

Patronage, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Florence

Fall 2012

Art and music have always been used in the service of religion and politics. Musicians, artists, dancers, and poets alike worked under the patronage system in Florence. The resulting works were created to glorify the city, mythologize its past, and further the political (and, by implication) social goals of powerful families and institutions. In this course, we will address some important questions:

- Who were the patrons and who the audiences for music created in early modern Florence?
- What role did gender play in the commissioning of art and music, in the subject matter, and in the portrayal of women?
- How did rulers use music and art to create a public image and consolidate power?

Kelley Harness states “Like their male counterparts, women commissioned or otherwise sponsored works that both reflected and helped construct their status within contemporary hierarchical social structures.”¹ The ways in which both men and women used the arts in the process of ‘self-fashioning’, defined by Harness as “the process in which visual images create symbolic responses to historical events and assert the legitimacy of an individual ruler,” will be a subject of inquiry in the course.

A prime focus of the course is discussion of life under the Medicis. Examples of self-fashioning began with Cosimo I, the first Medici duke, who appropriated the *Sala Grande* in the *Palazzo della Signoria*, filling rooms with allegorical paintings of himself. This space will be one of our on-site visits. Musical analogies include pieces composed for Medici weddings, and other festivities, especially the marriage in 1589 of Christine of Lorraine to Ferdinand I of Tuscany for which Jacopo Peri, a Medici employee, wrote the first opera, *L’Euridice*. We will listen to excerpts from the opera and discuss the libretto with its rich allegorical meanings.

A particularly fascinating period in Florence was the regency of Christine and her daughter-in-law, Maria Magdalena, of the Hapsburg line, from 1621 to 1629. Both commissioned works of art and music in which women feature prominently. For example, frescoes at the *Villa Poggio Imperiale* (now the *Collegio Statale delle SS. Annunziata*) and altarpieces made for the *Monastero di Santa Croce* (“La Crocetta”) depict female saints and heroines. Stage works by Francesca Caccini (*La liberazione di Ruggiero*) and Caccini and Giovanni Battista da Gagliano (*Il martirio di Sant’Agata*) feature female protagonists. The choice of subject matter and portrayals of the characters in these works relate to the questions posed earlier, more specifically with regard to the exercise of political power by women. We will visit the Medici Palazzo Riccardi to see the kinds of rooms in which these theatrical entertainments were presented.

In this course, students will

¹ Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women’s Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006),8.

- See works *in situ*, read libretti, and listen to music, either in concert or on recordings and explore the ways in which meaning is conveyed: namely, myth, allegory, technical control--brushwork, color, *chiaroscuro*, and symbolism, in the case of art; text, structure, line, harmony, and rhythm in music-- and function.
- Develop their analytical skills in order to uncover deeper meanings in the art and music being studied.
- Reflect on how art and music embody the concerns and the qualities valued by the people who commission it, and by the people who receive it.
- Draw analogies with contemporary cultural life, because these are timeless issues that students will, one hopes, continue to wrestle with for the rest of their lives.

Topics and sites for Gender, Patronage, and Power (tentative schedule)

Weeks 1 and 2 Renaissance Women as Patrons of Music

- Isabella d'Este (Mantua)—Bartolomeo Tromboncini, Marco Cara
- Lucrezia Borgia (Ferrara)--Tromboncino
- Isabella de' Medici Orsina (daughter of Cosimo I and Eleonora of Toledo), Maddalena Casulana
- Leonora Orsini (daughter of Isabella)

Weeks 3 and 4: The social and political roles of music and dance

- Allegory of good government, Siena
- Palazzo Medici Riccardi, the room of the Four Seasons ("Spring")
- Music for Medici Festivals: The Interludes for *La Pellegrina*, 1589
- Peri, *L'Euridice*, 1600

Weeks 5 and 6: Female artists and musicians at the Court of Archduchess Maria Maddalena of Austria

- Arcangela Paladini, self-portrait, Vasari Corridor.
- Francesca Caccini, *Il primo libro*, *La Liberazione di Ruggiero*, Settimia Caccini, vocal music,
- Women depicted in frescoes, Villa Poggio Imperiale

Weeks 7 and 8: Female artists and musicians patronized by other members of the Medici family

- Giovanna Fratellini (1666-1731)(training subsidized by Grand Duchess Vittoria della Rovere; patroness was Violante Beatrice di Baviera, governor of Siena and wife of Ferdinando de' Medici), self-portrait, Vasari Corridor; pastels, Medici Villa La Petraia
- Margherita Caffi (1650-1710), Vittoria della Rovere and her grandson, Ferdinando III, still lifes at Medici Villa Poggio a Caiano

Weeks 9 and 10: Female musicians and artists as teachers

- Fratellini to Violante Beatrice Siries Cerroti (1709-1783) (also at Villa La Petraia, boudoir of Rosa Vercellana; also painting, *The Madonna presents the Christ Child to Saint Maria Maddalena de'Pazzi*, church of Santa Maria Maddalena de'Pazzi; also self-portrait and *Portrait of a lady with roll of parchment* in the Vasari Corridor)
- Siries Cerroti to Anna Bacherini Piattoli (1720-1788)

Week 11: Convents as patrons of musicians and artists, both male and female

- Suor Plautilla Nelli (1524-1588), Museo di San Salvi

Week 12: Self-portraiture among women artists:

- Lavinia Fontana, Sofonisba Angiussola, and others, Vasari Corridor
- Teresa Berenice Vitelli (Suor Veronica), Pitti Palace

Assigned readings will supplement lectures. Written work will consist of reflection essays in the form of journal entries that connect the readings with impressions of art and music studied on site, assigned reports on musicians/artists, and presentations of these reports.