

## **Bernardo Pasquini as a Counterpoint Teacher A Critical Introduction to *I Saggi di Contrappunto (1695)***

**Armando Carideo**

Istituto dell'Organo Storico Italiano, Roma  
iosi.ac@fastwebnet.it

§ Solo pochi anni separano i *Saggi di Contrappunto* (1695), le *Sonate per uno o due cembali con il basso cifrato* (1703-04) e i *Versetti con il solo basso cifrato* (1708).

Ciò che colpisce nei *Saggi di Contrappunto*, se paragonati ad altri trattati del tempo, è la mancanza di spiegazioni teoriche.

Tutto il trattato si fonda sulla modalità, nonostante il nascente gusto per la tonalità. Questo nuovo corso era comune a Roma nei lavori di Arcangelo Corelli e in molte altre composizioni per tastiera dello stesso Pasquini, come si può constatare nel manoscritto autografo *Landsberg 215*, specialmente nelle arie, suite di danze e in qualche variazione. Pasquini, così come Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni e più tardi Giovanni Battista Martini, conosceva bene e padroneggiava le nuove tecniche compositive, ma, allo stesso tempo, conosceva e apprezzava le possibilità espressive dello *stile antico*.

§ There are only a few years between the *Saggi di Contrappunto* (1695,) the *Sonate per uno o due cembali con il basso cifrato* (1703-04,) and the *Versetti con il solo basso cifrato* (1708.)

What strikes in the *Saggi di Contrappunto*, in comparison with the other treatises of the time, is the lack of theoretical explanations.

All the treaty is based on modality, notwithstanding the rising taste for tonality. This new way was common also in Rome, in the works of Arcangelo Corelli and in many keyboard compositions by Pasquini himself, as it can be seen in the autograph manuscript *Landsberg 215*, especially in the arias, dance suites and in some variations. Pasquini, as well as Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni and later on Giovanni Battista Martini, knew very well and mastered the new compositional techniques, but at the same time knew and appreciated the expressive possibilities of the *stile antico*.

### **Pasquini, the teacher**

The didactic skills of Bernardo Pasquini are evident from a group of works that have in common the practical *manuductio* (the act of leading by hand) of the pupil to the art of composition. The two explicitly didactic manuscripts belong to this category, together with the London manuscripts that contain hundreds of *Versetti in basso continuo*, *Arpeggi*, and short compositions titled *Arie*, and *Accadenze*, as well the fourteen *sonate* in basso continuo and the fourteen *sonate à due cimbali*. Recently another sixty versets have been discovered by Francesco Cera in the Library of the *Studio Teologico Sant'Antonio* in Bologna. These collections support Pasquini's fame, as declared by his student Francesco Gasparini (1661-1727) in the famous didactic manual *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo*:

One who has had the fortune of performing or learning at the school of the most famous Sig. Bernardo Pasquini in Rome, or who has at least seen or heard him playing, has been exposed to the true, beautiful, and noble manner of playing and accompanying (GASPARINI 2001, p. 62)

In the manuscripts of the Berlin *Saggi* and in the *sonate* and *versets* from London, the name of his nephew and pupil Felice (or Bernardo, or Bernardo Felice) Ricordati appears many times. The different hand from the master could be his. What is surprising in the *Saggi di Contrappunto* and in the *Regole per ben suonare il Cembalo o Organo* is the lack of theoretical discussion. The textual part is very limited, and calls for skills already learned by the student. These books are intended as exercises in realizing basso continuo, ordered in a way that reveals the didactic approach of the maestro. The pupil is led by hand through the various techniques of composition. In the London manuscripts, on the contrary, only a few works are realized; the verset and the sonata are figured bass, upon which the keyboardist is called to apply his improvisatory art.

The first critical edition of Bernardo Pasquini's Keyboard Works, started in the year 2000 by the Istituto dell'Organo Storico Italiano, is almost completed, lacking only the ninth volume, now in preparation. The detailed description of the sources can be read there, but here it is useful to give a list of all the sources, with a brief commentary, in particular for the *Saggi di contrappunto*.

### **Sources**

*Berlin, S.B.P.K. Landsberg 215* (Pasquini 2002-2004)

It is the largest of the autograph manuscript sources for keyboard works, containing all the musical forms of the period, from those of great dimensions like the *Ricercari*, *Fantasie*, *Capricci*, *Canzoni*, *Toccatas*, *Variations*, to the shorter ones typical of the last period, like the *Arias* and the several kind of dances. In the manuscript there are autograph dates from 1691 to 1702. Also

in this anthology the handwriting of the teacher is evident, especially in some notes where Pasquini invites the musician to continue the improvisation. In the *Partite del Saltarello*, after the seventeenth variation (p. 309), Pasquini writes: *Laus Deo. Se ne possono fare moltissime altre ma chi vuole imparare studii* (Glory be to the God. Many more variations can be done, but who wants to learn must study.) A careful analysis of these works can become a real school for compositional techniques. For a study of the source see (CARIDEO 2003).

*London, Bl Ms. Add. 31501, I* (PASQUINI 2006a)

The earliest of the three manuscripts in London is completely autograph, dating from May to December 1704. It is therefore a continuation of the Berlin manuscript. About the didactic importance of the *sonate* in basso continuo for one or two harpsichords one can read the rich introduction by the editor, Edoardo Bellotti, who stresses the relationship between the figured bass and the counterpoint. In Pasquini the didactic and theoretical Italian tradition is well alive, from Diruta to Agazzari, from Banchieri to Penna and Berardi.

*London, Bl Ms. Add. 31501, II-III* (PASQUINI 2006b)

Until f. 23 of the second manuscript the compositions are written in Pasquini's hand: a series of Arie and three large pieces (a Toccata dated 4 December 1708, *Passacagli* and *Variazioni sopra la Follia*). The following group of versets in basso continuo, written in another hand, goes on until the end of the manuscript and for the whole next one. At the end of the third manuscript there are again some fully written short compositions, completely without figures. It is a mine of partimenti with frequent entries of a second voice and indications like *entra la fuga* or *entra la fuga al roverso*, or *entra il soggetto*, or *il pensiero* (here enters the subject, or, the inversion of the fugue, or here enters the subject, or the theme), *solo*, *tutti*. It is a real practical school of counterpoint.

*Bologna, Biblioteca dello Studio Teologico Sant'Antonio di Bologna* (PASQUINI 2000)

Sixty versets, some of them like small toccatas, the majority in imitative style. They are not in figured bass, but fully realized. It is a collection of examples showing the variety of contrapuntal techniques, to study and memorize. A critical review is given by (TAGLIAVINI 2000).

*Münster, Santini Sammlung, Regole per ben suonare il Cembalo o Organo*

This is a manuscript lost during the Second World War. No reproductions or transcriptions are known, and we do not have a codicological description. W. Gerstenberg, in his thesis on Domenico Scarlatti, written for Leipzig University (1931), as quoted in the article about Pasquini in the first edition of MGG, comments briefly on the *Santini* manuscript, saying that it was

important “not really because of the short theoretical explications, but because of the examples, far more than three hundred”. We can therefore assume that it was a work exactly in the same stream as the *Saggi di contrappunto*: a short theoretical text and a lot of realized example illustrating contrapuntal and harmonic techniques. As a consolation for the loss we could imagine that the two London manuscripts contain similar material in the sections with versets in basso continuo.

*Bc, MS. D 138/2 (PASQUINI 2009)*

This is the second of six short manuscripts, called in the index at f. 1: “*Regole del Sig.r Bernardo Pasquini per accompagnare con il Cembalo*”. Dated 1715, it was therefore compiled after Pasquini’s death.

After the list of manuscripts there is an important note:

There ought to be other Rules for accompanying by Bernardo Pasquini, much bigger than these ones. A beautiful collection of such a rules, in a large book, is owned by abbot Santini.

In the historical file of the library, compiled by Gaetano Gaspari (1807-81), one can read:

only six folios make up this little treatise; it is probably a summary of the ampler one for theories and examples that was sent to us by the famous abbot Santini, because we could examine it, and after that we sent it back.

Both of these quotations refer to the lost *Münster* manuscript.

*NC, Rari 1.9.14(1): Principi e Regole / di Partimenti / con tutte le lezioni.*

This is a large autograph manuscript of the great master of the Neapolitan school Carlo Cotumacci (1709-85). At pp. 162-70 he closes the treatise with about ten *Partimneti del Sig.r D. Bernardo Pasquino*.<sup>1</sup> This testifies to the link between the Neapolitan school and Rome, through Alessandro Scarlatti and Francesco Durante, who lived in Rome in the years around 1718 (and maybe also before that) and was Cotumacci’s teacher.

*Berlin, SBPK Landsberg 214: Saggi di contrappunto (PASQUINI 2009)*

This is the principal source for Pasquini’s didactic method of contrapuntal techniques. What W. Gerstenberg wrote about *Regole per ben suonare il Cembalo o Organo* can be observed in the *Saggi*: very few textual annotations and a lot of examples with figures and realizations.

The presence of the figures could be considered superfluous because of the realization of the counterpoints and because these adhere strictly to the voice leading (so the figuring is contrapuntal, not harmonic). It most probably clarifies the genesis of the book: figured bass from the master, realized by the

---

<sup>1</sup> These partimenti will be published in the Vol. IX of the complete edition.

student, checked, discussed and corrected with/by the master; this process can be seen in the numerous erasures and corrections, almost all of them clearly decipherable, being signs of the didactic labor (PASQUINI 2009, pp. XIV-XXI).

Another precious didactic tool is the very frequent suggestion for *alio modo*.

### **The *Saggi* and the modal theory**

The whole treatise is written according to modal theory, following the tradition of Gioseffo Zarlino and Giovanni Maria Artusi (at least as concerns the widening to the twelve modes), the same thoughts that informed treatises in the second half of the seventeenth century like those of Lorenzo Penna, Giovanni Bononcini, Angelo Berardi, etc. This might appear surprising, considering the date (1695) and in comparison with the prevailing tonal taste, especially in France and Germany, but also in Rome, for example in the works of Arcangelo Corelli and in Pasquini's keyboard works, as shown in the autograph manuscript Landsberg 215, in the Arias, Suites and in some Variations. The argument is very complex and the several treatises deal with it in different ways. It is therefore useful to give the modal scheme as Pasquini writes it in the central part of the manuscript, explaining the main notes of every tone:

- |       |                      |
|-------|----------------------|
| I.    | Tono Naturale: D-A-D |
| II.   | Tono Naturale: A-D-A |
| III.  | Tono Naturale: E-B-E |
| IV.   | Tono Naturale: B-E-B |
| V.    | Tono Naturale: F-C-F |
| VI.   | Tono Naturale: C-F-C |
| VII.  | Tono Naturale: G-D-G |
| VIII. | Tono Naturale: D-G-D |
| IX.   | Tono Naturale: A-E-A |
| X.    | Tono Naturale: E-A-E |
| XI.   | Tono Naturale: C-G-C |
| XII.  | Tono Naturale: G-C-G |

Now that the texts are available in a critical edition, it will be necessary to study in depth the contents and the didactic method. The *Saggi* are organized in three parts: in the opening one the student is trained in the different contrapuntal techniques, from the easiest to the most complex (from two to five voices); in the central part the student applies these techniques in the

twelve modes, with much attention to transpositions;<sup>2</sup> in the final part it is required of the disciple to utilize all the techniques learned to compose real compositions, in different polyphonic forms of usual length (from thirty to forty measures), in two or three voices, in all the twelve modes, and in four parts only in the I, II, III, V and VI tones.

Considering the content and the date of 1695, one could in a simplistic way label Pasquini as a conservative outside his time; or might this be a much more complex musicological problem, that has been underestimated so far by the specialists? I have suggested some arguments dealing with the *Guida Armonica* of Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni (CARIDEO 2009). Bernardo Pasquini, as Pitoni, and later on Giovanni Battista Martini, knew very well how to master the new compositional techniques, but, at the same time, knew and appreciated the expressive possibilities of the *stile antico*, not refusing to use its resources in the musical forms and in contexts which could be enriched by it.<sup>3</sup>

One could investigate, comparing the treatises and the compositions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries based on modality with those based on the tonal system (with only two scales, the major and the minor one), whether there is an enrichment or an impoverishment of technical and expressive resources in music making. A good example is given by the first large composition in the Landsberg 215 manuscript, the *Fantasia la, mi-fa fa* (solmisation of D, A-B flat, F) where Pasquini frees the contrapuntal and expressive creativity in certain directions that would be unavailable if the composition developed as a theme in d minor, according to the possibilities allowed in the tonal system.

Closer attention is needed by musicologists to provide serious analysis of the repertoire of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in order to explain the function of transitions from one mode to another in a composition, when this is used to express a change of affect. The expressivity certainly depends on the rhetorical use of the rhythms, intervals, melisma, harmonies and contrapuntal techniques; but above all it depends on the functional use of the modal scales. This is not only necessary in order to 'dress' a poetic or sacred text, but also for expressing a 'history of affects' in purely instrumental music. And not only in forms like toccatas, the capriccio, the fantasia or the variation, that call

---

<sup>2</sup> These are some of the annotations by Pasquini: «Un ton più basso del suo naturale; un tono più alto; una 4.a del suo Naturale; un'ottava più alto del Naturale. Si canta e si suona alla 4.a Bassa; 4.o Tono con chiavi trasportate, si suona, e si canta una 4.a bassa; una quarta più alta dal suo naturale; una 4.a bassa; Quinto Tono con chiavi trasportate» (A tone higher than its natural; a tone higher; a 4<sup>th</sup> of its natural; an 8<sup>ve</sup> higher than the natural. It's sung and played a 4<sup>th</sup> below; 4<sup>th</sup> tone with transposed clefs, sung and played a 4<sup>th</sup> below; a 4<sup>th</sup> higher than its natural; a 4<sup>th</sup> below; 5<sup>th</sup> tone with transposed clefs).

<sup>3</sup> On this point is interesting what Kirnberger says in *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik* (1776-79): «Knowledge of these old church modes and their correct treatment is necessary not only because correct fugue writing cannot be learned without them, as will be clear from what I shall say later about this matter, but also because the old style of writing has real advantages which are missing in the new style», (KIRNBERGER 1982, p. 319). My thanks to Edoardo Bellotti for bringing this point to my attention.

for a mobility of affects, but also in a subtler way in forms structurally more static, like the *ricercare* or other compositions that have no changes in tempo or other rhetorical artifices.

## Bibliography

- CARIDEO, A. (2003), *Il manoscritto autografo di Bernardo Pasquini conservato nel fondo Landsberg di Berlino*, in *Et facciam dolci canti*, Tomo I, pp. 811-826.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2009), *La 'Guida Armonica' di G. O. Pitoni, testimone 'informato' nel passaggio tra 'lo stile degli antichi' e 'gli stili dei moderni e dei modernissimi'*, in *Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni e la musica del suo tempo*, pp. 71-78.
- «*Et facciam dolci canti*». *Studi in onore di Agostino Ziino* (2003), a cura di Antolini, B.M – Gialdroni, T.M. – Pugliese, A., LIM, Lucca.
- Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni e la musica del suo tempo, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi* (2009), a cura di Stella, G., Istituto Italiano per la Storia della Musica, Roma.
- KIRNBERGER, J.P. (1982), *The art of strict musical composition*, translated by Beach, D. and Thym, J., Yale University Press, New Haven.
- PASQUINI, B. (2000), *Oper per Tastiera*, a cura di Cera, F., Andromeda Editrice, Colledara. (Tastata. Opere d'intavolatura d'organo e cimbalo, 2).
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2002-2004), *Opere per Tastiera*, a cura di Carideo, A., Il Levante Editrice, Latina (Tastata. Opere d'intavolatura d'organo e cimbalo, 5, 9, 10, 13).
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2006a), *Opere per Tastiera*, a cura di Bellotti, E., Il Levante Editrice, Latina (Tastata. Opere d'intavolatura d'organo e cimbalo, 18).
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2006b), *Opere per Tastiera*, a cura di Carideo, A., Il Levante Editrice, Latina (Tastata. Opere d'intavolatura d'organo e cimbalo, 19).
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2009), *Opere per Tastiera*, a cura di Carideo, A., Il Levante Editrice, Latina (Tastata. Opere d'intavolatura d'organo e cimbalo, 24).
- TAGLIAVINI, L.F. (2000), *Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710): Opere per Tastiera – Vol. I (Bologna, Bibl. St. Teol. S. Antonio)*, review, «L'Organo», XXXIII, pp. 283-286.
- 

**Armando Carideo** ha pubblicato diverse importanti fonti musicali in edizione critica, dapprima presso Ut Orpheus (1997-2000). Nel 2000 ha fondato l'*Istituto dell'Organo Storico Italiano*; dall'ora è stato il direttore della collana di fonti per strumento a tastiera. Dal 2005 insegna presso l'*Accademia Internazionale di Smarano* e, dal 2000 al 2009, è stato professore a contratto di storia degli strumenti musicali all'università di Roma - Tor Vergata.

**Armando Carideo** has published several important musical sources in critical edition, at first by Ut Orpheus (1997-2000). In 2000 he founded the *Istituto dell'Organo Storico Italiano*, and since then he has been the director of the music sources for keyboard instrument series. Since 2005 he is lecturer at the *International Organ Academy* in Smarano. He taught History of Musical Instruments at Roma - Tor Vergata University (2000-2009).