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Renaissance Singing

Performance Practice and the Falsobordone

Murray C. Bradshaw

The falsobordone was not the most sophisticated of 16th and early 17th-century genres, but it was certainly among the most popular. Only twenty or so surviving pieces may date from the late 15th century, but several large collections began to appear in the first half of the 16th century, and by the end of the century hundreds of compositions were being published.¹ There are many reasons for such a growing popularity—the clarity of text declamation in the genre, for

¹ Among early 16th-century publications are 117 falsobordoni compositions in a Jena ms. dated 1510-1520 and 35 in Rhaw's *Vesperarum* of 1540. Late publications would start with Ruffo and Asola's 32 pieces in their *Falsi Bordoni* of 1575, and continue with Caesare de Zachariis's 143 compositions in his *Patrocinium musices* of 1594, Lodovico Viadana's 57 in his *Falsi Bordoni* of 1596, and Giulio Marchesi's 112 (*Cento, e dodeci falsi bordoni*, 1596). See the list of publications and manuscripts in the two basic studies of the genre: Murray C. Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone, a Study in Renaissance and Baroque Music* ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1978), 159-187, and, with duplications from the former, Guido Macchiarella, *Il Falsobordone, fra tradizione orale e tradizione scritta* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, [1995]), 299-316.

instance, reflected the ideals both of humanists and of the Tridentine church²—yet none was of such importance as the very simplicity of style that allowed falsobordoni to be easily mastered, and at the same time to be musically satisfying.

Even more important, this simplicity of style allowed the falsobordone, in its long existence, to become perhaps the most malleable of genres. Composers, singers, and instrumentalists turned the basic, classical structure of a four- or five-part polyphonic composition into solo and embellished settings, keyboard works, and polychoral compositions. As such, the falsobordone is a good example of the different kinds of performances available to musicians of that day, and of the problems we have in reconstructing those performances. Furthermore, although very few publications or treatises provide us with information on how musicians performed falsobordoni, from the style of the music itself along with the few later comments that we have, we can at least begin to understand how this music, in its many different manifestations, was performed.

* * * * *

Falsobordoni originated around 1480 in the peninsular lands of Italy, Spain, and Portugal. An anonymous composition from Barcelona ms. 451, dated ca. 1600, is a typical example—a “classical” example—the style of which has lasted down to our present times.³ Yet, this composition reveals very little about how singers might have performed it (Example 1). From later compositions, however, we know that they would have added psalm verses to this four-part setting, probably alternating them with verses in Gregorian chant or with organ versets, even though no text at all is given in the score. This Barcelona composition is a perfect mirror of the first Gregorian psalm tone (asterisks indicate the psalm tone) with repeated chords

during the recitations (1–3 and 7–8) and with the melody of the two cadences, mediant (4–6) and final (8–12), elaborated even more than

² See, Murray C. Bradshaw, “The Falsobordone as an Expression of Humanism,” *VIII International Musicological Congress, “Musica Antiqua Europae Orientalis”* (Bydgoszcz, 1988), 135–159.

³ Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone*, 146.

they were in the original melody. Furthermore, the first verse of psalm 109 fits it perfectly.⁴

Example 1. Ms. Barcelona 454, fol. 144v., primus tonus.

Recitation x Cadence x

Di-xit Do-mi-nus Do-mi-no me-o:

Di-xit...

Di-xit...

Di-xit...

Recitation x Cadence x

se-de a dex-tris me-is.

10

⁴ Psalm 109 is the first psalm of Sunday Vespers, the favorite liturgical place for the genre; see Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone*, 26 et passim.

Falsobordoni are almost always strophic compositions and the performance was usually an alternating one, even though during the long history of the genre there is seldom *any* text at all given for a falsobordone (as in Example 1, above). In one of these early settings from the late 15th century, all the alternate verses of a psalm are set, and in another the second verse of a psalm is given, implying an alternating performance. Only occasionally were all the verses of a psalm written out in a falsobordone. Paolo Ferrariensis, for instance, in 1565 wrote at the end of the first verse of one composition that "all the other verses should be sung in the same way" (*sic cantentur omnes alij versus*). In short, as the 16th century unfolded, having no text was the norm, and if a text was supplied, it was usually the second verse or a series of alternating verses: singers preferred to sing every other verse, and not every verse, as a falsobordone.

Granted that the alternate verses of a psalm could be added to a falsobordone,⁵ there is the question of how this was done, since psalm verses have irregular lengths. First of all, just as in the Gregorian psalm tones, performers could sing as many words and syllables as needed to the simple triad of the recitation, finishing with a cadence. The only variables at the two *cadences* would have been the presence of trochaic or dactylic accents (final words with an accent followed by one or two unaccented syllables), and this could be solved by putting an extra unaccented syllable on any convenient note. Nevertheless, how the words of the *recitations* were declaimed is more complex. Very clearly, applying the text "Dixit Dominus" to the Barcelona example (Example 1) gives us a series of longs and shorts (two values) all within a strict duple meter. But applying other verses to the same rhythm simply will not work—rhythmic changes would have to be made, as in Example 2, which consists of the soprano line of Example 1, but with the third verse of Psalm 109 added. The music still uses a duple meter and only two rhythmic values, but the rhythm of both recitations (1–5, 8–12) must be altered to fit the new texts. Cadences present no problems.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

Example 2. Primus Tonus with added verse
 (Ms. Barcelona 451, late 15th c.)

Recitation

3. Vir-gam vir - tu - tis tu - ae e - mit - tet Do - mi - nus ex

Cadence

Recitation

Si - - - - - on: do - mi - na - re in me - di -

Cadence

- o in - i - mi - co - rum tu - o - - - - - rum,

Yet, the solution given in Example 2 for singing recitations is not the only one, and, indeed, as the 16th century unfolded, does not seem even to have been the preferred one. At least two other solutions are available. One of these, not indicated in the Barcelona manuscript, is to use even values without any meter, much like the monks of Solesmes would chant a psalm tone today. Some of the 20 or so early pieces have only one note for the recitations—as was the usual practice in almost all 16th-century publications—and such a performance would be perfectly feasible for this kind of notation. Furthermore, in a few publications all the notes were written out in even values, as, for instance, in Georg Rhaw's *Vesperarum precum officia* of 1540. The reason for Rhaw's careful notation of every note and syllable was his declared desire to help young boys learn how to sing, and at the same time to learn the psalms in Latin. Another didactic publication, Macé's *Instruction* of 1582 (intended

to make the singing of figured music more common in France) also had all the notes written out in even-valued fashion.⁶

Yet, even such chant-like notation may not prove that the syllables were sung evenly. It only proves that some falsobordoni were not sung as in Examples 1 or 2. Any director could easily have fashioned the evenly-notated rhythm found in Rhaw and Macé to the natural flow of the words, and a third rhythmic approach, and perhaps the most favored one, was to use uneven values, but not within a strict meter. Even though this practice is not explicitly indicated in any of these early works, by the end of the century a musician like Severi was indicating just such a performance (see below). In short, unless otherwise indicated, a falsobordone's recitation could be sung in three ways: (1) in a free chant rhythm (as was indicated in the music by Rhaw and Macé), (2) with irregular values in a strict meter (as in the Barcelona ms.), and (3) with irregular values not in a strict meter. The preference was for the latter.

In addition to the rhythm of the recitation, a second performance question is exactly who sang these compositions: an ensemble of soloists, a chorus, or even a soloist with some kind of instrumental accompaniment. All three are possibilities. A late 15th-century composition like that in Example 1, and, indeed, all classical, polyphonic falsobordoni written in the 16th century, are in a style that points to a choral performance—"the limited range of each part, the conjunct melodies, the simple rhythms, the clear phraseology, and indeed the complete lack of artifices of any sort, all point to choral singing."⁷ Reinforcing parts in a few of the early manuscripts also point to such a performance. Furthermore, choral singing was becoming more and more common at this time, and the falsobordone, with its simple music repeated for every other verse and with only the very familiar psalms as texts, could easily have been picked up by any moderately trained choir. Yet, solo ensemble performances can by no means be excluded. The size of some of the early manuscripts is not exceptionally large, and Viadana, admittedly quite a

⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷ Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone*, 25.

bit later (in 1609), advocated a solo-ensemble performance—although he also prescribed other kinds of performance.⁸ In short, although a choral performance seems likely, solo-ensembles were also used.

Toward the end of the 16th century, the performances of such *falsobordoni* led to a far more renowned kind of solo composition, the *falsobordoni* or *salmi passaggiati*. These kinds of pieces are very different from the style of the classical kind of composition found in the Barcelona manuscript and in numerous other collections from the 16th century, but these new, brilliantly embellished pieces also shed light on the performance of the traditional polyphonic *falsobordone* itself.

* * * * *

Two important publications devoted entirely to embellished *falsobordoni* appeared in the early 17th century. The first was by Giovanni Luca Conforti, a falsettist in the Sistine choir, who wrote three volumes of *Salmi passaggiati* (1601–1603), solo embellished *falsobordoni* with continuo accompaniment. For all the psalms, he wrote out all the alternate verses in a strict meter. He did so primarily because he embellished recitations as well as cadences. As Example 3 shows, Conforti's recitations are all in a strict meter made up of many different note values. Yet, it is most important to know that Conforti stresses the declamatory nature of these recitations, since he stated that they were to be sung freely. "From the beginning of the verse," he wrote, "up to the line with two dots, even if written in measured time, you can sing without it [measured time], but from these two dots up to the first dot of the words of the verse and of the end you must always sing with the beat."⁹ Conforti did not supply the dots for every verse (he did not use them in Example

⁸ Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone*, 26.

⁹ "Dal principio del verso insino all'hasta con due punti ancora che siano scritti à misura, si possono cantare senza essa, ma dalli due punti insino al primo punto delle parole del verso, e del fine, si deveno [*sic*] cantare in ogni modo a battuta"; *Alli studiosi lettori*; mod. ed., Murray C. Bradshaw, ed. *Early Sacred Monody*, 5/1 (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag, 1985), lxxix.

3 because the recitations are short), but whenever he inserts them he does so always at the beginnings of the two cadences. What this

means is that the text preceding the dots, the recitations (1–3 and 9–10), are to be sung freely with the natural rhythm of the words taking precedence over a strict rhythm and meter, but after the dots, which indicate the beginnings of the cadences (4–8 and 11–18), the meter becomes strict.

Example 3. Giovanni Luca Conforti, *Salmi passaggiati* (1601), tone 2.

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

System 1: The first staff begins with a 'Recitation' marking above the first measure. The lyrics are '2.Do - nec po - nam i - ni - mi - cos tu -'. The second staff has a 'Cadence' marking above the final measure.

System 2: The first staff begins with a 'Recitation' marking above the first measure. The lyrics are 'os, sca - bel - lum pe - dum tu -'. The second staff has a 'Cadence' marking above the final measure.

System 3: The first staff begins with a 'Recitation' marking above the first measure. The lyrics are 'o -'. The second staff has a 'Cadence' marking above the final measure.

System 4: The first staff begins with a 'Recitation' marking above the first measure. The lyrics are 'rum.'. The second staff has a 'Cadence' marking above the final measure.

With regard to embellished singing, in general, Conforti makes one remark that might apply to other embellished compositions, namely, to "sing embellishments of four or five beats as quickly as possible, so that you do not have to take a breath."¹⁰ This implies, despite what he said above, a certain freedom of rhythm in the cadences, similar to that in recitations. He also says that singers can add ornaments even to this embellished music. "Where a 't' is written . . . you should sing a *trillo* if you know how to do it." Unfortunately, except for this rather cryptic remark, he gives us no more information on this important ornament. "Where the *grosso* is used," he continues, "you must be aware that it can be held for double its length, since it is used only at cadences or on penultimate notes . . ."¹¹

On the title page of his volume, Conforti states, too, that the psalms are accompanied by a bass line "for singing with organ or with other instruments," and the embellishments "will also benefit those who wish to play with ease the viola, violino, or wind instruments."¹² The organ was clearly the main accompanying instrument for church music at this time, but other instruments could still have been used. Furthermore, in his treatise on embellishment published in 1593, the *Breve et facile maniera*, he noted that his exercises, similar to those used in his later embellished falsobordoni, can serve to help players of "the viola or other wind instruments . . . to relax their hands and tongues, master their material, and on their own invent new ones."¹³

¹⁰ "Dove si troverà il passaggio di 4. o 5. battute sarà bene che si cantino con la maggior velocità, che si possa, acciò che non s'interrompano con lo spezzar del fiato"; *ibid.*

¹¹ "E dove sarà notato un t. ò di sopra, ò di sotto la riga delle note, significherà, che vi si faccia il trillo, da chi saperà adoperarlò; e dove si troverà il grosso, notate del g., si doverà avvertir che si può tener lungo al doppio, poiche non si da se non nelle cadenze, ò nelle penultime note quando si finisce il soggetto"; *ibid.*

¹² ". . . Con il Basso sotto per sonare, & cantare con Organo, ò con altri stromenti . . . Li quali, anco possono servire per quelli, che leggiadramente vogliono sonare di viola violino, ò d'altri stromenti da fiato. . ." *ibid.*

¹³ "Et questo ancora serve p[er] quei che sonano di Viola, o d'altri instromenti da fiato per sciogliere la mano et la lingua et per diventar possessore delli soggetti et far altre inventioni da se . . ."; *Breve et facile maniera* (Rome, 1593); mod.

Conforti may have been trying to reach as large an audience as possible with these advertising gambits, but his treatise, as well as his *Salmi*, are useful to both instrumentalists and vocalists in mastering the art of embellishment.

A few years later, another composer of the Sistine choir, the castrato Francesco Severi, confirmed Conforti's free, declamatory approach to the recitation. In his *Salmi passaggiati* of 1615,¹⁴ Severi used only a single note for all the recitations, but noted that they should be sung with unequal values. "If when singing the verses it should happen that there are many words on one syllable [which only occurs during the two recitations], they should be sung gracefully, always holding the first syllable and passing quickly over the second one, and so one with every two syllables. Take care to hold the last syllable of the word."¹⁵ Two things are noteworthy, first, Severi's emphasis on the graceful singing of these recitations, and second, that the rigid application of Severi's rule of holding every other note and the last syllable of each word would lead not only to incorrect accentuations but to a stilted declamation far from what he seems to have desired. Severi undoubtedly wanted, above all, an easy flow that would mark accents and ends of words, that would, in short, be speech-like. The following example shows the way the music appears in the modern edition, and, also, in Example 4b, probably what Severi might have wanted during the first recitation. Regardless, though, both Severi and Conforti, did not want recitations sung with equal values.

Severi, as Conforti did, also stresses the quick speed of some of the embellishments, when he wrote that "semicromes are sung in a lively and quick way." Furthermore, he adds a fermata sign ("F") to his embellishments. "The singer," he wrote, "should stop when he comes across the letter F; this is because some performers sing one

ed. with trans. by Murray C. Bradshaw, forthcoming in *Miscellanea* 6 (American Institute of Musicology: Neuhausen-Stuttgart).

¹⁴ Mod. ed. Murray C. Bradshaw (Madison: A-R Editions, 1981).

¹⁵ "Che quando nel cantare li Versetti occorrerà che si recitino molte parole sopra una Note, si dicano con gratia femandosi sempre sopra la prima sillaba, e si passi presto la seconda, e così di due in due sillabe, con avvertire anco da fermarsi su l'ultima sillaba della parola"; *A i lettori*.

Example 4 (a) Francesco Severi, *Salmi passaggiati* (1615), tone 1

25 F F

Virgam virtutis tuae emittet Dó - mi - nus ex Si - - - on:

30

domináre in médio inimi - có - rum tu - ó - - - - -

F 35

rum.

(b) soprano line

Vir - gam vir - tu - tis tu - ae e - mit - tet Do -

passaggio right after another, not breaking the voice, which they should do on notes that leap and sometimes at the ends of a beat, provided that the passaggi do not consist of semicromes that go beyond the beat.”¹⁶ Embellishments of that time, then, do *not* flow along with a steady beat, but pauses were made on leaps and at the ends of patterns (see mm. 25, 26, and 34 in Example 4).

It should be noted, too, that Conforti and Severi stress that their embellishments are not as brilliant as some singers of that day might have wished. Conforti wrote that his pieces “are very moderate in their tempo and note values, not going beyond cromes and semicromes [8th and 16th notes],” the reason being “so that anyone who wishes to gain some level of ability can practice by himself.”¹⁷ Severi noted that there are others who sing more difficult embellishments than are found in his volume, but that his purpose was twofold, “not only to publish embellishments that seem natural and improvised, but which also conform to the ecclesiastical style of Rome.”¹⁸

Finally, the improvising of embellishments seems to have increased in popularity between the time of Conforti’s *Breve* (1593) and Severi’s *Salmi* (1615). In his treatise, the *Breve et facile maniera* of 1593, Conforti stated that “only in great cities and in the courts

16 “Che si fermi un poco chi canta dove ritrova la lettera F e questo tanto quanto non paia di cantare seguitamente l’un passaggio con l’altro, non interrompendo la voce il che si dovera fare nelle note che saltano et alle volte nel fine della battuta purchè non siano passaggi di semicrome di piu battute i quali bisognerà cantare tutti seguiti sino al fine”; *ibid.*

17 “. . . chi vorrà giunger à qualche grado di leggiadria; e sarà forse questo bastevole . . . perche sono facilissimi nell’andare, e nel valor, e non escono dalle crome, e semicrome”; *ibid.*

18 “So che alcuni i quali cercano passaggi difficili e stravaganti, non si compiaceranno à fatto di quest’ opera, ma se consideranno, che l’intentione mia . . . dar in luce passaggi naturali, e . . . fatti all’improviso, e conforme allo stile Ecclesiastico di Roma . . .”; *ibid.*

of princes does the art of singing with beauty and facility flourish."¹⁹ By the 1610's Severi could write that "I well know that similar passaggi are *customarily* improvised by good singers in Rome and elsewhere when they sing services, but [I am publishing my works] because I wish only to please those who desire to see the style adhered to in Rome in singing psalms."²⁰ The particular practice of singing embellished falsobordoni was especially centered in Rome, and the most famous falsobordone of all time, Allegri's *Miserere*, continued to be sung at the Sistine for centuries.²¹

The art of embellishment, too, was changing. Conforti's embellished falsobordoni (Example 2 above) are limpid, expressive compositions, with one word flowing easily into the next. Variety of rhythm and of melody, and an expressiveness springing not from empty virtuosity but from a desire to express the text, are at the root of all his embellishments.²² Severi's compositions, thirteen years later, seem far more rigid and perfunctory than those of Conforti, and Donatiello Coya, in his *Responsorii* of 1622, offers a later and even different style in his embellishments of a famous falsobordone setting of the

19 "... che solo nelle Città grandi, e nelle corti de Principi, si usa il modo di cantar con vaghezza, e dispositione . . ."; *Breve et facile maniera* (Rome, 1593 [n.p.]) *Dichiaratione*.

20 "... so molto bene che simili Passaggi si sogliono fare all'improvviso da i buoni Cantori che in Roma et altrove ordinariamente cantano nelle Solennità ma solo per giovare a quelli che desiderano di vedere lo stile che in Roma si tiene in cantare detti Salmi . . ." *A i lettori*.

21 See the basic study by Julius Amann, *Allegris Miserere und die Auführungspraxis in der Sixtina* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1935); see also Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone*, 127-30. Other composers who published embellished falsobordoni are Bovicelli in his *Regole, passaggi di musica* (1594) and Viadana in his *Cento concerti ecclesiastici* (1602).

22 I have discussed Conforti's expressive embellishments in more detail in "Giovanni Luca Conforti and the Art of Embellishment: from Formula to Artful Improvisation," *Performance Practice Review* 8 (1995), 5-27, and in "Musical Allegory in the 'Salmi passaggiati' (1601-1603) of Giovanni Luca Conforti (ca. 1560-1608)," *X International Musicological Congress, "Musica Antiqua Europae Orientalis* (Bydgoszcz, 1994; in press).

Example 5. Donatiello Coya, *Responsorii* (1622), *Miserere* (Dentice)

27 Recitation

Ecce [enim veri] - tá - tem di-le - - - - - xi - sti:

30 Cadence

Recitation

in - cértā [et occúlta sapiéntiae tu] - ae ma - ni-fe-stá - - - - -

35 Cadence

- - - - - sti - mi - hi.

40

Miserere psalm by Fabrizio Dentice.²³ As did Severi, Coya makes use of repeated figures (as in m. 36-37 of Example 5), but in a far less rigid way. He breaks up his melodic line by unexpected pauses, as in measures 37-38, where a scale passage is almost rudely broken off by the following rest and octave leap (see bracket). In the second recitation (m. 33) the gentle leap of a fourth is "unexpected" (see bracket) and, perhaps, reflective of the text ("incerta"); Coya uses it in no other recitation. The leap of a major sixth in m. 29 (bracket), too, is not expected. Rhythms change abruptly, with faster figures contrasted dramatically with longer, drawn-out notes (m. 30). Harmonically, the entire verse is far more solidly and obviously grounded in its underlying chordal structure than the previous pieces by Conforti and Severi, due undoubtedly to Dentice's original slow rate of harmonic change and simple harmonies. Dissonances are not only used but emphasized (as with the sustained b^1 at m. 30 or the emphasized g^1 in 39).

Although it may be dangerous to stress the difference in the embellished style between these three compositions—such music was, first of all, centered only in Rome, and, second, the differences might be peculiar to the individual composers—yet, as far as these few pieces are concerned, a clear change of style has taken place in the art of embellished falsobordoni, from the smooth flowing Renaissance *passaggi* of Conforti (1601–1603) to the sectional, repetitive ones by Severi (1615), and, finally, to the more dramatic setting by Coya (1622).

²³ Severi also set Dentice's falsobordone in the *Salmi passaggiati* of 1615. Dentice (?1525-35–after 1601), a famous virtuoso on the lute, published seven falsobordoni, one of which was his famous *Miserere*, in the *Lamentationi* (RISM D 1659) of 1593. His *Miserere*, as far as we can tell, was the first *Miserere* composition to be notated with written-out embellishments. It stands "at the very beginning of a long line of compositions whose embellished performance spans almost 300 years"; Bradshaw, *Francesco Severi*, x. (Dentice's original setting is printed in this modern edition on p. 72, and Coya's complete embellished setting on pp. 73-76.)

Embellishments appeared also in keyboard falsobordoni. Only a few compositions survive, probably because they were so easy to improvise. The most famous are by Antonio de Cabezon (ca. 1500–1566).²⁴ They are eminently practical pieces in that his usual procedure for each of the tones was to write a simple four-part setting followed by three embellishments, the first *glosa* having the soprano embellished, the second most often the bass, and the third usually both inner parts. The following composition by Cabezon (Example 6) is important because with its smooth flowing rhythms and melodies, and mild embellishments—Cabezon also embellished recitations as well as cadences—organists would have used it in two ways: (1) as a solo in the frequent *alternatim* performance of chant or falsobordoni psalm verses; and (2) to accompany a falsobordone. In 1623 Heinrich Schütz wrote in the prefatory material to his *Aufferstehungshistorie* that during the recitations of falsobordoni, “it is the organist who comes to the fore,” because, as long as the recitation lasts, he should play “always elegantly and appropriately, runs or passaggi . . . which will give to this work as well as all other falsobordoni, the correct style.”²⁵

Example 6. Antonio deCabezón, keyboard falsobordone, tone 1



²⁴ Modern edition by Higinio Anglés in *Monumentos de la música española*, 27 (Barcelona: Instituto Español de Musicología, 1966), 48–70. There is an earlier edition (1895) by Philippo Pedrell.

²⁵ “Es ist aber der Organist, welcher seine Person hier wol vertreten will zue-rindern dass so lange der *falsobordon* in einen thon weret er auff der Orgel oder *Instrument*, mit der Hand immer zierlicher und *approprierte* leuffe oder *passaggi* darunter mache welche diesem Werck wie auch allen andern *falsobordonen* die rechte art geben sonsten erreichen sie ihren gebührlichen *effect* nicht”; *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, 3 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1956).

Cadence

5

5

Recitation

Cadence

9

9

13

13

17

17

Embellishment, then, played an important role in the falsobordone, as well as in other music of that time. Not only would vocal embellishments have been added at cadences, but also during recitations; in either case, the recitations would be declaimed in a free fashion following the natural accentuation and declamation of the text; furthermore, the accompanist would add embellishments during the recitation, and would be expected to improvise alternate verses following the shape and style of the vocal compositions.

It is important to realize, too, that the polyphonic classical falsobordone, like that in Example 1, lent itself to a solo performance. An organist could easily play the bottom three or all four lines, and a soloist sing the top line. If the soloist added embellishments during the recitation or cadence, it would become an embellished composition, and the organist could do the same during recitations. The repetition of the same music over several verses would have invited embellishment, or, at the very least, the addition of ornaments like *gropi* and *trilli*. The ease with which such pieces could be turned into solo compositions or monodies, is one reason why Lodovico Viadana (ca. 1560–1627), the one composer most closely associated with early sacred monody, and indeed, with the falsobordone, wrote so few of these solo monodic compositions. A second possibility, and a peculiar one when we consider the simplicity of Example 1, is that Viadana found this kind of falsobordone to be more dramatic and effective than a simple monody.

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The falsobordoni of Lodovico Viadana not only bring to an end the golden age of the genre, but also sum up the different styles and techniques used in singing falsobordoni, and other music of that time. He also gives us a great deal of information on performing the genre. Viadana was, furthermore, one of the most prolific and popular composers of his day. Between 1588 and 1619 he brought out 27 different publications that appeared in 60 editions. Most of this was

sacred music, and the falsobordone played a role, often major, in many of these publications.²⁶

He devoted two complete volumes to the genre (1596 and 1612). The 1596 volume, reprinted in 1610, contains 57 classical, polyphonic falsobordoni and the 1612 volume 120 (!) falsobordoni. The 1612 volume differs in two ways from that of 1596. First, it is polychoral music (or possibly so), with each of the eight tones having 14 four-part settings (7 for each choir) with a final *insieme* setting for both choirs. Second, it has a "basso per l'organo" accompaniment that duplicates the bass voice and has no numbers. The music is very conservative, in the classical polyphonic style, but it shows that a more dramatic polychoral performance is possible, although not demanded, and that an organist accompanied the music. If only a single choir was available, it could sing any of the compositions without an answering choir. Such performances of falsobordoni were becoming common at that time.²⁷ It has also been pointed out that polychoral performances in Rome and Venice regularly had at least one choir made up of soloists.²⁸ These falsobordoni would then have an ensemble/full chorus contrast—which Viadana was also to suggest (see below).

Simple, unembellished monodies occur only in Viadana's *Cento concerti ecclesiastici* (1602) and the *Concerti III* (1609), and their number pales when placed next to the hundreds of compositions he wrote in the traditional, classical style. The reason why Viadana preferred the older style was not only that any polyphonic composition could easily be changed into a monodic one by having an organ-

²⁶ This section is based to a great extent on research done for my article "Lodovico Viadana as a Composer of Falsobordoni," *Studi musicali* 19 (1990), 91-131.

²⁷ Gardano, for instance, brought out a collection of *Falsi bordoni* in 1601 "Duobus Choris si placet"; see Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone*, 171. Giulio Marchesi in his *Cento, e dodeci falsi bordoni* of 1596 even had some pieces that are for one choir in the first half of the verse and for two in the last half, a most unusual procedure.

²⁸ Richard Sherr, "Performance Practice in the Papal Chapel during the 16th Century," *Early Music* 15 (1987), 456.

ist play the bottom parts, but also because he thought the polyphonic falsobordone had greater possibilities than a simple monodic setting, that it offered, in short, more variety and drama. Two publications of his, in addition to the publication of 1612 just discussed, show what might be done with a simple, traditional falsobordone.

In his *Salmi a quattro chori* of 1612, Viadana gives very valuable information on how the four different choirs might be arranged. Although the volume does not contain a complete falsobordone psalm, a number of sections are scored as falsobordoni: the opening response, along with verses in five of the seven psalms and in one of the two Magnificats (for a total of ten psalm verses). Viadana describes the performance in this way. The first choir is a "five-part choir, that will stand by the main organ, and will be a 'choro favorito,' [whose music] will be sung and recited by five good singers, who are solid, straightforward, and who sing in the modern style."²⁹ No instrument will accompany them "except for the organ, and, if it pleases, a chitarrone. The organist has to be vigilant in registrating according to the place and tempo. When he finds the words 'soft' [voto] and 'full,' he must use a soft and full registration."³⁰ Furthermore, "when, in the same chorus [of soloists] one, two, three, four, or five voices will sing, the organist should play simply and straightforwardly, not diminishing ["isminuendo"] the sound or adding any embellishments."³¹ The warning to the organist not to add any embellishments shows how prevalent this practice must have been.

²⁹ "Il primo Choro à cinque, starà nell'Organo principale, e sarà il Choro favorito, e questo sarà cantato, è recitato da cinque buoni Cantori, che sieno sicuri, franchi, e che cantino alla moderna"; Federico Mompellio, *Lodovico Viadana, musicista fra due secoli (XVI-XVII)* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1967), 163.

³⁰ "In questo Choro non ci anderà stromento nessuno, se non l'Organo, e un Chitarone, à chi piace. L'Organista starà vigilante per registrare a luogo, e tempo; e quando troverà queste parole VOTO [vuoto], e PIENO, doverà registrare, voto; e pieno"; *ibid.*

³¹ "Quando nel detto Choro canterà una voce, due, tre, quattro, cinque; l'organista sonerà semplice, e schietto, non isminuendo, nè facendo passaggi niente . . ."; *ibid.*

The second choir is "the very nerve and foundation of a good performance." In this chorus, "there should be no less than 16 singers. Less than that number, the choir will always be weak." But, even better, "when there are 20 or 30 voices and instruments, there will be a good body of sound, and the result will always be successful."³² There is then a contrast between a solo chorus and a full one.

The other two choirs offer a contrast in pitch as well as sound. "The third choir is for four high parts," and "the first soprano, a very high soprano, will be played by a cornetto or violin: the second will be sung by one, two, or three very good soprano voices; the alto part is a mezzo soprano, and will be sung by several voices, violins, and curved cornetti; the tenor remains a tenor and will be sung by several voices along with trombones, violins, and the organ at the high octave [with 4' stops]."³³

"The fourth chorus," on the other hand, "is low, that is, with equal voices: the soprano is a very low alto, and will be sung by several voices along with violins playing an octave higher, and curved cornetti; the alto is most suitably a tenor, and will be sung by several voices along with trombones; the tenor is a baritone, that is, a *mezzo basso*, and this part should also be accompanied by good voices, or by trombones and violins; the bass is always low, and for this reason should be sung by very low basses along with trombones, double

³² Il Secondo Choro à Quattro, farà la Capella, ove consiste tutto il nervo e fondamento della buona Musica. In questo Choro, non ci vogliono manco di sedici Cantori, e mancando di tal numero, sarà sempre debil Capella; ma quando saranno venti, e trenta e di Voci e di Stromenti, sarà buon corpo di Musica, e farà ottima riuscita"; *ibid.*

³³ "Il Terzo Choro a Quattro sarà Acuto: Il Primo Canto, come sopranissimo, sarà sonato da Cornetto, ò Violino. Il Secondo sarà cantato da una più buona voce, ò da due, ò da tre di Soprano. L'Alto, è un mezzo Soprano, e sarà cantato da più voci e Violini, e Cornetti storti. Il Tenore sarà ancor'esso cantato da più voci, con Tromboni, e Violini, e Organo all'Ottavo alta"; *ibid.*

violins [double viols?], bassoons, and an organ at the lower octave [with 16' stops]."³⁴

If these huge resources are lacking, Viadana, ever the practical musician, says that the psalms "can also be performed with only two choirs, namely, the first [the solo ensemble] and the second [the full chorus]."³⁵ Equally, "if you wish to make an even more beautiful display, you can have up to eight choirs by doubling the second, third, and fourth."³⁶

In all of this, however, "the director, who will be with the five-part chorus [the first choir or solo ensemble] must always see to it that the basso continuo of the organist follows the tempo of the music, and he must indicate when the singing is for a solo voice and when it is for two, three, four, or five voices." Especially, "when all the choirs sing, he must turn his face to all of the choruses lifting both of his arms—a sign that all are singing together."³⁷ Regardless, all of the falsobordoni verses are scored for the total number of choirs, and all have an instrumental accompaniment of trombones, cornetti, strings, and continuo.

³⁴ "Il Quarto Choro a Quattro, sarà Grave, cioè à voci pari: Il Soprano, e un'Alto bassissimo, e sarà cantato da più voci, con Violini all'ottava, e Cornetti storti. L'Alto, e un Tenore commodissimo, e sarà cantato de più voci, con Tromboni. Il Tenore, è un Baritone, cioè mezzo Basso, questo ancora doverà esser'accompagnato da buone voci, o da Tromboni, e Violini. Il Basso stà sempre Grave, per ciò sarà cantato da profondi Bassi, con Tromboni, e Violini doppi, e Fagotti, con Organo all'Ottave bassa"; *ibid.*, 163-64.

³⁵ "Questi salmi si possono cantare anco a due Chori soli, cioè Primo è Secondo Choro"; *ibid.*

³⁶ "Chi volesse poi fare una bella mostra come hoggidì il Mondo si compiace di fare à 4. à 5. à 6. à 7. à 8. Chori, radoppi il Secondo, Terzo, e Quarto Choro . . ."; *ibid.*

³⁷ "Il Maestro di Capella, starà nell'istesso Choro à Cinque, guardando sempre su'Basso Continuo dell'Organista, per osservare gli andamenti della Musica, e comandar quando à da cantar' un solo, quando due, quando tre, quando quattro, quando cinque. E quando si faranno i Ripieni, volterà la faccia a tutti i Chori, levandò ambe le mani, segno che tutti insieme cantino"; *ibid.*

In 1609 Viadana had published some *Responsorii* in which the verses of all the pieces are set as falsobordoni. In the traditional form—R V R' (abcb)—V or c is sung as a falsobordone. In that same year he also brought out a parallel publication of *Lamentationes*, and in this publication he gives some information on performing the previously published responsories. "They should be sung quickly," he wrote, "with a hurried beat, and loudly, with four or five singers on a part." In contrast, "the falsobordone verse should be sung more slowly, with four solo singers." After this, "the repetition is made, but with a great deal of noise, because this variety in going from one extreme to the other produces a most beautiful feeling."³⁸ This "bellissimo sentire," of making a good effect by means of dramatic contrasts—in dynamics, tempo, number of performers, as well as style—probably is the main reason why Viadana preferred the older kind of falsobordone to the new monodic type. A choral ensemble or solo/ensemble contrast "was far more dramatically effective than a simple monodic performance."³⁹

The somber nature of the Holy Week liturgy may well have accounted for Viadana's restrained treatment of the falsobordone verses in these responsories—their slow tempo and scoring for solo voices—but they show, too, how adaptable the genre was to a wide variety of different performances, ranging from the overwhelming choral-orchestral performances of the *Salmi a quattro chori* to these restrained Holy Week settings, as well as the more usual monodic performance (usually embellished, at least in Viadana's oeuvre) and a choral performance.

Viadana adds to our performance knowledge in a few other publications. In a setting of all twenty verses of the *Miserere* psalm in his *Concerti ecclesiastici* of 1609, Viadana writes many of the ver-

³⁸ "I Responsorij . . . andaranno cantati allegri, con misura frettolosa, e strepitosamente, con accompagnar quattro, e cinque cantori per parte. Il verso a falso bordone, andará cantato più largo, e da quattro soli cantori, facendo poi la replica, pur con grande fracasso, si perche andando da un'estrem'all'altro, questa varietà farà bellissimo sentire"; *ibid.*, 151.

³⁹ Bradshaw, "Lodovico Viadana as a Composer of Falsobordoni," 109.

ses as falsobordoni, and states, too, that “for all of the verses of the psalm, the keyboard player—an organist or harpsichordist [!]⁴⁰—is to always play a short *Sinfonia* ending on the chord with which the music begins.”⁴⁰ Similarly, in his *Concerti* of 1602, Viadana set psalm 109, “Dixit Dominus,” as a three-part concerto, and noted that “an organ intonation” may be used “if desired.”⁴¹ These are not alternate verses, but introductory pieces played before each verse or each composition.

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The falsobordone has obviously moved far away from the rather austere composition found in the Barcelona manuscript (Example 1), yet, no matter how overwhelming in its sound or brilliant in its embellishments, it has always remained what it basically was—a simple part setting of a Gregorian psalm tone or at least using the form of a psalm tone. A full choir or possibly a solo ensemble might have performed it with the recitations being sung in even values or, more likely, in uneven ones and probably without a metric pulse, following the natural flow of the words, and with cadences almost always metrical; or it might have been turned into a solo song with organ or some other instrument as accompaniment; or brilliantly embellished by a solo voice (such *salmi passaggiati* were very popular from about 1600 to 1620 and help to show how the art of embellishment was changing during that time); or it could be performed by many choruses and accompanied by a huge body of instruments; or, as part of a larger composition, like a responsory, it could be sung by a small, solo group with a slow tempo, contrasting with a noisy, full chorus singing another section of the piece in a faster tempo; it could be introduced by a short instrumental introduction or could itself be turned into a keyboard composition. In short, as the aesthetic demands of the times changed, so did the falsobordone, and in its simplicity it proved itself to be, perhaps, the most adaptable of all Renaissance and early baroque genres.

⁴⁰ “. . . e ad ogni versetto l’Organo, o Manocordo farà sempre solo un poco di Sinfonia, lasciando sù quella corda, ove la Musica à da cominciare”; Mompellio, *Lodovico Viadana*, 156.

⁴¹ “. . . con l’intonatione dell’Organo se piace”; *ibid.*, 132.