

IL VERO MODO DI DIMINUIR

Translated by Jesse Rosenberg

Girolamo dalla Casa detto da Udene, the author of this text, was an important cornetto player, instrumental leader and composer who codified the Italianate instrumental compositional style in the music of his famous *Il Vero Modo di Diminuir* of 1584. Girolamo was named "capo de concerti" at the basilica in Venice during the 1580s. Girolamo's playing may have served as inspiration for the instrumental canzonas and sonatas of Giovanni Gabrieli. His *Il Vero Modo* is a treatise on ornamentation and gives many examples of embellished lines from motets and madrigals of many composers who were popular at the time. This work is an important addition to the many tutors that established the florid Italian instrumental writing as an ideal throughout Europe.

Il Vero Modo di Diminuir is available in a facsimile edition from Arnaldo Forni Editore. The translator offers special thanks to Lawrence Rosenwald as well as to Bruce Dickey for his assistance with the "cornetto" section of this text.

THE TRUE WAY OF MAKING DIMINUTIONS

ON EVERY SORT OF INSTRUMENT:

WIND, STRING, AND VOCAL

by Girolamo dalla Casa detto da Udene

Head of the concerts of wind instruments
of the most Illustrious Lordship of Venice

First Book

To the most illustrious

Sig. Count Mario Bevilacqua

by privilege

in Venice by Angelo Gardano

1584

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TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS
LORD SIGNOR COUNT MARIO BEVILACQUA
MY MOST PERCEPTIVE SIR.



It has been many days since I determined it to be of use, most illustrious Sir, to compose and bring to light the present work on musical diminutions. But I could hardly claim the consolation to my soul of having carried out my intention without expressing the profound hope that whosoever shall look upon this my labor, divided into two books, will not only find it fruitful, but also as revealing to the world the great devotion that I feel towards your most illustrious Lordship, to whom I have wished to dedicate it, as to a staunch protector of virtuosi. Thus it shall go its way by the splendor of your great name and your renown already celebrated through all of Italy by the mouths of many virtuous persons for whom your illustrious House serves as a continuous refuge, of which their many and diverse works published under your protection offer ample faith and testimony. To the perfection of these last my own testimony might perhaps yield, but I shall never yield to any in my desire ever to be ready to love and revere your Lordship as the old and devoted servant which I consider myself to be of your rare qualities. May your Illustrious Lordship, then, deign to accept this my small gift, less in regard of its lowness than of your Lordship's kindness and of my own good intentions, which shall favor my labors and make me worthy of your grace. To which, offering myself ever more reverently, I must kiss the hands

of your most illustrious Lordship.

Servant Girolamo dalla Casa detto da Udene

TO THE READERS

Having decided long ago to take pen in hand, and to show the true way of making diminutions for the benefit of any *dilettante*, and having written these two books of examples, I wished to bring them to print in order that everyone might avail himself of it for the playing of all wind and keyboard instruments and every sort of viol.

The first book treats of tonguing, and of simple *crome* [eighth-note] diminutions of the semibreve and minim [whole-note and half-note]. [Example 1.] It begins with diminutions of stepwise motion from note to note, and then proceeds to include skips of the 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th and 8ve. Then follow examples of *semicrome* [16th-note] diminutions of the same note values [Example 2]. Next there are examples of *tremolo gropizato* diminutions of the semibreve and minim [Example 3]. Afterwards come *groppi battuti* diminutions of the same note values, which are used in cadences [Example 4].

Then several madrigals *a 4* of Cipriano [da Rore] with simple *crome* diminutions are presented. Each group of diminutions is preceded by the notes as they appear in the original, thus demonstrating how to make these diminutions in other places as well. You shall then be able to play these madrigals in company.

Then follow other 4-part madrigals of the same composer of simple *semicrome* diminutions of the same note values used in the first set of madrigals [Example 5]. Next are shown passages and cadences taken from various [Italian] madrigals and French *canzone* [De Monte, Willaert and Striggio] which show examples of diminutions of *croma* and *semicroma* above each note. Then follow *semicrome* and *trePLICATE* [16th-note triplets], which are 24 notes per [semibreve-] beat in passages and cadences, and then will follow another example of passages and cadences of *trePLICATE* and *quadruplicate* [32nd notes], which are 32 notes per [semibreve-] beat [Example 6]. Then we deal with mixed diminution [Ex. 7], which consists of the 4 figures together, that is, *croma*, *semicroma*, *trePLICATE* and *quadruplicate*, in passages and cadences of different madrigals and French chansons. I have greatly marveled, and continue to be bewildered, that so many excellent musicians who have written [on the subject] have never treated, if not of the *croma* and *semicroma*, of the other 2 figures, the *trePLICATE*, which are 24 per beat and the *quadruplicate*, which are 32 per beat. These are so necessary in diminution that in truth one cannot make diminutions without them: for mixed diminution is true diminution, that is, of the four figures, *croma*, *semicrome*, *trePLICATE* and *quadruplicate*.

OF THE THREE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF TONGUING

Since the principal type of tonguing is that of the *lingua riversa*, we will discuss it first, for it is more similar to that of the *gorgia*¹ type of articulation than the others. And it does require *gorgia* tonguing. This type of tonguing is extremely fast, and difficult to control. Its beating [striking point] is on the palate, and it proffers itself in three ways. Ler, ler, ler, ler, derler; Ter, ler, terler. The first is to be done softly. The second is medium, and the third is harder than other others, being a more pointed tonguing. In the beginning of this work you have the examples of all three sorts, in which the syllables shall be written below each note, and you will accompany the tonguing with

1. *Gorgia* literally means throat and likely refers to an articulation encountered in vocal study.

your hand. This will hold for all of the examples.

The second tonguing is this: tere tere, tere, terete. This tonguing requires a straight [direct] tongue, its articulation is in the teeth, and is by nature a light tonguing, and good for examples of *croma* and *semicroma*, being naturally controlled. Here you will have the same format explained above.

The third tonguing is this: Teche, teche, teche, techte.² This tonguing is articulated in the palate close to the teeth, and is a crude [hard] tonguing for players who want to give an effect of terror [*far terribili*]. It is not especially gratifying to the ear, and is by nature quick and difficult to control. You have the same format as above.

There are two others commonly used, not to mention several others of which it would not be appropriate for me to speak at this time; I will discuss only these two. The first is this: te, te, te, te. This is good, and is used in playing the *croma* and longer note values. Then follows the other tonguing, used for De, in this way: De, de, de, de. You can use these to make diminutions upon the same note values as the first. This tonguing, articulated in the palate, is softer than the first, which is articulated in the teeth. You may use whichever seems best; both are by nature lazy and are used for the *croma*. I will not speak more of this, having already said enough. We shall treat in the following paragraph the cornetto.

OF THE CORNETTO

The cornetto is the most excellent of the wind instruments since it imitates the human voice better than the other instruments. This instrument is played both loud and soft, in every sort of tone [tuono], as does the voice. You must practice in order to master this instrument and take care not to produce a tone that is horn-like or muted.³ One must then adjust the lips in such a way as to produce a good tone; open lips give the tone a somewhat horn-like or muted quality [whereas] lips which are too tight make the tone shrill. Therefore follow the middle way. It should be played with discretion and good judgment. The tonguing should be neither too dead nor too strongly articulated but should be similar to the *gorgia*. Moreover, with divisions [*minuta*] do few things, but make them good. So, let everyone strive for a good tone, good tonguing and good divisions and imitate as much as possible the human voice.

I would write more of other wind instruments, but since this is the first of which I shall write, for now let us proceed to the examples.

TO THE READERS

In this second book I treat of running diminutions upon different French *canzoni* and [Italian] madrigals that may be played on any sort of instrument. In order that players of any instrument may make use of these diminutions correctly, whether on a wind, keyboard or string instrument such as the viola da gamba and the viola da braccio, you will find mixed diminutions upon all these *canzone*, that is, uniting the four figures, *croma*, *semicroma*, *treplicate* and *quadruplicate*, as I have already explained

2. The Italian "ch" is pronounced as "k."

3. The Italian expression *far buon stromento*, is difficult to translate. It has both the broad sense of mastering one's instrument as well as the narrow sense of producing a good tone on one's instrument.

in Book I. In virtue whereof I believe that everyone who desires to learn these diminutions will find my examples helpful for any sort of instrument, because, in truth, it is for this aim that I have exercised my modest labors.

OF BRINGING THE EXAMPLES UP TO TEMPO

I declare that bringing the examples up to tempo is difficult, and this is of the greatest importance to everyone who plays diminutions, regardless of the particular instrument being played. Let each player, then, be careful to beat the time, and never to practice without doing this, and accustom yourself to the beat, because otherwise it would not be correct. And let him be careful of the four figures, that the speed of the *semicroma* (as is known) be precisely the double of that of the *croma*, which are eight, i.e., sixteen, and the *trePLICATE* be brought from sixteen to twenty-four, which is one-third more than the *semicroma*. The *quadruplicate* also are brought up one more time, that is from twenty-four to thirty-two. Everyone must adjust himself to the tempo, and beat his example note by note, whether playing a wind instrument or a keyboard, and don't run *di soprana*, as many do when playing a wind instrument, playing with a dead tongue, without tonguing the example, to make it easier, because this is impossible to control, as in the *lingua riversa*, which too is difficult to control. Therefore, let everyone beat the examples note by note, and bring these four figures up to the proper tempo, if he desires to do well.

OF THE VIOLA BASTARDA

I have wished also to exercise these my modest labors to demonstrate diminutions of canzoni and madrigals a 4 to be played on the viola bastarda, in which one plays all of the parts, as the learned musicians do. And to demonstrate to those who wish to practice this art, I have made diminutions upon all of the parts of two songs in *crome* so it may be seen how to play in this manner. Next are presented diminutions in *semicrome* and the other two figures, thus demonstrating how to play in these diverse manners. In the end I have made diminutions upon two songs, the first all in *trePLICATE* and the second all in *quadruplicate*, in order to show to musicians that which others have not shown, these figures being so necessary in making diminutions that one cannot do less than know all of them, since mixed diminution is the true diminution, consisting of the four figures united. Of this matter, having said enough, I shall extend myself no further. I shall treat instead briefly of the human voice.

OF THE HUMAN VOICE

Since many gentle spirits might wish to have guidance in performing a few examples with their voices, I have undertaken the modest labor of making diminutions on several madrigals, and to demonstrate to all *dilettanti* with these examples what they must do, and how to make use of them in other places. I have made diminutions upon the soprano part, since it is the part most frequently subjected to diminutions, and also since it is of use to all those who delight in singing to the accompaniment of the lute. I have also wished to give satisfaction to those who sing the other parts as well. I have, then, presented the song *Alla dolc' ombra* [sic] of Cipriano [da Rore], with diminutions upon each of the four parts, so as to accommodate all of the singers.



