

Author: Doni, Giovanni Battista

Title: On the observation of the musical modes and on their obligations

Original title: De gl' obblighi [et osseruatione add. supra lin.] de Modi Musicali

Source: Firenze, Biblioteca Marucelliana, MS A.CCXC.V.3., f.<1r>-<8r>

[<f.1r>-] On the observation of the musical modes and on their obligations

To Signor Pietro Eredia

Since I have found practical confirmation through Vostra Signoria' s beautiful and thoughtful compositions of what I considered to be absolutely certain, namely, that the pieces that embody the variety of the modes of the ancients are extremely successful, and, since I could not publish at present what I have observed on this matter and that I derived from good and ancient writers, which will be of no little consequence for practical composition, nevertheless I wanted to collect in this short essay some of the notions that are most necessary in order to compose in a orderly fashion according to the nature and property of the main modes, as well as to discuss some of the obligations that they carry with themselves. In fact, despite the fact that these restrictions and obligations are normally despised because they tie our hands to some extent, I shall endeavour to demonstrate, as far as an improvised speech allows me to do, that many [<f.1v>-] positive effects ensue, and, in particular that the melodies of each mode turn out to be much more varied and pleasant, if these obligations are followed. Vostra Signoria will be able to recognise this much better from experience itself that from my doctrine, which has not been developed fully so-far. As I know that you enjoy this, as you should, just as everyone else does, I do not believe that you shall deem it a hardship to verify some of these facts in practice. Firstly, since it is utterly certain, as Boethius states clearly, that all the modes consist of the different species of fifth and fourth (which is something that modern theorist state as well in relation to their own modes, although they do not observe those different species in practice) it is necessary to see how this can be interpreted and what are its rational consequences. If we take as a premise what I have proved with evidence elsewhere, namely, that the ancient modes or tones are not contained within an octave or limited to its span (as the writers the last few centuries believed confusing the species of the diapason with the modes, namely, the form with the matter) and that they are connected with each other according to the order of the notes of a diatonic system, but in the opposite direction, (for instance if the Dorian [<f.2r>-] tone is contained between E and e, the Phrygian will be contained between D and d a tone higher; if the Dorian lays between A and A, the Phrygian shall proceed between G and g; if the former lays between A and e, which is a twelfth, this one will lay between G and g, with equal systems and always with the same distance of a tone) hence one knows by experience that the modes with a livelier tension are accommodated to a livelier species and vice versa. Therefore, they result more lively and varied between each other, unlike ours, which, since they follow the sequence of a single system, have the livelier species in a more relaxed tone and at a lower pitch, and the more relaxed and lower species in a more intense and forced tone. This is also partly responsible for their lack of variety and efficacy. One must also presume, as I have proved sufficiently in the whole of my work, that the three more general, principal and ancient tones, namely, the Dorian, the Phrygian and the Lydian, derive from the three species of the Diatessaron, and, if one adds to them the Mixolydian as a fourth, they are the product of the four species of the Diapente, and that it is true that those three tones are based on these three notes Mi, Re, Vt, since the first one befits the Dorian, the second one the Phrygian and the third one the Lydian, or that the last one represents the species of fourth Vt, fa, the Phrygian the species Re, Sol and the Dorian the species Mi, La. One must also suppose that the species of fifth Re La must be ascribed to the Dorian, the species Vt Sol to the Phrygian and the species fa, fa to the Lydian. If the Mixolydian is added to these, the fifth Mi mi suits it, while it has the fourth Mi La in common with the Dorian. Therefore, because of its closeness to that mode, it was also called Hyperdorian, since it was subordinate to it, so to speak, a fourth above. There follows from this that the Dorian species E, e is divided by the note A, the Phrygian d d, but the note G, and the Lydian [[F, f]] [C, c corr. supra lin.] by the note F, just like the Mixolydian [sqb] [sqb], [sqb] by the note E. It flows from this that some Dorian cadences terminate

downwards in Mi Re, some Phrygian ones in Re Vt and the other Lydian ones in Sol, Fa. Moreover, since every cadence terminates, both upwards as downwards in four ways, with a semitone, with one, two and three tones, which are the terminations of the four types of fifth, hence almost all the variety of the melodies (that differ mostly because of the four species of fifth) derives, because the *clausulae* divided from the melodies rarely exceed their boundaries, as one can see in the Psalms. Of these species, La Sol, re, mi, Fa, which has three consecutive tones appears to be the most lowly and least used of all. It is hardly used by employed composers, [-<f.3r>-] so that the variety of modern tones, if they are not totally mixed with each other, can be reduced to the three species of the fourth or to the notes Vt Re, Mi or Fa Sol la, which, as Glareanus confirms, are the lutenists' modes. One must note, above all else that the plagal tones are the most pure and simple among the modern ones, and that they are closer to the ancient ones than the authentic tones because the latter consist of a dissimilar fourth and fifth, which does not occur in the plagal ones and in the tones of the ancients. For instance, the [[first]] [third corr. supra lin.] tone consists of the species of the fifth Vt Sol and of the fourth Vt fa, which are at least dissimilar, if they are not opposite, since one of them has the tone at the end, while the other has the semitone; therefore, that tone partakes of the Phrygian, and so on. In the true ancient tones one must consider, besides the note that constitutes the species of the Diapason and the one that divides it into its diapente and diatessaron, also the one that divides it into fourth and fifth in the other direction. For instance, the [sqb], although it is not so important, must be considered as a cadential note, besides the E and the A of the Dorian. The reason is clear. In fact, if the Modes consist of the species of fifth and fourth and the variety of their progress, called [ethos] by the Greeks, derives from the different endings of the *clausulae* in the extreme notes of this or that sort of fourth and fifth, according to what its progress determines, thus la sol fa mi, which stays in E la mi is Dorian and the same progression ending in [sqb] mi will be Dorian, which is all the more true since we must remember that the ancient tones or harmonies were not measured by the extremities of the octave, but the habit or relation that they had towards the middle note of the Tenor in the Choral Tone, or Dorian. For the same reason D la sol re will be a cadential note of the Dorian, but a less important one. because one hears the same species of fifth la sol fa mi re ending on A la mi re starting from e la mi as ending on D la sol re starting from A la mi re. However this is not the cardinal note going upwards, because one would hear the Phrygian fourth Re mi fa sol; nor it is the [sqb] mi, because it is the upper limit of the species of fifth [-<f.4r>-] Mi Fa Sol re Mi, which is not Dorian, but Mixolydian, and it suits completely the function of that tone, which was useful to sing sad and tearful subjects because of its own rawness. Therefore, take as a certain and fundamental statement that the principal and cadential notes of the Dorian are E and A, while [sqb] and D are the secondary ones. This is why the most ancient writers assigned (as Aristides Quintilianus teaches us) this species of the ninth D e to the Dorian compositions. I infer from this the consequence that, if modern composers had higher regard for the general and specific differences of the melodies when they establish their modes, as they should do, than for the rules of polyphonic composition, it would be an intolerable error on their part to count among the cadential notes the one that divides the fifth into the two thirds, but not the one that divides the octave into fourth and fifth in the other way. Nevertheless, it would have not mattered much to consider them as cadences in this respect, since the nature and property of the modes has to be judged from the way the *clausulae* proceed and end as well as from the final cadences. As to the fact that they are made to move up and down across all the notes almost as a sort of practice and that the Vt, the Re and the Mi are made to be heard almost in equal measure, this is not reprehensible, as long as the subject matter requires it, because I believe that one can and has to do so even when composing in the [-<f.4v>-] the tones of the ancients, when it is appropriate, in order to vary the melodies to a greater extent. Moreover, this is necessary, in order to reduce music to greater order and method, to distinguish, as the ancients did, the cadences and turns of melody specific of this or that Mode, so that one may understand their nature and property [[to apply them appropriately and to observe the progress of a mode, when it is necessary and in order to vary it with good reason when one wants]] and, consequently, to apply them with reason and good judgement. For this reason Zarlino would have done better to present examples of his modes that

were a little more complying with the rules and less free, although he did not profess to be describing the modes of the ancients in their pure form. In truth, it seems to me that to present all the examples and forms of the modes according to their modern application is akin to put in front of who is learning to paint all the colours mixed together, but none that is pure and simple. In this way, one cannot find the colour red, green, blue and so on, but finds instead the colour purple, the aquamarine, the grey and so on. Therefore, one should in the first place describe the modes pure and simple, as if they were as many elements of music, so that one can handle them and mix them with good order and method. Apart from the cadences, one must observe other rules that maximise the variety among the modes. In particular, one must not employ leaps of a fifth and a fourth with regularity, [-<f.5r>-] and especially not between the cardinal notes of said modes. In fact, for instance, if one hears in the Dorian the leap of this fourth *Vt fa*, or *Re sol*, and even more in the case of fifth corresponding to these, this way of proceeding will affect the simplicity and propriety of the mode and it will assume some of the melodic progress of the Phrygian or Lydian mode. One may know this to be true from the fact that in the more natural, ancient and melodic songs sung in different countries, as well as in the dances that preserve much of the purity of the modes, one hardly hears those leaps of a fourth or of a fifth that do not correspond to the proper and principal cadences. [Nor it is reasonable to say, conversely, that all the leaps of a fifth, fourth and so on sound the same, since their difference derives only from the notes contained within the leap. In fact, the sequence of the notes in each mode has such a great impact on the memory and the imagination when it is heard, that not only we are aware of the extreme notes of a leap or of an interval, but also of the notes contained potentially between those extremes. in marg.]

I believe that it is much more important (and I am surprised that this is not normally discussed and observed) that composers should let the listener hear the cardinal notes and not others of the modes in the highest and lowest parts of their compositions, because there is no doubt that the greatest melodic variety is produced by the highest and lowest part of the compositions. Therefore, I state, to explain myself more clearly, that in continuous passages, both in the case of essential notes, which are the ones sung under different syllables, as in the case of the accidental ones, which are the ones contained within *passaggi*, the highest and lowest note should be the cardinal notes of the mode. Moreover, wherever possible, they should be not only these but also those that shape, as intermediate notes, the continuous passages called by the Greeks [*agogai*]. I also maintain that one should consider not only the last note of in the cadences, but [-<f.5v>-] also the penultimate one. In fact, although the cadence on *Re* (for instance, of *D la sol re*) is shared in some measure by the Dorian and the Phrygian mode, nevertheless the descent towards *Vt* does not suit the Dorian, as in this case,

[Doni, On the observation of the musical modes and on their obligations, 5v,1]

but it suits the Phrygian. Conversely, the following one suits the Dorian, but not the Phrygian

[Doni, On the observation of the musical modes and on their obligations, 5v,2]

I also deem it appropriate that the extreme notes (the highest and the lowest) outside continuous passages should be the cardinal note themselves. Here I depart from the practice of modern theorists who will judge [according to *Zarlino* in marg.] a composition to be of the third mode when it is contained within the high *d* and the low *D*, although these low and high notes are touched on maybe only once or twice. In fact, if the mode is named according to the note most frequently used, the note that regulates the mode shall not be one that is touched on once, but the one that is mostly involved in concluding the composition or its sections. Hence, I am quite surprised with *Zarlino*, who, in the example that he provides of the third mode has the soprano sing the whole first *clausula*, which consists of fifteen bars, between these sevenths *D c*, while the Bass, as it imitates the soprano, is contained within *A F*, so that [-<f.6r>-] there is no doubt that the composition spans between *D* and *fa* and that it partakes more of the seventh and eighth mode than of the third or of

another one of the same kind. The same lack of rigour can be observed in the second one, where in the first part the fa is heard more than any other notes in the extreme parts, and in the all of the others, that really respond to the rules very badly. [However, since the composition for one voice and those for several voices cannot be subject to the same rules in every respect, I would maintain personally that in the former sort of compositions (that are much better able to preserve the uniformity of a single mode) one should be careful to place the cardinal note as the highest and lowest of the composition, with this difference, namely, that this should be observed in the singing part both upwards and downwards and in the bass only downwards. However, in the latter sort, namely, in the compositions for several voices, I believe that it would be sufficient to apply this precaution only in the two extreme parts of it, namely, upwards in the Soprano and downwards in the Bass. in marg.] I want to add something very worthy of note on this matter and perhaps observed only by me. Ordinarily, every composition has two type of cadences, of which – I speak in relation to the melody and to polyphonic practice – one is employed in the cadences where the sense is perfectly complete, and the other in those cadences that do not punctuate absolutely the sense of the words. These cadences are found ordinarily in the compositions that are simpler and that observe a single mode and they are a second apart between them. Therefore, it shall not be difficult to ascertain from this their species and true mode, or, to be more precise, the property of the mode ([ethos]). For instance, that sweetest and most moving melody of the *Ave maris stella*, spans between D and d. Its progress or [ethos] is partly Phrygian for this reason, because its fourth note highlights greatly the ut of G sol re ut, and because it also cadences in the ut of C sol fa ut at the word *Virgo*. Nevertheless, it partakes very much [-<f.6v>-] of the Dorian progress or mode, as the fifth Re La or Re Re, which is its chief grace, the cadence Re Mi Re, and the final cadence Re mi Re, which occurs at the word *Alma*, show. However, since the final and principal cadence is in D la sol re and the middle one mentioned above is in C sol fa ut, we can state with certainty that its species is Phrygian in this form

[Doni, On the observation of the musical modes and on their obligations, 6v,1]

or in this one

[Doni, On the observation of the musical modes and on their obligations, 6v, 2],

which is the same (while the Hypophrygian cannot belong here) since both of these systems occur in the same tension or tone. Equally, of the two cadences in Mi and Re used appropriately and gracefully by Vostra Signoria in the Dorian setting of the most noble sonnet of Nostro Signore, the first one is the imperfect one that falls in E la mi at that word eye-lashes (*ciglia*), while the second one is the perfect one in A la mi re with which the first half of the first verse and, equally, the last verse end. However, I have discussed more subtly and at length how one could and should distinguish the compositions of that Dorian tone (I am referring to the true and ancient ones) in the whole of that work of mine entitled *On the genera and Modes*. Now I want to add something I observed recently while tuning my viols to the two most famous forms of the Syntonic, [-<f.7r>-] since it appeared to me very worthy of reflection and it has confirmed me very strongly in my belief that the obligations that spring from the nature and particular properties of the harmonies produce very good effects in music. Therefore, the second time that I changed the disposition of said viols, I assigned Didymus' Syntonic to the Dorian System and Harmony, as it is the better ordered and sweeter than the Ptolemaic, contrary to common belief, and more akin to the nature of said Dorian. Then, I assigned the Ptolemy's Syntonic, which is cruder and more cheerful to the Phrygian Harmony, since it seemed to me that they produced a good effect. However, one must be aware of the notes that are missing some consonances in both species, so that one may remedy to this either by altering some details of the piece to be played or by rising or lowering in some place the entire composition and its melody in order to escape such encounters and avoid having to use two Ds and two Gs, which would produce some difficulty for the players. Of the two Ds, the one with the dot

beneath it is more necessary to Ptolemy's species, while the G with the dot beneath is more necessary to Didymus' one, while the [sqb] with the dot beneath is very useful, if not necessary in all the instrumental distributions of the perfect tuning. Therefore, I maintain that, where a note with the dot is placed to substitute some consonance and one wants to have another one ascend or descend from it by the interval of a fourth or of a fifth, if [-<f.7v>-] said interval moves enlarged or reduced of a comma, we must abstain from it in every way possible because of the offence that it would cause the ear and because this is required by the property of such harmony. For instance, immediately before or after the [sqb] with the dot, we shall not place the higher E la mi in order to avoid hearing the augmented fourth, nor we shall use the lower one to avoid hearing the diminished fifth, thus:

[Doni, On the observation of the musical modes and on their obligations, 7v].

Instead, we shall strive to avoid such encounters as much as we can, although in the Mixolydian (which has the fifth E [sqb] as its distinctive interval, and it appears that certain harsh intervals such as the Tritone or the Semidiapente are closely connected to it) perhaps this type of harsh intervals are not out of place, as one finds through experience. Moreover, this is not difficult to avoid by taking the [sqb] mi as natural and diatonic (Paramese) instead of the one with the dot, which is the Chromatic paranete Synemmenon. However, what shall we do about the clashes between the D and A and C and G, one of which forms a diminished fifth in Ptolemy's Syntonic and the other in Didymus' one, since in the viols or other instruments those notes are doubled? If we want to apply the rule mentioned above to avoid leaps of the fifth and of the fourth ordinarily in our compositions except between the cardinal notes of the mode, we shall avoid this error without any other. In fact, since the Diapente Re Re is specific of the Dorian, it will not happen to us to write it in the Phrygian harmony, which does not tolerate that clash, nor to use this one Vt [-<f.8r>-], which is typical of the Phrygian, in the Dorian, where it is defective because of that species of the Syntonic. As to the thirds, they are unlikely to bother us much because they do not offend the ear, whether they are enlarged or reduced, at least in stepwise motion, and because they are not cardinal intervals, so to speak, within the compositions. I maintain that the same goes for some altered fifth that emerges between a natural note of the mode and a metabolic one, as between b E and b (Trite Synemmenon) because they are encountered only rarely and mostly in passages that contain some change of mood, where, perhaps, that small alteration of the interval can produce a good effect. Thus, we can believe that what little imperfection is contained in the perfect tuning is balanced not only by some notable mystery, but by some obligation which contributes to preserve the individual nature of the modes and to render them very different one from the other, so that one may be able to hear then melodies differing greatly in style and character, which is perhaps the greatest perfection one can find in musical compositions.