Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

Contents

Chapter: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
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Preface

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This volume, principally devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (with some small spillover into the nineteenth for the sake of completing the discussion of Beethoven's instrumental works), presents and contextualizes material usually covered in music history courses surveying the so-called baroque and classical periods in the traditional (that is, twentieth-century) periodization of music history. The book is designed to accompany such courses, but at the same time it is hoped that its use will help reconceptualize their content. The text itself gives copious reasons for regarding the terms *baroque* and *classical*, and the conventional periodization they symbolize, as outmoded. Both terms are anachronistic to the repertories with which they are now associated. The adjective *baroque* was first applied to music in the eighteenth, not the seventeenth, century—and then as a pejorative. The adjective *classical* was first applied to the composers we now intend the term to cover in the 1830s, after they all were dead. Their being dead was part of what made them "classical," but in every other way the term is misleading.

Rather than two "periods," the contents of this book might be viewed as encompassing several major events or watersheds in the history of European music. The first is the establishment of opera, both as a genre and as an institution, at the center of European dramatic art. The volume opens with the two earliest masterpieces of the new theatrical form, both by Claudio Monteverdi but exemplifying vastly different, even antithetical, creative purposes arising from their respective origins in an aristocratic court (in the case of *Orfeo*) and a public theater (in the case of *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*). That social difference provides a paradigm that will be constantly invoked and reinvoked as the history of the genre continues in subsequent chapters. The earlier history (or "prehistory") of opera, the subject of the last chapter in volume 1 of the Oxford *History*, concerns the rise of the "monodic" idiom (solo voice accompanied by a chord-strumming instrument whose notation consists of a figured bass), a fancied imitation of ancient Greek theatrical declamation that supplanted the fully elaborated (or "perfected") polyphonic style of the sixteenth century.

The *basso continuo* texture thus arrived at became ubiquitous in European music for the next century and a half, the period coextensive with what is usually called baroque, and it provides a much better (because concrete) descriptor of that period. Conceptualizing the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as the period of the *basso continuo* has two additional advantages: It focuses attention on harmony, the musical domain that saw the most radical development during the seventeenth century, culminating in the full elaboration of major-minor tonality as a governor—and generator—of musical form. And the new conception of harmonically governed or determined form largely conditioned the amazing rise of instrumental music in the second half of the seventeenth century to the point at which, in the eighteenth, it could vie with vocal music for dominance, and by the end of the period covered by this book, actually achieve it.

The dominance of instrumental music over vocal not only was a triumph of formal organization but also represented the triumph of a new esthetic ideal, that of romanticism. To observe this is to broach the ultimate advantage of reconceptualizing the contents of this book (and of the courses it accompanies) away from the traditional, chimerical, baroque/classical periodization toward one truly reflective of contemporary events. For the rise of romanticism, in stark contrast to such nonevents as the "rise" of "the baroque" or "the classic," was an actual contemporary event, and one of transformative importance to music, both as reflected in its style and in its expressive content. And beyond even that, it was an intellectual juncture that transformed notions of what it meant to be an artist.

That is why it is of crucial importance that the rise of romanticism be given the proper context: namely, the social, historical, and intellectual currents of the late eighteenth century, for all that it is the nineteenth century that in conventional periodization is called the romantic period. Romanticism was emphatically a product of the eighteenth century, and that point is driven home by the boundaries of the present narrative.

And, it follows, that is why Beethoven is encompassed (but for his single opera) within the confines of this volume rather than the next one. That Beethoven's creative career began, and his creative personality was formed, at the end of the eighteenth century is sometimes adduced—especially by historians writing in the aftermath of World War II and in the immediate environment of the looming cold war—as evidence of his essential classicism and (in the especially insistent version of Charles Rosen's widely read treatise of 1970, *The Classical Style*) his freedom from all taint of the romantic. The question that so exercised twentieth-century historians—was Beethoven classic or romantic?—is very illuminating of their time; it is altogether meaningless in the context of Beethoven's time, when "the classic" as a concept in opposition to romanticism did not exist, and it has absolutely no light to shed on him. Beethoven's coming of age in the last decades of the eighteenth century, far from equipping him with a protective shield against burgeoning romanticism, was precisely what made him the primary embodiment of that very burgeoning.

Another way of taking the measure of the contents of this volume without recourse to obsolescent or essentialist notions of "period" is to compare conditions at its outset with conditions at its completion. When the curtain goes up, the main figure on stage, Monteverdi, is an Italian specialist in vocal music. When it comes down, the main figure on stage is Beethoven, a German specialist (not as complete a specialist as Monteverdi, but nevertheless decidedly a specialist) in instrumental music. These two changes—one a geographical migration of musical initiative, the other a decisive transvaluation of esthetic values (in the course of which, incidentally, *esthetics* as a term and as a subject area had its birth)—constitute in the large the trajectory this book's contents will trace.

Another change, perhaps equally momentous: Monteverdi and Beethoven were both men of strong personality and will. Far from humble men, they have left ample evidence of their sense of self-worth; and, indeed, they are among the strongest individual agents to figure as dramatis personae on the stage of music history. The dynamic or dialectical relationship between strong agents and the enabling and constraining conditions of their environments is always the main subject of art history. That dialectic is adumbrated in the strongest contrast that may be drawn between our opening and closing protagonists: Monteverdi's career was passed in service to courts, municipalities, and speculative enterprises that granted him employment; he could conceive of no other social status for a musician. Beethoven passed his entire mature career without official affiliation; and, although he did accept aristocratic patronage, he was able to decide with a degree of freedom that would have been inconceivable to Monteverdi what to write and when to write it. That social emancipation—or was it social abandonment?—of the artist is perhaps the largest theme broached within the covers of this book. It is not a story this book narrates in its fullness. Monteverdi's status and expectations were formed by developments described in the previous volume, and Beethoven's status and expectations led in directions that will be described in later ones. But the crucial move from service personnel to autonomous agent takes place in the course of our present narrative, and it was the biggest social transformation in the history of music as a fine art. Without it, this book would have had no call to exist.

R. T.

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CHAPTER 1 Opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi

Princely and Public Theaters; Monteverdi's Contributions to Both

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

COURT AND COMMERCE

Nino Pirrotta, an outstanding historian of Italian music, once proposed the title of this chapter as a joke, but it contains an important insight and provides an excellent frame for discussing some issues of major consequence.[1] Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), previously best known as a composer of polyphonic part-songs, or madrigals, was also a major player in the "monodic revolution," the rise to dominance of harmony–supported solo singing in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Owing to the unusual length of his career and the places where he happened to live, moreover, he made distinguished contributions to the burgeoning repertoire of music for the stage during more than one phase of its development. His first "musical tale," as the nascent opera was called, dates from 1607, his last from shortly before his death, thirty-six years later. The first was performed before an invited assembly of nobles in Mantua and had a mythological theme. The last was performed before a paying public in Venice and had a theme from history. Stylistically as well as socially and thematically, the two works were worlds apart. To all intents and purposes, whether historical, theoretical, or practical, they belonged to different genres. It was the second that actually bore the designation *opera*, and that still looks like one.

fig. 1-1 Claudio Monteverdi.

The first was called *Orfeo*, and it was a *favola in musica* on the same music-myth previously (and separately) musicalized by the Florentine courtier-musicians Jacopo Peri and Ciulio Caccini. The other, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* ("The crowning of Poppea," the emperor Nero's second wife), was designated a *dramma musicale* or *opera reggia* ("staged work"), *work* being the literal meaning of the word *opera*, which has stuck to the genre ever since. Both works still have a toehold on the fringes of today's repertory, although neither is without interruptions in its performance history. They are the earliest and for today's audiences the exemplary ("classic") representatives of the noble musical play and the public music drama, respectively. To put it a little more loosely and serviceably, they are the prime representatives of the early court and commercial operas. As Pirrotta implied, comparing them, the common author notwithstanding, will be a study in contrasts and a powerfully instructive one.

Because he was so widely recognized by his contemporaries as the most gifted and interesting composer in Italy, Monteverdi (though he had no hand in its inception) became willy-nilly the spokesman and the scapegoat of the new manner of composing (or *seconda prattica*, as Monteverdi himself called it). It was captious criticism from detractors that made it necessary for Monteverdi to engage in defensive propaganda. But that redounded to our good fortune, because it enables us directly to compare his preaching with his practice, his professed intentions with his achievement.

Notes:

(1) Pirrotta, “Monteverdi and the Problems of Opera,” in *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 248.

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See also from Grove Music Online

Opera: Origins

Monteverdi: Mantua

Monteverdi: Venice

Madrigal

FROM MANTUA TO VENICE

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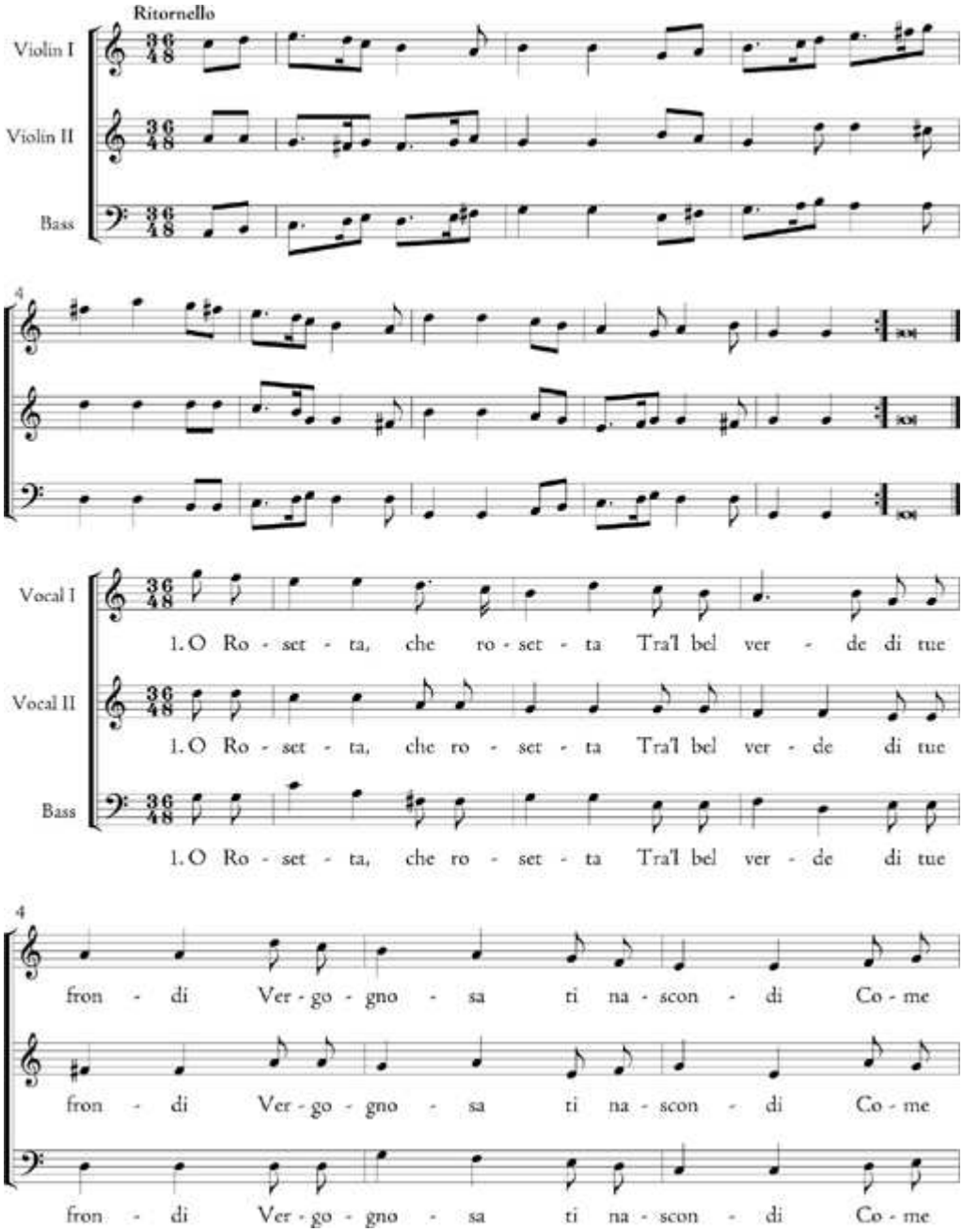
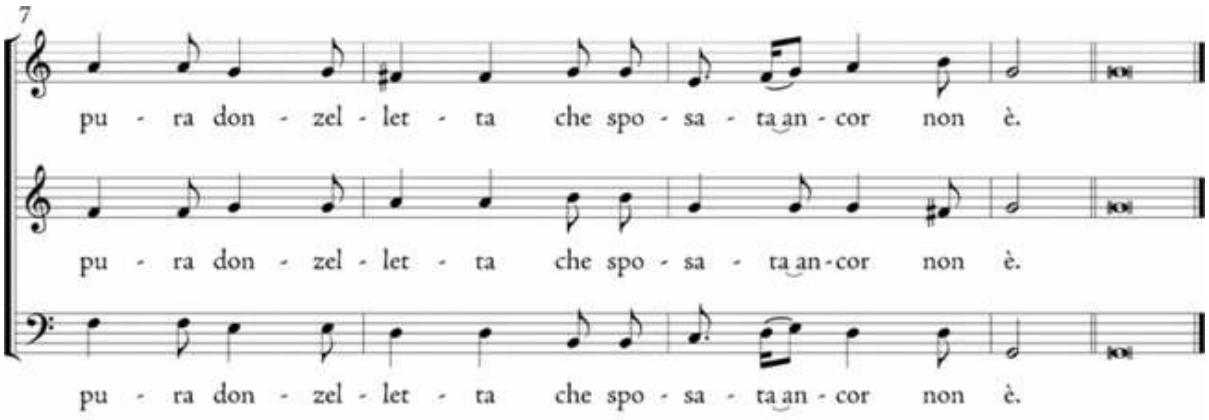
By the time he composed *Orfeo*, Monteverdi had been an active composer for a quarter of a century. His first publication, a book of three-voice motets, came out in 1582, when he was the fifteen-year-old pupil of Marc'Antonio Ingegneri, an important Counter-Reformation composer who had studied with Vincenzo Ruffo and who was the *maestro di cappella* at the cathedral of Cremona, Monteverdi's birthplace. By the late sixteenth century Cremona, a city in Lombardy southeast of Milan, was already famous as a manufacturing center for string instruments. The Amati family had established there the workshop where the design of the modern violin family began to be standardized in the earlier part of the century. Antonio Stradivari (1644–1737), who apprenticed with Niccolo Amati, and who is still thought of as the greatest of all violin makers, inherited the Cremonese art and brought it to its peak.

In view of his city's traditions, it is perhaps not surprising that Monteverdi's first official appointment should have been as a *suonatore di vivuola*, a string player, in the virtuoso chamber ensemble maintained by Vincenzo Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua. (As far as we know, however, Monteverdi never composed a single piece of textless instrumental music.) He was engaged in 1590 and remained at the Mantuan court until a few months after Vincenzo's death in 1612, when he was summarily fired in a notable show of ingratitude by the new Duke Francesco, in whose honor *Orfeo* had been originally performed.

By then Monteverdi was a famous musician. He had been *maestro di cappella* at Mantua for eleven years. By the time of his accession to the post in 1601 he had already published four books of madrigals (one of them containing sacred madrigals) and had already been famously attacked by a conservative music theorist named Giovanni Haria Artusi for harmonic liberties in madrigals that would eventually be published in his next book (1603). The controversy enhanced his reputation enormously, especially when he joined in himself, first (and sketchily) in the preface to his Fifth Book of Madrigals (1605). That book made him by common consent, and by virtue of the debates that surrounded his work, the leading composer of madrigals at the tail end of the genre's history.


Ritornello
Violin I
Violin II
Bass
Vocal I
Vocal II
Bass
1. O Ro - set - ta, che ro - set - ta Tra'l bel ver - de di tue
1. O Ro - set - ta, che ro - set - ta Tra'l bel ver - de di tue
1. O Ro - set - ta, che ro - set - ta Tra'l bel ver - de di tue
fron - di Ver - go - gno - sa ti na - scon - di Co - me
fron - di Ver - go - gno - sa ti na - scon - di Co - me
fron - di Ver - go - gno - sa ti na - scon - di Co - me



1. Oh, little rose, what a rose
Amid the bright green of your branches
Shamefully you hide
Like a pure young maiden
Who is not yet married.

2. Se dal bel cespo natio
Ti torrò non te ne caglia
Ma con te tanto mi vaglia,
Che ne lodi il pensier mio
Se servigio ha sua mercè.

2. If from the bush that bore you
I would pluck you, do not anger
For it is worth so much to be with you,
So much my thought would praise you
If you have served your purpose.

3. Caro pregio il tuo colore
Tra le man sia di colei,
Che governa i pensier miei,
Che mi mira il petto, e'l core
Ma non mira la mia fè.

3. So valued be your color
Between the hands of her
who rules my thoughts,
Who delights in my bosom and my heart
But scorns my faithfulness.

ex. 1-1 Claudio Monteverdi, *Scherzi musicali: O rosetta*

Two years later—in 1607, the year of *Orfeo*—Monteverdi fully responded to his critics. The answer was included in a new book of what were actually rather innocuous little convivial compositions that he called *scherzi musicali* (literally "musical jests"): strophic, homophonic canzonetti and balletti (love songs and dance-songs) in three parts to racy "Anacreontic" (wine-women-song) verses by the poet Gabriello Chiabrera, full of catchy "French" rhythms (as Monteverdi called them) based on hemiolas, but without harmonic audacities or any adventurous word painting to speak of. But it was Monteverdi's first publication to include a basso continuo, and the strophic songs had instrumental ritornelli between the stanzas. This demonstrative use of what was known as the "concerted" (*concertato*) style, albeit on a chamber scale, was in itself already a deposition in favor of the latest musical techniques and their implied esthetic (for a sample see Ex. 1-1). But the book also contained a formal statement of principles, one that ever since the seventeenth century has been among the most quoted documents in music history.

The full title of the 1607 publication was this: *Scherzi musicali a tre voci di Claudio Monteverde, raccolti da Giulio Cesare Monteverde suo fratello, con la dichiaratione di una lettera che si ritrova stampata nel quinto libro de suoi madrigali* ("Musical jests in three voices by Claudio Monteverdi, collected by his brother Julius Caesar Monteverdi, with a declaration based on a letter that is found printed in his Fifth Book of Madrigals)." Using his younger brother, also a composer, as a mouthpiece, Monteverdi wrote what amounted to a manifesto of the "second practice." The term became standard, as did his famous slogan—"Make the words the mistress of the music and not the servant" (*far che l'oratione sia padrona del armonia e non serva*), which managed to sum up in a single sound bite the whole rhetorical program of the radical musical humanists of the preceding century.

The discussion of the first and second practices in the Declaration is itself a masterpiece of rhetoric. The chief appeal of Artusi and other upholders of the polyphonic tradition had always been to the authority of established practice. The *ars perfecta* (the "perfected" polyphonic style) was supreme because it was the hard-won culmination of a long history, not the lazy whim of a few trendy egotists. At first the Declaration seems to honor that pedigree. The first practice, defined as "that style which is chiefly concerned with the perfection of the harmony," is traced back to "the

first [composers] to write down music for more than one voice, later followed and improved upon by Ockeghem, Josquin des Prez, Pierre de la Rue [court composer to the Holy Roman Emperor in the early sixteenth century], Jean Mouton, Crequillon, Clemens non Papa, Gombert, and others of those times." Finally granting flattering recognition to Artusi's own chief authorities, the Declaration concludes that the first practice "reached its ultimate perfection with Messer Adriano [Willaert] in composition itself, and with the extremely well-thought-out rules of the excellent Zarlino." Just what Artusi might have said.

But this recognition of the *ars perfecta*'s pedigree was only a rhetorical foil. In the very next breath Monteverdi claimed for himself a much older and more distinguished pedigree. "It is my brother's aim," wrote Giulio Cesare, "to follow the principles taught by Plato and practiced by the divine Cipriano [de Rore] and those who have followed him in modern times," namely Monteverdi's teacher Ingegneri, plus Marenzio, Giaches de Wert, Luzzasco Luzzaschi (a madrigalist who worked at Ferrara and accompanied a famous trio of virtuoso sopranos—the so-called *concerto delle donne*—at the harpsichord), Peri, Caccini, "and finally by yet more exalted spirits who understand even better what true art is." Plato, the Monteverdian argument implies, beats Ockeghem any day. Who, in the age of humanism, would dare disagree?

As early as 1610 Monteverdi, rather spectacularly mistreated by his patrons in Mantua, was casting about for a more satisfactory position. Several of his letters testify to his resentment of the high-handed way in which the Gonzagas dealt with their servant despite his standing in his profession. Like the anecdotes that circulated in the sixteenth century concerning Josquin des Prez, they testify to what we might call artistic self-consciousness and "temperament" of a sort that later came to be highly prized by artists and art lovers. But where the Josquin anecdotes are apocryphal, the Monteverdi letters are hard documents, the earliest we have of artistic "alienation." His hair-raisingly sarcastic reply to an invitation to return to Mantua in 1620 still makes impressive reading, and while it probably marked him as nothing more than a crank so far as the Gonzagas were concerned, it marks him for what we now might call a genius; it has in consequence become far and away the most famous letter by a composer before the eighteenth century.[2]

By the time he wrote it, Monteverdi had been living in Venice for seven years, serving as *maestro di cappella* at St. Mark's Cathedral. He had attracted the interest of the Venetians with a large book of concerted psalm motets for Vespers, plus some continuo-accompanied madrigalistic "antiphons" and a couple of Masses, one of them, unexpectedly, in the *stile antico*, or old fashioned polyphonic style, based on a famous motet by the sixteenth-century Flemish composer Nicholas Gombert. This Vespers collection was actually written, it seems, in hopes of gaining employment in Rome; and yet its appeal to the home city of the grand concerted (mixed vocal - instrumental) style seems almost predestined.

Monteverdi's tenure in Venice did not overlap with that of Giovanni Gabrieli, who had died in 1612; there is no evidence that the two greatest Venetian church composers ever met. Nor, contrary to the easy assumption, was Monteverdi hired to replace Gabrieli, who had served not as choirmaster but as organist. (Monteverdi replaced the previous choirmaster at St. Mark's, a minor figure named Giulio Cesare Martinengo, who died in July 1613.) The position suited him magnificently, in part because Venice was a republican city where the chief cathedral musician enjoyed a higher social prestige than he could ever have attained in a court situation. He stayed on the job for three decades, until his death; after about 1630, however, he occupied the post only nominally, living chiefly on a pension in semiretirement. This, as we shall see, freed him for other kinds of work in his late years.

Once in Venice, Monteverdi composed only in the concerted style. He did not publish the service music he wrote in his actual job capacity until his retirement, but he continued to issue madrigals with some regularity, beginning with the Sixth Book in 1614, his last publication in which traditional polyphonic madrigals, left over from his late Mantuan period, appeared cheek by jowl with continuo compositions. They include what could probably be called Monteverdi's *a cappella* masterpiece (and probably his last non-continuo composition)—a spectacular cycle of six madrigals, *Lagrime d'amante al sepolcro dell'amata* ("A lover's tears at his beloved's grave"), composed in 1610 to a cycle of poems by Scipione Agnelli that poured subject matter in the recent, racy pastoral mode into an ancient, rigid mold: the old *sestina* form of Arnaut Daniel, the most virtuosic fixed form of the twelfth-century Provencal poets known as troubadours, as later adapted by the Italian poet Petrarch in the fourteenth century.

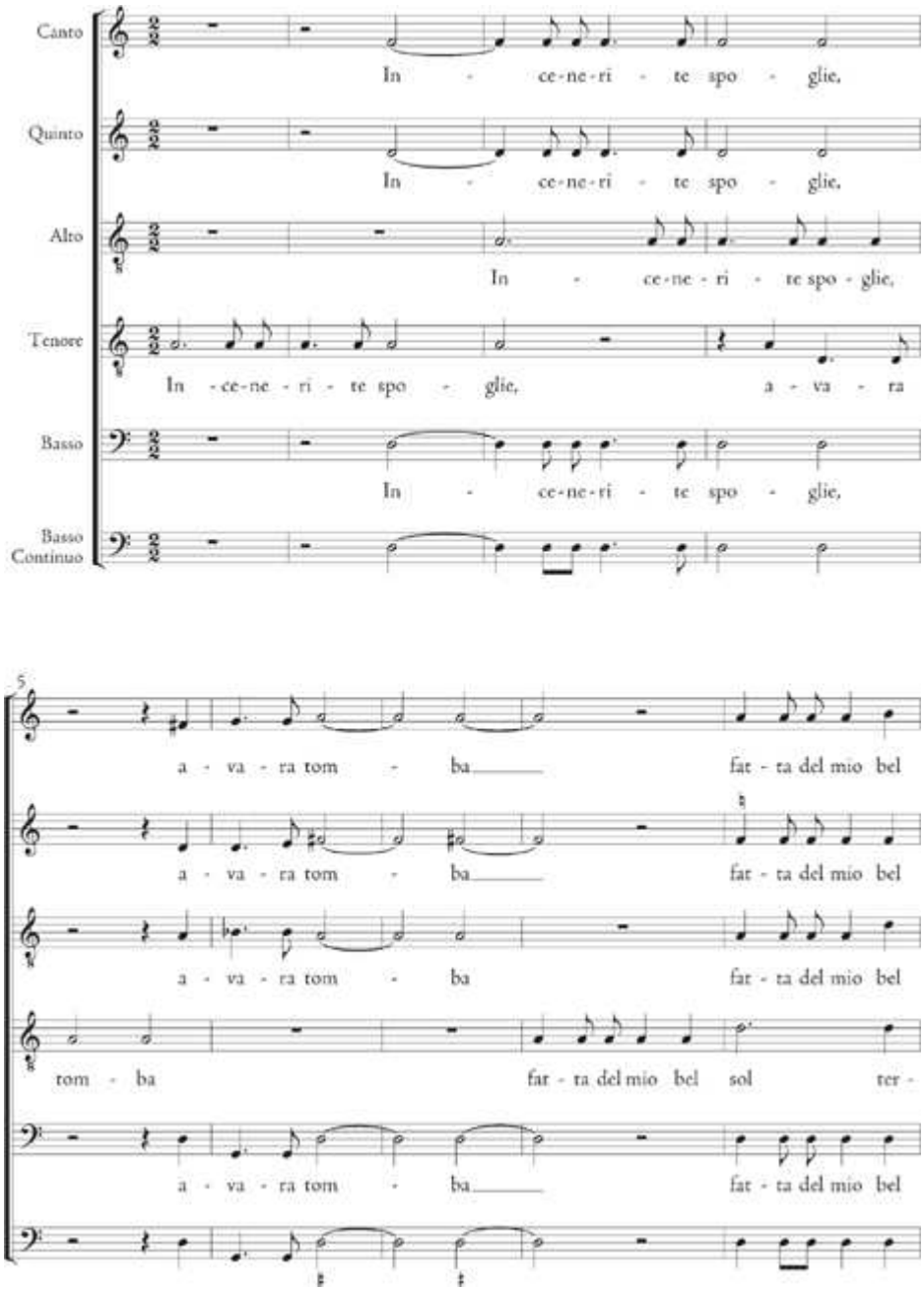
(The term *sestina*, derived from the word "six," denotes a cycle of six six-line stanzas in which the poet is limited to six rhyme words—that is, three rhymed pairs—that have to be deployed in each stanza in a different prescribed order; the six stanzas exhaust the possible permutations. Writing sensible, let alone moving verse under such constraints is a feat that few poets manage successfully; most sestinas, including Agnelli's in the opinion of some connoisseurs

fall into the category of valiant attempts.)

By the time he composed the *Lagrime d'amante*, even Monteverdi's polyphonic style had been touched by the monodic *stile recitativo*, as the opening of the first madrigal (*Incenerite spoglie*, "Ashen Remains") vividly suggests. Here, certainly, the words of the spiritually benumbed and torpid mourner at the tomb (clearly identified with the tenor) are the "mistress of the music" (Ex. 1-2), and the static harmony mimics the early operatic style of Peri.

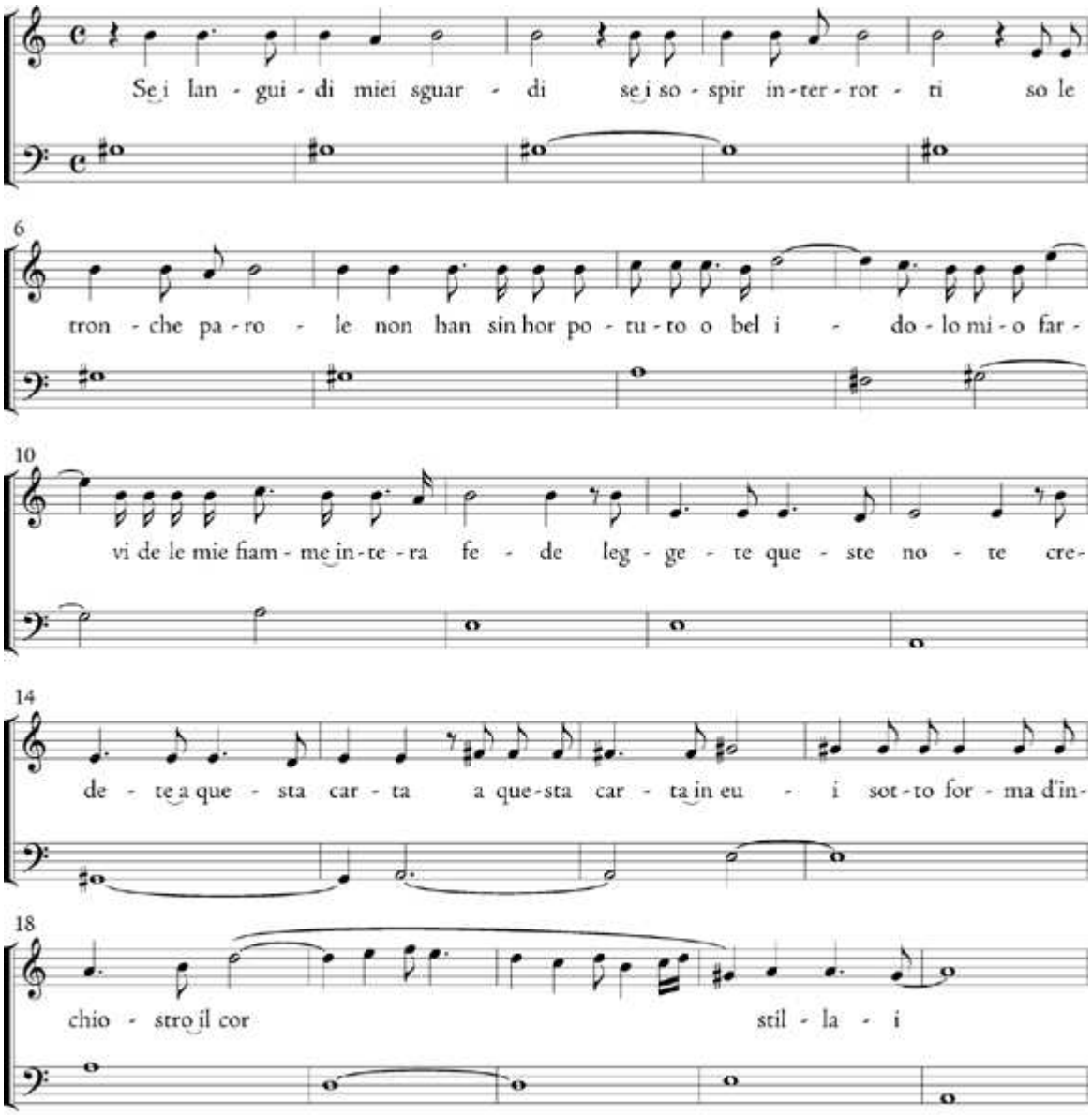
Monteverdi's Seventh Book of Madrigals, issued in 1619, actually bore the title *Concerto*. One of its most characteristic items, however, the famous "Lettera amorosa" (love letter), is a monody, the most extended one that Monteverdi ever conceived outside of an actual theatrical situation, or for a single soliloquizing voice. And yet it is theatrical all the same, as Monteverdi recognized by designating the piece as being *in genere rappresentativo*, "in the representational style." The style had its technical requirements, notably the static bass, and these are met entirely, so that the whole work becomes an unprecedented 12-minute unstaged *scena*: music for staging in the theater of the mind (Ex. 1-3).

Monteverdi's Eighth Book (1638), his last and most lavish in its instrumentation, was called *Madrigali guerrieri, et amorosi* ("Madrigals of love and war,") and also included a few little works (*opuscoli*) specially designated as being *in genere rappresentativo*. The earliest item in the book and, in its inextricable mixture of the martial and the erotic, possibly its conceptual kernel, was a setting Monteverdi had made in 1624 of a sizeable chunk from *Gerusalemme liberata* ("Jerusalem delivered," 1581), the celebrated epic poem of the crusades by Torquato Tasso, whom Monteverdi might have known during his early years in Mantua.



ex. 1-2 Claudio Monteverdi, *Sestina* (Madrigals, Book VI), no. 1 (*Incenerite spoglie*), mm. 1–9

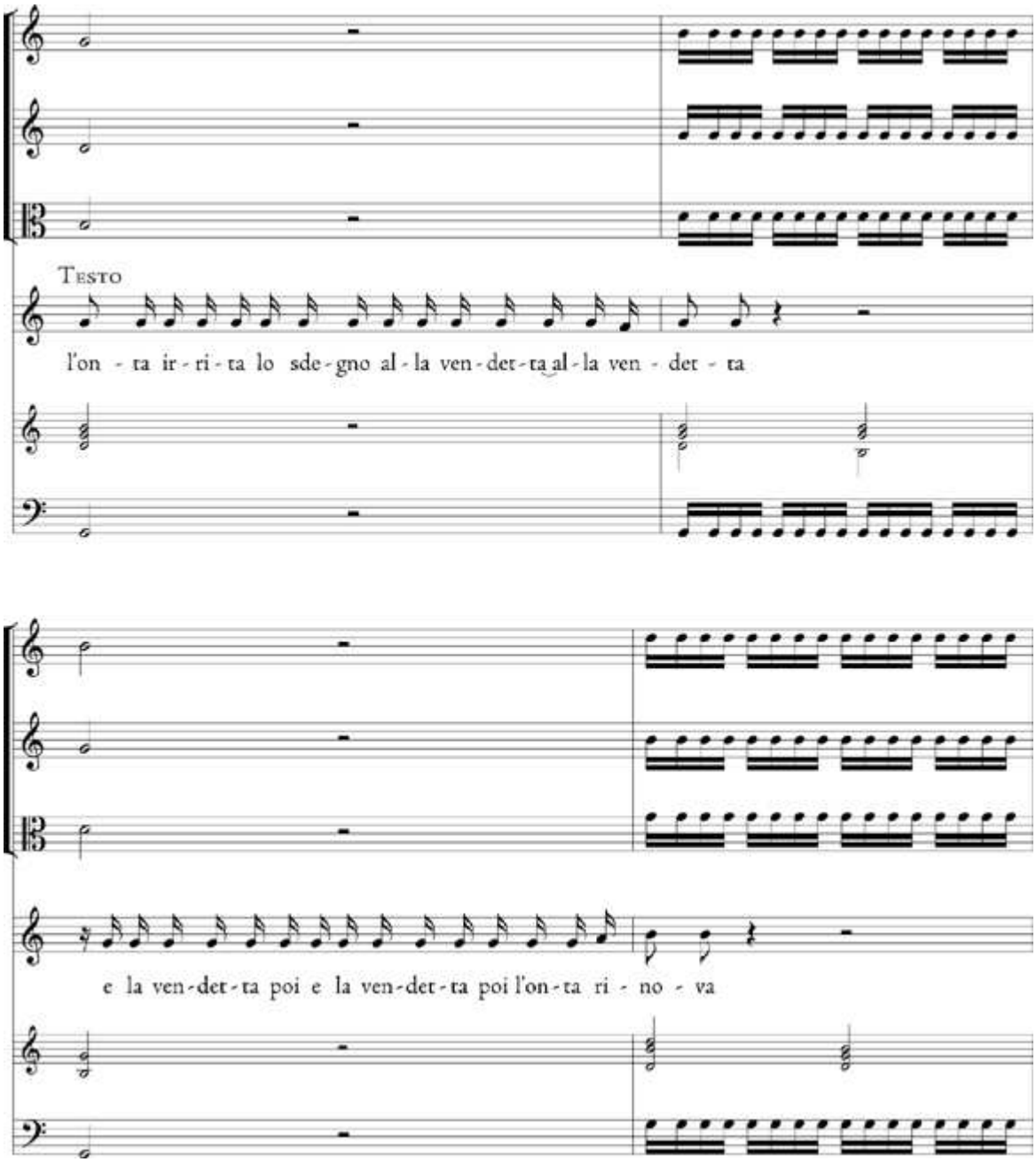
The poem, like any epic, is a narrative, but Monteverdi solved the problem of turning it into a dramatic representation by selecting one of its best-known episodes, called the "Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda," in which the hero Tancred engages in ferocious hand-to-hand combat with a soldier whom he finally kills, but who in dying reveals herself to be his former lover Clorinda. It is a scene with dialogue, suitable for dramatic treatment, plus a narrator (or the *testo*, the "text-reciter," as Monteverdi calls him) who gets most of the lines, and whose graphic description of the gory fight is acted out by the protagonists in mime.



O my idol, if my languishing glances, my interrupted sighs, my faltering words, have not been able to make you believe in the sincerity of my passion, then read these notes, believe this paper, this paper on which I have poured out my heart.

ex. 1-3 Claudio Monteverdi, *Concerto* (Madrigals, Book VII), *Lettera amorosa* (*Se i languidi miei sguardi*), mm. 1–22

To give adequate expression to this exceptionally violent text, Monteverdi invented a new style of writing, which he called the "agitated style" (*stile concitato*), and which consisted of repeated notes articulated with virtuosic rapidity. In his preface, Monteverdi related his *stile concitato* to the Pyrrhic foot of Greek dramatic poetry, which "according to all the best philosophers ... was used for agitated warlikedances."[3] (This correspondence was no doubt arrived at after the fact, but like a good humanist Monteverdi reports the "discovery" as if it had been some sort of disinterested scholarly research.) Most of the *concitato* effects were assigned to the basso continuo and to the concertato string instruments; it was the origin of the string *tremolo* that has been a dependable resource ever since for imitating agitation both physical (as in stormy weather) and emotional, and linking them. In the *Combattimento*, the concitato rhythms move imperceptibly from strictly mimetic imitations (the hoofbeats of Tancred's horse, the clashing of swords, the exchange of physical blows) to more metaphorical representations of conflict. At the very climax of battle, the *testo* gets to match speed with the instrumentalists to electrifying effect (Ex. 1-4).



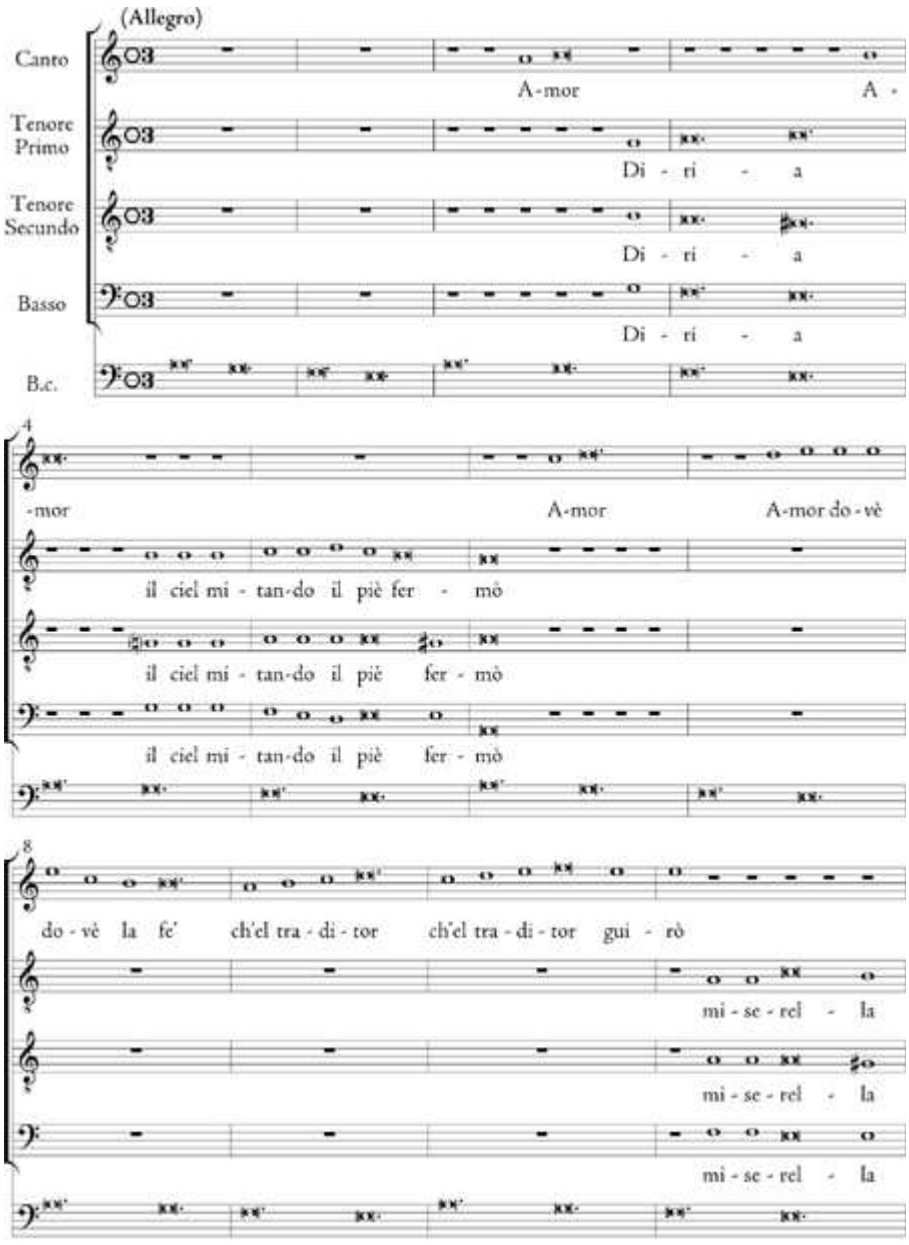
ex. 1-4 Claudio Monteverdi, *Combattimento*, fifth stanza, *L'onta irrita lo sdegno a la vendetta*

In another "theatrical opuscule" from the Eighth Book, a setting of Rinuccini's famous canzonetta *Lamento della ninfa*, "The nymph's lament" (Ex. 1-5), Monteverdi again turned a narrative into a dramatic *scena* by framing the complaint of a rejected lover, sung as a solo aria over a ground bass, with narration by a trio of male singers (satyrs?), as if eavesdropping on her grief. The ostinato bass line is no longer one of the standard aria or dance tenors of the sixteenth century, but a four-note segment (tetrachord) of the minor scale, descending slowly by degrees from tonic to dominant—a figure that Monteverdi, through his affecting use of it, helped establish as an "emblem of lament" (so dubbed by Ellen Rosand, a historian of the Venetian musical theater) that would remain standard for the rest of the century and a good deal beyond.[4]

This was a new sort of dramatic or representational convention: a musical idea that is independent of any image in the poem, that does not portray the nymph's behavior iconically or hook up with any observable model in nature; a musical idea associated with a literary one, in short, not through *mimesis* or direct imitation but by mere agreement among composers and listeners. This, of course, is the way most words acquire their meaning. The new technique could be called lexical or indexical (as opposed to mimetic) signification, and it became increasingly the standard way of representing emotion in the musical theater. The most fascinating aspect of Monteverdi's use of it is the way he

plays off its regularity by making the phrasing of the voice part unprecedentedly irregular and asymmetrical for an aria, and the similar way in which he uses its strong and regular harmonic structure to anchor a wealth of strong, "ungrammatical" and otherwise possibly incomprehensible dissonances between voice and bass.

Monteverdi issued most of his Venetian church music in 1641 in a huge retrospective collection titled *Selva morale et spirituale* ("A Righteous and Spiritual Forest [i.e., large accumulation])." Most of its contents resemble the contents of the 1610 Vespers collection: continuo madrigals on sacred or liturgical texts, and grand *concerti* in the Gabrieli mode. One of the latter, a Mass *Gloria*, sometimes known as the "Gloria concertata," is a spectacular "theatricalization" of the liturgy, as originally sanctioned by the Counter Reformation. It is utterly unlike any previous liturgical setting of the Mass Gloria, and the very opening is the chief symptom of that difference. Monteverdi's setting is possibly the first Mass Gloria in which the opening words "Gloria in excelsis Deo" are set to original music by the composer rather than being left for the celebrant to intone as a memorized chant formula. And the reason for this considerable liberty—one that, if not expressly forbidden, would not likely have occurred to any composer as desirable before the seventeenth century—lay in an old madrigalist's inveterate eye for musically suggestive antitheses, and an old theatrical hand's ability to render them vivid. What could be more irresistible than to contrast bright "glorious" melismas and the high angelic voices of sopranos caroling "on high" (*in excelsis*) with low-lying "terrestrial" sonorities and the slow-moving rhythms of peace, its tranquil enjoyment affirmed with mellow chromatic inflections?



"Love, where is the fidelity that the traitor swore?
Love," she said: looking at the sky, she stayed her feet.

ex. 1-5 Claudio Monteverdi, Madrigals, Book VIII, *Non havea febo* (*Lamento della ninfa*), mm 1–12

So Monteverdi's Venetian music, while chiefly written for church and chamber, was increasingly couched in theatrical terms: church-as-theater as determined by the Counter Reformation ideal, and chamber theater in the form of *opuscoli in genere rappresentativo*. What life in Venice did not give him much opportunity to create was actual theatrical music, and that was because Venice, being a republic, had no noble court and consequently no venue for the performance of *favole in musica*. What actual theatrical music Monteverdi composed during his tenure at St. Mark's was written on commission from north Italian court cities (including Mantua, his old stamping ground), where there continued to be a demand for *intermedii*, for *favole* and *balli*, or court ballets. Monteverdi wrote (or is thought to have written) at least seven theatrical works between 1616 and 1630, but for the most part their music has been lost.

Notes:

(2) The letter may be found complete, in English translation, in *The Monteverdi Companion*, ed. Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune (New York: Norton, 1968, pp. 52–56,) or in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (2nd ed., Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2008) pp. 153–55.

(3) Trans. R. Taruskin in Weiss and Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp.146–47.

(4) See Ellen Rosand, "The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament," *Musical Quarterly* LXV (1979): 346–59.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Venice

POETICS AND ESTHESICS

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The situation in Venice changed drastically when the Teatro San Cassiano opened its doors during the carnival season of 1637. This was the Western world's first public music theater—the world's first opera house—and it seems in retrospect inevitable that it should have been Venice, Europe's great meeting place and commercial center, that brought it forth. "There and then," as Rosand has written, "opera as we know it assumed its definitive identity—as a mixed theatrical spectacle available to a socially diversified, and paying audience: a public art."[5] This was a greater novelty, perhaps, than we can easily appreciate today, after centuries of public music-making for paying audiences. But it made a decisive difference to the nature of the art purveyed, and learning to appreciate this great change will teach us a great deal about the nature of art in its relationship to its audience. In a word, it will teach us about the politics of art and (for our present purposes even more pressing) about the politics of art history, which like the music theater itself is a *genere rappresentativo*, an artful representation of reality.

fig. 1-2 Carnival festivities on the Piazza San Marco, Venice.

In classical times, and again since the "Renaissance," or revival of secular learning in the sixteenth century, most history has actually been biography, the story of great men and great deeds. Since the nineteenth century, which was not only the "Romantic era" but also the era of Napoleon and Beethoven, and of a triumphant middle class of "self-made men," the great men celebrated by historians have typically been great neither because of high birth or hereditary power, nor because of their election by God, but rather by virtue of their individual talents and their ability to realize their destinies, especially in the face of obstacles. (This, we can easily see, is an exact description of both the Napoleonic myth and the myth of Beethoven.) Like Josquin des Prez before him, (see "Music from the Earliest Notations to the Sixteenth Century," chapter 14), Monteverdi has been Beethovenized by historians. For a long time, the standard account of his life and works was a book by the German musicologist Leo Schrade called *Monteverdi, Creator of Modern Music*.[6]

An art historiography that is centered on great creative individuals will be a historiography centered on what is called *poetics*. This word has an etymology similar to the words "poetry" or "poetic", but has an altogether different meaning and a very useful one that should be kept free of the more commonly used words that resemble it. All of these words stem from the Greek verb *poiein*, "to make." The word "poetics" remains close to this original meaning and refers to the creative process, the actual making of the artwork.

The near-exclusive focus on poetics—on making—that is typical in post-Romantic historiography can lead to what is sometimes called the "poietic fallacy." (The peculiar spelling "poietic," derived from the Greek root word, is used here simply to lessen the possibility of confusion with the more ordinary meaning of "poetic.") The poietic fallacy is the assumption that all it takes to account for the nature of an artwork is the maker's intention, or—in a more refined version—the inherent (or immanent) characteristics of the object that the maker has made.

There has been considerable (quite diversely motivated) resistance to this model of art historiography since twentieth century, and some revision of it. This book will reflect that resistance and revision to some extent. It will pay as much or possibly more attention to larger social, economic, and religious forces as to the personal intentions of composers and theorists. (It could go without saying, but perhaps it had better be said anyway, that complete disregard of such intentions would be just as partial and just as distorted a viewpoint as its opposite: composers are influenced by all sorts of "larger forces," as are we all, but subjectively—and directly—they are most of all influenced by music.)

And yet when it comes to the neoclassical impulse that gave birth to dramatic music at the end of the sixteenth century, which found expression in so much explicit theorizing, it is hard not to follow the "poietic" model, putting things mainly in terms of artists' and theorists' expressive aspirations and achievements. But like any other form of art (at least those that have been successful), dramatic music, of course, had an "esthesic" side as well (from the Greek *aisthesis*, "perception"), reflecting the viewpoint and the expectations of the audience. ("Esthesics," like "poetics," has a more common cognate—"esthetics," the philosophy of beauty—with which it should not be confused.) In fact the esthesics of dramatic music is perhaps more of a determining factor (or at least more obviously a determining factor) in its development than in any other branch of musical art, and it is very closely bound up with politics. Before we can understand "opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi"—that is, the differences between Monteverdi's *Orfeo* of 1607 and his *Incoronazione di Poppea* of 1643—that bond has to be explored.

Notes:

(5) Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 1.

(6) Leo Schrade, *Monteverdi, Creator of Modern Music* (New York: Norton, 1950).

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Intermède

Opera: Origins

Giulio Caccini

OPERA AND ITS POLITICS

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

fig. 1-3 Francesco Gonzaga (1466–1519), depicted on a Mantuan coin.

One important aspect of the "esthesics" of early dramatic music was its descent in part from the sixteenth-century Florentine court spectacles known as *intermedii*. All the earliest *favole in musica* were fashioned to adorn the same kind of north Italian court festivities, flattering the assemblages of "renowned heroes, blood royal of kings" who were privileged to hear them, potentates "of whom Fame tells glorious deeds, though falling short of truth," as La Musica herself puts it in the prologue to Monteverdi's *Orfeo*—first performed during the carnival season of 1607 to fête

Francesco Gonzaga, the hereditary prince of Mantua, where the composer was employed. The words were written by the prince's secretary, Alessandro Striggio (the son of a famous Mantuan madrigalist of the same name), and the whole occasion had a panegyric (prince-praising) subtext.

Thus the revived musical drama—the invention of a humanistic coterie of Florentine nobles—reflected (and was meant to reflect) the recovered grandeur and glory of antiquity on the princes who were its patrons. Like most music that has left remains for historians to discuss, it was the product and the expression of an elite culture, the topmost echelons of contemporary society. To put it that way is uncontroversial. But what if it were said that the early musical plays were the product and the expression of a tyrannical class—a product and an expression, moreover, that were only made possible by the despotic exploitation of other classes? That would direct perhaps unwelcome attention at the social costs of artistic greatness. Such awareness follows inescapably from an emphasis on the "esthesic," however; and that is perhaps one additional reason why the "poietic" side has claimed so vast a preponderance of scholarly investigation.

One scholar who did not flinch from the social consequences of the untrammeled pursuit of artistic excellence was Manfred Bukofzer, in a still unsurpassed essay, "The Sociology of Baroque Music," first published in 1947. Bukofzer characterized the early musical plays, of which Monteverdi's *Orfeo* was the crowning stroke, as the capital artistic expression of the twin triumphs of political absolutism and economic mercantilism, an expression that brought to its pinnacle the traditional exploitations of the arts "as a means of representing power." It was precisely this exploitation that, in Bukofzer's view, brought about the stylistic metamorphosis that, following the terminology of his time, he called the metamorphosis from "Renaissance" to "Baroque." His description is vivid, and disquieting:

> Display of splendor was one of the main social functions of music for the Counter Reformation and the baroque courts, made possible only through money; and the more money spent, the more powerful was the representation. Consistent with the mercantile ideas of wealth, sumptuousness in the arts became actually an end in itself.... However, viewed from the social angle the shining lights of the flowering arts cast the blackest of shadows. Hand in hand with the brilliant development of court and church music went the Inquisition and the ruthless exploitation of the lower classes by means of oppressive taxes.[7]

With the spread of musical plays from the opulent courts of Italy to the petty courts of northern Europe—chiefly Germany, where the first musical play was *Dafne*, a setting of the Florentine court poet Ottavio Rinuccini's libretto for the earliest of all *favole in musica* (originally set by Peri for performance in 1597) as translated by Martin Opitz, court poet of the Holy Roman Empire, with music by Heinrich Schütz, a former pupil of Gabrieli, performed to celebrate a princely wedding at the court of Torgau in 13 April 1627—the costs became ever more exorbitant and the bankrolling methods ever more drastic. "The Duke of Brunswick, for one, relied not only on the most ingenious forms of direct and indirect taxation but resorted even to the slave trade," Bukofzer reports. "He financed his operatic amusements by selling his subjects as soldiers [in the Thirty Years' War] so that his flourishing opera depended literally on the blood of the lower classes."[8] The court spectacles thus bought and paid for apotheosized political power in at least three ways. The first and most spectacular—and the most obvious—was the fusion of all the arts in the common enterprise of princely aggrandizement. The monster assemblages of singers and instrumentalists (the former neoclassically deployed in dancing choruses like those of the Greek drama, the latter massed in the first true orchestras) were matched, and even exceeded, by the luxuriously elaborate stage sets and theatrical machinery. Second, the plots, involving mythological or ancient historical heroes caught up in stereotyped conflicts of love and honor, were transparent allegories of the sponsoring rulers, who were addressed directly, as we know, in the obligatory prologues that linked the story of the opera to the events of their reign.

Third, most subtly but possibly most revealing, severe limits were set on the virtuosity of the vocal soloists lest, by indecorously representing their own power, they upstaged the personages portrayed, or worse, the personages allegorically magnified. The ban on virtuosity reflected the old aristocratic prejudice, inherited from Aristotle, that found its most influential neoclassical expression in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, in which noble amateurs are enjoined to affect *sprezzatura* ("a certain noble negligence," or nonchalance) in their singing lest they compromise their standing as "free men" by an infusion of servile professionalism. Giulio Caccini, the leading early monodist, had explicitly revived the concept of *sprezzatura* in the preface to his famous songbook *Nuove musiche* of 1601 and in so doing gave some precious insight into the manner and purpose of the moderate, intimate, elegantly applied throat-music called *gorgia*, comparable in some ways with the intimate style of singing known in the twentieth century as crooning.

Caccini's preface contained a sarcastic, even cranky comparison between the subtle *gorgia* he employed and the unwritten (extemporized or memorized) *passaggii*—real virtuoso fireworks—with which less socially elevated singers peppered their performances. *Passaggii*, Caccini sneered, "were not invented because they were necessary to the right way of singing, but rather, I think, for a certain titillation they afford the ears of those who do not know what it is to sing with feeling; for were this understood, then passages would no doubt be abhorred, since nothing can be more contrary to producing a good effect." The matter is couched outwardly in terms of fastidious taste, but the social snobbery lurking within is not hard to discern. Virtuosity is "common." Those who indulge it or encourage it with their applause are to be despised as vulgar, "low class." (To find Caccini's heirs in this antipopulist bias, chances are one need only read one's local music critic or record reviewer.)

Not surprisingly, virtuosity found a natural home in the commercial music theater. It is only one of the reasons for regarding the Venetian Teatro San Cassiano and the year 1637, not the Florentine Palazzo Pitti or the year 1597, as the true time and place of the birth of opera as we know it now. Where the court spectacles, even *Orfeo*, now seem like fossils—ceremonially exhumed and exhibited to sober praise from time to time (and dependably extolled in textbooks) but undeniably dead—the early commercial opera bequeathed to us the conventions by which opera has lived, in glory and in infamy, into our own time. From now on, the word *opera* as used in this book will mean the commercial opera. Anything else will be called by a different name, whether or not its creators chose to do so.

As Ellen Rosand has written, modern operagoers can still recognize in seventeenth-century Venetian works "the roots of favorite scenes: Cherubino's song, Tatiana's letter, Lucia's mad scene, Ulrica's invocation, even Tristan and Iseult's love duet."[9] With these references to characters and scenes from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century operas by Mozart, Chaikovsky, Donizetti, Verdi, and Wagner, all pillars of the modern repertoire, and surely not by accident, Rosand has named four potent female roles, one fairly neutered masculine partner, and a delectable cross-dresser. Ever since opera opened its doors to a paying public—a public that had to be lured—it has been a prima-donna circus with a lively transsexual sideshow, associated from the very beginning with the carnival season and its roaring tourist trade. Uncanny, nature-defying vocalism easily compensated for the courtly accoutrements—the sumptuous sets, the intricate choruses and ballets, the rich orchestras—that the early commercial opera theaters could not afford. Never mind the noble union of all the arts: what the great Russian basso Fyodor Chaliapin called "educated screaming" is the only bait that public opera has ever really needed, and its attraction has never waned.

Notes:

(7) Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era* (New York: Norton, 1947), pp. 394–95.

(8) Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era*, p. 398.

(9) Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, p. 7.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Castrato

Opera: Early opera, 1600–90

SEX OBJECTS, SEXED AND UNSEXED

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The greatest screamers of all, and the most completely "educated" (that is, cultivated), were the male prima donnas known as *castrati*, opera's first international stars, whose astounding sonority and preternaturally florid singing style confirmed opera in an abiding aura of the eerie. Although castrati originated not in the theater but in the churches of sixteenth-century Italy, where females could not perform but a full range of singers was desired, and where (as the historian John Roselli has put it) "choirboys were no sooner trained than lost,"[10] the burgeoning commercial opera stage with its exhibitionism and its heroics gave these unearthly singers their true arena. In an age that valued finely honed symbolic artifice, these magnificent singing objects—artists made, not born—were "naturally" the gods, the generals, the athletes, and the lovers. Seventeenth-and eighteenth-century "serious opera" is unthinkable (and unrevivable) without them.

Here too there are social costs to consider; for if it was to be musically effective, castration had to take place, so to speak, in the nick of time. That meant that the necessary surgery had to be performed on boys before they reached the age of consent. For this reason the operation was always officially illegal, even though the practice catered in large part to the most official social strata. When Charles Burney, the eighteenth-century English music historian, went in search of information on the practice, he was given a royal runaround: "I was told at Milan that it was at Venice; at Venice, that it was at Bologna; but at Bologna the fact was denied, and I was referred to Florence; from Florence to Rome, and from Rome I was sent to Naples."

Greedy parents were often responsible; a prospective castrato was supposed to be brought to a conservatory to be tested "as to the probability of voice," as Burney put it.

But, he continued,

> it is my opinion that the cruel operation is but too frequently performed without trial, or at least without sufficient proof of an improvable voice; otherwise such numbers could never be found in every great town throughout Italy, without any voice at all, or at least without one sufficient to compensate such a loss.[11]

And as other travelers reported, no churchyard in Italy was without a contingent of unemployed or failed castrati, begging for their subsistence. The eunuchs of Italy were not all heroes.

By the end of the seventeenth century the serious—the noble and the heroic—was only one of the available operatic modes. The commercial opera was from the first a bastard genre, in which crowd-pleasing comic characters and burlesque scenes or interludes compromised lofty classical or historical themes in violation of traditional (that is, Aristotelian) dramatic rules, before being segregated by snobbish dramatic purists (in the eighteenth century) into discrete categories of "serious" (*opera seria*) and "comic" (*opera buffa*). And this was the other great difference—an even more significant difference—between court music spectacles and commercial opera: the latter, at first under cover of comedy, introduced oppositional, anti-aristocratic politics into the genre. The commercial (later the comic) opera, originally instituted as a carnival entertainment, became a very hotbed of what the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin called "carnivalism": authority stood on its head.

It was already a license to display operatic divas (women singers, literally "goddesses"), veritable warbling courtesans, to the public gaze, and a notorious Jesuit critic, Giovan Domenico Ottonelli, lost little time in rising to the bait. In a treatise of 1652 called *Delle cristiana moderazione del theatro*, he denounced the theaters of the

"*mercenarii musici*" (money-grubbing musicians) as voluptuous and corrupting in contrast to the edifying spectacles mounted "*ne' palazzi de' principi grandi*" (at the palaces of great princes).[12] But the most significant licenses were as much political as moral and marked the public opera indelibly. Public opera became a world where satyrs romped and Eros reigned, where servant girls outwitted and chastised their masters, where philandering counts were humiliated, and where—later and more earnestly—rabbles were roused and revolutions were abetted. No one had to be sold into slavery to support it; and yet, for the most cogent of reasons, opera became the most stringently watchdogged and censored of all forms of art until the twentieth century, when that distinction passed to motion pictures.

Examples of opera's disruptive and destabilizing vectors can be drawn from any phase in its history, beginning with the earliest, and the promised comparison of Monteverdi's two most famous theatrical pieces, sole survivors in the repertory of the court and market genres of seventeenth-century Italy, will make an ideal vantage point for observing them since they epitomized the two artistic and political poles.

Notes:

(10) John Roselli, *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. "castrato."

(11) Percy A. Scholes, ed., *Dr. Burney's Musical Tours in Europe*, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 247–48.

(12) Quoted in Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, p. 11.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Claudio Monteverdi

Orfeo

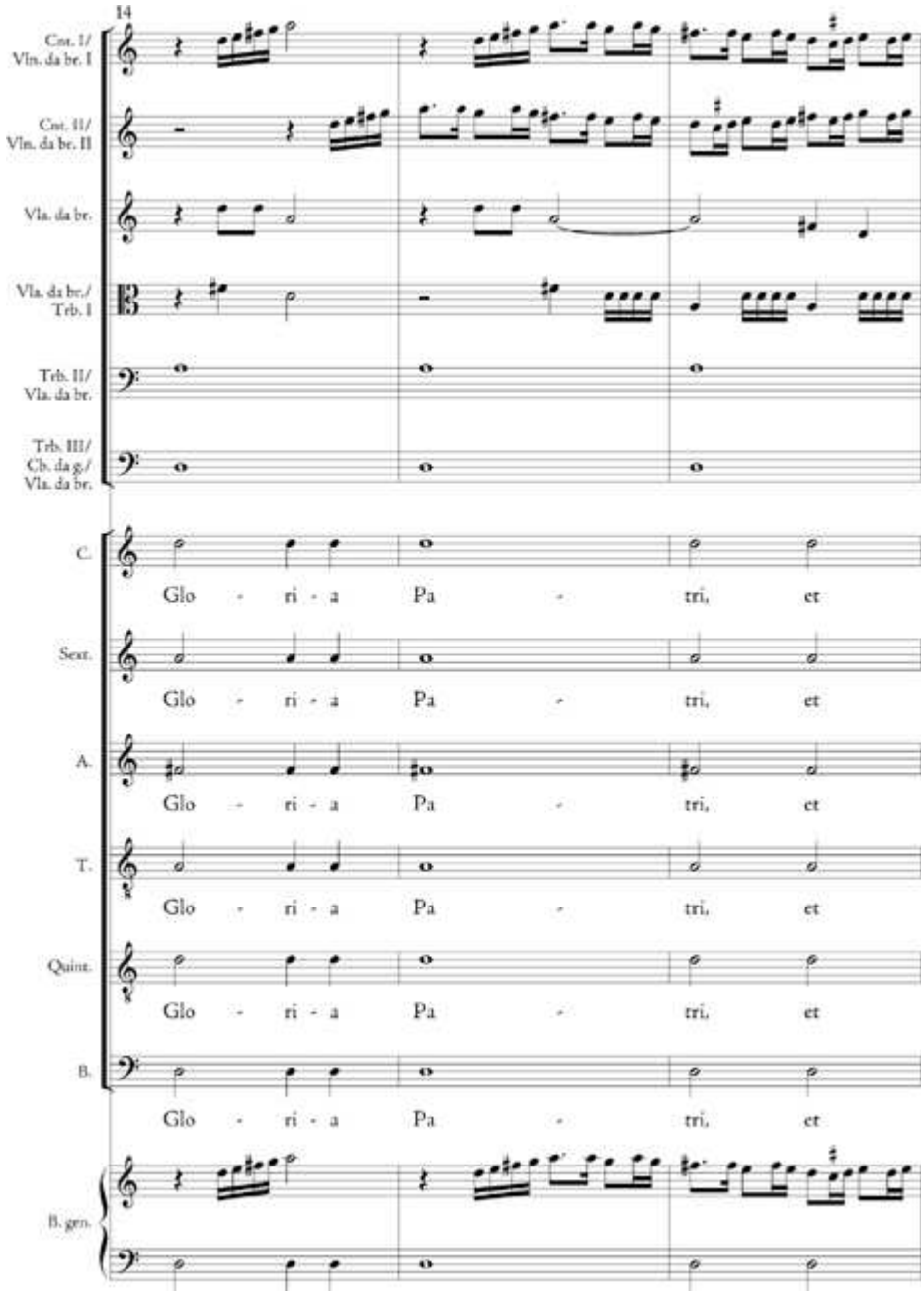
THE QUINTESSENTIAL PRINCELY SPECTACLE

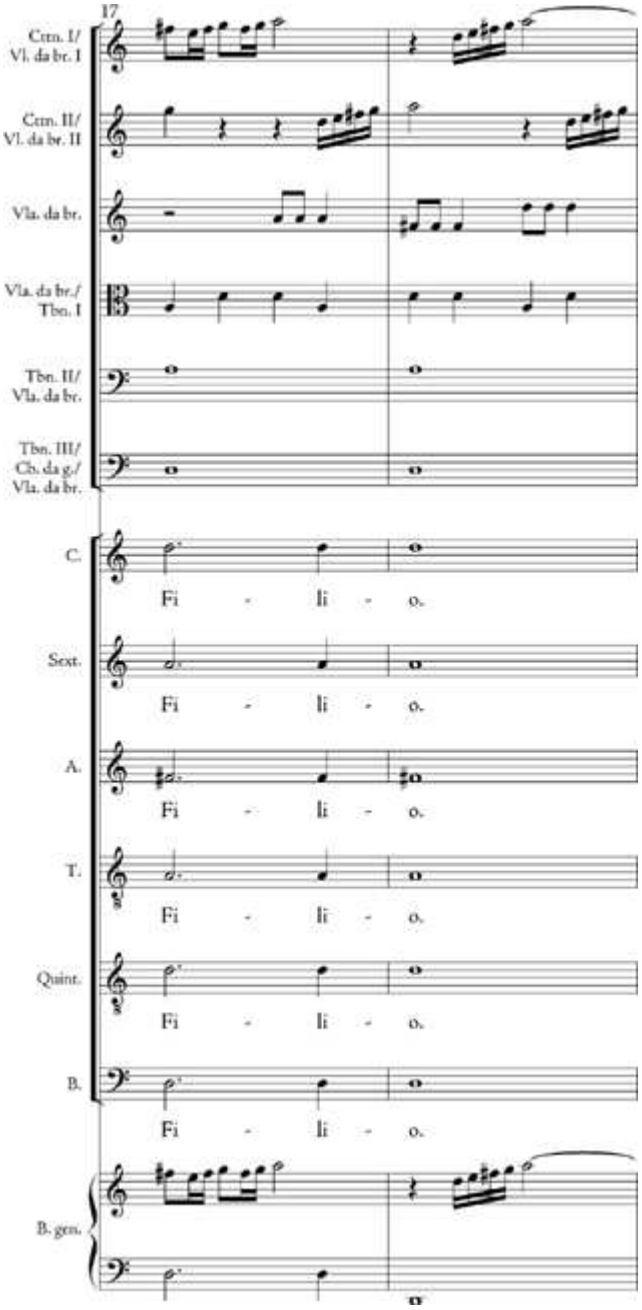
Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Orfeo was officially mounted not by the Mantuan court itself but by an Academy or noble learned society—the Accademia degli Invaghiti ("Academy of those captivated [by the arts]") as it was called—but that was just a front to make the production look like a gift, since the academicians (whose ranks included both the librettist Striggio and the princely honoree) were all courtiers. Its orchestra surpassed that of any *intermedio* in its range of colors, although no more than a fraction of the full assembly of instruments plays at any one time, so that relatively few musicians were required as long as their ranks included "doublers" who could take different nonoverlapping parts.

The published score (Venice, 1609) calls for a ceaselessly churning *fundamento* or continuo contingent of five keyboard instruments (two harpsichords, two flue organs, one reed organ or regal), seven plucked instruments (three *chitarroni*, two mandolinlike citterns, and two harps), and three bass viols. The string ensemble, which mainly played ritornellos between the stanzas of the strophic numbers, consisted of a basic band of twelve *ripieni* or ensemble members and two soloists on "French violins" (evidently meaning small dancing-master "pocket fiddles" or *pochettes*). Finally there was an assortment of wind and brass, some of them reserved for the infernal scenes: two end-blown whistle flutes or recorders, two cornetti, three *trombe sordini* ("mute trumpets," probably with slides), five trombones, and a *clarino*, meaning a trumpet played in its highest register.

The brass colors were to be flaunted first in a *toccata* (= tucket in English, *Tusch* in German)—a quasi-military fanfare that, according to the published score, was to be played three times from various places around the hall to silence the audience and invest the proceedings with appropriate pomp. (Contemporary accounts of the premire suggest that a tucket—perhaps this very one—was played before all Mantuan court spectacles; the one in *Orfeo*—as so often in the case of apparent innovations—was just the first to get written down.) Bukofzer's point about the interest in ostentatious displays of power that the Counter Reformation church shared with the "baroque courts" is nicely confirmed by Monteverdi's reuse of the *Orfeo* toccata three years later in a very uncustomary way to back up the choral *falsobordone* (choral recitation) for the Invitatory (opening Psalm verse) in his Vespers of 1610 which, we recall, was originally intended for Rome, the Counter Reformation command center. The concluding doxology is sampled in Ex. 1-6.


14
Cnt. I/ Vln. da br. I
Cnt. II/ Vln. da br. II
Vla. da br.
Vla. da br./ Trb. I
Trb. II/ Vla. da br.
Trb. III/ Cb. da g./ Vla. da br.
C.
Glo - ri - a Pa - tri, et
Sext.
Glo - ri - a Pa - tri, et
A.
Glo - ri - a Pa - tri, et
T.
Glo - ri - a Pa - tri, et
Quint.
Glo - ri - a Pa - tri, et
B.
Glo - ri - a Pa - tri, et
B. gen.



ex. 1-6 Claudio Monteverdi, *Vespro della beata virgine* (1610), *Deus in adiutorium meum intende* (doxology), mm. 14–18

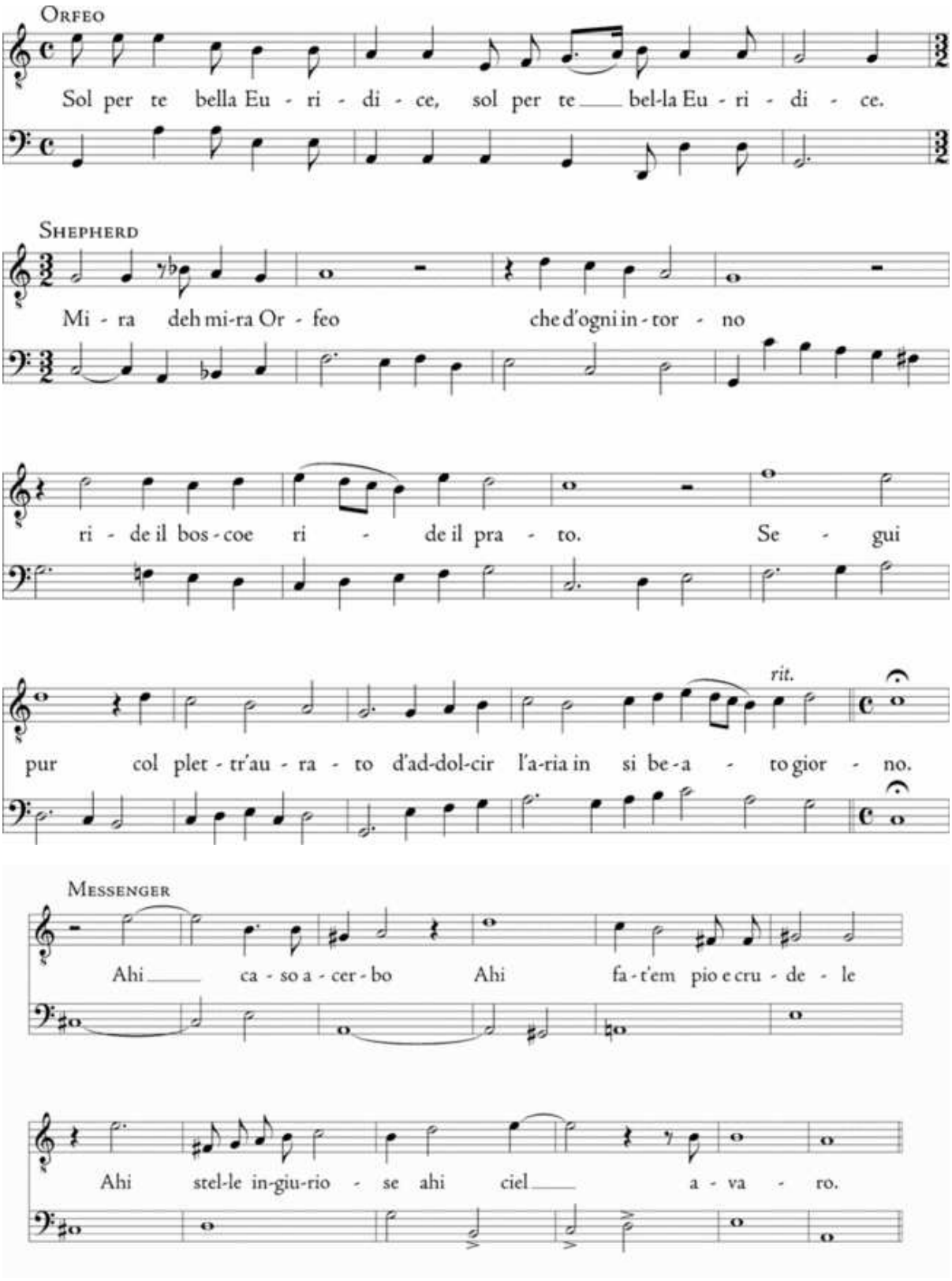
As in the case of Rinuccini's libretto for Peri's *Euridice*, Striggio's for *Orfeo* revises its mythological subject to avoid a tragic conclusion. In the myth, after losing Eurydice a second time, Orpheus turns against all women, for which reason a rioting chorus of jealous Bacchantes tears him to pieces. In the *Orfeo* libretto Orpheus's father Apollo, the divine musician, translates Orpheus into the heavenly constellation that bears his name, substituting serene apotheosis for bloody cataclysm. There is also a somewhat didactically pointed clash between virtuosity and true eloquence in Orpheus's great act III aria *Possente spirto*, his plea to the ferryman Charon to transport him across the river Styx to the Underworld. The aria consists of five strophes over a ground bass. The first four are decorated with flowery *passaggii* that exploited the famous skills of Francesco Rasi, a pupil of Caccini, who sang the title role. His florid stanzas are sung in alternation with fancy instrumental solos for the "French violins" mentioned earlier, for harp (standing in for the Orphic lyre), and for cornetto. When all of this artifice leaves Charon unmoved, Orpheus, in desperation, drops all pretense of crafty rhetoric and makes his final appeal in unadorned *recitativo* to a bare figured bass, the very emblem of sincerity. (Charon, while too oafish to respond, nevertheless falls asleep at this, possibly charmed by Apollo, and Orpheus steals his boat; it is the single touch of comic relief.) Above all, and perhaps strangely to us who know what opera has become, there is virtually no love music in this tender *favola*, for all that it concerns the parting and reuniting of lovers. Orpheus sings on and on about his love for Eurydice, but he does not

express it directly through music—that is, to her. Indeed, as it took a feminist critic, Susan McClary, finally to point out, Eurydice, with only a couple of very plain-sung lines in act I and a couple more in act IV, is hardly a character at all in what is at bottom a very decorous, an inveterately "noble," and an insistently masculine spectacle in its focus on natural male vocal ranges and on the ideal of self-possession.[13] This focus is made explicit in the scene where Orpheus loses Eurydice for the second time and a chorus of spirits sing the moral (intended not only for Orpheus but for the young prince Francesco in whose honor the *favola* was performed): only he who can subdue his passions with reason is worthy of reward. Indeed, the original performance observed the interdiction on female singers in serious places like the *palazzi de' principi grandi*, casting the solo feminine roles—from La Musica to the Messenger to Eurydice herself—for castrati or, in some cases, possibly, for boys.

What, then, can account for this oddly restricted work's enduring hold on audiences, even nonnoble ones, even to this day? Of all the individual acts, the second might best suggest the answer in the way Monteverdi's music mirrors the implicit point of the whole *favola*, which is in essence a music-myth, a demonstration of music's power to move the affections. For in the second act Monteverdi and his librettist contrived a determined clash between "phenomenal" and "noumenal" music, as defined by the critic Carolyn Abbate: music actually "heard" as such on stage, and music that symbolizes the emotions expressed in speech. It concentrates the radical humanist message into a more powerful dose than any other contemporary composer imagined.

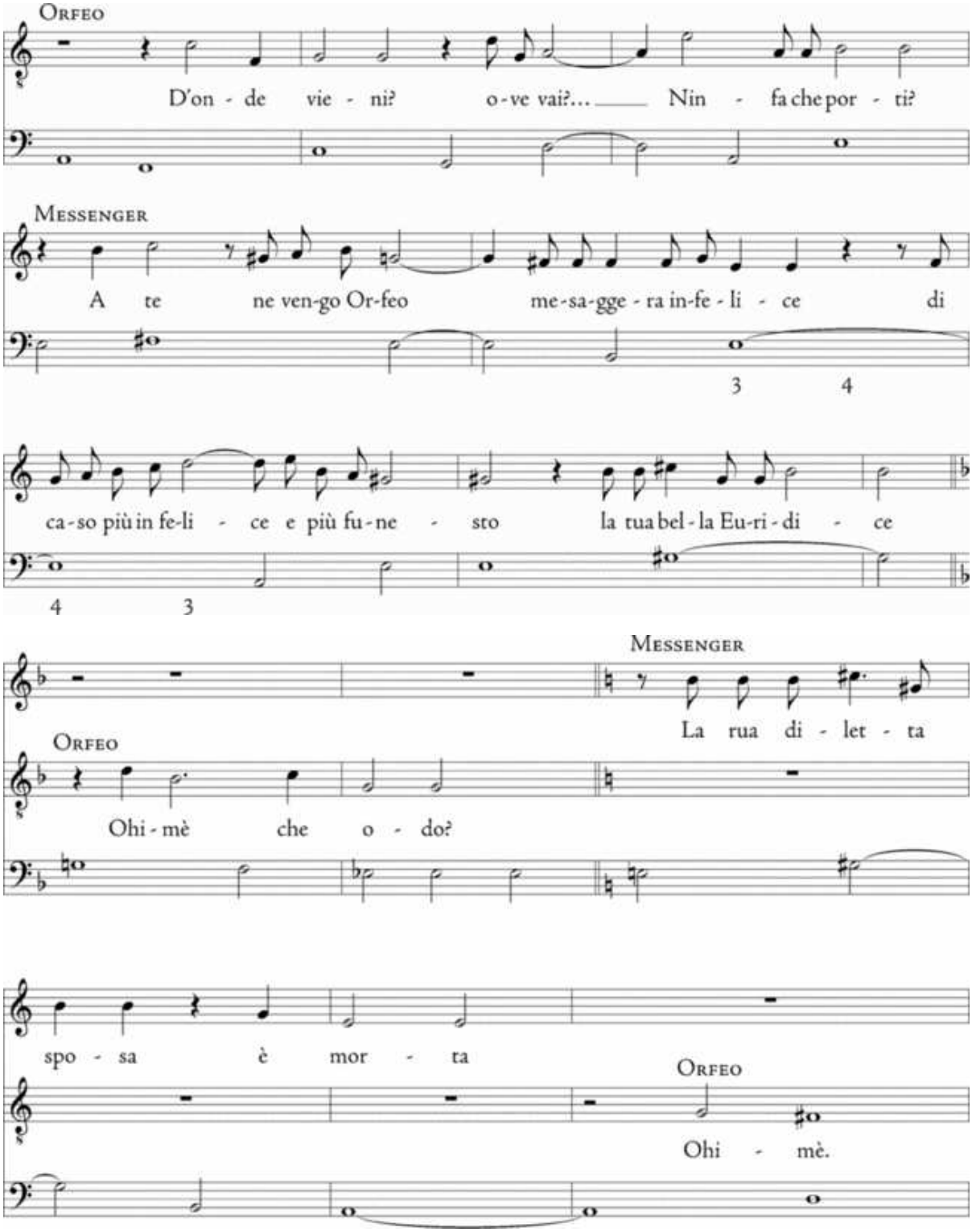
The act begins with a celebration of the wedding of Orpheus and Eurydice. Orpheus, surrounded by his friends the shepherds, celebrates his love. They do it as a kind of concert consisting, after an invocation by the title character, of no fewer than four strophic arias, veritable *scherzi musicali* with lavishly scored instrumental ritornelli, in all likelihood danced as well as sung. The first three are sung respectively by a shepherd, by two shepherds, and by the full chorus. Then comes Orfeo's big number, the aria *Vi ricorda o bosch'ombrosi*, in which he gives catchy vent to his joy, using the elegant hemiola meter Monteverdi designated in his *Scherzi* of 1607 as "French" (=elegant, as in "French pastry"). Repeated references in the verses to Orpheus's lyre leave no doubt that he is playing along to accompany the singing, and that the songs and dances are literally that—actual songs and dances performed "phenomenally" on stage.

After Orpheus has finished, one of the shepherds bids him strike up another song with his golden plectrum; but before Orpheus can comply, the baleful "Messenger" (actually the nymph Sylvia) bursts in with the horrible news of Eurydice's death and silences the stage music for good and all (Ex. 1-7). But the phenomenal music is silenced only so that the noumenal music, the real music of lyric eloquence, can work its wonders on the audience. From here until Orpheus and the Messenger depart the scene (he to fetch Eurydice back, she to hide in shame at having broken such bitter news) no instrument is heard but those of the *fundamento*, whose music goes symbolically "unheard" on stage.



ex. 1-7 Claudio Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Act II, messenger breaks in on song and dance

The central business of the act is the exchange between Orpheus and the nymph Sylvia (fulfilling the same function as the nymph Daphne in Rinuccini's *Euridice* libretto), which is clearly modeled on, but just as clearly far surpasses, the analogous scene in Peri's and Caccini's earlier *favole* (Ex. 1-8). Monteverdi actually pays Peri the homage of imitation in his deployment of jarring tonalities; but where Peri had contrasted the harmonies of E major and G minor in large sections corresponding to the main divisions of Orpheus's soliloquy, Monteverdi uses the contrast at very close range to underscore the poignancy of the dialogue psychologically.

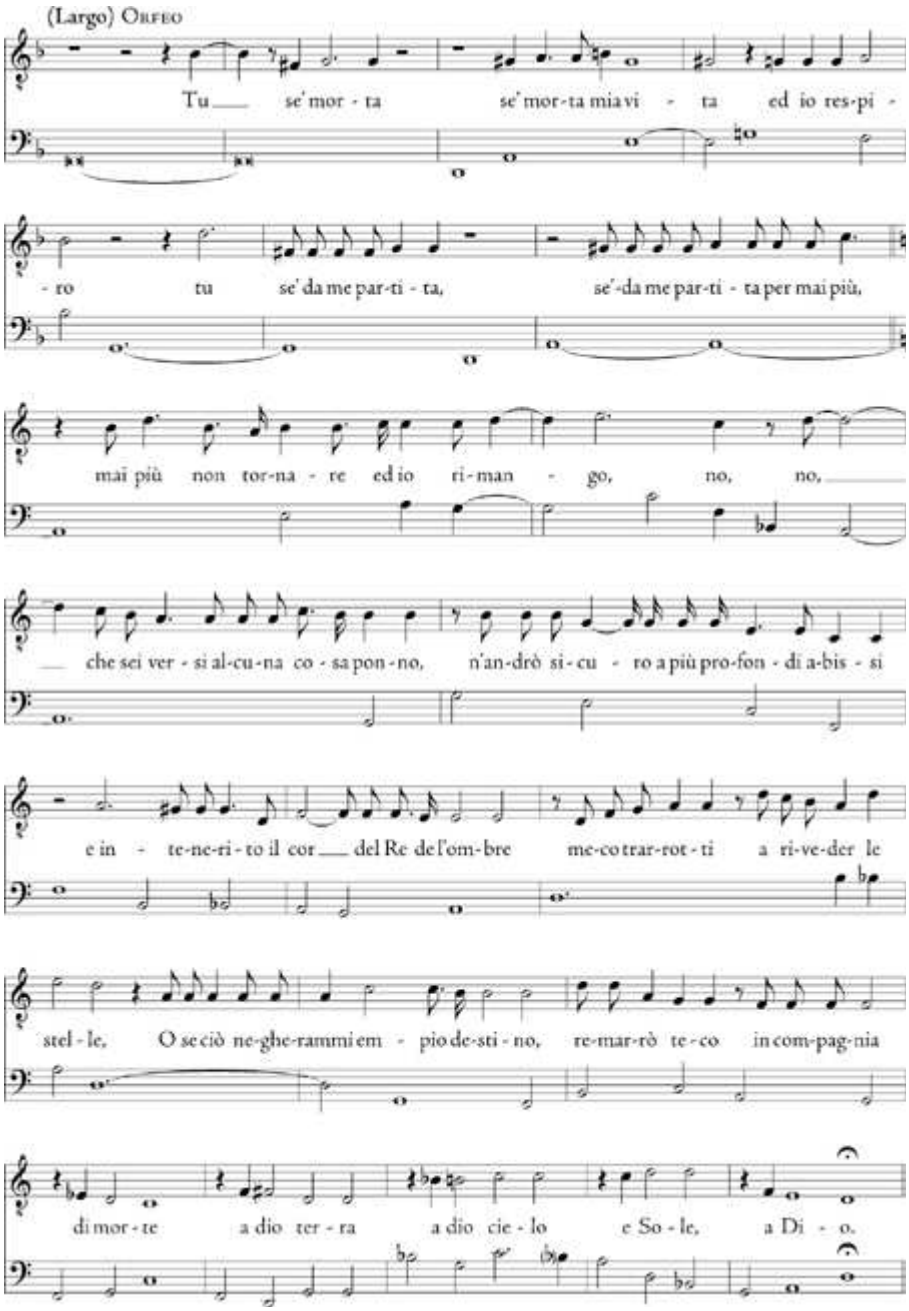


ex. 1-8 Claudio Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Orfeo gets the horrifying news from the messenger

The harmonic disparity between Orpheus's lines and Sylvia's symbolizes his resistance to the untimely news she has brought him. He breaks in on her narrative with G minor—*Ohimè, che odo?* ("Oh no, what am I hearing?")—as soon as she has mentioned the name of Eurydice (on an E-major harmony), as if to deflect her from the bitter message she is about to deliver, but she comes right back with E major and resolves the chord cadentially to A on the word *morta*, "dead." When Orpheus responds with another *Ohimè*, this time he takes up the same harmony where she left it and confirms it with D, the next harmony along the circle of fifths: the message has sunk in, and he must accept it.

Once again, as in *Euridice*, the same horrific events are recounted rather than portrayed: not only out of delicacy, but because the composer's interest is in portraying not events but emotions, those of the Messenger herself and those of Orpheus. When Orpheus finds his voice again after temporarily becoming (as one of the shepherds puts it) "a

speechless rock," Monteverdi again shows his reliance upon Peri as a model, but once again only to surpass his predecessor. Monteverdi's central soliloquy, like Peri's, builds from stony shock to resolution, but does so with a fullness of gradation that mirrors much more faithfully—and recognizably!—the process of emotional transmutation (Ex. 1-9). The secret lies in the bass, which begins with Periesque stasis but gradually begins to move both more rhythmically and with a more directed harmonic progression, approaching some middle ground between *recitativo* and full-blown song. (Later this middle-ground activity would be called *arioso*.) Orpheus having spoken and left, the chorus strikes up a formal dirge by turning the messenger's opening lines ("Ah, grievous mischance...") into a ritornello, the messenger's notes forming the bass, against which a pair of shepherds sing lamenting strophes that recall the previous rejoicing with bitter irony (Ex. 1-10). Whether to regard the dirge as phenomenal or noumenal music is a nice question; but in any event it is formalized and ritualized emotion that is here being expressed, rather than the spontaneous outpouring that provides the act with its center of dramatic gravity. In this most affecting act of *Orfeo*, then, the dramatic strategy has been to frame dramatic recitative with decorative aria. The commercial opera would eventually reverse this perspective.



ex. 1-9 Claudio Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Orfeo's recitative ("Tu se' morta")

Notes:

(13) See Susan McClary, “Constructions of Gender in Monteverdi’s Dramatic Music,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* I (1989): 203–23.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

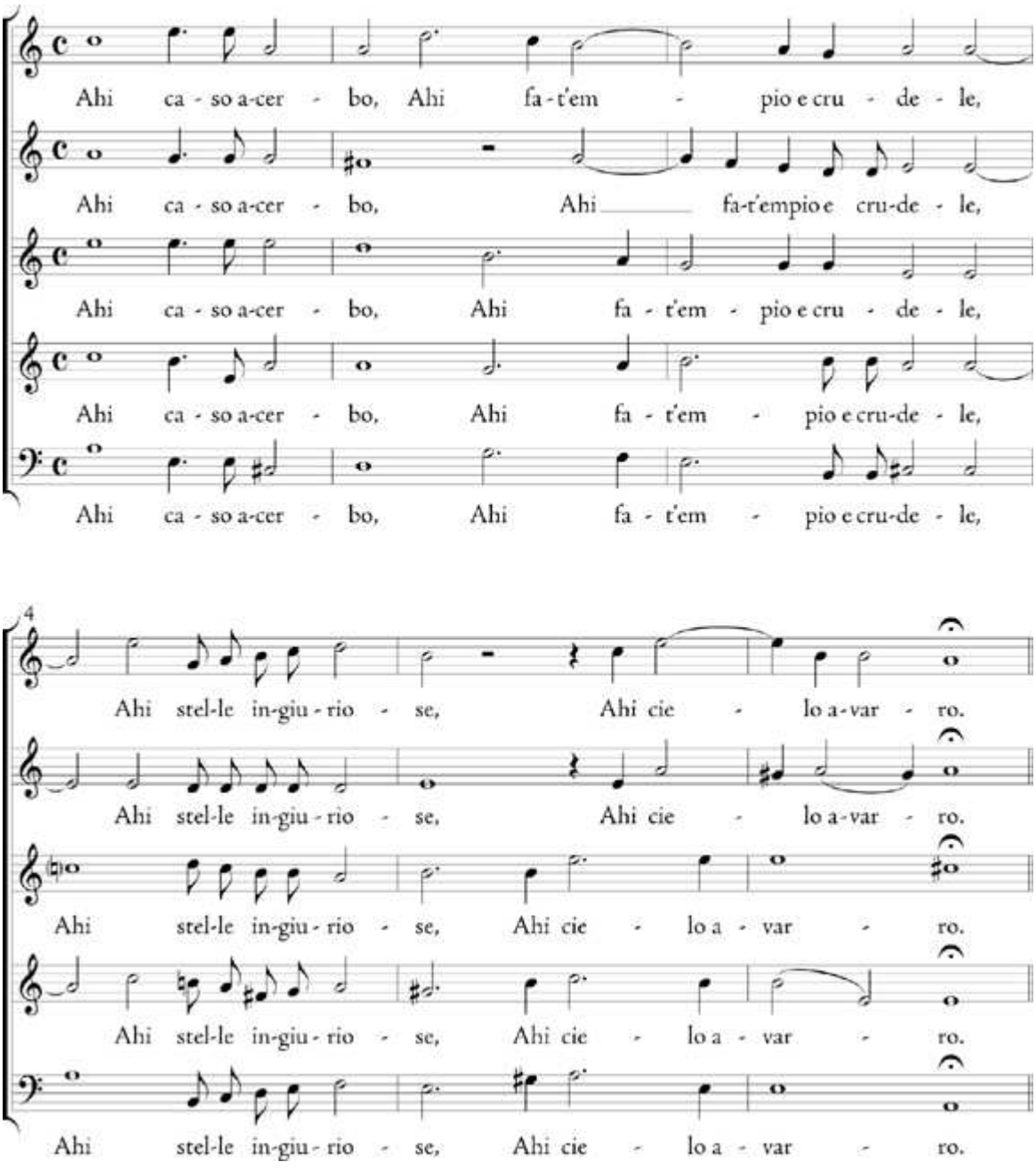
See also from Grove Music Online
Claudio Monteverdi

L'incoronazione di Poppea

Opera: Early opera, 1600–90

THE CARNIVAL SHOW

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Opera from Monteverdi to Monteverdi
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin



ex. 1-10 Claudio Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Chorus ("Ahi caso acerbo")

In one of the most impressive feats of self-rejuvenation in the history of music, the septuagenarian Monteverdi

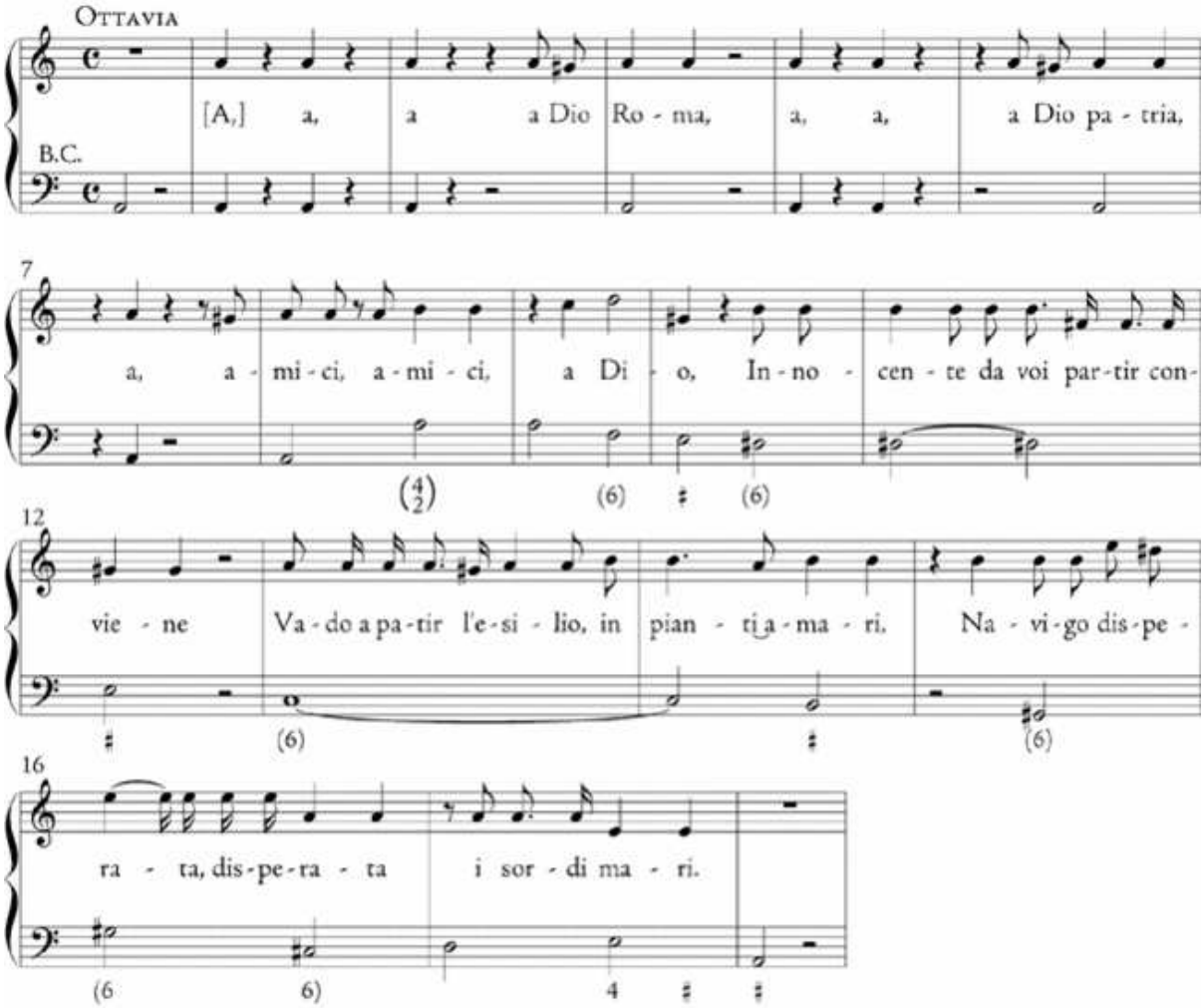
bestirred by the institution of public opera theaters, or else offered terms he could not refuse, came out of retirement and composed a final trio of operas for the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo, one of several competitors that quickly sprang up to challenge San Cassiano, the original opera house. The first was *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (*Ulysses' Return to His Homeland*), after Homer's Odyssey. The second, now lost, concerned another mythological subject, the wedding of Aeneas. The last was *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, not a mythological but a historical fantasy based on Tacitus and other Roman historians. The librettist was Giovanni Francesco Busenello, a famous poet who was active in the Accademia degli Incogniti (the Academy of the Disguised), a society of libertines and skeptics who dominated the early Venetian commercial theater and did their best to subvert the values of court theatricals for the greater enjoyment of the paying public.

Busenello's libretto celebrates neither the reward of virtue nor (as in *Orfeo*) the chastisement of vice. It is a celebration of vice triumphant and virtue mocked. The librettist's own *argomento* or synopsis, published in 1656 in his collected works, puts the story very concisely:

> Nero, enamored of Poppaea, who was the wife of Otho, sent the latter, under the pretext of embassy, to Lusitania [Portugal], so that he could take his pleasure with her—this according to Cornelius Tacitus. But here we represent these actions differently. Otho, desperate at seeing himself deprived of Poppaea, gives himself over to frenzy and exclamations. Octavia, wife of Nero, orders Otho to kill Poppaea. Otho promises to do it; but lacking the spirit to deprive his adored Poppaea of life, he dresses in the clothes of Drusilla, who was in love with him. Thus disguised, he enters the garden of Poppaea. Love [i.e., the god Eros] disturbs and prevents that death. Nero repudiates Octavia, in spite of the counsel of [the philosopher] Seneca, and takes Poppaea to wife. Seneca is sentenced to death, and Octavia is expelled from Rome.[14]

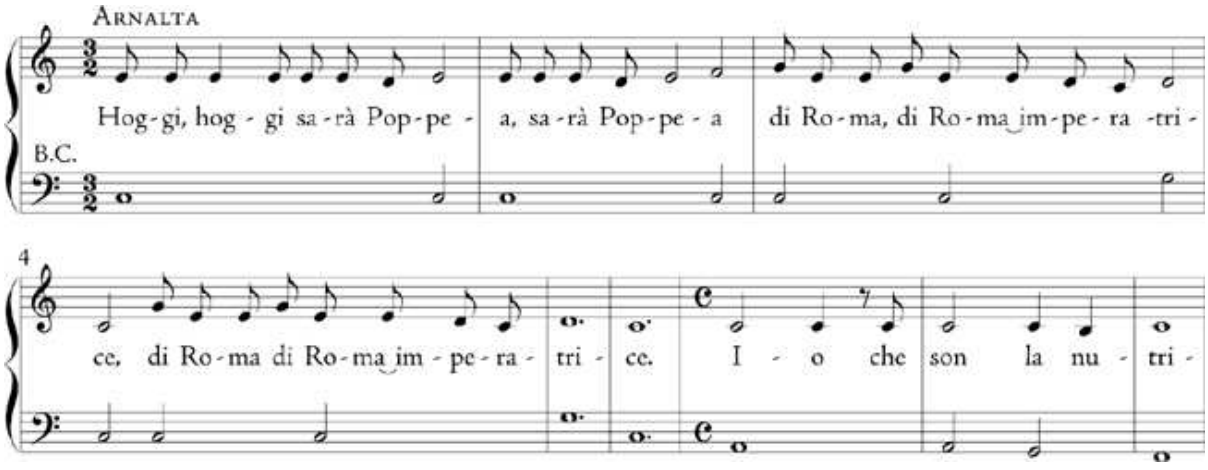
Monteverdi's setting of this most unedifying—and in places virtually obscene—entertainment has the skimpiest of orchestras (just a little ritornello band notated in three or four staves for unspecified instruments, most likely strings), but it is cast throughout for flamboyant voice types that could never have existed in the court *favole*: two superbly developed prima-donna roles (the more virtuosic of them the fork-tongued, string-pulling title character, the more poignantly monodic one the wronged and rejected wife), two *male* parts for shrill castrato singers (the higher of them the feminized, manipulated Emperor Nero, the other the stoical wronged husband), and a quartet of low-born comic characters—one of them, a ghastly crone (Poppaea's former wet nurse Arnalta) often played by a male falsettist in drag—who spoof, intentionally or not, the passions and gestures of their betters.

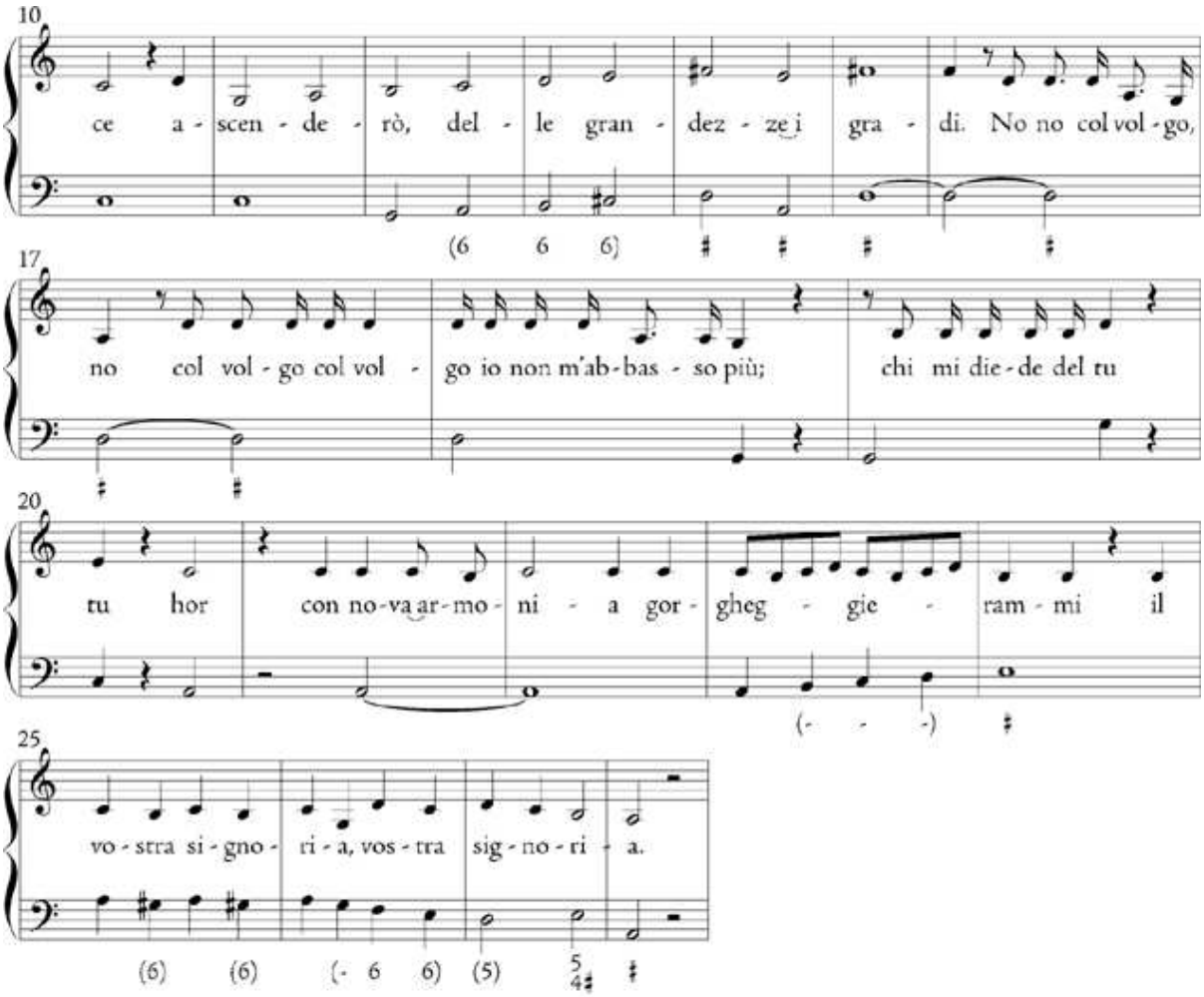
As often in Shakespeare, Monteverdi's shorter-lived contemporary, the comic scenes are paired with the most serious ones. Thus, the scene in which Seneca carries out Nero's sentence of death by committing suicide surrounded by his loving disciples is immediately followed by one in which Octavia's page is shown chasing her lady-in-waiting, coyly singing the while that he is "feeling a certain something" (*Sento un certo non so che*) between his legs. And the opera's most tragic moment, Octavia's farewell to Rome as she boards the ship that is to take her into exile (Ex. 1-11), is followed immediately by the most farcical—Arnalta's gloating at her mistress's impending elevation, and her own (Ex. 1-12). Elsewhere the page, the opera's "lowest" character, directly mocks Seneca, its most exalted one (Ex. 1-13).



Octavia: Farewell, Rome, farewell, my homeland, farewell.
Innocent, I am going to leave you,
I am going to suffer bitter grief.
I am sailing in despair across the deaf sea.

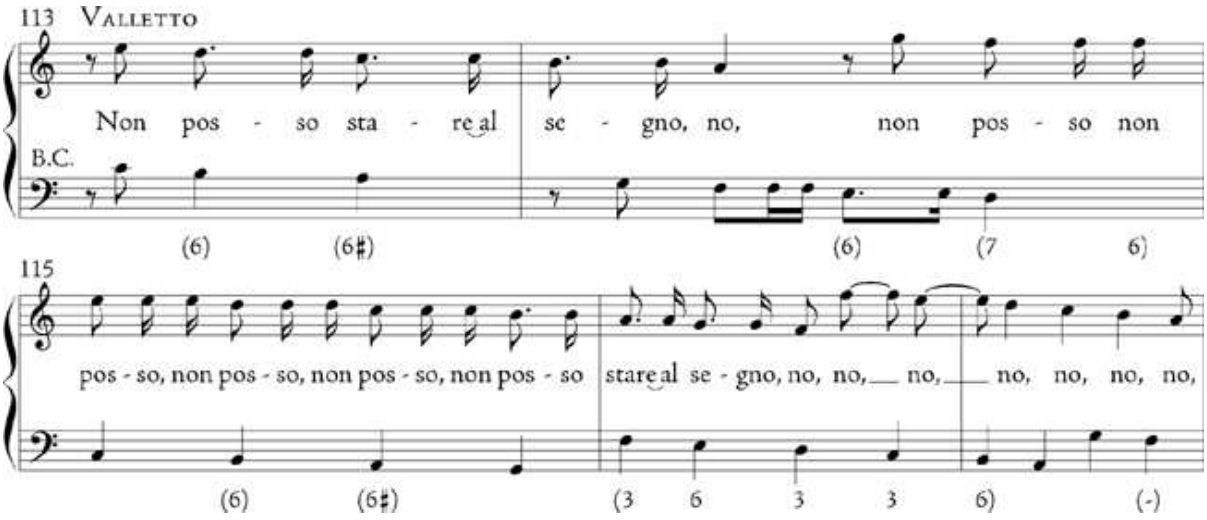
ex. 1-11 Claudio Monteverdi, *Lincoronazione di Poppea*, Act III, scene 6 (Octavia), mm. 1–18

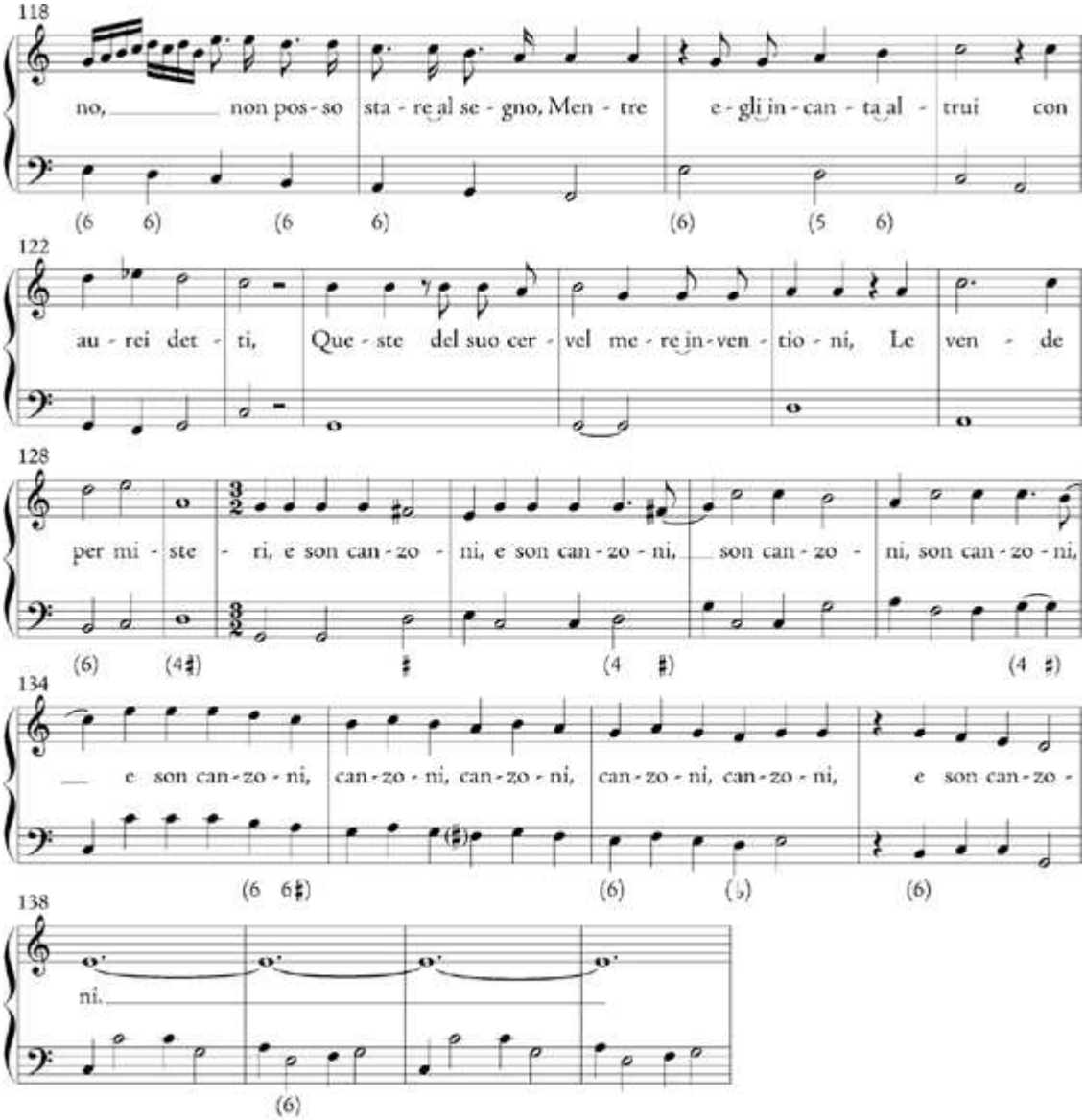




Arnalta: Today Poppea will be empress of Rome.
I, her nurse, will climb the steps of status.
No, I will not slum it with the vulgar.
Those who were on familiar terms with me
will now embellish a new harmony,
"Your ladyship!"

ex. 1-12 Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Act III, scene 7 (Arnalta), mm. 1–28

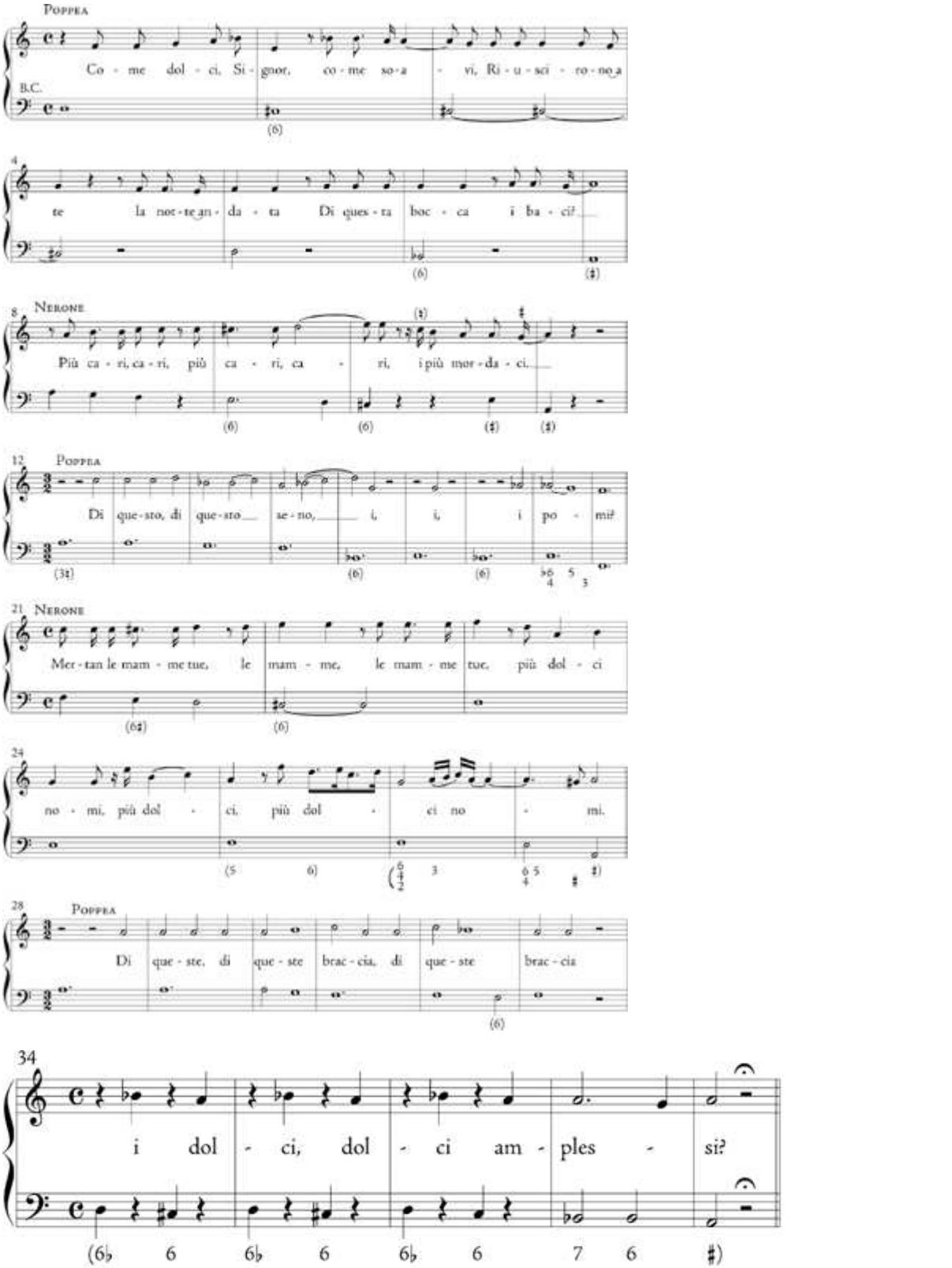




Page: I cannot do my duty, no, no, no,
while he bewitches others with golden words.
They are mere inventions of his brain.
He touts them as mysteries, but they're just songs.

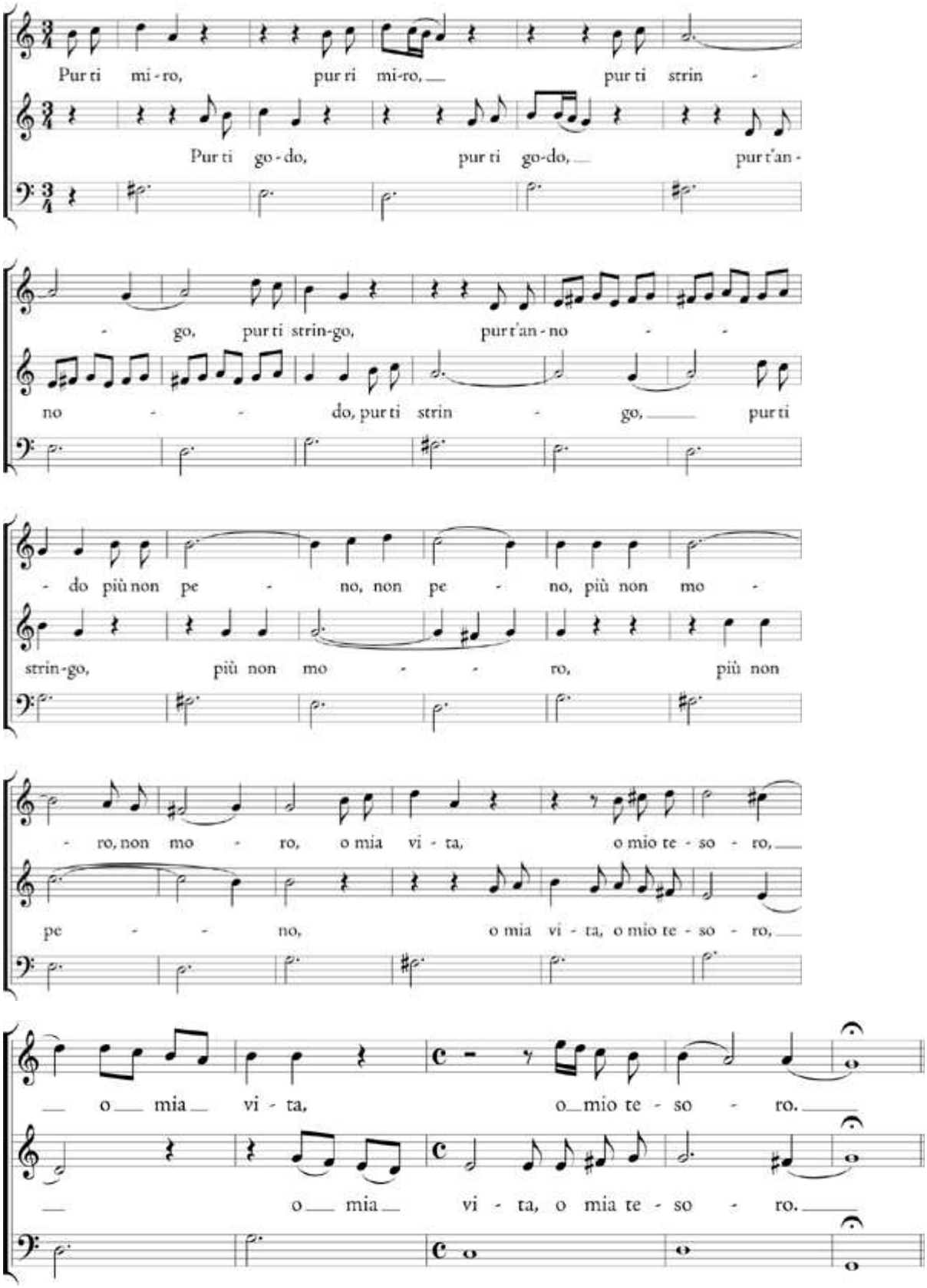
ex. 1-13 Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Act I, scene 6, mm. 113–41

The relationship between Nero and Poppaea is represented frankly as lustful, and that lust is given graphic musical representation. In an early lovers' dialogue, Poppaea flaunts her lips, her breasts, and her arms at Nero, and the composer, taking on the role of stage director, seems to prescribe not only her lines and their delivery but her lewd gestures as well. Nero, in response, makes explicit reference to their sexual encounters, even to "that inflamed spirit which, in kissing, I spilled in thee" (Ex. 1-14). And in the opera's famous culminating number, the duet *Pur ti miro*, an arching, bristlingly sensual lust duet (for two sopranos, impossible to savor today at full outlandish strength even when the part of Nero is not transposed to the range of a "natural" man but sung by a woman), the music, in its writhing, coiling movements, the increased agitation of the middle section, and the dissonant friction between the singers' parts (or between them both and the bass: see especially the setting of the words *più non peno, più non moro* in Ex. 1-15), leaves no doubt that the lovers are enacting their passion before us, whether or not the stage director dares show them in the act.



Poppea: How sweetly, my lord, how smoothly did you enjoy last night the kisses of this mouth?
Nero: The sweeter they were the more they bit me.
Poppea: The apples of this bosom?
Nero: Your breasts deserve a sweeter name.
Poppea: The sweet embraces of these arms?

ex. 1-14 Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Act I, scene 10, mm. 1–38



ex. 1-15 Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, final scene, no. 24 (ciaccona: *Pur ti miro*), end

This duet, of which the final, opera-ending section is given in Ex. 1-15, symbolizes and formally celebrates in the guise of a *ciaccona*, a slow dance over a mesmerizing ground bass (again a descending tetrachord at the beginning and the end, but in the lubricious major rather than the lamenting minor), a craving that has subverted all moral and political codes. (Its form, with a contrasting middle section and a reprise of the opening "from the top" [*da capo*], would become increasingly popular with opera composers and eventually replace the strophic aria.) Where *Orfeo*, the court pageant, celebrated established order and authority and the cool moderation that its hero tragically

violates, *Poppea*, the carnival show, brings it all down: passion wins out over reason, woman over man, guile over truth, impulse over wisdom, license over law, artifice (in persuasion, in the singing of it, in the voice itself) over nature.

Scholars now agree that *Pur ti miro*, once thought to be the aged Monteverdi's sublime swan song, was not written by him at all, but by a younger composer (maybe Francesco Cavalli, Monteverdi's pupil; maybe Benedetto Ferrari; maybe Francesco Sacrati, now regarded as the prime suspect) for a revival in the early 1650s. Only that version, presumably one of many that circulated in the theaters at the time, has survived. And so it is now the standard text, but it had no such status in its own day. That is another difference between the court spectacles and the earliest real operas. The court operas, performed once only, were then printed up as souvenirs of the festivities for which they were composed in fully edited, idealized texts that resembled books. These scores could become the basis of later productions (and did so in the case of *Orfeo*), but that was not their primary purpose.

Commercial operas, by contrast, were not published at all until comparatively recent times. Like today's commercial (e.g., "Broadway") musical shows, they existed during their runs and revivals in a ceaseless maelstrom of negotiation and revision, existing in a multitude of versions—for this theater, for that theater, "for the road," for this star or that—and never attained the status of finished texts. It distorts them considerably even to contemplate them from the purely "poietic" standpoint that has become the rule for "classical music." They were esthesic objects par excellence, not texts but performances, embodying much that was unwritten and unwritable, directed outward at their audience, not at history, the museum, posterity, the classroom, or any other place where poietics is of primary interest.

Once again we observe that the fully textual (or textualized) condition we associate with "classical music" and its permanent canon of masterpieces came into being much later than many types of music that eventually entered its orbit, sometimes with distorting or invidious result. And yet the commercial opera never did altogether supplant the courtly, since they occupied differing social spheres and have only lately met, uneasily, on the modern operatic stage.

Ever since 1637, then, the world of opera has been a divided world, its two political strains—the edifying and the profitable, the authoritarian and the anarchic, the affirmational and the oppositional—unpeacefully coexisting, the tension between them conditioning everything about the genre: its forms, its styles, its meanings (or its attempts to circumvent meaning), its performance practices, its followings, its critical traditions. The same political tension lies behind every one of the press skirmishes, reforms, and "querelles" that dot operatic history (and that we shall be tracing in due course), and it informs the intermission disputes of today. Nothing else attests so well to opera's cultural significance, and nothing else so well explains the durability of this oldest of living musical traditions in the West.

Notes:

(14) Trans. Arthur Jacobs, in Monteverde, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Libretto by G. F. Busenello, English version by Arthur Jacobs (London: Novello, 1989).

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean

Organ Music from Frescobaldi to Scheidt; Schütz's Career; Oratorio and Cantata

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

SOME ORGANISTS

Whoever wrote it, and however it may have related to Monteverdi's original design, the ending of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* was a harbinger. The seventeenth century was the great age of the ground bass. Infinitely extensible formal plans (if "plan" is indeed the word for something that is infinitely extensible) enabled musical compositions to achieve an amplitude comparable to the extravagantly majestic Counter Reformation church architecture that provided the spaces in which they were heard (and to which the word "baroque" was first applied).

These forms grew directly out of an oral or "improvisatory" practice that continued to flourish alongside its written specimens. The written examples, especially those meant for solo virtuosos to perform, represented the cream of the oral practice—particularly effective improvisations retained (as "keepers") in memory for repeated performance and refinement and eventual commitment to paper, print, and posterity.

fig. 2-1 Girolamo Frescobaldi, by Claude Mellan (1598–1688).

fig. 2-2 Interior of St. Peter's basilica, Rome, painted in 1730 by Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1692–1765).

That certainly seems to be the case with Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643), the organist at St. Peter's basilica in Rome from 1608 to his death, whose mature works were among the most distinctive embodiments of practices arising in the wake of the Counter Reformation. He was at once the most flamboyantly impressive keyboard composer of his time and the most characteristic, because it was characteristic of early seventeenth-century music to be flamboyantly impressive. The theatricalized quality that virtually all professional music making strove to project was as avidly cultivated by instrumentalists as by vocalists and those who wrote their material. The stock of the instrumental medium rose in consequence to the point where a major composer could be concerned primarily with music for instruments. Before the seventeenth century that had never happened.

Many of Frescobaldi's compositions circulated during his lifetime only in manuscript, but the composer did personally oversee the publication of sixteen volumes between 1608 and 1637. Of the sixteen, only four volumes contained vocal compositions: one of motets, one of madrigals, and two of continuo arias written during a brief sojourn in Florence. The remaining twelve were devoted to instrumental works. Eight of them were issued *in partitura*, that is, laid out in score with strict voice leading, in most cases with parts provided so that they could be performed by ensembles as well as at the keyboard. The remaining four were *libri d'intavolatura*, idiomatic keyboard compositions laid out like modern keyboard music on a pair of staves corresponding to the player's two hands, with free voice leading and other effects that precluded ensemble performance.

When he played them himself, the composer certainly adapted his ricercari, fantasias, and canzonas to the idiomatic style of his "intabulations." Nevertheless, the *libri d'intavolatura* contained Frescobaldi's most novel, most theatrical, and most elaborately "open-ended" compositions, and in that sense they reflected his most vividly over-the-top (i.e., "baroque") side. Such compositions came in two main types—*partite* (that is, variations) over a ground bass, and formally capricious, unpredictable *toccate*. We will sample both at their most flamboyant.

A visiting French viol player named André Maugars left a revealing description of the mature Frescobaldi at work (or at play) in 1639, "displaying a thousand kinds of inventions on his harpsichord [*spinettina*] while the organ stuck to the main tune," adding that "although his printed works give sufficient evidence of his skill, still, to get a true idea of his deep knowledge, one must hear him improvise toccatas full of admirable refinements and inventions."[1] Maugars well knew whereof he spoke. As an internationally famous musician from whom no written music survives, he if anyone knew that the musical daily business of seventeenth-century instrumentalists continued to be transacted *ex tempore*. On the same trip to Rome, Maugars enjoyed his own success before Pope Urban VIII, Frescobaldi's patron,

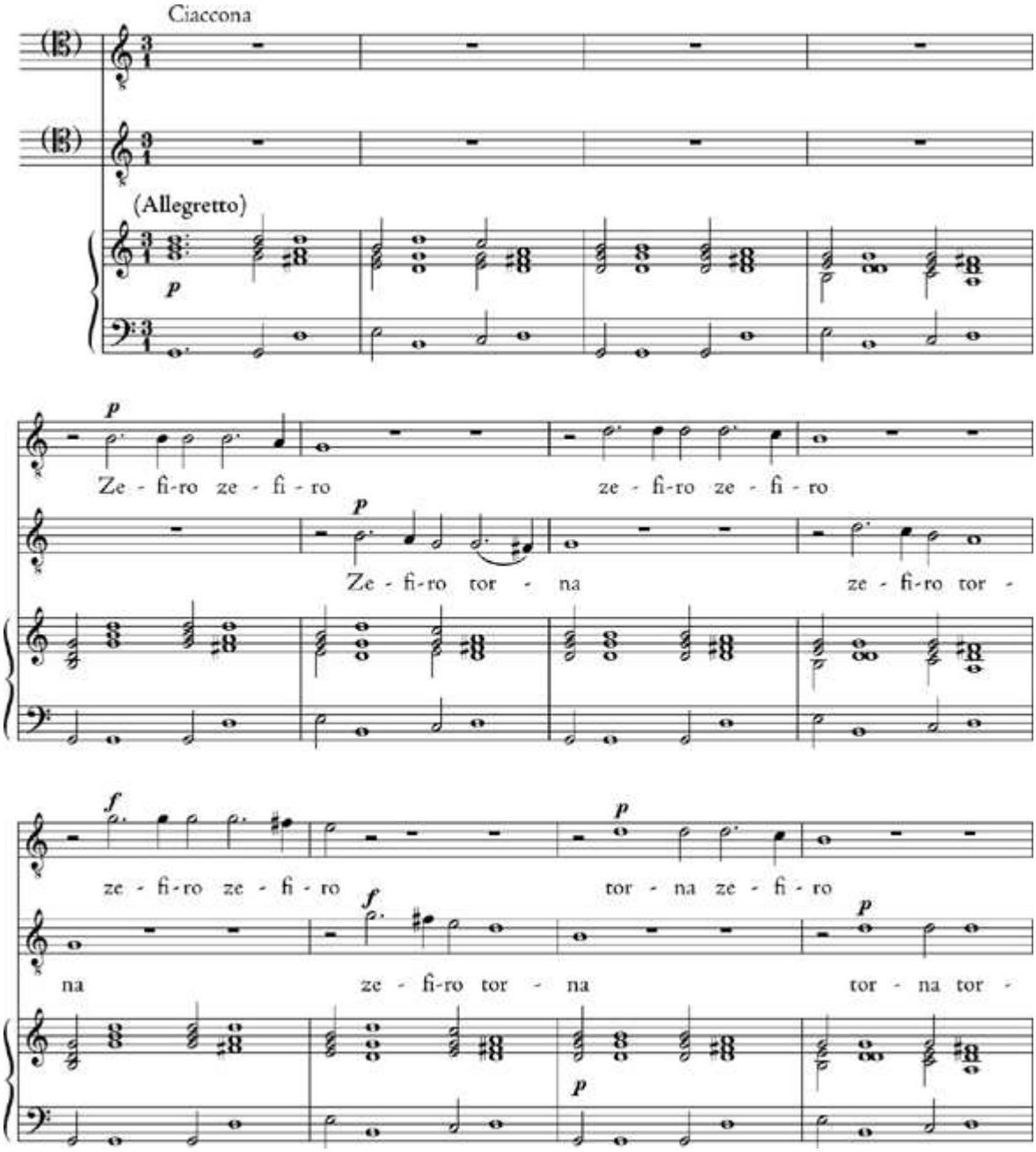
improvising in the organ loft during Mass on a theme presented as a challenge by the organist, who then repeated it as an accompaniment "while I varied it with so much imagination and with so many different rhythms and tempi that they were quite astonished." Frescobaldi's famous *Cento partite sopra passacagli ("A Hundred Variations on Passacalles")*, the concentrated residue of years of similar improvising, is nothing if not astonishing, with its frequent surprising forays into contrasting rhythms and tempi and its startling harmonic effects. It comes from the last of his keyboard publications, called *Toccate d'intavolatura di cembalo et organo, partite di diverse arie, e correnti, balletti, ciaccone, passacagli*, published in Rome in 1637. The title lists four other keyboard genres besides toccatas and partitas:

—The *corrente* was a dance in triple meter (*courante* in French) that could occur either with a quick step notated in or or in a more stately variant notated in with many hemiolas.

—The *balletto*, as Frescobaldi used the term, was a dignified dance of German origin (hence *allemande* in French), usually in a broad duple meter. Balletti and correnti were often cast in melodically related pairs, like the pavanes and galliards of the previous century.

—The *ciaccona* was a fast and furious dance in syncopated triple meter, which in the sixteenth century had been imported into Spanish and Italian courtly circles from the New World. (The first literary use of the word *chacona*, the Swiss music historian Lorenzo Bianconi has disclosed, came from a Spanish satire on Peruvian customs published in 1598.[2]) Its first appearance in a musical print was in an Italian guitar book of 1606, where it was given as a formula for singing poetry in the manner of an old-fashioned "aria."[3] As a dance, the ciaccona was built over repetitive chord progressions similar in practice to the traditional Italian dance tenors, and was considered so inveterately lascivious that it was banished—as an actual dance—from the Spanish stage. An air of forbidden fruit surrounded it thereafter, which is why it was the inevitable choice of Sacrati (or whoever it was who renovated *L'incoronazione di Poppea*) for the lubricious final duet. The Italian poet Giambattista Marino (1569–1625), whose highly mannered, flamboyant verses Monteverdi often set, aimed some mock curses at this "immodest, obscene dance, with its thousand twisted movements" in his epic *Adonis*: "Perish the foul inventor who first amongst us introduced this barbaric custom,...this impious profane game, which the *novo ispano* [i.e., the denizen of "New Spain," meaning the Americas] calls *ciaccona*!"[4] These lines were written in 1623. Nine years later, Monteverdi published his setting of Ottavio Rinuccini's imitation of Petrarch's famous sonnet *Zefiro torna* ("The breeze returns") in the form of a "ciacona" (Ex. 2-1), and from then on it was a major Italian medium for love poetry, for stage music, and for instrumental virtuosity.

—*Passacagli* is Italian for *passacalles*, a related Spanish genre consisting of variations on cadential patterns that apparently grew out of the habits of guitarists who accompanied courtly singers, and who introduced and bestrewed the songs with casual ritornellos—the kind of thing accompanists in today's nonliterate ("pop") genres call "vamping." Like today's popular guitarists and keyboardists, who often take off on their vamping figures for impressive flights of fancy, so the players of *passacagli* often elaborated them into long instrumental interludes, eventually into independent instrumental showpieces.



ex. 2-1 Claudio Monteverdi, *Zefiro torna*, beginning

The repetitive cadential phrases of the ciaccona and the passacagli were a natural for adaptation to traditional ground-bass techniques, and that is how they entered the domain of written music. The first literate instrumental adaptations of the two related genres were by Frescobaldi. His second *libro d'intavolatura*, published in 1627, contained both a set of *Partite sopra ciaccona* (roughly "variations on the chacona") and one of *Partite sopra passacagli* ("variations on passacalles"). Eventually the name of the latter variations genre was standardized in Italian as *passacaglia*, and the ciaccona, owing (as we shall see) to its many adaptations on the French stage, has become falsely but firmly identified with France and is now most widely known as the *chaconne*.

Frescobaldi's enormous *Cento partite* ("hundred variations") of 1637, though nominally another passacaglia set, actually mixes several of the genres just described. A total of 78 actual *passacagli* or varied two- or four-bar cadence figures alternate first with a *corrente* and then with some forty *ciaccona* progressions, producing a total far in excess of one hundred, from which the player was invited to choose ad libitum. As the composer wrote in the preface, "the passacaglias can be played separately, in accordance with what is most pleasing, by adjusting the tempo of one part to that of the other, and the same goes for the ciacconas."[5]

It is even possible that the word *cento* in the title was chosen for its resonance with the earlier Latin usage, chiefly

used in connection with church chant, which denotes not literally “one hundred” but rather a patchwork or mixture of formulas. The title, then, would mean something like “A mixed bag of variations on passacaglias [and other things]” or “Passacaglias mixed with other ground-bass formulas.” In any case, Frescobaldi’s fanciful mixture of sameness and contrast gave instrumental music access to a whole new temporal plane, and a newly dramatized character. This was music with real “content,” not just an accessory to vocal performances or a liturgical time-filler.

Yet tonally speaking, and in keeping with its character as compendium rather than a work of fixed content, Frescobaldi’s mixed bag is extremely, even disconcertingly, loose. The first set of passacagli, as well as the corrente that they surround, are in D minor. A sudden cadence to what we call the “relative major” on F, duly labeled “altro tono” (“the other mode”), leads to the first section labeled ciaccona, also in F. From there on the tonal behavior of the composition is altogether unpredictable, as is the final cadence on E. This lack of “tonal unity” has led some writers to suggest that the work is no “composition” at all, but just an assortment of goods. Other writers have even suggested that the components were printed in the wrong order as the result of “some sort of mishap at the printer’s office,” to cite one scholar’s particularly rash proposal.[6] The composer’s presence on the scene, and his presumable role as proofreader, makes this somewhat implausible. While granting that the performer had many options besides the printed order (“in accordance with what is most pleasing,” as the composer allowed), the printed order must surely be counted as one of the available options. The only conclusion the evidence supports is that the “tonal unity” we look for now in an extended composition was not (yet) considered a necessary criterion of coherence for works of this type. Ex. 2-2 shows the final section, in E. Note the cadences in every other bar. Their regularity is in fact a guide to tempo; from their placement we can tell, for example, that the note values following the triple meter signature should be read at *doppio movimiento* or double speed.

Notes:

(1) Maugars’s whole letter, translated by Walter H. Bishop, may be found in Weiss and Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd ed., p. 165–68.

(2) Lorenzo Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. David Bryant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 101.

(3) Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 103.

(4) Trans. by R. Taruskin from the Italian given in Bianconi, p. 102.

(5) Quoted in Richard Hudson, *Passacaglio and Ciaconna from Guitar Music to Italian Keyboard Variations in the Seventeenth Century* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 237.

(6) Hudson, *Passacaglio and Ciaconna*, p. 237.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

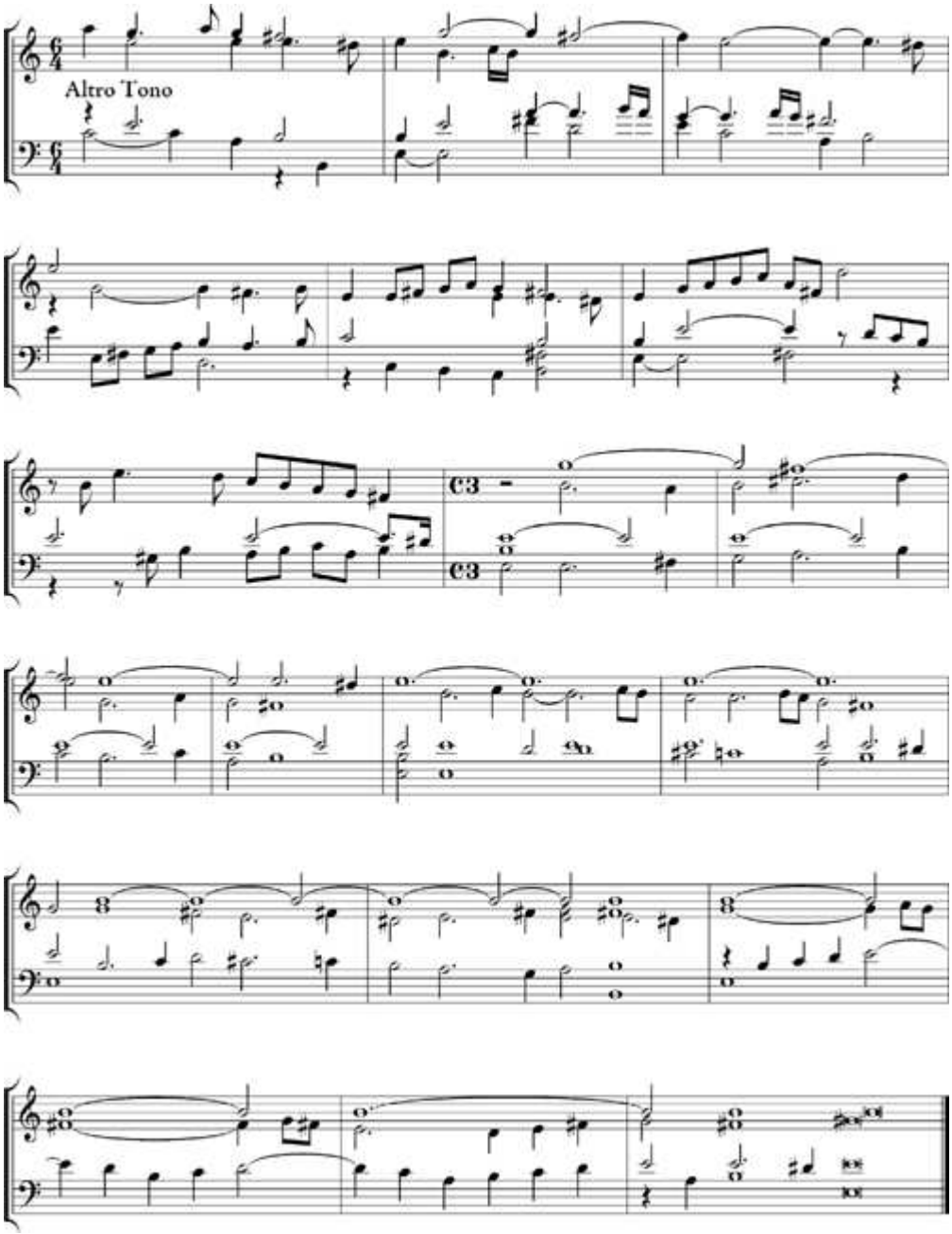
Toccata

Girolamo Frescobaldi

Michelangelo Rossi

THE TOCCATA

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

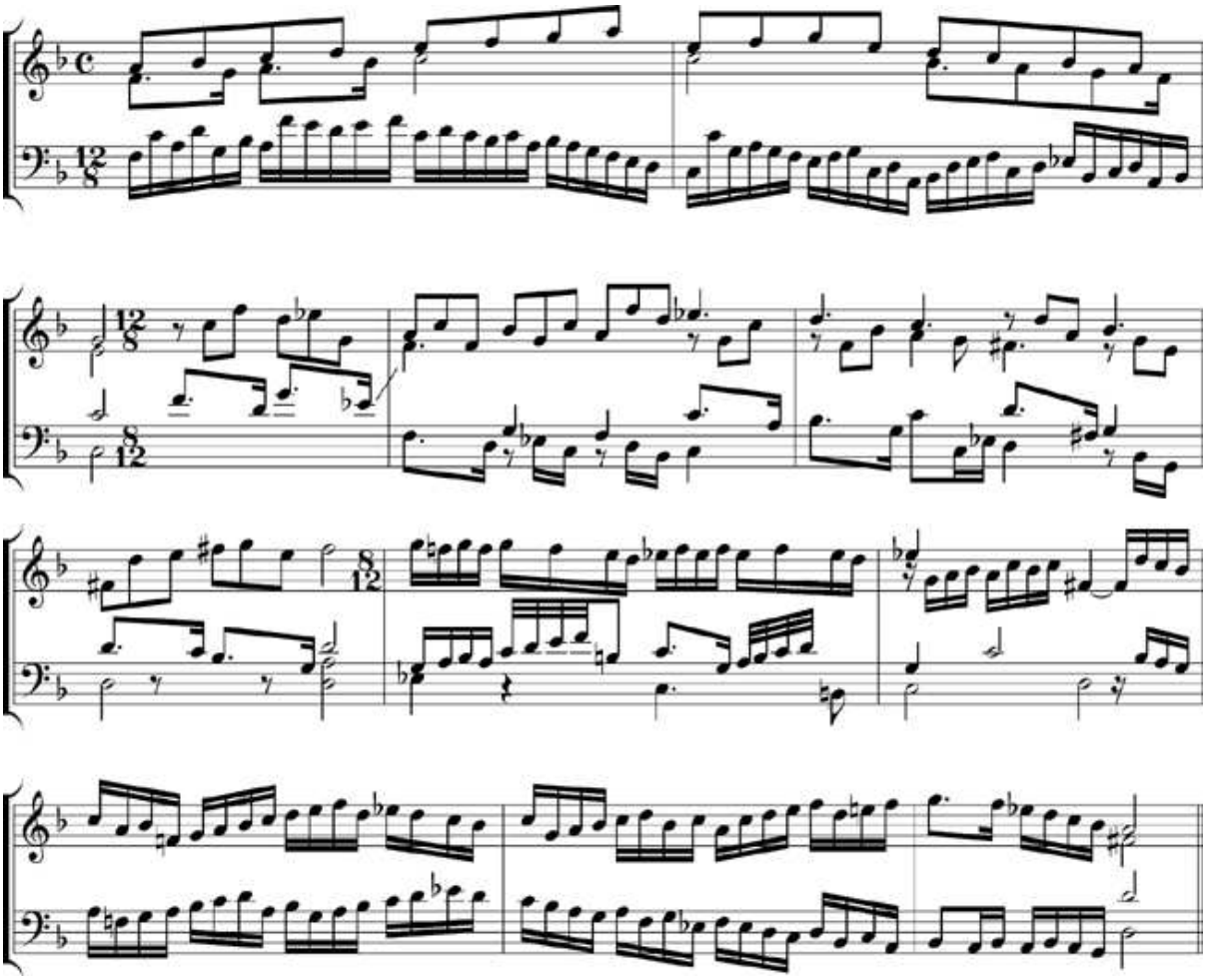


ex. 2-2 Girolamo Frescobaldi, *Cento partite sopra passacagli*, conclusion

The earliest recorded use of the word "toccata" in a musical source occurs in a lute collection of 1536, where it refers

to the kind of brief improvisatory prelude formerly called *preambulum* or *ricercar* or even *tastar de corde* ("checking to see if the strings are in tune"). The new term was evidently coined to substitute for "ricercar" when the latter term had become firmly associated with "strict" imitative compositions in motet style. Over the next hundred years the term saw a variety of uses; we have already seen it applied by Monteverdi to the curtain-raising flourish before his *Orfeo*, a kind of theatrical preambulum. Later on, pieces called "toccata" achieved greater dimensions and independent status, but they always remained "free" and open in form, deriving their continuity from discontinuity, to put it paradoxically. That is, they relied on contrast—in texture, meter, tempo, tonality—between short striking sections, rather than the continuous development of motives, to sustain interest. "Striking" meant virtuosic as well; toccatas, like the preluding improvisations of old, were often festive display pieces that turned the very act of playing (or "touching"—*toccare*—the keys) into a form of theater.

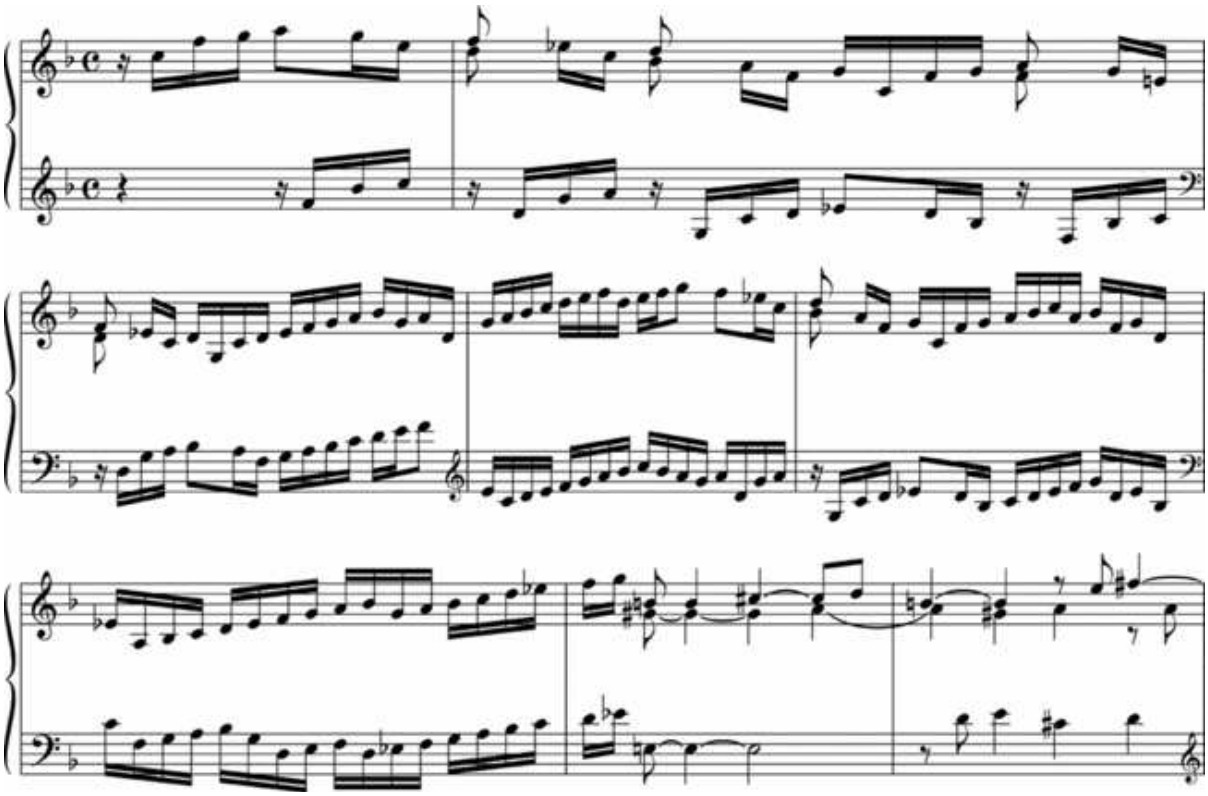
Frescobaldi inherited the toccata from Claudio Merulo (1533–1604), whose two books of toccatas, published in Rome shortly before Frescobaldi took up his duties at St. Peter's, had established what would become the genre's basic modus operandi as an alternation of "free" chordal and "strict" imitative sections. With his horror of regularity, Frescobaldi turned Merulo's placid interchanges into another sort of "mixed bag," in this case a dazzling bag of tricks. In the very lengthy and detailed preface to his first book of toccatas, the epochal *Primo libro d'intavolatura* ("First book of intabulations," 1615), reprinted in every subsequent book, Frescobaldi explicitly gave the performer the last say as to the form his toccatas took, just as he himself must have done when performing them. "In the toccatas," he wrote, "I have taken care not only that they be abundantly provided with different passages and affections but also that each one of the said passages can be played separately; the performer is thus under no obligation to finish them all but can end wherever he thinks best."[7]



ex. 2-3 Girolamo Frescobaldi, Toccata IX (*Toccata nona*), mm. 11–22

This option would seem to apply particularly to the famous *Toccata nona* or ninth toccata from Frescobaldi's second book (1637), which set a new and widely emulated standard for fireworks (Ex. 2-3). It begins with a bit of cursory lip service to imitation between the hands, but motivic consistency is not maintained past the second bar; and although the piece ends where it began, in F, the tonal vagaries along the way are seemingly as wayward as possible. It is that

sense of wandering through a harmonic labyrinth, as well as the mounting rhythmic figuration and the frequent superimposition of conflicting divisions of the beat ("threes against twos"), that must have prompted the curious note of mingled self-congratulation and lampoonery that Frescobaldi appends in conclusion: *Non senza fatiga si giunge al fine* ("You won't make it to the end without tiring"). The many apparent changes of time signature along the way are really proportion signs: , for example, literally means 12 sixteenth notes in the time of eight, later cancelled by its seemingly inscrutable reciprocal, . It is the sort of thing indicated in more modern notation by the use of triplet signs and the like (Ex. 2-3).

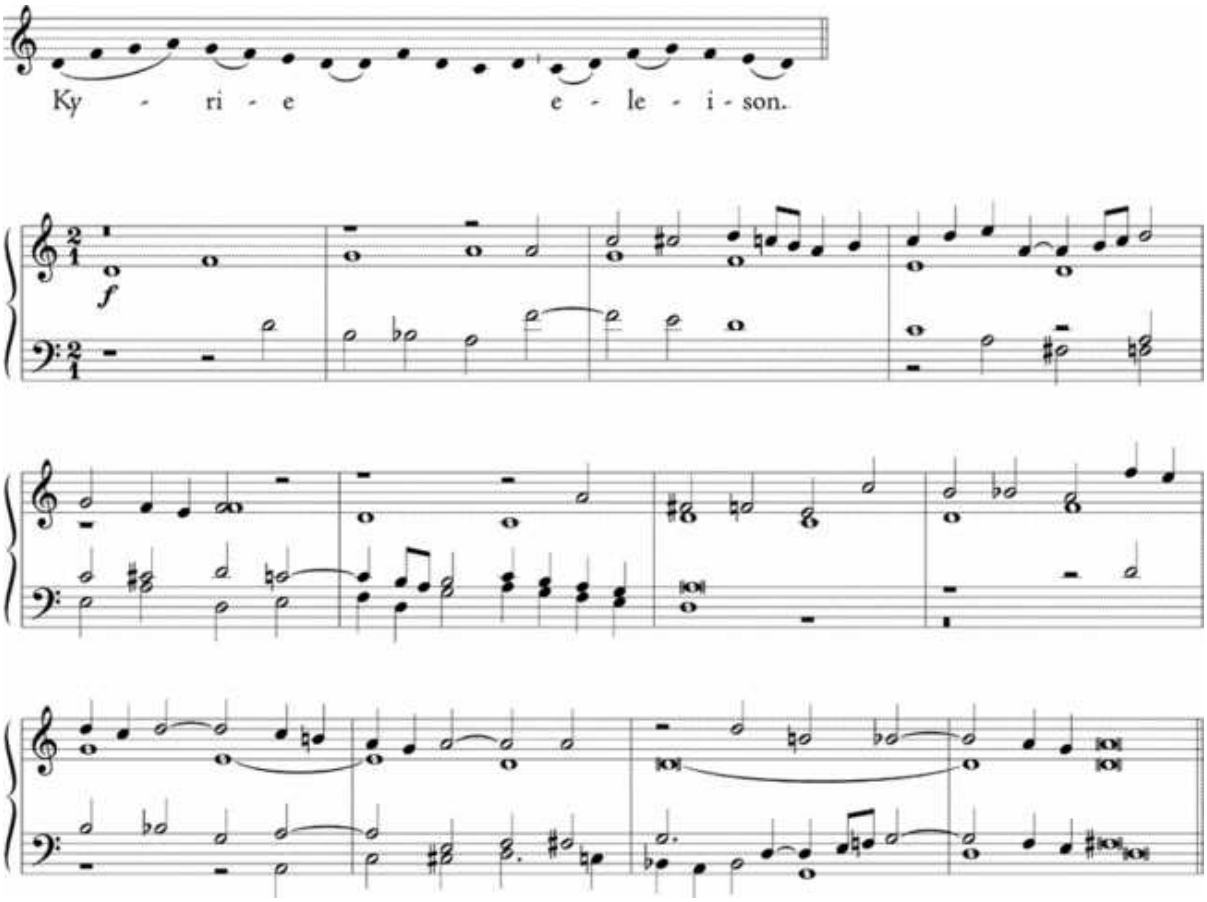


ex. 2-4 Michelangelo Rossi, Toccata VII (*Toccata settima*), mm. 9–16

In the hands of Frescobaldi's pupils like Michelangelo Rossi (1602–56), the toccata could become truly bizarre, seemingly in the spirit of the late polyphonic madrigal. In Rossi's *Toccata settima*, the seventh toccata in his first *libro d'intavolatura* (published in Rome without a date, most likely around 1640) the weird harmonic successions of Carlo Gesualdo's madrigals or the monodies of Sigismondo d'India are elevated to the level of broad sectional contrasts (Ex. 2-4). Music like this is clearly contrived to knock listeners for a loop, the way an outlandish twist of plot might do the spectators in a drama.

In Frescobaldi, stupefying chromatic effects are most often found in a special subgenre called *toccate di durezze e ligature* ("toccatas with dissonances and suspensions") that inhabits a very different expressive world from the histrionic self-assertion of the showpiece toccatas. Such pieces are found among the other toccatas in Frescobaldi's *libri d'intavolatura* (and they are found in the work of some earlier organists as well), but they may be seen in their natural habitat, so to speak, in his largest collection, *Fiori musicali* ("Musical flowers," 1635), which contains music designed for specific liturgical use, arranged in three "organ Masses."

This wonderfully suggestive volume enables us to imagine the way in which organists, still for the most part working *ex tempore*, actually accompanied the church service in the years following the Counter Reformation. Each Frescobaldi organ Mass begins with a short flourish of a toccata (*Toccata avanti la Messa*) that functions as an *intonazione*, a fancy way to give the choir its pitch. The next (and longest) section is a complete and very old-fashioned cantus firmus setting of the Kyrie, the organist's equivalent of the choir's *stile antico*. Ex. 2-5 shows the beginning of the Kyrie setting from the second organ Mass in *Fiori musicali*, the *Messa della Madonna* ("Mass of the Virgin Mary"), based on the Gregorian Kyrie IX ("Cum jubilo").



ex. 2-5 Girolamo Frescobaldi, *Messa della Madonna* (in *Fiori musicali*), opening section of Kyrie, mm. 13–23

Then follow a lively *Canzon dopo la Pistola*, a "canzona [for playing] after the Epistle [and before the Gospel]," to preface or stand in for the Gradual; a strictly imitative *Recercar dopo il Credo*, a "ricercar [for playing] after the Credo," to introduce the Offertory and accompany the collection (sometimes itself preceded by a short toccata, giving the effect of what was later known as a prelude and fugue); and to conclude, a *Canzone post il Comune*, a "canzona [for playing] after [the singing of] the communion [chant]," also sometimes introduced by a little toccata, to accompany the distribution of the wine and wafer. The *canzona*, a name descending from the French *chanson* (song), denoted a catchy, lightweight piece in many sections.

The *toccata di durezze e ligature*, sometimes called the *toccata chromatica*, is played *per le levatione*, "for the Elevation," the moment when the priest performs the transubstantiating miracle that turns the wine and wafer into the blood and body of Christ, as his ordination empowers him to do. It is the most mysterious moment of the Mass, a moment of sublime contemplation, and it is that mood of self-abasement before a truth that passes human understanding that the elevation toccata, in its unearthly harmony, is designed to capture, or induce.

The Elevation toccata from Frescobaldi's *Messa della Domenica*, the Mass for Sundays throughout the year, is both his most chromatic composition and the one most poignantly riddled with suspensions. Its obsessive contemplation of an "irrational" idea, in which an apparent leading tone turns tail and descends dissonantly through semitones (an effect later classified by German theorists, among other "unnatural progressions," as the *passus duriusculus*, "the hard way down"), makes the toccata an epitome of the Counter Reformation ideal, long since associated with St. Theresa, that envisaged "religious experience" as deeply felt emotion on the very threshold of pain.

Notes:

(7) Quoted in Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 95.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck

Fantasia

Samuel Scheidt

SWEELINCK—HIS PATRIMONY AND HIS PROGENY

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Surely the most spectacular workout ever given the *passus duriusculus* was in a *Fantasia chromatica* by the Dutch organist Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621), Frescobaldi's older contemporary, who succeeded his father as chief organist at Amsterdam's Oude Kerk (Old Church) while still in his teens, and held it until his death. Unlike Frescobaldi, Sweelinck was not a church organist in the full sense of the word. The Dutch Reformed Church, Calvinist in outlook, forbade the use of "figural" (polyphonic or instrumental) music during services. Rather, Sweelinck was employed to perform what amounted to daily organ recitals—an hour of uninterrupted music making—to follow the morning and evening services. Like Frescobaldi, and like every other keyboard virtuoso of the day, Sweelinck was best known for his improvisations, and the works he noted down and allowed to circulate (in manuscript only) represented the skimmed cream of this daily exercise.

For publication Sweelinck composed a great deal of vocal music, most of it secular and none of it meant for actual service use. It was intended for the international music trade and was therefore composed to texts in international languages: French (chansons and metrical psalms), Latin (motets), and Italian (madrigals). Although some of his publications were equipped with organ accompaniments to make them commercially viable, none of Sweelinck's music is actually "concerted." His vocal music is all fully polyphonic in the sixteenth-century style; never does the instrumental bass play an independent role, nor did Sweelinck publish so much as a single solo song or monody. That makes him the youngest continental composer never to write in the concerted or monodic styles of vocal music, and he therefore looms in retrospect as the last of the legendary "Netherlanders" of the polyphonic Golden Age.

But his dual preoccupation with old-fashioned vocal music and extremely up-to-date keyboard compositions puts Sweelinck in a position comparable to no other Netherlander, but rather like that of William Byrd, his older English contemporary. The similarity was not fortuitous. While he never met Byrd, Sweelinck was well acquainted with several other English composers who had settled in the southerly (Catholic) part of the Netherlands that is now Belgium. Peter Philips (1560–1628) came to Brussels in 1589 in the entourage of a recusant nobleman, Lord Thomas Paget, who had fled England to avoid religious persecution. After Paget's death the next year, Philips relocated in Antwerp. He was joined in 1612 by John Bull (1562–1628), who also claimed to be a religious refugee but is now thought to have been evading some sort of "morals" charge (possibly adultery or pederasty). Philips and Bull were the conduits through which the very advanced art of the Elizabethan keyboard composers established, through Sweelinck, a continental base. Sweelinck composed variations on a pavan (a slow keyboard dance) by Philips, and after his death Bull based a fantasia on a theme by Sweelinck.

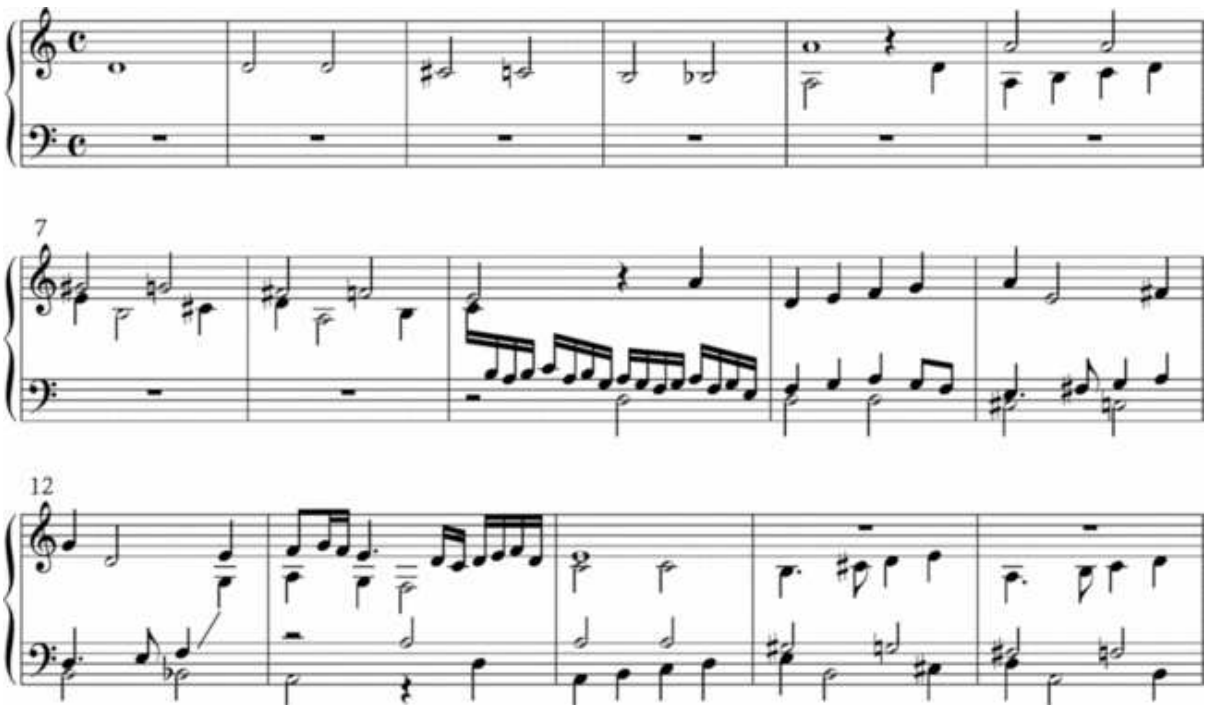
Once he had absorbed the English styles and genres, moreover, Sweelinck's work began circulating in England along with native wares. A fantasia by Sweelinck is found in the so-called Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, a mammoth collection of English keyboard music and the chief source for much of Philips and Bull. Its present name comes from its present location, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, but it may actually have been assembled at the Fleet Prison in London, where its compiler, Francis Tregian, was confined for recusancy from 1614 until his death three years later. "Virginal" was the name of the English version of the harpsichord: a small box, often in the shape of a pentagon, that contained only a single set of strings. Several virginals of various sizes were often piled atop one another to gain a fuller range of pitch and color. The origin of the name is obscure, but it was popularly associated with the girls who were most often taught to play it as a social grace, and it became the inevitable pretext for a lot of

coarse punning.

fig. 2-3 Pentagonal virginal (Italian, 1585) at the Russell Collection, University of Edinburgh.

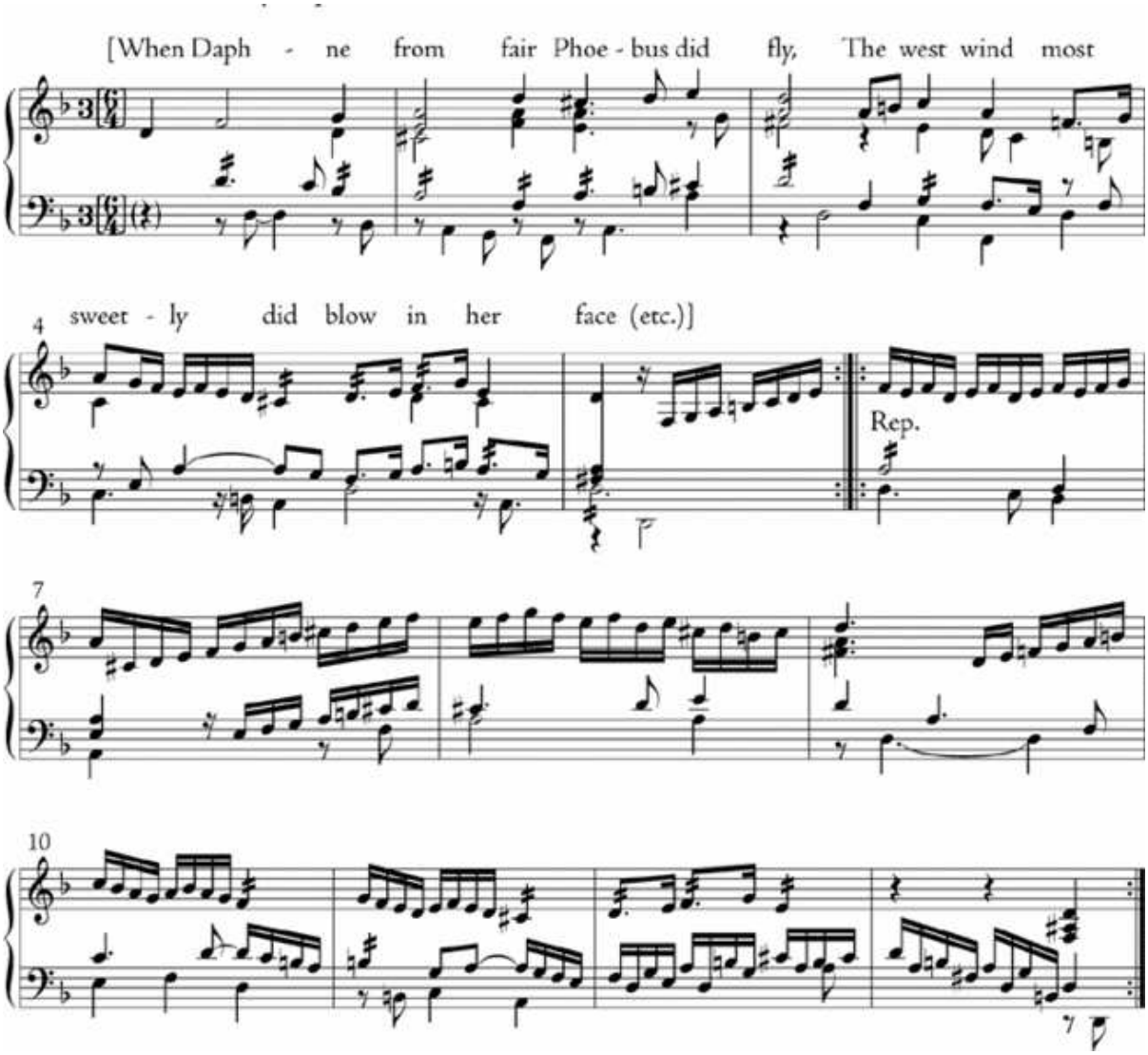
The Sweelinck fantasia—one of many, especially by English composers, that used the solmization hexachord (ut–re–mi–fa–sol–la) as cantus firmus—was entered in the Fitzwilliam manuscript in 1612. Equally a tour de force of keyboard virtuosity and of counterpoint, it contains twenty officially numbered statements of the familiar scale segment, both ascending and descending, in various transpositions, diminutions, and syncopated forms, and against many countersubjects and accompaniment figures. And it harbors many hidden variations as well, including strettos. More organ-specific yet are Sweelinck's four fantasias "op de manier van een echo" (in the manner of an echo), or echo-fantasias, in which the middle section of the piece consists of little phrases marked *forte* and repeated *piano*, calling the multiple keyboards or manuals of the organ into play. The effect is transferable to a multiple-manual harpsichord as well, and Sweelinck's fantasias are often played on that instrument. But on the organ, with its spatially separated ranks of pipes, such passages come out as literally antiphonal, reflecting the old Venetian polychoral style.

The Chromatic Fantasia (Ex. 2-6), on the *passus duriusculus* tetrachord, pitches the titular chromatic descent on D, A, and E, so that all twelve notes of the chromatic scale are eventually employed in stages over the course of the composition. The piece is thus a magnificent reconciliation of the venerable academic counterpoint of the sixteenth century with the burgeoning affective or pathetic style of the seventeenth. It is also a summit of virtuosity, displaying the cantus firmus at four rhythmic levels (from whole notes to eighth notes in the transcription) and reaching a peak of rhythmic excitement with sextolets (sixteenth notes grouped in sixes like double-time triplets) and thirty-second notes, very much in the style of English keyboard figuration.



ex. 2-6 Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, *Fantasia chromatica*, mm. 1–16

English sextolets can be seen in their natural habitat in Giles Farnaby's *Daphne*, from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book (Ex. 2-7). This is a set of variations (or divisions, to use the contemporary word) on a bawdy popular song that retold the myth, popularized by Ovid, of Apollo's (or Phoebus's) lascivious pursuit of the nymph Daphne and her rescue by the earth-goddess Gaea, who transformed her into a laurel tree. These variation sets were the virginalist composer's most characteristic genre. Their nearest precedent were sets of *diferencias*—Spanish for divisions—on popular songs that were published by Iberian lutenists and organists beginning with Luis de Narváez in 1538; the most famous such set is the one by the blind organist Juan de Cabezón on the folk tune *Guárdame las vacas*—"Watch over my cattle"—printed in 1578, twelve years after his death. Farnaby (1563–1640), a "joiner" or carpenter by trade, was eventually a builder of virginals as well as a performer on them and composer for them. His extant work is preserved almost complete in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book and is hardly found elsewhere.



ex. 2-7 Giles Farnaby, *Daphne*, mm. 1–13

Whether through Farnaby's work or Byrd's, or through personal contact with Philips and Bull, this type of variation writing passed to Sweelinck, who wrote the best-known examples of it, of which some are still played by organ recitalists today. The set on the French love song "Est-ce Mars?" uses a tune known far and wide in many guises. (Farnaby wrote a version under the silly name "The New Sa-Hoo"—i.e., "Say Who?") The words as Sweelinck knew them mean, "Could this be Mars, the great battle-god, whom I espy? To judge by his arms alone, so I'd think. But at the same time it's clear from his glances that it's more likely Cupid here, not Mars." Sweelinck is just as droll and whimsical as Farnaby and reaches the obligatory rhythmic peak with sextolets; but unlike his English counterpart he is concerned to show off his contrapuntal technique as well as his eccentric fancies, with a suggestion of stretto as

early as the second variation and a brief canon in the last. Oddly enough, and with only a couple of exceptions, the only sacred melodies to which Sweelinck devoted variation sets were Lutheran chorales. This unexpected preoccupation on the part of a non-German, non-Lutheran organist seems to have come about as a by-product of Sweelinck's extensive teaching activity. He was much sought after by pupils, to whom he devoted a great deal of time, and his best ones were German. For a time the three principal organ posts in Hamburg, the largest North German city, were all held by former pupils of "Master Jan Pieterszoon of Amsterdam," which led Johann Mattheson, an eighteenth-century composer and music historian, to dub Sweelinck the "hamburgischen Organistenmacher" (the Hamburg-organist-maker).[8]

fig. 2-4 Samuel Scheidt, woodcut from *Tabulatura nova* (Hamburg: Michael Hering, 1624), the earliest German keyboard publication (its title notwithstanding) printed in open mensural score rather than actual organ tablature. The sheet of music contains a four-part canon in contrary motion on the final words of the Te Deum prayer: *In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternim* ("In thee, O Lord, have I trusted; let me not ever be confounded").

With his prize pupil, Samuel Scheidt (1587–1654), who came from the Saxon town of Halle in eastern Germany and

apprenticed himself to Sweelinck in Amsterdam around 1608 or 1609, Sweelinck engaged in some friendly rivalry, recalling the emulation-games of the early Netherlanders. Scheidt's monumental organ collection *Tabulatura nova*, issued in three volumes in 1624, contains examples of every genre that Sweelinck had practiced, including those, like the echo-fantasia, that Sweelinck had pioneered. The first volume even has a set of variations on a "cantio gallica" (French song) that turns out to be *Est-ce Mars*?. It was no doubt a tribute or a memorial to Sweelinck, but the pupil's set is twice as long and twice as elaborate as the teacher's. Also unlike Sweelinck's, Scheidt's set begins with a bald statement of the "theme" before proceeding to the ten *variationes* (singular *variatio*), a term that in fact first appears in print (with its modern meaning, anyway) in the *Tabulatura nova*.

Yet since Scheidt worked for the Lutheran church, which unlike the Calvinist or "Reformed" church integrated organ-playing into its actual liturgy, the *Tabulatura Nova* contains many works in genres that Sweelinck did not compose in, and that Scheidt presumably picked up from the work of German predecessors, particularly those from the Catholic southern regions of Germany, like Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612), who came from Nuremberg and studied with Andrea Gabrieli in Venice, or Christian Erbach (1568–1635), the Augsburg cathedral organist. The most important of these liturgical genres were the chant-based "versets," or organ settings of alternate lines of text in Kyries, Glorias, hymns, and Magnificats. These were interpolated—*alternatim*-fashion, as it was called—into choral or congregational performances. It was yet another instance of an "oral," extemporized genre (one that in Germany went back at least as far as the fifteenth century) that had only lately begun the process of transformation—or ossification—into a literate one. A great many of these snippets, organized into "organ Masses" and "organ Vespers," can be found in Book III of *Tabulatura nova*. As the largest collection of German liturgical organ music of the seventeenth century, Scheidt's volumes could be thought of as the Protestant counterpart to Frescobaldi's *Fiori musicali*, which came out about a decade later.

Notes:

(8) Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* (Hamburg, 1740), quoted in R. Tollefsen and P. Dirksen, "Sweelinck," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XXIV (2nd ed., New York: Grove, 2000), p. 771.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Chorale settings

Samuel Scheidt

LUTHERAN ADAPTATIONS: THE CHORALE PARTITA

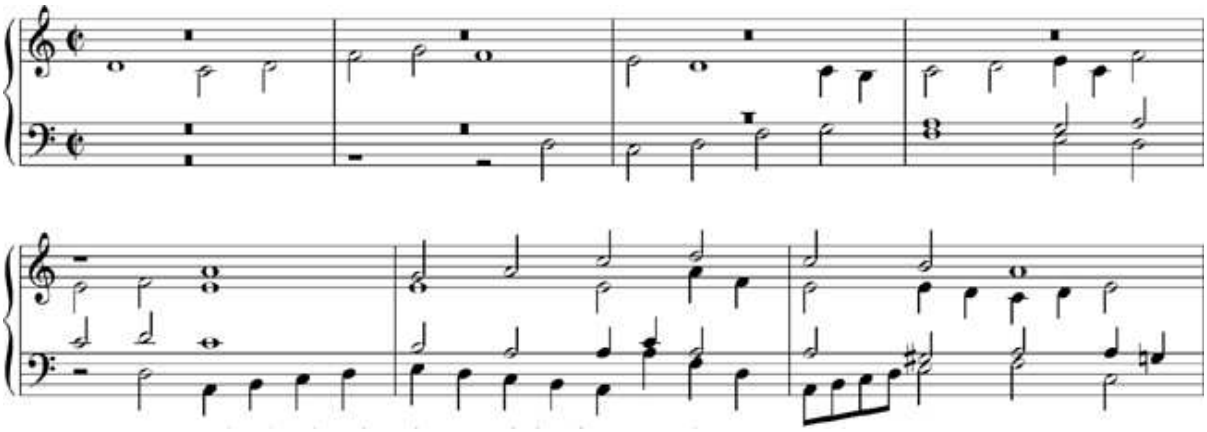
Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Most of Sweelinck's chorale compositions are found in a huge manuscript of organ scores, now at the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek (German National Library) in Berlin, dating most likely from the early 1630s. It is otherwise devoted to chorale variations by a dozen or so of his German pupils, some in the form of collaborative sets, with individual variations contributed by both master and disciples.

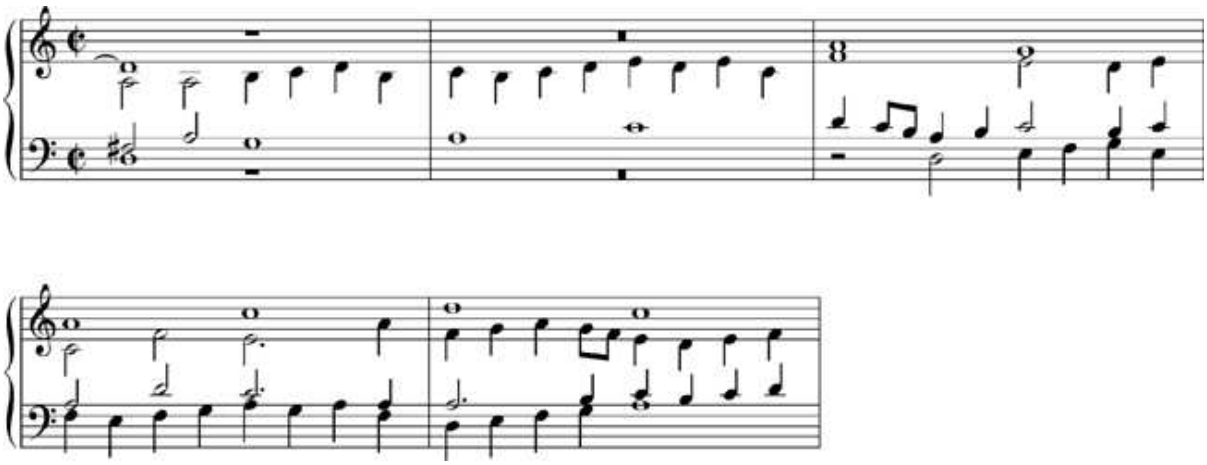
In all these works, both Sweelinck's own and those of the pupils, the basic technique is the same. The variations correspond to the verses of the chorale. In each of them the traditional melody is treated strictly—that is, with little or no embellishment—as a cantus firmus in a single voice. Where the secular variations keep the tune consistently in the uppermost voice, the chorale variations not only allow the lower voices to be tune-bearers in the old cantus-firmus manner but also allow the hymn tune to migrate through the texture as verse succeeds verse. The accompanying voices vary freely in number from a single one (producing a two-part or "bicinium" texture) on upwards. Sometimes they incorporate aspects of the chorale tune, thus integrating it into the polyphony; sometimes they contrast with it as countersubjects.

This, too, was a technique that Sweelinck had picked up from the English and passed along to his pupils. It corresponds exactly to the hymn-setting technique of John Bull, which derived in turn from that of Bull's teacher, John Blitheman (ca. 1525–91), a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal from 1558 to his death. Tracing it gives us a particularly crisp example of the way in which traditions of personal emulation can serve as the means through which the larger, less personal phenomenon of stylistic dissemination takes place. A technique that English organists had developed for accompanying and supplementing choral hymnody was transferred in stages to a new geographical terrain and a new, music-hungry church, which had an even greater need for organ music to supplement a choral hymnody that had spread from the elite choir to full congregational participation. Sweelinck was the middleman who brokered the transaction.

The end result was the Lutheran chorale partita, as practiced first by Scheidt, most spectacularly by J. S. Bach, and by Lutheran organist-composers to this day. Scheidt's partita on the "cantio sacra" *Christ lag in Todesbanden* ("Christ lay in death's bondage," a venerable Easter hymn: Ex. 2-8) comes from the second volume of *Tabulatura nova*, printed exactly one hundred years after the earliest polyphonic settings of the chorale had appeared. In five verses, Scheidt's set begins with two connected settings of the chorale in the highest part: the first is an integrated motetlike setting with some old-fashioned *Vorimitation* (imitative foreshadowing of the cantus firmus) in the accompanying voices, of a kind that Luther himself would surely have recognized; the second is more à la Sweelinck, with successive lines of the chorale set in relief against a series of ever more rhythmically active countersubjects, each treated in imitation (Exx. 2-8a-b).



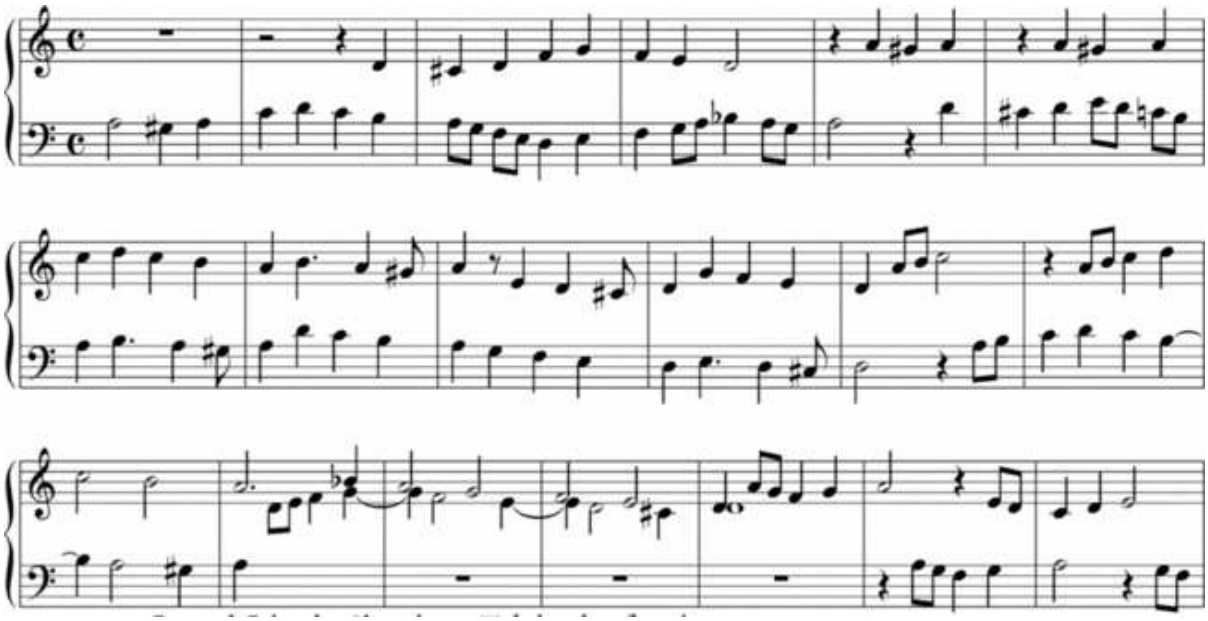
ex. 2-8a Samuel Scheidt, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, first versus, mm. 1–7



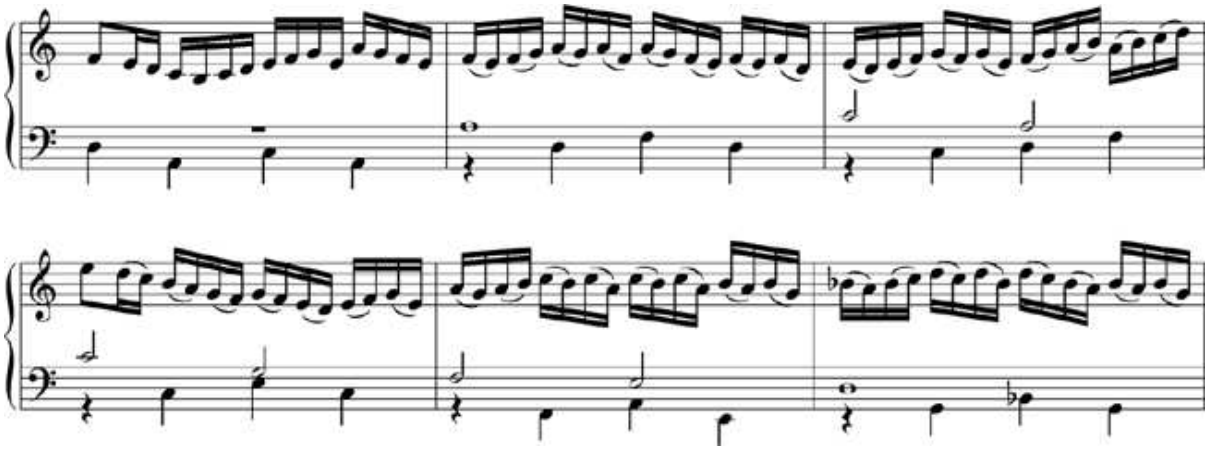
ex. 2-8b Samuel Scheidt, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, second versus, mm. 1–5

The third verse, the centerpiece, is a "free" variation: an intricate bicinium in which the individual phrases of the chorale are independently developed in dialogue between the player's hands, sometimes broken up into motives, sometimes superseded altogether by episodes (Ex. 2-8c). The fourth and fifth variation return to a stricter cantus-firmus style. In the fourth, after a brief foreshadowing in the bass, the cantus firmus, placed in the middle voice (the "tenor"), is pitted against two exceptionally florid outer voices that sometimes develop countersubjects in imitation, sometimes contrast with one another as well as with the subject, creating toward the end an "obbligato" texture with a fast-flowing line above the tenor, a slower "walking bass" beneath it (Ex. 2-8d).

The fifth and last variation is presented and harmonized in a very unusual fashion that could be considered either tonally wayward (to adopt the viewpoint and expectations of an observer contemporary with Scheidt) or tonally "progressive" (to adopt the viewpoint and expectations of an observer contemporary with us). It is a fascinating case to consider, for the difference between the two historical and aesthetic vantage points is rarely so clear-cut or easily identified. Do we get more aesthetic gratification from the standpoint that sees the piece as intriguingly capricious or "deviant," or from the one that sees it groping, so to speak, toward a more modern (familiar? higher? more integrated?) conception of tonality? Can we somehow view it from both standpoints at once?

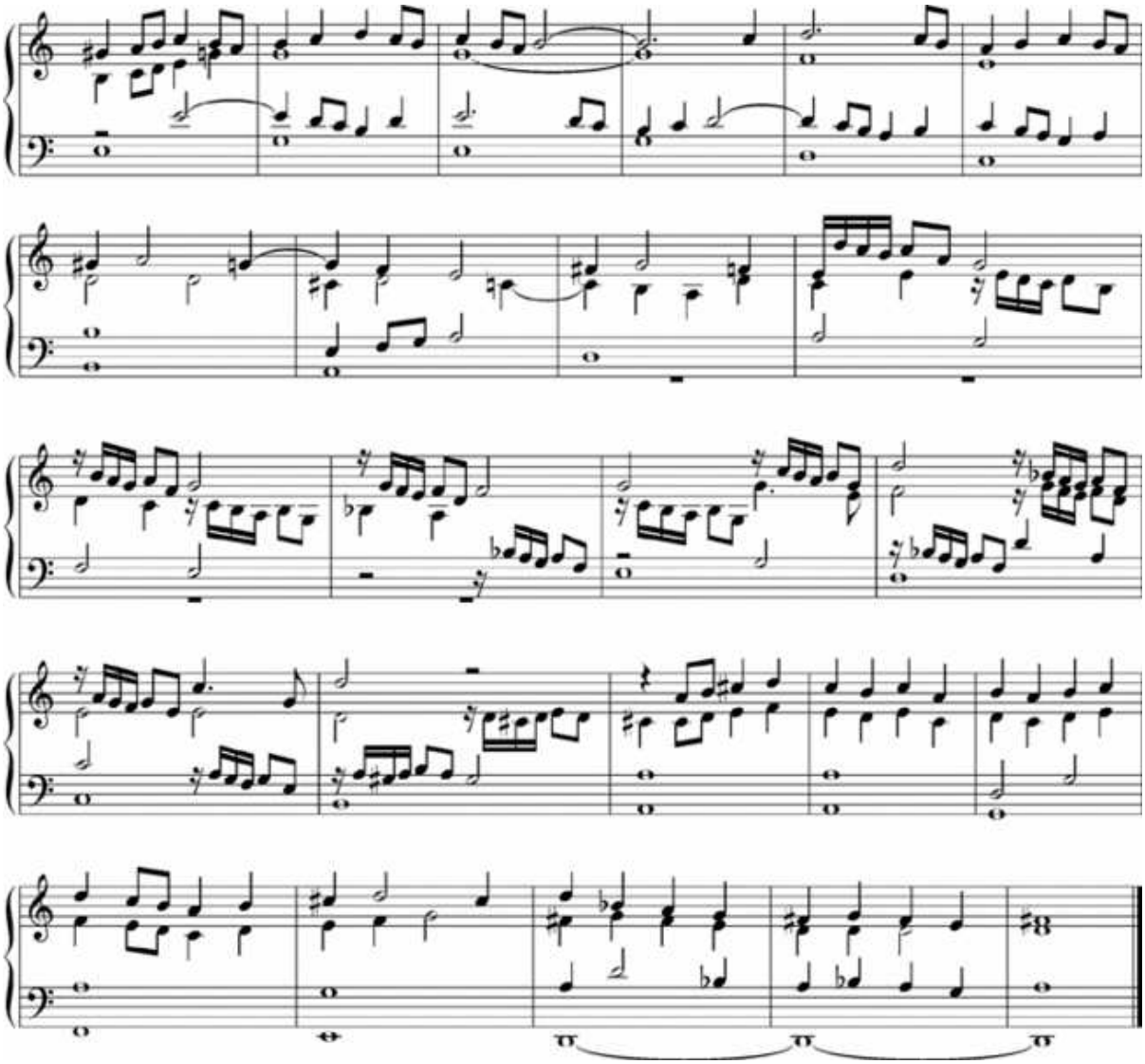


ex. 2-8c Samuel Scheidt, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, third versus, mm. 1–19



ex. 2-8d Samuel Scheidt, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, fourth versus, mm. 39–44

Here is how the piece works. The bass carries the complete cantus firmus (though the "cantus" or top voice and the "tenor" also get to quote phrases from it), but its various constituent phrases are independently transposed. The music thus seems to oscillate between implied mode finals on D, on A (the upper fifth), and on G (the lower fifth), staking out the tonal areas we now think of as "tonic," "dominant," and "subdominant." Particularly "modern" in its tonal effect is the last phrase in the bass, ending on A (the dominant) so as to prepare the grandiose final cadence (Ex. 2-8e).



ex. 2-8e Samuel Scheidt, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, fifth versus, mm. 65–end

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Johann Hermann Schein

Michael Praetorius

THE CHORALE CONCERTO

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The Lutheran chorale partita had its vocal counterpart as well, in which sacred genres that had developed elsewhere were adapted to specifically Lutheran use. The result was the so-called chorale concerto, a mixed vocal-instrumental genre that in its more modest specimens seemed a direct outgrowth of Viadana's pioneering *Cento concerti ecclesiastici* of 1602 (pirated by a German publisher seven years later) and that in its more opulent ones could vie with the most extravagant outpourings of the Venetians. Its two main exponents, besides Scheidt, were Michael Praetorius (1571–1621), organist to the Duke of Brunswick (Braunschweig), and Johann Hermann Schein (1586–1630), the cantor of St. Thomas's School in Leipzig, where J. S. Bach would occupy the same position a hundred years later.

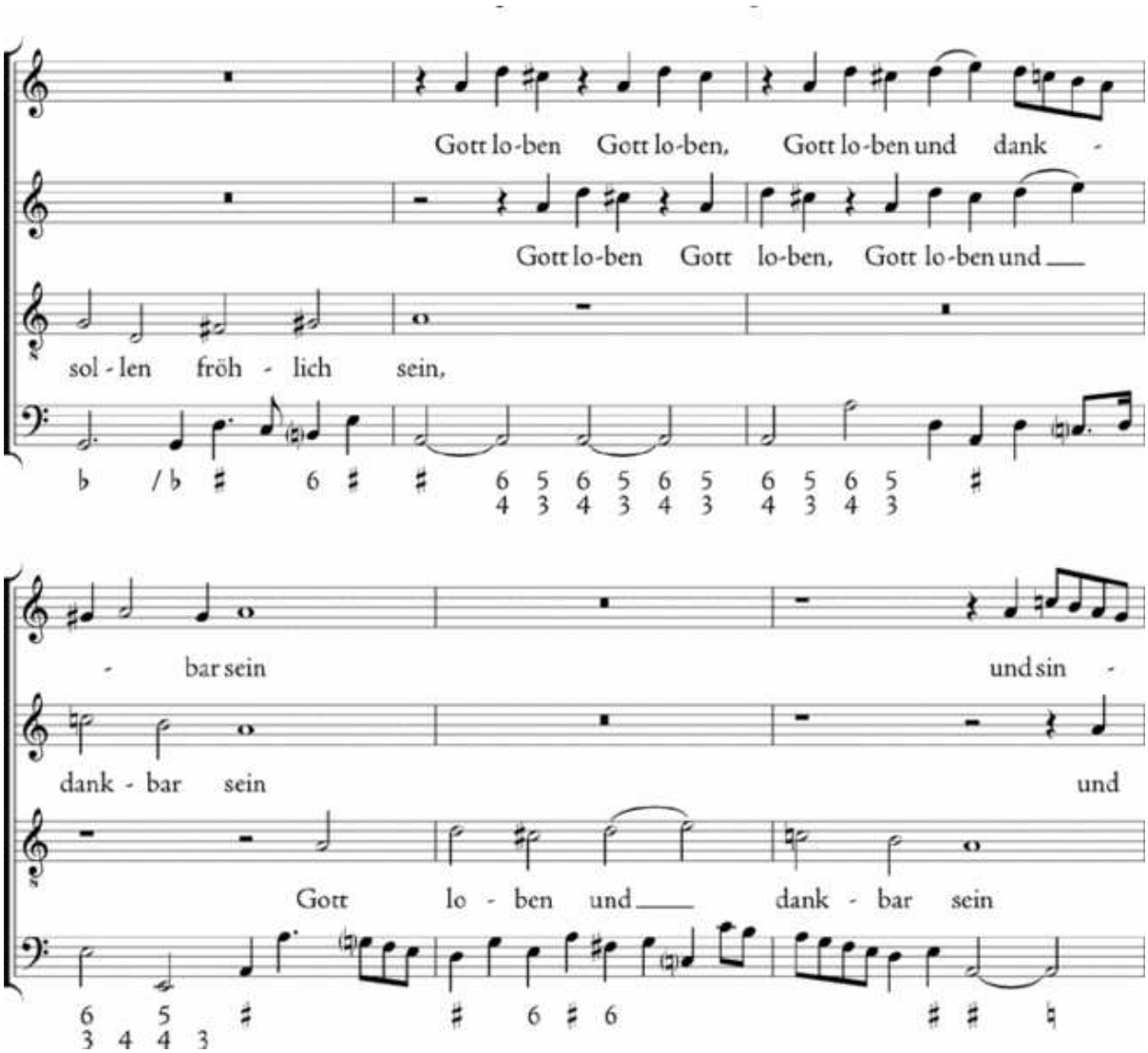
fig. 2-5 Johann Hermann Schein, woodcut portrait at the Musical Instrument Museum, University of Leipzig.

Schein (like Sweelinck before him and Bach after him) was a contracted civil servant who reported to a town council, not a court or church employee who served at the pleasure of a patron. He published a great deal of secular music as well as sacred, including the *Banchetto musicale* (Leipzig, 1617), an early book of dances-for-listening organized into standardized sequences or *suites* (though Schein does not use the word). Played by ensembles of viols and violins, they probably served originally as dinner music (*Tafelmusik*, literally "table music") at the noble houses where he served briefly before being elected "Thomaskantor." Each suite in the collection consists of an old-style pair—a slow duple-metered padouana or pavan followed by a quick triple-metered gagliarda—and a new-style pair consisting of the same genres (courente and allemande, as Schein called them) that we saw in Frescobaldi. Each suite ended with a quick-time sendoff in the form of a fast triple-metered variation on the allemande called the *tripla*. What so distinguished Schein's suites was his application to them of the keyboard variation technique pioneered by the virginalists and Sweelinck. The components of each suite, as Schein put it, were integrated both in mode and in "invention," meaning that they were fashioned out of a common fund of melodic ideas so that they became in effect not only a suite but a set of variations as well.

Schein made three settings of *Christ lag in Todesbanden*. Two of them were *Cantionalsätze*, simple chorale

harmonizations to accompany congregational singing. The third comes from Schein's first continuo publication, *Opella nova* ("A new collection of works," 1618), which consisted, according to its title page, of *geistliche Concerten auff italiänische Invention componirt*: "sacred concertos composed on the Italian plan." It is scored for two sopranos (boys) and a tenor over a very active basso continuo. For instructions in realizing his continuo parts, Schein actually referred the user of his book to the preface of Viadana's *Cento concerti*.

It looks at first as though the two boys are going to sing a paraphrase of the chorale melody, but it turns out that it is only *Vorimitation*, preparing the way for the tenor, the true bearer of the cantus firmus. In the second part of the concerto, corresponding in the original melody to the "B" of the AAB chorale form, the boy sopranos and the tenor are pitted against one another in true concertato style (Ex.2-9). The boys sing fanciful diminutions on the chorale phrases, full of imitations and hockets, that sound like countersubjects against the tenor's rather stolid enunciations of the same phrases, unadorned. Take away the boys, replace them with violins or cornetts, and the piece would still be a viable chorale concerto. (In fact it might easily have been performed that way on occasion.)



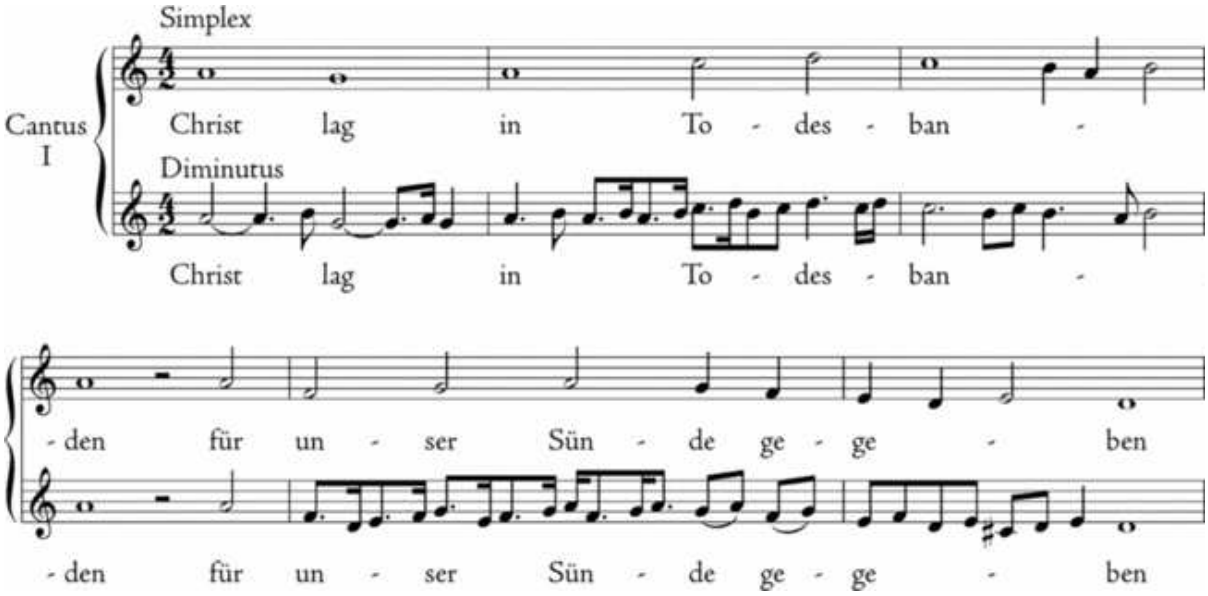
ex. 2-9 Johann Hermann Schein, *Christ lag in Todesbanden* from *Opella nova* (1618), mm. 20–25

The incredibly industrious Michael Praetorius, who is said to have died pen in hand on his fiftieth birthday, produced in his relatively brief career well over a thousand compositions, most of which were issued in 25 printed collections published between 1605 and the year of his death. Except for eight chorale settings for organ and a very successful and influential book of ensemble dance music (*Terpsichore*, pub. 1612)—and also apart from five treatises, including the *Syntagma musicum*, a giant musical encyclopedia that came out in three volumes between 1614 and 1618—Praetorius's works consist almost entirely of psalm motets (nine volumes called *Musae sioniae*, issued between 1605 and 1611) and chorale concerti. His most grandiose compositions were reached in what turned out to be his culminating publication, a three-volume monster issued between 1619 and 1621 and named, significantly, after

the ancient Muse of oratory and sacred poetry: *Polyhymnia caduceatrix et panegyrica* (Polyhymnia, bringer of peace and singer of praise).

The concerti in this collection, some scored for as many as twenty-one mixed vocal and instrumental parts, were written (possibly on commission) after Praetorius had visited the court of Dresden, where the musical establishment was the envy of all Germany. The concerto on *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, from the second volume, is composed in such a way that it can be performed in various concerted combinations: by two boys with basso continuo, by two boys and two basses with basso continuo, or by two boys and a three- or four-part instrumental ensemble plus basso continuo, for a maximum of seven sounding parts.

In addition, when the two boys perform without competition from other concerted parts they are given the option of singing highly embellished lines—or rather, the composer supplied for them the sort of vocal diminutions more experienced singers habitually extemporized when performing concerted music. Ex. 2-10 shows how Praetorius decorated the chorale's famous opening line. It is the rare instance like this one, where the composer went to the trouble of furnishing in advance what was normally left to the promptings of the moment, that give us our scarce and precious clues to what the written music whose physical remains we now possess really may have sounded like in life—that is, in performance.



ex. 2-10 Michael Praetorius, *Christ lag in Todesbanden* from *Polyhymnia caduceatrix et panegyrica*, vol. II (Cantus I)

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

RUIN

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

All this Italianate splendor was not fated to last. The second quarter of the seventeenth century was a horrendous period for the German-speaking lands, marked by an unremitting series of territorial, dynastic, and religious conflicts collectively known as the Thirty Years War. What had started in 1618 as an abortive revolt of the Protestant nobility in Bohemia against the dominion of the Holy Roman (Austrian) Empire spread all over Germany as the Scandinavian kings to the north of Germany opportunistically took up the offensive against the Austrians to the south. By the mid-thirties the German Protestant territories were one huge blood-soaked battlefield.

A peace was declared in 1635 that gave the Empire the advantage. This antagonized France, the other great centralized European power. France joined forces with Sweden and the final stage of what had in effect become a general European war began. The German princes were forgotten as the French and the Austrians, with their various allies, contended everywhere: in the Netherlands, in Spain, in Italy, and in the north, where the Scandinavian powers were now divided. Peace negotiations were begun even before 1640, but hostilities continued sporadically until 1648. The result was a vastly weakened Austrian Empire, a vastly strengthened France, and a completely ruined Germany.

Powerful repercussions of this virtual world war were felt immediately in the arts. The military successes that made France the richest and most prosperous land in Europe laid the foundations for what the French still call their *grand siècle*, their Great Century. The musical results of that flowering will be the subject of the next chapter. The impoverishing effects of the war on the arts of the German-speaking countries, on the other hand, can scarcely be imagined.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Heinrich Schütz

Schütz: Madrigals and motets

A CREATIVE MICROCOSM

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The "high" or courtly arts managed to hang on through their vicissitudes, though not without crucial adaptive change. In music, that process of adaptation may be viewed with exceptional clarity thanks to the presence on the German scene of a composer of irrepressible genius, whose long career, mirroring in an intense creative microcosm the general fate and progress of his art, furnishes us with an ideal prism. His name was Henrich (or more commonly, Heinrich) Schütz. Despite the conditions in which he was forced to work, he became the first internationally celebrated German master.

Born in 1585 to a family of innkeepers in the Saxon (east German) town of Köstritz near Gera, a musical instrument center, Schütz early displayed his gifts. His singing voice was noticed by a music-loving nobleman, the Landgrave Moritz of Hessen, who happened to stay at his father's inn in 1598, when the boy was just entering adolescence. Over the objections of his parents, the Landgrave had the lad brought to his residence in Kassel for instruction and training "in all the good arts and commendable virtues." After his voice changed, Schütz ostensibly gave up music for university studies in law, also underwritten by Landgrave Moritz, who had become a surrogate father to him.

But then one day in 1609, when his protégé was twenty-four, the Landgrave came to visit him at school with a proposition: "Since at that time a very famous if elderly musician and composer was still alive in Italy," as Schütz recounted his patron's words in old age, "I was not to miss the opportunity of hearing him and gaining some knowledge from him."[9] Since the proposal was backed up with a generous cash stipend, the young man "willingly accepted the recommendation with submissive gratitude,...against my parents' wishes."

The musician in question was Giovanni Gabrieli. Schütz spent three years in Venice under his tutelage, right up until the master's death, by which time the young Saxon had become his prize pupil. "On his deathbed," Schütz recalled, "he had arranged out of special affection that I should receive one of the rings he left behind as a remembrance of him." This gift not only signaled the passing of the Venetian musical heritage to a new generation, but also symbolized its becoming, through Schütz, an international standard.

fig. 2-6 Heinrich Schütz, portrait by Christoph Spetner (ca. 1650) at the University of Leipzig.

The year before, Schütz had composed a book of Italian madrigals that Gabrieli thought worthy of publication. It was issued in Venice in 1611 with an attribution to *Henrico Sagittario allemanno*—"Henry Archer (i.e. Schütz) the German"—but its contents are completely indistinguishable in style from the native product. Schütz wanted nothing else. He went back to Germany in 1613 with the intention of fulfilling his promise to his patron by adapting the glorious Venetian style to the needs of the Lutheran church, just as Praetorius and others were also doing, but with the added benefit of authenticity arising out of training at the source.

For the rest of his life Schütz saw himself primarily as the bringer of Italianate "light to Germany" (as his tombstone reads), and saw the composition of grand concerted motets and magnificent court spectacles as his true vocation. Given that ambition, his career was dogged by cruel frustration. His actual contributions, not only to the musical life of his time but to the historical legacy of German music, tallied little with his intentions. But his musical imagination was so great, and his powers of adaptation so keen, that what he did accomplish was arguably a greater fulfillment of his gifts than what he set out to achieve.

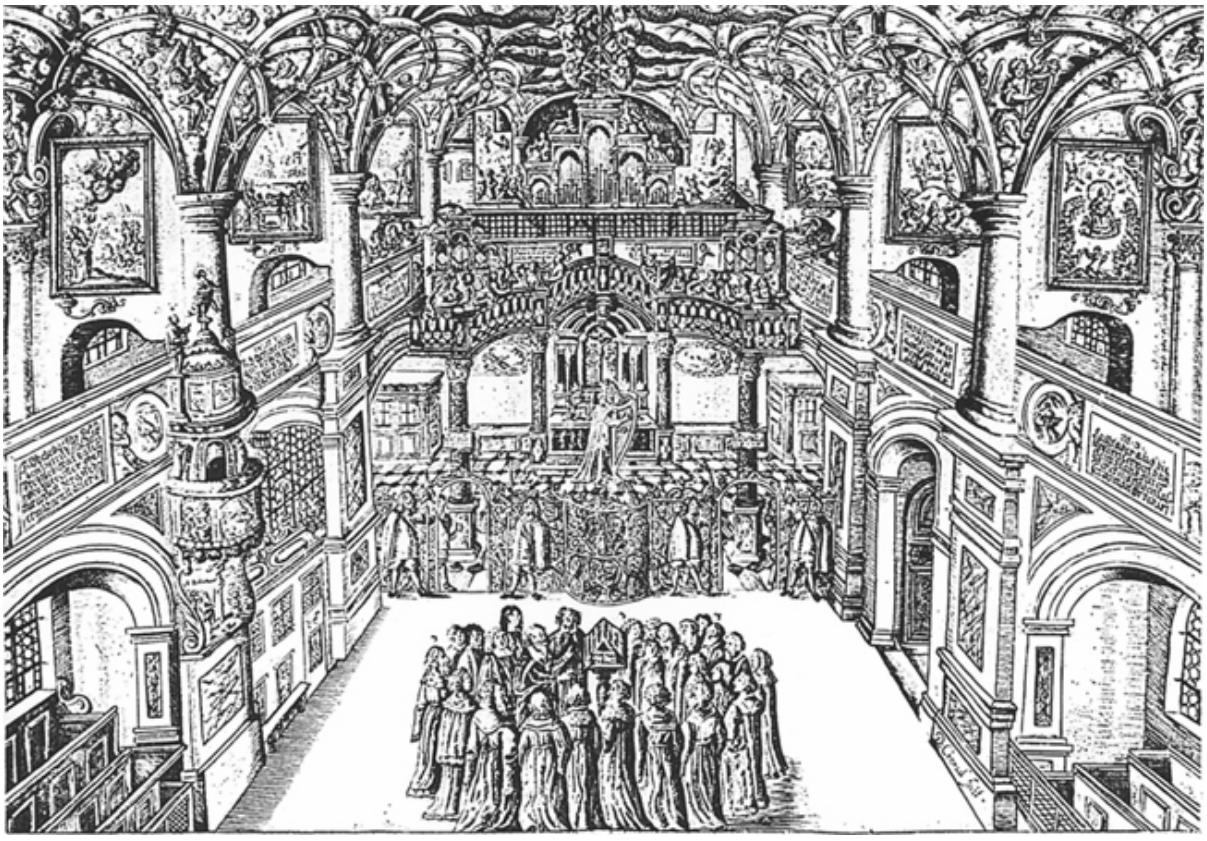


fig. 2-7 Schütz directing his choir at the Dresden court chapel. Copperplate engraving from the title page of his pupil Christoph Bernhard's *Geistreichen Gesangbuch* ("Artful songbook") of 1676.

On returning to Germany with his sterling credentials, Schütz went back to work, as expected, for Landgrave Moritz of Hessen. The very next year, however, the Elector of Saxony, a personage far superior in rank to the Landgrave, called Schütz to his legendarily appointed court at Dresden, the very court that Praetorius was adorning so splendidly with his *Polyhymnia* motets, and Moritz had to release him. Schütz arrived in 1615 and spent his entire subsequent career at Dresden (from 1621 as court Kapellmeister), serving faithfully through thick and thin for almost sixty years.

At first the times were "thick," indeed downright opulent. Schütz's first German publication, issued at Dresden in 1619, was *Psalmen Davids* ("The psalms of David") a book of twenty-six sumptuous concerted motets for up to four antiphonal choruses with continuo ("organ, lute, chitarrone, etc.," according to the title page) and parts for strings and brass *ad libitum*. There are also archival records of gala court performances of secular compositions by the young Kapellmeister. They included "The Miraculous Transport of Mount Parnassus" (*Wunderlich Translocation des ... Berges Parnassi*), a mythological ballet performed for the visiting Holy Roman Emperor Matthias, and a polychoral birthday ode for the Elector on the subject of Apollo and the Muses. The most tantalizing such reference is to an opera, the first ever composed to a German text, on the time-honored subject of Apollo and Daphne, for the marriage of his first patron's son to his second patron's daughter. The libretto was in fact an adaptation by a court poet of Rinuccini's libretto for Peri's *Dafne* of 1597, the first musical tale of all. Except for the early book of madrigals, though, Schütz's secular output, comprising as well an Orpheus opera and a whole series of court ballets, has perished with only the most negligible exceptions. The five hundred or so works by which he is known to us are virtually all sacred.

And from his Latin-texted *Cantiones sacrae* of 1625 to his German-texted *Geistliche Chor-Music* of 1648, Schütz's output reflects to varying degrees the austerity of wartime conditions, when court establishments were decimated by conscription and budgets for the fine arts were ruthlessly slashed. Schütz was forced to renounce the polychoral style in favor of simpler choral textures and even sparser forces. In 1628, he issued a new collection of settings from the Psalter, again called *Psalmen Davids*. But where the first collection, counting on the Dresden court chapel forces at their most lavish, had assumed the grand manner, the new one consisted of simple part-songs with continuo, based on metrical psalm paraphrases by Cornelius Becker, a Leipzig churchman, which (as the "Becker Psalter") were then popular.

Faced with increasingly difficult conditions in Dresden, Schütz petitioned for leave so that he could visit Venice again and wait out the war. He departed in August 1628 and stayed for about a year. He seems to have become acquainted this time with Monteverdi, now the *maestro di cappella* at St. Mark's, and to have experimented on the scene with the new declamatory styles that Monteverdi had pioneered. While in Italy he published a book of fifteen sacred concerti to Latin texts, which he called *Sacrae symphoniae* in tribute to his late teacher Gabrieli, who had published a similarly titled collection in 1597. These are comparatively modest works, scored for one or two solo voices (in one case for three) with obbligato instrumental parts. Only one of them is antiphonal in the literal sense of employing spatially separated ensembles, but all of them remain Venetian in spirit by extracting a maximum of color and interplay out of their reduced forces.

O quam tu pulchra es ("O how comely art thou"), one of the best known items from Schütz's *Symphoniae sacrae* of 1629, is set to a text from the Song of Songs that had already served countless composers going back as far as the early fifteenth century (see "Music from the Earliest Notations to the Sixteenth Century" chapter 11). The reason for its popularity, and also the reason why this particular concerto of Schütz has served so long as a favorite introduction to his work, surely lies in the spectacularly erotic text, replete with a catalogue of the beloved's anatomy, that furnished Schütz, as it had furnished his predecessors, with both a wonderful opportunity to display the attractions of a new "luxuriant" style, and a pretext for pushing the style to new heights of allure.

Notes:

(9) Heinrich Schütz, letter to the Elector of Saxony (1651), trans. Piero Weiss, in P. Weiss, *Letters of Composers Through Six Centuries* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1967), pp. 46–51; abridged in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp. 157–59.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Christoph Bernhard

Schütz: Madrigals and motets

LUXURIANCE

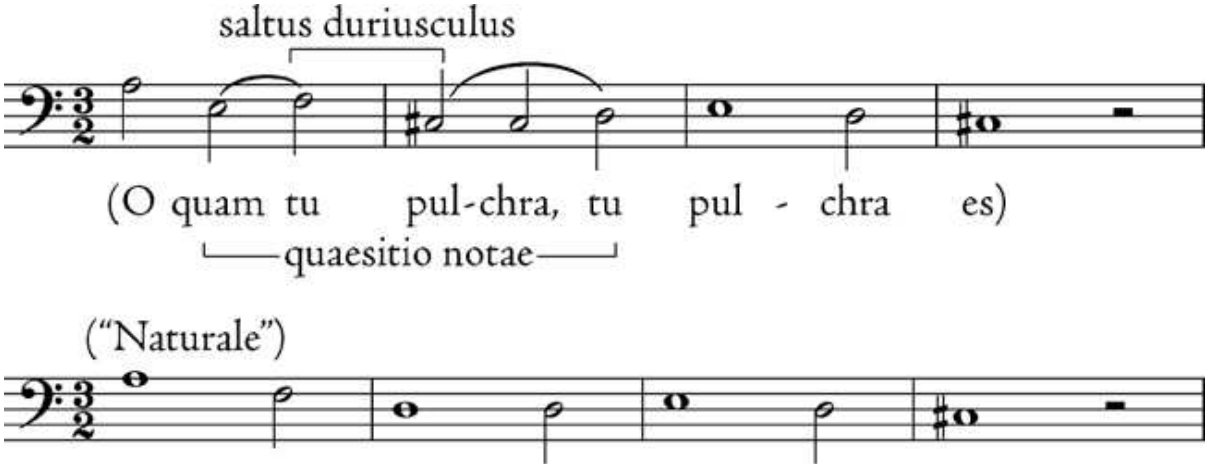
Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The term "luxuriant style" (*stylus luxurians*), meaning a style brimming abundantly with exuberant detail in contrast to the "plain style" (*stylus gravis*) of old, was coined by Christoph Bernhard (1628–92), Schütz's pupil and eventual successor as the Dresden Kapellmeister, in a famous treatise on composition that circulated widely in manuscript in the later seventeenth century and was widely presumed to transmit Schütz's teachings. What mainly abounded in the luxuriant style was dissonance, which makes the *stylus luxurians* the rough equivalent of what Monteverdi called the *seconda prattica*.

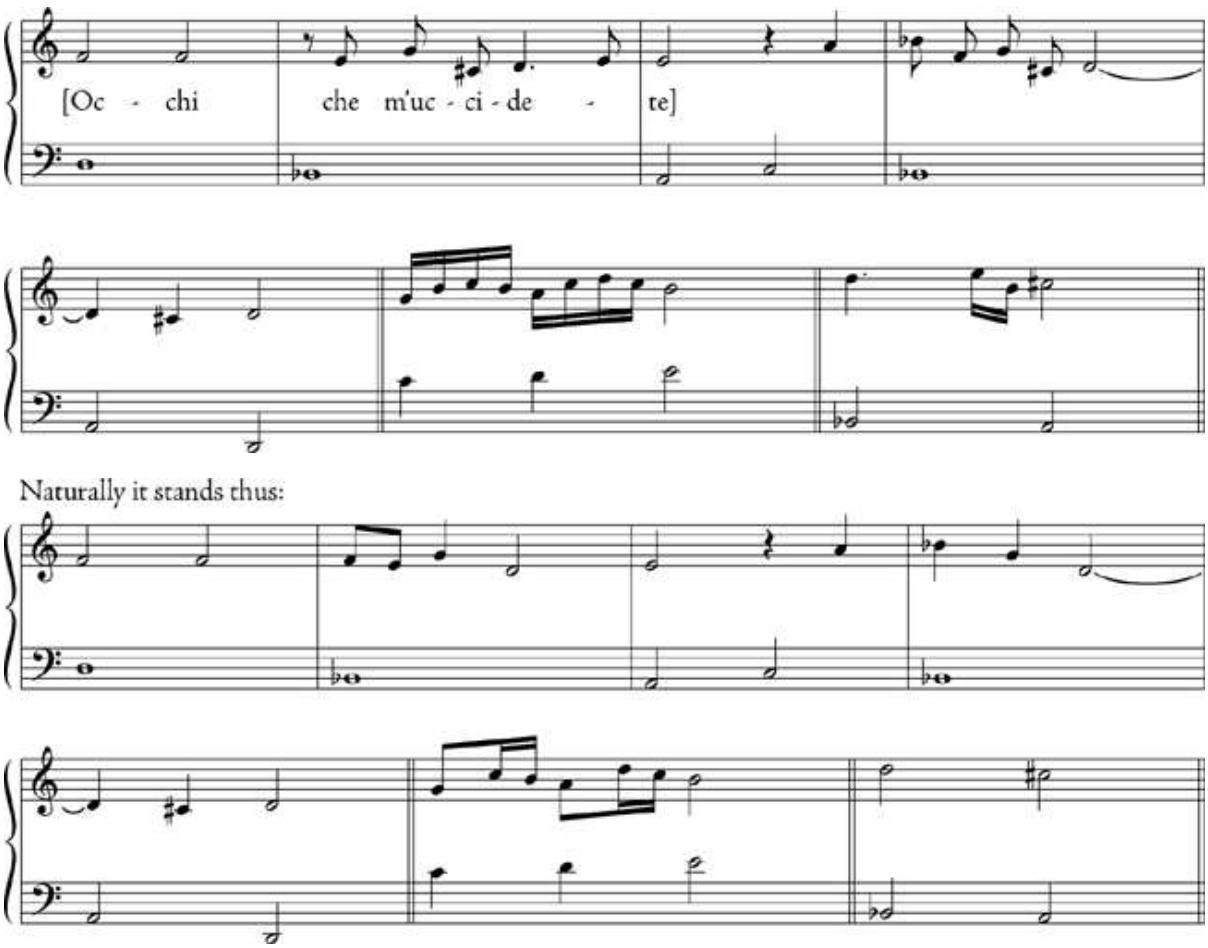
Like Monteverdi, Bernhard stipulated that freely handled dissonances arose out of (and were justified by) the imagery and emotional content of a text.[10] They were an aspect of rhetoric: ornamental figures, so to speak, of musical speech. That is why Bernhard called them *figurae* (*Figuren* in German), and why his theory of composition, which treats the novel dissonances of the luxuriant style as ornaments on the surface of the plain style, is known as the *Figurenlehre* (the doctrine of figures). Bernhard's *Figurenlehre*, which may derive from Schütz's own take on Monteverdi, was the first of many theories of composition, mainly put forth by German writers, that conceptualized and analyzed music in terms of an ornamental surface projected over a structural background.

But the *stylus luxurians* was anything but a passive response to the contents of a text. On the contrary, and as *O quam tu pulchra es* shows especially well, the composer actively shaped the text to his musical purposes even as he shaped the music to conform to the text's specifications. It was a process of mutual enhancement and intensification —indeed, of mutual impregnation—that bore an offspring more powerfully expressive than either words or music alone could be.

Reading Schütz's setting of the concerto's opening words in terms of Bernhard's opposition of plain background and luxuriant surface (Ex. 2-11a), we might characterize it as descending through the notes of the tonic triad (A–F–D in D minor) with lower neighbors ("overshooting"—*quaesitio notae*, literally "searching for the note"—in Bernhard's parlance) decorating the F and the D in the manner of what we would now call an *appoggiatura* (see Bernhard's illustration of the practice in Ex. 2-11b). The neighbor to the root of the triad is raised a half step to function as a leading tone, resulting in a diminished fourth—in Bernhard's parlance a "hard leap" (*saltus duriusculus*)—from F to C♯. This chromaticized interval coincides by finely calculated design with the main "operator" in the text, the word *pulchra*, or "beautiful".[11]



ex. 2-11a First line of Heinrich Schütz's *O quam tu pulchra es* rhetorically parsed

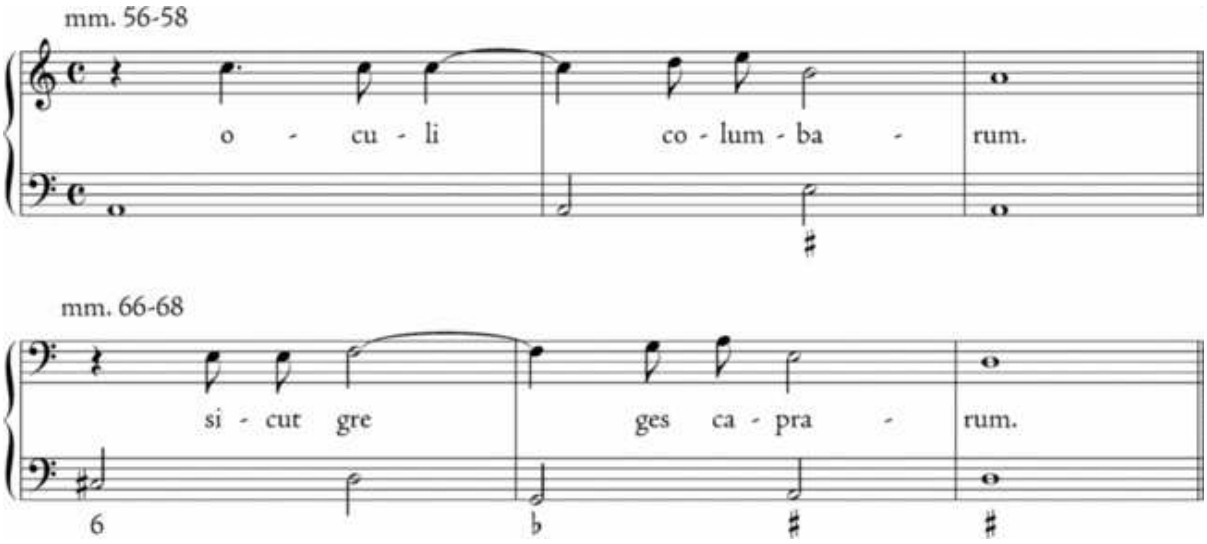


ex. 2-11b Christoph Bernhard, example of *Quaesitio notae*

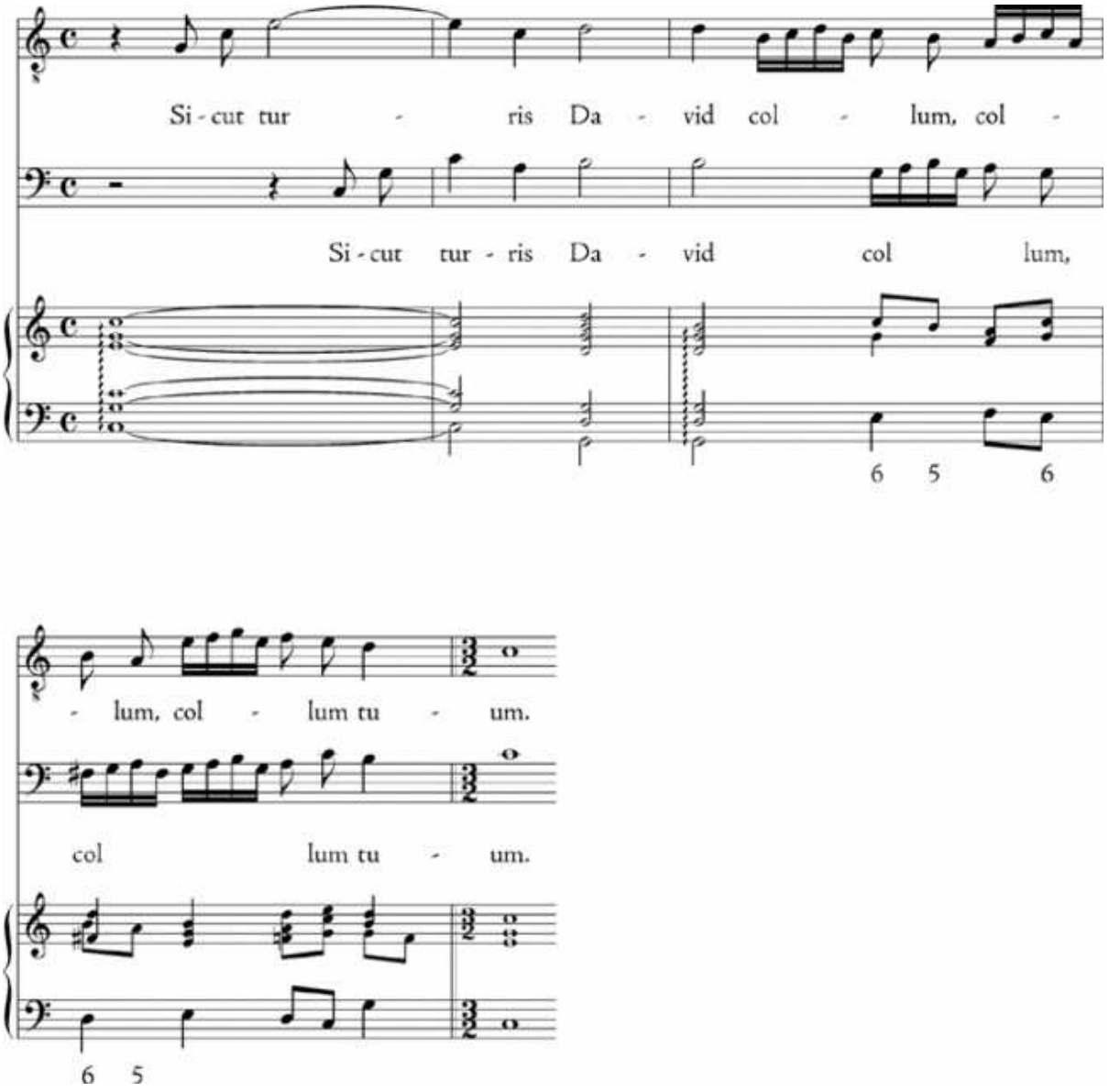
The lilting triple-metered refrain thus created is heard again and again over the course of the concerto. After addressing a series of endearments to the bride that intensify through sequences to a drawn-out hemiola cadence, the baritone soloist returns to the opening phrase, this time joined by the tenor in imitation. When the pair of vocal soloists have repeated the baritone's invocation to the bride, the opening phrase jumps up into the range of the instrumental soloists, the violins, who fashion from it a *sinfonia* or wordless interlude—wordless, but still texted in a way, since the opening melody has been so strongly associated with the opening words. Finally, the vocal soloists join the violins for a final invocation in four parts over the basso continuo to finish off the first section of the concerto.

From this point on the text of the concerto consists of the famous inventory of the bride's body, in which every part named is made the object of a vivid simile—a verbal figure. Since the music performs a similar "figurative" function, Schütz radically abridged the text, leaving most of the actual work of description to the music. This gives him time to bring back the opening phrase in both words and music as a *ritornello* to follow each item in the enumeration. Its dancelike triple meter contrasts every time with the freer declamatory rhythms of the simile verses.

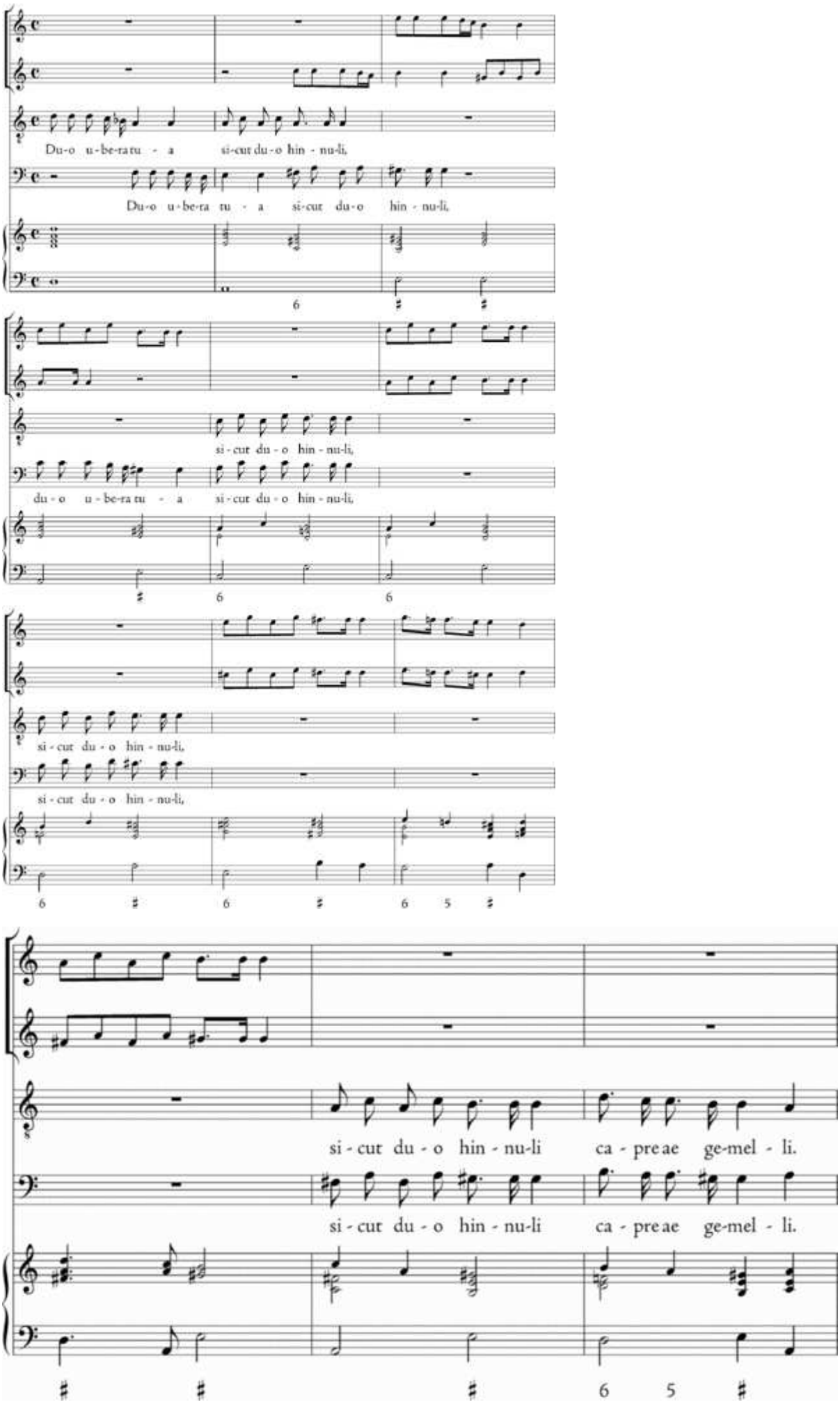
The first simile is the most straightforward; the beloved's eyes are compared with the eyes of a dove. The music is comparably straightforward, consisting of recitative in what for Schütz was a new style. The next, comparing her hair (presumably as it is blown by the wind) with a flock of (frisking) goats, is matched by trills and wide leaps in the music. The cadence on *greges caprarum* (mm. 66–67) is similar to that on *oculi columbarum* (mm. 56–57), but is intensified harmonically very much à la Monteverdi: by interpolating the subdominant (G) in the bass, the melody note (F) is turned into a dissonant suspension that does not resolve directly, but only through an intervening ascent to a more strongly dissonant ninth (A), from which a (goatlike?) leap is made to the note that would have resolved the original suspension by step (Ex. 2-12a). In such a passage it is especially easy to see the "structural" voice leading that underlies the frisky "ornamental" figures on the surface.



ex. 2-12a Heinrich Schütz, *O quam tupulchra es* (*Symphoniae sacrae I*), mm. 56–58, mm. 66–68



ex. 2-12b Heinrich Schütz, *O quam tu pulchra es* (*Symphoniae sacrae I*), mm. 91–95


Du-o u-be-ra tu - a si-cut du-o hin - nu-li,
Du-o u-be-ra tu - a si-cut du-o hin - nu-li,
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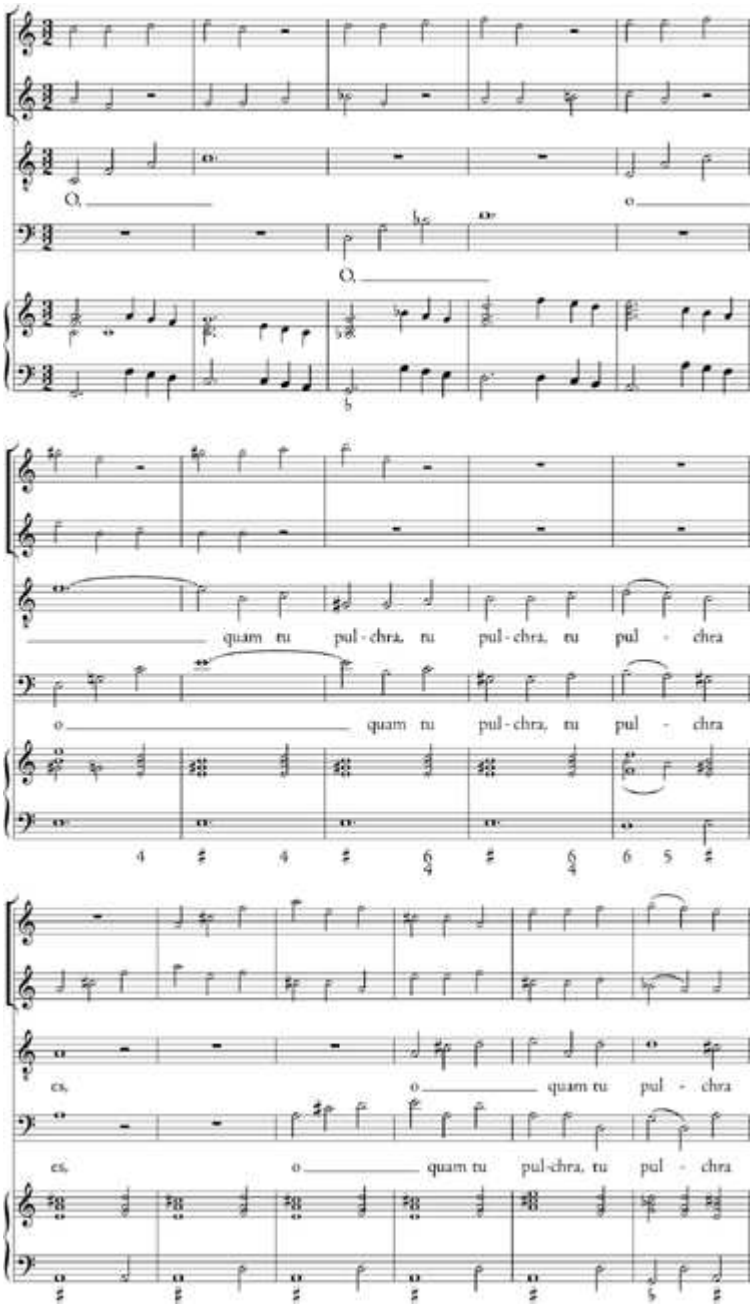
si - cut du - o hin - nu-li ca - pre ae ge-mel - li.

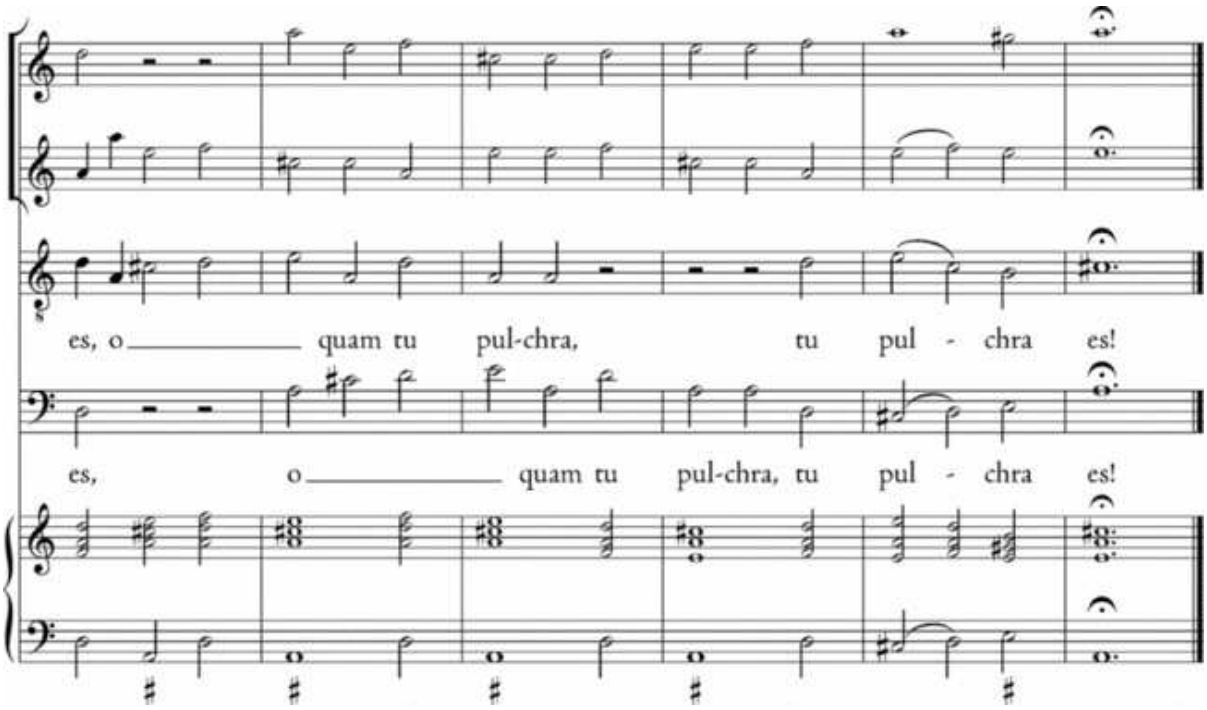
ex. 2-12c Heinrich Schütz, *O quam tu pulchra es* (*Symphoniae sacrae I*), mm. 100–111

After a return to recitative for the simile comparing the bride's teeth to the whiteness of shorn sheep, there is a steady increase in musical floridity with every extravagant textual figure. From here on the tenor and baritone are in constant, quasi-competitive duet, their intertwining lines suggesting the scarlet ribbon to which the beloved's lips are compared, the winding staircases that encircle the tower to which her long neck is likened (Ex. 2-12b), and the cavorting of the twin fawns that symbolize (the jiggling of) her two breasts (Ex. 2-12c). The last being an especially potent sexual symbol, it is played out at length, with the violins at last taking part in the simile.

It is followed by what is quite obviously a musical representation of a sensual climax, the violins' mounting arpeggios introducing a passage in which the singers vocalize on similar arpeggio figures, their text shrunk back to mere moaning iterations of the opening *O*, and with the violins now sounding the aching *saltus duriusculus* (the diminished fourth) not as a neighbor but as a harmonic interval, producing arpeggios of augmented triads. The baritone, it seems hardly necessary to add, reaches his highest note on his final *O*. The final cadence is packed with extra cathartic force by adding arbitrarily to its dissonance: the tenor's C, on the "purple" word *pulchra*, is not only a dissonance approached by leap but also a false relation with respect to the C♯ immediately preceding it in the baritone and basso continuo parts (Ex. 2-12d). (The apparent ending on the dominant is resolved by the next concerto in the collection, *Veni de Libano*, set to a continuation of the same passage from the Song of Songs.)

The most remarkable aspect of *O quam tu pulchra es* is the refrain. There was nothing new, of course, about the idea of the refrain as such. It was one of the most ancient of all musical and poetical devices, with a literally prehistoric origin. The way Schütz employs it here, however, it acts in a double role—or rather, it combines two roles in a singularly pregnant way. It is of course a musical (or "structural") unifier, quite a necessary function in a composition that otherwise sets so many contrasting textual images to contrasting musical ideas. It is at the same time the bearer of the central affective message both of the text and of the music, its constantly reiterated and intensifying diminished fourth saturating the whole with the "lineaments of desire," to borrow a neat phrase from the English Romantic poet William Blake. The refrain, being both the concerto's structural integrator and its expressive one, erases any possible line between the expressive and the structural. From now on, musical ideas would tend increasingly to function on this dual plane; ultimately that is what one means by a musical "theme."


O
O
O
quam tu pul-chra, tu pul-chra, tu pul - chra
o quam tu pul-chra, tu pul - chra
es, o quam tu pul - chra
es, o quam tu pul-chra, tu pul - chra



ex. 2-12d Heinrich Schütz, *O quam tu pulchra es* (*Symphoniae sacrae I*), mm. 112–end

Notes:

(10) See *The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard*, trans. Walter Hilse, *The Music Forum*, Vol. III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973); excerpts printed in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp. 159–61.

(11) Aaron Copland, "The Teacher: Nadia Boulanger," in *Copland on Music* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 85.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Heinrich Schütz

Schütz: Sacred concertos

SHRIVELED DOWN TO THE EXPRESSIVE NUB

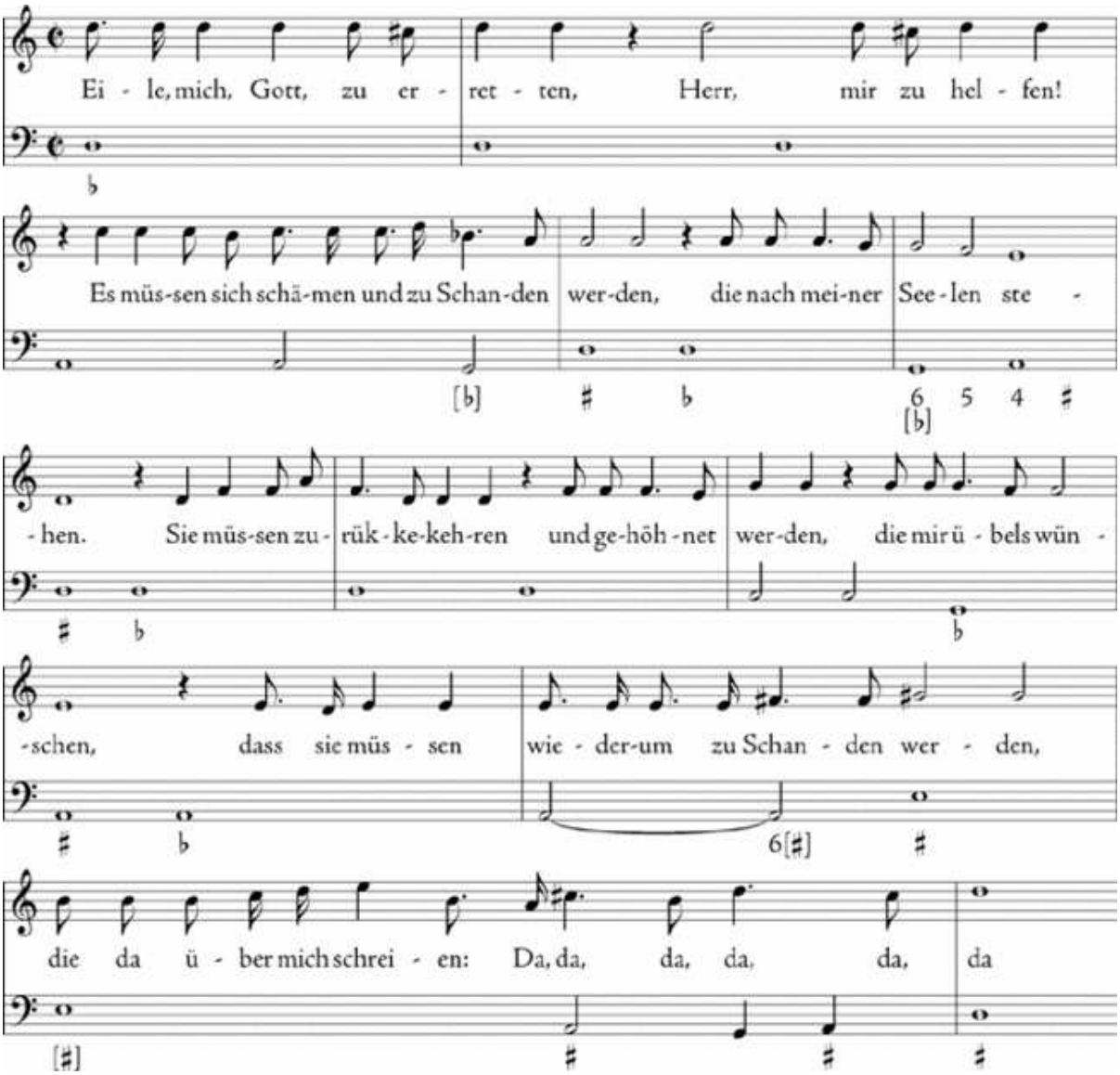
Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Schütz returned from his second Italian sojourn to find conditions in Germany greatly worsened. The war economy interfered more directly with musical opportunities than ever, and in the autumn of 1631 Saxony became an active belligerent in alliance with Sweden. Most of Schütz's singers were drafted into the army; by 1633, the Dresden musical establishment, once the envy of Germany, was to all intents and purposes disabled, "like a patient *in extremis*," as Schütz put it in a letter to his patron, and so it remained until the mid 1640s. The Gabrielian side of Schütz's Venetian heritage was deprived of an outlet. "I am of less than no use," the unhappy composer complained in another letter from the time. The only gainful employment he had during this dismal period came from courts to the north and west that continued to function, particularly that of King Christian IV of Denmark in Copenhagen, which Schütz was permitted to visit from 1634 to 1635 and again from 1642 to 1644, and that of Hildesheim, where he spent some months from 1640 to 1641.

During these bleak years Schütz's "Monteverdian" side came into its own, as if by default. In 1636 and in 1639 he published collections of what he called *Kleine geistliche Concerte* or "Little Sacred Concertos," vastly scaled-down compositions for from one to five solo voices with organ continuo, completely without the use of concertante instruments (with one exception, a dialogue setting of the Ave Maria in the second book). These ascetic compositions were characterized not only by drastically curtailed forces but by a mournfully penitential, subjective mood as well. The ones for single solo voices and continuo, performable by only two musicians, were perhaps the most characteristic of the lot, amounting to what Italian musicians would have called sacred monodies in recitative style, or (as Schütz called it) the *stylus oratorius*.

The opening concerto in the first book, *Eile mich, Gott, zu erretten* ("Hasten, O God, to deliver me!"), a complete setting of the tiny Psalm 70, sets the tone (Ex. 2–13). In this earliest German recitative (labeled *in stylo oratorio*—"in the style of an oration"—in the original print), the flamboyance of Schütz's earlier style is replaced by terse declamation. There is not a single melisma. Emphasis comes not from a proliferation of notes but from repetition of key words and phrases, usually without any corresponding repetition of music. A certain amount of word-painting remains—the melody "turns back" on itself on the word *zurückekehren* in mm. 6–7; the words *hoch gelobt* ("highly praised") are repeated in mm. 14–15 on the way to a high note—but it is very restrained. Instead of seeking out madrigalian imagery, Schütz now seems bent on distilling a more generalized, concentrated emotion in the spirit of Monteverdi's *seconda prattica*, achieving it through dissonant leaps (see especially the taunts in mm. 11–12) and syncopated rhythms.

Perhaps the most poignant reminder of the straitened circumstances in which Schütz was now forced to work is the puny little *symphonia* between the stanzas of the psalm (just after Ex. 2-13 breaks off), a single optional (*si placet*) measure scored for just the bare figured bass. The absence of any tune save what the organist may extemporize searingly dramatizes the absence of the court instrumentalists whose corpses were piling up on the Saxon battlefields.



ex. 2-13 Heinrich Schütz, *Eile mich, Gott, zu erretten* (*Kleine geistliche Concerte I*), mm. 1–16

In Schütz's new-found techniques of poignant text-expression, we may observe the beginnings of a tendency that would reach a remarkable climax in the Lutheran music of the coming century: the deliberate cultivation of ugliness in the name of God's truth, an authentic musical asceticism. It is often thought to be a specifically German aesthetic, and as evidence of a special Germanic or Protestant profundity of response to scripture (as distinct from Italianate pomp and sensuality). And yet the musical means by which it was accomplished, as Schütz's career so beautifully demonstrates, were nevertheless rooted in Catholic Italy. Schütz was only the father of modern German music to the extent that he served as conduit for those Italianate means.

Rebuilding of the impoverished German courts and their cultural establishments could only begin after the signing of the Peace of Westphalia on 24 October 1648, which effectively terminated the Holy Roman Empire as an effective political institution (although it would not be formally dissolved until 1806). The German Protestant states, of which Saxony was one, were recognized as sovereign entities, leaving only France as a united and centralized major power on the continent of Europe. Schütz's patron, the Elector Johann Georg, emerged from the war as one of the two most powerful Protestant princes of Germany. (The other was the Elector of the state of Brandenburg, which later became the kingdom of Prussia.)

Schütz's last publications reflected these improved fortunes. In 1647 he issued a second book of *Symphoniae sacrae*, scored like the first for modest vocal/instrumental forces, but with texts in German. The next year saw the publication of his *Geistliche Chor-Music*, beautifully crafted polyphonic motets specifically intended for performance by the full chorus rather than *favoriti* or soloists. Finally, in 1650, aged sixty-five, he issued what is now thought of

as his testamentary work, the third book of *Symphoniae sacrae*, scored for forces of a size he had not had at his disposal since the time of the *Psalmen Davids*. The music, though, was still characterized by the terseness and pungency of expression he had cultivated during the lean years. Schütz's Gabrielian and Monteverdian sides had met at last in a unique "German" synthesis.

One of the crowning masterworks in this final collection is *Saul, Saul, was verfolgst du mich*, scored for six vocal soloists, two choruses, and an instrumental contingent consisting of two violins and *violone* (string bass), all accompanied by a *bassus ad organum* (continuo). The text consists of two lines from the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 7, verse 14), containing the words spoken by Christ to the Jewish priest Saul on the road toward Damascus. As Saul, according to the Biblical account, later reports to Agrippa I, the grandson of King Herod:

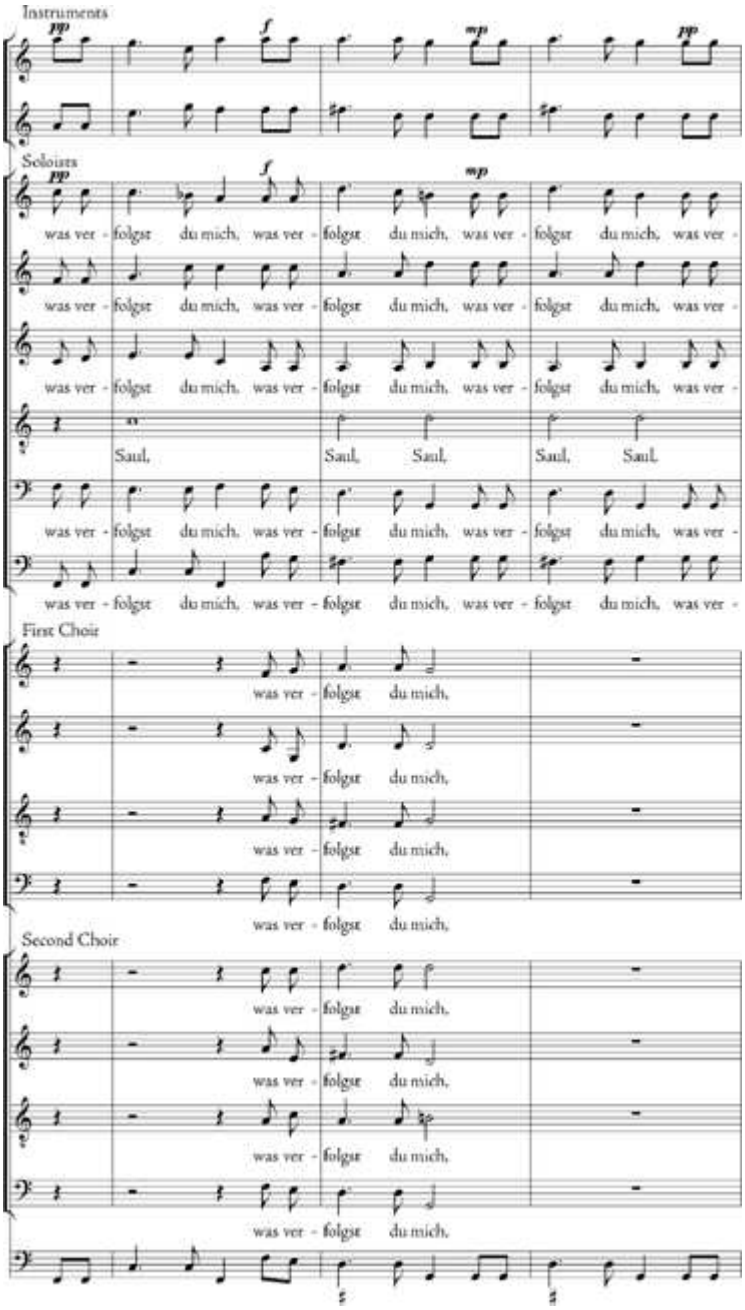
> I myself once thought it my duty to work actively against the name of Jesus of Nazareth; and I did so in Jerusalem.... In all the synagogues I tried by repeated punishment to make them renounce their faith; indeed my fury rose to such a pitch that I extended my persecution to foreign cities.
>
> On one such occasion I was travelling to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests; and as I was on my way, Your Majesty, in the middle of the day I saw a light from the sky, more brilliant than the sun, shining all around me and my travelling-companions. We all fell to the ground, and then I heard a voice saying to me in the Jewish language, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you, this kicking against the goad*." I said, "Tell me, Lord, who you are"; and the Lord replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But now, rise to your feet and stand upright. I have appeared to you for a purpose: to appoint you my servant and witness, to testify both to what you have seen and to what you shall yet see of me" (translation from *The New English Bible*).

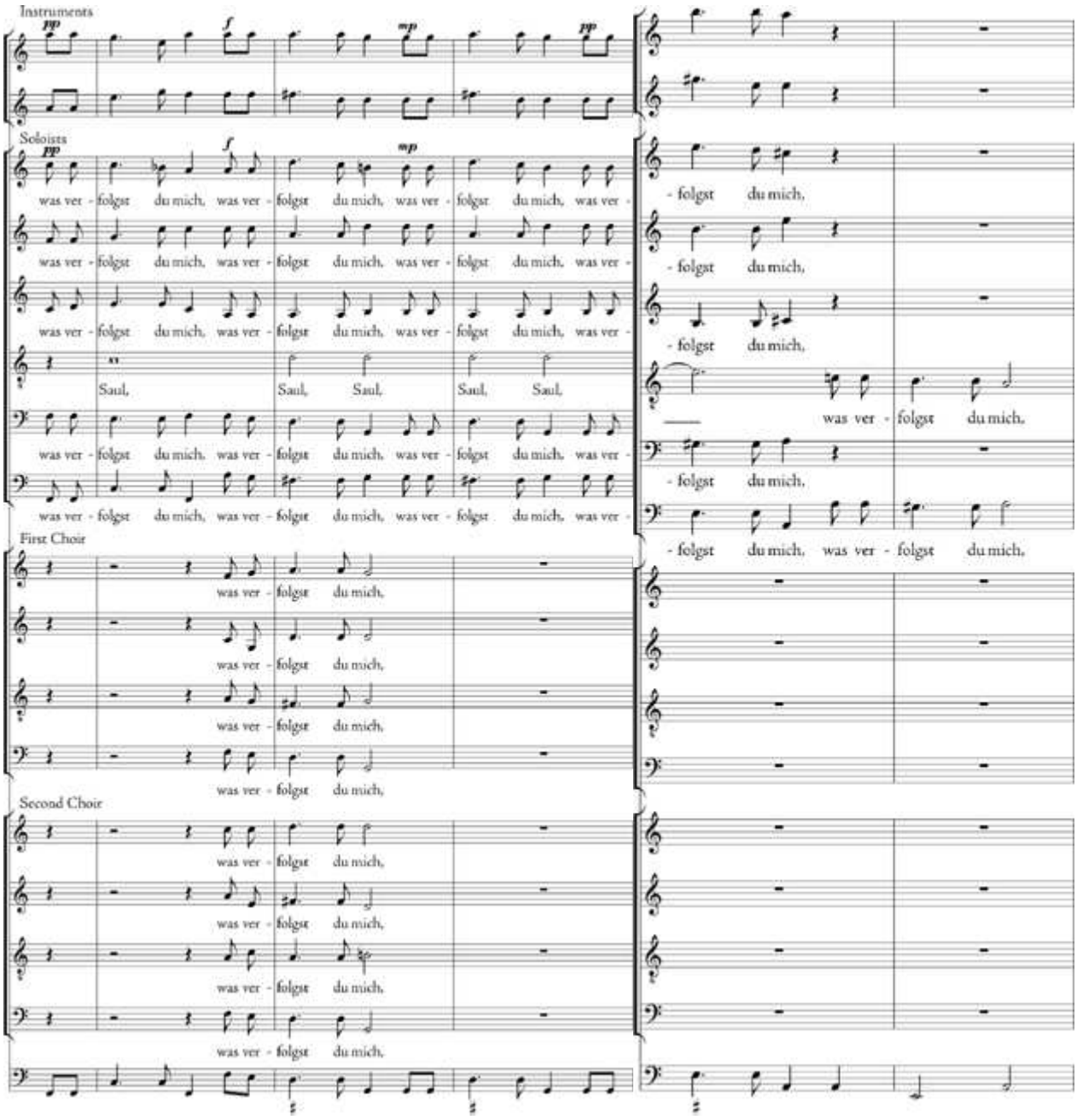
Thus did Saul become the Apostle Paul. The italicized words are the ones that form the text of Schütz's concerto. It is no straightforward setting, but one designed to fill in a great deal of the surrounding narration of Paul's miraculous conversion by means of dramatic symbolism. The words echo and reecho endlessly in the prostrate persecutor's mind, which we who hear them seem to inhabit. The echo idea is portrayed in the music not only by repetition but also by the use of explicitly indicated dynamics, something pioneered in Venice by Schütz's first teacher.

The musical phrase on which most of the concerto is built is sounded immediately by a pair of basses, then taken up by the alto and tenor, then by the sopranos, and finally by the pair of violins as transition into the explosive tutti. (Divine words were often set for multiple voices, so as to depersonalize them and prevent a single singer from "playing God.") The syncopated repetitions of the name Saul are strategically planted so that, when the whole ensemble takes them up, they can be augmented into hockets resounding back and forth between the choirs, adding to the impression of an enveloping space and achieving in sound something like the effect of the surrounding light described by the Apostle. The words *was verfolgst du mich* ("Why dost thou persecute me?") are often set in gratingly dissonant counterpoint: a suspension resolution in the lower voice coincides with an anticipation in the higher voice, producing a brusque succession of parallel seconds (later known, albeit unjustly, as a "Corelli clash" owing to its routinized use in Italian string music).

The second sentence of text is reserved for the soloists (*favoriti*), whose lines break out into melismas on the word *löcken* (*lecken* in modern German), here translated as "kick." Against this the two choirs and instruments continually reiterate the call, "Saul, Saul," as a refrain or ritornello. In the final section of the concerto, the soloists declaim the text rapidly in a manner recalling Monteverdi's *stile concitato*. Meanwhile, the tenor soloist calls repeatedly on Saul, his voice continually rising in pitch from C to D to E, the two choirs interpreting these pitches as dominants and reinforcing each successive elevation with a cadence, their entries marking "modulations" from F to G to A, the last preparing the final return to the initial tone center, D (Ex. 2-14).

The ending, rather than the climax that might have been expected, takes the form of reverberations over a fastidiously marked decrescendo to *pianissimo*, the forces scaled down from tutti to favoriti plus instruments, and finally to just the alto and tenor soloists over the continuo, the fadeout corresponding to the Apostle's "blackout," his loss of consciousness on the road to Damascus. Through the music we have heard Christ's words through Saul's ears and shared his shattering religious experience. Schütz has in effect imported the musical legacy of the Counter Reformation into the land of the Reformation, reappropriating for Protestant use the musical techniques that had been originally forged as a weapon against the spread of Protestantism.


Instruments
Soloists
was ver - folgst du mich, was ver - folgst du mich, was ver - folgst du mich, was ver -
Saul, Saul, Saul, Saul, Saul.
First Choir
Second Choir



ex. 2-14 Heinrich Schütz, *Saul, Saul, was verfolgst du mich* (*Symphoniae sacrae III*), mm. 67–74

Schütz's largest surviving works are oratorios, or as he called them, *Historien*—Biblical "narratives," in which actual narration, sung by an "Evangelist" or Gospel reciter, alternates with dialogue. Oratorios were most traditionally assigned to Easter week, when the Gospel narratives of Christ's suffering (Passion) and Resurrection were recited at length. Sure enough, of Schütz's six Historien, five were Easter pieces: a Resurrection oratorio composed early in his career, in 1623; a setting of Christ's Seven Last Words from the Cross, evidently from the 1650s; and three late settings of the Passion according to the Apostles Matthew, Luke, and John, respectively. These last, in keeping with Dresden liturgical requirements for Good Friday, are austerely old-fashioned *a cappella* works in which the chorus sings the words of the crowd (*turbae*), and the solo parts (the Evangelist, Jesus, and every other character whose words are directly quoted) are written in a kind of imitation plainchant for unaccompanied solo voices.

The remaining oratorio, called *Historia der freuden- und gnadenreichen Geburth Gottes und Marien Sohnes, Jesu Christi, unsers einigen Mitlers, Erlösers und Seeligmachers* ("The Story of the Joyous and Gracious Birth of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Mary, Our Sole Intermediary, Redeemer and Savior"), performed in Dresden in 1660, is by contrast a thoroughly Italianized, effervescent outpouring of Christmas cheer in which the Evangelist's part (printed by itself in 1664) is in the style of a continuo-accompanied monody. The words given to the other soloists (Herod, the angel, the Magi) and chorus in ever-changing combinations are set as eight little interpolated songs (*Intermedia*), accompanied by a colorful assortment of instruments: recorders, violins, cornetti, trombones, and "violettas," the last

probably meaning small viols; and there are introductory and concluding choruses—the former announcing the subject, the latter giving thanks—in which voices resound antiphonally against echoing instrumental choirs in a manner recalling the Venetian extravaganzas of the composer's youth.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Giacomo Carissimi

Oratorio

Barbara Strozzi

CARISSIMI: ORATORIO AND CANTATA

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The chief Italian composer of oratorios in the time of Schütz was Giacomo Carissimi (1605–74), a Roman priest who served as organist and choirmaster at the Jesuit German College (Collegio Germanico) from 1629 until his death. His fourteen surviving works in the genre probably represent only a fraction of the biblical narratives he composed, beginning in the 1640s, for Friday afternoon performances during Lent at the college and at other Roman institutions, notably the Oratorio del Santissimo Crocifisso (Oratory of the Most Holy Crucifix), which lent its name to the genre. His many foreign pupils at the College included Christoph Bernhard, who had already trained with Schütz, and the French composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier, who brought the practice of setting dramatic narratives from the Latin bible back with him to his native country.

fig. 2-8 Jephte recognizes his daughter. Painting by Giovanni Francesco Romanelli (1610–1662).

Jephte, Carissimi's most famous biblical narrative, was composed no later than 1649 (the date on one of its manuscripts). The story, from the Book of Judges (chapter 11), is a celebrated tale of tragic expiation. The Israelite commander Jephte vows that if God grants him victory over the Ammonites, he will sacrifice the first being who greets him on his return home. That turns out to be his beloved daughter, a virgin, who is duly slaughtered after spending two months on the mountaintop with her companions, lamenting her fate.

The last part of Carissimi's setting, consisting of two laments, the daughter's and (in the final chorus) the community's, is introduced by a portion of narrative text sung by the *historicus*, as Carissimi calls the narrator's part. (In Carissimi's setting, the function of *historicus* is a rotating one, distributed among various solo voices and, as here, even the chorus.) The daughter's lament, a monody in three large strophes, makes especially affective use of the "Phrygian" lowered second degree at cadences, producing what would later be called the Neapolitan (or "Neapolitan-sixth") harmony. These cadences are then milked further by the use of echo effects that suggest the reverberations of the daughter's keening off the rocky face of the surrounding mountains and cliffs. Like Schütz (in *Saul, Saul*), Carissimi uses the music not only to express or intensify feeling, but to set the scene. The double and even triple suspensions (on *lamentamini*, "lament ye!") in the concluding six-part chorus are a remarkable application of "madrigalism" to what is in most other ways a typically Roman exercise in old-style (*stile antico*) polyphony. Its emotional power was celebrated and widely emulated. The chorus was quoted and analyzed by Athanasius Kircher in his music encyclopedia *Musurgia universalis* (Rome, 1650), and "borrowed" almost a hundred years later by Handel (who also wrote a *Jephtha*) for a chorus in the oratorio *Samson*.

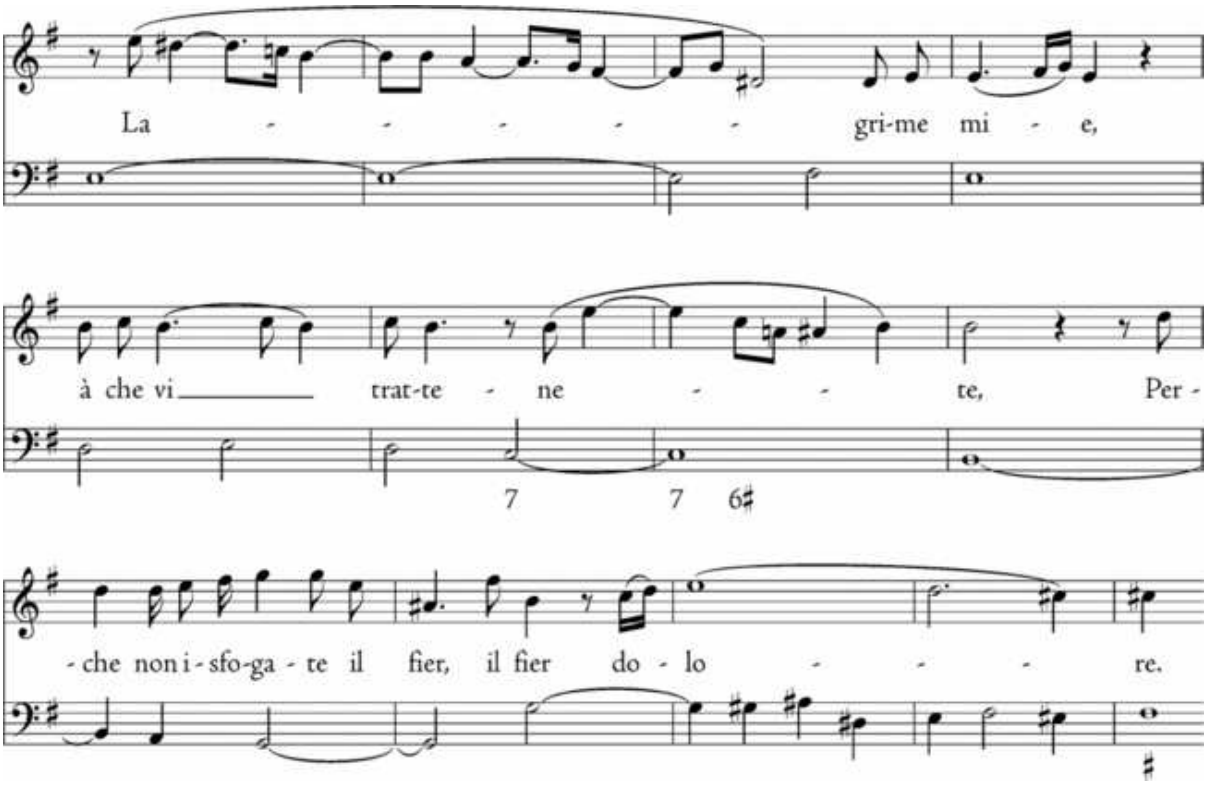
Carissimi's other major service appointment was as *maestro di cappella del concerto di camera* (director of chamber concerts) for Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–89), patroness of the philosopher René Descartes, who lived in Rome following her notorious abdication in 1654 and subsequent conversion to Catholicism. For her, and for many another noble salon, Carissimi turned out well over one hundred settings of Italian love poetry in a new style known generically as *cantata* (a "sung" or vocal piece as opposed to *sonata*, a "played" or instrumental one).

Carissimi wrote so many cantatas that he is sometimes credited with inventing the genre. The cantata, however, was well established as a genre in Rome by the time Carissimi began contributing to it. The first composer known to have used the term was Alessandro Grandi (1586–1630), a member of Monteverdi's choir at St. Mark's in Venice, in a book published around 1620.

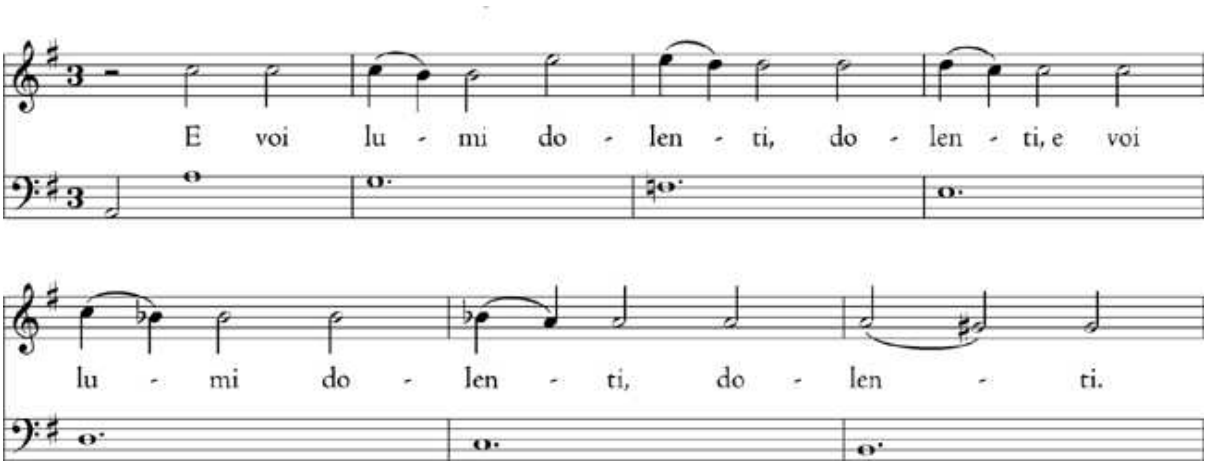
Like the monody, the cantata was a solo successor to the madrigal. It eventually came to denote a relatively ambitious setting that mixed several forms—strophic or ground-bass arias, little dancelike songs called *ariette*, recitatives, etc.—in a quasi-dramatic sequence. The more or less regular alternation of narrative and lyric items—recitatives that set the scene and arias that poured out feeling—first became standardized in the Roman cantata. It soon characterized all dramatic genres, especially opera. Most of the conventional aria types that later provided Italian opera with its stock in trade were first tried out in the cantata as well. The genre could thus be viewed as a kind of musico-dramatic laboratory.

fig. 2-9 Barbara Strozzi. Portrait with bass viol by Bernardo Strozzi (ca. 1640).

From Rome, the cantata radiated out to more northerly Italian cities, chiefly Bologna and Venice (the latter still the great publishing center). Ex. 2-15 samples an especially rich cantata, *Lagrime mie* ("My tears"), by the Venetian singer and composer Barbara Strozzi (1619–77), a pupil of Francesco Cavalli, the foremost Venetian opera composer at midcentury, and the adopted daughter and *protégée* of Giulio Strozzi, a famous academician and poet-librettist whose words were set by almost every Venetian composer from Monteverdi on down. The fact that Barbara Strozzi published eight books of madrigals, cantatas, and arias, and did so at a time when prejudice against the creative abilities of women ran high, bears impressive witness to her excellence as a composer in the eyes of her contemporaries. *Lagrime mie* comes from her seventh book, titled *Diporti di Euterpe* ("Euterpe's Recreations") after the muse of lyric poetry and music, published in 1659, when the composer was forty years old and done with her career as singer and aristocratic hostess.

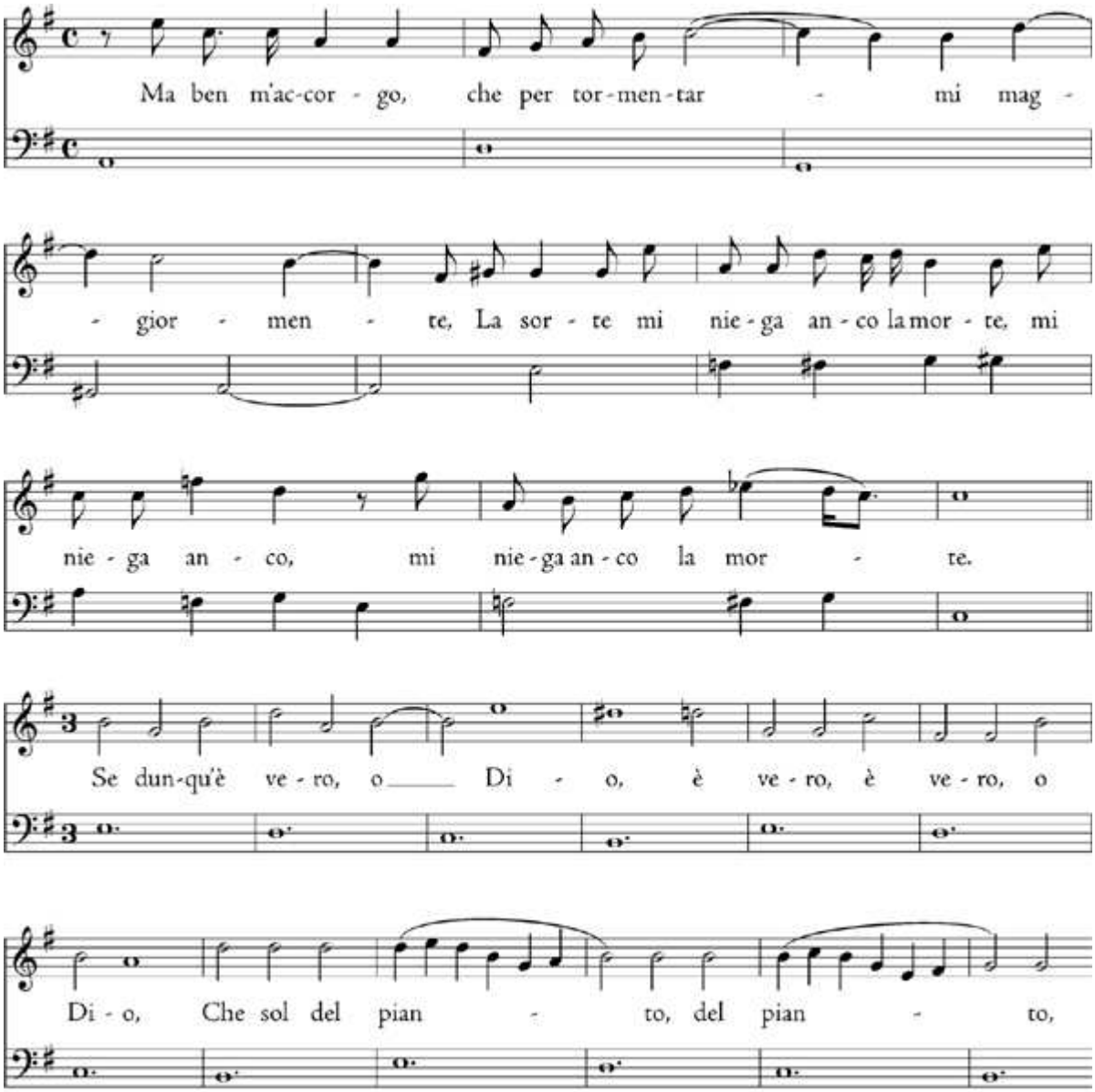


ex. 2-15a Barbara Strozzi, Cantata: *Lagrime mie*, mm. 1–13



ex. 2-15b Barbara Strozzi, Cantata: *Lagrime mie*, mm. 49–55

The text, following convention, is composed from the male perspective. A lover laments the loss of his beloved, locked away in her father's castle. The vocal range is soprano, however, and might as well have been taken by a female singer such as Strozzi herself as by a castrato. The setting of the opening line (Ex. 2-15a), which will return later as a refrain, is identified by the harsh (and unconventionally resolved) dissonances, and by the somewhat decorated scalar descent in the bass from tonic to dominant, as a *lamento*. Expressive dissonance in the manner of the *seconda prattica* arrives as a palpable twinge when the bass leaps from A♯ to D♯ under the voice's sustained E on—what else?—the word *dolore*, giving concrete auditory representation to the lover's pain.



But I am well aware that in order to torture me even more, Fate even denies me death.
It is true then, oh God, that destiny desires only my tears.

ex. 2-15c Barbara Strozzi, Cantata: *Lagrime mie*, mm. 88–108

The second stanza is divided quasi-operatically into narrative and lyric segments. The culminating, albeit fleeting aria (*E voi lumi dolenti*) is cast in the stately triple meter we have already encountered in *Pur ti miro*, the concluding duet in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Ex. 2-15). It was the lyric aria meter *par excellence*, partly because of the way it lent itself to expressive suspensions of the kind that Strozzi provides at this point in such abundance (Ex. 2-15b). In each measure, the first beat contains the dissonance, the second beat the resolution, and the third the preparation for the next suspension. The resolutions take place through slurred anticipations calculated to sound like sobs, a resemblance that was probably emphasized by the singer's voice production. ("Sobbing" remains a specialty of Italian tenors.) The final stanza is the most obvious harbinger of the recitative/aria pairing that would soon become standard operating procedure (Ex. 2-15c). The first couplet is set in a free, unpredictable style that follows the rhythm of speech in good *seconda prattica* fashion. The second couplet returns to the flowing triple meter; its first line unfolds over the emblematic bass tetrachord, and the last line (not included in the example) provides a lyric capstone, ascending to the highest note in the cantata's range and signaling the end by means of a full harmonic closure.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Women in music

Francesca Caccini

WOMEN IN MUSIC: A HISTORIANS' DILEMMA

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 Fat Times and Lean
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Because the history of European and Euro-American art music is the story of a literate tradition—that is, to a very great extent the story of musical texts and their making—women are seriously but inevitably underrepresented in it. Even this book, despite its strenuously "foregrounded" efforts not to forget the oral side of musical traditions or neglect the effects of performance, will necessarily fail to reflect the full extent of women's contribution, since no matter what we may assume or conjecture, the historical sources on which the narrative is necessarily based consist overwhelmingly of musical texts.

It is a question that must be dealt with in the open, since the right of women to participate in public and cultural life as the social and economic equals of men has never been a more important or hotly debated a political issue than it became in late twentieth-century America. It is therefore incumbent on the historian—the teller of the tale—to explain the reasons for the glaring absence of female participants in the story that is told, lest it be assumed (as it has been, often) that the reasons lie in the nature of women, or the nature of music, rather than in the nature of the story.

A well-known example of how easy it is to fall prey to such assumptions is the answer Aaron Copland (1900–90), a famous American composer, gave some time ago to what was once a much-asked question: "Why have there been no great women composers?"[11] Copland opined that there may be "a mysterious element in the nature of musical creativity that runs counter to the nature of the feminine mind." His answer, while seemingly dogmatic and misogynistic, was not made in any such spirit and was not singled out at the time for criticism by readers or reviewers of the book in which it appeared. In fact, it comes from a tribute to an important woman musician, Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979), Copland's early composition teacher, who had once aspired to a composing career of her own. It was an answer typical of its time and reflected a viewpoint that was widely shared by men and women alike.

That, of course, did not make it correct. After decades of cogent feminist critiques of age-old cultural assumptions, it is very easy to spot the fallacies that inform it. Copland was asked a question that reflected a situation that everyone acknowledged, but one that he could not effectively explain. It was, in short, a mystery. And so the explanation had to be a "mysterious element" that women lacked. The mystery was "solved" simply by calling it a mystery. That is what is known in logic as a tautology—a mere repetition of a premise in other words, or (in this case) an arbitrary definition.

How can we do better? First by acknowledging that the "problem" of women's creativity in the arts, and in music particularly, is one that we do not see directly but through a screen of social and esthetic issues. These involve the value placed on the composer (and, more specifically, on the "great composer") in our modern musical culture, which follows, as already suggested, from the high value placed by modern musical culture on written texts. Once this is realized, economic and political factors such as *access* and *dissemination* suddenly stand revealed.

Before the twentieth century (indeed, the *late* twentieth century), it was only under exceptional circumstances that women enjoyed access to media of textual preservation and dissemination. It was because she was an abbess, the head of an exclusively female religious institution, that Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) had the means at her disposal to record her inspired religious poetry and the extraordinary melodies to which she sang it. Before they were committed to writing (probably not by Hildegard herself but by a scribe to whom she as a socially privileged person could dictate them), Hildegard's poems and songs were worked out in memory. In this activity she was hardly alone. Countless other nuns, as well as countless forgotten monks, surely made up liturgical songs. But only those with the

power to command the necessary material and human resources got to preserve their works and make them available, so to speak, to the modern historian. The same is true of Beatriz di Dia, the *trobairitz* or lady troubadour, one of whose songs was among the handful of troubadour poems to survive from the twelfth century with its melody intact. "Music from the Earliest Notation's to the Sixteenth century", chapter 4. As a noblewoman, she had privileged access to the means of inscribing and disseminating her work.

It was this power of access, rather than powers of verbal or musical inspiration, that was disproportionately commanded by men, because men commanded the overwhelmingly greater part of the political and (especially) the ecclesiastical power structures in European society. To gain access to the means of inscription and dissemination, a creatively gifted male musician sought institutional connections as an employee of court or church. Such positions were rarely open to women. For a creatively gifted woman to gain such access, she would have had to be the employer, not the employee. And that is why, until the nineteenth century, practically all women composers came, like Hildegard and Beatriz, from the higher echelons of the monastic hierarchy or from the hereditary aristocracy.

More than one reviewer of the exhaustive *Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (New York and London, 1994)—an unprecedented biographical compilation covering almost nine hundred musically creative women who managed to contribute materially to the literate tradition—expressed astonishment at the number of titled names the book contained, from Schütz's contemporary Sophie Elisabeth (1613–76), Duchess of Brunswick, to Amalia Catharina (1640–97), Countess of Erbach, to Wilhelmina (1709–58), Princess of Prussia, to Maria Barbara (1711–58), Queen of Spain, and so on.

Yet the astonishment is misplaced, and the fact easily misinterpreted. Noblewomen proportionately outnumber noblemen in the ranks of aristocratic dilettantes precisely because the rank of noble dilettante was virtually the only rank to which a woman composer could aspire. So there is no real mystery about male dominance in music, and no lack of data to account for it. The illusion of gendered disparity in musical endowment (Copland's "mysterious element") turns out to be the result of gendered disparity of access to the means of inscription and dissemination, something for which historical evidence could hardly be more abundant.

The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the "early modern" period) began to witness exceptions to this pattern, as we have observed in the case of Barbara Strozzi. New careers opened up to women as performers with the advent of professionalized court singing, particularly at the music-loving court of Ferrara in northern Italy, which maintained a famous *concerto delle donne*, a "consort" of virtuoso women singers for whom several important (male) composers wrote flamboyantly ornate madrigals near the end of the sixteenth century. With the advent of public opera in Italy beginning in the 1630s, women performers reached new heights of accomplishment and renown.

And yet their musical accomplishments did not bring women performers enhanced social status; rather the opposite. Women who sang or danced in public still bore a stigma in Christian Europe, where such activities were traditionally associated with prostitutes (or courtesans, as they were known in more elevated social circles). Thus a recent study by the music historian Anthony Newcomb of the *concerto delle donne* and other professional court singers of the time bears the title "Courtesans, Muses or Musicians?" and confirms the fact that, unless married to a nobleman, a professional woman singer was thought of as "a remarkable renegade to be looked at, applauded, but not included in polite society."[12] Even Barbara Strozzi, in the words of her biographer Ellen Rosand, "may, indeed, have been a courtesan, highly skilled in the art of love as well as music."[13]

Strozzi was nevertheless able to function as a professional composer—a creator—as well as a performer, and this was an "early modern" novelty. Many of the women performers at Ferrara and other north Italian courts were known to have composed a significant part of their own repertoires, but with only a single notable exception—Maddalena Casulana, who issued three books of madrigals in Venice between 1568 and 1583—they did not publish their work and are lost as composers to history. Strozzi, by contrast, was considered an important composer in her day, as was her older contemporary Francesca Caccini (1587–ca. 1641), who published a book of monodies in 1618 and had an opera performed at the Medici court in Florence in 1625.

Just to name these two composers, however, is to explain their exceptional status and to realize that they are only exceptions that (as the saying goes) "prove the rule." Both of them were daughters (in one case natural, the other adopted) of famous fathers who commanded great prestige in musical circles. It was on their fathers' coattails that the daughters could find an outlet for their talents where other talents, perhaps equally great, could find no outlet. Strozzi, in an effort to mitigate the audacity of her career objectives, paid tribute to the prejudice against women

composers even as she overcame it, writing in the preface to her first publication that "as a woman, I publish [it] all too anxiously," and in her second, dedicated to the Emperor of Austria, that "the lowly mine of a woman's poor imagination cannot produce metal to forge those richest golden crowns worthy of august rulers."

Caccini left the service of the Medici on the death of her husband in 1626. Recent research by Suzanne Cusick has shown that she married again a year later, to a wealthy nobleman and musical dilettante, and that she continued to compose music for entertainments at her new home—but anonymously, as befit her new social rank.[14] Thus, ironically, access to a private fortune through marriage—a marriage probably contracted precisely because of her musical talents—actually took away from Caccini the outlet she had formerly possessed, by virtue of her father's fame, to the public profession of music and the dissemination of her works.

Indeed, she now outranked her father socially. After her second husband's death, she returned to the Medici court, but as a lady-in-waiting rather than as a designated musician. (She did, however, sing in chapel services and also taught music in a convent school—a "gynocentric" environment, as Cusick calls it, and an oral one that is for both reasons hidden from the purview of conventional historiography.) In a final touch of irony, she refused permission to have her daughter sing in a dramatic spectacle such as she had participated in during her own previous stint in service, lest it damage the girl's prospects for a good marriage. Francesca Caccini recognized, in short, that her own lucky combination of musical and social success had been freakish, and not likely to be repeated in the next generation.

So, to pose once more the question Copland so glibly answered and answer it anew: There have been no "great women composers" because of a virtual catch-22. Without social rank, feminine access to the means of dissemination was impossible for one reason, but with it access could become impossible for another reason. Besides, the problem as we pose it today is compounded by a subtle nuance in the wording of the question. As we will see in greater detail when we investigate the musical results of the romantic movement, the concept of artistic greatness (a far more recent concept than one might assume) is itself a gendered one. Even earlier, the concept of artistic creation was linked with the notion of the biblical Creator, traditionally a patriarchal rather than a matriarchal figure. So the question itself, like many questions that purportedly seek simple "natural" answers, is not innocent of cultural bias.

So what do we do? One way of restoring women to the history of music, informally known as "mainstreaming," is to give the works of women composers disproportionate representation so as to offer a constant reminder that (*pace* Copland) men have no monopoly on compositional talent. The choice of Strozzi's cantata as a specimen for analysis in this book, rather than one by the more famous and prolific Carissimi (or Luigi Rossi, another Roman specialist in the genre), is an example of mainstreaming. Its immediate purpose, however, was more to provide an opening for the present discussion than to even the score between men and women in the history of composition. There is simply no way of evening that score; and while mainstreaming may constructively counteract the unfounded assumption that women are lacking in innate capacity to compose, it, too, distorts the historical record. Nor does concealing the fact of any group's historical exclusion serve to advance its current prospects for equality.

Another way of restoring women to music history is to change the nature of the story, giving less emphasis to composition and more to performance, patronage, and other areas in which the contributions of women have been more commensurate with those of men. The present account, with its constant reminders that the literate repertory is not the sole subject of music history and its constant attention to the social contexts in which music has been made, shows the influence of this trend. And yet to the extent that it remains the aim and obligation of a text like this not only to narrate the story of past musical activities and deeds but also to provide an introduction to the material products—the textual remains—of those activities, the literate repertory must, despite all caveats, retain its privilege and remain the primary focus of the story.

Whatever the quantity of women's contributions to that repertory and whatever the extent of its representation in a book like this, another question remains to be asked about it. Is its quality, or essence, distinct in any observable way from that of men? Is there something peculiar about the musical expression of women (and, it follows, of men) that is the direct result of the composer's gender? Do men or women, as composers, possess a particular group identity, the way they do as participants in the act of sexual reproduction? And if so, is that identity truly a biological given and a determinant of their behavior, as it is in reproduction, or is it the result of habit and socialization (that is, behavior one learns from other people)?

These questions—which can be applied not only to matters of gender but to a broad range of differences among

human groups including race, nationality, religion, erotic preference, and as many others as we can describe—have become increasingly common in recent years, and increasingly fraught, as different human groups (especially minority groups) have demanded, and been accorded, increasing respect in many modern societies. Answers to them have been extremely various, and they have been subject to heated, often acrimonious debate as befits the important political and economic issues that are at stake behind them, even when asked in the relatively serene context of the arts and their history.

An inclination toward affirmative answers to questions about the reality of group identity as a determinant of individual behavior is generally called the *essentialist* position, while the tendency to answer such questions in the negative marks one as a *social constructionist* or *constructivist*. These extreme positions are rarely espoused in pure form except by political activists. And even political activists sometimes recognize that the political implications of these positions are seldom unambiguous. Asserting an essentialist notion of women's writing, as certain literary critics have done (especially in France, so that "women's writing" is often called *écriture feminine* even by English or American writers), has been a useful tactic in calling attention to the existence of such literature and gaining a readership for it. And yet women writers have often resisted the notion, thinking it a predefinition of their work, hence more a limitation on them than a liberation. There has been a certain amount of musicological criticism along such lines (an example is Cusick's work on Francesca Caccini, whom she has termed a "proto-feminist").

But there is little consensus on the matter, and it will be noticed that the present discussion of Strozzi's style as evinced by her cantata has sought a neutral or agnostic (some might call it an evasive) stance. On the one hand, it is evident that Strozzi follows practically all of the same expressive conventions previously observed in the work of men like Monteverdi and Schütz. On the other, her work does possess distinguishing characteristics that, some might argue, involuntarily reflect her group identity. Questions of essentialism *vs*. constructionism, in any event, cannot be approached on the basis of a single example, and a broader empirical survey lies beyond the scope of a book like this. As in all such controversies, the burden of proof lies with those who assert the critical relevance of the issue.

Notes:

(11) Aaron Copland, "The Teacher: Nadia Boulanger," in *Copland on Music* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 85.

(12) Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians? Professional Women Musicians in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, eds. J. Bowers and J. Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 103.

(13) Ellen Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi, *Virtuosissima cantatrice*: The Composer's Voice," *JAMS* XXXI (1978): 252.

(14) See Suzanne G. Cusick, "Thinking from Women's Lives: Francesca Caccini after 1627," *Musical Quarterly* LXXVII (1993): 484–507.

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CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored

Tragédie Lyrique from Lully to Rameau; English Music in the Seventeenth Century

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

SENSE AND SENSUOUSNESS

The story is told of King Louis XIV of France that once a courtier fond of the brilliance and grandeur of Italian music brought before the king a young violinist who had studied under the finest Italian masters for several years, and bade him play the most dazzling piece he knew. When he was finished, the king sent for one of his own violinists and asked the man for a simple air from *Cadmus et Hermione*, an opera by his own court composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully. The violinist was mediocre, the air was plain, nor was *Cadmus* by any means one of Lully's most impressive works. But when the air was finished, the king turned to the courtier and said, "All I can say, sir, is that that is my taste."[1]

Invoking taste, the thing that is proverbially beyond dispute, is always a fine way of putting an end to an argument, especially when invoked by one to whom nobody may talk back. But while a king's taste may not be disputed, it may still be worth investigating. Nor can we say we really understand a story unless we know who is telling it, and why.

**fig. 3-1 Jean-Baptiste Lully, Superintendent of the King's Music.
Engraving by Henri Bonnart (1652–1711).**

This particular story comes from a pamphlet, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique française* ("A comparison of French and Italian music"), issued in 1704 by one French aristocrat, Jean Laurent Lecerf de la Viéville, Lord of Freneuse, in answer to a like-named pamphlet, *Paralèle des Italiens et des Français* ("Differentiating the Italians from the French"), issued in 1702 by another French aristocrat, Abbé François Raguenet. It was the opening salvo of a press war that would last in France throughout the eighteenth century—that is, until the revolution of 1789 rendered all the old aristocratic controversies *passé*.

The reason why it enters into our story a little ahead of schedule, and why it was so very typical of France, is that the musician it defended had been dead for almost twenty years at the time of writing, and *Cadmus*, his second opera, had had its first performance more than thirty years before. Nowhere else in Europe had operas become classics, nor had any other composer of operas been exalted into a symbol not only of royal taste but of royal authority as well. Authority is what French music was all about, and Lully's operas above all. They were the courtiest court operas that ever were.

Lurking behind the story, as behind every discussion of opera in France, was a political debate. It was touched off by

Raguenet's admiring description of castrato singing, probably the most vivid earwitness account ever penned of singers the likes of which we will never hear. Sometimes, wrote Raguenet (in the words of an anonymous eighteenth-century translator):

> you hear a ritornello so charming that you think nothing in music can exceed it till on a sudden you perceive it was designed only to accompany a more charming air sung by one of these castrati, who, with a voice the most clear and at the same time equally soft, pierces the symphony of instruments and tops them with an agreeableness which they that hear it may conceive but will never be able to describe.
>
> These pipes of theirs resemble that of the nightingale; their long-winded throats draw you in a manner out of your depth and make you lose your breath. They'll execute passages of I know not how many bars together, they'll have echoes on the same passages and swellings of a prodigious length, and then, with a chuckle in the throat, exactly like that of a nightingale, they'll conclude with cadences of an equal length, and all this in the same breath.
>
> Add to this that these soft—these charming voices acquire new charms by being in the mouth of a lover; what can be more affecting than the expressions of their sufferings in such tender passionate notes; in this the Italian lovers have a very great advantage over ours, whose hoarse masculine voices ill agree with the fine soft things they are to say to their mistresses. Besides, the Italian voices being equally strong as they are soft, we hear all they sing very distinctly, whereas half of it is lost upon our theatre unless we sit close to the stage or have the spirit of divination.[2]

And yet, Raguenet emphasizes, these desexed singers were not only the best male lovers, they were the best females as well:

> Castrati can act what part they please, either a man or a woman as the cast of the piece requires, for they are so used to perform women's parts that no actress in the world can do it better than they. Their voice is as soft as a woman's and withal it's much stronger; they are of a larger size than women, generally speaking, and appear consequently more majestic. Nay, they usually look handsomer on the stage than women themselves.[3]

To us, living in an age when sexual identity has become a "hot button," Raguenet's comfortable enjoyment of masculine cross-dressing is perhaps the most striking aspect of his description. It is a facet of a general comfort with artifice, and a willingness to accept all manner of make-believe, that contrasts strongly with more modern theatrical esthetics. But at the time the most provocative aspect of Raguenet's discourse—and the one regarded as most potentially degenerate—was his ready receptivity to the purely sensuous pleasure of singing and his willingness to accept it as opera's chief, most characteristic, and therefore most legitimate, delight. This went not only against the grain of Lecerf de la Viéville's argument, which ends with strenuous exhortations to "yield to reason" and heed the admonitions that "reason pronounces for us" (that is, for us French)—it went against the whole history of operatic reception in France, and England too.

Opera had a difficult time getting started in France. Indeed, it had to succeed as politics before it had any chance of succeeding as art. Like their English counterparts, who also possessed a glorious tradition of spoken theater (as the Italians did not), the aristocrats of seventeenth-century France saw only a child's babble in what the Italians called *dramma per musica* (drama "through" or "by means of" music). To their minds, the art of music and the art of drama simply would not mix. "Would you know what an Opera is?" wrote Saint-Evremond, an exiled French courtier and a famous wit, to the Duke of Buckingham.[4] "I'll tell you that it is an odd medley of poetry and music, wherein the poet and musician, equally confined one by the other, take a world of pains to compose a wretched performance." Music in the theater, for the thinking French as for the thinking English, was at best an elegant bauble, more likely a nuisance. High tragedians made a point of spurning it. Pierre Corneille, the greatest playwright of mid-century France, would admit music only into what was known as a *pièce à machines*—a play that already adulterated its dramatic seriousness for the sake of spectacle in the form of flying machines on which gods descended or winged chariots took off. And even then, he wrote in 1650 in the preface to his drama *Andromède*, "I have been very careful to have nothing sung that is essential to the understanding of the play, since words that are sung are usually understood poorly by the audience."[5] But then artists and critics who value intellectual understanding have always resisted opera. From the beginning dramatic music has been reason's foe, as indeed it was expressly designed to be.

Notes:

(1) Jacques Bonnet, *Histoire de la musique*, Vol. III (Amsterdam, 1725), p. 322.

(2) Quoted in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: Norton, 1950), p. 483 (translation slightly adapted).

(3) Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History*, pp. 485–86.

(4) Quoted in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd ed., p. 172.

(5) Pierre Corneille, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. I (Paris, 1834), p. 570.

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See also from Grove Music Online
Cardinal Jules Mazarin

Sociology of opera: Patronage

THE POLITICS OF PATRONAGE

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The irrational, though, can have its rational uses, and nobody knew that better than Jules Mazarin, the seventeenth century's most artful politician. It was Cardinal Mazarin (né Giulio Mazzarini), the Italian-born de facto regent of France, who took the first steps, in the earliest years of the boy-king Louis XIV's reign, to establish opera in his adopted country. He recruited the services of Luigi Rossi (ca. 1597–1653), the leading composer of Rome, to write an opera expressly for the French court. Fittingly, indeed all but inevitably, this first officially sponsored French opera, performed at the Palais Royal on 2 March 1647, was another *Orfeo*, another demonstrative setting of the myth of music's primeval power to move the soul.

Forty years after Monteverdi's treatment of the same tale, the new work showed the influence of opera's commercial popularization, so that it resembled Monteverdi's *Poppea* more than it did his *Orfeo*. Where Monteverdi's *Orfeo* had only the briefest of duets for Orpheus and Eurydice (to celebrate their happiness, not express their love), Rossi's gave the nuptial pair (both sopranos) no fewer than three extended love scenes. Orpheus, a natural tenor in Monteverdi's setting, is a soprano castrato in Rossi's, so that these scenes closely resemble the ones for Nero and Poppea in Monteverdi's last opera. Also in the spirit of *Poppea* rather than Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, Rossi's *Orfeo* has a pair of comic characters (one of them a satyr) who mock the lofty passions of the main characters.

But like Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, and like all the early aristocratic musical tales, Rossi's *Orfeo* was fitted out with sumptuous scenery, with dancing choruses, with lavish orchestral scoring and with machines (the most splendid one reserved for Apollo, who descends in a fiery chariot that illuminates a fantastic garden set). Above all, it had the requisite sycophantic prologue that showered praises on the young King Louis from the mouths of gods and allegorical beings.

By masterminding this display, Cardinal Mazarin secured for himself a prestige that rivaled that of his own mentor, the Roman cardinal Antonio Barberini, Rossi's patron. The Italian spectacles, full of everything *merveilleux*, bedizened the French court more gloriously than any rationalistic drama could do, for "the purpose of such spectacles," wrote the moralist Jean de la Bruyère (1645–96), a court favorite and a converted operatic skeptic, "is to hold the mind, the eye and the ear equally in thrall."[6]

And there was something else as well. Rossi, in his turn, recruited for his performances a troupe of Roman singers and instrumentalists, a little colony of Italians in the French capital who were personally loyal to Mazarin, and who, in the time-honored fashion of traveling virtuosi, could serve him as secret agents and spies in his diplomatic maneuvers with the papal court. All of this was a lesson to Mazarin's apprentice, the young king, who thus received instruction, as a French historian has put it (using the French word for lavish arts patronage), in "the political importance of *le mécénat*."[7] The foundations were laid for what the French still call their *grand siècle*, their great century, and opera was destined to be its grandest manifestation.

Yet it was a very special sort of opera that would reign in France, one tailored to accommodate national prejudices, court traditions, and royal prerogatives. The French autocracy was the largest ethnically integrated political entity in Europe. Its royal court was the exemplary aristocratic establishment of the day, and its musical displays would classically embody the politics of dynastic affirmation. Like every other aspect of French administrative culture, the French court opera was wholly centralized. Its primary purpose was to furnish "propaganda for the state and for the divine right of the king," as the music historian Neal Zaslaw has written, and only secondarily to provide "entertainment for the nobility and bourgeoisie."[8] No operatic spectacle could be shown in public anywhere in

France that had not been prescreened, and approved, at court.

At the same time, however, French opera aimed far higher than the "musical tale" of the Italians, which was essentially a modest pastoral play. The French form aspired to the status of a full-fledged *tragédie en musique* (later called *tragédie lyrique*), which meant that the values of the spoken drama, France's greatest cultural treasure, were as far as possible to be preserved in the new medium despite the presence of music.

To reconcile the claims of court pageantry with those of dramatic gravity was no mean trick. Only a very special genius could bring it off. At the time of Luigi Rossi's momentous sojourn in France, another far less distinguished Italian musician—just an apprentice, really—was already living there: Giovanni Battista Lulli, a Florentine boy who had been brought over in 1646, aged thirteen, to serve as *garçon de chambre* to Mme. de Montpensier, a Parisian lady who wanted to practice her Italian. She also supported his training in courtly dancing and violin playing. When his patroness, a "Frondist" (that is, a supporter of a failed parliamentary revolt against Louis and Mazarin), was exiled in 1652, Lulli secured release from her employ and found work as a servant to Louis XIV's cousin, Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orleans (known as the "Grande Mademoiselle"), and as a dancer and mime at the royal court, where he danced alongside, and made friends with, the teenaged king. Upon the death of his violin teacher the next year, Lulli assumed the man's position as court composer of ballroom music.

His rise to supreme power was steady and unstoppable, for Lulli was a veritable musical Mazarin, an Italian-born French political manipulator of genius. Shortly after the founding in 1669 of the Académie Royale de Musique, Louis XIV's opera establishment, Jean-Baptiste Lully, who like Mazarin had been naturalized and Gallicized his name, managed to finagle the rights to manage it from its originally designated patent holder. From then on he was a musical Sun King, the absolute autocrat of French music, which he re-created in his own image.

He had a crown-supported monopoly over his domain, from which he could exclude any rival who threatened his preeminence. He squeezed out his older, native-born contemporary Robert Cambert (ca. 1628–77), who, despairing of ever producing his masterpiece, *Ariane* (1659), withdrew embittered to London where in 1674 he did finally see a much-modified version of it performed in Drury Lane to a partially translated libretto. Likewise Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704), a younger competitor who, though trained in Italy and employed by the king's cousin and later by the *dauphin* (the future Louis XV), had to wait until the age of fifty before he could get a *tragédie en musique* (*Medée*, 1693) produced at court, several years after Lully's long-awaited death in 1687. (The old monopolist had died with his boots on, so to speak, following a celebrated mishap with a time-beating cane that resulted in gangrene.) By then Lully had produced thirteen *tragédies lyriques*, averaging one every fifteen months. The pattern that he set with them became the standard to which any composer aspiring to a court performance had to conform. Two generations of French musicians thus willy-nilly became Lully's dynastic heirs. His works would dominate the repertory for half a century after his death, in response not to market forces or to public demand but by royal decree, giving Lully a vicarious reign comparable in length of years to his patron's and extending through most of the reign of Louis XV as well. His style did not merely define an art form, it defined a national identity. *La musique*, he might well have said, *c'est moi*.

Notes:

(6) Jean de la Bruyère, *Les Caractères* (Paris, 1874), p. 21.

(7) Madelleine Laurain-Portemer, *Études Mazarines* (Paris, 1981), quoted in Neal Zaslaw, "The First Operas in Paris: A Study in the Politics of Art," in *Jean-Baptiste Lully and the Music of the French Baroque: Essays in Honor of James R. Anthony*, ed. J. Heyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 8.

(8) Zaslaw, "*Scylla et Glaucis*: A Case Study," *Cambridge Opera Journal* IV (1992): 199.

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See also from Grove Music Online

Atys

Lully: Operas

André Campra

Rameau: Dramatic music

Castor et Pollux

ATYS, THE KING'S OPERA

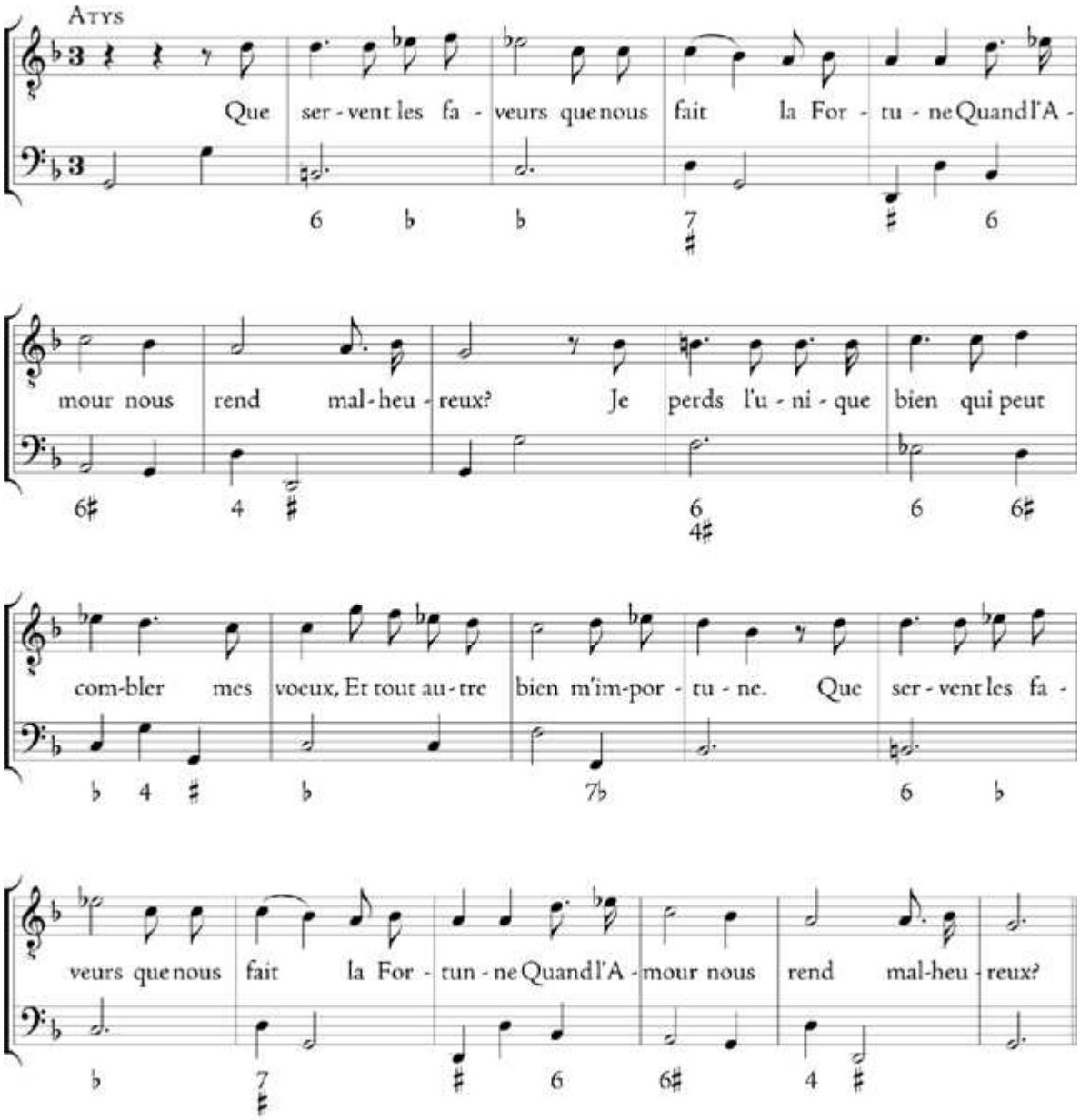
Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But of course the brave castrato voice referred to anything but itself. The one thing its brassy timbre never symbolized was actual eunuchhood. And so the last character a castrato might have effectively represented was Atys, or Attis, the hero of the ultimate courtly sacrifice-spectacle, known in its time as "the king's opera" and cited not only as an operatic but as a literary classic by Voltaire, seventy-five years after its first production.[9] Attis was a god of pre-Hellenic (Phrygian) religion, later taken over as a minor deity by the Greeks. Like Adonis, he was a beautiful youth over whom goddesses fought jealous battles. Cybele, the earth or mother goddess, fell in love with the unwitting and insouciant Attis, and so that none other shall ever know his love, caused him to castrate himself in a sudden frenzy. Like Adonis, he was worshiped by the Greeks as a god of vegetation who controlled the yearly round of wintry death and vernal resurrection.

In Quinault's libretto, Cybele's rival for the love of Attis is the nymph Sangaride, to whom Attis has actually declared his affections. At the end of the opera, Cybele causes Attis to kill Sangaride in his frenzy, and then to stab himself fatally. Before he can die, Cybele transforms him into a pine tree whose life is renewed yearly, so that she will be able to love it forever. According to a gossipy courtier who authored several highly revealing letters about the preparations for the *Atys* première and about the staging, this ending was contrived expressly so as to avoid having to show an act of castration on stage. The very avoidance, however, testified to everyone's awareness of the real nature of the hero's sacrifice and lent an added resonance to the contemporary subtext, no doubt well known to Lully and Quinault: "Word has it," one of the letters divulges, "that the King recognizes himself in this Atys, apathetic to love, that Cybele strongly resembles the Queen, and Sangaride Mme. de Maintenon, who enraged the King when she wanted to marry the Duke of B****."[10]

In other words, the opera gave symbolic representation to a love triangle that was even then being played out in the king's own household; for "Mme. de Maintenon" (that is, Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon), the widow of a court poet and an influential royal adviser, became the second wife of Louis XIV in 1684. No wonder *Atys* became known as "the king's opera." It was, even beyond the obligatory prologue, an opera about the king. And in its famed artistic "chastity"—(almost) no comic interludes, (almost) no subplots, in short (almost) no popular "Venetian" trappings of any kind—*Atys* reflected on the artistic plane the same tendency toward serenity and exalted moderation that Mme. de Maintenon advocated in court life.

The third act of *Atys*, at once the most succinct of the opera's five acts and the most varied, is a perfect model of courtly opera at the peak of its prestige. It begins with a short soliloquy for the title character, cast as an *haute-contre*, the highest French male voice range, a soft tenor shading into falsetto and the very antithesis of the plangent castrato (Ex. 3-4a). Atys laments the loss of Sangaride to her betrothed, King Celenus of Phrygia. This little number epitomizes Lully's deliberate avoidance of big Italianate vocal display in the interests of dramatic realism; as the anonymous letter writer describes it, "all in half-tints: no big effects for the singers, no grand arias, but small courtly airs and recitatives over the bare continuo, and their alternation is what will give shape to the action."



Of what use are Fortune's favors when Love makes us miserable?

ex. 3-4a Jean - Baptiste Lully, *Atys*, Act III, Atys's opening *air* (sarabande)

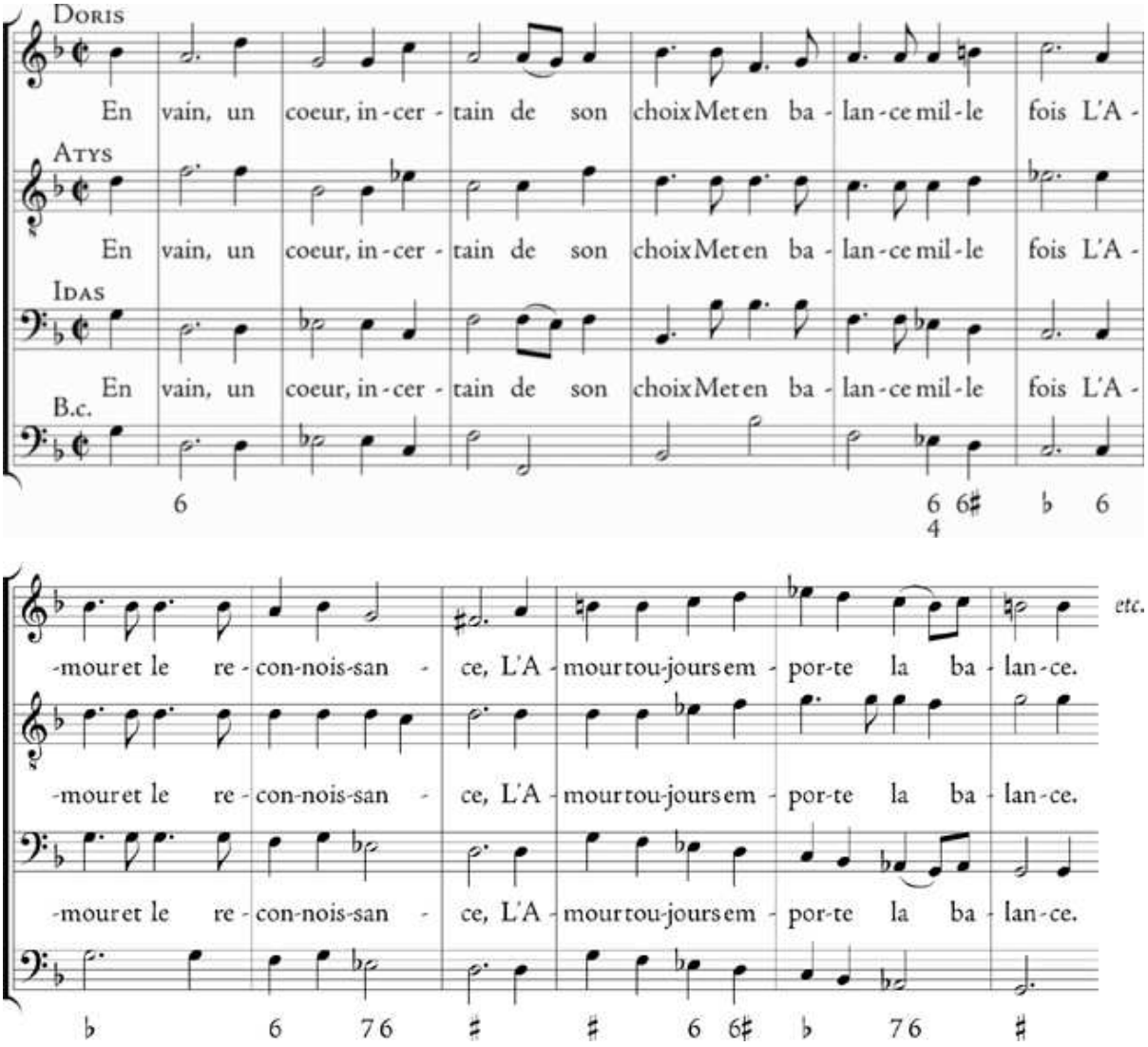
Atys's solo is just such a "courtly air" (*air de cour*). The text consists of a single quatrain, of which the first pair of lines (*couplet*) is used as a refrain to round it off into a miniature ABA (*da capo*) form. This little rounded entity is further enclosed between a pair of identical *ritournelles*, in which the first measure already discloses the characteristic meter and rhythm of the sarabande. Thus even the vocal solos reflect the underlying basis of the French court opera in the court ballet, and beyond that, in ballroom dance itself. The setting of the text is entirely syllabic and responsive to the contours, stresses, and lengths of the spoken language, reflecting the other underlying basis of the court opera, namely high-style theatrical declamation.

These values were hard-won. They ran counter to "musicianly" instincts, and Lully's famous skills as autocratic disciplinarian, with unprecedented authority stemming directly from his patron the king, were necessary ones to the success of his undertaking—as the anonymous letter writer confirms in a delightfully written, somewhat cynical passage that conjures up a vivid sense of something new in music: haughty, easily offended authorial pride.

> Lully is ranting at everybody. Everyone wants to shine in *Atys*, and there is no way to shine in this work of Lully's. Everything is fashioned, calculated, measured so that the action of the drama progresses without ever slackening. This singer takes it upon himself to add ornaments, slowing down the beat; and in order to remain

> on stage longer and arouse a little more applause, drags out an air that Lully intended to be simple, short and natural. That dancer begs for a futile repetition; the violins want to play when Lully asks for flutes ...,. Everybody seeks his own reflection in *Atys*. Lully has to defend his work.[11]

After Atys's solo, the nymph Doris and her brother Idas enter to urge Atys to act on his passion and spurn his official duty as Celenus's protégé and chief sacrificer to Cybele, thus crystallizing the moral dilemma on which the drama turns. Like most scenes of dialogue, it is carried by a rhythmically irregular recitative that alternates between measures containing four big beats and measures containing three. But when the two confidants come to their principal argument ("In love's realm duty is helpless"), they come together in another minuscule *air* in minuet tempo, into which (and out of which) they slip almost imperceptibly: that is the deft "alternation that shapes the action," in the words of the anonymous letter writer. And when they win Atys over, he joins them in a tiny trio in the style of an allemande with dotted rhythms recalling the imperious strains of the overture (Ex. 3-4b).

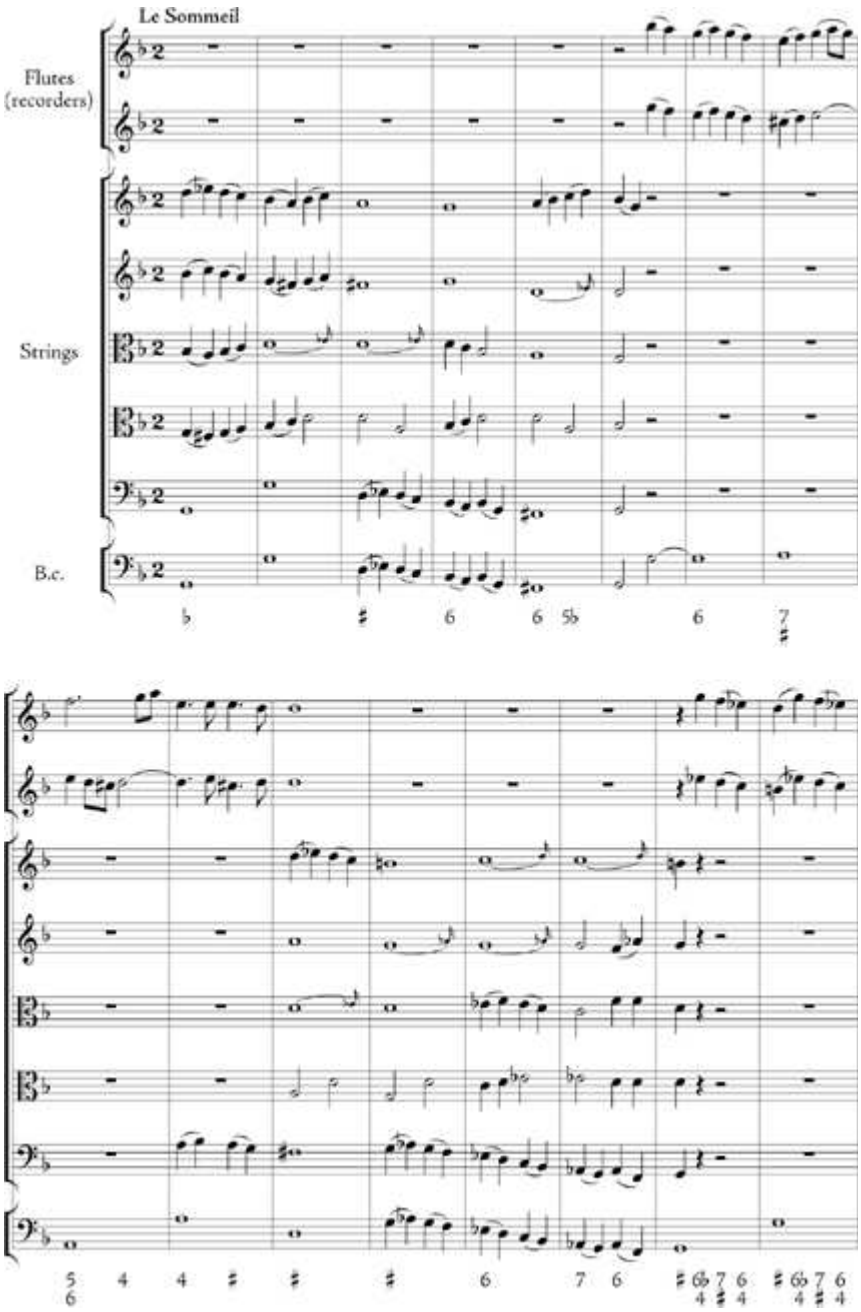


ex. 3-4b Jean - BaptisteLully, *Atys*, Act III, *Air à trois* (allemande)

fig. 3-5 Costume design by Jean Berain for the *Sommeil* ("sleep scene") in Lully's *Atys* (1676).

Left alone once again to reflect on his amorous prospects, Atys launches what appears to be another sarabande, heralded by another orchestral ritournelle. (Its giveaway rhythm is the accented and lengthened note on the second beat of the measure.) But he is quickly distracted by the counterclaim of duty and lapses into a recitative, from which he lapses further into sleep. This is an enchanted slumber that Cybele has engineered in order to apprise him of her love without having to confess it (degrading for a goddess). The scene thus conjured up is the most famous scene in the opera—the subtly erotic *Sommeil*, literally the "sleep scene" or "dream symphony," so widely copied by later composers and librettists that it became a standard feature of the *tragédie lyrique*.

It begins with a Prelude (Ex. 3-4c) in which soft, sweet-toned whistle-flutes (what the French simply *called flûtes*, or recorders in English) are spotlighted in a somewhat concerto-like dialogue with the string band. The rocking rhythms, slurred two-by-two and surely performed with the characteristic French lilt (the so-called *notes inégales*), literally cradle the entranced title character and serve as the prologue to a charmed vision of Sleep himself (haute-contre), who sings a hypnotic refrain in alternation with his sons Morpheus (another haute-contre), Phobétor (bass), and Phantase or "Dream" (tenor).

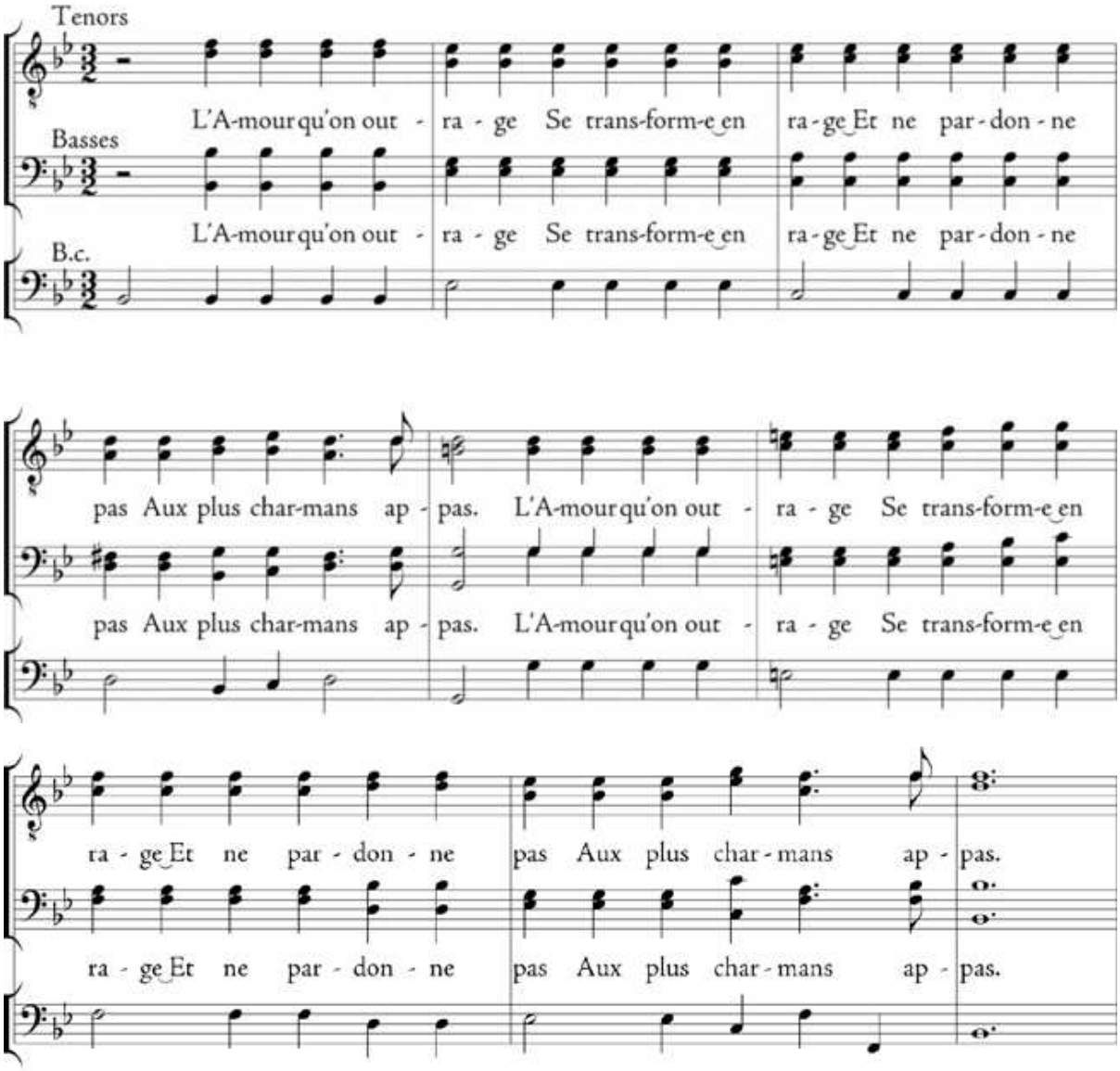


ex. 3-4c Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Atys*, Act III, *Sommeil*

Morpheus's short recitative, in which he informs Atys that he has the honor (or in view of the outcome, the curse) of being loved by the exalted Cybele, introduces a typical process of alternating recitatives and accompanied airs with refrains, the chief refrain being the quatrain sung by the three sons of Sleep that continually reminds Atys that Cybele's love exacts duty and constancy in return. Exhortations give way to a ballet of sweet dreams (*des songes agréables*), in which the minuet danced by the corps de ballet forms a refrain to alternate with that of the sons.

The ballet of the sweet dreams is suddenly disrupted by one of nightmares (*songes funestes* or "evil dreams"), who enter, heralded by a bass who warns against offending a divine love, to the strains of an allemande in pompous overture style, its regal rhythms reflecting the high station of the goddess at whose behest the nightmares have appeared. The chorus of evil dreams that follows (Ex. 3-4d) is in one of Lully's specialty styles: the rapid-fire "patter chorus," which reached its peak the next year with the chorus of "Trembleurs"—People from the Frozen Climates whose bodies quake and whose teeth chatter with the cold—in Lully and Quinault's pastoral *Isis*. Having sung, the evil dreams launch into a lusty *courante*, full not only of the usual hemiolas but of rattling military tattoos as well. The nightmare sequence is dispelled by the awakening of the startled Atys and the arrival of Cybele herself, who comforts him, distressed though she is to learn, through an exchange of minuscule airs, that Atys properly reveres her but does not return her passion. Sangaride enters for a long scene in recitative that encloses the drama's

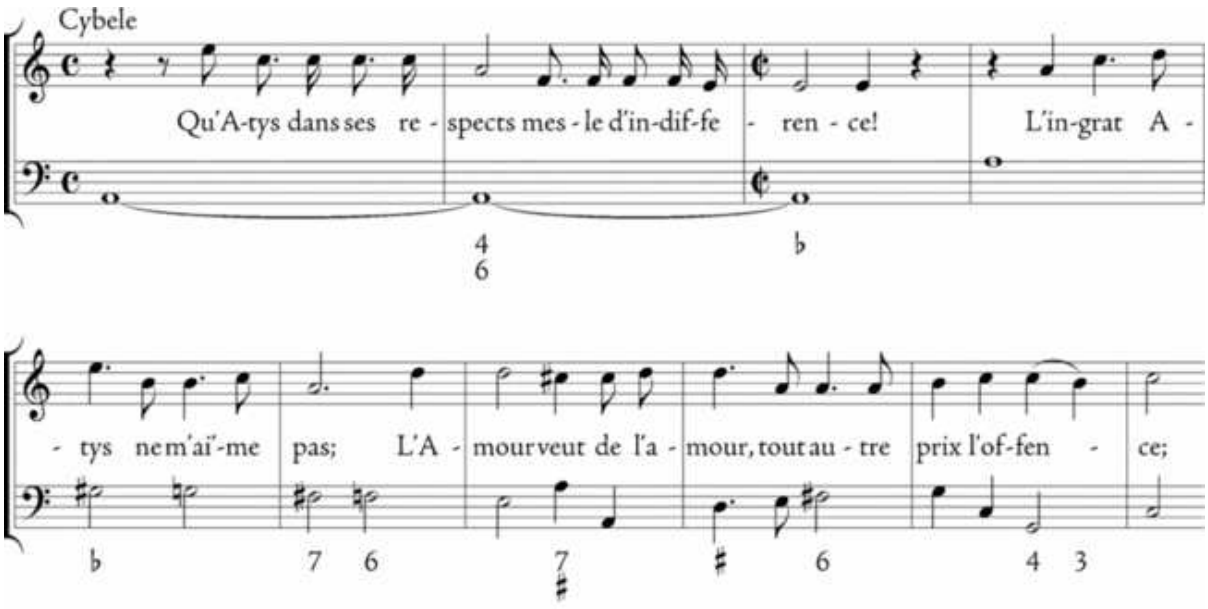
(would-be) turning point, when Cybele (alas, only temporarily) promises to aid her rival out of unselfish love for Atys. Her crucial decision is rendered as a maxim: "The gods protect the freedom of the heart," set as a tiny march or allemande for the goddess, immediately repeated by the mortal pair.



Love insulted turns to fury and won't forgive the most charming appeal.

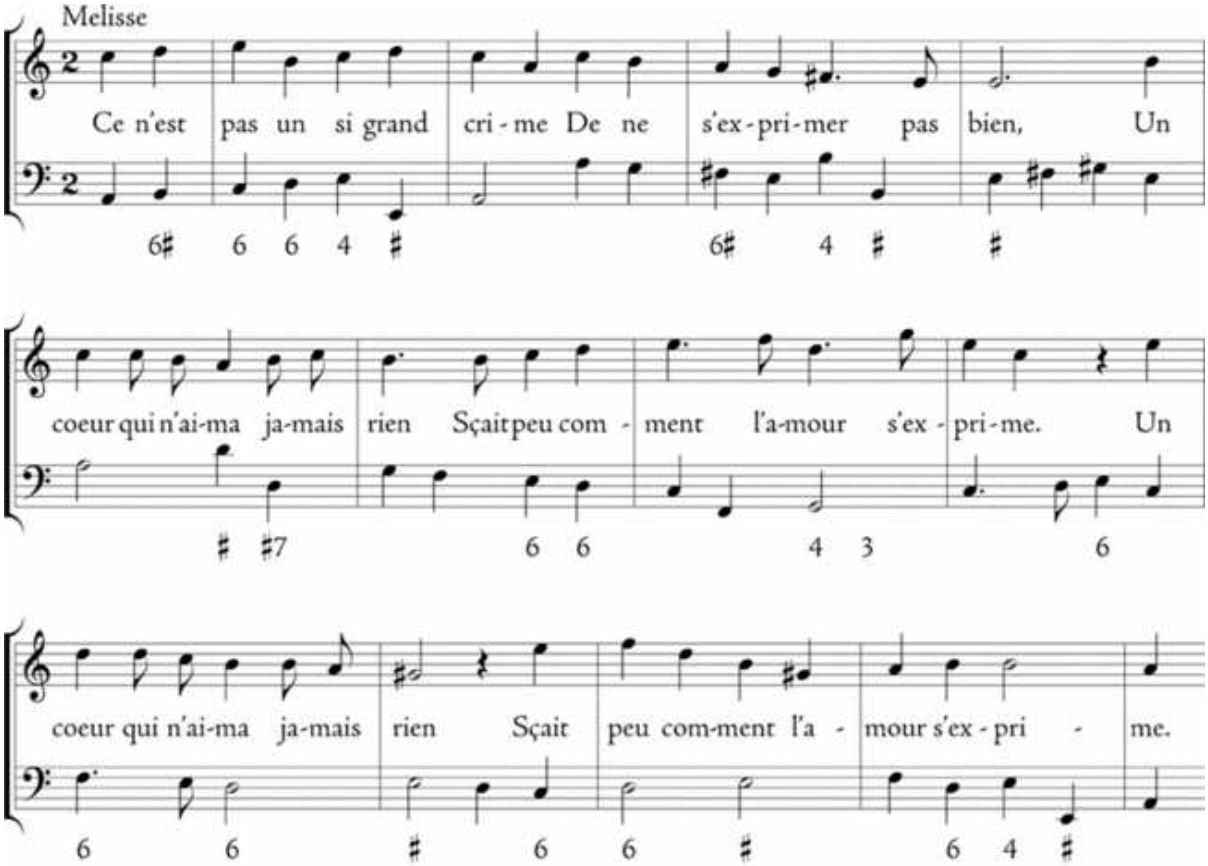
ex. 3-4d Jean - Baptiste Lully, *Atys, Choeur des Songes Funestes*

Sangaride and Atys exit to seek the aid of Sangaride's father, the river Sangarus. (His scene, in act IV, is the opera's one comic divertissement.) Cybele's confidant, the priestess Melissa, now enters to console the unhappy goddess, whose complaint that "the ungrateful Atys loves me not" is set against the all-but inevitable *passus duriusculus*, the chromatically descending tetrachord, in the continuo (Ex. 3-4e). She sings in recitative style throughout, while Melissa's attempts to console her take the form of *petits airs* (little songs without repeats), the first of them a gavotte (Ex. 3-4f), identifiable by its characteristic two-quarter upbeat in quick "cut time" (two half notes to the bar).



How doth Atys mix indifference with respect! The ungrateful wretch loves me not; Love demands love, any substitute is an offence.

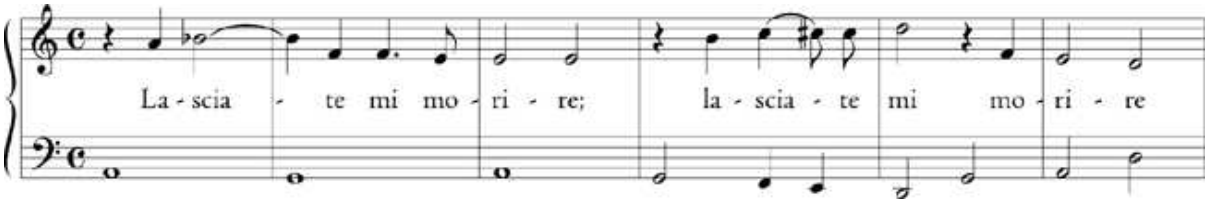
ex. 3-4e Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Atys*, Act III, Cybelés complaint



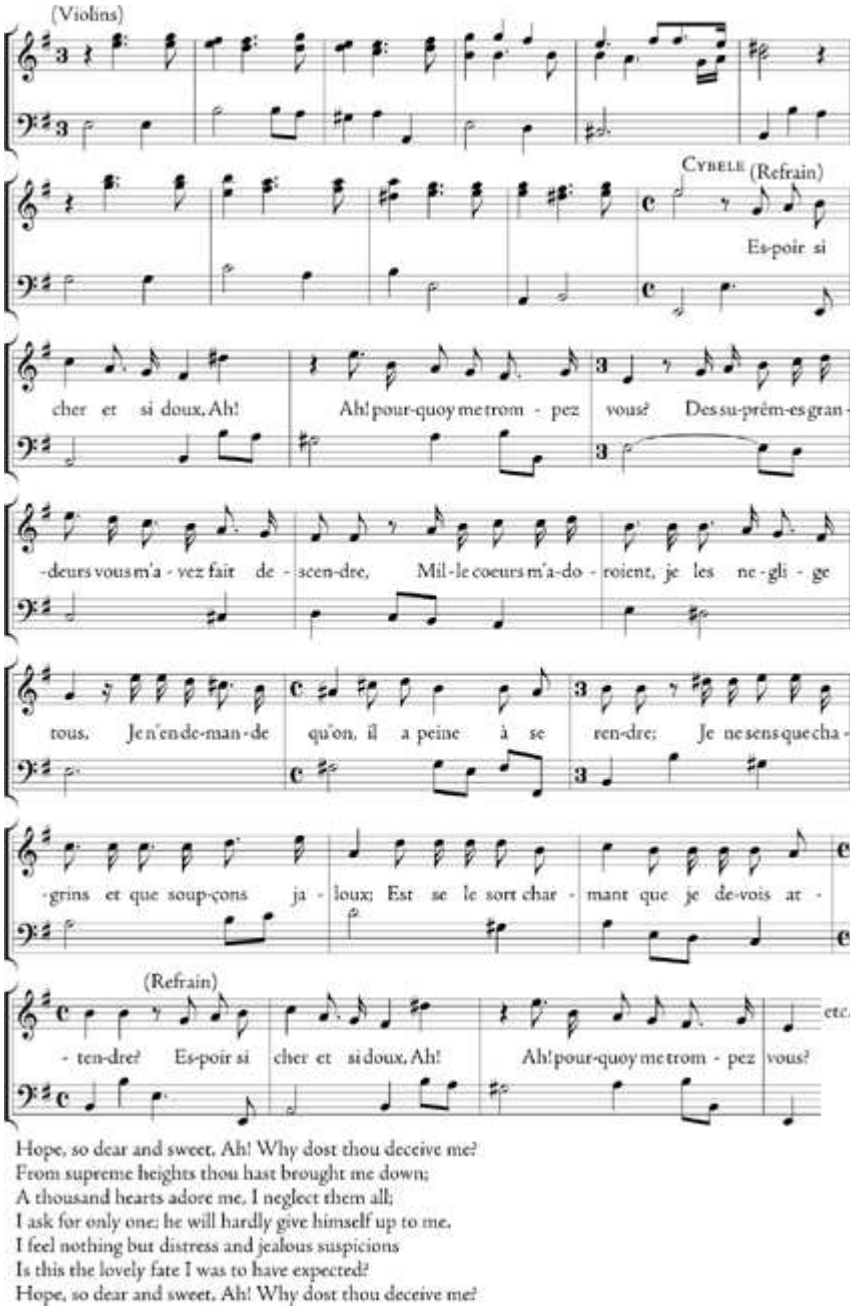
It is not so great a crime to express oneself poorly; A heart that has never loved knows little about how love is expressed.

ex. 3-4f Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Atys*, Act III, Melissa's *petit air* (gavotte)

Finally, Melissa leaves Cybele alone on stage and the goddess delivers herself of an impassioned yet dignified lament, the most extended solo turn in the opera. Impassioned though it is, however, it is far from what one would expect from a contemporary Italian opera at such a point. Rather, it harks back directly to such masterworks of the early, courtly Italian style as Monteverdi's famous lament for Ariadne—Lully surely knew it—in the otherwise lost opera *Arianna* of 1608, named for her (Ex. 3-4g). Introduced and concluded by a ritournelle in an elegiac sarabande style, Cybele's lament (Ex. 3-4h), like Ariadne's, is a recitative built around a three-fold textual and musical refrain: "Hope, so cherished, so sweet, Ah, … ah, why dost thou deceive me?" Between the two consecutive "Ahs," Lully inserts a quarter rest, called a *soupir* ("sigh") in French, on the downbeat. (A teaser: Was the rest called a sigh because it was used like this, or did Lully use it like this because it was called a sigh? The history of the term is not well enough established to answer the question, but it raises the prospect that even the most obviously "onomatopoietic" or "iconic" musical imitations are actually mediated through language concepts and are, in effect, puns.)



ex. 3-4g Claudio Monteverdi, *Lamento d'Arianna*, refrain



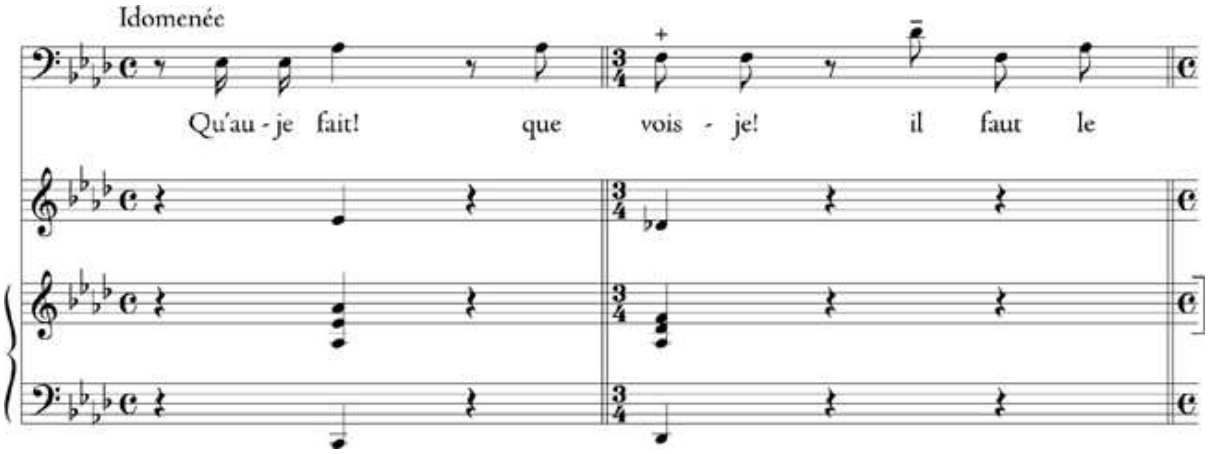
Hope, so dear and sweet, Ah! Why dost thou deceive me?
From supreme heights thou hast brought me down;
A thousand hearts adore me, I neglect them all;
I ask for only one; he will hardly give himself up to me.
I feel nothing but distress and jealous suspicions
Is this the lovely fate I was to have expected?
Hope, so dear and sweet, Ah! Why dost thou deceive me?

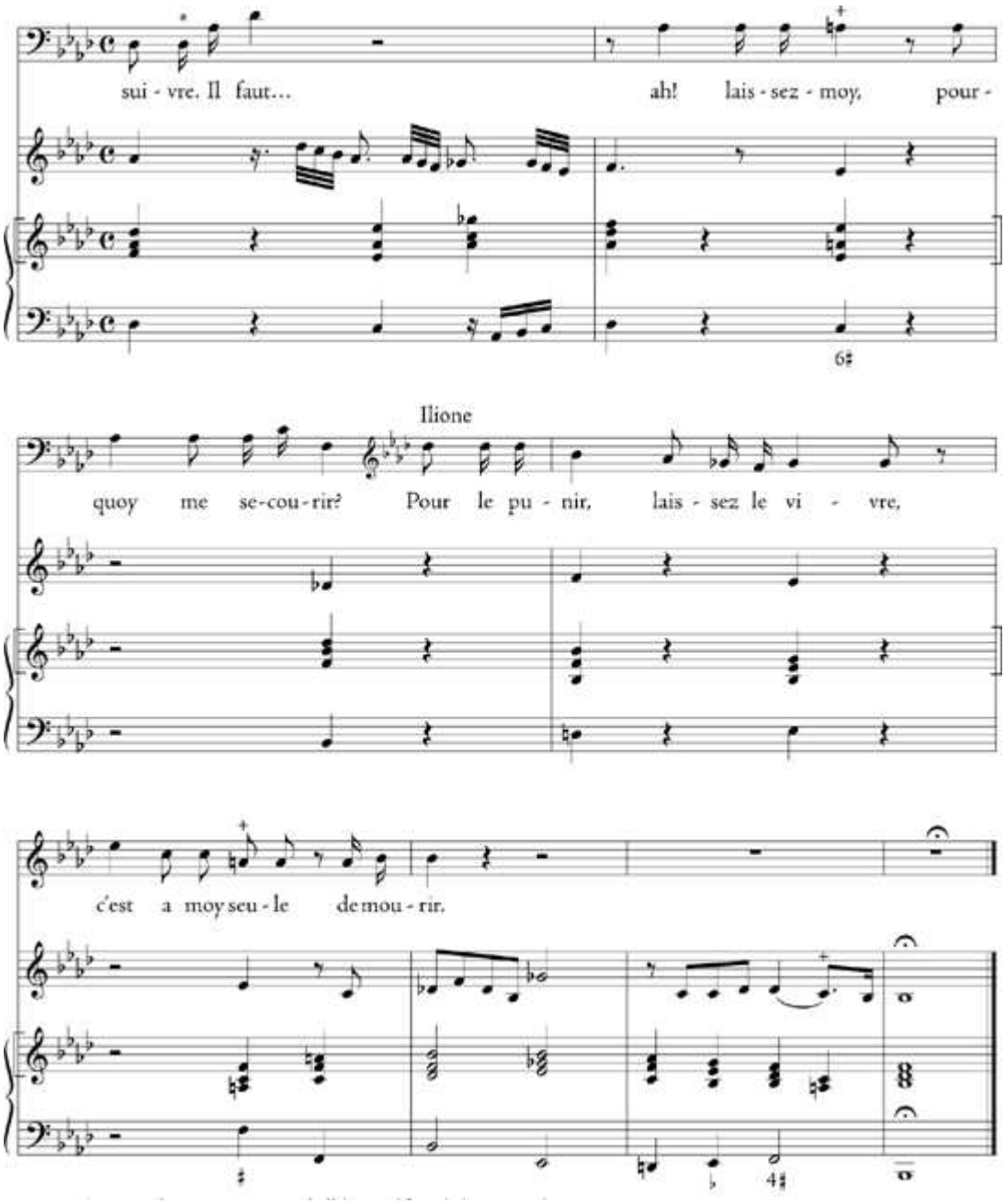
ex. 3-4h Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Atys*, Act III, Cybeles lament (sarabande)

As we see from the third act of *Atys*, French singing actors were rarely if ever called upon to contend with the full orchestra. Their scenes and confrontations were played against the bare figured bass in a stately, richly nuanced recitative whose supple rhythms in mixed meters caught the lofty cadence of French theatrical declamation. Lully, for whom French was a second language, was said to have modeled this style directly on the closely observed delivery—the contours, the tempos, the rhythms and the inflections—of La Champmeslé (Marie Desmares, 1642–98), the leading tragedienne of the spoken drama, who created most of the leading roles in the works of the great dramatist Jean Racine. Racine personally coached her, and thus indirectly coached Lully, whose *tragédies en musique* were exactly contemporaneous with Racine's great tragedies for the legitimate stage. Cybele's concluding lament in act III of *Atys* was an obvious instance of this musicalized tragic declamation.

Roulades and cadenzas would only have marred this lofty style, but Lully's singers employed, as if in compensation, a rich repertoire of "graces" or *agrémens*: tiny conventional embellishments—shakes, slides, swells—that worked in harness with the bass harmony to punctuate the lines and to enhance their rhetorical projection. And there were all kinds of subtly graded transitions in and out of the *petits airs*, the tiny, simply structured couplets and quatrains set to dance rhythms, which animated the prosody while placing minimum barriers in the way of understanding.

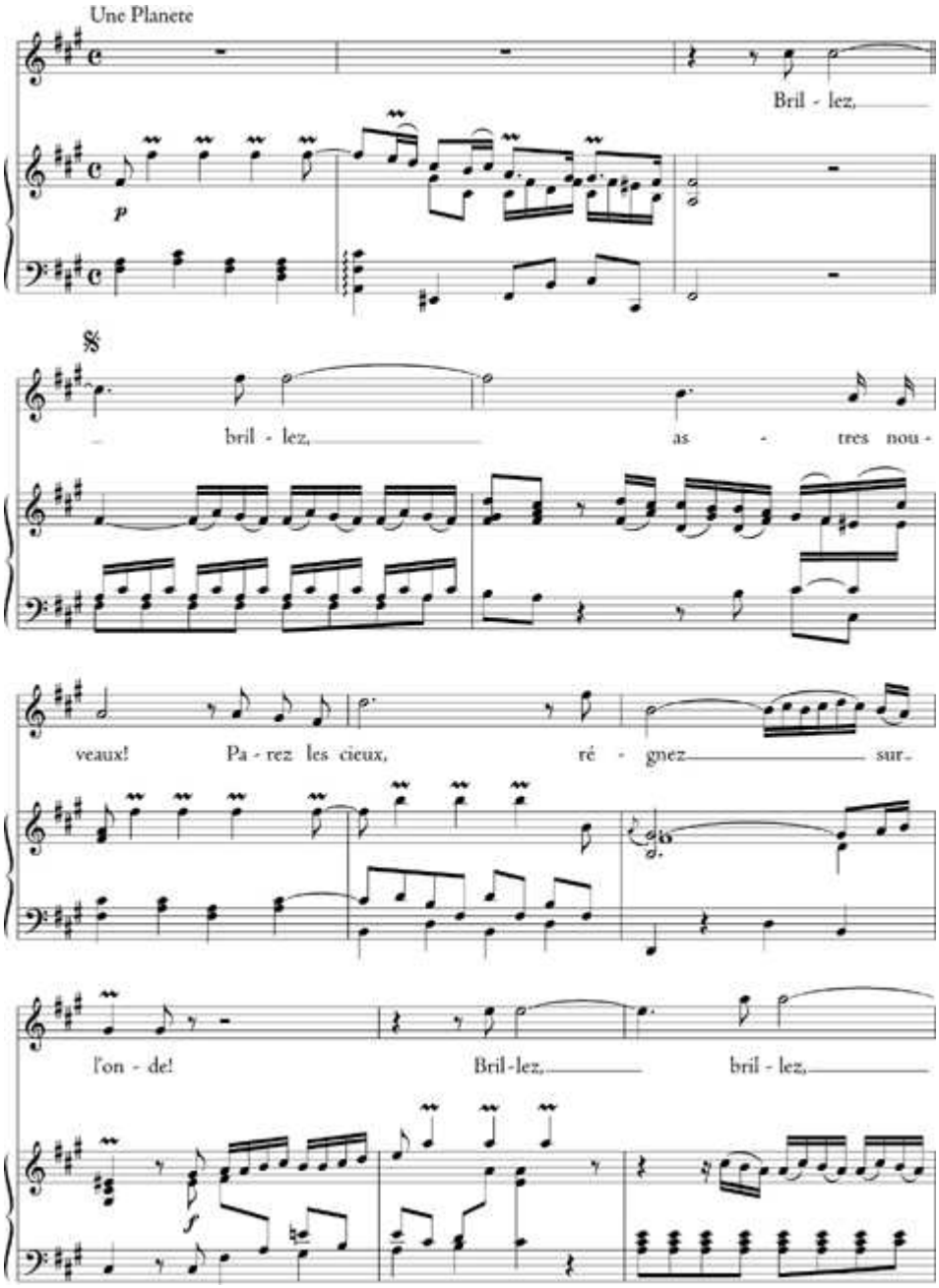
This, then, was the perfect opera for snooty opera haters like Saint-Evremond: an eyeful of spectacle, one ear full of opulent instrumental timbre, the other ear full of high rhetorical declamation. Vocal melody was far from the first ingredient or the most potent one, and the singers were held forcibly in check. Vocal virtuosity was admitted only in a decorative capacity on a par with orchestral color and stage machinery, never as a metaphor for emotion run amok. For passions out of control, the title character's harrowing final mad scene in Campra's *Idomenée* marked the absolute limit (Ex. 3-5). The tragic agitation is conveyed by brusque orchestral roulades, not vocal ones, and by the use of extreme tonalities, whose timbres were darkened by lessened string resonance, and whose unfamiliar playing patterns and vocal placements caused the performers to strain.

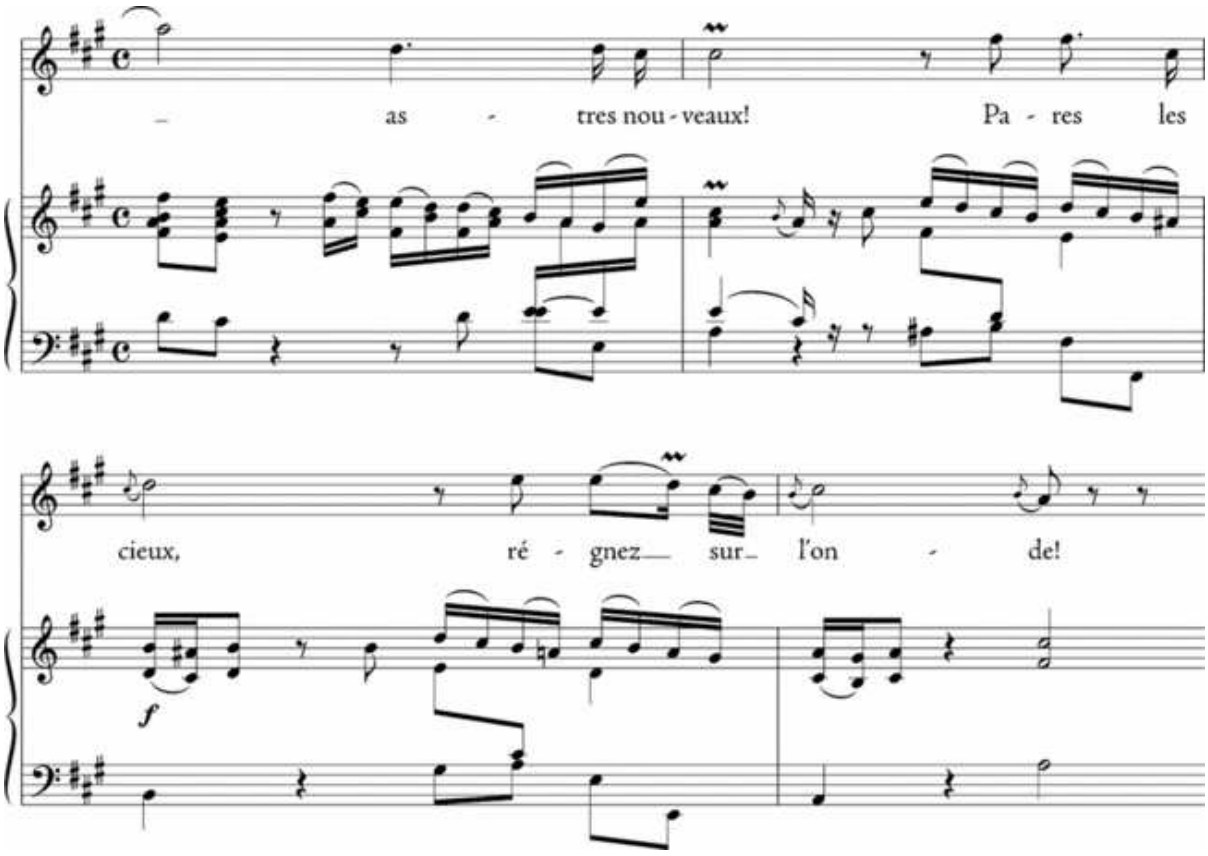




ex. 3-5 André Campra, *Idomenée*, from the final mad scene

By contrast, virtuoso singing could only emanate from the lips of anonymous *coryphées*: soloists from the general corps, representing members of the crowd, shades, athletes, even planets—whatever the dramatic or allegorical circumstances required. The singing planet in Ex. 3-6—a brilliant *ariette* to greet a new heavenly constellation—is from Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, part of the *fête de l'univers* decreed by Jupiter. It embodies a kind of singing otherwise uncalled for in the opera—one that, while eminently theatrical, is essentially foreign to the dramatic purposes of the *tragédie lyrique* and therefore only suitable for an undramatic ornamental moment in a divertissement.


Une Planete
Bril - lez,
p
bril - lez, as - tres nou -
veaux! Pa - rez les cieux, ré - gnez sur
l'on - de! Bril-lez, bril - lez,
f



ex. 3-6 Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Castor et Pollux*, Act V, ariette, *Brillez, brillez astres nouveaux*

fig. 3-6 Costume designs for Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* (1737).

The resplendent general impression to which this coldly dazzling ariette contributed took precedence over the personality of any particular participant. The concert of myriad forces in perfect harness under the aegis of a mastermind was the real message, whatever the story. While even the prejudiced Saint-Evremond had to admit that "no man can perform better than Lully upon an ill-conceived subject," he turned it into a barb: "I don't question but that in operas at the Palace-Royal, Lully is 100 times more thought of than Theseus or Cadmus," his mythological heroes. But that was all right, since the king was even more thought of than Lully.

Rameau's planetary *ariette* shows the influence of a later Italian style than Lully could have known. (We will give it fuller consideration when we turn to the operas of Alessandro Scarlatti and George Frideric Handel.) In a sense it belongs to another age; but although Rameau is obviously later than Lully, and novel enough to have inspired resistance, he is not essentially different; and that is important to keep in mind. The eighteenth-century philosopher Denis Diderot had it right when he called Lully *Monsieur Ut–mi–ut–sol* (C–E–C–G)—roughly, "Mr. Music"—but called Rameau *Monsieur Utremifasollasiutututut* (CDEFGABCCC)![12] For the Rameau style was the Lully style advanced—in no way challenged, but intensified: richer in harmony, more sumptuous in sonority, more laden in texture, more heroic in rhythm and rhetoric, more impressively masterminded than ever.

When André Campra said of the fifty-year-old Rameau's first opera that it contained enough music for ten operas, he did not mean it as a compliment. That same opera, *Hyppolite et Aricie* (1733), was the very first musical work to which the adjective "baroque" was attached, and as we know, that was no compliment either. Rameau's prodigality of invention and complexity of style were taken by some as a hubris, a representation of personal power and therefore a *lèse-majesté* (an affront to the sovereign), offensive not only to the memory of the great founder, whose works were in effect the first true "classics" in the history of music, sacramentally perpetuated in repertory, but also to what the founder's style had memorialized.

Indeed, if (as we have done) one compares Lully's dulcet *Atys* of 1676 with Rameau's pungent, even violent *Castor et Pollux* of 1737, one can experience a bit of a shock—until one reckons that the span of time separating these two works is greater than the span that separates Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* from Monteverdi's *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (or, more recently, Bach's Mass in B Minor from Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony, or Verdi's *Il Trovatore* from Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*). Then the shock of the new gives way to amazement at the hold of tradition, a hold that testifies first of all to the potency of administrative centralism and absolute political authority.

The real challenge, to look ahead briefly, came about fifteen years later, with the so-callecl *Guerre des Bouffons*, the "War of the Buffoons," an endless press debate that followed the first performances of Italian commercial opera in Paris, when the French court opera received, according to the great philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "a blow from which it never recovered."[13] Rousseau was a dilettante composer in addition to being a philosopher, and he had an interest in seeing the grand machinery of the official French style, with which he could never hope to cope, replaced with the sketchy "natural" spontaneity of the Italians. He even rode the coattails of the Italians in Paris to some popular success with his own little rustic one-acter called *Le Devin du village* ("The village soothsayer").

Bur of course Rousseau was much more than a musician, and his incense interest in the War of the Buffoons suggests that much more than music was at stake. Historians now agree that what seems a ludicrously inflated press scuffle about opera was in fact a coded episode, and an important one, in the ongoing battle between political absolutism and Enlightenment that raged throughout the eighteenth century. As always, the Italian commercial opera—epitomized this time by a farce (we'll take a close look at it later) in which a plucky maidservant cows and dominates her master, subverting the social hierarchy it was the business of the French opera to affirm—exemplified and stimulated the politics of opposition.

Notes:

(9) Voltaire, *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), cited in Lois Rosow, "Atys," *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. I (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 242.

(10) Letter of August 1675, ed. Jean Duron in booklet accompanying *Atys, de M. de Lully*, recording by William Christie and Les Arts Florissants, Harmonia Mundi France HMC 1257.59 (1987), p. 21.

(11) Letter of August 1675, *Atys* booklet, p. 21.

(12) See Denis Diderot, *Les bijoux indiscrets, Au Monomotapa* (Paris: Durand, 1748).

(13) J. J. Rousseau, *Confessions* (New York: Modern Library [Random House], n.d.), p. 395; see also Rousseau's *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753), in Strunk, *Source Readings*, pp. 636–54.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

ART AND POLITICS: SOME CAVEATS

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The political conflict embodied or symbolized in the War of the Buffoons has a great deal of resonance for contemporary politics, or so one might be inclined to think, and for American politics in particular. The basic philosophical contradiction eventually transcended philosophy and passed into political action, culminating in revolutions not only in France, the original site of operatic contention, but in the American colonies as well. The anti-aristocratic, egalitarian ideals expressed in America's foundational documents, the Constitution and (especially) the Declaration of Independence, arose precisely out of the political ferment adumbrated by the War of the Buffoons. The *tragédies en musique* of the *grand siècle* speak eloquently for a social order unalterably opposed to every principle Americans are supposed to hold dear.

And yet we are not likely to be any more troubled by the political content or implication of these works—at least while listening to them—than we are likely to be troubled on hearing "popish ditties" like the Missa Papae Marcelli if we are Protestants (as long as we do not hear them in church). Nor are we apt to be troubled by our equanimity when (as now) it is pointed out. But why should that be so? Why does our appreciation of such works now tend to be almost completely nonpolitical, when their political content was so much a part of their original meaning and value?

Answers to these questions are not simple; indeed, they are questions with which we will have to struggle repeatedly from this point on, just as composers and listeners have struggled with them ever since the notion—the ever-expanding notion—of modern participatory politics (or democracy, as we call it now) was born. Suffice it to say at this point that the answers will have to do both with the artworks with which we engage and with ourselves. Since the nineteenth century the concept both of "the work of art" and of its social import have changed radically.

Once the idea of autonomous art, existing in some sense for its own sake, was born, the tendency has been to apply it to all art that we value. We tend therefore not to expect works of "classical music" to engage with political or social issues, even if they did so at an earlier phase of their history. We are often content to enjoy it and not ask questions. And yet opera—a genre that contains much more than music, and that so often engages explicitly with political and social issues to this day—remains a somewhat ambiguous category. It is hard to regard it wholly as art for art's sake.

So if we are not troubled by the art of the *ancien régime* and its absolutist politics—politics that would have consigned the vast majority of those who now enjoy that art to what we would certainly now regard as a miserable existence—it must also be because we no longer regard the figure of Louis XIV or his policies as politically active agents. The War of the Buffoons is over, we are apt to think, and Louis lost. He and his despotic policies are "history"; they do not threaten us. His victims (as we would now define them) are all dead, along with those who mourn them, and we take no umbrage at an art that glorifies his power.

When dealing with more recent despotisms—Nazi Germany, for example, or Soviet Russia, whose victims are still remembered keenly and with anguish—some remain disinclined to regard the art that glorified them as entirely innocent or politically denatured. Studying history, moreover, makes it harder to ignore the fact that it was the political absolutism they celebrated that gave the practitioners of French court music (and Lully above all) the right to institute in their own artistic sphere their own tyrannical exercise of power. Absolute authority—especially as vested in choral and, later, orchestral conductors—has remained part of the ethos of musical performance in the West long after it disappeared from the political scene. Only recently, in fact, has it been moderated by the advent of labor unions representing musicians.

Moreover, whereas modern Protestants, living in societies that have long protected their rights, or where they make up the majority population, may not regard the messages of Counter Reformation art as threatening, it may be a different matter with today's minority populations. There is a great deal of Christian art, even very old Christian art, that makes modern Jews uncomfortable; there is a great deal of Western art that deals troublingly with "oriental" peoples; and there is much music, now regarded as "classical," set to texts deriding the rights of women, the elderly

the handicapped, and so on.

We will encounter many examples as we continue our story into the modern age. It is important, at least in a book like this, to take the opportunity historical discussion grants us to air these matters dispassionately. As we are nearing the beginning of the age of modern politics, it seems the right time to raise the issue and make a couple of cautionary observations. One is that it may not be wise simply to assume that an artwork's status as "classical" is enough to render it politically and socially innocuous. Another is that the impulse to dismiss such considerations as mere sanctimony or "political correctness" may be similarly imprudent.

In today's society, it may not be superfluous to observe, the charge of "political correctness" is almost invariably made by members of privileged groups against the claims and concerns of the less privileged. It is a way of warding off threats to privilege. "Classical music," like all "high art," has always been, and remains, primarily a possession of social and cultural elites. (That, after all, is what makes it "high.") This is so even in a society like ours, where social mobility is greater than in most societies, and where entry into elites can come about for reasons (like education, for example) that may be unrelated to birth or wealth. To maintain that "classical music" is by nature (or by definition) apolitical is therefore a complacent position to assume, and a rather parlous one. Complacency in support of a not universally supported status quo can serve, in today's world, to marginalize and even discredit both the practice and the appreciation of art. With these matters explicitly raised and fresh in mind, we may return to our historical narrative with heightened awareness, perhaps, of their ubiquitous implicit presence.

Our next topic, the fate of music (and particularly of opera) in England during the seventeenth century, will underscore with special intensity the relationship between high art and the fortunes of social and political elites. It will also help delineate the difference between the elite attitudes of yesterday and those of today. The hereditary elites of old regarded art as something "there for them"—something that was at their disposal, that awaited their pleasure. The cultural and intellectual elites of today often seem to regard art with a respect formerly reserved for the holy and the mighty. High art has been placed on a pedestal, and we, so to speak, are there for it. And in this attitude of submission to art we have perhaps identified another rationale for our curious habit of purging the notion of art of its social and political component: we now think of art as bigger than its patrons.

These notions are recent, they are virtually restricted to "the West," and they are decidedly odd when placed in a historical or a global context. But they are the ones most of us have grown up with, and so they can seem "natural" to us. To see them historically means seeing them as strange. Observing a radically different scale of values at work can help us achieve detachment from the familiar and better evaluate our acceptance of it.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

JACOBEAN ENGLAND

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Whether courtly or commercial, opera (or, for that matter, any full-blown music in the theater) simply did not take hold in England for most of the seventeenth century. “Spoken drama with musical decorations” was about as far as the English were prepared to go. Shakespeare’s plays made provision for a bit of incidental music, not only in occasional popular-song texts—for instance “It was a lover and his lass, with a hey and a ho and a hey nonny no” from *Twelfth Night*, of which Thomas Morley made a still-famous setting—but also in the stage directions, which call for trumpets, “hautboys” (high woodwinds, or what would later become oboes), and so on, playing “alarums” (signals for attention), or “sennets and tuckets” (flourishes and “toccatas,” as Monteverdi called them). And a stronger case of the same prejudice that prevented the French from tolerating a virtuoso aria from the mouth of a major character prevented the English from tolerating any music at all from such a mouth. Dramatic “verisimilitude”—sheer believability—would not stretch that far in England. Music, when used at all in the theater, was consigned to the gaudy periphery.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

William Shakespeare

Masque

Consort

Christopher Tye

Alfonso Ferrabosco II

MASQUE AND CONSORT

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

During the early Stuart reigns—called the "Jacobean" period after James I (reigned 1603 – 25), the Scottish king whose ascent to the throne of England created what is now officially known as the "United Kingdom"—music found its chief theatrical outlet in dance entertainments called masques, which lay somewhere between a costume ball and the prologue to an early Italian or (especially) French court opera. The name of the genre recalls its early link with mummery—masked ceremonial and carnival dancing. By the time of James I such entertainments were organized around mythological or allegorical plots in praise of the ruler or some aristocratic patron. (One early Jacobean masque took as its theme "The Virtues of Tobacco," recently imported to England from the New World colonies and thought to have medicinal properties.) The participants were noble amateurs, who often selected dance partners from the audience for a central episode (or "entry," from the French *entrée*) called "revels," that amounted to a suite of plotless social dances.

The chief Jacobean masque-maker was the playwright Ben Jonson (1572–1637), whom James I chose as "Master of the Revels" before elevating him in 1617 to become the first British poet laureate. The few individual songs and dances that survive from Jonson's masques were mainly the work of James's stable of court composers, including Robert Johnson (ca. 1583–1633), Thomas Campion (1567–1620), Alfonso Ferrabosco II (ca. 1575–1628), and John Cooper (alias Coprario, d. 1626). The closest the Jacobean masque ever came to opera was Jonson's *Lovers made Men* of 1617, in which the music, by Nicholas Lanier (1588–1666), was "sung after the Italian manner, *stilo recitativo*," according to the published libretto. The music does not survive, however, and so it is impossible to say how continuous it really was.

It is also difficult to say how much masque music survives in the many Jacobean manuscripts that contain dances for lute or for "consorts" (or as we would say, ensembles) of viols. The great profusion of Jacobean instrumental music, especially consort music, compared with the relative paucity of vocal or theatrical music, seems a reliable guide to the musical tastes of the period no matter how low a survival rate we assume. Jacobean England may well have been the earliest European society to value instrumental music more highly than vocal. The preference was as much a social as an esthetic indicator.

Jacobean consort music was, in effect, the earliest instrumental chamber music. It had its forerunners, chiefly in northern Italy—the instrumental chanson reworkings published by the Venetian printer Ottaviano Petrucci beginning in 1501, the ensemble ricercars and canzonas of sixteenth-century Venice, and so on. But the English repertory was not only larger and more varied than these; it also came much closer to our modern idea of what chamber music is. Although "chamber music" performance in our own time has by now been thoroughly professionalized and takes place as much or more on the concert stage than it does in homes, the idea of chamber music originally implied private conviviality. In chamber music, audience and performers are ideally one.

Thus it was in its origins a wholly secular art and largely a domestic one, without significant or necessary social ties to the contemporary court or church (although, as we shall see, there were some residual musical ties to the latter). It was an art addressed to amateurs and connoisseurs, implying privacy and leisure, and ultimately affluence. But its uniqueness lay in the fact that it was an art not primarily of noblemen or courtiers but one of "gentlemen"

—aristocrats of commerce and education rather than by way of birthright. Only England had a class of this kind—"self-made men" (though not yet a "bourgeoisie" since they resided for the most part on country estates) —sufficiently numerous and developed to support a distinct musical subculture.

One of the best descriptions of this musical subculture was written by Roger North (1651–1734), a latter-day member or descendent of the class that nurtured it. He belonged to a very distinguished family, a few of whose members held baronies, estates that carried with them minor titles of nobility. The untitled members of the clan distinguished themselves in learning, in trade, and in civil service. Roger North spent his early years in law and politics, holding the offices of solicitor general to the Duke of York and attorney general to the queen consort of King James II. His elder brothers had even more distinguished careers. One, Sir Dudley North (1641–91), amassed a huge personal fortune in trade with the Ottoman Empire and, not altogether surprisingly, became an important early advocate of laissez-faire economics ("free trade").

Roger North was rather early excluded from politics as a result of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 that dislodged the Stuart dynasty from the throne, and he spent the rest of his life as a country squire and scholar with a special interest in music. In this he followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, Dudley, the third Lord North, an exemplary Jacobean gentleman who

> took a fancy to a wood he had about a mile from his house, called Bansteads, situated in a dirty soil, and of ill access. But he cut glades, and made arbors in it. Here he would convoke his musical family, and songs were made and set for celebrating the joys there, which were performed, and provisions carried up for more important regale of the company. The consorts were usually all viols to the organ or harpsichord.... When the hands were well supplied, then a whole chest went to work, that is six viols, music being formed for it; which would seem a strange sort of music now...[14]

Indeed, it was even by the time Sir Roger wrote a somewhat strange sort of music, and one that has long attracted the special interest of musical sociologists.[15] It was a socially and politically "progressive" repertory in that it was cultivated by very early members of an entrepreneurial class that, over the next couple of centuries, would challenge the power of the aristocracy all over Europe and that appears to us now as the truest harbinger of the capitalist or "free market" societies of the modern world. At the same time, it was stylistically about the most conservative repertory to be found anywhere in the world. That very combination—economic libertarianism and cultural conservatism—characterizes "business" attitudes to this day.

The two main genres of Jacobean consort music were both inherited directly from the Elizabethan, and even pre-Elizabethan, past. The fantasy or fancy as it was colloquially known (or "fantazia," to give the more formal designation found in the musical sources) was, in North's unimprovable phrase, an "interwoven hum-drum" made up of successive points of imitation—known as *fantazies* since the fifteenth century—occasionally relieved by chordal writing. In other words, it was a textless imitation of the sacred genre known since the fifteenth century as the motet (although the term goes back to the thirteenth).

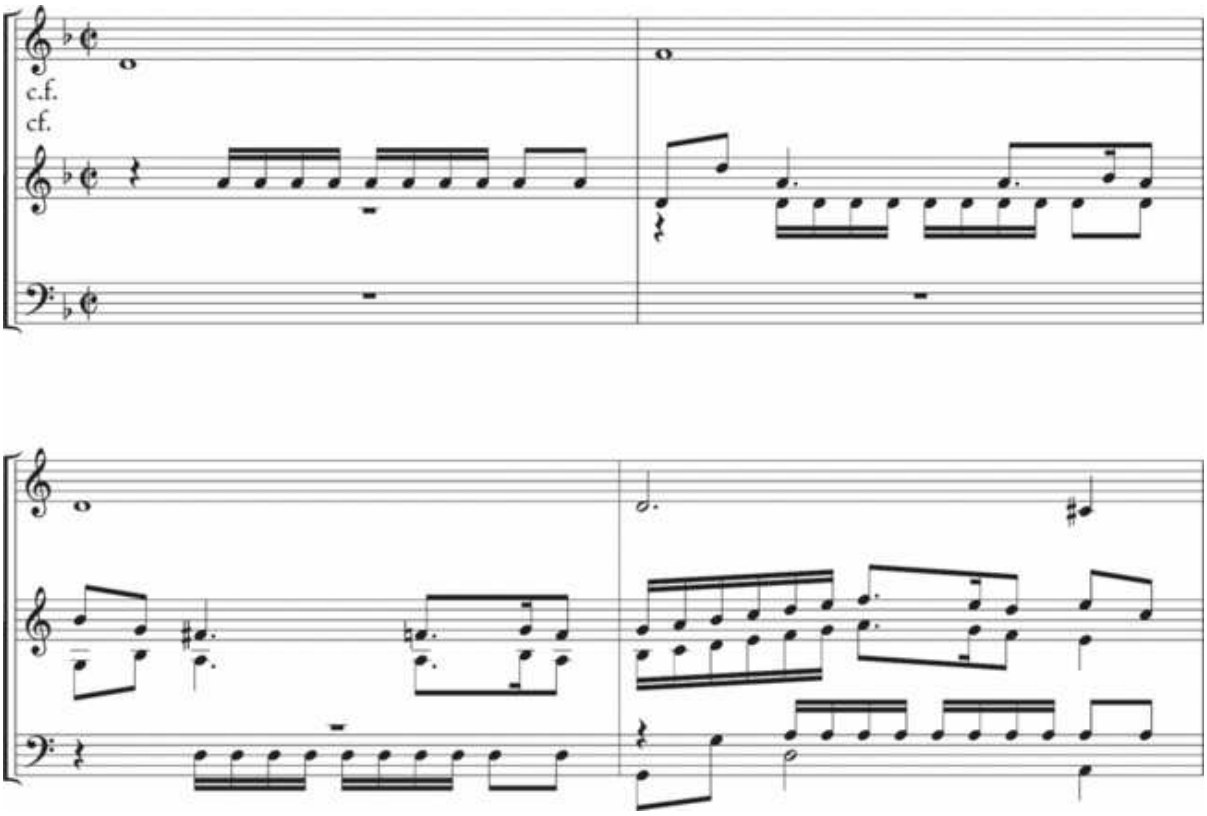
Thomas Morley, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, called it "the chiefest kind of music which is made without a ditty," that is, without words, and emphasized the freedom that this gave the composer, who "taketh a point at his pleasure and wresteth and turneth it as he list, making either much or little of it according as shall seem best in his own conceit," so that "in this may more art be shown than in any other music because the composer is tied to nothing, but that he may add, diminish, and alter at his pleasure."[16] Morley's description, with its enthusiastic emphasis on freedom of enterprise, is consistent with the social status of the genre, even in Morley's day a gentleman's occupation par excellence, and also consistent with Morley's own status as England's foremost musical entrepreneur.

The genre's extreme stylistic conservatism—conservatism in the most literal, etymological sense of "keeping old things"—can be dramatically illustrated by focusing on one of its most popular subgenres, a special type of fancy called the "In Nomine." The odd name, which means "in the name of," is derived from the text of the Mass Sanctus ("Benedictus qui venit *in nomine* Domini" or "Blessed is he who cometh *in the name of* the Lord"). Indeed, the instrumental genre goes back to a particularly grand and venerable English cantus-firmus Mass, John Taverner's six-voice *Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas*, based on a pre-Reformation (Sarum) Vespers antiphon for Trinity Sunday, "Glory to thee, O Trinity." Taverner probably composed the Mass around 1528. The chant-derived cantus firmus from the *In nomine* section of Taverner's Sanctus, scored for a reduced complement of four solo voices, became the

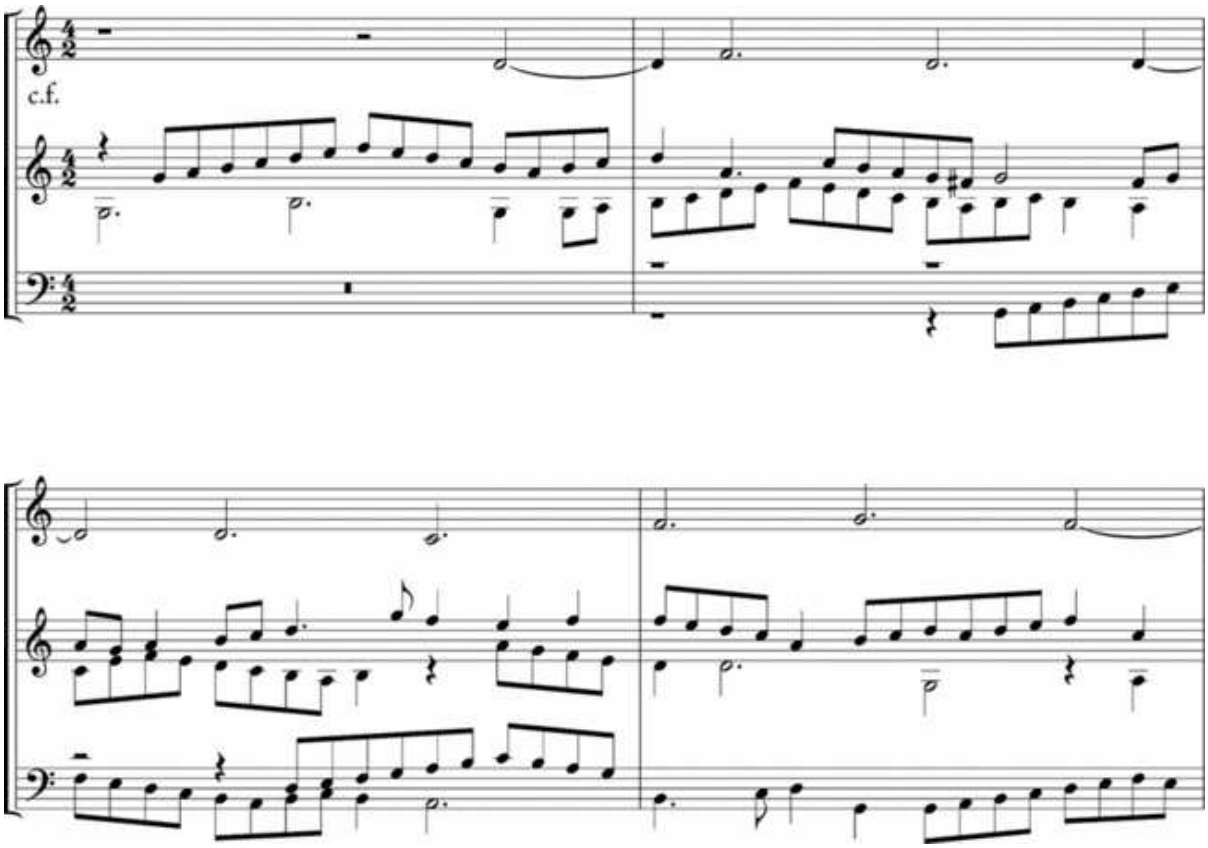
ever-present cantus firmus for the whole repertory of instrumental *In Nomine*s, a repertory numbering in the hundreds and practiced for almost a century and a half after Taverner's death in 1545.

How did such an improbable tradition get started? Although Taverner's original *In nomine* was copied out for instruments and is found in many manuscripts containing fancies, the instrumental *In Nomine* repertory as such evidently goes back to Christopher Tye (ca. 1505–73), an Elizabethan composer best known for his Anglican hymns and anthems, who wrote no fewer than twenty-one *In Nomine* fancies (mostly in five parts) over (or, more frequently, under) Taverner's cantus firmus as a sort of sideline or hobby. As usual with a big series of similar pieces, the composer eventually began to show off his craft by indulging in various sorts of gimmicks.

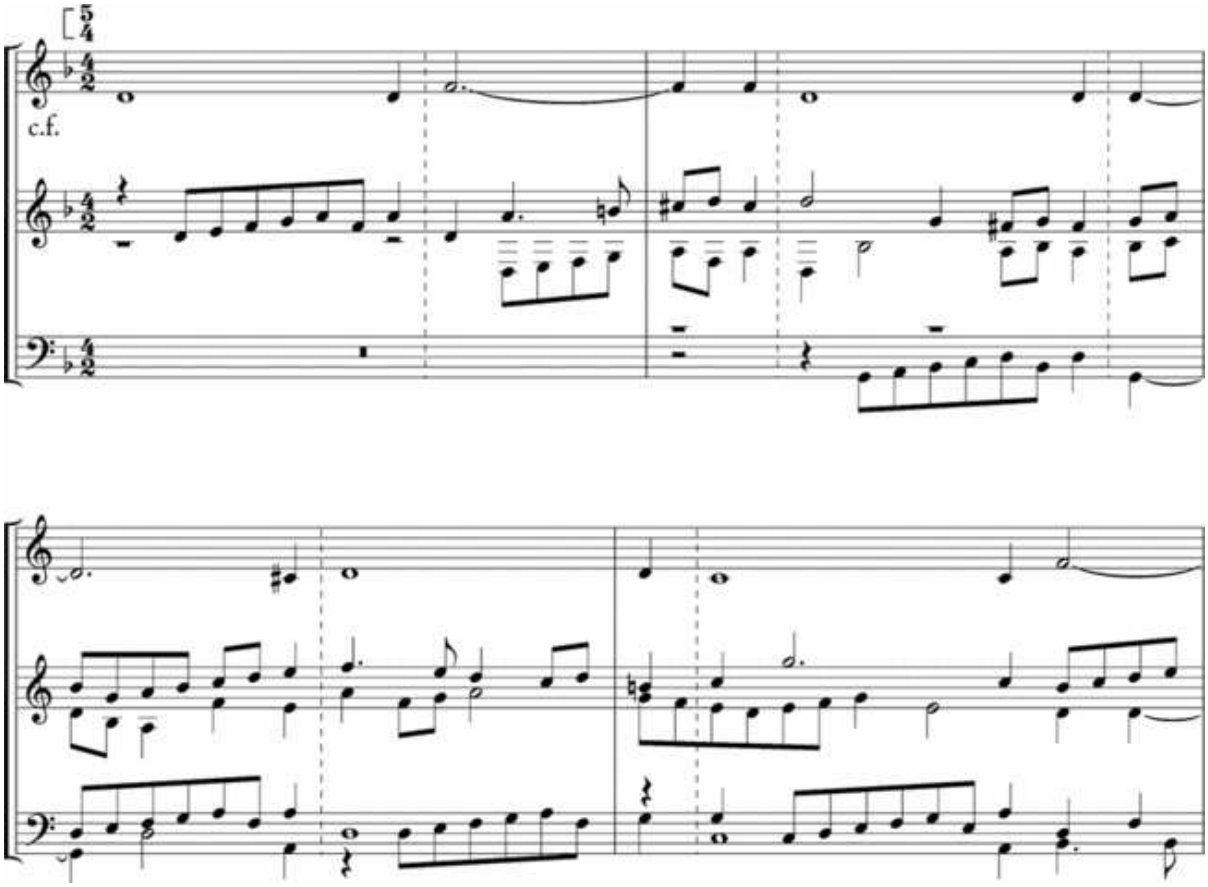
One of his *In Nomine*s, for example, called "Crye," has a subject consisting of a series of rapid repeated notes that mimic a street vendor's cry. (Weaving plebeian "Cries of London" or "Country Cries" into the otherwise abstract texture of viol fancies was another standard subgenre that amused the gentlemen patrons of the medium.) Another, called "Howld Fast" (i.e., "hang on") casts the Taverner cantus firmus in dotted semibreves that crosscut the implied meter of the other parts. Yet another, called "Trust," is cast in what we would now call a meter (Ex. 3-7).



ex. 3-7a Christopher Tye, *In Nomine*s, "Crye" (opening)



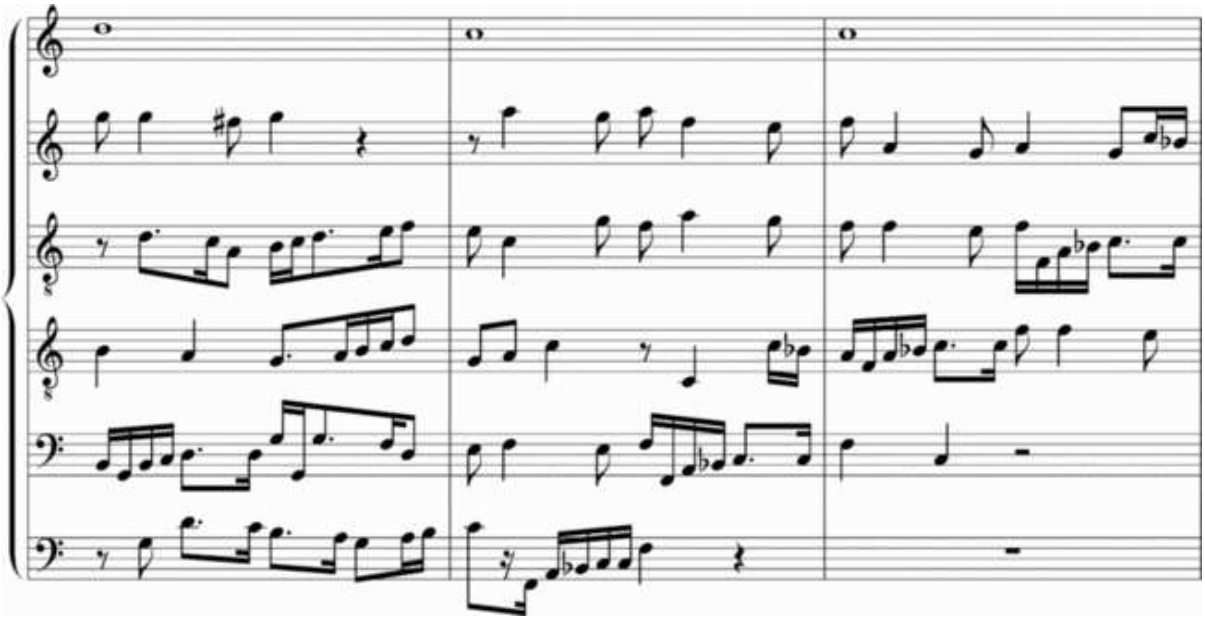
ex. 3-7b Christopher Tye, *In Nomine*s, "Howld Fast" (opening)

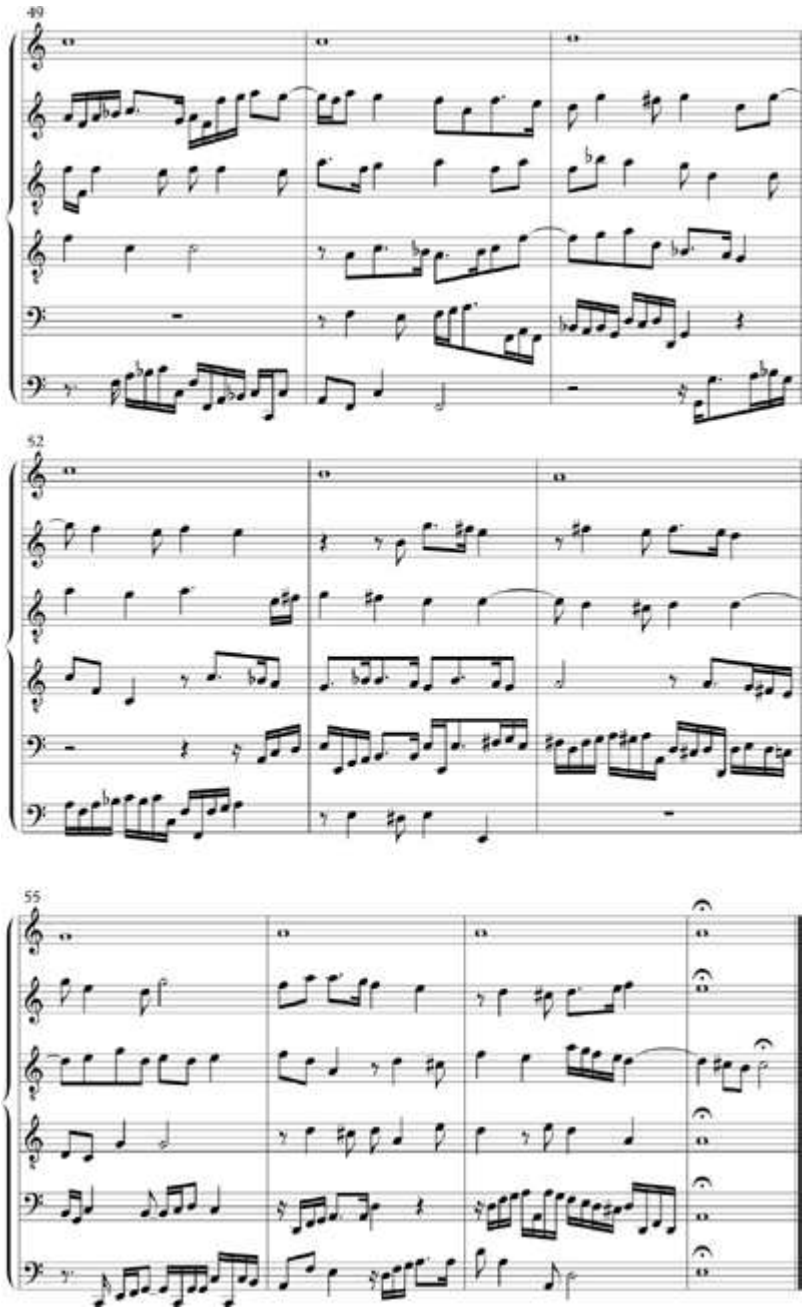


ex. 3-7c Christopher Tye, *In Nomine*s, "Trust" (opening)

As in the case of the "L'Homme Armé" Masses of the fifteenth century, Tye's prolific output of *In Nomine*s, both technically impressive and whimsical, seems to have stimulated the emulatory impulse that led to the creation of the genre. The great upsurge of interest in consort music during the Jacobean years led to a flood tide in which every composer of fancies participated. The aged William Byrd composed seven *In Nomine*s, a total exceeded only by Tye himself. After Byrd, the next most prolific *In Nomine* composer was Alfonso Ferrabosco II, the English-born son of Byrd's early Italian motet mentor, who composed six, of which three were scored for the full "chest" of six viols, thought not only by North but by all contemporary writers to be the ideal consort medium: "your best provision (and most complete)," in the words of Thomas Mace, seventeenth-century England's most encyclopedic theorist, who specified that a "good chest of viols" were "six in number, 2 Basses, 2 Tenors, 2 Trebbles, all truly proportionably suited."[17] As time went on and the tradition developed, the style of writing became increasingly idiomatic and "instrumental," further belying the genre's vocal, ecclesiastical origins.

The *In Nomine* by Ferrabosco excerpted in Ex. 3-8, which dates from around 1625, is scored for just such a full complement of viols (Fig. 3-7). The old cantus firmus is given, rather unusually, to one of the treble viols, and was probably played by a novice on the instrument. (The inevitable presence of a part playable by a child has been counted one of the reasons for the *In Nomine*'s popularity, given the family surroundings in which English consorts were apt to be played.) Meanwhile, the other parts converse motet-fashion, approaching, toward the end, the kind of "perpetuall intermiscuous syncopations and halvings of notes" that North cited as one of the chief pleasures of the genre.





ex. 3-8 Alfonso Ferrabosco II, *In Nomine* a 6

fig. 3-7 A chest of viols (the ensemble near the right), shown in an anonymous painting (ca. 1596) of the wedding masque for Sir Henry Unton, Queen Elizabeth's special envoy to the French court.

The bass viols, in particular, are given some elaborate "divisions" to play during the last point of imitation; these reflect the solo repertoire that was also growing up at the time, which mainly consisted of bass viols doing what contemporary musicians called "breaking a base": performing ever more elaborate variations over a ground. Like most virtuoso repertories, that of the "division viol" was as much an improvisatory practice as a literate one. (Its greatest exponent was a gentleman virtuoso named Christopher Simpson, who published a treatise on the subject, called *The Division-violist, or the Art of Playing Extempore upon a Ground*, in 1659.) The consort fancy, however, depended entirely on writing for its dissemination and performance. It represents positively the last outpost of what on the continent had already been consigned once and for all to the "first practice" or *stile antico*: a final wordless flowering of the motet, and even, in the case of the *In Nomine*, of traditional cantus-firmus composition.

Notes:

(14) John Wilson, ed., *Roger North on Music* (London: Novello, 1959), pp. 10–11.

(15) See, for example, Ernst H. Meyer, *English Chamber Music* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1946).

(16) Thomas Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musick* (1597), in Weiss and Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp. 109–110.

(17) Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument* (London: T. Ratcliffe and N. Thompson, 1676; facsimile ed. New York: Broude Bros., 1966), p. 245.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Ayre

William Lawes

AYRES AND SUITES: HARMONICALLY DETERMINED FORM

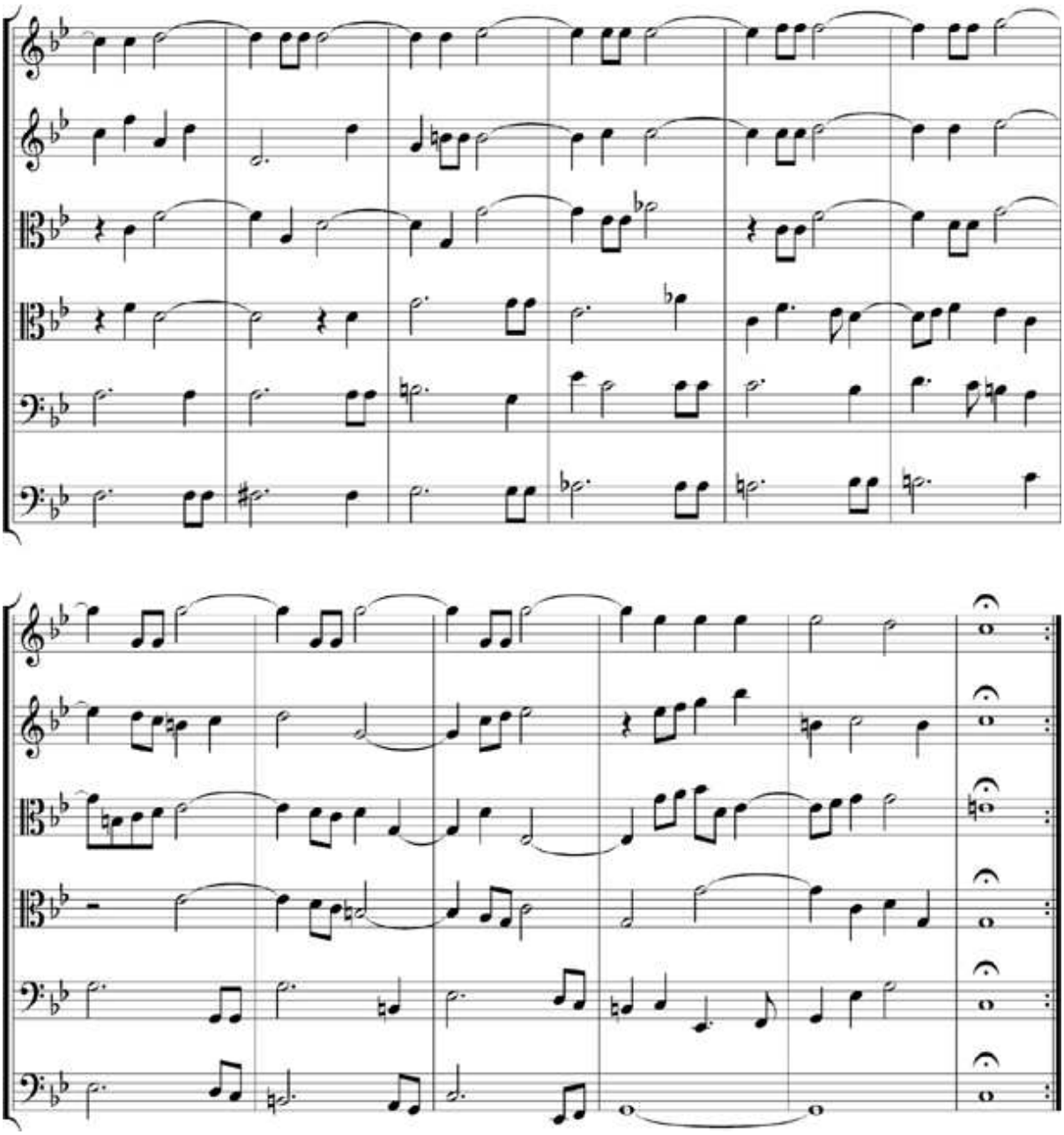
Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The other main genre of consort music was the "ayre," a general term no longer meaning a song, but rather any sort of dance-style composition. (Its etymology was chiefly by way of the solo accompanied song or "lute ayre," which in the hands of great virtuoso John Dowland usually took the form of a pavane or galliard with two or three repeated strains.) The later composers of consort music tended to write their pieces in "setts" that began with one or two numbers in the more elaborate fancy form and concluded more lightly with an ayre or two. The ayre by William Lawes, whose ending is shown in Ex. 3-9, is the final item in what the key signature of two flats already identifies as an unusually serious set: on the way to it there are two lengthy fantasies and an "Inominy," all in what we would call the key of C minor. (In the seventeenth century minor keys with flats generally carried "Dorian" signatures, that is, with one less flat than their modern counterparts; flatting of the sixth degree was usually done at sight, by applying already ancient rules of chromatic adjustment.)

This ayre, which is really an *alman* or allemande ("German dance"; cf. Frescobaldi's *balletto*) in a dignified duple meter, is cast in a form that will remain with us for centuries to come. Its two dance strains make cadences respectively on the dominant (replete with borrowed leading tone) and tonic, producing an effect of harmonic (or "tonal") complementation. This "there and back" or "to and fro" effect was immediately found to be an exceedingly stable and satisfying plan for structuring a composition. Indeed, the very concept of autonomous musical "structure" was in large part enabled by the seemingly inherent coherence of this complementary (or "binary") harmonic relationship. The binary form, originally associated, as here, with dance-derived compositions, would undergo a glorious evolution that quickly transcended the utilitarian genre in which it originated and provided the basis for what has long been known as "absolute music."

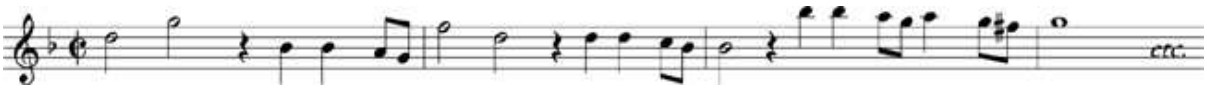
That evolution, of course, lay largely in the future when Lawes composed his "setts," but his use of the binary form already entailed a good deal of "transcendence of the utilitarian." The genre of chamber music is itself an embodiment of transcendence, since its constituent genres—the motet-derived fantasy, the Mass-derived *In Nomine*, the dance-derived ayre—have all been thoroughly divested of their original functions and have become the bearers of abstract or "absolute" tonal patterns for performing or for listening (or, ideally, for both at once) as a form of social recreation.

Yet "abstract" or "absolute" by no means precluded a high level of purposeful expressivity. Flat keys, as we have observed, already connoted pathos, and Lawes followed through with pungent suspension dissonances in the first strain and chromatic inflections in the second (including a really acrid augmented triad in the third measure of Ex. 3-9). These "madrigalisms" without a motivating text show the tardy but inexorable infiltration of what the Italians called *seconda prattica* effects into the consort repertory.

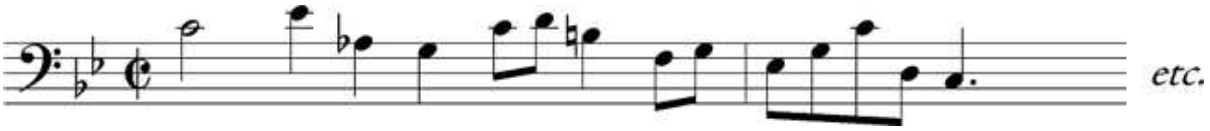


ex. 3-9 William Lawes, Ayre in six parts

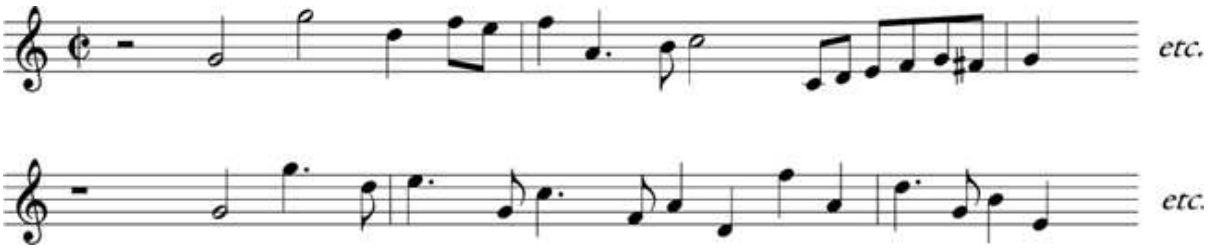
Lawes (1602–45), whose career reached its peak under Charles I, King James's son and successor, cultivated a highly pathetic style in all his works, as a few of his expressively contorted fantazia themes will vividly attest, their wide leaps and striking arpeggiations seeming to parallel the "mannerist" elongations and foreshortenings of an El Greco torso (Ex. 3-10). Lawes's remarkably "purple" manner made the already idiosyncratic mixture of old and new in the English consort idiom seem all the more noteworthy and bizarre. Some accounts of Lawes' spectacular "manneristic" tendencies attribute them to sheer composerly appetites and creative genius; others have sought the origins of the style in broader historical and political conditions. But there is no reason to regard these alternatives as incompatible. Like everyone else, musicians respond to varying degrees, and with varying degrees of consciousness, to historical and political conditions; but—perhaps needless to say—musicians also respond, and respond with the keenest consciousness, to music.



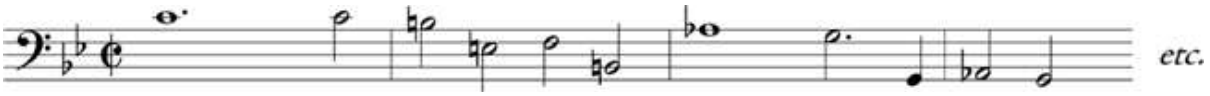
ex. 3-10a William Lawes, fantazia themes, Suite in G Minor



ex. 3-10b William Lawes, Suite in C Minor in five parts



ex. 3-10c William Lawes, Suite in C Major (two variants)



ex. 3-10d William Lawes, Suite in C Minor in six parts

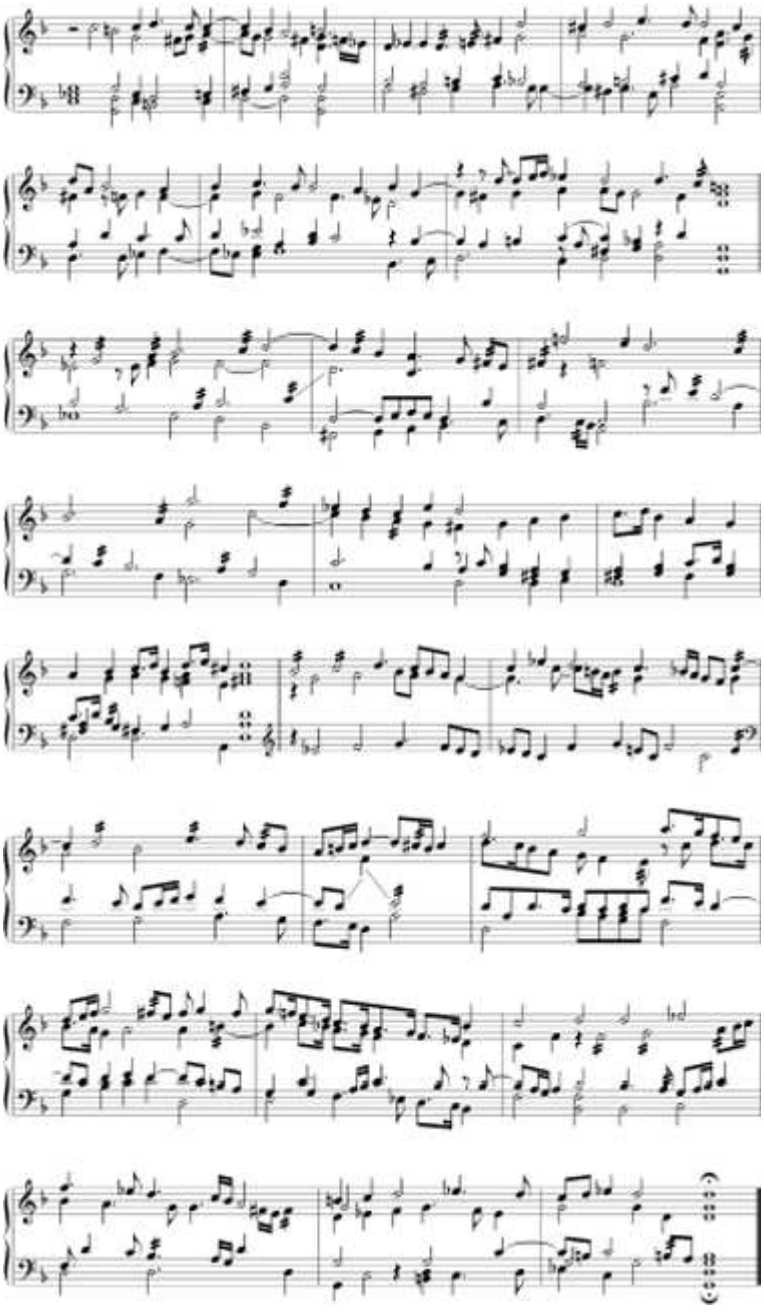
Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Thomas Tomkins

DISTRACTED TIMES

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The broader historical and political conditions to which musicians of the mid-seventeenth century perforce responded are reflected deliberately and directly in "A Sad Pavan for These Distracted Times" by Thomas Tomkins, originally for keyboard but transcribed for strings as well (Ex. 3-11). Tomkins (1572–1656), formerly organist of the Chapel Royal, was one of the oldest English musicians still alive and semi-active during the times in question.



ex. 3-11 Thomas Tomkins, "A Sad Pavan for These Distracted

Times"

The phrase "these distracted times" was a standard contemporary euphemism for the greatest political upheaval in British history: the Civil War of 1642–48 that culminated in the trial of King Charles I for treason and his beheading on 30 January 1649, after which a republican form of government, called the Commonwealth, was instituted under the nominal rule of Parliament, but in actuality under the personal dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, the leader of the Puritan party, who in 1653 took the title of Lord Protector. Tomkin's Sad Pavan bears the date 16 February 1649, roughly a fortnight after the regicide, and its tone bears witness to his loyalty and his sorrow at his former patron's fate.

Although it is often called the Puritan Revolt, the English Civil War is no longer thought of as a primarily religious conflict. Historians now view it as a collision between the country gentry and urban merchants (the very classes whose support had made possible the growth of English chamber music) on the one hand, and the crown and nobility on the other, whose restrictive trade policies were inhibiting the economic growth of the self-made classes. The most lasting result of the Civil War was the victory of the "common law" over the so-called divine right of the king and the eventual establishment (after the Glorious Revolution of 1688) of the world's first constitutional monarchy.

Despite the popularity of their chamber music among the classes who broke with the crown, the loyalties of composers, as of all artists and entertainers, were overwhelmingly on the royalist side, for that is where artists and entertainers dependent on patronage had always perceived their self-interest to lie, and that must account in part for the elegiac tone that is so conspicuous in the instrumental music of the Caroline years, the years of King Charles's ill-fated reign. In the exaggerated but colorful words of the mid-nineteenth-century historian Thomas Macaulay, "the Puritan austerity drove to the King's faction all who made pleasure their business, who affected gallantry, splendour of dress or taste in the lighter arts, and all who live by amusing the leisure of others, ...for these artists well knew that they might thrive under a superb and luxurious despotism, but must starve under the rigid rule of the precisians [religious ascetics]."[18]

Indeed, one of the casualties of these tumultuous events was William Lawes himself, who fought and died in the 1645 Siege of Chester, one of the King's signal defeats. As the very partisan poet Thomas Jordan put it in a eulogy for the fallen musician,

- When pestilential Purity did raise
- Rebellion 'gainst the best of Princes, And
- Pious Confusion had untun'd the Land
- When by the Fury of the Good old cause
- Will Lawes was slain by such whose Wills were Laws.[19]

Puritan hostility to the arts, and to music in particular, is often exaggerated. Unlike the early Anglicans they did not instigate search-and-destroy missions against musical artifacts. But of course the absence of a royal court, both under the republican Commonwealth and under the military dictatorship (Cromwell's Protectorate) that succeeded it in the 1650s, meant that patronage for musicians reached an all-time low. As Calvinists, the Puritans did not tolerate an elaborate professional church music, and so the musical establishments of the Church of England reached a low musical point as well, and the most exalted of British musical traditions suffered disruption and virtual extinction. The Puritans were indeed hostile to the theater, and from 1649 to 1660 closed it down in England; but as we have seen, musical theater had failed to establish itself in England for reasons unrelated to the fall of the royal court or the rise of the Puritan party to power.

Notes:

(18) Thomas Babington Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James II*, Vol. I (1849), Chap. 1, part v.

(19) Quoted in Murray Lefkowitz, *William Lawes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 37.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Matthew Locke

RESTORATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The fortunes of music in England, and of theatrical music in particular, took a decisive turn with the Stuart Restoration, the reestablishment of the British monarchy less than a dozen years after its abolition. Charles II, the 30-year-old son of the deposed king, was summoned back from France, where he had been exiled (with interludes in Germany and the Netherlands) since 1646, and crowned in 1660. A shrewd diplomat and skillful politician, Charles II reigned relatively peacefully until 1685, the last three years actually as an absolute monarch without a parliament, but—in marked contrast with this father—a very popular despot. One of the sources of his popularity was the cosmopolitan, libertine character of his court, a most welcome contrast with the times that had gone before. It was a court where (in the waggish words of Keith Walker, a literary historian), "anything went, where actresses were regularly rogered, where whores were ennobled to duchesses, where the arts flourished, where if greed wasn't yet good, hypocrisy certainly was."[20]

In its very cynicism, this sentence neatly encapsulates the contemporary attitude toward the arts and their place in the Restoration scheme of things. No matter how heroic or serious their content, they were viewed and cultivated as an aspect of luxurious living on a par with other sensual and gustatory delights. That hedonism, tinged as it was with licentiousness, may seem to us attractive enough; but in the context of seventeenth-century England it meant a resurgence of aristocratic tastes, values, mores, and privileges. We have another choice example of the beneficial effect of absolutist politics—an ugly politics, most would agree today—on the growth of the fine arts; and again the question starts nagging, whether the élite arts that we treasure can truly flourish in a political climate that we would approve.

fig. 3-8 Eleanor (Nell) Gwynn, seventeenth-century English comic actress, as Cupid. She was the mistress of Charles II.

Having spent his late adolescence and early adulthood in France, Charles naturally modeled his idea of kingship not on his tragically aborted father but on his near contemporary (and distant cousin) Louis XIV, for whom song, dance, and theater were both a political symbol and a personal passion. Where the first Charles "had insisted on the divine rights of a king, and the sanctity of his office," and paid for his insistence with his very life, Charles II, the little sun-king, "lent his coronation robes to the players in the recently re-established playhouse," as Walker reminds us, and counted many of them among his friends and intimates. He famously fathered two sons by the actress Nell Gwynn, the leading lady of the London stage and the most celebrated of his many mistresses. Leaving behind no legitimate offspring, he was succeeded by his brother, James II, a confessed Catholic whose short and troubled reign was cut short by the Glorious Revolution that finally put an end to absolutist politics in England.

This was the atmosphere that conditioned the "Restoration period," the brilliant rebirth of English art and literature—and music, too, but on a new footing. The theater that Charles II reestablished and revived was, to an extent previously unimaginable in England, a musical (or better, a musicalized) theater. While opera as such remained with a few equivocal exceptions beyond the pale, virtually all plays featured specially composed musical scores (what is now called "incidental music"), often the work of teams or committees of composers. They consisted

typically of a French-style overture, dances and jigs (the latter being not a specific dance but a song-and-dance medley), songs (chiefly for minor or allegorical characters), and instrumental curtain-music ("act tunes") for the end of each act. No more sad pavans would be composed in England—in fact no more pavans or galliards of any kind. The Restoration at last brought English music up-to-date vis-à-vis the continent.

In addition, most Restoration plays included masques of a much more elaborate type than their Elizabethan or Jacobean predecessors. Restoration masques were extended song-and-dance interludes—sometimes with spoken dialogue, sometimes with recitatives, often only tenuously related or even unrelated to the main plot but with well-defined dramatic plots of their own. At their most elaborate they could amount to virtual one-act operas or opera-ballets. An especially resonant example of the type was the masque interpolated into the fourth act of *The Empress of Morocco*, a heroic drama by Elkanah Settle, the Lord Poet of London, first performed at the royally patronized Duke's Theater in Lincoln's Inn (later called the Dorset Garden) in 1673. It took the form of a miniature Venetian-style opera on the time-honored subject of Orpheus and Eurydice.

Its composer was Matthew Locke (ca. 1622–77), who seems already to have been in Charles's employ during his Netherlands exile, and who became the leading stage musician of the early Restoration period. Equally adept at dance compositions in the French manner and recitatives in the Italian, Locke was the virtual inventor of a peculiarly English mixed genre called the "dramatick opera" (or "semi-opera," as it is now usually called) in collaboration with the playwright Thomas Shadwell and Thomas Betterton, the manager of Dorset Garden, who had seen Lully's works in Paris and wanted to create something comparable for the suddenly ready English market.

Semi-operas, in effect, were *comedies-ballets* or *tragédies lyriques* adapted to the tastes, and above all to the longstanding prejudices, of the English theatergoing public. To the decorative songs and dances and instrumental tunes of the masque, now present in greater profusion than ever, was added the spectacular stage machinery for which the French court opera was particularly renowned. The major compromise was the insistence that major characters never sing, following the old pre-Lullian prejudice (quoted earlier in this chapter from Pierre Corneille) that sung words are poorly understood, and that therefore a sung drama could not really be a drama but only a concert in costume. The result was a peculiar split between protagonists who never sang and incidental characters who only sang, making the new genre quite literally a semi-sung play.

Some of the most celebrated semi-operas were adaptations of Shakespeare—or, rather, readaptations of the lightweight Shakespeare adaptations, often by poet laureate John Dryden, that were standard on the Restoration stage. The first major success was *The Tempest* (1674), in which Ariel was the main singing character. The music was supplied by a committee of five, headed by Locke. Perhaps the greatest and most ambitious "dramatick opera" —certainly the most lavish and expensive according to Curtis Price, the leading historian of the early English musical stage—was *The Fairy Queen*, based on an anonymous adaptation (probably Betterton's) of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[21] It was produced at Dorset Garden in 1692, with music by a former pupil of Locke named Henry Purcell.

Notes:

(20) Keith Walker, "In the Merry Monarchy," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 September 1995, p. 26.

(21) Curtis Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 320.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Semi-opera

Henry Purcell

The Fairy Queen

PURCELL

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

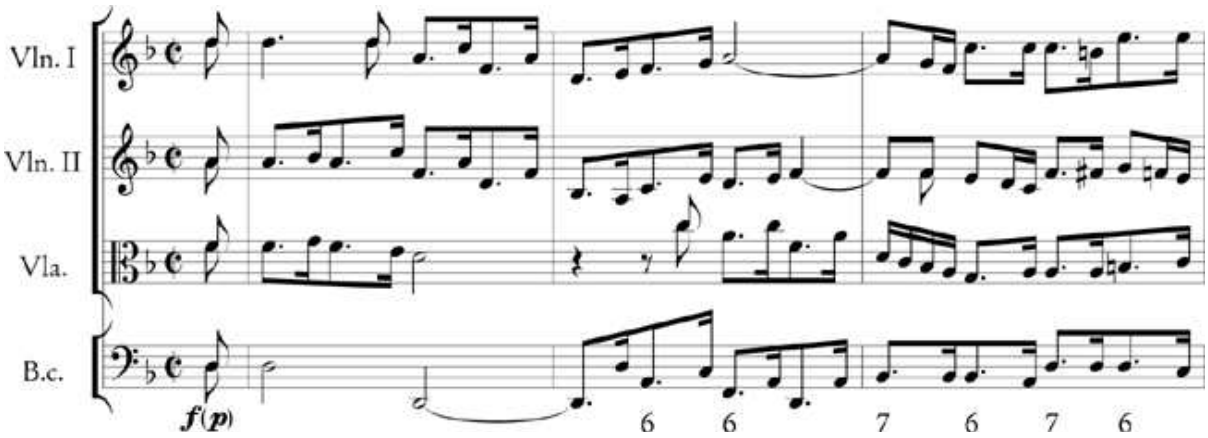
Chiefly employed as an organist (first at Westminster Abbey and later at the Chapel Royal), Purcell (1659–95) was as close to an all-round musical genius, within the practices of his day and the institutions he served, as England has ever produced. He excelled in every genre, from Anthems and Services and royal odes and “welcome songs”—these being the genres he was officially employed to produce—to instrumental chamber music and harpsichord pieces. For the London stage he produced songs and instrumental pieces for more than forty plays between 1680, his twenty-first year, and 1695, the year of his untimely and much-mourned death.

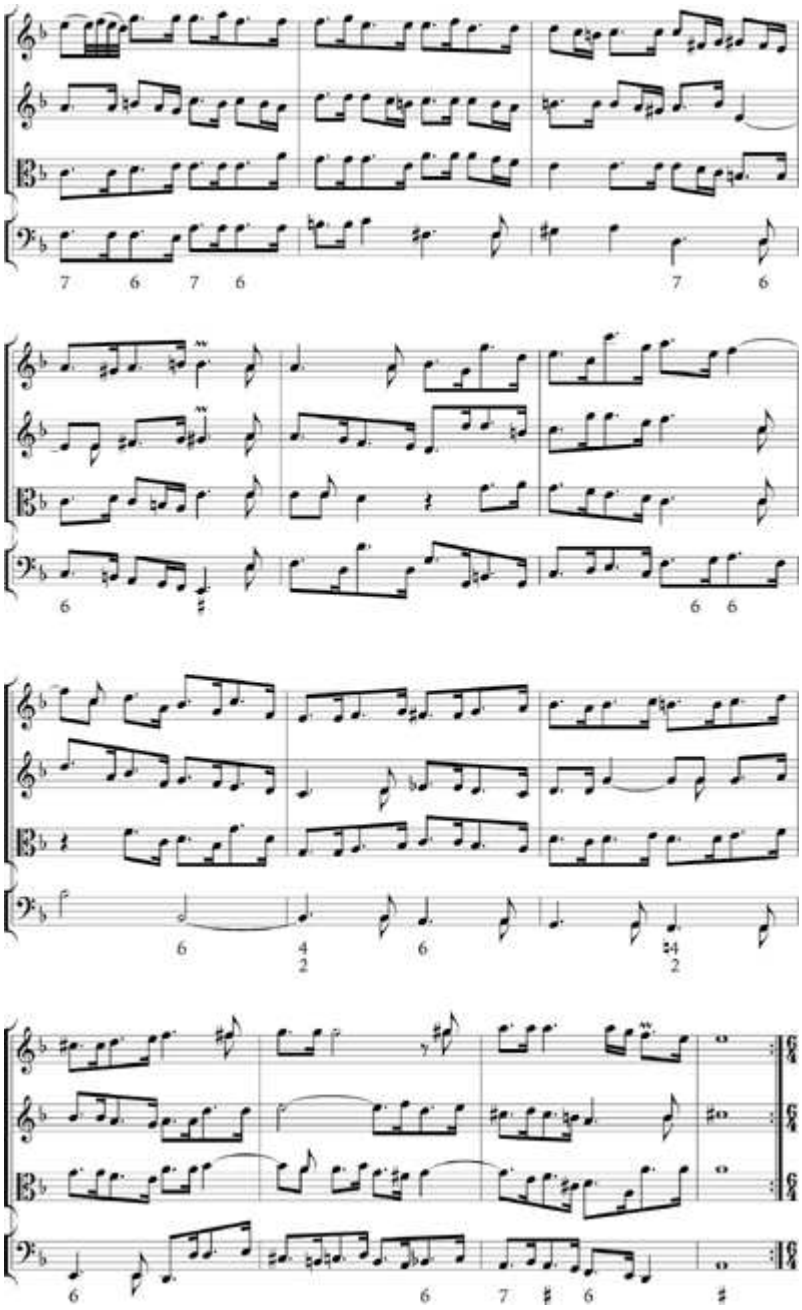
fig. 3-9 Henry Purcell by John Closterman (1695). This painting, now in the National Portrait Gallery, London, served as a prototype for the frontispiece engraving in *Orpheus Britannicus* (1698), a posthumous collection of Purcell's songs.

An idea of his brash and pungent style, and that of Restoration theater music generally, is startlingly conveyed by his Overture in D minor (Ex. 3-12), a work that must have started life as a dramatic curtain-raiser but that is now found only as a freestanding composition for four stringed instrument parts and continuo. The play, one tends (perhaps naively) to think, must have been a tragedy, for the dissonance level is remarkably high. In the first measure, for example, both violin parts skip down from a seventh that is itself approached by skip; in the fourth and fifth measures, every beat carries brusque suspensions between the outer parts (seventh–ninth–seventh–ninth) that are resolved only on the fourth sixteenth, which in the French style is performed extra short; in the sixth measure a seventh between the outer voices is resolved through a chromatic "escape tone"; and so on. The part writing is so forcefully directed, however, that long-range harmonic goals are never lost sight of; instead, the dissonances, especially when they occur in sequential passages, impel the harmony on its way with special vigor.

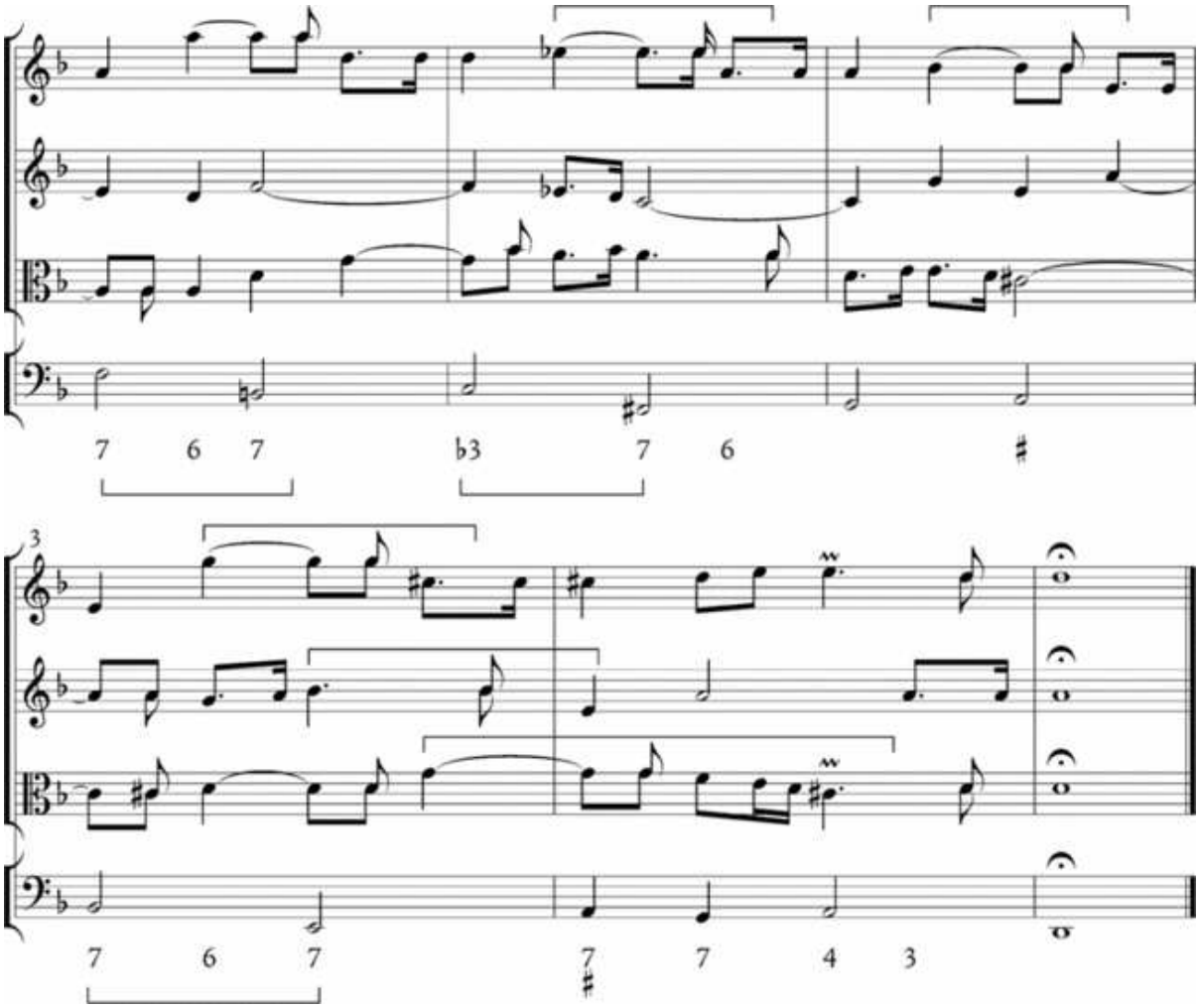
Chromatic writing not only enhances the sense of pathos but also the remarkable thrust with which Purcell propels the part writing toward the main cadences. The ending of the first section of the overture is expedited (Ex. 3-12a) by

an amazing chromatic ascent that leads (albeit with a couple of breaks) through an eleventh (an octave plus a fourth); as it nears its climax it is joined by a chromatic descent in the bass from tonic down to dominant (the familiar *passus duriusculus*), which is decorated with neighbor notes whose resolutions contradict the direction of the overall line and lend an extra sense of effort to the "difficult pass." The middle section seems to hark back to the motetlike fantazia (of which Purcell had written several outstanding specimens in his prentice days) in its use of two successive points of imitation instead of the single-subject fugato favored by Lully and his successors. The final section reverts not only to the original tempo but also to the original tone of high pathos. Every instrument gets to subside through a moaning diminished fifth (as indicated by brackets), and the outer parts are given veritable sequences of chromatic plunges (Ex. 3-12b). Purcell's pompous theatrical style is a far cry from the immediate expressivity of Lawes or Tomkins, however. Stage music strikes showy attitudes of sentiment rather than, as in the earlier chamber style, speaking intimately or "subjectively" and stirring sympathy.





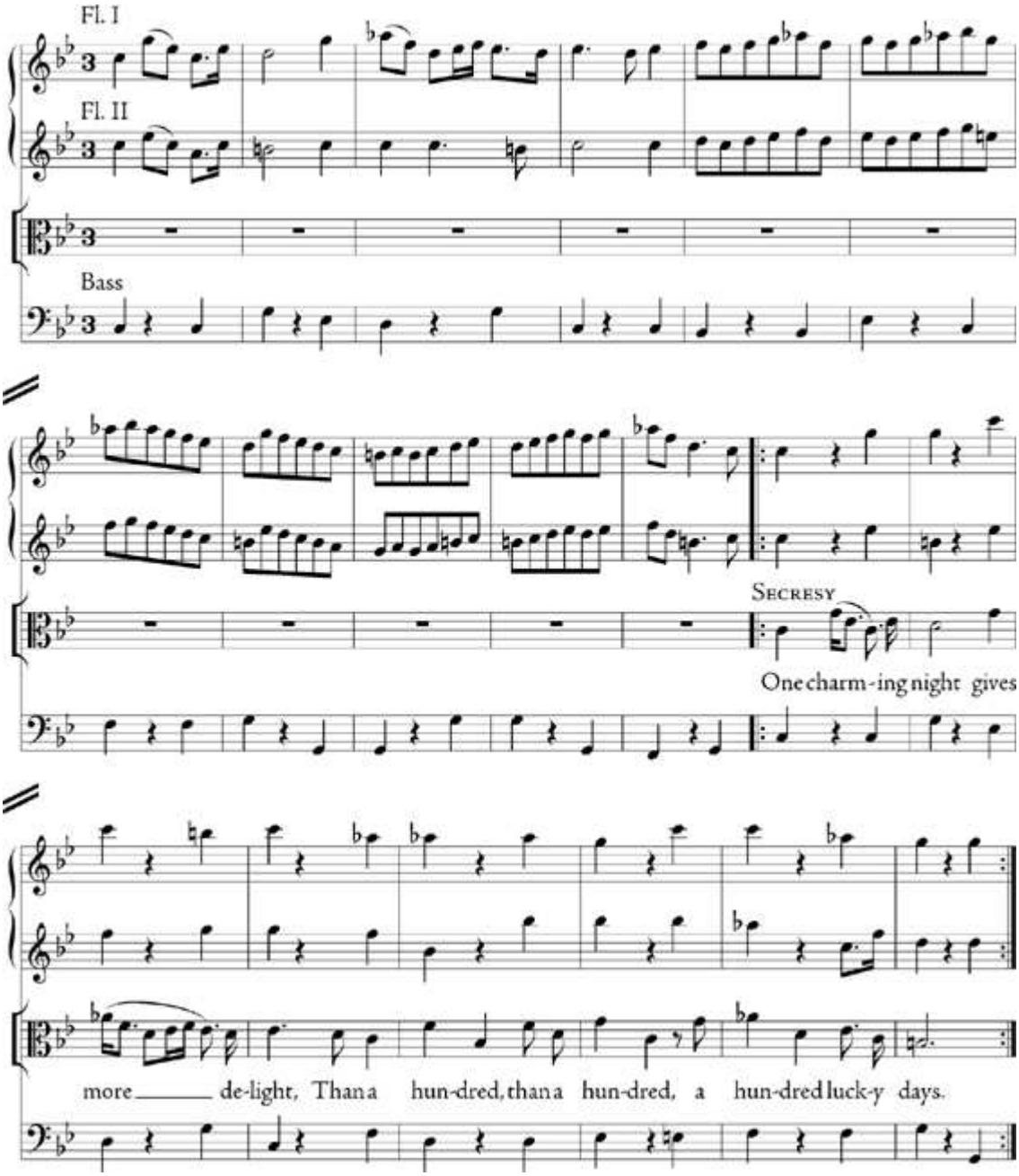
ex. 3-12a Henry Purcell, Overture in D Minor, beginning



ex. 3-12b Henry Purcell, Overture in D Minor, end

The Fairy Queen was Purcell's third "dramatick opera," commissioned from him by Betterton's theater after Purcell had become without dispute the star composer of the London stage. In addition to the overture and entr'actes (suites of act tunes), the score consists entirely of interpolated masques, one per act. As first performed in 1692, these began in act II with a Masque of Sleep (compare the French *sommeil* as in Ex. 3-4c) to follow title character Titania's request for a lullabye entertainment. Purcell might have set Shakespeare's own "Fairies Song' ("Ye spotted Snakes…"), but instead he was given by his librettist a far more elaborate scene in which two fairy choruses are followed by sleep-inducing songs by the spirits of Night, Mystery, and Secrecy, and a final air with chorus to depict the actual onset of sleep.

Secrecy's song, "One charming night," with ritornello for obbligato recorders (*flûtes douces*), is set for a male alto voice, modeled perhaps on the French *haute-contre* but sung in the "head voice" or "falsetto" range throughout (Ex. 3-13). This peculiarly English voice category, called "countertenor" in England since the seventeenth century, has been universalized in the twentieth century by the "early music" revival, following the precedent set by the widely imitated English falsettist Alfred Deller (1912–79), who made a remarkable recording of Secrecy's song.



ex. 3-13 Henry Purcell, *The Fairy Queen*, Act II masque, Secrecy's song

In act III the masque consists of an entertainment called up by Titania to entertain ass-headed Bottom, with whom she is temporarily enamored. In act IV a Masque of Four Seasons is ordered by Oberon, the Fairy King, to celebrate his reconciliation with his spouse, and in act V the Masque, ordered by Juno herself to entertain the two pairs of human lovers, provides a brilliant finale to the whole spectacle. (It sports a florid trumpet aria, "Hark! the ech'ing air," that dazzlingly imitates the very latest Italian fashions.) It is characteristic of the semi-opera that, although he might well have done so (or so it seems to us), Purcell did not set a single line of Shakespeare's to music. The score was meant not as a medium for the original play but rather, as Curtis Price aptly puts it, as "an extended meditation on the spell it casts."

The act I masque, composed for the revised and expanded revival of *The Fairy Queen* in 1693, is a comic interlude completely unrelated to Shakespeare's plot. It consists of a rather cruel slapstick entertainment, ordered up by Titania, in which the band of fairies torments a defenseless drunken poet. With its quick repartee and its broadly "realistic" portrayal of the poor victim, the Masque of the Drunken Poet is the closest episode in Purcell's London stage works to full-fledged opera as the Italians knew it.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Henry Purcell

Dido and Aeneas

DIDO AND AENEAS AND THE QUESTION OF "ENGLISH OPERA"

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

He came closer still in *Dido and Aeneas*, his single stage work that, while still technically a masque, was meant to be sung straight through from beginning to end. The plot was adapted by the poet Nahum Tate from the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, the Roman poet Virgil's epic poem that tells of the hero Aeneas's return from the Trojan War. On the way he stops at Carthage, in North Africa, where the Queen, Dido, having given him hospitality, conceives a passionate love for him. But the gods send Mercury to bid the hero continue on his journey (in Virgil, that is; in the libretto it is a false Mercury sent by scheming witches) and Aeneas departs, leaving Dido bereft. She dies (that is, kills herself) out of grief and shame.

The one documented performance of this little opera took place in 1689 at a London girls' school ("Mr. Josias Priest's Boarding-School at Chelsey," as the libretto's title page says); but as historians now mostly agree, that performance was probably not the first. Tate, the librettist, was a prominent figure who was chosen poet laureate by William and Mary a few years later. It seems unlikely that he and Purcell would have collaborated on a major work for so lowly a venue; but then again, *Dido and Aeneas*, as a through-composed if miniature tragic opera, was not a work that would have been welcomed on the Restoration stage. For its time and place it was an anomaly, probably meant for court performance (around 1687, for James II), and—as scholars now contend—embodying a now obscure political allegory favorable to the ill-fated king.[22]

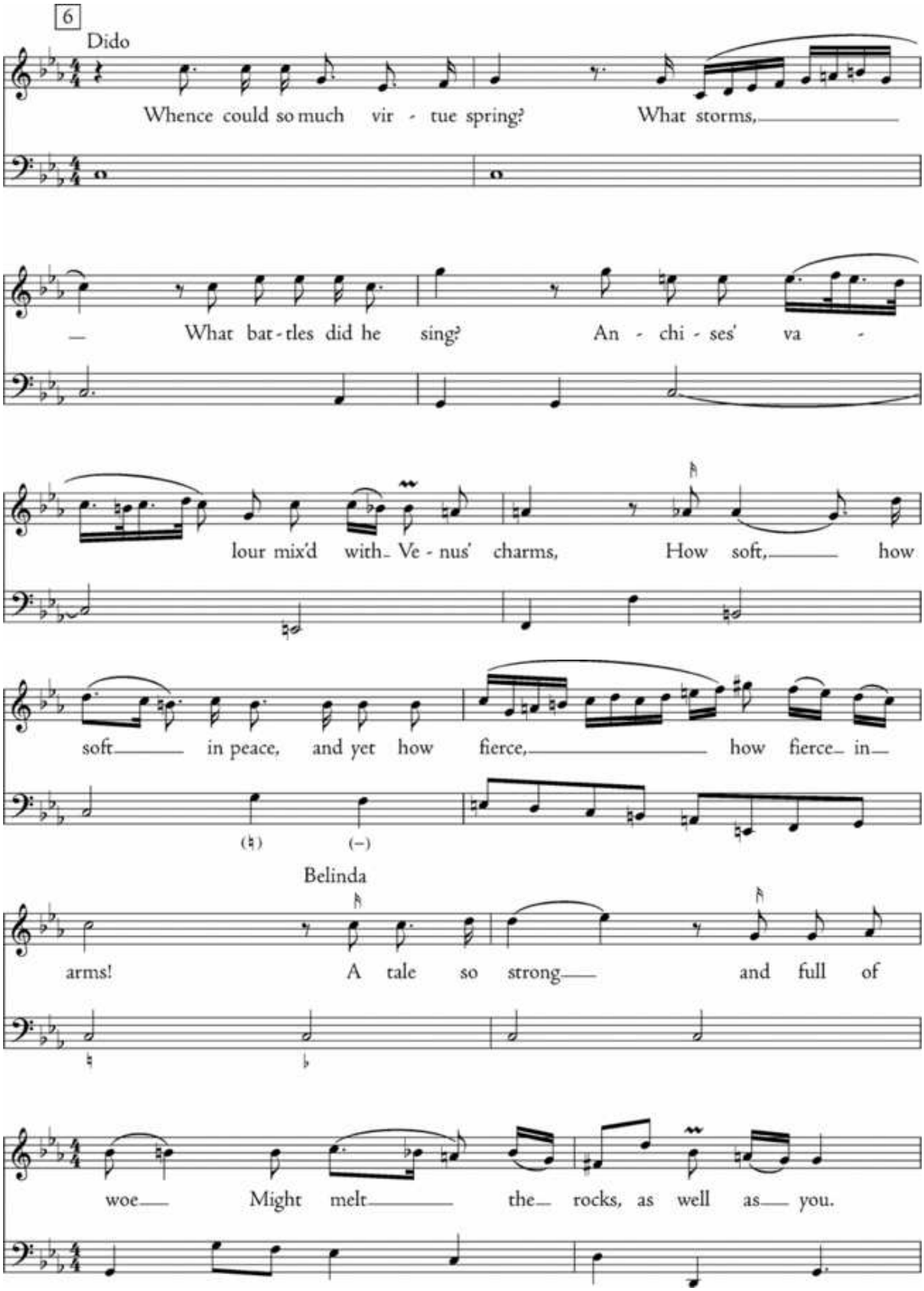
Even so, it was not entirely without precedent. If by "English opera" one means a continuous musical setting of a dramatic text in English in more than a single act, then *Dido and Aeneas* was probably the fourth of its kind. The earliest surviving one is *Venus and Adonis* (1683) by John Blow (ca. 1649–1708), another of Purcell's teachers, who served as the Westminster Abbey organist both before and after his famous pupil's tenure. It consists of a kind of sing-song melodic recitative modeled on those of Locke, alternating with danced choruses à la Lully.

Charles II could not have liked it very much, because he snubbed its composer a couple of years later in conspicuous and painful fashion. After weathering a political crisis and an attempted assassination in 1681, Charles decided to commission a grandiose operatic allegory of his restoration and reign to celebrate the deliverance of the house of Stuart. Poet laureate Dryden concocted a libretto called *Albion and Albanius*, in which the two title characters (both of whose names were derived from archaic names of England) stood transparently for Charles and his brother, the later James II. The action depicts the defeat of the three nefarious opponents of Christian monarchy, namely Democracy, Zelota ("Zeal," meaning Puritanism), and Asebia (Atheism).

When it came to commissioning the music, though, all native-born composers were passed over in favor of Luis Grabu, a Spaniard then living in Paris, who years earlier had already aroused the envy of English musicians when Charles II appointed him to a brief term as Master of the King's Musick. In the event, Grabu's operatic panegyric to the king was ill-fated. On 6 February 1685, days before its scheduled première, Charles II suddenly died, and its rescheduled run in June was cut short after six performances by another political crisis (the Duke of Monmouth's Rebellion). Nevertheless, despite its musical sterility, the *Albion and Albanius* episode is historically significant for the way the resentment it stimulated led to the first expressions of musical nationalism, as we understand the word today.

The chief cause for nationalistic disparagement was always Grabu's asserted inability to set English words correctly. The specialness of English prosody has been a critical watchword ever since, and Purcell has always been looked

upon as its greatest master. The difficulty of setting English is said to consist in the language's unusual accentuation patterns, in which stressed syllables and long syllables do not necessarily coincide, the way they do in Italian. (And indeed, Grabu's recitatives, in mixed meters adapted directly from Lully, would have been better suited to a language that, like French but unlike English, does not have a heavy tonic stress.) But Purcell's musical prosody in recitatives was not his original discovery; it derived from that of his teachers, Blow and Locke.



ex. 3-14 Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, recitative and dance song

The very first recitative in *Dido and Aeneas*—Dido's exchanges with her handmaiden Belinda and a second woman about Aeneas's virtue, and her fear of unrequited love—is an ideal introduction to this idiosyncratic English declamation (Ex. 3-14). In most ways the setting follows the conventions of Italian recitative as we have observed them as far back as Peri and Monteverdi at the dawn of opera. There are a few residual madrigalisms: rapid melismas on "storms" and "fierce," a melisma in regal dotted rhythms on "valour," and the like. There is also a great deal of conventionally affective harmony, such as the chromatic inflection on "woe." Where the setting is syllabic, however, it follows the rhythms of English speech very strictly, as we may still confirm by testing our modern English pronunciation against Purcell's notation. Another English feature, taken over from Lawes and Locke, is the characteristic progression in the bass line from long notes into "walking" quarters and eighths (the kind of thing that we now call "arioso").

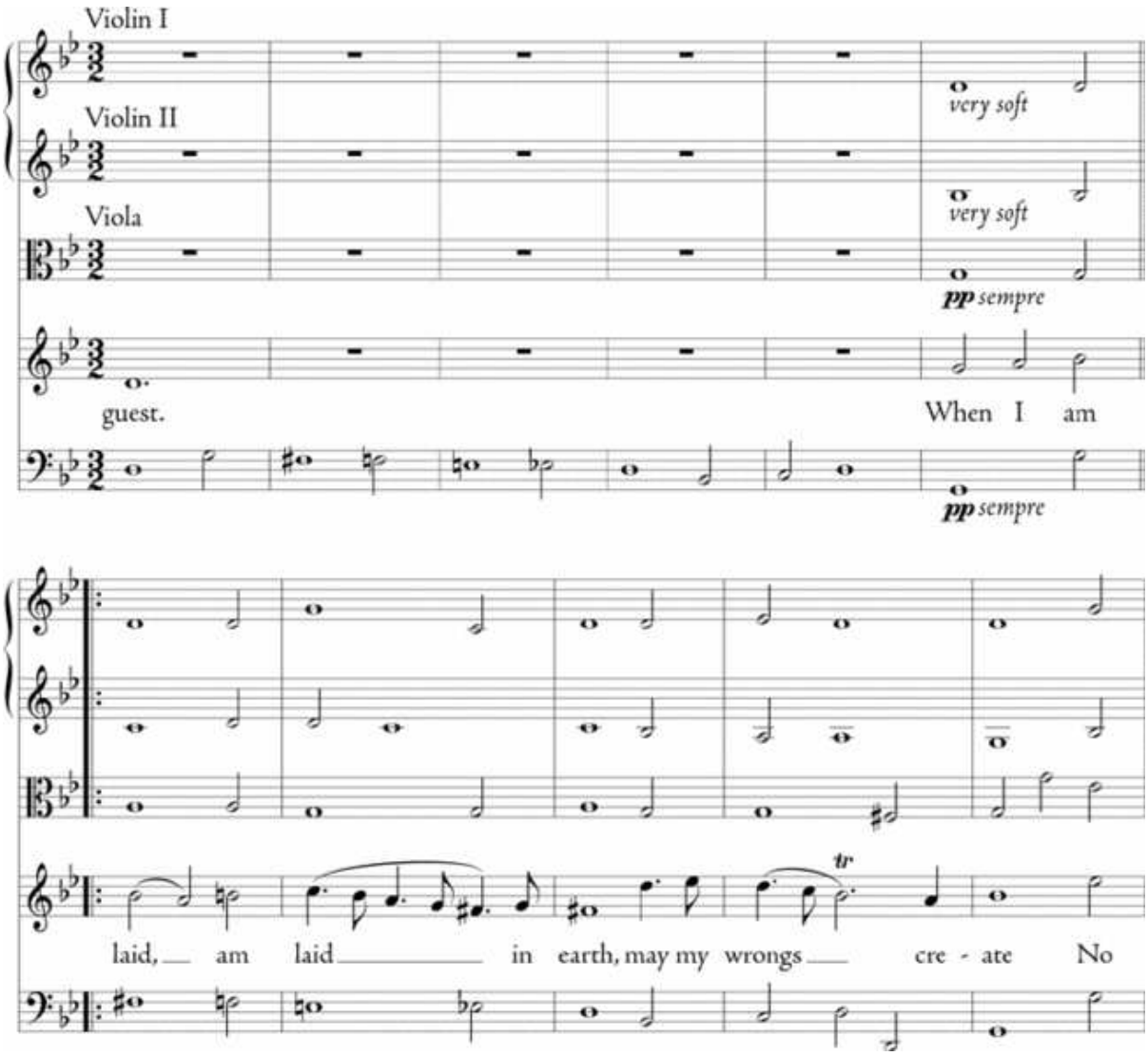
The most conspicuously "English" prosodic effect is the frequent use of short–long rhythms ("Lombards" or "Scotch snaps") on accented beats to reflect the distinctive English short stress. In the very first measure, the rhythm of "so much" is fastidiously distinguished in this way from the rhythms that precede and follow it. Other short–long pairs occur on "did he" in m. 3 and "full of" in m. 10. And in the typically masquelike (hence typically English) dancing-air-plus-chorus that follows the recitative ("Fear no danger to ensue"), the short–long rhythm, alternating with its opposite, is turned into a characteristic metric pattern.

For the most part, however, the "Englishness" of *Dido and Aeneas* consists of an original synthesis of French and Italian ingredients that is more attributable to Purcell's individuality (and to his exceptional familiarity with, and receptivity to, foreign trends) than to his nationality as such. In his case, an apparently insular style was really cosmopolitanism in disguise. It is easy enough to catalogue the imported ingredients. Group activities—choruses, dances, orchestral numbers—are governed by French conventions, as often observed, and solo behavior by Italian.

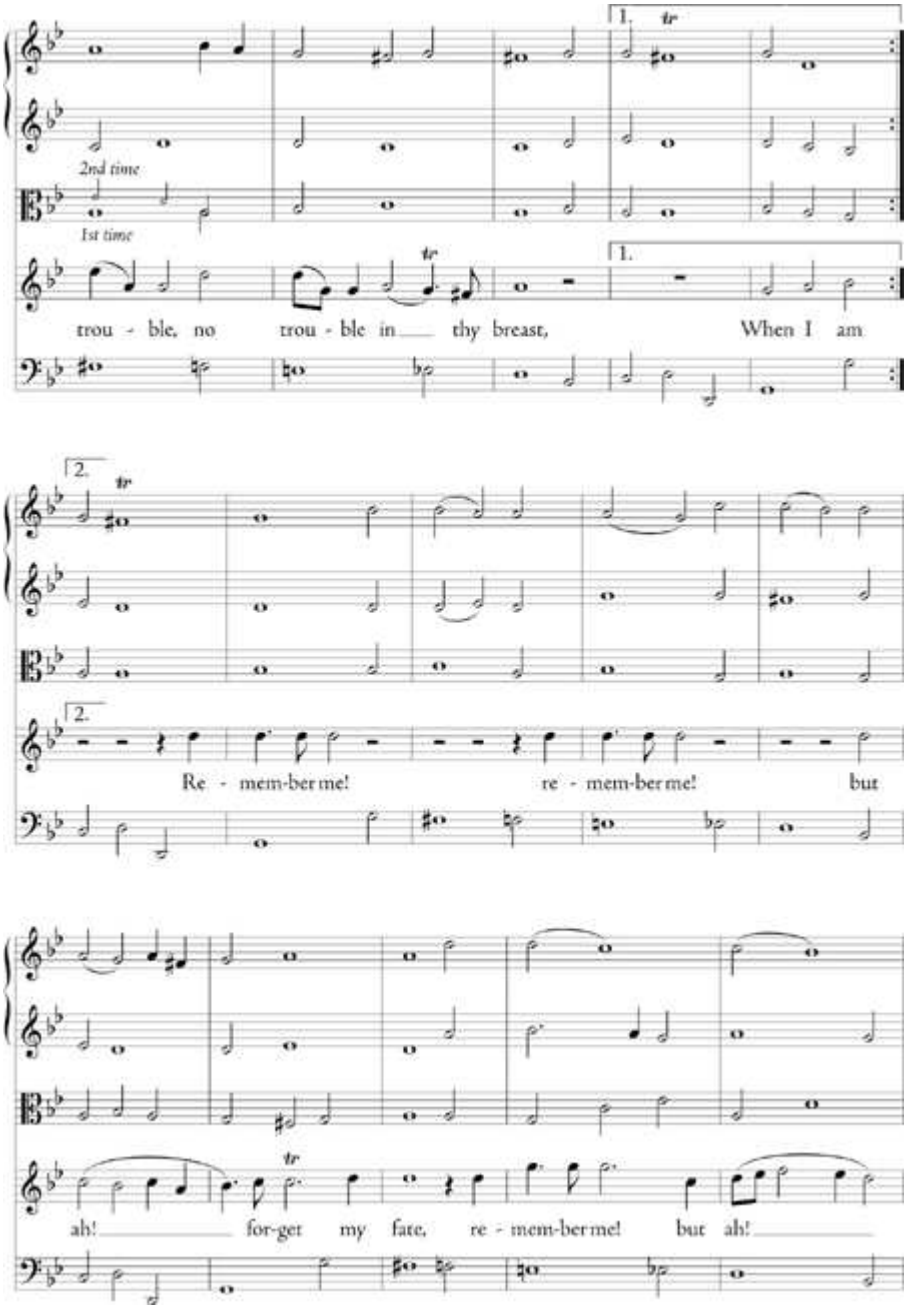
And yet the French and Italian strains were not wholly discrete in the seventeenth century. Both made conspicuous use of ground basses, for example; and ground-bass numbers, for which Purcell had an uncanny gift, are one of the special glories of *Dido and Aeneas*. The ending of act I puts a French spin on the device, that of act III, the opera's final scene, puts an Italian one; both, however, are at the same time inimitably Purcellian.

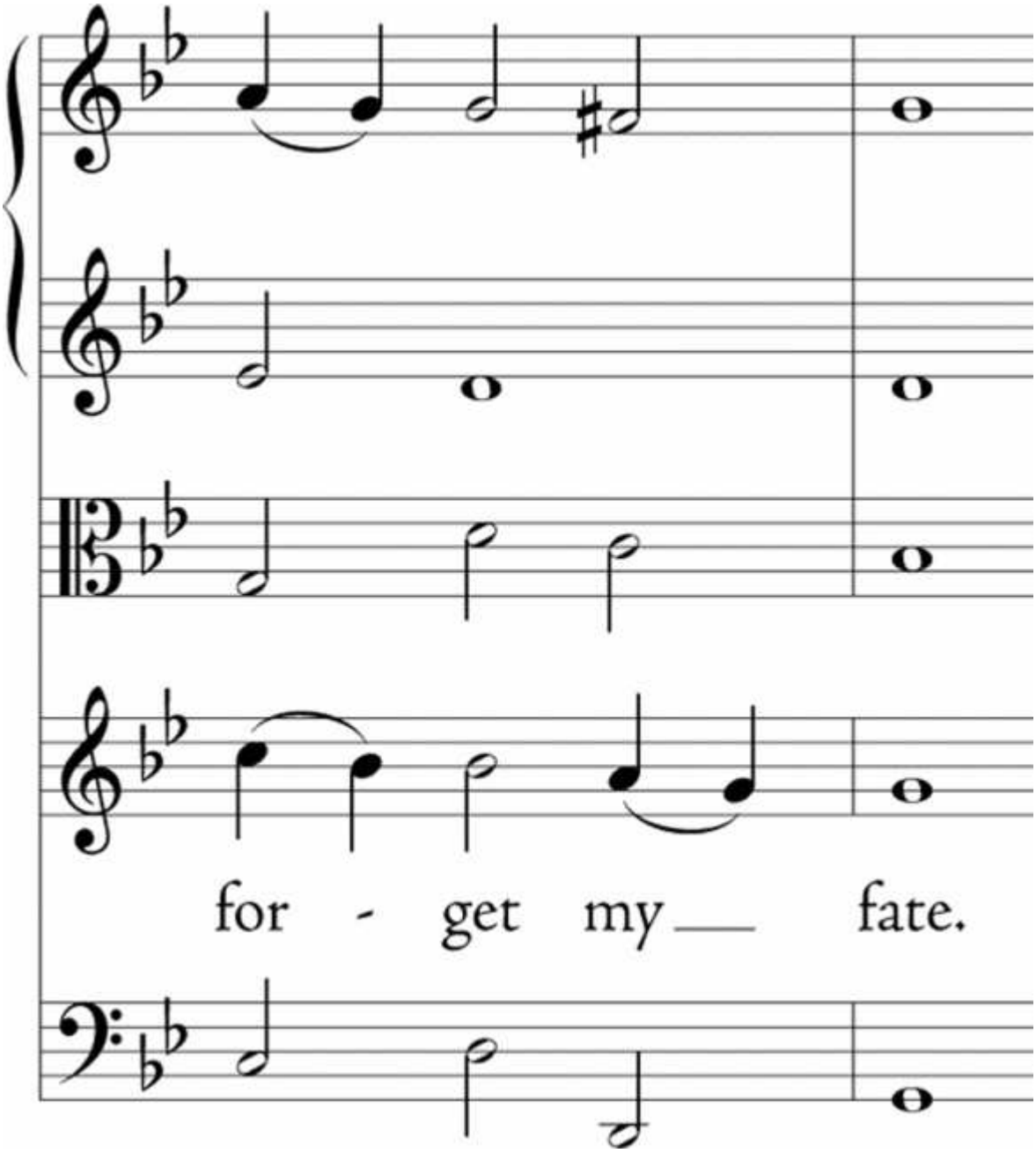
Act I ends with a celebration by the chorus of the title couple's as-yet-undeclared love. After singing, they do a "Triumphing Dance" in the form of a chaconne, the customary celebratory dance of the French lyric stage. Like most of the numbers in *Dido and Aeneas*, it is a miniaturized adaptation of its model, but it has lots of tonal and rhythmic variety. The twelve statements of the four-measure bass are organized into two little ternary forms around modulations to the dominant (3 + 1 + 3; 1 + 1 + 3). In between come two surprising bars that have no bass at all and throw the measure count delightfully off symmetry.

The second scene of act III, the opera's dénouement, consists of a dramatic recitative in which Aeneas takes leave of the forlorn and lovesick Queen, a sadly sympathetic comment from the chorus, and Dido's suicide aria (Ex. 3-15), to which a final chorus of lamentation is appended. Dido's diminutive aria is usually called her lament, because it is written in the style of a Venetian *lamento*, a form we have traced from its Monteverdian origins (see Ex. 1-5, the "Lamento della Ninfa"). By the end of the seventeenth century it had become a virtual cliché. Purcell is true to the established convention in his choice of a descending tetrachord as ground bass, and he is also conventional in the chromatic interpolations that turn the tetrachord into the standard *passus duriusculus*.


Violin I
Violin II
Viola
very soft
very soft
pp sempre
guest.
When I am
pp sempre

tr
laid, am laid in earth, may my wrongs cre - ate No


2nd time
1st time
trou - ble, no trou - ble in thy breast, When I am
Re - mem-ber me! re - mem-ber me! but
ah! for-get my fate, re - mem-ber me! but ah!



ex. 3-15 Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, Act III, sc. 2, Dido's lament

Altogether unconventional and characteristic, however, is the interpolation of an additional cadential measure into the stereotyped ground, increasing its length from a routine four to a haunting five bars, against which the vocal line, with its despondent refrain ("Remember me!"), is deployed with marked asymmetry. That, plus Purcell's distinctively dissonant, suspension-saturated harmony, enhanced by additional chromatic descents during the final ritornello and by many deceptive cadences, make the little aria an unforgettably poignant embodiment of heartache.

Notes:

(22) See John Buttrey, "Dating Purcell's Dido and Aeneas," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* XCVI (1967–68): 52–60; also Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, ed. Curtis Price (Norton Critical Scores; New York: Norton, 1986), pp. 6–12.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Opera: Early opera, 1600–90

THE MAKING OF A CLASSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Courts Resplendent, Overthrown, Restored
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Unforgettable, yet long forgotten. Within a few years of Purcell's death, *Dido and Aeneas* was in typical "Restoration" fashion ruthlessly cannibalized as a masque within a performance of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, and then laid aside. It was not the time or place for "classics." The opera was rediscovered during the nineteenth century—a great age for classics!—and published for the first time in 1841. The first modern staged revival took place in 1895, the bicentennial of Purcell's death; like the first documented performance, it was a student production. Yet George Bernard Shaw, not yet a famous dramatist but London's leading music critic, traveled out of his way to cover it, and informed his readers that the two-hundred-year-old "first English opera" was "not a bit the worse for wear."[23] Since then, usually as part of a double bill, it has been a staple of the Anglo-American musical stage. The advent of recordings and, later, the vogue for "early music" or period performance-style, has further enhanced its popularity.

So it was that this very late, atypical, and geographically peripheral seventeenth-century opera, from a country where opera was practically unknown, managed to become the twentieth-century "classic" of the genre; and that is how Dido's immensely moving yet stylistically rather offbeat lament has become the main representative of the ubiquitous seventeenth-century ground bass in modern repertory. The main agent of this lucky though improbable transformation was burgeoning English nationalism. In the late nineteenth century, English composers were trying hard to establish a distinctive national identity after a long period of aping continental fashions. English musicians and music writers of all kinds, Shaw very conspicuous among them, were trying to recover from the written remains of English music what cultural historians call "a usable past"—a legacy that could serve as a model for constructing a distinctive national identity in the present.

Purcell fit the bill. The unusualness of his idiom (his "freshness," as Shaw put it), and in particular "his unapproached art of setting English speech to music," provided English composers with their model, and one of the least typical of his works became the very archetype of Englishness in music.

Notes:

(23) Dan H. Lawrence, ed., *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes*, Vol. I (London: Bodley Head, 1981), p. 559.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism

Opera Seria and Its Makers

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

NAPLES

Returning now to Italy after a chapter spent in France and England, it is worth a reminder that (with the exception of Portugal) France and England were the only countries in seventeenth-century Europe whose borders then were pretty much what they are today. They were also, and not by coincidence, the only nations in Europe that were ethnically and linguistically more or less coextensive with their territory. The other European nations were either empires—multiethnic, polyglot dynastic states—or small hereditary or republican enclaves whose political boundaries had little to do with language or ethnicity. The much-weakened "Holy Roman" (Austrian) Empire, Charlemagne's tattered legacy, was the main representative of "supra-ethnicity." Its main rival, and avid foe, was the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries expanded aggressively into southeastern Europe from Asia Minor and as late as 1683 threatened the walls of Vienna, the Austrian capital. The main areas of fragmented "subethnic" political division were Germany and Italy.

Northern Italy was dominated by the republic of Venice, which in the mid-seventeenth century reached its height of power, controlling much of the eastern Adriatic coast (territory belonging now to Slovenia and Croatia) and extending its rule as far as Crete in the eastern Mediterranean. The other main north Italian city states were Florence and Genoa, both of which had expanded territorially far beyond their municipal borders, with Genoa controlling the Mediterranean island of Corsica. Extending like a stripe through the middle of the Italian peninsula was the Papal State (or Papal Estates), the temporal domain of the Roman Catholic church. The south of Italy was occupied by the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, both of which belonged to the Spanish crown in the seventeenth century and were ruled by provincial viceroys, one in the city of Naples, the other in Palermo, the Sicilian capital, each backed up by an army of occupation.

This period of subjugation, which lasted from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth, was an economic disaster for southern Italy, the repercussions of which continue to this day. The city of Naples swelled with an influx of dispossessed peasants, making it by the end of the seventeenth century, with close to 200,000 inhabitants, perhaps the largest but also the most squalid metropolis in Europe. Historians of Neapolitan culture call the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the city's "iron age."

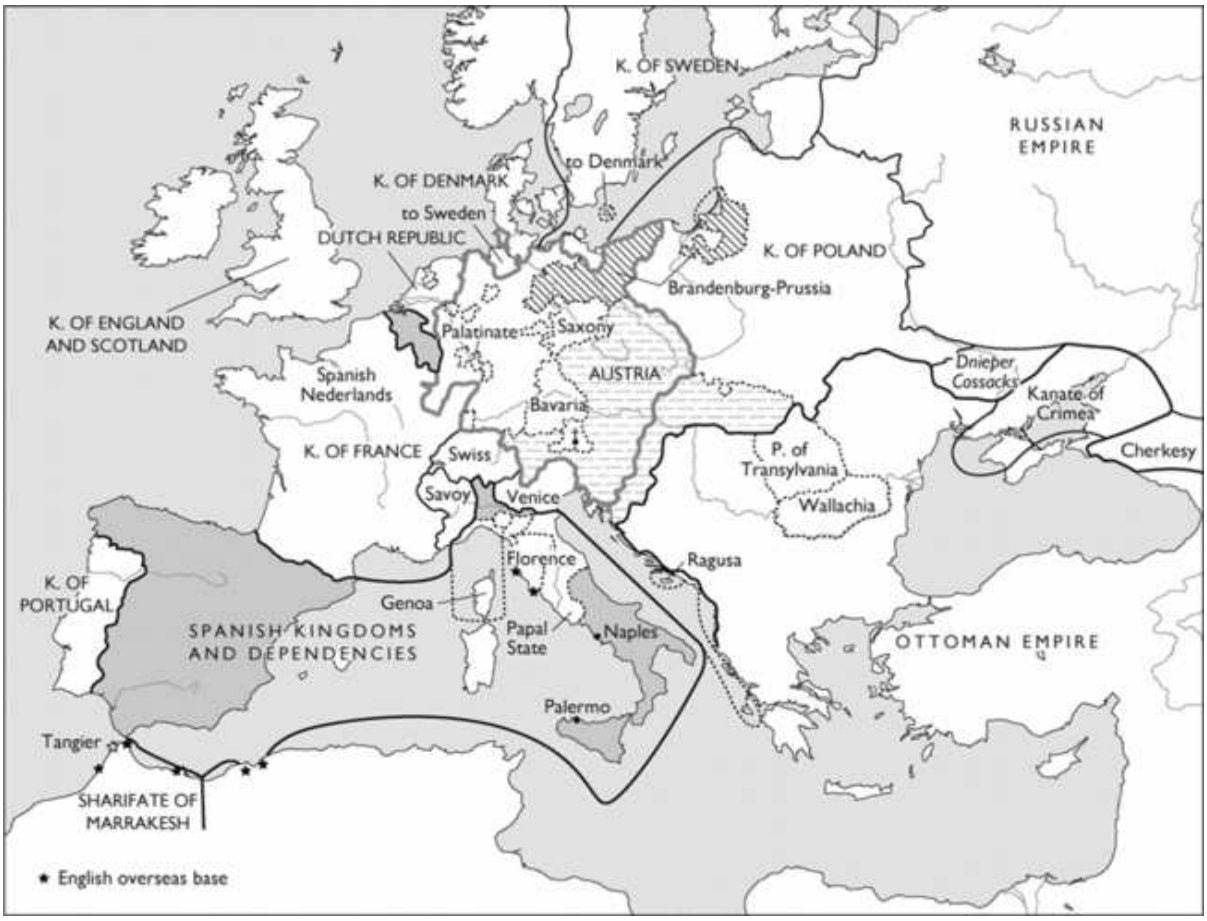


fig. 4-1 Europe, ca. 1680.

Musically, however, and in seeming paradox, the same conditions created a golden age. In direct consequence of the urban poverty that viceroyal rule had engendered, a number of orphanages and foundling homes had to be set up in the city. These houses where homeless boys were harbored were called "conservatories" (*conservatorio* in the singular, meaning "place of safekeeping" in sixteenth-century Italian). They were self-maintaining organizations. Money spent in providing for the inmates was recouped by putting them to work. And one of the obvious ways in which you could employ an orphan was to make him a choirboy. So the training of choirboys became a major preoccupation of the Naples conservatories, training that was eventually expanded to include secular and instrumental music, as the need arose.

That need was greatly stimulated by the importation of opera—"Venice-style music," as it was at first called by the Neapolitans—beginning around 1650 at the instigation of Count d'Oñate, the mid-century Spanish viceroy. (The first opera production in the city, it is said, was *Il Nerone*, an adaptation, by a traveling company, of Monteverdi's *Poppea*.) The first Neapolitan opera house, the renovated Teatro di San Bartolomeo (St. Bartholomew's), opened in 1654. Though a public theater, it enjoyed the direct patronage of the viceroyal court. By the 1680s, the court and chapel musical establishments, staffed chiefly by musicians educated at the conservatories, had in large part been siphoned off to San Bartolomeo, which became one of the best-endowed opera houses in Europe. Around the same time, too, its repertoire began shifting over from a transplanted Venetian to a local Neapolitan one that soon became itself a major international force.

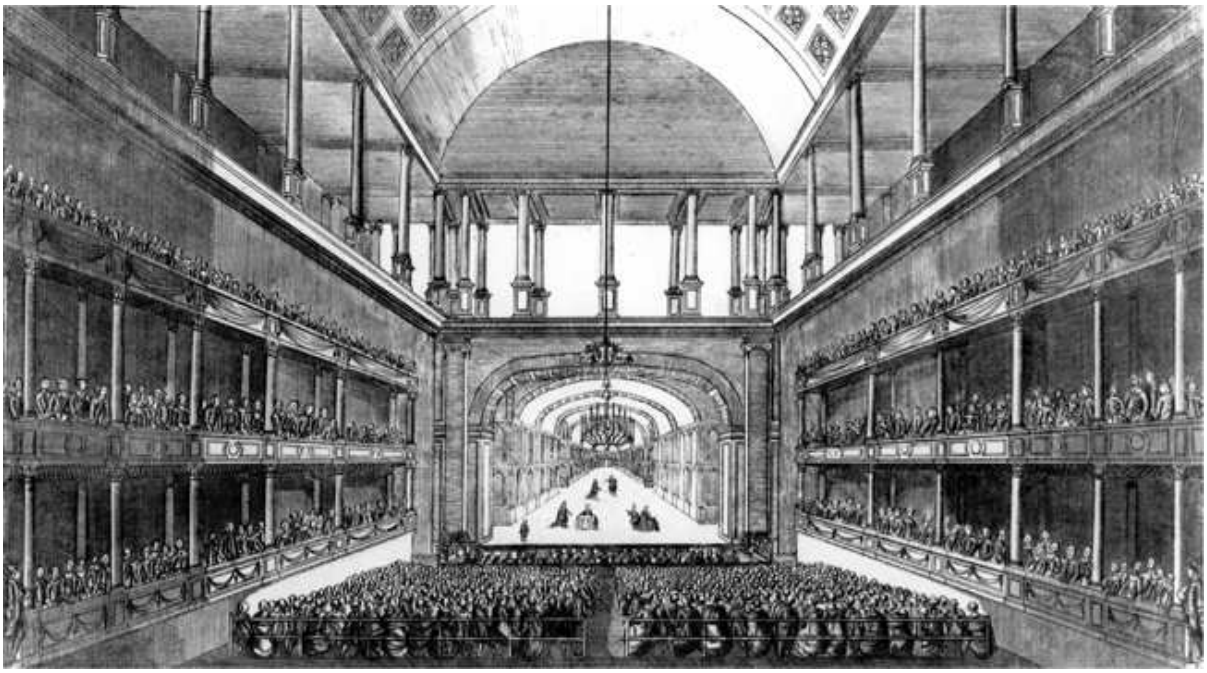


fig. 4-2 Interior of the Teatro San Bartolomeo, Naples (eighteenth-century engraving at the Bibliothèque et Musée de l'Opéra, Paris).

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Alessandro Scarlatti

Aria

Cantata

SCARLATTI

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The guiding genius behind the Neapolitan ascendency was a Palermo-born composer named Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725), who dominated the Neapolitan musical scene from 1683 to 1702, and again (after Naples had passed from Spanish to Austrian rule) from 1709 to 1721. His career was international, or at least pan-Italian; he had important stints of service in Rome, in Florence, and elsewhere. But the bulk of his voluminous output of operas (114 by his own count) and cantatas (more than 800 by modern scholarly count) was written for Naples, where in 1696 the theater was expanded and newly outfitted just for him by the viceroy, the Duke of Medinaceli, who was a great *melomaniaco* (as the Italians called an opera fan). The inheritor and transformer of the Venetian tradition, Scarlatti could be looked upon as the culminating figure of opera's first century. By reshaping and standardizing the legacy he inherited, he laid the foundation for the next century of operatic development, especially as regards what came to be known as "serious" opera (*opera seria*).

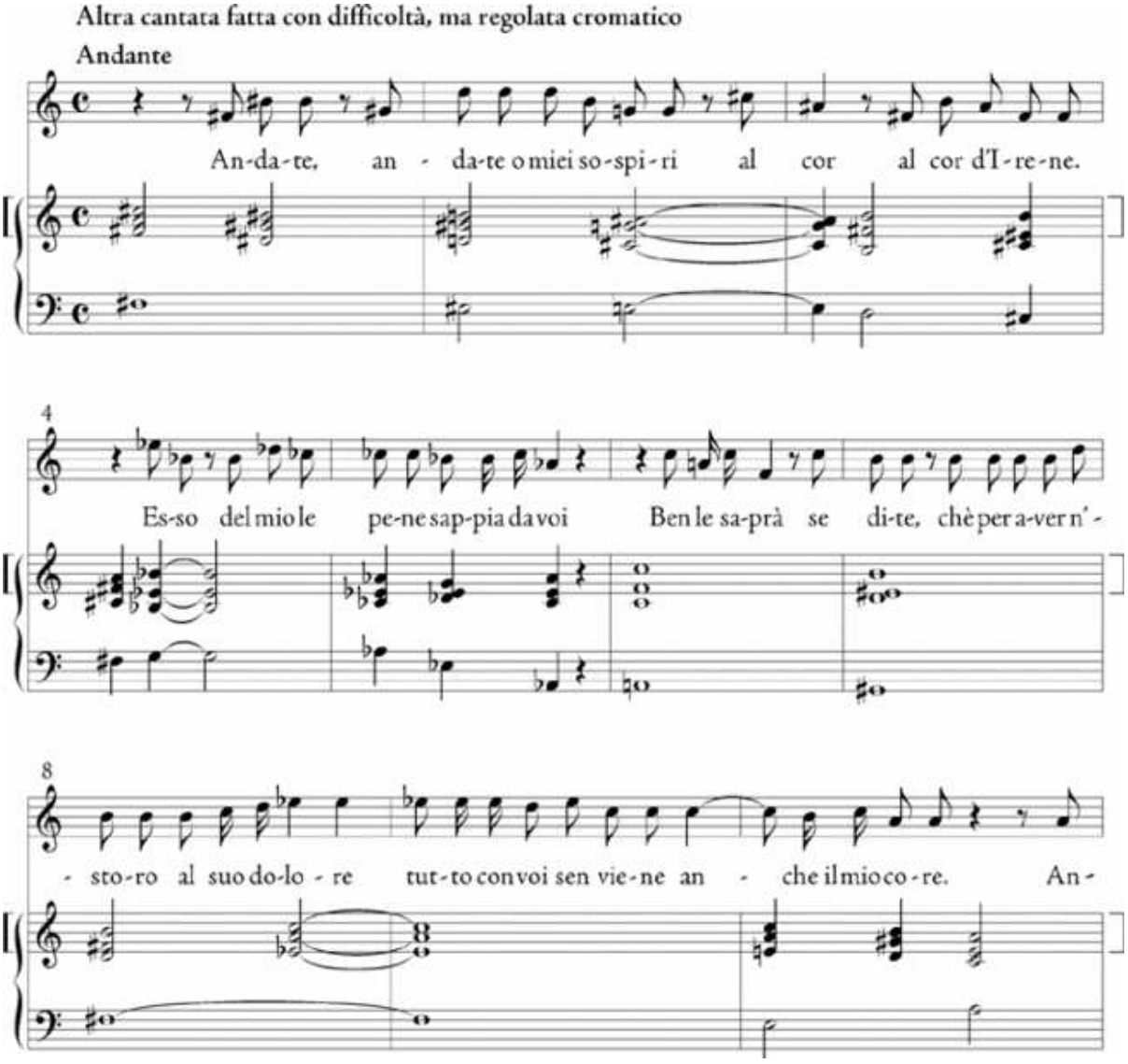
fig. 4-3 Anonymous portrait of Alessandro Scarlatti at the Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, Bologna.

Scarlatti served his apprenticeship in Rome, where he was a favorite of the aging Queen Christina. When the Spanish ambassador to the papal court was named viceroy of Naples, he brought Scarlatti along with him as *maestro di cappella*. The twenty-three-year-old maestro's duties were staggering. He was under contract to compose, as well as rehearse and perform, an average of four operas a year. He had to provide the music for the viceroy's chapel, including a yearly oratorio for Lent and an annual Te Deum or two for occasions of state. And he furnished on commission untold cantatas and miniature operas known as serenatas for various noble salons. No wonder, then, that he tended to standardize his *modus operandi*. In the words of Donald Jay Grout, his biographer, the hard-pressed maestro was "forced to make as many minutes as possible of music at the cost of as few minutes as possible for getting the notes written down."[1] His methods of standardization were widely emulated by his contemporaries and immediate successors, who were just as overworked as he was.

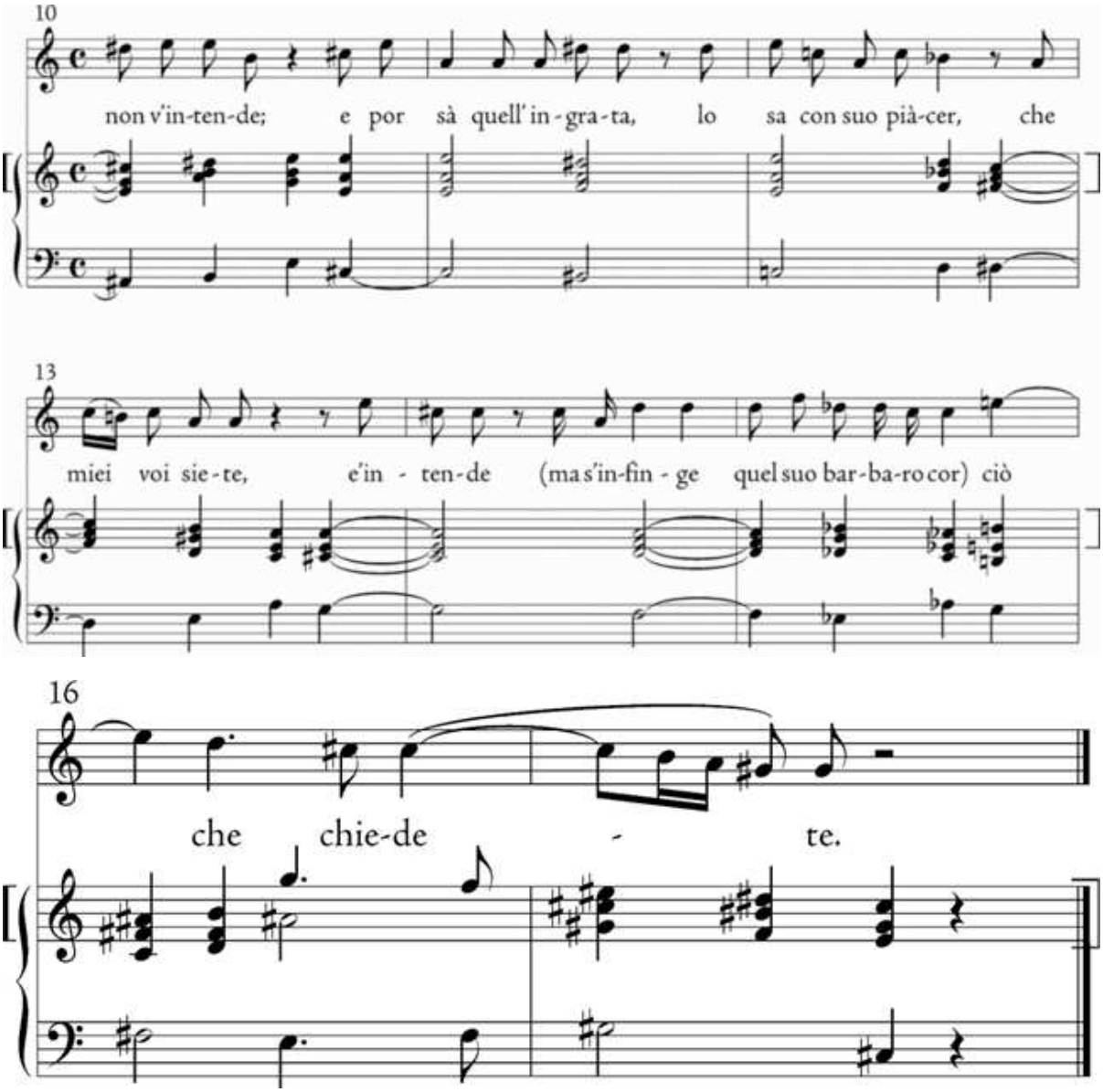
Since much of Scarlatti's work remains unpublished, or available only in scholarly editions, and since a whole opera or even a single act would tax our available space, the best way of observing Scarlatti's standard operating procedure is within the more modest confines of a cantata, the form to which he was the last (and by far the most) prolific contributor. *Andate, oh miei sospiri* ("Go, O my sighs") was written in 1712, during Scarlatti's second stint as chief

composer in Naples. It was, for Scarlatti, an especially labored-over composition, since he wrote it in friendly competition with his younger contemporary Francesco Gasparini, a leading Venetian composer of the day. Each composer had to compose two settings of the same text, as different from one another as possible.

The one we are sampling here was Scarlatti's second setting, composed, as he put it on the title page, "*in idea inumana, ma in regolato cromatico; non è per ogni professore*" ("in a devilish style, but within the rules of chromatic writing; not for your average tootler"). The harmonic extravagances to which he refers—and which begin at the very beginning (Ex. 4.1a) with two successive tritones on the repeated opening word, a flattened second degree (the so-called "Neapolitan" harmony) almost immediately following, and many diminished-seventh chords throughout (a particular Scarlatti mannerism)—are not really all that unusual. Rather, they place the work within the old tradition of the "mannered" madrigal that stood parent to the cantata. They are quite comparable to the expressive harmonic effects in Barbara Strozzi's cantata, composed half a century earlier, which was discussed in chapter 2. The most "mannered" moment comes in a later recitative at the parenthetical line "(*ma s'infinge / quel suo barbara cor*)", which means "(while her cruel heart pretends otherwise)." The sudden, radical harmonic excursion (Ex. 4.1b) is indeed a perfect analogue to a parenthetical thought, especially one that is not only parenthetical but also antithetical to the main sense of the words.



ex. 4-1a Alessandro Scarlatti, Cantata: *Andate, oh miei sospiri*, opening recitative.



ex. 4-1b Alessandro Scarlatti, Cantata: *Andate, oh miei sospiri*, third recitative, harmonic "aside".

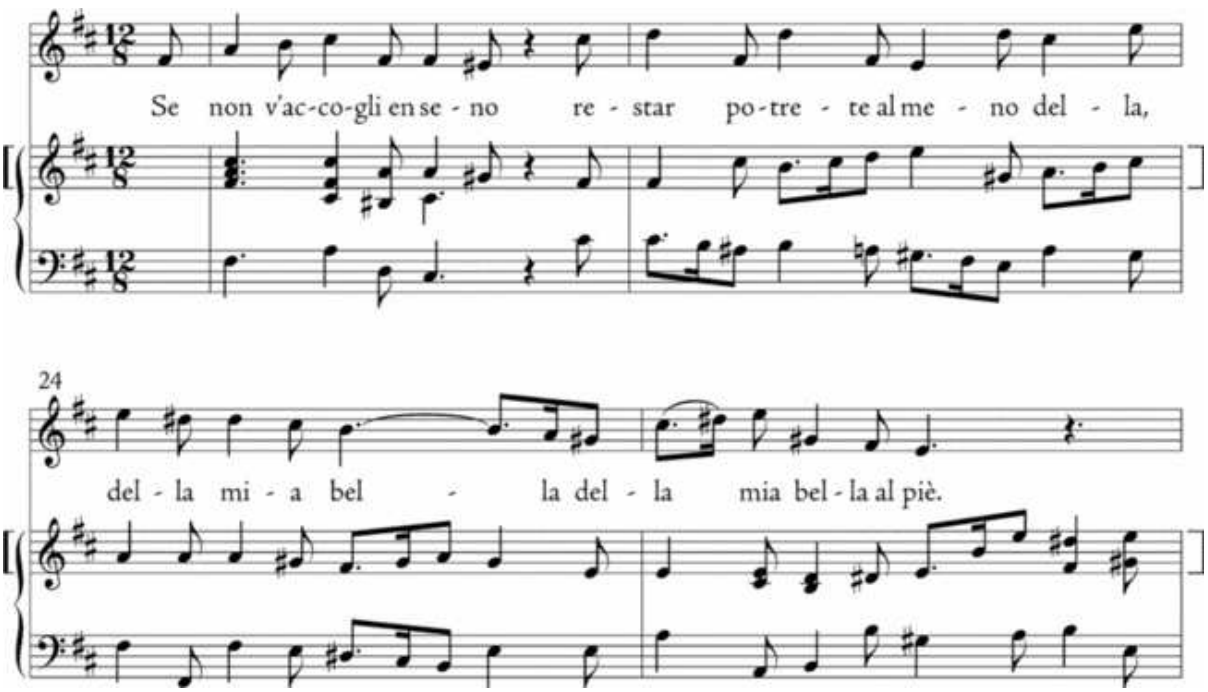
Such bizarre rhetorical effects were nothing new, as comparison with Strozzi's work will quickly show. Completely new, however, and completely unlike Strozzi's cantata, is the thoroughgoing formal regularity of Scarlatti's setting. It is cast in four discrete sections that form two recitative–aria pairs. The poetry is made for this division. The recitative sections are cast in *versi sciolti* ("free verses") in which eleven-syllable lines alternate irregularly with sevens. These lend themselves to the flexible declamation of recitative. The arias are cast in shorter lines with a regular meter and (especially in the case of the second one) a simpler rhyme scheme.

Not only is the setting fixed and formal in its alternation of recitative and aria, but the arias themselves are also uniform in structure. The texts are cast in two sections, each consisting of a single sentence. These sentences are given discrete musical settings. The first, by far the longer thanks to a continuo introduction and many repetitions of words and phrases, cadences on the tonic. The second is not only shorter, it is tonally distinguished from the first as well, beginning and cadencing on a different scale degree (in effect, in a different key).

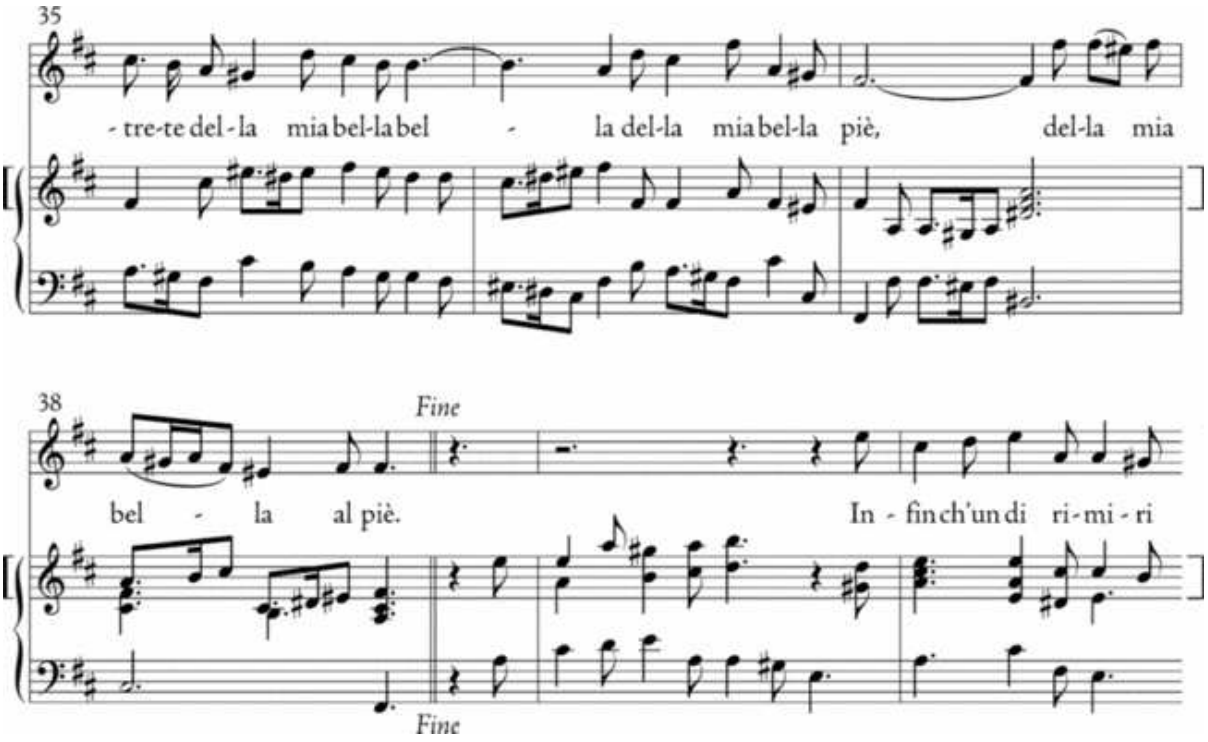
Obviously the aria cannot end with this tonally subsidiary second section. The words *da capo*, written at its conclusion, confirm this point. They mean "from the top," and direct the performers to repeat the first section, in its entirety or up to the word *fine* ("end"), so that the whole has a tonally stable, recapitulatory form that could be designated ABA. This tripartite form, known informally as the "da capo aria," remained the absolutely standard aria form for the rest of the eighteenth century. Its advantage for the composer was obvious: he had to write only two parts out of three, amounting to perhaps three-fifths of the total duration. The rest was taken care of by the

unwritten repeat. Its advantage for the performer consisted in the opportunities the unwritten repeat offered for spontaneous embellishment. The da capo aria was (or became) the virtuoso display aria par excellence, ensuring the kind of spectacular performance on which public opera has always thrived.

The origins of the form are a bit obscure. Scarlatti, though his name is now firmly associated with it, certainly did not invent it. It appears to be an abridgement of an earlier strophic form, as befits the use of the word "aria," which originally designated a poem declaimed stanza by stanza to a musical formula. Indeed, in Scarlatti's earliest operas each aria had two strophic stanzas separated by refrains. Shrink such an aria down to a single stanza framed by the refrain, enlarge and embellish the simple structure thus achieved, and the "da capo aria" is the result.

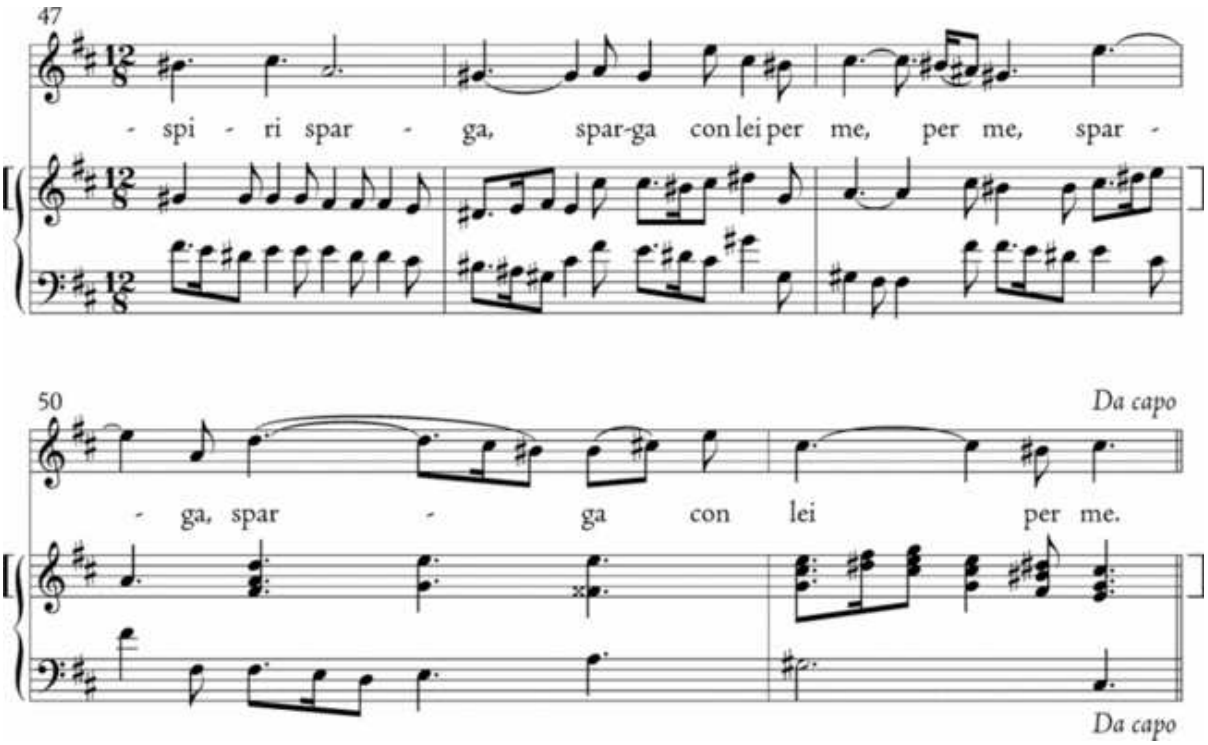


ex. 4-2a Alessandro Scarlatti, Cantata: *Andate, oh miei sospiri*, second aria (in *siciliana* style), setting of opening line.



ex. 4-2b Alessandro Scarlatti, Cantata: *Andate, oh miei sospiri*, second aria (in *siciliana* style), section

break.



ex. 4-2c Alessandro Scarlatti, Cantata: *Andate, oh miei sospiri*, second aria (in *siciliana* style), end of middle section.

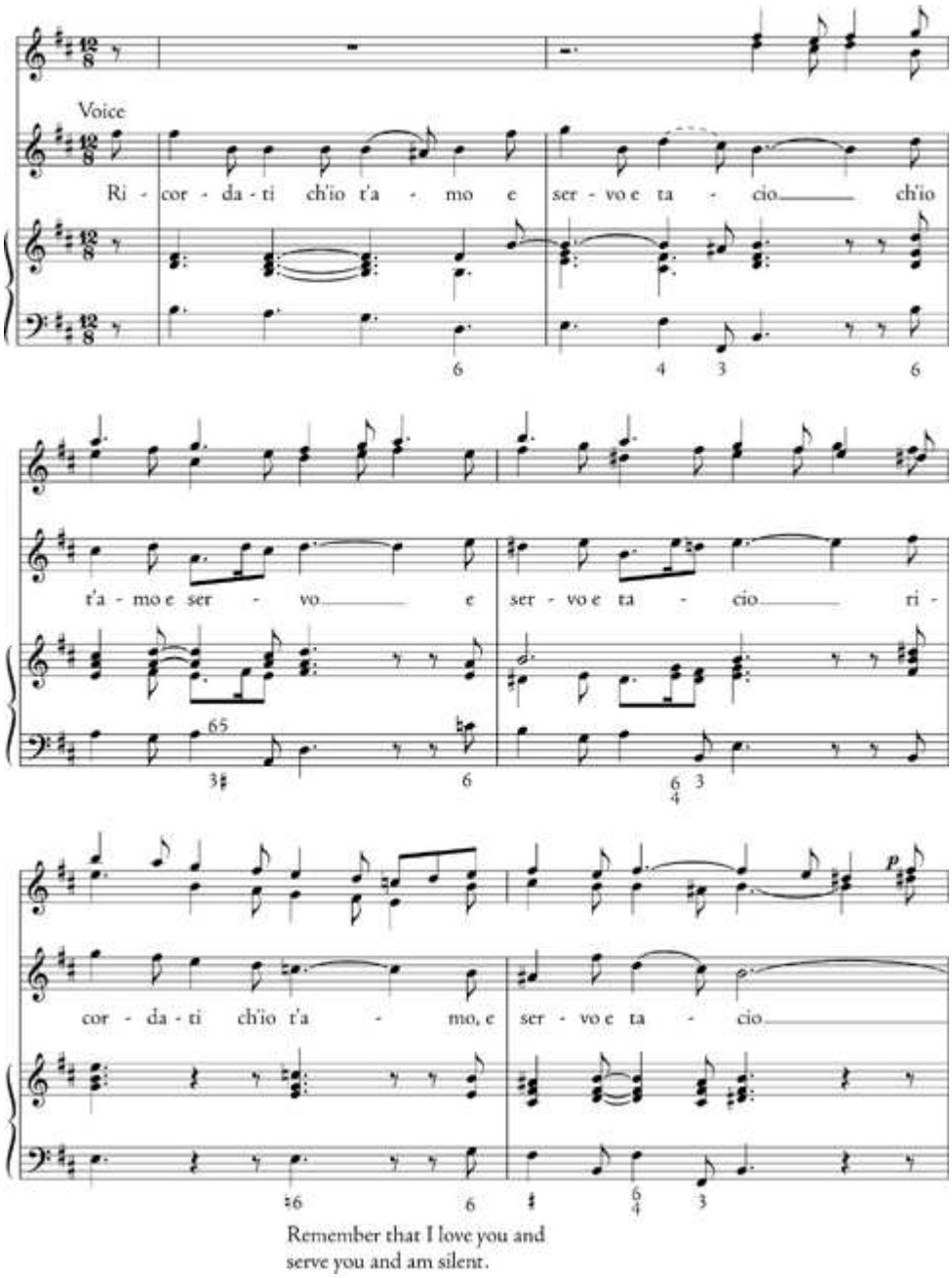
The second aria in *Andate, oh miei sospiri* belongs to a type that was particularly characteristic of Scarlatti and of Neapolitan music in *general*. Identifiable by compound meter (or, more commonly,), leisurely or languid tempo, lilting rhythms (with much use of the figure) and (usually) by an eighth-note pickup, such an aria was called a *siciliana* and is often assumed, although without any real evidence, to stem from a jiglike Sicilian folk or popular dance. Very often, too, *siciliana* arias exhibit at their cadences the "Neapolitan sixth" harmony that emerges when the already-observed flatted second degree in the tune coincides with the fourth degree in the bass. This distinctive harmonic mannerism, which quickly caught on in other repertoires, reinforces the impression that the *siciliana* may have originated in some local musical dialect. Ex. 4.2 shows the main tune, as sung by the soloist on entering (after a little introduction for the accompanists); the join between the A and B sections; and the end of the B section, marked *da capo*. (The "Neapolitan sixth" occurs in the penultimate bar, on the word *sparga*.)

The main difference between cantata arias and their operatic counterparts is in scoring. Cantatas are chamber music; the basic ensemble of voice plus basso continuo—sustaining bass, usually string, and chordal "realizer," usually key-board—generally suffices for them. In the opera house a small "Venetian style" string band (like the one encountered in Monteverdi's *Poppea*) was employed to accompany the voice part or set it off with ritornellos, as in the siciliana aria in Ex. 4.3, from Scarlatti's opera *L'Eraclea* (Heraclia) first performed at the Naples opera house in 1700. Note the "Neapolitan" throb in m. 5 that emphasizes—what else?—the words "I love you"!

Like the da capo aria itself, the siciliana was something Alessandro Scarlatti used so abundantly that his name became identified with it, but again he was not (as sometimes stated) its inventor. Yet a third important operatic convention not invented by Scarlatti but standardized and popularized by (and hence often attributed to) him was a new type of *sinfonia* (that is, overture) consisting of a brilliant opening in fanfare style, a central slow episode (often with "affective" harmonies involving suspensions or chromatics), and a concluding dance.

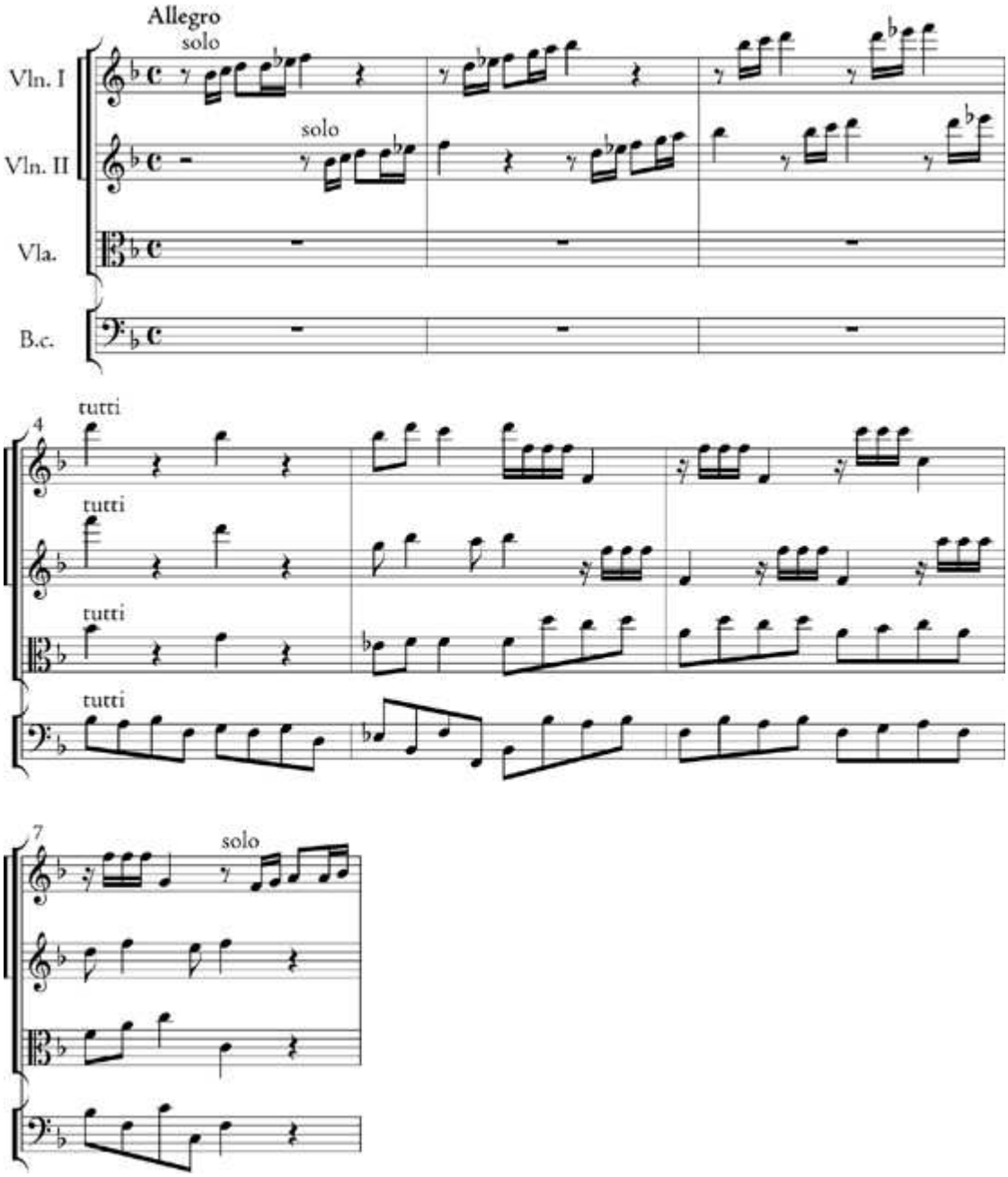
This last section, as was by then standard for dance movements, was cast in two repeated strains, the first cadencing on the dominant or some remoter degree, and the second on the tonic. Like the da capo aria, then, the "binary" dance movement embodied a "closed" tonal motion—away from the tonic and back. The resulting effect of harmonic contrast and closure, and its standard employment as the chief articulator of musical form, was perhaps the most powerful new idea that can be associated with late seventeenth-century Italian music, and certainly the most

influential one. In all sorts of ways, it conditioned the development of European art music for centuries to come. Alessandro Scarlatti's stature in music history derives from his important role, by virtue of his prolific output and its high visibility, in establishing these new harmonic and formal norms.

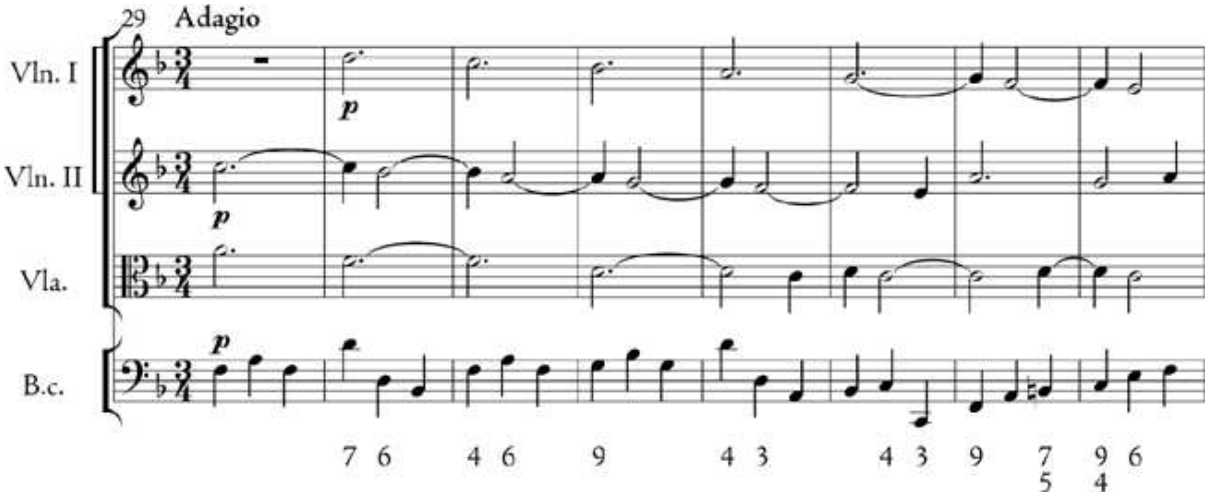


ex. 4-3 Alessandro Scarlatti, *L'Eraclea*, "Ricordati ch'io t'amo," mm. 1–6.

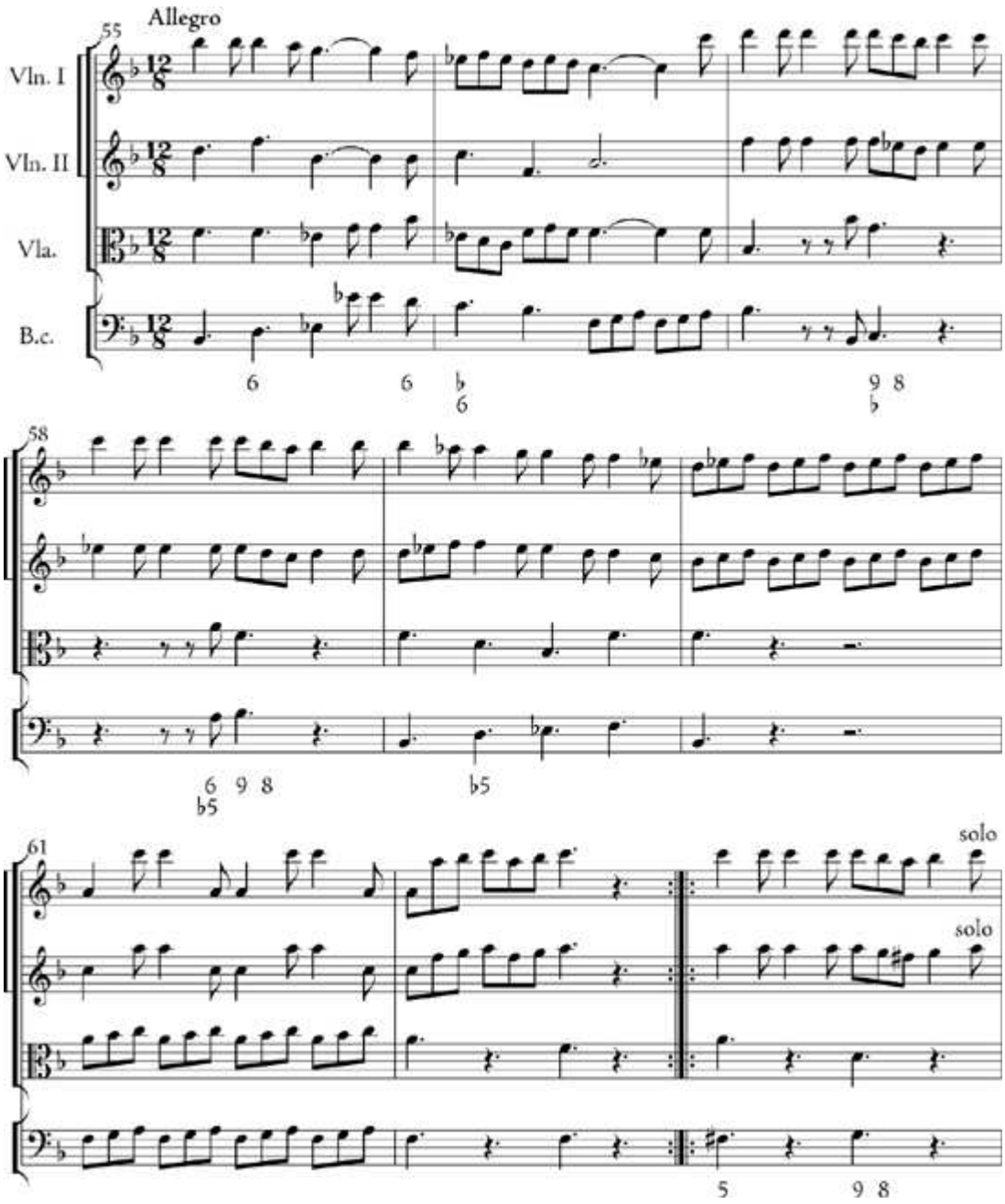
Scarlatti employed the new overture form as early as 1681, in *Tutto il mal non vien per nuocere* ("Not Every Misfortune Is Harmful"), his third opera and first big hit, which played in six Italian cities in as many years. Perhaps not coincidentally, this was a comic opera, where a high-spirited curtain-raiser would have seemed especially fitting. But by the turn of the century such overtures were standard in operas of every plot type. Given in Ex. 4.4 is a sort of summary of the "Sinfonia avanti L'Opera" from *La caduta de' decemviri* ("The Fall of the Decemvirs"), a serious opera first given at San Bartolomeo in 1697, with a plot (like that of Monteverdi's *Poppea*) adapted from Roman history. The final dancelike section, given complete as Ex. 4.4c, is cast in Scarlatti's ubiquitous meter.

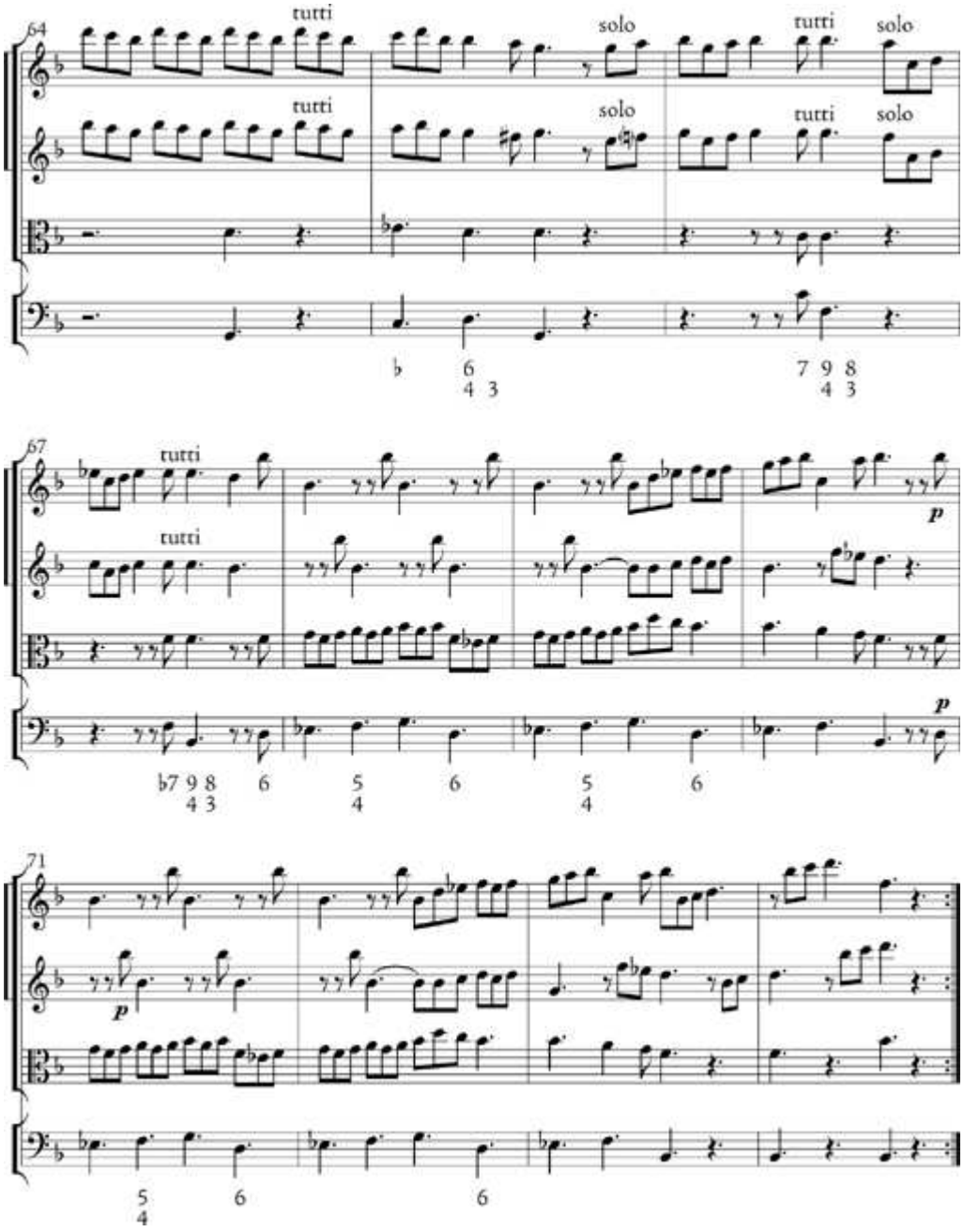


ex. 4-4a Alessandro Scarlatti, *La caduta de' decemviri*, Sinfonia, mm. 1–7.



ex. 4-4b Alessandro Scarlatti, *La caduta de' decemviri*, Sinfonia, mm. 29–36.





ex. 4-4c Alessandro Scarlatti, *La caduta de' decemviri*, Sinfonia, m. 55–end.

Notes:

(1) Donald Jay Grout, *Alessandro Scarlatti: An Introduction to His Operas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p. 15.

Citation (MLA): Richard Taruskin. "Chapter 4 Class and Classicism." *The Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2011. <http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume2/actrade-9780195384826-div1-04002.xml>.
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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Arcadian Academy

Opera: The 18th century

NEOCLASSICISM

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

In 1706, while living in Rome between his two stints as *maestro di cappella* in Naples, Scarlatti was honored by election, along with the keyboard virtuoso and composer Bernardo Pasquini and the great violinist Arcangelo Corelli, to a very prestigious association of musical and literary connoisseurs known as the Arcadian Academy. It had been founded in 1690, the year following the death of Queen Christina, Scarlatti's former patron, by former habitués of her salon. At its head was Pietro Cardinal Ottoboni, grandnephew of the reigning pope, Alexander VIII. For more than fifty years Cardinal Ottoboni was far and away the most lavish patron of opera in Rome. He was also an amateur librettist, whose texts, whatever their shortcomings, were eagerly set by composers in hopes of an extravagant production and an outstanding performance supervised by Pasquini and Corelli. Two of Scarlatti's operas and several of his oratorios were set to Ottoboni librettos, including *La Statira*, the cardinal's maiden operatic effort.

The Arcadians preached, and to a considerable extent practiced, very lofty esthetic ideals. Following Aristotle, as they would have claimed, but also responding to the criticism of French dramatists who (as we saw in chapter 3) heaped scorn on theatrical music, they wanted to restore opera to its original "classical" purity. This meant cleansing it of the old Venetian comic and bawdy scenes with their conniving servants and aging wet nurses, which had catered to the tastes of paying audiences, and returning opera to the chaste pastoral or heroic historical spheres from which it had sunk. Like most operatic reformers (and as a venerable wag once put it, the history of opera is the history of its reforms), the Arcadians sought to recover the politics of affirmation that had attended the original invention of opera at the noble north Italian courts a hundred years before.

Thus librettos became vehicles for noble sentiment—noble in both the literal and the figurative sense of the word. Real tragedy, which according to Aristotle required a flawed hero and a terrifying dénouement, was deemed unsuitable for moral instruction in an enlightened age: therein lay one crucial difference between the actual classical drama and the "neoclassical" drama of the European courts. A happy ending (*lieto fine* in Italian) was mandatory in an opera libretto even if it contradicted historical fact; for as Marita McClymonds, a leading historian of "reform" opera, has observed, "poets were expected to portray what, according to an orderly moral system, should have happened rather than what actually did happen."[2] That, as far as opera was concerned, was what was meant by "verisimilitude." In practical terms, this requirement entailed a schematic, idealized cast of character types that, in Grout's words, represented "not a picture of the actual world in which people then lived, but rather a diagram of it."[3] This abstract diagrammatic representation of the social world implied, for its fullest delineation, the depiction of three social levels—rulers, confidants, and servants—each represented by a loving couple (or a would-be loving couple). The dramatic intrigue, always played out in three acts, involved the interplay among this set of characters, augmented by one or two others (villains, jealous or rejected lovers, false friends), until the inevitable happy ending, "where," as Grout writes, "all the couples are finally sorted out and launched on a life which presumably will continue happily ever after." Most important, he continues, "this consummation is usually brought about not by luck, still less by any intelligent planning by the persons chiefly concerned, but rather by the last-minute intervention of the ruler, in an exemplary act of renunciation inspired by pity and greatness of soul."

The ruler, in short, functioned in an ideal opera libretto the way a benevolently intervening deity—the proverbial *deus ex machina* or "god from out of a machine"—descended, like Apollo in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, in ancient plays or the earliest courtly operas. Here is another important distinction between the "classical" and the "neoclassical." Intervention in the newly idealized opera could not be supernatural; it had to be human, but the human intervener, like the ruler in an absolutist state, was taken as the earthly representative of the divine. The neoclassical drama thus celebrated the "divine right of kings."

These Arcadian reforms were anticipated and paralleled in Venice, the former hotbed of "impure" opera, by Apostolo Zeno (1668–1750), a famous poet and scholar who had founded his own Academy for the restoration of taste and tradition, and whose librettos were set many times over by many composers. Like most operatic reformers, Zeno had high aristocratic patronage (in his case the "Holy Roman" Emperor, no less), and wrote librettos on commission from the Viennese court (where he was eventually in residence) which further idealized the role of the beneficent monarch. One of these, *Scipione nelle Spagne*, was set by Scarlatti and no fewer than eight other composers between 1710 and 1768: such libretto-longevity was not at all unusual in the eighteenth century.

Along with the purification and elevation of subject matter went the standardization of form and regularization of verse. In librettos like *Griselda* (on which Scarlatti, one of fourteen who set it, composed his last opera in 1721, twenty years after its creation), Zeno began to cast all the scenes in the same basic shape—recitative followed by a single da capo aria, after which the singer exits amid applause—and made every aria the bearer of a single vivid and consistent emotional message, cast in a simple and distinctive meter to facilitate its setting by the composer. It became a point both of technique and of esthetics to employ as great a variety of aria meters as possible. Thus Zeno and the Arcadians sought at the level of the libretto, the highest level of operatic "structure," to match Scarlatti's achievement in standardizing forms and procedures.

Notes:

(2) Marita McClymonds, "Opera seria," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. III (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 698.

(3) Grout, *Alessandro Scarlatti*, p. 9.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Pietro Metastasio

Libretto

Dido and Aeneas

Attilio Regolo

METASTASIO

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Ultimate "classical" perfection was reached by the Roman poet Pietro Antonio Trapassi (1698–1782), a godson of Cardinal Ottoboni himself, who was virtually raised in the bosom of the Arcadian Academy and who eventually replaced Zeno as Austrian court poet in 1730. His pen name, Metastasio, has become the very emblem of the genre he perfected. It was a sort of pseudo-Greek translation of his family name: *trapasso* means transit or conveyance from one place to another (and by extension, death, or "passing on"); Metastasio substitutes Greek roots for Latinate ones (compare the medical term *metastasis*, meaning the spread or transference of a disease or a fluid from one part of the body to another). The "translation" signaled the poet's neoclassical leanings and his avowed aim, as usual, of re-resurrecting the ancient Greek drama, and all its effects, through opera.

Between 1720 and 1771 Metastasio wrote some sixty librettos, of which about half (twenty-seven) belonged to the genre of *opera seria*—"serious opera"—the term now used for what Metastasio, following tradition, had called *dramma per musica* ("drama through music"). Over the next century or more, Metastasio's texts were set more than eight hundred times by more than three hundred composers. During that long span of time, and at the hands of several generations of musicians, the music that clothed these texts underwent considerable stylistic change. (At the most basic level, the settings of the arias became steadily longer and more elaborate, and therefore fewer.) But the librettos remained relatively constant. That is what it means to be (regarded as) a classic. No other librettist ever achieved such a stature or so dominated the opera of his time.

The stylistic changes in the music will naturally be the subject of future discussions in this book. And of course Metastasio's librettos did undergo a certain amount of adaptation (or *refacimento*—"remaking"—to use the Italian word) as they circulated over time and from place to place. They had increasingly to be cut as the musical entities got longer. But their longevity, and their consistency, are nonetheless remarkable and have a great deal to teach us about the musical and social ideals of their age. It was an age of relative political and social stability, a stability that the very longevity and consistency of Metastasio's libretti can seem to symbolize. In advance of all musical discussion, then, the style and structure of the Metastasian libretto deserve consideration, since they embody a critical set of concepts with many important consequences.

The Metastasian libretto was a supreme balancing act, reconciling the theoretical ideals of the Arcadian reformers with the practical demands of the stage. Not only the audience but the performers had to be considered, for the star singers in an opera performance were in effect another hierarchical society, and a very demanding one. To meet and balance all demands, the older reform libretto was adjusted to feature six main roles, deployed in two pairs and a "remainder."

At the top was the first couple: the *primo uomo* or first man, almost always played by a castrato, and the *prima donna* or first lady, played by a soprano where women were allowed on the public stage, and by another castrato where they were not. The indifference to the actual sex of performers, which is evident in the casting not only of *opera seria* but also the contemporary spoken theater, is something that fascinates many historians in our present era of gender politics. In the case of *Artaserse*, a famous Metastasio libretto that will furnish our main example, the first performance of its first musical setting took place in Rome, where women could not sing on stage, and featured two male castratos in the main lovers' roles. Most subsequent performances cast the roles according to sex, although

the male was always a eunuch, never a "natural" man. But in at least one production, a gala sung at Naples in 1738 on the birthday and wedding-eve of the King of the Two Sicilies, both "first" roles were sung by women. As the figurative meaning of "prima donna," which still survives in colloquial English, emphatically suggests, these favored singers, whatever their actual sex, had many prerogatives and insisted on them. Between the two of them, the first couple had to sing half the arias in the show, amounting to as many as half a dozen arias apiece. And only they could sing a duet.

The second couple, also noble, claimed three or four arias apiece. Afterwards came the "remainder": confidants, villains, servants, whatever. They could be given no more than two arias, and these arias had to be positioned less conspicuously than those of the higher-ranking roles. One of these characters, for example, had to sing the first aria in act II, because in many theaters that was when refreshments were served to the audience and nobody was listening. (The first aria in act II actually came to be known as the *aria di sorbetto* or "sherbet aria," and the hapless singer to whom it was assigned could expect to be drowned out by the clinking of spoons.)

In addition, the arias each character sang had to belong to different standard types that showed off different aspects of their vocal prowess. These included the *aria di bravura* or virtuoso aria full of difficult coloratura passages; the *aria d'affetto* or tender aria full of long-held, swelling notes; the *aria cantabile* or lyrical aria, in which the singer's ability to sustain long phrases was displayed, and so on. Not only were these types to be distributed within the roles; they also had to be distributed in their succession, so that there never be two arias of the same type side by side. Thus the librettist had to be able to anticipate the demands of singer and of composer alike, and also meet strict standards of plot propriety and literary style. It was specialist work, and in its profusion of rigorous conventions it was a "classical" art indeed. No wonder the works of Metastasio, who could manage all these staggering prerequisites within a style that apparently exemplified classical "simplicity" and "naturalness," were kept up in active use as long as they were.

Metastasio rationalized the artificiality of the neoclassical dramatic art he practiced and reconciled it with the principles of the classic drama he claimed to emulate by comparing the arias, which functioned as reflective monologues at the conclusion of every scene, not with soliloquies but with the chorus—the eternal commentator—in the classical Greek drama. In this way the aria differs in quality and function even from the recitative soliloquy that might precede it. The essential difference is that the recitatives exist within the stage world; they are addressed to the *dramatis personae*, the characters on stage, even if the singer and the addressee are one and the same (as in a true soliloquy, an "internal dialogue").

The arias, like the Greek choruses, are addressed outward to the audience; they are emotional weather reports, so to speak, delivered in a sort of stopped time, or "time out." As traditionally staged, the arias were actually sung stage front, facing the spectators, accompanied by appropriate stylized poses or attitudes. A "character," in such a drama, was only the sum of the prescribed attitudes he or she was called upon to strike.

The artificiality of this scheme is proverbial and often mocked. And yet no matter how much opera may have changed after Metastasio, no matter how vehemently later operatic composers, librettists, or theorists may (in the name of one form of "realism" or another) have rejected his stylizations, this most fundamental stylization forever remained: the distinction between "recitative time" (public time, clock time, time for action) and "aria time" (internal time, psychological time, time for reflection). The formalization of this distinction was the great stroke of genius that gave opera not only more room for music but also a special dramatic dimension that modern spoken drama (despite many fruitless experiments with "asides") could never match.

Metastasio began his career in Naples, Scarlatti's old haunt, with *Didone abbandonata* ("Dido abandoned"), based on the same story as Purcell's famous little opera of 1689. Even though it was an early work and therefore somewhat atypical (lacking a *lieto fine*, for one thing), *Didone abbandonata* was one of Metastasio's most popular librettos. It was set more than sixty times by composers great and obscure over a period of precisely a century, from 1724 to 1824.

Comparing Metastasio's libretto with Virgil's original story as summarized in chapter 3, and with Purcell's setting as discussed there, will illuminate the special nature of *opera seria*. Like virtually all *opere serie* it is in three long acts. Where Nahum Tate, Purcell's librettist, had three main characters—Dido, Aeneas, and Belinda (Dido's confidante)—Metastasio's has the standard six. Dido (soprano) and Aeneas (alto castrato) make up the first couple. The second couple consists of Araspes (bass) and Dido's sister Selene (soprano), who at first is also in love with Aeneas: the remainder consists of the villains Iarbas (tenor), a Moorish king who is fruitlessly wooing Dido, and Osmidas

(tenor), Dido's faithless confidant, who is plotting against her with the help of the jealous Iarbas.

In the first act, Aeneas informs Dido of his decision to leave Carthage; Iarbas, unaware of this, tries to kill Aeneas with the help of Araspes, his henchman. In the second act, Araspes declares his love to Selene who rejects him; Aeneas magnanimously intercedes with Dido on behalf of Iarbas, who has already been set free by Osmidas; Dido at first pretends to accept Iarbas's offer of marriage to test Aeneas's love; having been reassured, she rejects Iarbas. In the third act, Iarbas challenges Aeneas to a duel, whereupon the Moors and Trojans all begin fighting with one another; again Aeneas shows his magnanimity by defeating Iarbas but sparing his life; Selene declares her love to Aeneas but cannot deter him from leaving. Araspes comes with news that the Moors have set fire to Carthage, but even at this Dido does not give in to Iarbas's entreaties. Learning of Osmidas's betrayal and her sister's secret love, she sings a rage aria (modeled by Metastasio on the ending of Quinault's libretto for Lully's *Armide*, performed at Louis XIV's court some forty years before; see chapter 3), following which she throws herself into the fire and is killed.

A cluttered action, a confusion of lovers, a welter of superfluous characters (there is also "Arbaces," Iarbas in disguise), but ample opportunity to display the high virtues of fidelity, steadfastness of purpose, and noble generosity (all at grave personal cost) and express the high emotions of love in many variations. In writing it, the young Metastasio was guided by the singers who were to portray the leading couple: Maria Anna Benti, called La Romanina, Italy's reigning diva (at whose house the poet was staying), and her partner, the castrato Nicolo Grimaldi, called Nicolini. They gave the librettist, in seriousness, the indispensable advice he needed about role requirements and aria types, the notorious but inviolable rigmarole later parodied by so many satirists of the opera seria like Carlo Goldoni (see Weiss and Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp. 194–96). His early mastery of these absolute injunctions enabled Metastasio to cope, for the rest of his career and with seeming effortlessness, with all the competing demands of the librettist's craft.

The libretto Metastasio himself regarded as his masterpiece, at once typical and ideal, was *Attilio Regolo*, which more than any other highlighted the theme of noble self-sacrifice. The title character, Marcus Attilius Regulus (d. ca. 250 bce), was, like so many *opera seria* heroes, an exemplary historical personage: "a Roman hero of consummate virtue," as Metastasio himself put it, "not only in principle but in practice," because he is "a rigid and scrupulous observer, not only of justice and probity, but also of the laws and customs which time and the great authority of his ancestors have rendered sacred to his country."[4] A Roman consul and general, Regulus invaded Africa and defeated the Carthaginians in 256 bce but was defeated and captured by them the next year. Having promised to return whatever the outcome, he was sent by the Carthaginians to Rome in 250 to negotiate peace and exchange prisoners. Having failed in his mission, but remaining true to his promise, Regulus returned to Carthage and was tortured to death.

The distribution of the six roles emphasizes filial as opposed to erotic love. The main couple is Regulus (alto castrato) and his daughter Attilia (soprano), leaving the latter's husband (the impassioned Licinius, another castrato) to the "remainder." The second couple consists of Hamilcar, the Carthaginian ambassador, and Barce, a Carthaginian noblewoman who has been kept as a slave by Publius, Regulus's son, who also loves her. (In another act of noble magnanimity, Publius gives her back her freedom to return to Carthage with Hamilcar.) The remainder consists of Licinius, Publius (who must argue in the Senate against the proposed peace even though its rejection means his father's certain death); and Manlius, Regulus's successor as consul, who at first is ruled by envy of his predecessor, but is finally persuaded by Regulus's sterling example to act nobly on behalf of state and civic interests.

The libretto's ideology of civic fortitude and heroic sacrifice to the social order is most explicitly set forth by negative example, through the mouth of the uncomprehending Barce, the Carthaginian slave, who is portrayed with undisguised racial contempt. The librettist describes her as "a pleasing, beautiful and lively African," whose "temperament, like that of her nation, is amorous," not noble.[5] She cannot fathom the magnanimity of the Romans, Metastasio's idealized European patrons. "What strange ideas does the love of praise excite in Rome!" she declares (in the words of Metastasio's eighteenth-century translator, John Hoole), and continues:

> With envy Manlius views his rival's chains, while Regulus abhors the public pity that would save his life. The daughter glories in her father's sufferings, and Publius—this surpasses all belief!—Publius, my beauty's slave, for honor's sake, resigns the mistress whom his soul adores.[6]

That is the recitative preceding Barce's last exit aria, which begins, "But thanks be to Heaven, I don't have a Roman

soul!"

Metastasio prepared this grand quintessence of everything that is meant by the word "august" for a gala performance in Vienna to honor Emperor Charles VI on his saint's name day in 1740. Charles's sudden death two weeks before the planned celebration prevented its performance. Instead of letting the work out for another occasion, Metastasio continued to work on it intermittently over the next nine years, during which time it was on several occasions performed at court under the Empress Maria Theresa as a spoken play despite its operatic structure that turned every character into an endlessly soliloquizing Hamlet. Metastasio always maintained that his librettos were suitable for spoken performance and that he would rather hear them that way than poorly set.

fig. 4-4 Johann Adolf Hasse, copperplate engraving by C. F. Riedel after a painting by Pietro Antonio Rotari (1707–1762).

Metastasio finally let *Attilio Regolo* out for setting in 1749 at the request of King Frederick Augustus II of Saxony, who wanted to have it performed at his court in Dresden. The proposed composer, Johann Adolf Hasse (1699–1783), was a musician the librettist could trust. He had already composed 43 *opere serie*, fifteen of them to Metastasio libretti (one of them for Vienna, where it had triumphed in the poet's presence). Even so, Metastasio sent Hasse a long letter, now a classic text of music history, in which he detailed his wishes as to how his text should be set.

In particular, he bade the composer set certain key passages—mainly the title character's occasional soliloquies of impassioned self-doubt—in accompanied recitative (*recitativo obligato* in eighteenth-century Italian), a style reserved for very special effects, in which the whole orchestra, not just the continuo, accompanied the singer. And he counseled so, as he put it to Hasse, "for (you know this as well as I) the same words and sentiments may be uttered, according to the diversity of situation, in such a manner as to express either joy, sorrow, anger, or pity."[7] And music may underscore such nuances and ironies with peerless subtlety and truthfulness "by the judicious and alternate use of *pianos* and *fortes*, by *rinforzandos* [sudden loudening], by *staccatos*, slurs, accelerating and retarding the measure, *arpeggios*, shakes [trills], *sostenutos* [that is, *fermatas* or holds], and above all, by new modulation [of the harmony]." With the insight of the trained musician that he was, Metastasio presumed to instruct the composer how to let the music not merely transcribe or represent, still less duplicate, but actually *supplement* (at times by contradicting) the meanings of the words to which it is set. Hasse, it may be presumed, did not really need this lesson. It is something all successful opera composers know, for it is the very idea of the *dramma per musica*—not just "a play for music," as normally translated, but a play *through* music.

Metastasio's letter was dated 20 October 1749. The première of Hasse's lengthy opera took place on 12 January 1750, a mere 84 days later. That speediness was enough, from the point of view of its producers and consumers, to justify all the many easily derided conventions of the *opera seria*.

Notes:

(4) Pietro Metastasio to Johann Adolf Hasse, 20 October 1749, trans. John Hoole, in Patrick J. Smith, *The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto* (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 403.

(5) Ibid., p. 405.

(6) Smith, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 96.

(7) Metastasio to Hasse, in Smith, *The Tenth Muse*, pp. 407–8.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Pietro Metastasio

Johann Adolf Hasse

METASTASIO'S MUSICIANS

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Partly because it was a fairly late work and partly because of its extraordinary literary demands, *Attilio Regolo* was not frequently set to music. Besides Hasse's setting there were only three others, the last in 1780. By contrast, Metastasio's most popular libretto, the most frequently reused operatic libretto of all time, was *Artaserse* (Artaxerxes). It was set first in 1730 by Leonardo Vinci, Scarlatti's successor as *maestro di cappella* in Naples, for performance in Rome. Vinci's setting became a frequently revived classic in its own right and helped establish the text as a must for budding composers. (Two very famous later composers of opera, Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck and Johann Christian Bach, made their debuts with settings of *Artaserse*, in 1741 and 1760 respectively.)

In all, over ninety settings of this libretto are known, the last being *The Regicide*, set in translation by a composer named Lucas for performance in London at the incredibly late date of 1840, some 110 years after the first setting was heard. On the way, just about every important composer of *opera seria* set it, including Giuseppe Scarlatti, a nephew or grandnephew (accounts differ) of Alessandro, who set it for Lucca in 1747; Baldassare Galuppi, who set it for Vienna, and Niccolò Jommelli, who set it for Rome, both in 1749 (each of them made at least one later setting as well); Giuseppe Sarti, who set it for the Royal Theater of Copenhagen in 1760; Thomas Arne, who set it for London in 1762; Niccolò Piccinni, who set it for Rome in 1762; Giovanni Paisiello, who set it for Modena in 1771; Josef Mysliveček, who set it for Naples in 1774; Domenico Cimarosa, who set it for Turin in 1784; and Nicolas Isouard, who set it for Livorno in 1794.

Hasse, Metastasio's favorite, set *Artaserse* three times: for Venice in 1730, close on the heels of Vinci; for Dresden in 1740; and for Naples in 1760. In 1734, following a common practice, a *refacimento* of Hasse's first setting was presented in London in the form of a *pasticcio* or hodgepodge (literally a pie), in which a lot of the original music was replaced with popular arias by other composers, including Nicola Porpora, a Neapolitan composer who was then enjoying a great vogue in the English capital, and Ricardo Broschi, another visiting Neapolitan, who wrote for it (under circumstances shortly to be described) one of the most celebrated arias of the century.

What has so far gone without saying, but had better be said now, is that with the sole exception of Arne's (for reasons that will emerge in a later chapter), and of course Lucas's anachronistic *Regicide* of 1840, every one of these settings was performed in Italian, wherever it was staged (whether in Denmark or in Russia, where a setting by Francesco Araja was given for the St. Petersburg court as early as 1738), whatever the composer's nationality (whether Czech like Mysliveček or Maltese French like Isouard), and whether or not the audience understood the language in which it was sung. And that is because wherever *opera seria* was sung, the singers were mainly Italian virtuosi, whose careers (like those of most Italian composers) were international.

The international status—indeed, the "world" hegemony—of Italian music (and not only opera) from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries is still reflected in the Western "classical" musicians' vocabulary, which to this day is an international patois based largely on the terminology the Italians brought with them wherever they went. (This is already demonstrated by the translation given above of Metastasio's letter to Hasse, which was published in 1796 by Sir Charles Burney, the English music historian; even in the adapted version given here, alterations are mainly substitutions of more familiar Italian words, like *fermata*, for the less common ones Burney employed.)

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Artaserse

Leonardo Vinci

Vinci: Artaserse

Johann Adolf Hasse

Hase: Artaserse

THE FORTUNES OF ARTASERSE

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Because there is so much material to choose from, the ubiquitous *Artaserse*, in its various early settings, makes an ideal introduction to the music of the *opera seria*. Metastasio's own plot synopsis or *argomento* was published in all of the opera's printed *libretti*—the "little books" that were sold to the audience so that they could follow the text if they wished, including the lines of recitative that had been cut by the composer. The story, attributed to the third-century Roman historian Justin (Marcus Junianus Justinus), reads as follows:

> Artabanus, chief officer to Xerxes, King of Persia, seeing the power of the king diminish daily because of his losses to the Greeks, hopes to sacrifice to his own ambition the whole royal family, along with the abovementioned Xerxes, and ascend the Persian throne. Therefore, taking advantage of the ease of access to which his intimate friendship with his master entitled him, he gained entry to Xerxes' palace at night and killed him. Then, to dispose of the royal princes, Xerxes' sons, he sets them one against the other, causing Artaxerxes, one of the abovementioned sons, to kill his own brother Darius, believing him to be a parricide upon Artabanus's insinuation. The only thing the traitor fails to accomplish according to plan is the death of Artaxerxes. Through various accidents (which supply the episodes that adorn the present drama), in the end his treason is exposed and the safety of Artaxerxes is assured, which exposure and assurance are the main action of the drama.[8]

And yet it is a question what is the main action and what are the episodes, since the greater part of the libretto's actual events, and four of its six characters, were "freely" invented by Metastasio so as to meet the specific demands of opera. Artabanus and Artaxerxes are transferred from the historical account to the operatic plot, but neither of them belong to the "first couple." That pair, to whom the lion's share of arias are assigned, consists of Arbaces, Artabanus's son and Artaxerxes' bosom friend, and Mandane, Artaxerxes' sister, who is Arbaces's beloved. To round out the second couple and achieve a pleasing symmetry, Artaxerxes is also given a beloved: Semira, daughter of Artabanus and sister of Arbaces. Thus the sister of each main male character is the other's lover. And so as to have an "inferior" character as part of the remainder, Artabanus is given an evil confidant: Megabises, a corrupt army general.

Such an extreme symmetry of design cries out for a "structuralist" interpretation that will bring its motivating premises to light. Martha Feldman, a historian of the genre, has embodied the relationships in *Artaserse* in an ingenious diagram representing what she calls its "archetypal geometry."[9] It is laid out in the form of two "patriarchal triangles," with the rival fathers Xerxes (an unseen presence) and Artabanus at their heads (Fig. 4-5). Stripped to its most basic level, the story of the opera reduces to the fundamental narrative of all *opere serie*: "a moral tale of impure elements tamed and eradicated from the idealized body politic."

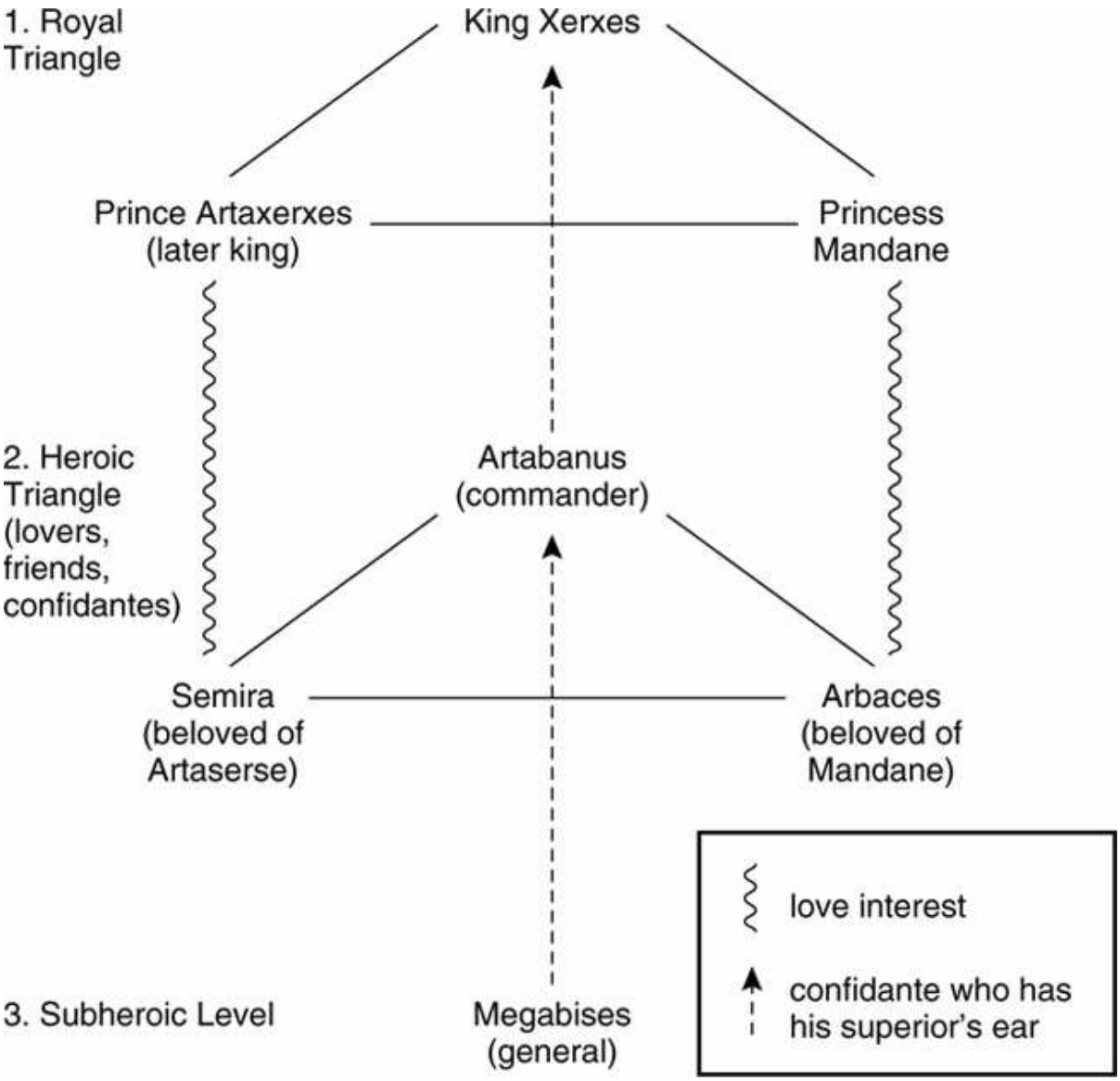


fig. 4-5 "Geometry" of the dramatis personae in Metastasio's libretto *Artaserse* (after Martha Feldman).

The invention of Arbaces gives Artabanus a new motive for killing Xerxes, who has tried to prevent the marriage of his daughter to Artabanus's son, a social inferior. That is what makes Arbaces the central character in the drama, for it is he who symbolizes the basic conflict between love and duty.

In the first act, Artabanus exchanges swords with Arbaces so as to hide the murder weapon. But later, to exculpate himself, he reveals the bloody sword in Arbaces's possession to Artaxerxes and accuses the bewildered Arbaces of the murder. Artaxerxes, mourning his father and brother and loath to execute his friend and prospective brother-in-law, is bereft and confused. In the second act, Artabanus proposes to Arbaces a plan not only to escape but to usurp the throne; but Arbaces, the paragon of honor, refuses to cooperate, leaving his father at once enraged at his disobedience and awed by his probity. Semira pleads with Artaxerxes to show mercy for her brother, but Mandane, more loyal to her class and family ties than to her lover, calls for vengeance against the man she believes to have killed her father. Artaxerxes, still trusting Artabanus, bids him resolve the matter. Artabanus, to everyone's horror, condemns his son to death but is still secretly planning to dispossess Artaxerxes and put Arbaces on the throne.

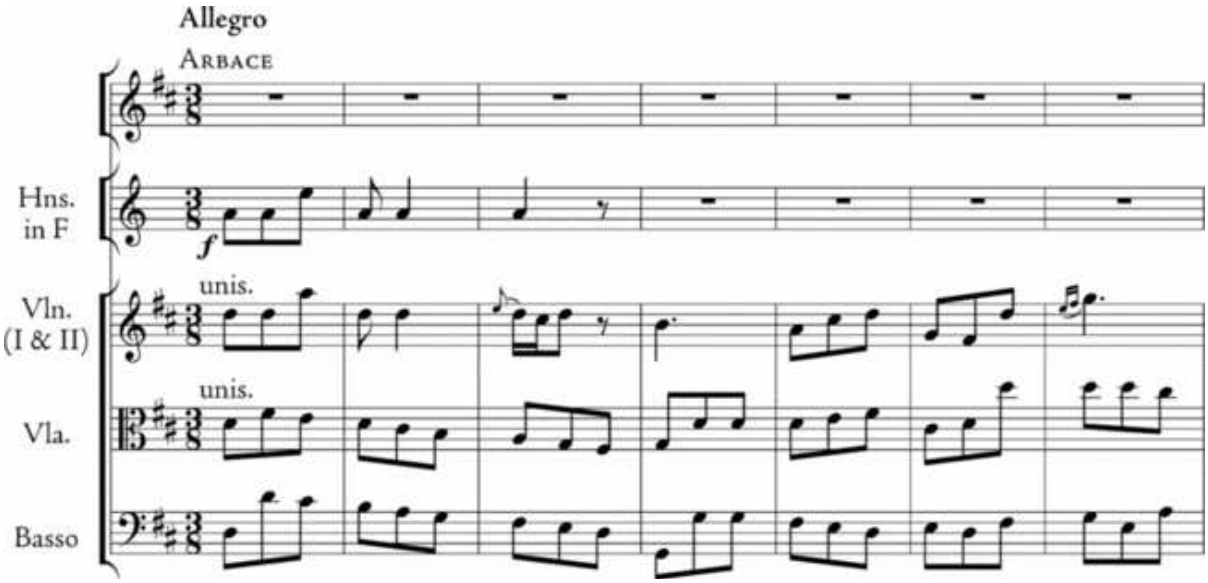
In the third act, Artaxerxes, despite Arbaces's apparent treason, releases his friend from imprisonment on the condition that he exile himself forever. Artabanus then comes to his son's cell to rescue him, but finding it empty assumes that Arbaces has been executed. Mandane laments his death; but Arbaces, overhearing her, reveals himself alive and proclaims his love, vowing to die rather than leave her, showing his steadfastness.

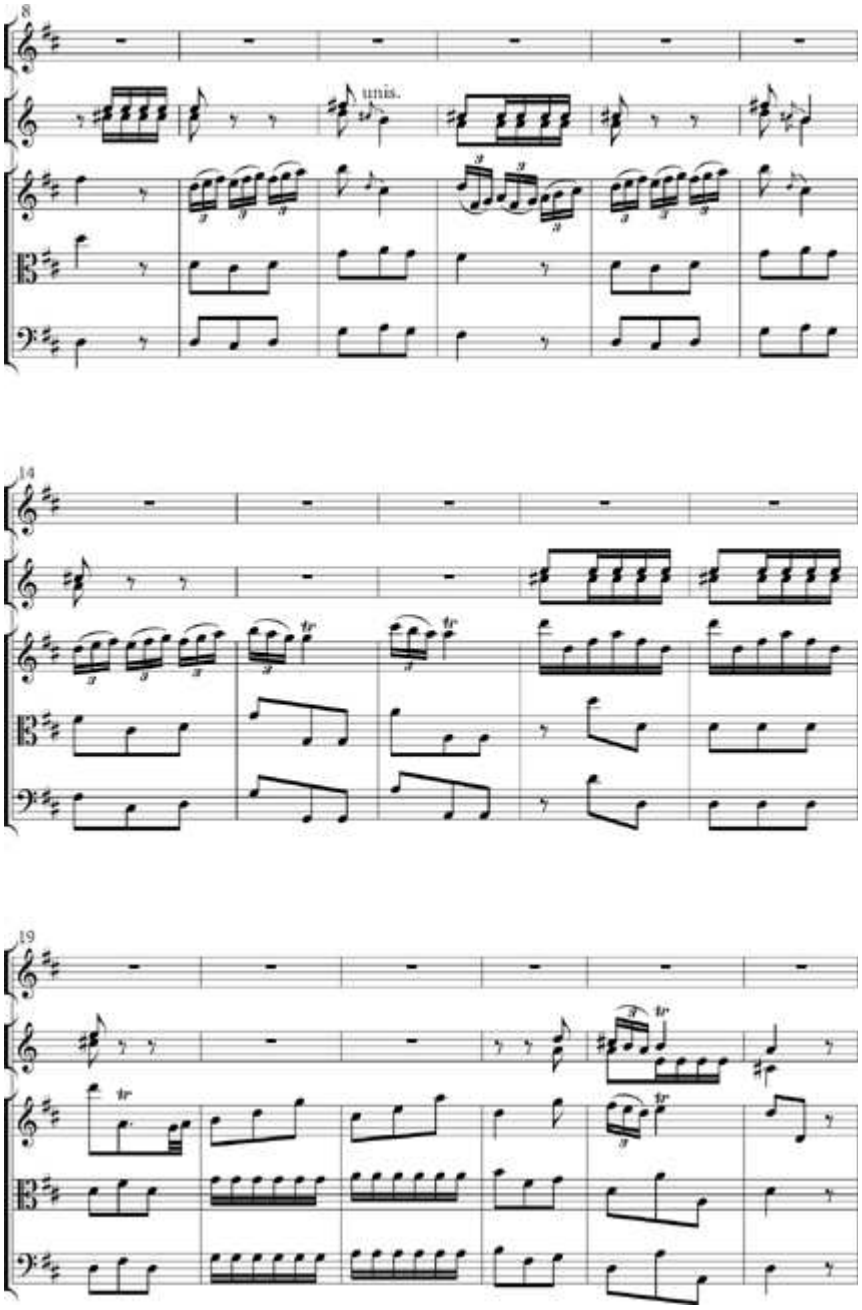
Meanwhile Artabanus, still up to no good, poisons the wine in Artaxerxes' coronation cup. The coronation is

interrupted, just as Artaxerxes is about to drink, by reports of a rebellion that has been fomented by Megabises on behalf of Artabanus. Arbaces, at first suspected of leading it, reveals himself as its suppressor and is reconciled with Artaxerxes. As a token of renewed friendship, Artaxerxes offers Arbaces the first sip from the coronation cup. Artabanus, who loves his son despite all his evil designs, intervenes and confesses. He is at first condemned, but Arbaces offers his life in place of his father's, thus proving once again his true nobility of spirit and making himself worthy of Mandane's hand. Artaxerxes, in an act of kingly magnanimity, commutes Artabanus's sentence to exile and the two loving couples are betrothed amid coronation festivities. The last number in the opera is a "chorus" (that is, an ensemble of all the principals minus the banished Artabanus) praising the clemency shown his enemies by Artaxerxes, the "Giusto Re" ("just king").

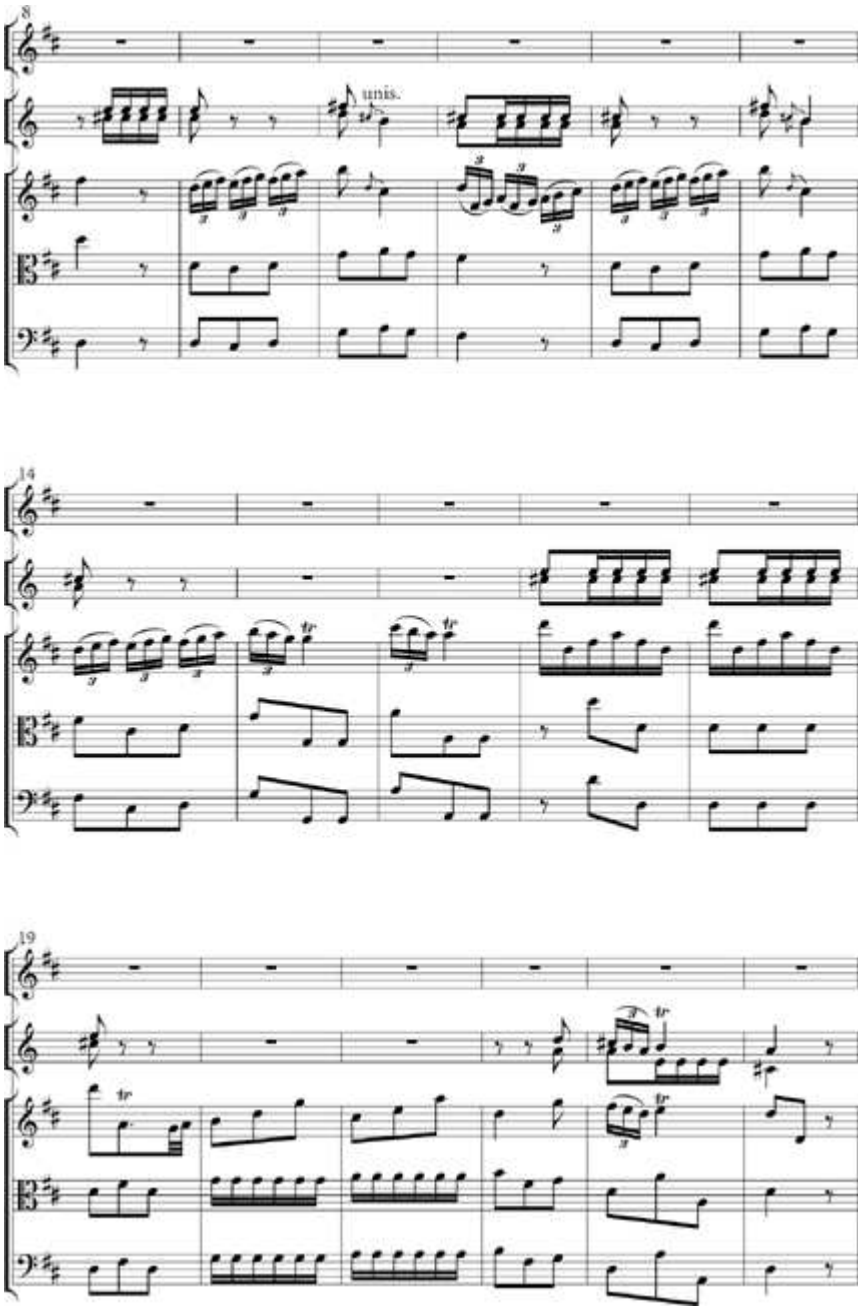
The opera contains thirty arias in all. Arbaces, the *primo uomo*, gets six (two per act); Mandane, the *prima donna*, gets five. In addition, the first couple, in accordance with their prerogative, sing the one duet in the opera, which occurs in the act III declaration scene, giving Arbaces a total of seven numbers and Mandane six. Artaxerxes, Artabanus, and Semira have five apiece. Last, and least, Megabises makes do with three (one per act), which is actually rather generous for an inferior role. As the main character, Arbaces gets to sing not only the most arias but also the most elaborate ones.

Particularly impressive is his *aria di bravura* in act III, sc. 1, which Arbaces sings upon leaving his cell and setting off for points unknown. It is a "simile aria," in which the singer's situation or emotion is pinpointed by means of a poetic image, here *L'onda dal mar divisa*—a wave severed from the sea. Vinci's setting (Ex. 4.5), from the original Rome production of 1730, is typical of his style, and that of the early *opera seria* generally. It also typifies the music that the great castratos sang. (The part was originally intended for Giovanni Carestini, already a famous soprano at the age of twenty-six, of whom Hasse would say, "he who has not heard Carestini is not acquainted with the most perfect style of singing."[10])

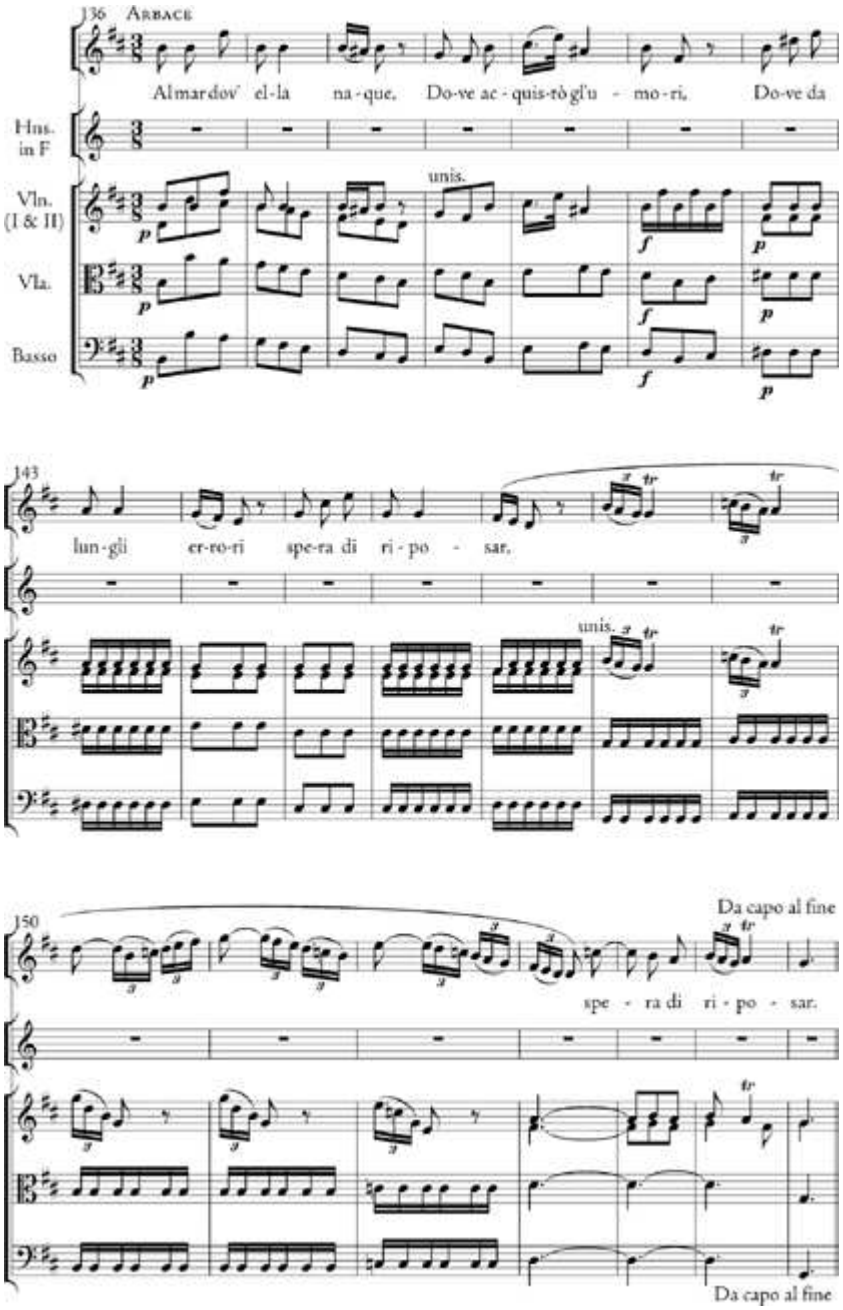




ex. 4-5a Leonardo Vinci, "L'onda dal mare divisa" (*Artaserse*, Act III, scene 1), mm. 1–24.



ex. 4-5b Leonardo Vinci, "L'onda dal mare divisa" (*Artaserse*, Act III, scene 1), mm. 39–55.



ex. 4-5c Leonardo Vinci, "L'onda dal mare divisa" (*Artaserse*, Act III, scene 1), mm. 136–56.

It was a style Vinci had in fact pioneered, making him historically a figure of considerable importance, even if his music is forgotten today, along (for the most part) with the *opera seria* itself. *Artaserse* was the short-lived Vinci's last opera (out of thirty-one, all composed between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four!), and his sixth setting of a Metastasio libretto. By the time he wrote it, the da capo aria format had undergone considerable transformation since Scarlatti's death, only a decade or so before.

The lengthy orchestral ritornello (Ex. 4.5a) consists of three distinct, indeed contrasting, parts: an initial statement of the main theme that will be taken up by the singer, a middle section "spun out" in sequences of triplets, and a final cadential phrase. The ritornello alternates with the voice three times during the aria's first section: $R^1V^1R^2V^2R^3$. Each vocal passage consists of a complete setting of the first sentence of the text, so that the entire text is repeated, giving the "A" section of the aria its greater amplitude. The repetitions are tonally contrasted: the first begins in the tonic and cadences in the dominant; the second, following the complementary trajectory, begins in the dominant and cadences in the tonic. The middle and final ritornellos are partial ones, consisting of a bit of the triplet material plus the cadence phrase. The "triplet material," as becomes evident when the singer takes it up in impressively "wavy" melismas (Ex. 4.5b), represents the motion of the metaphorical sea.

fig. 4-6 Leonardo Vinci, caricature by Pier Leone Ghezzi (1674–1755).

The aria's middle section (Ex. 4.5c) also embodies a tonal contrast, beginning in the relative minor and ending with a cadence on the subdominant. Thus the piece is laid out according to a clearly demarcated sectional plan, articulated by cadences and tonal "movement," that organizes a relatively long span of time. But if the format of the aria has become ampler and more complicated since the time of Scarlatti, the texture has been simplified. Dr. Burney, a great admirer of Vinci, gave him credit (perhaps a little too much credit) for virtually reinventing opera along lines similar to those that attended its original invention among the Florentines a century before.

"Without degrading his art," Burney exulted, Vinci "rendered it the friend, though not the slave to poetry, by simplifying and polishing melody, and calling the attention of the audience chiefly to the voice-part, by disintangling it from fugue, complication, and laboured contrivance."[11] And yet one of Vinci's contemporaries, Pier Francesco Tosi, a castrato and a famous singing teacher, complained in his *Observations on the Florid Song*, published in Bologna in 1723, that "poor Counterpoint has been condemn'd, in this corrupted Age, to beg for a piece of Bread in the Churches"[12] (where the *stile antico* still hung on).

The place to look, when judging texture, is the bass line, and Vinci's static bass gives credence both to Burney's delight, and to Tosi's complaint, that counterpoint had been banished from the theater. Vinci's bass is no longer in a

contrapuntal relationship to the melody but rather its well-subordinated harmonic accompanist. Its cadential rests very often coincide with those of the melody, so that the phrases are very clearly set off and balanced one against another. For long passages, indeed, the bass is confined to reiterations of single pitches that change regularly on the bar line. It is most static, in fact, precisely when the voice part is the most florid, leaving no doubt about who is carrying the musical ball. Like everything else in the setting, the homophonic—indeed, newly "homophonized" —texture casts a spotlight on the virtuoso singer.

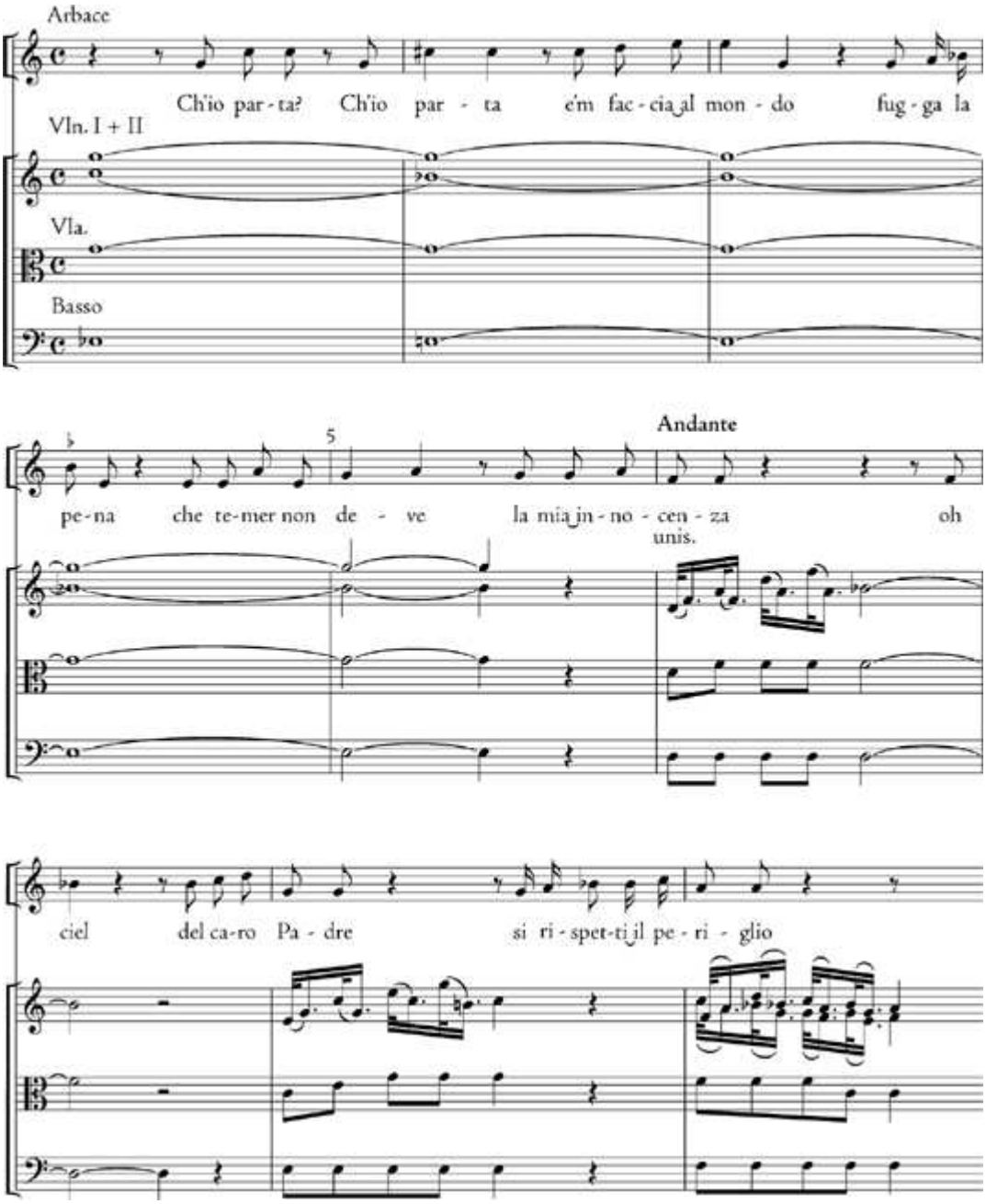
Also noteworthy is a new style of orchestration, in which two horns join the orchestral strings, never to play *obbligati* (that is, independent melodic lines) but only to double the string parts or provide harmonic support. The sound thus gained is handsome, but the use of natural brass instruments sets new and narrow limits on the harmony, virtually confining it to what we now call the "primary" chords—tonic, dominant, subdominant. These limits were not only acceptable but actually desirable within the new style; they were an additional simplification and clarification of design.

The use of horns or trumpets as supporting members of the band can be found in earlier Italian music—in the work of Scarlatti, for one, and in even older composers. Scarlatti used to be given credit for it along with so much else to which he is no longer thought entitled, not only because the work of his older contemporaries was even less well known today than his but also because innovations, historians tended to feel, had to have protagonists. More likely the practice originated in the unwritten repertories that provided the stylistic background to the new Italian idioms we are now discovering. Its incorporation into "art" music coincided with the "liberation of melody" so touted by Burney, among others, and the undisputed sovereignty of the singers who sang them.

Just how much the singers controlled the show in *opera seria* we cannot tell by looking at just one setting of a given libretto. We have to compare settings. So let's have a look at the analogous number—Arbaces's exit aria in act III, sc. 1—in Hasse's *Artaserse*, composed in the same year as Vinci's for performance in Venice. And to our surprise, we find that it is a wholly different aria—different not only in music but in text as well. Metastasio's original simile aria has been bumped, as it were, in favor of another (by a poet unknown) consisting of an accompanied recitative ("Ch'io parta?"/"Should I go?"; Ex. 4.6a) and a much more florid, virtuosic aria in which the voice enters (Ex. 4.6b) with a long held note on the first syllable of the word "Parto" ("I go"), and then begins again with the main theme as foreshadowed by the ritornello: "Parto qual pastorello prima che rompa il fiume" ("I go like a shepherd lad before the flood"). Ex. 4.6c shows the beginning of the first main vocal passage, to give an idea of the extreme virtuosity required of the singer.

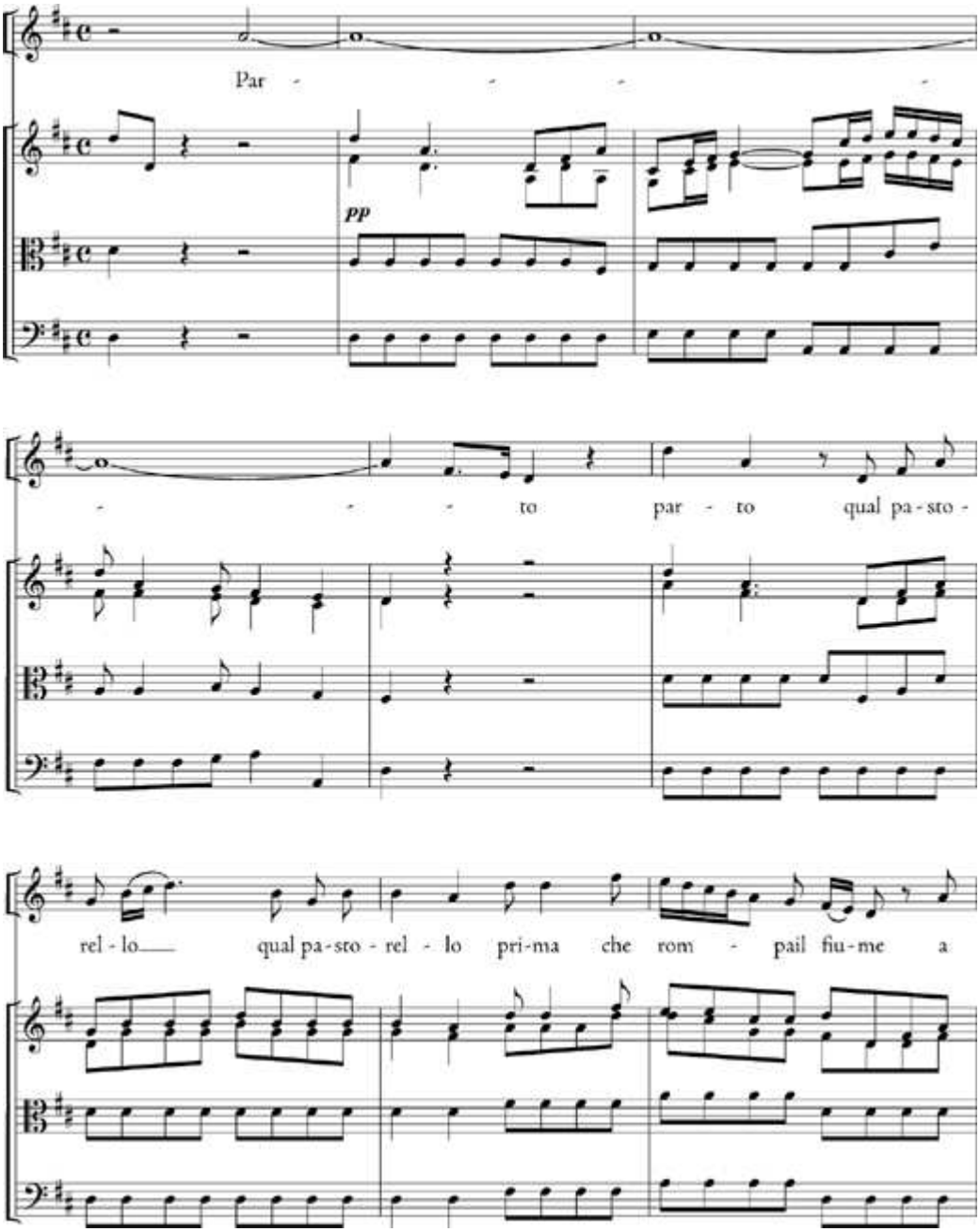
The reason for the substitution lies in the casting. The role of Arbaces was sung in Venice by the greatest of the eighteenth century castrati and very likely the greatest opera singer who ever lived: Carlo Broschi (1705–82), known as Farinelli, after the Farina family, a noble Neapolitan clan who were his earliest patrons. Although he was undisputed champion among the singers of his time and lived a long life, Farinelli had a short public career, beginning in Naples in 1720 and ending in London in 1737. Afterwards he joined the household of King Philip V of Spain, whom he served not only as court singer but as a trusted and powerful counselor as well. The development of Farinelli's career was mirrored in the music his talent inspired. He left behind a veritable wake of florid arias, indeed the fanciest, most embellished vocal music in the entire European operatic tradition.

The substitute aria interpolated into Hasse's version of *Artaserse* was very likely a "portfolio aria," composed by Hasse just for Farinelli to use as a signature piece.



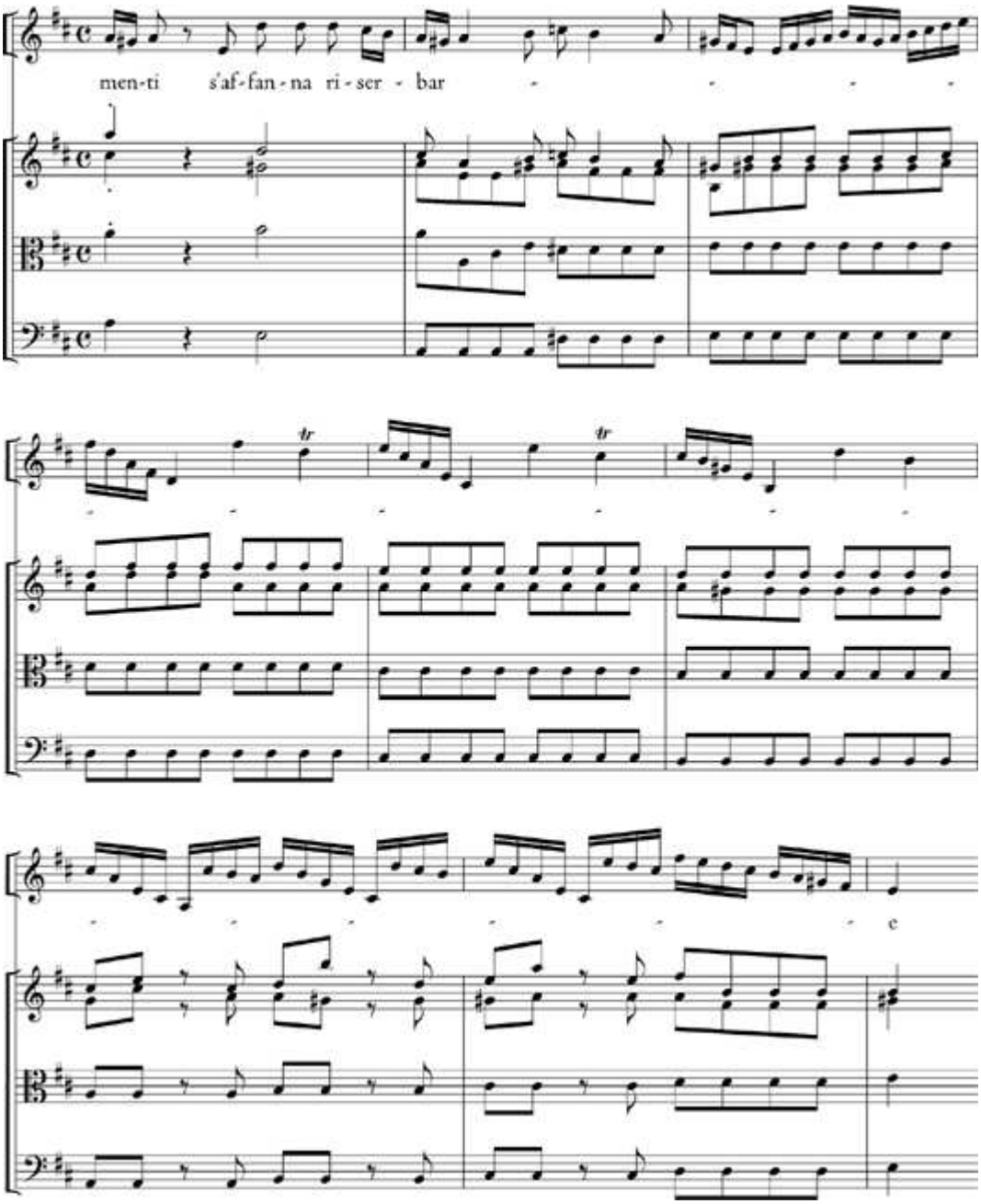
ex. 4-6a Johann Adolf Hasse, *Artaserse* (1730), recitativo obligato ("Ch'io parta?") mm. 1–9.

All the great castrati had such arias that they brought with them wherever they sang. When Hasse revised his setting of *Artaserse* thirty years later for performance in Naples, Farinelli was no longer active—and sure enough, the 1760 score reverts to Metastasio's original aria text, "L'onda dal mar divisa", set this time with only modest coloraturas and without any *recitativo obligato*.

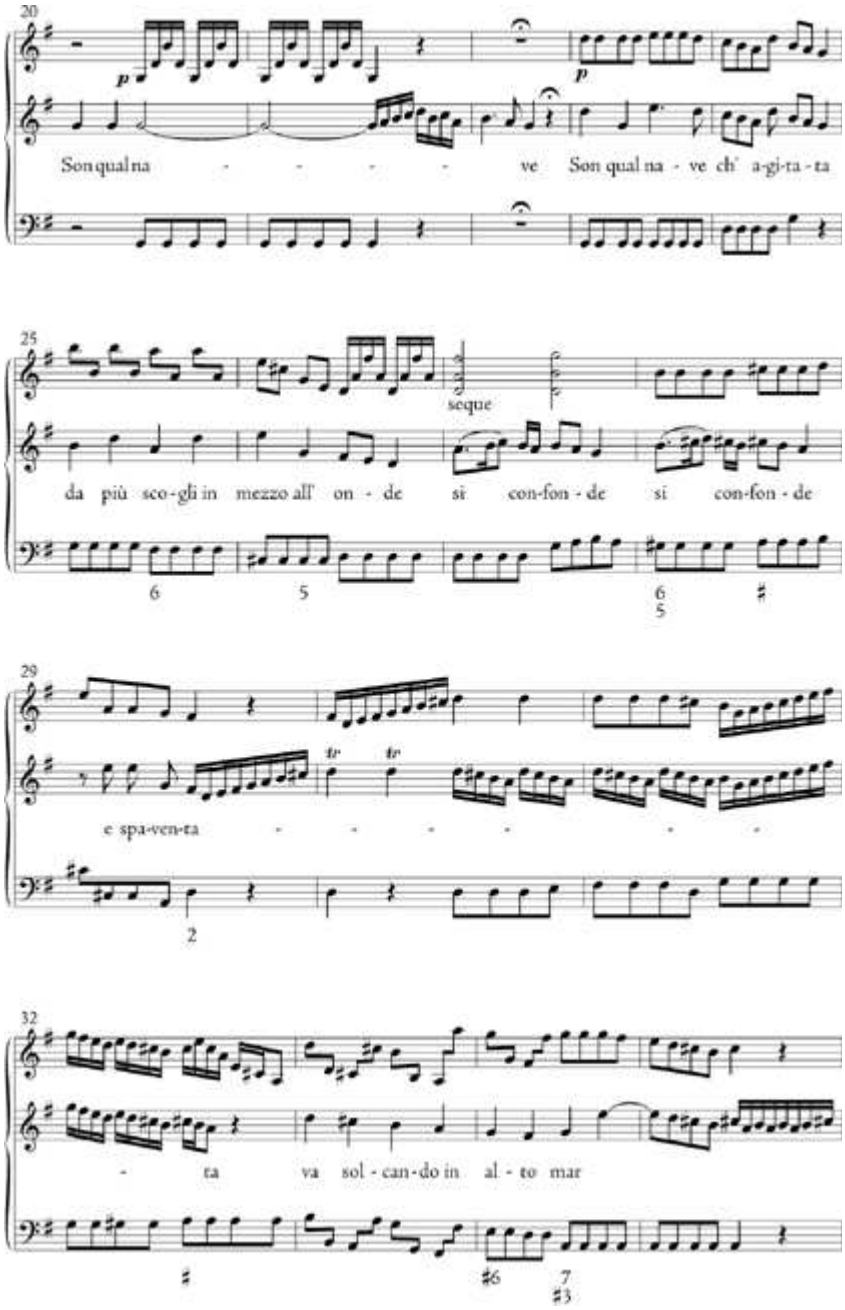


ex. 4-6b Johann Adolf Hasse, *Artaserse* (1730), aria ("Parto qual pastorello prima che rompa il fiume"), mm. 37–45.

The ultimate Farinellian signature tune was the famous shipwreck simile aria, "Son qual nave ch'agitata" ("I am like a storm-tossed boat at sea"), first heard in the London pasticcio version of *Artaserse* in 1734. Although published that same year in a volume called "The Favourite Songs in the Opera call'd Artaxerxes by Sig. Hasse," this particular vehicle was actually the work of the singer's brother Ricardo Broschi (1698–1756), a minor Neapolitan composer who has ridden his sibling's coattails into the history books. (Except for the recitatives, the whole role of Arbaces was done over for this production, mainly by Farinelli's former teacher, Porpora, then one of the reigning composers for the London stage.)



ex. 4-6c Johann Adolf Hasse, *Artaserse* (1730), aria ("Parto qual pastorello prima che rompa il fiume"), mm. 49–57.


20
p
p
Son qual na - - - - - ve Son qual na - ve ch' a-gi-ta - ta
25
seque
da più sco-gli in mezzo all' on - de si con-fon - de si con-fon - de
6
5
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29
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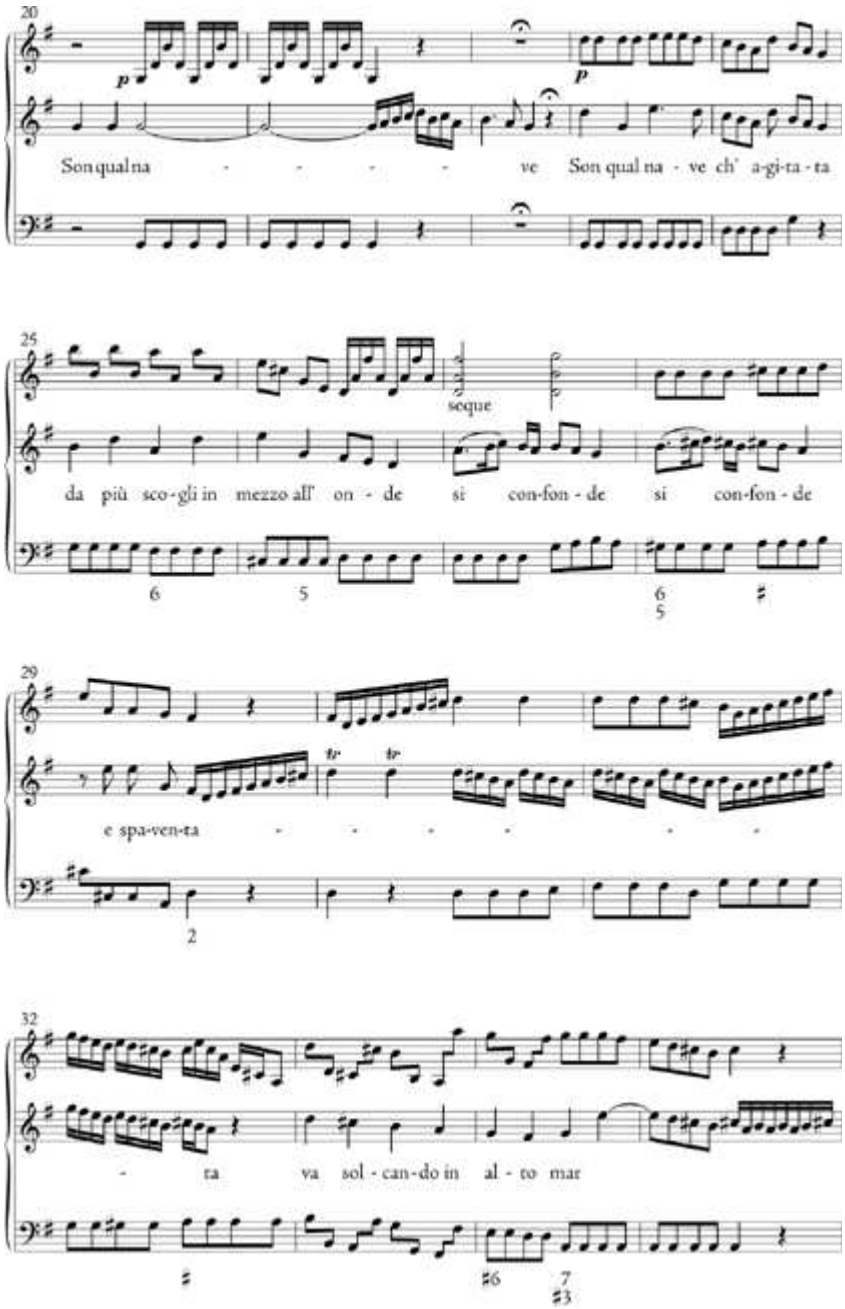
tr
e spa-ven-ta - - - - - -
2
32
- ta va sol - can - do in al - to mar
♯
♯6
7
♯3



ex. 4-7 Riccardo Broschi, "Son qual nave ch'agitata"

Ex. 4.7 gives the first solo entrance of an abridged and simplified version of this virtually incredible display aria, published in 1734, with the orchestral accompaniment (the by-then standard strings and horns) reduced to a single violin line. The full score, with many more virtuoso turns, is found in a manuscript that the Spanish king (Farinelli's patron) sent Maria Theresa (Metastasio's patron) as a gift in 1753, containing the repertory with which the retired singer now entertained the Spanish court in private.[13]

Notes:

(8) *The Works of Metastasio*, trans. John Hoole, Vol. I (London: T. Davis, 1767), p. 3.

(9) Martha Feldman, "Magic Mirrors and the *Seria* Stage: Thoughts toward a Ritual View," *JAMS* XLVIII (1995): 454–55.

(10) Dale E. Monson, "Carestini, Giovanni," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. I (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 731.

(11) Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, Vol. II, ed. Frank Mercer (New York: Dover, 1957), p. 917.

(12) Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song; or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, trans. J. E. Galliard (London, 1742), p. 126.

(13) It is published in facsimile in Hans-Peter Schmitz, *Die Kunst der Verzierung im 18. Jahrhundert* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1955), pp. 76–93.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Opera seria

OPERA SERIA IN (AND AS) PRACTICE

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The first sung phrase in Ex. 4.7 is followed by a fermata in the printed score. Such fermatas in virtuoso arias signal not a pause but a "cadenza" (short for *cadenza fiorita*, "ornamented cadence"), an unwritten solo that can come (as here) after the textual "motto," but that more often precedes—and delays—an important cadence. Cadenzas are display vehicles abounding in what their singers called *passaggii*, from which we get our English term "passage" or "passagework," replacing the earlier English "divisions." In theory cadenzas were improvised by the singer on the spot, but in practice they were often worked out in advance and memorized.

fig. 4-7 Jacopo Amigoni, portrait of Farinelli (center), surrounded by (left to right) Metastasio, Teresa Castellini, the artist, and the artist's page, holding his palette.

There are three fermatas signaling cadenzas during the second vocal solo alone in the version of Farinelli's shipwreck aria in the Maria Theresa manuscript, and we have the word of many earwitnesses that singers considered all of the main cadences in an aria fair game for embellishment. As often happens, it was chiefly those who disapproved of the practice, or of what they took to be its abuse, who took the trouble to write about it. P. F. Tosi, himself a singer (but writing as a preceptor of singers), complained in 1723 that the ends of all three sections in da capo arias were becoming overgrown with cadenzas: during the first cadenza, "the orchestra waits"; during the second "the dose is increased, and the orchestra grows tired."[14] But during the last cadenza, chaffs Tosi, "the throat is set going like a weather-cock in a whirlwind, and the orchestra yawns." There was a touch of envy here, perhaps, for

we do not find much indication of audiences complaining. Nor did Metastasio himself, who might have been expected to think the practice of interpolating cadenzas, and also of adding coloraturas by the bushel to the da capo repeat, an assault upon his handiwork. Quite the contrary: as we see in a group portrait (Fig. 4-7) by the Madrid painter Jacopo Amigoni (now hanging in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia), Metastasio and Farinelli were the best of friends. They met in 1720, when the singer, then a teenager, made his Neapolitan debut on the very occasion at which the poet's verses for music were first sung in public, and remained on terms of intimacy until the end of their lives more than sixty years later. (The figures in the portrait, from left to right, are Metastasio, Farinelli's pupil the soprano Teresa Castellini, Farinelli, the artist, and his page.) The great librettist recognized the great singer as a major influence—a far greater one than any composer—on the development of the *opera seria* and its supremely ornate, aristocratic musical style. The two of them, Metastasio and Farinelli, were likewise universally regarded during the eighteenth century as being far more important to the art of opera than any composer, and so a historian must regard them as well.

Notes:

(14) Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, pp. 128–29.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Pietro Metastasio

Opera: The 18th century

Opera seria

"PERFORMANCE PRACTICE"

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Class and Classicism
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

It is no easy task nowadays, even for a historian, to demote the composer from the top of the musical hierarchy or to acknowledge the fluidity of *opera seria* texts at the hands of the singers, not to mention the crucial importance of unwritten music to the genre. In an essay of 1957 devoted (with *opera seria* uppermost in mind) to the variable aspects of performance practice and the relatively weak integrity of musical texts during this period, Donald Jay Grout argued strongly, and against longstanding prejudice, that "the problem with regard to most old music is not to determine a single, fixed, invariable practice."[15] And yet in the very next sentence, he made an assertion with which no one involved with opera during the seventeenth or the eighteenth century would have agreed. The real problem, as he put it, was "rather to determine the limits within which the several aspects of performance might have fluctuated without leading to results that the composers would have found unacceptable."

We do not know what these limits were, we will never know them, and they do not matter, because during the period in question nobody ever consulted the composers about such things. The highest arbiter of taste and practice was the ruler or patron; next in order of clout came the audience; next the singer; next the librettist. The composer was there to serve them all. Now we ordinarily think just the opposite: that librettist and performer are there to serve the composer, and that even the audience must strive to adapt itself to the demands that composers make.

These familiar ideas were entirely alien to the world of eighteenth-century opera. They are all tenets of Romanticism, and, in an even stronger form, of modernism. They are the philosophical foundations, in other words, of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art. They arose precisely in reaction to the decline of noble patronage, and they are utterly anachronistic to the esthetics of the repertory we are now invetigating.

The fundamental values of the *opera seria*, as reflected in the ranking of librettists and singers above composers, are so remote from today's "classical" musical values that the culture that produced such a thing can seem bizarre and paradoxical today. Apparent contradictions abound. One is the clash between the high-minded reformist mission that demanded the removal of comic scenes from librettos (thus enabling the very concept of "serious opera") and the spectacular antics of performers—often crowd-pleasing to the point of clownishness.

The liberties singers were *expected* to take with the written music, and *had* to take or lose all respect, would be thought a virtually inconceivable desecration today. But that was the very least of it: the great Neapolitan castrato Gaetano Majorano, known as Caffarelli (1710–83), another pupil of Porpora who was generally ranked second only to Farinelli, was actually arrested and imprisoned, according to the police report, for "disturbing the other performers, acting in a manner bordering on lasciviousness (on stage) with one of the female singer, conversing with the spectators in the boxes from the stage, ironically echoing whichever member of the company was singing an aria, and finally refusing to sing in the *ripieno* [the concluding "chorus" of principals] with the others."[16] He was released, however, by royal command and reinstated in the company, for he was the public's darling. They loved his monkeyshines.

Now what sort of public would tolerate such behavior, let alone delight in it? Nowadays only a circus audience, perhaps; surely not any sort of "serious" theatrical public. We, who expect (and are expected!) to sit still and pay attention when attending any theatrical performance, can only regard the behavior of the *opera seria* audience as something virtually other-planetary. That audience, a mixture of aristocracy and urban middle class (what we would now call "professionals"—doctors, lawyers, clergy, civil servants, and military officers), was famed throughout

Europe for its sublime inattention. They "sat (or roamed) in a continuously well-lit auditorium," as one commentator remarked, having come to the theater "to see itself as much as to see the show." As Feldman reports (citing research by Kathleen Hansell), at San Bartolomeo in Naples, a particularly aristocratic house, "noise levels astonished diarists from abroad, nobility arrived with servants who cooked whole meals, talked, played [at cards], and relieved themselves in the antechambers that stood in back of each lavish box."[17] Even if we avoid judging such manners by contemporary standards of decorum, we are easily left bewildered. Never mind questions of mere etiquette. How is all of this evident anarchy on stage and in the hall to be reconciled with the nature of the dramas themselves, which (as we have observed in some detail) exalt a perfectly ordained, God-given, and rigidly hierarchical social order?

The explanation for all these apparent contradictions lies partly in the social mixture alluded to above. The *opera seria* had a dual inheritance. Its subject matter descended from the courtly opera of old and shared its politics of submission and affirmation. The theaters were maintained in most cases by royalty, and the performances *as occasions* were embedded, as historians are at pains to point out, in the forms and hierarchies of absolutism. The theatrical schedule itself reflected this: performances, particularly galas, were held on royal birthdays and name days, as well as church holidays. The librettos were metaphorical embodiments of these occasions. This, so to speak, was Metastasio's heritage.

Farinelli's heritage, on the other hand, was that of the commercial opera theater, even if, at its height, the art of the castrato was by virtue of its sheer price primarily an aristocratic property and even, in its floridity and flamboyance, a virtual symbol of noble aggrandizement. (The word *virtuoso*, which became an international word exactly at this time as applied to singers, comes from the Italian word *virtù*, "virtue"; in modern Italian *virtuosità* still means "virtuousness.") The art of such a singer only began with the written notes. Many theatrical virtuosi did not read music well, if at all, and learned their arias by rote as a basis for personalized embellishment. Recitatives were often improvised outright, based on the harmonies the singers could overhear from the pit, and the words that they overheard from the prompter's box. In a more literal sense than we would ever guess today, only the libretti (or more narrowly yet, only the words of the recitatives) were fully fixed and "literate" in *opera seria*.

There is no comparable genre in classical music today. The modern counterpart of the *opera seria* castrato is the improvising jazz ("scat") or pop singer. And the relationship such singers have with their audience is again sooner comparable to that between the *opera seria* audience and the castrato than that between any sort of contemporary "classical" musician and the modern concert or opera audience. However inattentive during recitatives or "sherbet arias," the audience sprang to attention when the *primo uomo* held forth, egging him on with applause and spontaneous shouts of encouragement at each vocal feat. The singers, striking their attitudes front and center, had to work to capture their hearers' attention. They had, quite literally, to seduce the noble boxholders, drawing them out from the backs of their boxes, because listening to the music was only one of the things the audience was there to do.

For nobles and urban professionals tended in those days to live their social lives outside of their houses, especially in the evenings. A box at the opera, rented for the season, was a virtual living space, and occupying it was a social ritual in which the musical performance was not the only component, or even necessarily the most important one, especially as the season consisted of only a few works, each of which had a run of twenty or thirty performances. The audience, in perpetual attendance, "could hardly have been expected to take a close interest in the action after the first few performances," as McClymonds notes.[18] "And since the literate part of it knew Metastasio's dramas virtually by heart," she continues, "they could dip in and out at will, interrupting the flow of social intercourse to attend to the most affecting scenes or the favorite arias of the leading singers."

In any case, as Feldman shrewdly observes, listening and reacting to the performance "was rarely prescribed."[19] The only occasions when you did have to behave and pay attention were those evenings when the king himself, the latent subject of the opera, was present, enacting his role of surrogate father (or "sire"). What could better attest to the nature of "patriarchy," the social system that the *opera seria* preeminently reflected? At other times, listening to the opera was only one option that could be "selected from a heavy menu of social choices."

The modern counterpart, again, is not any sort of classical musical performance, or indeed any musical performance. Rather, it is the living room TV, which in many homes today hums in the background all evening and is only occasionally watched. It works as the symbol and embodiment of at-homeness, and so did the *opera seria*. For all their obstreperous behavior, indeed *through* their obstreperous behavior, the *opera seria* audience demonstrated their at-homeness with the genre and with the patriarchal social structure that it validated. It is about the crispest example the history of European music can furnish of an art invested with, and affirming, a social and political

system—a system with which no one educated according to the principles of the Enlightenment (which is to say, just about anyone reading this book) could possibly sympathize today.

So once again the questions nag: How do we relate to the artistic products that bolstered an ugly patriarchal, absolutist politics in their time? Can they be detached from it? Can we vote for the art and reject the politics? It is the job of a book like this one to raise these questions, not answer them. In any case, though, it would be a feat of understatement to note that the social use to which opera is put has changed, and changed radically, since the days of Scarlatti or Metastasio. It would make little sense to expect its content or its manner of execution to have remained the same—or to think that the *opera seria* could be revived today, in today’s opera houses, for today’s audiences. (To begin with what you’d have to begin with, the return of the castrato voice would be about as likely or as feasible as the return of public hangings.) Sometimes, though, it is just those aspects of bygone art that are most bygone from which we can learn the most about ourselves and our present world, and the place of art within it. That is enough to justify the long and lingering, if not exactly loving, look we have just taken at what is perhaps the most irrevocably bygone genre in the history of European art music.

Notes:

(15) Donald Jay Grout, “On Historical Authenticity in the Performance of Old Music,” in *Essays on Music in Honor of Archibald Thompson Davison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 343.

(16) Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956), pp. 144–45.

(17) Feldman, “Magic Mirrors and the *Seria* Stage,” p. 480.

(18) *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. III, p. 700.

(19) Feldman, “Magic Mirrors and the *Seria* Stage,” p. 444.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form

Corelli, Vivaldi, and Their German Imitators

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

STANDARDIZED GENRES AND TONAL PRACTICES

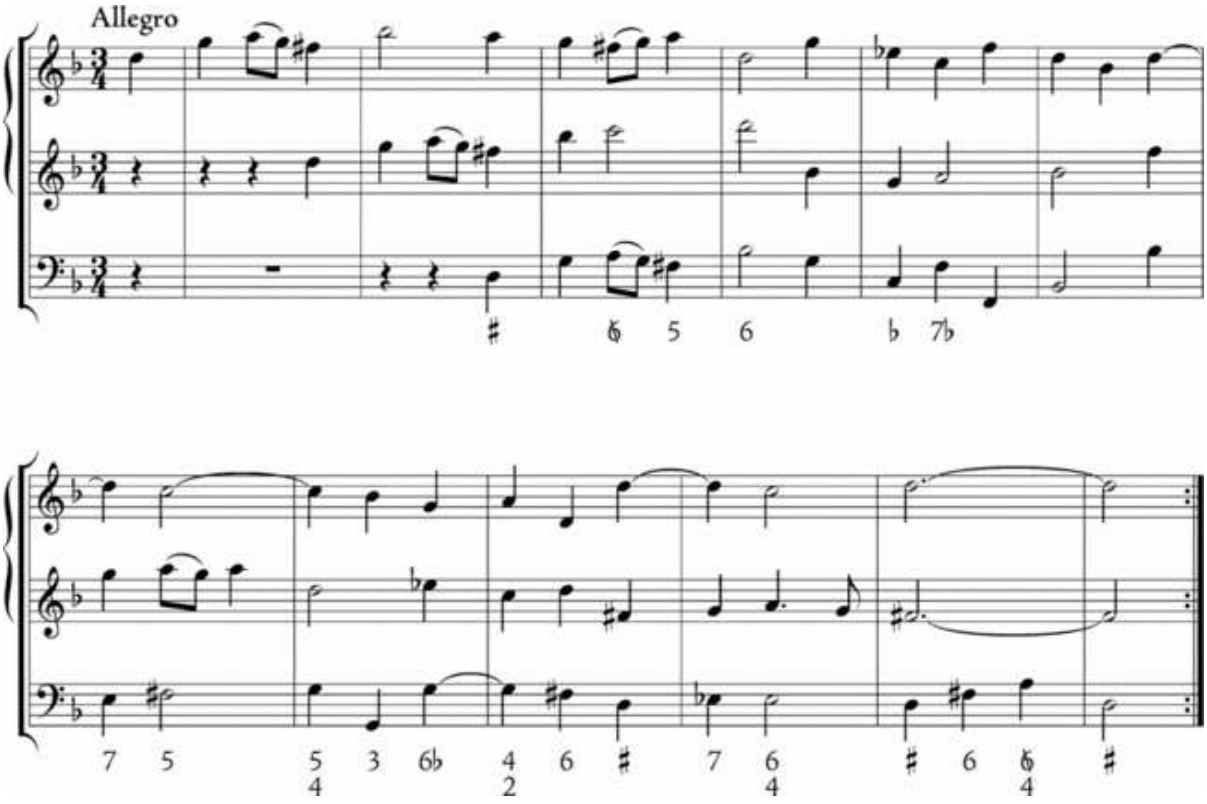
As far as we know, Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) never set a word of text to music. A virtuoso violinist, he was the first European composer who enjoyed international recognition as a "great" exclusively on the strength of his finely wrought instrumental ensemble works. They circulated widely in print both during his lifetime and for almost a century after his death, providing countless other musicians with models for imitation. In his chosen domain of chamber and orchestral music for strings, he was the original "classic," playing a major role in standardizing genres and practices, and setting instrumental music on an epoch-making path of ascendency. His sonatas and concertos may no longer be played much except by violin students, and yet their historical significance is tremendous, affecting European music of every sort.

Corelli's career, based (after apprenticeship in Bologna) almost exclusively in Rome, outwardly paralleled Alessandro Scarlatti's: service to Queen Christina and Cardinal Ottoboni, membership in the Arcadian Society, and so on. His main activities were leading orchestras, sometimes numbering one hundred musicians or more, in the richly endowed churches and cathedrals of the city, and appearing as soloist at "academies" (*accademie*), aristocratic house concerts.

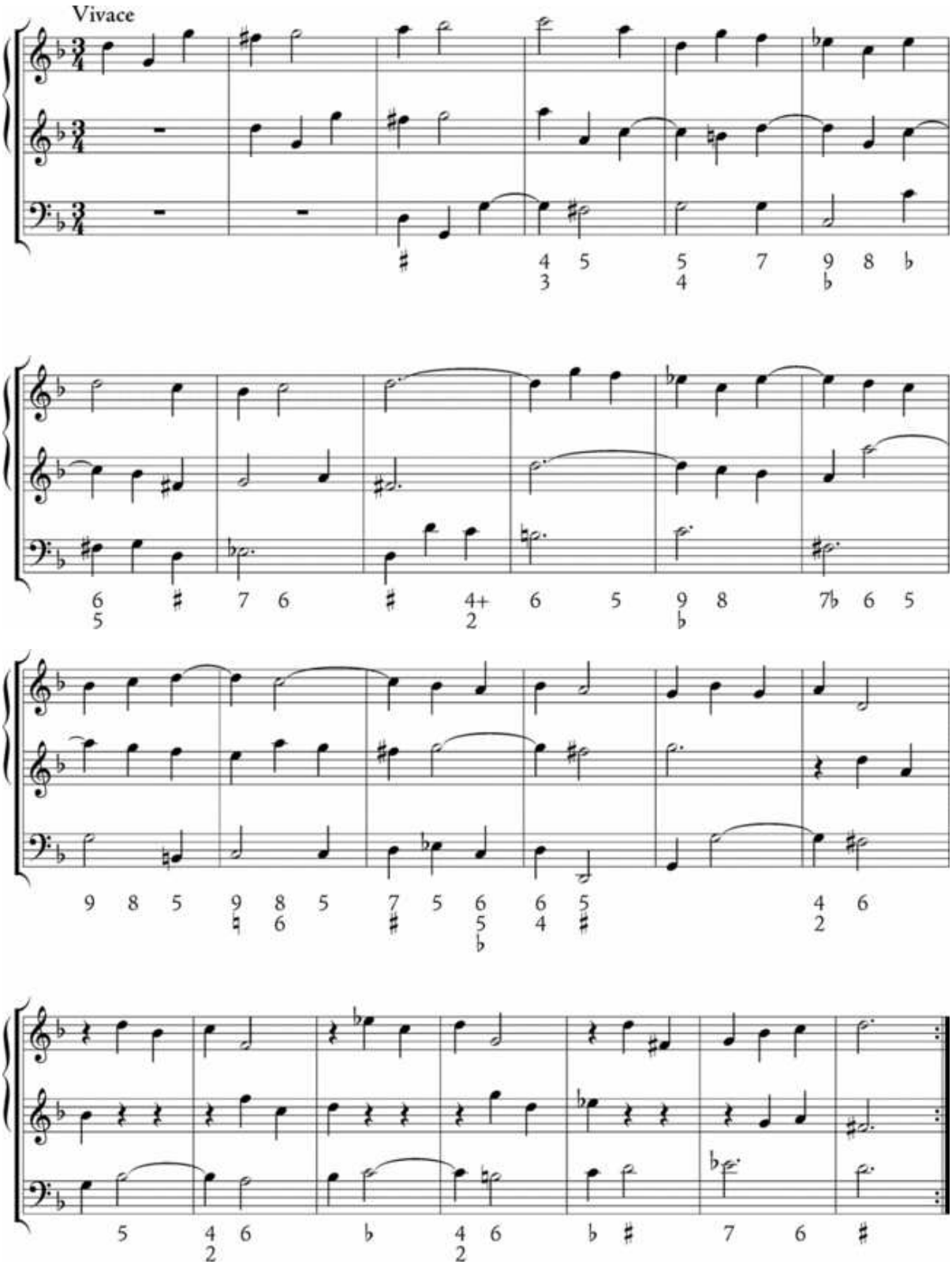
fig. 5-1 Arcangelo Corelli, portrait by Hugh Howard, adapted as the frontispiece engraving for a late edition of Corelli's trio sonatas, op. 1 (Amsterdam: Estienne Roger and Michel Charles Le Cène, ca. 1715).

For sacred venues Corelli perfected an existing Roman genre known as *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata). Such pieces could be variously scored: for solo violin and continuo, for two violins and continuo (hence "trio sonata," albeit normally played by four instrumentalists), or amplified by a backup band known as the *concerto grosso* ("large ensemble"), which eventually lent its name to the genre itself. Thus when Corelli's collected orchestral music was finally published in 1714 (a year after the composer's death) by the Amsterdam printer Estienne Roger, the title page used the term *concerto grosso* in both senses at once: *Concerti grossi con duoi violini e violoncello di concertino obligato e duoi altri violini, viola e basso di concerto grosso ad arbitrio, che si potranno radoppiare, opera sesta.* Reissued the next year by the London house of John Walsh and John Hare, the title page was Englished thus: "*Concerti grossi*, being XII great concertos, or sonatas, for two violins and a violoncello: or for two violins more, a tenor, and a thorough-bass: which may be doubled at pleasure, being the sixth and last work of Arcangelo Corelli." Church sonatas or concerti grossi were often played during Mass to accompany liturgical actions: typical placements were between the scripture readings (in place of the Gradual), at the collection (in place of the Offertory) or at Communion. At Vespers they could be played before Psalms in place of antiphons. A standardized outgrowth of the earlier canzona, the church sonata usually had four main sections in contrasting tempos ("movements"), cast in two slow–fast pairs resembling preludes and fugues such as organists were used to improvising. The more elaborate of these fugal movements was the one in the first pair; it was still occasionally labeled "canzona."

For aristocratic salons, Corelli adopted another standard violinist's genre, called *sonata* (or *concerto*) *da camera* (chamber sonata or concerto). This was essentially a dance suite, which Corelli adapted to the prevailing four-movement format (a "preludio" and three dances or connecting movements). Between 1681 and 1694 Corelli published forty-eight trio sonatas in four collections of twelve, alternating church sonatas (opp. 1 and 3) and chamber sonatas (opp. 2 and 4).



ex. 5-1a Arcangelo Corelli, *Sonata da chiesa*, Op. 3, no. 11, final Allegro, mm. 1–12



ex. 5-1b Arcangelo Corelli, *Sonata da camera*, Op. 4, no. 2, final Corrente, mm. 1–25

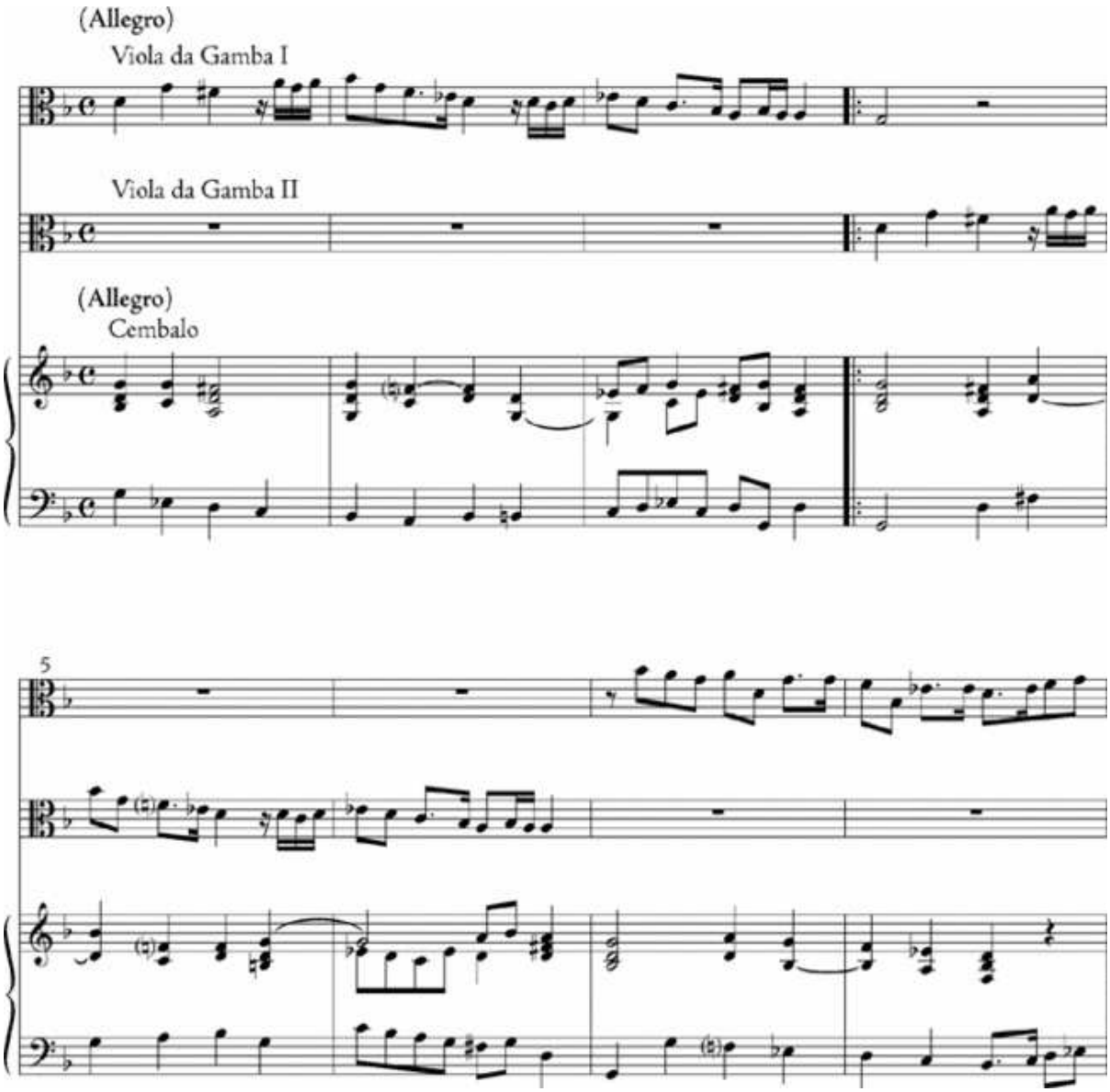
The eleventh church sonata from opus 3 (1689) and the second chamber sonata from opus 4 (1694) make an effective pair for comparison both with one another and with the works of other composers. They are both in the key of G minor, and illustrate between them virtually the full range of Corellian forms and styles. They also show the overlap in practice between the church and chamber genres. Their last movements, especially, might be interchanged (see Ex. 5-1a-b, which show their respective first halves). Although one is marked *corrente* (a fast triple-metered dance) and the other, untitled, is implicitly a fugal movement, they are virtually identical in form (binary), texture (imitative), and character (lively culmination). But where the second movement of the sonata da camera, the *allemanda*, is also a binary dance movement, the second movement of the sonata da chiesa (the "canzona"

movement) is “abstract” and “through-composed” as befits its forebear. Stylistically, that “canzona” movement (presto) from op. 3, no. 11 (Ex. 5-3) may be the most revealing movement of all. A brief comparison with a work (Ex. 5-2) by one of Corelli’s Austrian contemporaries, Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741), will indicate what was so novel about the work of the Italian composer, and so potent.

Fux was a conservative and academic musician. His best-known work was no musical composition but a textbook, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, which remained for more than a century the standard compendium of the *stile antico*, the mock-Palestrina style, quick frozen in the sixteenth century, that counterpoint students still learn to imitate in school, using methods that are still derived from Fux’s famous analysis of strict counterpoint into five rhythmic “species.” The stately sonata for two viols and continuo in canonic style (published in 1701), of which the opening is given in Ex. 5-2, illustrates not the *stile antico* itself, but rather the kind of modern contrapuntal virtuosity that immersion in the *stile antico* was meant to instill.

Like Corelli’s, Fux’s is a church sonata, meant to replace the Mass Gradual on a festive occasion. Its measured, allemande-like tread, over a “walking bass” whose notes coincide with the metrical pulse, lends it a noble “affect” or mood. The leisurely three-measure interval of imitation sets the standard “sentence-length” for the piece. The opening tune breaks that standard sentence into three asymmetrical, cunningly apportioned phrases, each longer than the last. The long last phrase is accompanied by a rhythmic diminution in the bass, creating a mild “drive to the cadence.”

By comparison, Corelli’s movement (Ex. 5-3) seems virtually jet-propelled, and not only by its faster tempo. Everything about the composition is pressured and intense. The opening three-note motif is identical to that of Fux’s canon. But what a contrast in the way it is handled! What was only a beginning or a headmotive for Fux is the whole thematic substance for Corelli, as if Corelli had decapitated Fux’s theme and tossed its “head” like a ball between the two violins.



ex. 5-2 Johann Joseph Fux, Canonic Sonata in G minor, I, 1–8

Meanwhile, the bass accompanies their agile game of catch with a so-called "running" pattern that moves steadily at a rate twice that of the beat value. The hocket effect between the violins is intensified after the first cadence (m. 7), their tossed motivic ball now consisting of only two notes in an iambic pattern (that is, starting with an upbeat), while the bass continues its frenetic run, made even more athletic by the use of large skips—octaves, ninths, even tenths. At the movement's midpoint (m. 21) the original motive is tossed again, this time beginning a fourth lower than the opening—i.e., on the fifth degree of the scale. Thus the movement over all has the satisfying harmonic aspect of a binary form: a run out from I to V, and a run back from V to I.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Tonality

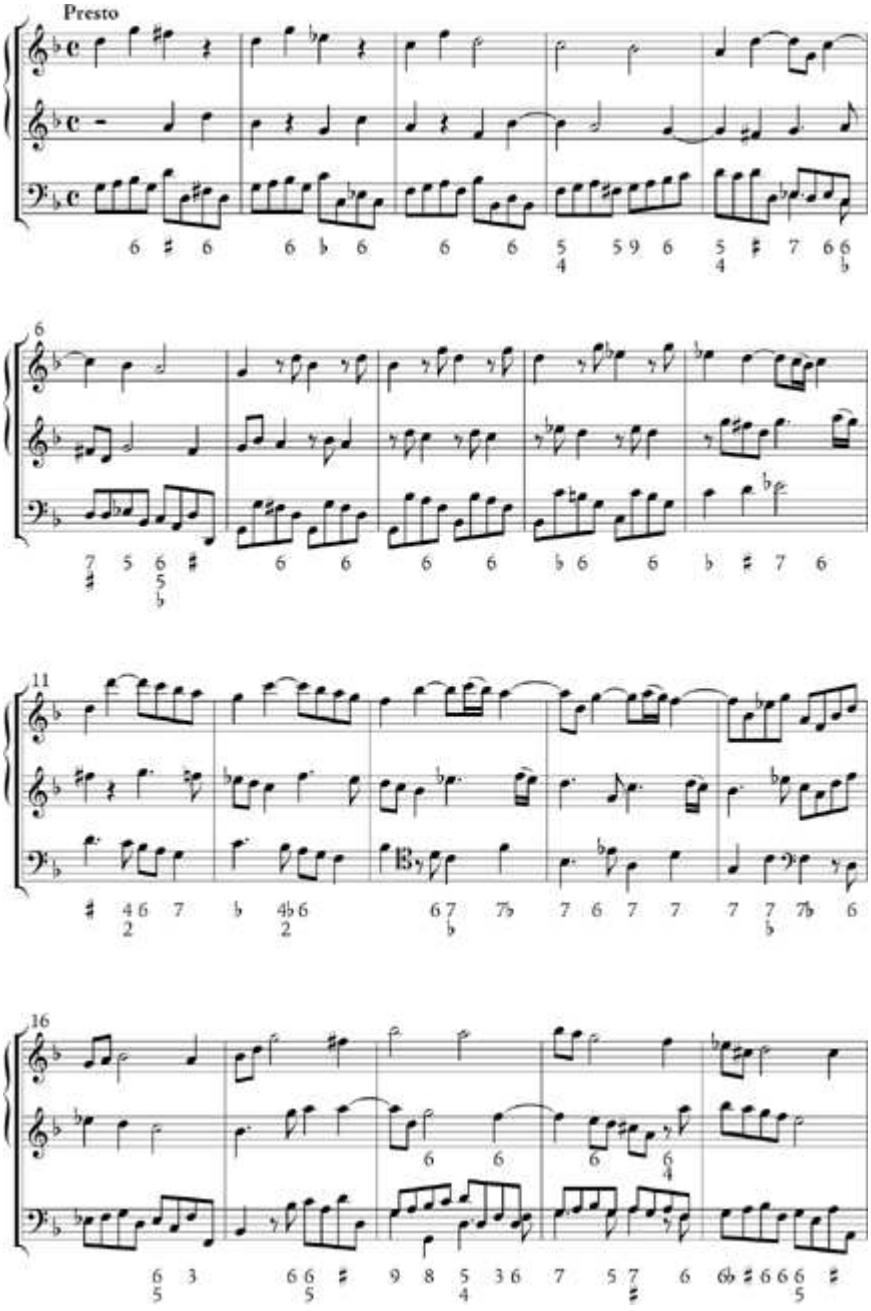
Circle of fifths

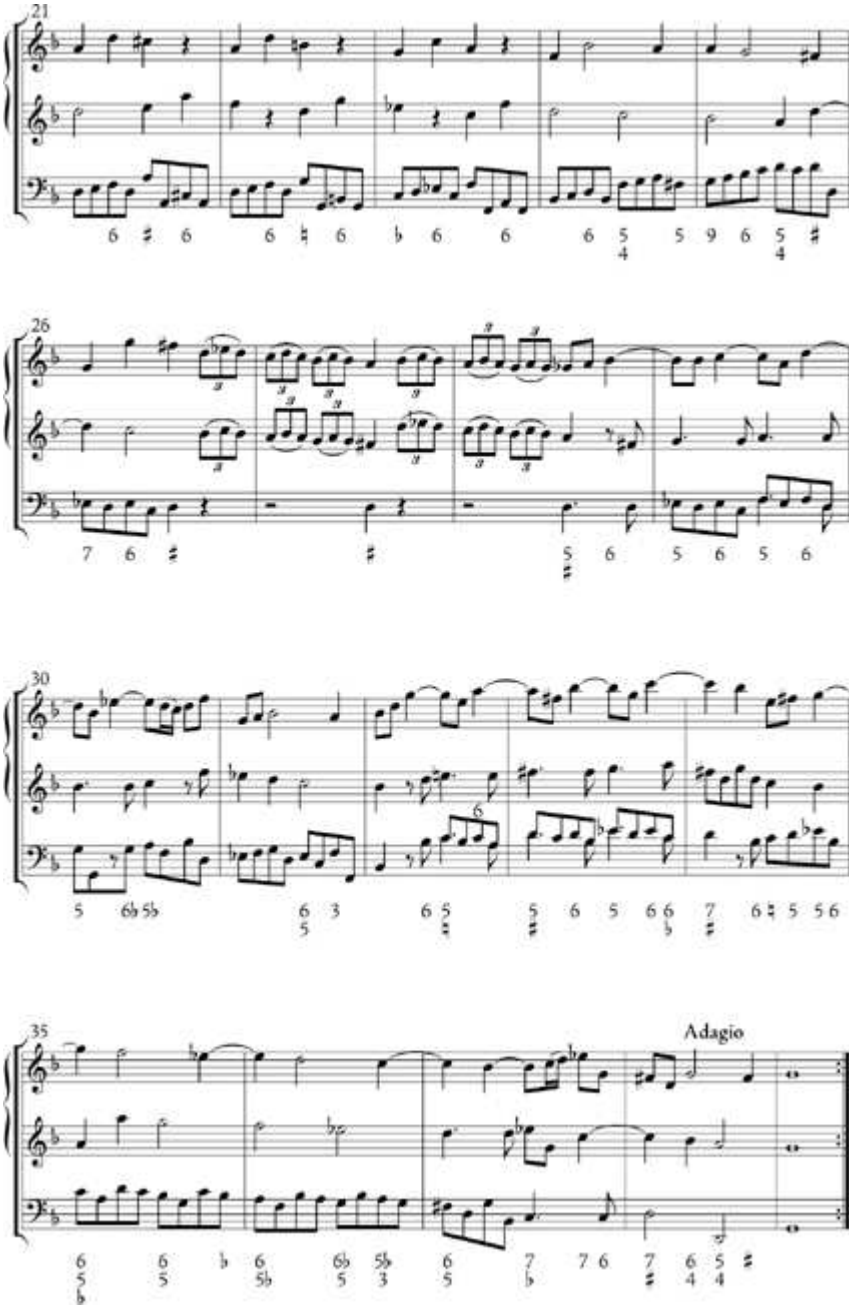
Alessandro Scarlatti

Arcangelo Corelli

WHAT, EXACTLY, IS “TONALITY”?

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form
Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Author(s): Richard Taruskin





ex. 5-3 Arcangelo Corelli, *Sonata da chiesa*, Op. 3, no. 11, second movement (Presto)

And yet this description has so far omitted the most potent factor in the movement's extraordinary momentum. That factor is the harmony—the "tonal" harmony, as we now call it. The standardizing of harmonic functions, something going on in all music at the time but particularly foregrounded and made an "issue" in the Italian string music of which Corelli was the foremost exponent, was his most transforming and enduring legacy.

The opening exchange between the violins describes a preliminary alternation of tonic (I) and dominant (V), that establishes on the smallest level the motion "out" and "back" that will give coherence to the whole. It necessitates a small adjustment in the intervallic structure of the "head motive." When describing the motion "out" from tonic to dominant, the motive consists of a rising fourth and a falling semitone; but when describing the motion "back" from dominant to tonic, the second interval is altered to a falling third. This kind of adjustment between the motive and its imitation is now called "tonal answer," because it arises in response to the exigencies of the tonal functions that are driving the music so forcefully.

When the movement "back" from dominant to tonic has been completed, the bass continues to move in the same harmonic direction, passing "Go" (as one says when playing Monopoly) and moving by half-measures through the tonic to the fourth degree or subdominant (C), the seventh degree (F), and the third or mediant (B ♭), for a total of four moves along an exhaustive cycle that we now call the "circle of fifths." It was precisely in Corelli's time, the late

seventeenth century, that the circle of fifths was being "theorized" as the main propeller of harmonic motion, and it was Corelli more than any other one composer who put that new idea into telling practice.

As a sort of harmonic curiosity, the circle of fifths and its modulatory properties had been recognized as early as the mid-sixteenth century. There is, for example, a curious motet by a German humanist musician named Matthias Greiter called *Passibus ambiguis* ("By sneaky steps"). Published in 1553, its text concerns the vagaries of Fortune, and its cantus firmus consists entirely of the six-note incipit of a famous old song called *Fortuna desperata* ("Desperate Fortune"), somewhat shakily attributed to the fifteenth-century Burgundian court composer Antoine Busnoys. The little snatch, consisting of the syllables *fa–fa–sol–la–sol–fa*, is repeated over and over, and is transposed up a perfect fourth (or down a perfect fifth) seven times, so that its tonic pitch proceeds in a perpetual "flatward" progression from F to F ♭ , thus: F–B ♭ –E ♭ –A ♭ –D ♭ –G ♭ –C ♭ –F ♭ . (Meanwhile, the other parts have to scramble for their notes by applying the rules of *musica ficta*, chromatic alteration at sight, as practiced since the fourteenth century, in unheard-of profusion.) It is an amusing allegory for a serious idea. The circle of fifths symbolizes the fabled "wheel of Fortune," and by ending on a note that looks like F but sounds like E (and even looks like E on a keyboard or a fretted fingerboard), the composer has transformed the "happiest" final (Lydian *fa*) into the "saddest" one (Phrygian *mi*), illustrating the precariousness of luck and the transience of earthly joys (Fig. 5-2).

fig. 5-2 Tenor (based on *Fortuna desperata*) from Matthias Greiter's *Passibus ambiguis*, in Gregorius Faber, *Musices practicae erotematum libri II* (Basel, 1553).

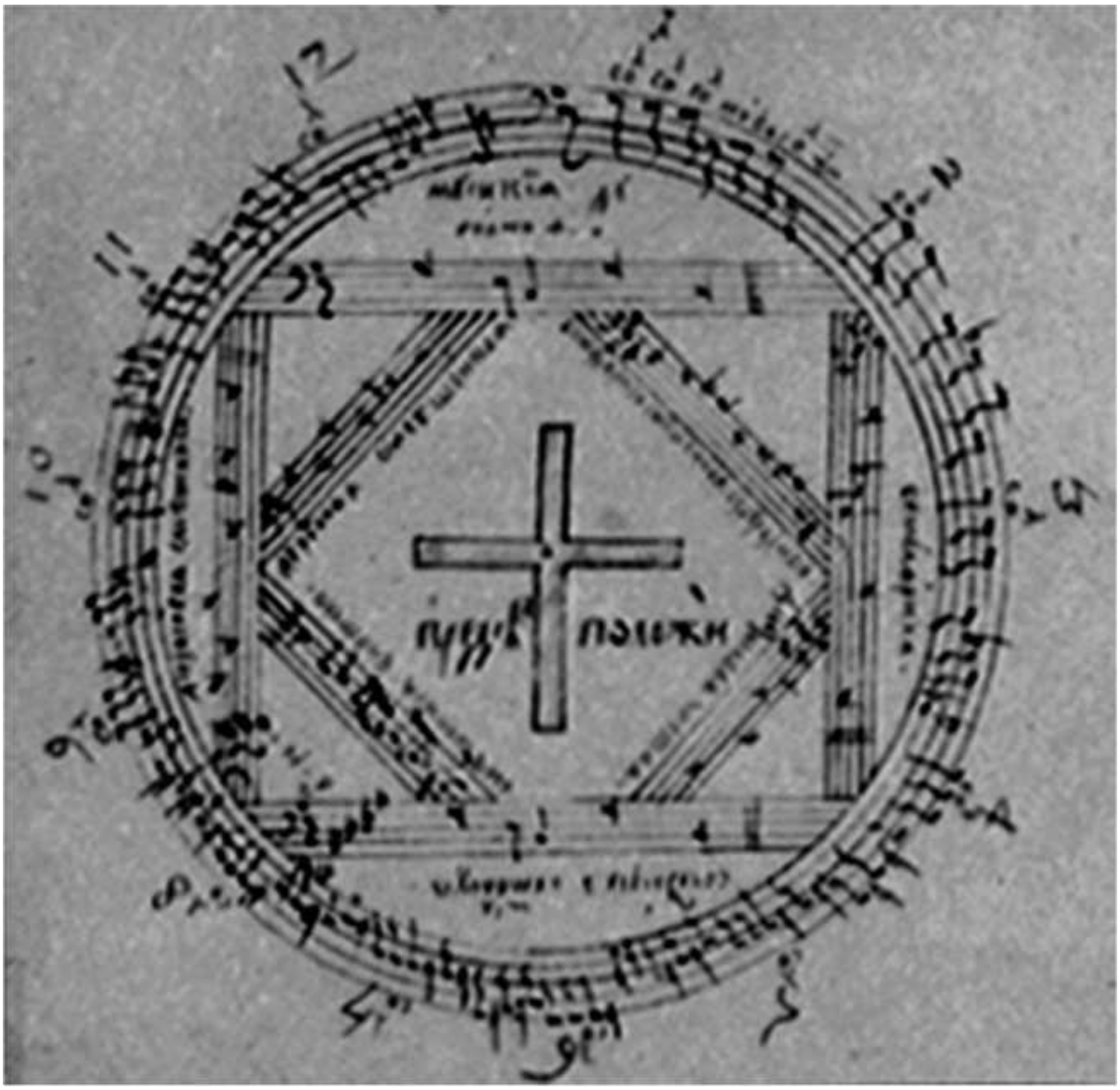


fig. 5-3 Early diagram of the circle of fifths, from Nikolai Diletsky, *Ideya grammatiki musikiyskoy* (Moscow, 1679).

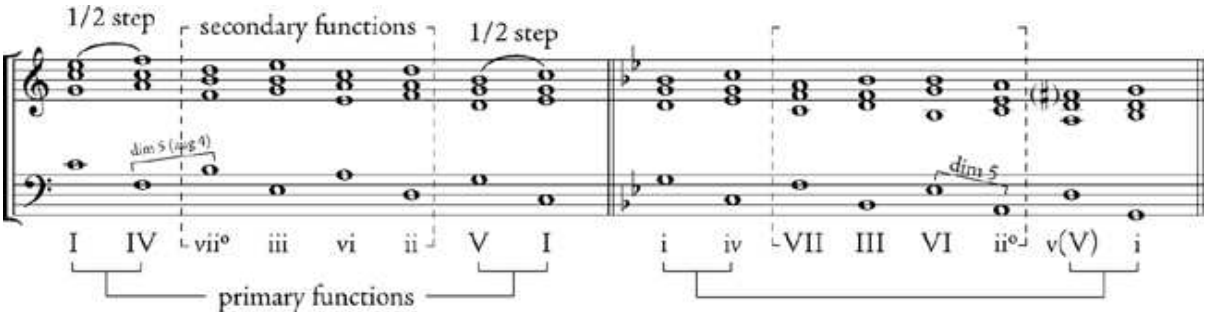
What was merely a curiosity to sixteenth-century musicians was bread and butter to their seventeenth-century successors. The circle of fifths was represented for the first time in a theoretical treatise composed in Polish by a Ukrainian cleric and singing teacher named Nikolai Diletsky (or Dilecki), who lived at the time in the city of Vilnius (see Fig. 5-3). (It was first printed in 1679, in Moscow of all places, in Russian translation.)

This earliest complete circle is a circle like Greiter’s extended to its limit. That is, it is made up of twelve perfect fifths and shows all possible transpositions of a major scale (that is, all the possible keys) but does not define the harmonic relations implicit in a single key. On the contrary, a circle like Greiter’s or Diletsky’s leads ineluctably away from any stable point of tonal reference.

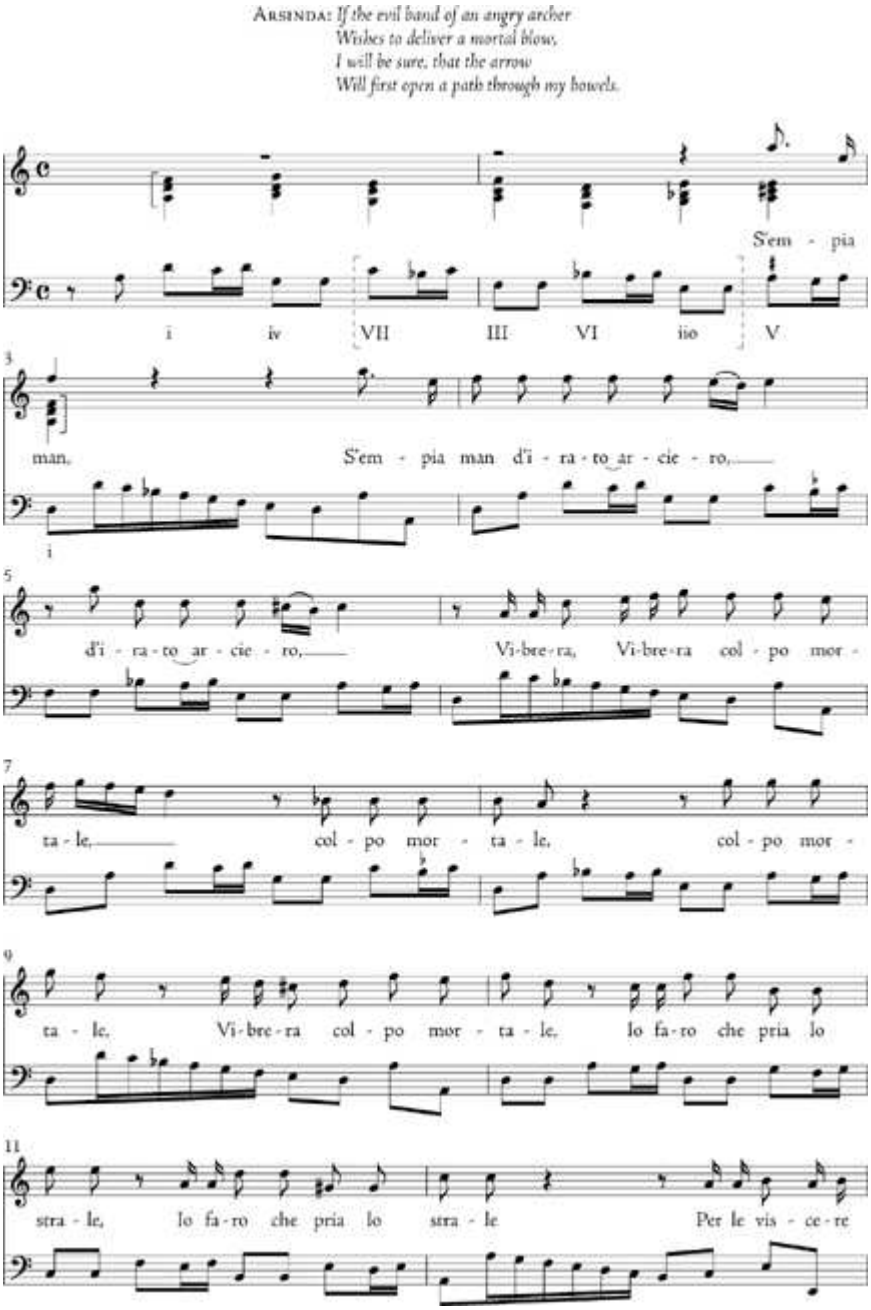
The decisive practical move was to limit the circle of fifths to the diatonic degrees of a single scale by allowing one of the fifths to be a diminished rather than a perfect fifth. When adjusted in this way the circle is all at once transformed from a modulatory device—that is, a device for leading from one key to others progressively more distant—into a closed system of harmonic functions that interrelate the degrees of a single scale. When thus confined, the circle of fifths became an ideal way of circumscribing the key defined by that scale by treating every one of its degrees as what we now call a harmonic root.

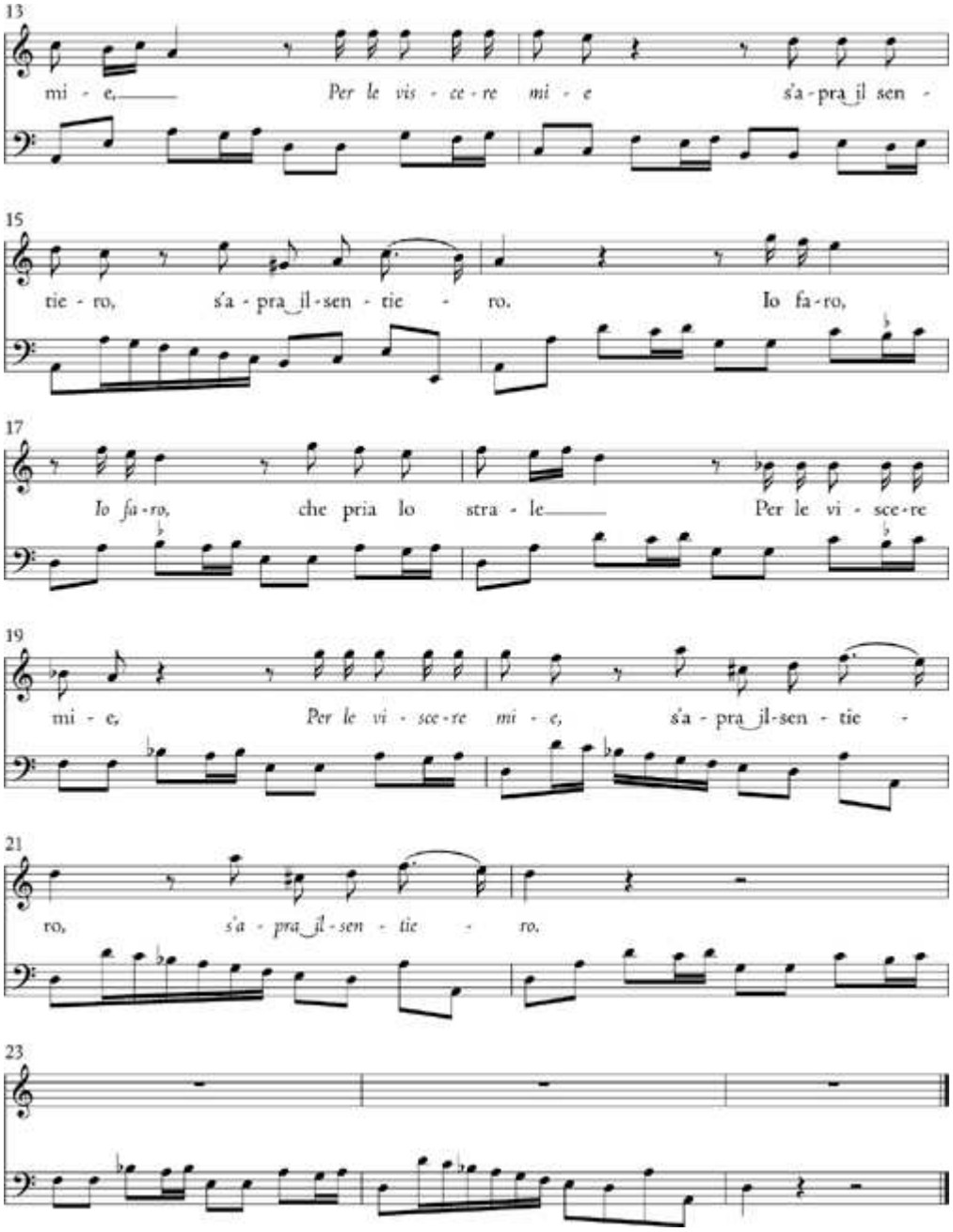
The progression by fifths thus became the definer of “tonality” as we now know it: a model for relating all the degrees of a scale not only melodically but also harmonically to the tonic, and measuring the harmonic “distance”

both among the degrees within a single scale and between scales (Ex. 5-4). When the diatonic circle of fifths became the basis of harmonic practice, the major–minor tonal system (or "key system") can be said to have achieved its full elaboration.



ex. 5-4 Diatonic circles of fifths on C major and G minor





ex. 5-5 Alessandro Scarlatti, *L'Aldimiro* (1683), "S'empia man" (Act III, scene 12)

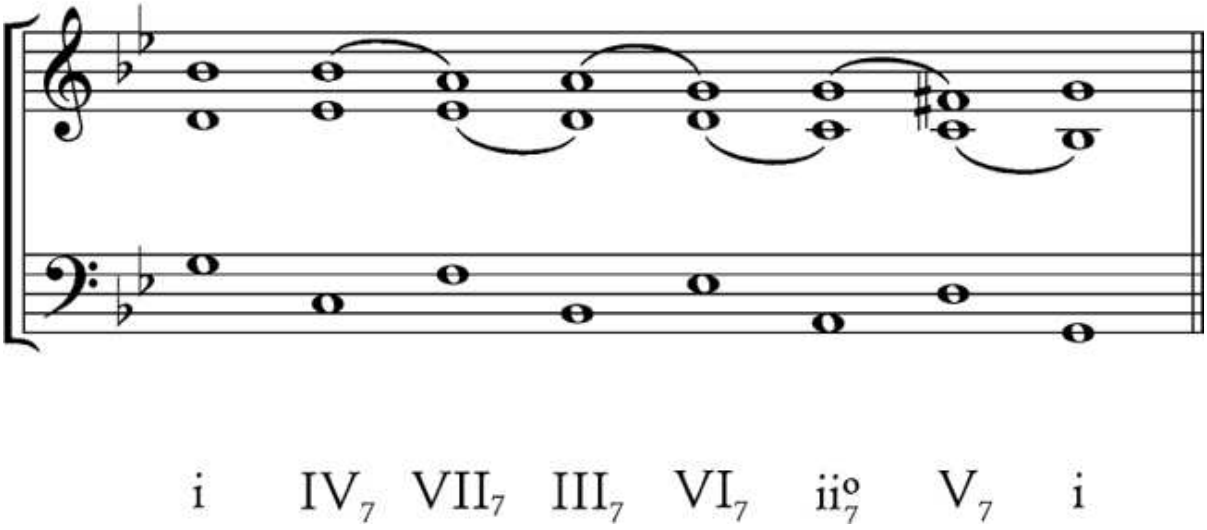
The fully elaborated system's birthplace was the Italian music of the 1680s. The earliest example known to the author of the use of a full diatonic circle of fifths to circumscribe and thus establish a diatonic tonality occurs in a tiny aria from the third act of *L'Aldimiro*, Alessandro Scarlatti's third opera, first performed in the theater of the Royal Palace at Naples in November 1683. It functions here as a ground bass (the more elaborate *da capo* structure not yet having become the standard; see Ex. 5-5). Like all ground basses, this one surely had a "preliterate" prehistory in improvisation. And like all ground basses it is a static element, a bead for stringing, rather than a dynamic shaper of form.

The Presto from Corelli's op. 3, no. 11 (Ex. 5-3), published in Rome in 1689 but probably composed some years earlier, no longer shows the circle of fifths off as a "device" but simply harnesses it, a fully integrated element of technique, to drive a dynamically unfolding form-generating process. That much is typical of the north-Italian instrumental ensemble music of the time, which for that reason stands as one of the great watershed repertories in the history of European music. It is certainly no accident, moreover, that "tonality" as a fully elaborated system emerged first in the context of instrumental music. Instrumental music stood in far greater need of a potent tonal unifier like the circle of fifths than did vocal music, which can as easily take its shape from its text as from any internal process.

So for our purposes we can let Corelli stand as protagonist of this all-important development—one that put instrumental music on a path of ascendency that would ultimately challenge the preeminent status of vocal genres. For in no other composer of the time is the circle of fifths quite so conspicuously and copiously deployed. In the Presto of op. 3, no. 11, Corelli resorts to it over and over again. The instance already noted at the outset is the first segment of the circle of fifths to appear; but it is by no means the most extensive one, for it only takes the circle half way, to III (what we now call the "relative major"). For a complete circle, fully circumscribing the key of the piece (and then some!), see mm. 11–15.

Not only does Corelli use the circle here in its complete form, he also manages to enhance its propulsive force in two distinct ways: first, by doubling the rate of chord change (what is now often called the "harmonic rhythm") in the second half of the progression; and second, by adding sevenths to most of the constituent chords, especially in the latter (faster, more emphatic) portion. These sevenths, being dissonances, create the need for resolution, thus turning each progression of the circle into a simultaneous reliever and restimulator of harmonic tension. In this intensified form, the circle of fifths becomes more than just a conveyor belt, so to speak; it becomes, at least potentially, a channeler of harmonic tension and a regulator of harmonic pressure—phenomena that can be easily associated or analogized with emotional tensions and pressures, hence harnessed for expressive purposes (see Ex. 5-6).

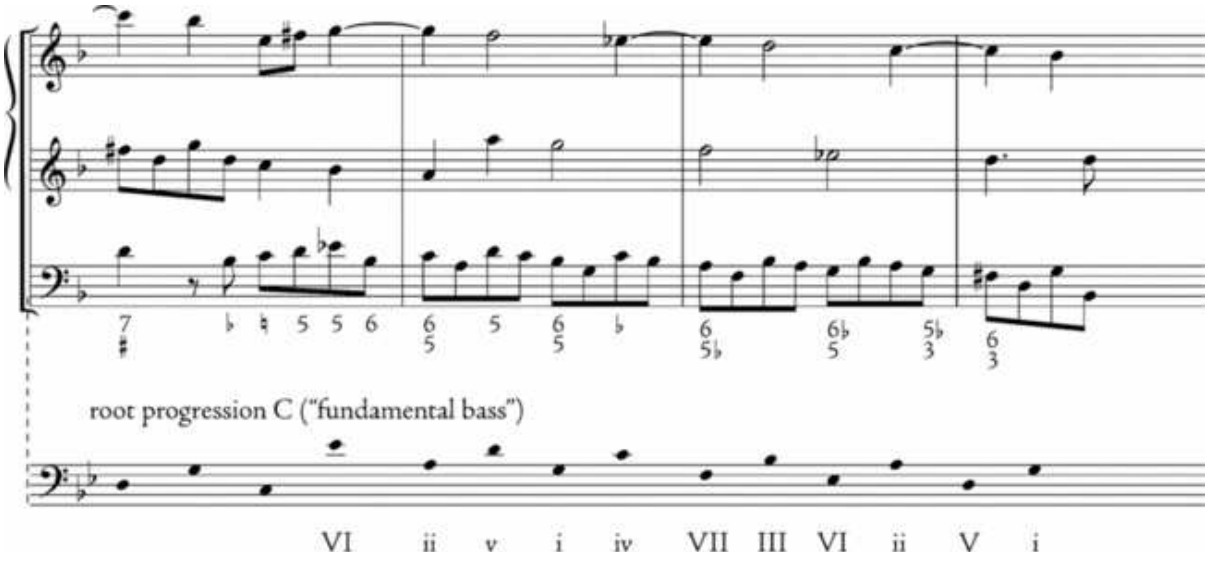
ex. 5-6a Circle of fifths in Corelli, Op. 3, no.11, II (Presto)



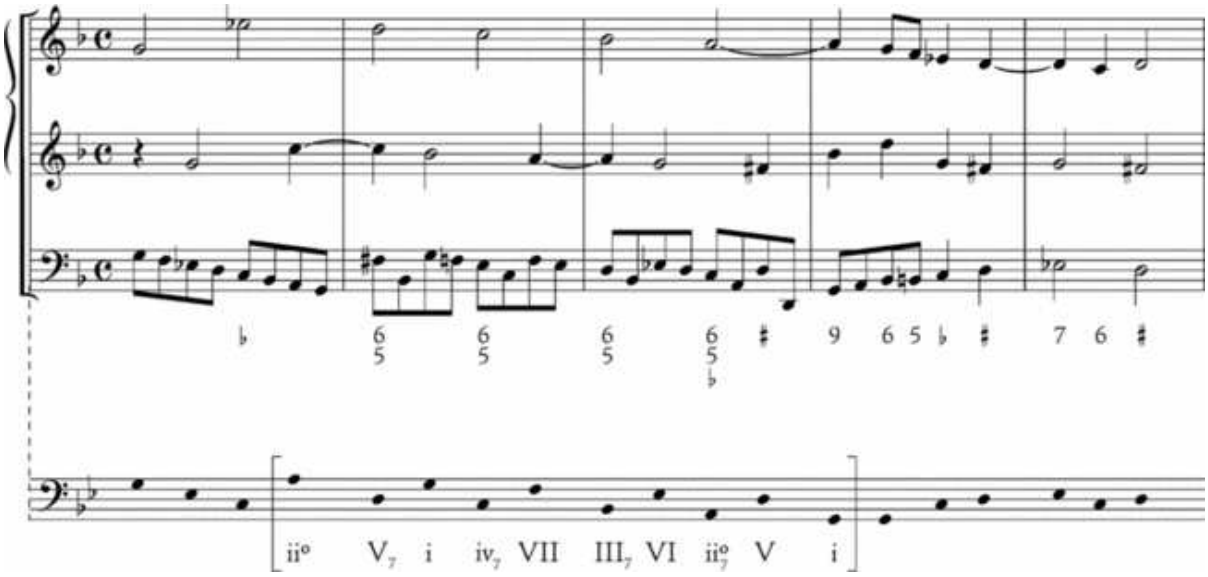
ex. 5-6b Circle of fifths in G minor with interlocking sevenths

Note, finally that when this inexorable cycle gets underway, Corelli (like Scarlatti before him) reinforces it with melodic sequences—another way of demonstrating the inexorability of the progression.

Another kind of standard sequence, not simply melodic but contrapuntal, is the suspension chain. It, too, is easily adapted to the circle of fifths, as Corelli demonstrates in mm. 34–36, the passage that sets up the final cadence: the suspensions between the two violins are accompanied by another supercomplete progression, VI–ii–v–i–iv–VII–III–VI–ii–V-i (Ex. 5-7a). Compare also the suspensions over the "walking bass" at the beginning of the Preludio from the sonata da camera, op. 4, no. 2 (Ex. 5-7b).



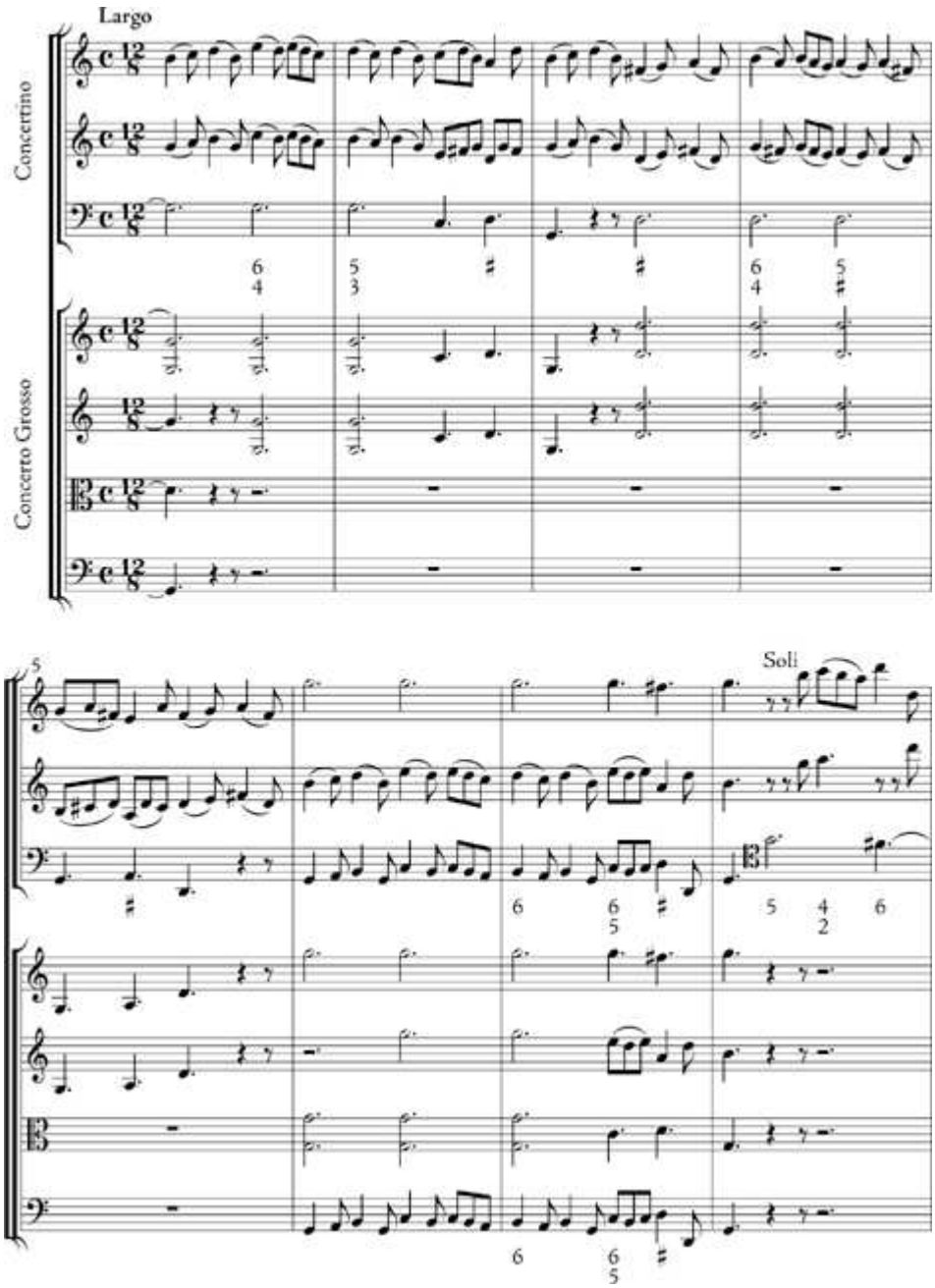
ex. 5-7a Arcangelo Corelli, Op. 3, no. 11, II (Presto), mm. 34–36, analyzed to show *basse fondamentale*

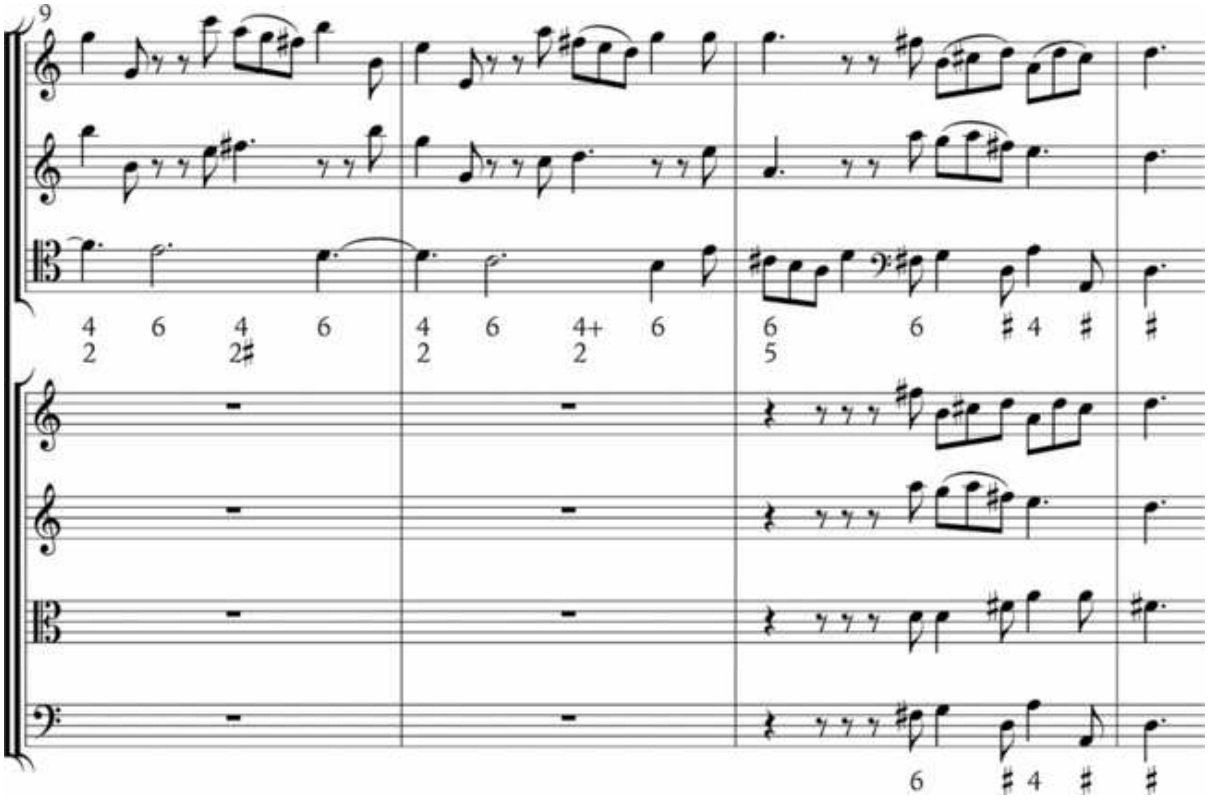


ex. 5-7b Arcangelo Corelli, Op. 4, no. 2, I, mm. 1–5, analyzed to show *basse fondamentale*

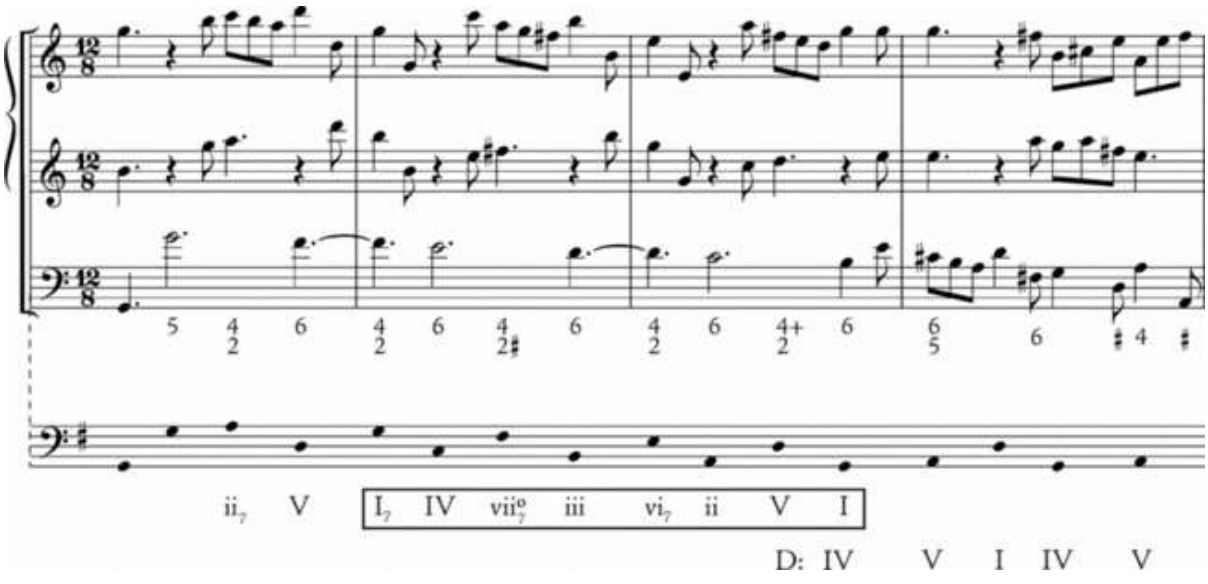
These two techniques in tandem—melodic sequences or suspensions underpinned with dynamic circle-of-fifths harmonies—would become the standard by which all tonal progressions would henceforth be measured. They became, in effect, the basis of what is often called the "Era of Common Practice"; and the "sequence-and-cadence" model (shown at its most primitive in Scarlatti's ground bass) became the chief generator of form in "tonal" or "common-practice" music.

For a final illustration from Corelli's own work we can take a look at one of his most famous compositions, the "Pastorale ad libitum" from the Concerto Grosso, op. 6, no. 8, a *concerto da chiesa* "made for Christmas Night" (*fatto per la notte di natale*) and usually called the "Christmas Concerto" in English. It was probably composed in the 1680s but first published in 1714.


Largo
Concertino
Concerto Grosso
Soli



ex. 5-8a Arcangelo Corelli, *Pastorale ad libitum* from the "Christmas Concerto", Op. 6, no. 8



ex. 5-8b Arcangelo Corelli, *Pastorale ad libitum*, mm. 8–11, analyzed to show *basse fondamentale*

This Pastorale movement is an appendage to the concluding fast movement in the concerto, a dancelike number in binary form. (While untitled, as was the rule in a concerto da chiesa, the movement is clearly a gavotte, and would surely have been so labeled in a concerto da camera.) The Pastorale is marked "ad libitum" (optional) so that the concerto might be performed without it on other occasions, for it is the Pastorale alone that has obligatory or "programmatic" associations with the holiday theme. The Largo tempo and the meter will bring the Scarlattian "siciliana" to mind with all its rustic associations, and the plangent bagpipe drones with which the backup band (*concerto grosso*) accompanies the soloists (*concertino*) in the opening ritornello (Ex. 5-8a), and on its later reappearances, leave no doubt that we are standing among the shepherds, and that the music is painting a manger scene.

That ritornello consists of nothing but three sequential repetitions of a three-bar "rocking" motif (Mary cradling the

infant Jesus?) and a two-bar cadence. The little episode for the *concertino* in mm. 8–11 contains the first circle of fifths. As happens so often, the harmonic circle is unfolded through a suspension chain; in this case, somewhat unusually, the syncopated voice that creates the suspensions is the bass. Its dissonances and resolutions identify an essential root progression by fifths that is broken up and somewhat disguised in the voices above (Ex. 5-8b). The first theorist to employ the technique of “root extractions” used in this analysis and the preceding one was Jean-Phillippe Rameau, in his *Traité de l’Harmonie* or “Treatise on Harmony” of 1722; as usual, a theorist of the next generation has found a way of systematically rationalizing and representing a manner of writing—or rather of thinking musically—that had already become well established in practice.