

# Comparing Tosi, Galliard, and Agricola on Recitative

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Tosi begins by saying that there are three types of recitative, with the following characteristics:

## 1. Church:

- 'Does not admit those wanton graces of a lighter stile; but requires some *messa di voce*, many *appoggiaturas*, and a noble majesty throughout' ('*che non ammette scherzi vaghi di stile indecente, ma richiede qualche messa di voce, molte Appoggiature, e una continua nobiltà sostenuta.*')
- 'Yields more liberty to the singer than the other two, particularly in the final cadence.' ('*concede a Vocalisti più libertà degli altri due...massimamente nelle Cadenze finali.*') In the original Italian, Tosi includes here the words '*e gli esime dal rigore del Tempo*' ('and exempts them from the rigour of time,') a passage which is omitted from the Galliard translation, but is included in that of Agricola.

## 2. Theatrical:

- Is 'always accompanied with action by the singer' ('*che per esser inseparabilmente accompagnato dall' azione del Cantante.*')
- Should not be sung like that of the church or chamber.
- Should only be ornamented during a soliloquy ('*soliloquio.*')

## 3. Chamber:

- 'Obliges the master to give the scholar a lively impression of them [the words]... where passion speaks, all shakes, all divisions and graces ought to be silent' ('*Questo esige quasi sempre un particolar artificio a cagion delle parole... dove parla la passione i Trilli, e i Passaggi devon tacere.*')

Agricola adds the following comments about Church recitative:

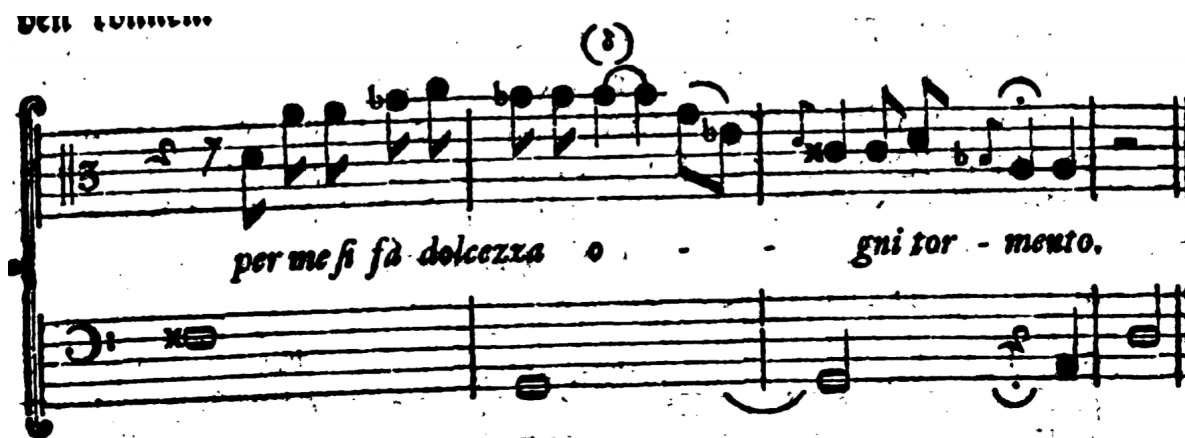
- A certain amount of sustaining ('*aufhaltung*') is allowed at moments of particularly strong affect ('*bey affectreichen Stellen*') in order to insert ornamentation, which is typically not as florid as in arias.
- When the ending of a recitative is notated as follows:

è, chi al pen si men: - - - - - to è tar - do.

It can be sung in either of these two ways; with a 'double trill' ('*Doppeltriller*') before the fermata (in the first example below,) or 'a gently executed trilled turn provided with a long sustained, crescendoed appoggiatura' ('*Oder ein mit einem lang ausgehaltenen verstärkten Vorschlage versehener, matt ausgeführter prallender Doppenschlag*') as in the second example below:

è tar - do. è tar - do.

- it is also possible to perform the example above by simply sustaining one of the preceding short notes, as seen on the syllable 'men.'
- At cadences (such as the example above) or on simple sustained notes, some extra ornaments can be added, although one should mostly just use some 'slow drawn-out notes' ('*langsam gezogene Noten.*') In the example below, any of the two ornaments mentioned above could be used at the indicated point.



Tosi continues by saying that modern teachers are particularly negligent in the teaching of recitative because 'in these days the study of expression is looked upon as unnecessary...' (*'oggi lo studio dell' espressiva, o non è considerato come necessario...'*) A large part of this is supposedly due to the problems of 'modern' composers. As such, it is of utmost importance for the singer to understand and reflect upon the meanings of the words.

Agricola explains that no sort of recitative should be sung in strict time (*'nach dem Tacte gesungen werde,')* and that one should be 'guided more by the length and shortness of syllables in common speech than by the written value of the notes' (*'Man muß sich dahin mehr nach der Länge und Kürze welche die Sylben in der gemeinen Rede haben.'*) It was apparently very common, however, for German choral singers to 'burst out with three sixteenth notes...in a recitative after a short rest' (*'etliche deutsche Chorsänger drey Sechzehnthelle nach einer kurzen Pause, vergleichen sehr oft im Recitative ausstoßen,')* performing them so quickly that 'no one will recognise the recitative as an imitation of common speech' (*'daß niemand daraus eine Nachahmung der gemeinen Rede...erkennen wird.'*)

That being said, interludes performed by instrumentalists in between phrases of a recitative must be performed 'in strict time' (*'müssen nach dem Tacte ausgeführt werden.'*) If a passage should be performed in strict time, such as ariosos, the composer will often add the words 'a tempo' or 'according to the beat,' (*'nach dem Tacte,')* and the singer is obliged to follow this direction. However 'it is customary to change some notes in all three kinds of recitatives' (*'in allen dreyen Arten des Recitativs einige Noten verändert werden,')* although it is more common in church and chamber recitatives than in theatrical.

Agricola continues by saying that cadences in which the final and penultimate notes are the same should be sung as follows:

Example (1) shows a musical score with two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music, each starting with a circled number (1) and (2). The notes are quarter notes and eighth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains two measures of music, each starting with a circled number (1) and (2). The notes are quarter notes. The lyrics "NON A-MO-RE." are written below the top staff, aligned with the notes.

If the cadence ends with a single long syllable, one should insert an appoggiatura instead, as seen below:

Example (2) shows a musical score with two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music, each starting with a circled number (1) and (2). The notes are quarter notes and eighth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains two measures of music, each starting with a circled number (1) and (2). The notes are quarter notes. The lyrics "cam - biato ancor fa - rà, fa - rà." are written below the top staff, aligned with the notes.

Before an on-beat, descending leap of a third, one typically sings an appoggiatura with a trill as seen in the example below:

(9)

co - me s' arda e s' agghiacci a un punto sol tu m' inse-

co - me s' ar - da a un pun - to sol

Or, in moments which are 'not with feeling' (*'an Stellen die nicht affectuos sind,*) especially if another note follows on the same pitch, it is possible to insert an appoggiatura instead of the first note:

(10)

troppo à il suo cor av - vol - to. av - vol - to.

Both options described above are equally possible if the melody descends by a second, as seen below:

(11)

d'ogn' alma ina - mo - ra - ta - mo - ra - ta, - mo - ra - ta.

Furthermore, at moments where a single note is repeated, one can occasionally introduce a mordant such as in the following instances:

Quo-stra che miri o Ni-ca cam-pa-gne ame-ne

ove inno-cente e bella gui-da la Pa-sto-rella

These can be sung like this:

Ni-ce, me-ne bel-la reb-la

One can also use the ornaments notated below; leaping appoggiaturas with mordants, in church and chamber recitative:

Tosi then provides a few principles for the performance of ‘church-airs,’ (*Arie Ecclesiastiche*) which Galliard defines as ‘motets, or anthems,’ saying that a singer must ‘lay aside all the theatrical effeminate manner, and sing in a manly stile...’ (*in cui bisogna lasciar da parte ogni vezzo Teatrale, e femminile, e cantar da Uomo.*) The singer must make sure of the following:

1. ‘The words [must] be well pronounced, and perfectly understood’ (*le parole sieno ben pronunziate, e meglio intese*)
2. ‘The recitatives [must] be expressed with strength and supported without affection’ (*sieno espressi con forza, e sostenuti senza affettazione*)
3. In (church) airs the singer must use some graces of ‘good taste’ (*gustoso artificio*) and ‘the final cadences of the motets [should] be performed with divisions distinct, swift, and in tune’ (*i finali de' Mottetti sieno eseguiti da' Passaggi distaccati, intonati, e veloci.*)

Agricola clarifies that the ‘motets’ in question are solo pieces as opposed to choral, and also emphasises that all that has been said can be applied to the performance of German Church cantatas (*deutschen Kirchencantaten.*)

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## Notes

This small collection of summaries is designed to make wading through the dense Italian, English, and German texts easier for students of ‘historically informed’ singing. As such, the presentation aims to be simple and accessible, while those passages in which Tosi digresses, such as those addressing compositional practice or other more theoretical elements are omitted. While these are doubtless useful for the student of ‘historically informed’ singing, their inclusion would defeat the point of this summary. Links to digital reproductions of the original texts can be found below.

Pier Francesco Tosi’s *Opinioni de’cantori Antichi, e Moderni* is debatably the most influential treatise on singing from the eighteenth century, being cited in works on vocal pedagogy into the present day.

Tosi (1654-1742) himself was an Italian castrato, teacher, and composer. He was employed as a church singer in Rome between 1676-1677, sang in Milan with the Cathedral choir until 1685, and was based in Genoa before traveling to London in 1693, where he found employment as a concert singer and singing teacher. Between 1701-1723 he worked as a diplomat for Emperor Joseph I, before returning to London in 1724, establishing himself a singing teacher. The emphasis on past musical practices throughout the treatise is reminiscent of much modern discourse on both a supposed ‘Golden Age’ as well as the ‘Historically Informed’ movement. Indeed, it is hardly surprising to learn that Tosi was one of the founding members of the Academy of Ancient Music in London in the 1720s.

Tosi’s English translator, John Ernest Galliard (1666-1747) was a German composer and oboist active in England during the first part of the eighteenth century. As a member of the London musical scene during this period, he very likely knew Tosi personally, indeed Galliard was also a fellow founding-member of the Academy of Ancient music. If Dr. Kitchener is to be believed, George Frideric Handel himself was a significant admirer of Galliard’s skill as a composer.

Johann Agricola (1720-1774,) Tosi’s German translator, was a composer, organist, singing master, and conductor. In 1738, during his studies in Law at the University of Leipzig, Agricola became a pupil of Johann Sebastian Bach and, in 1741 became a pupil of Johann Joachim Quantz. In 1772, Charles Burney described Agricola as ‘the best organ-player in Berlin, and the best singing master in Germany.’

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## Bibliography

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All three books are available on [IMSLP](#)

A searchable transcription of Tosi's original text can be found [HERE](#):

A searchable transcription of the Galliard translation can be found [HERE](#):