

Harmonisation

Hi Máté. In this tutorial I'm going to take you through a couple of harmonisations. Don't think of this as a comprehensive guide, because an almost infinite number of things need to be covered, but we'll work on different aspects as we go along. This is just the basics, **but** the framework or system I'm going to show you for writing harmonies beneath a given melody should stand you in very good stead. I still use these exact same principles myself.

First of all, I'm going to go through the chorale you did for me, so you can see the sort of approach needed for chorales. However, as I said in the forum, I do think that Bach's chorales are very advanced, and to begin with, not the best learning ground (later on they'll be a superb resource). Let's have a look at it step by step and see how we get on:

Ex. 1

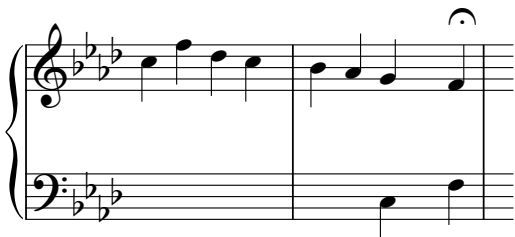


[For the step by step part I'm just going to work on the first phrase, so we can be a little more detailed.]

1. So, the very first thing you must **ALWAYS** do, is examine the phrase in your head (or sing or play it if possible). The first thing to take in is obviously the key and time signature, but after that you should **look at the first cadence**. What type of cadence is it?

In answer to this question you have to think of the types of cadence it could be. In fact there's usually only one or two that will work. Here it must either be perfect or interrupted. Which should you use? Well interrupted cadences are, as you may remember, a special effect, intended to surprise. Is that appropriate in the first bar of a chorale? No. Therefore it must be a perfect cadence. **So write it in this cadence in the bass voice straight away** (ex. 2)! (The inner parts you should leave blank for now.)

Ex. 2

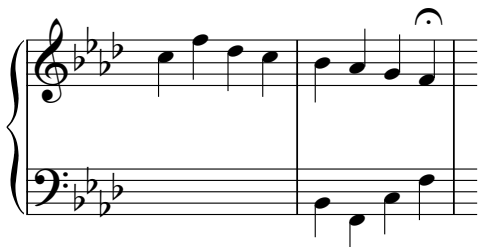


2. Once this is done, you can think about the chords that lead up to the cadence (usually the two or three notes just before). For now, we are sticking to the bass part only. (The chords you want to have are always implied by the bass, but you can't fill in the inner parts until you have a better idea of what's going to happen). Look at the notes before - B♭ → A♭ (followed by G → F). What chords can we have leading to our perfect cadence beneath these notes? You make think of a $\frac{9}{4}$ chord beneath the A♭. This would be easy to prepare (with a B♭ minor chord before it), but would break an important rule: cadential $\frac{9}{4}$ chords should always sound on the strong beat. A I $\frac{9}{4}$ here would upset the metre.

That leaves us with few alternatives. The A♭ cannot be harmonised with III this close to the cadence, (III-V is too weak for such an important moment in the music). If we put a D♭ in the bass, giving chord VI (or possibly IV $\frac{5}{5}$) we run into trouble: A♭→G and D♭→C will create consecutive fifths.

Therefore, the only real possible option to harmonise the A♭ is chord I or I⁶. Before this we can have a few possibilities, but either ii⁶ or iv would sound strongest (because of the motion by fourths in the bass). Now we've decided what to do, **write it in the bass voice** (ex. 3).

Ex. 3



3. Now we've done that we should continue to **complete the sketch of the bassline for the phrase**. Look at the opening. We have to begin on the tonic chord. (If we begin on III the music sounds as if in a different key - an interesting effect but not one that is appropriate here. If we begin on V, the first beat will sound like an upbeat: again, not a good idea.)

What about the next beat (F in the melody). If we begin with the tonic chord, we could have another chord i here or alternatively chord iv. Sometimes it helps to look at the next note. This D \flat clearly sounds best harmonised with either ii 6 or iv. In this case the second crotchet (F) cannot be iv; the same chord across beats 2 and 3 will upset the pulse. If you ever have to subdivide the pulse (i.e. by having two repeated harmonies on consecutive beats), split it according to the placement of strong beats. (ex. 4)

Ex. 4

harmony:

bad good

So the second beat cannot be chord iv, if we are to have iv (or ii 6 which is very closely related) on the third beat. We have to have tonic chord beneath the F instead. If we begin with the tonic chord in root position on beat 1, it makes sense to have I $\frac{3}{2}$ on the second, to create a little interest.

That only leaves us with one note left to harmonise: the fourth beat of the first bar. We've already decided that the bass note of the first beat of the next bar will be a B \flat and we think that beat before will also be chord iv, and therefore probably have a B \flat in the bass too. So what can we use to connect these chords? Perhaps we can use our 'secondary dominant' principle from the last lesson. What is the dominant of B \flat ? F. So let's put in an F chord on this beat. But rather than having it as a minor triad (i.e. the tonic triad), let's make it major, so it becomes the dominant chord of B \flat (V/iv). This will create some more interest and push the music forwards. Putting it in first inversion will also mean that we don't have another F in the bass. Let's **write all that in** (ex. 5). As you can see I've added a few quavers to create more of a 'line'. It's important that your bassline has its own interest (but not so much that it will draw attention away from the melody).

Ex. 5

p.n. a.n.

p.n. = passing note
a.n. = arpeggion note

An arpeggion note (which you may use to decorate lines - as long as they don't create consecutives!) is a consonant note that belongs to the same chord as the main note and is approached by skip. It is useful particularly when filling in gaps in the bassline. (N. B. You cannot use it to fill in the gap of a fifth at a perfect cadence. Perfect cadences are a fixed formula that should not be altered, they are too important for the overall structure of the music.)

4. Next you can think about the inner parts. First we must go back to the cadence. With our bass line, the spacing of the last chord is dictated for us. The A \flat must go in the the tenor, the C in the alto. That tells us what to do with the preceeding chord V (ex. 6). I've put in a seventh on the quaver. Remember that at a perfect cadence, the leading note (when in an inner part) may have to leap down to the fifth to give a full chord on the next beat. Bach does this frequently. (Other composers such as Haydn and Mozart prefer not to.)

Ex. 6

15

5. Now it's time to add some more detail to the inner parts. Again first complete the notes immediately before those you already have with smooth voice-leading (ex. 7a). Look at the contour of the melodic line. It moves by step. That means we can create **suspensions** of some kind. **Sketch any of these in.** This will help you work out your spacings later on. On the fourth beat of the first bar I've added a seventh on the quaver, as this will create a smooth transition to the following subdominant chord (ex. 7b).

Ex. 7

a) b)

6. Now it's time to fill in the remaining gaps. Use the notes from the harmonies you have decided, and try to create smooth lines without leaping around too much. The easiest way to do this is take one voice at a time, and work backwards from what you already have (ex. 8). Notice how we can have the alto moving in parallel 10ths with the bass passing notes on the first beat.

Ex. 8

7. Fill in the remaining gaps, using the same method. This should be fairly easy, and make any adjustments you feel are needed to create good part-writing. If you've been careful about your voice-leading all along there shouldn't be any consecutives, but it's always a good idea to check for them at this stage. Notice the passing V 6/4/3 we are able to insert between the first two beats (ex. 9).

Ex. 9

Other things to consider when harmonising

We haven't used any here, but during the early stages, it's also possible to create suspensions in the bass, which can sound very nice.

Here's another version, which I've annotated to show you some of the more idiomatic things Bach uses. We will eventually cover all of them in these lessons. Don't try any of them in your harmonisations yet though!

Ex. 10

typical Bachian progression over melodic minor scale

'chain suspensions' in alto

diminished 7th acting as secondary dominant to V (i.e. vii/V)

diminished 7th leading onto tonic chord (vii/i)

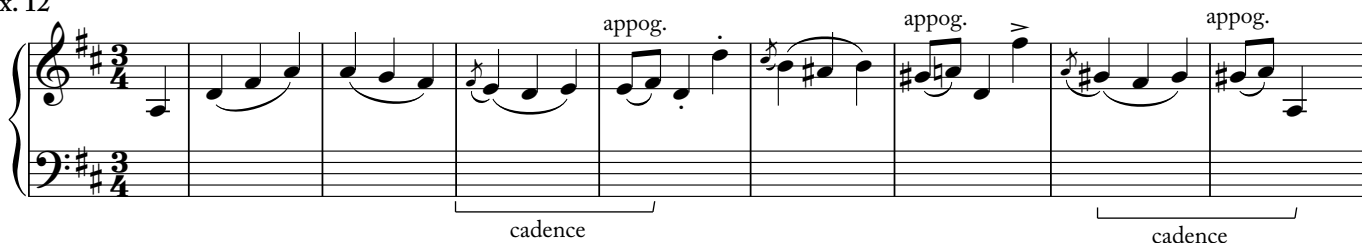
Now let's work on something more straightforward, but using the same principles. This is the sort of thing I'll be setting for your homework over the next few lessons.

Ex. 11 (Haydn String Quartet op. 76 no. 5, Menuetto)



We haven't worked on anything in the Classical style yet, so it's a good idea to analyse the melody quickly. First of all, let's identify the cadences. In the classical style, phrases are often divided up into four bar groups, which makes the cadences easy to spot. **Sketch in where they go to** begin with (ex. 12).

Ex. 12



You may notice that the first note of these cadences is dissonant. Don't worry. These are called appoggiaturi and typical of the style. The good news is you don't have to harmonise them any differently; you can imagine they're just not there. There is also another appoggiatura in the sixth bar. Grace notes are purely decorative in this piece, so we can ignore them. Now it's time to do the harmonisation.

1. Look at the phrases. The accidentals suggest that the music changes key. The first phrase is in the tonic. What type of cadence is it? Perfect or interrupted, once again (remember NOT to be confused by the appoggiatura!).

Write in a perfect cadence **in the bass** in bars 3-4 (an interrupted cadence would not occur this early in a piece).

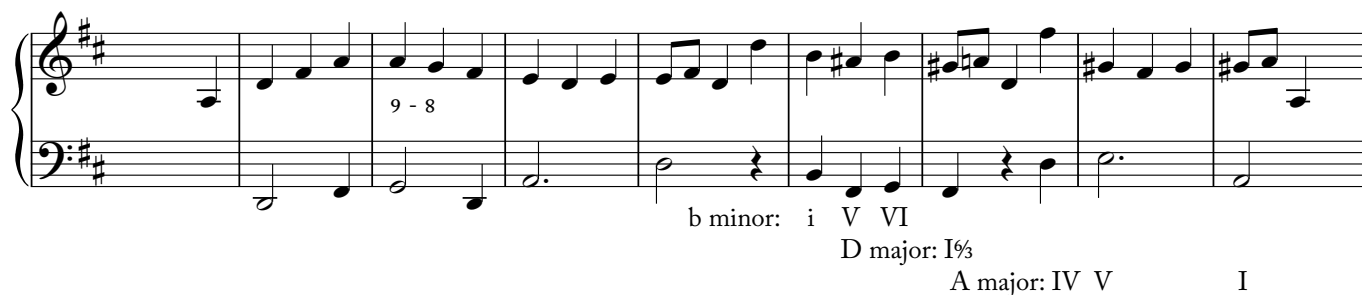
What about the next phrase, it seems to start in B major or minor. Which is more likely? B minor - it is the relative minor. What key are bars 6-8 in? The G#s suggests A major. Is this likely? Yes. A major is the dominant. What sort of cadence does the phrase end on? Once more - perfect. Write this in the **bass** (ex. 13).

Ex. 13



2. Now it's time to fill in the rest of the bass. Did you notice the suspension in the melody line in bar 2? The A from the previous beat is held on from weak to strong, and then moves downwards by step. This is perfect for creating a suspension. The choice of suspensions is up to us, but here I've chosen a 9-8. In bar 5, when the music briefly moves to B minor, I've put in harmonies that suggest an interrupted cadence in that key (i-V-VI), before moving back onto the tonic chord in G. All the other chords are filled in using normal consonances - thirds and sixths beneath the melody line, in order to create a smooth and interesting bass (ex. 14).

Ex. 14



3. Now it's time to think about the inner parts. **First of all, we must fill in the notes around the cadence where the spacing will probably be decided for us by what is already there.** First we take the tonic chord in bar 4. The best spacing for the chord is to have the fifth in the viola (remember this is for strings!), and the doubled root in the second violin. This dictates the notes in the previous V chord (remember to watch for consecutives when you do this!). Before this the most obvious choice is to put in another chord I.

Now let's take the second cadence. In my version I've used a 7th with in bar 7, so the fifth is missing in the following chord, to prevent consecutive fifths in the viola and cello (the B cannot leap down to E across bar 7-8). This is OK in the classical style. The fifth is not entirely necessary. For the preceeding chord (last beat of bar 6), I've put in a secondary dominant (V/V) with D# in the bass, which creates a real surprise after the D in the melody before. (Surprise is an important feature of the style.)

Ex. 15



4. Finally you can fill in the rest of the inner parts, based on what you already have. For a fully finished piece to be performed you can add in some articulations (ex. 16).

Ex. 16



Homework:

Harmonise these minuet tunes, in the style of Haydn or Mozart, using the steps shown above. Check for any modulations to related keys in the music (dominant/subdominant/relative major or minor); accidentals in the melody will help you with where these occur and to which key they go. Look out for any suspensions that you might be able to add, and any chromatic secondary dominant chords, and feminine endings (see the last lesson).

Rests are a great way to improve the texture by the way, don't be afraid of them!

a)

b)