



# PARTIMENTO AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

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# NEAPOLITAN CONSERVATORIES

16<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c. music theory

Accompanied by rule treatises

- Mostly musical examples
- Very little text



# PARTIMENTO

# AND

# REALIZATION

Five staves of musical notation in bass clef, 3/4 time, key of D major. The notation shows a sequence of notes with various annotations including slurs, accents, and circled numbers.

(\*)

(5)

(5)

(\*See the appendix for a likely realization.)

Four systems of piano realization in grand staff (treble and bass clefs), 3/4 time, key of D major. The notation shows chords and melodic lines with measure numbers 8 and 14.

8

14

# 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 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.

Parisian conservatories, Nadia Boulanger

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