

On the Development of Sixteenth-Century Figurative Madrigals:

A Study of Baldassare Donato's *Il secondo libro de madrigali a quattro voci* (1568) and the Willaertian Madrigals

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"Diminution," an improvisational embellishment technique in the Renaissance period, gradually changed from being "improvised" to being "written-out," or "composed" in the transition of musical styles around the 1600s. This article aims to explore an early stage of the development of written-out diminutions in the sixteenth-century madrigal repertoire, focusing on the works of Baldassare Donato (1529–1603).

Donato, a Venetian singer, teacher, and composer, studied with Adrian Willaert and became *maestro di capella* of St. Marks Basilica in 1590. This article analyzes the first six pieces from his *Il secondo libro de madrigali a quattro voci* (1568), which are embellished by abundant written-out diminutions. Especially, *A qualunqu'animal alberga in terra*, set to a sestina by Francesco Petrarca, shows a close relationship between written-out diminutions and a usage of mensuration signs: as the number of written-out diminutions increases, Donato also changes the sign from *tempus imperfectum diminutum* (ϕ) to *tempo ordinario* (C). Donato also gives an *ordinario* sign to all his figurative madrigals, whereas he uses *diminutum* signs in non-figurative madrigals. This fact leads to further research on the style of written-out diminutions in each mensuration sign among the "Willaertians", pupils of Willaert, and composers who were influenced by him. Through the study of madrigals by Willaertians, such as those by Vincenzo Ruffo, Jan Nasco, Cipriano de Rore, Perissone Cambio, and Costanzo Porta, the same tendency as the one found in Donato will be highlighted: they clearly distinguished between figurative madrigals in *tempo ordinario* and non-figurative madrigals in *diminutum* sign. After the introduction of *note nere* madrigal notations in 1540s, the central note values for compositions shifted into smaller values. Thus, compositions have approached the values which were used in improvisational diminution. Willaertians differentiated the style of their madrigals in mensuration signs and developed the style of the figurative madrigal in *note nere* notation.