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TRILLS AND FRILLS, A VARIETY OF INVENTIONS: The North Italian art of Diminutione and Tremoli

by Richard Lester

Faced with interpreting the keyboard works of Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven and beyond, we generally play exactly from the printed score, without the need for extra ornamentation. This was not the case during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when in Italy especially, embellishment was actively encouraged with advice in a plethora of principally vocal, string and wind treatises. One disadvantage with written studies, important though they are, is the lack of examples in context, and in this respect, *Il Transilvano* by Girolamo Diruta, first printed in 1593, is the only treatise that gave clear musical examples for keyboard within a work. Illustrations prior to this are rare, mainly due to the improvisatory nature of the various genres that essentially represented the entire keyboard repertory: ricercari, canzoni and toccate.

However, in delving further back into 16th-century sources, I became absorbed in a set of ricercari by Jacques Buus, a Flemish composer and organist at the Basilica di San Marco in Venice from 1541 during Adrian Willaert's tenure. In his article on Frescobaldi in *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*,¹ Christopher Stembridge selects and briefly discusses Recercar Primo from Buus' *Intabolatura* of 1549, which in reality, is a highly embellished intabulation by the composer himself of a ricercar formerly published in *Il secondo Libro de recercari*, Antonio Gardane. Venezia 1549. This work says Stembridge "throws light on keyboard performance" and "suggests that contrapuntal music of the period should be embellished at

the keyboard considerably more than current performance practice would generally admit."

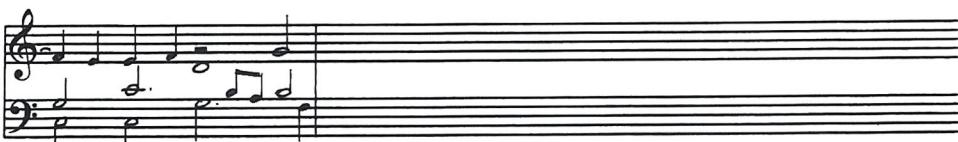
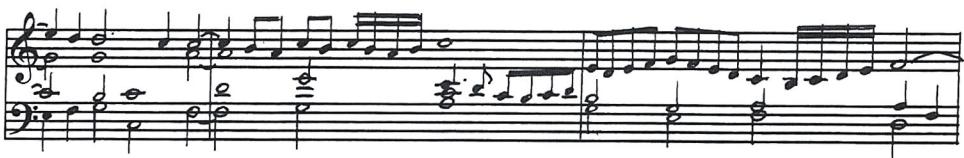
The plain version of Buus' Recercar Primo in quadruple time is a lengthy and rather sober affair of some 280 bars, relieved by a central section in triple metre that effectively lightens the mood before returning to the more formal character of the opening, but with fresh thematic material. (See Ex. 1.) The ornamented version of the 1549 *Intabolatura* however introduces *diminutione* of such melismatic inventiveness and rhythmic innovation that we begin fully to appreciate and understand the concept of improvised embellishment. This then was obviously intended as a model; it is first hand evidence of how unornamented works of that period were treated. (See Ex. 2.)

Andrea Gabrieli, second organist to Claudio Merulo at San Marco in 1557, and first organist himself in 1566, also provides examples in the art of embellishment; notably a wonderfully imaginative intabulation by the prominent madrigal composer Cipriano de Rore, of a work entitled "*Ancor che col partire*." The original madrigal à 4 appears in *Primo libro di madrigali a quattro voci di Perissone Cambio con alcuni di Cipriano Rore, 1547*.² Gabrieli's intabulation was published posthumously by his nephew Giovanni in *Ricercari di Andrea Gabrieli organista in S.Marco di Venetia composti & tabulate per ogni sorte di strumenti da tasti... Libro secondo, Venezia, Gardano, 1595*.³ Further intabulations also appear in this edition, but the writer considers this the best and

Ex. 1 Recercar primo *Intabolatura d'organo di recercari 1549* (Bars 1-10)



Ex.2 Recercar primo *Il secondo Libro di recercari 1549* (Bars 1-10)



most relevant example to the discussion. The words, “*Ancor che col partire io mio sento morire, partir vorrei ogni momento, tanto e’ il piacer ch’io sento;*” [“Although when I part from you it is a kind of dying, I would be glad to leave you every hour, every moment so great is my joy”],⁴ reflects the anguish of parting from a loved one and the immense joy of reconciliation.

Gabrieli’s writing demonstrates a wealth of inventive ideas that embrace the full meaning of the text. The plain, unembellished central section also forms the concluding eight bars of the work and invites personal elaboration in the form of *minuti*, explained later, to create movement, and to colour the expressive nature of the words “*partir da voi vorrei: tanto son dolci gli ritorni miei*” [“I would that I could part from you: for so my heart leaps when we are reunited.”] This work represents one of the most imaginative intabulations in the volume and is thoroughly worthy of study. I have included this particular work in *Masterworks and Miniatures, a volume of North Italian Keyboard music* published by Nimbus. (Details below). But from where did all these ideas spring?

As already indicated, a number of treatises on ornamentation appeared throughout the sixteenth century and one of the earliest detailed references can be found in Sylvestro Ganassi’s *Opera intitulata Fontegara* published in Venice in 1535. Although primarily intended for recorder players, it explains how to embellish music through improvised ornamentation; and according to Ganassi’s preface, also includes those “who delight in singing.” Ganassi himself was a member of the Venetian state wind band and his treatise is one of the most important of its kind. With over 170 examples, *Opera intitulata Fontegara* is an invaluable source in the art of *diminutione* on a variety of elementary themes that extend to more flamboyant melodic and rhythmic innovation as the work progresses; a style that was to spread throughout the instrumental world and influence keyboard writing.

Ganassi discusses three important factors: Time, Rhythm and Melody. Time involves fitting four, five, six or seven notes to a beat or *tactus* shown as semibreves in his opening examples. Rhythm is stimulated by contrasting rhythmic configurations, and also shown later by either short long or long short dotted rhythms. Melody is concerned with melodic innovation achieved by playing around with the tune whilst preserving the original melodic line. He illustrates this with eight examples on six notes C D E F G A that were named *Ut re mi fa sol la*, in plain semibreves. In the first example, Ganassi produces a simple, but very elegant way of moving from one note to the next and demonstrating the simplest melodic and rhythmic basis for diminution. (See Ex 3.) In the second system of that example, a more complicated rhythmic melody is presented. For those puzzling over Ganassi’s notation, Ex. 4 explains the general rhythmic configuration. Examples 4, 5, 6 and 7 demonstrate how notes are fitted into a constant *tactus*, plus numerous other rhythmic intricacies in later examples. 175 examples of embellishing a single cadential phrase are also provided. If, after tackling all of these exercises, the recorder player hadn’t lost the will to live, the most difficult work should not have presented many problems.

Most other 16th- and 17th-century Italian instrumental and singing treatises of that period included Riccardo Rognonio’s *Passaggi per potersi esercitare nel diminuire* (Venice 1592), Giulio Caccini’s *Le nuove musiche* (1602), and Antonio Brunelli’s *Verii Eserciti* (1614). On page two of Brunelli’s treatise are ways of enlivening a plain line of equal length notes in “better, better still, and best” versions of dotted note configurations together with a variety of other inventive ideas. All of these treatises are worthy of study, but in the bigger picture are very similar in content.

By far the most important treatise on the subject of *diminutione* for keyboard is the aforementioned *Il Transilvano* by Girolamo Diruta, and in my previous article “Fingers Crossed”, I

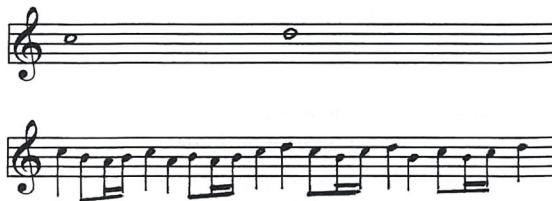
examined his system of keyboard technique with a brief reference to ornamentation. Towards the end of *Libro Primo Parte del Transilvano*, Diruta discusses in some detail the subject of *diminutione* and other ornamental inventions, with examples in context in *Il secondo parte del Transilvano*, preparing the performer for an analytical re-evaluation of other works from the period. All the following examples appearing in this article are examples taken from the 1625 reprint of *Il Transilvano*.

Readers will recall from the previous article that *Il Transilvano* is in the form of a dialogue between Istvan de Jostika, a Transilvanian diplomat who came to study music with Diruta in Venice. Towards the end of the text of *Il Primo parte*, Transilvano asks Diruta, “Preguoui à dir qualche cosa sopra li Groppi, e Tremoli.” [“... please say a few words on *groppi* and *tremoli*.”]⁵ Diruta presents different ways in ascending and descending versions combining the two, and advises that “they are done in varied fashion with semi-minims [*crotchets/quarter notes*] and bischromes [*demi-semiquavers/32nd-notes*.”⁶ His examples include a variety of note values that also comprise cromes [*quavers/eighth notes*] and semi cromes [*semiquavers/16th-notes*]. He continues, “These are found in different ways, as in ascending and descending or with accidentals.”⁷ From his description, *groppi* are short melodic configurations that generally precede a cadence and often resemble a modern turn. (See Ex. 5.)

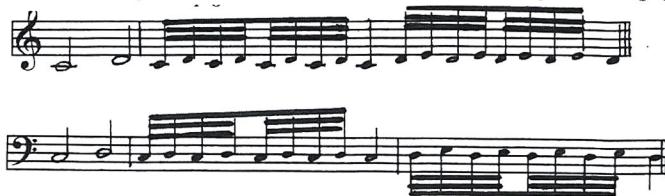
Next follows a discussion on *tremoli*, an ornament played with the upper auxiliary note and “in a sprightly manner, and with agility.”⁸ We are then advised that “when a *tremolo* has to be played on a note of minim value, it must last for the value of a semiminim, as shown in the example.”⁹ (See Ex. 6.) “This rule must be observed with all notes, that is, to play the *tremolo* so that each note gets half the value, as can be seen in several examples.”¹⁰ On the subject of the execution of the *tremolo* Diruta has previously stated, “I advise you, then, to play the notes in the

tremolo in a sprightly manner, and with agility,” but, he continues, “Do not play them, as many others do, in just the opposite fashion, for they play them with the lower and not the upper note. Observe that violin, viola, and lute players, as well as other instrumentalists, always play the tremolo with the upper and not the lower note.”¹¹ Diruta’s insistence on this leads one to think that he wished to make a clear distinction between the *tremolo* and what we would call the lower *mordent*; although as such it is never referred to.¹² Written out examples of the “lower *mordent*” are relatively uncommon, but do occur occasionally; one, notably at the beginning of Merulo’s *Canzona La Bovia*. (See Ex. 6a.)

Ex. 3 Sylvester Ganassi: *Opera Intitulata Fontegara* (Venice 1535)

Ex. 4 Rhythmic figure of No 2 Sylvestro Ganassi: *Opera Intitulato Fontegara* (Venice 1535)Ex. 5 Groppi. Diruta: *Il Transilvano Libro primo* 1695 (page 18-19)

Ex. 6 Tremoli with the right and left hands Diruta: *Il Transilvano Libro primo 1695* (page 19)



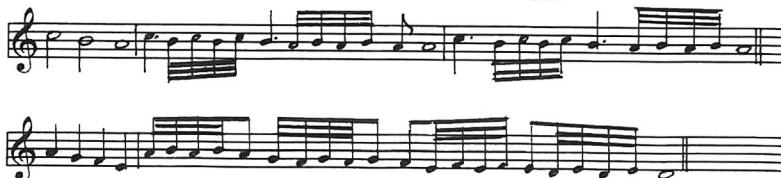
Ex. 6a Claudio Merulo: *Canzoni d'intavolatura d'organ* (La Bovia bar 1)



Ex. 7 Tremoli on minimis and crotchets. Diruta: *Il Transilvano Libro primo 1695* (page 20)



Ex. 8 Examples of tremolo in step Diruta: *Il Transilvano Libro primo 1695* (page 20)



Continuing with the dialogue between the two, Transilvano then asks when *tremoli* should be introduced, to which Diruta replies, "Tremoli are used in the beginning of some Ricercari or Canzoni or anywhere else where desired; also when one hand plays many parts and the other one part alone, this being the part in which one plays the tremolo. Moreover, it is wise to warn the organist that when a tremolo is played gracefully and at the proper moment it will adorn the playing and will give more life to the harmony. I have promised to give you some examples in this regard. The first is done on a minim, the third on a crome [quaver/quarter note]. It cannot be done on a semicrome [semi-quavers/ 16th-notes] because of its speed. First I will play the minims as they would be used in a subject and then the tremolo in two ways. I will follow with a semiminim and crome,

first with one then the other hand."¹³ (See Ex.7.) Note Diruta's comment that "Tremoli are used in the beginning of some Ricercari or Canzoni....," suggesting that some discretion be allowed.

Diruta continues that "some organists, (and in particular, Signor Claudio Merulo), use certain *tremoletti*, when notes descend by step, to cut off the following note, as shown in the following example." ¹⁴ Ex. 8 This he follows by examples of *tremoletti* that take the form of an oscillation of four notes between the main note and its upper auxiliary. Ex. 9 shows a plain version (bar 1) followed by the same with *tremoletti* using oscillation of two notes. The next example (second line down) is a plain version followed by *tremoletti* with four notes. Similarly the bass example follows the same pattern.

Ex. 9 Tremoletti. Diruta. *Il Transilvano* page 21 (wrongly labelled 19)

Although for convenience sake, *tremoli* are largely written out in exact note values, it is generally the accepted practice to perform them as Diruta advises, “gracefully” and “in a sprightly manner and with agility” that adds to the expression and lifts the spirit of the music. In fast pieces I would advocate adding to the number of printed notes with increasing velocity for greater effectiveness.

Diruta next provides a step by step instruction beginning with harmonized forms of cadential *diminutione* using what he describes as *minuti*; a means of linking either soprano, alto, tenor or bass parts of chordal sections by creating a continuous melodic line of passing notes. (See Ex 10.)

In Ex. 11 we see *groppi* (first two systems), then *tremoli*, and then added to these forms of ornamentation are the *clamationi* and the *accenti*. The *clamatione* joins intervals of a third or fourth, reached by sliding from the third below in various rhythms including dotted figurations either on the beat or before. The *accenti*: The effect is often termed “changing note”; one that rises diatonically, then falls to the third below. Written out examples of *clamatione* and *accenti* are rare, but I have given some suggestions (marked A and C on the score) for its possible use in Ex 12a & b. Here I have added these ornaments to a plain version of a *ricercare* by Diruta and to a *canzona* by Giovanni Gabrieli. It would appear that whereas *groppi* and *tremoli* were often written into the score, *Clamatione* and *Accenti* were possibly left more to the players’ discretion.

Diruta’s explanations of ornaments continue with a complete score of *Canzona* (*L’Albergona*) by Antonio Mortaro, replete with examples of *minuti*, *groppi* and *clamatione*. Mortaro was born in Brescia in 1570 and worked mainly in Milan. The example of 11 bars is given, demonstrating extreme inventiveness. In the score Diruta’s own labeling of ornamentation is as follows: C = *clamationi*; G = *groppi*; M = *minuta*; T = *tremolo* (See Ex. 13.)¹⁵

Some of the finest examples in the art of diminution though can be found in the *Canzoni*

d’intavolatura d’organo 1592, 1606 and 1611 of Claudio Merulo; an absolute master in the genre. Merulo was second organist to Annibale Padovano at St Mark’s Venice from 1557 and was then appointed as first organist upon Padovano’s departure in 1565 with Andrea Gabrieli appointed a year later as second organist. The published *canzoni* comprise 24 works, all of which are intabulations of pre-dated works. Although the first prints date from 1592, they were possibly conceived during Merulo’s time in Venice between 1564 and 1584, when his name also appears in the payment register of the Farnese Court. *Libro primo*, dated 27 May 1592 and containing nine works, is dedicated to his patron, Ranuccio Farnese, fourth duke of Parma, an enthusiastic patron of the arts. *Libro secondo* contains 11 *canzoni* and is dated 1 November 1606 and *Terzo libro*, dedicated on 1 March 1611, contains four *canzoni*. For further studies, readers should consult the excellent modern edition, volumes 90-91 in the series *Recent Researches in the music of the Renaissance*.¹⁶ This also contains ten of the ensemble *canzoni* intabulated by Merulo, and a first hand insight into the art of diminution; a further testament to his skill at breathing new life into original material through improvised elaboration.

These ten ensemble *canzoni*, probably harmonized by Merulo himself, are intabulated in the most astonishing way, and I have chosen two examples for the purpose of this article. *La Zambeccara* in its ensemble version (Ex. 14a) is conceived in precise instrumental terms, but in contrast, the embellished version lifts the work out of its formal structure and spins melodic semi-quaver lines that alternate between the hands in an evolving thought process in *bel canto* style. Most of the galleria of ornaments, *tremoli*, *tremolandi*, *minuti* and *groppi* are explored to the full. (See Ex. 14b.) The whole “miniature”, reflective in mood, is a masterwork in the art of embellishment, and also reflective of others in the set. However, this does not preclude additional

Ex. 10 Diminutione Minuti. Diruta: *Il Seconda parte del Transilvano* (pages 11-12)

The musical score consists of eight staves of music, each with a treble clef and a bass clef. The time signature is common time (indicated by a 'C'). The music is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. The first staff shows a simple harmonic progression. The second staff begins with a sixteenth-note pattern. The third staff features a continuous sixteenth-note run. The fourth staff returns to a simple harmonic progression. The fifth staff continues the sixteenth-note run. The sixth staff shows a more complex harmonic progression with some eighth-note patterns. The seventh staff continues the sixteenth-note run. The eighth staff concludes the section with a sixteenth-note pattern.

Ex. 11 Diminutione Diverse di Groppo sopra l'accadenze
Diruta: *Il Seconde parte del Transilvano* (pages 11-12)

Tremolo di minima. Diruta: *Il Seconda parte del Transilvano* (pages 13)

Ex. 12a Ricercare à 4 (bar 58) Diruta: *Il Seconde parte del Transilvano* (page 5)

Ex.12b Canzone detta la Spiritata (Bars 55-61) by Giovanni Gabrieli.

Diruta: *Il seconde parte del Transilvano* (page 14)

Original

Ornamented

Ex. 13 Canzone (L'Albergona) Antonio Mortaro Diruta: *Il Seconde parte del Transilvano* (page 18-21)

The musical score for Ex. 13 consists of five staves of music for two voices (I and II) and basso continuo. The music is in common time, with various key signatures (G major, C major, F major, B-flat major, E major, G major). The score includes numerous trills and frills, indicated by 'M' (Mordent) and 'G' (Gruppetto) markings. The vocal parts are in soprano and alto range, and the continuo part includes basso and organ parts.

embellishment by us, the interpreters. Take for example the plain line of left hand quavers in bars six and seven. Many woodwind and singing treatises of that time contain dotted rhythm alternatives to a plain line of equal length notes and Antonio Brunelli's suggestion of a "better, better still, and best way" to rhythmically enliven notes, seems appropriate. Giulio Caccini *Le Nuove Musiche* 1602 also has similar ideas that reflect a century old tradition. To create movement in bars six and seven, the bass line could possibly include dotted figurations and melodic invention as shown in Ex 14b.

Another interesting example is *La Zerata*, renamed *La Gratiosa* in the intabulated version. (See Ex. 15a.) Again the ensemble version, relatively short, is in strict imitative style while *La Gratiosa* is lengthened by ten bars and repeats part of the concluding material. In the opening, Merulo expresses the last two minims of bar one with *minuti* that leads to the first minim of the second bar, by means of a *groppo* (Ex. 15b). *Minuti* weave their way imitatively in bass and treble with simple chordal accompaniment in either hand to which attractive *tremolletti* add momentum. Imitation is a useful device in the art of diminutions, and if we study further examples in Merulo's exemplary inventiveness, much can be learned.

For those eager to experiment with *diminutione*, the unadorned versions in open score of Merulo's *Canzoni* are a sound opportunity to improve ones improvisatory skills by studying the aforementioned complete set of *Canzoni*.¹⁷

Move forward 100 years and we find the art still very much alive in a reworking by Giovanni Battista Ferrini (a colleague of Frescobaldi in the Rome concerts c.1640), of a keyboard *Balletto* by Girolamo Frescobaldi. Frederick Hammond gives the following example (Ex. 16a) of a *Balletto* by Frescobaldi and comments that "The original version of the *balletto* from the *Aggiunta to Toccate I* is decorated with a number of trills, usually underlining a rhythmic stress, and a modest

cadential ornament. The written-out variation confines its embellishment to the soprano part except where there it dialogues with the bass and employs filled intervals, after-beats, and the generally more continuous rhythmic surface of Frescobaldi's own varied *corrente*."¹⁸ Ex. 16b.

When recording the organ masses of Cavazzoni, Andrea Gabrieli and Merulo, (Nimbus NI5909/11) I included my own intabulation of the motet "Fuit homo missus a Deo cui nomen erat Ioannes" ["There was a man sent from God whose name was John"] from (*In Nativitate S. Ioannis Baptiste*) by Andrea Gabrieli, and taken from the *Ecclesiasticarum Cantionum, liber primus, Venezia, Angelo Gardano* 1576. The score is now available from Nimbus.¹⁹ Gabrieli's only printed collection of 29 works covers the complete cycle of the *Proprium Sanctorum* and is dedicated to Duke Wilhelm V of Bavaria. The motet itself is a beautiful setting to the text. Intabulations of this kind were commonplace as cover for an activity: Offertory, Graduale, Elevation of the Host, Communion, or as a substitute for Gregorian chant etc.

It is hoped that this article will inspire readers and ignite a desire to explore the wonderful repertoire of North Italian keyboard music, at present so poorly represented on the concert platform, and in particular through the medium of the broadcasting channels. Those who wish to explore the latent possibilities of ornamentation in North Italian Keyboard music may wish to consult a compilation of works that I have edited for Nimbus Publishing with many examples in context.

Ex. 14a. La Zambeccara

Claudio Merulo: Canzoni d'intavolatura d'organo

Musical score for Ex. 14a. La Zambeccara, showing six staves of organ music. The score consists of six staves, each with a different key signature and time signature. The staves are: G major (2/4), G major (2/4), G major (2/4), D major (3/4), G major (2/4), and C major (2/4). The music is written in a tablature-like style with vertical stems and horizontal dashes.

Ex 14b. La Zambeccara

Claudio Merulo: Canzoni d'intavolatura d'organo

Musical score for Ex. 14b. La Zambeccara, showing six staves of organ music. The score consists of six staves, each with a different key signature and time signature. The staves are: G major (2/4), and G major (2/4). The music is written in a tablature-like style with vertical stems and horizontal dashes.

Ex. 15a La Zerata (La Gratiosa) Bars 1-8 Claudio Merulo: *Canzoni d'intavolatura d'organo*. 15b La Gratiosa Bars 1-8 Claudio Merulo: *Canzoni d'intavolatura d'organo*

Frescobaldi, Balletto; G. B. Ferrini Balletto 2.o (Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Mus. 569, fols. 18-19v)

Ex. 16a (Bars 1-6) *Original*



Ex. 16b (Bars 1-6) *Ferrini's embellished version*



¹ Christopher Stembridge, "Italian organ music to Frescobaldi", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*, ed. Nicholas Thistlethwaite and Geoffrey Webber, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1998), 148.

² Online, "International Music Score Library Project", <http://imslp.org/wiki/Ancor_che_col_partire_%28Rore,_Cipriano_de%29>, accessed 27 June 2015.

³ Volume 3: Ricercari II, Pl. No. B.A. 1781, (Kassel: Barenreiter, 1952) , 38. Or available Online, "International Music Score Library Project" , <http://petrucci.mus.auth.gr/imglnks/usimg/0/03/IMSLP39828-PMLP87293-Gabrieli__Andrea_-_Organ_Works,_Vol._3_-_Ricercari_.II.pdf>, Accessed 27 June 2015.

⁴ Text and translation by Mick Swithinbank, Online, "Choral Public Domain Library", http://www2.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Ancor_che_col_partire_%28Cipriano_de_Rore%29, Accessed 27 June 2015.

⁵ This and all subsequent translations are taken from Catherine Crozier, "The principles of keyboard technique in *Il Transilvano* part 2", (Master of Music Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1941); 35.

⁶ Crozier, 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Crozier, 37.

⁹ Crozier, 38.

¹⁰ Crozier, 38-39.

¹¹ Crozier, 37.

¹² It is worth noting that Diruta makes no reference whatsoever to a lower mordent, and there is no reference in any other treatise, vocal or instrumental, that I have seen. One reason for this is that the notes of a so-called lower mordent and its more elongated version are mostly absorbed into the general melismatic configuration of which there are numerous examples.

¹³ Crozier: 38-39.

¹⁴ Crozier, 40.

¹⁵ The full score of this piece can be obtained as part of a new Nimbus publication - see endnote 19.

¹⁶ Claudio Merulo, Canzoni d'intavolatura d'organo, ed. Walker Cunningham and Charles McDermott ; in *Recent researches in the music of the Renaissance* Vol. 90-91, (Madison: A-R Editions, 1995).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Example of Balletto 2.o from Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Mus. 569, 18-19v, cited in Frederick Hammond, *Girolamo Frescobaldi*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 250-251.

¹⁹ Masterworks & Miniatures (2015), ed. Richard Lester. Nimbus Publications NMP 1015. The 90-page publication, includes 17 complete works by Girolamo Diruta, Claudio Merulo, Andrea and Giovanni Gabrili, Giosèffo Guami, and Antonio Mortaro, with a preface on performance practice, fingering, etc. and a DVD on these topics. It also includes the Nimbus CD recording NI 5931 of works featured in the publication performed by Richard Lester at the organ and harpsichord.

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