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Myself when Young: Becoming a Musician in Renaissance Italy—or Not

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READING VASARI'S *Lives of the Most Illustrious Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* many years ago, I noted with surprise how often he mentions artists who were talented as musicians when they were young but decided to turn to art. Why should that be? Was it a better career choice to become an artist rather than a musician in Renaissance Italy? But if music was the greater lure, should one try to become a professional performer, or play music simply for pleasure? These questions still occupy us today. But there are others that were also asked in the Renaissance: Just how far should a gentleman go in showing his musical expertise? Was it acceptable for women to perform in public? How important was it for rulers to employ the best musicians? These are some of the questions I shall consider.

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Benvenuto Cellini, looking back on his childhood, recounted his experience of learning music as follows: 'My father began teaching me to play the recorder and to sing; and though I was at the very young age when little children like to play with a whistle and such toys, I had an overwhelming

Read at the Academy 27 October 2011. Musical examples at the lecture were performed by the Marian Consort, directed by Rory McCleery, and the lutenist Katalin Ertsey.

dislike for it, and played and sang only to obey my father.’¹ Thus began a battle of wills between father and son, the father wishing his son to become famous as a musician and insisting that he practise daily, while the son hated every minute of it, but went along with his father’s wishes till the age of 15. In truth, Benvenuto was talented musically and continued to play in later years, even for Pope Clement VII,² but his heart was already fixed on another occupation. We should not regret his rebellion against his father, however, for he excelled in his chosen profession. His technical expertise as a goldsmith may owe something to his having been forced to be dextrous with his fingers at a very young age.

Benvenuto Cellini is one of the rare Renaissance artists who wrote an autobiography, and thus we know more about his childhood than we usually do of the early lives of Renaissance artists and musicians. In his reminiscences, written towards the end of his life, he keeps coming back to his contest with his father on his profession; clearly it was a very formative experience. But why was his father so insistent that he become a musician, and why as a player of wind instruments? Cellini himself tells us: his father Giovanni was a musician, and a member of the civic wind band in Florence from 1480 to 1514, with interruptions. But he was also an engineer and a maker of musical instruments, and he belonged to one of the great guilds. Benvenuto claimed that his father was dismissed from the Florentine *pifferi* in 1514 because he refused to move to Rome with other members of the company, at the wish of Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici, the future Pope Clement VII; in fact, as we know from other sources, his aged father was pensioned off because he was no longer playing very well.³

Being a town musician was a very smart career move in the Renaissance: the job was well paid and often passed down from father to son.⁴ The musicians were expected to welcome important official visitors, for which

¹ ‘Cominciò mio padre a ’nsegnarmi sonare di flauto e cantare di musica; e con tutto che l’età mia fussi tenerissima, dove i piccoli bambini sogliono pigliar piacere d’un zufolino e di simili trastulli, io ne avevo dispiacere inistimabile, ma solo per ubbidire sonavo e cantavo’; B. Cellini, *Vita*, ed. E. Camesasca (Milan, 1985), p. 89.

² *Ibid.* 128. He played motets on the cornetto with some Florentine musicians.

³ See T. J. McGee, ‘Giovanni Cellini, *piffero* of Florence’, *Historic Brass Society Journal*, 12 (2000), 210–25 at 214. For the wider context see id., *The Ceremonial Musicians of Late Medieval Florence* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 2009). We do not know which guild Giovanni belonged to; Benvenuto notes that some musicians were members of guilds, including the silk and wool guilds (*Vita*, p. 90). There were no musicians’ guilds in Florence; see *Ceremonial Musicians*, p. 204.

⁴ On Italian town musicians, see the still useful survey in C. Anthon, ‘Some aspects of the social status of Italian musicians during the sixteenth century—II’, *Journal of Renaissance and Baroque Music*, 1 (1946), 222–34 at 222–5.

they could anticipate tips (and very lucrative ones, as I recently discovered in the account books of a Renaissance cardinal, Ippolito d'Este II⁵). They also performed for entertainment at official banquets. Moreover, there were perks: the Florentine pifferi could have their meals and sleep in the Palazzo della Signoria, and they could retire on a pension at 60.⁶ However, the job was not necessarily secure: Giovanni was dismissed in 1491 because Lorenzo and Piero de' Medici wanted to make use of his talents as an engineer, which they did for several years. But so eager was he to rejoin the wind band that in 1497 he bribed a fellow piffero 50 florins, almost a year's salary, to resign so he could take his place. It was the steady income that appealed to him, but also, as he pointed out to Benvenuto, being a town musician was not a full-time job; there was work to be had from moonlighting. The pifferi could perform serenades and play at private banquets and at weddings, accompanying dancing. Dancing was an important part of Renaissance social life, and dancing-masters were very much in demand at princely courts.⁷

Close proximity to high officials meant that musicians, who were treated as servants and therefore largely ignored, could overhear conversations, and one of their moonlighting occupations might be spying. We know of several examples, especially of Italian musicians at foreign courts. The Venetian ambassador to Henry VIII reported to the Senate in 1525 the sad tale of a young Venetian harpsichord player, Giovanni da Legge, the illegitimate son of the Lord Lieutenant of Cyprus, Donado da Leze (the Venetian spelling), who went to England with his harpsichord, at a cost exceeding 100 ducats, 'believing that the King, who delights in music, would give him a salary, as he did to the Crutched friar of Cà Memo [Dionysio Memmo], for whom he provided largely, and subsequently Memo departed for fear of his life, and is said to be in Portugal'. It appears that Memmo was suspected of being a spy, which Giovanni evidently did not know; he was surely no spy himself. He played before the King, reported the ambassador, who 'it seems was not much pleased, and made him a present of 20 nobles', evidently far less than Giovanni expected, and

⁵For example, 'uno mandato de di 21 in Siena alli tamburi de Montalcino de scudi 10'; Modena, Archivio di Stato, Amministrazione dei Principi, no. 893, Memoria de mandati for 1553.

⁶McGee, *Ceremonial Musicians*, pp. 203–6.

⁷See J. Bryce, 'Performing for strangers: women, dance, and music in Quattrocento Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 1074–1107. For Siena, see F. A. D'Accone, *The Civic Muse: Music and Musicians in Siena during the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Chicago and London, 1997), pp. 641–55.

the young man, in despair, stabbed himself in the breast at table with his companions and later hanged himself.⁸

We know nothing of Giovanni's life in Venice but, since he bears his father's name, he was probably brought up as the son of a gentleman (Sanudo, who incorporated the account in his diary, remarks that he 'was dearly loved by his father, who has no other children'), and developed his musical talents without the idea of becoming a professional, which at the time would have meant only as a church organist. Rather, it is more likely that he played for his own pleasure and in company among friends. Music was an indispensable part of the *ridotti*, social gatherings in the homes of Venetian noblemen and gentlemen.⁹ According to Vasari, when Giorgione was young he participated in these gatherings: 'He was raised in Venice, and continually delighted in matters of love, and the sound of the lute pleased him so much that he learnt to play and sing at that time so divinely that he was often asked to participate in various kinds of music-making and gatherings of noble persons.'¹⁰ A painting of a lutenist and two companions by the Bergamasque artist Giovanni Cariani gives some idea of musical entertainment at one of these gatherings. The lutenist, who is also singing, is centrally placed in the foreground, looming larger than the two men, and is quite extravagantly dressed, which perhaps indicates that he is an entertainer, not a gentleman musician, although he wears a fur stole, a sign of social status.¹¹ The man on the left holds a book, probably a music book because of the oblong format, and perhaps the lutenist gave lessons to him and his son. It has also been suggested that the man on the left is a tutor, and the young man on the right his pupil, but both wear fur collars, indicating that they are gentlemen. The double-strung six-course lute and

⁸M. Sanudo, *I diarii*, ed. R. Fulin *et al.*, 58 vols. (Venice, 1879–1903), xl, cols. 532–3 (under the date 24 Dec. 1525). The English translation is from *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, relating to English Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collection of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, ed. Rawdon Brown, iii (London, 1869), 515. On what is known of Giovanni's life, including two of his letters, see *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians*, ed. B. J. Blackburn, E. E. Lowinsky, and C. A. Miller (Oxford, 1991), pp. 988–90.

⁹See M. Feldman, *City Culture and the Madrigal at Venice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, and London, 1995), Pt. I, 'Patrons and academies in the city'.

¹⁰'Fu allevato in Vinegia, e diletto di continovamente delle cose d'amore, e piacque il suono del liuto mirabilmente e tanto, che egli sonava e cantava nel suo tempo tanto divinamente, che egli era spesso per quello adoperato a diverse musiche e ragunate di persone nobili.' Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, ed. G. Milanesi (Florence, 1906), iv. 92.

¹¹The painting, formerly in the collection of Mrs Rudolph Heinemann, is now in the National Gallery, Washington, DC <http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=90793>, accessed 2 Feb. 2012. It is discussed in R. Pallucchini and F. Rossi, *Giovanni Cariani*, Monumenta Bergomense, 63 (Bergamo, 1983), p. 125, who date it 1518–20.

the playing position are accurately depicted, and the lutenist is singing from memory, perhaps a frottola such as Marchetto Cara's *Se non soccorri, amore*.¹²

The song is about love, or rather an invocation of the God of Love. In Vasari's view music is dangerously associated with love, and he criticises some artists for spending too much time on frivolous pursuits when they could have been creating great works of art; Giorgione died young, for example, because he caught the plague from his girlfriend. Vasari admires artists who practise music for noble ends and have other graces, such as pleasant conversation or the ability to write poetry.¹³ He makes a revealing comment about Sebastiano Veneziano—known later as Sebastiano del Piombo:

Sebastiano's first profession, as many affirm, was not painting but music, because, besides singing, he greatly enjoyed playing various instruments, especially the lute, on which he could play all the parts without any companion; this made him greatly appreciated by the gentlemen of Venice, with whom, as a virtuous person, he was very much at home. . . . Agostino Chigi sought to bring him to Rome, not only because his painting pleased him but also because he played the lute so well and was amiable and pleasant in conversation.¹⁴

Sebastiano died three years before Vasari published the first edition of his *Lives*, in 1550, and although Vasari knew him personally, he evidently had not interviewed him, not expecting him to die and thus to become eligible for inclusion in the book; the evidence about his playing seems to be second-hand. For all other musically talented artists, Vasari merely remarks that they liked to sing or play the lute. What he says about Sebastiano is different, and indicates that he played the lute expertly: he could play three or four voices at once, not just a simple chordal accompaniment to singing, as in Marchetto Cara's frottola, arranged for voice and lute.

¹² Performed at the lecture by William Balkwill, accompanied by Katalin Ertsey. For the song, see W. F. Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes: the Frottole of Marchetto Cara* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1980), pp. 483–8.

¹³ See K. A. McIver, 'Maniera, music, and Vasari', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 28 (1997), 45–55.

¹⁴ 'Non fu, secondo che molti affermano, la prima professione di Sebastiano la pittura, ma la musica; perchè, oltre al cantare, si diletò molto di sonar varie sorti di suoni, ma sopra il tutto il liuto, per sonarsi in su quello stromento tutte le parti senz'altra compagnia: il quale esercizio fece costui essere un tempo gratissimo a' gentiluomini di Vinezia, con i quali, come virtuoso, praticò sempre dimesticamente. . . . Agostino Chigi sanese . . . cercò di condurlo a Roma; piacendogli, oltre la pittura, che sapessi così ben sonare il liuto, e fosse dolce e piacevole nel conversare.' *Le Vite*, ed. Milanese, v. 565–6 (from the 1568 edition; the wording differs only slightly from the 1550 edition). Paolo Pino confirms Sebastiano's skill in his *Dialogo di pittura* (1548), in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, ed. P. Barocchi, 3 vols. (Bari, 1960), i. 135: 'Frate Sebastiano dal Piombo come riuscì eccellente nel liutto!'

We have examples of such music in a beautiful lute book copied in Venice around 1517, now in the Newberry Library in Chicago.¹⁵ It contains the compositions of Vincenzo Capirola, a Brescian gentleman who lived in Venice, who was the teacher of the copyist, a certain Vidal.¹⁶ Vidal claims that he had the pages of his book populated with delightful illustrations of flowers and fauna precisely so it would survive. Indeed, he was prescient, because we have lost the vast majority of music manuscripts that belonged to private persons; music is more ephemeral than art. Capirola and his pupil must have been very accomplished musicians if they could play pieces of the difficulty represented in the book, the kind of music that Sebastiano could play.¹⁷

It is often a question, when we look at portraits of musicians, whether the sitter is a professional musician or a gentleman amateur.¹⁸ Girolamo Giovanni Savoldo's portrait of a young man playing a recorder is a good example.¹⁹ Savoldo (c.1485–1548) was a Brescian painter who worked mainly in Venice. His accuracy in depicting instruments and his ability to notate music indicate that he too was familiar with music. Here I think we see a gentleman: he wears a fur collar, as do the gentlemen in Cariani's portrait; in fact, he is surprisingly heavily dressed for an indoors portrait, even for playing music; such dress was meant to indicate elevated social status, not the temperature of the room at the time of sitting or the actual moment of performance. Unusually, he holds a recorder; this is an instrument normally given to shepherds, and thus associated with lower social

¹⁵ It is available online at <<http://ricercar.cesr.univ-tours.fr/3-programmes/EMN/luth/pages/notice.asp?numnotice=4>>, accessed 2 Feb. 2012.

¹⁶ For a modern edition with an extensive introduction see *Composizione di Meser Vincenzo Capirola: Lute-book (circa 1517)*, ed. O. Gombosi (Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1955).

¹⁷ At this point Katalin Ertsey played Ricercar VIII, pp. 76–7 in Gombosi's edition. In addition to instrumental pieces the book also includes intabulations of vocal compositions, as well as instructions for playing from lute tablature and stringing the lute.

¹⁸ Arnaldo Morelli has written a very thoughtful article on this topic: 'Il ritratto di musicista nel Cinquecento: tipologie e significati', in *Il Ritratto nell'Europa del Cinquecento: Atti del Convegno (Firenze, 7–8 novembre 2002)*, ed. A. Galli, C. Piccinini, and M. Rossi (Florence, 2007), pp. 169–91.

¹⁹ The portrait belongs to the Banca Popolare di Brescia and is on deposit at the Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo in Brescia. See *Giovanni Gerolamo Savoldo tra Foppa, Giorgione e Caravaggio* (Milan, 1990), no. I. 29, and F. Caroli, *L'anima e il volto: Ritratto e fisiognomia da Leonardo a Bacon* (exh. cat., Milan, 1998), p. 82 (colour reproduction on p. 83). The most detailed discussion is H. C. Slim, 'Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo's *Portrait of a Man with a Recorder*', *Early Music*, 13 (1985), 398–406, reprinted in his *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century: Essays in Iconography*, Variorum Collected Studies (Aldershot, 2002), no. XI. An online reproduction may be found at <http://arthistory.about.com/od/from_exhibitions/ig/Great-Painters-in-Brescia/Young-Man-with-a-Flute.htm>, accessed 2 Feb. 2012.

status. Unlike shepherds, however, he is playing from a music book. The notation is not completely legible, but that of the sheet of music pinned to the wall is, as it catches full light. The music has been identified as the canzona *O Morte? Holà!*, published in 1531 with an ascription to a certain F. P. The text, however, is not the text of the canzona. Rather, it reads: 'Joannes Jeronimus Savoldis de brisia faciebat' (Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo of Brescia made this). Retexting a piece of music is a novel way of indicating the painter's name, which in Venetian paintings normally appears in a cartellino somewhere near the bottom of the picture. Nothing points to the identity of the sitter, as far as I can see, and this is often the case with portraits, since the commissioner and his friends knew perfectly well who he was.

This young man may have been one of the pupils of Silvestro Ganassi (1492–after 1550), called Silvestro dal Fontego because he lived in Venice near the Fondaco dei Tedeschi.²⁰ Like Cellini's father, he was a professional piffero, and was employed by the Venetian government beginning in 1517. In 1535 he published the very first method for playing recorders, the *Opera intitulata Fontegara*, named after his locality in Venice (Fig. 1). Here we see five men gathered at a table around three music books. One is singing and three are playing recorders; the fifth holds a soprano recorder in his left hand. On the ledge are two cornetti. Three different sizes of viols and a lute hang on the wall. Indeed, the title page specifies that because the treatise teaches how to make diminutions—rapid ornamental notes—it is also useful for players of all wind and string instruments as well as singers. Silvestro dedicated the book to his employer, the doge Andrea Gritti.

Ganassi begins his treatise by remarking that all musical instruments are less worthy than the human voice, but one should strive to imitate the human voice as much as possible, just as the painter tries to imitate the

²⁰ On Ganassi, see H. M. Brown and G. Ongaro, 'Ganassi dal Fontego, Sylvestro di', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn., ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London, 2001), ix. 508. The date of his death is not known. An unexpected discovery provides a *terminus post quem* and indirectly links him with Titian: on 20 Oct. 1550 Ganassi served as witness for the priest who had married Titian in 1525: 'Reverendus Dominus Presbiter Paulus Petri Diaconus in Ecclesia Sancti Joannis Novi habitator Cenetae et Canonicus in dicto loco, de cujus nomine et cognitione fidem fecit ser Silvester quondam ser Antonij Ganasso pifarus a fontico, testis productus, citatus, monitus, juratus ex mandato dominorum Judicum Examinatorum.' The document also specifies his father's name as Antonio. See G. Ludwig, 'Neue Funde im Staatsarchiv zu Venedig', *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlung*, 24 (1903), Beiheft, 110–18 at 115. He was evidently still alive in 1557, when he is mentioned in Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura* (see below, n. 21).



Figure 1. Title page of Silvestro Ganassi, *Opera intitulata Fontegara* (Venice, 1535). Photo: author.

effects of nature with various colours. The analogy with painting is not accidental since, as we learn from the artist Paolo Pino, who incidentally was Savoldo's teacher, Silvestro himself was a painter: in his *Dialogo della pittura* of 1548, Pino calls him 'nipote della pittura', nephew of painting, because he is the son of music, painting's sister art: 'He has a divine intellect, very elevated and talented (*tutto virtù*), and he is a good painter.'²¹ No painting by him has been identified so far. In Ganassi we have a man who was talented as an artist, but chose music as his main profession. However, he designed, typeset, cut the woodblocks for, and printed his own books.

Ganassi published a second treatise in 1542, entitled *Regola Rubertina*, and a continuation in 1543, *Lettione seconda pur della prattica di sonare il violone d'arco da tasti*, on the title page of which he gives his name as 'Silvestro Ganassi dal Fontego desideroso nella pictura'. These books too were entirely his own creation.²² Both volumes teach how to play the 'viola d'archo tastada', the viol with frets. On the cover of the *Regola Rubertina* (Fig. 2) we see three men playing bass and tenor viols and a boy singing from music. The book is dedicated to and named after the Florentine exile and great music lover Ruberto Strozzi, who was Silvestro's pupil.²³ Ganassi evidently was proficient not only on wind but also string instruments.

Although we do hear of music schools, and I think the title page of Silvestro's first treatise shows his music schoolroom, most gentlemen probably learnt music through private tuition; this was another way that Giovanni Cellini moonlighted from his job as a town musician.²⁴ Music,

²¹ Pino, *Dialogo di pittura*, p. 135: 'Quasi che mi scordavo di Silvestro dal Fondago, nipote della pittura per esser figliuolo della musica, sirochia dell'arte nostra. Costui ha un intelletto divino, tutto elevato, tutto virtù, et è buon pittore.' Ganassi is also mentioned in Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura* (1557), in *Trattati d'arte*, i. 153: 'In ciò [whether painted figures can express emotion] si può ricercare il parer del vostro virtuoso Silvestro, eccellente musico e sonatore del doge, il quale disegna e dipinge lodevolmente e ci fa toccar con mano che le figure dipinte da buoni maestri parlano, quasi a paragon delle vive.'

²² There were complaints about errors in the first volume, as we can judge from his letter to the 'Humanissimo Lettor' at the end of the *Lettione seconda* and the colophon: 'Lettor la diligenzia del lezer sera il mezzo del conoscere alcun error si nel intaglio quanto della Stampa per il replicamento. Stampata per L'auttore proprio. Nel .M.D. XXXXIII.'

²³ On Ruberto Strozzi and music see R. J. Agee, 'Ruberto Strozzi and the early madrigal', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 36 (1983), 1–17. The *Lettione seconda* was dedicated to Strozzi's friend Neri Capponi, another Florentine exile and also a great lover of music. For both men and their role in Venetian society see Feldman, *City Culture*, 37–46.

²⁴ A later example: in 1581 the third priest of San Giacomo dell'Orio in Venice, 'bespectacled Battista', gave instrumental lessons in private houses (he also 'socialized in lay clothes in the evenings and drank "the odd drop of wine"'). See D. Howard, 'The role of music in the Venetian home in the Cinquecento', in ead. and L. Moretti (eds.), *The Music Room in Early Modern France and Italy: Sound, Space, and Object*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 176 (Oxford, 2012), pp. 95–114 at 104.



Figure 2. Title page of Silvestro Ganassi, *Regola Rubertina* (Venice, 1542). Photo: author.

as we know from Baldassar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, was a much-desired accomplishment for a gentleman.²⁵ It was important to start early. Titian's charming portrait of two boys of the Pesaro family shows two young boys, turned towards one another; the one on the left holds a lute, with a closed tenor partbook beside him, while the other has put down his recorder and rests his hand on another partbook, the music of which is not quite legible.²⁶ Titian was a music lover, but he did not think it was important, as Savoldo did, to indicate precisely what the music was; it may have been legible when first painted, but as is often the case with painted music, damage and imperfect restoration make it difficult to be sure of the original notation.

What possibilities were there in the Renaissance for ordinary people to learn music? For those who could not afford a private tutor for their children, it was possible to place talented boys in cathedral schools, all of which had a grammar master and a music master. Sometimes the music master had a wider remit: when the Florentine music theorist Pietro Aaron was *maestro di cappella* at Imola Cathedral (before 1516 to 1522), he was also paid by the General Council of the city of Imola to teach 'the art of music free of charge to poor clerics of the city or territory of Imola, as well as all other associates and persons serving in this musical chapel'.²⁷ In Lucca the *maestro di cappella* was engaged by the city to teach music to laymen as well; in the late fifteenth century the town and the cathedral shared the expense of paying the salary of the English Carmelite friar John Hothby.²⁸ Thus even those who could not afford private tutors could learn to sing and play instruments.

It is perhaps the experience of teaching amateurs that gave Pietro Aaron the idea for the portrait he included in his treatise called *Thoscanello*

²⁵ On music in the *Cortegiano*, see J. Haar, 'The courtier as musician: Castiglione's view of the science and art of music', in R. W. Hanning and D. Rosand (eds.), *Castiglione: the Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, CT, 1983), pp. 165–89, repr. in Haar, *The Science and Art of Renaissance Music*, ed. P. Corneilson (Princeton, NJ, 1998), pp. 20–37.

²⁶ <<http://www.pubhist.com/work/4768/titian-and-workshop/two-boys-of-the-pesaro-family>>, accessed 2 Feb. 2012. The painting is in private possession. Michael Jaffé's attribution to Titian is not universally accepted. See 'Pesaro family portraits: Pordenone, Lotto and Titian', *Burlington Magazine*, 113 (1971), 696–702. The enlarged image makes it clear that the music is not legible.

²⁷ *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians*, p. 79, citing a document of 3 Apr. 1521.

²⁸ For example, in the plague year 1480, Hothby was rehired by the city 'cum consueto salario pro annis tribus incipiendis die qua finit presens sua conducta et cum oneribus consuetis, et licet fuerit absens a civitate tempore epydimie, tamen quia assidue tenuit secum scolares docendo musicam et se exercuit sicut si fuisset Luce, ideo currant [sic] ei salarium dicti temporis' (Lucca, Archivio di Stato, Riformagioni Pubbliche 1464–1472, Consiglio Generale 21, fol. 72).

de la musica, published in Venice in 1523 (Fig. 3).²⁹ It gives the impression that he taught music at university: we see him teaching *ex cathedra*, weighty tomes on the shelves behind him, and on the table in the foreground a lute, a viol, a recorder, and two books; the oblong book is probably of music, the other a theory manual. By placing the instruments so prominently it would appear that Aaron teaches practical rather than speculative music, but in his surviving letters he mentions nothing about teaching music, let alone about instruments. Rather, these instruments seem designed to show that the subject is music. The portrait reflects Aaron's self-presentation as a music theorist, which was the most prestigious occupation for a musician in the Renaissance, and a teacher not of children but of grown men. It is very likely that Aaron got the idea for the portrait from the similar illustration of the Milanese theorist Franchino Gaffurio on the title page of his *De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum opus* (Milan, 1518); late in Gaffurio's career as *maestro di cappella* at the Duomo in Milan, Ludovico Sforza appointed him to teach music at the university in Milan, giving credible basis to his representation *ex cathedra*. Aaron's image, however, is at odds with reality: he held no public lectureship, and had left the cathedral in Imola to become the tutor to the children of Sebastiano Michiel, the Grand Prior of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem in Venice, to whom he dedicated the *Thoscanello*. He remained with him until the Grand Prior's death in 1534.³⁰

We know nothing about Aaron's origins except that he came from Florence, where he was born 'in tenuous fortune', and had become a priest by 1516. There is circumstantial evidence that he was a convert from Judaism.³¹ He certainly did not have a regular career; in the dedication of the *Thoscanello* he hints at difficult circumstances and the shattering of his hopes when Pope Leo X, a fellow Florentine and renowned lover of music, died in 1521. Unlike many theorists, Aaron never speaks about his

²⁹The treatise was reprinted 1529 with a slightly different title, *Toscanello in musica*. In both editions, which are largely identical except for the addition of an 'Aggiunta' in the 1529 edition, the illustration faces the opening of the Libro primo. It appears as well in his treatise of 1525, *Trattato della natura et cognitione di tutti gli tuoni di canto figurato*.

³⁰In his next treatise, *Trattato della natura et cognitione di tutti gli tuoni di canto figurato*, Aaron calls himself on the title page 'maestro di casa del reverendo et magnifico cavaliere Hierosolomitano Messer Sebastiano Michele Priore di Vinetia'. He mentioned Michiel's sons in several of his letters written to Giovanni Spataro (now lost), as we can tell from Spataro's replies, published in *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians*, e.g. p. 433.

³¹On what is known of Aaron's life, see *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians*, pp. 74–100.



Figure 3. Pietro Aaron, *Toscanello in musica* (2nd edn., Venice, 1529), sig. a ii^v. Photo: author.

teacher, and we have no idea if he attended university. In fact it is unlikely: although he had the ambition to compose his first treatise in Latin, he lacked the necessary competence; it was translated for him by a friend in Imola, the humanist Giovanni Antonio Flaminio, father of the more famous Marcantonio, and published in Bologna in 1516. The title page is plain, but it mentions the translator, who arranged the publication.³²

It is no wonder that the epithet 'Renaissance man' has become a commonplace. Those Renaissance men who were talented in music often had other inclinations and occupations as well. Silvestro Ganassi, as mentioned above, was not only a player of wind and string instruments, a teacher of music, and author of instruction manuals, but also a painter, woodcutter, typesetter, and printer. A more unusual case is that of Antonfrancesco Doni (1513–74), one of the more colourful characters of the sixteenth century. Scholars of Italian literature think of him as a writer; musicologists think of him mainly as the author of a dialogue on music (1544) that includes a number of musical compositions, some of his own making. Growing up in Florence, Doni seems to have tried out a number of careers, even as a Servite friar, which came to an abrupt end in 1540; it was probably this phase of his career that deepened his musical expertise. He became a prolific author on many subjects and cultivated a bizarre personality. He was in fact a jack of all trades: writer, poet, avid correspondent, would-be friend of the famous, musician, composer, typographer, printer, artist, and calligrapher. In a letter to Cosimo de' Medici in 1543 he called himself a 'Domine', a musician, a writer who had recently learnt Greek, and a poet.³³ Browsing through his *Nuove pitture del Doni fiorentino*, a beautifully calligraphed manuscript of emblems in the Vatican Library, I was startled to find a musical composition in four parts, but using cherries, hearts, bells, mice, and flowers as note heads; the date 1560 is worked into the initials.³⁴ *Al partir lagrimoso*, unlike many madrigals, is not a love

³² On the vicissitudes of this publication and the controversy with Aaron's fellow theorist Franchino Gaffurio, see B. J. Blackburn, 'Publishing music theory in the early Cinquecento: friends and foes', in R. M. Marvin and C. Monson (eds.), *Communicating (about) Music* (Rochester, NY, forthcoming).

³³ 'Io sono un Domine, che familiarmente favello con V.S. Illustris. & mi chiamo il Doni. Sono presso a parecchi anni ch'io uscì di Fiorenza: & son Musico, scrittore, dotto in volgare, & di nove per greco. son Poeta; ch'io doveva dire inanzi.' Dated 27 Mar. 1543, the letter was published in *Tre libri di lettere del Doni. E i termini della lingua Toscana* (Venice, 1552), p. 41. With it he enclosed a motet by Jachet Berchem, one of his own settings of canzone, and two of his sonnets.

³⁴ The manuscript has been published in an elegant modern edition: A. F. Doni, *Le nuove pitture del Doni fiorentino. Libro primo consacrato al mirabil signore Donno Aloise da Este illustrissimo et*

song but a musical thank-you note, very likely to the dedicatee of the treatise, Luigi d'Este, brother of Duke Alfonso II d'Este, who was to become a cardinal in the following year:

Al partir lagrimoso, Signor mio dolce et caro, di vostra vista ov'ogni mio riposo ripose et serba Amore, con acerbo dolore più che la morte amaro, l'alma propria senti' trarmi del core. Et degno fu, per ch'io sol di mirarvi vivo, signor mio;	At (my) tearful parting, My kind and dear lord, from your countenance, where Love rests and preserves my repose, with grievous sorrow more bitter than death, I felt my own soul drawn from my heart. And it was fitting, because I live only from looking upon you, my lord;
così toltomi voi (sorte empia et ria)	thus, when you were taken from me (impious and wicked fate),
viddi tirmi con voi la vita mia.	I saw my life taken from me too.

The text is rather over the top, but that is of a piece with Doni's style. Musically it is an adventurous composition, in which Doni attempted to write in the latest and rather *recherché* style, with much chromaticism (see Appendix I).³⁵ He was clearly familiar with Nicola Vicentino's *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* (Rome, 1555), which pioneered the use of the ancient chromatic and enharmonic genera in modern music.³⁶ The arcane secrets of this type of music were known to Alfonso and his siblings, since Vicentino, as he states in his treatise, had taught it to them in Ferrara.³⁷

Reverendissimo. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Patetta 364, ed. S. Maffei (Naples, 2006). The music is on fols. 27^v–29^r. The madrigal was sung at the lecture by the Marian Consort. James Haar, in his discussion of a madrigal manuscript presented to Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici, 'A gift of madrigals to Cosimo I: The Ms. Florence, Bibl. Naz. Centrale, Magl. XIX, 130', *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, 1 (1966), 168–89, repr. in his *The Science and Art of Renaissance Music*, 300–22, raised the question whether Doni was not only the editor but also the copyist (pp. 313–14). Comparison of the calligraphic style with the Vatican manuscript confirms that Doni was indeed the scribe.

³⁵ The transcription of the madrigal in Maffei's edition by Virgilio Bernardoni is faulty: it misses a number of accidentals. The text was also set by Philippe de Monte, in his *Secondo libro de madrigali a cinque voci* (Venice, 1567); modern edition in *Philippi de Monte Opera*, series D, Madrigals, vol. 2, ed. O. Wessely and E. Kanduth (Leuven, 1980), pp. 82–4. It is just possible to read the text in a woman's voice, but clearly as imagined by a man.

³⁶ In Vicentino's system, the dots above the notes in bars 4 and 11 would indicate quarter tones above the written pitch, but that does not seem to be the case here; rather Doni seems to mean some kind of intensification.

³⁷ *L'antica musica*, fol. 10^v. In the translation by Maria Rika Maniates, *Ancient Music Adapted to Modern Practice* (New Haven, CT, and London), pp. 33–4.

Doni had a very high opinion of himself, perhaps too high for the patrons he was always seeking out but, as mentioned earlier, musicians were usually treated as servants. This could be particularly irksome for creative artists. On the one hand it was prestigious to serve an eminent patron, but on the other one had to do his bidding. In the late 1480s the famous poet-improviser Serafino Aquilano was in the service of Cardinal Ascanio Sforza in Rome. We know from Serafino's biographer, Vincenzo Calmeta, that the poet and the cardinal did not get along with each other, and Serafino produced mordant verses on the subject.³⁸ Ascanio loved nothing more than hunting, and when Serafino heard the hunting horns, he cowered under his bed, imploring God to liberate him from his master. It is in this context that he wrote a consolatory sonnet to his fellow musician, the singer and composer Josquin des Prez, of which I give the beginning and the end in translation:

Josquin, don't say the heavens are cruel and merciless
 That gave you genius so sublime.
 And if someone is well dressed, do not mind,
 For this is the privilege of buffoons and fools.

...

But who has talent may wander through the world in his own way;
 Like the swimmer wrapped in a vest of cork:
 Put him under water, yet he fears not drowning.

Serafino decided he could do just that, and he left Ascanio's service. Now began a nomadic year, in which, according to Calmeta, he began

to give himself to the company of people who were not of his social standing, he spent an active night life, slept wherever he happened to be; any other house rather than that of Ascanio was his refuge and wherever he was (be it whosoever) he recited not only his compositions but gave copies thereof, so that throughout Rome no other poems were recited than his.

For Calmeta, Serafino had social standing as an artist, and his behaviour violated the norms of the social contract between patron and employee. As Ascanio's servant, Serafino would have been expected to perform only in his household or at his invitation, and certainly not to distribute his verses promiscuously.

³⁸ On Serafino and Ascanio, see E. E. Lowinsky, 'Ascanio Sforza's life: a key to Josquin's biography and an aid to the chronology of his works', in E. E. Lowinsky with B. J. Blackburn (eds.), *Josquin des Prez: Proceedings of the International Josquin Festival-Conference* (London, 1976), pp. 31–75 at 51–60, from which the following translations are taken (pp. 56, 53).

If we seek a parallel for modern pop musicians in the Renaissance, Serafino could qualify. He was a great favourite at a number of courts, including Naples, Urbino, Mantua, Milan, and Rome. The ability to improvise, both verse and music, was highly prized, and of course it was always a very public performance. Improvisers range from the equivalent of buskers, street musicians, to highly literate reciters of extemporised verse, even in Latin, such as by the humanist brothers Aurelio and Brandolino Lippi. A Renaissance banquet in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century would not be complete without a star turn by an improviser.³⁹ In two respects Serafino was different, however: his poetry has been preserved and his style of performance differed from that of other improvisers. After his death his verses (in a highly optimistic number) were published in a succession of editions. Many of these poems were set to music at the time, especially the *strambotti*, an eight-line verse form that was ideally suited to music.⁴⁰ It is tempting to think that these musical settings might reflect Serafino's style; while none is ever signed with his name, Calmeta always stressed that Serafino's music was just as important as his verse.⁴¹ The musical settings we know are quite simple, leaving the possibility of improvised ornamentation in the style of lute music, or of the type of diminution demonstrated in Ganassi's *Fontegara*. Calmeta, however, claimed that Serafino's performance was so effective precisely because he did not sing in this manner, but invented a new and more sublime delivery, 'accompanying the verses with music that was drawn out and simple, so that the excellence of the weighty and subtle words could be understood'.⁴²

³⁹ On oral delivery of verse in the Renaissance see the valuable contribution by B. Richardson, 'Orality, manuscript and the circulation of verse', in his *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 226–58, and '“Recitato e cantato”: The oral diffusion of lyric poetry in sixteenth-century Italy', in S. Gilson and C. Keen (eds.), *Theatre, Opera, and Performance in Italy from the Fifteenth Century to the Present: Essays in Honour of Richard Andrews* (Leeds, 2004), pp. 67–82.

⁴⁰ See Giuseppina La Face Bianconi and Antonio Rossi, *Le rime di Serafino Aquilano in musica* (Florence, 1999).

⁴¹ 'Nel recitare de' soi poemi era tanto ardente e con tanto giudizio le parole con la musica consertava che l'animo de li ascoltanti, o dotti o mediocri o plebei o donne, egualmente commoveva.' From the 'Vita del facondo poeta vulgare Serafino Aquilano', in V. Calmeta, *Prose e lettere edite e inedite (con due appendici di altri inediti)*, ed. C. Grayson, Collezione di opere inedite o rare, 121 (Bologna, 1959), pp. 75–6. Several contemporary accounts attest to the desire to obtain both the text and the music of his poems.

⁴² 'Altri saranno che, essercitandosi in un altro modo di cantare, semplice e non diminuito, vorranno di qualche arguzietta, o vero affetto, dilettersi, per uscir fuori della volgar schiera, quelle con lo instrumento di musica accompagnando, per poterle meglio non solo negli amorosi ma ancora negli eruditi cuori imprimere. Questi tali nel modo del cantare deveno Cariteo o Serafino imitare, i quali a' nostri tempi hanno di simile essercizio portata la palma, e sonosi

Star performers, because they were soloists, became an object of emulation, just as teenagers today are motivated to take up the guitar to emulate their favourite celebrity. It was no different in the sixteenth century; Serafino had many imitators. The humanists knew that in antiquity poets and musicians were one, which encouraged poets to try their hand at musical accompaniment. Even someone as exalted as the philosopher Marsilio Ficino learnt to play the viol and to sing, though privately, because he found that it had therapeutic value and elevated the spirit.⁴³ Statesmen could relax from weightier matters by playing and singing, a suggestion we often find mentioned in dedications of music books. Niccolò Machiavelli's brother-in-law, according to Girolamo Ruscelli, reported on a talent that we might find hard to imagine:

many people recall Niccolò Machiavelli, who would open any Latin poet, put it in front of him on a table and, while playing the lira, would sing and turn into the vernacular or translate the verses of that poet, making from them stanzas of *ottava rima*. He kept to a true translation with such elegance of style and such ease that ... everyone thought it impossible that he could improvise what many people who were learned and of lofty talent admitted they would have struggled to do in an adequate space of time.⁴⁴

Music played an important role in Machiavelli's life since his mistress was an accomplished musician. Her name was Barbera Salutati, and her relationship with Machiavelli lasted from 1523 until his death in 1527. In 1525 Machiavelli, in preparation for a performance of his comedy *La Mandragola* in Faenza in February 1526, wanted to have musical interludes between the acts. In a letter of October 1525 to the governor of the Romagna, Francesco Guicciardini, he writes that

Lodovico Alamanni and I have dined these [past] evenings with La Barbera [Salutati] and discussed the comedy, so that she offered to come with her singers to provide the chorus between the acts; and I offered to write canzone suitable for the acts and Lodovico offered to give her and her singers lodging there in the house of the Buosi.

sforzati d'accompagnar le rime con musica stesa e piana, acciocché meglio la eccellenza delle sentenziose e argute parole si potesse intendere'; from the essay 'Qual stile tra' volgari poeti sia da imitare', *ibid.*, pp. 21–2. By 'musica stesa e piana' I take Calmeta to mean that the harmonic rhythm was slow and ornamentation was not used. This style is differentiated from that appropriate to frottole and barzellette: 'Saranno alcuni altri i quali, diletlandosi d'arte di canto, desiderano col cantar, massimamente diminuito, gratificar la sua donna, e in quella musica parole amorse inferire. Costoro, non volendo più avanti di tale istituto procedere, circa le stanza, barzelette, frottole e altri pedestri stili deveno essercitarsi' (*ibid.*, p. 21).

⁴³ See Richardson, *Manuscript Culture*, pp. 235–6.

⁴⁴ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 253, with translation.

And in a later letter, of 3 January 1526, he says, somewhat mysteriously:

As for La Barbera and the singers, if some other consideration does not restrain you, I think I can bring her for fifteen soldi to the lira. I say so because she has certain lovers who could be in the way; however, by use of caution, they could be calmed down. And this will assure you that she and I have made up our minds to come: we have written five new canzone suitable for the comedy, and they are set to music to be sung between the acts, of which I send you the texts enclosed with this letter so your Lordship can examine them; as for the music, either all of us, or I alone will bring it to you.⁴⁵

The French composer Philippe Verdelot, then *maestro di cappella* at Santa Maria del Fiore, was engaged by Machiavelli to set the canzone to music.⁴⁶

Before the 1520s we know very little about professional women musicians, a topic that has become of great interest in recent decades. Almost without exception, women who perform music either are noblewomen such as Isabella d'Este, marchioness of Mantua, who never play in public but only within a small coterie of equals, such as Castiglione describes in *Il Cortegiano*, or courtesans, for whom music was a most desirable skill, though they too would have performed in private. With La Barbera we have a special case: she is a courtesan, with other lovers besides Machiavelli, but she is also a professional performer, appearing in public with other singers.⁴⁷

In his biography of the Florentine painter Domenico Puligo (1492–1527), Vasari says that 'he also painted a portrait of la Barbera Fiorentina who was famous at that time, a very beautiful courtesan, and very much loved by many not only for her beauty but also for her good manners and especially for being an excellent musician, and she sang divinely'.⁴⁸ H. Colin

⁴⁵ Machiavelli is suggesting that he could persuade Barbera to accept a 25 per cent discount. I use the translation in H. C. Slim, *A Gift of Madrigals and Motets*, 2 vols. (Chicago, IL, and London, 1972), i. 93. The canzone, some of which were also performed between the acts of *La Clizia*, are discussed on pp. 92–104.

⁴⁶ For the music see *ibid.*, vol. 2, nos. 4, 6, 9, 10, and 11.

⁴⁷ For another such singer, also Florentine, see Richard Sherr, 'Verdelot in Florence, Coppini in Rome, and the singer "La Fiore"', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 37 (1984), 402–11 at 406–8; reprinted in Richard Sherr, *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome and Other Courts* (Aldershot, 1999), no. XIX.

⁴⁸ 'Ritrasse anco in un quadro la Barbara Fiorentina, in quel tempo famosa, bellissima cortigiana, e molto amata da molti, non meno che per la bellezza, per le sue buone creanze, e particolarmente per essere bonissima musica e cantare divinamente.' *Vite* (1568), ed. Milanese, iv. 465. In the 1550 edition Vasari, with his customary moral disapprobation, remarked that Puligo was not very assiduous at his profession, being distracted by music and love: 'E ciò fu cagione ch'egli continuo praticava con persone allegre e con musici, alcune femmine e certi suoi amori seguendo', which led to his death from the plague (p. 693).

Slim identified the description with the portrait of an imposing woman in a stunning red dress, holding a music book (Fig. 4).⁴⁹ She looks straight at the viewer: this is a woman to be reckoned with, one might say fully capable of standing up to Machiavelli. The music and text are clearly written. When we find legible music in a painting, it is likely to be significant. Under Barbera's right hand is a motet on the text *Quam pulchra es*, from the Song of Songs, which includes the line 'how lovely your voice', and under her left a French chanson, *J'ayme bien mon amy*, 'I love my friend well'.⁵⁰ Also on the table is what is known as a 'Petrarchino', a pocket-size volume of Petrarch's poetry, open to sonnet 213, 'Grazie ch'a pochi il ciel largo destina' (graces generous heaven bestows on few). Every courtesan should have owned a Petrarchino, and many gentlemen too. The painting also has the motto 'Meliora latent': 'better things lie hidden', suggesting that while she may be a courtesan, she is a woman of intellect; in the context of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Apollo and Daphne, l. 501), however, the 'better things' are hidden by Daphne's clothing, and some would have remembered that. Across the bottom is a line from the *Aeneid* (9. 404), invoking Diana, the moon goddess: 'tu, dea, tu praesens nostro succurre labori' ('You goddess, be here and help us in our work'). Machiavelli might have said precisely that to La Barbera when he invited her to sing between the acts of his comedy, which would have been performed at night. Philippe Verdelot's setting of one of the canzone Machiavelli composed for the play, *O dolce nocte* ('O sweet night, O blessed nocturnal and still hours that wait on ardent lovers'), is particularly appropriate in the context of *La Mandragola*.⁵¹

I mentioned above that it is difficult to tell whether a painting of a musician portrays a professional or an amateur. In the case of Barbera Salutati, we can be fairly certain that she is a professional because of the presence of legibly notated music; moreover, the juxtaposition of a motet

⁴⁹ See H. C. Slim, 'A motet for Machiavelli's mistress and a chanson for a courtesan', in S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus (eds.), *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore* (Florence, 1978), pp. 457–72, repr. in id., *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century*, no. IV. Slim's detailed study of the iconography, including the identification of the music, led to the proposal to connect this portrait with Barbera Salutati. On the earlier historiography see *Domenico Puligo (1492–1527): Un protagonista dimenticato della pittura fiorentina*, ed. E. Capretti and S. Padovani (exh. cat., Livorno, 2002), p. 122 (illustrated on p. 123). The painting is in a private collection and I wish to thank the owner for supplying a transparency.

⁵⁰ The motet has not been identified, but the text and melody of the chanson were set by a number of composers from the late fifteenth century to 1543; none of the versions agrees exactly with the voice part in the painting (Slim, 'A motet', pp. 463–5).

⁵¹ At the lecture the madrigal was sung by the Marian Consort.



Figure 4. Domenico Puligo, *Portrait of Barbera Salutati(?)*. Private collection; used by permission.

and a chanson on facing pages of the same book is unusual: the attributes in this painting were very carefully thought out, and all signs point to Machiavelli as the initiator of the commission.

Other representations of musicians are not as clear. A particularly problematic case is a portrait attributed to Sebastiano del Piombo, whose talent as a musician was discussed above. Since the nineteenth century it has been called 'Portrait of a Violinist' (see Fig. 5).⁵² This description is perplexing: there is no violin. The young man holds what is clearly a bow with which to play a string instrument; at that time it would be a viol or a viola da braccio, the instrument favoured by improvisers. On the parapet is the date 1518 in roman numerals, which is before the violin was invented. Is the sitter a musician? Unlike some of the portraits I have discussed, no music is present, which suggests that the young man improvises or performs from memory. Still, the absence of an instrument is puzzling: one cannot make music with a bow alone. Vasari claimed that Sebastiano made many portraits in Venice 'from life', and indeed the painting is very much in Venetian style, although for most of the nineteenth century the portrait was attributed to Raphael. Sebastiano, however, left Venice for Rome in 1511, seven years before the date on this portrait. The date has been questioned, however, since the last three figures look a little wobbly, suggesting that they might have been added later.⁵³ There is in fact no reason why Sebastiano should not have made trips back to Venice, since his family lived there.⁵⁴ If music was not a full-time job, neither was painting, especially if one had to depend on commissions.

⁵² On the painting, see M. Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford, 1981), p. 100, and *Sebastiano del Piombo 1485–1547*, ed. C. Strinati and B. W. Lindemann (exh. cat.; Cenate Sesto, 2008), p. 138 (entry by Mauro Lucco). It is in the private collection of the late Baron Guy de Rothschild in Paris. The previous literature on the portrait is most fully summarised in M. Davies's entry in the catalogue of the Worcester (MA) Art Museum, which possesses one of a number of copies of the painting, of uncertain date but perhaps eighteenth century. See *European Paintings in the Collection of the Worcester Art Museum*, 2 vols. (Worcester, MA, 1974), text vol., pp. 452–4.

⁵³ This suggestion was first made by G. Frizzoni, 'La Question de la date du "Joueur de violon" de la Galerie Rothschild', *Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité* (suppl. to *Gazette des beaux-arts*) (1905), 260, and has been generally accepted; moreover, after 1515 Sebastiano came under the influence of Michelangelo. No motivation has been suggested for the alteration of the original date. The painting, according to Hirst, has not been subjected to technical examination.

⁵⁴ He left Rome for Venice in 1527 following the Sack, and was there in 1528 for the marriage of his sister Adriana. Ludwig, 'Neue Funde im Staatsarchiv zu Venedig', pp. 110–18.



Figure 5. Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of a young man holding a bow*. Private collection.

The sitter looks a bit quizzical, as if to say: ‘Do I look silly holding a bow in this position?’ That too is odd: he is holding it in his *left* hand, not the one he would have used to play a viol, and gripping it as if it were a sword. In the place of a pommel is a wreath of laurel leaves and tiny flowers. What appears to be a book lies on the table. It is hard to believe that a musician would wish to have himself portrayed in such a peculiar manner. Or should we read the attributes as a rebus? The bow would indicate that we are dealing with a musician, but not a professional one. The position in which it is held suggests that the sitter is noble or has seen military service. The laurel leaves imply that he is a poet, the book that he is a writer. ‘Bow’ in Italian is ‘arco’ or ‘archetto’ (see Fig. 2; the ‘regola che insegna sonar de viola d’archo’). All these attributes can be brought together in the person of ‘Il Signor Conte Nicolò d’Arco’, who stands at the top of the famous list of *cantori a libro* in Pietro Aaron’s *Lucidario in musica* of 1545. The Conte and the others listed below him—noblemen, clerics, and composers—are those who can sing from written notation. Nicolò d’Arco was born in 1492 or 1493 in Arco, north of Lake Garda, to a family in Imperial service. He studied at the University of Pavia, where he knew Paolo Giovio and Andrea Alciato, and later at the University of Bologna, where he was acquainted with Marcantonio Flaminio. He spent most of his life in Mantua, where he died in 1547.⁵⁵ Nicolò’s Latin poetry was published by others in 1546; as a nobleman he had no intention of publishing it himself, and he was certainly not a professional musician.⁵⁶

Suggestive as this association is, problems remain: if the date 1518 is accurate, Nicolò would have been 25 or 26, but the sitter appears to be younger. Only late anecdotal evidence places him in Venice,⁵⁷ though it is almost unthinkable that he should never have gone there. Nor do I know whether he visited Rome. How did Pietro Aaron know him? He may have met him in Venice, but a more likely place is Brescia. In a letter of 7 October 1539, Aaron, who by then had become a Crutched friar in

⁵⁵ This date has been verified by R. Signorini, ‘Carte d’archivio per la biografia di Nicolò d’Arco’, *Il sommolago*, 15 (1998), 5–30 at 15 and 29.

⁵⁶ The most up-to-date information on his life is in the introduction to M. Welber’s edition of his poetry, *I numeri di Nicolò d’Arco* (Trento, 1996). In one of his poems he recalls with nostalgia his days in Pavia, asking himself why he does not return and finish his verses with the aid of his customary *lira* (‘Quin tu quin pocius petis | florentem studio ignobilis ocli | Ticinum, et solita lyra | olim incepta paras condere carmina?’; ‘Oda ad seipsum’, pp. 55–6). The second line is taken from Vergil, *Georgics* 4. 564 ‘studiis florentem ignobilis oti’. My thanks to Leo Franc Holford-Strevens for recognising this.

⁵⁷ In Antonfrancesco Doni’s discussion of the emblem of Giovanni d’Arco (apparently not a relation; he was from Vicenza); *Le nuove pitture*, ed. Maffei, p. 124.

Bergamo, tells his Venetian colleague Giovanni del Lago about his stay there:

I was in Brescia for a month, positively almost adored, especially by the Counts of Martinengo, Count Gian Paolo da Cavriolo, and his son Lorenzo, all good singers. I ate two days with the Martinenghi, two with the Cavrioli, and so passed a whole month of music-making with them, and I was treated warmly by other gentlemen as well. I have become friends with Count Fortunato Martinengo, who certainly loves me like a brother, and when I left he sent me to Bergamo with a mount and servant worthy of a Martinengo. He absolutely wants me to celebrate Carnival with them in Brescia.⁵⁸

Although Aaron does not list Fortunato among his famous musicians, he dedicated his treatise to him, and Fortunato's brother Ludovico heads the second list, of *Cantori al liuto*.⁵⁹ Aaron probably met Nicolò in Brescia; in 1542 the Conte d'Arco became the father-in-law of Fortunato through his marriage to Nicolò's daughter Livia.⁶⁰ Nicolò, moreover, provided encomiastic distichs for Aaron's *Lucidario* underneath a motto, VIRGA ARON REFLORVIT, and a medallion portrait of the author, crowned with laurel:

NICOLAI COMITIS ARCITENENTIS⁶¹

EXASTICHON IN P. ARON LAVDES

Vivat Aron, saeclo sua virga reflorat omni,
Per quem, obscura olim, Musica nunc rutilat.

⁵⁸ *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians*, pp. 715–20 at 715.

⁵⁹ There is a splendid portrait of Fortunato Martinengo by Moretto da Brescia in the National Gallery in London (<<http://www.googleartproject.com/museums/nationalgallery/portrait-of-count-fortunato-martinengo-cesaresco-134>>, accessed 2 Feb. 2012), leaning with one arm on a cushion in a typical melancholic pose. Fortunato was a poet and evidently a collector; on the table are a Roman oil lamp in the shape of a foot (perhaps used as an inkwell) and coins. The dreamy gaze suggests to me that he is listening to music: music and melancholy were closely intertwined in the Renaissance. The most extensive information on him remains [B. Zamboni], *La Libreria di S. E. il N. U. Signor Leopardo Martinengo patrizio veneziano ...* (Brescia, 1778), pp. 70–9. Zamboni quotes an encomium by Fortunato's son Giorgio, which states that 'Musica fidibus & tibiis oblectabatur' (p. 72 n. a); Giorgio also mentions music in connection with Ludovico: 'musicen & omne genus symphonia sibi assumebat' (ibid.). There are many branches of the Martinengo family; Fortunato belonged to the Cesaresco branch.

⁶⁰ Nicolò and Fortunato had surely known each other earlier. Fortunato himself was born in Arco in 1512, where his mother had taken refuge during the French invasion of Brescia; there had been intermarriage between the Arco and Martinengo families in an earlier generation. Musical talent also passed down through the generations: Nicolò was the grandfather of Livia d'Arco, one of the three ladies who formed the 'concerto delle donne' of Duke Alfonso II d'Este.

⁶¹ Curiously, and perhaps suggestively for Sebastiano's portrait, Nicolò Latinised his name as 'Arcitenens', which means 'holder of the bow'. Although this portrait appears on p. 7 of the facsimile edition by Forni (Bologna, 1969), in the original it precedes the title page. I am grateful to Leo Franc Holford-Strevens for the translation.

Ergo pulchra ferat tantorum dona laborum:
 Praemia quis tanto digna neget capiti?
 Vos vivum vates, statua et decorate corona:
 Post obitum sydus, Dii, facite esse novum.

Long live Aaron; may his rod reblossom in every generation;
 Through whom Music, once obscure, now shines.
 Therefore let him receive beautiful gifts of such great labours:
 For who would deny fitting rewards to so great a man?
 In life, you poets, honour him with statue and laurel wreath;
 After death, o gods, fashion of him a new constellation.

Thus Nicolò too must have been part of the illustrious company of noblemen and poets making music in Brescia, either in 1539 or later; we do not know if or when Aaron returned to Brescia.

Tantalising though the circumstantial evidence pointing to the identity of the sitter in Sebastiano's portrait is, the identification remains conjectural, and the problem of the date still needs to be solved. Moreover, there is a stubborn obstacle: a little-known portrait of Nicolò at the age of about 45 is preserved in the Fondazione d'Arco in Mantua, and it is not patently clear that it is the same person as in Sebastiano's portrait.⁶² The poses are different (full face rather than three-quarters), the older man is bearded, and some twenty to thirty years intervene, during which physiognomies can change considerably.⁶³ However, there are strong similarities between Sebastiano's portrait and a fresco of Nicolò in the former family palazzo in Arco (Palazzo del Termine).⁶⁴ In his poems Nicolò mentions Titian's (lost) portrait of Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, but unfortunately does not refer to any portrait of himself.

I conclude with a very different kind of musical career. The phenomenon of the castrato singer, so prominent in Baroque opera, arose in the Renaissance. The earliest notices we have are from the court of Mantua in the 1550s.⁶⁵ The duke, Guglielmo Gonzaga, himself a musician and com-

⁶²The painting hangs in the Segreteria in the Fondazione d'Arco, where I discovered it during the course of research in Mantua in June 2011. It is reproduced in R. Signorini, *La dimora dei conti d'Arco in Mantova: Stanze di un museo di famiglia* (Mantua, 2000), p. 85. It appears to be a copy, probably seventeenth century; the first inscription at the bottom is mostly covered over by another, more recent and historically inaccurate, and the coat of arms may be even later.

⁶³Michael Hirst, author of the standard monograph on Sebastiano, is convinced they are not the same person (personal communication, Oct. 2011).

⁶⁴The fresco, which is damaged, may be seen at <http://www.comune.arco.tn.it/conoscere/Personaggi_storici/Nicol%C3%B2_d%27Arco/Nicol%C3%B2_d%27Arco.aspx> (accessed 20 June 2012).

⁶⁵Richard Sherr, 'Guglielmo Gonzaga and the castrati', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33 (1980), 33–56; reprinted in Richard Sherr, *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome*, no. XVI.

poser, was keenly interested in acquiring young men who could sing soprano securely, knew how to ornament appropriately, and did not lose their high voices at puberty. Over seventy letters survive attesting to what amounted to an obsession. He sent agents to France and Spain, who were to audition these peacocks and persuade the best to enter the duke's service. One boy, reported the duke's talent scout, 'did not please me, because [his voice] is weak and somewhat hoarse. When he sings, he has trouble with high notes, cannot sing softly, cannot ornament, and (like one accustomed to singing in a chorus) knows no songs by heart.' Moreover, he is 17 '(even though he does not show it)', so one could not hope for his improvement.⁶⁶ The best castrati, it develops, wanted huge salaries, which Guglielmo was not willing to pay. We can already see that the sixteenth-century castrato was just as temperamental as Farinelli and his colleagues.

It has been proposed that the lute player in Caravaggio's well-known portrait is a castrato, which is easy to believe.⁶⁷ He looks like a boy, but is probably older; the very rounded face and thick hair are typical of castrati. Positioned as a man who sings like a woman, his androgynous quality is emphasised by Caravaggio, also in his clothing, which looks more like the white chemise that is normally an underdress. The eroticism of this portrait is inescapable. This singer was probably in the service of Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte; it has been suggested that he is Pedro Montoya, a Spanish castrato.⁶⁸ Indeed music-loving cardinals may have thought that it was not appropriate to hire female singers. There is no evidence before the early seventeenth century that boys were castrated in order to become singers, and the operation had long been carried out for other purposes—for example, to cure a hernia.⁶⁹ But the demand for castrati became so overwhelming that Duke Guglielmo's agent suggested, perhaps tongue in cheek, that if he couldn't import his castrati, perhaps he

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 38–9.

⁶⁷ F. Trinchieri Camiz, 'The castrato singer: from informal to formal portraiture', *Artibus et Historiae*, 9, no. 18 (1988), 171–86 at 171–5. The literature on the painting, two versions of which survive, is extensive, and many images of both are online. For the painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, on loan from the Wildenstein Gallery, see the exhibition catalogue *A Caravaggio Rediscovered: the Lute Player* (New York, 1990).

⁶⁸ F. Trinchieri Camiz, 'Music and painting in Cardinal del Monte's household', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 26 (1991), 213–26 at 219.

⁶⁹ R. Freitas, in his *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani* (Cambridge, 2009), traces the life of a seventeenth-century singer (b.1626) who, together with three of his brothers, was castrated at the wish of his father 'as a reasonable step in the patronage of his children' (p. 26).

ought to get some boys and 'make his own'.⁷⁰ By the end of the sixteenth century all the sopranos in the Papal Chapel were castrati rather than falsettos (the Papal Chapel, unlike most institutions, never had boy singers).

The castrato is now a historical phenomenon, but the fascination with seemingly unnatural vocal ranges and the discrepancy between body and voice remains. Some countertenors are able to sing very high and now take formerly castrato roles in opera, though they may struggle to achieve the strength of tone that characterised the castrato. Male sopranos are also known today, perpetuating an echo of a lost tradition.⁷¹

* * *

Was it a good career move in Renaissance Italy to become a musician? In 1592, reflecting on a trajectory that had seen him advance from an Augustinian novice in Pesaro in 1568 to a singer in the renowned court chapel of Wilhelm V of Bavaria under Orlando di Lasso in 1590 and author of a valuable treatise on music, Lodovico Zacconi reflected:

Might it not be a cause of wonder and provoke much thought to consider that the lawyer, philosopher, physician, astrologer, mathematician, and any other proponent of learning, if he wishes to make a living from his fame and knowledge, needs to work day and night and in doing so to consume his whole life to acquire a piece of honourable daily bread? I say nothing of how much artisans and workmen need to toil day and night to earn their keep just to live adequately among their contemporaries. Only the musician and singer gains his bread with gratification, enjoyment, and pleasure. And he lives honourably among the honoured and never worries or fears dismissal or not being admitted into any honourable or civil undertaking. Rather he achieves such esteem and reputation that wherever he is not, he is called, and where he is, he is embraced: everyone loves him, everyone cherishes him, and everyone tries to assist him, so much are the art and the artist valued and esteemed. . . . Thus if a simple singer can be so esteemed and valued, how much more will a true musician be esteemed and valued, and a good composer! If one esteems the pupil, how much more will one esteem the master? . . . Not only does it [music] make us cheerful and refresh the soul afflicted and ravaged by corporeal passions, but it also helps many to live honestly by it. . . . many by its [music's] favour find themselves where

⁷⁰ Sherr, 'Guglielmo Gonzaga', p. 36.

⁷¹ At the lecture Rory McCleery, a countertenor, sang a madrigal that Caravaggio's singer might have performed, Ippolito Macchiavelli's *Vita della mia vita*, accompanied by Katalin Ertsey on the theorbo.

they would not be by their own efforts, and others have admittance and are protected by great men who otherwise would have to remain outside, and find other means to get ahead. . . . Music has been one of the strongest causes of this, because it elevates and enriches many, and saves many poor from begging and trouble and places them in a honourable position.⁷²

If we believe Zacconi, who is living proof, to be a musician in Renaissance Italy, and especially a singer, on the whole was an honourable and sometimes lucrative profession, whether one was an official town musician or a star singer. Salaries may sometimes seem small, but for clerics they were often supplemented by ecclesiastical benefices, and for court musicians by housing, meals, horses, and servants, and occasionally even commercial concessions.⁷³ To be a professional musician was not to work at a job 9 to 5, any more than it is today. Amateur musicians probably outnumbered professional ones, and some, as we have seen, were very talented. The world of Renaissance musicians was much larger than we might imagine: musicians, artists, poets, humanists, and noblemen formed a vibrant network of acquaintances, and many had a second string to their bow, but the common thread in this tapestry is that they all had learnt music when they were young.

⁷²For the full passage see Appendix II. I am grateful to Elena Abramov-van Rijk for this reference.

⁷³Anthon surveys comparative salaries of court musicians in 'Some Aspects', pp. 229–33. At the Sforza court in Milan the choirmaster Antonio Guinati, who was married, received a concession in 1476 to work all the mines in the duchy of Milan. See E. Motta, 'Musici alla corte degli Sforza', *Archivio storico lombardo*, 14 (1887), 29–64, 278–340, 514–61, at 517–18; repr. in id., *Musici alla corte degli Sforza: Ricerche e documenti milanesi* (Geneva, 1977).

APPENDIX I

Antonfrancesco Doni, *Al partir lagrimoso* (1560)

From his autograph manuscript, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Patetta 364, fols. 27^v–29^r.

SOPRANO

Al par-tir la - gri - mo - so, Si-gnor mio dol-c'et ca - ro, di

ALTO

Al par-tir la - gri-mo - so, Si-gnor mio dol-c'et ca - ro, di

TENOR

Al par-tir la - gri-mo - so, Si-gnor mio dol-c'et ca - ro, di

BASS

Al par-tir la - gri-mo - so, Si-gnor mio dol-c'et ca - ro, di

6

vo-stra vi - sta o-v'o-gni mio ri-po - so ri - po - se et ser - ba A-mo-

vo-stra vi - sta o-v'o-gni mio ri-po - so ri - po - se et ser - ba A-mo-

vo-stra vi - sta o-v'o-gni mio ri-po - so ri - po - se et ser - ba A-mo-

vo-stra vi - sta o-v'o-gni mio ri-po - so ri - po - se et ser - ba A-mo-

1) 2) 3) 4)

12

- re, con a-cer-bo do-lo-re più che la mor-te a-ma-ro,

- re, con a-cer-bo do-lo-re più che la mor-te a-ma-ro,

- re, con a-cer-bo do-lo-re più che la mor-te a-ma-ro,

- re, con a-cer-bo do-lo-re più che la mor-te a-ma-ro,

18

l'al-ma pro-pria sen-ti' trar-mi del co-re. Et de-gno fu,

l'al-ma pro-pria sen-ti' trar-mi del co-re. Et de-gno fu,

l'al-ma pro-pria sen-ti' trar-mi del co-re. Et de-gno fu,

l'al-ma pro-pria sen-ti' trar-mi del co-re. Et de-gno fu,

23

per ch'i - o sol di mi - rar - vi vi - vo, Si-gnor mi - o;

per ch'i - o sol di mi - rar - vi vi - vo, Si-gnor mi - o;

per ch'i - o sol di mi - rar - vi vi - vo, Si-gnor mi - o;

per ch'i - o sol di mi - rar - vi vi - vo, Si-gnor mi - o;

27

co - sì tol - to-mi vo - i (sor - t'em-pia et ri -

co - sì tol - to-mi vo - i (sor - t'em-pia et ri -

co - sì tol - to-mi vo - i (sor - t'em-pia et ri -

co - sì tol - to-mi vo - i (sor - t'em-pia et ri -

31

a) vid - di tor - mi con voi la vi - ta mi - a.

a) vid - di tor - mi con voi la vi - ta mi - a.

a) vid - di tor - mi con voi la vi - ta mi - a.

a) vid - di tor - mi con voi la vi - ta mi - a.

APPENDIX II

Lodovico Zacconi on the Value of a Musical Career

From Lodovico Zacconi, *Prattica di musica* (Venice, 1592), Book 1, chapter 6, 'Quanto sia stato bene a ritrovar la Musica, & quanto beneficio agli huomini apporta', fol. 5^{r-v}.

Non è egli forse cosa di gran meraviglia, et di alta consideratione il considerare, che il Legista, il Filosofo, il Medico, l'Astrologo, il Mathematico, et qual si voglia altro professore di scienza, s'egli vuole esser di fama tale, et delle sue scienze vivere, bisogna, che egli s'affatica giorno e notte, et che nel faticarsi vi si consumi la vita per acquistarsi un pezzo di honorato quotidiano pane? Non dico poi de gli artefici, et de gli operarii quanto bisogna, che giorno, et notte stentino per guadagnarsi il vitto per viver fra gli altri mediocramente. Solo il Musico col cantore, si guadagna il pane con piacere, solazzo, et dolcezza. Et vive fra gli honorati honorevolmente, et ne dubita o ha timore, di esser discacciato, o di non haver ingresso in qual si voglia commercio honorato, et civile. Anzi che diviene in tanta stima, et reputatione, che dove egli non è, vien chiamato, et dove si può trovare abbracciato: ogni uno l'ama, ogni uno l'accarezza, et ogni uno cerca di farli servitio, tanto, l'arte, et il professore si prezza e stima. Io per me non sarei atto, ne haverei poter o lingua di dire in quanto prezzo, et stima sia un cantore, poiche quantunque paia, che egli sia appresso i grandi de gli infimi, et minimi, overo puro, et semplice mercenario, non per questo se li toglie come virtuoso, il loco, et l'honore; egli con tutti pratica, come persona honorata, in tutti i luoghi intraviene, come persona degna, et per tutto vien raccolto, et favorito: come ornato di virtù, & meritevol di favore: egli d'ogni hora, & d'ogni tempo è apparecchiato a servire, il suo servitio non stanca: ne ha briga di portarsi dietro istromenti, o d'haver officine, & case per poter la sua arte essercitare: ovunque egli va seco porta tutti gli istromenti suoi, ne predatori, o ladri gli può rubbare. Or se un semplice cantore vien tanto stimato, & riputato, quanto piu riputato, & stimato sarà un vero Musico, & un buon compositore. Se si stima tanto il discepolo quanto piu si stimerà il Maestro? certo, che non è lingua, che il possa dire, ne forse intelletto, che si possa pensare, il beneficio, che ne apporta la Musica: perché non solo l'esser suo ci rallegra, et recrea l'animo, dalle passioni corporali afflitto, & travagliato; ma anco aiuta molti, che per sua cagione honoratamente vivano. Io credo certo, che chi si disponesse, a numerare in qual si voglia parte del Mondo, habitata da ragionevoli creature, la quantità de quelli, che hanno il lor vitto, et sostentamento col mezzo della Musica, che il numero loro superaria il numero de Filosofi, de Medici, de Leggisti, & di qual si voglia professore di scienza, o s'almeno non lo superasse non si trovasse anco, chi lo passasse. Questo è quello, che io alle volte, scorrendo infra me stesso, & queste cose, & quelle meditando: dopo un stupor grande, & una gran meraviglia, mi rallegro, che i sottili ingegni, et l'inventioni mediante il favor di Dio habbiano fatto tanto, et tanto si sieno affaticati, che habbino scoperto sì ricca cosa al mondo: Io dico ricca, perché molti col suo favore si trovano ove per se stessi non seriano, et altri hanno ingresso, & sono da grandi favoriti, che altrimenti conveniriano star di fuori, et cercar altri mezzi per passar avanti. Perché ove non son ricchezze s'accarezzano le scienze, et le scienze non furon mai totalmente povere: Anzi, che arditamente io potrei dire, che le sieno d'ogni

tempo sempre state ricche, perché colui, che si è trovato dotto, et povero, o che la povertà sua è venuta nell'esserci poco atto nel loro acquisto, e nel conservarle, ovvero, che nella quantità non si satia: e però si può dire, che uno assai possiede: quando, che secondo il grado suo non ha da mendicar il pane, & con gli altri civilmente può conversare. Di questo la musica ne è stata una potentissima cagione: perché innalza et arricchisce molti, e molti dalle mendicità, et affanni pauperimi gli leva, et pone in honorata conditione.