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Basso continuo sources from the Dutch Republic c. 1620-c1790

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Basso Continuo Sources
from the Dutch Republic c.1620-c.1790

PROEFSCHRIFT

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Dit proefschrift is geschreven als een gedeeltelijke vervulling van de vereisten voor het doctoraatsprogramma docARTES. De overblijvende vereiste bestaat uit een demonstratie van de onderzoeksresultaten in de vorm van een muzikale presentatie.

Het docARTES programma is georganiseerd door het Orpheus Instituut te Gent.

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Abbreviations

arch.	archives
c.	circa
ed[s].	editor[s]
edn.	edition
et al.	and others
fig.	figure
fl.	flourished
introd.	Introduction
KB	Koninklijke Bibliotheek
mf.	microfiche
ms.	manuscript
NMI	Nederlands Muziek Instituut
p.	page
pp.	pages
repr.	reproduced
rev.	revised
s.n.	sine nomine
TK	Ton Koopman
trans.	translator
vol.	volume
v.h.	voorheen

Basso Continuo in the Dutch Republic: the missing link

In the period 2004-2006, I was active as a fellow of the Scaliger Institute of the University of Leiden Library, where I compiled a catalogue of the printed music found in the library archives from 1600 to 1800. This project was done under the guidance of prof. dr. Ton Koopman, and initially, with the help of a student of the University, Mees Duijfjes.

The University collection houses not only musical scores, but also countless books on music. In addition there are many examples of Dutch songs, the latter often without musical notes, but often with the required melody implied. In order to confirm that music was or was not present in a selected work, I made it a point of physically handling every book that would eventually be included in the catalogue. My perusals would frequently reveal unexpected contributions contained in the musical works, including printed basso continuo lines, with or without figures.

As a native of the United States of America studying at the Koninklijk Conservatorium, my experience with native Dutch music and Dutch styles at that time was limited, to say the least. After months of pouring over hundreds of books, I began to be curious as to the possibility of a distinct Dutch musical style, and in particular, a Dutch basso continuo style in the 17th and 18th centuries. As an experienced historical keyboard player with a thorough understanding of basso continuo styles as found in Italian, German, and French sources, I sought to place the Dutch Republic's contributions to this fascinating musical practice amongst the literature relating to the other mentioned countries, all of which have been thoroughly researched by others during the last 100 years.

This same research has led to well-defined concepts of continuo playing in these countries. They include the highly dissonant use of harmony and ornamental elaborations including the arpeggio and acciaccatura associated with Italy, the more understated use of dissonant harmony and elegant accompaniment associated with France, and Germany's austere realizations constrained by strict rules and propriety of style, with the idea of basso continuo as a theoretical model and essential means of learning composition. What then does the player, the listener, or the theoretician associate with the basso continuo style originating from the Dutch Republic?

Around the same time that I began my investigations into the source material related to basso continuo in the Dutch Republic, I was asked to set up a course at the Koninklijk Conservatorium presenting a detailed overview of the historical and theoretical developments of the practice of basso continuo. The aim of the course was to focus on keyboard sources from the beginnings of the practice up until the point that it was no longer a viable means of accompaniment.

This new project provided me with a perfect opportunity to re-read all the relevant sources, and compile source material to provide a detailed guide for conservatory students as to the important developments in harmony, theory and practice that basso continuo was responsible for in the history of music.

I re-read not only historical sources, but also modern contributions made on the subject. I was surprised to discover how little discussion there was of the Dutch Republic as a viable source for basso continuo. At most there was mention of two well-known sources, those by van Quirinus van Blankenburg and Johann Philipp Albrecht Fischer, and the fact that works such as those by Niccolo Pasquali and David Kellner had been translated into Dutch.

The Dutch have a history of personal communication, be it through letters, travel journals, diaries, or addendums in translations of other works. As the Dutch language was not a common one spoken in most other European countries during the 17th and 18th centuries, it was also necessary to provide translations of popular books for the literate Dutch public. As a result of this output, I quickly became familiar with the productive talents of translators of foreign works into Dutch such as Jacob Wilhelm Lustig and Gerhardus Havingha. In addition to discovering so many original contributions made by Dutch authors in the form of complete treatises, short entries, and manuscripts, I was also delighted to discover that many of them had provided commentary or additions to the original works.

My initial dissertation plan was to analyze the sources per book, focusing on each individual work's contribution to the development of a Dutch basso continuo style. However, as the sources kept revealing themselves, the number of works to analyze individually became too large to fit in the scope of one dissertation, so another approach was decided upon. My dissertation as it now stands is a survey of all, important sources initiating from the Dutch Republic in the period c.1620- c.1790, containing an analysis of all relevant material pertaining to the understanding and the historically appropriate realization of a basso continuo line in Dutch music from the period.

Throughout my research there was a necessity to handle many sources before coming to any conclusions. Not only to be able to place the Dutch Republic's contribution to the playing of basso continuo in it's theoretical and harmonic form, but also to provide the student with a guide as how to best approach the practical performances of playing Dutch basso continuo in a piece of music, something distinctly lacking in the documentation on historical performance practice available to musicians interested in the same. This last one is an especially relevant point, as the majority of Dutch basso continuo sources contain practical instruction for beginners, and only contribute limited information aimed at professional keyboard players.

An analysis of the sources provided me with information about how to best approach the playing of Dutch music in the period c.1620-c.1790, including Dutch music written in the Italianate or French styles. An additional result was the understanding of how a Dutch basso continuo player possibly would have approached foreign repertoire, considering the information and sources available. Finally, I found a confirmation of the typically Dutch attitude of welcoming foreign styles and seeking to thoroughly understand and assimilate them into the Dutch musical practice.

As an aide to the performance of Dutch basso continuo, I would have liked to have found more realized examples, not only of pieces of music of course, but also of simple examples such as can be found in Jan Alensoon's thorough text. While Christian Ernst Graaf provides us with his own Sonatines as a way of practicing the skills learned in his guide, it would also have been welcome to find more references to musical works where the student could apply the knowledge gained, and also some mention of players who were particularly gifted in the playing of basso continuo in the relevant period.

It is my hope that the fruits of my research will help put the Dutch Republic on the map as an important source of information on the practice of basso continuo. This dissertation is intended as a musical and theoretical reference on the playing of basso continuo in the Dutch Republic. Of course, those interested in a complete analysis of a particular source used in this study will find all complete titles and relevant information in the bibliography.