

Giovanni Battista Doni and his Vision of Performing Poetry*

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Figure 1 Vincenzo Franceschini (1695–after 1770), *Portrait of Giovanni Battista Doni*, etching.¹

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¹ Illustration from *Io. Baptistae Doni Patrici Florentini Lyra Barberina amphichordos*, Vol. 1, ed. Anton Francesco Gori & Giovanni Battista Passeri (Florence: Stamperia Imperiale, 1763).

Foreword

Although I missed the chance to be a student of Professor Judith Cohen, since I entered the Israeli musicological world at relatively late stage, I can thank her for being an important figure in the development of my musicological interests. As one of the expert readers of my doctoral thesis, in which I had not intended to move too far beyond my favorite topic of the Italian Trecento, Judith Cohen encouraged me to go deeper into the studies of the phenomenon of reciting verses up to its end in the early seventeenth century. Not least, due to her astute and challenging questions, my dissertation, and—to a greater extent its published version—was enriched with a chapter giving a short survey of Cinquecento literary theory regarding the practice of performing poetry. However, it soon became clear that I had barely opened the door to the fascinating world of the performance of poetry in the sixteenth century, and that further investigation was necessary. Following this, I wrote another book, devoted to the literary origins of monody in the Cinquecento, with Vincenzo Galilei as the leading figure. While reading Judith Cohen's review in the Israeli musicological journal *Min-Ad*, I was happy to discover that she liked it. Now, I would like to entertain her with a short sequel to my second book, in which the topic of reading verses aloud in public is traced to its historical conclusion.

The corpus of works of the Florentine literato Giovanni Battista Doni (1595-1647) is abundant, as appears from the inventory of his writings, both finished and unfinished, in Volume 1 of the two-volume edition of his essays, treatises, and lectures on music printed in 1763 under the title *Lyra Barberina*.² Indeed, Doni's proficiency in different fields of knowledge and his meticulous approach to research made his written legacy a treasure trove of information. He rightly is considered one of the first music historians, and one of the first critics of contemporary musical practices.³

Doni's philosophy of musical drama, as viewed from the viewpoint of classical Greek theatrical practice, forms the most important part of his musical doctrine.⁴ Indeed, he was the most enthusiastic successor and developer of the ideology of the Florentine Camerata. In his works, he elaborated on the core ideas about Greek music that had been shaped before him by Girolamo Mei and Vincenzo Galilei.⁵ Doni developed them into a well-constructed theory of the true musical Renaissance, which should have reverted to the Greek models. Unfortunately, Doni was some two centuries late with his vision of the Renaissance in music in its proper sense; that is, as a revival of ancient canons in music, exactly as happened in architecture, the figurative arts, and philosophy. By the 1630s-'40s, the interest in these trends had already passed, and few of his colleagues showed any enthusiasm for, or even curiosity about, Doni's ideas.

Few of Doni's scholarly interests have been examined in modern musicology. Together with his comments on contemporary musical dramas, another important topic has occupied scholars, namely his ideas about the authentic Greek modes and the principles of tuning of musical instruments.⁶ However, many other subjects that engaged him have been overlooked, such as his thoughts on the compatibility of various musical instruments to be played together with or without a singing voice, a topic that surely heralded the future art of orchestration, or his personal experience in musical iconography. Elsewhere I have considered Doni's theory of the *stile recitativo*,⁷ but not his ideas about how to revive the ancient practice of reciting verses and adapting it to the tastes of seventeenth-century listeners. This neglected topic is the focus of this essay.

In Doni's approach to contemporary music, specifically the monodic style, one peculiarity deserves special attention, for it allows a better understanding of his doctrine.

² *Lyra Barberina amphichordos: accedunt eiusdem opera*, in two volumes, ed. Anton Francesco Gori & Giovanni Battista Passeri (Florence: Stamperia Imperiale, 1763).

³ Claude Palisca, "G.B. Doni, Musicological Activist, and his *Lyra Barberina*," in *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 467-507.

⁴ On Doni's doctrine of theatrical music see Claudio Gallico, "Discorso di G.B. Doni sul recitare in scena," *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 3 (1968): 286-302; Silke Leopold, "Das Madrigal und die wahre Theaternmusik: Die Stillehre Giovanni Battista Donis," *Musiktheorie* 4 (1989): 143-51; Susalle Schaal, *Musica scenica: die Operntheorie des Giovanni Battista Doni* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993); Frederick Hammond, *Music and Spectacle in Baroque Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁵ See more in Elena Abramov-van Rijk, *Singing Dante: The Literary Origins of Cinquecento Monody* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014) (RMA Monographs, 26), 2-10, 84-88, 122-25.

⁶ Claude Palisca, "Vincenzo Galilei's Arrangements for Voice and Lute," in *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory*, 364-88, Patrizio Barbieri, "Gli strumenti poliarmonici di G.B. Doni e il ripristino dell'antica musica greca (c. 1630-1650)," in *Studien zur italienischen Musikgeschichte XV*, ed. Friedrich Lippmann, *Analecta Musicologica* 30 (Laaber, 1998), 79-114 and *Enharmonic Instruments and Music 1470-1900: Revised and Translated Studies* (Latina: Il Levante Libreria Editrice, 2008); and recently Martin Kirnbauer, *Vieltönige Musik: Spielarten chromatischer und enharmonischer Musik in Rom in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Basel: Schwabe, 2013).

⁷ Abramov-van Rijk, *Singing Dante: The Literary Origins of Cinquecento Monody*.

When analyzing the new genre of musical drama, Doni gave not only notable attention to its literary component: he presented it as the leading element. That is, he regarded the genre of opera primarily as the presentation of poetry, a dramatic piece. In his *Trattato della musica scenica*, written in 1633-35, he introduced the first musical dramas, composed between 1598 and 1608, as literary works by Ottavio Rinuccini, the poet he venerated most highly among other contemporary authors:

La prima Azione, che in questo nuovo stile di Musica si rappresentasse fu la Dafne favola boschereccia del Rinuccini; la quale si recitò in Casa del Sig. Iacopo, essendo stata modulata così dal Peri, come dal Caccini, con gusto indicibile della Città tutta. Dipoi furono recitate altre Favole e Azioni intere, e soprattutto con regale apparato nelle Nozze della Cristianissima Regina di Francia l'Euridice del medesimo Sig. Ottavio modulata per la maggior parte dal suddetto Peri (che anco recitò da se qualche Personaggio, siccome nella Dafne aveva rappresentato Apolline) e il restante fu messo in Musica dal Caccini, e ciò fu nel 1600, nel quale per la medesima occasione fu rappresentato anco il Rapimento di Cefalo, dove il Caccini vi ebbe la maggior parte. Conseguì parimente grande applauso l'Arianna del medesimo Rinuccini, la quale fu vestita di convenevole melodia dal Sig. Claudio Monteverde, oggi Maestro di Cappella della Repubblica di Venezia, il quale ne ha dato in luce la parte più principale, che è il lamento dell'istessa Arianna, che è forse la più bella composizione che sia stata fatta a' tempi nostri in questo genere.⁸

The first performance in this new style of music was the *favola boschereccia Dafne* by Rinuccini, staged in the house of signor Jacopo [Corsi] with music by both Peri and Caccini, which was massively liked by the whole of the City [of Florence]. After that, many other fables and entire dramas were recited, and especially those created for the royal wedding of the most Christian Queen of France, the *Euridice* by the same signor Ottavio, the greatest part of which was set to music by the above-mentioned Peri (who also personally performed some of the roles, just as in *Dafne* he sang Apollo), and the rest of music was set by Caccini. It took place in 1600, on the same occasion as another work was performed, *Il Rapimento di Cefalo*, whose music for the greatest part was written by Caccini. There was subsequently much praise by the same Rinuccini for *Arianna*, which was set to a suitable melody by signor Claudio Monteverdi, who is now Maestro di Cappella of the Republic of Venice, and who has published its most important part, which is the lament of the same Arianna, perhaps the most beautiful composition ever created in our times in this genre.

It is astonishing to learn that the function of the great Monteverdi was no more than to give “a suitable melody” to the drama by Rinuccini. Doni expressed the same attitude toward a more recent musical work, the opera *Sant'Alessio* by Stefano Landi, staged for the first time in 1632.⁹ For Doni, this opera was above all the dramatic piece by Giulio Rospigliosi, the future pope Clement IX; there is never any mention of the composer's name:

⁸ Chapter 9: “Dell'origine che ebbe a' tempi nostri cantare in Scena” (*Lyra Barberina amphichordos: accedunt eiusdem opera*, ed. Anton Francesco Gori & Giovanni Battista Passeri [Florence: Stamperia Imperiale, 1763], Vol. 2 [henceforth *Lyra Barberina II*], main part, 24-25.) There are two versions of the *Trattato della musica scenica*, both published in the same volume. The second, later version follows the pagination of the main part, whereas the earlier, first, version has a separate pagination in an Appendix. More on this in Abramov-van Rijk, *Singing Dante*, 2-3.

⁹ This opera had been presented several times up to the time of Doni's account in the above-mentioned *Trattato* (about 1634).

Per Rappresentazioni non intendiamo quelle goffe e plebee che vanno per le leggende o che si usano dalle Monache, perché quelle non meritano di essere annoverate tra le altre Poesie, ma di quelle polite, e ben tessute con arte e favella poetica, quale è il *S. Alessio* dell'ingegnossissimo Monsignore Giulio Rospigliosi più volte rappresentato, e sempre con applauso universale ricevuto.¹⁰

For the Rappresentazioni, we do not mean those clumsy and plebeian works based on legends or those used by nuns, because they are not worthy to be called poetry, but we mean those ones that are well made and interwoven with art and poetic language, as is the *S. Alessio* by the most talented Monsignor Giulio Rospigliosi, which has been performed many times and which has always been received with great enthusiasm.

It is difficult to say to what degree such an attitude was common in Doni's time, namely, to whom the public would give priority, the poet or the composer, but Doni certainly had his own reasons for his viewpoint. In the first place, he was a literary scholar and not a practicing musician. Moreover, his preoccupation with the finest subtleties of Greek style was prompted not purely by musical interest. On the contrary, it was strongly linked to his ideas about the best possible expression of the content and affects of the poetic text.

Doni was not happy with the contemporary *stile recitativo* as used in musical dramas, since, according to him, it was not entirely appropriate for theatrical music. In his *Trattato della musica scenica* and in a number of his lectures delivered orally on various occasions, Doni proposed ways of improving the musical style of opera. Thus, he recommended that the *stile recitativo* be reserved for dialogues and narrative passages, whereas music for choruses and monologues, in which sentiments were to be expressed, would do better to follow the manner already well established in the *stile madrigalistico* of the so-called *seconda pratica*, namely, a developed and embellished melody with a richer orchestral accompaniment. This certainly conformed better to the tastes and possibilities of the epoch. Doni insisted that the pure *stile recitativo* was better suited to the performance of epic poems:

Parmi d'aver sufficientemente mostrato che lo stile che dicono recitativo si convenga alla recitazione dei poemi eroici che alla imitazione scenica.¹¹

I think that I have already sufficiently proved that the style we call *recitativo* is more suitable for the recitation of heroic poems than for theatrical representation.

Doni noted a decline in the practice of reciting verses¹² in public in his time, which he deeply regretted. According to him, it was no longer an art in itself, but rather a pedagogic training method used in schools or private homes:

Ne' nostri tempi ancora s'usa assai frequentemente di recitar poemi in pulpito, massime per le scuole, ma con canto vero e

In our times, the custom of reciting [epic] poems on the podium is practiced quite frequently, especially in schools, but no longer

¹⁰ Chapter 6: "A quali specie di Azioni Dramatiche convenga più o meno la melodia" (*Lyra Barberina* II, main part, 14-15).

¹¹ Chapter 11: "Dello stile proprio delle azioni drammatiche e quello che in esso si deve osservare" (*Lyra Barberina* II, main part, 23.)

¹² See also in Abramov-van Rijk, *Parlar cantando: The Practice of Reciting Verses in Italy from 1300 to 1600* (Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2009), 230-33 and *Singing Dante*, 122-23.

grazioso non già, che io sappia. Si cantano bene le ottave in varie sorti d'arie che riescono molto grate e dilettevoli, ma ciò si fa privatamente ed in tuono basso.¹³

with true and lovely singing, as far as I know. They do sing *ottave rime* with various kinds of melodies, which are very pleasant and delightful, but for private use and in a low voice.

Doni wanted to revive this practice. However, since he understood that neither the manner of simple recitation nor the traditional singing of heroic poetry were agreeable to the public, he drew up a model for the performance of epic poetry that could satisfy the most critical experts in music and poetry.¹⁴

In Doni's opinion, the solo performance of an epic poem was perfectly fitting for festive days, and could be presented after the regular church service.

Non si costuma già di far cantare in pubblico da una persona sola i poemi: la quale usanza mi parrebbe molto lodevole ed a giudizio mio sarebbe bellissima riuscita così delle materie sacre come nelle profane; imperocché nei giorni festivi, finito il consueto ufficio si potrebbe eleggere un cantore di vita modesta e di costumi e maniere lodevoli il quale ... cantasse in questo stile recitativo qualche gentil poema.¹⁵

It is no longer the custom that one person sings poems in public, though it seems to me very praiseworthy, and in my judgment it would work beautifully for both sacred and secular topics; during festive days, after the regular service, one could elect a singer of modest habits and praiseworthy conduct, who could sing ... some graceful poem in this *stile recitativo*.

From this excerpt, however, it is not entirely clear exactly where it was supposed to be presented; however, the words "finito il consueto ufficio" allow us to understand that Doni believed it possible that it could be performed even in church, immediately after the liturgy. For the secular poems, Doni reserved the academy halls and other public buildings:

Nelle Accademie poi e Sale pubbliche si potrebbe parimente recitare e cantare qualche Poema di soggetto profano; ma virtuoso, come in lode di qualche illustre Campione defunto, o altro Personaggio, che il valesse.¹⁶

In the Academies and Public Halls, it would also be possible to recite and sing poems on a secular but virtuous topic, for example, in honor of some illustrious dead Hero or other deserving person.

Thus, it seems that he indeed considered the possibility of presenting poems on sacred subjects as a kind of para-liturgical activity acceptable in church buildings.

The performer is required to be a person of decent conduct and habits, and the text of the composition was to be censored and approved for its suitability by pious and expert

¹³ First version, Chapter 9: "Quale sia l'Epica Poesia, e dell'uso antico di cantare i Poemi" (*Lyra Barberina* II, Appendix, 20).

¹⁴ In the first version of the *Trattato della musica scenica*, ca. 1633, Doni dedicated two chapters to the recitation of epic poetry, both in ancient and modern times. Chapters 9 and 10; *Lyra Barberina* II, Appendix, 19-22. The very fact that these two chapters are absent in the second version of the treatise suggests that this topic was no longer relevant to theatrical music.

¹⁵ First version, Chapter 10: "Che i poemi si dovrebbero recitare in pubblico con ornate melodie in questo stile recitativo" (*Lyra Barberina* II, Appendix, 1.)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

persons. Of course, these demands for the modest behavior of both authors and performers should have served to reconcile the lascivious musical style associated with secular music as used in contemporary operas with the sober atmosphere of Counter-Reformation Rome of the first half of the seventeenth century.

Doni's specific proposals for the recitation of an epic poem follow. The length of the poem must be moderate, so that the listeners would not become bored, and it must consist of hendecasyllabic verses, unrhymed or arranged in *ottava rima*.

Prima dunque bisognerebbe avvertire, che il Poema non fosse troppo lungo, ma mediocre, acciò non generasse tedio, ma più presto lasciasse gli uditori con appetito, che con sazietà: che fosse nel genere Epico, il quale appresso di noi si compone di versi di undici sillabe, che suppliscono agli Esametri de' Greci e Latini; e perciò di due forme massimamente più idonee alle materie eroiche s'usassero di ottava rima e di versi sciolti; e la prima massimamente ne' soggetti profani, e la seconda, che ha più del grave e del libero, nelle materie sacre.¹⁷

First, it is necessary to note that the poem should not be too long, but rather of a moderate size, in order not to generate tedium, but to leave the listener with the feeling of appetite rather than fullness. [Second, the poem] will be of the epic genre, which we compose in hendecasyllables, equal to Greek and Latin hexameters, and therefore the two forms most suitable to heroic matters are *ottava rima* and unrhymed verses. The first goes well with secular topics, whereas the second, more weighty and free, is better suited to sacred topics.

As an example, Doni mentions the poem *Oronta* by Girolamo Preti (1582-1626) (erroneously calling him Giulio).¹⁸ The poem contains 40 stanzas of *ottava rima*, thereby reaching 320 lines. It tells of a beautiful Cyprian maid, Oronta, captured together with many other Christians by the Turks and sent to the sultan by ship as a gift. She succeeded in setting the ship on fire, thus avoiding capture and conversion to Islam.

Doni wished the poem to be recited by an expert reciter and singer, blessed with a beautiful voice, like that of Francesco Bianchi (1601-68), a famous Roman tenor who was a singer in the Sistine Chapel from 1625, and who, due to his excellent voice, had received permission to sing in theaters, like the Teatro Farnese in Parma. As an exemplary accompaniment, Doni proposes something like the harp playing of the famous Roman harpist Orazio Michi (1595-1641):

Quanto poi alla musica, senza fallo questo moderno stile recitativo ottimamente gli converrebbe, come pure il nome stesso dimostra; sebbene s'usa in rappresentare più che nel semplice recitare, cioè nei drammi o poesie rappresentative invece d'usarsi nelle miste o narrative con le quali molto più si confà; e per discendere a qualche particolare, sono andato alcune volte pensando che un poema simile a *Oronta* del Sig. Giulio Preti

As for the music, certainly this modern *stile recitativo* would suit it [heroic poem] excellently, as the name itself demonstrates, although it is used in scenic presentations more than in simple reciting, that is, in dramas and poetry on stage, instead of in mixed or narrative poems, with which [this style] agrees much better. To be more explicit, I have sometimes thought that a poem similar to Giulio Preti's *Oronta*, sung to an appropriate

¹⁷ *Lyra Barberina* II, Appendix, 1-22.

¹⁸ The poem *Oronta* was published in *Poesie di Girolamo Preti al serenissimo signore D. Alfonso d'Este principe di Modana* (Rome, 1622), 159-79.

modulato con melodia convenevole e recitato da un buon recitante e perito musico, il quale sopra tutto avesse una soave e sonora voce come quella del Sig. Francesco Bianchi,¹⁹ farebbe mirabile sentire, massime accompagnata dal suono dolcissimo dell'Arpa del Sig. Orazio,²⁰ e tanto che non si potrebbe sentire cosa più bella.²¹

melody and recited by a good reciter and expert musician, endowed above all with a sweet and sonorous voice, like that of Francesco Bianchi, would sound marvelous, especially when accompanied by the sweetest sound of the harp of Signor Orazio [Michi], so that nothing more beautiful could be desired.

The style of singing, in Doni's view, should generally follow the common practice of singing heroic poems, though the singer would need to vary the melodies of the aria, adapting them to the words and the plot. He proposed adapting the aria of several *ottava* stanzas to the same bass line, but certainly taking into account the prosodic differences in different stanzas. A change in the bass line, and thereby of the modes and harmonies, should be made with regard to the structure of the poem while proceeding from the preamble to the narrative section, to dialogues, climax, etc. In Doni's opinion, in contemporary practice this diversity was quite scant and insufficient:

...cantandosi Ottave come quelle dell'*Oronta*, potrebbe per mio parere imitare lo stile delle Ottave comuni, che si cantano, facendole però più varie tra di loro, e più adorne di quelle, che si cantano senz'arte: né gli sarebbe difficile trovare altre arie nuove e belle, purché egli fosse persona inventiva, e nata per questo. Potrebboni dunque fare più Ottave col medesimo canto ed aria, variando, o mantenendo il Basso medesimo, e così le parti di mezzo, secondoche il buon giudizio gli dettasse. E sopra tutto, credo, che riuscirebbe bene il continuare molte ottave col medesimo Basso, variando in qualche cosa l'aria

...when a person sings stanzas of *ottava rima*, like those of *Oronta*, I believe he could well imitate the normal singing style of stanzas of *ottava rima*, though making them more varied and more ornate than those sung unpretentiously. Likewise, it should not be difficult to invent new and beautiful melodies, provided [the singer] is a creative person, and born for this. It would be possible to make several stanzas in the same melody and aria, either with the bass line varied or unchanged, and likewise the middle sections, according to the requirements of good taste. But most of all, I believe that it would work well to sing

¹⁹ Francesco Bianchi (1601-68), the famous Roman tenor mentioned above (see more in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia>, accessed 17 January 2013). Doni also mentioned him in Chapter 29, "Dell'assegnare a ciascuno personaggio convenevole voce o tuono," in the second version of the *Trattato della musica scenica*: "Introducendosi Gesù nostro Signore (prima che patisse, o poi che risuscito glorioso, perché in ciò non farei differenza) pare che convenga darli l'istessa voce, cioè un bel Tenore (il quale vorrebbe essere soave e chiaro, come è quello del Sig. Francesco Bianchi) di Tuono ordinario; poiché questa voce più dell'altre conviene ad un corpo ben temperato e perfettamente organizzato." ("When introducing Jesus, our Lord—before he suffered or after his glorious resurrection, since they are similar [in mood]—it seems that it will be suitable to give him the same voice, namely a beautiful tenor (which must be smooth and clear, like that of Francesco Bianchi) of the ordinary tone [timber], since, of all voices, such a voice is the most suitable for a well tempered and perfectly organized ensemble.") (*Lyra Barberina* II, main part, 86).

²⁰ Doni surely means the famous harpist Orazio Michi (1595-1641), who lived in Rome from 1613. John Hill notes that "Michi was praised as a player of the double harp by Vincenzo Giustiniani in 1628, André Maugars in 1639, Pietro della Valle in 1640 and Severo Bonini in about 1650." ("Michi [Mihi; Dell'Arpa; Michi dell'Arpa], Orazio [Horatio]," in *New Grove* II, Vol. 16, 598. Hence, Doni was also among Michi's admirers.

²¹ *Lyra Barberina* II, Appendix, 22.

principale (per la quale intendo quella del Cantore) secondoché le parole richiedessero. Il Basso poi converrebbe variare massimamente in quei luoghi, dove si entra in un tema molto diverso da quello di prima, come passando dalla proposizione o proemio alla narrazione, e da questa alla rappresentazione di qualche personaggio, che parli, come dalla ... alla ottava, dove il Poeta introduce Oronta mirabilmente con quelle parole. ...²² Nel quale, e simili luoghi mirabile effetto farebbe il passare da un tuono all'altro, non tanto all'uso odierno (che cammina sempre per l'istesso tuono, come altrove ho dimostrato) quanto allo stile antico, che faceva grandissima varietà e recava grandissimo ornamento alla Musica.²³

many strophes of *ottava rima* on the same bass, through varying to some extent the main aria (I mean that of the singer), as the words require. The bass line should be changed, especially in those places where the topic [of the plot] becomes very different from that of the previous [section], such as when one passes from the proposition or prologue to the narration, and from the latter to the presentation of some person who speaks, as in... at the stanza where the poet wonderfully introduces Oronta with the words as follows:... In this and in other similar places, it would create a wonderful effect to change from one mode to another, not so much as is customary at present (which is always in the same mode, as I have shown elsewhere) but according to the ancient style, which created a great variety and endowed music with enormous beauty.

And, of course, the words must be heard very clearly, not spoiled by repetitions, superfluous imitations, and other artifices:

o se il compositore si volesse servire di vari artifizi, da alcuni detti soggetti e da altri invenzioni e comunemente fughe, lo facesse a suo talento per quanto si può senza usare ripetizioni e altre inezie e senza guastare le parole e corrompere la pronuncia; potendosi a suo piacere scapricciare nella parte instrumentale...²⁴

or if the composer should wish to use some artifices, called themes (*soggetti*) by some and inventions by others and commonly imitations, let him do that according to his talent, but as much as possible without repetitions and other platitudes, and without spoiling the words and corrupting the pronunciation, gratifying his whims in the instrumental part....

As to the instrumental accompaniment, Doni goes further, considering the possibility of using not a solo instrument, as was customary in the Cinquecento, but an instrumental ensemble to accompany a solo voice, giving the most beautiful melody to the singer:

E modulandosi questo, o simile poema, consiglierei che non una sola parte col semplice basso continuo si componesse, ma si concertasse tutta la sinfonia a cinque o sei

And for singing this or a similar poem, I would suggest that it (the instrumental accompaniment) be composed not for one voice with a simple *basso continuo*, but for an

²² Doni did not finish either version of his *Trattato della musica scenica*, so that there remain many blank spaces where he intended to insert musical and textual citations, names, dates and other data—apparently after additional meticulous checking. Unfortunately, most of this information does not seem to be recoverable. In this specific place, he surely intended to indicate a certain stanza before the words “Oronta era costei” at the beginning of stanza 18, where Preti introduces his heroine. A propos, she appears quite late, almost in the middle of the poem.

²³ *Lyra Barberina* II, Appendix, 22-23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

voci una delle quali però servisse al cantore, ensemble of five or six voices, one of which
alla quale si desse la più bell'aria e più should serve the singer, to whom should be
leggiadra.²⁵ given the most beautiful and elegant aria
(melody).

In this, Doni was certainly following Vincenzo Galilei in his presentation of an excerpt from Dante before the members of the Florentine Camerata in about 1580, when Galilei sang with a “corpo di viole.”²⁶ Doni, it should be recalled, was the first historian of music to know (having been informed by Pietro de’ Bardi) about Galilei’s presentation of Dante.

Another comment by Doni is no less curious: he notes that the reciters of verses normally were not accustomed to observe any measure, giving their readings without meter. However, when it came to coordinating the voice with several accompanying instruments, it was necessary for there to be a guide or a conductor to direct the singer. Here, Doni finds a parallel with ancient practice, when a flautist was placed at a spot where he was visible to the reciter:

Non voglio lasciare ancora di dare un ricordo che sebbene in stile recitativo non suole il Cantore obbligarsi a battuta alcuna; tuttavia facendosi il concerto della sinfonia a posta, gli converrà seguitar la misura: il che veramente è più difficile del consueto stile; ma altrettanto più bello ed eccellente. E in tal caso doverà essere il Sonatore giudizioso ed esperto, per sapere dove conviene accelerare e ritardare la battuta; la quale perché gli bisognerà fare col piede, come anticamente si usava da’ Sonatori di flauto, doverà porli in luogo, dove dal Recitante possa essere comodamente veduta.²⁷

I would not like to overlook one more consideration, that even though the singer in *stile recitativo* is not accustomed to follow any beat, nevertheless when there are several instruments playing together for that purpose, he will be obliged to follow the meter: it is indeed more difficult than in the common [musical] style, but all the more beautiful and excellent. In this instance, the musician (player) must be judicious and expert, in order to know where it is necessary to accelerate or to hold back the beat. Since it must be done with the foot, as was the custom with ancient flute players, he (the player) must be placed where the reciter can easily see him.

Doni firmly believed that this was the way epic poetry was presented in ancient times, and he wondered why none of his contemporaries had considered adopting this art in their days:

...quale tengo per fermo che fosse lo stile di quell’antico e fiorito secolo. Maravigliandomi assai che oggi non venga ciò imitato e introdotto.²⁸

...which I firmly believe was the style of that ancient and flourishing age. I am very much amazed that it has not been imitated and introduced in our days.

The subsequent development of musical practice in Italy shows that Doni’s ideas about performing epic poetry by a solo reciter remained unrealized. Indeed, Doni’s conception

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See more in Abramov-van Rijk, *Singing Dante*, 104-105.

²⁷ *Lyra Barberina* II, Appendix, 23.

²⁸ Ibid., 22.

of the presentation of epic poems with music required an undeniable literary expertise and erudition on the part of the listener; he had at least to be aware of the ancient classic provenance of this action. Bellisario Bulgarini noticed at the time (in 1585), when referring to the Cinquecento practice of reading epic poems in theaters, that it was impossible to separate the erudite public from the ignorant one:

La poesia epica e drammatica, principalissime poesie, non sieno indirizzate all'audienza del Teatro, una mediante il canto del rapsodo, o vogliam dir Cantor dei poemi, e l'altra con la recitazion degli istrioni. Il qual teatro sappiamo esser composto d'una moltitudine, nella quale pochissimi dotti sono, molti quei di mezzana intelligenza, e gli altri di niun sapere Ora essendo che in tali recitazioni si desidera l'applauso dei più del teatro, li quali certa cosa è che non son gli scienziati.²⁹

Epic and dramatic poetry, the most important poetic genres, should not be designed for an audience assembled in a theater, the one [epic] through the singing of a rhapsodist, that is, the singer of poetry, and the other [drama] through the playing of actors. The theater, as we know, is composed of a multitude in which there are very few learned men, many of average intelligence, and the rest with no knowledge at all... Since in such [scenic] presentations the applause of the greatest part of the audience is desired, it is absolutely clear that is not going to include the knowledgeable.

It seems that the public of the mid-Seicento now had much more attractive options in seeking entertainment: the newborn opera, cantata, and oratorio. It is true that neither opera nor oratorio could have claimed literary supremacy in terms of profundity of subject, perfection of literary style, and subtlety of the verbal texture of their libretti. However, it does not seem likely that the theater-going public of the time would have been interested in looking for these features.

²⁹ Bellisario Bulgarini, *Repliche di Bellisario Bulgarini alle risposte del Sig. Orazio Capponi* (Siena, 1585), 23–24.