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Title: On the Dissonances

Source: Bologna, Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica, MS C.48. f.84r-92r

[-f.84r-] Number 12

On the Dissonances

[-f.85r-] “Dissonance is the mixture of two sounds separated so that one is higher and the other is lower which is hostile to the ear” (Ludovico Fogliani, section 2, chapter 2, What is Dissonance). In the previous Meeting the eight Rules of Counterpoint of Franchino Gaffurio have been defined, which are embraced by all musicians, as you, my Signori, heard. Now, it remains for us to put them into practice, since there is no doubt that everyone will be able to become a perfect Contrapuntist by observing those rules and through practice. However, since there are different types of Counterpoints, before I discuss the Dissonances, as I promised to do, it is necessary to move on to explain how they are classified and subdivided. According to common opinion there are three sorts of Counterpoint, namely, the simple, the florid and the Coloured one. [[This is what Kircherio relates in the seventh chapter of the Fifth book, On the Division of counterpoint.]] The simple one occurs when one progresses with the same figures of the same value placing one against the other. The florid Counterpoint, which is also called broken by other writers, occurs when there are two or more notes against one, as it will please the Composer. It is called broken because the semibreve is broken into small and varied particles, namely, two minims, four semiminims, eight Chrome, [-f.85v-] sixteen semicrome, and similar ones. It is also called diminutions, which has the same meaning of broken Counterpoint, because the semibreve or other note values are broken up into different and varied smaller note values, as it has been said regarding the broken Counterpoint. The Coloured Counterpoint, finally, occurs when the parts progress at together with a variety of signs, proportions, Notes, differently from the florid, where a subject of semibreves is chosen and on top of it numerous Notes of smaller value than those which make up the subject are played or sung, but in the coloured one all the parts move in turn and create a musical Composition of the sort which we hear in private Houses and in Church when Compositions for several voices are sung. For this reason, according to some, Certain Compositions which we call motets are called in this way for their great variety and different changes of musical values that can be seen in them. All this is related egregiously by Kircherio in the seventh chapter of the Fifth book ‘On the Division of Counterpoint, where he says: “Counterpoint is of Three types, namely, simple, florid and Coloured. Simple Counterpoint is the one in which there are no variety of mensuration and of notes, but a point is placed against a point or a note against a note with an equal measure of time or when individual Notes, all of the same species, quantity and value are placed one against the other. Florid Counterpoint, or broken occurs when we adapt a species of different note values to any subject. We call it broken, because [-f.86r-] the notes of the remaining Voices which are added to the subject, divided into notes of smaller value, are broken and reduced, so to speak, to minimal parts. Coloured Counterpoint is the one which is created from the contraposition of different signs and notes, and in it the Notes are ordered not one against one, as in the simple Counterpoint, nor as Notes of different duration above a certain subject taken up with the aim to sustain

them, but it is created as if by different colours through separate consonances on the basis of a variety of signs and proportions based on different note values or as an Artificial Harmony of Notes. The Ancient called the Compositions of this type Motets, perhaps from the ample variation and variety of musical figures.” I read the same in Vannei, third book, Chapter 14 ‘On the disposition of simple Counterpoint’, and at chapter sixteen ‘On the foundations of florid Counterpoint’, in Zarlino’s *Institutioni Harmoniche* at chapter 40 and 42, in Guglielmo de Podio, in the first Chapter of the sixth book ‘On the name of Counterpoint’, and in an infinite number of other writers, whom I omit for reasons of succinctness, as I said in the beginning. However, since I discussed the simple Counterpoint sufficiently, I provided its rules and I demonstrated that is composed of Consonances rather than of Dissonances, it is necessary, therefore, to examine diligently what this Dissonance is, how it is considered by musicians, [-f.86v-] and how the Composer uses it in his florid Counterpoints. Gioseffo Zarlino at chapter twenty-seven of the third part of his *Instituzioni Harmoniche* says that the Compositions must be composed first of all of Consonances, and accidentally by Dissonances. He is right because the Dissonance, as Ludovico Fogliani says in the second chapter of the second section, “is the mixture of two sounds separated so that one is higher and the other is lower which is hostile to the ear,” or, as Boethius describes it with the following words, it “is the percussio of two sounds mixed together which proves harsh, when it reaches the Ears, and unpleasant. In fact, since the two sounds are unwilling to mix, each sustains itself untouched and separately, and one opposes the other one, both are transferred to the senses in an unpleasant way.” Therefore, since a Dissonance is an interval which produces Harsh sounds and, consequently, hostile to the ear, it is not surprising that it is placed in the Compositions Accidentally, as Zarlino says, although it provides some Usefulness to them. In fact, if it is true that ‘opposites placed next to each other are more vivid’, as light shines brighter after darkness and sweet taste after bitter. Therefore, although its own intrinsic nature is to offend the ear, nevertheless the ear enjoys it, albeit it is offended by it, because it produces greater pleasure when the Consonance that comes after it is heard. However, Ludovico Fogliani says, in the sixth chapter of the second section of his *Musica Theorica*, that the Dissonances [-f.87r-] are considered necessarily by the Musician, rather than Accidentally, as Zarlino maintains, because the Musician considers the Harmony which is produced by the consonance and because it is not possible to move from a Consonance to another but through Dissonance, since every Consonance is composed of Tones and semitones [[, and consequently of dissonances,]], since Tones and semitones are Dissonances. Therefore, Harmony cannot be formed without Dissonances, and, consequently, dissonances are considered by the musician and they are necessary in writing composition, according to the chapter quoted above. Fogliani says in that chapter: “Since the writing of the melodies and Harmony are the subject of the Musician’s consideration, as it is clear from what has been said before, the writing of the melodies and Harmony cannot be realised without Dissonances, namely, without Dissonant steps. It follows necessarily that certain Dissonances have to be considered by the musician.” Fogliani himself demonstrates in the same chapter than the Dissonances must be considered necessarily by the musician in a different way, and this is because of the knowledge of the Difference found between a Consonance and another one, which cannot be done without Dissonances. For instance, if one wants to know the quantitative Difference which is found between the Consonance of the Fourth and the

Consonance of the Fifth, one will find that they differ by a Dissonant interval [[which is the larger tone]], since the Fifth exceeds the Consonance of the Fourth by a larger Tone, which is [-f.87v-] a sesquiottavo tone. Hence, the above-mentioned Consonances differ because of the Dissonance. Let us listen to his precise words: “If someone wants to know the quantitative difference between the Diatessaron and the Diapente, certainly he shall find that they differ by a Dissonant interval, since the above-mentioned Consonances consecutive, and it is clear that no consonance can be contained within two consecutive consonances, but if they are separated from each other, their difference consists in a dissonance. This cannot happen at all without the intervention of the dissonances, as we said. Therefore, it follows necessarily that certain Dissonances have to be considered by the musician.” Therefore, one cannot deny that the Dissonances are considered by the musician. However, since Fogliani says ‘it follows necessarily that certain Dissonances are considered by the musician’, hence only a few Dissonances are considered necessarily by the musicians, and not all of them. It is absolutely true nor is it denied, because the Dissonances considered by the musicians are six. They are: the larger Tone, the smaller Tone, the larger semitone, the smaller semitone, the smallest semitone and the Comma, as Fogliani himself states in the seventh chapter of the second section: “Which intervals are considered Dissonant by musicians and how many they are. Let us say, therefore, that they are six in number, namely, the larger Tone, the smaller Tone, the larger semitone, the smaller semitone, the smallest semitone and the comma.” Therefore, [-f.88r-] Signori, nobody will doubt that the Dissonances are considered by the musician and that they are necessary in musical Composition, although they are harsh and hostile to the ear. However, since Fogliani has spoken only of the consonances which are smaller than any given Consonance, since the largest interval is the larger tone as Fogliani says himself: “Here we intend to speak only of the Dissonant intervals which are small than the Consonances.” We shall speak about the other remaining Dissonances employed by the Composer of music in his Composition at the next Meeting, and we shall illustrate the Usefulness that they bring to the melodies, although they cannot produce Any Harmony by themselves alone and they are abhorred in any respect by the ear. With this, I have finished.

On the Dissonances Considered
As Intervals by themselves alone,
and not as parts Which compose
Different and Varied Intervals.

Delle Dissonanze Considerate

“Which intervals are considered Dissonant and how many there are. Let us say, therefore, that they are six in number, namely, the larger Tone, the smaller Tone, the larger semitone, the smaller semitone, the smallest semitone and the Comma.” (Ludovico Fogliani, second section, chapter seven of his *theorica Musica*).

[-f.88v-] My Signori, a beautiful Diatribe was the one which took place Between Don Nicola Vicentino and Don Vincenzo Lusitano, on the question as to whether modern music was purely Diatonic or mixed with Chromatic and Enharmonic, since those Two Great Masters adduced very solid reasons to defend their opinion. In the end, since they could not resolve the matter on the basis of their adduced arguments, to see where the truth lay, they decided to appoint Two Judges who would establish who of them was correct. They were Don Bartolomeo Esgobedo and Don Ghisellino Dancherts, both of

whom were musicians [[of the Pope]] of great Value. Don Nicola tells about this amply at chapter forty-three of the fourth book of his *Antica Musica ridotta alla moderna pratica*, which is also the last one. There, he produces a Copy of their arguments together with the ruling provided and published by those Judges. Also Anniballe Meloni, in the Letter which he wrote to Knight Hercole Bottrigaro and reported in the *Discorso Armonico* of said Knight entitled *il Melone*, where he declares himself unconvinced by their arguments and by the verdict [-f.89r-] of the Judges, and even less of what Zarlino wrote about it in his *Institutioni and Dimostrations Armoniche*, and he pleads with said Bottrigaro to agree to resolve this Question and to show where the truth lays. In fact, if you consider the musical compositions of our time, who cannot see that the Chromatic is being mixed with the Diatonic? Is it not true that every day not only in private houses, but publicly in Church one hears compositions which proceed continuously and for extended passages from the Apotome to the Limma, or as Practical musician say, from the larger Semitone to the smaller Semitone, and continuing this manner of progress as if it were something new, well established and that should infuse a sense of great wonder in the Listener, and honour and glory to the Composer? One cannot deny that this manner of proceeding is something new because you will not find this way of progress in any Ancient and Learned composer; on the contrary, they were so hostile to it that they never used to avail themselves of the smaller semitone which is indicated by four lines placed in such a way as to form a cross and was called *Diazasis*, which then was called *Diesis* by practical musicians. [-f.89v-] They were very right in doing so, because the limma, or smaller semitone, does not belong to the composition of the Diatonic genus, because its Tetrachord, as I illustrated elsewhere, proceeds by larger semitone, tone and tone, namely, from E la mi to A la mi re, with the notes mi fa, sol la, so that in the composition of that Tetrachord there is no smaller semitone, albeit many Ancient writers of pure Theory believed that the interval which is found between b mi and C sol fa ut and between E la mi and f fa ut was constituted by a smaller semitone and by a larger semitone. This was a very grave mistake, as I Demonstrated on another occasion. Therefore Stefano Vannei, talking about that Genus at chapter 62 of the first of his *Musica Aurea*, says: “The Diatonic Genus is the one which modulates towards the high register through Semitone, Tone and Tone, with the notes mi fa sol la. There is a semitone between mi and fa, and a tone between fa and sol and between sol and la. Therefore, it is called Diatonic, because there is a Ditone, or Two separate Tones, above the semitone.” The Chromatic Genus proceeds within its Tetrachord by larger semitone, [f.90r-] smaller semitone and un-compounded semitone, or un-compounded minor Third, as Glareanus at chapter five of the first book reports, saying: “The Chromatic, which consists of a larger semitone, a smaller semitone and three semitones, or, which is the same, a semitone.” Therefore, we see that the progress through larger semitone and smaller semitone is Chromatic, rather than Diatonic, because the Interval which the smaller semitone creates does not belong to the Diatonic Genus, which is the natural Genus, on the basis of which the true and well-ordered melodies are created. Therefore, as it was said, Learned and true composers did not use that interval. Bothius supports this view at chapter 21 of the first book of his *Music*, Franchino at chapter two of the fifth book of his *Theorica Musica*, the *Margarita filosofica* at chapter eighteen of the fifth book, Stefano Vannei at chapter sixty-seven, entitled on modulating the Genera, of the first book, Guglielmo de Podio at chapter ten, On the larger number of the Notes and on the Distribution of the Genera of

the melody, Pietro Aron in the second opinion of the second book of his *Lucidario*, Ptolemy at chapter thirteen of the first book, Piermaria Bonino at chapter fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and eighteen of his very Acute observations on music, Francesco of Tovar at chapter twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three and twenty-four of his practice, [-f.90v-] Scipion Cerreto at chapter three of the third book, and, finally, to avoid extending this list naming infinite others, Gioseffo Zarlino, chapter sixteen of the third part of his *Institutioni Harmoniche*. Therefore, you resolve the controversy between Don Nicola Vicentino and Vincenzo Lusitano, and satisfy the request presented by Annibale Meloni to Knight Hercole Bottrigari, by saying that, if modern compositions will be well written, as the Diatonic Genus requires, they shall not be mixed with the Chromatic, but they will be pure Diatonic. Conversely, should they be composed with no order and Rule mixing the Chromatic Intervals with the Diatonic ones, in that case the Compositions shall not be called pure Diatonic but mixed Chromatic and they will employ Dissonant Intervals, but not those of the type mentioned by Fogliani, which are Six, namely the larger Tone, the smaller tone, the larger semitone, the smaller semitone, the smallest semitone and the Comma, which he considers to be necessary to the musician to create the Consonances, which are Intervals composed of [[Dissonances, but as individual intervals which create Dissonant intervals, which are not considered necessarily by the musician, as the six named by Fogliani, but accidentally considered as Gioseffo Zarlino says at chapter twenty-seven]] [-f.91r-] Dissonant Intervals not considered by the musician as those of Fogliani, which are six, namely, larger Tone, smaller Tone, larger semitone, smaller semitone, smallest semitone and Comma, which are not considered as necessary by the musician. In fact, since Harmony is composed of consonances, any Consonant Interval is composed of a variety of Small and Dissonant Intervals Added together, as Fogliani says in the chapter mentioned above: “Therefore, since Modulation and Harmony are the domain of the musician, and since it is very clear from what was said that Modulation and Harmony cannot be practice without the Dissonances, namely, without Dissonant intervals, there follows necessarily certain Dissonances cannot escape the consideration of the musician.” The Intervals which are not considered by the musician are those which constitute an Dissonant interval by itself which is not a part of a Consonant Interval, [-f. 91v-] as the one mentioned above by Fogliani, but exist as an individual Dissonant interval. These are the progress from the larger to the smaller semitone, and vice vers, the second, the Diminished Fifth, or the augmented one, the seventh and their replicate. These dissonances are not considered by the musician because Harmony can be created only with Consonances. Nevertheless, because ‘the opposites placed side by side appear more vivid’, the musicians uses them, so that the Consonance might appear more beautiful and sweet after the Dissonance, since the Dissonance is a sound which reaches the ears harshly, as Boethius says: “The Dissonances is the percussion of two sounds mixed together which reaches the Ears in a harsh and unpleasant manner.” Therefore, although its intrinsic character is to offend the Ear, nevertheless the Ear derives pleasure from it, albeit it is hit harshly, because the Consonance causes it greater pleasure after it. These are the dissonances (rather than those mentioned by Fogliani) that Zarlino refers to at chapter twenty-seven of the Third part of the *Institutioni* and that are considered accidentally [-f.92r-] by the musician. Therefore, one gathers from what has been said that one must not mix different Genera of melody so that the Harmonies may be purely Diatonic and that some of the Dissonances are considered necessarily by the musician,

while others accidentally. The former are all the Dissonances which are considered as Dissonances by contemporary practical nowadays, namely the ones that the Composer uses so that the Consonance may produce a more vivid effect, as you have heard. However, since the Contrapuntist cannot use them with the freedom with which he uses the Consonances, but in a restricted and particular way, therefore it shall be necessary to investigate how they are used. This will be done with clarity, with God's help, in the next Speech.