THE ORIGINS OF ORGAN TOCCATA. TERMINOLOGY AND SOURCES FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE RENAISSANCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the complex issue of the Toccata genre. The first part aims to define the term Toccata from a historical and philological perspective as well as to summarize the viewpoints of various theorists about Toccata as a genre, as reflected in a variety of older or more recent musicological sources. Their review is intended on the one hand to highlight the complexity of the subject of the Toccata genre, and on the other to illustrate the active character of the research and the refinement of the hypotheses, observations, comparisons, argumentations and conclusions. The purpose of the second part of the paper is to offer an original analytical contribution to the studies on Toccata evolution in various European countries like Italy, Spain, Germany and on its correlation with genres like falsobordoni and intonazioni, while capturing the similarities and the specific differences between them. This study is therefore intended to lead to a few important questions concerning the origins of organ Toccata: is it an improvisatory, free genre or is it based, harmonically and structurally, on a cantus firmus or on a psalm tone? Does it by any chance derive from the intonatio and is it somehow influenced by the embellished vocal falsobordoni?

Keywords: organ, intonatio, falsobordoni, psalm tone

1. The origin of the term Toccata. Etymology, chronological definitions

“Toccata” is one of the earliest terms used in the music for keyboard instruments (organ, harpsichord or clavichord). Its original definition has been blurred by time and it was only in the 17th century that specialized terms came into use to identify and define the musical forms and genres, along with the relationships between them.
In terms of typology, Toccata was originally an improvisatory introduction or prelude, but its relations with the other terms that define the instrumental genres of the 15th and 16th centuries, i.e. praeludium, fantasia, ricercar, intonatio, tiento, tastata, tañer, capriccio and sonata are not always very clear.

The term “Toccata” comes from the Italian word “toccare”, which literally means “to touch, to strike” (En. – to touch, Fr. – toucher, Sp. – tocar), and therefore the pieces bearing this name will be “touched”, i.e. played on a keyboard - originally an organ.50

The proper style of keyboard music developed only in the second half of the 15th century. At that time, the term designated several different types of music: thus, toccata con ligature e durezze is characterized, as its name suggests, by syncopation and dissonance, by a highly chromatic style, in a slow tempo, with occasional points of imitation, while Toccata in modo di trombetto is a fanfare transferred from brass to keyboard.

By the 16th century, Toccata had already turned into an instrumental piece whose primary destination was to highlight the performer’s technical virtuosity and which was often written in free form and almost always for solo keyboard instrument. Here we should also mention the meaning given by Isidoro Sevilla (ca. 560-636) to the notion of “hitting the organ”, which was already indicating the mode of attack of the string instruments as well. In fact, since as early as the 12th century, the word toccare had the double meaning of “to hit” and “to touch”. Thus, the expressions toccare la tromba il tamburo and toccata di trombetta had already acquired the meaning of “touching” the instrument.

The examples known as the earliest Toccatas start with a few chords, followed by a succession of scales and ornamental passages, sprinkled with small Fugato parts. The structure of the pieces generally consists of alternating the homophonic, chordal parts, with virtuosic polyphonic passages, with different types of scales, passages, figurations and embellishments. These virtuosic pieces, apparently improvisatory, in free form, with contrasts of pitch, tempo and intensity, were gradually subjected to more and more stringent counterpoint rules, the Toccata thus gradually becoming one of the favourite genres of contrapuntal and imitative art.

The constant evolution of genres and musical forms, even over a single period of time, brought along continuous changes in the meaning of the terms used to denote them. During the 16th century, the term Toccata was also used for lute compositions, works in free form

50 The pipe organ, the oldest keyboard instrument, present since the Middle Ages in most churches, was initially used only as accompaniment, serving to support the vocal polyphony of the choir. At times it would alternate with the choir in different parts of the religious service.
such as the Ricercar, the canzone and the prelude. The lute had a major role not only in the development of the instrumental genres, but also in the flourishing of the accompanied monody, where it was associated with the voice without merging with it, enriching the musical discourse without disturbing the intelligibility of the text. One of the masters of this instrument was Valentin (Greff) Bakfark (1507-1576), originally from Transylvania.

In 1508, Joan Ambrosio Dalza used the term *tastar de corde* (“testing the strings”) in the preface of five pieces, which was the precursor of the term Toccata, designating a piece with a strict chordal writing style. Nearly 30 years later, Giovanni Antonio Casteliano’s volume “Intabolatura de leuto de diversi autori” (1536) also included four *Tochate*, two of which were to be sung “nel fine del Ballo”52. Three of these pieces were entitled *Tochata* and were written by Francesco Canova da Milano. Here, the terms *tastar de corde* and *ricercare* disappeared and were replaced by the word *tochata*.

Returning to the terms that compete with that of *Toccata*, designating pieces with an introductory function such as *intonatio, ricercar, praeludium, prooemium, anabole, praeambulum, modus, tonus, introitus, intrada*, we will notice several convergences. Thus, we know that initially the Ricercar was not a very individualized genre, but rather played the role of *intonatio*. This implied the meaning of “searching out”, or re-examination of the tuning, in other words tuning the instrument before the actual execution of the piece and searching the tonality of the following piece. Thus, the function of *intonatio*53 does not straightforwardly imply the idea of ricercar, which is merely inferred. Johann Gottfried Walther’s expression: “ricercar’ uno strumento, un liuto, violino”, meaning “search whether an instrument, a lute, a violin is properly tuned or not”, fits perfectly with this stage of evolution of the meaning of the term.

The first to define the Toccata was Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), in his book *Syntagma musicum*, III (1619): “like a Praeambulum or Praeludium that an organist, starting to play the organ or harpsichord, fantasizes out of his head before commencing a motet or fugue.” [24, p. 25]. Here he briefly defines the main features of the Toccata, namely: it is a prelude, it introduces a vocal work, it is usually a fantasy and its style consists of embellished

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51 This was the first printed occurrence of the word *Toccata*.
52 For the titles and contents of these two collections, see [14].
53 This function occurs in the early non-imitative ricercars for lute in Joan Ambrosio Dalza’s collection published between 1507 and 1509 by the Venetian pioneer of printed music, Ottaviano Petrucci (1466-1539). The collection contains works by authors like Francesco Spinaccino, Franciscus Bossinensis and later Marco Antonio Cavazzoni [da Bologna] (1523), Francesco Canova da Milano (1536), bearing the marking “il tuono d’accordatura”) *Intabolatura de Lauto libro quatro*, Venice, 1508
chords. It also reminds of an individual freedom in performing such pieces: “one has his way, while the other has a different way of playing”.

Praetorius's definition supports this theory, grouping the pieces with a preludial function into three general categories:

1. “Praeludiis vor sich selbst” – preludes that stand alone: fantasia and capriccio, sonata, fugue and ricercar, sinfonia
2. “Praeludiis zum Tanze” – preludes for dances: intrada

According to Praetorius, Toccata is “an improvisation composed to demonstrate the technical abilities of certain instruments (organ), as well as an opportunity to warm up the fingers” [24, p. 25].

Praetorius's importance for the theme under discussion lies in that his definitions reflect the very concepts that many other historians and theorists relied upon. In 1632, for example, Christoph Demantius used virtually the same words that Praetorius had used to describe the Toccata: it is “a prelude that an organist improvises before commencing a motet or fugue.” [30, p. 3]

A century later, Mattheson, in his treatise on melody entitled Kern melodischer Wissenschaft [25] emphasized the imaginative quality of the Toccata. He wrote that “in instrumental music there is another defined type – which in contrast to all others remains however undefined (...) that includes capricci, Toccatas, preludes, ritornelli etc.” Even though they look as if they were improvised, most of them are written out in an orderly manner, but pay so little regard to rules and order that they can only with difficulty be called other than flashes of good inspiration. Therefore they are characterized by Imagination.” [25, pp. 122-123]

In 1739, in his work entitled Der vollkommene Capellmeister, Mattheson emphasized again the imaginative nature of the Toccata genre: “Whoever brings to this the most artistic ornaments and rarest inventions (...) does the best” [24]. Thus, he groups genres like “Intonations, Arpeggios, Arioso, Adagio, Passages, Fugue, Fantasy, Chaconne, Caprices…”, under the generic name of Toccata, considering that they belong to the so-called fantastic style (stylus fantasticus).

Later, referring to the writing of the fugue, Mattheson contrasted its “orderly and moderate” style with that of the Toccata and fantasies: “the larger or smaller sections (of a Toccata) should not be directly connected, much less performed in an orderly manner.
Therefore, the composers who work on correct Toccatas have no concept of the present style in their Toccatas and fantasies, to which nothing is more contrary than order and moderation” [24, p. 88].

Here is what Jacob Adlung wrote about Toccatas, in 1758: “when large Toccatas are nothing but fantasies, preludes and a few different fugue movements, these Toccatas can also be improvised” [8, p. 752].

1.1. Stylistic and structural evolution in the Toccata of the late Middle Ages (ca. 1300-1450)

One manuscript that stands out among the oldest manuscripts like Robertsbridge Codex (ca. 1320) and the ones known as the “Sagan”, “Winsem” and “Breslau”, is “The Ileborgh Tablature” (1448) by Adam Ileborgh. Here is a clear attempt to establish a tonal centre by defining the “tonus” and to indicate certain parts for the pedalboard. The Ileborgh manuscript contains 5 short preludes and 3 mensurae, written in a very different style than was common at the time. It does not seem to have a vocal model or to be based on a borrowed tenor. These are rather free compositions, in which the organist’s fantasy and technical skills stand out, while the different note values follow one another in varied succession. But this apparent “disorder” does not mean a lack of a law of construction, but rather an abandonment of the earlier traditions. The inner restlessness, the expressiveness and the ambition to create a new style is reflected already in the title: secundum modernum modum.

The “Hamburg Manuscript” contains among others a Praeambulum super g which, like Ileborgh’s preludes, starts with a short series of long notes, which in the final cadence turns into a movement with shorter note values, thus already containing the germs of the later Präludium.

In 1452, in his book entitled Fundamentum organisandi, Conrad Paumann (1410-1473), the organist of Nuremberg, laid out the composition principles of instrumental counterpoint. However, one must take into account that this development of the keyboard style represented the reform of the theories and experiments to that date. The manner in which Paumann put his theories into practice changed the whole concept of keyboard composition. In his work Mit ganczem Willen (With All My Heart), Paumann wrote the main melody on the bass, with a soprano line above. Here again we notice the germs of the later development of the prelude and of the Toccata.
Buxheimer Orgelbuch, a collection written and compiled around 1470, shows the progress in extending the melodic inventiveness. There are about 220 keyboard arrangements of certain melodies, most of which are written by composers of the Burgundian School,54 or by Dunstable, Paumann and Legrant. Even more significant are the 30 instrumental preludes, in which the improvisatory passages alternate with chordal ones. Moreover, the early practice of the fauxbourdon (a vocal genre the importance of which we will highlight later) played a significant role in the vocal music of the late Middle Ages and was also developed by Paumann. It is also interesting that several pieces were conceived in the rhapsodic style of Ileborgh’s praealudia, with free improvisatory passages and embellished passages.

2. Toccata in the Renaissance Europe. Major Italian contributions (ca. 1450-1600)

During Renaissance, keyboard composition flourished in Italy in a remarkable way and to an extent unparalleled in other countries. The Italian repertoire was centred mostly on the Ricercar and Fantasia, genres governed by complex contrapuntal rules. Already in the 16th century, the Italians used basic motifs that circulated in all the voices, either in their original form, or transformed – by means of diminution, augmentation or variation. The ricercar is more disciplined than the fantasia and represents one of the highest forms of instrumental counterpoint. Recerchari, Motetti, Canzoni (1523) by Marco Antonio Cavazzoni (1480-1559) – also known as Marc’Antonio da Bologna, is one of the oldest Italian collections and includes only 8 pieces: four transcriptions of French songs, two ricercari and two transcriptions of motets. The two ricercari have a specific structure that can be followed only by an organ motet. Here the meaning of the word ricercar designates an introductory piece written in the same tonality as the preceding motet, which it therefore “intonates”.

Girolamo Cavazzoni (ca. 1500 - ca. 1560), Marco Antonio’s son, is known for his outstanding contribution to the development of the instrumental technical abilities and style in organ literature. In 1543 he published a collection of pieces for organ called Intavolatura cioe recercari, canzoni, himni, magnificati.55 Cavazzoni expanded the themes in length, using flowing melodic passages, a real sense of polyphony and architecture and beautiful and inventive rhythms.

In the Italian culture of the time, it was assumed that during the religious liturgy, before a composition – whether a motet or another vocal piece –, each organist had to

54 Represented by composers from Belgium, the Netherlands, Burgundy and a large portion of France.
55 The term recercare already means an imitative piece, known as the ancestor of the fugue.
provide the tuning note for that piece or for whatever instrument. The Spanish version *tañer* was used in a more general sense, as was the case of Thomas de Santa Maria, for example, in *Libro llamado Arte de tañer fantasía* (1565), meaning “the art of playing the fantasia”.

But the Toccata proper, without any additional or supplementary title (except perhaps those indicating the mode or the tone) denotes the most famous genre of keyboard composition, in which sustained chords and virtuoso scale passages alternate with imitative sections. Later, this became the classic toccata for keyboard, which exerted a strong influence on the development of keyboard music in Western Europe. Furthermore, the term *toccata* is most often associated with this particular type of composition.

A decisive role in the creation and development of these new forms and genres \(^{56}\), typical for the keyboard instruments, was played by the representatives of the *Venetian School*, i.e. the organist-composers Adrian Willaert (ca. 1485-1562), the founder of this school, Annibale Padovano, Claudio Merulo, Andrea Gabrieli, Giovanni Gabrieli a.o. We should also mention the Neapolitan School represented by Giovanni de Macque (ca. 1550-1640), Ascanio Maione and Giovanni Maria Trabaci, and also the third one, i.e. the *Roman School*, represented by Luzzasco Luzzaschi, Enrico Pasquini, Luca Marenzio and Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina.

The first printed Toccatas of this genre – i.e. Toccatas with sustained chords, brilliant passages and imitative sections – appeared in 1591, in an edition by Sperandio Bertoldo. This initial stage of the genre ended in 1604 with two volumes, the first one containing 3 pieces by Padovano (1575) and 5 by anonymous composers, and the other one containing 10 pieces by Claudio Merulo. Girolamo Diruta’s didactic collection entitled *Il Transilvano*\(^{57}\) (1593) includes 13 pieces by various composers: four Toccatas by Diruta, two by Andrea Gabrieli and one each by Merulo, Giovanni Gabrieli, Luzzaschi, Antonio Romanini, Paolo Quagliati, Vincenzo Bell’Haver and Gioseffo Guami. In the same year, Antonio Gardano published four Toccatas by the Venetian organist Andrea Gabrieli. He developed the form while keeping the same principles, and focused on the ornamentation technique in terms of appearance, contour and form, through allegorical representation and an improvisatory ornamental style.

Despite the fact that the first printed editions cover a period of only 13 years, they bear the marks of several generations of composers. Andrea Gabrieli (b. ca. 1510) was the oldest,

\(^{56}\) One must not forget the existence of the communities of aesthetic and artistic aspirations of the various schools of those times, the most important one being the *Franco-Flemish School*, which was to influence the musical thought for many centuries.

\(^{57}\) Research proves that this volume was dedicated to the Transylvanian Prince Sigismund Báthory (1572-1613), who was himself an acknowledged musician. This organ treatise is written in the form of a dialogue between two characters, one of which is from Transylvania. Hence the title *Il Transilvano.*
while Girolamo Diruta (1561) was the youngest. Annibale Padovano, Vincenzo Bell’Haver, Sperindio Bertoldo and Claudio Merulo were born around 1530, Gioseffo Guami around 1540, Luzzaschi around 1545, Quagliati about ten years later and Giovanni Gabrieli in 1557. Apart from Bertoldo, Luzzaschi and Quagliati, all were active in Venice for at least a part of their lives. In short, the Toccatas for keyboard were born before 1575, by which time a certain tradition seems to have been established, centred around Venice. Clearly, the publication of these works was preceded by quite a long tradition of organ playing and improvisation.

2.1 Venetian Toccatas viewed through the lens of some of the 20th century musicologists

Modern musicologists have made interesting remarks about the Venetian Toccatas. In 1924, Wilhelm Fischer described them as “free” compositions, in that they are not based on a cantus firmus or on a vocal model. They lack, he says, “a voice standard, and thus any formal direction; this was the first playground of pure instrumental music” [7, p. 392]. Ernst Ferand emphasized this statement when he wrote that these Toccatas reveal for the first time a “spontaneous” type of instrumental music (unmittelbar), a genre that drew its form directly from the nature of the instrument itself, and not indirectly from a vocal model [18, p. 332]. Quite recently, Willi Apel included the Toccata among the “free” forms of the 16th century keyboard music, in contrast with the religious compositions (masses, motets), dances, imitative works and variations. He described the Toccata as “the second important genre of the free organ music of the 16th century” [9, p. 215], the first one being the prelude.

Also related to this is the assumption that the Toccata was generally thought to be an improvisatory practice, as was also stated by one of the quoted researchers, “the freest and most natural old form, at least in what regards keyboard music” [31, p. 3]. Otto Gombosi also described them as improvisatory compositions [22, p. 51], while Hans Herring remarked that in these works “improvisation is raised to the level of principle” [23, 277]. Thus, these works were considered to be early examples of keyboard music created on the spur of the moment – without any prior formal thinking – despite the fact that these improvisations were written in tablatures.

According to a third hypothesis, the Venetian Toccatas were born from the so-called intonatio for keyboard and both the Toccata and the intonatio derived from the early prelude.
Erich Valentin [31], Frotscher [19, p. 82] and Ferand [18] supported this point of view\textsuperscript{58}, while Apel, despite believing that the Toccata derived from the \textit{intonatio}, mentioned only that the \textit{intonatio} and the prelude are very similar [9, p. 212]. The relationship between Toccata and \textit{intonatio} is undeniable, at least in terms of style. The collection published by Gardano in 1593 includes thirty \textit{Intonationi} and four Toccatas by Andrea Gabrieli. These short compositions “begin with sustained chords, proceed with passages in alternating hands and end with a written-out trill, beginning on the upper note” [28, p. 540]. Although this style was not entirely new, in the hands of Andrea Gabrieli “these elements became much more integrated and are amalgamated into a homogeneous composition consisting of broad massive chords intertwined with impressive ascending and descending passages” [10, p. 54]. Brevity in musical thinking and unity in style remain the main differences between the two: the longest \textit{intonatio} consists of only 17 measures and does not include any extended imitative passage.

2.2. \textit{Falsobordone, intonatio, toccata}: similarities and differences

About 40 years before the publication of the first Toccatas, and very similar in style too, a composition genre had appeared called \textit{falsobordone} (Sp. \textit{fabordón}). In their simplest instrumental form, these pieces are exact transcriptions of some vocal \textit{falsobordoni}, compositions originating in Italy or Spain shortly before 1480 and which became very popular in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Such a composition could serve as an instrumental verse, substituting the verses of the psalm chorales. Such a \textit{falsobordone} for keyboard occurs in Luis Venegas de Henestrosa’s opera (ca. 1510-1570) entitled \textit{Libro de cifra nueva} (1557). The style of this \textit{fabordon glosado} (example 1) or of the embellished \textit{falsobordon} for keyboard displays many characteristics associated with the \textit{intonatio}: compact chords, scalar passages, beginnings written out in long note values, followed by short values:

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Die Entwicklung der Tokkata}, 11; \textit{Geschichte des Orgelspiels}, Berlin-Schöneberg, 1935, p. 82; \textit{Die Improvisation in der Musik}, 70. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht speaks about different definitions of the Toccata, \textit{intonation}, prelude and other related terms in [17, p. 905-926 (89-110)].
Example 1: Venegas de Henestrosa, *Fabordón glosado*, bars 1-10

In some of the *falsobordoni* for keyboard by Antonio de Cabezón (ca. 1510-1566) and in some from Henestrosa’s collection, the psalm tone is treated with a new flexibility. Firstly, the melodic movement continues with the cadence in the middle part. Secondly, the simple recitation of the homophonic chords is abandoned in favour of the embellishments in the recitativo. These techniques lead to major formal changes. One of Cabezón’s versets in Mode 590 transposed down a fifth, illustrates both these techniques:

Exemple 2: Venegas de Henestrosa, *Fabordón glosado*, bars 5-17

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59 According to Glareanus, the twelve modes (six authentic modes and their plagal versions) are, in order, the following: Dorian (D) – Hypodorian (A), Phrygian (E) – Hypophrygian (B), Lydian (F) – Hypolydian (C), Mixolydian (G) – Hypomixolydian (D), Aeolian (A) – Hypoaeolian (E), Ionian (C) – Hypoionian (G).
The stylistic similarities between this piece and the earlier intonatio are quite remarkable, so much so that it can be said that such falsobordoni served as models for the more assured and brilliant intonationi of the two Gabriels. Andrea Gabrieli transposed down a fourth the Intonatio in Mode 5 (example 3) which enables a convenient comparison:

Example 3: Andrea Gabrieli, Intonatio, bars 14-17

Both are written in the 4/4 meter, in which block chords sustain embellishments in diatonic scales. Both have a continuous structure, which is not the result of an imitative counterpoint (as is the case with the late Ricercars of the 16th century), but rather the result of their own specific style and technique. Both have a real bass line, progressing by intervals of fourths and fifths. And more importantly, both are based on psalm tones. To explain this cantus firmus technique, the borrowed psalm tone is placed on a separate staff. At the same time, they were intended to “give the pitch” to the choir – a function verified by the accurate transposition of Andrea Gabrieli’s compositions to different pitch levels. The name intonatione fits these pieces perfectly: it simply means singing “in tone”, more exactly “in the psalm tone”. The liturgical use of this new term is further corroborated by Francesco Severi in his collection of vocal embellished falsobordone (Rome, 1615). Here, the first verse of each

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60 The medieval psalm tones were built on D, E, F, and G (protus, deuterus, tritus, tetrardus), representing the authentic modes to which their plagal versions were added, the mode being completed with the sounds of a descending fourth (except for the deuterus plagal mode, where due to the B-C semitone only the C and D were added). The psalm tone had never had the dominant influence in the case of the prelude as it did later in the case of the Venetian intonation and Toccata.
composition, which is always written in a simple style, is called intonatio, while the remaining verses are always embellished and are called falsobordoni.

In his Toccatas and preludes, Andrea Gabrieli developed concepts of the ornamental style that had been unknown until then. He came up with the original idea of the passages with expressive scales, a new concept that was gradually adopted by all the schools of composition. The variety obtained by Andrea Gabrieli by means of a scalar melodic line - despite the simplicity of harmony - results from the technique of imitation and of the sequences used here, though with a new concept (Intonatio in Mode 7): 4):

Example 4: Andrea Gabrieli, Intonatio, bars 1-6

In 1593, Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli’s collection entitled Intonationi d’organi di Andrea Gabrieli et di Giovanni suo nepote appeared [20]. The function of intoning has a key role in the further development of the Toccata, being closely related with the intonatio, given that Andrea Gabrieli’s Toccata was conceived for liturgical use. Andrea's eight intonazioni match, in order, the eight church modes, thus expressing the organist’s intention to be prepared with a short introductory piece for each mode. The long sustained chords are dominated by that incipit sound, which will be the main sound throughout the entire piece. They are followed by passages of different lengths played by the right hand and then by the left hand in a lower register – while the other hand always plays triads with their inversions. These triads are generally an ascending or a descending fifth away from the root, emphasizing its role and importance. The most often used are the authentic cadences (I-V-I) while the final cadence is almost always plagal (I-IV-I).

Andrea’s “Intonations” are different from other earlier falsobordoni for keyboard. The bass line alternates between movements of fourths and fifths, which is an essential feature of
the choral falsobordon from the beginnings to the end of the 15th century. The notation with Roman numerals can be added very easily to identify the harmonic structure. The composer also emphasizes the tonal harmonic structures, major or minor, built using the degrees I, IV and V, rather than the modal degrees III and VI.

Another difference between the two genres is that Andrea Gabrieli’s ornamentation covers a wider range, extending from the high-pitched sounds of the keyboard to the low-pitched ones. Furthermore, they are not restricted to one or two parts, as in Cabezón’s compositions. The rhythmic movement is faster, more brilliant and more virtuosic, and the melodic contours are more pronounced and more vigorous. This was not mere virtuosity, but a totally new technique of expression, which heralded the rise of the Baroque spirit.

The last difference between Andrea Gabrieli's intonations and the earlier works is the merely “ideal” presence of the cantus firmus in the “intonations”, meaning that it is not present in the long note values, nor is it embellished or alternated between hands – thus falling outside these more or less direct traditional ways, while maintaining only a general intonational spirit, as a common allusive element.

Giovanni Gabrieli (1557-1612), nephew of Andrea Gabrieli, composed mainly for organ, although some of the techniques he developed were later applied to the harpsichord, too. An inherent characteristic of his music is the use of a highly personalized central theme. In addition to his talent regarding form and structure, Giovanni Gabrieli’s works are pervaded by a spontaneity and freshness that reflect the vividness of the Venetian spirit.

Even more than Andrea, Giovanni Gabrieli handled the psalm tone in a personal manner, adjusting it to his own needs and inspiration. Bernhard Schmid, who included their “intonations” in his opera Tabulaturbuch (1607), confused the works of the two composers, attributing those of Giovanni to Andrea and vice versa. In terms of virtuosity, Andrea seems to have been more advanced than Giovanni, although the latter handled the cantus firmus more freely than his uncle. Taking his methods into consideration, Giovanni added 11 intonations to his uncle’s works of this genre. He also composed in the church modes 9, 10, 11, and 12, for which there are no traditional psalm melodies. But the composer simply selected some of these familiar tones, which could be assimilated to the new modes. In the example below, the intonation in Mode 10 uses the first half of Mode 4:

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61The intonation in Mode 10 on the third and fourth psalm tones (del terzo e quarto tono) are merged, having only 5-6 measures as compared to Andrea's intonations, while for the Modes 11 and 12 he used the fifth and eighth psalm tones, respectively. Although Andrea’s intonations do not go beyond Mode 8, he wrote a Toccata for each of the Modes 9 and 10.
If we conclude that the “free” and “improvisatory” form in the intonatio is no more than an instrumental elaboration of the psalm tone, present at an “ideal” level, what are its implications for the keyboard Toccata? The broadest and most extended form of the Toccata can lead us, precisely because of this apparent freedom, to the belief that it emerged from a cantus firmus. But the surprising fact is that the Toccata also refers to the ideal presence of the psalm tone, and that its figurations are similarly based on the simple harmonic progressions, based on the “invisible” melody. Although Toccatas vary in length and complexity, they are essentially intonations extended in time by means of the simple process of repeating the psalm tone, a technique that is already visible in Giovanni Gabrieli’s intonatio in Mode V. Toccatas, along with Andrea’s intonations, represent a technical evolution compared to the earlier falsobordoni, but show no change in structure (ex. 6):
Example 6: Andrea Gabrieli, *Intonatio*, bars 15-18

Claudio Merulo (1533-1604) was one of the greatest organists of his time, working among others in the church of San Marco in Venice. He attracted many students not only due to his interpretation skills, but also due to his unrivalled talent in composition. His organ works – *Ricercari* (1567), a Mass and three volumes of *Canzoni fatte alla francese* – were much more advanced than those of his contemporaries. His 19 Toccatas are a combination of an improvisatory beginning, a *ricercare* with episodes and a free ending.

Merulo relied in his turn on the cadential melody of the Gregorian mode, but often repeated parts of the borrowed melody. Compared with Andrea Gabrieli, he implemented a fast harmonic rhythm with short figurations, which starts to resemble the rhythmic intensity of Frescobaldi's works. The structure remains based on the idealized psalm tone, that Merulo used at least three times in the first bars of the following example (ex. 7, *Toccata in Mode 5* in the second volume):

Example 7: Claudio Merulo, *Toccata*, bars 1-7
The technique of developing the basic motifs is handled freely and gracefully, so that the effect is entirely different from that of the earlier works that used the same method. Merulo’s works show more fluidity and continuity. In the example below we can see the development of the figured sixteenth notes, grouped in fours. Merulo later extended it to a motif of five notes, then of seven and finally of eight. He achieved a high contrast between rhythm and melodic movement, despite the fact that the harmonic structure remained very simple.

Example 8: Claudio Merulo, *Toccata*, bars 1-9
2. 3. Characteristic features in the German and Nordic Regions

Resuming the evolutionary thread of the Renaissance Toccata in the German area, we remark Leonhard Kleber’s work (1490-1556), which marked a significant shift in composition. His music displays a more “modern” tendency that anticipates Gabrieli’s era and even that of the future masters of the music scene. Kleber’s works are rich in ornamentation, especially in trills and melismatic notes. It is exactly due to this ornamentation that Kleber is sometimes called the first composer in the German Colorist school. He also created various contrasts in one piece by means of chord passages containing a melodic line in the soprano and imitative parts in two or three voices. While most composers conceived cadences in the tradition of mensural music, Kleber manifested a tendency towards something new, such as the use of the cadence I-IV-V-I (compound authentic cadence). Another novelty was placing a deliberate emphasis on the relationship between major and minor by means of the successive arrangement of different preludes.

From then on, the tradition of the Toccata was followed closely by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck and the North German organ school, especially by Samuel Scheidt, Heinrich Scheidemann and later by Dietrich Buxtehude. Girolamo Frescobaldi imitated Garibaldi’s Toccata without ricercare, being also the precursor of Johann Pachelbel and Johann Sebastian Bach. Johann Sebastian Bach himself continued the northern tradition, by developing a form that derived from the toccata with a ricercare.

Conclusion

It follows from the above that the Toccata is not necessarily an improvisatory composition, at least not in the sense that the musician creates something “unpredictable” (in provisus), or something conceived on the spur of the moment (ex tempore). If the Toccata is improvisatory, it is so in the sense of the traditional practice of adding (higher or lower) polyphonic voices to a given melody (discantus super librum). It is also improvisatory due to the embellishments that enrich the “harmonized” psalm tone. But the concept of free improvisation in the Toccata genre must be reconsidered, as the composer or organist was guided in his work by one of the most solid composition techniques – a cantus firmus.

Since the composer referred to this borrowed melody mainly in harmonic terms – as a falsobordone – he did not seek different harmonies from those used in the cantus firmus. The harmonic basis of the Toccata is therefore not randomly selected. It is even possible to
analyze the Toccata in terms of an “isoharmonic” structure, in the imitation of the isorhythmic and homophonic techniques of the medieval motet, but with one remark: the ideal melody, though highly restrictive on the choice of the harmonic structure, is not entirely restrictive. The choice of harmonies (particularly with earlier composers such as Andrea Gabrieli and Annibale Padovano) follows the psalm tone of the cantus firmus so closely, that the succession of certain chords cannot be considered merely something random, or a result of the chord formulas or modal clichés. The harmonies are too well connected by the melodies of the psalm tones for such considerations to be made. All the examples mentioned above are intended to prove the undeniable presence of the cantus firmus in the works of the great masters of the late Renaissance Toccata.

We can therefore state that the Toccata derives from the intonatio and that like its predecessor it was modelled harmonically after the psalm tone, which is habitually present in the soprano voice. What was considered to be one of the first examples of the idiomatic writing style for keyboard is now seen as an instrumental work based on a vocal model. Its entire structure and main elements – harmonic sections and embellished passages – resemble the embellished vocal falsobordon, which is the type of falsobordon that had the greatest influence on the Toccata for keyboard.

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