

Ippolito I d'Este's Music Room: Reconstructing a Magnificent Lost Collection

The 15th-century Este court at Ferrara developed a special and lasting interest in the manufacture of musical instruments. The Este princes were *bona fide* music lovers, and, from the 1430s onwards, sought out and purchased *avant-garde instruments* for their own personal use, and for the musicians of their court (Valdrighi 1884, Lockwood 2009). In fact, the oldest European document we have testifying to the existence of the *tuba ductilis*, a type of slide trumpet, comes from the Este court (Valdrighi 1883, p. 438-439; Downey 1984; Polk 1989). The technological innovation of this instrument, also known as a *trombone*, enriched the *alta* music of the court (dances, parades, processions, sacred music) with low sonorities. Indeed, with the sole exception of the great church organs, all the polyphonic vocal music and instruments of the early 1400s were high and middle pitched, and the low-pitched notes of the *trombone* fuelled a new trend in creative experimentation in musical instrument-making.

This was the context in which the Este family, curious patrons eager for innovation, commissioned musical instruments crafted with attention to both sound quality and aesthetics. The most striking example of their forward-looking patronage is the remarkable spiral organ built for Leonello d'Este by Costantino Tantini of Modena, of which only a depiction in Cosimo Tura's *Virgin and Child Enthroned* remains (London, National Gallery, Cavicchi 2007).

This passion for musical instruments became, to all intents and purposes, something of a family tradition. Duke Ercole I d'Este, Leonello's half-brother, set up a "music room", in which choral and part books, as well as instruments of every conceivable type were conserved (Lockwood 2009, p. 161). This room, one of the first known spaces devoted to the collection and preservation of music, was an established feature of the court until the end of the 16th century. (Cavicchi & Vendrix 2010, Newcomb 1980, p. 213-250).

Of all Ercole's sons, Ippolito I, one of the most powerful and feared of the Italian cardinals, was the most impassioned lover of instrumental music. It is known that he employed both Ludovico Ariosto and Adrian Willaert (Lockwood 1985), and, in the Modena State Archives, I have managed to uncover over 270 previously unseen documents (letters and payments) regarding the making of musical instruments at his behest. These documents are an extraordinarily rich source of information regarding the commissioning of organs (positive, for churches and for chambers), harpsichords, *violas*, lutes and flutes from the most skilled makers of the time, including Lorenzo da Bologna, Lorenzo Gusnasco da Pavia, Alessandro Pasi da Modena, Bastiano da Verona, Zoanpiero da Brescia, and many more. These documents not only testify to the intense production that took place at the Cardinal's behest, but also indicate that he was directly involved in ordering the instruments, urging the makers to create rare instruments, among them a claviorganum, made from a harpsichord by Gusnasco, to which Giovan Battista Facchetti added an organ (Mischiati 1984 and 1991); Afranio

degli Albonesi's *fagotus* (Cavicchi 2002), an aulic version of the *zampogna*; and the first *teorba* to be documented in Europe (1514).

The organization behind these commissions was highly structured and exacting; the Cardinal employed a musical superintendent, Francesco Corbo, to attentively supervise every detail of the construction of the instruments, to mediate between the Cardinal and the instrument makers, and to verify the quality of the instruments. He was also responsible for supervising the music room and the books and other documents conserved within it.

The committed patronage displayed by Ippolito's court certainly attracted virtuoso musicians (for instance Giulio Segni, Agostino dalla Viola and his sons Alfonso and Francesco), as well as skilled craftsmen, and these elements combined triggered a wave of experimentation in musical instruments, research into new materials (woods, metals, lacquers and fabrics) and technologies, and an exploration of applied acoustics. To give but one example, together the documents show that from the start of the 16th century several families of flutes, lutes and *violas* of different ranges (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) were commissioned. This flurry of activity was instrumental in the establishment of string ensembles, the creation of the *concerto*, and the defunctionalisation of polyphonic vocal music. Indeed, several payments testify to the performance of masses and motets on *violas* alone. A bucolic aulic instrument like the *fagotus*, on the other hand, was doubtless created for the pastoral themed plays, like that by Ruzzante, put on at court.

During the seminar at the Italian Academy, I presented two relevant parts of my research:

1. The reconstruction of Ippolito I d'Este's collection, by retracing the origins of the music room in Renaissance Italy and situating Ippolito's music room in the contemporary European context;
2. The impact of these instrumental experimentations on music creativity (musicians and instrument makers), by analysing the extent of organological experimentation from a technological perspective (choice of woods, metals, lacquers) and in terms of musical creation (impact on the repertoires).

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