

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS

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GEORG MUFFAT

AN ESSAY
ON THOROUGHBASS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HELLMUT FEDERHOFER



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY

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AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY
ARMEN CARAPETYAN, PH. D.
DIRECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid acceptance and spread throughout Germany and Austria, during the first half of the 17th century, of the ecclesiastical concerto written for a small number of voices compelled a knowledge of thorough bass that was often new and unknown to the German organists, accustomed as they were to organ tablature. Therefore German composers (such as G. Aichinger, M. Praetorius, J. Chr. Demantius, J. Staden, and H. Albert) included in their works brief thorough bass instructions¹⁾, following the innovations of L. G. da Viadana; and, for the same reason, M. Praetorius translated Viadana's rules and supplied for them, as well as for those of Agazzari, his own annotations²⁾. Nevertheless, not until the end of the 17th century did more comprehensive systems of thorough bass instruction appear in Germany. They were published either within general textbooks on music and composition, like those of W. C. Printz and D. Speer, or as independent treatises, like those of A. Werckmeister and G. Niedt. That of Niedt, whose rules were used also by J. S. Bach, already forms a transition to the 18th century³⁾.

In tracing the development of thorough bass doctrine in Austria, where monody had gained an especially early foothold, one finds that the only treatise to receive consideration heretofore has been the *Kurze Instruction und Anleitung zum Generalbass*, made up of 15 rules, by Wolfgang Ebner. It was printed by A. Herbst (who had translated it into German from a now lost and possibly unpublished Latin source) as an appendix to his *Arte practica et poetica* (Frankfurt, 1653)⁴⁾. Ebner was born in 1612 in Augsburg and was cathedral organist in Vienna since 1634. On the title page of the essay appended to Herbst's treatise Ebner is designated as court organist to Emperor Ferdinand III, a position he had acceded to on August 1st, 1637⁵⁾. Inasmuch as he refers to the Imperial Kapellmeister

¹⁾ For bibliography see F. Oberdörffer, "Generalbaß" MGG IV, Kassel-Basel 1955, 1734 f.; "Thorough-Bass", *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, VIII, 5th ed., 1955, 450; F. Blume, "Zur Generalbaßpraxis der Schütz-Zeit", *Die Musikantengilde*, V, 1927, 76 ff.

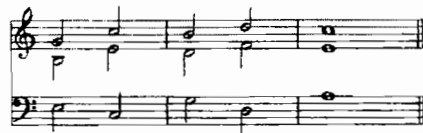
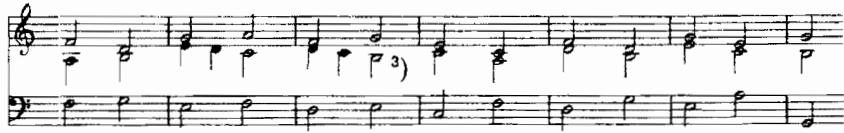
²⁾ M. Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum*, III, Wolfenbüttel 1619; facsimile reprint ed. by W. Gurlitt, Kassel 1958, 144 ff.

³⁾ Cf. Oberdörffer, *op. cit.*; E. Ulrich, *Studien zur deutschen Generalbaßpraxis in der ersten Hälfte d. 18. Jahrhunderts*, Kassel 1932, 41 f.

⁴⁾ F. T. Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-bass as Practised in the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, Oxford 1931, 131 ff.

⁵⁾ A. Orel, "Wolfgang Ebner" MGG, III, 1065 ff.

Etliche Manieren oder Ordinari nacheinander abzuwexeln²⁾).



- ²⁾ In most measures of Examples [p. 2, 3], as well as in some of those in Examples [p. 4, 5], one finds two short double strokes which are absent from all other examples. They occur sometimes between the lower and middle voices or between the middle and upper voices, sometimes also under the bass voice of the chord and apparently apply to the three-voice realization in that they signify only two-voice playing for the right hand. Since they appear only irregularly in this Examples and are lacking in analogous passages elsewhere, they have been omitted.
- ³⁾ The b was incorrectly written as a whole note.

bey der obern gebundenen Quart /: Quarta supersyncopata :/ K, 3^{tio} bey der unten [p. 47] gebundenen Quart /: Quarta subsyncopata :/ L,⁵⁸⁾ [ist kein chromatischer Effect.] Bey der welschen irregular Quart /: Quarta Italica :/ nota, wañ nit ^{58a)} bey dieser [eine] Sext major mit Tertia minor sich gesellet, ist kein falsches chromatisches Intervallum zu erwarten, da aber an stat der guten die kleine oder große falsche Quart genom̄en wird, wie wir schon an gehörigen Örthern gemeldet haben, so verursacht jederzeit solche falsche Quart gegen den Baß selbst chromatischen Effect. Und zwar die kleine falsche Quart, dan sie alß wie sieße Quart passiren will, macht ein chromatisches allein gegen den Baß, O. Da sie aber mit der falschen Quint zugleich als wie Quarta supersyncopata oder oben gebundene Quart genom̄en wird, ist das chromatisch gegen den Baß verdoppelt, P⁵⁹⁾. Wird sie von unten syncopirt, [Q] ist sie gegen den Baß einschichtig chromatisch, da sie als sieße, R, oder oben syncopirte, S, oder als durchgehende, T, oder als welsche, V, oder als rechter gemeiner Tritonus, X, gebraucht wird, und zwar bestehet der chromatisch falsche Effect gegen den Baß selbst. Nimbt man aber zum Tritonum noch ein Terz minor, wie bißweilen geschehen kañ, so ist der chromatisch Effect verdoppelt, in dem die falsche Quart gegen den Baß für sich selbst chromatisch lautet; mit denen Stim̄en aber, so die Terz minor nimbt, stehet sie entweder wie Secunda superflua /: groß falsche Secund :/, Y, oder wie Septima diminuta /: kleine falsche Sept :/, Z.

[p. 48]

⁵⁸⁾ The following passage is completely bungled, presumably because the copyist did not know French, which is employed only here. It reads: "L, se doi[t] changer, car 4ta subsyncopata est chromatique, 3ta, 2da d maceuse [= majeure?] et la 6t min: de 2 de subsyncopa[ta] p: [25]". The meaning is, presumably, that a "chromatischer Effekt" is created when the fourth or second is raised.

^{58a)} Incorrectly "mit".

⁵⁹⁾ In place of the letter P stands the letter Q which is missing from its proper location.

Exempla der unten gebundenen Secund.

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff contains a sequence of notes with fingerings: 2, 2, 2, 5/2, 5/2. The second staff contains notes with fingerings: 4/2, 6/2, 4/2, 2, 147) 5, #6, b6/2, 6, 4/2, 6. The third staff contains notes with fingerings: 6/5, #2, 6/5, 6, b, 6/5.

Nota: auf ein mi oder # mit der 2^d minor und sonst mit der falschen Quart und falschen Secund gilt die Sext und nit die Quint.

[p. 124]

Exempla der freygeschlagenen falschen 2^{da}.

One staff of musical notation in bass clef with fingerings: #2, 6/5, #, #, 4, 6, 2, #2, 5, 6, 6.

Exempla der oben gebundenen Quart.

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff contains notes with fingerings: 4, 3, 4, #, 6/5, 6/5, 4, 5, 6/5, 6/5, 4, 5, 6/5, 5, 6, 4, 3, 6, #, 4, 3. The second staff contains notes with fingerings: #, 4, #, 6, 5, 4, 3, 6, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3.

Nota: mit der kleinen falschen Quart bleibt die Octav aus, an dero sta die Sext mit gehen kann.

Exempla der unten gebundenen Quart.

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff contains notes with fingerings: 1/2, 2, 1/2, 4/2, 1/2, 1/2, 1/2, 6, 4/2, 1/2. The second staff contains notes with fingerings: 6/5, 4/2, b6/4, 6, 4/2, 6/5, 4/2, 6/5, 6, 4, 6/5.

Nota: auf ein mi oder # mit der b 2, item da die Quart oder 2 falsch ist wird die Sext^{147a)} und nicht die Quint gebraucht.

¹⁴⁷⁾ Before the number 5, a b.

^{147a)} Incorrectly "Sept".