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CAPPELLA CLAUSURA

BEFORE AND AFTER THE VEIL

RAFFAELLA:

Congratulamini mihi omnes

Vidi speciosam

Ego flos campi

Hodie nata est beata Maria

Sancta et immaculata virginitas

Exurgat Deus

Audivi vocem in caelo

Exaudi Deus orationem meam

Diligam te Domine

Miserere mei Deus

VITTORIA:

Se del tuo corpo hoggi la stampa horrenda

****intermission****

VITTORIA:

Hor che la vaga aurora

T'amo mia vita

Io v'amo vita mia

Ch'io non t'ami cor mio

O dolc'anima mia

Baciai per aver vita

RAFFAELLA:

Ascendens Christus in altum

Surge, propera amica mea

Vittoria and Raffaella (or is it Vittoria/Raffaella?) Aleotti

In 1593 the following two publications appeared: *Ghirlanda de madrigali a quattro voci, di Vittoria Aleotti* [Venetia, Giacomo Vincenti, M.D.XCIII.] and *Sacræ cantiones quinque, septem, octo & decem vocibus decantande, Liber Primus, A. R. S. Raphaela Aleotta Ferrariansi in Monasterio Rever, Monialium S. Vito Monaca* [Venetiis, Apud Riciardum Amadinum, M.D.XCIII]. What was the relationship between Vittoria and Raphaela (or Raffaella) Alleotti? In his *Quellen Lexikon* (1901-1904), Robert Eitner assumed, in his entry for the *Sacræ cantiones*, that Raphaela was the name adopted by Vittoria upon taking the vows as a nun at the San Vito Monastery in Ferrara. But the view was challenged by Jane Bowers in her article "The emergence of Women Composers in Italy, 1566-1700" in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1100-1950* [University of Illinois Press, 1986], in which she claims Raffaella to be the older sister of Vittoria.

The father, Giovanni Battista Aleotti, was architect and engineer for the Ducal Court at Ferrara under Alfonso d'Este II. In his letter of dedication to Vittoria's book of madrigals he states that the the eldest of his five daughters (not named) who had a natural inclination to His Divine Majesty, was placed under the tutelage of Alessandro Milleville in music, and later under Ercole Pasquini, who was also a pupil of Milleville. While she was learning, his second daughter called Vittoria (a girl of four going on five) was always present, and, after a year, nature has so loosened her hands that she began to play the harpsichord to the astonishment of her parents, and also the teacher himself. He, the good old man, then began to teach her and after two years suggested to have her brought up at the Convent of San Vito known for their perfection and excellence in music. At the age of fourteen, Vittoria decided to to take vows as a nun at San Vito. On seeing the progress she was making in music theory, the father obtained some madrigal texts of the court poet Giovanni Battista Guarini for Vittoria to set to music. When Count del Zaffo of Venice visited during Holy week of 1593, he was shown some of the madrigals, and decided to have them published. When Vittoria was approached, she said she no longer cared about worldly things and left it her father to follow through as he saw fit.

In the will of G. B. Aleotti (1631), the following heirs are named: Beatrice, widow of Orazio Nigrelli, Cinthia married to Cesare Bini, Orsolina and Ginerva Ballarini, children of his deceased daughter Armanda, and R. Suor Raffaella, a nun at San Vito. Luigi Napolitana Cittadella, in the preface to his 1847 edition of G. B. Aleotti's tract *Dell'interimento del Po di Ferrara*, writes concerning his family. The only son, Giambattista, died at age 4. The five daughters were Beatrice, Raffaella, Cinthia, Armanda, and Valeria. Beatrice, the oldest daughter became a nun at San Vito at the age of fourteen in May 1588, but left to become the wife of the physician Orazio Nigrelli. Cinthia was married twice, first to Cesare Filippo Bini and later Agostino Diani. She died in 1657. Armanda

was also married twice, first to Camillio Ballarini and second to Alessandro Caprilli. She pre-deceased her father. Raffaella and Valeria became nuns, the latter died in 1625. The source for Valeria is a document (Antolini 56) preserved at the Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea in Ferrara, listing both Raffaella and Valeria Aleotti.

In preparing the modern edition of Aleotti, it was decided that more research in the various archives in Ferrara was needed before it could be issued. Fortunately, the musicologist Massimo Ossi was available and willing to carry out this responsibility. He located the following baptismal records of G. B. Aleotti's daughters in the Register of the Santa Maria in Vado, Ferrara:

30 Jan. 1574: Beatrix Lucretia
22 Sept. 1575: Victoria Elisabeth
3 Aug. 1577: Cinthia Catherine
8 Nov. 1578: Ca(____)a Camilla

For Armanda, Ossi was unable to locate an entry, but in the introduction to Giuliana Gialdoni's edition of Vittoria Aleotti: Cinque Madrigali a 4 voce miste (1986), she gives the baptismal year as 1580.

In searching through the Libro delli Offizi at San Vito regarding both Raffaella and Valeria Alleotti, the earliest entry for Valeria Aleotti, complete with her surname, is in 1592, and from the last entry we can place the date of her death between 29 May 1625 and 29 May 1627. It is interesting to note that G. B. Aleotti's daughter, Camilla, who was not mentioned in the will would have been 14 in 1592, the same year Valeria Aleotti's name first appears in the above record. Since fourteen was the age that the other daughters took their vows, it seems quite plausible that Camilla also became a nun and adopted the name of Valeria.

Given the circumstantial evidence, we may assume that Vittoria Aleotti, the second daughter of Giovanni Battista Aleotti, took vows as a nun in 1589 at the age of fourteen at which time she adopted the name Raffaella. In her studies with Ercole Pasquini, she composed a number of madrigals possibly prior to her decision to become a nun, and between 1589 and 1593 she composed her motets which were published that year at age 18. A question remains, when did Ercole Pasquini take over the instruction of keyboard instruments and music theory from Alessandro Milleville? On 1 May 1592, Ercole da Ferrara (Pasquini) became organist to Count Mario Bevilacqua in Verona. While in Verona, he wrote and published a literary work entitled *I fidi amanti* in 1593 in preparation for the marriage of Don Carlo Gesualdo to Eleonora d'Este which took place the following year in Ferrara. In the dedication to Eleonora, he addresses her as his patroness. Bevilacqua died 1 August 1593, and it appears that Pasquini returned to Ferrara, where he succeeded Luzzasco Luzzaschi as organist at the Accademia della Morte. He was succeeded by Luzzaschi's pupil Girolamo Frescobaldi, in turn when he moved to Rome in 1597 where he became the organist at St. Peter's. Raffaella in her letter of dedication to the Sacre

Cantiones mentions only Ercole Pasquini as her teacher.

In his treatise *L'Artusi overo delle imperfettioni della modena musica*, Giovanni Maria Artusi, describes a performance of a concerto at San Vito given in November 1598 given before Margaret of Austria who was accompanied by her cousin Archduke Albert on the way to her marriage with King Philip III of Spain. On that occasion, they heard a concerto of instruments consisting of cornetts, trombones, violins, viola bastarda, double harps, lutes, cornamuses, flutes, harpsichords at the same time with “such smoothness and sweetness of harmony that it really was as though it were Mount Parnassus, and Paradise itself had opened, and not something human.” A later account of this same visit by Marc' Antonio Guarini, nephew of the poet G. B. Guarini, published in 1621, identifies several members of the concerto:

Among the said nuns were excellent composers, the smoothest voices, and instrumentalists of rare quality, such as Catabene de' Catabeni and Casandra Pigna, good tenors; Alfonsa Trotti with a singular bass voice; and the astonishing Claudia Manfredi and Bartolomea Sorianti, very delicate sopranos; Raffaella de' Magnifici and another Catabene, excellent players of the Cornetto, also playing every other sort of instrument. Olimpia Leoni, at present still living, plays with great agility a tenor viola, and sings contralto with great aptitude and excellent voice. And the most outstanding of all, and without equal in playing the organ, is Raffaella Aleotti, called l'Argenta, who is also expert in music theory; she has published various highly regarded motets and madrigals.

The question arises concerning the “good tenors” and the “singular bass voice”. Could these women actually sing these voice parts in the range normally sung by men voices, or did they sing them an octave higher, allowing the trombones and other instruments to supply the parts as written?

The Sacre Cantiones of Raffaella consist of 13 motets for 5 voices, 2 for 7 voices, 2 for 8 voices, and 1 for ten voices. One of the 5 voice motet “Jubilate Deo” (Ps. 99, vs. 1-20) and the ten voice motet “Quem viditis pastores” (Re-



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pensory for Christmas Matins) are by her teacher, Ercole Pasquini. Most of the motets for five voices are continuously imitative. In several including the motet “Ascendens Christus in altum”, imitative and homophonic passages alternate. The motet “Miserere mei Deus” is unique in that the fifth voice sings an ostinato pattern against the otherwise imitative texture. The texts are drawn mostly from the liturgical chants sung during matins (responsories or antiphons) and the Book of Psalms: “Exaudi meus orationes meum” (Ps. 54, v. 1-2), “Miserere mei Deus” (Ps. 56, v. 1-2), “Exsurgat Deus (Ps. 67, v. 1-2). The polychoral motets for seven and eight voices anticipate the concertante principles and techniques of the early Seventeenth Century. “Ego flos campi” for seven voices (two groups comprising three and four voices) and “Surge, propera amica mea” for eight voices (two choirs of four voices each) are based on texts from the Song of Solomon. The motets “Hodie nata est beata Maria” for seven voices and “Congratulamini mihi omnes” for eight voices are based on Responsories for feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the letter of dedication to Ghirlanda de Madrigali of Vittoria Aleotti (to use her secular name), her father stated that he had asked the poet Giovanni Battista Guarini to provide some of the texts. Guarini was noted for his pastoral drama *Il pastor fido* (pub. 1590), an important source of madrigal texts set by many noted madrigalists including Luca Marenzio and Claudio Monteverdi. A number of Guarini’s poems had been in circulation, but it was not until 1598 that an attempt was made to collect and publish them. Only four of the poems in this collection were set by Vittoria: “T’amo mia vita”, “Ch’io non t’ami cor mio”, “O dolc’anima mia”, and “Baciai per aver vita” (all four are on tonight’s program). In addition, some of the anonymous texts appearing for the first time in Ghirlanda may also have been written by Guarini. Only one other poet has been identified, Annibale Pocaterra, a minor Ferrarese poet whose poems were published in 1611 including “In v’amo vita mia” on tonight’s program. “Hor che la vaga aurora” appears as the opening madrigal in Vittoria’s book, and the concluding work is a madrigali spirituali, a setting of the sonnet “Se del tuo corpo hoggi le stampa horrenda”. As is customary in setting a sonnet, it is divided into two parts, the first part a setting of the ottava (rhyme scheme abba, abba), and the second of the sestina (cde, cde).

Considering that these madrigals were probably composed in her early teens while under the tutelage of Ercole Pasquini, they show that Vittoria was a competent composer. She takes full advantage of textural possibilities allowable within the limitations of four voices portraying, in particular, the contrasting affections in the longer hendecasyllabic lines. Each line of text, or half line, is given its own musical characterization relating to the various affections of the text. Her treatment of melody and dissonance, with few exceptions, is reflective of the older ideals of sixteenth-century counterpoint. One of these exceptions is encountered in the madrigal “Io v’amo vita mia” on the words “ch’i miei martire” (but of my sufferings). Reduced to a three voice texture, the top voice

moves continually upward stepwise on the weak beat to form a suspension to the two lower voices moving upward in thirds on the strong beat, creating the highest tension on the word “martire” (suffering).. This technique is fully exploited on one of Ercole Pasquini’s compositions for organ, a *Durezza e ligature*. This style of composition, emphasizing the use of dissonance and suspensions for organ was described by Girolamo Diruta in his *Il Transilvano* (1593) as being appropriate for playing during the elevation of the mass. It was often associated with the disposition from the cross. It was a style that was fully exploited in the Seventeenth Century, and the earliest examples known are those by Pasquini. Vittoria obviously picked up on this technique from her teacher. Vittoria’s approach toward rhythm and harmony anticipates much that will become standard practice in the next century, again the influence of Pasquini.

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- W. Richard Shindle, Professor Emeritus, Kent State U.
M.M. in Musicology, Indiana University, 1963
Ph. D. in Musicology, Indiana University, 1970

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