

THE ART OF
ACCOMPANIMENT
FROM A
THOROUGH-BASS

AS PRACTISED IN THE
XVIITH & XVIIITH CENTURIES

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
DENIS STEVENS

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The upper part represents the solo part, which we are, of course, at liberty to imagine an 8ve higher, as Ph. Em. Bach gave all his Exx. on a single staff.³

The $\frac{6}{4}$ * in Exx. (a) and (b) is the third inversion of a suspended Seventh, with augmented Fifth, on *c* (cf. Ch. xii, '6 Chords', § 6, Ex. 7), while the $\frac{4}{2}$ on *a* † in Ex. (a) is, of course, the inversion of an essential Seventh on the Supertonic *b* (cf. § 2, Ex. 10 a). Taking them as such, the progression in (a) and (b) would be, respectively:

Ph. Em. Bach appends the following suggested accompaniments, which, for the sake of clearness, are here given over the Bass:

N.B.—In the first chord of (b 2) the accompaniment, apparently, goes below the Bass, but the former must be imagined an 8ve higher (see above).

In (b 2) it will be observed that the 6 of the $\frac{6}{4}$ chord is omitted in the accompaniment.* Bach remarks: "instead of the Sixth, one can also take the doubled Second, as an anticipation of the Triad which follows."

This is, in the present instance, remarkable, since (1) the interval in question is not present in the solo part,⁴ and (2) the upper part of the accompaniment (with a skip, moreover, which Bach generally deprecates) merely duplicates the solo part.⁵

One is almost tempted to imagine that Bach's mind wandered from the single

³ "I have been obliged to give all the examples on a single staff, in order that this work might not become too voluminous and costly; one must, therefore, in these examples, have regard principally to the reason for which they are given, and not tie oneself to the pitch [lit. 'height and depth'] prescribed, as, moreover, the necessary information is always given about the positions [in which the chords are to be taken]."
—Ph. Em. Bach, *Versuch &c.*, Part II, 1762, Preface, folio 2 b.

⁴ In accompanying one or more solo instruments (or voices), especially in passages of delicate harmony, it is sometimes better to omit a discord from the accompaniment, even though prescribed by the figures, rather than discount the effect of the solo part by reproducing it in the accompaniment (see quotation from Werckmeister in Ch. i, 'The beginnings &c.', § 24, VII, 1 b).

⁵ Cf. Ch. iii. 'General character &c.'. § 5 b.

solo part given in Ex. 7 (b), and that he had in view a case in which the interval which he omits from the accompaniment was present in a second one, as e.g.:

The omission of the #*g* (rising to *a*) from the accompaniment would then be exactly in the spirit of Werckmeister's advice referred to in note 4.

In the accompaniment to both Exx., (a) and (b), Bach takes the 7 (in the 7 6 suspension on *b*) as $\frac{7}{3}$.

As the 6 on the Supertonic may be interpreted as $\frac{6}{5}$ (Ch. xxi, 'Incomplete figuring', II, § 1), the 7 can include the imperfect (diminished) 5th, which would then have its proper resolution (Ch. xi, 'Sevenths', IV, § 5).

The accompaniment would then be

or in any other position.

Ph. Em. Bach was, however, evidently not fond of including the 5, unless specially figured, in a suspended Seventh (Ch. xi, 'Sevenths', IV, §§ 2, 5, 8).

The above is a very remarkable Ex.

It has already been pointed out (Ch. xi, 'Sevenths', I, § 1 *ad fin.*) that a discord can be taken as an essential discord and resolved as a suspension.

In the present Ex. the $\frac{6}{4}$ on *a* is taken as the 3rd inversion of an essential Seventh on *bB*, but resolves as a Seventh on *g*⁶ with the Bass delayed by

⁶ The essentially dissonant note in the chord is therefore *f*, and the fact that it is taken without preparation is due to the fact that the chord itself was taken in a different capacity from that in which it was quoted.

If the *f* had been prepared

it would not have been necessary

to assume this change of character.