2

THE ROMANESCA

FOR THE PATRONS OF GALANT MUSIC, making informed judgments about compositions and their performances required familiarity with the important schemata of the style. For the composers, making works worthy of praise required being able to produce exemplars of every schema correct in every detail. The more passive knowledge of patrons could be gleaned from frequent listening to the typical phrases of galant music. The active, operationalized knowledge of composers was carefully taught to them by music masters— maestros. The greatest maestros of the age worked in Italy, and they developed a unique method of instruction centered on the partimento—the instructional bass. A partimento resembled the bass part given to eighteenth-century accompanists, with the difference being the lack of any other players or their parts. The partimento was the bass to a virtual ensemble that played in the mind of the student and became sound through realization at the keyboard. In behavioral terms, the partimento, which often changed clefs temporarily to become any voice in the virtual ensemble, provided a series of stimuli to a series of schemata, and the learned responses of the student resulted in the multivoice fabric of a series of phrases and cadences. From seeing only one feature of a particular schema—any one of its characteristic parts—the student learned to complete the entire pattern, and in doing so committed every aspect of the schema to memory. The result was fluency in the style and the ability to "speak" this courtly language.

Like commedia dell'arte actors memorizing all the scenes and "business" in their troupe's *zibaldone*, so young composers memorized all the schemata in the partimenti of their maestros. As apprentices in the guildlike system of court musicians, students did not learn about the schemata through verbal descriptions or speculative theories, but rather learned them by rote, realizing them in every possible key, meter, tempo, and style. This calculated and concentrated regimen, guided by what Giovanni Maria Bononcini (1642–

1678) called the "living voice of a well-established maestro,"[1] allowed students to build up a robust knowledge of which variations and exceptions were permissible and which were not. Three such "well-established" maestros were Giacomo Tritto (1733–1824) and Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816), both of Naples, and Stanislao Mattei (1750–1825) of Bologna. Paisiello, of course, was among the most famous opera composers of the eighteenth century, and the students of Tritto and Mattei included giants like Spontini, Donizetti, Bellini, and Rossini, who dominated early nineteenth-century opera. Below I have excerpted a passage from one partimento by each master. From Tritto comes a bass of simple whole notes intended as a beginner's exercise. Above the bass, in smaller notes, I show a likely realization with two additional parts. Below his bass, in measures 4–5, I show the figure "6" in brackets to indicate where the student would have been expected to play a 6/3 chord instead of the default 5/3:[2]

EX. 2.1   Tritto, from a partimento in F major, m. 1 (ca. 1810–20)

From Mattei comes a similar bass. Mattei's own numeric figures—hence a "figured bass"—indicated a chain of dissonances and their resolutions:[3]

EX. 2.2   Mattei, from a partimento in C major, m. 1 (ca. 1780s)

Notice that, on the last beat of measure 1 (ex. 2.2), Mattei adds the figure "5" to overrule the student's tendency to play a "6" there (C5 instead of B4), as was implied in Tritto's example.

From Paisiello comes another similar bass, also with indicated dissonances. But while Mattei sets the imagined upper voices against each other, Paisiello moves them in concert to make dissonances against the bass:[4]

EX. 2.3 Paisiello, an E♭-major passage from a partimento in C minor, Andante, m. 10 (1782)

Each of these partimenti is unique, and yet the three excerpts share many features. Their first five bass tones are identical in relation to their local keynotes. Their first three sonorities are the same, again in relation to the keynote. The imagined upper parts begin by descending in parallel thirds, whether by implication (Tritto), complete specification (Paisiello), or abstraction (Mattei, whose dissonances can be viewed as arising from the delay or "suspension" of an alto part that would normally be a third below the soprano). And each example represents, in its larger context, the entry of an important new musical theme or subject. They all, in fact, are common variants of a schema known as the Romanesca.

As its name implies, the Romanesca has an Italian provenance (as do most galant schemata).[5] It was first widely noticed and named by musicians in the sixteenth century, and during the seventeenth century it reigned as one of the most common ground basses. In more recent times, the Romanesca has been described as a common solution to a practical problem in composition: how to add a third voice, without introducing parallel fifths or octaves, to a pair of voices that move in parallel descending thirds.[6] If the added voice is a bass, the solution will closely resemble the music that made a forgotten seventeenth-century composition a household name among late twentieth-century devotees of classical music—Pachelbel's Canon (ca. 1680; see ex. 2.4). Its first three-voice combination, in measure 5, presents an obvious Romanesca where simple quarter notes mark each stage of the schema.

The horizontal braces in example 2.4 serve to highlight the general location of the schema. Again, the black-circled numbers indicate the scale degrees of the melody, and white-circled numbers indicate the scale degrees of the bass. Partimento manuscripts

EX. 2.4   Pachelbel, from his Canon in D Major, Andante, m. 5 (ca. 1680s)

ROMANESCA

in Naples may have been the first texts to treat scale degrees as an organizing principle and point of departure. In the brief rulebooks or *regole* sometimes attached to collections of partimenti, the ①–⑤–⑥ . . . bass of the Romanesca was described as *prima di tono, quinta di tono, sesta di tono*, and so on. Thus my scale-degree markings are less a modern gloss than a graphic depiction of indigenous galant concepts.

In eighteenth-century terms, the above basses represent *partimenti semplici* or basic patterns shorn of ornament. Florid basses, with the underlying longer notes "diminished" into shorter notes, were far more common. Georg Frideric Handel (1685–1759) served as music tutor and hence maestro to Anne, daughter of George II, from 1724 until her marriage in 1734. As a carryover, perhaps, from his previous years in Italy, Handel used partimenti in his teaching. He gave the Princess Royal florid partimenti as assignments, and some of these exercises have been preserved. Handel likely intended the excerpt below to be realized as a Romanesca:

EX. 2.5   Handel, from his exercises for Princess Anne, Allegro, m. 4 (ca. 1724–34)

ROMANESCA

Because the princess's completed exercise has been lost, I have provided a realization in smaller notes above the partimento. In this florid bass, each stage of the schema lasts for six eighth-notes, with the core events occurring on the first eighth-note of each stage.

All these differing exemplars of the Romanesca imply a more abstract concept of the underlying schema, perhaps something with (a) six stages, (b) a descending stepwise melody, (c) a bass that alternates descending leaps of a fourth with ascending steps of a second, (d) an alternation of metrically strong and weak events, and (e) a series of 5/3 sonorities, as shown in figure 2.1.
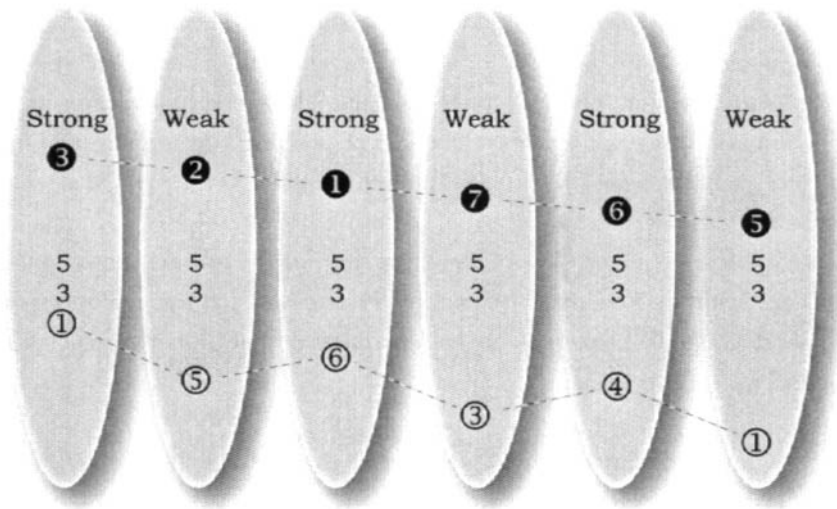

FIGURE 2.1   A schema of the Romanesca with a leaping bass

Even this brief introduction to the Romanesca should enable one to recognize, with some confidence, the same schema in the excerpt below:

EX. 2.6   Cimarosa, from his student notebook (*zibaldone*) of partimenti, m. 1 (Naples, 1762)

The only thing remarkable about its straightforward presentation of the Romanesca is its provenance. The example comes from a notebook of partimenti used at the Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto, Naples, by the thirteen-year-old Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801), later to become one of the most famous chapel masters in Europe.[7] The conservatory had taken the boy in following the death of his father. The next year, 1762, he dated and signed his name on a *zibaldone* of partimenti, most of which can be attributed to the great Neapolitan maestro Francesco Durante (1684–1755). This is a rare case where detailed biographical information about an indigent boy taken in by one of the great conservatories can be linked to a dated partimento manuscript.

The treble staff of example 2.6, added by me, shows a likely realization of two upper parts. The choice of those tones was highly constrained by the series of "5s" shown above Cimarosa's bass. The "5s" were a shorthand for "every bass tone should carry a 5/3 sonority." The original manscript, probably done by a professional copyist, only used figures at the cadence. A student, possibly Cimirosa himself, added the 5s to specify what was already self-evident to an adult musician.

During this same period Cimarosa was also studying the schema known as the Folia, which shares with the Romanesca a series of 5/3 sonorities and implied upper voices in parallel thirds. Example 2.7 presents the Folia partimento from Cimarosa's notebook, along with added, typical upper voices:

EX. 2.7   Cimarosa, from his student notebook of partimenti, m. 1 (Naples, 1762)

These forms of the Romanesca and Folia, part of the patrimony of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century musicians, were frequently modified as time passed. For the

Romanesca, the compositional problem posed earlier, "how to add a third voice, without introducing parallel fifths or octaves, to a pair of voices that move in parallel descending thirds," also has a solution in which the added voice is a treble. The "treble solution" may resemble this passage sung by the Three Ladies in Mozart's *Magic Flute* (KV620), where the parallel thirds are sung by the lower two voices:

EX. 2.8   Mozart, from *The Magic Flute* (KV620), act 1, no. 5, Andante (1791)

Johann Schobert (ca. 1735–1767), a celebrated keyboard player working in Paris and someone whose music the young Mozart studied assiduously, provided a more florid example of this Romanesca variant in the opening of his F-major trio:

EX. 2.9   Schobert, Opus 6, no. 1, mvt. 1, Andante, m. 1 (Paris, ca. 1761–63)

As an abstraction, this variant of the Romanesca features a stepwise descending bass in place of the previous leaping bass, and an alternation of 5/3 and 6/3 chords:
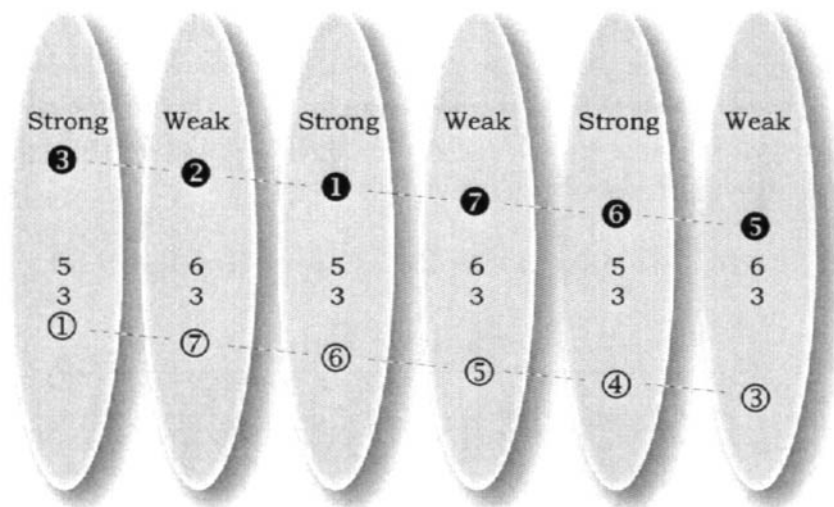
FIGURE 2.2   A schema of the Romanesca with a stepwise bass

While both types of solutions result in the same sequence of sonorities, the leaping variant (Pachelbel and Handel) is more characteristic of the seventeenth and very early eighteenth centuries, while the stepwise variant (Mozart and Schobert) is more characteristic of the later eighteenth century. Neither, however, was the preferred type for most galant musicians.

The Czech musician Wenceslaus Wodiczka (ca. 1715/20–1774) dedicated his Opus 1 violin sonatas (Paris, 1739) to the Duke of Bavaria, in whose orchestra he served as *primo violino*. In the dedication, Wodiczka effusively thanked the duke for having chosen him as a member of the duke's musicians, the *Filarmonici*, and for having arranged for his instruction in Italy under the guidance of "a most wise maestro." In Italy a young musician from the north could apprentice himself to one of the great masters of the galant style, and the diligent student could commit to memory the entire repertory of currently fashionable schemata. An examination of Wodiczka's compositions suggests that he was that sort of student, and I view his Opus 1 as a public presentation of the fruits of his Italian studies. Each page shows, with unusual clarity, the "compulsory figures" of the Italian galant.

The opening slow movement from the third of Wodiczka's sonatas begins with a good example of the preferred galant Romanesca (see ex. 2.10). The dashed lines at the right of the horizontal braces indicate that this type of Romanesca almost always blended into a following schema, often a cadence. Wodiczka's melody features the tonic and fifth of the key, with the descending stepwise melody of the older Romanescas now consigned to an inner voice. The particular contour of the melody—whether, indeed, ❶ preceded ❺ or vice versa—was not an important factor in the galant Romanesca. Wodiczka's first four sonorities alternate between 5/3 and 6/3 chords, somewhat like the stepwise variant (the figures shown between the staves are original). The 6/3 chord at the fourth stage over ③ in the bass, a feature not found in "pure" forms of the leaping or stepwise variants, was

EX. 2.10   Wodiczka, Opus 1, no. 3, mvt. 1, Adagio, m. 1 (1739)

nonetheless very common, and it was implied in the partimento of Tritto shown earlier (ex. 2.1). Thus Wodiczka's bass—one used by countless other court musicians—resembles an abbreviated hybrid of the two main variants:

FIGURE 2.3   The galant Romanesca bass as a hybrid

The first three tones of the galant bass match the stepwise variant, while its third through fifth tones match the leaping variant, though with a slightly different sonority. In place of the 5/3 sonority for the fourth event, the galant Romanesca usually has a 6/3 sonority. That is, for the bass shown above (in the key of C major), the galant version would sound a C-major chord at the point where the leaping or stepwise variants sound an E-minor chord. Why?

When I have posed this question to students and colleagues, they generally answer in ways that would have puzzled the musicians who conceived this music. My beginning students' training in "chord grammar" does not help them explain why, in the key of G

major, Wodiczka would follow an E-minor chord with a G-major chord in first inversion. Even the advanced student who invokes the post–World War I "theories and fantasies" of Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935), with that heavy-handed discourse of "the Will of Tones" and "the Spirit of Voice-Leading," is typically unsure whether training rusty artillery on a galant butterfly does justice to either the butterfly or the artillery.[8] The particular musical choice described above was not based on "chord grammar," the "rise of tonality," the "spirit of voice leading," or other grand abstractions. The proximate cause of that 6/3 sonority was a low-level nexus between the once common, concrete skills of solfège and the realization of unfigured basses (the more advanced type of partimenti), skills that were themselves merely codifications of a living musical praxis.

Creating a proper harmonic accompaniment from a plain bass part required the performer to make educated guesses about the musical context. The more obvious of those educated guesses became codified as rules or "laws." One of many such codifications was published in 1707 by Monsieur de Saint Lambert (fl. Paris, ca. 1700). As his very first law for realizing an unfigured bass, he declared: "A Si, a Mi, & a Sharp are always presumed to be figured with a 6 . . . , provided that the following note ascends by a semitone."[9] That is precisely the circumstance that obtains at the fourth bass tone of the galant Romanesca. Readers with a low tolerance for this sort of technical minutia might now wish to skip ahead to the following chapter, taking it for granted that eighteenth-century musicians played by eighteenth-century rules. For others who would like to understand how "a Si, a Mi, & a Sharp" could each trigger the "*mi*-rule," I provide the following excursus on eighteenth-century solmization.

Doh, a Deer . . . ?

The seven-syllable solfège in use at the Paris Conservatory for generations provides a unique verbal tag for every step of the diatonic scale:

EX. 2.11   A seven-syllable solfège

do   re   mi   fa   sol   la   si   do

Whether one treats these syllables as note-names that persist regardless of the key or mode (fixed-*do*, the later Parisian practice) or as position-labels that move as the key center moves (movable-*do*), they can provide a one-to-one mapping between a syllable and a musical location.

The earlier six-syllable solfège introduced in the eleventh century by Guido of Arezzo also associated syllables with tones:[10]

EX. 2.12   A six-syllable solfège

ut   re   mi   fa   sol   la

But this hexachordal solfège only defined a local context. The syllable *mi*, for example, could refer to a tone in at least three different hexachords. So to identify an exact global position, the Renaissance musician would resort to a many-to-one mapping, where the intersection of two or three local contexts would fix a global position. The modern A3 would become "A *la-mi-re*" by virtue of its separate locations in three cardinal hexachords (see ex. 2.13). Italian musicians maintained these triangulated names for specific pitches until well into the nineteenth century.

EX. 2.13   Three hexachords used to define one location

"natural" hexachord

la

"soft" hexachord

mi

"hard" hexachord

re

= A *la-mi-re*

Somewhere between these two systems—between the global generality of the seven-syllable solfège and the local particularity of the hexachords—lies the common practice of the eighteenth century. What Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770), the violin maestro of Padua, termed the "usual Italian solfeggio" is neither fully local nor fully global:[11]

EX. 2.14   The "usual Italian solfeggio"

ut   re   mi   fa   sol   re   mi   fa

Important intervals like semitones are treated locally, so that both E4–F4 and B4–C5 become *mi–fa*, as though they inhabit separate hexachords. Yet as we shall see, when the scale is extended beyond the range of a single octave, the patterns that emerge repeat after *seven* syllables.

Eighteenth-century practice was far from uniform. In some German texts one finds only the alphabetical note-names—A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. The violin treatise (1756) of Leopold Mozart (1719–1787) falls into that category.[12] Many French musicians were among the first to adopt a seventh syllable. The harmony treatise (1722) of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), for example, uses *si* for the seventh degree, as Saint Lambert did earlier.[13] The Italian writer Fausto Fritelli noted (1744) how chromatic and widely leaping melodies could confound the old system of hexachordal solfège.[14] Indeed, by midcentury some younger writers like Joseph Riepel and Johann Friedrich Daube had begun to ridicule all solfège systems as the imposition of needless complexity.[15] Nevertheless, the "usual Italian solfeggio" was widely known wherever the Italian style of music was cultivated. And in the eighteenth century, that was nearly everywhere.

A more detailed exposition of Italian practice as it was received abroad in the latter part of the seventeenth century can be found in the *Musicalischer Schlissl* [The Key to Music] (1677) by Johann Jacob Prinner (1624–1694).[16] Prinner begins with the hexachord, ascending and descending:

EX. 2.15   Prinner, *Musicalischer Schlissl*, a two-location hexachord

ut   re   mi   fa   sol   la   la   sol   fa   mi   re   ut

His use of two clefs indicates that the pattern of syllables is the same whether one sings the natural hexachord beginning on C4 (with the soprano clef) or the hard hexachord beginning on G2 (the bass clef). More generally, the point is that such hexachords share the same syllables and hence the same pattern of intervals. Thus the subject and "real" answer of a fugue, or the themes in sonatas that become transposed up or down a fifth, are the "same" by virtue of requiring the same syllables.

Prinner then shows how to extend the solfège beyond a single hexachord. The ascending pattern of syllables initially matches Tartini's scale, with subsequent alternating three- and four-tone groups that begin on *re*:

EX. 2.16   Prinner, *Musicalischer Schlissl*, the pattern of syllables when ascending


The descending pattern of syllables also alternates three- and four-tone groups that begin with *la*. The descending dyad *fa–la* may seem unusual, but it does conform to the then well-known precept that "a note above *la* should always be sung as *fa*" (*una nota super la / semper est canendum fa*):

EX. 2.17   Prinner, *Musicalischer Schlissl*, the pattern of syllables when descending
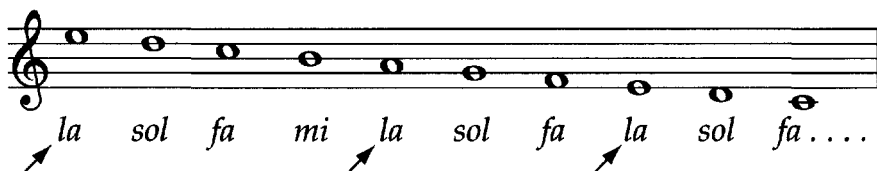
Adding a flat sign to the signature, which signals a change to the "soft" or *molle* system, transposes the syllables:

EX. 2.18   Prinner, *Musicalischer Schlissl*, the pattern of syllables in the "soft" system
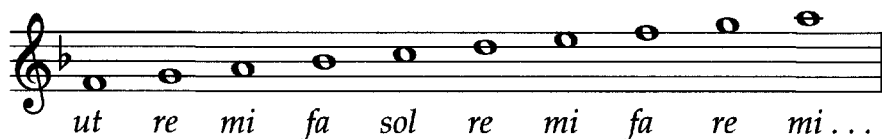
Thus the "usual Italian solfeggio" was, at least in some respects, "movable-*do*," although as we will see, different modes required different patterns of syllables. For Prinner, one might want to say "movable-*ut*," but for many Italians the syllable *do* was already replacing *ut*. Giovanni Maria Bononcini, in *Musico Prattico* [The Practical Musician] (1673), attributed the change to difficulties in singing the older syllable.[17] Tartini was probably adopting a scholastic stance by using *ut* almost a century later.

In reading Prinner or Bononcini today, a common confusion involves equating a solfège syllable with a scale degree. They are not the same. *Mi*, for example, defined a tone with a half step above it and a whole step below it, regardless of the location in a scale. Prinner, closely following Bononcini's treatise, displays an ascending scale for each mode with the semitones *mi-fa* highlighted as black noteheads. Here is his mode on D:

EX. 2.19   Prinner, *Musicalischer Schlissl*, the D-mode with *mi–fa* highlighted in black noteheads
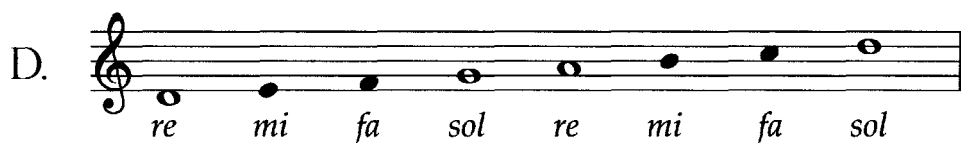
Some central precepts of the "usual solfeggio" should now be clearer:

> One should consider all semitones as *mi–fa* when ascending and as *fa–mi* or *fa–la* when descending, regardless of the mode.

> One should change hexachords on a new *re* if ascending and a new *la* if descending, when a passage moves beyond the range of a single hexachord.

> One should treat an accidental as a change of syllable. Thus ♭ means "treat as *fa*," and ♯ means "treat as *mi*."

> One can fit a short solfeggio fragment—*re, mi, fa*, for example—into multiple tonal contexts even with a single diatonic system: as (1) ❶–❷–❸ of the D or A modes, (2) ❷–❸–❹ of the C or G modes, (3) ❸–❹–❺ of the F mode, (4) ❹–❺–❻ of the E or A modes, (5) ❺–❻–❼ of the D or G modes, (6) ❻–❼–❶ of the F or C modes, and (7) ❼–❶–❷ of the E mode—twelve possibilities in all.

For a "practical musician" like Prinner, Saint Lambert's law about "a Si, a Mi, & a Sharp" would have been a rule about "a Mi, a Mi, & a Mi," since *si* was just another name for a *mi*-degree, and a sharp was an instruction to treat a tone as *mi*. These *mi*-degrees, when in the bass and followed by a *fa*, corresponded with musical contexts in which a locally unstable event preceded a locally stable event. Since the more stable events tended to have 5/3 chords, the *mi*-degrees, to avoid parallel fifths, should not have 5/3 chords (6/3 worked best, or 6/5/3). Hence the *mi*-rule, and hence an important reason why, when the fourth tone of

the Romanesca bass preceded a tone one half-step higher (as *mi* preceding *fa*), galant musicians responded with a 6/3 chord on *mi* and a 5/3 chord on *fa*. To do otherwise would have been a faux pas.

Saint Lambert's observations were fully in line with the doctrine of the Neapolitan conservatories. Francesco Durante, a major figure in Naples who numbered Pergolesi among his many talented students, summed up the rule in his collection of partimenti: "When the partimento ascends a semitone, it takes the 6th":[18]

EX. 2.20   Durante, *Regole*, for an ascending semitone in the partimento (ca. 1740s)
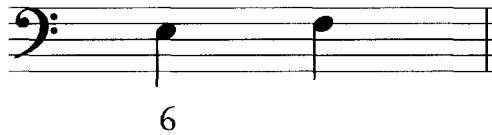
So a musical schema can be a patchwork, the result of interactions between numerous small practices and the larger forces of both historical precedent and contemporary fashion. The musicians who developed the galant Romanesca preserved a number of venerable traits from its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antecedents. But they also added the melodic focus on ❶ and ❺, shortened its length from six events to four, blended the stepwise bass with the leaping bass, and chose to make the fourth event a 6/3 sonority that would seamlessly connect to a following cadence or other schema:
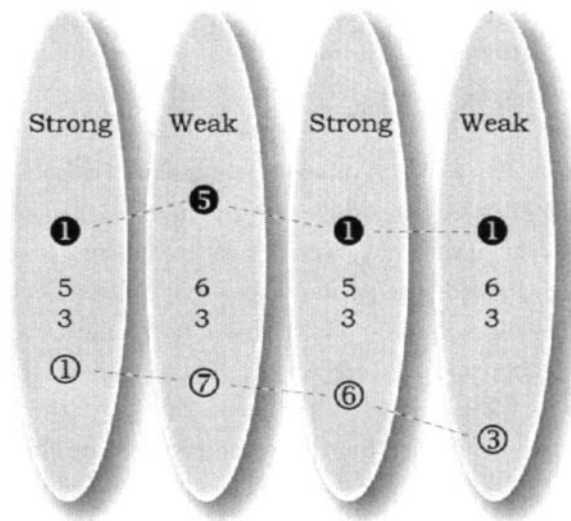

FIGURE 2.4   A schema of the preferred galant Romanesca

This galant Romanesca proved so popular that during the first half of the eighteenth century it became something of a cliché, especially in slow movements like that of the

Wodiczka Adagio shown earlier. It was one of the first patterns one might think of to begin any number of works. When Naples-trained Johann Adolf Hasse (1699–1783), the famous composer of court operas in Dresden, married the prima donna Faustina Bordoni (1697–1781) and wrote for her a dozen vocal exercises or *solfeggi*, he chose to begin the second one with a Romanesca:

EX. 2.21   Hasse, *12 Solfeggi*, no. 2, Allegro, m. 1 (ca. 1730s)

Note that Hasse's solfeggio includes a lightly figured bass, for which Neapolitan musicians also used the term *partimento*. The melody thus was schematically contextualized by its companion partimento, and the partimento was partially realized by its companion melody. Rather than being a single melodic line intended to teach some aspect of vocal gymnastics, as in the nineteenth century, an eighteenth-century Neapolitan solfeggio was a *two*-voice composition intended to teach melodic elegance and refinement in the context of the particular schemata codified by its companion partimento. Students who worked through these solfeggios would have an advantage when called upon to create keyboard realizations of free-standing partimento basses. That is, they could use solfeggios to "fortify their memory" with appropriate melodies, which could then be recalled when prompted by particular contexts or "occasions" in the partimento bass.

In the manner of a "usual scene" from the commedia dell'arte, the galant Romanesca depended for its effect on the quality of its presentation, not its originality. Yet it was never a completely fixed pattern. Further variation was possible if the overall schema remained recognizable. As a final variant, here is a Romanesca from a motet by the Milanese composer Giovanni Battista Sammartini (1700/01–1775), who was the maestro of Gluck. It conforms in most respects to the schema of figure 2.4, but holds the harmony of the first stage through the second stage, creating a lovely dissonance as the bass descends from ① through ⑦ to ⑥:

EX. 2.22   Sammartini, *Psalm* (J-C105), mvt. 6, *Gloria Patri*, Andante, m. 9 (ca. 1750s)

ROMANESCA

In many respects Sammartini's phrase is a performance of the same "scene" as Hasse's, with each composer making slightly different choices from among a set of known alternatives. The schema that they shared was "essentially" neither chord grammar nor voice leading, "fundamentally" neither harmony nor melody. Rather, each transcribed performance was a successful negotiation among a number of well-learned musical schemata within the constraints both of the practical requirements of particular musical situations and of each composer's background and training.

Sammartini was the premier church musician in Milan during the period when a young J. C. Bach (1735–1782) served as organist at the Milan cathedral. One can hear echoes of Sammartini's special treatment of the Romanesca in one of Bach's keyboard sonatas from 1766, written after the "Milan" Bach had acquired a reputation as an opera composer and been recruited to England where he became the "London" Bach:

EX. 2.23   J. C. Bach, Opus 5, no. 3, mvt. 1, Allegro, m. 63 (London, 1766)

ROMANESCA

Bach's follow-on riposte to the Romanesca, labeled with question marks in example 2.23, was itself one of the most common galant schemata, and it forms the subject of the following chapter.

After listening to these many examples of the galant Romanesca, you may have now acquired a "refined ear" and the ability to judge whether a particular presentation of it possesses a "superior gracefulness." Imagine yourself at the Vatican in 1750, in conversation with a devotee of galant sacred music. As musicians enter the chamber of Cardinal Albani, you sit and await the Naples-trained *maestro di capella*, Niccolò Jommelli (1714–1774). The portly maestro finally arrives and signals for a performance of his motet *Domus mea* to commence. It opens with a *largo* Romanesca. The two high male voices are supported by an organist softly playing the bass in his left hand and harmonies in his right:

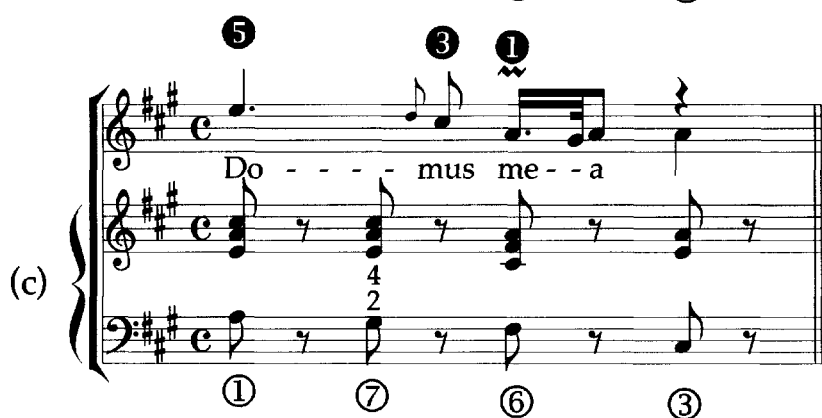EX. 2.24   Jommelli, *Domus mea*, m. 1 (Rome, 1750)

There were several possible choices for the second chord (above ⑦), three of which are shown in example 2.25. The organist played version (a), to which your noble friend later objects. She speaks of its "harshness," and after the musicians have left you recommend either the normal model of Hasse (cf. ex. 2.21, adapted as ex. 2.25b) or the more piquant model of Sammartini (cf. ex. 2.22, adapted as ex. 2.25c). Your friend is impressed by your display of discernment, and compliments you on your taste.

As fanciful as that scenario might seem, it does put the focus squarely on informed, educated taste, and especially on taste as a topic of conversation and good-natured disputation. To speak artfully of art was a social grace and distinction worth cultivating. The tiny differences in the organist's options may once have mattered a great deal. Quoting Norbert Elias from chapter 1 above, "These people experience many things that we would be inclined to dismiss as trivial or superficial with an intensity that we have largely lost." Though perhaps only musicians could have verbalized the options for harmonizing Jommelli's bass, the opinions of highly placed musicians mattered a great deal at any prestige-conscious court.

EX. 2.25   Three harmonizations of ex. 2.24: (a) "harsh"; (b) "normal"; (c) "piquant"

"Harsh"

à la Hasse:

the most common
type, with "6" above ⑦

à la Sammartini:

tonic harmony extends
through stage two,
with "4/2" above ⑦

Ironically, and perhaps reinforcing my remark about distinctions to which, "over the intervening centuries, we have become less sensitive," the "harsh" option, the one least appropriate, was the one chosen for the otherwise exemplary modern edition of this work.[19] The general sequence of schemata was not, fortunately, subject to revision. Jommelli gave his Romanesca the same type of riposte and continuation chosen by J. C. Bach (ex. 2.23). The nature of this preferred galant riposte is, as mentioned, discussed at length in the following chapter.