

Piece 1: 'Canon' or two-part canons based on a triad

A canon is a polyphonic play of proposita and riposta. In a two-part canon one voice (proposita, dux, leader) starts a melody that is imitated by a second voice (riposta, comes, follower) after a given duration (e.g. whole rest, half rest, quarter rest etc.). This duration is called 'imitation time'. The entry of the riposta is before the proposita has finished. So overlapping is the result.

'Canon' (piece 1) from 'Fantasia' of Oscar van Hemel (1892–1981) is at the unison, with the upper voice as the proposita. The ternary form A–B–A seemed to have structured his musical mind: a contrasting, more lively section B and a repetition of section A.

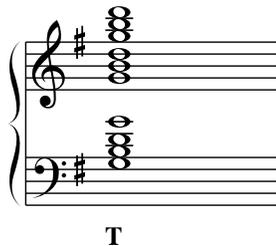
A nice educational feature is the idea to write a canon, based on only one triad: triad G–B–D. Another interesting idea is to repeat section A with a different 'imitation time'.

1. Canon of Section A and B

Step 1: the triad

The canon is based on the triad G, the tonic in G major (T)

Example 1a: basic structure triad G



Step 2: the basic canon section A + B

The imitation time of section A and B is 2 measures.

Example 2a: harmonic base canon, section A + B

The only thing we have to do is to make a melody for the proposita based on the notes of T. The riposta is a copy of the proposita.

Note that register is not important: the note G one-line octave or G three-line octave represent both T! So the previous example could have been represented in reduced form.

Van Hemel seemed to have made a flirtation with the well-known canon 'Frères Jacques'. However, we will not discuss the connection between both canons.

In the next example, Van Hemel's selection of main tones (you could choose of course your own). Note the use of register: from low to high.

Example 2b: main tones canon, section A + B

The next stage is to elaborate these main tones with neighbour and passing tones.

Example 2c: embellished main tones canon, section A + B, stage 1

The embellishing tones consist of neighbour and passing tones and a broken triad figures. The last stage is rhythmical differentiation, using the same embellishment methods.

Example 2d: embellished main tones canon, section A + B, stage 2

3. Canon of the repeated Section A

The imitation time of the repeated section A is a half measure. After two bars the proposta and riposta are free.

Example 3: embellished main tones canon, repeated section A

Proposta

Riposta

4. Canon, final version (with Van Hemel's indications how to perform)

Allegretto

p

5

9

p

About the author:

Reinier Maliepaard, psychologist, software engineer, organist and teacher at the ArtEZ Conservatorium Netherlands (music writing, music theory and music history). Maliepaard is the developer and maintainer of www.bestmusicteacher.com, that has three objectives education – information – inspiration

This article has been typeset with his free/open source music notation program MC Musiceditor 7.1.2, that can be downloaded at www.mcmusiceditor.com.