

# A Battle of Old and New: Giovan Maria Hebreo and Francesco da Milano at the Papal Court

by Hiroyuki Minamino

Giovan Maria Hebreo and Francesco da Milano were colleagues at the papal court for several years. Giovan Maria was a lutenist to Leo X from 1513 until the Pope's death in December 1521. After a short stay at the court of the Gonzagas in Mantua, Giovan Maria was back in the employ of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici in Rome by January of 1523 and continued working for him when Giulio became Pope Clement VII.<sup>1</sup> Francesco da Milano, born in Monza (a small town near Milan) in 1497, became a lutenist to Leo X during the last years of his pontificate; Francesco is first recorded in a papal document of 1519, when he was about 24. Francesco stayed in Rome throughout the reign of Adrian IV and the early years of Clement VII.<sup>2</sup> One may speculate that Giovan Maria and Francesco influenced each other's style and technique.

In the preface to his lute book of 1536, Francesco Marcolini advertised his reason for publishing a lute book of *ricercari* and intabulations by Francesco da Milano. Marcolini praised Francesco da Milano, Albert da Ripa and Marco dall'Aquila, whose music "moves the senses of him who hears it."<sup>3</sup> Although Marcolini credited the invention of tablature printing to the Venetian publisher Ottaviano Petrucci and admired the *finesse* Petrucci achieved in his lute series of 1507-1511, Marcolini considered the compositions that Petrucci's generation had appreciated—the works of Josquin des Prez, Giovan Maria Hebreo, Giovanni Angelo Testagrossa and Taddeo Pisano—old-fashioned. Marcolini's classification of Giovan Maria as a precursor of Francesco da Milano may have been valid in 1536, but inaccurate just a decade earlier.

By the time Francesco joined the papal service, Giovan Maria's musicianship was already an object of praise and admiration. At the end of the fifteenth century, celebrated improviser Serafino dall'Aquila immortalized Giovan Maria's playing in a poem.<sup>4</sup> In his posthumously published 1510 book on the ideal behavior of cardinals, Paolo Cortesi, an apostolic secretary and apostolic prothonotary to Pope Julius II and Alexander VI, considered Giovan Maria (and Balthasar Germanus) the representative of the new generation who refined the new style of polyphonic lute playing.<sup>5</sup>

Giovan Maria's compositions do not survive. Lorenzo Behaim's letter of June 1506 to Willibald Pirckheimer reveals that there once existed two "bassadanzas de Johann Maria."<sup>6</sup> Petrucci published Giovan Maria's compositions for lute as the third of his lute series in 1508.<sup>7</sup> This book is now lost. According to Ferdinand Colon, who purchased a copy in Rome in 1512 and made a detailed description of the book, the book contained 25 works ("cantilene

sunt 25"), opening with an intabulation of Alexander Agricola's chanson "Comme femme desconfortee" and ending with a "Recercare," and included lute instructions in Latin and Italian and a preface written by Giovan Maria.<sup>8</sup> Petrucci's third lute book may have been the one in which Sagudino, the secretary of the Venetian envoy to the English court Sebastian Giustinian, in 1517, asked one Alvise Foscari in Venice try to find Giovan Maria's lute music.<sup>9</sup>

Pope Leo X arranged entertainments that were criticized for extravagance. Many of them included some kind of musical performance. The festivities for the wedding of Lorenzo de' Medici and Madeleine de la tour d'Auvergne in Florence in 1518 included a dance performance that was accompanied by instrumentalists.<sup>10</sup> The production of Ludovico Ariosto's intermezzo *I suppositi* in 1519 included incidental music, performed on instruments such as lutes and viols.<sup>11</sup> At the feast of St. Peter, a concert included a Bergamasque song performed by singers and instrumentalists.<sup>12</sup> At a feast on the day of San Cosmas in 1520, an entertainment was provided by 52 singers and instrumentalists, all dressed as mendicants.<sup>13</sup> Since they were at the papal court during this time, Giovan Maria and Francesco must have participated in some, if not all, of the events Leo X arranged.

One particular composition may shed light on the skill of instrumentalists at the papal court, particularly that of Giovan Maria and Francesco, in 1519. Adrian Willaert's *Quid non ebrietas* is written as a "duo" but is actually a quartet.<sup>14</sup> The composition ends on a dissonant chord, but the problem can be solved by the ingenious application of *musica ficta*. The difficulty in performing the composition made the musicians of the papal court think Josquin des Prez, not the young Willaert, its composer. In his letter of 1524 to Pietro Aaron, Giovanni Spataro reminisced of a papal singer Lorenzo Bergomozzi's account of the performance of *Quid non ebrietas*, first by the papal singers and then by the instrumentalists on viols, with unsatisfactory results on both times.<sup>15</sup>

The earliest document that describes both Giovan Maria and Francesco as virtuoso lutenists is Filippo Oriolo da Bassano's poem written between 1519 and 1522.<sup>16</sup> In his list of famous lutenists of his day, Oriolo categorized Giovan Maria with other Petrucci lutenists (Francesco Spinacino and Joan Ambrosio Dalza) and treated him as precursor of Francesco. This may have been because Giovan Maria's lute compositions had been published more than a decade earlier, while Francesco's had not.

Paolo Cortesi praised Giovan Maria's skill in polyphonic

playing, and Petrucci published his solo lute compositions. But documents from the early 1520s indicate that Giovan Maria still cultivated the fifteenth-century ensemble lute style around that time. Papal court payment records often list him together with the other lutenists. When he performed at a Rome banquet for Adrian VI and some ambassadors on 20 May 1523, he played with a plectrum in an ensemble of four lutes.<sup>17</sup>

When Francesco performed for Isabella d'Este's visit to the papal court in January 1526,<sup>18</sup> he played in an ensemble of two lutes and a viol. We may assume that it was the monophonic playing of a polyphonic composition; perhaps Francesco offered spectacular passage work in fast running notes on the lute, with the second lutenist playing monophonic or polyphonic accompaniment and the viol playing a lower structural voice. Indeed, Francesco's skill in improvisation was reported by Francesco Salinas, who recalled hearing him improvise on a galliard tune as tenor.<sup>19</sup> Francesco's style likely created a new upper voice over the *cantus firmus*, rather than adding ornaments to the galliard tune.

While Giovan Maria's lute compositions were printed in 1508, Francesco's earliest datable compositions were published in 1536. It is more than likely that Francesco began composing while he was employed at the papal court in the late 1510s and early 1520s, and was acquainted with Giovan Maria's style. The similarities and differences in their style may be found in the *ricercar* genre itself.

The earliest extant *ricercari* (Pesaro, Biblioteca Oliveriana, MS 1144) in the late fifteenth century predominantly show the monophonic plectrum technique: single-line scale passages with chords on the adjacent courses, and thus playable with either a plectrum or a finger. Giovan Maria's lute *ricercari* may be similar to those of Francesco Spinacino, Joan Ambrosio Dalza and Franciscus Bossinensis, many of which are short, non-imitative, improvisatory pieces without clear formal structure. Short motives play an important role for the musical coherence. Vincenzo Capirola's *ricercari*, compiled about 1517, contain virtuoso passage work and refined formal structure, although still non-imitative. Some of Francesco's lute *ricercari* published in 1536 abundantly use motivic imitations and sequence writing in different registers in a manner that weaves a complex polyphonic structure in clear part-writing in three or four voices. Therefore, it is conceivable that the stylistic change in lute *ricercar* occurred in the 1520s and that the papal court where Giovan Maria and Francesco worked side by side was an important place for this development.<sup>20</sup>

Giovan Maria's popularity may have begun to wane during his final years at the papal court when Francesco became the principal performer. The eyewitness who reported Francesco's playing for Pope Clement VII and Isabella d'Este in 1526 described it as having "no equal in this sort of music," a judgment that may signal the end of Giovan Maria's dominance. And it turned out to be so for his life as well. On 6 May 1527, the army of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V attacked Rome with 20,000 men. The indiscriminate slaughter of innocents, the pillaging of treasures, and the destruction of the city, lasted eight days, during which Giovan Maria committed suicide. Francesco, appears to have fled the city shortly after the disaster and lived to produce lute compositions in a newer style.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> For Giovan Maria's biography, see H. Colin Slim, "The Keyboard Ricercar and Fantasia in Italy c. 1500-1550 with Reference to Parallel Forms in European Lute Music of the Same Period" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1960), 1:383-91; Gian Luigi Dardo, "Contributo alla storia del liuto in Italia: Johannes Maria Alamus e Giovanni Maria da Crema," *Quaderni della Rassegna musicale: La nuova musicologia italiana* 3 (1965): 143-57; H. Colin Slim, "Gian and Gian Maria, Some Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Namesakes," *The Musical Quarterly* 57 (1971): 563-68; and Anthony M. Cummings, "Gian Maria Giudeo, Sonatore del Liuto, and the Medici," *Fontes artis musicae* 38 (1991): 312-18.

<sup>2</sup> For Francesco's biography, see H. Colin Slim, "Francesco da Milano (1497-1543/44): A Bio-bibliographical Study, I," *Musica disciplina* 18 (1964): 63-84.

<sup>3</sup> For Marcolini's preface, see Arthur J. Ness, "The Herwarth Lute Manuscripts at the Bavarian State Library, Munich: A Bibliographical Study with Emphasis on the Works of Marco dall'Aquila and Melchior Newsidler" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1984), 1: 346-47 (translation). Saba de Castiglione in his *Ricordi* (Venice, 1555) equated Giovan Maria's playing ("suoni") with Josquin's compositions ("canti"); see Andre Pirro, "Leo X and Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 21 (1935): 10, n. 45.

<sup>4</sup> See Dardo, "Contributo," 144. According to Vincenzo Calmeta, Serafino died in Rome in 1500; on Serafino's biography, see Walter H. Rubsamen, *Literary Sources of Secular Music in Italy ca. 1500* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1945), 12-19; and James Haar, "Serafino de' Ciminelli dall'Aquila," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 17: 157.

<sup>5</sup> Paolo Cortesi, *Cardinalatu libri tres* (Castel Cortesiano, 1510), Book 11, f. 73; for the relevant passages, see Nino Pirrotta, *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 99-100 (text), 103 (translation). On the polyphonic manner of lute-playing, see Hiroyuki Minamino, "Conrad Paumann and the Evolution of Solo Lute Practice in the Fifteenth Century," *The Journal of Musicological Research* 6 (1986): 291-310. Saba de Castiglione made a humorous comparison between Giovan Maria's finger dexterity on the lute and the digital agility of a glutton; quoted in Dardo, "Contributo," 148-49.

<sup>6</sup> See Keith Polk, *German Instrumental Music of the Late Middle Ages: Players, Patrons and Performance Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 142. In his paper read at the American Musicological Society Annual Meeting in Oakland in 1990, Polk suggested that "La Gambetta/Mantuaner dantz" in the so-called Augsburg Song Book of ca. 1513 may have been composed by either Augustin Schubinger or Giovan Maria. For this dance, see Luise Jonas, ed., *Das Augsburg Liederbuch: Die Musikhandschrift 2o Codex 142a der Staats- und Stadtbibliothek*

Augsburg, Berliner Musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten, Band 21 (Munich and Salzburg: Musikverlag Emil Katzschler, 1983), 1: 61-62 (transcription) and 2: 35-36 (comments).

<sup>7</sup> See Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental Music Printed before 1600: A Bibliography* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), item [1508]/1.

<sup>8</sup> See Catherine Weeks Chapman, "Printed Collections of Polyphonic Music Owned by Ferdinand Columbus," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21 (1968): 63.

<sup>9</sup> See Herman-Walther Frey, "Regesten zur päpstlichen Kapelle unter Leo X. und zu seiner Privatkapelle," *Die Musikforschung* 8 (1955): 155; and Rowdon Brown, trans. *Sebastian Giustinian: Four Years at the Court of Henry VIII* [New York: AMS Press, 1970], 1: 81.

<sup>10</sup> See Anthony M. Cummings, *The Politicized Muse: Music for Medici Festivals 1512-1537* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108.

<sup>11</sup> See Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 48.

<sup>12</sup> See Bonnie J. Blackburn, "Music and Festivities at the Court of Leo X: A Venetian View," *Early Music History* 11 (1992): 5.

<sup>13</sup> William F. Prizer, "Lutenists at the Court of Mantua in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 13 (1980): 26.

<sup>14</sup> On this piece, see Edward E. Lowinsky, *Music in the Culture of the Renaissance and Other Essays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 681-98.

<sup>15</sup> Spataro's letter is reproduced and translated in Bonnie J. Blackburn, Edward E. Lowinsky, and Clement A. Miller, eds., *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 300-8. Artusi wrote that Willaert's "duo" was experienced on lutes and viols; see *ibid.*, 690.

<sup>16</sup> For the section on lutenists in Oriolo's poem, see H. Colin Slim, "Musicians on Parnassus," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 146 (text), 152 (translation).

<sup>17</sup> See Frey, "Regesten," 144-45. The relevant passage is reproduced in Cummings, "Gian Maria Giudeo," 316; and translated in Pirrotta, *Music and Culture in Italy*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> The letter is reproduced and translated in Prizer, "Lutenists at the Court of Mantua," 34 and 26, respectively.

<sup>19</sup> For the document, see Slim, "Francesco da Milano," 72. Two lute duets attributed to Francesco survive, one of which (entitled "Spagna Contrapunto") uses the Spagna melody as

*cantus firmus* on the second lute; the pieces are transcribed in Arthur J. Ness, ed., *The Lute Music of Francesco Canova da Milano (1497-1543)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 242-43 (Canon), 244-45 (Spagna).

<sup>20</sup> On the style of lute *ricercar* in the early sixteenth century, see Otto Gornbosi, ed., *Composizione di Meser Vincenzo Capirola: Lute Book (circa 1517)* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Société de Musique d'autrefois, 1955); XXXI-XXXV; Richard M. Murphy, "Fantaisie et ricercare dans les premières tablatures de luth du XVIe siècle," in *Le luth et sa musique*, edited by Jean Jacquot (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1957), 127-41; Slim, "The Keyboard Ricercar," 1: 216-300; Daniel Heartz, ed., *Preludes, Chansons and Dances for Lute by Pierre Attaingnant, Paris (1529-1530)* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Société de Musique d'autrefois, 1964), IX-XVII; Henry Louis Schmidt III, "The First Printed Lute Books: Francesco Spinacino's *Intabulatura de lauto, libro primo* and *libro secondo* (Venice: Petrucci, 1507)" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1969), 1: 60-80; and Vladimir Ivanoff, *Das Pesaro-Manuskript: Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der Lautentabulatur* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1988), 177-206. For Francesco's mastery in contrapuntal writing, see Otto Gornbosi, "A la recherche de la forme dans la musique de la Renaissance: Francesco da Milano," in *Musique instrumentale de la Renaissance*, edited by Jean Jacquot (Paris, 1955), 165-75.

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