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Phantasticus: An Exploration of the Sound World of 17th Century Italian Instrumental Music

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Phantasticus: An Exploration of the Sound World of 17th Century Italian Instrumental Music

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Abstract

The Baroque period is home to some of the most prolific composers known today: Handel, Vivaldi, Bach all fill the standard repertoire of many instrumentalists today. However, who came before, and why should we care? Prior to these notable composers of the High Baroque, the 17th century marked an era of immense musical discovery. The early 1600s was a time of exploration and excitement within the realms of music making and musical thought. Claudio Monteverdi was a pivotal figure in the development of the early Baroque world, and with that, new styles of music emerged, noted as *stil concertato* and *stil moderno*. This paper explores the sound world of 17th century Italian instrumental music; what would one expect if they were to travel back in time and attend performances of such repertoire. Through the examination of certain composers such as Dario Castello, Biagio Marini, and the later Arcangelo Corelli, style, ornamentation, instrumentation, and cultural perception of music of the period, it is determined that 17th century Italy had an extremely unique, virtuosic, and theatrical way of musical thought - including composition and performance. This paper will explore works such as Arcangelo Corelli's *Concerto Grosso Op. 6*, Dario Castello's *Sonate Concertate in stil moderno*, and Biagio Marini's *Affetti Musicali* as sources of interest.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Bianconi, Lorenzo. *Music in the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

This book by Lorenzo Bianconi tackles the large scope of research on 17th century music and presents it in a way that is not only digestible, but highly informative. This source deals with Bianconi's own thoughts on 17th century music, specifically the problems associated with it. While this book does not highlight Italian 17th century music, it addresses the overall trends of style and composition within the period. Luckily, many of these inventions within the Early Baroque period occurred in the bounds of Italy, so there is a variety of source material. This is what Bianconi addresses as "the problem," the multitude of national styles and their interactions across Western Europe during the 1600s. I am using this source to further examine Italy's influence, both negative and positive, during the Early Baroque period. Bianconi cites a variety of evidence from sources including musical scores, personal letters, as well as treatises from both 16th and 17th centuries. The source also spends time addressing the very early decades of the 17th century Baroque, directly correlating to my research. In comparison to my other sources, particularly those drawing on 17th century music as a whole, Bianconi is mostly in agreement with many of the other scholars - however, his research is older than many of my other sources. Bianconi is an Italian musicologist, as well as a leader in the field of Baroque music, specifically the 17th century, and has taught at many distinguished universities including Princeton. He has also conducted a plethora of scholarly research within the field, including operas of French, German, and Italian origin from this period. This source is useful to my research of 17th century Italian music because of Bianconi's statements on discourse and problems within the

performance practice of such music, as well as his large scope of discussion on the linkage between sacred vocal music and instrumental music.

2. Cypress, Rebecca. “‘Esprimere La Voce Humana’: Connections Between Vocal and Instrumental Music by Italian Composers of the Early Seventeenth Century.” *The Journal of Musicology* 27, no. 2 (2010): 181–223. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2010.27.2.181>.

Rebecca Cypress is a leader within the field of 17th century musical discourse, specifically regarding the practices of performance of Italian music. This source inspects the close ties of vocal and instrumental music of the period, suggesting that instrumental music was highly reflective of the trends occurring within vocal music. The most important argument made by Cypress is that instrumental music imitated vocal music; this is vital to my research as Cypress is highlighting that vocal music was at peak discovery, with its emphasis on the theatrical - instrumental music could be equally as so. In comparison to many of my other sources, I believe Cypress’ research to be extremely exciting, digestible, and fresh. Though she presents similar information to other sources in the field, her delivery is inspiring. Most evidence she cites are of treatises from the time, both instrumental and vocal, as well as musical scores, and letters of composers and performers. Cypress is highly regarded as a premier researcher of history in Early Modern music, specifically around music and feminist contexts. She has received degrees from many prestigious schools including Cornell, Yale, and the Royal College of Music, London. She is the associate Dean of academic affairs at Rutgers University, and has provided excellent research in the field of Baroque music. This source is useful to my research of 17th century Italian music because of Cypress’ research on the prevalence of *stile concertato* in vocal music, and its influence and imprint on contemporaneous instrumental music - specifically regarding style and performance practice.

3. — “Instrumental Music and ‘Conversazione’ in Early Seicento Venice: Biagio Marini’s ‘Affetti Musicali’ (1617).” *Music & Letters* 93, no. 4 (2012): 453–78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41811888>.

The main point of this source is to showcase the tastes of 17th century Italian music listeners and performers. The ultimate question addressed is, how did the average music listener of the 17th century react to new music? Cypress uses Biagio Marini’s *Affetti Musicali* as an example of this phenomenon. Cypress addresses Marini’s intentional plan to spur the emotions of his listeners with his new music, utilizing the audience almost like an experiment - how would they talk and have conversations regarding his music? Cypress uses letters from the time, and even discourse such as Stefano Guazzo’s *Civil conversazione* (1574) to highlight conversation regarding music, as well as Marini’s own *Affetti Musicali* (1617). This source is useful to my research of 17th century Italian Music because of Cypress’ discussion of internal dialogue of musical discussion within the contexts of the Early Baroque. It is extremely beneficial to hear how contemporary Italians viewed the new advancements in music, compared to other sources I have that address external perception of Italian music (such as French or English).

4. Fader, D. “The Honnete-Homme as Music Critic: Taste, Rhetoric and Politesse in the 17th-Century French Reception of Italian Music.” *The Journal of Musicology* 20, no. 1 (2003): 3–44. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2003.20.1.3>.

The main discussion point of this article by Don Fader is the French perception of Italian music of the 17th century. The French did not care for the style and manner of Italian playing, which was often fiery, virtuosic, and fleeting. To the French, this was a blasphemous way of music making, as they preferred the effortless and timeless style of performance practice. This stance was primarily driven by the noble elite, in which their *goût*, taste, was to be the pinnacle of society. Fader acknowledges that this element of *les goûts* is a primarily 18th century phenomenon, but its roots go back to the very beginnings of the Baroque; a main catalyst of this cultural phenomenon being the distaste of Italian music and style, a deliberate separation and damnation of such music. Evidence used by Fader includes letters and written accounts of courtly etiquette, as well as written accounts of perception of both Italian and French music during the 17th century. Don Fader is a musicologist and performer whose work centers mostly on Italian and French cultural exchanges during the Baroque period. He has several literary pieces published in renowned musicology journals, especially those pertaining to Early Music performance and its corresponding history. Fader also is a professional historical performer, primarily as a recorder player and a harpsichordist. In addition to his approach to historically informed performance, Fader has received several awards and distinctions for his work on the Italian and French schools of musical thought in both 17th and 18th centuries - specifically ideas surrounding aesthetics and society. This source is useful to the research of 17th century Italian music because it highlights an outsider perspective on the Italianate style from the stance of French contemporaries; ultimately, it highlights the deliberate cultural differentiation of style and musical thought.

5. Jander, Owen. "Concerto Grosso Instrumentation in Rome in the 1660's and 1670's." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21, no. 2 (1968): 168-80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/830852>.

As seasoned musicians, many of us know what a Concerto Grosso is, or are at least familiar enough to know its importance. The concerto grosso was a monumental music invention further perpetuated into the spotlight by Arcangelo Corelli's prized *Concerto Grossi, op. 6*. These works were extremely important during the Baroque, often used as a model for composers down the line including Handel, Vivaldi, and even Mozart. However, it would be a shock to find out that Corelli was not the first to implement the Concerto Grosso as a musical method. Jander delves into the roots of the Concerto Grosso, even going further to the earliest presentations of this form, pioneered by early 17th century composer Alessandro Stradella. Throughout sources on the topic of 17th century instrumental music, it is widely accepted that the concerto grosso is an Italian invention, thus vital in the discussion of Italianate traditions. Owen uses a variety of musical scores as evidence, including operas by Rossi and Monteverdi, as well as the conception of the *sinfonia*, the earliest predecessor of the Concerto Grosso. Owen then relates much of the earlier works to later ones by Corelli, specifically the op. 6 collection. Jander Owen was a renowned scholar of Baroque music, specifically that of Italian instrumental music, like that of Corelli's *Concerto Grossi op. 6*. However, his work on Beethoven and 18th and 19th century Viennese culture stepped him into the spotlight of musicology. This source is useful to the research of 17th century Italian music because of the exploration of the Concerto Grosso as a purely Italian invention - it highlights many of the aspects of the lineage of instrumental music of

the 17th century, and also steps out of the lens of Venice and Mantua, highlighting Rome as an important musical capital during the period.

6. Kite-Powell, Jeffrey, and Stewart Carter, ed. *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music, Second Edition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

The main purpose of this source is to draw on the elements of performance practice of 17th century music. What is particularly interesting about this source is that it is divided into several sections, including vocal and instrumental. Within the instrumental section, it is further divided into instrument types and groups, giving specific details of each instrument including history and performance practice in the contexts of 17th century traditions. Each section is written by a prominent historical player, including my very own Baroque violin teacher, Dr. Julie Andrijeski. Therefore, each section is presented by musicians in the top of their field. Besides vocal and instrumental guides, a section titled "Performance Practice and Practical Considerations" delves further into general topics across the board of the performance of 17th century music including ornamentation, meter, pitch and temperament, etc. All of these sections have proven extremely useful not only to my research, but to the overall understanding of important elements of 17th century musical thought. Because of all the different subjects spoken about within the book, each writer uses a variety of evidence relating to their specific field. For instance, in the Historical Violin section by Dr. Julie Andrijeski, she often cites prominent sources of the time including Nicola Matteis, John Playford and *The Division Viol*, as well as other prominent composers and works from the period. Jeffrey Kite-Powell is a prominent American Musicologist, served as Professor Emeritus at Florida State University and has conducted and written research on the performance practice of both Renaissance and Early Baroque music. Stewart Carter is a notable musicologist and historical performer. He is a professor at Wake Forest University and was once the editor of the Historical Performance in the *Journal of Early Music America*. This source is useful in my research of 17th century instrumental music because of its very detailed description of multiple aspects of music, including the many types of instruments common to the 17th century (and their corresponding performance practice), general performance practice of 17th century music (ornamentation, instrumentation, temperament), as well as its connection to vocal music techniques, both sacred and secular.

7. Price, Curtis Alexander. *The Early Baroque Era: from the Late 16th Century to the 1660s*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993.

This source focuses primarily on the very beginnings of the Baroque to the middle of the Baroque. These bounds are primarily connected to the discoveries of Monteverdi and the legacy of Jean Baptiste Lully. In the case of this source, much of it centers around the Italianate tradition, and then finishes with the influence of Italian tradition both west and north of Italy in the 1660s. Compared to the other sources I have selected, this source also highlights the societal impact of music, rather than just musical facts themselves. Music, especially during the Baroque, is tied to society. Society often dictated the taste and overall success of composers of the time, and it is important to note these trends were often set by the noble elite. Understanding the societal impact on music, and vice versa, during the early Baroque period is important in uncovering why this type of music has stood the test of time. The music of Monteverdi is

exemplary of this phenomenon, and it is vital to note that Monteverdi was a rockstar of 17th century Venice and Mantua. Curtis Alexander Price is a notable musician and historian. Some of his postings include principal of the Royal Academy of Music and professor of music at the University of London. Apart from this particular book, Price has also written on other 17th musical topics including the life and composition of Henry Purcell, as well as the English Restoration theatre. This source has been useful in my research of 17th century music because the book divides the content based on geographic location, therefore, it has been important in the development of my research on the perception of Italianate music across 17th century Europe.

8. Riedo, Christoph. "How Might Arcangelo Corelli Have Played the Violin?" *Music in Art* 39, no. 1–2 (2014): 103–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90012951>.

The problems with historically informed performance ultimately stems from the fact musicians and historians will never know the exact truth of performance practice from the Baroque. The research that has been done has been phenomenal and detailed, but it is the one pitfall with the Early Music movement. This source explores how Arcangelo Corelli may have played the violin - specifically looking at position. Corelli was a rockstar of his time, and really brought around modern violin technique as we know it today. This source argues that Corelli played his violin off the shoulder, resting on his collar bone, rather than resting on the shoulder as modern violinists know today. Evidence for this source relies heavily on written accounts such as letters from observers and his own students, but also portraiture from the time. Sadly, there are not many visual depictions of Corelli (this source actually predates the discovery of a 17th century portrait of Corelli that was uncovered in 2021 - the portrait only confirms Riedo's findings that he played off the shoulder on the ribs). However, the portraiture that does exist of contemporary players of Corelli's time exemplify a similar position, and with Corelli being a star violinist, many followed these trends. Christoph Riedo is a European musicologist who has done extensive research on music of the 17th and 18th centuries. He is a professor of musicology at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, and also often collaborates with Harvard University Music Department. This source has been useful in my research of 17th century music because of its exploration of a particular Italian performer of the time, who stood as a trend setter and someone to be admired. His music has proven to be some of the best string music, including his op. 5 Violin Sonatas and his op.6 Concerti Grossi. Ultimately, Corelli had a massive impact not only in 17th century Italy, but also around Baroque Europe, as his music spread throughout the continent.

9. Tomlinson, Gary. *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Monteverdi is one of the premier composers of the Renaissance, and is believed to be the founding father of the modern music tradition as we know it, kick starting the Baroque period at the very beginning of the 17th century. However, prior to his success in the beginning of the 1600s, he was a very popular Renaissance composer who had already written several large works of great importance. Though much of this book focuses primarily on vocal music, such as his madrigal settings, it has proven useful to research his musical thought prior to 1600. Ultimately, his success as a Renaissance composer set him up for his stardom as a Baroque one. This source argues that Monteverdi was dealing with the pressure of two conflicting schools of thought: the

traditional school of music making, and his own desire to push the bounds of music (which would be his Baroque inclination). What was remarkable about Monteverdi is that he took those traditional forms and ways of musical thought from the end of the Renaissance, and transformed them into something new, harkening a new modern style (noted as *stil moderno*). Gary Tomlinson is an American musicologist, and professor of musicology at Yale University. Much of his research centers around Renaissance music, as well as the early forms of Opera. He has also provided a great source of research on indigenous music of early America. This source has been useful in my research of 17th century music because it is helpful to know Monteverdi's way of musical thinking towards the tail end of the Renaissance. Seeing a trajectory from his beginnings in the Renaissance to his death in the early 17th century highlights his growth as a composer. He did not write much instrumental music without the presence of voice, however, the music he did write really inspired other contemporaneous composers such as Biagio Marini, Dario Castello, and Giovanni Battista Fontana - all remarked for some of the earliest solely instrumental music of its kind.

10. Walls, Peter. "The Influence of the Italian Violin School in 17th-Century England." *Early Music* 18, no. 4 (1990): 575–87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3127986>.

Because of Italy's musical discoveries, it gained recognition around Europe as a musical center. While Italy continued to promote new and inspiring music, its reach went beyond the bounds of its geography, infiltrating the rest of modern Europe including early Austria, France, Spain, and England. While France is noted to have a general distaste for Italian music and style, England really picked up on Italian elements. England is unique, because of its proximity to France, it really incorporated much of French style (note Henry Purcell), but also deeply admired the way of performance coming out of Italy. This can be primarily attributed to violin playing - with examples of prolific violinists with English influence being Nicola Matteis and Arcangelo Corelli. This source showcases England's fascination with Italian violin playing - specifically, aiming to show Italy's influence across the continent and its impact on composers, composition, and performers of the day. Walls uses written testimony from English observers, as well as written testimony of Matteis and other Italian violinists' impressions of English violin playing. Walls also uses a variety of musical fragments to display the virtuosity of Matteis' Italianate style, even how it inspired contemporary English composers like Blow and John Playford. Peter Walls is a renowned musicologist on 17th and 18th century English music, who has been granted several distinctions in teaching from Oxford University, the Victoria University of Wellington. He has written many books and literary pieces, and is known for his writing on historical performance practice - specifically in relation to the English Baroque. This source has been useful in my research of 17th century music because it displays another side of the positive perception of Italian music and style, outside the context of Italy itself.

11. Wasielewski, Wilhelm Joseph von. *Anthology of Instrumental Music from the End of the Sixteenth to the End of the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1973.

This source is actually a collection of musical scores of Late Renaissance and Early Baroque composers by Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewski at the end of the 19th century. Composers featured in this collection are Giovanni Gabrieli, Montverdi, Merulo, Marini, Torelli, Veracini, and Fontana. Each of these composers were known for their instrumental music -

particularly Torelli, Merulo, and Gabrieli. This source has been useful in my research of 17th century music because it has provided a plethora of options to research and utilize within this research process. Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewski was a German violinist, conductor, and musicologist in the middle to late 19th century. He studied with Felix Mendelssohn as well as Robert Schumann. He even wrote the first biography on Robert Schumann's life ever to be published. I wanted to really expand the bounds of my early 17th century repertoire, and this source has given many options of instrumental music beyond the bounds of string playing (though it includes a variety of great works written for strings, or mixed groups of strings and early brass and woodwinds).

12. Zaslav, Neal. "The Italian Violin School in the 17th Century." *Early Music* 18, no. 4 (1990): 515–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3127981>.

This source talks about the earliest origins of violin playing known. It is believed the violin has its roots in Italian invention in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. From there, the violin evolved and became a staple in instrumental playing of the 17th century. It was in the early Baroque period that the violin flourished with immense popularity. Originally, the violin was meant to be an instrument that supported vocal lines in works like early operas, however, it quickly became independent and composers began to write music just for violin(s) and other related string instruments. This source argues that the violin gained a unique independence from other instrumental and vocal music at the beginning of the 17th century. It was in Italy that the violin came to fruition, and because of Italian interest and care, the violin has become one of the most recognized and valued instruments of the modern western musical tradition. The source also delves into why the violin was prized in 17th century Italy, with reasons including its piercing but beautiful tone, flexible intonation and pitch (pegs and strings), and its ability to accompany but also display virtuosity. The violin could be played by professionals, amateurs, and even the musically illiterate (those who could not read sheet music, which was often expensive to acquire during this time, even with the invention of the printing press nearly two centuries prior). Neal Zaslav is an American Musicologist and currently professor emeritus of musicology at Cornell University. He has done a variety of research on western music tradition from the 9th to 21st centuries - particularly on early music, and even the historically informed approach to Mozart and his symphonies. This source has been useful in my research of 17th century music because it delves into the Italian perspective. While I have discussed the outside perspective of Italian music, from both French and English thought, it is useful to know the perspective of Italy's own. This source really draws on the history of the violin in 15-17th century Italy, and the violin's involvement in instrumental music of the period is paramount.