

Zeitschrift: Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis : eine Veröffentlichung der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Lehr- und Forschungsinstitut für Alte Musik an der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel

Herausgeber: Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

Band: 29 (2005)

Artikel: Florentine instrumentalists and their repertory circa 1500

Autor: McGee, Timothy J.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-869043>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 08.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

FLORENTINE INSTRUMENTALISTS AND THEIR REPERTORY
CIRCA 1500

by TIMOTHY J. MCGEE

It is clear that during the last half of the fifteenth century, in Florence as well as other Italian cities, there was an increase of instrumental music performed by amateurs and professionals. The upper class citizens purchased instruments and employed tutors to teach their children technique and repertory, and professional musicians were hired to play for numerous festive occasions such as the weddings, receptions, and banquets that took place in the villas and palaces of the noblemen throughout the year. We know something about which instruments were played and even the names of many of the professional musicians, but what is less understood is the way in which the instrumentalists participated in performances on these occasions and what music they played. A possible answer to this question may be seen by focusing on the musical tastes and activities of Florence's most illustrious citizen, Lorenzo de' Medici.¹

During the fifteenth century there was a continuing rivalry for political position among the rulers of the leading cities of Italy, and a serious part of the political statement involved the cultural elegance of the local monarch which was a part of an ostentatious show of intelligence, wealth, education, and good taste. The most prominent of the north Italian courts with whom Florence compared itself were Milan, Ferrara, Mantua, and Venice, but different from all of these places where a single ruler dominated with a single court, dictated the social customs, and was the sole custodian of artistic taste, the situation in Florence was far more diffuse with not one but several noble families vying for social as well as political leadership. There was little doubt, however, that after 1434, when Cosimo de' Medici returned from a year in exile, his family stood out from all of the others, a position that they quietly acknowledged while keeping up a constant effort to maintain and extend their control.²

Similar to his father and his grandfather, Lorenzo led Florence from behind the scenes, declining all invitations to place himself in the civic limelight as a member of the executive. Perhaps as a reflection of this reluctance to publicly claim leadership, he did not employ a large group of household musicians as did the rulers of the other cities, although he entertained frequently at his palace on the Via Larga, and at his country villas. The solution to his need to compete with the lavishness of the other courts while still maintaining

¹ On Lorenzo's assumption of power see F. W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the art of magnificence*, Baltimore 2004.

² See Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*, New Haven 2000; and Nicolai Rubinstein, *The government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)*, Oxford 1997.

the facade of merely being „another one of the nobles“, was to call upon musicians who were employed elsewhere in the city.

Lorenzo was a serious patron of music, and similar to all other Italian noblemen, he entertained visiting dignitaries with elaborate banquets which were highlighted by musical performances. There is some evidence that Lorenzo may have kept one or two musicians on his permanent payroll; there are no clear records of who they were, but anecdotal records do mention that he had „his“ lutenists and harp players with him on various occasions,³ and he apparently employed musicians to teach instruments and composition to his children. We know that he himself played the *lira da braccio*,⁴ and perhaps some of the keyboards and other instruments listed in the inventory of his palace at the time of his death:⁵

An organ of cardboard [...] by maestro Chastellano [...] with three bellows.⁶

An organ of cardboard made in the shape of a snail [...] with two bellows.

An organ of wood and tin [...] with two bellows.

A reed organ

An organetto

A gravicembolo that also serves as an organ

A simple gravicembolo with stops

A double gravicembolo with stops

Two small simple gravicembali

Three gravichordi, one in the German style

A vivuola with keys used as a monachordo [hurdy-gurdy?]

A harp with four strings

A large lute with twelve strings

A small broken lute

Three large vivuole in different styles

A set of large wind instruments [zufoli]⁷

A set of five wind instruments [zufoli] for the use of the pifferi⁸

³ Frank A. D'Accone, „Lorenzo il Magnifico e la musica“, in: *La Musica a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Piero Gargiulo, Florence 1993, 221.

⁴ That he played viola da braccio is established in a letter to Lorenzo from his viola teacher, Giuliano Catellaccio, 1 December, 1466; Archivio di Stato, Firenze (hereafter ASF): MAP, XXIII, 92, quoted in D'Accone, „Lorenzo il Magnifico“, 234.

⁵ For speculation that he also played keyboards, see D'Accone, „Lorenzo il Magnifico“, 228–230.

⁶ On cardboard organs see Pier Paolo Donati, „1470–1490: Organi di cartone degli studioli dei principi“, in: *La Musica a Firenze*, 275–280.

⁷ There are several different woodwind instruments that were called „zufoli“ during the fifteenth century, including transverse flute, recorder, panpipes and possibly shawm. See Marcello Castellani, „I flauti nell'inventario di Lorenzo il Magnifico (1492)“, in: *Sine musica nulla vita: Festschrift Hermann Moeck*, ed. Nikolaus Delius, Celle 1997, 185–191; and Timothy J McGee with Sylvia E. Mittler, „Information on instruments in Florentine carnival Songs“, *Early Music* 10 (1982) 452–461.

⁸ Castellani, „I flauti“, 189, suggests that this set of zufoli are the same as the „Quattro zufoli fiaminghi“, listed in the 1463 inventory of Lorenzo's father, Piero di Cosimo de' Medici. He also points out that the 1463 inventory lists „Tre zufoli forniti d'ariento“, which are probably the same as the last instruments on the 1492 inventory.

Three wind instruments [zufoli] with silver rings⁹

Throughout the last half of the fifteenth century, Florence was the home of a number of fine composers, singers, and instrumentalists, many of whom were attracted to the city by the direct intervention of Lorenzo, whose interest in placing talented musicians in the various church and civic ensembles was far from altruistic. There is little doubt that he cared deeply about the image of Florence, and therefore would have wanted quality in the musicians who were responsible for the sacred and secular performances in the city. But there was a far more personal interest involved here, namely, the quality of the music and musicians at his private palace. His method was as clever as it was simple: he would help scout musicians in other courts of Europe and use his influence to attract them to Florence where the churches and the government would offer them full-time employment. This gave him full and privileged access to these same musicians for his own purposes. It was a way of competing with the musical ensembles at the courts of the Sforza's, the Este's, and the Gonzaga's without seeming to have such a household ensemble, and also, we might notice, not having the burden of a large permanent payroll.

The precedent for this kind of procedure would seem to have been the arrangement that the Oratorio of Orsanmichele had with musicians from much earlier in the century. Between the years of 1405 and '37, for example, one Pagolo di Ser Ambruogio was hired by the Oratorio to play viola, rebec, lute, and „other instruments“, for the Oratorio and on special feast days for the laudese company of San Zanobi. The terms of Pagolo's employment state that he is also required to perform for the executive committee of the government

⁹ Un orghano di carta impastata, lavorato bene con istrafori, di mano di maestro Castellano [...] 3 mantici cho' piombi.

Un organo di carta fatto a chiocciola, [...] in una chassa di legno [...] dua mantaci

Un orghano di legname e di stagno e chon grave chordo, lavorato di fogliami e straforato [...] chon due mantici in una chassetta

Un orghano di channa, a una channa per tasto semplice, in chassa

Un orghanetto a una mano,

Uno gravicembolo ch' à servire anche a orghano, manchavi le channe, sonvi tutti gl'altri ingegni e mantaci

Un gravicembolo scempio, cholle tire, in una chassa d'abeto

Uno gravicembolo doppio, cholle tire, buono, in una chassa di nocie e cholle taste d'osso

Dua gravicembali scempi, picholi, che n' à uno Alexandro degli Alexandri, in una chassa di legno dipinta

Tre gravichordi che ve n' è uno alla tedescha

Una vivuola cho' tasti, a uso di monachordo

Una arpe a quatro filari

Uno liuto grande, a undici chorde

Uno liuto rotto, picholo, in chassa

Tre vivuole grandi di più ragioni

Uno giuochò di zufoli grossi in un guaina

Uno giuochò di zufoli a uso di pifferi, cholle ghiere nere e bianche, sono zufali cinque

Tre zufoli ghiere d'argento in una guaina guernita d'argento.

From ASF: MAP CLXV, fol.10v.

during their mealtimes, the Mensa of the Signoria, whenever he is requested, but without further payment.¹⁰ Lorenzo, therefore, was simply playing a variation on a theme already established, whereby a full-time salary from a church entailed duties elsewhere. I cannot say whether he also adopted the practice of not paying these musicians for the added services.

Lorenzo's aggressive pursuit of musicians for the city began as early as the mid 1460s, when he was still in his teens, and continued until the last years of his life. He recruited singers and composers for the various church choirs in the city. The most famous of these was Heinrich Isaac who found full-time employment as singer and composer in the choirs of the Baptistry, the Duomo and Santissima Annunziata.¹¹ But he also recruited prominent instrumentalists for two of the three civic musical ensembles: the trombetti, the group of seven small trumpets that represented the executives of government, and especially for the pifferi, the most musical of the ensembles whose principal duty was to entertain the executives daily at meal times in their private dining room in the Palazzo della Signoria.¹² In 1489, for example, Lorenzo attempted to fill a trombone vacancy in the pifferi by first approaching Bartolomeo Tromboncino in Mantua, who turned him down, and then Augustein Schubinger, stationed in Innsbruck, who accepted.¹³ The extent to which Lorenzo was involved with the details of the staffing of the civic instrumental ensembles can be seen in the four-year suspension from the civic pifferi of Giovanni Cellini in 1491, which was done apparently at the request of Lorenzo and his son Piero.¹⁴ The

¹⁰ See Giuseppe Zippel, *I suonatori della Signoria di Firenze*, Trento 1892, 22, note 5, and Blake Wilson, *Music and merchants: The laudesi companies of Republican Florence*, Oxford 1992, 250.

¹¹ On Isaac in Florence see Frank A. D'Accone, „Heinrich Isaac in Florence“, *MQ* 49 (1963) 464–483; and F. W. Kent, „Heinrich Isaac's music in Laurentian Florence: New documents“, in: *Die Lektüre der Welt: Zur Theorie, Geschichte und Soziologie kultureller Praxis (Festschrift für Walter Veit)*, ed. H. Heinze and C. Weller, New York etc. 2004, 367–371.

¹² There is no record of Lorenzo taking this kind of interest in the third ensemble, the trombadori, an ensemble of six large trumpets, a shawm and a percussion player, that played at all outdoor ceremonies and processions.

¹³ Lorenzo's way of recruiting a new trombone player was to send Jacopo di Giovanni, a member of the Florentine pifferi, to the courts of Mantua, Ferrara, and Modena in search of a replacement for the recently deceased trombone player, Johannes de Johannes, d'Alemagnia. Jacopo is mentioned in both Tromboncino's rejection letter and the letter from Michel Schubinger recommending his brother Augustein. The letters are: from Tromboncino ASF: MAP XLI, #167; and from Michel Schubinger ASF: MAP XLI #158. Both are published in: Bianca Becherini, „Relazione di musici fiamminghi con la corte dei Medici: Nuovi documenti“, *La Rinascita* 4 (1941) 107–109. For details of the performance careers of members of the Schubinger family see Keith Polk, *German instrumental music of the late Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1992, 76–77. Additional dealings of Lorenzo with instrumentalists are discussed in Frank A. D'Accone, „Lorenzo the Magnificent and music“, in Gian Carlo Garfagnini, ed., *Lorenzo Il Magnifico e il suo mondo*, Firenze 1994, 280–282.

¹⁴ Related in the autobiography of his son. See John Addington Symonds, transl., *The autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, (1927, repr. Garden City, N.J. 1948), 9.

position was then awarded to one Adamo d'Adamo, recruited from Freiburg.¹⁵ It is these people, the members of the Florentine pifferi, who would have been the major source of proficient instrumental musicians for Lorenzo's entertainments, and so we should look closely at their activities in order to form an idea of what would have been the probable repertory of instrumental music at Lorenzo's entertainments.

Many of the instrumentalists in the civic ensemble must have been quite versatile in the number of instruments they played. Although the official instruments of the civic pifferi were tenor and alto shawm and trombone, there is little doubt that the musicians could play several other instruments. And we can assume that Lorenzo's interest in appointments to the trumpet ensemble as well as the pifferi suggests that some of those musicians as well were capable of performing on a variety of instruments, which increases by seven the possible number of available civic musicians for the Medici entertainments in addition to the four pifferi (plus their apprentices).¹⁶

According to Benvenuto Cellini, his father Giovanni, who was a member of the pifferi from 1480 to 1514 (with the exception of his suspension between 1491–95), played bowed strings, and woodwinds,¹⁷ and taught Benvenuto to play recorder, cornetto and shawm, and to sing and compose. Benvenuto also claimed that his father constructed organs, harpsichords, lutes, and harps.¹⁸ It is not probable that all members of the pifferi were this versatile, but we do know that Augustein Schubinger played cornetto as well as trombone,¹⁹ and Cellini mentions in the course of his narrative that other members of the pifferi played woodwinds in addition to the shawm, and that some played lute.²⁰ This would be consistent with what is known about instrumentalists at other Italian courts at this time, as for example, a group of musicians in Verona in 1484 who state that they could play piffari, trombeti, flauti, arpe, lauti, organo and sing,²¹ and a request to the Sforza court in 1488 that they send to Naples the ensemble of pifferi along with the „shawms, dolzaine, pipes and drums, crumhorns, horns, and all the other instruments with which they

¹⁵ Giovanni's dismissal is recorded in ASF: Provvisioni Registri 182, fol. 77, for 20 December 1491; his reappointment in ASF: Provvisioni Registri 186, fol. 62v–63r, for 20 June 1495. See discussion in my „Giovanni Cellini, Piffero di Firenze“, *RIM* 32 (1997) 203, translated as „Giovanni Cellini, Piffero of Florence“, in: *Historical Brass Society Journal* 12 (2000) 212.

¹⁶ Benvenuto Cellini refers to apprentices studying with each of the pifferi, and there are other indications that the apprentice pifferi frequently performed with or in place of the regular members. See my „Giovanni Cellini“.

¹⁷ In Benvenuto's account they are identified as violi, flauto, e piffaro.

¹⁸ Organi con canne di legno, gravicembali, liuti, and arpe. See my „Giovanni Cellini“, 215.

¹⁹ Polk, *German instrumental music*, 77.

²⁰ See my „Giovanni Cellini“, 216.

²¹ Jeffrey Kurtzman and Linda Maria Koldau, „Trombe, trombe d'argento, trombe squarciate, tromboni and pifferi in Venetian processions and ceremonies of the sixteenth and seventh centuries“, in: *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 8 (2002) note 30, <http://www.sscm-jscm.org/jscm/v8/n01/Kurtzman.html>, quoting Enrico Paganuzzi, Carlo Bologna, Luciano Rognini, Giorgio Maria Cambié, and Marcello Conati, *La musica a Verona*, Verona 1976, 80–82.

play.²² It is probable, therefore, that when performing for Lorenzo's entertainments, the civic musicians would have played a number of instruments in addition to the usual shawms and trombone.

The number of other instrumental musicians available for performances at the Medici palace was considerable. The organist Francesco Squarcialupi²³ was a frequent guest, and several of the other members of Lorenzo's circle were known to have played the lira da braccio as did Lorenzo and his son Piero, including Antonio di Guido, the most famous cantimpanca of the time, poet Angelo Poliziano, humanists Marsilio Ficino and Cristoforo Landino, the artists Leonardo da Vinci, and Filippino Lippi who also played lute and recorders.²⁴ The inventory of Medici-owned instruments makes it clear that a number of keyboard instruments were available on the premises for those interested and capable, as well as several different sizes of lutes, some bowed strings, and a few woodwinds, five of which are stated in the inventory as having been for the use of the pifferi.

When joined with the knowledge that composer-singers Heinrich Isaac, Pietrequin Bonnel, and Colinet de Lannoy were on tap at Lorenzo's beck and call along with any number of additional singers from the several churches,²⁵ we can see that the possibilities for performance at the Medici palace were vast, encompassing a variety of styles of music: composed polyphony performed by selected singers from the cathedral choirs; cantare all'improvviso by professionals and amateurs who frequented the court; lute and harp performance by members of the family, the household music staff (who, presumably, could sing and probably play other instruments); keyboard performances by organist Squarcialupi and others; and additional instrumental music performed by the civic instrumentalists.

For some time musicologists have attempted to establish what would have been the repertory performed on such occasions by examining existing manuscripts known to have been of Florentine provenance. A number of manuscripts survive containing a sizeable collection of polyphonic secular songs. Seven of these are referred to as anthologies because they contain a variety of compositions, the bulk of which are French chanson, along with some Italian secular material and a few compositions from Germany and Spain.²⁶ We can

²² William Prizer, „Music at the court of the Sforza: The birth and death of a musical center“, *MD* 43 (1989) 181.

²³ Francesco was the son of Antonio Squarcialupi (d. 1475), who also was organist at the cathedral and a familiar of the Medici.

²⁴ The inventory of Lippi's possessions at the time of his death in 1504 includes a lute and five recorders. See my „Filippino Lippi and Music“, forthcoming.

²⁵ D'Accone, „Lorenzo il Magnifico“, 221.

²⁶ Florence, Bibl. Naz. ms Magl. XIX. 176; Magl. XIX. 178; and Banco Rari 229; Bibl. Riccardiana, MS 2356; Paris, Bibl. Nat., Ms fr. 15123 (Pixérécourt Chansonnier); Vatican, Capella Giulia, MS XIII.27; Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, Q17. These are the mss identified as of Florentine origin from the 1470s–90s by Allan Atlas, *The Cappella Giulia Chansonnier (Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, C.G. XIII.27)*, 2 vols. Brooklyn NY 1975–76, I, 258. An eighth collection, ms Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, MS 78. C. 28 may also be a part of this group.

probably conclude that this is the kind of polyphonic secular music that would have been popular among the nobles in Florence at the end of the century, and it therefore represents the repertory that would have been performed at Lorenzo's entertainments.

What would have been the repertory performed by the instrumentalists, however, is not quite so clear. Since the music in the *cantare all'improvviso* tradition was completely improvised, there are no expectations of locating any written music for that repertory, although we do have some evidence of the kinds of poetry that was sung in this manner.²⁷ For the other instrumentalists, those who played the keyboard instruments and the lutes, and especially the *pifferi*, there is not much agreement as to what they might have played. Although there are no keyboard or lute sources closely identified with fifteenth-century Florence, the few sources that do exist for those instruments demonstrate that the lute and keyboard repertory contained a large quantity of highly ornamented contemporary secular vocal music based on that found in the anthology manuscripts, as well as dances, preludes, and *recercari*. This is the kind of repertory that is found in the growing number of keyboard and lute sources published after 1500, and it is probable that the keyboard and lute performers at Lorenzo's court would have played a similar repertory.²⁸

What would have been the repertory of single-line instrumentalists such as the *pifferi*, however, is not quite so clear. Much attention has been given to the fact that in the polyphonic sources connected with Florence most of the compositions have little or no text, and many of those that do have a text in a language other than Italian, have a garbled and unintelligible version. Based on the curious assumption that singers can only sing when text is present, these manuscripts are often cited as possibly the repertory intended for performance by the instrumentalists.²⁹ In a 1993 article I suggested that this theory had little basis in fact or logic, and that there was ample evidence that Italians liked to sing polyphonic music without the words.³⁰ At the time I cited as evidence several manuscripts with unusual texting practices that supported this assertion. Now, I would like to look again at one of those manuscripts to expand on this point. The manuscript in question is the bass

²⁷ See Francesco Flamini, *La lirica toscana del Rinascimento anteriore ai tempi del Magnifico*, Pisa 1891, repr. Florence 1977. On the technique of improvisation see my „Cantare all'improvviso: Improvising to poetry in late medieval Italy“, in: *Improvisation in the arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Timothy J. McGee, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003, 31–70 (=Early Drama, Art and Music Monograph Series 30).

²⁸ The increasing number of publications, beginning in 1507 with Francesco Spinacino, *Intabulatura de Lauto, Libro Primo*, can be seen in: Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600. A bibliography*, Cambridge 1965.

²⁹ This idea is implicit in Louise Litterick, „Performing Franco-Netherlandish secular music“, *Early Music* 8 (1980) 474–485, and still considered as a possibility in: Howard M. Brown, „The diversity of music in Laurentian Florence“, in: *Lorenzo de' Medici new perspectives*, ed. Bernard Toscani, New York etc. 1993, 179–201.

³⁰ Timothy J. McGee, „Singing without text“, *Performance Practice Review* 6 (1993) 1–32.

part-book in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, Banco Rari 337, the sole survivor of what must have been a set of four, and which contains approximately 100 secular compositions, only ten of them with text. The manuscript is one of the earliest surviving part books and there has always been some curiosity about its use. Recently discovered information concerning one of the texted compositions in that manuscript, Isaac's „Alla Battaglia“, suggests a possible answer to that question.³¹

The new information has allowed Blake Wilson to accurately redate the composition of „Alla Battaglia“ to carnival time in 1488.³² It was commissioned to be a part of a *trionfo*, a processional cart with costumed actors and *tableaux vivants*, financed by Lorenzo's son Piero.³³ Unfortunately, although the Medici had high expectations for the performance, the newly discovered documents tell us that „Alla Battaglia“ was very poorly received³⁴. The problem may have been the text, which was originally written to celebrate the installation of Niccolò Orsini as captain general of the Florentine army in July of 1485, and is full of the names of members of the army.³⁵ When presented at carnival two and a half years later, the text was no longer relevant and even in the attractive four-part setting by Isaac, the composition did not delight either the carnival audience or its noble patrons. In all likelihood it probably was never performed again with its text; it survives in only one other source where it is without text.³⁶ Given the probable single performance of the texted version of the composition, there is a very strong possibility that the surviving bass part-book is the actual copy used by the bass singer in the 1488 carnival performance.³⁷

If that is so, we can speculate further as to who was the singer on that occasion: Ser Niccolò di Lore, one of the cathedral choir members who often sang with Heinrich Isaac at that time.³⁸ On what would seem to have been a regular basis, Isaac met with other singers in what might be considered to be a prototype composer-performer workshop, where new works were tested.

³¹ F. W. Kent, „Heinrich Isaac's music“, op. cit. and Blake Wilson, „Heinrich Isaac among the Florentines“, *Journal of Musicology* 23 (2006) 97–152.

³² Blake Wilson, „Heinrich Isaac“, 101–105. This replaces the date of July, 1485 for the composition proposed in my „Alla Battaglia: music and ceremony in fifteenth-century Florence“, *JAMS* 34 (1983) 287–302.

³³ Wilson, „Heinrich Isaac“, 102.

³⁴ See Wilson, „Heinrich Isaac“, 104.

³⁵ For a discussion of the names see my „Alla Battaglia“. The probable reason for reviving this text two years later is that it exhorts Orsini and his army to conquer the fort at Sarzana, a task he finally accomplished in June of 1487.

³⁶ Florence Bibl. Naz. Panciatichi 27, fols. 9v–12r, which is the only source of all four parts.

³⁷ The part-book is usually given a date later than that suggested here, but there is internal evidence that the manuscript may have originated as early as ca. 1480 with compositions added over a period of years.

³⁸ In April of that year he moved with contralto Bartolomeo d'Arrigo de Castris da Fiandra to the Hungarian court of Mathias Corvinus. See Wilson „Heinrich Isaac.“ Also See D'Accone, „Lorenzo the Magnificent“, 259–290.

The other singers who usually sang with Isaac at that time were soprano, Ugo di Parisetto di Champagnia de Reams, and contralto Bartolomeo d'Arrigo de Castris da Fiandra.³⁹ Isaac would have sung the tenor.⁴⁰

It is not possible at this time to affirm these points, but no matter who sang from the part book, ninety percent of what he and the other three singers performed from this set of books was sung without words. The repertory and the texting practices of this part book are quite similar to what is found in the other Florentine manuscripts of the time, which lends additional support to the idea that all of the existing Florentine manuscripts of polyphonic music, with their mostly missing and garbled texts, reflect both the performance practice as well as the nature of the repertory for singers in Florence during this period. In addition, since the newly discovered information about the disappointing reception of Isaac's „Alla Battaglia“ suggests that the bass part-book itself may have been directly connected with a performer who regularly sang at Lorenzo's palace, it may well be an accurate testament to both the repertory and performance practice in that place. Although this helps us restore the chanson manuscripts to the singers, it leaves us once again without any repertory for the instrumentalists.

The repertory most often associated with the pifferi is dance music; the earliest record we have of specific music played by the Florentine pifferi names only dances.⁴¹ The information is contained in a lengthy poem written to commemorate the visit to Florence by the Duke of Milan (Francesco Sforza) and Pope Pius II (Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini) in 1459, during which a dance in their honour was held in the mercato nuovo. The anonymous terza rima includes a passage that begins by describing the setting for the dance. The scene, with its public outdoor location, dancers under a canopy, and raised platform for the performers, is quite similar to that depicted in the so-called „Adimari Wedding Cassone“, which dates from that decade.⁴² Most important for our purposes is the section that names the music that was performed:

The worthy youths, splendidly dressed
 who were agile and light as a bird,
 danced with the accompanying ladies.
 And after dancing the salterello for a long time
 they danced a variety of dances
 as [first] this one and [then] that one was requested.

³⁹ Wilson, „Heinrich Isaac“.

⁴⁰ There are indications that the designation „tenor“ signified the leader of the ensemble rather than merely the second part from the bottom. See my „Music, rhetoric, and the emperor's new clothes“, in: John Haines and Randall Rosenfeld, eds., *Music and medieval manuscripts; paleography and performance*, Aldershot 2004, 223.

⁴¹ To my knowledge, this is the only record of specific music played by this ensemble throughout its history.

⁴² On the date and accuracy of the „Adimari“ scene see my „Misleading iconography: the case of the „Adimari wedding cassone“, *Imago Musicae* 9–12 (1992–95) 105–120.

They danced „la chiarintana“⁴³ very ornately and they did both of the „arrosti“ dances⁴⁴ with „Laura“,⁴⁵ „Mummia“, and „Charbonata“, „Lionciel“, „bel riguardo“, and „La speranza“,⁴⁶ „L'angiola bella“, and „La danza del re“,⁴⁷ and many others that I omit to mention.⁴⁸

Several of these dances are known from the extant dancing manuals as tenors for choreographed dances, and a number of them are closely associated with the Sforza court. They must have been in wide circulation throughout northern Italy since they were known to the Florentine poet, the pifferi, and to the citizens who would have had to know the choreographed steps that were particular to each tenor.⁴⁹ The music itself existed as only a tenor line to which the pifferi were expected to improvise a treble and a harmonic alto

⁴³ Identified as a popular dance for „as many as will“, in the Siena copy of Guglielmo Ebreo/ Giovanni Ambrosio's dance treatise. See Barbara Sparti, *Guglielmo Ebreo of Pesaro, De Pratica Seu Arte Tripudii/ On the practice or art of dancing*, Oxford 1993, 49 and note 5.

⁴⁴ Probably two versions of the ballo „Rostiboli Gioioso“, attributed to dancing master Domenico da Piacenza. See discussion in Sparti, *Guglielmo Ebreo*, (transcription on 246–247); Frederick Crane, *Materials for the study of the fifteenth-century Basse Danse*, Oatwa etc. 1968, 97–101; and Daniel Hertz, „A 15th century Ballo: Rôti Bouilli Joyeux“, in: Jan La Rue, et al. eds., *Aspects of medieval and Renaissance music*, New York 1966, 359–75.

⁴⁵ There is a bassadanza „Lauro“, credited to Lorenzo de' Medici in two of the dance treatises. See Sparti, *Guglielmo Ebreo*, 36.

⁴⁶ Balli named „Leoncello“ and „Belriguardo“ are found in the dance mss of Guglielmo Ebreo/ Giovanni Ambrosio, credited to Domenico da Piacenza and associated with the Sforza court. There is also a ballo named „Spero“, which may be related to „La Speranza“.

⁴⁷ There is a bassadanza „Reale“ credited to Domenico da Piacenza. See Sparti, *Guglielmo Ebreo*, 126–127. The dance mentioned here is probably related to the dance found in French and Italian sources named variously „Castille la novele“, „La basse dance de Spayn“, „Il Re di Spagna“, and „La Spagna“. See Crane, *Materials* 72–75, and Manfred Bukofzer, *Studies in medieval and Renaissance music*, New York 1950, 190–216.

⁴⁸ I gharzoni mangni dengni et tanto ornati
ch'eran destri et leggier chom'uno ucciello
danzavan cholle dame acchonpangniati.
Et ballato gran pezza al salterello
ballaron poi a danza variata
chome desiderava questo et quello
Feron la chirintana molto ornata
et missero amendue gli arrosti indanza
chon laura chon mummia et charbonata
Lionciel bel riguardo et la speranza
l'angiola bella et la danza del re
et altre assai che nominar m'avanza.

From Florence, Bibl. Naz. Ms. Magl. VII, 1121, fol.69r. My translation follows that by Giovanni Carsaniga in Jennifer Nevile, *The eloquent body*, Bloomington 2004, 156.

⁴⁹ On the bassadanza and its steps see Crane, *Materials*; Sparti, *Guglielmo Ebreo*; and Nevile, *The eloquent body*.

line.⁵⁰ Iconographic evidence tells us that although there were usually four members of the ensemble, only three played at a time.⁵¹

The Florentine pifferi in 1459 consisted of three shawm players: Cornelio di Piero from Flanders, Giorgio d' Arrigo from Germany (Alamania), Giovanni di Benedetto from Constance; and the trombone (or slide trumpet)⁵² player, Giovanni di Giovanni, also from Alamania.⁵³ The policy of hiring only northerners had been put in place in 1443, and although exceptions were made from time to time for gifted Italian musicians, the pay records bear testimony that until the end of the Republic in 1532, many of the pifferi continued to be northerners.⁵⁴ Their function on this and all other dance occasions would be to provide improvised polyphonic settings for the dance tunes, both the well-known melodies that were the basis of balli and bassadanze, and the generic dances such saltarelli.

Dancing was an important part of every festive occasion in Florence as it was elsewhere in Europe. It was a major activity at all public and private celebrations, and we can obtain an idea of the extent of its importance in Lorenzo's life by noticing that at his wedding in 1469, the festivities, which went on for three days, included a banquet at each mealtime with dancing during and following each one.⁵⁵ For this special occasion dancing masters Giovanni Ambrosio and Filippus Bussus wrote to Lorenzo offering their services, and proposing to teach „elegant, beautiful and dignified balli and bassadanze“ to Lorenzo, his brother, and their three sisters.⁵⁶ The widespread custom of hiring dancing masters in Italian courts for special occasions can be seen in the autobiographical remarks of dancing master Giovanni Ambrosio found in two copies of his dance manual, where he names important courts and events for which he designed dances.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ A decade or so later the third part would have been a bass rather than alto. This is explained in Polk, *German instrumental music*, 169–177; Also see the discussion in my *Medieval and Renaissance music; A performer's guide*, Toronto 1985, 189–198.

⁵¹ See, for example, the musicians in the „Adimari wedding cassone“.

⁵² The instrument was variously described in the pay records at this time as „tromba torta“, „trombone tuba ritorte“, or simply „trombone“. There is no clear idea whether the instrument was a slide trumpet or what we would presently consider to be a trombone. See the discussion of the instrument in my „Misleading iconography“, 149–155.

⁵³ The 1459 payroll can be found in ASF: Camera del Comune Debitorei e Creditori No. 2 1459, fol. 133v. Statements about the performers cities of origin are found in ASF: Camera del Comune Debitorei e Creditori No. 1, for 1458, fol. 85v; Camera del Comune Uscita generale No. 7 1454–57, fol. 9r; Provv. Regis. No. 136, for 1445, fol. 52r. The trombone player Giovanni di Giovanni was the same person whose death created the vacancy in 1489, filled by Augustein Schubinger, reported above.

⁵⁴ See discussion in my „In the service of the commune: the changing role of Florentine civic musicians, 1450–1532“, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30 (1999) 727–43.

⁵⁵ See D. Bonamici, *Delle nozze di Lorenzo de' Medici con Clarice Orsini nel 1469*, Firenze 1870.

⁵⁶ See my „Dancing masters and the Medici Court“, *Studi musicali* 17 (1988) 203–206.

⁵⁷ Reproduced in Sparti, *Guglielmo Ebreo*, Appendix III.

Lorenzo's interest in dancing continued throughout his life and even took the form of choreographic composition; in two of Ambrosio's dance manuals from later in the century there are two bassadanze ascribed to Lorenzo.⁵⁸ Various letters and diaries of the period often mention that following a banquet, dancing would continue on into the small hours of the morning. We can assume, therefore, that a major part of all festivities at the Medici palace would have been dancing, and the obvious group to provide music for this activity would have been the members of the pifferi. Given the quantity of time taken up by dancing on all such occasions, it is probable that the vast majority of music played by the pifferi on these social occasions was dance music, the kind of repertory they had been playing since the beginning of the century.

Other than the few sources of dance tenor lines, there is no other extant repertory specifically known to have been played by the Florentine pifferi. This should not come as a surprise since their tradition was one of improvisation, and in fact the anecdotal evidence suggests that improvisation was the most important of their abilities. When various talent scouts wrote to Lorenzo to recommend particular pifferi they often stated his ability to hold down a particular part: a soprano line, or a contra. In 1478 Leonardus piffarus wrote to Lorenzo from Mantua recommending himself as a master of the soprano line.⁵⁹ Giovanni Cellini was replaced in the Florentine ensemble in 1491 by Adamo d'Adamo who was recorded as a soprano line specialist. And in 1469 a particularly versatile piffero in Siena was recommended to Lorenzo as capable of playing tenor, contra tenor, soprano or trombone.⁶⁰ For the most part, therefore, these musicians were specialists who developed an ability to add a particular line in improvised polyphony, and there is evidence that this continued to be the case well into the sixteenth century.

We know of course, that by the last third of the fifteenth century the members of the pifferi could read music, and there is no doubt that they also could have performed from the kinds of manuscripts that contain the vocal repertory. In the late fifteenth century in some locations the pifferi were directed to play motets for the public in the evenings,⁶¹ and it is probable that they read from vocal scores on these occasions since no other sources have been found. Given their celebrated ability to improvise, the pifferi would have been quite capable of reading the individual lines of a polyphonic vocal composition and extemporizing the florid passage-work such as that found in sixteenth-century sources that were expressly written for instrumental performance. But these later written-out instrumental compositions were intended for amateurs who

⁵⁸ „Venus in tre composta per Lorenzo di Piero di Cosimo de Medici“, and „Lauro in due composta per Lorenzo di Piero di Cosimo de Medici“. See discussion in my „Dancing masters“, 212.

⁵⁹ „Bon maestro di sonare il soprano“. ASF: MAP XXXV #104. Quoted in: Becherini, „Relazione“, 105.

⁶⁰ „Contro o per tenore o per sovrano o chol trombone, chom' altri volessi“. ASF: MAP XX, #397. Quoted in: D'Accone, „Lorenzo il Magnifico“, 235–236.

⁶¹ Early performances of written polyphony by northern pifferi is discussed in: Polk, *German instrumental music*, 120–123.

could not be expected to be able to create these elaborations extemporaneously. The pifferi who played in the courts of the nobles, however, were professionals with a century-old tradition of improvisation and elaboration, and therefore not in need of special manuscripts with written-out elaborations; they could do quite well with whatever vocal music was at hand.

If we look again at the instruments on Lorenzo's inventory list we will see an emphasis on keyboard instruments, but not on the single-line instruments that would be played by pifferi; in fact, the set of five *zufoli* in Lorenzo's household is expressly marked as for the use of the pifferi, not for the members of the noble household. Apparently, it was not yet popular for high-born people to play single-line instruments, meaning that there was a very small tradition of amateurs instrumentally performing written polyphonic music on single-line instruments. Consequently, there was no call for written repertory for instruments usually played by professionals whose entire reputation was to be able to elaborate *all'improvviso*. The amateurs apparently played on the chording instruments, keyboards and lutes, by reducing the parts in the fashion we find in the slowly growing number of manuscripts and prints intended for amateur keyboard and lute players.⁶²

For the pifferi, when employed by Lorenzo de' Medici to entertain at his palace, the most likely repertory would have been balli, *bassadanze*, and other dances played from memory as polyphonic elaborations of a single line. On occasion they might also have played from the vocal manuscripts of the day, elaborating the lines extemporaneously. But it is my impression that we look in vain for polyphonic sources specifically destined for performance by the pifferi before 1500. The professionals had no need of such help, and the amateur market for this kind of material had not yet developed.

Applying this conclusion to the wider spectrum of Italian repertory, it may explain the curious lack of text in Ottavio Petrucci's first three publications of secular music: *Odhecaton A*, *Canti B*, and *Canti C*. These three collections consist of a total of nearly three hundred compositions, only seven of which have a complete text in at least one voice.⁶³ Often these publications are discussed as possibly intended for instrumental performance, which may be true to some extent. But assuming that a merchant would desire the largest possible sale of his product, we might wonder why Petrucci, when publishing a repertory that is clearly vocal music, would limit his market to the com-

⁶² For a discussion of Bianca de' Medici playing on keyboard some of the *chanson* repertory, see William F. Prizer, „Gamaes of Venus: secular vocal music in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento“, *Journal of Musicology* 9 (1991) 3.

⁶³ The texted pieces are: *Odhecaton*: De Orto „Ave Maria“, fol. 3v–4r (text in all four voices); *Compère* „Male bouche/ Circumdedederunt me“, fol. 51v–52r (text in contra); *Compère* „Le corps/ Corpus que meum“, fol. 72v–73r (text in contra). *Canti B*: *Compère*, „Virgo celesti“, fol. 2v–3r, (text in superius and tenor). *Canti C*: Japart, „Vray dieu/ Sanctem Johanes/ Ora pro nobis“, fol. 95v–96r, (texts in contra 1 and contra 2); [anon] „Alma redemptoris mater/ Ave Regina celorum“, fol. 133v–135r, (texts in superius and bassus); Agricola, „Belle sur toutes/ Tota pulcra es“, 160v–161r, (text in contra). I am indebted to Maureen Epp for help with this information.

paratively small amateur instrumental audience while ignoring the far larger audience of singers. It could not have been the technical problem of printing words on a page with music; each of the three books has at least one piece for which a complete text is underlaid in at least one part. If, however, the Italian convention of the time was to sing without text, he could merely have been saving money by not going through the expensive process of including texts when they would only have been ignored in performance.⁶⁴ If this was his motive for omitting the texts, the intended audience for his publications would have been the entire music-making public: the large market of singers, both amateur and professional, as well as the small but growing number of amateurs who played single-line instruments. When we finally encounter publications for single-line instruments beginning in the second decade of the sixteenth century, it is evidence of the growth of amateur instrumental performance to the point that it was recognized by the publishers as a viable commercial market.

There are numerous late fifteenth-century sources of Italian provenance, in addition to the Petrucci prints and the anthology manuscripts from Florence, that have minimal or no texts, perhaps the most prominent of which is the chansonnier Casanatense 2856.⁶⁵ The Casanatense manuscript, originating in Ferrara during the 1480s or 1490s,⁶⁶ has been identified by Lewis Lockwood as the item specified in an inventory from the Este Court in 1495 as „Cantiones ala pifarescha“, which he claims is evidence that the manuscript was intended for performance by the Este court pifferi.⁶⁷ Without completely dismissing that possibility, in the light of the preceding discussion I would question his conclusions on three accounts: first, given the number of textless manuscripts intended for vocal performance, the designation „cantiones ala pifarescha“ would not accurately identify this manuscript for anyone wishing to single it out from other textless manuscripts. Second, a manuscript intended for the pifferi would more likely be a manuscript of dance tenors, although in fact, the inventory lists another manuscript as „Tenori todeschi et altre cantiones“. Third, the phrase „ala pifarescha“, more likely means „in the style of the pifferi“, rather than for them. In Lorenzo's instrument inventory the *zufoli* intended for the pifferi are designated „a uso di pifferi“. One would expect that a manuscript intended for instrumental use would more likely be listed with that phrase or „per i pifferi“, or some similar phrase that indicates that it was intended for performance by the pifferi, not just writ-

⁶⁴ The texts that are underlaid are all Latin and sacred, most of which have the incipit for a secular text in the other parts. The reason for supplying these texts may be an indication of yet another poorly understood Italian practice that involves singing only the sacred text in such situations. The practice and its performance implications need further study.

⁶⁵ For a facsimile edition see Lewis Lockwood, ed., *A Ferrarese chansonnier, Roma, Biblioteca Casanatense 2856*, „*Canzoniere di Isabella d'Este*“, Lucca 2002.

⁶⁶ The 1480 date of the manuscript proposed by Lockwood, *A Ferrarese chansonnier*, has recently been questioned in: Joshua Rifkin, „Munich, Milan, and a Marian motet: Dating Josquin's Ave Maria [...] virgo serena“, *JAMS* 56 (2003) 314–323.

⁶⁷ Lockwood, *A Ferrarese chansonnier*, XIII–XIV.

ten in their „style“. If the phrase does not indicate a manuscript of tenors, „Cantiones ala pifarescha“ would more logically refer to some trait that was unique to pifferi performance, such as elaborately embellished lines of the type usually heard in instrumental performance, or some other aspect of performance particular to the pifferi, none of which are immediately evident in the Casanatense manuscript.

My point is that in the late fifteenth century, when instrumental performance of the vocal repertory was in its infancy, there was a difference between intention and result in terms of the written sources. The specific intention of the compilers of the numerous manuscripts of polyphonic chansons was the substantial number of singers who, in Italy, enjoyed singing without text. At the same time the compilers would have been well aware that instrumentalists, especially the professionals, would sometimes use these same sources as the raw material for instrumental elaborations. There would have been no conflict with this usage; the vocal lines were a suitable basis for the kinds of instrumental elaboration that the pifferi traditionally applied to all of the repertory. The polyphonic chanson sources at the end of the 15th century, both the manuscripts and the new printed sources, therefore, would have been utilized by both the vocalists and the instrumentalists, although they were written specifically for singers. The vocal lines would not have provided enough information for most of the amateurs to be able to treat in the traditional instrumental manner, however, but as that sector of the market grew in size, its needs were finally satisfied by publications that included realized embellishment in the style that the professionals were capable of extemporizing. But at the end of the fifteenth century, that market had yet to develop.

It would seem that the change in the instrumental practices at the end of the fifteenth century was the increasing popularity of instrumental embellishments of the polyphonic vocal repertory. Initiated by professionals, it caught on with the amateurs and led inevitably to the publication of editions aimed specifically for that market. In the last decades of the century, however, the written sources were intended primarily for singers. Instrumentalists could use them, but they had to improvise.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ A version of this paper was read at the symposium „Musikinstrumente und instrumentale Praxis um 1500“, at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, in December 2005. I am grateful to Allan Atlas, Maureen Epp, David Fallows, Keith Polk, and Blake Wilson for suggestions and remarks.

