

**Lodovico Zacconi**

**Prattica**

**Di**

**Musica**

(1596)

**Part 1, Book 1, Chapter 66**

***Che stile si tenghi nel far di gorgia, & dell'uso  
de I moderni passaggi***

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## Translator's Preface

Zacconi's discussion of the vocal diminution technique stands as one of the major sources on the practice, despite the fact that Zacconi himself is not, by his own admission, a performer of the first rank. Rather, he freely admits that his discussion is meant for students rather than professionals, and for this reason the practical musical examples, though moderately extensive, are of less importance than the text itself. For a practical guide to the technique the reader is better off consulting Francesco Rognoni's *Selva de Varii Passaggi* (1620) or Bovicelli's *Regole Passaggi di Musica* (1594). Even so, the defects of Zacconi's account reside not so much in the level of his instruction or the quality of his examples as in two other factors, logic and language. Zacconi finds himself fairly frequently at a loss as to how to explain what he means, which gives the distinct impression that he lacks the critical analytical skills to penetrate the nature of the issue or the expertise to explain it adequately—certainly he is famous, or infamous, for his unfortunate analysis in other subject areas [see the *Grove* article on Zacconi]. This inadequacy in critical skill is compounded by Zacconi's command of language, which he probably felt was stylish but actually was both inadequate and ill-suited to his purpose.

The problems with Zacconi's language are of two types: (1) the fluid state of Italian and its several dialects in the sixteenth century which results in a certain degree of understandable unpredictability and uncertainty for which he cannot be held culpable and (2) the personal idiosyncrasies in what he appears to feel he cultivates as a high literary style. As to the former, Zacconi was born in Pesaro, which is close enough to call a crossroads of the Abruzzi and Romagnol dialects, where he spent his developmental years till about the age of twenty. He also spent protracted times in Venice with its Veneto dialect, and in Pavia and Mantua in Lombardy, and was thus exposed to the Lombard dialect as well. Nonetheless, Zacconi's basic literary language is the Tuscan dialect that had been developing as the universal Italian literary dialect since Dante. Some distinctions can be seen in consonant gemination (doubling), other orthographic distinctions, and possibly in his pronoun forms, the use of infinitival substantives, and his tendency to create pronominal verbs freely. Most of these cause the reader and translator little if any difficulty; those that may do so receive attention below for the benefit of those who wish to try their own hands at Zacconi.

A far greater impediment to understanding Zacconi's text lies in the idiosyncrasies of what he appears to think he is cultivating as a high literary style. Understanding of the text can be severely inhibited by his continual circumlocutions, convolutions, analogies, metaphors, redundancies and chiasms, and most of all by his continual variation in terminology, which abounds in distinctions without differences. Most unfortunately this impacts worst of all on his central subject matter in the chapter, the diminution technique of the *passaggio*. His simple redundancies usually merely annoy, as if he were to say "the singer labors and struggles and by struggling and laboring improves his *passaggi*." In worse cases he often leaves the reader wondering whether or not he meant a distinction, as in "the singer may wish to employ *vaghezze* or *passaggi*." Does he imply they are different things by means of the disjunctive "or" (one but not the other), or does he mean they are the same by means of the explanatory "or" (= namely, I mean)? This leads naturally to the worst of his artificial stylistic conventions, which itself intersects with his apparent weak or faulty critical skill. Of the terms he uses in connection with the diminution technique, e.g., *gorgia*, *gorgheggiare*, *vaghe*, *vaghezze*, *passaggio*, *fiorire*, *fiorito*, he specifically states that *gorgia*, *vaghezze*, and *passaggio* are the same thing! He then

proceeds to use them in some circumstances where they appear actually to mean the same thing and in other circumstances where they almost certainly do not mean the same thing; but then what do they mean to him? What specific point is he trying to make or technique is he trying to describe? It is the same with even so simple a term as *figura*, which at times means “musical note” and at times appears to mean “musical figure.” The reader must decide which, especially when the term appears in the plural.

In order to deal with these issues and to help the reader who may wish to consult the original Italian I have adopted the practice of supplementing the translation with the original term in cases of potential ambiguity, of which there are many. I have also provided a glossary at the end, in which I try to correlate Zacconi’s usages and my conjectures as to similarities and distinctions in terms. In notes I fairly frequently comment on some of Zacconi’s linguistic idiosyncrasies, but not so often as they occur, otherwise the text would be overwhelmingly burdened with notes. I also list here below a few of the more common characteristics that seem identifiably different from other authors of the time whom I have read.

Zacconi uses the pronoun “*li*” as a fairly general purpose one for the masculine third person singular and plural, either as the singular and plural dative or as the third plural accusative, its modern sense. The word “*gli*” appears both as the regular masculine plural article and occasionally as the masculine nominative plural pronoun.

The difficulty of the former can be compounded by Zacconi’s very casual ambiguity in making clear the referents to his pronouns. Ambiguity is often clarified only by the fact that Italian has fortunately retained gender specificity in nouns, articles and relative pronouns, etc. It is as though one confronts the English sentence “he said he would do it as soon as he arrives,” in which “he” can refer to one referent or as many as three different ones.

Zacconi seems to use the infinitive with article more frequently than I have elsewhere seen as a substantive of the verbal force similar to the gerund. Of course, by virtue of its verbal force it can still take any constructions natural to that verb.

The feature that I find most interesting, and originally quite confusing, is Zacconi’s frequent creation of pronominal verbs, despite the class of the original, whether transitive, intransitive or reflexive. The pronominal is, of course, reflexive in form but not in meaning, e.g., the common *pentirsi di*, repent of, as in *si pente dei suoi peccati*, he repents (of) his sins. The sense of the pronominal is usually but not always completed by a complementary structure such as a prepositional phrase. The effect is to indicate some kind of particular involvement of the subject in the action of the verb. Considering how exasperating are so many of Zacconi’s stylistic characteristics, I find this one both subtle and attractive, though its translation is difficult if not impossible to express.

It goes almost without saying that Zacconi’s punctuation is emphatic, as typical of the time, and so not only is virtually worthless for determining syntactic structure but is even a significant impediment to determining it.

Zacconi’s book is foliated, not paginated. So that the reader can more easily consult the original, I provide folio numbers and sides in brackets, e.g., [59v] = folio 59, verso side, [62r] = folio 62, recto side.

The only other translation of this chapter that I have found is the partial one (about 40%) in Carol MacClintock’s book. As always, I never consult another’s translation until I have prepared a draft

plus a revision of my own. I have not made a complete collation with MacClintock's, but to the degree I have done so, I have found no major differences.

At the end of this preface I find myself in a situation similar to Zacconi. The Italian scholar may find these remarks superfluous or even unnecessary, but I do not present this translation for the expert, who no doubt will consult Zacconi directly. I present it to the non-specialist who would like to know what Zacconi says on the subject and may possibly wish to consult his text directly, or to develop the ability to do so.

## [58r] Chapter 66: What Style Pertains in the making of Gorgia<sup>1</sup> and on the Use of Modern Passaggi.

As fast as things once beautified by artfulness have become old-fashioned, just as quickly today are they beautified by the individual effort of many, for the reason that keen minds always are looking for new beautifications.

Rather, the one who aims well at the latter [new style], even if the former [the older style] at one time seemed beautiful, by determined study and long personal toil has added a new beauty to beauties. So that I do not talk at length on things that are little to the purpose, I will omit speaking about the particular embellishments that are made on the subject of the workings of the art and on its nature. I will say only that music has always been beautiful and at every moment it is beautified more, by means of the diligence and study that singers employ on it; which [music] isn't renewed or changed by means of its notes (*figure*),<sup>2</sup> which in it are always of one kind, but by the ornaments (*grazie*) and accents (*accenti*)<sup>3</sup> does it come always to seem more beautiful.

The ornaments (*vahezze*)<sup>4</sup> and accents (*accenti*) have been made by breaking up and fragmenting the notes (*figure*), every time that in one beat (*tatto*)<sup>5</sup> or half-beat a quantity of notes (*figure*) is added, which [figures] have the nature of rapid performance, and which render so much pleasure and delight that one seems to hear so many well-instructed angels who by their singing ravish our heart and cause us to remain very well content with their singing.

These [singers] such as have so great promptness and ability to execute at tempo such a quantity of notes (*figure*), executed with such speed, have made and make songs lovely (*vaghe*)<sup>6</sup> so that now the one who does not sing to the listeners as they [those singers] do gives little satisfaction and is little esteemed by singers. This way of singing and these embellishments (*vaghezze*) by the people are commonly called *gorgia*, which, then is nothing other than a collection and grouping of many eighth-

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<sup>1</sup> Zacconi seems to use this word as a term for embellishments of all types. Originally it derives from the word for throat and by extension to the technique of articulation in the throat used in singing passaggi, for which reason it was further extended to mean a passaggio itself, as Zacconi will subsequently define. *Cambridge Italian Dictionary* defines it as “strong guttural pronunciation.”

<sup>2</sup> Zacconi uses the term *figura* to do double duty as both “note” and “musical figure,” i.e., a sequence of notes usually in some identifiable pattern or as part of a passaggio. This apparently deliberate terminological ambiguity is characteristic of Zacconi. The specific sense must be determined from context, if possible.

<sup>3</sup> In this context Zacconi must mean the ornament *accento* because he immediately describes it as breaking up the note, as is the case with the *accento*. Rognoni, *Selva de Varii Passaggi* gives an illustration. It and the *portar la voce* are both kinds of preparatory ornamental notes to a following note and lie in the ancestry of the *appoggiatura*. Strunk/Treitler (1998) also provides a description, pp. 731-734, but terminology was very far from standard and uniform. As with *passaggio*, I have accepted *accento* and its plural as English terms without need of italics.

<sup>4</sup> Zacconi apparently uses *vaghezza* and *grazia* interchangeably to mean an ornament of some type. He seems to consider the *accento* sufficiently different to privilege it with its own term. See also Strunk/Treitler: 731-734.

<sup>5</sup> I have chosen to translate Zacconi's *tatto* (i.e., *tactus*) as beat. Even though it is an imprecise anachronism, it is probably the closest parallel to the non-specialist's understanding and is a close approximation, but only that. Although it later developed into our “measure,” at this time it usually refers to the value of a whole-note at about 70 bpm.

<sup>6</sup> The development of the original Latin *vagus*—wandering, doubtful, etc. to the sense of “lovely” seems to be an Italian phenomenon.

notes and sixteenth-notes<sup>7</sup> collected within some or other unit of time.<sup>8</sup> It [the technique] is of such a nature that because of the speed in which so many notes (*figure*) are constricted, one learns much better by ear than by examples, and this is because in the examples that [specific] measure and time cannot be presented in which they must be performed without defect.<sup>9</sup>

This [technique] consists more in the time and measure than in the rapid movement, since if one arrives early or late at [58v] the fixed end, the whole thing is worth nothing.<sup>10</sup> Two things are looked for in the one who wishes to practice this profession: chest<sup>11</sup> and throat [*gola*], chest so as to be able to carry out such a quantity and such a number of notes (*figure*) to a correct conclusion, throat, then, so as to be able to deliver them easily. Because many, having neither chest nor flanks, must interrupt their plans in four or six figures (*figure*)<sup>12</sup> or must close with an interruption in the middle,<sup>13</sup> and if indeed they don't finish, unwillingly in order to take a breath they take too long, so that they are not able to be in time when necessary. Others because of a defect of the throat cannot articulate the

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<sup>7</sup> I have chosen to retain the sixteenth-century note values in equivalents and not to modernize them to faster modern speeds.

<sup>8</sup> This would be a very welcome definition of the term at a time when terminology in general was imprecise and inconsistent, but Zacconi continues to use both terms, *gorgia* and *vaghezza*, not only indiscriminately but also adds to them the term *passaggio* and identifies all as meaning the same thing, even though he seems to use all at times also with different meanings.

<sup>9</sup> Zacconi discusses tempo and misura in chapters 28 and 29 of this same book, which is discussed below.

<sup>10</sup> This might well seem to say the opposite of what Zacconi really means and what is consistent with other authors. First, *tempo* here I translate as “time,” which involves unarticulated duration, as indicated by the word’s connection with measure (*misura*), duration articulated in specific rhythmic values, which together refer to the durational values of notes in the modern sense. As he says, the singer does not have to sing the notes fast—thus he can vary the tempo in the modern sense—but he must keep the time and measure—durational values—correct relative to each other and the other parts. If the rhythmic values are performed incorrectly, then the singer might get to the end too soon or too late relative to the other parts. It must be remembered that this technique is only in the context of polyphonic music, so that all the parts must line up vertically in proper time. Zacconi’s description of tempo variable in the modern sense is implicit only, but strict relative rhythm values is explicit and consistent with other sources. MacClintock’s translation of this passage (*Readings in the History of Music in Performance*) is more in the nature of a paraphrase and differs from my own for reasons that I cannot deduce from the original text. I prefer to stand by my present translation and understanding. More on this issue appears below in notes 22 and 59.

<sup>11</sup> The issue of “chest” is really that of breath as the issue of throat is that of the *disposizione* or the ability for throat articulation that is necessary in the diminution tradition.

<sup>12</sup> This statement is startling. Zacconi has been speaking of the small note values in eighth- or sixteenth-notes resulting from diminution of a whole-note, which latter at the time moved at about 70 bpm. It seems utterly incredible to believe that Zacconi refers to singers who cannot sustain air for more than four to six eighth-notes at that tempo! The alternatives seem to be two, either he is grossly exaggerating or here he does not mean “notes” but “figures. Eight eighth-notes (much less four or six) covering the duration of one beat at 70 bpm is absurdly short as a duration in excess of the ability of many singers. Since Zacconi’s examples show patterns or figures typically in groups of four eighth-notes, four to six such (half-note equivalent) figures equal only two or three whole-notes at 70 bpm each—still quite short for all but an emphysematic singer, but at least more believable than the alternative. Here the term *figura* clearly must mean a musical figure consisting of several notes and not an individual note; if not, then the statement is irredeemably ridiculous.

<sup>13</sup> Either they cannot complete four or six figures and so have to change their plans, or they have to take a breath in the middle.

figures so strongly, that is, they do not perform them sufficiently well so as to be understood as throat articulation (*gorgia*)<sup>14</sup>.

Some are accustomed to acquire it [throat articulation] easily, and these are those whose nature instructs and prepares it. Some others acquire it with labor and these are those who have made acquisition of it with great study.

The first kind will always be more elaborate and will delight more than the second kind. But, those whose nature disposes it and whose skill accommodates it are fortunate beyond all others in this profession.

In all the individual arts, the one who occupies himself with it [the art]<sup>15</sup> completely, with time he makes an abundant possession of it. But in this profession one who labors endures labor in vain on every occasion that nature does not help him some little; we see that this is true expressly because he to whom nature has been so benevolent and liberal by singing the little that he knows, takes away the place for the first singer who goes among the honored circles, and because this [*questa = gorgia*] is a quality above all the other excellences of the singers, one takes care so as not to make any one of these people listening to these improvised embellishments (*vaghezze*) laugh at him. One should first correct all the defects<sup>16</sup> mentioned above and all those abhorrent things that have been called to attention above, which if a bad habit ever is unbecoming in a singer, in the one who is singing diminutions (*gorgheggia*) it is even more so than for any other, for fear that he is observed and wondered at by the listeners more than another one who delights more by singing well and having an elegant (*vaghe*) style.

He who wants to make a diminution (*gorgia*) must take care to make it extremely well, otherwise to leave it alone if he cannot do it perfectly because there is nothing that has a greater need of a precise definition and perfect measure as much as this, since each little defect and failure that one discerns and recognizes in it, any beauty whatever in it is spoiled and ruined and instead of pleasing or delighting, not only disgusts<sup>17</sup> and annoys but even irritates and offends. Whence, out of necessity and for reason if one is wishing to preserve his reputation, one must not undertake it [*gorgia*] so as not, then, to do it well and with grace (*gratia*), so that, then, rather one makes oneself scorned and derided.

Any time, then, that the singer wants to put to the test whether he can succeed at diminution (*gorgia*), commonly called *passaggi*,<sup>18</sup> let him try in advance when he sings with others in ensemble, and those [in the ensemble] who have no partners in their parts [i.e., their parts are not doubled], [they] should try when all the voices make a full harmony, and thus let them practice so much that they may be able at some time to make themselves heard. But, because the one who does as I say must necessarily be a judge of himself, and the man in judging himself by himself alone often does not always tell his errors, in order to have a sincere and just opinion it is well to seek from reliable friends whether

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<sup>14</sup> It is possible that in this instance Zacconi means only “diminution technique,” but in this context an emphasis on the means of articulation seems justified.

<sup>15</sup> Zacconi’s Italian does not provide a clear referent for “it.”

<sup>16</sup> Presumably he refers to time, measure and breathing.

<sup>17</sup> The word *satia* is unknown to modern dictionaries. It is surely a loan from Latin *satiare*, “satisfy” in its negative sense of glut, cloy, disgust. Zacconi coins several neologisms and was influenced by Latin, despite admitting his command of that language was not great.

<sup>18</sup> This passage provides an important link in terminology in that it identifies the term *passaggio* with *gorgia*, which he has already identified with *vaghezza*, see note 8.

he in doing it gives delight and sounds good, and this is why many believe they are doing it and do it so little as can be said not at all.

On the contrary, I have seen some who believe they are doing it by wavering their voice and moving their head, but they aren't doing it, and anyone who speaks to them about it, that they should try<sup>19</sup> to do it better, they do it worse, because of which the listeners more willingly would listen to them if they were to sing as they did before.<sup>20</sup>

For this reason I say that by having oneself judged by others and willingly listening to others' opinion, the man avoids many impediments and fends off many abuses and errors.

The most beautiful and perfect thing that one searches for in making diminutions (*gorgheggiare*) is time and measure, which ornaments and spices all the figures collected and united, and he who guides or leads them beyond [i.e., in violation of] this measure and time scatters anything beautiful and loses in the end without any thanks.

This, [time and measure] then, is the most difficult thing that is in the diminution (*gorgia*), and this has more need of diligence and study than there is in wanting to produce together so many notes (*figure*); however, that singer will always be more praised who with a small diminution (*gorgia*) made in time goes only a little way<sup>21</sup> than the one who in going a long way arrives either late or early.<sup>22</sup> Rather, he who listens to and hears, they give infinite praise to him who does little but well, and admiring him always are expecting something better; and how much better it is that they should go away content with little and good than because of too much and bad they go off disgusted, bored and badly satisfied.

But the one who sets himself to this undertaking, let him take care first of all to do it well and then to measure it in time, so that by it he may cheer and satisfy everyone, and let him take care for the first rule, that in beginning whatever he sings, the other parts being silent, he does not begin with a diminution (*gorgia*); and no less, immediately after the said beginning when the others are not singing, let him [not] make himself heard with those embellishments (*vaghezze*), because it is customarily said that the high pleases [59r] by contrast with the low and one voice alone provides little delight as all know, indeed, many voices together make a sweet and gentle harmony.

Because of this, one sees that a counterpoint in the low or in the high [voice] without the other parts does not please because the contrast of the parts makes delight. Thus as well, the sweetness of the diminution (*gorgia*) is born from that charming and precise movement that the parts make whenever one of them moves more quickly.

The beginnings, then, if they are not all together and continuous [i.e., they enter successively], they ought always to be performed with simple and clear accents (*accenti*)<sup>23</sup> so that all the parts may be heard better when entering. Because that thing is more loved that is less expected and all the more as it comes unforeseen.

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<sup>19</sup> Zacconi either as a dialectical variant or an idiosyncrasy has *forzarsi* for *sforzarsi*.

<sup>20</sup> This short paragraph reveals a feature of Zacconi's style, in that for short clauses he uses the paratactical, non-subordinated syntax characteristic of speech.

<sup>21</sup> Zacconi reads *poco si lontana*, thus apparently creating the pronominal verb *lontanarsi* from the adjective *lontano* in both this and the next phrase. As a neologism I take it to mean "go far," in this phrase "goes little far."

<sup>22</sup> Again, Zacconi's description can be misleading. In context he appears to be consistent in allowing changes in overall tempo, what he objects to in regard to "*tempo e misura*" is performance of rhythmic values incorrectly so as to end in the wrong place. Thus, I continue to translate "*tempo*" as "time."

<sup>23</sup> Obviously he means the ornament *accento*.



Whence, in order to reveal better how unbecoming it is when one part begins with a diminution (*gorgia*) while the other parts remain silent, I say that everyone can make a diminution (*gorgheggiare*) by singing alone, because even though the people do not get all the delight from them, these diminutions (*gorgie*), [namely] the delight they would get from them if they were accompanied by the other parts, nonetheless they have this, anyway, that they don't get out of tune with any other; but the beauty and difficulty consists in giving pleasure to another without ugliness or dissonance, and the player of anything whatever is not praised for playing alone but for playing well and for being actively accompanied [i.e., engaged with others].

Further, that singer who at the entrance of singers not known to him takes upon himself all the burden in making diminutions (*gorgheggiare*) not only is worthy of reproach, on the grounds of trying to pretend that he knows something, but even does something such as brings upon him the shame and dishonor of it. Because if there, where he finds himself, he encounters there one better than he is, in the midst of his labors with a new style he can be replaced and thus deprived of all that he has earned up till then, so that they do very well and wisely who in the clubs where one sings,<sup>24</sup> when they have to sing they never cover up the first passage of music whatever they do. But, prudently and skillfully they quietly keep listening to the others so as to hear what the others know, since in every place and time a man can learn, but that depends on how much he listens. Then since he has listened he begins gradually to come forth with his own embellishments (*vaghezze*), which thus awakening in the listeners a new delight, he acquires an immortal fame.

In addition, the singer should take care at the end of any song not to do what many little wise and little practiced in this profession do, who make such a great mass of embellishments (*vaghezze*), because they want to show off everything at the end and have all the middle left empty and barren.

Because even little boys without any danger and labor run upon a straight beam, when, however, that beam lies on the ground and if it is there on the level long and stretched out, because they can see the ground nearby and close and they think that in falling nothing bad will happen, but when it is raised up high so that thus they can see the dangers and the precipice with the ease of falling, not only do they get afraid and fear to run there, but even when they have become men they fear and get afraid of the threateningly injurious fall.

Thus, the one who makes a diminution (*gorgia*) ought not solely show his valor at the end, but in the middle even ought he to show with boldness his courageous heart.

Similarly, let those restrain themselves who at the said end never are satisfied with diminutions (*gorgheggiare*), [but rather] do what all the members of the ensemble are expecting at the end of the songs, that, as best possible, let him make the decision, whichever person has this decision.

A certain amount of embellishment and ornamentation is proper at the end, when, however, also in the middle it has been ornamented and embellished, otherwise, it is not permitted. Those who do it are worthy of blame, since not being able to do something good, they disrupt the others who are making something beautiful in it.

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<sup>24</sup> This is an interesting glimpse into what is apparently trained "amateur" music making.

Nor must the vice be overlooked of those who in order to have the diminution (*gorgia*) become lovely,<sup>25</sup> they would like to do some little thing on every note (*figura*) and in doing it, even if it is good, they spoil the words and syllables.

Whence, in order to prevent them from many errors, beyond the other rules I want to give them this advice, that they take care in making passaggi (*passaggi*) on quarter-notes, especially when they are accompanied by the syllables, because the nature of their speed does not accommodate a long diminution (*diminution*),<sup>26</sup> and they do not bear fragmentation except in these and other similar occasions.

**Here Zacconi presents musical examples  
as samples of passaggi.<sup>27</sup>**

[59v] But, whenever one finds them [quarter-notes] such that they must be accompanied by one syllable only, they can be embellished [*invaghirsì*] confidently because they will turn out more beautiful because of the embellishment (*vaghezza*). On half-notes, now, because they are of a longer nature and taking up more time, one can easily do whatever one wants, provided that the said syllables or words are not spoiled.

On the other hand, when more half-notes are found together they can all be ornamented (*fiorire*), on any occasion when expanding it proves convenient to the singer and when the words are not obscured. On whole-notes, on breves and other larger notes (*figure*)<sup>28</sup> because they naturally require a long time, as much as one sees they require, because of this, many embellishments

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<sup>25</sup> This is an attested sense of the adjective *amico*, see *Cambridge Italian Dictionary s.v.*

<sup>26</sup> It seems very peculiar that this is Zacconi's first use of the word.

<sup>27</sup> It is somewhat difficult to interpret what Zacconi means in these examples because he does not illustrate "before and after," so that the reader is left to infer which the examples intend to represent. At the beginning of the chapter Zacconi said that passaggi are made using eighth- and sixteenth-notes, which later instructions, as well as common sense, make clear are the result of diminution applied to notes of long values. Here he says that passaggi on quarter-notes (*nelle semim[inime]*) should be avoided because the note value is so short, and especially in certain instances of text setting; as he says below when a quarter-note has only one text syllable it is acceptable to make a passaggio. He then gives four examples, which he says are exceptions on which passaggi can be made. The problem for the reader arises from the fact that the examples all look like the result of diminution in (not on) quarter-notes, the first three of only three or four quarter-notes. The fourth example, however, itself looks like a fairly long melismatic passaggio in quarter-notes on a single syllable! Zacconi's subsequent explanations on longer note values support a face-value interpretation of what he means, i.e., that these quarter-notes are appropriate for further diminution, though he does not explain why. To modern sensibilities, which is judging anachronistically and so unjustified, such further diminution of an already florid passage, as in the case of the fourth example, would seem an example of bad taste. It must be remembered, however, that aesthetics have changed drastically and that, to the modern perspective, the concrete evidence of the diminution technique in practice in polyphonic music of the time seems virtually inconceivable and a startling vitiation of polyphonic music as performed today. Long trained in harmonic practice, our ears find much more desirable the sonorities produced by polyphony than the sound of constant florid contrapuntal improvisation that would, to our sensibilities, obscure those sonorities.

<sup>28</sup> Here is an indisputably clear example of Zacconi's ambiguous use of *figura*, for here it cannot possibly mean anything other than a single note, such as he has been discussing, whereas in the earlier example of the emphysematic singer it makes most sense to have considered it as "figure," see note 12.

(*vaghezze*)<sup>29</sup> can be gathered together in them and ornament (*ornare*) these gatherings as it seems good and pleases each, or make use of them in more necessary and opportune places, as well separately on a syllable as on a word. So that the one who has a desire to learn to make diminutions (*gorgheggiare*) may see the places and how they are ornamented (*si fioriscano*), these few examples printed below are produced for him.

**Here Zacconi gives Musical Examples  
On the diminution of half-notes  
and notes of greater value.<sup>30</sup>**

[Instructions for the examples] By contemplating and trying them out in singing, one can practice them enough so that in time he may master them.<sup>31</sup>

[60r] These examples can be accommodated to any part whatever, as well in natural, high (*acuta*) as in low (grave), and over-high (*sopra acuta*).<sup>32</sup> But, because professional performers could laugh at these my little efforts, seeing them being placed before them, they who need something more learned and mature, for this I ask to be excused [on the grounds] that I don't labor to teach these things to them who know how, because I would demonstrate that I don't have the knowledge, but indeed, I intend to demonstrate them to desirous students and to put before them by clear and visible example all those things that they desire to see and know about, because when they do not have an understanding of it they may burn for it and be consumed to have some light about it.

Those, then, who want to have these my little efforts and those that follow, and if he wants to be master of them, let him arm himself first with patience and then study them often, so that the efforts made on them by long study easily will make him master of them.

Whence in order to facilitate the way better, more than the [example] that they see above has facilitated it [the way] for them,<sup>33</sup> I say that as if singing the notes (*figure*) of an easy duo,<sup>34</sup> as the saying

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<sup>29</sup> Here Zacconi seems to use *vaghezza* in the other more restricted sense as equal to ornamental figure. Again, Zacconi's variations in terminology seem to arise only from literary stylistic concerns.

<sup>30</sup> In these examples Zacconi does, fortunately, give before and after illustrations. The "before" is separated by a single bar-line from the "after," and the individual examples from each other by a double bar. The diminutions are exclusively in eighth-notes. Although the examples are few, rather casually presented and not organized in any apparent pedagogical progression, Zacconi provides instructions for their practice.

<sup>31</sup> Both examples and instructions seem rather perfunctory.

<sup>32</sup> I have been unable to find any explanation of these terms by Zacconi in my admittedly cursory examination of the remainder of his text. These appear to possess the significance of physiological vocal ranges or qualities rather than vocal "parts" of a score. Even by the early baroque the opinions in regard to vocal ranges were by no means uniform (see Brown/Sadie, *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*, p.100 ff.) Generally, "natural" is the term used at this time for the chest voice. High and low seem here to refer to ranges within the natural and *sopra acuta* may refer to head voice or falsetto, about which also there was no agreement.

<sup>33</sup> As a point of grammar, Zacconi seems to use *gli* as a conjunctive pronoun for both singular and plural third person. But, he also seems casually to switch between singular and plural forms, which might equally account for the phenomenon. *Cambridge Italian Dictionary* recognizes the use of *gli* as the dative third plural in colloquial speech, many characteristics of which Zacconi's prose exhibits.

<sup>34</sup> MacClintock has silently understood for Zacconi's "*di un difacil Duo*" the reading "*di un facil Duo*," which I believe is certainly correct, the superfluous "*di*" undoubtedly conditioned by the preceding *di* as a result of careless editing or typesetting—not the only instance.

commonly is,<sup>35</sup> and they labor to perform the said notes (*figure*) in time so that the eighth-notes particularly that they find in it may have no defect or lack, thus let the concept be of how they [the eighth-notes] ought to be performed in a diminution (*gorgia*), and if he wants to take a good style in this, let him take one of the said duos where there are quite a few eighth-notes, and when he is quite confident about it let him try to sing it to some words, and where there is a multitude of them [i.e., eighth-notes], sing there one syllable so that he will quickly notice where the difficulty exists, and let him work at it one, two, three or more times until it results that he perceives he is making good progress in it.<sup>36</sup>

But wherever in performing the said syllables he suffers fatigue and has difficulty, he must try to sing them so many times that he can sing them well habitually and can notice that he is singing them with the syllables lively and full as he would sing them if he enjoyed the notes,<sup>37</sup> or that he were singing them with one small part of a word by which he should make them so common and familiar that he would quickly know how to perform with the syllables not only those (studied so many times) but even how to perform any others as might be necessary.

Because by that exercise there is produced a principle of moving the voice with velocity, which by oneself, then, according to the convenience of nature without a teacher can be introduced into diminutions (*gorgie*) and passaggi (*passaggi*).<sup>38</sup>

Whence similarly in order to simplify the way for them<sup>39</sup> and to put him on the way to becoming a true performer in it and proper master, I say that one who wants to do well must sing on any sample and example whatever all the five vowels, which are A, E, I, O, U, because some of them need to be performed closed, like I and U, some others half open like E and O and one wide like A. He will see that I and U are easily pronounced and that with a little more effort E and O are executed, but that A, because it needs more air than all the others, one has more difficulty to perform.

Being thus trained in them, no obstacle at all can befall them<sup>40</sup> because all the common words in the vulgar language [i.e., Italian] end in a vowel and even a great part of those in Latin. So as to leave on this subject only to say, because of the great zeal and desire that I have to help the singer I say, that

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<sup>35</sup> For two reasons it seems that Zacconi may refer to an instrumental piece. First, he is clearly somewhat uncertain as to what to call it at a time when independent instrumental music was less common than vocal music. He alludes to setting and singing it to words, as though it is untexted and words must perforce be added to it.

<sup>36</sup> This seems a fairly confident rendition of a somewhat tortured paragraph.

<sup>37</sup> I conjecture that "*se le notegiasse*" is a combination of a misprint and an archaic form and stands for "*se le note giasse*" with *giasse* a presumed imperfect subjunctive of *gioare*, an obsolete alternate form of *gioire*, also as an obsolete transitive. See *Cambridge Italian Dictionary*. However, this requires the understanding of *note* = notes, when *figura* is Zacconi's term. I find no help from *nozze*, *note*, or *gioia*, or from any Latin source.

<sup>38</sup> Note that Zacconi has clearly said that a *gorgia* is a *passaggio* as commonly called. So it is uncertain whether he is here making a distinction or indulging in repetition as a quirk of style.

<sup>39</sup> Zacconi uses the construction "*per facilitarli . . . la via*" which appears to mean "so as to simplify the way for them," which takes the accusative plural *li* as an effective dative. Sansoni (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) recognizes something similar s.v. *Facilitare* (2), "*cercheremo di facilitarla nel pagamento*, we shall try to meet you over payment," but it has already been noted that he also uses "*li*" as dative plural. In this case the sense is clearer than the grammar.

<sup>40</sup> "*non li potrà accadere veruno intoppo*" is a good example of Zacconi's still unstable prose style. *Veruno intoppo* must be subject of *potrà accadere*, which latter is attested as only in intransitive and impersonal forms and so cannot take an accusative object *li*, but *accadere*, "happen to" takes the preposition "*à*," making this the dative plural.

even the tremolo, that is the trembling voice, is the true gate of entering into *passaggi* (*passaggi*), and of [setting in motion]<sup>41</sup> the throat (*gorgie*) because with greater ease the ship departs when it has first been set in motion than when in the beginning it needs to be moved, and the leaper leaps better if before he leaps he moves into the leap.

This tremolo ought to be precise and lovely because the excessive and forced wearies and annoys. It is of such a nature that in using it, it ought always to be used, so that the use is converted into habit because that continuous moving of the voice aids and pleasantly stimulates the motion<sup>42</sup> of the throat (*gorgie*)<sup>43</sup> and facilitates admirably the beginnings of *passaggi* (*passaggi*). This motion as I say ought not to be except with a just haste, but robust and vigorous.

The end ought to be exact and well-handled, the middle entirely equal and continuous so that one hears the said beginning no more than the middle and the end,<sup>44</sup> and no more the end and the beginning than the middle, because every obscurity that one makes in it as well as displaying a fear takes away all the good delight. If there is anyone who by assiduous and individual study, taking pleasure and delight in my first examples, has become a master of them, by giving the opportunity that by these simple and few they would undertake other larger ones, I produce this other series of them that is seen here.

#### [60v] Musical examples continued.

*Zacconi gives not quite a page full of additional examples, in before-and-after form, in eighth-notes and most relying heavily on scale patterns.*

With these one can lengthen and extend quite a distance with more than eight eighth-notes. But, it must be noted that the human voice can with difficulty proceed in leaps in these rapid notes (*prestezze*) and velocity, in regard to the fact that our voice does not have that facility that the hands possess in playing a keyboard instrument, but if the notes (*figure*) appear to him by step with these few

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<sup>41</sup> "Setting in motion" is a conjecture for the obscure *impataonirse*. The word is either an unknown neologism or the result of a misprint, the latter somewhat indicated by the incorrect reflexive ending *-irse* for *-irsi*. MacClintock silently suggests "become proficient in the gorgia." The present translation is at least consistent with the idea of starting something more easily that has already received a small impulse, and the Italian *impeto*, "impulse, impetus" looks at least a little like *impataonirse*. See also note 42.

<sup>42</sup> The phrase "stimulates the motion of the throat (*gorgie*)" seems to repeat the idea above and so lends support to the present understanding of the obscure "*impataonirse*."

<sup>43</sup> By use of the plural *gorgie* Zacconi probably means the vocal cords.

<sup>44</sup> In the earlier description of the tremolo it seems that as a trembling of the voice (*la voce tremante*) Zacconi might have been referring to vibrato, which idea is then reinforced by saying that it ought always to be used. The description in this passage, however, does not support that interpretation because of its reference to a beginning, middle and end. This sounds more like one of the two other possible meanings, the pulse on a single pitch, as Caccini (1601) and Rognoni (1620) describe a tremolo, or a trill as Praetorius (1619) or the instrumentalists Ganassi (1535) and Diruta (1593) adduce. Unfortunately, Bovicelli's description is too confused to be of much use. The Caccini-Rognoni tradition seems the more likely.

breaks,<sup>45</sup> so that he sees the way they are broken up, and one proceeds by leap, it will not fail in the progress of the *passaggi* (*passaggi*) to appear in what way it is possible to leap so as to keep the singer nimble and free.<sup>46</sup> Those<sup>47</sup> places, then, that invite singers to make ornaments (*fioretti*)<sup>48</sup> and *passaggi* (*passaggi*) are the cadences, which are of a nature that the one who does not know how to do them hinders and wastes every beauty and renders them to our ears full of deformity, whence so as to show some of them, all the specific examples below are produced:<sup>49</sup>

### Musical Examples extend from the bottom of 60r to the beginning of 61v

[61v] so that singers near and far can take them and easily make use of them as much in one part as in the others.

Moreover,<sup>50</sup> one way of ornamenting (*fiorire*) a cadence is found that—happy is that singer who executes it well and manages it perfectly—does not enter except on [the pitches] la-fa-la, as here is seen.<sup>51</sup>

### Musical Example<sup>52</sup>

Not only in this way that it appears here but also so as to make it fall well, it is necessary for the *fa* accidental<sup>53</sup> to precede it<sup>54</sup> when wanting to make it sound as it ought to sound according to its nature. Because I am uncertain of being understood by all, so that everyone may understand me and that such a beautiful manner not be lost, despite the fact that one of them has been created and made

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<sup>45</sup> This sounds rather like Zacconi refers to the repetitive or stereotyped patterns that play a large part in the *passaggi* that he presents and that the “breaks” (*rottore*) refer to the articulation points between these patterns. If so, then *figure* here could refer to figures rather than notes. It is unclear.

<sup>46</sup> The passage from “but if the figures” to this point presents several ambiguities resulting from Zacconi’s typical casual approach to grammar. The main issue is probably the need to understand “*ne*” as the negative conjunction “*né*” and not as pronominal “*ne*” dependent on the following verb “*mancherà*.”

<sup>47</sup> MacClintock’s translation resumes here, which perhaps hints at finding some of Zacconi’s grammar nearly unintelligible, as do I.

<sup>48</sup> Zacconi begins to use this term, introduced about mid-chapter, increasingly frequently until the end of the chapter, thereby increasing his terminological ambiguity yet more.

<sup>49</sup> Zacconi leaves implicit and unexplained that the improvisatory tradition recognizes and distinguishes two occasions for *passaggi*, at internal positions of the musical phrase and at cadences, the latter making greater use of standard ornamental figures.

<sup>50</sup> The final section of MacClintock’s translation is a partial paraphrase of this paragraph and ends at “executes it well.”

<sup>51</sup> If Zacconi’s earlier reference to the tremolo referred to the modern idea of a trill, it is strange that he does not connect the two, the tremolo and the la-fa-la, which latter does conform to a trill.

<sup>52</sup> The example shows the ornament entering on E (elami in the Guidonian system) and ascending to F (fefaut), thus the ornament would be on the Guidonian syllables of la-fa-la, etc. The ornament itself would be described in modern terms as an unprepared trill terminating on the main pitch with an elaborate turned termination extending to a third below the main pitch before ascending back to the main pitch, E.

<sup>53</sup> By “*fa accidentale*” Zacconi can only mean “the auxiliary pitch *fa*” (F) of the ornament.

<sup>54</sup> This is the clearest example yet encountered in the present text of Zacconi’s use of “*li*” as equal to the third person masculine singular dative pronoun “*gli*.” See the Translator’s Preface for a fuller discussion.

in the above example, another of them is produced in its own way and the proper place where it must be used.

### Musical Example<sup>55</sup>

Some passages [*passi* not *passaggi*] even are found that can be said are like common cadences, because they are discovered in almost every song, and those singers who don't know much about diminution (*gorgia*), feeling induced, would like even to make something beautiful there and because of unsuitability they are little appropriate. For which reason so as to divert him from things bad and ugly and to present to them some aid and light so that with this light and aid they may be able to correct themselves, and to restrain or choose a good manner, I produce some more of them in the series given below.

### Musical Examples 61v-62r

[62r] If what I most desire should happen to anyone, and to the end I would wish, namely that of these my *vaghezze*, *fioretti* and *passaggi*<sup>56</sup> he should become master, I remind him that it is not always good to use them, because also at some times a simple adornment pleases a lady, but so as to alternate them and render the others more lovely these simple diminutions (*rottore*) may be imposed so that of these also, given a time and place, he may prefer and make use of them for his convenience.

### Musical Examples

[62v] All these things look for aptitude, agility and time, without which nothing good is produced, and the singer in using or adopting them has to have this care of taking so many notes (*figure*) in one breath as he can conveniently perform. This is said because many in making a diminution (*gorgia*) exceed the number of eight notes (*figure*) per beat (*tatto*),<sup>57</sup> but because they arrange and adapt them well,<sup>58</sup> they provide agreeable pleasure, and no one (even if a good singer or composer) notices that there are too many of them. Instead, rather, if they put the defined number [i.e., the metrically correct number] of them under their beat (*tatto*) and that specific number does not fall in time [rhythmically correctly], it would always be judged that it were either too many or too few of

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<sup>55</sup> The only distinction in this example from the former is that the "before" form of this second example now includes an F (fefault) in the melody prior to the appearance of the F in the improvised ornament.

<sup>56</sup> I leave these terms untranslated in order to demonstrate Zacconi's ambiguity and the impossibility of determining any distinct meanings, if any he means!

<sup>57</sup> Here *figure* appears to refer to individual notes, not figures. According to *Harvard Dictionary* s.v. "Tactus," in the sixteenth century the ordinary tactus (beat) was the semibreve or whole-note. Thus eight notes in a semibreve would be eight eighth-notes, but the whole-note moved at about 70 bpm.

<sup>58</sup> Here in Zacconi's phrase "*gli l'acconciano*" *gli* can only be understood as the masculine nominative third plural pronoun, an indication of the fluidity of Zacconi's language as regards many aspects of grammar and especially here of pronouns, as often noted.

them.<sup>59</sup> For this I advise students that if the number of notes (*figure*) does not conform well in their diminutions (*gorgie*) to the number of notes in the beat (*tatto*) it doesn't matter, provided that they fall without flaw with measure and time and that in performing them one doesn't notice the defect and dissonance in them, because in this ability and profession many who make diminutions (*gorgheggiano*) well make lovely (*vaghi*) and beautiful passaggi (*passaggi*) that, were one to put them in writing—if he would find them always too many or too few—nonetheless he doesn't recognize in them even a tiny defect or failing. Similarly, in cadences, that replication of sol-fa-sol; la-sol-la; fa-mi-fa; and the others can be held as long as all the time lasts that is required. There are some who replicate in [the cadences?] notes[or figures?] (*figure*) of sixteenth-notes, and because they are repeating them [the cadences or figures?] with the same notes (*figure*), this is nothing other than multiplying them.<sup>60</sup> For this I don't provide another example of them believing I am understood in simple words.<sup>61</sup> But in making use of them [the examples] they can choose of them as many of them as they have need. I want to give this advice, that they guard against performing the end of the cadence languidly or dying as some do who believe they are making them lovely (*vaghe*) and beautiful [but] make them so deformed, ugly and unseemly that they make the listeners cover their ears so as not to hear, because the lower parts produce a defect in them and makes them appear so crude that they become wild and boorish. I believe I am understood, and if by chance someone does not understand me, I say this so as to make him understand: that the last part of the cadence, which is that nearest to the end, when wanting to provide it with accenti, by a double or simple accento, one ought never perform the lower third so languidly that in ascending he might demonstrate allowing it to draw out there unintentionally and to make it dragged out. This cannot be demonstrated with examples since this difficulty consists in bad performance of the notes (*figure*). But, if all do not understand me, they must excuse me, because I don't know how better to make myself understood about it, with what words better to demonstrate it.<sup>62</sup> Among singers [63r] it is customary to call a languid cadence, "dragged out" (*strascinata* = modern *trascinata*) or half-alive because of little vivacity and vigor, which those singing give to it. There is not lacking even a way to be able to beautify any notes (*figure*) in the bass or in other lower parts with ordinary accenti, which serve

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<sup>59</sup> In order to make sense of this passage in light of Zacconi's discussion of tempo/time in chapters 28 and 29, as well as his earlier discussions in this chapter, it must be understood that he is thinking in two different levels of tempo/time (= duration). In the first instance a good performer can adjust the lower level of duration of individual notes, say nine eighth-notes, so as to make them fit inconspicuously into the higher duration of a whole-note. But, lesser singers, if they sing eight eighth-notes to a whole-note but make them too long or too short, will cause a disruption to the time/tempo duration at the larger level of the whole-note as well, so that the *passaggio* won't "fit" the polyphonic context and line up vertically. See also notes 10 and 22.

<sup>60</sup> This is a good, or rather bad, example of Zacconi's ambiguity as to referents. The possible referents here are all feminine plural, and it is possible that he uses *figure* to mean both "notes" and "figures," making three possible referents. My conjecture is that he is saying "some people replicate eighth-note cadential figures in sixteenth-notes and, because they are merely repeating the same pitches in faster notes, they really aren't introducing new figures, just multiplying the same ones. For this reason I won't show an example because it is easily understood."

<sup>61</sup> Zacconi's phrase is *con semplice parole*. Ironically, Zacconi doubtless meant no irony despite the ambiguity, prolixity and convolutions in this passage.

<sup>62</sup> Zacconi's second attempt to explain this is almost more incomprehensible than the first. The clue to understanding is his mention of dragging out the lower third. What he is describing is that some careless singers in wishing to ornament the very end of the cadence introduce pitches that can cause dissonance with the lower voices if the ornament is prolonged too far.



in all these places that the said low parts support the high ones. In order to show some examples of them, the samples of them are written below.

### Musical Examples to end of 63r

[63v] For the rest, then, so that students may know better [as to] how to master my *passaggi* (*passaggi*) and may make themselves master of them, I have produced this example of them below, which is a motet, all complete,<sup>63</sup> thus by it they may be better able to have light how they may ornament (*fiorischino*) songs and for a greater knowledge not only have I wanted to ornament (*fiorire*) one part, but also with the ornamented (*fiorita*) part I have wanted to place the part as it is naturally [i.e., not embellished]. But always the first series of notes represents the adorned version and the second unadorned.

### Musical Example of Unadorned and Adorned Motet 63v-64v<sup>64</sup>

[64v] These few ornaments (*ornamenti*) and embellishments (*vaghezze*) can serve in every other occasion. That singer who will make use of these few of them well can call himself content that many embellishments (*vaghezze*), although they are delightful to our ears, do not for this reason always please. Rather, I have found at times that composers have avoided the occasion of having some of their works sung because they do not want to have them sung and given into the hands of such singers, for no other [reason] only because they [the composers] would be pleased to hear them with accents pure and simple so that the artistry with which they were composed could be heard.

But, if anyone should marvel at this and after marveling search out the reason why a motet more than a madrigal is appropriate for ornamentation (*fiorirlo*) and I should have chosen it to show ornamented (*fioriti*) examples, he should know that I have chosen it<sup>65</sup> because ordinarily madrigals are more difficult than motets, for which reason I decided that it is appropriate for beginners and, for those who do not know how, it is better than something else, the one exercised in these few will be able to take advantage of whatever he likes. Whence, so that he can do it better, I thought to add here all of these examples below.

### Musical Examples 64v-75r

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<sup>63</sup> It is, in fact, only a single voice of a motet "all complete."

<sup>64</sup> This is the most interesting of Zacconi's examples. The citation of passages from real music both unadorned and unadorned is a practice too little utilized among the authors on the subject.

<sup>65</sup> It is worth the trouble to digress on a linguistic characteristic of Zacconi's prose that was mentioned in the translator's preface. This is the second time in two lines that Zacconi has used the verb *eleggere* with the reflexive pronoun in an apparent pronominal sense. For most of such creations of his there are no attested reflexive or pronominal uses, which does not preclude their idiosyncratic use, which seems to be the case here. The creation of a pronominal verb by an author is often for the purpose of conveying the subject's special interest in the action. Here Zacconi seems to be saying not simple "I chose," but "I preferred," or "I personally chose." This is a common linguistic device in Italian. What makes it interesting in this connection is that it seems to constitute a regular feature of Zacconi's style. See Battaglia & Pernicone, *Grammatica Italiana* (1951) p. 278.

[75r] Of these one person will choose some and another person will choose others until in the end all have been taken, because that glove that doesn't fit one person well is good for another until all are sold and gone. But because there could be some of those who would be pleased more than others and those who are pleased to be of a contrary voice and part, in order to open the way for them<sup>66</sup> in what way one thing alone can work suitably in all places. Having taken the first example in these all-purpose (*universali*) passaggi (*passaggi*) and arranged it for all, where it can be so arranged, one demonstrates what can be done with the others and in as many parts of the hand<sup>67</sup> a single thing can come within, as is seen here.

### Musical Examples 75r-75v

[75v] For no other [reason] have I wanted to demonstrate in how many places only one thing can be adapted, only because if one by inclination and aid of nature, or by individual study, becomes a master, more one [example] than of another, as customarily frequently happens, he can see that in different places it is possible to write some, and one can with only one passaggio (*passaggio*) in more and more places be able to distinguish himself, because diminution (*gorgia*) does not so much consist in variety or diversity of passaggi (*passaggi*) as in a just and defined quantity of notes [or figures?] (*figure*). In respect to the great speed that it requires, it does not permit to be discerned whether what indeed was uttered repeats or returns for utterance.<sup>68</sup> Rather than a small quantity of figures [or notes?] (*figure*) it can by means of a circle or a corona<sup>69</sup> be repeated and replicated<sup>70</sup> more times, because the one who listens and hears, by hearing and listening<sup>71</sup> feels so great a delight in that gentle and rapid motion of the voice, that by the sweetness and its speed does not notice that little [i.e. the part that is repeated]—when [the *passaggio* is] not interrupted—being repeated more times. Also, then, it is better without comparison that one should do one thing often and well (most especially in the activity of ornaments (*fioretti*) and passaggi (*passaggi*)), than in doing a diversity to do them diversely bad, because one carries away less shame and less in what one does carry away, because he never has a great number of listeners who know either that what they hear [as to] whether it is the same thing repeated, or whether they find in it something new. Also even those who by means of the art of composition or by means of the profession [of singing], realize it [the repetition], in the presence of the audience, who are well pleased with something good repeated often, they are not going to shame the singing and

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<sup>66</sup> The text is *per aprirli la via*. This is perhaps the clearest example in this text where the conjunctive pronoun “*li*” must stand for the masculine third person plural dative, contrary to its earlier use as masculine third person singular dative and its modern use as masculine third person plural accusative. The context clearly can only refer to plural and dative.

<sup>67</sup> This refers to the positions on the Guidonian hand to which it can be transposed.

<sup>68</sup> Here Zacconi's redundant style produces an impenetrable situation in the form of the coordinate clauses “*se si replica, ò si ritorna*.” Zacconi makes such overly heavy use of non-significant stylistic redundancy that it is unclear whether the use of “*replica*” and “*ritorna*,” both of which mean basically “repeat,” is introducing the usual irrelevant redundancy or is a significant distinction. The conjunction “*ò*” does not help because, as in English, its Italian significance can be either disjunctive (mutual exclusion of terms) or explanatory, i.e., = “namely.”

<sup>69</sup> Another example of Zacconi's apparently pointless tautology.

<sup>70</sup> Yet another example.

<sup>71</sup> Tautology *cum* chiasma.

uncover the deceit, because if any activity of ours can with good face be excused,<sup>72</sup> that of diminution (*gorgia*) is one of the foremost and most meritorious, the voice not having that aptitude that the hands have in playing any kind of keyboard, which are so fast that at times they make us stupefied and astonished.

Whence, if we wish to see with what effort the human voice can carry those figures [or notes?] (*figure*), so fast and so rapid, and whether one can make with it all that the individual particularly wants, let us consider a little how many singers go through the world with elegant and with so fortunate voice and sing securely all the songs that are presented to them<sup>73</sup> indeed, yet nonetheless because of a certain natural inaptitude do not have *passaggi* (*passaggi*) or diminution (*gorgia*).<sup>74</sup> Do we believe that if they could take the ornaments (*fioretti*) and *passaggi* (*passaggi*) from the fortunate diminution singers (*gorgheggianti*), that they would gladly take them? Certainly yes! Because, were it possible to take them from them,<sup>75</sup> many who because of a mediocre voice live in mediocrity, with the acquisition of the *gorgia* (*gorgia*)<sup>76</sup> [throat articulation] they would live as signori.

But whenever these things in our fashion are not heard from a singer, and in all perfection, or indeed because one and the same thing is always heard, it is necessary to decide that he has the intention of making them perfect and labor hard to do each one beyond his ability. For this reason I have sought to break up [*rompere*] all the above *passaggi* (*passaggi*) and ornaments (*fioretti*) less than I could<sup>77</sup> so as not to put before the students something fatiguing and almost impossible for them, striving that my labors may not be useless and in vain, which if such I believed them to be, I myself would make of them, as it is customary to say, “my own poison and destruction.” But, although I have said that *passaggi* (*passaggi*) in the human voice must be continuous and not chopped up [*spezzare*], not for this reason, though having broken some [*rompere*], by breaking [*rompere*] them do I contradict myself, because it would seem that no voice could do it, and nonetheless there are quite a few of those

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<sup>72</sup> Zacconi uses a negative here that I take to be pleonastic. Otherwise he could mean something like “Even if no action is without some fault, nonetheless diminution is still meritorious even given any such defect.”

<sup>73</sup> This is an unquestionable use of “*li*” as the masculine third plural dative instead of modern “*loro*.”

<sup>74</sup> Again, the question that could be asked so many times throughout the text, is this disjunctive or explanatory?

<sup>75</sup> The text reads “*potendogli torre*.” Zacconi finds himself in the position of having to distinguish two pronouns, dative and accusative masculine third plural from each other, for which he usually uses only the single “*li*.” In order the dative comes first, for which plural he has used “*gli*.” “*Togliere + à*” = “take from” requires expression by the dative pronoun with “*à*” understood.

<sup>76</sup> I have chosen to retain “*gorgia*” in the translation because I feel that here he is really referring to the technique of vocal articulation and not to an embellishment.

<sup>77</sup> The text reads “*mancho ch' io potuto*” in which “*manco*” is the critical word. *Cambridge Italian Dictionary*, which is better than the more recent dictionaries in regard to archaic and obsolete terms, gives the meaning “less,” which alone can result in a sensible translation of the entire passage. Zacconi is saying that he has produced examples based on originals fewer of whose original notes are less extensively subdivided into diminutions than he could have done because he does not wish to confront the beginner with something too difficult. Thereafter the passage appears to succumb to Zacconi’s confused convolutions. Book 8 in Cerone’s *Melopeo y Maestro*, also in this translation series, is in large part a translation, paraphrase or summary of Zacconi text on *passaggi*. Fortunately, Cerone prunes most of Zacconi’s confused and confusing verbiage away and reveals the meaning of what Zacconi tries so clumsily to say, i.e., that he does not extensively subdivide rhythmic values but leaves most examples of *passaggi* in continuous eighth-note values. Zacconi’s use of *rompere* and *spezzare* and various derivatives appears to be no more than yet another example of his meaningless stylistic redundancy.

who break [*spezzare*] them.<sup>78</sup> For this reason I have broken (*rompere*) them not only because it may be seen in what way the breaks (*rompere*) can be made, but also so that no one may believe that it is necessary to proceed continuously. Now I can put an end to the present chapter on diminutions (*gorgie*), having said about them all that ought to be said. This only remains, that is, that I know well how some will be most diligent investigators of these my little things, and they will not fail—after having seen, gone through and considered them—to say that they are of little moment and shoddy, or that they are worth nothing. But, I console myself with this, that on the contrary even, he will praise me who feels aided by them.

I will not fail here, then, to say that if anyone should search out the reason why I, in the above examples and *passaggi* (*passaggi*), should not have given any examples of sixteenth-notes, let him know that having the particular intention of showing the first level of speed to slow voices, I only gave those in eighth-notes, so that with this simplification beginners could learn, it being the case that these labors are not made by the one who is learned in the profession but by those who don't know more than this amount and have the will to learn. If anyone should become so good a master of them that advancing them well he should have need of more speed in breaking them (*rottura*), he can change the examples from eighth-notes to sixteenth-notes, because he knows himself how he will form other examples of them and this assistance will reveal that he is more desirous of praise.

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<sup>78</sup> Twice here the text reads “*li*” which can only be masculine third plural accusative.

## Glossary

It must be said that it seems incredible that anyone who sets out to write what is, effectively, a complete guide to music of the day, could be so oblivious to the importance of precise terminology and even so casually deliberate in confusing it further. Confronted with the inexcusable mess that Zacconi has created in this chapter, a translator can only choose between Scylla and Charybdis: perpetuate the mess by refusing to deal with it and so to obscure it, or impose an arbitrary order on it that it does not inherently possess and so effectively obscure in a different way the problem by means of that imposition. I have chosen Charybdis, for the most part. First, for all the terms central to the problem I provide both a translation and the original alongside it in parentheses. The translations, as will be seen below, I attempt to derive by logical means and tradition, when possible. The worst of the mess that Zacconi has created is, of all things, central to his main subject, the diminution technique. As already alluded to in the preface, the problematic terms are *gorgia* and its derivatives, *vaghezza* and its related words, and *passaggio*, none of whose derivatives, blessedly, does Zacconi use—excluding twice the use of *passo*, in both cases clearly meaning simply a passage of music, not in the technical sense of diminution. A lesser problem concerns his use of the term *figura*.

**Figura**—the word is used in both singular and plural. In the majority of cases it seems fairly clearly to mean “note” or “notes.” There are a few instances where it seems extended to the sense of “figure” as in a musical figure consisting of several notes.

**Fiorire**—along with derivatives Zacconi introduces the use of this word in connection with the diminution technique. It appears to be a term related to embellishment or ornamentation and so very similar to that related sense of the word *vaghezza*. It and its derivatives are translated as some form of “ornament.”

**Gola**—this used only in the physiological sense of “throat.”

**Gorgia**—As noted in the translation, Zacconi specifically identifies this term as identical to *vaghezza* (58r ¶ 4) and *passaggio* (58v complete ¶ 5). It and its derivatives are translated here almost always as some form of the word “diminution.” Maffei (1562) had already established the word as connected with the technique of throat articulation used in the practice of vocal diminution. Thus, I extend that sense here. Further, on one or two occasions Zacconi seems to use it to communicate the more specific technique of throat articulation, which I have given in the translation.

**Gorgie**—In the plural this appears to refer to the vocal cords or to the technique of throat articulation.

**Gratia or Grazia**—the word appears seldom but with a vague meaning of grace, charm, or even ornament.

**Misura**—Zacconi uses this term in connection with *tempo* and means the articulation of temporal duration into discrete measurable rhythmic values.

**Passaggio**—The word is derived from *passo*, which means simply a passage, in this case of music. It has here the implication of a passage of music embellished in the diminution technique. It is a term sufficiently well known that I have chosen merely to anglicize it as *passaggio* and *passaggi*.

**Rompere**—Zacconi seems most consistently to use this term to refer to the subdivision of rhythmic values. **Rotture** appears to possess the same meaning and is only another instance of Zacconi’s stylistic redundancy.

**Tempo**—Zacconi uses this word as almost an abstract concept of “temporal duration,” which is articulated into measurable units by *misura*. He never in this chapter uses the word to mean “tempo” in the modern sense. Though there are some indications of a more modern sense of tempo in music pre-1600, it appears that the more common approach to tempo and its variation was through mensural means.

**Vaghezza**—the word derives from *vago*, lovely, and Zacconi has identified it with *gorgia* and *passaggio*. It and its derivatives are translated here as connected with “embellishment” because of the derivation from *vago*.

**Vago, Vaghi**—as stated above, the word’s basic meaning is “lovely” or “beautiful.”