

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

BAROQUE CONTINUO: A PRACTICAL MANUAL FOR HARPISTS

A MAJOR DOCUMENT

SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF MUSIC

Field of Harp Performance

By

Alison Elizabeth Attar

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

June 2003

© Copyright by Alison E. Attar 2003
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Although the harp was a fairly prominent continuo instrument throughout the Baroque period, there is a lacuna of information concerning harp continuo performance practices. Any written information was directed towards keyboard and lute players, and the skill of improvising continuo on the harp was learned aurally. However, brief references to the harp in Baroque music publications and art of the time clearly indicate that the harp was an essential continuo instrument until about 1750.

This manual provides the foundation for further studies of Baroque continuo playing on the harp. Included are a brief history of continuo playing, instructions on learning how to read and harmonize figured bass, the basic rules of good counterpoint, an introduction to the general concept of style, detailed examples of how to prepare for a first performance, a variety of chapters demonstrating the use of harp and continuo in the Baroque era using examples by Handel, Lawes, Purcell, and Monteverdi, advice on instrument selection, and learning to tune by ear. Each chapter is followed by a short list of pertinent suggested readings.

Information for this manual was collected from both primary and secondary sources discussing performance practices and basso continuo realization on keyboard instruments and lute. This academic information has been combined with personal experience in Baroque harp performance and teaching observations made in the author's private studio. The manual assumes a basic knowledge of music theory, note-reading skills and intermediate proficiency on the harp. It is designed to accommodate both

amateur and professional players and encourages historically informed performances.

Texts are in English whenever practical.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Elizabeth Cifani for her constant vision and support; Liz, Stephen Alltop, Robert Barris, Michael Pisaro and William Porter for participating on my doctoral committee; Brian, Allen, Mom and Dad for their persistence; and Barbara Weiss for her patience and encouragement. I would also like to offer a special thanks to Thomas Schaller for his engraving work, to Carl Johnson for diligently completing a trial version of the 12-Step Continuo program outlined in Chapter 3, and to the publishers who let me reproduce their works here for the purpose of examples.

PREFACE

After deciding that I was interested in learning to play Baroque continuo, I just couldn't find the information I needed to get started. Although I was offered a tremendous amount of information by historical harpists regarding technique, text and musical sources; I plunged into a continuo band; studied repertoire, style and interpretation with harpsichordists; and attended a class for beginning continuo players on harpsichord, I just couldn't get "started." The basics of Baroque continuo on the harp were not clear to me, and I found myself swimming in a sea of information.

This manual is designed to provide the information that you need *before* you are immersed in discussions of historical technique and primary sources, *before* you plunge into a continuo band, and most certainly *before* entering a beginning continuo class for keyboard players. It is designed for people who are not sure if they are even interested in Baroque continuo. And it is designed for people who must, whether they are interested or not, serve as a Baroque continuo accompanist for whatever reason.

If you find that you are interested in learning more about Baroque continuo playing, continue your reading studies with some of the **Suggested Readings**. Attend an early music or historical harp conference. Find a local expert with whom to study in the field of Baroque music. Realize scores and play along with recordings in the privacy of your living room. Most of all enjoy the journey!