Michelangelo Rossi (1601/2-1656) was an important Italian composer, violinist, and organist. Around 1624 Rossi moved to Rome where he would have met Girolamo Frescobaldi. Rossi composed two operas during his tenure in Rome during the 1630’s. Although Rossi was a virtuoso violinist, none of that music exists and today we have only one book of ten keyboard toccatas. Of these keyboard works, the seventh toccata is the best known for its unusual chromatic ending.

This toccata isn’t like the show pieces we have come to expect today. The word itself derives from the Italian “toccare,” meaning “to touch.”

Andrea Gabrieli (1533-1585) was an Italian composer of the late Renaissance. He was the uncle of the more famous Giovanni Gabrieli, and was the first internationally known Venetian to spread the Venetian style throughout Italy and Germany. In 1566 he became the organist at St. Mark’s, Venice, a position he held for the rest of his life. Most of his music was published posthumously by his nephew, Giovanni Gabrieli.

The Canzon Francese has its roots in vocal music, with many pieces being arrangements of vocal pieces. To make keyboard pieces out of these vocal models, the composer adds runs and other figurations to decorate the original framework.

Italian organs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were unlike other styles in Europe. Rarely larger than one keyboard, the Italian instrument might have had a pedal board of one octave, so the long, low notes could be played with a foot, freeing the hands for other passages. Liturgically, the Italian organ was used much like the Spanish relative; preludes, postludes, and many versets to be done in alternation with the clergy or choir.