

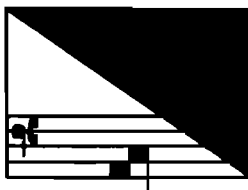
MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES & DOCUMENTS

40

Don Harrán

WORD-TONE RELATIONS IN MUSICAL THOUGHT

From Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century



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## FOREWORD

The volume surveys writings from the ancients to the early seventeenth century on the question of word-tone relations. Its subject matter ranges from the accentual, syntactical and affective connections between music and speech to the particular ways notes and syllables were arranged in writing and singing music. Thus word-tone relations admit both a broad and a narrower definition, the broad one referring to the total complex of associations between music and words in their structure and content, the narrower one to the problems and procedures of text placement – the alignment of pitches and syllables – in composition and performance. Statements of the theorists fall similarly into the one or other category of general affinities between music and language or the specific correlation of their notes and syllables. Though the two categories are logically susceptible of differentiation, the second presupposes the first and neither can be considered apart from the other for an inclusive view of the subject.

The study began in 1974 as a more circumscribed project entitled “the theory and practice of text placement in music of the Renaissance”: initial results were summarized in various articles (see Bibliography). Yet it soon became apparent that the topic formed an integral part of a larger and more fundamental one concerning the relationship, in music of the Renaissance, between music and language. The procedures of text placement invite consideration not only in themselves but also as betokening a particular form of interaction between words and sounds; behind the procedures lies the outlook or aesthetic position of the artist who subscribes to them. That theorists took pains to discuss these, forming rules for them from the 1530’s on, may be understood as an attempt on their part to rationalize and conventionalize the word-tone relation in their time. They acted under humanist impulses, hence the increased value they placed on the word and their concern with its comprehensibility. To demonstrate the humanist ramifications of the topic it was necessary to search for precedents: the coverage expanded from the Renaissance back to the Middle Ages and, ultimately, to the beginnings of Western musical culture in ancient Greece. Utterances on the word-tone relationship could be gleaned from the writings of the ancient philosophers and

## Chapter 1

### WORD-TONE RELATIONS: AN INTRODUCTION

Numeros memini, si verba tenerem.\*

Vergil, *Eclogae*, IX. 45

#### Music and Language

“*Accent* hath great affinitie with *Concent*, for they be brothers: because *Sonus*, or *Sound*, (the King of Ecclesiasticall Harmony) is Father to them both, and begat the one upon Grammar; the other upon *Musicke* . . . ” – thus Ornithoparcus in his *Micrologus*.<sup>1</sup> His words sound quaint, but they conceal a hard grain of truth: the intimate relation between music and language acts as a motivating force for the development of Western musical culture. It accounts in part for the origins of musical notation: the two basic signs (neumes) for the rise and fall of melodies derive from the accents *acutus* and *gravis* of the ancients; the two basic rhythmic durations derive from the longs and shorts of ancient metrical poetry.<sup>2</sup> Compound neumes derive from combinations of the basic signs, more intricate rhythms from a subtler differentiation of the components of length and brevity. The concept of perfect or imperfect time, at the root of mensural notation and, at a later stage, of ternary and duple meters, could not have evolved without the precedent of Greek and Latin metrical schemes. One view of the history of Western music, then, would be as a transformation of primordial linguistic shapes.

The concern with word-tone relations dates from the Greeks and was renewed with the humanist revivals of later periods, particularly the Renaissance. It underlay the neoclassical movement of the eigh-

\* “I remember the numbers [= rhythms, intervals] if I retain the words.”

<sup>1</sup> After translation of John Dowland, p. 68 (for the same passage in Spanish, see Cerone, *El melopeo y maestro*, I, 419 f.).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Parrish, *The Notation of Medieval Music*, p. 4.



the reader “will perceive the originality of its materials.”<sup>29</sup> Stoquerus hoped that “no one would be displeased to follow [him] in the reading and its organization.”<sup>30</sup> His arrangement of the contents may be summarized thus:

- [Introduction]. Chapters 1–5
- [Book I]: Sounds (solmization, etc.). Chapters 6–9
- [Book II]: Words (as joined to sounds). Chapters 10–31
  - 1. [Introduction]. Chapter 10
  - 2. “Compulsory” rules. Chapters 11–17
  - 3. “Optional” rules:
    - a. [General discussion]. Chapter 18
    - b. Those of older composers. Chapters 19–25
    - c. Those of the moderns. Chapters 26–31

For the “compulsory” rules Stoquerus seems to have provided seven musical examples, but the staves meant to carry them were unfortunately left empty by the scribe (assuming that the scribe had the examples to start with). Also incomplete is the end of the treatise, that is, the continuation of Chapter 31 and whatever chapters remained: the scribe broke off with the remarks “the rest is missing.”<sup>31</sup> On account of its novelty, Stoquerus felt it was incumbent upon him to engage in an apologetic. He foresaw resistance, and sought to answer all those who might claim that he was “‘seeking a knot in a bulrush’<sup>32</sup> (as they say) by relaying the precepts of this subject which is not bound by precepts, but rather proceeds freely in whatever manner the singer sees fit and, since it is to be grasped through practice alone, does not require artful explanations. If they are right in their opinions, I shall have wasted much time and effort.”<sup>33</sup> He tackled four possible objections: the first, that solmization suffices alone for a knowledge of vocal music; the second, that the principles of text placement may be learned without further ado from practice; the third, that the intentions of the composer are not binding, hence the text may be aligned in any way you wish; and the fourth, that

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 2.

<sup>31</sup> “Caetera desiderantur” (fol. 40<sup>v</sup>). Though its presentation of rules seems to be intact, the treatise noticeably lacks an epilogue.

<sup>32</sup> “. . . quod nodum in scirpo . . . quaeram” (an ancient proverb).

<sup>33</sup> *De musica verbali* (Chap. 3), fol. 3<sup>v</sup>.

## APPENDIX

### Containing Instructions of the Theorists for Relating Words and Tones\*

\*Within each grouping the instructions are arranged chronologically (for dates of sources, see under Primary Sources in Bibliography). Italic numbers in parentheses refer to pages in this volume.

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