Nicola Sala (1713–1801)

Elementi per Ben Sonare il Cembalo

("The Elements of Good Keyboard Playing")

by

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This Table of Contents is an editorial addition for the convenience of readers. It is not found in the original manuscript.

This collection, called *Elements*, contains what other masters called *Regole* ("Rules"). The manuscript begins by declaring the standard axioms, e.g., "There are four consonances . . . ." As it procedes to more advanced rules, small partimenti are inserted to illustrate the intended contexts. Because of the contrapuntal nature of these partimenti, your editor has included typical realizations to show what was probably intended. (The original partimenti are on a single bass staff; the editor's realizations are on treble and bass staves.)

Sala's fame as a master may have suggested his authorship. Careful analysis by Peter van Tour, however, shows that the manuscript is a mash-up from various sources, assembled around 1750 at the St. Onofrio conservatory in Naples. Nevertheless, its longer partimenti nicely illustrate suspensions and provide an excellent introduction to the style of Sala's authentic partimenti. Partimenti, as lessons for young students, passed on a shared tradition and were not expected to reflect a teacher's personal style.

Primieramente fà duopo sapere che le consonanze sono quattro cioè 3ª. 5ª. 6ª. 8ª. delle quali due sono perfette e due imperfette: Le perfette sono 5ª. ed 8ª., si dicono perfette perchè non possonsi fare ne Magiori e ne Minori: L'imperfette sono 3ª. e 6ª., si chiamano imperfette, perchè possonsi fare Magiori e Minori.

Le dissonanze anche sono quattro, cioè 2ª. 4ª. 7ª. e 9ª, le quali non si possono dare, se prima non sono preparate da qualche consonanza, e risolute nelle medesime, come se ne discorrerà a suo luogo.

Fa bisogno sapere che ogni tono prese per principale ave sette corde; cioè prima, 2ª, 3ª, 4ª, 5ª, 6ª, 7ª di tono. Di queste sette corde, quattro sono stabili, e sono la 2a quale è sempre magiore, la 4ª quale è

First of all, know that there are four consonances, namely 3rds, 5ths, 6ths, and 8vas, of which two are perfect and two imperfect. The perfect ones are 5ths and 8vas. They are called perfect because they cannot be made either Major or Minor. The imperfect ones are 3rds and 6ths. They are called imperfect because they can be made Major or Minor.

There are also four dissonances, namely 2nds, 4ths, 7ths, and 9ths, which cannot be used unless they are first prepared by a certain [type of] consonance, and resolved to the same, as will be discussed later.

It is necessary to know that each key has seven main notes, i.e. the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th steps of the scale. Of these seven notes, four are fixed, and they are the 2nd which is always major, the 4th which is always minor, the 5th which is natural, and

sempre minore, la 5ª quale è sempre naturale, e la 7ª che è ancora maggiore, se bene in certi casi puol essere anchè minore, colne sene parlerà in appresso.

Veniamo ora alli numeri che recercano dette corde; la prima di tono vole 3ª, 5ª, ed 8va; la seconda vuole 3ª, 4ª, ed 6ª maggiore; la terza vuole 3ª ed 6ª; la quarta ricerca numeri di trè specie; quando la quarta sale alla quinta vuole 3ª, 5ª, ed 6ª; quando non sale alla quinta vuole 3ª ed 5ª; quando poi della quinta scende all quarta vuole 2ª, 4ª maggiore, ed 6ª; la quinta vuole 3ª ed 5ª; la sesta vuole 3ª ed 6ª; quando poi scende è meglio darli 3ª ed 6ª maggiore. La settima quando va all'ottava vuole 3ª, 5ª, e 6ª: quando poi scende vuole 3ª e 6ª; ora per magior chiarezza sieguono gl'esempi di tutto ciò detto.

the 7th which is always major, even if in some cases it may also be minor, which we will talk about in due course.

We now come to the [interval] numbers associated with these [seven] notes. The first [scale step] of the key takes a 3rd, 5th, and 8va [above it]. The second takes a 3rd, 4th, and major 6th. The third takes a 3rd and 6th. The fourth takes three types of numbers. When the fourth rises to the fifth, it takes a 3rd, 5th, and 6th; when it does not rise to the fifth, it takes a 3rd and 5th; when the fifth descends to the fourth, the fourth takes a 2nd, augmented 4th, and a 6th. The sixth takes a 3rd and 6th; when it descends it is better to give it a 3rd and major 6th. The seventh, when it goes to the octave, takes a 3rd, 5th, and 6th; but when it descends it takes a 3rd and 6th. Now for greater clarity there follow examples of all that has been mentioned.

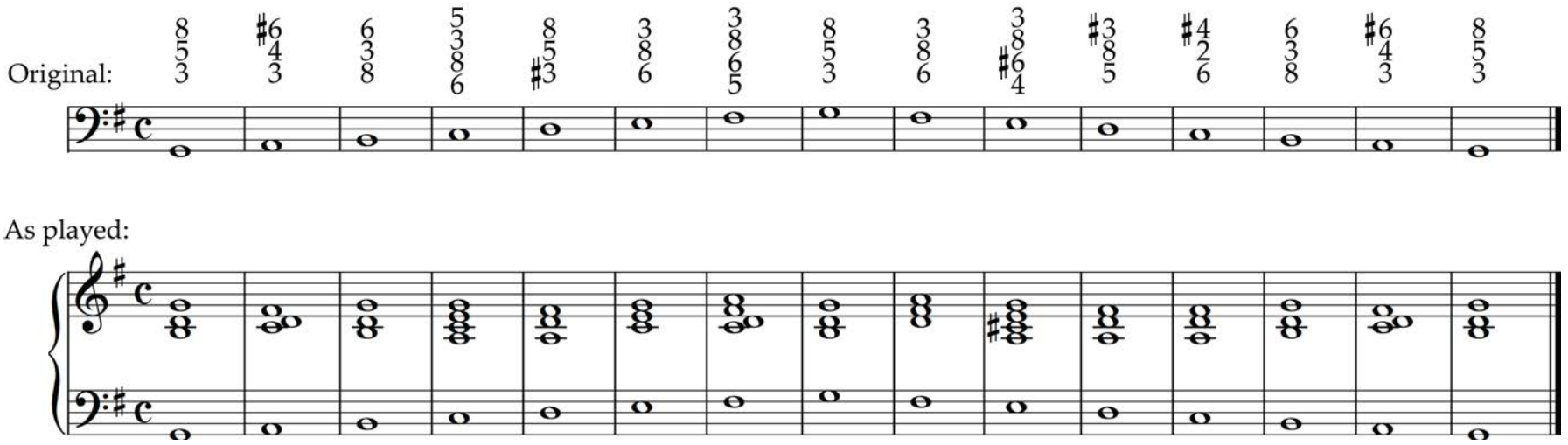
Si deve avertire di più, che la quarte di tono, hà la 3ª siccome l'hà la prima, se la prima di tono ave terza minore la quarta, anche deve avere 3ª minore se la prima l'have maggiore, la quarta ave maggiore. S'avverta ancora, che se la prima di tono ave 3ª maggiore, la 6ª, e 7ma nello scendere, è nel salire devono essere maggiori; se poi la prima di tono ave 3ª minore, la 6ª, e 7ma nel salire devono essere maggiori; ma nello scendere devono essere minori, se bene in certi casi nello scendere se vedrà la 7ma maggiore, e la 6ª minore.

Moreover it should be noted that the fourth [scale step] of the key has the [same type of] 3rd [above it] as the first. If the first step has a minor 3rd the fourth step must also have a minor 3rd, and if the first has a major 3rd, so must the fourth. Note also that if the first scale step has a major 3rd, the sixth and seventh [notes of the scale] must be major in both ascent and descent; if however the first step has a minor 3rd, the 6th and 7th steps in ascent should be major; but in descent they should be minor. Of course in some cases in descent one will see a major 7th and a minor 6th.

Siegue la Scala di prima posizione:

Here follows the scale in first position [the so-called Rule of the 8va]:

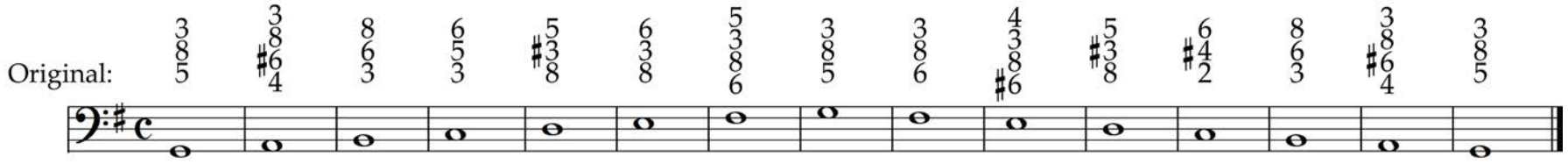
1st Position



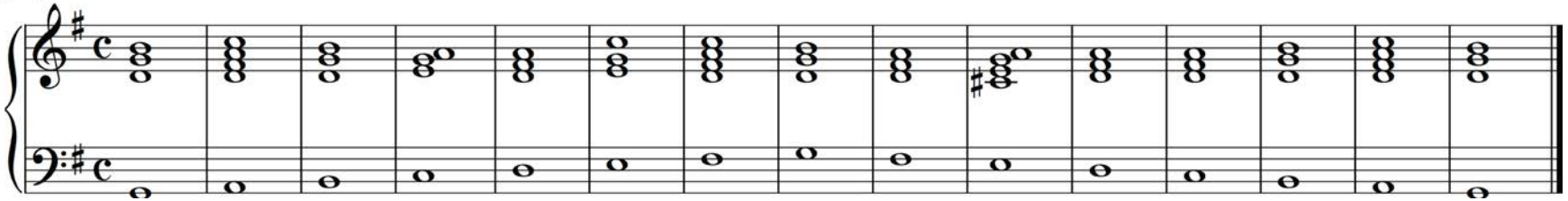
Editor's Notes: for the three positions of the Rule of the 8va, the copiest of the original manuscript in Naples copied one wrong example and mixed up the other two. Here the three positions have been reconstructed and put in the intended order. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd positions were defined by the beginning note played by the little finger of the right hand: 1st pos. = tonic or keynote, 2nd pos. = 3rd of the scale, 3rd pos. = 5th of the scale. In playing the Rule of the 8va do not worry about doublings or parallels. The purpose was merely to associate particular scale steps with chordal sonorities. Counterpoint came later.

2nd Position

Original:

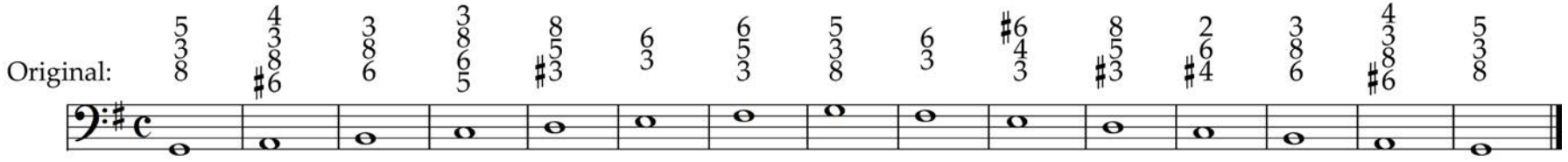


As played:

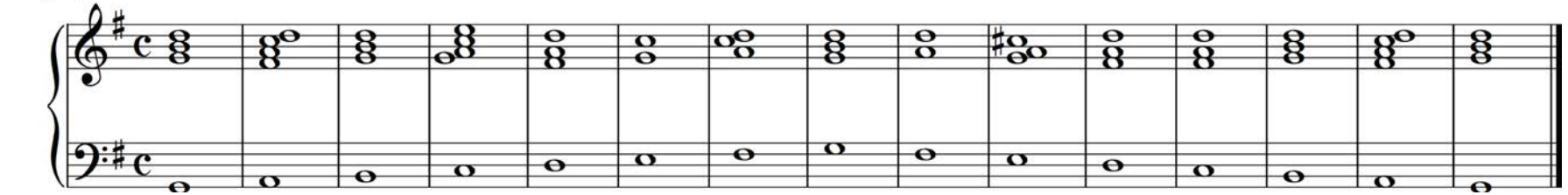


3rd Position

Original:



As played:

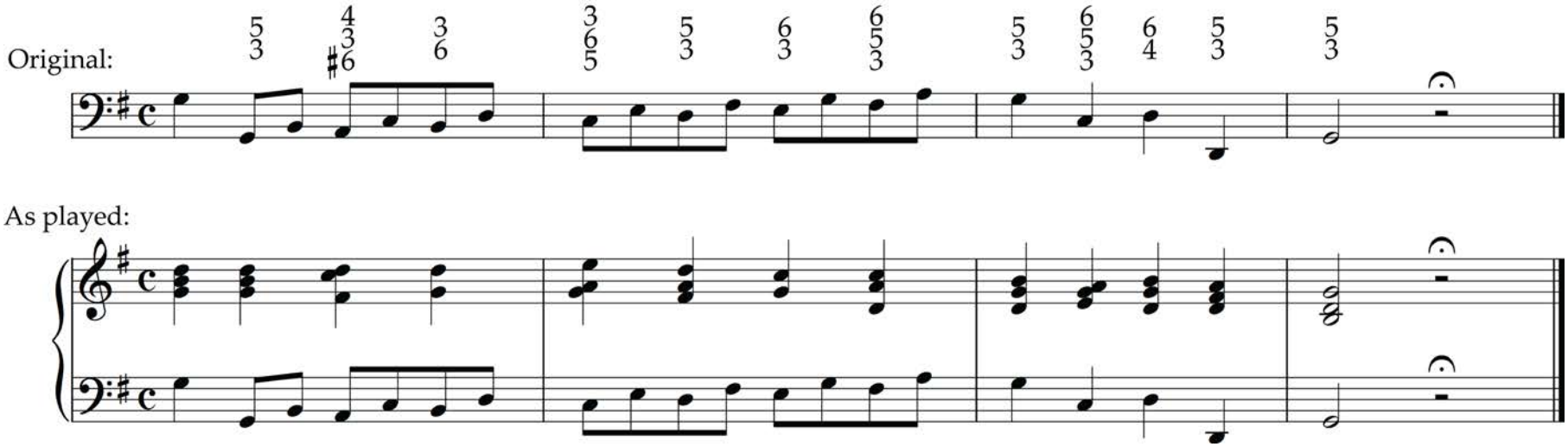


Adesso veniamo alli moti del Basso.

Quando il partimento sale di 3ª, la prima nota s'accompagna, e la 2ª nè.

Now we come to the bass motions.

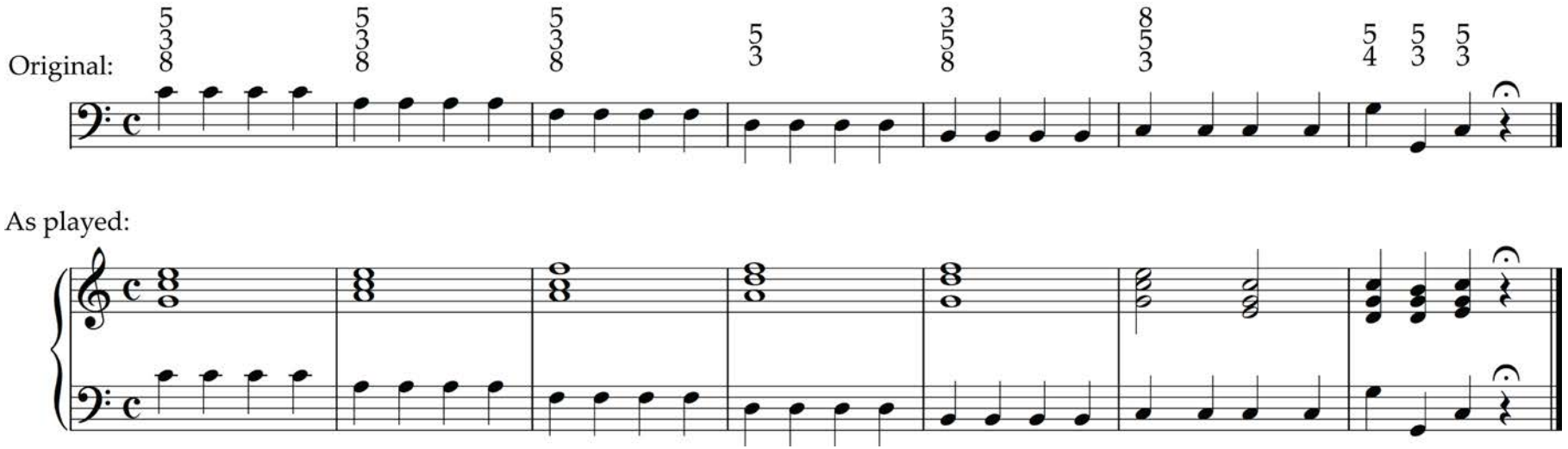
When the partimenti rises by a 3rd, one accompanies the first note but not the second.



Editor's Notes: in illustrating a series of rising thirds, this partimento sets the Rule of the 8va (3rd pos.) on the strong eighth notes (quavers). In measure 3 the partimento shifts to a compound cadence, discussed a few pages below).

Il moto di 3ª nel calare
s'accompana sempre con quinta.
For example:

One always accompanies a series of descending 3rds with 5/3 chords. For example:



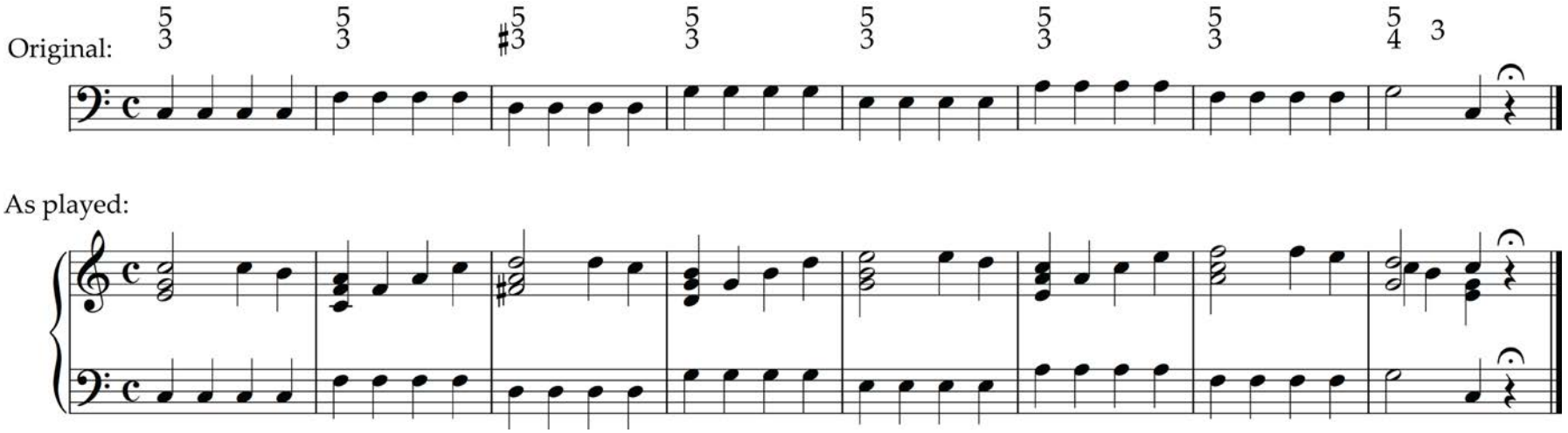
Editor's Notes: repeated notes are common in partimenti for beginners. They kept the idea of a tone present in a child's mind and compensated for the rapid decay of notes played on a small harpsichord. The suggested realization is as simple as possible. In measure 5, a 5/3/6 chord substitutes for 3/5/8.

I moti di 4a, 5a, 6a, e 7a s'accompano con 3a e 5a. Sieguono gl'esempi.

di quarta

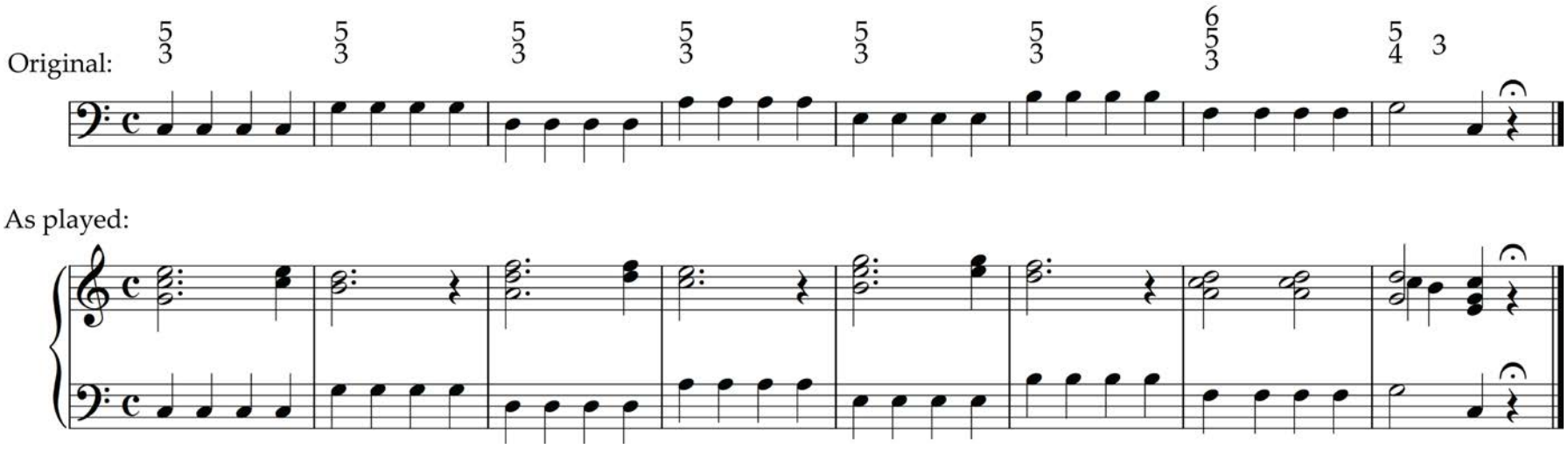
The [bass] motions of [ascending] 4ths, 5ths, 6ths, and 7ths are accompanied by 5/3 chords. Examples follow:

By [ascending] 4ths [and descending 3rds]:



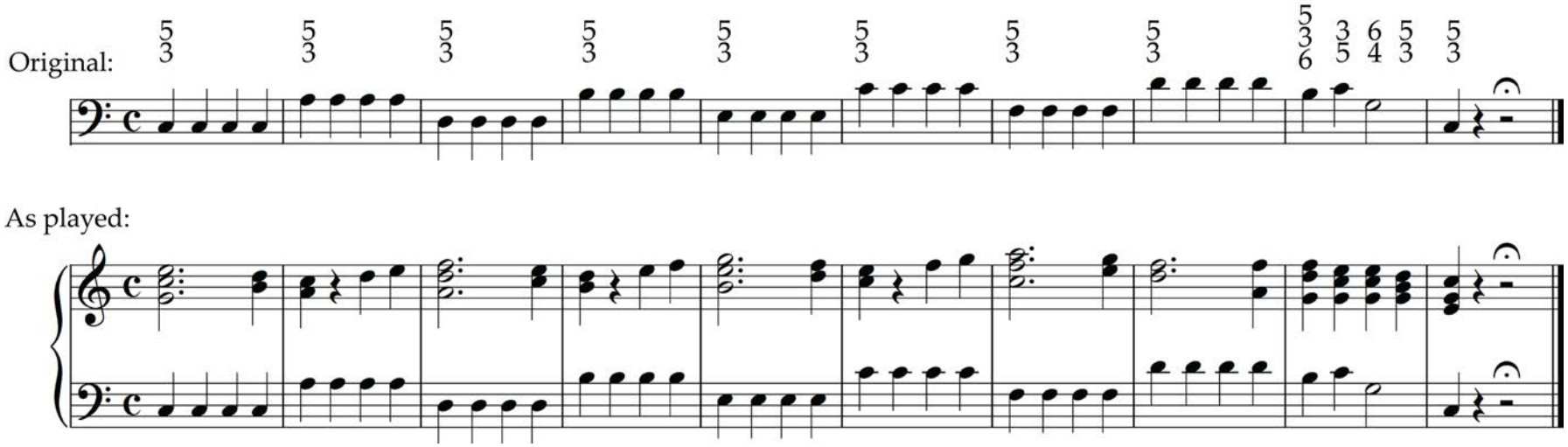
di quinta

By [ascending] 5ths [and descending 4ths]:



di sesta.

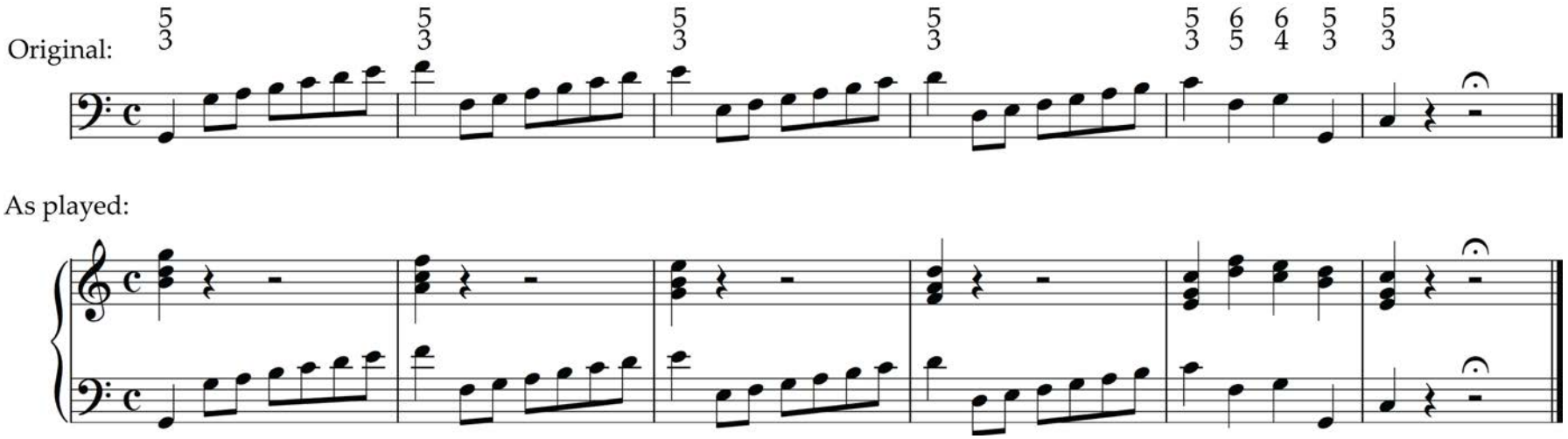
By [ascending] 6ths [and descending 5ths]:



Editor's Notes: In the realization, two kinds of graces or ornaments are employed. In the odd-numbered measures, the fourth beat has dissonant passing tones (passing between consonances). The even-numbered measures, on beat 3, have dissonant appoggiaturas ("leaning notes" that lean into consonances).

di settima

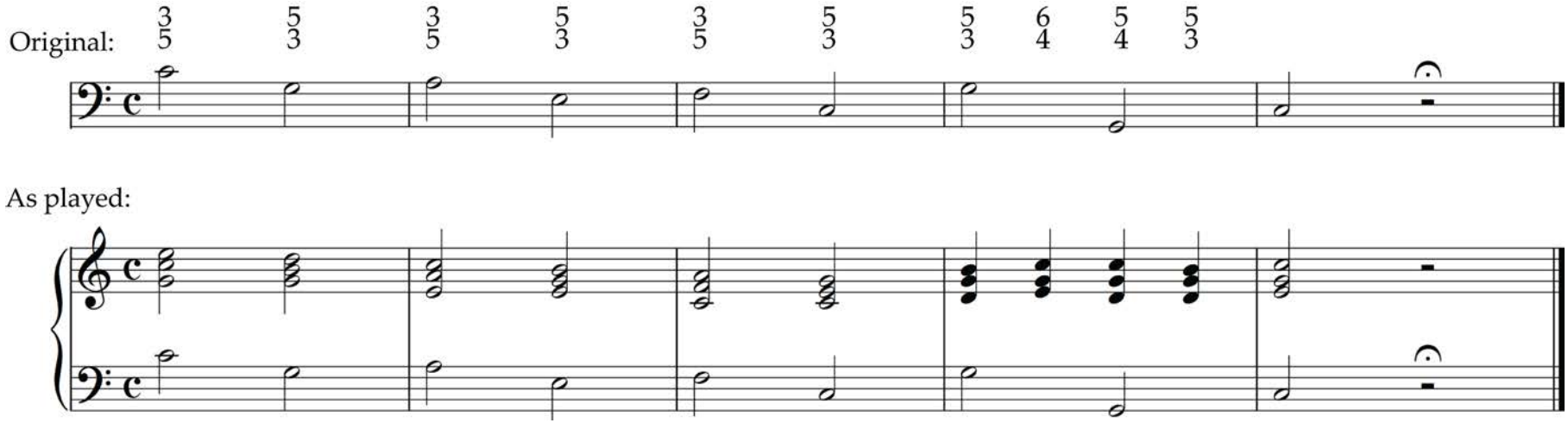
By [ascending] 7ths [and descending 8vas]:



Editor's Notes: This example follows the previous pattern (all 5/3 chords) but results in an uncharacteristic harmonization. It can safely be ignored.

Il moto che scende di quarta, e sale di seconda, se li da prima 3ª, e 5ª.

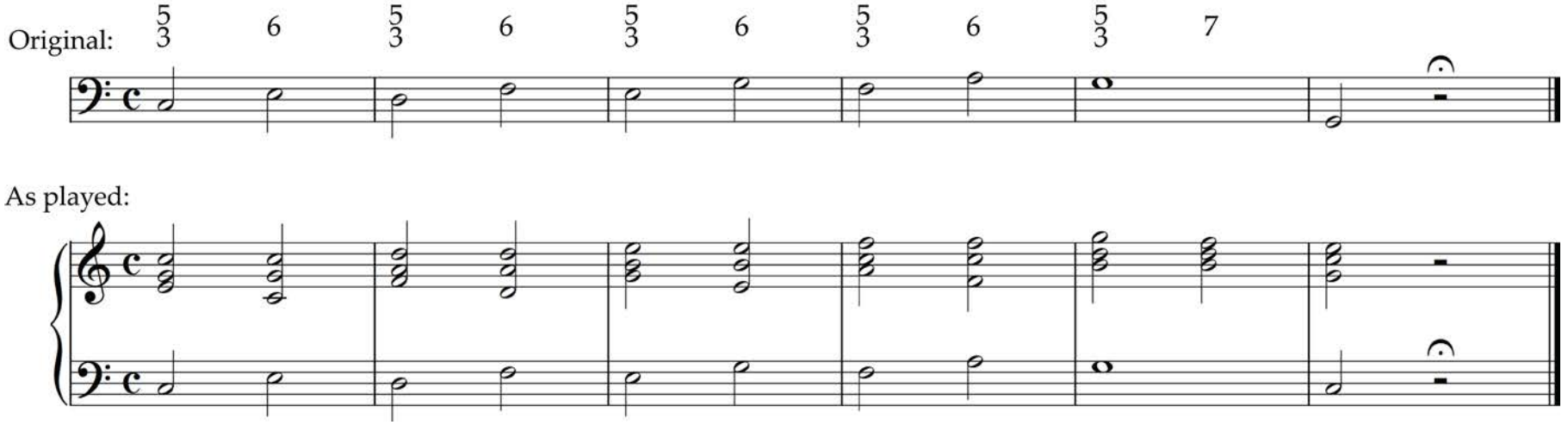
For the [bass] motion that falls a 4th and rises a 2nd, give the first [note] a 3/5 and [the second note] a 5/3.



Editor's Notes: Regular figures like "5/3" are symbolic of a general chord in any spacing or with any note in the top position. "Literal" figures specify the particular ordering of intervals from top to bottom. This example begins with literal figures and, in measure 4, switches to regular figures. Beginners often started with literal figures and then advanced to regular ones.

Il moto che sale di 3a, e scendi di seconda s'acompagna prima con quinta e poi con 6a.

The [bass] motion that rises a 3rd and falls a 2nd is accompanied first by a 5th and then by a 6th [, i.e. 5/3 then 6/3].



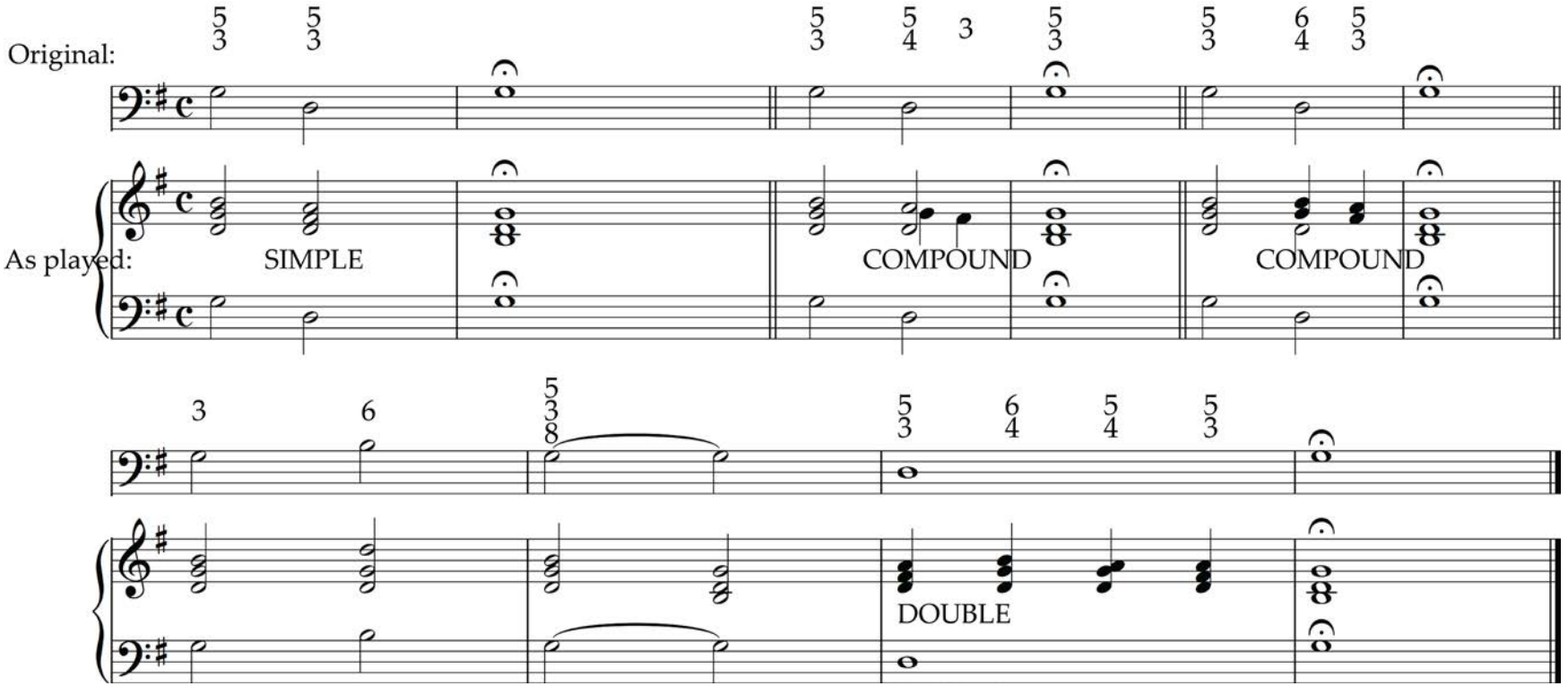
Editor's Notes: Compare this example to the one 7 pages earlier. Both go up a 3rd, down a 2nd, but the earlier example is faster and merges with the Rule of the 8va. The "7" in measure 5 has been substituted for the original "6" to create a proper cadence.

Vi sono altri tre moti, cioè Retto, con cui sagliono ambedue le mani, or scendano; od in questo bisogna badare di no fare due quinte, o due ottave :: Obliquo è quello con cui una mano camina, e l'altra sta ferma :: Contrario, é quello con cui ambedue le mani sagliono e scendano contrarie fra di loro.

There are three other [kinds of] motions, namely Direct [or Similar motion], in which both hands rise or fall [together]; and in doing so we must take care not to make two [parallel] fifths or octaves :: Oblique is the motion in which one hand moves and the other stands still :: Contrary is the motion in which both hands rise and fall contrariwise against each other.

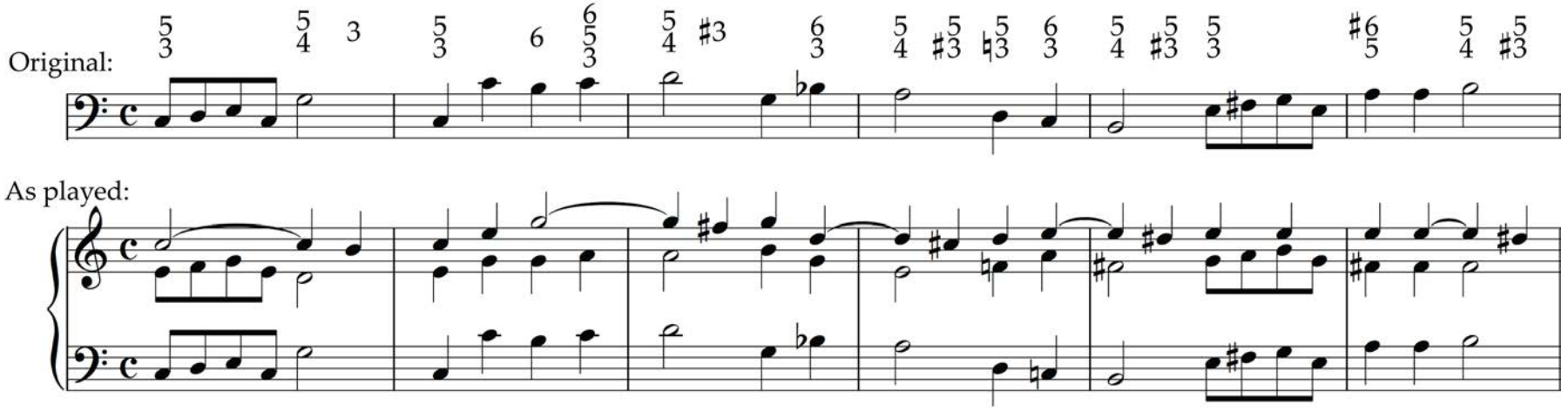
Le Cadenze ancora sono di trè specie diverse, cioè Semplice, Composta, e Doppia; le quali si fanno su la quinta del tono :: La semplice si fà con 3^a maggiore e 5^a :: La Composta se fà con 4^a e 5^a, or pure con 4^a e 6^a :: La Doppia si fà con 3^a e 5^a, 4^a e 6^a, 4^a e 5^a, e 3^a e 5^a.

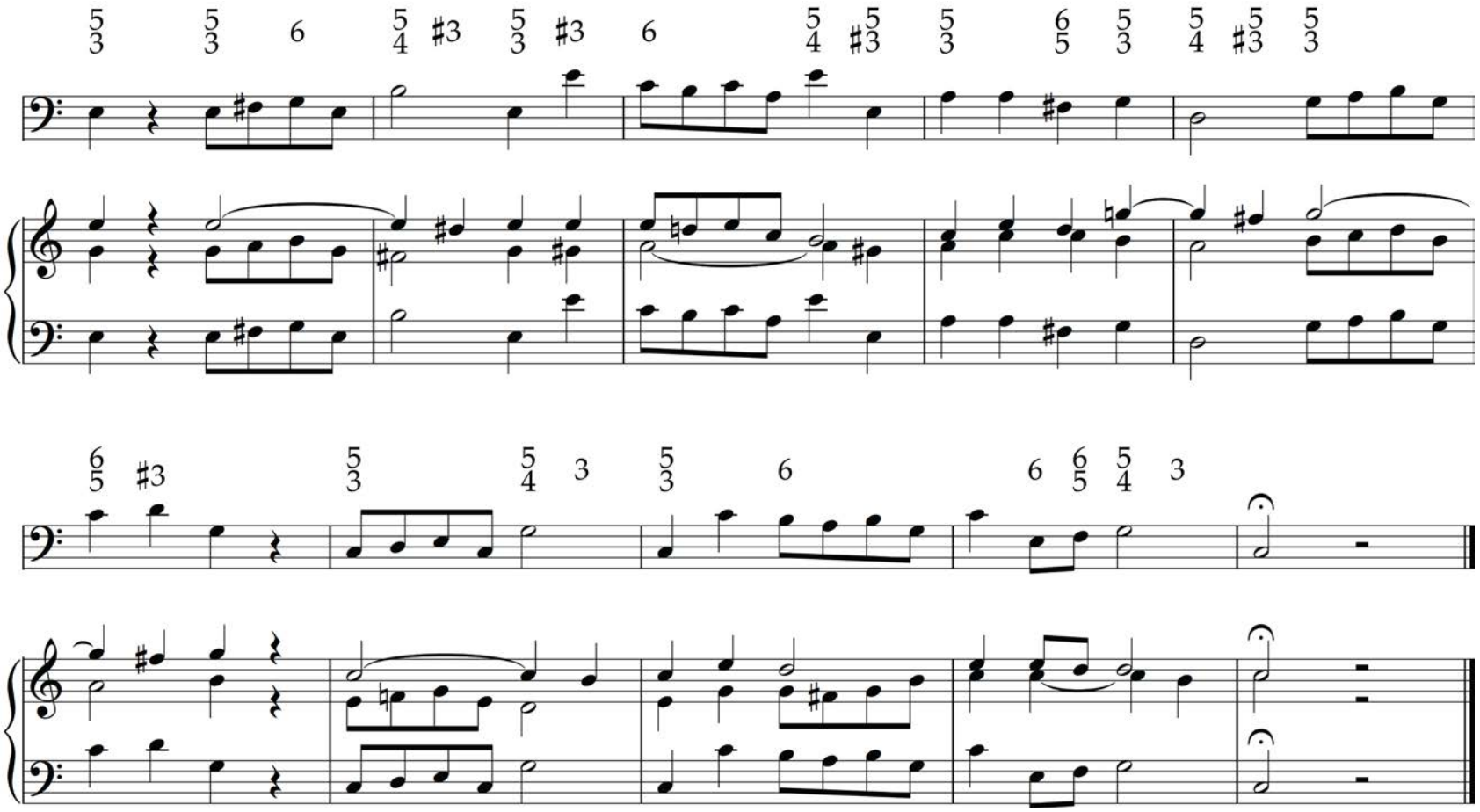
The Cadences are also of three different kinds, namely Simple, Compound, and Double; which are [all]made on the fifth of the key :: The Simple is done with a major 3rd and a 5th :: The Compound is done with a 4th and 5th, or also with a 4th and 6th :: The Double is done with a 3rd and 5th, 4th and 6a, 4a and 5a, and 3a and 5a.



Ora veniamo alla spiga delle Dissonanti :: la quarta essendo dissonanza si pulo preparare da tutte le Consonantie. Quanto se prepara dall'ottava il partimento sale di 5ª o scende di 4ª :: Quanto se prepara dalla quinta il partimento sale di grado :: Quanto si prepara dalla sesta, il partimento sale di terza :: Quando si prepara dalla tera, il partimento scende di grado, e la detta quarta si resolve a 3ª maggiore, se bene in certi casi si resolve a 3ª minors. Siegue l'Esempio.

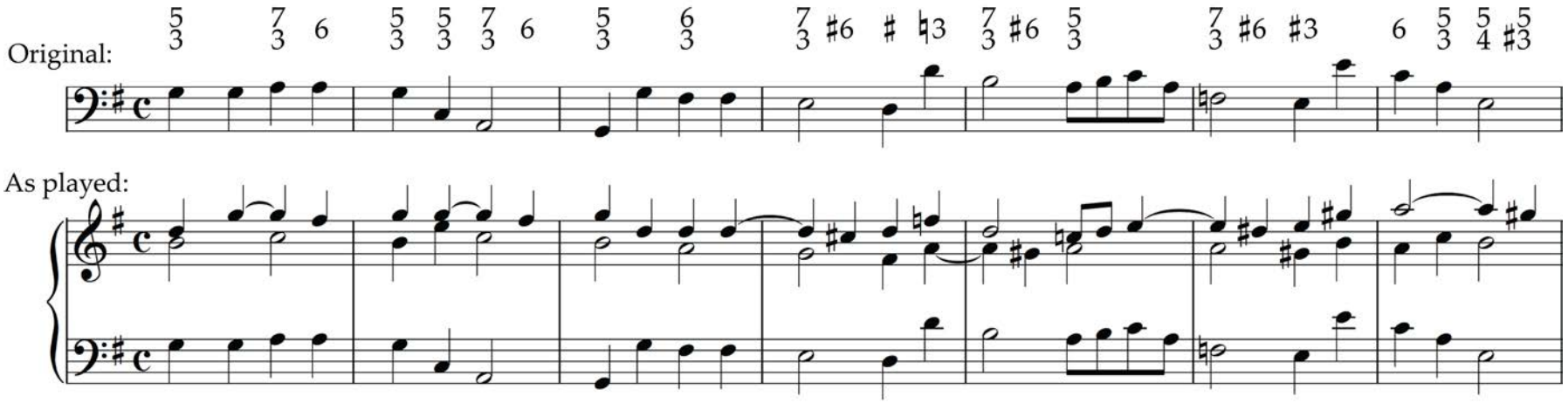
Now we come to the details of Dissonances: the fourth being a dissonance, it can be prepared by all the Consonances. When prepared by the octave the partimento goes up by a 5th or down by a 4th :: When prepared by a fifth the partimento goes up by a step :: When prepared by a sixth, the partimento goes up by a 3rd :: When prepared by a third, the partimento descends a step, and the said fourth resolves to a major 3rd, although in some cases it resolves to a minor 3rd. An example follows.

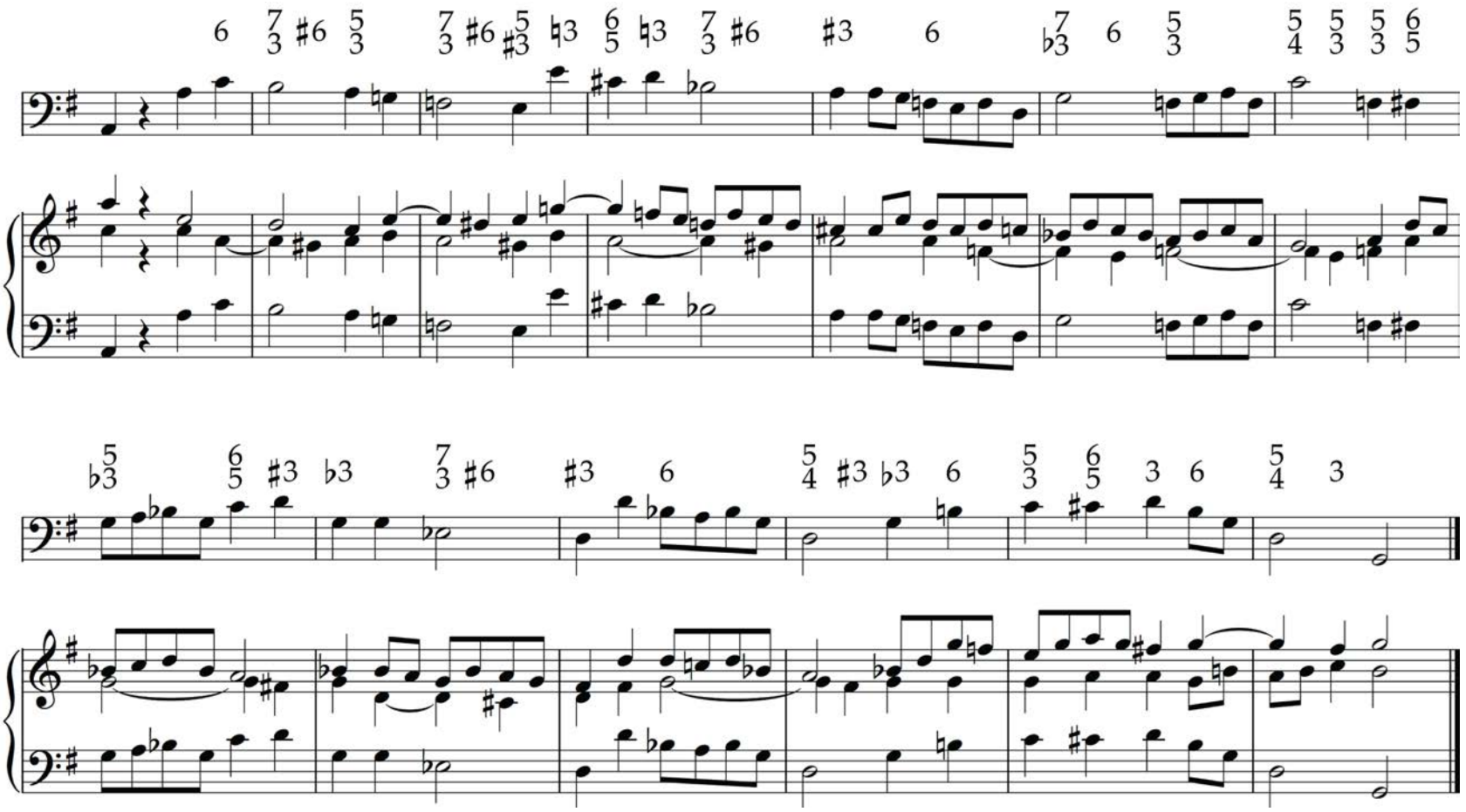




L Settima ancora si puol preparare da tutte le consonanze: Quando si prepara dalla Sesta, il partimento scende di grado: Quando si prepara dalla quinta,il partimento scende di 3a: Quando si prepara dalla Terza, il partimento sale di quarta o scende di quinta, e detta settima si resolve a Sesta maggiore. Siegue l'Esempjo.

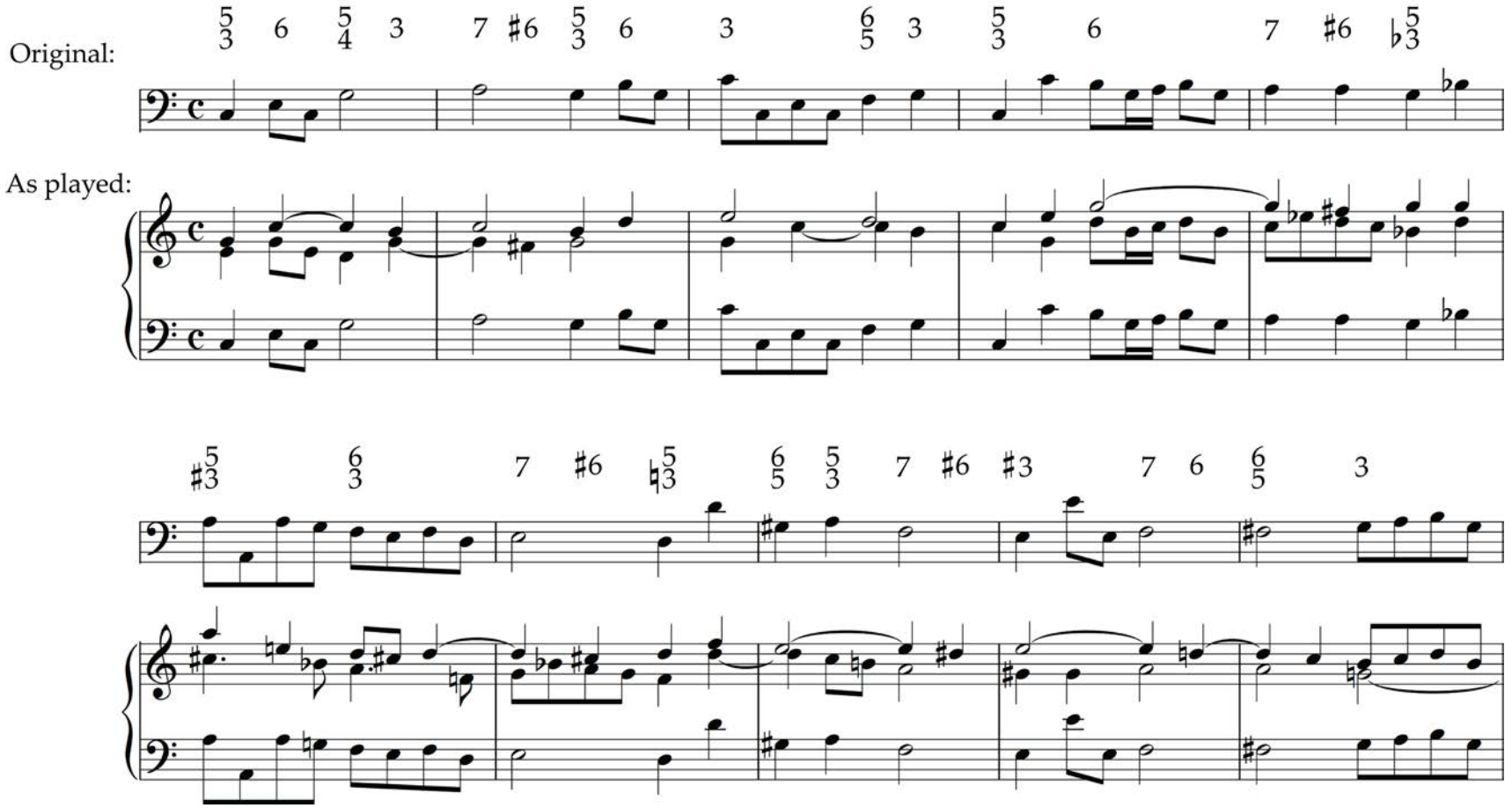
The seventh can also be prepared by all the consonances :: When prepared by the sixth, the partimento goes down by step :: When prepared by the fifth, the partimento goes down a 3rd :: When prepared by the third, the partimento goes up a 4th or down a 5th, and said seventh resolves to a major sixth. An example follows.

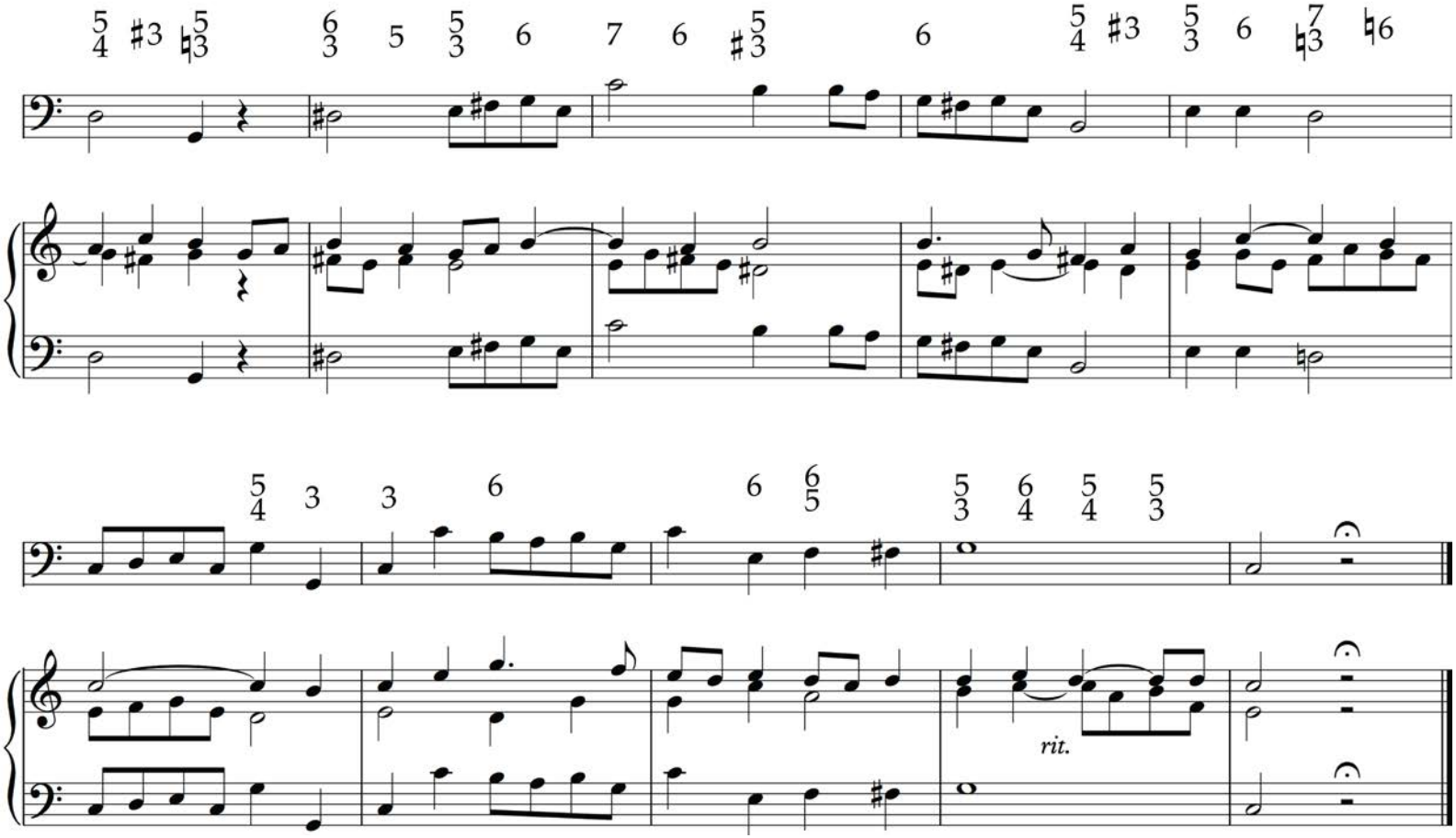




Siegue il Partimento con ligatura di 4ª e 7ª:

Here follows a partimento with tied suspensions of 4ths and 7ths:



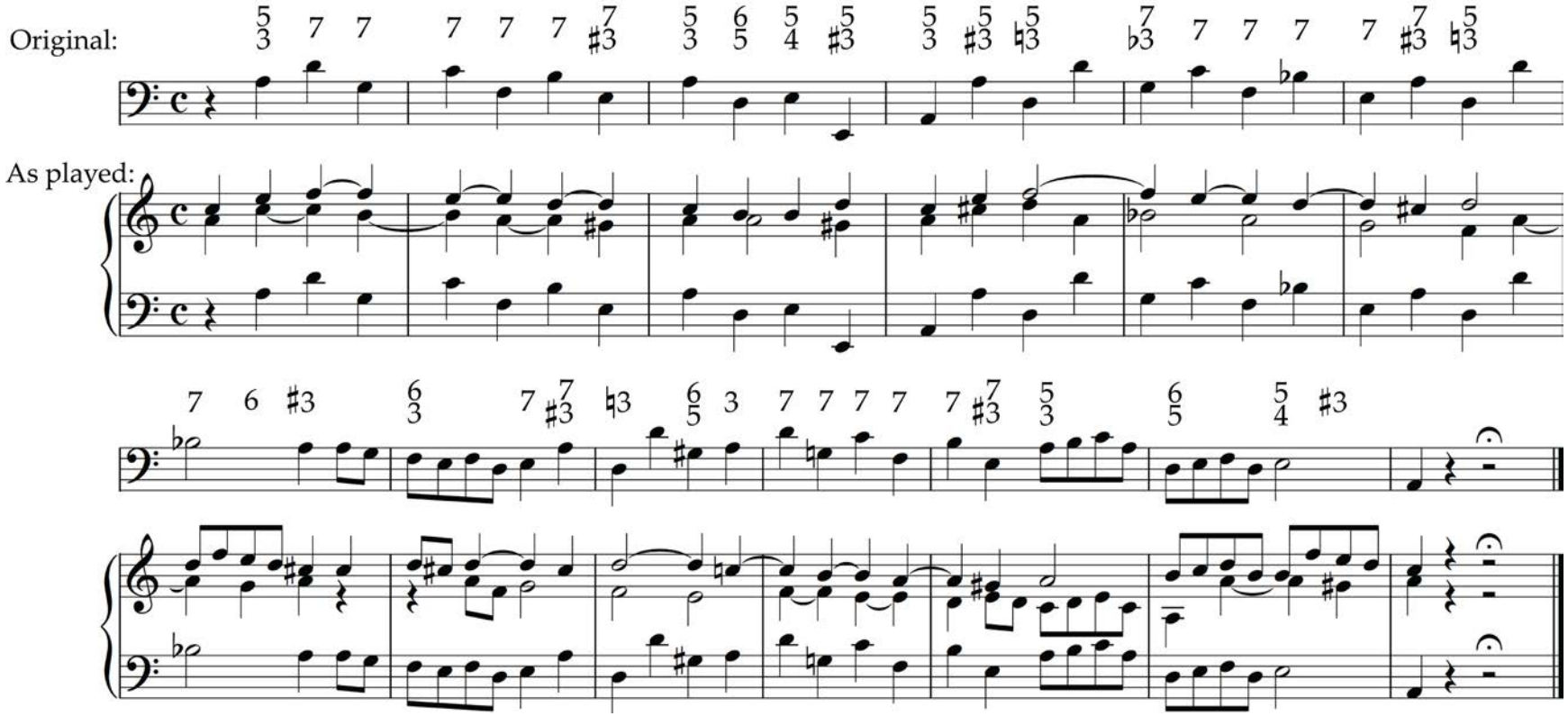

rit.

Quando il partimento scende di 5ª o sale di 4ª, se li dà 7ª preparata dalla 3ª de detta 7ª si resolve alla 3ª, e l'ultima 7ª si resolve con terza maggiore, poichè questa 7ª sempre s'accompagna con la 3ª.

Sieguono gl'Esempij:

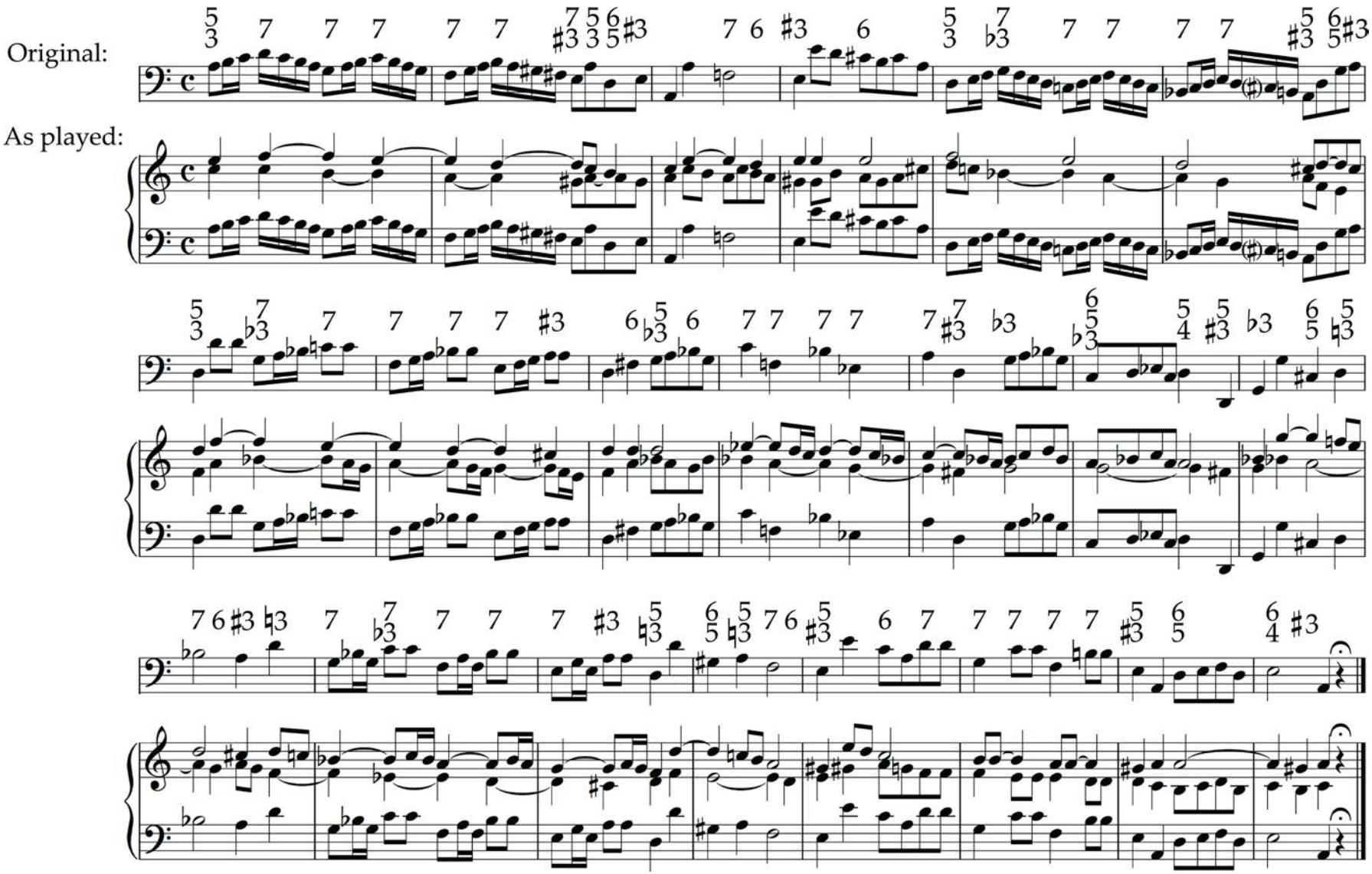
When the partimento falls by a 5th or rises by a 4th, give it a 7th prepared by a 3rd, and the said 7th resolves to a 3rd, and the last 7th resolves to a major third, since this 7th always accompanies the 3rd.

Examples follow:



Altro Esempio.

Another example:

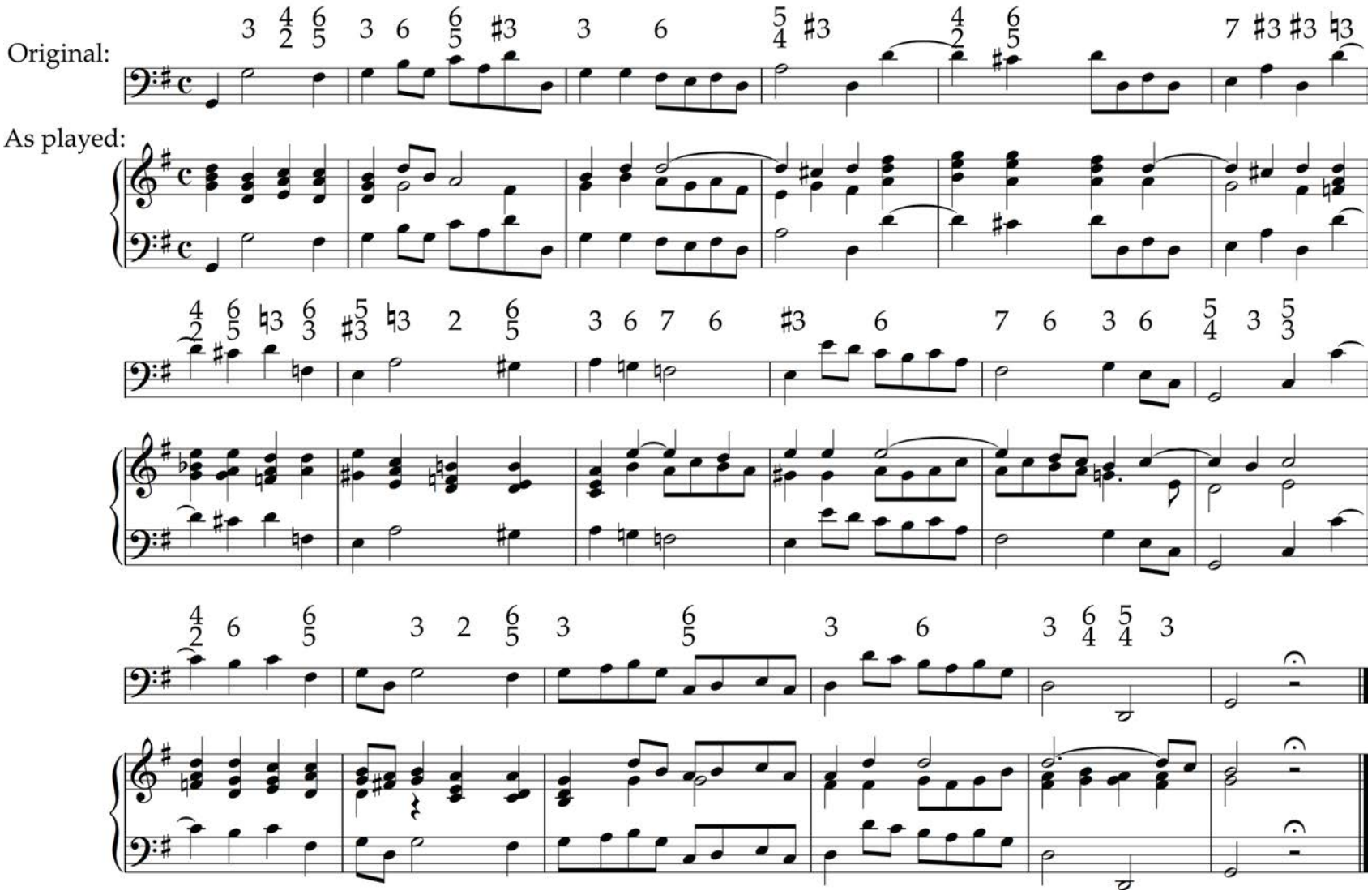


Quando il partimento è ligato, o singopato se li à 2ª e 4ª, assieme colla 6ª; ma se poi il partimento retorna al tono la 4ª deve essere minore; se poi non ritorna al tono deve essere maggiore.

Siegue l'Esempio.

When the partimento is tied, or sincopated, you give it a 2nd and 4th, together with the 6th. If the partimento returns to the [tied] tone the 4th must be perfect; if it does not return to the [tied] tone it must be augmented.

An example follows [of instances where the partimento returns to the tied tones].

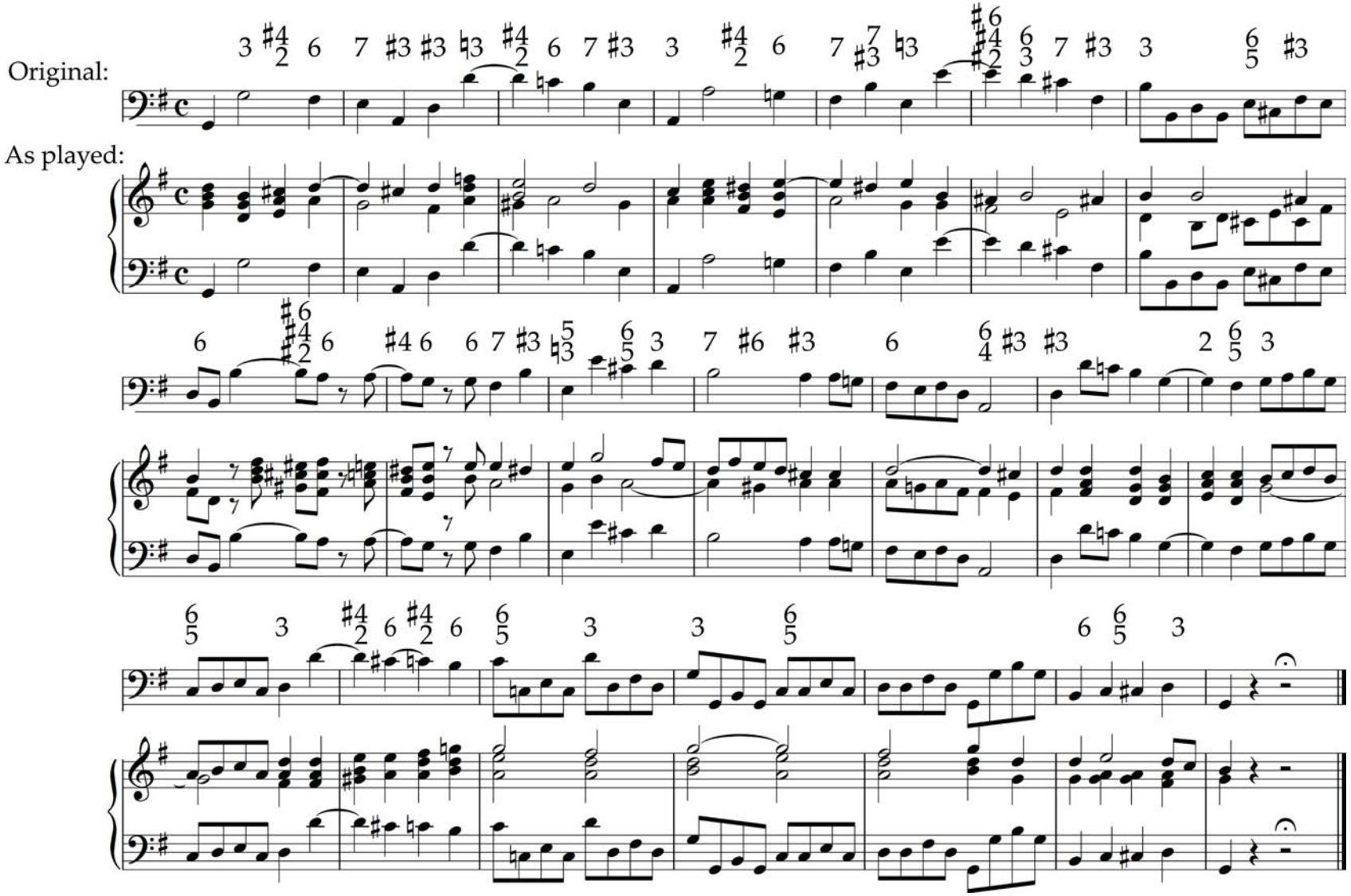

Original:
As played:

Quando il Partimento varia tono se li da 2ª 4ª maggiore colla 6ª.

When the partimento changes key [by not returning to the tied note after the resolution of the dissonance] you give it a 2nd and an augmented 4th, along with the 6th.

Original:

As played:



La Nona se puol preparare dalla 3ª, dalla 5ª, e si risolve all 6ª o all'ottava, accompagnandosi sempre colla decima, che è l'istesso dire la terza; e di più detta nona se puol resolvere alla 3ª quando il partimento scende de terza; siccome si puol resolvere alla 5ª quando il partimento sale di quarta.

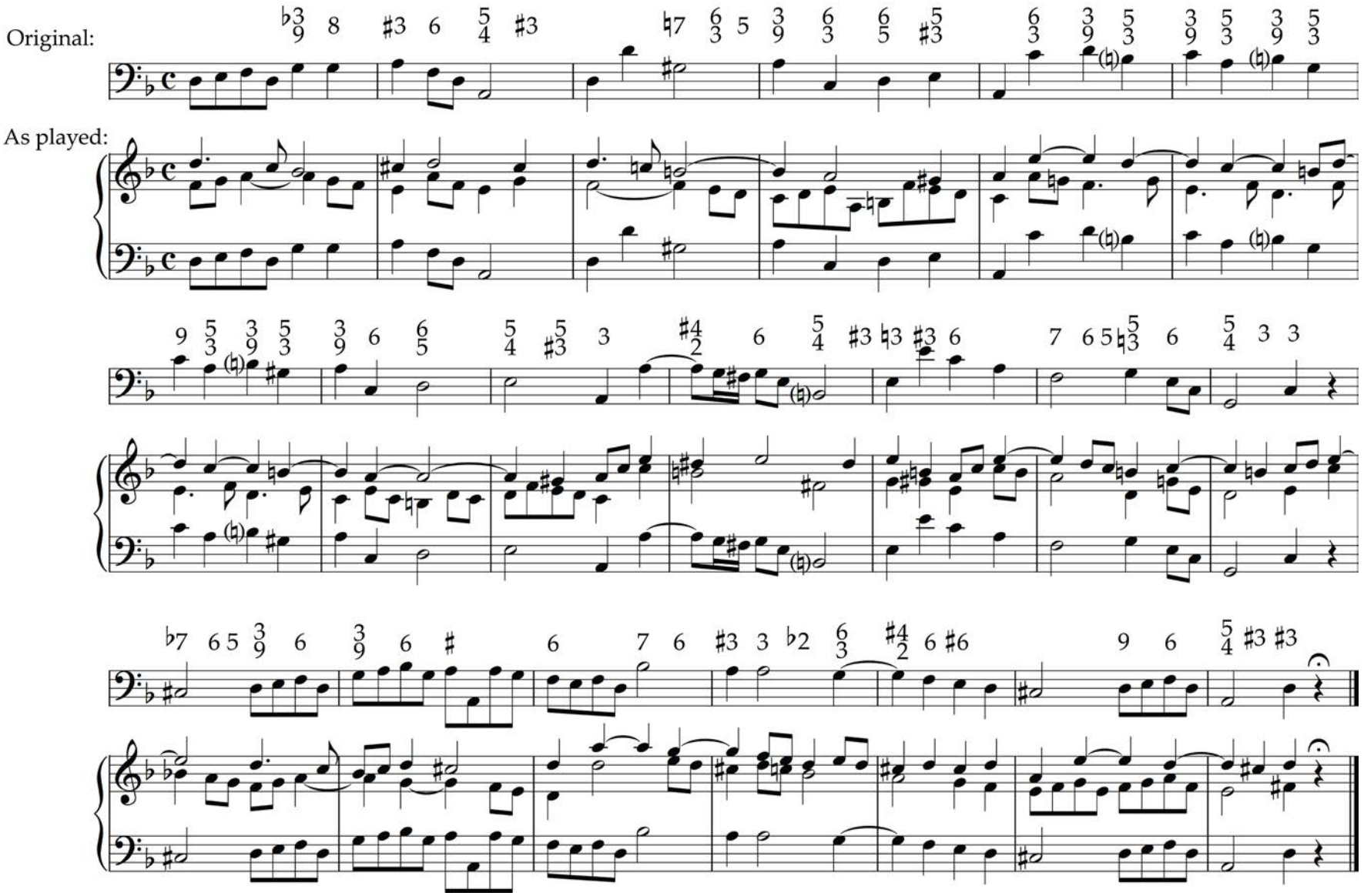
Siegue l'Esempio.

The ninth can be prepared by the 3rd, [or] by the 5th, and resolves to a 6th or an 8va, always accompanied by the 10th, which is the same as saying the 3rd; moreover, the said ninth can resolve to a 3rd when the partimento descends a third; whereas it can resolve to a 5th when the partimento rises a 4th.

An example follows.

Original:

As played:

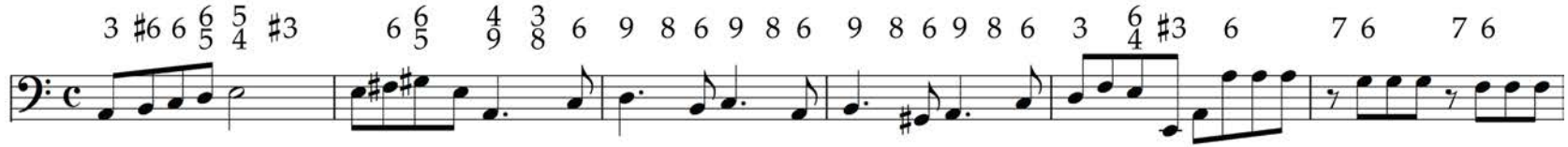


Altro esempio.

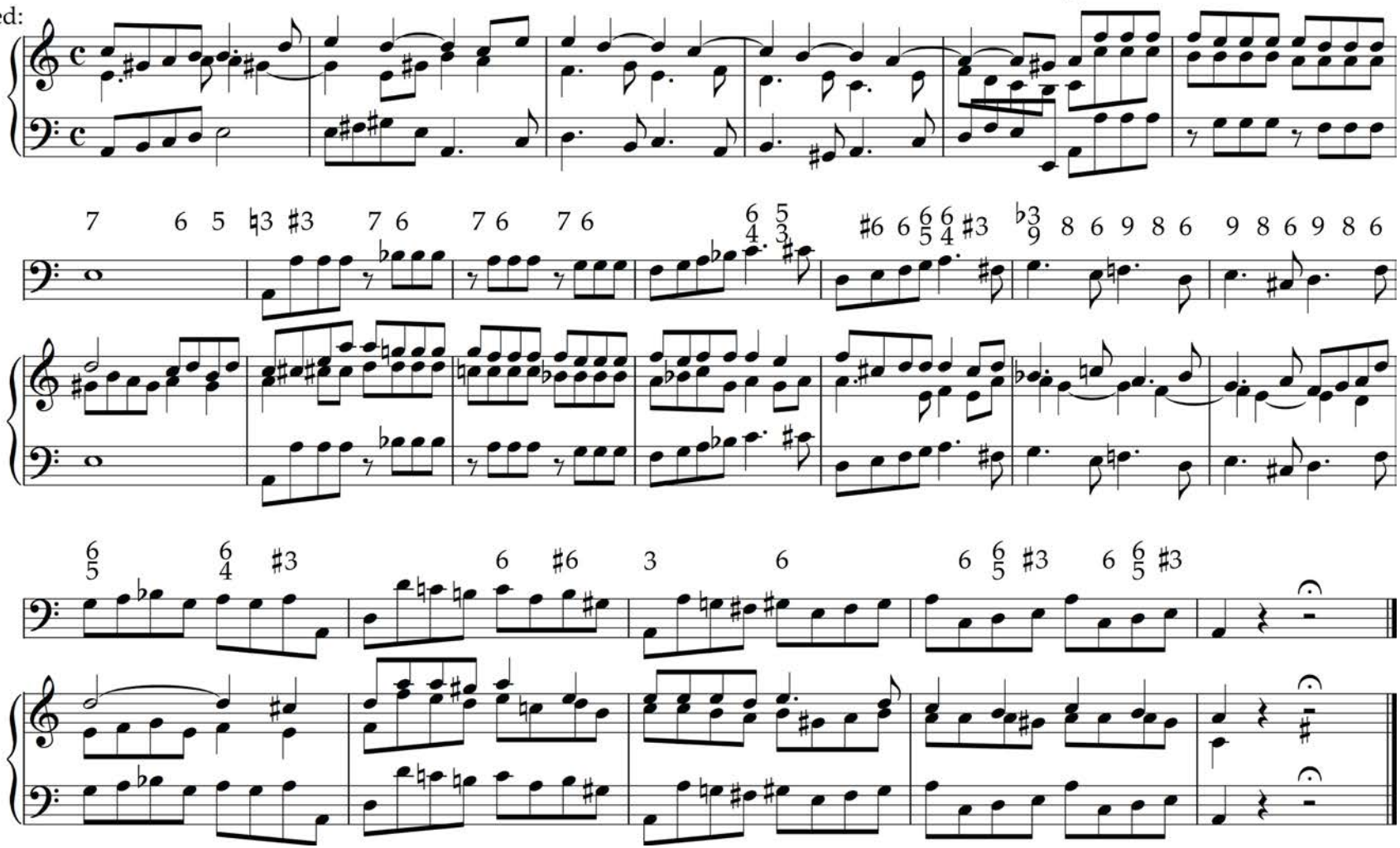
Another example.

Editor's Notes: The chains of 7–6 suspensions in the following example are shown with the 7s and 6s separated by eighth notes. The manuscript is imprecise and inconsistent, so it is equally possible to resolve to 6s full beats after the 7s.

Original:



As played:



Se deve ancora sapere che quando il partimento scende di 3ª e sale di grado, a quella, che sale, se li da 3ª e 5ª, ed a quella scende se li da 5ª e 6ª.

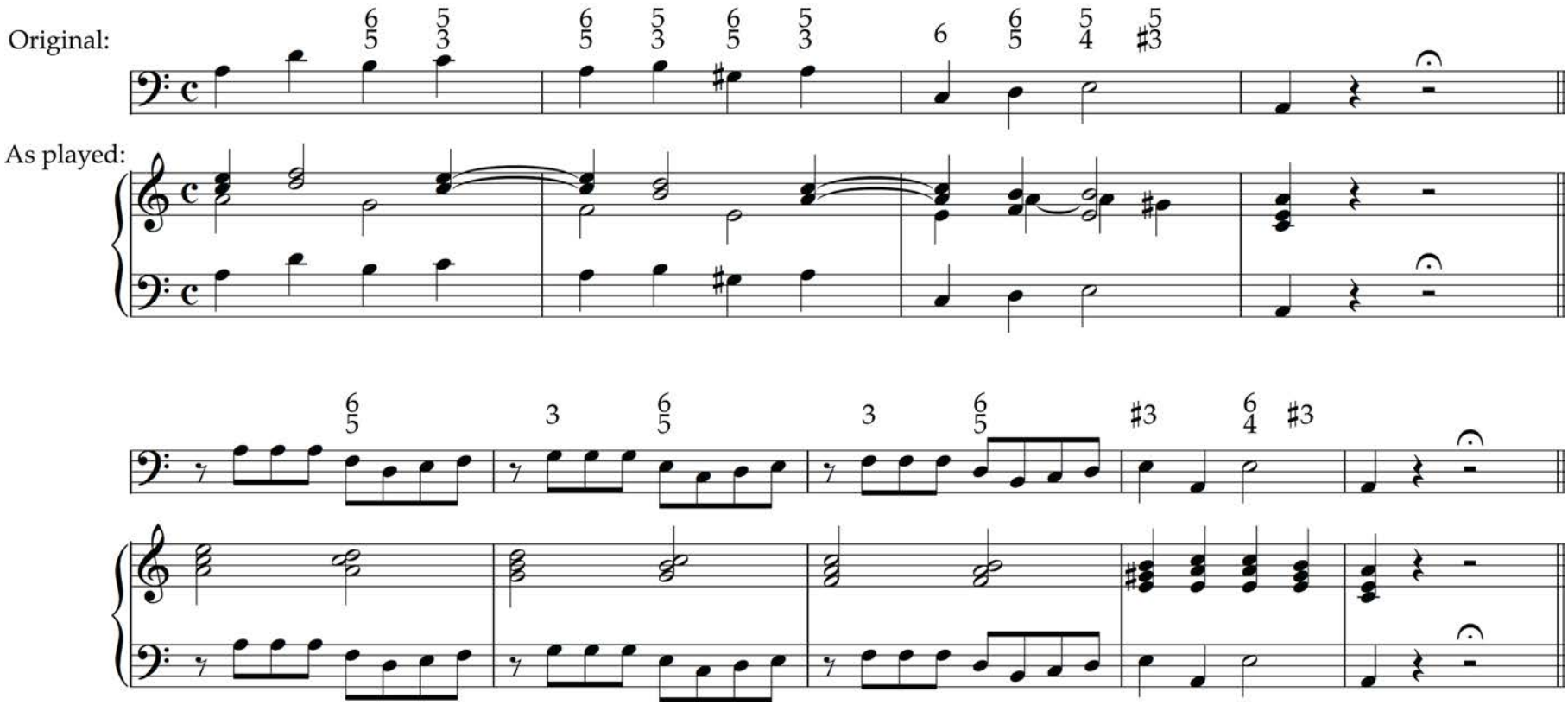
Esempio.

You should also know that when a partimento falls by a 3rd and rises by a step, the note that [will] fall takes a 3rd and 5th, and the note that [will] rise takes a 6th and a 5th.

An Example:

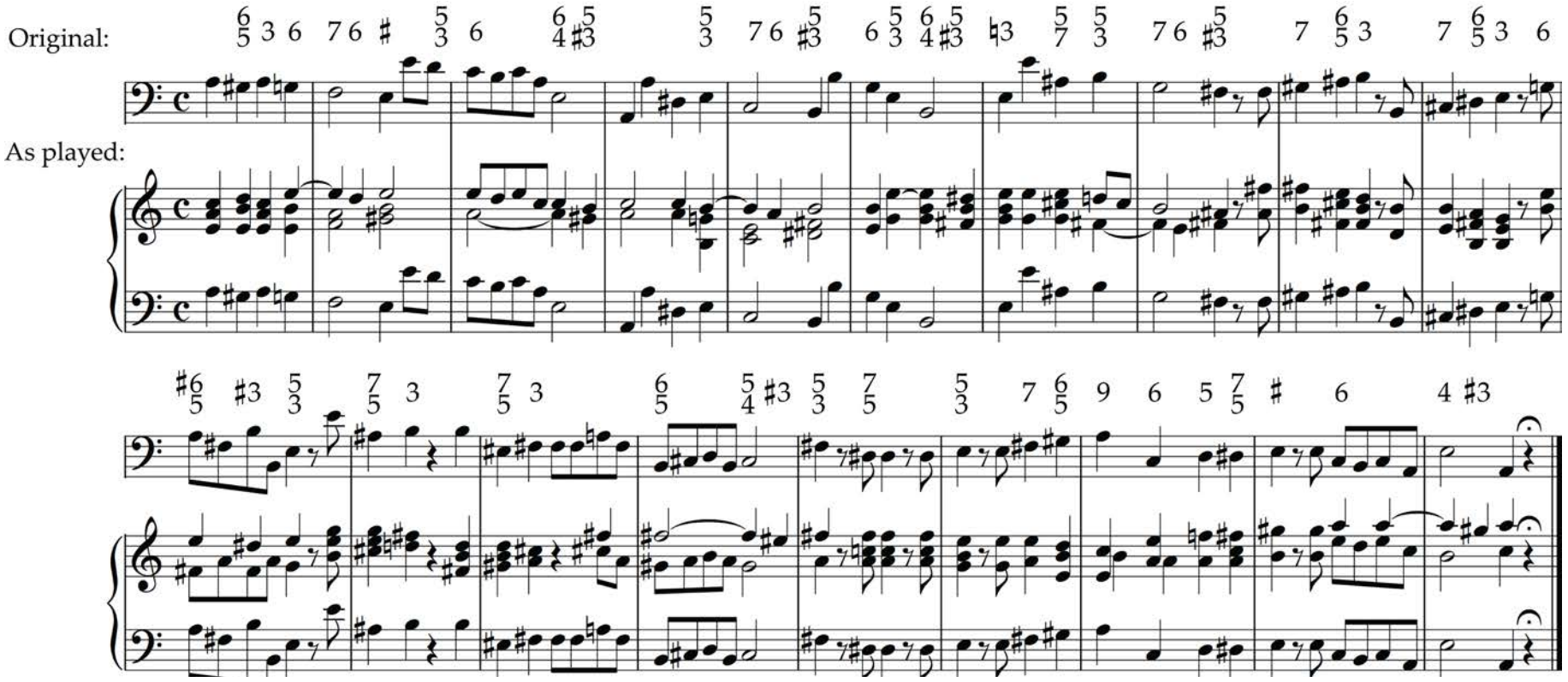
Original:

As played:



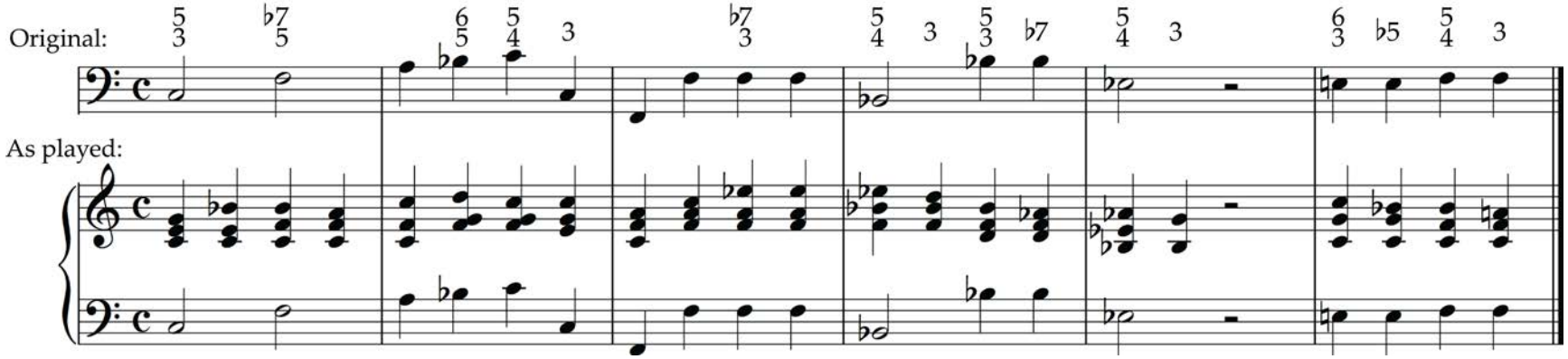
Siegue l'Exempio della quinta che varia tono.

Here follows an example of [diminished] 5ths that change the key.



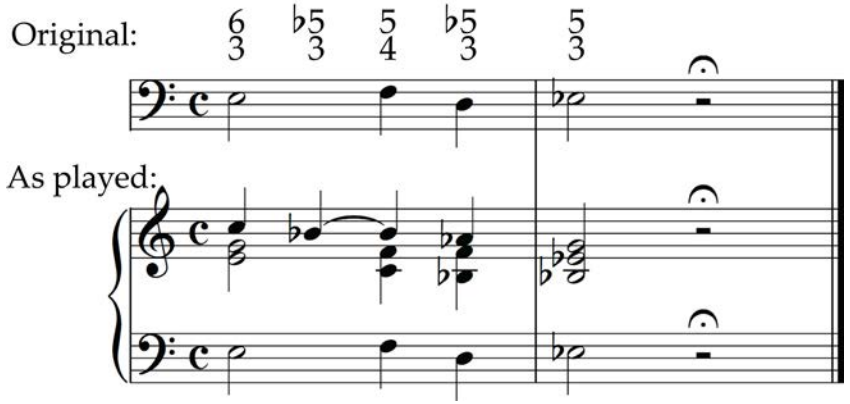
Di più devesi sapere che la 4ª non solo si prepara da tutte le consonanze ma ancora dalla 7ª minore, e dalla 5ª falza.
Siegue l'Esempio.

Moreover, you should know that a 4th not only can be prepared by all the consonances but also by a minor 7th or a diminished 5th.
An Example follows:.



Di più la quinta falza si puol risolvere ad un altra quinta falza. Esempio.

In addition a diminished 5th can resolve to another dim. 5th. Example:

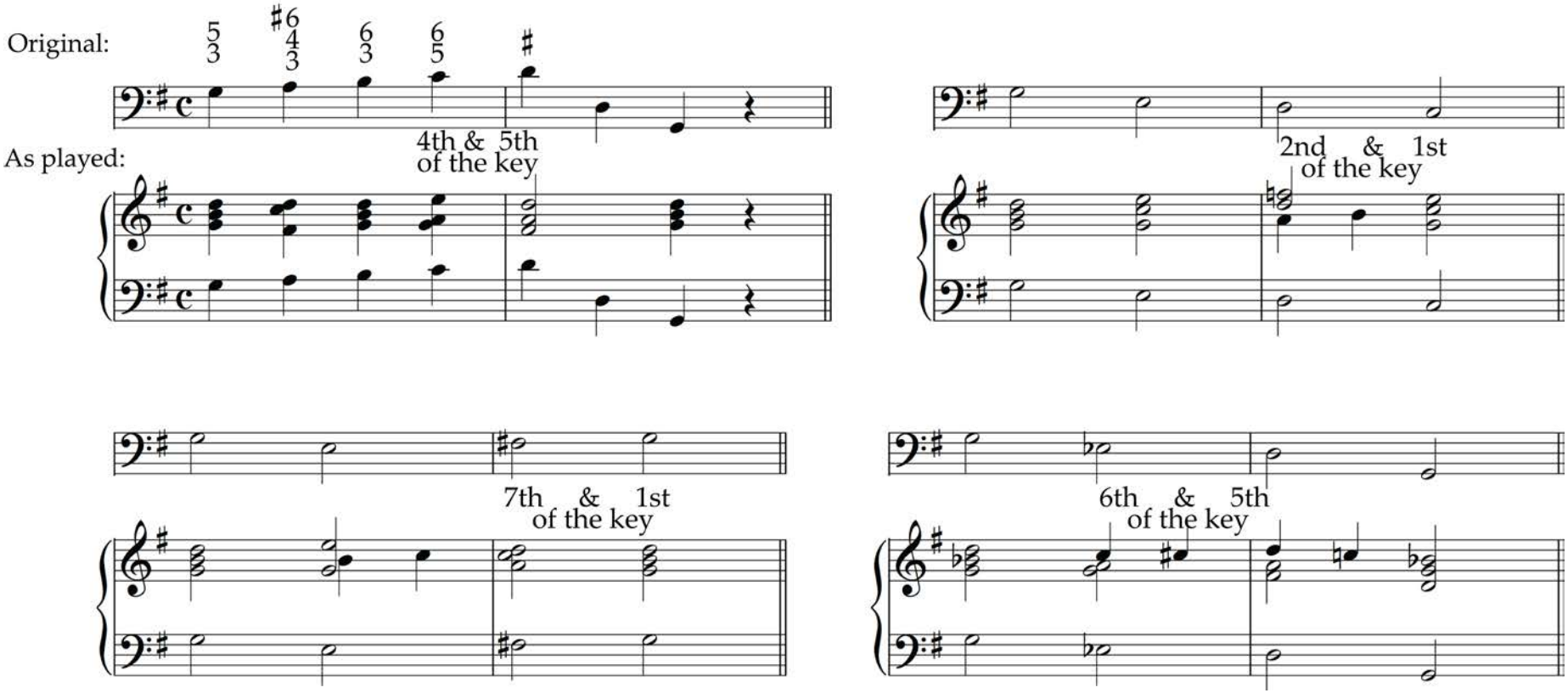


Si deve sapere ancora, che ogni tono hà le sue terminazioni, e sono due: acciò chi sona, sappia in che tono, si ritrova; se scende di tono; è seconda, e prima de tono; se sale di mezzo tono; è settima di tono, e prima di tono: se scende di mezzo tono; e sesta, e quinta, di tono.

Esempio

You should also know that each key has its endings [=markers of key and cues to cadences], and they [involve] two bass notes: so whoever plays [must] know in what key he finds himself [at each moment]; if [the bass] falls a whole step, [the cadence involves] the second and first scale degrees of the key; if it rises by a half step, you have the seventh and first degrees of the key; [and] if it falls by a half step, you have the sixth and fifth degrees of the key.

An Example


Original:
5 3
♯6 4 3
6 3
6 5
♯
4th & 5th of the key
As played:
2nd & 1st of the key
7th & 1st of the key
6th & 5th of the key

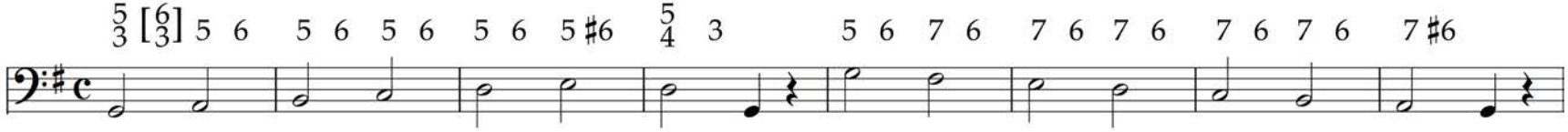
Quando il Partimento sale de grado in più note, se li da prima 5ª e poi 6ª, e l'ultima 6ª deve essere maggiore; quando poi cala di più note, se li da settima risoluta a sesta; e l'ultima sesta deve essere maggiore.

Siegue l'Esempio

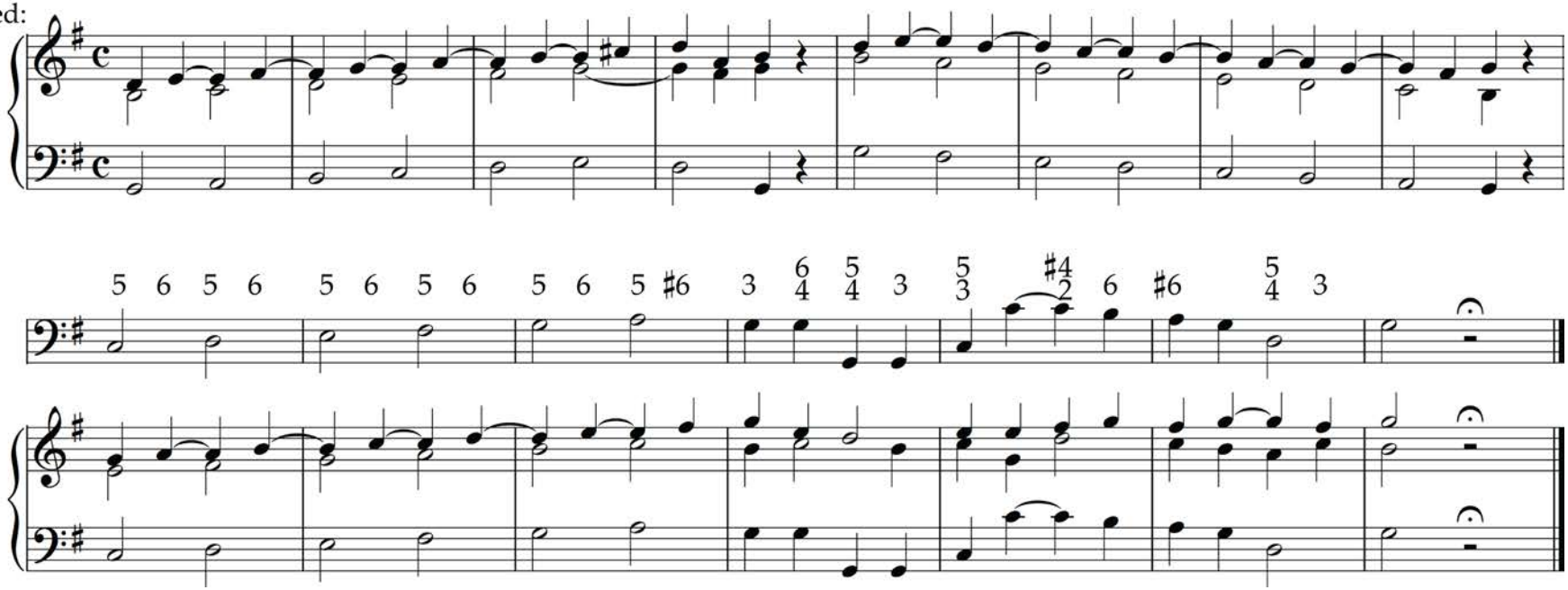
When the partimento [bass] rises stepwise for several notes, give the first [half of the note value] a 5th and then a 6th, and the final 6th should be major. When it then descends [stepwise] for several notes, give the first [half of a note] a 7th resolving to a 6th, and the final 6th should be major.

An example follows.

Original:

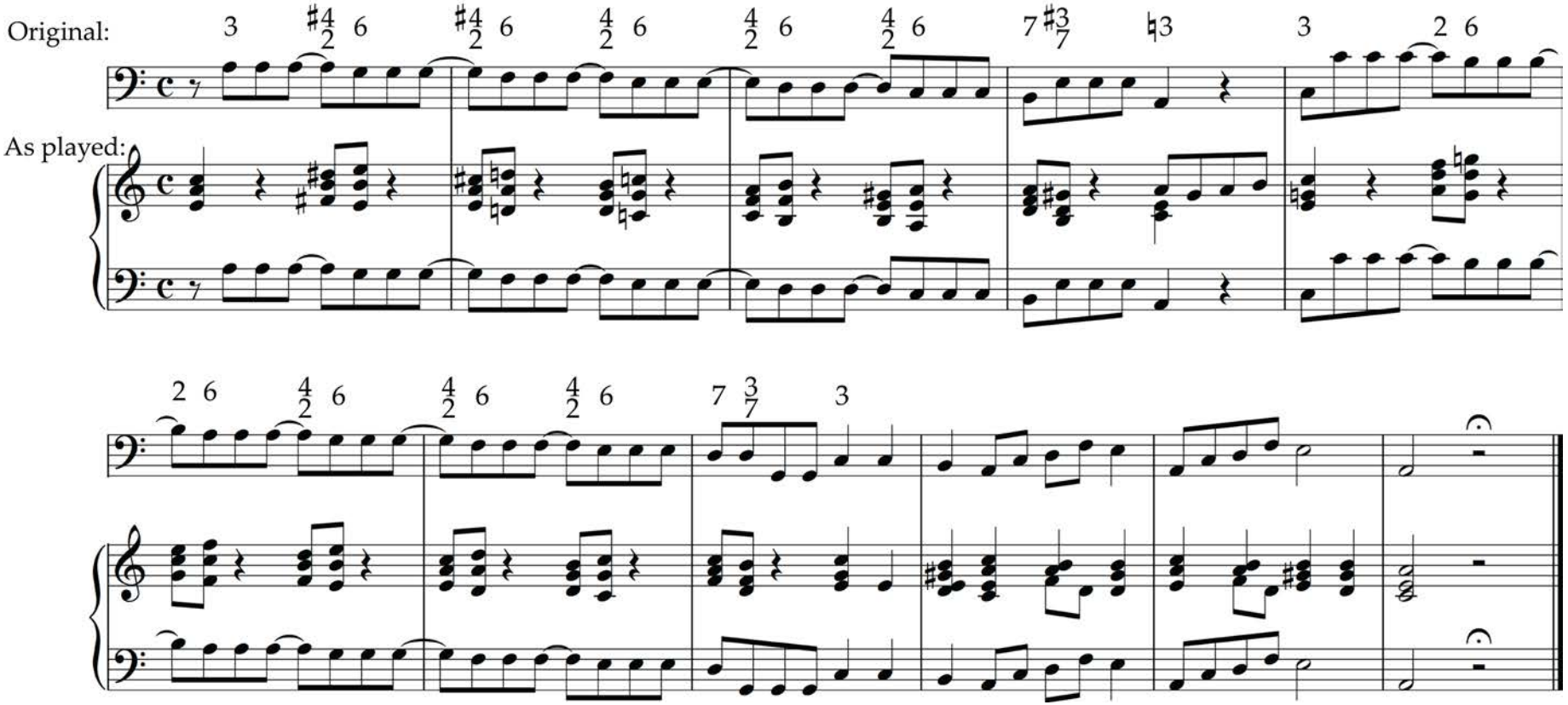


As played:



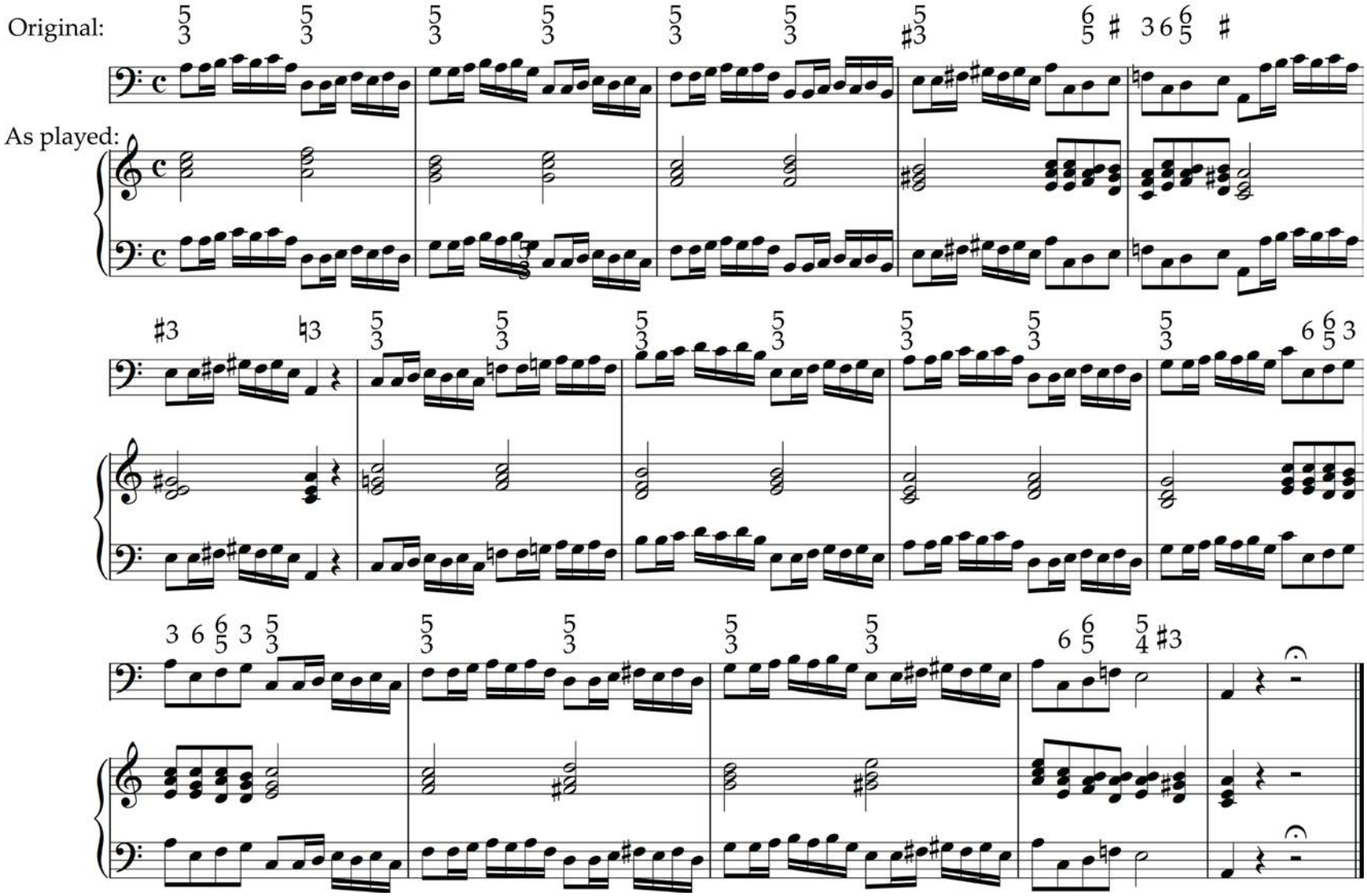
Quando il Partimento è ligato, e scende di grado, se li dà quarta maggiore, colla seconda; la seconda resta per terza; e la quarta maggiore va alla sesta.

When the partimento [bass] is tied and descends by step, give it an augmented 4th with a 2nd; the 2nd stays to become a 3rd, and the aug. 4th rises to a 6th.



Quando il Partimento scende di 5a; e sale di 4a si può anche accompagnare con 3a e 5a.

When the partimento falls by a 5th and rises by a 4th it can also be accompanied by a 5/3 chord.



Editor's Notes: The previous example shows two different *movimenti* or "bass motions." The first instance, as described in the manuscript, has the bass going "down a 5th, up a 4th in the key of A minor. In the second instance, the same general motion occurs in C major. In the third instance, the motion is "up a 4th, down a 3rd," with the key rising from F major through G major to A minor.

Sieguono le Lezzione Numeriche d'ogni genere Del Signore Don Nicola Sala.

There follow lessons in figured basses of all types by Master Nicola Sala.

Editor's Notes: The manuscript then continues, in a different hand, to present a number of Sala partimenti. For a modern edition, see the publication of all of Sala's partimenti by Peter Van Tour.