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Heinrich Isaac among the Florentines

BLAKE WILSON

One of the most characteristic features of the musical landscape of Renaissance Italy is the presence of northern musicians, whose services as composers and performers were in great demand by Italian rulers. However, the surviving documents that record the presence of northern musicians and repertory in Italian centers say very little about the daily activities and duties of these musicians, and they are silent about professional contacts, if any, they may have had beyond what we imagine to be the fairly circumscribed courtly and ecclesiastical institutions that were the primary sources of their patronage. For example, to what extent was a Du Fay in Rome, a Josquin in Milan, or a Martini in Ferrara free to accept private commissions from leading citizens, to freelance as performers in these communities, to retain private students of their own choosing, to disseminate their compositions, or did they in any way instruct or stimulate local composers just beginning to master the subtleties of northern polyphony?

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Earlier versions of this article, with the title "A New Witness to Musical Events in Laurentian Florence: the Correspondence of Ambrogio Angeni," were read at the spring meeting of the Capital Chapter, American Musicological Society in Washington, DC (March 2003) and the national meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in New York City (April 2004). A research grant from Dickinson College supported the original work on the letters upon which this article is based. I am particularly grateful to John Nádas, Nello Barbieri, and Leofranc Holford-Strevens for assistance in deciphering and translating original documents, and to Bonnie Blackburn, Anthony Cummings, James Haar, William Prizer, Rob Wegman, and Giovanni Zanovello for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

These questions are particularly vexing with respect to Florence, where the late 15th-century musical environment presents us with something of a paradox. Here the largest and most concentrated extant body of northern secular polyphony for its time, including the two largest chansonniers, survive in the most unlikely of patronage environments, a city without a formal court or dominant class of feudal nobility. On the other hand, from Cosimo's ascension to control in 1434 until the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, family leaders assumed the role—if not actual title—of an Italian prince, including the patronage of leading northern musicians. The result was a hybrid and very fluid patronage environment to which northerners were evidently drawn, but within which their activities are particularly difficult to track and imagine. Frank D'Accone has documented the continuous presence in Florence throughout this time of northern musicians, though their short tenures and frequent arrivals and departures suggest that Florence often played second fiddle in the recruiting game to other centers such as Ferrara, Naples, Rome, and (as we shall see) the Hungarian court.¹ Thus another paradox of the Florentine musical scene is that this city hosted one of the longest and most intimate residencies of any northern composer in Italy. As a promising if still relatively unknown young Flemish composer, Heinrich Isaac was recruited to Florence in 1485, and except for a seven-year absence in the employment of Maximilian I during ca. 1496–1502, the city would remain his principal residence until his death in 1517.² D'Accone's studies also show the critical role of the Medici in bringing Isaac and his northern colleagues to Florence, and in maintaining the musical chapels at the city's three leading churches (the Cathedral, Baptistery, and Santissima Annunziata) that are the only venues where his professional activity can be documented. Beyond this, however, his extant secular music in Florentine sources, particularly the few surviving carnival songs, are the only clue to the range of Isaac's local musical activities during his initial decade-long residence. Indeed, it is a musical environment about which there is still much to learn.

¹ "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence during the 15th Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (1961): 307–58; Heinrich Isaac in Florence: New and Unpublished Documents," *Musical Quarterly* 49 (1963): 464–83; "Some Neglected Composers in the Florentine Chapels, ca. 1475–1525," *Viator* 1 (1970): 263–88. After an absence of seven years, Isaac returned to his Florentine wife and holdings in 1502; see below, n2.

² Documents recently discovered by Giovanni Zanovello show Isaac to have been an active member of the Flemish confraternity of Santa Barbara in Florence from 1502 until his death in 1517. "Heinrich Isaac, the Mass *Misericordias Domini*, and Music in Late-Fifteenth-Century Florence" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Univ., 2005), chap. 2.

The fortuitous survival and discovery of a group of letters grant us a candid view of Isaac's activity in Florence of a kind that is rarely revealed in surviving documents.³ The letters are the one-sided correspondence of Ambrogio Angeni, a Florentine who throughout the 1480s and 90s wrote frequently to his close friend Antonio da Filicaia. Antonio, a member of an old and wealthy patrician family, was away on family business in northern Europe during most of this time and was naturally eager for news of local goings-on in Florence. Although Antonio's side of the correspondence does not survive, it is abundantly clear that they shared a particular passion for music, and that they were close to the most sophisticated circles of music-making in Florence at the time, those involving Lorenzo de' Medici and his imported musicians. The 13 or so letters that concern us all date from the period between December 1487 and July 1489, when Antonio was residing in Nantes, the chief city of Brittany. Antonio might have found this a congenial place for his musical interests, given that the city's musical life was at its height in the late 15th century under the rule of Anne of Brittany. As we shall see, Antonio did in fact establish close contacts with local musicians in Nantes, and set up something of a musical trade route between his two homes. Nevertheless, Antonio had every reason to pine for Florence, for its musical life was at its most varied and resplendent in these years prior to Lorenzo's death in 1492.

Isaac and the 1488 Carnival

In the earliest of these letters, dated 29 December 1487, Ambrogio addresses Antonio in intimate and familiar terms as *diletissimo fratello e caro Antonio*, an indication that the two may have shared membership in a confraternity as *confratelli*. Ambrogio conveys the greetings of Antonio's intimate circle, or *brigata*, of Florentine friends, among whom is a certain Ser Zanobi who was clearly a composer in his own right. Midway through this long letter is a passage that reveals Ambrogio's role as a coordinator of collaborations between Antonio as a poet, Zanobi as a composer, and a colleague named Simone Orlandini who acted as both copyist and judge of musical matters:

³ These letters were discovered by F. William Kent, who has published an article in which he edits portions of several letters (these reappear as documents 1b and 3c in the appendix of this article), and touches on many of the others; see "Heinrich Isaac's Music in Laurentian Florence: New Documents," in *Die Lektüre der Welt: zur Theorie, Geschichte und Soziologie kultureller Praxis (Festschrift für Walter Veit)*, eds. Helmut Heinze and Christiane Weller (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 367–71. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Kent for having brought these letters to my attention several years ago, and for graciously leaving some of the musicological stones unturned in his article.

And concerning the *canzona* you made and that Zanobi set to music, you thought this arrived but I am still waiting for it with great desire because I believe it will be pleasing.⁴ I will do as you wish, for I see you want to show it to Simone Orlandini, and if he likes it I will give him a copy, and keep [the original] for myself.⁵ (Doc. 1a)

Two paragraphs later, Ambrogio returns to the subject of music in a passage that is particularly rich in detail, and significant for the fact that the primary topic is Isaac or, as he is usually referred to in Florentine documents, “Arigo”:

I understand you are saying that you’ve promised the singers over there [in Nantes] that in case there were a new and pleasing *fantasia* [from Florence], you would manage to provide them a copy. I will do everything in my power to help you, [and] I believe you will be able to keep the promise, because I hear that there is a new composition

⁴ *Canzona* recurs throughout Ambrogio’s letters, and is not being used in the strict sense of an established poetic form, like the Petrarchan canzone, since these were rarely set to music at this time. On the contrary, Ambrogio seems to intend in each instance *poesia per musica*, a text, almost certainly an Italian text, that is intended for a polyphonic musical setting. It is also possible that on some occasions Ambrogio is referring to the specific poetic form of the *canzone a ballo*, a term used in Ambrogio’s day for the ballata (especially the barzelletta) that was the basis for most sung poetry at this time, including the carnival song. Ambrogio’s letters, in fact, bear witness to the moment and circumstances when Florentines—emerging professional composers like Bartolomeo degli Organi (1474–1539) and Alessandro Coppini (ca.1465–1527), skilled dilettantes like Ser Zanobi and his anonymous colleagues whose works are scattered throughout the polyphonic sources of the period, as well as informed consumers like Ambrogio and Antonio—are forming their own concept of the kind of polyphony suitable for setting Italian texts to music; see the comments of Howard Mayer Brown, “The Diversity of Music in Laurentian Florence,” in *Lucrezia de’ Medici: New Perspectives*, ed. Bernard Toscani (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 179–201. This emerging tradition stands in sharp contrast to the vogue still strong in Ambrogio’s day for copying large numbers of Franco-Flemish songs into Florentine anthologies with, or more often, without their texts.

⁵ The letters are preserved in Florence, Archivio di Stato, Corporazioni Religiose sopresse dal Governo Francese, 78, vol. 319. The transcriptions of the original Italian documents are to be found in the appendix to the present article, and all folio references there and in subsequent notes are to this source. In the texts of the transcriptions, original spellings have been retained, but punctuation has been added, as have occasional letters important to the sense of a word (in brackets), and abbreviations have been resolved (indicated by italics). I have also added accents, capitalized proper names, and separated words that had been run together in the original. The Florentine new year began on March 25, and so documents recorded between January 1 and March 24 usually carry the date of the previous year; in the appendix, such dates are recorded in both old, and (in brackets) modern forms.

It should be noted here that both the transcription and translation of these letters posed real challenges; many of them are water-damaged and difficult to see, and Angeni’s often rambling, convoluted and unedited prose, as well as his use of colloquial expressions, made for very difficult understanding. This is the prose of a Florentine of the merchant class, not a university-trained humanist scholar. While the general sense of a given passage is usually clear, the details sometimes are not, and translation of those passages remains somewhat conjectural.

by Arigo, in which I understand he has demonstrated great *fantasia*.⁶ It has been organized for this coming carnival, but I do not believe things are going as planned because a good friend has obtained a copy, and I don't believe it can be kept a secret until the performance, and because they say it is not an easy thing. So I do not believe they will be able to perform it if Piero di Lorenzo does not return from Rome; I hope he will take on the enterprise, otherwise it will not succeed because it is very expensive. (Doc. 1b)

The identity of Isaac's *gran fantasia* is not immediately apparent, but it is revealed in subsequent letters. On 14 January 1488, Ambrogio wrote "I will be sending you *una chanzona di battaglia* composed by Arigho, which will please you very much,"⁷ and by the planned mailing date on February 5, he calls it *un chanzone chomposta per Arigho ch'è La Guera di Serezana* ("a canzona composed by Arigo, which is [called] the War of Serezana"), which he predicts will cause a sensation because it is "marvellous, refined, worthy, suitable, and well-put-together."⁸ In the end Ambrogio did not send the canzona, because, as he said, "it is very long, and in my hasty copying of it I have made many errors."⁹

Clearly the work in question is Isaac's *Alla battaglia*, and this passage enables us to assign a new date and occasion for the work.¹⁰ Timothy

⁶ *Fantasia* is here used in two different senses, neither to signify the conventional musical genre of improvisatory lute and keyboard pieces that arises only in the early 16th century. The first attests to a quality exhibited by Isaac's music, which is discussed more fully below. In the second instance, *fantasia* is attributed not to the music, but to Isaac's own artistic invention. In both instances, however, *fantasia* may be understood to draw its meaning from invention, creativity, originality, novelty, imagination, and memory, with the intention of surprising or astonishing an audience. See Salvatore Battaglia, "Fantasia," in *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, 19 vols. (Turin, 1961–), V, 642–47. On the creative faculty of *fantasia* in the late 15th century, see Rob C. Wegman, "'And Josquin Laughed . . .': Josquin and the Composer's Anecdote in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Musicology* 17 (1999): 319–57, esp. 343–53; relevant literature is cited on 343n60.

⁷ Fol. 21or (14 gennaio 1487 [1488]): *Mandoti per la prima una chanzona di battaglia chomposta da Arigho, che piacerai assai*.

⁸ Fol. 211v (5 febbraio 1487 [1488]): *Mandoti chon questa una chanzona composta per Arigho, ch'è la Guera di Serezana, chosa assai piacevole. Qui si da ordine farla che stimo parrà chosa maravigliosa e singnorile e degna e idonia e chongiugha*. See Figure 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*: *Sarà della chanzona non nulla, perché è chosa lungha, e la fretta di chopiarla ò fatto molti erori* . . .

¹⁰ Kent, "Heinrich Isaac's Music," 367–68. The music is transmitted in two Italian and four transalpine sources: Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (hereafter BNCF), Panciatichi 27 (all four parts, but without text); BNCF, Banco Rari 337 (bass partbook only, but with a version of the poem missing several lines); to the three northern sources (a tablature and two contrafacts with Latin texts) listed by Martin Picker, *Henricus Isaac: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1991), 106, may be added Ulm, Schermer Bibliothek, Ms. Misc. 237, no. 6 (Bruges?, early 16th c.; untexted, and with minor variants relative to Panciatichi 27), recently edited by Dieter Klöckner (Stuttgart: Cornetto-Verlag, 2004). There is still no reliable edition of the original texted version of *Alla battaglia* in print. Bernard Thomas' edition (London: London Pro Musica, 1985) omits several lines of the poem, since he was not able to benefit from Tim McGee's reconstruction of the

McGee has already shown that the work and its text refer to the Florentine siege of the fortress of Sarzanello, begun in 1485 when the Florentines had sought to take it back from the Genoese in order to secure a foothold on the Tuscan-Ligurian coast.¹¹ In June 1487 the Florentines finally took the fortress. McGee argued logically on the basis of available evidence that the work was written for the 1485 installation of the captain-general of the Florentine army, Niccolò Corsini, Count of Pitigliano, and was performed in a public investiture ceremony conducted before the Palazzo Vecchio. Now it is clear that the work was composed near the end of 1487, in the immediate wake of the Florentine victory, and for some celebration to be held during the coming carnival season of 1488. Both the secrecy surrounding the project and the expenses it entailed indicate that the “enterprise” was probably an elaborately conceived *trionfo*, or processional wagon, that featured Isaac’s much-heralded setting of the descriptive battle text.¹² The more ambitious of these carnival projects could involve the commissioned collaboration of a poet, composer, performers, liveried torchbearers (for nighttime performances), and an artist responsible for designing and creating masks, costumes, props, and the wagon itself, all in accordance with a unifying theme or concept.¹³ Isaac’s participation and the rumored scale of his *fantasia* suggest that this was an ambitious carnival project involving the city’s leading creative figures, and the secrecy surrounding its battle theme clearly proved too difficult to maintain. As Ambrogio’s letter indicates, such projects required the financial support of a patron, and this project was faltering for lack of one. Despite the involvement of a composer and (as we shall see) poet who were both Medici clients, the project seems to have been conceived without Lorenzo’s direct support, for the hope is that Lorenzo’s seventeen-year-old son Piero (1471–1505)

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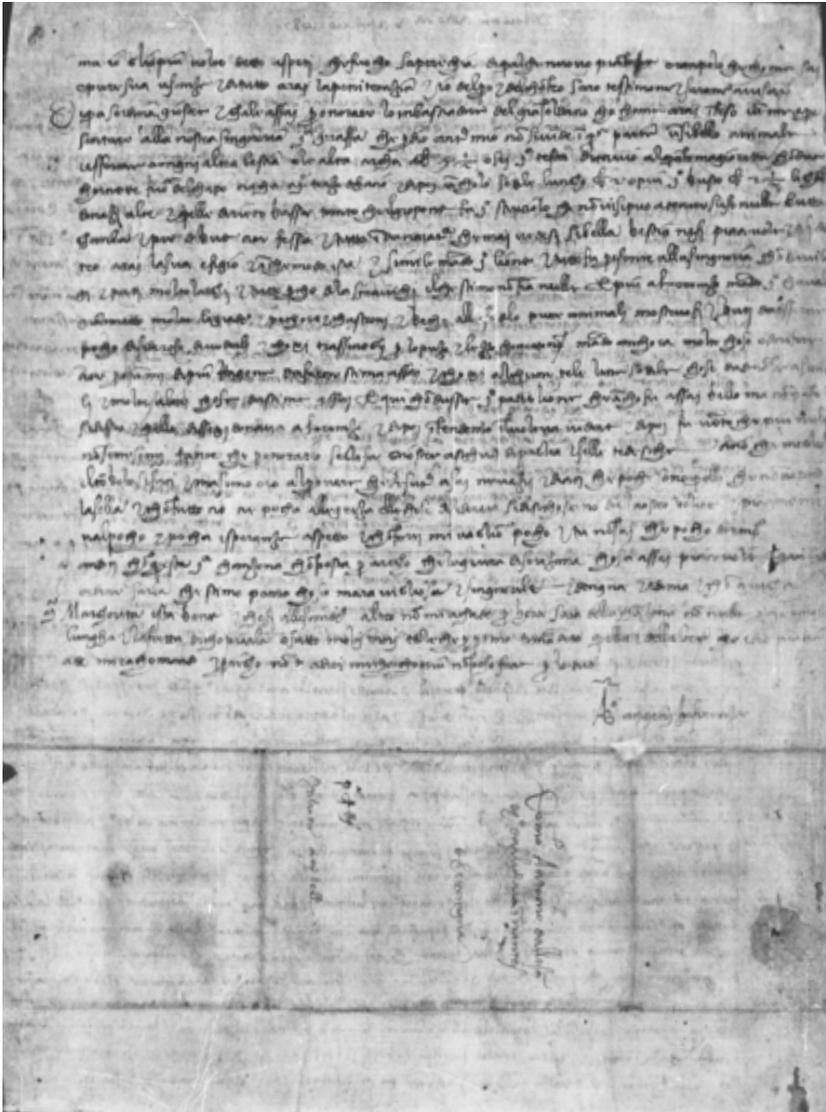
text, which can be found in his “*Alla battaglia: Music and Ceremony in Fifteenth-Century Florence*,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36 (1983): 299–302. An unpublished edition by McGee, which incorporates all the poetic lines of the reconstructed poem, is the basis for the musical example in this article. I am extremely grateful to Prof. McGee for sending me a copy of this edition, and for giving his permission to draw examples from it.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 287–302, where he explains the historical circumstances leading up to the battle, and thoroughly glosses the original text in order to reveal the military identities of the many names mentioned therein. The title Ambrogio cites (“*Guera di Serezana*”) apparently refers not to the object of the siege, the fortress of Sarzanello, but to the nearby Genoese city of Sarzana.

¹² Carnival *Trionfi* apparently were typically drawn through the city and stopped at a few important public locations for performances, but given the length and complexity of *Alla battaglia* it may have been given the same treatment as a political *trionfo* honoring Piero Soderini in 1503 that was stationed in Piazza della Signoria; see William F. Prizer, “Reading Carnival: the Creation of a Florentine Carnival Song,” *Early Music History* 23 (2004): 185–252, esp. 236–37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 192–93.

FIGURE 1. Florence, Archivio di Stato, Corporazioni Religiose sopresse dal Governo Francese 78, vol. 319, fol. 211v, letter from Ambrogio Angeni to Alessandro da Filicaia (5 February 1488): “Mandoti chon questa una chanzona chomposta per Arigho, ch’è la Guera di Serezana, chosa assai piacevole. Qui si da ordine farla che stimo parrà chosa meravigliosa e singnorile e degna e idonia e chongiugha” (lines 20–21).



would return from Rome in time to bankroll the project.¹⁴ In the event, the project did go ahead, and the Medici had every reason for wanting it to succeed.

The revised date of *Alla battaglia* is significant in several respects; if Isaac had composed *Alla battaglia* in 1485, he would have set this very long Italian text only months after his arrival in Florence from, reportedly, “as far away as Flanders;”¹⁵ by late 1487 he would have been much better acquainted with the language and the textual and musical traditions of the city’s public festivals, particularly the Florentine carnival song.¹⁶ It seems clear now that there is little evidence for the older view that carnival celebrations in Florence were officially suspended during a ten-year period following the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478, when Lorenzo’s brother Giuliano was murdered and Lorenzo barely escaped alive.¹⁷ It would be tempting to think that *Alla battaglia* was composed

¹⁴ At precisely this time the 17-year-old Piero was also recorded as assuming offices in important confraternities, in particular that of the Company of Sant’Agnese at the Oltrarno church of Santa Maria del Carmine, which in 1488 revived its performances of one of the city’s great public spectacles, the Ascension play. It appears, in other words, that Piero’s involvement in the city’s public life was a part of his training as Lorenzo’s successor. See Nerida Newbiggin, “Piety and Politics in the *Feste* of Lorenzo’s Florence,” in *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo mondo*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 26.

¹⁵ This was the recollection of Giovanni de’ Medici, writing by proxy in 1514 as Pope Leo X to authorize a stipend for the aging Isaac, who along with his Florentine wife had retired to Florence in 1512 when the Medici regained control of the city; D’Accone, “Heinrich Isaac in Florence,” 473. Though Florentine culture and language was certainly new to Isaac in 1485, he probably did not come there directly from his homeland in Flanders or Brabant, for in 1484 he was in Innsbruck, in the employment of Duke Sigismund of Austria; Reinhard Strohm, “Isaac, Henricus,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (New York: Grove’s Dictionaries, 2000) (hereafter *NG II*).

¹⁶ Elsewhere I argue that Isaac was also working against the backdrop of a very specific tradition of representing Florentine battles that were important to Florentine and Medici identity. Of particular importance was the Battle of Anghiari (1440), a Florentine victory that secured Medici hegemony, which was kept alive in the collective memory of Florentines throughout the 15th c. by poems, orations, images (including the uncompleted commission from Leonardo in 1503), and the older three-part *Alla battaglia* preserved in the Florentine manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fonds fr. 15123 (“Pixérécourt Chansonnier”); “Battle Songs of the Republic: *Alla battaglia* in the Music, Art, and Popular Literature of Early Renaissance Florence,” unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Sixteenth-Century Studies, Pittsburgh, PA, October 2003.

¹⁷ See Prizer, “Petrucci and the Carnival Song: On the Origins and Dissemination of a Genre,” in *Venezia 1501: Petrucci e la stampa musicale*, ed. Giulio Cattin and Patrizia dalla Vecchia (Venice: Fondazione Levi, 2005), 215–51 (I am grateful to Prof. Prizer for sharing a draft of this article with me prior to publication); and idem., “The Music Savonarola Burned: The Florentine Carnival Song in the late 15th Century,” *Musica e Storia* 9 (2001): 6–7, esp. 15. The pageant wagons for the patronal feast of San Giovanni Battista (June 24) were suppressed during this period, but there is no evidence that this stricture applied to pre-lenten carnival celebrations. The city’s *cantasi come* sources also testify to the continuation of carnival through the 1480s; these are discussed in my forthcoming book, *The Song Repertoires of Renaissance Florence* (Florence: Olschki).

for the very year in which the public celebrations would have been resumed, but what appears more likely is that Isaac observed Florentine carnival in full swing for several years prior to 1488, and perhaps composed some of his first carnival songs for these years.¹⁸ Though the events of 1478 did not affect public celebrations of carnival to the extent once believed, they apparently did dampen Lorenzo's own interest in them. Only near the last years of his life did Lorenzo resume his interest, including the composition of carnival songs, a point to which Ambrogio's letter lends support.

The composition of *Alla battaglia* in late 1487 coincides with, and in fact may directly result from, the point at which Lorenzo not only "rediscovered public spectacle," but had taken a keen interest in the potential of public festivals both as expressions of Florentine identity and Medicean dynasty, and as vehicles for classicizing programs and thus for new and more elevated styles of Florentine vernacular literature, art, and (it is not often said) music.¹⁹ Medici identification with the battle of Sarzanello was clear: Lorenzo had overseen the campaign in person from Pisa, and the historian Francesco Guicciardini had proclaimed that it "terminated with great glory to the city and to the regime."²⁰ Even the poem is effectively emblazoned with the Medici crest when among the victorious battle cries at the end (l. 82) we hear "Palle, palle, Marzoccho, Marzoccho!"; here the emblem of the Medici shield is conjoined with the lion, a Florentine emblem associated with the defense of its liberty.

¹⁸ Though most of the music of the carnival song repertory is lost, including, undoubtedly, many works by Isaac, the handful of Isaac's surviving three-part settings of Italian ballatas perhaps exemplify the style of his earliest songs from these years. The awkward accentuation in a work like *Un dì lieto giamai non hebbi* appears to be the work of a skilled foreign composer adapting more quickly to the musical idiom than the language; ed. Johannes Wolf, *Heinrich Isaac: Weltliche Werke*, in *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*, XXVIII, Jg. xiv/1 (Vienna, 1907), 44.

¹⁹ Perhaps more than the experience of the Pazzi conspiracy, the transformation of Lorenzo's own ideas about vernacular art and poetry during the 1470s and the attendant rejection of the older traditions of popular language, represented, for example, by the tradesmen's carnival songs and the works of Luigi Pulci, may have temporarily directed Lorenzo's turn away from public festivals. See Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), 114–17, 143–44; Newbiggin, "Piety and Politics," 36–41, esp. 39 where 1488 is shown to be a turning point. In that year, the San Giovanni pageants were resumed, as were the old sacred *feste* in the Oltrarno district; Lorenzo's son Piero enters into the covert administration of some of these events, and Lorenzo himself resumes the composition of carnival songs around this time. The larger context for these events may well be that described by F. William Kent: "The Laurentian desire to historicize and domesticate, as it were, Tuscan achievements in painting, literature, and even theology belongs to the late 1480s;" *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2004), 40.

²⁰ Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Florence*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 66.

While Lorenzo could pursue his artistic ideals with native talent like that of Botticelli and Poliziano in the areas of painting and literature,²¹ one of Lorenzo's primary reasons for importing Isaac must have been to secure what could not yet be found among his own citizenry, a composer of comparable stature and technical training. Writing much later, in 1559, the Florentine Anton Francesco Grazzini ("Il Lasca") remembered an older, pre-Laurentian tradition of carnival song performance that relied upon the singing of *canzoni a ballo*. In light of comments to follow, this probably refers to the well established practice of the Florentine *improvvisatori* whose performances were based on stereotyped melodic formulae and the spare textures of solo voice and *lira da braccio* or vielle accompaniment. He then credits Lorenzo with instituting a new way of celebrating Florentine public festivals, and clearly associates Isaac with its musical inception:

This [older] manner of singing il Magnifico considered always the same, [and so] he thought to vary it, and not only the music but also the invention and the way of composing the words, making songs with verses of different length and the music composed with new and diverse melodies. And the first song, or *mascherata*, that one sang in this manner was of the men who were selling sweet cakes (*berriquocoli e confortini*), written for three voices by a certain Arrigo Tedesco, then *maestro di cappella* at [the Baptistry of] S. Giovanni, and a musician most famous in those times. But before long they were writing them in four parts, and thus little by little well-known composers and poets began to write them, so that we arrive at the present situation.²²

As Prizer has shown, there are problems with Grazzini's chronology, for Lorenzo's *Canzona de' confortini* probably dates from the mid to late 1470s, and so predates Isaac's arrival in Florence.²³ The initial round of changes to the poetry and music of the carnival song which Grazzini attributes (whether rightly or not) to Lorenzo probably also date from this earlier time, when it would not be difficult to imagine the introduction of hendecasyllabic verses to the shorter line lengths of the *barzelletta*, and the displacement of the older improvisatory formulae by the "new and diverse" melodies of mensural polyphony.

²¹ Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love*, 13–15, 73–78.

²² Anton Francesco Grazzini, *Tutti i trionfi, carri, mascheate [sic] o canti carnascialeschi andati per Firenze dal tempo del Magnifico Lorenzo vecchio de' Medici; quando egli hebbero prima cominciamento, per infino a questo anno presente 1559* (Florence: [Tolentino], 1559), fols. aiiir–aiiir; translation is from Prizer, "Petrucci and the Carnival Song," 223–25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 223ff. For a different reading of Grazzini's claims, see Paola Ventrone, "Note sul carnevale fiorentino di età laurenziana," in *Il Carnevale: dalla tradizione arcaica alla tradizione colta del Rinascimento*, Maria Chiabò and Federico Doglio, eds. (Rome: Centro di studi sul teatro medievale e rinascimentale, 1990), 321–66.

Despite the unreliability of Grazzini's testimony, his association of Isaac with the musical reforms of carnival should not be dismissed out of hand. It is far more likely that carnival music would have continued to evolve in response to changes in musical style and the tastes of elite patrons, and that Isaac would have a hand in the stylistic development of the carnival song. The crucial decade for this would have been the 1480s when, as Ambrogio's letters so clearly reveal, northern composers and repertory penetrated the city's musical life in unprecedented fashion. The revelation that Isaac composed a work of unprecedented length and complexity for the 1488 Florentine carnival season suggests that he was indeed at the leading edge of ongoing stylistic experiments fostered by Lorenzo and possibly other progressive patrons.²⁴ In light of the date and texture of *Alla battaglia*, the four-part settings of carnival songs which Grazzini describes as part of the genre's stylistic evolution are perhaps not as uniformly datable to the early 16th century as some have argued.²⁵ Isaac's euphonious four-voice carnival song *Nè più bella di queste* easily could have been composed around this time, for it is an idealized portrait of Laurentian Florence as *figliuola di Roma*; its classicizing text describes the pagan deities that have bestowed upon Florence special traits, and Minerva is invoked twice as the source of "victory against enemies in war."²⁶ Though the language of *Alla battaglia* is hardly classicizing (it is more closely aligned with Tuscan vernacular literary antecedents), its role as an artistic component in a *trionfo* or *carro* representing a Florentine (and Medici) military victory accords well with Lorenzo's own conception *all'antica* of the importance and uses of civic tournaments and festivals. This vision was articulated some years earlier in Lorenzo's letter that accompanied the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, the famous collection of Tuscan lyric poetry that he assembled and sent to Federico d'Aragona of Naples in 1477: the new

²⁴ Though Lorenzo appears not to have been directly involved with the creation of *Alla battaglia*, this does not preclude a strong indirect influence (of the kind Lorenzo had mastered) through his ongoing patronage of Isaac, and the sympathy of other Medici-friendly patrons with his *politica festiva*. Given Lorenzo's strong involvement in Florentine public spectacles at this time, and Medici political investment in the actual war of Sarzana, it is inconceivable that Isaac would have acted independently in the *Alla battaglia* project.

²⁵ Joseph J. Gallucci, for example, dates all of the four-part Florentine festival songs in his edition to after 1500, with the exception of the *Canto dei sarti*, which was transmitted in a Neapolitan source (Perugia 431) datable to the 1480s; *Florentine Festival Music 1480–1520*, Recent Researches in the Music of the Renaissance, 40 (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1981), ix. For a reassessment of criteria for dating Florentine carnival songs, including the assignment of the 4-part setting of *Dalla più alta stella discende a celebrare* to 1492, see Prizer, "The Music Savonarola Burned," 28–31.

²⁶ The music is edited in Gallucci, *Florentine Festival Music*, 26–28, and in Wolf, *Weltliche Werke*, 40–41. The text is edited in Charles S. Singleton, *Canti carnascialeschi del rinascimento* (Bari: Laterza, 1936), 131–33.

trionfi adorned with art and theatrical display recalled the eternal fame and glory of the ancients, which had been won through the poetic and oratorical competitions that were among the *infiniti mirabilissimi ornamenti* attending the ancient Olympic games in Greece and the staged military triumphs in Rome.²⁷ As the musical centerpiece of a Florentine staged military triumph, *Alla battaglia* appears to have been an occasional piece *par excellence*, so it is surprising to learn that its premiere in the 1488 carnival was not a success.

Ambrogio's next letter on this subject dates from the following April (1488) after the much anticipated performance of *Alla battaglia*, and by this time the tide of opinion had turned against Isaac's battle piece:

I said I would send you a *battaglia* by Arigo, but now I have repented of this because every new thing pleases [at first]. In the event it did not much appeal to the taste of the connoisseurs, so I have abandoned the undertaking.²⁸ (Doc. 3c: 2–5)

It is ironic that one of Isaac's most popular pieces in posterity failed to please Florentine critics at its 1488 premiere, including presumably the two Medici with vested (and perhaps invested) interests, Lorenzo and his son Piero. But the reasons for its failure must be sought in the text and music in relation to its intended carnival venue. The text is attributed to Gentile Aretino, who may be Gentile Becchi, Bishop of Arezzo, Medici family friend and teacher of Lorenzo and his children.²⁹ Poet and composer were thus probably acquainted, and very

²⁷ Lorenzo's original text reads: "L'onore è veramente quello che porge a ciascuna arte nutrimento; né da altra cosa quanto dalla gloria sono gli animi de' mortali alle preclare opere infiammati. A questo fine adunque a Roma i magnifici trionfi, in Grecia i famosi giuochi del monte Olimpo, appresso ad ambedue il poetico e oratorio certame con tanto studio fu celebrato. Per questo solo il carro e arco trionfale, i marmorei trofei, li ornatissimi teatri, le statue, le palme, le corone, le funebri laudazioni, per questo solo infiniti altri mirabilissimi ornamenti furono ordinati; . . ."; *Prosatori volgari del Quattrocento*, ed. Claudio Varese (Milan: Ricciardi, [1955]), 987; discussed in Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love*, 116–17. As the processions of ancient Roman military triumphs became more elaborate, they included "banners, paintings of sieges and battles, musicians, and torch-bearers;" "Triumph," *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, rev. 3rd ed., ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 1554.

²⁸ Fol. 274v (April [no day] 1488). The passage *ogni chosa nuova piace* ("every new thing pleases") by itself makes little sense, but the actual sequence and context of events make clear the intention of Ambrogio's prose: *Alla battaglia* impressed only at first because of its novelty and reputation.

²⁹ McGee, "Alla battaglia: Music and Ceremony," 288–89. The sources of the text are Florence, BNCF, Banco Rari 337, fols. 78v–80r; and Seville, Biblioteca Colombina, MS 6-3-29, opusc. 25, a literary print bearing the attribution to 'Gentile Aretino'. McGee's reconstruction (Ibid., 299–302) is a conflation of these two sources. For separate editions of the two texts, see Gioia Filocamo, "Il repertorio profano con testo italiano del codice Panciatichi 27" (Tesi di dottorato, Università di Pavia-Cremona, 2000), 95–97.

likely collaborated from the beginning of the project, as was typical in such carnival projects.³⁰ It bears, on the one hand, the recognizable traces of its literary ancestry as a *battaglia*: irregular line lengths, abundant activity and shouting, a narrative culminating in the rout of the enemy, and inventories of battle gear and participants, and not just a few of them (see below, Table 1).³¹ Poor Gentile seems to have been charged with naming most of the officers on the Florentine payroll. Though the poem fails to adhere strictly to the form of the *barzelletta* in which the majority of carnival songs were cast, this suggests less a reason for its failure (the older *battaglia* poems seem made for outdoor performance) than that there was more than one kind of carnival song at this time.³²

As Angeni implies, the problem lies more with the music. It occupies eight pages of modern score, 213 measures of four-part polyphony, and that is only the setting of lines 1–29, the first of three stanzas. Presumably the second and third stanzas (lines 30–83) would have been sung to repetitions of this music, plus repetitions of the opening two-line refrain: that comes to 699 measures, truly a *battaglia* of epic proportions, or as Angeni said, “it is very long.” But Angeni’s language indicates that length was not the only, or even primary problem. The music is indeed as Angeni said, “refined . . . and well-constructed:” the melodic and rhythmic invention is rich and masterful (*singnorile*), as are the constantly shifting textures, now chordal, now contrapuntal, now two, three, or four parts (*congiuga*). But in the end a long and detailed poetic text arrayed in a complex musical texture that persisted for nearly 700 measures was surely an ineffective vehicle for conveying either the textual details or the sentiments of the Florentine victory, especially if the piece were performed outdoors amid noisy crowds. As Ambrogio had reported of the rumors preceding the work’s premiere, “they say it is not an easy thing,” and in the end he dismissed the work

³⁰ Prizer, “Reading Carnival,” 185–252.

³¹ For examples of older *battaglia* poems, and the closely-related *caccia*, see Giosuè Carducci, *Cacce in rima dei secoli XIV e XV* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1896; repr. Bologna: A.M.I.S., 1973). These are discussed in relation to Florentine military culture and pictorial traditions in Dale Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici and the Florentine Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 264–81, and the musico-poetic tradition is more fully explored in Wilson, “Battle Songs of the Republic.”

³² Gentile’s poem is something of a hybrid, combining the language and character of the Tuscan *battaglia* and *caccia*, with formal elements of the ballata (a refrain, the hint of a *volta* with each of three stanzas ending in a rhyme shared with the refrain, and a predominance of seven- and 11-syllable lines). Perhaps it was the intention of the poet or patron to bring the *battaglia* into the poetic tradition of carnival songs, for in the Seville source that names Gentile as the poet, the poem is called a *barzelecta morale che tracta delli adornamenti de Bactaglia*; McGee, “Alla Battaglia: Music and Ceremony”, 289n8. It is also possible that *Alla battaglia* represents the intention of “making [carnival] songs with verses of different length” that Grazzini attributed to Lorenzo.

as a passing novelty. The failure of Isaac's *Alla battaglia* was not a failure of invention or artistry, but of decorum: its diction aimed higher than what could be sustained by the public venue of carnival. Its perception as being too long, too difficult, and too novel must have arisen in comparison not with the secular northern polyphony currently being copied into Florentine chansonniers, with which Ambrogio surely was familiar and sympathetic, but with the concise and trenchant rhetoric of more traditional carnival songs with which *Alla battaglia* shared the civic stage of carnival.

From the perspective of Isaac's Medicean patrons, the work's poor reception undoubtedly had political repercussions. *Alla battaglia* failed effectively to represent in public what the Medici would like to have construed as a regime victory, a victory intended, no doubt, to share the stage in popular imagination with the victories engineered by Lorenzo's grandfather Cosimo at San Romano and Anghiari.³³ But it was also perhaps a failure of Lorenzo's artistic program to graft a more refined and elevated musical style onto the carnival performances. He had sought, as Grazzini said, to apply "new and diverse melodies" to carnival song texts, having done so with Isaac's collaboration, and *Alla battaglia* indeed appears to be an attempt to combine elements of northern contrapuntal art with the carnival song in a manner consonant with Lorenzo's goals. But there was a risk in such a traditional context of having Isaac's long, complex piece be perceived as a flouting of carnival song conventions, and of the Medici to be perceived (especially by their detractors) as imposing princely or foreign tastes on a popular public festival.

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The Projects of Antonio da Filicaia's 'Brigata'

Ambrogio frequently reported to Antonio on behalf of *la tua brighata*, and as subsequent letters show, Antonio was the leader of one of these most characteristic Florentine social groups.³⁴ The *brigata* was a group of friends, typically comprised of (or at least led by) the younger members of the patriciate, and their activities usually coalesced around the creation of projects linked to Florentine public festival life. These activities might engage the personal interests of a young patrician like Antonio, but their projects were also the means by which such men began to present themselves to the public prior to their official admission to the office-holding ranks of society.³⁵

³³ See n16.

³⁴ For example, on 7 November 1488 Ambrogio reported to Antonio that *la tua brighata sta tutta bene* (fol. 276r), and later that year, *tua brighata tutta sana* (fol. 263r).

³⁵ See Richard Trexler's illuminating discussion of this social group (*giovani*) in *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980; repr. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ., 1991), 387–99; and, with focus upon Florentine festival life during the

During the early months of 1488, prior to carnival, passages in two surviving letters by Ambrogio concern what seems to be an ongoing project among them, the canzone set to music by their colleague Ser Zanobi. Evidently frustrated with the vagaries of mail between Florence and Nantes via an agent in Lyons, Ambrogio wrote on February 5:

Again you said you thought I had received Ser Zanobi's canzona, which is not true, and perhaps you haven't received my [letter] either. God forbid; I see a bad sign, although I hope the canzona can be recovered in Nantes. [Doc. 2: 1–3]

And again in April,

In [the latest mail] I received one of Ser Zanobi's canzoni. I will tell you what happened [concerning the song], but I don't know if I will do so in this letter because today [the courier] Francesco Nori leaves from here and I don't have time to do everything I need to do. Otherwise let me assure you I will in love do everything I can.³⁶ (Doc. 3a: 1–4)

By the following September Zanobi's involvement in these compositional efforts was on hold, for Ambrogio was unable to engage the composer: "he is involved in his spiritual life, with psalms, prayers, and laude, and these are the things he is studying" (Doc. 6). The question of Zanobi's identity leads, for now, to three possible candidates. Ser Zanobi di Felice was a chaplain at the cathedral, and a tenor who during 1501–2 was hired as a lauda singer by the Company of St. Zenobius. During the same period he joined the newly reorganized polyphonic chapel at the Florentine Cathedral and Baptistry.³⁷ Another candidate is the otherwise unknown Ser Zanobi Ghuidetti who became the Cathedral's organist in 1501, and held the position until his death sometime before 1530.³⁸ A final candidate is the Zanobi da Ameria who, in the wake of a

Laurentian era, Paola Ventrone, "Lorenzo's *Politica festiva*," in *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, ed. Michael Mallett and Nicholas Mann (London: The Warburg Institute, 1996), 105–116, esp. 109–10.

³⁶ Fol. 211r (5 febbraio 1487 [1488]), and fol. 274r (aprile 1488). In the context of both passages, 'a Ser Zanobi' cannot be translated literally as 'to Ser Zanobi', rather Ambrogio's unorthodox usage seems to indicate the possessive.

³⁷ D'Accone, "The Musical Chapels at the Florentine Cathedral and Baptistry During the First Half of the 16th Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24 (1971): 4. If this Ser Zanobi is the son of the Felice identified in Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, C.G. XIII.27 as a composer of a *Fortuna desperata* setting (d. 1478), then he cannot be the Zanobi of Ambrogio's letters, whose father was still alive in 1488.

³⁸ D'Accone, "Heinrich Isaac in Florence," 468, and idem., "The Musical Chapels at the Florentine Cathedral," 16.

visit to Lorenzo de' Medici that involved musical performance, wrote to Lorenzo offering to give him a viola.³⁹ The Ser Zanobi of Ambrogio's circle may have been a priest, given his spiritual preoccupations, but he was certainly involved with laude and with the performance of polyphonic vocal music, so Ser Zanobi di Felice provides the closest match. Though we cannot at this point be certain of Zanobi's identity, nor can we identify any of his compositions (though some may survive anonymously in the Florentine chansonniers), we can add his name to the roster of native composers of polyphony active in Laurentian Florence.

If Zanobi's identity is not yet certain, that of several others named in Ambrogio's letters is. In the same April 1488 letter cited above, Ambrogio penned an extraordinary passage to Antonio:

I hope the Lamentations will be as [good] as you said, because the person who set your poem to music is very given to delights, [and] because I tried it out with the singers over here, that is, Arigo, Bartolomeo, and Ugo, who praised it very much. And, moreover, Arigo asked of me a favor; he would like to add a fourth voice to make it sweeter and better. If you and the *maestro* agree, I would like you to ask the *maestro* to do the same [i.e. *fare a quattro*], and send me a copy in order to compare [and see] which one knows better . . . how to compose. [Doc. 3b]

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Leaving aside for the moment the mention of a (presumably polyphonic) set of Lamentations, Ambrogio proceeds to a discussion of a canzone text written by Antonio, set by a composer who apparently resides in Nantes, and subsequently tried out (*fatto provare*) with Isaac and two singer companions named Bartolomeo and Ugo. Antonio must have particularly regretted his absence from Florence at this moment, for the musical setting of his poem was being tried by three of the best singers in Florence, all professionals on the payroll as *cantori di San Giovanni*, the polyphonic choir that served the city's principal churches: Isaac, Bartolomeo d'Arigo de Castris da Fiandra, and Ugo di Parisetto di Champagnia de Reams. Bartolomeo was a contralto whose arrival in Florence by 1482 predated that of Isaac, whereas Ugo, a soprano, had joined the cathedral chapel late in 1486.⁴⁰ Isaac probably sang the tenor part of what was clearly an originally three-part composition, and one that pleased them very much. Isaac then asks as "a favor" if he might *fare a quattro*, that is, add a fourth part to the original three, and under the circumstances it can only be a bass part. About five months

³⁹ Mario Martelli, *Studi laurenziani* (Florence: Olschki, 1965), 189; discussed in D'Accone, "Lorenzo and Music," *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo mondo*, 278.

⁴⁰ D'Accone, "The Singers of San Giovanni," 333–41. Ugo is recorded in the papal chapel in Rome by June 1489; *ibid.*, 342.

later, a letter dated 20 September describes a similar situation and confirms the procedure:

In your letters you mentioned Ser Zanobi, [and] that you were making a canzona for his appraisal . . . Then you sent the said canzona, and with it a motet, which things you sent to Lorenzo [de' Medici]. I made a copy right away, and gave Alessandro the letter so that he could follow your orders, and likewise I copied [all the pages?], and for now was unable to place [these] in the hands [of Ser Zanobi] because he was with his father at the fortress in Pisa. I had to await his return, and during that time I had it tried out, and found it good, and it was much praised, especially by Arigo, who wanted to add a bass part, and I promised to give [the music] to him. But in order not to [complicate?] everything, I copied it before giving it to him. And then [Ser Zanobi] returned [and] I did as it was my duty and his desire [. . . ?], and he thanked me and showed me he was very grateful. (Doc. 7a)

The work in question appears to be another collaboration between Antonio as poet, a resident composer in Nantes, and Zanobi as an evaluator of the resulting vocal composition. As in the situation of the previous April, Ambrogio is fulfilling his “duty” to Antonio as an agent in the midst of these complicated collaborations, which once again must involve a trying-out (*prova*) of the piece by Isaac and his professional colleagues, followed by Isaac’s request to add a part that is specified here as a bass voice (*voleva farli in chontroabasso*). We also learn this time that even more hands are involved in the project, those of Antonio’s father, Alessandro da’ Filicaia (1429–ca. 1512), and Lorenzo de’ Medici. Alessandro was a wealthy merchant and prominent citizen who frequently held high public office in the Florentine government.⁴¹ His family was closely aligned with the Medici, and in 1455 he married one of Lorenzo’s distant relatives. Alessandro enjoyed personal friendships with Lorenzo and members of his circle such as Marsilio Ficino and, we might presume, Heinrich Isaac. It must have been Alessandro’s access to Lorenzo and his circle, coupled with his evident willingness to indulge his son’s interest in music, that facilitated these collaborations.

These vignettes of Isaac being drawn into the activities of local musicians prompt a parallel with another great Medici client who was apparently all too accessible to local freelance work. One has to wonder if Isaac was as pestered by requests as Angelo Poliziano, who complained in 1490 to the Venetian ambassador Girolamo Donato: “Anyone who wants a brief motto to be read on the hilt of his sword or the chase of his ring, or a verse for his couch or his bedroom, or some inscription

⁴¹ “Filicaia, Alessandro,” *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–).

... off he runs straight away to Poliziano, and you may see me like a slug smearing every wall with all manner of texts and inscriptions. Here's a fellow demanding saucy jokes for Carnival, another holy homilies for services, one sad laments for the lute, another ribald songs for all-night revelries."⁴² Apparently Poliziano was among those poets to whom a patron and his *brigata* might turn for the crafting of a "saucy" carnival song, and perhaps they were drawn simultaneously into the city's vast patronage network when Isaac fashioned a three-part setting of Poliziano's light-hearted ballata, *Questo mostrarsi adirata di fore*.⁴³ In the two scenes described in Ambrogio's letters, however, there is none of Poliziano's resentment or reluctance, rather Isaac appears to step forward of his own volition. For now, what emerges clearly from these passages is Isaac's genuine interest in the art and process of composition, and a willingness to engage local Florentines on the subject. Why he would do this is a question to which we will return after pursuing several topics raised in some of the documents already presented.

Florence and Nantes

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Two of the documents considered above (3b and 7a) allude not only to the activities of Antonio's *brigata* in Florence during 1488 but to musical traffic between Florence and Nantes involving a local composer in Nantes. In April Ambrogio had already tried out a polyphonic song mailed from Nantes, and in his September letter he reports having received two more items, a secular song and a motet, which he copied immediately and sent to the omnipresent Lorenzo.⁴⁴ Later in this same letter Ambrogio clearly alludes to Antonio's interest in cultivating Lorenzo's favor when he says, "[you ask me] what can be done to please Lorenzo, to which I say: Send a little book of his things, which I think

⁴² Ed. and trans. by Bonnie Blackburn, "Lorenzo de' Medici, a Lost Isaac Manuscript, and the Venetian Ambassador," in *Musica Franca: Essays in Honor of Frank A. D'Accone*, ed. Irene Alm, Alyson McLamore, and Colleen Reardon (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1996), 24–25. Within a year this same person would request, and receive, a collection of Isaac's songs from Lorenzo de' Medici.

⁴³ Isaac's setting is published in Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, 3 vols., trans. Alexander Krappe, Roger Sessions, and Oliver Strunk. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949), iii, no. 2. See also settings by Pintello and Bartolomeo degli Organi. One of these musical settings, probably that of Isaac, was the *cantasi come source* for a lauda *Ben ch'adirato sai mostri'l signore* by another local Florentine composer, Ser Firenze. Of similar origins may have been Isaac's (lost) setting of Poliziano's "echo" song, *Che fai tu, Ecco*; text ed. by Saverio Orlando, *Angelo Poliziano: poesie italiane* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1976), 193.

⁴⁴ As Kent, Lorenzo's biographer, concluded of Angeni's letters, "Florentine musical culture at the end of the fifteenth century was not synonymous with Lorenzo de' Medici's taste, but he is everywhere in and around these musical letters exchanged between two friends" ("Heinrich Isaac's Music," 370).

will be good.” That the object is a book of musical compositions by the composer in Nantes is revealed in a previous sentence, where Ambrogio informs Antonio, “I understand that the *canzone* cannot be set to four parts, because of the opposition of your teacher’s teacher (*per la ‘posizione del maestro del tuo maestro*)” (Doc. 7b: 1–4). Apparently, then, there are two composers in Nantes, an apprentice whom Antonio claims as his teacher, and a master who is most likely the composer of the songs and motet mailed to Florence, and the one to whom Ambrogio counsels Antonio to turn for a *libretto* of works to send to Lorenzo.

We also learn here of the denouement in the little competition proposed by Ambrogio the previous April, which would have involved Isaac and the Nantes master in both adding bass parts to one of the latter’s three-part pieces in order to compare their respective merits as composers. Whatever the state of Isaac’s international reputation at this point, the Nantes composer may have concluded that going head-to-head with Lorenzo de’ Medici’s chief musician over one of his own compositions was probably not an advantageous undertaking for him, especially if he lacked confidence in handling four-part texture and an Italian text. The identities of the Nantes composers are not revealed, but the master was probably a northerner whose music was good enough to be “highly praised” by Isaac and his colleagues in Florence and worthy of putting before Lorenzo.⁴⁵ And what of the texts involved in this international collaboration? Antonio’s authorship, and the involvement in the project of local Florentines like Ser Zanobi and Ambrogio, strongly suggest that these *canzoni* are, like the rest discussed in Ambrogio’s letters, Italian secular poems. We are thus presented with the interesting scenario of a northern composer in France setting Italian texts to music, in proximity to a musically educated Italian merchant/poet (and patron?) able to provide him with texts and advice on Italian text setting. This could have been a more common situation than we might imagine, and it is an intriguing example of how some transalpine music was from inception destined for and conditioned by an Italian market.

⁴⁵ We learn from Ambrogio’s letter of the following December (1488) that Antonio did indeed follow Ambrogio’s advice about obtaining and mailing this music from Nantes to Lorenzo. We also hear a familiar complaint by Ambrogio (cf. Doc. 10b); he worries that Antonio has bypassed him and sent “the books” directly to Lorenzo because he no longer trusts Ambrogio, whom Antonio has clearly upbraided in past letters for not mailing things to Antonio in a timely fashion: “But I would have appreciated it if the books you had sent to Magnifico Lorenzo through the courier Girolamo had come [first] into my hands, then I would have given you credit [for this] as for other things. But I believe you did that to show me my errors about the things I promised [to send] you from here that did not arrive, [though] this was because I could not trust the courier” (Doc. 8: 8–13).

The remainder of Ambrogio's September 1488 letter is significant for what it tells us about the contemporary musical scene in both Nantes and Florence:

Let me say that if there was some good bass, tenor, or contralto voice over there [in Nantes], they would be well-received here [in Florence], because Niccolò di Lore has left here. He quit the chapel, and made an agreement with the King of Hungary, and Bartolomeo has done the same. Their departure without Lorenzo's knowledge has displeased him very much. I tell you all of this because if I can, I shall help any of your friends. (Doc. 7b: 5–9)

Cathedral documents published some time ago by Frank D'Accone record that on 30 April 1488 Bartolomeo de Castris and the bass Ser Niccolò di Lore left Florence, but we are not told why they left or where they went.⁴⁶ Both had come to Florence at about the same time in 1482, and Lorenzo's anger at their abrupt departure in 1488 is understandable; the music-loving monarch of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus, had covertly recruited from the Florentine chapel the services of two able and long-time singers, and in so doing had taken a lesson from the Italian princes who had long since been engaged in competition for the services of northern musicians in their chapels. What is perhaps more surprising to learn, however, is how close Ambrogio was to these events. The departure of good singers, particularly those with whom he had been directly involved, could not have escaped his notice, but he also felt compelled and qualified to act in helping to fill the vacancies. Moreover, Nantes, a city unnamed until now in surviving documents concerning the activities of northern singers and composers, emerges as a potential recruiting ground for new musicians and music, and Antonio as a Florentine agent in that process.⁴⁷ Antonio clearly had forged friendships with musicians in Nantes, who in return for whatever musical favors they had done Antonio there stood to benefit from their involvement with a well-connected Florentine.

⁴⁶ D'Accone, "The Singers of San Giovanni," 336–37, 341; the two left Florence on 30 April 1488. Niccolò di Lore is first recorded as a singer in Florence in 1479, but he left the following year to sing at Siena Cathedral before returning to Florence in 1482; *Ibid.*, 329, and Rob C. Wegman, "From Maker to Composer: Improvisation and Musical Authorship in the Low Countries, 1450–1500," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 49 (1996): 445. Niccolò and Bartolomeo both returned to the Florence Cathedral chapel in June 1492, the timing of which was certainly dictated both by the death of Mathias Corvinus in 1490, and in 1492 of Lorenzo de' Medici, who living doubtless would not have wished to rehire them.

⁴⁷ There is, for example, no mention of singers or composers in Nantes at this time in L. de la Laurencie, "La musique a la cour des ducs de Bretagne aux XIVe et Xve siècles," *Revue de Musicologie* 14 (1933): 1–15.

Ambrogio's interest in Antonio's musical colleagues in Nantes was expressed in two other letters, which also suggest something about the specific Florentine context operating in the background. The first is an undated letter that was probably written during late summer of 1488, in which Ambrogio reveals himself to be playing an unusually active role in the creation of a text and its musical setting:

Again we need to remind you that I created some indecencies on grafters (*anestatori*) so that you might have them set to music there by your friend. I also beg you for love of me to use your *fantasia* in writing some words, for you know how they should go in order to be elegant and pleasing to an audience.⁴⁸ (Doc. 5: 6–10)

Ambrogio, it appears, had created the basis for a poem, but not the actual poem, for which he defers to Antonio, whom he asks to craft the words with an ear to their eventual sung performance before an audience. But what audience might this be? Several clues, both here and elsewhere in Ambrogio's letters, suggest that Antonio's *brigata* (perhaps with the backing and connections of Antonio's father) was engaged in a project for the coming carnival season. One of the most characteristic activities of the Florentine youth brigades was competition among them in the creation of *mascherate* or *carri* for one of the major Florentine festivals, either pre-Lenten carnival or St. John's Day.⁴⁹ The opening "we" suggests that Ambrogio is speaking on behalf of the *brigata* in Florence, and the subsequent phrase *fabricho sopra anestatori qualche chazelleria* is obscure, to say the least, and might be translated as "I created some indecencies on grafters." This may be a reference to Lorenzo de' Medici's carnival song, *Donne, noi siam maestri d'annestare*, the *Canzone degl'Innestatori* (the Song of the Grafters), and thus an indication that Ambrogio himself has constructed a set of sexual double entendres that, like Lorenzo's poem, exploit the metaphorical possibilities of agricultural grafting.⁵⁰ From this sketch of the text's subject matter

⁴⁸ Fol. 263r [July/August 1488?].

⁴⁹ St. John's day (June 24) would have passed by this time, so Ambrogio's letter most likely refers to a project for pre-lenten carnival of 1489. The creative process for one carnival song is described in detail in Prizer, "Reading Carnival," 185–252, esp. 188–209. Prizer clearly establishes that the creation of carnival songs and their related projects was primarily the provenance of young patricians, *giovani* in their late teens and twenties. In 1488, Antonio was 23; Ambrogio, though not a patrician, was still a *giovane* at 29.

⁵⁰ In this reading, 'chazelleria' is tentatively interpreted as related to 'cazzo'. I am very grateful to Dr. Leofranc Holford-Strevens for this ingenious proposed reading of the passage. Lorenzo's text is edited with annotations in Riccardo Bruscaqli, *Trionfi e canti carnascialeschi toscani del rinascimento* (Rome: Salerno, 1986), I: 10–12. The carnival song probably belongs to the group of trade songs Lorenzo composed during the 1470s, so it would have been familiar to Ambrogio; see Paolo Orvieto, ed., *Lorenzo de' Medici: Canti carnascialeschi* (Rome: Salerno, 1991), 40–41.

Antonio will fashion the actual poem, and then turn it over to his composer “friend” in Nantes for setting to music.⁵¹ Since it involved a “saucy” trade-song, the project was probably not an elaborate *trionfo*, but a more modest *mascherata*, but even so the *brigata* could not have done without the collaboration of a poet and composer. Any well-educated young Florentine like Antonio could probably craft such a poem, but competition for the services of composers who could write music that would be “elegant and pleasing to an audience” had to have been keen, and was very likely behind some of the projects involving Ser Zanobi and Isaac. In this case, a carnival *brigata* appears to have gone to extraordinary lengths (and distance) to assemble the components of a *mascherata* which, if brought to fruition, must have involved a composition committed to paper and mailed back to Florence.⁵²

By the following December Ambrogio was again pressing Antonio to recruit musicians to Florence, but this time the object was Antonio’s *maestro* and one of his young disciples, and Ambrogio’s motives were more personal, spurred perhaps by his desire for proximity to a composer willing to work more closely with the *brigata*:

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But I think if your teacher and his young disciple come here, they will be well received . . . through you I will befriend him and will maintain the friendship if he is amenable. And if he does not come I will [still] be with Arigo. See if you can pick a small bunch of grapes from that big bunch, since it is not possible to have the whole vine. (Doc. 8: 13–18)

The Tuscan metaphor with which Ambrogio closes implies that there is a larger pool of musical talent in Nantes from which to choose.⁵³ He clearly hopes at least to lure Antonio’s *maestro* to Florence, where his

⁵¹ Though Ambrogio does seem to be providing Antonio with something (such as a set of key words or images) that will lead directly to the creation of the text and its musical setting, *fabrico* may imply something more than that, such as sketches or ideas for the visual components of the *mascherata*. Prizer, “Reading Carnival,” 192–93 explains that a detailed outline of the visual appearance of a carnival project usually accompanied the creation of the poetic text. I am grateful to Giovanni Zanovello for sharing with me his thoughts on this passage.

⁵² This time there can be no doubt that an Italian text was given to a composer in Nantes to be set. However, Ambrogio’s designation of him as Antonio’s “amico,” along with the strictly Florentine character of such a text, suggests that the composer was not the northern master involved in previous projects, but another, possibly Italian composer studying in Nantes who may also be Antonio’s *maestro*. Also interesting is the fact that despite his own musical studies and interest, Antonio never poses or is perceived as a composer in these letters; it may be that his study of music was motivated by his roles as a patron, poet and, like Ambrogio, a well-informed dilettante.

⁵³ An alternative reading would equate the vine with musicians/composers, and the grapes (the fruit of the vine) with musical compositions, or perhaps with young disciples of the musicians in Nantes.

services seem preferable to those of Isaac.⁵⁴ Ambrogio's interest in continuing to coordinate the musical projects of their *brigata* is clear, and his determination to establish links with a composer indicate that the *brigata* was regularly involved in projects like carnival *mascherate* that required newly composed music.

These passages afford us a glimpse of how an artistic supply route between Italy and northern Europe could function. Antonio's involvement in his family's cloth business led to extended stays in northern Europe throughout the last two decades of the 15th century, including the cities of Toulouse, Brussels, Bruges, and London, and as a musically literate Florentine he was certainly part of a large network by which cultural goods including music and musicians flowed between Florence and the north. News of vacancies in the musical chapels of Florence would have traveled far and wide in this manner, and courier networks were efficient enough that Antonio was able to remain actively involved in the projects of his Florentine *brigata*.

Music for Holy Week

In the spring of 1488, as Carnival passed and Isaac's *Alla battaglia* faded from view, two other musical subjects entered Ambrogio's letters and remained topics for the next year: a set of Lamentations, and a *Stabat mater* that Ambrogio calls a *motteto*. The latter is mentioned in a series of letters written between April 1488 and April 1489:

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I also have received [the] *Stabat Mater*, which I will immediately copy, and will give to Alessandro together with your letter, so that he can do as you wish, and I will keep it a secret as you requested . . . (Doc. 3a: 4–6)

I think at this time you might have received my [letter] where I told you about the letter sent to Ser Zanobi. And concerning the *Stabat mater* motet, I have done with it [according to] the instructions you gave Ser Bandone for me [with my] copy. Nor has anyone yet seen it, and nobody even considers singing it at this time. You will be advised about everything because [my letters] went safely into the hands of Francesco Nori, and I told him to give them to Machiavello in Lyons so that everything will have been done properly. (Doc. 4)

Now that for the grace of God I have received the Holy Word, my soul is saved! But I tell you that I am especially obliged to you for the *Stabat mater*, that disappeared into the hands of Castruccio and Nocha

⁵⁴ It may be that Ambrogio found the allure of a distant northerner greater than that of Isaac, whose international reputation probably was not yet established at this point. The context also suggests that the *brigata* sought a composer who was more available to them for collaborations than Isaac might have been.

before Ambrogio could show what it was, for fear of making a mistake. Still I cannot tell you because I have not heard it. I will have it performed as soon as possible, considering that I think it is a thing of perfection, but how much it will satisfy others I will tell you [later]. (Doc. 8: 1–6)

This motet was probably the creation of a northern composer, perhaps the Nantes master. It was acquired by Antonio and mailed to Ambrogio, who with undisguised excitement regards it a “thing of perfection” based only on seeing (and not yet hearing) the music. Once such a highly coveted possession had arrived in Florence it clearly precipitated a series of carefully orchestrated events. First Ambrogio made a copy to give to Antonio’s father, Alessandro (the patron in this case?), then he could feel secure in turning over his original copy to a trusted scribe (Ser Bandone) who prepared a fair copy for the singers. Next came the *prova*, or trying out, of the piece with singers in a private setting, which would form the basis for judgments about the quality of the piece such as Ambrogio promises to report back to Antonio. This might be the occasion for adjustments ranging from decisions about *musica ficta* to changes in the composition by the composer, if present. In certain settings, as when a composer of Isaac’s stature was present at the *prova*, this might lead to the offer (or request) to make an arrangement of, or addition to, the piece. When in April 1488 Isaac and his colleagues Bartolomeo and Ugo tried out the three-part piece by the Nantes composer, Isaac offered to add a fourth part in order “to make it sweeter and better.” In his discussion of other compositional “seekers of sweetness” Rob Wegman cited Johannes Manlius’s (probably apocryphal) account of Josquin’s same process of *provare* in order to attain a similar goal:

Whenever he had composed a new song, he gave it to the singers to be sung, and meanwhile he walked around, listening attentively whether the concordant sound (*harmonia*) came together well. If he was dissatisfied, he stepped in: “Be silent,” he said, “I will change it!”⁵⁵

In all of the instances of *provare* cited above, the music was probably copied on a single paper bifolium in parts (not score), which meant that the concordant aspect of the work, how well the parts “came together,” was the most difficult to assess for someone like Ambrogio

⁵⁵ Wegman, “From Maker to Composer,” 457. On the *prova* as a stage in musical composition, see also Jessie Ann Owens, *Composers at Work: The Craft of Musical Composition, 1450–1600* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 81, 270 (and n24); see also 72–73 for instances when an instrument might be used to try a vocal piece.

faced only with the written music.⁵⁶ Though Ambrogio imagines the new *Stabat mater* to be “perfect,” until he has it tried with singers he remains uncertain of “how much it will satisfy others,” that is, how it actually sounds. We know that in such circumstances Ambrogio could enlist the opinion of the best singers in town, and the trying out of such new pieces certainly would have been of interest to Isaac and his colleagues.

The most critical stage in this process was of course the performance, and given the care and secrecy surrounding the motet’s preparation to this point (an atmosphere not unique to carnival songs, we learn), the timing and location of its premiere must have been carefully calculated. The text of the *Stabat mater* is a sequence attributed to the Italian Franciscan Jacopone da Todi (d. ?1306), and whether arrayed in the musical garb of chant or, as in this case, the polyphony of a late 15th-century northern composer, it would have been intended for performance during Holy Week, at the culmination of Lent.⁵⁷ Pre-lenten carnival in Florence was a period of intense festivity and musical activity; correspondingly, Lent was a period of equally intense preaching, penance, and singing. Whether Alessandro or his son Antonio was now the actual proprietor of the motet, its performance venue was likely to be a Holy Week service at the family church of the da Filicaia family in their neighborhood, which was the *Chiave* district of the central San Giovanni quarter. Here the Florentine premiere of this novel piece of northern art would have added solemnity to the service and, like most such acts of patronage, reflected something of the taste and wealth of its patron. However, the impact of the motet’s novelty was compromised, for as Ambrogio says in his letter of 24 December, the music had “disappeared into the hands of Castruccio and Nocha,” probably local singers contracted for a *prova* who had allowed the work’s secrecy to be compromised. In the final letter on this topic, dated 24 April 1489, Ambrogio employs another colorful Tuscan metaphor in citing the premature leak of the *Stabat mater* as an example of what can go wrong when Antonio fails to send new pieces directly to Ambrogio:

But more than anything, and once and for all, I must tell you that when you send something new, let me be the one who handles things, so that I can do what I want [i.e. what needs to be done], [and] so that

⁵⁶ Owens concludes that “reading in parts must have been a common skill,” but it remains an open question just how much of a work’s entire sound fabric could be discerned this way, especially by a dilettante like Ambrogio; see *Composers at Work*, 48.

⁵⁷ No such work survives in Florentine sources, but northern composers were certainly fashioning polyphonic settings of the *Stabat mater* in the late 15th century; see Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music, 1380–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 322–23.

what happened to the *Stabat mater* won't happen [again]. Even the bakers were already full of it before I could try it. (Doc. 9b: 3–6)

Novelty was highly regarded among wealthy patrons,⁵⁸ and particularly in the production of more ephemeral projects like festival *trionfi* that passed through multiple hands on the way to performance, the impact of novelty was easily compromised by premature exposure (“even the bakers were already full of it”).⁵⁹ Secrecy was a documented concern of the *brigate* who prepared festival productions,⁶⁰ and, as we have seen, the 1488 carnival premiere of Isaac’s *Alla battaglia* was spoiled in part by the “leak” of Isaac’s score prior to performance. Apparently the premiere of an unstaged work like the *Stabat mater* could be subject to the same concerns.⁶¹

A setting of the Lamentations of Jeremiah was first mentioned by Ambrogio in a letter of April 1488 (Doc. 3b), at which point it was an anticipated work he hoped would be ready for Holy Week of 1489. A year later Ambrogio himself lamented the delay, but as on other occasions he was clearly more interested in the composition *per se* (*il tortello*) than in hearing it in the appropriate liturgical setting of Lent:

Lent has passed and still we do not have the Lamentations. I believe they have been held up by some legitimate cause. But even after Easter the cake (*il tortello*) would still be good [to eat]. (Doc. 9b: 1–3)

⁵⁸ Acting much like Florentine merchants abroad, the diplomatic agents of Duke Ercole d’Este reportedly were always on the lookout for “new things” (*cose nuove*) during their European travels. However, Ercole’s prohibition in 1498 against the distribution of court music without the Duke’s permission marks a change in the perception of the compositions by a composer like Isaac, which were subsequently regarded less as “freeware” (like the *Stabat mater* of Ambrogio’s letter), and more like economic commodities; see Wegman, “From Maker to Composer,” 465, and n161, where he cites the case of two priests disciplined for the unauthorized premiere of a motet by Mouton in 1501. This was perceived to be an act of musical theft involving the loss of “compositional novelty,” that is, the “employer’s privilege to hear a work first.” On Lorenzo’s engagement “in the search for novel pieces from the international repertory,” see Zanovello, “Heinrich Isaac,” 39.

⁵⁹ This passage is difficult to understand. Ambrogio is clearly peeved because he was bypassed in the process of controlling the distribution of this piece. What is not clear is whether he was lamenting the fact that the singers (the “bakers”?) saw the music before he did, or whether the premiere was ruined when a broader public (the “bakers”?) got a sneak preview of the piece that dampened an appetite for its formal performance.

⁶⁰ Prizer, “Reading Carnival,” 194–98.

⁶¹ On 3 November 1489 Ambrogio refers to a *Stabat* that must be a different work, since it was just received, and not yet tried out: *Io ebi per le mani del Machiavello stabat senza lettera alchuna a me. Non l’ò fatta provare per anchora. Vedrò quello sia, benché benissimo credo, e ne sarai avisato* (fol. 241r) [“Machiavello delivered the *Stabat* [mater] to me without any letter for me. I’ll see what it is like, although I think it will be very good, and I will inform you.”]

Nothing more is said of this project, but unlike the *Stabat mater* this was probably the creation of a composer residing in Florence, who would have been working within a well-established Florentine tradition of performing polyphonic Lamentation settings. The two-part settings of Johannes de Quadris of ca. 1440 preserved in a cathedral processional suggest that the practice dates back to the 1438 foundation of the city's polyphonic chapel, and predating this were the probably improvised polyphonic performances elaborating upon the intonation formulae that formed the basis of subsequent settings.⁶² Cathedral documents record payments in 1480 to Ser Matteo di Paolo "for settings in figural music of the Lamentations of Jeremiah," and payments to the northerner Arnolfo in March 1479 for "canti" he composed for the cathedral were likely settings of the same, for we know that his "ancient" compositions for Holy Week were still in use at the cathedral nearly a century later.⁶³

If new Lamentation settings continued to be commissioned for use at the Cathedral and other major Florentine churches, Ambrogio's intimacy with the singers clearly positioned him to gain access to the music. Lenten celebrations were not only a liturgical event in Florence, but civic and devotional, as well; the city's laudesi confraternities sponsored sermons and musical performances during every evening of Lent, and the polyphonic singing of both the *Lamento di Jeremia propheta* and the *Stabat mater* was widespread.⁶⁴ Ambrogio's reference also reflects a broader interest throughout Italy in polyphonic settings of Lamentations that gained momentum in the late 15th century with composers like Tinctoris and Agricola, both of whose Lamentations were printed along with those of de Quadris and a number of their contemporaries

⁶² Florence, Opera del Duomo, Archivio Musicale, parte V, no. 21; Giulio Cattin, ed., *Johannes de Quadris: Opera*, *Antiquae musicae italicae: Monumenta veneta sacra* 2 (Bologna: Bardolino, 1972), 10–63. See also Cattin, *Un processionale fiorentino per la settimana santa: studio liturgico-musicale sul Ms. 21 dell'Opera di S. Maria del Fiore* (Bologna: A.M.I.S., 1975), and Marica Tacconi, "Liturgy and Chant at the Cathedral of Florence: A Survey of the Pre-Tridentine Sources" (Ph.D. diss., Yale Univ., 1999), 241–46, where she argues that this source was compiled through the personal initiative and for the private use of "a cleric of the church, possibly a singer of the choir." The work Ambrogio awaits was very likely also the product of such private, rather than corporate, patronage.

⁶³ On Arnolfo and Ser Matteo, see D'Accone, "Some Neglected Composers," 264–71, 278–80. Francesco Corteccia reports in the preface to his own *Responsoria* (Venice: Gardano, 1570) that he was urged to print his own Holy Week music "because there were almost none of them left for us [to use here in Florence] except for those most ancient ones by a certain Arnolfo, which almost never cease insisting on the similarity of the voices, and for that reason are not very highly esteemed." *Ibid.*, 267.

⁶⁴ See Wilson, *Music and Merchants*, 66–70. In the Florentine *cantasi* come sources of this period, the *Stabat mater* appears as a source for two laude, and the *Lamento de Jeremia propheta* (apparently recast in the poetic form of a Tuscan strambotto) as a source for eight laude, five of them attributed to Feo Belcari; Wilson, *Song Repertories*, forthcoming.

in Petrucci's two books of *Lamentationum Jeremie prophete* (Venice, 1506).⁶⁵ Polyphonic settings of the *Stabat mater* were also on the rise at about this time, though as Ambrogio's situation suggests, the compositional impetus for these appears to have come more from northern Europe than, as with Lamentation settings, from within Italy.⁶⁶ Ambrogio's access to new settings of both suggests that everything was up to date in late 15th-century Florence regarding new compositional trends, and evidently more—perhaps a great deal more—polyphony circulated in Florence than is indicated by the extant musical sources. What is also clear is that taken together, carnival and lent generated enough composing and performing activity to keep the subject in the front of some Florentine minds all year round.

Ambrogio's Notebooks and Musical Literacy

Ambrogio's letters bear testimony to what could be called the revolution in musical literacy that took place in Florence and perhaps many other centers during the second half of the 15th century. In 1449, an

⁶⁵ The other composers are Marbrianus de Orto, Gaspar van Weerbeke, Erasmus Lapidica, Bartolomeo Tromboncino, Bernardus Ycart, and Francesco d'Ana; Günther Massenkeil, ed., *Mehrstimmige Lamentationen aus der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Musikalische Denkmäler der Akademie der Wissenschaft und der Literatur, 5 (Mainz: Schott, 1965). Isaac's lengthy four-voice setting of the *Oratio Jeremiae Prophetarum* well may have been composed for the Florentine Holy Week tradition, though it is probably not the work to which Ambrogio refers, or he would have named Isaac; the piece was published in *Selectae Harmoniae Quatuor Vocum de Passione Domini* (Wittenberg: G. Rhau, 1538), and is edited by Manfred Hug together with Pierre de la Rue's *Lamentationes Jeremiae* (Stuttgart: Cornetto, 1996), 32–51. On the cultivation of early polyphonic settings of Lamentations in the monastic houses of the Veneto, see Giulio Cattin, "Tradizione e tendenze innovatrici nella normativa e nella pratica liturgico-musicale della Congregazione de S. Giustina," *Benedictina* 17 (1970): 254–99.

Given the artistic relations between Florence and Naples during the late 15th century, the latter may have been a source for new settings appearing in Florence in Ambrogio's day. The Neapolitan manuscript Montecassino 871 was copied during the 1480s, and at one time included 13 settings (including, presumably, those by Tinctoris and Ycart), which reflects the lavish Holy Week celebrations of the Aragonese court; Isabel Pope and Masakata Kanazawa, *The Musical Manuscript Montecassino 871: A Neapolitan Repertory of Sacred and Secular Music of the Late Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), 45–46, and 343–75; and Allan Atlas, *Music at the Aragonese Court of Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 138.

⁶⁶ This is not to say that northerners were not composing polyphonic settings of Lamentations during the late 15th century; Jean Hemart (d. 1493), one of whose chansons was copied into the large Florentine chansonnier BNCf, Banco rari 229, composed a set of Lamentations reportedly entered into the choirbooks at Cambrai Cathedral in 1475–76, next to those of Ockeghem and Busnoys; David Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs, 1415–1480* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 697. On settings of the *Stabat mater*, see Strohm, *The Rise of European Music*, 322–23. Jürgen Blume, *Geschichte der mehrstimmigen Stabat-mater-Vertonungen* (Munich: E. Katzbichler, [1992]), 30–47, discusses settings that may predate 1488: three in the Eton Choir book, by John Browne, Richard Davy, and William Cornysh, and settings by Weerbeke and Josquin.

intimate of the great Florentine improvisatory singer Antonio di Guido praised him as a master of the art of singing, but with respect to Antonio's knowledge of written music he said what could have been said of most Florentines at that time: "I don't know if he really knows about music."⁶⁷ Only a few years earlier, in 1445, we learn that Antonio Squarcialupi, a virtuoso organist and the most famous musician of mid-century Florence, had struggled and ultimately abandoned the effort to set a ballata text in the style of Binchois because "he doesn't have a head for that sort of thing."⁶⁸ The improvisatory art exemplified by these two most typical of Florentine musicians declined after their deaths in the 1480s, and the increasing exposure of Florentines to sounding and written polyphony across the second half of the 15th century brought with it a host of new preoccupations to which Ambrogio's letters bear witness: the vulnerability to loss or premature discovery by others of an artifact no longer stored in memory, the possibilities for study, revision, and elaboration of a score that serves as a relatively objective frame of reference for these activities, an entirely new status attached to the activity of composing and to the composer, now distinct from the performer, and new possibilities for the transmission, acquisition, and ownership of music.⁶⁹ Particularly in a city where its citizens were accustomed to thinking of music in the ephemeral realm of performance and improvisation, the copying and transmission of written music was something of a novelty (a word Ambrogio uses often to describe Isaac's compositions), and the musical score an object of fascination, intrigue, and secrecy. As an individual, like some others in his *brigata*, who was not a part of "the world of clerics and intellectuals,"

⁶⁷ Antonio Lanza, ed., *Lirici toscani del '400*, 2 vols. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1973), I: 680–81.

⁶⁸ James Haar, "The Vatican Manuscript Urb. Lat. 1411: An Undervalued Source," in *Manoscritti di polifonia nel Quattrocento europeo*, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Trento, 18–19 ottobre, 2002, ed. Marco Gozzi (Trent: Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2004), 65–92.

⁶⁹ The use of the vernacular term *composizione* to refer to a musical composition in Ambrogio's letters (e.g. Doc. 1) is among the earliest known, and among Ambrogio, Antonio, and their *brigata* of music associates it clearly had some currency. The related term *compositore* first appears in German and Italian vernacular usage around this time, and signifies the emerging professional status of the composer; similarly, *composizione* implies a new reified status of a musical setting as an authored and authoritative work of art; see Wegman, "From Maker to Composer," 434–36, and 465 where he cites an April 1497 contract naming "Hainrich Ysacc, compositist" to service at the court of Maximilian I, a document Wegman argues "almost certainly marks the beginning of professional composition in the proper sense." However, Florentine Cathedral documents in 1486 and 1488 name Isaac a *chomponitore* (D'Accone, "Heinrich Isaac in Florence," 477), and the earliest document in which Isaac is mentioned, a 1484 account book from the court of Innsbruck, refers to him as *componisten* (Martin Staehelin, *Die Messen Heinrich Isaacs*, 3 vols. (Bern: Paul Haupt, [1978], II, 19). Isaac appears to have been the first composer to consistently bear this title.

Ambrogio no longer personified the late-medieval, and ultimately Aristotelian dichotomy between “making” (*poiesis*) and “doing” (*praxis*) as aptly described by Wegman:

In most people’s experience, discant was a practice, an event, and music a fleeting phenomenon. To handle the elusive complexity of polyphonic sound on paper, to capture and manipulate it as an object, to reflect upon it as a finished “work,” was to take it out of the sphere of actual music making into the world of clerics and intellectuals.⁷⁰

Ambrogio’s ability to negotiate the traversal between a score and its *prova* shows, in fact, quite the opposite, that “finished work” and “actual music making” had been brought into interactive proximity in a socially fluid environment, thus bearing out D’Accone’s observation of many years ago that “polyphony in Florence lost its restrictive associations and eventually came to form a part of even the ordinary citizen’s cultural interests.”⁷¹

Ambrogio’s ability to read and assess polyphonic scores was in part a product of his remarkable access to them, above all new music by Isaac, and most of it destined for Nantes. Throughout the two-year period under consideration, Ambrogio appears to have been in a continuous state of collecting, copying, and mailing *cose nuove* to Antonio:

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April 1488: I had hoped with this [letter] to send you some songs by Arigo newly composed, but I did not have enough time because I thought I could have them sooner [i.e. he did not get them in time]. (Doc. 3c: 1–2)

Summer 1488: Most beloved brother, several days ago I wrote to you about a few things, and I thought I could send you along with a new letter some songs, novel and delightful things, that I purchased and copied into a small notebook. I am not sending them for two reasons: first, I did not complete what I had planned to do, and also because I did not trust the courier to complete this job in time. (Doc. 5: 1–5)

December 1488: Of the things I planned [to send you] some I don’t like, while some new ones were created by our Arigo, who willingly composes new things because the boss [Lorenzo de’ Medici] enjoys them. (Doc. 8: 11–13)

April 1489: And in that packet [there was] a little notebook of some *canzone* newly composed here [in Florence] by Arigo. And everything was sent to Giovanbattista Machiavelli in Lyons; he hasn’t responded to say that he received it. (Doc. 9a)

⁷⁰ Wegman, “From Maker to Composer,” 429–30.

⁷¹ D’Accone, “The Singers of San Giovanni,” 350.

July 1489: In that packet was sent a little notebook with more of Arigo's novelties, highly regarded here [in Florence]. (Doc. 10)

We can only imagine which of Isaac's works were disseminated in this manner, and how many other times his music left Florence in diplomatic pouches and mercantile *schattole* in the form of modest little notebooks, never to resurface. On at least one more occasion, in 1491, Isaac's music would be posted out of Florence and into oblivion, but this time it was a "large volume" sent by Lorenzo himself at the request of the Venetian ambassador and music connoisseur Girolamo Donato, reportedly containing a "selection of everything" intended to demonstrate the full range of Isaac's art.⁷² Ambrogio's little *quaderni* may have lacked the size and scope of the 1491 anthology, but they shared a tantalizing quality: the music was all *nuove* and *nuovamente composte*. If we match the contents of music anthologies being commissioned and copied in Florence around this time with what we know of Ambrogio's and Antonio's shared taste for the latest vocal music, we can speculate that Ambrogio was mailing Isaac's latest settings of both French and Italian texts. The former would have found a sympathetic reception in Nantes, while the latter accords best with the *brigata's* preoccupations, and must have included carnival songs. If what Grazzini described in 1559 applied also to Florentine carnival of Ambrogio's day, carnival songs passed into the public domain within and beyond Florence soon after their performance:

[The singers of carnival songs] are seen and heard by everyone . . . and when the celebration, which all the populace has enjoyed, is over, the words are read by everyone and at night they are sung everywhere, and both [the words and the music] are sent not only all about Florence and to all the cities of Italy, but also to Germany, Spain, and France to relatives and friends.⁷³

In passing we also hear in the December 1488 letter that Isaac "willingly composes new things" for the pleasure of Lorenzo ("the boss"), an impression that was to be confirmed later, in 1502, when Isaac was an unsuccessful candidate for the position of *maestro di cappella* in Ferrara, and he was described by Duke Ercole's talent scout, Gian di Artiganova, as a "good-natured and companionable" composer who "will compose

⁷² Blackburn, "Lorenzo de' Medici, a Lost Isaac Manuscript," 19–21.

⁷³ Grazzini, *Tutti i trionfi*, fol. aii^v; original document edited by Prizer, "Reading Carnival," 247, and trans. 188–89. If this were true, one would expect to find some trace of Florentine carnival songs in non-Italian sources. This seems not to be the case, but the means of transmission may have been as perishable as Antonio's notebooks.

new works more often.”⁷⁴ What is perhaps most interesting to learn is that at least some of the “new things” composed for Lorenzo were regarded not as his private possessions, but as “freeware” that was allowed to pass into the public domain, where they were “highly regarded.”⁷⁵ Isaac’s secular music, it appears, enjoyed a wider circulation and greater popularity in Florence than we might have imagined.

Fare a quattro’: Sweetness and Novelty in Florentine Polyphony

With the full range of Ambrogio’s musical correspondence now before us, we may return to two similar episodes related by Ambrogio that deserve further comment. In both cases a recently-composed three-part composition by the composer in Nantes was given a *prova* organized by Ambrogio, in both of which Isaac participated as a singer, following which Isaac praised the piece and then asked if he might add a bass part. On the first occasion, in April 1488, Isaac reportedly asked to add a fourth part in order “to make it sweeter and better” (*Arigo . . . voleva fare a quattro sarebe asai più dolce e buono*), then in September 1488 Isaac asked to add a bass part (*Arigo . . . voleva farli in chontroabasso*).

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Though these compositional activities *per se* involved Isaac and another northern composer, they were set in motion by a group of musically literate young Florentines who stood to gain the most from Isaac’s exercise. Isaac cannot have been proprietary about the results, for Ambrogio’s plan—to involve Antonio’s *maestro* in Nantes in composing a bass part for comparison with Isaac’s “in order to . . . see which one knows better how to compose,”—reveals that he will have immediate access to Isaac’s bass part and the freedom to circulate it among the *brigata*. Though Ambrogio’s scheme did not materialize, the many secular works from just this period with added or *si placet* parts (not to mention the other forms of arrangement and “reworking”) may have arisen in similar contexts, in which the comparisons were explicit and closely juxtaposed, and perhaps even intended to instruct younger composers in the art of successive composition.⁷⁶

The more public, interactive face of Isaac’s activity suggests that the instruction of less experienced musicians must have been guiding Isaac’s offers to fashion added parts. Florentine composers of the 1480s like Ser Zanobi already would have been schooled in three-part writing,

⁷⁴ Lewis Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara, 1400–1505* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 204.

⁷⁵ See n58.

⁷⁶ If these added parts were primarily pedagogical in function, either as teaching examples or student exercises, this may explain why so many of them are unattributed. The attribution of the added bassus part to Martini in Casanatense 2856, discussed below, is an exception.

which is to say they had been taught how to add a contratenor to a cantus-tenor framework that itself could have been either successively or simultaneously derived. This was still a current pedagogical method in Florence a generation later; in 1527, the young Guido Machiavelli, Niccolò's son, looked forward to resuming his instruction in "singing, playing and writing counterpoint à 3, as soon as Baccio has recovered from his illness."⁷⁷ Guido's teacher was the Florentine composer Bartolomeo degli Organi (1474–1539), whose surviving works suggest a connection with Isaac, from whom he had probably learned his craft.⁷⁸

As the Florentine sources of the period show, however, four-part settings of secular texts grew in popularity during the 1480s,⁷⁹ and the logical pedagogical route would be the one demonstrated by Isaac: the extension of a successive compositional technique by the addition of a part to a completed three-part texture of the kind one had already learned to manage. There is no identifiable work by Isaac in Florentine sources that shows precisely this procedure, but there is a piece with interesting Florentine connections that does. The three-part setting of *Cela sans plus* attributed to Colinet de Lannoy is transmitted in eight sources, all Italian, five of these Florentine. A four-voice setting is preserved intact in two other sources, Petrucci's *Canti B* (Venice, 1502), and the Ferrarese manuscript *Casanatense 2856*, where the *si placet* bass part is ascribed to "Jo. martini" (see Ex. 1).⁸⁰ The ascription is credible since Johannes Martini was in the employment of the Ferrara

⁷⁷ D'Accone, "Alessandro Coppini and Bartolomeo degli Organi: Two Florentine Composers of the Renaissance," *Analecta Musicologica* 4 (1967): 53. On this method of three-part composition, see Brown, "Emulation, Competition, and Homage," 1–8, where the point of departure for this important essay is a student attempt at composing in three parts; and Blackburn, "On Compositional Process in the Fifteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40 (1987): 210–84, esp. 259, 276.

⁷⁸ D'Accone, "Alessandro Coppini," 45–46.

⁷⁹ The addition of a bass part to a preexistent three-part texture was in fact one of many kinds of compositional reworking being practiced in Florence at this time; see the perceptive study of Cynthia Cyrus, "Polyphonic Borrowings and the Florentine Chanson Reworking, 1475–1515" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990), in which she notes that "the Florentine tradition of chanson reworkings is at least partially distinct from the larger pan-European phenomenon" (p. 3), and "Florentine interest in reworkings . . . surpasses that of other centers of chanson production" (37). Stephen Self proposes that the *Si placet* repertoire "first flourished in Naples and Florence"; *The 'Si Placet' Repertoire of 1480–1530* (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1996), xi. In a chapter of a forthcoming study on the interaction of written and unwritten traditions in the music of 15th-century Florence, I will argue more from the perspective of the city's manuscript sources and cultural traditions that Florence was not only distinct in its chanson consumption and production, but was a formative center for hybrid compositional experiments that laid the foundation for later developments in secular polyphonic composition.

⁸⁰ See Helen Hewitt, ed., *Ottaviano Petrucci: Canti B, Numero Cinquanta; Venice, 1502*, *Monuments of Renaissance Music*, 2 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), no. 16, with text trans. and extensive commentary on 42–44.

EXAMPLE 1. Colinet de Lannoy, "Cela sans plus" (with *si placet* bass part attributed to Johannes Martini)

Cela sans plus

Contra
Ce - la sans

Tenor
Ce - la sans plus

Si placet
Johannes Martini

Detailed description: This system contains the first four staves of the musical score. The top staff is the vocal line for the Contralto, with lyrics 'Ce - la sans'. The second staff is the vocal line for the Tenor, with lyrics 'Ce - la sans plus'. The third staff is a vocal line with no lyrics. The fourth staff is the bass line, attributed to Johannes Martini, with no lyrics. The music is in a common time signature and features various rhythmic values and accidentals.

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5
plus et puis ho -

Detailed description: This system contains the next four staves of the musical score, starting at measure 5. The vocal lines continue with lyrics 'plus et puis ho -'. The bass line continues with its accompaniment. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

10
la. Gen -

Detailed description: This system contains the final four staves of the musical score, starting at measure 10. The vocal lines continue with lyrics 'la. Gen -'. The bass line continues with its accompaniment. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

EXAMPLE 1. (continued)

15

te ber - gie - re bel - le de bon re -

20

nom, Je -

131

25

tés mon cœur hors de vos - tre pri -

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EXAMPLE 1. (continued)

30

son, vos - tre pri - son,

34

132

Ce -

39

la sans plus et puis

EXAMPLE 1. (continued)

44

— ho - la, ho - la!

court when the manuscript was most likely assembled around 1480, and he and de Lannoy had been colleagues in Milan prior to 1477. De Lannoy's three-part song is not a particularly distinguished work: the canonic duet between the cantus and tenor, probably based on a borrowed tune, is rhythmically static and melodically dull and repetitive, faults not redeemed by the angular and meandering contratenor part.⁸¹ The frequent and sometimes disproportionately long rests effectively reduce much of the piece to a pair of sounding voices, exacerbating the overall impression of textural thinness and slow pacing. It shows, in other words, the “unisons, pauses, and ascending and descending leaps” that the theorist Pietro Aaron warned were the pitfalls of successive composition in the hands of inexperienced composers. It was for these reasons, Aaron goes on to say, that “those works had little sweetness and harmony” (*poca soavità et harmonia*).⁸² The only explanation for the work's popularity is that such pale counterpoint was ripe for reworking, and Martini may well have seen in de Lannoy's piece a set of problems and potential solutions similar to those discerned by Isaac in the pieces of the Nantes composer.

Martini's solutions are instructive; the new bass part resembles the contra in its rhythmic activity and the absence of thematic material, and

⁸¹ The work was famously described by Otto Gombosi as “decidedly the weakest piece I have ever seen . . . a shabby, anaemic composition of minimal originality;” *Jacob Obrecht: eine stilkritische Studie* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1923), 76–77.

⁸² Both passages cited and translated in Blackburn, “On Compositional Process,” 215.

so gives balance to a work now consisting of contrasting pairs of voices. However, the bass part adds little to the overall rhythmic activity; more often than not it is simply matching the movement of the upper voices. Its real contribution is to immeasurably enhance the work's overall *soavità et harmonia*. Many two-note sonorities become full triads (mm. 7¹, 9¹, 12¹, etc.), often in root position (mm. 20¹, 26¹, 43¹, 45³, etc.), and even the faster-moving passages seem designed more to enhance vertical sonority than to layer in more contrapuntal activity (mm. 26–27, 32–34). Martini's bass line also expands the dissonance level of the original; not only does the bass introduce suspensions (mm. 2, 15), but more often intensifies them (mm. 31, 37). In measure 35 a two-voiced 7–6 suspension resolving to the tonic G is transformed into a three-voiced 4–3 suspension that resolves “deceptively” when the bass moves to E \flat , which relieves the tonal monotony created by cantus/tenor melodies that too often begin and end on the tonic. De Lannoy's original has been transformed by Martini's bass line; the euphonious whole is greater than the sum of its contrapuntal parts or, as Issac might have said, it is *più dolce e buono*.⁸³

There is, however, a problem with the four-part version of this piece as it appears in its Ferrara source. Casanatense 2856 transmits a variant version of the contra part in measures 42–45 that simply does not work with Martini's bass line.⁸⁴ The bass part, in other words, was first composed to fit the version of the model represented in the eight sources of the three-part original, and model and bass part alike must predate the Ferrarese collection, which may date from the early 1480s.⁸⁵ From where, then, did Petrucci derive his exemplar of the

⁸³ A letter of 1494 from Giovanni Alvise Trombon, a member of the Venetian *alta cappella*, to Francesco Gonzaga describes four- and five-part motets outfitted with additional *contra basso* parts, the results of which “sound well” (*fa un bon audire*), and were all the rage in Venice (*tutta Venetia non vol audir altro*); ed. Stefano Davari, “La musica in Mantova,” *Rivista storica mantovana* 1 (1885): 53. Davari (p. 54) published another of Alovisi's letters to Francesco, dated 1505, which also describes the practice of added voices. For discussion and more reliable editions of both letters, see William F. Prizer, “La Cappella di Francesco II Gonzaga e la musica sacra a Mantova nel primo ventennio del Cinquecento,” in *Mantova e i Gonzaga nella civiltà del Rinascimento* (Mantova: Mondadori, 1977), 274, and *idem.*, “Bernardino Piffaro e i pifferi e tromboni di Mantova: strumenti a fiato in una corte italiana,” *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia* 16 (1981): 182–83. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Prizer for drawing my attention to these documents.

⁸⁴ The variant contra part is published in a footnote to Hewitt's edition; most revealing are the parallel sevenths between contra and bass at mm. 43–44; *Ottaviano Petrucci: Canti B*, 139.

⁸⁵ For Joshua Rifkin's more recent argument in favor of dating Casanatense 2856 to the early 1490s rather than the early 1480s, see his “Munich, Milan, and a Marian Motet: Dating Josquin's *Ave Maria . . . virgo serena*,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56 (2003): 313–23.

more correct four-part version he published in 1502.² All signs point to Florence. De Lannoy's original was well-known here since at least the late 1470s, when it was entered as the first piece in BNCF, Magl. XIX.176, the oldest source of de Lannoy's chanson, and (if the early date of the Ferrara manuscript is correct) the only one to predate Casanatense 2856.⁸⁶ It was subsequently copied into all four Florentine sources compiled during Isaac's time in Florence, and as argued above, the popularity of de Lannoy's chanson must have been based on its susceptibility to chanson reworking, a practice particularly cultivated in Florence. In fact, the model was the subject of several reworkings that either originated or were known in Florence. One of these is the later five-part arrangement of de Lannoy's cantus firmus by "gardinale di medici" (Giovanni de' Medici, the future Pope Leo X) preserved in Florence, BNCF Magl. XIX.107bis.⁸⁷ More revealing for our purposes, however, is the four-part *Cela sans plus ne souffi pas* by Johannes Japart, preserved in its only pre-1500 source, the large Florentine chansonnier BNCF Banco Rari 229. This piece is modeled on the design of Martini's arrangement.⁸⁸ Japart and Martini were colleagues in the Ferrara ducal chapel during 1477–81, and the opportunities for travel of music and musicians between Ferrara and Florence are borne out by the strong representation of both composers' music in Florentine sources.⁸⁹ Both de Lannoy's chansons and Martini's arrangement thus very likely were known in Florence before Isaac's arrival, and may reflect something of

⁸⁶ The edition of the upper three parts in Ex. 1 is based on this manuscript, which is generally dated to the late 1470s; Allan Atlas, *The Cappella Giulia Chansonnier: (Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, C.G. XIII.27)*, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1975), I: 246–47; Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs*, 17. The other Florentine sources for de Lannoy's chanson are Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, MS Q17; Florence, BNCF, Magl. XIX.178; BNCF, Banco rari 229; and Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cappella Giulia XIII.27, all datable to ca. 1492–95.

⁸⁷ See the list of "related compositions" in Hewitt, ed., *Ottaviano Petrucci: Canti B*, 43.

⁸⁸ Ed. in Howard Mayer Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier from the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent: Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale MS Banco Rari 229*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), II: no. 108. *Cela sans plus* served as a *cantasi come* source for Belcari's lauda *Andiamo a Jesù Cristo*, which would mean that de Lannoy's music had been absorbed into the city's oral traditions, and was subject to yet another kind of reworking; Cattin, "Contrafacta internazionale: musiche Europee per laude italiane," in *Musik und Text in der Mehrstimmigkeit des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ursula Günther and Ludwig Finscher (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1984), 417; Alessandro D'Ancona, *La poesia popolare italiana* (Livorno: F. Vigo, 1906; repr. Bologna: Forni, 1974), 478.

⁸⁹ Lewis Lockwood, "Music at Florence and Ferrara in the Late Fifteenth Century: Rivalry and Interdependence," in *La musica a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Piero Gargiulo (Florence: Olschki, 1993), 1–13. Martini's brother Piero was a singer at San Giovanni from October 1486 to March 1487, which might have provided the occasion for Johannes to visit Florence while en route from Ferrara to Rome in February 1487; D'Accone, "Singers of San Giovanni," 339–49.

the pedagogical tradition and compositional culture within which Isaac was working.⁹⁰

The retrofitting practiced by Isaac and exemplified by Martini was not the only approach to four-part composition available to composers in the late 15th century. Pietro Aaron's critique of the limitations of successive composition was first articulated in his *Libri tres de institutione harmonica* of 1516. He describes the procedure adopted by "modern composers" whereby "they take all the parts into consideration at once,"⁹¹ then we are told that his models of this new art are "Josquin, Obrecht, Isaac, and Agricola, with whom I had the greatest friendship and familiarity in Florence." Aaron was born and raised in Florence, and though we know nothing of his early life and training, he must have been born sometime during the 1470s in order to have had formative musical relations during the Florentine years of Isaac (ca. 1485–95) and Agricola (1491–92).⁹² Since Aaron was a priest by 1516, he probably spent his youth in a Florentine ecclesiastical institution the records of which have not yet come to light, but as a young singer with a keen and practical interest in composition he could hardly have avoided contact (nor did he, according to his own testimony) with the same musical circles around Isaac that Ambrogio found to be so accessible. Young Florentines of the 1480s with an interest in composition, like Aaron, Coppini, Baccio degli Organi, and Ser Zanobi, were witness to profound changes in the city's musical life, among them the shift in technique described later by Aaron. The new method of simultaneous conception and careful coordination of all parts of a composition, or "harmonic composition," was practiced by Isaac and his contemporaries, Aaron tells us,

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⁹⁰ That the source of the exemplar used by Petrucci in Canti B may have been Florentine is supported by the clef assignments of the various scribes. The Canti B version, as well as four out of five Florentine versions, show no flats in the upper three parts, while the Ferrara version uniquely transmits a flat in all parts; see the table in Hewitt, *Ottaviano Petrucci: Canti B*, 43.

⁹¹ As Bonnie Blackburn has proposed, this very passage was mistakenly eliminated from the 1516 Latin translation of this discussion, and subsequently restored in the Italian version published in his *Toscanello de la musica* (Bologna, 1523). For the relevant passages and bibliographic information, see "On Compositional Process," 212–19.

⁹² Isaac left Florence sometime during 1495–96, by which time he had found employment with Emperor Maximilian I; D'Accone, "Heinrich Isaac in Florence," 470. Agricola was in Florence during 1491–92 when he was hired to sing at both the Cathedral and (late in 1492) at Santissima Annunziata; his relations with Florence and the Medici continued through 1494 when the Medici were exiled and the Florentine chapels disbanded; Wegman, "Agricola, Alessandro," in *NG II*. Besides Aaron's statement, there is no documentary evidence that Josquin or Obrecht ever visited Florence. If they did, the visits were more likely to have taken place during or around their Ferrara years (Josquin, 1503–4; Obrecht 1504–5), and Aaron's statement should not be taken to mean that he knew the four men at more or less the same time in Florence.

and was “apparent from their compositions in four, five, six, and more voices,” though his discussion focuses on four-voice composition. Aaron also tells us that works composed in this manner sounded quite different from those made in the purely successive manner of the “older composers,” for they were “more harmonious” (*concinniozem*), and so would have struck musically educated Florentines of the 1480s as novel. We now know of at least one piece composed in the new style by one of Aaron’s “modern” composers that surprised Florentines in the 1480s.

In order to see and hear Isaac’s *Alla battaglia* as it might have been perceived by musically educated young Florentines in 1488, we must first divest ourselves of several biases that have tended to marginalize the piece in modern criticism. Both the work’s later history as a purely instrumental work and its estimation as a “mildly pictorial battle-piece,”⁹³ a sort of pale predecessor to Janequin’s *La guerre* (but with an even more occasional text), have prevented most students of Renaissance vocal music from taking the work seriously. But of course neither of these perspectives is relevant to its 1488 context. Even the news that *Alla battaglia* failed in the specific context of carnival should not obscure the stylistic novelty and importance of the work. Indeed, its novelty is underscored by its mixed reception, as well as the buzz of anticipation preceding its performance. Prior to seeing the written music, Ambrogio reported what others were saying, that the work was *non molto facile* and that it demonstrated Isaac’s *gran fantasia*. After Ambrogio had obtained the music (and perhaps heard a *prova*), he reported his own enthusiastic opinions that he was confident others would share: it was *maravigliosa e signorile e degna e idónia e chongiugha*, as well as pleasing, long and, he finally added, novel. The score itself tells us that the work is expansive, through-composed and apparently free of borrowed material, and thus by the standards of contemporary Florentine secular polyphony it was an ambitious work of extravagant *fantasia*.⁹⁴ Moreover, it could only have been composed in the new, “harmonic” manner, for it exhibits both the imitative and homophonic styles that Lowinsky delineated as the hallmarks of “the simultaneous conception of the polyphonic complex.”⁹⁵ It also reveals what Aaron describes as an essential quality of the new style: “each part has a comfortable, easy

⁹³ Strohm, “Isaac, Henricus,” in *NG II*.

⁹⁴ By “through-composed” I mean that the extant music contains no repetition of musical material. In a complete performance of all three strophes Isaac’s music would be heard three times.

⁹⁵ Edward Lowinsky, “On the Use of Scores by Sixteenth-Century Musicians,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 1 (1948): 17–23; discussed in Blackburn, “On Compositional Process,” 210–11.

and agreeable place.”⁹⁶ However the most distinctive, perhaps even revolutionary, feature of *Alla battaglia* was that which the new compositional method made possible—its variety.

The best witness concerning the importance of this quality in late 15th-century composition is Johannes Tinctoris, an important source for Aaron regarding harmonic composition.⁹⁷ Having already criticized English composers in his *Proportionale musices* (ca. 1472–75) for “always [using] one and the same manner of composing, which is a sign of the poorest invention,” Tinctoris concluded his *Liber de arte contrapuncti* (1477) with a discussion of the variety that “must be accurately sought in all counterpoint”:

A composer or improviser of the greatest talent may achieve this diversity if he composes or sings now by one meter, then by another, now by one perfection, then by another, now by one proportion, then by another, now by one [melodic] interval, then by another, now with off-beat rhythms, then without them, now with imitations, then without them, now with rests, then without them, now in diminution, then unchanged (III.viii.4).⁹⁸

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Though Tinctoris might have been surprised to see this rule of counterpoint in the service of such a text, it is hard to think of another secular piece of its time that so vigorously and boldly pursues Tinctoris’s vision of *varietas*.⁹⁹ And given the humanist environments in which Tinctoris and Isaac worked, both would have understood such *varietas* to be a component of classical oratory; that Isaac did is evident in the fresh and responsive counterpoint devised for each new phrase of text, the clearly defined tonal cadences of varying tonality and closure, and the careful

⁹⁶ Ibid., 215. In contrast to this is the contratenor of de Lannoy’s chanson, which constantly overlaps the tenor part and exhibits the “leaps that were difficult for the singer,” which Aaron listed among the faults of the older compositional method; Blackburn, “Compositional Process,” 215.

⁹⁷ Tinctoris defined written composition (*res facta*) as “composition in 3, 4, or more parts” in which “all the parts . . . should be mutually bound to each other, so that the order and law of concords of any part should be observed with respect to each single and all parts” (*Liber de arte contrapuncti* II.xx.2); trans. and discussed in Blackburn, “On Compositional Process,” 249.

⁹⁸ Translated in Wegman, “Sense and Sensibility in Late Medieval Music: Thoughts on Aesthetics and ‘Authenticity,’” *Early Music* 23 (1995): 307.

⁹⁹ For Tinctoris, the best examples of musical *varietas* were the works of Franco-Flemish composers, who “write new music each day in the newest fashion” (*Proportionale musices*, Prologus 12). So it might be said that in Ambrogio’s Florence, northern music tended to exhibit musical invention and variety, but lacked rhetorical force, whereas native styles like the carnival song and lauda exhibited rhetorical force but lacked musical *varietas*.

shaping of rhythm and melody in the individual lines to suit the declamation of the text.¹⁰⁰

The text is a strong determinant of the composition's most salient features (see Table 1). The 27-line strophe (lines 3–29) can be subdivided into four sections that alternate between four-line units of hendecasyllabic lines with an *abab* rhyme scheme (lines 3–6 and 13–16), and longer sections of more unpredictable line length, number, and rhyme (lines 7–12 and 17–29). At least in the first strophe, the tidy four-line units are reserved for the more leisurely and orderly assembly of the Florentine commanders, to which Isaac devotes more expansive musical settings (51 measures of music for lines 3–6 vs. 38 measures for lines 7–12; 39 measures for lines 13–16 vs. 64 for lines 17–29). The longer, more unpredictable poetic sections portray the more irregular formations of infantry and cavalry as they shout, don armor and weapons, and advance into the chaos of battle. Isaac's musical treatment of these sections reflects the quickened pace of the shorter lines and scurrying troop activity; he compresses and overlaps his setting of the poetic lines (esp. 17–24), and shortens the interval between imitative entries. Particularly in the final section (lines 17–29), Isaac intensifies the rhythm through diminution and by piling up ever shorter and more insistent ostinati aided by bass drumming figures.

In Isaac's setting of lines 13–16, musical portraits of 11 of the Florentine military commanders are inscribed into the sure-handed polyphony of Isaac's musical monument to victory (see Ex. 2). The opening high-voice duet is answered by the lower voices two measures later (Messer Ercole), and all four join forces leading to the homophonic cadence in measure 121 (Criaco e Cerbone). A short ostinato figure in the alto bridges this phrase to the next, which is built on a canonic duet between soprano and tenor that first descends (Conte Rinuccio) then rises (Signor Honorato), supported by the free counterpoint of the other two voices. In measures 130–39, the three figures of line 15 are accorded three separate musical portraits: strict homophony for Sir Piombino, overlapping ostinati for Annibale, and a cadential flourish for Guidone. The three *condottieri* of the next line (16) also receive their own musical portraits, but rather than discrete blocks of sound they are assigned distinctive themes that are treated to flexible contrapuntal

¹⁰⁰ On Isaac's compositional approach, see Owens, *Composers at Work*, chap. 10, where his sectional approach is discussed with respect to a motet based on a liturgical *cantus firmus*.

Lorenzo himself alluded to the variety to be found in Isaac's compositions in the letter accompanying the volume he sent to Girolamo Donati in 1491: "Arrigo Isaac . . . has made them in different ways, both grave and sweet, and also capricious and artful"; Blackburn, "Lorenzo de' Medici," 19.

TABLE I
Alla battaglia analysis

<i>Line</i>	<i>Syllable</i>	<i>Rhyme</i>	<i>Measures</i>	<i>Meter</i>	<i>Tonality/Cadence</i>	<i>Texture</i>
Refrain						
1	11	x	1-12	D	C-F (elided)	B,A,T,S imitative + A ostinato
2	11	x	13-30	D	C-F (fermata)	S,T imitative + A,B ostinato
Strophe						
3	11	a	31-48	D	G-C (elided)	S,T canonic + A,B free imitation
4	11	b	49-56	D	C-F (rests)	S,T canonic + A,B free CP
5	11	a	57-63	T	G-C (elided)	S,T canonic + A,B overlapping ostinati
6	11	b	64-82	D	G-C (fermata)	A,B duet; S,A,B canonic + A free CP
7	7	c	83-86	T	(C)-F (rests)	S,A duet
8	7	c	87-90	T	C-F (elided/extended)	a 4 homophonic
9	8	d	91-96	D	G-D (elided)	S,T imitative (+ B free CP)
10	7	c	97-102	D	C-F (rests)	S,T imitative + A,B ostinati
11/12	9/7	d/d	103-110	T	G-C (rests)	A,B duet; B,S,T imitative; a4 homophonic
13	11	e	111-121	D	C-F (elided)	S,A duet = T,B duet; a4 homophonic
14	11	f	122-129	D	G-C (rests)	S,T canonic + A,B free CP
15	11	e	130-139	D	G-C (rests)	a 4 homophonic; a 4 overlapping ostinati
16	11	f	140-148	D	C-F (fermata)	a 4 overlapping ostinati
17/18	7/7	f/f	149-160	D	G-C (elided)	S,T imitative ostinati + A,B ostinati
19-21	5/5/5	g/h/g	161-169	D	C-F (elided/extended)	a4 overlapping ostinati, rhythm intensifies
22-24	7/7/7	h/i/i	170-176	D	C-F (elided)	A,B free CP; S,T,B loosely imitative

TABLE 1 (continued)

<i>Line</i>	<i>Syllable</i>	<i>Rhyme</i>	<i>Measures</i>	<i>Meter</i>	<i>Tonality/Cadence</i>	<i>Texture</i>
25	7	i	177-189	D	C-F (elided)	A,B canonic duet; S,T vs. A,B imitative ostinati
26	11	j	189-193	D	C-F (rests)	S,A,T short, rapid ostinati + bass drumming
27	11	j	194-202	T	G-C (rests)	a 4 homophonic
28	7	j	203-208	D	D-G (elided)	A,S,T close imitation + B drumming
29	11	x	209-213	D	C-F (fermata)	= 203-8 in diminution + A,B drumming
<i>ALLA BATTAGLIA, REFRAIN AND 1ST STROPHE</i>						
1						To the battle, quickly to the battle,
2						Everyone must arm himself with armor and chain mail.
3						To help the excellent captain [Niccolò Orsini]
4						everyone must quickly be armed and go forth;
5						forward valiant men, one by one,
6						Signor Julio, Organino, and Paolo Orsino.
7						Sarzanell si spaza.
8						Armor for legs, kidneys, and body,
9						weapons, helmet, and flank armor,
10						forward lances, rapiers, and maces,
11						tighten this cinture.
12						Here is the bay and dark-colored horse.
13						Forward Sirs Ercole, Criaco and Cerbone,
14						Count Rinuccio and signor Honorato,
15						Sir from Piombino, Annibale and Guidone,

TABLE 1 (*continued*)

16	Giovan Savel, Malespina e Currado.	Giovanni Savelli, Malespina and Currado.
17	Ognun sia presto armato	Everyone quickly take arms
18	et a caval montato.	and mount your horses.
19	Su spade, sproni,	Forward swords and spurs,
20	le barde al leardo;	halberds, to the gray horse.
21	vie su poltroni.	Hurry up, lazy people.
22	Chi sia il più gagliardo?	Who will be the bravest?
23	Seguitiam lo stendardo.	We shall follow the banner.
24	Vie su, franchi Sforzeschi,	Hurry, bold people of the Sforza,
25	Bolognesi et Galleschi,	Bolognese, and French,
26	a lor a lor che son priogioni et rotti.	until they are prisoners and broken,
27	su, buon valenti e franchi stradiotti;	forward valiant and bold men,
28	su buon soldati et dotti,	forward good and well-trained soldiers.
29	leviam di qui quella brutta canaglia.	Let us clear away that ugly mob.

EXAMPLE 2. Heinrich Isaac, "Alla battaglia," mm. 111-148

111

Alla battaglia

Su, mes-ser Her-co-le Cri-a-coe Cer-

Su, mes-ser Her-co-le _____ Cri-

Su, mes-ser Her-co-le Cri-a-co

Su, mes-ser Her-co-le Cri-

118

- bo-ne, Con-te Ri-

- a-coe Cer-bo

_____ e Cer-bo-ne _____ Con-

a-co e Cer-bo-ne _____

143

124

nuc-cio,e'l sig-nor Ho-no-ra

- ne Con-te Ri-nuc-cio,e'l si-gnor Ho-no-ra-

te Ri-nuc-cio,e'l si-gnor Ho-no-ra-

Con-te Ri-nuc-cio,e'l si-gnor Ho-no-ra-to, Ho-no-ra-

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EXAMPLE 2. (continued)

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to, Sir di Piom - bi - no, An - ni - bal', An - ni - bal', An - ni -

to, Sir di Piom - bi - no, An - ni - bal', An - ni - bal', An - ni -

to, Sir di Piom - bi - no, An - ni - ba - le, An - ni -

to, Sir di Piom - bi - no, An - ni - ba - le, An - ni -

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ba - le e Gui - do - ne, Gio - van Sa - vel,

ba - le e Gui - do - ne, Gio - van Sa - vel,

ba - le e Gui - do - ne, Gio -

ba - le e Gui - do - ne, Gio - van Sa - vel

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Ma - le - spi - na e Cur - ra - do.

Ma - le - spi - na, e Cur - ra - do.

van Sa - vel, Ma - le - spi - na e Cur - ra - do.

Ma - le - spi - na Mal - le - spi - na e Cur - ra - do.

jostling over an ostinato in the bass. The first two themes are ingeniously conflated in the soprano beginning at measure 144, where the melodic highpoint of the entire section is reached, and then quit by a rare melismatic flourish. Throughout this example Isaac also can be seen striving for the accessibility of native Florentine polyphony. The melodic writing is conjunct and rhythmically straightforward, but never repetitive, and the mostly syllabic text-setting is, for a northerner faced with a long and strange Italian text, surprisingly natural.

Part of the novelty of *Alla battaglia* in performance would have been the rhetorically subtle yet forceful presentation of the text, though this was apparently lost on its original audience, and in subsequent transmission outside of Florence as a textless piece and a contrafact.¹⁰¹ Surely the *gran fantasia* Isaac was said to be revealing in this work is a reference to the formidable musical invention manifest in its *varietas*, and its careful conjoining of both vertical “harmonic” sonorities (Aaron’s *concinniorem*) as well as the unfolding, yet clearly-defined, semantic units accords perfectly with Ambrogio’s most precise adjective, *congiuga* (well put-together).¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ The primary, and only Italian, source of the four-voice music of *Alla battaglia* is the (north?) Italian source, BNCF, Panciatichi 27, where it is found on fols. 9v–12r without text. On the subsequent source tradition, see above, n17. Its transmission with the text *O praeclarissima* in Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 1494, a collection copied by Magister Nikolaus Apel during ca. 1490–1504, indicates how quickly the piece traveled north to begin its successful afterlife as a vocal and instrumental composition stripped of its topical Florentine text. What we now know to be the original, vocal conception of the work only recently has been recovered; see McGee, “*Alla Battaglia*: Music and Ceremony,” 287–89. The assumption that the textless transmission of vocal works indicates instrumental performance needs to be tempered by consideration of the immediate context of the source in question. Panciatichi 27 was probably intended for use in a clerical environment where the interest was in collecting all kinds of music and outfitting it with sacred texts (both Latin and Italian). This collection contains several pieces of Florentine provenance (among them *Alla battaglia*) that are either subjected to or intended for refitting with a sacred text, and in this regard it is related to the Florentine chansonniers of Ambrogio’s day that contain many untexted Franco-Flemish works. The Florentine *cantasi come* practice is directly related to the city’s chansonniers, and this context suggests that one of the intentions of the compilers of these anthologies was the retrofitting of untexted chansons with Italian lauda texts.

¹⁰² See Wegman, “‘And Josquin Laughed . . .,’” 345, where *fantasia* is described in the context of 15th-c. Italy as a faculty that enabled poets and artists to “create new images and ideas from forms stored in the memory” that were capable of astonishing audiences through their novelty and originality. This was certainly the case when in 1454 a young Florentine improvisatory singer was described as having a *buon ingegno e fantasia*, which in this case meant he was adept at the creative manipulation and re-assemblage of conventional poetic and musical materials stored as commonplaces in a trained memory; the relationship between vernacular poetry, improvisatory singing, and memory technique is explored in my “Cicero Domesticated: the *Arte della Memoria* and the Improvisatory Singers of Renaissance Florence,” paper delivered at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society, Columbus, Ohio, 2 Nov. 2002. From this perspective, it is possible to understand both *congiuga* and *fantasia* to mean that Isaac’s piece was the

The compositional ambition and novelty of *Alla battaglia* combined with what we now know of the specific context in which it was created invite us to reevaluate its function and significance. To summarize, *Alla battaglia* was commissioned by an influential patron, either the Medici or a close Medici partisan, for carnival of 1488. Its text and music were almost certainly intended to be components of a *trionfo*, the combined aural and visual effects of which were designed to celebrate a Florentine military victory, identify that victory with Medici rule, and cast that victory in the classical mold of a Roman military *trionfo*. Such intentions accord with the nature of Lorenzo's renewed interest in Florentine public festival at just this time, specifically in classically inspired programs (like Roman *trionfi*) capable of conveying Medici dynastic ambition. Such carnival venues were among the sites through which Lorenzo sought to elevate and refine Florentine vernacular traditions as appropriate expressive vehicles for these programs, and the joining of Isaac's novel and complex music with a traditional Florentine battle text may be viewed as a manifestation of just such intentions. At once traditional and modern, *Alla battaglia* looked both back to Florentine vernacular traditions of representing battles, like Anghiari and San Romano, as Medici victories waged in defense of Florentine liberty, and forward to the security and glory that continued Medici rule would maintain. Though its musical rhetoric overreached its performance venue, Isaac's ambitious musical setting remains as a testimony to the serious political and cultural intentions of its Medicean patron.

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If we had more Italian-texted works of this scope and ambition from Isaac, one would be tempted to speak more confidently of a stylistic link to the early Florentine madrigal. The failure of *Alla battaglia* in the public venue of carnival may have discouraged both Isaac and his Medici patrons from returning to this conjunction of music, rhetoric, and Italian vernacular poetry, and within a few years Lorenzo's death would shut down the cultural workshop within which Isaac had been working. Though Ambrogio continued to write to Antonio after 1492 (by which time he was in Toulouse), there is no mention of their *brigata* or its musical projects, and correspondence between them appears to have ceased around the time of the Medici exile in 1494.

product of the creative process of the *ars memoria*: the conventional elements of a carnival song are present in the dactylic rhythms of the opening phrases, the metric shifts between duple and triple, the vertically-aligned textures that aid a clear declamation of the Italian text, and cadential gestures, including hemiola, mild melismatic flourishes, and clear harmonic movement, that signal the ends of poetic phrases. However, it is against this backdrop of convention that the novel and surprising qualities of the piece ("new images and ideas") are thrown into relief: imitation, contrapuntal independence of the parts, harmonic and rhythmic subtlety, and textural variety.

* * *

At the height of their musical correspondence in 1488, Antonio da Filicaia was 23, and Ambrogio Angeni was 29. While Antonio's wealthy mercantile family lived in the central San Giovanni quarter, Ambrogio's circumstances were much humbler; he was from a family of stonemasons who resided in a working class district of the city, and who by the late 15th century were upwardly mobile in a modest way.¹⁰³ Though it is not yet clear what Ambrogio's profession was, his assets were modest, so his passion for buying and copying music must have been great, or at least was underwritten in part by Antonio. However, the strongest evidence of the character and interests of these otherwise unknown Florentines remains Ambrogio's candid letters. These reveal a friendship forged from among other things a shared passion for new music, fueled in part by Antonio's wealth and family connections to the Medici, and in part by the pluck of a modestly educated young man who must have had a Pythagoras among his stonemason ancestors. If in the 1480s a middle-class Florentine could find the ways and means to educate himself about polyphonic music, find access to a supply of the newest and best music in Florence, and could make his way into the city's elite circles of composers and performers, we are left to wonder how many other Ambrogio-like figures there might have been, and to marvel at what a vital, fluid, and democratic musical culture thrived in the Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici and Heinrich Isaac.

The late Howard Mayer Brown observed that "Coppini, Bartolomeo, and the anonymous composers of the seven Florentine anthologies should take their rightful places in music history as the first native-born Italians to write international counterpoint since the early years of the fifteenth century."¹⁰⁴ If Ambrogio's letters are an indication of Isaac's level of involvement with local Florentine musical culture, then as composer and teacher he must have played a critical role at this important juncture in music history.

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¹⁰³ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Catasto, vol. 1003, fols. 346r-47r, for the year 1480, when the 21-year-old Ambrogio was living with his parents, grandmother, older brother, and two younger sisters. Ambrogio's brother Angelo became a notary for the *Signoria*, the heads of government. The family owned their residence, a house in the Bue district of the Santa Croce quarter, as well as a farm and land. They were assessed a tax in excess of two florins. Further information on the family is recorded in BNCF, Poligrafo Gargano 98, fols. 129r-65r.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, "The Diversity of Music," 186.

Appendix

Documents

Letters: Ambrogio Angeni to Antonio di Alessandro da Filicaia
Florence, Archivio di Stato, Corporazioni Religiose soppresse dal Governo
Francese, 78 (Badia Fiorentina), vol. 319

- Doc. 1a Fol. 282v: 29 December 1487
 E più in essa di avere fatto *una* chanzona e Zanobi e fatta *intonare*, e che stimavi fussi giunta, aspettola *chon* desiderio assai *perché* stimo sia piacevole. Farrone buon *servigio* qual vegio *essere* tua voluntà mostrandola a Simone Orlandini, e quanto suo piacere fussi darli la chopia e *esser per me serbarla*.
- Doc. 1b. Fol. 282v: 29 December 1487
 Intendo chome di avere *promesso* a' chantori di chostù che semdo di *qua* alchuna fantasia nuova e piacevole, farai di darne loro chopio, il che mi t'ofero *chon* tutta mia possa, che stimo atterai la fatta *promessa* *perché* semto esserci di nuova alchuna chopo-sizione d'Arigho, ove intendo v'à dimostro in essa avere *gran* fantaxia, la quale è ordinata *per questo* charnovale, benché non credo vadi tanto avanti *perché* ci è alchuno che *per* amicitia grande n'anno chopia, né posso credere si tengha *ochulta insino* al' [tempo] ordinato; e anche dichono *essere* choxa non molto facile, il che stimo non seguirà di mandarla se già Piero di Lorenzo non tornasse da Roma; che spero sì e che lui ne pigliaxi la'npresa, altrimenti no, *perché* è chosa ch'a bisongno di spesa.
- Doc. 2 Fol. 211r: 5 February 1487 [1488]
 Anchora di' istimi abia avuto la chanzona a Ser Zanobi il che non è nulla. E simile di mia puo *essere* adivenuto che ora (a dio non piaccia benchè tristo semgno vegia); pur ò speranza ritroveralo in nantes la chanzona tanto doveva seguire o chapitari qui che non esendo dubito sia malchapitato *perché* lo'ndugio pigl[i]a vizio . . .
- Doc. 3a Fol. 274r: April 1488
 Inessa ò avuto *una* chanzona a Ser Zanobi. Non so se'n questa darò aviso del seguito *perché* *questo* di Francesco Nori parte di *qua* né ò tempo a fare le debite sue ghagioni. Ma soprastando in *questa* arai del tutto aviso che *chon* amore tutto farò. Ebi anchora stabat mater, la quale chopierolla *immediante*, e *chon* tua lettera la darò Alisandro acìo che lui segua tua voluntà, e io la terrò *ochulta* quanto ai deto . . .

Doc. 3b. Fol. 274r: April 1488
 Le lamentazione ispero sarranno quale ai deto, perché che chon-
 pose la tua chanzona è molto atirato ale diluze, perché ò fatto
 provare a' chantori di qua cioè a Arigho e Bartolomeo e Ugho la
 quale lodorno molto. E più che Arigho in piacere mi richielse
 5 che la voleva fare aquatt[r]o sarebe asai più dolce e buono. Vorei
 parendo a tte che volendo il ma[e]stro la facessi fare anchora a lui
 e di questa me ne mandassi chopia per fare di loro chonparazione
 quale più sa (?.....inlo) chomporne.

Doc. 3c Fol. 274v: April 1488
 Io credeti chon queste mandarti alchune chanzone d'Arigho nuo-
 vamente chomposte. Il tempo non m'è suto abastanza perché is-
 peravo averle prima. Dissi mandarti una Bataglia pure d'Arigho,
 ma ora mi sono di questa pentita perché ongni chosa nuova piace.
 5 Ma dipoi non vegho molto andare a ghusto di chi intende il che
 mi sono tolto da impresa.

Doc 4 Fol. 266r: 21 July 1488
 Istimo a questa giunta arai avuto una mia dove di tutto t'avisai
 della mandata a Ser Zanobi. E chosì del motteto stabat mater ne
 fe' quanto per aviso desti Ser Bandone per me chopia, né anchora
 non è da nessuno suta veduta neanche a questi giorni stima chan-
 5 tarla. Di tutto avresti aviso perché stimo sieno ite salve per le mani
 di Francesco Nori e a lui disse la dèssi al Machiavello in Lione che
 tutto arà benisimo fatto.

Doc. 5 Fol. 263r: [July/August 1488?]
 Amatissimo fratello io è più giuomi ti scrissi d'alchune chose e
 pure basste credeti mandarti chon nuova lettera alchune chanzone
 le quali ò cho[m]prato e choppio in picholo quade[r]nucio chose
 nuove e molto piacevole non te le mando per dua chagione: prima
 5 per non aver apieno quello ò disemgnato, e anche non [e]sendo
 mo[l]to fidato il portatore a tempo fare il bisongno . . . Di nuovo
 abbiamo arichordarvi che io fabricho sopra anestatori qualche
 chazelleria perché la facci intonare chostì al tuo amicho. E ancho
 te priegho ali operi la fantasia per mio amore a farvi alchune pa-
 role, che sai chome vogliono essere che abino gharbo e piacevole
 all'uditori.

Doc. 6 Fol. 259r: 10 September 1488
 Di presenti arai tutto del tuo Ser Zanobi t'ò a ridire quello ò deto
 per buona usanza. Feci il bisogno e disse rispondemi il che non

m'ai fatto essi molto dato a l'anima chon salmi, orazione, e lalde e questo è quale egli istudia.

Doc. 7a Fol. 257r: 20 September 1488
 E in tutte alchun motto di Ser Zanobi e che facevi a suo chontemplatione fare una chanzona. A tutte diei risposta ischusandomi de chomesi erori. Di poi mandasti detta chanzona e chon eso uno motetto, il quale dirizasti a Lorenzo. Chopialo subito e diei a Alisandro letera a ciò che seguissi tuo ordine e simile chopiai piegho fino a le foglie e non pote per allora dart'in mano il perché sendo lui a pisa chon suo padre in rocha. Mi fu forza aspetare sua tomata, in tal tempo fe provare e trovai essere buona, e molto fu lodato, da Arigo più forte che voleva farli in chontroabasso, e promisili darle. Ma per non (empirne?) tutto prima che la dessi in prop[r]ia mano li chopiai. Di poi tomato feci tal quali fu mio debito e suo disederio a lui (?...an)do di tuo essere il quale su nostro nuovo ringraziandami mostrando averlo molto a grato.

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Doc. 7b Fols. 258r-258v: 20 September 1488
 Intendo di non potere fare chonpore la chanzona a4 per la 'positione del maestro del tuo maestro, e di chome ti è disperato, e che [258v] stimi bicholarlo quì quando avessi presa buona e che faresti per chonpiacere a Lorenzo al quale dichio mandi uno libreto di sue chosete che stimo saranno buone . . . Avisandoti che quando chostì fusti alchuna voce di chontroabaso buona, e di chontralto e tenoriste arebono quì buono richapito. Il perché Nicholo di Loro s'è di quì partito, lasciato la chapella ed esi achoncio chon Re d'Ungeria, e simile Bartolomeo che è molto dispiaciuto à Lorenzo la loro partita senza sua saputa. Tutto a tuo aviso perché posendo farò bene alchuno tuo amicho posi.

Doc. 8 Fol. 253v: 24 December 1488
 Orche io ò di dio grazia avuta la santa parola sara sana e salva l'anima mia. Ma di tanto ti dichio che io non ti so grado di chosa alchuna simile a questa quanto è stabat mater, che prima è sparsa nelle mani dell Chastrucio e del Nocha che Ambnuogio abia per non erare posuto mostrarle che chosa si sia. Per anchora non so dirtelo per non averle udita. Farola provare quanto prima posta, che stimo chome di sia chosa chon tutta perfezione, ma quanto sodisfarà di tutto arai aviso. Ma mi saria ben suto grato che i llibri ano mandato al magnifico Lorenzo per Girolamo chorriere avessi operato mi venissi alle mani, che tene arei fatto onore chome d'altra. Ma stimo il facessi per dimostrarmi al mio errore della di qua

promessoti il che non mai seguitò, o per non mi potere fidare dello
 aportatore. Saranno chomunque o non saranno sechondo chome
 15 potrò fare perché delle ordinate alchuna mi dispiace, e qualchuna
 di nuovo anchor n'è nato dal nostro Arigho che volentieri chon-
 pone cose nuove perché il papasso ne ghode. Ma stimo venendo
 di qua il tuo maestro chol suo discepolo di sì tenera età credo areti
 buon richapito. S'egli a buon ghuzi man attendolo tutto (guolno
 ?) che per tuo mezo piglirò secho praticha e manfarolla se secho
 arà quel fatto d'amicho. E non venendo sarò chon Arigho. E vedi
 se potessi di quel grapolo spichare qualche racimolo non posendo
 avere la vite.

Doc. 9a Fol. 252r: 24 April 1489
 E in deta schatola uno quade[r]nucio d'alchune chanzone nuova-
 mente chomposte qui da Arigho, e tutto diritto a liona a Giovan-
 batista Machiavegli che dipoi no l'à risposta da lui di ricevuto

Doc. 9b Fol. 252r: 24 April 1489
 È passata la quadragesima e anchora non abiamo le lamentazione.
 Stimo per qualche chagione legittima siranno arestate. Ma sarà
 buono il tortello dopo pasqua, ma soprattutto per tutte le volte t'ò a
 dire che quando mandi alchuna chosa di nuovo, che io sia quello
 5 che n'abi asservire altri e che io ne posa fare mia voglia, che non
 mi seghua chome di stabat mater. Che prima i fornai ne fumo ripi-
 eni che io la potessi provare.

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Doc. 10 Fol. 232r: [lacuna] July 1489
 . . . in deta schatola e fuse mandato uno quade[r]nucio di più
 nuove d'Arigho e molte stimate qui. E da te non n'ò anchora rice-
 vuto e basti . . . Stimo arai avuto ancho le chanzone, benché nula
 me ne dica di ricevuto.

Doc. 11 Fol. 241r: 3 November 1489
 Io ebi per le mani del Machiavello stabat senza lettera alchuna a
 me. Non l'ò fatta provare per anchora. Vedrò quello sia benché
 benissimo credo e ne sarai avisato.

ABSTRACT

In the archives of the old and wealthy patrician family of the “da Filicaia” housed in the Florentine *Archivio di Stato* survives a group of letters written by, among others, one Ambrogio Angeni to the young Antonio da Filicaia, away on family business in northern Europe for

extended periods of time during the 1480s and 1490s. The correspondence details the musical activities of these young men's Florentine *brigata* and reveals a close involvement with Heinrich Isaac and proximity to Lorenzo de' Medici's private musical circles. The letters document a very active traffic in musical scores, both vernacular works composed in Florence by Isaac and others that were mailed north, as well as sacred and secular works composed in France and sent to Florence. More specifically, the letters contain many musical references to new compositions, works by Isaac, preparations for carnival, aesthetic judgments and technical discussions, Lorenzo's patronage, and a very active local composer previously unknown to musicologists. The correspondence dates from 1487-89, while Antonio was residing in Nantes (Brittany), and it provides an unprecedented view of musical life in Florence at a critical period when carnival celebrations were resurgent, northern repertory was being collected and copied, northern composers (like Isaac) were interacting with local composers, and compositional procedures were changing.