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CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI AND *L'ORFEO*,  
*FAVOLA IN MUSICA*:  
CHARACTER CONSTRUCTION  
AND DEPICTION OF EMOTION\*

ABSTRACT

La costruzione del personaggio nei primi spettacoli operistici per mezzo di gesti musicali, è una conquista del musicista italiano Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), una pratica ben visibile già nella sua prima opera *L'Orfeo, Favola in Musica*. Nella rappresentazione monteverdiana del personaggio, particolarmente in quelle di Orfeo e Apollo, la scelta di esprimere le emozioni attraverso un registro vocale specifico e impiegando soluzioni retorico-musicali, sembra essere in relazione anzitutto con la coeva concezione estetica e le convenzioni stilistiche del canto; tal scelta, invece, rappresenta idee su etica/carattere (*ethos*), ragione (*logos*) ed emozioni (*pathos*), in maniera più sottile che nella sua ultima opera, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Lo stile operistico di Monteverdi nell'*Orfeo* è dovuto a una molteplicità di fattori, di natura culturale, personale, di condizione sociale (ad es. il suo contatto con le attività musicali in altre città italiane, il suo coinvolgimento nelle accademie culturali, i vincoli imposti dal suo mecenate mantovano). Essendo ancora lontano da un tipo di scrittura libera da condizionamenti, come quella osservabile nelle sue ultime opere destinate ai teatri pubblici, *Orfeo* può essere letto con il risultato dell'incontro tra tre fattori determinanti: l'ambiente culturale e il sistema del mecenatismo; l'estetica del canto e della recitazione; l'influenza delle accademie culturali, in particolare dell'*Accademia degli Invaghiti*. Sottoponendo a nuove indagini e considerazioni sia fonti primarie che studi contemporanei, questo studio mira ad approfondire la posizione estetica di Monteverdi, e come essa abbia influenzato la costruzione dei personaggi operistici e la loro realizzazione musicale, informata alla luce dei tre fattori sopra richiamati. Un tale impatto verrà descritto attraverso l'aria di Orfeo, *Possente Spirto*, e il suo duetto con Apollo, *Salam, cantando* (senza tuttavia escludere altri importanti momenti dell'opera), nei quali soluzioni musicali similari rappresentano differenti situazioni drammatiche.

PAROLE CHIAVE Claudio Monteverdi, *L'Orfeo*, *Possente Spirto*, Accademia degli Invaghiti, Alessandro Striggio

## SUMMARY

The construction of character on the early operatic stage by means of musical gestures is an arresting achievement of Italian master Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), a practice first evident in his signature opera *L'Orfeo, Favola in Musica*. In Monteverdi's depiction of character, notably that of Orfeo and Apollo, his decisions to express emotion through voice type and musical/rhetorical devices appear at the surface to be connected primarily to contemporary aesthetic concepts and singing style conventions, representing the ideas of morality/character (*ethos*), reason (*logos*), and emotion (*pathos*) in much subtler ways than in his late opera *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Monteverdi's operatic style in *Orfeo* is indebted to several factors, namely cultural, personal, and social conditions (e.g., his exposure to musical activities in other Italian city-states, his involvement with cultural academies, and the constraints resulting from his Mantuan patronage). Lacking the freedom to write for the public theater as in his later operas, *Orfeo* can be seen as a result of three determining factors: cultural environment and the patronage system; aesthetics of singing/performance practice; and the influence of cultural academies, in particular the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*. By re-examining primary sources and re-evaluating several contemporary scholarly studies, this paper aims to further an understanding of Monteverdi's aesthetic position as it affected his construction of operatic characters and their musical depiction, informed by the three factors above. Such an impact will be discerned using Orfeo's *Possente spirto* and the duet between Apollo and Orfeo *Salam, cantando al Cielo* (without excluding other excerpts of great importance in this opera) in which similar musical settings represent different dramatic situations.

KEYWORDS Claudio Monteverdi, *L'Orfeo*, *Possente Spirto*, Accademia degli Invaghiti, Alessandro Striggio



### 1. Introduction

Claudio Monteverdi's development of an early operatic aesthetic and style is indebted to many different factors. To consider the context in which his dramatic works were created – namely the varying cultural, intellectual, and musical tendencies in the cities where he resided – can only enrich the understanding of the composer's artistry. The impact of these influences, prominent in the environment in which the composer lived and worked (in this case, Mantua), is particularly apparent in his approach to the construction of character in his first opera *L'Orfeo, Favola in Musica* in the 1609 printed score.<sup>1</sup>

\* This article represents a revised and expanded version of the paper presented at the *International Conference The Making of a Genius: Claudio Monteverdi from Cremona to Mantua* in 2017. I thank Dr. Jeffrey Kurtzman and Dr. Judith Mabary for their guidance in the 2017 version, as well as Chris Van Leeuwen for his help with the musical examples and substantial feedback for both the conference paper and the ensuing article.

Despite Monteverdi's displeasure reported in several letters, his musicianship benefitted from the cultural environment of Mantua:<sup>2</sup> he breathed the air of change, surrounded by musicians and intellectuals who were acquainted with the foundations of early opera created in Florence through the efforts of the *Camerata Fiorentina* and of the newly emerging virtuosic vocal style, already established in the late 1500s in Ferrara and then in Mantua by the *Concerto delle Donne*. It was also in the latter city that the opera *Orfeo* was created, under the auspices of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti* in which Prince Francesco Gonzaga (1586-1612) had a leadership role.<sup>3</sup>

To facilitate an understanding of the aesthetic influences of this opera, three main points will be examined: first, the cultural environment and patronage system under which Monteverdi worked; second, the overall vocal performance practice and artistic preferences in the late 1500s/early 1600s period; and finally, the intellectual milieu and the beliefs of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*.<sup>4</sup> These

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, when referring to the opera *L'Orfeo, Favola in Musica*, it will be abbreviated and referred to as *Orfeo*. For the original ending according to the 1607 libretto, see WHENHAM, *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, pp. 35-41. As for the possible reasons for the differences in Act V of the 1607 libretto, the 1609 surviving score, and the later edition in 1615, see Fenlon in WHENHAM, *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, pp. 1-19. See also PIRROTTA, *Scelte poetiche di musicisti*, pp. 197-241 and HANNING, *Of Poetry and Music's Power*, pp.128-130. According to Hanning, there is the strong possibility that Striggio was not the one writing the words for the last act of *Orfeo*: the existence of a *deus ex machina* in Monteverdi's *Arianna* (1608) with text by Ottavio Rinuccini (1562-1621) is a strong indicator that the latter poet was the author of the verses in Act V of the 1609 *Orfeo*. See HANNING, *Of Poetry and Music's Power*, and also ID., *The Ending of L'Orfeo*.

<sup>2</sup> See Monteverdi's letters: 26 November 1608 to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga translated by Denis Stevens in MONTEVERDI, *The Letters*, ed. Stevens, p. 47. Original Italian text in MONTEVERDI, *Lettere*, ed. Lax, p. 20; 2 December 1608 to Annibale Chieppio, MONTEVERDI, *The Letters*, ed. Stevens, p. 51. Original MONTEVERDI, *Lettere*, ed. Lax, pp. 20-21; and 6 November 1615 to Alessandro Striggio, MONTEVERDI, *The Letters*, ed. Stevens, p. 95, original MONTEVERDI, *Lettere*, ed. Lax, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Several other important works were composed while Monteverdi was in Mantua, for instance: the opera *L'Arianna* [performed 28 May; with libretto by Ottavio Rinuccini], the prologue to the comedy of Battista Guarini (1538-1612) *L'idropica* (2 June), the dramatic work *Il ballo delle ingrato* (4 June; libretto by Rinuccini) – all three completed for the 1608 festivities to celebrate the marriage of Prince Francesco Gonzaga to Margherita of Savoy (1589-1655) – along with the sacred work *Vespro della Beata Vergine* (1610) and the above-mentioned opera *Orfeo*, contributed significantly to Monteverdi's reputation in the early seventeenth century and to establishing his crucial importance to the history of Western music.

The facsimile of the preface printed in Malipiero's edition reads as follows: «Serenissimo signore mio signore et patrone colendissimo, La favola d'Orfeo che già nell'Accademia degli Invaghiti sotto gl'auspiti di V. A. fu sopra angusta Scena musicalmente rappresentata, dovendo hora comparire nel gran Teatro dell'universo à far mostra di se à tutti gl'huomini...». See MONTEVERDI, *Orfeo*, ed. Malipiero, preface.

<sup>4</sup> On Italian cultural academies during the 1600s, see MAYLENDER, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia*, and SISINNI, *Le accademie del Seicento*, pp. 17-20.

Both Paolo Fabbri and Barbara Russano Hanning defend that the Apollonian ending (as a *lieto fine*) in the 1609 published version is chronologically the later one, modified to please a wider public while also providing, in the words of Hanning, «a more explicit conclusion to the action than the dance of the *Baccanti*» in the original ending. In the 1609 version «Monteverdi

considerations will help inform an analysis of Monteverdi's construction of character and related expression of emotional content with regard to the characters Orfeo and Apollo in the opera *Orfeo*.

## 2. Cultural Environment and Patronage System

Regarding the first point of analysis—the composer's cultural environment and the patronage system under which Monteverdi was employed—it is important to begin by mentioning the importance of the transitional period in which the composer lived: it is undeniable that Monteverdi stood astride a change between the 'old' to the 'new' style.<sup>5</sup> Several sources from antiquity were discovered and translated during the Renaissance period – among them, newfound writings of Plato (c.427-c.348 B.C.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), and Cicero (106-43 B.C.) – which stimulated reflections on rhetoric and poetics and discussions of Neoplatonism and Aristotelinism.<sup>6</sup> On the latter two, the Neoplatonic concept of immortality of the soul—through the interpretation and translations of

realized that he could no longer count on the refined sensibilities and literary acumen of the original audience – the *Invaghiti* academicians – who, when they viewed the Bacchic finale of the original production, would have had to finish the story in their minds» (HANNING, *The Ending of L'Orfeo*). See also FABBRI, *Monteverdi* (always trans. Carter), pp. 66-67.

<sup>5</sup> See EHRMANN, *Claudio Monteverdi: Die Grundbegriffe*, p. 1, who pointed out that the 'new style' and the birth of a new terminology is present in the concepts of *seconda pratica*, the *moderna musica*, and even in titles of works such as *Le nuove musiche* of Giulio Caccini (1551-1618). Marco Scacchi was one of the initial writers to associate the first practice with the old style and the second with the new, modern one. See PALISCA, *Marco Scacchi's Defense*, pp. 189-235. The terms *prima pratica* and *seconda pratica* have been subjects of a great deal of interest by numerous scholars through the years, whether concerning the well-known Monteverdi-Artusi polemic, or by approaching terminology, characteristics, and history in relation to other composers associated with both practices. See, for instance, ROCHE, *Monteverdi and la Prima Pratica*, pp. 159-182; See also OSSI, *Divining the Oracle*, §§ 1, 5, pp. 27-57 and pp. 189-210, and PALISCA, *The Artusi-Monteverdi Controversy*, pp. 127-158. For the new practice, see BONOMO, *Melodia, ovvero seconda pratica musicale*, pp. 243-310.

The most famous response to this attack was written by Giulio Cesare Monteverdi, Claudio's brother (1573-1630/1631) in the 1607 *Dichiarazione della lettera stampata nel Quinto libro de' suoi madregali*, where he defended his brother's views that had been stated in the 1605 Preface to the *Quinto Libro de' Madregali*, reprinted in MONTEVERDI, *Lettere, dediche e prefazioni*, pp. 394-404 and pp. 391-392, respectively. See translation in STRUNK, *Source Readings in Music History*, pp. 408-410. Artusi's attack and Giulio Cesare's reply are translated by STRUNK, *Source Readings in Music History*, pp. 393-412.

<sup>6</sup> For further readings on the importance and impact of rhetoric during the Renaissance as well as its relationship with philosophy, see SANTOS, *Linguagem, retórica e filosofia no renascimento*, pp. 9-76. For issues on translations and interpretation of texts, see *ibid*, pp. 117-202. See also MACK, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric*.

Marsilio Ficino [1433-1499]—and Aristotle's writings on dramatic theory in his *Poetics* played a crucial role during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>7</sup>

By the late 1500s, the Aristotelian idea of *imitation*, with his well-known teaching «ars imitatur naturam» [«art imitates nature»], began increasingly to be paired with the new elements of astonishment, novelty, and surprise characteristic of the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> This effect of *meraviglia* was often expressed through idealistic conceptions, vocal technique with emphasis on virtuosity – including the 'supernatural' and crafted voices of the castrati – and the introduction of mechanization, as utilized in the 1609 version of *Orfeo* in the form of a *deus ex machina* with the god Apollo.<sup>9</sup>

The dichotomy and union of verisimilitude (imitation) and artificiality (virtuosity) – with unnatural means adopted to express or imitate 'nature,' often defying what was humanly possible – resulted in an aesthetic of elaboration and complexity in terms of musical technique that, at the same time, aimed to express (relatively) realistic emotional reactions: all of this was compatible with a character whose supernatural qualities were outside normal (or natural) human existence, well suited for portraying a demigod such as Orfeo.<sup>10</sup> Monteverdi adopted such an aesthetic when determining the content of the vocal line assigned to this character, a semi-divine being whose humanity is revealed in his passionate responses throughout the opera.

The display of vocal prowess was the taste of Monteverdi's patron at the time, Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga (1562-1612), whose fondness for the spectacular in the arts and of magnificence in his court was not a secret. His attraction towards the *meraviglia* effect could be seen in his musical preferences and in how he desired his court to be perceived: glorious and in active competition with other powerful families in other city-states of Italy, placing a renewed emphasis on appearance and a strong elite cultural life. Such aspirations included the recovery of myths of the past and their adaptation to the political and cultural conditions of Vincenzo's court through the lens of an increasingly absolutist ideology, using the arts for such a purpose.<sup>11</sup>

The history of music is also the history of society, reflecting the tastes of powerful individuals: the court of Mantua during Monteverdi's time was not an exception. Court life in general was organized around the prince, and there was

<sup>7</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, trans. Sachs. Such connections have been discussed in detail by scholars such as Stefano La Via and Jon Solomon. See LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, pp. 61-93, and SOLOMON, *The Neoplatonic Apotheosis*, pp. 27-47.

<sup>8</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Physica*, ed. Hamesse, p. 145, 104a. In the words of scholar Marvin T. Herrick, the concept of *imitation* in the eyes of Aristotle's commentators refers to the quality of the poet «who imitates by fabricating idealized representations of human beings in action». HERRICK, *Comic Theory*, p. 22. Regarding imitation in Monteverdi's music, see TOMLINSON, *Madrigal, Monody and Monteverdi's 'Via Naturale Alla Imitatione'*, pp. 60-108.

<sup>9</sup> On the concept of '*meraviglia*' see ROSEEN, *Monteverdi, Marino and the Aesthetic of Meraviglia*, pp. 415-427.

<sup>10</sup> Paolo Fabbri utilizes the expression «l'unione del verisimile e del meraviglioso», in FABBRI, *Tasso, Guarini e il 'divino Claudio'*, p. 248.

<sup>11</sup> See POTTER, *Vocal Authority*.

no higher identity above him. In the words of Italian Renaissance historian Lauro Martines,

luxurious ostentation at the courts was a display of power. Without such an exhibition, there was somehow no sufficient claim of title to the possession of power. Therefore, the need to show. At the same time, to show was to act out a self-conception: I am prince and I can show it. The more I show it, the more I am what I claim to be. It was a dialectic of ambition and being.<sup>12</sup>

It was a matter of power projected through propaganda in the arts, and no less was true of the Gonzaga dynasty. According to Ian Fenlon,

one area in which music and the arts played an increasingly important role during the period was in accentuating the aspect of despotic mythology... [which was] further encouraged by contemporary theories of magnificence and the tendency to generate an emphasis on the ceremonial.<sup>13</sup>

Musical patronage was, therefore, a self-serving cultural phenomenon by which the changing production of music reflected the activities and interests of the elite.

While *Orfeo* was initially written and performed for the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*, when analyzing the end-result one must consider the fact that its composer was under Vincenzo Gonzaga's patronage, whose musical interests were clear. The preference of Duke Vincenzo towards virtuosic singing was well documented and has been thoroughly studied;<sup>14</sup> Florentine and Ferrarese influence on Mantuan court music was reflected (and emulated) in new styles of singing and theatre since the 1580s. Vincenzo had spent a considerable amount of time at the Este court in Ferrara, home to the *Concerto delle Donne*, an ensemble formed in 1580 of three virtuoso sopranos (also called the 'Three Ladies of Ferrara' or *Concerto delle Dame*), who inspired a large amount of highly ornamented and vocally demanding secular music.<sup>15</sup> Around 1585, Vincenzo Gonzaga established a similar group in Mantua, whose music anticipated the solo singing in the earliest operas and reinforced the contemporary taste that favored the high and virtuosic voice.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> MARTINES, *Power and imagination*, p. 233.

<sup>13</sup> FENLON, *Music and Patronage*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> See for example FENLON, *Music and Spectacle*, pp. 90-105, and COLE, *Italian Renaissance Courts Art, Pleasure and Power*.

<sup>15</sup> The three ladies were initially Laura Peverara (1546-1610), Anna Guarini (1563-1598), and Livia d'Arco (1565-1611).

<sup>16</sup> This ensemble was part of the context of *Musica secreta* [Secret Music] in Ferrara, in which Duke Alfonso II (1533-1597), zealous of the singing and playing of his *Concerto delle Donne*, allowed only selected guests to hear them in his private events. As with well-treasured secrets, the legendary fame of these women spread throughout and beyond Italy, inspiring performers and composers with their dazzling technique. Their reputation laid the foundations of a rich repertoire for female high voices and played a crucial role in establishing solo-song repertoire in the new virtuosic and highly ornamented Baroque style. It is without a doubt that the artistic influence of this all-female ensemble was essential in establishing a tradition that lasted for many decades: the art of florid singing as practiced in Ferrara.

### 3. Emerging Vocal Aesthetics in the Late 1500s/Early 1600s

Such a preference towards virtuosity in vocal performance with the *Concerto delle Donne* leads to the second analyzed point of influence on Monteverdi's stylistic approach to *Orfeo*: the aesthetics of the late 1500s/early 1600s, a period characterized by a taste for ornament and extravagance in all the arts. In the words of scholar Anthony Newcomb, the *Concerto delle Donne* fed the «interest in ornamented singing and ... [promoted] the increasing number of virtuoso singers employed there in the numerous princely households».<sup>17</sup> The high voices of this ensemble reflected the desired technique and artistic preference towards florid repertoire, which was undoubtedly a trademark of the *Concerto delle Donne*.

This elaborate singing style can be seen in the following example, a madrigal by Luzzasco Luzzaschi (1545-1607) for solo soprano *O Primavera* (1601)<sup>18</sup> from the collection *12 madrigali per sonare e cantare* composed for the Ferrara ensemble. Its ornamented, melismatic setting, in particular in measures 11-12 and 17-19 on the word «*amori*» [love], can be seen in the following example (with full text and translation below):<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> NEWCOMB, *The Madrigal at Ferrara*, p. 64. From the same author, see also his Ph.D. dissertation: NEWCOMB, *The Musica Secreta of Ferrara*. Other authors have also contributed significantly to the study of the *Concerto delle Donne*, namely: EINSTEIN, *Anfänge des Vokalkonzerts* and *The Italian Madrigal*; FRANKLIN, *Musical Activity in Ferrara*; LO GIUDICE, *Carlo Gesualdo e il Concerto delle Dame*; KLOZ, *Wie klang der Frühling um 1600?* and the publications and editions of DURANTE – MARTELOTTI, *Madrigali segreti per le dame di Ferrara* and *Cronistoria del concerto delle dame*

<sup>18</sup> This piece was published in 1601 but it was likely written around 1580s or even before. Such a gap between composition and publication is mostly due to the nature of the *Musica secreta* at the court. See NEWCOMB, *The Madrigal at Ferrara*, chapter *Musical Practice within the Musica secreta*, pp. 53-89, DURANTE – MARTELOTTI, *Madrigali segreti per le dame di Ferrara* and *Cronistoria del concerto delle dame*, and FRANKLIN, *Musical Activity in Ferrara*, who wrote substantial contributions regarding the musical context, biographical information, and aesthetic remarks of the *Musica secreta* of the Ladies of Ferrara. The authors of all three sources explore, more or less in detail, the character of secrecy in this repertoire, while also explaining the active role of the publisher Simone Verovio (1575-1608) in the printing process in Rome of Luzzaschi's *12 Madrigali* collection.

Verovio published music sporadically from 1586 through 1608, and was the first to print music from copper engravings instead of moveable type, as extensively done in Venice. The technique using engraved copper plates was particularly suitable to the clusters of many short notes occurring in highly ornamented music, as in Luzzaschi's edition. The publisher was involved between 1586-1607 in the publication of several anthologies of canzonette, toccate, and madrigali that had intabulations for lute and/or harpsichord and were written by Giovanni Francesco Anerio, G. Peetrino, Claudio Merulo, Ottavio Durante, and L. Luzzaschi. See, for example, the collection edited by him *Diletto spirituale. Canzonette a tre et a quattro voci* (Verovio, Roma 1586), containing works by Boccapaduli, Anerio, Giovanelli, Palestrina, Mel, Nanino, Soriano and Marenzio. For further details, see CAMPAGNE, *Simone Verovio: Intaglio Techniques*, pp. 279-296 and *Simone Verovio: Music Printing*, and BARGIERI, *Music Printers and Booksellers in Rome*, pp. 69-112.

<sup>19</sup> With the exception of numbers 4 and 5, all musical examples presented in this article are transcribed without the continuo part, and the measure numbers refer only to the excerpt included in these pages and not to the example's position in the complete score. Luzzaschi's

Example 1. Luzzaschi, *O primavera* (12 madrigali, mm. 1-20)

Soprano

O Primavera, o Primavera, gioventù dell'anno, Bella madre di  
 8 fio - ri, D'erbe novelle e di novelli a - mo - ri,  
 12 ri, bel-la ma - dre di fio - ri, d'her-be no-vel-le  
 17 e di no-ve-li amo - ri,

O Primavera, gioventù dell'anno,  
 Bella madre de' fiori,  
 D'erbe novelle e di novelli amori!  
 Tu torni ben, ma teco  
 Non tornano i sereni  
 e fortunati di delle mie gioie.  
 Tu torni ben, tu torni,  
 Ma teco altro non torna,  
 Che del perduto mio caro tesoro  
 La rimembranza misera e dolente.  
 Tu quella sei, pur quella  
 Ch'eri pur dianzi sì vezzosa e bella,  
 Ma non son io quel, che già un tempo fui,  
 Sì caro agli occhi altrui.

Oh Springtime, youth of the year,  
 beautiful mother of flowers,  
 of new plants and of new loves,  
 you return indeed, but with you  
 are not returning the bright  
 and lucky days of my joys.  
 You return indeed, you return,  
 but with you, otherwise, is returning  
 only my dear lost treasure's  
 memory, sad and sorrowful.  
 You are that one, indeed that one  
 that you were not long ago, so lovely and beautiful,  
 but I am not that one that once I was,  
 so valued in the eyes of others.

In the renowned *Discorso sopra la musica*, the Roman patrician Vincenzo Giustiniani (1564-1637) wrote enthusiastic words about this new style that he had experienced both in Ferrara and in Mantua with the *Concerto delle Donne*:

The Ladies of Mantua and Ferrara were highly competent and vied with each other not only in regard to the timbre and disposition of their voices but also in the ornamentation of exquisite *passaggi* delivered at opportune moments, but not in excess. ... Furthermore, they moderated or increased their voices, loud or soft, heavy or light, according to the demands of the piece; now dragging, now breaking off with a gentle, interrupted sigh, now singing long *passaggi* legato or detached, now *gruppi*, now leaps, now with long *trilli*, now with short, and again with sweet *passaggi* sung softly, to which sometimes one heard an echo answer unexpectedly. They accompanied the music and the sentiment with appropriate facial expressions, glances, and gestures, with no awkward movements of the

example is taken from the score of LUZZASCHI, *Madrigali per cantare et sonare*, p. 3. The text is by Giovanni Battista Guarini and the translation is by John Glenn Paton (2000).



mouth or hands or body which might not express the feeling of the song. They made the words clear in such a way that one could hear even the last syllable of every word, which was never interrupted or suppressed by passages and other embellishments.<sup>20</sup>

Such an ensemble, dear to Vincenzo Gonzaga's aesthetic tastes, was of considerable importance, consequently, to Monteverdi's musical language: the composer paid diligent attention to creating elaborate ornamentation that did not detract from the clarity of the text, a practice exemplified in Orfeo's aria *Possente spirto*.

Much of the ornamentation vocabulary of the mid- to late- sixteenth century was, however, an intensification of Renaissance embellishments – in particular, diminutions/divisions – that were already a traditional part of the singer's grammar, as seen in vocal treatises or in vocal compositions of Giovanni Camillo Maffei (c.1500-1562/73), Ludovico Zacconi (1555-1627), Giovanni Luca Conforto (1560-1608), and Giovanni Battista Bovicelli (1550-1594). The Ferrarese influence was not the only factor in determining Monteverdi's flourished style: the virtuosic singing voice echoed the contemporary trend. Ornamentation was a relevant part of singing with grace and of delivering the text in a noble, refined manner, an aesthetic announced and explored in several music treatises before publication of *Le nuove musiche* by Giulio Caccini (1551-1618) in 1602.<sup>21</sup> Vincenzo Giustiniani in his *Discorso* observed that a different style of singing started to emerge around 1575:

In the Holy Year of 1575, or shortly thereafter, a style of singing appeared which was very different from that preceding. It continued for some years, chiefly in the manner of one voice singing with accompaniment, and was exemplified by

<sup>20</sup> GIUSTINIANI – BOTTRIGARI, *Il Desiderio or Concerning the Playing*, ed. MacClintock, pp. 69-70. For the original text, see GIUSTINIANI, *Discorso sopra la musica de' suoi tempi*, ed. Solerti, pp. 107-108, reproduced below:

«Era gran competenza fra quelle dame di Mantova et di Ferrara, che facevano a gara non solo al metallo et alla disposizione delle voci, ma nell'ornamento di esquisiti passaggi tirati in opportuna congiuntura e non soverchi ... e di più col moderare e crescere la voce forte o piano, assottigliandola o ingrossandola, che secondo che veniva a' tagli, ora con strascinarla, ora smezzarla, con l'accompagnamento d'un soave interrotto sospiro, ora tirando passaggi lunghi, seguiti bene, spiccati, ora gruppi, ora salti, ora con trilli lunghi, ora con brevi, et or con passaggi soave e cantanti piano, dalli quali talvolta all'improvviso si sentiva echi e rispondere, e principalmente con azione del viso e dei sguardi e de' gesti che accompagnavano appropriatamente la musica e li concetti, e soprattutto senza moto della persona e della bocca e delle mani sconcioso, che non fusse indirizzato al fine per il quale si cantava e con far spiccare bene le parole in guisa tale che si sentisse anche l'ultima sillaba di ciascuna parola, la quale dalli passaggi et altri ornamenti non fusse interrotta o soppressa».

Scholar Adriano Cavicchi indicates that the first account on the Ladies of Ferrara was before 1575: it was written by Bernardo Canigiani in August 1571, although no reference is made to the specific virtuosic aspect that was characteristic of this ensemble. Canigiano described Luzzaschi as playing for the ladies: «E dietro un gravincembalo tòcco dal Luzzasco, cantarono la Signoria Lucrezia e la Signora Isabella Bendidio a solo a solo, che io non credo si possi sentir meglio» (LUZZASCHI, *Madrigali per cantare*, ed. Cavicchi, p. 15).

<sup>21</sup> CACCINI, *Le nuove musiche*.

Giovanni Andrea Napoletano, Signor Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, and Alessandro Merlo Romano [all of whom] sang ... with a range of 22 notes.<sup>22</sup>

Highly-ornamented solo singing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries became progressively more intense. Vocal treatises of the time, namely those of Maffei, Zacconi, Conforto, and Bovicelli, indicate that the skill of the singer, evident in the selection and execution of ornamentation, should reflect a fine sense of balance and style.<sup>23</sup> As embellishments, diminutions became tiresome when excessive: if the music was expected to move the affections as nothing else could, ornamentation and improvisation acted as valuable tools with which the affections could be moved more intensely.<sup>24</sup>

The above-mentioned concerns are present in the ornamentation of Bovicelli for the soprano part of the madrigal of Palestrina (1525-1594) *Io son ferito*, published in the former's book *Regole, passaggi di musica* (1594). In this example, it is noteworthy to see the diminutions, ascending/descending notes, as well as the dotted notes in the lower staff against the original, unembellished setting on the top (example 2).<sup>25</sup>

The diminutions appear more sparsely in this excerpt in comparison with the previous one. They are used, however, in accordance with what became the general tendency during this time, with a variety of equally-spaced and dotted notes: for Caccini, dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note figures had more grace than four equally-spaced eighths.<sup>26</sup>

When compared with the written-out embellished line of Orfeo's aria *Possente spirto*, Bovicelli's selection seems rather simple while showing, nevertheless, some complexity in its technical aspect. The more intricate use of ornamentation, already seen in Luzzaschi's example, is present in the following

<sup>22</sup> GIUSTINIANI – BOTTRIGARI, *Il Desiderio or Concerning the Playing*, ed. MacClintock, p. 28. For the original text, reproduced here below, GIUSTINIANI, *Discorso sopra la musica de' suoi tempi*, ed. Solerti, 106-107. The singers cited here are Giovanni Andrea Napoletano (unknown dates), Signor Giulio Cesare Brancaccio (1515–1586), and Alessandro Merlo Romano (1543-1601): «L'anno santo del 1575 o poco dopo si cominciò un modo di cantare molto diverso da quello di prima, e così per alcuni anni seguenti, massime nel modo di cantare con una voce sola sopra un istrumento, con l'esempio d'un Gio. Andrea napoletano, e del sig. Giulio Cesare Brancacci e d'Alessandro Merlo romano che cantavano ... nella larghezza dello spazio di 22 voci [i.e., note]».

<sup>23</sup> See MAFFEI, *Delle lettere del Signor Gio. Camillo Maffei*; ZACCONI, *Prattica di musica*; CONFORTO, *Breve et facile manier d'essercitarsi*; and BOVICELLI, *Regole, passaggi di musica*.

<sup>24</sup> See BROWN, *Embellishing Sixteenth-Century Music*, for examples of embellishments applied in Sixteenth-century music. For later embellishments, see DICKEY, *Ornamentation in Early Seventeenth-Century Music*, pp. 293-316.

<sup>25</sup> BOVICELLI, *Regole, passaggi di musica*, p. 38. Original text and translation (unknown poet and translator) read as follows: «Io son ferito, ah! lasso, / e chi mi diede accusar pur vorrei, ma non ho prova» [I am wounded, alas, / and I desire to accuse her who gave it to me, but I have no proof].

<sup>26</sup> CACCINI, *Le nuove musiche*, preface.

excerpt of Monteverdi's aria, where four of the five *terza rima* stanzas are set to a highly virtuosic vocal line over a repeating bass (example 3).<sup>27</sup>

Example 2. Bovicelli / Palestrina, *Io son ferito* (mm. 1-13)

Io son fe - ri - to hai las - so Io son fe -  
ri - t'hai las - so e chi mi die  
de

Example 3. Monteverdi, *Orfeo: Possente spirto* (Act III, Third Stanza, mm. 1-3)

ORFEO  
A lei  
A lei  
vol - t'ho il ca - min  
vol - t'ho il ca - min

Scholar Tim Carter indicates that this strophic-variation aria – as well as the one in the Prologue of *Orfeo* – draws upon «standard improvisation formulas such as the *arie da cantar terza rime*, using stock melodic-harmonic progressions ... as a basis for declamatory and/or embellished singing».<sup>28</sup> In addition to this,

<sup>27</sup> MONTEVERDI, *L'Orfeo*, p. 58. For a modern edition, see MONTEVERDI, *L'Orfeo*, ed. Malipiero. Original text, by Alessandro Striggio, and translation read as follows: «A lei volt' ho il cammin [per l'aer cieco]» (For her I have made my way [through the blind air]). Translation by Gilbert Blin in MONTEVERDI – STRIGGIO, *Monteverdi's 'Orfeo'*, ed. Blin. All translations of *Orfeo* will be taken from this source. On the *aria da cantar terza rima* specifically, see PALISCA, *Aria Types in the Earliest Operas*.

<sup>28</sup> CARTER, *Some Notes on the First Edition of Monteverdi*, p. 130. See also CARTER, 'Possente Spirto': *On Taming the Power of Music*.

Monteverdi included both the plain and the embellished melodic line (similarly to Bovicelli's procedure in Example 2).<sup>29</sup>

As demonstrated by the three musical excerpts above, the level of difficulty increases from Bovicelli's 1594 ornamentation, to Luzzaschi's 1601 (published) works for the Ladies of Ferrara, and finally to Monteverdi's 1609 aria *Possente spirto*, with its written-out ornamentation. It is noticeable that in the latter example Monteverdi adopted a manner of elaboration that exceeds the simple use of diminutions. He blended them with more complex embellishments, sometimes fully flourished until the last note, while others are left deliberately empty. He also utilized several ornaments defined by Caccini in his Preface to *Le nuove musiche*, often personalizing them, with the extensive use of *trillo*.<sup>30</sup>

For Maffei, «the diminutions [and embellishments in general] become tiresome when the ear is saturated with them», and for Zacconi «that singer will always be praised who, with a few ornaments, makes them at the right moment». <sup>31</sup> Conforto, instead, focused mainly on acquiring agility and skill in improvising. In fact, Giustiniani complained that Conforto himself sang «too many notes.»<sup>32</sup> The question posed here, then, is: when does a lot become too much? Based on these accounts only, it is difficult to assess when and where there is an excess of notes/embellishments. For instance, when observing the difference between the highly ornamented *Possente spirto* and Orfeo's Act I aria *Rosa del Ciel*, the latter setting is rather limited regarding written-out ornamentations. When analyzing the music and the text of both examples, it becomes clear that the two depict significantly different intentions/emotions and are directed to different onstage listeners: in both pieces, such musical choices were beyond a mere preference towards vocal prowess. As scholar Silke Leopold determined,<sup>33</sup>

the precisely notated embellishments of 'Possente spirto' indicate that the coloratura was no longer seen only as a decorative accessory added by the singer, but rather as a constituent element of the composition.

<sup>29</sup> According to Carter, «it is not clear whether the embellished version of 'Possente spirto' reflects Monteverdi's attempt to notate [Francesco] Rasi's performance, his memory of that performance, or indeed what he wished Rasi had performed. There is no doubt, however, that Rasi was well equipped to handle such virtuosic writing» (CARTER, *Some Notes on the First Edition of Monteverdi*, p. 131).

<sup>30</sup> See CACCINI, *Le nuove musiche*, preface. *Trillo* here is in the sense of a re-striking of each note with the throat, or what we would today refer to as 'repeated notes,' or *note ribattute*.

<sup>31</sup> MAFFEI, *Delle lettere del Signor Gio. Camillo Maffei*, p. 59, and ZACCONI, *Prattica di musica*, translated in ELLIOT, *Singing in style*, p. 20. The original texts read as follows: «I passaggi di piacevoli, diventerebbono noiosi, quando l'orecchia appieno satia ne divenisse [sic]» and «Sempre sarà più lodato quel cantore che con poca gorgia a tempo fatta, poco si lontana, che chi lontanadosi molto tardi, o per tempo arriva».

<sup>32</sup> Giustiniani quoted in MAFFEI *et al.*, *Late Renaissance Singing*, ed. Foreman, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> LEOPOLD, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, p. 63.

Therefore, the ornamentation was to be performed as written by the composer, with nothing for the sake of aesthetic preference alone.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. *L'Accademia degli Invaghiti*: Musical and Philosophical Implications

Aesthetic preference is one of the reasons why Monteverdi chose to set the more elaborate pieces of *Orfeo* the way he did – such as Orfeo's *Possente spirito* and the final duet between he and his father Apollo. Particularly when comparing these two examples, several factors indicate that virtuosity in itself was not all that the Cremonese composer was aiming for. The third (and last) analyzed point of influence on Monteverdi's approach to *Orfeo* – the impact of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti* – can help explain Monteverdi's early operatic style in light of the philosophical and aesthetic ideals and preferences of the members of this academy. The cultural/artistic input of the *Invaghiti*, acting both as a patron and as a crucial component of the intellectual milieu, was strengthened by the fact that both Francesco Gonzaga and the librettist for the opera *Orfeo*, Alessandro Striggio (1573-1630), were members of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*.

The importance that the *Invaghiti* placed on oratory, poetry, and music, following Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, and Ciceronian principles, resonates in the writings and surviving works of the members of this academy, including *Orfeo*.<sup>35</sup> Such principles expressed the humanist view that, as with oratory, performance [whether is musical or textual] should serve «the secondary goals of 'moving' and 'delighting' the listener, while the primary value is to be found through the moral instruction offered in the meaning of the words themselves,» as scholar Joel Schwindt indicates.<sup>36</sup> Besides the moral instruction, Aristotle defended that the purpose of music was similar to that of oratory: to move the affections by

<sup>34</sup> For more information on ornamentation and performance practice during Monteverdi's time, see DICKEY, *Ornamentation in Early Seventeenth-Century Music*, pp. 31-44, and BAIRD, *The Bel Canto Singing Style* and pp. 293-316.

<sup>35</sup> As indicated by Schwindt, of the many letters on the *Accademia degli Invaghiti* several are available in the *Raccolta di cinquantaquattro lettere d'Accademici Invaghiti di Mantova dal 1563 al 1599*, at the Biblioteca Comunale Teresiana di Mantova, Ms. 995, and in the Archivio di Stato di Mantova (I-MAa) and in the Archivio di Stato di Parma. The sack of Mantua in 1640 and a fire in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino in the early twentieth century contributed to a considerable loss of many of the works produced by the members of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*. See SCHWINDT, 'All that Glisters', p. 240. For the writings on their activities that are based on research of surviving documents, see, for example, MAYLENDER, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia*, pp. 363-366; CAPPELLINI, *Storia e indirizzi dell'Accademia Virgiliana*, pp. 199-213, and CARNEVALI, *Cenni storici sull'Accademia Virgiliana*, pp. 7-27.

<sup>36</sup> SCHWINDT, 'All that Glisters', p. 246. See CICERO, *De oratore ad Quintum fratrem*, ed. Robia – Giunta, II, 28, for the primacy of instruction over the moving of the mind and the delight of the ears.

«anticipating and imitating the effects on the listener's *parti interne* of the emotion one wished to evoke,» in the words of Hanning.<sup>37</sup>

The members of the academy adopted such viewpoints, in direct opposition to the ideas that had been espoused by Monteverdi's antagonist Giovanni Artusi (1540-1613), to whom instead the musician's purpose was «giovare e dilettere», not «movere», and «not to act upon, nor to cause effects or move the souls of others to different passions».<sup>38</sup> For the *Invaghiti*, however, that was exactly what music was for. To this end, beauty and musical interest could be achieved through opposites, from tension and resolution, sadness and *lieto fine*, evil and good with a final moral message: in *Orfeo*, the «mutazioni affettive/d'affetti» (from unhappiness to happiness and vice-versa) are a crucial aspect of this opera,<sup>39</sup> already foreseen in the Prologue sung by the character La Musica, *Hor mentre i canti alterno hor lieti, hor mesti* [While I vary my songs, now happy, now sad],<sup>40</sup> and seen in great intensity in Act II in the announcement of the messenger Silvia of the sudden death of Euridice.<sup>41</sup>

In deference to the past, the *Invaghiti* adopted the maxim that art should «docere, movere, delectare», *i.e.*: instruction, followed by the movement of the mind and the delight of the senses, following the three goals of the orator according to Cicero.<sup>42</sup> This three-part axiom echoed the Aristotelian three modes of persuasion: *ethos*, appeal to ethics/character; *logos*, appeal to logic/reason; and

<sup>37</sup> HANNING, *Of Poetry and Music's Power*, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> ARTUSI, *Seconda parte dell'Artusi*, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> The expression «*mutazioni d'affetti*» referred to Monteverdi's music appears in BADOARO, *Argomento et scenario Delle Nozze d'Enea in Lavinia*, and is further discussed in LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, pp. 61-70. The question of opposites applied to Monteverdi's *Orfeo* – namely of passions – is discussed by several scholars, namely LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, pp. 61-93, and KURTZMAN, *Intimations of Chaos*, pp. 1-25.

<sup>40</sup> Striggio presented from the beginning in the Prologue an Apollonian music, one that can move the human passions (second strophe: «Io la Musica son, ch'a i dolci accenti, / Sò far tranquillo ogni turbato core, / Ed hor di nobil ira, & hor d'amore / Posso infiammar le più gelate menti» [I am Music, who in sweet accents, / Can make peaceful every troubled heart, / And so with noble anger, and so with love, / Can I inflame the coldest minds.]), but also of purifying the soul from those same passions (third strophe: «Io sù Cetera d'or cantando soglio / Mortal orecchio lusingar talhora, / E in questa guisa a l'armonia Sonora / De la lira del Ciel più l'alme invoglio» [Singing with my golden Lyre, I like / To charm, now and then, mortal ears, / And in such a fashion that I make their souls aspire more / For the resounding harmony of the lyre of Heaven']), connecting such *catharsis* of passions with the celestial harmony, hence grating eternal salvation to the soul. See LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, p. 90. See also CALCAGNO, *From Madrigal to Opera*, pp. 32-70.

<sup>41</sup> This scene has been analyzed by several scholars: see for example the analysis of LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, pp. 73-81; CHAFE, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, pp. 139-147; KURTZMAN, *Intimations of Chaos*, pp. 1-25; CARTER, *Some Notes on the First Edition of Monteverdi*, pp. 123-125.

<sup>42</sup> CICERO, *De oratore ad Quintum fratrem*, ed. Robia – Giunta; see translation CICERO, *On the Ideal Orator*. According to Lauro Martines, «the humanists believed that nothing moved the passions more effectively than the power of the language» (MARTINES, *Power and imagination*, p. 194).

*pathos*, appeal to emotion,<sup>43</sup> and it was in line with the Ciceronian idea embraced by the *Invaghiti* that «nothing is more attractive, more beautiful than virtue»,<sup>44</sup> a message that is reinforced in the duet between Orfeo and his father in Act V («...Dove ha virtù verace / Degno premio di sè, diletto e pace» [Where true virtue / Has the due reward of delight and peace]) and other references to Apollo throughout the opera, through the allusive quality of Striggio's text.

The idea of virtue in connection to Apollo appears in less ambiguous terms in the aforementioned duet if compared to Orfeo's first musical intervention, "Rosa del Ciel:" according to Paolo Fabbri, the meaning of the declaration to the Sun in Orfeo's Act I aria is clear in the first verses (seen below) «only with the reference to the device of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*: an eagle with its eyes fixed in the sun, accompanied by the motto '*Nihil pulcherius*' ['Nothing more beautiful']».<sup>45</sup>

ORFEO

Rosa del Ciel, vita del mondo, e degna  
Prole di lui che l'Universo affrena.  
Sol che'l tutto circonda e'l tutto miri,  
Dagli stellanti giri,  
Dimmi, vedesti mai  
Di me più lieto e fortunato amante?

ORFEO

Rose of heaven, life of the world, and worthy  
Heir of him who holds the Universe in sway:  
O Sun, who encircles all and sees all  
From your starry orbits,  
Tell me, have you ever seen  
A happier and more fortunate lover than I?<sup>46</sup>

*Rosa del Ciel* is framed with subtle textual references to the Sun, starting by the incipit, and has a focus on celebratory singing. Indeed, as Fabbri indicates, Orfeo is invited by a Shepherd to sing 'Some happy song inspired by Love' [*qualche lieta canzone che detti Amore*'], to which Orfeo responds by singing this aria.<sup>47</sup> As Solomon points out, Ficino referred to the Sun as the «physical, cosmic symbol of the purest Platonic knowledge.»<sup>48</sup> Sun as the light of the universe is an idea that

<sup>43</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, trans. Rhys Roberts, pp. 24-25, 1356a. See SCHWINDT, 'All that Glisters', pp. 239-270.

<sup>44</sup> The letter in which the *Invaghiti*'s motto is based is both reproduced in the original and translated to Italian in CICERO, *Le lettere familiari latine IX*, p. 118.

<sup>45</sup> FABBRI, *Monteverdi*, p. 69. John Whenham provides an alternative reading of this aria: «While this [piece] is clearly a reference to Apollo, son of Jupiter, Striggio carefully couches it in terms which could also be interpreted as referring to the sun as the creation of a Christian God, a cultural ambiguity which is exploited throughout the opera until the final (1609) chorus, which is explicitly Christian in tone (perhaps a further indication that the new ending was written by someone other than Striggio)» (WHENHAM, *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, p. 51).

<sup>46</sup> Translation by Gilbert Blin in MONTEVERDI, *Orfeo*, ed. Blin. All translations of the 1609 libretto of *Orfeo* will be taken from this source.

<sup>47</sup> The invitation to sing in Monteverdi's opera and the concept of mimesis is explored in further detail by FABBRI, *Tasso, Guarini e il 'divino Claudio'*, pp. 244-248. Adhering to such invitations (to realistically sing on stage) are, in Fabbri's words, «*passi assolutamente mimetici*», p. 245. On this topic, see also PIRROTTA, *Li due Orfei*. In this regard, in a letter of Monteverdi to librettist Striggio in December 9, 1616, the composer paraphrased the description of the Camerata Fiorentina regarding the concept of *recitar cantando* as «to speak while singing, and not ... [to] sing while speaking» [«al parlar cantando e non ... al cantar parlando»] in MONTEVERDI, *The Letters*, ed. Stevens, p. 110; see original in MONTEVERDI, *Lettere*, ed. Lax, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> FICINO, *Epistolae* 6, fol. 826, quoted in SOLOMON, *The Neoplatonic Apotheosis*, p. 36.

dates (at least) since Plato, and its recurrent reference in *Orfeo* is seen throughout the opera.<sup>49</sup> In *Rosa del Ciel* the reference to Apollo – god of the sun as well as of music and of reason – lasts only for a few verses, as seen by the text above, through the words «Sol(e)» and «(Rosa del) Ciel».<sup>50</sup>

In the brief textual reference to the Sun/Apollo, *Rosa del Ciel* is set harmonically in g with a minor third above the bass, until it changes to a different one (f) in the verse «Di me più lieto e fortunato amante» [A happier and more fortunate lover than I?] when no longer referring to the ‘Sun.’<sup>51</sup> The same harmony can be observed in other pieces that refer to Apollo, directly or indirectly, through Orfeo or Apollo himself, such as *Ecco pur* in Act II sung by Orfeo – a dance-rhythm in ternary form that, again, refers to the Sun (from which it can be inferred that it refers to Apollo), also in a simple, syllabic setting as with *Rosa del Ciel*:

<p>ORFEO Ecco pur ch'è voi ritorno, Care selve e piagge amate, Da quel Sol fatte beate Per cui sol mie notti han giorno.</p>	<p>ORFEO Here I return to you, Dear forests and beloved meadows, Blessed by that very Sun Through whom alone my nights are day.</p>
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Besides sharing the same mode, both arias follow a similar syllabic setting in words that refer to ‘Sun’ in their first occurrence, as seen in the following two musical examples: on Act I aria, the words «Rosa del Ciel» are set D-B ♭-A-B ♭, a short motive that is similar to the words on the first «Sol» in «Ecco pur» in the verse «Sol (fatte beate)» [(Blessed by that very) Sun], D-B ♭-C-B ♭:

<sup>49</sup> PLATO, *De Re Publica*, (as translated to Italian by Ficino) and *Plato's Republic for Readers*, trans. Blair, 508a-571c.

<sup>50</sup> «Ciel» [Heaven] is a word repeated throughout the opera in several instances, such as in the Prologue, in Act I the chorus' *Lasciate i monti*, in Act II right after Orfeo's *Ecco pur*, in Act IV right before Orfeo's strophic aria *Qual honor di te fia degno*, the chorus in Act V, among other examples.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Chafe discusses in depth the use of «tonal system/language/tonality» first in a broader spectrum and then applied to Monteverdi in the first three chapters of his *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, pp. 1-55, and specifically to *Orfeo*, pp. 126-158. Such a reading raises issues of «tonal and modal thinking» during the late 1500s/early 1600s in today's scholarship and is not met without criticism. Scholars Daniele Sabaino and Marco Mangani refer to and expand Chafe's tonal readings applied to *Orfeo* in SABAINO – MANGANI, *L'organizzazione dello spazio sonoro nell'Orfeo*, pp. 1-49.

Due to the intricacies of discussing the use of modes, modal mixture, and tonality in Monteverdi's music, for harmonic analysis the term ‘mode’ will be utilized instead of ‘key,’ and the use of a lower case letter in a certain mode – ‘g’, for instance – will refer to having a minor third above the bass (in the case of g mode, B ♭), while the use of upper case will refer to having a major third instead (in the case of G mode, B ♮).



Example 4. C. Monteverdi, *Orfeo: Rosa del Ciel* (Act I: mm. 1-2)

ORFEO

Ro - sa del ciel vi - ta del mon - do e de-gna pro - le di lui

Example 5. C. Monteverdi, *Orfeo: Ecco pur ch'a voi ritorno* (Act II: mm. 1-6)

ORFEO

Ec-co pur ch'a voi ri - tor - no ca - re sel - ve e piag-ge a - ma - te

da quel sol fat - te be - a - te per cui sol mie not - t'han gior - no

Both *Rosa del Ciel* and *Ecco pur* convey the serene joy of Orfeo before the *peripeteia* takes place with the tragic death of his beloved one, unlike other movements that, although not conveying anymore a peaceful environment due to Euridice's passing, share the same mode (g) with the two pieces just discussed above. Among these excerpts post-*peripeteia* are the Sinfonia that precedes and follows the aria *Possente spirto* (Orfeo); the same Sinfonia repeated in Act V when Apollo descends from a cloud; *Possente spirto*; Apollo's longest lines in Act V; and the final duet with his son.

As Chafe indicates in his monograph on tonal analysis applied to Monteverdi's music, G, g, a, and d modes appear often throughout *Orfeo*, with g related usually (but not always) to a «serious, hopeful mode, while G ... is associated with his overconfidence and failure to realize the harsh realities of existence».<sup>52</sup> These features and their contrast are particularly striking when, after singing the strophic variations of *Possente spirto*, Orfeo directs his speech to Caronte:

ORFEO	ORFEO
Sol tu, nobile Dio, puoi darmi aita,	You alone, noble God, can help me,
Nè temer dei, che sopra una aurea Cetra	Nor should you fear, since on a golden Lyre
Sol di corde soavi armo le dita	My fingers are only armed with sweet strings,
Contra cui rigid' alma in van s'impetra.	Against which the merciless soul tries in vain to resist.

<sup>52</sup> CHAFE, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, p. 138.

With a distinct setting from the previous stanzas, the first two lines of this example are set in g mode, when Orfeo's lines are set to convey a serious and humble manner, asking the ferryman for help as his only hope («Sol tu ... puoi darmi aita» [you alone ... can help me]). The second half of this stanza suffers a subtle change, turning to G mode, when Orfeo returns to talk about himself and his playing in the words «Corde soave ... armo le dita» [My fingers ... sweet strings], confident in his powers to which no 'merciless soul' [*rigid'alma*] can resist, abandoning the simple syllabic setting to a melismatic, ornamented words «in van» [in vain] at the end of his speech. To these words, Caronte simply and coldly responds:

CARONTE

Ben mi lusinga alquanto  
Dilettandomi il core,  
Sconsolato Cantore,  
Il tuo pianti e 'l tuo canto.  
Ma lunge, ah lunge sia da questo petto  
Pietà, di mio valor non degno effetto.

CARONTE

Indeed you charm me,  
Appeasing my heart,  
Disconsolate Singer,  
With your complaints and your song.  
But far, ah, far from this breast  
Lies pity, an effect unworthy of my valour

Orfeo's overconfidence expressed in this passage in G did not yield him the passage to Hades, nor did his joyful and equally self-assured moment in Act IV on his way to rescue Euridice while already in the Underworld, «Qual honor di te fia degno»:

SPIRITO

Ecco il gentil cantore  
Che sua sposa conduce al Ciel superno.

SPIRIT

Here is the gentle singer,  
Who leads his bride to the Heaven above.

ORFEO

Qual honor di te fia degno,  
Mia cetra onnipotente,  
S'hai nel Tartareo Regno  
Piegar potuto ogni indurata mente?  
Luogo havrai tra le più belle  
Immagini celesti,  
Ond'al tuo suon le stelle  
Danzeranno co' giri hor tardi hor presti.  
Io per te felice à pieno  
Vedrò l'amato volto,  
E nel candido seno  
De la mia Donna oggi sarò raccolto.

ORFEO

What honour is worthy of you,  
My all-powerful lyre,  
For you have, in the Kingdom of Tartarus,  
Been able to make yield every hardened heart?  
A place shall you have among the fairest  
Images of heaven,  
Where at your sound the stars  
Shall dance and twirl, now slowly, now quickly.  
I, through you, happy at last,  
Shall see the beloved face,  
And in the white bosom  
Of my Lady today I will rest.

Ma mentre io canto (ohimè) chi m'assicura  
Ch'ella mi segua? Ohimè, chi mi nasconde  
De l'amate pupille il dolce lume?

But while I sing, alas, who can assure me  
That she follows me? Alas, who hides from me  
The sweet light of her beloved eyes?

Punctuated with short ritornelli by violins and with some virtuosic (short) passages, *Qual honor di te fia degno* can, at first, resemble a musical miniature of *Possente spirto* until the verse «E nel candido seno / De la mia Donna oggi sarò raccolto» [But while I sing, alas, who can assure me / That she follows me?]. Unlike in the latter aria in g, however, Orfeo is not trying here to convince or show anything to anyone but himself, having substantially less ornamentation in his melodic line: the excess of confidence at the beginning of *Qual honor...* by singing victory just before losing Euridice for the second time is quickly shaken by his inner doubts, expressed by the tritone on the word «Ohimè [Alas] – Ma mentre io canto (ohimé) chi m'assicura» [But while I sing, alas, who can assure me] – in the sentence that immediately followed his (wrongly) victorious singing, forecasting Orfeo's second loss and, again, followed by his deep expression of grief.

Aligning both with the moral tone and with the poetic/dramatic concerns in several of the works written by the *Invaghiti* members, Orfeo's «second loss» of Euridice represents the Aristotelian «tragedy of character» and its *hamartia* of the main character in Monteverdi's opera, *i.e.*, the heroic protagonist who endures a tragic end due to his own failures and who «does not change into misfortune through bad character and vice, but on account of some missing the mark [*hamartia*], if he is among those who are in great repute and good fortune» in the words of Aristotle.<sup>53</sup> In the 1609 version of *Orfeo*, although the protagonist is not destroyed by the Bacchantes as according to Poliziano, he still loses Euridice twice, the second one irreversibly.<sup>54</sup> This time, such tragic event is attributed to Orfeo's inability to control his emotions and to follow the instructions of the 'test of virtue' on his 'youthful desire' [*giovenil desio*] that Plutone imposed upon Orfeo in Act IV: to not look back when rescuing Euridice from the Underworld, with the price of losing her forever. Orfeo's failure can be analyzed not only when he does gaze at her in Hades, but also when he does not succeed to convince Caronte with his virtuosic aria *Possente spirto*:

ORFEO

Possente Spirto, e formidabil Nume,  
Senza cui far passaggio a l'altra riva  
Alma da corpo sciolta in van presume;

ORFEO

Powerful Spirit and fear-inspiring God,  
Without whom to make passage to the other bank  
A soul, freed from the body, presumes in vain:

<sup>53</sup> The «tragedy of character» is one of the four species of tragedy discussed by ARISTOTLE, *Aristotle Poetics*, trans. Sachs, XVIII, pp. 45-47 (the «complex tragedy», the «tragedy of suffering», the «tragedy of character», and the «spectacular tragedy» or «simple tragedy»). Aristotle explored the concept of *hamartia* also in his *Poetics*, XIII, pp. 35-37.

<sup>54</sup> See POLIZIANO, *La rappresentazione della favola d'Orfeo*, as well as PIRROTTA, *Li due Orfei and Music and theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*. Besides the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian models, as La Via and Fabbri indicate, Striggio referred to *Aminta* of Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) and *Il Pastor fido* of Giovanni Battista Guarini (1538-1612) in terms of poetic/dramatic models in the writing of the libretto for *Orfeo*. See GUARINI, *Il Pastor Fido*, and TASSO, *Aminta*. See also LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, pp. 61-93, and FABBRI, *Tasso, Guarini e il 'divino Claudio'*, pp. 243-254.

Non viv' io, nò, che poi di vita è priva Mia cara sposa, il cor non è più meco E senza cor com' esser può ch'io viva?	I do not live, no; since my dear bride Was deprived of life, my heart is no longer with me, And without a heart how can it be that I live?
A lei volt' ho il cammin per l'aer cieco, A l'Inferno non già, ch'ovunque stassi Tanta bellezza, il Paradiso ha seco.	For her I have made my way through the blind air, Not yet to Hades, for wherever there is Such beauty there is Paradise in her company.
Orfeo son io, che d'Euridice i passi Seguo per queste tenebrose arene, Ove giammai per huom mortal non vassi. O delle luci mie luci serene, S'un vostro sguardo può tornarmi in vita, Ahi, chi nega il conforto à le mie pene?	Orfeo am I, who follows Euridice's steps On these dark sands, Where never mortal man has gone. O serene light of my eyes, If one look of yours can return me to life, Ah, who denies comfort to my afflictions?
Sol tuo, nobile Dio, puoi darmi aita, Nè temer dei, che sopra una aurea Cetra Sol di corde soavi armo le dita Contra cui rigid' alma in van s'impetra.	You alone, noble God, can help me, Nor should you fear, since on a golden Lyre My fingers are only armed with sweet strings, Against which the merciless soul tries in vain to resist.

Despite being written as an impressive display of vocal prowess during four of the five stanzas (lasting until when Orfeo discloses his identity, «Orfeo son io» [I am Orfeo] and abandons the strophic variation form), *Possente spirto* is also an example of when oratory becomes ineffectual, for nothing can move Caronte and make him allow Orfeo to enter Hades.<sup>55</sup> Although this aria charms and delights the heart of the ferryman – himself stating that «ben mi lusinga alquanto / dilettrandomi il core / sconcolato cantore» [Indeed you charm me, / appeasing my heart, / disconsolate singer], in response to the music of Orfeo – Caronte does not pity the protagonist, denying him access to the Underworld.

Instead of discreetly displaying talent with morally sound/reasonable arguments (*logos*, one of the Aristotelian modes of persuasion in his *Rhetoric* referred to above), Orfeo embodies musical brilliance for most of his aria, which is the main cause of his failure.<sup>56</sup> In the words of Schwindt,

the humanist philosophy of the *Invaghiti* would seem directly to challenge the view of the work as a 'hymn' to music's greatness. As an oration that fails as a result of the speaker's attempt to substitute stylistic brilliance for argumentative substance, the musical exhibition of Monteverdi's setting [of "Possente spirto"] becomes an illustration by excellence of the protagonist's attempt to sway his

<sup>55</sup> Such a reading has been supported by scholars such as STEINHEUER, *Orfeo*, pp. 119-140 and SCHWINDT, 'All that Glisters', pp. 239-270. Tim Carter defends that the failure of this aria is «not due a lack of rhetorical: nothing could move Caronte, and pity is more a female virtue. ... Falling asleep – that is, being enchanted into another world – is an entirely positive response to (Orphic) music». Also, the attempt to evoke pity in Caronte at the beginning of the fifth stanza led Orfeo to fail in his purposes. As Carter reminds, pity is «more a female virtue» CARTER, *Some Notes on the First Edition of Monteverdi*, p. 116.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

judge with a barrage of 'musical delights,' rather than a triumphant display of music's expressive power.<sup>57</sup>

The misuse and misjudgment of the rhetorical style leads Orfeo to fail in his task to convince the river Styx ferryman: Joachim Steinheuer analyzes the use of high, middle, and low rhetorical styles when referring to the case of Orfeo, and matches each style with the situation and listener in both Striggio's libretto and the composer's music:<sup>58</sup> Orfeo's failure in the first four stanzas of *Possente spirto* lies first in the use of a middle expressive style, displaying his singing abilities, instead of engaging a high style more suitable for a persuasive speech to Caronte. Furthermore, the aria lacks the moral instruction and logical arguments necessary to convince him. Orfeo attempts instead to evoke musical delight and *pathos*, rather to focus on *logos* or *ethos*, leading to his unsuccessful attempt to cross the Styx river. The elaborate and excessive embellishments in *Possente spirto* further demonstrate Orfeo's erratic behavior, with his eagerness and urgent need to persuade Caronte to deliver him to his beloved, yet failing to achieve his goal. The complex ornamentation, intended to persuade but going against the idea of the *recitar cantando* due to its emphasis on the (mimetic aspect of) singing rather than convincing with words/arguments,<sup>59</sup> is a product not of reason [*logos*] nor moral/character [*ethos*], but of passion [*pathos*].<sup>60</sup>

Florentine patron Giovanni de Bardi (1534-1612) affirmed, «as Aristotle said elsewhere, he cannot be called a good musician who does not have the power to draw someone to some moral *ethos*».<sup>61</sup> The legendary demigod Orfeo, however, cannot be considered a poor musician despite his temporary lapse into human vulnerability and misuse of rhetorical style and purpose, for he will have the opportunity to redeem himself for his excessive display of vocal prowess and of emotion. After an immoderate lament at his final loss and an equally immoderate renunciation of all love for any woman at the beginning of Act V, he will be restored to celestial divinity by Apollo. Orfeo's redemption comes indeed at the conclusion of the 1609 version. As La Via indicated, this celestial ascension of Orfeo enabled by his father Apollo, occurring in Act V before the final chorus, represents his distancing from the human passions finally while achieving harmony through the 'true virtue' [*virtù verace*] of eternal life.<sup>62</sup> This Neoplatonic

<sup>57</sup> SCHWINDT, 'All that Glisters', p. 244.

<sup>58</sup> STEINHEUER, *Orfeo*, pp. 119-140.

<sup>59</sup> MONTEVERDI, *The Letters*, ed. Stevens, p. 110; see original in MONTEVERDI, *Lettere*, ed. Lax, p. 9: «Al parlar cantando e non ... al cantar parlando,» paraphrasing the expression «recitar cantando» of the Camerata Fiorentina referring to the new monodic style.

<sup>60</sup> The depiction of emotion has been discussed in depth by Jeffrey Kurtzman, most notably in his discussion of the expression of grief through the use of the tritone (signifying his «psychological disintegration») when Orfeo learns of the death of Euridice and then experiences her loss a second time. See KURTZMAN, *Intimations of Chaos*, pp. 1-25.

<sup>61</sup> BARDI, *Discorso da me mandato a Giulio Caccini detto Romano*, ed. Palisca, p. 113.

<sup>62</sup> LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, p. 65. As Solomon put it, «the concept of ascending to heaven as a reward for virtue and to avoid the vagaries of human emotions is germane to neither musical theater nor Renaissance Catholic eschatology. It belongs to Renaissance Neoplatonism, as promulgated by Marsilio Ficino and Matteo Palmieri» (SOLOMON, *The Neoplatonic*

message is compatible with the Aristotelian *catharsis* of mortal affects, both echoed in the words of the chorus before the scene in Act IV with Orfeo and Apollo:

CORO DI SPIRITI (Act IV)	CHORUS OF SPIRITS (Act IV)
È la virtute un raggio	Virtue is a ray
Di celeste bellezza,	Of celestial beauty,
Pregio de l'alma ond'ella sol s'apprezza:	Prize of the soul, where alone it is valued:
Questa di Tempo oltraggio	The ravages of Time
Non teme, anzi maggiore	It does not fear, rather
Ne l'uom rendono gli anni il suo splendore.	In man do the years restore its greater splendour.
Orfeo vinse l'Inferno, e vinto poi	Orfeo conquered Hades and then was conquered
Fù da gli affetti suoi.	By his emotions.
Degno d'eterna gloria	Worthy of eternal glory
Fia sol colui ch'avrà di sè vittoria.	Is the one who will have victory over himself.

and later at the end of Act V, reinforcing the ideas of virtue and celestial beauty (for, following the Ciceronian's thoughts discussed above, «nothing is more beautiful than virtue»),<sup>63</sup> eternal life/glory, and, finally, Orfeo's purification of human passions.<sup>64</sup>

CORO (Act V)	CHORUS (Act V)
Vanne, Orfeo, felice apieno	Go, Orfeo happy at last,
A goder celeste honore	To enjoy celestial honour
L'ave ben non mai vien meno.	Where good never lessens,
L'ave mai non fu dolore,	Where there was never grief,
Mentr'altari, incensi e voti	While altars, incenses and prayers
Noi t'offriam lieti e devoti.	We offer to you, happy and devoted.
Così va chi non s'arretra	So goes one who does not retreat
Al chiamar di lume eterno,	At the call of the eternal light,
Così grazia in ciel impetra	So he obtains grace in heaven
Ahi qua giù provò l'inferno	Who down here has braved Hell
E chi semina fra doglie	And he who sows in sorrow
D'ogni grazia il frutto coglie.	Reaps the fruit of all grace.

According to Platonic philosophy, the higher one ascends, the greater Virtue, Goodness, and the (idea of) Beauty are – as referred to in the last chorus, «celeste bellezza» [celestial beauty].<sup>65</sup> Apollo references these thoughts when inviting

*Apotheosis*, p. 28). Both Solomon and Hanning share the beliefs that the happy ending belongs to Ottavio Rinuccini in the libretto for Euridice, written nine years before the 1609 *Orfeo* version. See HANNING, *The Ending of L'Orfeo*.

<sup>63</sup> See footnote 44.

<sup>64</sup> SOLOMON, *The Neoplatonic Apotheosis*, pp. 37-39. Also, see LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, pp. 66-67 and 85-86.

<sup>65</sup> Beauty's distinctive pedagogical effects show why Plato talks about its goodness and good consequences, sometimes even its identity with «the good». See PLATO, *The Laws*, 841c; PLATO, *Philebus*, 66a-b; PLATO, *Plato's Republic for Readers*, trans. Blair, 401c; PLATO, *The Symposium*, trans Bisshe Shelley, 201c, 205e.

Orfeo for his apotheosis, where he will be able to see the ideal representation of Euridice's physical beauty through heavenly beauty.<sup>66</sup> As Sternfeld states, «Orfeo's happiness at being able to view Eurydice's lovely 'semblance' in the stars, instead of beholding her personally, is a faithful reflection of Neoplatonism views».<sup>67</sup>

The appearance of Apollo in Act I and then at the end of the opera in the 1609 version with his demigod son, during the apotheosis, gives a sense of a complete narrative: the relationship between Orfeo and he is portrayed as more closely related, unlike in the original ending.<sup>68</sup> The duet brings together several of the aspects seen so far in the Opera, such as the Neoplatonic ascension to heaven – where Orfeo can contemplate the ideal form of Euridice's Beauty – the Aristotelian *catharsis*, the power of music, and the achievement of Virtue as an ultimate (moral and ethical) goal:

APOLLO E ORFEO	APOLLO AND ORFEO
Siam cantando al Cielo,	Let us rise, singing, to Heaven,
Dove ha virtù verace	Where true virtue
Degno premio di sè, diletto e pace.	Has the due reward of delight and peace.

This duet takes place after Apollo descends from heaven in a cloud, at the sound of the same g-mode Sinfonia that appeared two acts prior, before and after *Possente spirto*, indicating the relationship between this aria and the final duet. Borrowing Nino Pirrotta's phrase, the use of the Sinfonia of *Possente spirto* for the scene between Apollo and Orfeo represents «un altro simbolo orfico».<sup>69</sup> In the duet, also in g mode just as in Orfeo's main aria, both characters are assigned florid and vocally demanding passages, after Apollo arrives on stage as a *deus ex machina*. Some portions of the duet are equally difficult in florid style and vocal range for both characters, resembling the difficulty level and even some fragments appearing in the first four stanzas of the aria *Possente spirto*, as can be observed in the following example, particularly with Apollo's measures 3-4 and 10:<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> PLATO, *De Re Publica*, and *Plato's Republic for Readers*, trans. Blair, 508e-509a. See Solomon's discussion of 'celeste bellezza' in SOLOMON, *The Neoplatonic Apotheosis*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> Sternfeld in WHENHAM, *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> As D. Freeman states, «Apollo appears in the first act during *Rosa del Ciel*, so that this intervention in the final act could have something of the effect of a successful *da capo* – inevitable and surprising at the same time. Not an artificial ending, but a coming full circle» Freeman in WHENHAM, *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, p. 163.

<sup>69</sup> PIRROTTA, *Teatro, scene e musica nelle opere di Monteverdi*, p. 53.

<sup>70</sup> MONTEVERDI, *L'Orfeo*, pp. 95-97.

Example 6. Monteverdi, *Orfeo: Saliam, cantando* (Duet Apollo and Orfeo, Act V: mm. 1-15)

APOLLO

ORFEO

3

5

8

11

14

Sa - liam, sa - liam sa - liam

can - tan Can -

d'al Cie - lo, do - ve ha vir - tù ve - ra - ce de - gno

tan d'al Cie - lo, do - ve ha vir - tù ve - ra - ce de - gno

pre - mio di sè di - let pre - mio di sè

- to e pa - ce, do - ve ha virtù ve - ra - ce de - gno pre - mio di sè

do - ve ha virtù ve - ra - ce de - gno pre - mio di sè

di - let - to e pa - ce. di - let - to e pa - ce.

When comparing Apollo's measures 8-11 with the four measures in the first stanza of *Possente spirto* on the words «alma da corpo sciolta in van presume» [a soul, freed from the body, presumes in vain], the musical similarities are notorious with their dotted ascending notes, identical mode, repeated fast notes (*trillo*), descending scalar notes, as well as the same cadence and mid-vocal range.



Considering the different situations in the opera, such likeness requires some clarification.<sup>71</sup>

Example 7. Monteverdi, *Orfeo: Possente spirto* (Act. III, First Stanza, mm. 1-4)

ORFEO

al - - - ma da cor - - po sciol - ta in-  
 al - - - ma da cor - po sciolta in-van  
 3  
 van pre - - su - - me  
 pre su - - me

Despite the similar setting, unlike *Possente spirto* the duet between Apollo and Orfeo is not about *pathos*. Instead, it portrays the moral and rational aspects – *ethos* and *logos* – that are announced in Apollo’s arioso to his son before the aforementioned duet:

APOLLO	APOLLO
Troppo, troppo gioisti	Too much, too much did you rejoice
Di tua lieta ventura;	In your happy fate,
Hor troppo piagni	Now too much do you weep
Tua sorte acerba e dura.	At your bitter, hard fortune.
Ancor non sai	Do you still not know
Come nulla qua giù diletta e dura?	How nothing that delights down here will last?
Dunque se goder brami immortal vita,	Therefore, if you want to enjoy immortal life,
Vientene meco al Ciel, ch’a se t’invita.	Come with me to Heaven, which invites you.

In the passage reproduced above, Apollo returns to g mode (after Orfeo’s speech in a mode) «chiding Orpheus for his excess in lamenting his hard lot» («hor troppo piagni...») [now too much do you weep], in the words of Chafe.<sup>72</sup>

Orfeo rejoiced too much when he first won Euridice, as seen before, and given a chance to reunite with her lost her forever because he lacked sufficient emotional control. In the meantime, he failed to persuade Caronte with his overconfidence in his musical abilities. Through similar passagework – with the four measures mentioned above, same Sinfonia, same mode, and identical virtuosic singing – Monteverdi indicated that the aria *Possente spirto* and the duet *Saliam, cantando* are to be recognized as related. Yet how is it possible to reconcile using similar settings for different intentions: one the result of emotion, the other a moral commentary?

<sup>71</sup> MONTEVERDI, *L’Orfeo*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>72</sup> CHAFE, *Monteverdi’s Tonal Language*, p. 156.

Considering the parental relationship between the main character and Apollo and the imitation of musical motives and devices between their lines, Petrarca's discussion of imitation in a letter to Boccaccio can be relevant to understanding Monteverdi's motivation in this particular musical setting, first sung in a more elaborate manner by Orfeo, and later by his father:

a proper imitator should take care that what he writes resembles the original without reproducing it. The resemblance should not be that of a portrait to the sitter ... but it should be the resemblance of a son to his father.<sup>73</sup>

In the duet, Monteverdi calls for the son to echo the father. In taking the lead, Apollo's line is both animated and moderate, displaying the balance (in music and in words) that Orfeo had been lacking. In the aria *Possente spirto* almost all words are embellished in order to display the great virtuosic skill of the demigod to the Styx ferryman; in the duet, instead, the embellishments are few and refer to a precise, more contained meaning. In Orfeo's aria, the demonstration of vocal abilities leads to, at least on the surface, the ornamentation of both important and less relevant words, if compared to other words within the same verses. Examples of this are the words «in van» [in vain] in the first stanza in the verse «Alma da corpo sciolta in van presume» [A soul, freed from the body, presumes in vain] (see example 7), the longest melisma of all in that verse and a word that is also embellished at the end of the fifth stanza of *Possente spirto*; and the article in the third stanza «il» [the] in the verse «A lei volt' ho il cammin per l'aer cieco» [for her I have made my way through the blind air]. As Mauro Calcagno has demonstrated, however – and as it is expected – such apparent lack of meaning in some embellished words in *Possente spirto* have a certain meaning and purpose:

The first two strophes of the text, accordingly, are dominated first by the address to Charon's "spirto," then, from strophe 2 on, by a persistent emphasis on first-person singular pronouns and possessive determiners ('*non vivo io ... mia cara sposa ... il cor non è più meco ... ch' io viva ... Orfeo son io*'). This is interrupted in strophe 3 by a reference to the 'she' ('*lei*') of Eurydice, a shift that, however, does not change the musical style of the piece. Orpheus, caught in his glorious embellishments, could very well continue to speak about himself, Eurydice being merely his alter ego.<sup>74</sup>

Orfeo's insistence on talking about himself, all the while trying to convince Caronte and displaying his virtuosic capabilities, reveals a display of vanity that justifies the significant amount of ornamentation in several of his words. One of these instances is observed in the lengthy and highly embellished passage on the words «in van» [in vain] using several sixteenth and thirty-second notes, first dotted in ascending motion, then with repeated notes (*trillo*), finishing in a stepwise descending motion down to the notes F#-G that leads to the g cadence. Such procedures anticipate Apollo's less complex, yet similar, line in singing the

<sup>73</sup> PETRARCA, *Epistolae familiares*, 23.19, pp. 211-212.

<sup>74</sup> CALCAGNO, *From Madrigal to Opera*, p. 39.

word «diletto» [delight] in the final duet: it follows the same devices and melodic direction that is represented in Example 7, except using only eighth and sixteenth notes in measures 8-11 in Example 6.

In *Saliam, cantando* (Example 6), ornamented words are carefully chosen to achieve different results from the ones Orfeo tried in Act III: to show-off, to convince, and to self-praise. «Saliamo», [let us rise], in measures 1-2, is set in ascending patterns and dotted notes, representing the movement 'to ascend;' «cantando» [singing],<sup>75</sup> in measures 3-5, is set with sequential *gruppetti* and *trilli*, evoking singing gestures; and «diletto» [delight], in measures 8-11 and 14-15, appears in marked dotted rhythms and *trillo*, similar to Orfeo's passage on the word «van» [in vain] in his aria (see Example 7, mm. 2-3). Unlike in *Possente spirto*, no articles or prepositions are musically embellished in the Apollo-Orfeo duet, and the contrast that follows with a simple homophonic setting is rather striking on the key-sentence: «...Dove ha virtù verace / Degno premio di sè, diletto e pace» [Where true virtue / Has the due reward of delight and peace]. Each ornamented word and contrast in text setting contributes to the greater purpose, which is to construct the aspect Orfeo lacked previously within a Neoplatonic frame of moderation and virtue and an Aristotelian purification of passions, instead of being overwhelmed with emotion and, sometimes, self-praise.

As Solomon indicates, Orfeo is not distinguishable because of his musical and poetic abilities, but because he endured twice both the ultimate joy and grief of mortal life. It is in this sense that Apollo is not seen as merely the god of music who comes and rescues a demigod musician, but the (divine) father who rescues his son of his human pain, giving him a divine alternative to an earthly end (bacchantes) while providing the moral and rational guidance of which Orfeo was in need.<sup>76</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The reasons behind the decisions Monteverdi made in writing *Orfeo* are numerous and no single isolated influence fully explains them. Instead, the Cremonese composer was responding to several interconnected factors simultaneously: satisfying a royal patron and his musical preferences, as well as the aesthetic tendencies and philosophical concerns of the time. The result was an opera in which the composer developed a musical language that conveys both emotion and its opposite (moderation/reason) according to the text he was to set,

<sup>75</sup> One of the purposes of music, including for Plato, was to elevate the soul: see PLATO, *De Re Publica*, and *Plato's Republic for Readers*, trans. Blair, 397a-400e. According to La Via, certainly music is what brings eternal happiness and salvation, ascending and singing while going towards Heaven ('*Saliam cantando al Ciel'*), where virtue is. See LA VIA, *Allegrezza e perturbazione*, p. 91.

<sup>76</sup> SOLOMON, *The Neoplatonic Apotheosis*, p. 31.

whether by using written-out ornamentation or omitting it, selecting the vocal type (here the middle voice), as well as similar musical material.

In trying to persuade with *pathos* as in Orfeo's aria or in exhibiting moderation as in the duet with Apollo, Monteverdi's search for the verisimilitude of human emotions is paired with the artificiality of the supernatural, machine-like technique of a semi-divine being. That Monteverdi reduced ornamentation in the duet scene while retaining passages from the aria can be viewed as indicative of emotional restraint. As demonstrated above, such segments strongly suggest that Monteverdi's depiction of passion and reason were thoughtfully considered when setting the relationship between Orfeo and Apollo.

By taking over Orfeo's musical lines in *Possente spirto* and reworking them in the duet in a more moderate – yet still virtuosic – setting, instead of embellishing words such as 'the' and 'in vain,' Monteverdi carefully chose words that would reflect the teachings of a father to his son: the ornamented settings of «salaam» [let us arise], «cantando» [singing'], and «diletto» [delight] contrast with the homophonic, syllabic, and simple style that musically depicts the moral goal «dove ha virtù verace...» [where true virtue ...], to be sung together with Orfeo. In a such a way, Monteverdi set his music so that Apollo was in control during this duet and could bring back his son Orfeo to a world of moderation and celestial contemplation, ideal for a philosophical frame that aligned with the intellectual thinking of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*.

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*Armè, con altre cose d'importanza & dilettevole. Ultimamente s'insegna il modo di fiorir una parte con vaghi & moderni accenti*, Bartolomeo Carampello, Venezia 1596.



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