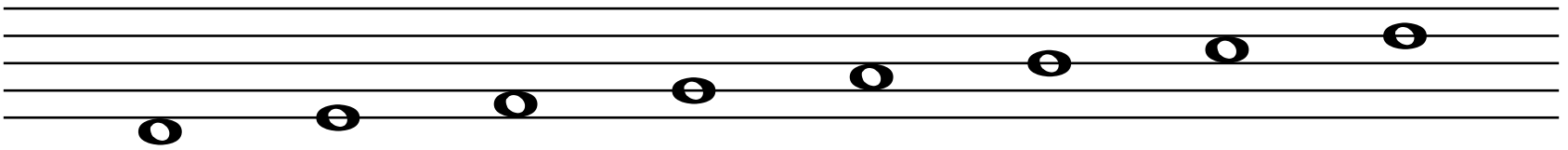
The Eighth Part

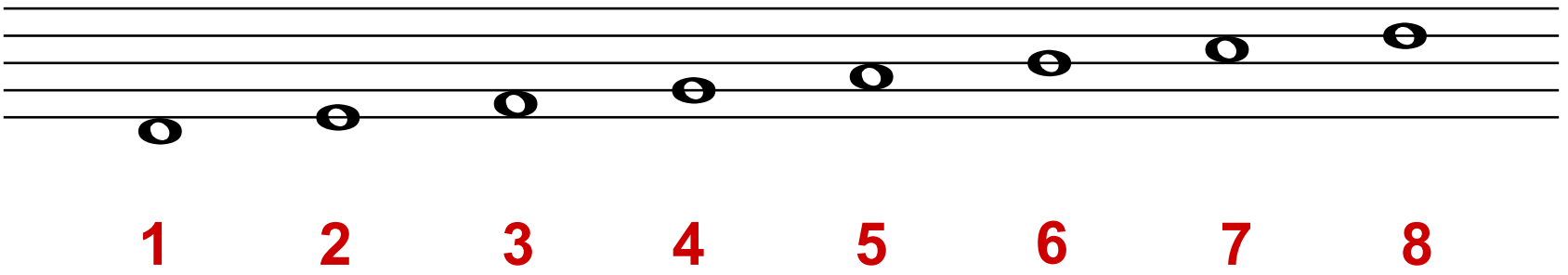
How 16thC polyphony works

By Master Crispin Sexi, OL

Melodic intervals

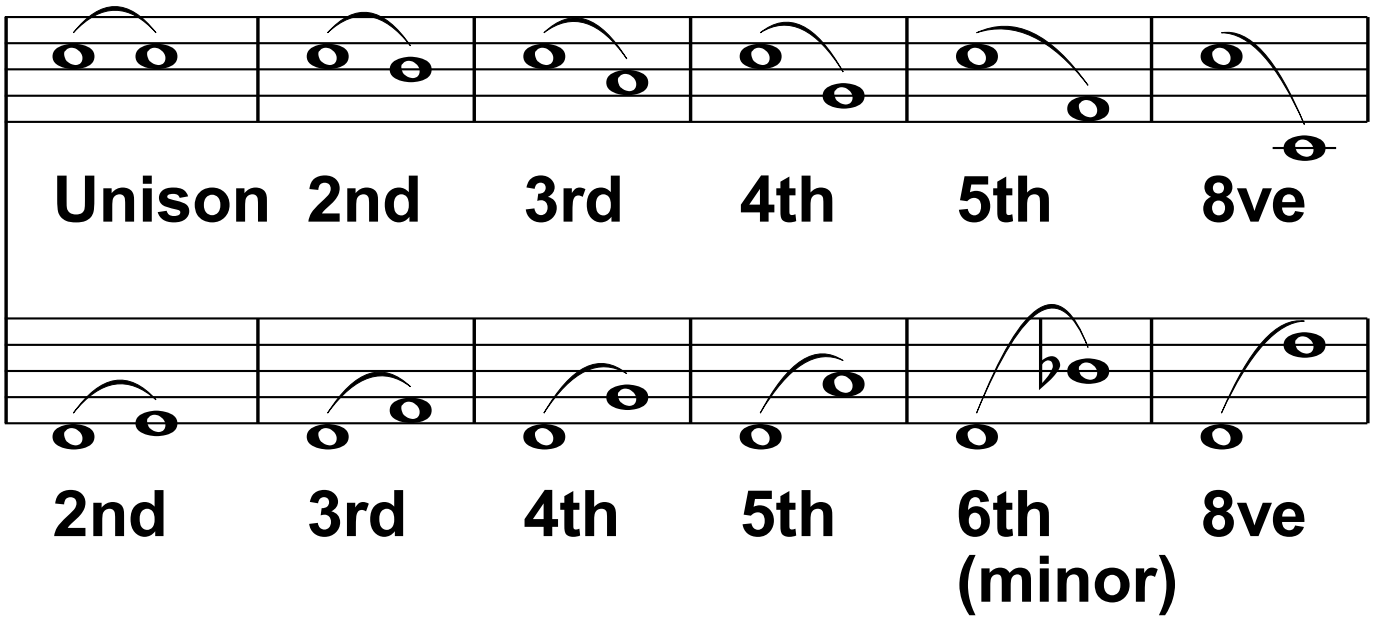


Melodic intervals



Melodic intervals

Easy to sing:



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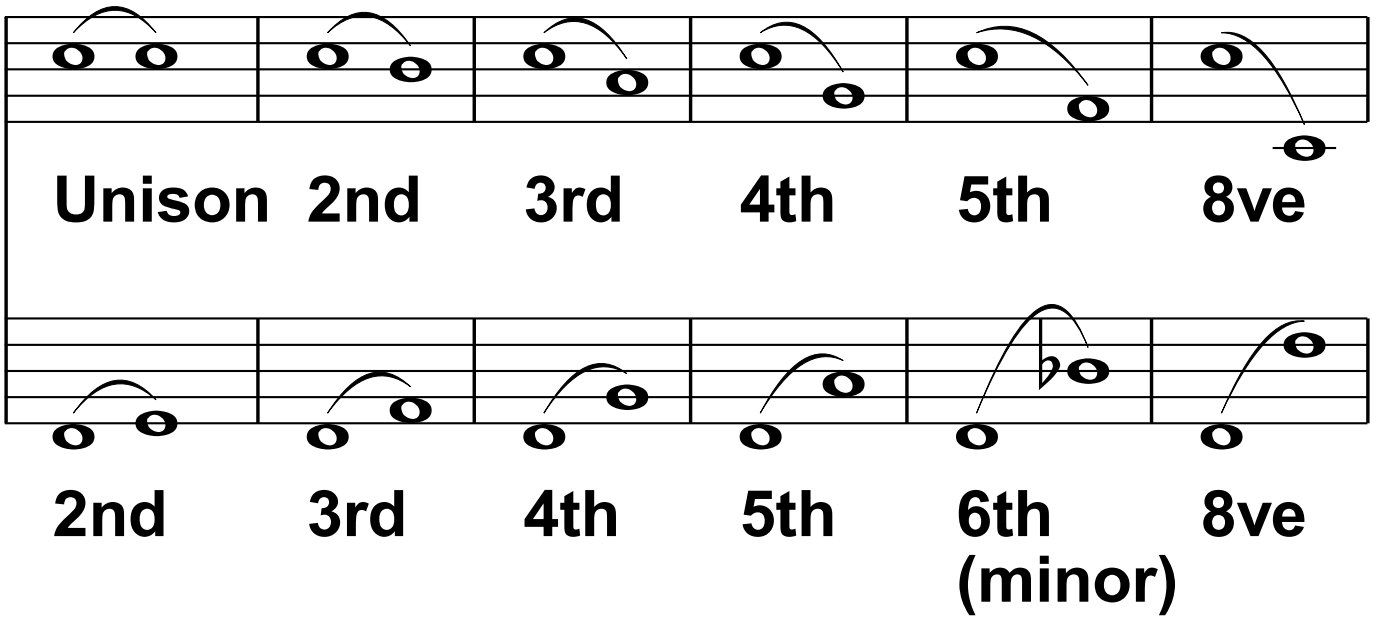
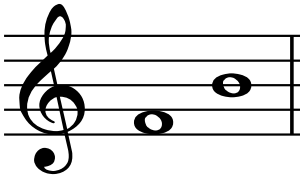


Hard to sing: greater than 8ves, 7ths, 6ths, augmented, diminished, especially tritones.

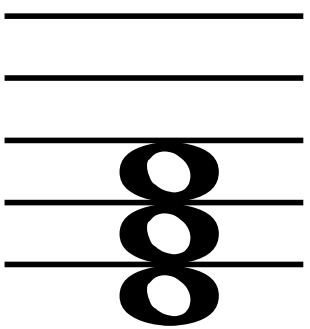
Tritones

An interval of 3 whole tones, for example F to B.



They sound awful. Blame Pythagoras!

The chord in the Renaissance



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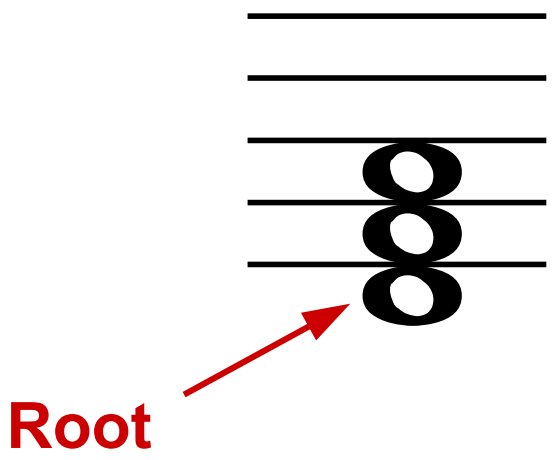

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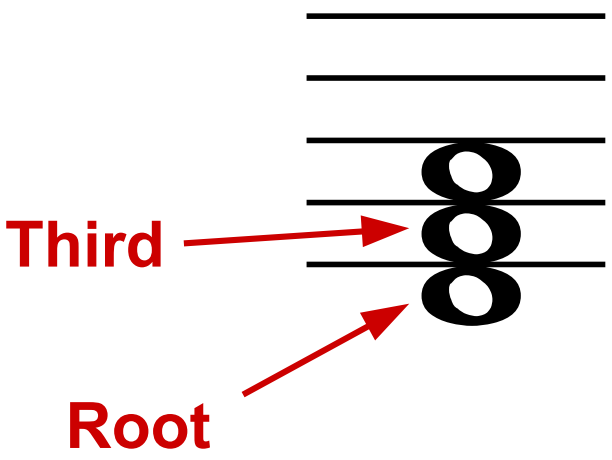

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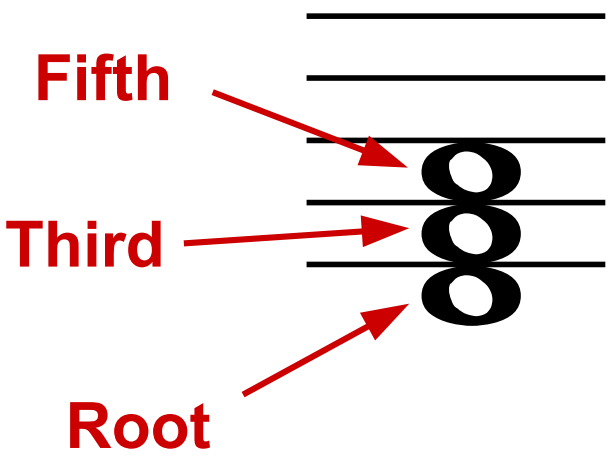

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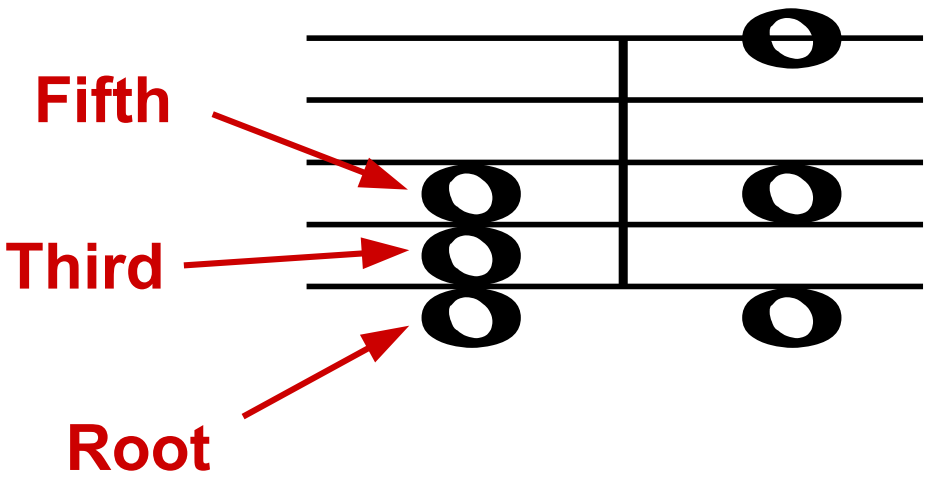

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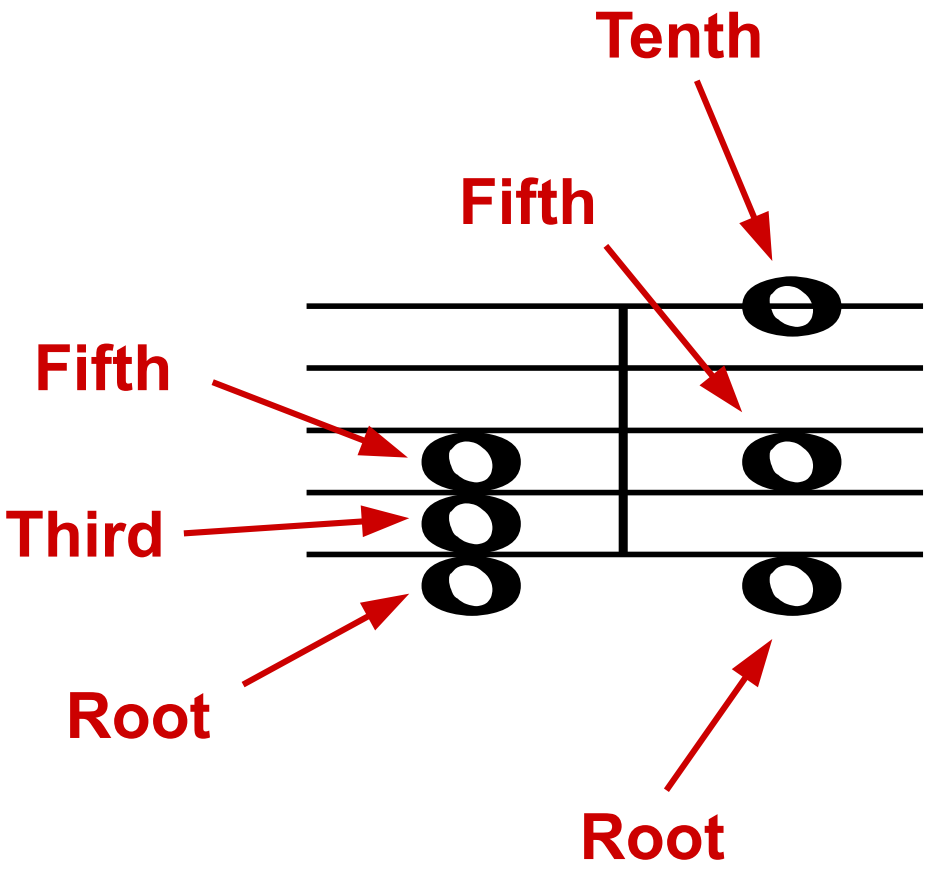

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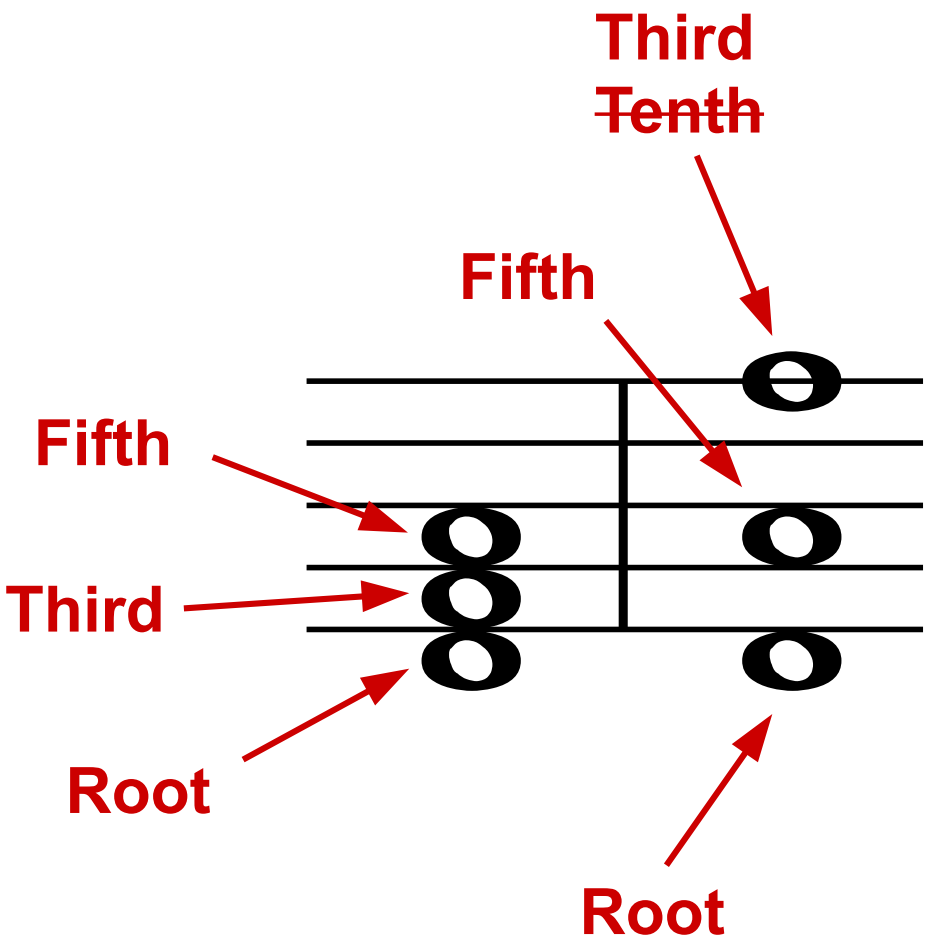

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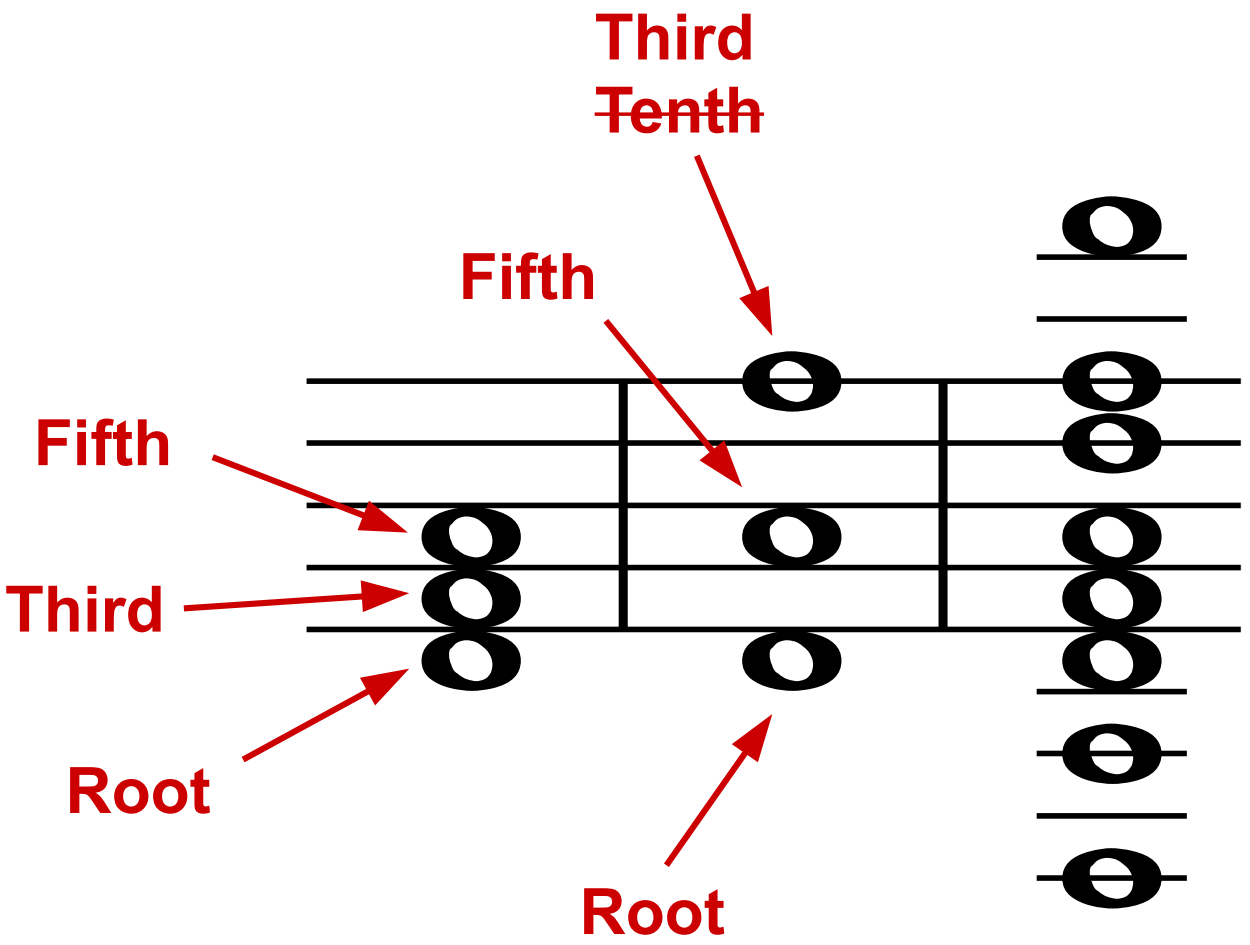

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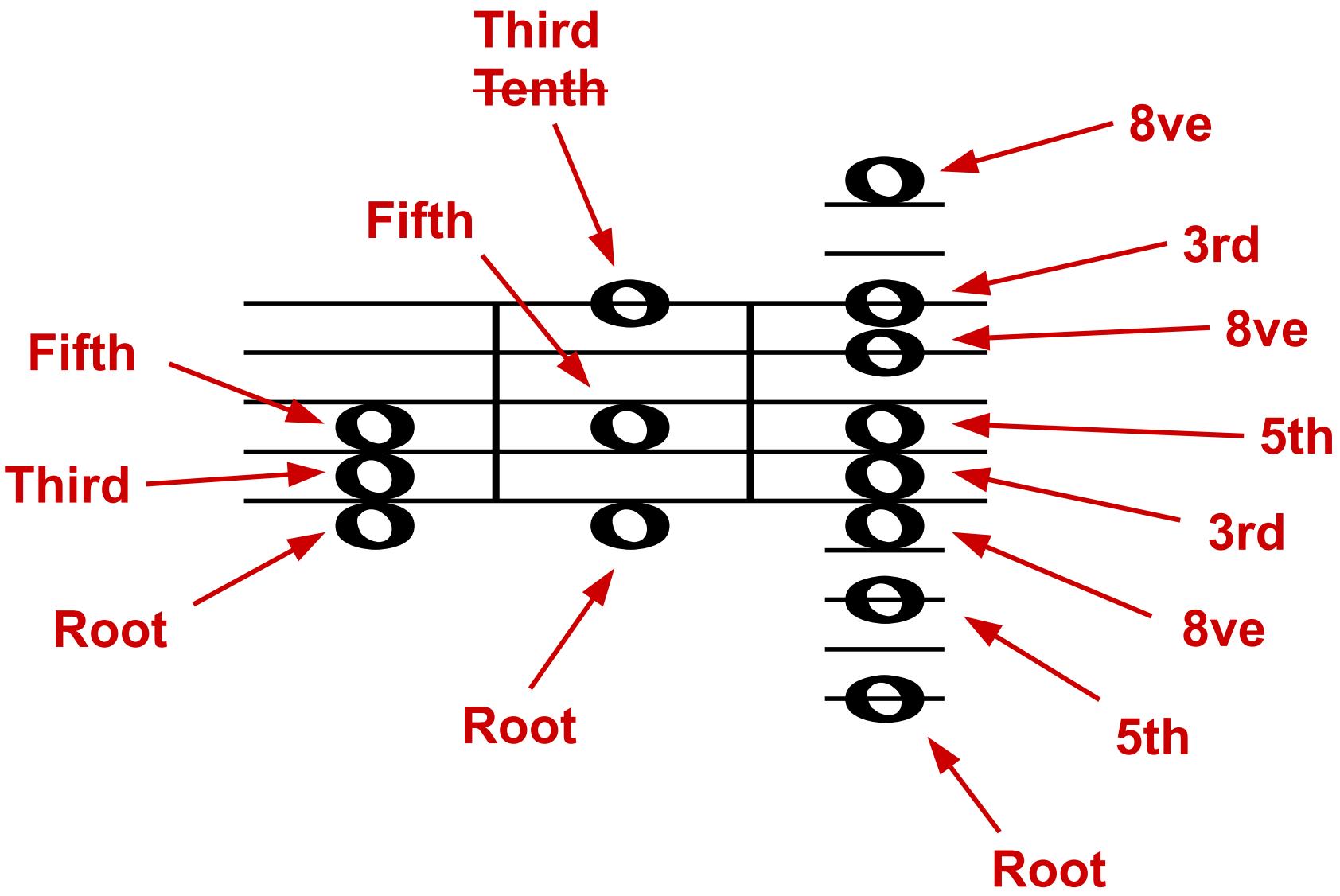

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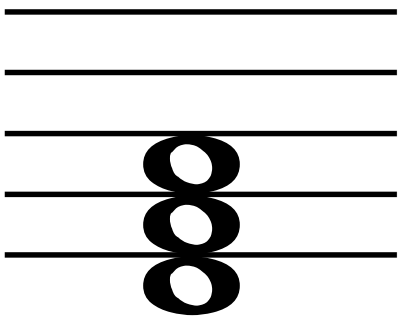
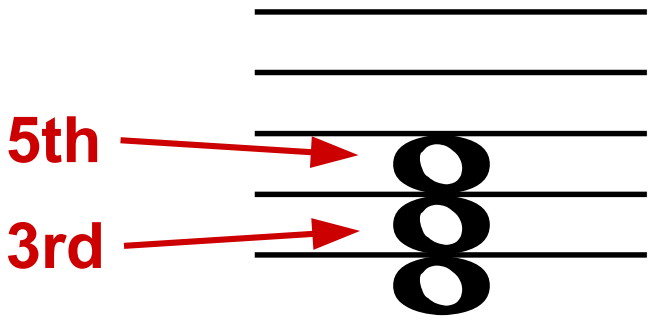


Root Position

The chord in the Renaissance



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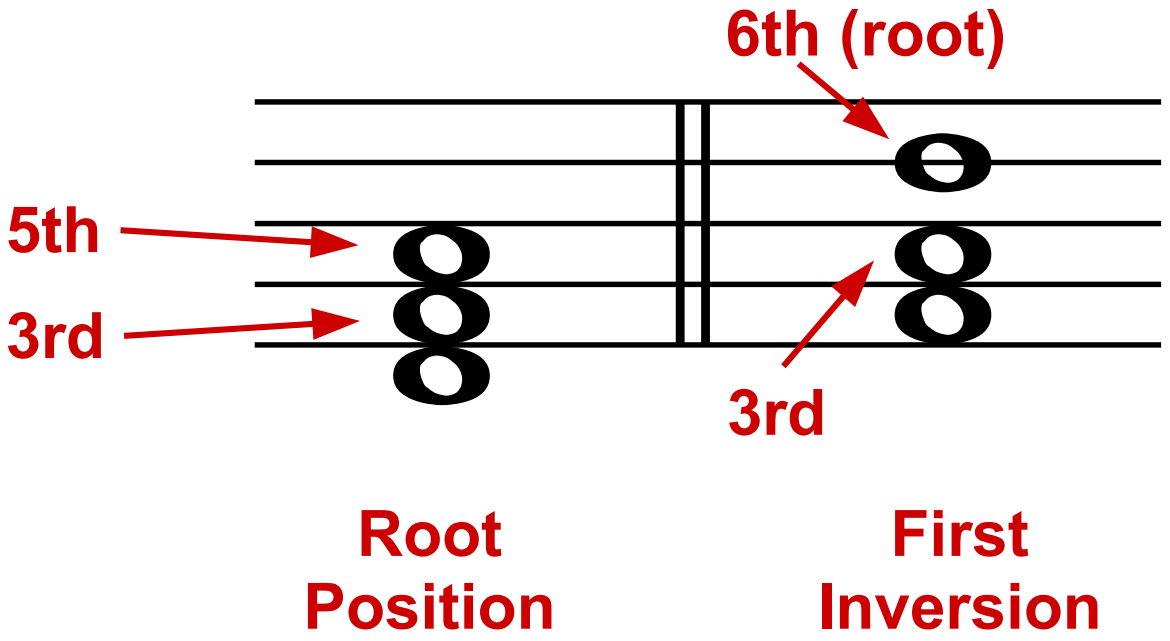

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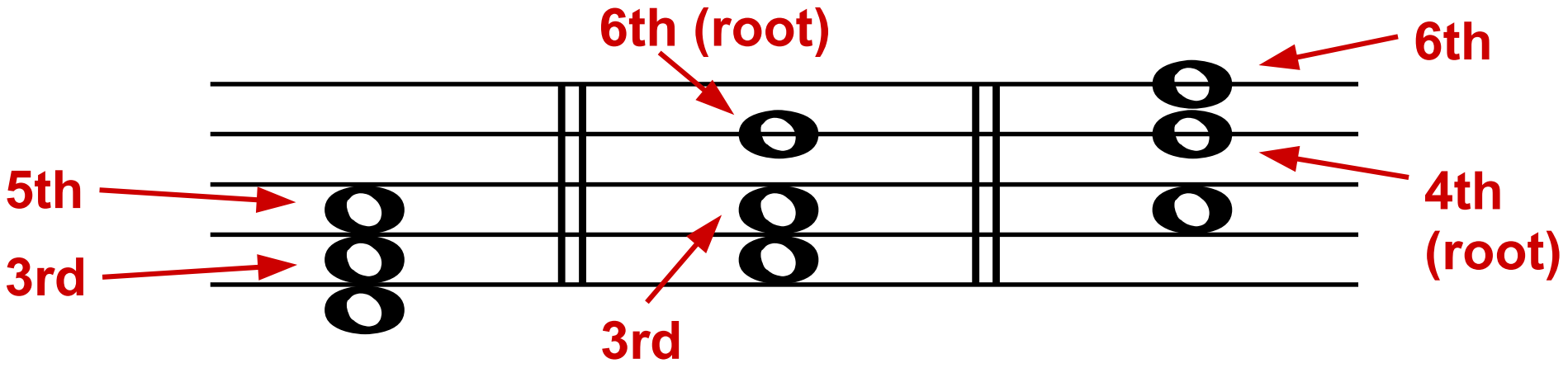

Root Position **First Inversion** **Second Inversion**

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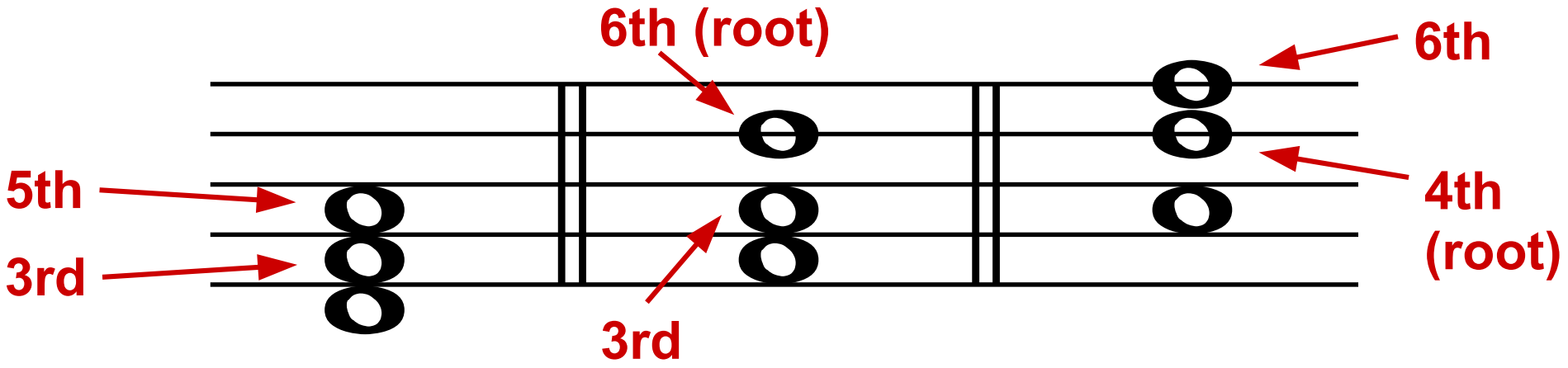

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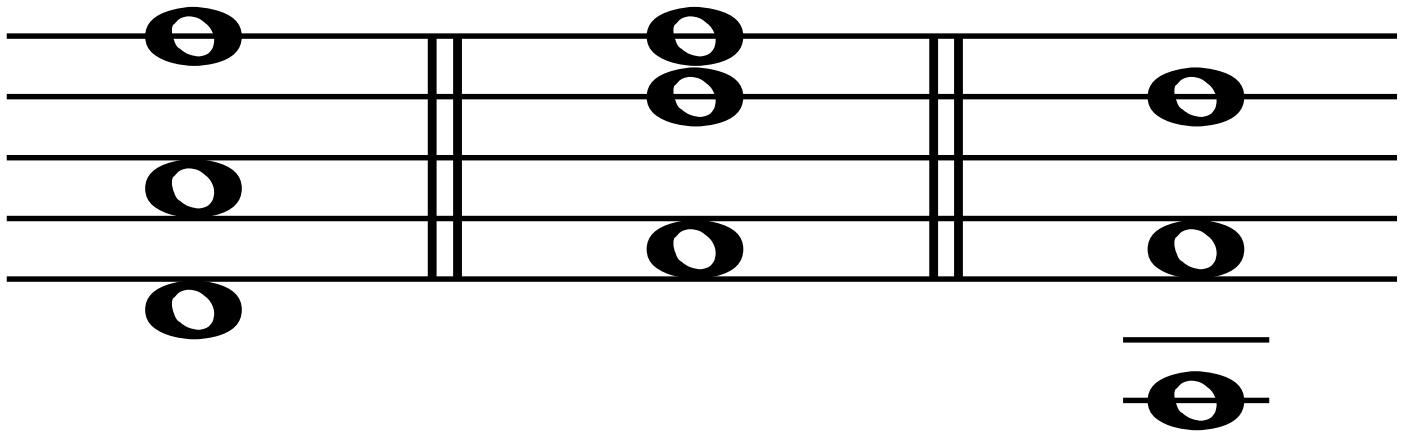
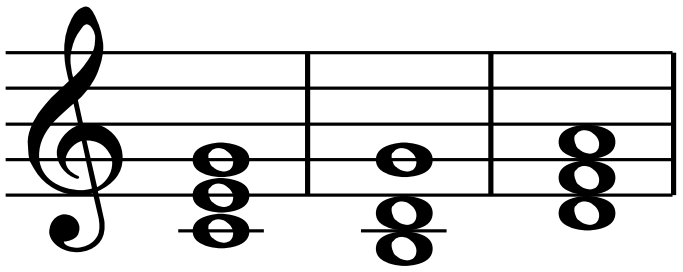
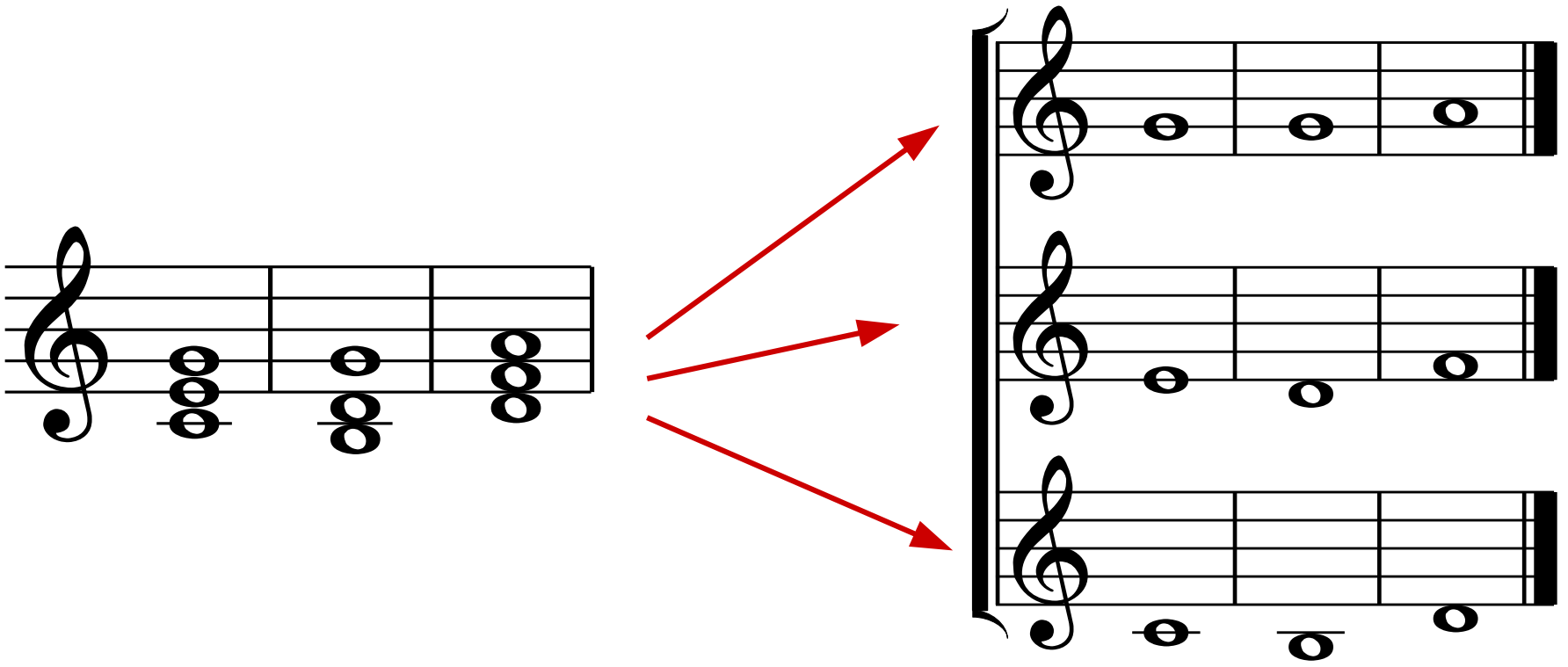


Dividing chords into voices



Harmony

Dividing chords into voices



Harmony

Melodies

Some rules of Renaissance music

- All voices sing notes of the chord.

(All these rules have exceptions)

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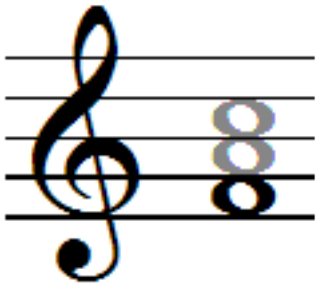
These rules allow all the voices to sound nice together while moving in apparent independence.

(All these rules have exceptions)

Moving from chord to chord

There are only three notes in a chord: Root + 3rd + 5th



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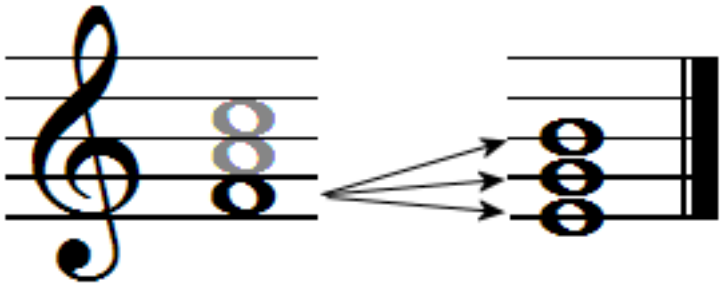

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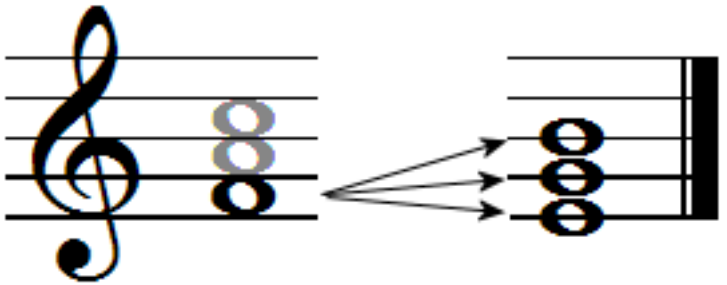

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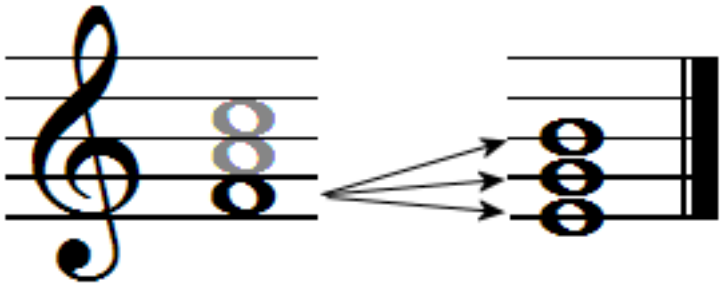
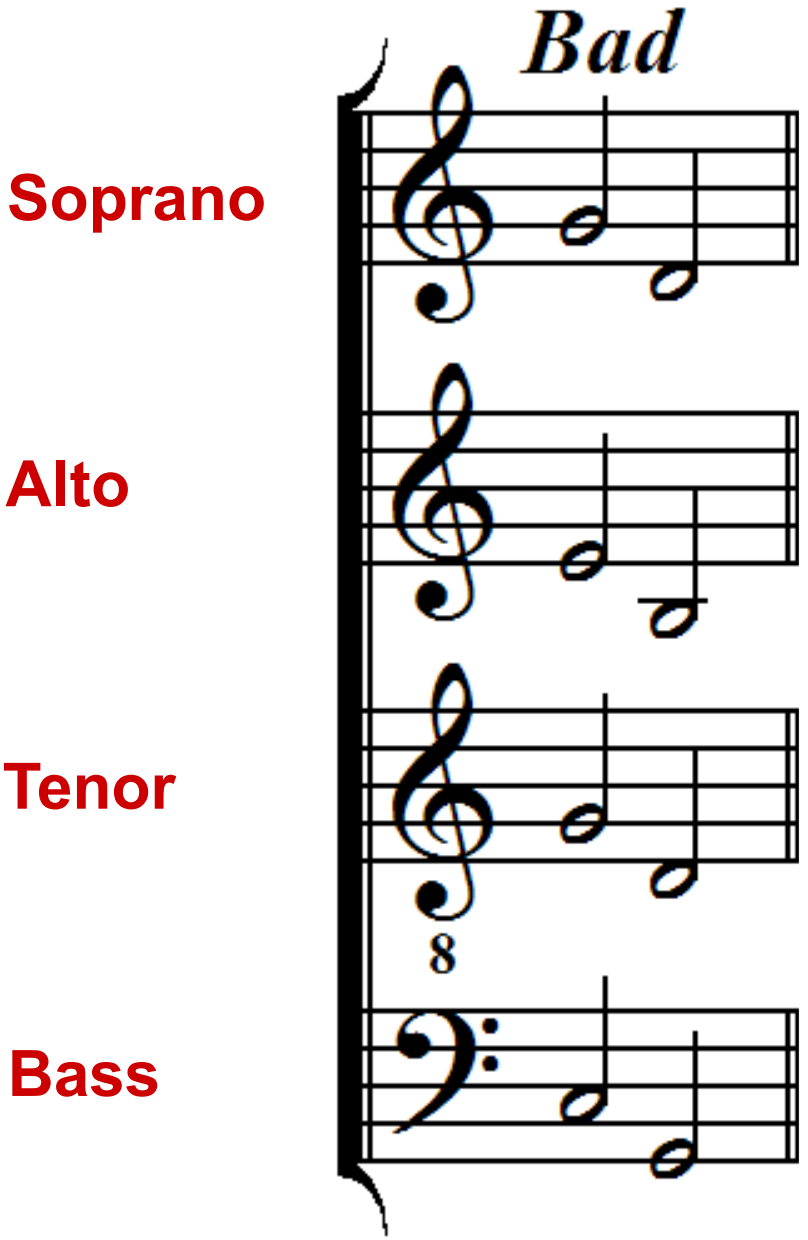


~~**9 options for movement from one chord to the next…**~~

Except you cannot move in parallel motion from 5th to 5th

So 8 options for movement from one chord to the next!

Moving from chord to chord



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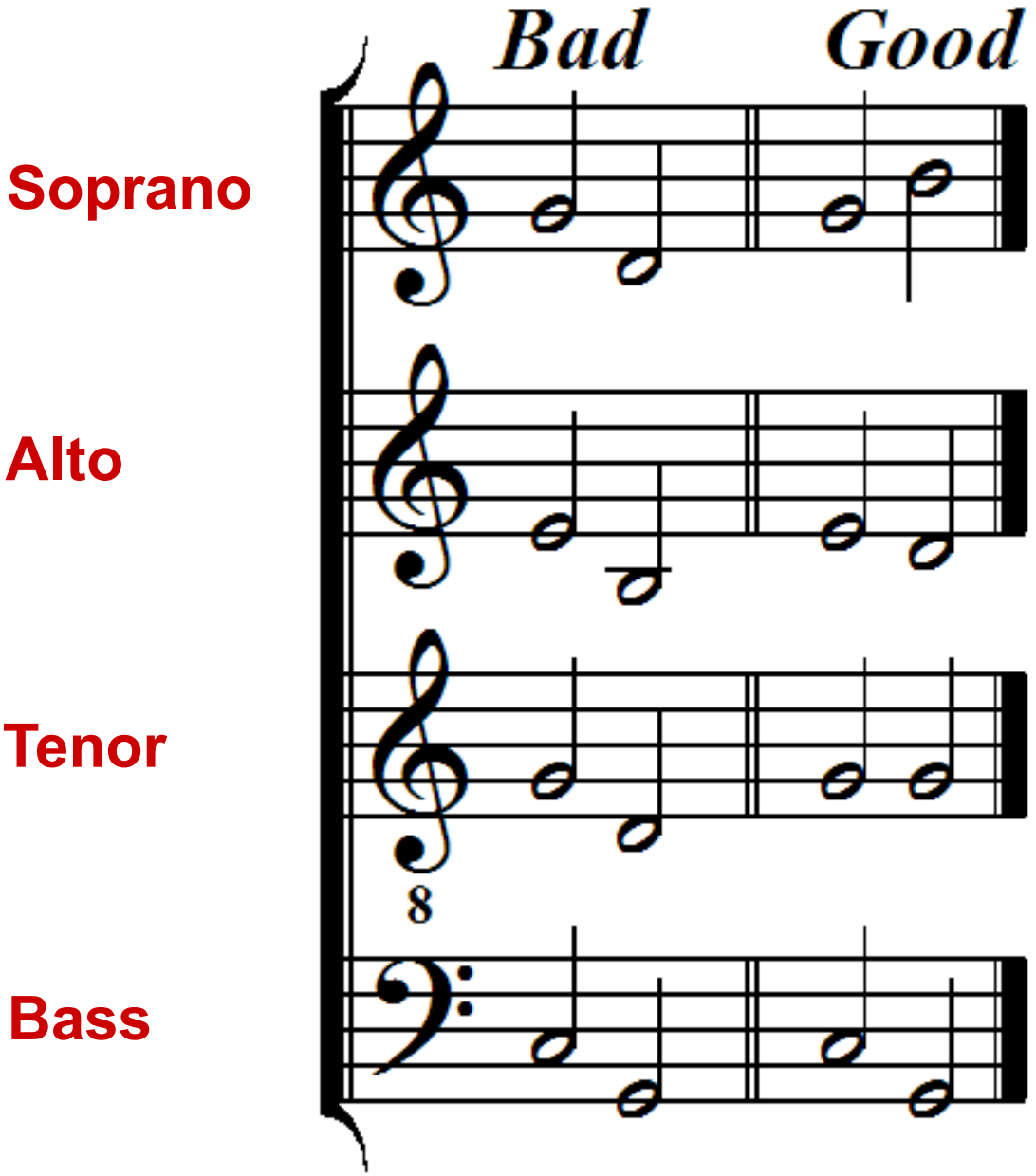
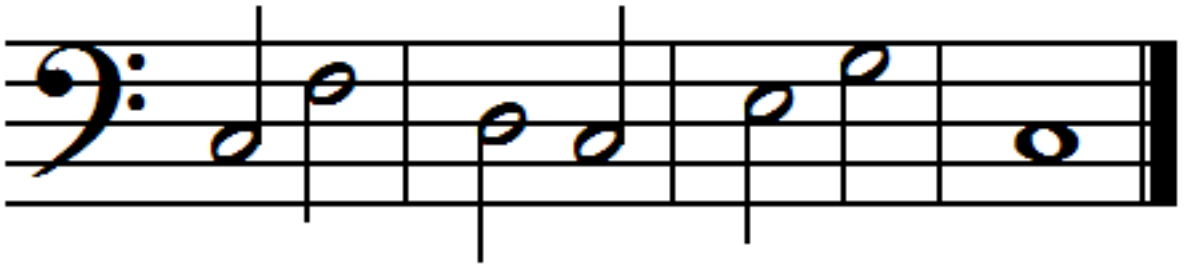


One Part

Bass parts are the ground that all other voices Are supported by.

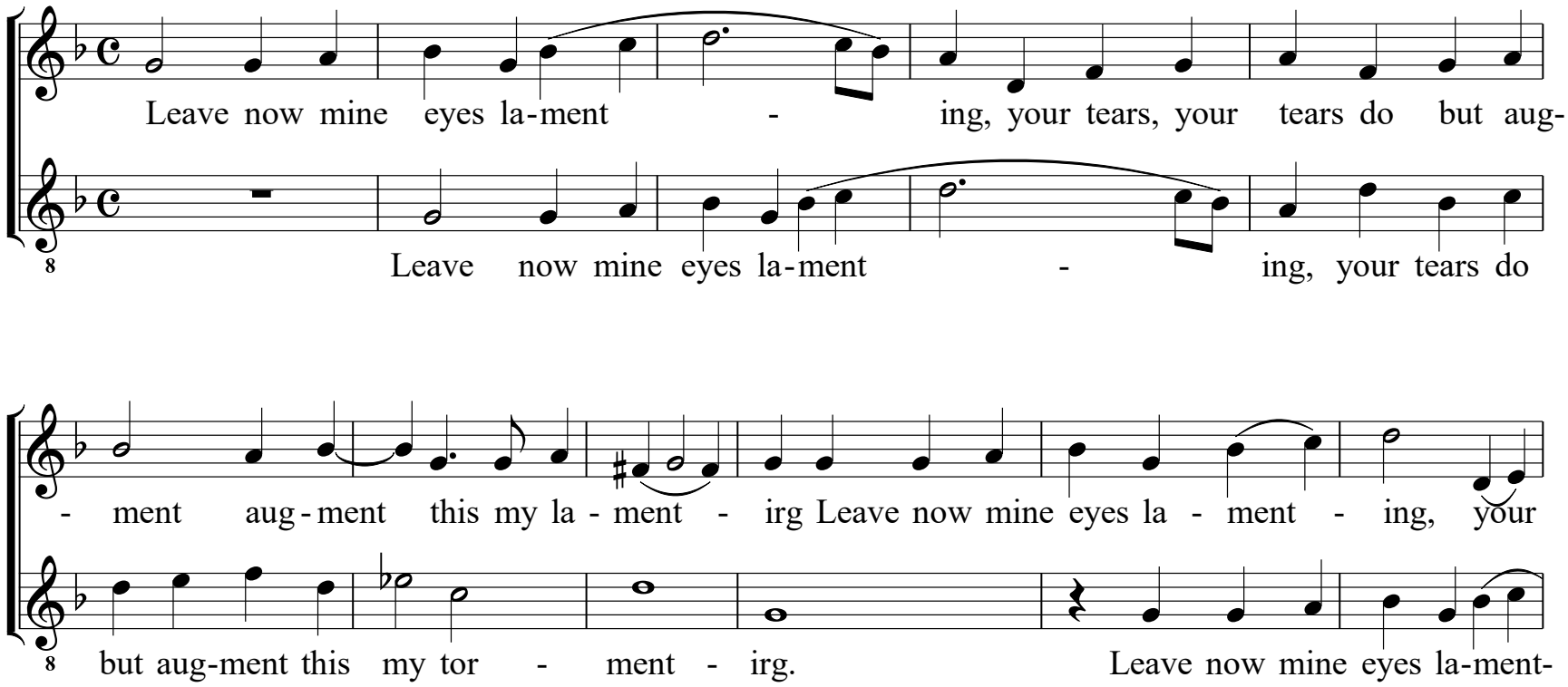


Bass parts are the lowest note of any chord. Usually they sound the root, sometimes the 3rd very rarely the 5th.

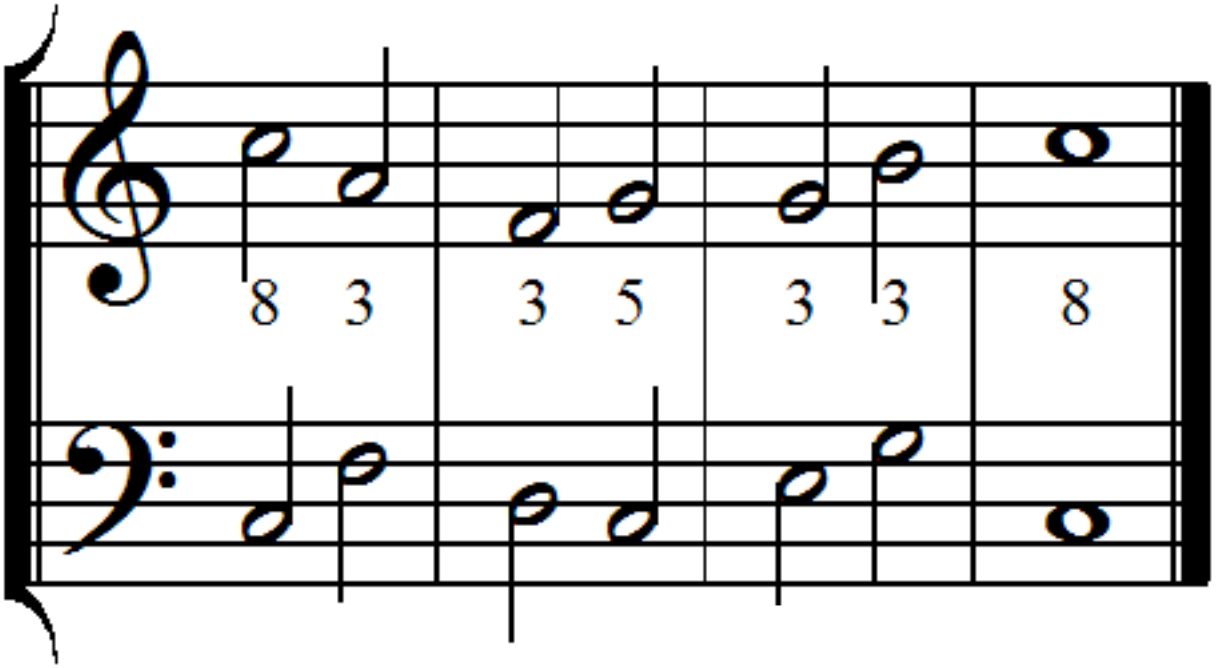
Bass parts should move more by leap than step.

Leave now mine eyes lamenting

Thomas Morley



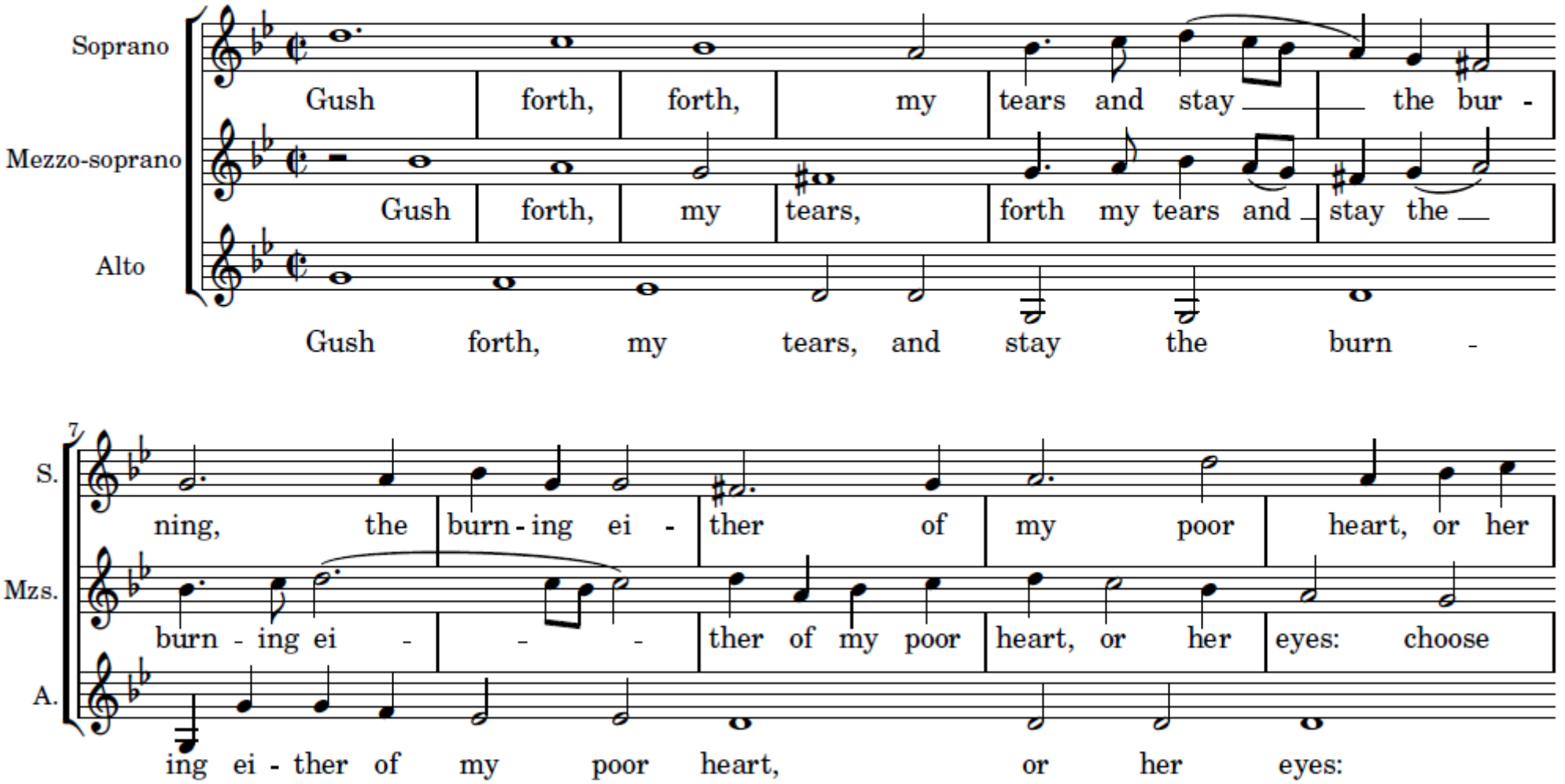
Two Parts



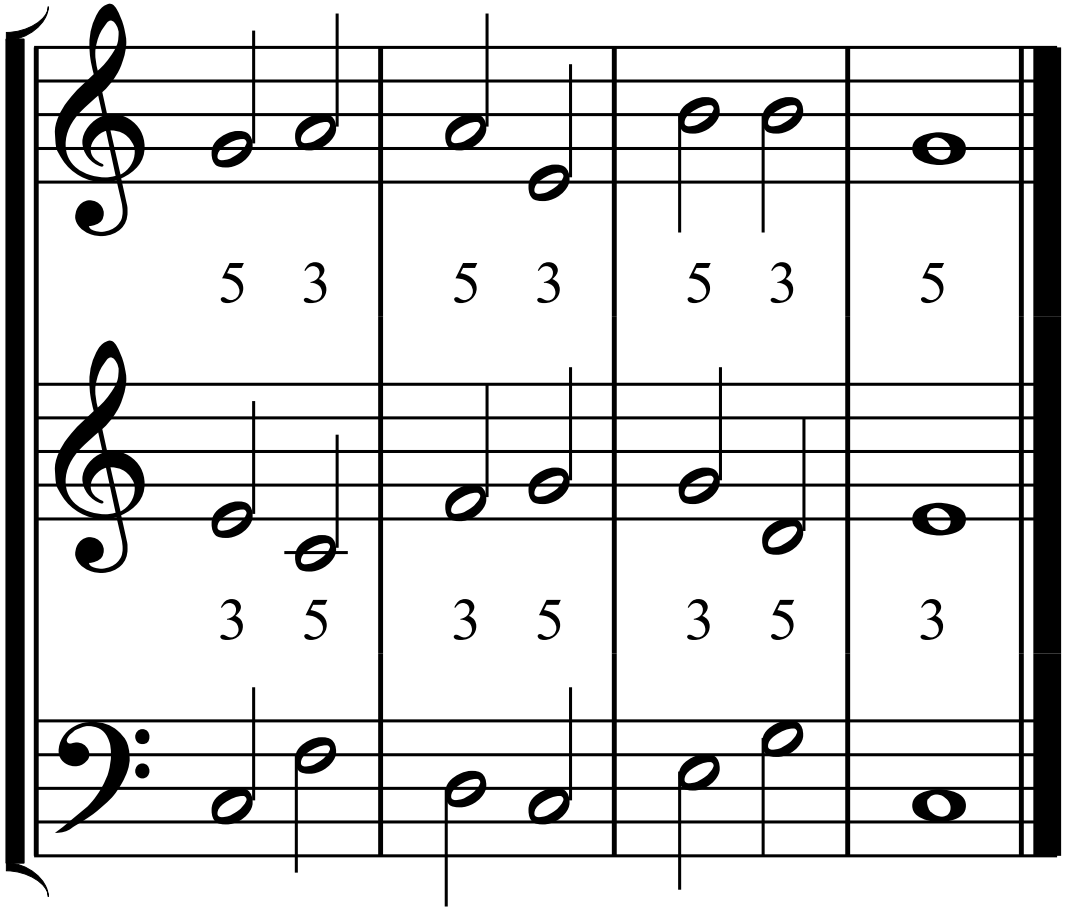
When adding a single melody, it will feature a lot of 3rds or 6ths. Avoid having two 8ves or two 5ths in a row.

Gush forth, my tears

William Holborne (1597)



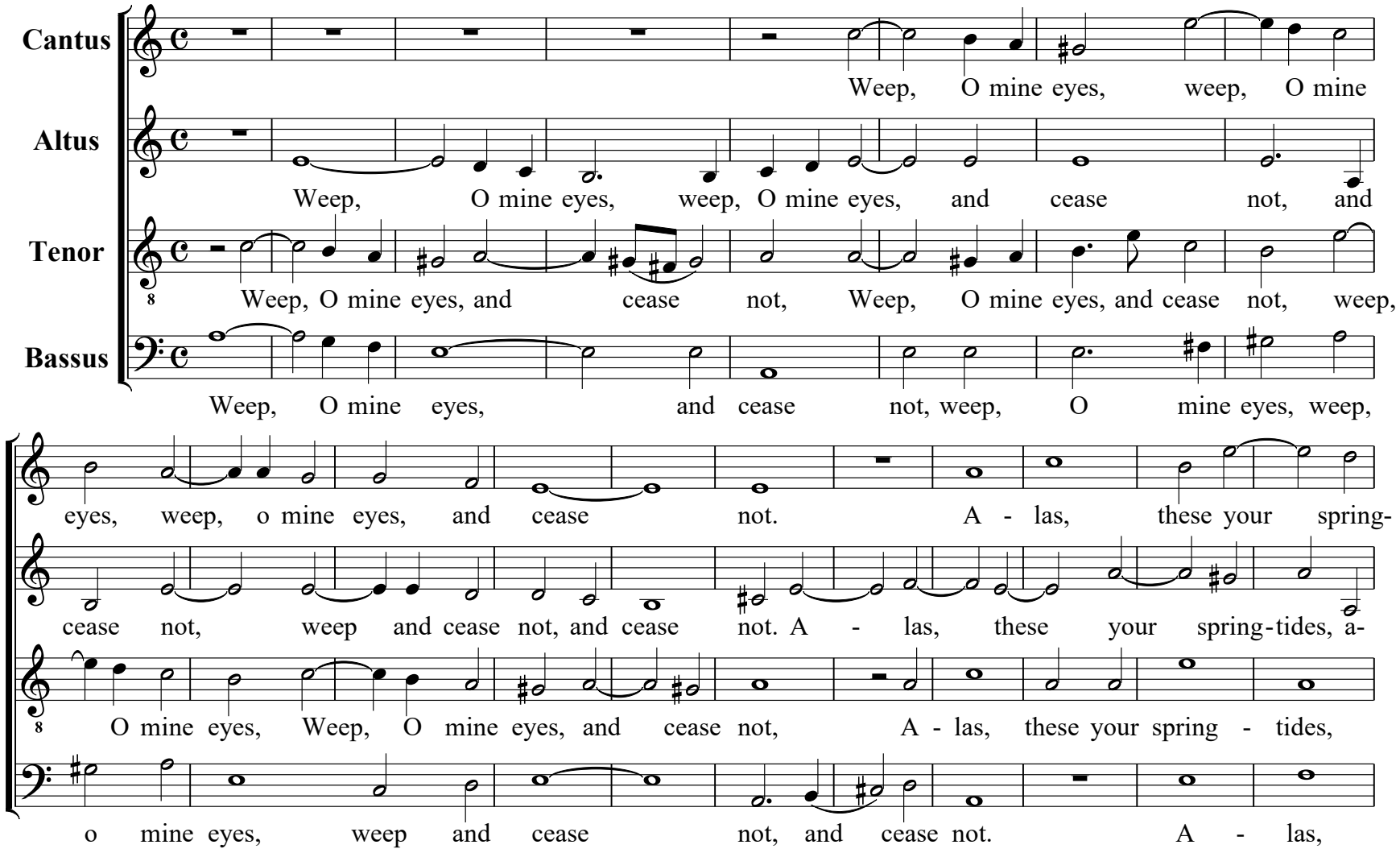
Three Parts



… Just sound the three chord members?

Weep, O Mine Eyes

John Bennet



Four Parts

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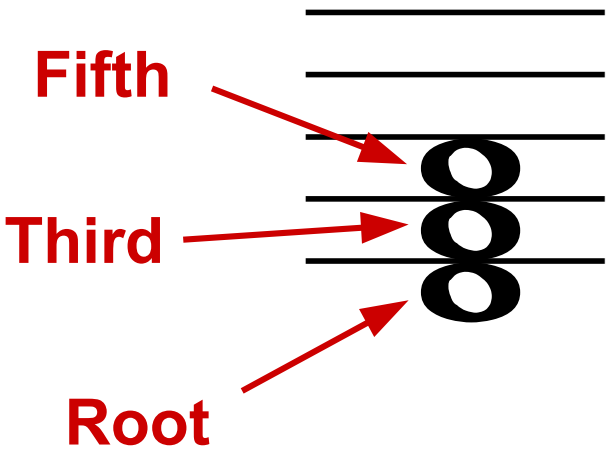

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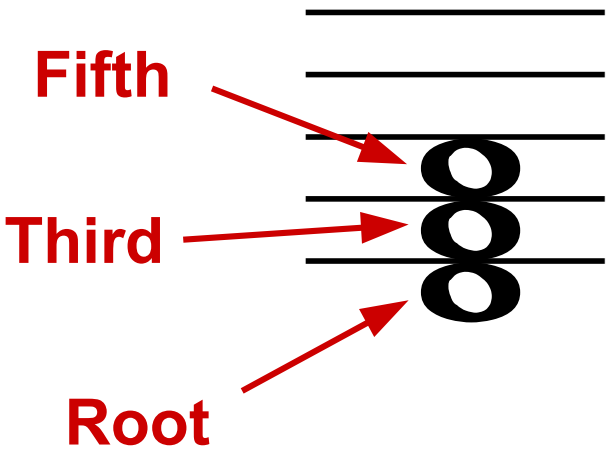

The new voice must double-up with chord members already sounded, but avoid moving in parallel 5ths or 8ves with any of the other parts.

Four Parts

Thomas Campion to the rescue!

8	3	5
3	5	8

Four Parts

Campion's method:

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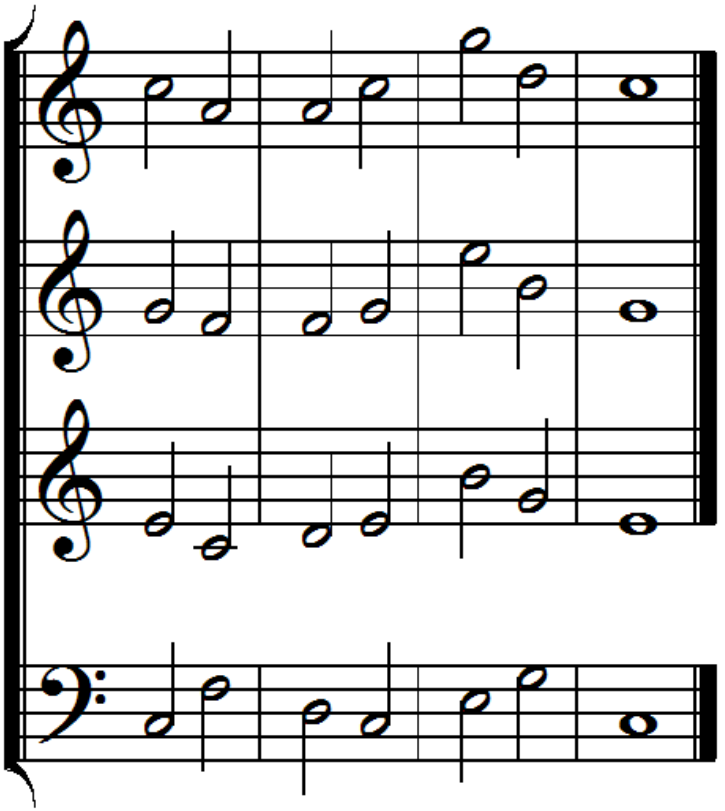
3	5	8



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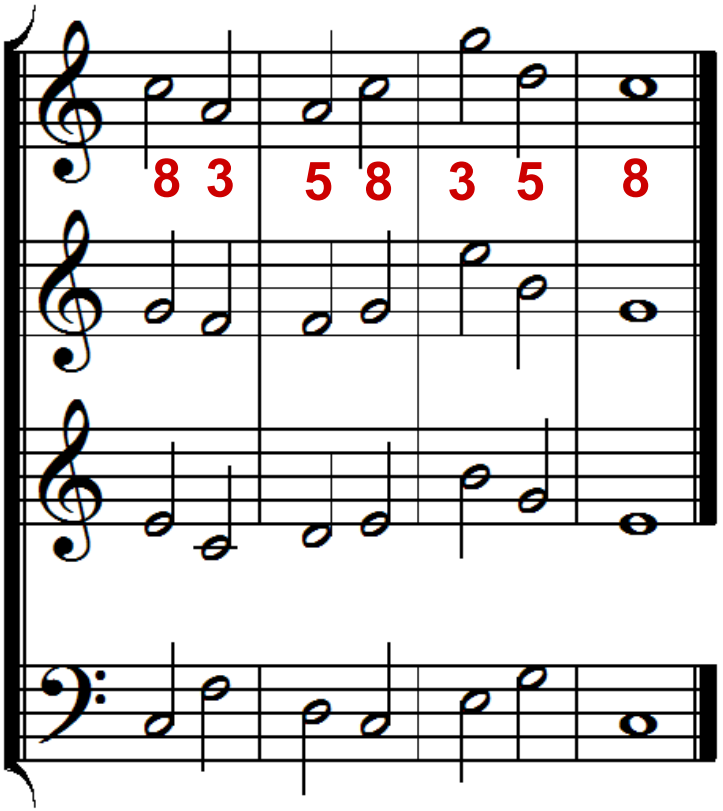

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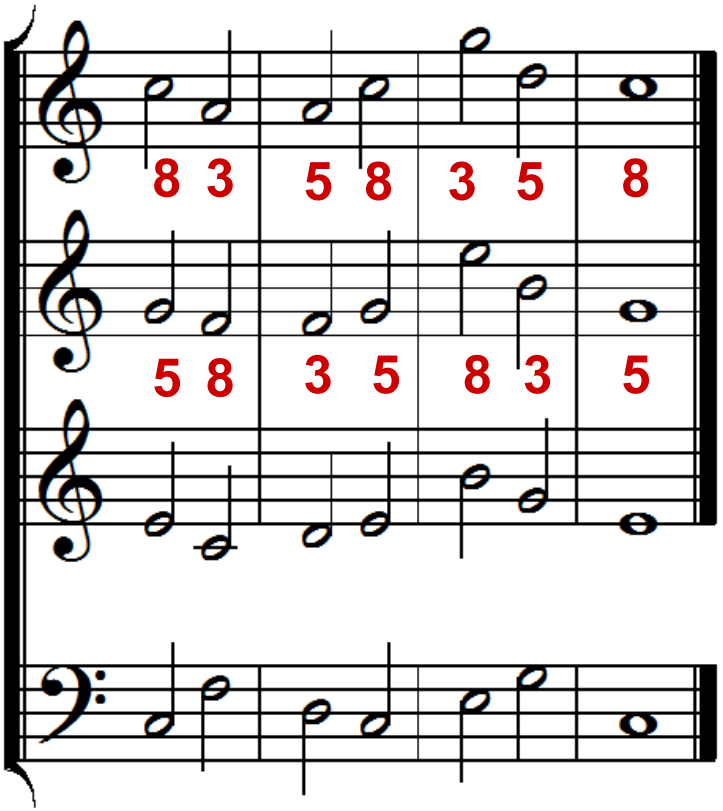

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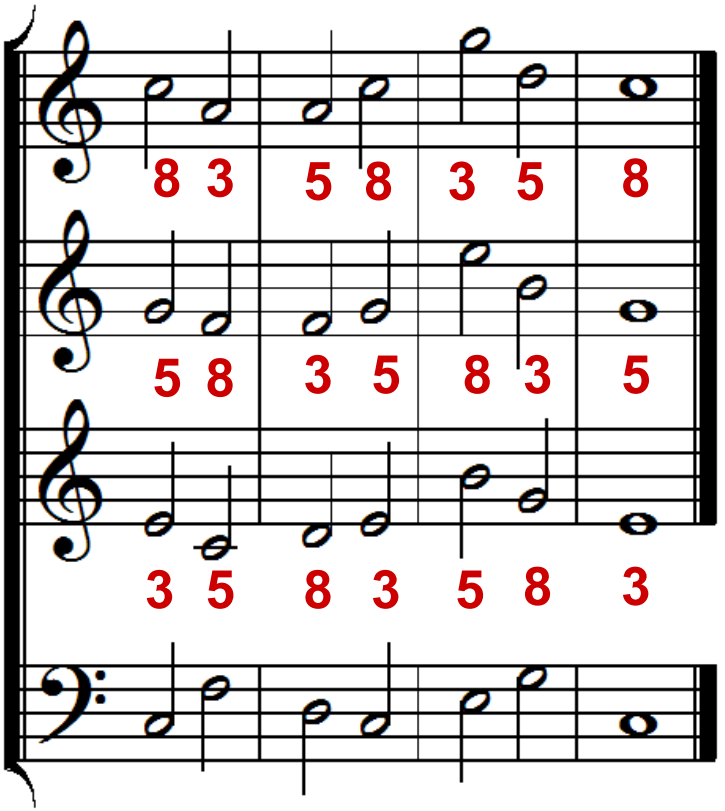

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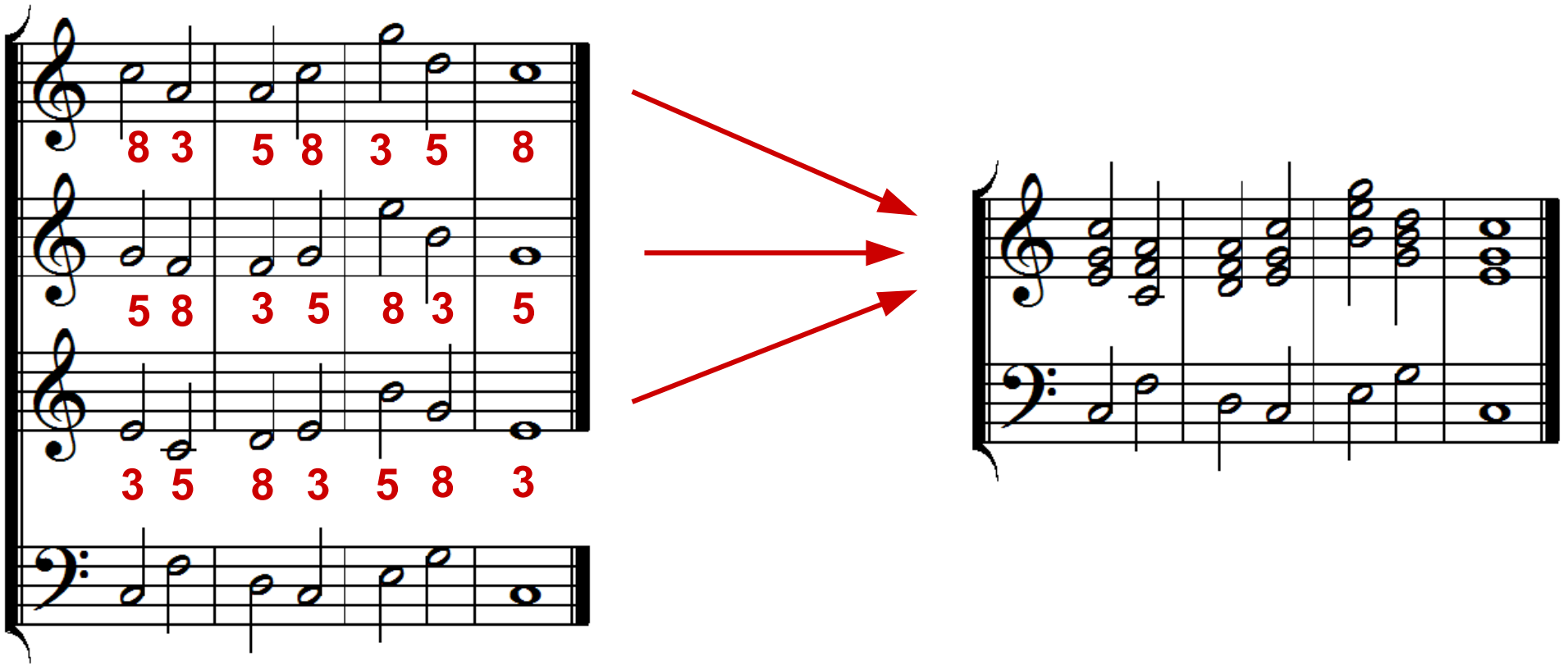

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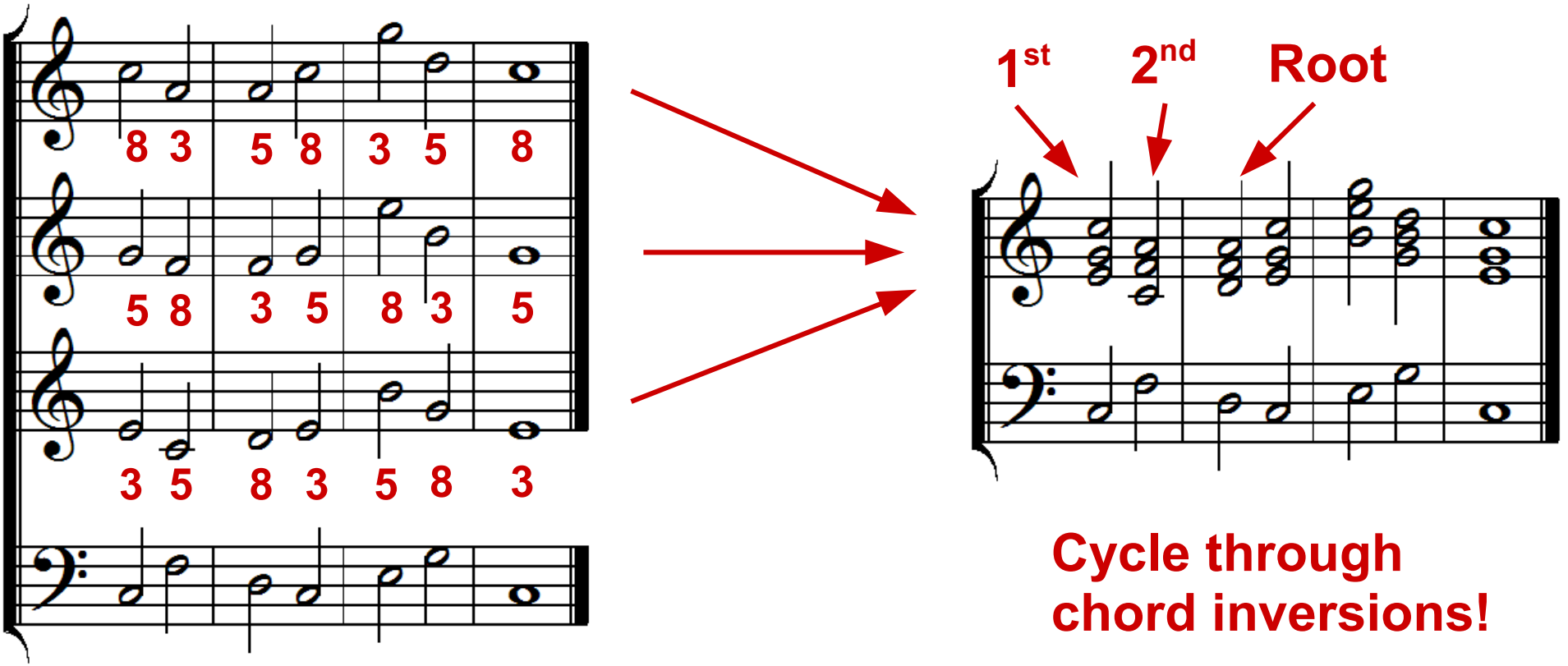
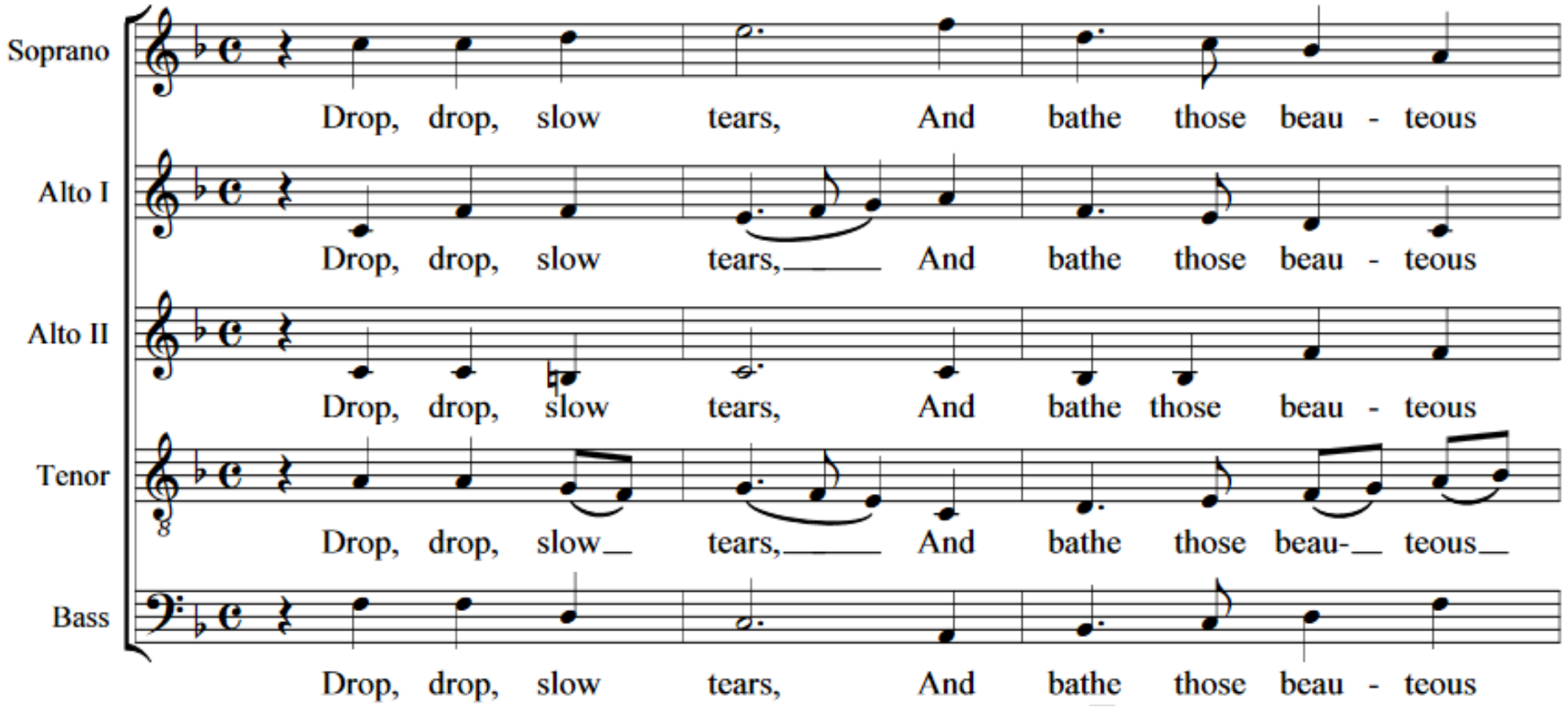


Cycle through chord inversions!

Drop, drop slow tears a 5

Phineas Fletcher
(1582-1650)

Orlando Gibbons
(1583-1625)

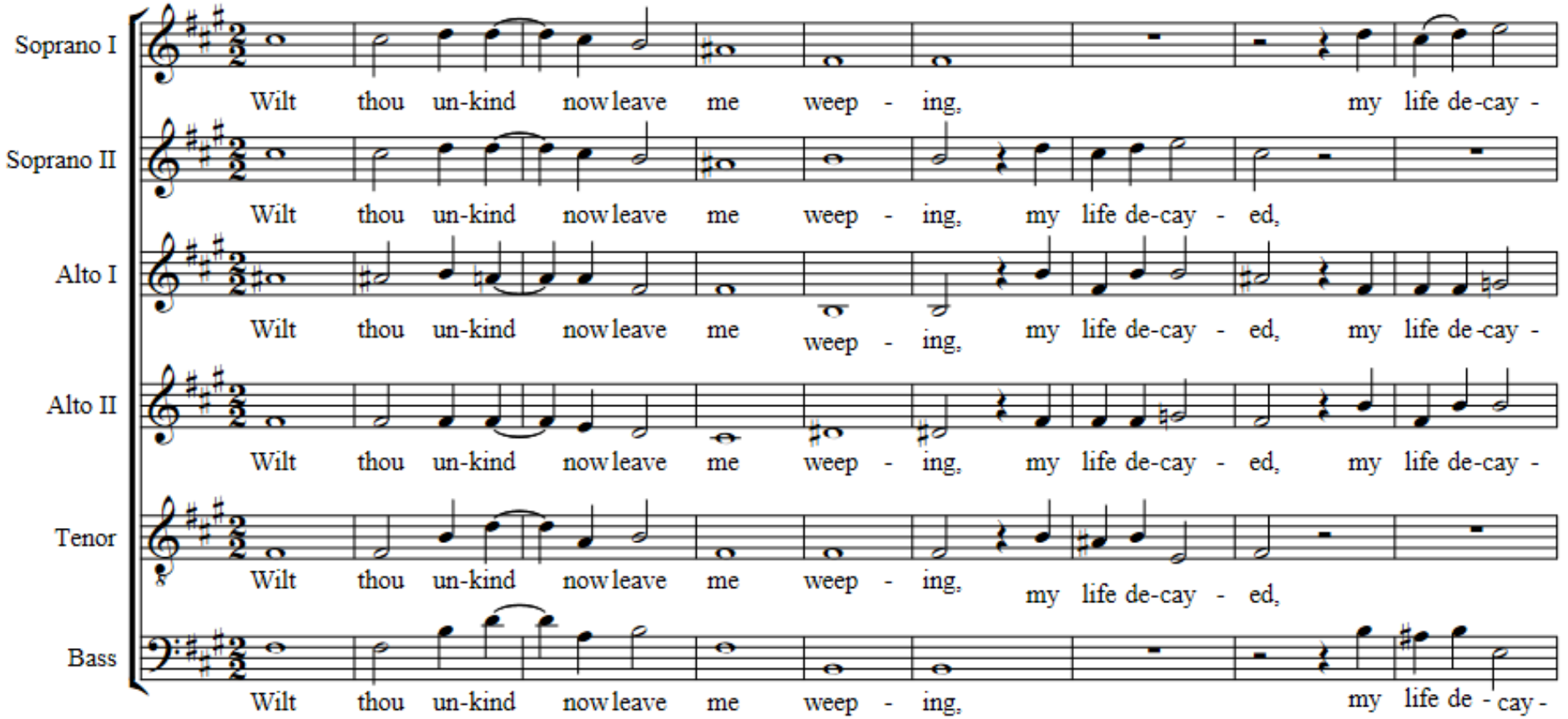


Wilt thou unkind now leave me weeping

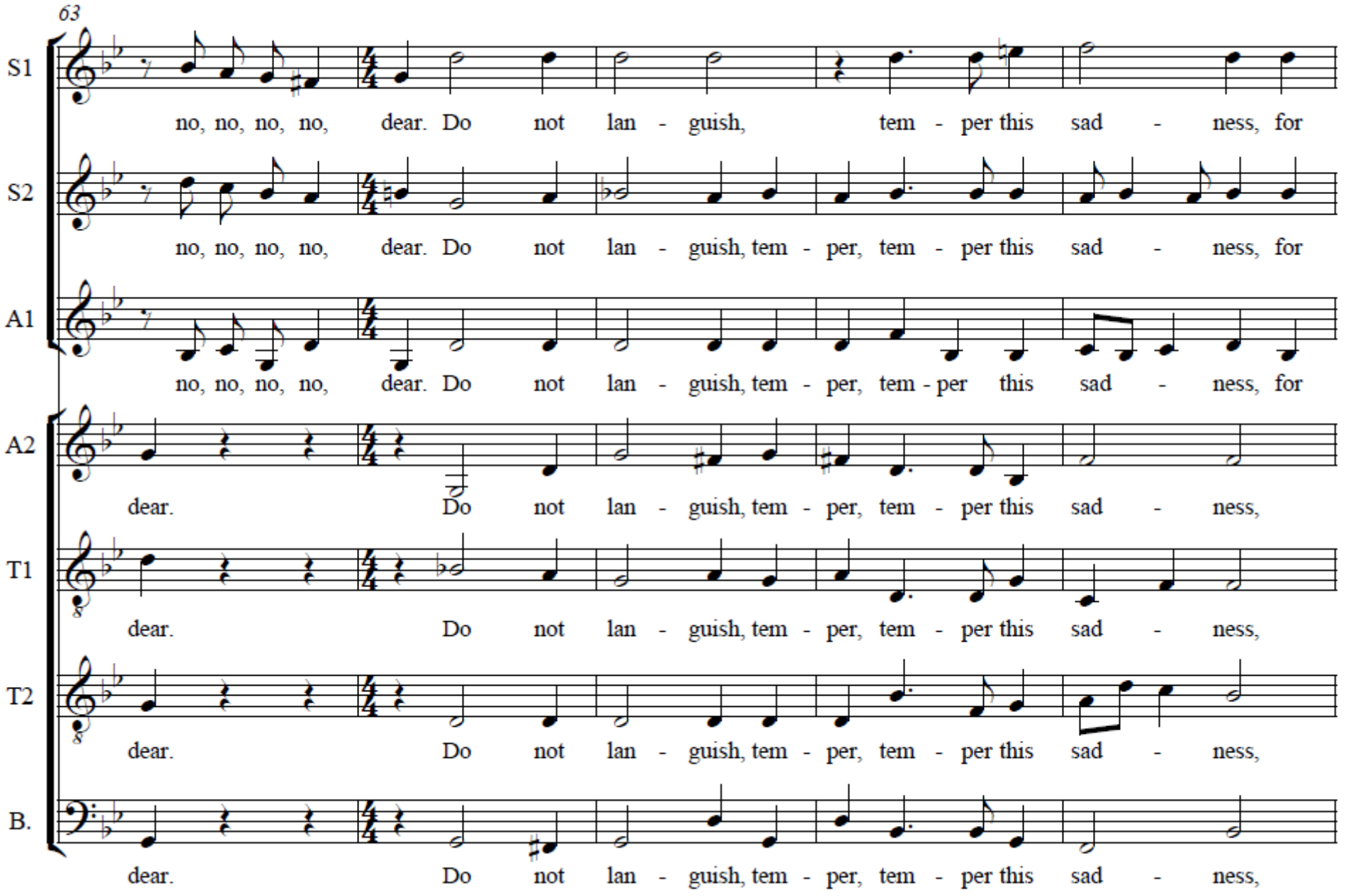
from MS Add. 17786-17791, British Library, London

transposed up major 3rd;
some tenor and bass passages switched

Robert Ramsey (d. 1644)
edition by Thomas Lloyd



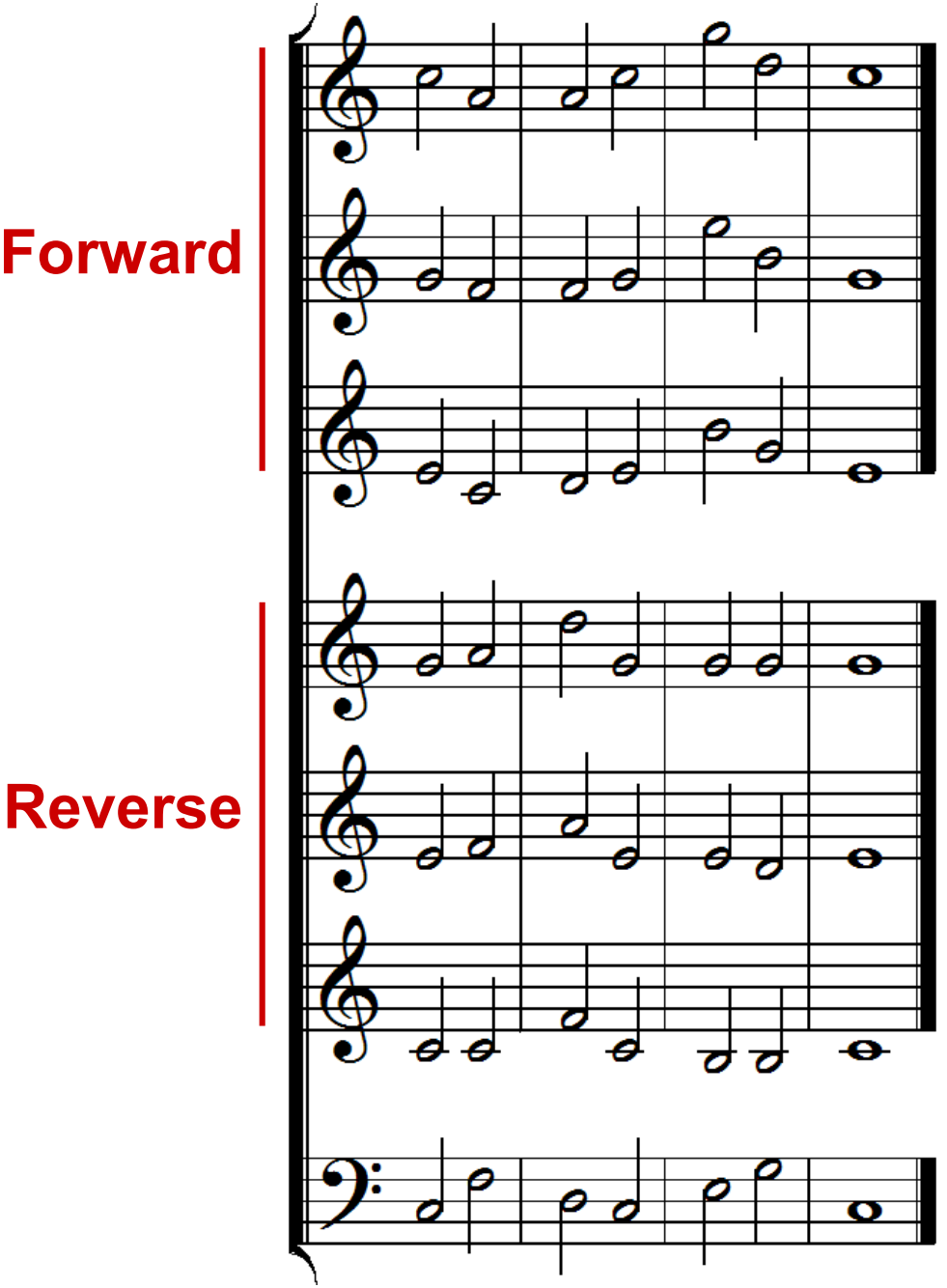
Phillis, I fain would die now, by Thomas Morley



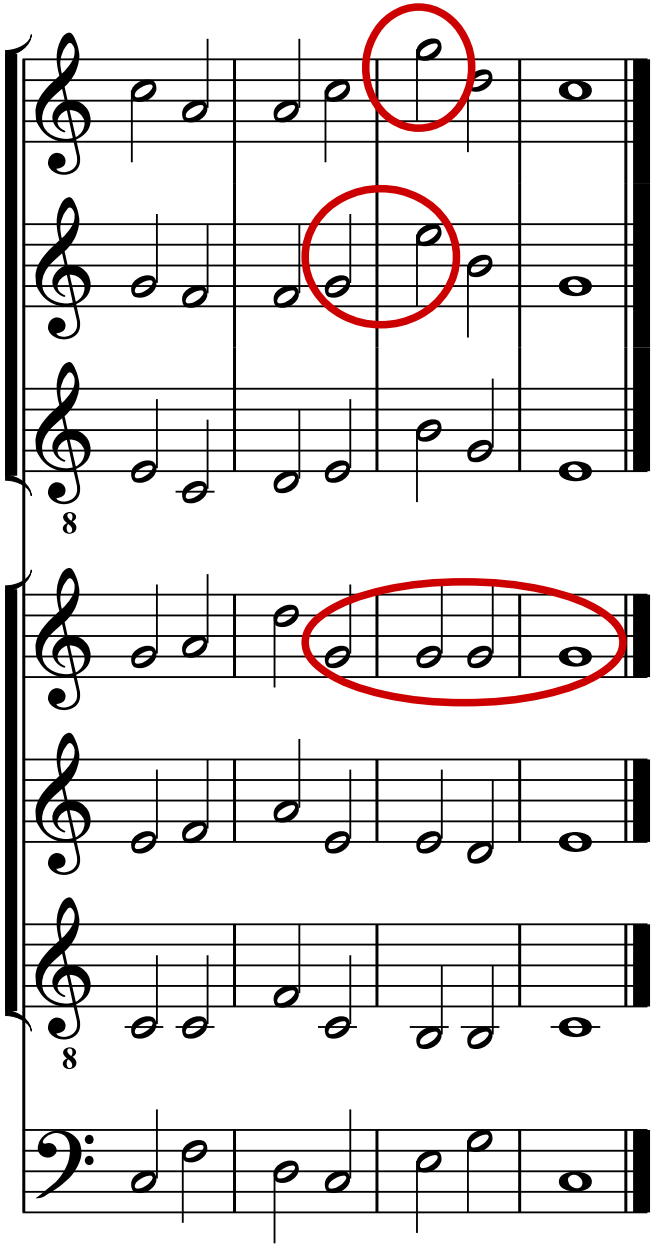
Five, Six or Seven Parts

We can make another three voices by using Campion's method BACKWARDS!

Forward	8 → 3
	3 → 5
	5 → 8
Reverse	8 → 5
	5 → 3
	3 → 8



Fixing Some Issues



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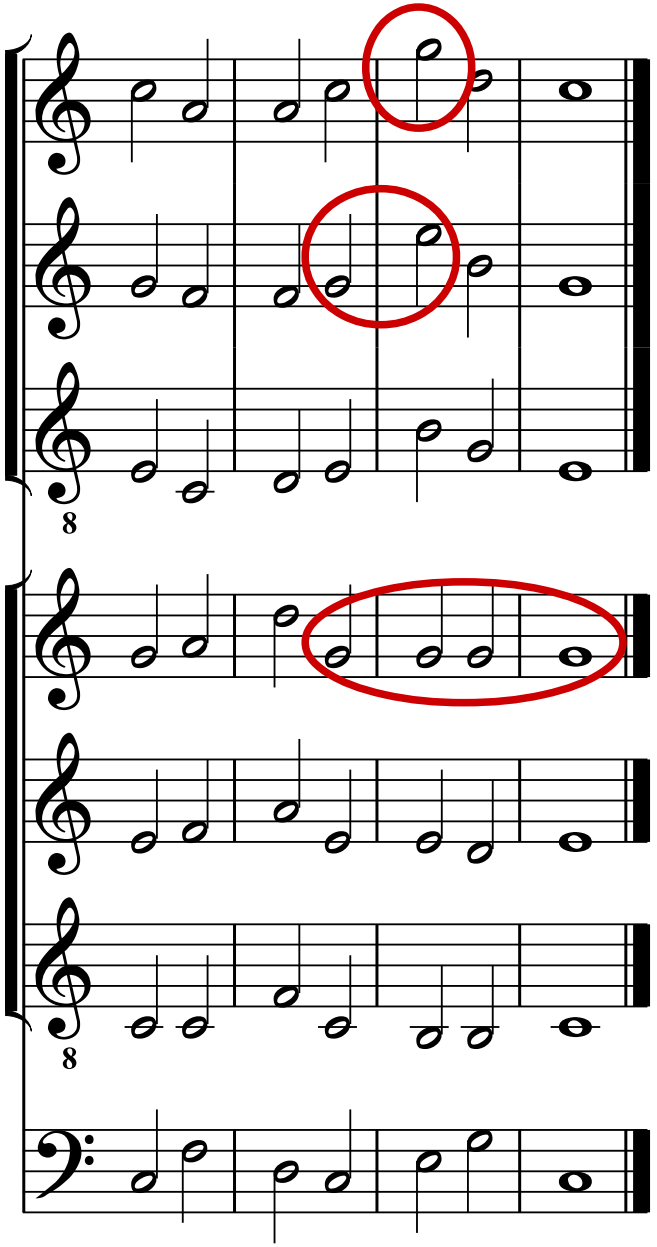
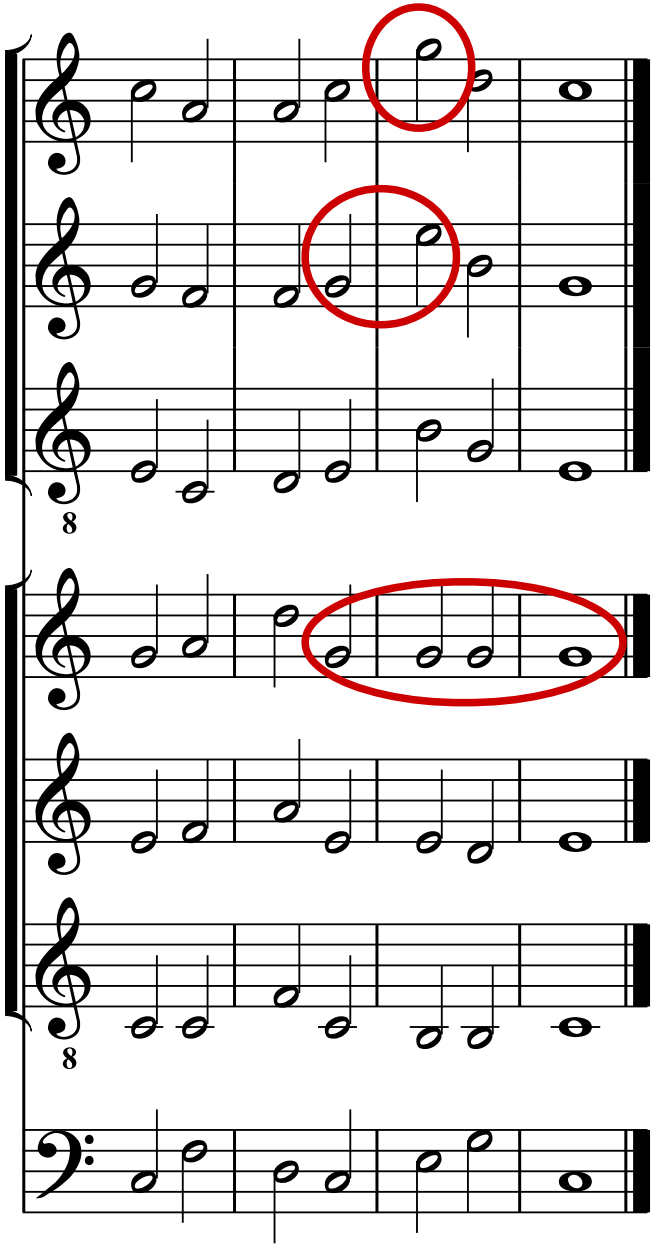


1. Invert the interval.

2. Add a rest.

3. Switch with a voice on the same note.

Fixing Some Issues



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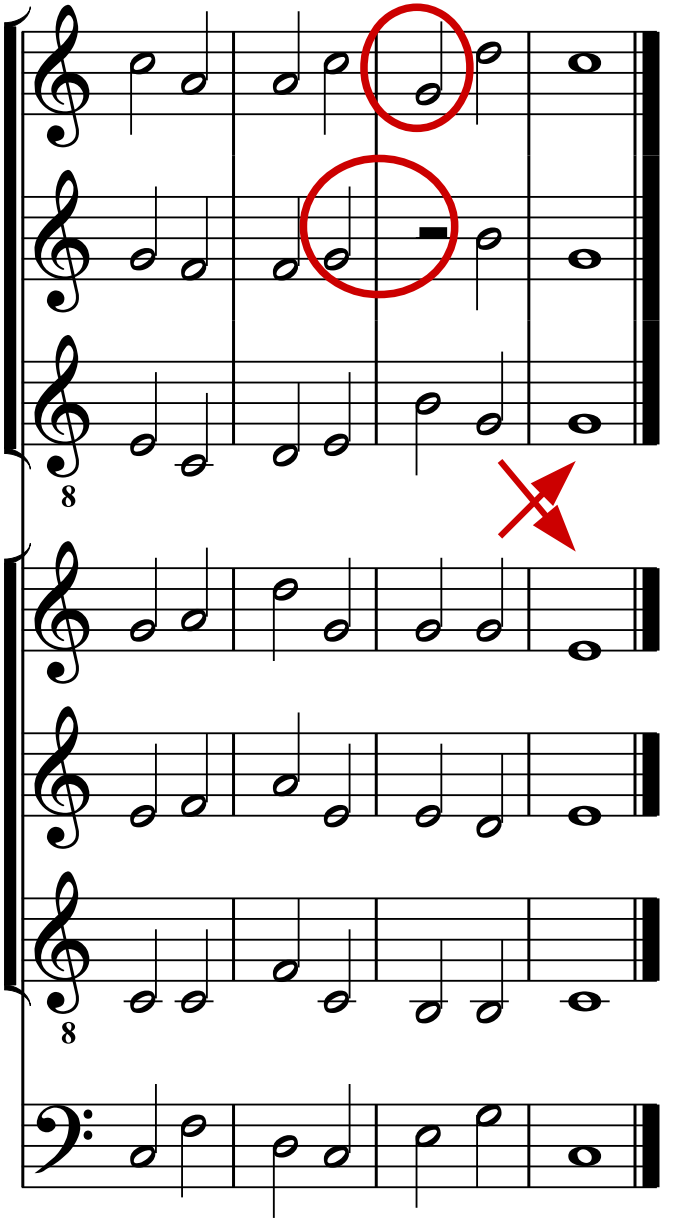
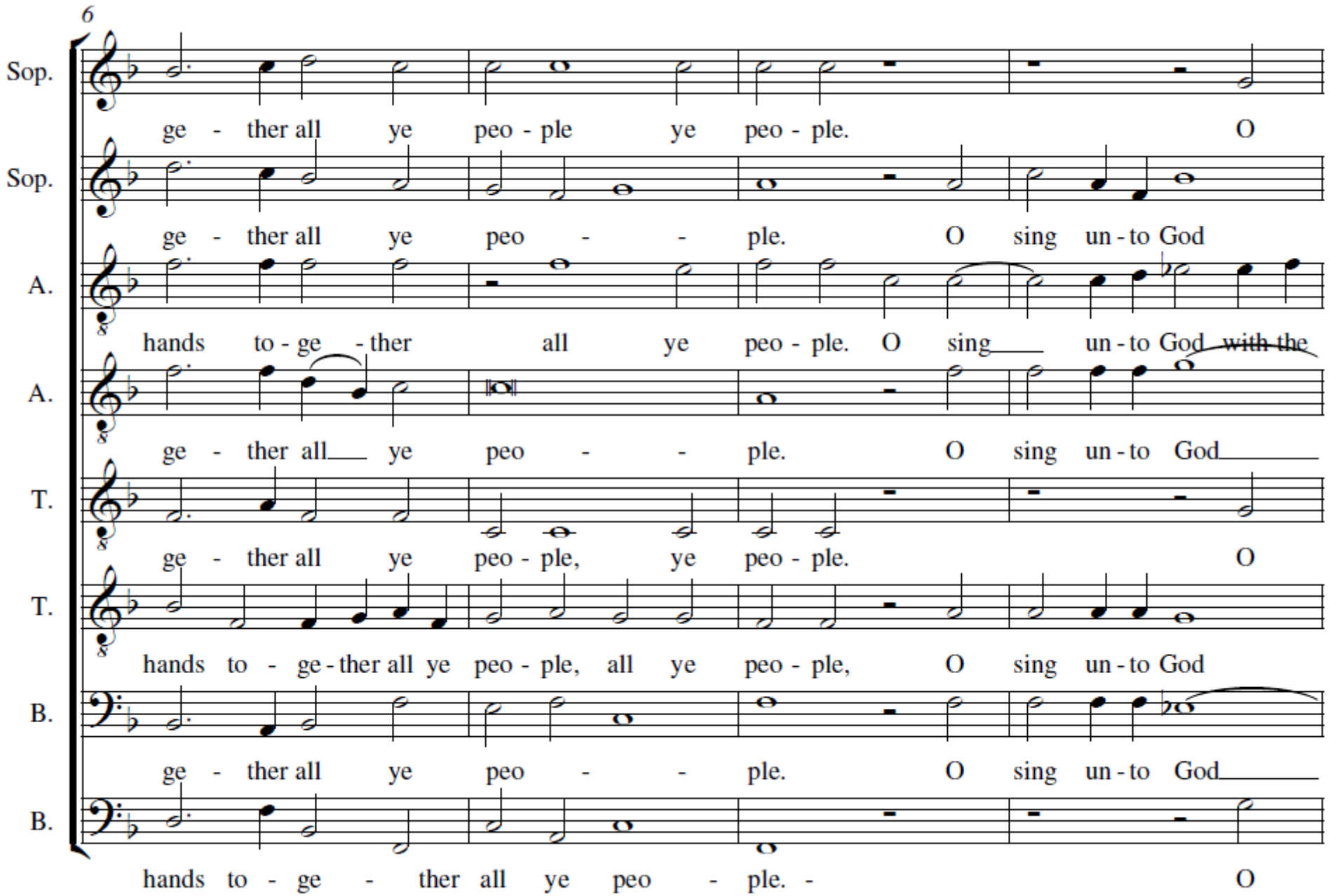


O Clap Your Hands, by Orlando Gibbons



Eight Parts

There are only 3 notes in the chord.

Must avoid parallel motion.

Campion's method gives us:

Root moves to Root / 3rd / 5th

Eight Parts

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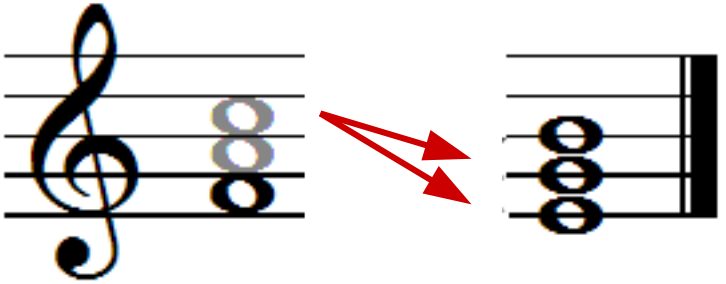


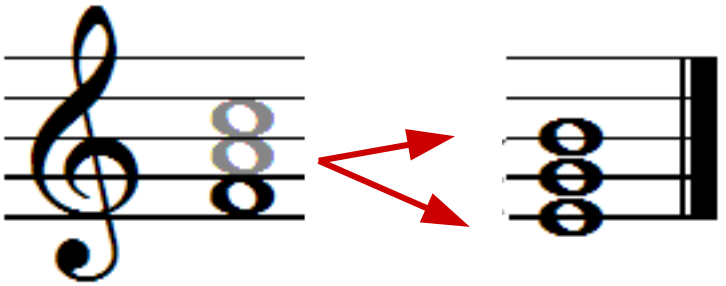
Campion's method gives us:

5th moves to Root / 3rd

Eight Parts

There are only 3 notes in the chord.

Must avoid parallel motion.



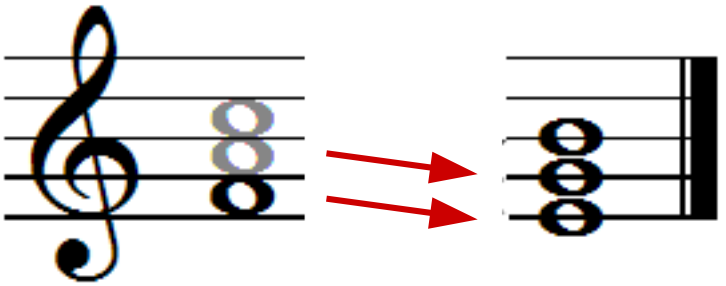
Campion's method gives us:

3rd moves to Root / 5th

Eight Parts

There are only 3 notes in the chord.

Must avoid parallel motion.



But parallel 3rds is okay!

Eight Parts

Using parallel 3rds gives us:

Forward	8 → 3
	3 → 5
	5 → 8
Reverse	8 → 5
	5 → 3
	3 → 8
Parallel 3rds	3 → 3
Bass	1 → 1

- 8 voices
- All singing in harmony
- Each doing their own thing
- No parallel 5ths or 8ves

Eight Parts

Using parallel 3rds gives us:

Forward	8 → 3
	3 → 5
	5 → 8
Reverse	8 → 5
	5 → 3
	3 → 8
Parallel 3rds	3 → 3
Bass	1 → 1

- 8 voices

- All singing in harmony

- Each doing their own thing

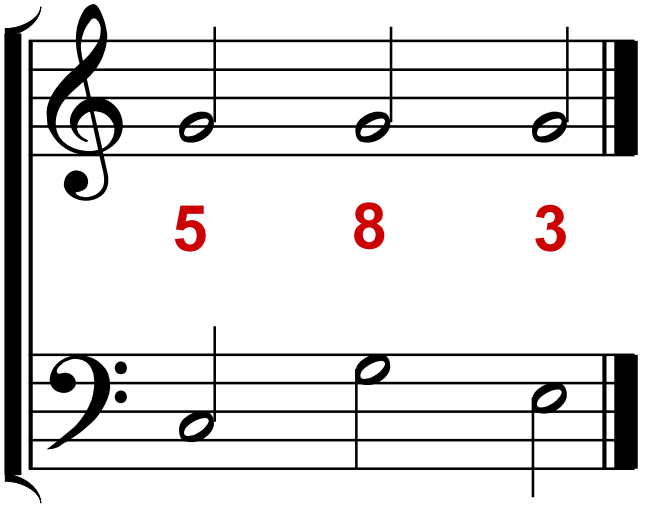
- No parallel 5ths or 8ves

However 3 voices all singing the 3rd all the time is too much of a good thing!

Eight Parts

What other options do we have?

1. Don't move at all!



Eight Parts

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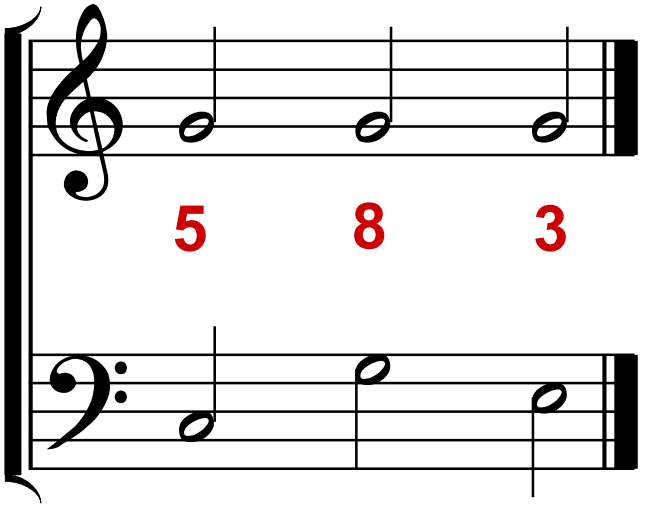
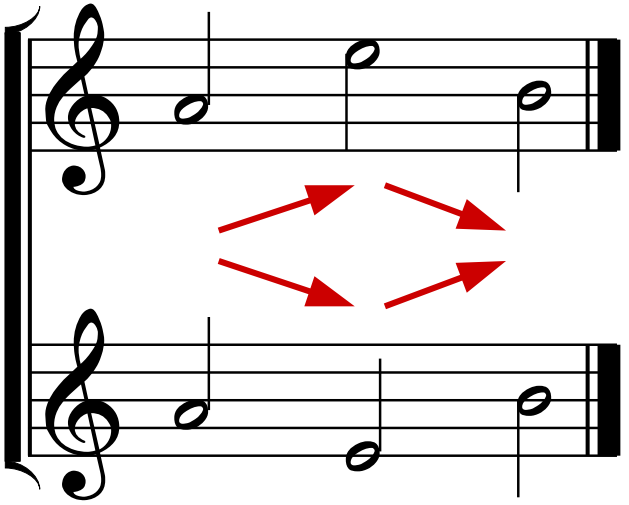


2. Contrary motion.



The Eighth Part Table

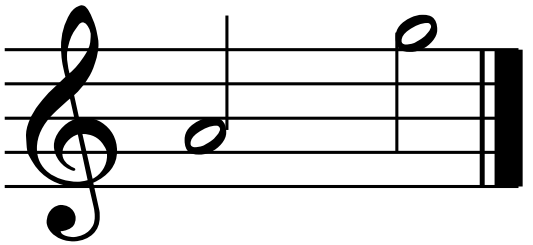
	Current interval		
Bass line movement	8	5	3
4 up or 5 down	<u>5</u> [8]	[5]	3 [3]
3 up or 6 down	[3]	<u>3</u>	3 <u>8</u> [5]
2 up or 7 down	[3]	[8]	3 [5]
Unison	<u>8</u> [5]	<u>5</u> [8]	<u>3</u>
2 down or 7 up	[5]	[3]	3 [8]
3 down or 6 up	<u>3</u>	[3]	3 <u>5</u> [8]
4 down or 5 up	[8]	<u>8</u> [5]	3 [3]

Key: <u>Stationary</u> / [Contrary] / Ordinary

Avoiding Bad Leaps

Most difficult to sing intervals are avoided by picking the closest note to the previous one.

Don't do this:



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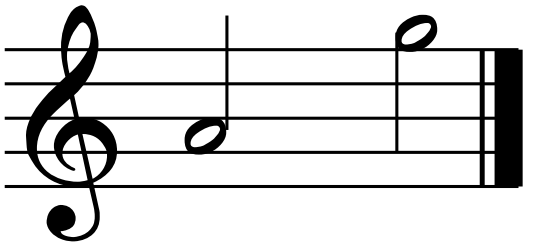
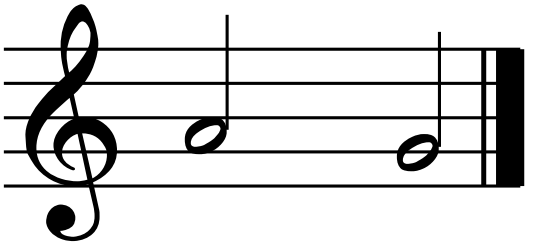
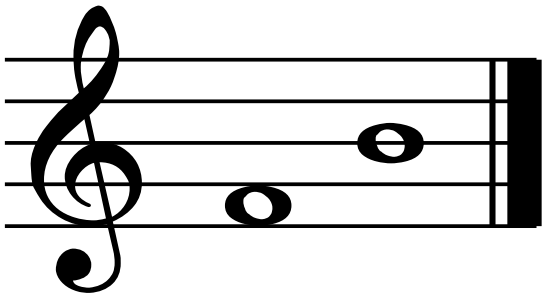


Do this:



Avoiding Bad Leaps

This just leaves augmented and diminished intervals to worry about, especially the *TRITONE*.



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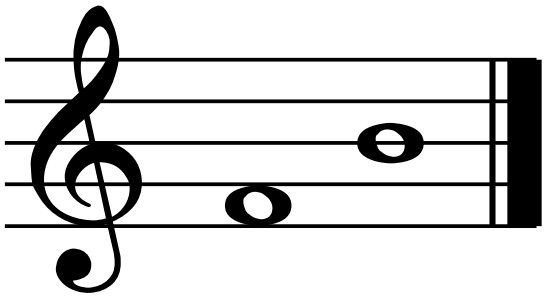


Not a nice person :(

Avoiding Bad Leaps

Bass goes up by	Options	Bass goes down by
Major 7th	none	minor 2nd
minor 7th	min to Maj	Major 2nd
Major 6th	Maj to min	minor 3rd
minor 6th	min to Maj	Major 3rd
Perfect 5th	min to min Maj to Maj	Perfect 4th
Perfect 4th	min to min Maj to Maj	Perfect 5th
Major 3rd	Maj to min	minor 6th
minor 3rd	min to Maj	Major 6th
Major 2nd	Maj to min	minor 7th
minor 2nd	none	Major 7th

Avoiding Bad Leaps

Another way of looking at it, the following chords are safe to be placed next to each other...
(assuming no sharps or flats in the key)

	Am	C	Dm	Em	F	G
Am	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**
C	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**
Dm	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**		**Y**	
Em	**Y**	**Y**		**Y**		**Y**
F	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**		**Y**	
G	**Y**	**Y**		**Y**		**Y**

(B diminished has a tritone, so best to avoid it.)

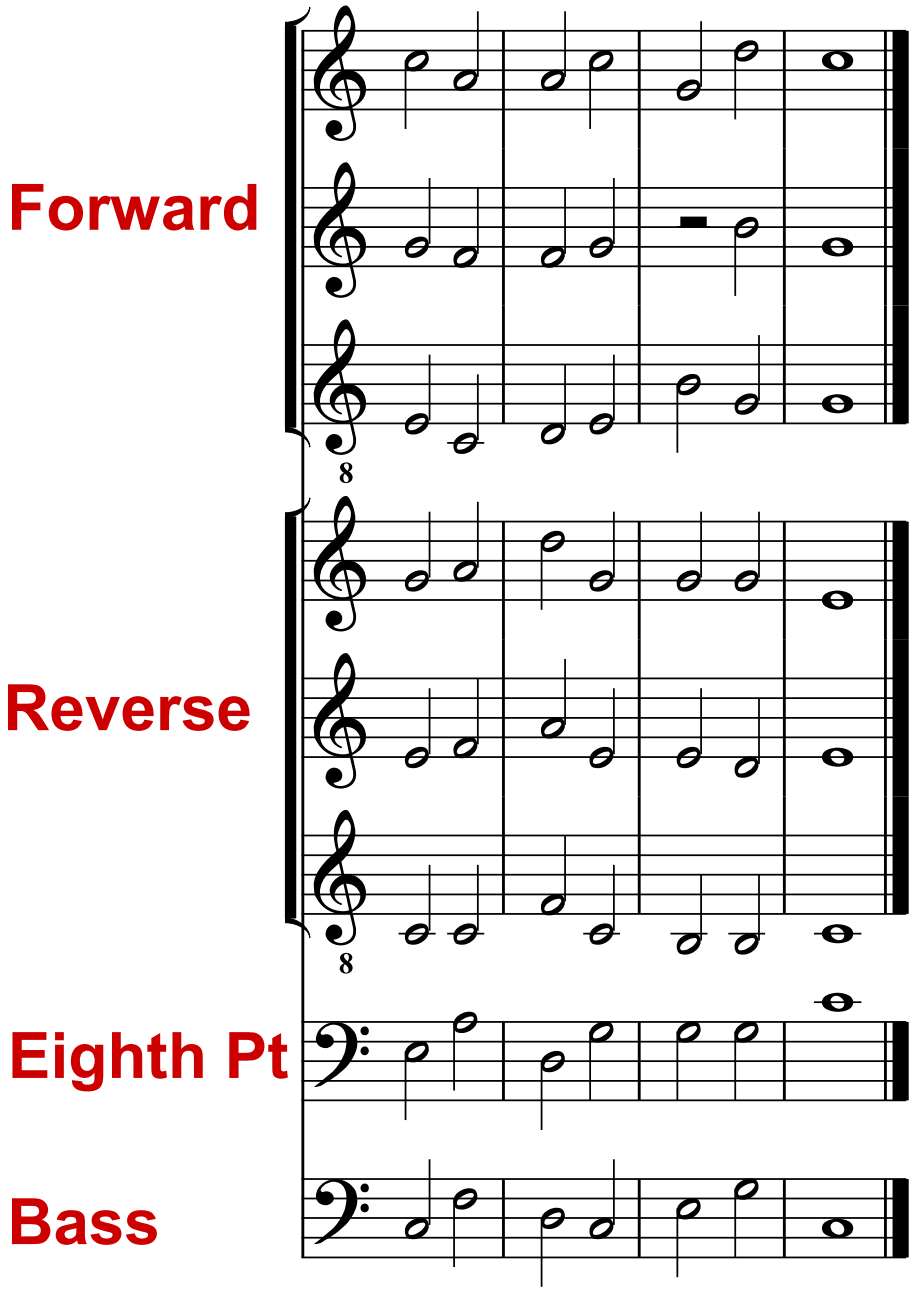
Avoiding Bad Leaps

But what if we really want to put incompatible chords next to each other?

1. **Add a rest to avoid the tritone leap.**

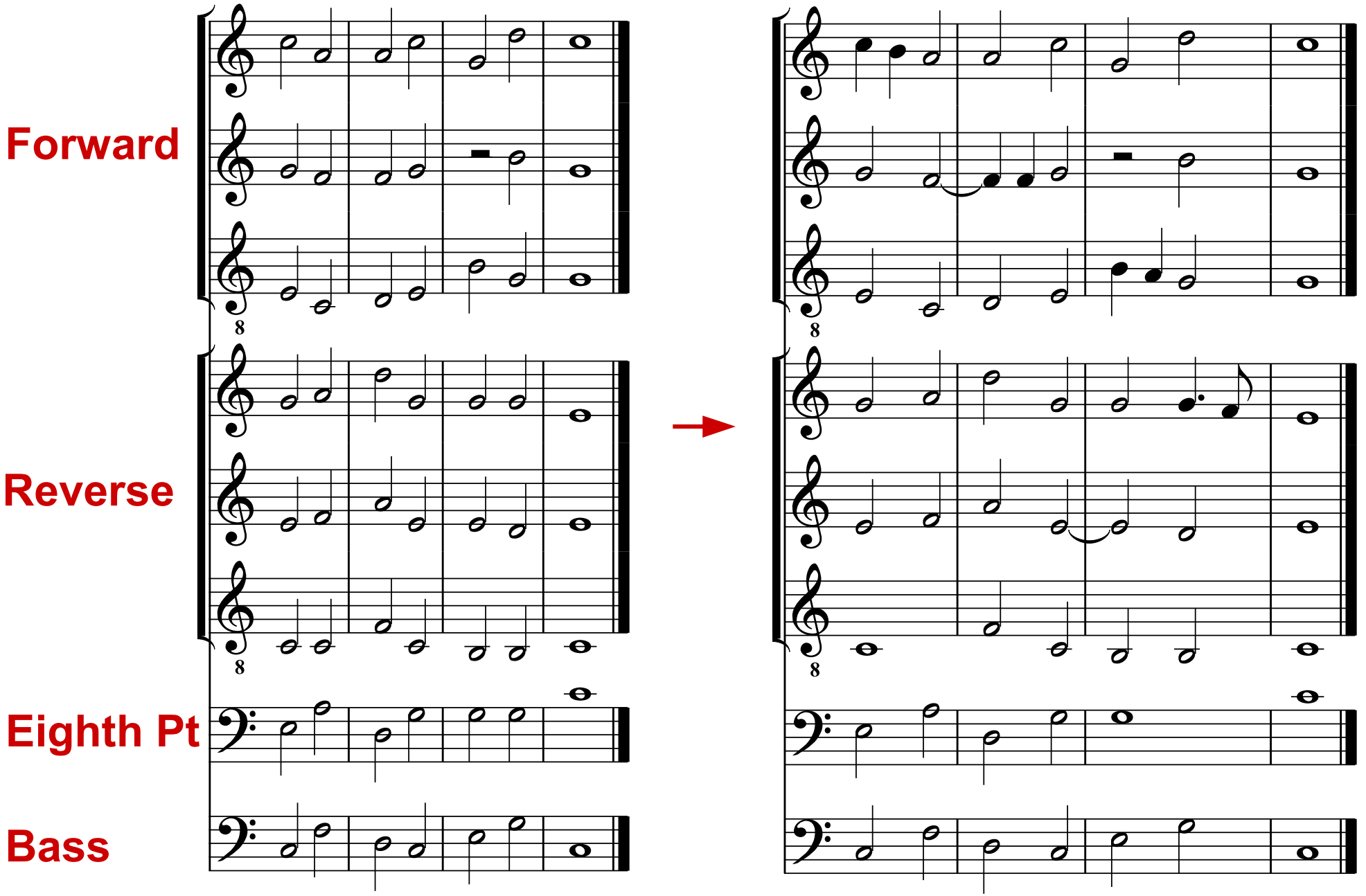
2. **Substitute an unused option from the *Eighth Part* table.**

Eight Parts

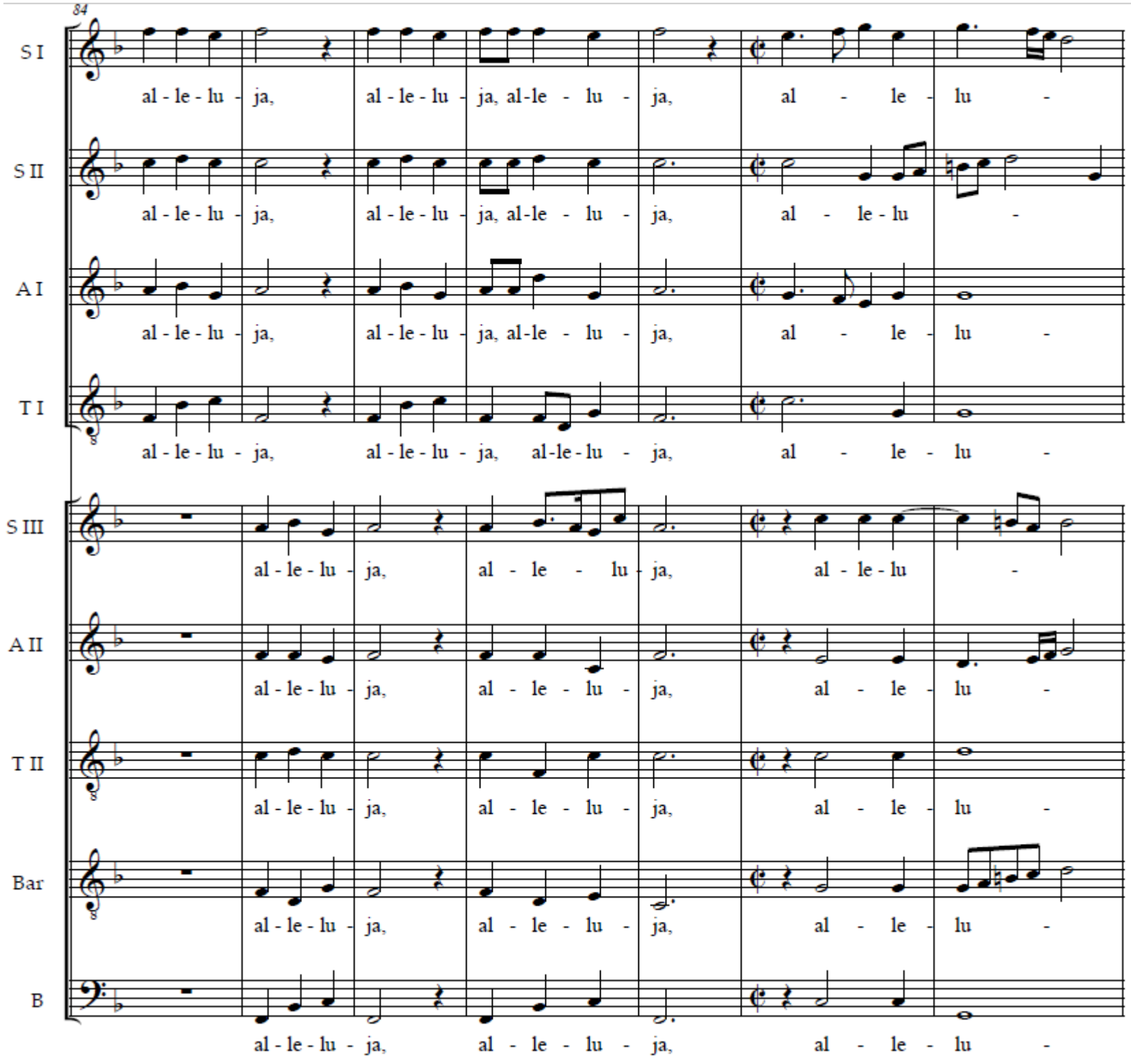


Eight Parts

Add passing tones.
Tie some notes.

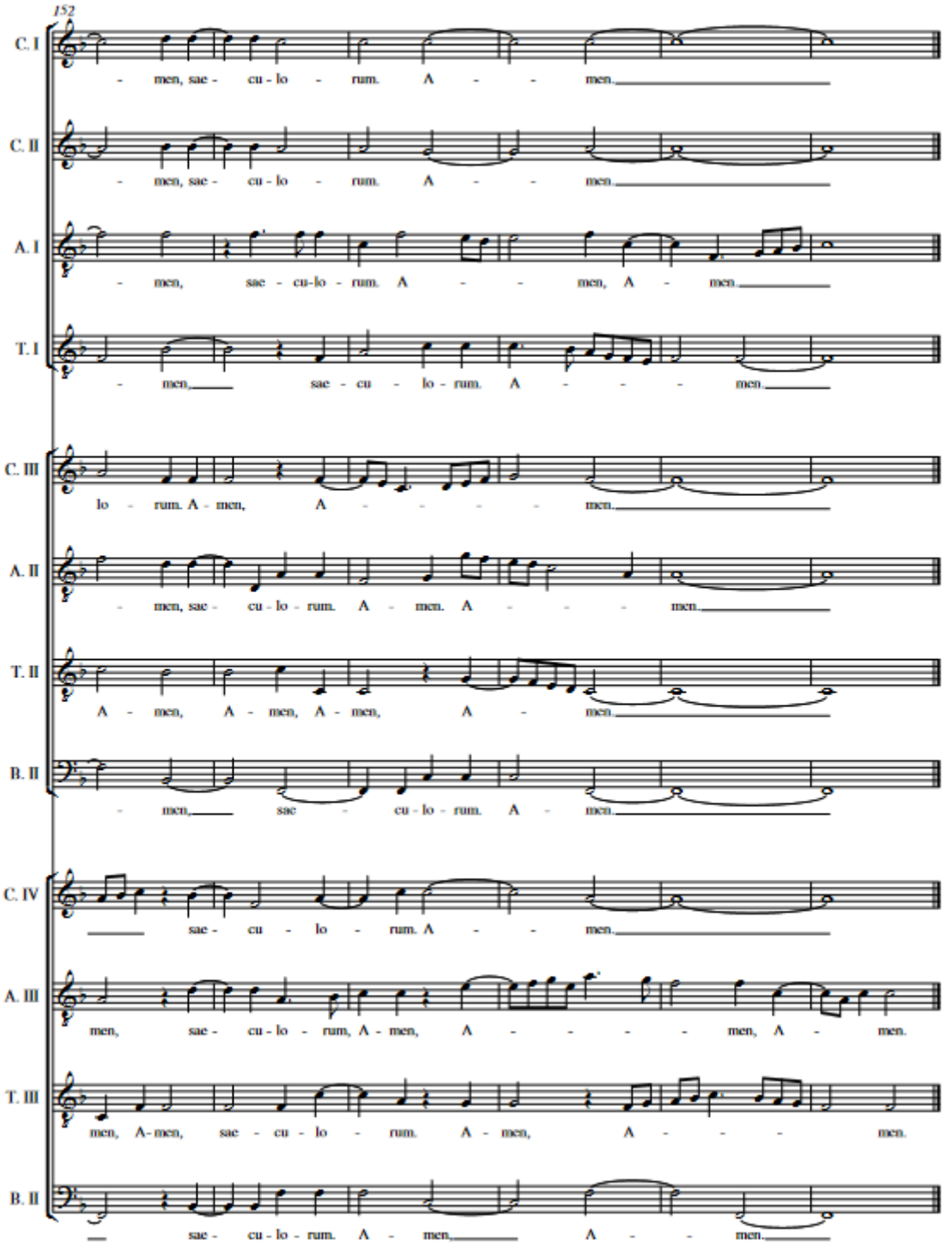


ANGELUS AD PASTORES, by Hans Leo Hassler



Laetatus sum

By Tomás Luis de Victoria



Nine to Twelve Parts

	Current interval		
Bass line movement	8	5	3
4 up or 5 down	5 [8]	[5]	3 [3]
3 up or 6 down	[3]	3	3 8 [5]
2 up or 7 down	[3]	[8]	3 [5]
Unison	8 [5]	5 [8]	3
2 down or 7 up	[5]	[3]	3 [8]
3 down or 6 up	3	[3]	3 5 [8]
4 down or 5 up	[8]	8 [5]	3 [3]

Key: Stationary / [Contrary] / Ordinary

Nine to Twelve Parts

Careful examination of the Eighth Part table reveals that for any movement by the Bass, there are in fact four or five options.

This makes it possible to use this method as an aid to writing music for up to as many as twelve parts.

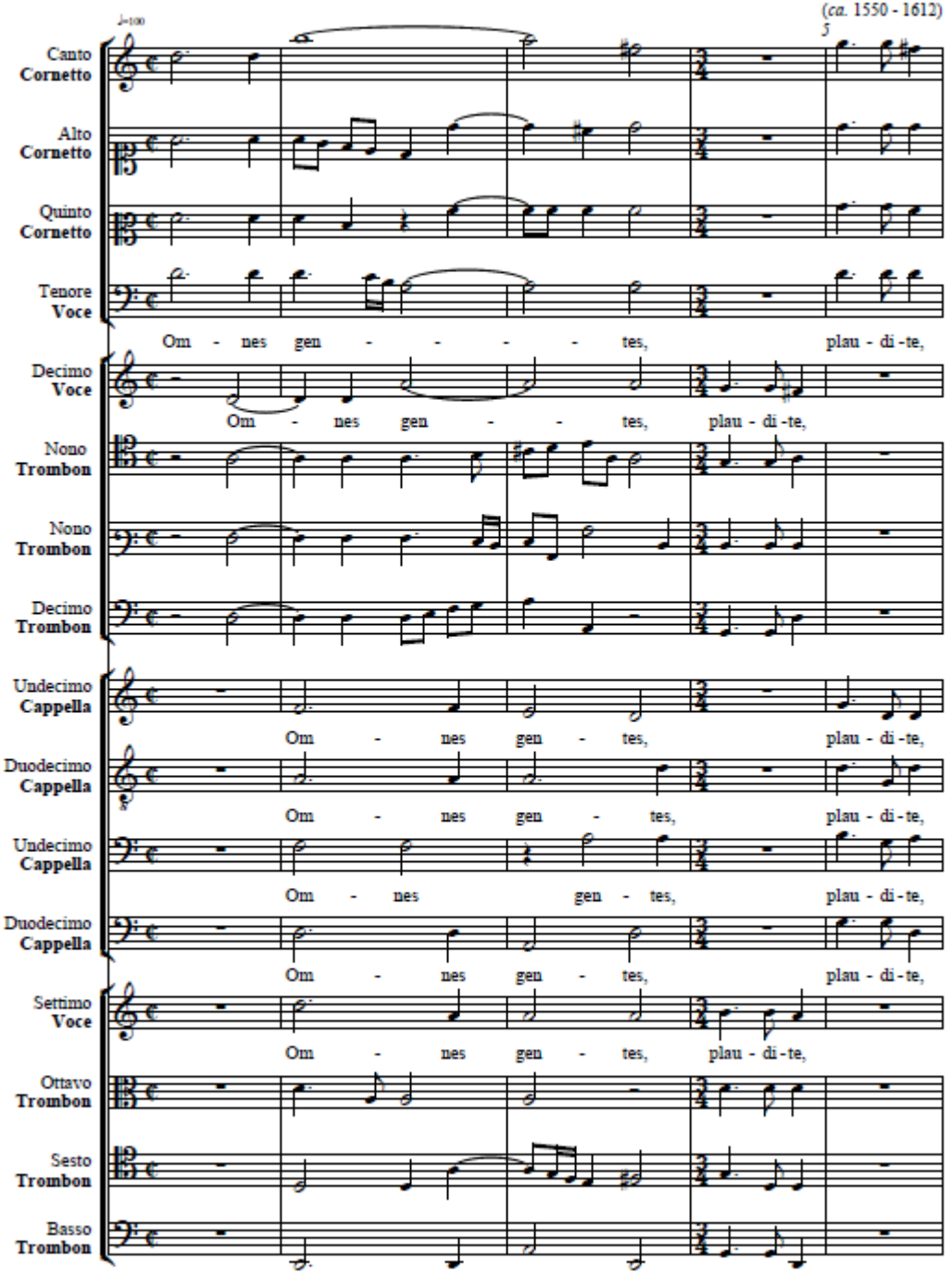
The biggest problem in so doing is that when the Bass moves by a 4th or 5th, a contrary 8ve and 5th cannot both be used. That would cause the additional two parts to make a parallel 5th.

Instead, a rest would have to be substituted in one of the parts.

OMNES GENTES, PLAUDITE MANIBUS

à 16 voci.

Giovanni GABRIELI
(*ca.* 1550 - 1612)

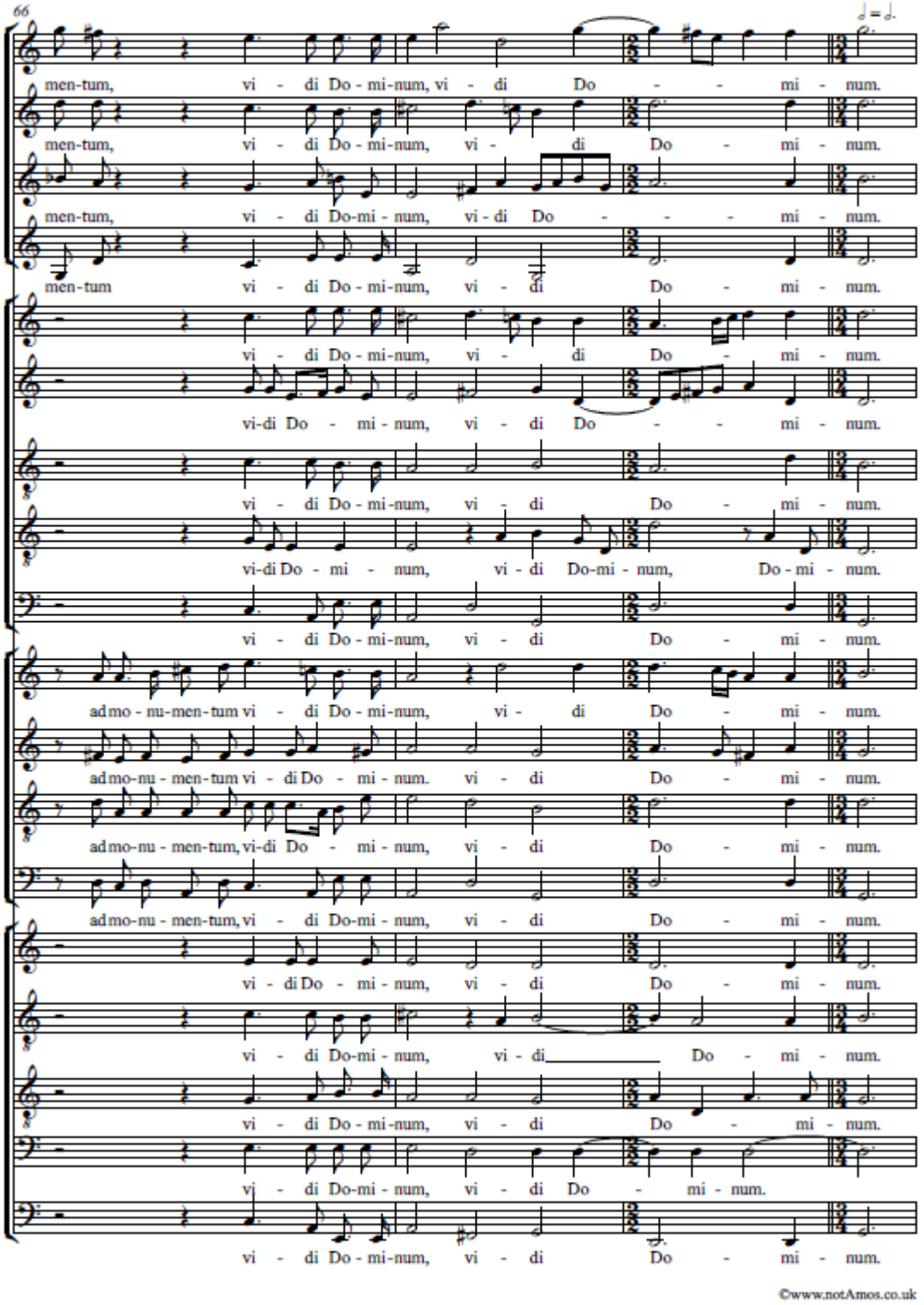


© Steven Langley Guy 2001

Congratulami ni mihi omnes

By Hans Leo Hassler

18 Voices!



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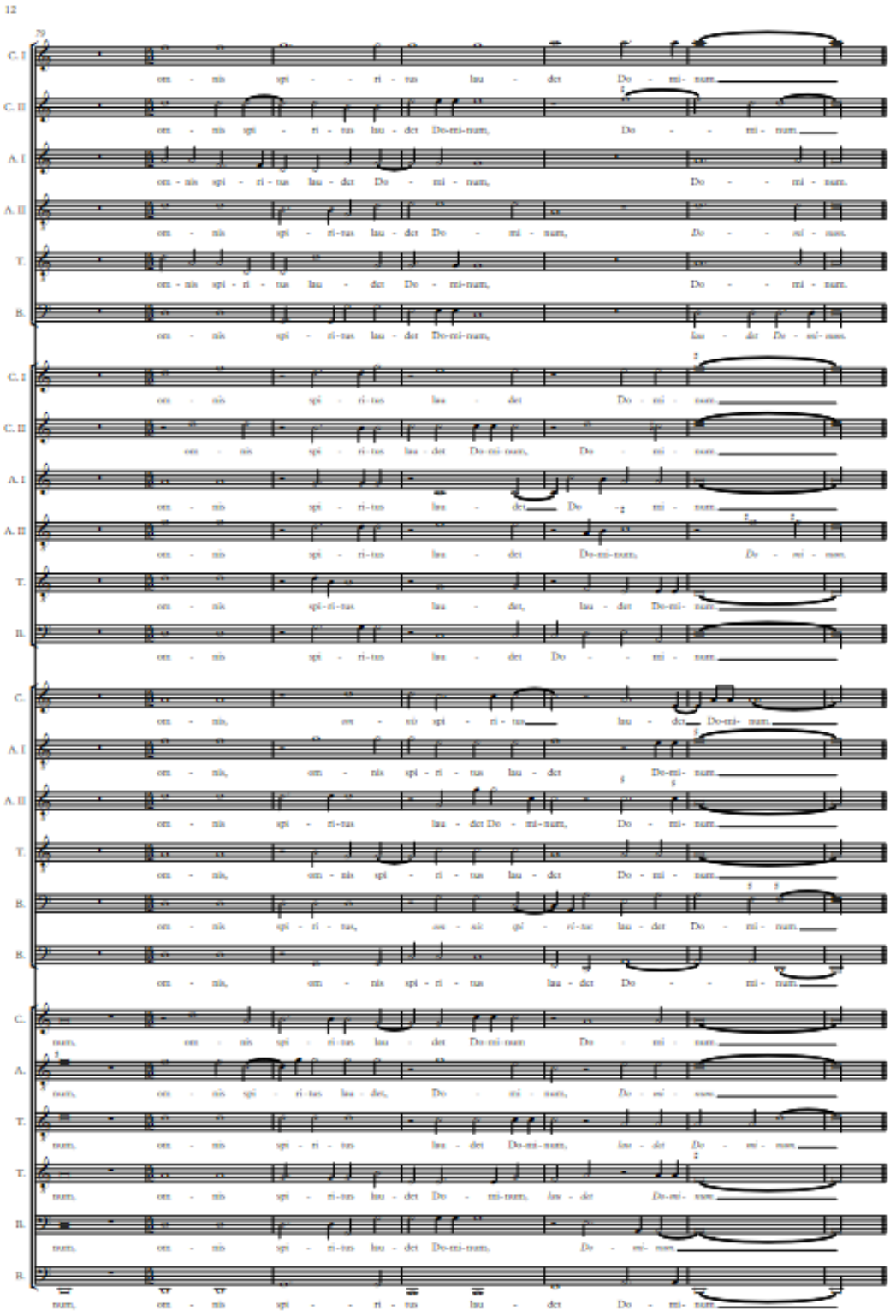
Laudate Dominum

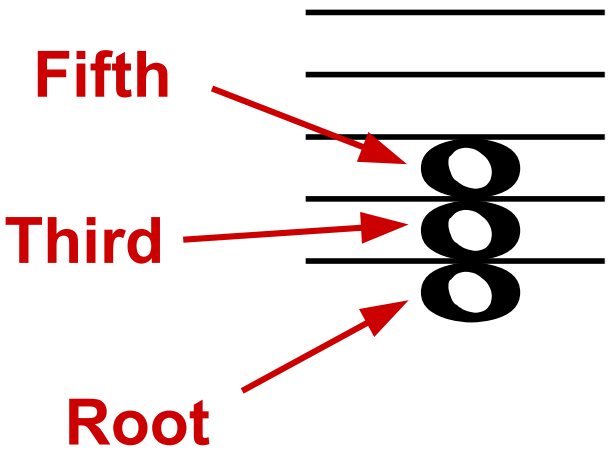
By Jakob Händl

24 voices!



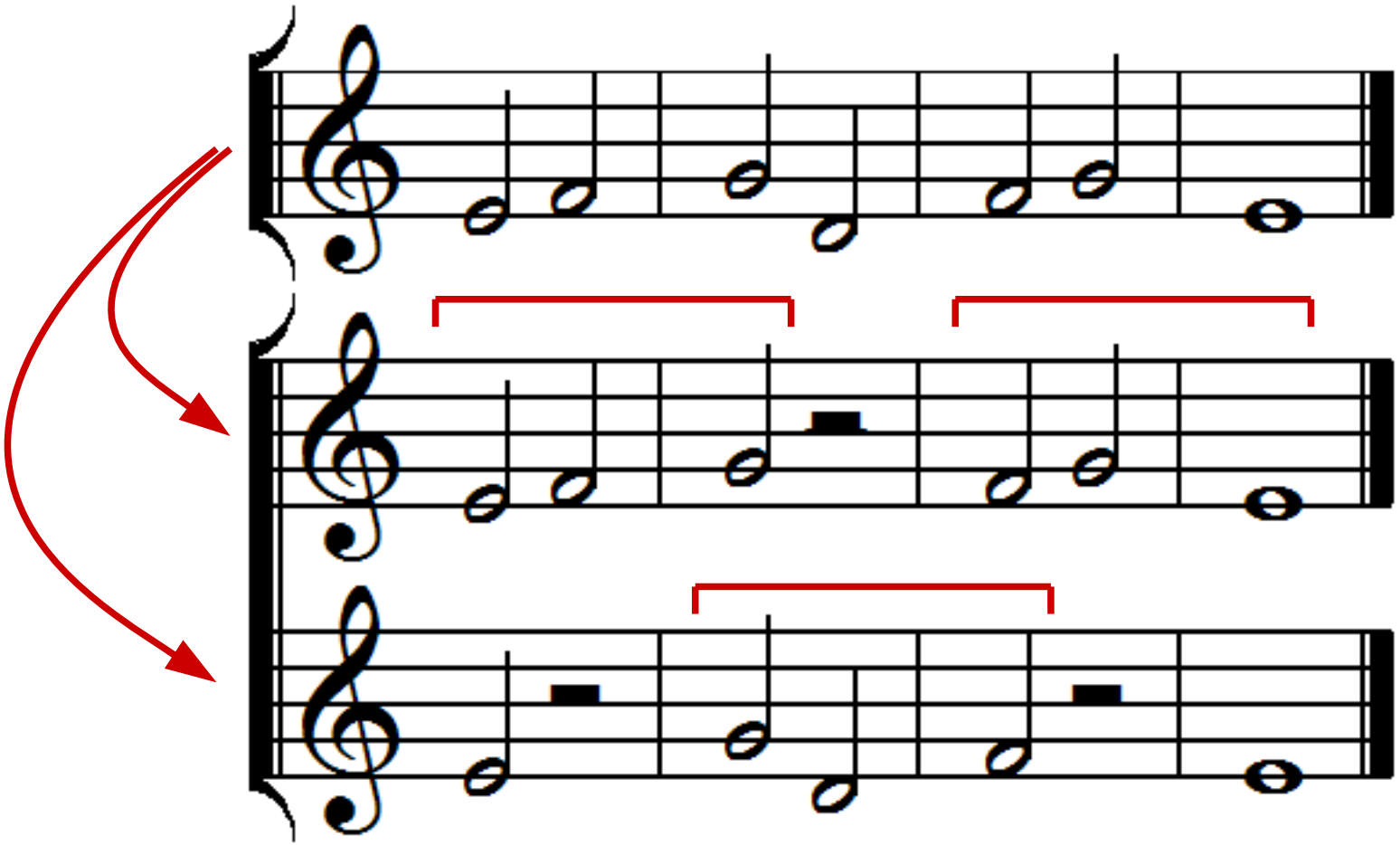
Even More Parts!

There are ONLY THREE NOTES in a chord!



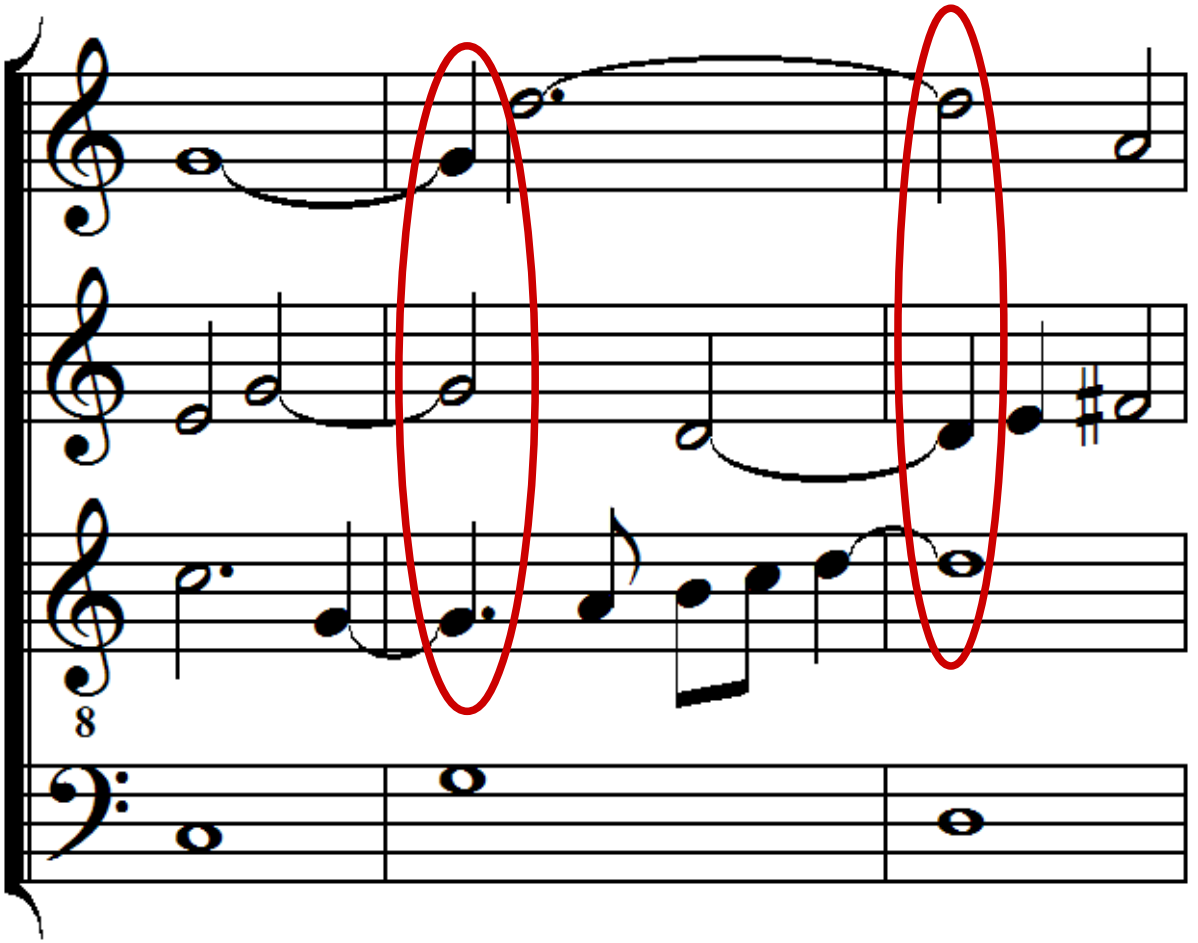
Even More Parts!

1. Use rests to split a melody between voices.



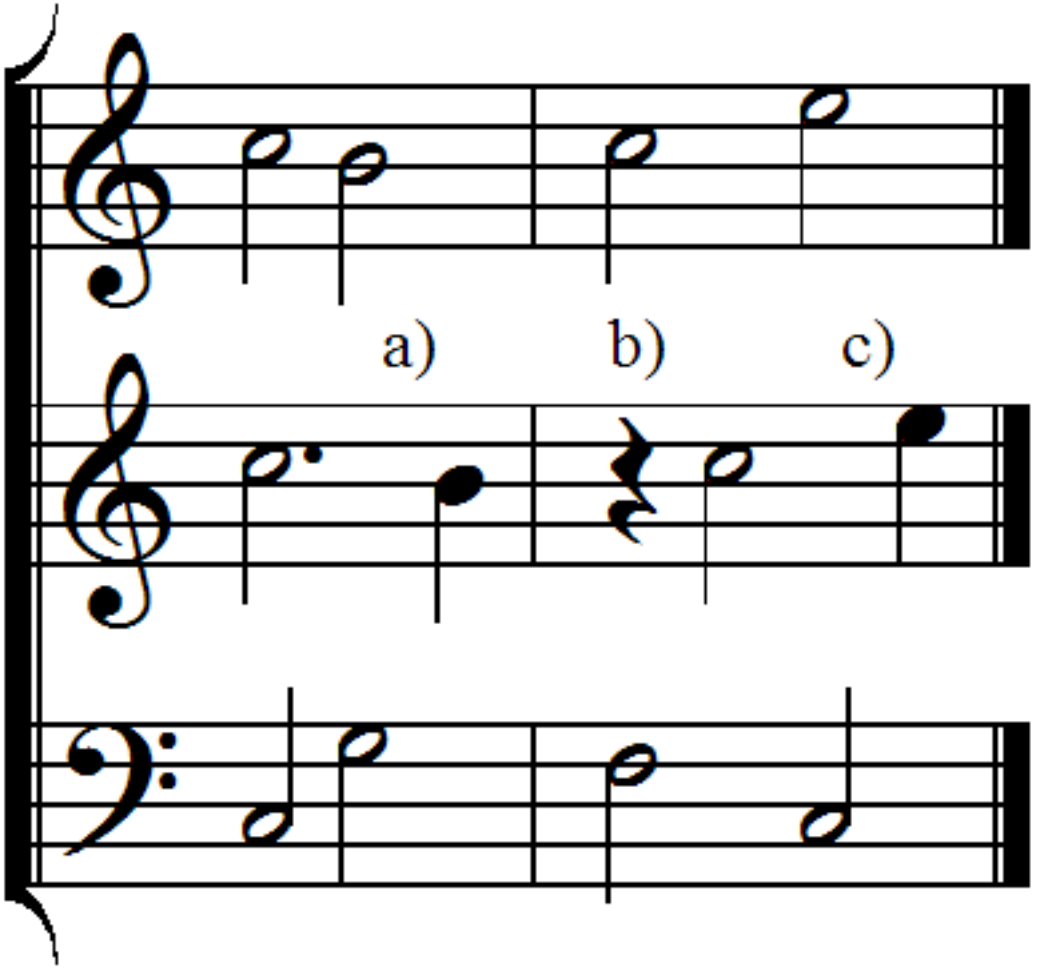
Even More Parts!

2. Have as many parts as possible to be on stationary notes, thereby not causing parallel motion.



Even More Parts!

3. Use syncopation to avoid moving in parallel.



a) Suspension

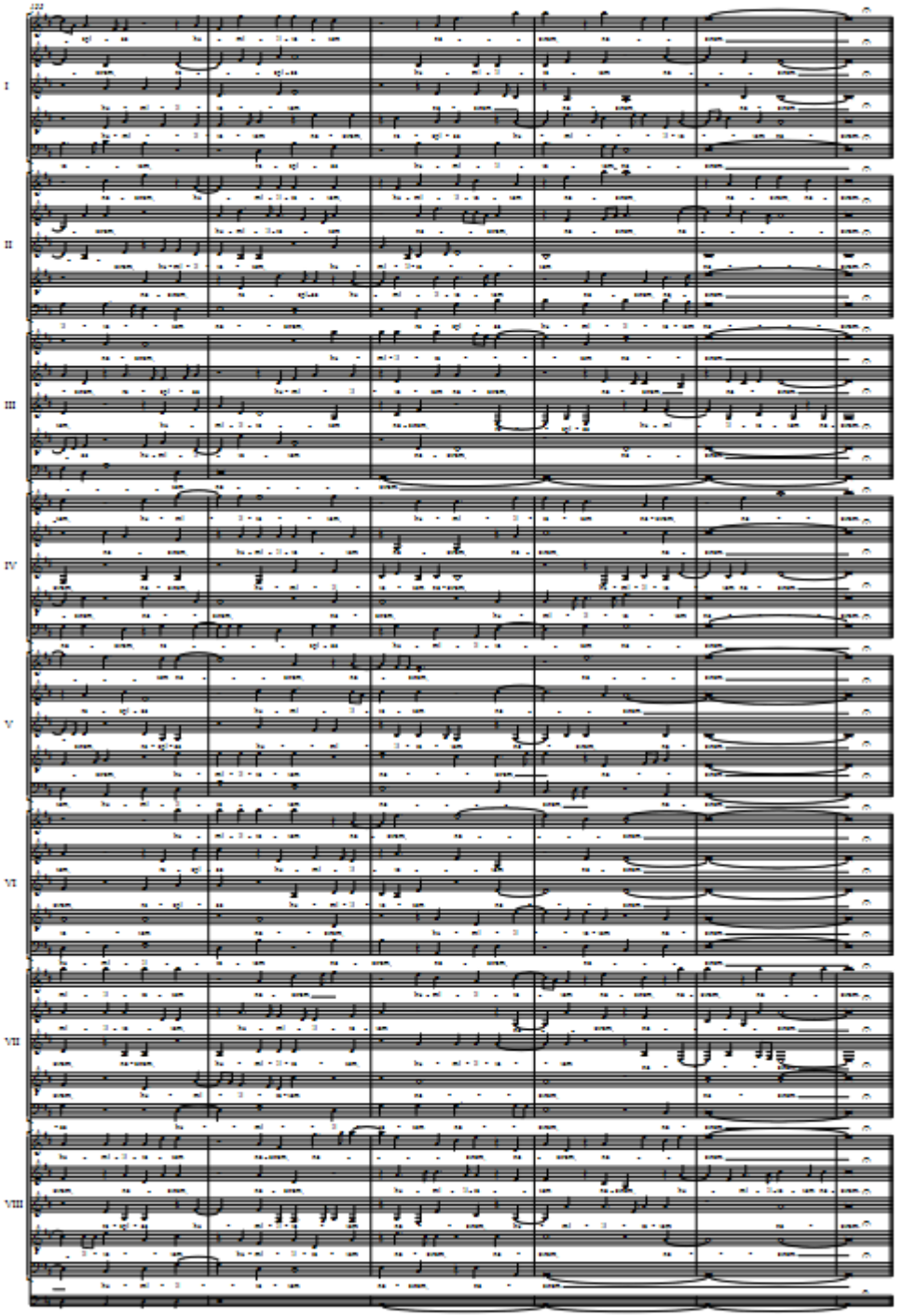
b) Rest on the beat

c) Stationary note

Spem in alium

By Thomas Tallis

40 voices!



Alessandro Striggio even wrote a **60 part** piece: “Missa sopra Ecco sì beato giorno”

In Summary

1. Start with the Bass part.
2. Use Campion's method.
3. Then Campion's method backwards.
4. Eighth Part Table:
   - Parallel 3rds,
   - Contrary Leaps,
   - Stationary Notes shared between chords.
5. Share melodies between voices using Rests.
6. If there's time, move to a Stationary Note.
7. Syncopation / Suspensions.
8. Fix melodies by swapping parts that share a note.
9. Decorate using Passing Notes and Tied Notes.
10. Any remaining problems: insert a Rest.

And that's how massive 16thC polyphony works!

Thank you for listening.

Master Crispin Sexi, OL

crispin.sexi@protonmail.com

http://aelflaed.homemail.com.au/doco/eightpart.html