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Review by Susan Treacy

Fenlon, Iain, ed. *Music and Culture in Late Renaissance Italy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2003, 288 pages.

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Iain Fenlon has gathered under one cover ten essays, eight of which have previously been published in other collections. Now revised and updated, these essays as complementary chapters in a book present a fascinating portrait of post-Tridentine Italian culture and the intertwining of statecraft, ceremony, devotion, and music. To make the book more accessible to a wider audience, Fenlon has eliminated passages deemed musically too technical. The unifying points for such a collection of essays are two: First, that music was used by sixteenth-century power brokers to accomplish their various agendas, and, second, that contrary to commonly-held views, late Renaissance Italy was not a period of decay but in fact responded with vitality and originality to the challenges of the Catholic Reformation.

Not surprisingly, the orbits of discussion are the major city-states—Venice, Rome, Milan, Florence, and Mantua. Venice is the focus of Chapters One, Two, and Six. In Chapter One, “Magnificence as Civic Image,” Fenlon charts the gradual development of the “myth of Venice,” through a symbiosis of Church and State (the doges), and use of ritual, para-liturgical events (especially processions), urban planning, architecture, and music. Saint Mark’s Basilica was the private chapel of the doges, whose palace adjoined the basilica. The doge gradually assumed a position as “vicar” of Saint Mark analogous to that of the pope to the universal Church. Starting in the 1530s the Piazza San Marco was renovated in classical style under the direction of Jacopo Sansovino. As a musical equivalent to this, the basilica’s *maestro di cappella*, Adrian Willaert, developed the splendid *cori spezzati* style, itself a “renovation” of an earlier style of *alternatim* chanting of Vesper psalms. Fenlon cites the celebration of Mass and various processions, including those for Corpus Christi, the investiture of the doge, and the celebration of the victory of the Holy League over the Turks at Lepanto, as examples of that comprehensive

magnificence with which Venetians celebrated their Catholic faith and their own political significance.

The chapter on “Strangers in Paradise: Dutchmen in Venice in 1525” follows the pilgrimage of Arent Willemsz, a barber-surgeon, and the priest Jan Goverts van Gorcum, both of whom kept travel diaries. Through Willemsz’s account primarily, Fenlon is able to contribute to a picture of liturgical and musical practices in Saint Mark’s Basilica prior to the tenure of Willaert as *maestro di cappella*. The predecessor of the grandiose polychoral music of the later sixteenth century was a simpler, improvised polyphony sometimes known in northern Italian circles as *mos georgianus*. Willemsz describes two groups of canons singing from the choir and alternating between plainsong and simple improvised polyphony. For important feast days, hired musicians were brought in, and these occupied the *pulpitum magnum*, a large, octagonal, enclosed platform placed outside the sanctuary. By 1564, when Bartolomeo Bonifacio described the ceremonial, the choir was entirely made up of professionals.

In Chapter Six, “Zarlino and the Accademia Venetiana,” Fenlon discusses one example of the academy, a feature of many Italian Renaissance cities. Described by Fenlon as an “engine of civic virtue,” the academy was a noble venture to accomplish—in the garb of Christian humanism—the education of philosopher statesmen in the vein of Plato’s *Republic*. The Accademia Venetiana della Fama was an ambitious undertaking founded in 1557 by Federigo Badoer, a diplomat and intellectual. After an initial period at Badoer’s house, the Venetiana was moved to the vestibule of the Biblioteca Marciana, directly across from the doge’s palace, thus making the academy even more emblematic of the Republic’s values. The Venetiana’s program of learning was publicized through its publications; Fenlon focuses on the eleven music treatises, a selection of ancient, mostly Greek, works and a smaller number of contemporary writings. Gioseffo Zarlino, a Franciscan equally famous for his *Istitutioni harmoniche* (Venice, 1558), a classic of Renaissance music theory, was apparently one of four academicians chosen to supervise the music department of the Accademia Venetiana. It was he who probably selected Glarean’s treatise for translation as his own *Istitutioni* features Glarean’s expanded system of twelve modes. Ultimately, Fenlon

sees Zarlino, with his vast erudition, as a “serious and dedicated Christian humanist.”

Rome is the center of activity for Chapters Three, Five, and Seven, but other cities also figure prominently in these chapters as part of the Catholic network. “Music and Reform: The Savonarolan Legacy” presents an alternative view of post-Tridentine musical reforms. Usually the focus is on the masses and motets of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and Vincenzo Ruffo, with Palestrina’s *Missa Papae Marcelli* serving as the leading example of reformist music. In reality, Fenlon relates, this music was only a small part of the renewal of Catholic life following the Council of Trent. One of the leading Counter-Reformation saints, the Florentine Philip Neri, was responsible for cultivating Savonarolan spiritual traditions in Rome, and among these traditions was the singing of the *lauda spirituale*, a simple devotional song in popular style and usually with vernacular texts. Originally sung in unison, the *lauda* texts gradually began to be set as simple part-songs, and later as polyphony of a somewhat more artistic style by composers such as Giovanni Animuccia, (a Florentine) and Palestrina, both of whom were part of Neri’s circle in Rome.

In “Scipione Gonzaga: A ‘Poor’ Cardinal in Rome,” we meet a lesser member of the Gonzaga family whose life as a churchman placed him in contact with many musicians and who lived a moderately ascetic lifestyle in line with the ideals of the Council of Trent. His letters show that he was a kind of musical clearinghouse for friends and relatives in Mantua, Ferrara, and other parts of Italy who were seeking talented musicians to employ; in particular, we are able to follow the patronage history of the young composer Luca Marenzio.

“Lepanto: Music, Ceremony, and Celebration in Counter-Reformation Rome” compares Venetian and Roman celebrations of the victory of the Holy League against the Turks on 7 October 1571. Venice emphasized its own part in the victory and since the battle had taken place on the local feast day of Santa Giustina, special devotions to her were instituted and her name was invoked as an intercessor on behalf of the Venetian successes at Lepanto. Romans celebrated Pope Pius V, who had formed the Holy League and appointed Marc’ Antonio Colonna his Captain General, and a great number of commemorative items were produced, including coins, medals, engravings, and even musical compositions.

One of the most zealous reformers in post-Tridentine Italy was Saint Charles Borromeo, who is the focus of Chapter Four, “Music and Civic Piety in Counter-Reformation Milan.” For Cardinal Borromeo music was a handmaid to the implementation of reforms in every level of society. His cathedral music master, Vincenzo Ruffo, composed liturgical music that fulfilled the ideals of the Council of Trent—masses and motets in simple chordal style, which allowed the words to be understood. Cardinal Borromeo’s dream of seeing the laity revitalized led to the founding of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Florence is the focus of Chapters Eight and Ten. Chapter Eight, “Rites of Passage: Cosimo I de’ Medici and the Theatre of Death,” details the fabrication of the elaborate 1574 obsequies for Duke Cosimo I. As the founder of the state of Tuscany and the first to hold the title of Grand Duke, Cosimo would require a funeral that would reflect his importance and be a model for subsequent Medici dukes to follow. The ceremonies were an impressive amalgamation of Catholic liturgy with elements of classical Roman imperial obsequies and the relatively recent obsequies of the Emperor Charles V (1558) and Michelangelo (1564).

Chapter Ten, “Preparations for a Princess, Florence, 1588-1589,” discusses the politically-motivated marriage of Duke Ferdinando de’ Medici and Christine of Lorraine, his cousin, and the favorite granddaughter of Catherine de’ Medici. Ferdinando’s marriage to Christine represented a switch to France from Florence’s traditional ally, Spain. It is interesting to follow the theatrical and musical intrigues involving the likes of Giulio Caccini and Emilio de’ Cavalieri as the *intermedii*, sumptuous spectacles (with political overtones) of music, dancing, and theatre were being devised. Fenlon observes that these traditional entertainments continued to flourish, even after the advent of opera in 1600.

Chapter Nine, “Giaches de Wert and the Palatine Basilica of Santa Barbara: Music, Liturgy, and Design,” demonstrates very clearly that the Council of Trent did not impose complete uniformity in liturgical matters. In fact, the Council’s liturgical guidelines were rather general, which allowed for more variety than is commonly thought. It is well known that the Council stipulated that any Catholic liturgical tradition older than 200 years was not

obligated to adopt the Roman rite. Cardinal Borromeo and the Ambrosian rite of Milan benefited greatly from this dispensation, but there were also a number of local rites, particularly those associated with local saints, which included the Venetian cult of Santa Giustina, mentioned above in connection with the Lepanto victory celebrations. More surprising, however, is the fabrication of a new rite, albeit one imbued with the spirit of Trent. In Mantua an entirely new liturgy was devised for the Palatine Basilica of Santa Barbara, the chapel of the Dukes of Mantua. Even Palestrina was commissioned to compose a series of masses for use only at the Santa Barbara basilica. As in the other chapters of *Music and Culture in Late Renaissance Italy*, we see here the inextricability of religious devotion, politics, and the arts.

What a fascinating discussion of late Renaissance Italian culture is Fenlon's book. His decision to limit the technical discussions of music has made the book a more general cultural history and less a book about music, *per se*, and it opens up this rich period of Italian history to a wider readership. The book has an extensive bibliography, as well as many helpful illustrations and two plans—one of the Santa Barbara Basilica and one of sketch plans for the Piazza San Marco at the beginning and end of the sixteenth century. A plan of the Basilica San Marco itself would have been welcome, as well, especially in Chapter Two. A few typographical errors that escaped the eyes of the proofreader are the spelling of "altar" as "alter" on p. 39 and the misspelling of *oratorio vespertino* (correct on p. 56) as *oratorio vespertina* on p. 57. The context of the discussion would seem to warrant the spelling of "discrete" as "discreet" on p. 161. These are minor flaws, however, in a book that is exhaustively researched and engagingly written, and which provides a portrait of the variety and vigor of post-Tridentine Italian culture.

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