Madalena Casulana:
Her Life and Works

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Abstract

This article examines the life and works of Madalena (Maddalena) Casulana (1540–1590), who composed and performed in the public sphere at a time when women were discouraged from both activities. In 1568 Casulana published her own volume of madrigals, *Il primo libro di madrigali a quattro voce* (RISM A/I C 1516), under her own name. This publication appears to be the first printed work in the history of European music that was fully composed by and attributed to a woman. This article explores two madrigals by Casulana—*Ridon or per le piaggie* and *Io d'odorate fronde*—and examines Casulana's use of text, madrigalisms, and chromaticisms in her compositions.

Madalena Casulana[1] (1540–1590) lived in northern Italy during a significant period of the Renaissance when the role of women in music was contentious and changing. While a few women gradually began to participate in music in the public sphere, Casulana was an anomaly, performing and composing at a time when women were discouraged from either. During her lifetime, she was respected by prominent composers of the period, including Orlando di Lasso. Casulana managed to do what no woman before her is known to have done: notate and publish a volume of her own musical compositions under her own name while also rising to a reputation of esteem and respect with other composers of the period.

According to historian Joan Kelly-Gadol, the Renaissance did not generally include women's participation in the flourishing arts and music, especially women of higher social status,[2] who were expected to focus on motherhood and domestic duties, with a devotion to religion and humility.[3] Social mores demanded reticent females whose quieted voices reflected their chastity.[4] However, women's role in society during the 1500s became a topic of contention, especially in France and Italy. By the middle of the

[1] Scholars differ as to the spelling of Casulana's name, either as "Maddalena" or "Madalena." Because she herself signed her dedications with the spelling "Madalena," that spelling will be used throughout the paper. Any direct quotations that spell the name differently will be copied *sic* for accuracy.

[2] Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 140.

[3] Ellen D. Lerner, "Madalena Casulana," in *Women Composers: Music through the Ages* Vol. 1, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 99.

[4] Bonnie Gordon. *Monteverdi's Unruly Women: The Power of Song in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 2.

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sixteenth century, noble families were expected to give young girls a proper education, including the study of Latin and music.[5] While upper-class ladies of this period were able to acquire musical knowledge precisely because they grew up in wealthy families, they were not trained or encouraged to devote themselves seriously and over a long period of time to developing those skills.[6] Further, outside of private tutors, educational opportunities were scarce.[7] Indeed, many families didn't see the reason to provide an education, especially in music, for women who would not use it. Overall, females experienced a limiting of social and personal options that men of their classes did not.[8] The usual areas of patronage and employment in music—the church and the court—were essentially off-limits to females. Music in sixteenth-century Italy existed in somewhat of a dichotomy, juxtaposed between those who considered it an appropriate skill for a lady and those who considered it a dangerous gateway to impropriety. Females did begin singing in public spheres, but during Casulana's lifetime the connection of women and music remained a delicate one. While it became more acceptable for women to perform as singers during the late 1500s in Italy, few women made their careers in music. According to Casulana scholar Thomasin LaMay, Madalena Casulana "resisted and often defied the boundaries peculiar to women in her social environment, even those somewhat looser structures allowed to women who performed."[9] In spite of these restrictions set upon her gender, Casulana's music rose to prominence and renown in sixteenth-century European society.

Madalena Casulana's known biography is brief, and is best presented by Beatrice Pescerelli in *I Madrigali di Madalena Casulana*. Casulana is thought to have been born circa 1540, but her place of birth is uncertain. Pescerelli makes a strong case that Casulana was born in Casola d'Esla, or Casula, a small village near Siena; this led to Madalena's surname of Casulana, according to the custom of the time in which people were associated with the town of their birth.[10] Other contemporaries of Madalena were also given the designation Casulana, as a reference to their hometown. In addition to the well-known painter Alessandro Casolano, the musician Leonardo Morelli appears in the print of his work as "Leonardus Casulanus." This man, another native of Casole d'Elsa, was active in the cathedral of Volterra from 1586 to 1604.[11] These examples support Pescerelli's argument that Casulana was a geographical reference, rather than Madalena's actual surname.

Born into modest means, Casulana existed in the middle of the social classes: high enough that her family could afford her an education, but not so high that she was forced into a socially advantageous marriage. Pescerelli proposes that Madalena was educated in Florence, and, although little is known of Casulana's education, this education in both composing and notation would define Casulana's life and career.[12]

Although Casulana eventually gained acclaim as a composer, she began her career as a singer and lutenist, which was considered more appropriate

[5] Kelly-Gadol, 140.

[6] Jane Bowers, "The Emergence of Women Composers in Italy, 1566-1700," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 133.

[7] Ibid.

[8] While men of the nobility did experience some constriction of social and personal opportunities, men of the bourgeoisie experienced instead a widening of opportunities. (From Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 140.

[9] Thomasin LaMay. "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows of Unheard of Songs!" in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002) 42.

[10] Beatrice Pescerelli, "Maddalena Casulana," in *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed James R. Briscoe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004) 44.

[11] Ibid., 45.

[12] Beatrice Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1979), 5.

for a woman of the period.[13] In order to bypass the obstacles in Italian culture surrounding female composition, Casulana began her career by entering the salons and academies in and around Venice, one of the more liberal areas of Italy.[14] By singing and composing for the male musicians and patrons in the area, she earned the respect of these members, who in turn helped promote her published works.[15]

Madalena Casulana's music was first published in the anthology *Il Desiderio I* in 1566, which featured four of her madrigals. A year later, another madrigal appeared in *Il Desiderio II*. These publications apparently caught the attention of Orlando di Lasso, who would become a lifelong supporter of Casulana.[16] Although he was employed in Munich in the court of Duke Albrecht V starting in 1566, in 1567 di Lasso was in Venice to oversee the publication of his *Libro Quatro* for five voices (composed for the Ferrarese Duke Alfonso's newly formed *concerto delle donne*), and it was probably during this visit that Casulana and di Lasso became acquainted.[17] These were the first records of a connection between Casulana and Orlando di Lasso, which would continue throughout her life. He was apparently impressed by her compositions, as he, in 1568, commissioned and performed Casulana's madrigal *Nil mage incundum* in Munich at the wedding of Archduke Wilhelm V of Bavaria. While the music itself has not survived, the Latin text is included in a review of the piece by Massimo Troiano.[18]

In that same year, Antonio Molino (c. 1495–1571), a prominent Venetian actor in the c*ommedia dell'arte* published his own volume of madrigals, dedicated to Madalena Casulana, whom he called his teacher. While his music differs from that of Casulana, it may have been Casulana who taught Molino how to notate his music, as it was tradition in *commedia dell'arte* to improvise. This connection to a prominent member of Italian artistic society gave Casulana legitimacy in the Venetian culture and helped give her music respect in the eyes of Italian culture.

In 1568, Madalena Casulana published her own volume of madrigals, *Il primo libro di madrigali a quattro voce*, under her own name. This publication appears to be the first printed work in the history of European music that was fully composed by and attributed to a woman.[19] Casulana's dedication of this volume drew wide interest. Dedicated to Isabella de Medici Orsina, Casulana showed clear self-awareness of her uncommon status as a female composer. In the dedication, Casulana calls the madrigals her "first fruits," in her aim to "show the world... the futile error of men who believe themselves patrons of the high gifts of intellect, which according to them cannot also be held in the same way by women."

Her *Primo Libro* contained twenty-one madrigals, five of which were previously published in *Il Desiderio I* and *II*. The dedication was signed from Venice, and it was likely she was in the city at that time. After 1568, Casulana's publications indicated she travelled to northern Italy. Her *Secondo Libro di Madrigali a Quattro Voce* was published in 1570, and was dedicated to Antonio Londonio, president of the Milanese ministry of finance (of all her known madrigals, this set alone survives intact).[20] This, in combination with musician Nicolo Tagliaferro's report of his encounter with Casulana in Milan

[13] Ellen D. Lerner, "Madalena Casulana," Women Composers: Music through the Ages, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 99.

[14] LaMay, "Composing from the Throat," 371.

[15] Lerner, 99.

[16] LaMay, "Composing from the Throat," 372.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 374.

[19] Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana*, 16.

[20] Ibid.

confirms her presence in that city.[21] In Tagliaferro's *Esercisi Filosofici*, he describes one of Casulana's performances, along with two other singers, Vittoria Moschella and Sudetta Fumia. In his document, Tagliaferro writes that Madalena, instead of dedicating herself to the art of singing, prefers to devote herself to the art of composition in which "she delighted a lot, even more than that of a professional woman of the Conviensi."[22]

By 1583, Madalena Casulana published her *Il Primo Libro di Madrigali a Quinto Voce*, dedicated to Count Mario Bevilacqua.[23] In this work, Casulana signed her name as "Madalena Mezari detta Casulana Vicentina," and Gardano of Monte's dedication to Madalena in his first book of madrigals for three voices (also in 1583) named her as "Signora Madalena Casulana di Mezarii."[24] Although Pescerelli and other sources suggested that Madalena may have married sometime after 1570 and settled down in Vicenza (*Vicentina*), LaMay proposed that Casulana, after having finally achieved recognition as a composer and musician, either took a new surname or finally became known by her original surname.[25] In any case, her connection to Vicenza was clear, as she was confirmed as a participant in one of the musical gatherings of the Accademia Olimpica of Vicenza in 1583.[26]

Casulana's Madrigals

In her madrigals, Madalena Casulana used unexpected harmonies and chromaticism to create madrigals in a popular style. She chose the poetry she set with care, and brought the lyrics to life through contrasts of register and dissonance, word-painting, and expressive vocal lines.[27] Her part-writing was less-strong, often featuring errors, but her unique compositional style created an expressive and personal style.[28] Like many of her contemporaries, Madalena Casulana often selected texts by Petrarch for her madrigals, including

- *L'aver l'aurora (*from *Il primo libro di Madrigali a quatro voce)*
- *Amore per qual cagion (*from *Secondo libro di Madrigali)*
- *Io d'odorate (*from *Secondo libro di Madrigali)*
- *Ahi possanza d'amor (*from *Secondo libro di Madrigali)*
- *Datemi pace (*from *Il Primo Libro di Madrigali a Cinque Voce)*
- *Perch'al viso d'amor (*from *Il Primo Libro di Madrigali a Cinque Voce)*

In addition to Petrarch, Casulana set texts written by other respected poets, including Jacopo Sannazaro, Luigi Tansillo, Serafino Aquilano,[29] Bernard Tasso, Annibale Caro, Guilio Strozzi, and Vincenzo Quirino, also popular with established madrigal composers of the period.[30] Sannazaro, whom Casulana set extensively throughout her career, was also a favorite of Jacques Arcadelt (1504–1568) (*Se per colpa del vostro fiero sdegno*), Orlando di Lasso (*Per pianto la mia carne*), and Claudio Monteverdi (*La pastorella*).

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[21] Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana*, 16.

[22] LaMay. "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows of Unheard of Songs!" 52.

[23] Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana*, 17–18.

[24] Ibid., 16–17.

[25] LaMay. "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows of Unheard of Songs!" 48.

[26] Pescerelli, *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana*, 19.

[27] Thomas Bridges. "Casulana [Mezari], Maddalena." *Grove Music Online,* 2001, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000005155.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Serafino Aquilano's family name was Cimini, of the Cimini family in Italy. Similarly to how Madalena was designated "Casulana" in reference to her place of birth, Serafino was called Aquilano or dell'Aquilano in reference to Aquila, where he was born in 1466.

[30] Lerner, 102.

In addition to the care with which Casulana chose poets, she also selected unique texts that were either gender-neutral or written from the male perspective (a *he* speaking to or about a *she*).[31] This was highly unusual with creative female contemporaries of the time.[32] Gaspara Stampa's *Rime* were all written from her own "I" voice or a separate "she" voice, often longing for an absent lover named "he."[33] Courtesan Tullia d'Aragona specifically named men in her volumes of poetry, whom she addressed in her own voice. In her volume of letters, Veronica Franco wrote from her own perspective, keeping the gaze completely on herself while also controlling that gaze.[34] Alleotti and Ricci, the madrigal composers who followed Casulana, usually composed from the female perspective. Casulana selected texts that spoke of women from the male perspective, and who were often depicted as unattainable, cold objects. LaMay suggested that Casulana chose to speak from the male perspective so that she could control how the female was viewed.[35] Casulana was "not willing to move the female out of critical positioning in the story… she wanted to hold up the beautiful woman, but control who was looking at her."[36] Perhaps this was part of Casulana's motivation, but perhaps the true motivation behind which texts Casulana chose was more simple and direct. While this did provide Casulana with control of how to treat the subject, she stated her goal herself in the dedication of her first book:

> I know truly, most Illustrious and Most Excellent Lady, that these first fruits of mine cannot, because of their weakness, produce the effect that I would like, which would be, other than to give Your Excellence some proof of my devotion, to show also to the world (as much as is allowed me in this musical profession) the conceited error of men. They believe so strongly to be the masters of the high gifts of the intellect that, in their opinion, these gifts cannot likewise be shared by Women.
>
> —Dedication from Maddalena Casulana's first publication, *Il primo libro de madrigali a quattro voci*, Venice: Girolamo Scotto, 1568.

Casulana aimed to prove to men that they were not the only ones capable of fine composing. By maintaining the male or gender-neutral perspective, Casulana was, in effect, able to create a direct comparison of her compositions to those by male madrigalists.

In Madalena Casulana's dedication of her first book of four-voice madrigals, she hoped her compositions would prove that men were not the only possessors of intellect. By choosing an established idiom and mastering its style, Madalena Casulana created a direct correlation that could not be ignored and was published alongside other renowned composers of the time. Through her text selection from established poets and themes, as well as her use of madrigalisms, text painting, and rhythmic complexity, Casulana created compositions that followed the traditions and also achieved success in all standards of criteria for the period. By carefully selecting texts and displaying her compositional ability through madrigalisms, tonal shifts, and text painting, Casulana created madrigals that were unique and respected, gaining popularity and publication in spite of the obstacles surrounding a female composer in sixteenth-century Italy.

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[31] LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs!" 57.

[32] There were no contemporary female composers that scholars can directly compare, but female poets of the time used the opportunity to write from the female perspective.

[33] LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs!" 57.

[34] Ibid., 58.

[35] LaMay, "Composing from the Throat," 366.

[36] Ibid.

Poetry, Madrigalisms, and Word Painting in Ridon or Per le Piaggie

Although madrigals in the first half of the sixteenth century were based around the use of thick and continuous counterpoint, by the 1550s, madrigal composers were beginning to favor polyphony, including imitation, canonic techniques, word painting, chromaticism, and changes in texture. From even her earliest pieces, Casulana used these techniques to display her skill. She exemplified the use of madrigalisms, chromaticism, and text painting in one of her very first compositions: *Ridon or* [hor] *per le piaggie*.[37]

The text of *Ridon or per le piaggie* is part of the larger sestain *La ver l'aurora*. The longer poem, *La ver' l'aurora*, was written in sestain form, consisting of six stanzas of six lines each, normally followed by a three-line envoi. The words that end each line of the first stanza are used as line endings in each of the following stanzas, rotated in a set pattern.

The sestain, from the perspective of the poet, describes awaking in the dawn to a gentle breeze, which makes the poet think of his beloved, Laura. Petrarch often used wordplay to reference his love, Laura, and the breeze, *l'aura* in Italian. He likened obtaining his love to catching the breeze in a net. The speaker's love was unrequited, as was always the case when Petrarch was describing his love for Laura. For her madrigal *Ridon or per le piagge*, Casulana set the final stanza of the sestain in *La ver l'aurora*, before the final three-line envoi (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Translation of Ridon or per le piaggie

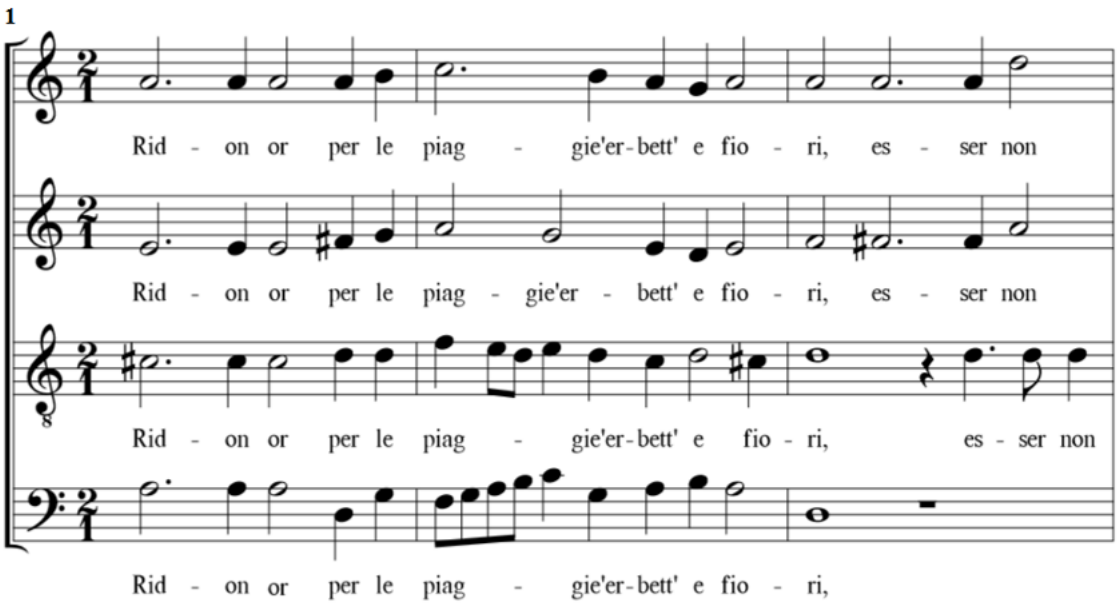
Ridon or per le piagge herbette et fiori:	Now the meadows smile with grass and flowers,
esser non pò che quella angelica alma	it cannot be that her angelic soul
non senta il suon de l'amorose note.	does not hear the sound of loving music.
Se nostra ria fortuna è di piú forza,	But if my cruel fate has the greater power,
lagrimando et cantando i nostri versi	sing and weep together will be our song,
et col bue zoppo andrem cacciando l'aura.	and with a lame ox go to catch the breeze.

[37] The modern spelling of "or" would today be "hor" in Italian. For the rest of this paper, however, Casulana's original spelling of "or" will be used.

Casulana composed melodic vocal lines that expressed the emotion inherent in this respected text, with appearances of word painting and sudden chromatic shifts. Casulana began the madrigal with the expected musical setting of the word "ridon" (laughter). However, Casulana didn't simply set "ridon" in rapid eighth or sixteenth notes, as was the obvious text setting for words denoting joy; rather, the word "piaggie"[38] (meadows) was set with running eighth notes in the bass voice. This created an image of "laughing meadows" within the first line (see Example 1). The use of quickly-moving notes was an established madrigalism for words of laughing or joy, and Madalena took the traditional idiom and created an aural picture.

Madalena captured the contrasting emotion of the next line, "esser non pò che quella angelica alma non senta il suon de l'amorose note," (it cannot be that her angelic soul does not hear the sound of loving music), by creating imitative protests in the voices, repeating "esser non pò" (it cannot be) first in the alto and canto voices, then the alto, tenor, and bass voices, and finally echoed again by the canto voice, the music imitated the disbelief of the words "esser non puo" (see Example 2). Next, Casulana calmed the voices for the words "quella angelica alma" (that her angelic soul), leading to a brief cadence on a D major chord (see Example 2). Through the contrasting setting of the two phrases, "esser non puo" and "quella angelica alma," Casulana juxtaposed the difference of the two phrases "it cannot be" and "her angelic soul." This sudden change in texture exemplified another traditional compositional technique in the late 1500s.

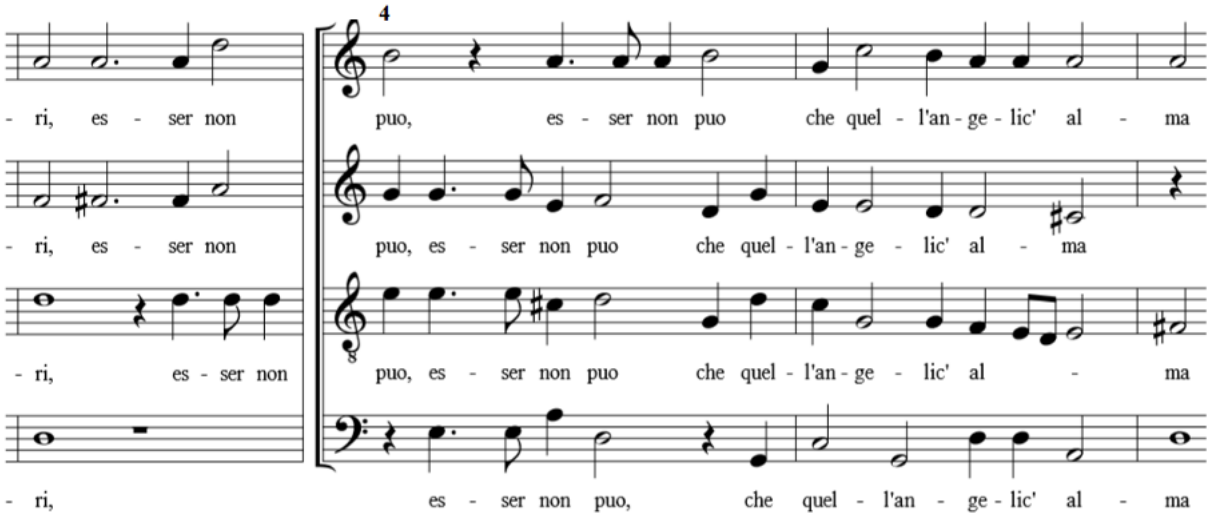
Example 1. "Laughing meadows" Ridon or per le piaggie



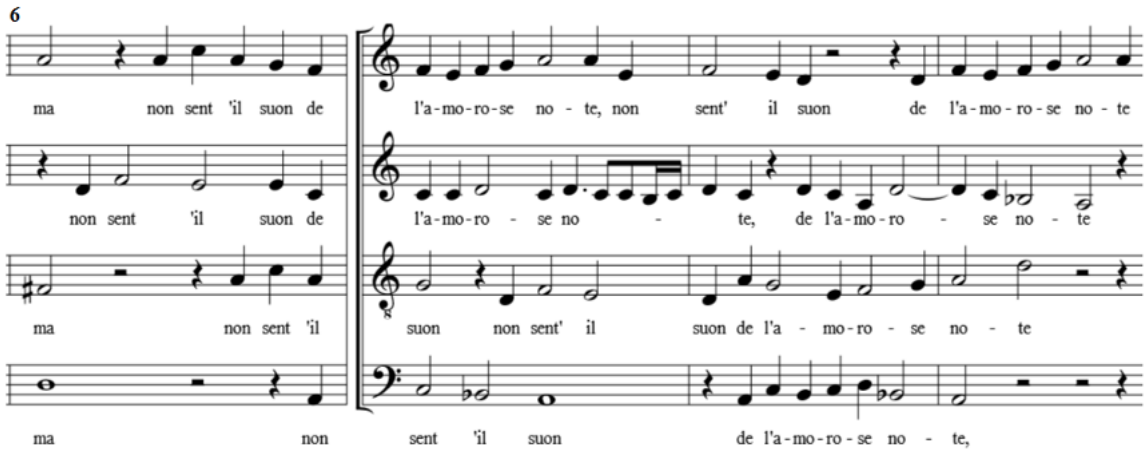
[38] Spelled "piagge" in modern Italian.

In *Ridon or per le piaggie*, Casulana created a brilliant musical setting for the words "non sent'il" (cannot hear). Whereas the composition up to this point is mostly homophonic, with slight imitative entrances that still allowed the words to be understood, at this point Casulana created an almost contrapuntal texture. The alto introduces the text, followed by the cantus, tenor, and bass voices (See Example 3). The listener is unable to discern the text or differentiate the voices. Following "non sent'il," Casulana composed music that illustrates a deep and low sonority for the text "de l'amorose note" (the loving music), bringing in descending lines in the alto and bass voices, while also setting "note" (notes) in half notes. Casulana also moved the music toward A phrygian, lowering the B♮s in the bass voice to B♭, then doing the same in the alto voice (see Example 3). Casulana displayed her compositional ability through setting each phrase in music that reflected the textual meaning.

Example 2. "Esser non puo" Ridon or per le piaggie



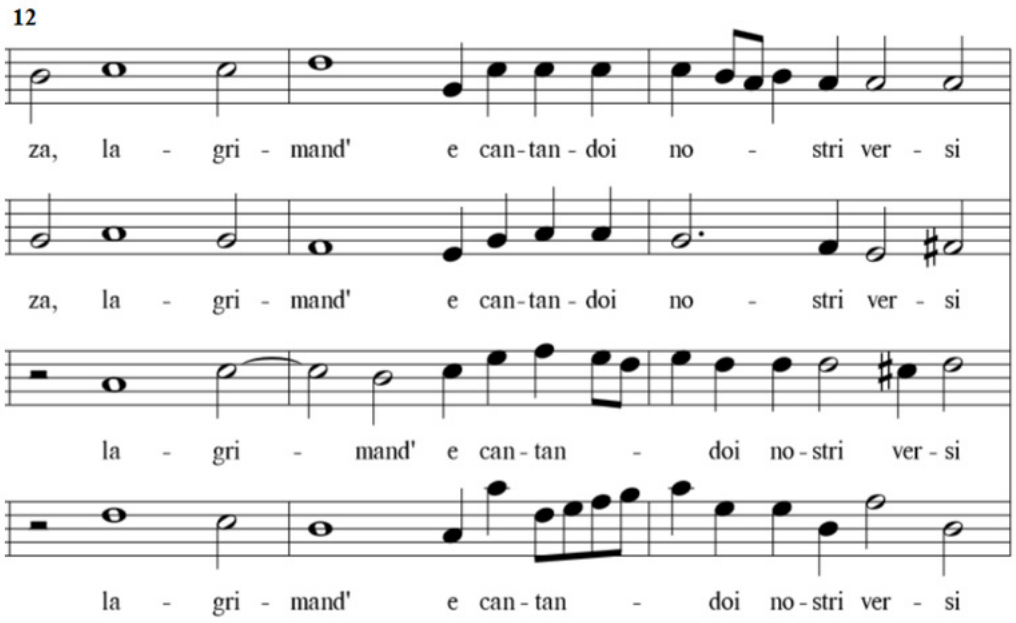
Example 3. "Non sent'il suon" Ridon or per le piaggie



While the texture was mostly energetic until this point in the piece, the next line of text "lagrimando et cantando i nostri versi" (sing and weep together will be our song) is set with evident text painting. The word "lagrimando" (weeping) is set with long note values: whole and half notes (see Example 4). Casulana also created a weeping motive through the suspensions in the tenor line. This weeping motive is even more dramatic as it contrasts the next word, "cantando" (singing). Casulana set "cantando" in swiftly moving quarter and eighth notes in each voice, bringing out their flexibility and range (see Example 4). Like Casulana's use of the madrigalism for "laughing," her use of the established compositional techniques for "weeping" and "singing" displayed her mastery of the madrigal idiom.[39]

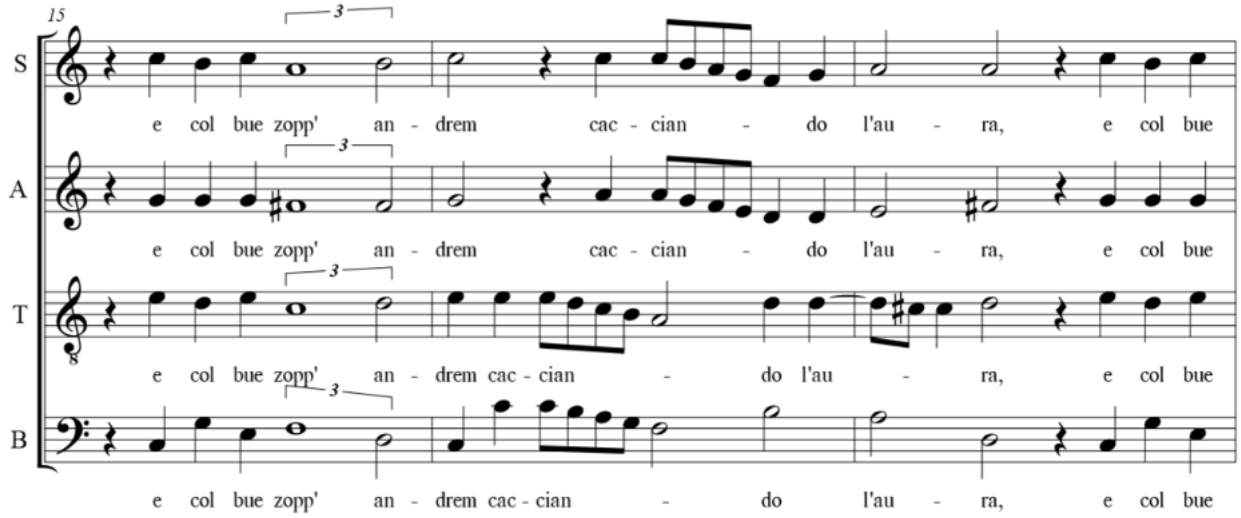
Finally, Casulana seemed to impart some humor with the text "ol bue zoppo" (the lame ox). In the original engraving, she moved from common time to triple meter, as though the singer is suddenly tripping (denoted here with a triplum bracket) (see Example 5). Then, she immediately created the feeling of "cacciando" (chasing) with imitative running eighth notes, first in the tenor and bass voices, and then in the alto and canto voices. Casulana echoed this motive for the final phrase, repeating the text "ol bue zoppo" with the tripping triple motive, then the running eighth note motives for "cacciando" before finally cadencing on a D major chord for the words "l'aura" (the breeze).

Example 4. "Lagrimand'ed cantandoi" Ridon or per le piaggie



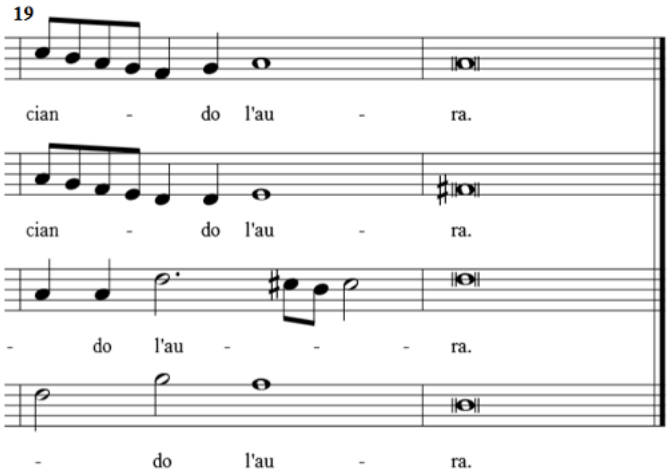
[39] LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows Unheard Of Songs!" 45.

Example 5. "e col bue zopp'andrem" Ridon or per le piagge



Petrarch often used the breeze (*l'aura* in Italian) as a subtle way to refer to his unrequited lover, Laura. Casulana skillfully invoked this double meaning by using the same D Ionian chord used for the cadence on "angelic' alma" (angelic soul) that Petrarch calls Laura earlier in the stanza, that she does for the cadence for "l'aura." The "angelic soul" is both "the wind" and "Laura" (see Example 6).

Example 6. "L'aura" Ridon or per le piaggie



Throughout *Ridon or per le piaggie*, Casulana used the respected and well-known text of Petrarch as a canvas on which she displayed her mastery of the madrigal idioms. Even from her earliest compositions, her mastery of idioms of the sixteenth-century madrigals was on full display.

Poetry, Madrigalisms, and Chromaticism in Io d'Odorate Fronde

Throughout Casulana's career, she continued to develop her madrigal compositional methods. While *Ridon or per le piaggie* exemplified the skill with which Casulana composed her very first publications, in *Io d'odorate fronde*, published in her *Secondo Libro de Madrigali a Quattro Voce*, she developed her skill even further. The text of *Io d'odorate*, one of the popular Chloris stories,[40] describes the experience of smelling flowers in the night; the narrator can't see them, but knows they are there through their scent (see Figure 2).

With this emotive text, Casulana quickly created a relationship between the text and the music. From the very beginning of the piece, she set the poetry with music that reflected and enhanced its meaning. First, the tenors introduce the "felice Arrabia" (happy Arabian) with eighth notes that are then imitated by the other three voices (see Example 7).[41]

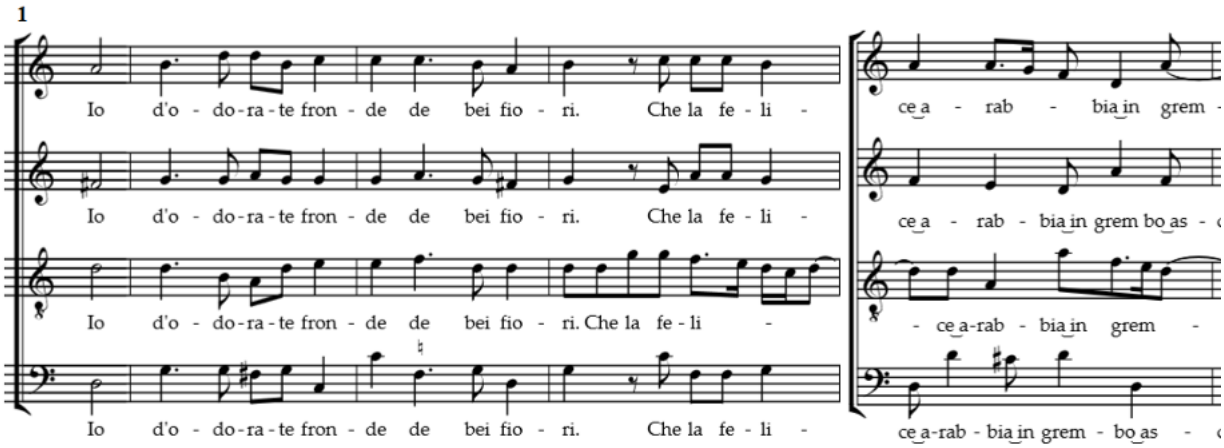
Figure 2. Translation of Io d'dodorate fronde *texts*

Io d'odorate fronde de bei fiori Che la felice arabbia in grembo asconde Te sacra un gran altar tra verde alhori Che arda mai sempre qui vicin al onde.	I, with the scents of leaves of the beautiful flowers that the happy Arabbia (Arabian) in her lap hides dedicate to you a great altar of greens that at all hours will burn forever near the waves.
E de le nimphe de la nobil ciori Meco la piu leggiadro in queste sponde Cantera, cantera le due lodi ad una Fin che col sol il ciel tutto si in bruna.	And, of the nymphs of the noble Chloris with me the prettiest on this shore will sing, will sing the two praises until the end when (at which time), with the sun, the heavens all themselves will become dark. (until the end of time)

[40] Popular poetry and music of the Renaissance often focused on Greek and Roman myths. Chloris was a nymph in one such myth, who was raped by the Zephyrus. After the encounter, Zephyrus renames Chloris "Flora," and makes her the goddess of flowers.

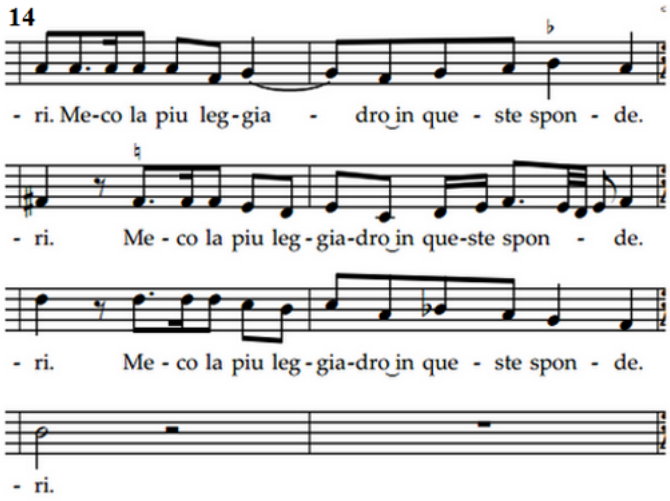
[41] Lamay, "Madalena Casulana, By Body Knows Unheard of Songs!" 59. In Greek and Roman literature, the Arabian peninsula was divided into three regions, the Arabia Deserta (Arabian Desert), Arabia Petraea (area around the city of Petra) and Felix Arabia (Fertile Arabia). In this case, the poetry makes a play on words with the "felice" making a sound similar to "Felix," denoting both the happiness of the narrator as well as the fertility of the nymph Chloris and Arrabia's "lap."

Example 7. "Io d'odorate fronde e bei fiori" Io d'odorate fronde



This text painting continues throughout the piece; when the text speaks of "Meco la piu leggia" (the prettiest [nymphs]), the three upper voices sing the text with swift and graceful eighth notes, while the bass voice rests (see Example 8). Without the lowest voiced present, the upper three voices can represent the lithe, feminine nymphs.

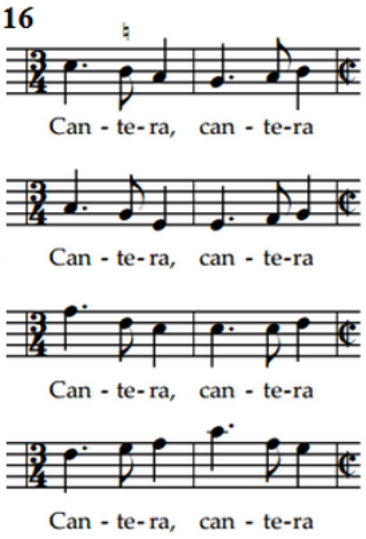
Example 8. "Meco la piu leggia" Io d'odorate fronde



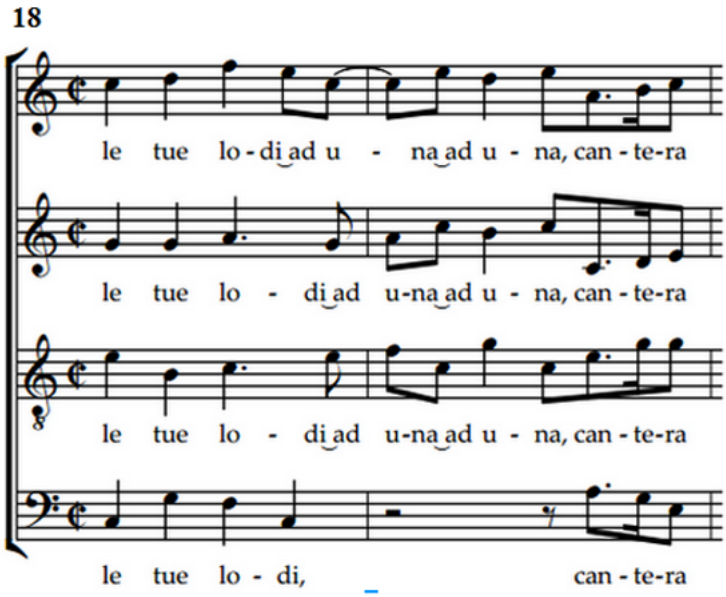
Next, Casulana set the phrase describing how the nymph will sing (*cantera*) with a lilting dotted rhythm in triple meter (see Example 9).

Although the music reverts to duple meter with text "le due lodi" (the two praises), upon the returning "Cantera," Casulana maintained the dotted rhythm (see Example 10).

Example 9. "Cantera, cantera" Io d'odorate fronde



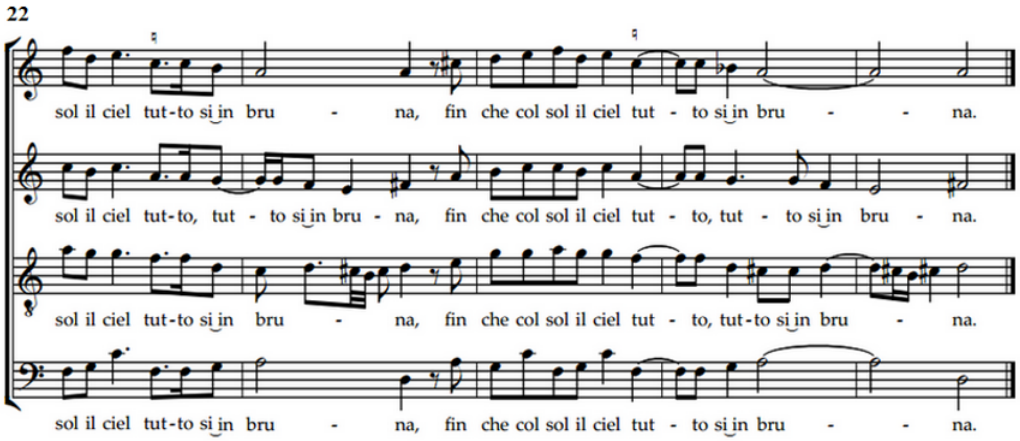
Example 10. "una, cantera" Io d'odorate fronde



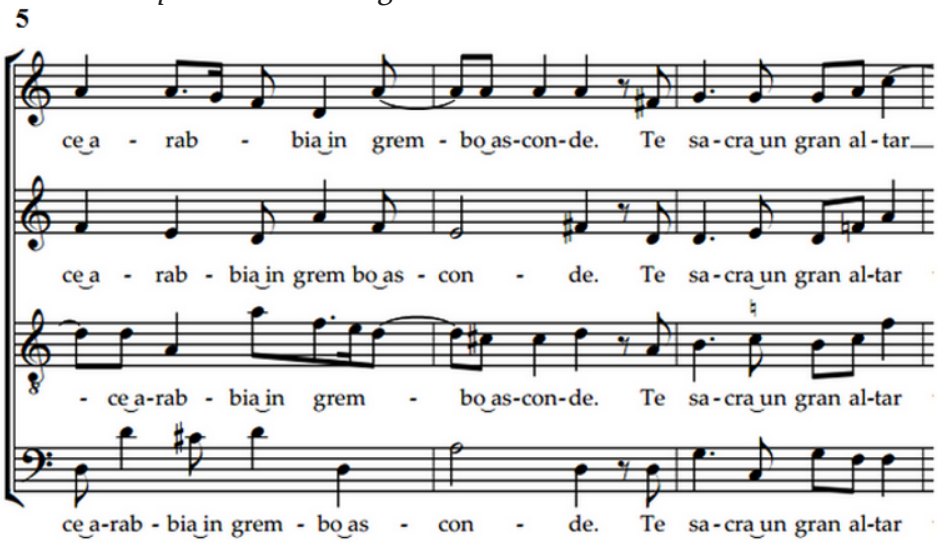
Finally, as the text proclaims that the narrator's joy will continue until the sky turns dark ("sol il ciel tutto si in bruna"), the outer three voices slow to longer values, and all three voices return to a lower range (see Example 11). As the text describes the darkening sky, Casulana created darkness through the lower ranges of the voices. Casulana stated in the preface of her *Primo Libro* that she aimed to prove that not only men were capable of intelligence. Her artistic setting of this text proved that a woman could create a composition through the techniques of the period.

This text painting is paired throughout with modal shifts. For instance, as "arabbia in grembo asconde" (happy Arrabia hides [the flowers] in her green womb), Casulana shifted the tonal center from D to G, through the sudden appearance of chromaticism (specifically the F#) (see Example 12). One of the first madrigalists to use this chromaticism was Adrian Willaert, who associated certain intervals with relating emotions.[42] Willaert correlated major thirds and sixths with harshness, while minor intervals were related to sweetness or grief.[43] In this section, Casulana focuses on sweetness (perhaps melancholy), using the minor third from D to F natural in the alto line (see Example 12).

Example 11. "sol il ciel tutto si in bruna" Io d'odorate fronde



Example 12. "arabia in grembo asconde" Io d'odorate fronde

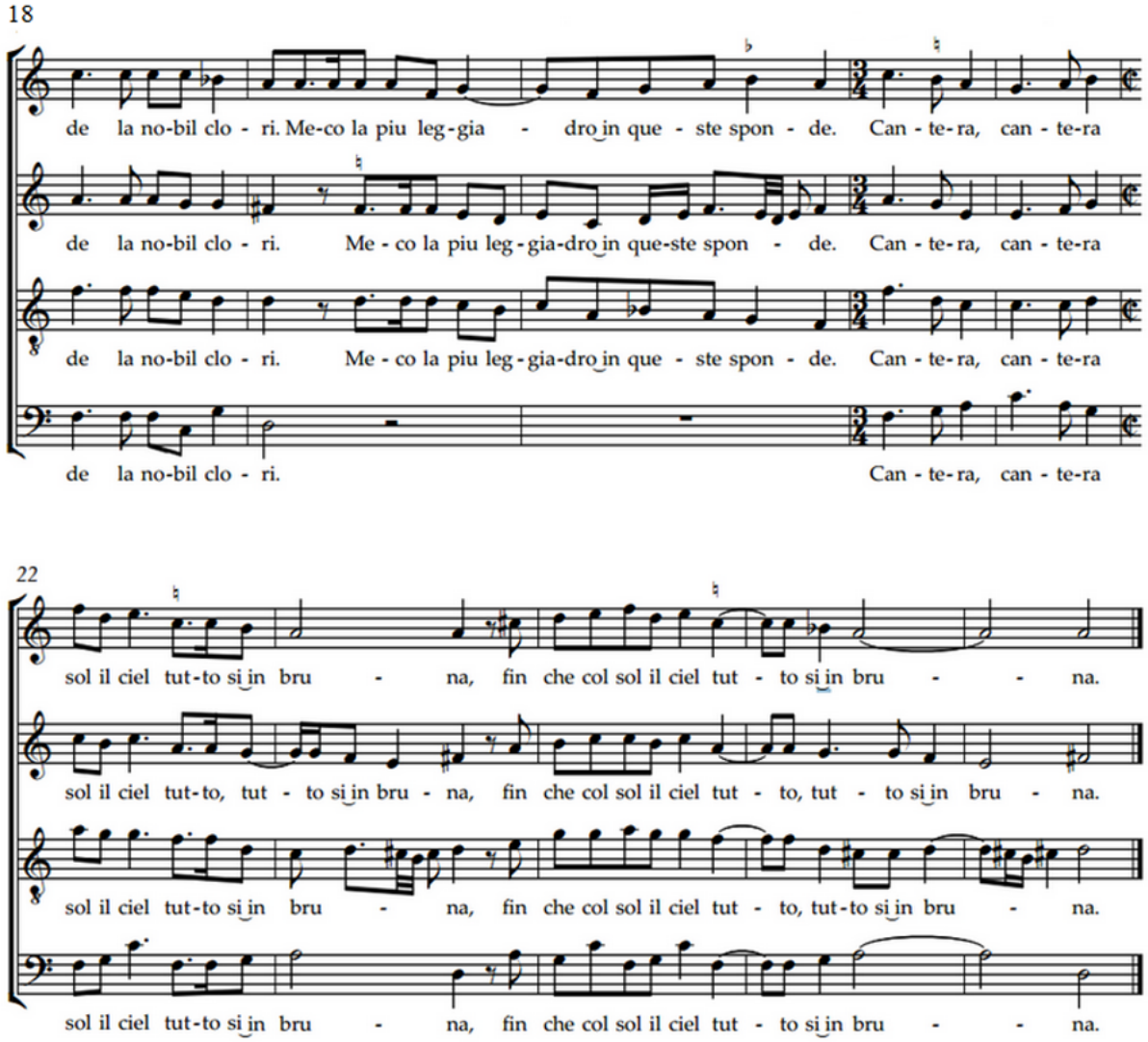


[42] Roche, 9.

[43] Ibid.

As the text exclaims “Cantera” (sing), Casulana employs a sudden shift to B♮ from the measure prior, and continues to move between C♮ and C♯, as well as B♮ and B♭, for the rest of the piece (see Example 13). The chromaticism creates color, emphasizing the text painting that Madalena displayed throughout the madrigal. This chromaticism also proved that Casulana was not only the master of madrigalisms and text-painting, but could also employ chromatic shifts to achieve artistic expression. In *Io d’odorate fronde*, Casulana expanded her musical expression through chromaticism and tonal shifts. Casulana used established and accepted madrigal composition techniques in her works, which helped her compositions gain admiration and renown.

Example 13. Chromaticism in Io d’odorate fronde



The last documentation pertaining to Madalena Casulana is found in the 1591 publication from Venetian publisher Giacomo Vincenti. This music catalogue lists two volumes of *madrigali spirituali a 4* by Casulana. Unfortunately, the music for these pieces is no longer extant.[44] Bowers noted that these volumes were previously printed by Girolamo Scotto, and that the term *spirituali* was not in fact referencing Casulana's compositions. Instead, LaMay suggested that it was her first two books of madrigals reprinted in the volume.[45] This would seem to indicate that Casulana's compositional output slackened in the 1580s. Those who believe she married after 1570 (hence the name change), say she was pushed into an early "retirement" from composing in favor of marriage and domestic responsibilities.[46] Others maintain that the evidence she married is slim, and she maintained independence throughout her life.[47]

Madalena Casulana is certainly notable as being the first woman with an extant volume of published music, and her ability and insistence on notating her music set her apart from all other female participants in music, theater, and creations. In the 1600s in Italy, the act of singing was directly connected with courtesans, who were chiefly found in Venice.[48] Courtesans of the era were expected to entertain their guests with witty conversation and lively music. The courtesans, especially in liberal cities such as Venice, were even able to achieve some amount of independence; courtesan Tullia d'Aragona, for instance, headed an intellectual salon in Venice. Veronica Franco (d. 1591) was also a renowned courtesan, who was an accomplished singer and poet.[49] However, Casulana's composing and ability to write down her compositions set her apart from courtesans.[50] Courtesans thrived on improvisatory song, while Casulana was able to record her music in notation and publication. Written composition differed completely from the courtesan tradition, and that of the traditional female role. For Casulana to publish "distanced her significantly from the women singers of her time—courtesan and otherwise—who gained public space but never clamored for professional legitimacy."[51] Courtesans improvised their music, or at least memorized it; it was never written down. The music was a product of the moment, and in their reviews of Casulana, men made sure to mention her notation of music and her virtue; both of these set her apart from the courtesans.[52] Casulana's ability and insistence to notate and publish her music may have made her the focus of criticism, but it may also have saved her reputation.

Women in sixteenth-century Italy also began participating in the *commedia dell'arte* troupes that had emerged during the period. Players were expected to sing and dance, but only through improvisation. In fact, some scholars suggest *commedia dell'arte* took shape when courtesans introduced their virtuoso musical and poetic gifts to the bawdy, sexually explicit, all-male comedy

[44] Lerner, 99.

[45] LaMay. "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows of Unheard of Songs!" 50.

[46] Bowers, 107–108.

[47] LaMay, "Madalena Casulana: My Body Knows of Unheard of Songs!" 43.

[48] LaMay, "Composing from the Throat," 369.

[49] Meredith Ray explores Veronica Franco's creative output in her volume "Writing Gender in Women's Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance." Franco published a volume of fictional letters in 1580, in part to defend herself against criticism from the emerging movement against courtesans. Unlike a noble woman, Franco was a public figure, and therefore she could, at least in theory, express herself freely in print. This is another instance of a woman both claiming independent voice, while also working within a common writing method of men of the period. However, Franco's publication did inevitably meet with resentment from some. By publishing her own letters, Franco was determined to compete with men "in their own territory and with their own literary instruments" (Ray 135).

[50] Not only does Madalena's composing differ from the courtesan's skills, but there is a lack of any evidence connecting Casulana with any group of courtesans, or even a *concerto della donne*.

[51] LaMay, "Composing from the Throat," 370.

[52] Ibid.

of Pantalone.[53] Even the *concerto della donne* of Ferrara specialized in improvisation. Singers were famous for their music decorated with numerous *passaggi*, trills, and cadenzas; however, the singers probably "improvised these in rehearsal, and then committed them to memory."[54] Notation was the domain of composers, not performers.

Throughout her life, Madalena Casulana did not fit the traditional female role of sixteenth-century Italian society. She gained acclaim through her compositions and performances, and developed relationships with prominent male composers and artists of the period who supported her compositional career. Further, her notation of her music set her apart from other women of the period, who mainly performed through improvisation and memorization. In total, 66 of her madrigals survive today. Madalena Casulana was respected by her peers and contemporaries, so another question remains: why is her work relatively unknown today? Few performance editions are available to purchase or find online, and even fewer are frequently performed. However, Casulana's works exist in one of the first extant publications dedicated to a woman, and her music stands alongside de Rore's and di Lasso's work as highly artistic examples of the Italian madrigal form. Hopefully, through research and editions, modern musicians and choirs can be introduced to Madalena Casulana's name and work.

Selected works of Madalena Casulana available in modern editions

Il primo libro de madrigali, 4vv (Venice, 1568)

- *Morir non può il mio cuore*
- *Sculpio ne l'am' Amore*
- *Se sciôr si ved'il laccio a cui dianz'io*
- *Vedesti Amor giamai*

Il secondo libro de madrigali, 4 voice (SATB) (Venice, 1570) (modern transcriptions available on IMSLP or CPDL)

- *Ridon hor per le piaggie*
- *Amor per qual cagion*
- *Io d'odorate fronde*
- *Ahi possanza d'amor*
- *O notte o ciel o mar*
- *Morte che voi*
- *Ben venga il pastor mio*
- *Adio Lidia mia bella.*
- *Cinta di fior un giorno.*
- *Gli ochi lucenti e belli.*
- *La dea che nel mar nacque.*
- *Io felice pastore.*
- *Per lei pos'in oblio.*
- *Monti selve fontane*
- *Vaghi amorosi augelli*
- *S'alcun vi mira*
- *Come fra verdi erbette*
- *Vivo ardor viva fiamma*
- *Il vostro dipartir*
- *Gran miracol d'amore*
- *Tra verdi frondi* (misattributed, actually composed by Leandro Mira)

Stavisi Il Mio Bel Sol (SSA) Il Gaudio (1586) (available on CPDL or IMSLP).

Additional madrigal editions can be found in B. Pescerelli: *I madrigali di Maddalena Casulana* (Florence, 1979) Pescerelli.

[53] LaMay, "Composing from the Throat," 373.

[54] Pendle, 82.

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