Ever so slowly, English-speaking musicologists are bringing to light important documents of eighteenth-century musical thought in scholarly, annotated translations. Still, when we consider how long the vast corpus of ancient writings on music theory have enjoyed the attention of scholars (Meibom's "edition" of Greek theory treatises was published, it will be recalled, in 1652), the paucity of editions for more modern writings might seem perplexing. This is especially so for eighteenth-century music-theoretical treatises, given that the music contemporaneous with them is among the most widely performed and analyzed today. Until only recently, though, just a handful of the most important theoretical documents of eighteenth-century music theory was available in published English translations. Of course there are obvious explanations that can be offered. First of all, there are not the overt paleographic and linguistic barriers with the writings of a German or French music theory text from the eighteenth century that one faces with a medieval theory manuscript penned in Latin. Further, a treatise on, say, the thoroughbass presumably needs less exegetis than does a text on mensuration from the fourteenth century. But such complacency, I fear, is misplaced. As the two recent translations reviewed here vividly demonstrate, we still have much to learn about eighteenth-century perspectives on music that can be gleaned by a thoughtful reading of primary documents. Perhaps more to the point, we have a number of persistent prejudices and misconceived notions regarding eighteenth-century music theory that need to be laid to rest.

The present translations of treatises by Friederich Erhardt Niedt and Johann Friedrich Daube can contribute to this enlightenment. Although chronologically distant from one another and, more importantly, separated in stylistic outlook, they share a surprising number of characteristics. These common traits provide telling evidence supporting those historians
who have lately argued for a more unified vision of eighteenth-century music (as opposed to the traditional view in which a stylistic fault line runs across the century at midpoint, polarizing it into “Baroque” and “Classical” periods, respectively).

Niedt's *Die Musikalische Handleitung* is certainly one of the better known thoroughbass treatises of the Baroque, due largely to the fact that J.S. Bach copied out parts of it for his own instructional purposes. In fact, the rules Bach gleaned from Niedt are neither original with Niedt nor reflective of the most interesting aspects of the treatise. Thanks to the efforts of Pamela Poulin and Irmgard Taylor, English-speaking historians can now get a more complete picture of Niedt's work.

The *Handleitung* was issued in three installments in Hamburg over a twenty-year period. Its publication history is somewhat complicated in that both Part 1 (1700) and Part 2 (1706) were reissued in second editions (1710 and 1721, respectively), with the later one edited by Johann Mattheson. Before the revised edition of Part 2 came out, though, Mattheson had meanwhile overseen the publication of Part 3 in 1717. (Niedt died in 1708, never seeing this part into print.) Matters are further complicated in that Mattheson heavily revised Part 2 in the 1721 re-edition, and interspersed the text on almost every page with his own lengthy annotations and additions. Poulin does her best to navigate the reader through this labyrinth by sorting out Niedt's original text from Mattheson's emendations, but the result is still confusing. The main problem is that Mattheson's comments continually undermine Niedt's approach to thoroughbass pedagogy, causing the text virtually to implode from self-contradiction.

Niedt's fundamental thesis—such as we can call it—emerges in the course of a delightful allegorical story that prefaces the *Handleitung*. The tale goes briefly as follows: One day while on a journey through the countryside, our story-teller (presumably Niedt) encounters a group of musicians. Upon learning that the visitor is himself a music lover, they invite him to a nearby gathering of merry music-making. During the evening's festivities, though, an argument ensues between two of the participants, Mopsus and Fidelio. The gist of the argument is whether thoroughbass was a skill that should precede or follow the learning of keyboard performance. Niedt—through the voice of a third intermediary named Tacitus—averts that the thoroughbass is a critical prerequisite for all musicians, as in it is contained "the entire foundation of practical music and composition" (p. 23). Unlike those backwards country organ teachers who have their pupils begin by memorizing fugues and toccatas read from tablature—of which one understands nothing—the thoroughbass makes the student see how music is put together and, moreover, how all varieties of music are but elaborations of harmonic structures conveyed by the figured bass signatures.
It is Niedt's conviction that in the thoroughbass the student learns both performance and composition at the same time. This is why Parts 2 and 3 of the Handleitung move well beyond instructions in the realization of simple signatures (the subject of Part 1 copied out by Bach), to address issues such as variation technique and genre. Indeed, Part 2—by far the longest of the three books—is a virtual compendium of Baroque diminution figures that can be applied to thoroughbass patterns in order to produce a wealth of musical forms and genres.

Mattheson was probably not the most appropriate editor to have brought out revised editions of Niedt's Handleitung, given that he disagreed fundamentally with this idea. In his ubiquitous and prolix annotations, Mattheson continually takes issue with passages of Niedt's text. At times he sounds like a school-master looking over the shoulder of his pupil and chastising him for wrong-headed ideas and infelicitous examples. Mattheson believed that thoroughbass, far from being the "foundation" of performance and composition, was really only a utilitarian trade (Handsachen) that required none of the knowledge or talent composition did, which for Mattheson was above all the art of composing beautiful melodies. (It is ironic how Mattheson ends up sounding at times like Niedt's dim-witted critic of the thoroughbass, Herr Mopsus.) The kinds of variations Niedt proposed, Mattheson claims, are better reserved for "unimaginative composers and organists deficient in improvising" (p. 67). He elsewhere warns that Niedt's description of the thoroughbass as the "foundation of music must not be taken too literally" (p. 75)—despite that Niedt himself was unambiguous about this fact!¹

Mattheson was right in at least one way, though. The equating of thoroughbass and composition was not universally made in the eighteenth century. For all those theorists who did indeed equate the two (including C.P.E. Bach, Heinichen, and, as we will see, Daube), there were others who viewed composition as a quite different skill from that of chord realizations (for example, Fux, Riepel, Koch, and Georg Michael Telemann).² Still, Niedt's coupling of composition with the thoroughbass—or more accurately, with keyboard improvisation—reflected the dominant view in the eighteenth century.³ And it is this conception of composition as an elaboration of a figured bass skeleton that will be seen to be a thread running through the century, despite the radical changes in style that meanwhile take place.

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With Johann Friedrich Daube's Der Musikalische Dilettant of 1773, we move now toward the other end of the eighteenth century, as well as southward to Vienna. Like Niedt's Handleitung, it is a representative document reflecting the musical tastes of its times, in this case, the "galant"
aesthetics of the class of musical amateurs referred to in the title—"The Musical Dilettante." We must not infer anything pejorative about this title. The musical dilettantes Daube is addressing made up the respected class of amateur bourgeois music lovers that were growing to such visibility in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It was this new proto-middle class of musical consumers who supported musicians like Daube by buying their music, attending their newly-inaugurated public concerts, and taking lessons on the harpsichord or fortepiano.

Daube's own life was itself emblematic of this change in musical patronage. As Susan Snook-Luther tells us in her informative biographical introduction, Daube's earliest employment was as a court musician to Frederick the Great in Berlin (as a lutenist), and later in Stuttgart. In 1765 Daube left the secure—but confining—employment of the court to enter the world of the free-lance music teacher and composer. He first worked in Augsburg and in 1769 moved to Vienna, where he was to remain until his death in 1799. Although few details are known of his life in Vienna, Daube left a rich legacy of publications that reflect in detail the changing musical tastes of Vienna during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. With the present volume of *Der Musikalische Dilettant*, we have in English translation what is arguably Daube's most original work, if hardly his best known.

Daube is much better known to music theorists today (thanks to the press he has received by historians such as Fétis, Riemann, and Matthew Shirlaw) for his first book on theory: *General-Baß in drey Accorden* (Leipzig, 1756). The *General-Baß* is a much misunderstood work, being repeatedly misinterpreted as either a blatant plagiarism of Rameau's "triple geometric progression" (in which a mode is constituted by three fundamental functions: the tonic, added-sixth subdominant, and dominant seventh chord), or a prophetic anticipation of nineteenth-century German Funktionstheorie. In fact it is neither. The *General-Baß in drey Accorden* is a conservative work and stands much closer to Niedt than to either Rameau or Riemann. It is true that Daube's three chords reflect the absorption of Rameau's ideas. But Daube either did not understand, or did not accept, the broader tonal coherence and functional hierarchy Rameau posited for these three chords.4

The filiation of Daube's treatise to Niedt lay in their mutual acceptance of the thoroughbass as a foundation for composition. Just as Niedt did, Daube argues that an understanding of thoroughbass is the very best preparation for a would-be composer, for it teaches one "the knowledge of chords and their succession" (p. 35)—knowledge essential for writing any kind of music. Of course for Daube, chordal components and successions were modeled by his three fundamental chords. Still, it is a structure analogous to Niedt's figured bass skeleton.
One might miss Daube's implicit chordal basis, as the volume translated by Snook-Luther begins with composition in two voices, and proceeds only gradually to music in four or more parts. And in only a few examples does Daube ever introduce figured bass notation. Yet it quickly becomes clear that a chordal understanding rooted in the thorough bass on the part of the reader is everywhere assumed by Daube (a foundation offered in the first volume of *Der Musikalische Dilettant* not translated here). One learns to put together two voices and elaborate them based upon the harmonic outline of the three chordal functions. So, as one illustration, the opening of example 1 shows a simple two-part counterpoint outlining the three basic chord functions in C major. (The "1st chord" is C major, the "2nd chord" F₃, and the "3rd chord" is G⁷.) In example 2, Daube diminishes the bass line, all the while retaining the original harmonic outline.

Example 1.

![Example 1 Image]

The remainder of the text never deviates far from this basic approach. That is to say, the most complex textures and genres of early classical music can be composed out through—and regulated by—a basic harmonic skeleton.

The similarity of approach between Niedt and Daube underscores a unifying thread in eighteenth-century thoroughbass pedagogy that is too often overlooked by current music theorists, particularly by those who adopt more contrapuntal perspectives. Voice-leading considerations were of course important to thoroughbass theorists. But to view thoroughbass theory as but an advanced stage of species counterpoint (as many Schenkerians do) is to distort grossly the tradition of thoroughbass (to say nothing of counterpoint!). With but a few exceptions, thoroughbass in the eighteenth century (and the seventeenth century, for that matter) was
constantly and uniformly seen as a harmonic/chordal activity. This does not preclude the possibility that someone like Mattheson might not accept the thoroughbass as the "foundation" of music. But there was little dissent from the view that chords formed the primary constituents of the thoroughbass, and voice leading was a secondary matter.

Of course Niedt and Daube had different conceptions as to where these chords came from and how they were put together. Daube was situated thoroughly in the post-Rameauian paradigm, whereas Niedt knew nothing of chord roots or inversional theory. More importantly, perhaps, Daube recognized and was among the first to describe how texture, voicing, spacing, and orchestration might come into play for the articulation of harmonies. As Snook-Luther correctly points out in her introduction, Daube's discussion of topics like voicing in the string quartet or orchestration in the "free-style" of the symphony opens up new frontiers of music theory (p. 24). Just as Niedt's book offers a contemporaneous view of Baroque dance genres, so too does Daube give us one of the few eyewitness accounts of Viennese classical music in its formative years. Yet for all the differences between the kinds of music with which each author was concerned, I remain most impressed by their similarities. Whether it is Niedt working out a courante from a preconceived figured bass line (pp. 167-70), or Daube detailing the use of imitation in a quartet using the elaborations and modulations of his "three chords" (pp. 109-11), we encounter a uniform presumption that harmony—the well-regulated succession of chords—forms the foundation of music. The styles and genres of music generated from this harmonic skeleton are all but kinds of variations.

We are fortunate that Oxford and Cambridge University Presses have lavished such care in publishing these translations. (Is this a field that will now be taken over by British presses?) Both Pamela Poulin and Susan
Snook-Luther have produced fluent translations with helpful annotations and bibliographic information (although on occasion I found Poulin's commentaries and extensive etymological digressions a bit intrusive). As the number and variety of writings from the eighteenth century continue to emerge, our understanding of the music of this century will be commensurately enriched and, I suspect, further complicated. But if this means debunking some of the more resilient notions we have tenaciously held to for so long, I do not think that is such a bad outcome.

—Thomas Christensen

NOTES

1 Mattheson's most detailed elaboration of these views is to be found in his Kleine General-Bass-Schule (Hamburg: Kißner, 1735), esp. pp. 39–67.
2 For further discussion of these opposing views of thoroughbass pedagogy, see Walter Heimann, Der Generalbass-Satz und seine Rolle in Bachs Choral-Satz (Munich: Katzlbichler, 1975), 20–47.
3 Bach, too, accepted Niedt's thoroughbass approach; C.P.E. Bach reported that his father always had his students begin with four-part chorale harmonizations rather than the "dry species" of Fux's counterpoint. See C.P.E. Bach's letter to Forkel dated 13 January 1775, quoted in The Bach Reader, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel (New York: Norton, 1966), 279. Also, in his gloss of Niedt's Handleitung, Bach began, as did Niedt, with simple triadic structures (the radix simplex) rather than with intervals or contrapuntal rules.
4 This is why, paradoxically, I do not find it implausible that Daube could have indeed been influenced by Rameau, contrary to Snook-Luther's suggestion (p. 10). That Daube did not know or understand the more contorted arguments of Rameau by which the three primary chords were derived from the geometric triple progression (and more specifically, the corps sonore), does not mean that Daube could not have quickly gleaned the idea of "three chords" through a quick perusal of the text and plates of Rameau's Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie of 1750—something Daube admitted to have done just before writing his first treatise.
5 The examples are taken from pp. 56–57 of Snook-Luther's translation.
6 In his Handleitung, Niedt continually refers to counterpoint as a musical ABC—a beginning rudiment of music akin to spelling, but itself only the first step to true mastery of composition, "for mere counterpoint itself contains no beauty and sounds like the spelling of a beginner, where one can hear syllables and words but can discern no complete meaning or context" (p. 237).
7 It is hence disconcerting that in her commentary Poulin continuously refers to "root-position" and "first-inversion" triads. Niedt never used such terms, and indeed, he would have found the concepts that they represent foreign. He certainly recognized an affinity between chordal inversions, in that the right hand might finger the same notes for each chord. But he would never have considered the 6/3 chord to be "generated" from the fundamental of the 5/3 chord. (This suggests another fallacy often found in current music-theoretical research, which is to conflate a harmonic perspective with Rameau's theory; the fundamental bass is only one subspecies of harmonic theory found in the eighteenth century, and a relatively late one at that.)
8 A striking confirmation of this view applied to Haydn's compositional technique is found in Elaine Sisman's eye-opening new study, Haydn and the Classical Variation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).