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# CANZONA AND SONATA: SOME DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL IDENTITY

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The task of drawing reliable distinctions between the canzona and the sonata — the two chief genres of instrumental music in the time of Gabrieli — is one that has never fared particularly well when approached either in an historical or in a stylistic manner. In particular, during the 30-year period (1600—1630) during which the two genres overlapped the application of generic titles often appears to have been arbitrary. This is attributed by some to the lack of consistent spelling and usage at the time, always with the thought in mind that there was some conceptual musical difference between the two. But recent investigations tend to suggest that the most conspicuous differences were in the differing social and behavioural associations of the two genres.

To review briefly purported stylistic differences, the canzona is said to have been a sectional work. This is usually true of examples composed after 1600 and usually not true of examples before that date, unless one is willing to regard the use of a succession of motives as sectional contrast. The succession of metres and tempi in later canzonas is more striking as an expression of contrast. Conversely, sectional contrast of this latter sort is not absent in sonatas of the period 1600 to 1630. It is also commonly stated that a distinguishing mark of the canzona is its propensity to start with a dactylic figure ( ♩ ♩ ♩ ). While indeed associated with the canzona, this figure was not *exclusively* associated with it. It too is common in early sonatas, particularly those of the 1620's. The polyphonic sonata in vogue from the 1590's up to about 1620 was characterised to the same degree by the dotted opening figure  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$ , and as Michael Praetorius validly observed in comparing the polyphonic sonata with the canzona in his *Syntagma musicum* (1619), the sonata was written in white notes while the canzona was written in black notes. At best these differences can be seen to be too burdened with

qualifications, and perhaps too concerned with superficial traits to be altogether persuasive. When we turn our focus from the music to those who wrote it, clearer distinctions rapidly emerge.

Canzona composers were almost without exception organists. Organists were rigorously trained in musical theory and particularly in counterpoint. Requirements for organists auditioning at the Basilica of San Marco, Venice, in the sixteenth century give some idea of the contrapuntal expertise desired. In the early sixteenth century the audition had two parts: (1) given the beginning of a Kyrie or motet, the candidate was to improvise a development and completion without mixing up the parts; and (2) given a *cantus firmus*, the candidate was to improvise a four-part work in such a way as to have the *cantus* rotated through the four voice parts and to derive imitative counterpoints.<sup>1</sup> By 1623 only the second part of the examination seems to have been used, and the improvisations were now referred to as *alcune sonate*, but they were first to be written and then to be played.<sup>2</sup>

The organist's involvement with the canzona could take two forms: he could perform the work himself at the keyboard or he could accompany an ensemble, each of whose members played a separate part. The canzona was not exclusively for keyboard solo or instrumental ensemble. Thus it was a prerequisite that it be of a sufficiently bland character to permit flexibility of resources to be used in its performance. But in either case the composer was involved in the performance. (While there is no firm evidence that the earliest canzonas were accompanied, it can be demonstrated that by the 1590's keyboard accompaniment was used in at least some cases.<sup>3</sup>

Organists were relatively well educated and relatively well paid members of the musical community. Their music would have been expected to survive rigorous academic scrutiny, and its value would have been judged to some degree at least by the correctness of signs on a printed page. The fact that so many persons engaged as organists in their youth became the masters of music of large institutions in their later years demonstrates that the training an organist received was one that was relatively complete in academic matters and well regarded by the world at large.

Of composers up to 1630 who published volumes consisting wholly or largely of canzonas, practising organists constitute roughly 90 per cent. The remaining 10 per cent are usually persons

<sup>1</sup> Francesco CAFFI, *Storia della musica sacra nella già cappella ducale di San Marco in Venezia dal 1318 al 1797*, 2 vols. (Venice, 1854–55), I, p. 228; quoted in both English and Italian in James HAAR, 'The *Fantasia et Recerchari* of Giuliano Tiburtino', *The Musical Quarterly*, 1973, Vol. LIX, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> E. SELFRIDGE-FIELD, *Venetian Instrumental Music from Gabrieli to Vivaldi*, Oxford and New York 1975.

<sup>3</sup> E. SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 'Gabrieli's Canzona No. 12', article forthcoming in *The Musical Times*.

whose precise occupation is unknown; there is a good chance that most of these too were organists. Among verified organists, the following may be listed.

*Table 1.*  
Canzona Composers Who Were Organists

Composer	Canzonas appear in <sup>4</sup>	Employed as organist at:
Maschera	1584a	Brescia Cathedral
Merulo	1592c	Parma
	1606d	(deceased)
	1611b	(deceased)
Banchieri	1596b	San Michele in Bosco, Bologna
	1603c	San Michele in Bosco, Bologna
Gabrieli, Gio.	1597e	San Marco, Venice
	1615f	(deceased)
Rovigo and Trofleo	1600?b	Milan
Mortaro	1600c	probably Brescia
Canale	1600d	Brescia
Guami	1601e	Lucca Cathedral
Soderino	1608g	N. S. della Rosa, Milan
Valentini	1609l	probably Venice
Bargnani	1611f	Duke of Mantua
Priuli	1618/9a	Imperial Court, Vienna
	1619/20k	Imperial Court, Vienna
Usser, Francesco	1619a	San Salvador, Venice
Frescobaldi	1623e	San Pietro, Rome
Corradini	1624a	Cremona Cathedral
Picchi	1625a	S. Maria de' Frari, Venice
Biumi	1627d	Metropolitano, Milan
Pietragrua	1629c	San Leonardo, Pallanza

<sup>4</sup> All prints identified according to the sigla used in C. Sartori, *Bibliografia della musica strumentale italiana stampata in Italia fino al 1700*, Florence 1952; *Aggiunte e correzioni*, Florence, 1968. Sartori gives old-style dates. Modern dates at variance with these are indicated by a slash. Reprints are not cited. This list is representative but not exhaustive.

The chief canzona composers not definitely identified as organists were Merula (1615d) and Lappi (1616b). Both were employed as *maestri di musica* when their canzona collections appeared and had almost certainly been trained in the organist-choirmaster tradition. Priuli, definitely known to have been an organ pupil of Gabrieli, was similarly employed (by the time his canzonas appeared) in a broader musical capacity. The names of nearly all the composers represented in the ambitious and diversified Raverio canzona anthology of 1608 appear in Table 1 and were organists.

Sonata composers, in contrast to canzona composers, were usually ensemble instrumentalists. They were concerned with the performance possibilities of individual instruments rather than with the academic perfection of the written score - in short, with *sound* rather than theory. Their training was focused on *instrumental technique* and especially on improvisation and embellishment. As such it dwelt entirely on the individual part, not the combined sound of several parts. According to Silvestro de Ganassi, who wrote both a treatise on the recorder (1535) and a treatise on the viol (1542—3), division could be created by variations in time, rhythm, and melody. Ganassi developed elaborate tables to demonstrate systematically the myriad logical possibilities obtainable from a single melody. His mathematical approach accords with the Renaissance orientation to aesthetics, although his product previews the letter of the Baroque improvisatory idiom. Giovanni Bassano, a cornettist at San Marco and a counterpoint teacher at its affiliated seminary, considered intervals and cadences and gave advice on how to ornament them in his tutor for instrumentalists of 1585/6. Bassano's predecessor as master of the instrumentalists at San Marco was Girolamo Dalla Casa (*detto da Udine*), another cornettist whose own tutor on ornamentation included divisional settings of chansons and madrigals for lyra viol and also for lute. While none of these persons composed sonatas, they and others like them collectively created the milieu from which the early sonata composers came, while at the same time they developed specific techniques for individual instruments. In this milieu counterpoint was a remote consideration, as were the rules of voice-leading that had been developed in polyphonic sacred music over the course of centuries. Zarlino, the preeminent contrapuntal purist of the sixteenth century, took the trouble to speak against 'certain divisions . . . that are so savage and inappropriate that they . . . are ridden with thousands of errors . . . intolerable in composition'.<sup>5</sup> The need for Zarlino's attack cannot be gauged by unwritten improvisations, of whose character we lack any final knowledge. But it can be said that many of the early sonatas ignore the commonly accepted rules of sixteenth-century counterpoint by

<sup>5</sup> Gioseffo ZARLINO, *The Art of Counterpoint (1558) Istitutioni, Part III*, trans. Gyu A. Marco and Claude V. Palisca, New Haven and London 1968, p. 110.

exhibiting tritones, unprepared and unresolved dissonances, cross-relations, and even on occasion parallel fifths and octaves. All these indications suggest that what was valued in the sonata was the actuality of its performance, not its conformity to theoretical norms as demonstrated on paper.

Instrumentalists were poorly paid and were regarded with rather less respect than organists in the musical community. To use figures from San Marco as examples, violinists and trombonists were customarily paid 15 ducats a year between 1614 (when the first orchestra was fully chartered) and 1630. Organists of the same era were paid ten times as much: from 120 to 16 ducats a year. The difference reflects to some degree the more numerous responsibilities of organists, but that in itself is a crude indicator of differences in public esteem.

The sonata is distinct from the canzona in accomodating the interests of the performers. It is to the sonata repertory that one must turn to find the bulk of early instances of dynamic indications, instrumental specifications, advice on the performance of the basso continuo, bowing indications, tempo and character indications, advice on staging techniques (such as placing echoing instruments out of sight), programmatic effects, and intricate solo passagework — features that seem superficial when viewed individually. But viewed in their social context, there is a consistency item to item that suggests their importance to have been fundamental.

It is difficult to produce a statistic on the percentage of sonata composers up to 1630 who were instrumentalists for two reasons. (1) In general sonata composers were not well known and often nothing about their occupations is known. (2) Many early sonatas were included as quite peripheral components in volumes of either sacred vocal music or other kinds of instrumental pieces, and in this minority status the occupations of their composers must be regarded as statistically irrelevant.

Extensive data on instrumental music in Venice at this time<sup>6</sup> do permit us to see two correlations of interest with regard to sonata composition in that community: (1) sonatas, in distinction to canzonas, being for ensemble only, are usually scored for specific instruments. The designation 'per ogni sorte di stromenti' is virtually non-existent in the Venetian sonata literature. (2) Quite appropriately, the instrument(s) the composer scores for is often one he plays and thus, as is the case with nearly all other music of the time, self-interest and close acquaintance with the performance medium are operative forces. Table 2 is relevant here.

Omitted from this list are Carlo Farina and G. B. Buonamente, whose early instrumental publications emphasize dance music and provide little information about instrumentation, although Farina

\* E. SELFRIDGE-FIELD, *Venetian Instrumental Music*. See especially Chapters 5 and 6.

*Table 2.*  
Sonata Composers Who Were Instrumentalists

Composer	Own Instrument	Sonatas scored for	Sonatas appear in
Marini	violin	violin, <i>viola grossa</i> , cornett, trombone, bassoon	1617/8c
Castello	violin, bassoon, trombone <sup>7</sup>	violin, trombone, bassoon	1621n
		violin, <i>violetta</i> , <i>viola</i> , cornett, trombone, bassoon	1629f
Picchi	organ, harpsichord	violin, recorder, cornett, trombone, bassoon	1625b
Fontana	unknown	violin, cello ( <i>violoncino</i> ), cornett, bassoon, chitarrone	1641b <sup>8</sup>

was famous as a violinist and Buonamente was probably an instrumentalist. Of those included, Castello and Picchi were Venetians. Marini came from Brescia and was trained in Venice. He later went to Germany. Farina was a Mantuan but was employed at the Saxon Court. Buonamente, also Italian, worked at the Viennese Court. Dance pieces for ensemble were as much the product of the German and Austrian courts as church sonatas were of the Italian religious institutions.

Inevitably there are exceptions to the general rule that canzonas were written by organists and sonatas by instrumentalists. Some works that are entitled 'canzona' are conceived in the sonata style. It is interesting to note that those instances that occur are provided by persons trained in the high culture of organists but conversant as well with ensemble instruments. Two worth mentioning appear in Table 3.

Riccio and Rovetta both worked in Venice. Another composer who might be mentioned here is Francesco Rognoni, whose canzonas published in 1608 required violin and *lyra viol*. The works, however, are incomplete and their character cannot be determined. Rognoni was a violinist active in Milan. His interest in catering for individual instruments is further demonstrated by the '*Toccata per sonar con il Piffari*' included in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> These are instruments played by members of his family. His own activities are obscure. See E. SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 'Dario Castello: A Non-Existent Biography', *Music and Letters*, 1972, Vol. LIII.

<sup>8</sup> Posthumous work. Fontana died in 1630.

*Table 3.*  
Works in Mixed Idioms by Persons of Mixed Backgrounds

Composer	Own Instrument	'Canzonas' scored for	Works appear in
Riccio	organ, violin	recorder	1612g
		not specified	1614a
		recorder, violin, cornett, trombone, bassoon	1620/1b
Rovetta	various <sup>a</sup>	violin, <i>violetta</i> , <i>viola da braccio</i> , cornett, trombone	1626/7a

Sonatas by organists are also known. In contrast to the ornate divisional works listed in Table 2, the sonatas of the persons listed in Table 4 below are mostly in the polyphonic vein of the sonata that can easily be associated with the organist-choirmaster tradition. In several cases there is some indication of familiarity with one or more ensemble instruments. This suggests that those organists who had some skill at playing ensemble instruments, as opposed to mere contact with instrumentalists, tried to provide token works in the newer style. But the reticence about instrumentation in Table 4, in contrast to the explicitness in Table 2, is striking.

From these four tables one can begin to perceive not only some of the distinct differences between the canzona and sonata but also the reasons for them. Since the canzona did not afford much opportunity to demonstrate timbre or technique, it was of little interest to emerging virtuosi. Specific instruments were less frequently named in canzonas than in sonatas, and indeed in sonatas deriving from the organist-choirmaster culture. Whatever the merits of the 'high' musical education of the time, the persons trained in it simply did not have a good working knowledge of ensemble instruments unless they undertook to learn them. Conversely, the indication 'for all kinds of instruments' was avoided by sonata composers who were instrumentalists, for they desired specific timbres and sonorities. Modern performers of works from this era may err in treating the sonata with the same liberty in instrumentation as the canzona if they ignore clear indications provided by the composer.

At the same time it should not be concluded that a separate and individual idiom, purely instrumental in nature, developed for each instrument. It is true that violin flourishes at cadences are very different from the dotted scale passages often assigned to trombones, and that recorder parts may come in pairs that consist entirely of parallel thirds while virtuoso passagework in even semiquavers



*Table 4.*  
Sonatas by Organists

Composer	Own Instrument	Sonatas scored for	Works appear in
Gabrieli	organ	cornett, trombone, viola	1597e
	(deceased)	cornett, trombone, violin	1615f
Gussago	organ	not specified	1608j
Riccio	organ, violin	not specified	1614a
		not specified	1620/1b
Usser, F.	organ	not specified	1619a
Turini	organ	violin	1624e
Picchi	organ, harpsichord	violin, trombone, recorder, bassoon	1625b
Grandi O.	organ, violin	violin, trombone	1628d

is characteristic for the bassoon. But it must be remembered that different families of instruments had symbolic meanings that continued to be recognised throughout the seventeenth century — the strings being associated with the soul, the trombones and bassoons with the underworld, and the recorder with the shepherd in the field. The imagery of madrigal poetry and the idiom of opera libretti appear to have provided much of the impetus for special effects in instrumental music, such as imitations of bagpipes, nightingales, and the thundering cavalcades of the *stile concitato*.

The supposed uniqueness of scoring techniques for specific instruments in these decades is greatly diminished by comparison with the new vocal genres of the 1620's — the solo motet, the cantata, and the duets in operas and motets for several voices. Often enough the idiom is nearly identical to the various treatments of instruments found in the early sonata literature. This idiomatic likeness must bear witness to the same social conflict in the realm of singers as is found in the realm of instrumentalists. Composers continued to be rewarded for their polyphonic works with high positions in churches, but what singers wanted to sing was conceived in an altogether different style. Thus to a great extent singers who wanted to sing and players who wanted to play music of an individualised, improvisatory or divisional nature were both in league against

<sup>9</sup> Rovetta was trained in the 'high' musical culture. He served, in succession to Monteverdi, as *maestro di cappella* at San Marco from 1644 to his death in 1668. He says in the preface to 1626/7a, his Op. 1, that he played 'all kinds of instruments'. His father, Giacomo, was a violinist.

the traditional 'high' musical culture. In both the sonata and the cantata the performer was, possibly for the first time since the later Middle Ages, a figure of greater importance than the composer. This decided shift of social values within the musical community is undoubtedly a potent if little discussed ingredient in the concomitant shift of aesthetic ideals from the Renaissance to the Baroque era.

### *S a ž e t a k*

#### CANZONA I SONATA

Razlike između kompleksa canzone i kompleksa sonate u razdoblju od oko 1600. do 1630. godine ne mogu se uvijek lako odrediti iz partiture. S obzirom da su oba žanra bila djela odvojenih stvaralaca čini se da je canzona bila tvorevina kompozitorâ znatne glazbenoteorijske naobrazbe, dok su sonatu njegovali glazbenici praktičari koji su se prepuštali improvizaciji i razradbama pasaža daleko više nego kontrapunktičkim vježbama. Time se mogu objasniti razlike koje su se mogle događati u izvedbi. To također upozorava na društvenu osnovu važnih razlika između renesansnih i baroknih estetičkih shvaćanja.