Elizabeth Farr: AGO Workshop June 13, 2017
Handout 1

Basso-continuo on the harpsichord

- Understanding how sound is produced (pluck)
  Sitting at the instrument, feet, source of balance
  Hand position, fingers, arm weight
- Touch
  Arpeggiation
  Articulation and over-holding vs. legato
- Implying dynamics through:
  rhythmic hierarchy
  lengths of notes
  speed of arpeggiation

Basso-continuo on the organ

- Registration and size of ensemble
- Pedal?
- Bass line vs. RH realization – lengths of notes

Preparing for the performance

- Examine the figures, you may need to write in a few simple figures (such as 6) or accidentals that have not been notated (believed to be obvious)
- If the piece has no figures at all, analyze the full texture and write in your own figures
- Learn the figures, refrain from consistently doubling upper lines
- Rehearsal: it can be helpful to play only the bass line at least once to match sound with other bass-line instruments and determine what the best approach will be for your RH realization; what can you contribute to the whole, what is the affect?
- Performance: how should the performers be positioned for the best effect?

Types of accompaniments

- Bass line: figures requiring realization, but only the bass line is composed
- Obbligato keyboard: the RH part is fully notated by the composer
- Recitativo: secco (bc) and accompagnato (strings and bc)

Scores

- Urtext: with or without figures, unrealized (although some are editorially realized for those who do not read figures)
- Modern "practical" edition: not only already realized but at times altered
- Reductions of orchestrations: best on piano, possible on organ, not good on harpsichord
- BC part from the publisher: usually rather poor, better to play from a full score

Also available at the session

- Handout 2: basic basso-continuo figures
- Handouts/excerpts (4): pedagogical exercise (Handel), violin/bc sonata movements (Corelli), flute/bc sonata movement (JS Bach), cantata recitative (JS Bach)

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Handout 2

Basics of basso-continuo figures

Triads:

Root position	5 3	3	5	or blank/no figures (only when the piece is otherwise figured)				
1st inversion	6 3	6			2nd inversion	6 4		

Seventh chords:

Root position	7 5 3	7 3	7 5	7	1st inversion	6 5 3	6 5	
2nd inversion	6 4 3	4 3			3rd inversion	6 4 2	4 2	2

♯ ♭ ♮ / sharp, flat, natural next to a number or slash through a number raise or lower that pitch; sharp, flat natural alone (without a number) refer to altering the third of the chord.

Suspensions:

4-3 7-6 9-8 2-1 6-5

Check the context to see if another instrument or a vocalist carries the dissonant non-chord tone, in which case you should not double their notes and may play against the dissonance.

The most common suspensions in figures are 4-3 and 7-6, but the others are possible, and all Introduce a brief moment of melodic tension and resolution.

Dissonant figures:

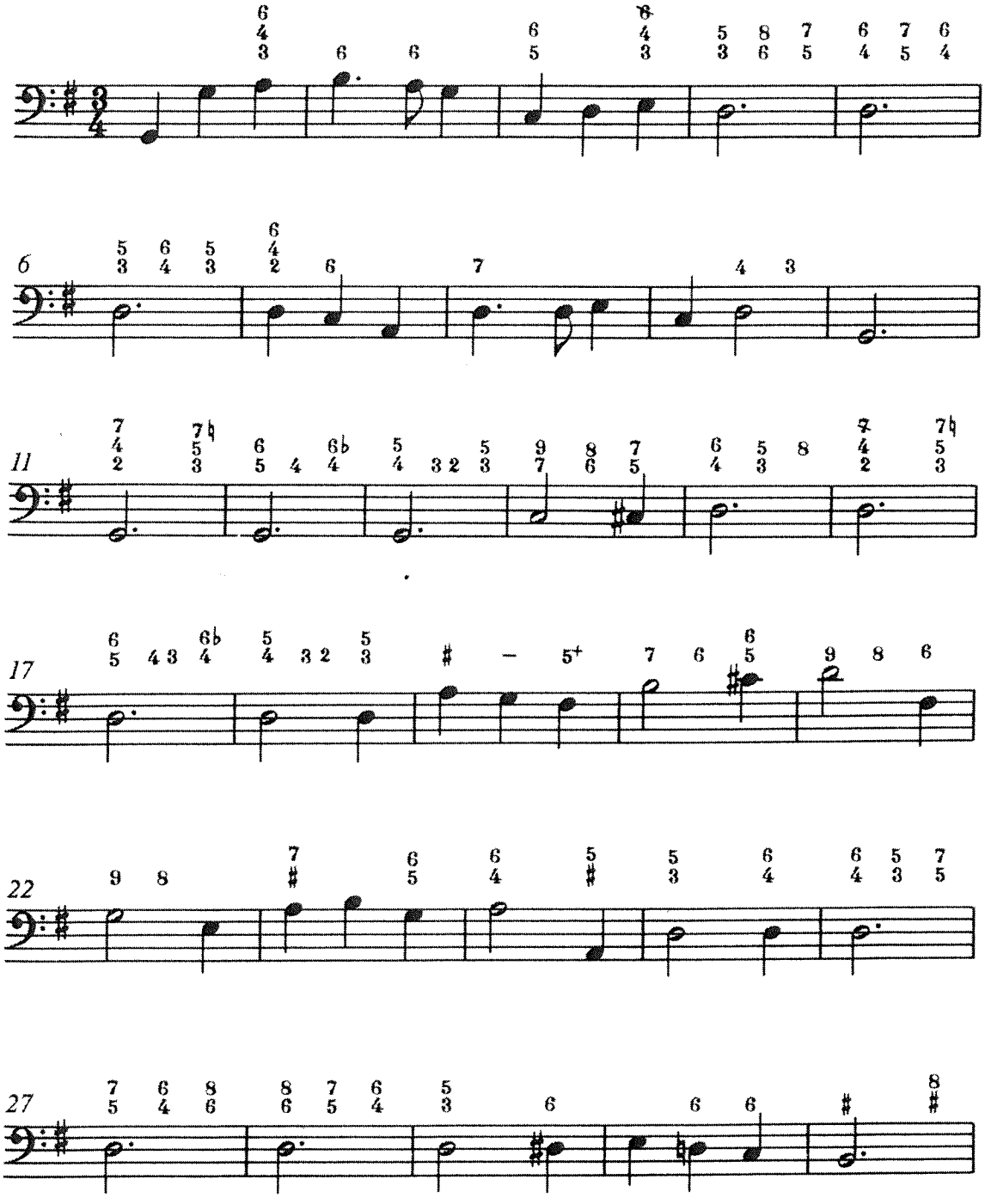
These figures frequently occur over a pedal-point, and do not represent triads or seventh chords. They tend to be a method of working out ornamental passages that stress dissonance and resolution, juxtaposing chords against the bass that are not built on it.

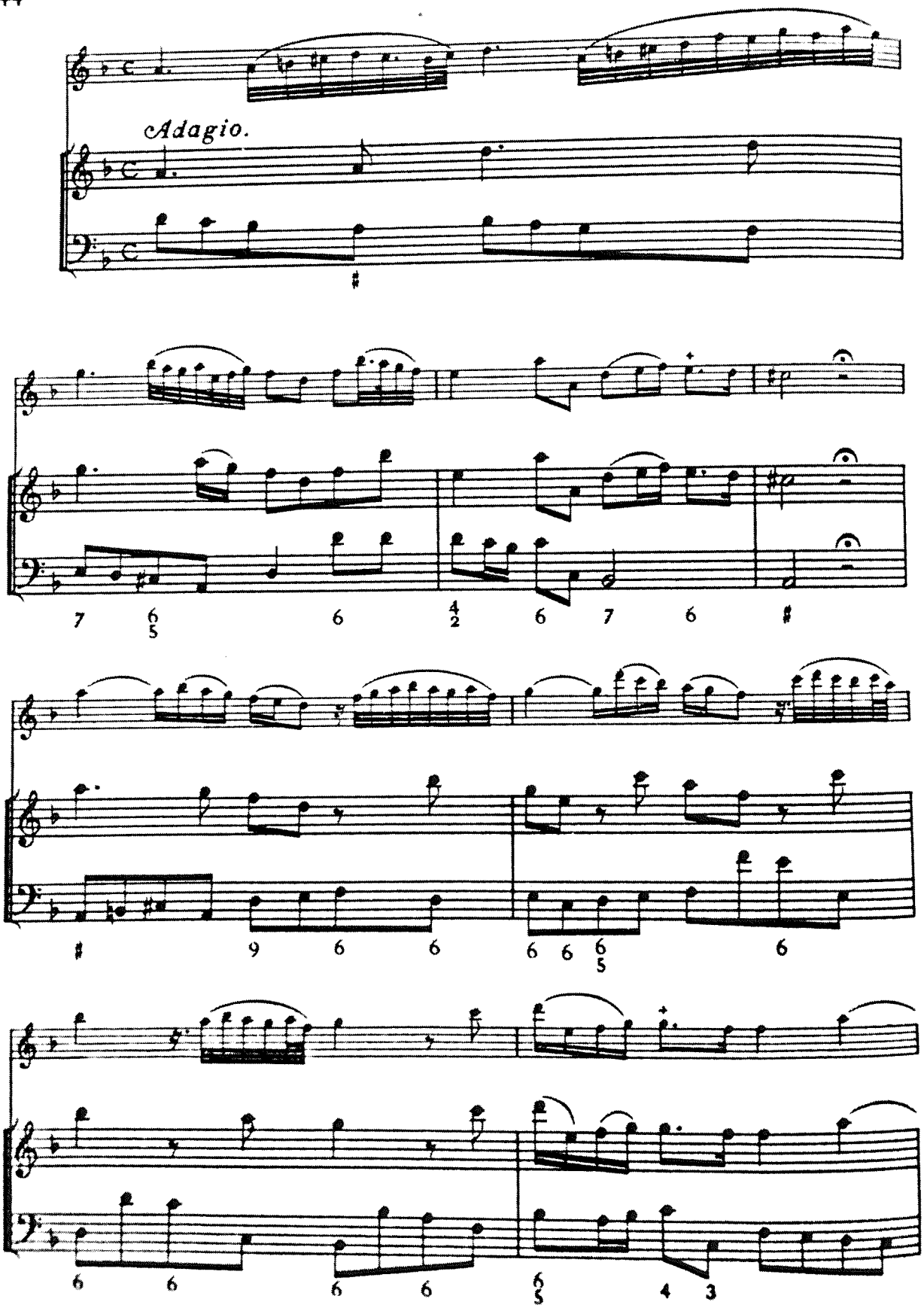
Ex: 7
4
2

This figure over a C would represent a b-diminished harmony dissonant to C and needing resolution (compound 9th, 11th, and 13th chords are not recognized as harmonies in this period but rather as dissonant tones that require resolution).

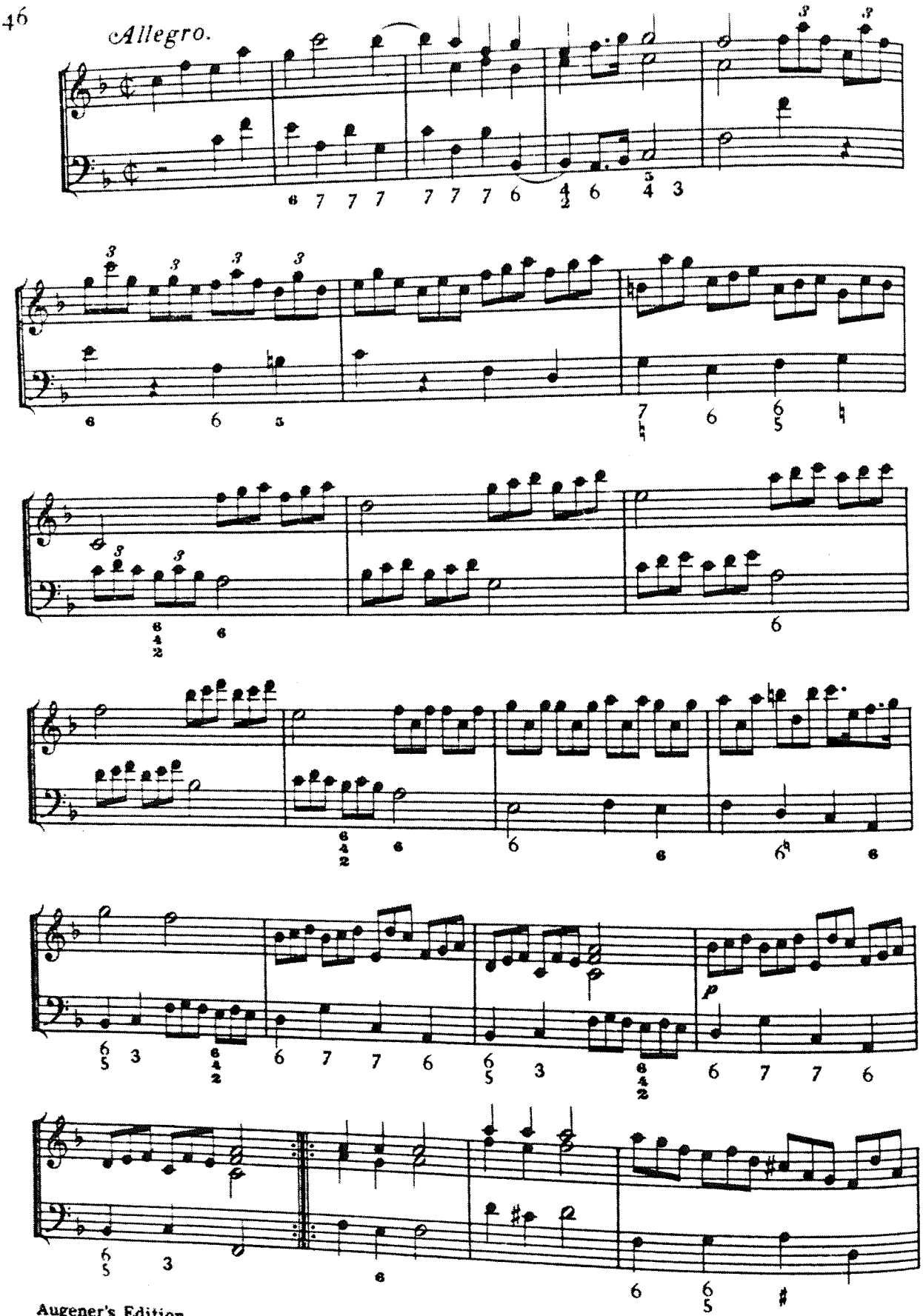
Practice pieces

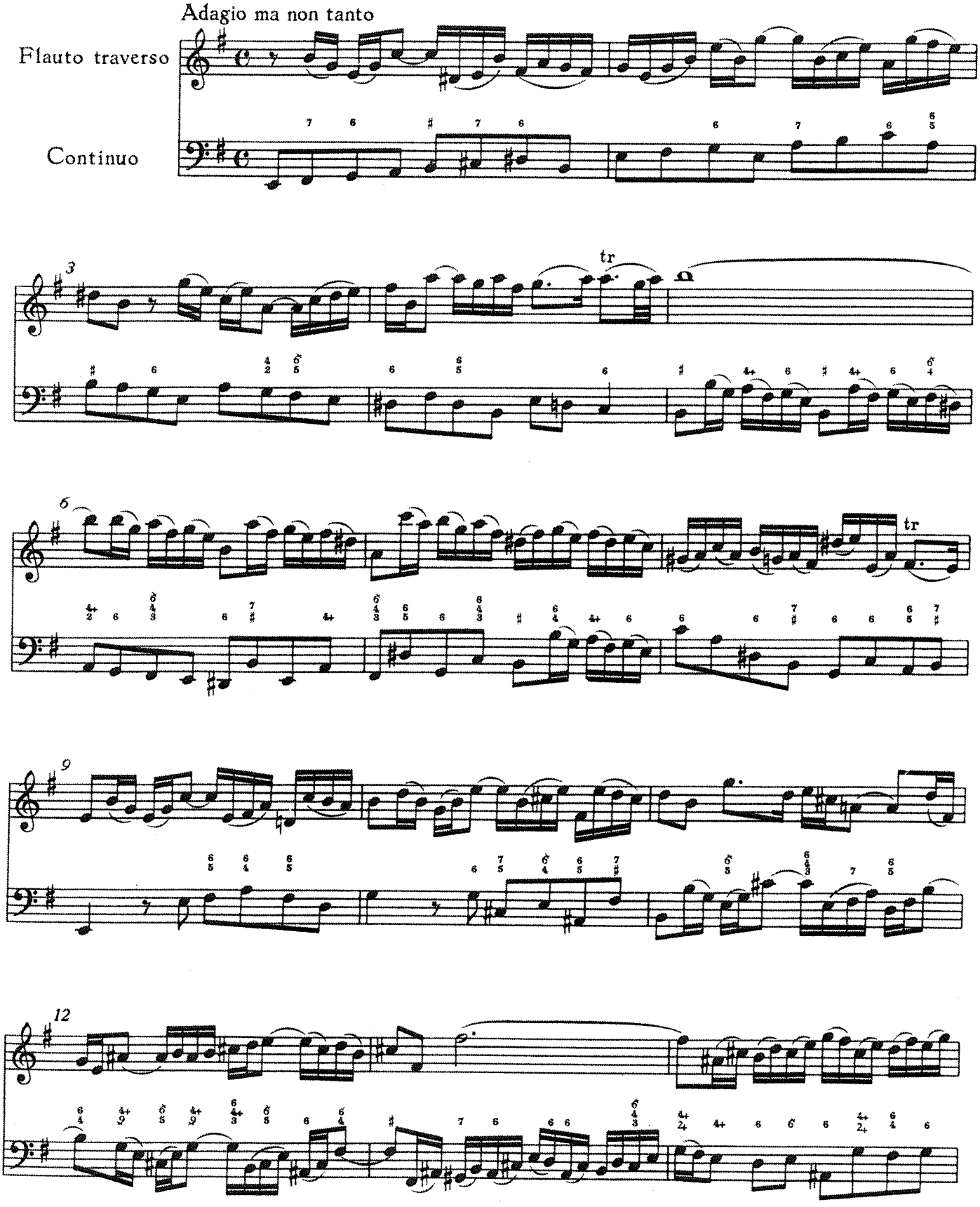
No. 22



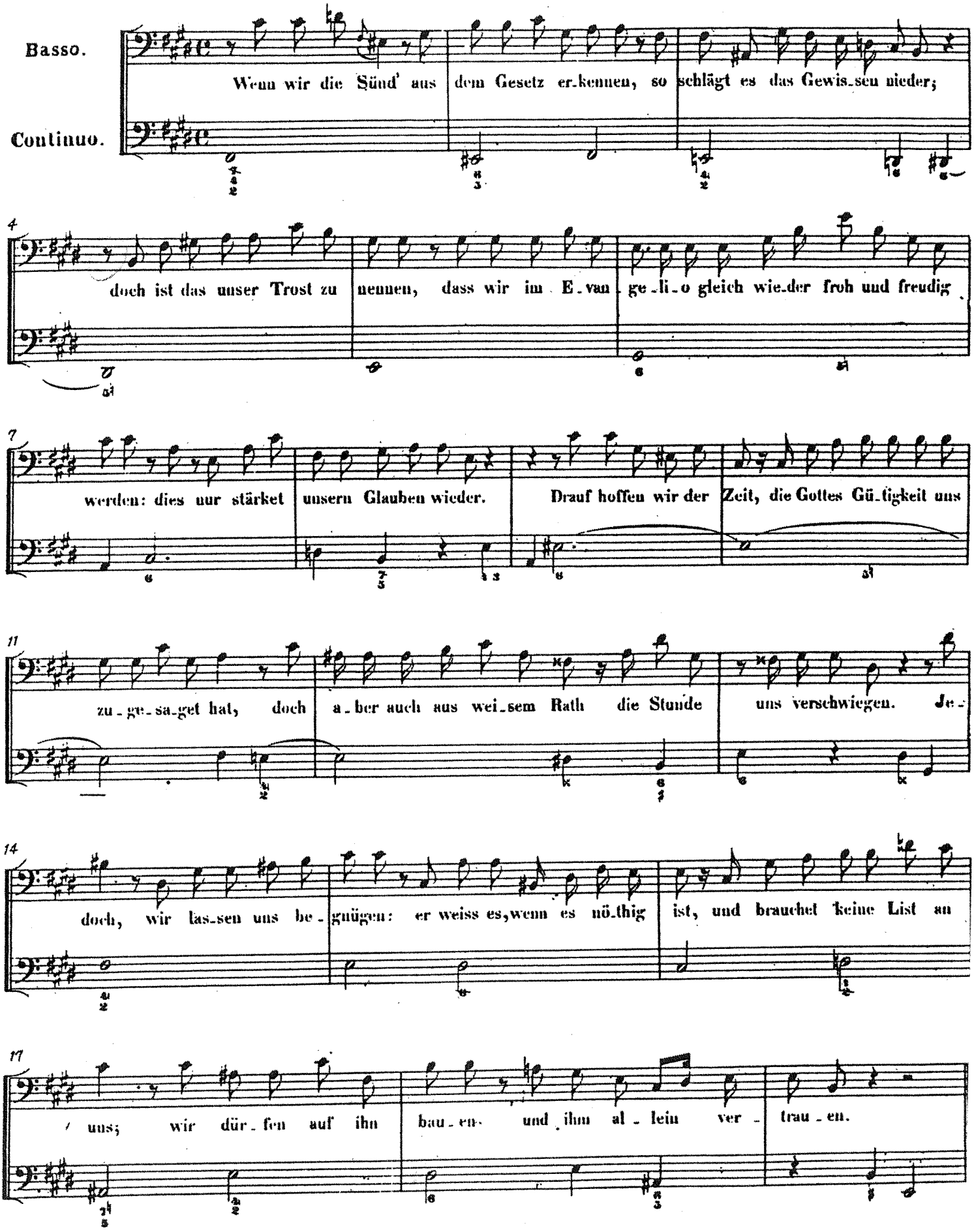

Adagio.

46




Adagio ma non tanto
Flauto traverso
Continuo
tr
tr

RECITATIVO.


Basso.
Continuo.
Wenn wir die Sünd' aus dem Gesetz er-kennen, so schlägt es das Gewis-sen nieder;
4
doch ist das unser Trost zu nennen, dass wir im E-van-ge-li-o gleich wie-der froh und freudig
7
werden: dies nur stärket unsern Glauben wieder. Drauf hoffen wir der Zeit, die Gottes Gü-tigkeit uns
11
zu-ge-sa-get hat, doch a-ber auch aus wei-sem Rath die Stunde uns verschwiegen. Je-
14
doch, wir las-sen uns be-gnügen: er weiss es, wenn es nö-thig ist, und brauchet keine List an
17
uns; wir dür-fen auf ihn bau-en und ihm al-lein ver-trau-en.