Species Counterpoint

Gradus ad Parnassum

- When Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven were learning to compose, they all used the same book:
  - *Gradus ad Parnassum*, written by Johann Joseph Fux in 1725
  - The book is written as a dialogue between a teacher named Aloysius and his pupil Josephus
  - It was originally written in Latin, but was later translated to German, Italian, French, and English
- *Gradus ad Parnussum* presents a method of learning to compose by steps called *species counterpoint*
  - There are five *species*, or *steps*, in this method

Counterpoint

- The word "counterpoint" comes from the Latin phrase *punctus contra punctus*—or "point against point"—referring to the way in which one note is combined with another note
  - Good counterpoint involves two or more voices moving and interrelating in a fairly independent way
- In species counterpoint, we combine a newly-composed melody with a pre-composed melody called a *cantus firmus* (a fixed melody):

The first species

- In the *first species*, one note in the counterpoint is written against each note in the cantus firmus

- This is the simplest kind of counterpoint, which permits only *consonant* intervals between the two voices

The second species

- In the *second species*, there are *two* notes in the counterpoint for each note in the cantus firmus

- In this step, dissonances are now allowed in the form of unaccented passing tones

The third species

- In the *third species*, *four* notes in the counterpoint are written for each note in the cantus firmus

- Third species introduces other kinds of dissonances such as the neighbor tone

The fourth species

- In the *fourth species*, tied half notes in the counterpoint created a syncopated effect with the cantus firmus

- The fourth species is really just an exercise in writing suspensions

The fifth species

- Having mastered the previous four species, the *fifth species* is a combination of all of these, also known as *florid counterpoint*

- The fifth species introduces rhythmic variety, and is the most like actual music composition