

DREAM OF A DREAM: GIOVAN MARIA'S EXTRA-MUSICAL CAREER

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On 1 July 1510 Giovanni Angelo Testagrossa, a lutenist, wrote a letter to Isabella d'Este Gonzaga asking her permission to leave his post at the Mantuan court. Testagrossa was seeking employment at the court of Urbino. According to Testagrossa, the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria della Rovere, had promised him a salary of 200 ducats: the exemption from a court duty of going to battle (worth 120 ducats), tax exemption (worth 24 ducats) and the remainder in a payment of 56 ducats, as well as travelling expenses for three people and three horses.¹ Moreover, Francesco Maria promised Testagrossa that the benefice of 100 ducats currently being paid to the Duke's lutenist, Giovan Maria Hebreo, would be given to Testagrossa's son.² Francesco Maria's purpose in transferring Giovan Maria's benefice was solely 'per dispeto': to spite Giovan Maria. Ten days later a reluctant Isabella d'Este granted Testagrossa's request. Apparently Giovan Maria lost his job. The exact nature of the Duke's 'spite' is a matter for speculation, but three years later the tale of this relationship between former employer and employee was to take the first of a series of extraordinary and cynical twists.

On 22 June 1513 Pope Leo X appointed Giovan Maria the castellan of Verucchio, a papal fief bordering the Duchy of Urbino. Leo X's generosity was a newly elected Pope's expression of gratitude to a musician for his long service; in a letter of the same year Leo X wrote of Giovan Maria as 'a man skillful in art and very close to me, indeed an old friend'.³ This was not the only instance of extravagant treatment of servants and entertainers on the part of Leo X, but nor was it a mere whim on the part of a benevolent Pope.⁴ He used nepotism and favouritism to its limits, and to his own advantage. His installation of Giovan Maria as the castellan of Verucchio was related to the Italian political climate of the time, and the Pope's campaign to expand his public and private power. In order to build a barrier against aggression from France, the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman empire, Leo X's ultimate plan was to strengthen the Papal States by combining Florence, Milan, Piacenza, Parma, Modena, Ferrara and Urbino in a powerful federation. The union was to be made by marriage and other means, and the Medicis and their loyal allies were to rule the new states. A pressing task for Leo X was to weaken opposing dukes who held the key territories in the Papal States. Giovan Maria's nomination as the castellan of Verucchio was therefore part of the Pope's design to deprive his political rival, Francesco Maria della Rovere, of political power. There were, however, some conflicts from the beginning of Giovan Maria's political appointment: the nomination was resisted by inhabitants of the

fiefdom. Ironically, Leo X needed help from Francesco Maria della Rovere to settle the matter.⁵

In July 1515 Giovan Maria returned to Rome from Florence after a year's absence (possibly from March 1514 to July 1515).⁶ It was no doubt the result of Leo X's generosity towards his family in the provision of entertainment, but Giovan Maria's presence in Florence was extraordinary. Twenty-three years earlier, in 1492, the court of justice of Florence charged Giovan Maria with the murder of one Giuliano Bartolomei, alias el Grasselino of Tennghis.⁷ According to the deliberations of the court, Giovan Maria attacked Giuliano with a sort of club or an iron dagger, in the district of St Peter Major, administering a blow to the victim's kidneys and another fatal blow to his throat. The verdict and sentence handed down by the Council of Eight were for the decapitation of the defendant and the confiscation of his goods: his head was to be cut off with a broadsword by an executioner and his goods were to be transferred to the Commune of Florence. The trial of Giovan Maria was conducted *in absentia*, and he fled the city before the sentence became effective. His contumacy and narrow escape may be understood if there was a powerful intervention by the Medici family, Giovan Maria's employer.

Leo X's move to send a convicted felon and fugitive to the city where he had been sentenced (possibly having been assured of Giovan Maria's safety there) may have been connected with the fate of Francesco Maria della Rovere. Leo X may have required Giovan Maria to act as intermediary between him and his brother Giuliano de' Medici. Leo X's plan to nominate Giuliano as the commander of the papal army in 1515 was an important act in the expansion of the Pope's power, for the position had been held by Francesco Maria della Rovere since 1508. Yet the Pope met with Giuliano's firm opposition. Giuliano's reluctance to carry out his design against Urbino arose from a debt of gratitude towards Francesco Maria's parents, who had offered shelter and protection to the Medicis when they were expelled from Florence.

Although Leo X met this unexpected resistance from his own brother, events were moving swiftly towards the actual deposal of Francesco Maria delle Rovere. In 1515 Leo X had to organise the formation of an Italian alliance and army against an invasion of Italy by Francis I of France. The Pope provided financial assistance in advance to Francesco Maria, for the preparation of his troops as part of the papal army. But the Duke failed to follow the Pope's orders for the army to advance, leading the Pope to suspect that Francesco Maria had had secret dealings with Francis I. When Francesco Maria refused to obey a papal summons to Rome, to answer a charge of insubordination, Leo X excommunicated the Duke and annexed his territories. Francesco Maria made a hasty flight to Mantua while papal troops seized Urbino. Leo X declared the deposal of

Francesco Maria and installed his nephew Lorenzo II de' Medici as the new Duke of Urbino.⁸

The *familia* of Leo X was a large establishment, including his officials, secretaries, servants and entertainers: it had 700 members between 1514 and 1516.⁹ Instrumentalists belonged to the group called *scutiferi* which also included the master of the stable, personal assistants, and an astrologer to Leo X; the papal singers belonged to the *cubicularii*. Giovan Maria was an instrumentalist, playing the lute and the *viola*. His musicianship was the object of much praise and admiration. A celebrated improviser, Serafino dall' Aquila, for instance, immortalised Giovan Maria's playing in a poem.¹⁰ Paolo Cortesi, an apostolic secretary and an apostolic prothonotary to Pope Julius II and Alexander VI, considered Giovan Maria (alongside Balthasar Germanus) as a representative of the new generation of lutenists who refined the new style of lute playing.¹¹ The Venetian publisher Ottaviano Petrucci published Giovan Maria's compositions for lute in 1508, as the third of his lute tablature publications.¹² Praises of Giovan Maria's musicianship continued throughout his career and even beyond.¹³

Leo X's financial resources made it possible for him to pursue his patronage of musicians, artists and other entertainers on a much grander scale than he had been able to as a cardinal. During his pontificate Leo X organised numerous occasions in which musical entertainments were prominent, for instance the wedding festivities of Lorenzo de' Medici and Madeleine de la tour d'Auvergne in Florence in 1518, Ludovico Ariosto's intermezzo *I suppositi*, in Rome in 1519, and a feast of St Peter, and a feast on San Cosmas' day in 1520,¹⁴ all of which included some kind of musical performance. Indeed Leo X loved music. Baldassare Castiglione, for instance, wrote to Isabella d'Este in 1519 that 'the Pope [Leo X] takes more pleasure than ever in music and architectural works'.¹⁵ A Venetian ambassador noted the rumour circulating in Rome of Leo X's infatuation with the lute; he reported that the Pope 'values nothing except to sound the lute'.¹⁶ Giovan Maria no doubt enjoyed generous patronage from such a music connoisseur, and Leo X took great pleasure in retaining Giovan Maria in his service. But the good times did not last long. On 1 December 1521 Leo X died.

Giovan Maria's promotion to the rank of count was certainly Leo X's private favour towards his long-time entertainer. This degree of favour was not shared by others. Leo X's successor, Adrian VI, did not sympathise with his predecessor's political plans, or with his spending habits. Shortly after his accession Adrian VI issued a bull reinstating Francesco Maria della Rovere to all his former honours, including control of Urbino.¹⁷ Giovan Maria, on the other hand, soon lost control of the fortress of Verucchio, and his title was nullified. A series of letters written on behalf of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici in May 1522 concerns the situation in Verruchio, whose inhabitants had been resisting Leo X's designated proxy.¹⁸ In a

letter of July 1522 sent from Rome to Pietro Aretino in Bologna, Giovan Maria is already referred to as 'the former Jewish Count of Verucchio.'¹⁹ The wheel of fortune was turning swiftly downwards for Giovan Maria.

Leo X was criticised for his lavish spending; Adrian VI was famous for his parsimoniousness, and condemned extravagant entertainments and other frivolities. It is doubtful that Giovan Maria was in the regular employment of the new Pope. Although he was somehow associated with the papal court, his position may not have been as favourable as it had been under Leo X. Indeed, only a month after Leo X's death, Giovan Maria was seeking employment at the court of Urbino, with a recommendation from the Archbishop of Mons.²⁰ Considering their past relationship, it would have been a small wonder if Francesco Maria della Rovere had rehired this loyal servant of the faction that had proved to be his nemesis.

Meanwhile, Giovan Maria's financial situation became serious, approaching destitution. He tried to secure a post at the court of Mantua and asked Cardinal Giulio de' Medici for his assistance. In a letter of October 1522 to Federico Gonzaga in Mantua, Giulio emphasised Giovan Maria's loyalty and attachment to Leo X.²¹ Baldassare Castiglione, then the Mantuan envoy in Rome, also wrote a letter in November of that year to Federico Gonzaga, stressing that Giovan Maria was very badly off, not even having enough to eat, since the papal court had stripped him of his title.²² Acting as an intermediary, Castiglione negotiated terms: the lutenist would be willing to enter service in Mantua if Federico agreed to provide the necessary travelling expenses. These negotiations bore fruit, and Giovan Maria was appointed as a music teacher to the children of the late Marchese Francesco.²³ This new development at the court of Mantua certainly did not sit well with the chief lutenist there, Giovan Maria's old rival Giovanni Angelo Testagrossa, who was back with his old employer in that year.²⁴ Not surprisingly, Giovan Maria found his situation in Mantua unfavourable, and his stay there was short. He was back in Rome, in the employment of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, by January 1523.²⁵ The accession of Giulio as Pope Clement VII in that year brought the hope of much better times to come, or so it seemed.²⁶

On 6 May 1527 the army of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, led by Charles Duke of Bourbon and numbering 20,000 men, attacked Rome. Clement VII could only order the Roman militia and the Swiss Guards to resist their advance. The Roman forces amounted to 4,000 soldiers, with some artillery commanded by Benvenuto Cellini. As the imperial forces entered the helpless city they degenerated into a mob. Dignitaries and wealthy merchants were forced to pay huge ransoms for their safety; nuns and other women were violated, many innocent Roman citizens were tortured and killed; churches and other buildings were burned or destroyed; treasures including paintings, sculptures, books and

jewels were stolen. This indiscriminate slaughter, pillage and destruction lasted eight days. In the midst of the Sack of Rome, Giovan Maria committed suicide.²⁷

Notes

I am grateful to Dr Arthur Ness for his comments on this paper.

- 1 See 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), p. 11, for an English translation of the letter.
- 2 The negotiation Testagrossa describes raises a question as to what degree his statement is reliable. Why did Francesco Maria need to exercise such an intricate financial manoeuvre to induce a lutenist who had frequently changed employers and was dissatisfied with his present situation at the court of Mantua? For a biography of Testagrossa see Arthur J. Ness, 'Testagrossa, Giovanni Angelo', in *New Grove* (vol. 18, p. 706 in the 1980 edition). The annual salary of 200 ducats equalled that of the most famous composer of the early Renaissance, Josquin des Prez, who was employed by Duke Ercole I d'Este at the court of Ferrara between 1503 and 1504. One of Ercole's agents who recruited Josquin regarded Josquin's salary as exorbitant. The document concerning Josquin's salary is translated in English in Lewis Lockwood, 'Josquin at Ferrara: New Documents and Letters', in *Josquin des Prez: Proceedings of the International Josquin Festival-Conference* (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 133. Moreover, as Christopher Reynolds 'Musical Careers, Ecclesiastical Benefices, and the Example of Johannes Brunet', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 37 (1984), p. 89, points out, it was unlikely that Giovan Maria would have had a benefice, although Reynolds does not consider the fact that Giovan Maria converted to Christianity before 1492.
- 3 The document is reproduced in Herman-Walther Frey, 'Regesten zur päpstlichen Kapelle unter Leo X und seiner Privatkanzlei', *Die Musikforschung* 8 (1955), p. 427, and partially translated in Andre Pirro, 'Leo X and Music', *The Musical Quarterly* 21 (1935), p. 9, n. 43. Indeed, Giovan Maria gave long years of service to the Medici; he was even called 'Giovan Maria de Medici'. For biographical information 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. dissertation, Harvard University, 1960), 1, pp. 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), pp. 143-57; H. Colin Slim, 'Gian and Gian Maria, Some Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Namesakes' *The Musical Quarterly* 57 (1971), pp. 563-8; and Anthony M. Cummings, 'Gian Maria Giudeo, Sonatore del Liuto, and the Medici', *Fontes artis musicae* 38 (1991), pp. 312-18. For details of Giovan Maria's Ferrarese service, see Lewis Lockwood,

'Adrian Willaert and Cardinal Ippolito I d'Este: New Light on Willaert's Early Career in Italy 1515-21', *Early Music History* 5 (1985), p. 11, and William F. Prizer, 'The Frottola and the Unwritten Tradition', *Studi musicali* 15 (1986), p. 17, n. 53.

- 4 For instance, the improviser Bernardo Accolti became the Duke of Nepi, and the Spanish singer Gabriel Merino was promoted to become Archbishop of Bari, and later to the cardinalate; see Pirro, *op. cit.*, p. 9; and Richard Sheer, 'The "Spanish Nation" in the Papal Chapel, 1492-1521', *Early Music* 20 (1992), p. 608. Merino's elevation to an archbishopric may have been determined largely by his extra-musical skills as an administrator, an organiser of hunts, and an intermediary for recruiting musicians.
- 5 For the letter of 8 July 1513 see Frey, *op. cit.*, p. 427; and Pirro, *op. cit.*, p. 9, n. 43.
- 6 The documents are reproduced and translated in Slim, 'Gian and Gian Maria', p. 565, n. 11, and p. 565 respectively. These documents are recorded in the personal debit-credit account book of Lorenzo II de' Medici. According to Edward E. Lowinsky, ed., *The Medici Codex of 1518: A Choirbook of Motets Dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 1: 32, n. 23; Lorenzo mostly stayed in Rome with few interruptions from September 1514 until 1516.
- 7 The document is quoted in Dardo, *op. cit.*, p. 143; and reproduced and translated in Slim, 'Gian and Gian Maria', pp. 572-4 and 563-4 respectively.
- 8 See Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes* (London, 1924-1953), 7: pp. 147-57.
- 9 See John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University, 1983), p. 42.
- 10 See Dardo, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
- 11 Paolo Cortesi, *Cardinalatu libri tres* (Castel Cortesiano, 1510), Book II, 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), pp. 99-100 (text), p. 103 (translation)
- 12 This lute book is now lost; see Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental Music Printed before 1600: A Bibliography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), item [1508]/1. Ferdinando Colon who purchased a copy in Rome in 1512 made a detailed description of the contents of the book, see Catherine Weeks Chapman, 'Printed Collections of Polyphonic Music Owned by Ferdinand Columbus', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21 (1968), p. 63. According to Colon, Giovan Maria wrote the preface to his lute book.

- 13 Filippo Oriolo da Bassano in his poem written between 1519 and 1522 included Giovan Maria in his list of the famous lutenists of his day; Francesco Marcolini in the preface to his lute book of 1536 as a precursor of Francesco da Milano's generation, and Saba da Castiglione in his *Ricordi* (1546) made a humorous comparison between Giovan Maria's digital dexterity on the lute and the digital agility of a glutton. On Oriolo's poem see H. Colin Slim, 'Musicians on Parnassus', *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965), p. 146 (text), p. 152 (translation). On 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. dissertation, New York University, 1984), 1: pp. 346–7 (translation). The relevant passage by Castiglione is quoted in Dardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 148–9. Castiglione equated Giovan Maria's playing ('suoni') with Josquin's compositions ('canti'); see Pirro, *op. cit.*, p. 10, n. 45.
- 14 See Anthony M. Cummings, *The Politicized Muse: Music for Medici Festivals 1512–1537* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 108; Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 48; Bonnie J. Blackburn, 'Music and Festivities at the Court of Leo X: A Venetian View', *Early Music History* 11 (1992), p. 5; and Prizer, 'Lutenists at the Court of Mantua', p. 26, respectively. In 1513 Giovan Maria performed in the presence of prominent personages, including his former patron, Cardinal Ippolito I d'Este, see *ibid.*, pp. 33, 22, for a reproduction and translation of the document.
- 15 See Pastor, *op. cit.*, 8: p. 318.
- 16 See Pirro, *op. cit.*, p. 7, for translation.
- 17 See James Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino: Illustrating the Arms, Arts and Literature of Italy, 1440–1630* (London and New York: John Lane Company, 1909) 2: pp. 411–18.
- 18 The letter are reproduced in Cummings, 'Gian Maria Giudeo', pp. 316–17.
- 19 The document is quoted in Dardo, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
- 20 The document is quoted in Dardo, *op. cit.*, p. 146; and reproduced in Cummings, 'Gian Maria Giudeo', p. 316, n. 17.
- 21 The letter is quoted in Dardo, *op. cit.*, p. 145; and translated into English in Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 282. Anthony M. Cummings, 'Giulio de Medici's Music Books', *Early Music History* 10 (1991), p. 73, suggests that Giovan Maria was closely associated with the cardinal.
- 22 The letter is quoted in Frey, *op. cit.*, p. 156, and translated in Slim, 'Gian and Gian Maria', p. 566.

- 23 See Iain Fenlon, *Music and Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Mantua* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1: pp. 42-3.
- 24 Prizer, 'Lutenists at the Court of Mantua', p. 12.
- 25 See Franco Pavan, 'Liutisti itineranti e rapporti culturali fra le corti italiane del primo cinquecento', *Il Fronimo: Rivista trimestrale di chitarra e liuto* 69 (1989), p. 46. On 20 May of that year, Giovan Maria is recorded to have performed at a banquet in Rome for Adrian VI and some ambassadors; see Frey op. cit, p. 144; Cummings, 'Gian Maria Giudeo', p. 316 (reproduction); and Pirrotta, *Music and Culture in Italy*, p. 108 (translation).
- 26 Giovan Maria's popularity may have begun to wane during the final years of his stay at the papal court. It was during those years that the twenty-nine year old Francesco da Milano who was chosen to perform for the occasion of Isabella d'Este's visit, in January 1526. The surviving eyewitness account describes Francesco's playing as being without equal; this may be an indication that Giovan Maria's era was coming to an end. I am preparing a study entitled 'A Battle of Old and New: Giovan Maria and Francesco da Milano at the Papal Court' for a discussion of the rivalry between these two lutenists.
- 27 See Cummings, 'Gian Maria Giudeo', p. 315. Saba de Castiglione in his *Ricordi* mentions Giovan Maria in heaven with Josquin and Mouton; see Slim, 'The Keyboard Ricercar', 1, p. 388.