Canon Assignment

Write a strict canon at the octave that lasts 8 – 12 measures.

Follow these steps:

1. Write the first part (dux), only as far as the distance between it and the second part (comes). In the example below, it is two measures long.

2. Copy this much into the second part immediately at the octave.

3. Write new counterpoint in the first part to accompany the notes entered in the second part, using primarily 3rds and 6ths between the voices. Follow the guidelines for tonal counterpoint, avoiding dissonances on strong beats and parallel 8ves and 5ths.

4.Copy this new counterpoint into the second part.

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 (leap-frogging) until you have reached the end of the piece.

6. Be mindful of the harmonic progressions you are implying with your choice of notes as you write each new counterpoint, and create strong forward movement. You may wish to modulate for tonal variety.

7. Abandon the strict imitation at the end to create a strong final cadence.

Other considerations:

You may wish to write several openings to your canon, using different keys, meters, and motives. As you compose the counterpoint you may need to edit the opening phrase if the scale degrees you chose do not yield a strong progression. Analyze each measure harmonically with the goal of creating intentional movement between dominant and tonic functions at points of arrival.

Write the number of each interval between the pitches as you notate them to avoid undesirable dissonances. The use of some non-chord tones will lend interest, such as accented passing tones and suspensions.

Even in a brief example, too much reliance on the same pitches and motives may not generate a sense of forward movement. For this reason, a modulation or change of mode is a good way to introduce some variety, as is the incorporation of new rhythmic motives and syncopation. In general, short note values against longer ones and the use of rests will create a more interesting texture.

Students should try composing with a pencil and paper to draft this assignment, using a keyboard to improvise musical ideas, rather than entering pitches directly into a computer.

Canon Assignment Example

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