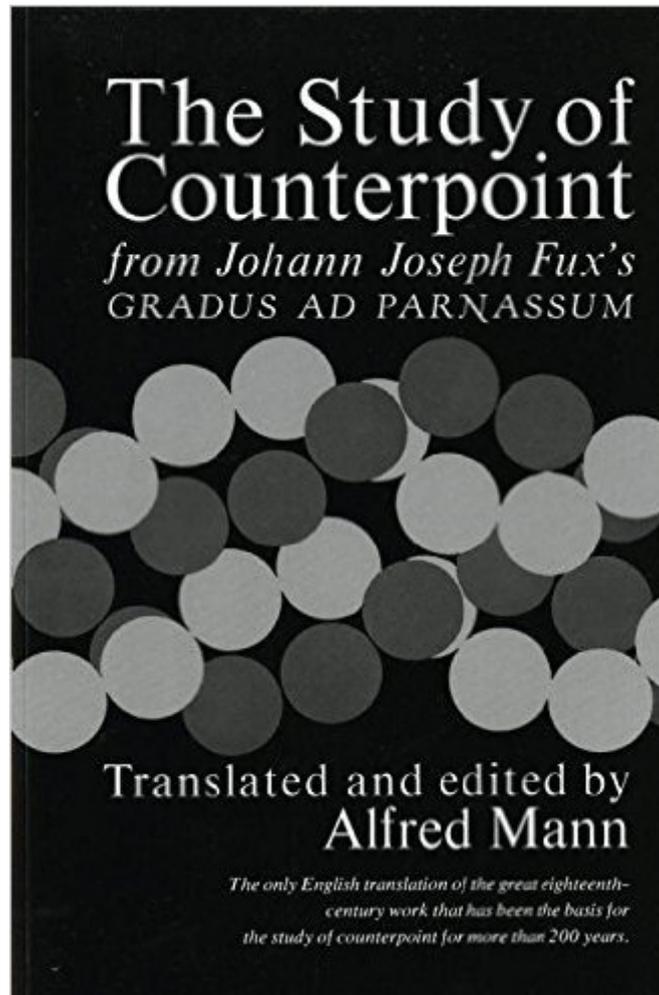


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Study Of Counterpoint: From Johann Joseph Fux's Gradus Ad Parnassum



Synopsis

The essence of the most celebrated book on counterpoint, Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum*. The most celebrated book on counterpoint is Fux's great theoretical work *Gradus ad Parnassum*. Since its appearance in 1725, it has been used by and has directly influenced the work of many of the greatest composers. J.S. Bach held it in high esteem, Leopold Mozart trained his famous son from its pages, Haydn worked out every lesson with meticulous care, and Beethoven condensed it into an abstract for ready reference. An impressive list of nineteenth-century composers subscribed to its second edition, and in more recent times Paul Hindemith said, "Perhaps the craft of composition would really have fallen into decline if Fux's *Gradus* had not set up a standard." Originally written in Latin, *Steps to Parnassus* was translated into the principal European languages, but the only English version was a free paraphrase published in 1886. The present translation by Alfred Mann is therefore the first faithful rendering in English from the original Latin and presents the essence of Fux's teachings. For its distinction as a classic and its undiminished usefulness for the modern student it is a privilege to offer this fine translation in the Norton Library.

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Customer Reviews

[reprint -- sorry]At one point in the text, Aloysius pretty much says it all: "These lessons are not worked out for actual use but for exercise. If one know how to read one need no longer bother with spelling; similarly, the species of counterpoint are given only for purposes of study."I have been working out of this book (which is really an excerpt of a larger book called Steps to Perfection)

with a private tutor for a year, and it has been a difficult but rewarding experience. Essentially, the species provide a platform to learn how to compose concurrent melodic lines. Each following species builds upon the knowledge of the previous. Rules that begin absolute slowly become contextual. While the book's original title is anachronistic, the program within encourages steps towards the understanding of basic tonal principles that have formed the foundation of the grand tradition of western music. I'd recommend keeping an open mind about the rules. These are treated as the "rules," but are expected to be broken with time and experience. After all, the rules are no more than the collected general tendencies of the great composers. Another thing to keep in mind is that Fux's book provides an introduction to composition based upon the limitations--and, accordingly, the beauty--of the human voice. This book does not deal with the embellishments and ornaments possible on all instruments. More caveats: One, I would recommend studying this book with an experienced teacher. It's like a beginning yoga text: basic, but someone with experience will put things in perspective. Two, the exercises, especially for three and four voices, are difficult and require commitment and discipline. (Again, like yoga.) There is no need to rush through the exercises.

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