

Foreword

Anyone who assumes the task of publishing a method of thoroughbass playing today has no need of proving the necessity for it. There is no useful method except Riemann's small *Katechismus*, yet everyone who performs or arranges the music of the 17th and 18th centuries is forced to come to terms continually with the problems of thoroughbass. The reprinting of old sources (Praetorius, Telemann, C. P. E. Bach, Quantz), important though it is for the theoretical foundation of thoroughbass technique, cannot take the place of a practical thoroughbass method such as we need today. What is required is a work in which we can again learn, through *unrealized* and progressively arranged practice examples, what every musician knew then, namely how to improvise the realization of a figured bass at the instrument, without previous written preparation, and in doing so to adapt it each time to the particular circumstances.

No one will deny the need of achieving this objective, since there are still not many accompanists today who trust themselves (and whom a conductor will allow) to accompany a Bach cantata or Passion from the figures in the score. But this cannot be achieved by reprinting one of the great old thoroughbass methods, for these works are intolerably verbose as instruction books for students today, and, while thoroughbass is their main subject, they extend over every conceivable area of music. Others again, such as Mattheson's *Kleine Generalbass-Schule* or Telemann's *Singe- Spiel- und Generalbass-Übungen*, do not proceed beyond first principles.

Today it is customary for anyone who begins the study of thoroughbass playing to have acquired some previous knowledge of the simpler principles of harmony, or at least enough of the fundamental principles of music to suffice for the study of the present method. Accordingly, the first part, which treats of the meaning of the figures and of their use in four-part, note-against-note writing, can be more briefly treated than in the 18th-century methods. The crucial part of our book lies in the second part, the examples from 17th- and 18th-century compositions; that is, in the application of "school knowledge" to the multifarious and living music of the Baroque era. From the basic theoretical works of that period we have chosen only what the practical musician must know; the scholar will always have to refer to the sources themselves. The present method, though, within its limits may help to supply the practical musician with the foundations for a stylistically suitable performance of the music of the Baroque.

Foreword

Much of importance is yet to be done in this area, for there is still a wide gap between knowledge and practice. In the last century we were given many editions that were unobjectionable from a scholarly standpoint but artistically unsatisfactory (I am thinking now, among other things, about many cadences of Chrysander in the oratorios of Handel, or Seiffert's editing of Handel's organ concertos). Or there were new editions that were musically of high quality but stylistically impossible (e.g. of violin concertos by outstanding violin virtuosos). For some years now it has seemed as though we have at last achieved the necessary synthesis—that is, acquiring the scholarly knowledge of the performance principles of the thoroughbass period as an obvious foundation, but then fostering beyond it that artistic freedom without which music cannot even exist (e.g. Arnold Schering, Friedrich Blume). It is hoped that the present method will provide the student with a skill—not only a knowledge—that may later qualify him for this freedom, insofar as his artistic powers permit.

It is plain to the writer that such a goal will be reached only in part through this first attempt at a modern thoroughbass method; certain unfortunate condensations and limitations were necessary, principally because of the lack of space enjoined by the cost of publication. In spite of that, publisher and author hope that the method may be assiduously used in institutions where church and school music are taught, in musicological proseminars, in conducting and composition classes of conservatories (where, with appropriate oral supplementation by the teacher, it could be used in teaching harmony, and would be more stimulating for students than most of the dry instruction of this subject), and above all by the many, even the amateurs, who are concerned with the execution or arranging of old music for church, home, or concert hall. It is with all these in mind that the method was planned. Since the examples have been taken from the best literature of the Baroque period, there is also the possibility that the method may well be used for practical music-making, and that would be pre-eminently in the spirit of the period.

The reader who has worked through this method will then seek to penetrate further into the material by himself, to read the sources himself, and to educate himself in the very rich literature that we have in the works of Bach and Handel, in the monuments of musical art of the 17th and 18th centuries, and other original editions. There is no end to learning! And finally, in whatever new ways a new harmony and a new harmony teaching may evolve, thoroughbass holds good as the foundation of the music of the 17th and 18th centuries and thereby of our own music also, and no one may be called "a solid musician" (in the words of F. E. Niedt) who does not master it thoroughly.

Hermann Keller

Stuttgart, Summer of 1931