

**Desperate Measures:
The Life and Music of
Antonia Padoani Bembo**

Claire Fontijn

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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In the conventual buildings attached to this church [Santa Maria dei Frari] are the state archives of Venice . . . they are said to number millions of documents. “They are the records of centuries of the most watchful, observant, and suspicious government that ever existed—in which everything was written down and nothing spoken out.” They fill nearly three hundred rooms. Among them are manuscripts from the archives of nearly two thousand families, monasteries, and convents. The secret history of Venice for a thousand years is here—its plots, its hidden trials, its assassinations, its commissions of hireling spies and masked bravoës—food, ready to hand, for a world of dark and mysterious romances.

—Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*

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A project such as this one—which deals with music that has long lain forgotten in manuscripts—relies heavily on performers who are willing to experiment with making editions and trying out first-time performances. It has also made a great deal of difference to a scholar working in relative isolation to learn of others' love of Bembo's music. I am thankful for the opportunity to work with Laury Gutiérrez and La Donna Musicale—particularly Lydia Heather Knutson, Laura Gulley, Na'ama Lion, Ruth McKay, and Daniela Tosič—on a decade of performances of Bembo's psalms, portions of the opera, and arias. A collaboration with Maria Jonas helped deepen my familiarity with the gargantuan compilation of *Produzioni armoniche*. I am grateful to Wolfgang Furlinger, Conrad Misch, Dorota Cybulska, Ralf Dahler, and the Radio Suisse Romande for sharing with me recordings of their performances of Bembo's music. It has been a recent delight to work closely with Elena Russo of Bizzarrie Armoniche, Milan, and to discover the magnificent results achieved by singer Roberta Invernizzi. Toby Mountain of Northeastern Digital mastered the accompanying CD.

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herent worth and understood the cross-cultural issues and feminist challenges that accompanied it. His comments on the book's chapters have been indispensable over the course of their developing narrative. It is rare to find a reader at once so encouraging and so discriminating, and surely no one reads more thoroughly and quickly than he.

No musicologist in Venice should undertake any project without at some point consulting Beth Glixon and Jonathan Glixon. Their methodology and meticulous knowledge of the Archivio di Stato and the Biblioteca Marciana has provided much of the basis for this biography. I cannot thank them enough for their unstinting gifts of time, documents, and friendly collegiality over the course of the past decade.

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This book has been typeset in the Bembo font.

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EDITORIAL POLICY

The goal throughout this book has been to normalize and modernize the notation found in the manuscripts. Likewise, the text has been normalized and modernized in the intercalated musical examples and in appendix 2, and orthographic mistakes tacitly corrected. By contrast, the texts found in appendix 1 represent transcriptions that have remained as faithful as possible to the original documents.

For the labeling of instrumental and vocal parts, see the abbreviations list. The instruments in use during Bembo's time were quite different from those found in the modern orchestra. While the violin roughly corresponds to the instrument she called the "violon," the inner and bass parts contrast with the standard string family of today. The first and second violins are usually called first "dessus" and second "dessus" to indicate their treble range; the same term is employed for the first and second soprano parts. The inner parts correspond to the modern viola in their alto range, but in French performance practice Baroque violas were named variously "haute contre de violon" or "taille de violon." The vocal parts correspond to the instrumental parts, with "haute contre"—male or female—as a designation referring to the alto or high tenor range. The basso continuo part could be played by the harpsichord, organ, and/or theorbo, along with the viola da gamba, violoncello, and/or bassoon. Bembo called for flutes at several junctures; the final chapters consider to which instruments she may have been referring.

For the meaning of abbreviations used in references to documents in the text and notes, see the bibliography.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A.1 a longer musical example found in appendix 2
- anti. antiphonal passage
- B bass
- b. bb. *busta*—a large folder in an Italian archive
- b.c. basso continuo
- bis measures appearing in the manuscript and not in the modern edition
- Bsn. bassoon
- CD tr. tracks on the accompanying compact disc
- Chorus “chœur de voix” (S¹, S², HC, T, B, b.c. with figures)
- d.c. da capo
- doc. appendix 1, documents 1–30
- doux soft (piano)
- ff. plural of folio (f.), or of what follows (m. 34 ff. means the measures after m. 34)
- Fl. flute
- fort loud (forte)
- HC *haute-contre* (male or female singer in the alto range)
- HCV¹ *haute-contre* or *taille de violon* 1, corresponding to the modern viola
- HCV² *haute-contre* or *taille de violon* 2, corresponding to the modern viola
- m., mm. measure, measures
- m.v. *more veneto*: the Venetian calendar year starts in March (e.g. January 2005 m.v. = January 2006)
- Ps. Psalm
- rit. ritornello

- S¹ soprano 1
S² soprano 2
Symph. “chœur de symphonie” (V¹, V², HCV¹, HCV², b.c. unfigured)
sync. syncopated passage
T tenor
Tutti the full complement of voices and instruments
V¹ *premier dessus de violon* (or top treble line) corresponding to violin 1
V² *deuxième dessus de violon* (or second treble line) corresponding to violin 2
Vdg. viola da gamba
Vm¹ library shelf number for Parisian sources

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INTRODUCTION: UNCOVERING HER STORY

Sire,

The immortal fame of Your Majesty's most glorious name, instilled in my heart since childhood, made me decide to leave my country, family, and friends to come and bow down before so great a monarch. I arrived at this royal court already many years ago where, by my fate, it was presented to Your Majesty that I had some talent in singing and you were willing to listen to me; learning that I had been abandoned by the person who took me away from Venice, Your Majesty was so kind as to reward me with a pension, with which I could stay in the community of Notre Dame de Bonne Nouvelle, until the occasion arose to put me in a more suitable place. Now in this holy refuge, obtained through the magnificence of Your Majesty, I have made some compositions in music; I come to deliver them at your royal feet as a most reverent tribute of my immense obligation. I beg you most humbly to accept them with your customary royal kindness and to you I make my deepest bow.

Your Majesty's humblest and most obedient servant,
Antonia Bembo, Noble Venetian¹

The composer's dedicatory letter to King Louis XIV introduces her first collection of vocal pieces, *Produzioni armoniche*.² It also provides intriguing autobiographical information. Why would she leave Venice? How had she gained admiration for the king so early in life, and under which circumstances did he deem her a singer worthy of a pension? How was she abandoned and what was "the community of Notre Dame de Bonne Nouvelle" ("Our Lady of Good News")? When did she move to the "holy

¹For a complete transcription of the document, see appendix 1, document 1; hereinafter, doc. 1.

²F-Pn, Rés. Vm¹117, ff. 4–5.

refuge,” and where was it? How did she learn to compose all of this music? This book takes on these questions, as well as others that sustained a decade-long search for details about her career. Bembo’s letter begs as much for biographical as for musical attention; the tale of her life has remained even more obscure than her *œuvre*.

In late January 1990, I read that Yvonne Rokseth in 1937 had relegated the composer’s identity to the “enigmas of music history.”³ It appeared that, even decades after Rokseth’s statement, no one had matched a person with the manuscripts of *Produzioni armoniche* (now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris) signed “Antonia Bembo.” Thanks to fellow French Baroque music scholar Antonia Banducci, who sent me microfilms of the music manuscripts, my quest could begin immediately. In Paris that summer, I determined that Bembo’s “holy refuge” referred to the community of the Petite Union Chrétienne des Dames de Saint Chaumond. In Venice at the start of the 1991–1992 academic year, I developed a working hypothesis that the composer had not been born a “Bembo,” but had married into the family. I gathered information about the family of the only “Antonia” who matched that criterion in the pertinent years, mostly having to do with her father, Dr. Giacomo Padoani. From October through April I combed Paris for any mention of her, but there was none. To date, her name appears in no source in France beyond her own music manuscripts.

Shelf browsing one morning in the Reading Room of the Marciana Library during the last week of a second research trip to Venice in May, I opened a book mentioning a collection of papers concerning “Antonia Padoani who had gone to Paris.” Quickly crossing the city from San Marco to the Frari, I inquired about the papers at the Archivio di Stato, where I learned that they were preserved somewhere inside the archive’s 22 large folders (*buste*) containing the records of the former convent of San Bernardo di Murano. Working backward from *busta* 22 to *busta* 20, and then forward from *busta* 1 to *busta* 17, by the week’s end I was still empty handed, exhausted from working at top speed, grimy from documents covered in centuries of accumulated matter, and heavy hearted as a *tempesta di mare* brewed outside the apartment where I was staying with my colleague Marinella Laini. On my last working day in Venice, a morning made crystal clear by the storm, I ordered *busta* 18. Within minutes, I held the envelope with the papers pertaining to Antonia—at last making contact with the heretofore hypothetical composer. *Busta* 19 brought still more treasure: the Parisian address of “la Bemba” written in a small journal kept by one of her friends at the convent on the island of Murano.

The following summer, I examined the documents at a more normal pace, finding an abundance of information about the branch of the Bembo fam-

³ Yvonne Rokseth, “Antonia Bembo, Composer to Louis XIV,” *Musical Quarterly* 23 (1937): 169.

ily into which Antonia had married. With a crucial lead from Beth Glixon, further digging in the Archivio di Stato of Mantua revealed Antonia's encounters with composers Francesco Cavalli and Francesco Corbetta during the 1650s. The "Corbetta Hypothesis"—that the musician escorted her to Paris some two decades later—has become an increasingly plausible explanation of her definitive departure from Venice, and of how she came to live among other Italian expatriates in Paris, apparently, before moving to the Petite Union Chrétienne.

Produzioni armoniche does not stand alone; the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris preserves five other manuscripts by Bembo. In the 1930s, the library had acquired her two-volume opera *L'Ercole amante* (table I.1b), which joined the four other manuscripts that had belonged to the former Bibliothèque Royale (table I.1a).⁴ The acquisition led Rokseth to write a far-ranging article about Bembo, whose music had neither been published nor copied into other exemplars. Rokseth effectively offered the first study of the *Gesamtausgabe* of a rather prolific composer.

Rokseth's article served as the source of information for all other writings on Bembo until the work of Marinella Laini and my own.⁵ Those included reference works, catalogues, and books that address specific issues related to women in music, as well as general music histories.⁶ Since I began my research, further references to the composer have appeared in several studies of musical culture.⁷

⁴ Previous to the acquisition of the opera, Michel Brenet had noted the four manuscripts in her dictionary entry, "Bembo, La signora Antonia," in Robert Eitner, *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Quellen-Lexikon der Musiker und Musikgelehrten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1900), 1: 429.

⁵ Mine include: "In Honour of the Duchess of Burgundy: Antonia Bembo's Compositions for Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy," *Cahiers de l'Institut de recherches et d'histoire musicale des états de Savoie* 3 (1995): 45–89; "Antonia Bembo," in *Women Composers: Music through the Ages*, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996), 2: 201–216; "Baroque Women 5: Antonia Bembo," *Goldberg Early Music Magazine* 6 (1999): 110–113; and "Le armoniose relazioni," *Amadeus* 175 (June 2004): 28–30. Laini published findings in "Le 'Produzioni Armoniche' di Antonia Bembo" (Laureate Thesis, Università degli studi di Pavia, 1987); "La musica di Antonia Bembo: Un significativo apporto femminile alle relazioni musicali tra Venezia e Parigi," *Studi Musicali* 25 (1996): 255–281; and "Antonia e le altre: percorsi musicali femminili nella Venezia del Sei-Settecento," in *Ecco mormorar l'onde: la musica nel Barocco*, ed. C. de Incontrera and A. Sanini (Monfalcone, 1995), 138–169. In addition, we collaborated on two dictionary entries: "Bembo, Antonia," in *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, ed. Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel (London: Macmillan, 1994), 56–57, and "Bembo, Antonia" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 3: 220–221.

⁶ For a literature survey, 1937–1994, see Fontijn, "Antonia Bembo: 'Les goûts réunis,' Royal Patronage, and the Role of the Woman Composer during the Reign of Louis XIV" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1994), 2.

⁷ Such studies include those by Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes, *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations 1525–1855* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993; rev. ed., Elsie Arnold, 1996), 237; Barbara Garvey Jackson, "Musical Women of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Women and*

TABLE I.1 Bembo's Music Manuscripts at F-Pn (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale)

	Shelf number	Date ^a
a. Manuscripts from the Bibliothèque Royale		
<i>Produzioni armoniche</i>	Rés. Vm ¹ 117	1697–1701
<i>Tè Deum</i> and <i>Divertimento</i>	Rés. Vm ¹ 112–113	1704
<i>Tè Deum</i> and <i>Exaudiat te, Dominus</i>	Rés. Vm ¹ 114–115	1708
<i>Les sept Pseaumes, de David</i>	Rés. Vm ¹ 116	1710
b. Manuscripts acquired, mid-1930s		
<i>L'Ercole amante</i> , in two volumes	Rés. Vm ⁴ 9–10	1707

^aDate is putative for manuscripts from the Bibliothèque Royale. The date for *L'Ercole amante* is on the title page.

The groundwork laid by Rokseth and Laini oriented my initial study of the manuscripts. Rokseth dated and ordered them, discussed their bindings and their royal dedicatees, and noted the occasions for which they may have been composed. She identified the authors of several of the texts, considered the subject of female education in France and in Italy relevant to the composer, transcribed and provided facsimiles of representative works, and identified the characteristics of Bembo's musical style. Laini transcribed the texts of *Produzioni armoniche*, evaluated their quality, enumerated the pieces in the compilation, and edited an aria and a cantata from it.⁸

The absence of information or eyewitness accounts in chronicles from the period remains a challenge in writing about Bembo's musical career. Yet the numerous documents that have now surfaced regarding her relations with the Padoani and Bembo families permit a reconstruction of her biography in part I. As the only daughter of Venetian *cittadini*—members of Venice's professional middle class—she followed for some time the path that her parents set out for her. Part of her father's ambition almost certainly concerned making connections to musical circles. He wrote that he and his wife had worked hard to “nourish her soul in order to make her succeed in ‘virtù’ to the astonishment of the world” (doc. 12). Chapter 1, “The Girl Who Sings,” confirms Antonia's studies with Cavalli, the renowned composer and *maestro di cappella* of St. Mark's, and examines the implication that she was something of a child prodigy.

Recent scholarly inquiry into the lives and works of long-ignored women composers has led to new information about them and to new recordings of

Music: A History, 2nd ed., ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 120–123; Julie Anne Sadie, “Paris and Versailles,” in *The Late Baroque Era: From the 1680s to 1740*, ed. George J. Buelow, Music and Society Series (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 137; and Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 248, n. 1.

⁸Laini, “Le ‘Produzioni Armoniche,’” 31–75.

their music, as is the case for Bembo's two most important contemporaries, Barbara Strozzi in Venice and Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de La Guerre in Paris. For several reasons, Bembo's story has remained far more obscure than theirs. Unlike Strozzi, who had a significant place in the musical life of her father's academy in Venice, or La Guerre, who came from a musical dynasty and enjoyed both royal and public support for her work as a musician, Bembo had no family connection to music. Her tale therefore can only be pieced together from archival evidence, with only the rare document linked to the musical world. Her compositions must be interpreted entirely from manuscripts rather than from the printed editions that her female contemporaries managed to have had published. Now, supplied with specific details of her life excavated from the archives and with several editions of her music,⁹ this study offers a comprehensive biography and an analysis of representative pieces that together establish her place in the musical culture of Venice (1640–1677) and Paris (1677–1720).

Similar research projects—on Strozzi and La Guerre, but also on Francesca Caccini and on music in Italian women's convents—reveal that many women enjoyed significant musical careers in seventeenth-century France and Italy.¹⁰ Evidently Bembo had little public presence, given that her name appears in no contemporary chronicles; yet preserved correspondence, her manuscript dedications, and several song texts reveal her proximity not just to Cavalli and Corbetta but to the private circles of Carlo II Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua; the Italians in Paris; Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy, Duchess of Burgundy; and Louis XIV. Having escaped from Venice, Bembo needed to be sure she would not be found in Paris and forced to return. Apparently she concealed her whereabouts until she reached the safety of the semi-cloistered Petite Union Chrétienne. If indeed no mention of her exists in Paris, perhaps

⁹ Five edited works are available from *Produzioni armoniche*: John Glenn Paton, ed., *Italian Arias of the Baroque and Classical Eras* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred, 1994), 56–59; three pieces in Fontijn, “Antonia Bembo,” and Fontijn, ed., *Per il Natale* (Fayetteville, AR: Clar-Nan, 1999). Also see Wolfgang Furlinger, ed., *Tè Deum* (F-Pn, Rés. Vm¹114) (Altötting: Copenrath, 1999), Conrad Misch, ed., *Les Sept Psaumes de David*, vols. 1–7 (Kassel: Furore Verlag, 2003), Conrad Misch, ed., *Tè Deum* (F-Pn, Rés. Vm¹112) (Kassel: Furore Verlag, 2003), and Conrad Misch, ed., *Exaudiat te Dominus* (Kassel: Furore Verlag, 2003).

¹⁰ On Caccini, see Suzanne Cusick, *A Romanesca of One's Own: Voice, Subjectivity, and Power in Francesca Caccini's Florence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming). Beth Glixon's articles—“New Light on the Life and Career of Barbara Strozzi,” *Musical Quarterly* 81 (1997): 311–335, and “More on the Life and Death of Barbara Strozzi,” *Musical Quarterly* 83 (1999): 134–141—reveal astounding new facts about Strozzi's life in Venice and that she lived until 1677—well past 1664, the publication date of her last work. On La Guerre, see Catherine Ces-sac, *Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre—Une femme compositeur sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1995). For information about women and musical life in convents, see especially Robert L. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and Craig A. Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

it was of her own doing, in order to protect her precarious existence abroad. She now emerges, joining La Guerre as one of the two most prolific women composers active in France during the Sun King's reign.¹¹

Bembo's further musical career would wait until well after the years she lived as a Venetian nobleman's wife.¹² Chapter 2, "Our Lady of Good News," notes a shift in focus from singing to composition after she obtained the king's support (doc. 1). Like many recent historical projects, this study examines one of the common people, one of the good but not "great" musicians.¹³ In this sense, this project diverges from most life and works studies of composers in that so little of Bembo's documented life has anything to do with music making. It seems quite unlikely at this point that more substantive documentation about her career will surface, but her pieces provide vibrant testimony to the milieux in which she worked. Her music navigates smoothly between two cultures and between her worldly and religious environments.

Part II examines each manuscript (table I.1), the products of a mature musician composing music between her fifties and her seventies. Her music presents nothing less than a retrospective sweep through the predominant styles of vocal music, chamber music, and opera found in Venice and Paris in the 1650–1710 period. In chapter 3, "Harmonic Productions," the autobiographical details of the dedication to *Produzioni armoniche* guide an analysis of the narrative unfolding throughout its contents. Bembo wrote the majority of its pieces for her own voice, a high soprano, with the accompaniment of the basso continuo (b.c.). Most notable are the solo songs, sacred and secular, delivered in the subjective voice of a woman asserting an incontrovertibly feminine force. In all likelihood several represent her long-standing repertory as a singer, only here committed to paper. Harking back to Monteverdi (with an allusion to *L'Orfeo*), Cavalli (with a new setting of *L'Ercole amante*), and Strozzi (with amorous song and clever madrigalism), some of the Italian pieces suggest that they were conceived, if not composed, in Venice. Music for the

¹¹ Citron named Bembo and La Guerre as early examples of professionals. Although they do share other characteristics (such as precocious talent, the composition of an opera, and royal patronage), the concept applies only to the latter. See *Gender*, chapter 4, "Professionalism," 81. For details about the two dozen or so women actively pursuing composition during the reign of Louis XIV, see my "Antonia Bembo: 'Les goûts réunis,'" 115–214.

¹² For a description of the restrictive life of Venetian noblewomen, see Alexandre Toussaint de Limojon, Sieur de Saint Disdier, "Des Gentils Donnes venetiennes," 355–363 in *La Ville et la République de Venise* (Paris: Louis Billaine, 1680).

¹³ See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982; orig. *Il formaggio e i vermi: Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* [Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1976]). Ginzburg cited Brecht as the inspiration: "In the past historians could be accused of wanting to know only about 'the great deeds of kings,' but today this is certainly no longer true. More and more they are turning toward what their predecessors passed over in silence, discarded, or simply ignored. 'Who built Thebes of the seven gates?' Bertolt Brecht's 'literate worker' was already asking" (xiii).

French royal family represents new encomiastic song. The pieces espousing the French styles of the Lullian *petit motet* and the airs of the urban salons demonstrate remarkable acculturation. The core of the compilation reflects the *poesie per musica*, comedic play, and music produced by Bembo's compatriots in Paris.

The set of wedding pieces in *Produzioni armoniche*—in which Bembo made her Monteverdian allusion—may have won her the patronage of a fellow Italian-speaker at court: Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy, Duchess of Burgundy. First honored with three of Bembo's pieces when she arrived in France, she received a much larger composition for the occasion of the birth of her first child and heir to the French throne, the Duke of Brittany. The boy's mixed Italian and French heritage offered the perfect vehicle for Bembo to blend the two national repertoires with which she was familiar: a French-style *Tè Deum* in Latin and a *Divertimento* in Italian. Chapter 4, "Ties That Bind," takes particular note of the fact that Bembo focused on the duchess's heroic role as peace-maker and mother, rather than on the more customary consideration of a foreign bride as a pawn in a peace treaty.

In keeping with the pious final years of the reign of Louis XIV, Bembo turned her attention to offering him two large-scale pieces of sacred music, the subject of chapter 5, "The United Tastes." Bembo emulated the practice of the Chapelle Royale by scoring a second setting of the *Tè Deum* as a *grand motet* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. Drawing on the models of Charpentier and Lalande but ultimately enjoying the freedom to adopt her own manner, she found here an optimal site for vital interplay between the French and the Italian styles. "Les goûts réunis," a phrase coined by François Couperin in 1724 to describe a burgeoning mixture of the French and Italian styles, refers here to Bembo's particular way of synthesizing them. As a language belonging to both nationalities, Latin offered neutral ground for uniting the tastes. Expanding on the Lullian *petits motets* of *Produzioni armoniche* and employing the same scoring as the *Tè Deum* for Marie-Adélaïde, *Exaudiat te, Dominus* effectively paved the way for her next project: a complete setting of the penitential psalms.

Chapter 6, "Penitence," furthers the notion that Bembo sought ways to give voice to women's experience. Taking on French paraphrases of the seven penitential psalms, she championed the work of the extraordinary Parisian poet, painter, engraver, sculptor, academician, musician, and teacher: Élisabeth-Sophie Chéron. It may have been Chéron's salon at Saint Sulpice that offered a venue for the performance of Bembo's settings of her poetry, intimate music for an assortment of voices with an instrumental trio. The Parisian salon offered a forum for artistic and intellectual exchange among the many gifted women who prospered during the reign of Louis XIV. *Les sept Pseaumes, de David* represents Bembo's most Gallic moment; in its dedication she styled herself "Antoinette" and likened her patron to the king of the psalms.

Chapter 7, “*Hercules in Love*,” treats Bembo’s greatest achievement: a new setting of Buti’s libretto for *L’Ercole amante*. The operatic medium brought together all her skills in vivid text painting, character depiction, chamber and orchestral instrumental music, and choral writing. It has been argued that Cavalli left no successors.¹⁴ It is the contention of this study that a good part of his legacy resides in these manuscripts, but the process involved in judging the truth of the claim—editing, performing, and recording the music—has only just begun.

¹⁴Jane Glover, *Cavalli* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 151.

Part I

The Life

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Chapter I

THE GIRL WHO SINGS

In the dedication to her first compilation of pieces, the composer identified herself as a noble Venetian brought by an unnamed person to Paris, as a pensioner supported by Louis XIV to live at Notre Dame de Bonne Nouvelle, and as a singer with some talent (doc. 1). Effectively serving as an autobiography gleaned from her six manuscripts of music, these details long remained the sole source of information about her; apparently no further testimony survives in France. In 1992, the discovery of a packet of documents at the Archivio di Stato in Venice corroborated her words and launched the biography of the person now known by her full name, Antonia Padoani Bembo (c. 1640–c. 1720).¹ Thanks to the careful preservation of further documents held in several more Italian institutions, dozens of new archival findings have since surfaced. The vital interplay between the emergence of her story and the analysis of her compositions makes possible a reconstruction of her extraordinary career.

Doctor Padoani's Daughter

In September 1634 “Jacobus Padoani Vicentinus” received his medical degree from the University of Padua.² In more than one instance, Giacomo Padoani (1603–1666) described himself as belonging to a family of modest means from the province of Vicenza and emphasized that it had been through hard work in his profession that he had gained status as a Venetian *cittadino*, a mem-

¹ Fontijn, “Antonia Bembo,” 3.

² I-Paa, Dottori licenziati in chirurgia del 1629 al 1640, Codex 275, ff. 90–90v.

ber of Venice's professional middle class.³ His degree was awarded by the Collegio Veneto of the University of Padua.⁴ By comparison with the noble Paduan Count Girolamo Frigimelica Roberti (1611–1683), who received his degree at age 18, Padoani became a professional quite late in life.⁵ Antonia's father nevertheless enjoyed a successful career, known as one of the chief physicians of Venice.⁶

Padoani's skill in oratory also earned him recognition in several publications. The eighteenth-century bibliographer Cinelli Calvoli noted his epigram and sonnet published in Padua in 1632.⁷ The next year, the doctor was invited to deliver a speech at the convocation of his last year of university studies.⁸ In 1640 he published a valedictory oration for Girolamo Bembo, who from 1637 to 1639 served as *Podestà* (mayor) of the Istrian city of Montona (Motovun), a town then belonging to the Venetian Republic.⁹ The title page describes Padoani as "medico ordinario di detta terra," an indication that he was the official physician of Montona.¹⁰ The oration represents an initial link between the Bembo and Padoani families.

³ In his first will of 1651, Padoani specified that all of his earnings "acquired through his labors in medicine" ("aquistato con le . . . fatiche della medicina"), as well as his inheritance from his mother's dowry, should go to his daughter and wife but not to any other family members (I-Vas, Notarile, *Testamenti chiusi*, Girolamo Brinis, b. 642, f. 1v).

⁴ Private communication with Dr. Emilia Veronese and Dr. Rea Caseracciu at the Archivio Antico dell'Università di Padova, who identified Padoani's diploma in that list.

⁵ Charles Patin, *Lyceum Patavinum* (Padua: Frambotti, 1682), 12–13. Frigimelica Roberti received his medical degree in 1629 and taught in the Collegio Veneto beginning in 1633; he served as witness to the birth of Antonia's first-born son in 1665.

⁶ Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare, descritta in XIII libri, con aggiunta da D. Giustiniano Martinioni* (Venice: Steffano Curti, 1663; facs. repr., Venice: Filippi, 1968), 2: Terzo Catalogo, 16–17.

⁷ I-Vnm, Misc. 207/5 preserves the original print. See the reference to this booklet in Giovanni Cinelli Calvoli, *Biblioteca volante* (Venice: Albrizzi, 1734–1735; facs. repr., Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1979): "de' PADOVANI (Giacomo) Oratio Illustriss[imo] & Excellentiss[imo] viro Aloysio Valareso Equiti, cum Praefectura Patavii summa cum laude & applausu administrata abiret dicta a *Jacobo de Patavinis* Vicentino anno reparatae salutis 1632. die 16. Mensis Decembris. Patavii ex Typographia Bartolomae Caretoni 1632. in 4. * nel fine v'è un Epigramma e Sonetto dello stesso Padovani" (4: 3). Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, *Saggio di Bibliografia veneziana* (Venice: G. B. Merlo, 1847; facs. repr., Bologna: Forni Editore, 1967) mentions this publication as well.

⁸ I-Paau, Codex 472: "2 novembris diem nobilitabit oratio in aede Cathedrali pro felici studiorum initio artistarum nomine habita a Iacobo Paduanino, quam sua praesentia reverendissimus episcopus et illustrissimus praeter urbisque praefectus cum magnifica artistarum universitae circumfusa frequenti nobilium studiosorum corona condecorarunt" (ff. 347–348). For modern transcriptions, see Silvio Bernardinello, *Le orazioni per l'annuale apertura degli studi nell'Università di Padova (dal 1405 al 1796)—Saggio bibliografico* (Padua: Società cooperativa tipografica, 1984), 378–379, and Lucia Rossetti, *Acta nationis germanicae artistarum (1616–1636)* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1967), 347.

⁹ Luigi Morteani, *Storia di Montona* (Trieste: Tipo-Litografia Leghissa, 1963), 246.

¹⁰ Giacomo de' Padovani, *Oratione all'illustrissimo Signor Girolamo Bembo nella partenza dal suo reggimento di Podestà a Montona*. Di Giacomo Padovani Dottor di Filosofia, & Medicina,

Although Padoani's presence in Istria in the late 1630s holds possibilities for the hypothesis that Antonia was born during his period of service there, baptismal records in Montona do not support the idea.¹¹ Padoani moved to Venice no later than the summer of 1641, when a patient, Cattarina Grigis, came to sign her will at the home of "Giac[om]o Padoani medico della contrà di S[an]ta Maria Mater D[omi]ni."¹² A census record for the neighborhood of Santa Maria Mater Domini at the end of that year lists the members of the household as Padoani, a woman, and a servant.¹³ The "woman" in question may well have been his wife, Diana, but the census did not mention her by name.

Little is known about the family of Padoani's wife, Diana Paresco (1609–1676), but a few relationships can be deduced from surviving documents. Like her husband, she had ties to Vicenza and Padua as well as to Venice.¹⁴ In his will of 1662, Giacomo referred to his father-in-law as the "late Camillo Paresco" ("già S[igno]r Camillo Paresco") (doc. 12).¹⁵ A notarized act from 1655 concerns Diana's aunt Isabella Rosan, there named as the daughter of Giulio Rosan and the widow of Antonio Moreschi (his fourth wife).¹⁶ If the biographical situation of Diana Paresco seems somewhat puzzling, even more so is that of her daughter, Antonia, about whom more questions than answers arise regarding the circumstances of her birth.

The census record of 1641 makes no mention of a daughter in the Padoani

Medico ordinario de detta Terra (Venice: Pietro Miloco, 1640). The Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr owns this rare print.

¹¹ Hr-Ppa, Battesimi, 1586–1644 and 1645–1736; the Padoani family name does not appear in either register. Padoani would return to work in Istria at a later date; in 1663 he contacted Raimondo Fini, a lawyer in Capodistria, to help him retrieve money for services rendered in Buje, a town to the northwest of Montona across the Quietto River (I-Vas, Notarile, *Atti*, Camillo Lion, b. 8029, minute, 1663, 2 January).

¹² I-Vas, Notarile, *Testamenti*, Pietro Reggia, b. 831, n. 24 (1641, 27 August). Padoani also served as the treating physician when she died on 1 January 1642.

¹³ I-Vas, Provedditori alla sanità, b. 571: "Giacomo Padovani D[otto]r fisico," "Nume[ro] Delle Anime di casa: 3; Nume[ro] Delli huomini da 18 sin 50: 1; Nume[ro] Delle donne: 1; Nume[ro] delle Massere: 1." "o" is given under the category "Nume[ro] Delle putte sino li 18." Girolamo Brinis, Padoani's notary, is listed just above his entry among the "Cittadini" (the other two categories are "Nobili" and "Artefici"). Thanks are due to Beth Glixon for showing me this census record.

¹⁴ Her dates have been determined by her death notice, which gives her age at the time of decease: I-Pas, Ufficio di Sanità, b. 482. I thank Beth Glixon for this reference.

¹⁵ I-Vas, Notarile, *Atti*, Pietro Bracchi e Girolamo Brinis, b. 871, protocollo (1649, 17 February), mentions Isabetta Giacomoni, the widow of "Giacomo Paresco di Vicenza," who signed an agreement in Venice in 1649, but it is unclear how this couple is related to Diana.

¹⁶ I-Vas, Notarile, *Atti*, Pietro Bracchi e Girolamo Brinis, b. 842, protocollo 1655, ff. 51–52. Rosan drew up this document for Diana, who stood to inherit from her; the inheritance record can be found in I-Vas, Notarile, *Atti*, Camillo Lion, b. 8029, minute (1663, 22 June and 12 July).

household, nor do baptismal records.¹⁷ Yet the descriptions of Antonia in 1654 suggest that she was born no later than about 1640. That the records of baptisms in Montona do not mention her birth in the likely years does not eliminate the possibility that Diana Paresco may have returned to her parents' home in order to deliver her daughter; Antonia herself would do so when she bore at least two of her children in Padua in the 1660s.¹⁸ If it were possible to discover more information about Diana's family, perhaps Antonia's birth date could be ascertained; an estimation of 1640 must suffice.

Padoani's will of 1651 suggests that Antonia had a somewhat willful character. He wrote that she, his "only and beloved daughter," would one day inherit everything from him on the condition that she "should obey her mother . . . if [she] displeases . . . Signora Diana can deprive her of everything that [he is] leaving her."¹⁹ Padoani's threat of disinheritance may reflect his daughter's obstinate behavior. Obedience to her mother would remain an important requirement for Padoani. In his subsequent will he returned to the theme when he accused Antonia of treating her disrespectfully, mentioning the significant role that Diana had played in her education (doc. 12).

In February 1653 Padoani signed an agreement to rent the house of Zan Francesco Balbi in Dorsoduro in the parish of San Pantalon *in salizada*, that is, in one of the streets leading away from the church.²⁰ This house would remain the Venetian residence of the Padoani family for the next twenty years: when Antonia married in 1659 she would live there with her husband, and her widowed mother still resided in the house in 1673.²¹ The Padoani family maintained residences there as well as in Padua during the 1660s.

Soon after the move to San Pantalon, the Duke of Mantua, Carlo II Gonzaga, invited the doctor to serve at his court. The correspondence between them, preserved at the Archivio Gonzaga of Mantua, provides somewhat cryptic information about the doctor, his wife and daughter, and the musicians Francesco Corbetta (c. 1615–1681) and Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676). Al-

¹⁷ According to the Archivio storico del Patriarcato di Venezia, the baptismal records for Santa Maria Mater Domini reside at the church of San Cassiano. Despite two visits to the church, I was unable to find the records there. Her name does not figure among the births listed in the relevant years of the baptismal records for San Cassiano.

¹⁸ I-Vas, *Avogaria di Comun, Processi per Nobiltà*, b. 294/12, no. 23, for example, gives details of the circumstances under which her first son, Andrea, was born.

¹⁹ I-Vas, *Notarile, Testamenti chiusi*, Girolamo Brinis, b. 642, nos. 31–35 (1651, 19 October), f. 1.

²⁰ The terms of the rental agreements are found in I-Vas, *Notarile, Atti*, Girolamo Brinis, protocollo, b. 840, ff. 48–50v, and minute, b. 871 (1653, 19 March); and *Notarile, Atti*, Giorgio Emo, b. 5508, ff. 195–195v.

²¹ I-Vas, *Notarile, Atti*, Girolamo Brinis, b. 885, f. 518v (1658, 5 October) and *Notarile, Atti*, Camillo Lion, b. 8022, f. 174v (1660, 27 March). Discussion of the Padoani's homes in Venice and Padua are found in I-Vas, *Notarile, Atti*, Giovanni Antonio Mora, b. 8636, ff. 108v–109v (1673, 14 May).

though the letters ostensibly concern employing Padoani, nearly every exchange also mentions his daughter.

A letter addressed to the duke in March 1654 finds Padoani in the midst of negotiating his employment at the Gonzaga court, a process that he described as having gone on for several months and that involved the “Residente” Antonio Bosso, a Mantuan envoy working for the duke in Venice (doc. 2).

Your Most Serene Highness,

It pleased Your Most Serene Highness in the past months to invite me into the service that I had already longed for myself; the extent of your kindness did not stop there: your envoy Bosso also explained to me the comforts that I would have received. And since, on one hand, I have not heard anything more about this and, on the other, it being time for me to resume my most important engagements in this city, I have decided to send in my place the Latin teacher [“maestro di grammatica”] of my only daughter, to beg your Highness humbly and devotedly to command me to do whatever pleases you more, if I move or if I stay. In one case I would enjoy great happiness, and in the other I would have the pleasure of serving you. My daughter continues to make good progress studying with Signor Cavalli; she is humbly devoted to the sublime merit of your Highness and, with me, bows down before you as I, together with her mother, in the depth of deference, salute the most Serene Archduchess.

Your Lordship’s humblest, most devoted, and most respectful servant,
Giacomo Padovani, Physician²²

Although Padoani’s signature would seem to indicate that he was to come to work as a doctor in Mantua, he decided to send the “maestro di grammatica” in his stead. He provides here several details of Antonia’s studies in music and letters, the two disciplines constituting the core curriculum in the education of the few girls fortunate enough to have tutors.²³ The unnamed “maestro di grammatica” held a title denoting his role as a teacher of Latin grammar

²² I am grateful to Beth Glixon, who uncovered this letter in 1993, as well as Docs. 3–4; her discovery led me to look at the documents first on microfilm at Venice’s Fondazione Giorgio Cini in 1994, and then further into the actual holdings of the Archivio di Stato of Mantua in 1996.

²³ Paul F. Grendler devoted a section of his study on the history of education to the question, “What Should Girls Learn?” and found that only “a significant minority of girls studied the Latin humanities, usually with all household tutors,” in *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 93. Home studies with tutors or parents paralleled those of the convents, which generally offered instruction in music, reading, and writing. The Venetian writer Moderata Fonte (Modesta da Pozzo, 1555–1592), for example, “learned Latin, wrote vernacular poetry, did arithmetic, played lute and harpsichord, sang, [and] sewed” (94). Fonte’s education suggests a model for the type that Padoani may have established for his daughter.

and language, reading, and composition.²⁴ Like the Padoani family, the eminent composer Francesco Cavalli lived in the parish of San Pantalon, within the magnificent Palazzo Balbi on the Grand Canal, but at the back, facing the Corte di Marconi.²⁵ A further degree of connectedness is suggested by the fact that, in 1652, during the final illness of Cavalli's cherished wife Maria, one of Padoani's acquaintances from Padua, Raimondo Zanforti (?–d. 1678), served as the attending physician.²⁶

No sign of the matter of Padoani's appointment in Mantua follows the March 1654 letter until a flurry of documents appears in July of that year. This time, Padoani addressed his letter to Giulio Cesare Gonzaga (1618–1676), one of the Mantuan courtiers who had been assigned the task of negotiating the appointment.²⁷ Even four months later, little seems to have altered in the stalled employment process and, worse yet, an intrigue complicated matters on both sides. Padoani required a license, assurance of a salary, and arrangements for his daughter before he could leave Venice and go to serve the duke. Yet the impasse proved injurious to his reputation in Mantua; he alluded to gossip going around and of people speaking badly of him because some secret information had gotten into the wrong hands. His worry—that someone with “malicious curiosity” was prying into the affair—caused him to ask if the message that Giulio Cesare Gonzaga had received with an earlier letter of 7 July (one not found in the archive) was truly what he had written (doc. 3):

Most Illustrious and Most Esteemed Sir, and Most Honorable Patron,

I have before me the letter of Your Excellency [Giulio Cesare Gonzaga] and that of the Most Serene Highness [the duke], both together. I am deliberating about complying, because I owe it to His Highness and to Your

²⁴ See Grendler, *Schooling*, 4–5.

²⁵ The 1661 census for Dorsoduro-San Pantalon shows Cavalli living there; see I-Vas, X Savi alle decime, b. 424, no. 407. The rent on the entire property amounted to 600 ducats a year; no separate figure appears for Cavalli's quarters. On average the other homes in San Pantalon rented for 60 ducats a year.

²⁶ I-Vsp, Morti dal 1632 al 1652, f. 147: “La Sig[no]ra Maria moglie del Sig[no]r Franc[esc]o Cavalli Organista di S[an] Marco d'anni 40 in c[ir]ca amalata da febre gia mesi uno, et mezzo. Il Medico [Raimondo] Z[an] Forte.” Jane Glover, *Cavalli* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 36, n. 55, gives 16 September 1652 as the date of the opening of Maria Cavalli's testament, and the necrology cited here reveals her death the day before.

²⁷ Primarily a politician and member of the militia, Giulio Cesare Gonzaga served Ferdinand III in Vienna and Cosimo III in Florence. He did not belong to the branch of the family that ruled the duchy. See Pompeo Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane*, “Gonzaga di Mantova,” Part II, Index 49, fascicle 50. His interest in the arts might be divined from the fact that he is recorded as having been part of a four-person team (“squadra”) that represented Jason at a spectacle—*Festa del combattimento a cavallo dei mostri*—staged for a state Carnival celebration in 1652; see Angiolo Tarachia, *Feste celebrate in Mantova alla venuta de' Serenissimi Archiduchi Ferdinando Carlo e Sigismundo Francesco d'Austria et Arciduchessa Anna Medici, Il Carnevale dell'Anno 1652* (Mantua: Osanna, 1652), 44–52.

Excellency, but I wish to reveal once again the error of those who pretend that I am just trying to make excuses about not coming. I know that Your Excellency will work on getting the license, in accordance with all the things that were said, and with the promised letters that only have to do with the girl. Nevertheless, I beg you fervently that the first year be paid in advance with one hundred doblas, so that in the ensuing time I won't have to beg for money and—as I have said before—so that it won't be necessary to blush when asking for it. Because if I relinquish my daily earnings here, I know that I will not be able to earn very much in Mantua visiting the sick. This is my greatest concern, the only thing that makes me hesitate; this is what scares me, and why I must make these demands. If you arrange things in the way that I wish and send me the license, along with the money for the first year, I will set to work with arranging my departure, and at just 15 or 20 days' notice I will be able to get the boat to pick me up, along with my belongings and my family. I think that by the time these things are done, Mantua's bad air will be past and, God willing, I will have completed my work here. And that is all that I can tell Your Excellency from my side, confiding the rest to the magnanimity of His Highness, which he shows me with his letters, and to the protection of Your Excellency, who will be my protector. Meanwhile I beg you to look at the attached, written above, and let me know if it is the same as the letter that you sent to me with yours of the 7th of this month, because I have come to believe that malicious curiosity is at work. Likewise I beg you to let His Highness know most liberally of my readiness to serve him, so that if something is in the air—setting fires and making a mess—it will be known as fraudulent. And do believe me, Your Excellency: because it may seem that I might be making this up, I do not mean to speak flippantly when I recall Aesop's fable about the serpent nursed in the breast.²⁸

I've said too much but it will never be too much.

Venice, 13 July 1654

Your Most Illustrious Excellency's most obliged and devoted servant,
Giacomo Padovani

In order to be sure that there had been no forgery or misrepresentation, as his reference to the fable suggests, he added a postscript indicating his worry: "I beg you to see that these letters were still sealed when they were received."

²⁸ Pietro Pancrazi related the following tale in *L'Esopo moderno* (Florence: E. Ariani, 1930): "*Il contadino e il serpe*. D'inverno, un contadino trovò un serpe tramortito dal freddo. Ne ebbe pietà, lo raccolse e se lo mise in seno. Rinvenuto dal calore, quello ritornò serpe, e morse il contadino. Il quale, mentre già moriva: —Ben mi sta, disse; perché aver pietà d'un cattivo?" (82). An English edition practically contemporary with Padoani's letter, John Ogilby's *The Fables of Aesop* (1668; repr. edn. Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1965), gives the moral of the tale as follows: "Ungrateful men are Marshal'd in three Ranks, / This not returns, the Second gives no Thanks. / Evil the last for Good repays, and this / Of all Hell's Monsters the most Horrid is" (44).