An Introduction to Figured Bass
by Derek Remes

The tradition of using figured bass exercises, or partimenti, to teach harmony goes back to 16th century Italy. Organists in the 16th century often accompanied polyphonic vocal music by playing the lowest sounding voice at any given time and filling in the upper voices freely. Use of the term basso continuo became widespread following the publication of Lodovico Viadana’s Cento concerti ecclesiastici in 1602. This publication was unique in that the continuo parts were not extracted from other voices, as was done earlier, but instead were composed independently.

It was not until the 18th century that figured bass exercises, also known as thoroughbass exercises, became a major tool for teaching harmony. During that century, more manuals were published on the subject that any other musical topic. Most publications focused on part-writing rules, such as avoiding parallel octaves or fifths. By the late 18th century, thoroughbass was no longer the dominant compositional technique, but the use of figured bass exercises as a pedagogical tool continued.

Around the turn of the 19th century, teachers at the newly founded Paris Conservatory turned to Italian pedagogical methods for their curricula. Reproductions of many basses by famous Italian composers were used, although Luigi Cherubini, who was trained in partimenti in Bologna and was directory of the Conservatory from 1822 to 1841, contributed many of his own exercises. Later, graduates such as Delibes, Franck and Thomas, made additional contributions to the curricula.

Paul Vidal used his collection of exercises, Basses et Chantes Données, in his harmony classes at the Paris Conservatory. Nadia Boulanger, one of his students, used his book to teach generations of students in the 20th century. Her student, Narcis Bonet, recently published a revised edition of these exercises, A Collection of Given Basses and Melodies, which is available in two volumes online. Therefore this collection of exercises represents an important musical lineage. There are also ten books of exercises published by Henri Challan, Professor at the Paris Conservatory, which are available at online. I personally prefer Challan's exercises because of their brevity and musicality. The examples in this essay are taken from these two sources.

In the French tradition, realizations are to be done at sight at the piano, possibly while singing one voice in solfège. The goal of singing is to always be thinking linearly even while playing chord progressions. Transpositions can be done in enharmonically related keys by changing the key signature, or to other keys by changing clefs (see my essay Transposition by Changing Clef for more on this topic).
Part I: Voice-Leading & Doubling

Music is a language (though not a universal one), and like any language, music exists as sounds and symbols which carry meaning. The primary mode of expression for music and language is the human voice. Therefore, even though figured bass is to be played on a keyboard instrument, it is still conceived as essential vocal music: it divides into four parts, like a choir; its ranges are that of the vocal parts that would sing them; its phrases are of a natural singing length; and it is almost always legato.

- As a general rule, move the outer voices in contrary motion. This will prevent most problems. When contrary motion is not possible, try to move the soprano by step.
- When the bass moves by step, all other voices must move in the contrary motion. The only exception to this is the deceptive cadence.
- Use close position as the default between the upper three voices. If this creates parallels or other spacing problems, try an open position.
- No parallel 5ths or 8ths between any voice (parallel 4ths are perfectly acceptable)
- No more than an octave between the upper three voices. The tenor and bass may have any interval (this is Hindemith’s recommendation).
- Any interval up to an octave (excluding a 7th, for now) is available melodically.
- In general, move as little as possible between chords. Keep common tones, except in the soprano, which may keep them but should also have an interesting melodic contour.
- Try to avoid direct 5ths & 8ths in outer voices unless one voice moves by step and the other voice moves by “harmonic step” (i.e. a perfect 4th or perfect 5th). Occasional direct 5ths and 8ths are unavoidable in four-part harmony, especially with the inner voices.
- Try to end with a perfect-authentic cadence (V-I in root position with the root in the soprano) and avoid the PAC until this point by having a different note in the soprano or one of the chords in inversion.
- Keep the four parts within the ranges of a choir. Notice that each voice part has the range of an octave. As a basic rule, do not go above a high A in the soprano, or below a low D in the bass. The ranges of the inner voices are less important in the beginning.
• Keep chromatics in the same voice. This means that any accidental must be preceded by a pitch of the same letter name in the same voice part if that pitch is present in the preceding chord.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c}
   & ii^6 & V_5^6/V & I & V_7^7/vi & V^6 & V_2^4/IV \\
\end{array}
\]

• If that pitch is doubled in the preceding chord, choose an outer voice to take the accidental.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c}
   & V & V_5^6/vi & I^6 & V_2^4/ii \\
\end{array}
\]

• Note that failure to follow this rule results in a cross-relation and usually awkward voice leading.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c}
   & I & V_2^4/vi & IV^6 & V/V \\
\end{array}
\]

• Regarding notation, always put the soprano and tenor stems up, and the alto and bass stems down. Also, always put the alto in the treble clef and the tenor in the bass clef.
Very important: the rules of voice leading apply to the moments between harmonies, not within a single harmony. Therefore, one can leap to any chord-tone freely while the overall harmony remains static, even creating direct 5ths. It is only when the harmony changes that the above rules apply, and it is then best to move by step.

Chord Functions: There are three possible functions for all chords in tonal music. These functions will remain the same even if the chord has a seventh or other upper partial added, or if the chord is in inversion.

Tonic Function: I, vi, iii (vi and iii are weaker than I)
Dominant Function: V, vii\(^{0}\), iii (iii is weak, but is also v of relative minor)
Subdominant Function: ii, IV, vi (IV is weaker than ii; vi has dual function)

Chord Syntax: Most harmonic progressions fit in one of these patterns. For instance, the progression - I V vi IV V I - would be: Tonic > Dominant > Tonic > Subdominant > Dominant > Tonic. Notice how the cadences can overlap.

1. Tonic > Subdominant > Tonic

This is the plagal cadence and is the weakest of the three cadences.

2. Tonic > Dominant > Tonic

This dominant cadence is stronger because of the root motion down a fifth.

3. Tonic > Subdominant > Dominant > Tonic

The last (No. 3) is the strongest form of tonicization, especially when the Dominant and Tonic are in root position with the Tonic in the soprano, forming a perfect-authentic cadence. In practice, these basic harmonic "sentences" are not written in stone, however.
Basic Doubling Rules:

Nadia Boulanger said that harmony is the art of doubling. Harmony in four voices requires that all triads have one pitch doubled.

- **Root Position Triads:** Always double the root, if possible. If not, the 5th is acceptable. Only double the 3rd in the deceptive vi cadence or diminished triad (in root position). Any note may be in the soprano. If the 5th is omitted, triple the root rather than doubling the 3rd.

**Deceptive Spacing and a Diminished Triad Double the Third:**

![Deceptive Spacing and a Diminished Triad Double the Third](image)

The deceptive cadence is the only way the bass can move by step without all the other voices moving in contrary motion. The diminished triad in root position doubles the third to avoid doubling the tritone. Doubling a tendency tone results in parallel octaves. These two instances are the only time that a root position chord doubles anything other than the root.

The deceptive spacing does not have to follow the V chord, or be used only on vi. It is a useful spacing in many other scenarios.
The deceptive spacing is the basis for many other chords. By moving the other voices by step, we can create many variations. In this way, we see how highly chromatic harmony is based on simple rules. All of these chords are subdominant in function because they resolve to I 6/4.

- **First Inversion Triads:** The following table summarizes the rules for doubling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Inv. CHORD</th>
<th>I⁰ / i⁰</th>
<th>ii⁰ / ii⁰⁰</th>
<th>iii⁰ / III⁰</th>
<th>IV⁰ / iv⁰</th>
<th>V⁰ / v⁰</th>
<th>vi⁰ / VI⁰</th>
<th>vii⁰⁰</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOTE TO DOUBLE</td>
<td>root</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>root</td>
<td>root or</td>
<td>root</td>
<td>root</td>
<td>root</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soprano NOTE</td>
<td>root is best,</td>
<td>root is best,</td>
<td>root is best,</td>
<td>root is best,</td>
<td>root is best,</td>
<td>root is best,</td>
<td>root is best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th is ok</td>
<td>5th is ok</td>
<td>5th is ok</td>
<td>5th is ok</td>
<td>5th is ok</td>
<td>5th is ok</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost all six-three chords will be in one of the following spacings (not just C Major, of course). The last spacing is less common because the 5th is in the soprano.
The highlighted area in the table emphasizes an important exception where a six-three chord should double the third rather than the root. The other exception is vii\(^6\), which like any diminished triad, doubles the third to avoid doubling tendency tones. Doubling a tendency tone results in parallel octaves.

Doubling the third of ii\(^6\) emphasizes its subdominant function by doubling the bass note. (Remember that the root is the bottom note when arranged in the thirds, and the bass is simply the lowest voice at any given time.) If ii\(^6\) is not used in a subdominant function, that is, it does not precede a dominant chord, do not double the third. This often happens in sequences.

**ii\(^6\) Doubles the Third (Bass) to Emphasize Subdominant Function:**

![Musical notation]

The reason for doubling the third of the cadential ii\(^6\) is that it is acting more like a IV chord. This concept is unique to the French method of realization, as far as I know. It goes against most contemporary theorists by asserting that the bass is more important than the root of a chord when determining function. In this view, the soprano is a melodically free pitch, making all the following chords belong to the same subdominant family. Again, one can see how highly chromatic music originates from a simple concept.
Lastly, the phrygian cadence is a common exception where doubling the 5th is actually required. A phrygian cadence is a type of half-cadence, named because the half-step motion in the bass resembles the phrygian church mode. It often ended slow movements in the Baroque era.

There are the three most common spacings, all of which double the 5th.

- **Second Inversion Triads:** Six-four chords do not exist like root position and first inversion chords. Rather, they are the by-product of melodic events. Nevertheless, for classification purposes they are organized into four types.
  
  - 1. **Passing,** 2. **Neighboring,** 3. **Cadential;** always double the 5th, which is always in the bass, for all three types.
  
  - 4. **Deceptive;** double the root, though this chord is non-standard and can be seen as part of a passing structure. This chord was labeled as “deceptive” by Nadia Boulanger, so it is included here.

**The Four Types of Second Inversion Chords:**
- **Seventh Chords:** If using a complete seventh chord, then all four voices are used and no doubling is possible. If incomplete, only the 5th can be omitted, and then root must be doubled because the 3rd and 7th are tendency tones. Doubling a tendency tone results in parallel octaves.

- **Note:** A diminished 7th chord usually resolves to doubled 3rd, which resolves both diminished 5ths inward, towards each other. This is not always possible in practice, however.

  **Diminished Seventh Resolves to Doubled Third:**

  ![Diminished Seventh Resolution](image)

  $\text{vii}^7 \rightarrow I$

  I highly recommend Paul Hindemith's *Traditional Harmony, Book 1* if you need additional help with the material in Part 1.
Part II: Sequences

The following system of understanding sequences makes figured bass realization much easier. I learned this method from Dr. Philip Lasser, Professor of Composition at the Juilliard School, while at the European American Music Alliance in Paris, France. In this system, there are only two basic types of sequences, which are distinguished by their bass motion: the cell of the 4th and the cell of the 5th. Both cells are possible with the second triad in first inversion.

The Cell of the 4th and the Cell of the 5th

Cell of the 4th (C4)  Cell of the 5th (C5)  Cell of the 4th with inversion (C4I)  Cell of the 5th with inversion: (C5I)

These cells can repeat at any interval to form sequences (by step or leap, up or down). Here are some common intervals for sequential repetition.

Typical Intervals of Cell Repetition

C4 repeating down a diatonic 3rd  C5 repeating down a diatonic 2nd

Typical Intervals of Cell Repetition with Inversions

C4-I repeating down a diatonic 3rd  C5-I repeating down a diatonic 2nd
C4-I repeating down a third has a problem though – there are direct 5ths between the tenor and bass voices. Nadia Boulanger suggested this voicing instead:

**Nadia Boulanger’s Solution for C4-I Repeating Down a 3rd**

![MIDI notation for Nadia Boulanger’s Solution for C4-I Repeating Down a 3rd]

C4 and C5 can also be reversed, making four possible variations in all.

**C4 and C5 with Chords Reversed**

![MIDI notation for C4 and C5 with Chords Reversed]

The retrograde versions can be distinguished from the regular versions by identifying which chord tone is in the soprano (the soprano note in the above examples is almost always maintained throughout the exercises found later in this essay).
Here are some additional sequences using retrograde cells:

**Typical Intervals of Reversed Cell Repetition**

C4-R repeating up a diatonic 2\textsuperscript{nd}  
C5-R repeating up a diatonic 2\textsuperscript{nd}

**Typical Intervals of Inverted, Reversed Cell Repetition**

C4-IR repeating up a diatonic 2\textsuperscript{nd}  
C5-IR repeating down a diatonic 2\textsuperscript{nd}

Notice that diminished triads do not double the third when part of a sequence.

Cells can also modulate. This common sequence modulates up a 5\textsuperscript{th}.

**A Modulatory Sequence using C4-I Repeating Up a 3rd**

A Minor: C Major: E Minor: G Major: B Minor: D Major:
Here are some examples of sequences from the literature, with analyses according to Dr. Lasser's method.

Important: Creative use of sequences results from how the surface rhythm is activated and neighboring keys are tonicized. This means adding passing tones, neighboring tones, arpeggios, accidentals, and often slowing down the harmonic rhythm.

**Mozart, Piano Concerto No. 9, K.271 - Mov. 3 (m.133-137)**

The following analysis places greater importance to the first note of each measure because it is metrically accented, rather than the highest note in each measure. Notice Mozart’s adjustment of accidentals in the sequence to tonicize G-minor and C-minor. (The accidental A-flat also tonicizes E-flat Major, which is not represented in the following analysis).

**C4 Repeating Down a Diatonic 3rd**

**Beethoven, Violin Sonata No. 3, Op. 12 – Mov. 3 (m.341-45)**
Beethoven also makes adjustments to the sequence to tonicize F-minor:

**C4-IR Repeating Down a Step**

Brahms, Violin Sonata No. 3, Op. 108 – Mov. 3 (m.43-47)

Like Mozart and Beethoven, Brahms also makes adjustments to this sequence to tonicize A-Major.

**C5-IR Repeating Up a Diatonic 2\(^{nd}\)**
Part III: Root Position Exercises

The figured bass exercises published by Narcis Bonet are in two volumes and are arranged progressively, beginning with root position triads and proceeding through augmented sixth chords.

- Root Position Triads
- First Inversion Triads
- Second Inversion Triads
- Diminished Triads
- Dominant Seventh Chords
- Non-Dominant Seventh Chords
- The Dominant Ninth Chord
- The Seventh on the Leading Tone
- The Diminished Seventh Chord
- Exercises with all previous chords
- The Augmented Sixth Chords

The first exercise for root position triads.

In order to facilitate reading at the piano, identify the location and type of sequences employed. Remember that in sequences, the same soprano note from the above examples will be used consistently throughout the exercises. It is also helpful to label soprano pitches occasionally, although eventually you will want to be able to realize the exercise without doing this.

Knowing the soprano note is very important because for root position triads, all three upper voices are almost always arranged in close position (i.e., without the omission of a chord tone between any voice) - except for the deceptive vi, which doubles the third. Therefore, if the soprano note is identified, the alto and tenor notes can be placed under it easily.

As mentioned in Part I, the goal of voice-leading is to move as smoothly as possible between chords while avoiding parallel 5ths and 8vas and making the soprano as melodic as possible (i.e., avoiding common tones). Since the upper three voices are usually determined by the soprano note, moving the soprano stepwise and contrary to the bass will usually facilitate smooth voice-leading.
Here is the finished realization, which usually would be done at sight at the piano. Remember that for root position triads, generally the root will be in the soprano. Notice how the soprano usually moves stepwise and contrary to the bass, while the alto and tenor are placed in close position beneath it. Some variations are possible.
This is another example using root position triads, with some soprano pitches given in solfège (using “fixed-do”)

Here it is realized. Some variations are of course possible.
Here is one more example using root position triads. Note the deceptive use of an A-major triad in m.13! This sort of trick is typical of Vidal’s exercises. Also, m.9 contains an error – a dominant function G-sharp major triad leads to a subdominant function F-sharp minor triad. Technically this is not correct, but perhaps Vidal thought it was acceptable because of the weak rhythmic placement of the subdominant chord.

Here is the realization. Notice in m.15 how Vidal uses IV rather than iv, and ii rather than ii⁰, which prevents using an augmented second melodically in the soprano. Also, notice how the last beat of m.16 requires keeping a common tone in the soprano to parallel 8vas with the bass.

An “X” indicates a location of a V-vi progression, which for voice-leading reasons, does not use the typical deceptive vi doubling of the third.
Part IV: First Inversion Exercises

Realizing exercises with first inversion triads often requires use of the “melodic six solution.” The goal of this solution is to harmonize a series of parallel first inversion chords while avoiding parallel 5ths and 8vas. (Treaties from the Baroque era usually said to change from four voices to three voices to make parallel first inversion chords easier to play.) Notice that in the upper three voices, two voices move parallel while one moves contrary. Parallel fours are acceptable of course. Usually only a portion of this example is used in context, perhaps for only a few consecutive first-inversion chords.

Melodic Six-three Solution

In Part I it was stated that first inversion triads must always have the root in the soprano and never double the 3rd. When this solution is used, melodic considerations are overruling harmonic ones, because the need to avoid parallels trumps the need for correct doubling.

Here is an exercise using first inversion chords. The solfege pitches and analysis of the sequences are added in this example. Remember the doubling rules for first inversion triads, which were outlined in Part I. It can be assumed that chords without figured bass numbers are in root position. However, for sake of clarity, sometimes a “5” or “5/3” is included as a reminder.
Here it is realized. This example uses a portion of the “melodic six solution,” as well as a doubled pedal point. Pedal points call usually be identified by consecutive first inversion triads which move by leap, as in m.17-19.
A final example of an exercise using first inversion triads my soprano notes and analysis. This example occasionally indicates the direction of the inner voices with an arrow.

Remember that ii₆ going to V will double the third to emphasis its subdominant function. The deceptive voicing is used in m. 11 because it avoids parallel 5ths between soprano and tenor. Note that m.17 does not use the deceptive voicing in order to avoid parallel 5ths.

The “X” in Example 14 indicates that these first inversion chords are the product of voice leading and do not require that the root be in the soprano. This example also uses the Boulanger solution for C4-I moving down by a third in m.6-7, as well as a doubled pedal point at the end (see next page for the realization).
Part V: Second Inversion Triads

Remember that there are only four types of second inversion triads; passing, neighboring, cadential, and the non-standard “deceptive.” No other second inversion chords should be used. It is important to note that all passing 6/4 chords have the same structure: two voices move stepwise in opposite direction (also called a voice-exchange), one voice is a lower neighbor, and the other remains a pedal. These four voices can be arranged in any vertical order, so long as the bass moves stepwise.

**Passing 6/4 Chords**

This is the first exercise of the second inversion chords. It uses all four types of 6/4 chords.
Here is the realization. Notice that the ii\textsuperscript{6} chord in m.19 doubles the root because it doesn’t precede a V chord like the ii\textsuperscript{6} in the following measure. This example also used a doubled pedal point in m.15-16.
Part VI: Dominant Seventh Chords

The French labeling system for seventh chord inversions is as follows. The plus refers to the leading tone. A slash through a number means that pitch is lowered a half-step.

- Root Position: 7/+  
- First Inversion: 6/5
- Second Inversion: +6
- Third Inversion: +4

The basic strategy for using dominant seventh chords is to begin by realizing the chord as if it were a triad, following the standard doubling rules. Then move one of the roots down a step to create the seventh chord. In the case that the seventh is already in the bass, proceed as if it were the root. The following example illustrates this procedure:

**Strategy for Realizing Dominant Seventh Chords**

First realized as triads:  
Then with 7th added:

Remember that when possible, the seventh of a dominant seventh chord must be prepared by common tone in the previous chord. Most sevenths in figured bass exercises will be complete – that is, all four chord tones will be represented. If incomplete, only the 5th can be omitted. In that case, the root must be doubled because the 3rd and the 7th are tendency tones and would cause parallel octaves if resolved correctly.
Seventh Chord Exercise
Notice the various non-standard usages of the deceptive doubling in this example: m. 17 & 18 use it to create the “deceptive” 6/4 chord; m.27 uses it as a result of resolving the tendency tone in the tenor; and m.29 & 37 use it to avoid parallel 5ths in the alto and tenor. Bass motion under a dominant seventh usually indicates a voice-exchange with an upper voice. Measures 19 through 26 create an extended voice-exchange.
Conclusion VII:
Realizing figured basses is an excellent tool for learning harmony and voice-leading. At the piano, it requires the active participation of the student, rather than passive observation. However, it is important to remember that these exercises are only distillations of the rules that composers tend to follow most of the time. These exercises can provide a solid foundation, but they are still only a point of departure. The ultimate goal is the creative use of these principles.

Bibliography:
Figured Bass and Soprano Exercises
by Henri Challan

Root Position Bass Lines:

Root Position Soprano Lines:

First Inversion and Root Position Bass Lines:
First Inversion and Root Position Soprano Lines:

10

Second Inversion, First Inversion, and Root Position Bass Lines:

13

14

Second Inversion, First Inversion, and Root Position Soprano Lines:

16

17

18
Start with a close spacing in the upper three voices as a default. This is easy to play on the keyboard, and dictates that the middle voices lie directly below the soprano. If this creates parallel 5ths, 8ths or other spacing problems, try an open position.

Direct 5ths and 8ths are occasionally allowed in four part writing when they create a better line or a better progression. D5/8 are more permissible when between and inner voice, or when one voice moves by step and the other moves by "harmonic step," (perfect 4th or perfect 5th). Sometimes, however, they are still unavoidable.

Try to end with a perfect authentic cadence (V-I in root position with root in soprano), and avoid a PAC before the end by having a different scale degree in the soprano, or one of the chords in first inversion. Look for opportunities to use the C4 and C5 chord progressions in sequences. They are everywhere!

**Root Position Bass Lines:**

The deceptive vi spacing is not used in order to make better voice-leading in the alto line. Notice all the C4 sequences.

A common tone is kept in soprano so that root can be in soprano at the end of this plagal cadence.

A rising soprano line breaks out of a stagnant range.
The deceptive vi spacing is useful, even when it does not follow V.

Half cadences do not always have to use the dominant harmony.

Questionable D5s

Double 5th to avoid leaping over previous alto pitch.

First Inversion and Root Position Bass Lines:

Cadential ii6 doubles the 3rd. This is very important and is unique to the French method of realization.
Direct 5ths between T/B approaching the cadential ii6 happen often. Double 3rd to avoid P8s with the bass.

Alternate solution: (soprano not shown)

Portion of the melodic 6 solution

First Inversion and Root Position Soprano Lines:

iiº6 always doubles 3rd

First inversion chord avoids PAC
Second Inversion, First Inversion, and Root Position Bass Lines:

Notice how the passing 6/4 chords are usually part of a set of three. Common tone in soprano avoids PAC but reaches climax at end for exciting variation.

Non-standard spacing, but still doubles 3rd

Second Inversion, First Inversion, and Root Position Soprano Lines:
By the last set of exercises, the music was beginning to look more complete and melodically smooth, even somewhat resembling a hymn. This is because Henri Challan's and Paul Vidal's methods are additive; that is, all the previous chapters' material is still available in the later ones, which compounds the number of available options. Both methods continue to grow in complexity, adding dominant seventh chords, diminished sevenths, ninth chords, etc. until the musical vocabulary is very developed.

However, one can easily expand on the basic material given here by connecting leaps by step (what Fux calls "diminution" in *Gradus ad Parnassum*), tonicizing various keys, adding anticipations, and making chromatic adjustments for added color and variety. A particularly beautiful technique is to add suspensions. This can be done a "quick and dirty" way by taking any voice that moves down by step and delaying that stepwise motion by half the rhythmic value of the second note. This may require that you slow down the harmonic rhythm.

See the example below for ways to embellish these exercises and make them more musical. Hopefully now it will be easier to see how highly ornamented melodies and harmonies are based on a simple framework.
Resources for Practicing Figured Bass

by Derek Remes

Figured Bass for Beginners, by Helen Keaney

Used at Indiana University with their organ students, this book outlines basic principles if you have no experience with figured bass. It isn’t done in the French tradition, however, so certain customs are different between this book and the two following sets. There aren’t that many exercises included in each section because this is only an introduction. An ambitious student could probably complete this book in a few weeks.

A Collection of Figured Bass Lines (Books I and II), selected, revised and realized by Narcis Bonet

This set of two books is very important because it contains exercises (and solutions) that Nadia Boulanger learned from Paul Vidal at the Paris Conservatory, and therefore represents the continuation of this valuable tradition. It doesn’t, however, give explanations as to why it chooses certain solutions over others. These principles can be inferred by examining enough of the solutions, but it would be more direct to look at my essay, An Introduction to Figured Bass Exercises, since this essay was designed to compliment the French way of doing figured bass.

380 Basses et Chants Données en Dix Recueils (Given Bass Lines and Melodies in 10 Collections) by Henri Challan

Each collection contains two books - one for the melodies and one for the solutions. Like Narcis Bonet’s collection, this set of 10 books (actually 20 if one includes the solutions) gives no explanation about the underlying principles. I prefer this collection to all the others because I think the exercises are more musical. Again, I tried to write my essay as a compliment to this particular system.

Traditional Harmony, Book 1 and 2 by Paul Hindemith

I have read Book 1 briefly without doing the exercises, and Hindemith presents a very concise set of rules for realizing figured bass. I found this book very useful, although I don’t have experience with Book 2.

Thoroughbass Method by Hermann Keller

This book has been translated into English, so I would worry that some vocabulary may not match up with the other books. It appears to have a more historical approach, with examples from various treaties. Again, I haven’t investigated this book yet.