

Regole della diminutione (rules of diminution)

From Aurelio Virgiliano's "Il Dolcimelo", MS treatise, c.1600

1. Diminutions must run by step as far as possible.
2. All the diminutions must be alternately good and bad¹.
3. Those diminutions which leap must all be good.
4. The main note should always be played at the beginning, middle and end of the bar. And should it not be convenient to do so in the middle of the bar, one must at least play a nearby note which is consonant, never dissonant; excepting the fourth above.
5. When the subject rises, the last note of the diminutions must also rise, and vice versa.
6. It makes a nice effect to run an octave up or down, when convenient.
7. When leaping an octave, it should be done upwards, not downwards, so as not to cross with the other voices.
8. The diminutions should never extend more than a fifth above or below the subject².
9. Except in the case of treble G, where the diminutions may extend seven steps above and seven below: but this is only permitted in a fury of semiquavers³.
10. When one finds two rising thirds, such as G, B, D, it is permitted to make use of the fourth below, since it will be the octave below the final third. So, conversely, when two falling thirds are found, one may do the equivalent [make use of the fourth above].

¹ "Good" and "bad" in this context signify "consonant" and "dissonant".

² Presumably with the exception of cases where rules 6 and 7 apply!

³ Clearly he is intending these rules to apply principally to diminution of the treble voice.