

Music and the Myth of Arcadia in Renaissance Italy. Giuseppe Gerbino.
New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism. Cambridge: Cambridge University
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The central topic of Gerbino's prize-winning book is "the musical representation and stylization of the myth of Arcadia in sixteenth-century Italy" (1). He makes clear that the "real focus of [his] study is . . . the social bond forged through the sharing of poetry and music under the sign of a fictional Arcadian setting" (5); his goal is "to show the extent to which the unique musicality of the pastoral myth, [in] all its versions and variations, affected the forms of musical signification in Renaissance Italy" (8). Gerbino needs to address and explain two anomalies. One is "the chronological gap between the literary and musical histories of the pastoral" (2). Nearly a century separated the literary beginnings from the musical vogue for the pastoral that began in the 1570s and 1580s. The other anomaly is the sleight of hand that occurred in early opera: he asks, "How did Rinuccini and his fellow intellectuals and composers manage to make their pastoral fables pass for a modern equivalent of ancient tragedy?" (3).

The narrative arc of the book attends to the first of the anomalies in part 1, "Music in Arcadia: An Unsettled Tradition." Five brief chapters elucidate the prehistory and uncover hidden and overlooked strands of the pastoral. Gerbino thus produces a new reading of the history of the early madrigal against the prevailing focus on Petrarch. Part 2, "Theater," tackles the second anomaly by examining a series of case studies that reveal the centrality of the pastoral in dramatic genres. He offers key insights into the cultural contexts: "pastoral developed as a dramatization of the phenomenology of love that had shaped the behavioral codes and patterns of social interaction of the Italian cultural elite" (105). The chapters in this part range over time and place, from the Latin eclogue at the court of Pope Julius II, to the rustic folksongs of the Paduan peasant Ruzante, to the Ferrarese court of Duke Hercules II, with performances of pastoral dramas by Giralaldi and Beccari. The final chapter of this part, "The (Female) Performance of High Culture," tracks the evidence for "social performance" — "various forms of role playing with more or less structured contexts, ranging from banquets, masquerades, ceremonial displays of court sociability such as dance and choreographed ballets, and private or semi-private dramatizations" (193). In this and the previous chapter, Gerbino turns his critical eye to musical settings. In his comments about Striggio's setting of *All'acqua sagra del novella fonte*, the source of which he identified as part of a pastoral eclogue by Laura Battiferra, Gerbino astutely calls out the Ovidian theme of transformation in Striggio's play on musical notation at the text "Cangiar fa in mille disusate forme" ("she changes

into a thousand unaccustomed forms”), a passage that would be quoted by English theorist and composer Thomas Morley in his 1597 treatise (217).

From the contexts established in the first two parts, Gerbino turns in part 3 to the pastoral tradition in the Italian madrigal from the 1570s to the early seventeenth century. The previous scholarship on the madrigal has tended to be focused on a single composer or on a court or city. Gerbino breaks new ground in seeking to define and explain what he convincingly describes as a revolution. Having traced the prehistory (at least musically speaking) of the pastoral, and its survival during the period of Petrarchan domination, Gerbino can both document the astonishing emergence of the pastoral in the final decades of the madrigal’s existence and draw a sharp distinction in approach from the Petrarchan domination. This is an elegant and original interpretation that demands a new understanding of the entire genre. Exploring the two sides of Arcadia — “from an original state of sensual beatitude, to the postlapsarian malady of lovers” — Gerbino, in chapters 12 and 13, explores how “the pastoral madrigal could be construed both as a dramatization of the void afflicting the lover’s soul, and a utopian alternative to the Petrarchist determinism of unfilled desire. Music’s unique power consisted in this. It could evoke the illusion of a total pacification of the senses, or it could plunge the listener into the dark depths of the lament” (255). The book is full of such statements that both ring true and demand further investigation. Like all seminal works of scholarship, *Music and the Myth of Arcadia in Renaissance Italy* maps an agenda that will occupy scholars for some time.

Gerbino shows uncommon and wide-ranging erudition in his book, with a command of Italian literary, cultural, and political history from the fifteenth into the seventeenth century, as well as the classical traditions of the pastoral. He moves effortlessly across a complex musical landscape. This is a dense book, weighing in at 445 pages, and yet it is also remarkably spare and taut, the writing exemplary in its lucidity and lack of jargon. The American Musicological Society recognized Gerbino with the 2010 Lewis Lockwood Prize for an “outstanding book on a musicological subject published by a scholar in the earlier states of her or his career.” In fact, all scholars of Renaissance Italy will welcome this rich and important contribution.

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