

Writing for Four Voices: 3 Realizations of a Famous Bass Line

Continuo Style (or Keyboard Style): top 3 voices in R.H. as close as possible (mostly 3rds and 4ths).

A musical score for Continuo Style. The right hand (RH) consists of three staves with chords, and the left hand (LH) consists of two staves with a bass line. The chords in the RH are closely spaced, primarily using thirds and fourths. The bass line in the LH consists of a sequence of notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1.

4-Part Chorale Style (Closed position: top 3 voices in 3rds and 4ths).

A musical score for 4-Part Chorale Style in closed position. The right hand (RH) consists of four staves with chords, and the left hand (LH) consists of two staves with a bass line. The chords in the RH are closely spaced, primarily using thirds and fourths. The bass line in the LH consists of a sequence of notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1.

4-Part Chorale Style (Open position: top 3 voices in 6ths and 5ths).

A musical score for 4-Part Chorale Style in open position. The right hand (RH) consists of four staves with chords, and the left hand (LH) consists of two staves with a bass line. The chords in the RH are widely spaced, primarily using sixths and fifths. The bass line in the LH consists of a sequence of notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1.

OBSERVED TENDENCIES IN VERY STRICT FOUR-PART CHORALE STYLE

1. In upper 3 voices (S A T), common tones are kept in the same voice, otherwise stepwise motion is preferred.
2. Each chord contains a root, 3rd and 5th.
Root position favors a doubled root.
A doubled 3rd is avoided (unless the chord is diminished or stepwise contrary motion is involved)
A doubled leading tone is avoided except when the function is iii.
3. Open or closed position is maintained.
Ranges of voices are respected.
In open and closed positions, maximum 2 octaves between T & B, minimum is a unison.
Crossing and overlapping of adjacent voices is avoided.
4. Parallel unisons, P5th's, and P8va's between any two voices are rigorously avoided.
5. Contrary motion between outer voices is preferred.
Between S and B, if one voice skips, another steps in the opposite direction.