of rhythmic values, around half of the notes falling on unaccented beats;
- smaller note values in ascending motion appear early in the *soggetto* and in descending motion at its end;
- leaps are generally countered by steps in contrary motion;
- the *soggetto* does not contain any sequences and ends on the *finalis* which is reached stepwise.

This is, of course, a very condensed generalisation and not one intended as a reduction of a stylistic model as in Knud Jeppesen or Arthur Tillman Merritt; it is simply a description of typical melodic material in Roman-Catholic imitative writing, drawing particularly from motets and mass settings by Palestrina, Victoria, and Lassus, since these are most readily available in modern editions and well-known to the presumptive reader.³ If we were to consider equivalent parameters in the thematic material available in Caldara's and Fux's counterpoint in ecclesiastical style, we would have to acknowledge the following:

- predominantly even distribution of note values;
- smaller note values appear either in ascending or descending motion anywhere in the *soggetto*;

³ Arthur Tillmann Merritt, *Sixteenth-Century Polyphony: a Basis for the Study of Counterpoint*, (Cambridge, MA, ²1946); Knud Jeppesen, 'Das "Sprunggesetz" des Palestrinastils bei betonten Viertelnoten (halben Taktzeiten)', *Musikwissenschaftlicher Kongress: Basel 1924* (Leipzig, 1925), 211–219; id., *The Style of Palestrina and the Dissonance* (Copenhagen, ²1946).

- leaps generally countered by contrary motion, either in the form of steps or by leap;
- *Soggetto* may include sequences, ending either on the *finalis* or the *tenor*, reached by step or leap.

As becomes clear from this schematic melodic generalisation, there are a number of points in which the thematic material of Fux (to some extent) and Caldara (to a greater degree) differs from that of the sixteenth-century. This comes as no surprise, but it is striking that, as we shall see, many precepts of sixteenth-century voice leading were adapted in the imitative polyphony of these two, and some other, composers. How then could thematic material of different melodic conventions function according to similar voice leading regulations? We must first look closer at some of the stylistic differences mentioned above. The fact that *soggetti* frequently finish on the tenor of their mode (or indeed the dominant of their tonal key) in Fux and Caldara seems essentially related to the general sharpwards orientation of fugal writing (something that is anachronistic in relation to the polyphonic style of, for example, Palestrina). Entries are sometimes directly orientated harmonically towards the dominant harmony, as opposed to a unified harmonic function with different transposition levels. An even distribution of note values is, to a somewhat greater degree, stylistically consistent with much music from the generation before Palestrina—we shall see below some further correlations between late Franco-Flemish polyphony and Fux's contrapuntal writing.

Example 1 shows a *soggetto* which is, due to its metrical and rhythmic properties, highly atypical for the voice leading rules of the sixteenth century, and indeed for any polyphonic style from the same period.

EXAMPLE 1. Fux, *Ad te Domine levavi*, bars 38–41



Yet, Fux superimposes voice leading regulation from that specific context onto thematic material that is essentially foreign to it. We can note briefly that Fux adheres more closely to melodic constraints than, for example, Caldara and later Georg Christoph Wagenseil, Georg Reutter, and Michael Haydn, even in cases where these composers apply voice leading that is balanced and less fugue-like. If we consider an example by Caldara it is clear that, in addition to its mensural rigidity, it outlines harmonic properties, on

account of which it is even further removed stylistically from the linear context from which *stile antico* voice leading regulations were derived.

EXAMPLE 2. Caldara, *Missa con canoni diversi*, Kyrie, bars 2–5



In his chapter on invertible counterpoint, Fux expectedly warns against progressions by skip to the octave.⁴ This is all in good sixteenth-century practice, but such writing is still found in his own *a cappella* works. This leads us to voice leading.

VOICE LEADING

Gradus ad Parnassum deviates in numerous aspects not only from sixteenth-century musical practice, but also from treatises of the same period. One of these is terminology. Fux uses, for example, the term *inganno* for deceptive cadences. In earlier Italian theory, this signified something very different (permutation of melodic material, essentially another facet of the concept of deception). Here he also states that ‘the formal or perfect cadence leads from a major third into an octave’ rather than the movement from major sixth to octave. He also illustrates that it is exactly the falling fifth that makes it a ‘full cadence’, something that in sixteenth-century writing in more than two voices is symptomatic of, rather than effecting, the cadence.⁵ The older view is suggested in the two-part examples in *Gradus ad Parnassum*, but not in four-part examples, where the bass part takes precedence over the tenor part as the operative cadential part.

Gioseffo Zarlino’s *Le institutioni harmoniche* (Venice, 1558) appears to have been important for terminology and concepts of the *Gradus ad Parnassum*. Fux uses *motus rectus*, *motus obliquus*, and *motus contrarius* for parallel, sidewise, and contrary motion. This was probably taken from Zarlino or one of the generic traditions following his writings (the most common terminology of Bartolomeus Ramis de Pareia, Johannes Tinctoris, and well

⁴ Johann Joseph Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, Vienna, 1725, 155.

⁵ Fux, *Gradus*, 175: ‘Clausulam formalem, sive absolutam, Tertia majore concludi, inde in Octavam labi, non ignoras. Clausula vero ficta loco Tertiae majoris, minore utens, clausulam formalem auribus expectam avitando eludit, atque audientis opinionem fallit. Unde ab Italis *Inganno* nuncupata est.’

into the sixteenth century was ‘*ascendente vel descendente simili*’, or similar phrases). The system of species adopted by Fux can be seen in rudimentary form in Zarlino and Orazio Tigrini, but is most likely taken from one or several treatises such as Girolamo Diruta’s *Il transilvano dialogo* (Venice, 1593) and Adriano Banchieri’s *Cartella musicale* (Venice, 1614), certainly also by way of Angelo Berardi’s *Documenti armonici* (Bologna, 1687) or *Miscellanea musicale* (Bologna, 1689), published within Fux’s own lifetime.⁶

Concerning the pedagogical method for voice leading, there are some marked discrepancies in attitude compared to sixteenth-century treatises. Zarlino’s view that many problems of voice leading disappear with imitation denotes that a good *soggetto* and a good grip of how to apply this in imitation is the proper starting point for voice leading—a much more pragmatic and effective method for counterpoint pedagogy than the graded voice leading practice patterns with freely invented counterparts in the *Gradus ad Parnassum*.⁷ This has to do, of course, with a difference in assumed prior knowledge: Fux’s method aspires to be a universal *manuductio* even out of its context. It is obvious that some elements taken from sixteenth-century treatises have an artificial presence in the treatise. For example, the *sospiro* rest with mensuration value of a minim is a structural device in sixteenth-century counterpoint—in Fux’s description and examples it has no such function, being mentioned as a useful device only in the second species.⁸

As regards the general view of sacred music, its functions, and ideals, Fux’s treatise conforms surprisingly well to that of much earlier texts. His briefly defined concept of taste (*gusto*) effectively recounts all precepts of the fifteenth century, as they are found, for example, in Tinctoris.⁹ But there are also passages that outwardly reflect patterns of thought from even earlier music theory. Consider these passages concerning the ontology of music as compared to liturgical texts:

In componendo partes praedictas [of the Mass] debet artifex dictamen vel materiam ab alio, puta theologo vel legista, recipere, et post hoc formam ei debitam debet musicus applicare. Sic enim ad invicem se iuvant artes mechanciae, ut in sutoria et corii praeparatura sensui fit apertum.¹⁰

⁶ Especially Diruta is interesting in this aspect. His seven contrapuntal patterns are described in *Il transilvano, libro secundo*, 9–15.

⁷ See Gioseffo Zarlino, *Le istituzioni armoniche* (Venice, 1558), chapter 28.

⁸ Fux, *Gradus*, 59.

⁹ *Complexus effectuum musices* (c.1485), in Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay [Corpus Scriptorum de Musica, 22] (Rome, 1975–1978), ii, 165f.

¹⁰ Johannes de Grocheio, *De musica* [c.1300], ed. E. Rohloff [Media latinitas musica 2] (Leipzig, 1943), 41–67, at 66.

(In composing the mentioned sections [of the Mass] the artist must receive the text or subject matters from another person, the theologian or the theorist, after which the musician should apply to it the appropriate form. Thus the lines of craft support one another, as is clear to see in the workshop of the shoemaker or skin tanner.)

Ad hæc omnia assequenda, compositor peritum in arte sua sartorem imitabitur, qui omnes corporis articulos, longitudinem, & latitudinem exacte mensura dimetitur, ut vestem corpori quam aptissime convenientiam conficiat: ita musico textus vestiendus, significationis, & affectus ratio habenda est, ut musica verborum aptata significatui non solum canere, verum etiam perorare videatur.¹¹

(In order to achieve all these things the composer will imitate the tailor who is skilled in his craft, who measures exactly all the parts of the body, length and breadth, in order to make the garment fitting in best possible way. Just in this way, the text must be clothed by the musician, and its significance and feeling should be taken into account in order that music, fitting the sense of the words, express these rather than just sing them.)

One may note (i) that the passages appear in similar contexts: speaking of words in relation to music and the style fitting sacred music; (ii) that they are similarly phrased and structured; and (iii) that they both relate to a figure of thought according to which music's relation to text is inherently reliant, representing the ecclesiastical style as an applied art. There are in the *Gradus ad Parnassum* several other passages that suggest paraphrase or reference to medieval treatises, a fact that will have to be discussed separately elsewhere. Finally, a fourth possibly significant connection between the two above statements is that both authors write from a rather self-conscious geopolitical position: Johannes de Grocheio in Paris and Fux in the centre of the Habsburg Empire, pinpointing distinct styles, rather than music in general—both describe normative procedures of composition with full awareness of other styles.

Franz Nekes suggested, now more than a century ago, that in the late sixteenth century the guiding rule concerning the 1:4 mensuration ratio (four crotchets against a semibreve) mainly had to do with contour rather than with the placing of consonances and dissonances.¹² This observation finds significant support in the repertory, for example, in Palestrina's *Missa Dilexi quoniam*. This is, in fact, a perfect example of the conflict between Fux's concept of style and his precepts, supposedly deduced from observations in

¹¹ Fux, *Gradus*, 243.

¹² The remark is found in a review of the *Kompositionslehre* of Michael Haller, in the *Gregorius-Blatt*, 1892, 81.

the repertory. Fux, as far as I have been able to ascertain, completely refrains from part-writing such as that found in the mentioned work by Palestrina; moreover, his precept that the third note in the figure of four crotchets can only be dissonant if framed by two consonant notes—certainly conceived long before transmitted as text in the *Gradus ad Parnassum*—seems to have led him to writing passages that have no single analogy in sixteenth-century repertory. He writes this figure with only the note preceding the dissonant third note being consonant, for example, in the Gloria of his *Missa Constantiae*. This is thus an example in which the stylistic principles of Palestrina and Fux not simply differ, but are in fact mutually exclusive. While it may be true that Fux did not attempt an exact replication of Palestrina's writing, and that it is usually futile to suggest precepts of general sixteenth-century voice leading, Fux seems to be in conflict with a majority of extant sixteenth-century instruction, both theoretical and practical, concerning the treatment of crotchets. Jeppesen has pointed out that it goes specifically against Tigrini's *Compendio della musica* (1588), where he states that a passage (Tigrini specifically mentions cadences) consisting of four crotchets is generally set in a way that the third crotchet forms a dissonance.¹³ This is completely reverse to what Fux teaches and, as we have seen, it is confirmed by a lot of extant repertory of the generation following Tigrini. This goes back further: already in Pietro Aaron's *Toschanella in musica* (1523) we find that the first and last notes in such movement (not specifically at cadences, as it is phrased in Tigrini) should be consonant, while the middle notes could be dissonant.¹⁴

One element of voice leading that was common by the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the embellishment drop of a fifth in a syn-copated suspension. It is certainly very rare in South-European sixteenth-century music. Fux describes in practical detail how to turn a ligature into this figure: 'the ligatures described so far may also be used in a different way, where the original form is hardly changed, but nevertheless a more enlivening movement results.'¹⁵

¹³ Knud Jeppesen, *Counterpoint: the Polyphonic Vocal Style of the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1939; R/Dover, 1992), 29f.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fux, *Gradus*, 76.

Pro concinnitate sequentis Speciei hîc præmitto, Ligaturas hucusque dictas etiam alio modo fieri posse, quæ quidem substantiam minimè evertunt, afferunt tamen concentui celerioris motûs rationem. E. G.



FIGURE 1. Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, 76

It seems that eighteenth century composers in the Habsburg Empire had received this mannerism via traditions outside Roman music. It is found in the later Franco-Flemish traditions, in German secular music, and early Lutheran music as well as in polyphony of seventeenth-century Northern Europe—Aloysius is, it appears, not a Roman after all.

EXAMPLE 3. Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, p. 137, bars 6–11



This latter point relates also to the comments regarding the Amen in the *Missa Credo in unum Deum*, where Fux addresses real or possible criticism against his voice leading by letting Aloysius demonstrate how the perceived writing of consecutives in fact occurs only as an embellishment which does not concern the ‘core’ of the work (the same principle can, if

reversed, give rise to such writing, for example, by having consecutive intervals falling on accented beats in second species writing). While most modern analysts would probably agree that it is a difference between the ‘core’ or ‘background’ progressions and the ‘outer’ or ‘foreground’ voice leading, instances such as those in the *Missa Credo in unum Deum* are not to be found either in extant sixteenth-century counterpoint instruction nor, it appears, in repertory from that period (unless one considers rules such as those by Franchinus Gaffurius and Nicolò Burzio, who maintain that it is better to have faulty voice leading in small note values so that its effect is less easily perceived, but this has to do with dissonant passing notes).¹⁶

ASPECTS OF MODAL HARMONY AND VOICE DISTRIBUTION

What then was Fux’s relation to modal concepts of the sixteenth century? If we look at his bicinia and compare them to, for example, the ‘Et resurrexit’ in Josquin’s four-part *Missa l’homme armé sexti toni*, we see that none of them uses the unprepared fourths on a stressed beat as found in the passage by Josquin.

EXAMPLE 4. Josquin, *Missa l’homme armé sexti toni*



¹⁶ Franchinus Gaffurius, *Practica musicae*, facs. of the 1496 Milan edn. (New York, 1979), fol. D 3v.

EXAMPLE 5. Palestrina, *Missa ad fugam*, Sanctus, bars 36–38

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It consists of three staves: a vocal line (treble clef), a piano accompaniment line (treble clef), and a bass line (bass clef). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is simple and catchy, with a repeating pattern of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment provides a steady harmonic foundation with chords and single notes. The bass line follows the harmonic structure, often mirroring the piano accompaniment.

Some of the examples of invertible counterpoint at the tenth in the *Gradus ad Parnassum* correspond closely to the composition model Gaffurius discusses and ascribes to Tinctoris, Guarnerius, Josquin, Werbecke, Alexander Agricola, Compère, Brumel, and Isaac, with parallel tenths in outer parts with 2 : 1 or 4 : 1 rhythmic relation to the c.f.

¹⁸ Zarlino, *Istitutioni*, chapter 5. We find indications of this when Fux describes which type of voice distribution and disposition sounds best with reference to the order of the harmonic overtone series.

FIGURE 2. Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, 179

It is interesting to note that such strict writing is largely absent from Fux's compositions. The reason seems to be that this was only a demonstration of the inversion, giving the inversions simultaneously in outer parts with either imitation or another *soggetto* in the middle parts. This is indicated by the statement: 'now it remains to be demonstrated how this species of counterpoint should be used in practical composition.'¹⁹ This is the main difference in relation to pre-Palestrinian composers, who used this pattern as a structure in itself, either as a *bicinium*, or with additional parts.²⁰

We have seen that a number of stylistic traits in Fux's and Caldara's polyphony have their counterparts in Franco-Flemish music before c.1550 and in later music in Central and Northern Europe but not to any greater degree in Festa, Palestrina, Zoilo, or other music from Rome in the late sixteenth-century. This seems to indicate either that the later composers had learned from repertory of the earlier sixteenth century (for example through examples cited in Glareanus) or that they followed a tradition of contrapuntal writing that was conspicuously dissimilar to what may be termed 'Palestrina style', constituting a rather diluted and eclectic tradition of the same. Important future research tasks would include a thorough philological analysis of the *Gradus ad Parnassum* in relation to earlier music theory and further identification of stylistic elements in the *stile antico* of the Habsburg Empire in the first decades of the eighteenth century with specific focus on the music of composers such as Caldara and Palotta.

¹⁹ Fux, *Gradus*, 189: 'Jam demonstrare restat, quo modo Contrapunctum hoc in usum componendo redigendum sit [...].'

²⁰ Mattias Lundberg, 'Tracing an Ontology of Voice-Leading in Fifteenth-Century Counterpoint Regulation', *Principles of Music Composing: Aspects of Historical Dispersion* (Vilnius, 2004), 41–49.

