

Paolo Teodori

Conservatorio S. Cecilia - Roma, Italia  
p.teodori@conservatoriosantacecilia.it

## Partimenti, a method for learning, making and composing music yesterday and today

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

The harmonization of the bass, made in some form, has for some centuries been a major part of the musical apprenticeship of musicians. In Italy the evolution of this practice took place with a slip from the practice of the basso continuo to the art of *partimento*, then from this to that of the *basso di armonia*.

The latest studies of music analysis have shown that the investigation of this evolution is of fundamental importance for the understanding of the changes that took place in music between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; in particular for changes in the relationship between teaching practice and musical performance on the one hand, and in the approach to composition on the other. The *basso continuo* training was directly linked to a common aspect of Baroque style and music practice, with the art of *partimento* there has been a gradual shift of attention to the specific field of didactics: the *partimento*, that was still “*arte di ben accompagnare*”, became increasingly clear the method of assimilating common and shared practices and processes; these were crystallized in the form of automatisms that concerned the voice-leading, the chord’s progression and the musical form. The automatisms were reinforced by the control capacity acquired by counterpointing and were available, as schemes, for the different genres and styles of composition. The aim of my speech is to shed light on the ways and the reasons for the gradual passage that went through the course of the nineteenth century from the art of the *partimento* to the practice of *basso di armonia*, in the belief that in this passage reveals a profound change in the way of considering music composition and proceeding to it. On the surface the passage manifests the enhancement of the intellectual and abstract aspect of composing and the fall of interest in improvisation, both from the point of view of musical performance and educational perspective. Exceptionally, the *basso di armonia* is played directly on the keyboard; normally it is written in a four-voices *disposizione*, regardless of the possibility to run on the keyboard.

There are several reasons behind the transformation; my intervention will focus on the influence that it had the different way to proceed in musical composition.

The *partimento* expresses a compositional technique that moves in the background of a clear tonal framework, animated by modulation mostly confined within the context of the near tones; in each *partimento* the bass line insists on recurring figures whose harmonization can benefit from usual patterns, often resulting from the extension of two-voice contrapuntal formulas.

The *basso di armonia* must train the young musician to solve problems of other complexity, since 19th-century music normally includes modulation or transitions between close and distant tones, gradually exploding the chances of resolving each chord on any other chord. The bass line open to different realization possibilities with figures available for multiple tonal solutions, which can hardly be synthesized in repeated formulas; In this framework, there was a growing sensitivity for harmonic progressions in itself and not obtained as the extension of original two-voice contrapuntal movements.

Exercise on *basso di armonia* has different goals than the *partimento*; for this reason it tends to absorb the rules of counterpoint and to interpret them with increasing rigidity. This starts the path for a reset of the composition

teaching, in which the study of *basso di armonia* represents only the initial phase of learning. In the 18th century *partimento* and counterpoint were parallel forms of music learning; along the course of the nineteenth century, the *basso di armonia* and counterpoint became later stages in the formation of young composers.

#### Obiettivi e corpus

The study of harmony, according to the prevailing practice in the Italian Conservatories, is often judged negatively. The purpose of the intervention is to propose a new evaluation of this form of study; in fact, it connects many aspects to the Neapolitan tradition of the *partimenti* and interprets the techniques in the light of the evolution of the musical style and the compositional approach that took place in the nineteenth century.

#### Metodologia

Comparison of texts and composition techniques.

#### Contributo della vostra ricerca

The aim is to give the right value to the study of harmony according to the pedagogical model still in use in some Italian Conservatories.

#### Parole chiave

Partimento, armonia, armonia complementare.

### RIFERIMENTI BIBLIOGRAFICI

- FENAROLI, FEDELE (1775), *Regole musicali per i principanti di cembalo*. Napoli, Mazzola-Vocola. Faccs. Bologna: Forni, 1975
- FENAROLI, FEDELE [ca. 1846], *Partimenti e regole musicali per quelli che vogliono suonare coi numeri e per i principanti di contrappunto di F. Fenaroli. Nuova edizione corretta e illustrate con annotazioni ed esempi dimostrativi secondo la scuola dell'autore di P. Mandanici*. Milano, Giovanni Ricordi.
- NAPOLI, GENNARO (1938), *Bassi melodie e temi per lo studio della composizione*, Milano, Ricordi.
- PAISIELLO, GIOVANNI [ca. 1782], *Regole per bene accompagnare il partimento, o sia il basso fondamentale sopra il cembalo di Giovanni Paisiello*. Ms.
- SANGUINETTI, GIORGIO (2012), *The art of partimento: history, theory and practice*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- CHRISTENSEN, THOMAS, & GJERDINGEN, ROBERT, & SANGUINETTI, GIORGIO, & LUTZ, RUDOLF (2010), *Partimento and Continuo playing in theory and in practice*. Orpheus Institute, Leuven University Press.
- Gjerdingen, Robert (2007), *Music in the galant style*, Oxford, university Press.
- Sullo, Paolo (2014), *I solfeggi nella scuola di Nicola Zingarelli*, a.c. di A. Carocchia, F. Di Lernia, Claudio Grenzi Editore, Foggia.