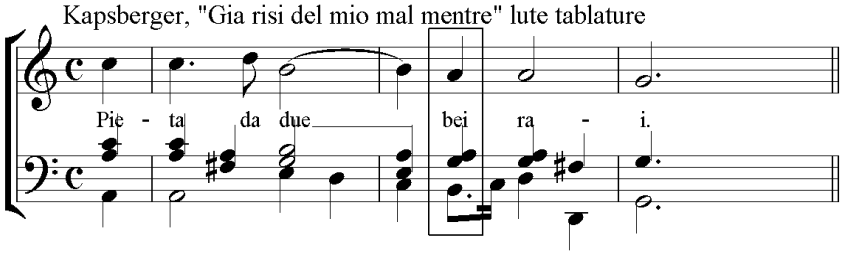
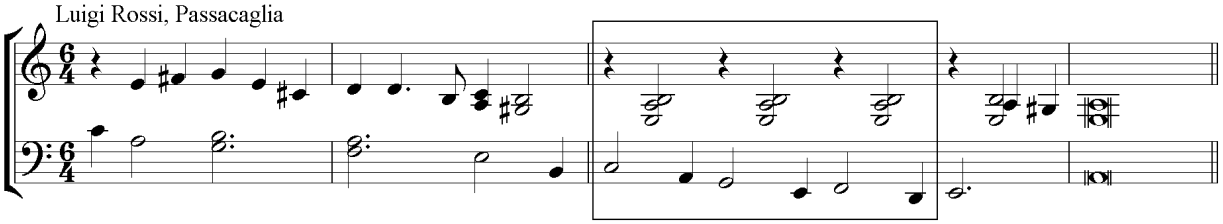
The *cadentia duriuscula*

Sometimes one encounters an interval of a fourth or seventh between the melody and continuo line which does not respond to the usual harmonization (a 4-3 suspension or a 7 of some kind, respectively). This is an example of the *cadentia duriuscula* (the "harsh conclusion"), a kind of tone-cluster shown below in the rectangle:



The *cadentia duriuscula* is often encountered as an insistent repetition of the same cluster:



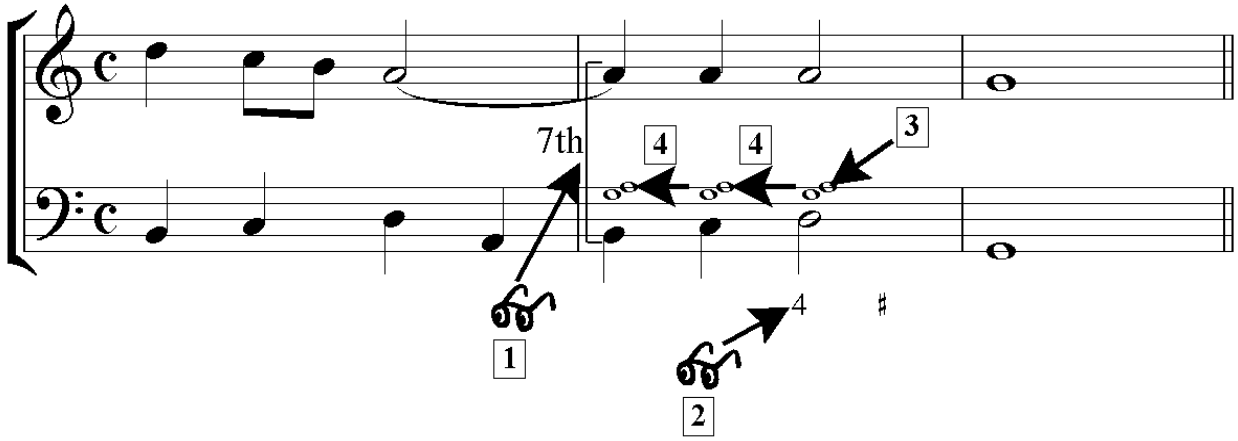
This is a product of the *seconda prattica* style's free treatment of dissonance in early Baroque vocal music and is an expressive technique used to point up particularly affective parts of the text. It is almost never notated in the continuo part and must be spotted by finding seemingly out-of-place 4ths or 7ths between the bass and melody. Because early continuo rules are derived from Renaissance ideas about consonance and dissonance treatment, the notation does not really exist to properly express this cluster, which would have to be written as something like $\frac{4}{3}$ or $\frac{7}{6}$. However, written-out realizations from early times prove that this device was in use, and it was mentioned by composers as diverse as Christoph Bernhard (Germany) and Henry Purcell (England).

As seen in the examples above, the upper voices in the *cadentia duriuscula* consist of the notes played above the figure 4 in a 4-3 suspension, but shifted backwards in time to one or more bass notes occurring before the figure 4. A tone-cluster is created by arranging the upper voices so that the interval of a second is heard uppermost.

Further information can be found in the article "From dissonance to note cluster: the application of musical-rhetorical figures and dissonances to thoroughbass accompaniment of early 17th-century Italian vocal-solo music" by Thérèse de Goede, published in Early Music (May 2005, p. 233).

(more overleaf)

Here is a 4-step process for locating a place to use the *cadentia duriuscula* and determining what notes to play:



1. Notice the interval of a 7th in an unusual context.
2. Look ahead to find where a 4-3 occurs in the continuo.
3. Determine the upper voices over the figure 4 and arrange them so a 2nd is heard uppermost.
4. Shift these upper voices back to the location found in step 1 and repeat them as necessary until the 4-3 is reached.

The same technique would be applied if an unusual 4th were encountered.

Naturally, all this must be done in the blink of an eye when playing a continuo realization!