Vivaldi's Concerto Op. 8, No. 3 *L'Autunno* (Autumn) - 2nd movement

Figured Bass

The page of music you have with this worksheet is the bass part to the 2nd movement of Autumn. The music was not just intended to be played on bass instruments like the cello or double bass. In 1730, when this music was first published, it was usual too that chord playing instruments (like the organ, harpsichord, lute or theorbo) would play the bass line of the music. Whichever instruments were chosen to play, they were usually grouped together under the heading, the *basso continuo* group.

To show the chord-playing *basso continuo* instruments what to play, the composer used a system of figures (numbers) written above the bass notes to show how the chord should be built up from the given bass note.

Look at the music on the page called *Autumn 2nd Movement: Figured Bass*

In bars 1-4 of the music the bass note is always D.

In bar 1 the 3 & 5 above the note mean that F & A must be played with the D (i.e. D-F-A or a D minor chord in root position)
In bar 2 the 3 & 6 above the note mean that f and Bb must be played with the D (i.e. D-F-Bb or a Bb major chord in first inversion)
In bar 3 the 4 & 6 above the note mean that G and Bb must be played in the D (i.e. D-G-Bb or a G minor chord in second inversion)
And so on.....

Note the following points carefully:
1. The bass note is always counted as note number 1 when working out the figures.
2. When the bass note changes (as the C# in bar 5), then you must work out the figures from the new bass note (here, C#)
3. The key signature here will always change Bs into Bbs.
4. When you see a #-sign or a +-sign by a number, a slash through a number or a natural sign this means that the note indicated must be raised by a semitone.
5. When you see a flat-sign by a number this means the note indicated must be lowered by a semitone.

Your exercise:

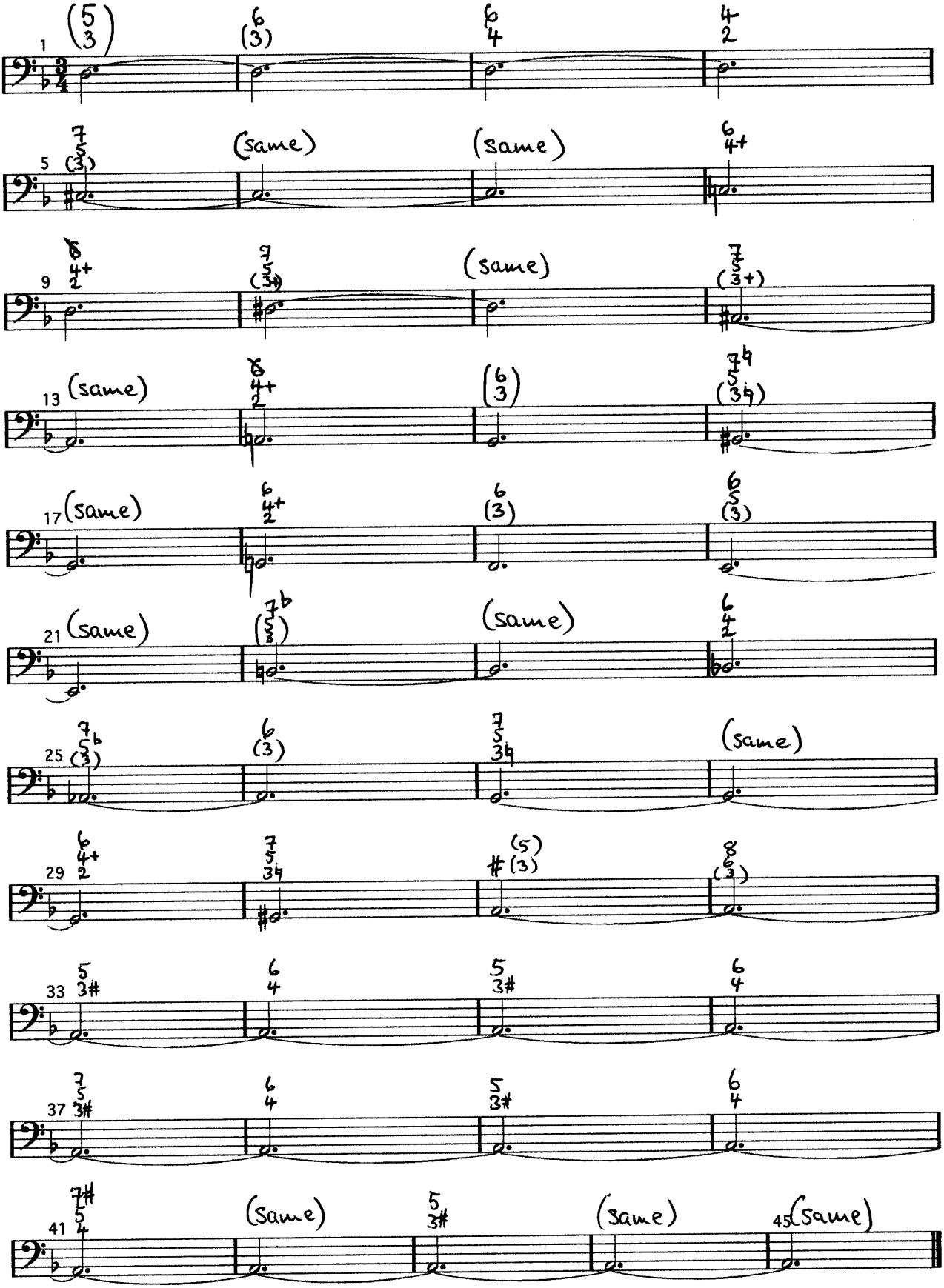
is to learn to play the chords fluenty and steadily, keeping to the slow 3/4 time.

You can play all the notes of the chords together if you wish or you can spread the notes out. You might even try to make little rhythmic patterns out of the notes. *Realising* a figured bass (as it is called) is a form of improvisation, so you have quite a lot of freedom.

On the music MIDIfile you can hear these three different models of playing the figures if you wish.

When you play along with the strings on the MIDIfile using an electronic keyboard, set it on a harpsichord, guitar or organ sound. You may try recording your improvisation to an unused track on the music sequencing programme playing the MIDIfile.

Autumn-2nd Movement: Figured bass



The numbers in brackets are not usually given. Look carefully and you will see that they are most frequently the numbers 3 & 5. Because this is the simplest way of building a chord, the combination 1-3-5 was often left out by the composer. If the performer was unsure of the chord, this would be the first combination to try out.