

## ON LANDINI AND SER LORENZO \*

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The beginning of 1997 has brought with it a revival of interest in Francesco Landini, “il cieco degli organi,” who died six centuries ago, on the second day of September 1397, leaving, as stated in the inscription on his sepulchral stone in the Florentine church of San Lorenzo, “his remains here, his soul on the stars.”<sup>1</sup> Having been involved myself in some of the celebrations, I should like to reconsider a suggestion I made some years ago that he might have been in some way a pupil of Laurentius Masii or Masini (the son of Maso or Masino), who was a canon, and an influential one at that, in the chapter of the ancient basilica of San Lorenzo from at least 1348 until his death, in late 1372 or early 1373.<sup>2</sup>

A personal relationship between the two must have existed, for Landini, too, was active in San Lorenzo as a “cappellano e organista” from at least 1365 up to his own death.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, we cannot exclude the possibility that he had already been present in the same ecclesiastical milieu for some time before 1365. In any case the coexistence in a narrow, selective ambience of a young composer and an older and authoritative person, who was still engaging, or who had once engaged, in the same rather uncommon activity of writing polyphonic music, makes some sort of a direct relationship inevitable. Lorenzo certainly was, or had been, an interesting if not too productive composer with a bent for teaching, as suggested by the nonmensural monophonic piece *Diligenter advertant cantores*, found in the London manuscript, British Library, Add. 29987, with the title “L’antefana di ser

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\* The editors wish to thank Professor Pirrotta for his timely response to their request for an essay commemorating the 600th anniversary of Francesco Landini’s death that could be published in 1997. Though the present volume of *Musica Disciplina*, 48, bears the date 1994, it is indeed appearing in 1997.

<sup>1</sup> “Luminibus captus, Franciscus [...] hic cineres, animam super astra reliquit. M.CCC.LXXXXVII. die .II. Sep.”.

<sup>2</sup> F.A. Gallo, “Lorenzo Masini e Francesco degli Organi in S. Lorenzo,” *Studi musicali* IV (1975), pp. 57-63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 62-63.

Lore(re)nzo.<sup>4</sup> Many features of his works and his attempt to improve — as he must have thought — on the customary practices of the Italian system of mensural notation bespeak a speculative mind. Evidence of such an attempt is provided by the three differently notated versions of his madrigal *Ita se n'era a star nel paradiso / Cogliendo fior Proserpina cantava*.<sup>5</sup>

The poem of *Ita se n'era a star* poses a problem in itself, being the only text we know to have been set by two Trecento composers, Lorenzo and Vincenzo da Rimini. It has been suggested that the repetition resulted from a competition; but a competition between a Benedictine abbot and a distinguished Florentine canon seems unlikely to me, especially in view of the fact that we know very little about Vincenzo, and, indeed, why, when and for how long he was in Florence, if indeed he was ever there. A Florentine poet is most likely to have written the text, which describes Persephone (Proserpina) in the act of picking flowers, as suggested by a passage in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Purgatory* XXVIII, 40-51).<sup>6</sup> The Dantesque reminiscence must have interested Lorenzo and induced him to reuse the poem for a new setting. *Ita se n'era a star* is also by far the longest of the ten known madrigals by Lorenzo — in my edition it runs to 98 measures, as opposed to the 46-76 measures of all of the others.<sup>7</sup> This is probably one of the reasons why it was copied twice, in two different versions, at the very beginning of the section in the Squarcialupi Codex that contains all sixteen of his secular pieces.

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<sup>4</sup> The redundant syllable in the composer's name, (re), is given in the manuscript. The Latin text begins: "Diligenter advertant cantores oris soni ne inanis presumptio ignoranter absorbent mentem corderm et pectora," which I translate: "Let the singers be most careful lest the empty boast of their mouths should through ignorance involve their mind, heart and breasts." The not too reliable version of the text and its music in the London manuscript is discussed by A. Seay, "The Beginnings of the Coniuncta and Lorenzo Masini's 'L'Antefana'," *L'Ars Nova Italiana del Trecento* III (1970), pp. 51-65.

<sup>5</sup> The piece is preserved in the Squarcialupi Codex, fols. 45v-46r, 46v-47r, and in British Library, Add. 29987, fols. 42v-43r.

<sup>6</sup> I accept the idea of such a relationship, one first pointed out by M. P. Long, "*Ita se n'era a star nel Paradiso*: The Metamorphoses of an Ovidian Madrigal in Trecento Italy," *L'Ars Nova Italiana del Trecento* VI (1992), pp. 257-67, especially p. 260.

<sup>7</sup> I am referring to the length of Lorenzo's madrigals as they appear in *The Music of Fourteenth-Century Italy*, III (American Institute of Musicology, 1962).

I edited the first of Squarcialupi's two versions so many years ago that I am no longer absolutely certain of how I proceeded;<sup>8</sup> I am sure, however, that I was helped in doing so by the readings in the other two versions. Actually, I do not know to what extent the copyists of the Squarcialupi Codex really understood Lorenzo's novel notational practices, nor how faithful to his original was the source from which they were copying. Lorenzo sought to provide his own solution to the problems created by the new needs of rhythmic variety within the traditional system of the Italian *duodenaria* and *octonaria* measures. His solution seems to have been to replace *duodenaria* and *octonaria* by *senaria perfecta* and *quaternaria* measures while adding a new variety of tails and other marks to the minima figures; prevailing usage instead (see the second Squarcialupi version and the one in the London manuscript) was to adopt a ternary or binary of *quaternaria* measures.<sup>9</sup>

Lorenzo, as I have said, does not seem to have been a fertile composer. But he was mindful to introduce variety into his pieces, beginning with his choice of texts. These include three by Niccolò Soldanieri, two by Giovanni Boccaccio, a madrigal and two ballate by Franco Sacchetti,<sup>10</sup> and a ballata by Gregorio Calanista. Lorenzo himself might have written the didactic text of his madrigal *Dolgomi a voi, maestri del mie canto*, which ends, after at least one missing tercet, with an unusual ritornello of four seven-syllable lines:

Se vogliono 'nparare  
 a 'llor dite: — Pian, piano  
 ché ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la  
 comincian dalla mano. —

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9. Some hint of my procedures is given in the Foreword of the volume, pp. III-IV. I see that at the time I thought that the problems of the first version had induced Lorenzo to introduce modal notation in the second, suggested to him by French models. My thinking is now just the opposite and I no longer see a French suggestion present in the modal solution, mode being practically nonexistent in French secular polyphony. At this time I take occasion to voice my regret at having left my edition incomplete after the fifth volume. I had already prepared a sixth volume, but never published it after Leo Schrade began his edition. I thought it useless to have two editions of the same music when so much music of various kinds and genres remained unpublished.

<sup>9</sup> That the latter are translations, so to speak, from Lorenzo's peculiar notations is shown by the unusual alternation of *quaternaria* and *novenaria* measures.

<sup>10</sup> The music of the two ballate is now lost.

To give strength to the complaints and admonitions of such a text, Lorenzo composed the music of the tercets for three voices, alternating sections of extensive melismas in the two equal upper parts with those of strongly accentuated simultaneous recitation of the lines of text by all three. In the above quoted ritornello, instead, only the first cantus and the tenor are present. They emphasize musically the point of the last two lines by singing them in strict imitation on, respectively, the ascending and descending notes of the soft hexachord.<sup>11</sup>

The unusual sudden change in the number of voices in *Dolgomi a voi* finds an even sharper analogue in Lorenzo's only known caccia *A poste messe*, where the twice-repeated canon for three voices of the first section is followed by a single-voice ritornello. *A poste messe* is actually the piece in which an unusual combination of musical inventiveness and cunning calculation are most evident. A unison canon for three equal voices (the third one replacing the normally untexted tenor),<sup>12</sup> adds to the usual variety of calls and sounds of its hunting narrative a calculated effect, at first of intensification and then of slackening – or of approaching and then moving away – obtained by means of the repetition of the following lines:

– Ecco là, ecco là –  
 – Guarda, guarda, qua! –  
 – O tu, o tu, o tu,  
 passa, passa, passa! –

As a result of such repetition, these calls, at first uttered at the usual distance by the first two voices, become closer when the third voice joins in as the first two voices state the calls a second time, and so on until the reverse process of less frequent repeats takes place. The same effect is then repeated for the corresponding group of calls in the second strophe of the caccia text. Then, as in *Dolgomi a voi*, an even sharper reduction in the number of voices is introduced in the ritornello for the lines:

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<sup>11</sup> *The Music of Fourteenth-Century Italy*, III, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> This, too, has been considered a result of French influence, though we have no evidence that any of the very few French chaces were ever known in Italy and particularly in Florence. Once more, I see here, a sign of Lorenzo's predilection for experimenting with unusual procedures.

A ricolta, bu, bu, bu senza corno,  
tatim, tatim sonammo per iscornò.

Here, in spite of the ironical “iscornò,” the onomatopoeic sounds are preceded and followed by two beautiful, impressive effusions of melody.<sup>13</sup>

I do not intend to touch upon all of Lorenzo’s madrigals here, but merely to point out that melodic passages, often rich in melisma, frequently alternate with passages in which the voices utter the text in sharp syllabic recitation, either simultaneously or again in alternation. Strangely enough, such effective refinements go together with what might seem to be a technical deficiency a bit more marked than in other contemporary composers, that is, the frequency of parallel perfect consonances or of clashes between the two or three voices of the setting. In my opinion this can be explained by the fact that the composer aimed above all at a linear (today we would say contrapuntal) rather than harmonic relationship between the voices. In any case, to restate a judgement trenchantly expressed by Kurt von Fischer, “Lorenzo’s style emerges . . . as highly complex, many-sided and vigorously experimental.”<sup>14</sup>

It seems logical to think that the coexistence in the same restricted milieu of an older composer with the younger “cappellano e organista” would take the shape – if not of a teacher-pupil relationship – of that of a model and adviser to a willing recipient of suggestions. All things considered, I now believe this last of be more likely for two reasons. The first is that Landini must have been young, but not too young, when his association with Lorenzo began.<sup>15</sup> The second is that I find in Landini’s two-voice madrigals a feature never present in the works of the

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<sup>13</sup> I edited the music of the caccia in 1962 (see my already cited edition, Vol. III, pp. 17-19), also trying to show (*Ibid.*, p. IV) how a canonic solution seems highly improbable for the ritornello. I could only confirm my opinion when the piece was edited once more by A. Main, and this because of the excessive number of sharp dissonances present in the canonic ritornello. See his “Lorenzo Masini’s Deer Hunt,” in G. Reese and R. Brandel, eds., *The Commonwealth of Music, in Honor of Curt Sachs* (New York, 1965), pp. 130-61, particularly, 148-61. In addition, none of the indications usually given for the conclusion of the canon by all three voices simultaneously is present in the manuscript.

<sup>14</sup> K. von Fischer, “Lorenzo da Firenze,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Vol. 11, p. 235.

<sup>15</sup> After 1359 and before 1365, as indicated by the documents referred to by F. A. Gallo, *Op. cit.*, p. 59. Landini by then should have been nearing forty, according to the generally accepted birth-date (ca. 1325); he would have been nearing thirty, according to my own suggestion (born, ca. 1335).

older composer and possibly derived from the madrigals – well known in Florence-of Jacopo da Bologna. This feature is the frequent insertion of an untexted (instrumental?) passage between the end of one line of text and the beginning of the next one, given mostly to the tenor and on a few occasions to both voices.<sup>16</sup> Such passages never occur in Lorenzo's madrigals nor in Landini's madrigals for three voices, which I see as nearer to Lorenzo's models.

The relationship between model/ adviser and willing recipient may have been only textual in the case of Landini's *Musica son che mi dolgo piangendo* (see Lorenzo's *Dolgomi a voi* as well as Jacopo's *Oselletto salvazo*), where the different texts in each voice find conspicuous correspondences also among Jacopo's works. But I see a more direct relationship between Landini's *Sì dolce non sonò con lira Orfeo* and Lorenzo's *Povero zappator in chiusa valle*.<sup>17</sup> In the latter the melismatic course of the upper voice does not seem to be hampered by the constrictions deriving from the obbligato procedures of the tenor, of which every third unit of ternary mode repeats in diminution the melody and rhythm of the two preceding units. In addition, every line of text ends with a repetition of the entire line set syllabically to a melody which returns transposed up a fourth for the second line and up a second for the third line. (See Examples 1a, b, c.) Furthermore, the two lines of the ritornello text are stated twice, the second time repeating in diminution a simplified version of their previous melodies.

As for Landini's *Sì dolce non sonò con lir' Orfeo*, its isorhythmic structure is well known, having first been hinted at by Leo Schrade and then more fully described by Kurt von Fischer, who also suggested that the poem makes reference to Philippe de Vitry.<sup>18</sup> Landini, who composed at least one motet, shows full cognizance and mastery of isorhythmic technique and applies it by assigning new music to all three tercets. I shall add only that following the Vitriesque music of such

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<sup>16</sup> Such untexted passages are occasionally present also in works by other composers, though never as consistently as in Jacopo's madrigals.

<sup>17</sup> *The Music of Fourteenth-Century Italy*, Vol. III, pp. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> See L. Schrade, *Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century. Commentary Notes to Volume IV* (Monaco, 1958), p. 156, where, as elsewhere, the notation in a binary or ternary mode of *quaternaria* is called "French notation;" also see K. von Fischer, "Philippe de Vitry in Italy and an Homage of Landini to Philippe," in *L' Ars Nova Italiana del Trecento*, IV (1978), pp. 225-35.

## EXAMPLES 1a, b, c

a

le ... po- ve-ro zap-pa-tor in chiu-sa val- le

b

gno ... son a-por-ta-to con di - ser-to le- gno

c

le ... rot- to dal mar al qual da - t'ò le spal- le.

tercets there is a ritornello whose music sounds very Italian to me, perhaps Lorenzese, in its interplay of strict imitations.<sup>19</sup>

The third of Landini's madrigals for three voices, *De' dimmi tu che sei così fregiato*, is technically a caccia because, after the solo beginning of the upper voice, the lower voices form a canon, with the contratenor entering a fifth above the tenor. Set to a moralistic text ("Oh, tell me, you who are so bejeweled with pearls

<sup>19</sup> With regard to Landini's motet, mentioned above, I should add that only a fragment, apparently the upper voice, survives dedicated to the Venetian doge Andrea Contarini ("Principum nobilissime"). Its text ends, after having asked God to give a long life to the dedicatee, by asking the same for the composer himself, "et me Franciscus peregre canens" (in the original his name is given in the accusative case).

and gold, who do you think you are when you look at yourself?”), it also gives new music to its two tercets. The ritornello is a canon as well, this time begun by the upper voice, with the contratenor once again imitating the tenor at the upper fifth (lower fourth of the cantus). Once more Landini’s ability in overcoming the strictures deriving from these self-imposed technical obligations is reminiscent of Lorenzo’s speculative, yet sensitive, mind.

Much less impressive, Landini’s single caccia, *Così pensoso com’amor mi guida* (whose short text actually describes a fishing scene), does not seem to have been influenced in any way by Lorenzo’s models. Rather, it recalls in its unusual rhythm of *senaria imperfecta*, Jacopo’s canonic madrigal *Giunge ’l bel tempo della primavera*, and might also be related to *Nell’acqua chiara e dolce pescando* (by Vincenzo da Rimini), with which it shares not only the *senaria imperfecta* rhythm but also the fishing theme of its poem. In any case I believe it to be a work that dates from before Landini’s association with Lorenzo.

I do not know whether Lorenzo ever wrote a polyphonic ballata. The five monophonic ones that come down to us, all preserved in the Squarcialupi codex, are notated, but for one, in a ternary mode of *quaternaria* with some irregular passages, possibly due to miscomprehension on the part of the copyists of the composer’s peculiar style of notation. The single exception, using a slightly faster *senaria perfecta*, is still in agreement with the traditions of the lyrical monophonic ballata.<sup>20</sup> The first polyphonic ballate known to us come instead from composers, Donato da Cascia and Niccolò da Perugia, who would seem to have been convinced that lyricism did not agree with polyphony. Donato’s only extant piece in this genre, — *Senti tu d’amor, donna? — No! perché?* —, sets an unlyrical dialogue between a man and a woman and uses a binary mode of *quaternaria*. As for Niccolò’s twenty-one ballate for two voices — which might seem to have coincided in time with Landini’s initial output in the new polyphonic genre — all but three are set on either moralizing or comical texts, a few of them polemical dialogues. Landini’s two-voice ballate are instead prevalingly set to lyrical love poems and

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<sup>20</sup> I see an established tradition of ternary rhythm (prevalingly *duodenaria* or its modal transcription) in the five lyrical ballate included in the Vatican, Rossi 215, manuscript and in the Ostiglia fragments, where the single exception, *Amor mi fa cantar alla Francesca*, underlines its *novenaria* rhythm by the *double entendre*, “Love makes me sing to my Francesca” or “Love makes me sing in the French way.” Just a little less consistently such a tradition is present in the five lyrical monophonic ballate by Gherardello, two of them in the usual ternary mode of *quaternaria*, two in *senaria perfecta* and one in a binary mode of *quaternaria*.

quite often return to a ternary mode of *quaternaria*. Should we see there once more the result of his admiration for his older colleague Lorenzo?

I am speaking here of Landini's admiration, not of his having been taught by Lorenzo. We know that Landini, "il cieco degli organi," was already treated as an expert player on his instrument by 1361;<sup>21</sup> and, as suggested above, he might have already composed most of his two-voice madrigals by 1365. If this is so, then the relationship of an admirer to a revered older person is most likely.

Rome

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<sup>21</sup> By 1361 he had already been invited to play on his favorite instrument in the Florentine church of the friars of the Vallombrosan order; see F. A. D'Accone, "Music and Musicians at the Florentine Monastery of Santa Trinita, 1360-1363," in "Memorie e contributi alla musica del Medioevo all'età moderna offerti a Federico Ghisi nel settantesimo compleanno (1901-1971)," *Quadrivium* XII (1971, actually 1973), pp. 131-51, particularly, 134-35.