

Johann Christoph Kellner's (1736–1803)

Grundriss des Generalbasses
Basics of Thoroughbass (1783)

*eine theoretisch-praktische Anleitung
für die ersten Anfänger entworfen*

*A Theoretical and Practical Guide
Intended for Absolute Beginners*

Op. 16, Erster Theil. Cassel: gedruckt auf Kosten des Verfassers.

Op. 16, Part One. Kassel: Printed at the Author's Expense.

Vol. 1: Commentary and Text

Edited and Translated by Derek Remeš

www.derekremes.com
derekremes@gmail.com

© 2020

Goals of this Publication

In recent decades a growing number of musicians, scholars, and pedagogues have come to recognize the foundational importance of thoroughbass in eighteenth-century music. This has created a demand for historically informed teaching materials. Yet very often, historical treatises are too foreign, verbose, and abstract for today's students. J. C. Kellner's *Grundriss des Generalbasses* (Kassel: 1783) represents a notable exception. Since his target audience is absolute beginners, Kellner's instruction is cogent, concise, and decidedly practical. The goal of this publication is thus threefold: first, to call attention to Kellner's treatise; second, to make Kellner's instruction accessible to English-speaking musicians; and finally, to provide historically informed models for the realization of Kellner's exercises. Those readers seeking further instruction in thoroughbass are encouraged to consult my 2019 [book](#) and my 2020 [dissertation](#). My [website](#) also contains many free materials.

Historical Background

Johann Christoph Kellner (1736–1803) was a German organist, composer, and sought-after pedagogue. His father was Johann Peter Kellner (1705–1772), who played an important role in the dissemination of J. S. Bach's music and who may have been a pupil of Bach. After initial instruction with his father, Johann Christoph went to Gotha in 1754 to study with Georg Benda (1722–1795). After a brief stay in Amsterdam and The Hague from 1762–1763, Kellner eventually settled in Kassel, where he became court organist and cantor from 1772 until his death in 1803. Kellner's music is mostly galant in style. His output includes numerous works for keyboard and organ, some cantatas, and one *Singspiel* (a type of German opera). Kellner's enormously popular treatise, *Grundriss des Generalbasses* (*Basics of Thoroughbass*), was reprinted seven times between 1783 and 1796. Robert Eitner's 1882 [biography](#) of Kellner claims that Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach edited the 1796 edition of the *Grundriss*. If true, this would have been a posthumous publication, given that Emanuel Bach died in 1788. In any case, no copies of the 1796 edition survive. As evidenced by the title page of the *Grundriss*, Kellner planned subsequent volumes, but these never materialized.

About this Edition

This edition and translation is divided into five parts. Vol. 1 contains Kellner's prefatory text and examples (pp. 1–14). Vol. 2.1 contains Kellner's forty-eight thoroughbass exercises in their original form (pp. 15–47), except that a blank treble staff has been added in order to write down one's realization. Vol. 2.2 gives editorial realizations intended for advanced students. To make these exercises more accessible for beginners today, Vol. 3.1 gives editorial suggestions for realization (the highest voice), along with an analysis of the bass scale degrees; all that remains is for the student to fill in the middle voices. Finally, Vol. 3.2 gives editorial realizations for beginners. This information is summarized in the following table.

	Original	Contents	Target Audience
Vol. 1	pp. 1–14	Commentary and Text	All Students
Vol. 2.1	pp. 15–47	48 Exercises in their Original Form	Advanced Students
Vol. 2.2		Editorial Realizations for Advanced Students	
Vol. 3.1		48 Exercises with Editorial Suggestions	Beginning Students
Vol. 3.2		Editorial Realizations of Vol. 3.1 for Beginners	

Editorial Principles

The present edition is based on the facsimile held at the Universitätsbibliothek in Frankfurt am Main ([D-F Mus W 131](#)). This copy bears no indication of its year of publication. The name “J. A. André” is inscribed on the title page, which is likely a reference to the music publisher and composer Johann Anton André (1775–1842). The following additions are editorial:

- Text after “Note from the editor”
- Figures in square brackets
- Accidentals in round brackets
- Bar numbering
- The blank treble clef
- All gray and bracketed text
- Horizontal brackets over the staff
- Dotted ties
- Continuous numbering of exercises
- Clefs in the fugues (Nos. 44–47).

The original pagination is given in curly brackets {...} in Vol. 1. Kellner makes no distinction in the typography of German and Latin words; thus all text is roman. The long s (ſ) has everywhere been replaced with s. Accidentals in Vol. 1 appear as follows: flat , sharp <#>, natural <n>. Figures with a slash appear as <2/>, <3/>, etc. “c1” indicates that the original clef is a soprano clef; “c3” indicates alto clef; and “c4” indicates tenor clef. Kellner’s errata (p. 48 in the original) have been incorporated without comment. Beaming and stem direction are not original. Footnotes in Vol. 1 are translated in square brackets [...] directly following the original text. The text explaining the relationship between relative key signatures in Exercises Nos. 1–12 has been omitted.

Overview of the Forty-Eight Exercises

The main part of Kellner’s treatise (pp. 15–47) consists of forty-eight thoroughbass exercises, which progress in difficulty and length. These exercises culminate in four thoroughbass fugues (Nos. 44–47) and an example with enharmonicism and chromaticism (No. 48) that includes Kellner’s own realization. Kellner’s *Six fugues pour les Orgues ou le Clavecin* (Amsterdam, 1770), which exhibit a flexible number of voices, served as models for the realization of the thoroughbass fugues in Vol. 2.2. The fugues in Vol. 3.2 are realized more strictly, as this is generally easier for beginners.

Exercises	Harmonic Focus
Nos. 1–12	8/5/3 chords
Nos. 13–15	6/3 chords
Nos. 16–18	6/5 chords
Nos. 19–20	6/4 chords
No. 21	6/4/3 chords
Nos. 22–24	7 chords
Nos. 25–27	5/4 chords
Nos. 28–30	6/4/2 chords
Nos. 31–33	9 chords
Nos. 34–48	Summary Examples
Nos. 44–47	Thoroughbass Fugues
No. 48	Enharmonicism and Chromaticism

Advice for Beginners (Vols. 3.1 and 3.2)

In Kellner’s prefatory text, his realization of Exercise No. 48, and in his published compositions, the number of voices fluctuates freely between three and four. This freer conception of voice leading is the norm in the galant style. This creates problems for beginners, however, who require guidance regarding whether to realize figures in three or four voices. The following table sets firm rules for each type of figure. It applies only to Vols. 3.1 and 3.2, not to the “advanced” realizations in Vol. 2.2.

Figure	Voice Number in Vols. 3.1 and 3.2	
8/5/3, 5/3, or 5	Always four (play 8/5/3)	
6/5 or 6/5/3	Always four (play 6/5/3)	
6/4	Always four (play 8/6/4)	
6/4/3 or 4/3	Always four (play 6/4/3)	
7/5 or 7/5/3	Always four (play 7/5/3)	
5/4 or 4	Always four (play 8/5/4)	
6/4/2	Always four (play 6/4/2)	
6/3 or 6		Always three (play 6/3)
6 – 5 or 5 – 6		Always three (play 6/3 – 5/3 or 5/3 – 6/3)
7 or 7/3		Always three (play 7/3)
7 – 6		Always three (play 7/3 – 6/3)
9 – X		Always three (play 9/3 – X)
9/7 – 8/6		Always three (play 9/7 – 8/6)
9/4 – 8/3		Always three (play 9/4 – 8/3)

Parallel Perfect Intervals

There are two situations in which parallel perfect intervals are sometimes allowed in thoroughbass. The first is when parallel fifths occur between two upper voices (as secondary intervals), rather than in relation to the bass (as primary intervals). For instance, Kellner’s realization of Exercise No. 48 includes parallel fifths in mm. 23–24 between the soprano and tenor voices, as shown below.

48

W. A. Mozart also wrote similar parallels in his [correction of an exercise](#) by his pupil, Thomas Attwood (page 23, system 3, bar 1, upper voices). However, upper-voice parallel fifths are forbidden between consecutive 6/3 chords, as Kellner notes in his treatise. All parallel fifths are marked in the realizations in this edition, except when a diminished 5 is involved as either the first or second fifth.

The second situation in which parallel perfect intervals are sometimes allowed involves an ornamented bassline. Here is an example of parallel octaves between tenor and bass from the editorial solution to Exercise No. 24 (m. 1) in Vol. 2.2.

Alternatively, one could change position on the third eighth note in order to avoid these parallels, yet this is somewhat inelegant and difficult for non-keyboardists to play. Besides, the structural bass notes in this measure are f and g in half notes, as indicated by the editorial arabic numerals; the parallel octaves do not involve these structural notes. Students should thus take note of the following rule, which applies throughout the editorial realizations: *Parallel perfect intervals are only invalid if they involve structural, accented bass notes (i.e., those with an arabic numeral).*

Preparation of Dissonances

Upper voices that form a dissonance against the bass generally require *preparation* and *resolution*. However, there are many exceptions regarding *preparation* in the galant style of Kellner's exercises. The four dissonances that may enter unprepared are the diminished 5, the perfect 4 in a 6/4 chord, the minor 7, and the diminished 7 (as measured from the *bass*, not the "chordal root"). All four intervals still require the upper voice to resolve down by step to a consonance, though. Moreover, these intervals should be prepared in the same voice whenever possible (i.e., if the same pitch is present in the previous harmony). I use ties throughout the editorial realizations to draw attention to a prepared dissonance. *In performance, one may omit the tie and restrike the dissonant note.*

Another exception to the rule that dissonance must be prepared arises in order to create a melodious soprano voice or to gain a more advantageous right-hand position. For instance, in Exercise No. 32, I could have prepared the diminished 5 in the alto voice (see tie in ossia staff). But instead I decided to leap up to gain a better position for the following phrase. This results in a dissonant diminished 5 that could have been prepared in the same voice, but was not (see asterisk).

The 6/5 chord with perfect 5 represents a different kind of exception to the rule that dissonance requires preparation. Although the perfect 5 forms a consonance against the bass, in a 6/5 chord, the 5 is syncopated—that is, made to act like a dissonance (i.e., resolve down by step to a consonance)—by the 6. The counterintuitive result is the following rule: *In a 6/5 chord, the consonant perfect 5 must be prepared, but the dissonant diminished 5 may enter unprepared.* Yet whether perfect or diminished, the 5 in a 6/5 chord must resolve down by step to a consonance in the same voice.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Domen Marinčič for proof-reading the editorial realizations.

Bibliography

Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel. 1753–1762. *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*. 2 vols. Berlin: Author.

Eitner, Robert. 1882. “[Kellner, Johann Christoph](#).” In *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Band 15, 592–93. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot. Accessed July 27, 2020.

Fellerer, Karl Gustav. 2001. Kellner, Johann Christoph. *Grove Music Online*. Accessed July 27, 2019.

Kellner, Johann Christoph. 1770. [Six fugues pour les Orgues ou le Clavecin](#). Amsterdam, J. J. Hummel. Accessed July 27, 2020. The date of this publication is referenced in Eitner’s biography of Kellner, listed above.

———. 1783. *Grundriss des Generalbasses | eine theoretisch-praktische | Anleitung | für die ersten Anfänger entworfen*. Op. XVI. Erster Theil. Kassel: Author. [Facsimile](#). Accessed July 27, 2019.

Kirnberger, Johann Philipp. 1771–1779. *Die Kunst des reinen Sazes in der Musik*. 2 vols. Berlin and Königsberg: Decker and Hartung.

Marpurg, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1755–1758. *Handbuch bey dem Generalbasse und der Composition*. 3 vols. Berlin: G. A. Lange.

Mattheson, Johann. 1731. *Große General-Baß-Schule*. Hamburg: Kibner.

Mozart, W. A. 1965. [Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke. Series X: Supplement. Werkgruppe 30, Bd. 1](#). Kassel: Bärenreiter. Accessed Aug. 16, 2020.

Rathey, Markus. 2003. “Kellner, Johann Christoph.” *MGG Online*. Kassel. Accessed July 27, 2019.

Remeš, Derek. 2019. [Realizing Thoroughbass Chorales in the Circle of J. S. Bach](#). Vol. 1: Sources from J. S. Bach, C. P. E. Bach, and D. Kellner, with a Primer by D. Remeš. Vol. 2: The Sibley Chorale Book. Colfax, NC: Wayne Leupold Editions.

———. 2020. [“Thoroughbass, Chorale, and Fugue: Teaching the Craft of Composition in J. S. Bach’s Circle.”](#) PhD Dissertation. Hochschule für Musik Freiburg (Germany). Accessed July 27, 2020.

———. 2020. <https://derekremes.com/teaching/historicalimprovisation/>. Accessed Aug. 16, 2020.

<p style="text-align: center;">GRUNDRISS des GENERALBASSES eine theoretisch-praktische Anleitung für die ersten Anfänger entworfen, von J. C. Kellner <i>Op. XVI. Erster Theil.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">~~~~~</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cassel, gedruckt auf Kosten des Verfassers.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BASICS OF THOROUGHBASS A Theoretical and Practical Guide Intended for Absolute Beginners, by J. C. Kellner <i>Op. XVI. Part One.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">~~~~~</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kassel, Printed at the Author's Expense.</p>
<p>{3} Vorerinnerungen.</p>	<p>Preface.</p>
<p>Ich will mich nicht dabei aufhalten, dem Publico in langen verwickelten Perioden, die, doch in den meisten Fällen erdichtete, Beweggründe vorzutragen, welche mich zur Herausgabe dieser Anleitung bestimmten; sondern dafür die Entstehungsart derselben erzählen, ihren Zweck und Gebrauch anzeigen.</p>	<p>I do not wish to linger in lengthy, convoluted passages on the enumeration of the motivations that brought me to publish this guide, for such accounts are in most cases invented. Rather, I would like to describe the genesis of this work, while showing its purpose and application.</p>
<p>Schon vor einer langen Reihe von Jahren war es mein Beruf, junge Leute, und überhaupt, Liebhaber der Tonkunst zu unterrichten. Hierunter waren denn nicht selten künftige Tonkünstler, welche den Generalbass, und die Regeln der Setzkunst, studierten. Indem ich diese, und neben ihnen Liebhaber, die von dem Nutzen des Generalbasses in der Musik überzeugt waren, zur Erlernung des Generalbasses praktisch anwies, fand ich für sie im ersten Anfang alle Anleitungen, die mir zu Gesicht gekommen waren, zu schwer, so, dass die Meisten vor ihnen zurückbeben, und die Lust zur Erlernung des Generalbasses verlohren. Ich befolgte also von der Zeit an in meinem Unterricht, ohne eine andere Anleitung zum Grunde zu legen, beständig die Ordnung der verschiedenen Theile des Generalbasses, die in gegenwärtiger Anleitung befolgt ist, und verband mit ihnen die Theorie, eben so, wie ich ihre ersten Grundlinien hier angezeigt habe. Da nun nicht alle, die Generalbass lernten, gerade Tonkünstler werden wollten, ihn also nicht weiter studierten, als bis sie im Stande waren, leichte Stücke auf dem Klaviere zu accompagniren, und Choräle zu spielen, so</p>	<p>For many years it has been my profession to instruct young people and lovers of composition. Among them were very often prospective composers who studied thoroughbass and the rules of composition. While instructing these pupils (as well as amateurs who were convinced of the usefulness of thoroughbass in music) in a practical manner, I found that in the very beginning, all treatises that I came across were too difficult, such that most of the pupils recoiled and lost the desire to learn thoroughbass. From this time onward, without relying on another treatise, my instruction followed the ordering of various topics of thoroughbass as given in the present work, and united these with the first principles of music theory as they are shown here. Since not all those who learned thoroughbass desired to become composers—and thus did not pursue the study of thoroughbass until they were capable of accompanying simple pieces on the keyboard and of playing chorales—I thus prepared for them an outline of the first principles of thoroughbass.¹</p>