

# PARTIMENTO FUGUE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY: A BRIDGE BETWEEN THOROUGHBASS LESSONS AND FUGAL COMPOSITION

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## ABSTRACT

*The pervasiveness of thoroughbass in eighteenth-century German musical pedagogy is illustrated by the way that it extends from continuo realization exercises and chorale harmonizations to complete fugues. This article seeks to demonstrate how partimento fugue can be construed as the missing link between thoroughbass exercises and fully fledged keyboard fugues, by expanding on ideas first advanced by William Renwick. Through an examination of partimento fugues from J. S. Bach's Precepts and Principles, Handel's Lessons for Princess Anne, the Langloz manuscript and Heinichen's Der General-Bass in der Composition, this study outlines a progression from basic realization exercises, in which the emphasis lies on the recognition and execution of continuo figures, to advanced recomposition assignments in which the performer is expected to project a rich contrapuntal texture from a simple figured-bass line, a task which is crucially dependent on the ability to memorize and reuse thematic material. The pedagogical value of partimento fugues also hinges on the acquisition of commonplace patterns such as the scalar descent and the harmonization of a chromatic line in alternating thirds and sixths. Although these patterns are often merely implied, they are found repeatedly in specific musical contexts, suggesting that they may function as generative melodic lines from which the composer derived both the harmonic progression and the underlying bass line, in a striking reversal of the standard compositional paradigm proposed by eighteenth-century theorists such as Niedt. Finally, the occurrence of these formulas in thoroughbass exercises, as well as in masterpieces such as J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, points to their ubiquitous character and demonstrates that they were part of a common language shared by many German composers of the period, thus emphasizing the need for an increased familiarity with the German partimento repertory and its conventions.*

The importance of thoroughbass as a fundamental component of eighteenth-century German musical culture cannot be overstated. To eighteenth-century German composers and theorists, figured bass embodied not only practical keyboard skills, but also aspects of composition, improvisation, harmony and counterpoint. Major treatises such as those of Niedt, Mattheson, Heinichen and Marpurg made thoroughbass the crux of their teaching.<sup>1</sup> Evidence suggests that in the mind of the German baroque composer, there

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Erhardt Niedt, *Musikalische Handleitung*, reprint of the original editions, Hamburg 1710, 1717 and 1721 (Buren: Knuf, 1976). Johann Mattheson, *Grosse General-Bass-Schule*, facsimile of the original edition, Hamburg, 1731 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968). Johann David Heinichen, *Der Generalbass in der Komposition*, facsimile of the original edition, Dresden, 1728 (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1969). Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Handbuch bey dem Generalbasse und der Composition*, facsimile of the second revised edition, Berlin, 1755 (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1974).



existed a continuum that extended from chorale harmonization and basic continuo realization exercises to more advanced pieces and finally to complete fugues.<sup>2</sup> Niedt's influential treatise *Musikalische Handleitung*, written around the turn of the eighteenth century, is a clear reflection of this state of affairs, as it shows how different genres, such as keyboard suites or fugues, could be elaborated upon the same basic figured-bass framework.

However, the continuity between simple continuo realization exercises and four-part keyboard fugues might not be apparent, and the intermediate steps required to progress from the former to the latter might appear elusive at best. According to William Renwick, it is the partimento repertory, and especially partimento fugue, that provides 'the essential link between a basic harmony framework and an elaborate contrapuntal texture'.<sup>3</sup>

The partimento repertory originally took the form of a notational shorthand for short compositions such as organ versets. This notation, practised by seventeenth-century Italian keyboardists such as Banchieri and Pasquini, consisted of a figured-bass line, sometimes accompanied by rudimentary indications for upper-voice entries, to be realized by the performer. As thoroughbass became the conceptual foundation of baroque musical thinking, a whole pedagogical approach to learning compositional and improvisational skills developed such that, by the turn of the eighteenth century, a culture of figured-bass exercises and idioms, such as the famous *règle de l'octave*, had already spread across Europe.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, although the partimento tradition is generally associated with Italian, and especially Neapolitan, composers such as Leo, Durante and Fenaroli, who were among the most celebrated composers of partimenti, a lesser known tradition existed in Germany, especially in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The more advanced partimento collections often included figured-bass lines with thematic repeats that had to be realized at the keyboard in fugal style. As shown in Example 1, such partimento fugues often included passages written in two voices (bars 3–4) and clef changes to indicate subject entries (bar 5). More sophisticated examples featured episodes and strettos, and sometimes elaborate notational systems to indicate subject entries in the upper voices.

In recent years several scholars have emphasized the importance of the partimento repertory as a pedagogical tool for teaching composition. Focusing mostly on the rich Neapolitan partimento tradition, Robert Gjerdingen has shown how the practice of partimento exercises would train students to recognize specific schemata.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Christensen has noted that, in general, for German theorists and composers, 'thorough-bass instruction was much more compositionally oriented' than for the Italian masters, and that 'German pedagogues tended to be more concerned with the contrapuntal/chordal rules governing the construction of a harmonization above a bass than they were with the practical realization of that bass by a

2 The following descriptions of J. S. Bach's teaching method, by C. P. E. Bach and Kirnberger respectively, are emblematic of this attitude towards composition: 'His pupils had to begin their studies by learning pure four-part thoroughbass. From this he went to chorales; first he added the basses to them himself, and they had to invent the alto and tenor. Then he taught them to devise the bass themselves' (Letter of C. P. E. Bach to Johann Nicolaus Forkel, dated 13 January 1775, trans. in *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, revised and enlarged by Christoph Wolff (New York and London: Norton, 1998), 399); 'His method is the best, for he proceeds steadily, step by step, from the easiest to the most difficult, and as a result even the step to the fugue has only the difficulty of passing from one step to the next' (Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *Gedanken über die verschiedenen Lehrarten in der Komposition als Vorbereitung zur Fugenkenntnis* (Berlin, 1792), 4–5, trans. in *The New Bach Reader*, 320).

3 William Renwick, *Analyzing Fugue: A Schenkerian Approach* (New York: Pendragon, 1995), 9.

4 Thomas Christensen gives a detailed account of the historical development of the *règle de l'Octave* in 'The Règle de l'Octave in Thorough-Bass Theory and Practice', *Acta Musicologica* 64/2 (1992), 91–117.

5 Robert Gjerdingen, 'Transmitting a Music Culture through Partimenti', Society for Music Theory Meeting, Madison, November 2003. Gjerdingen has also compiled a large online database of partimento manuscripts (including many with realization). See Gjerdingen, *Monuments of Partimenti*, <<http://faculty-web.at.northwestern.edu/music/gjerdingen/partimenti/index.htm>>. His most recent book, *Music in the Galant Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), discusses partimento in connection with a wide variety of musical schemata of the galant period.



Example 1 Langloz manuscript, Fugue No. 19 in F major (all excerpts from the Langloz manuscript after William Renwick, *The Langloz Manuscript: Fugal Improvisation through Figured Bass* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)). Used by permission

The label *Ten.*, given in the original manuscript, indicates the tenor entry

keyboardist'.<sup>6</sup> Renwick suggested that partimento anthologies such as the Langloz manuscript functioned as thesauruses of styles and patterns that had to be mastered by organists and composers.<sup>7</sup> However, the precise content and pedagogical goals of the compositional lessons taught by the German partimento tradition, and especially by the partimento fugues, remain to be defined.<sup>8</sup>

In the following pages I intend to expand on Renwick's ideas by demonstrating how partimento fugue can be construed as the missing link between thoroughbass and fully fledged keyboard fugues. I propose that the value of partimento fugues as a pedagogical tool hinges on two points. First is the development of the keyboardist's ability to realize at sight a complex contrapuntal texture from a figured bass, a task which often involves the memorization of specific thematic materials (the subject and countersubject) and the identification of opportunities for weaving these thematic elements into the texture, especially in the upper voices. The second involves the acquisition of commonplace patterns that were fundamental to the baroque composer and keyboardist. I will present two such patterns and discuss their functional implications: (1) the closing scalar descent and (2) the harmonization of a chromatic line in alternating thirds and sixths. I will conclude by suggesting that these abilities were not only beneficial for the purposes of continuo realization, but, perhaps more importantly, they were also crucial in fostering improvisational and compositional skills.

## PARTIMENTO FUGUE IN GERMANY: THE SOURCES

This study will examine partimento fugues from the following four sources, representative of the German school of the eighteenth century: J. S. Bach's *Vorschriften und Grundsätze zum vierstimmigen Spielen des*

<sup>6</sup> Christensen, 'The Règle de l'Octave', 113.

<sup>7</sup> Renwick's publication of the Langloz manuscript must certainly be acknowledged as an important step towards a better apprehension of this repertory. See Renwick, *The Langloz Manuscript: Fugal Improvisation through Figured Bass* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Another important study of the pedagogical role of partimenti is Alfred Mann's survey of Handel's *Lessons for Princess Anne* (*Theory and Practice: The Great Composer as Student and Teacher* (New York: Norton, 1987), 7–39). See also David Ledbetter, *Continuo Playing According to Handel: His Figured Bass Exercises* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).



*Generalbasses* (hereafter *Precepts and Principles*), Handel's *Lessons for Princess Anne*, the Langloz manuscript (the largest extant collection of partimento fugues of German origin) and finally a model realization of a partimento fugue from Heinichen's *Der General-Bass in der Composition*.<sup>9</sup>

Handel's and Bach's manuals are essentially thoroughbass manuals, and include only a few fugal exercises. Bach's *Precepts and Principles*, which, as Pamela Poulin has noted, is modelled on Niedt's *Musikalische Handleitung*, begins by expounding basic rules of realization and voice leading for various sets of figured-bass symbols and then proceeds to longer examples, which include five partimento fugues (one of these is shown in Example 2).<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in Handel's *Lessons*, each type of figured-bass symbol is introduced successively, beginning with simple inversions and then moving to seventh chords and suspensions, all the while increasing the level of complexity from basic figured-bass examples to more advanced exercises, whose degree of difficulty approaches that found in Mattheson's twenty-four 'test pieces' (*Probestücke*),<sup>11</sup> and finally to partimento fugues. As Alfred Mann remarked, the *Lessons* are a remarkable example of a smooth and stepwise pedagogical progression in thoroughbass instruction, which 'leads directly to the study of fugue'.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Mann points out that the first fugue assignment, which is extremely simple (Example 3), incorporates almost verbatim a 7–6 suspension-chain pattern that was the focal point of an earlier figured-bass exercise. Subsequent fugal exercises introduce invertible counterpoint, double fugue and stretto, culminating in a partimento double fugue with stretto in augmentation and diminution.

On the other hand, the Langloz manuscript contains a collection of fifty-seven fugues, which are, for the most part, fairly developed pieces requiring a sophisticated level of musicianship, which suggests that they were intended for advanced musicians.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Bach's and Handel's manuals, there is no general

9 Bach's *Precepts and Principles for Playing the Thorough-Bass or Accompanying in Four Parts* are reprinted in Phillip Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller-Maitland (London: Novello, 1883–1885), Appendix 12, 315–347. See also J. S. Bach's *Precepts and Principles for Playing the Thorough-Bass or Accompanying in Four Parts (Vorschriften und Grundsätze zum vierstimmigen Spielen des Generalbasses)*, trans. with facsimile, Introduction and notes by Pamela L. Poulin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

Handel's *Lessons for Princess Anne (Thoroughbass and Fugue)* are reprinted in *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe: kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Supplement, volume 1, ed. Alfred Mann (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1978). See also Ledbetter, *Continuo Playing According to Handel*, and Mann, *Theory and Practice*, 7–39.

Mus. Ms. Bach P 296, known as the 'Langloz' manuscript after its scribe, contains two sets of partimento pieces, the first one comprising thirty-eight fugues and the second comprising fifteen preludes and fugues, three preludes and four fugues. Its title-page reads '39 PRAELUDIA et FUGEN del Signor Johann Sebastian Bach'. Its attribution to Bach is, however, doubtful. For a detailed discussion of the contents and of the possible origins of the Langloz manuscript see Renwick, *The Langloz Manuscript*, 9–28.

Heinichen's model realization of a partimento fugue is reprinted in George Buelow, *Johann David Heinichen's Der General-Bass in der Composition: A Critical Study with Annotated Translation of Selected Chapters* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1961), 368–370.

10 Bach's thoroughbass instruction is actually a paraphrase of Niedt's *Musikalische Handleitung*. See Pamela L. Poulin, 'Niedt's *Musikalische Handleitung*, Part I, and Bach's "Vorschriften und Grundsätze . . .": A Comparison', *The Music Review* 52/3 (1991), 171–189.

11 Mattheson's two volumes, consisting of twenty-four 'test-pieces' each (*Exemplarische Organisten-Probe*, Hamburg, 1719; later included in the *Grosse General-Bass-Schule*, Hamburg, 1731), are, according to Renwick, the last important collection of German partimento exercises (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 8). The similarity between some of Handel's more advanced thoroughbass exercises and Mattheson's *Probestücke* has been noted by Ledbetter (*Continuo Playing According to Handel*, 35).

12 Mann, *Theory and Practice*, 15.

13 Renwick observes: 'The [fugue] subjects of P 296 [the Langloz manuscript] are consistently more fully developed than those found in the *Precepts and Principles*, for example, or in the work of Pasquini, and are certainly comparable to Handel's partimento subjects' (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 18).



The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major). The time signature is common time (C). The first system shows the initial subject and answer. The second system shows the subject and answer with figured bass notation below the bass staff. The third system continues the subject and answer with figured bass notation. The fourth system concludes the subject and answer with figured bass notation.

6  
subject answer

subject

6 6 6 6 4# 6 6 5 6 6 6 7 7

11  
answer

6 6 6 6 5 5b 4 5 6 7 6 5 6

16  
subject

7 6 6 6 4 6 6 7 6 7 6 5

Example 2 Johann Sebastian Bach, *Precepts and Principles*, Exercise No. 16 (Phillip Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, translated by Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller-Maitland (London: Novello, 1883–1885), appendix 12, 339)

Accidentals in parenthesis were added by the author. The answer includes a retransition indicated by a dotted line

sense of graduated levels of technical difficulty as one progresses through the manuscript. Rather, fugues and preludes are arranged by keys, covering the fifteen keys that were common in early eighteenth-century music.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the fugues of the Langloz manuscript display an interesting stylistic variety: while many subjects begin with a repeated-note subject head which, according to Stefan Kunze, is characteristic of the *Spielfuge* (Example 4a and Example 4c), a few are written in *konzertante Fuge* style (Example 4b), and yet

14 These keys are all the white-key major and minor keys, except B major, plus two flat keys, B flat major and E flat major. Renwick notes that this selection of keys is identical to that found in Bach's fifteen Inventions, and that it remained a standard through the middle of the eighteenth century. *The Langloz Manuscript*, 11.



Example 3 George Frideric Handel, *Lessons for Princess Anne*, Fugue assignment No. 1 (Alfred Mann, *Theory and Practice: The Great Composer as Student and Teacher* (New York: Norton, 1987), 27). Used by permission

others exhibit a definite *ricercare* affect (Example 4d).<sup>15</sup> One of the didactic goals of the Langloz manuscript could be to provide an anthology of common keys and fugal styles.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Heinichen's encyclopaedic treatise *Der General-Bass in der Composition* presents a partimento fugue, which is actually a double fugue (Example 5), along with a detailed commentary on issues pertaining to its realization and performance.<sup>17</sup>

## FROM BASIC KEYBOARD REALIZATION EXERCISES TO VIRTUAL RECOMPOSITIONS

A few examples of realizations of partimento fugues, including model realizations by Heinichen (Example 5) and Handel, have come down to us, providing a wealth of information about the voice-leading and textural styles that were practised when realizing these pieces. These written-out realizations were certainly a useful didactic tool by which the master could concretely show his pupil what was expected in thoroughbass accompaniment. Indeed, no less an authority than C. P. E. Bach encouraged his students to write out their realizations as a means of developing their skill.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Stefan Kunze, 'Gattungen der Fuge in Bachs Wohltemperiertem Klavier', in *Bach-Interpretationen*, ed. Martin Geck (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 74–93.

<sup>16</sup> Renwick, *The Langloz Manuscript*, 20. Ledbetter likewise considers that the Langloz manuscript represents a common stock of generic fugue subjects: *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: The 48 Preludes and Fugues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 100.

<sup>17</sup> Heinichen's example is meant to illustrate the accompaniment of an instrumental or vocal ensemble. See Buelow, *Johann David Heinichen's Der General-Bass in der Composition*, 367–372.

<sup>18</sup> C. P. E. Bach writes: 'The student, in receiving instruction, must first play each example and then write it out in two staves. The ear and eye will thereby learn to distinguish clearly between the good and the bad' (*Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William J. Mitchell (New York: Norton, 1949), Introduction to Part Two, §32, 176–177).

(a) Fugue No. 1 in C major, bars 1–5 (*Spielfuge*)

subject

Alt:

7 6 6 5 4 6  
2

(b) Fugue No. 18 in E minor, bars 1–7 (*konzertante Fuge*)

subject

Alt:

(c) Fugue No. 24 in G minor, bars 1–6 (*Spielfuge*)

subject

Ten:

b b 6 6 7 # 6

(d) Fugue No. 25 in F minor, bars 1–11 (in *ricercare* style)

subject

Ten:

6 6 5 6 7 6 b 7 6

## Example 4 Some fugue openings from the Langloz manuscript

The labels *Alt:* and *Ten:*, given in the original manuscript, indicate the alto and tenor entries respectively

At its most basic level, the realization of a partimento fugue is nothing more than a chord-filling exercise, as can be inferred from the realizations of the fugal exercises included in the *Precepts and Principles* (see Example 2). This style of realization was probably expected from beginners or when merely sight-reading a



Example 5 Johann David Heinichen, *Der General-Bass in der Composition*, model realization of a partimento fugue (George Buelow, *Johann David Heinichen's Der General-Bass in der Composition: A Critical Study with Annotated Translation of Selected Chapters* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1961), 368–370). Used by permission

figured-bass accompaniment part.<sup>19</sup> In many ways, the resulting texture is not that different from a standard continuo accompaniment in block chords of a vocal fugue.<sup>20</sup> As with a typical continuo exercise, little attention is paid to melodic continuity in the upper voices when sounding a full four-part texture, and the

19 C. P. E. Bach suggests that ‘it is best to begin with four-part accompaniment and establish its foundations. Those who learn this style thoroughly will find it easy to go on to others’ (*Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. Mitchell, Introduction to Part Two, §34, 176–177).

20 See David Schulenberg, ‘Composition and Improvisation in the School of J. S. Bach’, *Bach Perspectives* 1 (1995), 1–42.





21

9 8 6 7 6 6 5 6 6# 6 6 7 6 5

26

b7 6 6# 6 6 6 6 4 3

Example 5 *continued*

rules of voice leading seem to be relaxed, although care is still taken to avoid parallel octaves and fifths. (There are specific recommendations to this effect in the *Precepts and Principles*; however, a few parallel octaves and fifths appear in Heinichen's model realization. See Example 5, bars 8–9, 16 and 21–22.<sup>21</sup>) In particular, no real attempt is made to connect the subject and countersubject entries in the upper voices with the ensuing chordal accompaniment in the right hand, which prevails once the subject enters in the bass (see, for instance, bar 6 in Example 2). Partimento fugues realized in this style are made to sound fugal only in a superficial manner, brought about by the repeated subject entries which seem to mimic a four-part fugal exposition, while the upper parts revert to a typical continuo texture as soon as all the voices have entered. The illusion of a fugal texture is heightened by subsequent thematic statements in the bass part, which help create the impression that additional voices are entering, especially when sounded in a lower register, even though that is not actually the case (see Example 2, bars 16–18). However, since the realizations of the *Precepts and Principles*' exercises are most likely the work of a student, it would be unreasonable to assess the quality of a typical eighteenth-century continuo realization on the basis of these examples, whose poor quality has been mentioned by several scholars.<sup>22</sup>

At a more advanced level, the performer must remember and subsequently reuse a countersubject, which is usually written out in full in the opening bars of the fugue, typically in a two-part texture involving soprano and alto, and later suggested by figures, a situation that regularly arises in many fugues of the Langloz manuscript (see Example 4). Such countersubjects are generally rudimentary, often built around a simple suspension figure that combines with the subject to form a contrapuntal combination that is invertible at the

21 Buelow notes 'the freedom with which Heinichen moves between four and five parts and his unconcern for parallel octaves and fifths between inner parts' (*Johann David Heinichen's Der General-Bass in der Composition*, 371).

22 Mann remarks that 'it [the manuscript of the *Precepts and Principles*] contains, in an unidentified hand, a number of exercises which, as is evident from their poor execution, were not reviewed by Bach' (*Theory and Practice*, 10). Renwick comments that 'it is to be regretted that these examples have been the most widely available partimento fugues. Their barely competent, certainly unimaginative realizations, possibly by a student of Bach, give little idea of the range of musical possibilities inherent in partimento fugue' (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 4). The poor style of realization was also noted by Spitta (*Johann Sebastian Bach*, see footnotes on 315–347) and by F. T. Arnold (*The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass*, 2 volumes (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), volume 1, 215).



Example 6 Handel, *Lessons*, realization of Fugue assignment No. 2 (after Mann, *Theory and Practice*, 28; realization provided by the author)

Note that all three upper parts are written in smaller print on the upper staff in order to distinguish between the realization and the original bass line

octave (see Example 4c and Example 1), but they can sometimes be fairly elaborate, as in Example 4d. In the absence of a model realization for these fugues, we can only conjecture that, given their prevailing level of complexity and sophistication, a more imaginative realization was favoured over the simple continuo style previously seen.<sup>23</sup>

The demands on the performer's memory are even higher in Handel's advanced fugal exercises, in which the subject and countersubject entries above the bass are indicated using Handel's shorthand notation, which specifies the voice and starting-pitch for entries in the upper parts (Example 6). Mann explains that Handel 'outlines the exposition by marking the voices in capital letters, C (*Cantus*, i.e. soprano), A, T, B and by fixing their entrance tones through the symbols of German organ tablature in adding above the respective letters, as needed, one or two short lines (the first or second octave above middle c; small letters without lines serve for the octave below middle c, capital letters for the octave below that) – a practice that reflects his own training under Zachau'.<sup>24</sup> In some cases the performer is expected to remember both the subject and countersubject, and to make the required tonal adjustments between the subject and answer forms (Example 7). Moreover, Handel's model realizations are much more sophisticated than the ones provided in the *Precepts and Principles*, suggesting that, even in the context of a partimento exercise, Handel appears to be mindful of issues of voice leading and melodic continuity.

<sup>23</sup> Mattheson writes: 'Again we point out that the ornamental and variegated playing of thorough-bass has little place in pieces where the fundament [bass part] itself has been purposely written in an ornamental and variegated style. On the other hand, if the bass is written without any special ornamentation, and if one plays alone, be it in the beginning of an aria, in the middle, or wherever else an interlude appears, then and there do these ornaments, these figures, these ideas, these niceties . . . find their proper setting – yes, almost their necessary place' (Harvey Reddick, *Johann Mattheson's Forty-Eight Thorough-Bass Test-Pieces: Translation and Commentary* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1956), 40). Although Mattheson does not discuss partimento fugue per se in this passage, one can easily see how his comments would be relevant to partimento realization as well.

<sup>24</sup> Mann, *Theory and Practice*, 16. Bernardo Pasquini's *Fuga in Basso Continuo* also shows subject entries in the upper voices by means of markings; however, Pasquini's system does not indicate the starting pitches or the register (London, British Library, MS Add. 31501 (Bernardo Pasquini, Partial Autograph), in *Seventeenth-Century Keyboard Music*, ed. Alexander Silbiger, series 8, volume 2 (New York: Garland, 1988), 37–38).



countersubject

subject

5

10

7  $\sharp$  6 6  $\flat$  6  $\sharp$  6 7 7  $\flat$  subj. in Cantu 6 6 6 7

7  $\sharp$  6 5  $\flat$  6 6 7 7  $\flat$  g contrasubj. in Tenore 6 6  $\flat$  6  $\sharp$  6 subj. in Alto 6

$\flat$  d contrasubj. in Cantu

Example 7 Handel, *Lessons*, Fugue assignment No. 5, bars 1–14 (Mann, *Theory and Practice*, 30)

subject

6

11

16

6 6 6 6 4 3 4 6 6 5 6 4 4  $\flat$  6 5

6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 4  $\sharp$

4 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 4 4

Example 8 Langloz manuscript, Fugue No. 14 in E flat major, bars 1–19

Possible placements of the fugue subject in the upper parts are indicated in smaller print on an additional staff

Finally, it is possible in some fugues from the Langloz manuscript to place an additional upper-voice subject entry above the bass line when the figured-bass symbols suggest such a placement. Example 8 shows a passage from Fugue 14 in which potential upper-voice subject entries are indicated in smaller



notes on an additional staff. Note that the performer has to supply the missing first few notes of the subject in order to realize a potential stretto at the octave between soprano and alto beginning on the third beat of bar 10.<sup>25</sup> In this case, not only must the performer work out where to place a subject entry above the bass line, but he must also select an appropriate starting-pitch and register. This level of complexity is not observed in the examples found in the *Precepts and Principles*, where the thematic statements are restricted to the lowest voice once the exposition is completed, nor in the fugal assignments from the *Lessons*, in which the placement of subject and countersubject entries is always precisely indicated to the performer. While the notation system used by Handel is more accurate and permits a variety of textures (see below for a discussion of partimento fugue texture), the fugues of the Langloz manuscript are, as a group, probably the most advanced among the German school of partimento fugal pieces, by virtue of the demands they impose both on the performer's memory and ability quickly to parse a figured bass in order to locate potential thematic entries in the upper voices.

The graded levels of difficulty presented here outline a progression from realization exercises, in which the emphasis lies on the recognition and execution of continuo figures, to recomposition exercises, in which the performer is expected to memorize the subject and countersubject and recognize opportunities for additional upper-voice subject entries, in order to project a rich contrapuntal texture from a simple figured-bass line. Undoubtedly, the practice of these advanced partimento fugues would have been an efficient means of developing a keyboardist's compositional skills.<sup>26</sup>

#### THE ROLE OF NOTATIONAL SYSTEMS AND CLEF CHANGES IN SPECIFYING SUBJECT ENTRIES AND TEXTURES

The type of notation used in a partimento fugue has a direct bearing on the order of subject entries in the exposition and on the types of textures that are available to the composer or performer. For instance, in the model fugue provided by Heinichen, as well as in the fugues found in the *Precepts and Principles* or in the Langloz manuscript, there is no notational system to indicate entries above the bass. Hence the composer has no consistent method for indicating subject and countersubject entries in upper voices, though, as we have seen, thematic statements can sometimes be suggested by figures (see Example 8). It thus seems more convenient to place subject entries almost exclusively in the lowest-sounding voice. One consequence is that the large majority of these fugues show a Soprano–Alto–Tenor–Bass (henceforth abbreviated SATB) order of entries in the exposition, which is also the standard order of entry for most fully written-out fugues.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the typical SATB exposition is found in forty-seven of the fifty-seven fugues of the Langloz manuscript, and in all but one of the fugal exercises in the *Precepts and Principles*.

25 The reader will notice that I have not amended the figured bass in bar 10 (a 6 would be required under the E[flat] on the fourth beat of bar 10).

26 Tharald Borgir, in a discussion of advanced partimento exercises, remarks that 'the player had to recognize at sight opportunities for using diminutions, imitations, motivic interplay, etc. . . ., and thereby developed compositional skills. A central aspect of this training was the necessity of working out musical ideas on the spot' (*The Performance of the Basso Continuo in Italian Baroque Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1987), 147).

27 Mattheson, praising diversity in the order of entries, writes: 'Now as regards skillful alternation [of subjects and answers], we do not mean the old, trodden path, straight from the top to the bottom, or from the bottom to the top voice (for many fugues also begin very nicely in the bass or tenor); but we mean an arrangement and division whereby the theme is sometimes in this and sometimes in that position, be it high or low, without rank and order' (Ernest Harriss, *Johann Mattheson's Der Vollkommene Kappelmeister: A Revised Translation with Critical Commentary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1981), Part 3, chapter 20, §106, 730).



On the other hand, the notational system used in Handel's fugal exercises is so precise that, in many passages, the performer has only a few choices regarding the realization of the piece; he is in effect coerced to use a particular voice leading that was undoubtedly intended by the composer. In such a case, the partimento fugue can be construed as being almost a sort of stenographic notation for a complete composition (Example 6).<sup>28</sup> Since the subject entries of Handel's collection can be indicated precisely in the upper voices, the order of entries does not necessarily have to be SATB. Moreover, this notational system allows the melodically interesting material (such as subject and countersubject statements) to be distributed more evenly among the different parts, instead of being located mostly in the lowest-sounding voice, as is typical of other partimento pieces, such as many preludes and fugues from the Langloz manuscript or Mattheson's *Probestücke*. While the performer must memorize the subject and countersubject, he is not required to determine their placement above the figured bass. For the composer, the precision afforded by this system results in a greater freedom regarding placement of subjects and countersubjects. It also projects an implied musical texture that is rigidly coded: although it is possible to realize a piece written using such a system in a few different correct versions, the differences between these performances would probably be restricted to surface elements such as ornamentation or chord doubling.

Another peculiar aspect of the notation of partimento fugues resides in the numerous clef changes, which can even be found after the exposition. Clef changes are relatively rare in most non-fugal partimenti: indeed, there are no clef changes in any of the preludes of the Langloz manuscript, nor in the twenty-four test pieces from the first volume of Mattheson's *Exemplarische Organisten-Probe*. In fact, most figured-bass exercises and non-fugal partimenti indicate only the lowest part, notated in the bass clef, and this part is generally the most melodically active as the keyboardist is not expected to provide much more than a simple chordal accompaniment in the right hand. Conversely, the majority of the fugues of the Langloz manuscript, as well as partimento fugues by Niedt, Handel and Heinichen, contain frequent clef changes.<sup>29</sup> For instance, several fugues from the Langloz manuscript include passages written in two parts, which generally consist of an accompanied upper-voice thematic statement notated in soprano or treble clef (see Example 8, bars 11–12, and Example 9, boxed sections). Assuming that the partimento score usually indicates the lowest-sounding voice, from which the harmonies are realized with the help of the figured-bass symbols, the use of alto or soprano clefs would indicate the omission of the lower parts, resulting in a thinner texture.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in addition to conveying information regarding the placement of upper-voice subject entries, clef changes could be used in partimento fugues to suggest lighter textures that are typical of a realization in fugal style. Indeed, Heinichen's own model realization of a partimento fugue shows how, over the course of the piece, the texture frequently alternates between a full four-part continuo texture, with doubled octaves in the left hand to add thickness and depth to the bass part, and lighter textures in one or two parts. Heinichen's observations regarding this realization are particularly illuminating in this connection (his comments refer to Example 5):

28 Alexander Silbiger observes that, in imitative textures, Pasquini sometimes indicated upper-voice entries as 'entra il pensiero', 'entra la fuga', 'entra il soggetto', or even 'entra la fuga al' roverso' in his *Fuga in Basso Continuo*. Silbiger states that 'in these cases the notation transcends that of a simple figured bass, and approaches a short-hand for a full composition. Indeed, when these basses are suitably realized, a body of varied and attractive compositions emerges that cannot be dismissed as mere exercises' (Introduction to MS Add. 31501, in *Seventeenth-Century Keyboard Music*, series 8, viii). Those comments could apply to Handel's fugal exercises as well.

29 The partimento fugues of the *Precepts and Principles*, which are relatively simpler, do not contain clef changes after the exposition; their style of realization is closer to that of a typical figured-bass exercise (see Example 2).

30 Renwick, commenting on partimento fugue texture, observes that 'maintenance of strict four-part music is by no means obligatory in this repertoire. Extensive use can be made of three-part realization as well as of fuller harmonies, particularly at cadential points' (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 15). Moreover, it is very likely that textural changes were sometimes hinted at by the figures; for example, Renwick notes that the sudden appearance of complete figurings such as 8/5/3 in Fugue No. 5 (bar 19) suggests a contrast between a contrapuntal texture and a full chordal texture (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 39).



subject

Example 9 Langloz manuscript, Fugue No. 19 in F major  
The passages notated in two parts are boxed on the score

- (1) One finds the inscription *tasto solo* twice in this example. The words *tasto solo* fully signify that one should play these same notes as single keys or [with] single fingers, without additional accompaniment, until another part or another clef appears.
- (2) One sees at various places just two parts written one over the other, which means that in such circumstances one should never play more than is notated.<sup>31</sup>

As further evidence suggesting that clef changes indicate thinner textures, it is worth pointing out that the two-part textures presented here are always harmonically self-standing, that is, they do not require a bass line to be harmonically complete (refer to Example 8, bars 11–12, and Example 9, boxed sections). In particular, there are no harmonic intervals of a fourth that would indicate incomplete first-inversion chords, for which a bass part would have to be added to provide the missing chordal factor.

In a few cases the performer may indeed be expected to provide an accompaniment in the left hand to a passage in one part written in the soprano clef, but these instances seem to be the exception rather than the norm.<sup>32</sup> For instance, in Fugue No. 27 from the Langloz manuscript (Example 10), bars 18–20 show a passage notated in soprano clef with the stems pointing upward, suggesting a chordal accompaniment in the left hand (a possible accompaniment is indicated in smaller notes).

Finally, a strong correlation may be observed between textural changes and the introduction of new thematic or motivic material, or of a new contrapuntal combination. Thus the first *tasto solo* marking after the exposition in Heinichen’s model realization (Example 5, bar 11) coincides with the introduction of a new subject (which will eventually be used in combination with the main subject). The second passage notated in two parts (Example 5, bars 18–21) shows a stretto, while the third such passage (Example 5, bars 25–28) brings together the first and second subjects, leading to the final cadence in a full-voiced texture. The fugues in the Langloz manuscript, as well as Handel’s partimento fugue assignments, share this connection between textural changes and the introduction of a new theme or contrapuntal combination (Example 8, bars 11–12).<sup>33</sup>

31 Buelow, *Johann David Heinichen’s Der General-Bass in der Composition*, 367.  
 32 Renwick notes that ‘In three or four treble passages of P 296 [Langloz manuscript] a simple accompaniment in a lower part seems warranted, even though none is indicated within the confines of a partimento score’ (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 17).  
 33 The use of textural changes as structural markers in Handel’s partimento fugue assignments was observed by Ledbetter, who notes that ‘Handel’s model [for fugue assignment No. 3 of the *Lessons*] demonstrates the textures of



Example 10 Langloz manuscript, Fugue No. 27 in G major, bars 13–23

A possible realization of the lower part is indicated in smaller print (realization by the author)

### PARTIMENTO, IMPROVISATION AND COMMONPLACE PATTERNS

In addition to its pedagogical and compositional ramifications, the partimento tradition was also intimately linked with improvisation. According to an oft-quoted letter by C. P. E. Bach, his father composed his keyboard works in two ways: the first method was to improvise at the keyboard and later set the piece onto paper, while a second approach was to compose at the desk.<sup>34</sup> It has been suggested that, for baroque composers, keyboard improvisation was the norm, and composition was taught as a logical extension of extemporized continuo realization.<sup>35</sup> Presumably partimento was seen as a quick and easy way to set down improvisatory pieces, and might also have been a starting-point for further improvisations. An early practitioner of partimenti, Pasquini, wrote out a long series of unrealized figured-bass progressions which, according to Christensen, 'could serve both as thorough-bass exercises as well as harmonic skeletons that the performer would fill out using appropriate diminution and passage work'.<sup>36</sup> David Schulenberg also argues for an explicit connection between improvisation and partimento, remarking that 'several Bach fugues seem to resemble the products of an improvised partimento'.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, several shorter fugues in the Langloz manuscript could legitimately be seen as frameworks from which a fully fledged fugue could be improvised.<sup>38</sup>

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improvised fugue and how these may be used to articulate structure. Most of the fugue is in three parts only, with rests to give emphasis to a new entry of the subject. A full four-part texture is reserved to give a sense of climax to the final bass entry (b. 11), to which the right hand adds the usual continuo-style chordal suspensions' (*Continuo Playing According to Handel*, 48).

34 C. P. E. Bach, in a letter to Forkel quoted in George Stauffer, 'Bach as Reviser of His Own Keyboard Works', *Early Music* 13/2 (1985), 185–198.

35 See Stauffer, 'Bach as Reviser of His Own Keyboard Works'. In addition, Schulenberg writes that 'with respect to keyboard music, many of the documents concerning teaching and practice in the Bach circle relate not to composition as such but to a tradition in which composition and improvisation were two aspects of a single activity' ('Composition and Improvisation', 2).

36 Christensen, 'The Règle de l'Octave', 108–110. The idea that short partimento pieces, and especially those characterized by imitative texture, may have been used as improvisational material is also entertained by Silbiger, who suggests that some of Pasquini's short *Versetti* 'may also represent the recording of musical ideas that could be worked out into more extended movements; characteristically they commence with two successive imitative solo entries, followed by a *tutti* bass entry, in a style that suggests the development into a substantial sonata or concerto movement, but instead, they progress rapidly to a concluding cadence' (Introduction to MS Add. 31501, in *Seventeenth-Century Keyboard Music*, series 8, vii).

37 Schulenberg, 'Composition and Improvisation', 17.

38 Renwick mentions fugues Nos 11 in D minor and 15 in E minor as excellent starting-points for improvising more extended fugues (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 45 and 49).



Improvised music must, by necessity, rely on recurring patterns and well known schemata. Schulenberg claims that such was the case within the Bach circle.<sup>39</sup> These patterns may consist of melodic figures such as Marpurg's *Setzmanieren*,<sup>40</sup> harmonic progressions such as the *règle de l'octave*, basic contrapuntal formulas such as Vogt's *phantasia simplex*,<sup>41</sup> or even learned contrapuntal devices such as stretto.<sup>42</sup> Not unexpectedly, the partimento repertory makes frequent use of these and similar formulas.

One very commonly used pattern was described by Mattheson. Commenting on what might be expected in an improvised fugue at an audition for a major organ post, he proposed a descending chromatic tetrachord as a potential countersubject for his model fugue subject, which it harmonizes in alternating thirds and sixths (Example 11a).<sup>43</sup> Presumably this contrapuntal combination afforded composers a commonplace, ready-made subject/countersubject pair involving a descending chromatic tetrachord, which has the advantage of being invertible at the octave (compare bars 5–8 and 9–12 in Example 11b).<sup>44</sup> While the descending chromatic tetrachord is found more frequently in connection with this pattern, an ascending chromatic line can also be harmonized in a similar fashion (Example 12). Moreover, the descending chromatic line can span a larger interval than a fourth, as in Example 13, in which the chromatic line spans a sixth.

This contrapuntal pattern is found not only in figured-bass exercises (Example 12) and partimento fugues (Examples 4d and 13), but also in masterpieces from various composers spanning over two centuries, from Sweelinck (Example 11b) to Handel (Example 14) and Bach (Examples 15 and 16).<sup>45</sup> In Handel's Fugue in C minor HWV610 the alto part (inner voice) accompanies both chromatic descending lines in bass and soprano in alternating thirds and sixths (Example 14, boxed sections in the score). The two excerpts from the second book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* show Bach's elaborate treatment of the basic pattern. In the excerpt from Fugue No. 17 in A flat major (Example 15) Bach has reversed the standard pattern of alternating thirds and sixths (compare with Example 11b, bars 11–12), resulting in somewhat unexpected harmonizations of the subject/countersubject pair over the course of the fugue. In Fugue No. 18 in G sharp minor (Example 16) Bach employs rhythmic displacement to disguise the pattern (a version showing the basic pattern is proposed in smaller print on the upper staff).

Handel's models from the *Lessons* constitute an especially appropriate source of information regarding the types of patterns that were commonly found in a fugal realization. Their coupling to the fugue assignments, added to their ostensibly didactic function, leads one to surmise that their realization would be stylistically similar to that expected of the adjoining assignments. In all three models, a scalar descent is explicitly present in the top voice in the bars immediately preceding the concluding cadence (Example 17). The descents in Example 17a and Example 17c span an entire octave (from tonic to tonic), while Example 17b shows a descent from the fifth scale degree to the tonic.

That this pattern ends each of the three model fugues suggests that it is fairly common and prompts a closer examination of the six adjoining partimento fugues, in order to assess whether such a pattern is

39 Schulenberg, 'Composition and Improvisation', 25.

40 Marpurg presents a series of *Setzmanieren*, which are basic melodic figures, such as arpeggiations or neighbour-note figures, that could theoretically be strung together to form a melodic line (*Anleitung zum Clavierspielen* (Berlin, 1765); French edition: *Principes du clavecin* (Berlin, 1756)).

41 Moritz-Johann Vogt demonstrates how to develop a simple two-part texture in minims into a fugal texture in *Conclave Thesauri magnae artis musicae* (Prague, 1719), section 3, chapters 5 and 6. See Hans-Heinrich Unger, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Musik und Rhetorik*, in *Musik und Geistesgeschichte*, Berliner Studien zur Musikwissenschaft, volume 4 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1969), 39.

42 Schulenberg, 'Composition and Improvisation', 25. See also Renwick, *Analyzing Fugue*, 165–188, and 'Structural Patterns in Fugue Subjects and Fugal Expositions', *Music Theory Spectrum* 13/2 (1991), 197–218.

43 Mattheson, *Grosse General-Bass-Schule*, 38. See also Renwick, *The Langloz Manuscript*, 18.

44 See Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 315.

45 Renwick observed that this pattern was also present in Bach's Fugue in C minor BWV537 and in Pachelbel's Ricercare in C minor (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 58).





a) Mattheson, model fugue subject (after Mattheson, *Grosse General-Bass-Schule*, facsimile of the original edition, Hamburg, 1731 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 38). Used by permission

The theme may have been borrowed from the fugue of Bach's Sonata in C major for unaccompanied violin (BWV1003)

b) Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, *Fantasia Chromatica* (Dorian mode), bars 1–13 (*Works for Organ and Keyboard* (New York: Dover, 1985), 1–5). Used by permission

Example 11 Two instances of descending chromatic tetrachords harmonized in alternating thirds and sixths

Example 12 Handel, *Lessons*, Exercise No. 9, bars 5–8 (Mann, *Theory and Practice*, 14, Example II–11)

implied in these assignments as well. Indeed, the concluding bars of assignments No. 1 (the descent, spanning an octave, is harmonized with a 7–6 suspension chain; see Example 3), No. 3, No. 5 (Example 18a) and No. 6 (Example 18b) can all be realized in a musically satisfying way using a scalar descent. Scalar descents may also be used convincingly as a closing gesture in partimento fugues found in the *Precepts and Principles*, as well as in the Langloz manuscript (Example 19). The descent may be realized plainly, as in Example 19a, or embellished by using motives derived from the thematic material of the fugue, as in Example 19b, in which the descent is ornamented by using a motive from the countersubject.

At this point the reader might object that the use of an upper-voice scalar descent in the realization of the concluding bars of the preceding examples is not unambiguously indicated by the figured-bass symbols, and



Example 13 Langloz manuscript, Fugue No. 38 in B minor, bars 18–22 (realization by the author)

Example 14 Handel, Fugue in C minor, HWV610, bars 57–64 (*Keyboard Works for Solo Instrument*, after the Deutsche Händelgesellschaft Edition, ed. Friedrich Chrysander (New York: Dover, 1982), 36–37). Used by permission

that different realizations of the same pieces could also be musically valid. However, besides Handel's documented usage of this pattern in his *Lessons*, the fact that the figured basses of the concluding bars from many of these examples share similar structures, such as chains of suspensions or sequences of seventh chords, supports the existence of a common pattern.<sup>46</sup> More importantly, the use of scalar descents is not restricted to partimento fugues, as evidenced by its occurrence in a fugue from Handel's *Keyboard Suite*

<sup>46</sup> Many of those scalar descents end with variants of the *cadenza doppia* (also known as the 'consonant-fourth' cadence), which are characterized by a descent from the fourth scale degree to the tonic in the melody. See, for instance, Examples 17, 18, 19 and 20a.



Example 15 Bach, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, second book, Fugue No. 17 in A flat major, BWV886, bars 1–4 (all excerpts from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* after J. S. Bach, *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, ed. Otto Von Irmer (Munich: Henle, 1974)). Used by permission

Example 16 Bach, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, second book, Fugue No. 18 in G sharp minor, BWV887, bars 66–68  
A version showing the basic contrapuntal combination is proposed in smaller print on an additional staff

No. 2 in F major, HWV427, an early version of which was found at the end of the manuscript for the *Lessons*.<sup>47</sup> Although it exhibits a far greater degree of contrapuntal complexity than the fugal assignments from the *Lessons*, this fugue ends with an embellished scalar descent, realized over a dominant pedal (Example 20a, bars 47–51), that retains many of the characteristics of the ‘model’ scalar descents that were seen in the *Lessons*. Additional fugues by Handel which show an extended scalar descent framing the final cadence include the Fugue in C minor (see again Example 14), in which the upper part shows an extended scalar descent, spanning a twelfth, that is chromatically embellished in bars 60–61, the Fugue from the Keyboard Suite No. 8 in F minor and the Fugue in G minor HWV605. This pattern is also found in Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*. A particularly telling example is found towards the end of the E major fugue from Book II (Example 20b). Here Bach emulates features of *stile antico*, one of which is, according to Ledbetter, a ‘tendency for the last phrase to end with a descending scale pattern decorated with suspensions’.<sup>48</sup> In this excerpt the scalar descent in the top voice (bars 41–44) is accompanied by a similar descent in the bass line (bars 40–43).

The scalar descent thus appears to be a widely used end-of-piece marker in this repertory, a conventional formula that functioned as an extended cadential pattern.<sup>49</sup> The formulaic character of these cadences,

47 This fugue is the fourth movement, marked Allegro, of the Suite No. 2. Mann writes: ‘As a final example, Handel added the first draft for one of his own published works. It is a fugue which he composed in open score notation (as did Bach in various examples preserved in that form) and which breaks off after thirty-eight measures – a conclusion is hastily sketched in a four-measure fragment suggesting pedal point and cadence’ (*Theory and Practice*, 18). See also Renwick, ‘Hidden Fugal Paths: A Schenkerian View of Handel’s F Major Fugue (Suite II)’, *Music Analysis* 14/1 (1995), 49–67.

48 Ledbetter, *Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier*, 279.

49 Several scholars have noted that final cadences were often treated as standardized, stereotypical gestures in this style. See Joel Lester, ‘Heightening Levels of Activity and J. S. Bach’s Parallel-Section Construction’, *Journal of the American*



a) Model for fugue assignment No. 3, bars 11–14

b) Model for fugue assignment No. 5, bars 14–18

c) Model for fugue assignment No. 6, bars 17–21

Example 17 Descending scalar patterns as closing gestures in the models for the fugue assignments from Handel's *Lessons* (all examples after Mann, *Theory and Practice*)

which are devoid of any piece-specific motivic content, implies that an eighteenth-century performer might not have played the subject above the few final chords of a partimento fugue, even if such a realization were theoretically possible, and that, if the figures permitted him to do so, he might have favoured a prolonged scalar descent in the top voice in light of the strong connotations of ending associated with this formula.<sup>50</sup> The fact that fully written-out fugues sometimes indicate the final cadence by means of figures over the last few chords seems to bear out this assertion (Example 21).

As discussed previously, gestures such as the final scalar descent in the upper voice were merely implied in partimento pieces, where the bass line is the sole notated part. This stands in stark contrast to other patterns, such as the *règle de l'octave*, which were explicitly indicated by the figured-bass symbols and

*Musicological Society* 54/1 (2001), 49–96, and especially page 77 for a discussion of cadential formulas. See also William Caplin, 'The Classical Cadence: Conceptions and Misconceptions', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/1 (2004), 51–117.

<sup>50</sup> Renwick's edition of the Langloz manuscript contains several annotations about placing a subject entry in the upper voices over the final cadence. Not only do these potential subject entries rarely match the figures indicated after the first few notes, but they do not correspond to the concept of a formulaic cadential gesture. See, for instance, Renwick's comments about Fugue No. 21 in F major ('A final subject entry can begin on f' in bar 21' (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 54)) and Fugue No. 23 in F major ('At bar 22 beat 1 the treble can reiterate the head of the subject beginning on c' (*The Langloz Manuscript*, 56)).



a) Fugue assignment No. 5 (realization by David Ledbetter, *Continuo Playing According to Handel: His Figured Bass Exercises* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 104). Used by permission

The scalar descent in the top voice (bars 20–24) spans an octave (from  $e^2$  to  $e^1$ )

b) Fugue assignment No. 6 (realization by Ledbetter, *Continuo Playing According to Handel*, 106)

The scalar descent in the top voice (bars 13–15) spans an fifth (from  $b^1$  to  $e^1$ )

Example 18 Descending scalar patterns in the concluding bars of the fugue assignments from Handel's *Lessons*

In both cases, a suggested realization is written in small print on the top staff

abundantly discussed by eighteenth-century theorists.<sup>51</sup> This may also explain why such patterns have gone relatively unnoticed by modern scholars. It also points towards a subtle reappraisal of the relationship between the extant figured basses and their implied realizations. For instance, while the figured basses of the final bars of the two partimento fugues previously shown in Example 19 can be said to imply a descending scale in the upper voice, the figured basses themselves could alternatively be viewed as possible harmonizations of a descending scale in the upper voice. In other words, although an upper-voice descending scale is not explicitly present in the written-out versions of these partimento pieces, it could be construed as a 'virtual' melody from which both the notated bass line and harmonization were derived. This suggests that, at least in certain cases, the generating line of a partimento piece would, from a compositional standpoint, be located in the upper voice, even though the bass part is usually assumed to be the line from which the entire piece is reconstructed by the performer. This view essentially contradicts the standard eighteenth-century thoroughbass paradigm, proposed by Niedt, which regards the various possible realizations of a figured bass as mere surface variations on an essentially unchanging harmonic progression. Instead, it suggests a

51 Christensen, 'The Règle de l'Octave'.



a) Fugue No. 1 in C major, bars 22–27 (realization by the author)

Notice the subject entry in the soprano in bar 23, which creates a stretto effect

b) Fugue No. 5 in D major, bars 26–33 (realization by the author)

Example 19 Scalar descents in the concluding bars of two fugues from the Langloz manuscript

conception of figured-bass realization in which the melodic implications of the upper voices are inextricably tied to the harmonic implications of the bass line.<sup>52</sup>

Although both eighteenth-century and modern writers seem generally to have limited the use of paradigmatic formulas to improvisatory genres such as preludes, fantasias or cadenzas, the previous examples have shown that, on the contrary, these patterns were also fairly common in partimento

<sup>52</sup> Although he did not develop the idea of ‘implicit generating lines’ to such an extent, Gjerdingen suggested in his paper ‘Transmitting a Music Culture through Partimento’ that some typical patterns could be found either in the bass or in the top voice, or could involve both voices. See also Gjerdingen’s discussion of schemata in *Music in the Galant Style*.



a) Handel, Suite No. 2 in F major, HWV427, fourth movement (Allegro), bars 46–51 (published version of 1720, after the *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe: kritische Gesamtausgabe*, series 4, volume 1, ed. Rudolf Steglich, revised by Terence Best (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1993), 15–17). Used by permission

b) Bach, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, second book, Fugue No. 9 in E major, BWV878, bars 40–43

Example 20 Scalar descents in the concluding bars of written-out fugues

fugues.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the ubiquitous character of these formulas, as evidenced by their occurrence in basic thoroughbass exercises as well as in the fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, demonstrates that they were part of a common language shared by many German composers of the period, thus underlining the strong link between the partimento tradition and some of the most celebrated compositions of the baroque era. Presumably the patterns which have been presented in this article are but a few of a potentially wide array of commonplace figures with which any baroque keyboardist or composer would have been thoroughly familiar.<sup>54</sup> In that regard, a prolonged exposure to the partimento repertory would have afforded the budding eighteenth-century keyboard player an opportunity to acquire a thesaurus of idiomatic musical

53 Schulenberg observes that 'the use of formula is not confined to pieces in the expressly improvisatory genres, such as preludes and fantasies, although it is naturally most common there and in passages such as cadenzas that were meant to sound like improvisations (even if they did not actually originate as such)' ('Composition and Improvisation', 23).

54 Schulenberg, discussing the use of formulas among Bach's circle, notes that 'some formulas . . . might have been favorite personal inventions', while 'others would have corresponded to conventional cadential and sequential patterns or to established opening or closing gestures. Indeed, in genres such as the prelude there must have been a fairly well-established protocol regarding the proper use of such formulas' ('Composition and Improvisation', 20).



Example 21 Handel, Fugue in B minor, HWV608, bars 51–61 (*Keyboard Works for Solo Instrument*, 10–12)

gestures that could then be applied to a variety of circumstances, whether when accompanying, improvising or composing.<sup>55</sup>

The pedagogical value of the German partimento tradition is much richer than has previously been recognized. In addition to teaching continuo skills, the practice of partimento fugue realization provided keyboardists and composers with a repertory of commonplaces and developed their ability to extemporize a complex contrapuntal texture from a simple figured-bass line. Clearly, the knowledge thus acquired could then be applied to their compositional skills as well. However, the role of the partimento tradition was by no means purely pedagogical. Partimento pieces offer us a glimpse of the everyday baroque musical language heard in churches and developed in improvisations. Partimento idioms, rather than being confined to mere exercises, pervaded the entire musical repertory of the era. Therefore an increased familiarity with the German partimento tradition and its conventions will greatly aid in refining our understanding of a musical style which still mesmerizes us, in no small part, by its ability constantly to renew itself through ingenious presentations of the same oft-heard idioms, always in original guises and inventive juxtapositions.

<sup>55</sup> See Renwick, *The Langloz Manuscript*, 14.