

**Zeitschrift:** Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis : eine Veröffentlichung der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Lehr- und Forschungsinstitut für Alte Musik an der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel

**Herausgeber:** Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

**Band:** 18 (1994)

**Artikel:** The Italian influence in Heinrich's Der General-Bass in der Composition (1728)

**Autor:** Buelow, George J.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-869093>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 12.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# THE ITALIAN INFLUENCE IN HEINICHEN'S *DER GENERAL-BASS* IN *DER COMPOSITION* (1728)

by GEORGE J. BUELOW

When examining the question *Was der Generalbass sey?* Heinichen's monumental work gives wide-ranging and particularized answers. Completed one year before his death in 1729, *Der General-Bass in der Composition* established the author's international reputation. Charles Burney referred to him as „the Rameau of Germany," Johann Scheibe said „Nature guides his every note," and Johann Mattheson commented: he „does not just compose, he contemplates and thinks ... and shows the world what knowledge is."<sup>2</sup> The justification for Mattheson's praise lies in Heinichen's great work, its organization and comprehensiveness. It is the single most important resource on the thoroughbass written during the Baroque, and the most practical and inclusive tool for reconstructing the style and form of thoroughbass accompaniments for music written after 1700 in the German-Italian theatrical styles. The particular strength of Heinichen's explanations lies in his examination of aspects of Italian continuo practice, making *Der General-Bass* a unique document among all the sources available for reinventing the thoroughbass practice in Baroque music. That a German should write with such authority about Italian performance practices is not as paradoxical as it might seem at first. Why this is the case can be explained by a brief review of his life and career.

The basic facts are found in Walther's *Musicalisches Lexicon* (1732): „[Heinichen] ... son of a pastor, born the 17th of April, 1683 in Crössuln, a place two hours from Weissenfels [reckoned in an 18th century concept of travel time], close to Teuchern, studied in Leipzig, made a trip to Italy around 1710, and was appointed Capellmeister in 1715 [sic] by his Royal Highness, the Prince-Elector of Saxony."<sup>3</sup> In his twelfth year (on 30 March 1695) Heinichen

<sup>1</sup> For a complete study of Heinichen's work see the author's *Thorough-Bass Accompaniment according to Johann David Heinichen* (3rd edition, Lincoln, Nebraska & London 1992), from which some of the material of this article is drawn.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (London, 1776–1789). New ed. Frank Mercer (London, 1935; repr. New York, 1957) II, p. 459; „Die Natur begleitet alle seine Töne." Johann Scheibe, *Der critische Musikus* (Leipzig, 1737), p. 764; „Mein Heinichen componirt nicht bloss, er sinnet nach, er dencket ... und zeigt der Welt was Wissen sey." Johann Mattheson's *Ode auf des S.[alvo] T.[itulo] Hrn. Capellmeister Heinichen[s] schöne neues Werck von General-Bass*, printed as an introduction to Heinichen's treatise, *Der General-Bass in der Composition* (Dresden, 1728).

<sup>3</sup> „Heinichen ... eines Priesters Sohn, war gebohren an 1683 den 17ten April in Crössuln, einem 2 Stunden von Weissenfels nahe bey Teuchern liegenden Orte, studirte in Leipzig, that ohngefehr ums Jahr 1710 eine Reise nach Italien, wurde anfänglich an 1715 bey Sr. Königl. Hoheit, dem Chur-Prinzen von Sachsen, und, nach Absterben Herrn Johann Christoph Schmidts, Königlich-Polnischer und Chur-Sächsischer Capellmeister." Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1732), p. 306.



enrolled in the Leipzig Thomasschule, where he became a student of keyboard instruments with Johann Kuhnau, who at that time was organist in the Thomaskirche. After Kuhnau succeeded Johann Schelle as cantor of the Thomasschule, Heinichen continued his studies with him and served as his assistant, copying and correcting the composer's music. It was certainly Kuhnau's tutelage that encouraged and developed Heinichen's talents as a composer. Subsequently, however, he studied law at Leipzig university, and in 1706 he began a short-lived practice in Weissenfels. Here he found a lively musical milieu at the residence of Duke Johann Georg, Elector of Saxe-Weissenfels, where Johann Philipp Krieger (1649–1725) was court Kapellmeister. It is unknown whether Heinichen had success as a lawyer. But it is clear that his abilities as a composer continued to mature, for in 1709 he returned to Leipzig to write operas for that city's opera house and to direct the Collegium musicum. He also found the time and motivation to write his *Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung ... zu vollkommener Erlernung des General-Bass*, published in Hamburg in 1711, frequently and misleadingly considered to be the first edition of his later treatise.

Sometime late in 1710 Heinichen traveled to Venice. During the next seven years (which are as yet still poorly documented) he had a variety of experiences, as composer for the Sant'Angelo opera house, for a while in the service of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, and as a composer and performer frequently invited into the homes of the wealthy Venetians. In 1713 two of his operas received unusually strong public favor. One can imagine the rich musical experiences Heinichen had during the seven years he spent in and around Venice. He would have made contacts with many of his contemporaries in Venice, including Tomaso Albinoni, Francesco Gasparini, Carlo Francesco Pollaro, Antonio Lotti, and certainly Antonio Vivaldi.

His musical successes brought him to the attention of the Prince-Elector of Saxony who usually spent long periods in Venice, and in August, 1716, Heinichen was employed as a Kapellmeister to serve the Dresden royal court, beginning in early 1717. Dresden, under the rule of Friedrich August I (the Strong), became a model of an absolute monarchy in which the arts including music played a central role. Heinichen's employment was partly related to the pending marriage of the crown prince to Maria Josepha, daughter of Emperor Joseph I. Taking place in September 1719, these month-long ceremonies rose to the zenith of cultural display and confirmed the Dresden court's reputation for ostentatious spending of enormous sums of money on elaborate festivities. Among the major musical events were performances of several large cantatas by Heinichen. His opportunity to continue to compose operas in Italian style, however, was abruptly ended when the King disbanded the Italian opera company. From 1721 Heinichen served as Kapellmeister to the court's Catholic chapel. Also he must have devoted much of his time to rewriting and greatly expanding the earlier thoroughbass manual into *Der General-Bass in der Composition*.



It is a common misunderstanding to consider the *Neu erfundene Anweisung ... zu vollkommener Erlernung des General-Bass* the first edition of his later treatise. Indeed, it might not be too speculative to believe that it was while writing his first thoroughbass treatise that Heinichen realized how little he knew about Italian contemporary music and especially about Venetian opera. The desire to gain such knowledge probably was the primary reason for undertaking the arduous trip to Italy and Venice. The original treatise, which served as the model for the second, has been ignored as unimportant when compared to its greatly enlarged successor.<sup>4</sup> The *Neu erfundene Anweisung*, however, has the distinction of being the first German work giving keyboardists detailed instructions on how to realize continuo accompaniments from figured as well as unfigured basses and to draw careful distinction between the *stylus gravis* and the *stylus theatralis*. It is also the earliest German guide for creating a stylistically correct realization of recitative accompaniments in the theatrical style. If Heinichen had written only the *Neu erfundene Anweisung* it would remain one of the best sources of information for the thoroughbass and its usage in the theatrical style. In addition, it includes extensive commentary concerning the relationships between musical composition and rhetorical principles employed in German compositional practice in the first decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> A comparison of the two works clarifies in their differences the intellectual and musical impact on Heinichen of his Italian years that gave him important new knowledge about the thoroughbass practice.

The title-pages of the two treatises emphasize the significant shift of viewpoint regarding the value of learning the thoroughbass. In 1711 he stated:

Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung / wie ein Music-Liebender auff gewisse vortheilhaftiger Arth könne zu vollkommener Erlernung des General-Basses, entweder durch eigenen Fleiss selbst gelangen/oder durch andere kurtz und glücklich dahin angeführet werden dergestalt/ daß er so wohl die Kirchen also Theatralischen Sachen/ insonderheit auch das Accompagnement des Recitativs-Styli wohl verstehe/ und geschicht zu tractiren wisse.

In contrast, in 1728 the emphasis has been refocused:

Der General-Bass in der Composition, oder neue und gründliche Anweisung / wie eine Music-Liebender mit besonderm Vortheil, durch die Principia der Composition, nicht allein den General-Bass im Kirchen, Cammer- und Theatralischen Stylô vollkommen, & in *altiori Gradu* erlernen; sondern auch zu gleicher Zeit in der Composition selbst, wichtige *Profectus* machen könne.

Heinichen was the first of several eighteenth-century writers to advocate teaching composition with principles derived from the thoroughbass. This development adds a new dimension to the implications of the question *Was*

<sup>4</sup> For example, while *Der General-Bass* is available in a facsimile edition, the *Neu erfundene Anweisung* is not.

<sup>5</sup> See this author's article, "The *loci topici* and Affect in Late Baroque Music, Heinichen's Practical Demonstration," *The Music Review* 27 (1966), p.161.



*der Generalbass sey!* The only clue to Heinichen's purpose in rewriting his treatise appears in the preface to *Der General-Bass*. Having been persuaded to take up his pen again, Heinichen says he would rather

... dieses, von dem alten *Tractat* gantz unterschiedene, und bald 4.mahl so starcke Werck dergestalt einrichten wollen, damit sowohl Geübte als Ungeübte, Gelehrte und Ungelehrte, sowohl *Accompagnisten* als *Componisten* mit besonderm Nutzen davon *profitiren* können. Dahero ich durch das gantze Buch nicht allein die nöthigen *Fundamenta Compositionis*, sondern auch solche wichtige, und zum Theil noch unbekannte Materien beyhergeführt, wovon uns zur Zeit weder alte noch neue, weder Deutsche, Italiänische, noch Französische *Autores* etwas zu lesen gegeben haben.<sup>6</sup>

A comparison of the two treatises highlights other usually overlooked reasons for Heinichen's changing concepts regarding the thoroughbass, how it was to be learned, and what this knowledge encompassed for the amateur as well as for the professional composer. Each version consists of two *Abtheilungen*: Part One for the beginner, Part Two for the advanced accompanist and, significantly, in the second version also for the composer. Part Two in each instance places its emphasis on accompaniments and their realization in the theatrical style. In *Der General-Bass* each part begins with a new chapter, Part One with an elaborate classification of intervals, Part Two with an invaluable explanation of dissonances and their irregular resolutions in the theatrical style. Although in 1711 Heinichen had grouped the study of intervals together with those other elementary concepts of musical knowledge he thought could be learned in one or two months,<sup>7</sup> in 1728 he had come to believe that „zu Erfindung dieser *Harmonia* gehöret vor allen Dingen eine genaue Erkenntniss der Musicalischen Intervallen.“<sup>8</sup> It is clear from the abundant explanations for those aggressively dissonant chord formations found in Italian theatrical works, both operas and cantatas, that his new, rigorous, and almost obsessively detailed attention to the study of intervals had become supremely important to his method of realizing late Baroque and particularly Italian harmonic innovations.

Heinichen's first treatise, with an almost total absence of references to other composers or theorists, suggests a limited intellectual awareness of other composers and writers on music. There is but a single reference even to his

<sup>6</sup> Heinichen, *Der General-Bass*, p.[vii]: „... fully differentiate this work from the old treatise, making it four times as strong a work so that experienced as well as inexperienced, learned as well as unlearned accompanist as well as composer could gain special usefulness from it ... [The new work includes] not only the necessary fundamentals of composing, but also such important and still partly unknown material about which, to date, we have been given nothing to read by old or new, German, Italian, or French authors.“

<sup>7</sup> Heinichen, *Neu erfundene Anweisung*, p.14–15: „Also kan nur derjenigen bey guter Anführung schon mit Nutzen den General-Bass zu spielen anfangen welcher nur auff gestrichenen oder ungestrichenen *Octaven*, ingleichen was *Secunda*, *Tertia*, *Quarta*, *Quinta*, *Sexta*, *Septima*, *Octava*, und *Nona* sey/ vollkommen inne hat; ... welches ein Arbeit von 1/ oder höchst 2 Monathen seyn kan.“

<sup>8</sup> Heinichen, *Der General-Bass*, p. 96.



teacher, Johann Kuhnau – to the *Biblische Historien* – and a mention of Kircher's description of a musical circle to facilitate modulations. The *General-Bass*, in contrast, refers to a significant number of composers and theorists, including Johann Mattheson and all of his major books published up to 1728, Francesco Gasparini's *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo*, Saint-Lambert's *Nouveau traité de l'accompagnement du clavecin*, as well as citations of works by Kircher, Werckmeister, Boyvin, and Rameau. Composers who are mentioned include Lotti, Caldara, d'Astorga, Vivaldi and, perhaps most significantly, Alessandro Scarlatti.

Each version gives a table of what Heinichen labels the common thoroughbass figures. The one in the *Neu erfundene Anweisung* consists of twelve symbols, the usual forms of triad, their inversions, seventh chords and the  $\frac{2}{6}$  chord. This table omits the  $\frac{2}{7}$  figure which in the section on recitative he adds to his list of usable figures. The list of thirteen symbols grows to thirty-two in *Der General-Bass* (but not including variations of the symbols by adding accidentals nor the symbols for a triad with a single sharp or flat). The original table was expanded by adding a number of dissonant chords built on the minor second, augmented fifth, various sevenths, and a new category for ninth chords.

Example 1:

	(2)						(1.)					
Signaturen.	6.	43.	76.	7.	78.	9.	6.	6r.	7.	4.	4r.	5.
	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.	43.	—	3.	—	—
Die hierzu	3.	5.	3.	3.	3.	3.	3.	8.	3.	6.	2.	3.
gehörigen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stimmen.	8.	8.	8.	5.	5.	5.	::	::	5.	5.	6.	6.
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	(2.)						(1.)					

Table of Thoroughbass Figures from Heinichen's *Neu erfundene Anweisung* (1711), p.65.

	2		3		4				5		6					
Gewöhnliche Signaturen	2	3	#	b	4	4	4	4	43	5b	5r	6	6	65	6b	6
des General/Basses		$\frac{2}{6}$			2		3					4	43	4r	5	54
Die dazu gehörige	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	3	3	8	8	2	3
Stimmen.	4		8	8		2		8	8	3	8	*8			*8	
										*8						



	7							9						
Gewöhnl. Signaturen des General-Basses	7	76	7	7	7	76	67	67	9	98	9	9	9	98
			2	$\frac{4}{2}$	4	56	56	65			4	$\frac{6}{4}$	7	$\frac{7}{4}$ 56
Die dazu gehörige Stimmerz.	5	3	4	*5	5	3	3	3	5	5	5	3	3	5
	$\frac{3}{*8}$	5	*5		*8	*8	*8	*8	3	3			3	

Table of Thoroughbass Figures from Heinichen's *Der General-Bass in der Composition* (1728), p.256.

The rapidly growing complexity of thoroughbass figures faced by accompanists did not end with Heinichen's compilation, for Mattheson, a few years later, published an expanded table of seventy figures and took the opportunity to criticize the incompleteness of Heinichen's list.<sup>9</sup>

It needs to be emphasized that no chapter from the *Neu erfundene Anweisung* was left intact in *Der General-Bass*, and the substantial increase in size from the 284 pages in the first version to some 960 pages in the second version results in part from the addition of numerous long footnotes. They enable Heinichen to infuse his text with wide ranging reflections on aesthetic questions concerning musical taste and styles and also aspects of practical performances. Many of these have the character of a continuous monologue by the author that preserves the immediacy of Heinichen's intense involvement with the revision of his treatise. The expanded size of *Der General-Bass* also resulted from the extraordinary increase in the number of musical examples, making it the only entirely practical thoroughbass manual for keyboardists published in the Baroque.

A comparison of the two treatises underscores the practical, aesthetic, and philosophical distance Heinichen had traveled between 1711 and 1728, an experience enriched by his exposure over seven years to distinguished composers and outstanding performances of opera and chamber music in Venice and elsewhere in Italy. *Der General-Bass* not only demonstrates a variety of practical considerations about the state of the thoroughbass practice that had evolved in Italy during the early decades of the eighteenth century, but Heinichen also provides insights into the changing concepts of musical styles and aesthetic values for music. While much of this material lies beyond the purpose of this article, it should not be overlooked that the treatise of 1728 remains a major source of information regarding the development of the *style galant* and of an evaluative standard of good taste (*bon goût*) as a guide to musical excellence. Here, however, I shall concentrate on four of the most important additions of content to *Der General-Bass* concerning the thoroughbass practice. These concern four significant developments in the Italian practice of the

<sup>9</sup> Johann Mattheson, *Kleine General-Bass-Schule* (Hamburg, 1735), p.136.



thoroughbass in the theatrical style from the first decades of the eighteenth century: I. the treatment of the full-voiced style of accompaniment, II. a theory of the resolution of dissonances in the theatrical style, III. a discussion of embellishments in accompanying, and IV. instructions for accompanying from unfigured basses, especially recitatives.

### *I. The Full-Voiced Style of Accompaniment*

More than one writer on the thoroughbass in the eighteenth century voiced concerns about the ever-increasing sonorities of music and began to suggest ways to prevent a harpsichord realization from being covered over by the instrumental and vocal textures. It is a concern that all too few performers of Baroque music take seriously even today. Yet clearly, in order to generate a louder sound from the harpsichord, the eighteenth-century keyboardist was expected, when necessary, to double as many tones as possible of the chordal realization in the left hand as were played by the right hand. Heinichen makes *Vollstimmigkeit* an integral part of the basic knowledge of thoroughbass accompanying, and he gives the most detailed account of it found in any source. And it is significant that he places these instructions in part one of the treatise where the beginner receives instruction on the basic principles of the continuo practice. The full-voiced style was not, of course, appropriate for realizations on the organ, for, as Heinichen comments, „Je vollstimmiger man auf denen *Clavecins* mit beyden Händen *accompagniret*, je *harmonischer* fällt es aus. Hingegen darff man sich freylich auf Orgeln, (sonderlich bey schwacher *Music* und ausser dem *Tutti*), nicht zusehr in das allzuvollstimmige *Accompagnement* der lincken Hand verlieben, weil das beständige Gemurre so vieler tieffen *Töne* dem Ohre unangenehm, und dem *concertirenden* Sänger oder *Instrumentisten*, nicht selten beschwerlich fällt. Das *Judicium* muss hierbey das beste thun.“<sup>10</sup>

To form such an accompaniment one must be careful to keep the top and lowest parts free of parallel octaves and fifths. Then one fills in the space between the hands with as many chord tones as the fingers can play. The resulting parallel octaves and fifths between inner voices are inoffensive, according to Heinichen, because they are heard as resulting from the crossing of parts. To assure this illusion, however, it is essential that the chords of the two hands are not too widely separated (making what Heinichen calls a vacuum). *Vollstimmigkeit* frees the inner parts from the rules of correct contrapuntal writing, and Heinichen offers extensive comments and illustrations as to how

<sup>10</sup> Heinichen, *General-Bass*, p.132 (fn.d): „The more full-voiced one accompanies with both hands on the harpsichord, the more harmonious it will sound. Contrarily, on the organ one must not become too enamoured with the all too full-voiced accompaniment in the left hand (particularly in music of a few parts and except in *tuttis*), because the constant rumble of so many low notes is unpleasant to the ear and not infrequently burdens the solo singer or instrumentalist. Here judgment must do its best.“



5 6 7 6 7 6 7 6 7 4 3 7 4 2 7 #

7 # 7 # 6 4 7 6 5 # 6 7 7 6 4 2 7 3 7 5 6

7 6# 6 7 5 4 6 5 4 5 4 3 6 4 7 4 2 5 3 6 5 4 3

5 6 5 7 3 4 3 5 4 2

Example 2: A four-part realization of chords with sevenths

various dissonance intervals are treated freely when doubled between the hands. (See Example 2 illustrating how to make a full-voiced accompaniment from a four-part realization of chords with 7ths.)

Heinichen was not the first to suggest this method for increasing the sonority of chordal realizations on the harpsichord. Already in the seventeenth century writers such as Praetorius (1619) and the Carmelite monk Lorenzo Penna (1672) both recommended including chord tones in the left hand when accompanying a large ensemble of instruments or voices.<sup>11</sup> In France the first men-

<sup>11</sup> Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum* III (Wolfenbüttel, 1619), p. 145, and Lorenzo Penna, *Li primi albori musicali* (Bologna, 1672), p. 82–83.



The image displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The first system is in G major (one sharp) and C major (no sharps or flats). The second system is in G major. The third system is in G major. The fourth system is in G major. Each system includes figured bass notation (numbers 1-7) and some systems include accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and brackets indicating specific voicings or fingerings. The notation is a full-voiced style realization, showing the relationship between the figured bass and the actual notes played in both hands.

The sample example realized in full-voiced style

tion of a full-voiced realization occurs in Jean D'Anglebert's, *Principes de l'accompagnement* (Paris, 1689) and Etienne Delair's *Traité d'acompannement* [sic] (Paris, 1690). But as late as 1707 Saint-Lambert remained conservative and cautious about this practice, recommending its use only when many voices were singing and when there was insufficient support from other orchestral instruments. Unlike Heinichen he would not permit doubling any dissonance in the left hand other than the second.<sup>12</sup> Francesco Gasparini's thoroughbass manual *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo* (Venice, 1708), which

<sup>12</sup> Saint-Lambert, *Nouveau traité de l'accompagnement* (Paris, 1707), p. 129.



seems to have been a key influence on Heinichen, also mentions the practice of doubling tones in the left hand from the right hand. This included the doubling of consonances as well as dissonances, in arpeggios played between the two hands, but reserved only for recitative accompaniments.<sup>13</sup>

Heinichen's detailed description of this practice and his numerous examples greatly expanded his work. One of his aims in *Der General-Bass* was to achieve a treatise of practical demonstrations, and clearly he thought this material was indispensable for training accompanists. Other writers, especially of elementary manuals, may have been reluctant to introduce beginners to a practice ignoring the very principles of good voice leading usually taught as the foundation of continuo realization. For example Sorge, in 1745, warned against informing beginners about this practice: „Anfänger verschone man damit, und halte sie lieber an, daß sie den Bass, so viel sichs thun lasset, durch Octaven verdoppeln, und die Dissonantzen allein mit der rechten Hand abfertigen, weil sie sonst leicht auf Irrwege gerathen können. Niemand wage sich an diese vollstimmige Spiel-Art biss er erst in 4. stimmigen *Accompagnement* recht gesetzt und fertig ist.“<sup>14</sup> Sorge's caution is understandable; however, the failure to recommend the full-voiced style of continuo realizations in modern editions of Baroque opera and orchestral scores continues to mislead many keyboardists.

## II. The Resolution of Dissonances in the Theatrical Style

Heinichen's account of dissonances and their irregular resolutions is a major contribution to our knowledge of the continuo practice and also an original contribution to Baroque music theory. Heinichen's theory of free dissonant treatment had some precedent in those musical-rhetorical explanations for exceptional dissonances in the theatrical style already included in German treatises of the previous century, for example in Christoph Bernhard's *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus*. It would seem plausible, however, that Heinichen's experiences as a performer and composer of music in the Italian operatic style, with its aggressively vertical and powerfully dissonant harmony, led him to open the second half of his reconstituted treatise with an extensive and new chapter entitled „Von Theatralischen Resolutionibus der Dissonantien.“ The originality of these ideas stands out in the fact that before Heinichen no Italian discussion of the continuo practice or any Italian music theorist ever touched these issues. The absence of a theoretical examination of the new use

<sup>13</sup> Gasparini, *L'armonico pratico*, p.23.

<sup>14</sup> Georg A. Sorge, *Vorgemach der musicalischen Composition* (Lobenstein, 1745–1747), p.418–419: „Spare the beginners this [the full-voiced accompaniment] and preferably restrain them so that as much as possible they double the bass in octaves and prepare the dissonances in the right hand alone, because otherwise they could easily fall upon the wrong way. Nobody should venture into this full-voiced manner of playing until first he is correctly trained and prepared in the four-part accompaniment.“



of dissonances in the theatrical style was, in fact, what led Heinichen to his theory of dissonance resolutions. For in defending the theatrical style against the accusations of those who charged that it was without rules and that it employed dissonances without fundamental procedures of resolution, he argued:

Es ist nichts gemeiners, als daß man den *Stylum Theatralem* blamiret, er *observire* keine Regel, und verfare man mit denen *Dissonantien* und derselben schönen *resolutionibus* nicht *fundamental*. Wir wollen aber allhier solcher Leute Unwissenheit deutlich zeigen, und beweisen, daß dieser *Stylus* gar *fundamentale*, und zugleich weit künstlichere und schönere *Resolutiones Con- & Dissonantiarum* habe, als der *regulirteste antique stylus* selbst. Und weil dieses eine Materie ist, welche heut zu Tage bey denen meisten, ja auch so gar (welches zu verwundern) bey sonst berühmten *Componisten* und grossen *Contrapunctisten* annoch *inter terras incognitas* .... gehöret, da doch gleichwohl die *Fundamenta* des gantzen *Theatralischen Styli* darauff beruhen: so hoffe, es werde manchen ein Gefalle geschehen, wenn wir diese so nützliche Materie (darinnen man keinen Vorgänger weiß) allhier gründlich zu untersuchen, uns bemühen.<sup>15</sup>

Heinichen believed that a freer approach to dissonance occurred gradually as composers modified the rules pertaining to the *stylus gravis*, and, in his opinion, because of the monotonous regularity of always preparing dissonances and resolving them down by step. Composers began „to invert chords more freely, and particularly to alter in various ways suspensions and the resolutions of dissonances according to Nature’s guidance“:

Dergleichen Verwechselung der Stimmen, oder Verwechselung der *Harmonie* (nach der bekandten Arth zu reden) ist nun sonderlich nach Erfindung des *Theatralischen Styli* auf das höchste und gleichsam *ad excessum* getrieben worden, weil immer einer dem andern es in solchen Neuigkeiten, und vermeinten *Libertaeten* zuvor thun wollen, ohne zu wissen, warum? oder aus was *Fundament* solches geschehen könne?<sup>16</sup>

To bring order and logic to what had become a musical practice seemingly bordering on chaos, at least as viewed from the accepted principles of continuo practice, Heinichen proposed to re-examine the theory of irregular resolutions of dissonance in the theatrical style according to the following principle:

<sup>15</sup> Heinichen, *General-Bass*, p. 586: „For nothing is more common than to accuse the theatrical style of not observing rules and of permitting one to proceed contrary to fundamentals. We shall, however, show here the ignorance of those individuals and prove that this style is absolutely fundamental and, in addition has far more artful and beautiful resolutions of consonances and dissonances than the most regular, antique [church] style. And since this material currently is *inter terras incognitas*. . .for most, even for otherwise famous composers and great contrapuntists – though at the same time all the fundamentals of the theatrical style depend on it – one hopes that many will consider it a favor if we try to give a basic study of this most useful material (for which one knows of no predecessors).“

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 587: „After the invention of the theatrical style this inversion of parts – or of harmonies (to speak in the accepted fashion) – has been advanced to perfection but at the same time to excess, because one will always try to outdo others in new things and imaginery freedoms without knowing why or the fundamental principle on which such things are based.“



DASS ORDENTLICHER WEISE KEIN, IN DISSONANTIEN BESTEHENDER THEATRALISCHER SATZ ODER GANG VOR RICHTIG PASSIREN KÖNNE, WO NICHT ZUGLEICH EINE LEGALE RESOLUTION DER DISSONANZ DARAUFF ERFOLGET, es geschehe nun solches vor oder nach der Verwechselung der *Harmonie*, in der obern- mittlern- oder untersten Stimme. Hält der Satz diese Probe, so ist er *fundamental*; wo nicht, so ist er allerdings verdächtig ...<sup>17</sup>

Heinichen strove to systematize complex harmonic practices that previously had received neither theoretical nor practical explanations. Unlike his contemporary Rameau, whose theory of chord inversions he seems to have rejected, Heinichen attempted to codify the various types of dissonant chordal progressions. This he did by defining basic principles of harmonic procedures underlying the Italian practice in the theatrical style. He admitted that exceptions existed that fit into no convenient category but which must be recognized as part of current harmonic freedoms. To him this was part of *Was der General-Baß sey*. He divides theatrical resolutions of dissonances into eight categories, and all of them observing his fundamental rule that every dissonance must have a resolution. The categories involve delayed resolutions, the anticipated or omitted passing tone, the inversion of the dissonance before resolution as well as the inversion of the resolution itself. The complexity of the subject can only be understood by examining the rules and numerous examples provided by Heinichen.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, however, continuo realizations for Italian and German Baroque music of the eighteenth century are inadequately achieved until performers have absorbed these important guidelines to resolving dissonances.

### *III. Adding Embellishments to a Thoroughbass Accompaniment*

Of all the questions involved with restoring a continuo practice appropriate to the style and period of the music being performed, perhaps nothing seems more controversial than the degree of musical independence an accompaniment should be permitted. The subjects of ornamentation and independent melodic lines as applied to thoroughbass realizations have frequently been debated. While the very improvisatory nature of continuo playing must always result in a wide variety of solutions, there are, at least from Heinichen's viewpoint, rather clear guidelines as to what is or is not appropriate. After warning that no beginner should be permitted to employ the considerable numbers of existing embellishments until he has learned the fundamentals, he adds:

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: „Normally [in the theatrical style] no chord or progression can be considered correct that is not followed by a correct resolution of the dissonance, whether it occurs before or after the inversion of harmonies, in the upper, middle, or lowest part. If the chord passes this test, it is fundamental; when it does not, it is incorrect.“

<sup>18</sup> This I have done in my book on Heinichen's treatise. See Appendix C, p. 381–438.



Der General-Bass ist ohne diß nicht deswegen erdacht worden, daß man damit, wie in denen *preludiis concertiren* solle, sondern nur denen *concertirenden* Stimmen *accompagniren* solle ... Ist man aber zuvor in *fundamentis* richtig, alsdenn erst ist es Zeit an die Neben-Dinge, *flosculos* und Zierrathen des *General-Basses* zu gedencken, umb selbige bey schwacher *Music*, und wo ein vollstimmig *Accompagnement* (zumahl auf Orgeln) nicht allzeit nötig ist, mit *Discretion* anzubringen.<sup>19</sup>

It seems obvious that Heinichen does not consider the art of melodic ornamentation an essential skill for accompanists, for he describes only adequately those embellishments applicable to the chords of a realization as distinguished from melodic ornamentation of the top part. He admits that ornaments are numberless, and that each performer will have individual preferences. Moderation, however, is Heinichen's rule: „Es bestehet aber die Kunst eines manierlichen *General-Basses* überhaupt darinnen, daß man seine *Accorde* nicht überall platt niederschlage, sondern in allen Stimmen (besonders in der äusersten Stimme der rechten Hand, die am meisten vorsticht) hier und dar eine Manier mit anbringe, und dadurch dem *Accompagnement* mehr *Grace* gebe ...“<sup>20</sup> Since he maintains that the harpsichordist must frequently use the full-voiced style, it is, therefore, impossible for more than a few ornaments to be added because all of the fingers are already engaged.

There are better sources<sup>21</sup> from which to learn the nature of those ornaments Heinichen briefly describes: the trill, *transitus* or passing tone, appoggiatura (Vorschlag), slide (Schleiffung), and mordent. The exception, however, is his discussion for the acciaccatura, dissonant semitones, types of mordents, struck below as many chord tones as the fingers make physically possible which are immediately released again. These, he says, have a grand effect on the harpsichord and are particularly useful for expressing the affective meaning of words in recitatives and other vocal music. No German writer on the thoroughbass prior to Heinichen mentions the acciaccatura, and Heinichen himself must have learned of the practice only in Italy. His explanation relies largely on Gasparini's description in *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo*. It would appear that for both Gasparini and Heinichen the acciaccatura was considered part of the performer's improvisational technique since neither writer suggests a distinctive sign to indicate when these ornaments are to be played.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 521: „Besides, the thoroughbass was not conceived to enable one to perform with it as in preludes, but only so that the concerted parts would be accompanied ... When, however, one is trained previously in the fundamentals, only then is it time to think of secondary things, *flosculos* and decorations of the thorough-bass, in order that these can be applied discreetly to music of a few parts, and where a full-voice accompaniment is not always necessary (particularly on the organ).“

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: „The art of the embellished thoroughbass, however, really consists of one not simply playing chords, but of using an ornament here and there in all parts (particularly in the outermost part of the right hand which usually stands out), and thereby giving more elegance to the accompaniment.“

<sup>21</sup> The most comprehensive being by Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music* (Princeton, 1978).



In Heinichen's experience, a second class of embellishment depends upon a performer's musical inventiveness and includes: melody, *passaggi*, arpeggios, and imitation, all of which, when appropriate must be improvised without any indicated signs or other instructions from a composer. Heinichen, as the experienced composer-accompanist, illustrates ways in which an uninteresting and stylistically inadequate accompaniment might be made more musical, more appropriate to the work being performed. Example 3 shows what Heinichen considers a very simple realization of a bass line. To improve this accompaniment, he suggests the upper part can be given a more interesting melodic line, either (1) by dividing the accompaniment between the hands, as shown in Example 4, or (2) by taking the full accompaniment in the left hand and creating the melody in the right hand without supporting chord tones as in Example 5. He stresses that the best opportunities for this kind of improvisation occur in a *cantabile* solo, or in the „empty ritornellos of arias.“ In no circumstances does Heinichen consider this kind of embellished realization appropriate to the normal character of a continuo part when another vocal or instrumental part or parts have the focus of musical interest. *Was der General-Baß sey*, in this context of realizing chords from a bass line, remains always an accompaniment to a concentration of musical substance found in other solo or ensemble parts. According to Heinichen these continuo realizations should be unobtrusive, sonorous in the fullness of their harmonies, but never having an independent musical interest, except when the continuo itself is given a solo opportunity in a composition.

Example 3: A conventional four-part thoroughbass realization without melodic interest in the top part



The musical score is written for piano in B-flat major (two flats) and 6/8 time. It consists of five systems of two staves each. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line characterized by frequent trills (marked 'tr') and slurs. The left hand (bass clef) provides a harmonic accompaniment using chords and single notes. Fingering numbers (6, 7, 8) are indicated below the notes. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand and a sustained note in the left hand.

Example 4: The same example with the accompaniment divided between the hands and with the top part provided with melodic interest.



The musical score consists of five systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment, frequently using sixteenth-note patterns indicated by the number '6'. The treble staff contains a more complex melody, including trills (marked 'tr'), slurs, and various note values. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The systems are arranged vertically, with the first system at the top and the fifth at the bottom.

Example 5: The same example with the accompaniment entirely in the left hand and with the top part free to play a more elaborate melody, „the best opportunities for which are found in a *cantabile* solo and in the empty ritornellos of an aria without instruments“.



#### IV. Accompanying Recitatives and Arias from Unfigured Basses

The unfigured thoroughbass was controversial from almost the beginning of the Baroque. As early as 1607 Aggazzari warned of the ambiguities inherent in the practice,<sup>22</sup> and Praetorius<sup>23</sup> rejected the practice out of hand. Despite the frequent complaints about the lack of figures in thoroughbass parts, the practice became well-established in the seventeenth century and a commonplace in secular as well as sacred music of the later Baroque. Heinichen did not avoid the challenge of establishing practical rules for determining correct harmonies when the accompanist had only a bass line and a melodic part as a guide.

Already in 1711 he had provided a set of rules and practical suggestions for playing from unfigured basses as well as some special guidelines for the problems of unfigured recitative basses. They consisted of some rather simple observations, such as: (1) the harmonies will usually conform to those that the accompanist had already learned earlier in Heinichen's instructions. (2) In general the harmony can be derived from the vocal part; (3) there are general rules, largely from counterpoint and already established early in the seventeenth century, by which conventional bass progressions usually require the same harmonies; (4) the *ambitus* of a scale usually suggests a particular chord formation for each note of the scale, what became known as the „rule of the octave.“<sup>24</sup> Based on these principles Heinichen included as a practical example of realizing an unfigured bass, a cantata entitled *Della mia bella Clori*, by an anonymous composer. Stylistically the music is typical of various cantatas in Italian style written at the beginning of the eighteenth century. As far as I am aware this is a unique and admirably practical lesson from the first decade of the eighteenth century in which Heinichen explains how to divine chords for each unfigured bass note in the cantata, and it is regrettable that no modern edition of this demonstration has as yet been published.

In *Der General-Bass* Heinichen replaces the anonymous cantata with Alessandro Scarlatti's, *Lascia deh lascia al fine di tormentarmi più*. Heinichen knew that Alessandro Scarlatti more than any other contemporary composer employed highly irregular and extravagant harmonies. Therefore, he thought that if an accompanist could become accustomed to such a difficult and unconventional style, he need not fear other, commonly appearing regular styles of music.<sup>25</sup> He explains the special difficulties of Scarlatti's music and his dislike of their results as follows:

<sup>22</sup> Agostino Aggazzari, *Del sonare sopra 'l basso con tutti li strumenti* (Siena, 1607).

<sup>23</sup> Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum*, III, p. 147.

<sup>24</sup> For a comprehensive study of this important guide to thoroughbass realization see Thomas Christensen, „The Règle de l'Octave in Thorough-Bass Theory and Practice“, in *Acta musicologica* 64 (1992), p. 91–117.

<sup>25</sup> Heinichen, *Der General-Bass*, p. 798.



Denn es bindet sich dieser *Autor* selten oder niemahls an einen *regulirten ambitum modi*, sondern er verwirfft die *Tone* gantz ungleich auf eben die *Arth*, und öffters mit mehrer Härteigkeit, als man jemahls im flüchtigen *Recitativ* thun kan. Meines wissens hat ihn biss *dato* unter unzehligen *Practicis* noch kein einziger *imitiren* wollen ...“<sup>26</sup>

He regrets that Scarlatti would make a general style out of such harshness that is opposed to the true purpose of agreeable music. He suggests this music finds approval only with those he calls „bizarre“ amateurs, but nevertheless concludes that the accompanist can profit from the study of such irregularities. And certainly Heinichen's experiences in Italy with the music of Scarlatti, even if he found the music at times distasteful, convinced him that accompanists must have a familiarity with the performance problems it contained. Therefore, his practical example (which has been published in a modern edition) reveals Heinichen's own attempts to rationalize many aspects of Scarlatti's highly chromatic and dissonant harmonies. In addition to using the guidelines he had developed for accompanists in the first treatise, he now employs the principles of irregular resolutions for dissonances, which it would seem, may have been born out of the very problems of harmonic analysis contained in Alessandro Scarlatti's music. As with the earlier example, the Scarlatti cantata receives a detailed discussion for every note of the bass line. Filled with Heinichen's practical observations, it is a lesson of singular value for all continuo performers, unlike anything else available from the Baroque period in Italy or Germany in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

These are only four of the contributions Heinichen made to our knowledge of the thoroughbass, each of them reflecting Italian aspects of that practice learned by the composer during his Italian years. *Der General-Bass*, however, is encyclopedic in its content, and its immense value to continuo performers as well as theorists and historians is beyond summarizing. But Heinichen does suggest an apt definition as to *Was der General-Baß sey* with which to conclude this essay. The following passage first appeared in the *Neu erfundene Anweisung* in 1711, and was repeated *verbatim* in *Der General-Bass*:

Daß der *Bassus Continuus*, oder so genannte *General-Basse* nechst der *Composition* eine der wichtigsten und *fundamentalesten Musicalischen* Wissenschaften sey/ dessen wird kein *Music-Verständiger* in Abrede seyn. Denn woher entspringet derselbe anders/ als aus der *Composition* selbst? und was heißet endlich *General-Bass* spielen anders/ als zu der einzigen vorgelegten *Bass-Stimme* die übrigen Stimmen einer völligen *Harmonie ex tempore* erdencken/

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.797 (footnote): „For this composer seldom or never conforms to a controlled scale system, but throws the tones in a way and often with a harshness as one can normally do in rapid recitative. As far as I know not one among countless composers has to this day wished to imitate him.“

<sup>27</sup> The cantata together with a suggested realization of the continuo part is given in the author's *Thorough-Bass Accompaniment According to Johann David Heinichen*, Appendix A, p. 293–306.



oder darzu *componiren*? So edel aber als der Ursprung des *General-Basses* ist/ so groß ist auch der Nutz and Vortheil/ welcher allen *Musicus aus deßen Erkänntniß* zuwächset ... so darff man nur überhaupt erwegen/ daß uns der *General-Bass* eben wie die *Composition* selbst/ zu völliger Untersuchung des gantz *Musicalischen* Gebäudes anführe<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 1: „No music connoisseur will deny that the *Basso Continuo* or so-called thoroughbass is, next to composition, one of the most important and most fundamental of the musical sciences. For from what source other than composition itself does it spring forth? And what actually is the playing of a thoroughbass other than to improvise upon a given bass the remaining parts of a full harmony, or to compose [to the bass]? As noble as the origin of the thoroughbass is, so equally great is the benefit and advantage accruing to all musicians from this knowledge. ... Thus one need only consider that the thoroughbass, like composition itself, leads to the complete investigation of the entire musical edifice.“



