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Improvisation in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Lessons from Rhetoric and Jazz

John Bass

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Saying that embellishment was a big deal for sixteenth-century musicians is hardly a bold move; evidence abounds in treatises, music collections, and written accounts from the time.¹ It has also been the subject of a fair amount of keen musicological scholarship over the years.² But making sense out of what musicians of the time actually did in performance—and trying to reproduce it today—has proven to be more difficult, mainly because improvisers, by nature, do not tend to record what they do. The modern prevailing view seems to be that ornamentation was important, mainly because evidence suggests it was so widespread, but ultimately that it was a sort of varnish: something that could add color or texture to the surface of the music but that always left the original clearly discernable underneath. Certainly pieces back then, as today, were performed without embellishments, but perhaps there is more to the ornamentation than mere decorative sheen. As someone who has been trained to improvise on a fairly high level as a

¹ In addition to the ornamentation manuals discussed below, some other sixteenth-century major sources containing evidence of ornamentation include: the seven Spanish vihuela sources, Luys Milán, *El Maestro* (1536); Luys de Narváez, *Los Seis Libros del delphin de Música* (1538); Alfonso Mudarra, *Tres Libros de Música* (1546); Enriquez de Valderrábano, *Silva de Serenas* (1547); Diego Pisador, *El libro de Música de vihuela* (1552); and Miguel de Fuenllana, *Orphenica Lyra* (1554); also Sylvestro Ganassi, *Opera Intitulata Fontegara* (Venice, 1535); Adrian Petit Coclico, *Compendium musices* (Nuremburg, 1552); Juan Bermudo, *El libro llamado Declaración de instrumentos musicales* (Osuna, 1555); Hermann Finck, *Prattica musica* (Wittenberg, 1556); Giovanni Camillo Maffei, *Delle lettere del Signor Gio. Camillo Maffei da Solofra, libri due, dove ra gli altri bellissimi pensieri di filosofia, edi medicina, v'è un discorso della voce e del modo d'appraare di cantar di garganta, senza maestro, non più veduto, n'stampato* (Naples, 1562); Tomás de Santa María's *Arte de tañer fantasía* (Valladolid, 1565); Lodovico Zacconi, *Prattica di musica...* (Venice, 1592); Girolamo Diruta, *Il transilvano dialogo sopra il vero modo di sonar organi, et istromenti da penna* (Venice, 1593); Giovanni Luca Conforto, *Breve et facile maniera d'essercitarsi ad ogni scolaro...* (Rome, 1593).

² While by no means a complete list of research on the topic, major works in the field include: Ernest T. Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik* (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1938); Ferand, "Improvised Vocal Counterpoint of the Late Renaissance and Early Baroque," *Annales musicologiques* 4 (1956): 129-74; Imogene Horsley, "Improvised Embellishment in the Performance of Renaissance Polyphonic Music," *JAMS* 4 (1951): 3-19; and Howard Mayer Brown, *Embellishing 16th-Century Music*, Early Music Series 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Timothy J. McGee, "How one Learned to Ornament in Late Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Performance Practice Review* 13 (2008) <<http://cdl.libraries.claremont.edu/u/?ppr,3017>>

jazz musician, I see something different when I look at these types of sources from the past. Perhaps the point of sixteenth-century embellishment is not necessarily to remain true to the original and adorn it unobtrusively, but rather to create a new thing through the ornamentation—a thing that only exists in that moment of performance.

Before I get too far, a note about terminology: I believe a major obstacle to our understanding of extemporaneous activity from the past has been the words we use to describe the processes, primarily ornamentation and embellishment, which are actually quite different from the ones used at the time, such as *glosas*, diminutions, and *passaggi*. For the purposes of clarity in this paper, I have chosen to use the terms ornamentation, embellishment, and improvisation interchangeably. Although the connotations are a bit different, especially between improvisation and the first two, I suggest that they are all parts of the whole of improvisatory thought in the sixteenth century; a spontaneously ornamented or embellished performance is essentially an improvised one.

In fact, differentiating ornamentation from improvisation is virtually impossible. Even today with the advantage of sound recordings and mass media, drawing the line in a genre like jazz with its strong improvisatory tradition is difficult. I think most would agree that jazz artists improvise, but performers rely on preexisting material to some degree: common patterns or licks, quotations from other jazz artists, fragments of different tunes, etc. Even the basic melodies of tunes are normally embellished and often change between performances—you will rarely hear “Summertime” on a jazz gig, for example, the way George Gershwin published it in *Porgy and Bess*. So, what should we be calling improvisation? Discussing the issue, guitarist Mick Goodrick says,

Even though a lot of us are “improvisers,” we spend a large percentage of time “playing” things that we already know. We mix it up a bit, to be sure, but most of it involves things that we’ve worked with (to one extent or another) and things that we are (at least somewhat) familiar with. “Pure” improvising is different than “playing.” “Pure” improvising involves things that are *unknown*; things that you’ve *never* played before; things that you are *unfamiliar* with. “Pure” improvising is exhaustingly hard work. If it happens to you even a few times a year, you should consider yourself fortunate.³

I certainly agree that most of what we call improvisation is not what Goodrick terms pure improvisation, but I do not believe that precludes us from talking about improvisatory procedures in slightly impure extemporaneous situations.⁴ In fact, the more rigidly we define the term, the less room we will have for discussion of it, especially when talking about trends from the past. To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that Goodrick’s notion of pure improvisation can be found

³ Mick Goodrick, *The Advancing Guitarist* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1987), 108.

⁴ Goodrick’s book is actually devoted to this.

in sources from the sixteenth century (how could they be?), but that what can be found are improvisatory strategies and intellectual approaches that can help us understand the language and possibly lead to new improvisatory moments.

In this paper, the window into sixteenth-century embellishment will be the Italian ornamentation treatises of the last half of the century. The most famous of these authors today was a Spaniard living in Naples, Diego Ortiz, but the others were northern Italians, namely Girolamo Dalla Casa, Giovanni Bassano, Ricardo Rognoni, and Giovanni Battista Bovicelli.⁵ A few years ago the word *ornamentographer* was coined, somewhat casually, in a seminar I attended to describe these authors, and it has taken root in my vocabulary as a way of suggesting that their great contribution was to write ornaments down.⁶ While we must be careful not to take them too literally, their work still offers the most direct link we have to the practice of actual sixteenth-century improvisers, and in particular their ornamentographs (pieces with written-out ornamentation) are the closest things we have to recorded performances of sixteenth-century improvisation.

These manuals share a layout, which, I believe, has also contributed to our modern idea of how ornamentation existed back then.⁷ All of these sources begin with a written portion describing the practice, giving practical advice on performing and adding embellishment, and providing warnings about the misuse of the material. This is followed by what is their most dominant feature: massive lists of sample intervals, cadences, and passages. As an example, see Figure 1, which is from Giovanni Bassano's *Ricercate, passaggi et cadentie* (1585).⁸ In the first measure, Bassano presents an interval of a major second (from C to D in semibreves) followed

⁵ The manuals they wrote are: Diego Ortiz, *Trattato de Glosas* (Rome, 1553); Girolamo Dalla Casa, *Il Vero Modo di Diminuir con Tutte le Sorte di Stromenti* (Venice, 1584); Giovanni Bassano, *Ricercate, Passaggi, et Cadentie* (Venice, 1585) and *Motetti, Madrigali et Canzonie Francese* (Venice, 1591); Ricardo Rognonio, *Passaggi per potersi essercitare nel diminuire terminatamente con ogni sorte di instrumenti, et anco diversi passaggi per la semplice voce humana* (Venice, 1592); and Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, *Regole, passaggi di musica, madrigali et motetti passeggiati* (Venice, 1594).

⁶ The word first appears in John Bass, "Would Caccini Approve?: A closer look at Egerton 2971 and florid monody," *Early Music* 36 (2008), 81-93.

⁷ This layout was likely borrowed from such rhetorical treatises as Cicero's *De inventione*, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, and Erasmus's *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum commentarii duo*, which were likely a staple of the general education of the authors. This is further explored in my dissertation, "Rhetoric and Musical Ornamentography: Tradition in Sixteenth-Century Improvisation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Memphis, 2008) and a paper entitled "Rhetoric and Music from an Improvisational Point of View," read at the 2009 annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Los Angeles.

⁸ Giovanni Bassano, *Ricercate, passaggi et cadentie* (Venice 1585), foreword by Peter Thalheimer (Bologna: Meroprint 2036, 1994).

by four examples of ornamented ways to perform it. He then presents the same interval in minims, giving four more ornamented examples, and afterward moves to the interval of D to E in semibreves. Following this, he continues the process through various intervals and cadences. The number of these out-of-context gestures varied between the ornamentographers: Dalla Casa gave a large number of original cadences and only a few ornamented examples of each, while Rognoni gave only six sample cadences, but provided between 25 and 33 ornamented examples for each one. However, the general process resembles Bassano's treatment.

Figure 1. Giovanni Bassano, *Ricercate, Passaggi et Cadentie*⁹



Following these tables, sample pieces with ornamentation written in (ornamentographs) are presented to show how to use these patterns in the context of a performance. As time goes by, these become a more prominent feature of the manuals as the authors feel a greater need to show how the practice occurs within the context of an actual performance. On the surface, the process here seems to be simple: ornaments and figures are chosen from the lists and inserted into performance at appropriate times, and this was the crux of Howard Mayer Brown's argument in *Embellishing 16th-Century Music* in 1976.¹⁰ This is true to a degree, but by stepping back and looking at the embellished performance as a thing unto itself, and not just a collection of licks from the tables, something new emerges. More on this in a bit.

I believe these treatises are training manuals meant to help a student acquire the necessary musical language to function in improvisatory situations, and their approach is not terribly different from that of modern jazz pedagogy. The strategy of giving lists of ornaments and cadences strikes me as being very similar to that of Jerry Coker's *Patterns for Jazz* books (this observation is actually what started me down this path in the first place). Coker's books

⁹ Giovanni Bassano, *Ricercate, passaggi et cadentie* (Venice 1585), foreword by Peter Thalheimer (Bologna: Meroprint 2036, 1994).

¹⁰ Brown even constructs an embellished melody of his own using this process. He uses ornaments from Sylvestro Ganassi's tables to adorn Arcadelt's *O felici occhi miei*. *Embellishing 16th-Century Music*, 12-16.

provide sample patterns to be used over certain chords or progressions (see Figures 2 and 3 on the following two pages) and are basically a storehouse of licks from the jazz tradition.¹¹ They are meant to be training tools, though, to teach the jazz language to the student to be used in an original way, and not to simply construct a solo by plugging in patterns in appropriate places (although this might be an intermediate step). It is a pedagogical strategy—one of many—but if these books were the only surviving evidence of jazz, I think that our conception of what the music is might be different, and that it might be more in line with what most of us consider ornamentation than improvisation.

¹¹ Jerry Coker, *Patterns for Jazz* (Lebanon, IN: Studio P/R, 1970).

Figure 2. *Patterns for Jazz* by Jerry Coker¹²

61 $\text{♩} = 100-144$ Note: To be used for C, CM6, CM7 or CM9.

Transpose Pattern No. 61 in remaining eleven keys.

62 $\text{♩} = 100-144$ Note: To be used for C, CM6, CM7 or CM9.

Transpose Pattern No. 62 in remaining eleven keys.

63 $\text{♩} = 72-104$ Note: To be used with C, CM6, CM7 or CM9.

Transpose Pattern No. 63 in remaining eleven keys.

29

¹² Jerry Coker, *Patterns for Jazz* (Lebanon, IN: Studio P/R, 1970), 29.

Figure 3. *Patterns for Jazz* by Jerry Coker¹³

This pattern uses fragment 5-6-7-9 from the scale of the minor seventh chord, and fragment 5-3-2-1 from the scale of the dominant seventh chord. Practice Pattern No. 128 with the *chords* in Patterns No. 123-126.

$\text{♩} = 108-136$

128

$\text{♩} = 108-136$

129

$\text{♩} = 100-132$

130

$\text{♩} = 116-160$

131

89

¹³ Ibid., 89.

The ornamentographs in the sixteenth-century manuals remind me of transcriptions of jazz solos, and perhaps we can apply modern pedagogical strategies to these as well. Books of solo transcriptions are a mainstay of modern jazz education; a quick search of Amazon.com reveals 462 books featuring solos by classic and modern jazz artists.¹⁴ Perhaps the most famous of these books is the *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, which is a publication featuring his solos on most of his recorded performances.¹⁵ Like the Coker book, this is a training tool. The idea is that a student should play through Parker's solos to get an idea of the language and get the patterns under his or her fingers in the hopes of using some of them in original solos.¹⁶ These are not, however, meant to be played on the bandstand—this would be a good way to get booted from a gig.

If we accept that we are dealing with a largely improvisatory tradition when looking at these sixteenth-century sources, then I think it might be helpful to refocus our views of them through the lens of an improviser. Improvising musicians have to take a different approach to making music than composers or performers playing from the page; having to create in the moment of performance necessitates what a performer can or cannot think about. Personally, I know that I only have time to focus on big issues when I am improvising: contour, speed, color, intensity, etc. I cannot get bogged down trying to insert specific patterns or scales into my playing at predetermined times—trying to force the issue usually results in a disjointed, stiff performance and does not allow me to react appropriately to the changing music. This is not to say that learned gestures do not materialize in performance but that they only do so once they have been internalized through years of practice.

The most common complaint I hear from students learning to improvise (and one of mine too when I was in school) is that they will spend hours working on patterns, scales, or specific licks that they would like to use while playing, but these gestures never seem to come out on the bandstand while improvising (it is maddening, really). My answer to them is the same one that my teachers had for me: be patient, it will come (not that it is comforting after a particularly unconvincing and uninteresting solo). That does not mean that one should not continue to work on such things in practice. On the contrary, it means these musical patterns and ideas will not materialize until they have been practiced and absorbed to the point that they become part of one's musical vocabulary. It is both a practical and a rather mysterious development.

Improvising in the sixteenth century was clearly not the same as improvising today in jazz—the languages are different as well as the social implications of the music—but I do

¹⁴ Amazon.com accessed July 18, 2009.

¹⁵ Charlie Parker *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, ed. Jamey Aebersold (New York: Criterion, 1978).

¹⁶ In fact, after playing through several of Parker's solos, one will notice that he too uses many of the same licks or patterns across solos.

believe there are basic tendencies of improvising musicians that can be seen in the two traditions (as well as other improvising traditions around the world) and that by comparing similarities, we might be able to understand better what was happening back then. What follows are some observations I have made about things I have seen in the ornamentography manuals and comparisons to similar occurrences in jazz, as well as other observations about the rhetorical effects created by ornamentation. They are case studies, if you will, and not meant to encompass the entirety of either tradition. Also, my analyses of these pieces are largely descriptive, rather than looking at specific patterns on a measure-by-measure basis, in order to try to ascertain overall approaches toward the performance and to focus on things improvisers would have time to think about in the moment.

Miles Davis and John Coltrane

A particularly useful and well-known example from the world of jazz comes from the late 1950s when Miles Davis and John Coltrane engaged in several recording sessions together. I often use their solos with my jazz students to show the vastly different approaches that improvisers can take toward a model—this, I think, is more valuable than the actual musical patterns each plays—and I think the lesson can serve this study as well.

Example 1 (next page) shows the solos by Davis and Coltrane on Davis’ tune “So What” recorded on the 1959 album *Kind of Blue*.¹⁷ The most obvious difference between the two is the basic speed with which each moves—Coltrane plays faster than Davis—but the structure of each is also a contrast. Davis’ trademark is that he picks key moments to play certain notes, thus dividing his improvisation into distinct sections. The G and E at the beginning of the second chorus (measures 32-33), for example, emphasize the ninth and eleventh of the underlying harmony, rather than the root, third, fifth, and seventh, which had been his primary note choices up to this point. He is also very deliberate about where he changes rhythmic patterns (measure 49 is a good example), and these different patterns often signal new improvisational areas. Additionally, he re-uses material (measures 41-48 are similar to the opening measures) to give his entire solo a sense of unity, almost as if it were composed ahead of time.

¹⁷ Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*, Columbia Records, CS8163.

Example 1. Solos by Miles Davis and John Coltrane over "So What" from the album *Kind of Blue*.¹⁸ Parts shown in concert key.

The musical score is presented in six systems, each with a staff for Miles Davis and a staff for John Coltrane. The key signature is D minor (two flats). Measure numbers 7, 12, 17, 21, 26, and 30 are indicated at the start of each system. Chord changes are noted above the staves: Dm7 at the beginning and 17, Ebm7 at measure 17, and Dm7 at measures 21, 26, and 30. Davis's solo is marked with a '7' above the staff, and Coltrane's solo is marked with an '8' above the staff. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and triplets.

¹⁸ These are adapted from transcriptions by Rob Duboff, Mark Vinci, Mark Davis, and Josh Davis, found in *Kind of Blue: Transcriptions of the classic Miles Davis album* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2007), 23-28.

Example 1 (continued)

35 Davis

35 Coltrane

40 Davis

40 Coltrane

44 Davis

44 Coltrane

48 Davis

48 Coltrane

53 Davis

53 Coltrane

57 Davis

57 Coltrane

62 Davis

62 Coltrane

D m7

Ebm7

Coltrane's organization of material, on the other hand, is more focused and happens in smaller increments. It is also more purely organic in that it consists of creating a pattern through improvisation and then using that pattern as a vehicle for expansion, mostly through sequence and variation. The first sixteen measures of his solo offer a tidy example of this. The figure in measures 1-2 (D-F-G) is the basic idea here and is repeated with minor variation over the first eight measures. Beginning in measure 9, Coltrane truncates the rhythm of the opening figure and extends its range, and this, in turn, becomes the source material for the development of measures 9-16. In fact, the opening idea is the raw material for the entire solo: notice how the beginnings of most major sections (in measures 25, 33, 41-42, and 49) allude to the opening idea. It is as if Coltrane's approach is to see how much mileage he can get out of a small fragment of material, interspersing it with longer florid sections.

As in Davis' solo, there is a developmental quality at work here, but the two feel very different. To my ear, the interest in Davis' solo comes from hearing the new melodic and rhythmic areas that he takes the listener to (perhaps the same sensation as listening to a great composition), whereas the appeal of Coltrane's solo is based on his individual virtuosity on the instrument along with his wittiness at musing on a theme. I do not, of course, mean that either solo is greater than the other; Davis and Coltrane were both supreme improvisers at the height of their powers when this record was made. They were just two humans who came to the same task with different approaches, and whatever the differences may have been between sixteenth-century improvisation and mid-twentieth-century jazz, it should be self-evident that the ornamentographers were the same way.

From a practical standpoint, the reasons for these differences make sense. When going more slowly, an improviser has more time to think of an overall structure and to use musical material in a larger scheme. In fact, it is necessary to do this in order to create interest among listeners. When moving more quickly a different approach must be taken, as there is less time to think of larger structures, and organization tends to happen on a smaller scale with idea progressing to idea on a measure-by-measure basis or faster. The listener does not need to hear the same structural cohesiveness in a more florid performance partly because the technical skill of an extravagant performance inherently creates a sense of interest (the virtuoso phenomenon), and partly because there is so much more music coming at the listener that it is easier to grasp organization in smaller units rather than trying to make sense of hundreds of notes over the course of a longer performance. One is not preferable to the other, however, and, as we will see, the ornamentographers are very careful to present their material not as the way to improvise, but as the way that one can improvise.

Diego Ortiz

For a sixteenth-century example, let us look at two of Diego Ortiz's *La Spagna ricercadas* found in his *Trattado de glosas* (Rome, 1553).¹⁹ Although they are not proper ornametographs since they do not ornament an existing part (Ortiz writes new material over a common tenor), they give insight into how structure might have been created in freer extemporaneous situations. Since Ortiz gives only the tenor of *La Spagna* in breves of equal duration, it is up to the new melodic line to create contour and shape over the ground. He does not give any specific comments differentiating the *recercadas*, saying only that he gives numerous examples "...in order to satisfy the different tastes, every one to take what seems best to him."²⁰ On the surface, the differences appear purely pedagogical, as there are slower moving examples progressing to florid ones, seemingly meant for players of various (or developing) skill levels. Upon closer study, however, there are some interesting structural differences. Comparing these to the solos in Example 1, we can see a similar relationship between speed and organization: slower-moving examples tend to develop more on a larger scale with distinct melodic areas that develop from phrase to phrase (*à la Davis*), and faster moving ones develop more out of melodic variation on a smaller scale, organically springing out of the material just heard (*à la Coltrane*). Example 2 shows Ortiz's *La Spagna ricercadas* 1 and 4, which represent the slowest and fastest moving of the bunch.²¹

¹⁹ Diego Ortiz, *Trattado de Glosas* (Rome, 1553), ed. Annette Otterstedt, trans. Hans Reiners (Basel: Bärenreiter, 2003), 77, 80-81.

²⁰ Ibid., 76: "...por satisfazer a diferentes fustos, caduano tome, lo que meior le pareçiere."

²¹ I am assuming that the cantus firmus moves at the same speed for all of the *recercadas*.

Example 2. Diego Ortiz's recercadas primera and quarta over *La Spagna*.

Recercada Primera

Recercada Quarta

Cantus Firmus
"La Spagna"

[E-sharp in original]

5

R. 1

R. 4

C.F.

9

R. 1

R. 4

C.F.

13

R. 1

R. 4

C.F.

17

R. 1

R. 4

C.F.

Example 1 (*continued*)

The musical score is divided into five systems, each containing three staves labeled R. 1, R. 4, and C.F. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 8/8. Measure numbers 21, 25, 29, 33, and 37 are indicated at the start of each system.

- System 1 (Measures 21-24):** R. 1 has a melody with quarter and eighth notes. R. 4 has a more active melody with eighth and sixteenth notes. C.F. provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords.
- System 2 (Measures 25-28):** R. 1 continues its melodic line. R. 4 features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth notes. C.F. continues with harmonic support.
- System 3 (Measures 29-32):** R. 1 has a melodic line with some rests. R. 4 has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. C.F. provides harmonic accompaniment.
- System 4 (Measures 33-36):** R. 1 has a melodic line with a key change to two flats (B-flat and E-flat) in measure 34. R. 4 has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. C.F. provides harmonic accompaniment.
- System 5 (Measures 37-38):** This system shows the final two measures. R. 1 and R. 4 have a final chord, and C.F. has a final bass note.

Recercada 1 has a rather distinct three-part structure, divided into measures 1-16, measures 17-26, and measures 26ff.. The main structural component in the first section is a dotted half note followed by three quarter notes (starting on either F or B-flat), which occurs five times within the first sixteen measures. The second section, measures 17-26, generally moves quicker with quarter notes as the primary rhythm, and it climaxes in measure 23, with a leap of an octave (to the high G), followed by a octave-and-a-fifth fall by step that eventually cadences on the low C in measure 26. The final section, from measure 26 to the end, develops sequentially, but in generally slower moving notes than the middle section, and it reuses material from earlier: measures 26-28 use a sequence from measures 21-22 and the structural idea from the first section (a dotted half note and three quarter notes) returns in measures 31-33. Overall, there is an arching form to the ornamentation here, in which the speed gets faster, climaxes around measure 23, and eases up over the remainder of the piece. Just as interesting is the reuse of material, which helps give the entire example a sense of continuity.²²

By contrast, the fourth *recercada* is more florid and might appear, on the surface, to be a more advanced piece. It would indeed require somewhat greater technical proficiency on the instrument, but in terms of its overall design, it is arguably simpler. The organization here relies heavily on sequence, which becomes apparent from the beginning as the rhythmic structure of the first measure is repeated three times through measure four. Measure 5 contains a bit of florid cadential material before the next sequence is started in measure 6. This new figure is nearly identical to the first and is used until measure 11, where Ortiz truncates the idea to create a new pattern that he, in turn, uses until measure 14.²³ At this point he creates a new sequence using the opening rhythms with new intervals, which he continues until measure 19. Beginning in measure 21 is a figure that Ortiz uses in every measure through the end of the piece. Clearly, the focus in this *recercada* is on melodic sequence and getting the most mileage out of a single idea.

Ortiz gives four other *La Spagna ricercadas* in his manual and they show similar traits relating to speed and the organization of material. As a general rule, if there can be such a thing, the slower the material moves, the more it is divided into clear sections that create global structures over the course of the piece. As things start to speed up, this approach gradually gives way to more organic development, using smaller bits of material in sequence to create structure. As Ortiz said in the quote given earlier, no one approach is better than the others and it is left up to the taste of the reader to decide which to take in performance. It seems safe to say, though, that the slower-moving examples are not simply training pieces leading up to the more florid ones.

²² Recall a similar phenomenon in Davis's solo in Example 1.

²³ This is similar to what Coltrane did in the first 16 measures of his solo, shown in Example 1.

Trends in Venice

Ortiz's manual is rather early in the line of ornamentography publications, and it is not until the 1580s that we see others. After 1584, however, five manuals are published within a decade of one another. All of these were published in Venice, but their authors lived in either Venice (Dalla Casa and Bassano) or Milan (Rognoni and Bovicelli), and I believe that the different musical activity in each place played a major role in the stylistic differences we see in their manuals.

Venice in the 1580s and 1590s was a hotbed of instrumental music, both in and out of the church.²⁴ In particular, St. Mark's Basilica became renowned for its instrumental consorts and composers such as Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli famously took advantage of these ensembles in their compositions.²⁵ Two of the ornamentographers, Girolamo Dalla Casa and Giovanni Bassano, were active professionals at the time and each held the position of *capo de' concerti* at St. Mark's and performed as members of the consorts there. Their manuals show how the tradition of improvised ornamentation existed within the context of these large ensembles, as well as other performing situations, and this paper will use two examples by Dalla Casa as representatives of the Venetian style.²⁶

Traditionally, Dalla Casa has been painted in a rather unfavorable way in comparison to Ortiz or later ornamentographers, mainly because his examples tend to alternate violently between original material and floridity. This led Howard Mayer Brown to say, "clearly Dalla Casa's chief goal was not the invention of sophisticated variation but rather the more primitive desire to show off his manual dexterity; he asks merely that the listener marvel at the agile throat

²⁴ There was, of course, much more going on in Venice than instrumental music, and among other things, it was a hub of Italian music publishing. For a general discussion about musical activity in Venice before 1600, see Ellen Rosand, "Venice, 1580–1680," in *Music and Society: The Early Baroque Era: from the Late 16th Century to the 1660s*, ed. Curtis Price (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 75–102; and Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

²⁵ Showing this influence, Bassano included an embellished version of Andrea Gabrieli's pieces, *Caro dolce ben mio*, in his *Motetti, madrigali, et canzoni francese di diversi eccellenti autori* (Venice, 1591); Bassano's original has been lost since World War II and it exists only as a handwritten copy by Friedrich Chrysander, which is housed in Hamburg at the Universitätsbibliothek. Brown lists it as 1591₂ in *Instrumental Music Published Before 1600* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965). For more on the Giovanni Gabrieli connection with Bassano, see Eleanor Selfridge-Field, "Bassano and the Orchestra of St. Mark's," *Early Music* 4 (1976), 152–158.

²⁶ Girolamo Dalla Casa, *Il vero modo di diminuir con tutte le sorti di stromenti* (Venice 1584), ed. Giuseppe Vecchi (Bologna: Forni Editore, 1983), and Giovanni Bassano, *Ricercate, passaggi et Cadentie per potersi esercitar nel diminuir terminatamente con ogni sorte d'instrumento* (Venice 1585), foreword by Peter Thalheimer (Bologna: Meroprint 2036, 1994). Bassano's ornamentation exhibits many of the same characteristics and has been omitted for brevity. See Bass, *Rhetoric and Musical Ornamentography* for transcriptions and discussions of Bassano's pieces.

or fingers of the performer.”²⁷ I would suggest that this idea might be a bit misleading, however, and the style of his ornamentation may point more to a performing situation than purposeful extravagance.²⁸

As you can see in example 3 (next page), an excerpt of his ornamented version of the superius voice from Clemens non Papa’s *Frisque et gaillard*, there is a rather exaggerated starting and stopping quality to the line. But Dalla Casa did not intend for these to be stand-alone pieces; rather they were meant to show how a player playing a soprano part in consort (as he often did at St. Mark’s) might go about embellishing a part in performance.²⁹ The unadorned sections likely represent the space needed for other members of the consort to ornament their parts, and fortunately, Dalla Casa does not leave the reader to wonder how such a performance might have taken shape. At the end of *Il vero modo* he presents Cipriano de Rore’s madrigal *Alla dolce ombra* in partbook format with embellishment written in all parts, and Example 4 is an excerpt from the *prima parte* in score format.³⁰ Glancing through this example, one will notice that the soprano is not necessarily more elaborate than the other voices nor does it ornament a far greater percentage of the original notes, which would seem to work against the notion that showmanship—especially that of a single performer—was the primary motivating factor.

²⁷ Brown, *Embellishing 16th-Century Music*, 36.

²⁸ To be fair to Brown, whose shoulders I stand upon in this paper, he lived in a time before performers such as Bruce Dickey and Jordi Savall were performing pieces from this repertory with such *sprezzatura* to make them really work.

²⁹ Brown also notes this in *Embellishing 16th-Century Music*, 36.

³⁰ Dalla Casa, *Il vero modo*, book II, 38-49.

Example 2. Excerpt from Dalla Casa's ornamented superius of *Frisque et gaillard*, along with the original.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Frisque et gaillard". It is presented in two parts: "Dalla Casa" (ornamented version) and "Frisque et gaillard superius" (original version). The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of two staves per system. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the ornamented version featuring a trill and a sixteenth-note run in the final measure. The second system begins at measure 4, showing a complex sixteenth-note pattern in the ornamented version. The third system begins at measure 7, showing a similar sixteenth-note pattern. The fourth system begins at measure 10, showing a more complex sixteenth-note pattern. The original version is written in a simpler, more melodic style, with fewer ornaments and a more straightforward rhythm.

Dalla Casa

Frisque et gaillard superius

4

7

10

Example 3. Excerpt of Dalla Casa's ornamented version of *Alla dolce ombra, prima parte*.

The image displays a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The score is organized into four systems, each containing four staves. The first system shows measures 1 through 3. The second system, starting at measure 4, includes a measure rest for the Bass. The third system, starting at measure 7, includes a measure rest for the Alto. The fourth system, starting at measure 10, includes a measure rest for the Tenor. The notation features various musical symbols such as clefs, time signatures, notes, rests, and ornaments, indicating a complex and ornamented musical style.

Looking at an example like *Alla dolce ombra* might help us rationalize Dalla Casa's superficially uninspired-looking method of ornamentation. Because of the performing circumstances of the consort, Dalla Casa's ornamentation cannot approach the level of individual floridity or sophisticated melodic development of Ortiz, whose pieces were mostly intended for solo viol with accompaniment. The sophistication here comes from the complex interaction between members of the group and their ability to create an improvisational collage on the fly. The situation, to make another jazz comparison, reminds me of the practice of collective improvisation characteristic of early New Orleans-style jazz. The typical group from the time would be divided into a front line consisting of cornet, clarinet, and trombone, and a back line made up of tuba, banjo, and drums. Arrangement of music for these groups involved members of the front line improvising simultaneously over a given tune, and a system—often unspoken—was ultimately worked out that allowed each player freedom, but kept them from clashing: the cornetist would play the melody with minor embellishments, the clarinetist would play higher and faster than the cornetist, and the trombonist would either play the bass line of the piece, or would improvise in a lower register and slower than the other instruments. This allowed for a great deal of flexibility and provided musicians with a quick way of arranging tunes for their groups.³¹ Example 5 (next page) shows a transcription of the first eight measures (following a two-measure introduction, which I have not given) of “Krooked Blues,” recorded by King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band in 1923, which exemplifies a section of collective improvisation.³²

³¹ See Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 63-88, and Samuel Charters, *Trumpet Around the Corner: The Story of New Orleans Jazz* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008).

³² “Krooked Blues” (by Benjamin Spikes, John Spikes, and Bill Johnson) recorded by King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band on 3 October 1923, Gennett 5274-A. A bit of commentary is necessary for this example. First, this is a somewhat skeletal transcription, as there is more going on than is on the page. Both King Oliver and Louis Armstrong played cornet on the recording and while they played the same melody, they interpreted it differently, making for a heterophonic texture, which I have not transcribed for clarity’s sake. Also, Stump Evans plays C-melody saxophone on the cut, but his part is barely audible at times, so I have chosen to leave it out. Also, it is very possible that little of this example was actually improvised for the recording session. Because recording was such a different experience from playing live (and you only had one shot), groups often played rehearsed versions of their pieces on sessions. This is evident from listening to the alternate takes of tunes from this particular session (which can be found on the CD *King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band: The Complete Set*, Challenge Records, CHA79007, 1996). Even individual solos were often carefully prepared and rehearsed; the most famous example of this is King Oliver’s muted solo on “Dippermouth Blues,” which was recorded on 6 April 1923. See Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 630-631 for more on this solo. We know, however, that they did collectively improvise, and even if this is a simulated performance, it can serve as an example of the process for this study.

Example 4. Transcription of “Krooked Blues” (by Benjamin Spikes, John Spikes, and Bill Johnson) recorded by King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band on 3 October 1923, Gennett 5274-A. All Parts shown in concert key.

Perhaps such unspoken arrangements were present in the late Renaissance as well. By looking at Dalla Casa’s *Alla dolce ombra*, there are some tendencies we can take note of that might help us when trying to reproduce this idea of consort improvisation. First, the order of embellishment among the voices, with minor exception, seems to follow the order of their polyphonic entrances—this at least can help us get started. Also, the musical material seems to spring from what the musicians themselves do and a series of reactions that follow; a figure will inspire another that gets passed among the voices, and as it does, it changes into a new figure and the process is repeated (see Example 4, pg. 20). Taken as single parts out of context, as in Example 3, they do appear to be rather simplistic and disjointed, but within the context of a larger piece the embellishment proves to be cunning and effective.

It is not only the pieces clearly intended for use in ensemble playing that show evidence of this consort mentality. Example 6 shows the first 18 measures of Cipriano de Rore’s *Anchor che col partire* and two ornamented versions by Dalla Casa, the first a texted superius part intended to be sung with either a consort of instrumentalists or a solo lute, and the second intended for a solo viol in the *bastarda* style.³³

³³ Unlike Ortiz, who includes similar pieces, Dalla Casa does use the term *bastarda* in his manual. There is some disagreement concerning what the term *bastarda* actually means: it is either an instrument or an improvisatory style of the viol in general. For more, see Jason Paras, *The Music for Viola Bastarda* (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 1986), and Paolo Pandofo, “The Viola Bastarda and the Art of Improvising,” in *The Italian Viola da Gamba*

Example 6. Measures 1-18 of Dalla Casa's ornamented superius and viola *bastarda* versions on *Anchor che col partire*, along with the original superius part.

Ornamented Superius (Dalla Casa)

Anchor che col partire Superius

Bastarda

An - cor - - - che col par - - - ti - - - re

An - chor - - - che col par - - - ti - - - re

lo - - - mi sen - - - ta - - - mo - ri - - - re,

lo - - - mi sen - - - ta - - - mo - ri - - - re,

Par - - - tir - - - vor - - - rei ogn' hor o - - - gni mo - men -

Par - - - tir - - - vor - - - rei ogn' hor, o - - - gni mo - men -

to, Tant' è il pia - cer ch'io sen - to Tant' è il pia - cer ch'io sen - to

to: Tant' è il pia - cer ch'io sen - to, Tant' è il pia - cer ch'io sen - to

De la vi - - - ta ch'ac - - - qui - - - sto - nel

De la vi - - - ta ch'ac - - - qui - - - sto nel

ri - - - tor - - - no;

ri - - - tor - - - no.

The texted example may resemble Dalla Casa's superius from *Frisque et gaillard* in that it alternates between sections of original material and embellishment, but the rationale is a bit different here. Rather than alteration out of necessity (i.e. leaving space for others to ornament), the embellishments in *Anchor che col partire* are more closely linked with the madrigal's poetry. In fact, if we look at how Dalla Casa colored the text, the ornamentation becomes explicitly rhetorical. Without delving too deep into metaphors about death and sexuality, the poem is a rather intense double entendre focusing on the pleasure, in both the innocent and the naughty sense, of leaving and returning,³⁴ and it is precisely these words ("partire," etc. in measures 2-3 and 7, and "ritorno" in measures 14-17) that get the most extravagant treatment by Dalla Casa. This works in conjunction with the rhetoric of the text, especially in highlighting each double entendre, and perhaps adds a layer of persuasiveness to the madrigal.³⁵

The *bastarda* version is on the whole more florid, but by lining it up with the superius part (as I have done in the example), we can see some interesting structural characteristics take shape—especially that it seems to show consideration for the presumably absent superius line. To me, this reinforces the idea that Dalla Casa thought primarily as a consort improviser, even when away from that performing situation. In Example 6, notice how the embellishment seems to fill in the gaps where the soprano voice is resting or is less active: for example measures 3-4, 7, 11-12, and 15. Even though the soprano voice is not given in Dalla Casa's example, he seems to be cognizant of it and adds the most elaborate ornamentation in spots where it would either be resting or moving slowly. This might also be a clue to how pieces like this were organized, since internal development tends to be rather loose (based on all voices of the original) and organized from the bottom voice up, and it even hints at the possibility of a fascinating performing situation in which a singer would sing the superius line with ornamentation and the viol would accompany in this *bastarda* style.

Milan in the 1590s

The final two ornamentography manuals of the sixteenth century were also published in Venice, but their authors, Ricardo Rognoni and Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, lived and worked in Milan where the musical climate was a bit different. As in Venice, instrumental music was

³⁴ The metaphor relating death to sex is common in Italian madrigals of the sixteenth century (and goes back even further). For an analysis of how the metaphor works specifically in this madrigal, see Lewis Lockwood, "Text and Music in Rore's Madrigal *Anchor che col partire*," in *Musical Humanism and its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca*, Festschrift 11, ed. Nancy Kovaleff Baker and Measuremeasurea Russano Hanning (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992), 243-253. For more on the sexual subtexts in the madrigals of this time, see Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal," *The Journal of Musicology* 14 (1996), 1-34.

³⁵ Bassano shows a similar approach in his versions of *Anchor che col partire*. See Bass, "Rhetoric and Musical Ornamentography" for a more thorough discussion along with transcriptions, 243-255.

prominent, but the emphasis was more on individual performers than large consorts.³⁶ Milan was also one of the first regions that saw a push toward the Baroque form of the solo sonata and several of the first generation of sonata writers, most famously Giovanni Paolo Cima (c1570-1630) and Biagio Marini (1584-1663), called Milan home. With this emphasis placed on soloists, a decidedly more flamboyant brand of ornamentation emerged, and in many ways their ornamentographs are the most advanced of the entire tradition, being both technically demanding and cunningly constructed.

As a contrast to Dalla Casa's examples, the same 18 measures of Ricardo Rognoni's texted superius version of *Anchor che col partire*, from his *Passaggi per potersi* (Venice, 1592), are shown in Example 7.³⁷ There is a noticeably different approach here and gone is the alternation between original and florid material. Clearly, the point of Rognoni's ornamentograph is to show a single embellished line to be performed with accompaniment, rather than one that is meant to be a part of a larger improvisational performance among several musicians.

³⁶ For a general discussion of music in Milan, see Robert Kendrick, *The Sounds of Milan, 1585-1650* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Christine Suzanne Getz, *Music in the Collective Spirit of Sixteenth-Century Milan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

³⁷ Ricardo Rognoni, *Passaggi per potersi essercitare nel diminuire* (Venice, 1592), ed. Giuseppe Vecchi, preface by Bruce Dickey (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 2002).

Example 7. Measures 1-18 of Ricardo Rognoni's texted superius parts on *Anchor che col partire* along with the original part.

Rognoni
Texted Superius

Anchor che col partire
Superius

1 An - cor che col par - ti - re Io

5 mi sen - ta mo - ri - re, Par - tir vor -

8 rei ogn' hor o - gni mo - men - to, Tan' è il pia -

11 cer ch'io sen - to, Tan' è il pia - cer ch'io sen - to

14 De la vi - ta ch'ac - qui - sto nel

17 ri - tor - no;

It becomes immediately clear that Rognoni's improvisatory language is more constantly florid than that of Dalla Casa's, and the ornamentation and original are woven into a much more seamless fabric, although rhetorical considerations still seem to be the driving force. Over the first 10 measures there is an ebb and flow to the ornamentation, with the most ornate material occurring in measure 2 (on "partire," or leaving), in measures 5-6 (on "senta morire," highlighting "death"), and in measure 8 (on the second syllable of "vorrei"). Beginning in measure 10 is a trend of increasing ornamentation that continues until measure 18. Here too, several smaller bursts of floridity work to highlight specific rhetorical moments: the activity increases over "de la vita" (life) eases over "ch'acquisto," and again gets more complicated over "ritorno" (return) in measure 17, which contains the most florid episode yet. Like Dalla Casa, Rognoni has stayed

remarkably close to the original pitch structure thus far, leaving it only when inserting the customary *gruppi* at cadential points, but the major difference is that in the sections of less activity, Rognoni does not return to strict presentations of original material. Measure 15-16 (“ch’aquisto”) is a good example: he uses a dotted quarter note and eighth note rather than the original half note, which lowers the speed compared to the previous measure and hints at the original material, but still keeps the overall level of floridity up.

One thing that becomes clear from looking at these versions of *Anchor che col partire* is that sixteenth-century improvisers seem to be concerned with the rhetorical effect of extemporaneously added material. This idea, which transcends individual or regional differences in style, holds the tradition together and reinforces the notion that musical embellishment was an intellectual exercise. To see how this occurs in a treatise designed specifically for singing, we turn to our final examples by Bovicelli.

Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, a singer also active in Milan, published the final proper manual of ornamentography in the sixteenth century, but outside of this treatise, little is known about his life or career. It stands to reason, though, that he was a singer of considerable merit based on accounts from the time by Damiano Scarabelli, vice-*maestro di capella* at the Milan Cathedral,³⁸ and by the complexity of the embellishment in his treatise. This manual, *Regole, passaggi di musica, madrigali et motetti passeggiati* (Venice, 1594), is especially important in the tradition of improvised vocal ornamentation because it is the only one of the century focused explicitly on singing.³⁹ Other authors stated that vocalists as well as instrumentalists could use their manuals—they even included texted examples—but all of them were professional instrumentalists and their vocal ornamentographs feel less weighty than the ones intended for instrumental performance. Bovicelli, however, was a professional singer and clearly meant for his examples to be sung. In fact, his ornamentographs are so adventurous and take such liberty with the original material that they have led some scholars to question their musical value; Alfred Einstein, for instance, called them “monstrous” and Brown said that they showed that “...surely bad taste is not the exclusive property of the current century.”⁴⁰

³⁸ This statement appears in Scarabelli’s *Liber primus Motectorum* (Venice, 1592), see Imogene Horsley. “Bovicelli, GiovanniBattista.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03748> (accessed July 24, 2009).

³⁹ Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, *Regole, passaggi di musica, madrigali, e motetti passeggiati* (Venice, 1594), ed. Nanie Bridgman, Documenta Musicologica 12 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1957). Also Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, *Regole, passaggi di musica, madrigali et motetti passeggiati* (Venice, 1594), in *Late Renaissance Singing*, ed. and trans. Edward Foreman (Minneapolis: Pro Musica Press, 2001), 119-212.

⁴⁰ Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), II: 840-1, and Brown, *Embellishing 16th-Century Music*, 73. As stated earlier, Einstein and Brown lived before a time when performers had really taken to this repertory, and it is possible that they would have softened their stances on Bovicelli’s ornamentographs if they had the opportunity to hear such performances, rather than only being able to look at the music on the page.

Bovicelli's work is unique because the majority of the pieces he chose for models were sacred pieces, perhaps reflecting his professional life as a cathedral singer. In fact of the eleven ornamentographs, six are motets (*Ave verum corpus* by Palestrina, *Angelus ad pastores* by Rore, *Vadam, et circumibo civitatem* [prima and secunda parte] by Tomás Luis de Victoria, *Domine speravi* and *Assumpsit Jesus* by Claudio Merulo), three are falsobordones (a Magnificat by Giulio Cesare Gabussi, a Magnificat, even verses, by Ruggiero Giovanelli, and a *Dixit Dominus* by Bovicelli himself), and two are madrigals (*Io son ferito ahi lasso* by Palestrina, and *Anchor che col partire* by Rore). What is even more interesting is that two of the motets are contrafacta of madrigals by the same composer: *Io son ferito ahi lasso* and *Ave verum corpus* by Palestrina have nearly identical superius parts (a few measures are different, but the overwhelming majority of material is the same),⁴¹ as do *Anchor che col partire* and *Angelus ad pastores* by Rore.⁴² This gives us a unique opportunity to examine Bovicelli's thinking to see if different texts changed his approach toward embellishment.

Since it has served this study so well—and as an homage to its popularity in the sixteenth century—example 8 (next page) shows the first 18 measures of the superius lines of *Anchor che col partire* and *Angelus ad pastores* embellished by Bovicelli, along with the original superius part from *Anchor che col partire*. Looking at *Anchor che col partire* first, the ornamentation exhibits many of the same characteristics as the versions shown earlier in this paper. Notice that the most elaborate figures are tied to the most colorful words (reinforcing the double entendres of the text): “morire” in measure 6; “partire” in measure 7; “de la vita” in measures 14-15; and “ritorno” in measures 17-18.

⁴¹ *Ave verum corpus*, in fact, may have been given its sacred text by Bovicelli or someone in the Milan cathedral, as there is no other evidence of the existence of this piece. It is listed in the Grove as a ‘doubtful or unconfirmed’ motet: Lewis Lockwood, et al. “Palestrina, Giovanni Pierluigi da,” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20749> (accessed September 23, 2009). A fragment of a different melody on the same text appeared in the old Palestrina edition of his collected works: Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Vol. xxxi, ed. F.X. Haberl and others (Leipzig, 1907), iii.

⁴² *Angelus ad Pastores* is not known outside of the *Regole, passaggi di musica* and is not listed under Rore's works in Grove: Jessie Ann Owens. “Rore, Cipriano de,” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23815> (accessed September 23, 2009).

Example 8. Bovicelli's ornamented superius of *Anchor che col partire* and *Angelus ad pastores* along with the original superius of *Anchor che col partire*.

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with three staves. The top staff in each system is Bovicelli's ornamented superius, the middle staff is the original superius, and the bottom staff is Bovicelli's *Angelus ad pastores*.

System 1:

- Bovicelli Anchor che col partire:** An - - - chor - - - che col - - - par - ti - - re
- Anchor che col partire Superius:** An - - - - chor - - - che col par - ti - - - re
- Bovicelli Angelus ad pastores:** An - - - ge - lus ad pa - sto - res a - - - it - -

System 2:

- Bovicelli Anchor che col partire:** Io - - - mi sen - - - ta - - - mo - ri - - re,
- Anchor che col partire Superius:** Io mi sen - - - - ta mo - ri - - - re,
- Bovicelli Angelus ad pastores:** ad - - - pa - sto - res a - - - - - it

System 3:

- Bovicelli Anchor che col partire:** Par - - - - tir vor - rei - - - ogn' hor o - - - gni mo - men -
- Anchor che col partire Superius:** Par - - - - tir vor - rei ogn' - hor, - o - - - - gni - mo - men -
- Bovicelli Angelus ad pastores:** A - - - nun - ci - o - - - vo - bis A - nun - ci - o vo -

System 4:

- Bovicelli Anchor che col partire:** to, Tant' - - - è il pia - cer ch'io - sen - to, Tant' - - - è il pia - cer ch'io -
- Anchor che col partire Superius:** to: Tant' è il pia - cer ch'io sen - to, Tant' è il pia cer ch'io
- Bovicelli Angelus ad pastores:** bis gau - di - um ma - - - - gnum, gau - di - um ma -

Example 8. (*continued*)

13

sen - - - to De la

sen to De la vi - - -

- - - gnum gau - di - um ma - - -

15

vi - - - - - ta ch'ac - - -

- - - - - ta ch'ac - - -

- - - - - gnum, ma - - - - -

16

qui - - - - - sto

qui - - - - - sto nel

17

nel ri - - - - - tor - - - no.

ri - - - tor - - - no.

- - - - - gnum,

Bovicelli's treatment of *Angelus ad pastores* is a bit different, and the placement of the embellishment shows that the words had a great deal of pull on Bovicelli as he added new material to the piece. In contrast to *Anchor che col partire*, notice how the opening three measures of the piece ("Angelus ad pastores") are unadorned except for a small figure on the penultimate note. Rather than moving to new text for the next phrase as the madrigal does (measures 4-6), the motet repeats the end of the previous line, "ad pastores." Bovicelli used this repetition as an opportunity to superimpose new material that begins simply in measure 4 and progresses to a more complex figure in measure 5 that extends the range of the original melody

before moving closer to it in measure 6. The next phrase in measures 7-10 is similar in that the motet repeats the words “anuncio vobis” to fill the same space of one line of text in the madrigal (“Partir vorrei ogn’ hor ogni momento”). This repetition of text is used as an improvisatory vehicle here as well, as the initial statement is presented unadorned (measures 7-8), and the second is embellished (measures 9-10).

The next three musical phrases (measures 10-11, 12-13, and 14-18) all use the same text, “gaudium magnum,” and although measure 18 is major cadential point for both the madrigal and motet, Bovicelli approaches this point differently in each example. In *Anchor che col partire*, measures 10-11 and 12-13 are repeated phrases and Bovicelli treats them like many other ornamentographers, embellishing the second phrase more than the first. This is followed by the final phrase in the first sentence (measures 14-18), which is given as the most extravagant musical passage yet moving to the cadence. In *Angelus ad pastores*, however, there are three phrases in a row with the same text, and Bovicelli uses a different approach to increase the level of improvisatory activity. What he does is to use embellishment to color “magnum” in all three phrases. Notice that “gaudium” is presented virtually unadorned in measures 10, 12, and 14, whereas “magnum” is given increasingly extravagant figures in measures 11, 12-13, and 14-18. In fact, measures 14-18 are more florid than anything found in *Anchor che col partire*, probably because here Bovicelli is simply ornamenting one word rather than an entire line of text; it also highlights the different rhetorical structure of the motet (emphasizing “great”). The only real break in this final florid section is on beat 3 of measure 15, which is probably meant to facilitate a breath, especially since the word is restated on the following beat. Interestingly, Bovicelli actually warned—quite vividly—against this in his treatise, saying, “...it is a very great fault not to ever finish the word, and always repeat the two or three first syllables, as in, for example, saying, Benedi, Benedictus, similarly to those who have damaged their teeth and many times masticate the same food before swallowing it.”⁴³ Worrying about the placement of the words is something that singers had to do in a way that instrumentalists did not, and Bovicelli’s concern for the integrity of the text is important and, I believe, strengthens the notion that improvisers were concerned with the rhetorical effect of their ornamentation on a piece of music—at least in sung performances.

Conclusion

Taking a step back, I believe that the things we see in these manuals can be quite valuable toward our understanding of improvisatory activity in the sixteenth century. In particular, if we look at the ornamentographs as things unto themselves and not simply adornments of original

⁴³ Bovicelli, *Regole, passaggi di musica*, 9 (Foreman translation in *Late Renaissance Singing*, 132): “...grandissimo vitio è di coloro, I quali non sanno mai finire la parola, e sempre vanno replicando le due tre prime sillabe, come per essemplio, dicendo, Benedi, Benedictus, assomigliandosi a coloro, c’hanno guasti I denti, che piu volte vanno masticando o stello cibo prima, che l’inghiottiscano.”

pieces, we can see some trends that might help us approach improvising today. One of the most refreshing realizations is that the training modern improvisers receive might be similar to what sixteenth-century musicians underwent. Moreover modern approaches toward constructing improvisations might be applied to older forms as well. The relationship between speed and organization seen in Ortiz's manual, I think, is particularly helpful: it gives a potential improviser something to concentrate on in the moment rather than trying to recall specific patterns from the manuals and insert them at appropriate times—or even more dubiously writing them out ahead of time. To be clear, we should certainly practice and learn the patterns in the tables, but in the moment of performance, we should think about broader things and let the patterns materialize in natural ways.

Likewise, Dalla Casa's examples show first of all that improvisation was not only a solo skill (as most of the other ornamentographers would seem to imply) but something done by all the members of an ensemble, and beyond that they give an idea of how this rather different practical proposition was carried out. There are some basic tendencies we can follow, i.e. let the embellishment follow the order of entrances and have the musical material sequence among voices, but the exciting thing is how reactionary it seems to be. In such situations with well-trained performers, one can imagine what might come about when players are allowed to follow their ears and instincts.

A trend seen across the manuals—represented in this paper with examples of *Anchor che col partire* by Dalla Casa, Rognoni, and Bovicelli—and one I think that is perhaps the most useful to us today, is the idea that ornamentation follows the rhetoric of the text and works to reinforce its underlying meaning, even in purely instrumental situations. This is something we can run with today: after becoming acquainted with the improvisatory language of the century, we can approach a performance through the text and allow extemporaneous gestures to color the words in new ways, maybe even strengthening its rhetorical persuasiveness.

We must remember, though, that these documents are not really improvisations; rather they are carefully constructed—and more or less idealized—representations of how extemporaneous performances might have taken shape. As a result, they must be viewed with some level of skepticism. Also, one of the larger problems is that many improvisatory nuances do not come across in notation, which leaves us with only part of the picture: written-down Bovicelli and written-down Coltrane alike cannot properly capture all of the intricacies of an actual improvised performance.

Ultimately, the ornamentographers were not special because they were improvisers; they were special because they decided to try to write down what they did. Despite whatever problems we can find in their treatises, their work gives us models we can follow today to train ourselves to view ornamentation through their eyes. Of course we will never be able to fully recreate their improvisatory world, but by immersing ourselves in what they left behind and viewing it from the point of view of improvisers, perhaps we can use our musical instincts to build new performances with the tools they have supplied.