

THE ART OF
ACCOMPANIMENT
FROM A
THOROUGH-BASS

AS PRACTISED IN THE
XVIIITH & XVIIIITH CENTURIES

BY F. T. ARNOLD, M.A. (CANTAB.)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
DENIS STEVENS

IN TWO VOLUMES

Volume I

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This edition is dedicated
to the memory of

FRANCK THOMAS ARNOLD

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INTRODUCTION TO THE DOVER EDITION

When Franck Thomas Arnold, a university professor of German language and literature, was devoting his leisure hours to collecting, translating, and compiling the basic theoretical materials that gradually gave generous shape to a book still unsurpassed for its scope and erudition, the word "baroque" was rarely (if ever) mentioned in connection with music, unless in the context of speculative musicological writings. The seventeenth century, and the greater part of the eighteenth, were known to the majority of historians and critics as the period of the thorough-bass, and it is only in recent years that the term "baroque" came to be accepted as a part of our legal musico-terminological tender.

At first, the essentially pejorative overtones of the word seemed to lie outside the normal auditory range of musicians, both amateur and professional; but after a time the inevitable reaction set in, and enthusiasts joined with iconoclasts to ask whether the drenching downpour of sonatas, concertos, and concerti grossi—especially of the Italian school—would ever come to an end. On the air and on disc, in concerts and in festivals, on tape and on television, this flood of baroque music threatened to engulf the world of music and drown it in a sea of pompous puerilities.

There was a stage when Arnold's book could have done something to save the situation, but as luck would have it, stocks were exhausted and copies could only be consulted in libraries. In consequence, the one genuinely creative contribution to a performance of a baroque instrumental or vocal work—the artistic and imaginative realization of the continuo part—was all too often conspicuous by its absence, which did not (as far as the true connoisseur was concerned) make the heart grow fonder. Indeed, baroque music began to fall into disrepute, although there began to emerge in certain countries a select group of organists, harpsichordists, and lutenists capable of enlivening a continuo part in keeping with the style and spirit of the age. They, like their fellow musicians, realized not only the thorough-bass; they realized that a vast proportion of the newly fashionable baroque repertory had been primarily created for the performer, not the listener. All over Europe, the devotees of the *accademia*, the *collegium musicum*, the orchestral society, the *concert spirituel*, demanded newly composed instrumental music suitable for immediate performance, and the evidence points to the fact that they were more than satisfied, if not satiated.

Musicians today have this lesson to learn: that much of this material can still be played for enjoyment, but that full enjoyment will come only when