

Francesco II Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este:
New Perspectives on Music and Art
at the Mantuan court, 1484-1519

by

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ABSTRACT

Isabella d'Este (1474-1539), the wife of Francesco II Gonzaga (1466-1519), Marquis of Mantua, is widely acknowledged for her patronage of the arts at the Gonzaga court in Mantua, during a formative period in her life, 1490 to c.1523. This thesis draws attention to a dilemma in Renaissance studies: namely, that musicologists have a far greater appreciation of Isabella's work as a patron of music, whereas she has been less positively appreciated in some of the art historical literature. A similar phenomenon is observed in the case of Francesco II, who was, for many years, the patron of the well-known artist, Andrea Mantegna, as well as being a strong patron of the liberal arts, including music, (sacred and secular), yet art historians have only recently begun to re-evaluate his contribution in a positive light, and some historians have undervalued his role as a politician, diplomat, and ruler. This study explores how this husband and wife team collaborated on various projects involving the visual arts and music to build up the cultural profile of their court at Mantua. It would seem that a greater cross-disciplinary interaction between art historians, historians, and musicologists, would broaden our understanding of patronage studies during the Renaissance.

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DEDICATION

To Don and Neil - with love

Introduction

In recent decades, art historical research on the court at Mantua in the later fifteenth- and early sixteenth-centuries has focused extensively on Isabella d'Este's art collection and the details of how she acquired the many beautiful objects in her collection. However, as this thesis will show, Isabella was also successful at advancing the standing of the Mantuan court, a fact that I believe should be acknowledged more often by art historians. The longer I researched Isabella's achievements, the more I realized that her husband, Francesco II Gonzaga, was also a worthy patron of the arts, an individual whose projects embodied the Renaissance concern with *magnificentia*, bearing in mind that each ruler had his own sense of what was appropriate in a particular context.¹ My research into their contribution to the visual arts was followed with further study on their advancement of music in court society and it soon became clear how far music had infiltrated into many other avenues of both art and protocol at the Mantuan court. Part of a small private chapel in the cathedral of Mantua, used by Francesco to house his choir, has been removed and re-located, but the deep cupboards still house precious vestments worn by Gonzaga clergy hundreds of years ago, which are fortunately still intact. There was ample room for the storage of instruments and music. The cathedral also includes the burial place of Cardinal Ercole I, Isabella and Francesco's second son, in a sarcophagus high up on a wall, and remains untouched; it is one of the very few historically well-preserved Gonzaga burial places. The traces of their lives, their passion for art and music, may be seen everywhere in Mantua.

¹ Alison Cole, *Virtue and Magnificence. Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, (London: Calmann and King, Ltd., 1995), 19-35, offers a succinct overview of this concept in relation to Italian court societies.

Until only recently, there have been few comprehensive studies on Francesco's role as a patron of the arts and those only within the last decade. The work of Clifford Brown has been used extensively in this thesis. There have been a number of publications by Renaissance musicologists addressing Francesco's patronage of both secular and sacred music. The thesis also clarifies how Francesco has suffered in historical reviews of this period: the result was numerous implied assessments of his inability to match Isabella's profile as a patron of note at the Mantuan court. In some cases the assessments were extremely negative, as recorded in the literature review found in Chapter One.

However, my thesis is not only focused on the individual characters of Isabella and Francesco, but on their combined contribution to the success of the Mantuan court. To understand what they both brought to life in their court environment, I have highlighted the start of Francesco's rule in 1484 and his interests in music and art at that time, six years before his marriage to Isabella; an overview of his contribution is provided in Chapter Two, so that we may understand the many aspects of his complex character. Just a little over a decade later, Isabella, from c.1492-1500, had started to achieve the fame that has placed her in the forefront of the history of Italian music, as well as becoming a renowned collector of art. Chapter Three offers a brief review of her training at her birthplace, the court of Ferrara, as well as accounting for her arrival and consolidation as a consort at the Mantuan court. The culmination of the artistic strength of patronage by Francesco is seen in his city-palace, the Palazzo di San Sebastiano, in which there is acknowledgment of the interests of both Isabella and Francesco in the

programme of decoration. It is really this last monument that should be read as a project in which their different strengths interweave to a considerable degree.

As Chapters Four and Five of this thesis demonstrate, the importance of music to Isabella is seen in many forms in Mantua: in her art collection, the decoration of her rooms, and in her own desire to be a musician. During her first five years at Mantua she began her promotion of Italian composers of music, bringing the importance of court music to a new level. This interest in music was shared with Francesco and he willingly shared the opportunity to increase the resources of his larger court. The new musical genre, the "*frottola*," enjoyed increasing significance in the art of music from 1490 to c.1515, and led to the more widely known Italian genre of the madrigal. Its beginnings, however, were firmly based in Isabella's patronage of the *frottola*, enough to give pause and consider that, had she not promoted this form to its highest level, Italy might not have become one of the leading musical centres of Europe.

During my research to evaluate Isabella and Francesco's patronage, I found a surprising amount of information on Francesco's role as a patron of both music and art, both of which are just beginning to be appreciated by art historians. Francesco admired and supported his wife's specialized avenues of patronage, but he also followed his own equally specialized avenues of patronage. The one exception was music, where I found they shared the patronage of musicians, composers, and poets. Despite having separate households, as was the custom in many Italian court societies, we should take account in our discussions of the important fact that, when necessary, Isabella had access to the much larger resources of Francesco's court, especially in terms of personnel. As a result of my research, I will argue that Francesco's role as a patron needs to be more closely

researched, and I will also argue that Isabella achieved the fame she did as a result of Francesco's continuous support of her desire to have only the highest qualified artists and musicians in her court.

Their patronage also extended to instrument makers; for instance, Isabella had the highest quality as well as the most beautiful instruments made for her by Lorenzo da Pavia. It seems that she absorbed this cost within her own household income. Francesco's court naturally required a large variety of instruments although it is not clear how they were acquired, stored, or maintained, or if the musicians paid for their own instruments. Instruments were clearly of great importance, but despite the considerable literature available on the Mantuan court, we still find areas that are undocumented.

Isabella as a famous art collector did not fit the usual role of a consort in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, although there are exceptions for women as patrons, but it speaks for Francesco's affection and tolerance that he gave Isabella the freedom to follow her own avenues of patronage.² Isabella emerges as a many-sided personality, capable in many directions: as an art collector, patron of music, a natural leader, a mother, a political adviser and diplomat, and one who was capable of managing not only the rules of state, but was also a careful manager of financial matters.

Isabella's many roles will only be dealt with briefly in this thesis, as the emphasis has been on indicating the sharing of resources with Francesco, as discussed in Chapter Five. As a patron of the arts Isabella quickly became known as a knowledgeable and astute collector. Few rulers in Italy would not have known her, both from her

² Isabella had her own court of one hundred members in the earlier part of her life, as well being given male administrative staff and courtiers as needed from Francesco's court; she also accumulated wealth of her own through Francesco's generous transfers of estates, which she turned into ongoing revenue for herself. Her court then totalled in excess of one hundred and fifty members; nevertheless Francesco had ultimate power over Isabella's court if he wished to use it.

management of the Mantuan court and her especial knowledge of the arts of antiquity. Her own strength of character is also put forth in this thesis. The evidence shows that she became friends with the minor branches of the Gonzaga family throughout Mantua, and with Francesco's immediate family, in effect consolidating her position at court as soon as she arrived in Mantua as a young bride. Isabella's continuing interest in the welfare of Mantua contributed a great deal to the harmony of this small princely state. It was to prove invaluable many years later when Isabella, without warning, had to take charge of Mantua when Francesco was imprisoned, and it was then that it became clear how fortunate she was to be able to rely on the full support of his family.

In Chapter Five, and including the research of others, I have argued that Francesco was a patron of significant importance. He was a confident promoter of the enhancement of the Gonzaga rural palaces, which were an important element in his status as a ruler. He used the resources of his court to organize building and decorating programmes to create lavish palaces full of art works, with subjects ranging from contemporary cosmographical and historical knowledge to classical art. In his later years he repeated this extensive patronage of the arts and knowledge in his city-palace in Mantua, especially designed to display Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*. Scholars of art history are now acknowledging Francesco as the long-standing patron of Andrea Mantegna, but if this had been recognized many years ago Francesco would have stood as one of the most famous patrons of Renaissance art, as a result of his twenty-two years as Mantegna's patron. I would argue that this is a case where an examination of Mantegna's secure position in Mantua, despite his acknowledged difficult temperament and constantly rising debts, would have shown that this could not have been achieved

without Francesco's considerable support and patronage. Furthermore, there was a strong bond between artist and patron that indicates that Francesco was not insensitive to art, or to other people, as has been suggested in some of the previous scholarship.

Francesco's patronage of music has covered a wider area than I had anticipated. He brought Mantua to prominence when he established a permanent chapel and cathedral choir in Mantua. The prestige attached to a court that could afford a chapel choir is an important part of the art history of Renaissance courts, as musicians by this time were commanding even higher salaries than some artists, providing an important perspective on our respective disciplinary assumptions.

It is hardly surprising that Mantua soon became one of northern Italy's most culturally advanced princely states, despite its small size. Part of my hypothesis regarding Isabella and Francesco has been that their work together at Mantua was only achieved by the development of a rapport between them. In this thesis, I argue that the success of Mantua could not have been built on a fractious atmosphere between its ruler and his wife. Nor could it have succeeded to the cultural level with either one alone; both husband and consort played their roles to the full, focusing on enhancing the image of their court.

Francesco will be shown to have had a close association with the rulers of the leading courts of Italy and France, a sure indication of the high status of his own court. Isabella, while observing the correct attitude for her womanly status, delighted in any opportunity to be a ruler. The affairs of the Mantuan court came before everything else in her life (even her beloved music), and this earned her the loyalty of Francesco and of the Mantuan people. Francesco was far from being indifferent and unappreciative of

Isabella's unique qualities. Perhaps he had his own challenges working his way around these, but as Burckhardt aptly comments, Isabella and Francesco "in spite of some few irregularities, were a united and respectable couple."³ At times, it seemed that scholars liked to generate unduly negative assessments of both individuals and their relationship, which I hope to counter here.

As part of my re-evaluation of Francesco, I also demonstrate here that he had a discerning mind when it came to political maneuvering to keep Mantua from being involved in war, and especially to keep from fighting against his closest relatives. He was also prepared to allow considerable expenditure of court funds on programmes of patronage. Mantua was wealthy, strong, and of prestigious standing. Isabella's fame as a patron of the arts should include her contribution as a patron of music, with its considerable influence on the future of Italy's reputation as an important musical centre. It is also an acknowledgment of Francesco's understanding of the importance of the arts that contributed to the high cultural standing of the Mantuan court during his rule.

These multiple aspects of their lives, of their interests and competencies, has prompted me to write a thesis that calls for a re-examination of their many contributions, and, in a sense, has forced me to rethink disciplinary lines.⁴ It would seem that art historians have much to learn about patronage studies from musicologists, and vice versa, as suggested in my reading of a recent book on Burgundian culture during this period.

³ J. Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore, (Connecticut: Konecky and Konecky, 2002-4), 43-44. While in Mantua in May 2003, my mentor, Laura Vernizzi, stressed that it had been important for Mantuan society that Isabella and Francesco appeared together at important public functions.

⁴ For an innovative inter-disciplinary study of Cosimo de' Medici as patron of an array of social actions, see the revisionist work of Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

According to Marina Belozerskaya, Burgundian visual culture has not been as positively valued as it should be in scholarly evaluations of European Renaissance culture. Much of the art historical literature focuses on the innovations present in Italian culture, whether in the city-republics or courtly centres. Burgundian culture, on the other hand, is praised for two contributions alone: the invention of oil painting and the development of music.

The following paragraph from her book illustrates the complex issue of valuation, and, I would argue, provides support, from a different perspective within Renaissance studies, for the need for cross-disciplinary exchange in period studies of music and the visual arts:

The Burgundian cultural dominance in fifteenth-century Europe is well known to musicologists... In his introduction to the history of Renaissance music, Iain Fenlon writes that “Huizinga’s picture of the fifteenth century in the north as an ‘epoch of fading and decay’ has so dominated the historiography of the subject [i.e., Renaissance studies] that the notion that Burgundian culture had a real influence not only in England and Spain but even in Italy may seem startling. The history of music provides a clear... instance of the extent of this northern influence.”⁵

Belozerskaya’s book aims to make this phenomenon equally clear for art history and to illustrate that “Burgundian influence extended to numerous branches of art [across Europe].”⁶ As suggested in these passages, scholarship may be dominated by long-held biases, which offer important contradictory perspectives for scholars to reflect on, and ultimately, prompt us to revise our thinking about how we assess the achievements of individuals in the various arts that marked Renaissance European culture.

⁵ Marina Belozerskaya, *Rethinking the Renaissance. Burgundian Arts Across Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45.

⁶ Belozerskaya, *Rethinking the Renaissance*, 45.

The review of the literature in the next chapter shows us a varied account of Isabella and Francesco, both of whom help us to ‘rethink the Renaissance’ and our understanding of all that it meant to be a patron within the complex social network of a court society.⁷

⁷ See in particular, *Patronage, Art, and Society in Renaissance Italy*, eds. F.W. Kent and P. Simons, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

Chapter One

Literature Review

The literature under review is mainly concerned with my perspectives of Isabella d'Este and Francesco II Gonzaga as individual patrons of the arts, their roles as consort and ruler, and how the combination of their many skills promoted the cultural level of the court of Mantua. While I have restricted my thesis to the period of 1484-1519, I have briefly considered earlier periods in the lives of Francesco and Isabella in order to judge the possible influences of family environment on their future courtly interests. Works that highlight the cultural heritage of Isabella and Francesco, their family traditions, access to education, and an awareness of artistic environment, provide an invaluable perspective on their lives. Essays relating to Isabella's move to the Corte Vecchia around 1522 and after her husband's death in 1519, are included because they provide documentation for an assessment of her Castello di San Giorgio *studiolo* (a private study) and *grotta* (an old name for a small room), both of which retained their original functions.

The literature review is grouped in general in chronological order within my area of interest, beginning with Isabella's biography written in 1903. Between 1928 to 1943 brief histories of the Renaissance⁸ were published and they include interesting observations on the popularity of secular music in princely courts, and the changes in society as the courts moved forward from medieval times. From the 1960's to the 1990's we have witnessed the publications of many works by art historians and musicologists that demonstrate the rise of the arts in Italian court society.

⁸ The newer terminology for the early Renaissance period is "the early modern period" but as most of the publications I have used still refer to this period as the early Renaissance, I will use this term throughout the thesis.

Julia Cartwright's two-volume biography of 1903 on Isabella d'Este has not yet been replaced with a modern biography in English.⁹ Cartwright published from at least 1893 to 1915, with major biographies on distinguished men and women in Italy, France, and England. She wrote biographies of such notable Italians as Beatrice d'Este, published in 1899, and Baldassare Castiglione, published in 1908.

Cartwright's first volume on Isabella d'Este is focussed on her background at Ferrara and her first twenty-two years of marriage to Francesco II; it includes many of the negotiations dealing with the acquisition of her art collection. The first half of the second volume briefly mentions Francesco's imprisonment in Venice, his release one year later, and his move to his new city-palace. There is surprisingly little information on Francesco's death in 1519. The major part of Volume 1 gives details of the remarkable number of Isabella's close friends and the correspondence between them, as well as details of the many agents and ambassadors who kept her up-to-date with current happenings in other courts. Each chapter begins with a brief list of paginated items of interest, and at the top of each page there are a few words indicating the subject matter on that page. Cartwright has done extensive archival research; she captures the intellectual intensity of Isabella's mind and her vitality in pursuing her astonishingly large number of interests.

One minor problem throughout the two volumes is the dating of events or letters. The day and month are given but frequently not the year and this necessitates going back fairly constantly trying to find the right year. The two volumes, and sometimes the

⁹ Julia Cartwright (Mrs. Ady), *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua 1474-1539: A Study of the Renaissance*. 2 Vols., (London: John Murray, 1903). Jan Laut's *Isabella d'Este: Fürstin der Renaissance 1474-1639*, (Hamburg: M. von Schröder, 1952), in German, is considered an important biographical study and has been translated into French but not into English.

chapters, are not in chronological order. Nevertheless, these are indeed minor problems, as the major advantage of this comprehensive work is the full English translation, from Italian, of important documents written or received by Isabella.

Cartwright's biography of 1908 of Baldassare Castiglione, also in two volumes, reflects the major role Isabella played in the life of this Mantuan statesman, writer, and poet.¹⁰ Many of Castiglione's friends were also friends of Isabella's, and Cartwright's work supplies a considerable amount of detail on how courts interact with each other through these friendships. The two volumes, and Volume I in particular, are a useful source of information on the many travels undertaken by both Francesco and Isabella. The complicated political manoeuvres necessary in order to keep Mantua in a secure position are discussed and Francesco's changing alliances are well described. Although Castiglione was for some years at Urbino, during which time he had been exiled from Mantua, his political loyalty remained steadfastly to the Gonzaga family. Isabella's meetings with important people, and the place and date, are more easily accessible in these volumes, particularly Volume I, than in her own biography. Castiglione's constant lack of money while at the Urbino court, and his complete dependence on his mother, who lived in Mantua, for clothes, food and money, provides a factual view of how courts and courtiers all seemed to have a cash flow problem but still managed to create an air of wealth and prosperity.

An indispensable reference for the history of the Gonzaga, which includes dates of marriages and an excellent genealogy table, is the catalogue accompanying the

¹⁰ Julia Cartwright (Mrs. Ady), *Baldassare Castiglione, The Perfect Courtier: His Life and Letters 1478-1529*, 2 Vols., (London: John Murray, 1908).

exhibition *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, held in London in 1981-82.¹¹ Twenty-six authors assisted the two editors, Chambers and Martineau, in their contribution to essays and entries in the text and in the Catalogue section. The Catalogue items are an invaluable source of information, with items running from 1 to 282, covering the period of the first Gonzaga captain in 1328 to Vincenzo II, the seventh Duke of Mantua, who died in 1627. The catalogue is well illustrated throughout and almost every Catalogue item is accompanied by an illustration. The essays are also well illustrated. Since 1982, however, there has been further research on the Gonzaga family with the result that some information is slightly outdated, but this is of minor importance since this is the only English reference available for the history of the Gonzaga.

In an article by Rose Marie San Juan, "The Court Lady's Dilemma: Isabella d'Este and Art Collecting in the Renaissance,"¹² San Juan describes Isabella's position as a court lady, her private ambitions, and her "dilemma" as a woman art collector in the early Renaissance period. From the literature of the 1960's to the 1990's San Juan has put together a portrayal of Isabella as one whose collection reflected her female identity, and whose patronage lacked artistic knowledge. While San Juan's own position on Isabella's contribution as an art patron remains somewhat ambiguous to me, she concludes that Isabella had been marginalized because of her position and gender within contemporary society, an assertion that I wish to counter in this thesis.

¹¹ David Chambers and Jane Martineau, eds., *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, exhib. cat., 4 November 1981 – 31 January 1982, (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981).

¹² Rose Marie San Juan, "The Court Lady's Dilemma: Isabella d'Este and Art Collecting in the Renaissance," in *The Oxford Art Journal*, 14:1, (1991): 67-78.

Peter Elmer, in his essay on “Court Culture in the Renaissance,”¹³ includes the Gonzaga Court in his discussion of buildings and architects of the fifteenth-century, and under a separate sub-heading he discusses Isabella d’Este, her patronage of the arts and music, and her intellectual interests. He expresses the firm opinion that Isabella has suffered from the negative criticisms over the years and gives excellent examples of such stereotyping. Molly Bourne (see below) also notes that scholars are now recognizing “the biases that riddle Isabellian historiography.”¹⁴

The important role of Isabella as a patron to promote music composed by Italians from poetry written by Italians, is covered not only by musicologists writing on the Italian history of music, but also by historians writing about the northern princely courts. Lewis Lockwood’s book of 1984, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara, 1400-1505*, draws a detailed picture of the Estense court through the study of three rulers, Leonello d’Este, Borso d’Este, and Ercole I d’Este, the latter being Isabella’s father.¹⁵ It is an authoritative source of information on the role of court musicians from the time of Leonello in 1441 to the death of Ercole I in 1505. Lockwood’s work gives comprehensive details on the management of a large and wealthy princely court. Ercole I was accused of being frugal, or even mean, in running his court, and Isabella may have inherited many of her frugal ways – often viewed so negatively by some scholars – from seeing how her father managed Ferrara; this is possibly a sensible strategy given the constant difficulties of cash-flow in European court societies as a rule. Lockwood’s book emphasizes Ercole’s

¹³ In David Mateer, ed., *The Renaissance in Europe: A Cultural Enquiry*, (New Haven and London: The Yale University Press, 2000), 1-96.

¹⁴ Molly Bourne, “Renaissance Husbands and Wives as Patrons of Art: The *Camerini* of Isabella d’Este and Francesco II Gonzaga,” in *Beyond Isabella*, edited by Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2001- 2002), 112, n.4.

¹⁵ Lewis Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara, 1400-1505: The Creation of a Musical Center in the Fifteenth Century*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).

interest in church music and his desire that his children were to be brought up to be knowledgeable musicians. It is not clear just why Isabella, whose interest was specifically in secular music, was so determined to be such a well-qualified musician. Lockwood presents Ercole I as being almost totally engrossed by his interest in sacred music and church doctrine in his later years.

Nesta de Robeck's publication of 1928, *Music of the Italian Renaissance*, draws attention to the growing importance of secular music in the early Renaissance, and of Isabella bringing it into prominence as a contemporary song form the very early genre of the *frottola*, then closely related to the early 1300's *ballata*.¹⁶ de Robeck provides interesting detail on the early courts and their rulers, and the development of music from the plainsong of the 1300's to the more polyphonic choral music, and on to the popularity of secular music.¹⁷ Seventy-five years later, in 2003, Giulio Ongaro wrote a similarly titled but more comprehensive book, *Music of the Renaissance*.¹⁸ It broadly follows the lines of de Robeck's work, but is a more thorough examination of Renaissance genres of music, and of musicians, composers, instruments, and instrument makers, as well as music and dance in courts and in private residences.

The first two chapters of Walter H. Rubsamen's *Literary Sources of Secular Music in Italy (ca. 1500)*,¹⁹ identified Isabella's role in the beginning of the history of Italian Renaissance music. Rubsamen also discusses the natural progression of the *frottola* to the madrigal, Italy's better-known early music genre. In a later chapter he

¹⁶ See Chapter Four.

¹⁷ Nesta de Robeck, *Music of the Italian Renaissance*, (Unabridged edition of first edition published in 1928 by the Medici Society, London; New York: Da Capo Press, 1969).

¹⁸ Giulio Ongaro, *Music of the Renaissance*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Walter H. Rubsamen, *Literary Sources of Secular Music in Italy (ca.1500)*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1943); see Chapter I, 1-8, and Chapter II, 9-11.

discusses Isabella's interactions with the most famous poets of the time, and the influences of Petrarch's poetry. The court improvisators of the 1460's to 1490's are represented by Serafino, who devoted his life to perfecting the art of singing in the courts of Milan and Naples, and in Rome. His poetry was pertinent to the times and he was extremely popular. He corresponded with Isabella, asking for Bartolomeo Tromboncino to set some of his poems into musical compositions. He visited Mantua in 1494.

William F. Prizer has written extensively over many years on music at the Mantuan court and he is an authoritative source of reference for both Isabella and Francesco's patronage of music. Prizer's doctoral dissertation of 1974 on the Mantuan composer, Marchetto Cara, was rewritten, expanded, and published in book form in 1980 under the title *Courtly Pastimes: The Frottole of Marchetto Cara*.²⁰ It has useful information on Francesco's patronage of music as well as describing Isabella's important role in raising the status of Italian music. Prizer's short essay, "*Una 'Virtu Molto Conveniente A Madonne': Isabella d'Este as a Musician*," is essential reading for an understanding of the depth of Isabella's love of music.²¹ Another important article by Prizer, "North Italian Courts, 1460-1540,"²² is an invaluable source of information on Francesco's role in the patronage of music at the Mantuan court. It includes references to earlier Gonzaga family music patronage and to Francesco's patronage of theatre combined with music.

²⁰ William F. Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes, The Frottole of Marchetto Cara*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980, 1974).

²¹ William F. Prizer, "*Una 'Virtu Molto Conveniente A Madonne': Isabella d'Este as a Musician*", *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol.17, No.1, (Winter 1999), 10-49.

²² William F. Prizer, "North Italian Courts, 1460-1540," in *The Renaissance: From the 1470's to the end of the 16th century*, edited by Iain Fenlon, (Basingstoke and London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989).

Prizer's essay "Marchetto Cara at Mantua: New Documents on the Life and Duties of a Renaissance Court Musician,"²³ highlights the position of northern musicians at Italian courts during the 1430's to 1490, although they were not employed at Mantua. The Italian composers Bartolomeo Tromboncino and Marchetto Cara gained prominence during this period, and Prizer's article also includes information on the formation of Francesco's chapel choir and Cara's ability to handle both secular and sacred music. Prizer's article "Isabella d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia as Patrons of Music: The Frottola at Mantua and Ferrara,"²⁴ is of particular interest in regard to Isabella's partiality towards string and keyboard music, and his view is that Isabella's patronage of music was strictly governed by her own musical ability and the type of music which interested her most.

Iain Fenlon's two-volume *Music and patronage in sixteenth-century Mantua*,²⁵ a major contribution to the understanding of the influence of music on social patterns over nearly a century, is included here because in the first few chapters Fenlon draws attention to the influence of music on Isabella's art collection, and to the iconographical references to music in almost everything that surrounded her life at Mantua. Fenlon is an important Renaissance musicologist and art historian whose essays and books provide reliable historical material on music and art in the Renaissance.

Sylvia Ferino-Pagden's catalogue of an exhibition on Isabella held in Vienna in 1993-94 is in German and Italian: *La Prima donna del mondo: Isabella d'Este - Fürstin*

²³ William F. Prizer, "Marchetto Cara at Mantua: New Documents on the Life and Duties of a Renaissance Court Musician," in *Musica Disciplina: A Yearbook of the History of Music*, edited by Armen Carapetyan, (Vol.32, 1978): 87-110.

²⁴ William F. Prizer, "Isabella d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia as Patrons of Music: The Frottola at Mantua and Ferrara," in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, No.1, (Spring 1985): 1-33.

²⁵ Iain Fenlon, *Music and Patronage in sixteenth-century Mantua*, (Cambridge, London, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980-1982).

und Mäzenatin der Renaissance.²⁶ The exceptionally high quality of the illustrations in this catalogue is a highly recommended source for appreciating Isabella's contribution to art. The illustrated medals and coins document the historical background of the Gonzaga and Este families. The medals show Francesco at several stages in his life, thus providing an interesting alternative to the heavily defined bronze bust that is more frequently illustrated. There are also rare portraits of Francesco, his brother Giovanni, and four of Francesco's children: Ippolita, Paola (Livia), Federico, and Ferrante. The missing children are Eleonora, their first-born child, and Ercole, the second son. There are also excellent illustrations of Isabella's *Imprese* and beautiful reproductions from Isabella's *grotta* and *studiolo*; Ferino-Pagden's use of the magnification of some items demonstrates how effectively Isabella used these designs as decoration. The bibliography, although superseded in newer publications, is comprehensive.

Phyllis Williams Lehmann's essay on Mantegna's first painting for Isabella's *studiolo*, the "Parnassus," is a highly recommended analysis of this famous work. It is one of three essays published under the joint names of herself and her husband, Karl Lehmann in 1970.²⁷ Lehmann's essay is beautifully illustrated, and she uses magnification of some of the smallest details of Mantegna's work to complement her reading of the painting. It includes a discussion on whether or not Mantegna knew of the drawings of the Muses executed by the artist Cyriacus in 1444. Lehmann suggests that the themes of harmony and love, and music and poetry, may all be found in the *Parnassus*.

²⁶ Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, "*La Prima donna del mondo*" Isabella d'Este - *Fürstin und Mäzenatin der Renaissance*, exhib. cat., Kunsthistorisches Museum, (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, 1994).

²⁷ Phyllis Williams Lehmann, "The Sources and Meaning of Mantegna's *Parnassus*," in P.W. Lehmann and K. Lehmann, eds., *Samothonian Reflections: Aspects of the Revival of the Antique*, Bollingen Series XCII, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973).

This first painting for Isabella, the *Parnassus*, has brought forth many readings of its meaning. I draw attention to a scholarly essay by Stephen Campbell, who reads Mantegna's *Parnassus* through its iconography as relating to the historical source of the arts, letters, myths, and nature; in particular he discusses at length the importance of the origins of nature's sources. This is a serious study of the classics and ancient myths in relation to the *Parnassus*, and presents an important re-evaluation of Mantegna's painting.²⁸

La Corte di Mantova nell'eta di Andrea Mantegna: 1450-1550, The Court of the Gonzaga in the Age of Mantegna: 1450-1550,²⁹ consists of a total of twenty-six essays, thirteen in Italian and thirteen in English. The authors represented are among today's leading Renaissance scholars and the book is important for the variety of subjects discussed under a time period of a century. Essays of particular interest are those on the decorative tiles ordered by Francesco for the rural Marmirolo Palace; the paintings of the Muses at Ferrara; and a history of the Francesco's military commands, although half of this latter essay is on the military career of Francesco's son, Federico II, after he became the fifth Marquis of Mantua. The essays assembled provide excellent coverage of many of the cultural activities of the Gonzaga court during this rather wide period, and are well illustrated.³⁰

Clifford M. Brown is without doubt the most prolific and scholarly author on the Mantuan court and his work includes in-depth studies on Isabella's art collection. Only

²⁸ Stephen J. Campbell, "Mantegna's *Parnassus*: Reading, Collecting and the *Studiolo*," in *Revaluing Renaissance Art*, edited by Gabriele Neher and Rupert Shepherd, (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000).

²⁹ Cesare Mozzarelli, Robert Oresko, and Leandro Ventura, a cura di (eds.), *La Corte di Mantova nell'eta di Andrea Mantegna: 1450-1550, The Court of the Gonzaga in the Age of Mantegna: 1450-1550, Atti del convegno (Londra, 6-8 marzo 1992/Mantova, 28 marzo 1992)*, (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1997)

³⁰ Important Italian texts have been very kindly translated for me by the following: Nerida Newbegin, of Sydney University, Australia; Janis Elliott, of the University of Victoria; Simone Testa of the Royal Holloway University, London; and Graham Fawcett, also of London.

his most pertinent publications are cited in my bibliography. Nearly all his works include archival and other primary Italian sources, and they are frequently presented in full, and separately, in Appendices. Two of Brown's articles on Francesco's patronage of art are the basis for much of my discussion in Chapter Five.³¹ Brown does not hesitate to express his view on the neglect by scholars of Francesco's appreciation of both the liberal and visual arts. The historical detail presented shows clearly that Francesco had a solid appreciation of an artist's work, and the depth of his interest and patronage has indeed been neglected. His excellence as a host, combined with luxurious rural palaces and the very large Palazzo Ducale in Mantua would have considerably enhanced Mantua's reputation for prestige and wealth. These articles represent a comprehensive study of old Chancery records and are an indication of how much more there is to learn about the Mantuan court.

I would especially draw attention to Brown's recent publication *Per dare qualche Splendore a la Gloriosa Città di Mantua – Documents for the Antiquarian Collection of Isabella d'Este*.³² It is an intensely detailed study of the many complexities Isabella faced as a consort, and gives an in-depth study of how a consort manages to project her interests, whether or not as a collector of art, or simply as interested in art. There are two parts to this work. The first part includes the artistic interests of members of other Gonzaga families, especially Isabella's close friend, Antonia del Bolzo of Gazzuolo. The

³¹ Clifford M. Brown, "Concludo che non vidi mai la pio bella casa in Italia: The Frescoed Decorations in Francesco II Gonzaga's Suburban Villa in the Mantua Countryside at Gonzaga (1491-1496)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (1996), 268-302; and Clifford M. Brown, "The Palazzo di San Sebastiano (1506-1512) and the Art Patronage of Francesco II Gonzaga, Fourth Marquis of Mantua," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 129 (1997), 131-180. Both these articles were written in collaboration with Anna Maria Lorenzoni.

³² Clifford M. Brown, with the collaboration of Anna Maria Lorenzoni and Sally Hickson. *Per dare qualche Splendore a la Gloriosa Città di Mantua – Documents for the Antiquarian Collection of Isabella d'Este*, (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2002).

limited financial resources for a consort, and lack of inherited items, are two interesting subjects that are also discussed. The second part includes the later years of Isabella's life as a collector. The book contains a vast amount of factual material from primary sources.

A recent publication, which came to my attention after my thesis was commenced, is Molly Bourne's short essay on "Renaissance Husbands and Wives as Patrons of Art."³³ The essay includes a study of Francesco's city-palace, the Palazzo di San Sebastiano, and includes a projected design for the large rectangular room where Francesco displayed his most important paintings, those of the Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*. There was ample room to display other battle scenes of interest and additional paintings by Lorenzo Costa. Bourne also mentions Francesco's interest in architecture and building projects, and includes a brief mention of the style of art patronage favoured by their son, Federico. The decoration of Isabella's *grotta* and *studiolo* is compared with Francesco's decorative programme for the Palazzo Sebastiano. Of particular interest, in view of the inclusion in this review of comments on the negative press given Isabella over a period of years, is the fact that Francesco suffered from almost total oblivion. We have seen Brown's comments above, and an expanded discussion is included in the next chapter. Bourne also adds her view of this neglect, with the blame placed at the door of the nineteenth-century scholar, Alessandro Luzio, whose conviction was that Isabella had no faults, was the only patron of note at Mantua, and that "the 'untamed and wild'

³³ Molly Bourne, "Renaissance Husbands and Wives as Patrons of Art: The *Camerini* of Isabella d'Este and Francesco II Gonzaga," in *Beyond Isabella*, edited by Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2001- 2002).

Francesco was incapable of cultural contribution;" Francesco's projects were simply overlooked or considered to be those of Isabella's.³⁴

The literature reviewed above indicates the level of scholarly work available for research into the continually fascinating subject of the Mantuan court, and in particular to the approach to patronage by Isabella d'Este and Francesco II Gonzaga.

³⁴ Bourne, "Husbands," 112, n.4. Bourne's doctoral dissertation was on Francesco II Gonzaga, but it was unfortunately not available to me in book form; however, Bourne is publishing her dissertation in an expanded and revised edition and publication is expected shortly. (Personal discussion with Molly Bourne, whose help with my study in Mantua in October 2004 was invaluable.)

Chapter Two

Francesco II Gonzaga

Francesco II was born in 1466 to Marquis Federico I Gonzaga and Margreta of Bavaria, one of six children who each have a place in Italy's history.³⁵ A brief history of the Gonzaga line is warranted here to understand his background and sense of his family's position in this area of Italy. The line started with Luigi Gonzaga (c.1268-1360), but it was not until the rule of Gianfrancesco, from 1407-1444, that we see a pattern of courtly art patronage emerging as a means of creating an authoritative image of the ruler, who exercises a fuller sense of magnificence with the aim of crafting his state along distinctive cultural lines.

Gianfrancesco was a military commander engaged by Venice in its war against Milan, but nevertheless he became an ally of Milan afterwards. This sudden changing of political alliances was typical of the political turmoil well before Francesco's time. Gianfrancesco became a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire in 1432, allowing Mantua to be referred to as a princely state. In 1433 he became the first Marquis, granted by the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund. Gianfrancesco followed the life of a *condottiere* but he was also a patron of letters; he owned a library reputed to contain over 400 manuscripts or illuminated books. This level of culture in a small dynastic court in the overlap between medieval times and the early Renaissance is remarkable, and a study of the manuscripts in his library would be informative in relation to his interests.

³⁵ Chiara married the Lord of Bourbon-Montpensier, Sigismondo was a Cardinal, Elizabetta was Duchess of Urbino, Maddalena married the Lord of Pesaro, and the youngest brother Giovanni was Lord of Vescovato. They were a close family, all of whom were good friends to Isabella.

Gianfrancesco employed Vittorino da Feltre, a well-known humanist scholar, as his librarian, but Vittorino asked permission to start a school for his patron's children, the first such school in northern Italy.³⁶ The school opened in 1423 under the cheerful name of *Casa Giocosa* (Joyful House). It included not only the children of Gianfrancesco, but also children from other nearby States such as Urbino, children from other branches of the Gonzaga family who ruled semi-autonomous estates throughout the province of Mantua, and children from families in the city of Mantua who exhibited a high intelligence.³⁷ This was indeed forward thinking on the part of Gianfrancesco and Vittorino, and Mantua became famous as a centre for learning, a tradition carried on well into and past Francesco II's time. Francesco was well schooled in his early years and more proficient in Latin than his wife, Isabella.³⁸ The curriculum covered important elements of the liberal arts, including music and dancing.³⁹ That Francesco had acquired a high level of scholarship will be seen in the decoration of his rural palaces, which reflected this learning. As early as 1488 the Mantuan court practised the art of dancing and Prizer records Francesco's proficiency in dancing as late as 1511.⁴⁰ The courtly practice of borrowing musicians, or artists, had been started before Francesco's marriage as may be seen from the following comment by Allan Atlas, referring also to 1488:

³⁶ See Iain Fenlon, "Music and Society" in *The Renaissance: From the 1470's to the end of the 16th century*, edited by Iain Fenlon, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989), 3.

³⁷ See Prizer's *Courtly Pastime*, 2; as noted above, Prizer, among other musicologists, gives a concise history of the geographical position of Mantua, and its history. He pays considerable attention to Francesco's part in increasing the quality of musicians at the court after Isabella's arrival in 1490.

³⁸ Burckhardt points out that at the time of Vittorino's school "a knowledge of Latin was necessity; and after Latin came logic," Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S.G.C. Middlemore, (Connecticut: Konecky and Konecky, 2002-2004), 213-14. Francesco owned at least one treatise in Latin on agricultural methods. By contrast, Isabella's education apparently did not include a compulsory learning of Latin, but included a knowledge of Greek antiquities.

³⁹ See Fenlon, "Music and Society," 3.

⁴⁰ Francesco was still taking part in dances at Pietole, when he was forty-five and not in good health; see William F. Prizer, "Games of Venus: Secular Vocal Music in the Late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento," *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (Winter 1991), 35.

one can appreciate the roles that social dancing and the *alta cappella* (a group of musicians) played in the festive life of the court from a letter of 18 August 1488 from King Ferrante to Francesco Gonzaga, in which the king implores the Marquis of Mantua to order his two wind players to return to Naples immediately.⁴¹

As the art of patronage was an important path a ruler needed to take to gain prestige for his court, it could be debated that this was a subject also channelled into the schooling of a son and heir, a fact not stressed sufficiently in the literature.⁴² Ludovico II, Gianfrancesco's son and heir, and Andrea Mantegna's first patron, commissioned Mantegna to paint his bedroom in the Gonzaga palace, known as the Palazzo Ducale. It took some years to complete, and despite many restorations, it is still a remarkable work. Known as the *Camera Picta* (the painted room) or the *Camera degli Sposi* (the room of the married couple) it is a major tourist draw for Mantua. Ludovico also requested Florentine architect Leon Battista Alberti to design two churches for Mantua: the beautiful Sant' Andrea church that is an almost equal tourist attraction with the Palazzo Ducale, and the church and convent of San Sebastiano, opposite Francesco's city-palace of the same name.

Ludovico's son and heir, Federico I (1441-1484) ruled for only six years and died at forty-three years of age; he was an active *condottiere* and in his short rule he did not have time to adopt a style of patronage. He became Mantegna's second patron but there is little detail on commissions he gave Mantegna except for a project in 1483 to paint the main hall of the country palace of Marmirolo. Federico had engaged architect Luca Fancelli, the successor to Leon Battista Alberti, to design the graceful palace, *Domus*

⁴¹ See Allan W. Atlas, "Aragonese Naples," in Fenlon, *The Renaissance*, 169.

⁴² There is a fine line between being a patron and an employer: a ruler could use patronage of the arts to improve the cultural standing of his court or for his own self-fashioning; he was also the employer of all the minor artists and artisans of his court, including those who were part time, or contract workers, some of whom would fit under the umbrella of "costs of patronage".

Nova, close to the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua, but it was never completely finished and succeeding generations of Gonzaga did not use it.

Francesco II ruled Mantua from 1484 until 1519, and he spent a much longer time than his forebears as a military commander, but he continued his patronage of the arts and music between military assignments. Historical evidence shows that Francesco also had an interest in collecting treatises and manuscripts, a hobby similar to that of his great-grandfather Gianfrancesco,⁴³ and he was exchanging manuscripts with Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici in 1500 and 1501.⁴⁴ Francesco's forebears were *condottieri* who had used art patronage as a further means of achieving power and prestige, and as this thesis demonstrates, Francesco followed the same pattern. According to Rodriguez-Salgado all the Gonzaga presented themselves as living luxuriously, as was expected of a princely court.⁴⁵

Francesco's life started as a young and enthusiastic patron and ruler; he travelled to neighbouring princely states to establish a good diplomatic rapport. He was a much sought-after military commander and he was an important patron of music and art who started rebuilding his rural palaces to suit his lavish style of living. Ceremonial and carnival music were features of his rule, and he excelled at jousts. Francesco had the undoubted advantage of riding his own Gonzaga horses, which were the envy of all rulers in Italy. He was an eminent breeder and his stables reflect a comprehensive knowledge of horses.

⁴³ See Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours*, 146-148.

⁴⁴ Brown, "Concludo che," 277, n.22.

⁴⁵ See M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado, "Terracotta and Iron: Mantuan Politics (ca.1450-ca.1550)," in Mozzarelli, *La Corte di Mantova*, (1997), 26.

As Mantua's fourth Marchese in 1484, and at eighteen years of age, Francesco became Mantegna's third, and last, patron. Tietze-Conrat notes that Francesco apparently understood Mantegna's style and difficult temperament.⁴⁶ This seems to be confirmed in Francesco's affection for Mantegna, and his constant support for the artist over twenty-two years. Mantegna also welcomed the young Isabella when she arrived in 1490 and some of his most outstanding masterpieces were carried out for these two young patrons over the next sixteen years. Francesco shared with Mantegna an interest in the classical world and early Roman history, while Isabella shared his interest in antiquities. Mantegna was a versatile artist; he painted a *Madonna* for Francesco in 1485, to give to Isabella's mother as a Christmas present. Francesco also had paintings known to be by Mantegna and presumed to be of the *Madonna* in his private bedroom in his rural palace in Gonzaga.

Art historians now recognize that Francesco was certainly the most likely person to have commissioned the *Triumphs of Caesar*, and a general starting date for the cycle has been accepted as 1486. These nine magnificent paintings were designed for Francesco's large reception room in the Palazzo Ducale. Historically then, Francesco was a notable patron of the arts very early in his rule. Many of the panels were completed by 1502 and all were completed before Mantegna's death in 1506.

Francesco's many roles as a patron appear throughout this thesis but I would summarize this discussion of his earlier life in the following way: from 1487 to 1489 Francesco had the accomplished Venetian musician, Bartolomeo Tromboncino, in his service. The latter moved back and forth to Mantua and by 1494 he had become a

⁴⁶ See E. Tietze-Conrat, *Andrea Mantegna 1431-1506*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1955), 18.

famous composer in Isabella's service. As both music and art are a focus of my thesis, it is interesting to hypothesize that the young Francesco II was a master of the courtly arts, learned in the art of war, a good ruler, and with sufficient artistic knowledge to start his own programme of patronage some years before the arrival of Isabella at Mantua. The influences of previous Gonzaga standards of art patronage were, I would argue, significant in his success as a patron.

Politics and War:

An important element in understanding Francesco's character and personality is to examine his management of his role as a military commander of armies formed by states outside Mantua. He had a well-trained army of men, using the superb Gonzaga horses, and he was known as a strong and fearless leader. Direct combat was not often necessary but his strength at the Battle of Fornovo has been well noted. His skill with horses and lances, and the art of defence, must have been learned from an early age, as courtly jousts were part of the entertainment at carnival time.

The years around 1494-1530 were some of the most turbulent in Italy's history, but in Francesco's time the ever-changing alliances are today quite hard to follow – an ally one minute and an enemy the next, with alliances constantly changing their support from one independent state to another. In a time of marriages arranged to cement alliances between states, it created a strain on families as well as on rulers. Isabella was always concerned about the safety of Ferrara, and Francesco had strong ties with his in-laws in both Ferrara and Urbino. He was very fond of his sister, Chiara, who married the Duke of Montpensier, and their son, Charles, Duke of Bourbon. He constantly supported

his sister Elizabetta, married to the Duke of Urbino, a marriage that was a great strain on Elizabetta because of the Duke's poor health. He gave them refuge twice when they were forced to flee Urbino, and at great risk to himself politically. His most difficult task was trying to balance the Gonzaga's long unofficial association with the French court while they continued to invade Italy, and yet keep his loyalty to his Italian allies. To successfully negotiate this time of intense political "warfare" by coalitions intent on overrunning the smaller states called for political expertise and an ability to judge the strongest side. When it suited him, Francesco used the excuse to not go to war because the Gonzaga were tied to Germany and the Holy Roman Emperor. At other times he procrastinated until a solution was found that suited him. However, Mantua was never invaded and Francesco's family never suffered the distress and deprivation of possessions by having to go into exile.

Francesco's approach to war is discussed in a lengthy essay by Rodriguez-Salgado, although the essay is divided almost evenly between Francesco and his son, Federico II; nevertheless, "Terracotta and Iron" contains valuable historical detail.⁴⁷ In 1493 Francesco was sought by the French to allow Mantua to act as an additional buffer to protect Ferrara and Urbino,⁴⁸ but he chose to stay with the Venetians, with whom he had a contract. In 1495 Francesco was fighting the French (Charles VIII) at Fornovo, a battle he won. Although the combined allied forces allowed Charles VIII to remove his forces from Italy, the outcome of the battle led many Italian historians to see the Battle of

⁴⁷ See M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado, "Terracotta and Iron," in Mozzarelli, *La Corte di Mantova*, (1997). This forty-six page essay is devoted exclusively to Francesco and his son Federico, and although dotted with cynicism throughout the first half on Francesco, it provides comprehensive details of this extraordinary time in Mantua's history.

⁴⁸ A number of Gonzaga kinsmen who were known as very competent military men joined France at this time, and stayed in the service of the French court, as did Isabella and Francesco's third son Ferrante. Both Ferrante and Francesco's nephew-in-law, the Duke of Bourbon, ensured her safety during the Sack of Rome in 1527.

Fornovo as the beginning of foreign domination by the French and the Spanish in Italy, because if Charles could go down into Italy and get back out, others could do so as well. The lack of support to Francesco by the troops of Ludovico Sforza and Maximilian at a crucial time of the withdrawal of the French is noted by Rodriguez-Salgado.⁴⁹

Francesco lost no time using art patronage to ensure that this battle was recorded historically for Mantua by commissioning Mantegna to paint a beautiful altarpiece in honour of the Virgin Mary, to whom he had prayed before leaving for battle. He also built and dedicated the church where the altarpiece was to be installed.⁵⁰ It is one of Mantegna's outstanding paintings, presently in the Louvre.

In 1497 Francesco was out of favour with the Venetians and he retired to his rural palace at Gonzaga for some months. In 1499 he fought with Milan against the French, and lost. To save himself a certain amount of embarrassment he sent Isabella to Milan on his behalf to celebrate Charles VIII's entry into Milan. Francesco then had a period of joining the imperial forces and allowed German troops to cross Mantua, and in 1501 he was their captain-general. The ties that Francesco and his family had long held with France prompted him to travel there in 1502 to re-establish a good relationship. By 1505 the war-like Pope Julius II was embarked on his plan to take the smaller princely states of Urbino, Bologna, and Ferrara, and eventually Venice. By 1507 Francesco, probably justifiably, had had enough and tried to avoid going to war again, and particularly against Ferrara and Venice. Eventually he had to lead a coalition force against Venice and was

⁴⁹ The Sforza of Milan and Maximilian, Emperor of the Imperial Forces, supplied allied troops, but they did not consider they were directly responsible to Francesco, who was concerned that the French could regroup; he found he had an allied force in disarray and his own troops were left unprotected. See Rodriguez-Salgado, "Terracotta and Iron," 28, and 28, n.36-37.

⁵⁰ This is perhaps the only time Francesco did not commission an actual battle scene from an artist, but rather a devotional painting with himself in full armour.

almost immediately captured just outside his own boundary. He was imprisoned for a year. Pope Julius obtained his release but it was still some months later before negotiations for his freedom were completed.⁵¹ Julius then made him Captain-General of the Papal forces in an alliance with Venice, his recent captors. By this time, however, Francesco had brought considerable wealth to Mantua and he had been in military service for over twenty years.

A further asset both economically and strategically was that Mantua was situated strategically as a base for provisioning war camps; the land was (and still is) extremely fertile; it was able to provision large armies, which was done in Francesco's time. Francesco was well compensated for allowing armies of different allegiances to pass through Mantua, a route connecting eastern and southern Italian states with Germany. This was not a popular move with anyone but the commanders of the army using Mantua as a safe route. These uses of Mantuan land brought added wealth to the small state, even though they caused Francesco's allies considerable anxiety trying to guess his political motives.

That Mantua was saved from ever being devastated by war was undoubtedly helped because Francesco, as Rodriguez-Salgado describes it, practised "the art of masterful inactivity."⁵² On the other hand Mantua could easily defend its own natural waterways, it was rich in food sources, possessed the finest horses in Europe, and Francesco was known for his formidable skill as a military commander.

⁵¹ Rodriguez-Salgado concludes his essay with the following comment: "Terracotta vessels cannot endure serious blows from vessels of iron. It is a mistake to regard Mantua as a fragile vase constantly trying to avoid being smashed by neighbours . . . Mantua was successful because it was itself iron-clad, protected by its own arms and above all, by the arms of others." Rodriguez-Salgado, "Terracotta and Iron," 57.

⁵² Rodriguez-Salgado, "Terracotta and Iron," 32.

The Mantuan Court:

Rulers of small princely states who earned their living as *condottieri*, quickly settled down to ruling their state and following their own style of patronage. As noted above, for nearly seventy years, art patronage in Francesco's family represented one of the major paths to personal importance for rulers, and was an indicator of wealth and power for Gianfrancesco and Ludovico II. There is no valid reason for art historians to ignore Francesco as a patron of the arts. He cared about Mantua and its future. He particularly cared if the Gonzaga name or the reputation of his state was harmed in any way, and he had already established a reputation as an exceptional host. Patronage was a significant part of court expenditure and there is no record of Francesco hesitating when it came to taking the best artists or musicians into his service. He supported Isabella by increasing her yearly allowance, sufficiently for her to re-invest it and accumulate property as well as revenue. The greater the number of specialist artists a court could afford to pay, the more power it could exercise over its neighbours as having a higher cultural and prestigious standing.

In addition, we should remember that the social importance of the clergy was considerable. If a court was wealthy enough, and in high standing, it could buy a cardinalate for second sons, and the Gonzaga had an amazing record of cardinalates in their family. The first Gonzaga cardinal was Francesco's uncle, Francesco Gonzaga (1444-1483). Another uncle, Ludovico, was Bishop of Mantua (1460-1511), and his brother Sigismondo (1469-1525), became a cardinal, with the necessary financial help from Francesco. Both Ludovico and Sigismondo were very fond of Isabella and left her antiques and other cherished items in their wills; Sigismondo also left Isabella the right to

his commune at Solarolo, in Emilia-Romagna. Ercole, Francesco and Isabella's second son, was also a cardinal, and was very nearly elected Pope, with only one necessary vote – that of Spain – against him. Chambers notes that the Gonzaga “had conspicuously heavenward leanings which were expressed by their patronage of Mantuan churches and convents and their traditions of personal piety.”⁵³ The clergy was the next highest social rank after the ruler and his family. Cardinal Ercole (1505-1563) inherited his family's love of music, as he was the most well-known and versatile patron of music in the Gonzaga family.

Francesco's interest in music was an important part of his life, whether at home or in the field on his military assignments, or in music for the numerous carnivals with dances and masked balls, town celebrations of important saints and other religious events. We know that Francesco took his favorite musician, Cara, with him into the field on his military commands – something that understandably did not appeal to Cara!

In 1508 Francesco moved to his city-palace, the Palazzo di San Sebastiano (see below) and it was evident that he had contracted syphilis, a disease that was to cause him considerable distress until his death. His city-palace was not large enough to hold large state functions but Francesco presided over formal functions for as long as possible at the large Ducal Palace. Nevertheless, because Isabella was in residence at the ducal palace it fell to her to prepare and arrange housing for important visitors and their large retinues of staff, together with the considerable task of supervising entertainment. During this time, probably the most trying period for them both, Isabella had to adjust to Francesco being home permanently, and thoroughly in command as ruler of Mantua, and Francesco had to deal with the trying demands of his illness. With Francesco's blessing, Isabella

⁵³ D.S. Chambers, “Mantua and the Gonzaga,” in Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours*, xxi.

visited Rome in 1514, for a much needed holiday. Just before his death in 1519, Francesco appointed Isabella ruler of Mantua until Federico became of age in 1521. The rise of the Mantuan court to such wealth and cultural prestige was achieved as a result of the skilled management of this small court not only by Francesco but also by Isabella. Both of them put the needs of the State above their personal lives. Their individual interests and individual avenues of patronage complemented each other, and contributed to the high cultural status of the Mantuan court.

I have already noted that Francesco was welcomed at all the major courts of Italy and also that he received negative assessments as a ruler and patron of the arts by earlier scholars of this period. Therefore, I will conclude with an example of his ability to get on well with two major figures of the times, both known for their extremely unpopular temperamental outbreaks: Andrea Mantegna, the much revered, but difficult, Mantuan court artist, and the much feared Pope Julius II of Rome. Mantegna never seemed to keep out of trouble with his neighbours and he was always in debt. He was well paid and Francesco gave him many added benefits. He owned several houses, one of which was the costly and startlingly different house near Francesco's San Sebastiano Palace. Its design is novel: the house has a circular interior courtyard, off which are small rooms, the whole of which is contained within a rectangular-shaped house. After it was completed Mantegna could not afford to live in it and moved closer into the centre of the city. The house is still in excellent condition and has been used for exhibitions. In 1502 Francesco bought the house, but it is not clear why, except that the extensive garden area adjoined his own palace garden. He may also have done this to alleviate some of Mantegna's debts.

Francesco's popularity with Pope Julius II, one of the most irascible popes ever to rule the papal court, was surprising, as Francesco frequently gave refuge to Julius's bitter enemies and he threatened Francesco accordingly; but Francesco quietly either ignored the demands or went around them another way. It was Julius II, however, who won his freedom from gaol in Venice in 1510, although he then appointed Francesco commander of the papal army in an alliance with Venice. To be sure of his loyalty however, his son Federico was held hostage by Pope Julius until the day he died, in 1513, and the ageing pope had become so devoted to Federico he hardly let him out of his sight. History repeated itself in 1516, when Federico was sent to the French court as part guest and part hostage as an assurance of Francesco's allegiance to France.

Mantua was powerful and wealthy within twenty years of Francesco's rule, supported by his maintenance of a stable economy, and also by Isabella, whose loyalty to the Gonzaga and her careful management of Mantua while acting as ruler should be more widely acknowledged. After Francesco's death in 1519 his son and heir Federico II was able to follow a lavish and eroticized style of patronage, a style quite the opposite of the more restrained and classically-oriented patronage practised by his father.

Chapter Three

Isabella d'Este: Ferrara and Mantua 1474-1500

Isabella and the Court at Ferrara:

Isabella d'Este, born on the 18th May 1474, was the first child of Duke Ercole I of Ferrara and his wife, Duchess Eleonora of Aragon. She had a sister, Beatrice, later the Duchess of Milan, and four brothers, the first of whom was Alfonso, a future Duke of Ferrara. Isabella married Francesco II Gonzaga, Marquis (Marchese) of Mantua, on the 11th February 1490, a few months before her sixteenth birthday. To historians studying Ferrara's history, Isabella was the star of the family almost from her birth. Among her many qualifications she was a natural musician, and gifted with an excellent singing voice. Even today we are amazed when a child of six, for example, is so educationally advanced, but that seemed to be the case with Isabella and other princely children in this early Renaissance period. Deanna Shemek, who is in the process of translating some hundreds of Isabella's letters,⁵⁴ notes that her father, Duke Ercole I, trained Isabella, her sister Beatrice, and two brothers, Alfonso and Ippolito, "for leadership on the public stage of politics and culture."⁵⁵ From the age of about nine or ten, she was writing her own letters to Francesco; she displayed then the same qualities that she was to have at Mantua,

⁵⁴ Deanna Shemek has already translated over 400 letters and aims to translate another 400, to complete a study that is expected to appear in the series "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe," to be published by the University of Chicago Press. Shemek has also written three other essays, all of which are relevant to my thesis. Deanna very generously forwarded them to me before publication so that I could include relevant information in my thesis. Two of the essays appeared this summer, and the third one is expected shortly. As I am using pre-published work, my page references may be different from the published material.

⁵⁵ Deanna Shemek, "'Ci Ci' and 'Pa Pa': Script, Mimicry, and Mediation in Isabella d' Este's Letters." *Rinascimento. Rivista dell' Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento* Seconda serie, Vol. 43 (2003), 76.

qualities which left her open to both praise and criticism: her impetuous fun-loving nature, her love of writing letters, and her belief that her opinion was important.

Deanna Shemek has researched Isabella's letters, which begin when she was just three years old. She points out that, even at this early age, Isabella was taught how to use secretaries and scribes. One could hypothesize that Isabella's upbringing at Ferrara was exactly the same as if she were to be the future heir to Ferrara. Shemek notes that although, in later years, some letters were "by her own hand" they were generally written by her secretary. Copies were made of Isabella's correspondence, whether at Ferrara or at Mantua.⁵⁶ Francesco was the recipient of many of these loving letters before they were married, including one in which she suggested, rather firmly, that he should pay a particular musician more money (Appendix 1).⁵⁷ An important point raised by Shemek is that both the Este and Gonzaga families "took pains to cultivate friendship and foster love between the future rulers of Mantua, in the wise conviction that conjugal harmony would enhance both their happiness and the fruitful procreation on which the dynasty's survival depended."⁵⁸

At the beginning of the last six years of their engagement, in 1484, Francesco became the fourth Marquis of Mantua. He visited Ferrara frequently, and it seems he knew Isabella well before they were married. Even if he found her strong-willed, with definite opinions of her own, he could not have easily withdrawn from this arranged marriage. Historical records such as those supplied by Deanna Shemek suggest, however, that Francesco was just as fascinated with Isabella as were most people who

⁵⁶ Shemek makes an interesting comment that Isabella's letters show that they were not "polished" or changed, or even slightly reworded by her secretaries, in their sending or during copying.

⁵⁷ Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, 11.

⁵⁸ Shemek, "Ci Ci' and 'Pa Pa,'" 12, 75-91.

knew her, and, except on one occasion, he gave Isabella a lot of freedom (Appendix 2).⁵⁹ He also enjoyed freedom and like almost all rulers he had illegitimate children, but while in Mantua he was loyal to Isabella. Isabella must have been well aware of the infidelity among the male members of a court; at the Milanese court, her sister's husband Ludovico il Moro was openly unfaithful to her. But despite Francesco's lack of loyalty at times, and the distress it caused Isabella, she remained loyal and was, as her letters suggest, always attracted to him. Francesco's family members, and his children, found him attractive, gentle and loving, none of which fit the man so unflatteringly presented by art historians as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Today's scholars now wonder how the misconception of Francesco's temperament was accepted without question for so long.⁶⁰

The court at Ferrara was aristocratic, wealthy, and noted for a continuing and comprehensive patronage of the arts through the time of Niccolò III d'Este (1393-1429) and his three sons, of whom only Ercole I, Isabella's father, was legitimate. Leonello was legitimized for the purpose of succession as ruler, and at his death, Borso became head of state. All three brothers, Leonello, Borso, and Ercole I, ruled Ferrara and were leading patrons of art, and chose different avenues of patronage to create their own self-image. In contrast to the rather extraordinary life of Niccolò III, who "made adultery a lifelong career,"⁶¹ it was Leonello, who in 1441, started to achieve the rich cultural diversity for which Ferrara has become so famous. His first patronage was of singers and musicians for both his court and his chapel. He recruited the best musicians on offer in France,

⁵⁹ As can be seen from the letter, Francesco had disapproved of the conduct of Isabella's court ladies in Milan. When she returned to Mantua, by a roundabout way, Francesco dismissed one her ladies. This serves to illustrate how Francesco had supreme power, even over Isabella's court. I believe this was the only time he used this option.

⁶⁰ See Cartwright, *Isabella*, Vol. 1, 42-43.

⁶¹ Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara*, 12.

Flanders, and Belgium, and even recruited musicians and composers from as far away as England. Under Leonello's patronage, court dance was brought to a new artistic height⁶² and he drew on the best dance masters throughout Italy; one of his long-lived instructors taught Isabella when she was six. His humanist teacher, the famous Guarino da Verona, encouraged his interest in works of art, and his personal art pieces included medals, engraved gems, ancient coins, and miniatures, together with books and manuscripts. These were displayed in his *studiolo* at Belfiore, one of the Este palaces devoted to displays of art. At Guarino's suggestion, the *studiolo* walls were decorated with paintings of the Muses, although they were not quite completed before he died.⁶³

Borso's rule, however, was the opposite of Leonello's, although he did finish the final decoration of the Muses in Leonello's *studiolo*.⁶⁴ He spent freely on the arts, as well as on his stables, dogs, and falcons. He dressed ostentatiously and under his rule the famous Palazzo Schifanoia was renovated and painted by court artist Cosimo Tura. These frescoes included images of sensual frivolities, the influences of the Zodiac, pagan stories, and frequent self-images of Borso taking part in day-to-day activities.

Isabella's father, Ercole I (1431-1505), ruled from 1471-1505, in contrast to both his brothers' shorter rule. He had one of the best chapel choirs in Italy and, like Leonello, he recruited singers from all over Europe, and paid them well; he also was a patron of the art of dance.⁶⁵ His wife, Eleonora, managed Ferrara when Ercole was away on military commands, and later in her life she assumed much of the administrative work when

⁶² Lockwood refers to a book by Michael Baxandall, in which he demonstrates that writers, when referring to paintings, used the terminology of dance theorists of the time; See Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara*, 72.

⁶³ Alison Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts: Virtue and Magnificence*, (London: Calmann and King Ltd., 1995), 124.

⁶⁴ See below for a more detailed discussion on the Muses and their affinity with poetry and music, and relevant comments on Jaynie Anderson's article on the Ferrara muses.

⁶⁵ See Cole, *Virtue and Magnificence*, 132.

Ercole's interests became more focused on the church and his chapel choir. Her new apartment was apparently beautifully decorated but details of its decoration and design have not been found. Eleonora died suddenly in 1493, shortly after these rooms were finished; according to Lockwood, she also had a music room for instruments and for playing music, one of the earliest records of such a room in a private palace.⁶⁶

At a later period in Ercole's life, his interests turned almost wholly to the church, its doctrines, and its music, but Isabella continued her training as a singer and instrument player of secular music. Ercole was the supervisor of his children's education, and music had been high on the list of their expected accomplishments. As a result Isabella and her two brothers, Duke Alfonso, and Cardinal Ippolito later became serious competitors for Italy's best musicians.⁶⁷

Lockwood's book, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara*, is a masterful account of the growing importance of music in the courts of fifteenth-century Italy. I have selected only key incidents to summarize here, which underline Isabella's competence as a musician. Her education was influenced by Guarino's humanist teachings and Guarino's son was one of her teachers. Everything else that was so important to her later – music, poetry, literature, patronage of the arts, ancient and classical history, and a keen respect for money – can be found in her upbringing.

The many areas of artistic activity in the Este court were a good background for Isabella to shape the cultural life of the Mantuan court. By the time Isabella commissioned paintings for her *studiolo*, artists had become more independent, especially

⁶⁶ Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara*, 145-46.

⁶⁷ Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara*, 125.

in their wish for artistic freedom.⁶⁸ Isabella's carefully designed commissions may not have left the artists much freedom to work on their own initiative, but this was then standard practice in fifteenth-century Renaissance Italy.

Jaynie Anderson's essay on the effect of Isabella's Ferrarese background on her future use of the Muses in her *camerino* (a small room) includes an extensive history of the Muses, taking examples of individual muses as illustrated in Leonello's *studiolo*.⁶⁹ The nine Muses also appear in Mantegna's first painting for Isabella, the *Parnassus*, and some are represented in Gian Cristoforo Romano's marble sculptures in the sides of the deep entrance doorway between the two rooms where Isabella's later collection was housed.⁷⁰ Anderson argues later that "the Muses could fulfill their true function as the inspiring deities of poetry, music and philosophy such as in a library like the famous one in ancient Alexandria, a private museum, or a gallery."⁷¹ Scholars not infrequently refer to the *studioli* as museums or art galleries, for private use or study, as can be seen in Isabella's first *studiolo* and *grotta*, and in Francesco's city-palace, the San Sebastiano, where there was a small *studiolo* designed along the lines of Isabella's; it featured a display of four of Costa's paintings. After a considerably detailed discussion on the Muses, Anderson concludes that Isabella's legacy from Ferrara can be seen in her "d'Este

⁶⁸ D.S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1970), documents correspondence from 1418 to 1511 which shows the gradually changing relationships between artists and patrons; Chambers includes all major avenues of patronage from Clerical Institutions through to Private Patronage.

⁶⁹ Jaynie Anderson, "What was Ferrarese about Isabella d'Este's *camerino*?" in Mozzarelli, *La Corte di Mantova*, 337; "*camerino*" may be translated as a private room, or a small room, but in this case it refers to the *Studiolo*.

⁷⁰ See Leandro Ventura, "*Gli Appartamenti Isabelliani in Palazzo Ducale*" in Daniele Bini, ed., *Isabella d'Este*, (Modena: Il Buloni edizioni d'arte, 2001), 79-80, for illustrations of Romano's marble sculptures of the Muses, and see also Ventura, "*Gli Appartamenti*," 77, for excellent illustrations in the marble doorway between the *Grotta* and *Studiolo* in the Corte Vecchia. See Leandro Ventura, "*Isabella d'Este committenza e Collezionismo*," in Bini, *Isabella d'Este*, 90, for six colourful illustrations (out of seven) of the paintings in Isabella's Corte Vecchia *studiolo*.

⁷¹ Anderson, "What was Ferrarese," 339.

taste for luxurious costume, (and) learned and beautiful imagery expressed with great refinement,” although Anderson later qualifies this with the view that the greater legacy was the programme of “education and independence” Isabella experienced at Ferrara.⁷²

A little more controversial is Anderson’s statement that while Isabella was building her art collection she was continually in competition with the Este family in the creation of a superior *studiolo*. However, Leonello’s *studiolo* was started in 1447 and Isabella’s in 1496-7, fifty years later. Alfonso, Isabella’s brother, established his *studiolo* at least fifteen years after Isabella and his choice of themes was almost completely the opposite of Isabella’s: a strongly sensual tone versus Isabella’s preference for the theme of virtue and chastity.

It is difficult to determine why Isabella returned so often to Ferrara within the first few years of her marriage. Within a short time of arriving in Mantua she returned home to Ferrara. She travelled three times in the first nine months of being married, visiting Lake Garda as well as Ferrara, and continued the next year in a similar pattern, visiting Ferrara, Milan and Venice. She continued to travel for a variety of reasons, some of which were diplomatic visits to Milan and Venice on behalf of Francesco, and several were pilgrimages to Loreto and the shrine of St. Mary Magdalene, in southern France.⁷³

By 1491 she was governing Mantua for Francesco and towards the end of that year, when she was away in Milan, Francesco wanted her to return home, as he would be going away again. This is an extremely young age for a young consort to be put in charge of a well-established court, and yet she carried out these duties successfully and was

⁷² Anderson, “What was Ferrarese,” 350, 352.

⁷³ See D.S. Chambers, “Isabella d’Este and the Travel Diary of Antonio De Beatis,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol.64, (2001), 296-308.

popular with the older administrative members of the Chancery. Paolo Malatesta Gonzaga, the first Marchesa of Mantua, managed her husband's court for the first few years of their marriage. The Duchess Eleonora looked after the Estense court's administrative duties; and Elizabetta, Duchess of Urbino, and Francesco's sister, had a very ill husband for many years and shouldered many of the duties of that court. But Isabella may have been one of the youngest consorts ever to do this, and Francesco seemed to expect that she would indeed manage the court in his absence. Many years later Isabella had her own commune in Emilia-Romagna to govern. The commune of Solarolo was passed to her upon Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga's death in 1525, and she was probably governing this small state after her return from Rome in 1527. She took possession legally in 1529.⁷⁴

While Isabella was never arrogant, there was never any doubt that she was capable of leadership. She came to Mantua as a consort who was of brilliant intelligence and with a comprehensive education; she was a competent musician and dancer, fun loving and full of high spirits, and willing to work with her husband to ensure Mantua's prosperity. She quickly proved herself capable of ruling Mantua and she became a patron of music when she saw the need to improve the quality of music at her husband's court. When renovations on the *studiolo* and *grotta* were finished she started her collection of beautiful art works, representing both ancient and contemporary art. Isabella d'Este was a patron of considerable knowledge and she shaped her own presence at the Mantuan court in a uniquely personal way.

⁷⁴ See Cartwright, *Baldassare Castiglione: The Perfect Courtier, His Life and Letters 1478-1529*, Vol.1, (London: 1908), 353-54; Sigismondo was granted possession of the commune in settlement of a large debt incurred by Pope Julius's nephew, Francesco della Maria, of Urbino.

Consolidation at Mantua, 1490-1500

Isabella arrived at Mantua in February 1490 to a tumultuous welcome by the people of Mantua. The city buildings and streets were decorated and the display of luxurious tapestries and gold and silver service at the Castello are well described by Cartwright, who mentions that for Francesco the only thing missing from the celebrations was that Mantegna was still in Rome.⁷⁵ She was greeted by Francesco's sister, Elizabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, and such was the warmth of this greeting that they remained close lifelong friends.

While my thesis is concerned with Isabella's promotion of music and in particular the use of the *frottola*, and with Francesco's surprising interest in the liberal arts as well as the visual arts, it should be stated that the strength of the Mantuan court was built on much more than music and art. If Isabella had been remote from the Mantuan people, and remote from Francesco's family, giving her time solely to her collection of *objets des arts*, the State could not have achieved its high cultural standing, especially in a time of constantly changing alliances. Isabella negotiated her way through all these successfully. She had many duties, as well as roles she was expected to play, but building up a strong connection with Francesco's family, and the Mantuan people, was a personal decision that proved to be important in later years. This subject has not been sufficiently addressed by scholars, and one hopes that this area of her life will be examined in future studies.

In forming these friendships age and sex made no difference and for a young girl of sixteen this shows considerable poise and a winning personality. No Gonzaga

⁷⁵ Cartwright, *Isabella*, Vol. 1, 16-18.

members challenged the rule of Isabella; on the contrary she was taken into their confidence. She first of all healed a rift between Francesco and his uncle, Ludovico, one of the few such family differences Francesco had. She gained the confidence of his brothers, as well as his sisters, and further, of the out of town members of old established Gonzaga clans who ran semi-autonomous states. Her work in cementing these relationships, together with visiting Bishop Ludovico, entailed travelling some distance across Mantua. Some of these family members were noted patrons and collectors of art and they appreciated the intelligence and knowledge of the arts of the young Isabella. She exchanged art with these relatives and as noted above both Bishop Ludovico and Cardinal Sigismondo left her very specific treasured pieces of art. As also noted above, Sigismondo left Isabella the small commune of Solarolo in the Emilia-Romagna region, and she ruled it until her death in 1539.

Isabella formed a long-lasting friendship with a much older relative, Antonia del Balzo, wife of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Count of Ródigo and Lord of Bozzolo. Antonia's husband employed an outstanding artist, Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, known more simply as "Antico," maker of bronze statuettes and beautiful small vases. Antonia lived well into her nineties so this friendship lasted many years, and proved to be very helpful when Isabella wanted Antico to copy some of his bronzes for her *grotta*. These family bonds, and the high regard of the townspeople for her, assisted Isabella in safely protecting Mantua from invasion many years later when her husband, Francesco, was imprisoned in Venice for a year.

Another important friendship was with Osanna degli Andreasi. I do not think Isabella was particularly pious, but she formed a deep friendship with Osanna, a tertiary

member of the Dominican Order, who was born in 1449 to one of Mantua's most noble families. Osanna was the spiritual and moral adviser to the Gonzaga family from the time of Federico I, Francesco's father. She was highly regarded by all the family. Isabella and Osanna developed a strong personal relationship; it seems typical of Isabella that she was able to offer such unaffected loyal friendship. It was to Osanna that Isabella turned in times of personal worry, including her concern that ten years after her marriage she still had not produced a son and heir. She asked Osanna if she could offer special prayers for her, that she might have a son. Isabella did in fact give birth to a son, Federico, in 1500. Osanna died in 1505, and Isabella was by her side at the time of her death. She then tried to have Osanna made a saint, spending many years and a lot of effort trying to convince Rome that this was deserved. While Osanna was not made a saint, she was beatified. The impressive dedication Isabella had made in her honor, as Beata Osanna degli Andreasi, was placed inside the front entrance of her home in Mantua, and is still there today, lovingly cared for by volunteers working for the Dominican Order, as is the whole three-storied house, the Casa Andreasi.

Isabella kept up an exchange of correspondence with an unbelievably large number of friends, relatives, agents, and ambassadors, and she always sought information that allowed her to judge how political alliances would or would not be to Mantua's advantage. She had six surviving children, but, other than an occasional mention in Cartwright's biography, there is very little information about the birth of her children.

Isabella clearly had a positive mind of her own, but remarkably, it seemed focused on the right things. She was a proud and confident woman, and a seemingly

assured patron of the arts in the man's world in which she lived.⁷⁶ Francesco supplemented her already generous allowance by giving her several small revenue-producing estates to manage, from which she saved enough money to buy another estate of her own in Mantua. He had no hesitation in asking her opinion on many matters (not necessarily restricted to art), and Isabella is recorded as learning about Vitruvius and architecture so that she could converse well with him.

If we turn now to consider her impact on music and poetry at the court, we note that it was not long after Isabella arrived at Mantua that she found she missed her singing lessons at Ferrara. Her teacher, Johannes Martini, was one of Ercole's most accomplished musicians. She quickly assessed the situation with Francesco's court musicians and found she was not able to continue her singing or keyboard lessons. Tromboncino, who had been in Francesco's service, had recently left, and the gifted lutenist and singer, Marchetto Cara had not yet arrived; Francesco's small group of court singers and instrumentalists could not provide teachers nor could they perform suitably for her own entertainment. Isabella immediately wrote to her father asking for the loan of some of her former teachers.⁷⁷ Her father dispatched her old teacher, Johannes Martini (but only temporarily), and loaned her songbooks, although he also requested them back as soon as they were copied.

As well as calling on the loan of Ferrara musicians, and as early as March 1490, Isabella asked Francesco if he would transfer some of his musicians to her court and also obtain certain musicians for her. Francesco's musicians however consisted of players of

⁷⁶ This fairly obviously also led to clashes of authority at times with Francesco, and Isabella's defence was to travel. When she was reprimanded for the gaiety of her court ladies in Milan, her pride was hurt, so instead of returning immediately Isabella wrote her husband a long letter. I have included it in the Appendix as an example of what I consider her "Ferrara pride," and strength of character. (Appendix 2)

⁷⁷ See Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara*, 172.

wind instruments such as trumpets, shawms, and trombones, who provided the traditionally dynamic music to greet visitors, and performed at festivals and civic ceremonial events, together with a smaller group of musicians, generally of four players, who provided the rhythm for dances and for court entertainment. Francesco had taken an active interest in his musicians as soon as he became Marquis in 1484, and it was also a shared interest with Ercole, Isabella's father, with whom he exchanged musicians. But under Isabella's influence he engaged more musicians and therefore was able to transfer some of them to Isabella as requested. Isabella had a clear idea of what she wanted and Francesco complied willingly. Prizer has prepared a table covering the period 1490-1500, showing the increased number of musicians at the court after Isabella's arrival and Francesco's influence in seeking the most qualified musicians for them both.⁷⁸

By 1492 Isabella was contacting poets to send her verses for her to have them composed and by 1493-4 she was establishing a name for herself, and for Mantua's composers, in particular for Francesco's newly arrived court musician from Verona, Marchetto Cara. Tromboncino had returned to Mantua, and he soon joined Isabella's court. Isabella is recognized in the history of Italian music as the first patron of music to use Italian poets and Italian composers to set musical compositions.⁷⁹ As Gallico points out, Italy witnessed at this time a shift from performance music based mainly on improvisation to music based on composition.⁸⁰ Isabella had turned to an old musical genre, the *frottola*: this form of a simple melody lent itself to the variety of poetic forms

⁷⁸ Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, Table 1, "New Musicians at Mantua, 1490-1500," 5-10.

⁷⁹ See Rubsamén, *Literary Sources*, Chapter V, "Isabella and Musical Texts by the 'Literary' Poets, Correggio, Tebaldeo, Bembo, Sannazzaro, and Ariosto," 24-31.

⁸⁰ Claudio Gallico, "Appunti sulla musica all'epoca di Isabella," in Bini, *Isabella d'Este*, 205: *C'è allora anche il passaggio da un modo prevalentemente improvvisatorio a un modo composto. Ne sono prova le finalmente numerose raccolte musicali italiane compilate a mano e a stampa in quei lustri.*

so popular as court entertainment in the early Renaissance.⁸¹ Isabella continued to seek the work of the most highly renowned Italian poets of her time, and within a few years she had raised the status of music at Mantua to a new artistic level. Other courts were quick to follow her lead, and the Mantuan composers rose to fame and were sought after by other courts.

It is not clear what propelled Isabella to seek this higher standard of musical entertainment. My view is that a higher level of courtly poetry rested more comfortably with her, and that by not using northern musicians she set her own self-image by her individuality. Several authors suggest that she was concerned about raising the level of own musicianship, and that northern musicians were simply more expensive. The first reason may have some validity, but not the latter, because I am sure Francesco would have recruited northerners had Isabella wished to have them. Further, it should be recognized that many Italian poets sought to write poetry to send to Isabella especially for her composers.

Isabella is, of course, best known for her patronage of artists working on her first *studiolo* in the Castello di San Giorgio. Isabella had moved to a court where one of the most famous artists in Italy, Andrea Mantegna, was court artist – and, through Francesco, at her service. But she made no move to engage him for six years. It was not until 1496 that Isabella sought to commission Mantegna to do the first of two paintings for her *studiolo*. Both the *studiolo* and the *grotta* had been renovated in various ways over the years and Isabella was ready to start adding paintings as part of the decorative programme of the *studiolo*. This, I will argue, was managed in between continuing her music patronage and, as we have seen above, between the many other roles she was

⁸¹ See Chapter Four.

expected to play, a fact that is often overlooked in assessments of her contribution to art. Isabella's life was not bound solely to her art collection, or to her music patronage. However, we will return to her work as a patron of the arts in Chapters Four and Five below, where I indicate how the cultural projects of husband and wife overlapped and were woven together.

Chapter Four

The Patronage of Music and Art

The promotion of music by both Isabella and Francesco in this small princely state of Mantua proved to be of significant importance in the development of the quality and artistic level of music, with a consequent increase in the cultural level of the state. Competition for Mantuan musicians gave Francesco a political advantage over other princely states as he had in his service the most highly qualified Italian composers at that time.⁸² Francesco's patronage of the arts started when he became Marquis in 1484 but it was after his marriage to Isabella d'Este that he built up the number and quality of his own musicians.⁸³ The subject of court music is bound by tradition and protocol, as already observed in an earlier chapter, but Isabella and Francesco were unusual in that they were both serious patrons of music for their own enjoyment as well as that of the court. They regularly enjoyed their favourite musicians playing for them in their own private rooms. What I have not discovered though is whether or not Isabella ever played or sang specifically for her husband. They both followed different approaches to this patronage over a period from 1490 to c.1518, a strategy that could be said to have benefited the cultural standing of the Mantuan court.

The number of occasions on which official state music was required is surprising, and the continuing promotion of musicians by Francesco over his lifetime places his patronage of music at a higher level of importance than so far acknowledged. Francesco was a constant and knowledgeable patron of the *frottola*, which was just as popular in his

⁸² Fenlon, *The Renaissance*, 34, and 161-62.

⁸³ Fenlon, *The Renaissance*, 34.

court as in Isabella's much smaller court.⁸⁴ Francesco's patronage of music was much wider than Isabella's and included some of the traditional necessities of patronage such as ceremonial and official court music;⁸⁵ but he also made arrangements for the more private performance of chamber music for distinguished guests, for particular friends, or solo performances by his favourite musicians. His interest in increasing the level of cathedral and chapel music led eventually to him obtaining his own chapel choir in 1510. Of particular interest, because it moves away from the more general areas of court entertainment, is Francesco's love of theatre, where performances included musical interludes. This is discussed below, together with the important performance of the *Favola d'Orfeo* (Fable of Orpheus) in 1480. Most musicologists and renaissance historians acknowledge Francesco's place in the history of music patronage, but it needs to be re-evaluated within the discipline of art history.⁸⁶ The main reason for emphasizing this view is that I would argue that art historians have assumed that Francesco wore a cloak of indifference to the finer things of life, under which we would include music and theatre, and therefore this thesis presents evidence to the contrary.

As well as art patronage, Isabella supported her continuing patronage of music, and musical instruments, in a fairly narrow field of singing and playing the lute or similar stringed instruments, and keyboard music. Her patronage of the *frottola* was clearly because these were songs she could sing, and she undoubtedly influenced Francesco in increasing the number and quality of his musicians, as these were popular songs for court entertainment. As Francesco had not employed northern musicians, he would have been

⁸⁴ See Fenlon, *The Renaissance*, 147; and William F. Prizer, "North Italian Courts," 145 and 147.

⁸⁵ Fenlon, *The Renaissance*, 147-48. Fenlon also notes that Francesco "established a court school for the training of young instrumentalists," see *The Renaissance*, 148.

⁸⁶ For example, see Prizer, "North Italian Courts," 143, 145, 147-48; and Brown, "*Per dare qualcha*," 69.

open to Isabella's historic use of Italian poets and musicians. However, it should be noted that Marchetto Cara was not, and never was, in Isabella's service, although she "borrowed" his services over many years. I have already drawn attention to the cost of employing highly qualified artists, which would be beyond Isabella's resources. Cara had always been Francesco's court musician as well as someone with whom he had a close friendship.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, despite what may seem to be this narrow definition of Isabella's patronage of music in her concentration on song and instrumental music, it was a dominant part of court life. As will be argued in the following chapter, music also dominates the iconography of several paintings in the *studiolo*.

Tromboncino, first in Francesco's court and then transferred to Isabella's court, was only sporadically at Mantua. Initially he filled many roles in Mantua before he became a composer of the *frottola*. As he became famous, he moved from court to court, and patron to patron. Lucretia Borgia, Alfonso's second wife, employed him around 1502 but then could not afford to re-engage him when he returned again to her court sometime in 1505. The only patron who could afford Tromboncino was Isabella's brother, Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, for whom Tromboncino worked for a short period while Ippolito paid his salary on behalf of Lucretia. Cara, equally as brilliant a musician but without the unreliable but probably artistically brilliant nature of Tromboncino, was in Francesco's service for his lifetime in Mantua, and everything in his life, including letters he wished written, was arranged through Francesco. It was Isabella who wrongly received a large share of the fame of Cara, because of the number of poems he set for her,

⁸⁷ Prizer, in *Courtly Pastimes*, has two chapters devoted to Cara and his compositions: Chapter III, "Cara and the Verse of the *Frottola*," 63-104, and Chapter IV, "Cara and the Music of the *Frottola*," 105-166. Full examples of musical scores are included. For examples of compositions of the major poetic forms see Rubsamen, *Literary Sources*, 39-68.

but his work for Francesco was far greater and covered a multitude of responsibilities as court musician. He seems to me to have been the hardest working artist in Francesco's court, and while obeying instructions from Francesco, he did not like travelling away from Mantua on the many calls for his services. It was also Francesco who made the decisions as to whether or not Cara could be loaned to other courts to perform, and who, of course, paid his salary.⁸⁸

How Isabella started on her road to fame as a patron of Italian poetry and music was discussed briefly in Chapter Three, but the song form known as the *frottola* was not fully explained. The word itself is most probably derived from the medieval Latin *frocta*, meaning a conglomeration of random thoughts.⁸⁹ In generic terms, it covers the full range of secular polyphonic types known to have flourished in Italy during the period in question, usually taken to be from about 1470 to 1520: hence odes, sonnets, *strambotti*, *capitoli*, and *canzoni* are all considered types of *frottola*.⁹⁰

The Venetian printer, Ottaviano Petrucci, used the term "*frottole*" collectively when he printed the first notated song music in a series of eleven books of *Frottole*, dated from 1504 to 1514, the first song books to cover the wide range of Italian poetic forms being used by the Italian composers. Nevertheless Petrucci still identified some of the songs by their poetic names, such as *strambotti* and odes, and the names of the composers were also added to the songs. Isabella and Francesco's two composers, Tromboncino and

⁸⁸ William F. Prizer, "Marchetto Cara at Mantua: New Documents on the Life and Duties of a Renaissance Court Musician," in *Musica Disciplina: A Yearbook of the History of Music*, ed. Armen Carapetyan, American Institute of Musicology, Vol.32, (1978), 97; as well as Cara being in the field with Francesco in 1495, Prizer lists additional trips Cara had to make away from Mantua by request from other courts from 1502 to 1525, the year of Cara's death.

⁸⁹ Don Harrán, "Frottola", *Grove Music Online*, ed. L.Macy, accessed 14 December 2005, <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

⁹⁰ Don Harrán (Text), and Don Harrán and James Chater (Bibliography), "Frottola," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, accessed 14 December 2005, <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> This comprehensive study of the *frottola* is divided into five parts: Introduction, Poetry, Music, Performing Practice, and Conclusion.

Cara, were well represented.⁹¹ The adaptability of the genre allowed for multiple performance options. While starting as a fairly simple treble-dominated composition for a singer accompanied by a lute, it developed into compositions for three or four singers who sang together, or alternatively string instrumentalists could replace one or more singers. There could be four instrument players, for example, but this seems to have been more rare. A keyboard instrument such as the clavichord could also accompany a singer. Isabella accompanied herself with either a lute or clavichord, and later added more instruments to her repertoire.

Francesco had attracted musicians such as Tromboncino and Cara to Mantua quite early in his rule. Tromboncino was a lutenist and an actor, and yet within less than ten years both he and Cara were considered the most brilliant composers of the *frottola* in the north Italian courts. They were the first Italian composers since the 1430's and were a major force behind Isabella's contribution to the history of Italian music.

The *frottola* was the perfect medium for her as it lent itself to a variety of courtly songs suitable for personal enjoyment as well as for courtly entertainment. It also lent itself to compositions of the classical poets of Isabella's time, and eventually, as will be seen below, Isabella turned to Petrarch, the model for the most classical of all courtly love songs, as the source for a higher level of musical composition.

In 1490, however, Isabella needed music for her own newly formed court, and many of the improvisations for the Mantuan court, and possibly the Ferrara court, could be set to music by using the melodic form known as the *barzilletta-frottola*, as it was suitable for singing accompanied by the lute, an instrument Isabella played well. This

⁹¹ Tromboncino seemed to work only sporadically for any one patron. The date of his patronage by Francesco is 1487 to 1495; and for Isabella, three dates only are documented: 1495, 1499, and 1505.

form also suited Cara, who was well known for his beautiful singing and lute playing, but his arrival in Mantua was still some three years away.⁹² Songbooks were not yet available in Mantua so both Isabella and Francesco borrowed from Ferrara, and had copies made in Mantua. It was an indication of their scarcity that they were asked to return them so promptly. If the books were away too long both Ercole, and later Alfonso, from whom Francesco also borrowed songbooks, would write rather shortly worded letters asking for their return.

Court singers must also have had considerable proficiency in adapting to the variety of *frottole* being composed, and outstanding singers such as Cara were in much demand. Marchetto Cara also played and sang *frottole* songs for Francesco privately and had travelled with him in the early years of his military commands. Isabella also arranged for Cara to go to Venice to help relieve the tension of prison life at the time of Francesco's imprisonment in 1509-1510, and Francesco sent a *strambotto* back to Isabella. Unfortunately, the words were not recorded.⁹³ Prizer has drawn up a table of Cara's principal benefits and it includes extra benefits and gifts he received from Francesco after his year in gaol.⁹⁴

In 1510 Francesco took into his service the fifteen members of the Ferrara chapel choir, released by Duke Alfonso because of the burden of his war with Pope Julius II.

⁹² Skilled lutenists commanded high salaries in the courts from at least 1470, when Ercole I of Ferrara employed some of the best in Europe. The Gonzaga court had in its service Tromboncino (for short periods) and Cara; Cara received the highest salary of Francesco's musicians. See also Leeman L. Perkins, *Music in the Age of the Renaissance*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.), 1965, 118-119.

⁹³ Francesco had portraits of Isabella and his daughter Leonora with him in prison.

⁹⁴ See Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, Table 4, 53, "Monetary Transactions regarding Cara." Gifts of money were given over a period from 1501 to 1515. Prizer follows this table with details of grants of land that brought in rental and Cara also had an estate that earned him over 150 ducats a year. He owned three houses, one was his principal residence worth 600 ducats, given to him by Francesco in 1507; the second house he bought and rented, and the third was another gift from Francesco in 1508 of a revenue-earning house in Mantua. These gifts were in addition to his salary. In 1520 Federico granted him citizenship.

Cara was appointed to the highly ranked position of *maestro di cappella* (choirmaster) and director of music for both the Mantuan cathedral liturgical services as well as for Francesco's private chapel choir. Cara was originally a cleric in Verona so Francesco and Cara combined their knowledge of hymns and sacred music to obtain extra music for the choir and offer them a much wider repertoire. Cara became virtually indispensable to Francesco in later life.⁹⁵ (See Appendices 3 and 4)

The culmination of Isabella's work in promoting Italians as serious contenders with the best of the northerners reached its peak when she took what could be called the last step in her progressive patronage of music since the early 1490s. It was brought about by the most outstanding part of her character: she always sought the highest standards of perfection. Isabella at first wrote to poets she knew and asked them to send her their verses, but this quickly changed and the most eminent poets were sending her verses to have them composed, generally on the assumption that she would sing them herself. But she still sought that higher artistic level, the "classical elegance of the golden *trecento*" as Rubsamen calls it.⁹⁶ In 1504 she wrote to her long-time friend and poet in Ferrara, Niccolò da Correggio, asking him to recommend some of Petrarch's verses for her.⁹⁷ Her idea was that his verses composed into songs would make Petrarch's poetry even more beautiful and the songs equally so. It was this interest in a higher level of poetry, rather than the extremely varied range of poetry commonly in vogue in the courts, that lifted Renaissance music to new artistic levels. Isabella had the best composers of

⁹⁵ Francesco was in despair when he was very ill during in January 1513. Cara had been loaned to Massimiliano at Cremona in November 1512, but he then took Cara back with him to the court of Milan, and Francesco could not get Massimiliano to send Cara back, see Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, 44-45; the extensive correspondence, in Italian, is listed in Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, 270-288.

⁹⁶ Rubsamen, *Literary Sources*, 24.

⁹⁷ Rubsamen, *Literary Sources*, 24, and Prizer, "North Italian Courts," 147.

the period to call on for raising the art of music to this new level. It resulted in fame for Isabella and the Mantuan court musicians, and set a trend quickly followed by other courts in Italy.

As previously suggested, Isabella's lifelong interest in music may well have been influenced by her humanist studies at Ferrara. In her fascination for antiquity, ancient myths, and the classical world of writers and poets, she would have been aware of the ancient world of music. Musical instruments and stories of the gods in pagan times are almost a feature of at least three of her paintings. It is even possible that her commissioned paintings were designed to work around the music of ancient times, and therefore it was an iconographical indication of her interest in music; it may not be an accident that her five paintings also feature scenes from nature, a form long appreciated by artists as influencing the harmony of life.

While we have no records to date, it seems acceptable to suggest that Francesco was always interested in music and that this may have started with liturgical music, as he was known to be a pious man and had private altars in his palaces. It would certainly have been a common interest with Isabella's father, Ercole I. Apart from the many visits Francesco made to Ferrara, Ercole visited Francesco before his marriage in 1486 and 1489, in 1490 when Isabella was married, and in 1491, at Gonzaga where coincidentally the musical drama "*Orfeo*" was performed. The Este and Gonzaga families must be considered in the forefront of promoting music and drama, both of which required specialized knowledge and the resources to meet the financial commitments of the cost of patronage of these two arts. For at least thirty years Francesco had followed a personal interest in both secular and church music, and had brought both into prominence during

his rule. Fenlon considered the growing importance of music reflected “a time of changing political and social ambitions” in this period.⁹⁸ Francesco’s household musicians were specialized in performing a variety of music but according to Prizer, these musicians, with Cara at their head, were also very competent composers and performers of the *frottola*, and Francesco “must be viewed as one of the genre’s leading patrons.”⁹⁹ That his patronage was much wider than Isabella’s is understandable, as he managed a large court, and was responsible for all official visitors.¹⁰⁰ Francesco was more pious than Isabella, with a special devotion to the Virgin Mary, to whom his private chapel was dedicated, but he also made sure the needs of the cathedral were met, and his choir performed there on occasion. Although much of this chapter praises Isabella’s well-deserved place in Italy’s history of music, Francesco’s interest in music was more encompassing than is generally acknowledged.

Francesco was an ardent supporter of theatre. Musical interludes, first started I believe by Ercole I, were now included in these performances. Theatre was costly to stage, with some performances being more lavish than others. Comedies were popular with the local Mantuans, but the more learned classical plays were also performed. Francesco had the ardent support of his uncle Ludovico, Bishop of Mantua, who favoured comedies. His much older uncle, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga (1444-83) was the patron of Angelo (or Angiolo) Poliziano for around eight months in 1480 – time enough however for Mantua to stage Poliziano’s *Orfeo* (Orpheus).¹⁰¹ This performance of a

⁹⁸ Fenlon, *Music and Patronage*, p.15.

⁹⁹ Prizer, “North Italian Courts,” 147.

¹⁰⁰ Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, 143, 145, and 147.

¹⁰¹ Rubsamen, in *Literary Sources*, 32-33, gives examples of “lyrics chanted to music”, including “Orfeo’s prayer to the infernal spirits” and “a chorus of Bacchantes,” as well as information on other musical plays at Ferrara, Casale, and Mantua; see also Angiolo Poliziano’s work for his Florentine patron Lorenzo de’ Medici (1449-1492) in Rubsamen, *Literary Sources*, 21-22.

combination of story and music possibly made quite an impression on Francesco, then fourteen years old. Poliziano was a Florentine, in temporary exile from the Medici court and found a home in Mantua during 1480.¹⁰² Just as Mantua took the first step towards a school for princely children, with an eminent humanist teacher, this initiative in producing Poliziano's musical drama was advanced thinking on the part of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, and ten years before Isabella's arrival, Mantua was becoming famous for its patronage of music and learning. The plays put on by Francesco were popular with his people and there is evidence that the musical interludes soon became as popular as the plays themselves, especially if the dramas became drawn out. Brown reports that *Orfeo* was again performed in 1491 at the family palace at Gonzaga, some distance south of Mantua, where Francesco was redesigning and redecorating the palace; the performance was, according to Brown, a lavish affair.¹⁰³ Poliziano had returned to Florence in 1481, but he was in Rome in 1488, and Bologna and Ferrara in 1491, so this second performance in Gonzaga is notable, as it would confirm there were two performances of "*Orfeo*" at Mantua.

Mantua could not help becoming the leading musical city in Italy with two patrons such as Isabella and Francesco. They brought a high profile to the Mantuan court. It also led to Francesco being asked for the loan of his best musicians – a practice that still astonishes me – but I have been assured that it was an indication of the high

¹⁰² An earlier date of 1472 is suggested by some scholars, see for example, Lehmann, "The Sources," 162, for a suggestion that it was performed for Ludovico de' Medici in 1472; Poliziano first entered Lorenzo's court around this time, therefore this date seems doubtful.

¹⁰³ Brown, "Concludo che," 277.

cultural status of a court.¹⁰⁴ Cara was always in demand, even by Francesco's sister, the Duchess Elisabetta at Urbino.

As we have seen above, the high artistic level of the *frottola* achieved by Isabella made a tremendous impact on the musical world of Italy. Financially, Isabella could not have achieved this herself. For Isabella poetry and music were a lifetime interest, although it was strongly influenced by her own talent as a musician. Isabella and Francesco followed their personal choices as patrons of music, but what is remarkable is that they appeared to have had a successful system of interlocking exchanges in sharing musicians, and possibly instruments, music, and other such requirements. There is little doubt that Francesco had a sufficiently sound knowledge of music to appreciate what Isabella was doing in promoting Italian musicians and Italian poets, but, as with their interests in other avenues of patronage, Francesco quietly pursued his own patronage while allowing Isabella to receive the greater share of fame for her patronage and knowledge of the work of contemporary musicians.

However, I would argue that the promotion and development of the artistic standard of music at Mantua was the result of a sharing of resources by both Francesco and Isabella over a long period of time. Music was important to them personally and their combined patronage was a remarkable achievement in the art of patronage and a significant advance in the cultural importance of the Gonzaga court.

¹⁰⁴ From a personal discussion with Dr. Claudio Gallico in Mantua, May 2003.

Chapter Five

Palace Decoration by Francesco and Isabella:

Themes of Music and Art

In the first section of this chapter, the various palaces worked on by Francesco II between 1490 and 1512, at Marmirolo, near the Gonzaga hunting grounds; the Palazzino at Gonzaga near San Benedetto Po; a suburban villa at Poggio Reale; and the city-palace of San Sebastiano in Mantua, are examined, to establish his importance as a patron of architecture and art. His achievements are compared with those of his consort, Isabella, who was also active as a patron of the arts from 1490 until shortly before her death in 1539. Both individuals entered a phase in their lives, from between 1506 and 1512, when they shared resources to complete the various projects that they were working on. It will become clear that their joint contribution enabled them to establish their court as one of the most renowned in Italy. They each brought their own special qualities to the cultural life of Mantua, as this chapter will demonstrate.

To understand Francesco's sense of himself as an art patron, a brief account of his family's contribution to the arts is required. Paola Malatesta Gonzaga (1393-1453), Ludovico II's mother, seems to have been the first patron to start a re-building programme of the palace at Marmirolo, and she also founded the Poor Clares' convent in Mantua. Ludovico, like his mother, was engaged in an extensive building programme of churches for Mantua, designed by Leon Battista Alberti. He had taken Andrea Mantegna into his service and had him paint the famous frescoes in his *Camera degli Sposi*. His son Federico I's few projects during his short reign of six years included a new palace alongside the old Castello, the Domus Nova, designed by the architect Luca Fancelli. As

Mantegna's second patron, Federico engaged him to work at the rural palace of Marmirolo. Federico spent most of his time fighting wars that drained Mantua's finances and did not have time to build up a lavish life style. He died in 1484, and Francesco II became the fourth Marquis, and Mantegna's third patron.

In considering Francesco's contribution to the cultural programme at his court, it is important to note that the site at Marmirolo was in constant use, and it is quite a loss that the palace has not survived. Marmirolo has a long history, starting from the fourteenth century as the Gonzaga hunting palace. While there was no Gonzaga policy in place for re-building or re-decorating palaces, each ruler seemed to renovate Marmirolo along the lines of his or her interests. As seen above, Paola Malatesta started a re-building programme, although this was only one of her many projects.¹⁰⁵ Ludovico II, his son Federico I, then Francesco II and his son Federico II, all followed Paola's lead and constantly restored and added to the beauty of Marmirolo. The palace was situated close to beautiful hunting grounds and marshes about sixteen kilometres north of Mantua. This was the palace where all Gonzaga rulers took their most important guests for the sport of hunting and falconry, for which the Gonzaga hosts were famous. But it was also a place where carnivals, music concerts, and theatricals were held, and it was a popular retreat for the ruling family.

Information on the decoration of Marmirolo is scattered throughout the literature. Brown refers to some earlier publications of the nineteenth century which, as well as

¹⁰⁵ Paola Malatesta Gonzaga (1393-1453) was a patron of considerable importance. She was the wife of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Mantua's first Marquis, and spent some years re-building sections of the Marmirolo Palace, where she added a library and fountain; she also founded the Poor Clares Convent in Mantua and employed the staff to run it. These projects were financed, among many other continuing projects, from a large sum of money paid to her 1414, and a high Treasury income; see Welch, "The Art of Expenditure," 311, and n.25; for the receipt of the lump sum of money, see 309.

being difficult to access, are mainly concerned with the work of Mantegna at Marmirolo.¹⁰⁶ Cartwright, in her publication of 1903, also refers to Francesco as having been by 1494 supervising the work of “architects and artists” for three years at Marmirolo.¹⁰⁷ Cartwright also notes that Francesco was “fully alive to the lustre and renown which his court and person derived from great artistic achievements, and became a liberal patron of scholars and painters . . .”¹⁰⁸ One other note of interest in regard to Marmirolo is the letter of 1491 in which Francesco mentions “we have made a *palazzetto* of great convenience and ornament,” at Marmirolo.¹⁰⁹ The date of 1490 or 1491 coincides with Francesco’s rebuilding and decorating programme of his rural place at Gonzaga, for which we do have information as a result of Clifford Brown’s extensive research on the Gonzaga chancery records.

Francesco’s first work at Gonzaga was to build a small Palazzina as an adjunct to the older Palazzo Gonzaga,¹¹⁰ located south of Mantua, close to the Po River, and, as at Marmirolo, this may have been added as a wing to the Palazzo designed by Luca Fancelli and built by Ludovico in 1467. Francesco commenced structural work on the Palazzina in 1490, and at the same time restored six of the main rooms in the Palazzo. His decorative programme followed in 1491, the year in which there was “a lavish staging of Angelo Poliziano’s ‘*representazione de Orpheo et Euridice*’” in “either the structures built by Ludovico II or the new one added by Francesco II.”¹¹¹ The resources needed for this performance must have been considerable. The Palazzina contained twenty-six

¹⁰⁶ Brown, “*Concludo che*,” 272.

¹⁰⁷ See Cartwright, *Isabella*, Vol. 1, 106.

¹⁰⁸ Cartwright, *Isabella*, Vol. 1, 41-42.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, “*Concludo che*,” 269.

¹¹⁰ The older palace (added in 1467) is called the *Gonzaga Palazzo* of Ludovico II, and Francesco’s addition is called variously the *Palazzina* (by Brown), and *palazzetto* (by Francesco), and the *Palacine da Gonzaga* (by Stivini, the notary); see Brown, “*Concludo che*,” 277.

¹¹¹ Brown, “*Concludo che*,” 277.

rooms, identified by the notary Stivini from the decoration of each room.¹¹² Francesco also added a private altar, as he was to do later in his San Sebastiano palace in Mantua.

Fifteen to twenty years later Francesco decorated a city-palace, the Palazzo di San Sebastiano, not far from the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. It was built between 1504 and 1506, and presumed to be built from an older structure. Around this time Francesco also built a summer palace at Poggia Reale, across the lake from the San Sebastiano palace, from plans made for him some years earlier by Leonardo da Vinci. The decorative schemes of the palaces at Marmirolo, Gonzaga, and Mantua, all seem to have followed a similar design, and from the limited documentation available, Poggia Reale (1508) seems to have followed the same pattern. It was similarly situated, but not close, to Isabella's favourite summer palace, the Palazzo Porto, near what is known today as Mantovano. Isabella's palace was apparently very beautiful and should take its place along with Francesco's consistent attention to his own decorative projects. The extent of their patronage is a reminder that the patronage of the arts was an established Gonzaga tradition.

The scale of the decoration of the Palazzina at Gonzaga seems overwhelming but it is possible that some of the rooms were smaller than we imagine. Francesco hired a number of artists, one of whom, Teofilo Collenuccio, was chosen as artistic supervisor; he also had a supervisor of equipment, while another was in charge of the painters who painted walls and rooms not fully decorated by frescoes or paintings, or where tapestries were hung. Bernardino Ghisolfo was in charge of the entire project. Francesco kept in close touch with these supervisors, checking continually that work was being done as he wished and that practical things like bathrooms, heating stoves and boilers, were ordered,

¹¹² Brown, "Concludo che," 277.

and that his loggia was painted correctly.¹¹³ Brown gives details of the artistic themes for nearly all the rooms, and I will briefly summarize some of the most interesting ones because they are also similar to the decorative scheme to be used later in the San Sebastiano palace.

Separate rooms featured such subjects as a world map; the four elements of air, water, fire, and earth; the planets; historic battles of the Gonzaga; a room with friezes (or panels) of the Muses; accurate maps of large cities throughout Europe; a genealogical “tree” of both sides of his family, which included some family portraits; and a room featuring some of his most famous Gonzaga horses. The gilded ceilings so favoured by Francesco were installed at Gonzaga. Brown’s assessment of Francesco’s decorations indicates the impact of this programme: “a visitor walking through the sequences of spaces would have had at his disposal in visual form a sizable portion of the sum total of human knowledge – food for the mind as well as a delight to the eyes.”¹¹⁴

One of the most important commissions undertaken by Francesco for the palace at Gonzaga was a history painting by Domenico Morone, who was thought to have been in Mantua around 1494 while he (Morone) was absent from Verona. This painting *The Expulsion of the Bonacolsi in 1328* is of historic importance for our records of Gonzaga family history.¹¹⁵ It illustrated the battle that the Gonzaga won, allowing them to claim ownership of Mantua. It is important to note that Francesco commissioned other battle

¹¹³ Brown, “*Concludo che*,” 273; two supervisors are named by Brown: Teofilo Collenuccio in the earlier part of the decoration, with overall control in the hands of Bernadino Ghisolfo; see “*Concludo che*,” 279, 284. In 1540, Odorardo Stivini took an inventory of the contents of the rooms occupied by Ludovico and Francesco; the names of all these rooms are given by Brown, see “*Concludo che*,” 277. As Brown’s articles on the decoration of both the Gonzaga palace and the Palazzo di San Sebastiano in Mantua, are the only detailed records that I know of, I am greatly indebted to his work, on which I have drawn for this chapter.

¹¹⁴ Brown, “*Concludo che*,” 273.

¹¹⁵ See Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours*, Catalogue Item No. 2, *The Expulsion of the Bonacolsi in 1328*, text by J.T. Martineau, 103-4.

scenes during his reign but none are as historically important as this; the painting was eventually transferred to the San Sebastiano palace.¹¹⁶ Isabella was known to have visited Gonzaga in 1496, one of a seemingly rare number of visits, and it is possible she would have been interested in Francesco's *Camerino da le Muse* if she had already started negotiations with Mantegna about the *Parnassus* painting. However, the decorative programme at Gonzaga reflects well on Francesco's ability to not only commission artists to undertake the painting of a wide range of artistic subjects, but also to order luxurious furnishings and organize a large number of painters and workmen, such that Collenuccio remarked "I have not seen a more beautiful residence in all of Italy."¹¹⁷ It is clear that Francesco was a patron of note.

To understand Isabella's contribution to the arts, we can study the decoration of her *grotta* and *studiolo* in the Corte Vecchia, comprising these two collection rooms, a salon, and a small private garden, although we have no further evidence of the decoration of her private apartment rooms. The *grotta*, with its beautiful gilded bronzes by Antico, the intarsia cupboard doors, marbled doorway and beautiful vases, was used as a room for a specific collection of items. The quality of these items indicates that they are not mere decorations to a room. They were genuine works of art, perfect, and representative of a particular time, place, or person, with antiquities and historic medals representing a major portion of the collection.

¹¹⁶ This painting was recorded at having been in the San Sebastiano palace when in 1707 it was entrusted to the care of Marquis Claudio Gonzaga; it stayed in the Gonzaga family until acquired for the Palazzo Ducale in 1913. It has the most interesting historical detail in it, with the palace on the right showing the entrances we still use today.

¹¹⁷ Brown, "Concludo che," 279, also the lead title of Brown's article: "Concludo che non vidi la più bella casa in Italia."

The *studiolo* also was intended to be a specific combination of themes, and representative of the best artists of the time; it took fifteen years to achieve, suggesting the lengths to which Isabella went to achieve its perfection. The first two paintings were acquired in 1497 and 1502, both by Francesco's court artist, Andrea Mantegna; the third in 1505 by Pietro Perugino, which required a considerable amount of correspondence in addition to the negotiation of his contract; and the fourth in 1506 by Lorenzo Costa. This last painting was done during a visit to Mantua, within months of Costa becoming Francesco's court artist; his painting for Isabella may have influenced Francesco to appoint him as his court artist, although Costa's work was also known to Francesco from his frequent visits to Bologna as well as assignments on behalf of Julius II.¹¹⁸ There is no information about money or a contract for Costa's painting of 1506.

The next gap of five years reflects many things, one of which may be that Francesco's decorating schemes took priority over Isabella's *studiolo*. In 1511, when Costa had completed his paintings and the supervision of the San Sebastiano palace, he either finished or redesigned, the *Comus* for Isabella, the painting started by Mantegna prior to his death in 1506. It is clear therefore that progress on the *studiolo* at this time was affected by the availability of Francesco's court artist.

The different artistic themes chosen by Isabella and Francesco allow us a wide perspective of their individual interests. Francesco has been criticized for his prevailing focus on battle scenes and horses, which, while true, formed only part of his major artistic programme as followed in at least three palaces, and are discussed further on in this chapter. Isabella's decorative themes were highlighted by her focus on music and musical instruments, and her promotion of the superiority of virtue or chastity over vice, themes

¹¹⁸ Isabella's half-sister was married into the Bentivoglio family of Bologna. They fled to Ferrara in 1506.

that were found in her choice of allegorical paintings based on mythological subjects. Francesco chose to include the classical world of early Roman times and themes of knowledge based on the liberal arts; the visual arts were well represented by the work of contemporary artists, and included the battle scenes referred to above, and some of his most famous horses. Both patrons used their *imprese* as decorative themes.

Isabella and Francesco followed different avenues of patronage, just as their own families had done, with the major difference that there were two major patrons of the arts in one court, both with strong individual personalities and personal choices – one a ruler and the other his consort. That Isabella achieved her own status as a woman patron during a time when rulers and their consorts rarely met on an equal intellectual footing, is a fascinating story in itself, but Isabella also exercised many other roles, which are outside the focus of this thesis. However, I would argue that some of her other major achievements should be included in a discussion of her importance as a patron because they would have been running parallel to her work in the arts, and for which she has received little recognition. Such roles include acting as Mantua's ruler on many occasions, keeping the Mantuan province safe from invasion while Francesco was imprisoned for a year – and managing the economy during this period when all gates into Mantua were closed; she had six healthy children, three of them sons, which ensured the Gonzaga dynasty,¹¹⁹ and acted as a diplomat for Francesco, almost “on call” while he stayed at Mantua and studied the options for impending potential alliances.

¹¹⁹ Francesco was very fond of his first daughter, Eleonora, and did not mind that Isabella had a second daughter, although she did not live long, but she was welcomed nevertheless by Francesco. He also was very fond of his sisters. Like many other things, it is not on record that he was concerned about not having sons.

We know virtually nothing of the decoration of Isabella's private rooms or of her summer palace referred to above. After Francesco's death in 1519 and her time of rule until Federico became of age, she commenced the move to the larger, ground level, Corte Vecchia section of the Palazzo Ducale, a move that took several years spanning 1521 to 1523. As Brown points out, she had time to decorate and design without restriction, but the historical records of her decorative themes are missing. From Brown's projected layouts one may obtain an idea of the loggias and gardens that always so delighted Isabella.¹²⁰

An important aspect of this topic is the consideration of both individuals' sense of magnificence and the idea that lavish spending was an essential part of a ruler's identity. For instance, it is inconceivable to me that Francesco would have had luxurious furnishings in his palaces and private rooms, and not have had Isabella's Castello di San Giorgio rooms lavishly decorated for her arrival from Ferrara in 1490, as he "embellished not only his palace and the houses of many leading citizens... but he richly embellished virtually the whole city."¹²¹ Rooms which were shared, such as bedrooms, dining, or reception rooms,¹²² would have been luxuriously furnished, simply because one cannot imagine Francesco living otherwise.¹²³ Clearly there were large differences in money and resources available to Francesco for patronage and luxuriously appointed courts, as against Isabella managing a much smaller court, and with no power, officially, to call on the resources of the State. This is particularly evident when Francesco was able to give

¹²⁰ Clifford Brown, "'Fruste et Strache nel Fabricare': Isabella d'Este's Apartments in the Corte Vecchia of the Ducal Palace in Mantua," in Mozzarelli, *La Corte di Mantova*, 319-20, and 337, Figs. 1 and 3.

¹²¹ Brown, "San Sebastiano," 160, quoting from an oration given by Matteo Bandello.

¹²² The continuing studies on Isabella's correspondence by Deanna Shemek may provide scholars with much needed family-oriented information, as both Isabella and Francesco shared a strong interest in their children's welfare and education.

¹²³ When captured in 1509, Francesco had with him lavish furnishings and silver services, such as are described in his palaces and villas. He lost all these possessions to the Venetians.

gifts of large sums of money and land to his court artists, as already noted for Marchetto Cara and Andrea Mantegna; in 1511 Lorenzo Costa received gifts of no less than the equivalent of 3,000 ducats. As Hollingsworth pointed out, it is all a matter of the building of a personal self-image, but it is also a reflection of the wealth, power and prestige of a court.¹²⁴ The power of adequate resources in Renaissance times should never be under-estimated.

As noted already, Isabella's part in this chapter is limited by how little we know about her own private rooms, or how they were decorated for her in the Castello di San Giorgio. We know she entertained special friends in her own court, but we fall back on what I call her public rooms, or the two collection rooms in the Corte Vecchia, the *grotta* and *studiolo*. From the inventory taken by the notary, Odoardo Stivini, in 1542, several years after Isabella's death in 1539, scholars have been able to put together a reconstruction of these rooms.¹²⁵ They were open to accredited people when Isabella was absent. Nevertheless, I believe Isabella's two collections rooms in the older Castello di San Giorgio were much more of a private retreat for her, despite their positioning of one floor above the other.

The Corte Vecchia rooms gave her the benefit of a grand salon, called the *Scalcheria*, which was far more suitable for entertaining small groups of friends, or for musical concerts. It provides entry to a corridor from which there is a door to the *studiolo*; from that room one enters the *grotta* through a beautifully decorated marbled doorway in the middle of the left wall of the *studiolo*. Access to the enclosed secret

¹²⁴ Hollingsworth, *Patronage*, 215.

¹²⁵ Similar reconstructions have been made for her *Studiolo* in the Castello di San Giorgio, and, with less success, for the *Grotta*, although its ceiling remains, much faded and missing some decorative *imprese*.

garden is from the end of the corridor, and thus can be entered without going into the two collection rooms.

The *Scalcheria*, painted in 1521-23 by Lorenzo Leonbruno (1489-c1537), is a reasonably sized room, with a fireplace, and windows on either side, giving it the advantage of both heating and light. From Brown's suggested layout, the *Scalcheria* had easy access to or from Isabella's apartments by means of a large corridor and loggia. Brown has done extensive research, with little success, to find records of how Isabella chose to decorate her rooms; this gap in our knowledge has been a puzzling element for any scholar of Isabella's fifty years in Mantua.¹²⁶

The Corte Vecchia *studiolo* still held the same five paintings as in the Castello *studiolo*, which meant Isabella had to make sure that the two side walls, including the one with the doorway to the *grotta*, would take the paintings. Three of the paintings included themes of music and mythology and two follow the theme of virtue versus vice. In the *grotta*, Isabella combined particular *imprese* (heraldic devices or mottoes) as decorative elements in the gilded ceiling, and beautiful intarsia cupboard doors, featuring – among other scenes – musical instruments that she played.¹²⁷ Of special interest is the use of a French chanson, minutely copied along the lower edge of a cupboard door, which is decorated with a city scene. This detail of the intarsia panel is remarkable for the accuracy of the musical score, see discussion below. Whether or not it was a musical theme used as decoration, or it held a personal meaning for Isabella is not clear. It should

¹²⁶ See Clifford Brown, "*Fruste et Strache*," Mozzarelli, *La Corte di Mantova*, (1997).

¹²⁷ The *imprese* appear on the walls in the corridor leading to the secret garden, or on the side of a door; they were also used as an ornament for Isabella's dresses. The YS (Isabella) symbol is by far the most frequent.

be observed that despite claims that both rooms were used for musical performances or for entertaining friends, these spaces seemed too small for both people and instruments.

The three paintings in which music is a part in the artistic design are Mantegna's *Parnassus* (1497), and Lorenzo Costa's *Coronation of a Lady* (1506), and *Comus* (1511). The musicians and instruments are generally obvious, but the iconography related to the theme of music is a little more subtle. In the previous chapter I drew attention to the possible influence of Isabella's humanist education on her choice of decorative themes such as pagan gods, ancient myths, music and nature, for the paintings in her *Studiolo*. As noted earlier, the remarkable combination of the young patron, Isabella, and the older experienced artist, Mantegna, both with similar historical interests, resulted in two paintings which must be numbered among the world's masterpieces: the *Parnassus* (1497) and *The Expulsion of the Vices* (c.1502), also called *Pallas Expelling the Vices*, or *Minerva Chases the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*. This latter painting is not under review here as it lacks a musical component but it does feature a garden scene in which the theme of virtue versus vice is emphasized. The second painting not under review also portrays a theme of virtue versus vice: *The Battle of Love and Chastity* (1505) commissioned from Perugino. The small slender figures are almost rhythmic in their movements, and there is a considerable iconographical content if one looks closely at the design. While musicians are scarce in this painting there is a group of satyrs playing at the far right side and small strangely portrayed musicians in the water in the background.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ See John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, 2nd Edition, (New Jersey: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002), "Fighting for Chastity," 296, (extracted from Chambers, *Patrons*, 135-143) for Isabella's instructions to Perugino, in which she describes the main characters and their action; the letter is politely worded and leaves room for Perugino to work within her request.

The theme of music appears in Mantegna's *Parnassus*, and Costa's two paintings, the poetic *Coronation of a Lady* and the *Comus*. Lorenzo Costa, a Ferrarese by birth, fled Bologna in 1506 when it was threatened by invasion from Pope Julius II, during which time he visited Mantua. He had returned to Bologna before Mantegna's death in September 1506, but after the fall of Bologna in that same year he made Mantua his permanent home. Francesco then took Costa into his service in November 1506 as a replacement for Mantegna. Francesco immediately put him to work on the decoration of his San Sebastiano palace, and appointed him supervisor, with the right to assign work to other artists.¹²⁹ It was around 1511-1512 before he finished this work and was able to finish the *Comus* for Isabella.

Before discussing the themes of music, I would draw attention to an earlier and similar background to the design for Mantegna's *Parnassus*. I first noticed the similarity in a black and white reproduction of a detail from Mantegna's *Camera degli Sposi* (the room of the married couple) painted for Ludovico II between 1465 and 1474. This detail was also published in Lehmann's analysis of the *Parnassus*.¹³⁰ The reproduction shows the forelegs of a powerful-looking Gonzaga horse strangely decorated in a similar way to those of the elegant Pegasus in the *Parnassus*; there is a profusion of fruiting and flowering trees behind the horse and servants and behind the trees is a background design that immediately reminded me of the *Parnassus* – it was almost a replica of the basic design for the *Parnassus*. A colour reproduction of this same scene, showing the position of the fresco, and the Gonzaga horse and servants, can be seen in the catalogue

¹²⁹ Brown, "San Sebastiano," 143.

¹³⁰ P.W. Lehmann, "The Sources," Fig. 44, 133.

Splendours of the Gonzaga.¹³¹ The stance of the legs of the Gonzaga horse is identical with the Pegasus, except in reverse – the Gonzaga horse has his left leg bent at the knee in the fresco, and Pegasus has his right leg bent at the knee in the painting. These mythological elements were clearly of interest to Mantegna, confirming that the artist had had a long-standing interest in themes of antiquity.

The fact that the mythological legends and associations of the gods frequently had diverse associations and meanings should be kept in mind throughout my analysis of these three paintings of Isabella's. For a discussion relating *Parnassus* to music it is necessary to include harmony, as will become clear below. Lehmann's study views the painting in terms of four pairs of characters,¹³² which I found an effective method for reading the painting.¹³³ The pairs and their legends are as follows: a) the celestial Venus succumbs to Mars, god of war, and their child is named Harmonia, who represents harmony in all the spheres;¹³⁴ b) Vulcan historically represents the god of the blacksmith's forge, who parallels the biblical Tubal-Cain as the first man to link changing tonal sounds with song and music.¹³⁵ The blacksmith in medieval times also forged musical instruments such as the trumpet. Amor is assigned by Lehmann to the "Eros of Plato's *Symposium*," an accomplished composer and "all that has to do with music,"¹³⁶

¹³¹ Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours*, Catalogue Item No.29, text by Caroline Elam, 118-19; the fresco appears to the left of the small door.

¹³² For a very clear reproduction of this painting, see Lehmann, "The Sources," Fig.1, 63.

¹³³ Lehmann, "The Sources," 60. Lehmann gives a full coverage of a spring, stones, and animals, and the bi-colored cluster of grapes. See also Campbell, "Mantegna's *Parnassus*," 69-67; Campbell also discusses these details throughout his discussion on the importance of origins in *histudiolo* essay. Fenlon's essay, "Music and Learning," in Mozzarelli, *La Corte di Mantegna*, 353-367, closely follows Lehmann's approach and adds valuable comments on the musical elements in three of Isabella's paintings.

¹³⁴ Mars, in Roman armour, is dressed in a similar way to the body held aloft in Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*, No.6; see Lehmann, "The Sources," Fig.13, 80.

¹³⁵ Mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras noted the different tonal sounds created by a blacksmith hammering on his forge, and formulated a range of proportional harmonic sounds giving them a mathematical number as a means of identification.

¹³⁶ Lehmann, "The Sources," 157.

c) Pegasus is consecrated to the Muses, and to song and poetry; Mercury, inventor of the lyre and the syrinx, is elaborately dressed; and d) the last “pair,” is the group of nine Muses, dancing and singing to Apollo with his lyre. The nine Muses, goddesses of the arts, music, and sciences, are shown here dancing and singing. Apollo, of beautiful and youthful masculinity, was the god of the Muses, and of stringed instruments.¹³⁷ He was also regarded as “a master of harmony, a position he shared with his Muses.”¹³⁸ Harmony, music, musical instruments, song, and dancing, can all be read in this beautiful painting through a knowledge of the myths of antiquity.

Isabella was, as we know an accomplished musician with a passion for collecting antiquities. She is reported many times as being devoted to the Muses, and even delighted in being referred to as the tenth Muse. Some of the Muses appear in the marble roundels in the beautiful doorway leading from the *studiolo* to the *grotta* in the Corte Vecchia. It would be easy to assume, as Brown puts it, that the Muses “migrated” with Isabella from Ferrara to Mantua, but he points out that this is not so, as Francesco already had a room in his rural palace at Gonzaga decorated with Apollo and the Muses, and according to some scholars he is portrayed in the painting (possibly a fresco) listening to the Muses.¹³⁹ The Palazzina decorations were finished by 1496-1497, and Isabella is noted as visiting Gonzaga in 1496;¹⁴⁰ she may well have adopted some of Francesco’s

¹³⁷ To Isabella the stringed instruments were more suitable for women; she would not have wind instrumentalists in her court.

¹³⁸ Irène Aghion, et al., eds. *Gods and Heroes of Classical Antiquity*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 45. In an earlier Chapter I drew attention to Lehmann’s view that Mantegna may have known Cyriacus, who had discovered an ancient relief of the Muses. There is also a relief of the Muses on a Roman Hellenistic sarcophagus, which Mantegna may have seen in Rome. The nine Muses are beautifully robed, with artistically drawn poses that indicate their relationship with their attributes; the relief, now in the Louvre in Paris, appears in excellent condition; see Pahlen, *Music of the World*, Fig. 13, after p. 14.

¹³⁹ This seems to be a significant representation of a patron, in the same way that donors appear in some Renaissance paintings.

¹⁴⁰ Brown, “*Concludo che*,” 288-9.

decorative themes, such as the Muses, for her newly completed *studiolo* in the Castello di San Giorgio.

The musical iconography in Lorenzo Costa's two paintings is a major artistic device, although the paintings are totally dissimilar in style. The *Coronation of a Lady* was painted for Isabella during Costa's brief stay in Mantua in the middle of 1506. His second work, the *Comus*, was commenced by Mantegna, but not completed at the time of his death in 1506. It is not known how much Costa carried on from Mantegna's work, or if he re-designed the painting; however it is generally recognized as a difficult theme in terms of understanding the iconographical content of the painting.¹⁴¹ It was completed by Costa around 1511-12. *The Coronation* features the arts of music and letters, and the lady being crowned is generally acknowledged as representing Isabella. Entrance to the garden, "a symbol of Mantua (where) the arts flourish and harmony reigns"¹⁴² is guarded, with Cadmus in a prominent position on the left. Cadmus, a warrior god, married Harmonia, daughter of Mars and Venus.¹⁴³ The artists in the garden on the right include a musician, an artist sketching, and a poet. This group balances a similar group on the left where another musician has his gaze fixed on the sky (for a reason that remains undetermined), and a philosopher-musician, clearly identified as Pythagoras from the long monochord in his arms. The single string can be seen in a close view, and he is not only in the almost exact centre of the painting but he appears slightly larger than the other

¹⁴¹ Egon Verheyen, *The Paintings in the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este at Mantua*. (New York: New York University Press, 1971).

¹⁴² Fenlon, "Music and Patronage," 21; Fenlon gives another excellent, although again brief, interpretation of these paintings in his article "The Gonzaga and Music," in Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours*, 87-88. For opinions that view Mars and Venus as representing Francesco and Isabella, see Brown, "San Sebastiano," 156, and Lehmann, "Sources," 174-175

¹⁴³ Aghion, *Gods and Heroes*, 74. See also my comment below, n.144, that no figure is accidental.

figures.¹⁴⁴ A battle rages outside the garden, with scenes of sensuality and scenes of pastoral love featured in the background to the right, while musicians play on the shore in front of the ship.

The *Comus* is also full of musical iconography but I find it difficult to understand Costa's – or Mantegna's – iconography. The scene is a garden with a theme of those inside the garden enjoying music, while others are prevented from entering or proceeding as far as Comus, the god of revelry. The painting is divided into three parts by a tree and a large gate. Musicians are obvious, on both sides of the tree, or hidden in thick bushes on the left, or in the distant water as barely visible musicians riding on the backs of fish. Comus and the celestial Venus are seen on the left of the tree, not paying attention to the terrestrial Venus, dressed in blue and gold, and holding a wind instrument, the syrinx. Venus is trying to stop Apollo, with his lyre, from moving towards the celestial Venus. An elderly man with a collection of musical instruments over one shoulder, possibly pipes belonging to a pipe and tabor, stands beside Apollo. On the right of the tree two musicians listen to a sad-faced woman, possibly begging to enter the garden. The meaning of the figures in the lower right of the painting is obscure. The iconography points to Bacchus (identified from the vines encircling the small fence) and Ariadne, but Bacchus has a distinctly unnatural head, not even resembling the attribute of a satyr. On the other side of the oversized gate, with "Comes" inscribed near its top, Janus, the two-

¹⁴⁴ I think we know by now that Isabella has a reason for everything and everyone in her paintings. They are not accidental, and the artist usually did not invent them. The painting was apparently finished in a short time, suggesting that Isabella was able to give Costa an exact idea of what she wanted, or that Costa had suggestions for the design that were acceptable. Pythagoras represents mathematics, music, and harmony.

faced god, and Mercury, lead a battle between gods and intruders to the garden.¹⁴⁵ The battle ends in Comus's favour.

The artistic impression created by the paintings in Isabella's *studiolo* must have been outstanding; Fenlon's view is that the paintings "should be interpreted as if it were a single work, and a single work over which the patron exercised a considerable degree of control."¹⁴⁶ The completion of five harmonizing paintings, which could only be of a certain size, was an artistic achievement for Isabella. We lack the evidence of contracts for paintings commissioned from Francesco's court artists that would help us understand the circumstances of her input into the themes of these works. However, it is evident that the themes and the cohesion of these paintings were conceived relatively close together so as to form a unified decoration within one room. Some years after the move to the Corte Vecchia Isabella added two more paintings, designed to fit the two narrow spaces above the door leading into her *studiolo*. These were two paintings by Correggio (c.1490-1534), giving her seven paintings in all. Both of Correggio's paintings included a musical instrument. However, their theme is familiar: one of virtue and one of vice.

The idea of one room devoted to the work of accomplished artists was reproduced by Francesco in the decoration of his San Sebastiano palace, reminding us of how this husband and wife team combined their ideas for artistic decoration. Isabella may also have drawn on a book of mythological themes by Philostratus the Elder, a book she valued highly, and one which years later her brother Duke Alfonso borrowed and was most reluctant to return. It is a tribute to her knowledge of the arts and antiquity that we

¹⁴⁵ See Fenlon, "Music and Learning," 359, for a similar, but brief, reading of Costa's *Comus*.

¹⁴⁶ Fenlon, "Mantuan Renaissance Culture," in Fenlon, *Music and patronage*, 18.

remain fascinated with the artistic beauty of her *studiolo*, and although not in their original place, all seven paintings are safely preserved in the Louvre in Paris.

Further decoration relating to music appears in cupboard doors in the Corte Vecchia *grotta*. A musical score is worked into the lowest portion of one door and represents Johannes Ockeghem's (c1410-97) chanson "*Prenez sur moi*." Ockeghem was a Flemish-born composer, who worked at the French court of Charles VII. The full chanson is reproduced with its correct name, its full score, and acknowledgment to Ockeghem. This is to me the most interesting of all Isabella's decorations because it raises a particularly personal question – why a French chanson? She did not speak or understand French well, and had been for at least twenty-five to thirty years, famous for her patronage of Italian musicians, and composers of Italian poetry. She did not employ any northern musicians, nor did she use poetry other than that written by Italian poets. Why then did she choose this chanson, "cast" in intarsia and lasting (so far) nearly five hundred years? I was able to obtain a full translation of this chanson in both French and English, see Appendix 5.¹⁴⁷ In 1480, when first engaged to Francesco, Isabella was given a chansonnier dedicated to her as an engagement present. It is one of the few such collections of songs now held in a library in Rome; Fenlon points out that Isabella also had books of French chansons in her own library but that they had previously belonged to a Ferrara repertoire.¹⁴⁸

The theme of music also appears in one of Isabella's *imprese* and in view of the emphasis given to Pythagoras in Costa's painting, I would like to add a possible interpretation for the *impresa* XXVII, possibly the most difficult of all her devices to

¹⁴⁷ I am greatly indebted to Dr. Scott-Atwell, whose academic work is focussed on Ockeghem, for this translation.

¹⁴⁸ Fenlon, "The Gonzaga and Music," in Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours*, 88.

read. My suggestion is that it is related to music and Pythagoras.¹⁴⁹ Two prominent Renaissance scholars, Sylvia Ferino-Pagden and Giancarlo Malacarne, also support a possible link with Pythagoras.¹⁵⁰ Isabella's musical device, one of her earliest *imprese*, shows an alto clef (Isabella's voice range), three different tempo signs, a balanced arrangement of intervals, and a repeat sign.¹⁵¹ The balanced arrangement of intervals (or "rests" or pauses) is of particular interest here as they are shown in different lengths, indicating intervals of a different length; these could be compared with Pythagoras's use of proportional numbers to identify intervals of harmonic sound.¹⁵² The number 27 is the highest proportional number he thought necessary to advance to on the harmonic scale.¹⁵³ However, 27 is also the cube of 3, a number of considerable importance in Christian history.¹⁵⁴ Pythagoras's harmonic range of 27 was the desired scale for lute and keyboard instruments, both of which Isabella played. It may also be read as signifying the importance of attaining harmony in all things as Pythagoras's work was based on the

¹⁴⁹ Recent scholarship discounts the meaning as "the sects are defeated," or "you are defeated."

¹⁵⁰ Ferino-Pagden, *Isabella d'Este*, 81. Giancarlo Malacarne, "Il Segno di Isabella Stemmi, Motte, Imprese" in Bini, *Isabella d'Este, La primadonna*, 196-97.

¹⁵¹ Similarly described by many scholars, for example see Fenlon's description, "Music and Learning," Mozzairelli, *La Corte di Mantova*, 362.

¹⁵² Working from the different tonal sounds made by the blacksmith's forge and hammer, Pythagoras divided a string into two pieces, mathematically 2 to 1. He then took further proportional lengths of the string to create different sounds, increasing the mathematical proportions accordingly. The one most pleasing to him was moving up one third of his original string, equalling the fifth note of a musical scale of eight notes and he gave this a mathematical proportion still valid today. Moving up the tone scale three times he reached 27. This information would have been available to Isabella through her singing and lute lessons.

¹⁵³ I would recommend two of the innumerable sites on the Internet that clarify Pythagoras's musical proportions: a) Boyd-Brent's site offers a triangular representation of the proportions, but note that it should be situated under "1" and not under "4": see John Boyd-Brent, "Pythagoras: Music and Space" in *Harmony and Proportion*: <<http://www.aboutscotland.com/harmony/harmony.html>>, accessed 2 September 2005; this useful diagram shows the ratios of musical intervals, similar to an inverted form of Isabella's musical device; and b) Peter A. Frazer, *The Development of Musical Tuning Systems*, April, 2001, at <<http://www.midicode.com/tunings/index.shtml>>, accessed 1 July, 2005.

¹⁵⁴ Malacarne, "Il Segno di Isabella," 197, suggests the Pythagorean tetraktys numbers of 4, 6, 8, 9, as equalling 27, and he also mentions, among other suggestions, that 3 cubed is 27 (*27 cubo di 3*).

harmony of sounds.¹⁵⁵ Isabella had the number 27 sewn in gold thread into the sleeves of a dress worn for Lucretia Borgia's wedding to her brother Alfonso in 1502; this action would have brought significant attention to the number. In the *grotta* in the Corte Vecchia the musical sign and the number XXVII are placed exactly opposite one another on the two long sides of the gilded wooden ceiling.

The years between 1506 and 1511-1512 were important years in the history of Isabella and Francesco's lives. By 1506 the building of the Palazzo di San Sebastiano was completed and Francesco started a programme for the decoration of his city-palace. It was fairly well finished when he moved there permanently in 1508 from the Palazzo Ducale, but final work continued up to 1511-1512, although slowing down during 1509-1510, the year of Francesco's imprisonment in a Venetian prison. The history of the restoration of the San Sebastiano building, and its architectural detail, are described by Bourne, who places an emphasis on the decoration of the main room where Mantegna's *Triumphs* and other paintings related to Francesco's image as a ruler and military commander were featured.¹⁵⁶ Brown has described the richness of the ceilings in the palaces Francesco decorated as they were gilded and generally patterned with his own dramatic *imprese*; two of the ceilings from San Sebastiano were later transferred to the

¹⁵⁵ Mario Equicola wrote a book (1505-06) about another of Isabella's devices, *Nec spe nec metu* (neither hope nor fear), and noted that he had put it into 27 paragraphs; he received permission to publish it, and sent it to Isabella as a birthday gift. Isabella later commented "I certainly never imagined all these mysteries when I made the little motto!" which may relate to the number 27 as Equicola must have cleared up any mysteries about "Neither hope nor fear" in 27 paragraphs; see Cartwright, *Isabella*, Vol. 1, 281.

¹⁵⁶ Bourne, "Husbands," 99-108, and see Fig. 13, for a photograph of the small open area on the top floor which was used as a dining room with a view, as it overlooked the town, the lakes, and Te Island; Fig. 16, shows the loggia as a commercial site, also shown in Brown, "San Sebastiano," Fig. 7, 135.

Palazzo Ducale, where they remain today.¹⁵⁷ Renovations to the San Sebastiano loggia have just been completed, after years of use as a popular commercial site.

After the structural work was finished in 1506 Brown reports “a scene of intense activity by a range of painters.”¹⁵⁸ Isabella’s famous letter written 5 October 1506, quoted frequently by scholars and used in part as an introductory paragraph by Bourne (and also quoted by Brown), is very difficult to understand, given our state of knowledge about their correspondence. The letter expresses her view that Francesco’s palace rooms were “even more beautiful as your Lordship learnt from my room . . . though it is true you improved them,” (*tanto più bello quanto Vostra Signoria ha pur imparato da la mia camera . . . L’è ben vero che l’ha pur migliorate*); this turn of phrase has been interpreted as referring to Francesco duplicating Isabella’s *studiolo*. This is only several weeks after Andrea Mantegna’s death on 13 September 1506, and before Lorenzo Costa’s arrival from Bologna, in November 1506. If the letter refers to Mantegna’s *Triumphs of Caesar*, they may well have been in place in the large room designed for them, or the letter may refer to paintings that Francesco possessed prior to Costa’s arrival in November, all of which would have already been known to Isabella.

It is therefore not clear which of Francesco’s rooms had been influenced in their artistic creativity by Isabella’s *studiolo*, which contained four paintings at that time, two of which were Mantegna’s, one of Perugino’s, and a very recently finished work by Costa. However, very little artistic work could have been achieved in San Sebastiano by 5 October 1506. I draw attention to this letter not only in regard to its confusing message

¹⁵⁷ See Brown, “San Sebastiano,” Figs. 11-14, 137-38, for *imprese* decorations, and for excellent reproductions of the two ceilings now in the Palazzo Ducale, see Figs. 16 and 17, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Brown, “San Sebastiano,” 137-38.

about which rooms were more beautiful than Isabella's room, a comment that occurred so early in Francesco's building and decorating programme, but because the comment prefacing the extract above may be interpreted that Francesco rightly believed Isabella could not be serious if she really thought his rooms – in 1506 – to be the equal of hers.

There is a surprisingly constant and frequent exchange of letters between Francesco and Isabella throughout their lifetime together. I would argue that there is a need for future study of this correspondence in order to determine if some of Isabella's later correspondence possibly expressed opinions, which, like her collection of *objets d'art*, were more for the benefit of posterity and historical record than for events at the time.¹⁵⁹ I would suggest that we need to study her letters and Francesco's responses, to obtain a fuller understanding of the dynamic between these two individuals.

The artistic patterns for the rooms decorated in the San Sebastiano palace followed similar lines to those in the rural Gonzaga *Palazzina*, decorated in the years of 1491-1496-97; as noted above the rooms were named according to their "pictorial motif."¹⁶⁰ Fifteen years later, Francesco still featured the liberal arts; Mantegna's famous *Triumphs of Caesar*; battle scenes – actual and fictional; and a small *Studiolo*. The number of rooms is not known, but the dimensions of the large room for the *Triumphs* has been reliably assessed, and that there were smaller rooms devoted to similar pictorial motifs as at Gonzaga. Brown lists the following "interlocking themes:

1. The geography of the Terrestrial universe.
2. The Caesar cycle as a classical precedent for the modern ruler.
3. The "*fasti*" of Francesco II's ancestors, as well as his own

¹⁵⁹ I believe there are studies of Francesco's correspondence in hand at the moment; they will be welcomed by scholars of the Mantuan court.

¹⁶⁰ Brown, "Concludo che," 277-78.

military deeds.¹⁶¹ 4. The genealogy of the ruler's family. 5. The ruler and his wife as examples of virtue."¹⁶²

In the list provided by Brown, Item 5 is of special interest as it comes closest to a *studiolo*, and is closely connected to the design of Isabella's *studiolo*. The four paintings in this room, all by Lorenzo Costa, are: *The Court of Isabella d'Este*; *Francesco II Guided by Hercules*, the *Triumph of Francesco II*, and one rather strange subject, *Latona and the Peasants*; these paintings filled the small room. Costa painted other work for the long room where Mantegna's *Triumphs* were displayed, featuring Francesco related to Hercules, the pagan Greek hero, and glorifying his present position as Marquis with his three sons (quite young at the time) as his male successors. Other decorations were a large world map, although it is not clear if this is an original or a copy of the map held at Marmirolo; a map of Cairo that was eighteen feet long and was more like a cultural history; and a map of Jerusalem, a city that Francesco thought was beautiful.

Brown estimates several more paintings were added during the preparation of self-contained rooms in 1511-1512 in case Lucretia Borgia of Ferrara, Duke Alfonso's wife, had to escape from the war against the Pope Julius II. One of the rooms included a painting by Dosso Dossi, possibly a *Bacchanal*,¹⁶³ and a painting of the Muses. The latter was named slightly differently from that in the Gonzaga *Palazzina*, its title being *Apollo and the Muses in the Presence of Francesco II Gonzaga*, and Brown feels that this indeed did relate back to the theme of the Muses in Mantegna's *Parnassus*.¹⁶⁴ In both

¹⁶¹ The "*fasti gonzagheschi*," meaning heroic deeds of the Gonzaga is a frequently used term in the Gonzaga literature.

¹⁶² Brown, "San Sebastiano," 141.

¹⁶³ Brown, "San Sebastiano," 143.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, "San Sebastiano," 155-56.

paintings of the Muses, in Gonzaga and in Mantua, Francesco's position is clearly that of a worthy patron of the arts.

Now that we have evidence of the extent of Francesco's art patronage, we are able to see that both Isabella and Francesco each brought their own special qualities to the cultural life of the Mantuan court. Their joint contribution enabled them to run a court that encompassed the arts, music, diplomatic and military expertise, and lavish entertainment and hospitality for guests. Separately, they both contributed a didactic approach to their patronage – recognized in Isabella's paintings (virtue against vice) and in her art collection (of antiquities and contemporary art). Francesco's comprehensive decoration of the Gonzaga rooms emphasized knowledge of the universe, and the continuing the role of his ancestors with his own "triumphs," extending to a fictional representation of his sons following the same pattern of triumphal battles.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that Francesco was Andrea Mantegna's patron and that the many works exhibited throughout museums of the world today, and completed during his twenty-two years in Francesco's service, could not have been achieved without the security Francesco offered him. Mantegna did some of his most outstanding work for Francesco and Isabella, and these paintings stand today among the world's masterpieces of art. The beauty and magnificence of the Mantuan court is the result of their joint vision in the importance of the arts, a dimension of their biographies that only emerges after one has conducted a thorough examination of the art historical, historical and musicological records.

CONCLUSION

Mantua had become one of northern Italy's most culturally advanced princely states, and as noted in the Introduction, part of my hypothesis regarding Isabella and Francesco was that their work together at Mantua was achieved by a consistent and dependable rapport between them. I have argued that the success of Mantua in this period could not have been achieved if there had been major differences between its ruler and his wife; nor could it have reached its cultural level by the patronage of arts and music by either Francesco or Isabella alone. Isabella was a brilliant consort to Francesco and brought fame to the Mantuan court. The Gonzaga palaces were renowned for their beauty and Francesco's hospitality, which included his famous hunting grounds, unequalled at the time. The San Sebastiano palace was almost as famous as Isabella's art collection rooms and the display of Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*, a room of paintings by Lorenzo Costa, together with specifically decorated rooms with a variety of themes, may in fact have surpassed Isabella's rooms in art and beauty. There would be very few of Italy's most distinguished dignitaries who did not visit Mantua during Francesco and Isabella's time in order to appreciate the vision of these two patrons and enjoy the magnificence of the Mantuan court.

As discussed above, details of the artistic decoration of Isabella's personal apartment rooms – and especially those in her new Corte Vecchia rooms, or in her summer palace, the Palazzo Porto – have not yet been as fully studied as they deserve. It is clear that scholars must move beyond a one-dimensional approach to her patronage of art that considers only her art collection and the well-known facts about both *studioli* and *grotte*.

I have demonstrated that Francesco was a good and successful ruler, with a strong personality and a discerning mind, and that he had an adept ability to understand the politics of the time. Further, this thesis has demonstrated that Francesco was a notable and successful patron of arts and music. At the end of his reign, Mantua was wealthy, economically strong, and of high courtly status.

However, as is now clear, it is the combination of the patronage of Isabella and Francesco that led to the acquisition of fame and elevated standing for their court during their lifetime. Isabella's fame as a patron of the arts should now include her fame as a patron of music, with its considerable influence on the future of Italy's reputation as a leading musical centre. This small Mantuan court had sufficient means to fund its extensive programmes of patronage, which allowed both Isabella and Francesco to follow their own separate interests as patrons of the arts; each played a part in the management of resources to achieve a particular end. Both contributed equally to making Mantua famous, as we must now acknowledge when we discuss this period in the history of the court. My research shows that the court is a system in which all the players play their own unique and essential parts. I have shown that a focus solely on Isabella would, in my view, be misguided; nevertheless, 'Isbellamania' will no doubt exist for some time yet.

As for the issue of how we increase our knowledge of a period and the individuals who animate culture of any kind, whether visual, literary, musical, or oral, I found that my work on this thesis grew in directions I could not have imagined when I first began the research. It has been an incredible journey, and I suggest that we need to keep in mind the complexities of cross-disciplinary perspectives when we think of Isabella d'Este and Francesco II Gonzaga.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Isabella's letter to Francesco, 15 October 1489, before their marriage. From William Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, 1980, 11, and 169, n.30.

I have heard that your Excellency has allowed Antonio, your player of three-hole pipe and tabor, to leave and that this is taking place because of the insistence that perhaps he has made for not having had that salary that it appears to him that he merits according to the good treatment that the other instrumentalists of your Lord enjoy. Since he bears such a good reputation among the other players of pipe and tabor and musicians, I would be particularly pleased for him to remain with your Lordship, hoping myself to enjoy his merit at some time with the pleasure and permission of your Excellency, [to] whom I pray to be [so] in your goodwill that you may wish to retain him still in your service . . . I shall remain in this [matter] most obligated to your Lordship, to whom I ask to be recommended.

Appendix 2. Letter from Isabella to her husband Francesco dated 12 March, 1513, in reply to his criticism of the behaviour of her court ladies at the Milan court. From Julia Cartwright, *Isabella d'Este*, vol. II, 1903, 84, n.3, and letter, 85-6.

My dear Lord – I am very sorry but hardly surprised to hear that you were not satisfied with my explanations, and I should be more so, if I felt this to be my fault, as it certainly is my misfortune. But, since the reason why I did not obey Your Excellency at once was that, with your permission, I wished to help my brother and please my nephew, it seems to me that you need not express so much dissatisfaction, and I can only lament the unlucky fate which always renders my actions displeasing to you. And I certainly do not believe that I have done anything on this Milanese journey, for which I deserve to become 'the common talk of the town'. I know that I have acquired many new friends on your behalf, as well as on my own, and that I have behaved as I ought to do, and as I am always accustomed to behave, for, thanks to the grace of my God, and myself, I never needed either to be controlled by others, or to be reminded how to govern my actions. And, although in other things I count for nothing, God has granted me this grace, for which Your Excellency owes me as much gratitude as ever any husband owed his wife, and even if you loved and honoured me as much as possible you could never repay my faithfulness. This makes you sometimes to say that I am proud, because, knowing how much I deserve of you and how little I receive, I am tempted at times to alter my nature and to appear different from what I am. But even if you should always treat me badly, I would never cease to do what is right, and the less love you show me, the more I shall always love you, because, in truth, this love is part of myself, and I became your wife so young that I can never remember having been without it. This being the case, I think that, without incurring your displeasure, I might be at liberty to put off my return a

fortnight, for the reasons which I have already explained. Do not be angry with me, and say that you do not believe I wish to see you, as I have said in my letters, for if my desire in this respect were satisfied, you would let me see you much more often than I do in Mantua. I commend myself once more to Your Excellency and beg your pardon for writing such a long letter. From one who loves you as well as herself. Isabella, Marchesa di Mantova. In Piacenza, the 12th day of March, 1513.”

Appendix 3. Letter from Francesco II Gonzaga to Duke Massimiliano Sforza on the 9th December, 1512. From William F. Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, 1980, 48.

Most illustrious and excellent Lord, Nephew, and honored brother:

As soon as I saw your Excellency's letter, I commissioned Master Rigo, my trombonist, to come to you and to do whatever you shall command, because I am always anxious to do you any favor and pleasure. I beg you urgently that by now you shall have taken enough pleasure in Marchetto, being pleased to send Roberto and him back, because the said Marchetto is the master of my chapel (*maestro de la mia Capella*). I should like, in these Feasts of Christmas, to be able to hear my singers, whose music is lacking and much the worse for the absence of their head (*capo*) and master (*maestro*).

Appendix 4. Letter from Francesco II Gonzaga to Massimiliano's agent in Milan, of 17 December, 1512. From William F. Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes*, 1980, 48.

Magnificent Cavalier and dearest friend: . . .

As for Marchetto, we say that we have been awaiting him eagerly for the pleasure we take in him, of which we are now deprived. And because he is master of our chapel (*maestro de la nostra Capella*), we shall be unable, because of his absence, to celebrate the Feasts of Christmas with the music of our singers, as was our dearest wish. In spite of this, since his Excellency the Duke has decided to take him with him to Milan, even though we are sorry to remain deprived of this our greatest pleasure, we shall be patient; but ask your Magnificence to undertake this task yourself – to have him sent back as soon as possible, that is, as soon as the most excellent Duke arrives at Milan, if we cannot hope for sooner . . .

Appendix 5. The translation for *Prenez sur moi* was provided by Dr. Scott Atwell, of Ferris State University, Michigan, U.S.A. Dr. Atwell draws attention to another translation in Vol. 3 of R. Wexler, ed., *Collected Works*, (American Musicological Society, 1992).

Prenez sur moi vostre exemple amoureux Learn from me a lesson about love:
Commencement d'amours est savoureux the beginning of love is sweet,

*Et le moyen plein de paine et tristesse
Et la fin est d'avoir plaisant maistresse
Mais au saillir sont les pas dangereux*

in mid-course it is full of pain and sadness,
and in the end you have a pleasing mistress;
but getting out of it is a difficult path.

*Servant amours me suis trouve eueux
L'une des foix et l'autre malleueux
Ung jour sentant confort l'autre destresse
Prenez sur moi vostre exemple amoureux
Commencement d'amours est savoureux
Et le moyen plein de paine et tristesse*

As the servant of love I found myself happy
at one time, unhappy at another;
one day feeling assurance, another distress.
Learn from me a lesson about love:
the beginning of love is sweet,
in mid-course it is full of pain and sadness.

Pour ung plaisir cent pensers ennuieux

For one pleasure, a hundred hurtful
thoughts,

Pour ung solas cent dangiers perilleux

for one solace, a hundred rejections to be
feared,

Pour ung accueil cent regards par rudesse

for one welcome, a hundred harsh looks.

S'amours sert donc de tels mets a largesse

Such dishes does love bountifully serve,

Et les loiaux fait les plus doloureux

and of the most faithful she makes the most
sorrowful.

Prenez sur moi vostre exemple amoureux

Learn from me a lesson about love:

Commencement d'amours est savoureux

the beginning of love is sweet,

Et le moyen plein de paine et tristesse

in mid-course it is full of pain and sadness,

Et la fin est d'avoir plaisant maistresse

and in the end you have a pleasing mistress;

Mais au saillir sont les pas dangereux

but getting out of it is a difficult path.

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