

Counterpoint

A Translation of *Kontrapunkt*
by Heinrich Schenker



Book II

Translated by
John Rothgeb
and
Jürgen Thym

Edited by
John Rothgeb

COUNTERPOINT

A Translation of KONTRAPUNKT
by HEINRICH SCHENKER

Volume II
of New Musical Theories and Fantasies

Book II
Counterpoint in Three and More Voices
Bridges to Free Composition

Translated by John Rothgeb and Jürgen Thym

EDITED BY JOHN ROTHGEB

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Author's Preface

How am I to teach my children to sort out
the useless and the harmful?

Tell me!

Tell them about heaven and earth
what they will never comprehend!—Goethe

The most insidious of all errors is when
good young minds think they will lose
their originality by recognizing as true
what has already been recognized as true
by others.—Goethe

Twelve years have passed since the publication of the first volume of *Counterpoint*. But during this protracted interval my activity has not ceased; on the contrary, I have occupied myself by design with works that had the function of amplifying the basic concepts of the [*Neue musikalische*] *Theorien und Phantasien*.¹ As I found it useful at the time—following the demands of necessity—to precede *Counterpoint* with *Harmony* as the first volume, and, as I felt compelled—again following demands of necessity—to juxtapose immediately with voice leading in two-voice counterpoint the prolongations of free composition, by the same logic it appeared useful to show the operation of the laws I presented in *Harmony* and *Counterpoint I* in living works of art of the highest rank, even before I clarified those laws in subsequent volumes revealing their higher manifestation. For, as I have said, exigencies of the present time have inexorably demanded this sacrifice. The works I refer to are *Beethoven's neunte Sinfonie* (1912); *Erläuterungsausgabe der letzten fünf Sonaten Beethovens*: op. 109 (1913), op. 110 (1914), op. 111 (1915), op. 101 (1920); the edition of all the piano sonatas by Beethoven (thus far, eighteen sonatas); and *Der Tonwille*, vol. I (1921).²

This work-plan had the advantage that in the present volume, I could refrain from such a detailed and extensive comparison of strict counterpoint and free composition as was necessary in the first. I considered it important, however, to maintain the encyclopedic method of presentation.

If my theories (like all my other works) have been imprinted from the outset with the character of a rescue-effort (since the task at hand was to protect music from centuries of misconceptions by theory and historicism), the need for such endeavor has increased proportionately as the intervening World War has loosed all forces of destruction that have utterly eradicated musical art in the West. Today the task before us is more to transmit the essence of music to more distant eras, since we cannot expect it to be restored in the near future.

How appalling the image of desperation and impotence presented by our time! What a contrast to a truly art-creating, or even just art-perceiving epoch!

The World War resulted in a Germany which, although unvanquished in battle, has been betrayed by the democratic parties—the parties of the average and the inferior, of half- and non-education, of the most flagrant individuals (“each,” as Brahms liked to say, “a summit unto himself”—a summit of humanity); the parties of incapacity for synthesis, of “omnipotence” (that is: impotence), of the most irresponsible doctrinarism and the blood-thirstiest insatiability for experimentation, along with terrorism, genocide, forgery, the lie of “the people,” worship and aping of the West, and all that goes with it. This Germany has taken over from the hostile nations of the West their lie of “liberty.” Thus the last stronghold of aristocracy has fallen, and culture is sold out to democracy, which, fundamentally and organically, is hostile to it—for culture is selection, the most profound synthesis based on miraculous achievements of the genius.

Since that time the decay continues unabated. It surely is not politics to say in retrospect that the Roman nation has done more of harm to world culture through its insatiable appetite for lands and peoples than of service through its modest intellectual legacy; by the same token, it is no more political when we evaluate nations still active today, just as we would evaluate individuals, with respect to the relation between claims and achievements.³ The peoples of the West, contaminated by deception and profiteering and barely touched by civilization, have, under a leadership even more cunning [than that of the Roman Empire]—in fact, a leadership more depraved than anything that sits confined under lock and key—subsequently feigned “victory” by continuing, against the letter and spirit of the treaty [of Versailles], the blockade of the German stomach; by waging an economic war on behalf of their own backwardness; by pillaging nations and lands (or having the “League of Nations”—a veritable academy of national theft—do the pillaging); and by invading the nations, as yet unvanquished by them, with commissions and occupation armies, and sucking them dry. Up to this hour they wallow in the filth of such cowardice against a disarmed Germany; yet they already verge on rivalry with each other for “hegemony”: there are just so many cravings for hegemony as there are nations! We know the lie of democratic “equality,” which in the end plays itself out in the act of repression!

If capitalism fights now as ever against capitalism, and democracy against democracy, rallying slogans such as “international capital” and “brotherhood of the people” are given the lie. The fact that during the war workers stood against workers has likewise sufficiently exposed the lie of the “international proletariat.” The masses are told that they have won, and they believe it. But masses can never win. In all corners of the earth and at all times, masses have been nothing but an eternal slumberer, a humus that is colored differently in different places only for climatic reasons. True, the masses were given their right to vote (*circenses*), but that has not changed the fact that millions of Chinese, Indians, Germans, Englishmen, and Frenchmen as well as thousands

of panderers to the people are worth less than just one Chinese, Indian, German, Englishman, or Frenchman. For masses become a suitable tool—be the cause noble or evil—only in the hands of an individual (for example, Gandhi or Kemal-Pascha). Alas, those people-panderers! More wretched and miserable than all the court-panderers, they themselves do not know the truth and only deceive the masses. (Isaiah: “My dear people, those who praise and esteem you, deceive you.”) At best, they revel in the fruits of their “leadership” like musical directors performing hack-works: whatever boredom or repulsion may torture the listener, the conductor beats time and, thus, feels himself occupied, even pleasantly entertained. But in view of such unsuitability of the masses and the people-panderers, is it not certain that secret diplomacy will be conducted, the parliament deceived, and, finally, the masses lied to—worse than could ever have happened under monarchs?

But democracy stubbornly resists recognizing its own misconceptions and lies, its violations of nature and culture. If Nature herself decreed evolution for humankind from its cradle onward, the people-panderers have proclaimed evolution to be unnecessary for a democratic man: as he is, so he remains—perfect, faultless, even without synthesis an art-work of creation. If, according to the teaching of one of its greatest spokesmen—the teaching of a Goethe—, culture characterizes the meaning of life with the words *Stirb und werde!* [Die and become!],⁴ the people-panderers teach instead that man arrives on earth in perfect and unalterable condition, provided only—in keeping with the democratic belief taught in school and in the world—that he avoid any ties, any connections with his ancestors. The democrat will not comprehend that there truly exist more divine miracles than Western skepticism and relativism can ever imagine. He has long since lost that wonderful astonishment, such as the Bible proclaims in its own way when commemorating the miracles of creation. He always sees only himself and the work of his hands as well as his calculations; he cares little for God, the “manufacturer” (to use his own language) of so many enigmas. In the worthless school of the West, the modern democrat has learned to be silent about God just as he prefers to be silent about any particular human genius. What is left to him is a kind of talcum of the soul (but ask not how attractive the soul is when the talcum has been blown away), commerce, and manual labor.

If universal intelligence, using Goethe—to cite again this most illustrious chief witness of culture—as a medium, praises “activity” [in general], the people-panderer associates this virtue only with manual labor, as, allegedly, the only activity that yields value. Where Goethe leads his Wilhelm Meister from noble dilettantisms to a useful occupation, democracy on the contrary guides its followers away from occupations (which would perhaps better suit them, or would at least be honorable) to activities and pursuits inappropriate to them. How completely their efforts contradict Goethe’s dictum:

The most reasonable thing is always that each pursue the metier into which he was born and which he has learned, and that he not hinder his neighbor from

pursuing his own activity. Let the shoemaker remain with his last, the peasant walk behind his plow, and the prince know how to govern. For even this is a metier that needs to be studied, and which nobody should be so presumptuous as to venture into without understanding it.

Disrespect for any kind of labor other than that pursued by a disciple of Marx has led to granting even a right of idleness to such a disciple, who is remunerated at the expense of the work of women and intellectual laborers. Isn't this the reason we have arrived at a time when the worker so frequently misuses his free time for profiteering, racketeering, and other such vices? It is significant that in Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* the prince approves of both Antonio and Tasso; the democrat easily simplifies the matter by readily eliminating from his state the intellectual as a bothersome parasite.

One thing is irrevocably ingrained in the mad democrat's mind: human progress can and must be achieved solely by means of Western democracy. And, as a symbol of his cultural qualifications, the democrat attaches himself to the genius. But how? He readily embraces, for example, Goethe, as has happened recently, even though Goethe stated clearly: "My works cannot become popular; whoever strives for that goal is in error. They are not written for the masses, but only for individuals who want and seek something similar, and who pursue similar directions." The democrat has no inkling that just as sound ricochets off a wall, the genius ricochets off the wall of the masses (but does the wall know it?); rather, he considers connection with the genius as simple as connecting a plug to an electrical outlet on the spur of the moment. That, on the contrary, only true receptivity, hence organic depth, can be the precondition of understanding the genius is entirely beyond his grasp. As little as a dull schoolboy tends to blame himself rather than Homer (or the teachers) for not having learned to read Homer at school, so little does it occur to the democrat to blame mankind—an eternally dull schoolboy—for not having learned anything in the school of the genius. To the average person, the one who discovers and solves problems is never the genius, but always only the average person's equal—that is, the other average person. Therefore, he believes himself to "progress" if only he runs past as many novel products of the democratic intellect as possible, as if they were display windows, and sees as many lands and peoples as possible—in short: simply takes in with his eyes the greatest possible turnover. Thus he sees "progress" rushing and careening forward person by person, second by second, issue by issue, faster than it could in fact move even among geniuses for millennia. Presumably he even considers city horses today, just because they are not afraid of a streetcar, more advanced than the horses of Antiquity or the Middle Ages.

Especially for music, the people-panderer has certain knowledge that its salvation can come only from the "people" rather than the individual genius. It escapes him that charlatans have already destroyed the pure tonal material—the art of voice leading and harmony—to such an extent that it is no longer possible to achieve even mediocre results, such as could at least

have been attained in previous ages in regions below that of genius. In short, we live in an epoch which future historians will consider an era of asininity, and which—I repeat—is most inimical to art.

If one sees how mankind is generally not lacking in dedication, but always strives with much greater perseverance and thoroughness for deception rather than truth, then one is tempted, in a jovial mood, to call in a Jacques Offenbach, who would drive away today's delusions by putting all the false gods of the West and their German imitators, including Marx and comrades, onto the operetta stage for the purpose of general ridicule. The Germans in particular would, of course, have at their disposal a more noble tool for liberating themselves, once and for all, from serfdom to the incompetent West. Having assured their panderers—as superfluous as they are detrimental—of unemployment compensation and having given them their walking papers, the German bourgeois and worker should band together, become musicians, and, under the baton of a chosen one, thunder the last movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to the West with the force thirty million strong until the people there, deeply moved by the German genius, would gladly kiss any German hand in gratitude that a German man had opened his chamber to them. But since we live in a completely depraved world in which, because of German treachery, the *capitis diminutio maxima*⁵ of the supermerchant has unfortunately failed to take place, we must content ourselves with such noble flights of fancy.

The mercenary spirit and politics of violence of the West have assumed the task of rebuilding and cleansing the world that they crushed and polluted. In keeping with his limited vision, the supermerchant thinks he can cure the thousandfold discontents of mankind⁶ by just one means, namely trade. He does not grasp that although trade may lead to wealth, the latter provides only the means to the goods, never the goods themselves; he does not grasp that the rich can find satisfaction only through the means, but never through the goods, and therefore can never arrive at that wealth of mind guaranteed only by the possession of the spiritual goods bestowed by the genius. Just as the rich have at all times stolen religions from the poor (who were wealthier in spirit and humanity) only to be able all the more safely—as “brothers” among brothers—to keep their possessions for themselves alone, so today the rich man, bourgeois as well as worker, may want to ally himself nominally, for reasons of self-protection, to the temple of culture. But since this practice has always been vain self-deception, it will reveal itself no less as such today. Trade is incapable of reconstruction. As it has caused most wars [in the past], it will continue—after a brief breathing space of peace—again to crave and steal land and people, for it is not the way of trade to be content with exchanging commodities alone. Imperialism sneers at the sovereignty of nations and freedom of trade.

Trade implies advantage, egoism, and thus is the deadly enemy of culture,

whose principal demand from man is to consider the other more eternal than his ego, to dedicate himself to the other, but not to place himself above the other, and to perpetuate himself through it so as to conquer eternity. Thus it is precisely trade that threatens culture, and thereby the true immortality of mankind: it questions the survival of the genius, the real connection to posterity, and barricades the pathways to a deeper understanding.

Art may be recommended to mankind as the only help in time of need, the only means of reconstruction! Let mankind learn to tame through art the chaos that lurks in any matter—to tame it through selection and synthesis.

I remind the reader of what I have said about tonality already in the first volume [*Harmony*]: No key at all could have been established, had not the way of pure Nature been abandoned, and the natural sequence of perfect fifths been adulterated with the admixture of the artificial, false, diminished fifth interval between the VII and IV steps. [See *Harmony*, §17ff.] There they sit for centuries, those faithful to utopian ideals, bourgeois and worker, snob by snob, and enthusiastically applaud masterworks that could be born only because they used the false fifth! Do they think that the synthesis of the state can be achieved without a false fifth, and do they expect of their product that it will appear more just and perfect than the state-syntheses of the past? They deceive themselves. Posterity will certainly applaud more heartily all those state-syntheses of the past, with their false fifths, than those allegedly natural, and yet so falsified, state-monstrosities of today. Schopenhauer puts it as follows:

In general, one could hypothesize that the law were of a quality analogous to certain chemical substances that cannot be presented in their pure and isolated form, but only with the aid of a small admixture that serves as a carrier or provides them with the necessary consistency—chemicals such as fluoride, even alcohol, hydrocyanic acid, and so forth. Accordingly, if the law wanted to gain a foothold and even prevail in the real world, it would necessarily require a small admixture of arbitrariness and force in order to be effective and lasting in this concrete and material world (in spite of its actual ideal and thus ethereal nature) without evaporating and flying off into the sky, as happens in Hesiod. All birthrights, all privileges by inheritance, all state religions and much besides may be regarded as the necessary chemical basis or amalgam described above; the law could be effectively and consistently practiced only on a firm foundation of this nature which thus would function, in a sense, as the *δός μοι ποῦ στᾶν*⁷ of law.

Let mankind observe in art the continuous natural growth of phenomena from the basis of a few principal laws, and learn to trust the power of growing outward from within more than the whims of that low plateau of humanity which believes it possible (or even necessary) to create new laws with each new motion of hand or mouth.

I have set forth in *Counterpoint I* the fundamental laws to the extent that they were revealed in two-voice counterpoint. Using the content of the present volume as a point of departure, I would like to give here an overview of the further growth [of these laws].

In three-voice counterpoint, the consonance is prolonged to ξ and ζ . The intervals 5 and 6 signify the limits of the consonance-concept, which neither four- nor many-voice settings can transcend (p. 1f.). The fifth is the limit given by nature; the sixth is a derivative.

In ξ is contained, at the same time, the roothood-tendency of the lowest tone; it reveals the desire of any lowest tone to be, above all, a root (p. 8).

In three-voice counterpoint, the setting of the outer voices becomes the vehicle of the basic two-voice counterpoint. The prolongation of two-voice counterpoint thus prevails over the three-voice format, and the voice-leading is the more beautiful the better it succeeds in resolving the conflict between the [demands of] three-voice format and setting of the outer voices in favor of the latter (p. 5f.).

Setting in three voices leads naturally to the necessity of distinguishing between open and close position (p. 25). Just an awareness of this distinction may lead to benefits for the voice leading.

The emergence of the ζ sonority suggests particular new questions and possibilities (p. 37ff.).

The addition of a third voice often makes nonparallel similar motions [to perfect consonances] necessary if other important merits of voice leading are not to suffer. The basic prohibition of such successions in two-voice counterpoint, however, is not invalidated by this fact; compensation is provided, in a certain sense, only by means of other effects. The social relations between tones thus requires proof of necessity, and the poor effect of an unjustified license is evidence for the urgency of the prohibition (p. 27ff.).

Since only two leading tones are available for concluding a melodic line, and no others are conceivable, the third voice can do nothing but make use of a tone that is not a leading tone. This third tone has the function of contributing to completeness of harmony. Under certain circumstances it can be only that fundamental tone we know from free composition as that of scale degree V; but it has no further right to affect the laws of leading tones and thus the social relations between tones (pp. 45 and 65).

In the framework of three-voice settings, moreover, the essence of passing tones reveals new depths and prolongations. The dissonant passing tone in the lower voice points precisely toward the [concept of the] scale degree in that it causes the memory to retain the consonant point of departure for the whole duration of the passing motion (p. 56). The increment in harmony occasionally turns even consonant second-progressions into a type of consonant passing or neighboring tone (p. 60). Retention [in memory] of the more clearly defined harmony of the downbeat already provides a glimpse of the fourth-space (p. 73); at the same time, the possible rhythmic forms of the neighboring note become clearer (p. 75). Accordingly, the concept of com-

posing-out makes a significant step forward (p. 58). The nodal points of the third are observed in passing motions (p. 58), while the neighboring note leads to the concept of substitution (p. 76). And the combined species reveal, for the first time, additional prolongations of the concept of the passing tone: an actual dissonant passing tone can even ensnare a leapwise interval, and this is the origin of the leaping passing tone (p. 182). The exchange of voices appears for the first time when two counterpoints are set in half- or quarter-notes (p. 179); and when two counterpoints are combined in different durations (half-notes together with quarters), a passing motion can produce for the first time a dissonant clash at the upbeat, which certainly extends the concept of the passing tone (p. 192). What brings us closest to the realm of free composition, however, is the experience that when several passing tones occur simultaneously, they join together in a kind of obbligate two-voice setting—that is, for the sake of their own clarification, they cultivate the consonance as the law of their relationship (p. 180). In a three- or four-voice setting with two or three counterpoints of the second species, this results most frequently in $\frac{3}{2}$ -sonorities, which should be regarded as the soul of the passing-tone organism (p. 184). Just as downbeats, in the framework of cantus-firmus exercises, must take refuge in the consonance, so also must passing tones on the upbeat. And from the distance, the concept of passing harmonies of free composition already beckons; regardless of their passing-tone purpose, these harmonies want first to be understood in and for themselves, and, often enough, appear as consonant while fulfilling a dissonant function.

Three- and many-voice settings bring us closer to the distinction between the authentic suspensions $\frown 9 - 8$, $\frown 4 - 3$, and other indefinite syncopes which may (but need not) signify suspensions; this is a distinction that requires closest attention in free composition (p. 85). Even if the increment of harmony provides new interval-nourishment to the syncopes of two-voice counterpoint, the uniformity of the syncopation-concepts stands unaltered (p. 100). This uniformity leads us in the combined species to a freer use of syncopes as well as, in general, to new syncope-constructions that give rise to seventh-chords (p. 215). If it becomes especially obvious with the latter that the upbeat, although representing a resolution of a dissonant structure from the downbeat, nevertheless manifests more independence than an upbeat does in the case of authentic suspensions, we arrive at an interpretation of tying as ultimately a purely rhythmic phenomenon. And this conclusion in turn leads us to an application of the tie even to dissonant passing tones and neighboring notes, more in the service of the passing motion than with the intention of tying for its own sake. This occurs in its simplest form with sustained bass notes (in free composition they can be omitted); thus we have gained the first access to the organ point (p. 258).

The next and last volume of [*Neue musikalische*] *Theorien* [*und Phantasien*] will have the task of showing the further developments, up to that vast scope which they have been given by the German genius of music—and, in fact, *only* by him. As to the matter of synthesis, several works of mine are, as

indicated before, already in print, and the "Entwurf einer neuen Formenlehre"⁸ previously announced will provide a concise overview. The sum total of my works present an image of art as self-contained, as growing of itself—but, despite all infinitude of appearance, as setting its own limits through selection and synthesis. It is my fervent wish that mankind may ultimately be permitted to be guided through the euphony of art to the noble spirit of selection and synthesis, and to shape all institutions of his earthly existence, such as state, marriage, love and friendship, into true works of art according to the laws of artistic synthesis!

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