



Beyond its obvious usefulness as a historical and style-analytical study, *Convent Music and Politics* serves two additional purposes. It enlarges our understanding of the astonishing variety of institutions that glorified the Habsburgs with music, and it reveals the important part that women played in creating the music that honoured them.

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GIORGIO SANGUINETTI

THE ART OF PARTIMENTO: HISTORY, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

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Four years after its publication, a book of such a great resonance as Giorgio Sanguinetti's *The Art of Partimento* can be supposed to be already well known to specialists in eighteenth-century music; moreover, an editorial on the subject of partimenti was written by Sanguinetti himself for this journal in 2014 (*Eighteenth-Century Music* 11/1 (2014), 3–9). In this review, therefore, I reconsider some aspects of the study from a much broader perspective, in order to focus on the book's reading of the partimento tradition as well as on its role in the 'partimento renaissance' currently underway.

The importance of partimento had already been suggested by Robert Gjerdingen in his illuminating *Music in the Galant Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), and a moderate number of articles and essays by several scholars, Sanguinetti included, also addressed this issue in the late 2000s. *The Art of Partimento*, then, was the first (and indeed remains the only) monograph entirely devoted to these neglected sketches on a single staff, easily recognizable by changes of clef and texture, polyphonic episodes, imitation, the absence of continuo figures and so on, which were at the core of composition teaching in eighteenth-century Naples – one of the most astonishingly productive pedagogical workshops in the history of Western art music.

The book opens with an introduction to the historical context in which partimenti took root, drawing considerably on primary sources and contributions by other scholars (mainly in Italian) that are commendably made accessible here to a wider readership – albeit with some indulgence in redundancy and anecdotalism. The second part is then concerned with theoretical instructions for the realization of partimenti, based on a selection of sources ascribed to different authors, from Alessandro Scarlatti to Giacomo Tritto, organized by subject. Even if dealing essentially with the accompaniment of an unfigured bass, these collections of *regole* – of which Sanguinetti provides a dense sixty-page compendium – supply a rare written account of applied Neapolitan theory, which was in fact an eminently oral tradition.

Finally, in a longer, twofold section divided into Parts Three ('Practice') and Four ('A Guide to Realization'), *The Art of Partimento* reveals its true aim. Despite the neutral, tripartite subtitle, this is definitely practice-oriented, as stated in the Prologue: 'This book is also' – indeed, perhaps one should say mainly – 'a practical guide to the use of partimenti as living teaching tools' (viii). Hence, after introducing some realization techniques and a few realized historical exemplars, Sanguinetti provides a number of complete partimenti arranged according to genre, form and style, as well as according to difficulty. These are also regularly supported by analytical commentaries and Sanguinetti's own partial realizations, so that the reader – a partimento player, from now on – can complete them or undertake fresh renditions following his example. A considerable amount of material is presented, and the effort given to analysis and realization is praiseworthy.



Yet this practical approach rests on the premise that ‘the potential of partimento practice as a teaching tool did not die out but is still intact’ (viii). This axiom seems to have been unanimously ratified so far, but in my opinion it is worthy of further discussion.

Partimenti – we are told – are ‘only potential musical works’ (167). They contain *in nuce* ‘all the [essential] aspects of the finished piece: length, tonal plan, harmony’ and, partially, ‘texture, and style’ (14), but these ‘implications need to be unfolded in order to become real music’ (167). In eighteenth-century Naples, students of composition were trained to realize promptly at the keyboard even the most demanding fugal partimenti in the unique environment of the conservatories, whose strenuous multi-year apprenticeship under the daily supervision of a master was also based on the study of written counterpoint. As a consequence both of the oral method of partimento teaching and of the extemporaneous nature of its realization, we have inherited only the large corpus of ‘assigned exercises’ (that is, the partimenti); the problem is that neither the instructions for their use nor their actual realizations can be retrieved, aside from the surviving *regole* and the few ‘authentic’ written renditions that have been fortuitously preserved.

The *regole*, as already mentioned, concentrate ‘exclusively on the basic level of partimento realization but tell us nothing about advanced issues such as diminution, imitation, texture, and style. This is’, Sanguinetti acknowledges, ‘one of the most puzzling aspects of partimento practice: on the one hand, the masters left us a vast legacy of complicated partimenti, which obviously need to be realized with flourishing styles, virtuoso figuration, complex contrapuntal and imitative texture. On the other hand, they never tell us how to do this’ (100). ‘This way of transmitting knowledge’, he adds, ‘was certainly the best possible solution for teacher and students in the Naples conservatories, but it leaves us totally unprepared to decrypt the most advanced – and challenging – partimenti’ (169) – that is to say, the majority of them.

At this point, provided that we are still convinced, along with Sanguinetti, of the intact potential of partimento as a pedagogical device, there is nothing more to be done than to take as a model the extensive series of *partimenti diminuiti* by Francesco Durante, in which each exercise is preceded by a short specimen of schematic diminution as a hint for the complete realization (‘an invaluable . . . source of practical examples of diminutions’ (184), of course, but also, it should be noted, limited to the early eighteenth-century scholastic style of a specific composer). To these can be added the surviving eighteenth-century realizations, though there were, alas, only six at the time of publication: three specimens by Gaetano Greco, two realizations by Durante and a toccata by Leonardo Leo. And yes, ‘probably others will surface in the future’ (50), but on closer inspection it becomes apparent that even these written realizations are, after all, not so ‘authentic’, given their lack of faithfulness to the ontological orality of partimento practice. The same applies even more to nineteenth-century realizations, which have survived in much larger numbers since, as the Neapolitan pedagogical tradition gradually fell into decay, written realizations became more and more common until ultimately they replaced improvisational practice, and ‘the exuberant, buoyant keyboard style of the previous century gave way to a more academic, predictable demeanour’ (232).

Arguably, then, the resources available may appear to be insufficient for a modern-day practical revival of the art of partimento. However much Sanguinetti – and we as well – may treasure the rules, the *diminuiti* or the preserved realizations, he cannot avoid resorting to his own musical instinct, taste and skills, in order to be able to recognize and develop the intrinsic elements of partimenti. Not surprisingly, his realizations, especially when compared with their eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century predecessors, contain passages in which not every note feels completely idiomatic. In fact, to make matters worse, three centuries of historical, theoretical and cultural conditioning (partly unconscious) come into play here, and to believe that we can repress these is an illusion that should have been debunked long ago. And yet *The Art of Partimento* seems inclined, or perhaps constrained, to turn a blind eye to our status as historical beings, and by so doing perhaps runs the risk of falling into a trap even more glaring than that of the so-called ‘authenticity’ striven for by early proponents of historical performance practice.

It is understandable, of course, to be tempted to ‘bring to life again’ this ‘long-forgotten tradition’ (vii) for a practical purpose: consider, for instance, the versatile proficiency that eighteenth-century students



gained through the practice of partimento, from automatism to fluency and astounding rapidity. And we are obviously free to revive this tradition, and also to transmit it, if we wish – as we are actually doing in academic courses, masterclasses and so on. But if we do so, this cannot serve as a revival of the art of Neapolitan partimento, but as the creation of our own. These remarks, of course, are not intended to dampen our enthusiasm for partimenti, but rather to enhance it, for it seems to me that the seductiveness of partimento as a practical, pedagogical device has been diverting our attention from other aspects that we should reconsider: as players and musicians, yes, but also as philologists, theorists and historians.

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PETER VAN TOUR

COUNTERPOINT AND PARTIMENTO: METHODS OF TEACHING COMPOSITION IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NAPLES

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This is a publication of Peter van Tour's 2015 doctoral dissertation (in English) by the awarding institution, Uppsala Universitet. Because 'dissertation' and 'dull' are words often connected in the minds of readers, let me state at the outset that van Tour's book is far from dull. It makes fascinating reading for any devotee of eighteenth-century music, and for specialists it will significantly raise the level of partimento studies and force some revisions in the history of compositional training. In this review I will survey the book's main findings and highlight the author's achievements. In addition, I will insert a sample of the kind of follow-on study that all of this new material invites and enables.

In van Tour's words, "Partimento" is understood as a notational device, commonly written on a single staff in the F clef, either figured or unfigured, applied both in playing and in writing activities, and used for developing skills in the art of accompaniment, improvisation, diminution, and counterpoint' (35). The crucial phrase 'both in playing and in writing' distinguishes van Tour's perspective from previous studies, which emphasized keyboard improvisation. This reviewer, in a 2006 address given at the Orpheus Institute, Ghent (published as 'Partimenti Written to Impart a Knowledge of Counterpoint and Composition', in *Partimento and Continuo Playing in Theory and Practice* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 43–70), did touch upon the subject, however tentatively. And Giorgio Sanguinetti's masterful *The Art of Partimento: History, Theory, and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) mentions a number of written-out partimento realizations, generally known in Italian conservatories as *disposizione à 3* or *disposizione à 4* (that is, three- or four-voice settings). But with van Tour's book a whole cohort of important and previously unknown manuscripts are introduced to show the step-by-step progress of specific students as they learned eighteenth-century counterpoint. Where previous scholars had to posit educated guesses about the details of such instruction, van Tour can report on exactly what was happening.

Partimenti belong to the musicological 'underground', where master artisans led the non-verbal training of young apprentices. Only in the last decade have scholarly treatments of partimenti emerged. As a new area of study, and with thousands of partimenti preserved in carelessly produced manuscripts, the situation has been reminiscent of what Jan LaRue encountered at New York University in the 1960s. His goal was to sort out the many problems of disputed attributions in the repertory of eighteenth-century symphonies (for example, the Pokorný controversy; see LaRue, 'Major and Minor Mysteries of Identification in the 18th-Century Symphony', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 13/1–3 (1960), 188–192). As mentor to a large cohort of eighteenth-century music specialists, he decided to establish a union catalogue of incipits