

The Split *Anstieg*: Initial Ascents Involving the Bass,
and Their Consequences

The notion that at least part of the fundamental melodic line's descent might take place in the bass is not new. One of Heinrich Schenker's most important unpublished sketches, housed in the Oster Collection at the New York Public Library, shows just that (Example 1).¹ The phenomenon, and especially the transfer of scale degrees $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{3}$ to the bass, has been studied in recent times as well.² But the mirror-image phenomenon, an initial ascent from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{5}$ that takes place at least partly in the bass, is relatively obscure, as are its consequences during the later, developmental pages of the composition.³

Example 2 illustrates. It is drawn from Book 2 of Handel's keyboard Suites, which was published surreptitiously in 1733 by John Walsh, using for the most part suites and other works that the young Handel composed during the early 1700s. The authenticity of the Allemande in Example 2 has been questioned,⁴ but its beauty seems self-evident, to me at least. An early analysis of

¹ Example 1b, an explanatory sketch in the hand of Ernst Oster, is reproduced from the Oster Collection: Papers of Heinrich Schenker, File 34, No. 15, by permission of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, and by permission of the custodian of Ernst Oster's papers.

² Wen 1999, Wen 2020, 194-96, and Yorgasson 2020, with further references.

³ *Anstieg* was Schenker's original term for our *initial ascent* ([1935] 1979, 163).

⁴ Terence Best (2001) has marshaled impressive (if not always convincing) evidence to suggest that an "English composer" (p. 10) was responsible for the Allemande (not least on account of some allegedly faulty craftsmanship in bar 10), and that William Babell was the composer of the subsequent Allegro.

it by Schenker (rather different from the analysis proposed here) appears in *Die Tonwille*.⁵

The analytical sketch in Example 3 shows how the ascent from $g^1 (\hat{1})$ to $a^1 (\hat{2})$ via a turn figure, $g^1-a^1-b^1-a^1$, in bars 1-2, continues to the bass B ($\hat{3}$) at the turn of bar 3. The bass B, for its part, continues to $c (\hat{4})$, $c\# (\#\hat{4})$, and $d (\hat{5})$ at the turn of bar 4. The upper voice attempts to follow, introducing $c\#^2$ on the second beat of bars 3 and 4, but there is little doubt that the bass gets to C# first, on the downbeat of bar 4, and that the bass leads. A three-bar auxiliary cadence (bars 5-7) introduces both the dominant and the upper-voice d^2 (bars 6^b-7), which picks up where the bass $c\#-d$ left off in bar 4.⁶ Note the clash between the upper-voice $c\#^2$ and $c\sharp^2$ in bar 4: it plays an important motivic role in the allemande's second reprise, and in the ensuing Allegro.

The second reprise opens with the tonicization, customary in major-mode binary-form movements, of the submediant, E minor (bars 8-11). The underlying

Schenker ([1933] 2004) had no trouble with the Allemande's counterpoint (not even with bar 10; see fn.5, below), and Susan Wollenberg, in a review (2002), remarks, somewhat ironically, that the "principle that emerges from Best's analysis could be summed up as either 'it isn't good enough to be by Handel' or 'it's bad enough to be by Babel'" (p. 283). I am proceeding under the assumption that both the Allemande and Allegro are authentically Handelian (even if not by Handel), and that they are thematically related.

⁵ Schenker [1923] 2004, 146-47. Schenker discusses the seemingly problematic voice leading of bar 10 (which involves apparent parallel fifths) in some detail (p. 147).

⁶ Structurally, the d^2 that is clearly implied in bar 4 anticipates the d^2 —the structural $\hat{5}$ —of bar 7.

upper-voice and bass both move, in octaves, to E. The upper voice reaches $d\#^2$ at the middle of bar 9, but $d\#^2$ is contradicted by the bass $d\sharp$ in bar 10, a clash that builds on the earlier clash between $c\#^2$ and $c\sharp^2$ in bar 4. The upper voice $d\#^2$ returns in bar 11, introduced by an elaborated turn figure, $f\#^2-e^2-d\#^2-e^2$. This turn figure is an enlarged inversion of the Allemande's opening turn, $g^1-a^1-b^1-a^1$ (see the square brackets in Example 3).

The remaining measures of the Allemande return to D via the turn figure $e-d-c-d$ in the bass (bars 12-13) and the somewhat obscured upper-voice descent d^2-c^2 ($\hat{5} - \hat{4}$). The auxiliary cadence that brings in the closing tonic and the upper-voice $\hat{1}$ (bars 14-16) also presents the structural $\hat{3}$, B, in the bass, at the turn of bar 14. The upper voice reclaims the descent's remaining stretch, a^1-g^1 ($\hat{2} - \hat{1}$), in bars 15 and 16.

The appearance of the structural $\hat{3}$, B, in the bass during the upper-voice descent mirrors and complements the appearance of the initial ascent's $\hat{3}$ in the bass of bar 3.

The Allemande's ascent and descent present in a nutshell some of the most important features of both the split initial ascent and its consequences. The tones $\hat{3}$, $\hat{4}$, and $\#4$ play the most significant role in the bass's attempt to usurp the ascent, and $\hat{3}$ plays an equally significant role in the bass's brief attempt to

take over the descent. During both ascent and descent—first in bars 3-4, then in bar 14—the upper voice is left to improvise upon the bass, which at these points is the leading voice. The upper voice's connection to the underlying structure is, at these two points, somewhat tenuous, a feature that acquires a life of its own in the Allegro.⁷

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The G major Suite's second movement is an Allegro (possibly spurious, though I believe it's authentic) in the French *style brisé* that enlarges freely upon the Allemande's principal thematic and structural features (Examples 4 and 5).⁸ The same turn figure that began the Allemande, $\hat{1} - \hat{2} - \hat{3} - \hat{2}$ ($g^1 - a^1 - b^1 - a^1$), occupies bars 1 and 2; it leads from the initial ascent's g^1 ($\hat{1}$) to a^1 ($\hat{2}$). B ($\hat{3}$) again arrives in the bass, at the beginning of bar 3, but it now supports an unexpected, pungently colorful B minor chord. This very surprising and expressive chord is prolonged by an inner-voice 5-6 motion to the middle of bar 5; only then is its root continued by c and, on the second beat of bar 6, by d. But the initial ascent's $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{5}$ have not yet been reached; the upper voice takes over

⁷ Observe how the g^2 and a^2 at the turn of bars 3 and 4 connect registrally—but not structurally—to the c^2 , b^2 , and a^2 in bar 10. The upper part of the two-line octave does not otherwise play a role in the upper voice's conduct.

⁸ The authenticity of the Allegro (and, by implication, its connection to the Allemande) has been questioned by Terence Best (2001); see fn. 4, above.

the $\hat{3}$ (b^1) in bar 5, and then cadences an octave below, in the small octave, in bar 6.

The ascent now begins again, in the upper voice—but in the small octave, shifted to the middle of the measure (bar 6^b). It concludes, implicitly, in the middle of bar 8, where $f\#^1$ stands for d^1 . $C\#$ appears only in the one-line octave, as $c\#^1$ (bar 8^a); d^2 appears fleetingly in the two-line octave at the end of bar 8, when cadencing in key of the dominant is already underway. One might say that the fleeting d^2 here only anticipates the appearance of the structural d^2 , which takes place just after the double bar, its long-awaited entrance wonderfully effective. In each of the two ascents that conclude the first reprise, the last half step ($c\#^1$ - d^1 in bars 8-10^b; g - a in bars 12-13) is enlarged by an auxiliary cadence establishing the dominant as the structural sonority that frames the double bar.

The tonicization of the neighboring submediant chord, along with an implied neighbor-note e^2 ($\hat{6}$) in the upper voice, is the focal point of the second reprise, even though VI is temporarily usurped by several transitional measures. As the submediant's tonicization gets underway, the restatement of the second reprise's first subphrase (bars 15-16) a step higher, in the minor-mode submediant (bars 17-18), recalls the surprising appearance of the mediant, B minor, in bar 3 (the corresponding spot in the first reprise).

A sequential descent, which now follows in bars 19-20, leads us to believe that the submediant might be bypassed, after all. And the auxiliary cadence that begins in bar 21 initially confirms that impression by using $d\sharp^2$ and $c\sharp^2$ in its rapid descent (bar 21^a). But the ear is pleasantly jolted when $d\sharp$ and $c\sharp$ appear in the bass on the last beat of bar 21, joined by $d\sharp^1$ at bar 22^a. (The jolt harks back to the similar jolt at the corresponding location in the Allemande, where the bass $d\sharp$ on the second beat of bar 10 contradicts the upper-voice $d\sharp^2$ of bar 9^b, only to be contradicted in turn by $d\sharp^2$ on the second beat of bar 11.)

The upper voice in these measures of the Allegro describes a descent from a superimposed g^2 (bar 19) to $f\sharp^2$ (bar 20) and to the aforementioned implicit e^2 (bar 22^a) over the affirmation, at last, of the submediant's tonicization. This sudden foray into the two-line octave, though clearly superimposing an inner voice, points to an important phenomenon: namely, in compositions where the bass threatens to take over the upper voice, however temporarily, forays of the upper voice are particularly difficult to assay in terms of the underlying top-voice structure.

And in fact the transitional, mock-sequential passage in bars 23-26 does allow the bass to take over (see again Example 5). The rising sequential pairs in these measures are only loosely connected; they seem to be searching for some destination in an improvisatory way. And that destination is the bass B in bar 25, which resets the direction of the passage towards the dominant of bar 26^b. The

emphasis on the bass B here, at the center of the second reprise, complements the emphasis on the bass B in bar 3, just as it did in the corresponding spot of the Allemande.

At a more shallow level, the bass also appears to describe a turn around D, namely E-D-C♯-C#-D (bars 22^b-23^b-25^b-26), in which D and C♯ are approached via their upper fifths, A and G (bars 23^a and bars 24^b-25^a). The artful connection between the explicit bass turn E-D-C-D in bars 19-22^b and the shadowy bass turn E-D-C♯-C#-D in bars 23-25^b is veiled but palpable.

As the bass outlines these somewhat ineffable turns, the upper voice shows an ascent towards that e² that was implied but never reached in bar 22^b, this by way of several superimposed descending thirds that resemble reaching-over figures (the second and third beats of each measure in bars 22-25). The upper voice then shoots past e² and reaches as high as a²-g²-f#² in bar 25. Except for the implication of d²—the $\hat{5}$ —at bar 25^b, this segment of the upper voice, even though it projects urgency and direction, does not connect with the underlying voice-leading structure. The g² of bar 19^a and the f#² of bar 25^b create at most a *Ränderspiel* (*boundary-play*), a play of superimposed tones at the border of the upper-voice line.⁹

⁹ See Samarotto 2009, with further references. The term *Ränderspiel* was coined by Schenker ([1935] 1979, §260). See also Wen 2020, chapter 12.

To close his Allegro, Handel brings back the opening two measures (bars 27-28) and, transposed, the two auxiliary cadences of bars 9-10 and 12-13 (at bars 29-30 and 31-32). Near the end of the preceding transitional measures (i.e., at bar 26), the underlying upper-voice tone is d^2 , continuing the e^2 implicit in bar 22. It remains for the two auxiliary cadences to bring in the $\hat{4} - \hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ of the structural descent. The bass takes over $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{3}$ (bars 29-30^a and 31-32^a). Rather rapidly, the upper voice supplies $\hat{2}$ and $\hat{1}$ (on the second and third beats of bars 30 and 32). It is important to note that the bass B on the downbeat of bars 30 and 32 is part of a prefix connecting the c of bars 29 and 31 with the d on the second beat of bars 30 and 32; it does not support a structural I⁶.¹⁰

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For a more extended and more complex example of an initial ascent that finds an elaborate response in the second reprise of a dance-suite movement, let us turn to the fifth movement, the Passepied, from Bach's G major Partita for Clavier (Examples 6 and 7). The intricacy of this movement is belied by its disarmingly simple texture; my analysis here represents my best effort, and it is of necessity subject to change.

As in Handel's Allegro, the bass announces its temporary takeover of the initial ascent by introducing an unexpected B minor sonority at the metrically stressed—in this instance, counterstressed—beginning of the second subphrase

¹⁰ For a detailed account of this prefix idiom, see Rothstein 1991 and 2004.

(bar 4).¹¹ Unlike Handel, who brings in his B minor at the metrically strong beginning of the second subphrase of his Allegro (bar 3), Bach introduces his unexpected B at the metrically weak ending of this first subphrase (bar 4). Bach then extends B in a mock-improvisatory manner to the end of the first full phrase (bars 1-8), creating a five-bar group in the process.¹² Bach's bass B continues on to $c^{\sharp 2}$ in the upper voice of bar 7, and to b^1 in bar 8 (see the arrows in Example 7).

The Passetied's second phrase (bars 9-16), even though it begins like the first, proceeds somewhat differently. Its opening bass tone is e, not g, and the resulting submediant composes out an inner-voice 5-6 motion over the tonic, G, which is implicitly sustained from the opening (see again Example 7). The contrapuntally derived E minor sonority ultimately underlines, rather than hides, the tonic's implicit extension under the sounding bass tone (in reality, the tenor voice). Across the barline at bars 12-13, the tenor's c^{\sharp} dissonates against the bass's still implicitly sustained G (see the beamed tones in the lower staff of Example 7). It is this tenor c^{\sharp} , the $\hat{\#4}$, that continues the pasetied's initial ascent, and it resolves, temporarily, to d across bars 13-14. The bass F# implied under d arrives in bar 15 as f^{\sharp} , an octave above (see again the beamed tones in the lower staff of Example 7). And the goal of the first reprise—namely, $\hat{5}$, the

¹¹ Very locally, a-b across the bar line in bars 3-4 supports a deceptive cadence in the briefly stabilized key of the dominant. On counterstress in Bach, see Willner 1998.

¹² 3+5 subphrases are common in Bach; see Willner 1998 and 2015.

upper voice d^2 , and the bass dominant D—arrives in bar 16. It is here that the initial ascent concludes, and the structural upper-voice d^2 is established.

A quick glance at Example 7 will disclose that I have also indicated a largely implicit $\hat{3} - \hat{2}$ descent across bars 1-16. Unlike Handel's *Allegro*, Bach's *Passepied* provides enough material in the higher register during its second reprise to warrant adoption of David Neumeyer's *three part Ursatz*.¹³ But I hasten to add that in this instance the high soprano voice, at the top of the two-line octave (active primarily during the second reprise), is clearly subservient to the lower alto voice, a sixth below; this is a common occurrence in the Baroque instrumental repertoire.¹⁴

The bass progression underlying the second reprise allows the dominant, held over from the first reprise, to make its way to the closing tonic at the very background while other events occur in between. We shall soon observe how the contrapuntal middleground bass line of the second reprise all but takes over the descent of the alto's fundamental melodic line.¹⁵

The second reprise of the *Passepied* divides into three phrases, marked Phrase 3, 4 and 5 in Examples 6 and 7. The first two are twelve-bars long each (bars 17-29 and 19-40), and the last is eight-bars long (bars 49-58). Only the last phrase achieves cadential closure. That the first two phrases do not close

¹³ Neumeyer 1987.

¹⁴ The two-line octave in Bach's *Passepied* is prominent enough to host a genuine—rather than a shadow—*Urlinie*. On shadow *Urlinien* see Yorgasson 2020.

¹⁵ For 19th-century examples of descents that take place in the bass see Wen 1999 and the further discussion in Yorgasson 2020 (and recall Example 1).

cadentially poses great difficulties only if one is trying to find a traditional, harmonic bass line in the reprise at all costs. And indeed the linearity of these phrases suggests that their bass line could be entirely contrapuntal, unusual though that might seem to be.

In the event, I believe that the bass line of the second reprise describes a slow descent of the $\hat{5}$ -line; see the intermittently beamed half notes in the lower staves of Example 7. The alto upper voice follows suit, a tenth or a third above; see the half notes in the upper staves of Example 7. From bar 30 on, these upper 10ths combine to outline much of the *proforma* alto upper-voice descent, but I would hesitate to read more into their descent than that.

The $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ soprano descent of the three-part *Ursatz*, in the two-line octave, remains largely tacit, but it is nonetheless clearly implied by the events in the first phrase, bars 17-28.¹⁶

That first phrase of the second reprise (i.e., Phrase 3) briefly tonicizes the dominant's neighboring chord, the submediant (bar 20), before returning to what appears to be the dominant. The apparent dominant is now a contrapuntal rather than a harmonic entity—it is a passing chord, represented initially by a tonic 6/4 sonority in bars 21-24. That is, it first appears in the descending step e^1-d^1 , in the one-line octave. The bass then descends further, down a ninth from

¹⁶ I have only provided a middleground graph of the *Passepied* because, as sometimes happens in the overwhelmingly contrapuntal Baroque repertoire, the events at the surface cannot be reduced out entirely without rendering the analysis meaningless.

e^1 to a more stable version of the dominant, over d in the small octave (bar 28; see the long slur in the lower staff of Example 7).¹⁷

The very conspicuous repetitions in bars 21-24 extend the locally passing 6/4 sonority over D , and in so doing they expand the movement of the bass line in bars 20-28.¹⁸ The prominence of the tone B in the upper voice (as b^1) and, at the fourth 16th of each left-hand repetition (as b), under the more essential bass tone d^1 , is emblematic of the role B plays throughout the second reprise.

This emphasis on B is an outgrowth of the surprise appearance that B makes in bar 4 of the first reprise, where it is positioned as a potential player in the *Passepied*'s later evolution. In bars 21-24 the emphasis on B contributes to the growing sense that the second reprise, and especially its bassline, is grounded in a large-scale contrapuntal, rather than harmonic movement.

The (alto) upper voice in the second phrase of the second reprise, bars 29-40 (i.e., phrase 4), accompanies the bass as the bass descends from $\hat{5}$ (D) to $\hat{3}$ (B) via $\hat{4}$ (C) through an unfolding, $C-A$, $G-B$ (expressed in the small octave as $c-a$, $g-b$). The bass leads the unfolding, and the upper voice follows, a 10th or a third above: e^2-c^2 , b^1-d^1 (see the unfolding signs in Example 8). The repetitions in bars 32-34 extend the unfolding's c^2/a ; the repetitions in bars 35-36 introduce

¹⁷ At a deeper level, the bass descent from e^1 to d is broken up into thirds, as the long slur in Example 7 shows.

¹⁸ For a recent look at various explanations of the tonic 6/4 see Temperley 2017, with further references.

the unfolding's b^1/g ; and the repetitions in bars 37-40 anticipate the unfolding's d^1/b . Again, the tone B stands out: first as an accented, passing inner-voice b^1 on the second beat of bars 32-34, and then as the repeated local goal, also b^1 , of the aforementioned upper-voice unfolding, e^2-c^2, b^1-d^1 in bars 35 and 36.

A copy-cat emphasis accrues to b in the bass of bars 37-40, where—as the goal of the unfolding I just described—it represents the B of the bass's descent from D to G. In hindsight, taking in the first reprise, the emphasis on the bass tone B indicates that it is probably the B minor chord in bar 4, counterstressed just where the initial ascent dips into the bass, that triggers this later composing-out and subdivision of the space between the bass D and the bass G, in the second reprise.

The bass repetitions in the second phrase of the second reprise are all essential to building up the Passepiéd's quadratic durational framework, and they cannot be reduced out, tonally or durationally.

The Passepiéd's last phrase (i.e., phrase 5), eight bars long (bars 41-48), introduces the bass descent's penultimate tone, A (bar 46) via a summary (bars 44-46) of the entire tonal trajectory of bars 30-46. That is to say, the entire tonal path of the second phrase and most of the third phrase of the second reprise (phrases 4 and 5) is condensed into—and restated in—these three measures. The summary imitates and, in retrospect, pulls together and gives shape to those seemingly redundant repetitions that have appeared earlier, putting them to more palpable tonal use. That is why the upper voice at this point suddenly

acquires the kind of weight and direction it has so far relinquished in favor of the bass descent.

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I hope that by dwelling on the intricacies of Handel's Allemande and Allegro, and on the twisted path of Bach's G major Passepied, I succeeded in some measure in enabling the reader to forge ahead and investigate the complexities of other compositions with similar initial ascents, ascents that touch on the bass, in the Baroque repertoire and beyond.

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