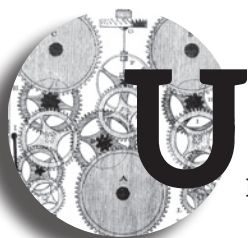




A basic IMPRO KIT



INTRODUCTION



Using the concept of a DIY kit, this worksheet features fundamental tools for Baroque improvisation. Although these are expressed in grand staff notation, they are not only intended for keyboard players but for ALL musicians who wish to upgrade their know-how in the art of extemporization.

Historically speaking, counterpoint was the earliest manifestation of polyphony, harmony deriving from it later. Therefore it is in that order that I present them: **5 species of counterpoint** (and their rules) are followed by **22 harmonies** (and a rule here too). I then discuss **3 essential cadences**, the vital punctuation connecting music phrases to each other. After that, we move on to **11 partimento bass motions**, equally vital building-blocks of composition (and I consider improvisation as nothing else than immediate and on-the-spot composition). My method closes with the discussion of the 3 melodic/harmonic progressions **Monte, Fonte and Ponte**.

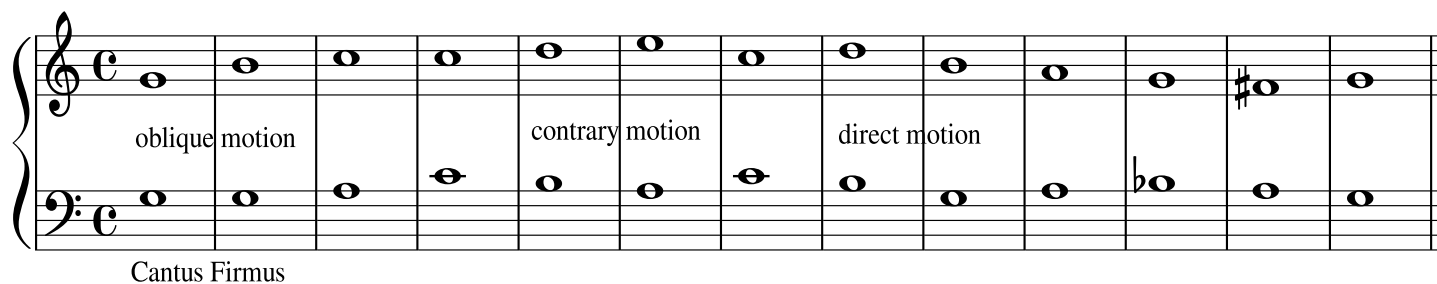
I have purposefully aimed to reduce textual explanations, leaving the examples to speak for themselves. Further reading on each topic will of course contribute to more knowledge, fluency and skilfulness.

Here are just a few suggestions (amongst many) for each section:

- **counterpoint:** Girolamo Diruta, *Il Transilvano*, 1593, book 2, Johann Joseph Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725), etc.
- **harmony (thorough-bass):** Georg Muffat, *Regulae Concentuum Partiturae*, 1699, Denis Delair, *Traité d'accompagnement pour le Théorbe et le Clavecin*, 1690, Jean-François Dandrieu, *Principes de l'Accompagnement du Clavecin*, 1719, Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, 1762 and a myriad of other sources.
- **Rule of the Octave (thorough-bass):** François Campion, *Traité d'accompagnement* (1716) et *Addition* (1730), Michel Corette, *Le Maître de Clavecin* (1753), etc.
- **cadences:** any treatise of composition from the 17th or 18th century or later!
- **partimento basses:** exercices according to Francesco Durante (1684–1755), The Brothers Greco (1650s–1720s), Fedele Fenaroli (1730–1818), Giovanni Paisiello (1741–1816), etc.
- **Monte, Fonte, Ponte:** Joseph Riepel, *Anfangsgründe zur musikalischen Setzkunst*, (1752/1755).

5 SPECIES OF COUNTERPOINT

1st species: note against note



oblique motion

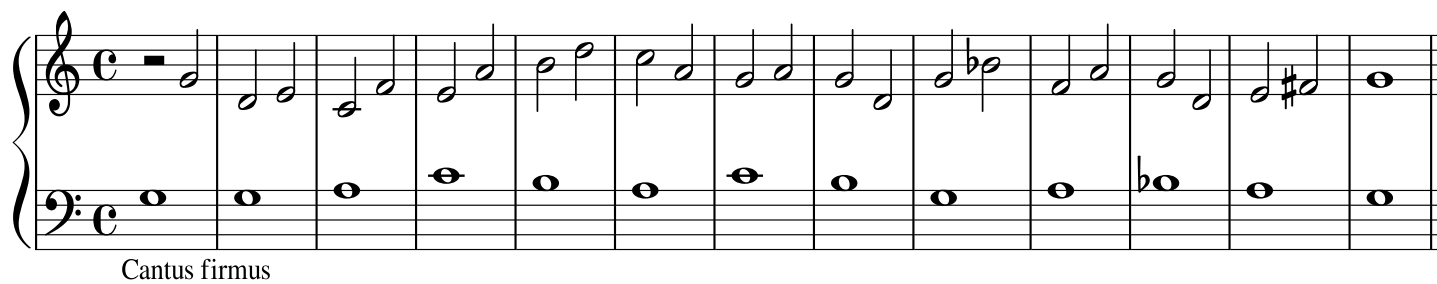
contrary motion

direct motion

Cantus Firmus

This musical score illustrates the first species of counterpoint, 'note against note', in C major. The Cantus Firmus is in the bass clef, consisting of a single half note per measure: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The counterpoint is in the treble clef, also using half notes. The first three measures are labeled: 'oblique motion' (C5 to D5), 'contrary motion' (D5 to E4), and 'direct motion' (E4 to F4). The piece concludes with a double bar line.

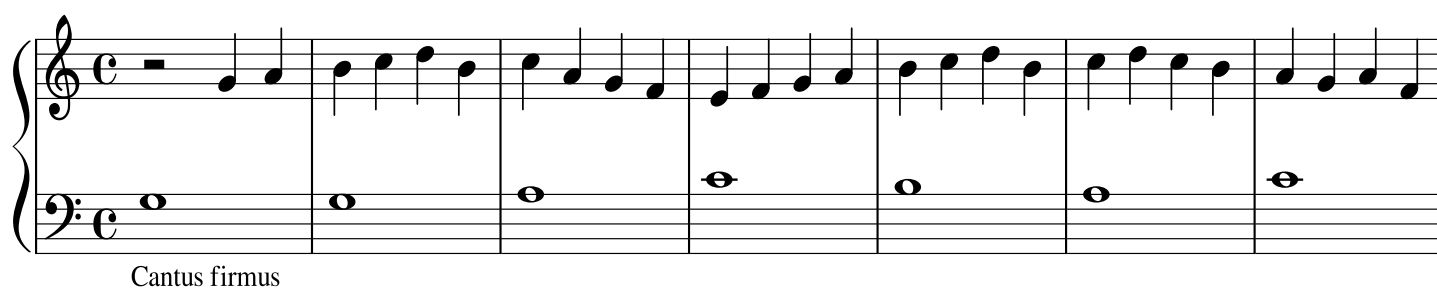
2nd species: 2 notes against 1



Cantus firmus

This musical score illustrates the second species of counterpoint, '2 notes against 1'. The Cantus Firmus is in the bass clef, with half notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The counterpoint in the treble clef uses quarter notes, with two notes per measure of the Cantus Firmus. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

3rd species: 4 notes against 1



Cantus firmus

This musical score illustrates the third species of counterpoint, '4 notes against 1'. The Cantus Firmus is in the bass clef, with half notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The counterpoint in the treble clef uses eighth notes, with four notes per measure of the Cantus Firmus. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

8



This musical score illustrates the fourth species of counterpoint, '4th species' (free counterpoint). The Cantus Firmus is in the bass clef, with half notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The counterpoint in the treble clef uses quarter notes, with four notes per measure of the Cantus Firmus. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

4th species: ligatures

Ligatures with consonances

Measures 1-7 of the first system. The treble clef staff shows a series of eighth notes, mostly beamed in pairs, with a final half note. The bass clef staff shows a cantus firmus of half notes: C2, D2, E2, F2, G2, A2, Bb2, C3.

Cantus firmus

8

Measures 8-13 of the second system. The treble clef staff continues the eighth note pattern, ending with a half note. The bass clef staff continues the cantus firmus: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, Bb3, C4.

14

Ligatures with dissonances

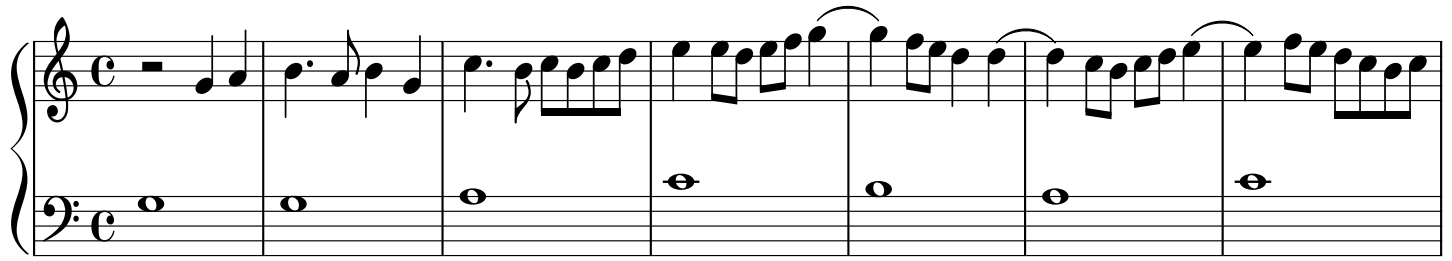
Measures 14-20 of the third system. The treble clef staff continues the eighth note pattern, ending with a half note. The bass clef staff continues the cantus firmus: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5.

Cantus firmus

21

Measures 21-26 of the fourth system. The treble clef staff continues the eighth note pattern, ending with a half note. The bass clef staff continues the cantus firmus: C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5, C6.

5th species: florid



Cantus firmus



A FEW RULES:

- Perfect consonances: 5th & 8th
- Imperfect consonances: 3rd & 6th
- Dissonances: 4th, 7th & 9th
 - > From a perfect consonance to another perfect consonance: contrary or oblique motion.
 - > From a perfect consonance to an imperfect consonance: as one wants.
 - > From an imperfect consonance to a perfect consonance: contrary or oblique motion.
 - > From an imperfect consonance to another imperfect consonance: as one wants.
- Parallel 5ths and 8ths prohibited!
- The counterpoint must begin and end on a perfect consonance.
- The counterpoint must be as singable and melodic as possible.



22 HARMONIES

THE RULE OF THE OCTAVE

The rule of the octave is a thorough-bass system devised in the early 1700s and hugely popular from then on amongst lutenists and keyboard players. It consists in the attribution of an “ideal” harmony for each degree of the rising and descending diatonic scale. It is also the cornerstone of the *regole* (rules) of partimento practice. In all, the Rule governs **7 harmonies/sonorities**, some used in more than one situation.

The **15 other harmonies** described later fall into the category of “independent” sonorities, i.e. not governed by the Rule.

The figures refer to the bass and are placed between the 2 staves. The circled numbers in black under the bass staff indicate the degree of the tonality.

The Rule of the Octave

In octave position (soprano = 8 from the bass)

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑦	⑥	⑤	④	③	②	①
8	6	6	5	3	3	3	8	3	3	3	4#	6	6	8
5	4	3	3	8	6	6	5	6	3	8	2	3	4	5
3	3	8	6	5	3	5b	3	3	4	5	6	8	3	3

In third position (soprano = 3 from the bass)

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑦	⑥	⑤	④	③	②	①
3	3	8	6	5	6	5b	3	6	4	5	6	8	3	3
8	6	6	5	3	3	3	8	3	3	3	4#	6	6	8
5	4	3	3	8	3	6	5	3	6#	8	2	3	4	5

In fifth position (soprano = 5 from the bass)

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑦	⑥	⑤	④	③	②	①
5	4	5	3	8	6	6	5	6	6#	8	2	3	4	5
3	3	8	6	5	3	5b	3	3	4	5	6	8	3	3
8	6	6	5	3	6	3	8	6	3	3	4#	6	6	8

INTERNAL REGULATIONS FOR THE RULE OF THE OCTAVE

5

3 (root) on the 1st or 5th degree.

8

6

4 (little sixth) on 2nd degree going up or down, 6th degree going down.

3

8

6 (simple sixth) on 3rd degree going up or down.

3

6

5 (fifth and sixth) on the 4th degree going up.

3

3 6

3 or 6 (doubled sixth) on 6th degree going up and 7th degree going down.

6 3

5b

6 (diminished fifth) on 7th degree going up.

3

6

4# (augmented fourth) on 4th degree going down.

2



OTHER HARMONIES/CHORDS/SONORITIES NOT CONTAINED IN THE RULE OF THE OCTAVE

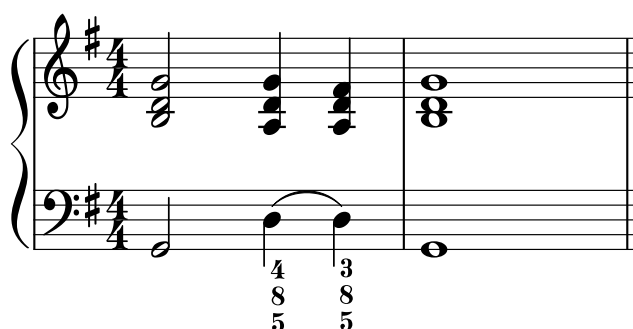
The 2 chord

The 2 chord is played on the 1st degree. Habitually standing alone, it asks for a 6 and 4. The bass becomes a dissonance on a 2 chord and resolves downwards to (usually) a 6 chord.



The 4 chord

The 4 chord is played either on the 1st or the 5th degree. The 4 (habitually standing alone) asks for a 5 and 8. It resolves down to a 3.



The 6/4 chord

The 6/4 chord is played either on the 1st or the 5th degree. The 6 and 4 (habitually standing alone) ask for an 8 and resolve down to a consonance.

6/4 8/5 6/4

The 7 chord

The 7 chord is played on any degree. It must be prepared by a preceding 6 chord. The 7 (habitually standing alone) requires either a 5 and 3, or an 8 and 3, and resolves downwards. For reasons of voice leading, the alternating 7 chord in a sequence does not contain a 5, which is then replaced by an 8.

6/4 7/6 7/5 7/4 7/3 7/2 7/1

The 9 chord

The 9 chord is played on any degree. The 9 (habitually standing alone) requires a 5 and a 3. It must be prepared and resolved downwards.

9/5 8/5

The $\frac{7}{5/2}$ chord

The $\frac{7}{5/2}$ chord is played on the 4th degree. The bass then rises to the 5th degree, usually generating a 4 chord.

7/5/2 4

The $\frac{7}{4}$ chord

The $\frac{7}{4}$ chord is (mostly) played on the 2nd degree. The bass subsequently descends one step, generating a consonance.

The $\frac{2}{5}$ chord

The $\frac{2}{5}$ chord is (mostly) played on the 2nd degree. The bass subsequently descends one step, generating a consonance.

The $\frac{9}{4}$ chord

The $\frac{9}{4}$ chord is played on any degree. Both the 9 and 4 (habitually standing alone) must be prepared and resolved downwards, usually to a root chord. The 9 and 4 require a 5.

The 7# chord

The 7# chord is played either on the tonic or the dominant. The 7# (habitually standing alone) takes a compulsory 2 and 4, and optional 5. The 7# resolves upwards, generating a consonance. In minor, the 7# takes a flat 6 instead of a 5. The chord is then expressed as 7/6b.

The 5# chord

The 5# chord is frequently played on the 3rd degree but can occur on others. Habitually standing alone, it takes a compulsory 9, 7 and 3. The 5# resolves upwards, whilst the 9 and 7 move downwards, generating a consonance. The 5# occurs in minor keys.

9
7
5#
3

The $\frac{9}{7}$ chord

The $\frac{9}{7}$ chord is played on any degree. The 9 and 7 (habitually standing alone) take a compulsory 3 and optional 5. Both the 9 and 7 resolve downwards, generating a 6 chord.

9
7
3
8
6
3

The $\frac{5^b}{6^\#}$ chord

The $\frac{5^b}{6^\#}$ chord is played on the 2nd degree. The 5b and 6# habitually stand alone and take a compulsory 3.

6#
5b
3
6

The $\frac{4^\#}{3^b}$ chord

The $\frac{4^\#}{3^b}$ chord is played on the 4th degree. The 4# and 3b habitually stand alone and take a compulsory 6.

4#
3b
6
6

The 2# chord

The 2# chord is played on the 6th degree. The 2# habitually stands alone and takes a compulsory 4 and 6.

The first system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. The treble staff contains a series of chords: a D4-F4-A4 triad, a D4-F#4-A4 triad, a D4-F4-A4 triad, a D4-F#4-A4 triad, and a D4-F4-A4 triad. The bass staff contains a series of notes: a D3, a D3, a D3, a D3, and a D3. The system is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure contains the first two chords and notes, the second measure contains the next two chords and notes, and the third measure contains the final chord and note.

The 7b chord

The 7b chord is played on the 7th degree. The 7b habitually stands alone and takes a compulsory 3 and 5.

The first system of the musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is shown. It consists of a treble and a bass staff. The treble staff has a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The bass staff has a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure of the treble staff contains a whole note chord consisting of G4, B-flat4, and D5. The first measure of the bass staff contains a whole note chord consisting of G3, B-flat3, and D4. The second measure of the treble staff contains a whole note chord consisting of G4, B-flat4, and D5. The second measure of the bass staff contains a whole note chord consisting of G3, B-flat3, and D4. The third measure of the treble staff contains a whole note chord consisting of G4, B-flat4, and D5. The third measure of the bass staff contains a whole note chord consisting of G3, B-flat3, and D4. The system ends with a double bar line.



3 CADENCES (CLAUSULAE)

The simple cadence

The simple cadence (*cadenza semplice*) features only 1 chord/sonority on the 5th degree.

The compound cadence

The compound cadence (*cadenza composta*) features 2 chords/sonorities on the 5th degree.

The 'or' variation is shown in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is common time (C). The notation includes various chords and single notes, with some notes marked with circled numbers 1, 3, 5, and 6. A double bar line separates this variation from the next one.

The double cadence

The double cadence (*cadenza doppia*) features 3 or 4 chords/sonorities - displayed on 4 "steps" - on the 5th degree.

PARTIMENTO BASSES

STANDARD MOTIONS

The following standard basses are derived from the partimento practice as taught by the Napolitan school of the 17th and 18th centuries. The *moti del basso* (bass motions) were devised as exercises to train conventional models of voice leading, harmony and musical form, using the Rule of the Octave, cadences and sequences. They were popularised by composers and pedagogues (*maestri*) such as the Greco brothers, Insanguine, Durante, Fenaroli, Paisiello and others. This is merely a selection of the main bass schematas which command music from roughly 1650 onwards.

As mentioned above, the figured bass is placed between the 2 staves. The circled numbers in black under the bass staff indicate the degree of the principle tonality (in grey for alternative degrees generated by modulation).

Stepwise ascent

Stepwise descent

Chromatic ascent

6 5 $\flat$ 6 6 5 $\flat$ 6 6 5 $\flat$ 6 6 6 Etc.

③ ④ ④ ⑤ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑦ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ③

Chromatic descent

(5) 6 7 6 7 6 7 6 Etc...

⑤ ④ ③ ② ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ①

Suspensions

① ① ⑦ ⑥ ⑥ ⑤ ⑤ ④ ④ ③ Etc.

④ ③ ② ① ⑦ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ①

Down a 3rd, up a 2nd

6 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 $\flat$

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧

Down a 4th, up a 2nd

This bass motion is also known as a "Romanesca".

Exercise 1: Down a 4th, up a 2nd (Romanesca). This exercise is in G major (one sharp) and C major (no sharps or flats). The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: G4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2, F#2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1, F#1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0, F#0, E0, D0, C0, B-1, A-1, G-1, F#-1, E-1, D-1, C-1, B-2, A-2, G-2, F#-2, E-2, D-2, C-2, B-3, A-3, G-3, F#-3, E-3, D-3, C-3, B-4, A-4, G-4, F#-4, E-4, D-4, C-4, B-5, A-5, G-5, F#-5, E-5, D-5, C-5, B-6, A-6, G-6, F#-6, E-6, D-6, C-6, B-7, A-7, G-7, F#-7, E-7, D-7, C-7, B-8, A-8, G-8, F#-8, E-8, D-8, C-8, B-9, A-9, G-9, F#-9, E-9, D-9, C-9, B-10, A-10, G-10, F#-10, E-10, D-10, C-10, B-11, A-11, G-11, F#-11, E-11, D-11, C-11, B-12, A-12, G-12, F#-12, E-12, D-12, C-12, B-13, A-13, G-13, F#-13, E-13, D-13, C-13, B-14, A-14, G-14, F#-14, E-14, D-14, C-14, B-15, A-15, G-15, F#-15, E-15, D-15, C-15, B-16, A-16, G-16, F#-16, E-16, D-16, C-16, B-17, A-17, G-17, F#-17, E-17, D-17, C-17, B-18, A-18, G-18, F#-18, E-18, D-18, C-18, B-19, A-19, G-19, F#-19, E-19, D-19, C-19, B-20, A-20, G-20, F#-20, E-20, D-20, C-20, B-21, A-21, G-21, 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MONTE, FONTE, PONTE

The Italian names *monte* (mountain), *fonte* (well or fountain) and *ponte* (bridge) were coined by the composer Joseph Riepel in his *Anfangsgründe zur musicalischen Setzkunst* (Fundamentals of Musical Composition), 1752 and 1755, a popular treatise which Leopold Mozart used to train his young son. The terms refer to melodic/harmonic sequential patterns which Riepel discusses in the second chapter of the *Anfangsgründe*. *Monte* (as in “going up a mountain”) is an ascending progression, *fonte* (evoking the descending flow of water) consists of a descending one and *ponte* (crossing a bridge) express the idea of something remaining level (one arrives on the same harmonic footing as one departed from).

Monte

Etc.

Fonte

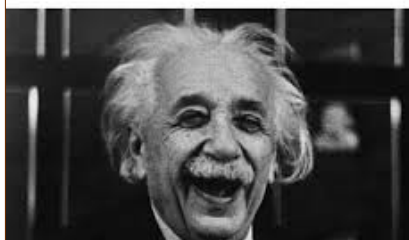
The musical score is written for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff in 3/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The melody consists of several measures, some with notes beamed together and some with ornaments. The bass staff is empty, with a few notes visible in the lower register. The piece ends with the word "Etc." written above the final measure.

Ponte

The musical score for the 'Ponte' section is written for piano in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score consists of four measures. The first measure features a treble clef with a melodic line starting on G4, moving to A4, B4, and C5, and a bass clef with a supporting line starting on G3, moving to A3, B3, and C4. The second measure continues the melody in the treble with a slur over the first three notes (G4, A4, B4) and a final note on C5, while the bass line has a single note on G3. The third measure shows the melody in the treble with a slur over the first two notes (G4, A4) and a final note on B4, and the bass line with a single note on G3. The fourth measure concludes the section with a final note on G4 in the treble and a single note on G3 in the bass.

CONCLUSION

That feeling when
you've finally understood
how it works!



This short worksheet does not have the pretence of being an all-encompassing list of existing schematas and models. Nevertheless, you will come across a lot of the material presented here in any work from the Renaissance to the Classical period (and even later!). Hence familiarising yourself with these basics and attempting to connect them in logical procedures, “Lego style”, will teach you, with time and patience, how to improvise skilfully.

Patrick Ayrton
January 2023

Many thanks to Robert de Bree for his judicious advice and suggestions.

For a complete survey, I refer you to Derek Remeš' excellent «Compendium»:
https://derekremes.com/wp-content/uploads/compendium_english.pdf