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**17th century Italian basso continuo
on the classical guitar**

Doctoral Dissertation Summary

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1. The subject, aim and hypotheses of the dissertation

The dissertation examines the basso continuo accompaniment of early 17th century Italian vocal compositions, with emphasis on performing those on the modern-day classical guitar.

The aim of the dissertation is to create a system of principles, which encompasses all the necessary information about early 17th century basso continuo, that a modern-day classical guitarist would need to start practicing this style of accompaniment. This system is based on the analysis of 17th century theoretical writings and intabulations of contemporary figured basses.

The hypothesis of the dissertation is that – by complementing each other – these sources provide a sufficient base from which we can derive these guidelines, which enable the reader to realize figured and unfigured accompaniments at a quality adequate for live performance on the classical guitar.

The secondary hypothesis is that the relation between the accompaniments and the vocal parts is much stronger than what we would infer from analyzing only the theoretical sources.

2. The structure and method of the dissertation

The main body of the dissertation starts with the chapter “Analysis of Early 17th century theoretical writings” in which the theoretical background of the dissertation is established. Relative to the importance of this form of accompaniment, there is a surprisingly small number of theoretical writings discussing the technique and even in these we can find minor contradictions. The function of the chapter is to synthesize a tangible theoretical basis derived from the analysis and comparison of theoretical sources, to which we can return in later chapters to compare the theory with the practical implementation. The list of 17th century theoretical writings used in the dissertation can be found in the bibliography of the dissertation summary.

The next chapter “Analysis of the sources containing realized basso continuo in tablatures” establishes the connection between the practice used by plucked instrumentalists and the theory. This chapter of the dissertation processes the data set that was created from the analysis of realized continuo accompaniments. Based on this we can formulate objective statements about the performance practice of the era. From this we can derive the principles that we can use to realize figured and unfigured basses. I will analyze the accompaniment of the selected pieces with realized continuo using four tools.

First, I will examine the distance between the top note of each chord played by the accompaniment and the corresponding sung vocal notes. The distance will be measured not in intervals, but in chord inversion distance. The reason for this is that the number of inversion rotations required by the accompaniment to reach the vocal part reveals much more about the relationship between the two parts than an interval without context.

My second analysis tool is the examination of the frequency of occurrence of different chord patterns found in the tablature, and the third is the examination of the average pitch of the highest vocal part. We need these analysis tools together to be able to check the validity of the results we got from the first analysis. It is possible to imagine a case where the correlations between the two voices are only the result of the fact that the upper notes of the comfortably playable chords on plucked instruments are in a register similar to the average vocal pitch. If we examine the occurrences of the different fingering variations used for the same type of chords, we can observe how often different upper voicings are used and whether these voicings are reacting to the different vocal notes found above them.

As a fourth analytical tool, I will examine the realized accompaniments in light of the theoretical base synthesized in the previous chapter. The aim of the comparison of realized plucked accompaniments and theoretical writings that are keyboard centric is to shed light on the possible differences that can be found in the accompaniment

technique of the two instrument families, and to highlight aspects that may be universally applicable regardless of the specific instrument. The list of musical pieces analyzed in the chapter can be found in the bibliography of the dissertation summary.

The principles of plucked continuo playing derived in the dissertation are summarized in the conclusion. Using these, the experienced instrument player will be able to realize figured and unfigured accompaniments from the early 17th century. In the subchapter that follows, I will collect the instrument-specific knowledge that can facilitate the realizing process and its live performance as well. The dissertation will be closed with a realized unfigured bass, with which I will show how the knowledge summarized before can be adapted.

3. Results and conclusions of the dissertation

3.1. The results of the comparison of theoretical sources

Based on the comparison of theoretical sources, we can conclude that the basso continuo style accompaniments were realized using relatively similar principles even at the beginning of the 17th century. Minor contradictions can be observed, but the desired musical function is not significantly different. The sources treat the following principles differently:

1. The strict application of the rules of counterpoint
2. The avoidance of the duplication and the register of the vocal part

If we treat the different notes of the accompaniment as separate parts, then the use of parallel fifths and octaves should be avoided according to the rules. However, we can find examples of these parallel motions in all musical examples provided by the discussed sources. In certain cases, these could be interpreted as an instrumental intabulation of the "virtual vocal polyphony" composed in the mind of the instrumental continuo player, but in live performance these would produce the audible effect of parallel motion.

Despite the superficial differences in the mode of execution, all authors have the same goal: the continuo part should not suppress the vocal part but help it. To achieve this, some authors have recommended using the above-mentioned principle no. 2. The underlying principles were shared by all theorists, even if not all of them agreed about the importance of this specific principle.

Based on the analysis of the different sources, we can summarize the requirements needed for continuo playing before and during performance in the following points:

1. Basic musical knowledge, such as adequate singing skills, the ability to navigate on the keyboard confidently and the ability to read different keys fluently.
2. Knowledge of consonant and dissonant intervals, the chords that can be built from them, as well as the possibilities of suspensions available.
3. Thorough preliminary study of the piece of music by the accompanist, and if possible, preparation of figures in the bass part or even writing a full intabulation.
4. A clean and simple playing style should be used, for the most part avoiding ornaments and diminutions.
5. The player should not cover the vocal part. He should choose the number of voices in the accompaniment, the dynamics (registration in the case of the organ) and the pitch register of the accompaniment according to the musical context.
6. Knowledge about the behavior of different bass movements. What chords are applicable to certain bass movements? Where can the player treat certain bass notes as passing notes? Paying special attention to the bass when cadence type chord progressions are available.

3.2. The results of the analysis of the pieces preserved in tablature.

Based on their detailed analysis, the continuo realizations discussed in the dissertation can be divided into two categories:

1. Pieces that are not fully utilizing the capabilities of the instrument. Therefore, these realizations are much more exposed to the convenient technical solutions of the instrument, hence they are less responsive to other elements of the musical fabric. This category includes the accompaniments found in Salamone Rossi's *Primo Libro de Madrigali a cinque voci* and the *Carlo G Manuscript*.
2. Pieces that utilize the capabilities of the instrument to a greater extent. Therefore, these realizations have a bigger freedom in reacting to the fabric of the music. This category includes the accompaniments found in Bellerofonte Castaldi's *Capricci a due stromenti* and Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger's *Libro primo di arie passeggiate*.

Despite the differences in terms of technical skill requirements – apparent from the tables created as the product of the analysis – the pieces of the first group are also worthy of a more detailed analysis, because the tuning of the instrument used in them shows a much closer relation to the tuning of the modern classical guitar. The instruments used to accompany the pieces of the second category use re-entrant tuning. This means that the fingering patterns of the chords that can be played on them are similar to the fingering patterns of instruments with a lute like tuning, but the resulting harmony is different due to the tuning of the first two strings an octave lower. For this reason, the comparison with the vocal part cannot be based solely on the fingering patterns. The analysis must be based on the true deciphered voicings.

The voicings of the chords created as the result of the re-entrant tuning cannot be perfectly reproduced on the classical guitar. However, from the point of view of the organic cooperation with the vocal

part, these sources can produce a stronger basis for the derived principles presented in the conclusion of the dissertation.

The secondary hypothesis of the dissertation (that is the relation between the accompaniments and the vocal parts is much stronger than what we would infer from analyzing only the theoretical sources) can be considered proven based on Castaldi's *Capricci* and Kapsperger's *Libro primo di arie passeggiate*, since a significant correlation can be observed between the upper voice of the accompaniment and the vocal part, which can no longer be explained by mere coincidence.

3.3. The principles derived from the theoretical and tablature sources, and a practical example of their application.

To prove the first hypothesis of the dissertation, the following system of principles was derived by comparing the aforementioned sources:

1. Within reasonable limits, try to double the note of the vocal part sung at the moment the chord is played.
2. The cantizans should be played on the instrument, even when it is also played in the vocal part.
3. Adjust the number of voices used in the accompaniment to the current needs of the movement. Passing notes and suspensions should be used in appropriate places. Be aware of the possible use of sonorities created on non-triadic principles, such as passing bass notes and various types of *preparamento alla cadenza*.
4. Do not disturb the vocal part either by using too high a register or by using inappropriate ornaments.
5. Generally obey the rules of counterpoint by avoiding perfect fifths and octaves, but take into account the instrument's own attributes and its ideal range of voicing.
6. In addition to taking aesthetic aspects into account, we should strive to use fingerings that ensure a graceful legato playing style.

This system of principles takes into account the internal logical framework of the aesthetic rules of music composition of the 17th

century, the practical circumstances of playing a plucked instrument and the accompaniment's relationship to the vocal part. For this reason, in my opinion, it has the potential to be used as a tool to recreate contemporary figured and unfigured continuo accompaniments.

To demonstrate this, in the final chapter of the dissertation, the step-by-step realization process of the continuo accompaniment of Kapsperger's "Ancora il Rè nasce piangendo" from the *Libro secondo d'arie* will be presented.

4. The results of the research presented in the dissertation in the light of modern literature

Summarizing and analyzing the writings of early 17th century theorists is not a new endeavor in modern literature. The publications of Rotem (2015) and Arnold (1965) deal with this issue most comprehensively. At the same time, this dissertation tries to approach this thoroughly discussed subject by introducing three new aspects:

1. Comparison of the theoretical sources of the era with the surviving realized tablatures, which embed the theoretical principles in the context of the instrumental practice used.
2. Analyzing the concrete relationship between the continuo and the vocal part it accompanies.
3. Approaching the continuo accompaniment technique of the era from the perspective of a plucked instrumentalist and adapting it to the modern classical guitar.

The results of the dissertation are naturally limited by the amount of surviving sources from the 17th century, hence the aforementioned system of principles does not wish to pose as the exclusive guide to realizing basso continuo. On the other hand, it would like to present an alternative approach to the subject that emphasizes performance practice and the relationship of the parties involved in chamber music, as opposed to a purely theoretical approach.

5. Bibliography

5.1. Theoretical writings from the early 17th century discussed in the dissertation

- Agazzari, Agostino (1607) *Del Sonare sopra 'l basso con tutti li stromenti*. Domenico Falcini, Siena
- Banchieri, Adriano (1611) Dialogo Musicale. in. *L'Organo suonarino*. Amadino, Venice
- Bianciardi, Francesco (1607) *Breve Regola per Imparar' a Sonare Sopra il Basso con Ogni Sorte d'Istrumento*. Domenico Falcini, Siena
- Praetorius, Michael (1619) *Syntagma Musicum III*. Elias Holwein, Wolfenbüttel.
- Viadana, Lodovico Grossi (1602) *Cento Concerti Ecclesiastici A Una, a Due, a Tre, & a Quattro voci. Con il Basso continuo per sonar nel' Organo. Noua inuentione commoda per ogni sorte de Cantore, & per gli Organisti di Lodovico Viadana Opera Duodecima*. Giacomo Vincenti, Venice.

5.2. Sources of the compositions discussed in the dissertation

- Castaldi, Bellerofonte (1622) *Capricci a due stromenti*. Modena
- G., Carlo (1600–1620) „*Carlo G manuscript*”. RISM 1001192911
- Kapsperger, Giovanni Girolamo (1612) *Libro primo di arie passeggiate*. Rome
- Kapsperger, Giovanni Girolamo (1623) *Libro secondo d'arie*. Luca Antonio Soldi. Rome
- Rossi, Salamone (1600) *Il Primo Libro de Madrigali a cinque voci*. Ricciardo Amadino, Venice.

5.3. Modern literature cited in the dissertation summary

- Arnold, Franck Thomas (1965) *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass: As Practiced in the 17th and 18th Centuries*. Dover Publications, New York
- Rotem, Elam (2015) *Early Basso Continuo Practice: Implicit Evidence in the Music of Emilio de' Cavalieri*. Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg. PhD thesis