

Girolamo Dalla Casa

Il Vero Modo di Diminuir,

con tutte le sorti di stromenti

Books 1 & 2

(1584)

To the Readers

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Translator's Preface

The Dalla Casa selections constitute one of the shortest texts in this translation series. This does not diminish—pun accidental but retained with pleasure—its value. Dalla Casa's book is the last statement exclusively devoted to the diminution technique as applied to instruments. Thus, he forms a kind of triumvirate with Ganassi (1535) and Ortiz (1553). In fact, it was Ganassi who had published the first diminution method of any kind for what was in origin and was still essentially a vocal technique. Perhaps for this reason Dalla Casa seems unable to keep himself from making a few comments on voice. Though these latter are brief, it does not mean that the remainder of his comments are irrelevant for vocal diminution. On the contrary, they are quite valuable as giving some of the most realistic descriptions of what was actually expected of professionals toward the end of the technique's heyday.

Much of Dalla Casa's explanatory text is taken up with describing his method. He is distinctive among the authors for clearly recognizing the need to provide the music both before and after diminution so that students could learn. The frequent lack of this approach is a constant frustration when using other authors' books, which all too often give little or nothing but diminished versions.

Dalla Casa was a wind instrumentalist among the first members of the permanent instrumental ensemble at St. Mark's in Venice. Clearly his preference was for the cornetto, judging from the specific information he gives about it, which F. Rognoni later borrows. His explanation of tonguing, also borrowed by Rognoni, though possibly marred by the compositor, is very welcome for wind performance practice and especially as stated clearly in the actual musical examples. His remark that the *lingua riversa* is similar in effect to vocal throat articulation is interesting and makes the reader wish for a sound recording. His third type, the crudest he says, seems very clearly to be the equivalent of modern double-tonguing.

Dalla Casa presents few difficulties of language for translation. His terminology for the tone quality of the cornetto and its defects is unfortunately vague but is a failure of the time not specific to the author. He is amusingly meticulous about rhythm, not only in his demand to "keep the beat in tempo," but also for his specificity as to the rhythmic complexity typical of the *passaggio*. An insight into his rhythmic world comes from his distinction between the triplet and quadruplet thirtysecond-note and the idiosyncratic note shape—an eighth-note (*croma*) with a "4" for its flag—that he devises for the latter. Anyone who knows anything about the history of music printing must be amazed that he could cajole a type founder into its production. His repeated explanation of the difference between the triplet and quadruplet are, in fact, amusing, but more importantly reveal both the author's precision and the apparent general lack of it at the time.

All the literary texts are on unnumbered prefatory pages in the front of the two parts (books) that comprise *Il Vero Modo*. Some invented device might be contrived to give them an artificial numbering, but it is unnecessary. The reader who wishes to find the particular section will find it very easily, since they are well identified by Dalla Casa.

To The Reader

[Book 1]

Having long deliberated on one day taking pen in hand and explaining the true method of diminution to the benefit of any person whatever whom it pleases, and having written these two books of mine of diminutions, I wanted to give them to the press, so that everyone can make use of them for all wind, keyboard and all kinds of viol instruments.

In the first book, then, issues of tonguing are treated and of simple diminutions of eighth-notes on whole-notes and half-notes. One begins first stepwise note by note and then by thirds and fourths and fifths and sixths and sevenths and octaves. Following them is the diminution of sixteenth-notes on the same examples. At the end you have the examples of the tremolo *gropizato*¹ on the whole-note and half-note. Then follows the groppo played on similar notes, which are used in cadences.

After this follow some madrigals à 4 by Cipriano [de Rore] of uniform eighth-notes, with the example before the diminution in order to demonstrate note by note the thing one does in order to be able to make use of them in other places² and these madrigals you will be able to play in ensemble.

There follow, then, the other madrigals by the same author à 4 in continuous sixteenth-notes in the same manner as the former ones.

Then passages are presented and cadences taken from different madrigals and French chansons, in which passages the diminutions are demonstrated in eighth-notes and thereafter in sixteenth-notes on each passage.

Then follow sixteenth-notes and triplet thirtysecond-notes³ (*trePLICATE*) which are twenty-four to the beat, on passages and cadences, after these follows another example on passages and cadences of triplet and quadruplet⁴ thirtysecond-notes, which latter are thirty-two to the tactus.⁵ Then follow passages and cadenzas of continuous triplet thirtysecond-notes, which are twenty-four to the tactus. After that come those of continuous quadruplet thirtysecond-notes, which are thirty-two to the tactus on passages and cadences.

After this mixed diminution is treated, which is the four types of notes [*figure*] together, that is eighth-notes, sixteenth-notes, triplet thirtysecond-notes and quadruplet thirtysecond-notes on passages and cadences of diverse madrigals and French chansons.

I am much amazed and nevertheless a great astonishment remains in my mind that so many excellent musicians who have written have never discussed anything except the eighth-note and sixteenth-note and have never treated the two other types of notes, the triplet thirtysecond-note of twenty-four to the tactus and the quadruplet thirtysecond-note of thirty-two to the tactus, these being so necessary for diminution that, in truth, in diminution one can do nothing without them, because mixed diminution is

¹ The term *gropizato* is obscure but is intelligible. Examples of the tremolo *gropizato* appear beginning on page 5. It might be described as a series of turn-like figures combining various rhythmic levels. This figure bears the closest resemblance to Bovicelli's illustration of the tremolo of any I have found, though Dalla Casa's is not exclusively stepwise and by no means resolves the obscurities of Bovicelli's description and illustration. Two examples appear at the end.

² It may seem an obvious method, but Dalla Casa is actually among the few who do this or do it consistently.

³ Dalla Casa uses the ordinary note form of three flags.

⁴ Dalla Casa uses an idiosyncratic note shape for this, the combination of an eighth-note (*croMa*) with a numeral four for its flag.

⁵ Dalla Casa uses *battuta*, which apparently serves both for the beat = tactus and beat = smaller units, similar to *Takt* in German.

true diminution, that is of the four types of notes, eighth-notes, sixteenth-notes, triplet thirtysecond-notes and quadruplet thirtysecond-notes.

On the Three Main Tonguings

The reverse tongue (*lingua riversa*) being the main one of the three tonguings, I will put it in first place because it has the similarity to the [vocal] *gorgia* [throat articulation] more than the others, and it goes by the name of *gorgia tongue* (*lingua di gorgia*). This tonguing is fastest and is difficult to control. Its place of articulation is the palate and it is produced in three ways:⁶ ler, ler, ler, ler, der ler, Ter, ler, ter, ler. The first is gentle to produce. The second is medium and the third more crude than the others because the tongue is more raised. In the beginning of the book you have examples of all three kinds of production, in which the two syllables will be written under every note and you will accompany the tongue with the hand. You will observe this rule in all the examples.

The second tonguing is this: tere-tere-tere-terete. This tonguing goes by the name “direct.” Its place of articulation is on the teeth and is a tonguing naturally pleasant,⁷ and is good for diminutions of eighth-notes and sixteenth-notes, being naturally restrained. You have the same examples as I said above.

The third tonguing is the Teche-teche-teche-techete. This tonguing articulates on the palate behind the teeth and is a crude tongue for performers who would like to produce dreadfulness. It is not at all grateful to the ear and is by nature rapid and difficult to restrain. You have examples like the others.

There are two others of them, then, which are ordinarily performed, leaving aside some others that are not relevant for discussing at present. I will speak only of these two. The first is this: te-te-te-te, which is good and is executed in producing notes up to diminutions in eighth-notes. The other one results by producing “de” in this way de-de-de-de. You will be able to execute it there on the same examples as the others. This latter is softer than the former and is articulated on the palate, while the former is on the teeth. You will be able to choose the one that seems good to you, both of the two are slow by nature and are restricted to diminutions in eighth-notes. I will not extend this further, having said enough. I will discuss in the following a discourse on the cornetto.

⁶ The reader will immediately note a disparity between the syllables as presented here and as presented in the musical examples. F. Rognoni produces a similar set of tonguing syllables, which I compare in a table below. Bruce Dickey in the preface to his edition of Riccardo Rognoni's *Passaggi per potersi essercitare nel diminuire* (1592, Forni 2007) suggests that the combined form, “ler,” may be closer to the actual articulation in performance. Despite Dalla Casa's printer being the famous Angelo Gardano, the form here could also result from an uncomprehending compositor.

⁷ The word here “*leda*” is obscure. I take it as a misprint of “*lieto*.”

Lingua Rivrsa (Reverse)

1

le re le re le re le re le

de re le re de re le re le

te re le re te re le re le

Detailed description: This section contains three staves of music in bass clef. Each staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and a bass line with a single note. The lyrics are: Staff 1: le re le re le re le re le; Staff 2: de re le re de re le re le; Staff 3: te re le re te re le re le.

Dritta (Direct)

te re te re te re te re te

Detailed description: This section contains one staff of music in bass clef. The melodic line consists of eighth notes, and the bass line consists of a single note. The lyrics are: te re te re te re te re te.

Unnamed

te che te che te che te che te

te te te te te te te te te

de de de de de de de de de

de re de re de re de re de

Detailed description: This section contains four staves of music in bass clef. Each staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and a bass line with a single note. The lyrics are: Staff 1: te che te che te che te che te; Staff 2: te te te te te te te te te; Staff 3: de de de de de de de de de; Staff 4: de re de re de re de re de.

Tonguing Comparison Rognoni & Dalla Casa	
<i>Sorte</i> (Kind)	
<i>Lingua Versa</i> (on the palate)	
<u>Rognoni</u>	<u>Dalla Casa</u>
1. lere lere lerede	lere lere lere lerele
2. dere dere derede	dere lere dere lerele
3. dere tere derete	tere lere tere lerele
<i>Dritta</i> , Direct (on the teeth)	
1. tere tere terete	tere tere tere terete
2. te te te te te te	
Unnamed (on the palate behind the teeth)	
teche teche techete	teche teche teche techete
Also	
	te te te te
	de de de de
	dere dere dere dere

On the Cornetto

The cornetto is the most excellent of the wind instruments because it resembles the human voice more than the other instruments. This instrument may be used soft and loud and in any sort of key just like the voice. It is necessary, then, to work at making a good sound on the instrument and to take care not to make the instrument be like a horn or feeble. For this purpose one needs to arrange the embouchure in such a way that it produces a good sound on the instrument. The open embouchure makes the instrument like the horn and weak, the embouchure too tense makes it crack.⁸ Thus, one will keep to the middle course. It needs to be played with discernment and judgment. The tonguing needs to be neither too dead nor too marked but needs to be similar to *gorgia* [vocal throat articulation]. In diminutions make few things but good, so that everyone should strive for a good sound on the instrument, a good tonguing, a good diminution, and to imitate the human voice as much as possible.

I would write also about the other wind instruments, but because this is the principal one, I leave off from writing in order now to give attention to diminutions.

⁸The text is "*sfesso*." On brass-type instruments, among which the cornetto ranks owing to its mouthpiece, an embouchure that is too tense can result in several negative results, which one Dalla Casa means is unclear. It can make notes "crack" by missing the specific harmonic. It also results in an unpleasant "pinched," very nasal sound. When the harmonics lie close together it is possible to miss the one intended, in which the instrument produces simultaneously the two adjacent ones, causing an unpleasant rapid beating or popping sound.

To the Readers [Book 2]

In this second book is treated diminution in current use on diverse French chansons and madrigals for all kinds of instruments, so that everyone in the profession will be able to perform his own and to make use of them in ensemble with other instruments—wind, keyboard and also strings, with viola da gamba, viola da braccio. You also have on all the canzonas mixed diminutions of the four notes: eighth-notes, sixteenth-notes, triplet thirtysecond-notes and quadruplet thirtysecond-notes such as I described in the first book, in which place I believe that everyone who has the desire of learning them can search out some fruit with all kinds of instruments because truly to this end of being useful to others have I produced this little work.

On Keeping the Diminution in Tempo

I say that it is a difficult thing to keep a diminution in tempo, and this is of greatest importance⁹ for everyone who follows this profession of making diminutions with all kinds of instruments. So, everyone should take care in his own study to beat the time (*batter il tempo*) and never to practice without this order, and to accustom oneself to the beat because doing otherwise would not be a good thing. One should take care for the four kinds of notes, because the sixteenth-note (as it is made) is extended to the double of the eighth-note, which is eight [to the whole note]¹⁰ to its sixteen, and the triplets extend [that] sixteen to twenty-four, which is a third more than the sixteenth-notes. The quadruplets are also extended one time more, so that from the twenty-four [triplets are produced] thirty-two. When everyone takes care to conform to the tempo and to beat his diminutions note by note, so for the winds as for those who play keyboard instruments, and not to run ahead as many do who play a wind instrument, who go along with a dead tongue without striking the tongue with the diminution for his own greater ease, and so as not to restrain it, such as the reverse tonguing, which is difficult to restrain, then everyone beats the diminution note by note and takes all four note types in the same tempo, if he desires to make a good outcome.

On the Viola Bastarda

I wanted also to make this little work of making diminutions on some canzonas and madrigals à 4 for playing with the viola bastarda, in which profession one is playing all the parts such as the knowledgeable do who make a profession of it. For the knowledge of those who wish to practice in the said profession I have made diminutions on two songs all in eighth-notes, so that one can understand how this method goes in playing, and after this you have the sixteenth-notes and the other two types of notes, so that everyone will be able to practice and learn the method of this playing. Finally, I have made diminutions on two other songs, the one all in triplets and the other in quadruplets in order to demonstrate in an example for everyone whom it may please because others have not written, it being so necessary in diminution, that one not be able to do less than these, mixed diminution being the true diminution of four note types. For the sake of brevity I will not go farther, enough having been said, but I will discuss a little on the human voice.

⁹ Virtually all, if not all, the authors emphasize this.

¹⁰ As will become clear, Dalla Casa is thinking numerically not in duration value. In regard to any larger note the sixteenth-note “doubles” the number of the eighth-notes.

On the Human Voice

Since I see that many gentle spirits would hold it dear to be instructed as to making some diminutions with the *gorgia* [technique of throat articulation], for this reason I also wanted to make this little work of diminutions on some madrigals and to demonstrate to all those whom it would please with examples before diminution, so that they will be able to see what they do and to make use of them in other places. I have made diminutions on the soprano as being the part most frequently in diminution and also for those whom it pleases to sing with the lute. I wanted further to give satisfaction to those who sing other parts. You have, then, in diminution Cipriano [de Rore's] "*alla dolce umbra*," all the canzona and all four parts in diminution for the convenience of everyone.

Extracts from the Method

Ornaments

Gropo on a whole-note Gropo on a half-note



Tremolo gropizzato on a whole-note with all note types Tremolo gropizzato on a half-note



The image shows two rows of musical notation on a single staff in bass clef. The first row shows a whole note followed by a half note, each with a 'gropo' ornament consisting of a series of eighth notes. The second row shows a whole note followed by a half note, each with a 'tremolo gropizzato' ornament consisting of a series of sixteenth notes.

Tremolo Comparison

Dalla Casa's tremolo gropizzato Bovicelli's tremolo (?)



The image shows two examples of tremolo ornaments on a single staff in bass clef. The first example, 'Dalla Casa's tremolo gropizzato', shows a whole note followed by a half note, each with a series of sixteenth notes. The second example, 'Bovicelli's tremolo (?)', shows a whole note followed by a half note, each with a series of sixteenth notes, but with a different rhythmic pattern.