The Art of Improvised Counterpoint in Early Modern Italy: Applying the Didactics of Banchieri (1605) and Diruta (1609)

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Abstract

L'organo suonarino (1605) of Adriano Banchieri and *Seconda parte del Transilvano* (1609) of Girolamo Diruta contain pedagogical methods for organists learning to improvise counterpoint over a *cantus firmus*. Although regarded as the first Italian sources to address this topic within the context of keyboard practice, the information presented in these two treatises remains relatively neglected as a resource for modern practitioners of historical keyboard practice. This paper aims to present the author's application of Diruta and Banchieri's didactics in performance contexts, thereby establishing a precedent for their adoption as models for practical improvisation studies and related baroque keyboard practice.

A reading of both sources supplemented by supporting context taken from sixteenth-century treatises on counterpoint and improvisation runs parallel to a following presentation of the author's methods for improvising counterpoint at the organ. An exploration of historically relevant practices (*cartella* sketches, singing improvised counterpoint, and the use of *basso figurato*) provide evidence for the effectiveness of certain techniques, providing an enriched pedagogical model for future students who will study improvised counterpoint.

Resumé

L'organo suonarino (1605) d'Adriano Banchieri et la *Seconda parte del Transilvano* (1609) de Girolamo Diruta contiennent des méthodes pédagogiques pour les organistes apprenant à improviser du contrepoint sur un *cantus firmus*. Bien que considérées comme les premières sources italiennes à aborder ce sujet dans le contexte de la pratique du clavier, les informations présentées dans ces deux traités restent relativement négligées en tant que ressource pour les praticiens modernes de la pratique historique du clavier. Cet article vise à présenter l'application par l'auteur de la didactique de Diruta et Banchieri dans des contextes de performance, établissant ainsi un précédent pour leur adoption comme modèles pour les études pratiques d'improvisation et la pratique du clavier baroque associée.

Une lecture des deux sources complétée par un contexte tiré de traités du XVIe siècle sur le contrepoint et l'improvisation est parallèle à une présentation suivante des méthodes de l'auteur pour improviser du contrepoint à l'orgue. Une exploration de pratiques historiquement pertinentes (esquisses de cartella, chant de contrepoint improvisé et utilisation de basso figurato) témoigne de l'efficacité de certaines techniques, fournissant un modèle pédagogique enrichi pour les futurs étudiants du contrepoint improvisé.

Introduction

Two treatises dating from the early seventeenth century address the practice of improvising over a *cantus firmus* (hereafter: CF); that is, a melody usually derived from plainchant. At the time of their publication, no pedagogical method for this practice existed in print, although several publications of organ music included fully-notated versets in this style.[1] Girolamo Diruta published his *Seconda parte del Transilvano* in Venice in 1609, aspiring to provide in four volumes everything that might serve an organ student in sacred and secular contexts:[2] he advises on practices of intabulation and diminution, compiles modal and contrapuntal theories from other prominent treatises, and reproduces *in partitura* examples of polyphony by various *maestri*. The other treatise is *L'organo suonarino* (Venice: 1605), written by Adriano Banchieri in the interests of codifying and teaching the practice of "alternating between organ and choir"[3] during the mass. While he devotes many pages to liturgical practices of the early-*seicento,* Banchieri also gives useful information on modes and transpositions that supplies several techniques relevant to improvised counterpoint. One must address both sources within their historical context, especially with consideration of the robust late-

[1] Adriano Banchieri, *L'Organo Suonarino*, ed. Edoardo Bellotti, Tastata - Opere d'Intavolatura d'Organo e Cimbalo 31 (Latina: Il Levante Libreria Editrice, 2014), 2.
Banchieri first alludes to a lack of writing on the matter of improvisation: "*inventione forse non piü scritta da altri, non sia per utilitare sopra gl'Organi…*"

[2] Girolamo Diruta, *The Transylvanian*, ed. Murray Bradshaw and Edward Soehnlen, Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen 38 (Henryville: Institute of Mediæval Music, 1984), 5.
Bradshaw's introduction lists the authors who cited or reproduced examples from Diruta's treatise in their own work, among them Bernard Schmid, Costanzo Antegnati, Michael Praetorius, and Ludovico Zacconi; demonstrating the singular instruction represented by *Il Transilvano* even in the decades to follow.

[3] Banchieri, *L'organo Suonarino,* 64:
"*alternare tra l'Organo chorista…*"

renaissance theoretical framework concerning counterpoint and musical invention. Diruta and Banchieri bid their readers to seek out further information the prominent treatises of Zarlino, Artusi, and others; likewise, this study will draw on contemporaneous source material to provide additional historical context. Building on the instruction in *Il transilvano* and *L'organo suonarino*, this paper will present a systematic pedagogy for improvising counterpoint on a CF designed for keyboard students of the twenty-first century. It will comprise an explanation of methodologies found in *Il Transilvano* and *L'organo suonarino*, a consideration of stylistic syntheses, and the author's reflections regarding his own technical development. The resulting didactic is designed with comprehensibility and pragmaticism in mind, with the hope that it might facilitate the study of this historical technique for practitioners of today.

Due to its rooting in motives relating to liturgical accompaniment of the period, the content of *L'organo suonarino* will raise several contextual questions for those unfamiliar with post-Tridentine sacred music. For the organist working in any church, improvisation represented an integral element to the daily celebration of mass and vespers. While the Latin liturgy pronounced at the altar was muttered inaudibly, the choir and organ would perform music drawing on the prescribed chants for that day in the church year. For centuries, chants (particularly longer forms such as canticles and psalms) were sung alternately between divisions of the choir, a member of the clergy and the choir, or some other rotating scheme. By the fourteenth century, sources transmit organ pieces setting one line or verse of a plainsong melody, accompanied by faster notes in another voice adorning the chant melody. Despite varying hypotheses regarding the development of their performance practice, scholars conclude that organ

verses began to account for one half of the alternating sections of a plainchant melody, rotating in turn with the choir in a practice later termed *alternatim*.[4] By the sixteenth century, one finds examples of chant-based polyphony for organ set to plainchant melodies of psalms, hymns, antiphons, and mass ordinaries in the Marucelliana and Castell'Arquato manuscripts, the Rovato source discovered by Martinez-Göllner (Staatsbibilothek Mus. Ms. 9437), and in the organ books of Marc-Antonio Cavazzoni and his son Girolamo.[5] In 1529, Biagio Rossetti described the ability to play counterpoint on plainchant melodies as the principal function of an organist, a practice requested specifically for auditions of organists in Treviso in 1531 and in Padova in 1579.[6] Sparse mention of the practice in early-renaissance sources aside, one can safely assume an ubiquity of this practice in Italy some one hundred years before Banchieri and Diruta wrote their treatises.

Even within the context of baroque performance practice, keyboardists may associate the term "improvisation" with free styles like the *toccata, præludium,* or *capriccio* – after all, these are the genres one most often hears improvised at the organ today. In the context of the Renaissance, improvisation was far more commonly practiced, studied by choristers from a very young age and required of most professional musicians as an everyday task. Sixteenth-century theorists often describe contrapuntal

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[4] Higginbottom, Edward. "Alternatim." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 10 June 2023.
See also: Will Apel, "Probleme der Alternierung in der liturgischen Orgelmusik bis 1600" (Cremona: Comitato per le celebrazioni nazionali del IV. centenario delle nascità di Claudio Monteverdi, 1969).

[5] Gary Towne, "Music and Liturgy in Sixteenth-Century Italy: The Bergamo Organ Book and Its Liturgical Implications," *The Journal of Musicology* 6, no. 4 (1988): 472-3.

[6] Philippe Canguilhem, *L'Improvisation polyphonique à la Renaissance*, 5 vols., Arts de la Renaissance européenne (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016), 93-5.

invention as parallel to the expression of one's thought through language.[7] The German author Lampadius describes the formal structure of a musical improvisation as the product of an established grammar, syntax, and set of symbolic meanings,[8] suggesting that musicians of the sixteenth century would employ phrases and motives in the same fashion as poets would their verse forms and thematic material. Another treatise, Cerone's *Passos comunes para Contrapunto comun* (Naples, 1613) presents a formula for producing a series of consonances among the most common types of voice relationships in line with rules of contrapuntal motion.[9] Across the entire literature, in fact, it is evident that musicians of early modern Italy were taught to view the *ex-tempore* invention of counterpoint as corollary practice to rhetorical language.

Many sixteenth-century sources on improvised counterpoint are written with the voice in mind, providing evidence that singers as well as organists improvised over CFs.[10] Vincente Lusitano's *Introduttione facilissima* (1553) describes a process in which several singers improvise counterpoint around the CF, or *tenor* in long notes, each adding its own unique line based on formulae which determine its motion and rhythmic offset. Lusitano's first example treats a CF that ascends and descends over a hexachord

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[7] Canguilhem, *L'improvisation polyphonique,* 19.
Canguilhem suggests contemporary theories of poetry as a possible means for understanding cultural ways of thinking about the structural pieces and synthetic methodologies common to both prose and music.

[8] Jessie Ann Owens, *Composers at Work: The Craft of Musical Composition 1450-1600* (Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66-7.

[9] Lorenzetti, Stefano, "Musical *inventio,* rhetorical *loci,* and the art of memory," in Massimiliano Guido, ed., *Studies in Historical Improvisation: From Cantare Super Librum to Partimenti* (London: Routledge, 2017), 31-2.

[10] Philippe Canguilhem, *Chanter Sur Le Livre a La Renaissance : Les Traites De Contrepoint De Vicente Lusitano*. (Belgium: Prepols, 2013).

in stepwise motion, as seen in **Figure 1**. To create a counterpoint, we must place "one point against another" as Zarlino says,[11] or add a voice or multiple voices to the existing one. As the most common point of imitation in Renaissance music is a fifth, Lusitano begins his first counterpoint at a fifth above the CF. Lusitano's method is as follows: when the cantus firmus ascends by stepwise motion, an imitation at the fifth above will create good motion and consonant intervals when it anticipates the counterpoint by half a tactus; here, a half-note. In descending, the opposite applies, and the imitating voice is delayed by the same value. The same method works for a cantus firmus that ascends or descends a fourth.

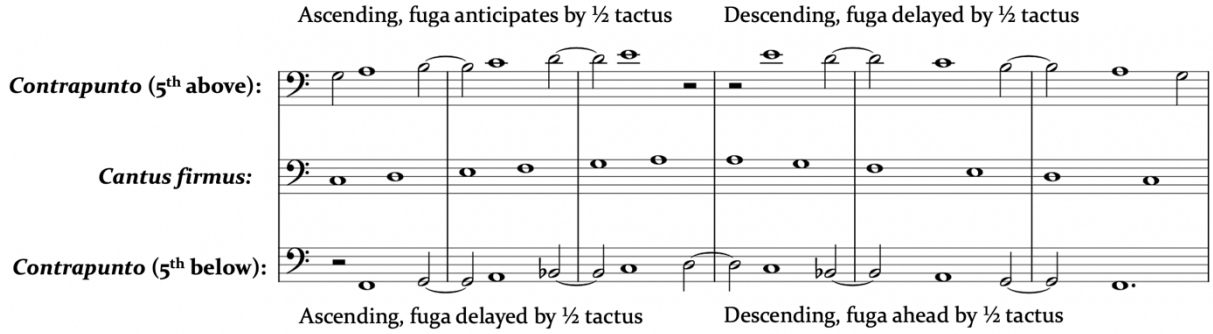

Figure 1. Lusitano's example of *contrappunto semplice*[12]

[11] Gioseffo Zarlino, *Le istitutioni harmoniche*, Arnaldo Forni, vol. 39, Bibliotheca Musica Bononiensis, II (Venice: Senese, 1561), 147:
"*Et perche li Musici gia componevano i lor Contrapunti solamente con alcuni punti, però lo chiamarono Contrapunto: perche ponevano l'uno contra l'altro, come facemo al presente noi, che poniamo una Nota contra l'altra: & pigliavano tal Punto per la voce: conciosiache si come il punto è principio della Linea, & è anco il so fine; cosi il Suono, o la voce è principio, & fine della Modulazione: & tra essa è contenuta la Consonanza, della quale si fa poi il Contrapunto.*"

[12] Vincente Lusitano, *Introduttione facilissima, et novissima, di canto fermo, figurato, contraponto semplice, et in concerto* (Rome: Blado, 1553), n.p. [14 in digitized file].

A counterpoint added at the fifth below is inverse in its rhythmic relation to the CF, as this voice follows a half-tactus behind on the way up and anticipates by the same value on the way down. Lusitano calls this technique *"fugare,"* a verb meaning "to flee" from which the term fugue will later derive, and it represents one of his foundational techniques for adding voices to a CF. Each of the added voices imitates the CF at its given interval in parallel motion, avoiding parallel intervals by the anticipation or delay of half a tactus. In the following pages, Lusitano provides formulae for this type of "*fugare*" over different intervals in the CF, one that alternates rising fourths and descending thirds, one that rises a third and descends a step, *et cetera*.

Lusitano's next technique is common to most sung counterpoint of the sixteenth century: *contrapunto fugato,* in which the counterpoint repeats a motivic pattern multiple times, rendering consonances with the CF. Diruta alludes to this type of fugal imitation in *Il Transilvano*, saying that it produces "beautiful and attractive counterpoint."[13] Lusitano's example from *L'arte del contrappunto* follows:

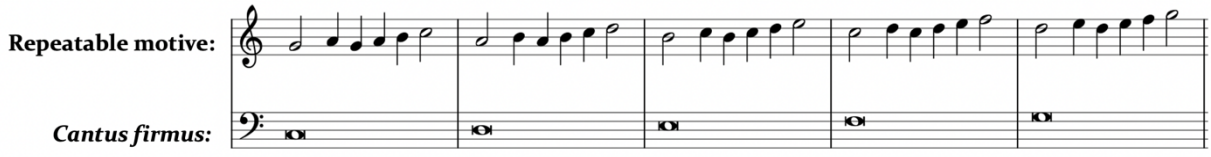

Figure 2. Lustiano's example of *contrappunto fugato*[14]

[13] Girolamo Diruta, *The Transylvanian = Il Transilvano*, ed. Murray Bradshaw and Edward Soehnlen, Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen 38 (Henryville: Institute of Mediæval Music, 1984), 41.

[14] Transcribed from Canguilhem, *Chanter sur le livre,* 171.

The design of the repeating motive, or *fuga,* is key to this technique. It must occur at consonant intervals with the CF, specifically on the tactus and half-tactus – here, those intervals are the fifth, the sixth, and the octave. Then, the singer practices repeating the same figure as many times as possible, increasing the ease of finding material to set against the CF. In addition to the basic repetition of the motive at regular intervals (as in **Fig. 2**), Lusitano's examples also contain the same technique at various rhythmic entries and intervals with the CF. Schubert suggests four strategies for placing the motive against the CF to render the most successful counterpoint,[15] each of which I applied in practice at the keyboard. Lusitano's examples certainly provide an imitable basis for the first attempts at the most daunting task: the formulation of material to add to the subject. Schubert's analysis reveals numerous techniques evident in Lusitano's treatises for motivic repetition and variation, providing a foundation for the period's improvisers: he states, "this technique, learned early on, is rich in complexity… it trains the singer to spot polyphonic potential in a CF melody, memorize combinations, vary them, and shape the whole using repetition and contrasting elements."[16] Considering that these examples were taught to singers who would add their motives over a CF *ex tempore,* their design is to be easily memorisable and replicable. Furthermore, *contrapunto fugato* was commonly practiced among choristers of the sixteenth

[15] Peter Schubert, "Contrapunto Fugato: A First Step Toward Composing in the Mind," *Music Theory Spectrum* 42, no. 2 (2020): 260–79.
The strategies are as follows: (1) maintaining the rhythmic alignment, placement, and consonance of the counterpoint with the CF, (2) searching for the placement of the counterpoint against analogous CF segments, thus rendering different consonances each time, (3) searching to place the counterpoint against CFs of different motions and intervals, transposing the accompanying motive if necessary, and (4) shifting the motive temporally to render consonances with the CF by entering at different points of the tactus.

[16] Schubert, ibid., 275-6.

century,[17] meaning that Diruta and Banchieri must have encountered them as part of their formative education.

Based on the evidence provided by sixteenth-century sources, I propose a twofold approach to a study of *Il Transilvano* and *L'organo suonarino*: first, a theoretical study of rules and structures; second, an actualization of these principals *ex tempore,* through one's own voice and at the instrument. In fact, the treatises at hand fortuitously take exactly this formal structure. Recalling the simile between spoken language and improvisation, one could say that Diruta's treatise represents the textbook, containing rules for grammar, syntax, and construction. Banchieri's *L'organo suonarino*, meanwhile, equates to a workbook containing exercises in which one begins to utilize these methods in responding to verbal prompts. In the way of supporting material, one might draw on a dictionary of vocabulary represented by notated contrapuntal works by various *maestri* of the late Renaissance and early Baroque. In the end, the student will produce their own rhetoric *in musica* through the act of improvisation; building on the dual foundation of theoretical understanding and technical mastery.

The first section of this paper will summarize the didactics on counterpoint and improvisation contained in two primary sources. Questions relating to practice and application will direct source readings of *Il Transilvano* and *L'organo suonarino*, drawing on related treatises to provide further context. The subsequent section will detail the course of my own development as I practiced and refined my abilities in

[17] Canguilhem, *Chanter sur le livre*, 23-7.

improvising over a CF, aiming to provide an accessible secondary source of pedagogy for future students wishing to do the same. Finally, I will propose several applications of the techniques in question within today's field of early music performance, considering that their historical function in accompanying Latin mass is no longer relevant. Providing research-backed evidence of historical methods and their relation to the performance demands of today's industry, I will demonstrate that modal counterpoint studies might enrich one's practice of accompaniment, arrangement, or historical polyphonic realization at the keyboard

Source Reading: *Seconda parte del Transilvano* (1609)

Girolamo Diruta (c. 1544-1610) held positions at the cathedrals of Chioggia and Gubbio, having studied prior with the most famous organist in northern Italy, Claudio Merulo. Diruta alludes to difficulties in his early career stemming from "bad training," after which he sought out Merulo for organ studies in Venice.[18] The first part of *Il Transilvano* (Venice, 1593) supplies all the elements of proper organ technique to a fictional student, the Transylvanian, in an effort to avoid the pitfalls of such faulty practices, repeatedly referring to the works of Merulo as outstanding examples. Diruta's treatise was among the first to address several issues specific to organ practice, including fingering, intabulation, and registration.[19] The edition was a success, reprinted

[18] Diruta, *The Transylvanian*, book 1, 105.

[19] Diruta, ibid., 6-7.

in 1597 and referenced by Banchieri in 1605 as the best instruction on technical execution for the instrument.[20]

Diruta lays out his method for improvised counterpoint in the second book of the treatise's second part (Venice, 1609), titled "in which the manner of improvising on a keyboard instrument is discussed, together with brief and easy rules for free and strict counterpoint."[21] The presentation of information is divided into statement of the rules and explanations (in dialogue between the author and the Transylvanian), each one followed by demonstrative examples in musical notation. Diruta adheres closely to the patterns of his former teacher Gioseffo Zarlino, echoing wordings and rationales as found in his treatise *Le istitutioni harmoniche* (Venice, 1558), one of the most influential theoretical treatises of the former century. Both authors introduce counterpoint with a classification of intervals into consonances (unisons, thirds, fifths, sixths, and their compounds) and dissonances (seconds, fourths, sevenths, and their compounds). Consonant intervals are the most important in Renaissance theory and are subdivided into *consonanze perfette* (perfect) and *consonanze imperfette* (imperfect).

[20] Adriano Banchieri, *L'Organo Suonarino*, 2.

[21] Diruta, book 2, 32.

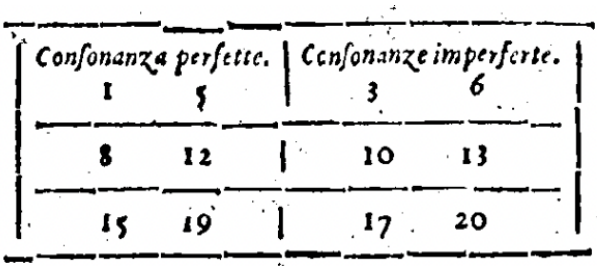

Figure 3. Classification of perfect and imperfect consonances[22]

In this system, the vertical alignment of two voices renders them consonant or dissonant, and one forms good counterpoint by rendering consonant intervals on the *tactus* and subdivisions thereof. The distinction between perfect and imperfect concerns the types of movement one makes between them, which Diruta classifies as in **Fig. 4.**

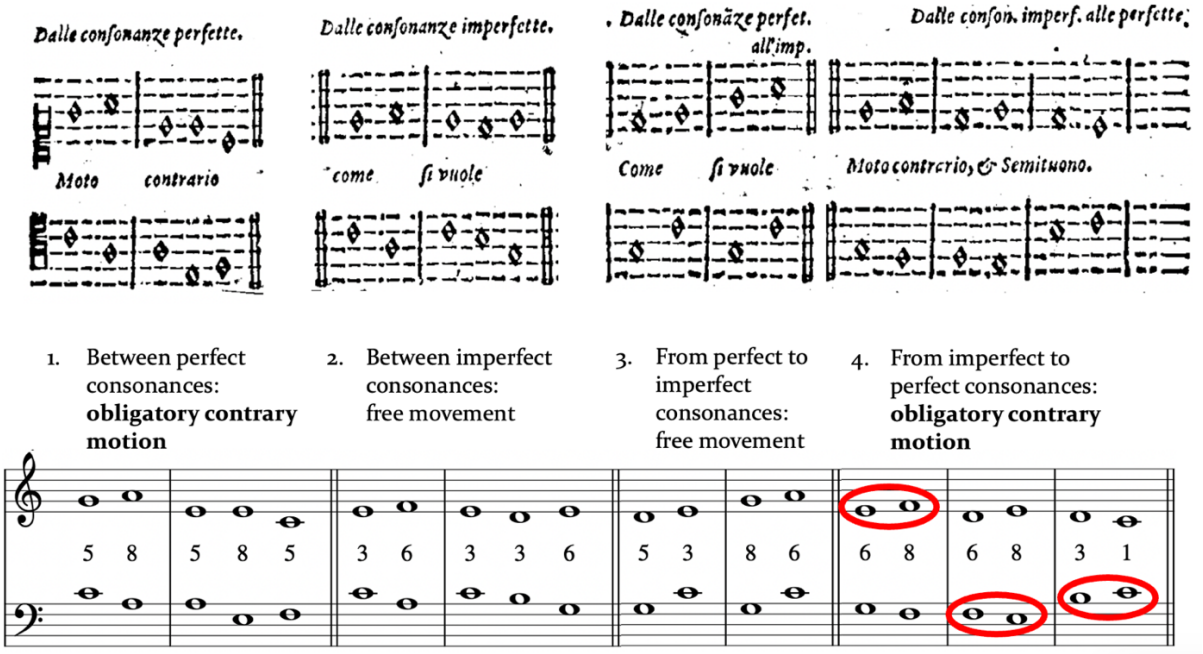

Figure 4. Four types of *movimenti* (movement between consonances)[23]

[22] Girolamo Diruta, *Seconda Parte del Transilvano*, terza ristampata, libro 2º, (Venice: Vincenti, 1622), 2. Although I refer primarily to Diruta's 1609 text in the translated edition by Bradshaw and Soehnlen, I will cite musical examples as they appear in a facsimile of the 1622 reprint as by this time, Vincenti had corrected many of the errors present in the first release.

[23] Diruta, ibid., 2. Transcribed into modern notation.

What appears at first a complex system comes to be distilled into an easily-followed rule, perhaps the most important of Diruta's method: When moving from any consonance to an *imperfect* one, the performer can move freely – that is, by jump or step in contrary, parallel, or oblique motion. However, when moving to a *perfect* consonance, Diruta obliges his student to move by contrary motion (*i.e.* contrary or oblique, as inferred from the example). When an imperfect consonance is followed by a perfect one, one of the voices must move by semitone, as circled in **Fig. 4**. Zacconi (1622),[24] Zarlino (1558),[25] and Artusi (1598)[26] lay out similar principles to guide contrapuntal movement between consonances. One must note that Diruta includes oblique motion in his definition of contrary motion, although Artusi uses the term "*obliquo*" in *L'arte del contrapunto* some twenty-three years prior.[27]

Moving to perfect consonances by contrary motion alone eliminates the potential pitfalls of simple counterpoint – the parallel succession of fifths and octaves, improper cadential voice leading, and simultaneous leaps in parallel motion – each of which weakens intelligibility of each distinct voice. The rest of Diruta's pedagogical text contains further directives in the form of a series of *dubii* (doubts) and *avvertimenti* (pieces of advice). Again, many of these echo the counterpoint rules of other theorists: he advises against *mi contra fa,* warns against tritones, and forbids leaping from a

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[24] Zacconi, 203v.

[25] Zarlino, 151-69.

[26] Giovanni Maria Artusi, *L'arte del contraponto ridotta in tavole,* (Venice: Vincenti, 1586), 11-12.

[27]Artusi, ibid., 31-3.

unison to a fifth using a third in each voice, echoing Zarlino's text.[28] Unlike his teacher, however, Diruta foregoes lengthy theoretical prose for an expedited and easily applicable explanation of each rule, providing a great advantage to his reader, who must recall and put them to quick use when searching for solutions at the keyboard. Several of the more involved rules warrant a more detailed examination.

The first movement is by far the most restrictive, as one must move in obligatory contrary motion between each interval. Diruta advises that when multiple perfect consonances occur consecutively, one might evade parallels while still moving in the same direction by delaying one of the voices by half a *tactus* (as does Lusitano) or by adding an intermediate note of an imperfect interval, creating contrary motion:

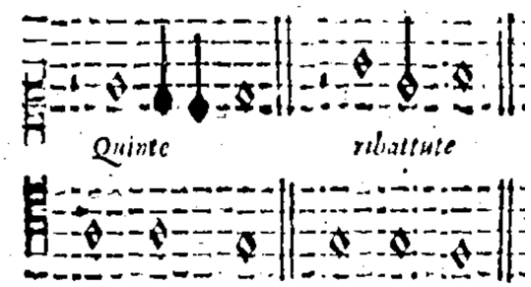

Figure 5. "Fifths [and octaves] repeated."[29]

[28] Diruta, ibid., 6-7

[29] Diruta ibid., 4.

Both solutions are common in other counterpoint of the time, most commonly in the literal imitation of a cantus firmus at the fifth above or below, when the intervallic content of each voice produces inevitable parallels.[30]

In the free motion permitted by the second *movimento* (between imperfect consonances), multiple thirds and sixths succession may produce false intervals such as *mi contra fa* or tritones across adjacent consonances, obscuring the counterpoint. Diruta's solution is simple and effective: when alternating between thirds and sixths, he advises, one must make one major and the other minor, and so forth. For example, if the first F of the upper voice in **Fig. 6** were sharpened, a tritone would occur between it and the C of the lower voice in the second tactus. The same is true for consecutive thirds and consecutive sixths. Alternating major and minor intervals avoids such instances in both contrary and parallel motion.

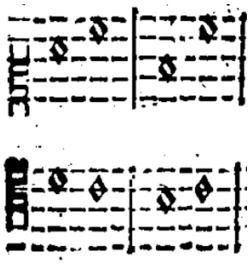

Figure 6.[31]

Here, Diruta references a discussion of *ficta* occurring in the first part of his treatise (1593). In this period, avoiding such false relations was the principal reason for the

[30] Vincente Lusitano's improvisation method relies on a similar system of delaying one voice in direct imitation, see previous discussion on p. 8.

[31] Diruta ibid., 4

application of sharps and flats outside of the mode. For the same reason, Diruta instructs the reader to apply *ficta* when necessary to avoid similar occurrences when moving from a fifth to a third or sixth, as shown below.

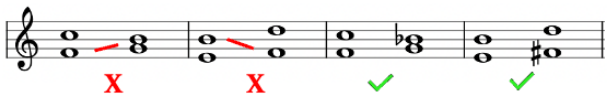

Figure 7. Diruta's application of *ficta* to avoid adjacent false fifths between two voices [32]

The applied portion of the text follows, as Diruta supplies contextual, notated examples of the principles described in the first few pages. The level of complexity increases with each example, beginning with the simplest: adding note-against-note (first species) counterpoint above a CF descending and ascending in stepwise motion. Diruta begins the CF on A *la sol re,* followed by a diatonic ascent to C *sol re ut* and returning ascent, ranging a hexachord. Each note of the hexachord contains two repetitions, except for *fa* and *mi.*

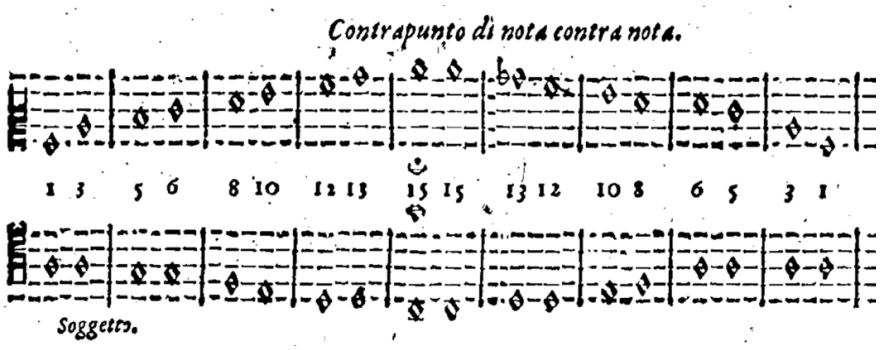

Figure 8. Diruta's "note-against-note" counterpoint[33]

[32] Example transcribed from Diruta, ibid., 6.

[33] Diruta ibid., 9.

Its palindromic structure may indeed render it the most idiosyncratic of any of Diruta's examples. The opening sequence of a unison leaping to a third and then a fifth is particularly unconventional for a descending bass, Furthermore, cadential motion is not observed at the conclusion, and the counterpoint does little to compare different types of *movimenti,* as both voices move in contrary or oblique motion throughout. I must also note an inconsistency in the penultimate measure, hereunto ignored by modern editions and commentaries: In its returning ascent, the CF jumps back from *fa* to *la* rather than passing through *sol,* presumably one of numerous *errata* that plagued Diruta's first edition and reprints alike – after all, the rest of the counterpoint's second half is a direct retrograde of what came before. I posit that Diruta intended these two consonances to be a sixth and fifth over G *sol re ut* in the CF and, thus, one should diatonically transpose this measure down a step.

This example introduces an essential element of Diruta's technique not yet described in the dialogue. Instead, the Transylvanian (and by proxy, the reader) must discover it himself. Describing the unusual sequence of consonances at the opening, he remarks, "do you move from a third to a fifth, the fourth movement which moves in contrary motion and with a semitone? Instead of the semitone, do the parts move by whole tone, as in this case, one can move… without the semitone, as you said?"[34] He references Diruta's earlier advice that a third expanding to a fifth by contrary stepwise motion might forego the fourth movement's obligatory semitone. He goes on to describe each of the consonances by the type of movement rendered by the counterpoint,

[34]Diruta ibid., 9. My own translation.
"*Andate poi dalla Terza alla Quinta, quarto movimento che si và con il moto contrario, & semituono? In luogo del semituono le parte vanno di grado, che in questo caso si può andare dalla Terza alla Quinta senza semituono, si come havete detto?*"

breaking down the decisions to a minute level of detail. Over the course of this close examination, a pattern of consonances emerges, evident if one observes their numbering in **Fig. 7**: all the consonant intervals occur in order. In this way, Diruta *always moves to the closest consonant interval* from the previous, presuming constant contrary motion between voices so that none of the *movimenti* can be made incorrectly. This also explains the inconsistent note repetitions of the CF, which moves through *fa* and *mi* at twice the speed of the other pitches. By moving from the octave to the tenth on F and E, an ascending scale occurs throughout the *fuga,* ending on the same note with which it began. This must also be the reason for starting on a unison followed by a third, rather than the more conventional expansion from unison to third by the third note of the CF.

The principle of moving to the consonance closest to the last is not absolute, based on the movements in Diruta's other examples and his explanation to his student. In fact, the Transylvanian inquires whether one must always move from one consonance to the next closest one, and Diruta answers that this is too great a limit.[35] Nearest-consonance primacy is a performance strategy, not a theoretical principle. Most musicians are aware of the benefits of risk-reduction in performance situations, and this technique supplies a sure solution in the face of uncertainty. If improvisation as an endeavor prioritizes some amount of spontaneity,[36] one must limit the number of variables to maximize this possibility. As Diruta denotes, "if you wish to learn easily and quickly [how to move from one consonance to another], diligently examine these

[35] Diruta, 1622, 9. My own translation.
"*Se poi desiderate d'imparar con facilita et presto, essaminate con diligenza a questi esempij…*"

[36] See Canghuilem, "*Création et spontanéité…*" in *L'Improvisation polyphonique de la Renaissance,* 19-29.

examples;"[37] thereby advising a process for acquiring fluency with the most instantaneous consequential practice in this style of improvisation. Thus, Diruta's first counterpoint demonstrates a twofold guiding principle: by maintaining contrary motion and moving first to the consonance nearest to that preceding, one will evade many of the contrapuntal errors and facilitate easier and quicker choices.

The following section of the treatise is likewise intended for individual observation, study, and extrapolation. Here, Diruta provides a series of counterpoints, each based on the same CF, progressing in their degree of complexity from note-against-note in two voices to four rhythmically varied voices. **Fig. 9** shows the first appearance of the CF (the upper voice) with the counterpoint starting at the unison.

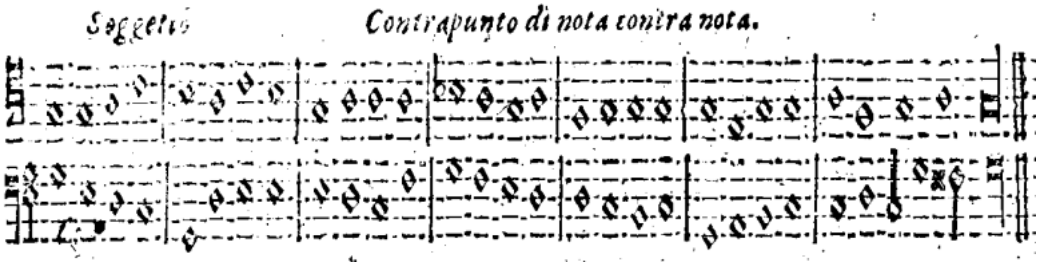

Figure 9. Diruta's note-against-note counterpoint on Zarlino's CF[38]

Diruta borrows material from Zarlino once again, as this CF is found in *Le institutioni harmoniche*.[39] While the counterpoints in *Il Transilvano* are all original, they

[37] Diruta, ibid., 9. My own translation.
"*Si essaminarete bene questo Contrapunto, imparerete presto il procedere da una consonanza all'altra.*"

[38] Diruta, ibid., 10.

[39] CF appears in Zarlino, 196.

sometimes feature shorter figures or rhythmic motives from Zarlino's text. These similarities demonstrate an important part of the process communicated by Diruta, namely that one should fashion one's vocabulary after the examples of established *maestri*. Given the unparalleled popularity of Zarlino, this subtext was likely perceptible to the *cognoscenti* amongst the treatises' readership in the seventeenth century.

Diruta demonstrates for the first time how both consonances and dissonances might be used in the context. As the section progresses, Diruta's verbal explanations grow increasingly sparse, intended only to summarize points for practical application. Their comparison to parallel passages in Zarlino's *Le institutioni harmoniche* and Artusi's *L'arte del contrapunto* (1598) further clarifies the principles demonstrated. One detects several distinct differences, again separating Diruta's pragmatic pedagogy from the verbose proliferations of others. As in the example over a hexachord, Diruta maintains one rhythmic motion and one applied concept for each new counterpoint over the CF. Second, his use movement between consonances might be criticized at certain junctures by a more conservative theorist such as Artusi, as marked in **Fig. 10,** where Diruta moves from a third to a fourth before descending to a unison. This is, in fact, the same movement Artusi notoriously criticized in a madrigal of Monteverdi, calling it a "barbarism"[40] and breaks Diruta's rule about the fourth being a dissonance unless it passes from the third to the fifth. Perhaps, as Artusi's fictional student argues in Monteverdi's defense, the figure is a written-out *accento*, a *grazia* using the fourth as an upper "escape note" before descending a third to the G. In either case, the fourth occurs

[40] Artusi. *L'Artusi overo delle imperfettioni della moderna musica*. Venice: Vincenti, 1600, 41.

on an unaccented beat (*nota cattiva*), and one might extrapolate that Diruta cedes the occasional breach of a minor rule in favour of preserving contrapuntal interest, especially while playing *ex tempore*.

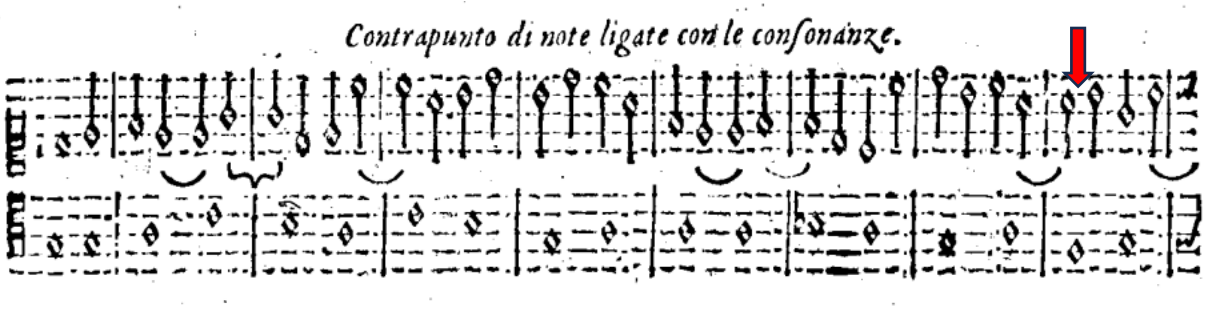

Figure 10. Counterpoint with notes tied over in consonance[41]

The final portion of Diruta's didactics concerns the form and structure of the counterpoints added, containing examples written in three and four voices over the same CF. In sixteenth-century theory, the beauty of counterpoint often relies on internal reference between them, specifically, how the voices imitate one another. Diruta begins his demonstration with the first *contrapunto,* in which the *fuga* sets four notes over CF note, explaining which of these notes should be consonant by recalling the terminology of *note buone and cattive* from his method of fingering in the first book. Echoing Zarlino's instructions,[42] Diruta requires that every other smaller note value should form a consonance; in this case, every other quarter should be consonant over the CF, *i.e.* two consonances per CF note. The example also introduces the technique of figural repetition, in which the motive occurring during the opening two measures repeats as

[41] Diruta, ibid., 10.

[42] Zarlino, 226-7.

frequently as possible. I have marked the points where the figure begins again at various transpositions in **Fig. 11**. This technique for setting motivic repetition over the CF exemplifies Schubert's "Type IIIb," in which different CF segments (here a repeated note and a step up) support the same ascending scale, creating new combinations.[43]

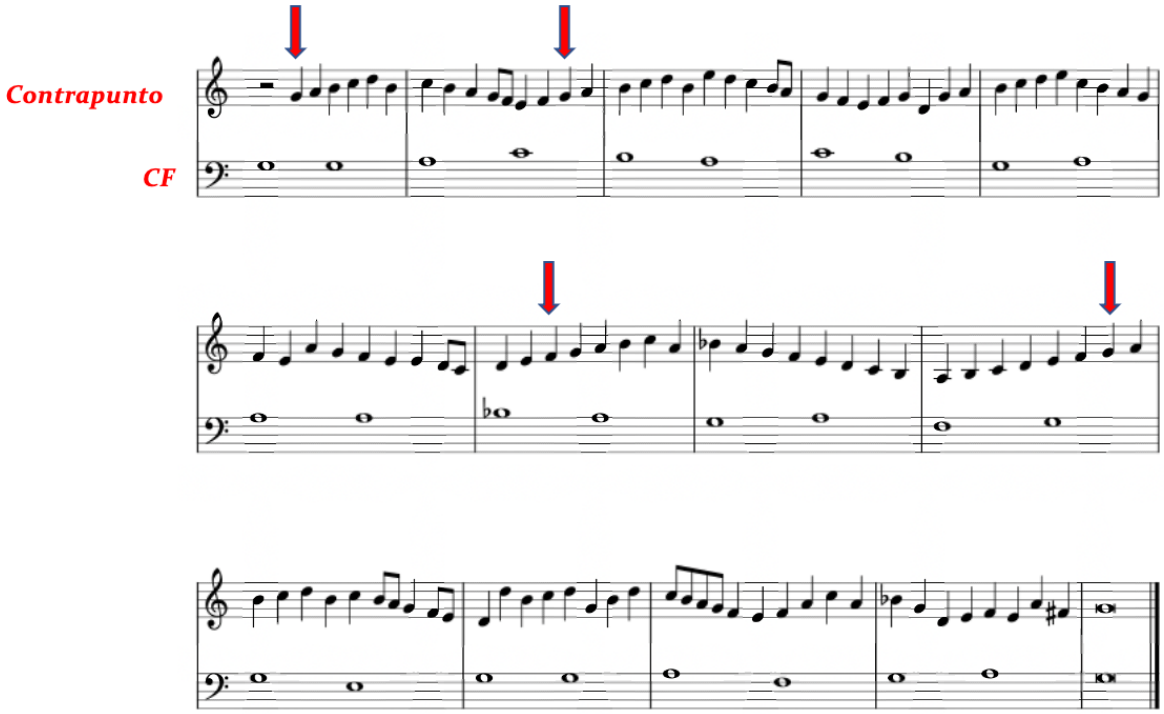

Figure 11. Diruta's *Contrapunto diminuitivo*[44]

[43] Schubert, ibid., 270-1.

[44] Transcribed from Diruta (1622), 11.

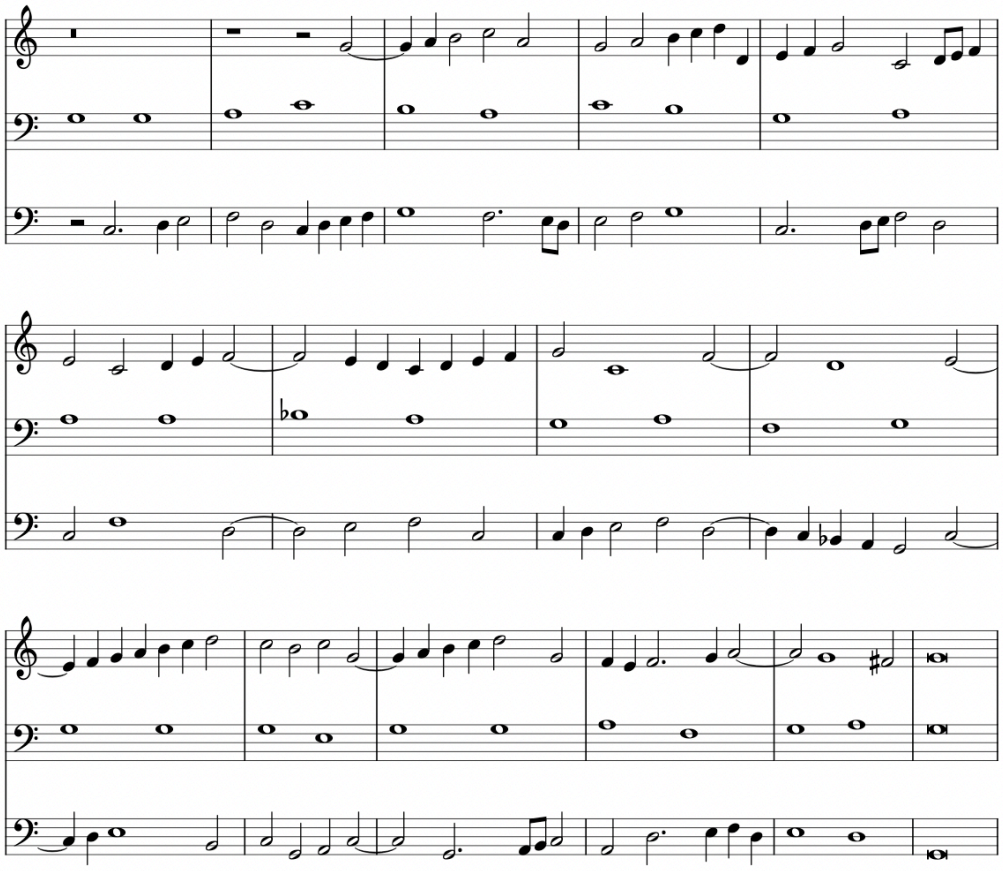

Figure 12. Diruta's *Esempio delli acompagnamenti à tre*, CF on middle staff[45]

In the following example of three-part counterpoint (**Fig. 12**), one finds further instances of imitation between the two outer voices, whose *fughe* Diruta sets in various transpositions and points of entrance to render them consonant with the CF and one another – now, the counterpoint reaches a notable degree of complexity. In addition to this example, Diruta's notated examples of four-part improvisations on hymns and Magnificat tones suggest imitation of a motive based on a fragmented incipit of the CF across all four voices. This technique is consistent with that evident in a number of organ versets by Girolamo Frescobaldi and Andrea Gabrieli, where the entrance of each

[45] Transcribed from Diruta, ibid., 16.

voice contains at least the incipit of the CF, although it often undergoes rhythmic or intervallic modification to accommodate the requirements of consonance and movement.[46]

Diruta's last inclusions in the second book are two compilations from other sources, intended for observation and imitation by the improvisation student. The most substantial are twelve *ricercari* (one in each mode) written by himself and other masters he admires – Picchi, Banchieri, and Luzzaschi. Just before the ricercars, however, he introduces the "finest and most ingenious" cadences by Gabriele Fattorini. These four-voice cadences over the same consonances are ostensibly designed to demonstrate how the same subjects can fit together many times over in various transpositions and inversions.[47] The first cadence is quite typical, containing proper pitch content and movement for *cantizans, altizans, tenorizans, bassizans*,[48] and all voices moving from one consonance to the next nearest one. Diruta labels each theme with the most recent place it occurs; for example, the second cadence's tenor is the previous one's bass transposed up a fifth.[49]

This amazing feat of internally referential counterpoint demonstrates the idealized synthesis of melodic cohesion with the theory of consonances above a CF. This

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[46] See "**Methodologies**" p. 36.

[47] Massimiliano Guido, ed., *Studies in Historical Improvisation: From Cantare Super Librum to Partimenti* (London: Routledge, 2017), 50-2.
An excellent analysis of techniques demonstrated by Fattorini's cadences.

[48] For further information on cadential voice leading theory, see: Bartolomeo Bismantove, *Compendio Musicale* (1677, Ferrara).

[49] For all the Fattorini cadences, see Diruta, ibid., 17-23.

style yields absolutely no material surplus – that is, there are no leftover notes not included in the original motives, such as one might usually add to render the usual consonances in a cadence. It is difficult to imagine improvisations of any substantial length that feature such tight contrapuntal organization, yet to the contrary, there inclusion here suggests the technique's mastery as an essential tool in period practice. A 2014 study by Schubert and Guido examines Frescobaldi's setting of each motive from a four-part progression at different points against itself in his Ricercari of 1615; nicknaming the technique "unpacking the box," in which the box refers to the motives in their original arrangement.[50] These instances provide fine examples for study and imitation, demonstrating how to transpose, rhythmically offset, or modify the same few lines of material in each voice to render diverse counterpoints.

Many notated instances survive well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, representing the furthest-extending development of *contrapunto osservato* practice. Several of the exemplary mass versets in Frescobaldi's *Fiori musicali,* published after his death, exhibit nearly the same level of contrapuntal economy. If one were to question Frescobaldi's capability in this art, their doubt would be refuted in reading two pieces on secular melodies that conclude the volume, which repeat only the four subjects introduced in each voice at the piece's opening and their variations in further versets. This interwoven genre of contrapuntal perfection was further promulgated among organists of northern Europe such as Dietrich Buxtehude and Jakob Praetorius, where the same techniques appear in settings over CFs titled

[50] Massimiliano Guido and Peter Schubert, "Unpacking the Box in Frescobaldi's Ricercari of 1615," *Music Theory Online* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2014).

Contrapuncti et Modulationes. These composers set carefully crafted *fughe* to CFs in the aptly named opening *Contrapunctus* that they would then transpose (usually to the fifth) *and* inverted in further variations called *Modulatio,* where they would naturally form a new, functionally individual counterpoint at different consonances (albeit inverted) CF. Such musical puzzles served as the fodder for later masterpieces in the late baroque such as Sebastian Bach's *Der Kunst der Fuge*.

Source Reading: *L'organo suonarino* (1605)

In 1605, Adriano Banchieri took leave of his position as monastery organist in Bologna, travelling to Venice to oversee the printing of a new treatise that would provide essential instruction to those of his profession. As noted in the introduction, the performance of *versetti* in alternation with sung chants represented a central responsibility for any liturgically engaged organist; yet until this point, no treatise had given specific instruction on the mastery of this art. While Diruta's *prima parte* had addressed technical elements of keyboard playing, his second volume had not yet been published, so one can only presume that any improviser of advanced faculties had accessed the practice *vis à vis* a master teacher. Banchieri intended to fill this specific gap in available source material, as we can read in the introduction to his first edition:

> "Being that sung and played music have been explained with great convenience… it occurred to me to add this, my *Organo Suonarino* (whatever it may be), for those who profess the playing of organs; not to give them rules for polished and learned playing (Diruta having already given them sufficiently in *Il Transilvano*) nor to detail the rules of

> counterpoint [*n.b.*] … but to show how to alternate with the choir on the *canti fermi* for all the festivities and solemnities of the [liturgical] year."[51]

The treatise contains notated examples in the form of CFs, *versetti* to be realized from a *basso figurato,* and contrapuntal examples in *spartitura*. Banchieri prefaces each section with brief remarks detailing the methods to be practiced, although much of the text addresses the liturgical ordering of chants and how to give the choir the correct pitch for their following incipit.

The pragmatic objectives of *L'organo suonarino* result in very little overlap with the topics discussed by Diruta. Banchieri explains neither the theory of consonance and dissonance nor how to create a *fuga* – in fact, he gives no methodical pedagogy on how to improvise counterpoint at all, instead referring the reader to Diruta, Zarlino, or Artusi. Eduardo Belotti's editorial preface describes the treatise a "manual for liturgical practice;"[52] that is, a reference book that may have been placed on the music desk during mass. It served to instruct which CF to play on which Sunday, how to render chants in a singable range for the choir, and how to perform psalms – giving ample material for practice along the way. Despite its emphasis on liturgical practice, however, *L'organo suonarino* will also provide a wealth of material for practice and refinement at the

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[51] Banchieri, 2. My own translation.
"*Essendo hoggidí la Musica in Canto, & Suono ridotta à docilità possible… mi é parso (qual egli sia) aggiungere questo mio ORGANO SUONARINO, à quelli che professano il sonare Organi; non già per dar loro regole di polito, & dotto suonare (havendole di già entro il Transilvano del sufficientissimo Diruta) ne tampoco per dar regole di Contrapunto… ma si bene per mostrare con vera pratica quanto occorrer suole à gli Organisti per alternare Corista a gli Canti fermi in tutte le feste, & solennità dell'anno.*"

[52] Banchieri, *L'Organo Suonarino*, ed. Edoardo Bellotti, xi.

keyboard, comprising exercises that might be rendered as simple or complex as suits the student's abilities. This reading will begin with a brief summary of Banchieri's advice on mode and transposition, followed by an examination of his notated *canti fermi* and *bassi figurati* for improvisation practice, one of the only applicable and non-realized demonstrations of the period.

Music of the early seventeenth century might be viewed as conforming to either of two concurrent modal systems, each observed by different schools or individuals. For example, Diruta had elected to operate under Zarlino's updated system of twelve modes for his students in *Il Transilvano,* while many others still observed the older system of eight modes, one authentic and one plagal for Dorian, Phyrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian. Banchieri uses this older system in *L'organo suonarino,* likely to reflect the presence of eight modes across all liturgical chant melodies. The *Secondo registro* contains CFs for the *Magnificat* and selected psalms in each mode, prefaced by a method for structuring cadences within an improvisation according to its modal properties.

For each of the eight modes, Banchieri states there are four species of *corde*, each serving a specific function within the verset. In this context, each *corda* represents a pitch within the mode on which a cadence might be made, and in all cases but one Banchieri indicates a stepwise motion for approaching the resolution. The *corde* are as follows (shown in **Fig. 13**): *Principiante,* which is the pitch taken from the last note of the chant; *Mezana,* where one makes a cadence in the middle of the verset; *Indifferente,*

upon which one cadences over the course of the piece; and *Finale,* from which the choir will take their next starting pitch.

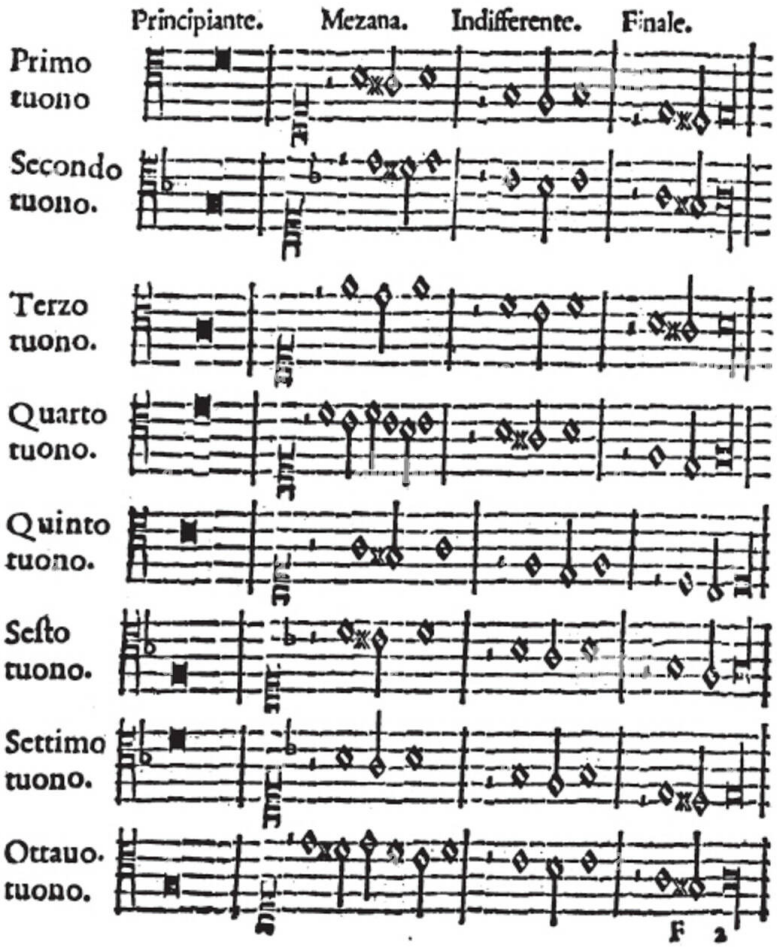

Figure 13. The four *corde* for each mode[53]

The table warrants several clarifications. First, half of the modes occur are transposed[54] in order to better fit a vocal range at which the chants would be sung: the *secondo tuono* and *terzo tuono* are transposed up a fourth, the *quinto tuono* down a fourth, and the

[53] Banchieri, *L'organo suonarino* (Venice: Amadino, 1605), 42.

[54] For more information on of transposing modes, see Diruta, *Seconda Parte del Transilvano,* book 3, 3-5.

settimo tuono down a fifth, with *ficta* applied to the signature to render the correct mode. Second, the fourth and eighth modes each contain two *corde mezane,* of which the organist might presumably select either for use in the middle of a verset.

That Banchieri writes out these easily executed transpositions affirms the treatise's utility as a practical guide, easily readable with no need for *ex tempore* modification. He also notes that one can transpose any mode to feature a final on D *la sol re* using *ficta,* which he witnessed Giovanni Gabrieli and Paulo execute skillfully while in attendance at St. Mark's during his stay in Venice. He provides examples of this transposition technique after his eight CFs on the incipit of the Magnificat, transposing each of them to use D *la sol re* as a final.[55]

The *quattro corde* represent an easily applicable method within the improvisational toolkit, referring to a structure that reinforces the function of different *solfeggii* within each mode. Furthermore, the practice of cadencing on each of these *corde* within an improvisation might help to break the patterns of tonal thinking so instilled in keyboard players of today. Regarding their contextual placement within counterpoint, one notes that each cadence represents a suspension and resolution by ascending stepwise motion. In all but the Phrygian modes, the resolution is by semitone, suggesting motion from leading tone to final, as would occur over a descending fifth in the bass. In some cases, such as the *finale* for the fourth mode, the resolution is made by whole tone, perhaps because the *ficta* to render a semitone (D-sharp) does not exist on a

[55] Banchieri, *L'organo suonarino,* ed. Bellotti, 30.

meantone keyboard (which contains only E-flat).[56] In this case, Bellotti suggests that the lower note should be accompanied by the sixth below or third above, the voice-leading resulting in what we would deem a Phrygian cadence.[57]

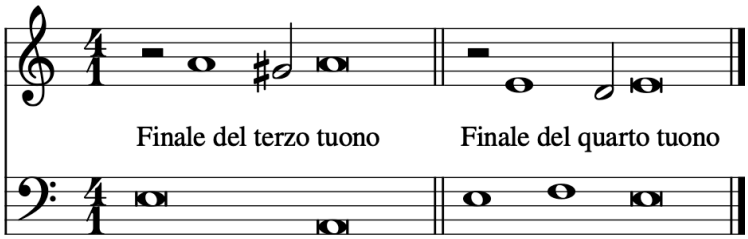

Figure 14. Possible placements of the *corde* within two cadences

Thus, the motion of cadences depends on the *ficta* available according to the limitations of a keyboard – and not the intervallic species within the mode. In the case of **Fig. 14**, the choice of movement for the *quarto tuono* is a result of the keyboard gamut containing E-flat rather than D-sharp. While in transposed *terzo tuono* with a final of A, approaching the final from an E-major modality is possible, one might just as easily feature G-natural accompanied by B-flat, rendering a different quality of cadence. Banchieri demonstrates this in the following section, a series of eight groups of *versetti* (again, one in each mode) on the CFs of various psalms. The practice in question occurs in the third psalm, where Banchieri transposes the *terzo tuono* to feature a final on D *la sol re*.[58] This mode will cadence on A as a *mezana,* F as *indifferente,* and D as *Finale*. As

[56] Banchieri uses *ficta* outside the keyboard gamut only once in *L'organo suonarino,* in the *Quarta Fuga* from the *Primo Registro,* described as *"Fuga Cromatica."* Should the prescence of split-keys be presupposed, the title would likely read *enharmonica* rather than *cromatica*. I suggest that the sonata might be transposed or played with the wolf-tone, according to the performer's interpretation.

[57] Banchieri, ibid., xi.

[58] Banchieri, ibid., 34.

B-flat is part of the key signature, Banchieri invariably moves to the *mezana* in Phyrigian motion, accompanying it with a G natural to precede the *corda*. Likewise, the *corda indifferente* on F is approached by the semitone below. For cadences on the D final, there are two possible precursors, one using C-natural and E-flat (Phrygian motion) and the other C-sharp and A. Banchieri uses both *ficta* options in the *versetti,* although he does choose the stronger motion using C-sharp over a descending fifth in the bass for each final cadence. This demonstrates that the performer can indeed choose between them when they are available.

To recall a simile made in the introduction, one might read *Il Transilvano* as the instructional textbook for contrapuntal language, and *L'organo suonarino* as a workbook containing exercises and blank spaces for one to apply the rules in practice. Each exercise (with only a few exceptions) takes the form of a single bass line, mensurally notated with intermittent figures indicating which interval to play above it. Each of these represents a *versetto* to be played by the organ on every other line of chant, the choir singing the remaining lines in alternation. Fascinatingly, Banchieri also notates the text of the CF chant under each bass *versetto,* perhaps to clarify what exactly is played and what is sung. The examples span CFs of every conceivable liturgical function, from mass ordinary to antiphon, hymn to psalm tone, even several "*ripieni per il* Deo Gratias" to end the mass.

At first glance, a method for completing these *versetti* seems far from evident, for which Banchieri gives little instruction. In his preface to the latest critical edition, Bellotti proposes a guiding philosophy:

> "if through the diligent study of music of great composers from this period – *ricercari, canzoni,* masses and motets – we are to identify complex contrapuntal structures and break them down into parts, Banchieri proposes an inverse operation through the figured bass, that is, to construct the contrapuntal architecture from its basic ideas and formulas."[59]

Diruta and other authors suggest the first method described by Bellotti, in which, for example, one sets about dissecting twelve *ricercari* to observe and infer elements of contrapuntal syntax. The process applied in completing the *versetti* over figured basses exercises the remaining faculties: the utilization of these internalized rules, formulas, and structures in creating one's own counterpoint. Banchieri facilitates this process by supplying a critical piece of information – the mensural *canto figurato* – furnishing a CF with distinguishable motives, a modal structure with ostensible cadences, and a rhythmic framework for the counterpoint.

Banchieri notes the use of *canto figurato* on his title page which notes that the melodies are expressed in the form of a "*Basso in Canto figurato suonabile, & cantabile*," [playable and singable bass in *canto figurato*][60] underscoring their readiness for performance alongside singers in a mass. The term *canto figurato* in sixteenth-century sources refers to measured polyphony based on a chant melody. Motivic functions within *canto figurato* play out in its reoccurrence, imitation between voices, and counterpoint with *fughe*. Notably, the term *Canto de órgano* occurs interchangeably in Spanish sources and in opposition to *canto llano* (*i.e.* plainsong),[61]

[59] Banchieri, ibid., xi.

[60] Banchieri, ibid., 1.

[61] Owen Rees, "Canto (i)," in *Grove Music Online.*

demonstrating consistencies between the practices of composing polyphony and improvising versets during mass. On a more technical level, the creation of a *canto figurato* is the first step of composing polyphony as described by Zarlino, setting the melody in rhythmic values. Writing shortly after the conception of *basso cifrato* shorthand, Banchieri is the first to apply this notational practice to a single bass line, furnishing a single *canto figurato* for completion at will. One might add a single voice to create a *duo* as suggested by Diruta, render a simple harmonization over each bass note, or invent counterpoint with points of imitation among the voices.

Banchieri's figured basses serve as a critical ligature between the two cognitive pathways represented in the example of language by hearing and speech. Before a child can speak in complete sentences, they might first speak only certain words or phrases, or respond to simple queries. Similarly, the completion of each *versetto* is indeed like answering a simple question. There is no one *correct* solution for any one,[62] and thus one cannot approach them as solvable riddles. Rather, they are an intermediate means for beginning to express one's own contrapuntal ideas in context, based on one given line. The practice is most successful in developing one's proficiency, the only skill remaining being the translation from *canto fermo* to *canto figurato*.

[62] Banchieri, ibid., xv-xxi.
Bellotti gives examples of three possible techniques for realizing Banchieri's *canti figuorati*.

Methodologies

These treatises attracted my attention as a performer when, discouraged by a lack of practical resources for historical improvisation technique, I sought out concrete methodologies rather than imitable examples to direct my course of practical study. However acquainted I grew with early-baroque style and repertory, imitating written-down counterpoint without understanding its theoretical underpinnings seemed like stringing together dictionary entries in a foreign language without having studied its grammatical structures. By producing pedagogical methods, Banchieri and Diruta encapsulate this missing information within an applied context for their reader. The student absorbs intricacies of contrapuntal theory in sounding out examples and exercises and, in doing so, understands and reproduces simultaneously. I suggest this progression as the most useful as a pedagogical method and the most historically based course of replicating this technical practice. In the instance of this study, my reading on modes, fugal techniques, and contrapuntal movements progressed quickly to the keyboard, where I memorized Diruta's notated examples over a CF. While it was not planned, I observed that this method resonates with the modern concept of research-creation, or the application of one's findings in scholarship towards the creation of a new piece of music.

Modern discourse on historical improvisation has long debated which approach might best serve the final product, which most can agree is to improvise in a fashion similar to performers of the period in question. In this context, the fact that we *cannot know* how improvisations sounded in any time before recordings presents the biggest

conceptual challenge. Furthermore, how might one bridge the final conceptual impasse, moving from studying written didactics and examples to the first steps of improvising one's own counterpoint at the keyboard? I wanted my application of historical improvisation technique to confront each of these expectations; if not to dispel all doubts, to produce a rationale for the choices I make in my own performances.

Having studied and analyzed Diruta's progressive examples, I began my own applications of the demonstrated techniques, adding my own counterpoints in consonance over a selected CF. For each exercise, I selected a CF from one of the primary sources cited in my bibliography; Diruta's compendium of liturgical melodies in the fourth book, the numerous basses in *L'organo suonarino,* and Zarlino's *soggetti* in the text of *Le istitutioni harmoniche* provided more than enough material. Beginning with CFs of uniform, long-note values, one might progress to those that include the occasional minim, then to Banchieri's collection of improvisation sketches over a fully-notated *canto figurato*.

For the purposes of this paper, I wrote my example counterpoints on a CF from Zarlino's *Le institutioni harmoniche* found in *Capitolo 28* of the *Terza Parte*[63] (**Fig. 15**). I replicated Diruta's method, following the advice of his theoretical text, producing the following progression from simple counterpoint *nota contra nota* to three-voice realization. I will explain my process for each example.

[63] Zarlino, 174.

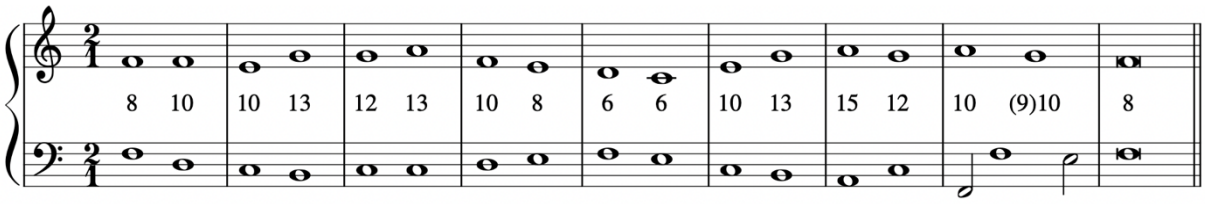

Figure 15. My own *Contrapunto di nota contra nota* on Zarlino's CF

Like Diruta, I began my practice by adding one voice to the selected melody, rendering one consonance below each value of the CF, *nota-contra-nota,* notated in **Fig. 15**. Having fashioned an accompaniment to the CF in my mind by playing it through (and often speaking the intervals out loud), I marked down my ideas in pencil on the *carta*. A tangible record of my decisions served my early progress, not only because it helped to visualize my application of *consonanze* and *movimenti*, but because I could reference my previous work in further practice, refining my contrapuntal vocabulary as I progressed. In the beginning, I also noted which *movimento* I made with each move to a new consonance, emulating the Transylvanian's own authentication of Diruta's first-species counterpoint.[64] After several tries, it became much easier to circle every perfect consonance rendered between voices, ensuring that I had rendered contrary in moving from the preceding consonance. In reviewing the counterpoint, I would verify that it followed Diruta's additional directives: that it alluded consecutive or adjacent *mi contra fa* and tritones, used the semitone in the fourth movement when required, featured a variety of consonances, and, most importantly, executed *movimenti* primarily to the nearest consonance. In the case of the example above, I moved to the

[64] Diruta, *The Transylvanian,* book 2, ed. Bradshaw and Soehnlen, 47.
In my example, only the second and third *movimenti* are made until the third measure, where the fourth is made in oblique motion. The only example of the first measure occurs in the second-to-last measure with the leap from an octave to a twelfth.

closest consonance before electing to jump in the counterpoint, and I used contrary motion where the CF ascends by consecutive thirds to render multiple consonances between voices. Thus, I verified that the resulting counterpoint neither featured too many leaps nor excessive parallel motion or unison with the CF, instead rendering a distinct, linear second voice.

Next, I increased the rhythmic value of the counterpoint, rendering my first *contrapunto diminuito*. Diruta's instructions for "good" and "bad" notes dictate that the first note of the *fuga diminuita* is obliged to be consonant, while the second may be consonant or dissonant, and so on; yet the first second-species examples include only consonances, therefore I began rendering two consonances per CF value. Obligatory movement *and* consonance on each half note rendered this exercise one of the most challenging, as forbidden *movimenti* and inexplicable leaps were common obstacles to reaching a consonance with a new CF note. **Fig. 16** contains a counterpoint in minims above the CF containing only consonances on the tactus and half-tactus.

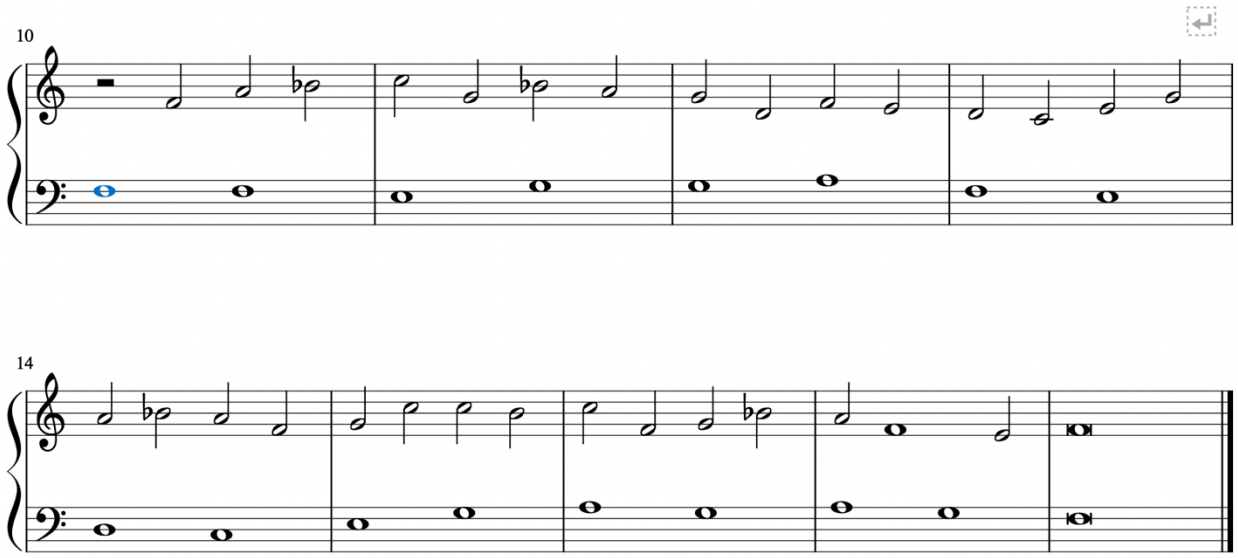

Figure 16. My own *contrapunto di minime* on the same CF

The task of *contrapunto diminuito* eases significantly when one allows the "bad" notes to be dissonant, as is more common in applied practice. Even so, an improviser who has already completed a note-against-note counterpoint need not devise a new series of consonances altogether. In marking the consonances formed in the first two counterpoints in *Il Transilvano,* one notices a pattern I quickly suspected the author intended for his reader's inference. Namely, almost every functional consonance present in the first-species example reoccurs above the CF in the *contrapunto di minime*. **Fig. 17** contains both of Diruta's examples for easy reference.

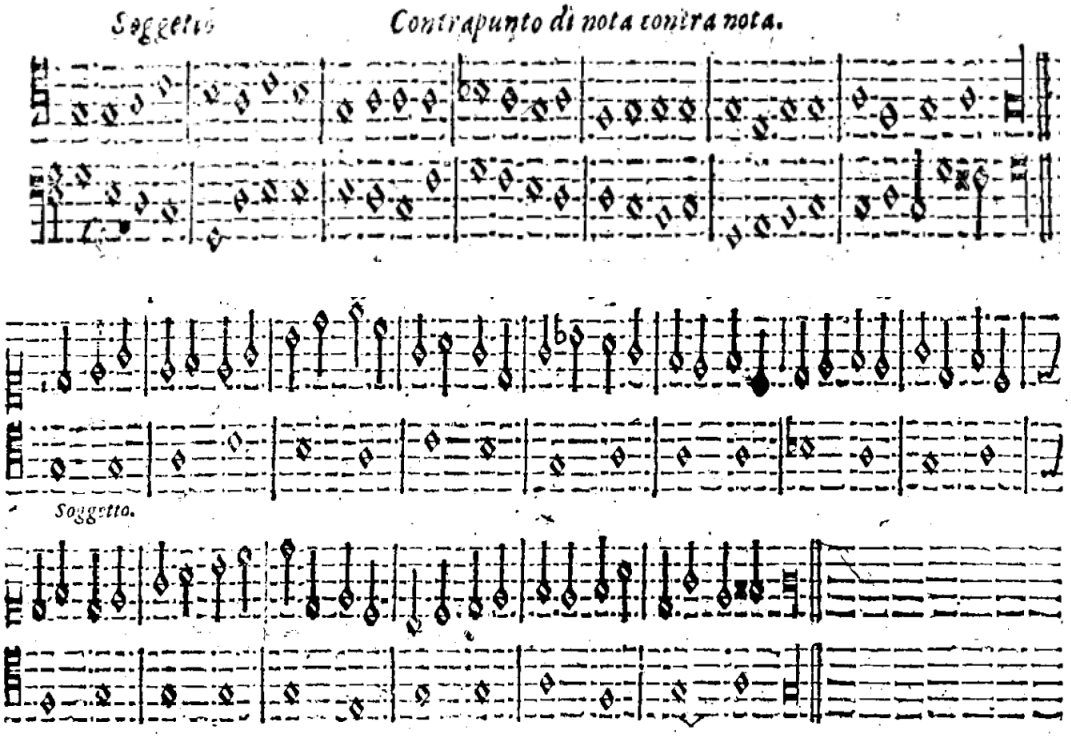

Figure 17. Diruta's note-against-note counterpoint (above) and *contrapunto di minime* (below)[65]

[65] Diruta *Secondea parte del Transilvano,* (Vincenti, 1622) 10.

This comparison must account for inversion, as the first counterpoint sets the CF in the upper voice and following examples set it in the lower voice; so, one must likewise invert sixths and thirds. Take the second counterpoint shown in **Fig. 17**: the first CF note is accompanied by a rest, but the second forms a sixth with the voice above, equating to the tenth formed on the second note of the CF in the previous example (in fact, both *fughe* contain the pitch E). The consonances over the third CF note are equivalent, although the fourth is not, demonstrating that the rule of nearest consonance can have precedence over the consonant structure. Because Diruta is utilizing only consonances in the *contrapunto di minime,* he cannot move by stepwise motion to the unison as in the first setting, nor can he move to another perfect consonance, the fifth, as this would break the rules of the *quarto movimento*. Thus, he moves to a third over the C, jumping efficiently to the fifth on the bad note, then rendering the octave over the B (fifth note of the CF). After this, the counterpoint swiftly moves to the consonance equal to that of the first example, the tenth, by which it can approach the twelfth (also consistent with its counterpart) on the sixth CF note. The pattern continues throughout the example and is evident throughout the consonant structures of each additional counterpoint on the same CF.[66]

Using this methodology, one can view *contrapunto diminuito* as a derivative of *contrapunto semplice,* and the first *carta* produced in practice becomes a roadmap for the further development of the added voice. As in Diruta's examples, one may render

[66] Zarlino, 196.
Similar (although not identical) consonant structures occur in Zarlino's counterpoints (all *diminuiti*) over the same subject.

these intervals in any of their composites and must swap thirds and sixths when inverting the voices. As the counterpoint features smaller or mixed note values, utilizing neighbouring or passing dissonances on bad notes, the consonant structure supplies a series of melodic targets on each tactus and may be utilized to determine melodic or figural motion.

For the next task, composing counterpoint in three parts, one must begin to strategically design the countersubjects to imitate either the CF or one another.[67] Several new rules apply to counterpoint in three or more voices. Carlo Abbate's *Regulae Contrapuncti* (1629) reminds the reader that in two-part counterpoint, one may not use the fourth, but that in three or more voices, one may indeed use it in one of the upper two voices, along with the fifth or sixth in the other.[68] Second, one must ensure that both voices are consonant with the CF and with each other on every half-tactus.

[67] Diruta *The Transylvanian*, book 2, ed. Bradshaw and Soehnlen, 57.

[68] Carlo Abbate, *Regulae Contrapuncti* (Leipzig: Nationales Druckhaus, 1977), 36-7. Banchieri, *Conclusioni nel suono dell'organo* (Bologna: Rossi, 1609), "Duodecima Conclusione dilucidata," 30-31.

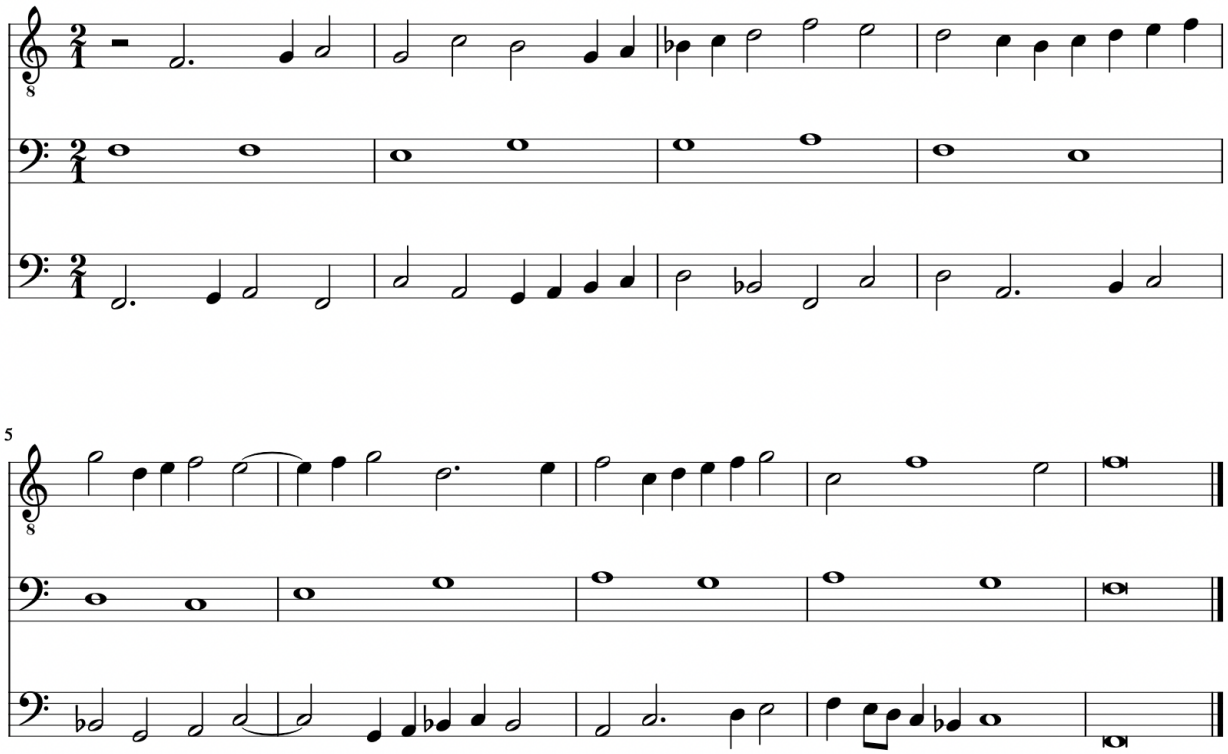

Figure 18. My own three-voice counterpoint on Zarlino's CF

When Diruta adds a second voice in counterpoint, he abandons the scheme of consonant inversion discussed above. Here, the improviser must devise consonant structures that will produce discernable counterpoint in each of the three voices. A *fuga*-like motive might begin each entry, imitated among the voices as often as possible. Here, the motive is an ascending third with passing tone, rendered in a dotted rhythm resembling an *accento*. A secondary motive is evident in the rising quarters imitated between voices in the second and third measure – these will also prove useful in several instances throughout the counterpoint. Having established the motives and their original entries, I proceed according to Zarlino's instruction: that contrapuntists must

compose first consonances and later add dissonances.[69] First, I find a progression of consonances in one voice that uses correct *movimenti* while envisioning the space that the second voice will fill in. One might aptly question whether one should hold all voices in consideration when devising the contrapuntal structure. Here, practice at the keyboard proves most useful. In marking consonances on the *carta,* one cannot easily envision the simultaneous multiple relationships between voices that will render a fully realized consonant structure. Of course, there are standard cells that one may use (returning to Lusitano or Cerone provides great assistance) to render common structures, but the only way to gain fluency is through repeated application. While the first few attempts are often painstaking, the process of discerning voice entries, motive placement, and detecting forbidden motions becomes easier with each repetition. Should the design of a consonant structure complete with cadences prove difficult, I recommend Banchieri's *bassi figurati* for their merits as "fill-in-the-blank" models. Here, a single voice and implied harmony are already specified, so one may more easily exercise one's skills in imitation in a concentrated context.

The written repertory of *versetti* surviving from the early baroque reveals several techniques not addressed by Banchieri and Diruta. These are especially evident in versets on hymn melodies, which composers appear to have set in free imitative structure after Banchieri's recommendations. Surviving examples suggest a range of techniques which the improviser might select as models. First, one must determine which part of the strophic melody the organ plays and which the choir would sing.

[69] Zarlino, 172.

Banchieri sets each hymn verse (*i.e.,* line, not stanza) as a short verset,[70] suggesting the organ and choir alternate at each phrase, while most published *versetti* draw on the incipit of the hymn alone as a CF, their uniformity suggesting alternation at each stanza. This structure will determine the which part of the melody is used for points of imitation. Each of Frescobaldi's hymn versets begins with a subject based on the first notes of the CF, while further voice entrances recall motives from later verses, but only after the *mezana* cadence.[71] The 1645 examples by Giovanni Battista Fasolo reveal yet another technique, as each *versetto* draws on a different hymn verse for its imitative subject.[72] The latter collection represents a particularly refined synthesis of Banchieri and Frescobaldi's techniques, demonstrating the development of counterpoint over CF by organists in the seventeenth century.

The second factor to be determined regards the translation of the CF into *canto figurato*. As discussed with regards to *L'organo suonarino,* one may mensurate the notes of the CF into rhythmic values that suit the counterpoint and draw the ear; and one may follow them with imitations on the same motive or *fughe*. Furthermore, Banchieri's examples reveal that the subject's intervallic content may change depending on the range of the imitating voice, as seen in **Fig 15a.** The *versetti* of Frescobaldi and Fasolo go one step further, sometimes setting the modified subject as the first point of entrance (**Fig. 15b**).

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[70] See Banchieri, *L'organo suonarino*, 48.

[71] Girolamo Frescobaldi, *Il secondo libro di toccate, canzone, versi d'hinni, magnificat, gagliarde, correnti, et altre partite d'intavolatura di cimbalo et organo* (Rome: Borbone, 1637).

[72] Giovanni Battista Fasolo, *Annuale che contiene tutto quello, che deve far un Organista, per risponder al Choro tutto l'Anno* (Venice: Vincenti, 1645).

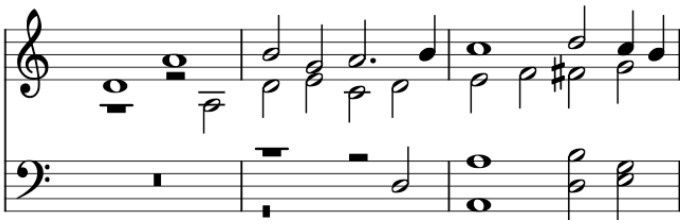
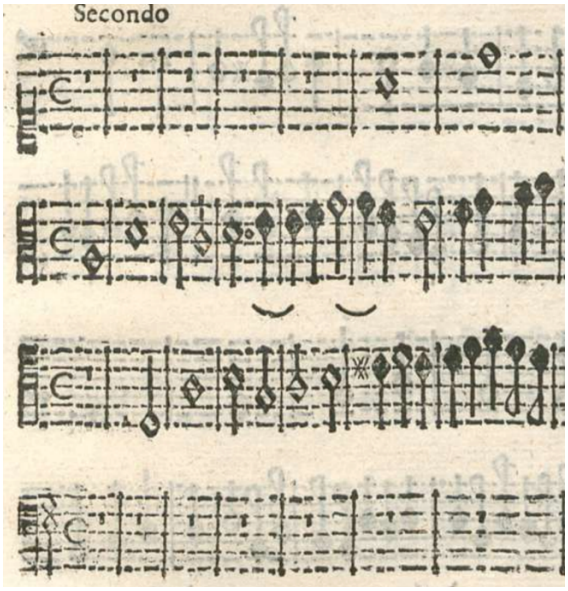


Figure 15a. Banchieri's *versetto sopra l'*Ave Maris stella,[73] featuring modification of the fifth to the fourth in the first two CF notes (alto and bass entries)



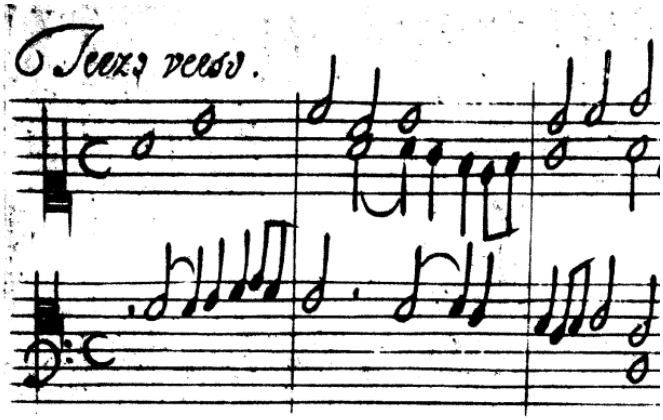


Figure 15b. Modified CF subjects by Fasolo (upper)[74] and Frescobaldi (lower)[75] on the same hymn

[73] *L'organo suonarino*, 121.

[74] Fasolo, 17.

[75] Frescobaldi, 66.

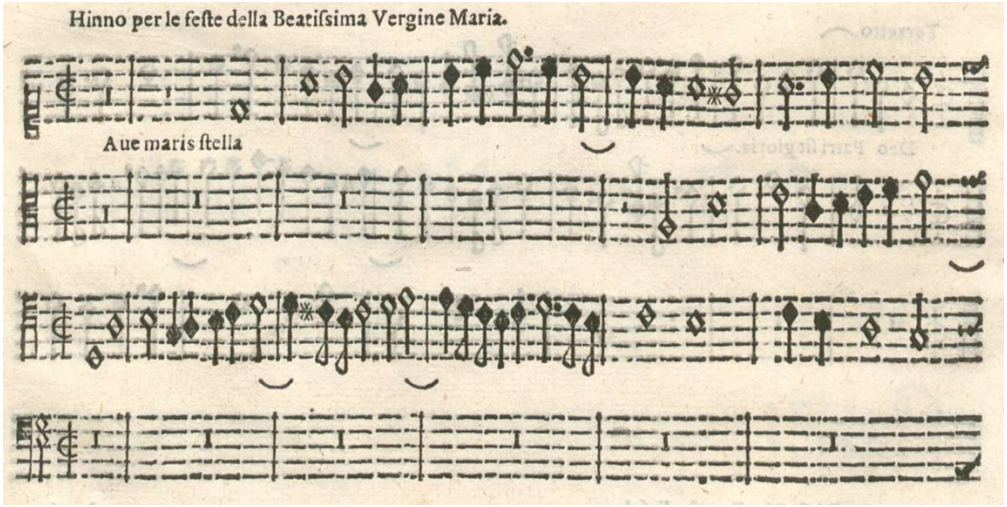


Figure 15c. Fasolo's first verset on the same melody,[76] featuring further affected embellishments

Fasolo's example shown in **Fig. 15c** suggests a liberal treatment of the CF melody in *canto figurato* practice *circa* 1645. The principal entrance in the tenor embellishes the subject almost like a *canzone francese,* passing up the scale stepwise from G to D, where it apparently abandons the CF after only four notes. The second point of imitation carries out a more complete statement of the melody, adding a G-sharp at the conclusion to emphasize the *mezana* cadence. The application of *ficta* is far less sparse in Fasolo's *Annuale* than in Frescobaldi's *Secondo libro di toccata,* although the Frescobaldi may have intended the reader to infer further occasions based on knowledge of the mode.

One need not master and apply every technique evident in primary literature – this daunting task would require more than a lifetime of inventory and practice. Yet *versetti* of the seventeenth century can in some cases help to answer outstanding

[76] Fasolo, 14.

questions regarding Banchieri's intentions. Diruta supplied the impetus for the adoption of a second supplemental technique, that is to look at the music of other masters in order to imitate their use of counterpoint. Certainly, this study anticipated a consultation of written *versetti* and considerations of contrapuntal language in other polyphony. In the end, my project comprised a far greater range of material than I could easily document in detail, ranging across several genres and extending several decades into the seventeenth century. I became acutely aware that while stylistic and formal elements changed during this period, most contrapuntal keyboard music maintained the language of *contrapunto osservato* described by Diruta, at least to the degree he suggests.

Stages of contrapuntal invention: *alla mente, alla cartella, and alla tastitura*

After a careful theoretical study, an internalization of contrapuntal building blocks, and the completion of exercises according to Diruta and Banchieri, one might feel fully empowered to assemble fully improvised pieces. My experience was to the contrary – upon sitting down at the keyboard, my inventive faculties became obstructed after a few short measures, causing me to lose track of the CF or work myself into an inescapable arrangement of consonances. In such cases, the root of this confusion proved not to be a deficit of inventiveness but one of organization, as one cannot proceed to the end of a thought without holding in mind where it is going. This led me to ask how one might mentally arrange one's cadences, entries, motives, and formal structure for instantaneous recall? More specifically (for those lacking a photographic

memory, such as myself), how does one organize this information in the mind before performing at the keyboard? This question requires another consideration of period practice – this time the specific stages of invention executed by a composer, from first idea to a notated final version.

Primary source material often describes the first stage of musical composition as taking place in the mind alone, evoking an association with improvisation.[77] The process involves several steps, the invention of motivic *soggetti,* the arrangement of cadences on *corde* as described by Banchieri, and their setting within consonant structures conforming to the rules of counterpoint.[78] Sixteenth-century practitioners used the word *fantasia* to describe musical invention from the mind alone, perhaps most famously in Tomás de Santa Maria's improvisation treatise *Arte de tañer fantasia* (1565). Diego Ortíz also references the *fantasia* in 1553 as the only category of improvisation between viol and harpsichord that does not rely on a dance form or polyphonic composition for its structure – rather the harpsichord plays a series of chords, over which the viol plays some elegant motives, and when the viol plays in long notes, the harpsichord will play the motives in imitation. Unfortunately, Ortiz does not provide an example, saying "I will not show this [practice], since everyone does it in their own way,"[79] emphasizing that the *fantasia* comes solely from the mind. Several other renaissance authors suggest that spontaneous creation produces music that surpasses any that could be written

[77] Owens, 64.

[78] Discussed in Schubert, *Contrapunto fugato.*

[79] Cunguihlem, *L'improvisation polyphonique,* 84.

down or planned out, with various references to "*divino furor,*" "*calor*" or *"dir di anima*" attesting to the emotive palpability rendered by master improvisers.[80]

In its most complete form, counterpoint in the mind could render an entire piece in nearly complete form, as reportedly practiced by *maestri* from Josquin to Monteverdi.[81] This undoubtedly relied on a toolbox, a practice hearkening back to the formulae of Lusitano discussed previously. Chiodino provides examples for this process in a treatise on creating "*contrappunto alla mente, et alla penna*," introducing a system of *loci,* or motivic segments to be used in *fughe,* that one might set against commonly occurring patterns in the CF, which he titles *imago*.[82] Banchieri describes a similar process in the *Cartella musicale,* replacing the terms *locus* and *imago* with *passaggio* and *memoria,* respectively. Providing several examples of each, the author states that, "the astute singer… when he finds simple notes like those of the *memoria* we have seen, can sing the corresponding *passaggio*. This will produce a good effect, and a graceful singer will acquire a good reputation as a result."[83] One can easily observe a pattern within the practice of composition *alla mente*: the setting of complimentary motivic cells as a contrapuntal shorthand for rendering commonly occurring patterns, a pattern to which Lorenzetti refers as a mnemonic device.[84] Indeed, a student who adds

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[80] Discussed by Canguihlem, *L'improvisation polyphonique,* 21-25.

[81] Owens, 66.
Owens recounts Monteverdi's claim to have completed a piece (*Zefiro torna*?) in his mind only requiring notation before completion.

[82] Lorenzetti, 29-33.

[83] Banchieri, *Cartella musicale,* Venice: Vincenti, 1601, 216-7.

[84] Lorenzetti, 30.

counterpoints to CFs after Diruta's method will notice the emergence of several patterns. Individual intuition may direct one to attempt to abandon these patterns in search of new ones, yet this does not necessarily reflect the practices of Chiodino or Lusitano. While one must indeed strive for motivic diversity motives across different *fughe,* I would also advise careful inventory of what patterns work against given intervals, melodic motions, and motivic cells. This, combined with the adoption of several from Banchieri's *Cartella* will assist with speed and clarity of *fantasia*.

Zacconi casts doubt upon contemporary methods for teaching *contrappunto alla mente* in his *Prattica di musica* (1622), recounting his observations of teachers who ask their students to improvise before stopping them, only to replace it with their own example for emulation. Indeed, we face much the same problem as students in the twenty-first century who can only imitate and cannot be corrected. "What good are [these methods]," Zacconi vents, "if they don't take the direct path to where they are going?"[85] I encountered similar frustrations in my first attempts to improvise from the mind alone and quickly heeded the advice of Johannes Avianius: "that beginners, who cannot yet organize *fughe* in their minds, may be helped a little as so pleases them, to write down the execution of *fughe* as they find necessary."[86] One cannot be exactly sure how Avianius's student's marked their *fughe,* although this passage suggests they marked the *carta* in the early stages of study. As I tried this process, I did not find it necessary to write out the entirety of a counterpoint but only to mark its entry and the

[85] Zacconi, 84. English translation from Owens, 68.

[86] Johannes Avianius, *Isagoge in libros musicae poeticae* (Erfurt, 1581).
Quoted in original Latin in footnote on Owens, 67. My own English translation.

interval above or below the CF. This determines the degree to which one will allow visual aids to assist in practice at the keyboard; that is, how much of my process will manifest *alla cartella* versus *alla mente*.

In her book on compositional processes common to the Renaissance, Jesse Anne Owens asserts that these two phases of musical creation were closely intertwined, practiced by composers and improvisers alike. One of her principal revelations surrounds a 1606 affidavit by Luzzaschi in which he affirms the authenticity of a manuscript and accompanying *cartella* by his teacher, Cipriano de Rore. The *cartella* is since lost, but Owens suggests that its mention proves the master composer engaged a sketching process using some sort of erasable tablet,[87] which she backs with evidence from preceding and contemporaneous accounts.[88] The presence of such a practice in the sixteenth century supports notions of authenticity and utility in sketching improvised counterpoint on one's own *cartella* – a practice to which Banchieri's outlined *versetti* in the form of *bassi figurati* already seem to allude.

I echo Avianius's sentiments in suggesting that the predetermined organization and detail of one's *cartella* relies on one's own preference. One might also develop their own systems for indicating the entry of each *fuga* or imitative CF motive, the intervals at which they occur, and the patterns that fit against one another. In my own practice, I wrote the CF fully on staff paper, determining the exact *canto figurato* I would play along with its intervallic modification and rhythmic values. Then, I would mark

[87] Owens, 64-6.

[88] Owens, 75-94.

consonances with a shorthand borrowed from examples in Zarlino, Diruta, and Zacconi: a small number above or below the CF indicating the interval at which the accompany material occurs. Reduction of all composite intervals to their most compact form (*i.e.* 10 to 3) suited my cognition the best, excepting several cases where the larger numbers specified important voice leading. When finished to the degree I found necessary, my *cartelle* ranged in appearance from consonant markings above or below a single-line staff to, in some cases, the CF spanning across two staves with information filled in around it (see **Fig. 16**). In the case of longer improvisations with multiple motives or CF entries, I would also mark down where I planned to cadence (at least the *corda mezana*) and how I planned to move between entries.

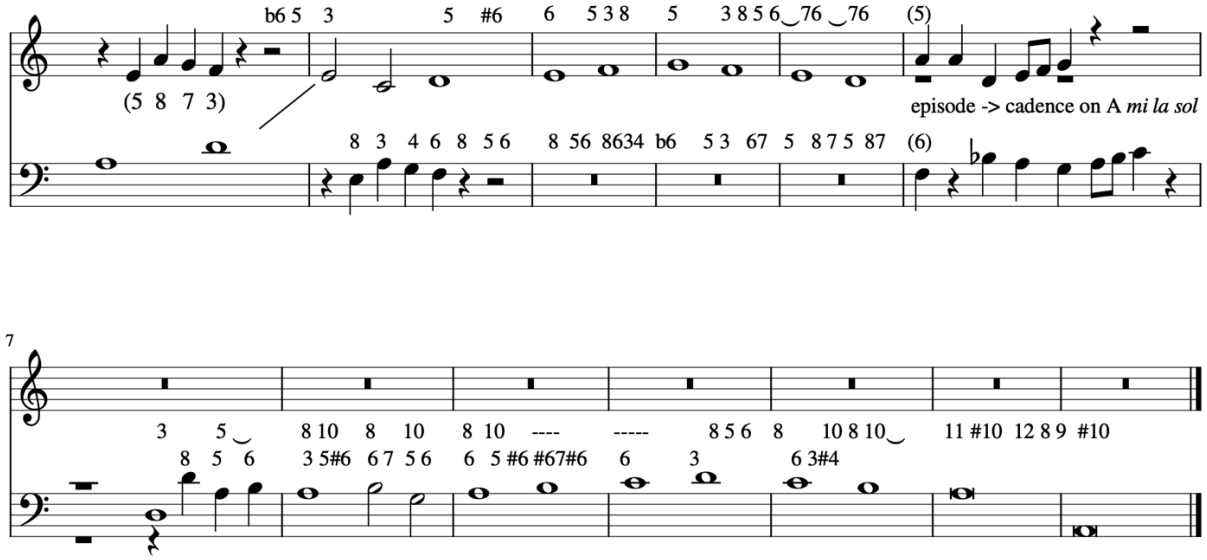

Figure 16. A reproduction of the *cartella* from which I improvised a three-voice verset on *Ave maris stella*. This iteration featured alternation between organ and choir on each verse; as the following line begins on A, my final cadence was on the *mezana* of the *primo tuono*.

The final inventive process is the most important to our study: rendering counterpoint *alla tastitura,* that is, producing a full improvisation at the keyboard. This applied process will require numerous attempts – especially while refining one's technique – before the discernment of a preferable execution. When planning my three-voice verset on *Ave maris stella,* I had determined to use *contrapunto fugato,* setting my *fuga* against the CF notes wherever possible. Having marked down preliminary entries of this motive, I was able to fit several more into the consonant structure (see **Fig. 16**). With the motivic material determined and the general intervals at which it would occur, I would note the *schemata* that best suited the structure, recognizing their synchronizations and repetitions as Bellotti suggests.[89] In this case, I found that if I repeated the CF in the lower voice in the second half, I could invert the *fuga* from the opening in imitation above it, providing varied material for the second half. This theme occurs in *stretto* in the final four measures. I also found that scalar motives (one of my preferred *loci*) in the middle voice accompanied both the inverted *fuga* and the CF from its first note until its fourth. To connect the two halves, I played an episode (noted on the *cartella*) utilizing two-voice motion between consonances of an octave and a third. One voice moves by third while the other moves by fourth in contrary motion, in which pattern I was able to reference motives present in the *fughe* or the first half. I modified the CF in three instances for individual reasons: first, its opening fifth was rendered a fourth due to the tenor range. Second, I spontaneously added a chromatic C-sharp in ascent to the D on the last line, in order to produce a stringent affect and because the only present consonance at a sixth above permits it. Lastly, I imitated the scalar motion

[89] Bellotti, Eduardo, "Composing at the Keyboard," in *Studies in Historical Improvisation,* 120.

of the alto voice in the penultimate measure of the bass, extending the last CF note and rendering a descending fourth in the bass. Banchieri would not consider this a final cadence, although by the time of Fasolo's *Annuale* it was common to all the modes. **Fig. 17** contains a transcription based on a recording of my live performance, representing the final stage of *contrapunto alla tastitura*.

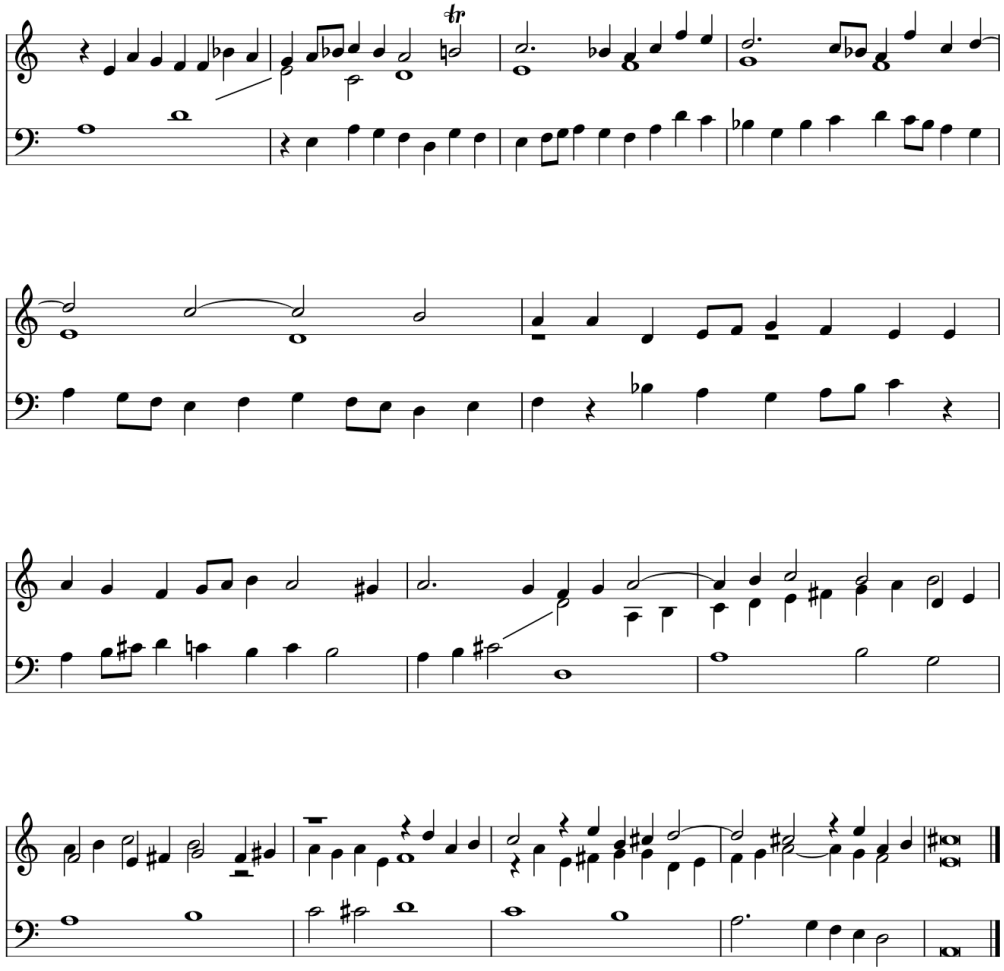

Figure 17. A transcription of the resulting improvisation[90]

[90] The author, transcribed from [fourth improvised *versetto* on *Ave maris stella*], Joshua Stanberry and Adrian Foster, sound engineers, recorded live 10 May 2023, unpublished digital file.

Possible applications beyond improvisation practice

As noted in the introduction, the practice of improvising counterpoint over a CF was central to musical creation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the age of professional maturity, most musicians would long since have mastered the art of *cantare super librum* as part of their liturgical training,[91] the basis of which practice established for the building blocks of musical syntax in the Renaissance. In their treatises, Banchieri and Diruta codified the same practice for organists. Furthermore, the formal structures and compositional techniques observable in later notated counterpoint prove that many organists followed these directives well into the seventeenth century, perfecting the setting and variation of *fughe* in imitation over the CF.

Due to the ubiquitous nature of these practices among early-modern Italian organists, a mastery of techniques relating to contrapuntal improvisation might inform other facets of early music performance. Today, the realization of an accompaniment from *basso figurato* or *basso continuo* is one of the most in-demand tasks for keyboard practitioners of historical performance practice One need only observe the editorial realizations of seventeenth-century *bassi* in critical editions to detect a sense of bewilderment -- or worse insecurity -- among practitioners faced with accompanying from a bass in the early-baroque, modal-based repertory.[92] Perhaps a perceived lack of early-seventeenth century treatises on the subject supports this sense of deficiency.

[91] Canguilhem, *Chanter sur le livre*, 117.

[92] Therese de Goede in "'Del Suonare Sopra Il Basso:' Concerning the Realization of Early Seventeenth-Century Italian Unfigured Basses," Accessed December 2, 2022.

Several pieces of scholarship have addressed this issue in recent decades, however, rendering much more information on bass accompaniment available to performers interested in the early modern period.

In his 1998 article on polyphonic keyboard accompaniment, Gregory Johnson insists on the coexistence two accompanimental techniques in the seventeenth century: *basso cifrato* and *intavolatura*.[93] In the latter case, the keyboardist provides an accompaniment to a soloist improvising over an existing piece of polyphony by producing an exact reduction of the accompanying voices. As Ludovico states in the preface to *Cento concerti ecclesiastici* of 1605 (one of the last editions to recommend accompanying from *partitura* rather than *basso cifrato*), the organist would be "obliged to play only the *partitura,* particularly with the lower hand, and if they like may make movement in the upper hands,"[94] suggesting the occasional addition of *passaggi* or flourishes. This strategy works well for renaissance music but does not suffice as we progress into music of baroque aesthetics, when it is evident that the bassist's responsibilities had increased.[95]

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[93] Gregory S. Johnston, "Polyphonic Keyboard Accompaniment in the Early Baroque: An Alternative to Basso Continuo," *Early Music* 26, no. 1 (1998): 51–64.

[94] Lodovico Viadana, *Per Sonar Nel'organo Li Cento Concerti Ecclesiastici*, "A' Benigni Lettori." My own translation.
"Che l'Organista sia in obligo di suonar semplicemente la Partitura, & in particolare con la man di sotto, & se pure vuol fare qualche movimento dalla mano di sopra, come fiorire le Cadenze, `o qualche Passaggio `a proposito, ha da suonare in maniera tale, che il cantore, `o cantori non vengano coperti, `o confusi dal troppo movimento."

[95] de Goede, 11.

Francesco Bianciardi's short treatise on *basso figurato* forms the basis of an argument for considerations of the relevancy of *contrapunto osservato* or even *fugato* in this context. He acknowledges that this new notational shorthand is not suited to older styles of music, but also notes that a bass player will do more harm than good if they try to realize an unfigured bass without some knowledge of "*l'arte del contrapunto.*"[96] Given the scope of contrapuntal study as discussed in this thesis, one might infer some sort of contrapuntal creation or even improvisation is implicit within this term. No detailed study has yet examined to what extent one can apply Diruta's method of creating *fughe* to a figured bass realization – after all, a figured bass is not a *Cantus firmus*; it is not even the melody, and to render it as such within a contrapuntal context would be confusing in principle.

Remarkably, a few notated accompaniments survive from this period, leaving only the information in *basso continuo* treatises as a guide. However, the written literature for keyboard, especially those of genres typically associated with free improvisation may provide an additional resource for inference of contrapuntal technique within the accompanimental practice of the *seconda pratica*. In her article on style and form in Frescobaldi's *Toccate e partite… libro primo* (1615), Rebecca Cypess argues the efficacy of the Roman organist's toccatas as imitable models for improvisation practice (as well as composition). She traces the pedagogical techniques present in Diruta's *Prima parte del Transilvano* (1593) across the *Romanesca* variations in the 1615 edition, showing that Frescobaldi progressively introduces

[96] Bianciardi, Francesco, *Breve Regola per imparar' a sonare sopra il Basso* (Siena, 1607). Digital version courtesy of Elam Rotem.

variation techniques in the same sequence that Diruta presents information on improvisation through his toccatas.[97] Given the well-established interpretive associations between toccatas and madrigals elucidated by Frescobaldi's first rule in the preface of his first book,[98] one might infer the application of toccata improvisation practice (which includes elements of imitative counterpoint!) within the vocal accompaniment. As mentioned before, very few written-out keyboard accompaniments from this period survive – here, I will examine several such examples that support the theory of technical correlations with free keyboard improvisation.

One such example comes from Frescobaldi's teacher, Luzzasco Luzzaschi, in a composition for voice and intabulated accompaniment. *Dodici madrigali per cantare e suonare* (Rome, 1601) contains madrigals falling under the stylistic conforms of the *nuova prattica,* and includes a fully-realized accompaniment for notated in keyboard tablature. We can read directly from this publication, as *partitura* the polyphonic accompaniment is intabulated under the vocal line.

[97] Rebecca Cypess, "Frescobaldi's Toccate e Partite… Libro Primo (1615–1616) as a Pedagogical Text. Artisanship, Imagination, and the Process of Learning," *Recercare* 27, no. 1/2 (2015): 103-38.

[98] Frescobaldi, *Toccate e partite d'intavolatura libro primo,* (Rome: Borboni, 1615), "Al Lettore:" "*Conviene fermarsi sempre nell'ultima nota di trillo, et d'altri effetti, come di s di grado, benché sia semicroma o biscroma; et communemente si sostengano assai.*"
Cypess 116-7.

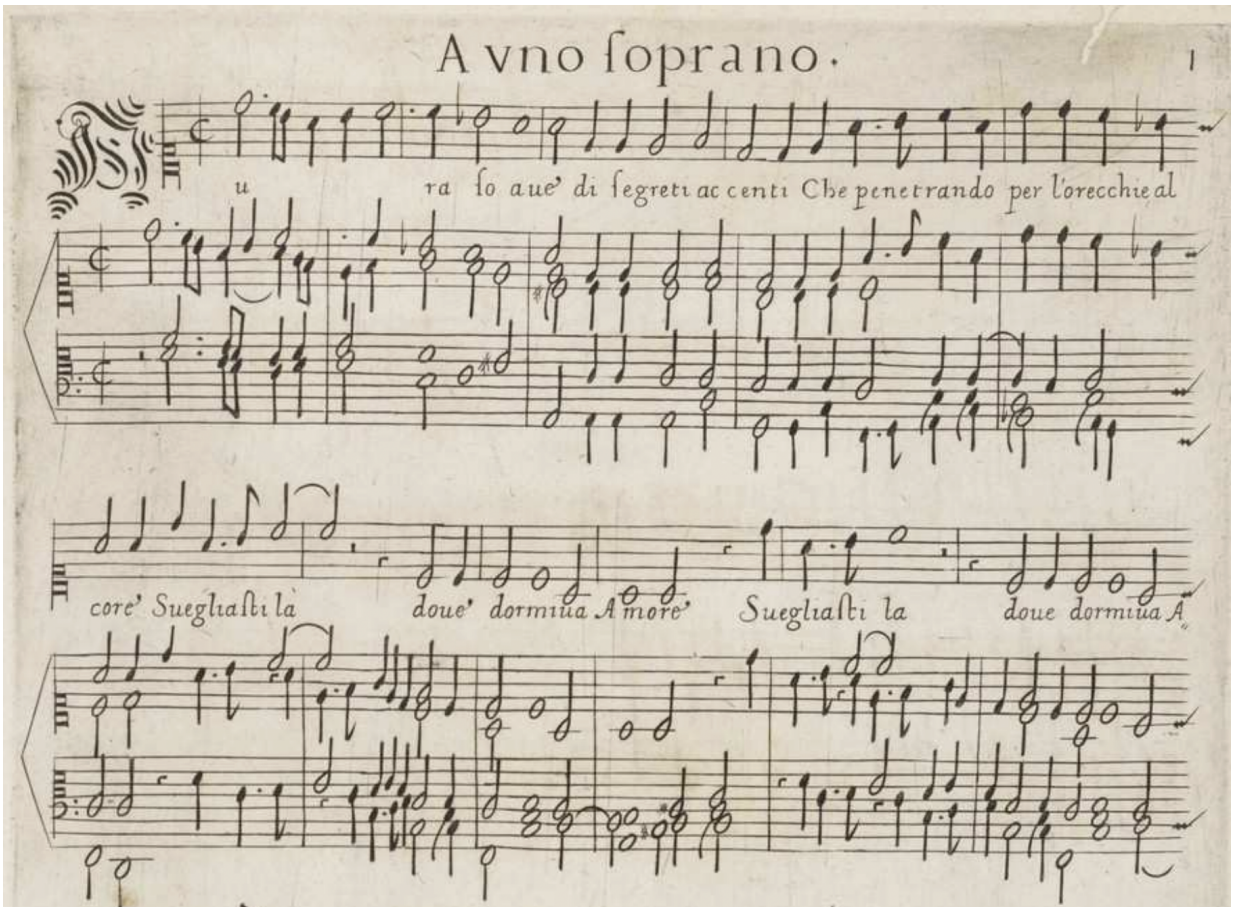

Figure 18. 1. *Aura soave' da segreti accenti* from Luzzaschi's *Madrigali* (1601)[99]

One immediately notes that the upper voice of the accompaniment and the sung part are identical. The tenor and bass lines imitate the entrance of the soprano exactly at least through the first note of the second measure. Then, the alto entrance imitates at the fourth below. All parts coincide in the second measure for a homophonic rendering of the text, a common feature in madrigalian style. Note that the entrances on the text *"suegliasti*" on the bottom of the page are similarly arranged. Indeed, Luzzaschi is imitating madrigalian features in his contrapuntal keyboard accompaniment, and one

[99] Luzzaschi Luzzasco, *12 Madrigali per Cantare e Sonare* (Rome: Verovio, 1601), 1.

might argue that this reflects an imagination of four voices singing in imitation of the soprano, not necessarily a real keyboard practice.

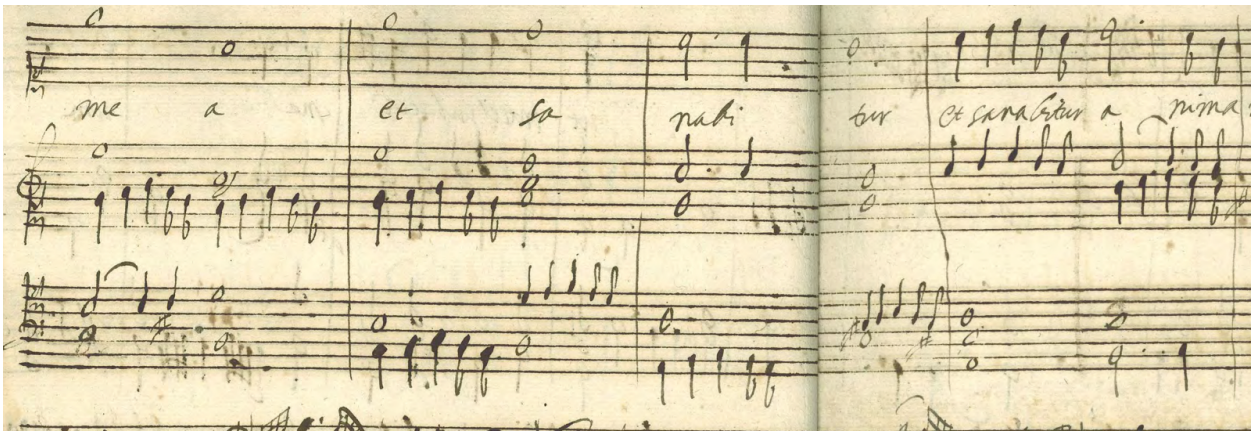

Figure 19. Imitative accompaniment in the Carlo G. Manuscript[100]

That argument held water until the recent discovery of the Carlo G. Manuscript, dating from approximately 1600-1620 northern Italy. Aside from a few keyboard toccatas, the manuscript contains sacred songs in Latin for one or two voices set against fully notated keyboard accompaniment, a remarkable inclusion for the period. Some are arrangements of other polyphony for one voice and organ, while some are full realizations of a basso continuo line. We can easily trace aspects of imitative counterpoint within these scores – here's one of the easier ones to spot. In constructing similar accompaniments from bassline, Diruta and Banchieri's principles of counterpoint at the keyboard prove indispensable.

[100] Anonymous, "Manuscrito 'Carlo G.'" (n.d.), IMSLP Petrucci Music library.

An article titled *A Display of Genius* by Christine Jeanneret and Margaret Murata supplies an interesting proposition of one such stylistic practice among the early seventeenth-century Vatican *Capella Giulia*. Jeanneret and Murata seek to discern applications in accompaniment for the technically advanced innovations evident in the keyboard works of Frescobaldi, taking into consideration the musical styles of the time, possible influences, and above all, his repute among colleagues as a dazzling *virtuoso* at the organ.[101] His talent was so exceptional that was nominated for the most notable position of his profession at the age of just twenty-five: the organist of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Frescobaldi's proficiency in improvisation on CFs was on full display at the Basilica and the Papal Chapel, alternating monophonic chant with elaborate polyphony. Meanwhile, the smaller *Capella Giulia* employed eighteen professional singers,[102] thus enabling the performance of different types of polyphony on alternate verses – including some sung improvisations in sixteenth-century styles.

The singing of psalms occurred daily at the Liturgy of the Hours, representing one of the principal responsibilities of Frescobaldi and his colleagues. Over the former century, a genre called the *falsobordone* had grown to be rather ubiquitous in polyphonic performance of psalm verses, and in Roman circles, a highly ornate art of improvised singing. The *falsobordone* is well-suited to strophic music, repeating a prescribed homophonic counterpoint for each verse of text, much like a chanted psalm tone. The singer uses a combination of recitations on held notes and rhythmically notated values to make all the words fit. By Frescobaldi's time, the *falsobordone* seems

[101] Margaret K. Murata and Christine Jeanneret, "A Display of Genius," accessed February 4, 2023.

[102] Ibid..

to have developed into a genre of notable spectacle, in which singers regularly added improvised *passaggi,* or affected diminutions above the prescribed progression.[103] Remarkably, notated examples survive in a 1615 print, composed by Francesco Severi, one of the singers in Frescobaldi's choir at St. Peter's. Severi, along with contemporaries Donatiello Coya and Giovanni Luca Conforti notated their *falsobordoni* over *basso figurato,* and Conforti asks that the accompaniment be played by none other than the organist, supporting and rendering intelligible the *passaggi*.

Jeanneret and Murata pose the question of how Frescobaldi would have realized the bass line in these ornate psalm settings. They suggest that "One can easily imagine Frescobaldi as an irrepressible continuo player, sorely tempted to execute with his left hand something in response to what he heard the singers inventing over the harmony."[104] They draw a line of connection to Frescobaldi's innovative and improvisatory toccatas, which like the *falsobordoni* contain different types of *passaggi,* are highly episodic, and are directed by the narrative of their "text" or "affect." In addition to these observations, I noted that the *Avvertimenti ai lettori* included by Severi after the title page reflect the assertions made in the *Al lettore* section of Frescobaldi's *Toccate e partite d'intavolatura, libro secondo*. For example, Severi states that the performer should take a *fermata* or slight pause, after one fast *passaggio* before

[103] Francesco Severi, *Salmi passaggiati : (1615)*, ed. Murray C. Bradshaw, Recent researches in Music Online, 2577-4573 (Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, Inc., 2021), ix-x.

[104] Murata and Jeanneret.

moving to the next if the next is different – thus avoiding confusion between them.[105] Frescobaldi, in turn, advises that the performer to pause on the last note of *trilli* or *passaggi,* so that one passage will not become "confused" with another,[106] using the same word and context. A similar concordance occurs when Severi asks that the beginnings should be sung *"adagio,* with a firm and full voice,"[107] corresponding to Frescobaldi's third instruction, that the beginnings of the *toccata* be played *adagio,* and arpeggiated.[108] These semblances irrefutably confirm Murata and Jeanneret's propositions of corollaries between the two genres. That Frescobaldi would have improvised virtuosic accompaniments to these pieces in imitation of the sung *passaggi* seems not only feasible but evident, especially considering his routine practice of improvised counterpoint in his work at the Basilica.

While these sources do not present a concrete practice for utilizing skills relating to contrapuntal improvisation while accompanying, ongoing musicological discussion reveals several possibilities for applications in this context. The next stage of development will likely play out in practical contexts, as performers develop

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[105] Severi, "*To the reader…*", in *Salmi,* [n.p.]. English translation by Bradshaw.
"Sixth, the singer should stop when he comes across the letter F [for *fermata*]; this is because some performers sing one *passaggio* right after another, not breaking the voice, which they should do on notes that leap and sometimes at the end of the beat."

[106] Frescobaldi, 1:
''Il separare e concluder de passi sarà quando troverassi la consonanza insieme d'ambedue le mani scritto di minime quando si trouera un trillo della man destra ò uero sinistra, e che nello stesso tempo passeggierà l'altra mano non si deue compartire à nota per nota, ma solo cercar che il trillo sia ueloce, et il passaggiossia portato men uelocemente et affettuoso: altrimente farebbe confusione."

[107] Severi, ibid..

[108] Frescobaldi, ibid..
"*Li cominciamenti delle toccata sieno fatti adagio, et arpeggiando…*"

methodologies in context by testing the value and feasibility of various possible techniques. Even in the early stages of this exploration, I posit that the pedagogical narrative supplied by Diruta and Banchieri may guide the process of recreating historical practice, supplying a context for the technical abilities occupied by organists of the early seventeenth century.

Conclusions

The idea that performers of historical repertories should study period methods, understand aspects of style and genre, and replicate historical practices is now mainstream within our academic and professional culture. A growing interest in improvisation reflects a desire to engage in practices common to those who first created and interpreted a repertory of music – a great example of an area first researched and publicized by musicologists and theorists and later taken up by performers. Yet many practices await serious consideration by most performers of today, leaving opportunities for applied studies such as this one, which will hopefully increase their approachability. This paper's findings suggest three aspects relating to early-modern contrapuntal improvisation that I believe warrant further consideration: (1) The integral position of improvisation practices within the study and mastery of counterpoint in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; (2) the adaptability of these practices to the performer's skill, role in an ensemble, and performance objectives; and (3) the possible applications and in other performance contexts (*e.g.* accompaniment) supplied by a reasonable proficiency with improvised counterpoint.

This study began as an exploit of individual development, as I pursued the goal of improvising *versetti* over a CF, a goal I felt I had long neglected. While my own technical abilities have indeed improved in the areas addressed, I also began to consider the utility of Banchieri and Diruta's treatises as pedagogical methods. Based on my experiences of study and practice, I pose that they offer great rewards in encouraging students to think differently about the formal structures and compositional practices native to baroque music (especially predating the eighteenth-century), encouraging considerations that do not directly relate to current standard pedagogy in theory. Furthermore, the study of improvisation encourages individual creativity and emboldens the student to rely on their intuition and technical foundation, even under the duress anyone experiences performing *ex tempore*. Thus, the aspirations of my project expanded to encompass a pedagogical framework that, although it awaits further development, I hope may serve future organ students interested in these methods.

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