

Visionary Pragmatism: Structural Design, Stylistic Features, and Performance Considerations in Lodovico Viadana's *Salmi a Quattro Chori*

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I. Biographical & Overview Information

- Born Lodovico Grossi (ca. 1560) in Viadana, Province of Mantua (later adopted name of his birth city); died 1627
- Friar in the Order of Minor Observants (Franciscans) by 1588
- *Maestro di cappella* in Mantua, Concordia, Fano, and Cremona; final years in Busseto and Gualtieri, near Parma
- Early work: mostly *a cappella*, some with *basso seguente* accompaniment, presence of *falsobordone* and polyphony
 - *Lamentationes*, Op. 22 (1609) – though not early in his output, demonstrates similar stylistic features: mixture of homophony and polyphony, fine counterpoint, expressive and highly singable melodic lines¹
 - Example: *Feria Quinta, Lectio I: Incipit Lamentatio Hiereniae prophetae*, performed by Collegium Vocale Ars Cantandi
- Later use of *basso continuo* in ecclesiastical music
 - *Cento concerti con il basso continuo* (1602) – first widely published sacred piece (Venice) to employ *basso continuo*
 - Shorter liturgical works for 1-4 voices
 - Composed with provincial and collegiate churches rather than large city cathedrals²
 - Example: *Sancta Maria*, Dominique Moaty, Emmanuelle Guigues, Marie Langlet, Pierre Cazes
- Modern view: Viadana stands with Monteverdi, Caccini, and Gabrieli as one of the most influential composers of the early Baroque
 - Expressive vocal writing, elegant and sophisticated text settings, wonderfully diverse use of rhythm and texture to create dramatic contrast within his works
 - Less interested in chromaticism and dissonance than other *seconda prattica* specialists
 - Made significant contributions to the polychoral idiom, rendering it more nuanced and capable of reflecting textual subtleties
 - Displays appreciation for the needs of church musicians in a variety of professional settings

II. The Vespers at the turn of the 17th Century

- Seventh daily service in Hours of Divine Office, held late in the day
- Structure:
 - *Deus in adiutorium* (versicle/response)
 - 5 Psalms
 - Frequently Ps. 109-113, 114-147
 - Each Psalm is paired with an opening antiphon and closes with the Lesser Doxology
 - Additional hymns, antiphons, versicles
 - *Magnificat* – Mary's song of praise, Gospel of Luke
 - Combination of Psalms and antiphons is specific to the feast day
 - Monophonic antiphons had to be in the same mode as the subsequent Psalm setting
- Second only to Mass in liturgical prominence in Viadana's time
- Northern Italian city states, especially Venice, presented Vespers as opulent, richly composed for large ensembles
 - Capable of displaying pomp and cultural civic achievement on major feast days
 - Personal accounts of Vespers attendance indicate it could last for several hours
- Publications: Psalm collections published with increasing frequency from 1570 on³
 - Far greater growth within publishing industry than Mass settings during the same period
- Vespers publications often include 2 *Magnificats* – one performed the eve before a major feast day, the other on the day itself; or left to *maestro's* discretion
 - Often one setting is subdued, darker, or contemplative, the other festive and exuberant
- Established understanding that, as with the Mass, churches could substitute specific movements from those in a published collection if the texts were compatible
 - Monteverdi 1610 Vespers – multiple *Magnificats*, optional instrumental passages in *Dixit Dominus*

1. Federico Mompelio, "Viadana, Lodovico." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, eds. Stanley Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: MacMillan, 2001), xxvi: 517.

2. Jerome Roche, *North Italian Church Music in the Age of Monteverdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 51.

3. *Ibid.*, 37.

III. The *Cori Spezzati* Tradition and Psalm Settings – A Problematic Pairing

- St. Mark's - Adrian Willaert (*maestro di cappella*, 1527-62)
- Late 16th century – with Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli – growing emphasis on spatial dialogue between ensembles singing in homophonic texture, and polyphony is greatly deemphasized (less the case in Rome and with other local polychoral traditions), inclusion of instrumental parts (brass, organ, *basso seguente/continuo*)
- Increasingly problematic for Psalm settings:
 - Antiphonal works viewed as cumbersome and heavy handed
 - Less capable of reflecting textual imagery
 - Influence of *stile moderno* increased demand for nuanced interaction between text and music
 - Psalm texts were especially troublesome, as they are neutral in tone (praise doesn't carry the same affective punch as love, misery, or anguish)⁴
 - Therefore, opportunities to capture the essence of text musically requires greater subtlety than could be accomplished with *cori spezzati*

IV. Viadana's *Salmi a Quattro Chori*

- Published in 1612, same year as Giovanni Gabrieli's death
- Four choirs:
 - I: SATTB *sol*, II: SATB *cappella*, III: SSAT, IV: ATBB
 - *Choirs III and IV are entirely optional*
- Instrumental doublings and staging provided in detailed instruction (see *Modo di concertare*)
 - Strings, sackbuts, cornets, organ(s), *chitarrone*
- Musical content of movements:
 - Antiphon (to be supplied by performer) & Incipit presents first line of text
 - Followed by a mixture of musical styles:
 - *Falsobordone*
 - Polyphonic *tutti* singing with instrumental doubling
 - Alternation between Choir I and Choirs II-IV in a variety of antiphonal manners
 - Broad spectrum of possibilities: lengthy passages of solo for one or two voices, madrigalistic and polyphonic writing for all five solo voices in a wide array of styles, rapid exchange of ideas between solo choir and *tutti* ensemble
 - Highly inventive development of motives, diverse rhythms, and rapid dialogue between choirs
 - No solo movements – only interplay between solo and *tutti*
 - Text requiring word painting is reserved for *sol*
- Order of movements:
 - i. *Deus in adjutorium*
 - ii. *Dixit Dominus* (Psalm 109)
 - iii. *Confitebor tibi* (Psalm 110)
 - iv. *Beatus vir* (Psalm 111)
 - v. *Laudate Pueri* (112)
 - vi. *Laudate Dominum* (Psalm 116)
 - vii. *Laetatus sum* (Psalm 121)
 - viii. *Nisi Dominus* (Psalm 126)
 - ix. *Lauda Jerusalem* (Psalm 147)
 - x. *Magnificat I*
 - xi. *Sinfonia a doi tenori* (inspired by *Song of Miriam*, Exodus)
 1. This movement is Viadana's own theological contribution to the Vespers, a duet for two tenors from Choir I whose text exalts God by drawing parallels to the Song of Miriam in Exodus. This is achieved primarily through its references to praise through music, specifically with use of tambourine. The duet helps create a temporal connection between female characters in the Old and New Testaments, and further reinforces the ongoing sense of dialogue present throughout the work.
 - xii. *Magnificat II*
- Psalms presented would allow for use on a variety of prominent feast days, including Christmas, the Circumcision, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and All Saints, plus the feast days of most saints

4. Gerhard Wielakker, introduction to *Salmi a Quattro Chori* (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1998), x.

Critical Edition

Viadana, Lodovico Grossi da. *Salmi a Quattro Chori*, Ed. Gerhard Wielakker, Vol. 86 of *Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era*, (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1998).

Recording Information

Robert Hollingworth & *I Fagiolini*, *1612 Italian Vespers*, Decca: 2012.

Acknowledgements

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