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BASSO CONTINUO ON THE ORGAN IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN MUSIC

by ARNALDO MORELLI

The last few decades have witnessed growing interest in the study of theoretical and practical problems concerning the performance of basso continuo. Although the organ appears to have been involved in this practice to a much greater extent than the harpsichord or other instruments, there is a noticeable lack of studies on this subject, particularly regarding Italian music.¹ Even the most philologically accurate performances and recordings betray uncertainties and even prejudice in the use of the organ in basso continuo. A „conditioned response“ still produces the equation „harpsichord: secular music – organ: sacred music“, an equation undiscerningly applied by many performers.

It is certainly not my intention to fill this gap, but rather to present a series of seventeenth-century Italian documents concerning organ continuo practice.

Before going any further, I think it would be appropriate to take a cursory view of the main features of organs in use in Italy between the end of the sixteenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century. This is necessary because, although single articles published over the last fifteen years have led to an increase in knowledge and a change of attitude on this subject while dissolving stereotypes still to be found in some music dictionaries and in a few organ history monographs, no updated monograph exists on the Italian organ.

Following Antonio Barcotto's manuscript treatise of 1652,² we may divide organs into two great classes:

I. Great fixed organs, usually church organs, called by Barcotto „grossi da muro“ („great wall-organs“); they generally have a single keyboard, but a few have two;³ their main body consists of the Principale stop (open), 16' or 8', and of a separate

¹ The only study to have dealt with this problem, albeit concentrating mostly on the German area in Bach's time, is: Peter Williams, „Basso Continuo on the Organ“, *Music and Letters* 1 (1969) pp. 136–152, 230–245; little is added by Tharald Borgir, *The Performance of the Basso Continuo in Italian Baroque Music*, Ann Arbor 1987.

² Antonio Barcotto, *Regola e Breve raccordo per far rendere agiustati ogni sorta di instrumenti da vento, cioè organi, claviorgani, regali e simili [...]* (1652), Ms. in I-Bc, published by Renato Lunelli, „Un trattatello di Antonio Barcotto colma le lacune dell'arte organica“, *Collectanea Historiae Musicae I*, Florence 1956, pp. 135–155.

³ Concerning the period in question, evidence exists of the following two-keyboard organs: Trento, S. Maria Maggiore (K. Zimmermann, 1536); Rome, S. Apollinare (S. Hay, 1581) and S. Maria in Aracoeli (D. Benvenuti – F. Palmieri, 1586); Orvieto, Cathedral (V. Fulgenzi, 1591); Cremona, S. Bartolomeo (L. Stanga, 1596); Pisa, Cathedral (F. Palmieri – G. Steininger, 1599); Rome, S. Lorenzo in Damaso (G. C. Bursi, 1638–42); Modena, S. Bartolomeo (A. Colonna, about 1650, enlarged by W. Hermans, 1661); Rome, S. Apollinare (W. Hermans, 1663) and S. Agnese (W. Hermans, 1666–70); Palermo, Jesuits (W. Hermans, 1674); Padua, S. Giustina (G. Bonatti, 1716); Vignanello, S. Maria (G. Alari, 1723). The organ builder Willem Hermans also built three-keyboard organs: Como, Cathedral (1650) and Genoa, Nostra Signora Assunta di Carignano (1658).

group of Ripieno ranks; in almost all specimens there are Flauto stops – usually „in ottava“, but also „in duodecima“ and „in quintadecima“ –, and sometimes reed stops, mainly with a short resonator („Regale“ or „Voce umana“) or a long one („Tromboni“); open wooden Principali are rare but not common, and even less so are the „coperti“ Flauti (stopped Flutes), in unison with the Principale.

II. „Portable“, or positive organs, based on an 8' or 4' Principale (ottavino); usually their first octave is stopped, whilst the remaining pipes are open; they may be subdivided into the following types:

a) „wing-shaped“ organs („organi ad ala“), particularly common in Rome and the central part of Italy, consisting only of Ripieno stops;

b) „wooden pipe“ organs („organi di legno“), with Principale and Ottava stops, and Flauti 8' or 4' – and sometimes 2' 2/3 – but, as pointed out by Barcotto, „omitting all of the Ripieno stops“; they are used above all „in accademia halls and chambers, so that the listeners' ears not be disturbed by the vicinity of too strong a sound.“⁴

c) „regal“ organs („regali“), consisting of a single reed stop with a very short wooden or tin resonator; they are used in both secular and sacred music.⁵

d) „table-shaped“ organs („organi in forma di tavolino“), whose wooden or metal pipes are placed inside a table-shaped case.⁶

e) „claviorgans“ („claviorgani“ or „graviorgani“), much more common than one might expect, a combination of a „table-shaped“ organ and a harpsichord placed on top of the pipes' case.⁷

⁴ Barcotto, pp. 148–149. The wooden organ is required, for instance, in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607) and in Francesca Caccini's *La Liberazione di Ruggero dall'isola di Alcina* (1628). Peri in his *Euridice* (1600) and Cavalieri in *Rappresentazione d'Anima e Corpo* (1600) probably refer to this when they mention an „organo suave“. Surprisingly, the only wooden organ from the early seventeenth century which has survived is in a church, Santa Maria delle Grazie in Montepulciano (Tuscany); however, it does not have a particularly soft sound, although closely resembling the sound of metal-piped organs.

⁵ For instance, the regal was used during the first half of the seventeenth century to play continuo in Como Cathedral (see Mario Longatti, „La cappella musicale del duomo di Como“, in: *La musica sacra in Lombardia nella prima metà del Seicento*, edited by Alberto Colzani, Andrea Luppi, Maurizio Padoan, Como 1988, pp. 301–302). In secular music we find it was used, for instance, in a sinfonia of Cristofano Malvezzi's famous Florentine *Intermedii e concerti* from 1589 („organo di pivette“) and in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, where it is associated with infernal scenes.

⁶ A splendid example of table-shaped organ is in the Museum of musical instruments of Basel's Musik-Akademie. For further information concerning this kind of instrument cf. Patrizio Barbieri, „Organi ‚in forma di tavolino‘ del Seicento romano“, *Amici dell'organo*, s. ii,i (1982), pp. 8–11. I would also like to point out that „a small table-shaped organ“ was donated to the Vallicella oratory in Rome at the end of the sixteenth century; see Arnaldo Morelli, *Il tempio armonico. Musica nell'oratorio dei Filippini in Roma (1575–1705)*, Laaber 1991 (*Analecta Musicologica* 27), p. 103.

⁷ Claviorgans were frequently to be found in the palaces of Italian noble families; see Franca Camiz, „Gli strumenti musicali nei palazzi e nelle ville della prima metà del Seicento a Roma“, in: *La musica a Roma attraverso le fonti d'archivio*, a cura di Bianca Maria Antolini, Arnaldo Morelli, Vera Vita Spagnuolo, Lucca 1994, pp. 595–608. About this kind of instrument, cf. Umberto Forni, „Nota sul claviorgano“, *L'organo* 24 (1986) pp. 79–89.

Accordingly, so great a variety of types – and those listed above are but the main ones – is related to an extraordinary variety of uses for the organ. Its main use was not in church music: it was employed for chamber music and even in theatres. Many documents testify to its use in chamber music, and further indirect proof is supplied by the personal property inventories of aristocratic homes, which very frequently list wooden organs and claviorgans as well as harpsichords and spinets.⁸ For instance, Monteverdi used an organ in 1611 to play madrigals at the Gonzaga's Court in Mantua.⁹ Frescobaldi also recommends the organ for some of his madrigals, published around 1621–22.¹⁰

As pointed out earlier, there is evidence of use of the organ in theatre music by Monteverdi, Cavalieri, Peri, Francesca Caccini,¹¹ and lastly in the only seventeenth century treatise about the staging of musical drama, *Il corago*, written in the 1630s and ascribed to Pierfrancesco Rinuccini, son of Ottavio, the better-known poet and librettist. In the thirteenth chapter of this interesting treatise, its anonymous author examines the instruments accompanying theatrical music and lists the advantages of the organ over other instruments. This description may be summarized as follows:¹²

1. „In ordine alle voci che cantano il fondamento migliore di tutti è comunemente stimato l'organo, ché per questo le chiese l'hanno eletto e non solo per la gravità sacra [...] massime se abbia canne di legno.“ („As regards the voices singing the foundation, the organ is considered the best of all: this is the reason why churches have chosen it, besides its sacred graveness [...] especially if it has wooden pipes.“)

⁸ For inventories of Roman aristocratic homes, see Franca Camiz, „Gli strumenti musicali“, *op. cit.*, and, for the Florentine court, Frederick Hammond, „Musical Instruments at the Medici Court in the Mid-Seventeenth Century“, *Analecta Musicologica* 15 (1975) p. 202–219.

⁹ See Paolo Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, Turin 1985, p. 171, who quotes one of Monteverdi's own letters: „farò sonare li chitarroni a li Casaleschi nel organo di legno, il quale è soavissimo, et così canterà la sig.ra Andriana et d. Gio. Batt.a il madregale bellissimo „Ahi che morir mi sento“, e l'altro madregale nel organo solamente.“ („I'll have the musicians from Casale play the chitarroni with wooden organ, which has a very soft sound, and the same goes for signora Adriana and don Giovan Battista who will sing the beautiful madrigal „Ahi che morir mi sento“ and the other madrigal with the organ only.“)

¹⁰ See Gabriele Giacomelli, „La fortuna dell'opera frescobaldiana in Toscana attraverso il carteggio di Francesco Nigetti (1618–1657)“, *L'organo* 25 (1987–88) pp. 102–103, quoting a letter addressed to the organist Nigetti: „As for Frescobaldi, he has printed nothing new, except four madrigals to be sung with an organ, which he said should not be sung without an organ.“

¹¹ See note 4. In 1624, the organ builder Tommaso Meiarini (or Migliarini) built „a portable little organ, to be used both in church and in the theatre“, for the Gonzaga court in Mantua; see Mario Levri, *Gli organi di Mantova*, Trento 1976, p. 34.

¹² *Il corago o vero alcune osservazioni per mettere bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche*, modern edition edited by P. Fabbri and A. Pompilio, Florence 1983, pp. 84–85.

2. „Non vi è istromento che toccato resti fermo con il suono durabile meglio dell'organo, dove l'istromento a corde getta il suono che fugge [...]“ („No other instrument holds its notes with long-lasting sound better than the organ. A note produced by a plucked instrument just fades away [...].“)

3. „L'organo tien fermo il tuono dell'accordazione né vi è pericolo che con il caldo, quale suole essere grandissimo in simili spettacoli, si stemperi o cali di voce, dove l'istrumenti di corde non tengan punto fermo.“ („The organ keeps its tuning well, and there is no danger that heat, which is usually considerable during theatre performances, might cause its voice to decrease or fade. Plucked instruments, on the contrary, do not keep their tuning.“)

4. „Un organo si può tenere drento alle scene senza incomodità delle machine, si può anche fattamente accomodare con i registri chiusi et aperti a buona ragione o vero con le canne di sopra coperte che non offuschi la voce del cantante. [...]“ („An organ can be kept backstage without causing any inconvenience to the machinery. Its stops may also be adjusted to be drawn or pushed in according to the occasion, and its pipes may even be covered so as not to overwhelm the singer's voice.“)

I would now like to turn to the playing peculiarities which distinguish the organ from other continuo instruments.

In the words of Saint-Lambert „the organ, more self-sufficient than the harpsichord, does not need any of those devices one must resort to with the harpsichord to compensate for the instrument's dryness.“¹³ With the harpsichord, the main problem for correct execution of basso continuo is centered on the art of „not leaving the instrument without sound“, in Frescobaldi's words; in organ playing, the problem lies in adjusting the sound's density by controlling the registration, the number of voices harmonizing the bass, and their distribution on the keyboard. This also depends on the variety of genres the organ may accompany, ranging from one-voice compositions to polychoral works.

Any problem concerning the practice of organ continuo (registration, number and distribution of voices in chords etc.) depends essentially on the number of voices that the instrument is accompanying, as expressed by Agostino Agazzari, the first theorist on our subject:¹⁴

„Si deve suonare con molto giuditio, havendo mira al corpo delle voci, perché se sono molte convien suonar pieno e raddoppiar registri, ma se sono poche scemarli [i.e. scemarli] e metter poche consonanze, suonando l'opera più pura e giusta che sia possibile, non passagiando o rompendo molto ma sì bene aiutandola con qualche contrabasso.“ („One must play with good judgement, considering the number of voices, for if there are many it is best to play a full

¹³ M. de Saint-Lambert, *Nouveau traité de l'accompagnement de clavecin, de l'orgue et des autres instruments*, Paris 1707, p. 132.

¹⁴ Agostino Agazzari, *Del sonare sopra l basso con tutti li stromenti*, Siena 1607 (facsimile edition Bologna 1979) p. 6.

sound and double the stops, but if there are few one must reduce the stops and use less consonances, and play the music as purely and correctly as possible, without too many passages or divisions, and helping it along with some Contrabasso [lower octave]"

The Roman composer Romano Micheli also maintains that registration should depend strictly on the number of voices that the organ is accompanying, in his *Compieta a sei voci* (1616):¹⁵ „E' stato necessario fare il basso particolare per lo maestro di cappella, dove nel principio delle cantilene è annotato quali parti doveranno cantare, senza mettere dilatione di tempo & parimente sarà nel basso continuo per l'organo, acciò il perito organista possa sapere quando doverà dare più o meno organo nel concertare secondo le parti che canteranno.“ („It proved necessary to write a special bass part-book for the choir-master, specifying which voices are to sing at the beginning of the sections ... and likewise in the organ continuo, so that the experienced organist may know when to draw more or less organ stops depending on the number of voices.“)

Regarding registration in motets for few voices (one to four), the player is usually advised to use only the Principale and eventually to increase the amount of sound by filling in the chords and using the pedal. Viadana suggests as much in his *Concerti ecclesiastici*:¹⁶ „Quando si farà i ripieni dell'organo faransi con mani e piedi, ma senza aggiunta d'altri registri perché la natura di questi deboli & delicati concerti non sopportano quel tanto romore dell'organo aperto, oltre che nei piccioli concerti ha del pedantesco.“ („Filler parts on the organ, when needed, shall be played with hands and feet, but without adding any stops because the very nature of these weak and delicate concertos cannot sustain the full sound of the full organ, and in small concertos it would sound somewhat pedantic.“)

Accordingly, Ercole Porta advises the organist to play¹⁷ „... con poco numero di consonanze nel ristretto d'una, due voci, riserbando di porre in opera mani e piedi nei ripieni, senza però l'aggiunta d'altri registri.“ („... with a small number of consonances when accompanying no more than one or two voices, possibly using the hands and feet in the filler parts, but without adding any stops.“)

Costanzo Antegnati also confirms the use of „Principale solo quando si vol cantare mottetti con poche voci“ („the Principale alone when singing motets with few voices“), but allows the use of „Principale, Ottava & Flauto in ottava“ o „Principale & Flauto in ottava per far d'ogni cosa e concertar mottetti“ („Principale, Ottava, & Flauto in ottava“, and „Principale & Flauto in ottava to play any music and to accompany motets.“)¹⁸

¹⁵ Romano Micheli, *Compieta a sei voci*, Venice, G. Vincenzi, 1616, preface „Alli signori musici“ in the „*Basso particolare*“ and „*Basso per l'organo*“ part-books.

¹⁶ Ludovico Viadana, *Cento concerti ecclesiastici a una, a due, a tre e quattro voci*, Venice, G. Vincenzi, 1602, preface „A' benigni lettori“; see the modern edition, edited by Claudio Gallico, Kassel etc. 1964, p. 121–128, with contemporary Latin and German translations.

¹⁷ Ercole Porta, *Sacro convito musicale [...] opera settima*, Venice, A. Vincenzi, 1620, preface „A' benigni lettori“.

¹⁸ Costanzo Antegnati, *L'arte organica*, Brescia 1608 (facsimile edition Bologna 1971) c. [9v].

But the *concertato* polychoral style, which started to assert itself at the beginning of the seventeenth century, soon had an effect on the way organists registered their accompaniments: sudden changes in sound during the passage from „Soli“ to „Tutti“ were accompanied by an appropriate registration. This ranged between the use of the Principale alone and the Ripieno and vice versa, with the gradual drawing or pushing in of single Ripieno ranks, depending of course on the number of voices and instruments which were to be accompanied.

The registrations prescribed by Monteverdi in two Magnificats (for 7 voices and instruments, and for six voices) from the *Vespri della Beata Vergine* (1610) – previously studied by Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini¹⁹ – are fundamental to our subject. These prescriptions can be summarized as follows:

1–3 voices	Principale ²⁰ / Principale and Fifara
1 voice+instruments	Principale
4–6 voices	Principale and Ottava
6–7 voices	Principale, Ottava and Quintadecima
7 voices+instruments	Full organ („A organo pieno“)

We see that Monteverdi makes almost exclusive use of Principale family stops, with two exceptions only: in the first Magnificat's *Fecit Potentiam* for „three voices and three instruments“ we find indications for „Principale et registro delle fifare o voci humane“; and in the second Magnificat's *Fecit Potentiam* we find „Principale e Pifara.“ The Italian expression „Voce umana“ (or „voci umane“, human voices) was extremely ambiguous at the time, for it indicated two different registers: the former was a labial register, tuned with a slight beat to the Principale, the latter was a short-piped reed register equivalent to the regal. As the music in question is rather vigorous, I believe that Monteverdi was referring to the second kind, that is to the reed register. Indirect proof of this is the fact that during the same years, organ builders Giuseppe and Giovan Angelo Vitani built an organ for St. Andrew's church in Mantua which also had a „voce humana“ register. It was almost certainly a reed register, because it had 50 pipes, thus covering the whole range of the keyboard.²¹ In fact, a labial „voce humana“ register would have had about half that number of pipes, covering more or less the

¹⁹ Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini, „Registrazioni organistiche nei ‚Vespri‘ monteverdiani“, *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia* 2 (1967) pp. 365–371.

²⁰ It must be noted that in the second Magnificat's *Quia Respexit* for tenor solo, at the words „ancillae suae“, „tremolari“ is prescribed along with the Principale: it is probably the „tremolo“ or „tremolante“ effect, which was in use in Italian organs since mid-sixteenth century.

²¹ Oscar Mischiati, „Documenti sull' organaria padana rinascimentale: II. Organari a Cremona“, *L'organo* 23 (1985) pp. 212–213. For a survey of the ambiguous term „voce umana“ (and of its two synonyms „cornamuse“ and „fiffaro“ or „piffaro“) in Italian organ building of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, see Pier Paolo Donati, „Regesto documentario“, in: *Arte nell'Aretino. La tutela e il restauro degli organi storici*, Florence 1979, pp. 179, 186, 251–253.

keyboard's upper half. The use of the Principale together with a reed register is confirmed also by Giovan Battista Doni, who believes the „zampogne, che s'usano massimamente ne' regali [...] fa ottimo effetto negli organi mescolato col registro ordinario [Principale]“ („zampogna“ register, which is used mostly in the regals [...] produces excellent results when played on the organ along with the Principale.“)²²

There are a two exceptions to the above-mentioned scheme, but both have an explanation: in the first Magnificat's *Quia Respexit*, tenors and six instruments „li quali sonaranno con più forza che si può“ („which shall play as loud as they can“) are accompanied by the organ with Principale, Ottava and Quintadecima. Accordingly, in the second Magnificat's *Quia Respexit*, at the words „Omnes generationes“, where „la voce canta forte“ („the voice [of the tenors only] sings loud“), the organ plays Principale, Ottava and Quintadecima for obvious „color“ reasons. Other – albeit merely apparent– exceptions can be found, e.g. in the first Magnificat's *Et misericordia*, in the *Quia Fecit* for six voices and in the second Magnificat's *Sicut locutus*, for five voices. Here the use of the Principale in five- or six-voice polyphony would appear to be contradictory, but it is justified by the dialogical style of these three sections, in which the voices are divided into two half-choirs.

Monteverdi's suggestions seem to be in line with other prescriptions offered by the composers in the organ part-books of works published in the decade following the *Vesperi*'s first appearance. Such prescriptions mostly concern the *concertato* genre with a choir of soloists and one or more *ripieno* choirs. Introductory suggestions and prescriptions enclosed by other composers in the organ part-books of works published in the decade following the first issue of the *Vesperi* also seem to coincide with Monteverdi's indications.

In his *Modo di concertar i detti salmi a quattro cori* (published in 1612) Ludovico Viadana writes:²³ „L'organista starà vigilante per registrare a luogo e a tempo, e quando troverà queste parole VOTO e PIENO, doverà registrare voto e pieno. Quando nel detto choro canterà una voce, due tre, quattro, cinque, l'organista sonerà semplice e schietto non isminuendo, né facendo passaggi niente. Ne' ripieni poi suonerà come gli piacerà perché all'hora è il suo tempo.“ („The organist shall take care to register at the right time and place, and on finding the words Empty or Full, shall register empty and full. When the choir is singing with one, two, three, four or five voices, the organist shall play simply and sincerely without diminishing and without playing any passages. He shall play as he likes in the filler parts, because that is his moment.“)

²² Giovan Battista Doni, *Compendio del trattato de' generi e de' modi*, Roma 1635, p. 57, quoted by P. P. Donati, „Regesto“, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

²³ Ludovico Viadana, *Salmi a quattro chori per cantare e concertare nelle gran solennità di tutto l'anno*, Venice, A. Vincenzi, 1612. This „Modo di concertar“ has also been republished in Claudio Gallico, *L'età dell'umanesimo e del Rinascimento* („Storia della musica a cura della Società italiana di musicologia“ 3) Turin 1978, pp. 144–145.

An inspection of the organ part-book reveals that a „full“ organ is required in the sections in which the choirs are singing together and to accompany the four-voice „chapel choir“, actually composed of no less than sixteen singers, as suggested by Viadana himself. Only in one case, in the psalm *Laudate Dominum*, in order to accompany the „Tutti“ sung by the four choirs, the composer explicitly prescribes „Principale, Ottava and Quintadecima up to the Ripieno“, i.e. to be added at the end of the passage. An „empty“ organ (i.e. Principale alone) is used constantly to accompany the „first choir“, consisting of five vocal soloists.

Such indications are in line with those given by Sebastiano Miseroca in his *Messa, vespro [...] a otto voci* (1609):²⁴ „[i cantori] staranno avvertiti che quando sarà tempo di replicare [raddoppiare con le parti di ripieno] il sig. maestro di cappella ne darà segno, et anco udiranno l'organo accresciuto di registri, poiché essorto li signori organisti che in gratia mia l'acrescano in quel tempo di dua o tre registri.“ („[The singers] shall be informed that, when it is time to double [with the ripieno parts], the choir-master will signal, and they will also hear the organ play with more registers, for I ask the organists kindly to add two or three registers at that moment.“)

In a nutshell, Miseroca is asking the organist to add „two or three registers“ – probably Ottava and Quintadecima – when the soloists' choir joins the *ripieno* choir (or, *ad libitum*, choirs).

Similarly, in his *Il primo libro delli salmi a sette voci* (1613) arranged for two „split“ choirs, the Veronese Marcantonio Negri prescribes that the organ should use Ripieno when the choirs sing together:²⁵ „Avertisca il sig. organista che quando troverà nel basso continuo segnati ,a 3', che denoterà quando canta tre solli (sic). & anco segnato ,a 4' quanda canta il secondo coro a quattro, & quando havrà segnato ,tutti' lì metterà il ripieno, & queste notazioni saranno tra una riga e l'altra dove si anotanno le parole.“ („The organist must note that ,a 3' written in the continuo' part indicates three singers only, and also tha ,a 4' indicates that the second four-part choir is singing, and ,Tutti' indicates that he must use *Ripieno*, and these prescriptions will be placed between the lines where the words are usually printed.“)

The same ideas are subscribed even more explicitly in Giovanni Ghizzolo's *Messa, Salmi, Lettanie* (1619):²⁶ „Li organisti per haver più facilità nel mettere o levare li registri secondo il bisogno, potranno riguardare agl'infrascritti segni e primieramente dove troveranno questa parola ,FORTE' tutta distesa, sarà inditio

²⁴ Sebastiano Miseroca, *Messa, vespro, motetti et letanie*, Venice 1609 „avvertimento“ *Alli signori musici* in the organ part-book, quoted in Paolo Fabbri, *Tre secoli di musica a Ravenna*, Ravenna 1983, pp. 32–33.

²⁵ Marcantonio Negri, *Il primo libro delli salmi a sette voci*, Venice, heir of A. Gardano, 1613, preface „A' lettori“.

²⁶ Giovanni Ghizzolo, *Messa, Salmi, lettanie della B.V., falsibordoni et Gloriapatri concertati a cinque o nove [...] opera decimaquinta*, Venice 1619, „Avvertimenti dell'autore alli cantori et organisti“.

che entri il secondo choro et si facci ripieno; ma quando troveranno la sola lettera ,F', sarà segno che entri il secondo choro, ma senza ripieno; e quando si troverà la parola ,PIANO', sarà cenno che cessi il secondo choro e canti solo il primo. [...] ritrovandosi le infrascritte lettere ,C.A.T.Q.B.' sarà segno che sotto a dette lettere entrino le parti del Canto, Alto, [Tenore], Quinto, [Basso], sì che secondo la necessità di più o meno organo per il concerto potranno l'organisti porre più o meno registri conforme il bisogno.“ („In order to make it easier for organists to know each time when to draw or push in the stops, they may look at the indications written between the part lines, and especially for the word ,FORTE' written in full, indicating that the second choir is singing and *Ripieno* is required; but when they find the letter ,F' alone, that indicates that the second choir will sing, but without *Ripieno*; on finding the word ,PIANO', the second choir will stop singing and the first choir will sing alone. [...] The letters ,C.A.T.Q.B.' signify that beneath these letters Canto, Alto (Tenor) Quinto, (Basso) voices are joining in, and the organists will be able to use more or less stops and therefore produce a greater or lesser sound, as the need arises.“)

A further example of registration for organ continuo is in Cesare Bianchi's *Secondo libro de' mottetti* (1620): in the introtus *Gaudeamus omnes* and in the Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie and Credo of the later *Messa della gloriosissima Vergine Maria* (for four voices) alternation between „Principale“ and „Ripieno“²⁷ is prescribed for the „soli“ – for one and two voices – and four-voice „tutti.“ Only twenty years earlier, Viadana would have judged this solution „somewhat pedantic.“ Nevertheless, this kind of registration – empty organ/full organ –, like those suggested by Negri, Micheli and Ghizzolo, reflect changes which had occurred in the practice of polyphony over a period of just a few years: polyphony based on counterpoint, which usually employed only one voice for each part, had changed to a polychoral, concertato style polyphony which was especially common in northern Italy and required great contrast between soloist and ripieno group, each of whose parts were executed by two or three voices.

Besides, in spite of what Tagliavini wrote 25 years ago, Monteverdi's indication may no doubt be considered a model of organ registration.²⁸ It does not seem to differ from the general practice of the time, and in fact Viadana's (1602) and Ercole Porta's (1620) suggestions for dealing with motets with a limited number of voices conform to Monteverdi's scheme.

Willem Hermans, a Flemish organ-builder who worked in Italy for many years, supplies us with further rules for the registration of organ continuo. His *Descrizione dell'organo nuovo della cattedrale di Como*, published anonymously in 1650 for the inauguration of his famous three-keyboard organ,

²⁷ Giulio Cesare Bianchi, *Secondo libro de' mottetti [...] a una, due, tre, quattro e cinque voci et una messa a quattro [...] con le Letanie a sei del sig. Claudio Monteverdi*, Venice, A. Vincenzi, 1620.

²⁸ Tagliavini, „Registrazioni“, pp. 368–369.

describes that instrument's stops and features:²⁹ „Le canne del principal secondo [16'] sono di legno, unisono con il primo, il qual serve per cantar a voce sola overo con istrumenti.“ („The second principale pipes [16'] are wooden, and in unison with the first, which is for accompanying both a solo voice and instruments.“)

This stands as significant proof of what could easily be guessed: that wooden stops were used in the Italian organ. Furthermore, after compiling an extraordinary list of suggestions for registration, the organ-builder adds six more rules „per la musica“ („for the music“), i.e. for the accompaniment of vocal music:³⁰

- „1. Il principal primo overo secondo. (The first Principale and the second)
2. Li due principali insieme. (The two Principali together)
3. Li due principali ed ottava. (The two Principali and the Ottava)
4. Il principal secondo ed ottava. (The second Principale and the Ottava)
5. Si aggiunge qualche volta la tromba e tromboni. (Add Tromba and Tromboni sometimes)
6. Il principal terzo e voce umana. (The third Principale and Voce umana).“

The last two, suggesting the use of reed stops in basso continuo, are quite remarkable: „Tromba and Tromboni“ (on the first keyboard) and „Voce umana“ (on the second), always with their own keyboard's Principale stops.

Nevertheless, considering that the regal was often used for accompanying voices and instruments, the use of reed stops in organ continuo should not be surprising.³¹ It must also be pointed out that, like Hermans, Monteverdi and Doni prescribe use of the short-piped reed register („voci humane“, „cornamuse“) together with the Principale.

A further remark about Hermans' rules: one must recognize that very few Italian church organs had wooden stops like the ones his instrument had; on the other hand, almost all of them were built with two Principale stops, open and in unison, made of metal (tin or lead). In spite of the high cost, it was decided that the organ should have two Principale stops probably because the instrument was often intended for continuo playing: these two stops differ slightly in sound intensity – above all, because the first is almost completely on the façade, the second inside the case – and were used both singly and together, making three different timbre nuances possible.

Speaking about organ registration, allow me to make an organological annotation. The above-mentioned composers (Ghizzolo, Negri, Viadana) all agree in suggesting the use of Ripieno in the „Tutti“, that is when the choirs sing to-

²⁹ *Descrizione dell'organo nuovo della cattedrale di Como, fabbricato l'anno 1650, da Guglielmo Herman religioso della Compagnia di Gesù, Como 1650; modern edition in Renato Lunelli', „Descrizione dell'organo di Como e l'attività italiana di Guglielmo Hermans“, Collectanea Historiae Musicae 2, Florence 1956, pp. 255–276: 273.*

³⁰ Lunelli, *Descrizione*, p. 276.

³¹ See note 5.

gether. For this reason, as polychoral music gradually became more frequent – at least in the most solemn occasions – it became necessary to build organs with a device which would enable the organist to quickly draw all the stops of the Ripieno ranks at the same time, „per la prestezza della musicha e concerti“ („for the quickness of music and concerts“), as organ-builder Michele Colberg explained in 1697.³² In fact, at the end of the first half of the seventeenth century a new device started to come into use, the „Tiratutti“ which could be worked by hand and could draw all of the Ripieno ranks starting usually from the Ottava. The earliest known Tiratutti, called „registro universale“ in the documents, is still visible inside a surviving organ which was sold to the Roman church of Santa Maria della Consolazione by Everardo Troncaro, a Lorenese organ-builder, in 1646.³³

It is also likely that two-keyboard organs, which were not common but certainly not a rarity in Italy during the seventeenth century,³⁴ were useful for accompanying the sudden Solo/Tutti passages of the concertato style. It is important to note that two of the organs built under the supervision of Emilio de' Cavalieri – one of the fathers of the monodic style –, one in S.Maria in Aracoeli in Rome (1586) and the other in Pisa Cathedral (1597–99), both have a double keyboard. Another motivation for the double keyboard may be found in an interesting, if somewhat later, example: in 1720 organ-builder Filippo Testa presented a project for changes to be made on the organ inside the choir-chapel of the Vatican basilica. The project included a second keyboard „per concertar dal piano al forte come si richiede dal sig. maestro di cappella [Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni] e dall'organista [Giacomo Simonelli]“ („for the accompaniment to change from piano to forte, as requested by the choir-master [Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni] and the organist [Giacomo Simonelli].“)³⁵

As mentioned earlier, problems regarding organ continuo concern not only registration but also the number and distribution on the keyboard of the different parts harmonizing the basso continuo. Regarding the number of parts, obviously it must be related to the number of voices they are accompanying. Thus, for one-voice compositions theorists recommend „pure consonances“: third, fifth, and octave, while compositions for many voices allow or even require that all consonances be doubled.

Among the host of contributions on the matter, I will quote the one by Penna, who is not as inaccurate as most of those who treat this problem:³⁶ „Quando si accompagna una sol voce, non si deve suonare più di tre overo [ma di rado]

³² Renato Lunelli, *Studi e documenti di storia organaria veneta*, Florence 1973, p. 89. The quoted sentence refers to Colberg's work on the organ in the Chiesa del Carmine in Padua in 1696–97.

³³ Jean Lionnet, „La musique à Santa Maria della Consolazione de Rome au dix-septième siècle“, *Note d'archivio per la storia musicale*, n.s., 4 (1986) pp. 192–193.

³⁴ See note 3.

³⁵ Renato Lunelli, *L'arte organaria del Rinascimento a Roma e gli organi di San Pietro in Vaticano dalle origini a tutto il periodo frescobaldiano*, Florence 1958, p. 87, n.42.

³⁶ Lorenzo Penna, *Li primi albori musicali*, Bologna 1672, p. 198.

quattro tasti, e non è bene che vi ponga l'ottava di sopra. A due similmente si devono adoperar pochi tasti & fuggir l'ottava. A tre & quattro voci si può empire un poco più, ma rare volte si deve raddoppiare il fondo, quando è su li Mi o su li diesis [ossia negli accordi di sesta]. A otto, tre chori e a quattro chori etc. si empia e radoppi pure le repliche, li diesis e ciò si vuole, perché farà bel sentire tanta varietà d'armonia. („When accompanying a single voice, never play more than three or [rarely] four keys, and it is not advisable to add the higher octave. With two, one must still use few keys and avoid the octave. With three or four voices, one can fill in a little more, but seldom double the bass-line, when it is an E or a sharp note [i.e. in sixth chords]. With eight voices, three choirs, four choirs etc. it is allowed to fill in and double the parts, the flat notes and anything one pleases, because such a varied harmony will produce a pleasant sound.“)

Concerning the problem of the distribution of parts on the keyboard, basso continuo treatises usually maintain that in one-voice compositions chords must be in the same range as the solo part.

Alessandro Poglietti³⁷ and a late seventeenth-century anonymous treatise³⁸ agree in limiting the right hand's range to the d'' of the tenor's range, as suggested by the above-mentioned Giulio Cesare Bianchi:³⁹ „Si compiaceranno li signori organisti di dar li accompagnamenti al basso con la mano destra in voce di tenore, mentre canterà una parte sola, e sarà il simile anco quando canteranno due e tre parti concertate ché così le voci havranno maggior soavità e s'intenderà più chiaramente l'oratione, altrimenti facendo si occuperebbero le voci e non sarebbe il canto tanto grato alli ascoltanti.“ („Organists will be so kind as to realize continuo with the right hand within the tenor's range when there is only one voice singing, and will do the same when there are two or three parts singing together, so the voices will sound sweeter and the words will be more understandable; otherwise, the voices would be overwhelmed and the result unpleasant for the listeners.“)

But one problem remains unsolved, which keyboard-players are confronted with when playing continuo on ancient Italian church-organs: how to control the Principale's sound intensity, particularly when accompanying a small number of voices or instruments.

In order to understand the problem, one must not underestimate the role played by the left hand in the execution of continuo; it plays the fundamental chords in the positions „ottava vuota“ and „ottava piena“ (i.e. with the fifth in the middle), „quinta vuota“ and „quinta piena“ (with the third in the middle) and „tasto solo“, as the bass-line moves gradually from low to high notes. Thus the right hand

³⁷ Alessandro Poglietti, *Compendium* (1676) quoted in Georg Muffat, *An essay on thoroughbass*, edited by Helmut Federhofer, Rome, American Institute of Musicology 1961, p. 9.

³⁸ *Artis magnae consoni et dissoni*, quoted in Muffat, *An essay, op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.

³⁹ Bianchi, *Secondo libro de' mottetti*, „Avvisamento alli signori organisti“, op. cit.

will have only one or two keys to play, and will find it much easier not to play higher than the voices or instruments it is accompanying.

Galeazzo Sabbatini provides another interesting outlook on the subject. His treatise (1628) has always been somewhat neglected by scholars, probably because it was only partially published; in fact, no trace remains of its second part. Sabbatini writes the following:⁴⁰ „Tutto il fondamento del sonar sopra il basso sta nella mano sinistra, la quale dovrà caminare regolatamente toccando la nota o col tasto solo o in compagnia d'esso una sol consonanza come è l'ottava o la quinta o la sesta, ovvero la terza. [...] quelle consonanze le quali deve haver la nota e che non saranno toccate dalla sinistra si dovranno supplire dalla destra, ma però dal G 2° fino al B 3°“ („The foundation of performing continuo is in the left hand, which must move in an orderly fashion, playing the note either with a single key or accompanying it with a single consonance; that may be the octave, the fifth, the sixth, or the third. [...] The necessary consonances that cannot be played by the left hand will have to be produced by the right, between G and b'.“)

Above all, we must remark that Sabbatini confines the right hand's extension to the space between G and b', entrusting the harmonization mainly to the left hand, whose notes more or less depend on the bass' position on the keyboard. For this reason Sabbatini divides the bass's keys into five „sections“, each of which implies different possibilities for the left hand:⁴¹ „Nelle note della prima divisione [Do₁-Fa₁] [...] con la sinistra si toccheranno l'ottave o i tasti soli [...] Nelle note della seconda divisione [Sol₁-Re₂] [...] la sinistra toccherà l'ottava o la quinta o la terza [...]. Nelle note della terza divisione [Mi₂-Sol₂] [...] si tocca o la quinta o la terza, l'ottava non si tocca perché nel dare il restante de gl' accompagnamenti con la destra si verrebbe troppo negli acuti. [Nel discendere] tasto solo o terza [...].

Nella quarta divisione [La₂-Si₂] si tocca solamente o la terza o il tasto solo [...]. Nella quinta divisione [Do₃-Re₃] si toccano i tasti soli [...]. („For the notes of the first section (CC-FF) [...] the left will either play the octaves or only the keys [...]. In the second section (GG-D) [...] the left hand will play either the octave, the fifth, or the third [...]. In the third section (EE-G) either the fifth or the third may be played, but not the octave because the rest of the accompanying notes played by the right hand would rise too high. [Descending] either only one key, or the third [...]. In the fourth section (A-B) it is either the third alone, or the key alone [...]. In the fifth section (c'-d') the keys alone shall be played.“)

Sabbatini also supplies an example of how to distribute the notes in the chord between the right and the left hand, and he is concerned more with keeping the right hand away from the high notes of the keyboard than with contrapuntal rules.

⁴⁰ Galeazzo Sabbatini, *Regola facile e breve per sonare sopra il basso continuo nell'organo, manacordo & altro simile istrumento*, Venice, Salvadori, 1628, pp. 10-23.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

In this excerpt – transcribed in full as indicated by Sabbatini himself – the left hand’s typical positions are easily recognizable: „empty“ positions, when only the simple consonances, octave and fifth, are played (two keys); „full“ positions, when a middle note is added to an octave or a fifth, respectively a fifth or a third (three keys).

8 V 8 P 6 5 V 5 P 3 V 3 P S V S P 3 S

S P S V 3 P 3 V 5 P 5 V 8 P 8 V 6 8 P 8 V

(3, 5, 8 ... = terza, quinta, ottava ...; S = tasto solo; P = pieno/a; V = vuoto/a).

Example 1. G. Sabbatini, *Regola facile e breve per sonare sopra il basso continuo nell'organo* [...] (Venice, 1628); reconstructed by the author.

This example clearly indicates that low notes are in a *lata* (wide) position, and as we proceed towards the higher notes, they tend to draw closer together, and are reduced from four to two.

Galeazzo Sabbatini’s ideas can be found basically unchanged even in other theoretical works of the second half of the seventeenth century, such as those by Pietro Paolo Sabbatini (1650),⁴² Bartolomeo Bismantova (1677)⁴³ and Angelo Furio,⁴⁴ up to Gasparini.⁴⁵

As I said at the outset, this essay lays no claim to being more than a collection of documents introducing the subject of organ continuo; most of the documents are unknown or at least have never been considered useful to this subject. I believe that the problem of organ continuo will be greatly clarified by the study of treatises, by examination of the many organological documents available in Italy, and by the study of musical iconography.⁴⁶

Let us conclude, as far as sacred music is concerned, by considering the use of the Italian organ, with its typical Principale (the diameter of its pipes is me-

⁴² Pietro Paolo Sabbatini, *Toni ecclesiastici [...] Modo per sonare il basso continuo [...] libro primo, opera decimottava*, Roma 1650, p. 17.

⁴³ Bartolomeo Bismantova, *Compendio musicale* (Ms. Ferrara, 1677, in I-REm) facsimile edition Florence 1978.

⁴⁴ Angelo Furio, *Armonica cultura* (Ms. in I-Bc, D.52, cc. 3–4; other copy in I-Rli, Mus.F.5).

⁴⁵ Francesco Gasparini, *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo*, Venice 1708, pp. 25–26.

⁴⁶ See Arnaldo Morelli, „Storia dell'organo italiano. Bibliografia (1958–1992)“, *Le fonti musicali in Italia* 6 (1992) pp. 25–92.

dium-sized, its mouth low, and the wind pressure low) and relative ranks of Ripieno. Use of the pedal in supporting the bass should not be neglected, especially in 16' organs, which an organist would obviously play in the upper octave; the great 16' Italian organs of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had between 15 and 22 pedals. Nor should the use of reed stops (especially of the „regale“ kind), used in specific cases to render the force of the words also from the point of view of timbre (for instance, the masterful example of Monteverdi's *Fecit Potentiam*) be neglected. Even when the continuo in sacred music is played by a small positive organ instead of a large „wall-organ“, I would certainly avoid the use of instruments based on the 8' stopped Diapason. Because the old Italian positive organs had stopped, at most, only the first octave of the 8' Principale, while all the remaining pipes were open.

To my way of thinking, the organ could also be used more in *concerti grossi* and in the so-called „church sonatas“, as this kind of music was prevalently used in major liturgical celebrations (masses and vespers) and oratorios.

As mentioned above, various kinds of organ were used in stage-music and opera: an „organo di pivette“ is used in Malvezzi's music, e.g. in the *Intermedii et concerti* of *La Pellegrina* (Florence, 1589); an „organo soave“, which was probably a wooden organ, was requested by Cavalieri for the *Rappresentazione di Anima e Corpo* (Rome, 1600) and plays in Peri's opera *Euridice* (Florence, 1600) and *L'Amor pudico* (Rome, 1614); the „regale“ and the „wooden organ“ are indicated in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (Mantua, 1607), while a wooden organ is used in *La Liberazione di Ruggiero dall'Isola di Alcina* by Francesca Caccini (Florence, 1625) and in later Italian works such as Antonio Cesti's *Il pomo d'oro* (Vienna, 1666) which requires a „regale“ and a „graviorgano“. From this short, certainly incomplete, but quite representative list, it emerges that the different kinds of Italian organ were used above all in operas and other musical performances which took place in the aristocrats' palaces and courts. There is no doubt that the large collections of instruments owned by these noble families encouraged the use of a wide range of instruments for these performances. The great variety of timbres was used to enhance the multitude of symbols in the „*drammi per musica*“, „*favole pastorali*“, and „*favole marittime*“ of seventeenth-century Italy.

There is no instrument that incarnates the essence of „concerto“ in its baroque meaning, better than the organ. Thanks to its flexibility of sound, and its ability to accompany musical forces of all kinds – from the single-voice motet to polychoral music, from the *concertato* to the *stile osservato* motet, from the solo-sonata to the *concerto grosso* –, and thanks to the variety of existing organs (great organs, positive organs with metal or wooden pipes, regals, etc.), this instrument can adapt to any situation both in sacred and in secular music.

I hope that the documents I have presented above will encourage performers to reconsider the use of organ in Italian music of the Baroque period.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ An appeal for greater use of organ continuo in Italian baroque music was made also by Denis W. Stevens, „Why not get Organized?“, *The Diapason*, Dec. 1992.

