

Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

Vol. 16, No. 1 Autumn, 2011

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Musical Instrument Research Catalog
(MIRCAt)

BOOK FOR THOROUGH BASS (1786)

owned by Ms. Avdot'ja Ivanova: Pages from one lady's music album during the period of Catherine the Great

By Maxim Serebrennikov

This paper deals with a handwritten sheet-music album of the second half of the eighteenth century, which raises the unknown fact of the attention given to the Italian partimento practice by Russian music lovers.

The History of the Manuscript

It is probably difficult today to find a musician who has not at one time or another heard about music collections such as the *Clavier-Büchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* (1720), the *Clavier-Büchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach* (1722), *Nannerl Mozart's Music Book* (1759), or *Leopold Mozart's Notenbuch* (1762). Many pieces from these early music albums have firmly entered the repertoire of amateurs as well as professionals and have attained an undying popularity.

It is thought that the lucky fate of these listed musical collections lies not only in the quality of the musical works within them but also in the names of the possessors themselves. The multitude of similar musical albums passed down to

us from a once rapidly flourishing tradition of family music making unfortunately continues to be ignored and forgotten. The sources that are concentrated in Russia are in an especially unfortunate position, since they have not even been in RISM (*Répertoire International des Sources Musicales*).

Appraising the current state of the the surviving music albums, N. A. Ogarkova notes "A musical album as an artefact of historical culture and music in everyday life rarely attracted the attention of researchers. A large part of the music albums, which are saved in our archives, are not attributed, not systemized and are not being used for source study, musicology or historical or cultural analysis."¹

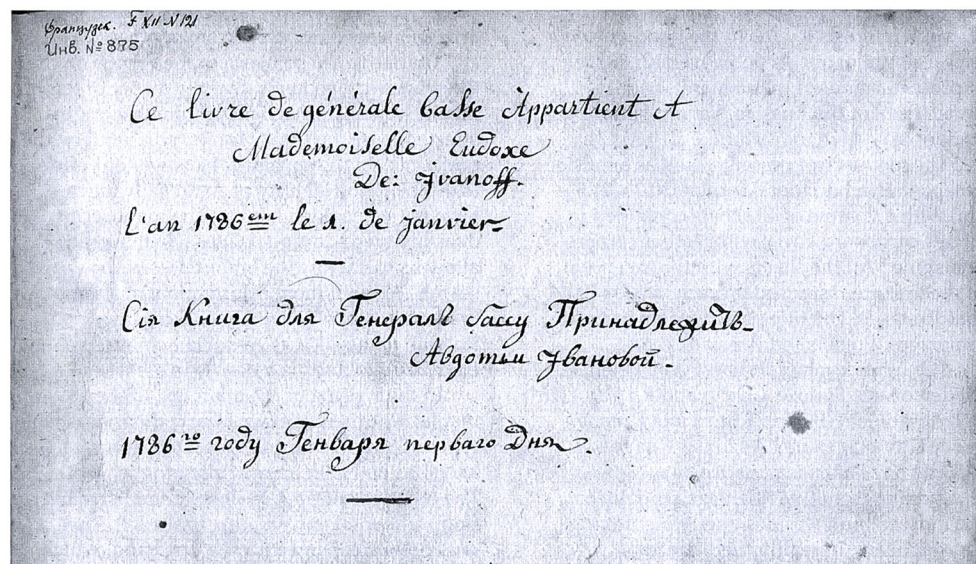


Fig. 1. Ms. Avdot'ja Ivanova's "Book for Thoroughbass" (1786). Title page. Reproduced by permission of the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg.



Fig. 2. Ms. Avdot'ja Ivanova's (1786). Folio 27v.
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In fairness, these words seemed almost designed for me personally when in 2003 my research interests led me to the handwritten music album of one Avdot'ja Ivanova, which at present is housed in the manuscript department of the Russian National Library under the shelf mark *Франц. F XII, № 121*.

The manuscript presents itself as a music notebook in a horizontal format (30.2 x 21.6 cm) with a volume of 40 sheets contained in a hard cardboard cover with leather corners and spine.² All the sheets with the exception of the first are rasterised on each side by hand into 10 staves. The title page, written in two languages (French and Russian), reads:

"Ce livre de générale basse Appartient A | Mademoiselle Eudoxe | De: Ivanoff. | l'an 1786^{em} | le 1. de janvier." / «Сия Книга для Генерал | бассу Принадлежит | Авдотьи Ивановой. | 1786го году Генваря первого дня» (See Fig. 1).³

Judging from this title page, initially the music album was designed for studying thoroughbass. In reality there are just little more than 11 sheets of manuscript dedicated to this art form. The remaining

29 sheets are filled with different keyboard pieces (solo and ensemble, originals and arrangements of excerpts from operas).

Thanks to the presence of the French on the title page we also know that the owner of the album was an unmarried girl of noble origins, attested to by the title "*Mademoiselle*" and by the prefix "*de*" in the surname. However our efforts to establish the identity of Avdot'ja Ivanova have not yet yielded results. The manuscript does not give additional clues which would allow us to narrow the boundaries of the search. Without more information, to attempt to identify a person with such a common Russian name such as Avdot'ja Ivanova, is equivalent to finding a needle in a haystack.

In the writing of the main text of the manuscript there are two clearly distinguishable types of handwriting. One is large, accurate and studious with an easy slant to the right. The other, in contrast, is slightly smaller, a bit sloppy, hurried and slanting to the left. The music album opens with the first hand, which is used in the majority of the manuscript text. The second hand enters on the recto side of

the 13th sheet⁴) and concludes on the folio 27r. In both cases the change of handwriting is so curious that it deserves a bit of commentary.

The first time the hands change imperceptibly is right within one of the pieces, in the fifth bar of the Polonaise (folio 13r, as mentioned above), the music for the right hand is still written with an accurate script and the music for the left hand is taken up by a careless script. As a result, both hands temporarily act “in counterpoint” with each other. The second time the change of the copyists is noticeable to the naked eye is obvious. The first hand has crossed out the beginning of the Sonata, which was carelessly and inadequately written on folio 27r, added the commentary “no good” and then cleanly rewritten the entire piece on the next page (See Fig. 2).

Besides the original text the manuscript also has a number of official marks left at various times by the staff members of the manuscript department of the library.⁵ Valuable information about the fate of the source is codified in the the mark “1908 / Pyk. 39.” (“1908 / Ms. 39.”), which can be found in the lower corner of page 40v. In the official documentation of the manuscript department, corresponding to this abbreviation, the music album of Avdot’ja Ivanova is registered on February 15, 1908 as a “purchase.”⁶

Thus far, having been added to the treasury of the manuscript department of the public library, *The Book of Avdot’ja Ivanova* became available for research. It is surprising that even after a lapse of a century the source has not yet received a serious scientific illumination in musicological literature, although throughout the years the album has been examined by Russian as well as western specialists.⁷

The earliest mention of the music album of Avdot’ja Ivanova that we have been able to locate is found in V.A. Natanson’s monograph *Russian Pianism of the Past* (1961). The author gives a short description of the manuscript and reproduces four facsimile pages of the album.⁸ In 1981, N.A. Kopchevsky published three musical pieces from the *Book of Avdot’ja Ivanova* in the collection *Russian Keyboard Music*.⁹ This publication, however, is not an independent work of the editor. As Kopchevsky himself indicates, all the material, namely the musical texts of the pieces and the information for their annotation, was borrowed from Natanson’s book.¹⁰ A brief reference to a piece from the music album of Avdot’ja Ivanova can be found in the textbook *Form of Musical Works* by Holopova in connection with a discussion of the different meanings of the term “rondo.”¹¹ We were not

successful in finding other references to the source in Russian and Western literature.

In 2003, during my acquaintance with the *Book of Avdot’ja Ivanova*, I discovered that the entire first part of the manuscript, dedicated to thoroughbass, was borrowed from the treatise *Regole per bene accompagnare il Partimento* by Giovanni Paisiello. From this moment on, the study of the source took a new turn.

The Book of Avdot’ja Ivanova as evidence of the practice of *partimento*

The eighteenth century has gone into the history of the Russian State as a period of active Europeanisation. It goes without saying that the process of assimilation of Western European culture enticed a colossal influx of foreign specialists, including musicians, into Russia.

The famous Italian composer Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816) served in Russia for more than seven years—from autumn 1776 through January 1784. This period turned out to be the most fruitful in his musical career. Holding the post of Kapellmeister at the court of Catherine the Great, he led a quite versatile musical programme. He composed theatre music, directed operatic performances, brightened up the leisure time of the empress and her circle with his keyboard playing, and taught keyboard to the members of the court, the most important of whom was the Grand Duchess Maria Fyodorovna (1759–1828), wife of the future emperor Pavel I. Paisiello was proud of the grand duchess as a pupil.¹² The lessons with her prompted the Italian master to create a whole set of keyboard works and also the treatise *Regole per bene accompagnare il Partimento* (1782), by which he continued the pedagogical principals of his teacher Francesco Durante (1684–1755), the patriarch of the *partimento* practice in Naples.

The Italian practice of *partimento* belongs to those multifaceted musical phenomena which are impossible to encompass in a single definition. This problem was accurately observed by contemporary Italian musicologist Giorgio Sanguinetti:

Not pretending that there is one singular definition, we will try to turn the explanation of Sanguinetti into as a concrete form, which will allow us move forward with discussion of the practice of *partimento*.

In the wide sense of the meaning, *partimento* is the art of solo keyboard improvisation based on the technique of thoroughbass. In the narrower sense, it is a solo keyboard exercise, a texture of which is encoded on a single staff with the help of thoroughbass

"It is not easy to tell exactly what a *partimento* is. It is a *basso continuo* or thoroughbass, but one that does not accompany anything except itself. It is a figured bass, but very often it has no figures at all. It is a bass, but can as well be a soprano, an alto, or a tenor. Whether tenor, alto, or soprano, it is often the lowest voice, but sometimes it can skip from one voice to another in the texture. It is written, but its goal is improvisation. And, finally, it is an exercise—perhaps the most efficient exercise in composition ever devised—but also a form of art in its own right."¹³

figures (*partimenti numerati*) or without them (*partimenti senza numeri*). Entire "schools" made up of such exercises were especially popular in the teaching practices of the conservatories at Naples, Bologna, and Milan. Durante's treatise *Regole di partimenti numerati e diminuiti*, which is among those *partimenti* collections that have survived to our day, was one of the most frequently used.¹⁴ In the opinion of Tharald Borgir, the worked out method of Durante became the model for all Neapolitan teachers until the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁵

Paisiello's *Regole per bene accompagnare il Partimento*, published in St. Petersburg in 1782 and dedicated to the grand duchess Maria Fyodorovna, also follows the general outline of Durante's manual and has four sections, which are typical for the Neapolitan school of *partimento*: 1) *regole* or theoretical "rules;" 2) *partimenti numerati* or figured basses for simple realization; 3) *partimenti diminuiti* or unfigured basses, suggesting a more florid realization, and 4) *partimenti* that contain obvious or openly marked points of imitation.¹⁶

In essence, the treatise of Paisiello stands alongside many other collections of *partimenti*, created after the *Regole* of Durante. Nevertheless, Paisiello's work occupies a particular place in the history of *partimento* practice, being the first published treatise on *partimenti*. Up until the *Regole* of Paisiello and for a long time after it, collections of *partimenti* circulated exclusively in manuscript form.¹⁷

As for the *Regole* of Paisiello included in the *Book for Thoroughbass* of Avdot'ja Ivanova, it does not appear as an exact copy of the printed edition. In the first place, only the first half of the treatise (from page 5 through page 30 inclusively) is included in the manuscript. Secondly, the text of the rules themselves are given in a French translation while the original was published in Italian. Thirdly, in a few cases,

the adjacent theoretical material and practical exercises are swapped. Fourthly, in a few of the *partimenti* the figures are written out in more detail than in the original edition. Finally, in the *Book* of Avdot'ja Ivanova the *Regole* of Paisiello are supplemented by a section called "All the Tonalities of Music" ("*Touts les tons de la musique*"), which consists of a complex cadence written out in all 24 keys (folio 9v–10v).

The discovery of Paisiello's treatise in the *Book* of Avdot'ja Ivanova (even in part) is an important step in the study of the manuscript itself as well as the practice of *partimento*. On one hand this partly resolves the question of the contents' authorship. On the other hand, this provides us with evidence of circulation of the Italian *partimento* practice in the circles of 18th-century Russian amateurs.

The *Book* of Avdot'ja Ivanova as evidence of 18th-century amateur music making

As has already been said, the copy of Paisiello's treatise occupies only a part of the *Book* of Avdot'ja Ivanova. The remaining pages of the manuscript contain various keyboard pieces, the genres and characters of which betray their entertaining and leisurely function. The fact that these pieces are present brings the music album of Avdot'ja Ivanova into the circle of sources belonging to a general European tradition of 18th-century amateur music making.

Let us be reminded that before the innovations in music printing in the 19th century, the publishing of music was not a wide-scale operation and remained a laborious and costly process. The primary means of disseminating music was to copy it out by hand. For this reason, every musician and amateur had to care for his own repertoire, copying into a special notebook the pieces he found to be useful, popular and interesting. Quite often the owner also entered into this very notebook his personal attempts at composition. Besides this, the copying of music solved important didactic tasks, contributing to the development of professional handwriting for music and the assimilation of the laws of musical composition. The deficit of printed musical editions, stimulated by a growing interest in music making (also in different classes of society), led to the appearance of an enormous quantity of repertoire music albums.

Although the *Book* of Avdot'ja Ivanova formally appears as a record of the every day Russian music making, in reality, it also belongs to a wider Western European tradition. The repertoire of Russian music albums of the

eighteenth century was directed primarily towards an active assimilation of folk music (songs and dances). Compositions orientated to the Western European style greatly dominate in the very *Book of Avdot'ja Ivanova*. The “specific gravity” of Russian music, in contrast, is extremely small and limited to only three pieces: the rather awkward harmonisation of the plaintive Russian song “Mother, it’s boring for me to live alone in the spring” (Table 1, No. 9); secondly, a stylization of a Russian song (Table 1, no. 10, Piece 10: *Andante in D Minor*); and thirdly, “*Aria russo pour ballet: Allegro in D Major*” from the suite *Ballet* (Table 1, no. 10, Piece 11), which sounds like variation in the minor mode on the second item, in the spirit of a dance tune. Thus, the content of the music album of Avdot'ja Ivanova supports the notion that the owner belonged to the class of nobility and that her tutor was probably a visiting foreigner.

One of the most serious research problems which the *Book of Avdot'ja Ivanova* poses is

attribution of the repertoire. The problem is that all of the music in the album was written or copied anonymously. Currently, we have been able to establish the origins of only those pieces which contain programmatic titles. These include a keyboard transcription of the overture to the opera *Les Deux Tuteurs* (1784) by Nicolas-Marie Dalayrac (1753–1809) and *Henri IV ou La Bataille d'Ivry* (1774) by Johann Paul Aegidius Martini (1741–1816) and the aria *Lison dormait* from the opera *Julie* (1772) by Nicolas Dezède (c.1745–1792), which served as the theme for the variations. The music of these popular (for their time) French composers was well known to the Russian public. As for the remaining pieces, we can at least say that they clearly belong to a minimum of two different composers. Even with a cursory acquaintance, one notices that the works are not equal in terms of mastery and quality of composition. In some pieces one distinctly feels the hand of a strong professional, in others, an inexperienced amateur or beginner.

Table 1. The contents of Ms. Avdot'ja Ivanova's *Book for Thoroughbass* (1786)

No.	folios	Contents (title, key, and commentar)
	1r	[Title-page]: “Ce livre de générale basse Appartient A Mademoiselle Eudoxe De: Ivanoff. l'an 1786em le 1. de janvier.” / «Сия Книга для Генерал бассу Принадлежит Авдотьи Ивановой. 1786го году Генваря первого дня.»
	1v	[blank]
	2r–13r	[Fragment of the treatise <i>Regole per bene accompagnare il Partimento</i> (1872) by Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816). Pages 5–31].
1	13r–13v	Polonoise, A Minor.
2	14r–17r	Ouverture del' <i>Opera Les Deux Tuteurs</i> (1. Tres Gayment, D; 2. Andante, D; 3. Tres Gayment, D). Note. Overture to opera <i>Les Deux Tuteurs</i> (1784) by Nicolas-Marie Dalayrac (1753–1809).
3	17v–23r	Duo d'quatre mains (1. Allegro non tanto, F; 2. Adagio, C; 3. Allegro, F).
4	23v–24r	Menuet ave 4 variations, F.
5	24v–25r	Allegro, F.
6	25v–26r	Polonoise, C Minor
7	26v–27r	Sonatina (1. Allegro moderato, G 2. Rondo, Allegretto, G)
8	27v–28r	Sonata (1. Allegro moderato, D; 2. Andante, G; 3. Rondeau, D).
9	29r	Песня. Скучно мат[ушка весной мне жить одной], c-moll. Note. Russian folksong “Mother, it’s boring for me to live alone in the spring.”
10	29v–34v	Note. Russian folksong “Mother, it’s boring for me to live alone in the spring.”
11	34v–35r	Allegro spirituosu, D Minor.
12	35r–35v	Menuetto, D Minor.
13	35v–39r	Overture d' <i>Henry IV</i> (1. Allegro maestoso, C; 2. Andante, C; 3. March. Maestoso, C). Note. Overture to opera <i>Henri IV ou La Bataille d'Ivry</i> (1774) by Johann Paul Aegidius Martini (1741–1816). Pseudonym — Schwarzenndorf.
14	39v–40v	Air: <i>Lison Dormait</i> . Allegretto, A. Note. Four variations on the Aria <i>Lison dormait</i> from the opera <i>Julie</i> (1772) by Nicolas Dezède (c.1745–1792).

Excerpts of the book have been edited by the author; scores and midi MP3s are available on the supplementary section of the website www.hfmagazine.info.

It would be logical to suggest that the pieces of the second group are attempts at composition by Avdot'ja, while the pieces of the first group could have composed by her teacher or borrowed from different manuscripts and printed sources.

The entire repertoire part of the Book of Avdot'ja Ivanova is undoubtedly of historical interest today, but it would be

unfair to examine it exclusively as a source of information about the practice of playing in a long past epoch. Indeed, while in this album we do meet many musical masterpieces, many of them, without exaggeration, deliver something truly pleasurable for the "heart and soul" and therefore deserve to be made available to a wider range of musicians.

¹ N.A.Ogarkova, *The Music Album in Russia of the End of the 18th Century to the Beginning of the 19th Century as a Historical and Cultural Document*, in: *St. Petersburg Music Archive 1*, (St. Petersburg, 1997), 78 [in Russian].

² Today the manuscript is wrapped in a protective grey paper.

³ "This Book is intended for Thoroughbass and belongs to Avdot'ja Ivanova. January 1, 1786."

⁴ From here onwards we refer to the face (front) page as recto (r) and the back side of the page as verso (v).

⁵ Some of the shelfmarks and pagination stem from Andrey Nicolavich Rimsky-Korsakov, Chief Librarian of the manuscript department from 1930 through 1940.

⁶ See *The Book of New Arrivals to the Manuscript Department of the Imperial Public Library for 1908*. Folio 1r. Record No. 39 [in Russian].

⁷ According to the manuscript's access record from 1954 for 2001, at least eight people consulted the music album of Avdot'ja Ivanova. Some researchers returned to the source repeatedly.

⁸ V.A. Natanson, *Russian Pianism of the Past (from 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century): Essays and Materials*, (Moscow: State Music Publishing House, 1960), 127–133 [in Russian].

⁹ *Russian Keyboard Music*, comp. and ed. N.A.Kopchevsky, (Moscow, 1981), 13–15 [in Russian].

¹⁰ *Kopchevsky*, 4.

¹¹ V.N. Holopova, *Forms of Musical Works: a Tutorial*, (St. Petersburg, 1999), 93 [in Russian]. I allow myself to disagree with Holopova, who defines the structure of the Rondo from the Sonata in D Major as a simple three-part form.

¹² For example, he wrote to his friend Ferdinando Galiani in Naples on September 18, 1781: "I don't want to fail to tell you that Her Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess does me great honour by the progress she has made while I have had the honour of giving her lessons." (Quoted in Jno L. Hunt, "The Keyboard Works of Giovanni Paisiello", *The Musical Quarterly* 61/2 (1975), 214.

¹³ Giorgio Sanguinetti, "The Realization of Partimenti: An Introduction", *Journal of Music Theory* 51/1 (2007), 51.

¹⁴ As of today there are known to be more than 20 handwritten copies of this handbook *R.Cafiero, Dietz H.-B.* Francesco Durante, in: *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Personenteil 5: Cov–Dz, (Kassel, Basel, London, etc.: Barenreiter-Verlag, 2001), Spt. 1672.

¹⁵ Tharald Borgir, *The Performance of the Basso Continuo in Italian Baroque Music*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 142. For more details about Durante's manual, see pages 141–147. The majority of Durante's partimenti is available now in the modern edition: Durante, *Bassi e fughe: un manuale inedito per riscoprire la vera prassi esecutiva della scuola napoletana del settecento*, (Padova: Armelin Musica, 2003); and on the web-site, "Monuments of Partimenti By Robert O. Gjerdingen" Online, Accessed 2 May 2011, <<http://faculty-web.at.northwestern.edu/music/gjerdingen/partimenti/index.htm>>

¹⁶ For more detail about Paisiello's treatise, see: Robert O. Gjerdingen, *Partimenti Written to Impart a Knowledge of Counterpoint and Composition*, in: *Partimento and Continuo Playing in Theory and in Practice*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 55–68.

¹⁷ Gjerdingen, 55. As Gjerdingen, believes, the reason for the unprecedented act of printing Paisiello's exercises could have been a direct result of the patronage of his high-ranking student grand duchess Maria Fyodorovna.