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On Divided Lines: Instrumentation for Bass Parts in Corelli-Era Sonatas

Peter Walls

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Ever since 1992 when Peter Allsop published his book *The Italian 'Trio' Sonata from its Origins until Corelli* there has been a certain nervousness about how to describe the principal chamber music forms of the early Baroque. The inverted commas ('scare quotes') around the word 'trio' have frightened musicologists away from using the term at all to describe seventeenth- and early eighteenth century works for two violins and bass. Moreover, it has led to an uncertainty about how to classify works for solo violin and bass—Corelli's Op. 5 (*Sonate a Violino e Violone o Cimbalo*, Rome, 1700) being the prime example here.

The reasons for the scare quotes are clear. As Allsop explains, the term 'trio' has been applied to two distinct types of sonata, "compositions for two melody instruments (most frequently in the treble range), or two trebles plus melodic bass instrument, each group supplied with its own continuo."¹ It thus rides roughshod over a very basic distinction about the number of melodic voices and the function of the bass line, a distinction that may relate to whether a particular work owes its derivation to the revolutionary monodic developments of the early seventeenth century or to an older contrapuntal tradition that extends back into the sixteenth century. Allsop dismisses the retrospective use of the term "trio sonata" as a matter of modern convenience born of a lack of understanding and adds that "it is to be hoped that in time the much more precise contemporary terminology of *a 2* and *a 3* will be restored to popular usage."²

In voicing this hope, Allsop was reiterating a point of view that had been powerfully argued by Neils Martin Jensen in 1972 and taken up by others (including Sandra Mangsen, in the pages of this journal) in the interim.³ Jensen dismissed previous claims that seventeenth-

In chapters 3 and 4 of *History, Imagination and the Performance of Music* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, and Rochester, NY, USA, 2003), I discuss bass line instrumentation in seventeenth-century Italian sonatas from various points of view. In this article, I revisit this topic questioning a supposedly clear historical distinction between *basso continuo* and melodic (or thematically significant) bass lines.

¹ Peter Allsop, *The Italian 'Trio' Sonata from its Origins until Corelli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 24.

² Ibid., 26.

³ Niels Martin Jensen, "Solo Sonata, Duo Sonata and Trio Sonata: Some Problems of Terminology and Genre in 17th-Century Italian Instrumental Music," in *Festskrift Jens Peter Larsen* (Copenhagen, 1972), 73-101. See also Tharald Borgir, *The Performance of the Basso Continuo in Italian Baroque Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI

century terminology was ambiguous and argued for its reinstatement—or rather for a more user-friendly system adapted from it. The seventeenth-century Italian system described chamber works according to the number of melodic voices. A sonata “a due” (a 2) has two voices, “a tre” has three, and so on. The basso continuo—where it functioned as non-thematic harmonic support—was not included in the arithmetic. Hence, a *sonata a 2* might be for violin and bass or it might be for two violins and bass provided that the bass in this case is clearly a basso continuo and not a third voice with some claim to equality in a contrapuntal texture. Similarly, a *sonata a 3* implies in this context a work for two violins and a thematically-significant bass line, that is to say a bass line that is not just a supporting basso continuo (which may or may not be present). In Jensen’s view (and later Allsop’s) “It is inexpedient to continue to call pieces for S/bc [soprano and basso continuo] and SB/bc [soprano, bass, and basso continuo] both solo sonatas, and equally, those for SS/bc and SSB/bc trio sonatas. One can instead apply names in conformity with contemporary practice and call sonatas for one melody instrument and b.c. solo sonatas, sonatas for two melody instruments and b.c. duo sonatas and sonatas for three melody instruments and b.c. trio sonatas, regardless of whether the melody instruments lie in the soprano or bass range.”⁴

According to this view, the Opus 1-4 sonatas of Corelli (all described on their title pages as “sonate a tre”) are genuinely trio sonatas while the Opus 5 sonatas (supposedly for two melodic instruments, “violino e violone” or “violino e...cimbalò”) are duo sonatas. For violinists (who have long regarded Opus 5 as one of the cornerstones of the solo repertory) it may seem counterintuitive to think of these sonatas as duos. Allsop, in his Corelli book, again resorts to scare quotes in his chapter on Opus 5 which is entitled “The ‘Solo’ Sonatas.” He even goes so far as to claim that commentators from Burney to the present day have missed that fact and that, although Corelli is known to have written solo sonatas, he didn’t ever publish any. He writes:

“...the title page [of Opus 5] unambiguously states that they were intended in the first instance as *unaccompanied* duos for violin and violone with the option of *replacing* the latter with the harpsichord, and this identifies the collection as part of a particular vogue for the unaccompanied duo current in the last quarter of the century.”⁵

Here with his insistence on the concept of “*unaccompanied* duos,” the question of genre and terminology becomes implicated in a debate about performance practice, a debate about the optimal instrumentation for the bass line. As Mangsen saw it, “Our failure to appreciate the seventeenth-century implications of the term *basso* (*B*) and *continuo* (*b*) has led us to impose eighteenth-century conventions of bass-line doubling on earlier sonatas, and to confuse what

Research Institute, 1987); Sandra Mangsen, “The Trio Sonata in Pre-Corellian Prints: When Does 3 = 4?,” *Performance Practice Review* 3 (1990): 138-64; Michelangelo Abbado, “Con quali strumenti si dovrebbero eseguire le sonate per violino e basso,” *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana* 12 (1978): 157-65.

⁴ Jensen, “Solo Sonata, Duo Sonata and Trio Sonata,” 82.

⁵ Peter Allsop, *Arcangelo Corelli: New Orpheus of Our Times* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 120.

were originally distinct textures.”⁶ This was my point of entry into the question—but I wish to leave it to one side for the moment and concentrate on the extent to which seventeenth-century Italian convention provides a more accurate way of describing the essential musical characteristics of small scale chamber music than the more modern and supposedly sloppy trio- and solo-sonata terminology.

The key to all of this is the character of the bass line. If it functions as a continuo part it doesn’t count in determining the work’s description (its genre, in fact). If it is melodically (i.e. thematically) significant it does. W. S. Newman developed a shorthand system for describing these relationships. Thus, S/b are sonatas for solo violin and basso continuo, whereas SB/b are duos for violin and bass (say, cello) plus basso continuo. SB (Bartolomeo Laurenti, *Suonate da camera a violino e violoncello*, for instance) are sonatas for violin and bass without basso continuo.⁷ Jensen, while applauding the possibilities of this method, criticizes Newman for frequently “explaining what is possibly a melody-bass as a concertizing elaboration of the continuo voice.”⁸ Tables 1-3 contain a selection of seventeenth-century publications with titles, part-books, and their designation according to the Newman system.

Table 1: Publications containing *a l* sonatas

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Scoring</i>	<i>Part books in publication</i>
Marco Uccellini (c.1603-1680), <i>Sonate over canzoni da farsi a violino solo</i> op. 5 (Venice: Vincenti, 1649)	S/b	(i) canto, (ii) partitura
Giovanni Antonio Leoni, <i>Sonate di violino a voce sola . . . libro primo opera terza</i> Op. 3 (Rome: Mascardi, 1652)	S/b	(i) violino, (ii) partitura
Giovanni Bonaventura Viviani, <i>Sinfonie, arie, capricci, alemande, correnti, gighe, introductioni, sarabande, &c. per violino solo</i> op. 4 (Rome: Vannacci, 1678)	S/b	(i) violino solo, (ii) organo ò gravicembalo
Pietro Degli Antonii, <i>Sonate a Violino Solo Con il Basso Continuo per l’organo di Pietro De Gli Antoni</i> op. 4 (Bologna: Monti, 1686)	S/b	(i) violino, (ii) partitura
Pietro Degli Antonii, <i>Suonate a violino solo col basso continuo per l’Organo</i> op. 5 (Bologna: Monti, 1686)	S/b	partitura
Antonio Veracini, <i>Sonate da camera a violino solo</i> op. 2. (Modena: Rosati, [c 169?])	S/b	(i) violino, (ii) cimbalo, o violone

⁶ Mangsen, “The Trio Sonata in Pre-Corellian Prints,” 141. In her article, Mangsen comes to very different conclusions than my own. She sees the presence of a melodic plus a harmonic keyboard instrument as being related to *da chiesa*—as distinct from *da camera*—practice. The sense of there being distinct church and chamber genres, however, is itself too problematic to allow us to deduce reliable information about sacred versus secular performance practice.

⁷ W. S. Newman, *The Sonata in the Baroque Era* (Chapel Hill, 1959; 4th ed. 1983). The S/b, SB/b (etc.) method of describing ensembles derives from Newman’s *The Sonata in the Baroque Era*.

⁸ Jensen, “Solo Sonata, Duo Sonata and Trio Sonata,” 78.

Table 2: Publications containing *a 2* sonatas

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Scoring</i>	<i>Part books in publication</i>
Marco Uccellini (c.1603-1680), <i>Sonate Arie, et Correnti A 2. e. 3 Per Sonare con diversi Instrummenti</i> (Venice: Vicenti, 1642)	SS/b	(i) canto I, (ii) canto II, (iii) basso continuo
Arresti, Giulio Cesare (Bologna, 1625-1704) <i>Sonate A 2, & a Tre. Con la parte del Violoncello a beneplacido</i> , op. 4 (Venice: Gardano, 1665)	SS(B)/b	(i) Violino primo, (ii) Violino secondo (iii) Violoncello (iv) Basso continuo
G. Colombi, (1635-1694), <i>Sonate a due violini con un bassetto viola se piace</i> op. 4 (Bologna: Monti, 1676)	SS(B)/b	(i) violino primo, (ii) violino secondo, (iii) bassetto viola, (iv) basso continuo
Antonio Veracini, <i>Sonate da camera A due, violino, e violone, ò arcileuto, col basso per il cimbalo</i> , op. 3 (Modena: Rosati, 1696)	SB/b	(i) violino, (ii) violone, ò arcileuto, (iii) cimbalo
Bartolomeo Laurenti, <i>Suonate da camera a violino e violoncello</i> (Bologna, 1691)	SB	(i) violino, (ii) violoncello

Table 3: Publications containing several types of sonata

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Scoring</i>	<i>Part books in publication</i>
G. B. Fontana (?1589-?1630), <i>Sonate a 1. 2. 3. per il violino, o cornetto, fagotto, chitarone, violoncino o simile altro istromento</i> (Venice: Magni, 1641) Sonatas 1-6: Violino solo Sonatas 7-8: Doi violini Sonatas 9-10: Violino, e Fagotto Sonata 11: Due Violini Sonata 12: Violino, e Fagotto Sonata 13-15: Doi Violini, e Fagotto Sonata 16: Tre Violini Sonatas 17-18: Doi Violini, e Fagotto	S/b; SS/b; SB SSB/b SSS/b	(i) canto primo, (ii) canto secondo, (iii) basso, (iv) partitura
Marco Uccellini, <i>Sonate Correnti et Arie da Farsi condiversi Stromenti si da Camera come da Chiesa à uno à due, et à tre</i> Op. 4 (Venice, 1645) Sonatas 1-6: violin and b.c. (<i>a1</i>) Sonatas 7-14: violin, bass, and b.c. (<i>a2</i>) Sonatas 15-22: 2 violins and b.c. (<i>a2</i>) Sonatas 23-30: 2 violins bass, and b.c. (<i>a3</i>)	S/b SB/b SS/b SSB/b	
Agostino Guerrieri <i>Sonate di Violino A 1. 2. 3. 4. Per Chiesa, & anco Aggiunta per Camera</i> op. 1 (Venice: Gardano, 1673)	S/b SS/b SB/b	(i) violino primo, (ii) violino secondo, (iii) terza

Sonatas 1-4 for 'à solo' Sonatas 5-12 'à 2 violini' Sonata 13 'La Lucina à 2 violini arpa over teorba' Sonatas 14-16 'à 3' Sonatas 17-18 'à 4'	SSS/b SSB/b SSSB/b	parte, (iv) viola, (v) basso continuo
<i>Prima scelta di sonata A 2. è 3. Istromenti. Col il suo basso continuo di diversi signori virtuosi moderni.</i> (Venice: Gardano, c. 1680?) Sonatas 1-6 are 'à 2 violini' Sonata 7: 'à 3. due violini e violone' Sonatas 8-10 & 12: 'à 3. due violini e viola' Sonata 11: 'à 3. due violini e violoncino'	SS/b SSB/b	(i) violino primo, (ii) violino secondo, (iii) viola, (iv) basso continuo
Carlo Fedeli, <i>Suonate a due, tre, et una a quattro con ecco col suo basso continuo per l'organo</i> , op. 1 (Venice: Sala, 1685)	SS/b SSB/b SSSB/b	(i) violino primo, (ii) violino secondo, (iii) viola, (iv) organo

Let me briefly summarize the possibilities here. A solo sonata will consist of a solo line (violin usually) and is usually—though not necessarily—accompanied by basso continuo. A duo sonata might be SB or SB plus continuo if that is provided for in the part books, or it might be SS plus continuo (a combination that in the bad old days got lumped in with genuine three-voiced trio sonatas). A sonata *a 3* might be SSB, SSB/b or even SSS/b. According to the Jensen/Allsop hypothesis, solo Bass parts do not need additional continuo support unless that is specifically provided for in the format of the publication.

This distinction between a “melody bass”—an equal partner in a contrapuntal relationship—and “a concertizing elaboration of the continuo voice” is crucial in what Jensen and Allsop propose as a more precise and differentiated view of the small chamber music genres in the seventeenth century. They would have us abandon loose and ambiguous terms like “trio sonata” and acknowledge that the terminology used by musicians in the *seicento* reflects a clearly-understood distinction between sonatas for one or two upper melodic lines with a melodic bass line and those that have one or two upper melodic lines supported by a basso continuo. Allsop, for example, has this to say about the historical context for Corelli's Opus 5:

“this relatively new genre of unaccompanied duo drew on traits of the existing forms of both the true solo sonata and accompanied duo sonata for violin and melodic bass. The solo sonatas of Marini and Uccellini, with the fluid structures and unpredictable changes of mood, epitomize that improvisatory and rhapsodical style classified by Athanasius Kircher as *stylus phantasticus*. In Uccellini's *La Lucimimonia contenta*, Op. 4 (1645), for example, interest is centred almost entirely on the spontaneous outpourings of the violin...while the bass provides a simple and unobtrusive harmonic support... Sonatas *a 2*, on the other hand, were regarded as far more suitable for contrapuntal elaboration, and this is aptly demonstrated by Sonata 8, the first of the free sonatas *a violino e basso* from Uccellini's 1645 collection... The unaccompanied duo sonata of the late seventeenth century availed itself of the

imitative textures and dialogues of the traditional sonata *a 2*, but treated both instruments in a much more soloistic manner akin to the true solo sonata.”⁹

Two general points need underlining here: first Allsop’s strong sense of two distinct genres each involving violin and bass, and second his use of the term “unaccompanied” in relation to the duo sonata. In other words, he argues that the bass part in the duo sonata is not a continuo part and therefore does not need to be realized by a chordal instrument in addition to the melodic bass (*violone* or *violoncello*). Obviously a parallel point can be made about sonatas for two treble instruments and a bass part that can either be melodic or harmonic in orientation.

Thought of in this way the genre determines the appropriate way to perform the bass line—with *violoncello* alone, with harpsichord alone, or with cello plus harpsichord (to enumerate only the simplest range of options). According to this view, there is no need for a continuo instrument as such unless it is specifically called for in the title page description and provided for in the part-books. In this context, instruments like the harpsichord need to be viewed as either a melodic or a continuo instrument—but that kind of dual function is acknowledged as early as Agazzari who includes lute, theorbo, and harp in both his foundation and ornamental instrument categories.¹⁰

My contention in this article is that the seventeenth-century terminology is not quite as watertight as a way of describing genre (and therefore determining the appropriate bass-line instrumentation) as the now prevailing view implies. I do not think that seventeenth-century musicians had such a consistently straightforward attitude to their own terminology or that their bass-line practices were completely pre-determined in this way. If it is valid, the Jensen/Allsop hypothesis must surely point to something real about the musical character of the all-important solo bass parts. In other words, shouldn’t we be able to determine whether we are dealing with a continuo line or a thematically-important part without reference to title pages or the headings on part-books?

Even the strongest advocates of re-adopting seventeenth-century terminology are aware of complicating factors. Jensen describes a “special category of trio sonata of the SSB/b type in which the performance of the bass part as a thorough-bass can almost be said to be degraded to *ad libitum* practice.”¹¹ This effectively gives us a third kind of bass line—one that lies half way between an independent, thematically significant melodic line and a continuo part (something that Jensen, as we have seen, refers to elsewhere in his article as a

⁹ Allsop, *Corelli*, 121.

¹⁰ Agostino Agazzari, *Del sonare sopra ‘l basso con tutti li stromenti, e dell’uso loro nel concerto* (Siena, 1607); trans Oliver Strunk, rev. Margaret Murata, in Leo Treitler, ed., *Source Readings in Music History*, revised edition (New York: Norton, 1998), 622.

¹¹ Jensen, “Solo Sonata, Duo Sonata and Trio Sonata,” 89.

“concertizing elaboration of the continuo voice”¹²). This mixed bass line, in my view, undermines the reliability of these genre descriptions as a guide to performance. Yet there are many instances that might be described in exactly this way.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, it is often a fairly straightforward matter to determine which works call for a harmonizing continuo instrument, either alone or in addition to a separate melodic bass. The Fontana *Sonate* of 1641, for example, are described unambiguously (see Table 3). The *basso* part-book contains only Sonatas 9, 10, 12-18. The first of these is headed up “Sonata nona Fagotto ò Chitarone ò Violonzono: Con Violino ò cornetto.” (Sonata 10 etc. just have “Fagotto e Violino”). Note that sonatas 1-6 are not included in the *basso* part; their continuo bass line is supplied in the *partitura* alone—which, incidentally, reverts to a figured bass part (rather than a score) for the sonatas involving more than one violin. The nature of the bass line for the sonatas without a separate entry in the *basso* part-book is well demonstrated by the opening movement of Sonata 5 (ex. 1). Here, the bass line is very clearly a harmonically supportive continuo part with virtually no independent thematic interest. In its uncluttered way, it leaves the violin free to indulge in soloistic gestures.

Example 1. G. B. Fontana (?1589-?1630), *Sonate a 1. 2. 3. per il violino, o cornetto, fagotto, chitarone, violoncino o simile altro istromento* (Venice: Magni, 1641), Sonata 5, mm. 32-46

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a sonata. Each system has two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The first system starts at measure 32, the second at measure 37, and the third at measure 42. The treble staff in each system contains a single melodic line with various ornaments and slurs. The bass staff contains a simple, harmonically supportive line with mostly whole and half notes, and some rests. The systems are labeled with measure numbers 32, 37, and 42 at the beginning of the treble staff.

Sonatas 9 and 10 for “Violino, e Fagotto” present a rather different picture, however. Example 2 shows part of an extended solo bass passage at the beginning of the sonata before the violin has entered. The *Fagotto* line immediately looks like a solo line. It is far more

¹² See above page 5.

active than the continuo line we have just been looking at in Sonata 5. But for all that, there is a close identity between the solo *Fagotto* line and the basso continuo line. One can be regarded as an embellishment of the other.

Example 2. G. B. Fontana (?1589-?1630), *Sonate a 1. 2. 3. per il violino, o cornetto, fagotto, chitarone, violonchino o simile altro istromento* (Venice: Magni, 1641), Sonata 9, bars 16-33 (violino o cornetto tacet)

The image displays a musical score for Sonata 9, bars 16-33. The score is written for two parts: Fagotto (Bassoon) and Chitarone or Violonzono (Chitarrone or Violoncello). The notation is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into four systems, each starting with a bar number: 16, 20, 24, and 28. The Fagotto part is written on a single staff, while the Chitarone/Violonzono part is written on a single staff. The two parts are often in unison or close harmony, with the Fagotto part sometimes featuring more elaborate melodic lines. The notation includes various note values, rests, and bar lines.

Numerous examples from later in the century are also completely consistent in their use of the terminology. The tables of contents in the various part books of Agostino Guerrieri's Opus 1 *Sonate di Violino*, for example, illustrate the system well (illus. 1-3). The *violino primo* and *basso continuo* part-books contain virtually identical lists. (The continuo part lacks a bass line for the last item on the violin's list—the Ruggiero variations.) But the melodic bass part (here called 'viola') has only five items:

- i. "La Lucina" a 2 which is assigned to "harp or theorbo and violin,"
- ii. "La Pietra" a 3 for two violins and basso di viola or theorbo,
- iii. "La Viviani" a 3 for two violins and theorbo,

- iv. "La Sevesca" *sonata* à 4
- v. "La Rovetta"—also *sonata* à 4.

Illustration 1. Agostino Guerrieri *Sonate di Violino A 1. 2. 3. 4. Per Chiesa, & anco Aggiunta per Camera* op. 1 (Venice: Gardano, 1673); Table of Contents, Violino Primo part book

TAVOLA	
Sonata malinconica à solo	1
La Rotini. Sonata à solo	2
La Scusichina. à solo	4
La Tità. à solo	6
La Rezonicha. à 2 Violini	8
La Brignoli. à 2 Violini	9
La Spinola. à 2 Violini	11
La Benedetta. à 2 Violini	12
La Marchetta. à 2 Violini	14
La Rosciana. à 2 Violini	15
La Galeazza. à 2 Violini	16
La Pinella. à 2 Violini	18
La Lucina. à 2 Violini Alpa ouer Teorba	20
La Balbi. Sonata à 3.	22
La Rauarina. à 3 Violini	23
La Gotella. à 3 Violini	24
La Pietra. à 3. due violini & Basso di Viola ouero Teorba	25
La Viuiani à 3. 2 violini & Teorba	27
La Scusca à 4.	28
La Rouetta à 4.	29
Balletto Primo per Camera	30
Balletto Secondo	31
Partite sopra Ruggiero	32
IL FINE	

Illustration 2. Guerrieri *Sonate* Op. 1; Viola part book

TAVOLA	
La Lucina Sonata à 2. Alpa ouer Teorba, & Violino	2
La Pietra. à 3. due violini & Basso di Viola ouero Teorba	3
La Viuiani à 3. 2 violini & Teorba	4
La Scusca. à 4.	6
La Rouetta à 4.	7
IL FINE	

Illustration 3. Guerrieri *Sonate* Op. 1; Basso continuo part book

TAVOLA	
Sonata malinconica à solo	1
La Rotini. Sonata à solo	2
La Scusfchina. à solo	4
La Tità. à solo	6
La Rezonicha. à 2 Violini	8
La Brignoli. à 2 Violini	9
La Spinola. à 2 Violini	11
La Benedetta. à 2 Violini	12
La Marchetta. à 2 Violini	14
La Rosciana. à 2 Violini	15
La Galeazza. à 2 Violini	16
La Pinella. à 2 Violini	18
La Lucina. à 2 Violini <u>Alpa ouer Tcorba</u>	20
La Balbi. Sonata à 3.	22
La Rauarina. à 3 Violini	23
La Gotella. à 2 Violini	24
La Pietra. à 3. due violini & <u>Basso di Viola ouero Tcorba</u>	25
La Viuiani à 3. 2 violini & <u>Tcorba</u>	27
La Scualca à 4.	28
La Rouetta a 4.	29
Balletto Primo per Camera	30
Balletto Secondo	31
Partite sopra Ruggiero	32
IL FINE	

“La Pietra” presents a very clear case of the “basso di viola” acting as an independent melodic voice on an equal footing with each of the two violin parts. It enters in bar 7 with imitative material that has been introduced in the upper voices (i.e. above the basso continuo line). Note that, even so, the basso part can be viewed as an embellished version of the continuo line (ex. 3).

Example 3. Agostino Guerrieri *Sonate di Violino A 1. 2. 3. 4. Op. 1* (Venice, 1673); *La Pietra a 3: due violini & basso di viola overo teorba*, mm. 1-9

The musical score is presented in three systems, each containing four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Basso continuo. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system covers measures 1-3, the second system covers measures 4-6, and the third system covers measures 7-9. Measure numbers 6, 5, and 6 are indicated below the first, second, and third systems respectively. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like *p* (piano).

Colombi's Opus 4, the *Sonate a due violini con un bassetto viola se piace* (Bologna, 1676), has an optional melodic bass line. The Adagio from the third sonata shows how this works, with the *bassetto viola* having imitative material (ex. 4). Despite its "optional" status, its entry (on E flat) in bar 2 is musically more fundamental than the second violin's doubling of it a tenth higher. From bar 3 onwards, the *bassetto viola* is the most active part in the excerpt. It still, however, adheres closely to the basso continuo part (only the *d* in the penultimate bar has any kind of independent existence that cannot be explained simply as an elaboration of the basso continuo line).

Example 4. Giuseppe Colombi, *Sonate a due violini con un bassetto viola se piace* Op. 4 (Bologna, 1676), Sonata 3, Adagio

Adagio

violino primo

violino secondo

bassetto viola

basso continuo

6 6 6 6 b5

6 5 6 5 6 b5 6 5 b5 b6 b5

6 5 7 7 4 3

Numerous other instances like this could be cited, where a melodic bass part is specified, where it has imitative material that relates to upper parts, but where a specified *basso continuo* part seems to be derived from it. In *History, Imagination and the Performance of Music*, I cite (for a different purpose) two such examples from Antonio Veracini's *Sonate da camera a due*[:] violino e violone o arcileuto col basso per il cimbalò

Op. 3 (Modena, 1696).¹³ Although these movements are exceptional in the context of opus 3, Veracini supplies *violone* and basso continuo parts for the entire collection even though the two parts are, for the most part, identical. This seems a fairly normal situation: a separate melodic bass part may be printed for the sake of a few quasi-independent gestures in a handful of movements. For the rest of the time, it will look like (optional) reinforcement of a continuo line.

Veracini's Opus 2 (published about the same time as Opus 3) is described as *Sonate da camera a violino solo* and its two part-books are designated *violino* and *cimbalo, o violone*. Hence, on the face of it, we are dealing with a different genre—not the *a 2* sonatas of Opus 3, but solo sonatas. It is, though, hard to see any difference between the duo sonatas of Opus 3, where *basso* and *basso continuo* are identical, and the supposedly solo sonatas in Opus 2. The “Alla Francese” Presto movement in the second sonata, for example, depicts a relationship between violin and bass that looks distinctly *a 2* with each involved in melodic counterpoint (ex. 5).

Example 5. Antonio Veracini, *Sonate da camera a violino solo*, Op. 2 (Modena, c.1695), Sonata 2, Alla Francese, mm. 1-8

So, one must ask why—if the explicit provision of separate part-books in Opus 3 encourages the doubling of the bass line by both melodic instrument and a chordal continuo instrument—should one feel prevented from doing so here? Going back to some of the earlier examples, we could see that there was a difference in character between continuo lines and the melodic bass lines that is acknowledged in the genre description of the sonatas that have them. But that clear-cut distinction seems to become rather vague.

The first Toccata in Giovanni Bonaventura Viviani's Opus 4 is for “violino solo” with a bass part described as being for “organ or harpsichord.” The opening, with the violin behaving in a rather virtuoso way above sustained pedal notes in the bass, may call to mind the opening of the first Sonata in Corelli's Opus 5. Here the bass obviously takes on a continuo role, providing an unconstraining harmonic platform for the violin's improvisatory

¹³ See Walls, *History, Imagination and the Performance of Music*, 62-3.

arabesques and displays of speed. But the “fuga” that follows immediately brings the two parts into an equal relationship with neither being thematically privileged. It is as if, despite the title page description, we switch from *a voce sola* writing to *a 2*.

There are many more instances where the self-containedness of these seventeenth-century genre descriptions seems to break down—and that blurring of clear distinctions must surely imply that it would be wrong to apply too rigidly the rule that melodic bass line instruments need only attend if invited in a separate and specially designated part.

When John Walsh published *The Score of the Four Operas by Arcangelo Corelli* (that is, *Sonate a tre* Ops. 1-4) he placed the following note on the title page: “N.B. The First and Third Opera being Compos’d for a Violoncello and Thorough Bass, of which the Variation being but little, they are put on the same Stave for the greater Facility in reading.” An opening from Opus 3 Sonata 12 illustrates how this works (illus. 4). On the entire first page, the bass and continuo lines are identical (and they shift between a clearly continuo-only function and a melodic one). On the second page, the bass line plays an elaboration of the continuo line.

Illus 4: *The Score of the Four Operas by Arcangelo Corelli* (London: Walsh, 1635), pp. 48-9; Op. 3, Sonata 12



Corelli's Opus 5 sonatas—"unaccompanied duos" according to Peter Allsop—show a similar ambiguity in the character of the bass line. The bass part of the fugue in the first sonata (referred to above) amply justifies regarding this as an *a 2* composition if one considers only the role of the two instruments. (If we were to consider the character of the writing we might have to describe it as *a 3*, in fact.) But we turn the page to a solo violin movement where the bass part never gets beyond a supporting continuo role.

The distinctions that the Jensen/Allsop hypothesis implies between *voce sola*, *a 2*, and *a 3* compositions are not, after all, so clear. The apparently neat schemes envisaged in tables 1-3 begin to break down as soon as we start looking at the actual musical construction of many of the sonata collections. Instead of clearly differentiated sonata types, we are confronted with mixed genres. Even within sonatas, the essential musical character can change from *voce sola* to *a 2*, or from *a 2* to *a 3*. Yet as the century progressed such changes were not likely to be reflected in the provision made for instrumentalists in the part-books. In other words, part-books tended to reflect the maximum instrumentation required but would continue to supply what are essentially redundant melodic bass parts for sonatas that reduce to basso continuo. Such a situation argues against applying too rigidly a rule about banning a second bass line instrument from sonatas where the bass clearly has a (limited) continuo function.

In fact, given the range of possibilities actually covered in sonatas described as "a tre," the discredited term "trio sonata" might just as well be rehabilitated. Off with the scare quotes! And let us also hope that ensembles will continue to approach the instrumentation of bass lines in this repertory with a latitude equivalent to that which we find in the printed sources.