

Comparing Tosi, Galliard, and Agricola on how to Perform Arias ('Arie')

Subject

- Tosi begins by dividing 'Airs' into three types according to the 'Ancients' ('*Antichi:*')
 - Theatrical, which are 'lively and various' ('*vago e misto.*')
 - Chamber, which are 'delicate and finish'd' ('*miniato e finito.*')
 - Church, which are 'moving and grave' ('*affetuoso e grave.*')
- He laments, however, that the difference between the three is 'quite unknown' to modern singers ('*Questa differenza a moltissimi moderni è ignota.*')
- Tosi continues to say that 'a few verbal Lessons cannot suffice' to teach the art of ornamentation ('*poche lezioni verbali possono servir d'insegnamento*') and, although it is possible to write down one's ornaments, 'there wouldn't be enough for all [situations], and they would always be lacking that sweet *portamento di voce* of the artist' ('*Perchè non basterebbono per tutte, e mancherebbon sempre di quel dolce portamento di voce dell' Autore.*') Galliard here translates the phrase '*quel dolce portamento di voce dell' Autore*' as 'that Spirit which accompanies extempore Performances.' This is perhaps not too much of a liberty since Tosi himself later refers to the ornaments in question as 'improvised embellishments' ('*abbellimenti improvvisi.*')
- As a footnote to this paragraph, Galliard comments that he presumes that 'the Scholar [student] is arrived to the Capacity of knowing Harmony and Counterpoint' [i.e. that the student is already versed in harmony and counterpoint.]
- Tosi explains that an 'Air' is divided into three parts:
 - The first (A) 'require[s] nothing but the simplest ornaments, of a good taste and few, that the composition may remain intact' ('*Nella prima non chieggono, che ornamenti semplici, gustosi, e pochi, affinche la composizione resti intatta.*')
 - The second (B) 'expect[s]...that to this purity some artful graces be added' ('*a quella purità ingegnosa un artificio singolare si aggiunga, acciò chi se n'intende senta.*')

- The third (A1) must be varied, for ‘he that does not vary it for the better, is no great master’ (*‘chi non varia migliorando tutto quello, che cantò, non è grand' Uomo.’*)
- At this point, Agricola comments that those ornaments from the second and third chapters of the book, the appoggiaturas and trills, are ‘almost sufficient’ (*‘Nahe hinreichend’*) for the performance of this first part of an aria.
- Tosi says that a student should ‘repeat them [the airs] always differently’ (*‘chi studia a replicarle sempre diversamente,’*) saying that an inventive singer ‘deserves much more esteem’ than a better, but less artful singer (*‘mediocre Vocalista merita asai piùstima d'un migliore, che sia sterile.’*)
- According to Tosi, If a singer is only accompanied by the bass (continuo) then their ornaments must be in time and consonant with the bass. If accompanied by other instruments however, the singer must be aware of their motion ‘in order to avoid the errors committed by those who are ignorant...’ (*‘Nell' Arie a solo l'applicazione di chi studia l'artificio è solamente soggetta al Tempo, & al Basso, ma in quelle, che sono accompagnate da Strumenti, allora bisogna, che sia intenta al loro andamento ancora per evitar quegli errori, che si commettono da chi non imparò a conoscerli.’*)
- As general advice, Tosi suggests that a student should not stop ‘practising in private, until he is secure of committing no error in public.’ (*‘Il primo eforta con un savio consiglio ad errar mille volte in privato (se occorre) con sicurezza di non fallar mai in pubblico.’*)
- Furthermore, a singer should sing the first rehearsal ‘without any other ornaments than those which are very natural,’ while nevertheless thinking about where to introduce ornaments in the next rehearsal ‘so from one rehearsal to another, [the singer is] always varying for the better’ (*‘si cantino alla prima prova senz'altri ornamenti che naturali, con ferma intenzione, però, che si esami nello stesso tempo colla mente il sito dove convengano gli artificiali nella seconda; Così di ripetizione in ripetizione, e di ben in meglio cangiando sempre si diventa insensibilmente un gran Cantore.’*)
- Tosi’s greatest complaint about the ‘moderns’ is their ‘neglect of keeping Time, which ought to be inviolable, and not sacrificed to their beloved Passages and Divisions’ (*‘loro modo di cantar le Arie se n' incolpi il rigoroso precetto del Tempo, che essendo costituito dall' Intelligenza per legge inviolabile alla Professione severamente me lo proibisce; E a dire il vero, il poco conto che ne fanno per sacrificarlo al gusto insulso de' loro amati Passaggi è troppo ingiusto per tollerarlo.’*)

- In fact, he complains about some singers 'who expect that a whole orchestra should stop' during a piece, 'to wait for their ill-grounded caprices [ornaments], learned by heart, carried from one theatre to another...' (*'Non è compatibile la debolezza di certi Vocalisti, che pretendono, che un' Orchestra intera si fermi nel più bel corso del regolato movimento dell' Arie per aspettare i loro mal fondati capricci imparati a mente per portarli da un Teatro all' altro...'*)
- Generally, Tosi's complain about 'modern' singers is that 'all their Application now is to divide and subdivide [i.e. add ornamentation] in such a Manner, that it is impossible to understand either Words, Thoughts, or Modulation, or to distinguish one Air from another, they singing them all so much alike' (*'non è possibile di poter più sentire, nè parole, nè pensieri, nè modulazioni, nè discernere un' Aria dall' altra a cagione di tal somiglianza.'*) In this complaint, Tosi repeats the ancient cliché that 'the Moderns are arrived at the highest Degree of Perfection in singing to the Ear; and that the Ancients are inimitable in singing to the Heart' (*'i Moderni sono inarrivabili per cantare all' udito, e che gli Antichi erano inimitabili per cantare al cuore.'*)

Notes

This small collection of summaries is designed to make wading through the dense Italian, English, and German texts easier for students of ‘historically informed’ singing. As such, the presentation aims to be simple and accessible, while those passages in which Tosi digresses, such as those addressing compositional practice or other more theoretical elements are omitted. While these are doubtless useful for the student of ‘historically informed’ singing, their inclusion would defeat the point of this summary. Links to digital reproductions of the original texts can be found below.

Pier Francesco Tosi’s *Opinioni de’cantori Antichi, e Moderni* is debatably the most influential treatise on singing from the eighteenth century, being cited in works on vocal pedagogy into the present day.

Tosi (1654-1742) himself was an Italian castrato, teacher, and composer. He was employed as a church singer in Rome between 1676-1677, sang in Milan with the Cathedral choir until 1685, and was based in Genoa before traveling to London in 1693, where he found employment as a concert singer and singing teacher. Between 1701-1723 he worked as a diplomat for Emperor Joseph I, before returning to London in 1724, establishing himself a singing teacher. The emphasis on past musical practices throughout the treatise is reminiscent of much modern discourse on both a supposed ‘Golden Age’ as well as the ‘Historically Informed’ movement. Indeed, it is hardly surprising to learn that Tosi was one of the founding members of the Academy of Ancient Music in London in the 1720s.

Tosi’s English translator, John Ernest Galliard (1666-1747) was a German composer and oboist active in England during the first part of the eighteenth century. As a member of the London musical scene during this period, he very likely knew Tosi personally, indeed Galliard was also a fellow founding-member of the Academy of Ancient music. If Dr. Kitchener is to be believed, George Frideric Handel himself was a significant admirer of Galliard’s skill as a composer.

Johann Agricola (1720-1774,) Tosi’s German translator, was a composer, organist, singing master, and conductor. In 1738, during his studies in Law at the University of Leipzig, Agricola became a pupil of Johann Sebastian Bach and, in 1741 became a pupil of Johann Joachim Quantz. In 1772, Charles Burney described Agricola as ‘the best organ-player in Berlin, and the best singing master in Germany.’

Bibliography

Agricola, Johann Friedrich Agricola. *Anleitung Zur Singkunst* (Berlin: G.F. Winter, 1757).

Agricola, Johann. *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, trans. Julianne Baird (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Boyd, Malcolm, and John Rosselli. "Tosi, Pier Francesco." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 11 Jan. 2021. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.access.authkb.kb.nl/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000028201>.

Fiske, Roger, and Richard G. King. "Galliard, John Ernest." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 11 Jan. 2021. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.access.authkb.kb.nl/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000010555>.

Helm, E. Eugene, and Darrell Berg. "Agricola, Johann Friedrich." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 11 Jan. 2021. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.access.authkb.kb.nl/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000000312>.

Tosi, Pier Francesco. *Opinioni de'cantori Antichi, e Moderni, o Sieno Osservazioni Sopra Il Canto Figurato*. (Bologna, 1723).

Tosi, Pier Francesco. *Observations on the Florid Song ; or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, trans. Johann Ernst Galliard (London: J. Wilcox, 1743).

All three books are available on [IMSLP](#)

A searchable transcription of Tosi's original text can be found [HERE](#):

A searchable transcription of the Galliard translation can be found [HERE](#):