Harpsichord & fortepiano

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Behind the Mask: Continuo in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*

Philip Pickett presents some of the fruits of his research and experience in preparing for his recording of Monteverdi's L'Orfeo.

THE HARMONY

At the end of the 16th century composers were still working with a complex system of church modes. The study and interpretation by Renaissance music theorists of the ancient Greek modes or *Tonoi* only added to the complexity, and it is now often difficult for us to discover exactly which system, if any, prevailed. The late-Renaissance idea of combining the Doctrine of Affections with theories of interval and tonality eventually led to the clear division of expressive function between major and minor thirds, but at the beginning of the 17th century there was still confusion. Theorists examined the expressive content of melodic and harmonic intervals, often without regard to their tonal context, so we find major thirds employed to express despair, anger, bitterness and harshness as well as joy. And conversely, minor thirds often express sweetness or softness, as well as sadness and weakness.

In *L'Orfeo* it is clear that Monteverdi uses certain modes for different affective reasons, and clearly specifies them by his use of key-signature. This is especially important in the 'minor' modes on D and G, and Monteverdi's use of B- and E- flat as key-signatures is very precise. Sometimes a flat appears, only to be cancelled two bars later. This frequently occurs in places where the harmonic, rather than melodic, content will be affected. One example must suffice:

At the beginning of Act IV Proserpina begs Plutone to take pity on Orfeo. He replies that, despite the immutable laws, he will grant her wish, but only on condition that Orfeo does not look at Euridice while they are still in the Underworld. He then directs his ministers to make his will known throughout the realm, so that Orfeo and Euridice may hear and understand.

I quote from Clifford Bartlett's introduction to his edition of *L'Orfeo:* "Generally, too many minor chords are heard in performances of music of this period; comparison with Monteverdi's fully-scored music shows that, when he wrote what we call a dominant-tonic cadence, he expected major chords." This is of course correct, though it is only intended as a helpful generalisation. A misunderstanding of similar scholarly statements has led continuo players and editors to place major chords at almost every cadence, so in modern performances we may often hear something like the following:

... Hor nel mio regno
Fate o miNISTRI (G major chord)
Il mio voler paLESE (D major chord)
Si che l'intenda orFEO (G major chord)
E l'intenda euriDICE (G major chord)
Ne di cangiar l'altrui sperar piu liCE. (C major chord)

Despite the fact that Monteverdi has clearly placed a B-flat in the key signature we do not hear a single B-flat, either melodically or as part of a chord, in the whole of this section; but this continuo realisation, as well as ignoring Monteverdi's key-signature, simply does not follow the sense of the text, which flows across several of the line endings. Our interpretation takes both factors into account:

... Hor nel mio regno
Fate o miNISTRI (G minor chord)
Il mio voler paLESE (D major chord)
Si che l'intenda orFEO (G minor chord)
E l'intenda euriDICE (G minor chord)
Ne di cangiar l'altrui sperar piu liCE. (C major chord)

The editorial figuring in Clifford Bartlett's edition in fact corresponds exactly with this. In the original prints Monteverdi provides only a few figures in the bass part, so continuo players and editors must decide for themselves which chords to play. In the choruses, *sinfonias* and *ritornelli* the various polyphonic parts generally make the choice of chord obvious, but the solo *arias* and the recitative require a thorough knowledge of 17th-century harmonic practice for an appropriate realisation.

I quote again from the introduction to Bartlett's edition: "The editor is convinced that chords should be simple; they outline a clear underlying

harmony and the discordant notes in the voice part should sound against it." In performances of *L'Orfeo* one still hears continuo players changing the harmony over long pedal bass notes to accommodate the dissonant vocal lines above. Again one example must suffice: during her recitative at the beginning of Act III Speranza sings 'Beyond this black swamp, this river, in those lands full of lamentation...' Here, over a long-held F major chord, the vocal line includes such dissonant notes as B-flat ('swamp'), D-flat and A-flat ('lamentation'). Changing the underlying harmony to accommodate the vocal line would be contrary to all the ideals of the *secunda prattica*, and negate the obviously intended affective dissonances which so aptly express the text.

While on the subject of dissonance it is important to realise that Monteverdi's approach to expression included the colourful and affective use of false relations. At the end of Act I two Pastori sing *E doppo l'aspro gel...* ('And after the bitter cold...'). Monteverdi colours the word *l'aspro* ('bitter') by deliberately writing two C naturals in the second tenor part against B natural and C sharp in the bass. The Messaggiera's *Ahi caso acerbo* ('Alas, bitter chance') has a G sharp clashing with an A minor chord at *acerbo* ('bitter'). There are many, many more examples throughout the work.

A close analysis of Monteverdi's madrigals should give any new interpreter of *L'Orfeo* strong grounds for re-assessing the true merit of the harmonies invariably employed, accepted and now even expected in modern performances of the work. The careful restoration of Monteverdi's imaginative and colourful use of mode and dissonance throughout the opera leads to the discovery of many previously unnoticed yet shatteringly affective moments.

THE BASS LINE

Both John Eliot Gardiner and Clifford Bartlett have drawn attention to the ties and brackets which frequently link together notes of the same pitch in the continuo bass part of *L'Orfeo*. Monteverdi's frequent use of shorter note values than necessary in the bass, tied or bracketed together to make a note of longer duration, is so unusual that it must certainly imply something, and as Gardiner suggests is too persistent to be ignored or dismissed as a printer's whim.

It is unfortunate that the most commonly employed modern edition of *L'Orfeo* converts these 'broken' bass notes into much longer note values, so the fact that they exist at all is known only to those with a facsimile of one of the original prints or an edition such as Bartlett's. Bartlett writes that these ties may imply some kind of chord repetition, but he also points out that there is not complete consistency between repeated passages, that in some cases the ties might represent line-ends in an earlier manuscript, and that it is likely that sometimes the ties imply a change of harmony above the same bass note.

Gardiner draws a distinction between ties and brackets, stating clearly his belief that the use of brackets indicates, at each new bass note, a reiteration of the chord by the plucked instruments, sometimes gently, sometimes more insistently, thus creating a pulsating, even rhythm against which the frequent anticipations, retardations and irregular resolutions in the vocal part can 'tug and pull'. While in principle Gardiner has made a valuable point, most musicians specialising in early 17th-century performance practice tend to disagree with the theory. It certainly poses problems for the keyboard players, particularly when they are playing alone. It could be argued that Monteverdi provided this kind of bass line throughout *L'Orfeo* just in case a plucked instrument is playing, and that if organs or harpsichords play alone then they should simply ignore the ties and hold the note for its full value; but this is not tenable as the tied bass notes occasionally appear even in sections where Monteverdi himself specifies an organ as the only accompanying instrument. In fact, brackets are used in the print simply because of the distances involved between tied notes. Ties connect notes which are close together, while long brackets are required when the bass notes are too far apart for a tie to be practical.

There had to be an answer to all this, so I began by examining the facsimile editions of two other early 17th-century operas - Caccini's and Peri's settings of Rinuccini's *L'Euridice*, both published in Florence. Like *L'Orfeo*, these were printed with regular bar lines, normally placed four minims apart. In these works the recitative is generally more four-square than in *L'Orfeo*, for both Caccini and Peri tend to manipulate the syllables of a text phrase into fairly regular metrical units with which the bar lines hardly ever interfere. To generalise, it could be said that when there are five or seven syllables the note values of the vocal line become longer, and when there are ten or eleven the note values become shorter. Ties or brackets in the bass line are few-and-far-between

in both versions of *L'Euridice*, and when they do occur it is for one of the following practical reasons:

They mostly show changes of harmony over the same bass note (this is quite clear as each of the tied bass notes is invariably figured).

They occasionally tie a chord across a bar line.

They occur when a bar is broken half way through at a line end, and continues on the next line.

They occasionally show that a bass note must be held beneath the vocal entry of another character (a form of dramatic elision).

There are literally only a few examples of repeated bass notes being tied for none of the above reasons, though I did find a couple of places where the ties formed a bass note of irregular length (three beats) within a bar. Because a dot was also sometimes used for the same purpose I did not immediately include this in my list of 'practical criteria for tied bass notes in two early 17th-century opera prints'.

Armed with this analysis I looked again at every tied bass note in *L'Orfeo*, marking with a red dot (!) all those to which none of the above criteria could be applied. The idea was, of course, that if there was no purely practical reason for the note to be tied then Monteverdi must unquestionably have wanted some extra continuo action. Whilst engaged in this satisfying task I discovered that in *L'Orfeo* a large number of the ties form bass notes of irregular length, both within and across barlines. Here I shall pause for a moment, because I believe these three- and five-beat bass notes merit special comment.

Monteverdi and Striggio seem to have had access to a score of Peri's *L'Euridice*, for there are interesting parallels between the construction of the two operas in both the music and the libretti. But although Monteverdi was obviously influenced by Peri's earlier experiments with recitative, his own text-setting is much more subtle and imaginative, and a good deal more flexible rhythmically. While frequently heightening the sense of individual words through the use of a variety of devices drawn from madrigalian rhetoric, Monteverdi also takes as a model the stylised delivery of an actor or orator, varying note values according to the rhythms of good declamation and the necessary emphasis on certain syllables for dramatic or expressive effect. As an example of this I quote very briefly from Pastore I's first recitative at the beginning of Act1:

In questo lieto e fortunato giorno...

The pitches of the notes chosen by Monteverdi perfectly 'imitate' the declamation of an orator who first demands our attention, then relaxes a little into his speech; and the rhythms emphasise the rhetorical significance of the key words in the phrase - *LIEto, fortuNAto* and *GIORno* are all lengthened. Monteverdi's careful attention to rhetorical detail and the accurate imitation of oratorical declamation is apparent in every phrase of the recitative in *L'Orfeo*, and this approach results in some of the most imaginative and varied text-setting of the early 17th century. Irregular phrases abound, and these of course often require bass notes of irregular length to support them. As I stated above, this happens rarely in the operas of Peri and Caccini, but it is so common (and necessary) in *L'Orfeo* that I decided not to mark the tied bass notes occurring at these points; they had finally joined my list of practical criteria.

So I was left with a number of red dots (implying extra continuo action of some kind) and a larger number of tied bass notes which, because they satisfied one or other of the practical criteria listed above, did not necessarily imply some kind of chordal or bass note reiteration. The last statement is of primary importance. 'Did not necessarily imply' because I am not prepared to say that wherever a tie appears for practical reasons one should simply hold the chord (it is perfectly possible that in many of these cases some continuo action would be desirable); and 'some kind of chordal or bass note reiteration' because creative continuo players, who pay close attention to the texts they are accompanying, have at their fingertips a large repertoire of imaginative and varied ways of playing a chordal accompaniment - rolls, upward or downward spreads, rumbles, bass note reiterations at different octaves, chord reiterations in different positions above a held bass note (particularly on the keyboard) and so on - and all these can be achieved loudly, softly, slowly, quickly, expressively or dramatically; all are appropriate in *L'Orfeo*.

Both Peri and Caccini had things to say about reiteration. In his Preface to *Le Nuove Musiche* Caccini writes: "The ties in the bass part have been so used by me because after the chord only the (bass) note indicated is to be struck again, it

being the one most necessary for the theorbo in its special capacity ... For the rest, I leave to the discretion of the more intelligent the striking again, along with the bass, of those notes ... which will best accompany the solo voice part". In the Preface to his opera *La Dafne* Peri writes: "And having in mind those inflections and accents that serve us in our grief, in our joy, and in similar states, I caused the bass to move in time to these, either more or less according to the passions, and I held (the bass) firm throughout the consonances and dissonances ... in order that (the vocal line) might not seem to dance to the movement of the bass, especially where the subject was sad or grave ..."

So what were the practical results of all this theorising? I simply insisted that, wherever my red dots appeared in their scores, the continuo players should consider the text or dramatic context carefully and decide upon some appropriate method of keeping the continuo active. In every instance the expressive or dramatic nature of the text justified the extra continuo action. For the places where the ties satisfied one or other of the purely practical criteria listed above the players themselves decided, with reference to the text-setting, whether or not to play something.

Putting aside for a moment all of the above, it is only fair to say that, left to their own devices, the collective experience, knowledge and creativity of the continuo team involved in the recording[1] would have led them to realise their accompaniments in ways often similar to those suggested by the notation of the bass line. In some instances they found Monteverdi's 'instructions' unnatural, puzzling or just too elaborate for their taste. But after a little discussion and much experimentation, good rhetorical or dramatic grounds were always discovered for trusting in what he had written, and an appropriate realisation found.

Modern performers often feel that they know too little about continuo practice in the early 17th century. The books by Viadana, Agazzari and Banchieri which deal principally with the *prima prattica* art of ecclesiastical and polyphonic accompaniment say little of relevance to the accompaniment of the newly-developed monodic song styles, where the dynamic and rhetorical declamation of the text and an expressive projection of its meaning are of paramount importance. Gagliano, in the preface to *La Dafne*, merely tells us that the accompaniment must be neither too weak nor too strong, must not hinder the audibility of the text and must be without adornment. Even Agazzari only says that continuo players, when serving as foundation to one or more voices, must maintain a solid, sonorous and sustained harmony (now loud, now soft according to context), and that they must not restrike the strings too often when the singer executes diminutions or expresses a passion. This lack of literature possibly suggests a period of exploration and experimentation, and the formation of new and entirely different styles of accompaniment appropriate to the new ideals.

Apart from being happy to see their own studies and musical instincts vindicated, the players found in this analysis of Monteverdi's uniquely detailed and careful directions a new and rich source of invaluable evidence and inspiration, and I believe that the resulting continuo realisations come closer than ever before to Monteverdi's original intentions.

THE CONTINUO LAYOUT

It is clear from the score that Monteverdi requires the following continuo instruments in *L'Orfeo*:

2 harpsichords
1 double harp
3 chitarroni
2 pipe organs
1 regal organ

Unfortunately we do not know how they were all laid out - except for the brief instruction at the beginning of Act V where we learn that the pipe organs were placed "one at the left-hand comer of the stage, one at the right". Organs are not easily portable, so it would seem likely that they remained fixed in these positions throughout the opera. While the instruction also implies that a *chitarrone* was positioned with each organ (a reasonable assumption; this combination was favoured in the 17th century, and is specified by Monteverdi throughout *L'Orfeo*) it is always possible that these more portable instruments were moved around. And we do not know if Monteverdi meant the front or back corners of the stage.

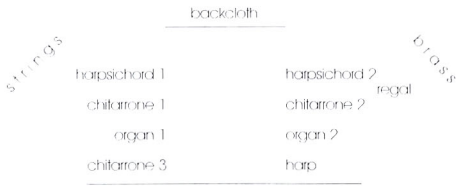
There is another piece of evidence from Monteverdi himself which might be considered, though it is of limited value here. In a letter to Annibale Iberti he discusses his *Tirsi e Clori*, written in Florence for the Mantuan court, stating that he would "think it proper to perform it in a half-moon, at whose corners should be placed a *chitarrone* and a harpsichord, one each side, one

playing the bass for Clori and the other for Tirsi, each of them holding a *chitarrone*, and playing and singing themselves to their own instruments and to the aforementioned. If there could be a harp instead of a *chitarrone* for Clori that would be even better."

For the sung ballet which followed the opening dialogue between Tirsi and Clori, six other singers are added, together with an instrumental ensemble of eight *viole da braccio*, a violone, a spinet, "and if there were two small lutes, that would be fine." This all suggests to me that the instruments and voices were laid out in a semicircle, with the action/ballet taking place in front of, and possibly within, that semi-circle. I would not imagine that any of these performers were involved in the ballet itself, as Monteverdi's letter goes on to suggest that "if you could let the singers and players see it for an hour before His Highness hears it, it would be a very good thing indeed", and it is important to remember that the piece was written for concert-performance in a palace chamber rather than for a theatre or stage.

In the Prefaces to some early 17th-century opera scores there are references to the placement of instruments on the stage, behind the backcloth, behind the scenery and in the wings. In these new and experimental works the illusion on stage was so important that instruments were generally not to be seen by the audience - but it was recommended by Gagliano, in his Preface to *La Dafne*, that the continuo players should be able to see the faces of the singers and be heard by them, for the sake of good ensemble. This probably meant that they were placed close to the sides of the stage, either visibly or in the wings; and I believe that they must have been positioned towards the front of the stage, in order to see the singers' faces.

Evidence within the score of *L'Orfeo* shows that, while there is some character/instrument association (as in the frequent use of a *chitarrone* to symbolise Orfeo's *kithara*), Monteverdi generally specifies changes of continuo colour according to the changing emotions of the text. Cavalieri, too, is known to have favoured changing the instrumentation according to the *Affekt* of the recitative. This suggested that the same continuo colours should be available on both sides of the stage (the direction at the beginning of Act V confirms this as far as the organs are concerned), so I divided the continuo instruments as equally as possible and, with the *Galleria dei Fiumi* in mind,[2] arranged them in two groups, with the organs set some 10 metres apart near the front corners of my stage area.



The opera was 'staged' for the recording according to our knowledge of Italian Renaissance traditions, and all the action took place quite convincingly within the small stage area. There was no experimental approach to continuo orchestration, with players simply accompanying a singer when he moved within their orbit. The continuo colours were chosen according to the principles described elsewhere, and the relative positions of the players fixed only after careful reference to Renaissance stage conventions (Right *versus* Left), the changes of continuo colour necessitated by Monteverdi's own directions, the scoring of parallel passages, the occasional instrument/character association and the changing *Affekts* of the recitative. There was no compromise and no manipulation, and whenever a particular continuo colour was required it was there, as if by magic, close enough to accompany the most wayward recitative.

THE CONTINUO SCORING

At several points in the score of *L'Orfeo* Monteverdi specifies particular continuo instruments. These instructions, though tantalisingly infrequent, are of vital importance; studied carefully (and with reference to other sources and conventions of the time) they can offer clear insights into Monteverdi's own approach to continuo colour in terms of symbolism, characterisation, dynamics, *Affekt* and dramatic function.

The *Prologo* is of course Olympian. La Musica has come to flatter the Gonzagas, silence the audience and lend credibility to a new kind of drama, where the characters sing throughout. She also draws attention to her great powers. All the continuo instruments except the regal play for her *ritornello*, wherever it appears in the opera, in accordance with Monteverdi's clear instructions when the *ritornello* returns at the beginning of Act V. I decided that only the organs, chitarroni and harp should accompany La Musica's strophic *aria*, and the combination of these instruments was varied according to the text and her position on stage.

In the various *Intermedi* organs and plucked instruments were often the principal continuo or foundation instruments employed, the latter mostly in large numbers. The *chitarrone* was probably invented specially for the Florentine *Intermedi* of 1589, and no harpsichords were employed in the instrumental ensembles on that occasion, though in earlier *Intermedi* they were often present. The *chitarrone* served as a substitute for the ancient *kithara,* and it was often associated (like the *lira da braccio*) with musical mythological characters, including Orfeo, Apollo and the Muses. But it was also used without allegorical or symbolic significance as the favoured continuo instrument for the new song styles of the early 17th century.

Act I is pastoral, and generally optimistic, but there are constant reminders of Orfeo's previous unhappiness. I therefore chose *chitarroni* as the basic continuo instrumentation for the whole Act, with one or two notable additions and variations.

Pastore I's first recitative consists of three distinct musical sections (ABA) which correspond to the sentiments of the text. I added a harpsichord to the *chitarroni* in the first and last section to symbolise joy (see below). In the middle section we are reminded of Orfeo's past sorrow, and *chitarroni* alone play Monteverdi's falling bass line, again symbolising unrequited love. I also added a harpsichord when Pastore I calls upon the company to hasten to the temple to give thanks to heaven.

The chorus *Vieni Imeneo* is to be accompanied by all the instruments, as is *Lasciate i monti.*[3]

The *chitarroni* are joined by the double harp in *Rosa del ciel,* Orfeo's hymn to Apollo. Although Monteverdi once wrote that harps were particularly suitable for accompanying shepherds (as they were sometimes used in the Intermedi), in *L'Orfeo* the instrument seems to be associated with heaven. Monteverdi asks for it several times in this context, and apart from these I have only used its very special colour to accompany La Musica and Apollo.

The organ makes one brief appearance in Act I. As Orfeo, Euridice and most of the chorus leave the stage in order to pray, the strings and an organ play a 'sacred' *ritornello,* which returns several times to remind us of what is happening off-stage in the temple.

Apart from a few special moments of extreme anguish, Monteverdi's own use of the harpsichords always accompanies the expression of great joy. They come into their own both singly and together during the Dionysian revel/ Theocritan pastoral idyll at the beginning of Act II. The climax comes when Orfeo sings *Vi ricorda o boschi ombrosi.* After the last strophe of this aria Pastore I begs Orfeo to continue singing, but his brief *Mira, deh mira Orfeo* is interrupted by the sound of the Messaggiera's distant lamenting. This is a difficult moment; somehow the excitement of the revel has to be kept going (are we about to hear yet another, perhaps more virtuosic display from Orfeo?) until the entry of the Messaggiera, otherwise the dramatic contrast is lost.

After the Messaggiera's first interruption (accompanied by the solemn tones of organ and *chitarrone*), Monteverdi specifies harpsichord, chitarrone and cello to accompany the Pastore's question *Qual suon dolente il lieto di perturba?* I believe that here he is in fact warning us not to change the scoring, which we might otherwise be tempted to do. Monteverdi is pointing out that, though the revel has been interrupted no-one is aware yet of the terrible news brought by the Messaggiera. The two contrasting continuo colours are employed to project states of mind (knowledge/ignorance) and also character association (Messaggiera/Orfeo, Pastori). We are witnessing the clash of two classical traditions - Theocritan pastoral idyll *versus* Messenger scene.

I think it is reasonable to assume that harpsichord, *chitarrone* and cello should accompany Pastore I's *arioso,* the use of cello in particular helping to avoid the possibility of anticlimax after Orfeo's *aria.* While continuing the 'joyful' harpsichord colour of the revel, this also establishes a 'live' continuo colour which will contrast vividly with the 'dead' colour of the organ.

Bowed basses rarely played continuo with lutes or keyboards at this time, but the unusually melodic bass line would support the practice here, as would Monteverdi's own instructions both later in Act II and in Act IV. But should the harpsichord and cello be employed for the anguished outbursts of Pastore I after he has heard and understood the terrible news? I would argue strongly in favour of this, remembering Monteverdi's 'warning' at *Qual suon dolente,* the dramatic contrasts of colour required throughout the scene, and the fact that Monteverdi scores several equally passionate moments in Act IV for the same combination of harpsichord, *chitarrone* and cello. A single *chitarrone* accompanies Pastore III as he draws the audience's attention to Orfeo's stunned reaction to the news.

For the remainder of Act II, Monteverdi is helpful. In keeping with the general mood of despair organ and *chittarone* are the only instruments

mentioned, both for Orfeo (once he has truly understood that Euridice is dead) and for the two Pastori who lament her passing. It therefore seemed obvious to use organ and two *chitarroni* with the five-part chorus and an organ for the Messaggiera's tragic *sinfonia*.

In Acts III and IV Monteverdi frequently specifies both regal and pipe organs. Orfeo is generally accompanied by organ and *chittarone* (though the *chitarrone* is silent while Orfeo quietly takes advantage of Caronte's sleeping to enter his boat) and the combination of harpsichord, *chitarrone* and cello appears only very briefly as Orfeo loses Euridice a second time. Plucked string instruments seem to have no natural place in Monteverdi's Underworld, so I decided that the noble Plutone was best accompanied by an organ, and the Spiriti by the regal. Monteverdi specifies regal with Caronte.

Proserpina, daughter of Zeus and Demeter and abducted by Plutone, is not truly of the Underworld. In the myth her mother and Plutone finally came to the agreement that she should be allowed to return to earth for half of every year. Her personality and the character of her recitative strongly suggested *chitarrone* accompaniment.

Speranza, of course, has absolutely nothing to do with the Underworld. Having been Orfeo's guide as far as the Styx she can go no further, for according to Dante (and quoted in Striggio's libretto) the words 'Abandon hope all you who enter' are inscribed in stone above the entrance to the *Inferno*. Because Speranza can also be seen as the personification of Orfeo's own hope, and as her recitative is set in a higher tessitura than Orfeo's, I cast a countertenor in the role.

Philosophers like Descartes believed that Man experienced feelings of hope due to an elevation of the soul or spirits, and later sources show that composers often expressed this through high pitched music. In contrast, despair was expressed by low pitches as in the 16th-century traditions of Underworld scoring. Joy was seen as an expansion of the soul, to be expressed musically by large, expanded intervals; and sadness as a contraction of the spirits, best expressed by the smallest intervals.

Orfeo left the pastoral world accompanied by an organ and a *chitarrone*. Surely the same instruments should be with him as he approaches the Styx; and surely Speranza, as Orfeo's own hope, should be accompanied by at least one of these same instruments. Following the general idea of elevation, we used a 4' organ stop instead of the 8' stop normally used to accompany recitative. The effect produced was so remarkable and so affective that we decided not to use a *chitarrone*, despite the relatively large number of tied notes in the bass line.

At the beginning of Act V Monteverdi again specifies organ and *chitarrone* with Orfeo, so I adhered to this scoring except for the most poignant moment when Orfeo sings *Si non vedro piu mai de l'amata Euridice dolci rai*. Here the *chitarrone* is silent. Harp and two *chitarroni* accompany the Olympian Apollo; and to end the opera, all the continuo instruments except the regal take part in the final *ritornello*, chorus and *moresca*.

Footnotes

1. David Roblou (who directed the continuo team), Richard Egarr (who pointed out the importance of Monteverdi's use of key signatures), Paula Chateauneuf, Tim Finucane and Frances Kelly all deserve special mention for their imaginative and colourful approach to continuo playing.

2. We do not know where the first performance of *L'Orfeo* took place, but two rooms in the Ducal Palace at Mantua correspond in size to rooms in other Italian palaces known to have been used for 16th- and 17th-century dramatic productions. These are the *Galleria degli Specchi* and the *Galleria dei Fiumi*, and while both have their supporters it is also possible that the actual room no longer exists due to alteration or demolition at a later date.

3. There are only two dances in *L'Orfeo — Lasciate i monti* (a choral *balletto*) and the *moresca*. The *balletto* occurs twice in Act I. The proportional time signatures, different for each of the three sections of the *balletto* and clearly marked by Monteverdi, are important for the dancers, and they give valuable clues for the performance and even for the scoring. The *balletto* is scored for bowed strings, plucked strings and one descant recorder. It follows a recitative in which the Ninfa calls on the Muses to strike the well-tuned strings of their lyres and join with the shepherds to celebrate Orfeo's good fortune; so the bowed strings represent the Muses' *liras*, while the plucked strings represent their *cetras*.

The much-praised recording of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* performed by the New London Consort under the direction of Philip Pickett is available on the L'Oiseau-Lyre label 455 545-2 (2 CDs).

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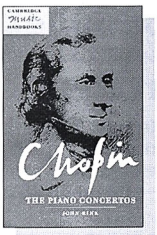

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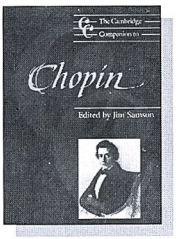

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