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Ut pictura musica: Carlo Farina's *Capriccio stravagante* and *Kunstkammer* Paintings

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Carlo Farina's *Capriccio stravagante* à 4 for violin consort, one of the most intriguing programmatic ensemble pieces of the seventeenth century, was long dismissed as of little interest. Sigmund Spaeth disparaged it as “a very bad piece of imitative music,” arguing that, considering the diversity of its programmatic subject matter – including cackling hens, barking dogs, and a collection of folk instruments – the title's reference to “extravagance” is “an understatement.”¹ Such disdain is perhaps due largely to the

1. Sigmund Spaeth, *Great Program Music – How to Enjoy and Remember It* (New York: Gajeuoiest, 2007) 8-9. For the score of this composition, see Carlo Farina, *Ander Theil newer Paduanen, Gagliarden, Couranten, französischen Arien*. (Dresden: Bergen 1627). Accessed March 10, 2012, <[http://imslp.org/wiki/Ander_Theil_newer_Paduanen,_Gagliarden,_Couranten,_französischen_Arien_\(Farina,_Carlo\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Ander_Theil_newer_Paduanen,_Gagliarden,_Couranten,_französischen_Arien_(Farina,_Carlo))> The publication, dated January 1, 1627, the second of two volumes, is titled in Italian and German and includes notes in both languages. See also: Carlo Farina, *Capriccio stravagante*, ed. by Hans Ludwig Hirsch (Adliswil, Switzerland: Edition Kunzelmann, 1980), and Carlo Farina, *Capriccio stravagante: Kurtzweilig Quotlibet aus 'Libro delle Pavane...'* Dresden 1626, ed. by Nikolaus Harnoncourt (New York: C. F. Peters, 1970). The instrument

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subject matter of the piece; instead of portraying the typical heroic subjects found in earlier programmatic music such as battle scenes or biblical episodes, it features barnyard animals and hurdy-gurdies.²

It is precisely the unusual subject matter, programmatic form, and instrumental techniques, however, which make *Capriccio stravagante* a fascinating experiment in form and an exercise in virtuosity and wit. Using both traditional and extended performance techniques to evoke different instruments and animal noises, it is less a narrative than an assemblage of aural curiosities for the amusement of the listener. In this way, it can best be likened to another popular artistic genre of the period: paintings depicting a *Kunstkammer*, or a “cabinet of curiosities” – a room displaying artwork and artifacts from a wide spectrum of styles, alongside objects from the natural world, including animals.

Born in Mantua in 1604, Farina was educated by his father Luigi, a violinist employed at the court of the Gonzaga family. Innovative composers such as Claudio Monteverdi and the violin virtuoso Salamone Rossi, both probably influential in shaping Farina’s virtuosic playing and

movements are: “Die Leyer,” “Das kleine Schalmeygen,” “Die Trommeten,” “Das Clarin,” “Die Heerpaucken,” “Die Flöten still. stille,” “Der Tremulant,” “Das Soldaten Pfeiffen,” “Die Paucken oder Soldaten Trommel,” “Die Spannische Cithar,” which can be translated as: “The Hurdy-Gurdy,” “The Little Shawm,” “The Trumpets,” “The Army Kettledrums,” “The Clarino Trumpet,” “The very quiet Recorders,” “The Organ Tremulant,” “The Soldier’s Pipe,” “The Kettledrums or Soldier’s Drums,” “The Spanish Guitar.” The animal movements are “Die Henne,” “Der Han,” “Die Katze,” and “Der Hund,” which translate as “The Hen,” “The Rooster,” “The Cat,” and “The Dog.”

2. Leslie Orrey, *Programme Music* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975), 29-36.

harmonically adventurous compositional style, dominated the musical environment of Mantua. In 1625, Farina was employed in Dresden as *Konzertmeister* of the court of Johann Georg I, Elector of Saxony. It was here that he encountered the influential composer Heinrich Schütz. While at the court, Farina composed a number of dance pieces, sonatas, and canzonas, almost exclusively for violin and accompaniment. These included the *Capriccio stravagante*, written when he was 23. Only a year later, Farina left the Dresden court, which, due to the financial strains of the Thirty Years War, was no longer able to support its musicians and composers. He then returned to Italy where various patrons employed him until his death in 1640.³

Farina's compositional style, as demonstrated by *Capriccio stravagante*, reveals a mixture of seventeenth-century German and Italian influences. The harmonic language is often strikingly dissonant when the programmatic subject of the composition calls for it, similar to some of the expressive word painting gestures of Monteverdi's *Madrigali*. Just as the extravagant dissonances of Monteverdi's music are explained by his protocol that "the poetry is ruler over the harmony,"⁴ the programmatic objectives of Farina's composition explain the most pronounced dissonances. The showy and difficult passagework resembles violin compositions by Rossi and other contemporaries, and some of the more unusual

3. Nona Pyron and Aurelio Bianco, "Farina, Carlo," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, accessed December 5, 2010, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/093>>

4. Giulio Cesare Monteverdi, quoted in John Hill, *Baroque Music* (Urbana-Champaign: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 45. Giulio Cesare was Monteverdi's brother.

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extended techniques, such as *col legno* and *glissando*, even suggest the influence of popular music traditions such as German “beer fiddlers.”⁵ Other elements can be traced back to sixteenth-century English keyboard works that may have been brought over by English composers employed in German courts.⁶

The witty mixture of styles in *Capriccio stravagante* is a characteristic feature of the early *capriccio* and *quodlibet*. The full title of the work identifies the piece as a *capriccio*, a genre characterized by imaginative and experimental approaches to form. According to Erich Schwandt, a *capriccio* “does not signify a specific musical technique or structure, but rather a general disposition towards the exceptional, the whimsical, the fantastic and the apparently arbitrary.”⁷ The German title identifies the style of the piece as a *quodlibet*: a musical work that combines various melodies, often secular and popular tunes, in a light-hearted manner. The *quodlibet*, a term derived from the Latin phrase “whatever is pleasing,” was popular in

5. Hill, *Baroque Music*, 158. So-called beer fiddlers were freelance itinerant string musicians who played rustic instruments. Stephen Rose, *The Musician in Literature in the Age of Bach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 93-94.

6. Nona Pyron and Aurelio Bianco, “Farina, Carlo.” John Dowland and Daniel Norcombe, for instance, spent much of their careers in Germany. Many popular compositions by earlier English composers such as William Byrd, John Bull, and Thomas Tomkins, sought to imitate battle scenes, dramatic weather, and the like, and Dowland’s own music is often highly imagistic, as in the famous *Lachrimae* (1604). See also Orrey, *Programme Music*, 29-31.

7. Erich Schwandt, “Capriccio (i),” in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, accessed March 9, 2012, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/048>>.

the Renaissance and Baroque eras; perhaps most notably, Johann Sebastian Bach included one as the last variation of his monumental *Goldberg Variations*. An earlier example of a *quodlibet* is found in the virtuosic collection of musical “found objects” in Adam de la Halle’s motet *Jeu de Robin et Marion*.⁸

The form of the *quodlibet* provided the ideal ground for composers to experiment with musical hybridity, a key feature of music from Farina’s time. As Marina Lobanova observes: “Just as ‘mixed wit, hybrid ideas’ were particularly valued in Baroque literature, in music homage was paid to compositions written in a mixed genus, in a mixed genre.” The most striking aspect of *Capriccio stravagante*, however, is Farina’s focus on the mechanics of musical representation. The piece features a number of musical passages in a diversity of styles following each other in quick succession in the typical fashion of a *quodlibet*.⁹ At the conclusion of the 1627 edition, Farina describes the extended fingering and bow techniques necessary to make the representations work; that is, how to make the music sound like the subject being depicted.¹⁰

A close examination of several passages of *Capriccio stravagante* reveals the ways Farina uses musical figures and indicators to portray the various musical styles. In the section

8. See R. Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* Volume 1, (New York: Oxford University Press 2005), 233.

9. As Jean-Jacques Nattiez writes, “a style is the identification of recurrent figures... style itself is a semiologic fact.” Jean-Jacques Nattiez, quoted in Ron Roozendaal, “Psychological analysis of musical composition,” in *Music and The Cognitive Sciences 1990*, ed. Ian Cross and Irène Deliège (Yverdon, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 333.

10. Carlo Farina, *Ander Theil newer Paduanen*, 31-32.

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“Der Spannische Cithar” [“The Spanish Guitar”] (Ex. 1), Farina represents the idiomatic sound of Spanish guitar-playing by indexing the most identifiable tropes of the style. The passage is entirely constructed of repetitions of the typical harmonic progression (V-i-v⁶-bII⁷-V) of Spanish guitar music. At the end of the passage, Farina indicates an *accelerando*, in keeping with the characteristic dramatic *rubato*. Farina even instructs the performers to swing their instruments under their arms and strum the strings, in the manner of a “real Spanish guitar”; thus, he replicates not only the sounds but also the visual elements of the traditional performance style.¹¹ These individual elements – the harmony, *rubato*, and visual effects of performance – serve as signifiers of the exotic yet popular and easily recognizable Spanish guitar idiom.

In another passage, Farina represents the acoustic image of a military band featuring a brass fanfare, followed by a clarion call, and accompanied at the end by the drums (Ex. 2). Unlike the other descriptive passages which are each separated by framing interludes, Farina includes a series of connected sections linking disparate images in a witty sequence. “Die Trommeten” [“The Trumpets”] (m. 149-154) which begins the sequence, imitates a trumpet fanfare, and thus contains the main identifying features of a fanfare: a

11. In the notes to the original score, Farina writes about the section: “Endlichen die Spannische Chitarren belangend, wird ihrer Art nach mit den Fingern geschlagen / indeme man die Geigen unter den Arm nimbt / und drauff schlegt als eine rechte Spannische Chitarrea wie.” (Finally, concerning the Spanish guitar, its style is achieved by plucking with the fingers, by taking the violin under the arm and plucking it like a real Spanish guitar.) Carlo Farina, *Ander Theil newer Paduanen*, 32.

pedal tone with an arpeggiated chord overtop. The low strings sustain a D for six full measures, while the other voices play figures featuring emphatic and declarative repeated notes containing only the notes of a D Major triad. Just as in a trumpet fanfare, the instrument playing the uppermost register has the most complicated figuration, and, in this case, the largest range. The lower the register of each instrument, generally the more sustained the notes it performs. In measure 155, after the close of “Die Trommeten,” Farina introduces “Das Clarin” [“The Clarino Trumpet”]. The two upper voices contain passagework with fast, articulated gestures in scalar patterns alternating with quarter notes, indicating the style of bugle call. In measure 172, entitled “Die Heerpauken” [“The Army Kettledrums”], Farina expands on the ideas of “Die Trommeten” by pairing the fanfare-like passagework of the upper voices with militaristic rhythmic patterns articulated crisply by the low strings and *continuo*, to mimic the drums customarily paired with trumpet ensembles. By introducing different musical tropes in an accumulating sequence, Farina conjures up the image of a military percussion band joining the rest of the instruments.

In the next sections, “Die Henne” [“The Hen”] and “Der Han” [“The Rooster”], Farina uses many of the same patterns that served to indicate the military band, but this time to depict hens and roosters. The descriptive titles framing the beginning of each episode in the work help the performer to recognize that sometimes the musical gesture has only been slightly modified, while the subject depicted has changed (as here, from the band instruments to the barnyard animals). Clearly, there is a joke here: he demonstrates how easily the

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sound of a marching army can be transformed into the procession of poultry in a barnyard.¹²

One of the episodes in the piece, “Der Tremulant” [“The Organ Tremulant”], (Ex. 3) features not only the typical elements of an organ playing with the tremulant stop, but also wittily depicts the mistakes of a second-rate organist. The most distinctive feature of the tremulant is the throbbing tone produced by the beat patterns of two organ pipes emitting slightly different pitches; Farina asks the string players to imitate this sound by “pulsing” the bow-arm.¹³ The harmonic rhythm is slow and constant, just as in a church chorale, but the harmonies are meandering and strange, and certain measures feature strikingly inexplicable dissonances. Thus, Farina seems to represent an untalented organist lost in an aimless improvisation who accidentally plays wrong notes, unable to find his way around the keyboard. The passage not only indicates a particular style of organ playing, but also suggests a humorous caricature that contains a narrative, depicted by the use of musical gesture.¹⁴

12. One other notable sequence of passages in mm. 55-88 evokes another kind of musical instrument review, linking together without interruption a series comprising “Die Leyer,” “Das kleine Schalmeygen,” and “Die Leyer uff ein andert Art.” It thus combines, in a single set, performance by series of old-fashioned instruments that were popular in previous generations but in sharp decline by Farina’s time.

13. In the notes to the score, Farina writes: “So wird das Tremuliren mit pulsirender Hand, darinnen man den Bogen hat / auff art des Tremulaten in den Orgeln imitiret.” (In this way, the tremolo played with a pulsating hand in which one holds the bow, imitates the technique of tremolo on the organ.) Carlo Farina, *Ander Theil newer Paduanen*, 32.

14. Rebecca Cypess, focusing on the performers task in imitating the novice organist, describes the work as a theatrical project that “calls for instrumentalists to step out of their ordinary roles to become

The unusual harmonies of the accident-prone organist are taken to new extremes in the startling dissonances that Farina employs in the caricatures “Die Katze” [“The Cat”] and “Der Hund” [“The Dog”] (Ex. 4 and 5). In “Die Katze,” Farina abandons any sense of musical counterpoint entirely for seven measures, repeating minor seconds and tritones, and instructs the violinist to slide down the fingerboard with a slow *glissando* away from each pitch to imitate the sound of a catcall. In the last measure, a flurry of sixteenth notes depict the cats scampering away as they “tend to do after they’ve bitten each other.”¹⁵ In “Der Hund,” however, the performer is asked to pull upward abruptly and forcefully, bending the pitch upwards in order to create a sound resembling a dog’s bark.¹⁶ Farina’s comment that the techniques of “Der Hund”

actors.” See Rebecca Cypess, “‘Esprimere la voce humana’: Connections between Vocal and Instrumental Music by Italian Composers of the Early Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Musicology* 27:2, (Spring 2010): 210.

15. “Das Katzenschrey anlanget wird folgender gestalt gemacht / daß man mit einem Finger von den Thon da die Noten stehet, mehlichen unterwartz zu sich zeuhet / da aber die Semifusen geschrieben sein / muß man mit dem Bogen bald vor, bald hinter den Stegk uffs ärgste und geschwindeste als man kan fahren / auff die weise wie di Katzen letztlichen nach dem sie sich gebissen und jetzo außreissen zu thun pflegen.” (The catcall is made in the following way, that one slides with a finger gradually downwards from where it [initially] stops the note [on the string]. But where the sixteenth notes are written one must move immediately with the bow, quickly forwards and then quickly behind the bridge in the most terrible and fast way one can; just as cats tend to do after they have bitten each other and now run away.) Carlo Farina, *Ander Theil newer Paduanen*, 32.

16. “Darcken das Hundebellen wird mit einem Finger von der Noten gar geschwinde auff einer seiten / nauffwärts gezogen.” (“On the other hand, the dog bark is made by pulling [i.e. sliding] upwards very quickly on the string from the [initial] note.”) The Italian notes emphasize

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are in opposition to (“darkegen”) those of “Die Katze” humorously reflects the stereotypical antagonism between cats and dogs. Perhaps just as he pits “Die Katze” against “Der Hund,” Farina’s complete abandonment of the laws of counterpoint in both passages posit a distinct contrast between the musical sounds of the natural and man-made instrumental worlds.

These assorted episodes, in divergent styles, form a brief catalog of different popular music styles of the period, clever imitations of a selection of contemporary and exotic instruments, all interspersed with facetious mimicking of animal sounds. This compendium is not simply a diverting exercise, however, but appears to be intrinsically related to the scientific investigations of the Dresden court at which Farina was employed. As Rebecca Cypess has noted, the collection of styles in *Capriccio stravagante* recalls the extensive treasury of objects in the Dresden *Kunstammer*, a “chamber of art and curiosities,” which “contained thousands of scientific and artistic objects, including musical instruments.”¹⁷ Indeed, the *Kunstammer* was a quintessentially Baroque phenomenon, emerging from the enthusiasm for collecting, compiling, and cataloging natural and man-made artifacts. Such collections

that the hand must always be moved “furiosamente.” Carlo Farina *Ander Theil newer Paduanen*, 32.

17. Cypess argues that “the work is essentially bound up with the cultures of the science and the arts” at the Dresden court. (Rebecca Cypess, “Carlo Farina’s *Capriccio stravagante*: a musical *Kunstammer*,” (Abstract for paper presented at 14th Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music, Queen’s University Belfast, June 30-July 4 2010.) Accessed March 14, 2011.

<<http://www.mu.qub.ac.uk/tomita/bachbib/conferences/Belfast-Jun2010/BarConf-Abstracts.pdf>>

were “the alembic in which a new view of nature took shape – one which showed visually and vividly that nature and art had histories, and emphasized the radical changes that nature underwent over time as its powers and resources were exploited in novel ways.”¹⁸ The *Kunstkammer* at the Dresden court featured many objects that seem to recall passages of *Capriccio stravagante*, including automata such as mechanical birds and exotic instruments like the Spanish-style guitar.¹⁹ As Cypess suggests, Farina’s composition may serve as a sort of musical tour of this very same collection.

The *Kunstkammer* also emerged as a popular subject for Baroque visual artists; and it is perhaps the painted versions, rather than the actual *Kunstkammer* at Dresden, that Farina’s composition most directly mirrors. These paintings, depicting rooms filled with assorted paintings, sculptures, and remarkable natural objects and curiosities, were a popular idiom among German and Flemish artists, such as Frans Fracken the Younger and Jan van Kessel. They featured not only the diversity of objects contained in an actual *Kunstkammer*, but often an imaginary collection that might include an assortment of artworks and artifacts in a variety of historical styles, along with animals such as dogs and birds. In much the same way, *Capriccio stravagante* accomplishes this effect musically, a kind of *ut pictura musica*, by representing a broad spectrum of contemporary popular musical forms and barnyard animals. Just as a painted *Kunstkammer* contained smaller images of framed paintings and artifacts in a diversity

18. Anthony T. Grafton, introduction to *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art, and Technology*, by Horst Bredekamp, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Weiner, 1995), xii.

19. Cypess, “Carlo Farina’s *Capriccio stravagante*.”

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of styles, Farina's *Capriccio stravagante* contains an assemblage of shorter "framed" acoustical environments. Moreover, like the paintings in this genre, Farina's aural collection of curiosities is self-referential: both use images of other art works to depict different historical styles, in Farina's case by using musical conventions and tropes to depict a wide variety of different soundscapes. Like an artist painting a *Kunstkammer*, Farina also takes pains to display his own talent and wit by being able to collect and display so many objects in an artistic (or in Farina's case, musical) frame. The purpose of painting a *Kunstkammer* was to demonstrate that a wide variety of natural objects and pictorial styles could all be represented with technical skill, and the purpose of Farina's *Capriccio* is to demonstrate that the mechanics of sound production using familiar instruments could, with similar success and through the virtuosity of the court musicians, represent the fabulous diversity of sounds in the world.

As Horst Bredekamp observes: "The *Kunstkammern* were seen as an ideal place where Nature the Player could be observed and at the same time a place in which nature could be faced with limits and given direction."²⁰ Bredekamp describes the link between the *Kunstkammer* and artistic experimentation generally: "The *Kunstkammern* did not offer merely a link between artifacts from historically, geographically, and ethnically foreign cultures and all realms of nature; they also provided an opportunity for experimentation in merging form and meaning."²¹ Each of the

20. Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art, and Technology*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Weiner, 1995), 69.

21. Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine*, 110.

musical styles embedded within *Capriccio stravagante* is given new meaning by its appearance in this catalog of musical types. In this way, Farina's musical compendium allows the listener to understand each musical idiom in a larger musicological context, and even to forge links between sonic environments as seemingly dissimilar as a military band and a clucking chicken. This approach to sound and form is far more complex and engaging than the humorous title implies, or the disdain of many musicologists and critics throughout its history has suggested.

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Appendix

Example 1: La Chitarra Spagnuola (mm. 351-371)

Farina's instruction: "Endlichen die Spanische Chitarren belangend, wird ihrer Art nach mit den Fingern geschlagen, indem man die Geigen unter den Arm nimbt und drauff schlegt als eine rechte Spanische Chitarren."

La Chitarra Spagnuola (Die Spanische Chitarr)

Andante

VI. I

VI. II

Vle.

Vle./Cb./Cemb.

Cembalo tacet

359

366

1.

12.

Qui finisce la Chitarra Spagnuola
Hier endet sich's.

**Example 2: La Trombetta, Il Clarino, Le Gnachere, La Gallina (mm.
149-186)**

La Trombetta (Die Trommetten)

Allegro

VI. I

VI. II

Vlc.

Vlc./Cb./Cemb.

153

Il Clarino (Das Clarin)

Allegro

158

163

168

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² Le Gnachere (Die Heerpauken)

172

175

179

Qui finisse la trombetta
(Hier endet sich die Trommetten)

La Gallina (Die Henne)

Qui finisse le Gnachere
(Hier endet sich die Pauken)

183

Il Gallo (Der Hahn)

Example 3: II Tremulo (mm. 243-265)

Farina's instruction: "So wird das Tremulieren mit pulsirender Hand, darinnen man den Bogen hat, auff Art des Tremulanten in den Orgeln imitiret."

II Tremulo (Der Tremulant)

VI. I

VI. II

Vle.

Vle./Cb./Cemb.

Cembalo tacet

250

256

261

Qui finisce il Tremulo
Hier endet sich der Tremulant

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Example 5: Der Hund

Il Cane (Der Hund)

The musical score is for a piece titled "Il Cane (Der Hund)". It is written for four parts: Violin I (VI. I), Violin II (VI. II), Viola (Vle.), and Violoncello/Contrabass/Combustion (Vlc./Cb./Cemb.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The score consists of four measures. In the first measure, Violin I plays a half note D4, Violin II plays a half note G3, Viola plays a half note G3, and the Vlc./Cb./Cemb. plays a half note G2. In the second measure, Violin I plays a half note A4, Violin II plays a half note A3, Viola plays a half note A3, and the Vlc./Cb./Cemb. plays a half note A2. In the third measure, Violin I plays a half note B4, Violin II plays a half note B3, Viola plays a half note B3, and the Vlc./Cb./Cemb. plays a half note B2. In the fourth measure, Violin I plays a half note C5, Violin II plays a half note C4, Viola plays a half note C4, and the Vlc./Cb./Cemb. plays a half note C3. Each part has a fermata over the final note of the fourth measure.

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