

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING VOCAL TECHNIQUE AND STYLE IN VARIOUS TREATISES FROM THE 17TH CENTURY

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SUMMARY. The early 17th century witnessed the establishment of Italian vocal art, that would become a reference point for other vocal idioms and the source of *bel canto*. Italian singers and their art were considered examples worthy of imitation, numerous German or French sources referring to the vocal mastery of the Italians. The present study aims to present several European treatises of the 17th century — Italian, Spanish, German, and French — gradually revealing the evolution of European vocal art, from the early Baroque and its *seconda prattica*, to the final decades of the century, marked by the growing dispute between the Italian and French style and vocal technique. Throughout the study, similarities and differences are pointed out, revealing that the requirements regarding vocal technique are rather similar for all the singing idioms. What distinguishes the various schools of singing are aspects related to the particularities of the language, that also leads to the adjustment of certain technical demands. Secondly, questions regarding style or the execution of ornaments seem to set the Italian and French vocal idioms apart. The present article represents the first part of a research that is dedicated to the analysis of various historical sources of the 17th and 18th centuries — as valuable milestones for the establishment of the great 19th century singing methods. Historically informed performances require the singer to become acquainted with the historical period to which a particular composition belongs, its treatises and other theoretical sources of the period, eventually arriving to a better understanding of the score and a more accurate construction and delivery of the vocal discourse. Finally, the authors wish to emphasize that the historical sources referred to in the current study represent only a small portion of the theoretical writings of the period, and that the chosen works were considered representative for the current research — but not necessarily the most important.

Keywords: voice, word-painting, singing, vocal registers, vibrato

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Introduction — Developments in music and vocal performance at the border between the Renaissance and the Baroque

In the late Renaissance, even before the Camerata de' Bardi (or the Florentine Camerata) proclaimed that the musical discourse should follow the meaning of the text ("*prima le parole, dopo la musica*"), composers aimed to emphasize the meaning of the words and make the poetic text more intelligible through the compositional techniques they employed. The Council of Trent, summoned between 1545 and 1563 to counterbalance the challenges brought about by the Reformation, declared that composers should focus on the intelligibility of the text, thus placing the musical discourse in the service of the words.³

To renounce the polyphonic musical discourse entirely was not yet possible, however composers strove to simplify the polyphonic texture or arrange the discourse in a manner that made the text more easily understood. *Word painting* was an approach that governed the composition of the Italian madrigal or the French chanson, the composers aiming to emphasise the meaning of the poetic text, the emotions conveyed by the words, using certain musical elements, such as melodic or rhythmic formulae or dissonant intervals. The use of well-established melodic or rhythmic elements with the purpose of depicting emotions lay the foundation for the *doctrine of the affections* (or *affects*) or *Affektenlehre*. Derived from the theories proposed by rhetoric and oratory, the doctrine of the affections gained popularity in the seventeenth century and claimed that passions could be represented through visible or audible signs, offering composers practical guides to follow.

According to this new approach, the poetic text was placed in the foreground, while the musical discourse was meant to emphasize the meaning of the words. To make the text more intelligible, gradually more transparent musical textures were preferred instead of the intricate polyphonic constructions.

Separately, but approximately at the same time, two groups of artists tried to suggest concepts and ideas that could direct the musical discourse toward new horizons: in Italy the *Camerata de' Bardi* paved the way for the *second prattica*, while in France the group of poets *La Pleiade* had a significant contribution for the evolution of French music. The ideas discussed and proposed by these two groups have led to the composition of vocal works that required singers to adapt their vocal technique in order to obtain a particular sound — desired, appreciated, and described in the treatises of the 17th century. In the early treatises the authors simply described the qualities of

³ Council of Trent, "Canon on Music to Be Used at Mass," September 1562 quoted in: Reese, Gustav. *Music in the Renaissance*. New York: Norton, 1959, p. 449.

the ideal voice, while in later sources singers were offered practical advice and recommendations. However, solutions for the discussed vocal issues were not clearly explained. The ideas regarding vocal production and the qualities of the sung voice, described in these works, serve as basis for the evolution of singing techniques, as these will be described in the great treatises of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Italian Treatises and Historical Sources

The innovative ideas and approaches to art and music proposed by the Camerata de'Bardi had a significant impact on the evolution of the musical discourse and vocal performance of the 17th century. Therefore, it is important to recall several ideas exposed in the writings of such members of the groups as Count Giovanni de' Bardi (1534–1612), Vincenzo Galilei (1520–1591), or Giulio Caccini (1551–1618).

A group of intellectuals, musicians, and poets from the late Renaissance Florence, the Camerata de'Bardi gathered regularly to discuss questions regarding music and art. From its first meeting in 1573, the Camerata had a significant activity between 1577–1582. One of the main ideas discussed was the revival of the aesthetic ideals of ancient Greek art and dramatic style. Thus, the musical compositions inspired by these views aimed to recreate the style of ancient Greek music, even though the ancient sources the Camerata referred to were scarce and poorly understood at that time, leaving room for speculation.

In the *Discorso sopra la musica anticha e 'l cantar bene* (1578), addressed by Giovanni de' Bardi to Giulio Caccini ("*Called the Roman*"), Bardi explained his desire to revive the ancient functions of music: namely, to second poetry and move listeners to various passions.⁴ However, Bardi did not go as far as Vincenzo Galilei, who advocated the return to monody in his *Dialogo della musica antica et della moderna* (1581–1582). The type of singing proposed by Bardi should be accompanied by instruments, in which he included ensemble singing as well.⁵

In his *Discorso*, Bardi speaks about "*that kind of music that is put into practice singing — whether in ensembles or solo — to the accompaniment of instruments*"⁶, and offers definitions to such concepts as *music*, *harmony*,

⁴ Palisca, Claude V. *The Florentine Camerata: Documentary Studies and Translations*. Music Theory Translation Series. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 84.

⁵ Idem, p. 84.

⁶ Giovanni Bardi in Palisca, *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

rhythm, explains the distribution and use of the *tonoi*, and gives advice regarding the use of musical instruments. At the same time, Bardi considers that the practice of music in his time, could be divided into two parts: “one is that called counterpoint; the other we shall call the art of good singing.”⁷ A good composition should be able to move the listener, to evoke a certain ethos, while the composer should strive to arrange the verse in such a manner that the words can be comprehensible, offering clear indications to the singer, so that unnecessary improvisation can be avoided. *Good speech and excellent diction*⁸ are imperative requirements for a good singer. Referring to a fine singer of that time, Bardi mentioned the wide vocal range, resonance, and sweetness of the voice⁹ — qualities that were appreciated, even required from the singers of the period. Nonetheless, all these qualities are spoiled when the singer gives little to no importance to the poetry and poetic accents. Like other contemporary musicians, Bardi makes a clear distinction between solo singing and ensemble singing, stressing the importance of “uniting one’s own voice well with others, making with them a single body,”¹⁰ when singing in an ensemble. To respect the beat and the indications in the score was crucial from Bardi’s point of view: “I would add [R13r] that the best thing a singer can do is to perform a song well and punctiliously, as it was composed by its creator. And do not do as some, who — and it is comical — from the beginning to the end so spoil a madrigal with their unhinged passaggi, thinking that they will thereby be considered clever, that even the composer does not recognize it as his offspring.”¹¹

The *Discorso* was one of the first theoretical writings to emerge from the Camerata, paving the way for the new direction in which music and singing were to go: the *stile recitativo*, a new style of performance, which led to the birth and evolution of opera. Bardi’s manifesto was followed by *prefaces*, such as the ones written by Ottavio Rinuccini, Giulio Caccini, and Jacopo Peri to *L’Euridice* (1600) and the preface Caccini wrote to his *Le Nuove Musiche* (1602), in which he described the qualities a good singer should possess, striving to offer practical advice for singers.

Caccini’s collection of monodies and songs for solo voice and accompaniment, *Le Nuove Musiche*, is one of the earliest and most important examples of composition in the *seconda prattica* style that characterizes the early Baroque. Caccini used the term *stile moderno*, to emphasize the differences between this type of composition and the earlier works. Palisca

⁷ Giovanni Bardi in Palisca, *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁸ Giovanni Bardi in Palisca, *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Giovanni Bardi in Palisca, *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹¹ Giovanni Bardi in Palisca, *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

considers, however, that Caccini's conception regarding the monodic style failed to develop beyond a certain point and that his compositions remain conservative and quite far from the *stile recitativo* proposed by the Camerata.¹²

In his *preface*, Caccini highlighted the importance of the text and wrote out the ornaments that he considered most suitable for expressing the *affects* of the words. According to Stark, Caccini employed the word *affetto* to suggest the ability to arouse strong emotions in the audience, using a particular vocal technique.¹³ The ideal voice was full and natural (*voce piena e naturale*), avoided falsetto (*le voci finte*), and should not be constrained to accommodate to other voices (through the latter statement Caccini advocated for solo singing).¹⁴ A good voice had to be supported by good control of the breath, and the ability to execute a *crescendo*.

According to these affirmations, as well as conclusion of a careful analysis of Caccini's compositions, it may be affirmed that the early 17th century vocal works employed a limited vocal range, which didn't require the tenor voice, for example, to solve issues regarding register changes. Caccini himself advocates for transposition when necessary, suggesting that the singers choose the version of a score that is most suitable for their vocal possibilities. This could be explained through the fact that Caccini, as his contemporaries, placed great importance on the intelligibility of the text — which is more clearly understood if sung or declaimed in the middle register of the voice. On the other hand, Stark believes that this approach could suggest that Caccini was “a one-registered singer who eschewed falsetto and knew nothing of covered singing”.¹⁵ This observation could be true, in part because the treatises of the early 17th century warn against the use of the falsetto but refrain from giving solutions to problems related to vocal registration issues.

The rhetorical importance of the ornaments (*effetti*) is also emphasized in Caccini's *preface*. *Effetti* were deemed important to increase the expressiveness of the text. Caccini also illustrated several vocal devices necessary in affective singing: *intonazione della voce* or *clamazione*, *esclamazione* (a close description of what Manuel Garcia would later explain as *messa di voce*)¹⁶, and *sprezzatura* (a concept that could be explained as rhythmic flexibility in the rendition of the vocal discourse).

¹² Palisca, Claude V. *Baroque Music*. Third Edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall History of Music Series, 1991, p. 27.

¹³ Stark, James. *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*. University of Toronto Press, 2003, p. 157.

¹⁴ Caccini, Giulio. *Le Nuove Musiche*. English translation by H. Wiley Hitchcock. Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1970, p. 98. [English translation of Caccini's 1602 *Le Nuove Musiche*].

¹⁵ Stark, James. *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 159.

A few years later, in 1605, Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) published his *Fifth Volume of Madrigals*, also announcing the publication of a theoretical work that would respond to those who attacked the new style of composition. The work was to bear the title *Seconda prattica, ovvero perfezione della moderna musica*, however such a theoretical work belonging to Monteverdi was not found. Throughout this period, Monteverdi expressed his approach to the new *stile concitato* or *genere concitato*. This new Baroque style, developed by Monteverdi and illustrated in such compositions as *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624), *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (1639), or *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1642) is characterized by such effects as rapid repeated notes, ornamental patterns, and extended trills, employed to emphasize agitation or anger.

In the foreword to the volume of his eighth book of madrigals, *Madrigali Guerrieri, et amorosi*, published in 1638 in Venice, Monteverdi reflects on the manner in which music is able to express the principal human passions, or affections: “I have reflected that the principal passions or affections of our mind are three, namely, anger, moderation, and humility or supplication; so the best philosophers declare, and the very nature of our voice indicates this in having high, low, and middle registers. The art of music also points clearly to these three in its terms “agitated,” “soft,” and “moderate” (*concitato, molle, and temperato*). In all the works of former composers I have indeed found examples of the “soft” and the “moderate,” but never of the “agitated,” a genus nevertheless described by Plato in the third book of his *Rhetoric* (...) And since I was aware that it is contraries which greatly move our mind, and that this is the purpose which all good music should have (...) for this reason I have applied myself with no small diligence and toil to rediscover this genus.”¹⁷

As illustrated in the vocal writing of *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (first performed in 1624 in Venice and published in Monteverdi's eighth book of madrigals), *stile concitato* required singers to clearly declaim the text, and have perfect control of the three registers of the voice¹⁸, in order to express the *agitated, soft, and moderate* (*concitato, molle, and temperato*)

¹⁷ Claudio Monteverdi in Strunk, Oliver. *Source Readings in Music History. From Classical Antiquity through the Romantic Era*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1950. p. 413. English translation of the original edition of the foreword (Venice, 1638). A facsimile of Monteverdi's *Foreword* is published in Vol. 8 of Malipiero's edition of the collected works.

¹⁸ The term *register*, in the present context, is rather related to the manner in which softness, moderation, or agitation are expressed — to the *emotional registers* — and not to the vocal registers discussed in the following centuries. Since no other source of the century speaks about three vocal registers, it can be assumed that Monteverdi referred to the registers of dynamics (volume and intensity), used to mirror the meaning of the text: *piano* for softness and *forte* for emotional intensity.

affects, previously mentioned by the composer. At the same time, rhythmic precision was also important, since the composer preferred well-established rhythmic formulae to express contrasting *affects*.¹⁹

Rightfully considered one of the first music historians, the Florentine theoretician Giovanni Battista Doni (1595–1647) criticized the musical practices of his epoch and published several treatises that represent valuable sources of information regarding the music composition and performance of the early 17th century. Among his notable writings the two-volume edition of essays must be mentioned, written between 1640 and 1647, and published in 1763 in Florence, under the title *Lyra Barberina*. The second volume of the *Lyra Barberina* contains an ample chapter titled *Trattato della musica scenica*, that deals with theatrical music. The author also tackles several issues related to vocal emission.

Doni argued that *stile recitativo* was not entirely suitable for opera, recommending that declamation be reserved for narrative purposes, while the more lyrical parts of the discourse were to be composed according to the *stile madrigalístico* of the *seconda prattica*.²⁰ He also makes a clear distinction between the *trillo* (or *increspamente*) and *tremolamento* (*trillo imperfetto*). Doni considers that the *trillo* represents the vibration of the voices, it does not alter the tone, and it is suitable especially for cadences and supported notes, best used in cheerful musical passages.²¹ The *tremolamento* was considered more feminine and suitable for the evocation of sadness. It is not entirely clear, whether the term *trillo* refers to the natural vibration of the vocal folds, while *tremolamento* could refer to tremulousness. Nonetheless, Doni suggested that the vocal vibrato was an imitation of the string vibrato.²²

Doni also devotes a few pages to his thoughts on the assignment of certain roles to particular voices, according to their timbre.²³ Similar to his predecessors and contemporaries, Doni writes about the importance of equalizing the vocal registers, referring to the correct emission of the high notes²⁴ — he mentions the desired outcome, but does not explain the technical mechanisms for achieving this.

¹⁹ Claudio Monteverdi in Strunk, Oliver. *Op. Cit.*, p. 414.

²⁰ Doni, Giovanni Battista. *Lyra Barberina Amphicordos: accedunt eiusdem opera*. Edited by A.F. Gori and G.b. Passeri in 2 volumes [*Trattati I* and *Trattati II*]. Firenze: Ant. Franc Gorius, 1763. vol. II, *Trattato della Musica Scenica*, pp. 31–33.

²¹ *Idem*, pp. 71–72.

²² *Idem*, pp. 71–72. See also: Stark, James. *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

²³ Doni, *Op. Cit.*, pp.85-85.

²⁴ Stark, James. *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

According to Stark, what we refer to as the *old Italian school of singing* can be traced back to the music of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, “*the first golden era of singing*”, when vocal technique and the new styles of recitative and monody were harmoniously united – as the works of Caccini and Monteverdi prove.²⁵ Polyphony was rejected in favour of solo singing, which implied that singers must comply to new requirements. The preferred voice had to be full and natural, the singer had to avoid falsetto. As early as 1592, Lodovico Zacconi wrote about *voce di petto* and *voce di testa* in his treatise *Prattica di musica*. In this context, *voce di testa* refers to falsetto, Zacconi arguing that he preferred chest voices that did not sound dull, neither shrill.²⁶ His point of view was further cultivated in the early 17th century. The concept of naturalness and avoidance of falsetto referred to the equalization of the vocal registers as well, to a smooth and imperceptible transition between the registers. When singers failed to achieve freedom in singing (especially in the high register), the resulting sound was not pleasant, nor acceptable — as the above-mentioned sources confirm. However, neither of these authors offered practical advice regarding vocal technique.

Despite the fact that it is not clearly reflected in historical sources, vibrato seems to have been considered a normal part of artistic singing²⁷ – as also suggested by the frequent parallel in treatises between the string vibrato and vocal emission.²⁸ Nonetheless, a strong distinction was made between the natural vibrato and vocal tremulousness, or *tremulo*, which was considered a flaw.

Spanish Sources

One of the most important Spanish treatises of the early 17th century, *El melopeo y maestro* (1613), was written in Spanish by Pedro (Pietro) Cerone (1566–1625), an Italian musician who travelled to Spain and served in the Royal Chapels of Philip II and Philip III. This monumental work, consisting of 22 “books,” 849 chapters, and 1,160 pages, faithfully restates the thoughts of Zacconi on the qualities of the singing voice, at the same time offering insights on the social position of the musician and his behaviour. Cerone compares the Spanish musical training and composition to the Italian musical practices, proving to be extremely conservative for his time. Nonetheless, his

²⁵ Idem, p. 197.

²⁶ Zacconi, Lodovico. *Prattica di musica utile et necessario si al compositore*. Venezia: Girolamo Polo, 1592, p. 56.

²⁷ Stark, James. *Op. cit.*, pp. 123–130.

²⁸ See also: Rousseau, Jean. *Traité de la viole*. Paris: Ballard, 1687, pp. 100–102.

work is considered an important historical document on the Spanish musical practices of the time. The treatise also offers observations regarding the execution of ornaments. Strunk considers, however, that the work offers an “*indigestible mass of information and misinformation*”, even useless ideas, also pointing to its conservative, old-fashioned tone.²⁹

The German Treatises

The views expressed in the Italian treatises were echoed by German composers and theorists as well. In 1618 Daniel Friderici (1584–1638), cantor, conductor, and composer, published *Musica figuralis oder neue Unterweisung der Singe Kunst*, in which he refers to the refinement and naturalness of the singing voice, that should be *zitternd* (trembling), *schwebend* (floating), *bebend* (pulsating).³⁰ The description refers to the vibrato³¹, a desired quality of the singing voice. Some sources consider that this *vibrato* is not the one referred to in the modern sense, but rather it is a recommendation for the voice to be emitted with freedom and without force.³²

Michael Praetorius (1571–1621) published between 1614–1620 *Syntagma Musicum*, a musical treatise in three volumes. In the present, the work is considered one of the most valuable sources for historically documented performance. The treatise consists of three volumes: *I. Musicae Artis Analecta*, *II. De Organographia*, *III. Termini musicali*. In the third volume, chapter nine, Praetorius offers instructions regarding singing, referring to the new Italian style and the teachings of Giulio Caccini and Giovanni Battista Bovicelli. He considers that apart from a solid technique, singers must be able to express accents and affections, proving a good intellect and understanding of music — the three requisites for beautiful singing, according to the author, are *nature*, *art or doctrine*, and *practice*.³³ Praetorius mentions the vibrato, as one of the first desirable qualities in a singing voice, referring to the natural vibrato of a well-placed voice: “(...) a nice, pleasant vibrato (not, however, like some are accustomed to in school, but clearly restrained)”.³⁴ The fullness of the sound

²⁹ Strunk, Oliver. *Op. cit.*, p. 262.

³⁰ Friderici, Daniel. *Musica figuralis oder new Singekunst*. Reprint edited after the 1614 edition by Erns Langelütje. Berlin: R. Gaertner, 1901, p. 17.

³¹ Stark, James. *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

³² Wistreich, Richard. *Vocal performance in the seventeenth century in The Cambridge History of Music Performance*, edited by Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 402.

³³ Praetorius, Michael. *Syntagma Musicum III*. 1619. Translated and edited by Jeffery Kite-Powell. Oxford Early Music Series. Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 215.

³⁴ Idem.

(related to the freedom of vocal emission) is described through the syntagm: “a smooth, round throat suitable for diminutions.”³⁵ In other words, the voice had to be round, but also capable of executing ornamental passages.

As other authors of the period, Praetorius places great emphasis on phrasing, recommending the singer to train his breathing in order to be able to sustain long tones. The problem of *false* is mentioned here as well, Praetorius advising against the use of this *half voice* that is forced, instead choosing a suitable vocal range that allows the singer to sing with a “full and bright sound”³⁶.

Like other contemporary theoreticians, Praetorius is against excessive ornamentation on behalf of the singers, who thus spoil the pieces they perform, making them unrecognizable and unintelligible. Even though he supports the study and performance of virtuosic scales, he also believes that a singer’s training must include diction. Ornaments are related to the expressive rendition of various affects, as the Italian treatises also revealed.

Among the flaws of the voice, Praetorius mentions singing through the nose, stifling the voice in the throat, and singing with clenched teeth.³⁷ In the conclusion of the chapter, Praetorius refers to a future work dedicated to singers (which was never published), that would detail the ideas previously exposed. He also offers examples for the execution of diminutions, suggestions for the execution of various ornaments.

Contemporary of Schütz and Praetorius, Johann Andreas Herbst (1588–1666) is considered one of the most important German theoreticians of the early 17th century. In 1642 he published *Musica Practica*, a treatise on the art of singing, in which the author gives advice regarding tasteful ornamentation. Herbst was an important figure in a time when Italian compositional and performance practices were imported to Germany. This is reflected in the Venetian polychoral style of his early works, for example. Despite the fact that he did not employ the monodic style and recitative, he nonetheless based his ideas regarding singing on the Italian manner (particularly on the concepts exposed by Caccini and Praetorius). Herbst calls for a bright and sonorous sound, that could be achieved without the use of *false*. The singer was also required to have “eine schöne liebliche zittern und bebende Stimme”, while the diminutions were to be executed with a round throat (referring to the freedom of the sound, owing to mastery of vocal technique).³⁸

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ Idem.

³⁷ Praetorius, Michael, *Op. cit.*, p. 216.

³⁸ Herbst, Johann Andreas. *Musica practica sive instructio pro symphoniacis (in first edition)*. Nuremberg: J. Dümmlers, 1642.

French singer and teacher, Manuel Garcia was familiar with the work of Herbst, which he quoted in his *Traité complète de l'art du chant*, published in 1847.

Another important treatise on the German vocal performance of the 17th century is *Von der Singe-Kunst oder Manier* (published around 1650) by Christoph Bernhardt (1628–1692). Like other sources, the work contains ambiguous explanations, such as those regarding artistic devices: Bernhardt mentions the *fermo* (steady emission) and *the trillo (ardire)*, and cautions against the *tremulo*, or vocal tremulousness. Bernhardt also distinguished between various Italian style of singing: *alla Romana*, *alla Napolitana*, *alla Lombarda*. He also speaks extensively about singing *forte* and *piano*, in order to achieve various technical accomplishments in singing.³⁹

The description of a narrow vibrato is present in most German treatises. Georg Falck (1630–1689), in his *Idea Boni Cantoris* (1688) speaks about a pleasant vibrato that flows from the throat but must not be articulated in the manner that resembles the sound of a goat (the later Italian treatises refer to this defect as *capretto*).

The French Treatises and the Dispute Between the French and Italian Styles

17th century French vocal music owes much to the innovation brought about in the 16th century by the group of poets *La Pléiade*, who aimed to revive French language and poetry. Desiring to strengthen the bond between poetry and music, in 1570 Jean-Antoine de Baïf founded the *Académie de Poésie et de Musique* and developed the *musique mesurée*. Music had to follow the rhythmic and metrical construction of declamation, *musique mesurée* becoming one of the most important concepts in the music of the late Renaissance, as mirrored by the works of such composers as Claude Le Jeune. *Musique mesurée* also played a significant role in the evolution of the *air du cour*,⁴⁰ a genre that would gradually replace the French chanson and grow in popularity in the 17th century.

It is interesting to note the similar concepts that governed the French and Italian music in the late Renaissance and early Baroque, and to draw a parallel between the concepts of the Italian Camerata de' Bardi and those voiced by the French *La Pléiade*.

³⁹ Bernhardt, Christoph. *Von der Singe-Kunst oder Manier*. Ca. 1650. Translation by Sion M. Honea available on-line: https://www.kastrat.se/_doc/Bernhard%201657.pdf

⁴⁰ Karácsony, Noémi; Rucsanda, Mădălina Dana. *The Evolution of the French Chanson during the Renaissance: From the Parisian Chanson to the Pléiade Chansons, and the Air du Cour* in *STUDIA UBB MUSICA*, LXVIII, Special Issue 1, 2024 (pp. 83–100).

Numerous French theoretical works refer to the dispute between French and Italian music, a rivalry that could be explained through several factors: the dispute between the supporters and opponents of Lully, during the reign of Louis XIV; the quarrels between the supporters of French opera and those of Italian opera, known as *Les Querelles des Bouffons*; Gluck's reform of the opera and the impact of *opera buffa*.

The evolution of the *air du cour* owes much to the compositional efforts of Pierre de Nyert, Michel Lambert, and Beningne de Bacilly (1625–1690). Bacilly published in 1668 his *Rémarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter*, consisting of three parts: the first exposes the principles of singing, while the second and third are concerned with pronunciation. Bacilly makes a distinction between the *pretty (belle)* and the *good (bonne) voice*. According to him, a pretty voice is endowed with *belle cadence*⁴¹, translated by certain sources as *vibrato*.⁴² Bacilly also speaks about large (*grande*) and small (*petite*) voices, seeming to prefer smaller and higher voices, due to their flexibility and ability to execute ornaments.⁴³ He also seems to have a more favourable approach regarding the use of *falsestto* and considers that *falsesttists* are able to render certain intervals or expressions more clear and refined than tenors (probably referring to the lack of register equalization in certain tenor voices). Nonetheless, Bacilly seems to appreciate the roundness of sound in singing. In the chapters devoted to pronunciation and consonant inflection, Bacilly speaks about the prolongation of consonants, depending on the *affect (passion)* the singer desires to express. The articulation of consonants would not alter the emission of the vowels, which were supposed to be governed by the steady airstream (onto which the consonants should also be directed).⁴⁴ Bacilly also mentioned *disposition*,⁴⁵ referred to in certain sources as *throat articulation*, employed in the execution of *agréments*, elaborate doubles or ornamented second verses of airs.⁴⁶

The *air du cour* composed and performed during the reign of Louis XIV could have exhibited a more pronounced Italian influence, as revealed by the comparison between Bacilly's treatise and that of Jean Millet (1618–1684), *La belle methode ou l'art de bien chanter* (1666). Most of Millet's works were

⁴¹ Bacilly, Bertrand de. *Rémarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter*. Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1671, p. 38.

⁴² Stark, James. *Op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁴³ Bacilly, Bertrand de. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 41–44.

⁴⁴ Sanford, Sally. *National Singing Styles in A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, edited by Stewart Carter. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012, p.14.

⁴⁵ Bacilly, Bertrand de. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 48–51.

⁴⁶ Sanford, Sally. *Op. Cit.*, p.13.

probably destroyed during the French Revolution, with four arias and two motets preserved in this treatise. Millet attempted to adapt mid-17th century French ornamental practice to Italian style⁴⁷, his treatise revealing that to him the art of singing was rather related to the art of ornamentation. Millet believed that the terms used to designate ornaments, such as *traits de gorge*, *portaments de voix*, *agréments*, *passages*, or *roulades* were related either to the manner in which these were produced (*traits de gorge*, for example), or they were defined in a general manner. Therefore, he preferred to use terms that suggested the location of the ornaments: *avant-son* (an accelerated movement of sound, just before the main note), *reste du son* (a short sound after the note), and the *roulade* (an elaboration of the main note; *passage*).⁴⁸ His description of the *trill* (*tremblement*) is as ambiguous as certain other terms, described by his contemporaries, Millet considering that it is impossible to learn its execution from written examples only.

As other authors of the century, Bacilly and Millet compared French *air du cour* with the singing of Italian compositions. In all these sources the differences regarding vocal technique and style are emphasized, with certain dissimilarities explained through the differences between the French and Italian language, as will be shown by the treatises of Abbé Francois Ragueneau and Jean Laurent Le Cerf de la Viéville, published in the first decade of the 18th century.

As the Italian and German treatises, the French stressed the importance of pronunciation, the clarity and intelligibility of the sung text. The delivery of the text could become more refined when the singer paid great attention to the articulation of the consonants. Poor pronunciation, wrong placement of the accent, the incorrect placement of ornaments and execution of trills were considered vocal faults, as were singing in the nose, incorrect or poor projection of the sound. Of utmost importance were correct intonation, also mentioned in the treatise of Bacilly, flexibility, evenness (referring to the equalization of registers),⁴⁹ and sonority.

⁴⁷ Cohen, Albert. "Jean Millet 'de Montgesoye (1618-1684)" in *Recherches sur la musique française classique*, vol. 8, Paris, Éditions A. et J. Picard, 1968, p. 16.

⁴⁸ Thomas, Barbara E. *Jean Millet's L Art de bien chanter (1666): A Translation and Study*. Thesis. Graduate School of the University of North Texas, 1998, pp. 13–16.

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the French treatises, as the Italian and German sources, also speak about two registers (referring to *falsestto*) and don't seem to offer any solutions to the equalization of registers.

The Voice of the 17th Century — Conclusions

Ulrich argues that the renunciation of the *falsestto* could be related to the advent of the castrati, in the last half of the 16th century.⁵⁰ The vocal emission of these singers allowed for the high register to be sung with more power and brilliance. The historical sources of the 17th century reveal that the *falsestto* emission, that was either weak or shrill and often out of tune, was no longer acceptable, nor could the new requirements of the *seconda prattica* be accomplished without the equalization of registers. The presented sources reveal that most musicians speak about two registers (*voce di testa* and *voce di petto*), yet neither offers practical solutions for singers who deal with problems regarding equalization of registers or the correct emission and placement of sound.

With the early Baroque, the contribution of women to the public performance of music grew in importance, thus the treatises distinguish between the female and male voice types. In Italy, another preferred vocal type alongside the *castrato* is the female *alto* or *contralto* voice. Especially in the compositions of the early Baroque, the tessitura employed by composers for roles designated as *soprano* today are easily accessible for mezzo-soprano singers. This could emphasize the fact that vocal designations were very much related to vocal colour, rather than extension.

If the “*prima le parole, dopo la musica*” point of view required clear diction, during the 17th century the vocal discourse gradually became more ornamented, leading composers to write about the execution of various types of ornamentations. French music, in particular, is very sensitive about the correct execution of ornaments, as revealed by such treatises as those of Marin Mersenne, Bernard de Bacilly, or Jean Millet.

Another interesting trait is the expansion of the vocal range throughout the 17th century, leading to new requirements in vocal technique, expressed in the treatises of the 18th century. Virtuoso singing will gradually be replaced by the transition toward a more balanced musical language in the dawn of the Classical period, which combined the wide vocal range with the capability of the singer to execute ornaments – but expressed in a different stylistic idiom.

⁵⁰ Ulrich, Bernhard. *Concerning the Principles of Voice Training During the A Cappella Period and until the Beginning of Opera (1474–1640)*. Translated by John W. Seale. Minneapolis: Pro Musica Press, 1973, p. 100. [First published as *Die Grundsätze der Stimmbildung während der A Cappella Periode und zur Zeit des Aufkommens der Oper 1474–1646* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1912)].

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