

## FLORENCE FROM BARZELLETTA TO MADRIGAL



In a recent article, intended like the present one to greet and honor a former pupil and dearest friend, I surveyed the contents of the early printed collections issued first by Petrucci and then also by Antico, to show how quickly the habit of setting polystrophic frottole, most often in an easy popular vein, had evolved in favor of more literary choices: petrarchan or petrarchist poems.<sup>1</sup> This process was also paralleled by a marked tendency to avoid repetition of the same music for all the stanzas of a poem or even for the symmetrical elements within the structure of each stanza. I was aware that the majority of the pieces I was considering had been part of a repertory which had been circulating around the turn of the sixteenth century in the seigneurial courts of Northern Italy, whereas the more recent ones also reflected new tendencies developing in a broader area, including the Rome of the Medici popes. My present purpose is to see to what extent and in what form parallel developments may have taken place in the Florentine milieu, a task made

<sup>1</sup>Nino Pirrotta, "Before the Madrigal," *The Journal of Musicology* 12 (1994): 237-52 (for James Haar).

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*Nino Pirrotta, who served as Professor of Music at Harvard University from 1956 to 1972, exerted a profound influence on a generation of musicologists, including Frank D'Accone. The breadth of his scholarship on Italian music is superbly illustrated in his numerous publications, among which may be cited Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque (Cambridge, 1984).*

easier by the many valuable new elements Frank's research has contributed to our knowledge of music in Florence.

To what extent the "frottola" repertory (I shall use this term à la Petrucci, in a general, all-embracing sense) may have been known in Florence is not fully evident. Certainly, a number of "frottola" pieces are found scattered in some Florentine manuscripts; they would seem, however, to have been a later, rather limited phenomenon. The sources containing such pieces are relatively late, being generally assigned dates not earlier than the second decade of the sixteenth century;<sup>2</sup> and it would seem to me that such occasional "frottola" appearances may have resulted from the arrival in Florence of isolated copies of some of the Petrucci prints. Indeed, some thirty pieces appear to be related to the contents of Petrucci's *Libro primo*, about half of this number are linked to his *Libro tertio* and even fewer to his *Libro quarto* and *sexto*; thereafter the interest for such novelties seems to have faded, so that further isolated concordances with other Petrucci collections may have been transmitted through manuscript sources. Concerning the composers, the lion's share is obviously assigned to pieces attributed to Cara or Tromboncino; less obvious is some preference accorded to works of such minor composers as Michele Pesenti, Filippo de Luprano and Iacopo Fogliano (the latter almost totally ignored by Petrucci);<sup>3</sup> Josquin d'Ascanio is present more than once with either *In te, Domine, speravi* or *Scaramella fa la galla*. It is worth noting that not a single copy of a Petrucci book is now present in Florence, while examples of several Antico editions, issued either in Rome or in Venice, are still preserved in the Florentine Nazionale and Marucelliana libraries.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>The latest date would seem to be that of the incomplete *Musica de meser Bernardo pisano sopra le Canzone del petrarcha* (Fossombrone: Petrucci, 1520), whose contents can only be partially reconstructed by concordances in manuscript sources.

<sup>3</sup>He is, however, represented with four pieces in *Canzoni sonetti strambotti et frottole libro primo* (Siena: Sambonetti, 1515), whose only extant copy is preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana.

<sup>4</sup>The Biblioteca Marucelliana has Antico's *Frottole libro tertio* (Rome, no date) and *Frottole libro quarto* (Venice, 1520); the Biblioteca Nazionale owns his *Canzoni sonetti strambotti et frottole libro quarto* (Rome, 1517), *Canzoni sonetti*

The great majority of pieces which found their way to the Florentine manuscripts are frottole in the most specific sense of this term, to which only scattered samples of odes, strambotti, and barzellette are added. Here, I must insist on the distinction between barzellette and frottole that I have already advanced in my previously-mentioned article.<sup>5</sup> Despite the similarity in the appearance of their texts—ballata forms with a *ripresa* most often consisting of four octosyllabic lines, followed by a series of stanzas, each numbering six or eight lines<sup>6</sup>—the way they are set to music is entirely different. Barzellette have different music assigned to the *ripresa* and to the first stanza (the latter obviously to be repeated for all the ensuing stanzas, the former to come back as a refrain); frottola pieces are instead treated in a way that somewhat resembles the handling of a *rondeau*, for all their stanzas are adjusted to the music given first to the *ripresa*—better said to its first part—while the final section, an amplified recapitulation of text and music of the first two lines, acts as a refrain.

Frottola pieces, which in the repertory of Northern Italy do outnumber barzellette, appear to have been a novelty for the Florentines and to have remained just a curiosity to them, for I do not know of a single piece in the Florentine manuscript tradition that followed their model; whereas barzellette-like texts (I do not know to what extent the term was used for them) seem to have been a generally-accepted fare in a line of robust popular humor—adopted first by the practitioners of what I call the unwritten tradition of music (not disdained even by members of the Florentine upper class), and then later and to a lesser

*strambotti & frottole libro tertio* (Rome, 1518), and an incomplete copy of *Frottole libro quarto* (Venice, 1520). Note the prominent position of the word "frottole" in the Venetian print of 1520 after its consignment to the last place in the titles of the Roman prints of 1517 and 1518.

<sup>5</sup>Pirrotta, "Before the Madrigal," 238–41, including the music of Cara's frottola *Si ben sto lontano alquanto*.

<sup>6</sup>Stanzas numbering eight lines most usually indicate barzellette; in a frottola setting such stanzas would require the music of the first two lines of the *ripresa* to be repeated three times for each new stanza.

extent among the composers of polyphonic pieces.<sup>7</sup> I do not know whether Poliziano himself may have been in the habit of singing *alla lira* or *alla viola* his own *I' son, donna, il porcellino, l' ho rotto il fuscellino, Una vecchia mi vagheggia, Io non l'ho perché non l'ho*, or *Canti ognun, ch'io canterò* (the last two are attributed to him with no definite proof, but certainly they belong to the amusements of an upper class milieu). Certainly, Lorenzo the Magnificent, an expert connoisseur and probable performer of polyphonic music, also liked to sing or even improvise in the popular ways; but his *Donne belle, i' ho cercato* is the only poem we know by him in the form and vein of a barzelletta. From the group of the early Florentine polyphonists come *Bench'io cerchi sempre invano*, set by Alessandro Coppini, as well as *El ridir, ciò che tu fai* (with a *ripresa* of only two lines) and, in a gentler mood, *S' Amor lega un gentil core*, both set by Bernardo Pisano.

Predominant indeed in the written tradition of polyphony are settings of more serious, literary texts; already Isaac, directly or indirectly teacher of and model for the earliest local polyphonists, adds to two short quodlibets with quotations of popular songs (somehow an anticipation of the northern villotte), a *trionfo* and a number of ballate variously structured in their interplay of heptasyllabic and hendecasyllabic lines. Not all of them, however, are regular ballate fully in agreement with the traditionally established structures: *Fammi una gratia, Amore, i' te ne prego* as well as *Lieto e contento Amor* and *Questo mostrarsi adirata di fore* (by Poliziano, a text later set by other composers) answer their three-line *ripresa* with a single-line *volta*, as well as different music; and the old rule that the *volta* should be given same music as the *ripresa* appears to be deliberately ignored in the settings of metrically-regular texts such as those of *La più vaga et più bella, Lasso, quel ch'altri fugge* and *Un di lieto giamai*. Often present in the *volta* are passages in ternary rhythm, which never occurs in the *ripresa*.

<sup>7</sup>The cantimpanca, who addressed their singing to the crowd in the open, were famous in their time, but the same kind of music making was well accepted in all states of life as a jocular amusement among friends.

Isaac's works were undoubtedly a model for the Florentine composers active between ca. 1490 and ca. 1515, whose extant works are available in the first two volumes of Frank's edition of *Music of the Florentine Renaissance*: Alessandro Coppini, Bartolomeo degli Organi, Giovanni Serragli, and Bernardo Pisano.<sup>8</sup> I have already mentioned some barzelletta-like pieces by the first and the last among them; to which we may add a work (metrically not a barzelletta but in a similar light vein), Coppini's *Tanto è la donna mia*, whose structure (no *ripresa* but a series of stanzas each numbering six lines, five heptasyllables plus a final hendecasyllable) does not agree with any traditionally established pattern. Disregarding for the moment all their settings of carnival songs or *trionfi*, we find ourselves once more dealing with their settings of ballata texts. Some are metrically regular such as Coppini's *Teco, signora mia* and *Troppi, donna, ne vuoi degli amatori*, Bartolomeo's *Donna, s' i' fu' già degnio* and *Un di lieto giamai* (previously set by Isaac), or Pisano's *Perché, donna, non vuoi, Son io, donna, qual mostri, Lieto non ebbi mai, Madonna, se dipende* (the latter all on texts by Lorenzo Strozzi) and *Cantiamo, orsù, cantiamo*; a few others are less regular, generally having a shortened *volta* or lacking symmetry among the *piedi*. In any case, even the regular ones always disregard the fact that symmetry between *ripresa* and *volta* had been traditionally intended to invite repetition of the same music; instead, we usually see repetition of the same music for the two *piedi*, graphically indicated by repeat signs (this, too, with some exceptions such as Bartolomeo's previously-mentioned *Donna, s' i' fu' già degnio* and *Questo mostrarsi adirata di fore*, and Serragli's *Questo mostrarsi lieta a tutte l'hore*). Pisano's handling of the ballata form requires particular attention, and will be addressed later.

<sup>8</sup>Frank A. D'Accone, *Music of the Florentine Renaissance*, vol. 1, Bernardo Pisano, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, *Collected Works of Alessandro Coppini, Bartolomeo degli Organi, Giovanni Serragli and Three Anonymous Works*, *Corpus mensurabiles musicae* 32 (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1966/1967).



Barzellette and ballate were certainly sung for the pleasure of groups of private people (perhaps even *by* such a group); carnival songs and *trionfi* were part of the traditional amusement of all Florentines at given times of the year. The former were humorous and sparkled with *risqué* double-entendres as required by the playful mood of the days preceding Lent; the latter were intended to illustrate the sumptuous pageants celebrating the feast of the city's patron saint. We have music for a few of them included among the works of our group of composers, set according to the new trend established for such celebrations by Lorenzo the Magnificent: a *Trionfo delle tre dee* by Isaac, five *canti* and two *trionfi* by Coppini, one *canto* by Bartolomeo, one more *canto* and one *trionfo* by Serragli.

All carnival songs initially name the kind of people the masquerading group is meant to represent, a statement usually addressed to the ladies, as in Coppini's *Aprite, in cortesia, donne, gli orecchi*, sung by a group of "hunters of partridges." Although such statements are made in an opening group of lines resembling the *ripresa* of a ballata, they do not seem to have been intended to return as a refrain after each stanza; nor do the stanzas, although similar in structure to those of regular or semi-regular ballate, ever reuse any music of the initial *ripresa*-like statement. The only instance where a sort of refrain occurs is in Coppini's *Canzone de' naviganti*, the stanzas of which all end with the music of the last two lines of the quasi-*ripresa* in a slightly modified version of their original words: "Fuggiam del ciel lo sdegno, / ché contro e venti, el mar, la terra abbiamo." Quite different is the structure of the *trionfi*: lacking a *ripresa*-like element, they all rather resemble canzoni with miniature stanzas, the first of which has the task of identifying the characters partaking in the pageant—a feature already present in Isaac's *Trionfo delle tre dee*:

Né più bella di queste, né più degna  
si trova alcuna dea:  
Giunon vedete, che nel cielo regnia,  
vedete Citherea,  
madre dolce d'Amore,  
vedete qui Minerva

che gli ingegni conserva  
e 'l marzial furore  
doma con l'Arte e colla Sapienza,  
venute insieme ad abitar Fiorenza.

(a Laurentian suggestion: "No goddess is more beautiful or more awesome: look at Juno, who reigns over all heavens; look at Citherea, sweet mother to Love; look here at Minerva, protectress of all talented people, who tames all martial furors with Art and Learning; all of them have come together to live in Florence.")

Up to this point I have tried to establish how much freedom was already present in the minds of Florentine poets and composers concerning the handling the traditional genres and forms of poetry. As Frank has duly warned,<sup>9</sup> a number of problems also arise from the various ways in which words are associated with the music in the sources. The tendency on the part of many scribes to reduce the verbal element to its absolute minimum is obvious. Perhaps they wanted to save themselves work; however another possibility must also be considered: the scribes may have also meant to leave the performers various choices, depending on the occasion as well as on the means available on each occasion. Certainly, we are faced with a "shortcut" when words are given only to the upper voice of carnival songs or *trionfi*, for both genres were undoubtedly meant to be performed on special festive occasions by a group of singers (the heralds of the Signoria?) with no support by instrumentalists.<sup>10</sup> Strengthening this argument is the fact that pieces given texts only for the upper part often progress to passages in which that upper part remains silent and gives way to a

<sup>9</sup>Collected Works of Alessandro Coppini, Bartolomeo degli Organi, Giovanni Serragli, XIII.

<sup>10</sup>The engraving shown on the title-page of the *Canzone per andare in maschere per carnevale fatte da più persone* (no precise date) is well known. It shows a number of young girls at open windows listening to a group of masquerading singers (three men plus two boys, who supposedly sing the soprano part together). Also to be noticed is the majestic figure of an observer, probably representing Lorenzo de' Medici. The performances of *trionfi* must have been quite different, with the singers probably surrounding the show mounted on a chariot.

texted interplay among the other voices. The latter consideration also applies to a number of ballate; among them Coppini's *Aprite, in cortesia* and *Bench' i' cerchi sempre invano* (this one a barzelletta) even have some passages in which the upper part, briefly silent, lacks some of the words.

Three-voice pieces—for instance, Coppini's *Con teo sempre, Amore*—may have been meant for three singers, yet they also admit the possibility of a performance by solo voice and an instrument (a lute?). Another possibility is offered by a number of four-voice ballate (among them Coppini's *Teco, signora mia* and Bartolomeo's settings of Poliziano's *Questo mostrarsi adirata di fore* and its counterpart by Lorenzo Strozzi, *Questo mostrarsi lieta a tutte l' hore*) which have text given to all four parts in the *ripresa*, but only to the upper part in the stanzas; this might seem to hint at the old way of singing danced ballate, in which the choral refrain alternated with the singing of all the stanzas by a soloist, the one who led the dancing.<sup>11</sup> Finally, ballata-like in its metrical structure but admitting no distinction or interruption between *ripresa* and its single stanza, Lorenzo Strozzi's *Son io, donna, qual mostri, ogni tuo bene?* (set to music by Pisano among others) stresses the dialogue between the distinct personalities of lover and beloved by alternating different groupings of the voices, all provided with text. In addition to the variety, flexibility, and freedom in the use of formal schemes and vocal sonorities, composers also exploited a variety of textures, alternating chordal declamation passages with those in which the voices achieve contrapuntal independence and freedom, eventually imitating each other (but this is a subject beyond the scope of this paper).

We certainly have no way to assign precise dates to the pieces I have been mentioning, and yet it seems easy to assume that most of them antedate the bulk of what remains of Pisano's works. Among the latter the two barzellette, *S' Amor lega un gentil core* and *El ridir, ciò che tu fai*, may be the earli-

<sup>11</sup>A description of how ballate were danced and sung is provided by Giovanni del Virgilio, a contemporary and correspondent of Dante, in the third Epistola of his *Diaffonus*; the passage is reproduced by Vincenzo De Bartholomaeus, *Rime giullaresche e popolari* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1926): 73–74.

est. No copyist's "short-cut" has deprived them of the traditional alternation between choral *ripresa* and soloistic stanza; and yet some novelty is present, at least in *S' Amor lega*, in the variety of the approach to the octosyllabic lines, some of them stated chorally and chordally in the traditional anapestic rhythm, others a bit more freely in a quasi-contrapuntal style. Showing even more freedom in their often imitative counterpoint, three lyrical ballate also adopt the alternation of choral *ripresa* and soloistic stanzas; all three are on texts by Lorenzo Strozzi, namely, *Questo mostrarsi lieta*, as well as *Amor sia ringratiato* and *Una donna l'altrier fiso mirai* (I use the term ballata even for the free text of *Amor sia ringratiato* because it seems evident that it requires the return of the *ripresa* after each stanza even though the rhyme that usually suggests such alternation is lacking). However, the three ballate were not included in the 1520 print of Pisano's works, since they are set for only three voices and have a number of stanzas. All the printed pieces (omitting for the moment the Petrarchan canzoni) are monostrophic; most of the texts come from the pen of Lorenzo Strozzi, and even if they are not up to Petrarch's standards, they all display literary aspirations.

Strozzi is also the author of the text of *Amor, quand'io speravo*, a single-strophe ballata, whose first word addressing Love is twice repeated in the music for greater emphasis, each time with the vowel *e* added to complete the last syllable and each time followed by rests; then the text continues, alternating chordal recitative with freer contrapuntal passages (the *ripresa* ends with a long sustained note in the upper voice, while the other parts continue their counterpoint for three more measures). In the stanza Strozzi's text is divided into unequal syntactic elements: one embracing the first *pie* plus the first line of the second *pie*; another one the remaining two lines of the second *pie*; a third one the whole of the *volta* (in this case symmetrical with the *ripresa*). Pisano's setting avoids any repetition of music for the *pie*, stressing instead the syntactic structure; it then returns to the music of the *ripresa* (omitting, however, its first six measures, those which had underlined the double invocation to "Amore"). Even more unusual is the



syntax of *Perché, donna, non vuoi*, also by Strozzi and also a monostrophic ballata; the first sentence of the stanza embraces once more the first *piede* plus one line of the second, and then another sentence takes all the rest of the poem, unified by a daring enjambment between the second *piede* and the *volta*. Pisano's setting is even more varied in texture, with frequent imitative entries and with the upper voice remaining silent while the others recite the first line; once more he avoids all symmetry between the music of the two *piedi* and only partially reflects in his music the existing symmetry between *ripresa* and *volta*.

I have paid special attention to the two single-stanza ballate by Strozzi and to their settings by Pisano because I see them to be almost more madrigalesque than the two madrigals on texts by unknown poets, *De' perché in odio m'hai* and *Donna, benché di rado*, also present in the edition of Pisano's *Musica*. In any event, all four pieces show the complete abandonment of the traditional *formes fixes*, a reaction to the feeling of constriction resulting from the effort to adjust the syntactic development of the poetic and musical discourse to such structures. This feeling is already present in both text and music of the two ballate by Strozzi; thus, I do not feel any need to insist on the point now by examining the music of the two above-mentioned madrigals or that of a third one, *Tanta pietà, cor mio, talor m'assale*, by Strozzi. I shall only hint at Pisano's most outstanding exploit in this direction, two settings of the madrigal dialogue by Strozzi, *Son io, donna, qual mostri, ogni tuo bene?*, both of which underscore the identity of the two characters with changes in the grouping of the voices.

Two of the pieces Frank assigns to Pisano on the basis of style also deserve comment, as they are settings of two of the four madrigals included in the Petrarchan *Canzoniere*; they thus establish a connection between the new efforts to attain flexible metrics and the model of the old master, who had given to each madrigal a different structure.<sup>12</sup> The two pieces

<sup>12</sup>The ballate included by Petrarch in his *Canzoniere* may have also been taken as models for non-strophic poems: only two of them have a second stanza.

may also be Pisano's first approach toward Petrarch, a preliminary step to the setting of the poet's *canzoni*, the culmination of his career as a composer.<sup>13</sup>

*Canzoni* are strophic poems, whose individual stanzas have, however, an amplitude and freedom of structure, corresponding to a depth of feeling and thought unknown to the ballata. I wonder, however, if Pisano intended his settings to be strophic as well. Frank seems not to have reached a definite conclusion on this point; while it is true that he gives complete texts of the five Petrarchan poems for which we have the music (as well as that of the dantesque *Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro*, also convincingly attributed to Pisano), he also warns that "in the musical sources . . . only the first stanza of each poem is found."<sup>14</sup> I myself think it may prove difficult to adjust the music of the first stanzas to the following ones and to the respective *congedi*. Take, for instance, the broadly imitative beginning of *Amor, se vuoi ch'io torni* in which, once more, a supernumerary *e* is added to give more emphasis to the invocation to Love; how could one adjust such a beginning to the simple word *Fammi* of the third stanza, or to the beginning of stanzas four, six, and seven? Similar problems may also arise when we try to adjust the lines of the *congedi* to the music previously intended for the corresponding final section of the first stanza. There is also the question of the *congedi*: why did Pisano give new music only to those of *Ne la stagion* and *Che debb'io far*? He did so, in my opinion, because their texts added a sense of completeness, not fully achieved by the texts of their respective first stanzas. Although not labeled "seconda parte," they are nevertheless the first examples of madrigals comprising more than one part.

Beginning in 1515 Pisano divided his time between duties in Florence and in Rome; it is therefore possible that much of the content of the 1520 print of his works was composed in the latter city under the auspices of his Medici protec-

<sup>13</sup>We do not know of any pieces set by him after 1520, although he lived another twenty-eight years in the city of Rome.

<sup>14</sup>Pisano, *Collected Works*, iv, n. 3.

tor, Leo X.<sup>15</sup> Yet all the elements of Pisano's style as well as his new tendencies and experiments were rooted in his Florentine training and successive practice. Florence had been long familiar with the sound of "all-vocal" polyphony, both sacred and secular; Florentine poets and composers had early on participated in the growing trend of Italian poetry to loosen the metrical and syntactical strictures inherent to the use of the traditional strophic *formes fixes*; and I wonder how much influence direct contact with Lorenzo Strozzi—the poet most often set by composers after the time of Lorenzo and Poliziano—may have exerted in this regard. In terms of musical style, most Florentine masters appear to have soon learned to attain variety through the alternation of chordal recitation by all voices with freer, even imitative, passages in counterpoint, as well as through changes in color and sonority obtained by various groupings of the voices. That all this had gradually produced a new genre, the madrigal, characterized by a more immediate adherence of the musical to the poetic discourse, I have no doubt; the term was already in the air and soon to prevail.

As for Pisano, I can see and understand the reasons why many hesitate to acknowledge him as the initiator of this new genre. Yet the fact that greater talents such as Verdelot and Arcadelt (in his own city of Florence), or later Willaert in Venice, almost immediately took over and gave new impetus and richer stylistic connotations to the new genre cannot erase the basic formal innovations he had achieved. Let us respect, anyway, his modesty; no dedication indicates that he might have been the promoter of the innovative 1520 edition of the *Musica*; nor did he attempt to have any other music printed before his death in 1548.

<sup>15</sup>Petrucchi was then still working in Fossombrone under a privilege granted to him by Leo X.

Bonnie J. Blackburn

## LORENZO DE' MEDICI, A LOST ISAAC MANUSCRIPT, AND THE VENETIAN AMBASSADOR



... Thank the Magnificent Venetian ambassador for having requested these songs of me, because I count it a favor to have been so requested by his Magnificence, whom, because of his virtues and learning, I am much obliged to and hold in affection, and also because I know that I am much loved by his Magnificence, to whom commend me. And I am putting the aforesaid songs in order and shall send them to you quickly, I believe by the first post. If I knew what kinds he likes best, I could have served him better, because Arrigo Isaac, their composer, has made them in different ways, both grave and sweet, and also capricious (lit. broken) and artful. I shall send a selection of everything, and after he has tasted it I shall know better what wine I shall need to serve ...

... I am sending you by this post a book of music with compositions by Isaac according to the request of the Magnificent Venetian ambassador, to whom you will give the book with the offer of anything else I may do for his Magnificence and recommending me to him ...

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