THE KEYBOARD IN BAROQUE EUROPE

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Contents

On Frescobaldi's recreation of the chaconne and the passacaglia

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Frescobaldi and Monteverdi, the two great musicians of the early *seicento*, are not often mentioned in the same breath. Both are pre-eminent in their respective domains, but those domains rarely overlap. Nevertheless, among their works are two compositions that invite comparison, if more for their differences than for their similarities: Monteverdi's 'Zefiro torna, e di soavi accenti' and Frescobaldi's *Cento partite sopra passacagli*. Each work is among its composer's most popular and frequently performed compositions, but it has not been generally recognised that each exemplified its composer's artistic recreation of the still rather unfocused chaconne and passacaglia genres according to conceptions that are distinct and even contrary.[1] Paradoxically, those opposing conceptions laid the foundation for a long and rich tradition of chaconne and passacaglia composition.

The basic conceptual difference is easily explained, in fact, readily apparent to anyone familiar with the two works. Monteverdi's 'Zefiro torna' perfectly illustrates today's common notion of a chaconne or a passacaglia; the constancy of its repeated ground bass provides a foil for the most far-flung variations. But that conception is totally undermined in Frescobaldi's *Cento partite*. Not only is the bass pattern never repeated, but everything else is in continual flux: harmonic progression, metre, tempo, key, even genre itself, as the piece metamorphoses back and forth from passacaglia to chaconne and indeed at one point into a corrente! Clearly this work represents an entirely different notion of the chaconne and the passacaglia.

None of Frescobaldi's chaconnes or passacaglias has a fixed ostinato bass, and examples by later composers readily come to mind that also lack this feature, among them the famous chaconnes for unaccompanied violin by Bach and Bartók. It is sometimes suggested that the absence or presence of a fixed ostinato has to do with the distinction between the chaconne and the passacaglia, but a survey of examples from many different repertories has generally failed to uncover any such correspondence.[2] Another seemingly reasonable hypothesis, that pieces for pedal organ or scored with continuo are more likely to have ground basses than

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[1] During the early 1600s terminology for the two genres was quite varied, but unless quoting titles, I shall use 'chaconne' and 'passacaglia'. Following French practice I shall refer to the individual segments, called *parte* or *partite* by the Italians, as 'couplet' rather than as 'strophe' or 'variation', both of which are potentially misleading. When the bass remains the same from couplet to couplet (i.e. a true ostinato) I shall call it 'fixed', otherwise 'variable'.

[2] For a discussion of the difference between the two genres, see my article 'Passacaglia and ciaccona: genre pairing and ambiguity from Frescobaldi to Couperin', *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music*, 2 (1996) <http://www.sscm-jscm.org/jscm/v2/no1/Silbiger.html>; with reference specifically to Bach's chaconnes and passacaglias, see my 'Bach and the chaconne', *Journal of Musicology*, 17 (1999), 358–85.

pieces for solo harpsichord or unaccompanied violin because of the difficulty of executing the grounds along with the variations on the latter instruments, is also not generally borne out. We shall shortly see that on the one hand, the earliest chaconne arias did not have continuo parts with invariant ground basses, and neither did ensemble works as late as Corelli's *Ciaccona*, op. 2 no. 12 (1685); on the other hand, examples of strict ground-bass compositions for solo keyboard are plentiful (e.g., in the English repertory) and even to be found in the unaccompanied violin repertory (e.g., the *Passacaglia* that concludes Heinrich Biber's *Mystery Sonatas*).

THE CHACONNE BEFORE *c.* 1630

The ciaccona appears to have started as a carnivalesque dance song among the underclass of the New World.[3] With a long string of verses and to the accompaniment of guitars, tambourines and castanets, it mocked the high and the mighty along with the low and the humble – somewhat like a late-renaissance calypso. Its popularity spread rapidly, first to Spain, and then to other parts of Europe, flourishing in the oral culture of street musicians and actors; efforts to ban it for its blasphemous texts and suggestive movements were of little avail. Despite its later ennoblement, its exotic origins and associations with mockery and licentiousness, with the topsy-turvy world of carnival and commedia dell'arte, were never quite forgotten.

Although the earliest references to the chaconne provide at most the text of some verses, the first musical notations suggest that the chaconne (or at least its customary refrain, which invited all to join in and celebrate the good life) had been sung to a standard melody or family of melodies. Almost all early examples commence with a I–V–VI progression in triple time, followed by a move back to V or a more elaborate cadential formula; it is not clear whether that pattern represented the actual melody of the refrain (e.g., c′–g–a–g) or a bass against which descants were improvised.

The earliest chaconnes to appear in print are found in collections of strumming formulas for the Spanish guitar, the first of which appeared in Florence in 1606.[4] These formulas are notated in chord tablature and thus provide harmonies but no real melodies or bass lines; the rhythms of some of the earlier notations are none too clear either. The collections generally included sets of such formulas in several major keys and rhythmic strumming patterns, each consisting of just a single couplet. These sets clearly were intended not as repertory

[3] On the early history of the chaconne and passacaglia, see T. Walker, 'Ciaccona and passacaglia: remarks on their origin and early history', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 21 (1968), 300–20 and the numerous writings on the subject by R. Hudson, in particular, his *Passacaglio and Ciaccona: From Guitar Music to Italian Keyboard Variations in the 17th Century* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1981); additional bibliography in A. Silbiger, articles 'Chaconne' and 'Passacaglia' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn, ed. Stanley Sadie, 29 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2001).

[4] G. Montesardo, *Nuova inventione d'intavolatura* (Florence, 1606). For a detailed discussion of the chaconne and passacaglia in early guitar tablatures, see Hudson, *Passacaglio and Ciaccona*, pp. 15–94, in particular p. 18.

Example 1.1   Anon. (L. Allegri?), *Ciaccona*, Nuremberg, Bibliothek des Germanischen National-Museums, Ms. 33.784/271 [3], fol. 13v (*c.* 1608–10), bars 1–4

collections but as exercises for the would-be (most likely amateur) improviser. Eventually the guitar tablatures began to include pieces that continued for several couplets and that specify plucking in addition to (and eventually, instead of) strumming, thus creating a repertory of chaconnes suitable for performance.

The passacaglia had at first followed a similar course, also with origins in Spanish popular culture. The term 'passacagli' (singular: *passacaglio*) originally referred to brief ritornellos improvised between the strophes of arias. The early chord-tablatures containing the chaconne formulas also included sets of passacagli, short formulaic progressions that presumably served as models for such ritornello improvisations and perhaps also as exercises for strumming common chord sequences.[5] They are usually based on a I–IV–V–I progression, provided in a wide variety of major and minor keys, metres and strumming patterns. None shows a bass pattern with a descending tetrachord, which, in fact, could not have been notated in chord tablature. As with the chaconne, the earlier examples generally offered merely a single couplet terminating with a cadence, but later ones were progressively extended by linking additional couplets.

If lutenists and harpsichordists followed their guitar-strumming colleagues in adopting these novel Spanish genres, they must have done so almost entirely within an improvisatory practice, as very few lute and no keyboard chaconnes have been preserved from before the late 1620s, and passacaglias are altogether absent. Among the numerous dances and variations in early seventeenth-century lute manuscripts, chaconnes are rare, but the few that survive do provide more information than the guitar formulas, since the actual pitches are notated, and since as many as half a dozen couplets may be included. The earliest are three examples in a Florentine theorbo tablature from 1608–10, mostly in the hand of Lorenzo Allegri;[6] all three are rather short but do show some chaconne gestures. One, in fact, begins with a bass that bears some resemblance to the *Zefiro* ostinato formula; a transcription of the first two couplets is given in Example 1.1. The first lute chaconne to appear in print, Nicolas

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[5] Examples are given in R. Hudson, *Passacaglio and Ciaccona*, pp. 20–67 and his *The Folia, the Saraband, the Passacaglia, and the Chaconne*, Musicological Studies and Documents, 35 (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: American Institute of Musicology, Hänssler-Verlag, 1982), vol. III, *The Passacaglia*, pp. 18–30. The latter, along with its companion volume *The Chaconne* (vol. IV), are two anthologies to which this study is much indebted (hereafter Hudson, *Passacaglia* and Hudson, *Chaconne*).

[6] Nuremberg, Bibliothek des Germanischen National-Museums, Ms. 33.784/271 [3], Nos. 6, 9, and 27; see V. Coelho, *The Manuscript Sources of Seventeenth-Century Italian Lute Music* (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 113–15 and 436.

Vallet's *La Chaconna* (1615), although somewhat longer than the manuscript examples, gives the impression of being little more than a hastily notated, rather routine improvisation.[7] More artistic planning is evident in the only other published chaconne from this period, Alessandro Piccinini's *Chiaccona in partite variate* for chitarrone (1623),[8] although compared even to the earliest of Frescobaldi's chaconnes, it is still a rather unsophisticated, impromptu composition that never departs from diatonic G major.[9]

Beginning around 1615 a light trickle of chaconnes, that is, pieces with 'ciaccona' or some variant in their title, begins to make its way into aria collections.[10] They differ from later chaconne settings like Monteverdi's 'Zefiro torna' in being brief strophic settings rather than through-composed, with each strophe sung to the same handful of couplets; thus in performance they will lack the seamless continuity and momentum of later chaconnes.[11] Furthermore, none features a fixed ostinato bass, although within these chaconnes the bass patterns may vary considerably or very little. In some arias, the chaconne serves as instrumental ritornello (like a passacaglia).[12]

The early vocal settings seem to both look back to the original chaconne dance songs and forward to later chaconne traditions. Despite occasional mock-serious moments in their texts, all are basically light-hearted songs in triple time. The bass of the initial couplet usually opens with the characteristic I–V–VI progression, and then proceeds to a cadential formula that links directly to the next couplet.[13] The basses of the succeeding couplets, even when not identical, are tied together by family resemblances, both within each piece and among the pieces, and these form the beginnings of a repertory of generic chaconne and passacaglia basses that later examples would continue to rely upon. And of course, the strong linking of successive couplets became one of the most telling features of the chaconne, no doubt contributing much to its long-lasting popularity.

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[7] Hudson, *Chaconne*, pp. 93–4.   [8] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[9] Hudson also presents two chaconnes from the British Library, London, MS Add. 16889 (*Chaconne*, pp. 99–100) which he dates *c.* 1620; however, they appear in a portion of the manuscript that has been dated to the second half of the seventeenth century, which accords with their stylistic character.

[10] The genre seems to have been enough of an attractive novelty that it was usually mentioned with the aria, sometimes even appearing in the title of the publication, for example: Francesco Manelli, *Ciaccone et arie* (Rome, 1629); Monteverdi, *Scherzi musicali . . . con una ciaccona* (Venice, 1632). Incidentally, at first there seems to have been some reluctance to call a published piece, whether vocal or instrumental, simply 'ciaccona' (or 'passacaglia'); often one encounters phrases like 'sopra l'aria di ciaccona' or just 'sopra ciaccona' which probably should be read as 'in the manner of a chaconne'. Similarly, 'Partite sopra ciaccona', should probably be interpreted as 'Couplets (or variations) in the manner of a chaconne', rather than as 'variations on the chaconne'.

[11] For examples, see Hudson, *Chaconne*, p. 12 and Plates iv–v, and S. Leopold, *Al modo d'Orfeo: Dichtung und Musik im italienischen Sologesang des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts*, Analecta musicologica 29 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1995), p. 87.

[12] See, for example, Hudson, *Chaconne*, Plates iv–v.

[13] G. Stefani's 'Bella mia, questo mio core' (Venice, 1618) begins with I–IV–V and is exceptional in other ways, with a rather weak sense of couplet structure (Leopold, *Al modo d'Orfeo*, p. 87); D. Crivellati's 'Luci belle, luci ingrate' (Rome, 1628) begins with I followed by IV–I–II, which could be heard as a reference to the I–V–VI pattern in the subdominant (Hudson, *Chaconne*, Plate v).

Example 1.2   C. Monteverdi, *Zefiro* bass

MONTEVERDI AND HIS FOLLOWERS

The years 1627 to 1632 form a watershed for the chaconne, with the publication of Frescobaldi's *Partite sopra ciaccona* (*Secondo libro di toccate*, 1627) for harpsichord, his *Ceccona* 'Deh, vien da me pastorella' (*Arie musicali*, 1630) for two tenors, and Monteverdi's 'Zefiro torna' (*Scherzi musicali*, 1632), also for two tenors, although only one other chaconne was published during those five years: Francesco Manelli's 'Acceso mio core' (*Ciaccone et arie*, 1629).[14] Most readers will be familiar with Monteverdi's popular setting. The first eleven lines of Rinuccini's sonnet, which describes in poetic detail the lovely pastoral setting, is set to fifty-six unvaried repetitions of the *Zefiro* bass (Example 1.2), over which the two tenors spin endless variations, often with disregard of the rhythm and phrasing of the ground (which has an ambiguous enough rhythm to begin with). When the final terzet is reached, 'Sol io, per selve abbandonate' ('I alone, among deserted forests'), the chaconne suddenly is halted, as the tenors intone those lines in a declamatory style. Twice it resumes, each time to give way again after only a few couplets.

'Zefiro torna' was not the first published chaconne based on the unvaried repetition of a bass pattern; Manelli's 'Acceso mio core' is constructed on fourteen exact repetitions of the pitches C–G–A–G, the ultimate reduction of the chaconne bass, set out in equal note values. This slow-moving pattern provides, nevertheless, a suitable foundation for the lively interplay of the three voices, as they engage in points of canonic imitation and brief dialogues.

The device of recitative interruptions had been anticipated in Frescobaldi's 'Deh, vien da me pastorella', published two years earlier. However, Frescobaldi's recitatives do not appear as surprise cadenzas near the end but enter during the course of the work as integral parts of the structure, effectively dividing the work into three parts, and thus creating a kind of recitative–aria sequence that at the time was quite novel.[15] And Frescobaldi's chaconne differs in another important way: its bass is ruled not by constancy but by change – in melodic pattern, in key and in metre.

After 'Zefiro torna' Monteverdi never wrote another full-length chaconne composition (unless he was indeed the author of 'Voglio di vita uscir', ascribed to him by some scholars, but contested by others).[16] In several works, however, he does introduce a few couplets of the

[14] Hudson, *Chaconne*, p. 16.

[15] For more on the context of the *Arie musicale*, see J. W. Hill, 'Frescobaldi's *Arie* and the musical circle around Cardinal Montalto', in *Frescobaldi Studies*, ed. A. Silbiger (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 157–94.

[16] 'Voglio di vita uscir' is transmitted in an undated Neapolitan manuscript; see M. Ossi, '*L'armonia raddoppiata*: on Claudio Monteverdi's "Zefiro torna", Heinrich Schütz's *Es steh Gott auf*, and Other Early Seventeenth-Century *Ciaccone*', *Studi musicali*, 17 (1988), 240–1. It uses a variable bass pattern with key changes, although the *Zefiro* bass is prominent in the first part and the descending tetrachord in the second part (after a metre change).

Zefiro bass, in some cases merely quoting it as a passing allusion. Massimo Ossi noted that Monteverdi uses the chaconne only 'to express joyful texts'; that joy often is accompanied by laughter – in at least one instance the laughter of mockery.[17] In the psalm setting 'Laudate Dominum in Sanctis ejus' (*Selva morale*, 1640–1) it accompanies the phrase 'Laudate eum in cimbalis jubilationibus' ('Praise him upon the high sounding cymbals') and in the sacred canzonetta from the same collection 'Chi vol che m'innamori', it underlines 'Hoggi si ride' ('today one laughs'), immediately followed by the contrasting 'e poi dimani si piange' ('and then, tomorrow, one weeps') in the vein of the interruptions at the end of 'Zefiro torna'. The formula appears as a two-couplet bass ritornello (hence serving as a 'passacaglio') in the aria 'Quel sguardo sdegnosetto' (*Scherzi musicali*, 1632), following 'Sanimi col riso' ('heal me with laughter'),[18] and in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, the continuo tosses off two couplets under Valletto's prolonged final syllable of 'canzoni', here meaning, made-up stories. Thus it seems that for Monteverdi the chaconne, represented by the reiterated *Zefiro* bass, is first of all an emblem of joy and laughter.[19]

The five years immediately following (1632–7) saw the publication of a rash of vocal chaconnes, nearly twice as many as during the entire preceding history of the genre, almost all of which appear to imitate Monteverdi's example – some quite flagrantly so, e.g., Giovanni Sances, *Cantada a doi voce in ciaccona* 'Lagrimosa beltà' (1633)[20] and Annibale Gregori, *Ciaccona à due soprani* 'Mai non disciolgasi dal mio cor misero' (1635).[21] All are lengthy, through-composed settings, averaging around fifty couplets, with the infectious *Zefiro* formula serving as a fixed ostinato,[22] and usually with the interjection of recitatives near or at the end. Merula's 'Su la cetra amorosa' (1633), with its 152 couplets, rather upstages Monteverdi's chaconne, which counts a mere 61; unlike the other settings, it does, however, shift keys a few times.[23] In 1637 Merula also published what seems to be the first printed ciaccona for instrumental ensemble; aside from the lack of text, it too follows the *Zefiro* model, including the surprise interruption at the end.[24] By 1641 the chaconne craze had invaded both secular and sacred music to the point that it caused Salvator Rosa to lament that one heard the ciaccona everywhere, even during the singing of the *Miserere*![25]

Was Monteverdi's 'Zefiro torna' really responsible for the sudden chaconne vogue after 1632? After all, dates of publication do not necessarily correspond to dates of composition,

[17] *Ibid.*, 251.
[18] It serves as the second ritornello, the first one being merely a descending tetrachord vamp.
[19] I use 'emblem' here in the same sense that Ellen Rosand called the descending chromatic tetrachord the 'emblem of grief'; see her 'The descending tetrachord: an emblem of lament', *Musical Quarterly*, 65 (1979), 346–59.
[20] G. Tomlinson (ed.), *Italian Secular Song, 1606–1636* (New York: Garland, 1986), vol. VII (Venice II), p. 109.
[21] *Ibid.*, vol. II (Pisa and Siena), p. 168.
[22] A few introduce slight melodic variants (CCCGGFFGC or CCCGAAFGC), preserving however the rhythm of the *Zefiro* formula.
[23] Leopold, *Al modo d'Orfeo*, p. 89.
[24] Tarqinio Merula, *Sonata 20: Ciaccona,* in *Canzoni overo sonate concertate, Libro terzo,* Op. 12 (Venice: Vincenti), 1637.
[25] In the satire *La Musica* (1641); see Ossi, '*L'armonia raddoppiata*', 251.

and Monteverdi's chaconne, or, for that matter, any of the alleged imitations, might well have been written several years earlier. Furthermore, as we noted before, most of the novel features of 'Zefiro torna' were not really without precedent.

As to its date of composition, some scholars have indeed conjectured that it preceded its publication by many years, albeit for reasons that seem not very persuasive.[26] However, even if it had already circulated in manuscript for some time, it had no discernible impact on the sparse chaconne production until after its publication, when within a few years it appears to have spawned a host of near-simulacra, or, in any case, works fundamentally different from the modest little *arie di ciaccone* of the previous decades.

Regarding its novel features, the *Zefiro* pattern itself had been used by Piccinini in 1623 for the first couplet of his chitarrone chaconne; it probably had not been invented by either Piccinini or Monteverdi but was one of several generic formulas circulating among chaconne players. Nevertheless, it seems that no one before Monteverdi had quite realised the potential of this rhythmically ambiguous ostinato formula, and the publication of 'Zefiro torna' does seem to mark the beginning of its pervasive popularity.

The idea of an ostinato aria was certainly no novelty in 1632, and while most earlier examples, such as the numerous Romanesca and Ruggiero settings, lack the strong linking between successive couplets, we saw that at least one composer, Francesco Manelli, anticipated Monteverdi's fixed-ostinato chaconne.[27] However, 'Acceso mio core', with its slow, skeletal bass, lacks both the catchy rhythmic twists generated by the *Zefiro* formula and the dramatic excitement of the recitative interruptions; altogether Manelli's chaconne has little in common either with Monteverdi's or with those that followed.

More tantalising is the relationship, if any, between the chaconnes of Frescobaldi and Monteverdi. Both are tenor duets and both introduce the novelty of recitative interruptions, yet in every other way the pieces are entirely different. Did one of the two musicians know the other's chaconne and respond with his own as a deliberate 'misreading'? Since both works may have been written long before their publication, I hesitate to award Frescobaldi any points for publishing his two years earlier, and will leave the question of influence – one direction or the other or neither – unanswered. While I find it hard to imagine that either composer would not follow the other's compositional efforts with keen curiosity, such may indeed have been the case. In any event, the works differ so significantly in the manner of the recitative interruptions and in other basic features, and it seems so clear that 'Zefiro torna' was the piece everyone rushed to imitate, that I feel justified in postulating – within the window of uncertainty surrounding any historiographic conclusion – that with this work Monteverdi established a new conception of the chaconne genre that was to be widely adopted.[28]

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[26] See, for example, G. Tomlinson, *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 197.

[27] T. Walker, 'Ciaccona and passacaglia', 317, n. 59.

[28] In in my article 'Bach and the chaconne' I called such a genre transformation, effected by a notable compositional departure, a mutation. The situation is complicated here by the near simultaneous appearance of two contrasting strains.

Before returning to Frescobaldi's engagement with the chaconne I must pick up the trail of the emerging passacaglia, because the two seem to have been closely linked in his mind. Except for the strumming formulas in the guitar tablatures the passacaglia was very slow to enter the published repertory, making no other appearance in print before the *Partite sopra passacagli* in Frescobaldi's *Secondo libro di toccate*. Even following its publication, passacaglias remained rare for some time; in the next few years only three new ones seem to have appeared, all for soprano solo: Frescobaldi's *Aria di passagaglia* 'Così mi disprezzate?' (*Arie musicali*, 1630), G. Sances's *Cantada sopra Passacaglia* 'Usurpator tiranno della tua libertà' (*Cantade*, 1633),[29] and M. Pesenti's *Cantata sopra il Passacaglio* 'O Dio, che veggio' (*Arie*, 1633).[30] Then in 1637 Frescobaldi published a new edition of his *Primo libro di toccate* with a supplement in which he propelled the passacaglia to centre stage; more about this shortly when I return to my discussion of Frescobaldi's engagement with both the chaconne and the passacaglia.

Both Sances and Pesenti adopted the 'Zefiro torna' model of variations over numerous repetitions of a ground bass, with the substitution of an unadorned descending tetrachord in even beats for Monteverdi's chaconne formula. Sances's 'Usurpator tiranno' has the usual recitative interruption toward the end, but in Pesenti's 'O Dio, che veggio', sections of couplets on a strict ostinato alternate with sections in a variety of genres, including not only recitatives but also instrumental ritornellos and vocal strophes in duple-time balletto style.

Among Monteverdi's own works there is no composition called passacaglia, although there are references to 'passacagli' in the manuscript copies of *Poppea*, presumably signifying that at those points improvised ritornellos are to be inserted. Monteverdi's 'Lamento della ninfa' (*Madrigali, Libro* VIII, 1638) is sometimes called a passacaglia because of the descending tetrachord, identical to that of Sances's 1633 'Usurpator tiranno'. However, Monteverdi does not make any reference to the passacaglia either here or with any other ostinato setting, so perhaps he preferred to reserve the term for its original use as improvised ritornello.

FRESCOBALDI'S CHACONNES AND PASSACAGLIAS

Frescobaldi's first two essays in the chaconne and the passacaglia appeared on the last pages of his *Secondo libro di toccate*, following a collection of sacred and secular pieces of many different types. His addition of these two genres, still closely associated with street and popular theatre culture, to this sophisticated anthology was in many ways without precedent. It was the first time that keyboard settings of either genre appeared in print, although harpsichordists might well have been playing chaconnes and passacaglias for some time. Perhaps of greater historical import: it appears to be the earliest known instance in which the two genres are brought in

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[29] Hudson, *Passacaglia*, p. 35.   [30] Leopold, *Al modo d'Orfeo*, p. 123.

Example 1.3
(a) Frescobaldi, *Partite sopra ciaccona, Secondo libro di toccate* (1627), p. 87, bars 1–4
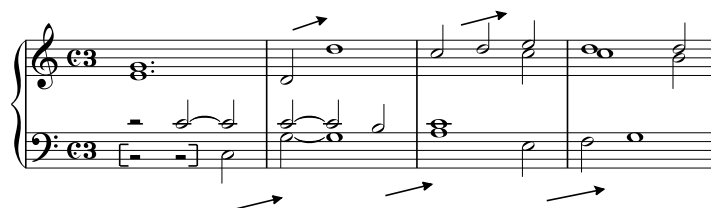
(b) Frescobaldi, *Partite sopra passacagli, Secondo libro di toccate* (1627), p. 88, bars 1–2

association with each other, or, to use the terminology I introduced elsewhere, the first time they are presented as a genre pair.[31]

Taken by itself, the *Partite sopra ciaccona* surpasses in length and in display of artistic fantasy all published chaconnes that had come before. But the *Partite sopra passacagli* represents perhaps the more momentous contribution. It differs in essential respects from the earlier cadential progressions called *passacaglio* or *passacagli* contained in the guitar tablatures and represents the first printed appearance of a passacaglia as a fully notated compositional genre. Whether Frescobaldi should in fact be regarded as the creator of the genre in this new guise is harder to determine, since some modest little examples found in lute and keyboard manuscripts might conceivably predate it. I shall further on discuss a few passacaglias in a recently discovered keyboard collection which deserve further consideration in this regard.

Frescobaldi's two *partite* have much in common, notably the seamless linking of successive couplets that sets them apart from his other variation sets; but, as is characteristic of genre pairs, they also show differentiating, even opposing traits, which establish their separate identities. Note, for example, in the first couplets that in addition to the major/minor contrast, the bass of the chaconne moves predominantly by *ascending* intervals, whereas the bass of the passacaglia moves predominantly by *descending* intervals (Example 1.3). That same contrast is seen in the upper voices of the first couplets; the up-beat character of the ciaccona receives further emphasis by the presence of several large skips. These contrasting characters are not necessarily maintained over all subsequent couplets, which traverse many moods. One other feature of the *Partite sopra passacagli* will prove to be significant: in addition to the continual varying of the bass pattern, there is, approximately two-thirds of the way through, a shift of the metre from 3/2 to 6/4.

[31] See Silbiger, 'Passacaglia and ciaccona', 5.

Example 1.4
(a) Frescobaldi, *Aria di passagaglia, Arie musicali* (1630), vol. 1, p. 32, bars 1–3

(b) Frescobaldi, *Cento partite sopra passacagli, Toccate, Libro primo* (1637), p. 74, bars 1–2

(c) Frescobaldi, *Passacagli* [primo], *Toccate, Libro primo* (1637), p. 70, bars 1–2

(d) Frescobaldi, *Passacagli* [secondo], *Toccate, Libro primo* (1637), p. 72, bars 1–2

Although Frescobaldi had written several ostinato arias,[32] in his vocal chaconne and passacaglia pair of the *Arie musicali* (1630), he showed again that a repeated unvaried bass formula did not fit with his ideas for these genres. In this pair, however, he carries the variation idea a step further, and takes the couplets of each through different keys, in addition to shifting the metre half-way through the chaconne. The bass patterns of the ciaccona are quite similar to those of the 1627 set, but those of the passacaglia have been extended from three to four bars. On the other hand, both *arie* introduce for the first time melodic and rhythmic figures and other details characteristic of Frescobaldi's later chaconnes and passacaglias, such as the passacaglia's opening turn figure shown in Example 1.4.

In 1637 Frescobaldi brought out new editions of the two books of toccatas; to the *Primo libro* (which had already gone through several editions, from 1615 to 1628) he added

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[32] For example, the *Aria di Romanesca* and the *Aria di Ruggieri* in the *Arie musicali*.

a 26-page supplement, and from the *Secondo libro* (first published in 1627) he removed the last four pages. The discarded pages had contained the chaconne and the passacaglia; their loss was amply compensated by the supplement to the First Book (the *Aggiunta*) in which chaconnes and passacaglias form a major presence. The reason for the removal of the earlier chaconne and passacaglia probably was not so much because they no longer met the composer's artistic standards as that they no longer agreed with his conception of the two genres, and genre definition always seems to have been an important issue for him.[33]

The centrepiece of the *Aggiunta* is the *Cento partite sopra passacagli*, a work of nearly monstrous proportions. In this curious composition nothing is what it seems to be or ought to be; every expectation is thwarted. To begin with, some partite are not 'sopra passacagli' but are marked *ciaccona* or, in one instance, *corrente*. Secondly, when counting the couplets, it is difficult to come up with exactly one hundred 'partite', although several scholars have made valiant attempts. Part of the problem lies in deciding what to count as a couplet; but did Frescobaldi really expect anyone to count all the partite?

The piece is in constant flux. It moves not only through different genres but also through different keys, modes, metres, and tempos; some of these metamorphoses are achieved gradually and smoothly, others abruptly.[34] The work ends in a key different from that in which it began; but, after hearing a 'hundred' couplets of tonal wandering, who will remember?

Shifts of various kinds, while contrary to later notions of these 'ostinato' genres, were part of Frescobaldi's conception from the beginning, and probably derived their inspiration from the passacaglia's origin as an improvised ritornello. The experienced ritornello-improvisers' art surely extended well beyond the simple chord-formula models of the tablature books. In addition to introducing the next song stanza or other musical number in the appropriate key, they may, say, in theatrical settings, have been called upon to extend the interludes with additional variations to accommodate the stage action or to change key, tempo or mood in preparation for what was to follow. Thus, passacaglia players had to acquire the skills to meet all such needs. The chaconne might have provided them an opportunity to improvise ritornellos in more upbeat tempos and moods.

The *Cento partite* is preceded in the *Aggiunta* by two much shorter passacaglias and followed by two short chaconnes; these sets are also connected with other genres – ballettos and correntes – but externally rather than internally, grouped together in little suites.[35] Altogether the *Aggiunta* contains forty-one chaconne couplets and seventy-eight passacaglia couplets, covering a wide range of keys and other characteristics. Nevertheless, within the pieces of each genre certain features remain constant, and these evidently constituted what

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[33] There are other possible explanations for the elimination of the two pieces; the issue will be considered in more detail in an article in preparation: 'The sights and sounds of Frescobaldi's two *Libri di toccate*'.

[34] See Silbiger, 'Passacaglia and ciaccona', 7.

[35] The *Balletto e ciaccona* (pp. 91–2) may also be connected with the preceding *Capriccio sopra Battaglia* in the same key (pp. 89–90); battle pieces often end with celebratory dances and there are other examples of chaconnes or passacaglias serving this function.

Frescobaldi now regarded as their defining markings. Interestingly, for both genres these markings differ from those of the 1627 sets.

The couplets of the 1627 passacaglia have a metrical pattern of three dotted semibreves, which only after the metre shift in the final section gives way to a pattern of four dotted minims. Whether this unusual pattern of three groups of three beats was an experiment or merely reflected the still somewhat undefined state of the genre, Frescobaldi never returned to it; nor, as far as we can tell, did anyone else employ it. Beginning with the 1630 *Arie musicali* he adopts four groups of three beats as the basic structure, with the core bass pattern of a descending minor tetrachord.

In the *Arie musicali* those beats are expressed as minims, but at the beginning of all three 1637 passacaglias they have been reduced to semiminims. Presumably Frescobaldi now regards that notation as the norm for passacaglias; he may have made the switch because the older form of notation led people to perform his passacaglias too slowly. (This assumption is supported by a manuscript version of the beginning of the *Cento partite*, which is notated with double note values, that is, with minim beats, and which Etienne Darbellay believes to represent an earlier version stemming from the composer.[36]) When for internal segments the beats are notated in values larger or smaller than minims, I believe this to be for one of two reasons: either because the segment follows another one (or precedes one) after a shift in tempo effected through metric modulation (as when moving from 3/2 to 6/8), or because the section had been written or engraved at an earlier time, before Frescobaldi decided to switch to smaller note values, and he did not want to recopy the entire segment (as he had done for the beginning of the *Cento partite*). If I am right, it means that the semiminim notation of the beginning of the *Cento partite* does not necessarily imply a faster than average tempo or that the minim or semibreve beats of an internal couplet should necessarily be taken slowly. Different note values only provide a *relative* indication of tempo, and only between segments that connect to each other in a continuous manner.[37]

For the chaconnes the most striking change also was in their metrical pattern. In both the 1627 and the 1630 chaconnes that pattern consisted of four groups of three beats, hence equivalent to that of the later passacaglias, but by 1637 the pattern had been tightened to two groups of three beats. As can be seen from a comparison of the beginning of the 1627 chaconne and the first chaconne couplet of the *Cento partite*, the secondary accent has shifted from the fourth to the fifth beat (Example 1.5). Incidentally, the notation of that couplet in terms of semibreve beats is exceptional, since minim beats now are the norm for his chaconnes. As with the passacaglia, the larger note values can be explained by the

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[36] See E. Darbellay, 'Le *Cento partite* di Frescobaldi: metro, tempo e processo di composizione 1627–37', in *Girolamo Frescobaldi nel IV centenario della nascita*, ed. S. Durante and D. Fabris (Florence: Olschki, 1986), pp. 359–73.

[37] I do not believe that time signatures, which Frescobaldi and his contemporaries inserted with great inconsistency, often provide by themselves much useful information on tempo, despite several theories proposed in this regard; but that is a topic to be pursued elsewhere.
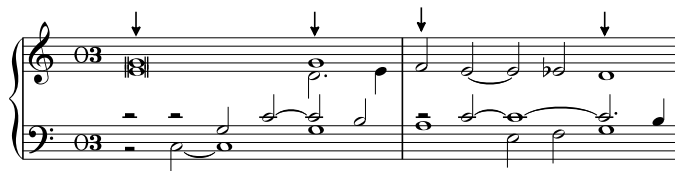
Example 1.5
(a) Frescobaldi, *Partite sopra ciaccona, Il secondo libro di toccate* (1627), p. 87, bars 1–4
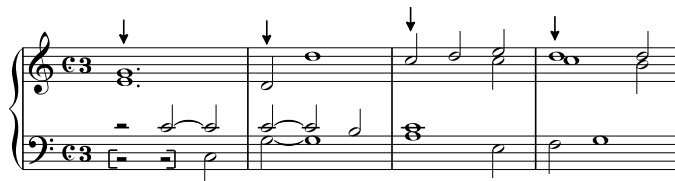
(b) Frescobaldi, first Ciaccona segment in the *Cento partite sopra passacagli, Toccate, Libro primo* (1637),
p. 74, bars 132–3 (transposed up a fifth)

notational requirements of a subsequent segment that follows after metrical modulation to a faster pulse; again, no intrinsic slow tempo is implied for the semibreve beats.

By changing to two-bar groupings Frescobaldi brought the metric pattern of his chaconnes in line with most of those in the publications by Monteverdi and his followers. Whether that was why he changed or whether he did so in order to maintain a distinct rhythmic difference with the other member of the pair in its new metrical guise is hard to say, but clearly both the 1627 ciaccona and its companion passacaglia in fundamental ways failed to meet his new conceptions of the genres, and presumably that is why they were dropped from the later edition.

CHACONNES AND PASSACAGLIAS IN KEYBOARD MANUSCRIPTS

The well-known collection of keyboard manuscripts in the Fondo Chigi of the Vatican library, apparently stemming from Frescobaldi's circle,[38] contains a large number of passacaglias (usually called 'passagalli') as well as a much smaller number of chaconnes. Although all appear anonymously (as does most of the content of these manuscripts), a few are in part or in their entirety identical to those in Frescobaldi's *Aggiunta*; some among those are believed to be earlier versions of the published pieces.[39] The chaconnes and passacaglias that have not

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[38] C. Annibaldi, 'Musical autographs of Frescobaldi and his entourage in Roman sources', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 43 (1990), 393–425. The only modern edition of the pieces in this collection – H. B. Lincoln (ed.), *Seventeenth-Century Keyboard Music in the Chigi Manuscripts of the Vatican Library*, Corpus of Early Keyboard Music 32, 3 vols. (American Institute of Musicology, 1968) – is quite incomplete, lacking, in particular, many of the chaconnes and passacaglias.

[39] E. Darbellay, 'I manoscritti Chigi Q.IV.24 e Q.VIII.205/206 come fonti frescobaldiane: criteri filologici di autenticità', in *Girolamo Frescobaldi nel IV centenario della nascita*, ed. S. Durante and D. Fabris (Florence: Olschki, 1986), pp. 107–24 and *Le toccate e i capricci di Girolamo Frescobaldi: genesi delle edizioni e apparato critico, Girolamo Frescobaldi, Opere complete*, suppl. to vols. II–IV (Milan: Suvini Zerboni, 1988), pp. 56–60.

Example 1.6   Anon., *Passagagli*, Lecce (Italy), private collection, Ms. Prontera, fol. 72v, bars 1–6

been connected directly with Frescobaldi nevertheless tend to conform to the conception of the two genres of the *Aggiunta*, and many of the anonymous pieces seem to be modelled on works of his. None is based on a fixed ostinato[40] and most chaconnes follow the 1637 metrical organisation of two groups of three beats. The passacaglias without exception follow the four groups of three beats scheme. Several passacaglias appear in sets, usually of six, in different major and minor keys; one much larger set also includes untitled pieces with descending basses in duple time.[41]

Another set of six anonymous 'passagalli' in different keys has turned up recently in a newly discovered keyboard manuscript in private hands in Lecce (Italy): Ms Prontera 1.[42] Although somewhat similar to the sets in the Chigi manuscripts they may date from an earlier stage of the passacaglia's history, perhaps predating even the *Partite sopra passacagli* in Frescobaldi's *Libro secondo*. The manuscript is not dated but its repertory seems to stem from the first decades of the seventeenth century, including some pieces from Frescobaldi's *Primo libro* of 1615, but nothing from any later publications.[43] Most of the pieces are quite brief, providing only a few couplets; not surprisingly, they have no fixed ostinatos. The basses are mostly variations and elaborations of descending tetrachords; there are no instances of ascending bass patterns. One of the passacaglias is in duple time (see Example 1.6).

Pending further study of this manuscript, it has to remain uncertain whether these pieces were in fact written before the passacaglia in the *Secondo libro*, but they do show the features one might expect for passacaglias bridging the gap between those in the early guitar and lute tablatures and those of Frescobaldi. Even the passacaglia in duple time accords with this idea, since the guitar tablatures contain some *passacaglio* formulas in duple time, which is not surprising in view of the original function of the passacaglia. Despite the overwhelming

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[40] One in Q.IV.28 is nearly so, however; see Hudson, *Chaconne*, p. 42.
[41] Incomplete edition in Lincoln (ed.), *Seventeenth-Century Keyboard Music*, vol. II, pp. 44–70.
[42] I wish to thank Prof. Dinko Fabris for providing me with a copy of the manuscript, a study of which is in preparation.
[43] Other composers, identified by attributions or through concordances, include Giovanni Paolo Cima, [Scipione] Dentice, Ercole [Pasquini] and [Giovanni] Picchi.

popularity of arias in triple time during the early *seicento*, settings in duple time do exist, and thus there would be a call for improvising an occasional ritornello in that metre.[44]

<div align="center">LATER CHACONNES AND PASSACAGLIAS</div>

In later Italian keyboard collections passacaglias continue to be much more numerous than chaconnes and more varied in key and mode (the chaconnes are most commonly in C major), but pieces in either category usually followed Frescobaldi's models. The most impressive post-Frescobaldian examples without a doubt are those in Storace's *Selva di varie compositioni* (Venice, 1664), some of which, like the *Cento partite*, not only move through different keys and metres but, in addition, have couplets with markings of tempo (allegro, grave) and character (*modo pastorale*).

On the other hand, Frescobaldi seems to have had little immediate impact on composers of vocal chaconnes and passacaglias. In the works by Merula, Sances and others published during 1633–7 one senses a spirit of enthusiastic experimentation and rivalry about where to take the two newly popular genres after 'Zefiro torna', but no one appears to follow Frescobaldi's quite different path as set out in his *Arie musicali*.[45] After the first wave of 'Zefiro' imitations and emulations the practice becomes more diverse. In both vocal and instrumental ensemble settings there are more departures from fixed ostinatos and excursions to other keys. Perhaps this was not so much because of Frescobaldi's growing influence or the waning of Monteverdi's (who in 'Voglio di vita uscir' seems himself to have moved in that direction), but rather because many composers began to find a bass with unvaried repetitions too confining, even if others continued to regard it an attractive challenge. Also, as time passed, the characteristic distinctions between chaconne and passacaglia were increasingly forgotten or ignored, at least by some composers, although from time to time other composers remembered or rediscovered them.

As the two genres gained popularity outside Italy, similar developments took place. The French seem to have had little patience with the strict ostinato, whereas the Germans embraced it with great eagerness. This German enthusiasm was responsible for the modern equation of the two genres with the ostinato variation, their revival having been mostly a German affair. Nevertheless, Bach's violin chaconne, with its free bass and minor–major mode shifts, shows that traces of the Frescobaldian conception (transmitted by way of France) made their way there too.[46]

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[44] The fact that duple-time passacaglias are not uncommon in the Spanish repertory, for example among the works of Juan Cabanilles, would also support this theory, since in Spain it appears to have evolved independently of the Italian tradition, which largely confined the genre to triple metre.

[45] J. Hill sees the influence of Frescobaldi's *Aria di passacagli* in a number of pieces in Florentine aria manuscripts from the 1630s and credits the composer with 'the introduction in Florence of a new fashion for ostinato arias' ('Frescobaldi's *Arie*', p. 191), although the examples of chaconnes he cites do have fixed ostinato basses.

[46] See Silbiger, 'Chaconne', and 'Bach and the chaconne'.

CONCLUSION

What motivated these two composers, whom I am proposing as creators of two opposing conceptions of the chaconne and passacaglia genres? Monteverdi's choice of the chaconne for all but the final lines of Rinuccini's sonnet represents of course his response to the text; we noted his employment of its bass formula as an emblem of joy and laughter. But the use of the strict ostinato bass for the first part of the sonnet is apt for another reason. No tale is being narrated; the poet merely describes the idyllic state of the world 'out there', in contrast to his own state of torment. He describes a moment of this outer world, but a moment that is timeless, of undefined length. The repeated bass formula represents this perfectly, never changing, yet extending to infinity like parallel reflecting mirrors. Of course, the chaconne doesn't really go on forever, just as the Arcadian vision is abruptly shattered in the final terzet.

When in 1637 Frescobaldi published his *Cento partite* the *Zefiro*-inspired chaconne craze in Italy was reaching its zenith. Yet with this composition, the central work in his last collection of keyboard pieces, Frescobaldi ignored the Monteverdian model, presenting instead his alternative vision of the genre, which in essence remained faithful to his earlier definition of the chaconne and passacaglia. In practical terms his procedure allowed him to extend a diverting textless composition to arbitrary lengths, continually refreshing the listeners' spirits with new surprises and departures.[47] But one could also say that to Frescobaldi the chaconne or passacaglia represented not the infinite expansion of a moment in time but the dance of life itself, a narrative of the flow and unpredictability of human experience.[48] And, as in life, the out-of-key ending of the *Cento partite* reflects that we rarely end up where we started.

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[47] In fact, Etienne Darbellay, in his brilliant study of the compositional history of the *Aggiunta*, has concluded the work was forged in stages by the addition of segments from other unpublished chaconnes and passacaglias; see his 'I manoscritti Chigi Q.IV.24 e Q.VIII.205/206', and *Le toccate e i capricci*, pp. 56–60.

[48] I would not want to push this metaphor any further and turn the piece into a seventeenth-century *Heldenleben*, but players or listeners are free to create their own stories, from the youthful impetuosity of the corrente to the resignation of the final chromatic passacaglia couplets.