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C. P. E. BACH'S *VERSUCH* AND ITS CONTEXT IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY THOROUGH-BASS PEDAGOGY

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There is probably no other musical treatise of the eighteenth century that is more esteemed than C. P. E. Bach's manual of keyboard instruction, the *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*. From the moment of its appearance, we find the *Versuch* praised by performers and composers alike – the approbations of Haydn and Beethoven being perhaps the most famous.¹ Musicians of Bach's own time recognized in it the virtues of clarity, completeness, and above all, incomparable musical sensitivity. One might go so far as to say that despite C. P. E. Bach's acknowledged stature as a composer, it was a pedagogical work that did more to secure his reputation in the 18th century than any of his compositions. In the eyes of many German musicians of his day, Bach was first and foremost a pedagogue – the famous author of the *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*. Few of Bach's musical publications enjoyed the numerous reprintings and widespread dissemination that his *Versuch* did. With the possible exception of Jean-Philippe Rameau, there was no composer of the 18th century whose reputation seemed so staked to his pedagogical writings.

Because the *Versuch* was highly praised in the 18th century, however, it does not necessarily follow that all parts of Bach's keyboard treatise were equally influential. As I hope to persuade in this article, such was not the case. The *Versuch*, it will be recalled, is divided into two halves separated in publication date by nine years. The first half published in 1753 deals with performing aspects of the solo keyboard (fingerings, hand position, embellishments, arti-

¹For the respective citations, see the Preface to William Mitchell's translation: *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (New York, 1949), p. 2.

ulation, phrasing, and the like), while the second half from 1762 deals with questions of accompaniment (most importantly, the realization of a thorough bass). It was the first half of the treatise which exercised the most influence in the second half of the 18th century. Bach's system of fingering, embellishing, and general advice on playing keyboard instruments laid the foundation for the first generation of piano instruction manuals that were to follow.² Part two of the *Versuch* turns out to have had far less resonance, not so much because the practice of thorough bass was in precipitous decline throughout the second half of the century (although this was partly true), but more because Bach's conceptual approach to the practice was rooted in a conservative tradition of compositional pedagogy that was increasingly being displaced by newer developments in harmonic theory emanating from France.

And what were these developments in harmonic theory? It was the system of harmonic generation and syntax articulated by the French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau and his followers. The difference between Bach's and Rameau's approaches to the thorough bass can be simply described. Based upon received traditions of contrapuntal pedagogy, Bach explained the chordal structures encoded in figured-bass signatures as composites of intervals—and hence subject to traditional contrapuntal rules of use. Rameau reversed this relationship by positing chords as the primary constituents of musical practice, while intervals were seen as but a consequence.³ More audaciously, Rameau enunciated a theory of chordal inversion by which numerous chords could be reduced to two prototypes: the consonant triad and the dissonant seventh chord. By manipulating these two chordal types (primarily through inversion), he was able to generate

²Among those early piano pedagogues who professed their indebtedness to Bach may be mentioned Marpurg (1765), Rigler (1779), Merbach (1782), Türk (1789), Dusseck (1796), and Clementi (1801).

³Rameau first articulated his theory in his *Traité de l'harmonie* of 1722, although he continued to develop and refine his ideas over the next 40 years in another half dozen major publications. A detailed discussion of Rameau's theory may be found in my recently-published book, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1993).

most every chord listed in the signature tables of traditional figured-bass manuals.

Example 1 offers a simple illustration of these two contrasting perspectives:

The image shows a musical score for a single system. The bass clef line contains five notes: G, A, B, C, D. Above the bass line are four figured bass symbols: $\frac{4\#}{2}$, 6, $\frac{4}{3}$, and $\frac{4}{3}$. The treble clef line contains five chords: G3-B3-D4, G3-A3-B3, G3-B3-D4, G3-A3-B3, and G3-B3-D4. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Example 1

From a strictly intervallic perspective in which signatures are calculated above the basso continuo, this progression contains three dissonances: the second of the $\frac{4\#}{2}$ chord, the augmented fourth in this same chord, and the perfect fourth in the $\frac{4}{3}$ chord. Of course there is a dissonant major second between the upper voices in the $\frac{4}{3}$ chord, but this dissonance is not the one considered in measuring the chord against the basso continuo – it is the fourth. Still, as Bach noted in his discussion of this signature, in practice „the third is treated as a dissonance and the fourth enjoys more freedom than usual“. ⁴ This suggests that the particular value of any interval is determined by its position in a chord. Indeed, Bach goes on to show the reader that there are many ways of employing – and resolving – the $\frac{4}{3}$ signature depending upon what scale degree it is played, and what chord follows it. We are thus shown how chordal context can change the abstract value of an interval. As William Mitchell has noted, it is the immediate musical environment of any given interval (i.e. its accompanying intervals and placement within the scale) that determines its ultimate meaning and treatment. ⁵

For Rameau and his followers, of course, the paradox of the „dissonant minor third“ is easily explained. The $\frac{4}{3}$ chord really is an

⁴Essay, p. 233.

⁵William J. Mitchell, 'Chord and Context in 18th-Century Theory,' *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 16 (1963), p. 229.

inversion of a dominant seventh chord built on D.⁶ The dissonant C, then, is the seventh of the chord (just as the sixth of the preceding 6/3 chord is the true root of that chord). This explains how a normally consonant interval like the minor third can sound like a dissonance in this progression, and must be treated accordingly. Moreover, by Rameau's theory of inversive equivalence, the C4#/2 chord is seen to possess the same root (or „fundamental bass“) as the 4/3 chord an A. The „fundamental bass“ of this progression would thus be D-D7-G-D7-G. While Rameau would have generally agreed with Bach's strictures concerning the voice-leading of this progression (the voicing of the chords, rules for treating the dissonance, restrictions of parallel motion between perfect consonances, etc.), he would have had a very different explanation of the origins of these strictures, origins that of course lay in the underlying fundamental bass. Whereas Bach's concern was the individual context and behavior of each signature, Rameau's was with their common origins; Bach's approach was rigorously empirical, Rameau's tendentiously reductive.

Now the reductive element in Rameau's theory, it can easily be shown, was born of pedagogical exigency. To see how this is so, we should recall how in the harmonic practice of the early 18th century, thorough-bass realization was not viewed as so daunting a skill that it could not be learnt tolerably well given the knowledge of a limited number of signature types. In his first treatise of accompaniment published in 1711, Johann Heinichen felt it sufficient to identify only twelve signatures for the accompanist to learn:⁷

6 4 3 7 6 7 9 8 9 6/5 6/4-5/3 b7 4/3 4 2

By learning what other intervals normally were to accompany each of these signatures (in most cases a third with the addition of either a

⁶Rameau would technically call such a chord a „dominante-tonique“ on account of its requisite resolution. He used the more general term „dominant“ to designate any minor seventh chord that resolves in imitation of the authentic cadence to some chord whose root lay a fifth below.

⁷Johann David Heinichen, *Neu erfundene und Gründliche Anweisung [...] des General-Basses* (Hamburg, 1711).

fifth, sixth, or octave), the student could expect to produce an acceptable accompaniment to the figured basses of most sacred and chamber pieces. (This was often taught by showing the student where to imagine a triad above a given bass note. For example, in the chord of the sixth, one imagines a triad a third below the bass, while to realize a $\frac{4}{2}$ signature, one thinks the triad a second above the bass. Such a heuristic may suggest inversional equivalence to us today, but it was not interpreted as such by pedagogues before Rameau.)

As the more ambitious dissonances and irregular progressions associated with the „stylus theatralis“ began to infiltrate the common language of Baroque composers, though, the quantity and complexity of figures facing the continuo player increased concomitantly. It is telling that in his second treatise of 1728, one in which full account of recent developments in Italian operatic practice is taken, Heinichen had expanded his signature table to 32. And when Johann Mattheson came out seven years later with a table of 70 signatures, one organist was reported by Schröter to have exclaimed in despair that the task of continuo playing was now only for the Devil himself.⁸

Clearly, the number and variety of signatures facing the continuo student were creating real pedagogical problems. Various strategies were tried in managing this morass of detail. Most commonly, signatures were grouped and taught on the basis of common interval content. Hence Heinichen arranged his chords based on the ascending order of their characteristic dissonance. After the independent (*ungebundenen*) chords of the „ordinairen Accorde“ (major and minor triads) and regular sixth ($\frac{6}{3}$), Heinichen went on to consider the dissonant chords of the second, followed by those containing the fourth, seventh, and ninth. But even here difficulties arose. Under the category of fourth chords, for example, Heinichen had to consider such disparate signatures as $\frac{4}{2}$, $\frac{4}{3}$, 4-3, and b^4 , each demanding different kinds of preparation and resolution. Other thorough-bass pedagogues felt it better to dispense with such signature tables altogether and simply have the student memorize a small number of

⁸Quoted in Franck T. Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass* (London, 1931), p. 299.

stock mnemonic progressions such as the normative scale harmonization known as the *règle de l'octave*.⁹ But the *règle* was not much help to the student faced with highly chromatic signatures or intricate bass lines.

It was precisely on account of the burgeoning number of signatures, then, that Rameau conceived his theory of the fundamental bass. Through the notion of chordal inversion (as well as ancillary manipulations such as supposition, suspension, „double employment,“ etc.), Rameau was able to reduce most chord signatures to the two fundamental types mentioned above: the triad and seventh. Further, he was by this means able to show how most chord successions followed a limited number of cadential prototypes (mostly with fifth motion in the fundamental bass). The fundamental bass thus offered a clarification and simplification of harmonic practice with immediate heuristic value. For those thorough-bass theorists who adopted Rameau's idea, a typical signature table would begin with the common triad and its two inversions (5/3, 6/3, and 6/4), the seventh chord and its three inversions (7, 6/5, 4/3, and 4/2) and then chords in which notes were added to the seventh (9, 11, 13), altered chromatically (diminished and augmented chords of all types), and modified by anticipations or suspensions (4-3, 9-8, 7/4/2-8/5/3, etc.). Through this rigorously generative procedure, all figured-bass signatures could be traced back to the two fundamental chord types the student needed to keep in mind. All this naturally made the fingering and memorization of thorough-bass signatures easier for the student. Rameau, I should add, did not himself fully develop this idea systematically in his own thorough-bass instructors.¹⁰ This was in large part because he was torn between systematic and pedagogical

⁹This would include the school of „Partimento“ instructors discussed in footnote 26 below. For more on the „Rule of the Octave“ and its applications, see Thomas Christensen, 'The *Règle de l'Octave* in Thorough-Bass Theory and Practice,' *Acta Musicologica* 64 (1992), pp. 91–117.

¹⁰Rameau's thorough-bass writings are to be found in his *Traité de l'harmonie* (Paris, 1722), Book 4, „Principes de l'accompagnement“; *Dissertation sur les différentes méthodes d'accompagnement pour le clavecin* (Paris, 1732); and the *Code de musique pratique* (Paris, 1760).

concerns.¹¹ Still, his theory offered the means for others to do so. It is not coincidental, then, that the earliest and most widespread adoption of Rameau's fundamental bass is to be found not in practical composition manuals or speculative treatises, but in tutors of the thorough bass.¹² Far from Rameau's theory being antithetical to the spirit of thorough-bass practice, as some theorists today assert, it in fact found there its most fertile application. The fundamental bass was a concept intimately allied to thorough-bass practice. As I have elsewhere argued, the thorough bass „was the chrysalis in which Rameau's theory of the fundamental bass was born; it furnished him with the major pedagogical problems he sought to solve, the notation

¹¹As only one example, Rameau vacillated in his writings between accounting for 11th chords as chords of supposition or suspension. (This would incidentally be one of the most contentious issues in the Streit between Rameau's supporters in Germany and his critics.) By the former perspective, the chord was theoretically a seventh chord with a „supposed“ bass placed a fifth below the true fundamental—hence allowing Rameau to subsume the dissonance within his fundamental seventh, as well as maintaining normative root motion of the fifth in the chord resolution. Of course this was purely a theoretical explanation. Practically, it was easier to explain the chord as a simple 4-3 suspension occurring over the same fundamental bass. And in his actual analytic notations, this is exactly what he did. For a more detailed analysis of Rameau's arguments on this topic, see Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, pp. 123–29.

¹²E.g. Michel Corrette, *Le Maître de clavecin pour l'accompagnement* (Paris, 1753); Claude de la Porte, *Traité théorique et pratique de l'accompagnement du clavecin* (Paris, 1753); M. Dubugrarre, *Méthode plus courte et plus facile que l'ancienne pour l'accompagnement du clavecin* (Paris, 1754); and Francesco Geminiani, *L'Art de bien accompagner du clavecin* (Paris, 1754). The first German authors to adopt Rameau's fundamental bass also did so in the context of the General Bass: David Kellner, *Treulicher Unterricht im General-Bass* (Hamburg, 1732); Georg Andreas Sorge, *Vorgemach der musicalischen Composition, oder: ausführliche, ordentliche [...] Anweisung zum General-Bass* (Lobenstein, 1747); Hartong (P. C. Humanus), *Musicus Theoretico-practicus* (Nürnberg, 1749); Johann Friedrich Daube, *General-Bass in drey Accorden* (Leipzig, 1756); and Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Handbuch bey dem Generalbasse und der Composition*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1755-58). It is revealing Heinichen took belated note of Rameau's fundamental bass at the very end of his 1728 treatise, after the bulk of the work was evidently already written and in press (Joel Lester, *Compositional Theory in the Eighteenth Century* [Cambridge Mass., 1992], p. 56). While Heinichen did not there fully endorse Rameau's ideas, he clearly recognized their relevance and value to the teaching of chord signatures.

and nomenclature to do this, and finally, the practice to which he would continually return in order to test his solutions“.¹³

By the time C. P. E. Bach came to publish Part 2 of the *Versuch* in 1762, Rameau's chordal approach to thorough bass had already taken strong hold in German soil. In the circle of musicians surrounding Bach in Berlin, the fundamental bass was adopted in whole or in part by Marpurg, Nichelmann, and Kirnberger (even if not all of Rameau's speculative or acoustical arguments were accepted). On the other hand, theorists who continued to teach thorough-bass skills through the more traditional intervallic approach were on the decline as the century progressed. By 1792 Türk was able to defend his own thorough-bass method by pointing out that the vast majority of music teachers had adopted – like himself – the „Kirnberger“ two-chord system. This system, Türk goes on to point out, had proven effective in teaching the thorough bass as well as accounting for the practice of such masters as Johann Sebastian Bach.¹⁴

Türk was not mistaken concerning the widespread acceptance of Rameau's inversional theory. In a survey of thorough-bass methods published in German between 1762 and 1800, plus a large number of manuscripts I was able to study in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, I found that the vast majority of figured-bass

¹³Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, p. 61. The polarization of Rameau's theory and the thorough bass has been most forcefully propounded in our own century by Schenker and his followers, inspired in no small part by their own political agenda. Mitchell's otherwise admirable article cited in footnote 5 repeats this erroneous dichotomy (p. 228).

¹⁴Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Beleuchtung einer Recension des Buches Kurze Anweisung zum Generalbafßspielen* (Halle, 1792), p. 23. The „Kirnberger system“ refers to Kirnberger's 1781 treatise, *Grundsätze des Generalbasses als erste Linien zur Composition*, which is itself based upon ideas articulated in his *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1771–79). In these works, Kirnberger invokes the generative idea described earlier in this paper, in which two fundamental chord types are posited: the triad and the dissonant seventh; all other signatures are derived from these two prototypes either by inversion, or through the suspension and anticipation of individual chord notes (creating a category of „accidental“ dissonances). Few German musicians of the later 18th century who made widespread use of the „Kirnberger system“ realized that this was basically Rameau's system (which was mistakenly identified with Marpurg's quite different perversion of that theory).

pedagogues invoke inversional theory in their teachings. Specifically, I have found 24 published treatises in which Rameau's two-chord system (often under the guise of the „Kirnberger system“) was either explicitly adopted or implicitly invoked (reflected above all in the groupings of figures based on inversional derivation). On the other hand, I found only eight treatises that seemed to have escaped the juggernaut of inversional theory and maintained a strictly intervallic approach. These two lists are to be found in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.¹⁵ (I might add, too, that if we considered the many genres of composition and harmony treatises, let alone works published in France, England, and Italy, the ratio would be even more heavily weighted toward Rameau.) What is perhaps even more surprising is that in the surviving compositional instructions we have of Mozart and Beethoven, we find the fundamental bass widely used – and this despite their well-known approbations of Bach's *Versuch*. Whether it is Mozart's instructions to Thomas Attwood, or Beethoven's lessons for Archduke Rudolf, we find Rameau's harmonic theories leaving their unmistakable mark.¹⁶ Even counterpoint could be approached harmonically, as Albrechtsberger's *Gründliche Anweisung zur*

¹⁵It should be kept in mind that the „intervallic“ tradition did not entirely pass away in the 19th century. Indeed in a few areas of Southern Germany and Austria, it enjoyed something of a revival (although not without betraying influences of Rameau's theory, to be sure). For a good discussion of this literature, see Ulf Thomson, *Voraussetzungen und Artungen der österreichischen Generalbasslehre zwischen Albrechtsberger und Sechter* (Tutzing, 1978).

Still, it was difficult for any 19th-century theorist not to filter Bach's intervallic approach through a more familiar harmonic sieve, as did the editor who brought out a revised edition of Bach's *Versuch* in 1852 and 1856 „im Gewande und nach den Bedürfnissen unserer Zeit.“ The particular editor in question (Gustav Schilling) there corrupted Bach's text by reordering, revising, and ascribing all figures in terms of inversional derivation. (Walter Niemann arrived at an even easier solution to make Bach's treatise more relevant to his readers in the 1906 reissue of the *Versuch*: He omitted the twenty odd chapters on thorough bass altogether!) It was little wonder that more sensitive musicologists such as Schenker and Otto Vrieslander expressed indignant outrage at such abuse and argued so passionately for a rehabilitation of Bach's original method.

¹⁶Joel Lester has traced the penetration of Rameau's theory into the compositional pedagogy of the later 18th century in his valuable study, *Compositional Theory in the Eighteenth Century*, especially in Chapter 8, 'Changing Aspects of Harmonic Theory,' pp. 193–230.

Composition (Leipzig, 1790) testifies. In this work, the famous Viennese teacher of Beethoven interprets Fux's species counterpoint from a chordal perspective, describing all intervallic relations and resolutions in terms of their harmonic functional implications (much as did Albrechtsberger's Viennese predecessor, Johann Friedrich Daube).

Now I do not want to explode one set of false polarities (Rameau's theory versus thorough-bass practice) merely to substitute for it another (Bach's „intervallic“ approach versus the fundamental bass). There were many ways that the two thorough-bass pedagogies could be mediated, Kirnberger's approach being perhaps the most effective.¹⁷ But it cannot be doubted, too, that in adopting Rameau's fundamental bass, these same composers and pedagogues were assuming a radically new perspective towards the structure and behavior of musical material, a perspective that entailed not only conceptual, but very practical ramifications in how music was taught, performed, and composed.

We can then wonder why Bach was not among those who chose to adopt Rameau's theory in their pedagogy of the thorough bass. It surely cannot have been that Bach was too much of a conservative, as there is little to suggest in his own compositional *oeuvre* that he felt hidebound to tradition. Nor is it likely that Bach was ignorant of Rameau's ideas given in Berlin by Marpurg in his journals. (Although there is no evidence on the other hand that Bach possessed a detailed

¹⁷Kirnberger is often cited as a theorist who bridged the gap between these two traditions. For example, he would distinguish sevenths that were the product of the fundamental bass (*eigentlich*) from those that were products of suspension (*zufällig*), thus showing sensitivity to both vertical and horizontal parameters. Kirnberger, we might also note, based his anthology of keyboard exercises upon Bach's system of fingering: *Clavierübungen mit der Bachischen Applicatur*, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1762–66). According to the Preface, Bach's method „is the easiest, most comfortable, and comprehensive means by which both the student and teacher may achieve [keyboard proficiency] in the shortest time.“ Still, that Kirnberger would so conspicuously make use of Rameau's fundamental bass in ordering and explaining the behavior of thorough-bass chords suggests that he was quite deliberate in sorting out those parts of the *Versuch* from which he would draw.

understanding of Rameau's theory, despite the single polemical jab he would make at it many years later.)¹⁸

The most reasonable explanation Bach remained disengaged from Rameau's theory, I think, is simply that it was not useful for his primary goal, which was to elucidate the many contexts in which a given signature may occur. Such variety could not easily be accommodated by the strictures of inversional theory, or at least not in any enlightening way. Bach's exuberant even manneristic – employment of dissonant harmonies, appoggiaturas, chromatic figurations, irregular resolutions, and modulations that are illustrated in his *Versuch* defied any easy harmonic codification or reduction. We might say, then, that the empirical riches of the *Versuch* were purchased at the cost of pedagogical efficiency.

To show the trade off most clearly, let us pick one chord—the „chord of the second“ (4/2) – and look at how Bach approaches the subject. His discussion of this single figure covers 13 pages and involves almost fifty separate examples.¹⁹ It is the most detailed and nuanced treatment of the 4/2 chord to be found in any thorough-bass treatise hitherto published.

¹⁸In a noisy argument waged between Kirnberger and Marpurg over the value of the fundamental bass, Bach took the side of Kirnberger and proclaimed his and his father's pedagogy to be „antirameauisch“ (quoted in Kirnberger's *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, vol. 4 [Berlin, 1779], p. 188). Such a statement cannot be taken at face value, however, since as I indicated earlier, Kirnberger's own theory was in reality closer to Rameau's theory than was Marpurg's (despite neither of them being aware of the fact). That there was no irreconcilable disjunction between the practice of Johann Sebastian and Rameau's fundamental bass is ironically shown by Kirnberger's own harmonic analysis of Bach's fugues. In any case, as I have argued in a previous paper, a more plausible motivation for Bach's anti-Rameauian posturing may have been political, stemming from Bach's earlier arguments with Christoph Nichelmann, another partisan of Rameau's theory. See Thomas Christensen, 'Nichelmann Contra C. P. E. Bach: Harmonic Theory and Musical Politics at the Court of Frederick the Great,' in: *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach und die europäische Musikkultur des mittleren 18. Jahrhunderts. Bericht über das Internationale Symposium der Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Hamburg, 29. September–2. Oktober 1988*, ed. Hans Joachim Marx (Göttingen, 1990), pp. 189–220.

¹⁹The discussion in the original 1762 edition occurs in Chapter 9, pp. 97–109.

Now the chord of the second, as mentioned earlier, was among the first dissonant signatures to be considered by thorough-bass pedagogues in the traditional „intervallic“ school, as the second was the smallest dissonant interval. But whereas Bach’s predecessors may have been content to discuss only a few paradigmatic uses of the chord, and then drill the student with lengthy progressions using various transpositions, sequences or textural variants of the chord, Bach is intent upon identifying and illustrating the variety of harmonic contexts and voicings which may apply to the chord. Bach begins by noting that it is the bass voice in the figure which is always to be prepared and resolved as a dissonance. The second is paradoxically to be treated as a consonance. (Rameau, we recall, would easily resolve the paradox by explaining the bass voice as the inversion of a dissonant seventh, while the second represents the stable root of the chord.) As a dissonance, the bass voice should be approached by a passing tone or prepared as a suspension. The most common structure of this chord is a major second and perfect fourth accompanied by a major or minor sixth. These are shown in Examples 2 and 3, respectively.²⁰



EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3

Sometimes the second of the chord may be represented by a minor second, shown approached in Example 4 as a passing tone (*transitus*).

²⁰All of the following examples are taken from Chapter 9 of Book 2, pp. 97–109 (pp. 252–60 in the Mitchell translation).



EXAMPLE 4

Now the normal chord of resolution for this signature is some variety of sixth chord. But other resolutions are possible, too. A few of these are illustrated in Example 5: a) a simple 5/3 chord; b) a 4/3 chord; c) a b7/b5 chord; d) or a 6/b5 chord.



EXAMPLE 5A



EXAMPLE 5B



EXAMPLE 5C



EXAMPLE 5D

A whole other category of second chords comes about when the augmented fourth is added above the interval of a second. Naturally the dissonant tritone suggests a resolution to a sixth in contrary motion (Example 6a).



EXAMPLE 6A

But other resolutions are also possible when the progression is allowed to modulate (Examples 6b–d).



EXAMPLE 6B



EXAMPLE 6C



EXAMPLE 6D

Another variant of the chord is the augmented second accompanied by the augmented fourth and minor sixth (a variety of the diminished-seventh chord). (Bach offers seven different possibilities of using this chord, of which Example 7 offers only three).



EXAMPLE 7A



EXAMPLE 7B



EXAMPLE 7C

While in all the cases seen so far the bass has resolved *somehow* by step (although in a few cases this has involved an irregular ascending resolution), it is possible to leap out of the dissonance as shown in Example 8.



EXAMPLE 8

Other possible uses of the chord are over a pedal note (Example 9),



EXAMPLE 9

or even resolving downwards to another chord of the second (Example 10).



EXAMPLE 10

All of these variants, it must be reiterated, are augmented with many more possible resolutions and voicings than those given here. And this is only one chapter. In the following three chapters, Bach goes on to analyze and illustrate the second when coupled with a fifth, a fifth and fourth, and a third, respectively.

The result is one of the most exhaustive and nuanced descriptions of North German *Empfindsam* practice to be found in the entire corpus of pedagogical writings for the time. No other thorough-bass treatise in subsequent generations comes close to the detail and variety Bach offers. The only thorough-bass treatise of greater length – the second volume of Michael Johann Friedrich Wiedeburg's *Der sich selbst informierende Clavierspieler* (Halle, 1767) – is dense only by virtue of the large number of exercises and long-winded commentaries offered by its inept author (who nonetheless stands deeply indebted to Bach). In terms of sheer variety of examples, though, Wiedeburg's work does not approach the number of examples (let alone the musicality) to be found in Bach's *Versuch*.²¹

²¹There is a short, 18-page manuscript of thorough-bass instructions attributed to

Now were we to try and add a fundamental bass to these signatures, we would run into difficulties. Let alone the problems in defining the root of many of these chords, the resulting fundamental-bass successions would make havoc of Rameau's normative models. As one example, the chords in Example 7c resist easy reduction. The diminished-seventh and augmented-sixth chords in the progression do not have unambiguous roots in Rameau's theory. While in one treatise Rameau would have considered the bass of the second chord in Example 7c to be a „borrowed“ root (the true root being a half step lower on E), in a later treatise he would simply assign the root to the leading tone (G#). The „German“ augmented-sixth chord is one Rameau never discussed in his treatises, although in analyses of related („French“) augmented-sixth chords, he seemed inclined to assign a root to the augmented fourth (so in this case the C would be the root „borrowed“ from B).

The other problem in applying Rameau's theory to Bach's progressions can be seen in Example 5b. While the designated roots of each chord seem clear, the resulting ascending progression of roots (C, D7, E7/b5, and F) makes little sense within the tonal syntax of fifth motion that Rameau prescribes as the normative motion of the fundamental bass. The reason, of course, is that not all of the signatures in these perspectives are harmonically functional. Forcing them into such a functional reading, naturally, results in syntactic nonsense. This is not to say, of course, that all fundamental bass readings are uninformative. But Rameau's theory is most insightful when applied to more normative progressions. And this requires disentangling the fundamental harmonies from those chords that are products of linear motion between voices. (So to return to Exemple 10, the second

Bach entitled *Kurze Anweisung zum General-Bass* that is in the Brussels conservatory library (B-Bc: MS II, 4165; Ms. Fétis 6487) and listed by Helm als H. 874. Along with Helm, I too am dubious about the accuracy of this attribution (made by Fétis). In both content and style, the manuscript does not at all relate to the *Versuch*: in the scattered ordering of topics, the unsystematic discussion of voice leading, and finally, the rather simple-minded exercises prescribed for the student to practice (including simple transpositions, diminutions, and the three [„inversional“] voicings of triads in the right hand).

4/2 chord could be more fruitfully analyzed as a passing chord filling in an arpeggiation of the dominant E Seventh chord.) An intervallic perspective to the thorough bass does not make such distinctions, in that every signature is properly a „chord.“ This is why Bach feels obliged to delineate all signatures in their manifold contexts in his text, without assigning priority to any one in particular.

One might rightly wonder, because of this, how practical a text Bach's *Versuch* is for learning the thorough bass. And from the above examples, one suspects that it is not. Certainly that seems to have been the general perception in Bach's own day.²² There are, after all,

²²Many of Bach's own colleagues saw the need for more practical thorough-bass methods despite whatever high regard with which they held the work. The author of the very next *General-Bass* treatise published in Hamburg after the appearance of Part 2 of the *Versuch* claimed, significantly, to offer the „easiest“ method to learn accompaniment without the aid of a teacher: Johann Heinrich Hesse, *Kurze, doch hinlängliche Anweisung zum General-Basse* (Hamburg, 1776). In this light, we should not also be surprised to learn that the most popular method of the thorough bass in Germany during the 18th century was not Bach's, but the little compendium of rules and guidelines written in 1732 by David Kellner, *Treulicher Unterricht im General-Baß* (Hamburg, 1732). Kellner's treatise was precisely geared for wide circulation; it was short, clear and affordable, and employed a variety of helpful mnemonic aids to simplify the learning of the thorough bass: the Rule of the Octave, Rameau's inversional theory, the musical circle, and modulation tables. Kellner's treatise went through nine different editions in the 18th century (the last appearing in 1796) and translations into Swedish, Dutch and Russian. So popular was the work that in the Preface to the second edition of 1737, Georg Philipp Telemann reported with astonishment that the entire first run of 2000 copies had been exhausted in just five years. To put this in perspective, Mitchell estimates Bach's *Versuch* probably had a yearly average sale of 30 to 40 copies between its publication and 1797 (Essay, p. 3). Mitchell tries to argue on the basis of this figure that Bach's *Versuch* was relatively speaking a commercial success. But his argument is unconvincing, especially given the questionable comparison he makes between the sales of the *Versuch* and a much more costly, multi-volumed edition of Goethe's works. When we place Bach's work next to a comparable text of the same genre, such as the keyboard treatises of Kellner, Löhlein, or Türk, its circulation is not at all so impressive. Finally, we might take note of a review of recent thorough-bass methods published in 1797 by the music pedagogue F. G. Drewis, who recommended above all the methods of Kirnberger and Sulzer, and for the theoretically minded, Marpurg – But there was no mention of Bach! (F. G. Drewis, *Freundschaftliche Briefe über die Theorie der Tonkunst und Composition* [Halle, 1797], pp. 73–74. The reference to Sulzer is to the articles on figured bass written by Kirnberger and his student, Johann Abraham Peter Schulz in Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* [1771–74].)

none of the lengthier exercises and models for the student to practice that one normally finds in other manuals of the thorough bass.²³ Indeed, with the exception of the Fantasy written out in the final chapter, virtually none of Bach's examples exceeds two measures, with the majority limited to two or three chords. Bach's many illustrations of signatures and their possible voicings, irregular resolutions, use in modulations, etc. seem less for preparing students for the kinds of harmonic progressions they may encounter while reading a figured bass (unlikely except in many of Bach's own *Empfindsam* experiments), as much as to show a student the *compositional variety* for which these chords may serve. In other words, Bach seems to have written as much a composition treatise as he did a thorough-bass treatise.²⁴

Now the coupling of the thorough bass with composition was hardly an idea conceived of by Bach. Since at least Friedrich Erhard Niedt's manual of thorough bass, *Musicalische Handleitung* (published in several volumes between 1700 and 1722), there was an important tradition in 18th-century German musical thought identifying the skill of the thorough bass with the art of composition. This

²³The *Probestücke* published as an accompaniment to the *Versuch* do not fit the bill, as they relate to Part 1 on performance skills, and not the figured bass. Otto Vrieslander has suggested, however, that Bach's multiple harmonizations of a chorale excerpt (*Zwey Litaneyen aus dem Schleswig-Holsteinischen Gesangbuch*, H. 871) might be seen as practical illustrations of his *Generalbaß-Lehre* (Otto Vrieslander, *Philipp Emanuel Bach* [Munich, 1923], p. 130). Illustrations of harmonic invention they may be, but these chorales hardly constitute practical exercises of thorough bass for a student to work through.

²⁴The refined – we might even say, manneristic – character of Bach's musical examples has been remarked upon since Bach's own day. Georg Michael Telemann, the grandson of the famous composer, while an ardent admirer and friend of Bach, cautioned in the preface to his own thorough-bass manual of 1773 that the musical examples in Bach's *Versuch* were much too sophisticated and refined to be of value to beginning harpsichordists, an opinion seconded by Johann Christian Bertram Kessel in his treatise of 1791. In our own century, the well-known harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick reassessed the *Versuch* as more a „finishing course“ for the accomplished continuo player (and heavily slanted at that to the practice and taste of Bach himself) rather than a practical tutor of the figured bass: 'C. P. E. Bach's *Versuch* Reconsidered,' *Early Music* 4 (1976), pp. 388–89.

is made explicit in the titles of Johann Heinichen's treatise of 1728, *Der Generalbaß in der Composition*, or Marpurg's three-volume manual of thorough bass, *Handbuch bey dem Generalbass und der Composition* (Berlin, 1755–58), and perhaps most explicitly in Kirnberger's treatise, *Grundsätze des Generalbasses als erste Linien zur Composition* (Berlin, 1781). Thorough bass was seen as but a practical form of composition, since the performer must in essence learn how to realize – that is to compose *ex tempore* – appropriate harmonies, melodies, and textures above a given bass line, a bass line that is sometimes figured, but sometimes not.

While Bach was never explicit in connecting the thorough bass with compositional pedagogy, the second half of the *Versuch* could be interpreted as a primer of composition, as Bach covers many topics that one would expect to find in a more complete composition primer: the selection, voicing and connection of chords, requirements for embellishing melodic lines, imitation, cadences, modulation, and various species of non-chord tones: the organ point, appoggiaturas, passing tones, changing notes, etc. Again, the compositional implications of Bach's method were not lost upon contemporaneous observers. Johann Adolf Scheibe noted in 1773 that „whether or not Herr Bach wrote his book for composers, since it is properly about keyboard performance and accompaniment, it nonetheless contains a great quantity of tasteful and sound observations about a large number of harmonic progressions and the proper employment of consonance and dissonance, observations unequaled by any other treatise aimed specifically at the teaching of composition“.²⁵

The compositional implications of the thorough bass are perhaps made most explicit in the famous last chapter of the work on improvisation in the Free Fantasy. There Bach shows how the figured bass

²⁵Johann Adolf Scheibe, *Ueber die Musikalische Composition* (Leipzig, 1773), p. 14: „Obschon Herr Bach sein Buch nicht eben für die Componisten geschrieben hat, weil es eigentlich vom Klavierspielen und vom Accompagnement mit dem Klavier handelt: so enthält es doch eine so große Menge geschmackvoller und gründlicher Betrachtungen über eine sehr große Anzahl harmonischer Sätze und über den regelmäßigen Gebrauch der Consonanzen und Dissonanzen, als man wohl in keinem Werke, das von der Satzkunst insonderheit handelt, antreffen wird.“

can offer a modulatory skeleton of harmony that forms the basis for melodic and textural elaborations that the keyboardist may improvise. Composition, Bach implicitly shows us, is but the extended realization of some underlying figured-bass structure. (This was the element of Bach's pedagogy, incidentally, upon which Schenker and his followers in our own century have fastened with such enthusiasm).²⁶

It is important for us to keep in mind, though, that this linking of thorough-bass and composition was by no means universally made, neither in Bach's own lifetime, nor in subsequent generations. For evidence, we need only look at the writings of Johann Mattheson, one of Bach's Hamburg predecessors. Mattheson – no friend of Rameau's – was a voracious critic of those who would equate thorough bass with the elevated art of composition. For Mattheson, realizing a thorough bass was a utilitarian labor (*Handsachen*) for church organists and members of continuo bands. It consisted of simply playing designated chords in some mechanical fashion – a clear legacy of when organists would accompany by reading tablature – and had nothing in common with the true art of composing music (*Setz-Kunst*), which for Mattheson, consisted above all

²⁶While it is beyond the scope of this paper to pursue the question further, the equation of improvisation and composition that Bach only suggests (but which Schenker aggressively drew out) raises a host of aesthetic problems over the nature of improvisation and its relation to a written score (to say nothing of the genre of the Fantasy itself). It is questionable whether a truly spontaneous „Free Fantasy“ ought be bound by the norms of harmonic coherence, syntax, and modulatory unity one might expect in a fully-composed work. Indeed, one might think that the qualities of unity and cohesion are perhaps the last one would look for in a Fantasy, at least when understood in the context of the more robust strains of German *Empfindsam* aesthetics. This is partly why Peter Schleuning has argued that improvisation in Bach's eyes was in fact governed by quite differing criteria than those governing his compositions. (See Peter Schleuning, *Die Freie Fantasie* [Göppingen, 1973], p. 95.) In any case, as John Rink has shown, Bach's approach to the teaching of the Fantasy was not necessarily representative in the 18th century, where many pedagogues such as Georg Simon Löhlein and Johann Gottfried Vierling tended to emphasize somewhat more the manipulation of thematic and melodic elements. See John Rink, 'Schenker and Improvisation,' *Journal of Music Theory* 37 (1993), p. 12.

in the writing of melody.²⁷ Many subsequent pedagogues agreed with Mattheson, including Georg Michael Telemann, who cautioned his readers – with explicit reference to Bach’s *Versuch* – that „thorough bass does not deal with composition, but above all, simple accompaniment.“ It is true, as I noted earlier, that Telemann owes a huge debt to Bach in this treatise, and he acknowledges this debt more than once with cheer and gratitude. (Virtually all of his rules for the realization and resolution of figured-bass signatures are synthesized from the *Versuch*.) But Telemann never placed the compositional burden Bach did upon this skill. As with Mattheson, Telemann saw the realization of the figured bass to be a mechanical trade, one which had no more to do with the composition of music than did a brick-layer’s job with the design of a building.²⁸

There were of course many teachers who continued to link the thorough bass and composition. Indeed, this was the primary reason the thorough bass survived as a practice to any degree in the 19th century. It is interesting to note, however, that this issue was independent of one’s theoretical allegiance. That is, one could accept the thorough bass as the equivalent to composition and reject Rameau’s theory in favor of a traditional contrapuntal approach. (Those in this class include, besides Bach, Wiedeburg, Johann Christoph Kellner, and Bühler.) But one could just as well hold the former view and accept Rameau’s theory of the fundamental bass (as in the case of Daube, Riepel, Schröter, and Kirnberger,

²⁷See Mattheson’s comments in his *Kleine General-Baß-Schule* (Hamburg, 1735), pp. 48–51. It is telling that in his own analysis of the chord just discussed – the chord of the second – Mattheson is content to show only one basic variety of resolution (downwards by step to the chord of the sixth). He notes there are at least six other resolutions possible (‘Entbindungs-Wege’), but „such instruction belongs more properly to composition than to the thorough bass“ (p. 190). Mattheson returned to discuss these additional resolutions in his lengthy book on composition found in *Der Vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739), pp. 302–07. Characteristically, he describes these additional resolutions of the second – which actually are now ten in number! – in terms of strict two-part counterpoint, not the figured bass.

²⁸Georg Michael Telemann, *Unterricht im Generalbaß-Spielen* (Hamburg, 1773), preface. For further evidence documenting the widespread separation accorded thorough-bass realization and compositional/improvisational pedagogy in the 18th century, see Fritz Oberdörffer’s fine article, ‘Neuere Generalbaßstudien,’ *Acta Musicologica* 39 (1967), pp. 182–201.

as well as 19th-century pedagogues such as Sechter). Conversely, one could reject the compositional implications of the thorough bass and teach it as a purely practical performance skill, and still either accept Rameau's theory (as did Kellner), or remain within the traditional intervallic paradigm. (Besides Mattheson and Georg Michael Telemann, we can probably include in this last category most of the manuals of French and Italian *Partimento exercises*.²⁹) Simply put, one's view as to the relation of thorough bass to composition had nothing to do with how one analyzed chord signatures theoretically.

Once we realize the compositional agenda underlying Bach's treatise, we can better understand why it was he was so resistant to Rameau's theory. At the same time, though, we can better appreciate why it was that Bach's method enjoyed relatively little emulation in the later 18th and 19th centuries. In the generations following Bach, a harmonic perspective based upon Rameau's theory of the fundamental bass was inexorably taking hold in Western music theory, and this in turn was effecting both the teaching of the thorough bass and of composition. Türk had enough distance in 1791 to recognize clearly how the topics of chordal construction and succession that had hitherto been included within the discipline of the thorough bass had by now been largely subsumed within an independent pedagogy of harmony – the *Harmonielehre*.³⁰

²⁹The *Partimento* manuals taught the thorough bass through rote practice and memorization of partially-realized figured-bass exercises in increasing orders of difficulty. One would typically begin by learning a very few simple harmonic patterns (such as the 'Rule of the Octave') and then move successively through more complex and lengthy exercises. It was an entirely practical approach to keyboard improvisation, with few subtleties of accompaniment, melody, or form, and with no compositional or theoretical pretenses. The most important *Partimento* tutors were written by French and Italian authors in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, although a few German teachers reflected the spirit of the *Partimento* approach, such as Johann Mattheson's *Exemplarische Organisten-Probe im Artikel vom General-Baß* (Hamburg, 1719). For more on the Partimento school, see my article 'The Règle de l'Octave,' pp. 110–15.

³⁰Türk, *Beleuchtung einer Recension des Buches Kurze Anweisung zum Generalbaßspielen*, p. 6.

One could lament this historical development, as did Schenker, who believed that the penetration of Rameau's theory into the hallowed practice of German musical thought portended nothing less than the planting of the „seeds of death“.³¹ But in taking such a myopic view, we would miss the real pedagogical exigencies that drove such a move in the first place. The thorough bass, we must keep in mind, is not a theory; it is a historically flexible and changing practice. But if it is to be codified and taught, this practice can – and indeed demands to be – filtered through some kind of theoretical apparatus. (And make no mistake about it – Bach's *Versuch* is a theory of the thorough bass no less than Rameau's, even if its theoretical bias is nowhere explicitly articulated.)

The question, then, is not „who got it right: Rameau or Bach?“ (Or even more pointedly, as Schenker would demand: „Rameau oder Beethoven? Erstarrung oder geistiges Leben in der Musik?“³² The question is, rather, to which pedagogical purpose is a given thorough-bass treatise best suited?

It has not been my intention in this paper to cast any aspersions upon Bach's *Versuch*, or to raise suspicion as to the concealed agenda of its author. Its comprehensive musical illustrations and brilliant insights have deservedly stood the test of time. The treatise remains one of the richest troves of knowledge we possess of the musical practice of its author and his contemporaries. We should simply be careful, though, that in our enthusiasm and admiration for the work, we do not unreflecting accept Bach's treatise as the sole legitimate interpretation of this practice. In his rejection of Rameau's inversionsal theory as well as his equation of the thorough bass with *Setz-Kunst*, Bach assumed a particular view of the thorough bass that was not a common one among his contemporaries and immediate successors. This is by no means to be disparaged, though. Indeed, we might say that there is no more obvious evidence of its worth than precisely in the fact that so few theorists felt the need – or possessed the competence – to imitate it. The work may stand alone among 18th-century thorough-bass manuals, but in this particular case, that is a testament to the genius of its author, not his failings.

³¹Quoted in Harald Krebs, 'Schenker's Changing Views of Rameau,' *Theoria* 3 (1988), p. 59.

³²Heinrich Schenker, 'Rameau oder Beethoven? Erstarrung oder geistiges Leben in der Musik?,' *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, vol. 3 (München, 1930), pp. 9–24.

TABLE 1

GERMAN THOROUGH-BASS MANUALS EMPLOYING RAMEAU'S
FUNDAMENTAL BASS (1762–1800)

*[Die Titelwiedergabe erfolgt nach: Écrits imprimés concernant la musique,
2 Bde., München/Duisburg 1971 (= RISM, B VI)]*

1765. Georg Simon Löhlein, Clavier-Schule, oder Kurze und gründliche Anweisung zur Melodie und Harmonie, Leipzig/Züllichau, 1765 (Later Editions: 1773, 1779, 1782, 1791).
1766. Georg Friedrich Lingke, Die Sitze der musicalischen Haupt-Sätze in einer harten und weichen Tonart und wie man damit fortschreitet und ausweicht, Leipzig, 1766.
1767. David Kellner, Treulicher Unterricht im General-Bass, 4. Auflage, Hamburg, 1767 (Later editions: 1773, 1782, 1787, 1796).
1767. Georg Andreas Sorge, Anleitung zur Fantasie oder zu der schönen Kunst, das Clavier, wie auch andere Instrumente, aus dem Kopfe zu spielen, Lobenstein, 1767.
1767. Johann Samuel Petri, Anleitung zur practischen Musik, vor neuangehende Sänger und Instrumentspieler, Lauban, 1767.
1767. Christoph Sasse, „Unterricht vom Generalbass.“ - D-B: Mus. ms. theor. 770.
1768. J. C. Schultze, „Drama Per Musica.“ - D-B: Mus. ms. autogr. theor.
1772. Christoph Gottlieb Schröter, Deutliche Anweisung zum General-Bass, in beständiger Veränderung des uns angebohrnen harmonischen Dreyklanges, Halberstadt, 1772.
1773. Johann Christian Carl Töpfer, Anfangsgründe zur Erlernung der Musik und insonderheit des Claviers, Breslau, 1773.
1778. N. N. Böhmer, „Traktat von der musikalischen Compostion.“ - D-B: Mus. ms. theor. 115.
1778. Georg Joseph Vogler, Kuhrpfälzische Tonschule, Mannheim, 1778.

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1780. Johann Michael Bach, *Kurze und systematische Anleitung zum General-Bass und der Tonkunst überhaupt*, Kassel, 1780.
1781. Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *Grundsätze des Generalbasses als erste Linien zur Composition*, Berlin, c. 1781.
1782. Johann Gottfried Buchholtz, *Unterricht für diejenigen, welche die Musik und das Clavier erlernen wollen, sonderlich für die Aeltern*, Hamburg, 1782.
1783. Johann Joseph Klein, *Versuch eines Lehrbuchs der praktischen Musik in systematischer Ordnung entworfen*, Gera, 1783.
1789. Johann Gottfried Vierling, *Kurze Anleitung zum General-Bass*, Kassel, 1789.
1789. Georg Friedrich Wolff, *Kurzer aber deutlicher Unterricht im Klavierspielen*, 3. Auflage, Halle, 1789.
1789. Christian Kalkbrenner, *Theorie der Tonsetzkunst*, Berlin, 1789.
1789. Johann Friedrich Christmann, *Elementarbuch der Tonkunst zum Unterricht beim Klavier für Lehrende und Lernende mit praktischen Beispielen*, Bd. 2, Speyer, 1782–1789.
1789. Johann Gottlieb Portmann, *Leichtes Lehrbuch der Harmonie, Composition und des Generalbasses*, Darmstadt, 1789.
1790. Johann Christian Bertram Kessel, *Unterricht im Generalbasse zum Gebrauche für Lehrer und Lernende*, Leipzig, 1790.
1791. Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Kurze Anweisung zum Generalbaßspielen*, Halle/Leipzig, 1791, (Later editions: 1800, 1816, 1822, 1824, and 1841).
1792. Justin Heinrich Knecht, *Gemeinnützlichtes Elementarwerk der Harmonie und des Generalbasses*, Augsburg, 1792.
1794. Johann Gottfried Vierling, *Versuch einer Anleitung zum Präludiren für Ungeübtere*, Leipzig, 1794.
1797. F. G. Drewis, *Freundschaftliche Briefe über die Theorie der Tonkunst und Composition*, Halle, 1797.
1798. Franz Xaver Rigler, *Anleitung zum Gesange, und dem Klaviere, oder die Orgel zu spielen; nebst den ersten Gründen zur Komposition*, Ofen, 1798.

1800. Johann Carl Angerstein, *Theoretisch-practische Anweisung, Choralgesänge nicht nur richtig, sondern auch schön spielen zu lernen*, Stendal, 1800.
Also see manuscripts: D-B: Mus. ms. theor. 1165, 1225, and AmB. 678.

TABLE 2

GERMAN THOROUGH-BASS MANUALS EMPLOYING TRADITIONAL
„INTERVALLIC“ APPROACH (1762–1800)

1765. Gilbert Herr, „Kurtzgefasste Regulin des General-Basses.“ – D-B: Mus. ms. theor. 380.
1767. Michael Johann Friedrich Wiedeberg, *Anderer Theil des sich selbst informirenden Clavier-Spielers oder deutlicher und gründlicher Unterricht zur Selbst-Information im General-Bass*, Bd. 2, Halle/Leipzig, 1767.
1767. Johann Christoph Kühnau, „Die Anfangslehren der Tonkunst.“ – D-B: Mus. ms. theor. 505.
1768. Georg Joachim Joseph Hahn, *Der wohl unterwiesene General-Bass-Schüler, oder Gespräch zwischen einem Lehrmeister und Scholaren vom General-Bass*, 2. Auflage, Augsburg, 1768.
1771. Johann Friedrich Hering, „Regeln des Generalbasses.“ – D-B: Mus. ms. theor. 348.
1773. Georg Michael Telemann, *Unterricht im Generalbass-Spielen, auf der Orgel oder sonst einem Clavier-Instrumente*, Hamburg, 1773.
1774. Henrich Laag, *Anfangsgründe zum Clavierspielen und Generalbass*, Osnabrück, 1774.
1776. Johann Heinrich Hesse, *Kurze, doch hinlängliche Anweisung zum General-Basse, wie man denselben aufs allerleichteste, auch ohne Lehrmeister, erlernen kann*. Hamburg, 1776.
1783. Johann Christoph Kellner, *Grundriss des Generalbasses, eine theoretisch-praktische Anleitung für die ersten Anfänger* entworfen, Kassel, 1783.
1791. Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, *Kurzgefasste Methode den Generalbass zu erlernen*. Wien, c. 1791. (Authorship questionable)
1793. Franz Bühler (Bihler), *Partitur-Regeln in einem kurzen Auszuge für Anfänger*, Donauwörth, 1793.