

Narration and Meaning in the Music and Visual Arts of Florence 1300-1700

Fall 2012

What does a work of art—painting, sculpture, fresco,—tell the viewer? Overt messages, allegorical representations, thinly veiled political and social commentary, and sensuous enjoyment abound in art and have their aural counterpart in music—songs, motets, Masses, music for the stage and ballets. The Baptistery doors and Giotto's frescoes in Santa Croce tell a story; so does a motet by Francesco Landini and an opera by Jacopo Peri. The goal of this course is to hear and learn about music of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and early Baroque that complements art of the same periods. Students will come away from the course with an appreciation of the multi-dimensionality of the arts, artists, and culture of Florence from ca 1350 to 1650.

In-class lectures on musical styles and listening examples will alternate with on-site explorations of art and architecture in Florence. Examples of some possible correlations include the Duomo with Guillaume Dufay's motet, *Nuper rosarum flores*, written using the same proportions as the cupola for the dedication of the finished building in 1436; Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* in the Museo di San Marco with Josquin Des Prez' *Ave Maria*, both embodying the Renaissance ideal of balance and clarity; the stairway of the Laurentian Library with Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli*, and the interior of the Teatro della Pergola with *La Liberazione di Ruggiero*, an opera composed in 1626 by Francesca Caccini.

Beyond comparing stylistic commonalities in music and art of the same periods, the course will examine how musicians are depicted in paintings and drawings in Florentine churches and museums. Paintings of the Nativity, in particular, commonly feature angels playing musical instruments. We will learn about the instruments and their associations (e.g., with chamber music, secular singing and dancing, and sacred music) and listen to examples of period music itself. As part of our study of instrumental music, the class will visit churches to see and hear historic organs and learn about their role in the music of the Church throughout the centuries.

One type of narrative in medieval and Renaissance art describes a place or event using allegory. Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco series, *Allegory of Good Government in the City and in the Country*, in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, are a prime example. One of the events portrayed in the "City" fresco is a group of women dancing to the beat of a tambourine, played by one of the participants. (This type of dancing is also described in a contemporary literary work, Boccaccio's *Decameron*). What might the musical story of this fresco be? Students will learn about the social dances—the *saltarello* and *ronda*-- and listen to examples either before or after seeing this art, and using Boccaccio's account as a guide, write their own narrative of the scene.

Another type of historical narrative, found most often in literature, is that of the medieval pilgrimage. The most famous medieval route led from Rome through Tuscany to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Students will listen to 13th- and 14th-century pilgrims' songs from Italy and Spain before boarding a train for a field trip ('pilgrimage') to Pistoia, one of the pilgrimage stations approximately 30 miles from Florence. There they will see the silver altar of San Jacopo in the Cathedral and the della Robbia and Santi Buglioni terra cotta frieze on the

Ospedale del Ceppo. A tour of the underground medieval city could add a fascinating dimension to the sense of history evoked by the art and architecture of Pistoia.

Assigned readings will supplement lectures. Written work will consist of several (3 or 4) listening exams to identify musical works studied in class and weekly essays comparing visual art and musical works that they discover on their own. A reflection paper on the 'pilgrimage' and selected other expeditions will round out the coursework.

Tentative schedule:

- Week 1 Music: Gregorian chant
Art: San Miniato (attend a service); alternatively, choirbooks at San Marco
- Week 2 Music: Landini, *Ecco la primavera* and other secular 14th-c. songs and dances
Art: Siena, Palazzo Publico, fresco, *Good Government*
- Week 3 Music : Guillaume Dufay and others: medieval music of pilgrimage
Art: Pistoia, Cathedral of San Zeno, altar of San Jacopo; Ospedale del Ceppo
- Week 4 Break
- Week 5 Music: Dufay, *Nuper rosarum flores* and other sacred music of the 15th century
Art: Duomo cupola tour
- Week 6 Music: Heinrich Isaac et al, *canti carnascieleschi*
Art: Museo del Duomo, della Robbia *Cantoria*
- Week 7 Music: Music for the Medicis: Jacopo Peri *L'Euridice*; Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*
Art: Palazzo Vecchio, rooms of Eleonora of Toledo, Leo X
- Week 8 MfM II: Francesca Caccini, *La Liberazione di Ruggiero*
Art: Villa Poggio Imperiale, frescos
- Week 9 Music: Caccini, *Il primo libro*; 17th-century partsongs
Art: Uffizi, domestic music-making: lute players, family paintings
- Week 10 Music: Corelli, *Sonatas* op. 2 and 3; Handel, *Sonatas*
Art: Galleria Accademia, Musical Instrument collection; Gabbiani paintings
- Week 11 Gloria in excelsis: Angel Musicians
Exam: identification, essay