

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

THE BASSO CONTINUO

A survey of its origins in Italy
and of its evolutionary diversification
in Germany and France between
1650 and 1750

FACULTY OF MUSIC

BY

RICHARD VAN SCHOOR

CAPE TOWN

SEPTEMBER 1998

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Music at the
University of Cape Town

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To Annie Nutkins

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Faculty of Music

ABSTRACT TO DISSERTATION
ON THE BASSO CONTINUO

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This Dissertation should be seen as an introduction to the basso continuo period. The dissertation does not approach the subject from the continuo player's point of view and therefore also provides an elementary introduction relating to the realisation of a figured bass. On the other hand, the dissertation does provide information on the most important and significant sources dealing with the basso continuo and therefore, also serves as a valuable reference for the continuo specialist.

Contents: Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Conclusion.

Preface: examines the harpsichord's role in terms of keyboard evolution and its suitability as a continuo instrument.

Introduction: discusses the role and significance of the basso continuo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; deals with the basic way in which one should approach the figured bass; provides important sources relating to the execution of the basso continuo.

Chapter 1: examines the need for the arrival of the basso continuo, looks at the type of music being performed towards the end of the sixteenth century and show how political and religious convictions can affect existing styles and trends. Further more the chapter deals with early organ basses, the revival of monody and four different types of accompaniment. The chapter which covers a period from 1550-1610, concludes with the choice of instruments used for the basso continuo accompaniment.

Chapter 2: shows how the basso continuo spread from Italy to Germany and how it was employed in a different way by Heinrich Schütz. Changes and developing accompaniment trends relating to the nature of the basso continuo accompaniment are examined with particular reference to the treatises by Johan David Heinichen. Music examples illustrate the

characteristics of the basso continuo accompaniment in Germany. The chapter roughly covers the period between 1650 and 1750.

Chapter 3: shows that in France, unlike Germany the development of the basso continuo was more individual and was not firmly rooted in Italian customs and traditions. The basso continuo practice in France established itself later than in Germany and while practices in Germany tended to linger on, the demise of practices in France was far more abrupt.

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PREFACE

I first became interested in the basso continuo during visits to the Bartolomeo Cristofori Museum in Florence, where I hoped to trace the development of the fortepiano and gain some insight into the circumstances responsible for its appearance.

Apart from an interest in the evolution of the piano as an instrument, I was eager to examine the relationship between instrument and composer with the demise of the basso continuo: were compositions being inspired by specific instruments or were the instruments evolving in order to accommodate new compositional styles and trends?

Tracing the beginnings of the fortepiano necessitated a thorough look into the nature and function of the harpsichord, which was its immediate predecessor in terms of instrumental function.

The following quote from the preface to Kuhnau's "Clavier Übung" (1692) suggests that in Germany it had not been customary for the harpsichord to assume particular solo instrument status at the time:

Warumb sollte man auff dem Claviere nicht eben, wie auff anderen Instrumenten, dergleichen Sachen tractiren können? Da doch kein einziges Instrument dem Claviere die Praecedenz an Vollkommenheit jemals disputirlich gemacht hat. (Why shouldn't one be able to manage such things [as sonatas] on the Clavier just as on other instruments? As no single instrument has ever been able to challenge the Clavier's superiority in completeness.)

Gerald Abraham, in an article on the harpsichord sonata also refers to this quote in terms of Kuhnau's role as a possible pioneer in the field and attributes the earliest harpsichord sonatas, roughly comparable to the Corellian sonata da chiesa,

to him.¹ Whether or not² Kuhnau was actually responsible for the first harpsichord sonatas, solo works for the instrument were at the time significantly increasing. This was also the case outside of Germany. The sonata in Bb (1692) and seven others from his "Frische Clavier Früchte" (1696) thus seem to represent a bridge between the harpsichord's function as a basso continuo instrument and the birth of its status as solo concert instrument.

Only thirteen years later, in 1709, Cristofori completed the invention of a hammer-action to replace the quill-jack at the end of the harpsichord key, an invention which did not leave much scope for the development of the harpsichord's new-found role as a concert instrument. With the discovery of this fact came the realisation that the harpsichord's role in terms of keyboard evolution would have to be re-evaluated. For many composers of keyboard works, the clavichord³ was

¹Gerald Abraham, The Concise Oxford History of Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979; Paperback 1985), 439

²"The sonata in Bb appended to the second of these sets [Clavier Übung 1692 consists of two sets] and often, although wrongly, hailed as the first keyboard sonata ... is the earliest now known in Germany or Austria for a stringed keyboard instrument. ... In 1837 a German author, Carl Ferdinand Becker, took his cue from these remarks [of Kuhnau's preface] and led off the long, seldom disputed procession of writers who made more of Kuhnau as a key figure ... " William S. Newman, The Sonata in the Baroque Era (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 239

³"Beim überwiegenden Teil seiner Klavierwerke dürfte Joh. Seb. Bach vor allem an die Ausführung auf seinem bevorzugten Instrument, dem Clavichord, gedacht haben" (With regards execution of the majority of Joh. Seb. Bach's compositions, one can be sure he had his preferred instrument, the clavichord in mind). Klaus Wolters, Das Klavier. Eine Einführung in Bau und Geschichte des Instruments und in die Geschichte des Klavierspiels (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1984), 7

"Clavichords were used throughout western Europe during the Renaissance, and in Germany until the early 19th century."

"As early as 1713 Mattheson singled out the clavichord as 'beloved above all' other keyboard instruments and declared it superior for performing ... because it permits one to produce a 'singing style' of performance ..., it is just in this respect that the

evidently the preferred instrument at a time when public concerts as such, had not yet been fully established.⁴ The harpsichord, overshadowed by the clavichord at the one extreme and the fortepiano at the other, was thus confined to the 'Cinderella' function of a basso continuo instrument, albeit a position which it completely dominated and a function for which the character of its sound was ideally suited.

Inevitably, the ensuing involvement within the domain of the basso continuo, meant that my initial investigation of the fortepiano would have to be shelved for a later stage. At this point one may well ask what the basso continuo has to do with the evolution of the fortepiano. The answer lies in the fact that "[c]ontinuo playing... was an art practised... throughout Europe for roughly two centuries after 1600, and as such concerned closely any musician involved with a keyboard instrument (either as composer, director-conductor or soloist)..."⁵ It thus becomes imperative as a keyboard player in search of information regarding the nature of the instrument, its function and development, to have a fairly comprehensive understanding of the

clavichord excels in contrast (to quote Mattheson again) to the 'always equally loud, resonant harpsichord' "

"This emphasis ..., heralds the period in which the clavichord began to have a literature of its own and in which large clavichords were first made. "

Edwin M. Ripin, "Clavichord" in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians , 20 volumes. Ed. Stanley Sadie. (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980), 4:458, 464

⁴"In various Italian, French and German states and cities performances in the 16th and 17th centuries were the responsibility of an Academy or Collegium Musicum. ... such bodies were technically private."

In England, "Instrumental music was brought properly into the public arena ... in 1672, ... "

In Germany, "On 21 January 1723 the *Frankfurter Nachrichten* advertised a concert ... This was the beginning of the events by which Telemann made Frankfurt a centre for concert-giving."

"In 1743 the term 'Grosses Concert' was applied to performances given in Leipzig by a select body of 16 players under the direction of J. F. Doles ..."

"The Gewandhaus concerts were founded in 1781."

Percy M. Young, "Concert" in New Grove, 4:616-619

⁵ Peter Williams, "Continuo" in New Grove, 4:685

causes and effects of the basso continuo period. This is further highlighted by the fact (to which many modern-day pianists are blissfully oblivious) that figured bass lines exist in concertos for the piano by Mozart and Beethoven. (see INTRODUCTION, p. 6)

However, once one starts to read about the basso continuo and to study sources regarding performing customs, one becomes increasingly aware that there were no definite answers or rules and that many contradictions existed even within the individual countries where the basso continuo was in practice. Performance indications were minimal and much was improvised in the spirit of the time and of the moment. Let us not forget, that in each period of music history, it was the music of the time which was being performed and encouraged. It was only in the nineteenth century that due to the industrious efforts of composers such as Mendelssohn and Schumann, the music of the seventeenth century was rediscovered. It was thus understandable that unnotated 'stylistic necessities' and improvisation practices were lost, with the passing of the generations who knew and practised them.

Nevertheless, in trying to acquire some knowledge on the subject of the basso continuo, one has to look for specific information and know where to access it. Information which gives one a broader overview is not always readily available and often papers are written in a way which assumes that the reader is already familiar with the art of continuo playing.

Since the basso continuo is inextricably linked to the study, rules and function of harmony, I must make it quite clear that as a non-continuo player, I do not intend to approach the subject from this perspective. This would require an entire dissertation in its own right. However, for those interested in this area, the basic principles will be

discussed where necessary and sources provided, where the desired information can be accessed.

It is therefore the purpose of this dissertation to make the subject of the basso continuo slightly more accessible (especially for those approaching it for the first time) by combining various sources, tracing the origins and highlighting the diversities of the basso continuo practice, thus providing an informative basis from which one can undertake more specific research.

INTRODUCTION

In the first instance this Introduction serves as a chapter discussing the role and significance of the basso continuo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Against this background we examine the reasons for its demise and reappearance. Furthermore the chapter deals with the basic way in which one should approach the figured bass, finally providing some of the most important sources relating to its execution.

The outset of CHAPTER I examines the need for the arrival of the basso continuo: was the basso continuo itself the new idea or did it simply serve the needs of a far more novel protagonist?

In order to determine this, we need to look at the type of music being performed towards the end of the sixteenth century, as well as contributing factors responsible for the establishment of the basso continuo around 1600. We will see how political and religious convictions can affect existing styles and trends, and how these can be influenced by geographic situations.

The origins of the basso continuo can be traced back to early organ basses, and we will, therefore, follow the development of these basses into new forms of accompaniments created by the revival of monody. Apart from the reasons responsible for the increasing importance of the basso continuo, we will be looking at four different forms of accompaniment and the debate surrounding the intavolatura.

The 'invention' of the basso continuo will be discussed in relation to Viadana and his Concerti ecclesiastici which show a new form of composition and

accompaniment. CHAPTER I which covers a period from 1550-1610, concludes with the choice of instruments used for the basso continuo accompaniment.

CHAPTER II will show how the basso continuo spread from Italy to Germany and how it was employed in a different way by Heinrich Schütz. We will look at the changes and developing trends relating to the nature of the basso continuo accompaniment with particular reference to the treatises by Johan David Heinichen. The characteristics of basso continuo accompaniment in Germany will also be illustrated by means of music examples. The chapter roughly covers the period between 1650 and 1750.

CHAPTER III will show that in France, unlike Germany, the development of the basso continuo was more individual and was not firmly rooted in Italian customs and traditions. The basso continuo practice in France established itself later than in Germany and while practices in Germany tended to linger on, the demise of practices in France was far more abrupt.

The Role and Significance of the Basso Continuo in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Suffice it to say that the influence of the basso continuo was evidently momentous enough to justify an entire period of music history being named after it:

"The Age of the Through-Bass"

Already towards the end of the eighteenth century, a symposium in Germany with the title "Was der Generalbaß sey?" had been envisaged. Two hundred years later, in March of 1993, a symposium with the same title took place at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland. Between 1750 and 1790 thirty publications on the subject of the basso continuo were available on the market. Even though few of these contained any original thought having mostly been copied from one another,

the sheer volume of material actually sold, attests to the huge popularity of these works.¹

Although interest in the basso continuo remained largely theoretical after its demise, a new awareness (in the twentieth century) of its vital role (within all music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), has inspired a revival of its original function.

With the escalation of instrumental, solo and operatic performances today being performed on historic instruments, together with an ever-increasing interest in authentic historic style, it has finally become necessary when researching the basso continuo, to do so within this context.

The rediscovery of the basso continuo and its true relevance to all music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was significantly enhanced by two independent works both published in 1931: Frank Thomas Arnold's The Art of Accompaniment from a Through-Bass as Practised in the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries² and Hermann Keller's Schule des Generalbaß-Spiels³.

Notwithstanding an enthusiastic revival of Baroque music⁴ during the first half of this century, most performances and recordings from this period, are devoid of the

¹Regula Rupp, "Was der Späte General-Baß sey" in Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis. XVIII 1994, ed. Peter Reidemeister (Winterthur, Switzerland: Amadeus Verlag, 1996), 116

²Frank Thomas Arnold, The Art of Accompaniment from a Through-Bass as Practised in the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries (London, 1931; New York: reprint in 2 volumes, Dover Publications, 1965)

³Hermann Keller, Schule des Generalbaß-Spiels (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1931)

⁴"On the air and on disc, in concerts and in festivals, on tape and on television, this flood of baroque music threatened to engulf the world of music and drown it in a sea of pompous puerilities." Denis Stevens, 'Introduction' in the 1965 edition of Arnold, Art of Accompaniment

improvised freedoms which characterised the original style. They tend towards a dogmatic realisation of the printed text exactly as published:

There was a stage when Arnold's book could have done something to save the situation, but as luck would have it, stocks were exhausted ... In consequence, the one genuinely creative contribution to a performance of a baroque instrumental or vocal work--the artistic and imaginative realisation of the continuo part--was all too conspicuous by its absence ... ⁵

The two most interesting artistic components relating to the basso continuo during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were: the spontaneous dialogue which occurred between the various parts (vocal and instrumental) and the practice of improvisation which resulted from figured bass playing. The former was able to exist as a result of the latter. Composers often left a scanty outline of the composition in the good faith that performers were well acquainted with the style. That is, the composition on the printed page often appeared meagre, when compared to the version one actually heard in performance. One should also remember that composers were mostly involved in the performing of their own works which rendered copious details and performing instructions superfluous. Figured bass notation thus ideally suited the improvisational needs of this style.

Therefore, the single most apparent reason for the disappearance of these components (and subsequent demise of the basso continuo practice towards the end of the eighteenth century) seems to be the inevitable need for more precise notation. This phenomenon continued to escalate throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, with the exception of jazz and certain aleatoric compositions.

⁵ibid.

During the first half of the eighteenth century a new style was emerging and composers began to thin out musical textures.⁶ More attention was lavished on the keyboard as solo instrument. Improvisation practices had to make way for an exact notation which heightened the keyboard's superiority but restricted its former freedoms. Already, in J. S. Bach's violin sonatas, very little scope is left for any improvisation: "... a few simple chords here and there, contrasting with the worked-out obbligato lines."⁷

In many instances, sonatas for wind or string instruments become piano sonatas (Mozart and Beethoven violin sonatas for instance) with the actual solo instrument acquiring a largely obbligato function. Title pages of some of these sonatas even go as far as referring to the sonata as being for piano with violin accompaniment (Kreutzer sonata by Beethoven, First edition) even though the violin part is extremely substantial. Although the first violinist sometimes had the function of directing an ensemble, the keyboard player in a continuo group more often than not assumed this responsibility. However, one must emphasize that generally the practice is inconsistent.

From the earliest examples of organ bass parts written for sacred works (even prior to the concept of a designated basso continuo) one sees that the function of these basses was to bind the vocal parts and hold the ensemble together. This eventually became the *raison d'être* of the basso continuo.

As the solo function of the keyboard gained more momentum, so the role of continuo player, soloist and conductor became progressively more defined, until the new style of composition eventually dispersed with the need for a continuo

⁶Williams, in New Grove, 4:689

⁷*ibid.*, 4:696

completely. Ultimately it became the responsibility of the conductor to hold the ensemble together. In the interim, the keyboard player in a concerto functioned as soloist and conductor.

This evolution is clearly observed when one looks at the earliest piano concertos. Here, the non-solo sections in the solo part are generally still figured. However, in later concertos, the bass line, though present, is unfigured.⁸ This is the case in all of Mozart's piano concertos, which would suggest that, in an authentic performance, it would be appropriate to accompany the ensemble in the tutti sections as well. However, if the soloist is not also functioning as director of the ensemble, the playing of tutti passages would seem to be incongruous.

In 1801 the original edition of Beethoven's First Piano Concerto op. 15 appeared in Vienna (published by Mollo) with a figured bass. Similarly, the autograph of the 'Emperor' Concerto also shows traces of a figured bass.

Eventually, the shifting of focus from music, governed largely by text, to more abstract forms of instrumental music, the advent of a new harmonic language, larger instrumental forces requiring the more specialised attentions of a maestro di cappella and a notation which could reliably reflect the composer's specific intention, were all contributing factors responsible for the gradual demise of the basso continuo.

Once the stylistic norms and improvisation practices had 'disappeared together with those who had practised them,' there only remained the theoretical treatises which have since become invaluable tools in the reconstruction of the true musical spirit of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁸Jörg-Andreas Bötticher and Jesper B. Christensen, eds., "Generalbaß" in Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag; 2d revised ed., 1995), 3:1204

One can deduce from the following how important it must have been for musicians to be able to improvise during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

... was damals jeder Musiker konnte, nämlich ohne vorherige schriftliche Ausarbeitung die Aussetzung eines bezifferten Basses am Instrument zu improvisieren und sie auf diese Weise jedesmal den gegebenen Verhältnissen anzupassen. Dieses Ziel, dessen Notwendigkeit niemand bestreiten wird, wenn es auch heute wohl noch nicht viele Begleiter geben wird, die sich getrauen (und denen es der Dirigent erlaubt!), eine Bachsche Kantate oder Passion aus der Bezifferung der Partitur zu begleiten... (...at that time something every musician could do, that is the improvisation of a figured bass at the instrument, without previous written calculations and adapting this each time to the given text. No one will dispute the necessity of this aim even though there are not yet many accompanists today who will dare [and whom the conductor will allow!], to accompany a Bach Cantata or Passion from the figures in the score, ...)⁹

The conductor as appendage (as opposed to the previously integrated role of the continuo-director) and the constricted attitude towards Baroque music, can further be deduced from Keller's Preface and supports Denis Stevens' account of Baroque music in the first half of the twentieth century. (see page 3, footnote 4)

There are two problems which have prevented the adequate or desired realisation of the basso continuo during the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as the greater part of the twentieth century, and to a large extent they are related: (a) ignorance as to the true realisation of the musical content beyond the printed text and (b) inadequate editions which either omit the intended bass figures (leaving a naked bass line) or provide an accompaniment (often stylistically inappropriate) arranged from the original figured bass.

Judging from the very well known "Open letter to Edward Hanslick" by Robert Franz (Leipzig 1871) this was a dilemma experienced as far back as the 1840s: "At the time, I am speaking of the early forties, ... [We] performed the works as

⁹Keller, "Preface" in Schule, 3

presented in the texts in question, and assumed, innocently enough, that, in them, the whole contents of those works of art were produced in their entirety."¹⁰

Franz admits that the Handel oratorios, for instance, were confined for them to the texts which had been adapted for performance by Mozart and Mosel. Many of Bach's works were limited to the editions by Marx and the appearance of a new edition, issued by the *Bach Gesellschaft*, seemed to fill Franz with wonderment: "Everywhere full figurings, which could not, after all, be there without a purpose, and which permitted definite conclusions with regard to an art-practice [Kunstpraxis] formerly in vogue."¹¹

Almost one hundred years later, in the nineteen thirties, Hermann Keller refers to a recently expired age (In dem jetzt hinter uns liegenden Zeitalter) yielding arrangements which were either musicologically sound (wissenschaftlich einwandfrei) but artistically not satisfying (künstlerisch nicht befriedigend), or re-arrangements, musically superior (musikalisch hochwertig) but stylistically unacceptable (aber stilistisch unmögliche Neubearbeitungen).¹²

Maybe it is an 'innocent assumption', similar to the one mentioned by Robert Franz which led publishers and arrangers to adopt such a laissez faire approach.

In his arrangements of works by Bach (e.g. St. Matthew Passion) and Handel (e.g. Israel in Egypt, Solomon), Mendelssohn, in spite of his generally

¹⁰"Wir führten die Sachen auf wie sie die Vorlagen darboten, und nahmen naiv genug an, daß mit ihnen der Inhalt jener Kunstwerke völlig erschöpft sei." Robert Franz, Gesammelte Schriften über die Wiederbelebung Bach'scher und Händel'scher Werke, ed. R. Bethge (Leipzig, 1910), 46; English translation without the German text also contained in "Preface" in Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, xii

¹¹Arnold, "Preface" in Art of Accompaniment, xiii

¹²Keller, "Preface" in Schule

retrospective historic attitude, does not set out the basso continuo part but rather supplements the bass by composing a free organ voice part.¹³

The function of the basso continuo, in terms of general music practice, had been vastly reduced by the middle of the nineteenth century. In church music, however, its use in terms of composition and practice is sustained almost entirely up until the middle of the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in works by Schubert and Bruckner for instance.¹⁴

On the other hand, a number of noteworthy composers continued to concern themselves with the theoretical aspects of the basso continuo. Schumann writes the following in Musikalische Haus und Lebensregeln: "Fürcht dich nicht vor den Worten: Theorie, Generalbaß, Kontrapunkt usw.; sie kommen dir freundlich entgegen, wenn du dasselbe tust."¹⁵ (Do not be afraid of words like: theory, general-bass, counterpoint etc.: they approach you amicably, if you too do the same.)

For Wagner the basso continuo even proved to be a catalyst which encouraged him to pursue a career in music:

Ich traute mir ohne alles Bedenken zu, diese so nötige Musik selbst schreiben zu können, hielt es aber doch für gut, mich zuvor über einige Hauptregeln des Generalbasses aufzuklären. Um dies im Fluge zu tun, lieb ich mir auf acht Tages Logiers Methode des Generalbasses und studierte mit Eifer darin. Das Studium trug aber nicht so schnelle Früchte als ich glaubte; die Schwierigkeiten desselben reizten und fesselten mich: ich beschloss Musiker zu werden.¹⁶ (Without the slightest deliberation, I dared to write this such necessary music myself. However I thought it a good idea to first inform myself with regards to some of the main rules concerning the general-bass.

¹³"...setzt den Generalbaß nicht aus, sondern komponiert dazu..." K. G. Fellerer, "Mendelssohns Orgelstimmen zu Händelschen Werken", in Händel Jahrbuch 4, 1931; Leipzig: reprint 1968), 79-98

¹⁴Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1243

¹⁵Dresden, ca. 1847-1850, quoted after W. Boetticher, ed., Robert Schumann in seinen Schriften und Briefen (Berlin, 1942), 461

¹⁶Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1243

In order to do this swiftly I borrowed Logiers Methode des Generalbasses for eight days and then eagerly studied it. The study did not bear the rapid results I had expected; similarly these problems compelled and fascinated me: I decided to become a musician.)

Shortly after 1900, musicological treatises which were of enormous importance in the field of the basso continuo (O. Kinkeldey, Landshoff, M. Schneider) appeared on the scene. Although these treatises started to categorise the chronological and stylistic elements of the basso continuo, they did not have any particular impact in terms of promoting the basso continuo during the course of the twentieth century.¹⁷ It was Frank Thomas Arnold's monumental work which gave a profound insight into all aspects of the basso continuo.

The discussion in favour of a responsible practice in terms of the publishing of editions emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. H. Albrecht provided the following as a guide line for an ideal layout of the basso continuo arrangement:

Jede Gb.-Bearbeitung soll nur einen Anhalt bieten; sie soll dem versierten Gb.-Spieler die Freiheit lassen, es besser zu machen; sie soll aber den ungeübten Benutzer der Ausgabe nicht auf falsche Fährten locken, sondern ihm einen Durchschnitts-Gb. vorlegen. (Every basso continuo arrangement should only provide an indication; it should leave the experienced player the freedom to improve upon the part, should not entice the inexperienced player to adopt the wrong approach but instead provide an arrangement which reflects the norm.)¹⁸

Up until the nineteen nineties the basso continuo accompaniment has been kept very simple. A concerted effort has been made not to disturb the upper voice and to keep the accompaniment as technically unproblematic as possible. However,

¹⁷Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1244

¹⁸ibid., 3:1245

in reference to historic sources, one notices that just the reverse was the case: generally the accompaniment was not easy and very often it was most complex.¹⁹

One should not underestimate the influence arrangements have had in the twentieth century. They have contributed a great deal to the misconception regarding an even vaguely acceptable style in performing.

Fortunately, a level of awareness in terms of authentic practice now prevails at many European institutions (notably, Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Basel, Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Graz and Conservatoire nationale supérieur de Musique de Lyon) who are committed to seeing the basso continuo reinstated as the central force within the context of Baroque music.

Peter Reidemeister, director of the Schola Cantorum in Basel, as recently as 1996, comments on the way the basso continuo practice has developed at their institution since the 1960s and gives a summary of their current objectives:

Die Stichworte der aktuellen Arbeit lauten: stilistische Differenzierung (gegenüber dem jahrzehntelang praktizierten Universalstil, den wir von vielen Aufnahmen früherer Jahre her kennen), Klangphantasie in der Gestaltung der harmonischen Vielfalt (gegenüber einer vorsichtig-zurückhaltenden, meist klanglich mageren Einheitsaussetzung unter Befolgung der Regeln), der Generalbaß als impulsgebendes Zentrum des Ensembles (statt in einer Art Dauer-'Begleithaltung' nur Impulse von der Oberstimme zu empfangen), ... (The objectives of the present undertaking are as follows: stylistic differentiation [as opposed to the universal trend practised for decades and familiar to us by means of many earlier recordings], tonal invention as manifested through harmonic diversity [as opposed to a cautiously reticent, tonally mostly meagre uniform rendition, subjected to the rules], the basso continuo, a central catalyst as impetus for the ensemble [instead of prevailing as a type of habitual accompaniment simply receiving impulses from the upper voice...])²⁰

¹⁹ibid., 3:1246

²⁰From the preface to a collection of lectures which took place at a symposium in Basel 1993 on the subject of the basso continuo, as published in the Basel Year Book of 1995. Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis. XIX 1995, ed. Peter Reidemeister (Winterthur, Switzerland: Amadeus Verlag, 1996), 6

Stephen Stubbs, in reference to the basso continuo's role today in places of instruction such as music colleges and conservatories, suggests that the subject of the basso continuo be regarded "firmly in the category of practical disciplines." He feels a "hands-on" manner of instruction should be available to all players and singers who expect to perform or teach any music from the period 1600-1750. He expects each music student to have a basic familiarity with the standard basses of the chaconne and passacaglia. In his opinion, only a few specialised and gifted players are destined to progress to a satisfying realisation of Bach's basses. However, he is convinced that with a generation [of students] who have had a basic experience of the early continuo, one could hope for more musicians in the future who understand the "feel" of harmony.²¹

Basic Information Regarding the Realisation of a Figured-Bass

The most essential points regarding the realisation of a basso continuo or through-bass around 1600 can be expressed quite simply and concisely as shown by Bianciardi and Agazzari. Francesco Bianciardi (Breve regola per imparar'a sonare sopra il basso con ogni sorte d'istrumento) and Agostino Agazzari (Del sonare sopra 'l basso con tutti li stromenti e dell'uso loro nel conserto), both published their treatises in Siena 1607.

What was then an emerging language in the practical sense is now, to a large extent, a forgotten book of rules. Naturally we have musicians today who are completely familiar, not only with the basic principles of the basso continuo, but also with the aesthetic realisation pertaining to the context of all music belonging to the

²¹ Steven Stubbs, "The Theory and Practice of Basso Continuo" in Neue Beiträge zur Aufführungspraxis, vol 1: Alte Musik - Lehren, Forschen, Hören ed. Johann Trummer (Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994), 107

basso continuo period. These are, however, musicians who have devoted their musical lives to this particular epoch or to a specific genre.

For the average musician, the language of the basso continuo in the twentieth century is thus no longer commonly understood, as it forms no essential part of our contemporary musical education. Today it has become necessary to reconstruct a puzzle of authentic practices in order that we may understand its full meaning.

In fact, Denis Stevens, in his Introduction to Arnold's Art of Accompaniment, suggests that one start with chapter XXV which is entitled Practical Hints and deals with the relatively elementary features relating to the harmonic realisation of the basso continuo. For similar reasons, I have included this introductory section dealing with basic principles relating to the execution of a figured bass in its harmonic context. In approaching this section, the student would do well to bear in mind Thomas Mace's advice of 1676:

This *Thing* will require a *Quick Discerning Faculty* of the *Ear*, an *Able Hand*, and a *Good Judgement*. The first of which must be given by *Nature*; the two last with *Practice* and *Care*.²²

Nigel North has the following to say about the study of the basso continuo:

The tradition of these instruments must have been a living one, learnt by example and practice and handed down from teacher to pupil. The art of the basso continuo has many benefits for modern players and its study and practice should be encouraged. Through it one can learn harmony, counterpoint and many points concerning composition. I would recommend, from experience, that those embarking on the study of the basso continuo for the first time, should analyse all their solo music from the continuo player's point of view.²³

²²Thomas Mace, Musick's Monuments (London, 1676. Facs. Paris, 1958. Transcriptions by A. Souris, commentary by J. Jacquet, vol. 2, 1966. Facs. New York, 1966), 217

²³Nigel North, Continuo-Playing on the Lute, Archlute and Theorbe: A comprehensive guide for performers (London: Faber Music Ltd. In association with Faber & Faber Ldn. Boston, 1987), xi

The harmonic content implied by the bass in 1600 could be derived in two ways without referring to figures or signs. The first expectation is that every bass note will have a triad built upon it in keeping with the key signature. Next is the progression of the bass from one tone to another. The interval between one bass note and another can alter the harmonic content of one or both notes. The interval of a fifth downwards or a fourth upwards suggests a cadence with the thirds altered, if necessary, to be major. These two aspects allow the player to reach the correct harmony in a large majority of cases. The necessity for figures or signs can thus be reduced to the minority of cases.

The function of the figured bass accompaniment was to provide an harmonic background to the whole, without attempting to reproduce the vocal or instrumental parts of the composition.²⁴

1. No Figures

The indicated bass note is played as written. The realisation of the bass note implies a triad being built upon it. Keeping the key signature in mind, the triad will contain the third, the fifth, and the octave. It is important to know that these degrees are included automatically and are not usually indicated by figures:

²⁴The exact notation of all parts could be accomplished by the making of an intavolatura (tabulature). The intavolatura was often used by organists who wanted everything notated exactly, needing a score from which they could accompany the singers (in an eight-part motet for instance). If singers were absent, the organist could fill in their parts by referring to the intavolatura. (see CHAPTER 1) Michael Praetorius regarded figuring as a necessity and therefore for him the intavolatura served not as a score from which one could play but rather as a preliminary in the preparation of the figures. (see chapter 6 of his Syntagma musicum 1619)

Fig. 1 shows a musical exercise in two staves. The treble staff (top) contains four measures of chords: a triad of G3, B3, and D4; a triad of G3, B3, and D4; a triad of G3, B3, and D4; and a triad of G3, B3, and D4. The bass staff (bottom) contains four measures of notes: G2, B2, and D3; G2, B2, and D3; G2, B2, and D3; and G2, B2, and D3. The word "or" is written between the two staves in the second measure.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2 shows a musical exercise in two staves. The treble staff (top) contains four measures of chords: a triad of G3, B3, and D4; a triad of G3, B3, and D4; a triad of G3, B3, and D4; and a triad of G3, B3, and D4. The bass staff (bottom) contains four measures of notes: G2, B2, and D3; G2, B2, and D3; G2, B2, and D3; and G2, B2, and D3.

Fig. 2

or

combinations:

Fig. 3 shows a musical exercise in two staves. The treble staff (top) contains four measures of chords: a triad of G3, B3, and D4; a triad of G3, B3, and D4; a triad of G3, B3, and D4; and a triad of G3, B3, and D4. The bass staff (bottom) contains four measures of notes: G2, B2, and D3; G2, B2, and D3; G2, B2, and D3; and G2, B2, and D3.

Fig. 3

2. Signs

For the indication of a major or a minor chord, the signs \sharp , \flat , \natural , are used in order to flatten or sharpen the third. These signs can be used above, below or in the bass line:



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

"... [A] major Third is sometimes indicated by \sharp prefixed to the bass note, as though that note itself were to be raised a semitone. [...]"

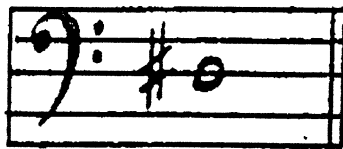


Fig. 6

This, ..., [could] be merely a mistake on the part of the [composer].²⁵

²⁵Johann Staden, "Treatise 1626" in Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 101

It is important to note that major or minor thirds can also be realised as tenths or seventeenths for instance.²⁶

The following examples constitute the basic information required for the realisation of the bass line (figured or unfigured):

3. Figures

When figures are written below the bass line they denote the distance from the bass note upwards. As mentioned previously, the third, the fifth and the octave are not normally indicated but they could be used to show the resolving note of a suspension or irregular dissonances. Thus:

- if a 6 is indicated, one does not play the 5.
- if a 4 is indicated, one does not play the 3.
- if a horizontal stroke appears after a figure, the note indicated by the figure should be sustained.

The image shows a musical score for a single instrument, likely a lute or harpsichord, in G major (one sharp) and common time. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The bass line is figured with the following figures: 9 8, 7 6 5 -, 9, 9 7 # 8 6 4, 5 #, and #. The figures are placed below the bass staff, with vertical lines connecting them to the notes they apply to. The first figure '9 8' is under the first two notes. The second figure '7 6 5 -' is under the next three notes, with a horizontal line under the '5' indicating a sustain. The third figure '9' is under the fourth note. The fourth figure '9 7 # 8 6 4' is under the next five notes. The fifth figure '5 #' is under the sixth note. The sixth figure '#' is under the seventh note. The eighth figure '#' is under the eighth note. The final figure is a whole note chord with no figure below it.

Fig. 7

²⁶"Some people, who want to be very accurate in all details, indicate with their figures the actual distance of the intervals, when the notes [...] are a [10th, 11th, 12th and 13th apart] ... But as it is too complicated, and only makes the work more difficult, it will be best to adhere to the simple numeri; for an Organist must himself take notice, with a good ear and great attention, whether it seems better to keep to the Third, Fourth, Fifth down below or to use their upper Octaves, the [10th, 11th, 12th etc.]" Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 95

4. Other Signs

- $\begin{matrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{matrix} \text{—}$ - a horizontal line after a figure or figures, shows that the harmony in the upper parts should be maintained, even if the bass line changes.
- $\overset{\prime}{5} \overset{\prime}{3}$ - a slanted stroke before the figure shows that an accented appoggiatura will precede the note.
- $\underset{\text{—}}{6} = 6^\#$ - a stroke through the top of a 6 for instance, means that the sixth is sharpened.
- $\overset{\cdot}{6}$ - a dot above a $\overset{\cdot}{6}$ for instance, means that the bass note should not be doubled.
- \circ - the figure \circ indicates tasto solo i.e. no accompaniment other than the bass note.
- $43, 98,$
 543 - two or more successive figures do not always indicate successive chords but only voice leading, appoggiaturas or passing notes.

Fig. 8

Example by Michael Praetorius

The above example taken from Herman Keller's Schule des Generalbaß-Spiels shows the realisation of a figured bass as provided by Michael Praetorius in his Syntagma musicum vol. 3²⁷

²⁷Keller, Schule, 36

After 1650 double figures were appearing with increasing regularity. Some composers added up to four figures above one another. Interesting are instances where composers notate compound figures in order to show the exact voice leading (J. S. Bach, the beginning of the sonata for violin and basso continuo in G major BWV 1021).

Some authors around 1700 went a step further by drawing a line between the figures, thus denoting the exact distribution of harmony between the two hands. The most frequently used figures are shown by means of tables in treatises of the eighteenth century. In his first treatise of 1711, Heinichen shows twelve different combinations of figures and in his second treatise Der General-Bass in der Composition (1728), the figure combinations already number thirty-two. In 1732 Rameau showed that for thirty chords, there were sixty-two different figure combinations in use. The compilation by Rousseau in 1768 of one hundred and twenty figure combinations can hardly be surpassed.²⁸

The following sources dealing with the basso continuo in its harmonic and compositional context, have been selected. Full details are provided in: SOURCES CONSULTED

AGAZZARI: The most comprehensive and concise Italian early treatise numbering twelve pages.

ARNOLD: A monumental work providing countless musical examples and cross references which could safely be called the basso continuo bible. Volume 2, chapter XXV provides elementary principles.

GASPARINI: Referred to as a very important source by many composers during the whole of the eighteenth century.

²⁸Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1206

HEINICHEN: The treatise for the eighteenth century.

KELLER: Combines practical rules with clearly defined musical examples. Whereas Arnold approaches the subject more theoretically, Keller gives an applied realisation.

KOLNEDER: This contains many shortened examples for practising the basso continuo. The amount of text is minimal and serves only to introduce the examples with occasional comments as reference.

MATTHESON: It is interesting to use this in conjunction with Heinichen's Der General-Bass for the sake of comparison. This is a much smaller treatise and easier to use.

PRAETORIUS: Important as it provides the first information on the basso continuo in Italy from a German composer's perspective.

RIEMANN: Quoted by many writers on the subject. Provides many practical examples for practising the basso continuo.

SAINT-LAMBERT: Probably the most important French treatise.

SCHNEIDER: Deals with harmonic figuration.

WERCKMEISTER: The most essential rules for the realising of a basso continuo.

WILLIAMS: Especially for those interested in Bach's use of the basso continuo.

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS OF THE BASSO CONTINUO IN ITALY

The novelty and scope of developments which emerged around 1600 have led to a tendency to regard 1599 as a punctuation between the end of one musical era and the beginning of another. Significant though these events may be, they do have clearly defined origins in sixteenth century practice, the knowledge of which contributes towards a more comprehensive understanding of the basso continuo period.

Before reviewing these factors it should be pointed out that the subject pertaining to the basso continuo is most extensive and wide-ranging. One dare not be inflexible regarding the rules, to which there are many exceptions. The art of continuo playing is a living art, demanding from each performer the ability to adapt according to the given circumstances. This is most succinctly put by Thomas Mace:

*The Greatest Excellency in This kind of Performance lies beyond whatever Directions can be given by Rule.*¹

Denis Stevens' statement: "If the idea of a basso continuo, or through-bass, had not arrived on the scene when it did ..., ... it would have been necessary to invent it"² is somewhat misleading, creating the impression that the idea, itself, arrived on the scene as a novel invention. The term, however, was something new

¹Thomas Mace, Musick's Monument (London, 1676; facs. Paris 1958; Transcriptions by A. Souris, commented by J. Jacquet, vol.2, 1966; facs. New York, 1966), 217

²Denis Stevens, "The Age of the Through-Bass" in The Pelican History of Music, vol. 2: Renaissance and Baroque, eds. Alec Robertson and Denis Stevens (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), 297

having first been introduced by Lodovico Grossi (1564-1645), also known as Lodovico da Viadana. The actual 'idea' of the basso continuo in this case could only be referring to its function, the origins of which lie further back in the sixteenth century.³ The function of the basso continuo was essentially accompanimental, but more specifically, the bass served to bind the instruments and voices, thus connecting the whole structure. This idea however, had already previously been accomplished by organ basses in the sixteenth century, as will be shown in due course.

The accompanimental function of the basso continuo in its novel sense, does not lie in the area of sacred polyphonic music, but acquires real definition in its support for a new type of monodic singing.

The Florentine monodists did not introduce the art of solo singing as is often, though wrongly, supposed: Alfred Einstein⁴, speaking about Pseudo-Monody, tells us that "genuine monody was in existence long before the appearance of the Florentine reformers, in the form of a recitation over a basso ostinato or 'ground'." Stephen Stubbs mentions a book of frottole for one voice and lute published by Bossinensis in 1509. Gerald Abraham⁵ writes about the Revival of Monody while Alfred Baumgartner⁶ speaks of a monodic fragment dating from ancient Greece back to the year 2 B.C.

³"Before the term Basso continuo was introduced by Viadana, that which it denoted was already in existence, ..." Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 6

⁴Alfred Einstein, The Italian Madrigal, trans. H. Krappe, R. H. Sessions and O. Strunk (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949), 2:836

⁵Abraham, Concise Oxford, 268

⁶Alfred Baumgartner, Der große Musikführer, vol. 1: Alte Musik (Salzburg: Kiesel Verlag, 1981), 27

It is in Greece that one finds the inspiration for Girolamo Mei's philosophy which argued that polyphonic music was not suited "to expressing the passions of the mind."⁷ The 'new music' thus grew out of an assumption that Greek poetry and drama were recited after a musical fashion, alla cantando. The most typical characteristic of this new monodic singing becomes the recitar cantando which is aimed at achieving this kind of musical speech.

Since the late fifteenth century it had been a basic requirement for musicians to be able to play a polyphonic improvisation incorporating a given melody and to be competent enough to arrange a polyphonic work for chordal instruments. There is a large number of intavolaturas in existence from this period for keyboard and plucked instruments. Either they are strictly polyphonic or otherwise they exist in the form of free chordal-style arrangements. It has been difficult to determine, however, to which extent these intavolaturas were used as accompaniments.

The combination of chordal instruments and voices for reasons of tonal support or accompaniment was probably nothing new by the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁸ In the musical Intermedio, Il commodo by Fr. Corteccia and C. Festa (1539), vocal music in four-parts was accompanied by gravicembalo and organetto with different registers.⁹ Verdelot's madrigals were arranged by Willaert for voice and lute in 1536. It is significant to note that he selected only those with a simple 'accompaniment' and a self-contained, song-like cantilena.¹⁰ This example is

⁷Abraham, Concise Oxford, 268

⁸Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1196

⁹Otto Kinkeldey, Orgel und Klavier in der Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts (Leipzig, 1910), 167

¹⁰Einstein, Madrigal, 2:840

representative of the type of monody which lute-playing singers employed at the time. Luzzasco Luzzaschi composed a four-part accompaniment for his madrigals in Italian tabulature (probably for harpsichord) which contains the complete madrigal. The ornaments and diminutions of the solo voice however, are not played. (cf. pp. 32, 33) This practice goes back as far as the 1570s.¹¹

Motets and madrigals were the most popular vehicles for musical expression during the sixteenth century. There was a tendency for the singer (whether soprano, alto, tenor or bass) to extract their vocal part from what may have been an eight-part motet for instance, and then sing this part to the accompaniment of the remaining voices, which were often substituted by instruments.

The factors, which may have encouraged this practice, are numerous. First of all, this type of rearrangement, regardless of whether the voice was a soprano or tenor, for instance, could only function because of the polyphonic, contrapuntal nature of the composition.

Sometimes, the reason for such an arrangement was that not enough singers were available to sing all the parts, as the following quote shows. On the other hand, singers had no other works at their disposal, which they could use in order to satisfy their personal vocal needs. (see Viadana p. 39)

Wir können heute beurteilen, wieviel Spielraum die Ausführenden bei der Wiedergabe einer Motette des 16. Jahrhunderts hatten und wie selbstverständlich der Komponist damit rechnete: Es war denkbar, daß sie nur von einem einzigen Sänger ... gesungen wurde, was bedeutete, daß die Orgel alle anderen Stimmen zusammenfaßte, weil keine anderen Sänger vorhanden waren.¹²

(We can see today, just how much freedom the performers had in the rendition of a 16th century motet and how naturally the composer anticipated

¹¹A. Cavicchi, "Preface" in Luzzaschis Madrigali (Brescia/Kassel: Monumenti di Musica Italiana, 1965), 14

¹²Peter Reidemeister, Historische Aufführungspraxis: Eine Einführung (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 30

singer, which meant that the organ had to combine all the other voices, because no other singers were available.)

This inclination of the singer towards a solo part with accompaniment, is a sure step away from existing polyphonic traditions in the direction of monodic revival. Apart from this, "an upper voice cannot help but dominate, a bass must support and thus assume a subordinate function, [and] inner parts must fill in and thus surrender part of their independence."¹³

Gioseffo Zarlino towards the middle of the 16th century shows a clear understanding of this fact by comparing the four voices with the four elements. The soprano which will automatically be more audible than the other voices, he compares to air. The earth sustaining the other elements is attributed to the bass which then in turn constitutes a foundation for the remaining elements, i.e. water and fire for tenor and alto respectively.¹⁴

Einstein explains that the a cappella ideal "bore within itself the germ of self-destruction." He argues that from the first moment "the equally privileged status of the several voices in the madrigal and motet was an illusion."

A climate, which allowed the cultivation of such thought, was largely provided by the Council of Trent. For some time, there had been growing dissatisfaction regarding the obscuring of sacred texts and the presence of secular elements in the music of the Catholic church.

Polyphonic music was seen as the main culprit in this connection.¹⁵ Zarlino gave an account of how this kind of music could destroy the meaning of the text:

¹³Einstein, Madrigal, 2:836

¹⁴ibid.

¹⁵Abraham, Concise Oxford, 207, 244

... so many singers and instruments that one hears nothing but the noise and uproar of voices mixed with the sounds of various instruments, a singing without judgement or distinction and with words pronounced in so disorderly a manner that nothing but confusion is heard.¹⁶

These conditions led to a reconvention of the Council in 1562 where directives for the suppression of polyphonic music and for the precedence of the text, were formulated.

In her article about basso continuo practices, Augusta Campagne argues that due to the fact that Italy demonstrated no political unity at this time, the practices are somewhat erratic and show that there existed some very individual regional traditions.¹⁷ This would mean that a number of developments could occur simultaneously. In Naples, one of the largest and culturally most important cities in Europe at the time, the works for keyboard instruments were published in four part "full score notation". The only Italian table of figures for the bass, those by Antonio Valente dating from 1576,¹⁸ also originated in Naples.

Rome and Florence, being closer to the Vatican, were both influenced strongly by the church music reform which followed the Council of Trent in 1564. Although the monodic style of singing could assert itself to a considerable extent, it was the polyphony of Palestrina's stile antico which continued to dominate proceedings. In Venice, on the other hand, disdain for the Vatican found an expression in a more progressive treatment of the existing polyphonic traditions.

¹⁶Einstein, Madrigal, 2:838

¹⁷Augusta Campagne, "Die Praxis des Begleitens im italienischen Früh-Barock" in Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis. XIX 1995, ed. Peter Reidemeister (Winterthur, Switzerland: Amadeus Verlag, 1995), 9

¹⁸Campagne, *ibid.*, 10

Although a certain amount of exchanging of ideas and practices took place between the different city states and republics, there remains a definite distinction between middle and northern Italian customs and traditions. As the century drew to its close the text as focal point became more important.

From the knowledge that a unity of poetry and music expressed by a single voice was said to have moved the ancient Greeks to experience all the affects of the soul, modern music (i.e. sixteenth century polyphony) was rejected by these thinkers and musicians as having brought musical practice to decadence through a 'laceration of the poetry', which made it incapable of truly moving the listener.¹⁹

The scholar Girolamo Mei (1519-1594), undoubtedly such a thinker, inspired Giovanni Bardi and Vincenzo Galilei with his translations of ancient Greek sources on music and aesthetics. A group of noblemen now known as the 'Florentine Camerata' gathered at Bardi's home in the 1570s and 1580s. Among those present were Caccini and Galilei who in turn inspired others with these ideas, including Peri and Cavalieri.²⁰

Thus the scene was set for a new type of monodic music, which at the hands of Peri, Caccini and Cavalieri followed soon afterwards by Monteverdi, would be destined to finally flourish in the form of opera. The most significant innovation in this regard was the so-called invention of recitative style.²¹

In sacred music, the last five years of the sixteenth century saw the printing of the first organ scores, which combined three to eight or even more voices in a

¹⁹G. Caccini, Le nuove musiche (Florence, 1602); trans. and ed. by H. Wiley Hitchcock; quoted by Stubbs, "Theory and Practice" in Neue Beiträge, 101

²⁰Stubbs, *ibid.*

²¹Although, 'recitative style of singing' is already referred to in Greece around 700 B.C.: "Vermutlich bald nach 700 v. Chr. spaltete sich die griechische Gesangskunst in den rezitierend deklamatorischen Sprechgesang der Rhapsoden und das Sololied zur Kithara;" Baumgartner, Alte Musik, 27

polyphonic work. Examples where such combinations were achieved with great diversity can be found in "Adriano Banchieri's Concerti Ecclesiastici, Venice (1595) and Giuseppe Galli's Sacri Operis Musici, Milan (1598)."²²

The idea of an organ bass originated from the vocal basses in a score. The organist would either extract the lowest bass part, or any other part, if it happened to be lower at any given moment. In this way the organist could use the bass to keep the flow and the sense of the music going, even if some of the singers were absent. The function of the organ bass was to keep the music together, but the work was complete without its inclusion.²³ In the context of a basso continuo function, however, the absence of the bass would render the composition incomplete.

This type of organ bass part first appeared in a barred score referred to as a spartitura or partitura. The individual vocal parts were usually unbarred. If these individual parts were barred, they were usually being prepared for inclusion in the score, where they were arranged one above the other.

An organ bass part was sometimes worked out in advance and printed on a single stave as a type of general-bass. Later the term spartitura was used by Agazzari to mean 'score'.²⁴ By this time, however, the organ bass part was already being referred to as basso per l'organo.²⁵

²²Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1197

²³"... the Organ Bass, though it supported and connected the whole structure [did not] bring into it anything *that was not there before*." Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 9

²⁴"The word partire (spartire) originally referred simply to the division of the stave by means of bar-lines." Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 6

²⁵In 1609 however, Diruta (in Il Transilvano second part, book 1,1) uses the word partire in the sense mentioned by Arnold. In Kinkeldey, Orgel und Klavier, 193

The scores containing four voices mostly reflect the vocal composition very accurately, while those scores containing two or three voices act as an harmonic grid following and including the highest and lowest voices, depending on the context. The further reduction of voices (in polyphonic works) to one or more bass voices, is what introduces the concept of a basso seguente, which then leads to the notation of the basso continuo. The first such bass appears in print by G. Croce in Venice as Spartidura delli motetti a otto voci (1594).²⁶ Handwritten organ basses do however appear before this date, for example the basso seguente to A. Striggio's forty-part motet Ecce beatem lucem (1587). Striggio made up a basso continuo part extracted from the lowest voices, which he called bassone. This part, played by a trombone, was designed to hold the forty parts together and was played within the circle of performers.²⁷

The basso voice to Palestrina's motet Dum complerentur (1569) is probably by the composer himself and poses new problems regarding the actual date of the basso seguente practice: "Schon 1585 ist die Mitwirkung der Orgel bei der Aufführung einer achtstimmigen Palestrina-Motette bezeugt." (P. Barbieri 1994)²⁸ (Already in 1585, the presence of the organ in a performance of an eight-voiced Palestrina motet is documented.)

It is generally accepted, however, that the term 'general bass' or 'basso continuo' first appeared in Italy around 1600. From then on, the continuo player had his own specially written part from which he could accompany the other parts or

²⁶Max Schneider, Die Anfänge des Basso Continuo und seiner Bezifferung (Leipzig, 1918), 69

²⁷ibid., 66, 67. A facsimile of part of this bassone is provided.

²⁸Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1197

voices. The term was used in reference to a figured or unfigured bass which supported the other voices in a composition, functioning as the harmonic foundation on which the entire work rested.

The first independent instrumental basses with their own parts from which one could accompany, appeared at the end of the sixteenth century. In 1594/1595 we find the first flat and sharp signs in these printed bass parts,²⁹ and the first figured basses appear in Le Musiche ... sopra l'Euridice (Florence 1600) by Jacopo Peri and Giulio Caccini, and in Emilio De' Cavalieri's Rappresentatione di Anima e di Corpo (Rome 1600).³⁰ The figured basses by Peri, Caccini and Cavalieri were used as a method to indicate the harmony and are now generally accepted as being the earliest such figured basses.

Agostino Agazzari provides the following reasons for the growing importance of the basso continuo in his Del Sonare sopra 'l Basso...³¹:

1. The new style: the cantar recitativo required a new type of composition to accommodate it.
2. Greater convenience: the making of an intavolatura was difficult and boring.
3. The huge diversity of the existing works: he reckoned that an organist would need a library larger than that of a doctor or lawyer if he was going to notate all the church works played in Rome during one year.

²⁹Schneider, Anfänge des Basso Continuo, 69

³⁰ibid., 74

³¹Agostino Agazzari, Del sonare sopra 'l basso con tutti li stromenti e dell' uso loro nel conserto (Siena , 1607; Facs, Milan 1933; Facs. Bologna 1933; Bologna: Forni, 1985), 10, 11. Also in Kinkeldey, Orgel und Klavier, 216-221

Agazzari says that the advent of the new style was responsible for the rise of the basso continuo. According to him, the old works with their counterpoint and fugal writing were not suited to the style of the basso continuo.

The so-called new style as it came to be known in Florence had a huge impact on the musical life of the time, but even so, it was at first confined to Florence and its immediate vicinity. As with the advent of all that is new, there was a tendency to break with the old completely. Naturally, as Agazzari says, there was no room for counterpoint, but this at first resulted in the new style being confined to comparatively simple, arpeggiated accompaniments. Especially at the outset of the basso continuo practice (in reference to no. 2 of Agazzari's reasons), there was always much debate as to whether one should play the intavolatura (which requires everything to be exactly notated so that nothing needs to be added or improvised) or the basso continuo part, which requires from the player the ability to fill in the parts above the bass line in a way which is suitable to the context.

... [the basso continuo] was also brought into a certain disrepute by incompetent musicians, who were incapable of reading from a full score, and who played, as best they could, from the Basso continuo, in order to save themselves the trouble of preparing an Intavolatura, ...³²

It is also difficult to make hard and fast rules as to when one may be more appropriate than the other. This is especially true during the transitory phase occurring between the old and the new styles. Even if set rules were possible, they would be constantly changing from one geographical zone to another.

Diruta's conception of the ideal accompaniment is, evidently, that it should exactly reproduce the texture of the vocal harmony ... Agazzari had attained a much freer conception of the accompaniment, for he expressly

³²Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 80

warns the organist that it is not necessary that the vocal parts should be reproduced 'as they stand'.³³

For the sake of clarity it would be helpful to define four types of accompaniment—the four covering the distance between the so-called old and new styles:

1. First we have the intavolatura of Renaissance origin.
2. Secondly there is the filling in of incomplete, non-four-part accompanying scores, where mainly the middle voices are added.
3. Next we find four-part accompaniments where the voices are conceived in relation to the bass and where the upper voice is not always doubled.
4. Finally, the free style of playing which follows the bass more in chordal progressions than in the movement of voices or voice-leading. This is far more improvised, unpredictable and not always very exact.

In Rome around 1590, the printer Simone Verovio published various volumes of sacred and secular music, using a copper engraving technique. This technique made it possible to publish music, the printing of which previously (due to the "block system" of printing, where each note had to be printed separately) could only be realised with great effort. Normally one finds the voices (mostly three voices) on two pages, notated separately with an accompanying harpsichord intavolatura to one side or at the bottom of the page.

Verovio also published a volume of madrigals by Luzzasco Luzzaschi in 1601. The music was composed between 1580 and 1597. The three singers accompanied

³³ibid., 81

themselves on the harp, gambe and lute. In turn Luzzaschi accompanied the group from the cembalo.³⁴ (see fig. 9)

If one looks at the intavolatura below the voices, one sees that the upper voice is playing in unornamental fashion, the middle voices show imitation from time to time and the four-part accompaniment is divided between the hands.

A tre soprani

troppo ben puo questo tiranno Amore Per far sog

troppo ben puo questo tiranno Amore Per far sogget to unico.

troppo ben puo questo tiranno Amore

Fig. 9
Luzzasco Luzzaschi, "Troppo ben puo" (a tre soprani),
in Madrigali per cantare e suonare, Rome 1601

The intavolatura represents the surest and most comprehensive way to secure the desired accompaniment as well as the composer's stylistic and harmonic intent. As late as 1622 one finds Italian sources which show decided preference for

³⁴Kinkeldey speaks about a collection of madrigals for 1, 2 and 3 sopranos by L. Luzzaschi. Kinkeldey, Orgel und Klavier, 157, 158

this style as opposed to the style of 'continuo playing'. These sources almost all originated in Northern Italy.

The type of debate resulting from a choice between the intavolatura and the basso continuo is illustrated by the following examples:

1. In the fourth book of Diruta's Il Transilvano written in dialogue form, he says:

Non si può dar regola sicura, atteso che non si può sapere Senza vedere le consonanze, che fanno l'altre parte sopra quel Basso generale - e di qui vieni che si commettono tanti errori di dissonanze - Sì che non vi date a questa poltonaria, partite li canti, e suonate tutte le parti, che farete bel sentire.³⁵ (One cannot give any particular rules regarding this issue, because without actually seeing the composition, one couldn't know what the other voices were playing over the bass and would therefore play many wrong dissonances. Therefore, do not succumb to this form of laziness, write the parts in full score, play them all and in so doing, make them sound beautiful)

2. Giovanni Domenico Rognoni Taeggio, an organist from Milan, in 1605 says quite emphatically that the score is far better than the basso continuo mode.³⁶

3. In 1615 Tarquinio Merula, organist in Cremona, says about his Canzonen that even though there is a basso continuo part in order to make it easier for the organists, he would personally prefer it if the part were set in score.³⁷

4. Cesare Zoilo, a Roman maestro di cappella, preferred his 1620 madrigals to be performed without accompaniment. However, he says that, if they were to be accompanied after the fashion of the day, he finds it would be better, especially as

³⁵Girolamo Diruta, Seconda Parte del Transilvano Dialogo diviso in Quattro Libri (Venice 1609; facs. ed. Bologna: Forni, 1983), 4:16

³⁶Giovanni Domenico Rognoni Taeggio, Canzoni a 4 & 8 voci, (Milan, 1605); "Preface" in Sartori, Bibliografia, 126

³⁷Tarquinio Merula, Il primo Libro delle Canzoni a quattro voci per sonare con ogni sorte de strumenti Musicali (Venice, 1615) in Sartori, Bibliografia, 211-213

far as the sections in two parts are concerned, to adopt an intavolatura.³⁸ From the printers' perspective this would not have been technically possible at the time.

Relating to the second type of accompaniment, Giovanni Paolo Cimo, organist and maestro di cappella in Milan, says that one should accompany the score using "pleasant middle voices". Ornamentations are sometimes written as a guideline to denote the style and to help the singer in the execution of the ornaments. They are not always intended to be played. Mostly the fermo is adequate as opposed to playing all the voices.³⁹

If one compares the comment above to the intavolatura of Luzzaschi, one notices that actually the same thing is being described: if three voices are written over the bass, one plays these voices (mostly without ornamentation) together with the bass. If there are two upper voices, one also plays these together with the bass, adding the missing voice so as to make up four parts. As Luzzaschi demonstrates, the middle voices should be more or less equal to the outer parts.

The following refers to the third type of accompaniment: in the preface to his L'Organo Suonarino of 1611 Adriano Banchieri, one of the most important Bolognese composers, explains which criteria one needs to be aware of when playing over the bass. He stresses the importance of good counterpoint where all

³⁸Cesare Zoilo, Preface to Madrigali a 5 (Venice, 1620) in Kinkeldey, Orgel und Klavier, 226

³⁹"Mi favoriranno anco i valenti Organisti quando sonaranno questi miei [...] (solo con Basso & Soprano) accompagnarli con le parti di mezzo con quella maggior diligenza che sia possibile, perche gli accompagnamenti grati fan grato il Canto...Et benche nel Partito in molti luoghi ci siano le gratie, come stanno nelle parti; L'ho fatto acciosi vegga lo stile; oltieche anco è di molto aginto al Cantore suonargli tal voltal'ornamento. Ma per lo più giudicarei essere bene, toccare solo il fermo rimettendomi però del tutto al perfettissimo giudizio loro..." Giovanni Paolo Cimo, Concerti Ecclesiastici (Milan, 1610; Facs. ed. Florence, 1986). Also in Basler Jahrbuch 1995, 19

four voices can be heard. One should practise this step by step by first playing the tenor over the bass and then adding the alto and soprano.⁴⁰ Banchieri also addresses the problems of consecutive fifths and octaves.

With the free style of accompaniment, the number of voices is not stipulated and the technique required is one of a type of "fixed hand position" which sometimes orientates itself according to a fingering principle.

To summarise: it is clear that an organist or harpsichordist had to be able to improvise well and this required a thorough knowledge of counterpoint. Not all performers at the beginning of the seventeenth century mastered the art of improvisation adequately and this influenced the beginnings of the basso continuo and contributed to the development of a new style. This situation is epitomised in the following passage from Adriano Banchieri's Conclusioni nel Suono dell'Organo: "...Fra tempo vi saranno dui classe di suonatori, parte organisti, cioe quelli, che praticallyranno le buone spartitura e fantasie, e altri bassisti che vinti da totale ifingardagine si contentiranno suonare semplicemente il Basso...."⁴¹ (Soon we shall have two types of players, some organists who are proficient in the playing from scores and in improvisation and others, bass players, who, succumbing to indolence, are content to simply play the bass.) Girolamo Diruta also mentions two sorts of players: "The one plays dances on the cembalo and the other plays music on the organ. The cembalists play the organ badly and the organists cannot play dances

⁴⁰Adriano Banchieri, L'Organo Suonarino (Bologna, 1605/1611; Bologna: Forni, 1978)

⁴¹Adriano Banchieri, Conclusioni nel Suona dell'Organo (Bologna, 1609; facs. ed. Bologna: Forni, 1981), 25. Also in Kinkeldey, Orgel und Klavier, 211. For interest also see Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 80, 81

and make the cembalo sound awful."⁴² This state of affairs was also as a result of the directives of the Council of Trent which forbade the playing of dances in the church.

The notation of keyboard works after a figure or "letter table" principle made exact voice-leading or doubling possible. This was the custom in Germany and Spain. In Italy, however, the first printing of keyboard works shows a mensural notation which is very similar to our modern-day keyboard notation.

The individual voice-leading is now often difficult to detect and no longer determines the harmony, which acquires its own specific function. According to Augusta Campagne, it is this development which leads directly to the birth of the basso continuo in polyphonic music. The inner voices lose their importance and their polyphonic role becomes less defined. The bass acquires a more fundamental character, the rhythm becomes simplified, while the harmonic function takes on a new and added dimension and significance. The basso continuo voice is thus no longer melodically and rhythmically equal to the other voices, but develops to resemble the bass parts in the dance music of the time. This process developed over a period of several decades and was more specific to certain musical genres than to others.

It should be mentioned for the sake of clarity, that confusion often exists relating to the so-called 'invention' of the basso continuo. Some sources attribute this invention to Viadana, but a distinction should however be made between whether one is referring to the principle of a basso continuo, the term, the method of notation

⁴²Campagne, in Basler Jahrbuch XIX. Here, translated from the German text. Accredited by Campagne to Girolama Diruta, Prima Parte del Transilvano Dialogo diviso in Quattro Libri.

or the entire concept. This is further complicated by the fact that many terms are used synonymously in reference to the basso continuo.

Although the term 'basso continuo' or 'general-bass' may today be used in a very 'general sense', one should best see the use of various terms, in the context of the works to which they refer or belong.⁴³ Viadana's claim to fame is based on the fact that he was the first composer or musician to use the term 'basso continuo'. It would thus be correct to say that Viadana introduced or invented the term basso continuo, but not the concept.

The earliest continuous basses (those discussed earlier as organ basses) were unfigured. The early figured basses would sometimes cease when the voice parts ceased and can thus not be seen as a basso continuo:

... [If], during the pauses of the vocal Bass (and perhaps other parts as well), we either supplied a Bass on the Organ, or incorporated into our organ part whichever voice part in the composition happened at the moment to be the lowest, and therefore the real basis of the harmony, the result would be a continuous part, prevailing and supplying a foundation to the entire structure --in other words a Bassus continuus,...⁴⁴

The nature of this bass, as described by Arnold, is characteristic of the basso seguente (from sequere - to follow) which eventually, developed into a basso continuo, simply--continuous bass. Thus, although Peri, Caccini and Cavalieri used the figured bass as a means to indicate the harmony, these basses also constitute a

⁴³In 1600 G. Fattorini uses the term in the following way: accompagnare, suonare sopra la parte--basso generale in Sacri concerti a due voci. Banchieri uses basso seguente in 1607: Sinfonia Ecclesiastici per sonare et cantare sopra un basso seguente op. 16. Usually synonymous with basso seguente are bassus pro organo, bassus ad organum and basso continuo per L'organo (used by A. Franzoni in 1625). H. Schütz uses bassus generalis in Auferstehungshistorie (1623). Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1194. Also used are: through-bass, thorough-bass, basso fondamento, general bass, basso numerato, figured bass, basse chifrée (pour la clavecin ou pour l'orgue) as used by Corrette, or simply, continuo.

⁴⁴Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 6

continuous accompaniment to the voice part and are therefore also 'bassi continui'. A bass, though fulfilling the latter function, would not necessarily need to be figured.

Unfigured basses integrated into a vocal composition were obviously more complicated to realise than the figured basses. If the bass was unfigured the organist had to rely on aural intuition. This was especially so if the cantus was not printed above the bass. The secure rendering of such an accompaniment was finally largely dependent on figures, especially for poly-choral works or large instrumental forces. Because of acoustical problems in the church, organists could not only rely on their ears. The bass part thus played a vital role in the realisation of the integral composition.

Vocal performances of works from this period often demonstrated a lack of continuity which, as previously mentioned, was largely due to the absence of singers whose parts were then simply omitted from the composition. In works with many voices, this was particularly disturbing even though many of the vocal parts were often substituted by solo instruments. The organ bass parts had been partly conceived in order to cover this very flaw but with varying degrees of success. Viadana was evidently struck by this need and endeavoured to provide a solution in the form of a collection of compositions for voices and organ entitled: Cento Concerti Ecclesiastici, a Una, a Due, a Tre & a Quattro voci. Con il Basso continuo per sonar nel Organo Nova inventione commoda per ogni sorte de Cantore, & per gli Organisti di Lodovico Viadana Opera Duodecima.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 2

Viadana's Preface to his concertos is very substantial and also concludes with a set of twelve rules which serve as a guide in the performance of these works. The importance and interest of this preface warrants the inclusion of a short extract:

... , hauendo...composti alcuni di questi miei Concerti con una voce sola per i Soprani, per gli Alti, per i Tenori, per i Bassi: & alcuni altri per l'istesse parti accompagnate diuersamente, con hauer riguardo à dare in esse sodisfattione ad ogni sorte di cantanti; accopiando insieme le parti con ogni sorte di varietà; di modo che chi vorrà un Soprano con un Tenore, un Tenore con un Alto, un Alto con un Canto, un Canto con un Basso, un Basso con un Alto: due Soprani, due Alti, due Tenori, due Bassi, tutti l'hauerà benissimo accomodati; & chi vorrà l'istesse parti diuersamente variate, pur anco le trouerà in questi Concerti, hora à tre, hora à quattro, talmente che non vi sarà cantante, che non si possa hauere quà dentro copia di Canti assai commodi, & seconda il gusto suo per farsi honore.

... I have ... composed some of these concertos of mine for a single voice (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and some others for the same parts in a variety of combinations, always making it my aim to give satisfaction thereby to singers of every description, combining the parts in every variety of ways, so that whoever wants a Soprano with a Tenor, a Tenor with an Alto, an Alto with a Cantus, a Cantus with a Bass, a Bass with an Alto, two Sopranos, two Altos, two Tenors, two Basses, will find them all, perfectly adapted to his requirements; and whoever wants other combinations of the same parts will also find them in these concertos, now for three, and now for four voices, so that there will be no singer who will not be able to find among them plenty of pieces, perfectly suited to his requirements and in accordance with his taste, wherewith to do himself credit.⁴⁶

Arnold gives a very detailed analysis of Viadana's concerti which shows the stylistic significance of the composition in relation to other sacred works in existence at the time. What he describes as "of paramount importance" are Viadana's twelve rules relating to the performance of his Concerti and especially of the basso continuo. From these rules one can see that Viadana always has the singer or singers in mind and that his rules exist with the express purpose of preventing any

⁴⁶Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 3,4. The entire Preface appears in Italian with English translation, as above.

possible interference from the accompanying body. (Only two of the rules apply to the singer directly.) Included here are the most essential points.⁴⁷

The first rule reminds the singers that they should sing their parts as written, with discretion and not use their vocal agility (un poco di gargante) to the detriment of the composition. He warns not to use accents or embellishments inappropriately and to realise the part with elegance. The next rule reminds the organist that the left hand part should be rendered with simplicity and that the inclusion of the right hand should not confuse or cover the singer with inappropriate embellishment.

The following pair of rules are related: rule four calls for the correct cadences and number three warns the organist to study the part beforehand. The organist should not double the leading note at a cadence unless it is in unison with the singer. 'Cadential accidents' can probably be avoided if rule three is adhered to.

Rule five tells the organist to follow a fugal subject in unison (con un Tasto solo) until all the parts have entered, after which he may accompany ad libitum. The following rule encourages the organists to make their own intavolatura which would finally be more convenient. The reason for not having made one himself, is that most organists would probably have difficulty playing such an intavolatura from sight and the majority would just play the organ bass to save themselves the trouble.

Next he warns about the drawing of additional stops on the organ. If more resonance or texture is required, the organist should fill out the chords and add the pedal. The sound of a large organ is not in keeping with the character of these concerti.

⁴⁷A very concise version numbered from 1-12 is provided by Peter Williams, "Continuo", in New Grove, 4:692

Rule number eight recommends the precise observation of accidentals and number nine allows for consecutive fifths and octaves in the organ part but not for the singers. The tenth rule suggests that for the sake of harmonic sense and the avoiding of dissonances, the organ should always be employed. Rule eleven advises that one not use boy sopranos (New Grove: boy trebles) because of the careless way they sing. Falsettists are recommended instead. The last rule tells the organist to observe the tessitura of the accompaniment in relation to the pitch of the vocal part. Except for cadences in the octave, the singing of a concerto of high pitch should never be accompanied by the organist in the lower register.

It is interesting to note that Agostino Agazzari, in his support for Viadana, and having obviously been influenced by him to a considerable extent, recommends that the accompanist avoid playing the same notes as the upper voice (soprano) and avoid the territory of the upper voices. (see last rule, Viadana) Rule six, on the other hand, is confirmed by Agazzari who also says that the intavolatura is difficult to make and the source of many errors (molto soggetta a gl'errori).

Viadana's declaration of intent to compose concerti for the church (for one to four voices) with basso continuo, rather than the traditional (five to eight-voice) motets which were complete without an independent bass part, at first glance comes as a very striking innovation.⁴⁸

In reference to footnote 48, it is true that Viadana's basso continuo sometimes functions independently of the vocal part (in the Concerti for combined voices, for instance) but mostly its function is closer to that of an organ bass. It should be

⁴⁸"The Concerti for a single voice, though differing in character from the Recitativ of the Monodists, are comparable with it in their dependence on the Bass and the harmony founded thereon." Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 9

recalled that Viadana's intent was to provide integrated compositions for the singer as an alternative to the motet. The organ bass in the motet only partly managed to link the various sections. For Viadana, the desired continuity inevitably meant extending the function of the original organ bass. The occasionally emerging independence of his basso continuo constitutes a step in this direction.⁴⁹

One cannot help but wonder though, why Viadana's Concerti (1602) should be considered so significant, when in 1600, one finds three earlier publications which, if not more significant than Viadana's compositions, are certainly of comparable importance. This is especially so in light of the fact that the real protagonist in this realm of 'new music' appeared in the form of the recitar cantando. The three composers in question all employ this type of singing, while Viadana does not (or only in a very limited sense).

The answer to this puzzle could possibly be contained in Viadana's Preface to his Concerti. In the last paragraph Viadana provides some interesting information regarding the reasons for publishing his Concerti:

L'altra causa men principale appresso alla predetta è stata quella che mi ha anco affrettato à porre in luce questa mia inventione, il vedere, cioè che alcuni di questi Concerti, che io composi cinque ò sei anni sono ritrouandomi in Roma, (essendomi souuenuto all'hora questo nouo modo) trouorno tanto fauore appresso à molti cantori, & musici, che non solamente furono fatti degni di essere spessissime volte cantati in molti lochi principalissimi; ma alcuni ancora hanno pigliata occasione di imitargli felicemente, & darne alla Stampa: Onde, & per questo, & per sodisfare à miei amici, da quali son stato piu volte instantissimamente richiesto, & persuaso à porre in luce quanto prima detti miei Concerti, mi sono finalmente risoluto dopo haver compito il designato numero di donargli alle stampe, come hora faccio, persuadendomi che questa opera non habbia ad essere in tutto disgrata à prudenti cantori, & musichi, che quando anco non vi fosse altro di buono, non sarà almeno mancato l'animo pronto, & efficace all'Opera, la quale, perche insieme con la

⁴⁹Arnold considers him "...unquestionably a pioneer, though his immediate object, ... was not so much to introduce an innovation in the matter of accompaniment, as to provide a stock of pieces which could be adequately performed, however small the available vocal resources might be." Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 10

nouità, apporta seco qualche straordinaria consideratione, potrete non isdignarui di leggere gl'infrascritti Auertimenti, che nella pratica vi apporteranno non poco giouamento.

The other less important reason (in comparison with the one aforesaid) which has also made me hasten to publish this my invention is the following: I saw that some of these *Concerti*, which I composed five or six years ago when in Rome (happening then to bethink myself of this new fashion), found such favour with many singers and musicians that they were not only found worthy to be sung again and again in many of the leading places [of worship], but that some persons actually took occasion to imitate them very cleverly and to print some [of these imitations]; wherefore, both for the above reason and also to satisfy my friends, by whom I have frequently been most urgently requested and advised to publish my said concertos as soon as possible, I have at last made up my mind, after having completed the intended number, to print them, as I am now doing, being convinced that this work need not be altogether displeasing to discerning singers and musicians, and that, even though it possess no other merit, a willing and active spirit will, at least, not have been lacking, and since it provides, along with its novelty, more than ordinary food for thought, you cannot disdain to read the following instructions, which, in practice, will be of no slight assistance.⁵⁰

From this extract one can see that Viadana's aim to write a collection of useful pieces for singers is foremost in his mind. There is no reference to special compositional techniques or the importance of a binding bass line with which he hopes to revolutionise the art of accompaniment.

These pieces probably arrived on the musical scene like a breath of fresh air, fulfilling the singers' requirements to a very large extent. The novelty of now hearing a solo voice extracted from its former polyphonic framework and set against an organic accompaniment conceived especially for it, could only have been an inspiration to other musicians. The popularity of these works (as mentioned in his preface), could not possibly have escaped the notice of the three monodists. Sources mostly refer to Viadana's Concerti coupled with its date of publication 1602. No reference is usually made to the fact that these Concerti were already being performed in 1596/97 (Arnold is the only source I have consulted who does). Yet this

⁵⁰Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 3,4

point is most significant: "... some persons actually took occasion to imitate them very cleverly and to print some ..." Short of actually mentioning the persons by name, Viadana is most frank.

It seems that he quite naively wrote his Concerti and that the innovation of his 'basso continuo part' happened almost by chance. Only after a couple of years, does Viadana himself realise the significance of his compositions and the effect they have had on other musicians.

"... I have frequently been most urgently requested ['instantissimamente richiesto'] and advised ['persuaso'] to publish my said concertos as soon as possible, ..." It seems evident here, that Viadana would like to see his concertos published, before further ideas are 'stolen' or imitated.⁵¹

The most important link in this chain of speculation is unfortunately missing. The first so-called opera, La Dafne by Peri, has regrettably been lost. The work, first performed in Florence in 1594, would have been a most interesting document from which to determine the nature of Peri's accompaniment and his possible indebtedness to Viadana in his later works.

Jacopo Peri and Giulio Caccini each rushed to publish their competitive settings of Rinuccini's L'Euridice: Peri, Le Musiche di Jacopo Peri nobil Fiorentino sopra l'Euridice del. Sig. Ott. Rinuccini. Fiorenza 1600 and Caccini, L'Euridice composta in musica in stile rappresentativo da Giulio Caccini detto Romano in

⁵¹"Es gab um diese Zeit ja kein Urheberrecht - jeder Komponist mußte gewärtigen, daß ihm wichtige und schöne Gedanken von einem anderen gestohlen und dann publiziert wurden. Sie versuchten sich möglicherweise gegen solche Raubdrucke zu schützen, indem sie ihre Ideen nicht allzu genau niederschrieben." (At this time there was no copyright - every composer had to reckon [with the fact] that important and beautiful innovations could be stolen from him and printed by someone else. They [composers] possibly tried to protect themselves against such pirate copies by not notating their ideas too exactly.) Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Der musikalische Dialog (Kassel: DTV / Bärenreiter, 1987), 50

Firenze. Emilio De'Cavalieri's Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo appeared in the same year. (see fig. 10)

Both Peri and Caccini use figured basses and unlike Viadana, they print the voice part over the bass following the example of Banchieri in his spartitura of 1595. It will be recalled that organists had difficulty realising the correct harmony without inclusion of the cantus part over the bass. Viadana's bass only involved the organ, which meant that the organist could regulate the harmony himself, after having notated the cantus above the bass part. The use of various instruments in the works of Peri and Caccini led them to adopt a system of figuring. Because of the technical demands made by the different instruments (i.e. chords on the harpsichord are shaped differently from those on the chitarrone)⁵², the inclusion of a cantus over the bass line as a means to determining the harmony, would have been superfluous. The use of figuring thus allowed each instrument, regardless of its nature, the possibility of realising the desired harmony.

The figuring of Peri and Caccini is somewhat simpler than that of Cavalieri, whose figuring enables one to realise a far preciser form of harmony (see fig. 12). Peri and Caccini, for example, never notate figures above one another or in combination with sharp or flat signs. This means that sometimes a note may be written in the voice part, but not indicated in the figuring. The ambiguity, which could arise from this, is largely reduced by Cavalieri's figuring which employs the use of double and, in one case, triple figures (figures arranged above one another). Arnold gives the following example:

" a 4 3 suspension may appear as 4. 3 (4. #3), or 11. 10 (11. #10 or 11. #),

⁵²Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 34

or 18. 17 (18. #17)"⁵³

These works first defined the genre which we today call 'the early opera', where all the personages 'speak' in music and which the contemporary composers dubbed stile rappresentativo. Cavalieri's Anima e Corpo extends the same principles of sung speech and basso continuo to the realm of modern allegory in a work which can arguably be called the first oratorio.⁵⁴

... it was this type of musical recitation for which the accompaniment of a lute or harpsichord was needed. The exact performance indications for this newly-invented dramatic solo singing were described in a most precise and almost dogmatic fashion. Up to this time the musical style had been almost entirely polyphonic. Now the singer had to depart from the character of the spoken word and for this recitar cantando an appropriate accompaniment had to be found.⁵⁵

A bass line too prominent or demanding would have distracted from the melodic line and diminished the importance of the sung text. The accompaniment which resulted for this function was what became known as the basso continuo.

For the accompaniment of these recitatives there existed exact performing instructions which only allowed for performance on instruments such as the lute, harpsichord and organ. A stringed instrument⁵⁶ which doubled or supported the bass

⁵³Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 49

⁵⁴Nevertheless "[es] wäre aber übertrieben , ihn zum Vater der Oper oder des Oratoriums zu ernennen." ([it] would be exaggerated to see him [Cavalieri] as father of the opera or oratorio.) Baumgartner, Alte Musik, 588

⁵⁵Harnoncourt, Dialog, 41

⁵⁶The 16th, 17th and 18th centuries represent the era of gambas and violins. Around 1600 the families of the gambas and violins stand next to one another. After 1800, only the violin family is being used, i.e. violin, viola, violoncello; and double bass which was previously referred to as 'violone' (though adopted from the gambas). Michael Dickreiter, Musikinstrumente: Historische Instrumente, Moderne Instrumente. Klangakustik (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1987), 60, 66

Scena Seconda Consiglio

La no-stra vita in ter - - ra Al-tro non è che guer - ra, Ch'aspi-ne

-mi-ci in-ter-no Ci sta la notte, el gior - no: E con ar - te e in-gan - no

Spes - so ca - der ci fan - no: Il mondo si fa bel - lo Co'l uetro e con l'or-pel - lo: La carne con mac

o - pre J ver-mi suoi ri - co - pre: E questa vita an-co-ra il suo cen'er in - do - ra:

Fig. 10
Emilio De' Cavalieri, Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo

was only used when the bass line enjoyed particular prominence, for instance, when the bass commented or answered melodically or motivically. It was important that the reciting solo voice not be intruded upon by inflexible rhythms or ornamentations from the basso continuo. "Generally speaking, the newest development or change to occur between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regarding the orchestral texture was the increasing importance of the outer voices."⁵⁷

An exact orchestration as we know it today did not exist. Instruments were divided into two main groups: fundamental and ornamental instruments.⁵⁸ The fundamental instruments were harpsichords, virginals, organs, harps, lutes, chitarrones and others. Instruments used purely as melodic instruments were known as ornamental. These were strings, woodwinds and also harp and lute (when not employed as fundamental instruments). In the eighteenth century the basso continuo was played by a fundamental instrument in combination with a cello for instance. The early practice after 1600 allowed a stringed or wind instrument to play the bass line, but only when the part had motivic interest.

In secular three-part pieces it was customary to play the bass part solistically (played by chitarrone, violone or trombone) and not arranged in the basso continuo setting. This phenomenon of playing without basso continuo accompaniments first appeared in dance music circles. Later the sonata da camera showed a similar tendency which was retained until ca. 1700.

⁵⁷ "The composition as creation consisted of the invention of these outer voices. Everything in between was improvised by the continuo player. These free artistic and creative additions (necessities) did not belong to the work but to the performance." Harnoncourt, Dialog, 42.

⁵⁸ Agazzari, Sonare sopra, 1-12

The Corelli Sonata da chiesa op. 1 (Rome 1681) shows a preference for the use of the basso continuo (i.e. with "Violone o Archi-leuto col Basso per l'organo"). The strength of bass resulted in the melodic use of the theorbo in addition to its role in the basso continuo. This trend is exemplified in the Italian trio sonata (eg. Corelli) where the three parts are for two violins, a tiorba (or "Violone") with the basso continuo part played on the organ.

The beginning of the basso continuo era demonstrates the use of a multitude of different instruments, especially when accompanying large groups, or polyphonic music. During the course of the seventeenth century the continuo group became increasingly defined. After 1700 there existed a mainly fixed, though smaller body of instruments for this purpose. The choice of instruments is largely governed by the occasion and venue of the performance and the availability of appropriate instruments. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the combination of instruments also differed from one country to another and even between one province and another.

The score for the Florentine Intermedii (1589) shows the use of a huge assortment of instruments. The first work of the first Intermedio, called Dalle più alte sfere, is by Antonio Archilei and the words by G. Bardi. The scoring is for solo voice, one grand lute and two chitarroni. (see fig. 11)

PRIMO INTERMEDIO

Dalle più alte sfere

Antonio ARCHIL.

(a)

Dal- le più al- te (2) sfe- re Dal- le più al-

(b)

te sfe- re Di ce-

(3) (4)

Fig. 11

Antonio Archilei, *Primo Intermedio: Dalle più alte sfere*
 Musique des Intermèdes de "La Pellegrina". Les Fêtes de Florence - 1589

In the second piece by A. G. Malvezzi entitled Sinfonia, one finds the following inscription from the first edition, which also mentions the instruments used: (see fig. 12)

La seguente Sinfonia si fece con gli detti Strumenti, & in oltre nel Cielo aperto con sei Leuti, tre grossi & tre piccoli, un Salterio, un Basso di viola, con tre tenori, quattro Tromboni, un Cornetto, una Traversa, una Cetera, una Mandola & un Sopranino di viola sonato in ogni maggiore eccellenza da Alessandro Striggio.⁵⁹ (The following Sinfonia was performed with [these] instruments and in the open air: three large and three small lutes, psaltery, bass viola, three tenors, four trombones, cornetto, flute, cittern, mandola and a sopranino di viola played excellently by Alessandro Striggio.)

The penultimate work of the sixth Intermedio, O fortunato giorno by Malvezzi, is interesting because of the huge forces it employs: it is a madrigal for thirty voices (Striggio employed forty voices in 1587) and seven choirs. The parts were doubled, which meant that sixty singers took part. (see fig. 13)

Other instruments used at this time, and up to the second half of the seventeenth century, were orpharions, dolcians, harps, theorbos, virginals, spinets, guitars, keyboard instruments adorned with silver bells, various types of organ (chamber) and bassoons. These were all used for auspicious occasions, celebrations or opera productions.

Antonio Barcotto in his treatise Regola e Breve raccordo ... (1652) divides organs into two classes: great fixed organs--grossi da muro and 'Portable' or positive organs, based as on 8' or 4' Principale. The 'Portable' organs can be further subdivided into the following: "wing-shaped" organs (organi ad ala), particularly common in Rome and the central part of Italy, consisting only of Ripieno stops; "wooden pipe" organs (organi di legno), used in academy halls and chambers, so

⁵⁹ Walker, D. P., ed. Musique des Intermèdes de "La Pellegrina": Les Fêtes de Florence - 1589 (Paris: Éditions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1986)

that the listeners' ears would not be disturbed by the proximity of too strong a sound; "regal" organs (regali), used in both secular and sacred music; "table-shaped" organs (organi in forma di tavolino) and "claviorgans" (claviorgani or graviorgani), a combination of a "table-shaped" organ and a harpsichord placed on top of the pipes' case.⁶⁰

The organ has an advantage over the harpsichord as a continuo instrument, being able to sustain the sound. Arnaldo Morelli quotes Frescobaldi saying that with the harpsichord, the main problem for correct execution of the basso continuo is centered on the art of "not leaving the instrument without sound."⁶¹

The problems concerning registration and the distribution of voices in a chord, depend on the number of voices being accompanied. Agazzari says:

Si deve suonare con molto giuditio, havendo mira al corpo delle voci, perché se sono molte convien suonar pieno e raddoppiar registri, ma se sono poche scemarli [i.e. scemarli] e metter poche consonanze, suonando l'opera più pura e giusta che sia possibile, non passando o rompendo molto ma si bene aiutandola con qualche contrabasso. (One must play with good judgement, considering the number of voices, for if there are many it is best to play with a full sound and double the stops, but if there are few one must reduce the stops and use fewer consonances, and play the music as purely and correctly as possible, without too many passages or divisions, and helping it along with some Contrabasso.)⁶²

⁶⁰Antonio Barcotto, Regola e Breve raccordo per far rendere agiustati ogni sorta di instrumenti da vento, cioè organi, claviorgani, regali e simili ... (1652), ed. Renato Lunelli (Florence: Collectanea Historiae Musicae I, 1956), 135-155

⁶¹Arnaldo Morelli, "Basso Continuo on the Organ in seventeenth-Century Italian Music" in Basler Jahrbuch XVIII, 34

⁶²Agazzari, Sonare sopra, 6

Sinfonia

MALVEZZI

Musical score for Soprano, Quinte, Alto, Settimo, and Tenore. The score is written in a single system with five staves. The top staff is for Soprano, the second for Quinte, the third for Alto, the fourth for Settimo, and the fifth for Tenore. The music is in a common time signature and features a variety of note values and rests.

Musical score for two additional vocal parts. The score is written in a single system with two staves. The top staff is for the first part and the bottom staff is for the second part. The music is in a common time signature and features a variety of note values and rests.

Fig. 12

A. G. Malvezzi, Sinfonia

Musique des Intermedes de "La Pellegrina". Les Fêtes de Florence - 1589

O fortunato giorno

RINUCCINI MALVEZZI

The score is for a six-part choir (Sesto Coro) and includes instrumental parts for strings and woodwinds. The vocal parts are labeled on the left as PRIMO CHORO, SECONDO CHORO, TERZO CHORO, QUARTO CHORO, QUINTO CHORO, and SESTO CHORO. The lyrics are: O fer-tu-na - to gior-no. The score shows the vocal lines with lyrics and the instrumental accompaniment. The title 'O fortunato giorno' is centered at the top. The names 'RINUCCINI' and 'MALVEZZI' are at the top left and right respectively.

Fig. 13

A. G. Malvezzi, Sesto Intermedio: O fortunato giorno

Musique des Intermedes de "La Pellegrina". Les Fêtes de Florence - 1589

"[Both] Viadana (1602) and Gasparini (1708) recommended that full choral passages be accompanied by large chords, played by hands and feet, rather than by the drawing of extra stops."⁶³

The organo di legno is used by Monteverdi in *Orfeo* (1607). Peri and Cavaliere may also be referring to this instrument in *Euridice* and *Rappresentatione* when they mention organo suave.⁶⁴ Probably one of the first examples for the use of the organ⁶⁵ in stage music, is found in the *Intermedia et concerti* of *La Pellegrina* (1589).

One of the most important instruments (besides the organ and harpsichord) for the realisation of the basso continuo, was the theorbo. The term theorbo can be confusing or misleading as it refers to any one of several large lutes which differed in many ways. The instrument first developed in Italy towards the end of the sixteenth century. "This instrument was expressly invented to accompany the 'Nuove Musiche' of the Florentine Camerata."⁶⁶ The qualities of the instrument are ideal because it can provide a full, rich, sustaining support for the solo voice without obscuring it. Compared with the lute, the bass register is very strong. This is due to the large body and long diapason strings. Nigel North points out that the theorbo's best qualities are lacking in the lute and that this is what makes them so different.

⁶³Williams, in *New Grove*, 4:690

⁶⁴Morelli, *Basler Jahrbuch XVIII*, 32

⁶⁵For information on organ stops and registration practices see: Morelli as mentioned above; Peter Widensky, "Zur österreichischen Orgelmusik des Barock" in *Neue Beiträge zur Aufführungspraxis*, vol.1: *Alte Musik - Lehren, Forschen, Hören* ed. Johann Trummer (Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994); M. de Saint-Lambert, *Nouveau traité de l'accompagnement de clavecin de l'orgue et des autres instruments* (Paris, 1707), 132; Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini, *Registrazioni organistiche nei 'Vespri' monteverdiani* (*Rivista Italiana di Musicologia* 2, 1967), 365-371

⁶⁶North, *Continuo-Playing*, 6-9

The term chitarrone (Caccini's preferred instrument for continuo), was merely used in reference to the theorbo in Italy until ca. 1650 and does not imply a metal-strung theorbo.⁶⁷ After this, one only encounters the term tiorba. The bass register is so strong that reinforcing by means of a bow is unnecessary. North says that this would be incorrect practice for the monodies and much instrumental music.

Three different names are used in reference to the lute: arciliuto, liuto and liuto attiorbato (all use the same basic tuning). The attiorbato was the real solo lute of the seventeenth century in Italy. Although one may play continuo on this instrument, its best role was that of a solo instrument, whereas the arciliuto is used for basso purposes.⁶⁸ When liuto is specified for a continuo part, it most likely means that the arciliuto is being referred to.

As the new Italian style grew in popularity, so did the archlute and by the eighteenth century one hears only of the archlute, the theorbo having dropped out of fashion, being considered too large and low in pitch.

Stefan Landi's score of the opera Il Sant'Alessio (Rome 1632) contains sinfonias, some of which are scored for a double bass-line. The lower bass in slower values is for the harpsichord, while the upper one is a kind of division of the bass part for the lutes, harps and theorbos. This is a clear case of bass ornamentation.⁶⁹

Monteverdi gives the most detailed information regarding the use of continuo instruments, in L'Orfeo⁷⁰ (1607). (see fig. 14) Instruments here are assigned to

⁶⁷Gut strings were standard although metal strings are mentioned as an alternative.

⁶⁸North, Continuo-Playing, 6-9

⁶⁹Stubbs, in Neue Beiträge, 105

⁷⁰Harnoncourt, Dialog, 171-179

characters and to emotional situations. One-dimensional figures, such as shepherds, are designated to the harpsichord and chitarrone, which are assigned to the characters for the duration of the work. Orfeo's changing emotions are represented by a changeable continuo. His accompaniment usually consists of organo di legno and chitarrone. In moments of extreme agitation his accompaniment changes to harpsichord, chitarrone and viola da braccio.

To the accompaniment of organ and chitarrone, Monteverdi adds obbligato instruments to emphasise the central ideas of the text. For Orfeo's address to the 'powerful spirit', Monteverdi provides two violins representing his lyre and its power, while the cornetti are representatives of the underworld.

The profusion of instrumental colour and the opulence of the early continuo orchestra as demonstrated by Monteverdi was a luxury which courts of the early seventeenth century were willing to support. In the 1640s however, opera entered the market place in Venice and orchestra proportions at times became vastly reduced due to the lack of funds. It was at this time that instrumental opulence and compositional creativity moved on to Rome.

It was also possible for one instrument to be accompanied by a group of other instruments. Muffat speaks of a performance (in Rome around 1700 under the direction of Corelli) of one of his Concerti Grossi. The Orchestra consisted of 35 strings of which one third were bass instruments (i.e. 10-12 celli and double basses).⁷¹

⁷¹ Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1209



PERSONAGGI.

1.ª Musica Prologo.
Orfeo.
Euridice.
Choro di Ninfe, e Pastori.
Speranza.
Carente.
Choro di Spiriti infernali.
Proserpina.
Plutone.
Apollo.
Choro de Pastori che fecero la maresca
nel fine.

STROMENTI.

Duei Cravicembani.
Duei contrabassi de Viola.
Dieci Viole da braccio.
Vn Arpa doppia.
Duei Violini piccoli alla Francese.
Duei Chitaroni.
Duei Organi di legno.
Tre bassi da gamba.
Quattro Tromboni.
Vn Regale.
Duei Cornetti.
Vn Flautino alla Vigesima seconda
Vn Clarino con tre trombe sordine.



TAVOLA

Prologo la Musica.	3
Atto Primo.	9
Atto Secondo.	43
Atto Terzo.	77
Atto Quarto.	114
Atto Quinto.	138

Fig. 14

Claudio Monteverdi, L'Orfeo, Universal-Edition

The basso continuo became so popular in some circles that certain works by earlier composers were re-published "...with the addition of a figured or unfigured Basso continuo for the Organ, ... One such publication, ... included three selected Masses of Palestrina ..."72

This practice started around 1610. The selected masses referred to were published no less than three times (in 1635, 1639 and 1689) showing the considerable demand which existed for such publications.⁷³

The basso continuo period allowed for three distinct lines of development:

The evolving needs of the church musician to cope with his task of providing regular music for worship, the contemporary humanist desire to recreate the musical wonders of antiquity and the crystalization of contemporary dance forms around repeating harmonic patterns.⁷⁴

The impact resulting from events and developments at the turn of the seventeenth century, had immediate and far-reaching consequences. We have seen that a conducive environment, in which these phenomena could flourish, depended on the merging of numerous factors. What is remarkable, however, is how quickly these innovations were able to spread in and beyond Italy, and how naturally they became integrated into the existing musical milieu.

By 1620 German composers had started publishing treatises on the basso continuo showing that the influence of the new Italian practice had already extended beyond the Alps.

⁷²Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 90

⁷³ibid., 91

⁷⁴Stubbs, in Neue Beiträge, 101

CHAPTER II

THE TRANSITION FROM ITALY TO GERMANY

By the time Michael Praetorius published his Syntagma musicum in 1619, the basso continuo in Italy was fairly well established.¹ In Germany however, these events were only starting to filter through in the form of treatises and written observations by German composers, who often travelled to Italy in order to study with Italian teachers.

Gregor Aichinger, who studied in Venice and Rome, was one such German composer. He evidently followed in Viadana's footsteps, calling one of his own Italian compositions Cantiones ecclesiasticae (1607). In his preface, he goes as far as saying: "... welchem Viadana Ich in gegenwertigen opuscolo hab wöllen nach-folgen." (...Viadana who with this work of mine I wanted to follow.)²

Viadana's Concerti were published six years later in 1613 by Nicolaus Stein at Frankfurt under the title of Opera omnia concertuum 1, 2, 3, 4 vocum cum Basso continuo et generali Organo applicato; novaque inventione pro omni genere et sorte Cantorum et Organistarum accomodata Auctore excellentiss.³

The treatise by Michael Praetorius in three volumes entitled Syntagma musicum (1619), represents the most important documentation of current Italian

¹As mentioned in CHAPTER I, existing polyphonic traditions were at first still able to dominate proceedings, though the extent to which this happened should be seen in a geographical context. (see p. 26)

²Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1200

³Arnold gives the date as 1613, Bötticher and Christensen give the date 1610. Probably more than one edition appeared.

practices. Praetorius who was much influenced by Agazzari was able to reach a widespread audience in Germany as a result of his publication. In Italy, the general character of composition had gradually changed since the three monodists towards the re-inclusion of polyphony. However, this return to polyphony did not extend to the accompaniment, which started to "[acquire] the character of an harmonic background to the polyphony of the principal parts,..."⁴

Italian polyphonic characteristics in keyboard accompaniment during the first half of the seventeenth century (after 1610) appear in the form of either three-part, four-part or free-style accompaniments. The free-style accompaniments alternate between three, four or more voices. (see fig. 15)

In the second half of the century this trend develops towards the realisation of a fuller texture. (see fig. 16) Characteristic are mainly chordal types of accompaniment (which still contain polyphonic elements) and accompaniments which show the use of acciaccaturas and mordents. Dissonances, resulting from the use of acciaccaturas, are also a very important component.

A general characteristic for the entire period is a cantabile upper voice, which, when the solo part is marked tacet, imitates the soloist, using diminutions or ornaments. Arpeggiated chords are either realised freely (as rolled chords) or within a strict rhythmic framework (as broken-chord patterns).

In Italy, the basso continuo had often been advocated and practised by those who were incompetent and unable to adapt it appropriately to the musical context, simply seeing the playing of a (more or less adequately harmonised) bass line as an

⁴Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 238

easy way out.⁵ For this reason the younger generation of organists may have approached the subject of the basso continuo rather dubiously. "... [The] younger school of Organists seemed to have considered that, by acquiring the art of using it, they were absolved from the necessity of cultivating other important branches of the Organists' equipment, such as the art of improvisation, playing from score, and a solid knowledge of counterpoint."⁶

Da sventu - ra a sventu - ra pas -
Da pensic - ri a pensic - ri vo -

so. pas - so l'ho - re. l'ho - re dolen -
lo. vo - lo sen - za. sen - za que -

Fig. 15
Free-style polyphonic setting of the
Cantata Da sventura (1690) by Alessandro Scarlatti

⁵It may be recalled that certain works (without basso continuo parts) by earlier composers (such as Palestrina) appeared in new publications with the addition of a basso continuo part for organ (see p. 60). Arnold refers to this misuse as "... an abuse, in the shape of putting 'old wine into new bottles' " (See also: "...The basso continuo was also brought into disrepute by incompetent musicians, ..." p. 31)

⁶Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 238

The image displays six systems of musical notation, each consisting of two staves (treble and bass clefs). The first system shows a vocal line with a treble clef and a bass line with a bass clef. The second system shows a vocal line with a treble clef and a bass line with a bass clef. The third system shows a vocal line with a treble clef and a bass line with a bass clef. The fourth system shows a vocal line with a treble clef and a bass line with a bass clef. The fifth system shows a vocal line with a treble clef and a bass line with a bass clef. The sixth system shows a vocal line with a treble clef and a bass line with a bass clef. The notation includes various note values, rests, and bar lines, illustrating different textures of accompaniment.

Fig. 16

An example by Georg Muffat showing three and four-part accompaniment as well as full-textured accompaniment, taken from his Regulae concertuum partiturae (1699), 103

Nevertheless, by the 1670s it can be assumed that most Italian organists were already accompanying from bass lines, even though these basses may have been sparsely figured. According to Williams, "[this] appears to have been the case in Germany only in the more cosmopolitan court chapels."⁷ There is truth in this, but it seems obvious from the preface to Schütz's Geistliche Chormusik (1648) that at that time, the basso continuo as a concept already existed.⁸ (see p. 70)

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) was one of Germany's most respected composers of the early Baroque. His first major work, Die Psalmen Davids op. 2, already demonstrates the use of the basso continuo, indicated as follows: "mit beygefügten Basso continuo, vor die Orgel / Lauten / Chitaron etc." Furthermore one sees from his preface to the work that his use of the basso continuo is very specific:

Der Basso continuo ist eigentlich nur für die Psalmen gemeint. Von der Motet an ... biß zum Beschluß deß operis werden sich fleißige Organisten mit absetzen in die Partitur zu bemühen,⁹ (The basso continuo is actually only meant for the psalms. From the motet onwards ... up to the end of the work, diligent organists will have to make an intavolatura, ...)

It is the conviction of Schütz that composers need to have a thorough grounding of contrapuntal techniques. Following Italian traditions¹⁰, he expects a variety of different types of accompaniment. For concertante works he finds the

⁷Williams, in New Grove, 4:688

⁸"Man kann davon ausgehen, daß der Generalbaß ab 1650 in Deutschland als Struktur und Kompositionsprinzip selbstverständlich verwendet wurde und ihm eine fundamentale Bedeutung zukam." (One can take it for granted that from 1650 the 'general bass' in Germany, as a structure and a compositional principle, was being employed as a matter of course and had acquired fundamental importance.) Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1201

⁹Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1199

¹⁰Abraham, Concise Oxford, "The greatest German composer of the seventeenth century, ... studied in Venice..., composed Italian madrigals." 205; "Both Scheidt and Schütz commanded considerable diversity of styles but Scheidt continued to remain closer to Lutheran hymnody, Schütz to adapt and develop Italian methods." 352

It is interesting to note that both Schütz and Praetorius use similar instrumental groupings and that the setting of the motets also shows Italian influence. Schütz, like many composers of Italian polyphonic music (at the turn of the sixteenth century) generally prefers the use of an intavolatura as opposed to the basso continuo, but in his case, the basso continuo part is not always continuous.¹² In Geistliche Chormusik (1648) a continuo part was added because it was considered good and desirable, and not out of necessity. Thus, one can deduce that the obligato parts are complete in themselves and do not depend on the support of a continuo instrument. (see also fig. 19)

It should be mentioned that Italian fashions dominated Germany in respect of theorbos and archlutes until the eighteenth century, so that when playing continuo in music by Schütz and his contemporaries, or in the Concerti grossi of Muffat, the same considerations concerning choice of instruments would apply (as in the Italian practice of that time).¹³

The following inclusion of the preface to Geistliche Chormusik is self explanatory (extract): (see fig. 18a,b)

Günstiger Leser: / Es ist bekand und am Tage / das nach dem der über den
 / Bassum Continuum concertirende Stylus Compositionis, aus Italia auch uns
 Deutschen zu Gesichte kommen und in die Hände gerathen / derselbige gar
 sehr von uns beliebt worden ist / und dahero auch mehr / Nachfolger
 bekommen hat / als vorhin kein anderer jemahls mag gehabt haben / davon
 dann die bißhero unterschiedliche in Deutschland hin und wieder
 ausgelassene / und in denen Buchläden befindliche Musicalische Opera,
 genugsam Zeugnüß geben. / nun tadele ich zwar solch Beginnen
 keinesweges; sondern vermerke vielmehr / hierunter auch unter unserer
 deutschen Nation / allerhand zu der Profession der / Music wohlgeschickte

¹²Praetorius tells us about the basso continuo in Italy: "The 'Bassus generalis seu continuus,' ... [and] is so called because it continues from beginning to end, ... ". Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 93

¹³North, Continuo-Playing, 6



Günstiger Leser :

Est bestand und am Tage / das nach dem der über den Bassum Continuum concertirende Stylus Compositionis, aus Italla auch uns Deutschen zu Gesichte kommen und in die Hände gerathen / derselbige gar sehr von uns beliebt worden ist / und daher auch nicht Nachfolger bekommen hat / als vorhin kein anderer jemahle mag gehabt haben / davon dann die hieher unterschiedliche in Deuschland hin und wieder ausgelassene / und in denen Buchläden befindliche Musicalische Opera, genugsam Zeugniß geben. Nun tadele ich zwar solch Beginnen keines weges; Sondern vermerte vielmehr hierunter auch unter unserer Deuschler Nation / allerhand zu der Profection der Musick wohlgeschickte und geneigte Ingenia, denen ich auch ihr Lob gerne gönne / und selbst zugeben willig bin; Weil es aber gleichwohl an dem / auch bey allen in guten Schulen erzogenen Musicis auser zweifel ist / daß in dem schwersten Studio Contrapuncti, niemand andere Arten der Composition in guter Ordnung angehen / und dieselbigen gebühlich handeln oder tractiren könne / er habe sich dann vorher in dem Style ohne den Bassum Continuum genugsam geübet / und darneben die zu einer Regulirten Composition notwendige Requisite wohl eingeohlet / als da (unter andern) sind die Dispositiones Majorum; Fuga Simpliciter, mixta, inversa; Contrapunctum duplex: Differentia Styli in arte Musici diversi: Modulatio Vocum: Concazio subiectorum. &c. Und dergleichen Dinge mehr; Worvon die gelehrten Theorici zweifelsüchtig schreiben / und in Schola Practica die Studiosi Contrapuncti mit lebendiger Stimme unterrichtet werden: Ohne welche; bey erfahrenen Componisten ja keine richtige Composition (ob auch solche denen in der Musick nicht recht gelehrten Ohren / gleichsam als eine himmlische Harmoni fürkommen möchte) nicht bestehen / oder doch nicht viel höher als einer tauben Nuß werth geschäget werden kan / &c.

Als bin ich hierdurch veranlaßet worden dero gleichen Wercklein ohne Bassum Continuum auch einzeln wieder anzugehen / und hiedurch vielleicht etliche / insonderheit aber theils der angehenden Deutschen Componisten anzurathen / das / ehe Sie zu dem concertirenden Style schreiten / Sie vorher diese harte Nuß (als worinnen der rechte Kern / und das rechte Fundament eines guten Contrapuncti zu suchen ist) aufheben / und darinnen ihre erste Proba ablegen möchten: Allermassen dann auch in Itallen / als auff der rechten Musicalischen hohen Schule (als in meiner Jugend ich erstmahls meine Fundamenta in dieser Professionulegen angefangen) der Gebrauch gewesen; das die Anfahenden ledersmahls dergleichen Geist- oder Weltlich Wercklein / ohne den Bassum Continuum, zu erst recht ausgearbeitet / und also von sich gelassen haben / wie denn daselbst solch gute Ordnung vernuthlichen noch in acht genommen wird. Welche weise zum Auffnehmen der Musick / auch Vermehrung unserer Nation Ruhm / wohlgenemte Erinnerung dann / ein jedweder um besten / und zu niemands Verfleinerung gememet / von mir vermerten wolle.

Es

und geneigte Ingenia, denen ich auch ihr Lob gerne gönne / und selbst zugeben willig bin: Weil es aber gleichwohl an dem / auch bey allen in / guten Schulen erzogenen Musicis auser zweifel ist / daß in dem schwersten Studio / Contrapuncti, niemand andere Arten der Composition in guter Ordnung angehen / und dieselbigen gebühlich handeln oder tractiren könne / er habe sich dann vorher / in dem Style ohne den Bassum Continuum genugsam geübet / und darneben die zu / einer Regulirten Composition notwendige ...

Fig. 18a

Heinrich Schütz, Geistliche Chormusik SWV 369-397,
Copy of Preface, first edition 1648, Wolfenbüttel

(Gracious reader: it is well-known that after that style of composition known as "basso continuo concertato", which originated in Italy, was introduced to us in Germany, it became very popular and was more important than any other. To this the many different musical works now found in the bookshops bear abundant witness. Now I do not in any way find fault with these

Es ist aber mit Stillsehmelgen ferner nicht zu übergehen/ das auch dieser Servus der Kirchen-Music ohne den Bassum Continuum (welche nur dabero Geistliche Chor-Music zu tituliren beliebt hat) nicht allezeit emerley ist/ sondern das etliche solcher Compositionen eigentlich zum Pulver/ oder zu einem/ bendes mit Vocal- und Instrumental- Stimmen besetzten vollen Choro gemeinet/ theils aber derogestalt aufgesetzt seyn/ das mit besserem Effect die Parteyen nicht dupirer, Triplirer, &c. sondern in Vocal und Instrumental- Parteyen vertheilet/ und auff solche Weise mit gutem Effect in die Digtel auch wohl gar per Choros (wann es eine Composition von Alto/ Sopraß/ oder mehr Stimmen ist) Musiciret werden können. Von welcher beyderley Gattung dann auch im gegenwärtigen meynen mit wenig Stimmen vor diesemahl nur heraus gegebenen Wercklein (und bevorab unter den Hymnisten/ bey welchen ich dabero auch den Text nicht habe unterlegen lassen) anzutreffen seyn: Gestalt der verständige Musicus in etlichen vorhergehenden dergleichen selbst wohl vermercken/ und dabero mit dero Anstellung gebühlich zuverfahren wissen wird.

Worbey ich dann zugleich hiernit öffentlich proferirer und gebethen haben will/ das niemand/ was ideo gedacht worden/ dahin ziehen wolle/ als ob dieses oder einiges meiner ausgelassenen Musicalischen Wercke ich jemand zur Information oder gewissen Wodell vorstellen und recommendiren wolte/ (deren Wenigkeit ich danc selbst gerne gestehe.) sondern will ich vielmehr alle und lebe/ an die von allen vornehmsten Componisten gleichsam Canonisirte Italianische und andere/ Alte und Neue Classicos Autores hiernit gewiesen haben/ als deren fürtreffliche und unvergleichliche Opera denen jenigen/ die solche absehen und mit Fleiß sich darinnen umbsehen werden: In einem und dem andern Srylo als ein helles Licht fürleuchten/ und auff den rechten Weg zu dem Studio Contrapuncti anführen können.

Wie dann über dieses ich noch der Hoffnung lebe/ auch allbereit hiervon in etwas Nachricht habe/ das ein/ mir wohlbekandter/ so wohl in Theoria als Praxi hocherfahrner Musicus/ herrschet dergleichen Tractat an das Tage-licht werde kommen lassen/ der hierzu/ insonderheit uns Deutschen auch sehr zuträglich und nutzbar wird seyn können: Welches/ das es erfolgen möge/ dem allgemeinen Studio Musicae zum besten/ ich mit Fleiß zu sollicitiren dann nicht unterlassen will.

Endlich: Da auch jemand von den Organisten etwa in dieses mein ohne Bassum Continuum eigentlich aufgesetztes Wercklein/ wohl und genau nur einzuschlagen Beliebung haben/ und solches in die Tabulatur oder Partitur abzufetzen sich nicht verdriessen lassen wird: lebe ich der Hoffnung/ daß der hierauff gewandte Fleiß und Bemühung ihn nicht allein nicht getriwen/ sondern auch diese Art der Music desto mehr ihren gewünschten Effect erreichen werde.

GDII mit uns sampt und sonders in Gnaden!

Author.



Fig. 18b

Heinrich Schütz, Geistliche Chormusik SWV 369-397,
Copy of Preface, first edition 1648, Wolfenbüttel

beginnings, rather do I detect both here and in works by German composers many clever and ingenious devices in the writing of music which have found favour and on which I would myself bestow praise. However, since for any musician, trained in the best schools in that most difficult study of counterpoint, it is customary not to attempt to produce other types of composition, treating and developing them appropriately, unless he has previously practised himself in the style without basso continuo and furthermore made a study of those skills necessary for a well-regulated manner of composition ...)¹⁴

... Furthermore, I live in great hope and indeed have some reasons to believe, that a well known musician, highly experienced in both theory and practice, will shortly publish a treatise which will prove very useful and advantageous, especially to us in Germany. And this, when it appears, I shall not hesitate to recommend whenever possible for the better furtherance of the general study of music. Finally, since an organist might occasionally want to play properly and correctly in the performance of one of these slight works without basso continuo and is not averse to transcribing it into tabulature or score form, I live in hope that he may not rue the effort expended, but rather that the music itself may all the more reach its desired effect.¹⁵

It seems that, for continuo purposes, Schütz prefers the organ above all other instruments. The lute is also often used but the harpsichord makes fewer appearances. In Mehrchörige Psalmen (1619), he speaks of a Coro di Liuti¹⁶ for the continuo and in his Exequien (1636) he shows his enthusiasm for the use of a Violine (16'), which is rather unusual: "aller bequehmste ... und beste Instrument ... wann es recht gebraucht wird."¹⁷ (The most convenient ... and best instrument when used appropriately)

Shortly before 1700 the diversification of national styles becomes more pronounced especially for Italy, Germany and France. As mentioned at the outset of

¹⁴Heinrich Schütz, Das ist je gewisslich wahr und ein teuer werthes Wort: Geistliche Chormusik 1648, opus 11 Nr 20 (SWV 388). Ed. Günter Graulich, Paul Horn. "Notes on SWV 388" trans. By Ursula Price and Derek McCulloch (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler Verlag)

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1208

¹⁷ibid.

this chapter, there is in the second half of the seventeenth century a tendency in Italy towards the realisation of fuller textures. The first composer to advocate the suonar pieno was probably Bernardo Pasquini. Francesco Gasparini in 1708 published his L'armonico pratico al cimbalo, which besides providing the most important information regarding the realisation of acciaccaturas and embellishments, also confirms the trend towards playing with 'full sound'.¹⁸

Around 1700 two 'General-bass schools' emerged in Germany. The first school of thought was inspired by Italy, consisting of Southern German and Austrian composers, of which the best known was Georg Muffat (1690-1770). The characteristic style of basso continuo accompaniment is seen to be divided fairly equally between the hands.

The other group is representative of North (and central) Germany, and the general accompanimental trend here shows the tendency towards playing the bass with the left hand and the chords with the right hand.¹⁹ Three composers are associated with this style, Friderich Erhard Niedt, Andreas Werckmeister and Johann David Heinichen. Each of these composers published a treatise, in 1700, 1702 and 1711 respectively.

Heinichen's first treatise of 1711, discussing the basso continuo in relation to recitative style and its role in the church and the theatre, is dismissed by Arnold in favour of his second treatise which appeared seventeen years later in 1728.²⁰

¹⁸Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 250-255 (also Gasparini 1708)

¹⁹"... (Locke, Blow, Saint-Lambert, Werckmeister, Niedt) either expressly state, or indicate by their examples, that, in a general way, the Bass is to be played with the left hand, and the chords with the right ." *ibid.*, 238

²⁰"This little work was, however, so completely dwarfed and superseded by a second edition ..., that we need not further concern ourselves with it." Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 255

Das ist je gewißlich wahr und ein teuer wertes Wort

1. Timotheus 1, 15-17

Geistliche Chormusik 1648, Opus 11 Nr. 20 (SWV 388)

Heinrich Schütz
1585-1672

CANTUS. *1. Das ist je gewißlich wahr*
omnes 3 5 *Soli*

Sopran 1
Instrument 1
(*d¹ - f²*)
DAS Das ist je ge-wiß-lich wahr und ein teu-
SEXTUS. Hear the faith-ful Word of God, for 'tis wor-

Sopran 2
Instrument 2
(*cis¹ - e²*)
DAS Das ist je ge-wiß-lich wahr und ein
ALTUS. Hear the faith-ful Word of God, for 'tis

Altus
Instrument 3
(*g - a¹*)
DAS Das ist je ge-wiß-lich wahr und ein teu-
TENOR. Hear the faith-ful Word of God, for 'tis wor-

Tenor 1
Instrument 4
(*c - g¹*)
DAS Das ist je ge-wiß-lich wahr und ein
QUINTUS. Hear the faith-ful Word of God, for 'tis

Tenor 2
Instrument 5
(*c - e¹*)
DAS Das ist je ge-wiß-lich wahr und ein teu-
BASSUS. Hear the faith-ful Word of God, for 'tis wor-

Bass
Instrument 6
(*F - c¹*)
DAS Das ist je ge-wiß-lich wahr,
omnes 3 5 *Soli*

Basso continuo
ad libitum
(*F - c¹*)

Fig. 19

Heinrich Schütz, Das ist je gewißlich wahr und ein teuer wertes Wort, SWV 388
As it is often the case with Schütz, the basso continuo part is marked: *ad libitum*.

It is interesting to note, however, that the first treatise already makes a clear distinction between the use of the basso continuo in church and its use in the theatre. Furthermore, a large portion of the treatise is devoted to the importance of ornamentation, which as mentioned previously was an important characteristic of accompaniment in the second half of the seventeenth century.

North German sources around 1700 describe a simple four-part chordal accompaniment. Both Niedt and Werckmeister refer to the accompaniment as being divided between the left hand playing the bass and the right hand playing the chords. With the accompaniment distributed in this way, it would have been difficult to achieve a cantabile upper voice as was characteristic of the Italian style.

Later in 1728 Heinichen mentions that when the upper voice is of a melodic or solistic nature, the accompaniment should be divided between the hands. This is also mentioned by Mattheson.²¹

The emerging independence of the harpsichord in an ensemble is shown in the following quote by Mattheson: "Hingegen steht es gar fein, wenn sich dass Clavicimbel, bey ersehender Gelegenheit, mit einigen besondern Zierrathen hören lässt, auch mit den anderen Instrumenten in die Wette arbeitet."²² (It is very nice if the harpsichord can, when an opportunity arises, make itself heard through some special ornaments [effects], and [in so doing] also work towards competing with the other instruments.)

Andreas Werckmeister in 1702 says that the basso continuo should be played "ohne viel Lauffwerck und Gequirrle" (without a lot of scales and flurry). He says however, that one can enliven the accompaniment by using "gebrochene Manieren" (broken arpeggios). The word Manieren is used in treatises from this period to refer to ornamentation.²³ Manierlichen Generalbass is an actual concept referred to often by Heinichen and is a term used throughout the eighteenth century to denote a particular style of accompaniment.

Heinichen makes special reference to the importance of a 'good arpeggio' in accompaniment. The so-called "gutes Arpeggio" was a very important component of the basso continuo accompaniment during the eighteenth century. In his first treatise he says: " ... dass die meiste Kunst [auf dem Cembalo darin bestehe] die Noten mit

²¹Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1231

²²ibid.

²³Andreas Werckmeister, Die nothwendigsten Anmerckungen und Regeln wie der Bassus continuus oder Gb. wohl könne tractiret werden ... (1702), 117

guter Art zu brechen oder zu theilen: wobey ein gutes Arpeggio viel Dienste thut."²⁴
 (... that the greatest art [on the harpsichord consists of] the ideal separation or
 breaking of chords: whereby a good arpeggio serves well as a means to achieving
 this). (see fig. 20)

From our perspective today, the use of an arpeggio or a broken chord as a
 means to varying an accompaniment may seem to be rather obvious or elementary.
 One does appreciate the significance of these 'innovations', though, when one
 examines the nature of accompaniment preceding their appearance.

Heinichen was instrumental in bringing the Italian style to Germany. Between
 1710 and 1717 he lived in Venice where he made contact with Albinoni, Gasparini
 and Vivaldi among others. The 1711 treatise has the distinction of being the first
 German work giving keyboard players detailed instructions on how to realise
 continuo accompaniments from figured, as well as unfigured, basses and to draw
 careful distinction between the stylus gravis and the stylus theatralus.²⁵

The most comprehensive document, showing the influence of Italian customs
 and practices regarding the basso continuo, is found in the form of his second
 treatise Der General-Bass in der Composition (1728). Heinichen was the first of
 several eighteenth-century writers to advocate teaching composition using the
 principles of the basso continuo.²⁶ Mentioned in his huge treatise of 960 pages are
 the works and methods of Gasparini, Mattheson, Rameau, Saint-Lambert, Scarlatti,
 Vivaldi, Werckmeister etc.

²⁴Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3: 1227

²⁵George J. Buelow, "The Italian Influence in Heinichen's 'Der General-Bass ...' " in Basler Jahrbuch XVIII, 49

²⁶ibid.

The image displays four musical examples of arpeggios, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The first example is a two-voice arpeggio with a treble staff containing four groups of eighth notes and a bass staff with a single eighth note per group. The second example is a two-voice arpeggio with a treble staff containing five groups of eighth notes and a bass staff with a single eighth note per group. The third example is a two-voice arpeggio with a treble staff containing four groups of eighth notes and a bass staff with a single eighth note per group. The fourth example is a four-voice arpeggio with a treble staff containing four groups of eighth notes and a bass staff with a single eighth note per group.

Fig. 20

The first two-voiced arpeggio is by
J. D. Heinichen, Der General-Bass in der Composition, 1728, 550
The other examples are of two-, three- and four-voiced arpeggios and are by
J. Mattheson from Grosse General-Bass-Schule, 1731, 205, 245

The 1728 treatise reflects the most significant stylistic characteristics of the time and gives an excellent insight into accompanimental practices. Here are some of the most important factors relating to basso continuo accompaniments:

Heinichen says that, if one only plays chords where the harmony changes, the accompaniment sounds "viel zu leer"²⁷ (much too empty). Instead one should play a new chord for each bass note even when the bass note happens to be a passing note. He suggests that one moves in parallel thirds or tenths to the bass but that even when doing this, one should still repeat the other notes in the chord as well.

Bötticher and Christensen mention that Telemann and J. S. Bach also tend towards the repetition of chords.²⁸ Sometimes Bach repeats a chord on each bass note, as in the accompaniment of his Sonata for violin and harpsichord obbligato BWV 1016 (third movement).

Heinichen also mentions, as a common practice, the doubling of the bass line in octaves. Both Heinichen and Mattheson mention that doubling of the bass line can also occur in quick scale passages or leaps. One of the most important characteristics of accompaniment during this period is what in German is called Vollstimmigkeit (full-texturedness). (see fig. 21) The use of das freie Arpeggio contributes towards this style of accompaniment: "... je besser, je vollstimmiger ... geschieht auf so eine Arth, und mit solcher Geschwindigkeit, dass es sich mehr oculariter, als durch Noten zeigen lässt."²⁹ (... the fuller, the better ... [this arpeggio])

²⁷Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3: 1228

²⁸ibid.

²⁹Heinichen, Der General-Bass in der Composition (Dresden, 1728), 556f.

occurs in such a way, and with such speed, that it is shown more as an effect than as notes.)

The image displays three systems of musical notation, each consisting of a treble and a bass staff. The notation is dense and fast, characteristic of the 'Vollstimmige' style. The first system shows a treble staff with chords and a bass staff with a rapid, flowing line. The second system continues this pattern with similar rhythmic intensity. The third system also maintains the fast, dense texture. A small number '54' is visible between the first and second systems.

Fig. 21
An example by Heinrich of a Vollstimmige accompaniment
taken from Der General-Bass... , 1728, 442

The ever-increasing sonorities of music in the eighteenth century resulted in the harpsichord being overpowered by the instrumental and vocal textures. This was most certainly a reason for the move towards Vollstimmigkeit. Although the vollstimmige style of accompaniment was not appropriate for realisations on the organ, Heinichen does see the knowledge of this style of accompaniment as an integral part of the basso continuo practice.

Heinichen warns that the top and lowest parts of the accompaniment should be kept free of parallel octaves and fifths. The space between the hands has to be filled in with as many chord tones as the fingers can play. The octaves and fifths which will arise between the inner voices, he says, are inoffensive because they are heard as resulting from the crossing of parts. He goes on to explain that to ensure this illusion, it is essential that the chords of the two hands are not too far apart.³⁰

It is interesting to note that the increasing of sonorities is also mentioned by Praetorius in 1619³¹ and Lorenzo Penna in 1672³². Both recommended the inclusion of chord tones in the left hand when accompanying a large ensemble of instruments or voices.

The use of dissonances is a very important inclusion in the art of accompaniment. George J. Buelow in his article about the Italian influence on Heinichen says that before Heinichen, no Italian discussion of the continuo practice or any Italian music theorist ever touched on the issue of dissonances.³³

³⁰ibid., 132

³¹Praetorius, Syntagma, 3:145

³²Penna, Li primi albori mausicali ... , 82-83. See also Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 133-153

³³Buelow, in Basler Jahrbuch XVIII, 56

Heinichen tried to codify the various types of dissonant chordal progressions. This was done by defining basic principles of harmonic procedures underlying the Italian practice in the theatrical style.³⁴ Heinichen says: "Dass ordentliche Weise kein in dissonantien bestehender theatralischer Satz oder gang vor richtig passiren könne, wo nicht zugleich eine legale resolution der dissonanz darauf erfolget..."³⁵ (Normally in the theatrical style no chord or progression can be considered correct that is not followed by a correct resolution of the dissonance...)

On the subject of embellishment, Heinichen says: "Es besteht aber die Kunst eines manierlichen General-Basses überhaupt darinnen, dass man seine Accorde nicht überall platt niederschlage, sondern in alle Stimmen (besonders in der äußersten Stimme der rechten Hand, die am meisten vorsticht) hier und dar eine Manier mit anbringe, und dadurch dem Accompagnement mehr Grace gebe..."³⁶ (The art of the embellished basso continuo however, really consists of one not simply playing the chords, but of using an ornament here and there in all parts [particularly in the outer most part of the right hand which usually stands out] and thereby giving more elegance to the accompaniment.) (see fig. 22)

In summarising, the most important points concerning the style of basso continuo accompaniment as found in Germany during the first half of the eighteenth century are:

(a) the accompaniment can be set using four or more voices. In a simple four-part accompaniment the inclusion of a dissonance will result in five voices; (b) full-textured accompaniment is desirable; (c) an arpeggio can be used in a variety of

³⁴ibid.

³⁵Heinichen, General-Bass, 587

³⁶ibid., 521

ways, helping towards achieving this type of accompaniment. The arpeggio can also be used in a mainly ornamental way; (d) thirds, sixths or tenths can be used in parallel movements to the bass line or solo voice; (e) when the solo voice or solo part is marked tacet, the accompaniment can imitate the solo part or play passing melodic phrases to bridge the gap between the solo sections; (f) each bass note should have an accompanying chord, also for passing notes; (g) the bass line may be doubled (i.e. octaves) in scale passages and passages with leaps regardless of tempo; (h) a variety of ornaments or embellishments may be used; (i) dissonances may be employed but have to be resolved appropriately.

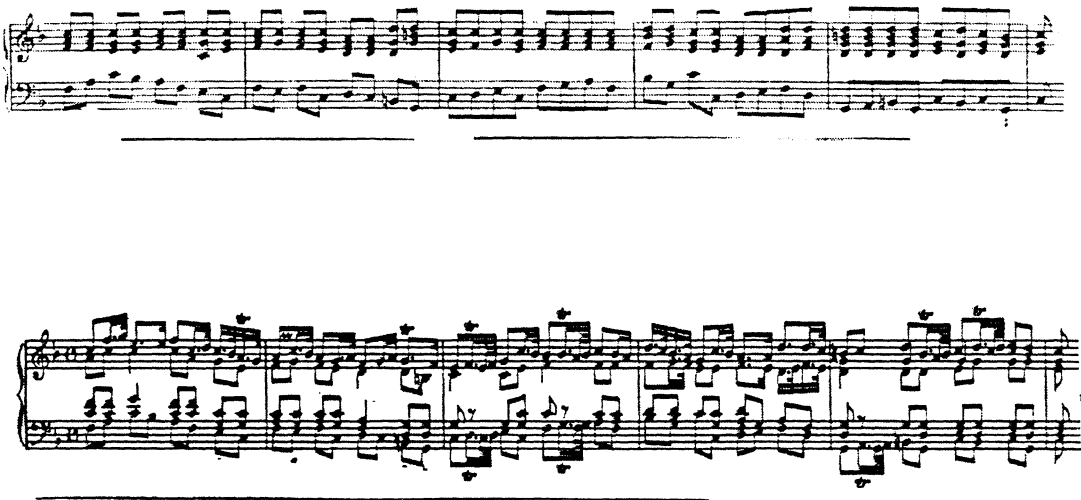


Fig. 22

The first example shows a conventional four-part basso continuo realisation without melodic interest in the top. The second example shows the same accompaniment divided between the hands and with the top part provided with melodic interest. Note ornamentation. Examples by Heinichen, in Keller, Schule, 61

The following music example of the Sonata a Cembalo obbligato e Flauto traverse in b minor by J. S. Bach taken from Herman Keller's Schule des

Generalbaß-Spiels, shows all of the aforementioned characteristics in one piece.

Keller says that from bar nine onwards, the students should add their own accompaniment as an exercise. (see fig. 23)

Largo e dolce

Flöte

Cembalo

*) Der Schüler versuche, den zweiten Teil selbst zu ergänzen.

Fig. 23

J. S. Bach, Sonata a Cembalo obbligato e Flauto traverso in b minor

In closing this chapter, it should be mentioned that Mattheson's Kleine General-Bass-Schule is a valuable source of information and could be used in conjunction with Heinichen's treatise of 1728.

Included here is a table of basso continuo figures. (see fig. 24) It will be recalled that Heinichen introduced a table of twelve figure combinations in his first treatise. The second treatise shows thirty-two combinations. A few years later Mattheson published an expanded table of seventy figures and took the opportunity to criticise the incompleteness of Heinichen's list.³⁷

It remains to be said that J. S. Bach's use of the basso continuo, as well as his use of figures, deserves special attention, but cannot be dealt with in this dissertation. Stephen Stubbs draws attention to the fact that Bach's music has often been the point of departure for an attempted understanding of the theory and practice of the basso continuo.³⁸ However, the harmonic complexity and concentration of Bach's music makes it the most difficult of all the Baroque repertoires to realise from a bass.

Where Bach famously explored a maximum range of keys, music in 1600 could be described as having only two conditions: with or without a B flat in the key signature. Where Bach's harmonic rhythm is often in crotchets or quavers and each bar is packed with a multitude of figures (most often of a compound nature), most music of the seventeenth century has an harmonic rhythm in semi-breves or minims and most of it can be expressed with very few or no figures.

I have, for the sake of interest, included a copy of the facsimile of a recitativo from Bach's Christmas oratorio, together with a 'modern' edition as comparison. (see

³⁷John Mattheson, Kleine General-Bass-Schule (Hamburg, 1735), 136

³⁸Stubbs, in Neue Beiträge, 100

The image displays a facsimile of a handwritten musical score. It features several staves of musical notation with various notes, rests, and clefs. The handwriting is in black ink on aged paper. A large, stylized signature, likely 'Johann Sebastian Bach', is written across the middle of the page. Below the musical notation, there are lines of German text, which are the lyrics of the piece. The text is written in a cursive hand, matching the musical notation.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Und wir haben gesehen in der stillen Nacht als der Vater bei uns geistlich
 sich niederließ und sprach: Ich bin der Vater und der Sohn und der Geistliche
 und der Vater und der Sohn und der Geistliche und der Vater und der Sohn und der Geistliche

Fig. 25
 J. S. Bach, *Weihnachtsoratorium* BWV 248,
 Facsimile reproduction of the autograph with a commentary,
 ed. Alfred Dürr (Kassel, Basel, London: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1984)

Fl. I
Fl. II
Ob. d'a. I
Ob. d'a. II
Ob. da c. I
Ob. da c. II
VI. I
VI. II
Vla.
Cont. Org. (Fg.)

6 4 6 5 6 4 6 6 6 4 3

Nr. 11 Recitativo

Evangelista
Tenore
Und es wa - ren Hir - ten in der - sel - ben Ge - gend auf dem Fel - de bei den Hür - den, die
Cont. Organo

I.
hü - te - ten des Nachts ih - re Her - de. Und sie - he, des Her - ren En - gel trat zu
Cont. Organo

T.
ih - nen, und die Klar - heit des Her - ren leuch - tet um sie, und sie furch - ten sich sehr.
Cont. Organo

7 5 6 4/2

3 6 3 5 3 5

Fig. 26

Bach, J. S. Weihnachts-Oratorium BWV 248,
ed. Carl Eberhardt (Frankfurt: C. F. Peters)



Fig. 28a

Mattheson, Kleine General-Bass-Schule, title pages

Dem
 Hoch-Edlen, Groß-Nachbahren, und
 Wol-Bornehmen Herrn,
 S G R R S
 Johann Ulrich
 Steiner,
 Berühmten Kauff- und Handels-Mann
 in
 Winterthur.

X 3

Hoch-

CHAPTER III

THE BASSO CONTINUO IN FRANCE

Unlike Germany where the basso continuo traditions can be clearly traced back to Italy, France has a more individual development which is rooted in the intavolaturas of early lute music.

Nicolas Fleury was the first in France to write a treatise on how to play from a basso continuo. As one can see from the title, Méthode pour apprendre facilement à toucher le théorbe sur la basse continue (1660), the treatise was written for players of the lute.¹ Sources in France do not allow one to follow a line of development as clearly as in Italy or Germany. "... [Sources] are so scanty that all we know is that by 1660 the French had learnt how to adopt the rich broken-chord, low-tessitura harmonies of baroque lute music to the harpsichord."²

The first publications in France containing figured basses are by C. Huygens, Pathodia sacra et profana occupati (1647) and H. Du Mont, Cantica sacra (1652).³ However, from 1608 we find Airs de cour with lute intavolaturas. In some of these polyphonic Airs, the lute part is only notated as a bass line. In his Harmonie universelle (1636) Mersenne makes no mention of the basso continuo. He does, however, speak about the solo voice being accompanied by the lute and suggests that Airs and other pieces be set in intavolaturas so that they can be accompanied

¹Jean-Yves Haymoz, "French Through-Bass Methods" in Basler Jahrbuch XIX, 34

²Peter Williams, in New Grove, 4:694

³Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1201

more easily. No mention is made of the organ or harpsichord in their capacity as accompanying instruments.

Peter Williams makes an important point when he says that a court opera written for performance in Florence 1610 could not have been accompanied in the same way as a public oratorio in Rome in the same year, nor a German cantata in 1650 like a French flute sonata in 1750.⁴ Obvious though this may seem, there is a tendency to generalise when it comes to the categorising of styles and trends pertaining to the basso continuo.

Keeping this in mind, one can safely say that the French style is far more discreet than the Italian style and that the bass sonority is comparably less important than that of the Italians. In Chapter One we saw how Muffat's Concerti grossi were performed in Rome under Corelli's direction and that twelve out of thirty-five strings belonged to the celli and double basses. In France (also around 1700) on the other hand, the twenty-four Violins du Roy employed no harpsichordist and no 16' bass instruments.⁵

As the seventeenth century progressed it became common practice in German opera to use two harpsichords (lutes were also used). From the end of the seventeenth century the organ was generally the main instrument used for accompanying in church. While France and Italy favoured the combination of organ and lute, Germany often used the harpsichord as an alternative to the organ.⁶

⁴ibid, 4:695

⁵Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1209 (The double bass only arrived on the scene in 1700 and was used in a very elementary way until ca. 1750.)

⁶ibid.

Whereas Fleury's lute treatise made its appearance in 1660⁷, sources relating to the organ and harpsichord (by J. H. D'Anglebert and G. G. Nivers, 1689) only appeared thirty years later and demonstrated different accompaniment characteristics.

The examples by Nivers show three- to five-part polyphonic accompaniments, while those by D'Anglebert are mainly characterised by four-part chordal writing. Polyphonic elements in accompaniment are still found in the works of Nivers until 1689, after which they disappear almost entirely.⁸

In the treatises of Delair, Rameau and Saint-Lambert, for instance, the information provided regarding basso continuo accompaniment is almost identical. This could be a reason why Arnold only chose to include one French treatise for discussion in his Art of Accompaniment.

Saint-Lambert's treatise Nouveau traité (1707) was, interestingly enough, also known in Italy and Germany.⁹ For the purpose of this dissertation, there are three points worth mentioning regarding Saint-Lambert's treatise. In his introduction the rule is given that the bass should be played with the left hand and the chords with the right (see Heinichen, CHAPTER II).¹⁰ Relating to the use of the sharp, flat and natural signs, we find here, for the first time (according to Arnold), the use of a

⁷Haymoz, in Basler Jahrbuch XIX, 34

⁸Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1220

⁹Arnold speaks of Italian translations at Bologna (probably referring to the library of the Liceo Musicale, which incidentally contains an extensive collection of material relating to the basso continuo). It may also be recalled that mention was made in Chapter Two of Heinichen's reference (in his treatise of 1728) to Saint-Lambert.

¹⁰Arnold says that no allusion is made anywhere to any other form of accompaniment. Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 175

natural sign to contradict, not only a flat other than B flat, but a sharp as well. The other minor point is that an accidental qualifying a figure can be placed after, as well as before, it.¹¹

Saint-Lambert's reference to dynamics also shows the custom (as practised in North and central Germany) of distributing the accompaniment in such a way that the left hand plays the bass and the right hand plays the chords. He says that if the voices being accompanied are powerful, the chords should be struck vigorously. If a more discreet accompaniment is required, he suggests one removes a register or two, playing three voices in the right hand and removing the octave which doubles the bass line in the left hand.¹²

Whereas the German and Italian treatises invariably start with a strong grounding in counterpoint, French treatises on continuo methods show that taste and pedagogical concepts are closely associated. Thus one finds that French treatises are written for amateurs as well as professionals. They start at the very beginning, explaining musical intervals and the nature of the keyboard, specifying the amount of study required by people who have never even heard of music theory. Fleury, for instance, thinks it will take about one month!¹³

Generally, ornamentation in France, (referred to in Germany as Manieren and in France as Agréments) also appears in the form of broken chords (also referred to as arpeggios) and are either of a freer nature or strictly rhythmical. The character of these arpeggios has a more violinistic character.

¹¹ibid., 172-202

¹²Saint-Lambert, M de. Nouveau traité de l'accompagnement de clavecin, de l'orgue et des autres instruments. Paris, 1707. (Facs. Geneva 1972.), 61

¹³Haymoz, in Basler Jahrbuch XIX, 33

The lute intavolaturas around 1630 show a combination of chordal and polyphonic accompaniment.¹⁴ It is these chordal accompaniments which constitute the actual character of the eventual basso continuo accompaniment in France.¹⁵ The chords are often varied using the aforementioned arpeggio or broken chord technique (known as style brisée) but compared to Italian or German accompaniment, the effect is far more reserved. Saint-Lambert recommends the use of arpeggios in recitative. These arpeggios are different from those found in ordinary accompaniments which are usually executed briskly. In recitative the execution tends to be slow and even.¹⁶

Apart from the free or rhythmic use of the arpeggio, ornamentation in basso continuo accompaniments was limited to the use of mordents (pincés) and trills. The art of French continuo playing relied on these relatively simple devices. Scales, melodic or solistic passages or imitation¹⁷ of the solo voice are not referred to in any of the French treatises.¹⁸

Rameau, referring to harpsichord accompaniment, warns that all the fingers should never be lifted together. The chords should be arpeggiated quickly from the forefinger to the little finger.¹⁹ Rousseau says about the accompaniment on the organ, that although the accompaniment for both instruments is very similar, the sensation is very different. Because the sound on the organ is sustained, the

¹⁴B.A. Boesset, Airs de cour mis en tablature de luth (1620-1643) and E. Moulinie, Airs avec la tablature de luth (1624-1635)

¹⁵Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1220

¹⁶Saint-Lambert, Traité, 62,63

¹⁷ibid., There is no imitation of the singers' line except when accompanying a solo voice in an Italian aria, where it is then permissible to imitate the subject on the harpsichord., 63

¹⁸Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1226

¹⁹Haymoz, in Basler Jahrbuch XIX, 42

sensation is very different. Because the sound on the organ is sustained, the accompaniment should be more legato than on the harpsichord and the hand should be lifted as little as possible.²⁰ (cf. Morelli quotes Frescobaldi chapter one p. 55)

Parallel octaves and fifths are strictly forbidden in the seventeenth century.²¹ In order to avoid parallel octaves, the position of the chords may be changed; however, no mention is ever made of voice-leading between the harpsichord and the soloist. The accompanist is mainly concerned with playing chords in a certain register of the instrument and does not care too much about the movement of the solo voice.²²

The ten-course lute was the main accompanying instrument in France until about 1645. In 1637 Mersenne refers to the arciliuto and describes the large tiorba as used in Rome.²³ (see description of theorbos, chapter one pp. 56, 57) It was this Italian theorbo which was gradually introduced into France. The theorbo arrived late in France and even though the archlute was also used, it was the theorbo which was always more popular, being used well into the 1730s.²⁴

The Italian instruments were generally larger and louder than the French instruments. The theorbo, although a very important continuo instrument in the theatre, court and chapel, was rarely used by the French as an obbligato instrument. The archlute survived longest in England and Italy. While the theorbo and five-

²⁰Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Dictionnaire de Musique, Accompagnement, Paris 1768, 1977, 47-48

²¹Saint-Lambert, Traité, 61

²² Haymoz, in Basler Jahrbuch XIX, 45

²³North, Continuo-Playing, 7-9

²⁴ibid.

course guitar were popular in France, the d-minor theorbo-lute was used in Germany until ca. 1770.²⁵

Rousseau, in an article on accompaniment, makes it quite clear that the approach to Italian and French music cannot be the same: "On ne doit pas accompagner de la meme maniere la Musique Italienne & la Francoise."²⁶ (One may not accompany the Italian and French music in the same way). He says the French accompaniment must be gracious and continuously arpeggiated from 'bottom to top' keeping the bass line 'clean'.

Mattheson included the following commentary by J. L. Le Cerf de la Viéville regarding the characteristic Italian accompaniment, in his Critica musica (1722) which he himself translated. The extract makes the French sentiment (regarding taste in accompaniment), clearly felt:

Durchgehend hört man in der italiänischen Music bloss einen allzeit variierten General-Bass der offft nur ein gebrochener Accord und Harffen-Mässiges Wesen ist ... Diese Bässe sind nur dazu gut dass man die Geschwindigkeit der Faust derjenigen so auf den Clavier ... spielen abnehmen möge. Ja ob sie gleich noch so bunt an sich selbst sind will man sie doch noch mehr variieren ...; so gar dass die Haupt-Melodie darüber nicht vernommen wird.²⁷ (In the Italian music one just hears throughout, a continually varied General-Bass which is often only a broken chord and harp-like creature ... These basses are only good for being able to show off the 'agile fist' [technique] of the harpsichord player. Yes, even though they [the basses] may in themselves already be so colourful, one still wants to vary them even more ...; to such an extent that the main melody can no longer be heard above it.)

The following quotation by Rousseau best summarises the French attitude towards accompaniment:

Accompagner ...J'ajouterai seulement que ce mot même avetit celui qui accompagne dans un concert qu'il n'est chargé que d'une partie accessoire, qu'il ne doit s'attacher qu'à en faire valoir d'autres, que sitôt qu'il a la moindre prétention pour lui-même, il gâte l'exécution, et impatiente à-la-fois les

²⁵ibid.

²⁶ Rousseau, Dictionnaire, 13

²⁷Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1203

habilement la sienne que d'en faire sentir l'effet sans la laisser remarquer.²⁸ (To accompany ... I would add only that the very word tells the accompanist at a concert that his is a secondary role, that his duty is to enhance others, and that by drawing attention to himself, he ruins the performance, annoying performers and listeners alike. The more he thinks he inspires admiration, the more he ridicules himself; an excess of sound or misplaced ornamentation attracts to himself the attention due to the soloist, and all his talent and skill of execution merely demonstrates his vanity and poor taste. To accompany with intelligence and with sensitivity, one must strive to support and flatter the essential part, and it is a very skilful accompanist who does this without drawing attention to it).

Graham Sadler and Shirley Thompson, in their article on Charpentier, see him as being particularly valuable in the context of the basso continuo because of the copious indications (in his scores) relating to performance.²⁹

The output of Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634-1704) amounted to some five hundred and fifty works and includes almost every type of French music that involved basso continuo, i.e. music for the stage, oratorio-like compositions, secular chamber works, orchestral pieces and a diverse sacred output far larger than that of any other French contemporary.

Despite Charpentier's precise indications, the contradictions and ambiguities which arise are considerable. For instance, nearly three hundred works show no labelling of the bass line whatsoever. More specific labelling occurs, for instance, when the number of staves changes from one system to another or when instruments or voices have to share the same staff. Sadler and Thompson say that if a piece contains no ambiguities of this kind, one may well have no clear indication as to the continuo instruments required. They also point out that this situation was not unusual in the Baroque period: "As an active, practical musician, Charpentier often directed his own performances and would not need to mark his scores with

²⁸Haymoz, in Basler Jahrbuch XIX, 48

²⁹Graham Sadler and Shirley Thompson, "Marc-Antoine Charpentier and the Basse Continue", in Basler Jahrbuch XVIII, 9

as to the continuo instruments required. They also point out that this situation was not unusual in the Baroque period: "As an active, practical musician, Charpentier often directed his own performances and would not need to mark his scores with self-evident information."³⁰

As continuo instruments, Charpentier uses organ and harpsichord, mainly for sacred and secular works respectively but not exclusively. There are two instances where organ and harpsichord are specified, yet in neither case is it certain that both were intended to be used together. Sometimes Charpentier calls for harpsichord or clavecin which he usually spells clavecim. One also often encounters clavissin. The theorbo was also used by Charpentier though rarely specified. In modern performances, the harpsichord and theorbo often alternate but there is no evidence that this was the composer's intention.

Sadler and Thompson give an instance of Charpentier's haphazard labelling: "At the start of the piece, the continuo line is unmarked. Later, it becomes clear, first, that bass, viol and organ are needed in the continuo. Then later still, we find the first and only indication [at the point where the number of staves changes] that the continuo team also includes a theorbo."³¹

For the Lully-Charpentier period, the passages in full scores labelled Basse Continue, are consistently figured, while those labelled, Basse de Violon or unlabelled, are not. The keyboard continuo players at the Paris Opera played, not from a full score, but from a mainly single-line partbook. They cannot, therefore, have played the movements which were not included in their partbooks (those labelled Basse de Violon or unlabelled). Sadler and Thompson point out that this

³⁰ibid., 10

³¹ibid., in reference to Pro omnibus festis BVM (H 333), 13

needs to be stressed, since there are those who try to ignore the evidence by pointing out that it is easy enough to play from an unfigured bass. This, they say is true, but only if one has the bass itself.³²

One can see how generalisations can occur in relation to the basso continuo. The only way to avoid this would be to refrain from having to deal with the subject of the basso continuo in its entirety. Sadler and Thompson also suggest that since the indiscriminate study of so many composers and genres has sometimes led to over-generalisation, the time seems ripe for individual studies of individual composers.³³

In summarising, the use of the basso continuo in France was not evenly distributed in all genres of music. In the opera, its only function was to serve as an accompaniment for the singers and being rarely employed in the orchestral pieces. The vollstimmige style of playing is also encountered in France at the turn of the seventeenth century as mentioned by D'Anglebert but its general use is somewhat confined and not particularly characteristic of the French style of accompaniment. Generally speaking, the texture and sonority of the basso continuo in France is far more restrained than in Italy. The accompaniments almost entirely show four- or five-part chordal settings. The French style of continuo playing was rather strict and did not demand great imagination. Italian or German accompanists were more concerned with harmonic progressions or skilful improvisation, while the French aim was to realise the arpeggios with refinement.³⁴

In France the basso continuo practice abruptly came to an end, so that by 1770, no harpsichord was used in the revival of Rameau's Zoroastre and from 1776, the Paris Opera no longer employed the services of a harpsichordist. In chamber

³²ibid., 25

³³ibid., 9

³⁴Haymoz, in Basler Jahrbuch XIX, 33

music, however, the basso continuo was able to exert its influence a while longer.³⁵

³⁵ Bötticher and Christensen, eds., Musik, 3:1203

CONCLUSION

The subject of the basso continuo has inspired a huge and highly diverse collection of sources from which one can obtain information. On examining original sources, one finds that theories on how to play a particular instrument and, when and where to play it, can differ vastly; that political and religious environments have contributed towards the encouragement of one musical style to the detriment of another; that the rapid spread of new innovations and the reluctance of existing traditions to accommodate them can lead to conflicting opinions and that the period of the through-bass was an age of extreme creativity and innovation. Ultimately then, to quote Peter Williams:

Not even in a single genre by one composer, therefore, can a blanket solution be applied.³⁶

It may be helpful to suggest, that in lieu of the above, one focuses one's research on one composer or one particular genre at a time.

Furthermore, it is hoped that this Introduction to The Age of the Through-Bass has been able to give a broader understanding of this period in music history and that an association with the subject has inspired the desire to conduct independent research.

³⁶Williams, in New Grove, 4:698

"And herewith I conclude my simple but well-meant account, which (in accordance with its title) is intended only for those who are inexperienced in the Bassus ad Organum and have no knowledge of it, as I have no intention of instructing experienced organists and practised musicians, who themselves well know what they ought to do and leave undone. And I hope that an intelligent mind will find no occasion to cavil at it ... End"³⁷

³⁷Closing paragraph of Johann Staden's 1626 treatise: "Kurzer und einfältiger Bericht für diejenigen, so im Basso ad Organum unerfahren, was bey demselben zum Theil in Acht zu nehmen." Translated in Arnold, Art of Accompaniment, 109

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