Basso Continuo
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Music 110: Baroque and Classical Music History
Basso Continuo

“Continuous Bass”

“Figured Bass”

1. Treble Melody
2. Bassline melody
3. Chordal “realization”
Basso Continuo

Agostino Agazzari

*Del Sonare Sopra’l Basso*
*Con Tutti Li Stromenti*
*E Dell’ Uso Loro Nel Conserto*
*(1607)*
Basso Continuo

Agostino Agazzari

Sounding above the bass
With all the instruments
And their use in the concerto
(1607)
Basso Continuo
Agazzari’s Rules

FIRSTLY, know counterpoint,
be able to sing,
feel proportion and the rhythm,
know all the clefs/keys;
know how to correctly resolve dissonances.

SECONDLY, Know how to play your instrument

THIRDLY, have a good ear to hear harmonic movement
Basso Continuo
Agazzari’s Rules

Instrumental Roles in Realizing the Continuo

Instruments of the Foundation
Strumenti da fondamento

Instruments of Ornamentation
Stromenti d’ornamento
Basso Continuo
Agazzari’s Rules

Instrumental Roles in Realizing the Continuo

Instruments of the Foundation
Strumenti da fondamento
Play bass melody and realize harmonic support

Instruments of Ornamentation
Stromenti d’ornamento
“Mingle with the voices in various ways for no other reason but to adorn and beautify”
Basso Continuo
Agazzari’s Rules

Instrumental Roles in Realizing the Continuo

Instruments of the Foundation
Organ, Harpsichord, Lute, Chitarrone, Theorbo, Harp

Instruments of Ornamentation
Lute, Theorbo, Chitarrone, Harp, Lirone, Spinet, Chitarrina, Violin, Pandora
Liuto

Lute
Tiorbo

Theorbo
Chitarrone

“Chi-ta-rra” = Kithara
“o-ne” = big
Organo di Legno

Chamber Organ
Arpa
Harp
Lirone

“Li-ra” = lyre
“o-ne” = big
Basso Continuo

Agazzari’s Rules

Instruments of the Foundation
Play the bassline as it stands, and supporting the voices by occasionally doubling the bass in the lower octave

Play the harmony firmly, sonorous, and unbroken

Avoid the registers of the voices and do not double their parts

Play within a small compass and low down.

Do not ornament in a way that obscures the voice parts
Basso Continuo
*Agazzari’s Rules*

**Instruments of Ornamentation**

“The instruments [of ornamentation] mingle with the voices in various ways…for no other reason but to adorn and beautify…and ‘season’ the said *concerto*.”

The player ‘composes’ new parts and counterpoints over the bass.

The player must observe and regulate himself according to the particular limits of his instrument to be successful.
When in all together the two groups must “have a regard to one another, giving way to, and not interfering with each other. If there are many of them, they must each bide their own time, and not like sparrows, all playing at once, and each trying to make the most noise.
All chords are natural to the key, or accidental which may be indicated in the basso continuo figures.

Accidentals in the figures refer to the third above the written note.

Numbers refer to the inversion and chord type.

Chord inversions—usually first inversion—not indicated by figures, May many times be recognized by an accidental in the bass part, but not always.
Basso Continuo
Agazzari’s Rules
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Agazzari’s Rules

Rule 1 & 2. Realization is in contrary motion to bassline

Rule 3. If the bass moves melodically (stepwise) in fast notes, the harmony remains stationary

Rule 4. If the bass motion is disjunct in fast notes, each note must be given its own harmony.
Basso Continuo
Agazzari’s Rules
Basso Continuo

Mo-ve-te vi à pie-tà, mo-ve-te vi à pie-tà
Basso Continuo

Uc-cì di-mi, do-lo re, uc-cì di-mi, do-lo re.
“Uccidimi, dolore” [Kill me, sadness]