

Singing madrigals: On the aesthetics of singing in Einstein's *The Italian Madrigal*

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While intended primarily as an academic work of music history, Alfred Einstein's *The Italian Madrigal* has had – and one might argue continues to have – a strong influence on the performance, as well as the study, of secular polyphonic vocal music from the Italian Renaissance. It is possible to trace Einstein's choices of repertoire in his Volume III in performances and recordings of the decades following its publication (witness the many editions and recordings of Giuseppe Caimo's *Mentre il cuculo il suo cucu cantava* and Domenico da Nola's *Chichilichi cucurucu* that are returned on a simple internet search). Given its canonic status in musicological literature, it is not unreasonable to reflect that the book's thesis regarding singing and its aesthetics might also have been influential on performers.

As a musician and scholar, for the past twenty-five years, I have engaged in researching and performing the music of the European fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with an all-female ensemble. I have had to pause now and again to wonder why my path has been construed – by some reviewers, musicians, and even scholars – as working against so-called »authenticity« or »composer intent.« In seeking answers, I have turned to pre-1970s musicological literature for writing that might explain why and at what point certain attitudes became orthodox in modern historically-informed performance practice: for instance, the superior aesthetic-moral status of singing Renaissance polyphony without alteration to the transcribed score, or the superior aesthetic-historical status of all-male ensembles – and concomitantly the compromise of using adult women in mixed ensembles, and the enduring dearth of all-female ensembles.

These attitudes were rigorously questioned, argued, and counterargued in the sixteenth century, of course: students of Renaissance musicology are familiar with how the *querelle des femmes* played out in arguments over nuns' music, for instance; and also with the heavily contested nature of ornamentation in both polyphony and solo singing. The disputes re-emerged in the twentieth century, in the years before and after World War II, when musicians like Paul Sacher, Thurston Dart, Gustav Leonhardt, and Thomas Binkley (to name but a few) joined or created tertiary-level educational institutions at which historical methodologies could be applied to the study of performance. Musicology became interested in the *how*, not just the *what*, creating a situation which prompted Donald Jay Grout to write,

»In the early days of the fashion for reviving old music, people did not bother about the original tradition, but simply assumed that the practice of their own nineteenth century was the universal rule and proceeded to apply it accordingly. Thus there were Zelter's performances of Bach, and Wagner's of Palestrina. Such days of innocence are over. Historical Musicology, like Original Sin, has given everybody a bad conscience.«¹

¹ Donald J Grout, »On Historical Authenticity in the Performance of Old Music«, in: *Essays on Music in Honor of Archibald Thompson Davidson*, Cambridge, MA 1957, pp. 341–347: p. 342.

Alfred Einstein was not known as a performer: his professional life before leaving Germany centred on editing and music criticism;² his scholarly output thereafter was dominated by work on the music and composers of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Schubert and, most importantly, Mozart. It is therefore understandable that his focus rarely turned to performance practice, or the *how* of sixteenth-century polyphony. Nevertheless, the high regard in which Einstein held this later repertoire, particularly its instrumental music, informs and infuses his writing of *The Italian Madrigal*. This mindset, along with another pervasive attitude – a distaste for female singers who he perceives to have insufficient reverence – emerges early in his diaries: at the age of nineteen, he notes, »A concert at the Akademie [der Tonkunst] which left me dissatisfied from beginning to end. It even filled me with indignation. Art is sacred, and there is such an incompetent ›dame‹ who believes *herself* to be sacred. O sancte Beethoven!«³

Einstein's early editorial reputation, perhaps building on his academic qualification of a PhD in musicology, emphasised an attitude of detachment, perhaps even of positivism, prioritising the presentation of facts and rejecting speculation and bias. One of his contemporary champions, Erich Hertzmann, praised his ability to shape the work of others in his editorship of the *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* and three successive new editions of Hugo Riemann's *Musik-Lexikon*:

»With his sense of responsibility and objectivity, with his mind open to all questions of musical import, he knew how to cope with his difficult task. [...] Not only did he revise and bring in line with present-day knowledge a great many outdated articles, but his unbiased judgment gave the work quite a new aspect. Hypothetical interpretations and personal preferences, which formerly had been allotted considerable space, were eliminated. The presentation of facts is as complete as it can be and shows the practised hand of a skilled lexicographer.«⁴

In the foreword of *The Italian Madrigal*, Einstein states a further objective for his writing: the rejection of a critical approach that privileged form over function in order to contextualise the madrigal culturally and socially in the Italian sixteenth century: »Purely formalistic discussion has been avoided as far as possible: the aim has been to go beyond the purely aesthetic aspect. The book seeks to define the function of secular music in the Italian life of the sixteenth century, and in so doing, hopes to arrive at certain new results.«⁵

And yet, despite both reputation and intention, in *The Italian Madrigal* Einstein uses three writing strategies that blur the boundaries between criticism and a »genuinely historical« survey.⁶ First, he does not forgo making and using value judgements, which are weighted equally to primary source citations, in the arguments supporting his central thesis. These judgements are primarily aesthetic (*pace* his declaration to go beyond), and as the twentieth-century art critic Clement Greenberg noted, aesthetic value judgments are »acts of intuition, and intuition remains

² See Cristina Urchueguía's contribution to this volume.

³ Michael Fink, Bess Hieronymus, and Alfred Einstein, »The Autobiography and Early Diary of Alfred Einstein (1880–1952)«, *The Musical Quarterly* 66 (1980), pp. 361–377: p. 375; »9. März. 6. Akademieconcert, welches mich vom Anfang bis zum Ende unbefriedigt ließ, ja mich mit Indignation erfüllte. Die Kunst ist heilig, und da kommt so ein unfähiges Weibsbild, das sich selbst nur heilig ist. O sancte Beethoven!« (US-BEm, Archives Einstein Coll. 2, Box. 1, Folder 1, diary 1898–1917, p. 6).

⁴ Erich Hertzmann, »Alfred Einstein and Curt Sachs«, *The Musical Quarterly* 27 (1941), pp. 263–279: p. 270.

⁵ *TIM*, p. vi; »Rein formalistische Betrachtungen sind in diesem Buch nach Tunlichkeit vermieden. Womit bereits gesagt ist, dass ihm der rein ästhetische Bereich nicht genügt. Es stellt die Frage nach der Function der weltlichen Musik im Leben Italiens des 16. Jahrhunderts, und gelangt damit, so hoffe ich, zu einigen neuen Resultaten« (*DIM*, p. ii).

⁶ *TIM*, p. vi; »Aber sie sind noch nie geordnet, gesichtet und in Zusammenhang gebracht: das heisst in den Dienst einer wirklich geschichtlichen Anschauung gestellt worden...« (*DIM*, p. ii).

unanalyzable.«⁷ Second, Einstein appears comfortable to offer the assumptions underpinning his value judgments in place of primary evidence to support his conclusions. When he does this, he ups his rhetorical game: he might use a question («A song of this kind is conceivable only as a song of defiance under the window or the balcony of the *belle sans merci*. Where else can it have been sung?»)⁸; or a logical fallacy («No one will be inclined to call such stuff poetry.... It is the very opposite of poetry»)⁹ to – perhaps unintentionally – misdirect the reader away from his intuition/judgment masquerading as fact. Third – in a different kind of rhetoric that forestalls counter-argument – he will propose a position based on observation, and then attempt to talk himself and the reader out of what might otherwise be quite astute or reasonable conclusions: These passages are accompanied with repetitions or variations of the phrase, »it would be a mistake« or »Es wäre jedoch falsch« to adopt the original proposition. All these strategies may read differently to a non-Anglophone audience, particularly in the German edition of *Das italienische Madrigal*, and may well have read differently to his contemporaries.¹⁰ Yet understanding the rhetorical frame of this important text can aid an understanding of Einstein’s choices in reflecting both his assessment of sixteenth-century aesthetic values and his own.

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If we understand singing as intrinsic to the study and enterprise of vocal music, it might be surprising, if not disconcerting, that in a book of almost 900 pages devoted to vocal music, the act of singing itself makes few appearances. Only one section, »The Madrigal as Chamber Music« (Chapter II), of which more below, devotes around five hundred words to how madrigals are to be sung, or not, but it does not contain any extended discussion regarding how singing might have been evaluated in the sixteenth century.¹¹ Nonetheless, the position of singers and singing in the book is curiously reflected by the decorative border on frontispiece (Figure 1), a visual compendium of quasi-woodcut images of cherubs and male musicians in Renaissance attire, in which the only singers are at the bottom, boys at study around a choirbook lectern or reading in front of their *magister*, clearly not singing madrigals.

Figure 1: Frontispiece of Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949)

⁷ Clement Greenberg, »States of Criticism« (1981), in: *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*, ed. by Robert C. Morgan, Minneapolis, 2003, pp. 86–92: p. 86.

⁸ *TIM*, p. 71; »Dergleichen ist kaum anders möglich denn als Trutzlied unter dem Fenster oder Balkon einer Schönen – wo sonst denkt man es sich gesungen?« (*DIM*, p. 69).

⁹ *TIM*, p. 64; »Niemand wird geneigt sein, dergleichen Poesie zu nennen. [...] Es ist das Gegenteil von kunstvoller Dichtung.« (*DIM*, p. 63).

¹⁰ Translation studies now offers a perspective on the difference between Anglophone and German academic writing styles: English writers are more inclined to assume responsibility for imparting knowledge, with explicit coherence, a linear »point-early« style, and an attitude of academic modesty; German writers are more inclined to assume the reader shares the writer’s subject knowledge, with implicit coherence, a spiral »point-late« structure, and an attitude of writer authority; Dirk Siepmann, »Academic Writing and Culture: An Overview of Differences between English, French and German,« *Meta* 51/1 (2006), pp. 131–150: pp. 141–143. Siepmann notes further »the possibility of camouflaging incoherence of digression by means of logical markers [...]. particularly common in the German linguaculture, which favours reader responsibility rather than reader orientation«; *ibid.*, pp. 138–139.

¹¹ Chapter X, »Music In Company,« considers contexts for the performance of a subsection of the repertoire which Einstein calls the »madrigal as a social game« (*TIM*, p. 743) but not so much the performances themselves.

[place Figure_1 here]

The impression that Einstein does not care much for singers or singing develops almost from the first pages, for throughout the introduction he establishes firmly that, in his frame of reference, notated counterpoint is the only music-making that constitutes composition or creativity. For example, very early on he states: »yet Pierobono was not a creative musician but a traveling improviser and lutenist.«¹² The sentence encapsulates what constitutes »creative« and even a »musician« to Einstein, or at least, what they are not: improvisation and performance are beneath consideration. Einstein also sees song as something quite different to the madrigal and is prepared to admit more agency to singers of song (to whom he gives the frottola) than to singers of polyphony. That agency, to be sure, is also value-laden: while he notes that Serafino's fellow musicians »saw that his manner of *performance* rather than his manner of *composing* was responsible for his glory« he qualifies this by asserting that Serafino »substitut[ed] simpler tunes easy to memorise [...] for a complicated and more difficult art of composing.«¹³ And in any case, he ensures that any discussion of song as composition (and therefore dignified or worthy music-making) is excluded from his main narrative since in his opinion, song is, to all intents and purposes, »doomed to lead [...] an underground existence«¹⁴ during the whole of the sixteenth century.

Einstein's attitude to performance as creativity crystallises in his *Musica reservata* section, at the point at which he devotes considerable space to the demolition of Adrian Petit Coclico. Although he credits Coclico for recognising »the new role of music as an art of men of genius«¹⁵, he dismisses the theorist's admiration for those who (in Einstein's words) »combine invention as creative musicians with a lively, attractive, stimulating style of performance«, saying that if he »actually regards this combination [...] as characteristic of his highest class of musicians, he was a muddlehead« because »the virtuoso is the natural enemy of the composer, and vice versa.«¹⁶

The opposition of virtuoso and composer exemplifies the many binaries Einstein uses to organise his aesthetics. Elements of gender and social class underpin a number of these binaries, inasmuch as they determined access to learning and opportunity, with the greatest opprobrium reserved for women and non-elites (see Table 1). Note, that while qualities in the left-hand column are constituted as positive qualities and are constructed against the qualities in the right-hand column, vertical relationships between qualities are not necessarily equivalences, but tendencies. For instance, what Einstein construes as common or popular he esteems less than that which he considers elite; improvisation is a craft, composition is an art.

¹² TIM, p. 8; »aber Pierobono war kein schöpferischer Musiker, sondern ein reisender Improvisator und Lautensänger.« (DIM, p. 7). Note that in the original German, Pietrobono is a »lute-singer« not a »lutenist«.

¹³ TIM, p. 89; »und da viele Spieler and Sanger sahen, dass die Art des Vortrages mehr als die des Componierens (Dichtens?) ihm Ruhm verschafft haben«; »wie der Ersatz einer complizierteren und umstandlicheren Art des Componierens durch einfachere, leicht nachzusingende Melodien« (DIM, p. 87).

¹⁴ TIM, p. 115; »ein unterirdisches Leben weiterfuhren« (DIM, p. 114).

¹⁵ TIM, p. 226; »die neue Rolle der Musik als einer Kunst der Manner von Genius« (DIM, p. 230).

¹⁶ TIM, p. 227; »Erfindungsgabe als schaffende Musiker mit lebendigem, erfreuemdem und erheiternden Vortrag verbinden.« (DIM, p. 231); »und wenn Coclico wirklich die Verbindung [...] als Merkmal der hochsten Klasse von Musikern bezeichnet, so war er [...] ein Wirrkopf, [denn] der Virtuos ist der naturliche Feind des Componisten, und umgekehrt.« (DIM, p. 232).

Table 1: Binary oppositions in the aesthetics of *The Italian Madrigal*

Composer	Virtuoso, performer
Elite	Common, popular
Art	Craft
Pure	Impure
Genius	Derivative, functional
Male	Female
Collective	Solo
Written	Improvised
Complexity	Simplicity
Knowledge	Ignorance
Flourishing	Decay
Dilettante/amateur	Professional

Many of these binaries are established early on in Chapter 1 – for instance, elite vs. common: »The public capable of enjoying and understanding the higher polyphonic art does not change; it remains an aristocratic public.«¹⁷ On art vs. craft, or genius vs. function, he notes of a sonnet »by Serafino dall’Aquila addressed to Josquin des Prez«:

»Does this not sound as if the author had in mind some jack-of-all trades like Conrad Paumann, who was actually rewarded with fine garments, rather than a true artist, whose genius is its own reward? The musician is no longer a tradesman or a savant as in the Middle Ages, but an exceptional man, endowed by heaven with imperishable gifts.«¹⁸

¹⁷ *TIM*, p. 30; »Das Publikum, das höhere, mehrstimmige Musik versteht und genießt, ändert sich nicht; es bleibt nach wie vor ein aristokratisches Publikum.« (*DIM*, p. 29).

¹⁸ *TIM*, p. 55; »Klingt das nicht, wie gemünzt auf Tausendkünstler wie Conrad Paumann, der in der Tat nur zur Voransicht mit einigen Prachtgewändern belohnt wurde – im Gegensatz zum wahren Künstler, der in seinem Genius Genüge findet? Auch der Musiker ist jetzt nicht mehr ein Handwerker oder ein Gelehrter wie im Mittelalter, sondern der Ausnahmensch, vom Himmel mit unvergänglichen Gaben überschüttet.« (*DIM*, p. 54). The notion of artistic genius as its own reward was already being questioned in early twentieth-century Anglophone writing; for instance, by Ethel Smyth in 1922: »It is easy to maintain that genius will make its way, but much depends on whether the means exist

These three binaries are gathered together in one of Einstein's many paradoxes created by the imposition of a narrative structure that weighs more importantly than the evidence squeezed into it (more on this below). And here we also see, not a binary as such, but an overt parallel between the madrigal and the chamber music of the Enlightenment, a strategy that informs and perhaps distorts Einstein's observations and analyses throughout:

»In an epoch so given to the arbitrary show of individual power, this ›democratic‹ tendency is something of an enigma, the more so since this is also the epoch which invented the concept of the virtuoso and found the first embodiment of this concept in the singers to the lute and viol and in the players of these instruments [...]. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized how small and select the circle must have been that cultivated secular music as a form of art and for which the collections of the printers were obviously destined. It was no greater than, in the eighteenth century, the circle of chamber music players for which Haydn and Mozart composed their new quartets. It was considered elegant to follow one's individual part in a complex ensemble, more elegant certainly, than to appear as a singer to lute accompaniment. These singers to the lute were nearly always professionals who were hired and paid as such.«¹⁹

In this passage, with its reference to democracy and absolutism, we can also see an ethical, even moral, dimension that informs Einstein's aesthetic judgment (except in the case of genius, which he never discusses in regard to performance, only composition). In relation to singing, this can be seen most clearly in his treatment of women singers and vocal virtuosi, categories that are almost, if not quite completely, synonymous in Einstein's world.

I've cited Einstein's attitude to female singers before, in particular the female singers at the court of Ferrara, noting that he »lays the responsibility for the decline of polyphony squarely at their feet.«²⁰ But he sees the process of decay beginning much earlier, as settings using four voices that stay in their respective ranges and roles give way to settings with two or more high, equal voices:

»In the madrigal, in the motet, the voices combine in a consonance, a *concerto*. No voice stands out; each voice recognizes the rights of every other; there is a truly democratic spirit. But in the course of the century the tension of the voices with respect to one another undergoes a change: two or more voices stand out, begin to compete, and force the rest to accept a subordinate and menial role.«²¹

»[...] the group of women's voices develops a rivalry within its own ranks, for there can be no choosing between two ladies, even in music. They begin a *concerto*-like competition.«²²

The distaste for the adult female voice becomes a preoccupation in the last three chapters of the book, but it is given an early foundation. Students of French feminist theory will recognise the

for bringing its output before the world. What could the Renaissance painters have achieved had there been no churches clamoring for altarpieces, no art patrons anxious to see themselves immortalized?« Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, London 1921, p. 239.

¹⁹ TIM, p. 153; »Diese ›demokratische‹ Anlage ist in einer Zeit, in der der Einzelne so mächtig, so willkürlich hervorzutreten liebte, nur schwer zu erklären; in einer Zeit, in der sich gleichzeitig der Begriff des Virtuosen bildete, und im Lauten- oder Violen-Sänger oder -Spieler seine früheste Verwirklichung fand. [...] Man kann nicht oft genug betonen, wie klein und gewählt der Kreis gewesen sein muss, der Musik, profane Musik, kunstmässig übte, und für den die Drucker ihre Sammlungen auf den Markt brachten. Er war nicht grösser als im 18. Jahrhundert der Kreis der Kammermusik-Spieler, dem Haydn und Mozart ihre neuen Quartette zudachten. Es galt als vornehm, seinen individuellen Part im gegliederten Ganzen durchzuführen, als vornehmer, denn etwa als Lauten-Sänger hervorzutreten. Die Lauten- Sänger waren fast immer Professionalisten, die man als Professionalisten engagierte und bezahlte.« (DIM, p. 154).

²⁰ Laurie Stras, *Women and Music in Sixteenth-Century Ferrara*, Cambridge 2018, p. 5.

²¹ TIM, p. 821; »Im Madrigal, in der Motette vereinigen sich die Stimmen zum Zusammenklang, zum ›Concerto‹. Keine will hervortreten, jede lässt der andern ihr Recht, es herrscht demokratischer Geist. Aber im Lauf des Jahrhunderts verändert sich das Spannungs-Verhältnis der Stimmen zu einander; zwei oder mehr treten hervor, geraten in Wettstreit, drängen andre in eine untergeordnete, dienende Rolle.« (DIM, p. 836).

²² TIM, p. 822; [...] und die weibliche Gruppe rivalisiert unter sich, da auch musikalisch zwei Damen niemals ungleichmässig behandelt werden durften. Sie beginnen zu konzertieren.« (DIM, p. 837).

trinity of women's commodification defined by Luce Irigaray: the unrealised potential of the virgin child; the realised value of the wife and mother; the abject nature of woman who is defined by usage and exchange.²³ In Chapter 1, Einstein sets up Irene de Spilimbergo as a model singer, but he notes that she is a nine-year-old child prodigy, so sees nothing untoward about her activity.²⁴ Nor does he see the frottola-singing women of Florence or the wife of Marchetto Cara in a particularly disparaging light, because these are chaperoned women, defined by their marital status.²⁵ Yet some fifty pages later he expounds at length about the »highly questionable virtue« of singing women, the »laxity« of Isabella d'Este's singing *damigelle*, and reports the opinion of »the great connoisseur Pietro Aretino, who presumably knew what he was talking about« regarding the effect of music learning on a woman's principles.²⁶ These swings from prurient fascination to coy euphemism are perhaps typical of the time, but we are left in no doubt from the outset that Einstein regards adult women's voices as inherently corrosive.

Throughout the rest of the book, women singers are introduced and woven into the narrative as the agents of negative change and decay. For instance, when Einstein levels his ultimate opprobrium at Giambattista Guarini and his text *Tirsi morir volea*, he begins:

»these dialogues in shepherd costume now become a sign of the madrigal's inner decay: the lyric utterance becomes more and more untrue, and its claims to a *mise-en-scene* lead it inevitably to the stage itself and thus to self-destruction. The several characteristics of the genre – its pastoral *mise-en-scene*, its sensuous action, half veiled, half unveiled, its epigrammatic formal concentration – are given their most typical expression in a piece more often set to music than any other of its kind, a madrigal by the poet Battista Guarini: *Tirsi morir volea*.«²⁷

In order to contextualise Guarini's working milieu, he shortly continues:

»Through the outward circumstances of his life, Guarini was almost continuously under the spell of music, a spell from which he could not escape. His sister-in-law was Lucrezia Bendidio [...] »gifted with a most beautiful voice and expert in the art of music, she and her sister Isabella always had the main part in the grandiose concerts which, from 1571 to 1584, under the direction of the famous Luzzasco Luzzaschi and of Tarquinia Molza, delighted the court of Ferrara. The two sisters Bendidio and Anna Guarini, a cavalier's daughter who later joined the court, served the duchess as chamber musicians and amazed everyone by their improvised singing of any motto or composition that was suggested to them.«²⁸

The discussion concludes:

»It is difficult to say precisely what qualities of this worthless, indeed contemptible, text of Guarini's are responsible for its enormous vogue. No doubt it was the pastoral setting, the

²³ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris 1977, pp. 180–181.

²⁴ *TIM*, p. 50.

²⁵ *TIM*, pp. 52, 78.

²⁶ *TIM*, p. 94.

²⁷ *TIM*, p. 539; »wird diese Dialogisierung im schäferlichen Costüm jetzt doch zum Zeichen einer inneren Versetzung des Madrigals: die lyrische Äusserung wird immer unwahr, und die Inszenierung, deren sie zu bedürfen glaubt, führt schliesslich zur wirklichen Szene und damit zur Selbst-Zerstörung. Das am häufigsten componierte Stück dieser Gattung, in dem die pastorale Inszenierung, die unverhüllt-verhüllte Sinnlichkeit des Vorgangs, die epigrammatische Zuspitzung der Form ihren typischen Ausdruck gefunden hat, ist ein Madrigal des Dichters Battista Guarini, »Tirsi morir volea« (*DIM*, p. 551).

²⁸ *TIM*, p. 539; »Guarini ist durch seine Lebens-Schicksale fast ohne Unterbrechung in den Bannkreis der Musik versetzt worden; er kann ihm nicht entrinnen. Seine Schwägerin ist Lucrezia Bendidio [...]. »Dotata di una bellissima voce, esperta nell' arte musicale, insieme con la sorella Isabella, aveva sempre la parte principale nei grandiosi concerti, che dal 1571 al 1584 rallegrarono il castello di Ferrara sotto la direzione del celebre Luzzasco Luzzaschi e di Tarquinia Molza. Le due sorelle Bendidio ed Anna Guarini, figlia del cavaliere, entrata più tardi nella corte, servivano alla duchessa per la musica segreta e facevano stupire tutti cantando improvvisamente qualunque motto o composizione si fosse loro presentata« (*DIM*, p. 552).

disease that had attached the taste of the time, but it was also the cantata-like presentation and the latent dramatic element. When an art form decays and is about to die, it grasps at intoxicants and stimulants like a hopeless invalid and, again like him, at stronger and stronger ones until the end.«²⁹

With no other description of the Ferrarese court at which the text was written, it seems we are to understand that, bewitched by female voices, Guarini was aesthetically doomed. The role of female voices in the reference to »the cantata-like presentation and the latent dramatic element« is explained much later in Chapter XI »Concento and Concerto«, which charts the simultaneous rise of the female singer and the decline of the madrigal, summing up: »It would be idle to ask whether the *concerto* of the three ladies was a result of the increasing concerto-like tendency in the madrigal, or whether, on the contrary, the tendency was brought about by the ladies. The fact is that the ladies did contribute to it all over Italy.«³⁰

The interchangeability of aesthetic and moral value is nowhere more apparent than in Einstein's fulsome critique of ornamentation as a singerly practice: Coclico may be a »Wirkkopf« for admiring skilful singers, but printed ornamented madrigals are »monstrosities« (»Monstrositäten«) and readers are warned against being »naïve« (»kindlich«) and »mised« (»verleiten«) into thinking that ornamentation treatises have any bearing on the realities of performance in the sixteenth century.³¹ A bit further on, we find perhaps his most extreme statement about the »barbarism and poor taste«³² (»Geschmacklosigkeit und Barbarei«³³) of late-century ornamentation, with unmistakably Siren-like imagery, »the virtuoso, the singer with a cunning throat and flowing coloratura, is the deadly enemy of the creative musician whose chief concern is expression.«³⁴ The language of conflict continues, as he reflects on »the abuse of freedom that characterized the beginning of the seventeenth century and whose correction required the century's untiring efforts.«³⁵ And yet, when stripped of ornamentation, what Einstein calls monody – a term which troubles me almost as much as »pseudo-monody« – in the early seventeenth century is to him »lean and sterile« (»dürren und trockenen«³⁶, a phrase he applies to Monteverdi's *Lettere amorse*) and incapable of »attain[ing] the ideal for which it is striving – the intelligibility and the power of the word, strengthened by and embodied in music.«³⁷ It is almost as if Einstein never imagines the music he writes about ever being sung –

²⁹ TIM, p. 543; »Es ist eine ernste Frage, welche Eigenschaften diesem nicht nur wertlosen, sondern sogar nichtswürdigen Text Guarini's zu so grosser Beliebtheit verholfen haben. Es ist die Geschmacks-Krankheit der Zeit, das Pastorale; es ist die kantatenhafte Einkleidung, die latent Dramatik. Wenn eine Kunstgattung entartet und stirbt, so greift sie genau so zu den ihr schädlichen Rausch- und Stimulanz-Mitteln, wie der hoffnungslos Kranke, und wie dieser zu immer stärkeren, bis zum »letalen Ausgang.« (DIM, p. 555).

³⁰ TIM, p. 828; »Es wäre müßig zu fragen, ob das »concerto« der drei Damen mehr ein Produkt der wachsenden konzertierenden Haltung des Madrigals war, oder ob seine Existenz mehr diese Haltung gefördert hat. Tatsache ist, dass es sie gefördert hat, in ganz Italien[,]« (DIM, p. 843)

³¹ TIM, p. 842.

³² Ibid.

³³ DIM, p. 858.

³⁴ TIM, p. 842; »der Virtuose, der Sänger mit Geläufigkeit und Coloratur, ist der Todfeind des schaffenden Musikers, dem es um Ausdruck zu tun ist.« (DIM, p. 858). It is curious that the Siren metaphor, the »cunning throat« does not appear in the German original – *Geläufigkeit* has the meaning of »fluency«. On the other hand, as Sebastian Bolz writes in a private communication, »»Geläufigkeit« is a term that is strongly connected to 18th and 19th century virtuosity: Mozart aims to write for the »geläufige Gurgel« (his words) of a particular singer, Czerny's famous »Schule der Geläufigkeit« etc. The English translation is deficient of these allusions«. My thanks to him for this further clarification.

³⁵ TIM, p. 843; »der Missbrauch der Freiheit, wie er zu Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts zu Tage tritt, und dessen Korrektur die Bemühungen dieses ganzen Jahrhunderts in Anspruch nimmt.« (DIM, p. 859).

³⁶ DIM, p. 863.

³⁷ TIM, p. 847; »das angestrebte Ideal erreichen: die Verständlichkeit des Wortes, die Gewalt des Wortes, verstärkt durch die Musik, versinnbildlicht in der Musik?« (DIM, p. 863).

the singer's agency to create meaning through the sound of the voice, guided by notation, is never acknowledged in his analyses.³⁸

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One of the abiding difficulties I have faced in extracting any coherent statement about Einstein's aesthetics of singing is that the aesthetic that most concerns him is not musical at all, but narrative – the »perfect and well-rounded curve«³⁹ (»vollkommen und rund Geformtes«⁴⁰) of his history, – almost an aesthetics of musicology itself. So while he waxes irritable about singers in general and laments that so-called »creative musicians«⁴¹ (»schöpferische Musiker«⁴²) have to have any dealings with them at all, a vision of what he considers good and bad singing is fleeting and vague. Nonetheless, he does refer occasionally to the experience of madrigal singing from the point of view of the singer.

Einstein's appreciation of this experience rests wholly on what might be called an aesthetic of function: he considers sixteenth-century secular music as neither »private nor public« (»Einsamkeit« und »Öffentlichkeit«) and that its »aim is not emotion, not edification, uplift, or self-improvement, but to serve as entertainment at best, and often enough as a prelude to Venus, an accompaniment to eating and drinking, or a mere pastime«.⁴³ Any audience is »uninvited and a general nuisance.«⁴⁴ And when he considers the aesthetic experience of the singers, it is not in auditory terms, but as sharing of affect among them, who he calls »active singers«⁴⁵ (»aktive Sänger«⁴⁶):

»just as in quartet-playing ›keeping together‹ is in itself an aesthetic value for the players, for example in a fugue or a fugato, so in singing together the overcoming of such small difficulties seems to have been similarly valued.«⁴⁷

He presents this statement, however, without evidence. And while this paper is not specifically concerned with Einstein's distaste for what he calls »the terrible confusion of wit with mind« – in other words, *imitazione* – I must necessarily touch on it because of the train of logic that spins away from the discussion, via a long section which dwells miserably on his disapproval of musical

³⁸ The notion of a performer's vocal agency may appear a modern concept and perhaps not one with which Einstein could or should have been familiar; however, it appears even within the texts that he cites; for instance, in Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna*, Florence 1581, pp. 89–90: »... esprimere i concetti dell'animo col mezzo delle parole ... osservino di gratia in qual maniera parla, con qual voce circa l'acutezza & gravità, con che quantità di suono, con qual sorte d'accenti & di gesti, come profferite quanto alla velocità & tardità del moto, l'uno con l'altro quieto gentilhoumo, attendino un poco la differenza che occorre tra tutte quelle cose, quando uno di essi parla con un suo servo, ovvero l'uno con l'altro di questi; considerino quando ciò accade al Principe discorrendo con un suo suddito & vassallo; quando al supplicante nel raccomandassi; come ciò faccia l'infuriato, ò concitato; come la donna maritata; come la fanciulla; come il semplice putto; come l'astuta meretrice; come l'innamorato nel parlare con la sua amata mentre cerca disporla alle sue voglie; come quelli che si lamenta; come quelli che grida; come il timoroso; e come quelli che esulta d'allegrezza.« See also the discussion in John Walter Hill, »Beyond Isomorphism toward a Better Theory of Recitative,« *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 9/1 (2003), <https://sscm-jscm.org/v9/no1/hill.html>.

³⁹ *TIM*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *DIM*, p. 2.

⁴¹ *TIM*, p. 8.

⁴² *DIM*, p. 7.

⁴³ *TIM*, p. 743; »die nicht Emotion zum Ziel hat, nicht Erbauung, Erhöhung, Selbst-Bereicherung, sondern im besten Falle Unterhaltung, und so oft lediglich Vorspiel ist für Venus, Begleitung zum Essen und Trinken, Zeitvertreib.« (*DIM*, p. 761).

⁴⁴ *TIM*, p. 743; »ungebeten und meist sogar lästig« (*DIM*, p. 761).

⁴⁵ *TIM*, p. 244.

⁴⁶ *DIM*, p. 250

⁴⁷ *TIM*, p. 263; »Solche Stücke müssen unter den Sängern ihre Liebhaber gefunden haben: wie beim Quartett-Spiel das »Zusammenbleiben« für die Spieler an sich schon ein ästhetischer Wert ist, etwa bei einer Fuge oder einem Fugato, so scheint die Bewältigung solcher kleiner Schwierigkeiten es auch beim Zusammensingen gewesen zu sein.« (*DIM*, p. 269).

symbolism, particularly ›Augenmusik‹.⁴⁸ The existence of notational representations or puns becomes what he calls »negative evidence« that madrigals were meant to be – if not seen-but-not-heard then seen-but-not-listened-to, written only for the aesthetic enjoyment of the participants, acquired through visual detection and understanding of the composer’s intention.⁴⁹ For instance, there is no acknowledgement that contrary motion can be detected in sound as well as by sight, or that in hearing long notes a listener might visualise semibreves. Einstein insists that the madrigal was not for hearing, but for doing: »Thus there were no listeners, but only ›active‹ singers; there was no singing by heart, but constant adherence to the part-book; all participants were equally privileged.«⁵⁰ Yet even though the listener is also a singer, there is no acknowledgement of listening as an intrinsic element of ensemble participation. The senses are curiously detached. There is no sound.

This premise underlies the book’s only coherent statement on how madrigals should be sung – given in the short passage labelled, »The Madrigal as Chamber Music« – in summary: softly, without instruments, one voice per part, in men’s voices by preference, with nothing added or taken away from the notes inscribed on the page. The principal evidence he offers comes not from the sixteenth century, but from Padre Martini, who also draws on his own experience to form an explanation for the apparently greater use of dissonance in secular works, making unsupported assumptions about sixteenth-century performing forces in both secular and ecclesiastical settings:

»These bold dissonances were permitted in madrigals, because, being sung only by the component voices and without any instrumental accompaniment, their perfect intonation by a few singers was easier than in church music where a whole crowd of singers is performing and where, experience teaches, not all have a just and perfect intonation....«⁵¹

The possibilities, even probabilities, of instrumental participation in the secular polyphony of the Italian Renaissance are now widely accepted: while unaccompanied performance is certainly one option, the view that it was a preference or even prevalent was perhaps encouraged by the printing conventions developed in Venice in the first half of the sixteenth century. »Bold dissonances« do indeed occur in sacred music throughout the sixteenth century – from Brumel at the beginning, Gombert and De Rore in the mid-century, and De Wert at its end – and while Nicola Vicentino is similarly dubious about the ability of church choirs to sing in tune, he remains silent on whether or not poor intonation is a reason to avoid dissonance.⁵²

Einstein’s narrative arc often describes the rise and fall of sixteenth-century *secular* polyphony in terms of flowering and decay, but beneath this lies an even more powerful metaphor of nascent, then mature democracy degenerating into tyranny.⁵³ He sees the early

⁴⁸ *TIM*, p. 229.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁵⁰ *TIM*, p. 244; » Keine Zuhörer, nur ›aktive‹ Sänger; kein Auswendig-Musizieren, sondern stetes Haften am Stimmbuch; volle Gleichberechtigung aller Mitwirkenden« (*DIM*, p. 250).

⁵¹ *TIM*, p. 245, »Man erlaubte sich solche (kühnen) Dissonanzen in den Madrigalen, da ihre vollkommen reine Intonation durch wenig Sänger nach den Stimm-Büchern und ohne jede instrumentale Begleitung leichter war als in der Kirchenmusik, in der die ganze Sänger-Schar singt, in der – die Erfahrung lehrt es – nicht alle einer richtigen und vollkommenen Intonation geneigt sind ...« (*DIM*, p. 250).

⁵² »Et perche le voci sono instabili, molte fiata avviene ch’il Choro abbassa un semitono, cantando dal suo primo principio, per seguire al fine: et inanzi che i Cantanti aggiungano al fine, qualche volta abbassano un tono.« Vicentino, *L’antica musica ridotta alla moderna practica*, Rome 1555, p. 47r.

⁵³ For further information see Anna Breidenbach’s contribution to this volume.

sixteenth-century vocal forms as inherently unequal, but the »revolution« of the madrigal brings greater social equality:

»No longer are the voices of unequal importance; each voice now claims a fairly equal share in the musical structure, though without prejudice to the special rights of the soprano as the highest part and the one most prominently heard, and of the bass, which supports the whole.«⁵⁴

Yet all is not well in this burgeoning aristocratic utopia: there remains an unresolvable tension. The ideologies locked in the madrigalian struggle are music and text, but since the voice is necessary and sufficient only to the text, the virtuoso singer gravitates to one only locus of power. To Einstein, the early madrigal, the inevitable transformation of the imitative motet, was

»the first victory of music over text, in spite of the fact that the madrigal is always dependent on the text. All during the sixteenth century, music retains this supremacy, though not without its being contested, until, toward the end of the century, it loses it as a result of a new revolution, or rather a short-lived would-be revolution – I refer to the action of the Florentine Camerata. It loses it because the madrigal carried with it from the first an inner contradiction: its polyphony forced it to express what is most personal with impersonal means and to entrust the most subjective expression not to one singer but to a number.«⁵⁵

Added to this tension between music and text is the tension between the voices themselves, because Einstein perceives a paradox that even within equality, there is no equality:

»To a still higher degree will the equality of all the voices in the more relaxed polyphonic music remain an illusion; for the upper voice is more or less obliged to lead, even though it is no longer a song-like melody, while the bass will always exercise a greater or lesser supporting function. Only the inner voice or voices will assume a life of their own. The process is much the same as in the chamber music of the eighteenth century when the trio sonata for two violins and continuo becomes the string trio, and the sonata for three instruments and continuo the quartet, when, the »polarity« between the dominant and the subordinate instruments is equalized in a »democratic« sense. None the less, the inner voices always remain what they are to some extent, however small, that is, they retain their function, which is to serve as harmonic filling; and a close examination of madrigals and motets of the sixteenth century will reveal that, in compositions for four or five voices, the alto, tenor, and quintus have always, roughly speaking, more notes and fewer rests than the soprano or bass. Perhaps they are no longer subordinate – they are indeed essential, fully privileged parts of the whole – but they still have menial work to do, as they had in the frottola.«⁵⁶

⁵⁴ TIM, p. 119; »Die Ungleichwertigkeit der Stimmen wird aufgehoben; eine jede gewinnt einigermassen gleichen Anteil am musikalischen Aufbau, wenn auch die Sonderrechte des Soprans als der obersten, an meisten ins Ohr fallenden Stimme, und des Basses als der stützenden immer gewahrt bleiben.« (DIM, p. 119).

⁵⁵ TIM, p. 151; »der erste Sieg der Musik über den Text. Während des ganzen 16. Jahrhunderts behält, wenn auch nicht unbestritten, die Musik die Oberhand, bis sie an einem Ende durch eine neue Revolution – eine Schein-Revolution von kurzer Dauer – ich meine die Aktion der florentiner Camerata, gestürzt wird. Und gestürzt deshalb, weil das Madrigal von Anfang an einen Widerspruch in sich trug: dass es durch seine Mehrstimmigkeit gezwungen war, Persönlichstes mit unpersönlichen Mitteln auszusagen, dass Trägerin des subjektivsten Ausdrucks nicht ein Vortragender, sondern eine Mehrheit von Sängern war.« (DIM, p. 152).

⁵⁶ TIM, p. 151–152; »In noch erhöhtem Mass wird in der freieren polyphonen Musik die Gleichwertigkeit aller Stimmen eine Fiktion bleiben. Mehr oder minder führt die oberste Stimme, obwohl sie nicht mehr Lied-Melodie ist; mehr oder minder stützt der Bass. Nur die Mittelstimme oder die Mittelstimmen beleben sich zur Selbständigkeit – es ist ungefähr der gleiche Prozess wie in der Kammermusik des 18. Jahrhunderts, wenn aus der Trio-Sonate für 2 Violinen und Continuo das Streichtrio, aus der Sonate für 3 Instrumente und Continuo das »Quadro«, das Quartett entsteht, wenn die »Polarität« zwischen führendem und dienendem Instrument im republikanischen, demokratischen Sinn ausgeglichen wird. Aber ein wenig bleiben auch die mittleren Stimmen immer »Mittelstimmen«, das heisst sie behalten ihre Funktion bei, zu füllen, und wer Madrigale und Motetten des 16. Jahrhunderts genauer ansieht, wird bemerken, dass – in vier- oder fünfstimmigen Stücken – der Alto, Tenore, Quinto immer (ganz oberflächlich und drastisch gesprochen) mehr Noten haben, weniger pausieren als der Sopran oder der Bass. Sie dienen vielleicht nicht

Ultimately, the tension between the voices – exacerbated by the corrosive effect of female singers and the burden of textual expression – collapses the ideal form: »The a cappella ideal bore within itself the germ of self-destruction, of internal discord: an upper voice cannot help but dominate, a bass must support and thus assume a subordinate function, inner parts must ›fill in‹ and thus surrender a part of their independence.«⁵⁷

Given this conviction of an inherent, fatal weakness in the polyphonic madrigal, it is all the more surprising that Einstein views music written in *genuinely* equal voices – that is, voices that share the same range of pitches – as also intrinsically musically flawed (and again, we note the malign influence of a woman, since the madrigal with its coarse text is the product of the courtesan’s agency, rather than Arcadelt’s genius):

»[Arcadelt] sets (*Terzo libro*) the coarse text sung by a courtesan *a voce mutata*, for four equal voices, sufficient proof that it was not meant to be sung by the fair one herself, but that it was simply written to her order [...]. Quite apart from the awkward setting, which is not unusual in compositions that are handicapped by being written for equal voices, [...]«⁵⁸

Einstein can understand the *voci piene* madrigal, its social function, and even its performance style as a functional and aesthetic antecedent of music for the Classical string ensemble (»The madrigal is chamber music, just as much as a quartet by Haydn or a quintet by Mozart«).⁵⁹ Its component voices, too, are as distinct to Einstein as the different members of the string family (»Of the men’s voices, which the time preferred, each stands by itself: bass, tenor, alto, or falsetto«).⁶⁰ Yet the *voci pari* madrigal is awkward and handicapped. Clearly he recognises no inconsistency in this evaluation – that genuine equality between the voices is somehow misconceived. And although there are other passages that highlight his disappointment in equal-voice polyphony, there is no further explanation given. Perhaps this perception of inferiority stems from the lack of a correlate genre in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instrumental chamber music, the lens through which the entire study is written.

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The centrality of this critical lens is crystallised in the sentence that I marked as »the motherlode« in my notes, regarding a quotation from Thomas More’s *Utopia*. The quote struck me instantly as both odd (in the sense of anomalous, since it was drawn from a literature foreign to the culture of the Italian madrigal) and yet somehow crucial, since it provided a contemporary justification for his ambivalence, even a dislike, regarding music that was intrinsically governed by text. By establishing a historical frame for the quote, we might better understand why it is there. Einstein says: »The most astonishing thing about this passage is that it concedes the expressive power of

mehr, sie sind vollwertige, gleichberechtigte Glieder des Ganzen, aber sie haben, genau wie in der Frottola, noch immer mehr zu arbeiten.« (*DIM*, p. 153).

⁵⁷ *TIM*, p. 836; »Im a cappella- Ideal lag der Keim der Selbst-Zerstörung, der Zwiespältigkeit von Beginn: eine höchste Stimme kann nicht anders als dominieren; ein Bass muss stützen, also dienen, und Mittelstimmen müssen ›füllen‹, also von ihrer Selbstständigkeit etwas abgeben.« (*DIM*, p. 851).

⁵⁸ *TIM*, p. 273; »Er komponiert (lib. 3²⁰) das derbe, einer Curtisane in den Mund gelegte Stück, das wir oben erwähnt haben, und zwar ›a voce mutata‹, für vier gleiche Stimmen – Beweis dafür, dass es nicht dafür gedacht war, von der Schönen selbst gesungen zu werden, sondern dass es nur von ihr in Auftrag gegeben worden ist [...]. Ganz abgesehen von dem linkischen Satz, der in Stücken mit der Fessel ›gleicher‹ Stimmen nicht selten ist:« (*DIM*, p. 278–279).

⁵⁹ *TIM*, p. 244; »Das Madrigal ist Kammer-Musik, wie ein Quartett Haydn’s oder ein Quintett Mozart’s.« (*DIM*, p. 250).

⁶⁰ *TIM*, p. 245; »von den immer überwiegenden männlichen Stimmen steht jede für sich, der Bass, der Tenor, der Altist oder Falsettist« (*DIM*, p. 250).

vocal music to instrumental music also – a true Utopia, which was not to be realized for several centuries.«⁶¹ In other words, the music of the Enlightenment is the music Einstein considered »a true Utopia« and it set a standard for his criticism of Renaissance madrigals.

This passage immediately follows a section on *Imitazione della natura* in which he discusses what he calls »the requirement of expression«⁶² (»die Forderung des Ausdrucks«⁶³ – which he consistently derides. He quotes extensively but selectively from Nicola Vicentino’s *ricordi utili* regarding matching the character of the music to the affect of the text and notes: »In spite of the primitive and childish character of these observations, they record a historic fact in the history of music between 1500 and 1530. The medieval autonomy of music is definitely at an end, and this includes vocal music. Music has become a servant: it obeys the text.«⁶⁴ If Einstein’s ambivalence about music that cannot be judged »on the basis of the notes alone and without reference to the text« bubbles under the rest of the chapter, it surfaces clearly after he cites Thomas More.

Einstein quotes More in Latin, from the Berlin edition published in 1865, prepared by Victor Michels and Theobald Ziegler – it is the only time that he uses this source.

»Verum una in re haud dubie longo nos intervallo praecellunt: quod omnis eorum musica, sive quae personatur organis, sive quam voce modulantur humana, ita naturales adfectus imitatur et exprimit, ita sonus accommodatur ad rem, seu deprecantis oratio sit seu laeta, placabilis, turbida, lugubris, irata, ita rei sensum quendam melodiae forma repraesentat, ut animas auditorium mirum in modum adficiat, penetret, incendat.«⁶⁵

»But in one thing doubtless they go exceeding far beyond us. For all their music, both that they play upon instruments, and that they sing with man’s voice, doth so resemble and express natural affections; the sound and tune is so applied and made agreeable to the thing; that whether it be a prayer, or else a ditty of gladness, of patience, of trouble, of mourning, or of anger, the fashion of the melody doth so represent the meaning of the thing, that it doth wonderfully move, stir, pierce, and enflame the hearers’ minds.«⁶⁶

This exact passage is quoted Johan Huizinga’s essay »Renaissance and Realism«, first published in 1929. In this essay, Huizinga translates More into Dutch, but gives the exact same quote in Latin in the notes, with the same citation as Einstein.⁶⁷ In itself, this might not be remarkable, but let’s look at the context and the way both authors frame this quotation. Huizinga introduces the text with the sentence »It is quite something else when Thomas More praises the church music of Utopia.«⁶⁸ After the quote, he continues:

⁶¹ TIM, p. 225; »Das Erstaunlichste an dieser Stelle ist, dass sie auch der Instrumental-Musik die Ausdruckskraft der Vokal-Musik zuerkennt – eine wirkliche Utopie, die sich erst nach einigen Jahrhunderten verwirklichen sollte.« (DIM, p. 229).

⁶² TIM, p. 221.

⁶³ DIM, p. 224.

⁶⁴ TIM, p. 222; »Trotz der Primitivität und Kindlichkeit dieser Beobachtungen: – sie formulieren eine Tatsache, der Entwicklung, die sich in der Musik seit 1500 und 1530 vollzogen hat: es ist zu Ende mit der mittelalterlichen Autonomie der Musik, auch der Vokal-Musik; die Musik ist jetzt eine dienende Kunst geworden, sie gehorcht dem Wort.« (DIM, p. 226–227).

⁶⁵ TIM, pp. 224–225. Citing Thomas More, Victor Michels and Theobald Ziegler, *Utopia, Lateinische Litteraturdenkmäler Des XV. Und XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1895, p. 110. In the German original, he provides a translation from Ralph Robinson’s English edition of 1556 (*A frutefull pleasaunt & wittie worke, of the beste state of a publique weale, and of the newe yle, called Utopia [...] translated into Englishe by Raphe Robynson*, London 1556), but this did not make it into *The Italian Madrigal*.

⁶⁶ Johan Huizinga, »Renaissance and Realism«, *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance; Essays*, trans. James S. Holmes and Hans van Marle, Greenwich 1959, p. 300.

⁶⁷ Johan Huizinga, »Renaissance en realisme«, *Verzamelde werken. Deel 4. Cultuurgeschiedenis 2*, ed. L. Brummel, Haarlem 1949, pp. 276–297, p. 288; First edition: Johan Huizinga, *Cultuur-Historische Verkenningen*, Haarlem 1929.

⁶⁸ Huizinga, »Renaissance and Realism«, pp. 299–300.

»Here, too, realism was an ideal, but with an intent that was quite different from the *naive urge to deceptive imitation: a realism that was directed toward the meaning of things*, and that could abolish the antithesis between the Scholastic concept of realism and the modern aesthetic one. *Behind More's plain and beautiful words one can, if one likes, hear Mozart and Beethoven, the entire music of the eternal Utopia that is the true land of music.*«⁶⁹

Huizinga's long essay discusses whether realism, and what kinds of realism, might be seen as a defining feature of the Renaissance. Although he barely speaks of music at all, he introduces More's belief that music should »represent the meaning of the thing« as a corrective to what he calls the »naive urge to deceptive imitation« that he feels obtained in European music »deep into the sixteenth century.« Crucially, he sees a direct path between More and his own aesthetics, and concludes, »Behind More's plain and beautiful words one can, if one likes, hear Mozart and Beethoven, the entire music of the eternal Utopia that is the true land of music.«⁷⁰

Einstein's frame is more succinct:

»Who was the intermediary who brought this *new concept* [»music is *expression*«] to Italy? For it did not grow up entirely on Italian soil. It was Adrian Willaert of Venice [...] It is probably no accident that in the very years when Willaert wrote his famous *Duo cromatico*, [...] a composition which is at the same time an experiment, symbol and expression, another Northerner stressed the expressive power of music, namely Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516). There we read (ed. Michels and Ziegler, p. 110 [1895]) of the inhabitants of Utopia:

[More's text]

The most astonishing thing about this passage is that it concedes the expressive power of vocal music to instrumental music also – a true Utopia, which was not to be realized for several centuries.«⁷¹

Einstein inserts More's text in his own chapter on music in Renaissance aesthetics at the opening of his subsection on *Musica reservata*. He does not interpret the passage beyond his observation about the expressive power of instrumental music in later centuries (»a true Utopia«), which more than echoes the earlier scholar's conclusion. This suggests that he had read Huizinga, admired his analysis, and found in the older, revered scholar's words a source and an argument that vindicated his response to a musical aesthetic he found utterly disagreeable. He therefore incorporated it into his own work, as a way of reinforcing the superiority of a wholly different kind of autonomous music that needed no words – and crucially therefore – no singers in order to move its listeners.

My lasting impression from my re-reading of *the Italian Madrigal* is that Einstein either could not imagine the sounding potential of the music that he saw on the page in front of him, or he could, but rejected that imagined sound – on moral rather than aesthetic grounds. If the first case is true, perhaps he was aware of his lack of imagination and resigned to it – and, ultimately given his distaste for so much of the music, even that which he decided was the work of genius, perhaps he even welcomed that lack. But there are clues right the way through the book that his aesthetic instincts about how the music might be performed were overpowered by his desire to appear to be someone who built an argument from his sources, rather than »hypothetical interpretations and personal preferences«, as Hertzmann noted. The most striking

⁶⁹ Ibid. (emphasis mine).

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 300.

⁷¹ *TIM*, pp. 224–225 (emphasis mine).

of these occurs in his section »The Rise of Pathos«⁷² (»Die Entstehung des Pathos«⁷³) in which he says of *Dunque basciar sì belle e dolci labbia* by De Wert: »Although the purely vocal performance of the first of these ottave is not merely probable but certain, we are reprinting it in the form of an ›accompanied monody‹ in order to show that this style did not need to wait for its ›invention‹ by the Florentine Camerata.«⁷⁴ He has already said, fifty pages before, of the same work, »One is almost tempted to view such pieces as monodies, the more so since in the printed part-books Wert always chooses the simplest cadence formulas, even for the upper voice, thus leaving the details to the improvisation of the singers. Yet it would be a mistake to view them in this light.«⁷⁵ It hardly seems accidental that the music which vexes him most is in a feminine voice.

Very close to the opening of the book is perhaps the most confounding passage, since it seems the antithesis of all else that Einstein writes; it reads as if a rebellious, intuitive subconscious has crept undetected into his final draft. He is puzzled by the music he finds in Petrucci's secular prints and claims he cannot hear from the page how it could possibly sound and he does not understand how to solve the problem. But perhaps it is more likely that he cannot reason through the cognitive dissonance that his imagination provides:

»But is this music for four singers? or for performance in various combinations? Or is it not music for a soloist who sings one part and condenses the other three/in the form of an accompaniment on the lute or viol? Thus we approach the problem of the performance of these works, a problem which only the music itself can solve. For the present we must postpone our attempt at its solution. One thing is certain: Petrucci's first secular prints offer only material for a performance which presents a problem of its own.«⁷⁶

The logical solution to the problem is to relinquish the adherence to the score as immutable, but this appears to be anathema to Einstein, who will not allow performance to usurp the printed page.

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With *The Italian Madrigal* still occupying a privileged position on many reading-lists, simply because there is nothing to replace it, Einstein's attitudes towards singers and madrigal performance are well placed to seep into the subconscious of successive generations of musicians and scholars. Much of its musical worldview feels unsettlingly modern still: the elevation (even sanctification) of the music of the Enlightenment and the remarks about women singers have a currency that belie the decades since the book's publication. Despite his reputation for unbiased judgment, Einstein's choices of source material (and secondary sources) are – as are all scholar's choices – subject to confirmation bias. If he had wished to present

⁷² *TIM*, p. 558.

⁷³ *DIM*, p. 570.

⁷⁴ *TIM*, p. 567; »Wenn wir die ersten dieser Ottaven, deren durchaus vokaler, vierstimmiger Vortrag nicht nur wahrscheinlich, sondern sicher ist, in Form der ›begleiteten Monodie‹ hierhersetzen, so wird man zugestehen, dass diese von der Florentiner Camerata nicht erst erfunden zu werden brauchte.« (*DIM*, p. 579).

⁷⁵ *TIM*, p. 517; »Es ist um so verführerischer, solche Stücke für Monodien zu halten, als Wert den Cadenzen im Druck immer die einfachste Formel gibt, auch in der Ober-Stimme, ihre Ausführung also der Improvisation der Sänger überliess. Dennoch wäre es falsch, sie schon als Monodien zu betrachten.« (*DIM*, p. 531).

⁷⁶ *TIM*, pp. 58–59; »Aber ist denn das Musik für vier Sänger? Oder für vier Ausführende? Ist es nicht Musik für einen Solisten, der eine Stimme vortrug und die andern drei zur Begleitung auf Laute oder Viola zusammenfasste? Schon erhebt sich die Frage nach der Ausführung dieser Werke – eine Frage, die nur aus der Musik selbst zu lösen ist. Wir müssen den Versuch dieser Lösung etwas verschieben. Eins ist sicher: die ersten Profandrucke Petrucci's liefern nur Material zur Ausführung, mit der es seine besondere Bewandnis haben muss.« (*DIM*, p. 58).

material that praised female voices; that suggested a wide range of performance practices, not hierarchically arranged; or that recommended the embellishment of the notated text, he could easily have done so, for the sources that support these arguments now are all contemporary with his own selections. If we are to reflect Einstein's continuing influence on later generations, we might consider how his views reinforce and perpetuate the misogyny and elitism (at the very least) of Western art music study and performance, and indeed the barriers between musicology and performance – issues that reverberate to this day.