Joseph Riepel (1709–1782), surely one of the most colorful, prolix, and revealing eighteenth-century writers on music, was chapel master to the wealthy Prince of Thurn and Taxis at Regensburg. For Riepel, certain galant schemata had so palpable a presence as to have their own names. In his fictional student-teacher dialogues (1752–65), Riepel has the teacher introduce three schemata—the Fonte, the Monte, and the Ponte—that are so important he implores the student to “keep this threefold example in mind as long as you live and stay healthy!” In this chapter I will explain what he meant by the Italian word fonte, leaving the monte for chapter 7 and the more perplexing ponte for chapter 14.

The fictional teacher shows the student several versions of the Fonte (It., “a well”), each time writing down only the melody. Here is the version most frequently cited today.

ex. 4.1  Riepel, a Fonte melody (1755)

Riepel’s many treatises provide few basses because for knowledgeable devotees of galant music—his expected audience—the basses could be imagined from the melodic context. The laconic and occasionally completely nonverbal Italian collections of difficult partimenti basses were written by and for professionals. Riepel’s readership was heavily
populated with amateurs who would appreciate genial commentary and simple musical
examples playable on the flute or violin.

Instead of defining the Fonte feature by feature, Riepel, as mentioned, provided mul-
tiple exemplars of its melody and allowed his fictional student or teacher to comment on
each in the manner of a wine tasting. From just the example above, one can already infer
that a Fonte has two main sections. Its first half (mm. 1–2) appears in the minor mode (D
minor) while its second half (mm. 3–4), one step lower, appears in the major mode (C
major). If one were to scan Italian partimenti for similar patterns, hundreds of examples
would come to light. Here is a typical partimento fragment from Tritto, transposed for
comparison with Riepel’s Fonte:

\[ \text{ex. 4.2 Tritto, a Fonte bass (ca. 1790s)} \]

\[ \text{ex. 4.3 Riepel, a Fonte with both melody and bass (1765)} \]

In Tritto’s bass, the leading tone of each half, 7, first appears on a downbeat and then
moves to the tonic, 1, in a direct stepwise connection that crosses a notated bar line. In a
later treatise (ex. 4.3), Riepel provides his Fonte with a bass, and that bass, though simpler,
has many features in common with Tritto’s. The 7–1 ascent in the bass is matched by
a 1–3 descent in the melody, often terminating a larger 6–3–1 descent that the Fonte
shares with the Prinner. This coordinated movement of melody and bass across a metrical
boundary is highlighted in the example by canted brackets superimposed on the score. The horizontal dashed lines indicate how the ②–① and ④–③ are doubly connected. One connection is indirect—from downbeat to adjacent downbeat—while the other is based on direct note-to-note succession. Galant melodies and basses are full of such subtleties, and I will not attempt to display them all. Because the bass’s leading tones are mi degrees, they will have 6/3 or 6/5/3 sonorities, and the ensuing tonic basses will have 5/3 sonorities. All these features together suggest a Fonte prototype of four events arranged into two pairs:

![Figure 4.1](image-url)  

**Figure 4.1** A schema of the Fonte as two pairs of events

I know of no direct evidence explaining how Riepel learned the term *fonte*. He never traveled to Italy, yet his matter-of-fact referencing of presumed Italian terminology suggests how strongly Italian music and musicians influenced German-speaking Catholic courts. Jan Zelenka (1679–1745), Riepel’s own maestro at Dresden, may have studied in Venice at a time when Antonio Lotti (1666–1740) and Francesco Gasparini (1661–1727) were actively teaching there. Lotti and Gasparini served as maestros to many future musicians of note, including Domenico Scarlatti, Galuppi, Marcello, and Quantz. Since Zelenka later taught Quantz as well, the possibility exists that Riepel’s terminology and his descriptions of compositional norms have their roots in Venetian practices from the first quarter of the eighteenth century. If so, one ought to find Fontes in the works of Gasparini.

Fontes, in fact, abound in his works. A characteristic use of this schema immediately following a double bar can be found in Gasparini’s comic opera *Il Bajazet* (Venice, 1719). Gasparini uses a ⑤–① bass, setting the Fonte’s leading tones, normally found in the bass, in
the violins (the top staff of ex. 4.4). The vocal part (the middle staff) concludes each half of the Fonte with the typical ❼–❽❼–❽ descent highlighted in Riepel’s melodic prototypes (cf. exx. 4.1, 4.3):

ex. 4.4 Gasparini, Il Bajazet, act 2, scene 4, aria of Tamerlano (Venice, 1719)

![Musical notation]

A later influence on Riepel may have been the great pedagogue Nicola Porpora (1686–1768), one of the premier Neapolitan teachers of singing, and chapel master to the Elector of Saxony at Dresden (1748–52) during the period when Riepel began writing his first treatise. Porpora had trained the leading castrati of Europe, Caffarelli and Farinelli among them, and in the 1750s he agreed to serve as maestro to Haydn, imparting the precepts of the Neapolitan conservatories to this talented young student. A hallmark of the castrato’s art had always been ornate melodic passagework and florid runs. The Dresden court seems to
have especially favored a luxuriantly complex melodic style. At times, the visual swarm of notes on the page can easily conceal the basic schemata being employed. In a Fonte from Porpora’s 1754 set of violin sonatas (ex. 4.5), I have indicated how the composer anchors each half of the Fonte with a ⑤ in the deep bass until, at the conclusion of each phrase, the Fonte’s standard dyads appear almost like closing punctuation:

**ex. 4.5** Porpora, *Sonate XII*, no. 7, mvt. 4, Allegro, m. 26 (Vienna, 1754)

Notice in the above Fonte how Porpora’s bass leads off with a flurry of sixteen-note triplets, which are then taken up by his melody. Many galant schemata could be described as a pas de deux with the part of the danseuse usually given to the melody and that of the danseur to the bass. In the Fonte, the bass’s normal role was supportive: to ascend in clear fashion from the local leading tones to their tonics. The melody’s normal role was more decorative: to trace a line that would close by descending through the local scale degrees ④–③. Yet these roles could at times be reversed. Niccolo Pasquali (ca. 1718–1757), an Italian violinist who became prominent playing in the theaters of London and Edinburgh, penned the following minuet in which the bass presents the prototype of the Fonte “melody,” and the melody, after initial flourishes, presents the prototype of the Fonte “bass” (ex. 4.6).
The same la–sol–fa–mi pattern, now in the normal upper voice, underlies the following more complex example by Pasquali’s contemporary Johann Stamitz (1717–1757), director of instrumental music for the Elector Palatine in Mannheim. Stamitz embeds a Prinner in each half of his Fonte and employs the Prinner-like technique of isolating the melodic 6–5 and repeating it before finally introducing the expected 4–3:

**ex. 4.7** J. Stamitz, Opus 6, no. 2, mvt. 3, Minuetto, m. 9 (ca. 1759)
Today, “la–sol–fa–mi” and “6–5–4–3” are generally taken as equivalent expressions. Eighteenth-century musicians, however, tended to be far less glib about equating syllables with numerical scale steps. In the two halves of a typical Fonte, a difference in the position of the melodic semitones would have required a difference in syllables. The second half could remain la–sol–fa–mi. But if the first half began with a 6–5 semitone, the “usual Italian solfeggio” would require the syllables to be “fa–mi” (or fa–la). One thus could imagine the Fonte’s first half as fa–la–sol–fa, which brings out the considerable scalar overlap between the two halves. Indeed, it might be historically more accurate, early in the century, to define the Fonte’s first half as Dorian and its second half as Ionian:

**Figure 4.2** The Fonte melody viewed as segments of adjacent modal scales

By midcentury, Riepel’s own description (1755) seems to favor viewing the Fonte as being in two distinct keys with analogous scale steps: “The... Fonte makes... a half-phrase in D (with minor third) so as then to complete, one step lower, a full phrase in C.”6 In my student days, before finding a reference to Riepel’s Fonte in an article by Leonard Ratner, I had routinely marked examples of this schema with the phrase “one step lower.” When the Riepel scholar Stefan Eckert showed me the above quote twenty years later, you can imagine my surprise and delight at hearing Riepel utter the same words (“eine Stufe tieffer”).

However one chooses to interpret the tonal system of the Fonte, Riepel himself was highly sensitive about the position of semitones. He seems to have considered the first half, with its initial melodic semitone and minor cast, to be feminine,7 and the second half, with its initial whole-tone and major cast, masculine. This gendered treatment may have encouraged him to label as “hermaphrodite” those instances where the second half is also given a prominent semitone between 6 and 5.8

**Ex. 4.8** Riepel, the hermaphrodite Fonte (1755)
Riepel admits that the hermaphrodite Fonte has “a hundred fanciers,” but he is resolutely not one of them. Although he might allow a Fonte’s second half to be entirely in the minor mode, he disapproves of the way the hermaphrodite version implies the minor mode (with the melodic A♭) but then continues on in major “contrary to expectation.” A passage from a minuet by the young Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787), perhaps one of those hundred fanciers, shows a hermaphrodite Fonte in a context where the melody presents the normal Fonte bass, and vice versa:

ex. 4.9 Gluck, Trio Sonatas, no. 5, mvt. 1, Andante, m. 9 (London, 1746)

“Hermaphrodite” is certainly a colorful, strong term, and it demonstrates both Riepel’s verbal flair and the extent to which the details of schemata mattered to a court composer. The proper execution of these details was part of court etiquette, and deviations from them could imply incompetence or impertinence. In the case of Gluck’s Andante, the effect seems merely sly or piquant (Mozart often favored the hermaphrodite variant). The underlying Fonte remains clear and unchallenged.

A schema’s objective features can be recognized and catalogued through careful observation and simple statistics. After all, both Riepel and I independently abstracted what he termed the Fonte, and we both made note of its second half being “one step lower” than its first half. But it can be much more difficult to divine how eighteenth-century listeners interpreted the musical meaning of individual schemata. Meaning is not easy to observe objectively. One might hope that vocal music could provide clues, since poetic texts clearly have meaning. Yet eighteenth-century composers tended to connect the meaning of a poetic text with, on the one hand, tiny melodic or rhythmic motifs or, on the other hand, the mood of an entire musical section or movement. Thus it can be difficult to link the Fonte with a particular poetic device or topic.
An interesting clue to how the Fonte was received in galant society comes from a pantomime ballet by the French ballet master Auguste Joseph Frederick Ferrère (fl. 1782). This ballet, *Le peintre amoureux de son modèle* [The Painter in Love with His Model], includes a Largo in which the artist stands by his easel, hard at work on a painting of a beautiful young woman. At a double bar in the score, a Fonte begins and the stage directions (shown below in quotes) provide a hint that the Fonte may have connoted a digression from, and then a return to, a previous state. The digression is in response to a problem, which achieves resolution with the return to the status quo. The meaning of this schema may thus have been connected less with an affect or mood and more with a detour in a narrative path:

**Ex. 4.10** Ferrère, *Le peintre amoureux de son modèle*, mvt. 5, Largo (Paris, 1782)

"Goes over to the model and positions her head;"

"returns and chooses a color."

Just how common was the Fonte? The German scholar Wolfgang Budday listed about thirty Fontes in his book *Grundlagen musikalischer Formen der Wiener Klassik* (1983). Yet Haydn alone wrote hundreds, and a list of ten thousand would still account for only a small
fraction of its presentations during the eighteenth century. Within Wodiczka’s Opus 1, for example, there are five minuets. If one looks only at the phrases immediately following the double bars, the results will tally one Monte, one modulation by fifth, and three Fontes. While I would hesitate to assign a numerical value to the probability of hearing a Fonte in a randomly selected galant work, the reader can be assured that the Fonte was a very common schema.

As a final example, let me present the Fonte from the first of Wodiczka’s minuets. This minuet includes a theme and three variations of the melody to be played over the same bass, so the notation (see ex. 4.11) shows all the melodies above that bass (please note: the melodies play sequentially, not simultaneously, in the order Theme, Var. 1, Var. 2, Var. 3). A dotted line indicates the metrical boundary that separates the Fonte’s dyads. In most previous instances in this chapter, that boundary coincided with a bar line. But in this case, and in many other minuets, the boundary separates beats 2 and 3:

Variation 3 illustrates that, given the right context, no single feature is absolutely necessary for a particular schema. The melodic 6–9, for instance, is a central feature of a Fonte. But after listening to the theme and the first two variations, the substitution of 6–9 for
in Variation 3 does not suddenly force one to put the phrase in a different category. It remains a Fonte, though a less typical one. In all of Riepel’s many examples of different types of Fontes, this “6–5” version occurs only once. So a statistically accurate Fonte prototype should retain a 4–3 dyad, even if that dyad is not the sine qua non of the schema in every possible context.

As mentioned above, Fontes in minuets often had a scansion that was no doubt influenced by the steps of that courtly dance. There were, of course, many variants of the dance, but the common type required a six-beat pattern with a close on the sixth beat. As the dancing master to the Queen of Spain expressed it in the 1720s, at the sixth beat the dancer must ensure “that the Heel be set down to be able to make a Sink to begin another Step.” The first beat of each six-beat pattern (the first quarter note of each two-measure unit) was an initiation of movement, and Wodiczka’s Fonte respects that dynamic as well.

In a short story by Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893), a young man meets a very old man who had been a dancing master during the reign of Louis XV. The nineteenth-century youth inquired of his eighteenth-century elder, “Tell me, what was the minuet?” The old man, startled, responded, “The minuet, monsieur, is the queen of dances, and the dance of queens, do you understand? Since there is no longer any royalty, there is no longer any minuet.” Minuets did fade away with the aristocrats who danced them. But the Fonte, so useful as a gentle move away from and then back to the main key, survived in various nineteenth-century social dances and songs. As late as the 1930s, popular composers in New York’s Tin Pan Alley employed the Fonte in the bridge sections of songs that became “standards” still heard today.