IN THE FALL OF 2007, at the edge of the Black Forest and nearly within sight of the Alps, I met a group of scholars who shared my interest in *partimenti*. We were in the old university town of Freiburg, Germany, as participants in the joint meeting of the sixth European Music Analysis Conference and the seventh annual Congress of the German Society for Music Theory, all ably organized by Ludwig Holtmeier, Günter Schnitzler, Janina Klassen, and Johannes Menke. Our group presented papers on partimenti in a session that appeared to be well received by its attendees. One of them, Patrick McCreless, had been dispatched by the editor of this journal to observe our session; he approached me afterward to inquire if it might be possible to expand selected presentations into formal papers that would constitute a special issue. Delighted by the opportunity, I signed on as editor of this special issue and devised the following playlist.

The introit is by Ludwig Holtmeier. He surveys the conceptual history of eighteenth-century *Satztechnik* and explores how it might be viewed differently had the "mute" tradition of the partimento been given a theoretical voice. A toccata follows by Giorgio Sanguinetti. As both a gifted keyboard performer and a skilled archival researcher, he is able to show how the "potential" music of a partimento can be coaxed into an artistic improvisation. I provide the largo slow movement, telling the sad tale of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a brilliant thinker who nonetheless failed to find fame as a composer. His struggles to learn a craft without a master highlight the cognitive hurdles that the conservatories of Naples taught their students to surmount. A theme-and-variations movement by Rosa Cafiero looks at different scenes in the transition of partimenti from Naples to Paris, from oral tradition to textbook. Finally, a Wagnerian march by Gaetano Stella takes the partimento well into the world of Romantic harmony.

By the way, what *are* partimenti? Why are they so important for understanding the professional training of composers from Bach to Haydn, to Rossini, Wagner, Ravel, and even Berio? The articles in this collection provide excellent starting points for anyone seeking answers to these questions. The unrivaled documentation of the partimento tradition provided here may help to explain how the conservatories of eighteenth-century Naples became models for the national conservatories of the nineteenth century. In reappraising both the practical history of compositional technique and the conceptual

Journal of Music Theory 51:1, Spring 2007
DOI 10.1215/00222909-2008-021

underpinnings of the history of music theory, these authors suggest many new avenues for the analysis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music. Performance practice, *Satztechnik*, improvisation, thoroughbass, music cognition, oral tradition, craft training, apprenticeship—they all come together in the study of partimenti.

—*Robert O. Gjerdingen*