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MARC-ANTOINE CHARPENTIER AND THE BASSE CONTINUE

by GRAHAM SADLER and SHIRLEY THOMPSON

Studies of French continuo practice have tended to survey wide repertoires, often involving many composers or genres. But French Baroque composers each tended to handle the notation of the *basse continue* in subtly different ways. Moreover, their treatment of these notational conventions might well change from one genre to another. Since the indiscriminate study of so many composers and genres has sometimes led to over-generalization, the time seems ripe for individual studies of individual composers.

In this respect Lully's great contemporary Marc-Antoine Charpentier makes a good choice: his large output, amounting to some 550 works,¹ includes almost every type of French music that involved basso continuo – music for the stage, oratorio-like compositions, secular chamber works and instrumental pieces, as well as a far larger and more diverse sacred output than that of any French contemporary. We are also fortunate in having no fewer than 28 volumes of his manuscripts (the *Meslanges autographes*²) – a larger corpus of holograph material than exists for any other major composer of his generation. Further, Charpentier marked his scores with copious indications relating to performance, and that makes them specially valuable in the present context. This article examines the various kinds of continuo instruments which Charpentier specifies, together with aspects of the composer's notation that provide clues as to how the continuo was realized. It also considers places where the continuo was omitted.

Instruments

For all their wealth of evidence on matters of performance, Charpentier's autographs are often inconsistent or even contradictory in the way in which information on instrumentation is conveyed. Thus on the precise scoring of continuo lines, as on many other matters, we do not always have as much

¹ These are catalogued by H. Wiley Hitchcock in *Les oeuvres de/The works of Marc-Antoine Charpentier: Catalogue raisonné* (Paris: Picard, 1982). A list of works appears in Hitchcock, 'Marc-Antoine Charpentier', *The New Grove French Baroque Masters* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.89–112. Recent studies of Charpentier include Catherine Cessac, *Marc-Antoine Charpentier* (Paris: Fayard, 1988); Hitchcock, *Marc-Antoine Charpentier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, = Oxford Studies of Composers: 23); Jane Lowe, *The Psalm Settings of Marc-Antoine Charpentier* (PhD thesis, Selwyn College, Cambridge, 1991). Bi-annual bulletins are published, in January and July, by the Société Marc Antoine Charpentier.

² *Meslanges autographes*: F-Pn Rés.Vm¹ 259; 28 volumes. Volumes 1 and 2 are available in facsimile (Paris: Minkoff, 1991). Other autograph material consulted in this study includes Vm⁶ 18, partbooks of *Les arts florissants* (H487a) and Vm¹ 942, partbooks of the *Mass Assumpta est Maria* (H11a).

evidence as we would like.³ Nearly 300 works, many but by no means all of them small-scale pieces,⁴ include no labelling of the bass line whatsoever. Where the composer does provide information, it is often by means of vague terms like 'basse continue', 'accompagnement' or even 'petit chœur'.⁵ More specific labelling of the bass tends to occur only when the composer wishes to avoid ambiguity – at the moment, for example, when the number of staves changes from one system to another; or when instruments or voices suddenly have to share the same stave; or, conversely, when a line divides into two. Indeed, such 'internal' labelling may well be the first and only time we learn which continuo instruments are involved. It follows, therefore, that if a piece contains no ambiguities of this kind, we may well have no clear indication as to the continuo instruments required. This situation was not unusual in the Baroque period: as an active practical musician, Charpentier often directed his own performances and would not need to mark his scores with self-evident information. In the case of works which would be written with particular establishments, and therefore particular forces, in mind, the required instrumentation would have been obvious.⁶ Yet even if it may be difficult or even impossible, in any given work, to determine the precise forces Charpentier had in mind, there are enough sporadic clues in his output for us to build up a coherent and remarkably varied picture of his general practice.

(a) *Chord-playing instruments.*

Predictably, where only one continuo instrument is specified, it is usually (though not always⁷) the keyboard – organ or harpsichord, the former normally in sacred and the latter in secular pieces. Exceptions do, however, exist: several sacred works call for a harpsichord – the *Psalmus David nonagesimus primus* (H185),⁸ for instance, and the *Gratiarum actiones* (H326),⁹ and a *Miserere*

³ A fuller discussion will appear in Shirley Thompson, *Problems of scoring and performance practice in the music of Marc-Antoine Charpentier* (PhD thesis, The University of Hull, GB, in preparation).

⁴ H402, for example, is scored for soloists and four-part chorus, with the verbal instructions 'avec' and 'sans' instruments.

⁵ E.g. H53, H170, H256, H392, ('basse continue') and H10, H180b, H230 ('accompagnement'). Alternations of *petit chœur* and *grand chœur* can be seen throughout H145a and in the Prelude of H167.

⁶ Some Comédie Française works, for instance, carry no details of continuo scoring: H494, H497, H500, H507. Similarly, there is no such information in the scores of a number of works for the Guise household (H195, H339, H345, H412, H414, H415, H483b, H484, H486) nor in some works probably intended for the Jesuits (H126–134, H160, H209, H211, H220).

⁷ In H471, for instance, 'viole' is the only named continuo instrument; even given this instrument's capacity to play chords, it seems likely that a keyboard instrument would also have been involved in this work.

⁸ Nothing is known of the circumstances for which this work was written.

⁹ The work celebrates the recovery of the Dauphin from illness.

des Jesuites (H193) which, despite its title (with the implication that it was composed for the Jesuit church¹⁰), was originally written for the household musicians of the Duchesse de Guise. The fact that an organ is specified in three dramatic works may initially seem surprising, yet these miniature operas,¹¹ written for this same Guise household, are all on sacred themes and may thus have been presented in the duchess's chapel.¹²

Of the two keyboard instruments, the organ is the more frequently mentioned, being specified in some 100 works. The way in which it is indicated is rarely as straightforward as in the *Elevation* (H245), with its rubric 'pour un dessus[,] deux violons et l'orgue'.¹³ More often, references to the presence of an organ are oblique: indications of manual-pedal contrasts;¹⁴ instructions to improvise organ couplets between movements;¹⁵ suggestions for registration or for doubling of obbligato parts (both discussed in more detail below).

Can we assume that, because the organ is the sole continuo instrument alluded to in these pieces, it is therefore the only one? Such a conclusion does seem plausible in a majority of those concerned. Well over two-thirds are either small-scale or early works (there is reason to believe that Charpentier, like others of his time, gradually favoured larger continuo groupings) or both. Typical is the *Messe pour les trepasses* (H2), an early work, scored for soloists, chorus, recorders and strings. Here, whenever the string group plays, the organ shares the bass line with the *basses de violon*, yet is marked 'orgue' or 'orgue seul' (never 'orgue et ...') when accompanying reduced forces; in other words, the *basses de violon* are deployed solely as the bass of the string group and never as continuo instruments in their own right. We shall, however, see that Charpentier made liberal use elsewhere of organ combined with a mixture of bowed string continuo instruments, and we must accept that such may have been his intention even in works where he did not specify as much.

In only a small proportion of pieces – about 20 works – does Charpentier call for harpsichord, or *clavecin*. (Mindful, perhaps, of the etymology of the latter term, the composer usually spells it *clavecim*). There are two instances where organ and harpsichord are specified, yet in neither case is it certain that both

¹⁰ Hitchcock (*Catalogue*, p.192) notes that the words 'Miserere des Jesuites' may have been added to the original title (*Psalm[us] David 50^{mus}*) when the work was revised or when Charpentier composed another setting of the psalm. The performers' names originally given in the score are those associated with the Guise household.

¹¹ H482, H483 and H483a (a substitute composition for part 2 of H483).

¹² Another indication of organ in what would seem a secular work is seen in H547, the *Marche de triomphe* and *Second air de trompettes*. These pieces may, however, have been intended for a sacred occasion.

¹³ See also H284, *Domine salvum a 3 voix pareilles avec orgue*.

¹⁴ See the indications 'pedale' and 'main' in *Motet de la Vierge* (H322).

¹⁵ Examples can be seen in H63, H64, H65, H67, H68 and H356. In H67, we also find the indication 'basse continue'.

were intended to be used together. The work entitled *Pour un reposoir: Ouverture dès que la procession paroist* (H523) and its untitled accompanying motet (‘Ave verum corpus’, H329) were designed to be performed at Corpus Christi, one after the other, before a street altar (‘reposoir’). Given the outdoor setting, the fact that the harpsichord is specified at the start of the overture (the bass is marked ‘clavecim et violons’) seems eminently practical, and the motet likewise is marked ‘viol[on] et clavecim’ towards the beginning. Yet at b.121 we find the rubric ‘voix[,] orgue et basse contin[ue]’. Did Charpentier have access to a portable chamber organ to take into the street (possible: see note 41)? Or is this, as Hitchcock suggests,¹⁶ a ‘slip of the pen’ (conceivable)? Or is the rubric at b.121 a later addition, made in connection with an indoor performance (perhaps the most likely)?

A parallel case is the little ‘opéra’ *Les arts florissans*. Here we have both an autograph score in the *Meslanges autographes*¹⁷ and what appears to be a complete parallel set of autograph partbooks.¹⁸ In the *Meslanges* the only continuo instrument required to play throughout is the organ, though the passage marked ‘Bruit effroyable’ specifies ‘[basse de] violes’ on an independent line. The performing material, by contrast, contains no part for the organ but one marked ‘clavecin’, while there is also a partbook for ‘[basse de] viole’ containing the entire bass line. It is of course conceivable that both keyboard instruments were used together, the organist playing from the full score and the harpsichordist from the partbook, the bass line being additionally supported by a basse de viole. Yet there is reason to believe that Charpentier’s usual practice, at least in larger-scale works such as this, was to have a part copied for the keyboard continuo player.¹⁹ In which case, the discrepancy between score and part-books may be no more than an oversight, reflecting perhaps a change of venue or some similar practicality.

A further chord-playing continuo instrument used by Charpentier was the theorbo. Surprisingly, it is only rarely specified.²⁰ It appears, for example, in the eight-part *Sonate* (H548), where it reads from a partbook almost identical with that for harpsichord. In modern performances, the two instruments often alternate, but there is no evidence that that was the composer’s intention.

¹⁶ Hitchcock, *Catalogue*, p.261.

¹⁷ Volume vii, ff.63^v–86^v

¹⁸ See note 2.

¹⁹ The performing materials for the Mass *Assumpta est Maria* and *Sonate* include separate partbooks for organ and clavecin respectively. Though not autograph, the partbooks to *Judicium Salomonis* Vm¹ 1481 (H422a), dated 1702 and thus contemporary with Charpentier, include a separate book entitled ‘Basse continue p[ou]r l’orgüe’. This matter is discussed further below.

²⁰ Jean Duron (‘L’orchestre de Marc-Antoine Charpentier’, *Revue de musicologie* 72 (1986), pp.23–65) is incorrect in stating that ‘Le théorbe n’est jamais mentionné dans les sources chez Charpentier’ (p.40).

In Charpentier's only other work to specify the theorbo, *Pro omnibus festis BVM* (H333),²¹ the instrument is identified in a way that nicely illustrates the composer's haphazard labelling. At the start of the piece the continuo line is unmarked. Later it becomes clear first that bass viol and organ are needed on the continuo. Then later still we find the first and only indication – at the point where the number of staves changes from one system to the next – that the continuo team also includes theorbo. Yet two bars later, the line marked ,violle et theorbe' ends with a minim, and the rest of the stave is taken over

Example 1

by voices singing from the mezzo-soprano clef. The ,violle' and ,theorbe' are clearly not intended to join the organ line at this point, since there would be little point in giving them their own stave at the beginning of this system. On the other hand (and this is not untypical of Charpentier), there is no indication later in the piece as to where these instruments should re-enter.

²¹ Added to the score are indications for adaptation of the work for a different group of singers (described in Hitchcock, *Catalogue*, p.263). However, we cannot identify either of the intended performing groups. It is, of course, possible that ,theorbe' was added to the score when the alterations were being made.

Although Charpentier specifies the theorbo in only two works, we may surmise that he intended it elsewhere. During his association with the Guise household, the duchess's musical establishment was directed by the theorbo player Philippe Goibaut, sieur de Bois, known as Mr Du Bois.²² It is thus no surprise that the above-mentioned *Sonate* – written, it would appear, for the duchess's musicians – includes this instrument. Doubtless it was included in other works for the Guise musicians. It has been noted, for example, that *Les arts florissans* seems to be a companion work to the *Sonate*:²³ the instrumental scoring is virtually identical except that the opera lacks any mention of theorbo.²⁴ The combination of theorbo and harpsichord, found in the *Sonate*, was, in any case, common enough in France: it was the norm at the Paris Opéra in Charpentier's day, where two theorbos remained part of the *petit chœur*, which included the continuo players, until at least 1719. It must presumably have been used in Charpentier's one work for the Opéra – the tragédie *Medée* (1693).²⁵ Duron observes that Charpentier's failure to specify the instrument may be regarded as an argument *a silentio*, the theorbo being taken so much for granted that it was not thought necessary to specify it.²⁶ This is a line of reasoning that should be used with due reserve, yet in view of the known existence of theorbos in some of the establishments for which Charpentier worked, it undoubtedly carries some weight.

(b) *Melody instruments.*

Although some works would no doubt have been performed with *basse continue* of organ alone, there is abundant evidence that in many others, as we might expect by the later 17th century, the continuo line was doubled by further instruments. The composer does not always indicate which: he often contents himself with such general directions as ,orgue et basse contin[ue]' (*Messe a 8 voix et flutes*, H3), ,orgue et basse contin[ue] seuls' (*Litanies de la Vierge*, H84) or ,orgue et accomp[agnement]' (*Exaudiat*, H162).

Still, enough works survive in which Charpentier's intentions are made more specific to allow us to see a pattern of sorts. In a few cases the scoring can be established by identifying players named in the score. *Psal[mus] David 5^{tus} post septuagesimum*, ,Notus in Judea' (H206), includes indications as to which lines should be played by ,Mr Converset' and ,M^r Marchand pere', whom Catherine Cessac suggests were respectively *basse de violon* and *basse*

²² Patricia Ranum (,A sweet servitude[:] A musician's life at the Court of Mlle de Guise', *Early Music* 15, (1987), pp.346–360) provides details about the personnel in the Hôtel de Guise.

²³ Julie Anne Sadie, ,Charpentier and the early French ensemble sonata' *Early Music* 7 (1979), pp.330–335.

²⁴ It is possible that the theorbo part has not survived with the other partbooks.

²⁵ *Medée* (Paris: Ballard, 1694). Further possible use of the theorbo is discussed below.

²⁶ Duron, ,L'orchestre', p.41.

de viole players.²⁷ Usually, however, instruments are specifically named. Yet rarely is that information found at the start: *Gratiarum actiones* (H326), in which the bass is entrusted to ,viole[,] basse de violon [et] clavecim', is one of only a handful of works where the continuo scoring is given at the outset. More typically, the presence of doubling instruments becomes apparent from passing references in the course of the piece: in *Psalmus 147* (H191), for instance, bass viol and organ are specified separately, the former on f.38, the latter in several other places.

The composer's many permutations of the continuo instruments available to him are discussed separately below. It is enough to note here that the most common doubling instruments are, as previous examples have suggested (and indeed as one would expect), the *basse de viole* and *basse de violon*. The latter could be used either singly or in groups as continuo instruments. Of the two, the *basse de viole* is marginally the more often indicated, though exact proportions are not possible to establish, since Charpentier has the unfortunate habit of using the abbreviation ,viol' to mean either instrument.²⁸ Occasionally his directions are more cryptic. From the rubric ,orgue et basses continue [sic] avec sourdines' (*Dialogus inter angelos et pastores Judeae*, H420) one might infer the doubling instruments to be *basses de violon*; but even then, there is reason to believe that Charpentier sometimes intended his bass viol players to use mutes.²⁹ On the other hand, ,avec sourdines' in this context may mean that the continuo group accompanied the main body of (muted) strings.³⁰

Where the bass instruments have rests, Charpentier sometimes follows what was by now common practice in calling upon the violas to double the high-lying organ line.³¹ More unusual, perhaps, is his occasional use of treble viols for this purpose. In *Pro omnibus festis BVM* ,Annuntiate superi, narrate coeli' (H333) the two obbligato treble viols and, ,if possible', the *basse de viole*, are instructed to double the organ line when it ascends into the mezzo-soprano clef (C²) with the rubric: ,les petites violes et la grande si elle [peut] avec l'orgue en haut'.

²⁷ Cessac, *Charpentier*, pp.75, 82 and 193.

²⁸ The question of terminology is discussed further in Thompson, *op.cit.*

²⁹ See H488, *La descente d'Orphee aux enfers*. On f.49 a section scored for three bass viols, harpsichord and voice is headed ,avec sourdines'.

³⁰ If this is the case, it tends to confirm that the string player(s) in the continuo group were regarded as distinct from the main string body, analogous to the distinction between *petit chœur* and *grand chœur* at the Paris Opéra. We have indeed noted that Charpentier occasionally labels the continuo section *petit chœur*.

³¹ See H189, for instance. It is clear that the continuo body in this work normally comprises organ and bass violins. However, at ,Et ipse redimet', the continuo line is written in the alto clef and accompanies an ensemble of high voices and two obbligato violins. At this point it is labelled ,orgue[,] taille et quinte de viollons'. Earlier in the work, where the pitch of the continuo line rises to accompany high voices, ,orgue seul' appears on the continuo line. Meanwhile, all the *grand chœur* basses are resting, but *taille* and *quinte* lines have a written-out doubling of the continuo line.

A significant number of works include wind instruments among the continuo group. Where a piece involves obbligato recorders and oboes or (in one instance) piva,³² Charpentier sometimes specifies one or more bassoons. In H547, for instance, 'orgue et basson sans vi[ol]ons' accompany passages marked 'pr[emier] hautb[ois] et fl[ute]' and 's[econ]d hautb[ois] et fl[ute]', while 'org[ue] et vi[ol]on sans basson' accompany 'pr[emier] vio[lo]n' and 's[econ]d vio[lo]n'. Where recorders are the sole obbligato wind instruments, Charpentier occasionally calls for a *basse de flute* on the continuo line, as in the *Prelude pour l'esté à 3 flutes* (H336a).³³

Jean Duron³⁴ draws attention to Charpentier's use of serpents and cromorne in the *Offerte pour l'orgue et pour les violons flutes et hautbois* (H514). Here the two lines in the bass clef are entrusted respectively to *basse de violons* and 'serpents[,] cromorne[,] basson et orgue'. The work in question, considered by Hitchcock to be an early one, has been redated by Jane Lowe to the period after 1685. When Charpentier was *maître de musique* at the Sainte-Chapelle (1698–1704), he had access to several serpent players,³⁵ though whether he did so before that period is not known. Boydell describes the cromorne as a wind instrument 'of uncertain identity' probably related to the bassoon.³⁶ The composer's rubric suggests that the instrument, whether or not related to the bassoon, was not identical with it. Duron notes the virtuosic nature of Charpentier's cromorne parts.

Combinations of instruments

In a brief article there is only space to hint at the richness and variety of Charpentier's grouping of continuo instruments. The numbers deployed on the *basse continue* are not necessarily related to the size of the overall performing forces. On the one hand, we have noted large-scale works in which, on available evidence, the continuo group may have been small (see note 4);

³² For a discussion of this instrument, see Duron, 'L'orchestre', pp.50–51 and Don L. Smithers, *The Music and History of the Baroque Trumpet before 1721* (London: Dent, 1973), p.239. See also the definitions by Sébastien de Brossard in *Dictionnaire de musique* (2nd edition, 1705; R Hilversum: Knuf, 1965): „Piva“, p.289; „Haut-Bois“, p.267.

³³ The presence of bass figuring indicates that a chord-playing instrument is required – perhaps, in this case, a theorbo. The [*basse de*] *flute* is also required to double the high continuo line in a section of H409. Some passages in *Medée* specify doubling of the continuo by a bass recorder (see pp.125, 126, 135, 136, 138 and 241). In one section (p.275f) the *basse de flûte* has an independent line with only minor differences from that labelled BASSE-CONTINUE.

³⁴ Duron, 'L'orchestre', pp.49–50.

³⁵ This is clear from details provided by Michel Brenet, *Les Musiciens de la Sainte-Chapelle du Palais* (Paris: Picard, 1910), pp.263, 265 and 266.

³⁶ Barra R Boydell, 'Cromorne', *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (London: Macmillan, 1984), Vol I, p.516. Boydell's suggestion is supported by Brossard in the following definition: 'FAGGOTTO. Instrument à vent, qui répond à nôtre BASSON, ou Basse de Chromorne', *Dictionnaire*, p.25.

on the other, it has also been noted that a modest work like the *Gratiarum actiones* (H326), comprising obbligato parts for three singers and three recorders, has a continuo section comprising three instruments. It goes without saying that the choice of instruments was influenced by what was available and where the performance would take place. In composing a large-scale *Epithalamio* (H473) for the Dauphin's brother-in-law,³⁷ Charpentier was writing for the musicians at the Munich court, for whom a continuo section of 'cembalo[,] violone e fagotto' was more the norm than it was in France. In writing the *Simphonies pour un reposoir* (H515) for an outdoor ceremony, he specifies at one point 'trois basses et clavecin', the three 'basses' almost certainly *basses de violon*. To the examples already given we may add the further combination of organ, bass viol and theorbo (discussed above) in *Pro omnibus festibus* (H333).

Handwritten musical score for "Pro omnibus festibus" (H333). The score is written on six staves. The top staff is for a vocal part with lyrics "e ne me per das illa die ne me per das it la di e". The second staff is for a vocal part with lyrics "e ne me per das ne me per das illa die illa die". The third staff is for a vocal part with lyrics "e per confuturaria ne me per das illa die illa die illa die". The fourth staff is for a vocal part with lyrics "quereus me se di shi". The fifth staff is for a vocal part with lyrics "quereus me se di shi". The sixth staff is for a vocal part with lyrics "quereus me se di shi". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and clefs. Handwritten annotations include "sans violon" and "orgue et voix".

Example 2

³⁷ According to Hitchcock (*Catalogue*, p.343) the work, with its Italian text, was probably commissioned by the Dauphin to celebrate the marriage of his wife's brother, Maximilian II Emanuel, Elector of Bavaria.

The scores of a handful of Charpentier's sacred works include more than one set of figures simultaneously – the *Troisième Magnificat* (H79), for example, and the *Prose des Morts* (H12). In the former, the figuring in one of the parts is far more sporadic than in the other, but the fact that it appears in three different places suggests that it is probably not a copying error. The sparseness of the figuring itself may suggest that this second instrument was a theorbo, sparseness of figuring being characteristic of theorbo parts. Multiple continuo lines may indeed have been more widespread in Charpentier than at first appears. Evidence for their use in the *Prose des morts*, for example, survives almost by accident: for the most part the autograph reveals only one continuo line; but at the upper system on f.40 (ex. 2), the score is expanded from four to eight staves in double-choir format. Here the bass lines of both choirs are figured, the upper one marked 'viol[on] et voix' and the lower one marked 'orgue et voix'. Given the unlikelihood that the *basse de violon* was expected to realize the figures, we must conclude that a second chord-playing instrument was required – possibly, once again, the 'phantom' theorbo that Charpentier seems to have been so reluctant to specify.

Four separate continuo parts are found in Charpentier's *Messe à quatre chœurs* (H4), each choir having its own continuo line. The instruments involved are never fully stated, though where the texture is reduced to two choirs the composer refers to 'les deux orgues'. The fact that all four parts are generally referred to in identical terms (e.g. 'les quatre basses continues accompagnent') suggests that he intended four organs. There are no clear indications that each line was doubled by a string bass: throughout Charpentier indicates string doubling of the voices by writing above the score 'avec violons' and 'sans violons', but it is unclear whether this extended to the doubling of the *basse continue* in passages where the string body does not play. As originally copied, all four continuo lines were virtually identical and played almost throughout, even when one, two or three of the choirs were resting. Crossings-out in the score provide evidence that at some stage Charpentier had second thoughts. At all events, it seems unlikely that the crossings-out were done to adapt the work for a later performance when four organs were not available: while the number of occasions where the continuo lines play simultaneously is much reduced, there remain places where all four play together.

The *Salve regina* for three choirs (H24) is another work with multiple continuo lines, one for each choir. Here the continuo of both first and second choirs play together for most of the piece, even where the first choir sings on its own. A third continuo part plays only when the third choir enters – i.e. about half-way through. Interestingly the third choir is labelled 'exules' (exiles). This raises the intriguing possibility that the third choir and its continuo were spatially separated from the others. If so, it is a rare and possibly unique example in late 17th-century France of this Italianate practice.

Cues to performance

Charpentier's manuscripts, as well as providing data on continuo instruments and combinations of instruments, also contain information on how, what and (sometimes) when to play. In a handful of works,³⁸ the composer specifies or at least hints at organ registration. For example, in *Caecilia virgo et martyr* (H413) he distinguishes between 'petit jeu' and 'grand jeu'. In the *Magnificat* (H78) the specified registration includes 'cornet' and 'jeux doux'. These terms, especially *plein jeu* and *grand jeu*, indicate a substantial instrument, one on which alternations between manuals was involved. We have also noted that Charpentier's directions to the organist sometimes involve manual/pedal contrasts. Further information on registrations may be gleaned from the composer's instructions to the organists as to the *couplets* they should play between movements of the *Messe pour le samedi de Pasques* (H8). At the start of the work, for example, he writes: 'L'orgue commence sur le plain jeu'; between the Kyrie and Christe he adds 'icy l'orgue joue un couplet sur les jeux agréables'.

All in all, such instruments seem not to have been the kinds of chamber organ we so often hear today in concerts and on recordings. Felix Raugel provides evidence that the organ in the Jesuits' church for which Charpentier wrote a significant number of works comprised three manuals and pedals, and around 20 stops.³⁹ And although we do not know the exact specification of the organ at the Sainte-Chapelle where Charpentier worked for the last six years of his life, a picture of the case published by Brenet⁴⁰ indicates a substantial instrument including pedals. At the same time Charpentier did of course have access to chamber organs: there was a portable instrument at the Sainte-Chapelle, for example,⁴¹ while according to Ranum a chamber organ 'in a fleur-de-lys painted cabinet' was situated in the *galerie basse* at the Hôtel de Guise to accompany the musicians at Mass and Vespers on feast days.⁴²

Caecilia virgo et martyr, discussed above, is one of several works in which the organist is given instructions to play the other instrumental parts: at one point we find the rubric 'l'orgue joüe les mesmes parties que les instrumens' (in this case the obbligato treble viols). Such wording suggests doubling rather than replacement, an interpretation supported by such later directions as 'violes et grand jeu' and 'violes et orgue'. Elsewhere the organist was occasionally expected to double the voice parts: in the *Miserere* (H173) he is instructed to 'joüe comme la voix'. It is possible, however, that in some of the works

³⁸ See H3, H8, H78, H148, H397, H413, H422, H534.

³⁹ Raugel, *Les Grandes Orgues des Eglises de Paris et du Département de la Seine* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1927), p.215.

⁴⁰ Brenet, *Les musiciens*, p.2. No instrument survives in the Sainte-Chapelle.

⁴¹ Documented in *ibid.*, p.261

⁴² Ranum, 'A Sweet Servitude', pp.354–355

under discussion the intention was for the organist, for whatever reason, to replace the instruments.⁴³

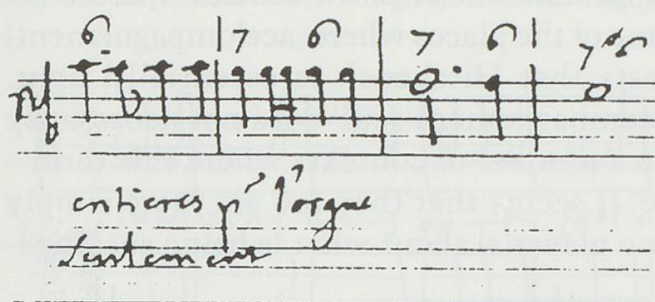
Among those pieces which possibly throw light on the manner of continuo realization, one of the most interesting is *Caecilia virgo et martyr octo vocib[us]* 'Est secretum, Valeriane' (H397).⁴⁴ Until the final movement the continuo line comprises a straightforward figured bass, but at the words 'jubilemus cantemus in chordis et organo' Charpentier – taking his cue from the text – provides a written-out part for the organist. Where the composer provides material for left and right hands, he marks the part 'grands jeux'; where the bass reverts to a continuo role, he labels it 'petits jeux'. At times fully written-out passages contain independent thematic material, as if the organ were an obbligato instrument; at times the organ doubles the obbligato instruments; and at other times the player is provided with what amounts to a continuo realization.

Example 3

⁴³ This is how the indications in H526, for example, may be interpreted: 'l'orgue joue les parties des flutes' and 'l'orgue joue les flutes'. Similar instructions can be found in H78, H416 and H525.

⁴⁴ An edition of the final sections may be found in Hitchcock, *The Latin Oratorios of Marc-Antoine Charpentier* (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1954), Vol. III, pp. 1–46.

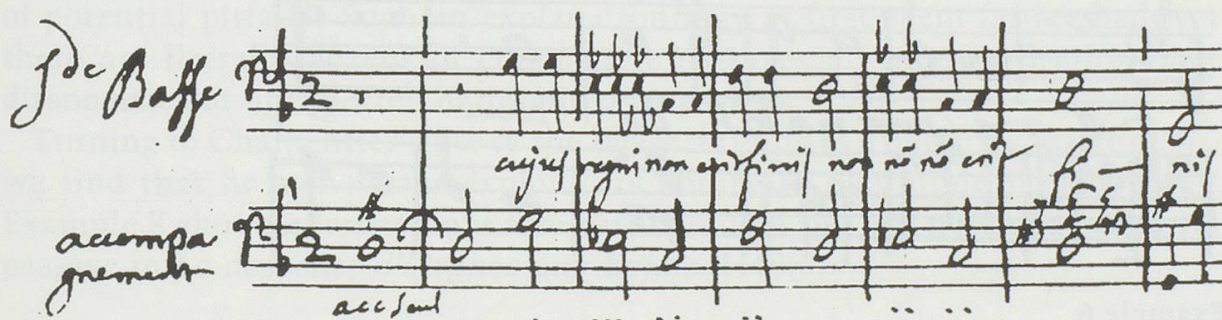
A significant number of Charpentier's marginalia are clearly intended for the copyist's benefit, and among these are some that reveal his care in distinguishing between the bass line played by the organ continuo and that played by the doubling instruments. In the *Messe ... p[ou]r Mr Mauroy* (H6) a passage marked ,acc[ompagnement] seul' bears the following additional rubric: ,entieres [i.e. semibreves] p[ou]r l'orgue seulement' (ex. 4) – instructions to the copyist, it would seem, that the string bass part should be copied with the written



Example 4

rhythms but that the organ part should be simplified as shown. (This tends to confirm other evidence that the organist played from a partbook rather than the score.) A further example can be found in H365, *In honorem Sancti Ludovici*, where Charpentier adds, to a bass line notable for its general activity, the words: ,plus simple pour l'orgue pendant tout ce chœur'. Supporting evidence of a different sort is revealed by Example 5 from the *Messe ... p[ou]r Mr Mauroy*,

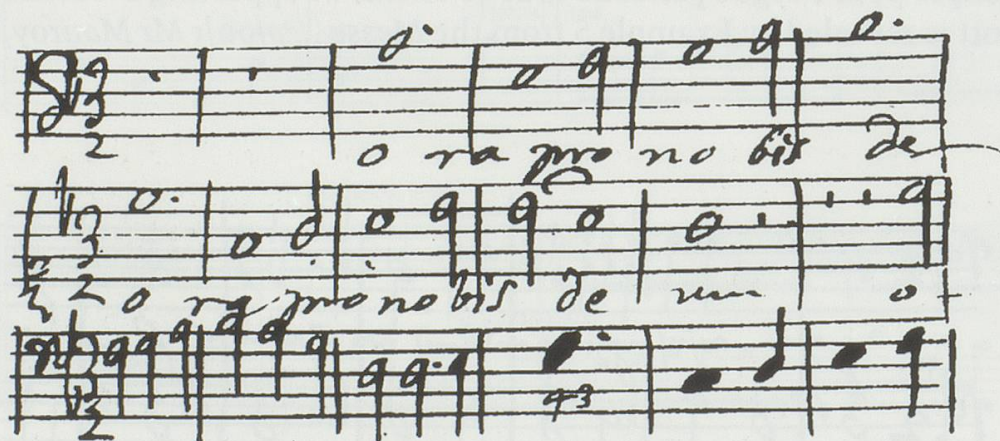
Example 5



where a series of little wedges appear below the bass line marked ,accompagnement'. It may be observed that the wedges correspond to the rhythm of the vocal bass immediately above. They therefore seem an indication to the copyist to write the vocal rhythm when he came to copy the string bass part (and presumably to retain the less active rhythms in the organ part).

Charpentier's manuscripts reveal his concern to keep the continuo player(s) informed as to what else was going on. The continuo lines in his full scores include a significant number of markings (,duo', ,trio', ,tous' etc.) which, in view of their redundancy in the scores, seem designed for transference to the organist's partbook both as rehearsal cues and as indications to adjust registration. Among these markings is a capital R, which, according to Hitchcock ,means „récit“ [i.e. a passage for solo singer(s)] ... and implies a minimal continuo group (usually indicated „accompagnement seul“), as opposed to a full one ([indicated by] „tous“).⁴⁵ The appearance of ,R' in the continuo partbooks of the *Mass Assumpta est Maria* in some of the places where ,acc[ompagnement] seul' occurs in the full score suggests that Hitchcock is essentially right. However, it should be noted that ,accompagnement seul' does not necessarily indicate a *reduced* continuo group; in a number of contexts where this term – and ,tous' – appear in a continuo line, it seems that they too are there simply to provide information to the continuo player(s) about what is being accompanied.⁴⁶

A different aspect of Charpentier's notation of the continuo is his treatment of coloration. For the most part his use of this device follows orthodox 17th-century practice, in that the coloration indicates hemiola; the prominence given to this notation in the bass line is no doubt connected with the keyboard player's vital role in controlling the harmonic rhythm. Elsewhere, however, coloration appears to have other, quite unexpected functions. The coloration in Example 6, from *Regina coeli* (H16), has no effect on the rhythm and at first sight seems redundant.



Example 6

But when the passage in black notation is compared with the upper parts in the previous three bars, its function becomes clear: to draw the continuo players' attention to an imitative entry that might otherwise have gone un-

⁴⁵ Hitchcock, *Catalogue*, p.134.

⁴⁶ Discussed further in Thompson, *op.cit.*

noticed. It is thus analogous to notation found in collections of 16th-century English keyboard works such as the Mulliner Book, where a cantus firmus in an inner part might be written in black notation to make it visually more distinct.⁴⁷

There are further instances of coloration deployed, it would appear, to signify something other than rhythmic change. Charpentier's use of coloured notes often seems to be warning the player to be ready for some specially colourful harmony. In Example 7, from *Confitebor a 4 voix et 2 violons* (H151), the black semibreves emphasise first an augmented triad and then a 9/7–8/6

Handwritten musical score for Example 7, featuring four staves with vocal parts and two staves with figured bass. The notation includes various note values, rests, and figured bass symbols (e.g., 4, 7, 6, 5, 3, 4, 3). The lyrics "intellectus bonus omnibus facit cultus e" are written below the vocal staves.

Example 7

double suspension. Was this designed to warn a relatively inexperienced player of potential pitfalls? Such an explanation may at first seem far-fetched, yet there are literally dozens of comparable passages all noteworthy for their dissonances or unexpected harmonic progressions.

Turning to Charpentier's use of the *basse de viole* as a doubling instrument, we find that he sometimes exploits its ability to play multiple stoppings. Example 8 shows a written-out five-part chord on the last note of a cadential passage in *La descente d'Orphee aux Enfers* (H488).

Handwritten musical score for Example 8, showing a five-part chord on a single staff. The notation includes various note values and rests. The figured bass symbols (e.g., 4, 7, 6, 5, 3, 4, 3) are written below the staff.

Example 8

⁴⁷ Ed. Denis Stevens, *The Mulliner Book*. Musica Britannica 1 (London: Stainer and Bell, 1951); see facsimile, p.xiv.

In a similar context in *Psalmus David nonagesimus 9^{mus}* (H194) the composer marks the final note: 'Il faut q[ue] la viole fasse l'acord de d la re sol avec 3#'. Elsewhere, in the *Elevation* (H408), multiple-stopping in one of the obligato bass viol parts gives the impression of being a written-out continuo realization. Though not strictly speaking part of the continuo group, which on a preceding page is labelled 'basse de violon et clavecim', the second of the two obligato bass viols (fourth stave) is playing chords in such a way that it is in effect realizing the figures – an interesting clue, perhaps, to the kind of realization continuo viol players may sometimes have improvised.



Example 9 (vocal parts omitted)

Continuo tacet

We come to the question of where the continuo did not play at all. We are concerned here with the secular works, both vocal and instrumental, particularly those in the field of dramatic music, though there is evidence that in the sacred music, too, the continuo was sometimes silent.⁴⁸

An article in *Early Music* some 15 years ago, by one of the present writers, drew attention to evidence that in French Baroque opera a proportion of each work was performed without chord-playing continuo instruments.⁴⁹ Since that article appeared, its findings have been confirmed by other scholars in the

⁴⁸ Discussed further in Thompson, *op.cit.*

⁴⁹ Graham Sadler, 'The Role of the Keyboard Continuo in French Opera, 1673–1776', *Early Music* 8 (1980) pp.148–157, was not the first to draw attention to this phenomenon: see Henry Prunières, *J.B. Lully: Oeuvres complètes, Les Opéras, 2, Alceste* (Paris, 1932; R New York, 1966), preface p.xxii; and Paul-Marie Masson, *L'Opéra de Rameau* (Paris: Laurens, 1930; R New York, 1972), p.514; these writers produced no supporting evidence, however.

same and in different fields.⁵⁰ Yet there are still those who, despite a large body of evidence, find it hard to accept that the continuo keyboard player did not play from beginning to end.

To summarise the evidence, at least for the Lully-Charpentier period:

1. In the full scores of 17th-century operas by Lully and Charpentier that were published under the composers' direction,⁵¹ a clear, thorough and consistent distinction is made between those bass staves labelled BASSE CONTINUE and those labelled BASSES DE VIOLON or, alternatively, not labelled at all.

2. In the full scores, passages labelled BASSE CONTINUE are consistently figured. Passages labelled BASSE DE VIOLON or unlabelled are not figured.

3. More important, this distinction is maintained in contemporary partbooks such as the complete set of Lully's opera *Isis* published by Ballard under the composer's direction in 1677. Here the BASSE CONTINUE partbook contains *only* those passages (for the most part, the vocal music) which in his full scores are typically labelled BASSE CONTINUE.⁵² Meanwhile the BASSE DE VIOLON partbook contains *only* those passages which are labelled Basse de Violon or are unlabelled, including those passages (typically the instrumental music) not in the BASSE CONTINUE partbook.

4. The keyboard continuo players at the Paris Opéra played, not from a full score but from a mainly single-line partbook. They cannot therefore have played the movements that were not included in their partbooks (those labelled BASSE DE VIOLON or unlabelled). This needs to be stressed, since there are those who try to ignore the evidence by pointing out that it is easy enough to play from an unfigured bass. Of course, but only if you have the bass itself.

The printed score of Charpentier's *tragédie Medée* closely follows the method established by Lully of indicating the presence or absence of continuo. The words BASSE CONTINUE are found under the start of every single system in

⁵⁰ Thomas R. Green, *Early Rameau Sources: Studies in the Origins and Dating of the Operas and other Musical Works*, (diss., Brandeis University, 1992); Peter Holman, 'Reluctant Continuo', *Early Music* 9 (1981), p.75–78; Peter Holman, *Four and Twenty Fiddlers: The Violin at the English Court 1540–1690* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.383–385; Judith Milhous and Curtis Price, 'Harpsichords in the London Theatres, 1697–1715', *Early Music* 18 (1990), pp.38–46.

⁵¹ In the case of printed scores of the Lully operas, a distinction must be made between, on the one hand, those which appeared during the composer's lifetime and which were prepared under his own supervision – *Bellérophon* (1679), *Proserpine* (1680), *Persée* (1682), *Phaëton* (1683), *Amadis* (1684), *Roland* (1685), *Armide* (1686) and *Acis et Galatée* (1686), all published by Christophe Ballard – and, on the other, those which appeared posthumously, often many years after the composer's death. All the former group but few of the latter display the characteristics described above.

⁵² In this respect the title of the partbook is revealing: 'Basse continue. Qui comprend toute la Piece, excepté les Airs de Danse qui sont dans la Basse de Violon'.

the vocal pieces as well as in certain other movements.⁵³ By contrast those words are completely lacking in some 14 movements, all instrumental.⁵⁴ Moreover, the continuo figuring confirms this distinction, figures being restricted to movements marked BASSE CONTINUE.

For Charpentier the presence or absence of continuo was, among other things, a textural and coloristic resource to be exploited not only between but within movements. In addition to the movements listed in note 54, a further three involve partial exclusion of the continuo. All three contrast the full five-part orchestral texture with passages involving the famous Lullian 'trio des hautbois'. In the five-part passages the bass is labelled 'Basse de Violon' (*Menuet en Rondeau*, p.lij) or unlabelled (*Canaries*, p.1; *Passepied*, p.liv); in three-part passages it is consistently labelled BASSE-CONTINUE. In the five-part *Suite de l'Air des Corinthiens* beginning on p.71, each system of the bass is marked 'Basse de Violon & Continuë' until the episode on p.73, where until the direction 'On reprend le Rondeau' (p.74) the bass is unlabelled.

Very occasionally, almost certainly through carelessness on the part of the printer, this pattern is broken. In the Chaconne (p.128), in which continuo realization is clearly intended throughout, the printer has omitted the BASSE CONTINUE label under eight of the thirteen systems; yet unlike those movements where the bass is completely unlabelled, the line is figured throughout. Similar inconsistency is found in the Passecaille (p.139).

Certain foreigners seem to have been aware of difference between Italian and French practice in this respect: for example, dances by Giovanni Maria Bononcini 'in stil Francese' either have a continuo part marked 'tacet' (*Varii fiori del giardano musicale*, Bologna 1669) or form part of a collection where the composer makes clear that the continuo part 'Violone o Spinetta' was primarily intended for the former (*Arie, correnti, sarabande, gighe, & allemande*, Bologna, 1671).⁵⁵ Muffat, in the preface to his *Second Florilegium* modelled on the music of the Vingt-quatre Violons, tells us that his dances 'can be played satisfactorily in four or five parts, with Basso Continuo ad libitum';⁵⁶ and Mattheson comments on the fact that the French sometimes did without chordal continuo.⁵⁷ So do the French themselves: Brossard, for example, main-

⁵³ Among instrumental movements that evidently required continuo are the Ouverture, Chaconne and Passacaille. The same is true of several of the equivalent movements in the Lully scores listed in note 51.

⁵⁴ Premier air, p.xvii; Loure, p.xlviii; Second air pour les Argiens, p.74; Sarabande, p.78; Entr'acte, p.80; Entr'acte, p.168; Premier air pour les Demons, p.214; Second entrée des Demons, p.228; Intermede, p.239; Charge, p.267; Les combattants, p.268; Fantomes et gardes, p.282; Ritournelle, p.290; Intermede, p.300. In addition, the final four systems of the opera, beginning at the end of p.348, were probably designed to be performed without continuo.

⁵⁵ See William Klenz, *Giovanni Maria Bononcini of Modena* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962), pp.52 and 66, and supplement pp.95 and 105.

⁵⁶ Georg Muffat, *Second Florilegium*, ed. Heinrich Rietsch (DTÖ, ii, Jg.i/2, 1895), p.224.

⁵⁷ Mattheson

tains that ,we also often play [the continuo] simply, and without figures, on the Bass Viol or the Bass Violin'.⁵⁸

At the Opéra, the practice of omitting continuo seems to have arisen in the following way. When Lully assembled the large and varied forces for his newly founded Académie Royale de Musique, he drew on existing French performance traditions. In France in the 1670s continuo instruments had for some time been associated with vocal music but not with instrumental. There is no evidence, for example, that the Vingt-quatre Violons or the Petite Bande ever had a continuo player. Why should they? Both orchestras played full-textured, rhythmically clear-cut music that needed neither the harmonic filling nor the rhythmic control that are the continuo player's main functions. The rhythmic function was taken by the *batteur de mesure*. Moreover, an organisation like the Vingt-quatre Violons had been in existence long before the importation of continuo playing; given its conservative disposition, there seems little likelihood that this orchestra would have adopted a new-fangled, foreign and seemingly redundant practice.

For the singers of the *musique du roi*, by contrast, continuo instruments were, by the nature of the music they sang, indispensable. The distinction between vocal and orchestral practice is nicely illustrated in the list of those who took part in the numerous rehearsals for Lully's *Le triomphe de l'Amour* (1681).⁵⁹ the keyboard players, Jean-Henri D'Anglebert and his son Jean-Baptiste-Henri, were present at the singers' rehearsals but not at the orchestral ones. It seems probable that Lully adopted the same distinction at the Opéra. Such a division of labour is primarily practical. As anyone knows who has realized the continuo in a complete Baroque opera, two or more hours is a long time to be playing more or less continuously. (There were no intervals at the Paris Opéra.) No one else in such works was expected to play throughout. If Lully realized what now seems obvious – that given large and varied resources there is scope for some players, including the keyboard and string continuo players, to sit a few movements out – that is one more testimonial to his legendary organizational skills.⁶⁰

A survey of the extensive music he wrote for the Comédie Française (H494–507) suggests that Charpentier adopted a similar practice there. While the sources do not distinguish verbally between BASSE CONTINUE and BASSE DE VIOLON, the distribution of figuring shows much the same pattern. Table 1 lists the items of two typical works, together with clef combinations in the

⁵⁸ Brossard, *Dictionnaire*, p.7.

⁵⁹ See André Tessier, 'Un document sur les répétitions du *Triomphe de l'Amour* à Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1681)', *Congrès d'histoire de l'art* (Paris, 1921), p.874ff.

⁶⁰ Holman (*Four and Twenty Fiddlers*, p.384), shows that Grabu imported to England Lully's system of labelling the bass: the continuo line of *Albion and Albanus* (1687) is frequently marked 'the BASS continued'; it often differs from the bass of the orchestra and seems not to have played in the dances and other instrumental numbers.

(i) H494 *Ouverture de la Comtesse d'Escarbagnas / Intermèdes nouveaux du Mariage forcé*

Ouverture	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Les marys	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Dialogue	(Vocal)					F
Trio	(Vocal)					F
Menuet	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
[Solos]	(Vocal)					F
Gavotte	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
[Trio]	(Vocal)					F
Les grotesques	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
[Trio]	(Vocal)					F
incl. 2 [ritornelles]	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Le songe	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Sarabande [et gigue]	(Voc./Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U

(ii) H502 *Endimion: tragedie meslee de musique*

Ouverture	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Prelude	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
[Chœur]	(Vocal)					F
Fantaisie	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Prelude	(Inst.)	G1,	G1,	F4	U	
[Solo]	(Vocal)					U
Prelude	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
[Duo]/Chœur	(Vocal)					F
Sarabande	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Gavotte	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
Gaillarde	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U
[Prélude]	(Inst.)	G1,	G1,	F4		F
[Solo]	(Vocal)					F
[Prélude]	(Inst.)	G1,	G1,	F4		F
[Solo]	(Vocal)					F
Gigue	(Inst.)	G1,	C1,	C2,	F4	U

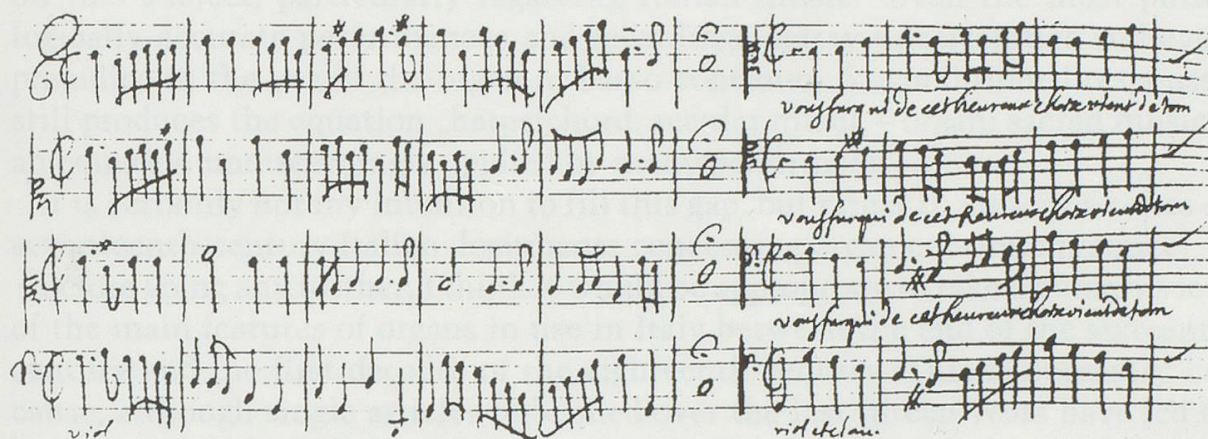
Table 1

case of instrumental pieces and whether each movement is figured or not (F = figured; U = unfigured). The table reveals that, where figuring occurs, it is in movements involving voices (though figures are often sparser than in *Medée*⁶¹) or in instrumental trios (which in French operas of the period often involve

⁶¹ For example, in *La pierre philosophale* (H501) a few figures occur in the opening *chœur* but not in the rest of the work, not even in other vocal sections.

basse continue). Moreover, the only references to 'clavecim' or to 'basse continüe' occur in vocal items (in the original prologue of *Le malade imaginaire* (H495), for example, such markings as 'basse du petit chœur' and 'basse cont[inue]' or 'bc' appear only in vocal solos, vocal ensembles, or ensembles combining voices and instruments), while such labelling as occurs on the bass line of instrumental items uniquely involves instruments other than the keyboard.⁶²

Less inconclusive is the labelling in *La pierre philosophale* (H501). In the first six bars of example 10, a brief instrumental interlude, the bass is marked



Example 10

,viol[on]' and is unfigured. Where the voices enter at b. 7, the bass is labelled 'viol[on] et clav[ecin]' and is subsequently figured. Moreover, the bass of the passage preceeding ex. 10, which involves voices, is also labelled 'clave[cin]' and also figured, albeit scantily.

It cannot be claimed that the continuo remained silent in all the four-part instrumental items at the Comédie Française. In *Les fous divertissants* (H500) and *Andromède* (H504), for example, the overtures – though not the other four-part instrumental items – are patchily figured, while *Circé* (H496), *Venus et Adonis* (H507) and *Le malade imaginaire* (H495) contain a small number of figured instrumental items. But then again, so do *Medée* and the Lully operas. The present article does not claim that the continuo was never used in instrumental pieces at the Comédie Française, but rather that, in view of the clear-cut pattern of evidence at the Opéra, we should not brush aside comparable albeit less clear-cut patterns in comparable repertory.

Some may feel that where the *basse continue* is concerned Charpentier's autographs raise as many questions as they answer. Certainly there are still gaps in our knowledge, and the composer himself frequently adds to our

⁶² In H498 the 'Marche de triomphe rondeau' is scored in five parts labelled: G1 'viollons et trompettes' / C1 / C2 / F4 'trompette et timballe' / F4 'viollon'. In H499, the bass line of the 'Marche pour les flutes' is simply marked 'bassons'. '[basse de]'.

uncertainty through the inconsistency with which he marks his scores. Even so, a picture emerges of considerable richness of resources and diversity of practice. To find such richness and diversity at the court of Louis XIV would not, of course, be surprising: yet it must be remembered that Charpentier worked largely outside court circles. The evidence of his autographs in respect of the *basse continue*, as of so many other issues of performance practice, thus provides a useful antidote to an excessively court-centred view of mid-Baroque French music prevalent among scholars. It is evidence that the performer, too, will not wish to ignore.