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Vocal Music at Literary Banquets in the Italian Renaissance

James Hankins

It is well known that the defining aspiration of humanist culture in the Italian Renaissance was the revival and imitation of classical antiquity, but the scope of this activity is less widely appreciated. Every Renaissance scholar knows that humanists since the later thirteenth century had devoted themselves to reviving classical literary genres, Latin eloquence, and moral philosophy; and humanist advocacy of the antique in the Quattrocento is recognized to have driven the development of major art forms such as sculpture, architecture, painting and even music.¹ But the humanist ambition to revive classical civilization went much further than that. Thus we find classical revivals, or attempted revivals, in a wide range of minor arts including calligraphy, numismatics, hardstone carving, textile design and the decorative arts, and humanists also looked to antiquity for inspiration in politics, diplomacy and warfare. So it is not surprising that a number of humanists also sought to revive ancient forms of sociability such as the philosophical debates depicted in Cicero's and Plato's dialogues, or rituals like ceremonial oratory at weddings, funerals, and state occasions.²

An example of such a revival that so far has drawn little comment in the modern literature on humanism is the revival of the literary banquet, a banquet held for the entertainment of learned men.³ Such banquets were an occasion for

1 Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*, Leiden, etc.: Brill 2003. For the humanist revival of antiquity in music see James Hankins, "Humanism and Music in Italy", in: *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, eds. Anna Maria Busse-Berger and Jesse Rodin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, 231–262.

2 For the customs and literature associated with Renaissance funeral and wedding orations, see, respectively, John M. McManamon, *Funeral Oratory and the Cultural Ideals of Italian Humanism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1989, and Anthony F. D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2004.

3 The most detailed treatment is Klára Pajorin, "La rinascita del simposio antico e la corte di Mattia Corvino", in: *Italia e Ungheria all'epoca dell'umanesimo corviniano*, eds. Sante Graziotti and Cesare Vasoli, Florence: Olschki 1994, 179–228. There are also useful remarks in Anthony M. Cummings, "Music and feasts in the fifteenth century", in: *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, 361–373; and Daniela Gionta, *Per i Convivia mediolanensia di Francesco Filelfo*, Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici 2005, 18–19.

the display of wit and recondite learning on a wide array of topics, ranging from etymologies and the interpretation of poetry to famous jests, sports, healthy eating, the effects of wine, and curious questions of natural philosophy. They often but not always contained musical performances of lyric poetry, hence their relevance to the subject of this special issue. The literary banquet is both a social practice and a literary genre, and should be distinguished from courtly or private banquets in general, which had their own protocols (and musical practices). They can also be distinguished from philosophical banquets, of which the most famous ancient examples were Plato's and Xenophon's symposial dialogues. Care is needed in defining genres, however, and in particular the line between philosophical and learned banquets was not always easy to draw. Learned banquets, for instance, frequently touched on philosophical issues, while philosophical banquets, even Plato's *Symposium*, substituted speeches from the several diners for the usual Socratic cross-examination, in deference to the conventions of convivial dialogues.

For the early Renaissance the great Greek model of the learned banquet was Plutarch's *Quaestiones convivales*.⁴ The principal Latin model was Macrobius' *Saturnalia*. Pseudo-Plutarch's *De musica*, another sympotic dialogue, in this case among experts in music, inspired Western humanists from the mid-Quattrocento onwards. Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights* preserved conversational materials from many learned banquets and even described one in chapter 9 of book 19, a birthday dinner that included musical entertainment in the form of songs sung to the lyre by young boys and girls. Plutarch tells us that while wine, food, couches and tables were necessary to the dinner party, diversions such as music, spectacles and buffoons were non-essentials added for the sake of pleasure. "With these latter, if they are present, the guests are pleased, but if they are absent, the guests do not very much desire them or criticize the party as being deficient".⁵ Rein-

4 Plutarch's *Quaestiones convivales* comprise Books VIII and IX of the *Moralia*. The other important example of the ancient sympotic dialogues, Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, was less influential in the Quattrocento and High Renaissance. A manuscript of the text was brought from Greece as early as the 1420s by Giovanni Aurispa and the text was printed by Aldus in 1514. But the work was not studied in any detail before the time of Isaac Casaubon, apart from several citations by Poliziano in his *Miscellanea*. Aldus' preface to the work illustrates how, typically, humanist interest in the text focused on the unknown source materials in Athenaeus, not on sympotic customs; see Aldus Manutius, *The Greek Classics*, ed. Nigel G. Wilson, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (I Tatti Renaissance Library 70), 262–269. Athenaeus is not mentioned by Janus Cornarius, whose *De conviviis*, published by Johannes Oporinus in Basel 1548, effectively summed up mid-Cinquecento knowledge of both the social practice and the literary genre.

5 Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, book 2, preface, 629C (Loeb translation). For the ancient symposial literature see Josef Martin, *Symposion: Die Geschichte einer literarischen Form*, Paderborn: Schöningh 1931; Jacques Flamant, "La technique du banquet dans le *Saturnales* de

forcing the belief that music was a luxurious addition to banqueting was a verse of Ecclesiasticus (32:5), “A concert of musick in a banquet of wine is a signet of carbuncle set in gold”. This attitude to musical pleasure was characteristic of learned banquets as of other kinds. The sources for both philosophical banquets and learned banquets urged that sympotic discussions should be animated by moral purpose, and praised the fruitfulness of mixing pleasure and instruction; these were the sort of hymns to virtue and *voluptas* that Quattrocento humanists loved to sing, taking all the repeats.⁶

The humanist revival of the learned banquet was essentially begun by Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), one of the great Hellenists of the fifteenth century, whose *Convivia Mediolanensia* in two books were composed around 1442/44.⁷ Written shortly after his arrival in Milan, the *Convivia* depicted in idealized form the activities of Filelfo’s own circle of learned friends, which included lawyers, doctors and government officials.⁸ Such men were the educated urban professionals who supported the humanist movement and formed its backbone. The *Convivia* are said to have been held at the houses of three of these men (although the third book, describing a third banquet, was apparently never written). As the new court poet of the Visconti dukes and a scholar of peninsular

Macrobe”, in: *Revue des études latines* 46 (1968), 303–319; *Poesia e simposio nella Grecia antica: Guida storica e critica*, ed. Massimo Vetta, Rome and Bari: Laterza 1983. Plato’s Socrates (*Protagoras* 347c–8a), by contrast, insists that educated men have no need of flute-girls or the like at their symposia, since they can entertain themselves with conversation.

⁶ Hermogenes of Tarsus, *De arte rhetorica*, cited by Martin, *Symposion* (see n. 5), 18, regards it as a genre requirement of the symposium to promote virtue; much of this text was known to the fifteenth century via George Trebizond’s *Rhetoricorum libri V* (1433/34, ed. princ. 1471). Martin also discusses Lucian’s send-up of the philosophical banquet in his *Symposium* or *Feast of the Lapiths*, which includes musical entertainment (§ 17) in the form of chanting (*errapsodei*) of odes by Pindar, Hesiod and Anacreon; a physician guest himself plays the pipes and the diner Histiaeus delivers an epithalamium (whether sung or chanted is not clear).

⁷ Gionta, *Per i Convivia mediolanensia* (see n. 3), 12. On the novelty of the genre in the Renaissance see Giovan Francesco Marliani’s letter to Filelfo (1477) from Pavia, printed with the *editio princeps* (ca. 1483/84) of the work; he describes the *Convivia* as a “novum quoddam [...] et inusitatum dicendi genus” (ibid., 96). Filelfo’s own account of his revival of the genre is given at the opening of Book I, where he remarks that the genre, combining *gravitas* and *suavitas*, was more cultivated among the Greeks than the Latins; he states that it is part of his mission as a Latin who knows Greek to bring the benefits of this predominantly Greek genre to the Latin world. In what follows I shall cite from the following edition: *Conviviorum Francisci Philelphi libri II*, Cologne: Ioannes Gymnicus 1537.

⁸ See Rudolf Georg Adam, *Francesco Filelfo at the Court of Milan (1439–1481): A Contribution to the Study of Humanism in Northern Italy*, PhD dissertation, University of Oxford 1974, 18, 87. If the claim of the *Convivia* is true – that the Milanese literati had started having literary *convivia* long before the banquets described therein – then Filelfo would merely have been giving literary form to an existing custom in Milan.

reputation, Filelfo became the leader of this group, taking over the position formerly held by Antonio Panormita, the previous court poet, who had moved to the court of Alfonso of Aragon in 1434. Filelfo's purpose in writing the *Convivia*, apart from showcasing his own command of Greek literature (something Panormita had lacked), was presumably to celebrate the flourishing of humanist culture in Milan under the patronage of Duke Filippo Maria Visconti. He also hoped to make converts to humanistic culture.⁹ Incidentally, he gave a striking demonstration of the riches that the literary treasures of the Hellenes could contribute to the world of Latinate culture, especially its medical, musical and philosophical knowledge. There was no better way to do this than to dramatize learned men (most of whom we may assume Filelfo was ventriloquating with his own learning) exchanging recondite information drawn from their putative study of Greek authors.¹⁰

One of the characteristic claims of the humanist movement was that the study of ancient literature, history and philosophy was a stimulus to virtue and wisdom, a stimulus made even more effective by the pleasures associated with the acquisition of humanist learning. Pleasure was the bait and virtue the hook. The pleasures of an ancient literature written in classical languages may be difficult to imagine for modern readers, used as we are to an endless variety of entertainment, but if one considers what other writings contemporaries had available to occupy their minds in the early Quattrocento – medical and legal treatises, technical philosophy and theology, works of popular piety – one begins to un-

9 See again Marliani's prefatory letter to Filelfo (Gionta, *Per i Convivia mediolanensia* [see n. 3], 95–96), in which he says that he has often been tempted, at Filelfo's urging, to turn from teaching the civil law to the *humanitatis studia* and that the *Convivia* have only sharpened the temptation, given the dazzling display of erudition Filelfo gives in all the orators, poets, philosophers, and historians, both Greek and Latin.

10 This was a point underlined in another prefatory letter from the famous Venetian humanist and writer of *strambotti* Leonardo Giustinian, found in many manuscripts and included in all the printed editions. Giustinian praised Filelfo for "imitating the greatest philosophers who wrote in Greek on symposia" (presumably Plato and Xenophon), and adds: "You have done that which I think writers should do first, and not without good taste: you have put into circulation something that isn't conventional and commonplace but new and not talked of everywhere ("Fecisti vero id quod primum scriptoribus non insulse faciendum arbitror: ut non rata scilicet aut vulgaria, sed novum aliquid et non iactatum passim in medium proferant"). He goes on to say that what Filelfo discusses in the *convivia* are old things, but they should be reckoned as new in human memory since they were almost forgotten. "Greece owes you thanks for having brought out into the light through your zeal and effort several brilliant discoveries that had been buried in antiquity, and Latium too, enriched by this gift, will augment your praises" ("Gratias igitur tibi habeat Graecia cuius aliquot praeclara inventa uetustate sepulta in lucem tuo labore et studio sunt educta, et Latium quoque hoc locupletatum munere tuas laudes augebit"). See *Conviviorum libri II* (see n. 7), a5r–v.

derstand the appeal of humanism. Vergil and Homer were surely more engaging than the latest medical treatise on the analysis of urine. The pleasures afforded by humanist culture were underlined by the genre of the sympotic dialogue, which showed learned men eating and drinking well and being entertained by speeches, poetry and singing. Horace's instruction in the *Ars poetica* (343) to mix the *utile* with the *dulcis* is given dramatic form; as Leonardo Giustinian writes in his prefatory letter to the work, Filelfo is providing an example of *honesta voluptas*, honourable pleasure.

In both books of Filelfo's dialogue the reader is treated to literary evocations of musical performances. These Filelfo presents as appropriate to the *convivii rationem*: they befit the correct practice of the classical dinner party. After an extended discussion of medical matters, a break is indicated in the discussion and one of the interlocutors, Giovanni Antonio Rembaldi of Brescia, a ducal secretary and a personal attendant of the duke, brings in two of his boys (not his sons, since the boys are from Liguria), who perform to the lyre and psaltery eight stanzas of poetry in alternating Sapphics and hexameters, "plucking and strumming to the melody". The poem is a celebration of the mental health offered by banqueting, to which is appended a panegyric of Filippo Maria, both presumably composed by Filelfo. The performance is praised by the company for the originality of its melody and the wondrous metre (or possibly rhythm: *miro numero*), and the quality of the boys' voices. This then gives rise to a learned and slightly farcical discussion of why boys from Liguria sing well and the etymology of the name Liguria, followed by praise of music and a long discussion of its origins and effects. We will return to this discussion shortly.

The second book of the *Convivia* also begins its banquet with musical performances of poetry, this time accompanied by wind instruments, *tubicines ac tibicines*, presumably cornettos and flutes, played in alternation.¹¹ These instruments are said to be more appropriate to the dignified subject matter of the poems, consisting of praise of the gentlemen attending the symposium and their prince, Filippo Maria. The poems are performed in two sets, the first as the diners are being invited to table, the second after they have taken their seats. The first tranche of poetry, consisting of some 40 lines, is written in elegiac couplets and hexameters, while the second poem contains 43 asclepiads on the subject of moderation and the hypocrisies of those who counsel extreme poverty. The singers of the two poems are not identified, unlike those in the first book.

11 *Conviviorum libri II* (see n. 7), e8r-v: "Nam si minus nobis aut psalterium aut lyra futura est, aderant tamen qui et tubis et tibiis, et ita certe utantur ut in sono ipso per omnem convenientiae musicae dignitatem eos suavissime etiam cecinisse sis dictum. [...] Sed inter haec caenaculi praefectus, cum monuisset iam dudum esse discumbendi tempus, tubicinesque ac tibicines continuo in haec uerba per alternas sonorum uices exorsi sunt".

As Ludovico Vives already recognized in his *praelectio* to the 1537 edition, Filelfo's work was primarily modelled on Macrobius' *Saturnalia*.¹² Yet it does not track the Macrobian model in every detail, and one departure from form, a departure which was to become influential in later humanist banquets, was the performances of young men singing to the *lyra* as a pretext for learned debates. This detail, I suggest, is most likely to have come from Xenophon's *Symposium* (2.1–2), a text Filelfo knew well, though (no doubt in view of its homosexual content) neither he nor any other humanist dared translate it until well into the sixteenth century.¹³ Placing the musical performances after the introduction to the dialogue but before the dialogue proper departed from the medieval tradition of *intermezzi* separating parts of the dialogue.¹⁴ Aside from the example of Xenophon, Filelfo may well have been motivated to include musical performances in his learned dialogue in deference to the taste of the dedicatee of the dialogue, Tommaso Tebaldi. Tebaldi was a humanist from Bologna who became a powerful and trusted agent of Filippo Maria; he was also known as a performer on the *lyra* (in this case probably a lute).¹⁵ In any event, Filelfo's formal innovation survived the immediate context, as we shall see.

Tebaldi's known interests may also have been in part responsible for a second feature of the *Convivia* not found in Macrobius. This was the long discussion of the origin and development of musical forms and instruments in ancient Greece that occupies the last third of Book I. That discussion is taken more or less whole cloth from pseudo-Plutarch's *De musica*, a text preserved in the fourteenth book of the *Moralia*. In form this work too is a literary re-creation of a dialogue among musical experts held at a banquet; Filelfo simply substituted the names of his friends for the Greek interlocutors of pseudo-Plutarch. That the passage was digested and in part translated from a Greek source, Filelfo does not reveal to his Latin readers. At the end, tellingly, Filelfo substituted a praise of virtue for the Greek author's praise of the gods. This ancient text is perhaps our most important surviving source for the history of early Greek music, and con-

12 Ibid., b7r: "Eum autorem [Macrobius] (arbitror) Philelphum in primis imitatum, ut variam suam eruditionem indicaret posteritati".

13 The first translation, heavily bowdlerized, was by Janus Cornarius in 1548; see David Marsh, "Xenophon", in: *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, vol. 7, eds. Virginia Brown et al., Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press 1992, 75–196: 189–190. On the popularity of Filelfo's translations of Xenophon see *ibid.*, 80–81, 87–91, and Francesco Filelfo, *Traduzioni da Senofonte e Plutarco: Respublica Lacedaemoniorum, Agesilaus, Lycurgus, Numa, Cyri Paedia*, ed. Jeroen De Keyser, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso 2012, XV–XXI.

14 Cummings, "Music and feasts" (see n. 3), 362–364.

15 Gionta, *Per i Convivia mediolanensia* (see n. 3), 27 (with further literature cited there); Cummings, "Music and feasts" (see n. 3), 369.

tains an account of both the technical and ethical development of music. The author is unknown but modern scholars believe him to be pro-Spartan, an affinity he shared with Filelfo himself.¹⁶ Filelfo's translation thus made the text, with its reports of Greek philosophical debates about the morality of music, available to the Latin world a half century before the work was digested by Giorgio Valla (1491–1501) and translated into Latin by Carlo Valgulio (1507).¹⁷

By suppressing the provenance and authorship of these parts of his dialogue, Filelfo made pseudo-Plutarch's strong prejudice his own, descending ultimately from Plato's *Republic*, against immoral music. Plutarch's history of Greek music is the story of the moral corruption of an art. Originally music was purely religious: citing Homer, pseudo-Plutarch/Filelfo says an articulate voice was given to mankind for singing the praises of the God. The gods invented the art of music. Later, the use of musical instruments was discovered. Music in the good old heroic days, the *prisca musica*, was written in Dorian mode, the mode of virtue, and inspired youth in war and athletic contests. It had nobility, simplicity, and decorum. Later a morally inferior music

which was soft and wanton was introduced, a music which, as Plato teaches in the third book of the *Republic*, was to be condemned and dismissed. Along with many other things of which he disapproved, Plato utterly rejected the Lydian harmonic mode, shrill and suited to wailing and lamentation. [...] The harmonic mode called Mixolydian is fitted to tragedy and compassion. [...] Sappho is said by Aristoxenus to have first invented the Mixolydian, from whom the tragedians got it. They joined the Mixolydian to the Dorian, for Dorian tunes represented by their modulations the breadth and greatness of a noble soul, while the Lydian songs showed the great power and force of the emotions. [...] Plato allowed and approved the Dorian since it taught men to be brave and extremely temperate.¹⁸

¹⁶ For pseudo-Plutarch's pro-Spartan sympathies, see the introduction to Plutarch, *De la musique: texte, traduction, commentaire*, ed. François Lasserre, Olten: Urs Graf 1954; for Filelfo's Laconism, see James Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2019, 351–363.

¹⁷ Claude V. Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1985, 88–110; Hankins, "Music and Humanism" (see n. 1), 242, 246.

¹⁸ *Conviviorum libri II* (see n. 7), 50: "Nam quae postea mollis et petulans introducta est, quam sit contemnenda nihilque faciunda in tertio de republica docet Plato, qui cum alia pleraque non probat, tum Lydii harmoniam plurimum reprobat, quae et acuta sit et ad lamentationem accommodata. [...] Harmonia vero quae dicitur mixolydius et commiserationis est et tragoediae congruens. [...] Sed Sappho [...] narratur ab Aristoxeno inuenisse prima mixolydium harmoniam, ab qua tragoediarum poetae doctrinam acceperunt. Ii enim mixolydium doria coniungere, nam doros representant modulationibus suis celsi animi convenientem magnitudinem atque amplitudinem, Lydii uero quanta sit uis et impetus perturbationum facile

The corrupt music of more recent times with its chromatics was sensual and effeminate, thus appropriate for the theatre. In order to further discredit the lascivious Mixolydian mode, Filelfo interpolates a brief discussion of its inventor Sappho – a discussion not in his Plutarchan source – including the scandalous report that “she had three friends, Atthis, Thelesippa and Megara, whose loves she exploited otherwise than wifely decency and shame would allow”.¹⁹

In Filelfo’s telling, however, the sorry state of modern music also becomes an opportunity for reform. A renaissance was possible that could reinforce the larger aim of the humanist movement, the revival of ancient virtue. Good music can not only help heal the body, it also has great potential to strengthen the character of youth, distracting them from sex and violence while increasing their warlike virtue. By so doing music could strengthen the commonwealth, given the potential of great musicians to promote virtue in rulers. Filelfo found this theme not only in Plutarch but in a text he called the *De regno* by the Cynic philosopher Dio Chrysostom, an author he much admired.²⁰ This work began with the well-known story of the flautist Timotheus and how his performance galvanized Alexander the Great into action. The power of music to stimulate virtue is then compared to that of the orator. Filelfo did not discuss the *De regno* in the *Convivia* but cited the Timotheus anecdote in his *De exilio* and elsewhere.²¹ Filelfo’s

demonstrant”. Ibid., 52: “Doricam autem [Plato] idcirco admisit ac probavit, quoniam viros fortes temperatissimosque doceret”.

¹⁹ Filelfo seems to have drawn details of Sappho’s mini-biography (ibid., 50–51) from the *Suda* Σ 107 (iv 322s Adler) and 108 (iv 323 Adler). He distinguishes her from Sappho of Mitylene, whom he knows from Ovid’s *Heroides*. Then, in another of his reflexive slaps at Poggio Bracciolini, he compares her to Poggio’s wife Vaggia Buondelmonte, “who used to be hot for girls” (Filelfo omits to note that she also bore Poggio six children); the interlocutor Ferusinus finds it satisfactory to know that Vaggia was not unexampled among women but that Sappho of Eretria also “had polluted herself with obscene affairs with three girls, a thing I wonder that Juvenal did not take notice of”.

²⁰ The text is now included in Dio’s *Discourses* as *The First Discourse on Kingship*. A text and translation is available in the Loeb Library. For Filelfo’s admiration of Dio see Gionta, *Per i Convivia mediolanensia* (see n. 3), 61. For Quattrocento translations of Dio and the use of Dio by Filelfo’s student, Francesco Patrizi of Siena in his political writings, see Hankins, *Virtue Politics* (see n. 16), 370, 392, 394–395.

²¹ Francesco Filelfo, *On Exile*, ed. Jeroen De Keyser, trans. W. Scott Blanchard, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2013 (I Tatti Renaissance Library 55), 226–229 (Book II, § 66). The example was evidently a favourite and was also cited twice in Filelfo’s letters (Book XVI, Letter 19 and Book XXXIII, Letter 6); see Francesco Filelfo, *Collected Letters: Epistolarum Libri XLVIII*, ed. Jeroen De Keyser, 4 vols., Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso 2015, II, 796–800, and III, 1415–1417.

former pupil Gregorio Tifernate later translated the text, dedicating it to Pope Nicholas V.²²

The idea that music could be an instrument of character building and even political order was of course not confined to Filelfo's works; it was a general assumption of Quattrocento humanists.²³ That alone was reason enough to include music in later humanist dinner parties. However, both of the two other known literary representations of learned banquets from the 1440s fail to track closely the model of Filelfo's *Convivia*, at least with respect to their musical aspects. Both were held in Venice, and it is not clear whether the author of either one was familiar with Filelfo's work. One of the banquets had no music at all: Filippo Morandi da Rimini's *Symposium de paupertate* (1449/50). The omission was probably a matter of decorum, for Morandi's was a small-scale dinner party among three learned friends, all merely of the citizen class and not nobles. Furthermore, the subject matter of the dinner party's discussions was the value of poverty; a musical entertainment would thus have been unsuitable amidst the banqueters' praises of honourable frugality.²⁴

The opposite was the case with the second known literary banquet of the 1440s, which was represented as a large and luxurious entertainment with multiple musical performances. This was the banquet depicted in Gianozzo Manetti's *Dialogus in symposio*, set in October 1448 and probably also written soon after that date. The text of the work was first published in 2014, and the edition included an analysis of the musical performances therein.²⁵ There is no need to repeat that analysis in detail here. It is worth pointing out, however, that from the point of view of the tradition discussed in this article, the sympotic dialogue presented by Manetti does not follow closely the genre requirements of ancient learned symposia. There are twelve *convivi*, not the canonical three to nine, and

22 There were two editions of the translation in the incunabular period, the *ed. princ.* of Venice 1471 and Bologna 1493 (source: *Incunabula Short-Title Catalogue*, British Library).

23 Hankins, "Music and Humanism" (see n. 1), 238–241.

24 On Morandi see Margaret L. King, "A Study in Venetian Humanism at Mid-Quattrocento: Filippo da Rimini and his *Symposium de paupertate*" in: *Studi veneziani* n.s. 2 (1978), 75–96; 3 (1979), 141–186 (with an edition of the text), 4 (1980), 27–44; Guido Arbizzoni, "Morandi, Filippo", in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 76, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana 2012, online at [www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filippo-morandi_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filippo-morandi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (11 July 2020).

25 Gabriella Albanese and Bruno Figliuolo, *Gianozzo Manetti a Venezia, 1448–1450*, Venice: Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti 2014 (Memorie 140), with an edition of the text on 329–405. The musical aspects of the work are described on 118–126. The literary work was apparently based on a real-life banquet given by Manetti; see esp. *ibid.* 56, which discusses descriptions in a contemporary diary kept by Manetti's secretary, Griselli Griso di Giovanni, which describes singing, dancing and musical performances along with learned discussions at Manetti's palace in Venice.

that is not counting the servants and musicians who appear intermittently. Unlike in ancient learned symposia, none of the learned diners is a doctor, nor is there any interlocutor corresponding to the stock figure of the Cynic philosopher who denounces the luxury of the times. Instead of the usual indirect report of the symposial doings, we have instead a direct account offered to the dedicatee of the work, Donato Acciaiuoli, by the author, who is also the host of the party. It is Manetti himself who recounts the gathering of distinguished Florentines living in Venice and their discussions.

The form and matter of the dialogue are also unusual. As one of the editors, Gabriela Albanese, notes, the dialogue mixes genres, the novel and the philosophical dialogue. It contains retellings of two famous novels, Boccaccio's Tancred tale and Leonardo Bruni's novella *Antioco, re di Siria*, each of which provides different, morally ambivalent models of fatherhood. The party is then treated to a disputation on the subject of which model is superior. The question is then submitted to two judges who, after a long interval, pronounce their judgement. Only after the disputation has taken place does the banquet begin in earnest.

The musical performances described in the dialogue also do not follow the model of Filelfo's *Convivia*. Using the same justification used in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the elaborate meal and multiple musical entertainments are justified as antidotes to a period of plague that had already lasted two years and was getting stronger. As in Boccaccio, singing, playing musical instruments, storytelling and disputation are sought out as modes of distracting the mind from depressing thoughts, which were believed to cause greater susceptibility to the disease. The musical performances have nothing to do with classical or neo-classical poetry; instead of providing a pretext for discussion, they fill intervals late in the dialogue, twice during the hours while the two judges were deliberating; then during a third interval while waiting for the banquet to be laid out; then finally at the end, when something like a post-prandial concert is given. The first interval is described in general terms as having been filled with vocal performances by young men and women, probably with an element of polyphony (Manetti's appreciation for the music of Guillaume Dufay is well documented), while during the second interval the company was entertained by two distinguished *maestri* on the plucked instruments and the portative organ (*duobus egregiis cithararum et organorum magistris*). In the third interval, while waiting for dinner, there are more performances on zithers and organs, as well as singing to lutes and other stringed instruments (*diversis cithararum et organorum instrumentis personabatur ac liris et fidibus canebatur*). The latter may well have included *canzoni a ballo*, since during the banquet the company is joined by Florentine youths who caper about and perform ring-dances (*saltare et choreas ducere*). The final and most extensive musical performances come at the end, after the dancing, where Manetti gives us a brief excursus describing in detail the various songs sung by

the *Florentini adolescentes*, which include French, Venetian and Sicilian songs.²⁶ Of these he says the Sicilian songs found the most favour with the audience. Manetti's report here is apparently one of only two Quattrocento accounts of the performance of Sicilian songs.

Manetti's *Dialogus in symposio* shows little concern for the genre requirements of either the ancient learned symposium or the neo-classical convivium as reconceived by Filelfo. We have other reports of learned symposia in Renaissance Italy from the late Quattrocento but few include musical performances. In addition to the occasions in the court of Matthias Corvinus discussed by Klára Pajorin in her fundamental article and the ones described by Raffaele Brandolini, mentioned in my more recent chapter for *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth Century Music*, one might include two other examples. The first was a banquet organized by the Roman *sodalitas* or academy of Pomponio Leto in 1483, as described by the diarist Jacopo Gherardi:

On the Esquiline hill near the house of Pomponio [Leto], on the following Sunday, the birthday of the City of Rome was celebrated by a literary sodality. The ceremony was solemnly enacted by Demetrius of Lucca, the prefect of the pontifical library, and Paolo Marsi gave an oration. There was a dinner at the church of San Salvatore de Cornelis, where the sodality had prepared an elegant symposium for literary men and scholars. Six bishops took part in the symposium and numerous *érudits* and noble youths. A privilege granted to the sodality by the Emperor Frederick III was read out at table and numerous verses were recited from memory by various learned youths. They discussed the laurel to be given to Fausto Andrelini of Forlì, a ceremony which was not so much denied him as put off to another time.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 404–405 (§§ 367–370): “Quod cum aliquandiu fecissent, ad gallicas cantilenas et melodias conversi, ita vocibus suis modulabantur ut pene celestes et quasi angelici cantus cunctis audientibus viderent. Venetis insuper cantiunculis et symphoniis aliqualem operam navaverunt. Ad extremum iuvenis quidam, nomine Cosmas, in Sicilia diutius commoratus, nonnullas siculas symphonias et cantilenas modulari et cantare cepit atque tanta nimirum suavitate modulabatur ut omnes audientes, incredibili modulandi et canendi dulcedine titillati, hanc siculam modulationem ceteris gallicis ac venetis cantibus longe preferre ac preponere non dubitarent”; see Albanesi's discussion (see n. 25), 123–26.

²⁷ James Hankins, “Humanist Academies and the ‘Platonic Academy of Florence’”, in: *On Renaissance Academies: Proceedings of the international conference “From the Roman Academy to the Danish Academy in Rome”*, ed. Marianne Pade, Rome: Quasar 2011, 35: “In Exquiliis prope Pomponii [Leti] domum, die dominico qui sequutus est, a sodalitate litteraria celebratum est Romanae Urbis Natale. Sacra solemniter acta, Demetrio Lucensi, bibliothecae pontificiae prefecto operante, Paulus Marsus orationem habuit. Pransum est apud Salvatoris sacellum, ubi sodalitas litteratis viris et studiorum studiosis elegans convivium paraverat. Sex antistites convivio interfuere et eruditi ac nobiles adolescentes quamplures. Recitatum est ad mensam Federici III Cesaris privilegium sodalitati concessum, et a diversis iuvenibus eruditis versus

Here we are back in the world of the neo-classical learned symposium, but with the added, Filelfian feature of learned youths reciting poetry from memory. Given the general character of Leto's academy, known from many other reports, we may be sure that the poetry was classical, but the word *recitati* seems to indicate that the poems were spoken or chanted, not sung.

We know of a second, less conventional learned symposium held in Florence in 1489 from the report of one its principals, Nicolaus de Mirabilibus, a Dominican friar from Hungary. Nicolaus reports a dinner party at the house of Lorenzo de' Medici at which were present nine *conviti*: three theologians (a Dominican, a Franciscan and a Servite), two doctors and professors of medicine from the University of Pisa, as well as Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Poliziano and Lorenzo himself. The dinner is followed by a theological dispute between the Dominican and the Franciscan on the subject of original sin, with the other diners weighing in, but only rarely (at least in Nicolaus' telling). Despite the tincture of humanist learning in the speeches of both disputants, this symposium has more the character of a philosophical than a Filelfian convivium. And at this dinner party too, we are not told of any musical performances or of the singing of classical poetry.²⁸

By the second half of the fifteenth century, however, we begin to get some humanist writers discussing at a more theoretical level the practice of the learned or philosophical symposium, and these writers sometimes mention musical practices associated with banqueting. The first such treatment occurs in a letter of Ficino, datable to 1476/77, directed to Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian ambassador to Florence, who sometimes attended functions of Ficino's 'academy' or gymnasium.²⁹ Ficino, himself a famous performer on his "Orphic lyre", praises the *convivium* as a perfect form of recreation for human beings, uniting pleasures of body, mind, and spirit; he advises on the proper mores to be observed

quamplures etiam memoriter recitati. Actum etiam de laurea danda Fasto Foroliviensi, quae non tam ei negata est, quam in aliud tempus dilata cerimonia".

²⁸ Discussed passim in Jill Kraye, "Lorenzo and the Philosophers", in: *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, eds. Michael Mallett and Nicholas Mann, London: Warburg Institute 1996 (Warburg Institute Colloquia 3), 151–166. The text of Nicolaus' report of the debate was published as *Disputatio nuper facta in domo Magnifici Laurentii Medices*, Florence: Francesco di Dino 1489, the basis for the rare edition of Jenő Ábel in: *Irodalomtörténeti emlékek*, 1, Budapest: A. M. T. Akadémia Irodalomtörténeti Bizottsága 1886, 351–426.

²⁹ *Epistulae* Book III, Letter 42. In: Marsilio Ficino, *Opera [...] omnia*, Basel: Heinrich Petri 1576, vol. I, 738–740; English translation with notes in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, vol. 2, *Liber III*, trans. Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, London: Gingko Press 1978, 51–55, 97–98.

by diners; and he quotes Vergil's description of the lyre-playing of Iopas at the table of Dido as a model for decent entertainment.³⁰

Johannes Tinctoris, in his *De inventione et usu musicae* of ca. 1481, in the surviving portions of this work, does not focus explicitly on the musical customs associated with the dinner table.³¹ However, while discussing testimonia to the ancient uses of various instruments, he mentions Valerius Maximus' famous report that Roman elders sang the deeds of their ancestors at dinner, accompanied by flutes, and also cites Horace's *Odes* (4.15.25) for the presence of flutes at banquets. The flute is also used today, he writes, "in many very pleasant and ingenious ways to entertain the public at wedding banquets and public banquets sponsored by wealthy men".³² Writing of the lyre, he says that the Gentiles made use of it to add pleasure to their banquets, while in the present day the lyre, "called vulgarly the lute (*leutum*), serves us [...] for feasts, dances, banquets and private recreations". He goes on to praise the Germans in particular for their skill on this instrument, as well as the famous lutenist and singer of Ercole d'Este's court, Pietrobono.³³

A third theoretical text – really more of a guidebook to ancient customs – Antonio Mancinelli's *Sermonum decas* (1511), collects for us in chapter 6 of book 9 information about noble banquets as practised by the ancients, with the usual assumption that modern lovers of ancient virtue will want to go forth and do likewise. In addition to directions about the number of diners, their behaviour, and the appropriate variety of food and drink, the humanist pedagogue notes (Valerius Maximus again) that at Roman symposia the elders would sing to the flute tales of the deeds of their ancestors in order to inspire the younger generation. Among the Greeks, he reports (quoting from Cicero's *Tusculan*

30 See Evan MacCarthy, "The Song of Iopas in Renaissance Italy", in: *Virgil and Renaissance Culture*, eds. L. B. T. Houghton and Marco Sgarbi, Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2018, 85–102.

31 See Johannes Tinctoris, *Complete Theoretical Works*, online at <http://earlymusictheory.org/Tinctoris/texts/deinventioneetusumusice/> (11 July 2020).

32 Ibid., Liber III, § viii: "Nostrorum autem Christifidelium quamplurimi extant qui templorum aliquando festis, sepe vero nuptiis ac splendidis magnatum conviviiis, triumphis etiam, ac ceteris honoribus tam publicis quam privatis necnon diei noctisque exordiorum concentibus in castris et urbibus adhibiti, omnis generis et sacros et prophanos cantus tibiis eorum ingeniosissime ac amenissime personant".

33 Ibid., Liber IV, §§ iv–v: "Usus autem ipsius lyre, quam "leutum" vulgo nuncupari prediximus, festis, choreis, et conviviiis privatisque recreationibus apud nos inservit. In qua plurimi precipue Germani eximie sunt eruditi. Siquidem nonnulli associati supremam partem cuiusvis compositi cantus cum admirandis modulorum superinventionibus adeo eleganter ea personant ut profecto nihil prestantius. Inter quos Petrus Bonus Herculis Ferrarie ducis incliti lyricen (mea quidem sententia) ceteris est preferendus".

Disputations), it was common to pass around the lute after a meal so that the diners could entertain their fellows.³⁴

The most important theoretical text on banqueting from this period was written by Giovanni ‘Gioviano’ Pontano, the leader of the Neapolitan academy. Included among his cycle of five short treatises on the social virtues is one, *De conviventia*, devoted to the proper ordering of banquets. The treatise does not address learned banquets in particular – although King Alfonso the Magnificent’s custom of having learned discussions with Panormita after dinner is mentioned with approval – but Pontano does recommend the custom of introducing the arrival of dinner with trumpets and flutes (*tubae tibiaeque*) in order to create an appropriately festive mood. He also commends the practice of having musicians perform songs during the meal, to banish sad or disturbing thoughts, to stop distracting conversations and to impose silence on the diners.³⁵

We are fortunate to possess, in addition to this general work, some vivid descriptions of learned banquets in Pontano’s academy contained in a work by one of its members, Alessandro d’Alessandro (1461–1523).³⁶ D’Alessandro was a Neapolitan jurist who as a youth had enjoyed a period of study in Rome, where he may have heard the elderly Francesco Filelfo lecture on the *Tusculan Disputations* of Cicero (1475). We know that d’Alessandro also was familiar with Filelfo’s *Convivia mediolanensia* since the 1537 edition of the latter work contains a *censura atque iudicium* of the work by him.³⁷ D’Alessandro’s *Dies geniales*, published finally in 1522 but probably composed before 1504, was a work that enjoyed extraordinary popularity in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, down to its last printing, in two volumes with added commentaries, at Leiden in 1673.³⁸ In part it owed its charm to the delightful vignettes of learned life in Rome and Naples, including evocations of dinner parties with the Neapolitan academy. Two such evocations describe musical performances.

In the first, d’Alessandro had come back to Naples with some of his friends during the Christmas holidays and was spending time in walks and conversations with his old companion Iacopo Sannazaro, the great Neo-Latin poet. When they came to see him, the poet would receive them with some freshly-composed epigram or elegy, then invite them to a fine dinner with many rare viands.

³⁴ Antonio Mancinelli, *Sermonum decas*, Paris: Josse Bade 1511, fol. LVr–v.

³⁵ Giovanni Pontano, *I libri delle virtù sociali*, ed. Francesco Tateo, Rome: Bulzoni 1999, 246–269: 260–261.

³⁶ Alessandro d’Alessandro, *Dies geniales*, Rome: Giacomo Mazzocchi 1522.

³⁷ This is one of several indications that the 1537 edition of Filelfo’s work was already in preparation much earlier; note also that Vives’ *praelectio* must have been written before 1 December 1521 since it mentions Pope Leo X *sub quo vivimus*.

³⁸ See Mauro De Nichilo, “Alessandro D’Alessandro”, in: *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 31 (1985), consulted on the Treccani website (see note 24).

Just so, it happened on that day, when he had produced a dinner for me and many learned men, he requested of Sannazaro – his worthy freedman from Ethiopia, an extremely clever young fellow whom Sannazaro had given his liberty and his *cognomen* and educated in the liberal arts so that he was the equal of anyone – that he should sing softly in a gentle voice the elegies of Propertius that he had corrected in many places. He was very willing to do that, and when he was embarked on singing the verses to the flute in a fine, sonorous voice, and we, with the utmost pleasure, were being ravished by the performer's words, the harmony and sweet rhythms; and now, after a thousand lines of melodious verses, when [Propertius] had been lamenting Cynthia's long absence while dwelling at Baia in these words,

Ecquid te mediis cessantem, Cynthia, Baiis,
qua iacet Herculeis semita litoribus,
et modo Thesproti mirantem subdita regno
proxima Misenis aequora nobilibus,

While you dally in the heart of Baiae, Cynthia,
where lies a causeway made by Hercules, and
marvel that the waters but recently below Thes-
protus' kingdom are now close to renowned
Misenum,³⁹

Accius [Sannazaro] ordered a pause in the singing, and turning to me said, 'You've studied geography for a long time – what do *you* think Misenum or Baiae have in common with Thesprotus' kingdom?'⁴⁰

At this point entertainment gives way to learned commentary, and the diners are soon lost in philological discussion. Sannazaro urges his fellow academicians to restore the text of Propertius, which, according to a report of Pontano, had only been recovered "in the time of our fathers", hidden in a wine cellar beneath some casks.

Here we have a recognizably Filelfian type of learned dinner party with a musical rendering of classical poetry followed by learned commentary, discussion and debate. A similar event is depicted at the beginning of book 5, when d'Alessandro goes together with members of the Neapolitan academy to visit one of its members, Gabriele Altilio, to congratulate him on being named bishop of

³⁹ Loeb translation.

⁴⁰ D'Alessandro, *Dies geniales* (see n. 36), Book II, § 1: "Velut fuit illa die, cum mihi et plerisque doctis viris coena exhibita Sannazario ex Aethiopia bonae frugi liberto, scitissimo adolescenti quem libertate et gentili cognomento donauerat, liberalibusque disciplinis instruxerat, ita ut cuius ingenio non impar videretur, demandavit ut Propertii elegias a se pluribus in locis instigatas summissim leniterque cantaret. Quod cum ille cupide faceretur, uersusque ad tibiam modulis dulcissimis scita et canora voce canere inceptaret, nosque ex proferentis verba et concentum numerosque admodum suaues summa cum voluptate captaremus, et iam milibus modulatis versibus ventum esset, ubi Cynthiam Baiis demorantem diu abfuisse conqueritur his verbis [...], Accius carminibus pausam fieri iussit, et ad me conversis: Quid tu, inquit, qui orbis situm tandiu legendo perscrutaris, Misenum aut Baias cum Thesproti regno commune habere uidisti?"

PolICASTRO, an event datable to 1493. On this occasion the academicians are invited to a modest *convivium* or rather a *caenula non iniucunda*. But they have a fine time with their learned talk. At the end of the dinner, Altilio summons to himself “a boy of rare gifts, liberal in figure and appearance, sufficiently christened with letters” and bids each of the diners pick out a favourite epigram for the young man to sing. The singer sang with great vivacity a few of these epigrams to the lyre (presumably a lute), “with lovely melodies and sweet harmony”. Then one of the diners, who had awaited his turn, proffered a four-line epigram from Martial, which the youth sang in a sweet and stylish way.

Quod non argentum, quod non tibi mittimus aurum,
 hoc facimus causa, Stella diserte, tua.
 Quisquis magna dedit, voluit sibi magna remitti;
 fictilibus nostris exoneratus eris.

If I send you no silver, if I send you no gold,
 I do it for your sake, eloquent Stella.
 Whoever gives much, wants much in return.
 My earthenware will take a load off your shoulders.⁴¹

This last epigram then gives rise to a learned philosophical discussion of liberality and avarice, gratitude and ingratitude. It is noteworthy that the music-making in this vignette is described as spontaneous, even if the verses themselves are taken from a classical source. The cult of spontaneity and virtuoso invention was part of the ethos of humanist musical performances, well documented from the middle of the fifteenth century down to the 1520s.⁴²

To sum up, the history of the learned banquet in the Italian Renaissance and its musical practices reinforces the picture we have from other sources of the impact of humanism on the musical life of educated Italians. The humanist movement promoted a new form of secular musical performance that involved the setting of classical and classicizing verse to music. Such settings involved expressive vocal performances of Latin verse, typically monodic in character, accompanied by cornettos, flutes and/or the *lyra* or lute.⁴³ It might thus be considered a predecessor of the monodic style later championed by the Florentine Camerata (1573–1587), also considered by its humanist inventors, Girolamo Mei, Giovanni de’ Bardi, and Vincenzo Galilei, as a revival of ancient Greek musical practice. This grew into the dramatic *stile recitativo*, early music drama, and eventually opera. Unlike that later flourishing of monody, however, our knowledge of early

⁴¹ Ibid., Book V, § 1.

⁴² Hankins, “Music and Humanism” (see n. 1), 252–257.

⁴³ Ibid.

humanist classical singing remains purely literary, and its connection with later musical styles must remain speculative. There are striking parallels of context and themes, however, that permit comparison. Certain accounts of the meetings of the Camerata at the home of the Count de' Bardi strongly recall the atmosphere of the learned banquets of the Quattrocento and its musical practices:

[Giulio] Caccini, however, testified that 'a great part of the nobility and the leading musicians and men of genius and poets and philosophers of the city' convened there, and Galilei recalled that many noblemen used to go there to pass the time in songs and discussions, which, according to Pietro Bardi, ranged over a variety of subjects, including poetry, astrology and other sciences [...]. Caccini mentioned having first performed three songs for the Camerata, *Perfidissimo volto*, *Vedrò il mio sol* and *Dovrò dunque morire*, in a manner of "speaking in melody" and treating dissonances, passing over a held chord with 'a certain noble carelessness (*sprezzatura*)'.⁴⁴

It is also significant that Bardi in his programmatic *Discorso mandato a Giulio Ceccini detto Romano, sopra la Musica antica, e l' cantar bene* shows the same fascination as Filelfo with the history of ancient music and particularly the moral effects of the ancient musical modes.⁴⁵ He too presents his work as a revival of ancient Greek musical practice and he too orients his musical researches by weighing the opinions of Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch and other ancient *savi*. Like some other humanists of the fifteenth century he is hostile to complex contrapuntal music and in general to musical textures that obscure the text and undermine the emotional effects of the words.⁴⁶ But whether and to what extent the connection between these two phases of accompanied humanist art song can be established must be a subject for future research.

⁴⁴ Claude V. Palisca, "Camerata", in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians: Second Edition*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan 2001, vol. 4, 870.

⁴⁵ In: Giovanni Battista Doni, *Lyra Barberina ampicordos*, Florence: Typis Caesareis 1763, vol. 2, 233–248: 240: "Ma torniamo a' miracoli della Musica, della quale ragionandone Damone maestro di Socrate disse, che ella aveva forza di disporre gli animi nostri a virtù, essendo onesta; e se contraria a contrarii vizi". The text is translated with notes in Claude V. Palisca, *The Florentine Camerata: Documentary Studies and Translations*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1989, 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 240–242. On this subject see Claude V. Palisca, *Music and Ideas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2006, 99–130 (chapters VI and VII) and Hankins, "Music and Humanism", (see n. 1), 245–251.

