

Zeitschrift: Basler Beiträge zur Historischen Musikpraxis : Veröffentlichungen der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

Herausgeber: Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

Band: 39 (2019)

Artikel: "Tanto che non si potrebbe sentire cosa più bella" : the harp as basso continuo instrument in Rome at the time of Orazio Michi

Autor: Galassi, Mara / Granata, Chiara

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-961729>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 08.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

“Tanto che non si potrebbe sentire cosa più bella”

The harp as *basso continuo* instrument in Rome at the time of Orazio Michi

Mara Galassi and Chiara Granata

Sono andato alcune volte pensando, che un Poema simile all'Oronta del Sig. Giulio Preti, modulato con melodia convenevole, e recitato da un buon Recitante, e perito Musico, il quale sopra tutto avesse una soave, e sonora voce, come quella del Sig. Francesco Bianchi, farebbe mirabile sentire, massime accompagnata dal suono dolcissimo dell'Arpa del Sig. Orazio, e tanto, che non si potrebbe sentire cosa più bella.

Giovanni Battista Doni, *Trattato della musica scenica*¹

I have sometimes thought that a Poem similar to the Oronta of Sig. Giulio Preti, set to an appropriate melody and recited by a good Actor and expert Musician, who had above all a sweet and sonorous voice like that of Sig. Francesco Bianchi, would make for formidable listening; at best, when accompanied by the melodious sound of Sig. Orazio's harp; such, that you could not hear anything more beautiful.

Introduction

This article would like to draw the reader's attention to a certain number of Roman sources from the beginning of the seventeenth century that contain references to the *arpa doppia* and its use as a *basso continuo* instrument.² At

¹ Giovan Battista Doni, *Trattato della musica scenica*, in: idem, *De' trattati di musica*, Vol. 2, ed. Anton Francesco Gori Florence: Stamperia Imperiale 1763, 1–144: 22. All translations of sources are by Giovanna Baviera unless stated otherwise.

² This paper was jointly conceived by the authors, who developed the following chapters respectively: Chiara Granata 1, 2, and 5 Mara Galassi 3, 4, and 6. The authors wish to thank Paul Beier and Emma Huijsser for their valuable contribution and Giovanna Baviera for the English translation.

that time, polyphonic instruments were commonly grouped together in practice, and were thus rarely referred to individually in written musical sources. However, treatises, chronicles, and epistolary exchanges between scholars show that characteristic roles were also attributed to each instrument specifically, so that each maintained its own peculiarity.

In reviving the idiom of the Italian seventeenth-century harp, we can be guided and inspired by an exploration of the effect that the instrument had in its time and of the *affetti* it was able to stir in the listener, as well as by an assessment of its role in ensemble performance. It is necessary to remind ourselves that what is written in sources does not represent a universal norm, but rather indicates the writers' personal points of view: these opinions often relate specifically to a certain repertoire and are subject to the individual writer's tastes and preferences. In any case these sources present precious points of view, laying the groundwork for us in rethinking the musical styles and gestures that have been generated in recent times as part of a historically informed practice. We will begin by examining the aesthetic categories of "majesty" and visual "fullness" as they relate to the harp, the harp's absence, or, contrarily, its desired and admired presence on a theatre stage – a presence inextricably linked with the harp's implied reference to Antiquity. We will then go on to analyse various questions relative to tunings and temperaments. We will underline the instrument's potential dynamic power compared to that of its plucked counterparts, ending with a brief excursus consisting of musical examples in which the harp is specifically mentioned within the ensemble of instruments. We will conclude with a few comments on selected pieces for voice and an intabulated theorbo part, which, though lower in *ambitus*, is a useful example because it is written for a plucked instrument with a wide dynamic scope.

1. The harp's majesty: the instrument's "aural image"

In a passage from *Annotazioni sopra il compendio del trattato de' generi*, in which the violin's possibilities are praised, Giovanni Battista Doni enumerates the particular characteristics of different musical instruments, which the skilled violinist should be able to evoke:

In somma egli rappresenta, quando è in mano d'un perito sonatore, la dolcezza del Liuto, la soauità della Viola, la maestà dell'Arpa, la veemenza della Tromba, la viuacità del piffero, il querulo del Flauto, il patetico del Cornetto; & quasi ogni varietà, che nella gran macchina dell'Organo, con mirabil'artifizio si sente.³

In short, when in the hands of an able player, it [the violin] expresses the sweetness of the lute, the melodiousness of the viol, the majesty of the harp, the vehemence of the trumpet, the liveliness of the *piffero*, the plaintiveness of the flute, the poignancy of the cornetto, and virtually any colour that the organ, with great artifice, can produce.

The aesthetic category chosen to describe the harp is "majesty" or "magnificence": in other words it is described as a solemn and stable aural presence that finds its fundament in the bass frequencies that are produced by the instrument. On the basis of this description, it would seem that Doni perceives the *arpa doppia* not as delicate and ethereal, but rather as deep and sonorous, with an overall timbre determined by the part of the instrument that had recently undergone the most substantial structural development: the lower bass-strings. We will not discuss the already well known facts on the development of the instrument's construction: suffice it to say that the *arpa doppia* was a large instrument (also known as *grande arpa* or *arpone*), often finely carved and sculpted, particularly on the column, evoking a grandiose visual impact which was often as significant, if not more, than the effect of the harp's sound. We will limit this discussion to the surviving instrument that embodies the characteristics of many harps described in the sources: the so-called "Barberini harp", the most important surviving Roman instrument from the early seventeenth century.⁴

If the harp's peculiarity was its magnificence, it would follow that the expectation of the instrument was also subject to this aesthetic and aural ideal. Giovan Battista Doni's comment on the relationship between "majesty", Dorian mode, and the harp points clearly to this connection of visual and aural ideals:

³ Giovan Battista Doni, *Annotazioni sopra il Compendio del trattato de' generi e de' modi della musica*, Rome: Andrea Fei 1640, 338.

⁴ Cf. Chiara Granata, "Un'arpa grande tutta intagliata e dorata. New documents on the Barberini harp", in: *Recercare* 27 (2015) 139–164.

Gli ordinarj, o principali registri (che si faranno di stagno) benchè devono rendere il suono comune degli Organi; tuttavia è convenevole variarli in modo, che il Dorio renda quanto si può il suono magnifico, e maestoso, quale si richiede massimamente nelle Musiche sacre. [...] E perché la Citara, e Lira antica, che hanno grande analogia con l'Arpa, si reputavano molto proporzionate all'Armonia Doria (e perciò credo che Pindaro desse alla Citara l'aggiunto di Doria) ci sforzeremo in somma, che il registro Dorio si accosti quanto più si può al suono dell'Arpa [...]⁵

The registers known as *ordinarj*, or *principali* (composed of tin-pipes), though they must produce a recognisable organ sound, should however be altered so as to render the Dorian mode as magnificent and majestic as possible, which is particularly required in sacred music. [...] And since the *cythara* and ancient lyre, which have strong analogies with the harp, were considered very fitting to the Dorian mode (it is for this reason that I think Pindar gave it the appellation “of Doria”), we will, in short, make an effort to make the Dorian registration as close as possible to the sound of the harp [...]”

2. Comparisons, classifications, preferences: which instrument was best suited to playing *basso continuo*? Doni's and Mersenne's correspondence in 1638

Making a classification of instruments by comparing their qualities was common practice both in printed sources and in private correspondence between scholars. On the basis of a theoretical dispute, positive and negative aspects of a thesis and of its contrary were listed in order to reach an Aristotelian mean position. Even objects, and among these musical instruments, were subject to this system of comparison, as each theoretician's thesis became the subject of discussion for whomever wished to challenge it. With this kind of argumentation Marin Mersenne evaluates strengths and weaknesses of different string instruments with a bass function: the harpsichord, the lute and the harp. In a passage from *Harmonie universelle*, Mersenne compares the spinet and the lute, showing how the two harmonic instruments compete for

⁵ Doni, *Musica scenica* (see n. 1), 49–50. See also in the *Discorso mandato da Gio: de' Bardi a Giulio Caccini detto Romano, Sopra la musica antica, e 'l cantar bene*, in: Doni, *ibid.*, 238.

perfection. The spinet allows one to play polyphonically with more voices, whereas the lute has the advantage of comfort, grace and sweetness.⁶ Comparing the harp to the spinet, however, Mersenne notes that the former is inferior insofar as it is endowed with what others would consider a strength – a greater resonance – which constitutes a hindrance for the harmony and forces the performer to damp the strings.

Quant à la Harpe, elle semble surpasser l’Epinette, en ce qu’elle retient les sons de resonnement plus long temps, car ses sons s’amortissent par le drap qui est pres de la plume, quoy que l’on puisse dire que ce resonnement de la Harpe nuit plustost qu’il ne sert à l’harmonie, si le ioüeur ne l’esteint avec ses doigts, aus quels supplent les petits morceaux de drap de l’Epinette.⁷

As to the Harp, it seems to surpass the spinet, in that it retains the tones in resonance a longer time, for [the spinet’s] tones are damped by a cloth which is close to the quill, although it can be said that this resounding of the harp more often harms than helps the harmony, if the player does not damp it with his fingers, which the small bits of cloth of the spinet replace.⁸

After reading the *Harmonie universelle*, Giovan Battista Doni wrote a letter to Mersenne containing certain passages that are of great interest for us today, both in what concerns musical life in Italy at the time and our knowl-

⁶ Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 2. Part: "Traité des instruments à cordes", Book 3, Paris: Pierre Ballard 1637, 101; English translation: Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle. The books on instruments*, trans. Roger E. Chapman, The Hague: Springer Science + Business Media 1957, 154. The *Harmonie universelle* constitutes a fundamental reference point for our knowledge of instruments in use at this time. Regarding the harp we would like to draw the reader’s attention to certain passages on the triple-strung harp and some annotations on new instruments contained in Proposition XI; Mersenne describes having received via Monsieur Bouchard a letter containing a description of a harp made by Stefano Landi after he had written the section on harps in the *Harmonie universelle*. Through Jean Jacques Bouchard, Cardinal Barberini’s secretary of Latin letters, Mersenne gathered that this harp had been invented thirty or forty years earlier by Luca Antonio Eustachio, a Neapolitan gentleman in Pope Paul V’s service, and that Orazio Michi had perfected the instrument, playing it with excellency.

⁷ Mersenne, *Harmonie* (see n. 6), 107.

⁸ Mersenne/Chapman, *Harmonie* (see n. 6), 159.

edge of the harp. Dated 7th August 1638, the letter is one of Doni's most extensive.⁹ It opens with a reference to musical theory of Antiquity, a recurrent theme in epistolary exchanges between the two scholars; Doni then goes on to critically evaluate certain passages of the *Harmonie universelle*. He considers the qualities of the instruments, and after having summarised and critiqued Mersenne's position, he dwells a moment on the harp, writing the following interesting statement:

En la comparaison que vous faites au *Livre premier des Istrumens*, où vous préferez l'espинette à la harpe, pource qu'elle maintient plus son accord, je vous dirai que noz musiciens ne sont pas de mesme avis, veu qu'ils estiment plus la harpe, pource qu'elle a *il piano e le forte*, c'est à dire qu'on peut jouer plus fort et plusellement avec plusieurs differences. Ce que l'on pratique quand on accompagne des melodies pathetiques et variées. Et sans doute que ceste qualité est bien plus considerable que celle de l'espинette.¹⁰

In the comparison that you make in the *First Book of Instruments*, where you prefer the spinet to the harp, because [the harp] maintains the sound longer, I would tell you that our musicians do not have the same opinion, since they consider the harp worthier because it has *piano* and *forte*, meaning that one can play louder and more beautifully with more nuances. Which is what one puts into practice when one accompanies moving and variegated melodies. And there is no doubt that this quality is far more considerable [in the harp] than in the spinet.

The harp is preferred over the keyboard instrument for its great potential for dynamic variation, a quality particularly useful in the accompaniment of melodies described as “*pathetiques et variées*”, in other words, in vocal pieces where musical setting follows the dramatic dynamic contained in the text, as occurs in monodies of the *moderna pratica*. The qualities that make the harp particularly praiseworthy relate to its use as an accompanying instrument: its greater sound duration in comparison with the spinet, the amount of sound it can produce in comparison with the lute, and also its dynamic scope, which is greater than that of either instrument, and gives the harp the con-

⁹ Marin Mersenne, *Correspondance*, Paris: C. de Waard and Pintard 1932, Vol. 8, 7–25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

crete ability to follow the *affetti* and to illustrate even the smallest nuance of the text.

Doni's letter concludes by drawing attention to an Italian anomaly, where an instrument with three rows of strings is called *arpa doppia*. Thus, what can be inferred from musical literature for harp of this time is confirmed: the harp had indeed been modified to include a third row of strings, despite the fact that it was still described as a "double harp" in sources. The term *arpa doppia* thus could mean an instrument with either two or three rows of strings.¹¹

3. The stage: some considerations on the placement of instruments

The central question examined in various Roman theoretical texts from the beginning of the seventeenth century is that of the disposition of instruments onstage and, accordingly, of their proximity or distance from the singers. One can observe how this issue was of great significance already in the foreword to the print of Emilio de' Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo*. A fixed disposition of instruments had not yet been developed: their positions were instead the result of experimentation, and would depend on how a specific performance space – sometimes of large dimensions – was used.¹² Cavalieri suggests that the instruments be kept hidden from the audience, but not too far away from the singers:

¹¹ Ibid., 20: "Au reste il y auroit moyen de rendre beaucoup plus parfaict le nostre harpe grande (qu'on appelle *double* quoiqu'elle soit *triple*), soit en la qualité du son y adjoustant un autre corps, soit en l'harmonie (que je prens au vray sens) y disposant, en 3 ou 4 rangs de chordes, deux ou plusieurs tons à la facon des Anciens et des espinettes qu'on a commencé à fabriquer ici." // "For the rest, there would be ways to perfect our big harp (that we call *double* though it is *triple*), both in sound quality, by adding another body, and in harmony (in its true sense) by providing it with 3 or 4 rows of strings, and with two or more *tons* in the manner of the Ancients and of the spinets that we have started building here."

¹² Alessandro Guidotti, *A' lettori*, in: Emilio de' Cavalieri, *Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo nuovamente posta in luce dal Signor Emilio del Cavaliere per recitar cantando, data in luce da Alessandro Guidotti Bolognese*, Rome: Nicolò Mutij, 1600, [3].

E gli stromenti, perché non siano veduti, si debbano suonare dietro le tele della scena e da persone che vadino secondando chi canta, e senza diminuzioni e pieno.¹³

And so that they may not be seen, the instruments should be played behind the stage curtains by musicians who follow the singer, playing without diminutions and with a full sound.

The author concludes that the instruments' use should vary according to the *affetti* expressed by the performer on stage:

E per dare qualche lume di quelli che in luogo simile hanno servito, una lira doppia, un clavicembalo, un chitarrone, o tiorba che si dica, insieme fanno bonissimo effetto; come ancora un organo suave con un chitarrone. Ed il signor Emilio laudarebbe mutare li stromenti conforme all'affetto del recitante.¹⁴

And to give an idea of the kind [of instrument] that was used in similar places, a *lira doppia*, a harpsichord, a *chitarrone*, or theorbo if you prefer, together create a very good effect; as does a sweet-sounding organ with a *chitarrone*. And *signor Emilio* would also praise changing the instruments in conformity with the *affetti* of he who recites.

The aim of the flexible disposition described in Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione* is that of amplifying the texts' expressive effect and of aligning the intentions of instrumentalists and singers; the most valuable recommendation on the *continuo* realisation seems to be that of avoiding diminutions to favour a fuller sound, clarity, and expressive versatility. The instruments' visual component, however, is reduced to a minimum.

Giovanni Battista Doni's well known accounts of the presence of instruments on stage, written nearly forty years after the *Rappresentazione* seem to take the discussion into a new and modern direction: instruments are now considered as powerfully evocative tools to stimulate the audience's imagination. Indeed, Doni allows some instruments to come into the visual field, as can be seen in numerous passages of the *Trattato della musica scenica*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Facendosi dunque apparire gl'Istrumenti alla vista del popolo, è convenevole aver riguardo, che abbiano bella, e graziosa apparenza, e perciò potendosene avere degli altri, loderei che i Clavicembali si lasciassero da banda. E perché un Arpa indorata fa bellissima vista, e il suo suono pure si sente, e meglio si unisce con la voce umana; e in somma ha più del grande, e del nobile, che gl'Istrumenti da tasti.¹⁵

By making the instruments visible to the people, it is appropriate to take care that their appearance be beautiful and graceful, and being able to procure other instruments, I would recommend that the Harpsichords be left to the side. And since a golden harp is a wonderful sight, and since its sound is audible, it is best coupled with the human voice: in short, it has more greatness and nobility than keyboard instruments.

Among the Florentine theorist's numerous references to the harp onstage, it is worth mentioning the following particularly detailed and relevant claim:

Fra gli strumenti, il più atto ad accompagnar simil musica crederei, che fusse l'Arpa: la qual vorrebbe esser sonata, da qualche esperto, e discreto Sonatore: in luogo poco remoto dal Recitante, e dove comodamente potesse esser veduta; sì veramente volendosi usar la battuta, il medesimo sonatore la potesse far col piede.¹⁶

Among the instruments most suitable to accompany such music I would think is the Harp: which should be played by an expert and skilled player in a place not far from the performer, where it can be comfortably seen, so that if one wanted to show the beat, the player could show it with his foot.

The harp's visual and acoustic presence is fully approved: the instrument should be placed in a position that ensures an effective visual and aural contact between singer and harpist, so that even the harpist's foot movement might help the singer in keeping time ("usar la battuta").

The difficulties of space management can be inferred by the reports contained in *Il Corago*, an anonymous text, probably from the 1630s, that was

¹⁵ Doni, *Musica scenica*, (see n. 1) 108.

¹⁶ Giovanni Battista Doni, *Compendio del trattato de' generi e de' modi della musica*, Rome: Andrea Fei 1635, 119.

written with the aim of providing recommendations on staging.¹⁷ The problem is argued thus:

L'incomodità dell'i strumenti di corde è grande perché non si trova luogo proporzionato di metterli sì che accompagnino la voce del cantante con soddisfazione di chi sente perché se si pongono dentro la scena non si sentono da chi recita, mai non [dagli] auditori se non quelli che stanno molto vicino al palco [...]. Se per il contrario l'i strumenti si cavano fuori più vicini alli uditori che non è il cantante, l'orecchi dell'i ascoltanti, massime di quelli che stanno al primo luogo, che sogliono essere i principi e le persone di più riguardo, sono offesi notabilmente dal dibattimento di quelle corde supera[n]te la voce del cantante [...].¹⁸

The impracticality of stringed instruments is significant because one cannot find a proportional space to put them in so that they may accompany the singer to the listener's satisfaction, because if you put them behind the stage they will not be heard by he who recites and definitely not by the audience, with the exception of those very close to the stage [...]. If, on the other hand, the instruments are put out in front of the audience and closer to them than to the singer, their ears are greatly offended by that striking of strings, which is louder than the voice of the singer; this is especially true for those sitting in the first rows, who are often princes and people of importance.

The author continues by comparing the qualities of the wind instrument – the organ – with those of stringed instruments. Amongst the arguments in favour of string instruments, there is one that directly focuses on the harp and on its quality of rhythmic clarity:

Essendo la musica rappresentata in scena più vivace et attuosa assai di quella cantata in chiesa o in altra occasione, molto più viva [= vivo] e quasi arieggiante [?] è

¹⁷ Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio (eds.), *Il Corago, o vero alcune osservazioni per mettere bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche*, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki 1983. The term *Corago*, which derives from Aristotle's *Poetics*, is commonly found in treatises of this time. It indicates the one who implements the setting of the stage, whose starting point is the written poetic work and end result is the staging, and whose tools are the arts involved in the show. Cf. Roger Savage, Matteo Sansone, "Il Corago and the staging of early opera: four chapters from an anonymous treatise circa 1630" in: *Early Music* 17/4 (1989), 494–511.

¹⁸ *Il Corago* (see n. 17), 84.

l'istromento di corde che stacca per aria la botta che non è il continuo suono dell'organo, per questo nei balli l'arpa è stimata la migliore, onde essendo il recitare con la voce e con il moto di tutte le membra simile ai movimenti ritmici, più a proposito si devono giudicare l'istrumenti di corde massime l'arpa quale [non] senza causa si chiama la regina dell'istrumenti; per questo anche appresso gli antichi nel tempo che la poesia o gusto del cantare anche scenicamente fiorì nel sommo come nel secolo di Nerone [...] si usò nel teatro l'istrumento di corde, e Nerone stesso che tanto si piccava di essere istimato il più intendente in questa parte adoprava l'arpa come si vede nelle sue medaglie e si racconta nelle sue istorie.¹⁹

Given that music on stage is livelier and full of action, in comparison with that sung in church or in other occasions, much more animated and nearly *arieggianti* [melodic], it is the string instrument that gives rhythmic impulses ("che stacca per aria la botta") as opposed to the organ's continuous sound; that is why the harp is considered the best to accompany dance music, because since reciting with the voice and with the movement of one's limbs is similar to rhythmic movement, string instruments accompany it better, and the harp first among them (not without reason is she known as the queen of all instruments); for this reason when the Ancients developed the practice of poetry and song, also on stage, and it blossomed in Nero's century, one used the string instrument in the theatre; and Nero himself, considering himself a prestigious *connoisseur* in this area, used the harp, as is seen in his medals and as is told in his stories.

Another question of extreme importance emerges in this defining phase of *recitar cantando* in discussions on instrument positioning on- and offstage and on instruments' aural and visual contact with singers: that is, whether or not singers should follow a regular beat. This question of a stable beat brings the author of *Il Corago* to abandon his otherwise neutral tone and to express a clear view in favour of a *recitativo* style free from a regular pulse: indeed, the *stile recitativo* was born to "show and imitate the natural way of reasoning";²⁰ thus the *tactus* cannot be fixed, but must be dictated by the *affetti*, "because the actor, having to stop, sigh for a long time as nature moves him to and hold the same note for a longer or shorter time according to the *affetto*, cannot be tied to a rule set by others, but must be able to indulge his

¹⁹ *Il Corago* (see n. 17), 85–86.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 89.

impetus and his *affetti*. This is of great importance for good acting".²¹ To this effect, one must ensure that "the principal instrumentalist at least sees and hears the actor".²² During rehearsal, both singer and instrumentalist evaluate which passages need more attention in order to be together; where there is a more rhythmically complex passage "the instrumentalist will have to adjust to the singer".²³ Only in polyphonic passages, grants the author, may one show the beat to aid the ensemble.

The new requirements for *recitar cantando* were thus altering the hierarchy between instruments. As the voice acquired utmost responsibility for the music's unfolding, other instruments had to follow suit: the organ, despite being an instrument with "perfetta armonia" is described as less versatile in following voices – being bound to a regular beat, rather than to following the singer's *affetti*. The trophy is thus given to string instruments.

4. Performance and tunings. How many instruments were there?

Preparing the stage for a performance means choosing the best disposition for each instrument in relation to the singers: it also entails establishing which combinations of accompanying instruments to use. Indeed, spatial acoustic issues cannot elude the more complex questions surrounding tuning and temperaments. One commonly held view in theoretical texts of the time is that it is wise to separate instruments according to their families.

Giovan Battista Doni explicitly suggests the alternating use of plucked string instruments (*di manico* – lutes and theorbos), keyboard instruments (*di tasto* – harp and keyboard instruments) and bowed instruments (*d'archetto* – violins and viols): "instead of a mixture nearly resembling an *Oglia podrida* in Spanish style, one should make different *sinfonie*: one with Viols and Violins; one with Lutes, Theorbos and *Lire*; one with Harps and Harpsichords; and one with Flutes and other Wind Instruments" ("in vece di una mescolanza simile quasi a un' *Oglia podrida* alla Spagnuola, far diverse sinfo-

²¹ Ibid., 89–90.

²² Ibid., 90.

²³ Ibid.

nìe; ora di Viole, e Violini; ora Liuti, Tiorbe e Lire; ora di Arpe, e Clavicembali; e ora di Flauti o di altri Instrumenti di fiato").²⁴

Doni later explains that so-called keyboard instruments (harpsichord, organ and harp) are the only ones able to play major and minor semitones, while the tuning of lutes and viols calls for less disparity between semitones:

Poiché nel Gravicembalo, Organo e Arpa, si conosce gran differenza di semitoni maggiori, e minori (e ne' Liuti, e Viole si tiene, che i semitoni siano eguali) sebbene non stimo io, che così sia; ma sì veramente, che non siano tanto diseguali, quanto negli altri strumenti di tasti; onde in molte voci è forza, che dissuonino, come si conoscerà quando se ne farà il paragone voce per voce; che perciò noi vediamo, che quelli, che suonano il Liuto, o Tiorba con Organi, o Gravicembali sempre diminuiscono; perché se usassero botte piene, vi si conoscerebbe la dissonanza, la quale in note veloci non dà fastidio, perché non si discerne.²⁵

Since it is known that in the Gravicembalo, Organ and Harp there is a great difference between major and minor semitones (and in Lutes and Viols one considers that all semitones are equal) though I do not think this is the case; but that indeed they are not as unequal as in other keyboard instruments; therefore, when there are many voices, it's obvious that they will be out of tune, as one will find out if one compares voice by voice: for this reason we see that those who play Lute and Theorbo with the Organ or *Gravicembalo* always add diminutions; because if they played with full chords one would hear the dissonance, which is not as disturbing in fast notes because it is less discernible.

It is worth noting that, according to Agazzari, instruments having "perfetta armonia"²⁶ (i. e. polyphonic instruments capable of perfect voice-leading) in performance must play "the purest and most correct realisation possible, without diminishing or breaking it too much, but aiding it at times by adding a bass at the lower octave [...]" maintaining "a stable, full and continuous harmony in order to sustain the voice, playing at times *piano* and at other times *forte* according to the quality and quantity of the voices, the space one is performing in, and the work one is playing, without striking the strings too

²⁴ Doni, *Musica scenica* (see n. 1), 110.

²⁵ Ibid., 93–94.

²⁶ Agostino Agazzari, *Del sonare sopra il basso*, Siena: Domenico Falcini 1607, 4.

often while the voice sings a *passaggio* in order not to interrupt it".²⁷ For so-called "perfect" instruments, simple and clear voice-leading is preferred. The diminution is seen here as an expedient for hiding non-homogeneous intonation, which would be avoidable by appropriately grouping different groups of instruments according to their temperaments.²⁸ But Doni goes further, drastically recommending the use of a single instrument. He is guided not by an abstract principle, but by the direct experience of hearing the famous singer Adriana Basile accompanying herself:

Per il contrario, chi avrà sentito cantare Adriana al suono della sua medesima Arpa, avrà potuto conoscere qual sorte di accompagnamento richieda una Musica efficace e patetica. E chi giudicherà, che questa semplicità non convenga alla scena, quanto a me io credo, che abbia il gusto corrotto. Tengasi dunque per fermo, che quanto minor numero d'Instrumenti si metterà in opera, tanto meno faranno difettosi i concerti.²⁹

On the contrary, whoever has heard Adriana sing to the sound of her Harp will have known what sort of accompaniment effective and moving music requires. And whoever considers that this simplicity is out of place onstage, I think their taste has been corrupted. Let us therefore take it as a fact, that the fewer instruments play, the less defective the ensemble will be.

Thus, the harp is a flexible and sonorous instrument, able to dominate the stage visually, but also able to support the voice fully.

²⁷ Ibid., 6: "[...] si deve suonare [...] l'opera più pura e giusta che sia possibile, non passeggiando o rompendo molto, ma sibbene aiutandola con qualche contrabbasso [...]. Il simile dico del Leuto, Arpa, Tiorba, Arpicordo, etc. quando servono per fondamento, cantandoui vna, ò più voci sopra; perche in tal caso devon tener l'armonia ferma, sonora e continovata, per sostener la voce, toccando ora piano or forte, secondo la qualità e quantità delle voci, del luogo e dell'opera, non ribattendo troppo le corde, mentre la voce fa il passaggio per non interromperla."

²⁸ About plucked string instrument tuning see Vincenzo Galilei, *Il Fronimo, Dialogo [...]*, Venice: appresso l'Herede di Girolamo Scotto 1584, 102–108. In relation to Doni's remarks on the same subject see Mark Lindley, *Lutes, viols, temperaments*, Cambridge: CUP Archive 1984, 46–49.

²⁹ Doni, *Musica scenica* (see n. 1), 111.

However, the problem of different tunings and temperaments is not resolved by simply separating instruments according to families, because they additionally get out of tune when exposed to the heat of the lights and crowded spaces: this causes an uneven change of tuning between string instruments and organs. When faced with this problem, the practical, common-sense solution was that of switching instruments, which, at least in the case of string instruments, could be done in shifts behind the scenes. The author of *Il Corago* clearly describes this practice thus:

Per rimediar poi che l'istromenti di corda non callino a poco a poco per il soverchio caldo che dai lumi e dai fiati si genera, non pare che fin ora vi sia sufficientemente previsto se non si tiene istrumenti dupplicati che a suo tempo vadino e venghino.³⁰

In order to remedy the string instruments going flat gradually because of too much heat created by lights and breaths, there seems to be no better way to prevent this until this day, other than keeping instrument duplicates that come and go.

Doni describes a similar alternation of instrumentalists, but his reasons, perhaps thanks to his greater knowledge of the harp, appear more articulate. Though having more than one harpist also served the purpose of giving the players rest – in itself a testimony to the widespread use of the instrument in performance – its first goal was that of being able to have instruments in two different tunings, thus allowing each instrument to accompany with “perfetta armonia” in different *toni*:

E si potrebbe moltiplicare quando una non bastasse per l'ampiezza del luogo, o per farle sonare scambievolmente, e dare qualche riposo a' sonatori: come naturalmente seguirebbe, se le melodie ora procedessero per un tuono, ed ora per un altro separatamente; passando per esempio dal Dorio al Frigio, e da questo a quello; perché ciascuno richiederebbe un'arpa propria.³¹

And one could add more when one was not enough for the dimensions of the space, or in order to make them play alternately and give the players some rest: as would naturally follow, if the melodies were at times of one *tuono*, at others of another;

³⁰ *Il Corago* (see n. 17), 89.

³¹ Doni, *Musica scenica* (see n. 1), 108–109.

passing for example from Dorian to Phrygian, and from this to that; because each [*tuono*] would require its own harp.

The two harp tunings in use were known as *per h duro* (B) and *per b molle* (B-flat), the latter probably preferred for pieces with a B-flat in the key signature. Both tunings allowed the use of many pure thirds: in the first system, one could have two different strings for A-sharp and B-flat as well as for D-sharp and E-flat, whereas in the second system G-sharp and A-flat could be separated, as well as C-sharp and D-flat.³²

The two possible tunings for the triple-strung harp are also described in detail in the manuscript *Accordatura per l'Arpa ò Cembalo*, which has survived in two copies, and is presented in this book in both facsimile and transcription, and with a summarized translation.³³

Vincenzo Galilei had already described the use of these two tunings relative to the double-strung *arpa doppia*. In his *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna* he writes:

[...] volendo hora temperarle per b molle, le 16 corde gravi della parte sinistra, vanno secondo la natura del comune Diatonico distribuite; e le 14 a queste opposte [...] ne hanno da dare per così dirlo, il Cromatico genere [...]. Quando poi si volesse suonare per h duro, si tolgono via i b molli di ciascun Diatonico, & si pongano nell'uno & l'altro Cromatico a luoghi de h duri, & questi si collocano a luoghi di quelli nel Diatonico della destra & della sinistra parte, il qual modo di procedere fu così ordinato dal suo autore, per la comodità & facilità che hanno le dita di ambedue le mani nel far particolarmente diminuzioni, e tirate.³⁴

³² The triple-strung harp could therefore have a tuning system similar to that of the *cembalo cromatico*, see Fabio Colonna, *La Sambuca Lincea*, Naples: Costantino Vitale 1613, Book 1 I, 3. Translation in Fabio Colonna, *La Sambuca Lincea*, ed. Patrizio Barbieri, trans. Hugh Ward-Perkins, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana 1992, LII.

³³ Mara Galassi, “*Accordatura per l'Arpa ò Cembalo*’ – a mysterious Roman manuscript on the tuning of the Italian *arpa a tre ordini*”, in this book. See also Patrizio Barbieri, *Acustica, accordatura e temperamento nell'illuminismo veneto*, Rome: Torre d’Orfeo 1987, 250–255.

³⁴ Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna*, Florence: Giorgio Marescotti 1581, 143.

If you wish to temper by B-flat the sixteen low strings of the left side (*parte sinistra*), you distribute them according to the nature of the common diatonic, while the fourteen opposite them [...] supply the notes of the chromatic genre [...]. If you want to play by B-natural, [...] you remove the B-flats [...] from each diatonic and place them in one and the other chromatic [row], at the place of the B-naturals, and the latter you assign to the places of the former in the diatonic of the right side and of the left side. This method of proceeding was ordered by its inventor for the convenience and ease of the fingers of both hands, particularly for making diminutions and runs.³⁵

Marin Mersenne also reports that, according to Jacques Jacques Bouchard, Stefano Landi used the above tunings:

Il adiouste que les chordes de dehors estant accordées par h [bequadro] *quarre*, celles de dedans s'accordent par b *mol*, & que celles-cy s'accordant par h [bequadro], celles-là s'accordent par b *mol*: & qu'il est l'instrument le plus difficile de tous, à raison de la difficulté qu'il y a à le faire, à l'accorder, & à trouver la chorde par où il faut commencer l'air ou le chant; car [...] il y a de la difficulté à discerner les cordes des trois rangs de la Harpe, parce qu'elles sont toutes semblables entr'elles, & bien que quelques-uns les aient voulu marquer par des couleurs différentes, l'on trouve tousiours beaucoup de difficulté à manier la main avec une grande vitesse & legereté.

Enfin il y trouve tant de difficultez qu'il espere d'en escrire un livre tout entier, afin d'enseigner tout ce qui le concerne, & que l'on puisse toucher les quatre parties dessus avec beaucoup plus de grace & de charmes que sur l'Orgue.³⁶

He adds that if the outer strings are tuned to B-natural, the ones inside are tuned to B-flat; and when the latter are tuned in B-natural, the former are tuned in B-flat; and that the harp is the most difficult instrument of all, because of the difficulty in building it, in tuning it, and in finding the string which begins the melody (*air*) or song. For [...] there is difficulty in discerning the strings of the three rows of the harp, because they are all similar to one another, and although some have wished to mark them by different colours, always a great deal of difficulty is found in managing the hand with a great speed and lightness.

³⁵ Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogue on ancient and modern music*, translation with introduction and notes by Claude V. Palisca, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 2003, 358.

³⁶ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle* (see n. 6), 216.

Finally, he finds so many difficulties that he hopes to write a whole book on it so as to teach all that concerns it, and that one can play the four parts on it with much more grace and charm than on the organ.³⁷

5. Images of Antiquity: the harp as a meta-historical instrument

Due to a vast knowledge of classical culture underpinning his theory, Giovan Battista Doni captured most profoundly the evocative potential of different instruments; indeed, he used them as scenic objects that contributed to the recreation of a constantly longed-for and idealised Antiquity. Thus, the harp and viol, rather than the irredeemably “modern” looking harpsichord, took their places onstage: according to Doni “their appearances have something simple and majestic, and they best of all represent Antiquity” (“che hanno non so che di semplice e di maestoso, e rappresentano meglio l’antichità”).³⁸

Those who developed instruments also aimed at imitating what was thought to have been proper of the Ancient world. Thus, in a letter to Mersenne from 1636, Doni wishes for the reconstruction of an instrument with three harps (!) that could play in Dorian, Phrygian and Lydian *genera*:

Quant à Atenée je ne sçay qu'il face mention d'un instrument à trois harpes pour les trois genres, mais bien du Tripode de Pythagoras Zacyntien à trois harpes, l'une desquelles avoit le sisteme du ton Dorien, l'autre le Phrygien, et la troisiesme le Lydien. Lequel instrument, si quelqu'un voudroit faire la despance, j'aurois bien le courage de l'entreprendre et parachever.³⁹

As for Athenaeus, I do not think that he speaks of an instrument with three harps for the three *genera*, but of the Tripod of Pythagoras Zacynthus, containing three harps, one of which was tuned in the Dorian system, the other in the Phrygian, the third in the Lydian. If someone were willing to cover the expense, I would have the courage to undertake and complete its construction.

³⁷ Mersenne/Chapman, *Harmonie* (see n. 6), 275–276.

³⁸ Doni, *Musica scenica* (see n. 1), 114–115.

³⁹ Mersenne, *Correspondance* (see n. 8), 82. Letter dated May 1636.

It is, however, a well-known fact that the contextual frame of Ancient theatre was evoked when it corresponded with modern tastes, and was just as easily ignored when it did not fit. An example of this would be the exposition on the usage of theatre masks in *Il Corago*: the mask is one of the most clearly documented elements of ancient theatre, yet it was not compatible with the aesthetics of modern audiences, who preferred reading facial expressions rather than contemplating magnificently decorated masks. Representation of Antiquity seems to have been a shared pretence, a sort of illusion cultivated for a specific purpose. Instruments also participated in this game of appearances, and the harp was able to appear onstage both as a functional modern instrument and one with an ancient aura.

The harp's practical usage could therefore have called for a more evocative role, aside from what is indicated in written scores. Indeed, in certain cases, like the *ritornello* of the third Act of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, the harp is separated from the other bass instruments in order to have its voice heard and to evoke the sound and likeness of mythical epic poets. The harp thus seems to have acquired an autonomous and authoritative place in Roman performances of the first half of the seventeenth century. In a passage from *Musica scenica*, Doni imagines a fitting conclusion to an action onstage: the plot interrupts, time is suspended, and there begins a beautiful harp *sonata* for gathering the listeners' attention – naturally as the Ancients would have done!⁴⁰

6. Some remarks on performance and musical examples

Pietro Della Valle praised the contemporary performance practice of string instruments as a virtuosic and subtle "art", in which the musician has to combine thorough knowledge of counterpoint with aesthetic sense for ornamentation:

⁴⁰ Doni, *Musica scenica* (see n. 1), 4: "Pare anco, che ad imitazione degli Antichi si potesse dopo l'Azione far sentire una bella sonata di Arpa." // "It also seems that after the Action, one could offer a beautiful harp sonata, imitating the Ancients."

Però alcuni de' più eccellenti moderni, che alle sottigliezze de' contrappunti hanno saputo aggiunger ne' loro suoni mille grazie di trilli, di strascichi, di sincope, di tremoli, di finti di piano, e di forte, e di simili altre galanterie da quelli dell'età passata poco praticate, come hanno fatto nella presente il Kapsperger nella Tiorba, Orazio nell'Arpa, Michel'Angelo nel Violino, ed altri se ve ne sono di pari grido, VS. non mi potrà negare, che non solo non abbiano agguagliato, ma anche superato in queste parti tutti i Suonatori de' tempi passati.⁴¹

But some of the most excellent contemporaries, who have been able to add to the subtlety of counterpoint a thousand graces – trills, *strascichi*, syncopation, tremolos, feints of piano and forte, and other similar gallantries used little in past ages – as have Kapsberger for the theorbo, Orazio for the harp, Michel'Angelo for the violin and others if there are any of the same level; Your Lordship will not be able to deny that they not only have equalled, but also surpassed in these aspects the players of past times.

Agazzari specifically states that the harp has the function of both fundament and ornament:

L'arpa doppia, qual è stromento, che val per tutto, tanto ne' soprani come ne' bassi, devesi tutta ricercare, con dolci pizzicate, con risposte d'ambi le mani, con trilli etc.; insomma vuol buon contrappunto.⁴²

The *arpa doppia* is an instrument such that it is usable everywhere, both in the treble as in the bass. Its potential must be searched for and put to good use by the player: with sweet plucking, with responses from both hands, with trills, etc.: in other words, it needs to be played with good counterpoint.

Below is a selection of detailed texts and musical examples regarding the use of the harp in figured bass, notably when playing alongside other instruments; these texts and examples are followed by brief considerations on intabulations of accompaniment parts for theorbo.

⁴¹ Pietro della Valle, *Della musica dell'età nostra che non è punto inferiore, anzi è migliore di quella passata*, in: Giovanni Battista Doni, *De' trattati* (see n. 1), 254.

⁴² Agazzari, *Del sonare*, (see n. 20), 9.

Athanasius Kircher

In the brief instrumental *sinfonie* for string instruments by the Roman composer Lelio Colista (1629–1680) and found in the *Musurgia universalis*, one can observe that the lowest voice of the composition is always assigned to the harp (Ex. 1). This voice, which is lower than that played by theorbos, often displays longer note values in comparison with the higher voices. In *Paradigma III, a5 Symphonia*, the voices of theorbos, lute, and cittern are diminished: this confirms Doni's statement, according to which diminutions should be played by instruments "da manico" (i. e. plucked instruments with a neck).⁴³

Stefano Landi

An interesting example of the use of the harp in a large ensemble can be found in the "Sinfonia per Introduzione al Prologo. A tre Violini, Arpe, Lauti, Gravicembali, Tiorbe, Violoni & Lira" in Stefano Landi's *Sant'Alessio*.⁴⁴ The foreword makes clear that doubling the violin parts was common practice for *basso continuo* instruments:

Stefano Landi a chi legge. [...] Le Sinfonie de' Violini sono à trè voci, e quasi sempre fanno armonia perfetta da sè; mà se per accidente vi sono i Bassi sotto, i quali tal volta caminano con uno de' Soprani ò in ottave, ò in quinte; e se bene ciò si sarebbe potuto fuggire, nondimeno, perche l'armonia camini con maggior numero, e vaghezza, si sono lasciati in questa forma; non negandosi, che sè si fussero composti à 3 Soprani, & un Basso sariano caminati con maggior regola, ma non con maggior leggiadria. E questa è stata la causa, che ne' Chori pieni delle voci si sono fatte le Sinfonie de' Violini in ottave delle parti.

Queste cose m'è parso bene accennare, per togliere a qualcuno la briga di notarle con osservazione particolare.

⁴³ Athanasius Kircher, *Musurgia universalis*, Vol. 1, Book 6, Part 2: *De musica instrumentalis*, Rome: Francesco Corbelletti 1650, 484.

⁴⁴ Stefano Landi, *S. Alessio*, Rome: Paolo Masotti 1634, 1–7. See also Mara Galassi "The *arpa a tre registri*", in: *Historische Harfen*, ed. Heidrun Rosenzweig, Basel: Eigenverlag der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel 1991, 60–79.

484

Artis Magne Diffoni, & Consoni

Parad. II. à 6. Symphonia Cytharis, Thiorbis, Harpis, & Testudinibus appropriata

Cantus

Primus.

Cytha:

Cantus

II.

Testud:

Altus

Testud.

Tenor

Primus

Tiorba

Tenor

II.

Tiorba

Bassus

Harpa

Paradigma III.

à 5. Symphonia.

Cantus

Cytha

Altus

Testud.

Tenor

Primus

Tiorba

Tenor

II.

Tiorba

Bassus

Harpa

Ex. 1: A. Kircher, *Musurgia universalis*, Vol. 1, Book VI, Part II: *De musica instrumentalis* 1650, 484.

Stefano Landi to the reader. [...] The *Sinfonie de' Violini* are for three voices, which almost always create a perfect harmony by themselves; but if in certain circumstances the basses play underneath [these three voices], moving in parallel octaves or fifths with one of the Soprano lines; even if this could have been avoided – nonetheless to let the harmonies proceed in greater number and beauty – it has been left in this form. I am not denying that if they had been composed with three soprano lines and one bass the parts would have progressed with greater conformity to the rules but not necessarily with greater grace. And this was the reason why, in the full choruses, the *Sinfonie de' Violini* double the voices at the octave.

I have thought it useful to mention these things, in order to save someone the trouble in case they wanted to make specific observations about them.⁴⁵

The *sinfonia* contains two separate bass lines: one lower, labelled "Basso Continuo per Gravicembali", and a higher one for "harps, lutes, theorbos, and violoni". Some conclusions can be drawn from observing the qualities of the two bass voices and the higher violin voices. First, the bass voice for harp, lute, theorbo, and violone often doubles the third violin part at the lower octave in order to strengthen the entrance of *soggetti* (bars 20–23), even in long diminished passages (bars 62–66). Second, in the Forte this same bass line presents diminutions and repeated notes (bars 31–32), while in the Piano it has rests (bars 33, 37–38). Third, it often presents diminutions, strengthening the melodic parts rhythmically (bars 52–53).

The two fundamental criteria used in this second bass line seem to be the doubling the material of the upper voices at the lower octave and the application of diminutions. Its second bass line's function is to clarify rhythmic impulses and to emphasise dynamics, in contrast to the simpler line of the harpsichords. The art of doubling parts seems to have been a ubiquitous practice which has today perhaps been lost:

Credo anche, che farebbe buon effetto, se oltre il concerto delle Viole, o del gravicembalo, vi fosse un Violino, o una Viola da Braccio, o un Cornetto, o un Flauto, o una Traversa, che si sentisse più degli altri suoni, e che facesse la principale consonanza con la voce che canta; massime quando il suono del concerto non potesse essere sentito dagli spettatori più remoti della scena, per la grandezza del

⁴⁵ Landi, S. *Alessio* (see n. 44), [I2].

luogo, o per altro: i quali forse goderebono di quelle due voci col suono ammollito, che i più vicini con quel concerto più pieno ma più crudo.⁴⁶

I also think it would have a good effect if, in addition to the Viol consort or the *gravicembalo*, there were a violin, or a viola da braccio or a cornett, or a recorder, or a flute, which were more audible than the other instruments, and which could make the principal consonance with the singing voice; especially if the sound of the ensemble were not audible for the spectators furthest away from the stage due to the largeness of the space or for other reasons; they may perhaps enjoy those two voices with a weakened sound more than those sitting in the front rows, for whom it would be fuller but also more raw.

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger's *Libro Primo di Arie Passaggiate* (Rome 1612)⁴⁷ offers a compendium for the possibilities of accompaniment with theorbo that can also be applied to the harp. Kapsberger's theorbo *basso continuo* intabulations are of great mastery and refinement, and therefore of great interest. Here, the realisation of the bass part is executed with a continuous variation in numbers of voices: from five to two, according to the progression of the bass. At the end of the phrase and on the text's weak syllables we often find four-part chords, marked with arpeggio signs, almost always major, both in intermediary and final cadences (see Ex. 2, 6, 8, 9 in the Appendix of this article).

The upper voice is often doubled at the lower octave, at times also in the case of passing notes (Ex. 3 and 4). When the bass is written in longer note values it is generally harmonised with three-, four- or five-note chords coupled with bourdon strings (Ex. 2); when the bass is instead written in shorter note values, it is realised with one or two voices, often with the melody of the *cantus* doubled an octave lower, as in *Sconsolato mio core* in Kapsberger's *Libro primo*, p. 10, third and fourth staff.

⁴⁶ Doni, *Musica scenica* (see n. 5) 114.

⁴⁷ *Libro Primo di Arie Passeggiate à una Voce Con l'Intavolatura del Chitarrone Del Sig. Gio: Girolamo Kapsperger, Nobile Alemano*, Rome: s. n. 1612.

The intabulated bass is sometimes moderately diminished with simple passing notes that fill out the bare bass and *cantus* structure (Ex. 9); often, the intabulated bass highlights the rhythmic gestures in the *cantus*, even doubling the *cantus'* syncopated figures (Ex. 5 and 10); the intabulated bass also shows frequent use of parallel thirds (Ex. 2 and 7). In some cases, the bass note is substituted by another note in the chord in order to make more notes available, and a chord is generally repeated on the dot of a bass note, with a chord change in certain cases (Ex. 6). It is worth highlighting that the intabulation does not present diminutions, even in cadences: this may either be in keeping with Cavalieri's cautionary statements or, on the contrary, it might mean that the embellishment of a cadence was left in the hands of the experienced player.

Dissonances, such as sevenths, are mainly coupled with simple triads that often resolve in six-four chords; in some cases, these dissonances are accompanied by a six-three chord (Ex. 10). Ninths are never doubled. The fourth in five-four chords is often not prepared (Ex. 3). Quick, embellished soprano lines are soberly accompanied by parsimoniously distributed chordal impulses (Ex. 8).⁴⁸

In Kapsbergers intabulation, chords are underwritten by signs for ornaments and arpeggi; these embellishments are repeatedly noted in commentaries on the performances of famous harpists:

Et ora Oratio Michi suona di questa Arpa Doppia quasi miracolosamente, non solo nell'artificio, [...] e di più in un trillo difficile a qualsivoglia altro.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ "[...] it was determined that, while the actors sang, the instrumental impulses should be few and far between" ("[...] si determinò che poche rare e rimesse fussero le botte degli strumenti mentre i recitanti cantavano"), *Il Corago* (see n. 17), 44.

⁴⁹ Vincenzo Giustiniani, *Discorso sopra la musica de' suoi tempi* [1628], Lucca: Giusti, 1878 (in: A. Solerti *Le origini del melodramma*, Bologna: Arnaldo Forni 1983, 124). For a complete transcription and analysis of the *Libro primo di arie passeggiate* by Jeronimus Kapsperger see B. J. de Dixmude, *Mémoire présenté en vue de l'obtention du grade de licencié en Histoire de l'Art et Archéologie – Musicologie*, Université libre de Bruxelles, Année Académique 1980–1981.

And now Oratio Michi plays this *Arpa Doppia* almost miraculously, not only in his artistry [...] and furthermore with a trill more difficult than any other one could think of.

A similar way of realising figured bass on the theorbo is well documented in the intabulated accompaniments of vocal pieces found in Bellerofonte Castaldi's *Capricci a due Strumenti cioè Tiorba e Tiorbino* (Modena 1622).

I wish the above examples to be inspiring for a modern realisation of an early seventeenth-century Italian *basso continuo* on harp. By request of my dearest colleague Heidrun Rosenzweig, I will try to give a few succinct suggestions for the realisation of the *basso continuo*, to be applied *cum grano salis*!

When realising *basso continuo*, one should not always feel necessarily bound to loyally execute the written notes. Indeed, much will depend on the chosen tuning, the speed of the bass and the clarity and quality of sound produced by the instrument. The bass can be transposed up or down an octave according to one's needs, and it may also be altered, omitting certain notes or, contrarily, adding diminutions.

Furthermore, it will be useful to alternate the number of voices, ranging from only the bass in very quick passages, to many voices in recitatives and slow arias. In faster or *arioso* movements, if there is another instrument playing the bass it is possible to double the singer either at the unison or at the octave, even doubling syncopation of the vocal part if the text suggests it. It is desirable to add trills, ornaments and additional melodic parts, making full use of bourdon strings, according to the situation. One should be frugal and sober in recitatives, and should adapt to the "pathetic" style of singing, wisely highlighting the dynamic capabilities of the instrument. In large ensembles one should contribute to the composition's rhythmic clarity by adding diminutions to the bass line and doubling the melodic instruments' entries both at the unison and at the octave, using with ingenuity the written musical material already at hand.

In order to provide examples of harp accompaniments in pieces by Orazio Michi, we have produced a video clip, available on the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis' research web portal (www.forschung.schola-cantorum-basiliensis.ch/de/forschung/basso-continuo-on-harp.html). The pieces performed are the *lamento* "Sola fra' suoi più cari" and the aria "Alma che ti sollevi a un

dolce lume"; the first can be musically described with G. B. Doni as effective and moving ("efficace e patetico", see quotation above and n. 29) while the second, with its fast passages of imitation between bass and melody, is well suited to a light and simple harp realisation. The performers are the soprano Marìa Cristina Kiehr and the harpist Mara Galassi.

Conclusions

We thus conclude our discussion on the harp's "aural image". The harp's grandeur, sonorous power, the malleability of its sound, its constant use for the evocation of Antiquity, and its wide range of tuning possibilities render the instrument "not without reason [...] the queen of all instruments" ("non senza causa si chiama regina dell'strumenti").⁵⁰ The harp does not accompany the lamenting Eurydice, and does not always support shepherds and nymphs; instead it is given to Orpheus, creating a mythical status that would define the instrument in successive music history. Haendel lays the harp in the hands of Timoteo, David, the proud Israelite women, and Cleopatra, who in order to seduce Caesar, surrounds herself with exotic "ancient" instruments. The images associated with the harp are not of feminine delicacy and fragility, but of voluminosity, power, and regal dominion over the soundscape.

⁵⁰ *Il Corago* (see n. 17), 86.

Appendix

Ex. 2–10: From J. J. Kapsberger, *Libro primo di arie passeggiate* 1612

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for a soprano voice, the middle staff is for a basso continuo (labeled 'B.C.'), and the bottom staff is for a basso continuo (labeled 'B.C.'). The music is in common time and key signature of one flat. The soprano part begins with a dotted half note, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are: "Oc - chi oc-chi so - li d'A-mo - re pie - tos' a' miei mar - ti - ri". The basso continuo parts provide harmonic support with chords indicated by Roman numerals and basso continuo symbols.

Ex. 2: *Occhi soli d'amore*, p. 4, beginning.

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for the voice (soprano) and the bottom staff is for the piano. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The vocal line starts with a dotted half note, followed by eighth notes, a sixteenth-note cluster, and then eighth notes again. The piano accompaniment features sustained notes and chords. The lyrics are as follows:

di quel so - a - ve_ar - do - re che vien da vo - stri gi -
- ri Hor che vol - ge_te al tro -ve_i vo - stri sguar - di

Ex. 3: *Occhi soli d'amore*, p. 4, second stave.

Ex. 4: *Occhi soli d'amore*, p. 4, fourth stave.

Ex. 5: *Occhi soli d'amore*, p. 5, second and third stave.

Ex. 6: *Ultimi miei sospiri*, p. 8, first bar.

Musical score for 'Ultimi miei sospiri' showing the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the third stave of page 8. The vocal line consists of a soprano and a basso continuo. The piano accompaniment features a bass line and harmonic support. The lyrics are: "Dal tuo Fe - del ne cac - ci em - pio mar - ti - re". The score is in common time, with a key signature of one flat.

Ex. 7: *Ultimi miei sospiri*, p. 8, third stave.

Musical score for 'Ultimi miei sospiri' showing the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the last bars of page 8. The vocal line consists of a soprano and a basso continuo. The piano accompaniment features a bass line and harmonic support. The lyrics are: "ch'io non vor - rò _____ ecco ecco". The score is in common time, with a key signature of one flat. The final section begins with a key signature of one sharp.

Ex. 8: *Ultimi miei sospiri*, p. 8, last bars.

A che fug - gir da me per dar - - - - -
mi pe - ne

8

Ex. 9: *Se la mia vita sete*, p. 9, third and fourth stave.

el - la non par che'l cre - da e si se'l ve - de

Ex. 10: *Lasso ch'io ardo*, p. 11, fourth stave.