

SOURCE READINGS IN *MUSIC*
HISTORY
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separate

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101 Lodovico Viadana

Born in Viadana near Mantua around 1560, Lodovico first appeared in print in 1588 with a set of vespers psalms. A Franciscan, he apparently taught plainsong to the clerics of the cathedral of Mantua before becoming its master of the chapel in the early 1590s. He held similar posts in the cities of Cremona, Reggio Emilia, Concordia (Portogruaro), and Fano. His itinerant life eventually led him back toward Viadana, and he died nearby in 1627 at the newly founded monastery of Sant' Andrea in Gualtieri.

Viadana published a number of volumes of sacred and secular polyphonic music, but his reputation rests chiefly upon the collection of *One Hundred Sacred Concertos*, all but two composed for one to four voices and organ, thought to have been written mostly in Rome around 1596 and published in Venice as op. 12 in 1602. It actually contains more than a hundred works; in addition to eleven solo concertos each for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass with basso continuo it offers twenty duets, seventeen trios, and sixteen concertos for four voices, as well as four psalms, two Magnificats, one instrumental canzona, and nine *falsibordoni*. It was reprinted immediately and repeatedly, appearing in a German edition in 1609 and achieving its eighth edition three years later. Although Viadana's vocal style belongs, not unexpectedly, to the sixteenth century, his practical reduction of the keyboard short score into a basso continuo part exerted a lasting influence on the rapid dissemination and development of sacred music for few voices. The general principles he set out in 1602 for realizing the bass remained valid in keyboard continuo performance long after musical style had changed.

Preface to *One Hundred Sacred Concertos, op. 12* (1602)

Lodovico Viadana to his kind readers,

There have been many reasons (courteous readers) which have induced me to compose concertos of this kind, among which the following is one of the most important: I saw that singers wishing to sing to the organ, either with three voices, or two, or to a single one by itself, were sometimes forced by the lack of compositions suitable to their purpose to take one, two, or three parts from motets in five, six, seven, or even eight; these owing to the fact that they ought to be heard in conjunction with other parts, as being necessary for the imitations, closes, counterpoints, and other features of the composition as a whole, are full of long and repeated pauses; closes are missing, there is a lack of melody, and, in short, very little continuity or meaning, quite apart from the interruptions of the words, which are sometimes in part omitted and sometimes separated by inconvenient breaks which render the style of performance either imperfect, or wearisome, or ugly, and far from pleasing to the listeners, not to mention the very great difficulty which the singers experience in performance.

Accordingly, having repeatedly given no little thought to these difficulties, I have tried very hard to find a way of remedying to some extent so notable a deficiency, and I believe, thank God, that I have at length found it, having to this end, composed some of these concertos of mine for a single voice (for sopranos, altos, tenors, or basses) and some others for the same parts in a variety of combinations, always making it my aim to give satisfaction thereby to singers of every description, combining the parts in every variety of ways, so that whoever wants a soprano with a tenor, a tenor with an alto, an alto with a cantus, a cantus with a bass, a bass with an alto, two sopranos, two altos, two tenors, or two basses, will find them all, perfectly adapted to his requirements; and whoever wants other combinations of the same parts will also find them in these concertos, now for three, and now for four voices, so that there will be no singer who will not be able to find among them plenty of pieces, perfectly suited to his requirements and in accordance with his taste, wherewith to do himself credit.

You will find some others which I have composed for instruments in various

TEXT: *Cento concerti ecclesiastici a una, a due, a tre, & a quattro voci con il basso continuo per sonar nell'organo* (Venice, 1602). A modern edition of the first part was edited by Claudio Gallico (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1964), pp. 121–23. This translation, with emendations, from Franck Thomas Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass* (London, 1931; repr. New York: Dover, 1965), pp. 2–4, 10–19 (with the Italian text); the last paragraph translated by Oliver Strunk.

ways, which makes the invention more complete and gives the concertos greater adaptability and variety.

Furthermore, I have taken particular care to avoid pauses in them, except so far as is necessitated by the character and form¹ of the melody.

I have, to the very best of my ability, endeavored to achieve an agreeable and graceful tunefulness in all the parts by making them singable and coherent.

I have not failed to introduce, where appropriate, certain figures and cadences, and other convenient opportunities for ornaments and passagework² and for giving other proofs of the aptitude and elegant style of the singers, although, for the most part, to facilitate matters, the stock *passaggi* have been used, such as nature itself provides, but more florid.

I have taken pains that the words should be so well disposed beneath the notes that, besides insuring their proper delivery all in complete and logical phrases, it should be possible for them to be clearly understood by the hearers, provided that they are delivered distinctly by the singers.

The other less important reason (in comparison with the one aforesaid) which has also made me hasten to publish this my invention is the following: seeing some of these *Concerti*, which I composed five or six years ago when in Rome (happening then to bethink myself of this new fashion), in such favor with many singers and musicians that they were not only found worthy to be sung again and again in many of the leading places of worship, but that some persons actually took occasion to imitate them very cleverly and to print some of these imitations³ wherefore, both for the above reason and also to satisfy my friends, by whom I have frequently been most urgently requested and advised to publish my said concertos long before, I have at last made up my mind, after having completed the intended number, to print them, as I am now doing, being convinced that this work need not be altogether displeasing to discerning singers and musicians, and that even though it possess no other merit, a spirit ready and willing to see it done, at least, will not have been lacking, and since it provides, along with its novelty, more than ordinary food for thought, you cannot disdain to read the following instructions, which, in practice, will be of no slight assistance.

First. Concertos of this kind must be sung with refinement, discretion, and grace, using *accenti* with reason and *passaggi* with moderation and in their proper place: above all, not adding anything beyond what is printed in them, inasmuch as there are sometimes certain singers, who, because they are favored by nature with a certain agility of the throat, never sing the songs as they are written, not realizing that nowadays their like are not acceptable, but

1. "Il modo e la dispositione del canto." Pauses that Viadana aimed to avoid would occur when singers sang choral parts as solos or performed ensemble works with fewer lines sung than notated (with the organ covering all lines not sung).

2. "Accentuare e passeggiare," see the Glossary of Foreign Performance Terms for *accenti* and *passaggi*.

3. For example, the *Sacri concerti a due voci* of Gabriele Fattorini, published in Venice in 1600.

are, on the contrary, held in very low esteem indeed, particularly in Rome, where the true school of good singing flourishes.

Second. The organist is bound to play the organ part simply, and in particular with the left hand; if, however, he wants to execute some movement with the right hand, as by ornamenting the cadences, or by some appropriate embellishment, he must play in such a manner that the singer or singers are not covered or confused by too much movement.

Third. It will likewise be a good thing that the organist should first cast an eye over the concerto which is to be sung, since, by understanding the nature of the music, he will always execute the accompaniments better.

Fourth. Let the organist be warned always to make the cadences in their proper position: that is to say, if a concerto for one bass voice alone is being sung, to make a bass cadence; if it be for a tenor, to make a tenor cadence; if an alto or soprano, to make it in the places of the one or the other, since it would always have a bad effect if, while the soprano were making its cadence, the organ were to make it in the tenor, or if, while someone were singing the tenor cadence, the organ were to play it in the soprano.⁴

Fifth. When a concerto begins after the manner of a fugue, the organist begins also with a single note, and, on the entry of the several parts, it is at his discretion to accompany them as he pleases.

Sixth. No tablature has been made for these concertos, not in order to escape the trouble, but to make them easier for the organist to play, since as a matter of fact, not every one would play from a tablature at sight, and the majority would play from the *partitura* as being less trouble; organists, however, will be able to make the said tablature at their own convenience, which, to tell the truth, is much better.

Seventh. When passages in full harmony are played on the organ, they are to be played with hands and feet, but without the further addition of stops, because the character of these soft and delicate *concerti* does not bear the great noise of the full organ, besides which, in miniature *concerti*, it has something pedantic about it.

Eighth. Every care has been taken in assigning the accidentals where they occur, and the prudent organist will therefore see that he observes them.

Ninth. The organ part is never under any obligation to avoid two fifths or two octaves, but those parts which are sung by the voices are.

Tenth. If anyone should want to sing this kind of music without organ or

4. In the interpretation of this rule, which is a most important one, everything turns upon the exact sense to be attached to the words "in their proper place" (*à i lochi loro*). Do they simply refer to pitch, i.e., to the octave in which the "cadence" (tonic, leading note, tonic) is to be played, or the *part* of the harmony in which it is to appear? . . . [It] seems probable that Viadana's meaning was that, when a bass was singing, the "cadence" should be made in unison with the voice, and that, in the case of the other voices, it was to be in the *part of the harmony* corresponding to the voice in question. Generally speaking (except in the case of a high voice . . .), this would also imply identity of pitch. [Tr.]

clavichord⁵ the effect will never be good; on the contrary, for the most part, dissonances will be heard.

Eleventh. In these concertos, falsettos will have a better effect than natural sopranos; because boys, for the most part, sing carelessly, and with little style⁶ likewise because we have reckoned on distance to give greater charm; there is, however, no doubt that no money can pay a good natural soprano; but there are few of them.

Twelfth. When one wants to sing a concerto written in four equal voices,⁷ the organist must never play up high, and, vice versa, when one wants to sing a concerto of high pitch, the organist must never play down low, unless it be in cadences in the octave, because it then gives charm.

Nor let anyone presume to tell me here that the said concertos are a little too difficult, for my intention has been to make them for those who understand and sing well, and not for those who abuse their craft. And be in good health.

5. "Manacordo"; the clavichord was a standard practice instrument for organists.

6. For the same judgment, see Pietro della Valle in No. 84, p. 549.

7. Strunk's emendation of Arnold's translation, which he explained: Viadana follows the usual practice of his time, which applies the expression *a voci pari* not only to music in a single register, high or low, but also to music in which the overall register is relatively restricted. Then in his "O sacrum convivium" *a voci pari* (Arnold, pp. 31–33) the four clefs are alto, tenor, tenor, and bass.