

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES & DOCUMENTS

28

THE ORIGIN
OF THE TOCCATA

MURRAY C. BRADSHAW



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY
1972

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES & DOCUMENTS

THE ORIGIN OF THE TOCCATA

BY

MURRAY C. BRADSHAW

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY

ARMEN CARAPETYAN, Ph. D.

DIRECTOR

© 1972 BY ARMEN CARAPETIAN

PREFACE

The subject of the toccata began to attract the serious attention of musicologists in the early decades of this century. In 1925/26 Leo Schrade published an article, "Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Tokkata," in which he discussed such important features of early toccatas as their function, style, and significance. A few years later, Erich Valentin wrote the first and only monograph on the subject, a survey which followed the development of the genre from its origins through Bach's death in 1750. Otto Gombosi, in an essay of 1934 titled "Zur Vorgeschichte der Tokkata," proved that the term "toccata" cannot be limited merely to keyboard pieces. These three writings make up the essential bibliography of the toccata, and even if several later contributions are considered — such as Suzanne Clercx's "La toccata, principe du style symphonique," Hans Hering's "Das Tokkatische," and Valentin's concise introduction to *Die Tokkata*, the seventeenth volume of *Das Musikwerk* — the number of scholarly efforts devoted to this significant genre remains quite slim.¹

The time seems right, then, both for a new approach to the toccata and for a reevaluation of some of the more commonly accepted ideas on the genre. The first chapter of this study is devoted to the different sorts of compositions "toccata" referred to in the Renaissance age, and specifically, since the focal point of this volume is the keyboard toccata of the Venetian school, to some of the more important and universally accepted notions about these pieces.

¹ Leo Schrade, "Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Tokkata," *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* VIII (1925-1926), 610-635; Erich Valentin, *Die Entwicklung der Tokkata im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert (bis J. S. Bach)* (Münster i. Westf., 1930); Otto Gombosi, "Zur Vorgeschichte der Tokkata," *Acta Musicologica*, VI/2 (1934), 49-53; Suzanne Clercx, "La toccata, principe du style symphonique," *La musique instrumentale de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1955), 313-326; Hans Hering, "Das Tokkatische," *Die Musikforschung*, VII/3 (1954), 277-294; Erich Valentin, *Die Tokkata* ("Das Musikwerk," XVII; Cologne, 1958).

CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES	11
Chapter I. Toccata: Definitions and Assumptions . . .	13
Chapter II. The Origin of the Venetian Keyboard Toccata	19
Chapter III. The Keyboard Prelude and Lute Toccata of the Renaissance	49
Chapter IV. Toccata and Prelude in the Seventeenth Century	67
APPENDIX OF MUSIC	
Introduction	87
<i>Intonazioni di Gio. Gabrieli</i>	
1. Primo Tono	93
2. Secondo Tono	93
3. Terzo & Quarto Tono	94
4. Quinto Tono	94
5. Sesto Tono	95
6. Settimo Tono	95
7. Ottavo Tono	96
8. Nono Tono	96
9. Decimo Tono	97
10. Undecimo Tono	97
11. Duodecimo Tono	98
<i>Intonazioni di Andrea Gabrieli</i>	
12. Primo Tono	98
13. Secondo Tono	99
14. Terzo Tono	100
15. Quarto Tono	102
16. Quinto Tono	103

CHAPTER I

TOCCATA: DEFINITIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The constant evolution of musical forms, even within a single period of time, brings with it a continuous change in the meaning of terms used for the various genres and forms of music. During the Renaissance, for instance, the term “toccata” referred originally to brass fanfares played at ceremonies and festive occasions, a type of toccata Suzanne Clercx has traced far beyond the confines of the Renaissance, finding evidence of it, for instance, in Monteverdi’s “toccata” or overture to *Orfeo* (1607), the sonatas of Maurizio Cazzati (d. 1677), the *sinfonie* or opera overtures of 17th and 18th century Italy, and, finally, the symphonies of the classical period¹.

But in the course of the 16th century it was also employed for some lute compositions. In 1508, Joanambrosio Dalza prefaced five pieces with the words “*tastar de corde*” (“sounding” or “playing strings”) — apparently a predecessor of the term “toccata” — and almost thirty years later, Giovanni Antonio Casteliono’s *Intabolatura de leuto* (1536) included four “tochate,” two of which were to be played “nel fine del Ballo.”²

Finally toward the end of the century, musicians used it to describe certain keyboard compositions. Yet even among these keyboard works the term referred to several different kinds of music. The “toccata ligature e durezza” is characterized, as the title indicates, by syncopation and dissonance and by a strongly chromatic style in slow tempo with occasional points of imitation. The “toccata in modo di trombetta” is simply a fanfare transferred to the keyboard.

¹ *La musique instrumentale de la Renaissance*, 313-326; Gombosi, in *Acta Musicologica*, VI/II (1934), 52, noted that “fanfare” toccatas appeared as early as 1393.

² For the titles and contents of these two collections see Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental Music Printed Before 1600* (Cambridge, 1965), 1508^a and 1536^a.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE VENETIAN KEYBOARD TOCCATA

About forty years before the publication of the first toccatas, a style quite similar to them occurs in a genre of composition known as the falsobordone (Spanish “fabordón”). In their simplest instrumental form these pieces are exact transcriptions of vocal falsobordoni, compositions that originated in Italy or Spain shortly before 1480 and that became immensely popular in the 16th century. They were most often used in the part singing of Vesper psalms, and the following example of a keyboard “fabordón llano” or “simple falsobordone” might very well have been intended as accompaniment to such a performance:

Ex. 1. Venegas de Henestrosa, *Fabordón llano*, psalm tone V (*Libro de cifra nueva*, 1557), ed. by Higinio Anglés, *MME*, II, 10.

The musical score consists of two systems of music. The first system, labeled 'A.', spans eight measures. It features a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The melody is primarily composed of quarter and eighth notes, with some rests. The bass line consists of chords, mostly dyads and triads. There are 'x' marks above the first, fourth, sixth, seventh, and eighth measures. A '5' is written above the fifth measure. The second system starts at measure 10 and ends at measure 15. It continues the same style, with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. Measure 15 has a sharp sign above it. The bass line continues with chords. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata over the final chord.

The musical score for 'B.' is a single system of music. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The melody consists of a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The piece ends with a double bar line.

It can be seen, too, that the toccata is not an improvisatory composition, at least not in the sense that the musician is creating something “unforeseen” (“in provisus”) or something evolved on the spur of the moment (“ex tempore”). If the toccata is improvisatory at all, it is in the sense of “discantus super librum,” that ancient practice of adding parts at sight to a given plainsong. It is also improvisatory in the decorations that grace the “harmonized” psalm tone. But the concept of free improvisation in the toccata must be greatly altered, for the composer or organist was guided throughout his composition by one of the most solid of all compositional techniques — a *cantus firmus*.

There are many reasons why composers thought to employ a falsobordone procedure in intonation and toccata. The psalm tones themselves were simple melodies, easily retained in the mind

CHAPTER IV

TOCCATA AND PRELUDE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

All the previous discussion raises a final question. Toccata and prelude continued to be important genres in the 17th century, especially in Austria and Germany. Just how long, then, did the Venetian structure survive and what is the relation of these later compositions to their prototypes, the 16th-century toccata and prelude?

No one disputes the Italian influence on the toccatas of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621, organist in Amsterdam). But with our new point of view, this influence can now be seen to extend far beyond that of style, for Sweelinck did in fact build all of his thirteen known toccatas on a psalm tone. A perfectly clear example is his setting of tone I where even the imitative section is based on the plainsong, a favorite procedure of the Venetians:¹

Ex. 20 Sweelinck, *Toccata*, tone I, ed. by Max Seiffert, *Sweelinck Werken voor orgel en clavecimbel* (Amsterdam, 1943), 90-91

The image shows a musical score for Sweelinck's Toccata, tone I, measures 25-30. The score is written for organ and clavecimbel. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The top staff contains a single measure with a whole note G4. The grand staff begins at measure 25. The treble staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The bass staff has a common time signature (C). The music is characterized by rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The piece concludes with a final cadence in the bass staff.

¹ Max Seiffert has edited the thirteen toccatas in *Sweelinck Werken voor orgel en clavecimbel* (Amsterdam, 1943). A toccata on the third tone by Pieter Cornet (ca. 1560-1626, organist at the court chapel in Brussels) uses the final ending of psalm tone III for the first ten measures only (see Willi Apel ed., CEKM, Vol. 26, No. 7, pp. 51-52); the remainder of the composition does not follow the Venetian structure.

1. Primo Tono.⁴

Recb Final

5

2. Secondo Tono.⁵

Recb Final

(fol. Iv)

5

⁴ Followed by "Primo Tono Trasportado alla Quarta alta," (fol. 1), that is, a transposition up a fourth with a key signature of one flat and ending on G.

⁵ Followed by "Secondo Tono Trasportado alla Quinta alta," (fol. 2), that is, a transposition up a fifth with a key signature of no flats and ending on D.