
As early as 1628 Girolamo Frescobaldi’s student Bartolomeo Grassi lamented that his master “has made an infinite number of other volumes, and continually goes on shaping new ones... but the effort, and expense of the printing do not allow them to appear.”1 Almost four centuries later, Frescobaldi’s works finally are appearing in a collected critical edition under the auspices of his birthplace, the city of Ferrara. The publication of the 1624 *Capricci* brings the project one-third of the way to completion.

Étienne Darbellay’s presentation of this volume cannot be (re)viewed in isolation from his other scholarly work. His forthcoming indispensable critical commentary to the present volume also contains the notes to his two previous volumes in this series, the first and second books of toccatas.2 This volume embodies Darbellay’s earlier research presented in his doctoral dissertation on the toccatas and in the article, “L’enigme de la première édition (1624) des ‘Capricci’ de Girolamo Frescobaldi.”3

Along with this close examination of the early printed editions of Frescobaldi’s works, Darbellay has pursued a parallel interest in their manuscript tradition. Beginning with his article, “Un manuscrit frescobaldien à Genève,”4 his work in this area has grown in interest and importance, culminating with two studies in the recently published report of the 1983 Frescobaldi congress in Ferrara.5

Darbellay realizes that in Frescobaldi questions of editing are inseparable from those of performance. Some of the principles on which he bases his

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editions originate in his study, "Peut-on découvrir des indications d'articulation dans la graphie des tablatures de clavier de Claudio Merulo, Girolamo Frescobaldi et Michel-Angelo Rossi?" Darbellay has also considered the performance of Frescobaldi's keyboard works in two articles and in the prefaces to all three of his volumes in the collected works, and in a paper for the Frescobaldi Quadricentenary held in Madison, Wisconsin (1983).

As a whole, Darbellay's work constitutes a major corpus of scholarly writing on seventeenth-century keyboard music. It is marked throughout by a comprehensive command of primary material, the ability to draw relevant conclusions from this material, and great gifts of historical imagination and exposition.

Darbellay's redactions of the Capricci and the two volumes of Toccati are clearly destined to become the standard, replacing the edition of Pierre Pidoux (to which, notwithstanding its shortcomings, we owe a considerable debt of gratitude). The Capricci are presented uncompromisingly in their original clefs and open score format, for which we must applaud both editor and publishers. For the faint-hearted, an intabulation in conventional two-staff keyboard notation is provided in a separate volume. The original beaming of notes (cf. "Peut-on découvrir") is retained except for the beaming of small note-values originally set separately in movable type. Since the temporal aspect of the music is a principal concern of Darbellay, the measure-barring and rhythmic notation of all three collections are preserved. The ficta is sensible, and the performer who disagrees with it in details is in no doubt of the original text.

The various strands of Darbellay's work—the detailed examination of printed sources and manuscript materials, the reading of both types of source as evidences of performance practice as well as of text—are woven together in the scholarly appendages of the Capricci and Toccati editions. The Preface to the Capricci volume gives in Italian a historical introduction to the works, the editorial criteria for the edition, and a discussion of performance centering on tempo and proportions (conclusions also presented in the article


Darbellay sometimes employs without comment a rule of ficta suggested by Vincenzo Galilei in the Fronimo (1584), which may be quoted here since it seems less known than it ought to be: “Et in questi tali casi.

Con tutto che il contrapuntista non habbia segnato nella prima semiminima di ciascuna casa il b molle, & le altre figure accidental; non è per questo che le non ci si intendino, & il medesimo si deue intendere molte volte nella prima minima di ciascuno esempio simile a vno di questi." (p. 39).

(“Although the composer has not indicated in the first semiminim of each bar the B-flat, & other accidentals; nonetheless they are understood, & the same must be understood often in the first minim of each example similar to one of these.”) Measure 65 of Capriccio 2 remains problematic.
"Tempo Relationships"—see note 5). The English version of the Preface that follows is not a mere summary but a concise version, that "allows for a logical reorganization of the subject matter in a more intelligible way" (p. xl, n. 8). The Preface to the Toccate (in Italian and French, with summaries in English and German) presents an historical background, a statement of editorial policy, and a brief discussion of performance.

The forthcoming volume of commentary (Genesi; cf. n. 2) begins with an extended discussion of the performance of the toccatas; the origins, various editions and sources of the Toccate are considered in detail, with a critical apparatus. For the Capricci the editor examines the original editions (Rome: Soldi, 1624; Venice: Vincenti, 1626, 1628, 1642) with particular emphasis on notation, the printing process, and the dedicatee, describing not only the successive editions but also virtually every single known example of each one. A concluding critical apparatus relates all of these to the final text.

The choice of the initial 1624 version of the Capricci as the source for the present edition seems at first glance illogical. As Darbellay points out, it contains numerous errors, some of them rectified in the course of the printing run, others corrected afterward by stamps, pasted bits of paper, or notations in ink. (This latter process ascribes to the members of Soldi's shop, but in at least one case this was done by Frescobaldi himself at home, before consigning the volume to a purchaser.)9 Darbellay concludes, however, that the 1624 edition reflects most closely Frescobaldi's original intentions as they evolved in the course of publication.

The account in the commentary volume of the tortuous process by which the 1624 edition of the Capricci was created is a fascinating piece of detective work. From a minute examination of the first edition Darbellay deduces an initial corpus of five capricci. This was subsequently enlarged by the inclusion of additional works, reshuffled, reworked by the addition of new material, and rounded out by the inclusion of the variation-capriccio, Or che noi rimena (removed from the subsequent editions). The chain of evidence is convincing, but a few doubts remain. Why would Frescobaldi have planned initially to publish only five capricci? Every other volume of his containing an opening set of works in a single genre begins with a substantial group (twelve fantasias, twelve/eleven toccatas, ten ricercars). If he decided to add to the original number, is it not more likely that he would have aimed right away for a canonical set of ten or twelve?

On the basis of this piecemeal genesis, Darbellay challenges the assumption that Frescobaldi intended the Capricci as an organic whole. "The iconoclastic nature of the contribution that follows cannot fail to shock the 'holistic' feelings of those musicologists who seek at any price to find in a complete opus of the seventeenth century those connecting links that . . . could unite a group of compositions esoterically in an overall view." He concludes that the order of the 1624 Capricci, their number, and even the "compositional organicity" of three of them are the result of "external chance rather than the original intention of the composer".10 As a performer, I share the "holistic" feelings of musicologists, at least to the point of preferring to believe that what I play is the conscious artistic intention of its composer and

10"L'enigme," 123.
not the result of “external chance.” Musicologists seek “connecting links” because they are often present in this repertory. Frescobaldi’s first three keyboard publications, the Fantasie, the Recercari, and the First Book of Toccatas, are arranged modally, and the Fantasie are ordered by increasing number of subjects as well—clear and not exactly esoteric unifying devices. It is a commonplace of critical theory that what an author publishes, even if it is arrived at by chance, is a final intention and is to be respected as such. Darbellay recognizes this himself in statements such as, “if the work is the result of successive additions, nonetheless it remains that the transformations in the order of the pieces that took place without being dictated by any apparent practical necessity confirm the importance that Frescobaldi attached to the equilibrium of the whole”.11

Darbellay’s examination of the recurrent metrical shifts in the capricci presumes a proportional intention deducible from their notation. Frescobaldi’s own preface to the volume declares that “in triplas, or sesquialteras, if they are major let them be taken slowly, if minor somewhat more rapidly, if of three semiminims, more rapidly, if they are six for four let their tempo be given making the beat move rapidly.”12 Frescobaldi is silent on the subject of duple meter, but Darbellay asserts that the concept of a variable duple tactus is “the logical base of the entire structure” (Prefazione, p. xxviii). “If the tactus were held constant throughout the composition, an unreasonably slow tempo would be required for the beginning in order to arrive at a realistic speed for the final sixteenth-notes”.13 To prove his argument he cites the varying lengths of the binary measure-bars (brevis versus semibrevis) in the 1624 edition as evidence of his two extreme varying tactus. Barlines spaced a breve apart and notated in a white Notenbild indicate a rather fast semibreve tactus but a relatively slow tempo. Passages barred in semibreves and featuring sixteenth-notes denote a slow minim tactus but a fast tempo. Between these extremes come two other binary measures, one divided into quarter-notes and generally barred in breves, the other divided into eighths and generally barred in semibreves.14 The skeptic may object that the one thing Frescobaldi says about the relation between notation and tempo is that in triple meter large note values indicate a slow tempo and small notes a rapid one; with duple meters Darbellay manages to create a system where exactly the opposite obtains. (Darbellay would presumably answer that he posits fast tactus = slow tempo in halves, slow tactus = fast tempo in sixteenths—but how variable does a tactus have to be before it becomes merely a tempo?) The player who wishes to test these conclusions can refer to a table of metronome-markings on p. xxxiii of the Capricci.

One minor notational/performance question remains. In his discussion of dotted patterns beginning with a rest, in which the rest and first note are equal but are to be performed as dotted in conformity with the rest of the passage, Darbellay states: “the dot was never added to rests, nor was the practice of the double dot known” (Prefazione, p. xxx). This dotted interpretation is assumed at least from Frescobaldi and his contemporaries to

12Sartori, Bibliografia, 296.
Domenico Scarlatti (cf. the opening of the sonata K. 238), but I cannot cite any written validation of this practice and know of at least one exception. In his Dialoghi e sonetti (Rome: Zannetti, 1638, p. 170), Domenico Mazzocchi did in fact employ both the equal eighth rest/eighth note and dotted eighth rest/sixteenth note:

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The reprint of Frescobaldi’s Second Book of Toccatas in 1637 removed from the original 1627 version sets of partite on the Ciaccona and the Passacaglia. For a reissue of the First Book in 1637 under the aegis of Cardinal Francesco Barberini, Frescobaldi added to the original an Aggiunta comprising dances and bass-variations, three capricci of various sorts, and the pièce maîtresse of the volume, the Cento Partite sopra Passacaglia. By an examination of the states of the original (which, being engraved rather than printed from type like the Capricci, display traces of successive revisions on the plates), Darbellay has reconstructed the evolution of the Cento Partite in the formation of the Aggiunta, devised an explanation of its metric scheme, and related the stages of the work to manuscript survivals in a way that changes drastically our view of the manuscript evidence.

In his as yet unpublished article, “New Light” (see n. 5 above), Darbellay traces the genesis of the Cento Partite as follows: the Cento Partite and the Capriccio sopra Ruggiero (now both in the 1637 Aggiunta of Book I) were originally intended to replace the final variation-sets at the end of the Second Book of Toccatas in its 1637 reissue. The next stage consisted of “an independent cycle of Passacaglia in d’ and “an autonomous set of Ciaccone” (p. 14 of typescript), each including a Corrente and showing “unusual tonal discrepancies” (p. 22); from this there evolved a single large cycle in F. A fourth stage consisted of a similar cycle in d minor containing one hundred variations (Cento Partite) and including left-over initial Passacaglia. The amalgamation of these two sets created the final version printed in the Aggiunta. Darbellay shows that, as in the case of the Capricci, this process was carried on in the course of the printing. Manuscript materials from the Chigi collection fit into this evolutionary scheme in a way that suggests that they are preliminary studies emanating directly from Frescobaldi, not merely later copies from the printed edition as had been supposed.15

The article “Le ‘Cento Partite’” takes the final state of the work as its point of departure for examining the metrical and rhythmical questions raised in performance. Here again, a proportional interpretation is assumed. Every writer on the Cento Partite cites Frescobaldi’s injunction appended in 1637 to the preface to the First Book of Toccate. The plain sense of the Italian is, “Those who find it more pleasing can play the Passacaglia sections separately, adjusting the tempo of one section to the next, and the same with the Ciaconas.” In other words, if you select only the Passacaglias or only the Ciaconas (since at one stage the Ciaconas formed an independent cycle) and leave out the intervening sections, you will have to adjust the tempi between

sections to compensate for the transformations that are automatically effected in the course of the complete version. This presupposes a continuum of notation/tempero relations; it does not in itself mandate a proportional interpretation.  

Darbellay’s account is by no means the only explication of the *Cento Partite*. That the work can provoke and survive such interest is a testimony of its power. Whatever the ultimate authority of Darbellay’s analysis as a prescription for performance, he demonstrates with new clarity the seemingly inexhaustible richness of Frescobaldi’s final design: “in what might appear . . . as a more or less aleatoric assemblage intended to use as best possible musical segments already composed or even printed, on the contrary we see emerging a master idea of formal synthesis to which in fact every stage of the process of modification contributes” (“Le ‘Cento Partite’,” p. 372).

Darbellay’s arguments raise several general questions. How do the conclusions reached in the context of the keyboard works compare with the notational practice of the vocal and instrumental ensemble works, notably the variety of triple mensurations in the various states of the *Canzoni* for instrumental ensemble? (Perhaps the forthcoming volume of the complete edition devoted to the three versions of the ensemble *Canzoni* will examine this problem, relating it also to the practice of Frescobaldi’s contemporaries.) How far are the statements in one of Frescobaldi’s prefaces valid for other collections? Darbellay himself gives a vivid picture of the evolution of notation and performance practice in the three decades covered by Girolamo’s publishing career. Can one assume, then, that the metrical indications in the preface to the *Capricci* (1624) must also govern the *Cento Partite* (1637), or that the performing directions given for the first book of toccatas (1614–1615) are valid also for the second book (1627) and for the 1637 reprints? To what extent can we rely on the dates of Frescobaldi’s dedications to his printed collections as historical evidence? As Anthony Newcomb has demonstrated, the dates of Frescobaldi’s dedications to his first two publications, the *Madrigali* and the *Fantasie*, are not trustworthy. Finally, Darbellay seems to assume the Neapolitan origin of Frescobaldi’s treatment of the capriccio (rightly, in the special cases of Capricci 8 and 9, “cromatico con ligature al contrario” and “di durezze”). As I have argued elsewhere, the presumption of Neapolitan influence can no longer be accepted at face value.  

16Another performing indication frequently misread occurs in the first version of the preface to the First Book of Toccatas: [le partite] “vogliono esser portate intere col medesimo tempero”, ([the partitas] “should be taken complete in the same tempero”); as the context and the reworking of this indication in the second version make clear, the reference is to each single partita, which is to be executed in the same tempo-range throughout, and not to an entire set of partitas.


18Frederick Hammond, “Girolamo Frescobaldi and the Hypothesis of Neapolitan Influences,” in *La musica a Napoli durante il Setecento: Atti del convegno Internazionale di Studi, Napoli, 11–14 Aprile 1985*, ed. Domenico Antonino d’Alessandro and Agostino Zizno (Rome, 1987), 217–36 (the essay was omitted from the Table of Contents). If I have overstated the case, perhaps it is time that someone did.
It is a curious example of “déformation professionelle” that Darbellay, so lucid in discussing the intricacies of notation and proportions, is occasionally unsure in historical detail. He makes heavy weather of identifying the “Most Illustrious Lord Cardinal Your Uncle” of Bishop Luigi Gallo, dedicatee of the second volume of Toccate, suggesting Pietro Aldobrandini or Guido Bentivoglio (Genesi, p. 94). Darbellay employs the relationship of the author of the dedicatory sonnet in the Second Book of Toccatas, Pier Francesco Paoli, with the Savelli family to hypothesize that even if Cardinal Savelli were not the “cardinal-uncle” of Gallo, Frescobaldi may well have been in the service of the Savelli since he must have frequented them (Genesi, p. 98; italics mine). In fact, Luigi Gallo’s “zio cardinale” was just that: his uncle Cardinal Antonio Maria Gallo (d. 1620), Dean of the College of Cardinals and a member of the musical circle of Cardinal Montalto, a visitor to Ferrara in 1598 with Clement VIII and the future Urban VIII—a personage concerning whose identity there could be no doubt in seventeenth-century Rome. There is no evidence that Frescobaldi worked for the Savelli and no reason to assert that theirs was the only circle in which he could have encountered Paoli. Paoli was published in Ferrara as early as 1600, provided texts for Frescobaldi’s pupil Grassi, was a member of Cardinal Maurizio of Savoy’s Accademia dei Desiosi, and was also patronized by the Barberini. These points are of some interest because Luigi Gallo was the only contemporary keyboard player ever to be mentioned, let alone praised, by Frescobaldi. The Bishop seems to have been indeed a remarkable performer, with a special gift for contrapuntal works. Antimo Liberati praised the “wonderful sonority” that Gallo achieved in playing his own intabulations of Cifra’s four-part ricercars.

It is now fashionable to denigrate the importance of Italian instrumental composition, “which currently somehow passes for one of the great achievements of seventeenth-century music.” But it is one of the dividends of time that we may appreciate perhaps even more fully than his contemporaries the music of Frescobaldi, in which craftsmanship becomes an aesthetic and indeed an emotional experience. It only remains to congratulate Darbellay and the sponsors of this complete edition, and to wish them all a conclusion as successful as their initial achievement. If “non senza fatiga si giunge al fine”, in this case the goal is eminently worth the effort.

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19Quoted in Francesco Luisi and Giancarlo Rostirolla, eds., Antonio Cifra: ‘Ricercari e Cansoni francesi (1619)’ (Köln, 1981), xviii, n. 104. As I have suggested elsewhere (“Girolamo Frescobaldi: nuovi appunti biografici”, Girolamo Frescobaldi nel IV centenario [see n. 5 above], pp. 35–45), it is likely that Girolamo’s “antica servitù" with the Gallo family included teaching Luigi.