J. S. Bach’s Chorales: Reconstructing Eighteenth-Century German Figured-Bass Pedagogy in Light of a New Source

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PDF of handout available at www.derekremes.com/research
Bach’s Figured-Bass Chorale Pedagogy:

Stage 1: Texture

- Types 1, 2, & 4.1
  - more triadic
  - more consonant
  - more disjunct
  - more homophonic
  - more diatonic
  - vertically oriented
  - half note pulse
  - often improvised
  - for congregational accompaniment where only chorale is sung

Stage 2: Harmony

- Types A & B
  - more dissonant figures
  - more suspensions
  - more conjunct
  - faster values (non-CT’s)
  - horizontally oriented
  - quarter note pulse
  - usually written out
  - for concerted music where each voice is sung

- Types C & D
  - more triadic
  - more consonant
  - more disjunct
  - more homophonic
  - more diatonic
  - vertically oriented
  - half note pulse
  - often improvised
  - for congregational accompaniment where only chorale is sung

Free Composition (non-chorale based)

C. P. E. Bach: “In composition [J. S. Bach] started his pupils right in with what was practical, and omitted all the dry species of counterpoint that were given by Fux and others. His pupils had to begin their studies by learning pure four-part thoroughbass. From this he went to chorales; first he added the basses to them himself, and they had to invent the alto and tenor [Stage 1]. Then he taught them to devise the basses [note the plural] themselves [Stage 2]. He particularly insisted on the writing out of the thoroughbass in parts [Aussetzen der Stimmen im Generalbasse]. [Presumably later,] In teaching fugues, he began with two-part ones, and so on. / The realization of a thoroughbass and the introduction to chorales are without doubt the best method of studying composition, as far as harmony is concerned” (New Bach Reader, 399).
Outline

Part I: J. S. Bach’s Pedagogy and *Choralbuch vs. Choralgesang* Styles
   - Ex. 1: Two Stages in Bach’s Pedagogy
   - Exxs. 2–3: The *Choralbuch vs. Choralgesang* Styles of Realization

Part II: Adding Inner Voices and Ornamentation (Stage 1)
   - Ex. 4: Five Types of Texture
   - Exxs. 5–9: Examples of Textural Variation

Part III: Composing New Basslines (Stage 2a)
   - Exxs. 10–11: Types of Harmony and Basslines
   - Ex. 12: Various Kittel Harmonizations

Part IV: Adding Figures and Middle Voices (Stage 2b)
   - Exxs. 13–17: David Kellner’s Advice for Unfigured Basses
   - Exxs. 18–19: Multiple-Bass Chorales by Kittel and Kirnberger
Example 1: Overview of J. S. Bach’s Two-Stage Pedagogical Method and Source Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Receives</strong></td>
<td>Chorale, Bassline, and Figures</td>
<td>Chorale only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Provides</strong></td>
<td>Inner voices and Ornamentation</td>
<td>Bassline, Figures, and Inner voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogical Focus</strong></td>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Harmony &amp; Two-Voice Counterpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Types of Sources</strong></td>
<td>Single-Bass Sources</td>
<td>Multiple-Bass Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bach Students</strong></td>
<td>Dresden School (Sibley Choralbuch)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. H. Gräbner (1705?–1769)</td>
<td>J. C. Kittel (1732–1809)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. F. Bach (1710–1784)</td>
<td>J. P. Kirnberger (1721–1783)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. A. Homilius (1714–1785)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musicians Outside Bach Circle Who Illuminate This Stage</strong></td>
<td>M. J. F. Wiedenburg (1720–1800)</td>
<td>J. D. Heinichen (1683–1729)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. C. Knecht (1752–1817)</td>
<td>David Kellner (1670–1748)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. G. Werner (1777–1822)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 2a: *Nun laßt uns Gott dem Herren* from the *Sibley Choralbuch* (anon. ms., likely Dresden, c. 1740)

Tune Source: Selnecker’s *Christliche Psalmen* (Leipzig, 1587)

Example 2b: J. S. Bach’s setting of *Nun laßt uns Gott dem Herren* from Cantata BWV 165, *O heilges Geist und Wasserbad*

Original Key: G major. Text replaced for comparison with 2a.

"Now let us give thanks to the Lord and honor him on account of his gifts which we have received."
Example 3a: *Erhalt' uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort* from the Sibley Choralbuch (anon. ms., likely Dresden, c. 1740)

Example 3b: J. S. Bach’s setting of *Erhalt' uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort* from Cantata BWV 6 (also set in BWV 126)

"Keep us, Lord, by your Word, and control the murderous rage of the Pope and the Turks, who want to cast down Jesus Christ, your son, from his throne."

Original text: *Beweis' dein' Macht, Herr Jesu Christ*. Text replaced for comparison with 3a.

Tune Source: *Geistliche Lieder auffs new gebessert* (Wittenberg, 1543)
Part II: Adding Inner Voices and Ornamentation (Stage 1)

Example 4: Five textures for realizing a figured-bass chorale from Knecht (1795-98), Werner (1805), and Wiedeburg (1765-75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Close Style</td>
<td>Spread Style</td>
<td>Ornamented Style</td>
<td>Full-voiced Style</td>
<td>Unison Style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF VOICES</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Four or Five</td>
<td>Between Five and Nine</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLES IN THIS HANDOUT</td>
<td>Ex. 5a</td>
<td>Ex. 5b</td>
<td>Exx. 6, 7, 8</td>
<td>Exx. 5c, 9</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Homorhythmic with upper three voices in close position</td>
<td>Simple rhythms in opening position</td>
<td>More active rhythm; still in open position</td>
<td>Usually parallel 5ths and 8ves are allowed in the middle voices if the outer voices move in good counterpoint</td>
<td>Single voice doubled in three or four octaves with pedal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wide gap between bass and tenor</td>
<td>Tenor is lower than in the close style</td>
<td>All voices may be ornamented, even the soprano</td>
<td>Avoid thirds in the left hand (too thick)</td>
<td>Used in congregational singing for variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Older method, for beginners</td>
<td>Harder because left hand and pedal are now independent</td>
<td>Bach’s chorales from the cantatas belong to this type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KNECHT’S SUBTYPES**

- 3.1: Ornamented bass & varied harm.
- 3.2: Ornamented A, T, and B
- 3.3: All voices ornamented (also chorale in soprano)
- 3.4: Contrapuntal, canonic, or fugal ornamentation
- 4.1a: Thick chordal texture; middle voices may have parallel 5ths and 8ves
- 4.1b: Variation: Hold chords half value, always sustaining the soprano
- 4.2: Five or six independent ornamented voices without parallels
Example 5: Three styles of realizing *Nun läßt uns Gott dem Herren*, from Knecht’s *Orgelschule* (Leipzig, 1795–98)

a) Type 1: Close Style (3:20)

b) Type 2: Spread Style (3:36)

[alto and tenor near-exact inversion of those in 5a]

c) Type 4.1a: Full-voiced Style with Parallels (3:75)

[parallel fifths and octaves]

Example 6: Type 3.1: Varied bass (and harmony) using *Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier*, from Knecht’s *Orgelschule* (Leipzig, 1795–98, 3:83)

Example 7: Type 3.2: Varied middle voices and bass using *Nun danket alle Gott*, from Kencht’s *Orgelschule* (Leipzig, 1795–98)

a) (3:87–88)

b) (3:88–89)

c) (3:89–90)
Example 8: Type 3.3: All voices ornamented, from Knecht’s *Orgelschule* (Leipzig, 1795–98)

a) *O heil'ger Geist, kehr bei uns ein [Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern]* (3:93–94)

Einfache Melodie zum Singen.

Figurirte Melodie zum Orgelspielen.

b) *Allein Gott in der Höh sey Ehr* (3:95–96)

[Unadorned melody (not in original)]

Example 9: Type 4.2: Five or six independent voices, from Knecht’s *Orgelschule* (Leipzig, 1795–98)

a) Five voices: *Ach bleib mit deiner Gnade* (3:79)

Mit obligatem Pedal.

b) Six voices: *In allen meinen Thaten* (3:80)

Mit obligatem Pedal.
Part III: Composing New Basslines (Stage 2a)

Example 10: Kirnberger’s Harmonic Types from *The Strict Art...* (1982 [1771–91], 284–85)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kirnberger’s Types</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong> (all types include chord inversions)</td>
<td>Triads from only degrees 1, 4, and 5</td>
<td>Triads from all degrees</td>
<td>Degrees 1, 4, and 5 from neighboring keys (especially dominants)</td>
<td>Dominants from remote keys, enharmonic progressions, and sudden harmonic shifts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 11: Types of Basslines (after McCormick 2015, 23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diatonic vs. Chromatic (Bass itself)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conjunct vs. Disjunct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel vs. Contrary to the Chorale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homorhythmic vs. Faster NCT’s/Leaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Suspensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedal Point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitative of Chorale or Inner Voices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 12: Kittel’s Harmonizations of *Jesu meine Freude* from *Der Angehende Praktische Organist* (Erfurt 1808, 1/30–32)

Chorale:

Example 12: "lacking variety in harmony" [Type A; diatonic; homophonic]

Example 12: "richer in harmony" [Type C; diatonic; parallel; conjunct]

Example 12: "good" [Type B; diatonic, parallel; conjunct]

Example 12: "pure, yet forcedly chromatic" [Type C; chromatic, contrary]

Example 12: "better chromaticism" [Type C; all voices chromatic; parallel; faster values]

Example 12: "even better" [Type C; pedal point; imitative of A/T; chromatic figures]

Example 12: "rich in harmony" [Type C; faster values; mixed motions; chromatic bass and fig.’s]
Ex. 12 (cont.)

Chorale:

8 “natural bass” [Type C; homophonic; disjunct]
9 “good bass” [Type C; homophonic]
10 “more artful bass” [Type C; chromatic bass]
11 “pure and chromatic bass” [Type C; chromatic upper voices]
12 “a little too sharp” [Type C; disjunct]

Chorale:

13 “natural bass” [Type B; disjunct]
14 “beautiful” [Type B; conjunct]
15 “too foreign to the chorale” [Type C; chromatic]
16 “clever” [Type B; homophonic]
17 “harmonic” [Type C; suspensions in all voices]
18 “chromatic” [Type C; chromatic bass & tenor]

Chorale:

19 “natural bass” [Type A; homophonic; disjunct; alto susp.]
20 “pathetic bass” [Type C; conjunct]
21 “enharmonic bass” [Type D; conjunct]

22 “too chromatic and enharmonic” [Type D]
23 “passage with suspensions” [Gebundener Saz]
24 [no description by Kittel]

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Part IV: Adding Figures and Middle Voices (Stage 2b)

Example 14: Kellner’s Figures for the Rule of the Octave from *Treulicher Unterricht* (2nd ed. 1737, 31)

Hypothetical realization (after Rameau, *Traité de l’harmonie* (1722, 232):

```
\begin{xy}
  8 & 6 & 8 & 6 & 8 & 6 & 8 & 6 & 8 & 6 & 8 & 6 & 8 & 6 & 8
  3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3
\end{xy}
```

Example 15: Kellner on Chord Inversion (2nd ed. 1737, 40)

```
\begin{xy}
  6 & 3 \\
  3 & 6 & 5 & 6
\end{xy}
```

Unprepared dissonance at (x) justified by inversion of voices in the Rule of the Octave without invoking the concept of a root (i.e., “inversion” for Kellner simply means “invertible counterpoint”).

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Example 16: Kellner’s Tables of Signatures (2nd ed. 1737, 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Bass Motion</th>
<th>Major Keys</th>
<th>Minor Keys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bass Scale Degree</td>
<td>In [Stepwise Ascending Only]</td>
<td>In [Stepwise Descending Only]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 5</td>
<td>6 - 5 8 3</td>
<td>6 - 5 8 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b 8</td>
<td>6 5 3</td>
<td>6 5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 6</td>
<td>4 - 3 8 3</td>
<td>6 8 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 2</td>
<td>6 8 3</td>
<td>6 8 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 2</td>
<td>6 8 3</td>
<td>6 8 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aug. 2nd 6</td>
<td>4 - 3 8 3</td>
<td>6 8 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 3 6</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 3 8 5</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 8 5</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ 6 2</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dim. 4th 6</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
<td>7 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 b 6 3</td>
<td>9 5 3</td>
<td>9 5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aug. 5th 7</td>
<td>9 5 3</td>
<td>9 5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 6 8 3</td>
<td>9 6 3</td>
<td>9 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 8    7 - 6 3</td>
<td>9 - 8    7 - 6 3</td>
<td>9 - 8    7 - 6 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 17: Kellner’s Tables of Available Dissonances (2nd ed. 1737, 96–97)

The most common [abbreviated] signatures

The required voices to be added

*When scale degree four in the bass is raised a semitone.
Example 18: Kittel’s Multiple Basses for *Liebster Jesu wir sind hier* from 25 Chorale... (ms., Erfurt, 1791)

1. CHORALE (four phrases)

2.  

3.  

4.  

Original Key: G# Major
Example 19: Kirnberger’s Multiple Basses (selection from 26 total) from *The Strict Art*... (1982 [1771–91], 300–5)

**CHORALE:**

**“Natural”**
[Type C; disjunct]

**“Greater variety”**
[Type C; disjunct]

**“Foreign Dominants”**
[Type C; mostly conj.]

**“Parallel motion”**
[Type C]

**“Contrary motion”**
[Type C]

**“Contrary motion”**
[Type C; chromatic; contrary motion]

**“Canonic Imitation”**
[Type D; disjunct]

**“Canonic Imitation”**
[Type D; conjunct]
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