



PARTIMENTO AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

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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
- Maesticelli
- 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

Five staves of musical notation in bass clef, common time. The notation shows a sequence of notes with various annotations:

- Staff 1: Notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Annotations: slurs under the last two notes of the first measure, and slurs under the last two notes of the second measure.
- Staff 2: Notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Annotations: slurs under the last two notes of the first measure, and slurs under the last two notes of the second measure.
- Staff 3: Notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Annotations: a circled '5' under the first note, and slurs under the last two notes of the second measure.
- Staff 4: Notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Annotations: slurs under the last two notes of the first measure, and slurs under the last two notes of the second measure.
- Staff 5: Notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Annotations: a circled '5' under the first note, and slurs under the last two notes of the second measure.

(*See the appendix for a likely realization.)

Four systems of piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs, common time. The notation shows chords and melodic lines:

- System 1: Treble clef has chords G3-B3-D4, A3-C4-E4, B3-D4-F4, G3-B3-D4. Bass clef has notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.
- System 2: Treble clef has chords G3-B3-D4, A3-C4-E4, B3-D4-F4, G3-B3-D4. Bass clef has notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6.
- System 3: Treble clef has chords G3-B3-D4, A3-C4-E4, B3-D4-F4, G3-B3-D4. Bass clef has notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6.
- System 4: Treble clef has chords G3-B3-D4, A3-C4-E4, B3-D4-F4, G3-B3-D4. Bass clef has notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6.

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.