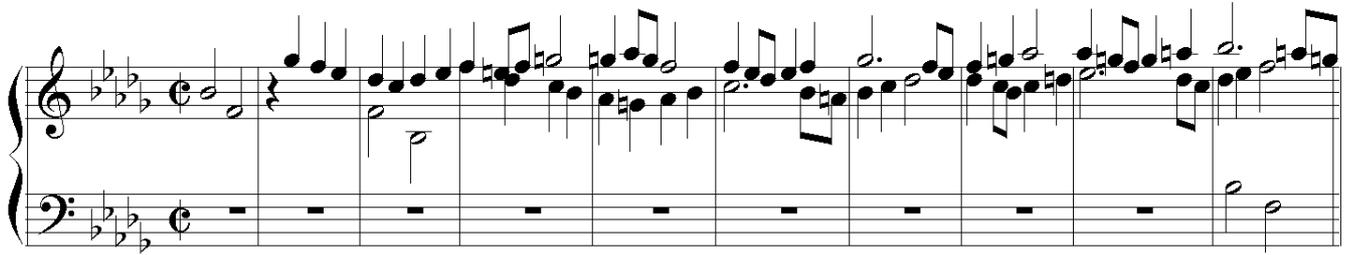# L. CHANGES IN KEYBOARD TEXTURE

Baroque composers often liked a polyphonic texture in which two or more "voices" sounded against each other, each voice with much the same degree of interest and importance. Sometimes, as in this fugue, the voices would enter with material already played by another voice.


Gradually the upper voice got the upper hand. In fact what was happening 'in between' the melody and bass line became less and less important. Often figures were added indicating chords for a keyboard performer to 'fill in'. He could play whatever notes he liked, as long as they fitted the chords indicated by the figures, and matched the style of the music.

In this excerpt from a Violin Sonata by Bach, the bass line is providing a support for the harmony, although doing it in a largely stepwise manner. It is not nearly as interesting as the melody in the treble clef. Notice how many chord changes there are. This is typical of Baroque music.
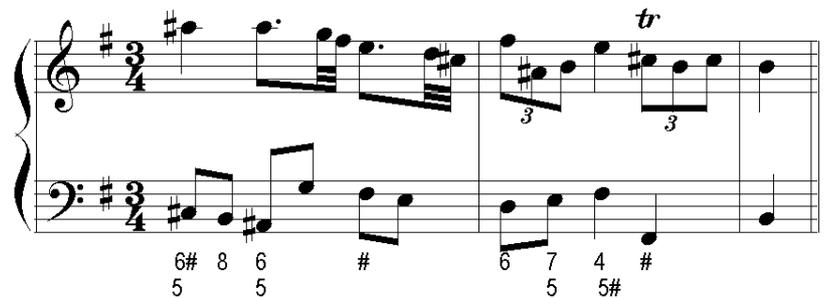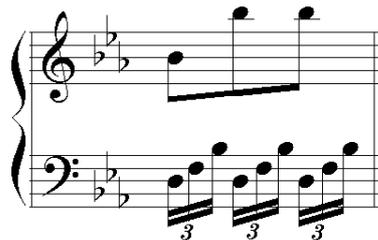

In the classical period the melody became all-important. Chords changed less frequently, so the bass line was less interesting. (In fact it almost dropped out.) Usually there was simply a melody line and chords. These three patterns were popular:
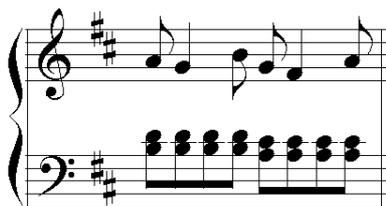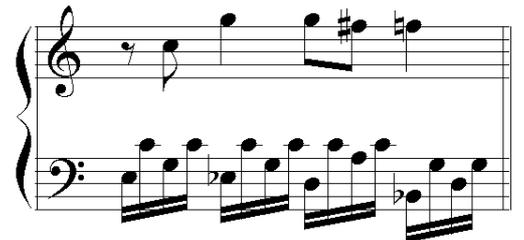
(a) Block chords   (b) Broken chords   (c) The so-called 'Alberti Bass'

By the time of Beethoven and Schubert the waltz was popular. The most suitable accompaniment for the waltz proved to be a simple vamp (the bass note followed by a chord or chords). Here are excerpts from waltzes by (a) Beethoven, (b) Chopin and (c) Brahms. Notice how the range becomes wider and the texture thicker. This is possible in piano music because of the invention of the sustaining pedal.