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Music at the Gonzaga Court in Mantua

By Donald Sanders



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Beginning in the second half of the fifteenth century, under the patronage of the Gonzaga family, the northern Italian city of Mantua became a vibrant center for visual art, theatre, and music. The performance at the Gonzaga court of Poliziano's *Fabula di Orfeo*, around 1480, marked the beginning of secular music theatre. The use of musical numbers within the drama anticipated the beginnings of opera at Florence a century later, as well as the first masterpiece of the genre, Monteverdi's *La favola d'Orfeo* at Mantua in 1607. Mantua reached the zenith of its artistic distinction during the reign of Duke Vincenzo I, between 1587 and 1612. During this time, Wert and Gastoldi were joined at the court by the important Jewish composer Salamone Rossi and, most notably, by Monteverdi. The premieres of his *Orfeo* and *Arisanna* made the Gonzaga court, for that brief period, the most important center in the development of opera.

In *Music at the Gonzaga Court in Mantua*, Donald C. Sanders discusses musical composition at the court in the context of the brilliant visual art that provided such a conducive environment. Sanders also traces the history of this very colorful family and their relationships with the emperors, kings, and popes who shaped modern Europe. Part history, part musicology, Sanders' analysis spans the fifteenth century through the seventeenth century, filling informative gaps with details essential for students in courses on Renaissance or Baroque music, or in more specialized courses on madrigal, opera, or liturgical music. *Music at the Gonzaga Court in Mantua* is also important reading for knowledgeable musical amateurs and anyone with interest in Italian history and arts.



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Editorial Review

Review

The author provides...many interesting stories of intrigue, deception, and humor in sixteenth-century Italian musical life, and the acquisition for instruments, singers, and composers. (*Sixteenth Century Journal*)

Sanders has combed the considerable literature on Mantua and sifted through archival records, weaving them into a fascinating account of the city's musical life during the glory years of the 'long' sixteenth century, all in the context of political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual developments of the time. It is certain to find a place alongside classic studies of the subject. (Linda P. Cummins, Coordinator of Musicology, University of Alabama)

Mantua has long been known as one of the great intellectual and artistic centers of the Italian Renaissance. Now Donald Sanders places musical composition and performance in this context, in a thoroughly researched and engagingly written account centering on the period from the 1490 marriage of Francesco II and Isabella d'Este through the Counter-Reformation to the creation of opera at the time of Monteverdi. It is at once a scholarly achievement and a good read. (Jan Herlinger, Louisiana State University)

About the Author

Donald C. Sanders is professor of music and Chairperson of Keyboard and Academic Studies in the School of the Arts at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

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