

Chordal Continuo Realization

on the Violoncello

A look at the practice of chordal accompaniment by cellists over the course of two centuries, with a focus on recitative accompaniment practices between 1774 and 1832

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RESEARCH QUESTION

What was the practice of chordal continuo realization by cellists in the eighteenth century?

Part 1.

- Is there actually a historical precedence for this practice?
- In what musical context would this type of continuo realization be used?
- In what types of ensembles, with what instrumentation, and in what repertoire was it appropriate for the cellist to realize a continuo line?
- Does the cellist only realize the continuo line if s/he is the only continuo player, or would the technique be employed within a continuo section as well?
- How did the practice develop or change over the course of time?

Part 2.

- How would this realization sound when used in performance?

Relevance of this research and implications for performance:

- Could influence instrumentation choices and allow for a wider diversity of timbres and colors within a continuo section
- Could significantly change today's continuo performance practice, giving modern-day historical cellists a wider range of skills with which to accompany

RESEARCH PROCESS, METHODOLOGY

1. Historical research:

- Examining treatises and instructional manuals
- Reading contemporary accounts
- Consulting secondary sources on the subject

2. Practical application in my own playing

- Working through the methods that I find, acquiring the skill and implementing it in my continuo performance.

INTRODUCTION

Shortly before I began my studies at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, I attended several days of concerts and events at the Utrecht Early Music Festival. I was inspired by many of the musicians I heard, but there were two performances that especially stuck with me, for the same reason: the cellists in the ensembles had played chords extensively in their continuo parts. I loved the rich, full sonority of the chords, and the cellists seemed to be able to add extra emphasis and support to the soloists' parts as a result. I knew I had to find out as much about the practice as possible, and learn how to do it myself.

When I embarked upon this research project, I was hoping to find historical evidence of a practice which would give me a new way of executing continuo lines in music of the High Baroque in the eighteenth century. After many hours in libraries, correspondences with other cellists and musicians about the topic, trips to libraries in Bologna and Madrid, and I realized that my topic had shifted a bit. What I was looking for—undeniable proof of the practice of continuo realization by cellists in the Baroque—did not really exist. What I found instead were many very interesting arguments for and against the idea, and solid proof of a chordal cello continuo realization tradition—but much later than I had originally expected.

I have divided my findings in this paper into three parts. The first part is dedicated to cello continuo practice in the Baroque, in which I present some of the scholarly arguments I have read in secondary sources for and against the idea that chordal continuo realization was common practice among cellists of the time, and also give my own opinions on the issue.

In the second, and most substantial part, I discuss the very well-documented practice of chordal recitative accompaniment by cellists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I will look in detail at five of the most important historical sources on this topic, compiling the information in these treatises into an accessible format and pointing out notable details, similarities, and differences between them.

The third section of the paper is a small collection of thoughts about the practical aspects of playing chordal accompaniments on the cello that I have compiled from the treatises as well as from my own experiences with the techniques. I have also provided an example of a recitative which I have realized according to the indications I found in the treatises.

Chapter 1. Chordal cello accompaniment practices in the Baroque

Context and background

The violoncello has been used as a continuo instrument since the very beginning of the basso continuo practice around the turn of the seventeenth century, and its use continued through basso continuo's final years in the early nineteenth century. Originating as a fundamentally accompanimental bass instrument and undergoing a constant evolution of form, range, and name, the instrument known today as the *violoncello* is most closely related to, and likely descended from, the bass violin. It bears mentioning that there is some diversity of terminology when it comes to the instrument we know today as the violoncello. The term *violone* (as appears on the title page of Arcangelo Corelli's Op. 5 violin sonatas, which will be discussed later on) was used during the seventeenth century to describe a variety of different bass instruments, ranging from bass viol-type instruments to violoncellos to double basses. Cellist and scholar David Watkin suggests that even though most of Europe used the term *violone* only to describe 16-foot bowed continuo instruments by the late seventeenth century, in Rome during Corelli's career, they still applied the term to 8-foot instruments just as frequently.¹

Despite its use in an accompanimental capacity for approximately a century before, the violoncello did not appear as a solo instrument until 1689 (with Domenico Gabrielli's seven *Ricercare*).² It was still another half a century after that before the first cello treatise appeared, Michel Corrette's *Methode, Théorique et Pratique pour Apprendre en peu de tems le Violoncelle dans sa Perfection*, in 1741. The violoncello had clearly undergone many changes of status in that time, judging by the considerable technical advancements that can be seen in solo and sonata repertoire that appeared during those years, but this evolution is largely undocumented in any kind of formal manner. As a result, scholars and performers must look to other epistemological means to answer questions of performance practice during that time.

Cello as sole accompanist

There are many accounts of musicians being accompanied by a single cello, though it is not always known whether for financial, practical, or artistic reasons. While some sources call for a violoncello (*violone*) *or* *cembalo*, including Corelli's Op. 5 violin sonatas, Sartori's *Bibliografia* of Italian instrumental music published before 1700, and Geminiani's Op. 1 sonatas (1716), some composers specified a preference for *violone* continuo without harpsichord. For instance, Corelli himself, in a letter to Count Laderchi in 1679, claimed that he thought the accompaniment of a single *violone* would "have a very good effect."³ G.M. Bononcini's *Arie*, Op. 4 and T. Pegolotti's *Trattimenti armonici da camera* (1698), too, both specify a preference for *violone* or *violoncello*, rather than *spinet* or *cembalo*.⁴ Charles Burney wrote about the great violinist, Veracini (1690-1768), who was accompanied on a tour only by the cellist Lanzetti (1710-1780) during 1722 and 1723.⁵ Like Lanzetti and Veracini, the violinist Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) toured with the cellist Antonio Vandini (1690-1771) as his sole accompanist, and

¹ David Watkin, "Corelli's Op. 5 Sonatas: 'Violino e violone o cimbalo'?" *Early Music* (1996): p. 646.

² Incidentally, some of these *Ricercare* contain chords that are only possible to play with the cello's A string tuned down a whole step, so these works act as something of a "missing link" between viol and violoncello music.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 649.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) accompanied the violin virtuoso Filippo Manfredi on a tour of Europe from 1766-1769.⁶

Early evidence and accounts of chordal accompaniment on the cello

In addition to the cello being used as a single-voice continuo instrument, some very limited evidence exists that some cellists realized their continuo lines, creating multi-voice chordal accompaniments. Pegolotti, in his *Trattimenti*, requests that the cellist add extra notes “if the texture is found too sparse,” while Tartini, in his Op. 2 no. 3 sonatas, includes an added tenor line in the bass part which is much more idiomatic for the cello than for the harpsichord.⁷ Further proof that Italians were using the cello to provide chordal accompaniment comes from a 1657 account of a travelling Englishman. In a letter to his brother, Abraham, Thomas Hill wrote of the musicians in Lucca (interestingly, the birthplace of both Francesco Geminiani and Luigi Boccherini): “The organ and the violin they are masters of, but the bass-viol they have not at all in use, and to supply its place they have the bass violin with four strings, and use it as we do the bass viol.”⁸ As David Watkin points out, at that time in England, the bass viol was being used primarily in the lyraviol style, which meant it played a lot of chords, often as an accompaniment to a solo instrument or voice.⁹

Accounts of performances in which cellists played chordal continuo realizations exist, though very sporadically, from throughout Europe, as early as the Hill brothers’ correspondence mentioned above, and as late as 1878.¹⁰ Possibly the most notable example of a cellist chordally realizing continuo lines is Robert Lindley (1776-1855). One of the greatest virtuosos of his generation, Lindley studied with James Cervetto (who no doubt encouraged his aptitude for chordal playing, being a great virtuoso himself and writing chordal accompaniments into some of his own compositions), and secured a position at the Opera in London in 1794, at the age of eighteen.¹¹ He became famous for his inventive and florid accompaniments, using chords and arpeggios, of recitatives in opera, most often with his close friend and standpartner of fifty-two years, the great double-bassist Dragonetti. The critic and editor, Henry Fothergill Chorley (1808-1872) said of Lindley and Dragonetti’s musical partnership: “Nothing could be compared with the intimacy of their mutual musical sympathy.”¹² A testament to Lindley’s virtuosity is the story of the great cellist Romberg, who, upon hearing Lindley play for the first time remarked, “He is the devil.”¹³

Scholars such as Nathan Whittaker¹⁴ and John Lutterman¹⁵ have pointed to J.S. Bach’s solo cello suites as proof that cellists could have likely realized continuo lines chordally in Bach’s cantatas. While cellists of Bach’s day would have certainly needed an impressive

⁶ David Watkin, “Corelli’s Op. 5 Sonatas: ‘Violino e violone o cimbalo’?” *Early Music* (1996): p.649.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 650

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewsk, *The Violoncello and Its History*. (London and New York: Novello and Company, 1894), p.193.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ , Nathan Whittaker, *Chordal Cello Accompaniment: The Proof and Practice of Figured Bass Realization on the Violoncello from 1660—1850*, (Dissertation: University of Washington, 2012), p. 38

¹⁵ John Lutterman, “‘Cet art est la perfection du Talent:’ Chordal Thoroughbass Realization and Improvised Solo Performance on the Viol and the Cello in the Eighteenth Century ” in *Beyond Notes: Improvisation in Western Music of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), p. 124

command of the instrument in order to perform the suites, and while the works certainly challenge the assumption that the cello is merely a single-line bass instrument through their prolific use of chords, implied harmonies, and polyphonic texture, I find it too much of a leap to assume that this mastery of chords would extend to spontaneous continuo realizations. It makes more sense to relate them to Bach's polyphonic and virtuosic works for solo violin and solo harpsichord, with which they share a musical language, than with his larger ensemble and vocal works.

German musicologist Arnold Schering argues that the ideas set forth in Jean Baumgärtner's 1774 treatise (which will be examined in Chapter 2) should be applied to Bach's vocal works, because it is the earliest work to give instructions in chordal realization of continuo.¹⁶ Even though it is often safe to apply the concepts in a treatise, as a general rule, to music written before it was published (just as the treatises of Quantz, C.P.E. Bach, and Leopold Mozart are often considered the authoritative sources on music of the High Baroque even though they were all published after 1750), there is simply too much of a difference between the musical contexts of Bach's vocal music and the opera recitatives of Baumgärtner's day to make Schering's argument convincing.

Some scholars¹⁷ have cited a caution by Quantz instructing cellists not to "garnish the bass with graces" or "introduce extempore embellishments into the bass"¹⁸ as evidence that most cellists were elaborating their basslines with chords whenever possible. While it is entirely likely that some cellists would have attempted to enliven mundane continuo lines with extra notes, many to less than great effect, this advisement from Quantz is hardly proof that this practice was commonplace. In fact, another statement from Quantz would argue to the contrary. He says at the very beginning of his section on the violoncello¹⁹ that cellists who want to both accompany and play solo should have two cellos, a bigger one for accompanying and a smaller one for solo playing. Knowing how challenging playing chords already is as someone with long fingers and a small cello, I can only imagine how difficult it must have been for a cellist of smaller, eighteenth-century stature, to reach these chords effectively and accurately on a larger instrument. Because of these purely practical concerns, I find it unlikely that every cellist was going to such great pains to realize their continuo lines on a regular basis.

Conclusions

Despite well-informed arguments for the widespread use of chordal continuo realizations by cellists throughout the Baroque, there is very little evidence, though much scholarly speculation and inference, that the practice of chordal continuo realization on the cello was widespread until the end of the eighteenth century. Certainly, the use of the cello as a lone accompaniment, especially for solo instrumental sonatas, was very common and there is significant evidence to support it. This, however, does not at all mean that the cellist was

¹⁶ Arnold Schering, *Johann Sebastian Bachs Leipziger Kirchenmusik. Studien und Wege zu ihrer Erkenntnis*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1936), pp.108-110

¹⁷ Marc Vanscheeuwijk, "The Baroque Cello and its Performance," *Performance Practice Review* (1996), p. 95

¹⁸ Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, (Berlin, 1752), p. 242

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 241

expected to realize figures (or supply chords if no figures were present), and I find the assumption to the contrary quite a leap of logic indeed.

Though it is entirely possible that there were some cellists who filled in some of the harmonies in the continuo lines they were playing, there is no clear written account of any such practice, and none of the earlier cello methods made any indication that this was part of the expected skill set of a cellist, or any kind of an established practice.

This changed in the latter half of the 18th century, when treatises began to appear featuring instructions for how to correctly execute chords during the accompaniment of recitative. Somewhere along the line, cellists had begun to realize their continuo lines, though there is no documentation whatsoever of this shift. This practice of realization, though it had become so common as to appear in many treatises throughout Europe, seems to be limited to only the accompaniment of secco recitatives in opera.

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Chapter 2. Chordal cello accompaniment practices, 1774-1832

Relevant developments in cello technique

Part of the difficulty in finding the source of the practice of chordal continuo realization on the cello is the lack of cello treatises until the middle of the eighteenth century. The first cello method was the *Méthode pour apprendre le violoncelle* of Michel Corrette, which appeared in 1741, but there were already many highly virtuosic pieces written for the cello before this, for instance the very technically challenging (and full of chords) Barriere sonatas written in the 1730s. The most relevant technical skill to the practice of chordal realization is that of double-stop and chord playing. Double stops and systems for their proper fingering appear in almost every cello treatise written, including those by Corrette, Tilliere, Gunn, Cupis, and others.

Increase in use of double stops and chords to accompany instrumental music

Many instrumental chamber works began to appear around the time that chordal recitative accompaniment was being employed widely by cellists, which showed a similar practice or aesthetic in the cello line. James Cervetto (1749-1837), the son of cellist Jacopo Bassevi Cervetto and a virtuoso cellist in London, wrote a small number of compositions, mostly for the cello, which feature double stops and sometimes chords throughout the accompanimental cello parts. This includes a set of three cello duets (Op. 3, ca. 1795) in which the second part is largely double stops and chords, essentially a written-out basso continuo realization. Similarly, Boccherini's basslines are written quite idiomatically for the cello, more so than for the keyboard, and they often contain double stops. Though he could have easily opted for the more

traditional fully-harmonized harpsichord accompaniment, Boccherini wrote the cello sonatas in a way that optimizes the unique timbre of the two-cello sound, and which fills out enough of the harmony to sound complete. He uses chords strategically, most often at cadences or in order to bring out particularly interesting harmonies. Whether or not this way of playing chords in the bassline was an accurate written-out representation of how cellists of the time were performing accompaniments spontaneously, it gives modern-day cellists some good ideas about how to treat bassline realizations.

Recitative accompaniment

Quite apart from the intermittent accounts of cellists playing chords in their continuo lines, a very well-documented tradition of chordal recitative accompaniment arose at the end of the Baroque and continued well into the nineteenth century.²⁰ Several treatises were published between 1774 and 1834 that give clear instructions and examples for the use of chordal continuo realizations on the cello in secco recitatives.

Treatises and instructional manuals for recitative accompaniment

Jean Baumgärtner: *Instructions de musique, théorique et pratique, à l'usage du violoncelle*, 1774

The earliest of the treatises that deal with chordal recitative accompaniment on the cello is by Jean (Johann Baptist) Baumgärtner, *Instructions de musique, théorique et pratique, à l'usage du violoncelle*, published in The Hague in 1744 (though some sources claim it was 1777). This is also the most comprehensive and specific of the treatises examined, and will therefore be given the most attention here.

Born in Augsburg in 1723, Baumgärtner was a highly acclaimed cellist who became a member of the Prince-Bishop's orchestra, gave a tour of Germany, Holland, England, and Scandinavia, and was famous for playing Boccherini duets exceptionally well.²¹ He lived in Stockholm, Hamburg, and Vienna, and settled in Amsterdam in 1774. Conflicting reports exist of his death in 1782; Van der Straeten says he died of consumption in Vienna, while Wasielevsky maintains that it was in Eichstädt.²²

Baumgärtner's treatise was written for his own students, with whom he used its ideas and principles before its publication, as well as for "other amateurs and...those who wish to make a profession of this instrument."²³ Baumgärtner spends the first several chapters of the treatise talking about the basics of playing the cello and music theory, before devoting the remainder and most significant part discussing the art of accompanying recitatives with chords on the cello. He

²⁰ Van der Straeten writes of an account of a cellist accompanying recitative with chords in Italy as late as 1873.

²¹ Edmund S Van Der Straeten, *History of the Violoncello, etc.*, (London: William Reeves, 1914), p. 181

²² Ibid., Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewski, *The Violoncello and Its History*. (London and New York: Novello and Company, 1894), p. 69

²³ Jean-Baptist Baumgärtner, *Instructions de musique, théorique et pratique, à l'usage du violoncelle*, (Den Haag: D. Monnier, ca.1774), p. 174 in Graves dissertation

cites Rousseau in his note to the reader, whose Dictionary of Music he recommends to amateurs and great musicians alike.

The information relevant to the practice of chordal continuo realization begins with the rules Baumgärtner gives for fingering double stops. These fingerings are of great importance, because one must be in the right position in order to correctly move from one interval to another, and especially to resolve dissonances properly. The list of fingering rules for various intervals is below:

Fingering rules for double stops:

(Baumgärtner, Chapter 9)

Unison: played with 2 and open

2nds: any finger but 1, because of resolution to the 3rd

3rds: 1 and 4

4ths: always 2 and 4, because of resolution to the 3rd

Tritone: always different according to position, but always resolves to a 6th

5ths: any finger

False 5ths (tritone): 2 and 3, resolving to 3rd

6ths: any fingers, except 4 on lower note

7ths: if no open string, 1 and 4 or 1 and 3 (in higher positions)

8ves: always with one open string

At the opening of his discussion on accompanying recitatives, Baumgärtner first makes a distinction between two types of recitatives: accompanied and ordinary. Accompanied recitative includes the addition of other instruments, such as violins, and is considerably more sustained than ordinary recitative. In accompanied recitative, Baumgärtner says, as well as in certain symphonic repertoire, chords can occasionally be played, but this is not usually necessary or recommended as the other instruments generally fill in the other voices.

Ordinary recitative, most often called *secco recitative* by other sources, is the subject of the remainder of Baumgärtner's treatise. He gives a set of rules regarding the accompaniment of ordinary (*secco*) recitative, as follows:

Rules for Accompanying Recitatives

(Baumgärtner, Chapter 12)

- Never change the fundamental note in the bass, unless the bass note is written high and it is impossible to play a chord above it otherwise.
- Do not sustain the tone in this type of recitative
- "Wait for the last word then, give a dry stroke with your bass note at the same time as the principal chord note of the melody. You have enough spare time while following the melody to search for your concordant note."

- It is often preferable to play a double stop, rather than a triple stop, for safety's sake.
- If you cannot play the chord in time, play only a single note.
- Know the common rules of accompaniment.

Baumgärtner goes on to give a table of all chords accepted in harmony, though they are in a very theoretical format rather than idiomatic to the cello. This reinforces the importance placed upon harmonic understanding for cellists.



Table of chords found in harmony

The following table of accompaniment lists the intervals to be played with the appearance of various figures. Some of these chords are fairly harmonically complex, so cellists would have had to have more than a cursory understanding of the theoretical side of music.

Table of accompaniment with each figure

- The second is accompanied with the fourth and the sixth
- The third with the fifth
- The fourth with the second and the sixth when the ligature is in the lower part.
- When the ligature is in the upper part with the fifth and octave
- The tritone is treated as the fourth with the ligature in the bass
- The fifth is accompanied by the third
- The false fifth by the third and the sixth
- The sixth with the third
- The seventh with the third and the fifth and sometimes also with the octave
- The ninth with the third and the fifth and it can also exist with the seventh.

Of significance in Baumgärtner's treatise is his emphasis on cadences. He says that all harmony is no more than a string of cadences, because it is all just a passage of dissonance to consonance. Unless the cadences are on open strings, the first chord of the cadence should be fingered with first finger on the lowest note and third finger on the top note, and the final note of

the cadence will be fingered with 1 on the lowest note and with 3 or 2 on the tenth above the note, in major or minor respectively.



Table of Cadences

After the discussion of cadences, Baumgärtner goes on to some more general rules that a cellist can apply depending on the movement of the bass, especially if the bass line does not contain figures.

Rules based on movement of the bass

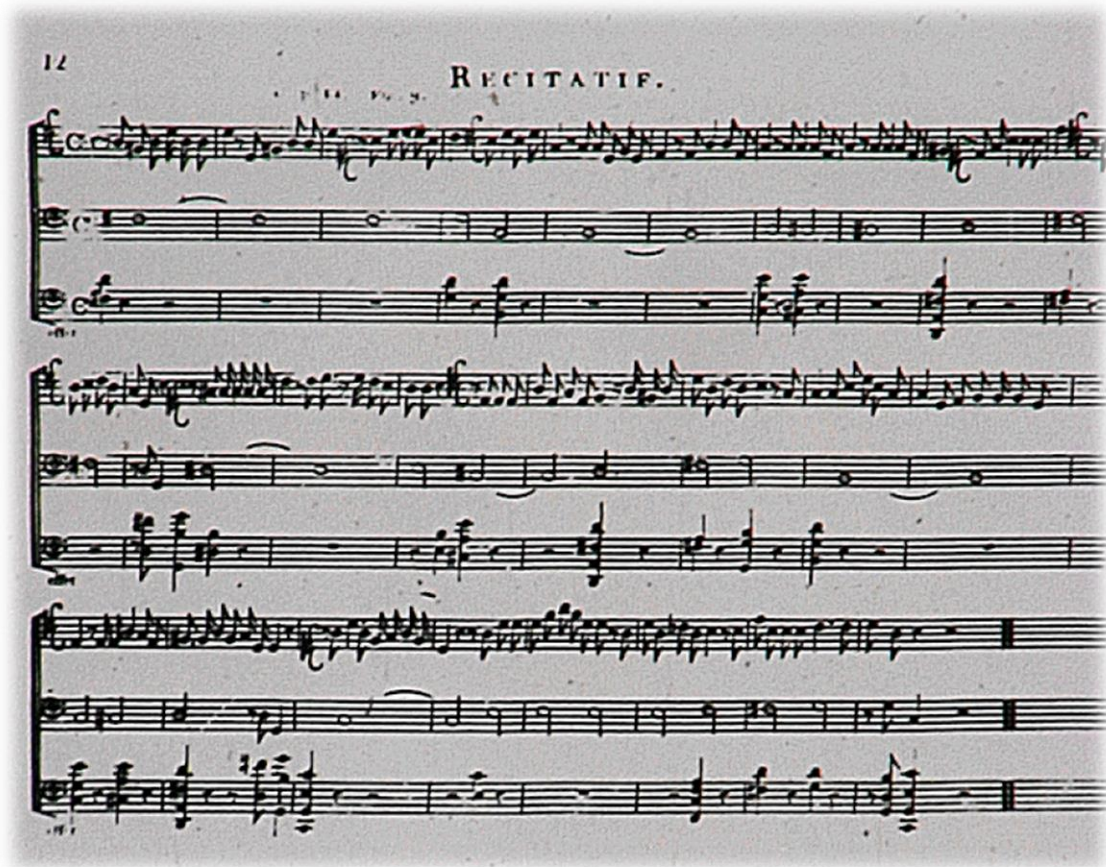
(Baumgärtner, chapter 13)

- If the bass is stationary you must use your ear, since there are no figures to guide you.
- When the line rises or falls by step, play 3rds or 6ths. There may be exceptions if slurs are present.
- If bass leaps up or down by 3rd or 6th, play a 6th.
- If bass leaps up a 4th or down a 5th, play a 5th or 6th.
- If bass leaps several 4ths up or 5ths down, slurs are usually used. Play simple notes or 3rds only.
- In leaps up of a 5th leaps down of a 4th, slur and play an octave, unison, or simple note.
- If the bass leap up a 6th or down a 3rd, play a 6th.
- If the bass note is sharped, usually play a false 5th (tritone).

Baumgärtner ends his instruction of chordal accompaniment with a brief discussion of modulation and general advice for accompanying, with this interesting final statement:

“It is absolutely forbidden to add ornaments, passages or other things in the accompaniment. If you do so, you will show your ignorance.”²⁴

I include below the examples from Baumgärtner’s appendix of a sample recitative with bassline realized as chords, as well as a page of typical basslines and cadential figures found in continuo parts, and how they would be realized on the cello.



Example of Recitative, with bass line as it appears and the effect of the realization

²⁴ Jean-Baptist Baumgärtner, *Instructions de musique, théorique et pratique, à l'usage du violoncelle*, (Den Haag: D. Monnier, ca.1774), in Graves dissertation, p. 201



Examples of typical basslines and their realizations

As the first person to write instructions for the chordal accompaniment of recitatives by cellists, Baumgärtner paved the way for cellists after him not only to employ these techniques in professional performance, but also to include similar instructions in the treatises and methods of the following half century. Whether he was one of the first cellists to use this practice in his performance or simply the first one to put it into writing, he was the frontrunner of a significant and fascinating performance practice tradition at a very dynamic time in the history of the cello.

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Pablo Vidal: *Arte e Esquela de Violoncello*, ca. 1790

Though little is known about the cellist Pablo Vidal, he was the principal cellist in Boccherini's Casa de Osuna orchestra at the Convent of the Incarnation in Madrid.²⁵ Working so closely with Boccherini would have certainly made Vidal very familiar with Boccherini's compositional style, which is rich in double stops and chords. Vidal published his *Arte e Esquela de Violoncello* around 1790, most of which is dedicated to general exercises similar to those found in other method-books, but which also contains a very brief section, easily overlooked, dedicated to chords for recitative accompaniment. Though he does not give specific written instructions as to the execution of the technique, the example he gives is a clear demonstration of exactly how a cellist would play a continuo line.

²⁵ Biography on Naxos online database of people: http://www.naxos.com/person/Pablo_Vidal/18044.htm



Excerpt from Vidal's *Arte y Esquela de Violoncello*, p. 15

Of note in this example are what appear to be different articulation markings under different chords. Under the chords in the first line and a half can be seen slashes, which in context would make sense to indicate an arpeggiation, but when the harmonic rhythm moves faster and forms cadences in quicker succession, the chords are marked with dots underneath them. Just as a harpsichordist would only play luxurious arpeggiations when the harmonic rhythm is slow enough to support them, a cellist would not have time to play anything but secco, quickly rolled chords when the harmony changes on every beat of a measure.

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Jean-Marie Raoul: *Methode de Violoncelle*, c. 1797.

Jean-Marie Raoul, b. Paris 1766, d. Paris 1837, was a lawyer by profession, but an astute enough cellist to write an excellent and comprehensive treatise, including studies for many different types of advanced techniques. Incidentally, he was also an avid violist da gamba and he attempted to “reinstate” the viol, so that it would regain some of its former popularity. His cello method includes a section on how to play chords while accompanying recitatives, a chart of chords to use on every tone of a scale, the fingerings for these chords, and their proper execution in the right hand.

According to Raoul, the role of the bass (the cello, in this context) in recitatives is to determine the intonation, guide the singer, and announce modulations. Therefore, the cellist must combine a detailed knowledge of harmony with great mastery of his instrument. Raoul does not give any specific instructions in proper harmonic movement, however, saying that there are other treatises that exist for that purpose, and that the focus of this method is simply to teach the proper execution of chords on the cello.

Of the proper breaking of a chord, Raoul says the attack should resonate first on the lowest note, before moving quickly across the other strings for the remaining chord tones. He gives the following example of what this effect would sound like:



How a chord should be properly broken in performance, Raoul p. 4

As for the chords themselves, Raoul gives scales in the most common keys a cellist would be exposed to (only a few are pictured below), putting appropriate chords on each scale degree. This is very much like the Rule of the Octave practiced by harpsichordists and lutenists, though of course the voicing has been adjusted to fall idiomatically within the hand on the cello. Also, depending on the string and position the scale starts on, as well as the mode of the scale, the inversions and harmonies of the chords vary.

Accords dans quelques tons .

En ut Majeur.

En la Mineur.

En sol Majeur.

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Chords in several keys, Raoul p. 41-42

One slightly strange thing about the fingerings in these chords is that they occasionally require extensions between 2 and 3 or 3 and 4, which is quite unidiomatic on the cello. Whether this is a result of a sloppy editor or an indication of different fingering practices is unclear, but after my experience of working through these chords, I recommend altering the fingering slightly, when necessary, to ones that sit more comfortably within the hand.

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Baillot, Levasseur, Catel and Baudiot: *Méthode de violoncelle et de Basse D'Accompagnement*. Paris Conservatoire method, 1804.

The Paris Conservatoire is commonly known to have contributed to a major shift in the way music was taught, and is credited with starting the trend of more standardized musical education and evaluation. The *Méthode de violoncelle et de Basse D'Accompagnement* is a collaborative publication of the Conservatoire which outlined the technical and musical skills a professional cellist in training would be expected to have. One of the most important of these skills is that of accompaniment, which includes realizing chordal accompaniments during recitatives.

This method is effectively a compilation of techniques that have appeared in the earlier methods of Baumgärtner, Vidal, and Raoul, and gives material that likely influenced Stiasny in the writing of his treatise decades later. Like Raoul's treatise, the Paris Conservatoire method gives an indication for how chords are meant to be played (the bass note struck first, followed by quicker, lighter notes in the remainder of the chord; example below).



Indication for the execution of chords, Paris Conservatoire *Méthode*, 1804, p. 38

The method describes chordal recitative accompaniment as the perfection of talent, because it requires technical mastery of the instrument, exact knowledge of harmony, and the intelligence required to apply the techniques tastefully. Like all of the treatises, it emphasizes that the primary function of the bass is to accompany, so it must be done at an extremely high artistic level.

This is the only one of the treatises that I have examined that says anything about affect in relation to the cello accompaniment. It states that when done well, the recitative accompaniment has an even pace which holds with the character of what is happening onstage, and the tone of the cello should follow the nuances of the voice.

On a more practical level, the cellist is advised not to repeat a chord except when the harmony changes, and not to add any embellishments to the bassline. The chords should always be struck as indicated in the example above, and never as rolling arpeggios that change direction.

A third, sixth, or well-placed unison is better than a lot of complex notes, because one should not attract attention away from the singer.

The truest accompaniment is that which serves to make the music better, so if there are some gaps and rests, one may be allowed to add some notes, always within the chord, but in a singing style.

The method gives the following example for how to practice the technique of accompaniment:

gni ar - te se l'in-gan - no ha il suo ef - fet-to se del Pa-dro-ne. io giungo ad es-ser spo-

sa tu da me chie-di e a-vra-i; di ca sa tu sa ra-i il se-con-do Pa-dro-ne, io tel' pro-

Section of realized recitative continuo, Paris Conservatoire *Méthode*, 1804, p. 39

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Bernhard Stiašny: *Méthode pour le Violoncelle*. Pub. posth. 1834.

Bernhard Wenceslaus Stiašny, born in Prague in 1770, was principal cellist in the orchestra of the Prague Theater, and a professor at the Prague Conservatoire. He wrote two instructional works, “*Il maestro e lo scolare, 8 imitazioni e 6 pezzi con fughe per due violoncelli*” and the treatise examined here, the “*Méthode pour le Violoncelle*,” published Mayence, 1832. B.W. Stiašny had a younger brother, Jan, who was also a cellist, and a more prolific composer than his older brother, and whose Op. 7 Concertino was dedicated to Robert Lindley, the most famous cellist to chordally realize basso continuo.

Stiašny’s *Méthode* is an eclectic and far from comprehensive treatise. It begins with a cursory introduction of basic cello skills, followed by several pages of intricate bowing exercises. After dedicating several pages to natural and false harmonics, thumb position, and arpeggios, Stiašny goes on to spend the remainder of the treatise on the technique of chordal recitative accompaniment on the cello.

Stiašny’s treatment of chordal accompaniment practice is notable for several reasons. First, he reinforces the statements of so many cello method authors before him, stressing the need that cellists be fully well-versed in harmony in addition to being fluent on the cello. He advises the performer to follow the recitative closely with the singer in order always to strike

correctly with the harpsichord, and, similar to Baumgärtner's instructions, the attack of the notes must be strong and quick.

Secondly, an intriguing aspect of Stiastry's example realization is the presence of some small notes that appear between the striking of many chords. These answer some questions about filling out more of a chord than can fit within one hand position on the cello, as well as about ornamentation present within realizations. About these, Stiastry says: "You may sometimes fill in the empty space between beats with ornaments, but never allow a deviation from the written chords."²⁶

Finally, the manner of execution of the chords, and their inversions, are dependent on the instrumentation available in the continuo section. Stiastry talks about the pairing of cello *and* double bass for recitative accompaniments, in addition to a keyboard instrument described as the *Clavier* in the German version, and *clavecin* in French, almost certainly the harpsichord. In the extensive example given of a recitative section, he includes both the un-realized bass line and the violoncello line, with its chords based on each of the bass notes, as do Baumgärtner, Raoul, and others in their treatises. He specifies, however, that the single-note bass line is for the Contrabasso, rather than merely the notes that appear for the cello and harpsichord to realize together. Additionally, many of the chords in the cello part add an extra note *below* the written bass note, which puts them into incorrect inversions for the implied figure, but with the Contrabasso playing the bass an octave lower than written, this is no longer a problem. This is an interesting solution to the difficulty of correct chord voicings on the cello due to the limitations of hand position and fifths-tuning. That said, Stiastry adds the following advice in the case that there would be no Contrabasso present:

It is also important to note that since the Violoncellist will often omit the root due to the difficulty of the hand position, the Contra Bass is absolutely necessary; but in the absence of a Contra Bass, the Violoncellist is obliged never to omit the root.²⁷

²⁶ Bernhard Stiastry, *Méthode pour le Violoncelle*, (Mayence: 1834), p. 21

²⁷ Ibid.

1768.

Excerpt from Stiasny's example of recitative accompaniment, p. 24

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Bernhard Romberg: *Violoncell Schule*, 1840

Bernhard Romberg (1767-1841) was born in Dinklage, Prussia. When still young, he accompanied his cousin on a tour to Holland and Paris, and they were so successful that they

were invited to perform at the Concert Spirituel in 1787.²⁸ He was renowned as a virtuoso and is widely considered to be the father of modern cello playing.

I include a brief mention here of Romberg's treatise even though he does not mention chordal realizations of recitative accompaniments, because he gives an exercise at the end of his method that outlines arpeggios above a figured bass note. Though many of the arpeggios would not fit under the hand as a chord, it is interesting to see the repurposing of bass figures this far after basso continuo practice, and to see that cellists were still expected to think harmonically, even if the result is melodic. Romberg recommends this study as important in the accompaniment of quartets, so that the cellist may apply a greater understanding of harmony in order to provide a more effective harmonic foundation to the quartet. This idea seems to share sentiments about the role of the cello with Quantz, who advocated that cellists understand harmony so that they can bring out the most important notes and give direction and support to the ensemble.



Excerpt from Arpeggio study, Romberg p. 122

Analysis, comparison and commentary

From many of the common themes shared by the treatises discussed above, we can make the following general conclusions about the performance practice of chordal recitative accompaniment on the cello:

- The primary role of the cello was still considered to be accompanimental rather than solo, but the execution of accompaniment had been elevated to a virtuosic art in and of itself.

²⁸ Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewski, *The Violoncello and Its History*. (London and New York: Novello and Company, 1894), p.115

- All cellists of the time were expected to have a full, working understanding of harmony, and the ability to put this knowledge into practice by realizing continuo lines was a vital skill for every professional cellist.
- Cellists had to have a strong enough grasp of the technical side of cello playing to be able to execute difficult chords cleanly and in tune enough to be a harmonic basis for singers.

There is some slight variation between the treatises, but some common ideas about execution include:

- The bass note should be struck first, resonantly, before the remainder of the chord is played, more lightly and quickly.
- Chords should be played only from the bass note up, and never arpeggiated in more than one direction
- The root of the chord must never be omitted, though if there is also a double bass playing (which was often the case), the cello can play the chord in a different inversion than what is written
- Though it is never advised that cellists ornament the bassline in addition to playing chords, small extra notes can be added during empty sections if they fit within the harmony and contribute to the effectiveness of the performance

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Chapter 3. Practical application of continuo realization techniques

General rules to keep in mind

The two main elements involved in playing chordal continuo realizations on the cello are:

- Understanding harmony
- Technical ability to play double stops and chords

All of the cello treatises, even many that do not cover the topic of chordal continuo realization, emphasize the importance of understanding harmony. As such, an incredibly helpful part of my own experience with learning to play chords on the cello was learning the history and theory of basso continuo, and learning very basic basso continuo realization skills on the harpsichord. Though not all of the chords playable on the harpsichord work on the cello, the same rules of harmony and doubling apply. Special care must always be taken to ensure proper harmonic movement (i.e. no parallel fifths or octaves) and to avoid doubling the melody whenever possible.

Typical voicings for the cello

Several pieces of advice from C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch* that could be particularly helpful for cellists' continuo realization are as follows:²⁹

- In two-part accompaniments, only the bass and the third are played
- In three-part accompaniments, the bass, third and fifth are played, but in some cases the octave of the bass can be substituted for the fifth
- Contrary motion makes the best accompaniments
- Three-part and two-part accompaniments are often preferable to more full-voiced accompaniments
- The bass can play thirds in order to avoid a bad progression, but do not play thirds above the bass if it results in doubling the solo line.
- It is also acceptable to play parallel sixths.

An aside:

- Because the cello is tuned in fifths, it is almost impossible to play triads on the cello. Therefore, many chords with the root in the bass will be spaced with a fifth on the bottom and either one or two sixths above it, depending on the lowest string.

Problems that may arise and possible solutions

Modern performers and scholars have identified certain problems that might arise in chordal cello realizations, and offer a variety of solutions to these issues. David Watkin discusses the problem of sparse texture in music accompanied by only one cello, and gives two ways performers could deal with this: 1: what Watkin calls "lateral harmony", i.e. the addition of embellishments or other melodic notes; and 2: the use of double stops and chords.³⁰ An example of Watkin's "lateral harmony" is the practice of embellishing basslines, as was outlined by Gasparini in his treatise, *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo* (1708).³¹ This, however, is a practice strongly discouraged by Quantz and several of the treatise authors discussed above, so I do not advise this in the accompaniment of recitatives.

The second way to remedy a sparse texture, according to David Watkin, is to add double stops and chords to the accompaniment line. One problem that may arise when a cellist realizes a figured bass line, and which would not be quite as apparent with a harpsichord or lute, is that sometimes the bass will end up playing higher than the solo line.³² The cello must also be extra vigilant not to double the solo line, so as to avoid incorrect textural balance, "with doubled thirds and no fifth, for instance."³³ Typical voicings one would find in harpsichord continuo realization, and which are advocated in treatises of harmony, are also often difficult on the cello, due to the limited number of strings and its tuning in fifths. Instruments tuned in fourths or thirds, like the

²⁹ C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, (1753. Tr. and Ed. William J. Mitchell, London: Eulenburg, 1949), p. 199, pp.390-391

³⁰ David Watkin, "Corelli's Op. 5 Sonatas: 'Violino e violone o cimbalo'?" *Early Music* (1996):, 653.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 659

³² *Ibid.*, p. 658

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 654

viola da gamba or lute, have a wider range of chords available and several viola da gamba treatises outline how to realize continuo lines. During the Baroque, string tunings, as well as the instruments themselves, were much less standardized than they are today, so one way the cello could have played chords more easily is with the option of more strings (Matheson is known to have mentioned several different models of cellos and violas, including what is now known as the violoncello piccolo) or different tunings.³⁴ With the limitations of four strings tuned in fifths, however, the cello may often find itself playing thirds above the written bass note, spacing almost never found in a harpsichord realization without a full realization above it in the right hand. Though the interval of a third in the bass can cause the texture to feel bottom-heavy, it is consistently found in the music of Boccherini, Tartini, and Stradella.³⁵

In their search for ways to solve voice leading problems in realized cello continuo, some modern scholars have turned to lute practice for answers. David Watkin states that both the lute and the cello were considered to fulfill the role of a harmonic and melody bass instrument, which, according to St. Lambert meant they were more interchangeable with one another.³⁶ According to Baillot, Levasseur, Catel, and Baudiot in their *Methode de violoncelle et de Basse d'accompagnement* (1804), the cello can use the lute trick, when necessary, of dropping the bass note down an octave when it becomes impractical to play realizations above the written note.³⁷ Lutenists will also often resolve dissonances incorrectly (in the wrong octave) if it allows for greater resonance, which cellists can also do.³⁸

Example of recitative with accompanying chords

I have decided to present an example myself of a realized recitative accompaniment for the cello, which I have realized in the style of chordal accompaniment presented in the treatises discussed in this paper. I chose the following recitative from Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte*, since it was written in 1790, which is comfortably in the middle of the existence of this practice.

(See following page)

³⁴ David Watkin, "Corelli's Op. 5 Sonatas: 'Violino e violone o cimbalo?'" *Early Music* (1996): p. 659.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 657

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 658-659

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 659

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Handwritten musical score for Act II Scene XII from *Così fan tutte*, W.A. Mozart. The score is written on six systems of three staves each. The top staff is labeled "Sola" and the second staff is labeled "Realization". The third staff is labeled "Bass line". The first system is labeled "Flord". The fourth system is labeled "Gugl" and "Fired". The score is written in a handwritten style with various musical notations including notes, rests, and accidentals.

Act II Scene XII from *Così fan tutte*, W.A. Mozart

Final thoughts

Though my research was initially begun by my curiosity after hearing cellists play chords in their continuo lines during performances of Bach oratorios and earlier Italian chamber music, I have found little that I consider historical proof that this practice would have been employed in such circumstances and repertoire. Many scholars have examined the issue and made the case that cellists in the Baroque, especially between the late 1600's and mid-1700's, were accustomed to playing chords in their accompanimental lines, not unlike keyboardists or lutenists realizing continuo lines. Though there are a few accounts of cellists playing chordal accompaniments during this time, most of the evidence provided is based on assumptions that I do not think are reasonable to make, and I do not find myself entirely convinced by their arguments.

Though I was disappointed not to have discovered a practice of chordal cello accompaniment applicable to all types of repertoire which I could have used in everyday performance, I was thrilled to find such a wealth of information and clear instructions regarding the practice of chordal realization on the cello in classical operatic recitatives. It is surprising to me how well-documented this practice is, and yet how few people take the opportunity to employ the techniques in performance. It has been very rewarding to learn the techniques described in these treatises, and I hope to get a chance to use them in a classical opera soon.

I find it extremely interesting that though I started this research with the hope of finding a new way of playing continuo lines for baroque music in general, the actual practices that I found deal with music performed after the Baroque was over. What we think of as one of the defining characteristics of baroque music—the basso continuo tradition—was coming to a close, but simultaneously, cellists were beginning to create a virtuoso art out of executing intricately figured basslines. I cannot help but see this as connected to the rise in virtuosity in the cello world, which leads to something of a contradiction. While one of the most important ideals in the Baroque was the firm basis of all music in harmony, and full harmonic awareness a high priority, the shift in priorities to impressive technical proficiency around the turn of the 19th century was causing the focus to shift less to general musicianship, and more to virtuosity. I find it fascinating, therefore, that during this revolution of cello playing and the birth of the cello as a virtuoso instrument striving to equal the stature of the violin, cellists were looking back at the practice of basso continuo, and emulating, in their way, the harpsichordists of the previous century.

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