

## L'ACCENTO: IN SEARCH OF A FORGOTTEN ORNAMENT

**Bruce Dickey**

*In questo lieto e fortunato giorno  
Ch' ha posto fine a gli amorosi affanni  
del nostro semideo,  
Cantiam, pastori, in sì soavi accenti  
Che sian degni d' Orfeo nostri concenti.*<sup>1</sup>

There are very few direct sources from which to re-create the instrumental performance practice of the seventeenth century, particularly with regard to brass instruments, since true instrumental tutors are practically non-existent before 1700. Consequently we must rely for the most part on encyclopedic theoretical works whose authors were largely dependent upon others for technical information, or on division manuals, written by virtuoso performers, but with a very limited purpose and scope. Such sources cover only a narrow range of topics: usually tonguing syllables (but with few indications on how to apply them), fingerings (in a few cases), occasionally tone production (through such comments tend to be ambiguous or obscure), and the art of improvising divisions.

One piece of advice, however, is found in almost all instrumental instruction books: “imitate the human voice as much as possible.” As long as we interpret this admonition merely as a banal instruction to “play vocally,” though, we are in danger of missing an important source of information—indeed the most important source—on playing our instruments, for “imitating the human voice” requires a knowledge of the art of singing as it was understood and taught in the seventeenth century. In contrast to the scarcity of sources on instrumental playing, vocal sources from this period abound, consisting for the most part of prefaces to published collections of monodies or motets, but also including several lengthy discourses on virtually every aspect of singing.<sup>2</sup>

From seventeenth-century sources on singing we learn that the three most important aspects of the vocal art were *disposizione*, *passaggi*, and *maniere*. *Disposizione* (literally, “disposition”) is a difficult term to translate, but it encompasses both vocal production in general and, more specifically, the agility of the throat required for the execution of rapid notes, whether repeated, as in the *trillo*, or running, as in divisions.<sup>3</sup> *Passaggi*, or divisions, were of such fundamental importance that several authors doubt whether a singer lacking the ability to improvise them can be said to sing well. Perhaps the largest part of seventeenth-century discussions of singing, however, is devoted to the art of *maniere*. *Maniere* are specific ornaments of various types—melodic, dynamic, and timbral<sup>4</sup>—which were applied to individual notes and to intervals in order to express or

underline the sentiments of the text or to “accompany the voice with grace” from one note to the next. Tasteful singing was conceivable without divisions (in fact it was sometimes preferable), but never without *maniere*.

Included among the *maniere* were various kinds of *groppi*, *trilli*, and *tremoli*, as well as ornaments of dynamic shape such as the *messa di voce* and the *esclamazione*, but none was more important than the *accento*. Lodovico Zacconi, theorist and singing teacher, takes pains, in his *Prattica di musica* (1592), to demonstrate the relationship between the *accento* and the courtly Renaissance concept of “grace:”

In all human actions, of whatever sort they may be or by whomever they may be executed, grace and aptitude are needed. By grace I do not mean that sort of privilege which is granted to certain subjects under kings and emperors, but rather that grace possessed by men who, in performing an action, show that they do it effortlessly, supplementing agility with beauty and charm.

In this one realizes how different it is to see on horseback a cavalier, a captain, a farmer or a porter; and one notes with what poise the expert and skillful standard-bearer holds, unfurls, and moves his banner, while upon seeing it in the hands of a cobbler it is clear that he not only does not know how to unfold and move it, but not even how to hold it. . . .

It is not, therefore, irrelevant that a singer, finding himself from time to time among different people and performing a public action, should show them how it is done with grace; for it is not enough to be correct and moderate in all those actions which might distort one's appearance, but rather one must seek to accompany one's acts and actions with beauty and charm. Now, the singer accompanies the acts with grace when, while singing, . . . he accompanies the notes with delightful *accenti*.<sup>5</sup>

Thus the *accento* is essential to the singer in demonstrating that same “grace” which distinguishes the horsemanship of a cavalier from that of a farmer.<sup>6</sup> It is his means of showing that that which he does, he does not just properly, but with supreme ease. It is part of the subtle and complicated courtly art of *sprezzatura*: using complicated artifice to make what is difficult appear to be so easy that it is done without thinking (while not, at the same time, letting it be seen that one is thinking about not thinking).<sup>7</sup> That an ornament of such overriding importance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries should be virtually unknown today, except perhaps in name, is indeed curious, for it cannot be from a lack of specific information about the form and use of this much-described device. Admittedly, this information is sometimes contradictory and ambiguous. Moreover, the usage of the term varies in its specificity: at times it seems to refer to a single ornament with an exact melodic and rhythmic shape, while at other times it appears to be a generic term for any ornament of few notes applied to a single melodic interval. We shall see, however, that even when used in this generic sense, certain

common identifiable characteristics recur.

It is the aim of this article to help bring the *accento* back into use, primarily among singers, but also among instrumentalists, for whom it presents an excellent opportunity to “imitate the human voice.” We will examine in detail the works of three Italian theorists—Lodovico Zacconi, Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, and Francesco Rognoni Taegio—who together offer a representative picture of the *accento* in Italy. We will then look summarily at a number of other Italian sources, before examining the way in which the *accento* developed after being imported into Germany.

### LODOVICO ZACCONI

The logical starting point for an examination of the *accento* is the *Prattica di musica* (1592) by Lodovico Zacconi, Venetian falsettiist and singing teacher, for his description of the ornament is not only one of the earliest, but also one of the clearest and most complete. After discussing at length the relationship between *grazie* and the *accento* as cited above, Zacconi proceeds to a detailed explanation of the musical form and function of the ornament.

The composer, Zacconi tells us, is concerned only with placing the musical figures in accordance with the rules of harmony, but the singer has the obligation of “accompanying them with the voice and making them resound according to the nature and properties of the words.”<sup>8</sup> In particular, he continues, when one has intervals larger than the second to sing, one should make use of some “beautiful *accenti*.” Zacconi illustrates the *accento* as applied to ascending and descending thirds with the following examples:



#### Example 1

Lodovico Zacconi (1592)

This written example, however, only approximates the considerably more subtle art of singing the *accento*,<sup>9</sup> as Zacconi’s description makes clear. In order to make an *accento* on the ascending third, for example, the singer must hold the first whole note a little into the value of the second. This lingering, however, must not exceed the value of a quarter note. One must then ascend to the second whole note, but, in passing, make heard “something like a sixteenth note.”<sup>10</sup> Thus if we insist on fixing in objective rhythmic notation something which Zacconi clearly intends to be rhythmically vague and subjective, an *accento* on the ascending third would have the following form:



#### Example 2

Zacconi’s *accento* (author’s realization).

Zacconi's example for the falling third in Example 1 introduces another common characteristic of the *accento* to be found in many later sources: the use of a rising second to ornament descending intervals. Indeed, we will see that *accenti* on ascending and descending intervals were often looked upon quite differently and had sometimes very dissimilar forms. In its most usual occurrence, the rising second is used to ornament the descending second. Indeed we shall see that in 1620 Rognoni Taegio describes exactly this type of *accento* and calls it the "true *accento*." Zacconi, at the end of his chapter on *accenti*, provides a short example of little divisions on descending intervals which he says should be done with a "certain vivacity and force and which make a very great and good effect in the music."<sup>11</sup> He does not call them *accenti*, but the second example among them is identical, as we shall see, to Rognoni's "true *accento*:"



**Example 3**  
Zacconi (1592)

For the ascending and descending second (see Example 4), Zacconi's *accento* retains the approach to the second note from the third below. This approach, always using a dotted rhythm, is related to another *maniera*, the *intonatio*, which is nothing other than a means of beginning the first note of a phrase on the third (or sometimes the fourth) below and then rising up to the written pitch, using this dotted figure.<sup>12</sup> Thus Zacconi's *accento* on the second is essentially an *intonatio* used between two neighboring notes.



**Example 4**  
Zacconi (1592)

In view of the explicit function of the *accento* in helping to "carry the voice" from one note to the next on larger intervals, it is rather more difficult to understand many of Zacconi's examples for the ascending fourth and fifth. Here he retains the dotted rhythm, but instead of filling in the interval melodically, as we might expect, he retains the leap as follows:



**Example 5**  
Zacconi (1592)

To understand the function of this seemingly rather odd form of the *accento*, we must bear in mind that the purpose of the *accento* is to help the singer accompany not only the notes, but also the words, with grace. By adopting this form of the *accento* for a leap of an ascending fourth where there is a change of syllable on the second note, the singer avoids changing syllables on the leap. Instead, he changes the syllable on the same note, but slightly after the beat (thus aiding the listener in hearing the consonant) and then produces the melodic interval melodically.

On the use of the *accento*, Zacconi recommends primarily the exercise of good taste and the imitation of excellent singers, but he does provide several interesting rules:

- At the beginning of an imitative piece where one part sings alone, it should be left without divisions (unless the piece is well known), but not without simple *accenti*.
- In some sorts of fugal entries and fantasies, *accenti* should be avoided in order “not to break the well ordered imitation.”
- Some kinds of texts do not call for ornaments of any kind. Among these are *Intonuit de Celo Dominus, Clamavit, Fuor fuori Cavalieri uscite*, and *Al arme al arme*.
- Other kinds of texts particularly require *accenti*. These include texts of extreme sadness such as *Dolorum meum, misericordia mea*, and *affanni e morte*.<sup>13</sup>

#### GIOVANNI BATTISTA BOVICELLI

Published in Milan in 1594, only two years after Zacconi’s *Prattica di musica*, Giovanni Battista Bovicelli’s *Regole, passaggi di musica*<sup>14</sup> has a richly informative preface containing a wealth of information on vocal ornamentation of all kinds. Following the preface are several motets and madrigals, ornamented in a highly individual and extravagant style, which provide invaluable illustrations of the musical use of the *accento* as well as a number of other *maniere*.

Bovicelli mentions *accenti* and *passaggi* frequently, making a clear distinction in their use related to the affect of the words:

As it would be very unbecoming to the composer if he were to accompany sad<sup>15</sup> words with cheerful notes, or put sad notes under cheerful words, so in singing one must imitate as much as possible the words, that is, not adorn sad words with *passaggi*, but rather accompany them, so to speak, with *accenti*, and a doleful voice. If the words are cheerful, one must use *passaggi*, and give them also liveliness, varying the notes, as is seen here

below.<sup>16</sup>

The precise nature of the *accento*, however, is nowhere made clear in Bovicelli's preface. The only description he supplies is contained in a rather obscure passage, more concerned with the nature of the *tremolo* which is used to elaborate the *accento* than with the form of the ornament itself:

Of this number of notes, which go by step, are those *accenti* which are done on half notes. These *accenti*, however, must be varied judiciously in different ways as to the value of the notes, which, although when sung seem to be little different, create, nonetheless, another effect. This one cannot do with *accenti* done on quarter notes because these *accenti*, being all of sixteenth and thirty-second notes, which are extremely fast, can be done in one way only. Still, one may make a *tremolo* here, but quickly and not so "formed" [*formato*].



### Example 6

Giovanni Battista Bovicelli (1594)

On the notes with the sign, one must make a "formed" *tremolo*.



### Example 7

Bovicelli (1594)

On the notes with the sign, one must make a *tremolo*, but not "formed" as above.

And although when written, it appears as in the examples above, in any case, whoever wants to make it clearer should write it out like this, speaking however of the "formed" *tremolo*.



Example 8  
Bovicelli (1594)

“Formed” *tremolo* above the two notes with the sign.<sup>17</sup>

Leaving aside for a moment the question of what Bovicelli means by *tremolo*, let us attempt to make some sense of this admittedly rather obscure passage. The author is describing an ornament, or more precisely, the way to vary and elaborate an ornament, the form of which he assumes is known to us. This ornament, the *accento*, is used to embellish a series of descending seconds, first in half notes, then in quarters. Since he is concerned here with the variation and elaboration of the *accento* and not with its basic form, we must try to generalize from his examples in order to extract its simple form. In each case his ornament, whatever its rhythmic shape, rises a third, then pauses a moment on the upper second (always the dotted note with the sign) before descending to the next note. Thus its basic motion, ornamented though it is with passing tones, is to the upper second in the manner of the “true *accento*” of Rognoni mentioned above.

To understand further Bovicelli’s description of this descending *accento* we must briefly digress to concern ourselves with the word *tremolo*, one of the most frequently encountered terms in seventeenth-century descriptions of vocal practice, and one of the most difficult to define. As we can see from descriptions of instrumental *tremoli* for wind, bowed, and keyboard instruments, a *tremolo* is a repeated fluctuation of a sustained note. Depending upon the techniques available on a given instrument<sup>18</sup> and upon the effect desired, this fluctuation can involve pitch, intensity, timbre, or any combination of these.<sup>19</sup> In seventeenth-century singing, the principal distinction was between an articulated fluctuation (*battuta con la gola*), generally referred to as a *trillo*, and a non-articulated one, normally called *tremolo*. It would be beyond the scope of the present article to determine more precisely the nature of this unarticulated fluctuation—i.e., its speed, the relative importance of pitch vs. intensity variations, or the technique used to produce it—but it does not seem unreasonable to consider it a kind of vibrato. As to the meaning of *formato* and *non formato*, it seems plausible to hypothesize that “formed” means “measured”—i.e., perhaps the *tremolo formato* is a rhythmicized (and possibly articulated) fluctuation while the *tremolo non formato* is an unmeasured (and unarticulated) one. This hypothesis is given some support by the fact that Bovicelli nowhere uses the term *trillo*. Perhaps his use of *tremolo formato* and *non formato* is a way of making the distinction usually expressed by the terms *trillo* and *tremolo*. Indeed, his clarification of the *tremolo formato* (Example 8) seems to be an attempt to indicate

a sort of measured articulation.<sup>20</sup> Thus his *accento* on half notes above would be sung with an articulated *trillo*, while those on quarter notes would be performed with an unarticulated *tremolo* or vibrato.

The elaborate *accento* illustrated above is the only one which Bovicelli discusses in his preface, but in his complete sets of divisions on motets and madrigals he uses many ornaments which we know from other sources to be *accenti*. The following example from Palestrina's *Io son ferito hai lasso* is representative of Bovicelli's style. In it all ornaments which could be considered to belong to the *accento* family have been marked with the sign "A."

The image shows three systems of musical notation for a vocal piece. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a four-part instrumental accompaniment (treble, alto, tenor, and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

System 1: Measures 1-6. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by a half note 'lo' and a half note 'son fe'. An ornament 'A' is placed above the 'son' syllable. The instrumental parts provide harmonic support.

System 2: Measures 7-11. The vocal line continues with 'ri - to hai las - so lo son fe'. Ornaments 'A' are placed above the 'hai', 'las', and 'so' syllables. The instrumental parts continue with sustained notes and moving lines.

System 3: Measures 12-15. The vocal line continues with 'ri - t'hai las so'. An ornament 'A' is placed above the 'las' syllable. The instrumental parts conclude the phrase.

### Example 9

G.P. da Palestrina, *Io son ferito hai lasso*, with superius ornamented by Bovicelli (1594)



The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, starting at measure 17, features a vocal line with lyrics "e chi mi die" and instrumental accompaniment. The second system, starting at measure 23, features a vocal line with the lyric "do" and instrumental accompaniment. Both systems include complex rhythmic patterns and dissonances marked with "A".

### Example 9. (Cont.)

In this analysis I have used a somewhat broader definition of *accento* than that provided in any single historical source. My definition is based on a composite of all the sources discussed in this article, including those not yet cited. If the reader encounters difficulty in recognizing any of these *accenti*, he is advised to return to this example after reading the entire article.

It is particularly interesting to note the way in which many of Bovicelli's *accenti* create dissonances on strong beats (as in measures 13 and 25 here, though this occurs frequently in all of his divisions) in a way prohibited by theorists of the period, and expressly forbidden in the rules for making divisions. These transgressions were probably tolerated since they represent merely a delay in moving from one note to another—a rhythmic freedom allowed under the concept of *sprezzatura*. Thus they represent more a controlled, momentary disregard of the harmony than an intentional or expressive dissonance.

## FRANCESCO ROGNONI TAEGIO

Our initial group of Italian sources ends with the *Selva de varii passaggi* (1620)<sup>21</sup> of Francesco Rognoni Taegio, *maestro di cappella* at Sant'Ambrogio in Milan and member of a famous Lombard violin-playing family.

Rognoni's manual is composed of two parts, the first of which is intended to teach singers "how to sing with refinement and grace; and the manner of "carrying the voice" (*portar la voce*) with *accenti*, with *tremoli*, *groppi*, *trilli*, and *esclamazioni*; and making *passaggi* by step, by leaps of a third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and octave; and final cadences for all the parts."<sup>22</sup> The second volume is devoted to difficult divisions for instrumentalists, and instructions on different types of bowing and tonguing for stringed and wind instruments respectively. In the title of part one, however, Rognoni points out that his instructions on singing will be useful to instrumentalists as well, "for imitating the human voice."

In a brief preface which defines and gives examples of a number of *maniere*, Rognoni has the following to say about the *accento*:

2. The *accento* should be done somewhat late rather than otherwise; the true *accento* is that which is done in descending, although nowadays there is another one in use in ascending, sometimes pleasing to the ear, but good singers use it rarely, because otherwise it would be tedious.<sup>23</sup>



## Example 10

Francesco Rognoni Taegio (1620)

The example Rognoni gives for the "true *accento* done in descending" is the one using the rising second, which we have already encountered in Zacconi and Bovicelli. The ascending *accento* appearing with it is a new one which differs from that given by Zacconi not only in melodic shape, but also in the fact that its rhythmic value appears to come entirely out of the first note. His comment, however, that the *accento* should be done late suggests the sort of rhythmic vagueness hinted at by Zacconi (and later by Praetorius).

A look at Rognoni's complete divisions on motets and madrigals shows clearly that

the musical example above is a simplification for didactic purposes of an ornamentation practice considerably more complex—and more similar to that of Zacconi and Bovicelli—than would appear from the preface. The beginning of Rognoni's divisions on the Palestrina motet *Pulchra es amica mea*, given in Example 11, exhibits a wide variety of both ascending and descending *accenti*, including both of Rognoni's simple forms (marked *a* and *b*), Zacconi's standard version for the ascending third (*c*), and Bovicelli's ornate *accento* for the descending second (*d*).

The musical score consists of six systems, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a lute line (treble clef). The lyrics are written below the vocal line. Various ornaments are indicated by letters *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* above specific notes.

System 1: *Pul - cra* *es a - mi - ca*

System 2: *me -* *a -* *mi - ca*

System 3: *me -* *a me -* *a*

System 4: *pul - cra* *es a - mi -* *ca*

System 5: *me -* *a*

System 6: *Intonatio* *su -* *a - vis et de -* *co -* *ra si -*

### Example 11

Palestrina, *Pulchra es amica mea*, superius, with ornamented version by Rognoni Taegio (1620)



19  
cut Hie - ru... sa - lem

21  
su... a - vis et de... co...

24  
rum si - cut Hie... ru... sa - lem si...

Example 11. (Cont.)

OTHER ITALIAN SOURCES

The *accento* is described or at least mentioned in many other seventeenth-century Italian sources on singing. Indeed, it is a rare discussion of singing in this period that does not at least mention it. Example 12 presents a summary of formulas for the *accento* appearing in the most important of these sources.



mi fa mi fa sol la la sol

la sol fa re la fa la

ut fa ut fa ut fa

ut sol ut sol

Example 12

a) Pietro Cerone (1613)<sup>24</sup>

ut mi re fa mi sol fa la  
la sol la sol fa sol fa mi re mi fa

b) Oratio Scaletta (1626)<sup>25</sup>

re fa re fa fa la fa la re fa  
re fa re sol re sol re la fa re la fa

c) Adriano Banchieri (1614)<sup>26</sup>

a. a.

d) Bartolomeo Bismantova (1677)<sup>27</sup>

accenti accenti accenti

tu tu tu tu tu tu tu tu tu tu

e) Jacques Hotteterre (1707)<sup>28</sup>

There is disagreement among these authors themselves about the proper way of making *accenti*. The major point of contention involves whether they are properly made on ascending or descending intervals, or on both. While Rognoni claims, as we have seen, that the “true *accento*” is made only in descending, Scaletta maintains that they may be made only on ascending intervals, and indeed goes on to say that in a series of ascending intervals, “they are done only when the part ascends to the highest note as in this example: if there were four notes ascending by step, the *accento* would be done on the last and not on the others.”<sup>29</sup>

Bartolomeo Bismantova, writing some fifty years later, seems unconcerned with the direction of the interval upon which the *accento* is made. Indeed, his *accento*, like the French *accent*, seems to be more an embellishment or intensification of a single note, rather than a grace which carries the voice from one note to the next:

The *accento* is nothing other than an increasing or raising by one step of the note upon which one wants to make the *accento*; and this *accento* should not be beaten with the voice, but rather pronounced and sung with a slur in the throat, in the manner of the *trillo*. It is done on all the vowels, and once this *accento* has been pronounced, one must immediately diminish it with the voice.<sup>30</sup>

Bismantova thus appears to represent a link between the Italian *accento* ca. 1620 and the later French ornament.

A singular source on the *accento* is the *Terzo libro di nuovi pensieri ecclesiastici*, published in 1614 by the Bolognese organist, composer, theoretician, academician, Olivetan monk and eccentric, Adriano Banchieri. A virtual compendium of the new monodic style, this work contains *concerti "passaggiati," "accentuati," and "affettati."*

A comparison of the motets designated *passaggiati* and *accentuati* reveals a more generic use of the term *accento* than that described in the principal sources above. Perhaps by calling his motets *accentuati*, Banchieri means to tell us they are ornamented simply, with graces of a few notes rather than with the long, winding *passaggi* found in those labelled accordingly. *Accenti* of the more "classic" variety are not lacking, however, and many of the other small ornaments could be seen as embellishments of these classic models. The dotted ascending *accento* of Zacconi does occur, as does the "true" descending *accento* of Rognoni, though more often in an embellished version (see ex. 13).

## THE ACCENTO IN GERMANY

The art of singing in Germany, after 1600, was greatly under the influence of the new Italian style. Many German singers and composers travelled to Italy to study, but even those who never crossed the Alps were inevitably exposed to the pervasive Italian influence brought northward by Italian musicians and singers working in Germany and by the circulation of printed music, primarily from Venice.<sup>31</sup>

Michael Praetorius, whose *Syntagma musicum* of 1618<sup>32</sup> is widely known among instrumentalists for its comprehensive descriptions of musical instruments, was well acquainted with the Italian singing style, and despite the fact that he never set foot in Italy, was one of the most enthusiastic promoters of the new style. Praetorius relies heavily on the works of Caccini and Bovicelli for his knowledge of Italian singing, but this information was surely supplemented by direct contact with Italian singers in Germany.

In lec - tu - lo me -  
 o quae -  
 si - vi per no - ctes quem di - li - git ij.  
 ni - ma me - a quae si - vi  
 per no - ctes quem di - li - git ij. a -  
 ni - ma me - a a - ni - ma me - a

**Example 13**  
Banchieri (1614)

30

Sur - gan - ti cir - cu - i - bo ci - vi -

33

ta - tem ij.

37

per

41

vi - cos et pla - te - as ij.

46

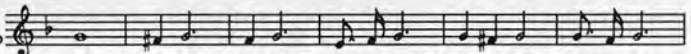
ij.

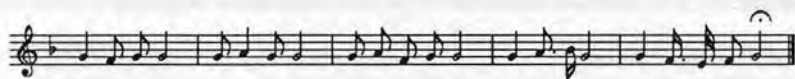
The musical score consists of five systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first system (measures 30-32) features a complex rhythmic pattern in the treble staff with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass staff has a simpler accompaniment. The second system (measures 33-35) shows a more relaxed treble staff with a long note and rests, and a steady bass line. The third system (measures 36-38) returns to a more active treble staff with eighth notes, and a bass line with some rests. The fourth system (measures 39-43) has a treble staff with eighth notes and a bass line with a mix of eighth and quarter notes. The fifth system (measures 44-48) features a treble staff with a mix of eighth and quarter notes, and a bass line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

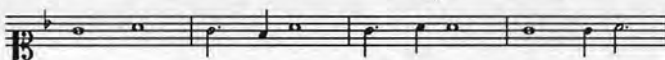
Example 13. (Cont.)

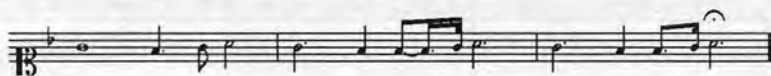



Typically, Praetorius treats the subject of *accenti* more encyclopedically than any of the Italian authors. He gives us a wealth of rhythmic and melodic variants of *accenti* for a number of ascending and descending intervals:

Nota initialis & finalis in unisono 



Per Secundam Ascendendo 




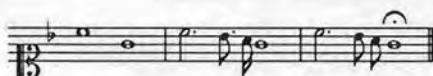
Descendendo 




Per Tertiam Ascendendo 

Descendendo 

Per Quartam Ascendendo 

Descendendo 

Per Quintam Ascendendo 

Descendendo 

**Example 14**  
Michael Praetorius (1619)

This profusion of formulas, however, is doubtless due to the author's Germanic desire to fix accurately in musical notation the nuances which Italian authors left to the performer. Indeed, many Italian sources warn that the *maniere* can be learned in all of their subtlety and variety only by imitating a master. Fortunately, such warnings seldom daunted the Teutonic spirit.

Among Praetorius' formulas for the *accento* we find many of the forms encountered in Italian sources.<sup>33</sup> Particularly interesting is the care with which Praetorius attempts to notate the *accento*. In the example *per secundam ascendendo*,<sup>34</sup> for instance, we find the value of the *accento* being taken from either the first note or the second, or a combination of the two.

Johann Herbst, in his *Musica practica sive instructio* of 1642, gives a series of *accenti* of three types for ascending and descending seconds:

1. modo

2. modo

3. modo

**Example 15**  
Johannes Herbst (1642)<sup>34</sup>

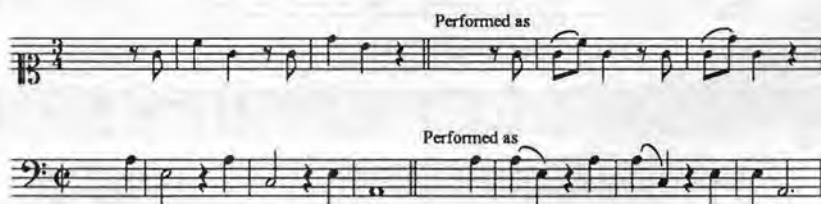
Herbst's first mode is unique in its use of chromaticism, but his second mode is strikingly similar to the example of Rognoni.

According to Mattheson's *Der Vollkommene Kapellmeister* (1739), the *Accent* was still an important ornament a century after Praetorius and Herbst:

The so-called *Accent*, which is called by some the *Vorschlag* and in France *le port de voix*, [is a grace in which] the voice first quickly touches twice very softly and sweetly the upper and lower neighboring tone before the following written note is expressed.<sup>35</sup>

The *Accent*, Mattheson continues, can be made on upward or downward moving notes, and it can be single or double. If it is "single," it takes only a small amount of the value of the following note; if it is double, it takes half the value, "so that the accented note is heard that much longer and with an agreeable delay, since therein lies often the greatest pleasure."<sup>36</sup> The *Accent* can be made, says Mattheson, in singing or in playing. When sung, though articulated in the throat, it must be "so gentle and refined that the two notes cling perfectly to each other and almost seem to be one."<sup>37</sup>

Mattheson describes another kind of *Accent* which he calls *Stufen-Accenten* ("step-accents").<sup>38</sup> These, he says, are the newest sort of *Accente*, and the most used, as they can be applied to all intervals, but particularly to those from the fourth to the octave. These leaping *Accente*, which prolong the note before the leap and then jump upward or downward, are similar (at least the ascending ones) to the leaping *accenti* of Zacconi.



**Example 16**  
Johann Mattheson (1739)

Still another form of *Accent*, which Mattheson calls *Überschlag*,<sup>39</sup> can be clearly traced in its origin to Rognoni's *accento* of the descending second, though in this case it is applied to leaps larger than the second.

Ich will mich dem Schick - sal beu - gen ij.

Performed as

Ich will mich dem Schick - sal beu - gen ij.

**Example 17**  
Mattheson (1739)

## CONCLUSION

The *accento* is not so much an ornament as a family of ornaments. In closing it might be well to consider the family resemblances. These similarities fall into three categories: form, manner, and use. What is characteristic of an *accento*, in other words, in terms of the notes which comprise it, the manner of performing it, and the places where it is done?

1. **Form.** The *accento* is an ornament of a few notes which “carries the voice” from one note to the next. It does this by introducing one or more new notes between those of the original melody. These new notes may be related to the original ones in a variety of ways, but they generally fall into one of three categories: a) filling in the interval between the notes, b) expanding a descending interval by approaching the second note from the third below (in the manner of the *intonatio*), or c) expanding a descending interval by rising a second at the end of the first note.

2. **Manner.** The performance of the *accento* has several typical features. It is characterized by a sort of rhythmic freedom described as “lateness” or “lingering.” This freedom may have the effect either of prolonging the first note into the second or, in the case of an *accento* which is notated as occurring within the value of the first note, of placing the ornament between the notes in a way which defies more accurate notation or definition. This “lateness” is an expression of the concept of *sprezzatura*, or the studied momentary disregard of rhythm (or harmony), intended to convey supreme ease and mastery. In addition, *accenti* are described as being articulated smoothly, bound together so that all the notes of the ornament seem to be part of one note. The *accento* on descending intervals which uses the rising second is executed with a diminishing of the voice on the upper note.

3. **Use.** The *accento* is essentially to be done wherever *passaggi* would be inappropriate but graces are required. *Accenti* are especially called for with texts full of affect, and particularly on words expressive of sadness, grief, mercy, death, and the like. They are also admissible in places, such as the imitative beginnings of madrigals and motets, where *passaggi* would make the music unintelligible.

While the formulas for the *accento* vary greatly in detail, they all share a common function: to move the voice with grace from one note to the next. As instrumentalists we will do well to bear this goal in mind. If the addition of an *accento* (or, indeed, any ornament) makes the original melodic movement sound more difficult, then the ornament is out of place, no matter how brilliantly conceived. That said, it must also be stressed that instrumental playing without ornaments (and here *accenti* must play an important part) can never be truly vocal, and playing which is not vocal, as Mattheson points out, is by nature incomplete:

It is an accepted fact that no one can play an instrument with grace who does not take the greatest and the best part of his skill from singing, since all musical handiwork serves only the imitation of the human voice or its accompaniment.<sup>40</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "On this gay and happy day / which has put an end to the lovesickness of our demi-god, / let us sing, shepherds, with such sweet *accenti* / that our music will be worthy of Orpheus." From *L'Orfeo* of Claudio Monteverdi, with libretto by Alessandro Striggio (1607), Act I.

2. For a survey of these vocal sources see Hugo Goldschmidt, *Die italienische Gesangsmethode des xvii. Jahrhunderts und ihre Bedeutung für die Gegenwart* (Breslau: Schlesische Buchdruckerei, 1890), and Max Kuhn, *Die Verzierungs-Kunst in der Gesangs-Musik des 16.-17. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902; reprint ed., Schann, Liechtenstein: Sändig, 1981).

3. For a thorough exegesis of *disposizione*, see Robert Greenlee, "*Disposizione di voce*: Passage to Florid Singing," *Early Music* 15 (1987): 47-55.

4. Under "timbral" could be included various types of vibrato and tremolo effects which modify the quality or timbre of a note, whether sung or played.

5. Lodovico Zacconi, *Prattica di musica* (Venice, 1592; reprint of 1596 ed., Bologna: Forni, 1983), *libro primo*, cap. LXIII. Zacconi's comments on singing have been translated into German by Friedrich Chrysander in "Lodovico Zacconi als Lehrer des Kunstgesanges," *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 7 (1891): 337-96; 9 (1893): 249-310; and 10 (1894): 531-67.

6. Zacconi points out that many felt the playing of cornetts, trumpets, and other wind instruments should be prohibited to gentlemen because of the ungraceful appearance required in playing them: "However he should first guard against making actions when singing not only with the waist, but

also with the mouth, twisting now in one way and now in another, or turning his eyes around as if possessed, because who hears and listens to him, not only listens and hears but also observes and watches him, and because beautiful features please more than any other thing. . . . From this arises the reason why many prohibit gentlemen to play wind instruments such as trumpets, cornetts, pifari and others, because with these one must spoil one's face and from appearing handsome make it monstrous and deformed." Zacconi, *Prattica* i, cap. lxii.

7. For a fascinating discussion of *sprezzatura* see Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano* (Florence: Heredi di Filippo di Giunta, 1528), *libro primo*.

8. Zacconi, *Prattica* i, cap. lxiii.

9. All ornamentation, of course, is difficult to fix into precise musical notation, but it seems to have been particularly true of the *accento* that its performance was meant to be free of a fixed rhythm. Words such as "lingering," "clinging," and "rather late" are frequently used to describe it, and we are frequently told that its exact nature can only be appreciated by hearing it done.

10. Zacconi *Prattica* i, cap. lxiii.

11. *Ibid.*

12. See Giulio Caccini, *Le Nuove musiche* (Florence, 1601; reprint ed., New York: Broude Bros., 1973), pp. [v-vi].

13. Zacconi, *Prattica* i, cap. lxiii.

14. Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, *Regole, passaggi di musica* (Venice, 1594; reprint ed., Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1957).

15. The word *molte* ("many") here seems to be a misprint for *meste* ("sad").

16. Bovicelli, *Regole*, p. 15.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

18. On keyboard instruments, for example, the *tremolo* was normally a trill (either upward or downward) beginning on the main note. The *tremolo* stop on Italian organs, however, functioning by means of a spring-activated flap which alternately opened and closed a hole in the wind chest, causing fluctuations in the wind pressure, was almost entirely an intensity variation. On bowed-string instruments the *tremolo* could be a pulsation created by varying the pressure of the bow in the strings or a pitch fluctuation produced with the left hand, either in the manner of a modern violin vibrato or with two fingers placed close together. On wind instruments, descriptions of the *tremolo* include trills in intervals varying from the major third to small fractions of a semitone and pulsations produced by varying the intensity of the breath.

19. In actual fact, all acoustic fluctuations involve multiple parameters. Variation of one parameter of a tone will necessarily influence others as well, and even in the case of a scientifically produced pure fluctuation, the nature of our perceptive mechanism causes us to hear changes in other parameters. Thus, for example, an intensity change will be heard as a change of pitch as well. It makes no sense, then, in terms of musical practice, to think of isolated variations of pitch or intensity.
20. The fact that there are only two notes under the sign does not necessarily mean that more repetitions of the note did not occur. Giovanni Luca Conforto in his *Breve et facile maniera* (Rome, 1593; reprint ed. with introduction by Denis Stevens [White Plains, NY: Pro/Am Music Resources, 1989], pp. 28, 33), indicates a similar rhythm for the *trillo*, but tells us that the number of notes should be doubled when sung.
21. Francesco Rognoni Taegio, *Selva di varii passaggi* (Milan, 1620; reprint ed., Bologna: Forni, 1983).
22. *Ibid.*, part i, title page.
23. *Ibid.*, p. [ii].
24. Pietro Cerone, *El Melopeo y maestro* (Naples, 1613; reprint ed., Bologna: Forni, 1969).
25. Orazio Scaletta, *Scala di musica* (Venice, 1598; reprint ed., Bologna: Forni, 1976).
26. Adriano Banchieri, *Cartella musicale*, 3rd ed. (Venice, 1614; reprint ed., Bologna: Forni, 1968).
27. Bartolomeo Bismantova, *Compendio musicale* (ms. dated Ferrara, 1677; facsimile ed., Florence: Studio per edizioni scelte, 1978).
28. Jacques Hotteterre, *Principes de la flûte traversière* (Paris, 1707; facsimile ed., Geneva: Minkoff, 1973). The example from Hotteterre has been included in order to illustrate the relationship of the eighteenth-century French *accent* to the earlier Italian *accento*.
29. Scaletta, *Scala*, cap. 15.
30. Bismantova, *Compendio*, p. [24].
31. Viadana's *Cento concerti ecclesiastici* (Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1602), for example, one of the first important publications of sacred monodies, was widely known and extremely influential in Germany.
32. Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum, Band III: Termini musici* (Wolfenbüttel, 1619; reprint ed., Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1958).
33. Some confusion may be created by the fact that Praetorius includes the *intonatio* as a type of *accento*.

34. Johann Andreas Herbst, *Musica practica sive instructio* (Nuremberg: Jeremias Dümmler, 1642).
35. Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739; reprint ed., Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1954), p. 112.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., pp. 112-13.
39. Ibid., pp. 113-14.
40. Ibid., p. 109.

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