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Renaissance Women as Patrons of Music: The North-Italian Courts

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During the last twenty years, a number of Renaissance scholars have analyzed the musical life of north-Italian courts and cities and have defined the patterns of patronage there. Thanks to their studies, we now know the basic chronology of the development: beginning in the early fifteenth century, more and more rulers began to see music as an aural and visual symbol of their power and standing. We also better understand the systems of supporting music: the rulers expanded small, preexisting groups of musicians and created new ones, establishing four basic units for the performance of secular and sacred music. These were (1) the singers and players of *bas* instruments for secular vocal music; (2) the pifferi, the shawms and trombones for processions and the dance; (3) the corps of trumpeters also responsible for processions as well as for fanfares and signal calls in battle; and (4) the chapel, the choir of singers of sacred music. To these should also be added the *tamborino*, the player of three-holed pipe and tabor who, like the pifferi, provided dance music, and an organist, attached to the chapel.[1]

In northern Italy, the first to grasp these possibilities seems to have been Pandolfo III Malatesta (1370–1427), signore of Fano, Brescia, and Bergamo, and Leonello d'Este (r. 1441–50) at Ferrara, who established the first court chapels for the performance of sacred music. It is likely, however, that these experiments were in some senses isolated phenomena; the true beginning of the trend is to be found after 1470 in the massive recruitments and elaborate plans of Ercole I d'Este (r. 1471–1505) and Galeazzo Maria Sforza (r. 1466–76) at Milan.[2]

If we now have a basic grasp of how the lords of northern Italy de-

veloped and used these groups of musicians, we yet lack an understanding of women as patrons of music. Did they have their own musicians as members of their personal courts, and if so what kinds of music and musicians did they patronize? Alternatively, is it possible that they simply used musicians from the standing bodies of court musicians as the need and wish arose?

It would certainly seem natural for noblewomen to be involved with music at court, since both dance and music were traditional components of their education. Already Francesco da Barberino (1264–1348), in his *Del reggimento e costumi di donna*, included these elements as integral parts of a woman's education. According to Francesco, the girl who was born to the nobility is expected to be able to dance "honestly, not like a court jester," because if she should fall and show a portion of her leg, it would be disgraceful.[3] At the same time the girl should be taught music, and should be able both to sing and to play instruments. The music suitable for her is of a particular kind, however: vocal music and the music of *bas* instruments, which Francesco calls "canto basso chiamato 'camerale.' " It is not clear here if Francesco is actually using "basso" as the technical equivalent of *bas*, but the types of music to be performed by the student are precisely that. She may sing "an honest canzonetta" in a low voice, and should play only quiet instruments; Francesco lists psaltery, viola, harp (which he says is particularly fitting for a great lady), or another "seemly, attractive instrument."[4] By the late fifteenth century, lute and keyboard instruments were also a part of the pantheon of acceptable instruments.

As new documents are unearthed, it is becoming increasingly clear that most elite women of the fifteenth century had a musical education something like that prescribed by Barberino. In Florence, Lucrezia Tornabuoni (d. 1482), wife of Piero de' Medici, sang, and her daughters Bianca and Nannina sang and played the organ.[5] In Milan, Valentina Visconti, daughter of Giangaleazzo Visconti, played harp and lute; Beatrice di Tenda (d. 1418), wife of Filippo Maria Visconti, and Ippolita Sforza (d. 1488), sister of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, also played lute.[6] In Ferrara, Parisina Malatesta (d. 1425), wife of Niccolò III d'Este, Isotta d'Este (d. 1456), Niccolò's daughter, and Eleonora d'Aragona (d. 1493), wife of Ercole d'Este, played harp.[7]

This list could be expanded, but its point is clear: music of some kind was a normal part of the noblewoman's education. What of her patronage of musicians? This question is difficult to answer, since the documentation is extremely slim. Nonetheless, some tentative answers can

be attempted. It is clear that noblewomen at court maintained their own households of servants and had a budget for this purpose: Christine de Pisan (ca. 1364–ca. 1431), for example, offers them advice on the wise governance and constitution of their courts.[8] Too, Eleonora d'Aragona in Ferrara had a court of fifty-one retainers in 1476, in addition to her ladies-in-waiting; these included administrators, chamberlains, tailors, a chaplain, and so forth. For this staff she received 700 *lire marchesane* a month. At the rate of 3.1 lire to the ducat, this translates to a budget of slightly more than 2,700 ducats a year.[9]

Lacking from her staff, however, is a self-contained corps of musicians. In fact, fifteenth-century noblewomen do not seem to have supported independent musical ensembles within their own households, at least in Italy. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that they did keep pipe-and-tabor players and dancing masters and that they may have had one or two musicians in their own employ. This is clearest in the case of Eleonora herself, whose personal court did include a certain Nardo tamborino, a player of the pipe and tabor.[10] Furthermore, Lorenzo Lavagnolo seems to have served women in Mantua and Milan as dancing teacher. At Mantua he is recorded as a familiar of Marchesa Margherita von Wittelsbach, wife of Federico I Gonzaga, in her will; after her death in 1479, he went to Milan, where he worked for Bona of Savoy (d. 1503). Also mentioned in Margherita's will is a player of the lira da braccio, Giovanni Pietro dalla Viola.[11]

There are exceptions to this pattern outside Italy. Iolanda of Savoy kept both secular singers and a self-standing chapel of boys and men for the performance of sacred music at least from late 1471 to 1473.[12] Iolanda, however, ruled the duchy as regent for her son Louis during this period, and it seems likely that this is the key to her support of music on a wide scale: as ruler, she supported exactly the same kinds of music that other rulers around her supported. Furthermore, Anne of Brittany kept her own musical establishment, including a chapel of singers; she, however, reigned as queen of France, and it is possible that this office itself required a woman to maintain a chapel.[13]

Nonetheless, the general situation in Italy, at least on the basis of the available documentation, points toward the lack of musicians in noblewomen's own households. This condition began to change in the late fifteenth century with a new generation of women coming to maturity and marrying: Beatrice d'Este (1475–97), wife of Ludovico Sforza in Milan; Elisabetta Gonzaga (1471–1526), wife of Guidobaldo di Montefelto in Urbino; Lucrezia Borgia (1480–1519), wife of Alfonso I d'Este

in Ferrara; and Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), wife of Francesco II Gonzaga in Mantua. For the first two of these, there is not yet enough documentation to support definitive findings.[14] For the last two, however, there is fairly abundant material on which to base a study: Isabella d'Este's voluminous correspondence survives virtually intact, and Lucrezia Borgia's Ferrarese pay records, although not complete, survive in sufficient number to allow some assessment of her patronage. For Lucrezia, the correspondence between Ferrara and Mantua is also of prime importance, and this is conserved along with Isabella's *copialettere* in the State Archives of Mantua. There exists, therefore, enough information to measure the roles of two of the great noblewomen of the Renaissance, and, since a direct comparison of styles of patronage is allowed, it is an added benefit that these two women were contemporaries, knew each other well, and were related by marriage. The primary purposes of this study, then, are to examine the musical households of Isabella and Lucrezia and to weigh their importance as patrons, by extension defining the position women enjoyed as patrons of music during the Italian Renaissance.

Although Isabella and Lucrezia were both noblewomen and lived at neighboring courts, their backgrounds and personalities offer strong elements of contrast. Isabella was the legitimate daughter of Ercole I d'Este, duke of Ferrara, and a representative of one of the oldest and most stable *signorie* in Italy. She was raised at her father's court with at least a partly humanistic education, having begun the study of Latin by the age of six.[15] She came to Mantua as the wife of Marchese Francesco Gonzaga (1460–1519) in 1490 and remained there as marchesa of the city and its territory for forty-nine years. She was undoubtedly the outstanding woman of her age and was not only a great patron of the arts, but was also a gifted administrator.[16]

Lucrezia, on the other hand, came from a family of more recent origins. She was born the illegitimate daughter of the Spanish Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia and Vanozza Catenei. Her father's rise to the papacy as Alexander VI (r. 1492–1503) made her the pawn of the Borgia plans for dynastic conquest and her family's search for exactly the kind of lasting status that Isabella's family already enjoyed. She was married first, in a blatantly political move, to Giovanni Sforza, papal vicar of Pesaro. After Alexander managed to have this marriage declared void, she was married again, this time to advance the Borgia plans in Naples, to Alfonso d'Aragona, duke of Bisceglie. This marriage, too, was terminated when

Lucrezia's brother Cesare had Alfonso assassinated in 1500.[17] In 1502, she married Alfonso I d'Este of Ferrara.

History has not dealt kindly with Lucrezia. She was first, thanks to anti-Borgia propaganda, viewed as a mad seductress and poisoner who was a wholehearted participant in the Borgia political game. Gregorovius, attempting to see her more impartially, painted her as almost two different people: she was first the wild enchantress of the Vatican, and then, after her marriage to Alfonso d'Este, the honored and pious duchess of Ferrara.[18] Maria Bellonci changed this picture of Lucrezia in her penetrating biography of 1939, in which she is viewed as more the pawn of Borgia politics than an active participant in them.[19]

From the correspondence between Mantua and Ferrara, Lucrezia's chief interests seem to include *feste* and the dance. This was clearly the case in her earlier period,[20] and remains true in Ferrara as well. The letters from Ferrara are full of descriptions of Lucrezia's banquets and dances, both during carnival and in other seasons. Typical, although unusually detailed, is a letter to Isabella from the Ferrarese chancellor Bernardino de' Prosperi describing a banquet given for Lucrezia in 1513 by Antonio de' Costabili: as the guests entered Costabili's house, they were welcomed by the bagpipes ("pive") of Alfonso d'Este; at the beginning of the dinner, Alfonso's singers sang psalms "in voce bassa"; and during the meal itself, the guests were entertained by lutes, viols, and cornets.[21]

Towards the end of Lucrezia's life, this pleasure in the secular was tempered with a real interest in the church. She took periodic retreats to the Franciscan convent of Ferrara and died in 1519 a tertiary of the order. Although she was far from the mental equal of Isabella, she shared certain intellectual concerns with her, notably a delight in the poetry of Petrarch and his imitators and in musical settings of his verse. Like Isabella, too, she was an amateur musician and poet.[22] Although these abilities are not well documented, they are included in an adulatory Latin poem addressed to her by Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), "Tempore, quo primam miscens fluvialibus undis." Bembo resided in Ferrara for long periods in the first decade of the sixteenth century and carried on a heated if platonic flirtation with the Borgia princess.[23]

> If you recite a poem in Italian,
> You seem a girl born in Italy.
> Or if you take a pen to compose verses and poetry,
> They are worthy of having been written by the nine Muses.
> Or if you touch the harp[24] or lute with your ivory hand,

> Conjuring up again in a different way those Theban modes,
> The nearby waves of the Po shiver, taken by your songs.
> If you choose to indulge in the dance,
> And with your foot spring agilely to its rhythm,
> Then I fear that one of the gods, seeing you,
> Would take you passionately[25] from your castle,
> Making of you, O sublime one,
> The goddess of a new star.[26]

Lucrezia Borgia came to Ferrara from Rome in January 1502 to marry Alfonso d'Este, first son of Duke Ercole d'Este and himself the future duke of Ferrara and Modena. This was a coup of unparalleled success for the Borgia, for the Estensi were the oldest and most stable of the papal vicars. Ercole, for his part, achieved thereby a certain guarantee that his duchy would be excluded from the ravages of Cesare Borgia throughout the Romagna.

The basic story of the wedding celebration in Ferrara is reported by Bellonci and is familiar to historians of the Renaissance.[27] Although he originally had wanted only a small celebration, Ercole eventually presented five classical comedies and gave seemingly innumerable banquets and dances. The festivities lasted from 1 February, the date of Lucrezia's arrival, until Ash Wednesday, 9 February. Already before her arrival Ercole had placed triumphal arches across her path throughout Ferrarese territory,[28] and Alfonso had given a banquet at which Ercole's singers performed.[29]

It was at this wedding that Lucrezia first met Isabella, and a pattern of rivalry between the two was established that was to encompass competition in the arts, clothing styles, jewelry, and even intellect in general. At one point it included a flirtatious but probably platonic affair between Lucrezia and Isabella's husband, Francesco.[30] This rivalry began before Lucrezia had even arrived in Ferrara. Isabella, not willing to brook a challenge as "la prima donna del mondo" in her native city, prepared carefully for the wedding. She wrote to her agents, requiring gold chains, cloth, and other items, and enlisted Il Prete, servant of Niccolò da Correggio, as a spy in the Ferrarese wedding party that was to go to Rome to accompany the new duchess on her journey. Il Prete reports on Lucrezia's wardrobe, her dazzling abilities at the dance, and on the lady herself, who he claims is a "lady with intelligence, astute; it's necessary to be on your toes [when you are with her]."[31] De' Prosperi writes Isabella on 3 October 1501, describing Lucrezia's jewels and saying, "Your Ladyship must now employ your abilities so that you

can show whose daughter you are, and, if you do not have as many jewels, that yours are no less well set than those of the others."[32] For Lucrezia's part, it was later reported that she had pawned her jewelry and had asked for Cardinal Ippolito I d'Este's revenues from the diocese of Ferrara for an entire year because she had spent so much to outshine Isabella during the 1502 celebrations.[33]

During the wedding itself, there was continued rivalry, paticularly on the part of Isabella. Already on 1 February, the marchesa of Crotone, an exile living at the Mantuan court, reported to Francesco Gonzaga that Lucrezia "is not very pretty but has a pleasing aspect. . . . We will bring home the prize for beauty with my Madama [Isabella], your consort."[34] Isabella herself wrote home to Francesco complaining about Lucrezia's habits and caused a scene in one of the comedies of Plautus given by Ercole for the wedding celebrations. On the last day of the celebrations, she wrote to her husband, saying, "I am sure that you have received greater pleasure from my letters than I have from these celebrations, because I have never stayed anywhere with greater annoyance than here."[35] Alessandro de Baesio also reports on 6 February that "up till now the bride has not been friendly with our Lady; they have not yet eaten together."[36]

From the very first, music took a central part in Isabella's designs: she was confident enough of her abilities that she was certain she could outshine Lucrezia at least in this one area.[37] On 12 January she wrote Lorenzo da Pavia, requiring him to put two of her lutes in order; one of these was the *vihuela de mano* Lorenzo had made for her several years before:

> Lorenzo. . . . We are sending you two of our lutes, one of which is the one of ebony, that are splintered and broken in the bowl, as you will see. We ask you to repair them immediately and bring them with you if you come to Ferrara for these wedding celebrations, and [if] not, to send them with a trustworthy person.[38]

The material she ordered for dresses also played a part in her musical preparations. On the day Lucrezia and her cortège entered Ferrara, Isabella, as if to announce her musical superiority at the very outset, was wearing a gown embroidered with her own personal musical device. The marchesa of Crotone reported to Francesco Gonzaga from Ferrara that "the marchesa, your wife, accompanied by several ladies, went to the house of the Administrator of the Gabelles to see the bride pass. She was attired in a lovely gown embroidered with that invention of mensuration signs and rests";[39] Marin Sanudo, the indefatigable Venetian chronicler, also reported that Isabella first received Lucrezia "dressed in a gown embroidered with musical rests."[40]

Finally, on 5 February, the one evening in which Lucrezia stayed in to wash her hair, Isabella gave a banquet for an impressive list of luminaries: the French ambassador, Ferrante and Giulio d'Este, Elisabetta Gonzaga, Laura Bentivoglio, Niccolò da Correggio, and four of the major Spanish dignitaries. Here Isabella had Marchetto Cara sing.[41] She herself also performed, although in her letter to her husband she modestly insisted that she was forced to do so: "After dinner, we danced the hat dance. When this was done, so many requests and demands were made of me that I had to demonstrate my singing to the lute."[42] The marchesa of Crotone was more specific in her comments; according to her, "after dinner, her Excellency the Marchesa, because of the requests of these Lords, sang two sonnets and a *capitolo*, and they were as delighted as it is possible to be."[43]

The rivalry continued after Isabella's return to Mantua and was surely fueled by a letter from an unnamed Roman academy to Isabella comparing unfavorably her behavior to that of Lucrezia during the festivities. The original of this letter is understandably missing, but the humanist Mario Equicola reported the contents to Margherita Cantelma, his patroness at the time:

> The content and tenor of the said letter is that it lists all the vices and failings of the women of Lombardy at the wedding in Ferrara and says, among the other [women], that the Marchesa [Isabella] was not well dressed, that she put on airs during the celebrations, and many other things, that she wanted to appear a boy [instead of a girl]. . . . The Marchesa is livid with anger.[44]

The two women did spend time together during Isabella's many trips to Ferrara, but they apparently were never friendly with one another. On her side, Isabella mocked Lucrezia's lack of intelligence and was infuriated by the duchess's imitation of her dress as well as her artistic patronage. On 6 July 1509, for example, Tolomeo Spagnolo reports that "today my most illustrious Madame [Isabella] made great fun of the Duchess of Ferrara, who, to demonstrate that she is chaste and faithful to her husband, has Pietro Giorgio da Lampugnano sleep in her antechamber."[45]

This rivalry also must have been felt among the two women's retainers, for Lucrezia's court contained several of Isabella's former employees. Paramount among these was the frottolist, singer, and lutenist Bartolomeo Tromboncino, recently in Isabella's employ, but from 1505 a

member of Lucrezia's court. On 6 June of this year de' Prosperi reports to Isabella:

> It appears that the Duke [Alfonso d'Este] wants Madonna Elysabeth and all the foreigners who are in the household of his wife [Lucrezia] to leave, even the Neapolitans and Samaritana romana, so that all are in the condition that your Ladyship can imagine. . . . They say also that Madonna Beatrice [de' Contrari] is to serve the aforementioned Madonna [Lucrezia], and that Tromboncino and Ser [Antonio] Tebaldeo are also to be included, but we shall know everything shortly.[46]

With Lucrezia, Tromboncino was a part of a nucleus of musicians responsible for the entertainment of Lucrezia herself and of the guests at her frequent *feste*. Although he was her highest-paid musician at 465 *lire marchesane* (150 ducats) annually, he was by no means her only one. In January 1506, the first date for which there are payment records,[47] he was one of four performers. Also listed are Dionisio de Mantova, called "Papino," Niccolò da Padova, and Ricciardetto Tamborino, a pipe-and-tabor player and instructor of Lucrezia's favorite pastime, the dance. In November of the same year these musicians were joined by another singer, Paolo Poccino.[48] It is symptomatic of the rivalry between Isabella and Lucrezia that Papino was Mantuan, that Poccino had been in Mantuan services at least until 1505, and that Ricciardetto had refreshed Isabella's knowledge of French dances for the 1502 wedding.[49] Of her five musicians, only Niccolò da Padova had been with Lucrezia for a lengthy period: he had journeyed to Ferrara with her for her wedding in January 1502 and may have served on her staff in Rome even earlier.[50] As Lewis Lockwood has discovered, Niccolò remained with Lucrezia until at least 1511, when he was included in a list of benefices as "Messer Nicolò, Cantore de la Duchessa."[51]

Although the personnel of Lucrezia's court fluctuated slightly, from 1506 through 1508 her musicians remained basically the same: Tromboncino, Ricciardetto, Poccino, Papino, and Niccolò da Padova.[52] In September 1507, however, a woman singer is added: Dalida de' Putti, musician and future mistress of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este.[53] Lucrezia had reduced drastically the number of her musicians by 1517, the next year for which there is a register of payments: of the six musicians with her in 1508, only Papino da Mantova remained; he was still there in 1519, the year of Lucrezia's death, as the sole musician in her employ.[54]

Lucrezia seems to have decreased the size of her staff in 1510 or 1511 because of financial problems in the duchy. The years 1511 and 1512 were difficult ones at the court of Ferrara: Duke Alfonso d'Este was at

war with Pope Julius II and was hard pressed to keep up payments to his soldiers, much less to his musicians. In fact, he released nearly all his musicians in late 1510, sending the majority to Mantua.[55] Moreover, several of Lucrezia's musicians had definitely left her services during this period. Niccolò da Padova seems to have been released about this time, for in April 1512 Lucrezia, apparently ignorant of his whereabouts, asked Francesco Gonzaga to aid "Niccolò cantor."[56] Francesco replied that he was unable to find Niccolò among the many formerly Ferrarese singers in his employ.[57] Dalida de' Putti also changed employers during this period; in 1512 she first appears in the Ferrarese household of Lucrezia's brother-in-law Ippolito d'Este.[58]

In November 1511 Bartolomeo Tromboncino, too, joined Ippolito's court. He is not listed in the pay registers among the "bocche," that is, with the regular musicians and servants to whom Ippolito gave monthly expenses for food and wine, but is included as an extra-ordinary musician in the *Bolletta dei salariati*, again with a higher salary than any other musician.[59] Bartolomeo remained with Ippolito in this capacity through June 1512, after which he again disappears from the pay records.[60]

There is, however, a Mantuan document indicating that Tromboncino was still in Ferrara the next year. In January 1513 Francesco Gonzaga gave him permission to travel through the Mantuan territory to return to Ferrara with two carts of wine.[61] If Bartolomeo was in Ferrara during 1513, he must have been once again with Lucrezia, for he had left Ippolito by June 1512 and does not appear on the payrolls of anyone in the Este family afterward. By 1513, with the death of Julius II, the tense political situation had eased somewhat, and Lucrezia could have afforded to rehire the frottolist. Ippolito, as an ecclesiastic and one of the wealthiest cardinals in Italy, was not severely affected by this situation and was able to keep his court intact throughout the difficult period. It is possible, therefore, that Ippolito took over Tromboncino's salary for Lucrezia and returned him to her as soon as she was able to resume paying him. This hypothesis is strengthened by two circumstances. First, Bartolomeo's salary of 38 lire and 15 soldi per month was exactly the same with both Ippolito and Lucrezia.[62] Second, in 1518 Lucrezia ordered the Ferrarese ambassador in Venice to request Tromboncino to return to Ferrara from that city. The letter containing this order also implies that the musician had recently moved there, had rented a house, and was teaching gentlewomen lute and singing. The most likely

explanation for this letter is that Tromboncino had recently left Lucrezia's services and that she was requesting his return.[63]

Among Lucrezia's musicians, none received anything approaching Tromboncino's annual salary of 465 lire. The next best paid, Ricciardetto, received 148 *lire marchesane* and 16 soldi annually, and Niccolò da Padova, Papino, Poccino, and Dalida de' Putti each received only 96 lire per year.[64] Tromboncino, with over three times the salary of even Ricciardetto, must have been viewed as a particular prize. His privileged position was surely the direct result of his fecundity as a frottolist, as well as, perhaps, of his particular skill as a composer and performer. Certainly Tromboncino was not the only composer on Lucrezia's staff, for at least another two of her six musicians were frottolists: Niccolò da Padova was the author of seventeen pieces in Petrucci's books of the genre, and Papino is listed as a composer in Petrucci's lost tenth book of frottole.[65]

These musicians gave Lucrezia a small but diverse group: she had three frottolists as well as singers of secular music and string players for the performance of the pieces produced by Tromboncino, Niccolò, and Papino. Bartolomeo was clearly a lutenist of some renown, for he is praised for his ability on the instrument in a premature epitaph by Hieronimo Cassio.[66] Poccino, too, was a lutenist: in 1505, the year before the musician's entry into Lucrezia's services, an unnamed writer sent Isabella a "*frotolina*," telling her to have Poccino set it to the lute.[67] Niccolò da Padova and perhaps Papino must have been lutenist-singers, too, and the female singer Dalida is praised as a singer alongside Tromboncino in Oriolo's *Monteparnasso*.[68] In 1508 de' Prosperi reports an ensemble of Ferrarese singers and string players that must have consisted of just these musicians. During carnival, Ippolito d'Este presented an eclogue by Ercole Pio that compared the virtues of Lucrezia, Isabella, and Elisabetta Gonzaga. In this play a group of shepherds appeared on stage: "Then Dalida, who was dressed, like the others, as a shepherd, began to sing with three companions, among whom was Tromboncino."[69]

Like Eleonora d'Este before her, therefore, Lucrezia had her own small court and a budget assigned her to pay for it. In fact, this budget was a matter of some controversy between Lucrezia and her father-in-law, Ercole d'Este. Lucrezia and her father, Pope Alexander VI, wanted her to have a budget of 12,000 ducats annually for a court of 118 to 120 servants,[70] but Ercole and Lucrezia finally compromised on a budget of 6,000 ducats plus the expenses for feeding her employees;[71] even so,

this was over twice the amount of approximately 2,700 ducats Eleonora had received for her court. In December 1506, for example, Lucrezia had 66 servants (plus an indeterminate number of servants in the stables), rather than the 118 she had wanted; these included cooks, tailors, meat carvers, a chaplain, and so forth.[72]

Of these servants, the best paid was Antonio Tebaldeo, who joined Lucrezia's court in 1505, at the same time as Tromboncino.[73] Tebaldeo, a poet, humanist, and priest, worked in Lucrezia's chancery and may have been responsible for much of the poetry set by her frottolists.[74] He was paid the astounding sum of 620 lire annually for this service, 155 lire more than Tromboncino, and exactly the salary Ercole d'Este had paid Josquin Desprez.[75] Next after Tromboncino in annual salary was the court painter Michele Costa, who received 31 lire a month, or 372 lire annually.[76] Lucrezia compensated the majority of her retainers more modestly: she paid her chief cook and her chaplain, for example, 48 lire a year, her tailor, 144 lire, and her doctor, 240 lire.

Lucrezia maintained, therefore, a complete, self-contained court including all the main elements of her husband's court, with the sole exception of military retainers. Unlike Eleonora d'Este and others from the previous generation of Italian noblewomen, she also maintained a self-sufficient corps of musicians. From her pay registers, in fact, one can infer the kinds of music that she, and perhaps other noblewomen of the Renaissance, patronized. Two facts are immediately apparent. First, with frottolists, singers, string players, and a dance instructor, Lucrezia was well furnished with the requisites for secular vocal music designed for court entertainment, as well as for the frottola's devotional equivalent, the lauda. Second, her musical staff was much more limited than her husband's, for she employed neither singers of sacred music nor players of loud instruments: trumpets, shawms, and trombones. Although a case might be made that she had no need of these musicians, since her husband employed them, the same point could be made concerning singers and string players, which she did have in her service. Rather, it seems that the absence of these musicians must have something to do with the proprieties of the era, in which noblewomen were expected to have in their households neither loud instruments, the rightful attributes of the warlike prince, nor a personal chapel.[77] The latter was by far the most costly undertaking in the patronage of music, equaling roughly the cost of all the other groups combined, and it seems logical that each court would maintain only one such ensemble, associated with the ruler himself.[78]

Without doubt, Lucrezia, with her love for dances and *feste*, occasionally needed loud instruments, and these she borrowed from Alfonso or Ippolito. In March 1506, for example, she paid Nicola Piva and his companions for having played at a *festa* that she gave during carnival. Nicola, although a Ferrarese figure, was not Lucrezia's musician.[79] At the end of the same year, she gave presents to Vincenzo Tamborino, servant of Ippolito, and to the trumpets and pifferi of Alfonso, presumably for having played for her during 1506.[80] On the basis of Lucrezia's staff, therefore, it would appear that noblewomen kept musicians for the softer types of court music alone, that is, for secular and devotional vocal music and perhaps for instrumental music played by ensembles of strings. This can be confirmed by examining the kinds of music patronized by Lucrezia's sister-in-law Isabella d'Este.

Without the presence of pay records for the Mantuan court in general, the size and nature of Isabella's particular court is difficult to assess. Nevertheless, that she maintained her own household is demonstrated in several documents, the most important of which are a pair of letters of 1502 between Isabella and her father. Ercole d'Este, outraged at the sum Lucrezia wanted for her court, wrote his daughter on 16 May, asking her for the size of her budget.

> We wish to know how much you are given annually by your husband the Marchese. We therefore ask you to write us immediately, detailing clearly your budget, including the living and eating expenses for you and your servants and everything else, so that we are completely clear as to the quantity and quality of your funds, and so that we know your total budget and how you receive it, and for this reason we are sending this special rider.[81]

Isabella responded to Ercole two days later, answering with some pride in her financial acumen:

> When I came here to this most illustrious house, I was given a budget of six thousand ducats a year in cash for dressing myself and my ladies . . . and to pay the salaries of all my servants and ladies. . . . Beyond this, [my husband's] court gave me the expenses for about one hundred mouths. Afterwards, in order to be freer in increasing or decreasing the size of my court and to be free of the expense, my illustrious consort on the advice of his factors assigned me two thousand ducats for the expenses of feeding my servants, including thus the expenses for my companions.[82] [The money] was assigned to me in the following fashion: six thousand ducats come from the taxes on the mill-stone, one thousand from excise duties, and the other one thousand from the income derived from the village of Palidano, the total coming to eight thousand ducats. It is true that, through my own industry, my income from the said court [Palidano] has increased by one thousand

> ducats, and from this income I have acquired the court of Castiglione Mantovano and Bondenazo, so that at present I have an income of around ten thousand, five hundred ducats; but I now have about fifty servants more than I originally had.[83]

Isabella therefore received from Francesco a budget of eight thousand ducats, two thousand ducats greater than that of Lucrezia. Isabella, however, was required to pay the living expenses of her servants and Lucrezia was not, so the actual budgets of the two noblewomen were roughly equal. It is true that Isabella managed to increase her funds, but she had a court of about 150, much larger than that of Lucrezia.[84]

The marchesa's household also included musicians, whom she had in her personal service rather than simply using those attached to Francesco's court. This was already the case shortly after her marriage, for in March 1490 she wrote to her husband:

> Creaco and his companion, [both] singers, have asked me to have your Excellency tell them what they are to do, because they say that you told them to remain here and that they are staying in the hostel. For this reason I ask your Lordship to advise me whether you want to keep them in your services or give them to me or whatever else is your wish so that I can tell them what they are to do.[85]

The singers must have stayed with Isabella, for she asked the Council of Verona several months later to help "Creaco, our singer" with a suit pending there.[86] This is a particularly early indication that Isabella had her own musicians, but it is by no means unique. Through a study of her correspondence, it can be shown that she employed singers and string players, as well as players of keyboard instruments and pipe and tabor.

One of the most important of these musicians who served on Isabella's staff was Bartolomeo Tromboncino. I now believe that, until his departure in about 1505, Tromboncino served as Isabella d'Este's personal musician and that, during this time, Marchetto Cara, the other great frottolist at Mantua, served principally Francesco Gonzaga, Isabella's husband.[87] The most obvious proof of this statement is contained in the few extant financial records, that is, the mandates and decrees ordering payment for special services or exemptions from payment due. All such monetary transactions for Tromboncino come from Isabella and her secretary Benedetto Capilupi.[88] In strong contrast, all those for Cara originate from Francesco and his secretary Antimaco.[89] Documents not concerned with payment also support this separation. Isabella treats Tromboncino as an employee, interceding on his behalf after he killed

his wife, writing to Francesco to beg his forgiveness.[90] Further, she requires Tromboncino to do tasks typical of a musical retainer. When poets send Isabella their verse to be set it is unfailingly to Tromboncino whom she turns for the settings, not to Cara,[91] and in 1498 she writes to her brother Ippolito:

> Your most reverend Lordship wrote me the other day asking that I have your old songs recopied. Thus, I have done it and send them to you, even though they are not copied as you asked, that is, in a small book, but, in order to not delay any longer I wanted to send them as they are. I shall now have Tromboncino recopy them and shall send them to you [again].[92]

With Cara, on the other hand, there is a certain distance in these early years of Isabella's reign. There are few letters concerning Cara in her correspondence before 1505, and these often relate him to Francesco. In August 1495, for example, she writes to her husband at Fornovo, sending Cara to him and apologizing for not having returned him sooner.[93] Finally, there is a group of letters of 1499 concerning a trip to Casale Monferrato by Tromboncino and other musicians that makes explicit this particular division of musicians. Isabella's brother Giulio writes her on 8 May, sending songs and asking her to have Cara put them into better form. Isabella answers on 14 May, thanking Giulio for the pieces, and, without mentioning Cara at all, says that she would have given them to Tromboncino, if he had not already left for Casale.[94] On 7 June Marchese Guglielmo Paleologo of Casale writes Isabella, not Francesco, apologizing for not having sent her singers back to her:

> The singers of your Ladyship who are here having asked permission to return to you, we were not able to allow this because we are in the process of having performed a comedy, in which it is necessary that these [singers] take part in order to sing some verses that were composed for them. We ask your Ladyship to be pleased to accept their explanation when they arrive, because we have kept them here to do this.[95]

One of these singers must have been Tromboncino, who had gone there by the middle of May.

Taken together, these documents indicate clearly that Tromboncino was Isabella's musician and that Cara was Francesco's. Such a situation helps to explain Tromboncino's early concern with higher-quality text forms, for it was Isabella and not Francesco who continually corresponded with poets, asking for their latest products, and who wanted musical elaborations of Petrarch. Conversely, the situation helps explain Cara's disregard of these forms early in his career, and his tremendous importance for them in later years; after Tromboncino's departure, Isabella obviously shared Cara with Francesco.

By using the same types of evidence, other musicians who were members of the Marchesa's personal household can be named.[96] On 10 December 1490, for example, Isabella, returning from Ferrara, wrote to her husband:

> This evening I arrived here [in Sermide] safe and sound. Tomorrow I shall be in Sacchetta and the next day in Mantua, as your Excellency knows from another of my [letters]. Having had Maestro Johannes Martini come to Mantua the other day to teach me singing, as your Excellency knows, I have taken great pleasure in this, since it appears to me a most laudable virtue. Now, to continue [my studies], I am bringing him back with me. But because he cannot remain there long, he brought with him a young Frenchman who has a good technique of singing and who would be good for the task because he is alone. If your Excellency approves, I should like to take him to stay with me. For this reason, I ask you to inform me of your wish [in this matter].[97]

This young Frenchman whom Isabella hired must have been Charles (Colinet?) de Lannoy, who deserted her court in 1491 to go to Florence, taking with him her singing method.[98] Another well-known musician, the lutenist and viol player Giovanni Angelo Testagrossa, was a member of Isabella's personal court from at least 1495 to about 1503, when he served as her lute teacher, and again intermittently thereafter.[99] Isabella's court also included a keyboard player named Alessandro and an unnamed pipe-and-tabor player.[100]

Whatever the exact makeup of Isabella's musical household, it contained all the basic elements of Lucrezia's: frottolists, singers, string players, and a pipe-and-tabor player. Unlike Lucrezia, she employed a keyboard player, most probably because she herself played these instruments.[101] Indeed, this may be the key to the entire picture of Isabella's patronage of music, for her patronage was a single-minded one, concentrating on a single type of music: the frottola. There is no trace in her correspondence of interest in sacred music with Latin texts, wind music, the French chanson, or anything other than secular and devotional vocal music with texts in the Italian vernacular.

This narrow focus of Isabella's patronage was the result of several factors, among them the proprieties of the era limiting the kinds of music suitable for a noblewoman's attention. The one that stands out most strongly, however, is that she was interested in patronizing only that music which she herself could perform. It is clear, for example, that

Isabella did not speak or understand French, and therefore was not interested in the chanson.[102] It is also clear that she did sing and play lute, viol, *lira da braccio,* and keyboard instruments, but did not play or appreciate winds.[103]

With slight differences, this is also the kind of music patronized by Lucrezia Borgia in Ferrara. Indeed, the musical forces of the two noblewomen were quite similar and conform to the prescriptions of Francesco da Barberino for music suitable for a lady: *bas* chamber music and music for the dance. This similarity, then, can provide a clue to the kinds of music supported by the new generation of noblewomen in Italy in the years around 1500: they seem to have patronized exclusively secular and devotional music and to have employed composers, solo singers, and players of string instruments to provide for their needs. Too, given the importance of the dance to women, they employed dancing masters and *tamborini.* Because of the social connotations of loud instruments, they left the patronage of pifferi to their husbands. Neither did they support the expensive chapels of singers for the performance of sacred music: this too, at least in Italy, seems to have been the exclusive province of the ruler himself. On the other hand, their establishments of musicians specializing in secular vocal music and string music were strong ones, as strong as those of their husbands, and their importance as supporters of secular and devotional music must be viewed as equal to that of their male counterparts.

Appendix: Documents[104]

Document 1: Letter of Bernardino de' Prosperi to Isabella d'Este, 4 June 1505 (ASMN B. 1240, fol. 298).

Illustrissima Madama. . . . El pare che la voluntà del Signore nostro sia che Madonna Elysabeth et tute l'altri forasteri et forastere che sono in casa de la Illustrissima Signora sua consorte se partino et le napoletane et anche Samaritana romana, donde tuti et tute stano come può pensare la Signoria Vostra. . . . Se dice anche che Madonna Beatrice ne va a stare cum la prefata Signora et che Tromboncino et Ser Thebaldeo sono nel numero de quelli che hano ad essere cossì, ma il tuto vederemo presto. . . . Ferrariae, quarto Junij 1505.

Document 2: Excerpts from the Court of Lucrezia Borgia in December 1506 (ASMO LASP L. 1130, fols. 92v–94).

Al Nome de Idio M.D.VI
Zobia a dì XXXI de dexenbre

[3.] Maestro Lodogivo Bonazolo medigo per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 20 dato el mexe—L. 240.

[4.] Messer Antonio Tibaldeo per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 51 [S.] 13 [d.] 4 dato el mexe—L. 620.

[*9.] Dionixe de Mantoa dito Papino per havere servito mixe dodexe in ragione de L. 8 dato el mexe—L. 96.

[*13.] Messer Niccolò de Padova cantore per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 8 dato el mexe—L. 96.

[*16.] Trombonzino cantore per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 38 [S.] 15 dato el mexe—L. 465.

[*17.] Rizardettj Tanborino per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 12 [S. 8] dato el mexe—L. 148 [S.] 16.

[23.] Zoanne de Formento sopra chuogo per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 4 dato el mexe—L. 48.

[40.] Don Rainaldo Capelano per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 4 el mexe—L. 48.

[48.] Maestro Anzelino sarto per havere servito mixj dodexe in ragione de L. 12 dato el mexe—L. 144.

[53.] Maestro Michel Costa depintore per havere servito mixj sette e mezo in ragione de L. 31 dato el mexe—L. 236 [S.] 5.

[*66.] Pozino Cantore per havere servito mixj duj che comenzò a dì primo de novembre in ragione de L. 8 dato el mexe—L. 16.

Document 3: Letter of Ercole d'Este to Isabella d'Este, 16 May 1502 (ASMN B. 1188).

Dux Ferrariae et cetera. Illustrissime et Excellentissime Domine filie nostre dilectissime, Domine Isabelle Marchionisse Mantuae et cetera, salutem. Desideramo de intendere quanta sia la provisione che singulo anno vi è data da lo Illustrissimo Signore Marchese vostro consorte, et però pregamo la Signoria Vostra che subito per una sua lettera ni voglia chiaramente significare quanta è dicta sua provisione, computate le spese del vivere et dil vestire per lei et per la famiglia sua et ogni altra cosa, per forma che restiamo ben chiari de la quantità et qualitade de dicta sua provisione, et che etiam sapiamo se de tuta la provisione gli è provisto a dinari contanti o come, et per questa causa spaciamo questo cavallaro a posta. Et il tuto ni serà gratissimo. Et bene valete. Belriguardi, XVI May 1502.

Document 4: Letter of Isabella d'Este to Ercole d'Este, 18 May 1502 (ASMN B. 2993, L. 13, fols. 71v–72v).

Illustrissimo Signore mio patre observandissimo. Quando io venni a principio in questa illustrissima casa, mi fu deputato de provisione sei mille ducati d'oro l'anno per il mio vestere et de le mie donne . . . et dare la provisione a tutti li servitori et donne . . . et ultra di questo la corte mi faceva le spese a circa cento bocche. Doppo, per essere in magior libertà de acrescere et sminuire la familia a mio modo, condescendendoli etiam voluntariamente lo Illustrissimo Signor mio consorte a persuasione di suoj factori per levarsi in tutto il peso dalle spalle,

mi furono deputati dua millia ducati per le spese, includendoli etiam le spese de li compagni, li quali me furono assignati in questo modo: li sei mille de la provisione sopra il datio de la macina, mille de le spese sopra una gabella, et per li altri mille mi fu data la corte et possessione de Letpaledano, sì che in tutto ascendino a la summa de octo mille ducati. L'è vero che poi, per industria mia et di mei, la intrata de dicta corte è acresciuta circa altri mille ducati, et ho de li avanzi acquistata la corte de Castiono Mantuano et dil Bondenazo, per forma che al presente mi ritrovo havere de entrata circa dece millia et cinquecento ducati l'anno, ma ho etiam forsi cinquanta bocche più che non mi furono deputate. . . . Mantuae, XVIII Maij MDII.

Document 5: Letter of Isabella d'Este to Francesco Gonzaga, 15 March 1490 (ASMN B. 2904, L. 136, fol. 10).

Illustrissimo Domino Nostro

Illustrissimo Signor mio. Creaco e lo conpagno, cantarini, me hanno pregata voglia intendere da la Excellentia Vostra quello che hanno a fare, perché dicono essa haverli facto restare qua et che sono suso l'hostaria. Sì che prego Vostra Signoria me avisi se la li vole tenerli a li servitij suoi o darli a me o qual altra sia la intentione sua atiò possa responderli quanto habiano a fare. . . . Mantuae, XV Martij 1490.

Document 6: Letter of Isabella d'Este to Ippolito d'Este, 14 December 1498 (ASMO, Estero, Cartegio di Principe e Signorie, Italia, B. 1196, [Mantova, B. 16]).

Reverendissimo et Illustrissimo Monsignor mio. La Signoria Vostra Reverendissima me scrisse l'altro dì che gli facesse refare li soi canti[105] vechi. Cossì ho facto e mandoli, benché non siano stati notati como havea ordinato in uno libretto picolo. M[a] per non differir più, ho pur voluto mandarli a questo modo. Farò mo notarne al Trombonzino de novi et mandarogeli, et alla Signoria Vostra Reverendissima me racommando. Mantue, XIIIJ Decembris 1498.

Document 7: Letter of Marchese Guglielmo Paleologo of Casale Monferrato to Isabella d'Este, 7 June 1499 (ASMN B. 740).

Illustrissima et Excellentissima Domina tanquam Soror honorandissima. Havendoni li cantori de la Signoria Vostra, chi sono qua, ricerchato licentia per ritornarsene da lei, non gli l'havemo possuta concedere per essere in atto de fare recitare una comedia a la quale è bisogno ch'epsi li intervengano per cantare alchuni versi se sono compositi a tale proposito. Pregamo la Signoria Vostra vogla admettere la loro excusatione quando sarano lì, per haverli noi rettenuti per fare questo effecto, et cusì a la Signoria Vostra se offerimo et racommandiamo. Datum Casali, die VIJ Junij 1499.

Document 8: Letter of Isabella d'Este to Francesco Gonzaga, 10 December 1490 (ASMN B. 2106).

Illustrissimo Signor mio. Questa sera sun gionta qua sana e salva. Domane sero a Sachetta et l'altro a Mantua, secundo che per un'altra mia haverà inteso la

Excellentia Vostra. Havendo facto venire l'altro zorno a Mantua Maestro Zoan Martino per imparare a cantare, como scià la Signoria Vostra, ne ho preso grande piacere, parendome virtute molto laudabile. Cussì adesso, per sequitare, lo reconduco meco. Ma perché lui non poteria restarli troppo, ha condutto seco uno zovene franzoso, qual ha bona rasone de canto et se ne haveria bon constructo perché è solo. Quando Vostra Excellentia se contentasse, io lo tuoria volunteri a stare meco: però la prego se digni farme intendere la volunta sua, et a la bona gratia de Vostra Signoria me raccomando sempre. Sermedi, X Decembris 1490.