

Monteverdi's *lamenti* and *lettere amoroze* and the  
pre-existing art of declamation

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## Introduction

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For a few years now, I have been intrigued by the lamentations and love letters set to music by Claudio Monteverdi throughout his life. The enormous amount of text in both genres, set on rhythms and pitches that resemble the natural flow and intonation of speech, has made me wonder whether we are in fact performing these genres in the right way. Nowadays, we seem to have lost the sense of freedom that comes from declaiming a text. We are very much bound to the *tactus*, to staying in the meter and keeping it as clean as possible. We do not dare to slow down and accelerate to mirror the passions of the text and we sing the pitches exactly as written instead of seeing in them the expressions of the words they accompany. Should the interpretation of Monteverdi's *lamenti* and *lettere amoroze* be closer to the pre-existing art of declamation? Monteverdi was at the start of the *seconda pratica*, a practice that started a bit before 1600 in which text became the master of harmony, as opposed to the *prima pratica* during which polyphony gave more importance to musical lines than words. With the start of the *seconda pratica*, appears the *stile recitativo* and *genere rappresentativo*.

Between 1635 and 1639, in his *Trattato della musica scenica*, Giovanni Battista Doni gives a definition of these terms:

« For the style called *recitativo*, today we mean that kind of melody in which one can recite appropriately and with taste, that is, solo singing in a manner such that the words are understood, or to do that on theatrical stages, or in churches or oratories in the manner of dialogues, or else in private chambers or elsewhere. And lastly, with this term we understand all kinds of music which one sings solo to the sound of some instrument, with scant drawing of the notes and in such a way that it approaches common, yet affective speech. [...] But for 'representative', we should understand that kind of melody which is truly proportionate to the stage, that is, for every kind of dramatic action that one wishes to represent (the Greeks say μιμείδαι, imitate) with song, which is almost the same as today's *stile recitativo* but not entirely, because some things should be removed to bring it to perfection, and others added, as will be shown below. Therefore it pleases me better to call this style accommodated to the stage *rappresentativo* or *scenico* rather than *recitativo*, because the actors called in Greek υποκριταί and in Latin *histriones* do not recite but represent, imitating the actions in human manners, and also because as I have demonstrated in my *Discorsi musicali*, this style would be excellently adapted to reciting in public to the sound of some instrument, conforming to ancient practice some heroic poem, as for example Pretis' *Oronta*, with those precautions that I noted there. »<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fabbri P., Monteverdi, Translated by Carter Tim, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1994, p. 166-167

Thus, Doni tries to make a distinction between both terms by giving to the second one a more theatrical connotation. However, both terms were used equally by composers. With time, the *stile rappresentativo* developed into opera in which many new musical ideas gave more structure to the singers' lines, making it more difficult to recite freely. However, Monteverdi's *lettere amorose* and *lamenti* (most of these *lamenti* were opera arias) remained in the original *stile recitativo/ rappresentativo*, with the purpose of being declaimed.

I think the reason for which we have become so rigid in this style is that we put it in the wrong context. It is too often assimilated to the style of Giulio Caccini because of the similar views that the composer had in the beginning of the 17th century and because both are remembered as important influencers of the *seconda pratica*.

We now create workshops called '*recitar cantando*' in which every piece can only be sung after having informed ourselves by reading Caccini's preface to the *Nuove Musiche*. But we forget that within this period of time that started the *seconda pratica*, there was more than one current.

Jacopo Peri, for example, in the introduction to his 1600 opera *Euridice*, wrote:

« Seeing that dramatic poetry was concerned and that it was therefore necessary to imitate speech in song (and surely no one ever spoke in song), I judged that the ancient Greeks and Romans (who, in the opinion of many, sang their tragedies throughout in representing them upon the stage) had used a harmony surpassing that of ordinary speech but falling so far below the melody of song as to take an intermediate form. [...] For this reason, discarding every other manner of singing hitherto heard, I devoted myself wholly to seeking out the kind of imitation necessary for these poems. »<sup>2</sup>

Twenty years earlier, Vincenzo Galilei had made a very similar claim in his *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna* (ca. 1581):

« When [composers] go for entertainment to the tragedies and comedies recited by the zanni, let them restrain their immoderate laughter and instead observe if they would in what manner and at what pitch (high or low), volume of sound, accents and gestures, speed or slowness of articulation a gentleman speaks quietly with another. Let them pay attention to the difference with respect to all these qualities when one of them speaks with his servants, or a servant to another, let them consider when this happens to be a prince talking with his subjects or vassals, or a suppliant pleading, how a furious or excited person speaks, how a married woman, a girl, a mere tot, a clever harlot, someone in love speaking to his beloved

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<sup>2</sup> Golomb U., *Ars Polemica: Monteverdi's Orfeo as artistic creed*, Goldberg: Early Music Magazine 45 (April 2007): 44-57, p.5

when he is trying to bend her to his will, how someone who laments, or one who cries out, how a timid person sounds or one exulting in joy. From these characteristics, observed with attention and diligently examined, they could take the norm of what suits the expression of any other idea that might come to hand. »<sup>3</sup>

He had added that he was against the excessive employment of « runs of gorgia and many other artifices » because, according to him, vocal music should emulate the art of actors and orators, and adhere strictly to the rhythms and structures of the poetic text.

Giulio Caccini, however, was making use of ‘runs of gorgia and many other artifices’ such as diverse *trilli*, *gruppi* and *esclamazione*. The musicologist Nino Pirrota, in 1982, in his essay ‘*Music and Theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*’, made a clear distinction between Peri’s style as being *recitar cantando* (singing speech), and Caccini’s style being *cantar recitando* (spoken song), for Caccini had greater faith in the expressive potential of vocal virtuosity and lyrical melody.<sup>4</sup>

Monteverdi himself wrote quite a few pieces in a more ‘*cantar recitando*’ style, such as most of his 1632 *Scherzi musicali*. However, when he wanted to express very genuine human emotions, he used the *stile rappresentativo* which emerged from the pre-existing art of oratio, using methods similar to those of Galilei and Peri, as explained in a letter he wrote to Alessandro Striggio in 1616 about *Le Nozze di Tetide* that Striggio wanted him to put to music:

« I have noticed that the interlocutors are winds, Cupids, little Zephyrs and Sirens: consequently many sopranos will be needed, and it can also be stated that the winds have to sing— that is, the Zephyrs and the Boreals. How, dear Sir, can I imitate the speech of the winds, if they do not speak? And how can I, by such means, move the passions? Ariadne moved us because she was a woman, and similarly Orpheus because he was a man, not a wind. Music can suggest, without any words, the noise of winds and cannot imitate the speech of winds because no such thing exists. [...] if this were something that led to a single climax, like Arianna and Orfeo, you would certainly require a single hand — that is, if it led to singing speech, and not (as this does) to spoken song. »<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wilbourne E., *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell’Arte*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, p. 153

<sup>4</sup> Golomb U., *Ars Polemica: Monteverdi’s Orfeo as artistic creed*, Goldberg: Early Music Magazine 45 (April 2007): 44-57, p.5-6

<sup>5</sup> Stevens D., *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, Faber and Faber, London, 1980, p.117-118

## I. Being aware of the Commedia dell'Arte's influence on the new style of composing and singing

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There is no doubt that the Commedia dell'Arte served as a model to the creation of Italian opera. Some commedia characters gave their form to opera characters. In *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, for example, the role of *Seneca* is a derivation of *il Dottore*, a pompous and educated doctor, lawyer or other character of high position who loves the sound of his own voice but who never says anything of value. *Ottone* seems to have been inspired by *il Capitano* who fought great wars but always ends up spilling his own blood.

However, the Commedia dell'Arte did not only influence Italian opera through its characters. It also gave it some of its own actors.

### Virginia Ramponi-Andreini

When Monteverdi wrote his opera *Ariana* (1607-1608) as part of the musical festivities for a royal wedding at the court of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, the title role was meant to be sung by the young Caterina Martinelli. Unfortunately, she died of small pox before it could be performed, and Monteverdi had to find a new *Ariana*: Virginia Ramponi-Andreini, a Commedia dell'arte actress who was the star of her husband's troupe, *I Fedeli*. At her audition for the opera—after only six days with the music—Andreini reportedly sang the role « in such a manner that [the Duchess Eleonora de' Medici Gonzaga] was left speechless » and all who heard her « were full of marvel. »<sup>6</sup>

About the performance, Federico Follino (the court's chronicler) wrote:

« The lament, which Ariana did on a rocky outcrop, abandoned by Teseo, was performed with such affect, and with such piteous gestures, that there was not a single listener whose heart was not softened, nor was there one lady who did not shed some small tear at her beautiful lament. »<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wilbourne E., *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, p. 92-95

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

Another review was written by Annibale Roncaglia, in a letter to the Duke of Modena Cesare d'Este, of which he was the ambassador:

« Each of the performers [recitanti] had very nice costumes and did their parts well, but best of all was Ariana the commedia actress [comediante]; they did the story of Ariana and Teseo, which, with her musical lament, accompanied by viols and violins, she made many weep with her pain. There was also [Francesco] Raso, a musician [musicco], who sang divinely; but Ariana outdid herself in this role, and the eunuchs and others seemed as nothing. »<sup>8</sup>

Virginia Ramponi-Andreini's career in Monteverdi's compositions did not stop after *Ariana*. She was reemployed by him to sing the role of the *Ingrata* in the *Ballo delle Ingrate*, which is centered around one aria, also a lament in the *genere rappresentativo*.

The fact that a comedian was at the start of Monteverdi's laments in *genere rappresentativo* shows how much this style is meant to be declaimed. By interpreting the role of *Ariana*, Virginia Ramponi-Andreini established a model of *recitar cantando* for others to follow later on.

## Il Corago

Much later, between 1628 and 1637, a treatise was written under the title of *Il Corago*.

*Il Corago* is a guide on how to perform early Italian opera. Its author remains anonymous, but there are high chances that it was written by Pierfrancesco Rinuccini, the son of Ottavio Rinuccini, Monteverdi's librettist for *L'Ariana* and *Il Ballo delle Ingrate*.<sup>9</sup>

*Il Corago* reflects on opera staging and setting, as well as acting and declamation indications for singers.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Savage R. Sansone M., 'Il Corago' and the Staging of Early Opera: Four Chapters from an Anonymous Treatise circa 1630, *Early Music*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1989, pp. 495–511, [www.jstor.org/stable/3127018](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3127018)

Here are a few passages in which declamation is discussed:

« For prospective composers, it could be of notable help to hear those same verses that one has to set to music recited first by a worthy and expressive actor, because having beforehand a fine prototype, the mind awakens to find the musical ideas or forms that best imitate the effects and the sense of the poetry. This third style of recitative is nothing other than a modulated imitation of a perfect recitation.

[...] The way of reciting is of great importance, because something spoken by one who knows how to deliver it well and to accompany it with gestures will make a far greater impression in the hearts of the listeners and move them more easily to feelings of rage, hatred, passion, happiness, and so on, than when simply narrated by someone without gestures or changes of voice. »

[...] The variation that the voice makes in speaking is too little, such that a diversity of sounds would be almost impossible. Thus that pleasure would be small and the labor extreme. To this also one could respond that [...] the variation that one employs in the common way of performance pleases such that good actors are praised principally for it and those who maintain an unvaried sound are notably displeasing. »<sup>10</sup>

The last point is later reinforced by the following statement:

« The perfection of dramatic poetry does not consist in [simply] portraying the naked truth of human actions, but rather in the imitation of these (actions) by means of reference formed by ingenuity. Hence the poet's supreme gift (as Aristotle says on this point) lies in forming the narrative, namely the invention of events structured and interwoven with verisimilar reference to the basis of truth. Thus the art of staging poetic action, which is completely subordinate to its poetry, should all the more adorn and express truth with feigned graces, so as to be esteemed praiseworthy and admirable. Otherwise this would not be a labor of imagination, but hackwork. »<sup>11</sup>

Emily Wilbourne describes this new genre as being based on a « preexisting theatrical idiom in which the sonic elements of linguistic communication were already exaggerated, heightened, and codified into a set of standard tropes. »<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Translated in: Wilbourne E., *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, p. 154-157

<sup>11</sup> Translated in: Padoan, Maurizio, and Robert Kendrick. "Tradition and 'Modernity' in 'Il Corago.'" *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1993, pp. 113-127, [www.jstor.org/stable/836972](http://www.jstor.org/stable/836972)

<sup>12</sup> Wilbourne E., *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, p. 154-157

The recitation of sung speech on stage was therefore not done by imitating the natural flow of speech, but the exaggerated flow of speech, a form that already sounded musical because of its variety of voice intonations and colors, and its speed of recitation.

## The early Italian opera singer

By the time the opera genre had been established, singers knew how to perform it, as indicated in the lower 1645 statement by Loreto Vittori who had sung the part of Galatea in Monteverdi's *Mercurio e Marte* in 1628:

« That true artist, when he has to portray the voice and the words of a man agitated by anger, makes use of a piercing, excited, often precipitous sort of voice; if he is to show compassion and sadness, a flexible, broken, weak sort of voice; if he is to express fear, a submissive hesitating, humbled quality [...] All of this is what the most authoritative voice teachers recommend. »<sup>13</sup>

During the carnival season of 1643, Monteverdi premiered his last opera, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, written on a libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello, at the Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. One of his singers was praised by the audience and critics: Anna Renzi, in the role of Ottavia. A year later, Giulio Strozzi (librettist of Monteverdi for *I cinque fratelli*, *La finta pazza Licori* and *Proserpina rapita*) published a book of poems praising Renzi's performance in various operas: *Le Glorie della Signora Anna Renzi*, and dedicated it to Renzi's teacher, Filiberto Laurenzi.

Here are a few passages from it:

« The action that gives soul, spirit, and existence to things must be governed by the movements of the body, by gestures, by the face and by the voice, now raising it, now lowering it, becoming enraged and immediately becoming calm again; at times speaking hurriedly, at others slowly, moving the body now in one, now in another direction, drawing in the arms, and extending them, laughing and crying, now with little, now with much agitation of the hands. Our Signora Anna is endowed with such lifelike expression that her responses and speeches seem not memorized but born at the very moment. In sum, she transforms herself completely into the person she represents, and seems now a Thalia full of comic gaiety, now a Melpomene rich in tragic majesty.

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<sup>13</sup> Translated in: Wilbourne E., *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, p. 92-95

[...] She has a fluent tongue, smooth pronunciation, not affected, not rapid, a full, sonorous voice, not harsh, not hoarse, nor one that offends you with excessive subtlety; which arises from the temperament of the chest and throat, for which good voice much warmth is needed to expand the passages, and enough humidity to soften it and make it tender.

[...] She silently observes the actions of others, and when she is called upon to represent them, helped by her sanguine temperament and bile, which fires her (without which men cannot undertake great things), shows the spirit and valor learned by studying and observing. »<sup>14</sup>

Records have shown that Anna Renzi sung the parts of Deidamia from Saccati's *La finta pazza*, Ottavia from Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Aretusa from Laurenzi's *La finta savia*, and Damira from Ziani's *Le fortune di Rodope e Damira*. According to Ellen Rosand, « from that music and from Strozzi's description of her singing, it is clear that Renzi's vocal style was not primarily showy or virtuosic—though she certainly possessed flexibility of voice. Her roles called for dramatic intensity above all. Her interpretations, then, would have enhanced the effect of opera as drama. »<sup>15</sup>

Of all the roles that have been performed by Anna Renzi, the one that draws my attention the most is the part of Ottavia in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

Ottavia is the wife of Nerone, emperor of Rome, who has fallen in love with Poppea whom he has made his mistress. Ottavia, jealous and betrayed, plots to eliminate Poppea and sends her soldier, Ottone to kill her. Ottone agrees to the task, as he has also been betrayed by Poppea who used to be his lover before she fell into the arms of Nerone. Ottone's new lover, Drusilla, desperate for his recognition, lends him her clothes to use as a disguise in order for him not to be recognized during the job. But before he can complete his task, he is caught by Poppea's nurse who, having mistook him for Drusilla, sends Nerone's guards to arrest Drusilla instead. Out of love for Ottone, Drusilla takes the blame for him and is sentenced to death. Feeling guilty, Ottone confesses having been sent by Ottavia, and Nerone, moved by Drusilla's act of love and Ottone's honesty, exiles them instead. Ottavia, judged a dangerous threat to Rome, is decrowned and exiled as well. Nerone and Poppea can finally get married without the disapproval of Rome.

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<sup>14</sup> Translations in: Rosand, Ellen: *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1991, p.232-234

<sup>15</sup> Rosand, Ellen: *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1991, p.232-234

Ottavia's part is set in what seems to be the *genere rappresentativo*. Its two arias are accompanied by a very simple *basso continuo* and do not include any *ritornelli*. The rhythms of her lines are very close to the natural rhythms of speech, and the pitch is rather central and does not form a melody of its own, but rather reflects the colors of the words.

Nowadays, we have become accustomed to giving the part of Ottavia to a heavy mezzo with a very dark sound to give a clear idea of the seriousness and nobility of the character. Ottavia's arias have become a way for singers to demonstrate the volume of their voice rather than the character they are portraying. The lines are stretched and lose their flow of text in such a way that the result is an Ottavia which is almost more spiritual than human. I must admit that I am myself very often amazed by the heaviness and power they give to this role. However, I think it should be put back in its original context.

In *Le Glorie della Signora Anna Renzi*, Strozzi writes about Anna Renzi's interpretation of Ottavia<sup>16</sup> :

« Poi cominciasti afflita  
tue querele canore  
con la tua voce divina  
'Disprezzata regina',  
e seguendo il lamento  
facevo di dolore  
stillar in pianto, e sospirar Amore.  
Sò ben'io, che se vero  
fosse stato il cordoglio,  
e l'istoria funesta,  
alla tua voce mesta,  
alle dolce parole, ai cari detti,  
si come i nostri petti  
colmaro di pietade, ah sò ben'io,  
Neron s'havrebbe fatto humile, e pio. »

Then, afflicted, you began  
your melodious complaints  
with your voice divine  
'Disprezzata regina',  
and continuing your lament  
you forced, out of grief,  
Amor to burst into tears and sigh.  
Well do I know that,  
had the grief been true,  
and the dolorous tale,  
hearing your mournful voice,  
your sweet words, your endearing expressions,  
just as they filled our breasts  
with pity, ah, well do I know that  
Nero would have been rendered  
humble and compassionate.

This review seems to describe Ottavia as a woman deeply hurt and grieved, but nonetheless graceful, endearing and sweet in her mournful speech. Somehow, we have turned a woman with whom the audience used to empathise, into a frustrated Disney witch.

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<sup>16</sup> Carter T., *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002, p.93-95

In his essay ‘Seeing the Empress Again On Doubling in "L'incoronazione di Poppea"’, Magnus Tessing Schneider argues that Anna Renzi probably also covered the role of Drusilla. This claim is a very serious claim to make, as the roles are nowadays sung by very different types of voices. Drusilla’s part is much more *cantar recitando* than *recitar cantando*, and is therefore set higher than the part of Ottavia. Today, its part is usually sung by a light soprano. According to Schneider, « Ottavia’s part is half the size of any other part Renzi is known to have sung. [...] The other roles written for her feature at least one solo lament, and the melancholy moments are invariably set off by starkly contrasting passions: pastoral simplicity, amorous reverie, self-denying heroism, searing jealousy or blood-crazed fury. All her roles feature most of these moods, but in Poppea, melancholy, jealousy and fury are Ottavia's domain, while simplicity, reverie and heroism are Drusilla's. [...] A comparison with Anna Renzi's other roles shows that she was no mezzosoprano, however, but rather a soprano with a flexible voice. She was clearly most comfortable in the area between a" and f", which Tim Carter describes as Drusilla's usual tessitura. [...] Drusilla’s exit lines at the end of Act I, where she addresses the audience directly, [give a clue to Renzi’s doubling of the roles]: Lieta men vado. Otton resta felice. M'indirizzo a riveder l'Imperatrice. [I leave gladly. Otho stays content. I go to see the Empress again.] »<sup>17</sup>

EXAMPLE 1. L'Incoronazione di Poppea, SV 308, manuscript, p.53



Whether Anna Renzi sung both parts, we might never find out. However, Schneider’s claim supports the idea that, to sing both roles in a convincing manner, Renzi would have had to emphasize the difference between Drusilla’s spoken song and Ottavia’s sung speech, therefore defining Ottavia’s laments by their declamative aspect.

<sup>17</sup> Schneider M.T., Seeing the Empress Again On Doubling in ‘L'incoronazione Di Poppea, Cambridge Opera Journal, vol. 24, no. 3, 2012, pp. 249–291., [www.jstor.org/stable/23319591](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23319591)

## II. The question of the tactus

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### Giovanni Battista Doni

In his 1640 *Trattato della musica scenica*, Giovanni Battista Doni writes:

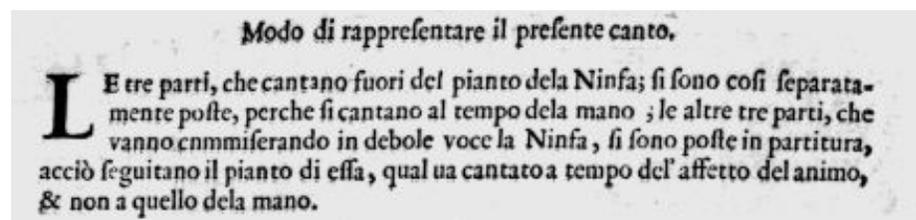
« I would not like to overlook one more consideration, that even though **the singer in *stile recitativo* is not accustomed to follow any beat**, nevertheless when there are several instruments playing together for that purpose, he will be obliged to follow the meter: it is indeed more difficult than in the common [musical] style, but all the more beautiful and excellent. In this instance, the musician (player) must be judicious and expert, in order to know where it is necessary to accelerate or to hold back the beat. Since it must be done with the foot, as was the custom with ancient flute players, he (the player) must be placed where the reciter can easily see him. »<sup>18</sup>

Through this quote, Doni gives us a clear idea of the freedom with which the *stile recitativo* was performed when only accompanied by a *basso continuo*.

### Senza batuta (without meter)

We all know the *Lamento della ninfa* written in 1638, which is beloved by so many because of the timelessness that is given to the canto. Monteverdi makes it quite clear, in the introduction to the piece, that the *ninfa* should be free in her recitation, singing « in the tempo of the soul and of the affects », to contrast the two tenors and one bass who should keep a steady tactus, singing « in the tempo of the hand ».

EXAMPLE 2.1. introduction to the *Lamento della Ninfa* in the *basso continuo* score of the 8th Book of Madrigals by Monteverdi, SV 146–167, first edition, published in 1638 Alessandro Vincenti in Venice, p.55




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<sup>18</sup> Abramov-van Rijk E., Giovanni Battista Doni and his Vision of Performing Poetry, *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online*, Vol. 13, 2015-16, p. 10

However, this freedom is not so unique, and is representative of many other characters created by Monteverdi. He seems to assimilate it to the *lamento* form of feminine characters who have been abandoned or betrayed in love, or to the *lettera amorosa* form of male characters who are longing for love.

At the top of the part score for voice of the *Lettera amorosa (Se i languidi miei sguardi)* published in 1619, Monteverdi has written ‘*Lettera amorosa a voce Sola in genere rappresentativo & si canta senza batuta*’ (Love letter for solo voice in the representative style to be sung without meter). Ironically, at the top of the *continuo* score, which has both *continuo* and vocal staves, he has only written ‘*Lettera amorosa in genere rappresentativo*’.

According to Paolo Fabbri, the instruction ‘*senza batuta*’ « does not present any particular problems, since it clearly refers to the need for a declamatory style that avoids all rhythmic rigidity in favour of free recitative governed only by the flow of the *oratione* and of the emotion. »<sup>19</sup>

EXAMPLE 2.2. beginning of the *Lettera amorosa* in the vocal part score of the 7th Book of Madrigals by Monteverdi, SV 117–145, first edition, published in 1619 by Bartolomeo Magni in Venice, p.27.



EXAMPLE 2.3. beginning of the *Lettera amorosa* in the *basso continuo* score of the 7th Book of Madrigals by Monteverdi, SV 117–145, first edition, published in 1619 by Bartolomeo Magni in Venice, p.33.

<sup>19</sup> Fabbri P., Monteverdi, Translated by Carter Tim, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1994, p.165

The exact same thing has been done with the *Partenza amorosa (Se pur destina)* published in 1623.

I can only assume that the reason for which the continuo player's score is lacking the indication *senza batuta* is that it would have been quite clear for him that he had to follow the singer. This does not mean that the singer has the freedom of reciting this without following certain rules of *orationes*, all of which are subtly indicated in the relation with the bass. I don't believe a certain *tactus* has to be kept by the singer and *continuo*, but if the accompanist follows every word the singer expresses in the way Monteverdi has written it, the piece will find a right *agogique*. In fact, in the *Lettera amorosa*, the continuo very often accents the end of words rather than the syllables that should be stressed in the natural way of speaking. This is probably an indicator of change of speed, as we will see in chapter III.

## Il Pianto della Madonna

A very similar clue is given to us in Monteverdi's *Selve morale e spirituale* (published in 1641 by Bartolomeo Magni in Venice).

Most of the pieces in this book are to be performed by several voices at the same time. In the *basso continuo* part book, to save space, Monteverdi has only written down the *continuo* staff and the first words of each section. The rest of the pieces are solos inserted here and there, either in the form of a *canzonetta* with several verses, either in an easy *cantabile* ternary form. For those pieces, Monteverdi still hasn't added any text or extra staff above the *continuo* in the *basso continuo* part book.

There are, however, two solos that made the exception: one motet for basso solo (*Ab eterno ordinata sum*) and the *Pianto della Madonna* written on the pre-existing notes of the *Lamento d'Arianna*. The motet is very virtuosic and has a lot of fast *colorature* to be sung by the bass. It is therefore quite normal that Monteverdi thinks the *basso continuo* player would feel the need to see the singer's part to make sure they are together in this difficult style.

The *Pianto della Madonna*, however, is a typical recitative piece which demands for no particular virtuosic skill. Why is it then that the *basso continuo* player is given the complete vocal part of this piece above his own staff? This gesture, to me, is an indication that, in this particular piece, the singer was expected to be much more free in

reciting, and was expected to slow down and accelerate to illustrate the affect of the words.

And following that logic, if the *Pianto della Madonna* was meant to be recited rather freely, and not within the structure of a rigid tactus, then so was the *Lamento d'Arianna* on which it was based. Actually, the solo version of the *Lamento d'Arianna* that Monteverdi had to retranscribe in 1623 after having lost the original copy, was published as the first piece of three, the two others being the retranscription of the *Lettera amorosa* and of the *Partenza amorosa* which were also meant to be sung *senza batuta*. One could of course argue that, as we know the *Lamento d'Arianna* was accompanied by viols and violins (see quote on p. 7), the piece should stay structured by a *batuta* if following Doni's advice (see quote p. 13).

At times, Monteverdi seems like a man of contradictions. Throughout his career, he wrote many compositions in the image of his *Lamento d'Arianna*, recreating the freedom of recitation that he had given to Virginia Ramponi-Andreini and that the audience had loved so much. However, so many of his other compositions, such as most of his characters in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, are given what seems like illusional freedom. Their parts are constantly going from *cantabile* dances to passages in *stile concitato* (agitated style with rapid repeated notes and extended trills as symbols of bellicose agitation or anger), in the middle of which sometimes appears a line in *stile recitativo*. This line, however, because it does not define the character, but rather the state that the character is in at that very precise moment, is used by Monteverdi as a color rather than an indication of freedom. The audience, by that time, recognizes the *stile recitativo* as being the style of lamentation and longing for love, and will therefore recognize these feelings when they appear in the middle of a more structured aria, without having to get rid of the *batuta* during those passages.

The musicians that have had a lesson or a masterclass with a highly creative teacher or expert will know that they tend to try to make one as creative as they are, by overwhelming their pupil with an idea of interpretation for each note or word. The pupil goes home with a score filled with marks and an interpretation that is the opposite of free. It seems to me that Monteverdi was that kind of artist, and that there is little space for interpretation in a lot of his over-developed later opera characters.

However, some of his characters **are** defined by the *stile recitativo*, such as Arianna (1608), the Ingrata (*Il ballo delle ingrate*, 1608), Penelope (*Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, 1639) and Ottavia (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*, 1642) or the protagonists of the *Lettera amorosa* (1619) and *Partenza amorosa* (1619). These parts are to be recited in a way that is more declaimed than sung in the rigid structure of meter.

### III. An interpretation of Monteverdi's *lamenti* and *lettere amoroze* that is closer to the pre-existing art of declamation

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#### Starting with the text

In 1608, in his *Discorso sopra l'arte comica con il modo di ben recitare*, Pier Maria Cecchini, and actor-manager who was part of Andreini's troupe 'I Fedeli', wrote:

« I will say once more (and with greater necessity) that the voice, whether loud or soft, does not always want to be carried [portata] the same way: but that it must be sent forth depending on the occasion of the conceit, that is, of the end to which it tends: now loud, now soft, and this using different accents and not loudly, and he who softly laments to himself speaks only to himself, [while] he who interrogates himself exaggerates various differences; and just as the words are varied, so variously one lets them out. »<sup>20</sup>

Throughout this research, I have been collaborating with Agata Garbuio, an Italian actress of the Commedia dell'Arte. She has helped me approach the prose used by Monteverdi in his *Lettera amorosa*, and the part of the libretto on which he composed Ottavia's aria 'Addio Roma' in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. By reciting those naked texts for me, separated from the music, she helped me get a feeling for Italian *oratio*.

The next step I took was to explore these texts and the way Monteverdi had composed for them with my accompanists. I am a fervent believer in the importance of taking time. We have nowadays fallen into the habit of rushing through rehearsal periods, mostly because there are not enough funds to give us the luxury of taking more time.

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<sup>20</sup> Translated in: Wilbourne E., *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, p. 156-157

About time, Monteverdi wrote, in a 1620 letter to Alessandro Striggio, concerning the production of *Andromeda*:

« Now consider, Your Lordship: what do you think can be done when more than four hundred lines, which have to be set to music, are still lacking? I can envisage no other result than bad singing of the poetry, bad playing of the instruments and bad musical ensemble. These are not things to be done hastily, as it were; And you know from *Arianna* that after it was finished and learned by heart, fives months of strenuous rehearsal took place. » <sup>21</sup>

I am in no way advocating that we should go back to spending five months of rehearsals on an opera. However, I do believe that every musician involved in a musical project should know exactly what the composition is about. Whether the composition performed is for a duo or a whole orchestra, if it is strongly based on text, everyone should be aware at all times of the meaning of the text. It is not enough to have a conductor or a singer who can lead his musician(s) to play in the manner that he thinks mirrors the affect of the words. He will surely manage to keep everyone together and playing in the correct way, but if they do not know why they play this way, the result will be unfelt, thus defeating the initial purpose of the composition.

We must also not forget that Monteverdi's orchestra members were Italian... They understood the text at all times.

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<sup>21</sup> Stevens D., *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, Faber and Faber, London, 1980, p.160

## Lettera amorosa: Se i languidi miei sguardi

(Composed in 1619 on a poem by Claudio Achillini)

Se i languidi miei sguardi,  
se i sospiri interrotti,  
se le tronche parole  
non han sin or potuto,  
o bell'idolo mio,  
farvi delle mie fiamme intera fede,  
leggete queste note,  
credete a questa carta,  
a questa carta in cui  
sotto forma d'inchiostro il cor stillai.

Qui sotto scorgerete  
quegl'interni pensieri  
che con passi d'amore  
scorron l'anima mia;  
anzi, avvampar vedrete  
come in sua propria sfera  
nelle vostre bellezze il foco mio.

Non è già parte in voi  
che con forza invisibile d'amore  
tutto a sè non mi tragga:  
altro già non son io  
che di vostra beltà preda e trofeo.

A voi mi volgo, o chiome,  
cari miei lacci d'oro:  
deh, come mai potea scampar sicuro  
se come lacci l'anima legaste,  
come oro la compraste?  
Voi, pur voi dunque siete  
della mia libertà catena e prezzo.

Stami miei preziosi,  
bionde fila divine,  
con voi l'eterna Parca  
sopra il fuso fatal mia vita torce.  
Voi, voi capelli d'oro,  
voi pur siete di lei,  
ch'è tutta il foco mio, raggi e faville;

If my languishing looks,  
if my suppressed sighs,  
if my unfinished words,  
have not yet,  
oh my life,  
proved my passion,  
read these notes,  
believe this letter,  
in this letter in which  
like the ink, my heart bled.

There you shall see  
the secret thoughts  
that with loving gait wander  
in my soul;  
so, shall you see burn  
as in its own sphere,  
by your beauty, my fire.

There is nothing in you  
that does not drag me  
with the invisible power of love:  
I am nothing more than prey and prize  
of your beauty.

To you I turn, oh, hair,  
beloved braids of gold:  
ah, how shall I escape  
if you have tied my soul like a plait,  
and bought it like gold?  
You, for you are  
the chain and the price of my freedom.

My jewels,  
fair divine twine,  
you are used by eternal Parca  
on her fatal spindle, weaving of my life.  
You, you braids of gold,  
you belong to she  
who is all my fire, my rays and lightning:

Ma, se faville siete,  
 onde avvien che ad ogn'ora  
 contro l'uso del foco in giù scendete?  
 Ah che a voi per salir scender conviene,  
 ché la magion celeste ove aspirate,  
 o sfera de gli ardori, o paradiso,  
 è posta in quel bel viso.

Cara mia selva d'oro,  
 ricchissimi capelli,  
 in voi quel labirinto Amor intesse  
 onde uscir non saprà l'anima mia.  
 Tronchi pur morte i rami  
 del prezioso bosco  
 e da la fragil carne  
 scuota pur lo mio spirito,  
 che tra fronde sì belle, anco recise,  
 rimarrò prigioniero,  
 fatto gelida polve ed ombra ignuda.

Dolcissimi legami,  
 belle mie piogge d'oro  
 quali or sciolte cadete  
 da quelle ricche nubi  
 onde raccolte siete  
 e, cadendo, formate  
 preziose procelle  
 onde con onde d'or bagnando andate  
 scogli di latte e rivi d'alabastro,  
 more subitamente  
 o miracolo eterno  
 d'amoroso desio,  
 fra sì belle tempeste arse il cor mio.

Ma già l'ora m'invita,  
 o degli affetti miei nunzia fedele,  
 cara carta amorosa,  
 che dalla penna ti divida omai;  
 vanne, e s'amor e'l cielo  
 cortese ti concede  
 che de' begli occhi non t'accenda il raggio,  
 ricovra entro il bel seno:  
 chi sà che tu non gionga  
 da sì felice loco  
 per sentieri di neve a un cor di foco!

For, if lightning you are,  
 why unlike fire,  
 do you descend?  
 Ah, you need descend to go up,  
 the high heaven that you yearn for,  
 oh, sphere of passion, oh, paradise,  
 lives in that radiant face.

My beloved forest of gold,  
 finest braids,  
 in you Love wove a labyrinth  
 where the soul is lost.  
 Can death cut the branches  
 of the lovely wood,  
 and from delicate flesh  
 free my spirit,  
 but in such a beautiful, yet pruned, canopy,  
 I shall remain captive,  
 made cold dust and knotted shadow.

Sweetest twine  
 my beautiful golden rain  
 each drop falling  
 from those rich clouds  
 that hold you  
 and, in falling, you make  
 pretty storms  
 and break waves and waves of gold,  
 swiftly shaded,  
 in crags of milk and rivers of alabaster  
 oh, eternal miracle  
 of loving desire,  
 in those beautiful storms my heart was burnt.

But now the hour bids me,  
 oh, faithful messenger of my affection,  
 precious love letter,  
 to separate my quill from you;  
 go, and if love and the courteous sky  
 prevent the rays  
 of her eyes from burning you,  
 find shelter in her lovely breast:  
 that per chance you reach out  
 from such a blessed place,  
 across snow-covered paths to a heart of fire.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Translation in the CD booklet of *Labirinto d'Amore*, recorded by Alpha Classics with Anna Reinhold and Thomas Dunford in Milan, 1994

I have put, on the research catalogue, a recording of Agata Garbuio's recitation of the prose (see recording number 1). You will notice, if listening to it while following the score on the next pages, that she does not share all of Monteverdi's ideas on the declamation of the text. When Monteverdi's personal ideas went against hers, I followed his of course. However, I could not help but inspire myself from the diversity of colours that she gave to her voice while expressing different emotions.

In the following passage, for example, I detected a smile in her voice, followed by an almost orgasm-affected voice that I wanted to reproduce. The subtext in the first sentence is the sinful beginning of the sexual act, and leads to the next sentence in which an explosion of colourful celestial metaphors describe the feelings of the pleasure shared during the act.

Ma, se faville siete,  
onde avvien che ad ogn'ora  
contro l'uso del foco in giù scendete?  
Ah che a voi per salir scender conviene,  
ché la magion celeste ove aspirate,  
o sfera de gli ardori, o paradiso,  
è posta in quel bel viso.

For, if lightning you are,  
why unlike fire,  
do you descend?  
Ah, you need descend to go up,  
the high heaven that you yearn for,  
oh, sphere of passion, oh, paradise,  
lives in that radiant face.

When then exploring the connection between the text and music with my accompanist, I tried to stay as close as possible to the dramatic flow of the text, without staying too much inside the boundaries of each written note value, or even of a fixed pulse. The note values that Monteverdi has written down are already quite close to the natural rhythm of the words they support, and he has anyway written that one should recite this piece *senza batuta*. However, I realized that, quite often, some of the notes in the basso continuo fall under word syllables that are not usually stressed in the Italian language. I decided to interpret this as a sign of change in the *agogique*.

Every unnaturally stressed syllable in the score marks either a sense of urgency in a phrase where one would tend to slow down to enjoy the dramatic meaning of the words — either the deceleration of a phrase by stretching its words to create a sense of tension or pleasure. If the basso continuo gives the indication for the acceleration and deceleration of phrases, it makes it possible for the singer to be spontaneous in recitation without taking away all of the accompanist's responsibilities.

In the score below, I've marked every acceleration by underlying in red the bass notes that fall under the unnaturally stressed syllables that indicate urgency. In the same way, I've marked every deceleration by drawing a red square around the bass notes that fall under the unnaturally stressed syllables that indicate tension or pleasure.

Lettera amorosa in genere rappresentativo 13

S E  
E' i languidi miei sguardi (c) sospir interrotti se le tronche paro-  
le nò hã sia hor potuto o bel dolo mio farui de le mie fiam'intera  
fede legete queste note credete d' questa carta a questa carta in cu-  
i sotto forma d' inchiostro il cor

- Se i languidi miei sguardi: the words, made heavy, mirror the feeling of languor
- Se le tronche parole non han ... : desperate attempt to prove passion
- questa carta, a questa carta in cui: urgency to explain how much pain the heart carries

14

stilla i. Qui sotto scorgete quelli in terni pensieri che cō pafsi d'a-

nore scorrò l'anima mia anzi auà par vedrete com'ia sua propria sfera nelle

vofre bellezze il foco mio non e già part'ia vol che con

forz'inuisibile d'amo re tutt'a se non mi traggia altro gianò son

\_ **quelli interni pensieri** che con... : urgent wish to exteriorize private thoughts

□ **l'anima mia**: enjoyment of inner thoughts

\_ **forza invisibile d'amore**: fast attraction towards the word 'traggia'

25

io che di vostra belta pre da'e Trofeo

A voi mi volgo'a chione Carl miei lacci d'oro Dhe

come mai potea scâpar siu ro se come lacci l'anima le gaste co-

m'oro la com praste? Voi pur voi dunque fete de la mia liber-

G 1

– **preda et trofeo**: pride in being a prize more than a prey

□ **come oro la compraste?**: pleasurable tension in feeling owned, used

16

tà catena, è prezzo stami miei precio-

fi bionde fila di uine con voi l'eterna

parca fura'l fuso fatal mia vita torce voi voi

capelli d'oro voi pur sete di lei ch'e tutte foco mio

— **stami mei preciosi, bionde fila divine**: from one wonder to the other, excited by the numerous beauties to be seen

□ **mia vita torce**: glorious almost sacred figure

37

raggiè fa uille. Mà se faville se te ond'anica ch'adogn'

hora contro l'uso del foco in giù scende te Ah ch'a voi per fa-

lir scender con uiene ch'à la magior celest' ou'aspi-

rate ò sfera de gl'ardori ò para-

G 4

- Ma, se faville siete, onde avvien che ad ogn'ora contro l'uso del foco in giù scendete?:  
tension in the awaiting of sinful pleasure

18

difo è posta in quel bel viso. Cara mia selua d'oro ri-

chissimi capelli in voi quel laberinto Amor intes-

se ond'uscir non sapra l'anima mia Tronchi pur

morte'i rami del pretioso bosco è de la fragil ca: ne scuota pur lo mio

- **quel laberinto Amor intesse** on'uscir non sapra l'anima mia: tension in this pleasurable imprisonment

39

Spirto Che tra fronde si belle anco reciso rimarro prigio-  
niero fatto gelida polue ed'ombra i gnuda  
Dolcissimi legammi belle mie piogge d'oro qual hor sciolte ca-  
dete da quelle ricche nubi onde raccolte fete è ca-

Partitura di Claudio Monteverde G 5

— che tra fronde si **belle** anco reciso: attempt to reaccelerate after slowing down on 'belle'

□ **rimarro prigioniero**: deceleration towards death/end of sexual act

30

dendo forma te pretiose procelle on' de con onde d'or bagnado andate'

fcogli di latte è riu d'alabastro More subitamente

ò miracolo e terno d'amoroso desi o fra si belle tem-

peste ars'il cor mio Ma già l'horà m'inui-

— **cadendo formate pretiose procelle onde con onde...** : delirious romanticism

□ **d'amoroso desi**o: delirious romanticism slowly coming to an end

ta ò de li affetti miei nuntia fedele cara

carta amorosa che dalla penna ti diuida homa

Vanne è s'Amor e' l Cielo cortese ti concede che da begl'occhi non t'accèda il raggio ricoura entro il bel feno chi sà che tu non

G 6

- **Ma già l'ora m'invita:** urgency to send the letter
- **cara carta amorosa che:** attempt to get back to the sense of urgency after spending too much time on the last words
- **che dalla pen...na:** back to the sense of urgency after creating the illusion that the word 'penna' was going to end differently...
- **e s'Amor e' l Cielo cortese ti concede:** reaccelerating of the phrase after coming down from a more solemn celestial tessitura

gion ga da si felice loco per fem tleri di neue à vn cor

di fo' co.

— **chi sa che tu non gionga**: last reaccelerating of the phrase after illusional early arrival on ‘gionga’

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These are the indications that I used to structure my interpretation (see recording number 2 on research catalogue). It seems to me, in this piece, that the freedom given to the singer is not, as we usually think it is, inside a fixed tactus, but inside affects. Every new affect is given by a subtle disruption of the text in the basso continuo, influencing the singer to hurry or calm down.

## Addio Roma

(Composed in 1642 as part of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, on a libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello)

A... A... A... Addio Roma  
A... A... Addio patria  
A... Amici... Amici... addio.

Ah... Ah...Ah...farewell, Rome  
Ah.. Ah.. farewell homeland  
Ah... friends, farewell.

Innocente da voi partir conviene. Vado a patir  
l'esilio in pianti amari, navigo disperata...  
disperata i sordi mari.

Though innocent, I must depart from you.  
An exile of sad tears awaits me, sailing in  
desperation the unheeding sea.

L'aria, che d'ora in ora riceverà i miei fiati, li  
porterà, per nome del cor mio, a veder, a baciare le  
patrie mura.

The breeze, which from time to time shall receive  
my breath, will carry it, in the name of my heart,  
to behold and kiss my homeland's walls.

Ed io, starò solinga, alternando le mosse ai pianti,  
ai passi, insegnando pietade ai freddi sassi.

And I shall be alone, alternately weeping and  
pacing back and forth, teaching compassion to the  
weak sex.

Remigate, remigate, remigate oggi mai perverse  
genti, allontanarmi, allontanarmi da... da... dagli  
amati lidi.

Paddle, paddle, paddle away today as never before,  
perverse people! Take me, take me far from  
these... these... these dear shores.

Ahi, ah, ah sacrilego duolo, tu... tu!  
Tu m'interdici il pianto mentre lascio la patria...  
M'interdici il pianto mentre lascio la patria...

Ah, ah, ah sacrilegious grief, you... you!  
You proscribe my weeping as I depart my  
homeland... You proscribe my weeping as I depart  
my homeland...

Né stillar una lacrima poss'io mentre dico ai  
parenti e a Roma...  
Né stillar una, una lacrima poss'io mentre dico ai  
parenti e a Roma... addio.

Nor may I shed one tear as I say to my family and  
to Rome...  
Nor may I shed one, one tear as I say to my family  
and to Rome... farewell.

*Scena 7.<sup>a</sup>*  
*Ana la notte. Maria sola.*

*Ai aiò Rosa ai ai aiò Rosa*

*A miei amici ai aiò in no cense da*

*noi parir conviene uado a parir l'eti l'is in pianti amari*

*navigo di speranza, disperata i sordi mari l'aria*

*che d'horra in hora riceve rai miei figli gli porrerai per nome del Cor*

*mis a veder a bacciar le parie, muros et io raro so =*

*l'ingr aver nando le memos ai pianti ai rati in se quando pie =*

*cade ai freddi sassi benignate demia  
 gate oggi mai pervenisse genti all'orta rarmi  
 da da da gl'amai li di Ah, Ah Ah sacrilego duolo mi  
 ni ni m'in verdi ci il pianto quando lascio la patria, in  
 verdi ci il pianto quando lascio la patria, re stillar una lacrima*

*poss'io mentre dico ai parenti e a Roma re stillar una, una lacri  
 ma poss'io mentre dico ai parenti e a Roma a fis.*

Although *Addio Roma* does not bare the title of '*Lamento d'Ottavia*', it seems appropriate to consider this aria as part of the *lamento* form.

I have asked the Agata Garbuio to recite the text of *Addio Roma* for me in the way that she would if Ottavia were a Commedia dell'Arte character. What came out of her recitation (see recording number 3 on catalogue) were many expressive voice colours and changes of speed that inspired me in my own (sung) declamation of the piece:

In the beginning, the voice she uses to stutter 'A...A...A...' is almost broken and stops in a very dry way. When repeating the word '*disperata*', her voice becomes softer, and she lingers a bit on the 's'. '*L'aria che d'ora in ora ricevera i miei fiati li portera per nome del cor mio a veder a baciare le patrie mura*' is said in a joyful way, with a lot of light in the voice. The words '*freddi sassi*' have a subtil sarcastic tone to them. The phrase '*Remigate... Remigate... Remigate oggi mai perverse genti*' is said with a full sonorous voice and progressively grows in anger only to soften on '*da... da... dagli amati lidi*' on a suddenly dry broken voice. '*Ahi, ah, ah*' (my favourite) has a connotation of nauseous pain. The voice is about to burst out into cries, but she lowers it again on '*tu... tu*', holding back the tears that Ottavia cannot shed. The second time she says '*Ne stillar una, una lacrima poss'io*', she emphasizes the second '*una*' and '*lacrima*'.

As for the way Monteverdi has put this text to music, it seems to follow the natural rhythm of speech and dramatic inflections of the voice quite well, and the *basso continuo* does not interfere with that.

I have thus decided to use this *lamento* to demonstrate (see recording number 4) the variety of voice colours that one can create to bring out the colours of the affects like Monteverdi's singers might have done (when inspiring myself from Loreto Vittori's quote on p. 9). As for the rhythmical aspect of the piece, I found it was clear enough for my accompanist if I simply followed the natural accents of the text. The repetitive stuttering of the word *Addio* in the beginning had to be, in my opinion, as spontaneous as possible, or it would have killed the effect of the stutter. This was perhaps the most difficult thing to synchronize.

So except for the beginning of this *lamento*, whereas most of the spontaneity of the *Lettera amorosa* lied in the rhythmical freedom of the piece, in *Addio Roma*, freedom is to be taken mostly in the pitch, and in extracting from those pitches, the dramatic inflections of the text.

## Conclusion

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All throughout his *Lamenti* and *Lettere amorose*, Monteverdi plays with declamation, giving his singer freedom to interpret and then taking it back to add his own interpretation. However, when he takes back this freedom, it is replaced by such colourful expressions, that I can only see it as an impulse of energy that he gives to the singer to urge him/her to declaim even more. Most of the places where Monteverdi takes back this freedom are indicated in the relation between the vocal line and the *basso continuo* line. The *basso continuo* player is thus master of the interpretation in these places, reincarnating Monteverdi for a short moment until he sends the ball back to the singer. The accompanist must remember to always serve the text. This does not mean that he should serve the singer and follow a completely improvised declamation of the text, but that the fire and energy of the text's drama should come from his harmony.

Whether this is the only right way to interpret Monteverdi's writing, we will never know. I have merely tried, throughout this research, to find a way to bring back the humanity of a few Monteverdi's protagonists, when it seemed to me that we had turned them into unreachable gods. By interpreting Monteverdi's *lettere amorose* and *lamenti* in a more declamative way, I hope to have helped desacralize a style that I believe was meant to represent the human being in all honesty with all his grace and vulgarity, strengths and weaknesses.

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