PARTIMENTO AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Deborah Longenecker
NEAPOLITAN CONSERVATORIES

16th century – “conservatori” in port cities like Naples
Church services, festivals, opera orchestras
Grew into famous music schools with renowned maestros
Taught both orphans and paying students
IN THE CONSERVATORY

Progression of study:
- Young junior (10-14): solfeggio
- Older junior: singing, instrumental, partimento/theory
- Seniors: singing, instrumental, partimento/theory, counterpoint
- Maestricelli
- Maestri
- Primo maestro
PARTIMENTO AS EXERCISE

Single staff sketch of unfigured bass

Purposes:

- teach composition through improvisation
- teach theory through developing instinct for tasteful and fitting harmonic progressions
- teach classical idioms through exposure
PARTIMENTO AS PEDAGOGICAL TRADITION

Not simply compositional exercises (partimenti)
Instead, embodies a theoretical approach to music
Partimenti as contextual examples of 17\textsuperscript{th}/18\textsuperscript{th} c. music theory
Accompanied by rule treatises
- Mostly musical examples
- Very little text
PARTIMENTO AND REALIZATION
Partimento tradition made possible through unique environment of conservatories

- Long course of study
- Master/apprentice relationship
- Oral transmission
- Implicit teaching of concepts through practice

“Do it, and do it as I say, because this is what my master Cotumacci taught me. Why are you asking for reasons, when in music the first, and strongest reason is effect? Listen . . . Listen how beautiful this chord is on the bass! Do you need any other better reason other than the effect it makes?” — Giovanni Furno
RAMEAU AND ENLIGHTENMENT IDEALS

Theory of Fundamental Bass
- Abstract theory over concrete practice
- One simple, coherent system of harmony
- Practical and accessible to amateurs
- Time-saving and efficient
- Capitalized on vogue philosophical ideas
DECLINE OF PARTIMENTO

Partimenti still in use as exercises throughout 19\textsuperscript{th}/20\textsuperscript{th} c.

Parisian conservatories, Nadia Boulanger

Though exercises remained in use, their full import was lost without oral tradition.