The Origins of Bel Canto

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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Capriole
Ensemble in Residence at the College of William and Mary

The Origins of Bel Canto

Friday February 1, University of Richmond
North Court Recital Hall, 8:15 p.m.
Saturday February 2, Williamsburg Regional Library
Arts Center Theatre, 8:15 p.m.
Sunday February 3, Chrysler Museum Theatre,
Norfolk, 3:00 p.m.
I. Musiche a una, due e tre voci, 1615
Mio speranze lusinghiere
Io vidi in terra
Valli profonde

Marco da Gagliano
(1582-1643)

II. What if I never speede, 1603
Can she excuse my wrongs with vertues cloake, 1597
Sorrow stay, lend true repentant teares, 1600
His goulden locks time hath to silver turned, 1597
Sir John Langton His Pavane for lute
Fantasie from Varietie of Lute Lessons, 1610
It was a time when silly bees could speake, 1603
In darkness let me dwell

John Dowland
(1562-1626)

III. Arie Musicali, 1680
Non vi partite
Aria de Romanesca: Dunque dovro
Aria di Passacaglia: Cosi mi disprezzate
Eri gia tua mia

Girolamo Frescobaldi
(1588-1643)

IV. Jubilate Domino

Dietrich Buxtehude
(c. 1637-1707)

V. Dialogue: Ich leide billig

Andreas Hammerschmidt
(1612-1675)

VI. Partita XI
Preluda (1645-1700)
Allemanda
Corrente
Sarabanda
Giga

Auguste Kuhnel
(1645-1700)

VII. Dalla guerra amorosa

George Frideric Handel
(1685-1759)

VIII. Lungi da me, pensier tiranno

G.F. Handel

IX. Voi che cercate amore, Duetti e terzetti, 1705

Antonio Lotti
(1667-1740)

Capriole
Derek Lee Ragin, countertenor
James Weaver, bass-baritone
Wayne Moss, viola da gamba
Howard Bass, lute and archlute
Gayle Johnson, harpsichord, director
Program Notes

Secular songs for the solo voice first began to be an important art form in the last twenty years of the sixteenth century. As professional singers began to find an appreciative secular audience in the courts of Northern Italy, they were eager to show off their technical virtuosity and the music written from approximately 1580-1600 was extremely florid and highly ornamented. In his* Nuove Musiche* published in 1600 Giulio Caccini heralded a new, less ornamented style that subjected vocal virtuosity to the overall dramatic and emotive content of the poem. Ornamentation became more expressive than technical, with trills expressing exultation and joy while dissonances emphasize the sweetness of the resolution to consonance on words such as love or kindness. Caccini was the first to describe subtle dynamic ornaments that crescendo and decrescendo on a long note to emphasize important words. Light dance-like songs such as *Mie speranze lusinghiere*, however, are less concerned with expressing the emotions of the text and can use fast stepwise ornaments that tickle the ear and are simply virtuosity for its own sake. Marco da Gagliano’s *Musiche a una, due e tre voci*, published in 1615 is an excellent example of this monodic style of which he, as *maestro di capella* to the Medici for thirty five years, was a leading proponent. In both *Io vidi in terra* and *Valli profonde* the character of each poem is clearly evoked, serenity in the first and despair in the second. The singer can show off his prowess in the ornamentation at specific words which add to the poetic imagery such as the fast motion on *aer* (air) depicting winds; the jagged melodic line and rhythms at *precipitantl sassi* (hurled rocks); and the twisting, writhing sixteenth-note line on *serpentl* (snakes).

The *Arie Musicali* of Girolamo Frescobaldi were published in 1680 during a six year sojourn in Florence; the rest of his life was spent in Rome. The duets are strophic canzonettes which repeat the same melody and bass for all three verses based on dance-like rhythms, like Gagliano’s *Mie speranze lusinghiere*. The *Aria di Romanesca* and the *Aria di Passacaglia* are both based on stock bass patterns. The *Aria di Romanesca* is a strophic song whose melody is carefully crafted to express the emotional contents of the text of each verse and is thus a tribute to the Florentine style led by Caccini & Gagliano. The *Aria di Passacaglia*, on the other hand, reflects the early cantatas being written by Frescobaldi’s Roman contemporaries at that time, both in the sectional alternation of aria and recitative and in the flowing lyricism of the melody.

It was soon after this, in 1640, that the term *Bel Canto* was first used in an Italian treatise on the art of singing and it was probably referring to this new lyrical Roman style which, while emphasizing the beauty of the voice, still offered plenty of opportunity for the singer to show off his technical skill through the effortless delivery of florid ornamentation. It is this combination of a naturally beautiful voice, technical skill and mastery of emotive communication that were to continue as the style of Italian singing that became known as *Bel Canto*.

Elizabethan England was particularly taken with Italian ideals and, in response to them, developed the genre of the English lute song, beginning in 1597 with the publication of John Dowland’s *First Book of Songs or Ayres*. The English show an equal sensitivity to expressing high quality poetic texts yetlyricism prevails over the more self-conscious manipulations of the Italians via word painting or ornamentation. There is often a play on words, such as in “It was a time when silly bees could speake” where time and thyme are often both implied. The lute pieces were published by Dowland’s son, Robert Dowland, in 1610.

The Germans were particularly fond of the Italian style and many went to Italy to study, bringing home music and ideas. Andreas Hammerschmidt’s *Dialogue between Jesus and the repentant thief* being crucified with Him hearkens back to the sacred duets of Heinrich Schutz who studied with Monteverdi in Venice. Dietrich Buxtehude’s *Jubilate Domino* unites technical virtuosity which expresses the joy of the text with Italianate word painting such as melismas at *cantate* and *psallite* (let’s sing) or the arpeggiated figure to evoke trumpet battle cries at *in buccinis et vocae tubae* (with the sound of cornettas & trumpets).

George Frideric Handel studied in Italy from 1705-1710, during which time he wrote many Italian cantatas such as *Lungi da me* and *Dalla guerra amorosa*. He undoubtedly heard the music of Antonio Lotti, *maestro di capella* in Venice at the time. Lotti’s *Duetti e Terzetti* were published in 1705 and may well have been the model for Handel’s Italian chamber duets. The works of both composers show the maturation of the cantata and the establishment of fixed forms based on the experiments from the seventeenth-century. Both clearly separate and alternate recitative and aria and use the Da Capo form where the first half of the aria is repeated, creating a tri-partite form. Both require a virtuoso command of brilliant figurations and of affective communication to express the text, thus synthesizing the seemingly opposing focuses of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries of virtuoso ornamentation vs. emotive rendering of the text.

-Gayle Johnson
Verse and is thus a tribute to the Florentine style led by Caccini & Gagliano. The singer can show off his prowess in the ornamentation at specific words which add to the poetic imagery of the voice, still offered plenty of opportunity for the singer to show off his technical skill through the ornamentation, as well as expressing the beauty of the voice, the skill and mastery of emotive communication that were to continue as the style of Italian singing that became known as Bel Canto.

Those singing in the Northern Italian courts, they were eager to show off their technical virtuosity and the music written from approximately 1580-1600 was extremely florid and highly ornamented. In his Nuove Musiche published in 1660 Giulio Caccini heralded a new, less ornamented style that subjected vocal virtuosity to the overall expression and emotional content of the poem. Ornamentation still trills expressing exultation and joy while dissonances emphasize the sweetness of the resolution on consonance words such as love, kindness. Caccini was the first to describe subtle dynamic ornaments that crescendo and decrescendo on a long note to emphasize important words. Light dance-like songs such as Mie speranza lusinghiere, however, are less concerned with expressing the emotions of the text and can use fast stepwise ornaments that tickle the ear and are simply virtuosity for its own sake. Marco da Gagliano's Musiche a una voce in 1664 published in 1615 is an excellent example of this monodic style of which he, as maestro di capella to the Medici for thirty-five years, was a leading proponent. In both Ju sieri in terra and Valli profonde the character of each poem is clearly evoked, solitude in the first and despair in the second. The singer can show off his prowess in the ornamentation at specific words which add to the poetic imagery of the voice, the skill and mastery of emotive communication that were to continue as the style of Italian singing that became known as Bel Canto.

The Arie Musicali of Girolamo Frescobaldi were published in 1650 during a six-year sojourn in Florence; the rest of his life was spent in Rome. The duets are strophic canzonettes which repeat the same melody and bass for all three verses based on dance-like rhythms, like Gagliano's Di R.omanesca and the Aria di Passacaglia are both based on stock bass patterns. The Aria di Romanesca is a strophic song whose melody is carefully crafted to express the emotional contents of the text of each verse and is thus a tribute to the Florentine style led by Caccini & Gagliano. The Aria di Passacaglia, on the other hand, reflects the early cantastas being written by Frescobaldi's Roman contemporaries at that time, both in the sectional alternation of aria and recitative and in the flowing lyricism of the melody. It was soon after this, in 1640, that the term Bel Canto was first used in an Italian treatise on the art of singing and it was probably referring to this new lyrical Roman style which emphasized the beauty of the voice, still offered plenty of opportunity for the singer to show off his technical skill through the ornamentation, as well as expressing the beauty of the voice, the skill and mastery of emotive communication that were to continue as the style of Italian singing that became known as Bel Canto.

Elisabeth England was particularly taken with Italian ideals and, in response to them, developed the genre of the English lute song, beginning in 1597 with the publication of John Dowland's First Book of Songs or Ayres. The English song is a high quality compared with equal sensitivity to the text over the more self-conscious manipulations of the Italians via word painting or ornamentation. There is often a play on words, such as in "I was a time when silly bees could speak" where time and thyme are often both implied. The lute pieces were published by Dowland's son, Robert Dowland, in 1621.

The Germans were particularly fond of the Italian style and many went to Italy to study, bringing home music and ideas. Andreas Hammerschmidt's Dialogue between Jesus and the repentant thief being crucified with Him heartens back to the sacred duets of Heinrich Schütz who studied with Monteverdi in Venice. Dietrich Buxtehude's Jubilate Domus unites technical virtuosity which expresses the joy of the text with Italianate word painting such as melismas at cantate and psalites (let's sing) or the arpeggiated figure to evoke trumpet battle cries in as buccina et voca tuba (with the sound of cornettas & trumpets). George Friedrich Handel studied in Italy from 1706-1710, during which time he wrote many Italian cantatas such as La guerre da ma and Dal silenzio amoroso. He undoubtedly heard the music of Antonio Lotti, maestro di capella in Venice at the time. Lotti's Duetti Teretici were published in 1705 and may well have been the model for Handel's Italian chamber duets. The works of both composers show the maturation of the cantata and the establishment of fixed forms based on the experiments from the seventeenth-century. Both clearly separate and alternate recitative and aria and use the Da Capo form where the first half of the aria is repeated, creating a tripartite form. Both require a virtuoso command of brilliant figurations and of affective communication inexpressible text, thus synthesizing the seemingly opposing forces of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries of virtuoso ornamentation vs. emotive rendering of the text.

Gayle Johnson
Cantata: Dalla guerra amorosa

Recitative
Dalla guerra amorosa or che ragion mi chiama
o miei pensieri, fuggite, pur fuggite.
Vergognosa non e in amor la fuga
che sol fuggendo un'alma del crudo amor
puo riportar la palma.

Aria
Non v'alletti un occhio nero
Con suoi sguardi lusinghiero
Che da voi chieda pieta.
Che per far le sue vendette
e con arco e con saette
ivi amor nascoso sta.
Non v'alletti...

Recitative
Fuggite, si fuggite! Ah! di quanto veleno,
amore asperse i suoi piaceri.
Ah! quanto ministra duol, e pianto,
a chi le seque, e le sue leggi adora!
Se un volto v'innamora, sappiate o pensieri miei,
Che cio che piace in brev' ora svanisce
e poi dispiace.

Aria
La bellezza e com' un fiore
sul matin di primavera vivace e bella,
Che la sera langue e more
si scolora e non par quella.

Recitative & aria
Fuggite, si fuggite!
A chi servo d'amor vive in catena
E dubbioso il gioir, certa la pena.

Cantata: Lungi da me

Recitative
Lungi da me, pensier tiranno!
Tu mi vorresti rendere infelice
col farmi credere Tirsi un traditore.
Ah! sento ch'il mio core mi dice,
che non puo l'alma si bella esser a me rubella.
Dunque da questo sen fugga l'affanno!
Lungi da me, pensier tiranno!

Aria
Pensier crudele, se vuoi ch'io creda
ch'il mio bel Tirsi sia ingannator!
Fia ch'il mio amore meco l'unisca,
poi lo bandisca da questo cor.
Pensier crudele...

Recitative
Ma se amor cio contrasta e'l cor ripagna
la sua virtu mel vieta
e la sincerita del suo bel genio
non vogliono ch'io creda che sia Tirsi ingrato.
Lungi, dunque da me, pensier spietato!

Dalla guerra amorosa

Recitative
Now that Reason calls me, flee from the amorous
war, o my thoughts!
Fleeing from love is not shameful,
for only in fleeing can a soul receive the palm
of victory from cruel Love.

Aria
So be not enticed by beautiful black eyes
with their deceiving looks
which ask you for mercy.
In order to take their revenge
they make love grow by means of
the bow and arrows of Cupid.

Recitative
Flee, yes, flee! Ah! Love sprinkles its pleasures
with so much poison.
Ah! how much he administers sorrow and tears
to those that follow him and adore his laws!
If you once fall in love, know, o my thoughts,
that peace vanishes in that brief hour
and then you will regret it.

Aria
Beauty is like a flower,
lively and beautiful in the spring morning,
but in the evening it languishes
and dies discolored.

Recitative & aria
Flee, yes flee!
Those who serve love lie in chains
The joy is doubtful but certain the pain.

Recitative
But if love resists it and the heart is reluctant,
his merit prevents me
and the sincerity of his genius
do not let me believe that Tirsi is a deceiver.
Far away from me, pitiless thought!
Cantata: Dalla guerra amorosa
Recitativo
Dalla guerra amorosa or che ragion mi chiarna
Vergognosa none in amor la fuga

Recitativo
o miei pensieri, fuggite, pur fuggite.
puo riportar la palrna.
che sol fuggendo un'alrna del crudo arnor

Aria
Non v'alletti un occhio nero
Con suoi sguardi lusinghiero
Non v'alletti ... Che per far le sue vendette

Fuggite, si fuggite! Ah! di quanto veleno,

Aria
La bellezza e corn' un fiore
sul mornin di prirnavera vivace e bella,
Che la sera langue e more

Fuggite, si fuggite!

Cantata: Lungi dame
Recitativo
Tu mi vorresti rendere infelice
Lungi da me, pensier tiranno!

Recitativo
Mase arnor cio contrasta e'l cor ripugna
la sua virtu mel vieta
e la sincerita del suo bel genio
non vogliano ch'io creda che sia Tirsi ingrato.
Lungi, dunque da me, pensier spietato!

Aria
Puggi da questo sen, o barbaro pensier!
Lasciami in pace!
Sebben m'aduli amor,
per te contente il cor perché ti piace.
Puggi da questo sen...

Recitativo
Non sa il mio cor sincero
credere d' error capace un'alma grande.
Dunque torna, o pensiero,
coi segni a funestar la mente oppressa
la vita a me la libertade intiera

di cedere Tirsi mio d' alma sincera.

Aria
Tirsi amato, adorato mio Nume!
Vieni, o caro, ritornami in sen
Farfalletta son io, che le piuene ardo al lume
del caro mio ben.

Duetto: Voi che cercate amore
Voi che cercate Amore, poveri arnanti,
Vieni, o caro, ritornami in sen
Nelle guance d'Eurilla,

Aria
Dunque toma, o pensiero,
Fuggi da questo sen ...
Non sa

Recitativo
Sebben m'aduli arnor,
con cia me la libertade intiera

Beloved Tirsi, my adored god!
Come, beloved, return to my arms.
I am like a butterfly whose wings burn in
in the light of my beloved.

Recitativo
Credete, amanti, a me
di cedere Tirsi mio d'alrna sincera.

Max van Egmond
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Friday, April 26, University of Richmond North Court Recital Hall, 8:15 p.m.
Saturday, April 27, Chrysler Museum Theatre, Norfolk, 8:15 p.m.
Sunday, April 28, Williamsburg Regional Library Arts Center Theatre, 3:00 p.m.
The Artists

Countertenor Derek Lee Ragin is in great demand throughout Europe and the United States, particularly for baroque opera. A native of Newark, Mr. Ragin is constantly on the move and since his last performance with Capriole last February has performed in Washington D.C., New York, Cologne, Munich, Salzburg, and London. Some of his most exciting recent performances include Gluck’s Orfeo at the London Proms with John Elliot Gardiner, in New York City and in his Salzburg debut. He will be recording it in May on the Phillips label. He particularly enjoys the music of Handel and since his Metropolitan Opera debut in Handel’s Giulio Cesare he has sung Handel’s Amadigi at the Early Music Festival in Utrecht, Holland; Terpsichore, directed by Nicholas McGegan, recorded in Hungary last June; the role of Guido in Flavio in Monte Carlo and Caen, France, directed by Rene Jacobs and recorded on the Harmonia Mundi France label; a recording of Handel cantatas on the CCS label; and Tamerlano on the Erato label. Other recent recordings include a set of Vivaldi cantatas on the Ectetera label and Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater. Mr. Ragin received his B.M. at the Oberlin Conservatory where he and Ms. Johnson first performed together in the Collegium Musicum. He then studied with Max van Egmond at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Holland.

Bass-baritone James Weaver is best known as an oratorio soloist and has appeared throughout the United States including Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, Washington D.C., Baltimore, the Bach Festival in Philadelphia, and the Berkeley Early Music Festival in California. His most recent appearances include Handel’s Joshua with Basically Baroque in Chicago; a series of Bach cantatas with the American Bach Soloists in Marin County, California; Monteverdi’s 1610 Vespers directed by Philip Brett at the Berkeley Early Music Festival; Bach’s St. John Passion with the San Francisco Bach Choir; Bach’s Christmas Oratorio and St. John Passion with the Smithsonian Chamber Orchestra and Chorus, the latter recorded on the Smithsonian label; and “Bawdy Ballads”, a program of seventeenth-century English music with the Baltimore Consort which is soon to be released on the Dorian label. He was recently heard in two national broadcasts on National Public Radio: one of J.S. Bach’s Christmas Oratorio with the Smithsonian Chamber Orchestra and Chorus on Christmas eve and one of Bach cantata 80 performed by the American Bach Soloists on Performance Today in January. A native of Detroit, Michigan, he studied at the University of Michigan and then received a performance degree from the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam where he studied with Max van Egmond.

Howard Bass has performed throughout the United States in solo, lute song and ensemble programs. He is a member of La Rondinella and the Baltimore Consort and has performed with the Santa Fe Opera, the Smithsonian Chamber Players, the Theater Chamber Players of the Kennedy Center, the Folger Consort, and many other Washington-area ensembles. He has recorded with La Rondinella, the Smithsonian Chamber Players, the Folger Consort, the Baltimore Consort, the Choral Arts Society of Washington and the New England Consort of Viols. As a soloist he gives recitals across the country for the Smithsonian National Associates Program. Mr. Bass is a program coordinator in the Department of Public Programs at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

Wayne Moss, a native of Virginia, is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music where he studied with Catherina Meints & Auguste Wenzinger. He has appeared extensively in the southern and southwestern United States and in Europe both as soloist and as member of various ensembles. He was associate faculty for viola da gamba and performance practice at North Texas State University, Southern Methodist University, University of Texas at Austin, and Rice University as well as coaching at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. He has performed and recorded with Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Gayle Johnson, Artistic Director of Capriole, is a scholar-performer who specializes in seventeenth-century Italian music. She has conducted cross-disciplinary studies of Renaissance and Baroque dance, Italian poetry, and the relationship between music and the graphic arts. A native of Richmond, Ms. Johnson studied harpsichord with Margaret Irwin-Brandon and John Gibbons and holds degrees from the Oberlin College and Conservatory.
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