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The Recorder in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries — Part II

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### **The Recorder in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries — Part II**

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#### **Renaissance Ornamentation**

The study of ornamentation can be a lifetime task, so diverse and numerous are the resources. This chapter will serve only as an introduction to the ornamentation practices of sixteenth-century Europe with regard to recorder performance practices. The techniques of several Renaissance authors for ornamenting the interval of the ascending perfect fifth will, however, be specifically discussed.

Sixteenth-century ornamentation (also called *division*, *diminution*, *glosas*, and *passaggi*) was usually an aural practice.<sup>25</sup> Only the writers of method books wrote down examples of ornamentation in an effort to explain correct and acceptable techniques. It is from their documents that certain characteristics of Renaissance ornamentation become evident. There were no set forms, and since ornamentation was not usually notated, there were no symbols.<sup>26</sup> Ornaments of this era were always diatonic.<sup>27</sup> Balance was important both in the melodic line and in the various rhythmic structures. Care was taken to preserve important vertical consonances. Instruments derived their ornamental techniques from vocal practices since the voice was the model for all music. Thus, it is valid to study treatises on vocal and string ornamentation, as well as recorder treatises, to determine recorder and other wind-instrument techniques. No distinction according to medium was made. As a matter of fact, the Baroque era was well established before each instrument, according to its nature, developed its own techniques of ornamentation.

In his treatise, *Opera intitulata Fontegara* (1535), Sylvester Ganassi presents the most complex and comprehensive exposition of ornamentation techniques. He pairs them with articulation in discussing the necessary elements for efficient finger techniques.<sup>28</sup> He recommends using graces sparingly and expressively and believes that they should be avoided at the

beginning of a piece and never used in two parts simultaneously. He says that both sacred and secular music may be ornamented.<sup>29</sup>

Ganassi counts intervals from semibreve to semibreve, ignoring the intervening composed notes.<sup>30</sup> But he specifies that “every division must begin and end with the same note as the unornamented ground.”<sup>31</sup> The result is that, while there is much deviation from the written melodic line, the vertical harmony is preserved.<sup>32</sup> The examples of ornamentation in *Fontegara* are rhythmically intricate. Ganassi is the only author writing on the subject to express his ornaments in proportions, such as four, five, and six notes per beat.

He also states that the “simplest ingredient in elegant and graceful playing is the trill.” Ganassi explains that trills were executed by “trembling” the finger over the hole. The third, the major second, and the semitone were the trilled intervals. Tunings may vary because of alternate fingerings, but such variants will probably be imperceptible to the ear. Ganassi calls the trilled third “lively,” and the trilled semitone “gentle and charming.” He rates all the trills either as “gay and lively” (indicated with a *V* for *vivace* or “graceful and gentle” (indicated with an *S* for *suave*).<sup>33</sup>

Adrianus Petit Coclico seems to have been the next author to discuss ornaments in detail. His *Compendium Musices*, published in 1552, gives a short summary of coloratura ornaments in which he presents simple melodic phrases and their ornamented versions. His ornaments are less complex than Ganassi’s. Coclico seems to have been the first to discuss the ornamenting of more than one line in polyphonic settings. He says that the bass must never be ornamented because it is the “fundamental upon which all the other parts rest.”<sup>34</sup>

Diego Ortiz, the Spanish theorist, gives simpler and more conventional ornaments than Ganassi. They are listed in his *Tratado de glosas . . .* published in 1553, in reference to *violone* technique. He lists three kinds of ornaments. The first and best kind, he says, consists of passages beginning and ending on the note to be embellished. The second kind allows more freedom and does not end on the note that is embellished. The third kind, according to Ortiz, “leaves the composition,” and allows the performer to “go by ear.” Ortiz calls this “despicable” because it distorts the original line.<sup>35</sup> Ornaments on cadences are taken for granted in correct solo playing. Ortiz lists cadential formulas first in his treatise. If an ornamented soprano line is accompanied by a keyboard instrument, he recommends that the original soprano line be omitted—a debatable point among other theorists of the time.<sup>36</sup>

Fray Tomás de Sancta María's *Libro llamado Arte de tañer fantasia* (published in Valladolid in 1565, but finished ten years earlier) is one of the main sources for the study of early keyboard and general instrumental music.<sup>37</sup> The ornaments written by Sancta María are very simple in rhythm and in melodic contour (see Plate V), much like those of Ortiz.

#### PLATE V

Fray Tomás da Sancta María's Ornaments for the Rising Fifth  
from *Arte de tañer fantasia* (Transcribed by Margaret Nosek)



The German composer, Hermann Finck, published his treatise, *Practica Musica*, in 1556. In it he discusses the techniques of singing and the art of coloratura embellishment. He states that ornamentation depends upon the aptitude of the person performing. He condemns those who copy other performers' ornaments and apply them indiscriminately. Finck feels that in ensemble pieces voices should ornament, not simultaneously, but in turn, so that each can be heard distinctly. When more than one player performs on a part, he recommends dispensing with ornaments altogether.<sup>38</sup>

In a letter to the Conte d'Alta Villa in 1562, Camilleo Maffei of Solofra, in discussing the principles of voice production and ornamentation, lists five rules to follow when ornamenting: First, ornaments should be used only at cadences or between the intervals immediately preceding cadences. Second, no more than four or five ornaments should be used per voice in a motet, otherwise "the ear may become satiated with too much sweetness."<sup>39</sup> Third, ornaments should be placed upon the penultimate syllable of the last word, so that both the ornament and the word will end simultaneously. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in his examples. In his fourth rule he states that ornaments sound best on the vowel "o". Finally, he says that in an ensemble of four or five players, ornaments should be performed by each performer in turn, otherwise the harmony will not be clear.<sup>40</sup>

Giralamo dalla Casa was a Venetian town musician, as was Ganassi. Similarly, his duties involved transcribing vocal pieces for instruments and instructing citizens on instrumental techniques.<sup>41</sup> His most important work was *Il vero modo diminuir*, published in 1584. This book is the last to deal with the late Renaissance style of ornamentation. Instead of presenting long ornamented cadence patterns, dalla Casa gives examples of *tremoli groppizzati* and *groppi battute* — predecessors of the modern trill. His suggestion for the naming of ornaments is the first to anticipate the Baroque nomenclature. Dalla Casa lists ornamentations for all of the intervals. Instead of giving rules for their usage, however, he lets ornamented Italian madrigals and French chansons composed by eminent composers of his time serve as examples. His ornamentations are characterized by varied note values, preservation of the contour of the line, and a careful concern for the audibility of text. Florid figures are employed mainly on long syllables.<sup>42</sup>

Plate VI, which presents a few measures of dalla Casa's ornamented version of de Rore's madrigal *Alla dolce ombra*, is a good example of a piece in which all of the voices ornament in turn. It must be remembered that this sort of embellishment would have been applied spontaneously by each performer in the sixteenth century. In order to have achieved unity in such a performance, the rapport between ensemble members must have been exceptional. Certainly, only the highly sophisticated artist would have been able to imitate the other voices' ornaments and, at the same time, maintain a rhythmic and melodic similarity and a sense of balance and unity for the work as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

In 1594 Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, a monk and singer in Milan, published a work on vocal figuration and ornamentation called *Regole passaggi di musica*.<sup>44</sup> The ornaments he wrote for certain intervals, although rhythmically varied, were not so complex as Ganassi's (see Plate VII).

Certain other theorists of the day also commented on ornamentation. Gioseffo Zarlino disapproved of adding anything to a composition, while Nicola Vicentino approved of ornaments, but only in pieces of more than four parts. Vicentino states that the fifth voice can fill in the harmony which might otherwise be left out in ornamenting. He also warns against using ornamentation in sad music. Fast motion, he says, destroys the mood by making it sound happy.<sup>45</sup>

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Editor's Note: The third part of Miss Nosek's article will appear in the January 1975 issue of *BACH*.

PLATE VI

Part 1

*Alla dolce ombra* by Cipriano de Rore

A musical score for Part 1 of 'Alla dolce ombra' by Cipriano de Rore. It consists of four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The first staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. The second staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. The third staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. The fourth staff has a bass line with quarter and eighth notes. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line.

PLATE VI

Part 2

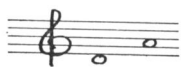
Ornamented Version of *Alla dolce ombra* by Giralamo dalla Casa

A musical score for Part 2 (Ornamented Version) of 'Alla dolce ombra' by Giralamo dalla Casa. It consists of four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The first staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes, including many ornaments. The second staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. The third staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. The fourth staff has a bass line with quarter and eighth notes. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line.

A continuation of the musical score for Part 2 (Ornamented Version) of 'Alla dolce ombra' by Giralamo dalla Casa. It consists of four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The first staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes, including many ornaments. The second staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. The third staff has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. The fourth staff has a bass line with quarter and eighth notes. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line.

## PLATE VII

Giovanni Battista Bovicelli's Ornaments for the Rising Fifth  
from *Regole passaggi di musica* (Transcribed by Margaret Nosek)



### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>25</sup> LaNoue Davenport, Discussions at a Recorder Workshop sponsored by the Cleveland Chapter of the American Recorder Society, October 26-27, 1973.
- <sup>26</sup> Imogene Horsley, "Improvised Embellishment in the Performance of Renaissance Polyphonic Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 4 (Spring 1951): 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Davenport, Workshop.
- <sup>28</sup> Sylvestro Ganassi, *Opera intitulata Fontegara, Venice 1535, A Treatise on the Art of Playing the Recorder and of Free Ornamentation*, edited by Hildemarie Peter (Berlin, Fichterfelde: Robert Lienau, 1956). English translation from the German edition by Dorothy Swainson, p. 15.
- <sup>29</sup> Thurston Dart, *The Interpretation of Music* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 143.
- <sup>30</sup> Horsley, "Embellishment," p. 9.
- <sup>31</sup> Ganassi, *Fontegara*, p. 18.
- <sup>32</sup> Horsley, "Embellishment," p. 9.
- <sup>33</sup> Ganassi, *Fontegara*, p. 87.

- <sup>34</sup> Horsley, "Embellishment," pp. 9-10.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11. For Ortiz's ornamentation of the interval of the rising fifth, see Diego Ortiz, *Tratado de glosas sobre clausulas y otros géneros de puntos en la música de violones* (Roma, 1553); modern edition by Max Schneider (Berlin: Bärenreiter-Ausgabe, 1913), pp. 46-47.
- <sup>36</sup> Giovanni Batistia Spadi, *Anchor che col partire*, "Diminutions for a Solo Instrument on a Madrigal by Cipriano de Rore for Flexible Instrumental Ensemble," edited by Imogene Horsley and LaNoue Davenport (New York: Associated Music Publishers, Inc., 1970), Preface note.
- <sup>37</sup> Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1941), p. 263.
- <sup>38</sup> Horsley, "Embellishments," p. 12.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 13.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 17.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.
- <sup>43</sup> Dalla Casa's ornamentation of De Rore's madrigal *Alla dolce ombra* is published in full in *Recorder Music from Italy, 26 Solos and Ensembles from the 14th to the 17th Century*, selected by Michel Sanvoisin (Paris: Heugel & Cie., n.d.,) pp. 44-47.
- <sup>44</sup> *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., s.v. "Bovicelli, Giovanni Battista," by Edmond Van der Straeten.
- <sup>45</sup> Horsley, "Embellishment," p. 17.