

# Songs of Love and Death: *I madrigali a cinque voci* (Venice, 1542) by Cipriano de Rore (1515/16–1565)

In 2015, the American Musicological Society gave the Noah Greenberg Award to musicologist Jessie Ann Owens and the vocal ensemble Blue Heron, directed by Scott Metcalfe, for their project to produce the world premiere recording of Cipriano de Rore's landmark *I madrigali a cinque voci* (Venice, 1542). The award, named for the founder of the New York Pro Musica Antiqua, encourages cooperation between scholars and performers and recognizes outstanding contributions to historical performing practices.

On May 3, 2018, Owens spoke at the Academy about Cipriano's music; following her presentation, Blue Heron performed a selection of madrigals drawn from his 1542 publication. The program, which served as the Academy's 2067th Stated Meeting, included a welcome from Jonathan F. Fanton (President of the American Academy) and an introduction by Jane A. Bernstein (Austin Fletcher Professor of Music Emerita at Tufts University). The following is an edited version of Jane Bernstein's introduction and Jessie Ann Owens's presentation.



## Jane A. Bernstein

Jane A. Bernstein is the Austin Fletcher Professor of Music Emerita at Tufts University. She was elected a Fellow of the American Academy in 2005.

## Introduction

It is a great honor for me to introduce this evening's program: "Songs of Love and Death: Selections from Cipriano de Rore's *I madrigali a cinque voci* of 1542." I am particularly excited to do so because this event exemplifies a true collaboration between mu-

sic scholarship and performance presented by my dear friend and colleague, Professor Jessie Ann Owens, and Boston's premiere early music ensemble, Blue Heron.

Jessie Ann Owens is one of the foremost scholars of Renaissance music. She is Distinguished Professor Emerita of Music and former Dean of the Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Davis. She has had a long and outstanding career as a teacher, scholar, and administrator. Before coming to UC Davis, she taught at the Eastman School of Music and then at Brandeis University, where she served first as Dean of the College and then as Dean of Arts and Sciences. She also holds the distinction of serving as president of two scholarly societies: the American Musicological Society and the Renaissance Society of America.

Her research in the Renaissance has centered on the Este Court in mid sixteenth-century Ferrara, compositional process, the Italian madrigal, Elizabethan and Jacobean music treatises, and the music of Cipriano de Rore. Not known to shy away from challenging projects, Professor Owens served as editor of the monumental thirty-volume series *The Sixteenth-Century Madrigal*, which for the first time made available to performers literally thousands of Italian madrigals in modern score. She is also acclaimed for her

pathbreaking book, *Composers at Work: The Craft of Musical Composition 1450–1600*, published by Oxford University Press, which received the 1998 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award. In this highly original study, Owens tackles the question of how Renaissance musicians wrote their music, offering for the first time a systematic examination of composers' autograph manuscripts before 1600. But it is her long and continuous work on the Flemish composer Cipriano de Rore and the madrigal that has led to her remarkable collaboration with Blue Heron.

The Italian madrigal is a unique musical/poetical genre, where, as the composer Mazzone de Miglione in his 1569 First Book of Madrigals put it, "the notes are the body of music, but the words are the soul." The vocal ensemble Blue Heron is the ideal partner for this important project, since under the leadership of Scott Metcalfe, the Boston-based group has been widely admired for its highly sensitive performances and its commitment to the understanding of the texts. Blue Heron has been praised by both music critics and scholars alike as one of the finest early music ensembles specializing in the Renaissance musical repertory.

Professor Owens's and Blue Heron's mission has been to bring to life again one of the most important works of the sixteenth century by creating the first recording of

Cipriano de Rore's first book of madrigals from 1542. For this exciting project, they have received the coveted Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musicological Society. Some of you may have heard of Noah Greenberg, who, in 1952, founded the New York Pro Musica, one of the first early music ensembles in North America, most famous for its revival of the great medieval masterpiece, *The Play of Daniel*. The Award, established by the Trustees of the New York Pro Musica Antiqua in memory of their first director, is intended as a grant-in-aid to stimulate active cooperation between scholars and performers by recognizing and fostering outstanding contributions to historical performing practices. What could be a more perfect project than this collaboration to produce a world premiere recording of Rore's landmark madrigal edition.



### Jessie Ann Owens

*Jessie Ann Owens is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Music at the University of California, Davis. She was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2003.*

It is becoming clear, thanks in part to the collaboration with Blue Heron, that Cipriano de Rore's first book of madrigals is remarkable both for its unprecedented scale and for the intensity of its emotional journey. My thanks to the American Academy for giving me the opportunity to present these findings and to Blue Heron for their inspired and revelatory performances.

In 1542, a Flemish immigrant to Italy with no steady job that we know of burst onto the musical scene with a remarkable publication. Cupriaen De Rore, or Cipriano de Rore, as he signed his name in his letters, was twenty-seven years old, or possibly twenty-eight, and had never published any of his music when he brought out *I madrigali a cinque voci* with a leading Venetian music printer, Girolamo Scotto.

The title page of his 1542 publication is remarkably spare (see Figure 1). We learn

nothing about the composer beyond his name – Cipriano Rore. We now think he may have been working as a freelance composer and living in Brescia, not far from Venice, when this book was published. Just a few years later, in 1546, he would secure the most prestigious post in Italy, chapelmaster for the Duke of Ferrara, so maybe this book functioned like a dissertation or a first book to advertise the composer's skills to potential employers. He later served as chapelmaster at the Farnese court in Parma and then at San Marco in Venice. He returned to Parma and died there in 1565, at the age of forty-nine or fifty. The portrait in Figure 2, in a luxurious manuscript commissioned by Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in 1559 and painted by court painter Hans Mielich, shows him at the height of his fame as a composer.

But there is more to be gleaned from the title page. "CANTUS" tells us that this is one of five separate volumes, or partbooks, one for each of the five voices. The singer with the highest voice sings the cantus, the top line. Each singer saw only his or her own part, much like the members of a string quartet today.

Then comes Cipriano's name, "CIPRIANO RORE," followed by a very brief title: "I madrigali a cinque voci," the madrigals for five voices. Most prints that contain madrigals – musical settings of Italian poetry – were part of a series, with titles such as "first book of madrigals for four voices," "second book," etc. By calling it "the madrigals," it is almost as though this would be his only book of madrigals. He would in fact go on to publish five books for five voices and two books for four voices. The title page ends with the conventional "nuovamente posti in luce," newly published, and information about the publication: the printer's mark, the printer, and place and year of publication.

Equally interesting is what is not present. The book lacks a privilege, a form of copyright protection granted by the Venetian



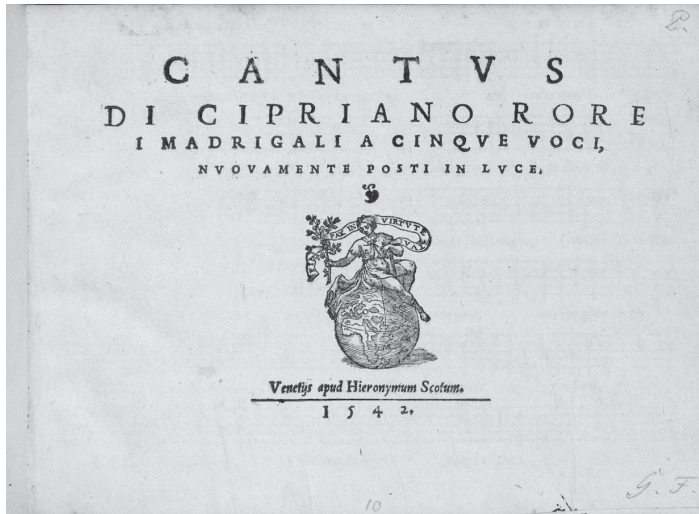


Figure 1. Title page, *Di Cipriano Rore i madrigali a cinque voci* (Venice, 1542), Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Musiksammlung, SA.77.D.5/1-5 (used by permission).

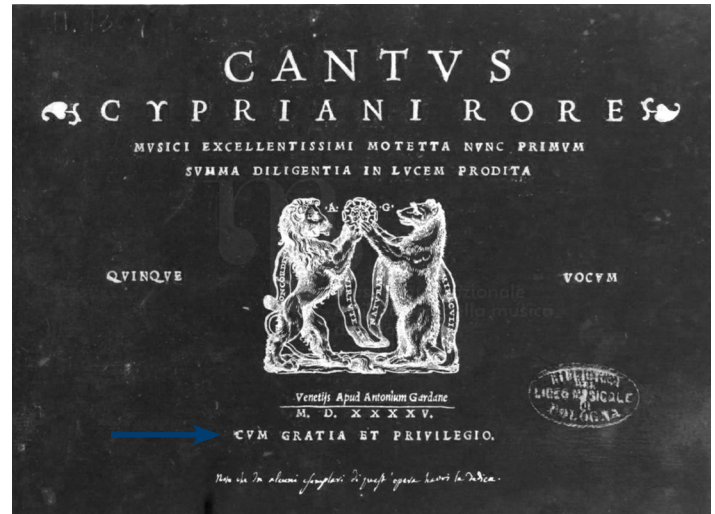


Figure 3. Title page, *Cypriani Rore motetta nunc primum summa diligentia in lucem prodita. Quinque vocem* (Venice, 1545), Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Musiksammlung, SA.77.D.32/1-5. Harald Fischer Verlag Online Collection "Die Musikdrucke der Staats- und Stadtbibliothek Augsburg 1488–1630" (used by permission).



Figure 2. Hans Mielich, portrait of Cipriano de Rore, 1559, Munich, Bavarian State Library, Mus.ms. B, p. 304 (used by permission). Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

government that is typically printed on the title page: "cum gratia et privilegio." The image in Figure 3 shows the title page of his 1545 book of motets, for which he did obtain a privilege. Did he not understand in 1542 the value of a privilege for protecting his intellectual property and creative work? Or did he lack the means for filing an application? The 1542 book became a best-seller, and four different printers brought out nearly a dozen editions over the course of the century.

Most striking is the absence of a dedication, the customary way of thanking a patron for financial support. The verso of the title page, where a dedication would typically be placed, has been left blank. Does this mean that Cipriano paid for the first edition of the book himself? Or was there possibly a patron who preferred to remain unnamed? Cipriano, unlike many composers, would never play the dedication game (trading a dedication for a subvention), and he never dedicated any of his prints to a patron.

At the very end of the 1542 *I madrigali a cinque voci* is the table of contents (see Fig-

ure 4), a simple list of the twenty pieces in alphabetical order, most with the notation "con la seconda parte" (indicating a madrigal divided into two sections). Nothing draws attention to the special character of the contents. In fact, this print marked a significant change in the kinds of Italian texts composers were setting, away from lighter and shorter texts to serious texts drawn above all from the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, or *Canzoniere*, the collection of 366 lyric poems by Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), known in English as Petrarch (see Table 1). Sixteen of the twenty madrigals in the 1542 book are sonnets, the first time the sonnet would so dominate a publication, and twelve of them are by Petrarch. This publication marked a decisive turn toward the unparalleled popularity of Petrarch among composers in the middle decades of the sixteenth century.

Stylistically, the music made a comparable shift: from the relatively simple chanson-like style of the early madrigal, typically for four voices, to a highly wrought setting

T A V O L A	
Altiero sesto	6
Amor che vedi, con la seconda parte	17
Ben si conuien a voi	18
Canai	1
Chi vol veder, con la seconda parte	14
Da qui bei lumi	20
Far potesse io vendetta, con la seconda parte	16
Hor che'l ciel e la terra, con la seconda parte	2
Hor che l'aria et la terra, con la seconda parte	19
Il mal mi preme, con la seconda parte	10
La vita fugge, con la seconda parte	8
Pogiam' al ciel, con la seconda parte	3
Per mezzo i boschi, con la seconda parte	11
Persequendomi amor, con la seconda parte	13
Quand'io son tutto volto, con la seconda parte	4
Quanto piu m'auicino, con la seconda parte	12
Quel sempre acerbo, con la seconda parte	15
Solba lontana, con la seconda parte	5
Strane rupi, con la seconda parte	7
Tu piangi, con la seconda parte	9
F I N I S.	

Figure 4. Table of contents, *Di Cipriano Rore i madrigali a cinque voci* (Venice, 1542), Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Musiksammlung, SA.77.D.5/1-5 (used by permission).



Figure 5. Giovanni Brevio, coat of arms, Arqua Petrarca (photo: Owens).

that used imitative polyphony of the sort more commonly found in motets, usually for five voices. These are long pieces, mostly in two sections (usually with the first eight lines of the sonnet in the first, the last six in the second), written in the new “black note” rhythmic notation. It is no exaggeration to say that with this print De Rore established the madrigal as a genre that would celebrate the fusion of music and poetry.

Other features of this publication have revealed themselves only gradually. Cipriano chose to compose and organize the music in the order of the modes, a kind of predecessor of keys in later music, from mode 1 to mode 8 (see Table 1). Only the final three pieces in the book do not adhere to this scheme. He distinguished between the pairs of modes – 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and so forth – through range: the contrast between high and low shown by the choice of clefs (the high g<sub>2</sub> versus the low c<sub>1</sub>).

This is the earliest collection of polyphonic music to use modal order, first recognized by Bernhard Meier in 1963 and remarked on by many scholars since then. In fact, Cipriano seems to have been among the first composers to understand how to translate the concepts associated with modality, devised originally for monophonic chant, for polyphonic music. The models he established would be followed by composers such as Palestrina and Lasso for the rest of the century.

Until now, however, no one has asked the why question: *why* would Cipriano decide to compose and organize this collection according to the eight modes? The answer gets at the heart of why this is such an important print. I believe that the texts form a previously unrecognized cycle of sixteen sonnets, a sequence that tells a story through words and – this is the crucial point – also through music by using modes to bring out the affect of the text.

The print divides into four large groups, with pieces ending on G, then E, then F, and then G again (the final three pieces stand outside this scheme). These groups can be seen as an orderly and logical series of moves through four scale types or sounds, each with a distinctive ordering of whole and half steps:

G with a flat (D transposed up a fourth)  
E  
F with a flat  
G

We can rearrange these four scale types or characteristic sounds along a continuum from the most minor sound, E phrygian, with its distinctive half-step opening, to the very bright F major, a continuum from darker to lighter:

Darker (E)  
Dark (G with a flat)  
Light (G)  
Lighter (F with a flat)



Table 1: Contents of Cipriano de Rore, *I madrigali a cinque voci* (1542)

No. First line	Poet	Form	Mode	Type (Key)
1 Cantai, mentre ch'i arsi del mio foco	Brevio	14-line ballata	1 tr.	b g2c2c3c3F3 G
2 Or che'l ciel et la terra e'l vento tace	Petrarch 164	sonnet	1 tr.	b g2c2c3c3F3 G
3 Poggiand'al ciel coll'ali del desio	anon	sonnet	1 tr.	b g2c2c3c3F3 G
4 Quand'io son tutto volto in quella parte	Petrarch 18	sonnet	2 tr.	b c1c3c4c4F4 GG
5 Solea lontana, in sonno consolarne	Petrarch 250	sonnet	2 tr.	b c1c3c4c4F4 GG
6 Altiero sasso, lo cui gioco spira	Molza	sonnet	3	- c1c3c4c4F4 E
7 Strane rupi, aspri monti, alte tremanti	Amanio	sonnet	3	- c1c3c4c4F4 E
8 La vita fugge et non s'arresta un'ora	Petrarch 272	sonnet	3	- c1c3c4c4F4 E
9 Tu piangi et quella per chi fai tal pianto	Tebaldeo	sonnet	4	- c2c4c4F3F4 EE
10 Il mal mi preme et mi spaventa il peggio	Petrarch 244	sonnet	5	b g2c2c3c3F3 F
11 Per mezz'i boschi inospiti e selvaggi	Petrarch 176	sonnet	5	b g2c2c3c3F3 F
12 Quanto più m'avvicino al giorno estremo	Petrarch 32	sonnet	6	b c1c3c4c4F4 FF
13 Perseguendomi amor al luogo usato	Petrarch 110	sonnet	6	b c1c3c4c4F4 FF
14 Chi vol veder quantunque pò natura	Petrarch 248	sonnet	7	- g2c2c3c3F3 G
15 Quel sempre acerbo et onorato giorno	Petrarch 157	sonnet	7	- g2c2c3c3F3 G
16 Far potess'io vendetta di colei	Petrarch 256	sonnet	8	- c1c3c4c4F4 GG
17 Amor, che vedi ogni pensiero aperto	Petrarch 163	sonnet	8	- c1c3c4c4F4 GG
18 Ben si conviene a voi	anon	9-line madrigal	[1]	b g2c2c3c3F3 D
19 Or che l'aria et la terra	anon	11-line madrigal	[2 tr.]	b c1c3c4c4F4 GG
20 Da quei bei lumi ond'io sempre sospiro	Brevio	13-line ballata	[3]	- c1c3c4c4F4 E

**Note:** b/- indicates the presence or absence of a flat in the signature; g2c2, etc., refers to the kind of clef and its placement on the staff; and the capital letter refers to the sonority of the final chord (a double letter refers to the lower octave).

If we then arrange the groups as they appear in the print, we see the audible effect of this grouping:

Dark (G with a flat)  
Darker (E)  
Lighter (F with a flat)  
Light (G)

The first half is in the minor modes (using the dorian and phrygian scales on D [transposed to G with a flat] and E), and the second in the major modes (using the lydian and mixolydian scales on F and G). This large-scale tonal structure reflects the narrative

arc of the cycle, which moves from the darkness of love's pain and loss in the first half to resignation and acceptance in the second.

At the very center is *Tu piangi et quella per chi fai tal pianto*, the only piece to end on low E (EE), which serves as a pivot between the two halves:

Il viver nostro è un fior colto de spina;  
però piangi la tua, non la sua morte,  
ché morte è quella che se chiama vita.  
(Tebaldeo, 1989 ed.)

Our life is a flower grown from a thorn;  
so weep for your death, not for hers,

for death is that which is called life.  
(trans. Lloyd/rev. Owens)

Death and life are juxtaposed.

The book opens with a *ballata* by an unnamed poet that functions like a proem or introduction to the sonnet sequence, highlighting themes that would recur throughout the cycle. From the 1545 publication *Rime et prose volgari di M. Giovanni Brevio* we learn that the poet was Giovanni Brevio (ca. 1480–ca. 1560), a Venetian priest and novelist. He wrote both the opening *ballata* and the one that closes the book. His pres-

ence in these important positions in *I madrigali* could well function as a poetic signature. We know little about his life: nephew of a cardinal (by adoption), he spent time during the 1510s in Rome and again in the 1540s, and held ecclesiastical benefices in the Veneto. He lived in Padua and Venice and was friends with many of Italy's leading writers. Although no portrait has survived, we do have his coat of arms, showing crossed lion's paws (see Figure 5).

We will never know for sure, but it seems very likely that Brevio collaborated with De Rore to assemble this set of texts, mostly by Petrarch but also by contemporary imitators of Petrarch, and to organize them in such a way as to create a narrative that can be expressed through the affects of the modes. I do not have time to make a detailed case for reading these texts as a cycle, but I can draw attention, by way of example, to links among the four darkest texts, those set to the E mode. *Altiero sasso* and *Strane rupi* both con-

prints of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, one of which survives today in Florence. It is a heavily annotated copy, in which he traces Petrarch's quotations and allusions. Brevio knew his Petrarch inside and out. He also shared with his friend Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), cardinal, poet, and influential literary critic, a fascination with fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *tre corone* – Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch – and owned a now-lost manuscript copy of the *Raccolta Bartoliana*, a collection of medieval lyric poetry.

Antonio Tebaldeo (1463–1537) was a well-known poet and courtier, associated with the courts in Mantua and Ferrara. He then moved to Rome, and as a member of the circle around Pope Leo X could well have known Brevio. Brevio copied and annotated Tebaldeo's poetry in a manuscript anthology that I believe he compiled, which is preserved today in Venice. Tebaldeo's sonnet *Tu piangi*, the oldest poem in the 1542 collec-

only did they overlap in Rome, where Molza lived for most of his life in the entourage of Medici prelates (Pope Leo X, Pope Clement VII, Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici), but they certainly knew one another. A wonderful letter from the Florentine historian and *letterato* Benedetto Varchi to Molza describes his visit to Catajo in 1536, the villa south of Padua where the Italian noblewoman Beatrice Pia degli Obizzi held a literary salon. Varchi had a *canzone* by Molza that he recited by heart to Bembo and then brought with him in written form to Catajo. Beatrice was not there but Brevio was. Varchi writes:

La mattina seguente, vedete che particolari io conto perché vostra signoria intenda ogni cosa, andando presso ad Arquà per visitare la Cavagliera de gli Obizi [Beatrice Pia degli Obizzi], gliele presentai scritta, sendovi solamente monsignor Brevio, ed egli or forte, e or piano, e or cantando, la lesse tutta più di vinti volte sempre lodandola; all'ultimo mi disse alcune cose di non molta importanza, come vedrà vostra signoria, e io, dubitando di non tenerle a mente e per non errare, gliele riportai a casa, perché egli umanissimamente, presa la penna, scrisse di sua mano quello che vedrà vostra signoria. Quelli segni o freghi sono dove sua signoria vorrebbe si mutasse, né allora gli sovveniva come; né m'accade dire altro circa la canzone, salvo che ringraziar vostra signoria da sua parte d'aver mandato a mostrargliela, che certo intende e parla di vostra signoria come ella merita e mostra amarla cordialissimamente . . . (ed. Bramanti, 2008)

The translation of the passage in bold is as follows: "I [Varchi] presented it to him [Brevio] in writing, and he read it more than twenty times, now loudly, now softly, and now singing it, always praising it." Brevio then took the poem home with him and

## The revelation of Cipriano's 1542 publication – the novelty that must have come as a shock to listeners accustomed to simple settings of amorous texts – is the power of music to portray human emotion.

cern the natural world (words for rocks and cliffs – *rupi, sassi, pietre* – recur several times). In *Strane rupi*, *La vita fugge*, and *Tu piangi* there are repeated references to sadness – the sad heart (twice), the sad fate – and no fewer than six references to weeping. Similar kinds of connections run throughout the cycle.

I will be the first to admit that the evidence of a collaboration is circumstantial. But it is significant that I can tie Brevio, directly or indirectly, to all of the poets whose texts make up the 1542 print. Pride of place, of course, goes to Petrarch. Brevio is known to have owned two early sixteenth-century

tion, apart from Petrarch's, was published in 1498 and many times thereafter.

Niccolò Amanio (ca. 1468–ca. 1528), a lawyer and administrator as well as a poet, died without publishing his *rime*. They circulated in manuscript and then, from 1545, began to appear in printed anthologies published by the Venetian printer Gabriel Giolito di Ferrari. Brevio knew Giolito and could have been involved in that venture, which also included some of his own poems.

Perhaps the best documented connection is between Brevio and the poet and *bon vivant* Francesco Maria Molza (1489–1544). Not



25479 - ROMA - Ritratto di signora - Bronzino - Galleria Borghese - Ripr. int. Anderson - Roma

**Figure 6.** Jacopino del Conte, portrait of Vittoria Farnese (1550–1560, Image date: 1930), Galleria Borghese, Roma, [http://library.artstor.org/asset/AZERIIG\\_10312611818](http://library.artstor.org/asset/AZERIIG_10312611818). Web. 2 Jul 2018. Artstor.

annotated it with editorial advice for Molza, whom he professed “to love most cordially.”

Molza’s sonnet in the 1542 print, *Altiero sasso*, is a strange text that has resisted interpretation:

Proud rock whose yoke breathes the ancient honor of the great people of Mars; river that breaks this way and that, now quiet and still, now full of rage and fury; slopes that all the world still loves and desires; eternal memories consecrated by so many and such writings; and you, scattered relics, on which every good soul gazes with devotion—I seem to hear fleeing around you the waves sighing, and the branches, and the flowers, and the breeze lamenting, and the stones breaking from grief, be-

cause already the day of weeping draws near when the beautiful face that all of Italy honors, will leave you, wrapped in horror at her departure. (trans. Feldman/rev. Owens)

The first section is clearly a reference to Rome, to the Capitoline and the Tiber. The natural world laments “because the day of weeping draws near when the beautiful face that all of Italy honors will leave you,” i.e., Rome, “wrapped in horror at her departure.” Who is this “bel viso,” the lady whose departure all of Italy mourns? A recent publication by Franco Pignatti has identified the context: the sonnet was written by Molza when it seemed that the “bel viso,” namely, Vittoria Farnese (shown in Figure 6 in a portrait by Jacopino del Conte), the niece of Pope Paul III and a very valuable property in the marriage diplomacy that was a constant in European politics, was set to depart for France to marry a member of the French royal family, François, duc d’Aumale. The negotiations failed, however; he would go on to marry Anna d’Este and she Guidubaldo della Rovere. The sonnet thus has a firm terminus ante quem of Spring 1541, after which it lost its original purpose and was in effect useless, except perhaps to Giovanni Brevio, who could imagine putting it into the group of sad texts that De Rore could set in the mournful phrygian mode. We have to imagine a manuscript circulation of the sonnet, perhaps between Molza and Brevio. Cipriano likely encountered the text after Spring 1541, possibly in 1542, setting it as part of the cycle.

But how did De Rore and Brevio connect? My best guess is through Count Fortunato Martinengo, who Bonnie Blackburn argues may have been De Rore’s patron in the early 1540s. The count can be documented in Padua, as part of the circle around the newly formed *Accademia degli Infiammati*. A letter from 1540 suggests that Brevio would be invited to join; he was living in Padua, just

down the street from Sperone Speroni, who in 1541 would become Prince of the academy.

Unfortunately, we have no evidence of performances of the 1542 madrigals during the sixteenth century, and so we do not know whether they were intended to be sung as a set or in smaller groups or individually, or in all of these different ways. The scale is monumental by Renaissance standards, in which most pieces lasted only a few minutes. The scale is also monumental by today’s standards, which is why Blue Heron is focusing this year on half of the pieces, and next year on the other half. (The two-CD set will be issued in 2019.)

Let me close by considering one of the pieces Blue Heron will perform: *Amor, che vedi*, the Petrarch sonnet that closes the cycle. The cycle had opened with the poet-narrator setting forth two protagonists: Madonna, his lady, and Amor, the vengeful god who drove his pain:

Cantai, mentre ch’i’ arsi del mio foco  
la viva fiamma ov’io morendo vissi,  
ben che quant’io cantai e quant’io scrissi  
di madonna e d’amor, fu nulla o poco.

I sang, while I burned from the living flame of my fire where I dying lived, although what I sang and wrote about my Lady and about Amor was nothing or little. (trans. Owens)

Amor, or Cupid, makes periodic appearances over the course of the cycle, and in the closing poem is addressed directly:

Amor, che vedi ogni pensiero aperto  
e i duri passi onde tu sol mi scorgi,  
nel fondo del mio cor gli occhi tuoi porgi  
a te palese, a tutt’altri coverto.

Sai quel che per seguirte ò già sofferto,  
et tu pur via di poggio in poggio sorgi  
di giorno in giorno, et di me non t’accorgi.  
che son sì stanco, e ’l sentier m’è troppo erto.

Ben veggio io di lontano il dolce lume  
ove per aspre vie mi sproni et giri,  
ma non ò come tu da volar piume.

Assai contenti lasci i miei desiri  
pur che ben desiando i' mi consume  
né le dispiaccia che per lei sospiri.  
(Petrarch, RVF 163, ed. Durling)

Love, you who see openly my every  
thought and the harsh steps where you  
alone guide me, reach your eyes to the  
depths of my heart, which appears to  
you but is hidden from all others.

You know what I have suffered in fol-  
lowing you; and still day by day you  
climb from mountain to mountain,  
and pay no attention to me who am so  
weary, and the path is too steep for me.

I do see from afar the sweet light to-  
ward which you spur and turn me  
through these hard ways; but I do not  
have wings, as you do, to be able to fly.

You leave my desires content as long as  
I am consumed with a high love [desir-  
ing well] and it does not displease her  
that I sigh for her. (trans. Durling)

The overall affect of the text reflects accep-  
tance, and the eighth mode can readily re-  
flect that affect. The poet/narrator tells Cu-  
pid that he is tired, that Cupid knows how  
much he has suffered on the journey. The  
closing lines explain that he is content be-  
cause he is consumed by loving and because  
his sighs are not displeasing to his lady. His  
beloved takes pleasure in his misery.

While working within the overall affect,  
Cipriano also brought out specific images  
(highlighted in bold) by means of vivid mu-  
sical gestures. He set “i duri passi,” the harsh  
steps, as a descending tetrachord at differ-  
ent pitch levels or steps. At the lover’s utter  
exhaustion (“che son sì stanco”), he intro-  
duced a B flat, which sounds like a lowering

of the key, a graphic illustration of the lov-  
er beaten down by his journey. At the end of  
the first part he represented the text, “and  
the path is too steep for me,” by employing  
a deliberate violation of the expectations  
for mode 8: he ends on D rather than on the  
more typical C, a subtle reference to the text;  
D is literally too steep or high for a plagal or  
low-range piece. In the second part, the lover  
continues to talk about “aspre vie,” the hard  
way or path, and now De Rore introduced  
sharps that are foreign to the mode to denote  
harshness. At the very end, he illustrated the  
lover’s sighs (“sospiri”) with rests. This ges-  
ture would become so common that there  
is scarcely a madrigal that does not depict  
“sospiri” with rests. These kinds of musical  
strategies invite the listener to savor the text  
and to be alert to specific musical responses.

The revelation of Cipriano’s 1542 publica-  
tion – the novelty that must have come as a  
shock to listeners accustomed to simple set-  
tings of amorous texts – is the power of mu-  
sic to portray human emotion. These mad-  
rigals, each one a world unto itself, when  
taken together tell a story about the many  
faces of love. Quite an achievement for a  
first book.

### Acknowledgments

This paper is drawn from a book in progress,  
*Cipriano and the Search for Music Drama*. I ac-  
knowledge with gratitude support from Villa  
I Tatti, the Harvard University Center for  
Italian Renaissance Studies, and the Gladys  
Kriebel Delmas Foundation.

### For Further Reading

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Owens, respectively