

A 18TH CENTURY INSTRUCTION ON WRITING TWO PART FUGUES

The organist and composer Albrechtsberger, known as the famous teacher of Beethoven, wrote an instruction on composing, named "Gründliche Anweisung zur Composition mit deutlichen und ausführlichen Exempeln, zum Selbstunterrichte (1790) erläutert". So for self-directed learning. Reading this instruction makes it clear that Albrechtsberger was a pedagogue par excellence. His text on composing a two part fugue (chapter 24) demonstrates that Albrechtsberger is able to instruct a student only with a few tips and tricks. His examples are well chosen and easy to understand. Some of them extends his theory in a natural way as if he is sitting near us, pushing us in the right direction.

In this paper I will review his text on the two part fugue. Papers on three and more part fugue writing will follow.

1. Why writing fugues?

Albrechtsberger defines the fugue as the most important genre of church music. Knowing that almost every composer in the 18th century was organist or Kapellmeister at a church, we can state that writing fugues was a skill, needed to be a fine church musician.

2. Vocal fugues in stile antico

Albrechtsberger illustrated his text with three examples of two part fugues, which are in fact vocal fugues. This means that the voices of the fugues are within a limited tonal range (maximum abitus: an octave; Albrechtsberger: 'zwischen den fünf Linien') and have no leaps greater than an octave. So they could be sung although the words in Albrechtsberger's examples are missing.

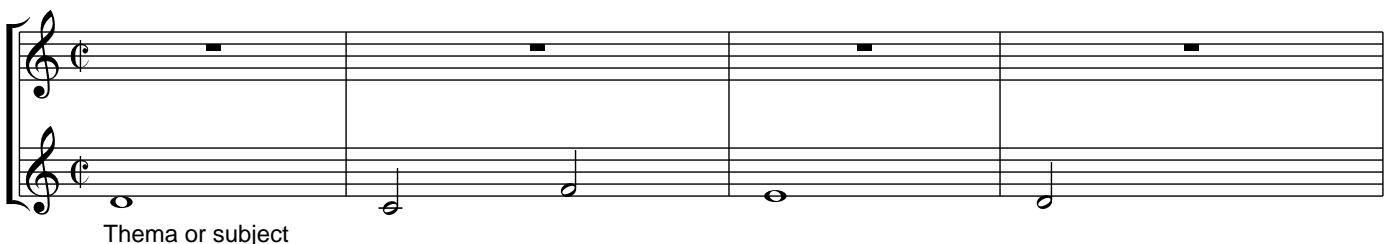
The fugue examples refers to the practice of the 'stile antico', a high Baroque church music imitation of late Renaissance musical style (with the music of Palestrina as model), in which composers controlled the use of dissonance and in which instrumental textures and rich ornamentation were avoided (cf. Monteverdi's *prima prattica*). *Stile antico* was the compositional device in the classic text-book on strict counterpoint 'Gradus Ad Parnassum (1725) of J. J. Fux, who was Albrechtsberger's predecessor of the St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna.

3. Fugue concepts

3.1. 'Thema' or 'Hauptsatz'

'Thema' or 'Hauptsatz' (nowadays called 'subject' or 'dux') is the melody the fugue starts with, which is the subject of the fugue. It recurs frequently in the course of the composition. Read in 7.1 more about the subject in the fugue.

The subject in Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue is:



3.2. Risposta (Responsum)

'Risposta' is nowadays called 'answer' or 'comes'. It is the second entry of the subject, a fifth higher or a fourth lower (Dominant). It can be modified to preserve the tonality of the fugue (in three or more part fugues: to facilitate the third etc. entry of the subject): Read in 7.3 more about the most frequent type of modification. The 'Risposta' in Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue is:

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled 'Risposta or Answer' and contains a melodic line starting with a whole note G4, followed by a half note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a half note D5, and a quarter note E5. The bottom staff is labeled 'Subject' and contains a melodic line starting with a whole note D4, followed by a half note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a half note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. Both staves are in C major time signature.

3.3. 'Gegensatz'

'Gegensatz' is the melody that accompanies the Risposta; better: the counterpoint to the Risposta (nowadays 'Gegensatz' is called free counterpoint; it is called countersubject if it also recurs in the course of the fugue). It can be seen as the follow-up of the subject. The 'Gegensatz' should have a rhythm that differs from the rhythm of the subject. Albrechtsberger suggests the use of syncopes and smaller notevalues; techniques which the student had learned in the fourth and fifth 'species' of his contrapuntal method (cf. chapter 9 – 22 of Albrechtsberger's 'Anweisung').

The 'Risposta' and 'Gegensatz' in Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue is:

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled 'Answer' and contains a melodic line starting with a whole note G4, followed by a half note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a half note D5, and a quarter note E5. The bottom staff is labeled 'Subject' and 'Gegensatz' and contains a melodic line starting with a whole note D4, followed by a half note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a half note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note D5, a quarter note E5, a quarter note F5, a quarter note G5, a quarter note A5, a quarter note B5, a quarter note C6, a quarter note B5, a quarter note A5, a quarter note G5, a quarter note F5, a quarter note E5, a quarter note D5, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4. Both staves are in C major time signature.

3.4. 'Zwischensatz'

'Zwischensatz' is a 'Gedanken' similar to the subject or 'Gegensatz', following the 'Gegensatz' (to lengthen the fugue and to make the fugue more beautiful). It is more or less based on the subject or 'Gegensatz'. In three or more part fugues the 'Zwischensatz' could be based on material of accompanying voices, so not on subject or 'Gegensatz'. Nowadays 'Zwischensatz', usually called 'episode', refers to more than one voice.

The first 'Zwischensatz' of Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue is:

The image shows two musical examples of clausulae. The first example, labeled 'tenor clausula', consists of two staves. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with a half note, a whole note, and another half note. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains a corresponding bass line with a half note, a whole note, and another half note. The second example, labeled 'diminished tenor clausula', also consists of two staves. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with a half note, a half note, and a whole note. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains a corresponding bass line with a half note, a quarter note, and a half note. Both examples are in C major and end with a cadence.

3.6.2. Imitation

Imitation is the use of similar, melodic material (usually a short figure) in different voices successively, at different pitch (e.g. the repetition starts fifth higher etc.) and at different intervals of time (after a quarter, a half or a whole note etc.).

The following two examples are from Chapter 23 of Albrechtsberger's 'Anweisung' on imitation:

The image shows two musical examples of imitation. Example 1, labeled 'Example 1', consists of two staves. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with a quarter note, a half note, and a whole note. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains a corresponding bass line with a quarter note, a half note, and a whole note. The two lines are separated by a seventh interval. Example 2, labeled 'Example 2', also consists of two staves. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with a quarter note, a half note, and a whole note. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains a corresponding bass line with a quarter note, a half note, and a whole note. The two lines are separated by a fourth interval. Both examples are in C major and end with a cadence.

4. Structure of a fugue

A fugue consists of a two section succession, which is repeated. In Albrechtsberger's examples the two sections are repeated two times:

- section 1: subject and answer
- section 2: 'Zwischensatz' and cadence
- section 3: subject and answer
- section 4: 'Zwischensatz' and cadence
- section 5: subject and answer
- section 6: 'Zwischensatz' and cadence

Some authors uses the term Repercussio for the subject-answer sections 1, 3 and 5. In this case the fugue structure of Albrechtberger's examples is given with a short and simple formula:

$$(R1 + Z1) + (R1 + Z1) + (R1 + Z1)$$

where R = repercussio and Z = 'Zwischensatz' + cadence.

It stands without reason that the number of sections can be extended:

$$(R1 + Z1) + (R2 + Z2) \dots + (Rn + Zn)$$

Note:

It is likely for pedagogical reasons that Albrechtsberger prescribes cadences at the end of the 'Zwischensatz'. Usually, in fugue writing cadences are for the sake of musical continuity evaded (melodically or harmonically -cf. Zarlino: fuggir la cadenza, 1558) or not written at all.

Section 1 and 2 from Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue:

Section 3 and 4 from Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue:

Section 5 and 6 from Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue:

Answer

25

Zwischensatz

Discant clausula

Subject

Tenor clausula

5. Key-organization in a fugue

Albrechtsberger's fugue examples have three cadences, which show traditional tonal relationships. The cadence at the end defines the key which is established at the start of the fugue: the principal key. The other two cadences define two other keys that are related to the principal key. The first cadence is always in the dominant key (so when the principal key is major or minor). The second cadence is in the key a third above the principal key.

Example 1: F major – C major (first cadence) – a minor (second cadence)

Example 2: d minor – a minor (first cadence) – F major (second cadence)

Example 3: E phrygian – C major (first cadence) – G Major (second cadence)

Note that C and not B is the dominant of E phrygian

In Chapter 4 Albrechtsberger explains the relationships between keys and gives the following examples of 'natural' key progressions:

– Major key: C major – G major (#) – A minor – F major (b) – D minor (b) – E minor (#) – C major

– Minor key: A minor – C major – G major (#) – E minor (#) – D minor (b) – F major (b) – A minor

Note 1:

The successive keys have 0 or 1 accidental; in other words the relationships between keys is defined as the maximum accidental number difference of 0 or 1.

Note 2:

– B major/minor and other keys with more than 1 accidental are in C major not 'natural'

– B major/minor and other keys with more than 1 accidental are in A minor not 'natural'.

Albrechtsberger explains that these non familiar keys can be used – for the sake of variety – in works of a greater length.

In Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue the key-organization is D minor – A minor – F major – D minor

6. Pitch organization of the subject and answer

Curious, however, are Albrechtsberger's remarks on the pitch of the subject: the subject and/or answer in section 1, 3 and 5 starts on the same pitch! Voice exchange is used for reasons of 'varietas', variety. This pitch instruction is extremely useful when learning a fugue!

An example from Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue:

The image shows two musical examples in D minor, 3/4 time. The first example shows a subject in the bass clef and an answer in the treble clef, both starting on the same pitch (D4). The second example shows a subject in the bass clef starting on D4 and an answer in the treble clef starting on F4. The second example is divided into two parts: the first part (bars 12-24) shows the subject in the bass clef and the answer in the treble clef, and the second part (bars 25-32) shows the subject in the bass clef and the answer in the treble clef.

7. Special notes on the subject and answer

7.1. What is an appropriate subject?

The best fugue subjects are subjects that are apt to 'Engführung' (= stretto) with different intervals of time. Note that this is a technically defined issue on constructing subjects! The foregoing example shows stretti (singular: 'stretto') with different intervals of time (from Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue).

7.2. A nice tip!

Albrechtsberger ends his text on two part fugue with the advice to use a rest or a leap before the entry of the subject. So the subject can better be heard! As an example the entry of the Risposta in bar 14 from Albrechtsberger's D minor fugue:

The image shows a musical example in D minor, 3/4 time. The subject is in the bass clef, starting on D4. The answer is in the treble clef, starting on F4. The answer is preceded by a rest in the treble clef, which is labeled '12' in the bass clef. The answer is preceded by a leap in the treble clef, which is labeled 'Answer' in the bass clef.

7.3. Modification of the answer

In case of a tonal answer (in contrast to a real answer) the answer as repetition of the subject can be modified to preserve tonality. This modification can be summarized as follows: the progression from tonic to dominant in the subject should usually be 'answered' as the progression from dominant to tonic. Albrechtsberger gives many examples of tonal and real answers. Now only three of the tonal answers will follow.

Subject: Tonic (G) → Dominant (D)

Answer: Dominant (D) → Tonic (G)

Answer: the fifth at the beginning is now a fourth

Subject: Dominant (F) → Tonic (D)

Answer: Tonic (D) → Dominant (F)

Answer: first note C instead of D

Subject: Tonic (F) → Dominant (C)

Answer: Dominant (C) → Tonic (F)

N.B.

8. Albrechtsberger's two part fugues.

On the next pages the three two part examples of Albrechtsberger, slightly annotated, will follow.

The sound files can be downloaded at:

1. www.bestmusicteacher.com/download/albrechtsberger_fugue_d_minor.mp3
2. www.bestmusicteacher.com/download/albrechtsberger_fugue_F_major.mp3
3. www.bestmusicteacher.com/download/albrechtsberger_fugue_E_phyrgian.mp3

In loving memory of Barbe Vivien

This paper is written by Reinier Maliepaard, based on notes of Barbe Vivien.
This paper has been typeset with MC Musiceditor 6.0.1 (www.mcmusiceditor.com – www.bestmusicteacher.com)

Fugue in D minor

Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736 1809)

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is D minor (two flats). The time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, and 35 indicated at the beginning of their respective systems. The first system (measures 1-5) shows the 'Subject' in the bass staff and the 'Answer' in the treble staff. The second system (measures 6-10) continues the 'Subject' in the bass and 'Answer' in the treble. The third system (measures 11-15) shows the 'Subject' in the treble and 'Answer' in the bass. The fourth system (measures 16-20) continues the 'Subject' in the treble and 'Answer' in the bass. The fifth system (measures 21-25) shows the 'Subject' in the bass and 'Answer' in the treble. The sixth system (measures 26-30) continues the 'Subject' in the bass and 'Answer' in the treble. The seventh system (measures 31-35) shows the 'Subject' in the treble and 'Answer' in the bass. The score concludes with a double bar line at measure 35.

Fugue in F major

Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736 1809)

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with two staves. The top staff is the treble clef and the bottom staff is the bass clef. The key signature is one flat (F major). The time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, and 35 indicated above the staves. The first system (measures 1-10) shows the Subject in the bass staff and the Answer in the treble staff. The second system (measures 11-20) shows the Answer in the treble staff and the Subject in the bass staff. The third system (measures 21-30) shows the Answer in the treble staff and the Subject in the bass staff. The fourth system (measures 31-40) shows the Answer in the treble staff and the Subject in the bass staff. The fifth system (measures 41-50) shows the Answer in the treble staff and the Subject in the bass staff. The sixth system (measures 51-60) shows the Answer in the treble staff and the Subject in the bass staff. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the sixth system.

Fugue E phrygian

Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736 1809)

The musical score consists of five systems, each with two staves. The notation is as follows:

- System 1:** The upper staff begins with the label "Subject" and contains measures 1 through 5. The lower staff contains the "Answer" starting at measure 5.
- System 2:** The upper staff contains measures 6 through 10. The lower staff contains the "Answer" starting at measure 10.
- System 3:** The upper staff contains measures 11 through 20. The lower staff contains the "Answer" starting at measure 20. A measure rest is present in the upper staff at measure 15.
- System 4:** The upper staff contains measures 21 through 25. The lower staff contains the "Answer" starting at measure 25. The label "Subject" is placed in the upper staff at measure 25, and the label "Answer" is placed in the lower staff at measure 25.
- System 5:** The upper staff contains measures 26 through 35. The lower staff contains the "Answer" starting at measure 30. The piece concludes with a double bar line at measure 35.