A basic IMPRO KIT

Introduction

Using the concept of a DIY kit, this worksheet features fundamental tools for Baroque improvisation. Although these are expressed in grand staff notation, they are not only intended for keyboard players but for ALL musicians who wish to upgrade their know-how in the art of extemporization.

Historically speaking, counterpoint was the earliest manifestation of polyphony, harmony deriving from it later. Therefore it is in that order that I present them: **5 species of counterpoint** (and their rules) are followed by **22 harmonies** (and a rule here too). I then discuss **3 essential cadences**, the vital punctuation connecting music phrases to each other. After that, we move on to **11 partimento bass motions**, equally vital building-blocks of composition (and I consider improvisation as nothing else than immediate and on-the-spot composition). My method closes with the discussion of the 3 melodic/harmonic progressions **Monte, Fonte and Ponte**.

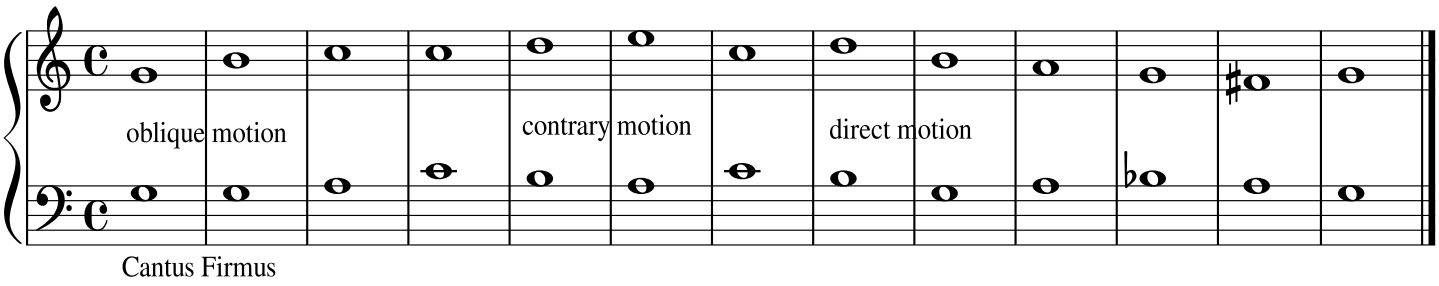
I have purposefully aimed to reduce textual explanations, leaving the examples to speak for themselves. Further reading on each topic will of course contribute to more knowledge, fluency and skilfulness.

Here are just a few suggestions (amongst many) for each section:

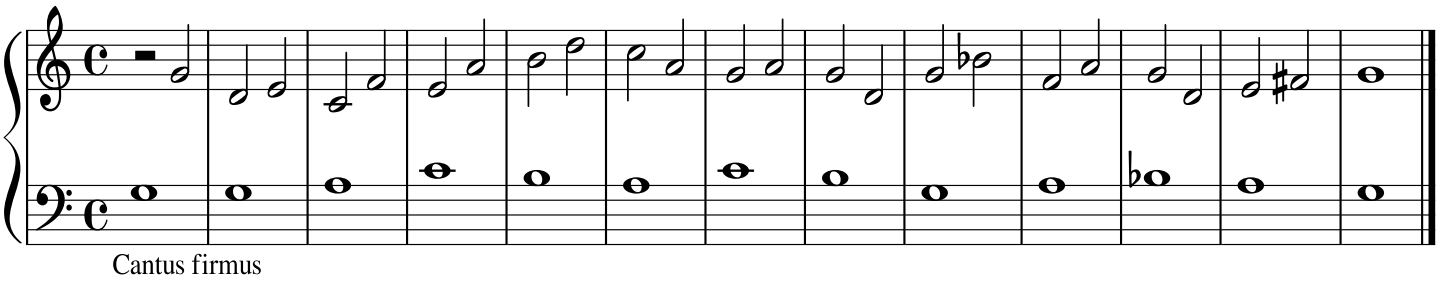
- **counterpoint:** Girolamo Diruta, Il Transilvano, 1593, book 2, Johann Joseph Fux, Gradus ad Parnassum (1725), etc.
- **harmony (thorough-bass):** Georg Muffat, Regulae Concentuum Partiturae, 1699, Denis Delair, Traité d´accompagnement pour le Théorbe et le Clavecin, 1690, Jean-François Dandrieu, Principes de l´Accompagnement du Clavecin, 1719, Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen, 1762 and a myriad of other sources.
- **Rule of the Octave (thorough-bass):** François Campion, Traité d'accompagnement (1716) et Addition (1730), Michel Corette, Le Maître de Clavecin (1753), etc.
- **cadences:** any treatise of composition from the 17th or 18th century or later!
- **partimento basses:** exercices according to Francesco Durante (1684–1755), The Brothers Greco (1650s–1720s), Fedele Fenaroli (1730–1818), Giovanni Paisiello (1741–1816), etc.
- **Monte, Fonte, Ponte**: Joseph Riepel, Anfangsgründe zur musikalischen Setzkunst, (1752/1755).

5 Species of Counterpoint

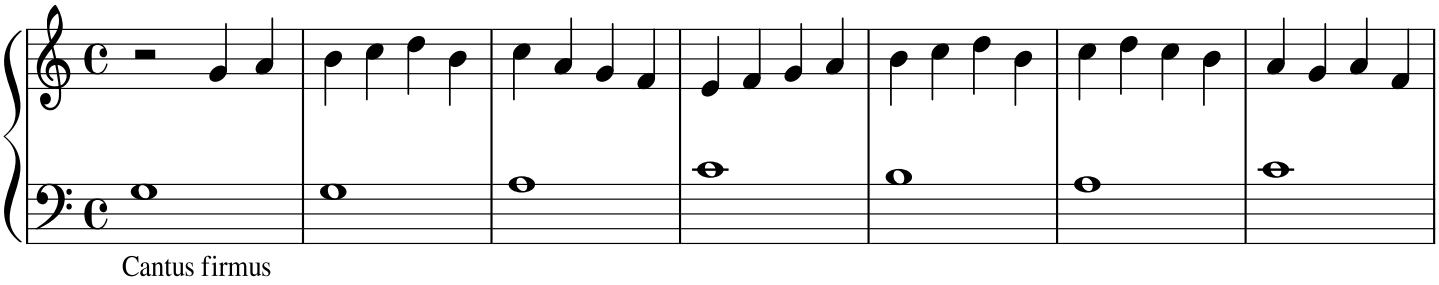
1st species: note against note

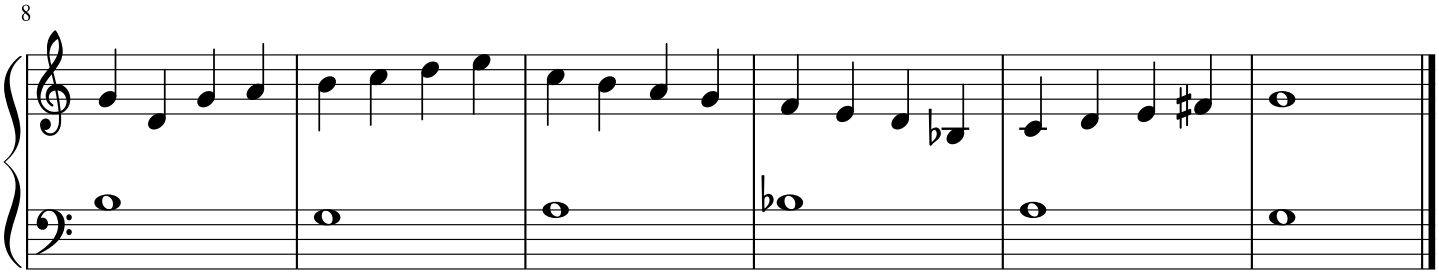


2nd species: 2 notes against 1



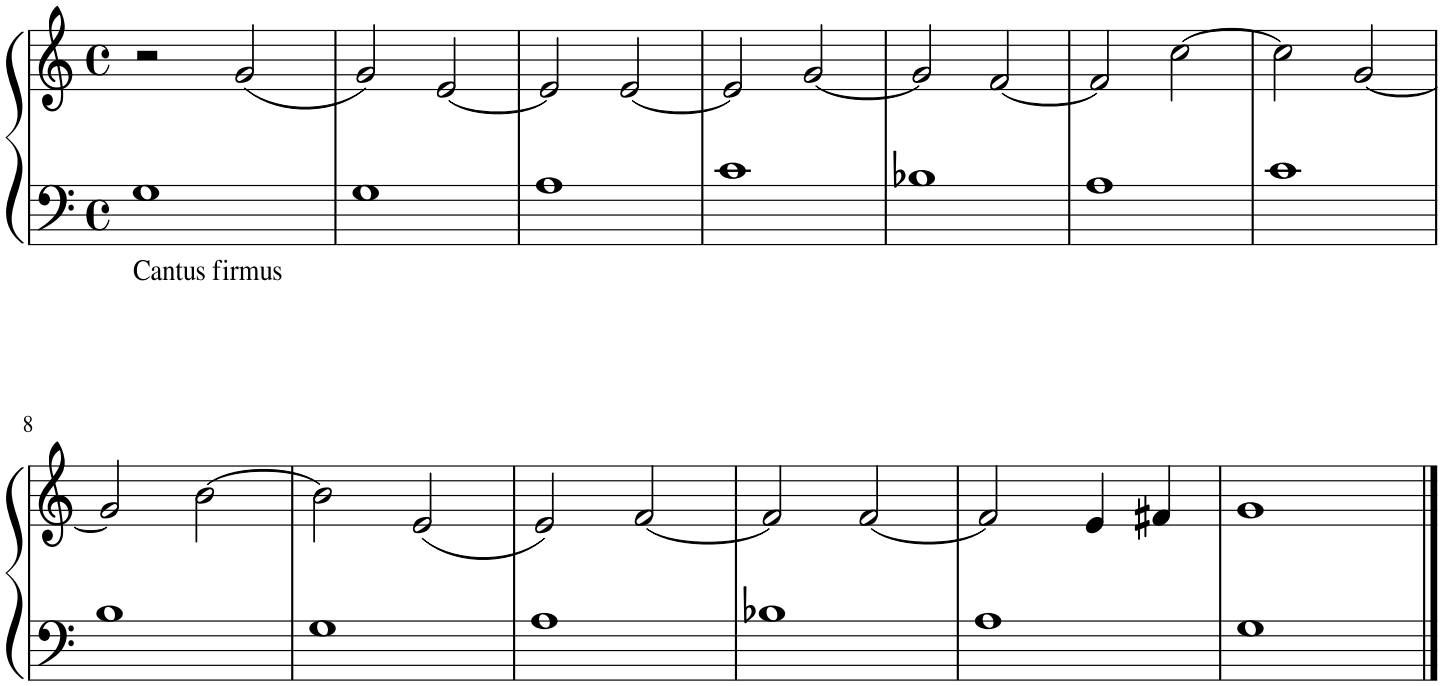
3rd species: 4 notes against 1



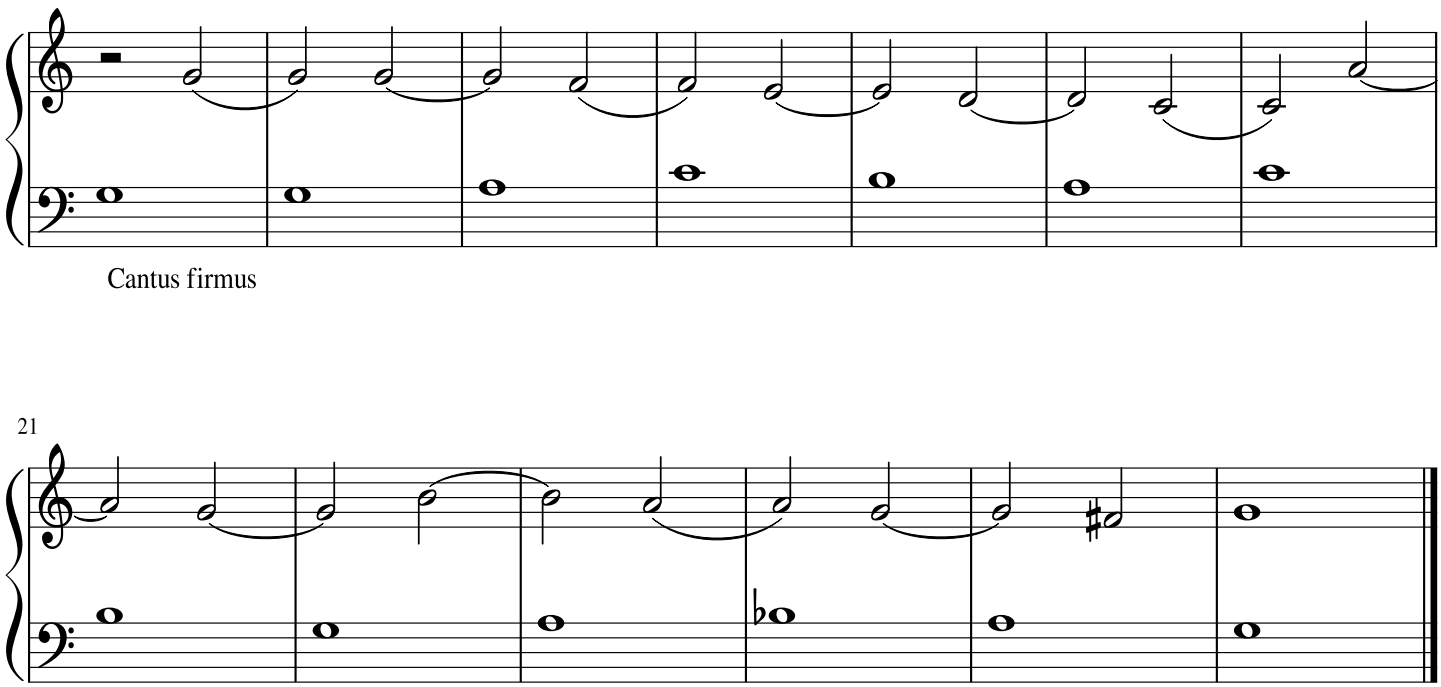


4th species: ligatures

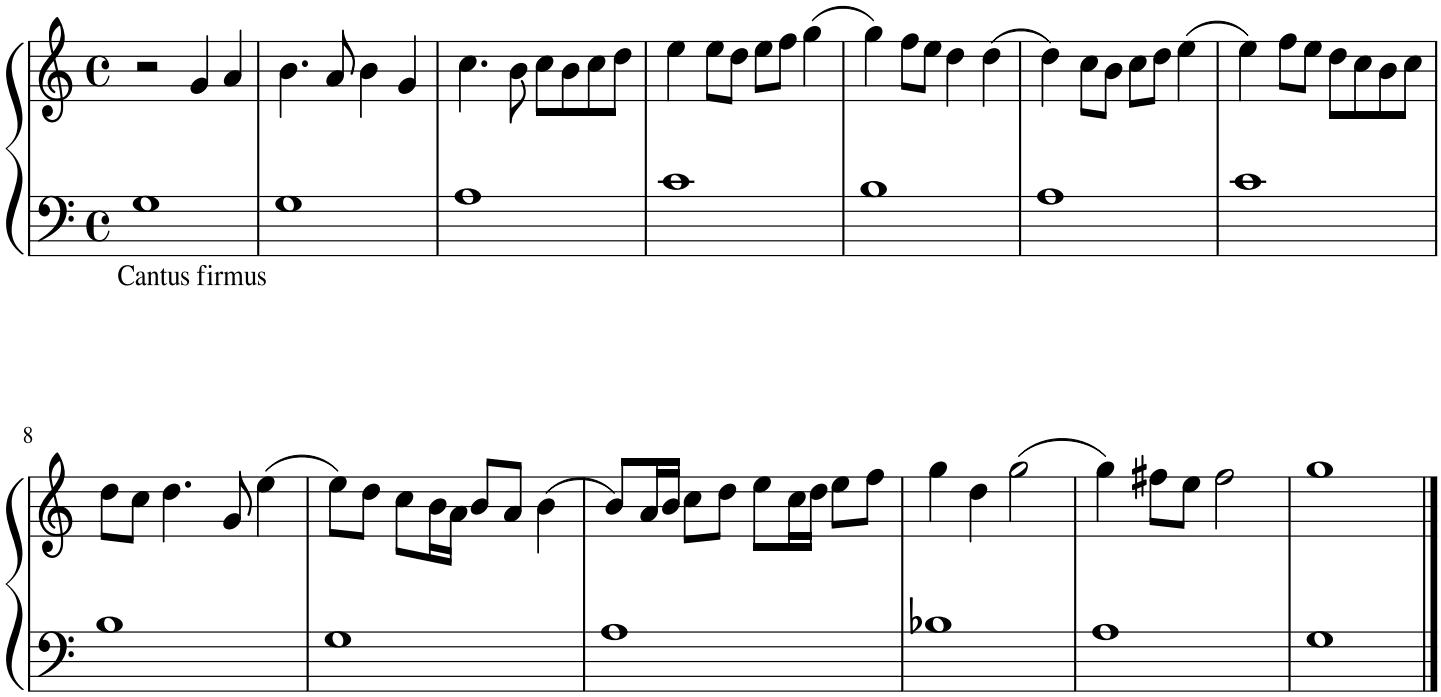
Ligatures with consonances



Ligatures with dissonances

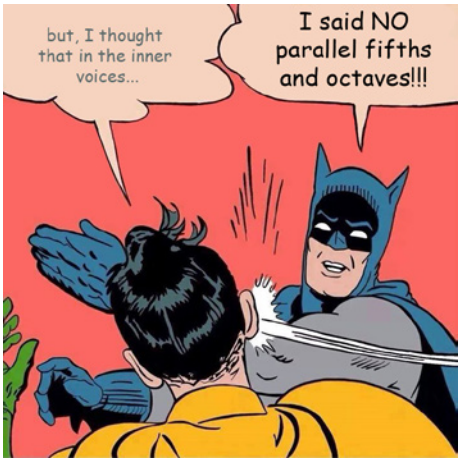


5th species: florid



A FEW RULES:

- Perfect consonances: 5th & 8th
- Imperfect consonances: 3rd & 6th
- Dissonances: 4th, 7th & 9th
  - > *From a perfect consonance to another perfect consonance:* contrary or oblique motion.
  - > *From a perfect consonance to an imperfect consonance:* as one wants.
  - > *From a imperfect consonance to a perfect consonance:* contrary or oblique motion.
  - > *From an imperfect consonance to another imperfect consonance:* as one wants.
- Parallel 5ths and 8ths prohibited!
- The counterpoint must begin and end on a perfect consonance.
- The counterpoint must be as singable and melodic as possible.



22 Harmonies

The Rule of the Octave

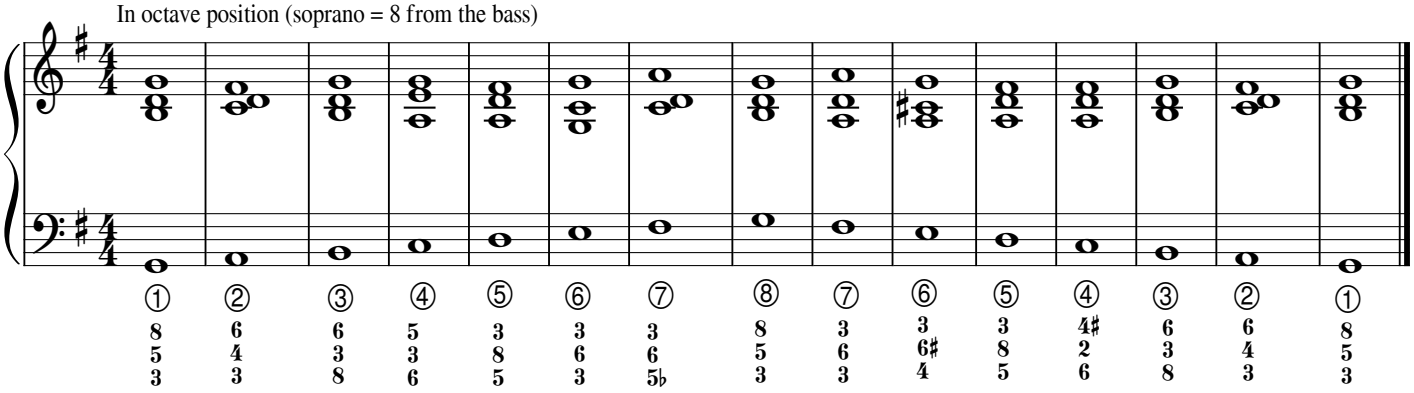
The rule of the octave is a thorough-bass system devised in the early 1700s and hugely popular from then on amongst lutenists and keyboard players. It consists in the attribution of an "ideal" harmony for each degree of the rising and descending diatonic scale. It is also the cornerstone of the *regole* (rules) of partimento practice. In all, the Rule governs **7 harmonies/sonorities**, some used in more than one situation.

The **15 other harmonies** described later fall into the category of "independent" sonorities, i.e. not governed by the Rule.

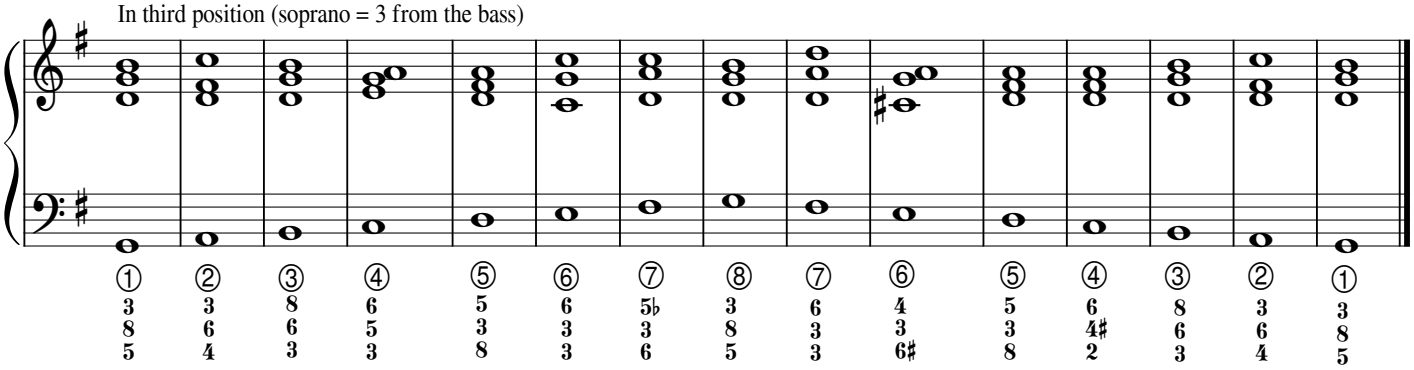
The figures refer to the bass and are placed between the 2 staves. The circled numbers in black under the bass staff indicate the degree of the tonality.

The Rule of the Octave

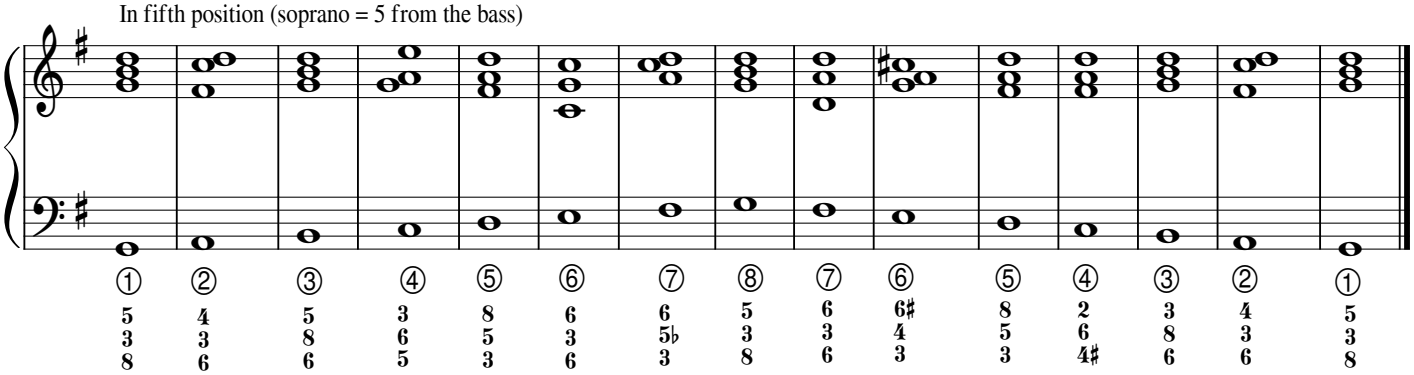
In octave position (soprano = 8 from the bass)



In third position (soprano = 3 from the bass)



In fifth position (soprano = 5 from the bass)



Internal regulations for the Rule of the Octave

5
3 (root) on the 1st or 5th degree.
8

6
4 (little sixth) on 2nd degree going up or down, 6th degree going down.
3

8
6 (simple sixth) on 3rd degree going up or down.
3

6
5 (fifth and sixth) on the 4th degree going up.
3

3 6
3 or 6 (doubled sixth) on 6th degree going up and 7th degree going down.
6 3

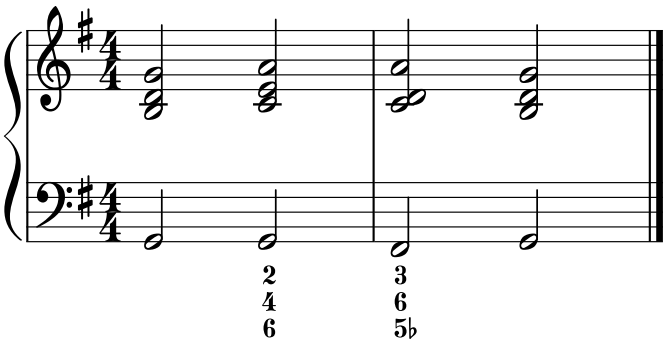
5b
6 (diminished fifth) on 7th degree going up.
3

6
4# (augmented fourth) on 4th degree going down.
2

Other harmonies/chords/sonorities not contained in the Rule of the Octave

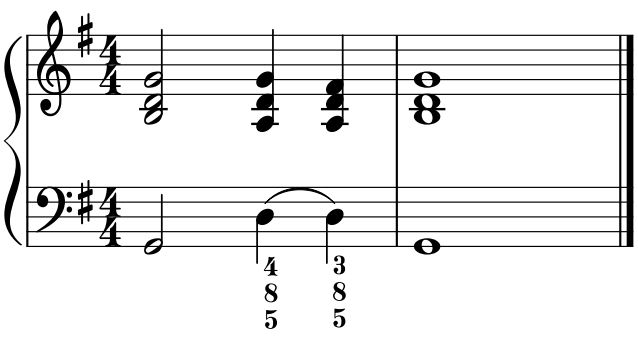
The 2 chord

The 2 chord is played on the 1st degree. Habitually standing alone, it asks for a 6 and 4. The bass becomes a dissonance on a 2 chord and resolves downwards to (usually) a 6 chord.



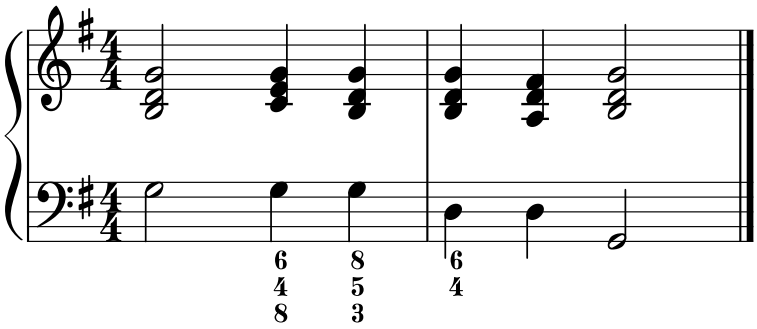
The 4 chord

The 4 chord is played either on the 1st or the 5th degree. The 4 (habitually standing alone) asks for a 5 and 8. It resolves down to a 3.



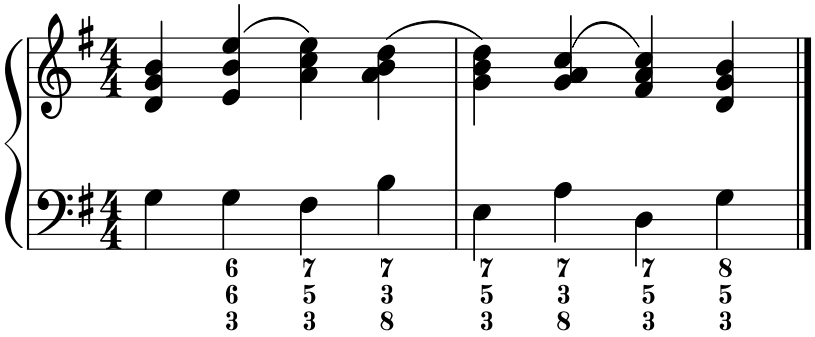
The 6/4 chord

The 6/4 chord is played either on the 1st or the 5th degree. The 6 and 4 (habitually standing alone) ask for an 8 and resolve down to a consonance.



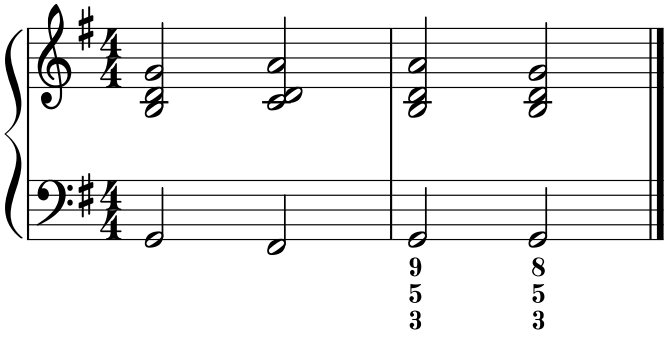
The 7 chord

The 7 chord is played on any degree. It must be prepared by a preceding 6 chord. The 7 (habitually standing alone) requires either a 5 and 3, or an 8 and 3, and resolves downwards. For reasons of voice leading, the alternating 7 chord in a sequence does not contain a 5, which is then replaced by an 8.



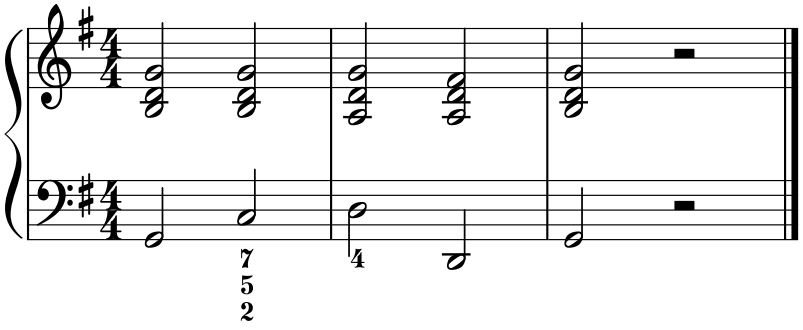
The 9 chord

The 9 chord is played on any degree. The 9 (habitually standing alone) requires a 5 and a 3.
It must be prepared and resolved downwards.



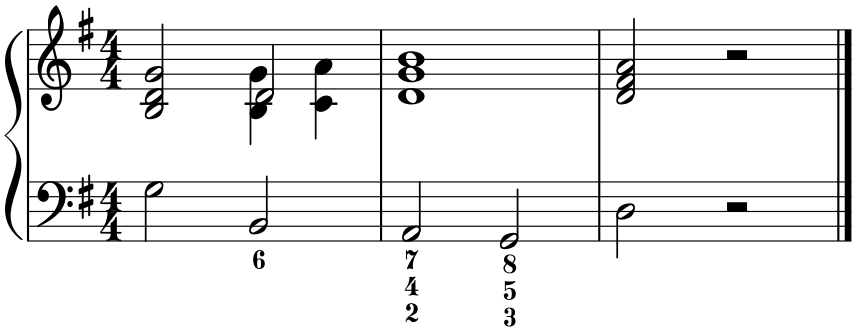
The $\frac{7}{5}{}_{2}$ chord

The 7/5/2 chord is played on the 4th degree. The bass then rises to the 5th degree, usually generating a 4 chord.



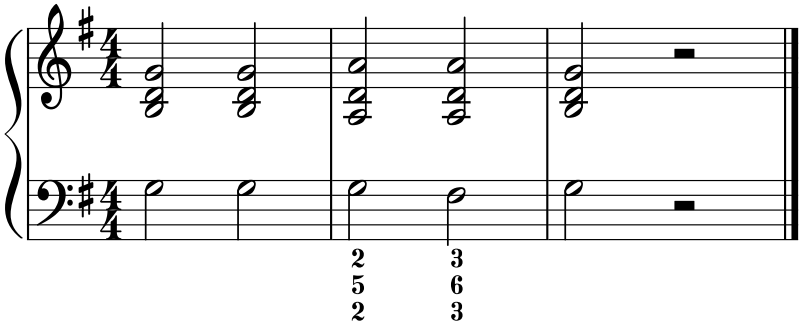
The $\begin{matrix}7\\4\\2\end{matrix}$ chord

The 7/4/2 chord is (mostly) played on the 2nd degree. The bass subsequently descends one step, generating a consonance.



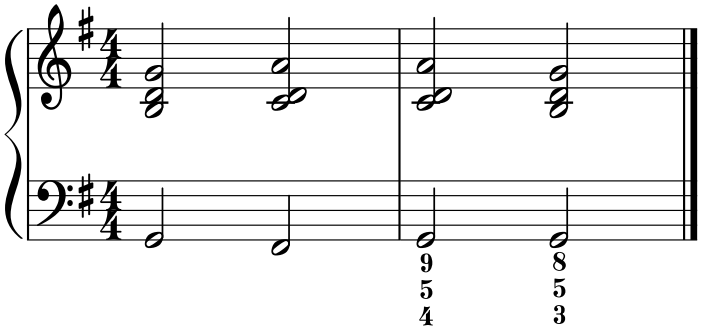
The $\begin{matrix}2\\5\\2\end{matrix}$ chord

The 2/5/2 chord is (mostly) played on the 2nd degree. The bass subsequently descends one step, generating a consonance.



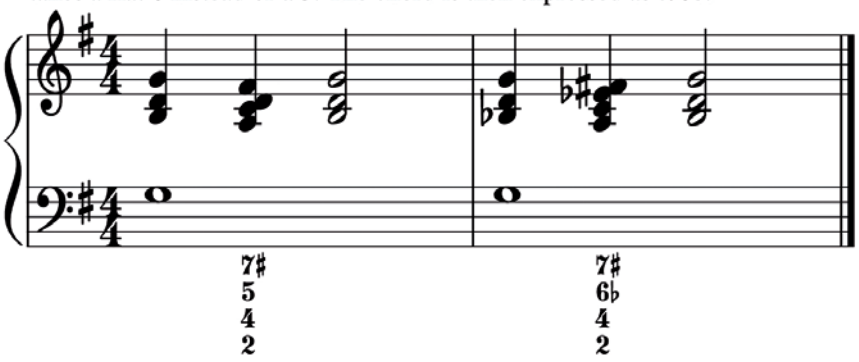
The $\begin{matrix}9\\4\end{matrix}$ chord

The $\begin{matrix}9\\4\end{matrix}$ chord is played on any degree. Both the 9 and 4 (habitually standing alone) must be prepared and resolved downwards, usually to a root chord. The 9 and 4 require a 5.



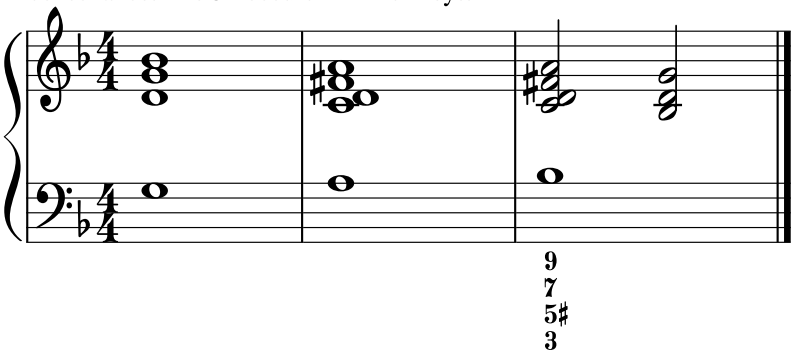
The 7# chord

The 7# chord is played either on the tonic or the dominant. The 7# (habitually standing alone) takes a compulsory 2 and 4, and optional 5. The 7# resolves upwards, generating a consonance. In minor, the 7# takes a flat 6 instead of a 5. The chord is then expressed as 7/6b.



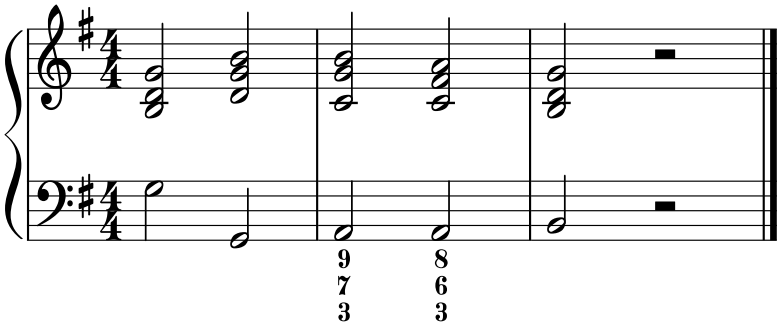
The 5# chord

The 5# chord is frequently played on the 3rd degree but can occur on others. Habitually standing alone, it takes a compulsory 9, 7 and 3. The 5# resolves upwards, whilst the 9 and 7 move downwards, generating a consonance. The 5# occurs in minor keys.



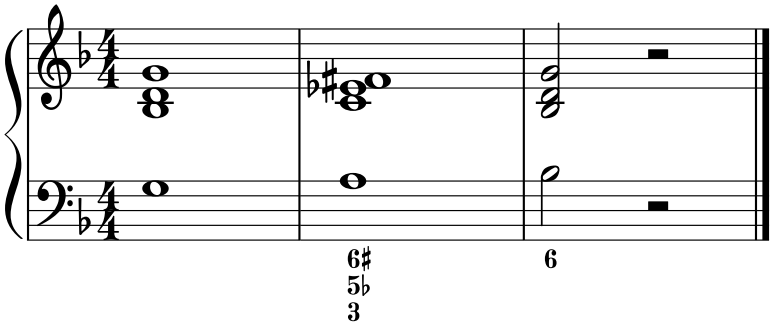
The $\frac{9}{7}$ chord

The 9/7 chord is played on any degree. The 9 and 7 (habitually standing alone) take a compulsory 3 and optional 5. Both the 9 and 7 resolve downwards, generating a 6 chord.



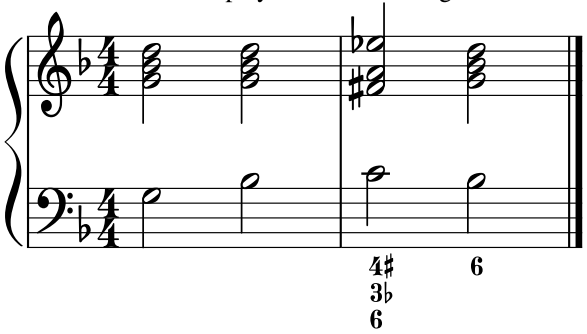
The $\frac{5\flat}{6\sharp}$ chord

The 5b/6# chord is played on the 2nd degree. The 5b and 6# habitually stand alone and take a compulsory 3.



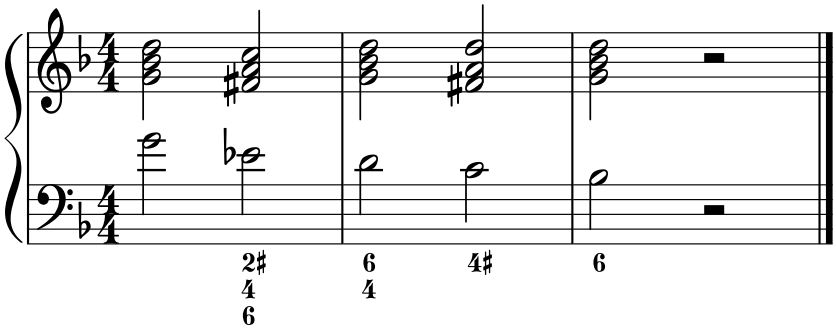
The $\frac{4\sharp}{3\flat}$ chord

The 4#/3b chord is played on the 4th degree. The 4# and 3b habitually stand alone and take a compulsory 6.



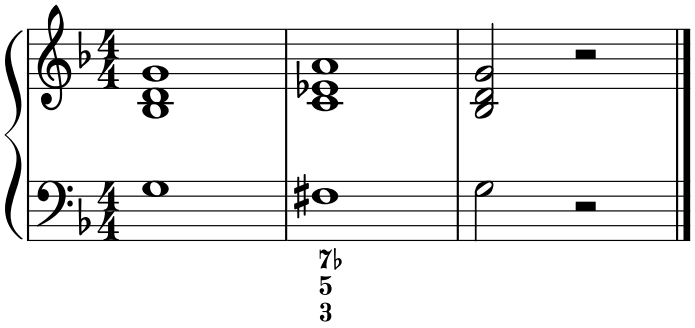
The 2# chord

The 2# chord is played on the 6th degree. The 2# habitually stands alone and takes a compulsory 4 and 6.



The 7b chord

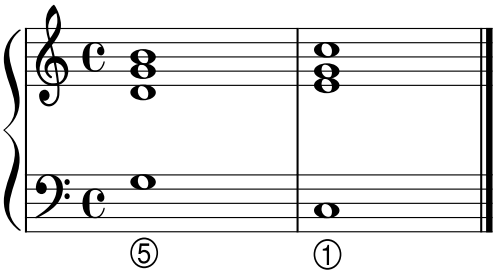
The 7b chord is played on the 7th degree. The 7b habitually stands alone and takes a compulsory 3 and 5.



3 CADENCES (CLAUSULAE)

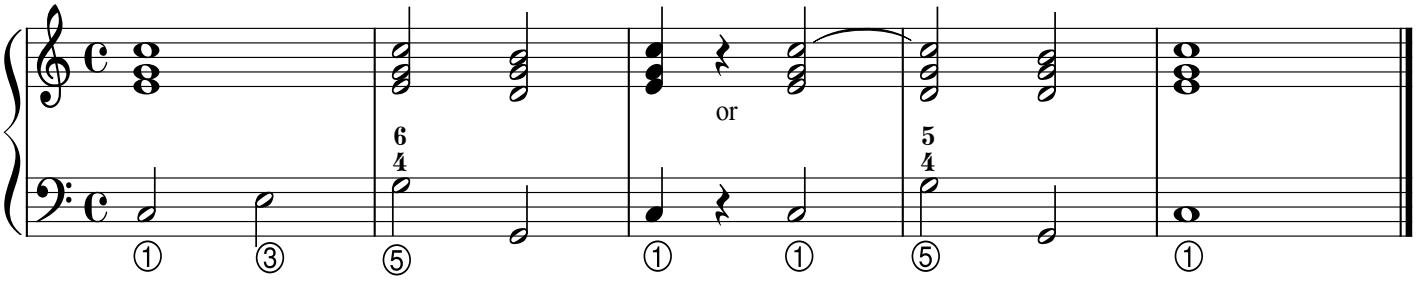
The simple cadence

The simple cadence (cadenza semplice) features only 1 chord/sonority on the 5th degree.



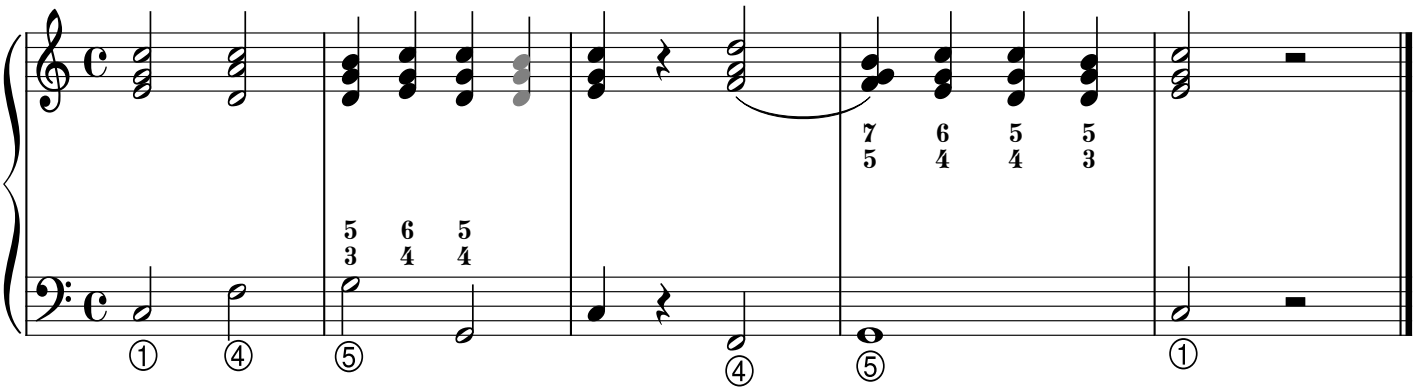
The compound cadence

The compound cadence (cadenza composta) features 2 chords/sonorities on the 5th degree.



The double cadence

The double cadence (cadenza doppia) features 3 or 4 chords/sonorities - displayed on 4 "steps" - on the 5th degree.



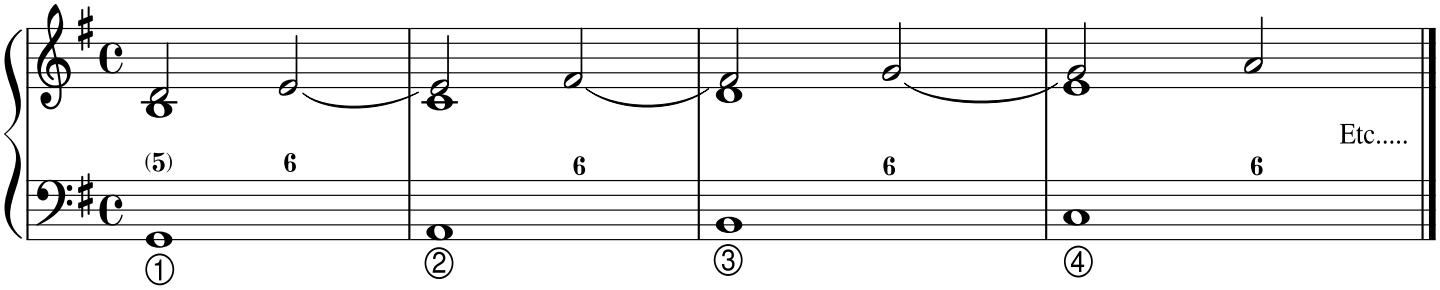
Partimento basses

Standard motions

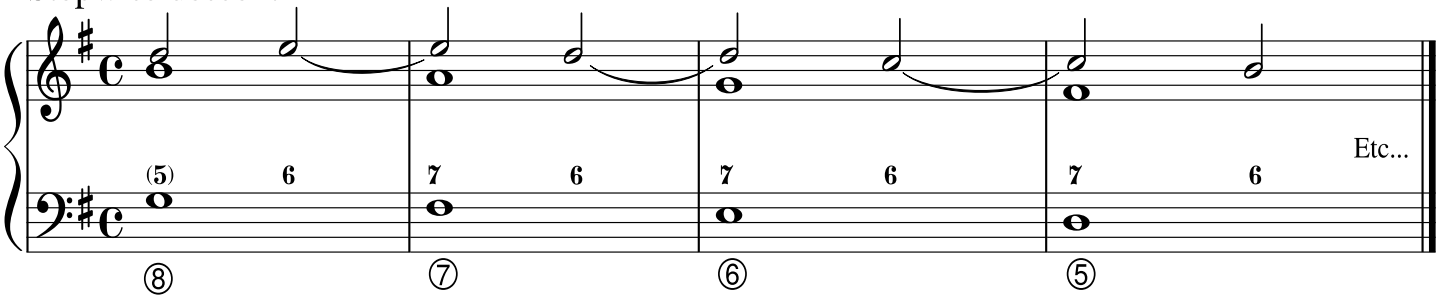
The following standard basses are derived from the partimento practice as taught by the Napolitan school of the 17th and 18th centuries. The *moti del basso* (bass motions) were devised as exercises to train conventional models of voice leading, harmony and musical form, using the Rule of the Octave, cadences and sequences. They were popularised by composers and pedagogues (*maestri*) such as the Greco brothers, Insanguine, Durante, Fenaroli, Paisiello and others. This is merely a selection of the main bass schematas which command music from roughly 1650 onwards.

As mentioned above, the figured bass is placed between the 2 staves. The circled numbers in black under the bass staff indicate the degree of the principle tonality (in grey for alternative degrees generated by modulation).

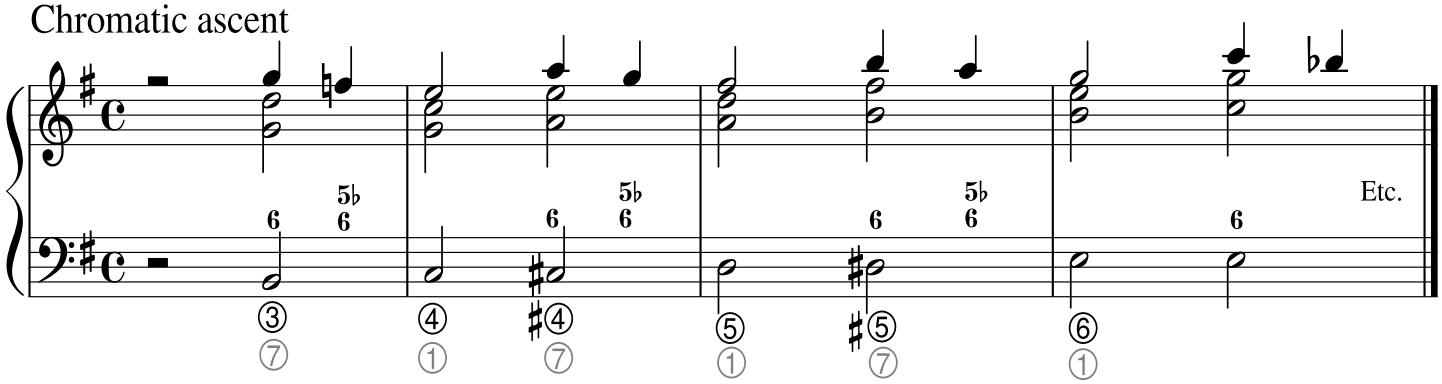
Stepwise ascent



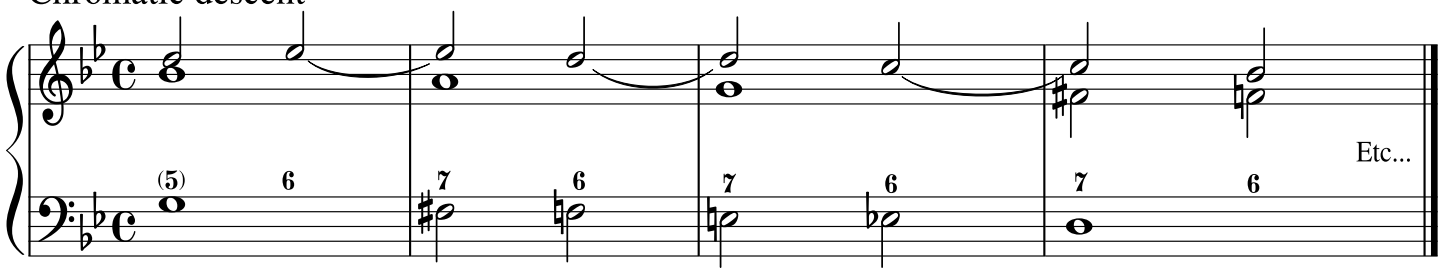
Stepwise descent



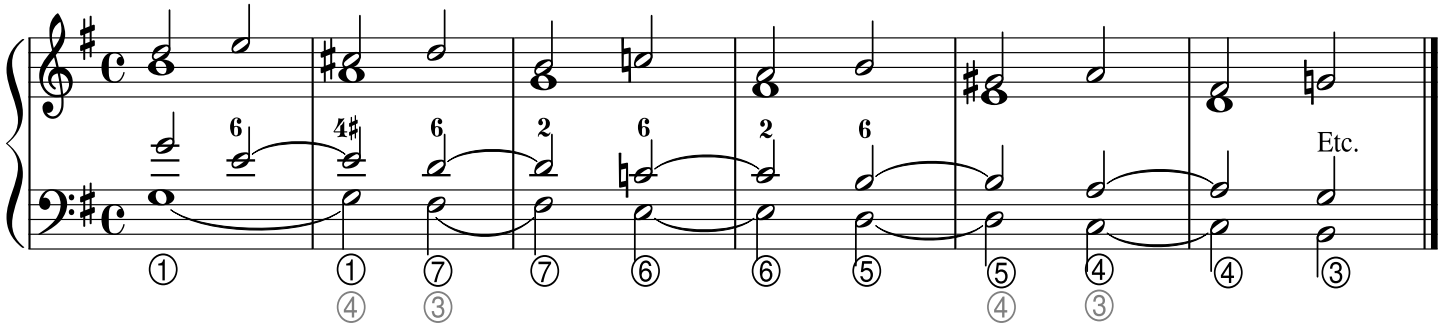
Chromatic ascent



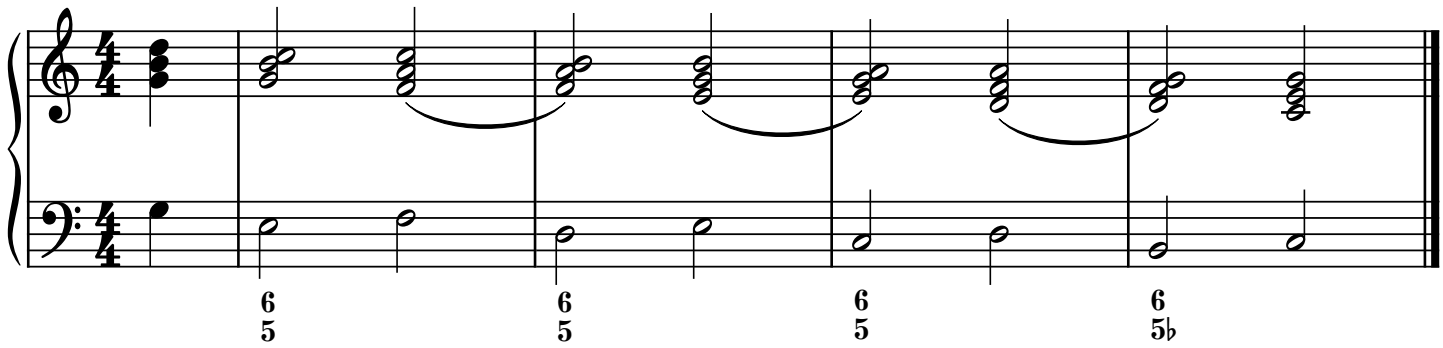
Chromatic descent



Suspensions

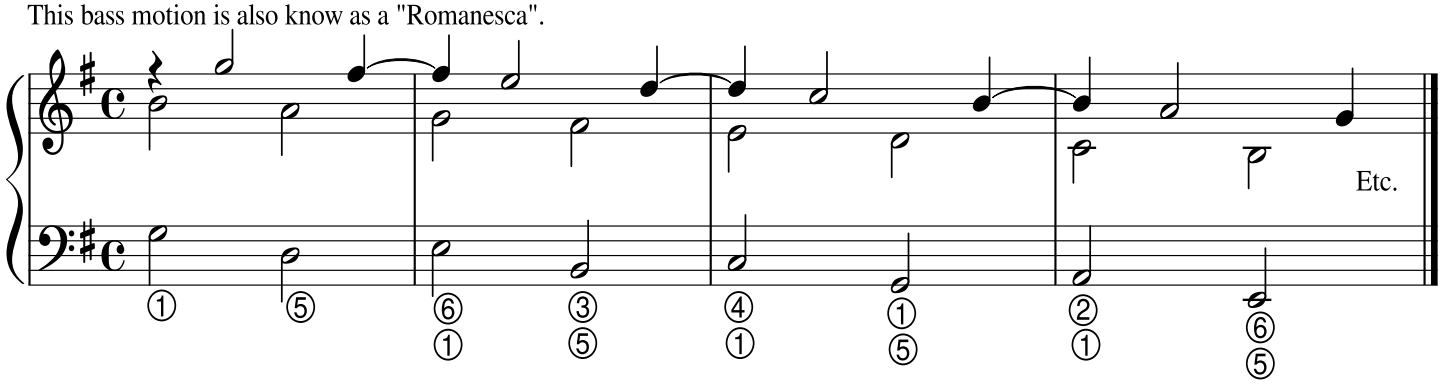


Down a 3rd, up a 2nd

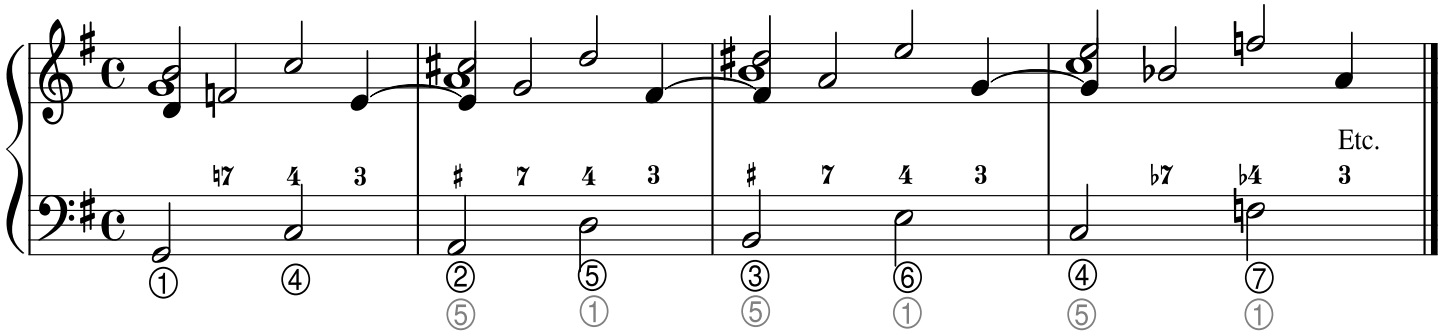


Down a 4th, up a 2nd

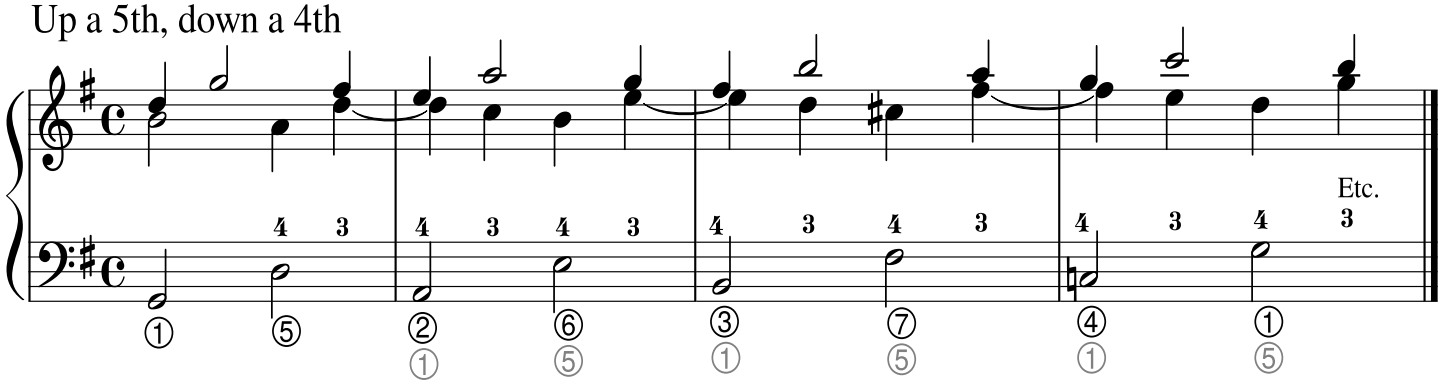
This bass motion is also know as a "Romanesca".



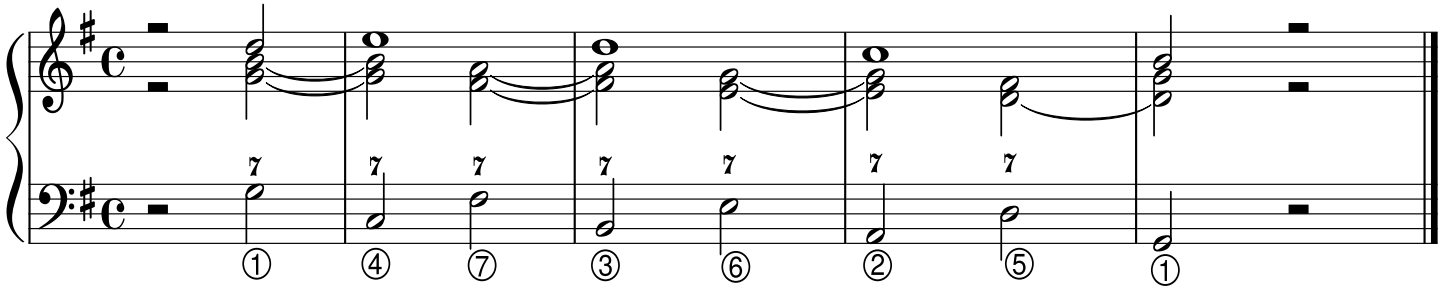
Up a 4th, down a 3rd



Up a 5th, down a 4th

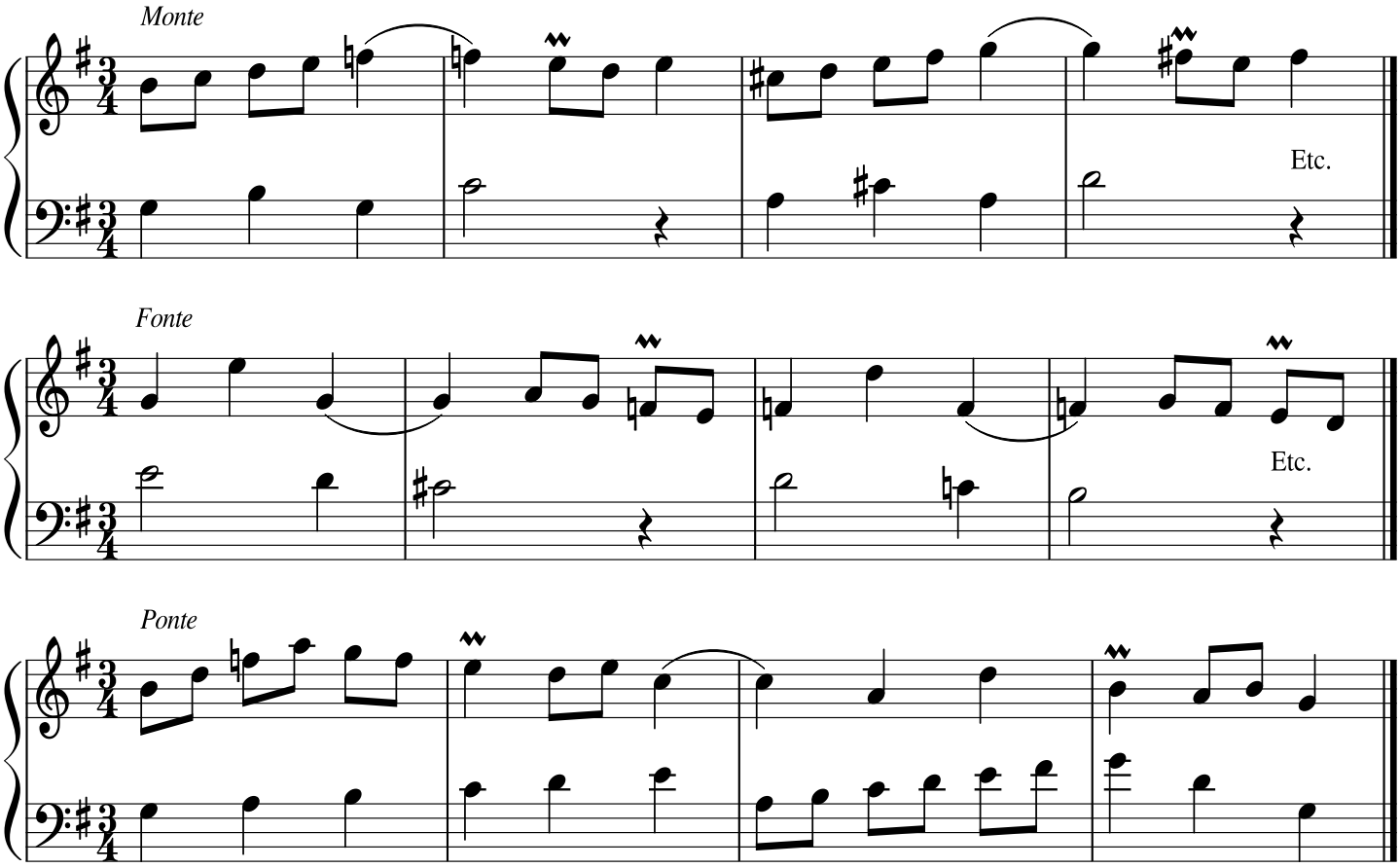


Down a 5th, up a 4th

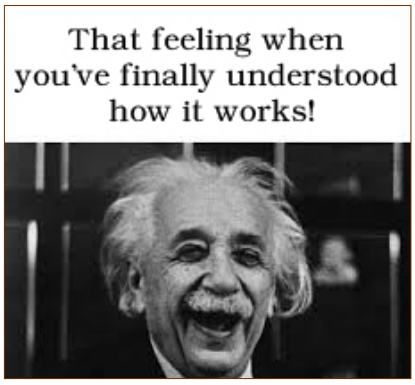


Monte, Fonte, Ponte

The Italian names *monte* (mountain), *fonte* (well or fountain) and *ponte* (bridge) were coined by the composer Joseph Riepel in his Anfangsgründe zur musicalischen Setzkunst (Fundamentals of Musical Composition), 1752 and 1755, a popular treatise which Leopold Mozart used to train his young son. The terms refer to melodic/harmonic sequential patterns which Riepel discusses in the second chapter of the Anfangsgründe. Monte (as in "going up a mountain") is an ascending progression, fonte (evoking the descending flow of water) consists of a descending one and ponte (crossing a bridge) express the idea of something remaining level (one arrives on the same harmonic footing as one departed from).



Conclusion



This short worksheet does not have the pretence of being an all-encompassing list of existing schematas and models. Nevertheless, you will come across a lot of the material presented here in any work from the Renaissance to the Classical period (and even later!). Hence familiarising yourself with these basics and attempting to connect them in logical procedures, "Lego style", will teach you, with time and patience, how to improvise skilfully.

Patrick Ayrton
January 2023

Many thanks to Robert de Bree for his judicious advice and suggestions.

For a complete survey, I refer you to Derek Remeš' excellent «Compendium»:
https://derekremes.com/wp-content/uploads/compendium_english.pdf