

Casulana and the *Madrigale Arioso*

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During the Renaissance, men and women were both involved in music, but they were not equally as accepted in a music career. Pioneer Maddalena Casulana however, did not represent the typical role of a woman in music during this time period. Casulana was the first woman to ever have a book of music published. She published 3 books of madrigals, which was a highly popular secular genre of music in this time period. Although extensive knowledge about her personal life is not in abundance, we can examine her musical life. One style of madrigal that Casulana often wrote in is the *madrigale arioso* style. Maddalena Casulana of course has her own personal touch as a composer, but this *madrigale arioso* style is also reflected in the works of other composers of the time. One example of a composer that also uses this style or sub-genre of a madrigal is Luca Marenzio. Drawing on my analysis of the works Maddalena Casulana and Luca Marenzio, I propose that although it's possible they never met, they influenced each other's works in their usage of the *madrigale arioso*'s lyrical passages and more modern sense of harmonic progression.

Maddalena Casulana's personal life is a bit of a mystery. She may have been a private woman and that is the reason there isn't a lot of information on her. Or perhaps the records about her have been lost. For whatever reason(s), what can be found about her is limited. It is assumed that she lived ca. 1540-ca. 1590. Maddalena Casulana is the name that is used by most to recognize her, but she later became associated with the name Mezari. Although there is not a lot of evidence, there is enough record that suggests she married a man with the surname Mezari.¹ Casulana was not only a madrigalist composer, but she was a *virtuosa*, meaning she was a singer

¹Ellen D. Lerner, "Casulana, Madalena; (ca. 1540-ca. 1590)" in *Women Composers*, Vol. 1, edited by Schleifer, Martha Furma, Sylvia Glickman. New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1996, 98-109.
https://search-alexanderstreet-com.byui.idm.oclc.org/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Creference_article%7C1000184201#search/casulana

and lute player. Although her exact whereabouts have not been exclusively recorded throughout the entirety of her life, she was quite the traveling musician.

She met many people through her travels and probably made many connections. In her first publication, she wrote a dedication to Isabella de' Medici Orsini. She gives the dedication to "...not only to give witness to [her] devotion to Your Excellency, but also to show to the world (to the degree that is granted to [her] in this profession of music) the foolish error of men who so greatly believe themselves to be the masters of high intellectual gifts that [these gifts] cannot, it seems to them, be equally common among women".² Her dedication to Medici implies their closeness and an agreeance of ideals about women in music at the time. She recognizes that the two of them are rare in a male dominated music arena. Medici wasn't a professional musician, but she was a supporter of music. Her support and enthusiasm for music is clearly represented in a painting of her, *Isabella with Music* (1565), where she is depicted holding sheet music in her hand. This is a bold statement and a surprise, "such an accessory is a departure from the usual images of young noblewomen, who are rarely accompanied by anything other than a small dog, child or prayer book".³ The connection between Medici and Casulana is significant given the political status that the Medici Family held.

Isabella de' Medici was not the only person to support Casulana's work. There were many madrigal composers and other professionals at the time that were also highly interested and impressed by her music. In the same year that she published her first book of madrigals, Lasso conducted one of her pieces for Archduke Wilhelm of Bavaria in Munich's wedding, others even

²Thomas W. Bridges, "Casulana [Mezari], Maddalena", Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.byui.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000005155?rkey=WxKGzG>.

³Caroline P Murphy, "*Murder of Medici Princess*", (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008).

dedicated books and canzones to her, like Antonio Molino and Giambattista Maganza.⁴ It is remarkable that she was so widely recognized and an esteemed composer, considering her being a woman. During this time period, women were expected to efficiently play and perform music in private settings, like the home. Her ambitions and success was so drastically different than the exception of women of the day. The continued support that she received demonstrates her musical abilities and possibly her networking skills.

Her madrigals were written in the *madrigale arioso* style. This style of music combines the elements of madrigals and arias. There is a focus on the rhetoric of the poetry and less a focus on any strict form or structure that an aria typically has. The melody is in the top voice and the other parts create chords below it with occasional moments of imitation or counterpoint. Generally, each phrase of the rhetoric ends in a cadence as well (Schubert). It makes sense that Casulana would write in this fashion because she was not only a composer of madrigals, but a *virtuosa*, who sang solo music frequently. The top voice being more lyric in nature compared to the harmonic qualities of the others is characteristic of the way she would have sung in her solo adventures. The lute has many uses and possible textures, but one that would use its full potential is by playing in chords rather than counterpoint lines. It's likely that Casulana started out singing and playing the lute and that her madrigals that she wrote were based off of this texture of a solo singer with lute accompaniment. There is no evidence showing that she was the first to use this

⁴Peter Schubert, "Finding the 'Air' in Maddalena Casulana's Madrigals" in *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Secular and Sacred Music to 1900*, edited by Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 47-73.

genre, but the style fits her style of *virtuosa* quite well.

Canto
Alto
Tenore
Basso

Io d'o-do - ra-te fron - de de bei fi - ori Che
Io d'o-do - ra-te fron - de de bei fi - ori Che
Io d'o-do - ra-te fron - de de bei fi - ori Che la fe-
Io d'o-do - ra-te fron - de de bei fi - ori Che

The above excerpt is the third madrigal in Casulana's second book of madrigals entitled *Io d'odorate fronde*. Even without extensive or deep study of the above excerpt, it is a clear example of the chordal texture that the *madrigale arioso* so often uses. Its syllabic nature allows for this. The chords do not have a harmonic tempo, but it is a rather modern usage of chords. Also in accordance to the *madrigale arioso* style, the phrase ends in a clear cadence. Analyzed chord by chord, this phrase reads mostly a series of dominant and tonic chords ending in a perfect authentic cadence (V-I). Casulana continues to include cadences at the end of each poetic phrase throughout the piece. Perhaps in her travels, Casulana sang the canto while she played the alto, tenore, and basso (or the rest of the chords) on the lute.

Luca Marenzio was also a renowned madrigal composer that lived at the same time as Maddalena Casulana (he lived ca. 1533-1599). Like Casulana, he also had connections to the famous Medici family of Florence. He worked for them for a time although most of his career

was spent in Rome. According to the Naxos Music Library, Marenzio appears to have written all of the music for the wedding of Ferdinando de' Medici and Christine de Lorraine. He wrote 29 compositions for the event. It must have been an extravagant wedding, based on the amount of music and the fact that it was for the Medicis.⁵ If he wasn't well known by the time he had succeeded in this feat, the magnitude of the event would have caused his name to begin to circulate about. Throughout his career, Marenzio composed commissioned pieces, was employed at several courts around Italy (including the Medici's court in Florence), and was even the *maestro di cappella* for the King of Poland too. His prestigious accomplishments show how important his influence was as a musician in the renaissance. As for the type of madrigals Marenzio wrote, he used a variety of styles. In an effort to stay on topic, those styles will not be extensively expounded upon. He did write using the *madrigale arioso* style in his earlier

⁵Naxos Digital Services US Inc, 2022,
<https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=6&sid=fa864b3a-9d76-4d5a-9c44-2dae6628c005%40redis&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwJnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=edsnoi.music.886449849604&db=edsnoi>

compositions.

2

In un___ bos-chet-to de' bei mir-ti e a - llo - ri Al - lor che d'her - be e

In un___ bos-che-to de' bei mir-ti e a - llo - ri Al - lor che d'her - be e

In un___ bos-che-to de' bei mir-ti e a - llo - ri Al - lor che d'her - be e

8
fior va-go è l ter - re - no, Vi-di un pas - tor al - la___ sua nin - - fa in se - no.

fior va-go è l ter - re - no, Vi-di un pas - tor al - la___ sua nin - fa in se

fior va-go è l ter - re - no, Vi - di un pas - tor al - la___ sua nin - fa in se - - - no.

Marenzio's composition above is called *In un boschetto*. This madrigal is short, but captures the essence of the *madrigale arioso* style. He writes in a chordal texture throughout generally with the exception of melismatic figures near the end of phrases. This is still

characteristic of this style.

so, ed io con lu - - i, ed io con lu - i, ed io con lu - - i.
 ed io con lu - i, cer-car non so, ed io con lu - - - i.
 so, ed io con lu - i, ed io con lu - i, ed io con lu - i.
 Ra - gio-nan-do con me - co, ed io con lu - - - i, ed io con lu - - i.
 cer - car non so, ed io con lu - - i, ed io con lu - i.

In his later madrigals, as mentioned previously, Marenzio wrote in other styles. *Si chi'io mi credo omai* is one example of a madrigal that he wrote that very obviously does not fit into the *madrigale arioso* style. The composition above is much more polyphonic in nature. The voices imitate each other rather than singing all together in unison. The style that Marenzio is most popularly known for is *madrigale spirituale*. This style was reserved for aristocratic audiences (like the Medici family).

Musically, Maddalena Casulana and Luca Marenzio wrote in some of the same ways and different in other ways. *Io d'odorate fronde* and *In un boschetto* are good examples to look at. As already discovered, they both have a chordal structure. A difference to consider is that the cadences at the end of each phrase contrast. Casulana is strict about her cadences and writes them simply enough that it doesn't take much study to identify the cadences and where they happen. In Marenzio's *In un boschetto*, it is still easy to find the end of the phrase and where the cadence should be, but it takes more careful consideration to understand what exactly is happening. Of the three of the cadences of the piece, in two of the cadences, the voices end in unison (really in octaves) rather than in a chord. The middle cadence does outline a chord in the

three voices instead of voicing them in octaves. Despite this difference, their works are still classified under the same style of *madrigale arioso* because that is the style that best fits these particular pieces. In regards to the chordal nature of these madrigals, it seems that it is far closer to homophony than the polyphony that has been used throughout the Renaissance. It is exciting to adopt a new texture into music. This is especially important because the madrigal was the most popular genre among all people. This genre was like the troubadour music of the day because it was performed and sang among the common people too. They also reflect well what the values of the common people were. Of course there were many of the higher class that enjoyed madrigals too, but as for the *madrigale arioso* its main audience was the commoner.

Another difference between Casulana's madrigals and Marenzio's madrigals is the voicing itself, or the amount of voices. In Casulana's madrigals, she mostly writes using a 4-part composition (she has some 5-part too) while Marenzio uses more of a variety. This could be a result of the difference in lifetimes. Marenzio lived roughly 66 years while Casulana lived only about 50 years. Marenzio had 16 more years of life, giving him more time to write music in a variety of ways. The difference could also be that although Marenzio could probably perform, there is no evidence suggesting that he performed his compositions. His main focus would be composing. The exact percentage isn't known, but Casulana did both performing and composing. She would not have focused entirely on composing and experimenting with new ways to compose since she would have also performed her pieces. This is possibly another reason that she didn't write in many other styles.

As for the text of these two madrigals in particular, they both deal with similar subjects. The text of *Il d'odorate fronde* talks about the smell of flowers, the waves and banks nearby and the nymphs that live there, and singing praises. The text of *In un boschetto* talks about a grove of

myrtles and laurels, herbs and flowers, a shepherd and nymph. These texts both deal with nature and the senses. At the time, humanism had sparked the interest of all people. Therefore, the subject of nature is not a surprising subject. Words paint images in the mind and these two madrigals are good examples of this. Madrigalisms, or cases in which the text is painted through the music, are not obvious in these excerpts, but they are there.

7

la fe-lic' A - rab-

la fe-lic' A - rab -

8 - lic' A-rab -

la fe-lic' A-rab-bia in

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for a madrigal. It consists of four staves. The first three staves are in treble clef, and the fourth is in bass clef. The music is written in a 16th-century style. The lyrics are: 'la fe-lic' A - rab-' on the first staff, 'la fe-lic' A - rab -' on the second, '- lic' A-rab -' on the third, and 'la fe-lic' A-rab-bia in' on the fourth. The number '7' is written above the first staff, and '8' is written above the third staff. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words split across staves. The music features various note values, including minims, crotchets, and quavers, with some notes beamed together. There are also rests and accidentals (sharps) visible.

In the tenor part a madrigalism is present. On the word *felic*' (truncated "*felice*"), Italian for happy, the tenor is prolonging the word to express the joyous emotion. A melismatic movement that prolongs and emphasizes a word is a common madrigalism. It is also used in Marenzio's *In un boschetto*. He writes melismatic figures at the ends of cadences on words that are important. The words he does this with are *allori* (laurels) and *ninfa* (nymphs). Interestingly, the voice that does this melismatic movement both times is the inner voice. In Casulana's madrigal, it is also the inner voice (tenor) that paints the text in this way. This is not a rule of the madrigal compositions, but the use of an inner voice implementing a melismatic figure, at a cadence especially, is used often in madrigals.

Casulana was a traveling performer and as a result, all of her travels were not recorded. Marenzio and his professional life is better recorded. One thing they both have in common is their connection to the Medicis: Casulana's friendship with Isabella de' Medici and Marenzio's employment to the family as a whole. Because of this connection, it is easy to wonder if their paths crossed at all. It is possible, but can't be confirmed. But how might this have affected their compositions? If they were in fact in Florence at the same time, Marenzio as an employee and Casulana as a friend of the family, could they have discussed the *madrigale arioso* style and their strategies in writing in this way? If they had been there at the same time, perhaps they sat down and discussed the changes in music of the day. These discussions absolutely would have influenced the way they composed. If they had known each other, why didn't Casulana experiment with the *madrigale spirituale* sub-genre? Was it because of the audiences she normally performed for? Even if they had not crossed paths, there is also the possibility of the Medici family discussing them. Since they are in the same profession, perhaps the Medicis spoke to Marenzio about Casulana and vice versa. It is interesting to think about what could have

happened. Undoubtedly, there is a strong possibility that they had some sort of influence on each other.

Maddalena Casulana should be celebrated for her efforts in professional music as she paved the way for both men and women to feel confident to also pursue music at a professional level. Throughout all study of the history of music, composers are often placed into boxes of what they are known for and what their classified genres of music are. Maddalena Casulana can be classified as a *virtuosa* and madrigal composer while Luca Marenzio can also be classified as a madrigal composer. But they are both more than these simple descriptions. There is much yet to be discovered about the lives of both Casulana and Marenzio. But what can be understood is fascinating from what they wrote, how they wrote, where they performed, and who they associated with. She and Marenzio may or may not have met, but their influence on each other is probable. With the amount of similarities in their compositions, like their use of *madrigale arioso*, suggests that they had a connection or influence on one another. Their emphasis on lyric focus and the harmonic or chordal texture of the music feel modern for the time period.

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