

Jazz Counterpoint

Counterpoint involves one note played against another. The notes are harmonically complementary. Incorporating counterpoint into your soloing involves meticulous work, but it can add a layer of depth to your arrangements.

TENSION RESOLUTION AS COUNTERPOINT

In the rules of jazz counterpoint, tensions on chords must resolve to certain scale degrees.

Downward Resolution

Chord	
Major 6	9-1, Maj7-6, 11-3, ♭6-5
Minor 6	9-1, Maj7-6, 11-♭3, ♭6-5
Minor 7	9-1, 11-3, ♭6-5
Minor 7(♭5)	9-1, 11-3, ♭13-♭5
Dominant 7	9-1, ♭9-1, 11-3, ♭5-3, 13-5, ♭13-5
	Tension to Tension Resolution:
	9-♭9, ♯9-♭9, 13-♭13, ♭13-♭5, ♭13-5, 13-♭13-♯11-5
Diminished 7	Tensions a whole step above a chord tone resolve down to chord tones by step
Major 7	9-1, 11-3, ♭6-5

Fig. 17.1. Tension Resolutions

If a note in either the original melody or contrapuntal melody is a tension, it will represent the chord tone it resolves to.

UPWARD RESOLUTION

Any basic chord tone is resolved to when it is approached chromatically from below.

FOUR-PART COUNTERPOINT

In jazz, you would take the melody and create contrapuntal lines to it using these techniques:

- a. Use stepwise motion. (Avoid using a tension resolution pattern if tension resolution occurs in the original melody.)

Fig. 17.2. *IncorrecT Tension Resolution*

- b. If you use a tension in your contrapuntal melody, it should be of shorter or equal duration to its resolving note.

For example, the $\flat 9$ tension on the third beat of measure 2 in figure 17.2, which lasts for only two beats, resolves to chord tone F on $B\flat$ Maj7, which lasts for seven beats.

Additional counterpoint can be added in third and fourth voices with the two remaining basic chord tones.

They may move in *parallel* motion (the same direction by the same interval), *contrary* motion (the opposite direction), *oblique* motion (one voice doesn't move, the other does), or *similar* motion (the same direction by a different interval).



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Fig. 17.3. *Four-Part Counterpoint*

- c. If you skip a note in your counterpoint, return in the opposite direction by step.



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Fig. 17.4. *Skips and Suspensions*

- d. Use suspensions where possible.
- e. When your melody is active, use sustaining notes in the counterpoint.

Fig. 17.5. *Rhythmically Active Melody and Final Resolution*

PRACTICE

Exercise 17.1. Four-Part Counterpoint

Play and analyze the following four-part counterpoint.

Exercise 17.2. Writing Two-Part Counterpoint

Arrange counterpoint to the melodies from the lead sheets in appendix A using the harmony provided.

Exercise 17.3. Writing Three- and Four-Part Counterpoint

Add a third and fourth voice to the counterpoint you wrote for exercise 17.2. Remember to choose your notes based on the chord tones missing from the first two lines.