

Frescobaldi's "Ancidetemi pur d'Arcadelt passaggiato" might be considered also an organ piece?

by *Umberto Pineschi*

1. Is Frescobaldi's "Ancidetemi pur" a toccata?

Why does Frescobaldi not call "Ancidetemi pur" a toccata? Is it a harpsichord piece more than an organ piece?

The title seems to suggest something different from the preceding 11 toccatas in the Second Book of Toccatas. Upon examining the piece, however, it is rather easy to conclude that in reality "Ancidetemi pur" is the toccata no.12 of the second book, in spite of its title.

Why, then, did Frescobaldi decided to have a "passaggiato" madrigal at the place of a possible 12th toccata, and why did he not call it toccata, at least as a subtitle?

A possible explanation can be found in the no. 1 and 2 of the preface "To the reader" that Frescobaldi placed at the beginning of the books of toccatas. In fact the word "madrigal" in the no. 1 and the word "passages" in the no. 2 are related to the toccatas:

1 First: this way of playing must not be subject to the beat, just as in the **modern madrigals**, which, though difficult, are eased by the beat, leading it sometimes languidly sometimes quickly, sustaining it also in the air according to their affects or meaning of the words.

2. In the toccatas I was concerned not only for them to be full of different **passages** and affects, but also that every passage may be played separately from each other, so that the player has the possibility to stop wherever he prefers without being obliged to complete them.

Arcadelt's "Ancidetemi pur" is a "modern madrigal" and Frescobaldi's "passaggiato (with passages)" version seems to be an explicit example of the relationship that he establishes between a "modern madrigal" and a toccata. In other words, he shows in a practical way how, in his opinion, one can turn a madrigal into a toccata by enriching it with "passaggi et affetti" (passages and affects).

A comparison between "Ancidetemi pur passaggiato" and all the toccatas, both of the first and second books, shows beyond any doubt, that they belong to the same kind of composition. Moreover, from the no.1 of the afore mentioned preface, we understand that Frescobaldi considers all his toccatas as "madrigali passaggiati", not only "Ancidetemi pur", since he suggests that their tempos move "sometimes languidly sometimes quickly, sustaining it also in the air according to their affects or meaning of the words" even if, with the only exception of "Ancidetemi pur", they have no words. Incidentally, we might notice that all the main organ forms come from a vocal form: the *ricercare* from the vocal motet, the *canzona* from the French vocal *canzona* and the Frescobaldi toccata apparently from the "modern madrigal". The "Ancidetemi pur passaggiato", a madrigal-toccatina, might be regarded, therefore, as a statement of intent by Frescobaldi.

Frescobaldi's organ toccatas can be divided in two groups: 1. "a pieno" toccatas; 2. "durezza e ligature" toccatas. We might extend this classification to all his toccatas, since they have a double intention, for harpsichord or organ, even if there are toccatas more suitable to the harpsichord, for example "Ancidetemi pur", and others definitely for the organ, for instance the toccatas for the Elevation or the toccatas "sopra i pedali".

The "a pieno" toccatas, except the short toccatas of the "Fiori Musicali", are clearly divided into several sections contrasting with each other, to be played even as separate pieces if one likes it, as Frescobaldi says in the already quoted no. 2 of the introduction "to the reader".

Also the "durezza e ligature" do have sections, but not that dramatically opposing to each other.

2. Is it possible to play "Ancidetemi pur" on the organ?

At least theoretically, the answer should be "yes" because it comes from the title that Frescobaldi himself

gave to his second book: “Toccate d’intavolatura di cembalo e organo” (Toccatas of tablature of organ and harpsichord), therefore also for organ, even if the title and the text of the madrigal would suggest rather a “secular” piece and, as such, intended for the harpsichord and certainly not for the church service. This is the text:

*Ancidetemi pur, grievi martiri
ch'l viver m'è sì a noia
che'l morir mi fia gioia,
ma lassat'ir gli estremi miei sospiri
a trovar quella ch'è cagion ch'io muoia
e dir'a l'empia fera
ch'onor non gli è che per amarl'io pera.*

[Kill me well, severe suffering,
Since living is so boring to me
That dying becomes joy,
But let my last sighing go
To find her who is the reason of my death
And tell the impious beast
That there is no honor for him that I perish because I love her].

Even if there is no need to perform “Ancidetemi pur” on the organ, nevertheless doing that helps to understand how to set the other toccatas of both books on the organ.

It is interesting to point out that Frescobaldi’s “Ancidetemi pur” consists of seven sections, the same number as the verses of the lyric (was it purposely done?), even if the instrumental sections do not correspond to the verses, since in the Arcadelt vocal composition the verses are repeated.

This is the setting:

- first section (bars 1-15a) for the first two verses, that is *Ancidetemi pur, grievi martiri / ch'l viver m'è sì a noia*, divided in two subsections at the middle of bar 10;
- second section (bars 15b-36) for the third verse, that is *che'l morir mi fia gioia*;
- third section (bars 37-59a) for the fourth and fifth verses, that is *ma lassat'ir gli estremi miei sospiri / a trovar quella ch'è cagion ch'io muoia*, divided in two subsections at bar 47 after the first chord;
- fourth section (59b-63a) for *e dir'a l'empia fera*;
- fifth section (63b-70a) for *ch'onor non gli è che per amarl'io pera*;
- sixth section (bars 70b-72) for the repetition of *e dir'a l'empia fera*;
- seventh and last section (bars 73-87) for the repetition of *ch'onor non gli è che per amarl'io pera*; at bars 79-80 there is perfect cadence (dominant-tonic), as if the piece would conclude there, followed by what we might call a “coda”, with a plagal cadence (subdominant-tonic), following somehow Arcadelt’s setting, where after the cadence the canto voice keeps a long a right to the end, while the other voices form a plagal cadence (incidentally, such a long note requires a rather fast tempo).

Performing Frescobaldi’s “Ancidetemi pur” on the harpsichord does not create registration problems. An Italian harpsichord of Frescobaldi’s time could have a single stop, that is an 8’, or two stops, that is 8’+8’, or three stops, that is 8’+8’+4’ and one can play the entire piece without changes, or using, when possible, these possibilities to change the sound.

On the contrary, a performance of this piece on the organ without changes of registration would certainly not be convincing. It is clear that it is possible to have different registrations for the seven sections, although this is a rather difficult matter. Also in this case, “the good taste and refined judgment of the player”, as Frescobaldi says for the tempo, would be crucial as a guide to the selection of the appropriate stops. Therefore I do not dare to suggest anything in terms of registrations, since the organist, before selecting the sounds, should decide whether to consider the lyrics dramatically violent (basically equal to the Ripieno sound), or desperately sad (basically equal to the Principale sound). The first case seems more convincing (It

might be relevant, under this respect, that the first and the last chords in the Frescobaldi's setting are in a major, while Arcadelt's are in a minor). Frescobaldi's "Ancidetemi pur" should, then, be treated as an "a pieno" toccata, that is complete Ripieno for the first and last sections and lighter registrations for the middle sections, with this possible result: 1st section fortissimo (complete Ripieno), 2nd piano f.i. 8', 4'), 3rd forte (f.i. +XIX), 4th piano (f.i. -XIX), 5th forte (f.i. +XIX, XXII), 6th pianissimo (Principale 8' alone), 7th fortissimo (complete Ripieno), with a better result —of course this is only my opinion— if one doubles the bass line with the pedals from bar 76b to 80a and then from bar 85 to the end.