

GIROLAMO FANTINI

(1600 - CA 1675)



Modo per Imparare a Sonare di Tromba

Complete English Translation,
Biography and Critical Commentary

by

Edward H. Tarr

*(First complete English translation published 1975)
revised, augmented 2009*

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warlike way as well as musically

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Girolamo Fantini: Biography

Birth, Training, and Positions

According to the most recent research performed by Igino Conforzi,¹ Girolamo Fantini was born in Spoleto in 1600, immediately preceding February 11, the date of his baptism. Various documents between 1544 and 1606 show the presence in Spoleto of a strong trumpet tradition within which Fantini could have received his training.²

On 20 February 1626 he was taken into the service of Cardinal Scipione Borghese in Rome, apparently as the only trumpeter in the noble household.³ He is recorded there through October 1630.⁴

With the title of Chief Court Trumpeter (*trombetta maggiore*), Fantini then entered the service of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando II de' Medici (who reigned between 1621 and 1670). This occurred at the latest in April 1631, but probably at the end of the previous year, since he later stated in the dedication to his trumpet method, printed in 1638, that he had served at that court for eight years. On 11 April 1631 Fantini was given a new trumpet made of silver and lavishly decorated with angel heads and jewels, two damask banners for the trumpet displaying the Medici coats of arms,⁵ and a salary of 10 *scudi* per month. This is an unusually generous sum for a trumpeter and gives a first hint that Fantini must have been particularly gifted. (All the other instrumentalists were paid less; only the singers and the chapel-master earned more.)⁶

His Performance in Rome together with Frescobaldi

Some time in the middle of 1634,⁷ Fantini gave a public concert in the chambers of his former employer, Cardinal Borghese, accompanied on the latter's house organ by none other than the illustrious organist of St. Peter's, Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643). A fact that has escaped trumpet historians until now is that Frescobaldi had even been in the service of the Grand Duke of Tuscany between November 1628 and April 1634,⁸ thus overlapping with Fantini there for nearly three years.

This is the first documented case in history of a performance on trumpet and organ. Documentation is provided by a letter written from Rome by Pierre Bourdelot, a physician and writer on music, to the Parisian theorist, Marin Mersenne, who at that time was preparing *Harmonicorum libri*, the original version in Latin of his famous later treatise, *Harmonie universelle*. In his letter, Bourdelot refers to Fantini as "the greatest trumpeter in all Italy". He also stated that Fantini demonstrated in the concert that he was capable of producing pitches between those of the harmonic series, although French trumpeters present on the occasion had denigrated them as "false, confused, and entirely disordered".⁹

(However that may be, our experience shows that such pitches produced by artifice have a different timbre from the natural harmonics. Perhaps the Frenchmen were overly critical, or even jealous.) What did Fantini and Frescobaldi perform? We imagine that Fantini played several of his own sonatas for trumpet and organ that were printed four years later in his trumpet method, some of which contain such pitches.¹⁰ As far as Frescobaldi is concerned, this is the period in which his famous collection of organ music for the Mass, *Fiori musicali*, was being prepared for the publisher. It appeared in print the next year in Venice. No compositions of his for trumpet and organ have survived, if in fact they ever existed.

Fantini's Trumpet Method

Fantini's reputation rests mainly on the present trumpet method, after Bendinelli's method of 1614 the second one in history, which he dedicated to his employer in 1638. That he received a special gratification of 3 *scudi* in the following fiscal year¹¹ might have to do with this dedication, although final proof does not exist. See further below (following the translations) for a more exhaustive analysis of the method.

His Medal from the Holy Roman Emperor

Opening Fantini's method to page three, the reader is confronted by a woodcut of the trumpeter, with a surrounding caption stating that he came from Spoleto and that the portrait was done when he was 36 years old. A medal, presumably of gold and suspended on a heavy chain running diagonally over his chest, bears the inscription FERDINANDUS SECUNDUS IMPERATOR. This medal thus seems to have been the gift of another Ferdinand II, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, who reigned from 1619 to 1636.¹² (Fantini's employer was the emperor's nephew!¹³) The emperor's son Ferdinand III (who reigned for twenty years) was crowned his successor on December 22, 1636 in Regensburg. It has been suggested¹⁴ that this medal serves as a clue for a trip made by Fantini on that occasion to Regensburg, although here too, no documentary proof exists. Perhaps the medal signifies Fantini's membership—albeit unusual for an Italian—in the Imperial Guild of Trumpeters and Military Kettledrummers, which Emperor Ferdinand II had founded by the granting of an Imperial Privilege in 1623.¹⁵

Another Instrument

On October 1, 1640, "a new viola" in Fantini's possession is mentioned in a court inventory.¹⁶ He thus must have played a stringed instrument as well as the trumpet. Is it significant that Fantini's main instrument (usually called *trombetta*) is no longer mentioned in connection with his name in the surviving Medici court records beginning with the fiscal year 1639 - 40?

Family

The archival documents contain hardly any information concerning his family. Nevertheless, we learn of a son, Giovanni, who is mentioned between 5 May 1637 and 21 June 1642, first as

his son (*figliolo*), then as his apprentice (*garzone*, 22 May 1637) and as his student (*scolare*, 20 December 1639, 22 February 1640, and 24 October 1641);¹⁷ and of a daughter Elisabetta, who was born in or shortly before 1650 and entered the convent of Marradi in 1668 as a nun.¹⁸

Last Archival Mention

Fantini is mentioned in archival sources for the last time in 1675. These documents reveal that he was living in a state of abject poverty, for he was sued by the prioress of his daughter's convent for not having paid her rent there. He was eventually able to resolve the issue after the favorable outcome of a suit of his own against one of his debtors. His sad condition was testified to during the suit: being entirely dependent on his income from an allowance (presumably from an annuity paid by the Medici court), he had thus been justified, "given his misery", not to have paid his daughter's debt.¹⁹

His Descendents

During the early 1970s, thanks to a member of my own trumpet ensemble, Klaus Rehm, I made the acquaintance of Hans Fantini, M. D., who lived in Munich. He claimed to be a descendent of the famous trumpeter, and had reconstructed his family tree back to him, although he had lost much of the documentary proof. According to him, the trumpeter's grandson, Adamo Giovanni Giacomo Fantini, had moved from Venice to Düsseldorf, thus founding a German line of the family. I gave this information to my then pupil Conforzi, who was able to supplement it with items from his own research. The thus enriched family tree can be found on p. 169 of Conforzi's biographical article of 1993.²⁰

Fantini's Mastery as a Trumpeter

Shortly after Grand Duke Ferdinando II married Princess Vittoria della Rovere of Urbino in July 1637, an account of the festivities was published. Concerning an equestrian ballet on 15 July, it was reported that "during the dancing, the singing continued from time to time at full voice with a melody appropriate to the clamor of that sound; when the singing ceased this was at times accompanied, with singular mastery, by the trumpet of Girolamo, His Highness' famous trumpeter."²¹ That trumpet ensembles traditionally provided the music for dancing horses is well known, but that a trumpeter should be singled out for special praise in the exercising of his duty is unusual, even singular.

It was stated above that his large salary at the Medici court hinted at his particular talent. Another milestone was his performance together with Frescobaldi in 1634, described above.

Finally, three poems of praise appearing at the beginning and end of Fantini's trumpet method testify to his great mastery of his instrument; they are translated in the appropriate places below. They all testify to Fantini's ability to soften the martial sounds typical of the military trumpet with its battle calls. Indeed, it would have been impossible to perform music together with a

house organ if the trumpeter were unable to "tune, with noble art, the warlike strains to softer songs",²² with the result that "knights and ladies alike languish with joy, his martial talent put to Love's use".²³ Soft playing, indeed, was a major prerequisite for the trumpet's entry into art music. It is Fantini's main claim to fame to have been the first to effectuate this entry.²⁴ As Hermann Eichborn wrote already in 1890, he "brought the technique and expressive possibilities of his instrument to their highest level."²⁵

Girolamo Fantini: Modo per imparare a sonare di tromba (1638)

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Translations

NB. Translator's remarks are preceded by an asterisk (*) or else are in footnotes.

[1]

TITLE AND SUBTITLE



Method for Learning to Play / THE TRUMPET / IN A WARLIKE WAY / as well as Musically, with the Organ, with a Mute, with the Harpsichord, and Every Other Instrument,³¹ / to Which Many Pieces Are Added, Such as Balletti, Brandi, Capricci, Sarabande, Correnti, Passaggi, and Sonatas for Trumpet & Organ / BY GIROLAMO FANTINI / OF SPOLETO / Chief Court Trumpeter of His Most Serene Highness / the Grand Duke of Tuscany, FERDINAND II / [coat of arms] / Published in FRANKFORT by Daniel Watsch,³² 1638 / with official permission

[3]

WOODCUT OF FANTINI



*Madrigale del Sig. Alessandro Adimari.
In lode dell'Autore.*

* The caption reads:

GIROLAMO FANTINI FROM SPOLETO AT AGE 36

* The medallion around his neck reads: "Ferdinand the Second, Emperor".

Madrigal by Alessandro Adimari
in praise of the author³³

O fortunate *FLORA*,
Daughter of ancient *ROME*
And friendly rival of her adventures,
You [may] now enjoy in your realm a new Aeneas,³⁴
Who has more than one Palinurus³⁵ on the Tyrrhenian Sea,
[But] you have lacked a Misenus.³⁶

And [now] *GIROLAMO* is here, playing constantly
With such marvellous art
That he can, with his proud song, arouse Mars;
And (to form such delightful sounds) he takes
His trumpet from Fame³⁷ and his wind from the air.

[4]

By an unknown author, to the same³⁸

This one, who with the sound of [his] bellicose instrument
At his will made helmets vacillate,
Spears shatter, and chargers,
Fiercer than lightning of the wind, shiver:

Now see how he, in a musical ensemble,
Sweetening his proudest sounds,
Makes knights and ladies [alike] languish with joy,
His martial talent put to Love's use.

[It is] amazing how Art and Nature together
Enclose in a single breast such virtue
That the fame of ancient Misenus is obscured.

He is today the monarch of the trumpet on earth,
Who is constantly secure of victory over [every] heart,
Arbiter of peace, and of war.

[5]

[Dedication] to His Most Serene Highness, the Grand Duke³⁹

The magnanimous generosity of Your Most Serene Highness and
the infinite obligation which I owe to You – after having served
You for the space of eight years – have led me to give some
sign of recognition of my personal gratitude, which I confess
be very small in respect to what I should owe to such a
my lord and patron, whose magnanimity was the
my bringing out this weak piece of work. It is the
little leisure conceded to me from time to time
accompanied by whatever study and diligence
me, and has been rather difficult for me
the art of the trumpet from its very beginning
perfection which it has reached only
its every possible use, both in music and
other action appurtenant to the
Most Serene Highness to the
this crude piece of music

You as a demonstration of the sincere affection of my spirit.⁴¹
It would have been neither right nor [even] possible to have
presented such a work to anyone else except Your Most Serene
Highness, first of all because my debt [to You] required that I
should consecrate the fruit [of my labor] to him who had allowed
it to flower, and also because the increased perfection in trumpet
playing is due to none other than the monarch of those peoples
who once were the inventors of such an art. And finally, while
I incline myself before You with all due reverence, I pray to
Heaven for the granting of Your every wish.

Given the 20th day of April 1638

Your Most Serene Highness'

Most devoted and most humble servant,
Girolamo Fantini

[6]

The Author to His Readers⁴²

[I have] sent to the press this insignificant volume of music
the benefit of those who play the trumpet, or would like to
to] play it – not in hit-or-miss fashion, as was done
but with [a] true foundation, just as [with] the
instruments,⁴³ even though the trumpet does
pitcher than those of the harmonic series, at
beginning of this work. No greater effort
to write for the said pitches, avoiding
reader] must be content with those
which in themselves bring little
parts were left without diminution
instrument[, the trumpet,
needed.⁴⁵ Accept [this work]
so, you may have opportunity
myself to your good

Instruction

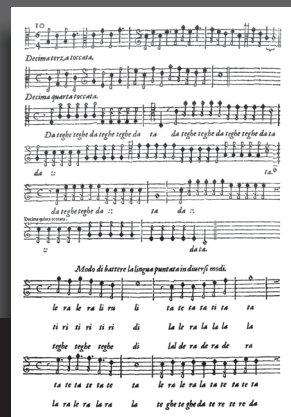
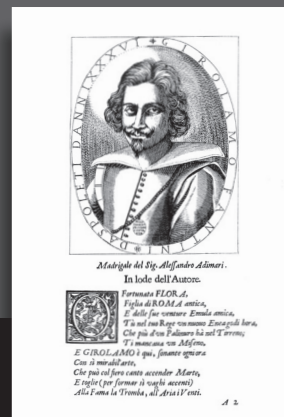
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P'

Girolamo Fantini

Modo per Imparare a sonare di Tromba (1638)

The Brass Press
Facsimile reprint



A seminal work in the history of the trumpet. Girolamo Fantini (?1600-ca.1675) was the first to introduce a new style of playing which made it possible for the trumpet to be accepted into art music.

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