

Varietas Delectat

Diminution and Chiaroscuro in half a millennium of musical repertoire.

In the preface to the second edition of Francesco Galeazzi's book *Elementi Teorico-Prattici di Musica* (1817), Giuseppe Rossini (father of Gioachino Rossini) asserts that style is the final stage of musical learning and that it is divided into two sections: ornamentation and expression. The detailed book contains an entire chapter (Articolo XVI) devoted to musical diminution and expression, in which various rules are established that can easily be compared with concepts already existing in earlier treatises dating back at least two centuries.

Furthermore, Manuel Garcia's extensive book *L'Art Du Chant*, which includes quotations from J.A. Herbst (1653) and from singers of the baroque period, was republished several times and finally translated into English by his grandson Albert Garcia in 1924.

In fact, *varietas* seems to remain an interpretive element in the 19th century, personalizing the character and style of the performer. The term *diminuizione* is still used in the same way as in Renaissance and Baroque music, and *chiaroscuro*, the *crescere et scemar della voce* of authors around 600' such as Giulio Caccini, Francesco Rognoni or Ignacio Donati, remains an expressive interpretive element documented in didactic treatises written on singing and the violin in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The retrospective citations between Manuel García (1847), Johann Andreas Herbst (1642), Francesco Rognoni (1620), Giovanni Battista Bovicelli (1594), Giovanni Bassano (1591) and Girolamo Dalla Casa (1584) simultaneously form an unbroken arc of didactic material on diminution. Beyond the distinction between *passaggio* or diminution and *gratie* or manners, the art of ornamentation is well documented in Western European music from the late fifteenth to the late nineteenth century. In addition, some Italian treatises seem to have had a significant influence on the repertoire and theoretical-practical sources of the Baroque period.

All together, this shows the importance of *varietas* for the interpretation of the musical repertoire of at least half a millennium. Many, however, are the doubts that continue to hinder our freedom of interpretation. Understanding the possibilities of diminution and *chiaroscuro*, as well as their possible characteristics, requires research that concerns practical musicians, and for this reason we want to promote their progress at our university.

Reference: Josué Meléndez (teacher of diminution and cornetto at the Hochschule für Musik Trossingen and the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt).



Josué Meléndez (cornetto, recorder) began his musical studies in Costa Rica at the Conservatorio Castella. From 1991–1995 he studied at the Escuela Nacional de Música in Mexico and founded the first early music festival of Mexico, Festival Santo Domingo de Música Antigua, where he conducted *L'Orfeo* by Monteverdi and many other projects of fifteenth and sixteenth-century music. In 1997 he moved to The Hague where he obtained two recorder diplomas at the Royal Conservatory, including one with an honorable mention in modern music.

From 2002 to 2006 he studied cornetto at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis with Bruce Dickey, and since then works as cornettist and recorder player worldwide. He is the founder and director of *I Fedeli*, and has performed and recorded with the most recognized European ensembles, such as Concerto Palatino, La Fenice, Les Cornets Noirs, Musica Fiata, Oltremontano, Nederlandse Bach Vereniging, His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts, Academy of Ancient Music, and with directors including Ton Koopman, Jordi Savall, Gabriel Garrido, Rinaldo Alessandrini, Claudio Cavina, Philippe Herreweghe, Paul van Nevel, Thomas Hengelbrock, Sigiswald Kuijken, and Rene Jacobs.

Josué Meléndez is a specialist in Renaissance and Baroque music improvisation. He teaches cornetto and diminution at Trossingen university of Music, Germany and the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts (HfMDK). He is as well active as a researcher and has published the article *Cadenze per Finali, Exuberant and Extended Cadences in 16th and 17th centuries* in “*Musical Improvisation in the Baroque Era*,” Ed. Brepols, and has presented different papers about aspects of Modes in Renaissance music as well as renaissance and baroque music improvisation subjects.

Josué Meléndez Peláez
Austrasse 101
4051 Basel
Svizzera
+41765255993

www.ifedeli.org