

Reviews

Bizzarini, Marco. *Luca Marenzio. The Career of a Musician Between the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation*, trans. James Chater. Aldershot, UK/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003. xvii, 370 pp. ISBN 0-7546-0516-7 US.\$ 84.95

“Muti una volta quel suo antico stile / Ch’ogni uom attrista e me po far sì lieto.” In setting this phrase from Petrarch’s famous sestina *Mia benigna fortuna* (Rime, 332), sixteenth-century composer Luca Marenzio underscored the contradiction between the grief that death brings to all men, and the happiness that it might bring the poet, by juxtaposing slow moving, unusual vertical progressions and linear chromaticism with lively tunefulness and harmonic sweetness. This kind of word painting is an integral part of the sixteenth-century madrigal. To Marenzio, however, goes the distinction of a musical style that most artfully mirrors the contrast between *piacevolezza* and *gravità* so popular with sixteenth-century poets and composers. Marco Bizzarini’s study of Marenzio is itself grounded in this idea of contrast, suggesting that such *varietà* characterises not only Marenzio’s music, but also a “musical career suspended between the glittering worldliness of the late Renaissance and the more introspective spirit of the Counter Reformation” (p. ix).

This book is a translation (revised and expanded) from the original Italian version published in 1998. Several book-length studies of Marenzio’s music already exist and, perhaps for this reason, Bizzarini forgoes detailed musical analysis in favour of a close study of the web of personal and professional connections that influenced the course of Marenzio’s career. Luca Marenzio (ca.1553 to 1599) was one of the more prolific composers of the sixteenth century, and his works had perhaps the greatest international circulation of any composer in that period. He was born in Coccaglio, near Brescia, but passed the greater part of his life in the service of various Roman prelates. The politics of Rome, with its complex network of local, national and international alliances, thus informs a major portion of this study.

With a delicate touch, Bizzarini carefully analyses all existing evidence, as well as a few documents previously unknown to musicologists, and introduces the reader most vividly into the social and political milieu of Counter Reformation Rome. He teases out the relations between the various figures encountered in the dedications, letters, and court documents relating to Marenzio’s service. Bizzarini weaves musical and political events together into a convincing narrative. For example, the correspondence concerning Marenzio’s possible transfer to France brings to light the network of diplomatic and family relations that complicated Luigi d’Este’s professional and personal life in the 1580s, related as he was to the rebellious Duke of Guise and yet devoted to serving the interests of the French crown in Rome on account of his relation to the late King Louis XII. Bizzarini

makes a convincing case that the dedication of two prints of secular music to French noblemen at this time was part of d'Este's diplomatic strategy, as opposed to an attempt by Marenzio to secure new employment.

Bizzarini focuses in particular on certain enigmas and seeming contradictions in Marenzio's career. The tension inherent in the title of Chapter five, "Secular Music for a Prince of the Church," is indicative. How could a composer most famous then and now for his secular compositions become an effective instrument in the political manoeuvres of powerful religious authorities in Counter Reformation Rome? How much say did Marenzio's patrons have in the direction of his musical dedications, and how might such dedications serve political ends? How, having been assigned the prestigious task of carrying on Palestrina's work of revising the official chant books and writing sacred music in accordance with the directives of the Council of Trent, could Marenzio have subsequently fallen into apparent disfavour with the pope?

This book contains twenty-six chapters, most of them less than fifteen pages long. Bizzarini's approach to the subject matter also takes inspiration from literary *varietà*. He eschews a strictly period-driven chronology, leading the reader instead along a more research-oriented track arising from the surviving documentation. Bizzarini introduces Marenzio as an acknowledged master in his prime being invited to contribute to a prestigious madrigal anthology. He then takes the reader back to Marenzio's impressive debut with his first publication. A couple of chapters (four and ten) digress into earlier, less well-documented portions of Marenzio's life.

Subsequent chapters are more or less chronological, but centred on the significant figures, groups, and events that shaped Marenzio's life and work. The contradictions of Marenzio's career are brought to the fore even here. Chapter eight, "Gentildonne," explores the significance of female performers and patrons, and is followed by a chapter on Roman confraternities. Chapter fourteen, "A job in Mantua?" is followed by an examination of the plans to send Marenzio to the French court.

The conflation of sacred and secular patronage is underscored in exploring Marenzio's interaction with various Roman confraternities. The confraternity of the Most Holy Trinity was an important sponsor of sacred music in Rome toward the end of the sixteenth century. From 1575 they regularly employed their own *maestro di cappella* and at the end of the century they had a permanent choir. Marenzio contributed sacred music for the festivities of the confraternity, and probably participated himself as a singer, but he dedicated secular music to certain individuals connected with the confraternity. The *Compagnia dei Signori Musici di Roma*, a quasi-religious company that would later become the *Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia*, sponsored publications of madrigal anthologies by Roman composers through the 1580s, to which Marenzio contributed. These

publications were dedicated to influential prelates, even though their contents were secular.

This otherwise fine study is marred slightly by careless editing. This aside, Bizzarini's book is valuable not only to historians of sixteenth-century music, but also to any scholar seeking a deeper understanding of the political dynamics of arts patronage during the Renaissance and Counter Reformation.

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The Cambridge Companion to Giovanni Bellini, ed. Peter Humfrey. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii, 355 pp., plates, figures, ISBN 0-5216-6296-6 US.\$ 95.

The extension of the excellent Cambridge Companion series to include volumes devoted to particular visual artists, alongside philosophers and writers, is most welcome. As academic literature becomes increasingly specialized and voluminous, it is becoming correspondingly difficult for scholars to cover all aspects of a major figure like Giovanni Bellini with the same confidence they once might have – thus, a team approach to the current state of the question in Bellini studies is a useful idea. The artist is already well-served by a few major monographs, including by Giles Robertson, Anchise Tempestini, and the late Rona Goffen, so one of this collection's stated aims (p. 8) is to complement and update these earlier efforts.

The discipline of the history of art has also traditionally had at its disposal the exhibition catalogue, a vehicle now very likely to contain specially commissioned essays on particular aspects of the artist in question, but while such catalogues can be effective in bringing together articles in one place, they can be hampered by other considerations, such as a natural inclination to concentrate on those works of the artist which were available for the associated show – consider the challenges of mounting a Bellini exhibit when many of his paintings, including major ones, still hang *in situ* in Venetian churches, with little chance of being gathered together in one space. The collection of essays under review here also has the potential advantage over an exhibition catalogue of becoming accessible in price if, as many previous volumes in the Cambridge Companion series, it eventually appears in paperback. Where this handbook cannot compete with a glossy catalogue or deluxe monograph such as Goffen's is in the reproductions. Anyone who has stood transfixed in front of one of the Bellini's crisp and almost supernaturally colour-infused canvasses (how many have had this experience before the Frick *St. Francis* or the London *Doge Loredan*?) will understand the need for large, colour plates to do the painter justice. Which is not to say that the producers of this book have not made some effort under the constraints of the