

MUSIC
IN
RENAISSANCE
FERRARA
1400–1505

The Creation of a Musical Center
in the Fifteenth Century



LEWIS LOCKWOOD

MUSIC IN RENAISSANCE
FERRARA 1400–1505

This page intentionally left blank

MUSIC IN
RENAISSANCE FERRARA
1400–1505

THE CREATION OF A MUSICAL CENTER
IN THE
FIFTEENTH CENTURY



LEWIS LOCKWOOD

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2009

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further
Oxford University's objective of excellence
in research, scholarship, and education.

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Copyright © 2009 by Lewis Lockwood

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Lockwood, Lewis.

Music in Renaissance Ferrara 1400–1505.

Includes index.

1. Music—Italy—Ferrara—15th century—History and criticism. I. Title.
ML290.8.F45L6 1984b 780'.945'45 84-4671

ISBN 978-0-19-537827-6

Published in the United Kingdom by Oxford University Press 1984

Published in the United States by Harvard University Press 1984

This edition published by Oxford University Press 2009

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

To Nino Pirrotta

This page intentionally left blank

Preface to the Paperback Edition



FOR many travellers to Italy Ferrara is a lesser destination among the great ones, a venerable town in the Po valley northeast of Bologna, a place to have lunch before going on to Florence or Venice, depending on your route. But to those who know more about its history it is a place of unusual beauty and special qualities. In literature it was the seat of the three most famous poets of the Italian Renaissance—Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso. In art it was the scene of action of a highly evocative school of painters who created the vivid images of court life mingled with astrological figures that adorn the walls of the Palazzo Schifanoia, a masterpiece of fifteenth-century fresco painting. Its enormous medieval castle, really a fortress with its towers and moats, still dominates the center of the city as a monument to the powerful ambitions of the Este family. When it was built in the fourteenth century the Este line had already ruled the town and its territory for more than two centuries and they continued in power until 1598, when, in what was called its “devolution,” they lost control of Ferrara to the Papacy and moved to Modena, a secondary city in the duchy. The result is that Ferrara became frozen in historical time, a place of hidden byways and of walled gardens. In the twentieth century its streets and buildings were imaginatively painted by Giorgio de Chirico, and its hidden gardens and old traditions were made memorable by Giorgio Bassani in his tragic novel on the fate of the Jews of Ferrara under Fascism, *The Garden of the Finzi-Contini*.

But if Ferrara as a city remained an architectural survival of the Renaissance, its moveable treasures (paintings, manuscripts, documents) were for the most part transferred to Modena, where anyone studying Ferrara must spend a great deal of time in the richly endowed Archivio di Stato and the Biblioteca Estense. This book is the main result of a long period of study that I devoted, years ago, to reconstructing the history of music and musical life at Ferrara in its first major period—the fifteenth century—a project that resulted in a new portrait of Ferrara as, in addition to its literary and artistic fame, an important musical center of Renaissance Italy.

This new edition of my book is neither a straight reprint nor a thoroughgoing revision of the original 1984 edition, but is something in between. When the Italian translation of this book was published in 1987 (issued by Il Mulino of Bologna as *La Musica a Ferrara nel Rinascimento*) I made a number of detailed changes in the text. These were mostly small-scale additions or corrections the need for which had been brought to my attention by my astute Italian translator, Bruno Meini, or had been pointed out by my three primary reviewers—William Prizer, Reinhard Strohm, and David Fallows. All of the changes that I made in the Italian version of 1987 are now incorporated into the present edition, along with other minor modifications that help to bring some particular issues into agreement with current scholarship.

My hope is that its ample factual material, based on first-hand study of archival sources and related source materials, and its comprehensive narrative account of music at Ferrara, will justify the reappearance of a book that has been unavailable in English since 1992. I have updated the bibliography, adding a number of important relevant publications since 1984, though inevitably not including every possible title. And in two areas I have made necessary changes in the text. The first concerns the important music manuscript Modena, Biblioteca Estense MS Alpha X. 1, 11, known as “ModB,” a large collection of sacred music that has long been thought by scholars, including me, to have originated in Ferrara, but which has been shown in a recent dissertation by Michael Phelps (see Bibliography) to have been made for the Papal singers under Pope Eugenius IV during the 1430’s. The second area that required changes in the light of recent research concerns the early career of Josquin Desprez in the years prior to his recruitment by Ferrarese agents in 1502 and his stay in Ferrara in 1503–04. Josquin biography has undergone a revolution in the past twenty years, thanks to new archival findings by various scholars, including Herbert Kellman and the team of Paul Merkley and Lora Matthews. From them and others we have learned that the previously accepted picture of Josquin’s early years (accepted, that is, since the 1950’s)—according to which he was a young singer in the Cathedral of Milan from 1459 to 1472—cannot be correct, and that the singer named “Jodocus de Frantia” or “Juschino” who served at the Milan Cathedral in those years and then in the Sforza chapel from 1473 to 1479, was not Josquin Desprez. The “real” Josquin evidently spent his early career in France not Italy. On the other hand, the Josquin who came to Ferrara in 1503 as master of the ducal chapel, and stayed for a year, is beyond doubt the great composer Josquin Desprez, not a minor namesake.

Looking back now to the distant years 1968–74, when I carried out the basic research for this project, I am well aware of changes

that have taken place since then in the general intellectual climate for historical scholarship and in the specialized and comparatively quiet precincts of Renaissance music history. Most of my work was done in the years before computers came into common use. Every document I found had to be copied by hand during many hours and days of archival work, and even photos were then hard to come by, since the Modena archive at that time did not permit massive photocopying (a practice that has changed since then, I am glad to say). In all my research I worked toward establishing a factually true portrait of the ways in which music and musical life developed at the Ferrarese court under its successive Este rulers. For this field there was no significant body of published documentation before mine, except some fragmentary compilations by 19th-century local historians, and as I slowly fashioned a portrait of the musical life of the Ferrarese court, I gained confidence that my research could form the basis for a well grounded and ample account of the historical landscape. Much of the history it covers may seem distant from the broad experience of many modern readers, but if it is read with patience it may convey some small part of what the great medievalist Marc Bloch once called “the subtle enchantment of the unfamiliar.”

The result is indeed a large mosaic, as I called it in my earlier preface, and in view of the vastness of the documentary sources in even the Modena archive, there are bound to be some gaps and missing pieces, since no single researcher could guarantee that every last scrap of documentary evidence has been found and included. So I am prepared to endorse the opinion of David Fallows in his trenchant review (in *Early Music History*, 6) to the effect that “the definitive documentary study is a chimera” and that other scholars should not be deterred from going over the same ground. Indeed they should not be and have not been, as we see from new documents recently uncovered by Paul Merkley and Lora Matthews in the Ferrarese diocesan and state archives and reported on in their recent articles dealing with musicians and their benefices.

In this line of work there is no perfection, only striving for it. The implicit premise of this book is that the direct personal study of primary sources, whatever the field, enlarges and transforms a historian’s vision. From this project I learned the importance of that premise, and it remains for me an article of faith.

This much said, I believe this book can stand as a basic contribution to the broad field of Italian Renaissance music history, and I am pleased to know that it will once more be available in print. I was deeply gratified when in 1985 it received the Kinkeldey Award of the

American Musicological Society and the Howard Marraro Prize of the Society for Italian Historical Studies. For encouraging me to bring out this edition and for overseeing its production with high professionalism, I am grateful to Suzanne Ryan of Oxford University Press, New York.

Lewis Lockwood

Brookline, Massachusetts
2008

Preface



THE project from which this book derives began as an attempt to enlarge our knowledge of one of the more prominent Italian local settings for the career and work of Josquin Desprez. In 1968, after a period of participation in work aimed at developing purely systematic and computer-aided procedures for analysis of Josquin's music, I turned back to my more deeply rooted interest in studying the music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in its authentic historical contexts. Attracted at first by the problem of the origins of Josquin's Mass for Duke Ercole I d'Este—the celebrated *Missa 'Hercules Dux Ferrarie'*—and by some important new documents on Josquin and Ferrara that had then been recently discovered by the eminent Josquin scholar, Professor Helmuth Osthoff, I decided to try to open up the field encompassed by Ferrara as a musical center, through close documentary research on its role as a seat of musical life and patronage in this period. In early planning for this project I felt a sense of returning to a new vein in the rich lode of Italian historical and musical source-materials in which I had previously worked on other topics, ranging from the music of the Counter-Reformation to music at the Friulian town of Cividale. For wise and generous advice at this stage I was and am grateful to Professor Nino Pirrotta, then at Harvard. What I owe to him, well beyond the dedication of this book and this brief tribute, is more than I can hope to repay.

Although Josquin continued to loom large in research for this project—as he does in this book—and although new documents about Josquin and the Ferrarese court actually came to light during my very first days of work in the Archivio di Stato in Modena—inevitably the topic broadened as I continued my work at Modena and elsewhere in Italy. I found, as no doubt others have before me, how vast are the archival materials for a truly documentary study of any phase of life at the Ferrarese court; and that the surviving music manuscripts and, especially, the archival documentation, including payment records, contemporary chronicles, and letters from, to, and about musicians and patrons, made up a vast mosaic that took time and patience to

form into a larger and intelligible pattern. The result, as presented in this book and in articles published earlier, constitutes the first extended and detailed documentary study of Ferrara as a musical center in the fifteenth century—its first and possibly its greatest period of cultural growth. I found too that the topic spills over the normally accepted boundaries of the discipline of music history, and that it contributes directly to what we may call the core history of the development of Ferrara, as well as to its place in the Italian Renaissance altogether. My close colleagues in this enterprise are therefore not only my fellow music historians working on comparable projects—Frank D’Accone (Florence), William Prizer (Mantua), Allan Atlas (Naples), and Richard Sherr (Rome), to mention only a few—but also those specialists in other historical fields who are at work on Ferrara or its many cultural developments. Above all here I must mention Werner Gundersheimer and Charles Rosenberg, from both of whom I have gained much valuable insight. Among other scholars to whom I owe equal debts are Maestro Adriano Franceschini, who provided me with generous help based on his unrivalled knowledge of Ferrarese notarial records; also Dr Luciano Chiappini, Vincent Ilardi, and Dr Luciano Capra, the latter in his capacity as Director of the Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea in Ferrara. And I owe special personal debts to Dr Adriano Cavicchi, whose love for his native Ferrara and knowledge of its past and present were of great help to me.

For aiding my work in the vast repository of documents housed in the Archivio di Stato in Modena, I am especially indebted to its former director, Dr Filippo Valenti, and to his successor, Dr Angelo Spaggiari. I remember with particular pleasure the careful and painstaking attention given to my early search for documents by Signor Lodi of the staff of the archive. At the Biblioteca Estense, comparable aid was extended by its staff, above all by Dr Selmi and Dottoressa Alessandra Chiarelli.

A project as broad as this relies, too, on the help and advice of many friends and colleagues. I include among the latter a number of former graduate students, especially those who were members of several graduate seminars on topics that grew out of this project, which I gave at Princeton University and more recently at Harvard. Besides the colleagues already named, I am grateful for assistance of various kinds to others, including Alberto Gallo, Jeremy Noble, Herbert Kellman, Keith Polk, and Isabelle Cazeaux. Among former graduate students who have subsequently done important work of their own on topics related to this one, I must mention especially Christopher Reynolds and Michael Long. Another former graduate student, Jessie Ann Owens, is now undertaking the formidable task of carrying forward

basic documentary research on Ferrarese music and musicians into the mid-sixteenth century; her work will thus form a potential bridge between the period covered by this project and the highly valuable work carried out some years earlier by Anthony Newcomb for his important book *The Madrigal at Ferrara, 1579–1597*.

I am greatly indebted to the staff of Oxford University Press for their assistance in the publication of this book, and wish to thank Dr David Butchart for his painstaking and exemplary editorial work.

I am grateful too for the fellowship and travel support that were needed for this project, provided by the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. The directors and staff of the Harvard Research Center at the Villa I Tatti made me a welcome guest during my year of residence in Florence in 1973–4. Finally, I am grateful above all to my wife, Doris Lockwood, whose work as a psychologist with families and children in Italy may have helped balance my work with aspects of their cultural history, while we were living in Italy for extended periods during the years from 1968 to 1974. To her, and to my children, Alison and Daniel, I am indebted in more ways than I can possibly express.

L. L.

Cambridge, Massachusetts
1984

This page intentionally left blank

Contents



| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | xix |
| <i>List of Tables</i> | xxi |
| <i>List of Music Examples</i> | xxii |
| <i>Archival References</i> | xxiv |
| <i>Music Manuscripts</i> | xxv |
| Introduction | 1 |

PART ONE

MUSIC AT FERRARA IN THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Ferrara and the Trecento Background | 7 |
| 2. Ferrara under Niccolò III d'Este (1393–1429) | 11 |
| Music in the Earlier Years of Niccolò III (1400–29) | 16 |
| Music at the Cathedral: Bartolomeo da Bologna (1405–27) | 18 |

THE PERIOD OF LEONELLO D'ESTE (1429–50)

| | |
|---|----|
| 3. Ferrara in the 1430s | 30 |
| The Council of Ferrara (1438) | 33 |
| 4. Feragut and Dufay | 36 |
| 5. Leonello's Rule, 1441–50; the Court Chapel | 43 |
| 6. Singers and Repertoires | 49 |
| The Manuscript Mod B | 55 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 7. Secular Music | 69 |
| Groups of Secular Musicians | 72 |
| Court Dance under Leonello | 76 |
| 8. Cathedral Music | 80 |
| Ugolino di Orvieto: Scholastic and Humanistic Views of Music | 83 |

BORSO D'ESTE AND FERRARESE COURT CULTURE
(1450-71)

| | |
|--|-----|
| 9. Borso as Ruler | 93 |
| Borso as Patron of Art and Literature; Music in the Frescoes of the Palazzo Schifanoia | 96 |
| 10. Pietrobono and the Improvisatory Tradition | 103 |
| Court Musicians under Borso | 103 |
| 11. A Secular Manuscript of the Borso Period: the Porto MS and Rinaldo Maria d'Este | 119 |

PART TWO

MUSIC AT FERRARA UNDER ERCOLE I D'ESTE (1471-1505)

| | |
|---|-----|
| 12. Ercole as Private and Public Figure | 133 |
| 13. Recruitment of Musicians in the 1470s | 143 |
| 14. Organization and Functions of the Court Musicians | 149 |
| The <i>Cappella di Cantori</i> | 149 |
| The Instrumentalists | 153 |
| Music in Daily Life | 161 |
| 15. Size and Structure of Ercole's <i>Cappella di Cantori</i> | 165 |
| National Groups | 167 |
| Rank and Hierarchy in the Chapel | 170 |
| 16. Some Representative Singers of Ercole's Chapel | 177 |
| Johannes Brebis | 177 |
| Magister Nicolò d'Olanda | 178 |
| Cornelio di Lorenzo of Antwerp | 178 |
| Jachetto de Marvilla | 183 |
| Johannes Martini | 185 |

Contents

xvii

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 17. | Social and Economic Status of the Musicians | 192 |
| | Inducements to Singers | 193 |
| | Salaries and Status | 197 |
| 18. | Benefices | 205 |
| | Benefices and the Strategy of Recruitment: the Case of don Filippo de Primis | 215 |
| 19. | The Last Years of Ercole's Patronage (1497–1505) | 218 |
| | Josquin Desprez at Ferrara (1503–4) | 225 |
| | Jacob Obrecht (1504–5) | 231 |

PART THREE

FERRARESE MUSICAL REPERTOIRES AND STYLES
IN THE LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 20. | The Production of Music Manuscripts under Ercole I | 237 |
| 21. | The Principal Repertoires in Ercole's Earlier Years (1471–82) | 255 |
| 22. | Masses by Martini and Other Composers | 260 |
| 23. | Josquin's <i>Missa 'Hercules Dux Ferrarie'</i> | 268 |
| 24. | The Psalms, Hymns, and Other Vespers Music by Martini and Brebis | 278 |
| 25. | The Motet at Ferrara | 287 |
| 26. | Secular Music at the Court: Chanson and Instrumental Music | 295 |
| | The Casanatense Chansonnier | 298 |
| | Martini's Secular Music | 301 |
| 27. | Music for Court Festivities and Theater | 308 |
| | Music for Public Festivals, Jousts, and Special Events | 309 |
| | Music for the <i>Intermedi</i> of Secular Drama | 311 |
| | Music for Religious Spectacles | 315 |
| | Epilogue | 319 |

APPENDICES

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| I. | Sources in the Archivio di Stato, Modena | 324 |
| II. | Documents | 328 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| III. A Précis of Papal Letters to Duke Ercole I and Duke Alfonso I d'Este on Provisions for the Singers of the Ferrarese Court, 1487–1506 | 334 |
| IV. A Chronology of the Correspondence between Duke Ercole I d'Este and Ferrarese Ambassadors at Rome and elsewhere, on Benefices | 336 |
| V. A Chronological List of Musicians Active at Ferrara, 1377–1505 | 346 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 363 |
| <i>Index</i> | 383 |

Illustrations



Figure 1. Pisanello, Portrait of Leonello d'Este, Bergamo, Accademia Carrara.

Figure 2. Pisanello, detail of Medal for Leonello d'Este showing scroll with music notation. Washington D.C. National Gallery, Kress Collection.

Figures 3a, b. Cornell, University Library, Ordo of Cathedral of Ferrara with fragments of polyphonic music.

Figure. 4a, b. Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, Frescoes: a) April, entire fresco; b) April, section of fresco showing scene of lovers and music.

Figure 5. Dosso Dossi, Portrait of Duke Ercole I d'Este. Modena, Galleria Estense.

Figure 6. Modena, Bibl. Estense, MS Alpha M. 1. 11–12 (Mod C₁ and C₂), fols. 1v–2 (Portion of the Psalm “Eripe me” by Johannes Martini).

Figure 7. Modena, Bibl. Estense, MS Alpha M. 1.13 (Mod D) fols. 1v–2 (Portion of Missa “Orsus” by Johannes Martini).

Figure 8a. Josquin Desprez, *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie*, Tenor: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo (from Ottaviano Petrucci, publisher, *Missarum Josquin Liber Secundus*, Venice, 1505).

Figure 8b. Josquin Desprez, *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie*, Superius, Kyrie and beginning of Gloria (from Petrucci, *Missarum Josquin Liber Secundus*, Venice 1505).

Figure 9. Map of the diocese of Ferrara and its churches (eighteenth century). Harvard University Library, Map Collection.

This page intentionally left blank

Tables



| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Court Trumpeters under Ercole I d'Este in 1484 | 155 |
| 2. Some Principal Events at the Ferrarese Court in 1476 | 162 |
| 3. The Singers of the Ferrarese Court Chapel under Ercole I d'Este Grouped by National Origin | 166 |
| 4. Musicians' Salaries under Borso d'Este, 1456 | 198 |
| 5. Musicians' Salaries in 1476 | 200 |
| 6. Salaries of Some Military Men and of Musicians, 1488–91 | 203 |
| 7. Extant Polyphonic Music Manuscripts from Ferrara, Datable between <i>c.</i> 1479 and 1505 (Period of Ercole I d'Este) | 242 |
| 8. Music Manuscripts in Two Late Fifteenth-Century Inventories of Estense Libraries | 244 |
| 9. Some Further Payment Records for Ferrarese Polyphonic MSS | 249 |
| 10. Masses by Johannes Martini | 260 |
| 11. Contents of the MSS Mod C ₁ and Mod C ₂ | 279 |
| 12. Composers Represented in the MS Casanatense 2856 | 302 |
| 13. Johannes Martini, 'La Martinella'; Segmentation | 305 |
| 14. Josquin Desprez, 'Ile Fantazies de Joskin'; Segmentation | 306 |

Music Examples



1. Bartolomeo da Bologna, 'Arte psalentes', mm. 1–36 (transcribed by Ursula Günther, 'Das Manuskript Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Alpha M. 5, 24, 26 f.). 23
2. Bartolomeo da Bologna, 'Que pena maior', mm. 1–8 (transcribed by G. Reaney, *Early Fifteenth-Century Music*, Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae, xi/5, pp. 47 ff.) 24
3. Guillaume Dufay, 'C'est bien raison', mm. 1–33 (from H. Bessler, ed., *Guillaume Dufay, Opera Omnia*, Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae, i/6, pp. 31 f.) 39
4. (a) Cornell University Library, MS Rare BX C36 0635, *Ordo Manualis*, p. 70. 82
(b) *Ibid.*, p. 167. 82
5. (a) Johannes Martini, *Missa 'Io ne tengo quanto te'*, MS Mod D, fols. 25^v–40; opening Tenor segments of principal movements and proposed reconstruction of first part of melody. 263
(b) *Ibid.*; opening Tenor segments of secondary movements, and proposed reconstruction of later part of melody. 264
6. Josquin Desprez, *Missa 'Hercules Dux Ferrarie'*, basic form of subject (from O. Petrucci, publisher, *Missarum Josquin, Liber Secundus*, 1505; reprinted in A. Smijers, ed., *Josquin Desprez, Werken. Missen*, Deel ii). 271
7. Josquin Desprez, *Missa 'La sol fa re mi'* and *Missa 'Faisant regretz'*, subjects (from A. Smijers, ed., *Josquin Desprez, Werken. Missen*, Deel i and iii). 273
8. Josquin Desprez, *Missa 'Hercules Dux Ferrarie'*, Kyrie I (after *Josquin Desprez, Werken. Missen*, Deel ii). 274
9. Josquin Desprez, *Missa 'Hercules Dux Ferrarie'*, Gloria, mm. 1–4, with plainsong intonation (cf. *Liber Usualis*; p. 88). 276
10. (a) Johannes Brebis, 'Deus tuorum militum', stanza 1. 281
(b) Johannes Martini, 'Deus tuorum militum', stanza 2. 282
11. Johannes Martini, *Magnificat Tertii Toni*, I. 285
12. Johannes Martini, 'Salve Regina', mm. 1–13 (from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS 3154, fols. 89–93). 288

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 13. | Josquin Desprez, 'Miserere mei, Deus', mm. 1–24 (after E. E. Lowinsky, ed., <i>The Medici Codex of 1518</i> , iv, 270–96). | 292 |
| 14. | Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2856, Alta Instrument Ranges. | 300 |
| 15. | Johannes Martini, 'La Martinella', mm. 1–40 (from E. G. Evans, ed., <i>Johannes Martini, Secular Pieces</i> , pp. 47 f.). | 304 |
| 16. | Josquin Desprez, 'Ile fantazies de Joskin', mm. 1–22 (from <i>Josquin Desprez, Werken. Wereldlijke Werken</i> , Deel ii). | 306 |
| 17. | 'G. L.' (= Giorgio Luppato?) (ascribed), 'O triumphale diamante', Italian secular composition in honor of Duke Ercole I d'Este, mm. 1–20 (from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Res. Vm ⁷ 676, fols. 76 ^v –77). | 313 |

Archival References



| | |
|----------|---|
| AN | Archivio Notarile |
| ASF | Ferrara, Archivio di Stato |
| ASM | Modena, Archivio di Stato |
| ARo | Ambasciatori, Roma |
| ASE | Archivio Segreto Estense |
| CTPE | Carteggio tra Principi Estensi |
| LASP | Libri di Amministrazione dei Singoli Principi |
| LCD | Libri Camerali Diversi |
| ASMN, AG | Mantua, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Gonzaga |
| B. | Busta |
| BE | Modena, Biblioteca Estense |

The abbreviation LM is used throughout this book for the standard Ferrarese monetary unit of the period, the *Lira marchesana*.

Music Manuscripts



- Aosta Aosta, Biblioteca del Seminario Maggiore, MS A 'D19
- Berlin 78.C.28 Berlin, Staatliche Museen der Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, MS 78.C.28 (*olim* Hamilton 451)
- Bologna 2216 Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS 2216
- Bologna Q 15 Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, MS Q 15 (*olim* 37)
- Bologna Q 16 Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, MS Q 16 (*olim* 109)
- Brussels 9126 Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 9126
- Casanatense 2856 Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2856
- Chigiana 234 Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Chigi C. VIII. 234
- Dijon 517 Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 517
- Escorial IV.a.24 Escorial, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial, Biblioteca y Archivo de Musica, MS IV.a.24
- Escorial V.III.24 Escorial, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial, Biblioteca y Archivo de Musica, MS V.III.24
- Fayrfax London, British Library, Additional MS 5465 ('Fayrfax Manuscript')
- Florence 27 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Panciaticchi 27
- Florence 112bis Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechi XIX.112bis
- Florence 229 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Banco Rari 229 (*olim* Magliabechi XIX.59)
- Florence 2439 Florence, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica 'Luigi Cherubini', MS Basevi 2439
- Jena 3 Jena, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 3
- London-Paris-Modena London, British Library, Additional MS 19583 (portion of a single Altus partbook from an original set of five); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. nouv. acq. 4599 (another portion of Altus)

- partbook); Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Alpha F. 2. 29 (combines fragments of Tenor and Bass partbooks)
- Milan 2267 Milan, Archivio della Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, Sezione Musicale, Librone 3 (*olim* 2267)
- Milan 2268 Milan, Archivio della Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, Sezione Musicale, Librone 2 (*olim* 2268)
- Milan 2269 Milan, Archivio della Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, Sezione Musicale, Librone 1 (*olim* 2269)
- Mod A Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Alpha M.5.24 (Lat. 568)
- Mod B Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Alpha X.1.11 (Lat. 471)
- Mod C₁ Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Alpha M.1.11 (Lat. 454)
- Mod C₂ Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Alpha M.1.12 (Lat. 455)
- Mod D Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Alpha M.1.13 (Lat. 456)
- Mod E Modena, Archivio di Stato, Frammenti Musicali (3 folios)
- Mod F Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Alpha M.1.2 (Lat. 457)
- Montecassino 871 Montecassino, Biblioteca dell'Abbazia, MS 871
- Munich 3154 Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Musiksammlung, Musica MS 3154 ('Chorbuch des Nikolaus Leopold')
- Oxford 213 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Canonici Miscellaneous 213
- Perugia 431 Perugia, Biblioteca Comunale Augusta, MS 431 (G 20)
- Porto 714 Oporto, Biblioteca pública municipal, MS 714
- St. Gall 463 St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Mus. MS 463
- Segovia Segovia, Catedral, MS s.s.
- Seville-Paris Seville, Biblioteca Columbina, MS 5.I.43; and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouvelle acq. fr. MS 4379 (Part I)
- Sistina 15 Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Cappella Sistina 15
- Sistina 35 Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Cappella Sistina 35
- Sistina 42 Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Cappella Sistina 42
- Sistina 51 Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Cappella Sistina 51
- Spataro Bologna, Archivio Musicale di San Petronio, MS A.XXIX (copied by Giovanni Spataro)
- Trent 87 Trent, Castello del Buonconsiglio, MS 87
- Trent 90 Trent, Castello del Buonconsiglio, MS 90
- Trent 92 Trent, Castello del Buonconsiglio, MS 92

- Vatican 1411 Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb. lat.
1411
- Verona 757 Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS 757
- Verona 759 Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS 759
- Vienna 4809 Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS 4809

This page intentionally left blank

MUSIC IN RENAISSANCE
FERRARA 1400–1505

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction



IN a memorable passage in *The Idea of History*, R. C. Collingwood dealt with the problem of interpreting a period of history as an age of greatness or as an age of decline.

At the present day, we are constantly presented with a view of history as consisting...of good and bad periods, the bad periods being divided into the primitive and the decadent, according as they come before or after the good ones. This distinction between periods of primitiveness, periods of greatness, and periods of decadence, is not and never can be historically true. It tells us much about the historians who study the facts, but nothing about the facts they study...Every period of which we have competent knowledge (and by competent knowledge I mean insight into its thought, not mere acquaintance with its remains) appears in the perspective of time as an age of brilliance: the brilliance being the light of our own historical insight.¹

Against this we may set the following excerpt from a widely-read general reference book on music, written a generation ago:

During the fifteenth century, Italian musical development declined, at least so far as we know. Only recently have some traces of musical activity come to light...Northern composers such as Dufay, Obrecht, Isaac, and Josquin travelled to the south, and features of harmony and balance found in their works have frequently, though with doubtful authenticity, been ascribed to 'sunny Italy'. While art music declined, popular music seems to have flourished, and it is this field that, towards the end of the fifteenth century, gave Italian music new life, in the *frottola* and *canti carnascialeschi*.²

The point at issue in the dictionary excerpt is not its factual reliability (though most of it now seems misleading or wrong), but its use of the term 'decline' to characterize the condition of music in fifteenth-century Italy. If we accept a familiar premise of traditional music history, that 'music' means 'art music', and that the central defining feature of

¹ *The Idea of History*, p. 327 f.

² *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd edn., p. 429.

a musical culture is the individual composer and his completed works, then the general tenor of this account seems justified. For it is true that, with the disappearance of the last representatives of the Trecento tradition, around 1425, no significant Italian composers of polyphony rose to inherit their roles and maintain a direct line of continuity from composer to composer in Italian fifteenth-century polyphony.

But the familiar premise is thin and insubstantial. To strengthen it, we must extend our view of the formative factors that went into the musical culture of the Quattrocento. And in doing so we must include under the broad heading of ‘music’ not only the greater mensural polyphonic genres of religious and secular music that were dominated by foreign composers, but also the co-existing traditions of plainsong and of improvisatory or simply-notated two-part polyphony that survived for centuries in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. We must include not only the courtly polyphonic chanson but also the improvisational singing of contemporary strophic poetry in Italian using narrative and formulaic melodic strains. We can, in fact, now trace a virtually continuous tradition of the singing of Italian verse both at popular levels and in occasional settings by foreign and Italian composers (among the former Dufay is the most famous), along with improvisational performance by native Italian poet-musicians, such as Giustinian.³ Singer-performers receive acclaim in the mid-fifteenth century at numerous Italian centers, and they range from the *cantimpanche* and *cantastorie*, who sang of mythical lovers and warriors, to the more sophisticated self-accompanied recitations of lutenist-singers such as Pietrobono of Ferrara, of whom we shall see much more in a later chapter. It is perfectly true that foreign composers dominate the sources of mensural polyphony that were compiled in Italy throughout the century. But that is exactly what we should expect in view of their productivity, their talents, and their traveling careers, which brought many of these musicians to Italy for shorter visits or for long periods of residence and activity.

To see the Quattrocento as a potential ‘age of brilliance’, we must try to make imaginative use of every type of evidence by which we can reconstruct the nature of the unwritten tradition – as Nino Pirrotta has emphasized over and over again – and understand the role of different kinds of music-making within the social framework of the period. To do this we will first have to concede that a musical culture, even one so integral to our Western composer-oriented tradition – was in fact

³ See Pirrotta, ‘Ricerche e variazioni su “O rosa bella”’; repr. in Pirrotta, *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*.

a richly complex and highly developed one, even if it did not depend entirely on notational systems and on the works and repertoires made possible by these systems. We need, in short, to develop a larger vision of the Quattrocento as a pluralistic musical culture.

Adopting this perspective for at least the middle decades of the century – roughly between 1420 and the first efforts to fix the frottola literature as a notated body of music – may in fact help us understand better not only the Quattrocento but the Trecento as well. Italian music from the time of Marchettus of Padua to the time of Landini was not the result of a broad musical movement that spread over the peninsula. It grew from the concentration of musical and poetic talents in a limited number of important centers – primarily in Florence, secondarily and sporadically in a few of the northern courts, from Milan to Padua. But the Trecento tradition neither depended on, nor was able to foster, a long-range didactic tradition of mensural composition that could produce schools of skilled Italian singers and composers far into the fifteenth century. The turbulent political developments of the first decades of the fifteenth century contributed to the breakdown of the conditions that had nourished musical life in the Trecento, evidently built on the base of a fragile patronage system that could not maintain continuity into the next century. Further study of the disjunction between these two periods in Italy would have to take into consideration their cultural diversity and the particular histories of individual city-states – above all, Florence – as well as the changes in the social roles of Italian musicians as a professional group – their training, skills, repertoires, and means of livelihood.

It does appear that, around 1430, a new phase of Italian musical life began based on new initiatives. Patronage grew and cultural competition became intensified, in part as a result of the return of the papacy to Italy under Martin V and the re-establishment of the Pope as a secular ruler who could fully compete with the larger states of Italy for every form of cultural advantage and political gain. In consequence the musical scene became more ramified and more diversified. The courts sought higher status by acquiring artistic and intellectual talent; no doubt in part to cover their inherent political, economic, and military weakness by emulating the celebrated French and Burgundian courts in cultural matters, in part to round out their broad patronage of literature and the visual arts. It was inevitable that the ruling families, whether newly installed or resurgent dynasties, sought to furnish themselves with the professional singers who could form a princely ‘chapel’ – a *cappella di cantori* – and thus undertake the extensive recruitment of non-Italian singers that became endemic in the second half of the century.

The aim of this book is to trace the development of one of these centers – Ferrara, in its first and greatest period – as a matrix for music in all its forms. The story is not one of continuous growth from simple to complex, from cell to organism – but rather one of changing taste, response, and initiative on the part of the successive Este rulers who held the levers of cultural as well as political power in this small oligarchy. In a sense the story is a microcosm of the larger development of music in the period as a whole. It moves from faint beginnings under Niccolò III d'Este to the first international chapel of singers founded by Leonello in the 1440s; to the emphasis on courtly improvisatory singing and instrumentalists under Borso; and, in the last three decades of the century, to the assimilation of international musical traditions under Ercole I d'Este. The larger process of musical acculturation at Ferrara is not completed within the period to which this book is limited; but the later patronage of the children of Ercole, and the entire development of Ferrarese musical life in later periods, grows from this soil. The story is also one that aims to explore the role of music in the cultural life of the period, and a primary assumption is that the main protagonists with whom we shall be concerned – the patrons, on the one hand, the musicians on the other – are best seen as members of a mutually beneficial system. They bend towards one another in recognition of their interdependence.

PART ONE



This page intentionally left blank

MUSIC AT FERRARA IN THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY



1

Ferrara and the Trecento Background

WE begin on barren ground. Ferrara, which became in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a musical center of continental importance, played no significant role in the rise of polyphony in Italy during the fourteenth century. Although reliable information on the musicians, patrons, and social foundations of musical life in Trecento Italy is still scarce, we can identify at least some of the conditions that fostered the growth of music in other states and cities of the time. Against this background it seems clear that Ferrara in the Trecento was incapable of sustaining a higher level of musical life, not only when compared to Florence but in more relevant contrast to the court-centered patronage of Padua and Verona.

Ferrara, unlike Florence, had as yet no strong civic tradition of political and artistic purpose, no concept of the revival of the glories of antiquity in the work of its statesmen, poets, and artists. It had no important and wealthy guilds that could generate a lively civic lay culture through group competition. Its middle and upper classes had not – and would never have – the range of international contacts developed by the great Florentine bankers and merchants, whose extended networks of finance, trade, and communication were expanding their direct knowledge of the art and products of northern Europe and were giving them the means to finance their increasingly opulent domestic life at home. In a still feudal and primarily agrarian state like Ferrara, before its increasing urbanization in the later fifteenth century, none of these elements was strong enough to produce the functional or recreational matrix in which the sophisticated practice of polyphonic music could have flourished. The firm political grip of the Este family was

never seriously challenged by rival families after the thirteenth century, and the local landowning bourgeoisie probably found it convenient to leave the defense and government of the state in the capable hands of this ambitious and ruthless dynasty, who also set whatever local standard there was in cultural matters.

The one potential seat of cultural life was the court, and here the preservation of the feudal mentality and the politically expedient promotion of chivalric myth displaced any strong development of vernacular poetry in the forms then suitable to musical expression. Throughout the Trecento no records show the presence at the Este court of musicians associated with polyphonic practice, or even of instrumentalists hired on more than a casual basis.¹ No Ferrarese manuscripts of polyphony are known from this period, and although the sources surviving from other centers contain a number of pieces dedicated to patrons by means of acrostic or symbolic texts, they reveal none for the Estensi. Composers did, on the other hand, address such pieces to contemporary patrons who cannot be said to have differed from the Estensi in basic outlook, such as the Visconti of Milan, the Scaligeri of Verona, and the Carrara of Padua.² That the Estensi were simply not then interested in the literary and artistic endeavors that would have included secular music, is also suggested by other evidence, including some that is connected with Petrarch.³

¹ The only isolated exception is a single instrumentalist named Enzellino *piffaro*, who was in the service of Niccolò II d'Este in 1377, and whose son was given an investiture in 1394 (documents in ASM, Camera Ducale, Investiture, Pergamene, dated 6 October 1377 and 30 July 1394).

² On the dedicatory pieces for the Visconti see Thibault, 'Emblems et devises des Visconti dans les œuvres musicales du Trecento'; on those for the Carrara see Petrobelli, 'Some Dates for Bartolino da Padova'; on Trecento musicians at Verona, a conspectus is offered by Paganuzzi, 'Medioevo e Rinascimento'. Despite Paganuzzi's view (p. 52) that the marriage of Niccolò II d'Este to Verde della Scala led to increased musical activity at Ferrara, spurred by her presence (she is presumed by some scholars to be addressed in the madrigal 'De soto 'l Verde', in the Rossi codex), there is no evidence to support this assertion.

³ Wilkins, *Petrarch's Later Years*, p. 165. Petrobelli, "Un leggiadretto velo" ed altre cose petrarchesche, suggests a plausible personal connection between Petrarch and Jacopo da Bologna at Verona between 1348 and 1352. On Petrarch's will see Mommsen, *Petrarch's Testament*, pp. 82 f.

In 1369, writing from his hilltop stronghold near Padua, the ageing poet and humanist urged a younger member of the household, Ugo d'Este, son of Nicolò II, to stick to his studies and put aside his worldly pursuits of hawking and hunting, if he wanted to be remembered by posterity. The advice was probably ignored, however, and Ugo certainly counts as a typical member of the family of that time. In the following year, 1370, Petrarch bequeathed his lute to a certain Magister Tommaso Bombasi of Ferrara, urging him to play it 'not for the vainglory of this world, but in praise of God everlasting'. But we know from other sources that this Tommaso was not then active in his home city, and that his fame as an actor, musician, and organizer of festivities had taken him to the more fertile ground of Venice.

Admittedly, the lack of documentation for musicians at the court in the Trecento might simply reflect a general absence of detailed evidence on court life for this period. While the fourteenth century's records at Ferrara are sparse and unrevealing, the fifteenth century confronts us with a flood of documentation preserved in an enormous number of payment registers and other types of historical sources, all of which only begin to be maintained in the 1420s and 1430s. These eventually grew in numbers as the record-keeping bureaucracy multiplied and assumed greater local importance. Still, it is likely that if any of the central musical figures of the Florentine or northern Italian sectors of Trecento polyphony had been in close touch with Ferrarese patrons, such contacts would have emerged through historical or textual evidence. Taking the situation as the evidence presents it, we are forced to conclude that in this period, even more than in literature or in the pictorial arts, Ferrarese musical culture remained, as Gundersheimer has put it, 'qualitatively insignificant and quantitatively trivial'.⁴

At the same time, we must also take note of recent and important revisions of traditional views of Trecento musical life and activities, chiefly advanced by Nino Pirrotta.⁵ Pirrotta's viewpoint rejects a formerly prevailing concept of Trecento music as being formed exclusively or even primarily by its polyphonic manifestations. Instead, he seeks to place the limited and quite special traditions of notated polyphony within a larger social and aesthetic framework in which the normal mode of existence of music was that of an oral, improvisatory tradition, both secular and sacred. Among ecclesiastics of this and other regions, in their churches, monasteries, and religious houses, we may assume the occasional singing of simple elaborations of plainsong in the *cantus planus binatim* that have recently been found in a certain number of written manuscripts but which were probably more often produced as improvisation.⁶ Indeed, in at least one Ferrarese religious house, that of the Carmelites of San Paolo, a more complex practice may have been developed, since a set of regulations of 1357 explicitly warns against the singing of 'motets', and 'other lascivious music'.⁷ But this appears to have been exceptional.

⁴ Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: the Style of a Renaissance Despotism*, p. 60.

⁵ See especially his 'Novelty and Renewal in Italy: 1300–1600', and his 'Ars Nova e Stil Novo', both repr. in his *Music and Culture*.

⁶ See Gallo, 'Cantus planus binatim; polifonia primitiva in fonti tardive'.

⁷ Kallenberg, *Fontes Liturgiae Carmelitanae*, p. 32. Kallenberg quotes at length from the Carmelite *Constitutiones* promulgated during a general chapter of the Order held in Ferrara in 1357 (of course its statutes reflect much more than local considerations). It includes this passage: 'Nullus in choro aliud vel aliter cantare presumat quam quod communis usus ordinis approbat et elegit. Sed neque motetos neque upaturam vel aliquem cantum magis ad lasciviam quam ad devocionem provocantem aliquis decantare audeat sub pena gravioris culpe per unam diem transgressoribus infligenda'.

On the secular side, we should also assume that the court at Ferrara was exposed in a normal degree to itinerant performers and singers of secular melody, to improvisational singing of verse, and even to some occasional polyphony – but all of this is undocumented.

As suggested earlier, a more specific inhibiting factor was political; or rather, political and cultural in equal parts. From the thirteenth century on, under Azzo VI (the first of the Estensi to gain political control at Ferrara, in 1208) troubadours from Provence migrating to Italy had been particularly welcome at this court. Some of them had left songs in honor of members of the newly established dynasty, and were commemorated in a handsome manuscript of troubadour poetry (but no music) that was written at Ferrara by court scribes.⁸ The Este family's enduring ambition to portray themselves as descendants of French royalty, and to glorify their mythic origins through literary means, was reflected in the cultivation of stanzaic narratives that celebrate Carolingian chivalric heroes and ultimately led to the great Ferrarese epic poems by Boiardo and Ariosto. But in the Trecento this chivalric myth had no means of connecting with the newer Italian lyric poetry and its music, as found especially at Florence. In so far as stanzas of praise and glorification were developed and sung, they could make do with simple musical formulas, sung by a solo singer with his lute; and this is exactly the pattern that persisted far into the fifteenth century as courtly entertainment. Accordingly, if we combine the improvisational and cultural hypotheses, we can accept that the courtly circles in fourteenth-century Ferrara did not lack music – which was surely present in various forms – but rather lacked the amalgam of aesthetic, linguistic, and cultural interests that was giving rise elsewhere to Italian poetic-polyphonic forms and repertoires – the *caccia*, *madrigal*, and *ballata*.

Outside the court there was no other major local base. The religious confraternities had some music of their own, but neither there nor at the cathedral, until the early fifteenth century, was there any figure of distinction in musical matters. Before the 1390s there was no university at Ferrara at all, thus no seat of interest in the speculative side of music and its scholastic and theoretical traditions, to which students and citizens could gravitate. Local society, from peasants to city burghers and lords, was exposed to music in a superficial and casual sense, ranging from popular tunes to dance music and perhaps to the occasional appearance of wandering singers and players – but all of this represents nothing more than was typical of musical life in any other urban center in the region, and it gives no hint of later growth.

⁸ On the troubadour tradition, see Carducci, 'La coltura estense', pp. 10–19. On the troubadour MS see Rajna, 'Ricordi di codici francesi degli Estensi nel secolo XV'.

Ferrara under Niccolò III d'Este (1393–1429)



HISTORIANS agree that the short reign of Alberto d'Este, from 1388 to 1393, began a transformation of Ferrarese civic and court life that continued through the fifteenth century, gradually reshaping Ferrara from a backward feudal stronghold into a culturally rich and well-endowed Renaissance city. For the local public the most visible sign of change under Alberto was the formal establishment of the university, for which a papal charter was issued in March 1391. For the court and its members a comparable event was the appointment of the humanist Donato degli Albanzani, first as chancellor and later as tutor to Alberto's legitimated heir, the future Niccolò III. Donato had been a friend of Petrarch's and translator of Petrarch and Boccaccio. As politician and teacher, later as *referendarius* under Niccolò III, he brought to the court a firmer contact with the rising currents of professional humanism than it had known before.¹ The credit for Niccolò's being even modestly receptive to intellectual matters belonged to Donato, and it was Donato who was primarily responsible for the growth of the court library in these years. The increase in the library is the only available index of court literacy, and its development suggests a growing awareness in court circles of a wider range of cultural interests. Donato paved the way for the more influential scholars that were to follow him as tutors of Niccolò's sons – Toscanelli, Aurispa, and especially Guarino Veronese.

Until 1402 Niccolò ruled under a regency; thereafter, in his own right. As twelfth Marquis in the Este line he could draw on a long-established family tradition for his sense of historical position, and his career as ruler was long and colorful, but streaked with cruelty

¹ On Donato at Ferrara see Novati, 'Donato degli Albanzani alla corte Estense'; Donato had evidently settled in Ferrara between 1377 and 1381. Of future significance too was the fact that Alberto obtained a papal agreement, in 1392, that agricultural lands in the *contado*, which had been largely owned by churches and monasteries, and distributed to the secular clergy under contracts, should not be restored to their original owners when the contracts ended but would come under marchional control; see Lazzari, 'Il Signor di Ferrara ai tempi del concilio del 1438–39: Niccolò III d'Este', 676.

and inconsistency. He managed foreign policy with a shrewdness and caution that were sharply at odds with his domestic life. He became notorious in his time when in 1425 he murdered both his young wife, Parisina Malatesta, and his eldest son, Ugo d'Este, after discovering their love affair.² Yet Niccolò himself made adultery a lifelong career. The same pattern marked his treatment of a long-trusted associate, Giacomo Zilioli, and his son Zilio. Giacomo had been a member of Niccolò's inner circle and had held court posts with distinction when, in 1434, he was suddenly stripped of his titles and property and thrown into prison along with his son.³ Although some historians have accepted the accusation of political plot and threat of betrayal which the local chroniclers recorded, that shrewd contemporary, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II), was probably closer to the truth when he said that Niccolò ruined the Zilioli because Giacomo doubted the legitimacy of Niccolò's plan to have himself succeeded by his natural sons, Leonello and Borso, and not by any legal male heir that might issue from his marriage in 1431 to Rizzarda da Saluzzo.⁴ The point is important because Leonello and Borso, in that order, did become Niccolò's successors, whereas Ercole (the legitimate male heir) later rose to power as a result of Borso's death and he was bitterly opposed by a son of Leonello's. The unparalleled solidity of Este rule in these centuries is characteristic of the dynasty as a whole, not of its individual members at any one moment; having little or no need to band together to prevent outside enemies from seizing power, the family members typically vented their rage on one another. And family competition, both with living rivals and with previous ruling members, is one of the basic themes that underlies the rivalry in patronage and the differences in artistic and musical achievements that emerge across generations. It is also one of the basic themes of this book.

For most of his political career, Niccolò devoted himself to mediating in disputes between other warring states, while steering clear of any military adventures that could threaten his small territory. His role as peacemaker was celebrated in poems and epitaphs, and is even mentioned in the best-known musical composition then written as

² On the episode Ugo-Parisina see Gundersheimer, *Ferrara*, pp. 77–9, which cites earlier literature, to which can be added the account in Gardner, *Dukes and Poets at Ferrara*, pp. 35–9. For a remarkable and imaginative treatment of major events in the life of Niccolò III, see Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound (1–95)*, (New York, 1956), Canto xxiv.

³ See Lorch, introduction to *Zilioli Ferrariensis Comediola Michaelida*, pp. 11–39. This is a Latin play written by Zilio Zilioli while in prison.

⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 39. For Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's opinion, see his *De Viris Aetate Sua Claris*, cited by Lazzari, 'Il Signor di Ferrara', 700, n. 1.