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

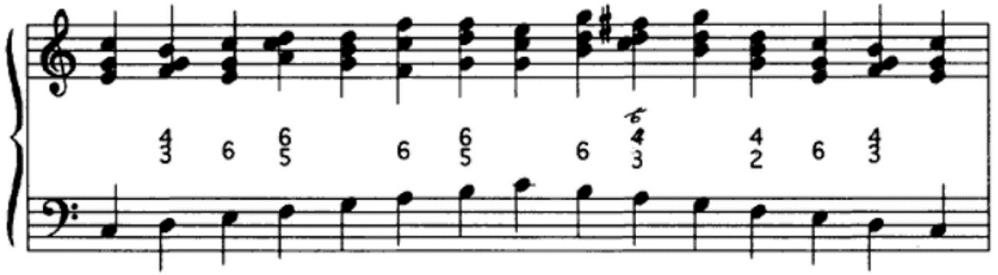
Not simply compositional exercises (partimenti)

Instead, embodies a theoretical approach to music

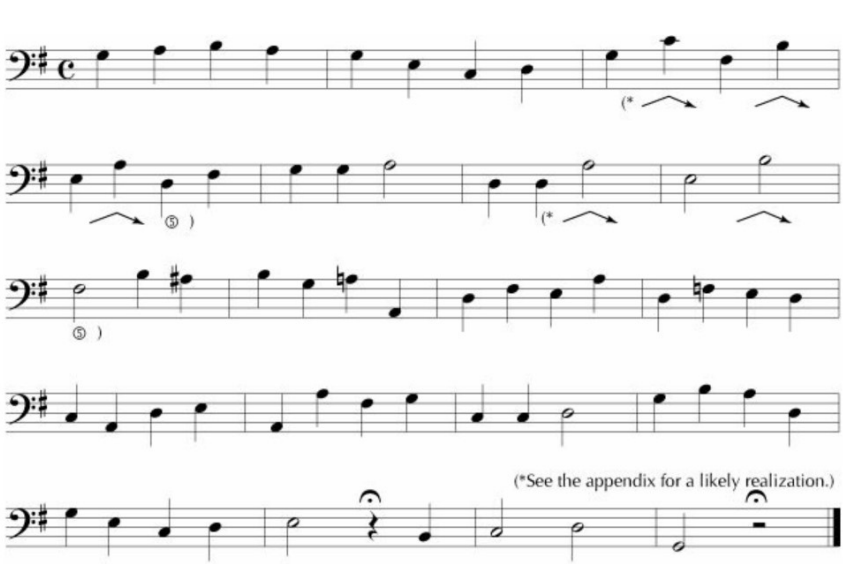
Partimenti as contextual examples of 17th/18th c. music theory

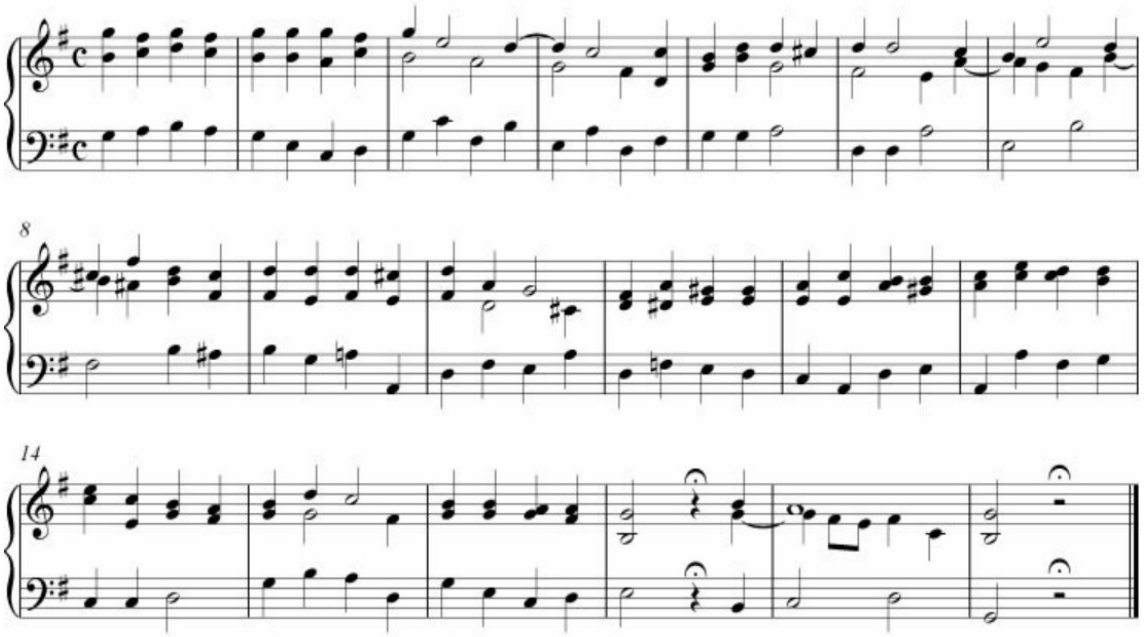
Accompanied by rule treatises

- Mostly musical examples
- Very little text



PARTIMENTO AND REALIZATION





PARTIMENTO METHODS

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 19th/20th c.

Parisian conservatories, Nadia Boulanger

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