What is Palestrinian Polyphony? – Palestrinian Polyphony was a High Renaissance compositional technique created by Giovanni Palestrina designed to present sacred music in a way that maintained textual and harmonic clarity.

Why is Palestrinian Polyphony important? – Giovanni Palestrina’s compositional style became influential due to its ability to present beautifully complex harmony in a way that maintained the intelligibility of the sung text. Palestrina’s techniques are still relevant because they provide modern composers with a means of creating intricate vocal works that are still understandable by untrained audiences.

Rules for Writing in the Style of Palestrina

1) The flow of music is to be dynamic, not rigid
2) The melody should contain few leaps
3) If a leap occurs, it must be small and immediately followed by stepwise motion in the opposite direction
4) Preferably, dissonances are to be confined to passing notes or weak beats

Application of Palestrinian Style

The intention behind my composition (Kyrie) was to emulate Palestrina’s style by following a set of specific guidelines derived from the common characteristics of his compositions. Ultimately, my goal was to craft a piece that served as a 21st century interpretation of Palestrinian polyphony. Although I took some liberties in terms of harmonic language, I ensured that the essential elements of textual clarity, imitation, stepwise motion, and fluid melodic structure were strictly executed.

This excerpt from Kyrie illustrates stepwise melodic figures, fluid musical flow, use of contrary motion following a leap, and use of imitation to provide each voice enough space to clearly state the lyrics.