

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS

9

1. HERCOLE BOTTRIGARI

IL DESIDERIO

OR

CONCERNING THE PLAYING TOGETHER OF VARIOUS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

2. VICENZO GIUSTINIANI

DISCORSO SOPRA LA MUSICA

TRANSLATED BY
CAROL Mac CLINTOCK



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY

1962

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY
ARMEN CARAPETYAN, PH. D., DIRECTOR

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES
AND DOCUMENTS

9

HERCOLE BOTTRIGARI

IL DESIDERIO

VINCENZO GIUSTINIANI

DISCORSO SOPRA LA MUSICA

FOREWORD

Il Desiderio, the best known of Ercole Bottrigari's treatises on music, first published in 1594, has long been considered an important source of information about Sixteenth-century practice. Copies of it exist in many libraries, excerpts have appeared in sundry histories of music and elsewhere, but the volume had not been reprinted since 1601, until in 1924 Kathi Meyer brought out a facsimile of the second (1599) edition* with an important introduction describing Bottrigari's life, his works, and containing also a discussion of the publication and the various editions. Professor Gustave Reese in 1957, in his pamphlet *Fourscore Classics of Music Literature*, placed high on his list of desiderata the translation of *Il Desiderio* into English. Like Rabelais' priests, who were "deaf in their Latin ear", some students find that Seicento Italian, especially of the learned variety such as Bottrigari's, is pretty hard to understand. If this translation makes *Il Desiderio* more easily accessible to all scholars and more useful to English-speaking musicologists, it will serve the purpose for which it was undertaken.

Perhaps a word would be in season about some of the knotty problems with which the translator of Bottrigari is confronted. In the first place, the treatise is written in what D. P. Walker in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* calls "einen ausserordentlich schwer verständlichen Stil". The prose tradition of the Seicento was purely Ciceronian, with long complex sentences, concessive clauses, unmarked parentheses, and no or completely disorganized punctuation — all the apparatus of the Schoolmen. Even in the hands of a great literary artist this style is difficult and confusing; in the case of Bottrigari, no literary genius, it becomes atrocious. To make reading easier the translator has broken up many of the long, intricate, complex sentences into manageable pieces and has supplied modern punctuation. The huge slabs have been carved into bite-sized bits more digestible to Twentieth-century readers. There is no sacrifice of meaning; on the contrary, this practice greatly improves the clarity of the exposition, as a comparison of the English and the Italian versions will amply demonstrate.

In the second place, the technical terminology, often translated from the Latin or Greek, is confused and confusing, the interpretation being by no

* The present translation was made from this facsimile.

TO THE KIND AND COURTEOUS READER

So great, and so burning a desire to understand and learn the theoretical things of music entered the mind of M. Annibale Melone in his mature years that, in a way, he little prized those practical things of which, by having sung and played many kinds of musical instruments, and having composed Madrigals and Motets, and having taught others in the public school, he had made an honored and useful profession. In both his youth and in his prime he had been able not only to meet his needs but had made such an accumulation of Fortune's goods that in his old age he had no fear of poverty. He sought diligently and with all his powers to know, to speak with, and to frequent the society of any person who took pleasure in musical theory, and wished to be known himself as a theorist by them and by everyone. When it happened that having learned of the return in 1587 of the Cavaliere Ercole Bottrigari from Ferrara, where he had lived for many years, to his native city — knowing how much the Sig. Cavaliere had devoted himself to this particular study of Music along with other various studies of Mathematics; and how in his youth having composed very pleasing *Cantilene*, later, turning to speculation, he had taken delight in reading the works of the theorists, both ancient and modern, in Latin and Greek as well as in Italian — M. Melone devoted himself with every affection, diligence, and solicitude to acting as the worthy and faithful servitor of this other Gentleman. Bottrigari, having known of Melone for some time, received him with the greatest courtesy and with familiar intimacy and became his friend, so that out of the 24 hours of each day, at least 3 during the daytime in Summer and 3 in the evening in Winter Melone was in the house of the Cavaliere continually discussing with him matters pertinent to Music and to its theory.

All this, Kind Reader, I have wished to narrate in full, since you have seen this Dialogue about Concerts of various musical instruments, entitled *IL DESIDERIO*, issue from the press not many years ago under the false name of a supposed author. Do not marvel, then, that you see it here with the true name of its real author, that is, the aforesaid Sig. Cavaliere who, since he wrote the Dialogue at the instigation or stimulus of, and for the contemplation and satisfaction of Melone, introduced him into the discussion under the very apt name and surname of Alemanno Benelli. By means of an Anagram, or transposition of letters, this reveals none other

DIALOGUE

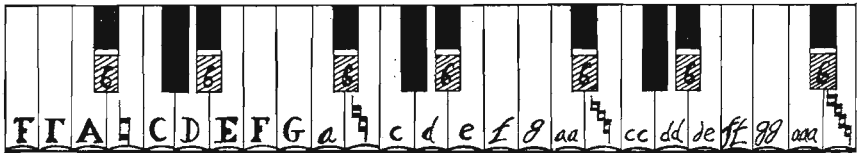
Speakers: Gratosio Desiderio and Alemanno Benelli

- Gr. This encounter, Messer Alemanno, at this hour and place, fills me with the greatest hopes of good fortune.
- Al. And why hopes of good fortune, Signor Gratosio? You know that I honor you as a Gentleman, and that I esteem you not only as one fond of *virtuosi* (which is a kind of virtue), but as a *virtuoso* yourself.
- Gr. I desire above all that we leave aside ceremony and insincere words as exaggerated and unfruitful; and for the many praises which you have given me I briefly return the greatest thanks that I can and should. But I will tell you gladly why I have placed such great hopes of good fortune on our meeting today — if perhaps I do not interrupt you in some of your business nor detain you from your journey.
- Al. I left my house not for business but with the intention of hearing a great concert of music, which I learned this morning was to be given in your neighborhood shortly after luncheon, in which perhaps forty persons will participate, some playing various instruments, some singing. But I know that when a group of people must be assembled, particularly such a large number, the concert is usually late; for that reason it had almost slipped my mind. Indeed, I would have forgotten it very easily if sleep, which in these hot days usually assails the eyes of men of leisure after luncheon and which had attacked my eyes strongly, had not made me remember it. So I, fleeing it not very hastily, am now on my way.
- Gr. Here is the beginning of my good fortune, M. Alemanno. The concert, for which you left your house, has already taken place; and I, having heard it through from beginning to end, am returning to my house with such renewed and increased confusion in my mind that I am not at all certain how it can be cleared up unless you, who are most intelligent and perfect in the art, and belong to the profession, liberate me (as I had told you I hoped you would), or at least give me some good solution and some help.
- Al. I am very sorry to be so tardy in leaving my house that the Concert is over. But I am even more sorry that because of this concert you feel such inward confusion that you desire to find some remedy for it, and particularly from me, for I am of no help.

form; and are accustomed to hear those only as tempered, defective, and altered on all the stable and stable-alterable instruments. And now, as we have no other means of making them heard, I promise you to demonstrate them another time at your pleasure on the Harmonic Rule, called by the moderns the Monochord, that is, an instrument of a single string.

Gr. I accept promptly your most kind offer, and I will avail myself of it whenever I am certain it will not be inconvenient to you. Nor do I wish to conceal my great ignorance in the matter, which I hope by your great kindness to overcome very soon.

Al. If it were not so late I would suggest that we send for the Monochord, but it is really too late. It would not weary you to wait till tomorrow, for then I hope to give you both satisfaction and pleasure. Now I think you clearly recognize that all these white keys are the same as those in this clavicembalo, and they are usually identical in all the other instruments of this species; in addition, some of these semitones may be divided in the middle, or duplicated, one being placed above the other; and because there was a reason for distinction I designed them this way, some all black and the others cross-hatched. (Ex. X).



Gr. I see that they are.

Al. Now you should know that all these black semitones have a voice, or better, a sound somewhat higher than their companions the hatched ones. And to give you more clear and precise information, I say that the first hatched semitone of this first pair is the low b fa usual in all such instruments; the other, its companion above, all black, is the added b fa. The next following all black is the added D sol re. This other hatched, then, the first of the second pair, is the added b molle for E la mi. And this second, somewhat higher all black, its neighbor, is the b molle of the E la mi usual in all such instruments. Of the other couple of single semitones, the first hatched is the b fa synemmenon, of which this other hatched is the lower 8ve; and this, its all black companion, is for the octave of the added low b fa; as are all these other semitones — respectively, the acute, more acute, and most acute of all the low ones. Now the function of the added flat before the E la mi would be to make the true fourth, as I told you somewhat

FOREWORD

Vincenzo Giustiniani's *Discorso sopra la musica* was first published in 1878 by Salvatore Bongi, archivist of the *Archivio dello Stato* in Lucca, and was printed in a limited edition of 150 copies to honor the marriage of Cavaliere Luciano Banchi with Giuseppina Brini. It is one of eight treatises found in a codex in the Library of the *Archivio dello Stato*. The codex is entitled *Miscellanea di cose diverse per la Curia Romana ecc . . . Varij discorsi, istruzioni, ecc . . .* and carries the mark O 49 of the collection Orsucci. It had apparently belonged to Nicolao Orsucci, who wrote his name on it and the date 1640. The *Discorso* itself may be dated 1628, or shortly thereafter, because of the reference to Vincenzo Ugolino, who was called to Parma in that year for the marriage of the Duke of Parma with Margarita de' Medici. The contents of the codex are as follows:

- 1° Dialogo tra Renzo e Aniello napoletano sopra gli usi di Roma e di Napoli.
- 2° Avvertimento per un Scalco.
- 3° Istruzione necessaria per Fabbricare.
- 4° Istruzione per far Viaggi.
- 5° Discorso sopra la Pittura.
- 6° Id. sopra la Musica.
- 7° Id. sopra la Caccia.
- 8° Istruzione per un Maestro di Casa.

No author's name appears in these essays, but the second treatise is in the form of a letter from Bassanese Passatempo (obviously a *nom de plume*) to a certain Francesco da Domo. From various references to his father and brothers, to his possessions, and to certain events in his life, there can be no doubt that the author is Vincenzo Giustiniani, and it is clear that Giustiniani was making no real attempt to conceal his identity.

The *Discorso sopra la musica* is also written in the form of a letter of instruction to a young nobleman, a not uncommon method of presentation in the 16th and 17th centuries. Indeed, this treatise may really have served that purpose because the language is informal, even colloquial, and the

the people obey the magistrates and superiors when there was disorder and rebellion. But I will go on without developing this detail, which is superfluous, since one can read what the ancient writers like Pythagoras and Plato have said about it. These philosophers, with others, also believed that there was a continuous harmony of the spheres, proceeding from their infallibly ordered movement, and that all the terrestrial harmonies are similar to this, and with the same proportions, since no other satisfactory reason except experience can be given for the cause of the consonances and dissonances. Notwithstanding the fact that the ancients and moderns tried to attribute them to the proportions of numbers and to the movement of the spheres, this nevertheless does not seem able fully to satisfy the intellect; therefore one is forced to have recourse to experiment alone, and to a *pratique* based on the hearing, not finding any other reason to explain that the 3rd, 5th, 6th and octave are consonances and the 2nd, 4th, and 7th are dissonances. In addition one must have recourse to many other rules of proportion on which counterpoint is based, both as to the duration of the notes and to the different proportions of the tempo, and the diversity of tones and many other things which it is not my business to explain to you.

One could also try to find out the reason why music is so exciting an instrument and one so able to move souls to love, particularly in women; to whom for this reason it is usual to make serenades. But this would be an undertaking rather for an astrologer or a philosopher than for me, and therefore I will leave it to them for the present. Likewise I will leave it to the theologians to explain the devotion and fervor that music arouses in the souls of men during the celebration of the divine offices, and in the uniting of many people's spirits on the occasion of singing together, as may be observed daily in the processions of the religious brotherhoods and societies through the streets of the city. *A propos* of this I will say that a person well known to me chose to frequent a certain congregation, preferring it to many others perhaps better, because its leader and Rector had a beautiful voice when he gave the sermon, and sang the litany well, with grace and with a pleasing tone.

There would remain also to be investigated the reason why, in fishing for swordfish, which one can say is almost hunting, it is reputed necessary to sing, and what is more, to sing with Greek words. Also the reason why instruments or song put human beings to sleep, particularly children and the other animals; and also why song lightens the effort and tiresomeness of the heat for the laborers and farm workers in the summer, even though with singing their thirst increases. And also from what comes the benefit that is commonly believed singing and playing brings to silk-worms, which are called "cavalieri" in Lombardy. And also why singing lessens fear in children while they are walking at night. But we shall leave these thoughts to doctors and to philosophers who know more about them than we.