

What a *mannered basso continuo* may be on the lute

I Introduction

The surviving sources from the early 18th century, for example works by Mattheson, Heinichen or Telemann, provide us with a lot of knowledge regarding the musical practice of playing basso continuo in this time. Unfortunately for us lute players, they are exclusively directed towards the players of keyboard instruments.

However, as countless sources point out, instruments off the lute family were also very commonly used for this purpose. Nobody less than Silvius Leopold Weiss himself, the *most famous lute player, Europe had ever heard and admired*¹ did *extraordinarily accompanied basso continuo, both on lute and theorbo*.²

If we read the most detailed piece of literature regarding the lute in the 18th century, Barons *Untersuchung*, which was already quoted above, we find an extra chapter regarding basso continuo. However, in this 218 page book, only ten pages are dedicated to this matter. None the less, Baron states the importance of it:

*He, who wants to excel on the lute, has to practice all matters that are needed to reach the perfection of this art... One of these matters is the basso continuo...*³

If we continue reading, it seems, as if it was already an issue in the 18th century, to find common teaching material for basso continuo on lute.

*Monsieur Franz le Sage de Richée*⁴ has promised to publish a work on how to play basso continuo, however he never stood up to that promise.⁵

After a short mentioning of Praetorius⁶ and other earlier sources, Baron goes on to mention Heinichen and his *treatise on basso continuo*.⁷

So, in order to come closer to an authentic style of play, I want to follow Barons advise and try to connect Heinichens approach of basso continuo with another very important source for lute.

¹ Gottsched, Johann Christoph (1700 - 1766), Handlexicon oder Kurzgefaßtes Wörterbuch der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste, Sp. 1644f, Leipzig 1760

² Baron, Ernst Gottlieb (1696 - 1760), Historisch-theoretische und practische Untersuchung des Instruments der Lauten, S. 78, Nürnberg 1727

³ Baron, S. 188ff

⁴ Le Sage de Richée, Philipp Franz (unbekannt), Cabinet der Lauten, Preface, Breslau 1695

⁵ Baron S. 190

⁶ Praetorius, Michael (1571 - 1621), Syntagma Musicum III, Wolfenbüttel 1619

⁷ Since Barons book was published in 1727, however Heinichen's *Der General-Bass in der Composition* in 1728, this work can not be the one, which Baron refers to here. It should therefore be *Neu erfundene und Gründliche Anweisung...* from 1711.

II The instruments used

The common lute instrument after 1650 was the 11-course lute in „d-minor tuning“. Of course, also other instruments were used. The theorbo even stayed in use till the middle of the 18th century or even later, as both Mattheson and Hiller confirm:

*the low (sounding) theorbo is an instrument, which for 50 or 60 years has overtaken the lute/ to play basso continuo on it. The sound of the long bass strings is so smooth and humming, that many prefer it to the keyboard/ that is mostly/ as they say/ because/ it is much easier to carry it from one place to another.*⁸

*The theorbo usually accompanies the opera with broken chords and in recits acts as the echo of the harpsichord.*⁹

This theorbo however, may not have been the same kind of instrument, as the one, we are usually using today. Both Weiss and Baron mention an instrument, which looks like a theorbo, but is not tuned this way.

*Today they (the theorbos) commonly have the new lute tuning.*¹⁰

*I have, to accompany in the orchestra or in a church, invented an extra instrument. It has the size, length, strength and resonance of a true theorbo; does the same effect; alone the tuning is different.*¹¹

The reasons for this change of the tuning system is obvious.

*...because it became very annoying for the lute players, to imagine everything very differently, every time they played the old theorbo.*¹²

29 years after these two statements were published in the same year, Baron gives us more information about the matter:

Note, that both (lute and theorbo) differ a lot from each other. Because on the lute we need a chanterelle; on the theorbo however, which is a third lower, counted from the first string and

⁸ Mattheson, Johann (1681 - 1764), *Das Neu=Eröffnete Orchestre*, S. 278, Hamburg 1713

⁹ Hiller, Johann Adam (1728 - 1804), *Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen die Musik betreffend III*, S. 25, Leipzig 1769

¹⁰ Baron S. 131

¹¹ A letter by Silvius Leopold Weiss, published in Mattheson, Johann (1681 - 1764), *Der neue Göttingische... Ephorus, wegen der Kirchen- Music... mit angehängtem Lauten-Memorial...*, S. 118f, Hamburg 1727

¹² Baron S. 131

*where there are one or two more bass strings, the chanterelle is missing: because it would break due to the length.*¹³

The tuning would be: d' - a - f - d - A - G - F - E - D - C - H - A - G - (F)

It is arguable, if Baron and Weiss¹⁴ are actually talking about the same instrument. Also Baron and could mean two different instruments, since there are 29 years between the publication of the two treatises.

A personal theory is, that Weiss could also be talking about a different tuning, than the one Baron suggest. Since all of his solo works are in the „d-minor tuning“ it seems to me, that is must have been most desirable for him, to find an instrument that was utilizing the exact same tuning, but was capable of accompanying in orchestra.

*To accompany with the lute in an orchestra, that would be to weak and ugly... but regarding the chamber, I assure you, that a Cantate á Voce sola, with a keyboard, and accompanied with the lute, does a better effect than with a archlute, or with the theorbo: since those to are commonly played with fingernails, giving a harsh sound.*¹⁵

So Weiss invented the theorbo mentioned above, tuned *different* than the „regular“ theorbo. But how? The „d-minor“ tuning would be the logical choice, but as Baron already told us, the first string would break on a *true theorbo*. Since Weiss says, his instrument does the *same effect*, as the old one, one might be tempted to think, that also his instrument used a re-entrant tuning. This is an object of speculation.

The sources however provide us with the hints for a different solution, which Weiss found later: the swan neck lute. In a Encyclopedia published shortly after Weiss' death, we find the following entry about him:

*One may call this great artist the father of the lute: because with him, it gained a whole new appearance. Not only did he put it from eleven to 13 courses, but also made the neck straight and theorbed, making it capable, to perform in the largest concerti.*¹⁶

Since this we can prove the existence of such an instrument only from 1732 onwards,¹⁷ Weiss statements from the letter from 1723 does not seem to apply to this form of lute.

¹³ Marpurg, Friedrich Wilhelm (1718 - 1795), Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik, Bd. 2, S. 119-123, Berlin 1756

¹⁴ For more about the relationship between Weiss, Mattheson and Baron see: Smith, Douglas Alton (1944 - 2018), Baron and Weiss contra Mattheson, In defense of the lute, Journal of the Lute Society of America VI, 1973

¹⁵ Weiss letter to Mattheson

¹⁶ Gottsched, Johann Christoph (1700 - 1766), Handlexicon oder Kurzgefaßtes Wörterbuch der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste, Sp. 1644f, Leipzig 1760

¹⁷ Schlegel, Andreas (*1962) und Lüdtke, Joachim (*1958), Die Laute in Europa 2, S. 365/366, Menziken 2011

But also the 11-course lute was used to play basso continuo. The earliest prove for this I could find, was in a treatise for singing from the year 1666 by Wolfgang Caspar Printz (1641 - 1717).¹⁸ With this source comes a short addition: *Short Attachment. How to learn on the lute/ to play from tablature, and to play basso continuo.*

Before his indeed very short treatise, we find a picture of a fingerboard of a lute with marked strings, making it with no doubt an instrument, we today would call an 11-course baroque lute. Unfortunately the following points regarding the lute do not give spectacular new pieces of information. He lists 14 point, of which the wirst 11 tell us the basics of tablature reading. The last three regard basso continuo:

§ 12. For basso continuo there is to know/ that first of all you have to observe the consonances and dissonances well.

§ 13. Also/ that you do not play two fifths or two octaves in a row.

§ 14. Regarding the figures above/ they should be played the same/ as on the keyboard.

Well, that is not spectacular indeed.

It does however provide us with a connection to Baron: Both suggest keyboards as role models for us to learn. So now, let's take a look in one keyboard source in particular and set it in context to another lute source.

¹⁸ Printz, Wolfgang Caspar (1641 - 1717), Kurtzer Bericht Wie man einen jungen Knaben auf das leichteste nach ietziger Manier könne singen lehren, Zittau 1666

III Regarding the style of play

Since Printz is the earliest source I could find, it seems most logical to start with him.

Close to Printz we find the organ player Matthäus Hertel (c1620 - 1672). It is almost certain, the two knew each other as Printz mentions Hertel.¹⁹

Hertels *praktische Exempel* of basso continuo for organ survived but where stolen from their library in Berlin in the 1990s.²⁰ However we have a modern edition.

Most of the rather conservative examples can be more or less directly transcribed and played on a lute. Here are two short examples:

12. Exempel von lauter 6ten und 3tien (Joh. Hermann Schein).

58

Lt.

Org.

6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 7 8 # 6 5 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 7 8 #

19. Exempel.

119

Lt.

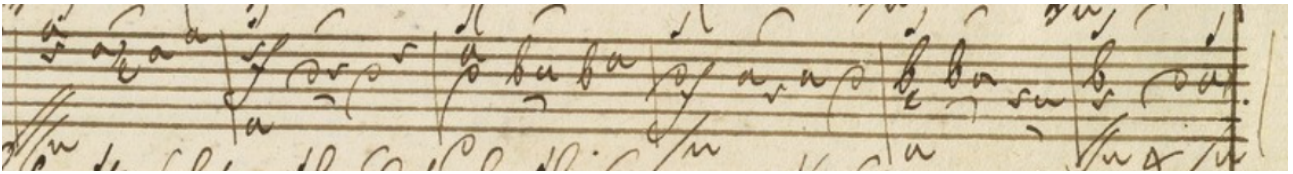
Org.

4 3 9 8 4 3 9 8 4 3 9 8 4 # #

In both examples I felt that some octave changes were possible. By constantly transposing the middle voice of the second example up an octave, we achieve a texture that reminds me of a solo work by Weiss:

¹⁹ Bergelt, Wolf (*1951)/ Brylla, Wolfgang (*1956): Matthäus Hertel; Orgelschlüssel, Preface, Berlin 2018

²⁰ Wolf Bergelt (*1951) und Wolfgang J. Brylla (*1956), Dokumente der Orgelwelt IX, Freimut & Selbst Berlin 2018



This example is taken from the earliest surviving manuscript with Weiss' music.²¹

But still, this kind of continuo playing looks more like an exercise than an actual piece of music. A later equivalent can be found in the Harrach collection:



Here we can find a bass line with figures, realized in lute tablature for 11-course lute.²² There follow several pages with similar examples in different keys.

With this source, we finally come to the main point of interest in this article: Heinichen. His above mentioned works from 1711 and 1728 provides us not only with the knowledge of how to play the right chords at the right time, but also, how to play *mannered*.

This is connected to the Harrach example, since Heinichen introduces the world to the phrase of *mannered basso continuo* in his *Anweisung* from 1711 after 150 pages of explaining basso continuo in great detail:

*If a beginner would ask now, what he still misses in learning basso continuo? Answer: Nothing/ and everything.*²³

In chapter six of his later work from 1728 it takes Heinichen more than 500 pages to reach this chapter. And still, we have everything to learn.

But what comes next? What do we have to learn?

²¹ F-Pn Rés. Vmc ms. 61, 8v

²² Archiv Harrach, H. 120

²³ Heinichen, Johann David (1683 - 1729), *Neu erfundene und Gründliche Anweisung...*, S. 161, Hamburg 1711

It is the art of mannered basso continuo that one does not simply push down his chords, but in all voices (especially the outer voice of the right hand, which is heard the most) uses an ornament, to give more Grace to it...

I will now list the ornaments he mentions, which to me seem to be most relevant for the lute:

1. trill
2. transition to the third of a chord
3. slide
4. the acciaccatura
5. melody
6. passaggio
7. arpeggio
8. imitation

Now he gives a variety of examples and we face the dilemma from the introduction: the examples are meant for a keyboard instrument.

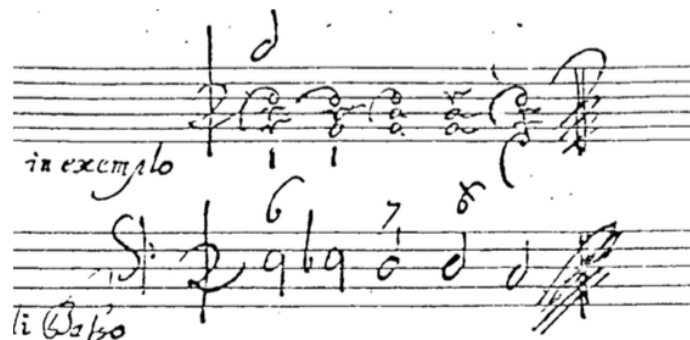
How do we play a mannered bass on the lute?

IV The *fundamenta* of lute music and composition

The Czech manuscript from the university library of Prague with the signum Ms.II.Kk.51 is a source called in the original German *Fundamenta der Lauten Musique und zugleich der Composition*.

The origin of this source can not be completely untangled. It has been dated between 1680 and 1720 and was probably written in the area between Prague and Vienna.²⁴

The manuscript contains text and a huge variety of musical examples, which are written in figured staff notation and tablature, again for an 11-course lute.



²⁴ Anonym: *Fundamenta der Lauten Musique und zugleich der Composition*, oberdeutscher Sprachraum, 1680 - 1720, published for the German Lute Society by Rainer Luckhardt und Mathias Rösel

It is not clear, whether this source should be seen as a book regarding basso continuo directly or just uses the way of notation to explain music in general. In every case it contains most valuable information, especially in regard to Heinrichens *mannered basso continuo*.

Here are Heinrichens ornaments in the way, the author of the *fundamenta* used them on the lute. I do not want to emphasize, that the authors knew the work of one another. To be honest, I consider that to be unlikely. But still, the connection is remarkable.

1. trill, 16/3²⁵

Musical notation for a trill ornament. The top staff shows a treble clef with notes a, c, a, a, b, a, a, a, a. The bottom staff shows a bass clef with notes a, b, a, a, b, a, a, a, a. Handwritten notes include 'x' and 'sehr schön'.

The trill is one of the most basic ornaments. It should be considered, that is can be used in all voices, even though in the top voice is efficient, as already Heinrichen stated.

2. transition to the third of a chord, 11/3b and 18/2

Musical notation for a transition to the third of a chord. The left side shows a treble clef with notes c, b, a, a, a, c, c and a bass clef with notes a, a, a, a. The right side shows a treble clef with notes c, c, c, c and a bass clef with notes b, c, a, c. Handwritten notes include 'x' and 'sehr schön'.

I was surprised to find this mentioned as an ornament at all. However in my practical experience it has been proven as most pleasing and very idiomatic.

²⁵ The numbers mark the appearance in the edition of the German lute society, where also the modern transcription is from. The first one is the page number, the second one the number of the example.

3. slide, 16/2b

The musical notation for 'slide, 16/2b' consists of two staves. The treble staff has a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music. The first measure has notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4. The second measure has notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4, with a slur over the last two notes. The bass staff has a bass clef and a 2/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music. The first measure has notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. The second measure has notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3, with a slur over the last two notes. Below the bass staff are the fingerings: 5 3, 6 4, 5 3, 6 4, 5, 6. A handwritten note in the middle of the bass staff reads '5 and 6 nach einander'.

The French called this ornament the *port de voix*. Since it can be found frequently in French solo repertoire of the 17th century and also its continuation in the German tradition, introducing it to basso continuo is logical.

4. acciaccatura, 26/4, 28/2 and 26/1

The musical notation for 'acciaccatura' shows three examples. Each example has a treble staff and a bass staff. The first example has a treble staff with notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4, and a bass staff with notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. The second example has a treble staff with notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4, and a bass staff with notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. The third example has a treble staff with notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4, and a bass staff with notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. Below the bass staff are the fingerings: 6 6 5, 6 #6 6, 6 6 b5.

Something, which was used frequently by Weiss himself in his solo music. Not only makes it the sound richer, it usually also makes the chord shapes on the fingerboard easier.

5. melody, 17/1

The musical notation for 'melody, 17/1' consists of two staves. The treble staff has a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It contains four measures of music. The first measure has notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4. The second measure has notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4. The third measure has notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4. The fourth measure has notes on the lines G4, A4, and B4. The bass staff has a bass clef and a 2/4 time signature. It contains four measures of music. The first measure has notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. The second measure has notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. The third measure has notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. The fourth measure has notes on the lines G3, A3, and B3. Below the bass staff are the fingerings: 6 5, 6 5, #, 6 6 #.

Of course a very beloved part of playing basso continuo. To this particular aspect there is a very nice description of J. S. Bachs continuo playing by his student and lutenist Johann Friedrich Daube (1740 - 1797):

Through him (Bach) the top voice became brilliant. With his very clever accompaniment he gave life to it, if there was non otherwise. He knew, how to imitate it with his left or right hand, or, to think of a counterpoint, so that any listener would think, it was written down beforehand...

Generally, his accompaniment was constantly like a very well thought of concertato voice, set next to the top voice, so that at the right time the top voice had to shine. This right was then also given to the bass, without taking anything away from the top voice. Enough! He, who did not listen to him, missed a lot .²⁶

6. passagio, 17/2 and 25/2

The image displays musical notation for a 6. passagio, consisting of two systems of treble and bass staves. The first system shows a treble staff with notes and a bass staff with figured bass (6 5 6 5). The second system shows a treble staff with notes and a bass staff with figured bass (6 6 6 5) and a handwritten note 'X nline Postel'. The notation includes various note values and rests, and the bass staff includes figured bass notation such as 6 5 6 5, 6 #6 6, 6 6, 6 5, and # 6 5 6.

A word, that might lets us think of Kapsberger, but apparently the practice was still common later in a very different kind of music.

²⁶ Daube, Johann Friedrich (1730 - 1797), General-Baß in drei Accorden, S. 203, Leipzig 1756

7. arpeggio 11/2, 20/2, 22/2 and 17/2

The image displays four examples of handwritten musical notation for arpeggio exercises. The first example (top left) shows a treble and bass staff with notes and fingerings (4, 3, 6, 5, 8, 7). The second example (top right) shows a treble staff with notes and fingerings (6, 6, 6, 5). The third example (bottom left) shows a treble and bass staff with notes and the handwritten text "arpeggio - broken like". The fourth example (bottom right) shows a treble and bass staff with notes and fingerings (3, 4).

A very important factor on lute instruments. It may happen on a lute, that we may strike a chord with a „little arpeggio“ without really trying, it happens automatically.

When you nip one, two or three strings, with a bass it will be good to strike the bass a little before the small string or strings.²⁷

There are countless ways in the French lute technique for arpeggio. To name them all is not the subject of this article, you can however find most of them in the Burwell lute tutor and the French prefaces.²⁸

Another quote from Daube:

Here the harmony of the right hand, after the bass has been struck, may be broken or form a melody; generally, this can be done in every melody where the singer or instrumentalist must not or can not make an ornament, there you may break it and there are many possible ways. This is equal to to accompaniment on theorbo or lute.²⁹

²⁷ Burwell, Elizabeth: Instructions for the Lute, Ms. ca. 1670, Edition by T. Dart in The Galpin Society Journal, Vol. 11, Mai 1958, S. 29

²⁸ A translation of the prefaces can be found in: Torres, George: Performance Practice Technique for the Baroque Lute, Journal of the Lute Society of America, Volume XXXVI, 2003

For more see also:

Bailes, Anthony: An Introduction to French Lute Music of the XVIIth Century, Le luth et sa musique, S. 213f, 1984

²⁹ Daube S. 203

A rich source of examples for arpeggiation of a chord on 11-course lute are Radolts *Concerti* from 1701.³⁰ Here are a few examples:



8. imitation, 13/2

Handwritten musical notation for '8. imitation, 13/2'. The score is written on three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with notes and rests. The middle staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with notes and rests. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with notes and rests. The notation includes various rhythmic values and fingerings (indicated by '6' and '7'). The word 'Vorspiel' is written in the middle staff. The time signature is 13/2.

A sophisticated way of playing. Heinichen however also states, that it can be difficult to fit it into a performance, because a good composer does not leave space to do it, because he already wrote out all the options possible in the score.

³⁰ von Radolt, Wenzel Ludwig: Die aller treueste Freindin..., Wien 1701

All these ornaments can be found many times in the fundamenta. I tried to sum them all up in a table. For the most part i have excluded the small *Préludes* which can also be found in the manuscript, because they are clearly no realizations of a basso continuo.

Trillo	12/2, 13/1, 14/2, 16/2a, 16/3, 17/1, 18/4, 19/1,2
Transitus zur Terz	11/2, 11/3b, 12/1, 12/2, 12/3, 13/1, 14/2,3, 16/3, 17/1,2,3, 18/1,2,3,4, 23/2
Schleifer	12/2, 16/2b, 17/2,3, 21/1
Acciaccatura/ Mordent	23/2, 26/4, 27/1, 27/4 28/1,2
Melodie	11/2, 13/1, 17/1,2,3, 18/1,2,3,4, 19/2,3, 21/2, 22/1, 23/1
Passagio	17/3, 20/1, 24/3, 25/1,2
Arpeggio	11/2, 13/1, 14/2, 17/1,2,3, 18/1,2,3,4, 20/2, 22/2
Imitation	12/3, 13/2, 14/1, 15/1,2,3, 16/3, 19/1

IV Final thoughts

An article like this can never deal with the whole field of basso continuo over such a long period of time in such a wide geographical area. The practice of basso continuo at one court in one decade alone could fill a book.

The details of playing in different regions, the difference of styles in theater, church or chamber and the option of playing on an instrument such as Gallichon have not been considered here. Also the sources providing us with a *liuto obligato* parts have not been taken into account.

I do hope however, that I was able to give an inspiring and scientifically accurate way to enable the reader to approach his or her own basso continuo studies from a new angle.

To quote Heinichen one last time:

*To play a mannered basso continuo, it needs a lot of experience, discretion and judgement.*³¹

One sentence that was once taught to me was: Basso continuo is not a theory, it's a practice. As Baron puts it so charmingly:

*With this matter it is not possible to do anything else, but to suggest practices and ways, to reach this noble and excellent goal.*³²

³¹ Heinichen 1728, S. 521

³² Baron S. 130