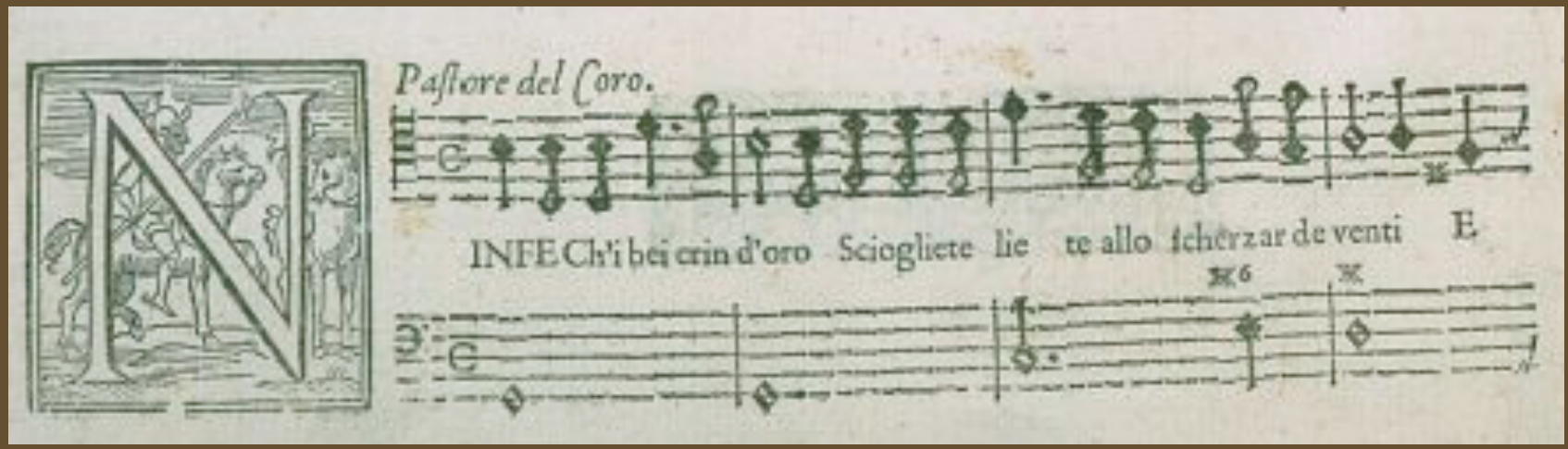
Basso Continuo

Gordon Haramaki
Music 110: Baroque and Classical Music History



Basso Continuo

"Continuous Bass"

"Figured Bass"

1. Treble Melody
2. Bassline melody
3. Chordal "realization"

Basso Continuo

Agostino Agazzari

Del Sonare Sopra'l Basso

Con Tutti Li Stromenti

E Dell' Uso Loro Nel Conserto

(1607)

Basso Continuo

Agostino Agazzari

Sounding above the bass

With all the instruments

And their use in the concerto

(1607)

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

FIRSTLY, know counterpoint,
be able to sing,
feel proportion and the rhythm,
know all the clefs/keys;
know how to correctly resolve dissonances.

SECONDLY, Know how to play your instrument

THIRDLY, have a good ear to hear harmonic movement

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

Instrumental Roles in Realizing the Continuo

Instruments of the Foundation
Strumenti da fondamento

Instruments of Ornamentation
Stromenti d'ornamento

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

Instrumental Roles in Realizing the Continuo

Instruments of the Foundation
Strumenti da fondamento
Play bass melody and realize harmonic support

Instruments of Ornamentation
Stromenti d'ornamento
"Mingle with the voices in various ways
for no other reason but to adorn and beautify"

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

Instrumental Roles in Realizing the Continuo

Instruments of the Foundation
Organ, Harpsichord, Lute, Chitarrone, Theorbo, Harp

Instruments of Ornamentation
Lute, Theorbo, Chitarrone, Harp,
Lirone, Spinet, Chitarrina, Violin, Pandora

Liuto

Lute

Tiorbo

Theorbo

Chitarrone

“Chi-ta-rra” = Kithara

“o-ne” = big

Organo di Legno

Chamber Organ

Arpa

Harp

Lirone

“Li-ra” = lyre

“o-ne” = big

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

Instruments of the Foundation

Play the bassline as it stands, and supporting the voices by occasionally doubling the bass in the lower octave

Play the harmony firmly, sonorous, and unbroken

Avoid the registers of the voices and not do not double their parts

Play within a small compass and low down.

Do not ornament in a way that obscures the voice parts

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

Instruments of Ornamentation

"The instruments [of ornamentation] mingle with the voices in various ways…for no other reason but to adorn and beautify… and 'season' the said *concerto*."

The player 'composes' new parts and counterpoints over the bass.

The player must observe and regulate himself according to the particular limits of his instrument to be successful.

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

When in all together the two groups must "have a regard to one another, giving way to, and not interfering with each other. If there are many of them, they must each bide their own time, and not like sparrows, all playing at once, and each trying to make the most noise.

Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

All chords are natural to the key, or accidental which may be indicated in the basso continuo figures

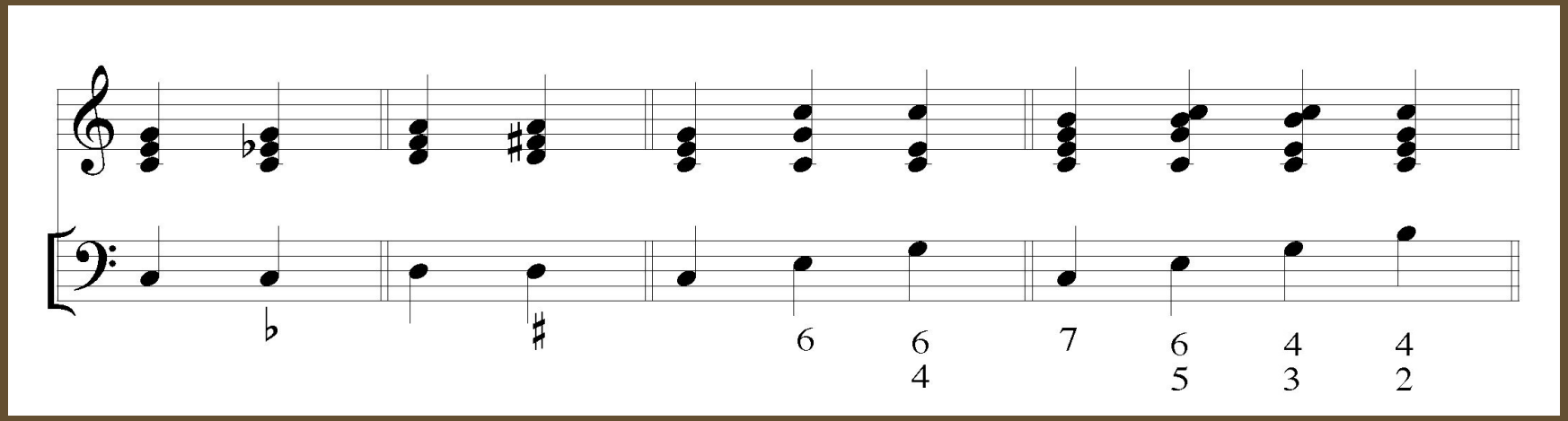
Accidentals in the figures refer to the third above the written note

Numbers refer to the inversion and chord type

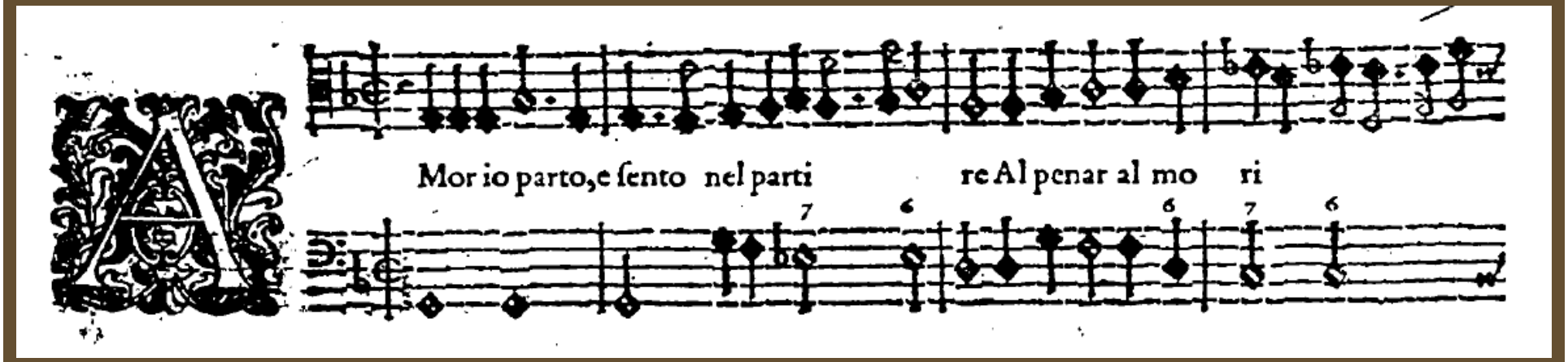
Chord inversions—usually first inversion—not indicated by figures, May many times be recognized by an accidental in the bass part, but not always

Basso Continuo

Agazzari's Rules



Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules



Basso Continuo
Agazzari's Rules

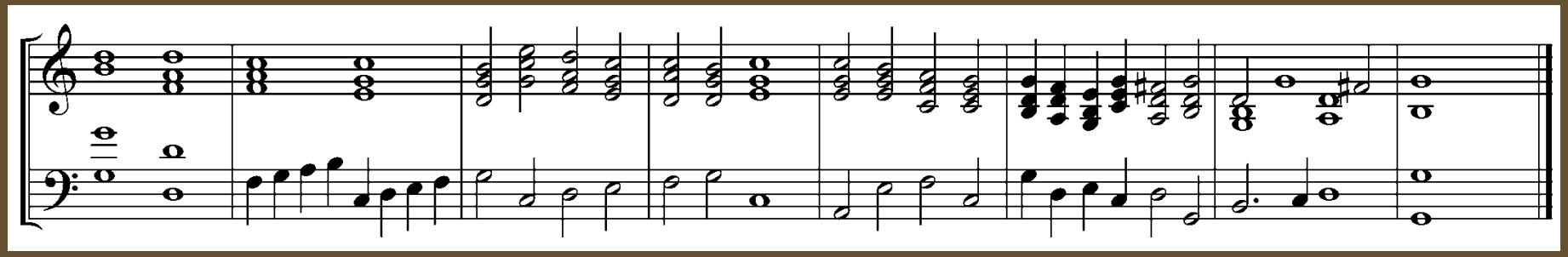
Rule 1 & 2. Realization is in contrary motion to bassline

Rule 3. If the bass moves melodically (stepwise) in fast notes, the harmony remains stationary

Rule 4. If the bass motion is disjunct in fast notes, each note must be given its own harmony.

Basso Continuo

Agazzari's Rules



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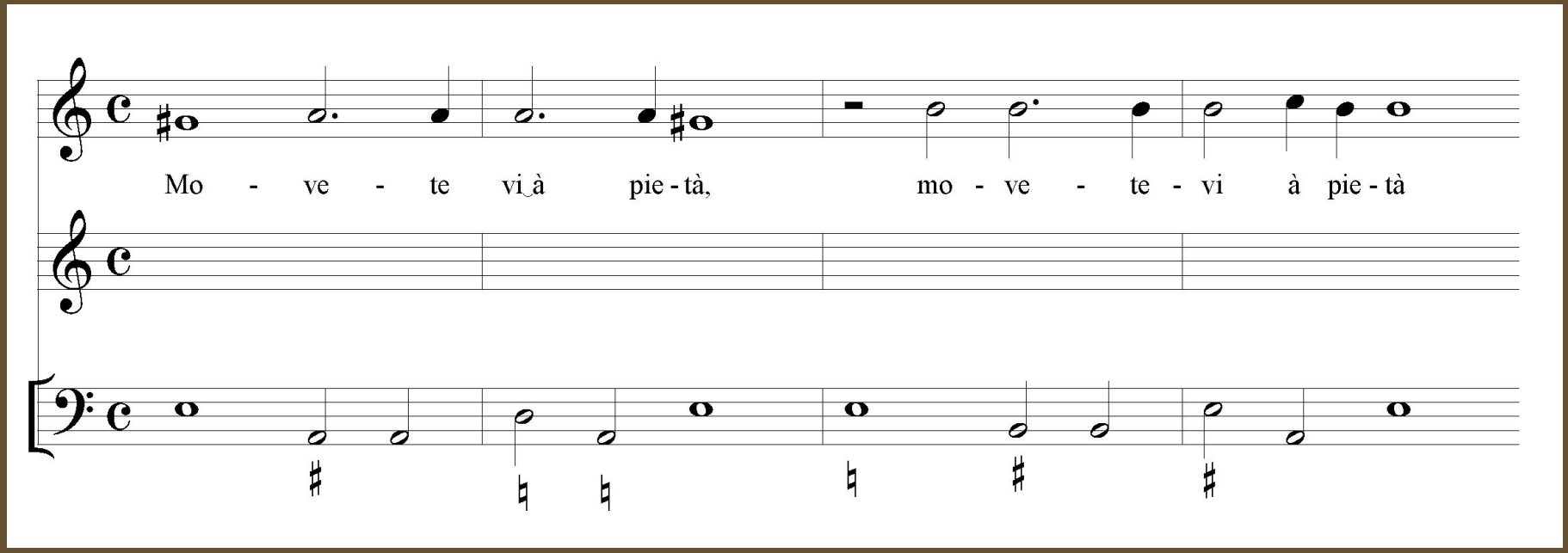

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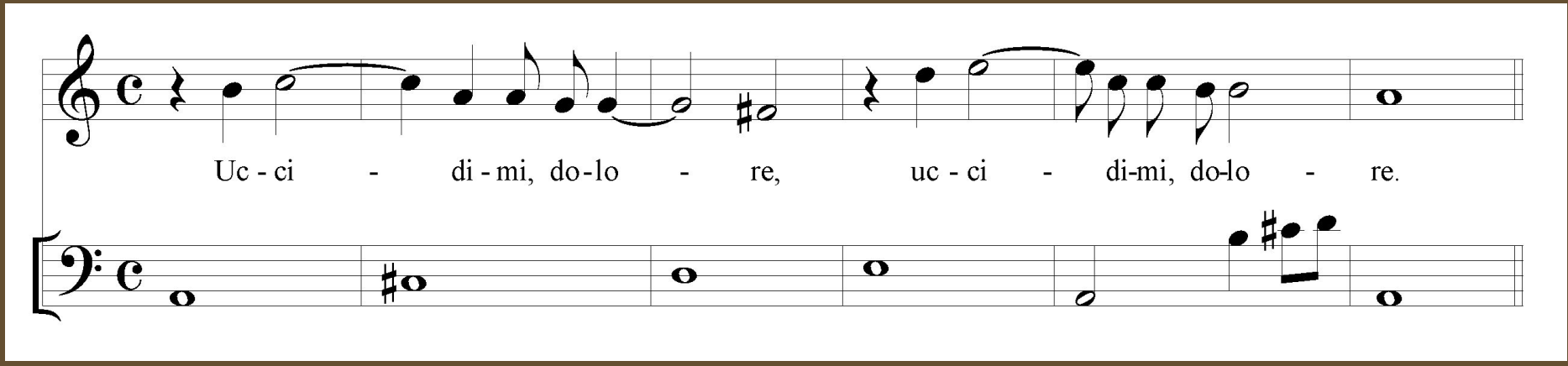

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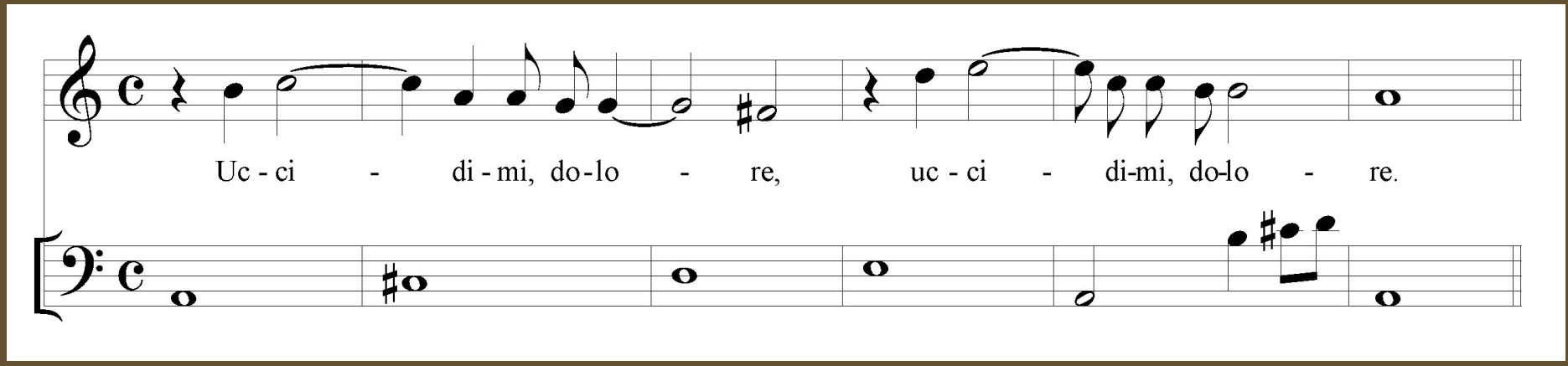

“Uccidimi, dolore” [Kill me, sadness]