

EXPLORING THE GOLDEN AGE – A PERSONAL APPROACH

Simon Carrington www.simoncarrington.com

“The orator-musician needs to be convinced about the message he is communicating, in order to do that he needs to understand the basic techniques of communication found in the study of rhetoric. Composers (in the Golden Age) were so familiar with the principles of rhetoric that they were probably not even conscience of them when composing. Ideas of development, structure and emotional tools would have been used in a natural way to compose music, as they were in the endless repetition of declamatory rhetorical exercises in the classroom.”

The Weapons of Rhetoric – a guide for musicians and audiences. Judy Tarling

Important Points to note:

- Singers and composers of the period would have enjoyed extensive study of Latin.
- They would be completely comfortable with the stress and direction of each word and phrase.
- To them would have come naturally and without thought what we have to study and analyse.
- They would also have studied rhetoric extensively as a fundamental of their education
- The technique of using words persuasively would have been a very important part of performance
- A sense of the expressive powers of certain intervals would have been part of their essential training.
- The singers would have felt naturally the ebb and flow of the lines and understood how to communicate the changing moods implied by the texts.

Some Practical Suggestions:

- Follow the word stresses carefully
- Study the tension and relaxation in the dissonances
- Shape all the phrases into and out of the suspensions
- Identify the composers most expressive interval shifts
- Don't be afraid of rubato and tempo flexibility for expressive purposes if the music and/or text suggests.
- Recognise and develop the identity of individual motifs
- Emphasise the differences between long and short phrases
- In polyphony identify the most significant melodic lines and expose them.
- Allow the rise and fall of the intensity in the writing to indicate dynamic levels
- Phrase away from the last notes at cadence points
- Study both the individual arches and the grand architecture
- Build towards accumulation points – where the polyphonic strands converge at cadences, for instance.