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Cover design and graphic excerpts used throughout this book are taken from the title page of *Del sonare sopra'l basso* by Agostino Agazzari (1578-1640). Published in Siena in 1607, it is one of the earliest and most celebrated instruction books for the realization of a figured bass.

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PREFACE

In my experience of teaching continuo classes I have found that knowledge of intervals and ease of reading and playing in most keys are lacking in many students. If the student does not need these drills he may start with Chapter 6.

In any case I have left nothing to chance so that, with a knowledge of elementary harmony and a modest keyboard technique, the material should be usable without a formal class or a teacher.

This is not a text book. It is a book of practical drills and exercises to accompany a fine text book. My recommendation is *Practical Elements of Thorough-Bass* by W. A. Mozart, published by Joseph Patelson Music House, 160 West 56th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019.

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Helen Keaney

INTRODUCTION



The first set of exercises is designed to give the student three skills—thinking intervals above the bass, facility in reading many key signatures, and hearing a note-against-note style of voice-leading. When you can read Chapter 1 with ease and fluency, you will find various rhythms in the soprano to be realized. When this chapter is comfortable for you, you will enjoy reading two voices above the bass in traditional three-part harmony. The fourth chapter continues with three voices to be realized.

If you have studied harmony, you will observe familiar rules. For example: 1) Keep common tones in the same voice or use contrary motion. 2) Use small intervals with little or no leaping in the soprano. 3) Be aware that contrary motion and oblique motion are to be preferred to parallel and similar motion especially in four-part writing.

Chapter 5 presents many idiomatic progressions used in continuo playing. They should be played many times in all keys through four sharps and four flats. (Very few baroque basses use more than four accidentals.)

The purpose of this chapter is to give you tactile familiarity with these common progressions. It is hoped that it will develop a quick response by the hand, so that physical and mental agility will be equally instantaneous.

The following chapters present you with carefully graded figured bass exercises. Rules will precede the exercises to which they apply so that they are available to you as you work.

CHAPTER ONE

two voices: note against note



Note against note—two voices only. The right hand must stay within this range:



Remember the key signatures. The figures denote intervals above the bass. Realize a smooth melodic line. Use small melodic intervals whenever possible. Numbers (or intervals) from 1 to 10 are used. Compound intervals (9, 10) do not generally denote a specific register in 18th century practice. 2 may be 9, or 3 may be 10.

Approach 5 and 8 in contrary motion. If the right hand has a choice of two notes select the smaller melodic interval. You may approach 5 or 8 in similar motion if the soprano moves by step.

The little bar following some figures indicates that the notes must be held for the duration of the bar (the bar of continuity).

Exercise I-1



Exercise I-2



Exercise I-3



Exercise I-4



Exercise I-5

