

## Music 301/501 Women in Music

**Renaissance:** approx. 1450-1600. A time of "revival;" philosophy and art developed at very accelerated pace

- Many precipitating events; some very important ones:
  - **Invention of printing press**/moveable type 1454 by Gutenberg
  - **Fall of Constantinople** (1453): Byzantine culture alive there until this time; with invasion, scholars ran for lives with ancient manuscripts and art

Renaissance development can be categorized by geography: **Northern** and **Italian**

- **Northern** came first: grew out of French supremacy in artistic things through middle ages. "Northern" includes French, Dutch and Belgian composers
  - Most Northern Renaissance composers wrote both sacred and secular music
  - Most powerful French court in 15<sup>th</sup> Century was **Burgundian**: Dukes of Burgundy owned huge amounts of land until 1477 when the court was taken over by the French King
  - Artists from Burgundy scattered to other cities: Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels
  - Women seldom mentioned in accounts of Northern renaissance, probably because of their diminished political power and lack of training in polyphonic music
  - **England**: Less affected by male-dominated circumspections of continental European countries
    - Educated people (including some women) would study the **Quadrivium** (in Liberal Arts, the so-called "upper group" or mathematical disciplines: arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy) as well as the rhetorical or lower group, the **Trivium** (grammar, logic and rhetoric)
- **Italian** (musical) Renaissance made rapid progress in 16<sup>th</sup> C: Italians recruited northerners to fill most important music jobs; learned from them; gradually grew to outpace the teachers

### **Background: 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italy:**

- Evidence mostly deals with upper class
- Through 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Italian secular music modeled French (chanson); beginning in 16<sup>th</sup> C, Italians more independent
- Women in 15<sup>th</sup> C Italy were still excluded from participation in church services and therefore musical composition. Composers usually began education as choir boys with instruction in voice and keyboard; later, often had careers as singers, choirmasters, organists in church or at court. This path not open to women
- Well-born 15<sup>th</sup> C Italian women were encouraged to learn to sing in social situations, as were men. Considered important social grace; might become **courtiers**, people who live at court to grace it with their accomplishments
  - Treatises by Barberino, Castiglione, Boccaccio describe what is expected of courtiers

### **16<sup>th</sup> Century Italy**

- There were many courts in Italy: Ferrara, Venice, Mantua, Rome, Florence, etc.; at courts, leaders were mostly friendly rivals: competed for best composers and performers, most lavish entertainments

- A professional group was established by Duke Alfonso II d'Este at his court at Ferrara around 1580, known as the **concerto delle donne**
  - The group had more specialized abilities than courtiers
  - Very popular idea, copied at other courts
- This arrangement led to establishment of specialized group of singers to perform **madrigals**
- Another career path: **Commedia dell' arte** (literally theater by professionals)
  - On the rise by mid-16<sup>th</sup> century
  - Quasi-improvisatory: stock characters participated in stock situations
  - Female characters sometimes played by men, but many troupes had women members. Part of this theater tradition included singing
  - Stature of commedia dell' arte actresses helped aristocrats see that women could be professional performers and could sing
  - One actress, **Vincenza Armani**, had great reputation for acting and singing, even wrote madrigal poetry and set to music
  - See <http://italian.about.com/library/weekly/aa110800b.htm> for additional information on *Commedia dell'arte*
- Principal musical form of 16<sup>th</sup> century is **Madrigal**: polyphonic vocal work for mixture of vocal ranges
  - In earlier works ranges could often be manipulated to be covered by men's voices; later madrigals had intricate high parts: difficult for falsetto to cover
- **Madalena Casulana**: Venetian; born ~1540?
  - One of the only women to have fame as composer in 16<sup>th</sup> C
  - Wrote madrigals: some published in anthologies that included other composers; then her own collection (1566 - 70)
  - These were **first compositions by a woman to be published**
  - Dedications of collections showed she was trying to attract a sponsor in the way usually done by men