

CHORALE NO. 41 BY J.S. BACH

“WASS MEIN GOTT WILL, DAS”

No. 41

Listen to the chorale <https://mymusictheory.com/wp-content/uploads/audio/harmony/chorales/chorale-41.mp3>

## PART WRITING: BASS

You will need to provide the bass line for the whole chorale, from around bar 3 onwards. Bass lines have the following characteristics:

- Usually move by 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>ve</sup>.
- Do not normally repeat the same note (except after a pause).
- Very occasionally move by a 3<sup>rd</sup> (up or down) or 6<sup>th</sup> (up only).
- Leading note invariably followed by tonic.
- Do not leap by a 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Do not normally leap by more than an 8<sup>ve</sup>.
- Almost never move by a diminished interval. (If used, a diminished interval must be followed by a step in the opposite direction).
- Always avoid outlining an augmented triad (e.g. falling 3<sup>rd</sup>s F#-D-Bb).
- Finish on tonic.

Here is the first part of the bass line from chorale 41. Notice the wider intervals used, and the absence of 3<sup>rd</sup>s and 6<sup>ths</sup>.



## PART WRITING: INNER PARTS

The inner parts are the alto and tenor, and they both have the same characteristics.

You may have previously learned that the inner parts in SATB harmony tend to be static, and use a lot of repeated notes. This is not true of chorale-style music however! Alto and tenor parts in Bach chorales are much more lively and tuneful. You may need to re-program yourself to avoid using a repeated note if one is available, and instead choose a note which is a 3<sup>rd</sup> away. This will then allow you to connect two chords with a passing note, to create an interesting part. Repeated notes are however still seen, often at cadence points, or in the run-up to a cadence.

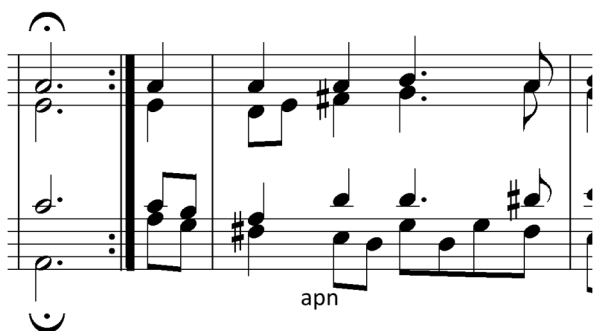
Inner parts have the following characteristics:

- Usually move by 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Occasionally move by 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or use a repeated note.
- Almost never move by any interval larger than a 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Almost never move by a diminished interval.
- Never move by an augmented interval, or a 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Sometimes move chromatically in semitones.

## ACCENTED PASSING NOTES

Accented passing notes help to give the music a forward impulse, and provide a nice moment of dissonance on the accented beat. It is worth trying to find a place to use one or two effectively. They are not common decorations (compared to unaccented passing notes), but do help to make a chorale sound more polished.

Chorale 41 has an accented passing note in bar 6, (marked “apn”, in the bass) in bar 6. The chord is D major, and the passing note is E. Notice how much more effective this is than putting the E on the previous quaver (eighth note) as an unaccented passing note, which would blend with the E in the alto.



## SUSPENSIONS

Suspensions, as their name suggests, keep us “in suspense”, and for this reason they are often best placed in the run up to a cadence.

The most typical suspension is the 4-3 (the 4<sup>th</sup> above the bass resolving to the 3<sup>rd</sup>).

Like the accented passing note, the suspension provides a moment of dissonance on the beat.

A suspension has three parts, a preparation, the suspension itself, and a resolution.

Chorale 41 has an example of a suspension in bar 4.

- The preparation (“prep”) note must be a chord note in the previous chord (A is part of the A minor chord).
- The suspension (“susp”) is the same note, in the same part, held over or repeated. At this point, it creates a dissonance of a 4<sup>th</sup> with the bass (E in the bass and A in the alto).
- The resolution (“res”) is a step downwards from the suspended note, and it must be a note that belongs to the next chord. (G# is part of the E major chord).

