HOW OPERA BEGAN (AND WHY IT BEGAN IN FLORENCE)

Note: Numbers in red refer to the accompanying powerpoint slides; the symbol [+] indicates an addition to the preceding slide.

[1] My goal today is to acquaint you with the circumstances leading to the advent of opera and to discuss the culture and events that surrounded its origins in Florence around the year 1600. But, in addition to summarizing HOW opera began (a subject which has already been very well documented in print), I should also like to explore a question that is less often asked – [2] that is, WHY opera began. And more specifically, [+] Why did it begin in Florence? and [+] Why did it begin when it did, at the end of the Renaissance?

[3] The Florentine composer Marco da Gagliano (maestro di cappella to the Medici court from 1609 until his death in 1643) provides a useful and accurate outline of "how." [+] In the preface to his opera *La Dafne*, performed and printed in 1608, he relates the circumstances of the genre's experimental beginnings.[1] *La Dafne* was Gagliano's own first effort in the new genre, examples of which he called, simply, *spettacoli*. (The word *opera*, which means "work" in Italian, only came into use later.) [4] His *Dafne* was a reworking and expansion of an earlier *Dafne*, from the previous decade—the first completely sung musical play. Gagliano relates how that first *Dafne* came about. He says that, after a great deal of discussion took place concerning the way the ancients had performed their tragedies and about what role music had played in them, the court poet Ottavio Rinuccini began to write the story (*favola*) of *Dafne*, [+] and the learned amateur Jacopo Corsi composed some airs on part of it. In order to see what effect a completely sung work would have on the stage, [+] Rinuccini and Corsi approached the skilled composer and singer Jacopo Peri, who finished writing the music and probably premiered the role of Apollo at the first performance. Gagliano tells us that it took place at "an evening entertainment" during the Carnival season of

1597/8. In the invited audience on that occasion were Don Giovanni de' Medici and (he says) "some of the principal gentlemen" of Florence.[2]

[5] Let me quickly fill in the events between 1598 and 1608. Encouraged by the success of the experiments that resulted in *La Dafne*, [6] in 1600 Rinuccini and Peri collaborate on a second production, which is first performed during the festivities honoring the marriage of Maria de' Medici to Henry IV of France.[3] [+] Rinuccini's libretto for this work, *L'Euridice*, is printed first, probably as a souvenir of the occasion, and it tells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. [+] In his preface (dated 4 October), Rinuccini explains that the work was partly motivated by the belief of some scholars that the ancient Greeks and Romans sang their tragedies on stage in their entirety. We understand from this (and other things he and Peri say) that they are interested more in the manner of performance of the new genre—its rhetorical delivery—than in reproducing the content of the ancient plays. We also recognize that their ambition is no less than the revival on stage of the ancient manner of declamation. Now another singer-composer also has a hand in composing *L'Euridice* for the wedding celebrations—namely Giulio Caccini, the protégé of Count Giovanni dei Bardi; and he has already been promoting a new rhetorical singing style since the meetings of Bardi's Camerata in the 1580s, decades earlier. The rivalry between Caccini and Peri becomes so intense that, [+] at the first performance of *L'Euridice* (October 6), Caccini does not allow his pupils to perform any music composed by Peri. The result is that Peri, in the role of Orfeo, sings music that he wrote while his bride, Euridice, sings Caccini's music! (Not a very good start to a marriage partnership! No wonder Orfeo couldn't keep his bride!) [7] Meanwhile, around this same time, Emilio de' Cavalieri, supervisor of the Florentine festivities, [+] publishes his score of the *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*) [+] performed earlier that year in Rome; and by the way, take special note of the generic title—*Rappresentazione*—which I'll come back to). But despite Cavalieri's claims of primacy, this

work is usually discounted in narratives of opera's origins because, even though it is sung throughout, its style is far from Peri's declamatory *recitar cantando* (the Italian expression for what we now call recitative—a style of singing midway between speech and song) and it has a spiritual subject (a dialogue between the Soul and the Body).[4] Such subjets later became the purview of oratorio. [8] A few days after *L'Euridice*, [+] Caccini's opera *Il rapimento di Cefalo* is premiered (set to a libretto by another prominent court poet, Gabriello Chiabrera). This work is, by all accounts, the blockbuster event of the weeklong festivities, but its grandness is not well suited to Caccini's intimate style of solo singing, so it is not favored with publication and is now lost except for the libretto. [9] Not to be outdone, however, [+] Caccini quickly finishes his setting of *L'Euridice* and rushes it into print a month before [+] Peri's score gets published early in 1601.[5] [10] But Caccini's completed version doesn't premiere [+] until late in the following year (1602), after his collection of solo songs, [+] *Le Nuove musiche,* puts him on the map as a composer.

Then, Rinuccini goes to France in the entourage of Maria de' Medici, Cavalieri stays in Rome, and Peri and Caccini remain in Florence, which soon takes a back seat in operatic developments. But their personal rivalries, fueled by the printers who quickly published their works, and the public competition among princes to garner attention with their patronage, are some of the factors that fostered the endurance of the first completely sung musical tales and their spread to other urban centers—Mantua, Rome, Venice, and elsewhere, both inside and outside the Italian peninsula. [11] Within the decade, the masterful madrigal composer Claudio Monteverdi (156?-1643) [+] makes his debut in the field with *La favola d'Orfeo* (1607), in Mantua, the first opera to achieve a place in the modern repertory. [12] The following year, Rinuccini, by this time back from France, collaborates with Monteverdi to create [+] *L'Arianna*—now lost except for the Lament, which was destined to become the most famous piece of music of the seventeenth century. *L'Arianna* completely eclipses

L'Orfeo; judging by all the descriptions of its performance, it is the work that brings the development of opera to its first great peak after only one brief decade, and makes all previous efforts look pale by comparison. [An aside: I don't know how many of you saw NY Times critic Anthony Tommasini's list of his top ten classical composers published in the *Times* earlier this year, but Monteverdi didn't make it onto the list; no composer before Bach did. In an effort to placate some outraged readers, though, Tommasini conceded Monteverdi's greatness, saying "Though Monteverdi did not invent opera, he took one look at what was going on in Florence in 1600 and figured out how this opera thing should really be done."] [13] Let's now hear the opening section of Monteverdi's Lament of Arianna, the only surviving piece from the opera. Listen especially to the way Monteverdi allows the phrases of text to dictate the contours and rhythms of the melody—expanding the range of the second phrase for emphasis; and in the next phrase, how he makes the melody rise (just as in speech) to express Arianna's rhetorical question (Who can console me); and on the return of the opening words, how Monteverdi rubs our noses in what was for its time a very strong dissonance between voice and bass to express the rawness of Arianna's emotion. [Play] The Lament continues for another 7 or 8 minutes, during which Arianna conveys a gamut of emotions ranging from anger and scorn at Theseus's betrayal to tenderness and resignation.

[14] So now, having seen that Florence was the birthplace of opera, let's ask why. [15] Why Florence? [+] First of all, Florence had a long tradition of musical theater in the sixteenth century, principally in the productions known as intermedi that were staged between the acts of spoken plays. Intermedi were only one of many types of theatrical entertainment produced by courts all over Europe. [+] But the Medici outdid all the rest in 1589 by staging the most magnificent and extravagant spectacle ever seen in order to celebrate the marriage of Grand Duke Ferdinando of Tuscany to the French Princess Christine of Lorraine, a union that had been in negotiation for nearly

a year. The intermedi that were produced for this event climaxed a monthlong sequence of public and courtly pageantry that combined all the intellectual, artistic, and administrative forces of Tuscany at the height of its wealth, power, and cultural prestige. One court chronicler wrote, "Their splendor cannot be described, and anyone who did not see [the production] could not believe it."

[16] Next, unlike other cities, Medicean Florence also had a particularly rich history of [+] "civic humanism"[6]—which means that its more educated citizens were involved in a network of formal and informal academies that were engaged in studying the Greek and Latin texts of the ancients. [17] Bardi's so-called Florentine Camerata, where Caccini was groomed, was only one of many such groups. Bardi was also a member of the Alterati, to which Rinuccini and Corsi belonged, and Corsi probably also had his own circle, the group that ultimately produced the first *Dafne*. We can think of them as satellite courts, surrounding and drawing inspiration from the brlliant Medici rulers. And their members all interacted in the planning and production of the 1589 intermedi, which was largely Bardi's brainchild but which required everyone else to contribute their efforts as well.

[18] Finally, as Gary Tomlinson and others have suggested, [+] Florence was the center of a particular Renaissance worldview that saw music as having a "magical" role in the cosmos and in mankind's interaction with it.[7] This particular worldview was rooted in Platonic thought, which held that the individual was connected to the entire universe through harmony. [+] Therefore, it followed that the best way to express this connection was by giving voice to song. So, in the court culture of Florence during the late fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth, singing—and especially solo singing—took on very special significance.

Before moving on, I want to look more closely at each of these three elements—intermedi, humanism, and musical magic—in order to see how they came together at the end of the sixteenth century and resulted in Florence becoming the birthplace of opera.

[19] The Florentine intermedi were lavishly produced pageants involving sumptuous costumes, special effects, instrumental music, dance, and song. They were produced as entr'actes to comedies or pastoral plays at court and served to separate the divisions of the spoken drama, since there was no curtain to be dropped. The 1589 intermedi were planned and rehearsed months in advance, and their cost and impact dwarfed that of the main drama [Bargagli's play *La Pellegrina*], so that absolutely no doubt remained in the minds of the invited guests about their host's wealth, generosity, and power.[8]

[20] A huge team of artists, artisans, poets, musicians, architects, and technicians was assembled under the intellectual guidance of the prominent Florentine aristocrat and military leader [+] Giovanni de' Bardi (1534-1612), who formulated the underlying conception of the intermedi, served as stage director, and coordinated all the thematic and antiquarian aspects of the project.[9] As the moving spirit behind the program, Bardi worked closely with the court poets, [+] principally Ottavio Rinuccini (1562-1621), who wrote most of the text of the intermedi and later wrote the verse for the first opera libretto, *La Dafne*.[10] [+] Emilio de' Cavalieri (c.1550-1602), the recently appointed superintendent of music at the ducal court who had been in Ferdinando's retinue while he was still a cardinal residing in Rome, became the show's musical director. [+] The court architect-engineer Bernardo Buontalenti (c.1531-1608), who had constructed for the Medici the first permanent indoor theater with a modern proscenium arch only a few years earlier, remodeled it for the occasion, and designed the sets and costumes.[11] [+] The music was largely composed by court organist Cristofano Malvezzi and madrigalist Luca Marenzio, with individual contributions by the young composer-singer Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), by Bardi's protégé Giulio Caccini (1551-1618), and by Bardi himself, among others.

[21] Bardi conceived the set of six intermedi as "a sort of mythological history of music,"[12] very suitable for a wedding celebration because it depicts the descent of Harmony as a gift from the gods and predicts a new Golden Age to be inaugurated by the newlyweds. Moreover, the individual tableaux are loosely unified by the literary theme of the power of music, a topic of longstanding interest to the Florentines, as we shall see. The opening intermedio contemplated the harmony of the spheres. The next, by representing a song contest between the Muses and their rivals the Pierides, dwelt on the virtues and virtuosity of song. [22] The third enacted the combat between Apollo and the Pythic serpent, prefiguring the opening scene from Rinuccini's and Peri's first opera, *La Dafne*. So it actually introduced the first operatic hero, [23] Apollo—god of music and of the sun, and, according to some accounts, father of the legendary musician Orpheus, who became in turn the protagonist of several early opera libretti. (That's Apollo swooping down to attack the dragon.) [24] The fifth intermedio gave a prominent role to Jacopo Peri, who composed and performed his first piece for solo voice to portray another poet-musician of antiquity, Arion; according to myth, Arion was saved from drowning by a dolphin attracted by the dazzling power of his song. [25] In the concluding intermedio, harmony and rhythm are given to mere mortals, represented by the nymphs and shepherds of Arcadia, who are instructed by the gods in the art of dancing during an elaborately choreographed *ballo.*

[26] The 1589 intermedi had many of the same players and almost all the ingredients of opera—gorgeous costumes and scenery, [27] stage effects (for example, the life-size fire-spitting dragon slain by Apollo), [13]enthralling solo singing, colorful instrumental music, large concerted numbers, dance—everything except a unified action and the rhetorical style of dramatic singing yet to be created. It remained for a few pioneering individuals to shape these elements into opera, a new

and quite "noble style of performance"[14] that, by emulating ancient theater, would revive the power of modern music to move the emotions.

[28] Now let's turn our attention to the second of the three elements that contributed to making Florence the birthplace of opera: [+] HUMANISM. In its narrowest sense, humanism was an interest in the culture and texts of antiquity on the part of the city's more educated or elite citizens—those who joined the network of academies I mentioned earlier. As we've seen, the first opera librettist, Rinuccini, maintained that his joint experiments with Corsi and Peri were motivated by the belief of some scholars that the ancient Greeks and Romans sang their tragedies on the stage in their entirety.[15] In fact, Renaissance scholars disagreed among themselves about the role of music in ancient tragedy, but what matters in our narration is that Rinuccini and his associates gave credence to the idea.

[29] A modern scholar of musical humanism (Gary Tomlinson) has called attention to three different but related types of humanism. There was philological humanism, which fostered the transmission, translation and interpretation of ancient texts. [+] The person who comes to mind in this regard is Girolamo Mei, the very erudite philologist who transmitted his ideas about language and ancient music to Bardi and became a sort of mentor to the Florentine Camerata. [+] Then there was rhetorical humanism, modeled on the principles of persuasive oratory, which Renaissance men of letters adapted to their own debates and writings. [+] An example of this type of humanist might be Vincenzo Galilei, who wrote his treatise for the Camerata (*Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna*, 1581) in the conventional Renaissance form of a dialogue—a conversation between two friends (one of whom is named after Count Bardi) debating the merits of ancient and modern music. (More about this in a moment.) [+] And finally, there was what Tomlinson calls "ordinary-language humanism," —a view that underlay "the whole late-Renaissance exaltation of music's affective

powers";[16] and, in one way or another, this view accounts for the great importance that all of Renaissance musical culture placed on expressing the meaning of the text. Ordinary-language humanism credited language itself—the very sound and shape of the words rather than the eloquence with which they were arranged—with the ability to communicate meaning and emotion. Now, it must have been possible to subscribe to all three types of humanism, and no doubt someone like Mei did. [+] But it seems to me likely that the court poet Rinuccini, and his collaborators Corsi and Peri, who did not know Greek or Latin and were not trained as scholars, nevertheless adopted this ordinary-language humanism as their type of Greek revivalism, and one that motivated them to create the first opera.

Where did these ideas come from? [30] Rinuccini belonged to the Alterati Academy—its very name (Academy of the Altered Ones) acknowledged the ability of ideas to effect change in human beings. The Alterati membership included the widely read and accomplished Count Bardi, already a member of long standing by the time Rinuccini was initiated in 1586, three years before they collaborated on the elaborate wedding intermedi. Another member was the remarkable scholar Girolamo Mei (1519-94), who was Florentine by birth, but worked in Rome and made known the results of his research into Greek music in his letters to Bardi and the other academy members. A brilliant philologist, Mei promoted theories about language that were in fact as central to the genesis of the new dramatic style of singing as his convictions about Greek music were essential to the origins of opera; for Mei believed not only that poems and plays were always sung in ancient times, whether by soloists or chorus, but also that they were sung monophonically—using one melody at a time, without competing lines—so that the words as sounding structures could act on the listeners' souls. And finally, the Alterati also counted among its members another Florentine nobleman, Jacopo Corsi (1561-1602),[17] the enthusiastic amateur who partially composed, and fully sponsored,

the production of the first completely sung play, *La Dafne,* in 1597/8.[18] [+] So it is with good reason that the Alterati of Florence have been called by one modern scholar (Claude Palisca) "pioneers in the theory of dramatic music."[19]

[31] Now, Count Bardi also had his own circle of friends with similar humanist and musical interests, a more informal academy that met in his palace and came to be known as *the* (Florentine) Camerata.[20] As the courtier chiefly responsible for organizing entertainments for the Grand Duke, Bardi naturally became interested in theatrical or dramatic music and eagerly cultivated his relationship with Mei.[21] [32] These two, then, were key players in both the Alterati Academy and the Camerata, and it is obvious that both groups shared a concern with musical humanism. Bardi's inner circle also included the singer-lutenist-composer Giulio Caccini (whom he involved in the 1589 intermedi) as well as Vincenzo Galilei (ca. 1530-91), another talented singer-lutenist-composer in his employ. Galilei, father of the revolutionary thinker and astronomer Galileo, had studied with the most famous counterpoint teacher of the age, Gioseffe Zarlino, and had already published a text on how to arrange polyphonic music for solo voice and lute (*Il Fronimo*, 1568), a medium that became increasingly popular during the last quarter of the century. [22] Under the influence of Bardi and Mei, [33] Galilei wrote his *Dialogo della musica antia e della moderna,* 1581,[23] which soon became the Camerata's radical manifesto, for it articulated the principles of ordinary-language humanism in the most radical way imaginable for a sixteenth-century musician: do away with vocal counterpoint altogether and revert to a type of nonpolyphonic composition combining words, melody, and simple accompaniment (which we now call monody).

Galilei reasoned that only monody was capable of imitating nature—that is, the "natural language" of speech, through which a person's character and states of soul are reflected. Mei, his mentor, taught that ancient music had always presented a single affection embodied in a single

melody.[24] He believed that melody alone could convey the message of the text through the natural expressiveness of the voice—via the register, rhythms, and contours of its utterance—and it could do this far better than the contrived delivery of a polyphonic texture.[25] Like Mei, Galilei was convinced that counterpoint was ineffective because it presented contradictory information to the ear. When several voices simultaneously sang different melodies and words—pitting high pitches against low, slow rhythms against fast, rising intervals against descending ones—the resulting web of sounds was incapable of projecting the semantic meaning or emotional message of the text. Only by returning to an art truly founded on the imitation of human nature rather than on contrapuntal artifice would it be possible for modern composers to realize the acclaimed effects of ancient music.

Plato had taught that song (melos) was comprised of words, rhythm, and pitch, in that order. From that concept followed two important humanist ideas. First, music and poetry were two sides of a single language; second, song arose from an innate harmony within the words that was muted in normal speech but manifest in heightened speech. [34] For this reason, Galilei advocated the art of rhetoric as a model for modern musicians, urging them to imitate the manner in which successful actors delivered their lines on stage:

> Kindly observe in what manner the actors speak, in what range, high or low, how loudly or softly, how rapidly or slowly they enunciate their words . . . how one speaks when infuriated or excited; how a married woman speaks, how a girl, how a lover . . . how one speaks when lamenting, when crying out, when afraid, and when exulting with joy.[26]

For Galilei, it is clear that "how one speaks" (or declaims) the words reveals their underlying emotion. For the composers of monody and theatrical song, by extension, it then became a question of "how one sings" the words to disclose their innate significance.[27]

[35] In order to see the important role that singing had in Florentine culture, I want to return to the third element in my discussion of why Florence was the birthplace of opera: [36] Musical

Magic. More than a century before the first experiments in opera, [+] Angelo Poliziano had dramatized the myth of Orpheus for the Florentine cultural elite. His *Orfeo* (1480), the earliest secular play in Italian, received numerous editions during the sixteenth century and became, in effect, a Medici literary classic, popularizing through the Orpheus legend the marvels of ancient music and musicians.[28] [+] The musician *par excellence* of antiquity, Orpheus had been able to tame the beasts of nature and charm the infernal gods into allowing him to lead Eurydice out of the Underworld—all by means of the power of his spellbinding incantation. [37] Poliziano himself was a member of the Neoplatonic circle [+] surrounding Lorenzo de' Medici (known as the "Magnificent" because of his brilliance and erudition). The main intellectual figure in his informal academy was [+] another erudite Florentine, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), a humanist well versed in Platonic thought. As early as 1489, Ficino postulated a "music-spirit" theory which explained the peculiar power of music by the fact that sound, unlike other sensual stimuli, is carried by air and is therefore similar to *spiritus*, the substance that mediated between body and soul.[29] Ficino also believed that the human voice, through music, provided the link between the earthly world and the cosmos.

Because Platonic thought held that the individual was connected to the entire universe through harmony, it followed that the artful singer could express psychological and moral reality through his voice and could use his rhetorical powers to make that reality present to others.[30] By employing certain patterns of correspondence between micro- and macrocosm, between the motions of the human soul and the hidden harmony of the cosmos, the singer could manipulate the listener's responses—a notion very much in keeping with the Aristotelian concept of imitation or mimesis. The composer-singer, then, in the guise of the legendary Orpheus, became the expressive agent of that artistic power. And Florentine Neoplatonism, in the artistic manifestation of Poliziano's *Orfeo*—

a spoken drama with interpolated song[31]—helped to stimulate a century-long fascination with the expressive powers of music.

So, in the court culture of Florence during the late fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth, singing—and especially solo singing—took on very special significance and it is easy to understand how Mei, Bardi, Caccini, Peri, and Rinuccini, being products of a culture steeped in Neoplatonic musical thought, were heirs to these Renaissance ideas about the magical effects of song. Mei shared some of Ficino's "music-spirit" theories, particularly those which held hearing to be superior to the other senses in its ability to act on the soul's passions.[32] As we have seen, Bardi's program for the 1589 intermedi revolved around the power of song while his protégé, Caccini, revitalized the Renaissance ideal of incantatory solo singing for the Camerata in his madrigals for solo voice he later collected and published as *Le nuove musiche* (1602).[33] In creating the first opera libretto, Rinuccini, under the weight of Florentine and Medicean tradition, [+] looked back to Poliziano's fable of *Orfeo*. Not only was Orpheus a fitting protagonist for a completely sung music drama aiming to demonstrate the power of song, but also, as Tomlinson points out, the fable's outcome and that of the other earliest tales of opera [quote] "vindicated the occult harmony of the cosmos . . . : [38] in the answer to Daphne's just prayers by her magical transformation [into a laurel tree], [39] in the alleviation of Ariadne's woes by the miraculous descent of Bacchus, [40] and in the transformative power of song in . . . [the] Orpheus librettos."[34] Like Ovid's tales of metamorphoses from which they were drawn, these early opera were fabrications or fables (*favole*) and, by focusing on timeless myths involving love and loss, they sought to dramatize, externalize, or represent human sentiment. And what better way was there of realizing the transformative power of song and Orfeo's vocal magic than through musical speech? This was at the heart of the notion of the representational style (*stile rappresentativo*). Peri's invention of the dramatic and rhetorical style of singing known as

recitative, then, was rooted in the conviction that musical speech was capable of transmitting an inner, emotional reality and could therefore represent human affections on stage.

The communication of affections on stage in opera by singing and acting bodies can only be experienced in the presence of both actors and listeners; and it can only be explained in the context of the location and the actual moment of the performance—the *rappresentazione*. The defining nature of the location or space makes the listener a component part of the musical process. In this way, early opera depended on both the sense of sight and hearing as no other musical art form (except the intermedi and court ballets) had done before. In fact, only a few years before the 1589 Florentine intermedi, [41] the court architect-engineer Bernardo Buontalenti had constructed for the Medici the first permanent indoor theater with a modern proscenium arch. This is significant because the proscenium arch not only frames a view into the illusionary depths of the representation, but also allows the performance taking place to be directly addressed to the viewer. And this is precisely what painting had been striving to do since the advent of perspective in the Renaissance. All of which finally brings me to the last of my concerns: [42] why opera began when it did—[+] around the year 1600, at the end of the Renaissance. The short answer (but one that I will elaborate upon in the remaining time) is this: it was the consummation of an idea that reigned supreme during the Renaissance—namely, that the sister arts of painting, music, and poetry all had the ability, through imitation, to portray some sort of psychological and moral reality; what's more, they all had the power—even the obligation—through rhetorical means to make that reality present to others. This view had long been held about the verbal arts, but the rivalry between poetry and painting during the sixteenth century, deriving from Horace's famous simile *ut pictura poesis* (as painting is, so is poetry), led painting to acquire the status of a liberal art, one that deserved equally serious consideration as that given to poetry. [43] Roger de Piles (1635-1709), one of the most influential art

theorists of the next century, was unequivocal in this matter: "One must think of painting as a kind of stage on which each figure plays its role." He also tells us that the "principal end" of the painter is "to imitate the mores and actions of men."[35] And we have seen that humanism demanded no less from composers and musicians.

A moment ago, I remarked that the communication of affections on stage, in opera, by singing and acting bodies, can only be experienced in the presence of both actors and listeners or viewers, and now I want to concentrate on the viewers. For, if the aim of the sister arts was to communicate the affections or passions—to imitate or represent affections in order to stimulate passions in the viewer—then the audience was clearly an important part of the process. It seems to me that painting offers a very instructive example of how all the arts, but especially opera at the beginning of the 17th century, defined themselves by the effect they had on the spectators.

[44] In a book about The Origins of the City of Florence and Its Famous Citizens (*De origine civitatis Florentiae et eiusdem famosis civibus*,1381-2), the Florentine humanist and chronicler Filippo Villani describes the many-faceted accomplishments of Florentine culture. His main theme was that this culture had declined in his own age (late 14th century), and that Florentines needed to be reminded of the greatness of such earlier citizens as Dante and Giotto and others of their generation. But Villani also included an entire chapter on painters and what I find noteworthy is that his remarks about Giotto make clear his belief that painting should aspire to the condition of theater:

[+] Images formed by [Giotto's] brush agree so well with the lineaments of nature as to seem to the beholder to live and breathe; and his pictures appear to perform actions and movements so exactly as to seem from a little way off actually speaking, weeping, rejoicing, and doing other things, not without pleasure from him who beholds and praises the talent and skill of the artist.

[45] Villani could have been talking about this painting from the series by Giotto in the Arena chapel.

Two generations later, in Florence, Leon Battista Alberti wrote a famous treatise on painting (*Della pittura*, 1435-6), which reveals that his conception of the art grows directly out of rhetorical humanism. [46]He bases his theory of pictorial composition—the way in which a painting can be organized so that each plane surface and each object plays its part in the effect of the whole—on the model of rhetorical *compositio*, or the way that a sentence is built up from a hierarchy of elements. Words are fitted together to make phrases, phrases to make clauses, and clauses to make sentences. In pictorial composition [use pointer], the parts of the narrative are bodies, the parts of the body are members, and the members are made up of plane surfaces. *Compositio*, according to Alberti, is that method of painting which composes or puts all these interdependent elements together in the work of art. And again, his way of speaking of the work suggests a theatrical performance: [47] "In my view," he says, "there is no painted narrative so filled with so great a variety of events that nine or ten persons will not be capable of acting them out quite fittingly."[36] Alberti himself refers his readers back to Giotto's work, but the mid-fifteenth-century painter perhaps most influenced by Alberti [48] was Andrea Mantegna, who produced the finest visual models of Alberti's ideas about composition. One of them is this engraving of the *Entombment.* The maximum ten figures are evident. Their planes or gatherings of drapery are formed into members—their various limbs or body parts; the members are harmonized to create bodies or whole figures; and the ten different bodies are interrelated to form the narrative.

Now, it was also the Florentine school of painting that worked out the principles of linear perspective, and their first theorist was again Alberti. [49] Here's a medieval *Last Supper*, a manuscript illustration from about the year 1200. Its two-dimensional style of spatial representation makes the picture face the viewer like a flat wall, generally excluding us from what appears as a self-contained, closed world. [50] With central perspective, however, the relation to the viewer changes.

In Leonardo's *Last Supper*, painted in the last decade of the fifteenth century, the figure of Christ is placed in the center of the composition, which is at the same time its vanishing point. The frontally oriented table and back wall support the majesty and stability of the principal figure, whereas "the side walls and ceiling swing outward, as though in a gesture of revelation."[37] [51] A modern diagram of the painting's perspective makes it clear that the principal structural lines are a system of beams coming from a focus within the picture space and breaking through the frontal plane as they move forward, opening the picture like a flower toward the viewer. This explicit acknowledgment of the viewer is the visual expression of the fact that the world represented in the picture is being sighted. In other words, the image presents a world seen from the viewpoint of an individual observer, and therefore changes the pictorial conception of space in a way that invites a new level of awareness on the part of the spectator.

[52] The Renaissance architect Palladio determined that the vanishing point should be placed in the center in order to give any picture *maestà* and *grandezza*, and indeed the symmetry of Leonardo's painting lends a certain *gravitas* to its style and subject. But as the stylistic outlook changes in the later sixteenth century, so does painting's relation to the viewer.

Perhaps the painter most emblematic of the style changes that took place in the early seventeenth century was Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610). [56] Among his very early works, *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* dates from approximately the same years as Peri's and Caccini's first operas, *La Dafne* and *L'Euridice*. Scholars explain the picture mainly as a study of extreme expression, and essentially realistic in its intent. Indeed, the painting should more appropriately be called *Boy Being Bitten by a Lizard* because [57] it depicts the very instant when the lizard emerges from the fruit on the table to bite his finger and, at the same time, demonstrates the artist's skill in representing (and I use that word very purposefully) the fleeting moment of the boy's reaction, as his

expression registers the surprise and sharp pain of the lizard's attack. [58] The painting is therefore a study of both physical action and psychological reaction—as are many Baroque representations that portray instantaneous and violent action as well as the expression of the emotions resulting from that action. We need only think of Eurydice's death by snakebite and Orfeo's subsequent stunned reaction to find fitting parallels. Just as Caravaggio captured the immediacy of the boy's reaction, Peri, Caccini, and (of course) Monteverdi in their footsteps, managed to convey Orfeo's intense emotion in the expressive recitative which he sings ("Non piango, e non sospiro") in reaction to Eurydice's death. Modern commentators have stressed the forcefulness with which Caravaggio's paintings at all stages of his career thematize or otherwise draw attention to their relation to the viewer. I suggest that the early operas similarly thematize or draw attention to their relation to the listener—by representing both action and reaction, making them present to the listener via the new musico-theatrical device of recitative. It is as though artists and musicians are exploring the whole issue of spectatordom in both painting and music at precisely the same historical moment, around the year 1600.

[59] Another work from this period that calls attention to the depiction of action and reaction as well as to the issue of spectatordom is *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (ca. 1620) by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653). In the destabilizing flow and counterflow of the painting, Judith's maidservant (in the center) struggles with the victim's thrusting arms as Judith herself concentrates on her deadly action; she performs the deed at arm's length as though she were at the same time reacting by distancing herself in disgust from her victim's gushing blood. [60] Notice how similar are Judith's features to Artemisia's, which we see in the painter's self-portrait. That allows us to think of Judith-the-executioner as a stand-in for Artemisia the painter—not only because they look alike but also because they are both initiating their actions (Judith is slaying Holofernes, Artemisia is

painting her own portrait). [61] We also see how Holofernes is looking out at us, as though pleading with us to intervene as we try to avoid being splattered with his blood. In this way, we viewers are being drawn into the action as well. What I'm suggesting, therefore, is that the work itself masterfully evokes both the making and the viewing of the picture, both for the benefit of the spectator. And in this way, by so forcefully merging their subjects with the viewer's environment, early modern artists sought to act upon and move the emotions of the spectator.

The key phrase here is "merging the subject with the environment," creating the illusion that the spectator is part of the action or even part of the scenery. [62] The court architect Buontalenti had already achieved this when he completed in the 1580s and 90s the spectacular grotto for the Medici princes in the Boboli gardens behind their apartments in the Pitti Palace. [63] Here, a decade before opera began, is a bucolic fantasyland, a retreat full of partly sculpted and partly frescoed images replicating the pastoral grottoes of Tasso's *Aminta* or the *Pastor fido* (the *Faithful Shepherd* by Guarini). [64] The spectator enters through the façade, under the Medici coat of arms, and [65] steps into a mythical world fabricated for the imagination, in which the viewer becomes a faithful shepherd or a sylvan nymph, surrounded by the companions of Arcadia. [66] He or she is completely contained within an illusory world. [67] As far as I know, the grotto was never used as a theater; rather, it was a playground for the courtiers and their guests, who could take refuge from the [68] garden's midday sun and refresh themselves in the grotto's cool shade.

[68] In his important book *From Art to Theatre*, George Kernodle states that "modern theatre grew out of the desire to see and hear with living actors the romantic stories and allegorical fancies already portrayed by the painters."[38] [69] If we substitute [+] the words *early opera* and [+] *singing actors,* we can understand how the new *favola tutta in musica* was also an entirely logical outcome of the whole development of Renaissance art and music in Florence. In other words, opera was the sonic

realization in three dimensions of the forms and conventions of its painting, sculpture, poetry, and song. The Florentine school had worked out the principles of linear perspective in two dimensions; [70] Renaissance architects like Baldassare Peruzzi (whom Vasari credits with the development of perspective scenery) reproduced the effects of painting in three dimensions, bringing the settings and backgrounds of the pictures to life on stage. The resulting illusionistic set designs, when framed by the new proscenium arch, reproduced a spectacular and complex unified painting through which the action could be addressed directly to the viewer. An exact relation, unknown before, was established between audience, actor, and setting which promoted the spectator's sense of being surrounded by or merging with the theatrical setting, an effect that Buontalenti later realized in the Boboli grotto. And when the scenery enclosed actors who were presenting the new recitative forged by Florentine composers and singers—that *sui generis* style of solo singing that heightened the delivery of speech but was more naturalistic than song—they realized Galilei's ideal of the actor who delivered his lines so as to reveal the emotions that lay behind the words, engaging the listener as never before. So, the integration of the sister arts in this way invested the new art form with a rhetorical power that could not be matched by any of them individually.

[71] Since we don't have any sets that survive from the earliest court operas, I'd like to close by looking at a much earlier painting sometimes attributed to the young Titian, and dating from the early 16th century, but depicting the same subject as that which interested the early opera poets and composers. Eurydice appears in the foreground, having been stopped in her tracks by the serpent's venomous bite. [72] I suggest that the shepherd in the middle ground is Aristaeus, from whom Eurydice was fleeing in Ovid's original story. Further to the right is perhaps one of Eurydice's companions, who is running off to tell Orpheus about his sudden reversal of

fortune. Of course, [73] the bucolic scene presents an entirely different problem in terms of perspective than an urban setting. Titian tried to create a sense of depth by duplicating a series of similar forms on successive planes of the picture, one behind the other. So the central cavernous structure which seems to be inhabited by ghostly heads is repeated further back, where its fiery opening certainly suggests Hades and behind that one, another furnace-like structure smokes in the distance. Did Titian imagine that Orpheus would have to go through a series of Underworld landscapes to retrieve his bride?

Granted, Titian's painting is not a stage set; but if you were trying to reproduce it or any sort of pastoral setting in the theater, you can see the problems that might present themselves. [74] The absence of a single strong focal point of the sort that court architects could devise for their street settings, which brought the viewer into the actors' illusory world—the absence of such a focal point might lead you to rely more urgently on the sense of hearing than the sense of sight in order to surround the viewer. [75] Therefore, the representation of an entirely sung play in an Arcadian setting (such as *La Dafne* or *L'Euridice*) may in part have been motivated by the desire to surround the spectators with a sonic environment—a *rappresentazione tutta in musica*—that helped to bridge the gap between reality and the mythical world they were being invited to experience.

In conclusion, I want to leave you with the idea that opera was, from its beginnings in Florence around the year 1600, a socially shared experience in which acting and singing—and particularly singing in the new, recitative style, about love and loss—was the culmination of a certain rhetorical type of speaking picture that had long been nurtured by the Renaissance imagination. Its aim was to revive the humanist ideals of incantatory singing so admired by the Florentine Neoplatonists and the style of theatrical declamation believed to have been so effective in ancient drama. It brought the spectator into a new relationship with the stage, heightening the immediacy of

its illusions and acting on the emotions through the sense of hearing as well as seeing. With Monteverdi, it spread to Venice and then throughout the Italian peninsula as well as elsewhere in Europe and the Americas.

The collaborators of the first operas believed they were creating a genre in which music and poetry, in order to serve the drama, were fused into an inseparable whole, a language that was in a class of its own—midway between speaking and singing. Looking ahead, briefly, to the decades and centuries that followed, an increasing separation between recitative and aria (or between musical declamation and outright song)—with recitatives becoming more perfunctory and arias more elaborate—the balance between these elements repeatedly shifted to favor music and singing at the expense of text and dramatic integrity, only to be brought back into relative equilibrium by various "reforms." But in the main, opera as it was envisioned at the dawn of the seventeenth century by a few Florentine noblemen and musicians has endured, uninterrupted, in Western culture for 400 years and counting.

Barbara Russano Hanning

March 25, 2011

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[1] Marco da Gagliano, preface to *La Dafne* (Florence, 1608; facs. Bologna, 1970). The translation used here is based on that of Carol MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979); see 188.

[2] Gagliano, ibid; see MacClintock, 188-89. The full text with an English translation (by Tim Carter) may be seen in *Composing Opera: From "Dafne" to "Ulisse errante,"* ed. Tim Carter and Zygmunt Szweykowski (Cracow: Musica Iagellonica, 1994), 46-67.

[3] Claude V. Palisca, "The First Performance of *Euridice*," in the *Twenty-fifth Anniversary Festschrift* (1937-62) [of Queens College], ed. Albert Mell (New York: Queens College of the City University of New York, 1964), 1-23; repr. with a new introductory headnote in Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory*, 432-51. Further on *Euridice* see, *inter alia*, T. Carter, "Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (1600): A Contextual Study," *The Music Review* 43 (1982) 83-103, repr. in Carter, *Music, Patronage, and Printing*; Kelley Harness, "Le tre *Euridici*: Characterization and Allegory in the *Euridici* of Peri and Caccini," *Journal of Sevententh-Century Music* 9/1 (2003) http://sscm-jscm.press.uiuc.edu/jscm/v9no1; Bojan Bujić, "*Figura poetica molto vaga*": Structure and Meaning in Rinuccini's *Euridice*," *Early Music History* 10 (1991), 29-62; and Gaspare de Caro, *Euridice: Momenti dell' Umanesimo civile fiorentino*.

[4] *La rappresentazione di anima, et di corpo novamente posta in musica dal sig. Emilio del Cavalieri per recitar cantando* (Rome, 1600). This judgment of Cavalieri's work was suggested by the Florentine man of letters Giovanni Battista Doni (1595-1647), perhaps the first historian of early opera. Further on Cavalieri see Claude V. Palisca, "Musical Asides in the Diplomatic Correspondence of Emilio de' Cavalieri," *Musical Quarterly* 49 (1963), 339-55, repr. in Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory*, 389-407. For a defense of Cavalieri's contribution to the creation of opera, see Warren Kirkendale, *Emilio de' Cavalieri, 'Gentiluomo Romano': His Life and Letters, His Role as Superintendent of All the Arts at the Medici Court, and His Musical Compositions* (Florence, 2001), 185-212.

[5] *L'Euridice composta in musica in stile rappresentativo da Giulio Caccini detto Romano* (Florence, 1601; facs. Bologna, 1968). In the dedication to Bardi, Caccini lays claim to "having been the first to give to the press like kind of songs, and the style and manner of them, . . . composed by me more than fifteen years ago at various times, since I have never used in my works any other art than the imitation of the sentiments of the words, . . ." (referring to his new score as well as to the monodies yet to be published in *Le nuove musiche*). The dedication is printed and translated in Carter, *Composing Opera*, 35-41, and trans. in Strunk, *Source Readings*, 606. Caccini's complete score, however, was not performed in its entirety until 1602. (The 1600 performance had been largely of Peri's music.)

[6] The concept of civic humanism was elaborated in Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1955; rev. 1966) and Eugenio Garin's *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz (New York, 1965); see Gary Tomlinson, "Renaissance Humanism and Music," *European Music, 1520-1640*, ed. James Haar (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006), 1-19, esp. 9-10. Also see the more recent study of Florentine civic humanism as it concerns the birth of opera: Gaspare De Caro, *Euridice: Momenti dell'Umanesimo civile fiorentino* (Bologna: Ut Orpheus edizioni, 2006).

[7] Gary Tomlinson, "Pastoral and Musical Magic in the Birth of Opera," *Opera and the Enlightenment*, eds. Thomas Bauman and Marita McClymonds (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7-20. Also see D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1958) and Ruth Katz, *Divining the Powers of Music: Aesthetic Theory and the Origins of Opera* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), esp. 87ff.

[8] James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as "Theatrum Mundi"* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 2. For a summary account of the intermedi, see Alois M. Nagler, *Theatre Festivals of the Medici* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964, 58-69. The relevant documentation is also illustrated in a recent exhibition catalogue: Maria Adelaide Bartoli Bacherini, *"Per un regale evento": Spettacoli nuziali e opera in musica alla corte dei Medici* (Florence, 2000). For an edition, see *Les Fêtes du marriage de Ferdinand de Médicis et de Christine de Lorraine (Florence, 1589), I: Musique des intermèdes de "La Pellegrina,"* ed. D. P. Walker (Paris, 1963).

[9] Further on Giovanni de' Bardi, see Tim Carter, "*Per cagione di bene, et giustamente vivere*: Some Thoughts on the Musical Patronage of Giovanni de' Bardi," *Neoplatonismo, musica, letteratura nel Rinascimento: I Bardi di Vernio e l'Accademia della Crusca; atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Firenze-Vernio, 25-26 settembre 1998*. Edited by Piero Gargiulo, Alessandro Magini and Stéphane Toussaint (Paris: Société Marsile Ficin, 2000) 137-46; Claude V. Palisca: "The Musical Humanism of Giovanni Bardi," *Poesia e musica nell'estetica del xvi e xvii secolo*, ed. H. Meyvalian (Florence, 1979), 45–72; and Warren Kirkendale: *The Court Musicians in Florence during the Principate of the Medici* (Florence, 1993).

[10] On Ottavio Rinuccini see, *inter alia*, Barbara Russano Hanning, *Of Poetry and Music's Power: Humanism and the Creation of Opera* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), esp. chap. 1 (1-19): "Rinuccini and the Power of Music"; and Hanning: "Glorious Apollo: Poetic and Political Themes in the First Opera," *Renaissance Quarterly* 32 (1979), 485–513.

[11] Detlef Heikamp, "Il Teatro Mediceo degli Uffizi," *Bolletino del Centro Internazionale di architettura Andrea Palladio* 16 (1974), 323-32; Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; Italian orig., Turin, 1969, rev. 1975), 365-83.

[12] The phrase is Richard Taruskin's; see his *Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[13] The pythic creature is described as greenish-black and covered with sparkling mirrors. It "was constructed in separate units of papier-mâché modeled over clay forms and assembled on a wooden framework," and it was operated by a stagehand from inside (Saslow, 231-32).

[14] Rinuccini's phrase ("si nobil maniera di recitare"), from the dedication (to Maria de' Medici) of his libretto *L'Euridice* (Florence, 1600); Italian text and translation in Carter, *Composing Opera*, 16-17.

[15] *Le musiche di Jacopo Peri sopra L'Euridice* (Florence, 1600 [but 1601, modern style]), facs. Rome, 1934 and Bologna, 1969; performing edition, ed. Howard Mayer Brown (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1981).

[16] Tomlinson, "Renaissance Humanism," 18.

[17] On Jacopo Corsi see Tim Carter, "Music and Patronage in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence: The Case of Jacopo Corsi (1561-1602)," in *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 1 (1985), 57-104,

repr. in Carter, *Music, Patronage and Printing in Late Renaissance Florence* (Variorum Collected Studies Series), (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000).

[18] William V. Porter, "Peri and Corsi's *Dafne*: Some New Discoveries and Observations," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18 (1965), 170-96.

[19] Claude V. Palisca, "The Alterati of Florence, Pioneers in the Theory of Dramatic Music," in William W. Austin, ed., *New Looks at Italian Opera: Essays in Honor of Donald J. Grout* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 9-38; repr. in Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 408-31.

[20] Claude V. Palisca, *The Florentine Camerata: Documentary Studies and Translations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); esp.1-11.

[21] Mei's correspondence to the Camerata is published in Claude V. Palisca, *Girolamo Mei (1519–1594): Letters on Ancient and Modern Music to Vincenzo Galilei and Giovanni Bardi: A Study with Annotated Text* (Musicological Studies and Documents, American Institute of Musicology, 1960, 2/1977).

[22] Claude V. Palisca, "Vincenzo Galilei's Arrangements for Voice and Lute", in *Essays in Musicology in Honor of Dragan Plamenac on His 70th Birthday*, eds. Gustav Reese and Robert J. Snow (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 207-32; repr. in Palisca, *Studies . . .*, 364-88.

[23] Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo della musica antica et della moderna* (Florence, 1581); repr. Monuments of Music and Music Literature in Facsimile, second series, no. 20 (New York: Broude Brothers [1967]); English trans. with introduction and notes, by Claude V. Palisca (New Haven: Yale University Press, c.2003).

[24] Mei had definitively established that the ancient Greek modes were different from the church modes by being essentially the same arrangement of tones transposed higher or lower on the Greek gamut; thus, depending on their register, some modes were more relaxed, others more intense, much like our modern scales. See his "Letter to Vincenzo Galilei, 8 May 1572," in Palisca, *The Florentine Camerata*, 66-67.

[25] Further on Mei's theories, see Hanning, *Of Poetry and Music's Power*, 31-41.

[26] Translated excerpts from Galilei's Dialogo may be found in Oliver Strunk, ed., *Source Readings in Music History,* rev. ed. by Leo Treitler (New York and London, 1998), and in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (New York: Schirmer, 1984), 166-68. The passage quoted above is taken from the latter, 167-68.

[27] Compare the following passage from Bardi's *Discourse on Ancient Music and Good Singing (Sopra la musica antica e 'l cantar bene)* addressed to Caccini: "Those great philosophers and connoisseurs of nature understood well that in the low voice is slowness and somnolence, in the

medium quiet, majesty, and magnificence, and in the high shrillness and lament. Now who does not know that the drunken and the somnolent usually speak in a low tone and slowly, and that men of great affairs converse in a medium voice, quiet and magnificent; . . . that in the rhythms are the portraits of anger, mildness, strength, temperance, and of every other moral virtue, as well as of all those qualities which are their contraries, . . ." (quoted and translated in Hanning, *Of Poetry and Music's Power,* 37-38). The entire discourse is printed and translated in Palisca, *The Florentine Camerata,* 90-131. Further on Caccini's relations with Bardi, see Claude V. Palisca, "The *Camerata fiorentina*: A Reappraisal," *Studi musicali* 1 (1972), 203-36.

[28] Pirrotta, "Orpheus, Singer of *strambotti*," in *Music and Theatre*, 3-36.

[29] See D.P Walker, "Ficino's *Spiritus* and Music," *Annales musicologiques* 1 (1953), 131-50. For a more extensive treatment of these ideas, see Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), esp. 101-44.

[30] Ficino wrote: "Remember that song is the most powerful imitator of all things. For it imitates the intentions and affections of the soul . . ."; quoted and trans. by Walker from the third book of Ficino's *De triplici vita* in "Ficino's Spritus and Music," 139.

[31] On the precise role of music in Poliziano's *Orfeo,* see Pirrotta, "Orpheus," 19-36.

[32] Hanning, *Of Poetry and Music's Power*, 27.

[33] Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche* (Florence, 1601 [1602, modern style]), facs. Rome, 1934; critical and performing edition, edited with a translation of Caccini's important Preface by H. Wiley Hitchcock in Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era, vol. 9 (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1970).

[34] Tomlinson, "Pastoral and Musical Magic," 17. Tomlinson also argues that "early opera was not a specific version of pastoral drama"; rather, both genres "arose from a culture whose world still offered magical realms' and grew out of 'the esotericism that burgeoned in Renaissance thought in the wake of the fifteenth-century revival of Neoplatonism" (loc. cit.).

[35] Quoted in Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 156.

[36] Leon Battista Alberti, *Dells Pittura* [On Painting], trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966/R1971); see especially 72-76.

[37] Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye, the New Version* (Berkeley: Univsity of California Press, 1974/R 2004), 295ff.

[38] George R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theater: Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 216.

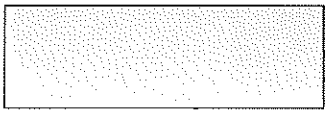
Agostino Carracci, *Orpheus and Euridice*
1594-97

HOW OPERA BEGAN

Barbara Russano Hanning

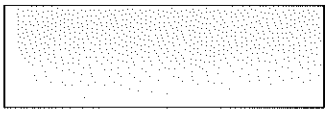
HOW OPERA BEGAN
AND
WHY OPERA BEGAN

Florence – why THERE?
ca.1600 – why THEN?



1608: Marco da **GAGLIANO**

Wrote ***Preface*** describing opera's origins



1597/98: *Favola* by Ottavio **RINUCCINI** (court poet)

Music begun by Jacopo **CORSI** ("learned amateur")
Completed by Jacopo **PERI** ("skilled composer and singer")

1608: Marco da **GAGLIANO**

Expanded original libretto
Composed new music

Wrote ***Preface*** describing opera's origins

Opera's First Decade

1597/98: Rinuccini / Peri / Corsi ***La Dafne***

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini ***La Dafne***

Opera's First Decade

1597/98: Rinuccini / Peri / Corsi ***La Dafne***

1600 Marriage of Marie de' Medici

Oct. 4 Rinuccini, ***L'Euridice*** libretto printed **(Preface)**

Oct. 6 Peri / Caccini, ***L'Euridice*** first performed

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini ***La Dafne***

1597/98: Rinuccini / Peri / Corsi *La Dafne*

1600

Feb. Cavalieri's ***La Rappresentatione di anima et di corpo*** in Rome

Oct. 4 Rinuccini, *L'Euridice* libretto printed

Oct. 6 Peri / Caccini *L'Euridice* first performed

Oct. 6? Cavalieri's ***Rappresentatione*** score published

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini, *La Dafne*

1597/98: Rinuccini / Peri / Corsi *La Dafne*

1600 Feb. Cavalieri's *La Rappresentatione di anima et di corpo* in Rome

Oct. 4 Rinuccini, *L'Euridice* libretto printed

Oct. 6 Peri / Caccini *L'Euridice* first performed

Oct. 6? Cavalieri's *Rappresentatione* score published

Oct. 9 Caccini, ***Il rapimento di Cefalo*** performed

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini, *La Dafne*

1597/98: Rinuccini / Peri / Corsi *La Dafne*

1600 Feb. Cavalieri's *La Rappresentatione di anima et di corpo* in Rome
Oct. 4 Rinuccini, *L'Euridice* libretto printed
Oct. 6 Peri / Caccini *L'Euridice* first performed
Oct. 6? Cavalieri's *Rappresentatione* score published
Oct. 9 Caccini, *Il rapimento di Cefalo* performed

1601 Jan. Caccini ***L'Euridice*** score published

Feb. Peri ***L'Euridice*** score published

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini, *La Dafne*

1597/98: Rinuccini / Peri / Corsi *La Dafne*

1600 Feb. Cavalieri's *La Rappresentatione di anima et di corpo* in Rome
Oct. 4 Rinuccini, *L'Euridice* libretto printed
Oct. 6 Peri / Caccini *L'Euridice* first performed
Oct. 6? Cavalieri's *Rappresentatione* score published
Oct. 9 Caccini, *Il rapimento di Cefalo* performed

1601 Jan. Caccini *L'Euridice* score published
Feb. Peri *L'Euridice* score published

1602
Feb. Caccini, ***Le nuove musiche***
Dec. 5 Caccini, ***L'Euridice*** first performed

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini, *La Dafne*

1597/98: Rinuccini / Peri / Corsi *La Dafne*

1600 Feb. Cavalieri's *La Rappresentatione di anima et di corpo* in Rome

Oct. 4 Rinuccini, *L'Euridice* libretto printed

Oct. 6 Peri/ Caccini *L'Euridice* first performed

Oct. 6? Cavalieri's *Rappresentatione* score published

Oct. 9 Caccini, *Il rapimento di Cefalo* performed

1601 Jan. Caccini *L'Euridice* score published

Feb. Peri *L'Euridice* score published

1602 Feb. Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*

Dec. 5 Caccini, *L'Euridice* first performed

1607 Monteverdi / Striggio, ***La favola d'Orfeo***

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini, *La Dafne*

1597/98: Rinuccini/ Peri/ Corsi *La Dafne*

1600 Feb. Cavalieri's *La Rappresentatione di anima et di corpo* in Rome

Oct. 4 Rinuccini, *L'Euridice* libretto printed

Oct. 6 Peri/ Caccini *L'Euridice* first performed

Oct. 6? Cavalieri's *Rappresentatione* score published

Oct. 9 Caccini, *Il rapimento di Cefalo* performed

1601 Jan. Caccini *L'Euridice* score published

Feb. Peri *L'Euridice* score published

1602 Feb. Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*

Dec. 5 Caccini, *L'Euridice* first performed

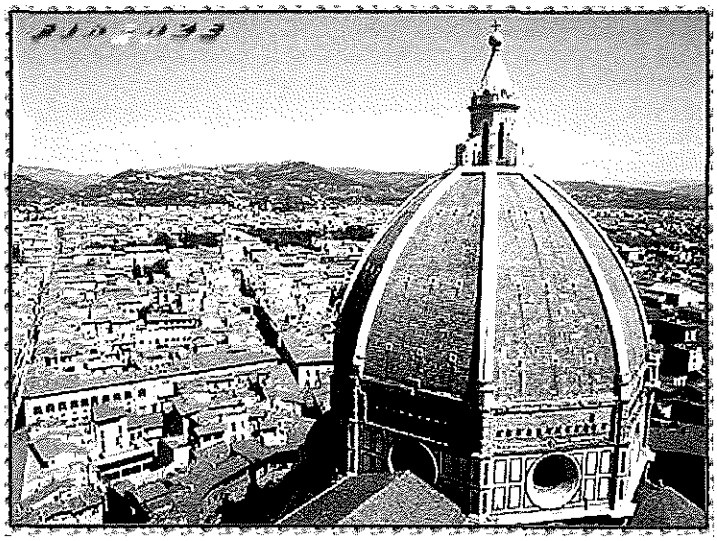
1607 Monteverdi/ Striggio, *L'Orfeo*

1608 Monteverdi/ Rinuccini, ***L'Arianna***

1608: Gagliano / Rinuccini, *La Dafne*

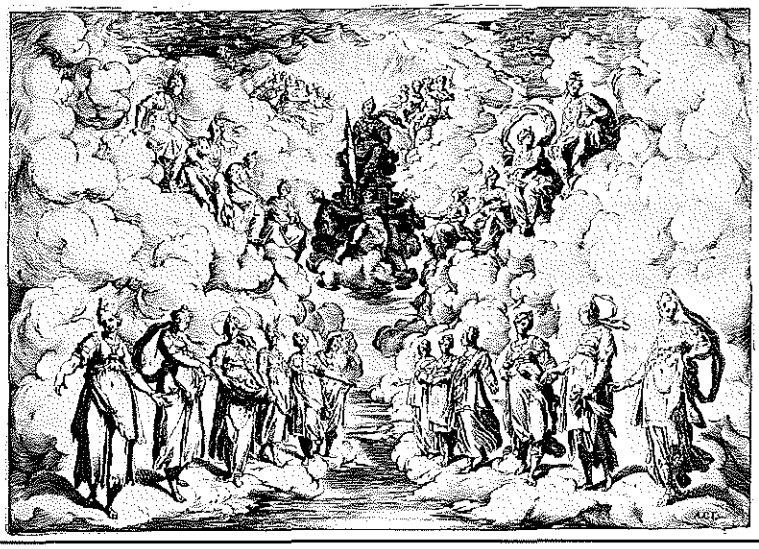
Lasciatemi morire,	Let me die,
lasciatemi morire;	Let me die!
e che volete voi che mi conforte	And who do you think could console me
in così dura sorte,	in so dreadful a fate,
in così gran martire?	in such great torment?
Lasciatemi morire,	Let me die!
Lasciatemi morire.	Let me die!

WHY FLORENCE?



WHY FLORENCE?

1. Long tradition of musical theater – **INTERMEDI**



15

WHY FLORENCE?

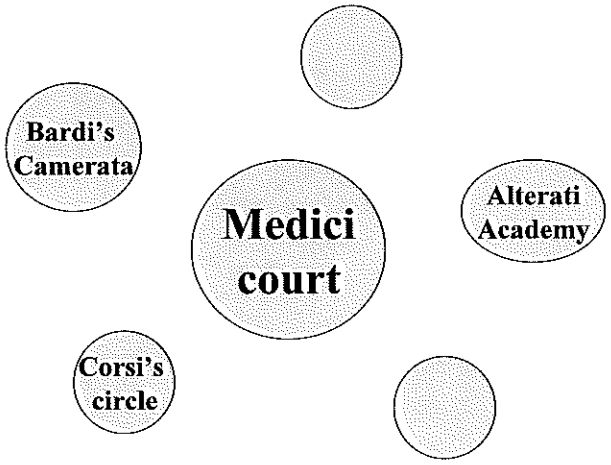
1. Long tradition of musical theater – **INTERMEDI**

2. Network of academies – **CIVIC HUMANISM**

16

WHY FLORENCE?

1. Long tradition of musical theater – **INTERMEDI**
2. Network of academies – **CIVIC HUMANISM**

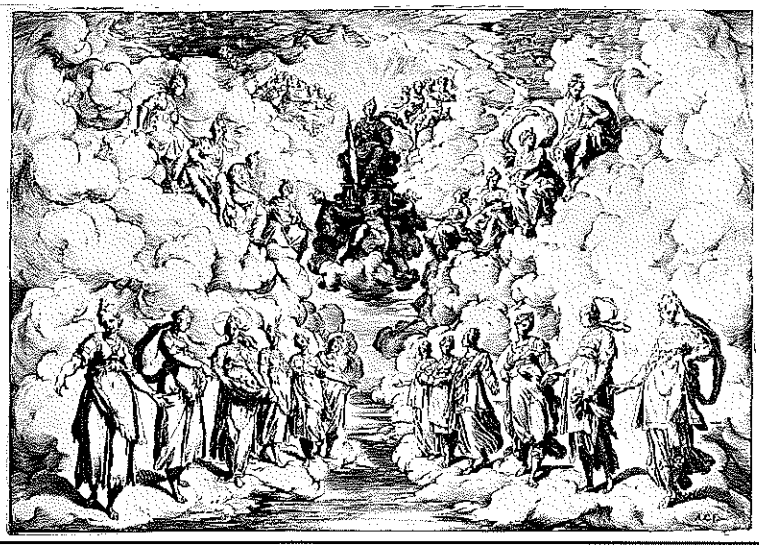


WHY FLORENCE?

1. Long tradition of musical theater – **INTERMEDI**
2. Net **CIVIC HUMANISM**
3. Part worldview – **MUSICAL MAGIC**

WHY FLORENCE?

1. Long tradition of musical theater – **INTERMEDI**



1589 INTERMEDI

The Team:

Giovanni de' Bardi, artistic director

Ottavio Rinuccini, poet

Emilio de' Cavalieri, musical director

Bernardo Buontalenti, costume and stage design

Music by Cristofano Malvezzi and Luca Marenzio,
with contributions from Jacopo Peri,
Giulio Caccini, and Giovanni de' Bardi

INTERMEDI

Harmony descends

as a gift from

the Gods

INTERMEDI

Apollo battles the Python

INTERMEDI

Apollo battles the Python

INTERMEDI

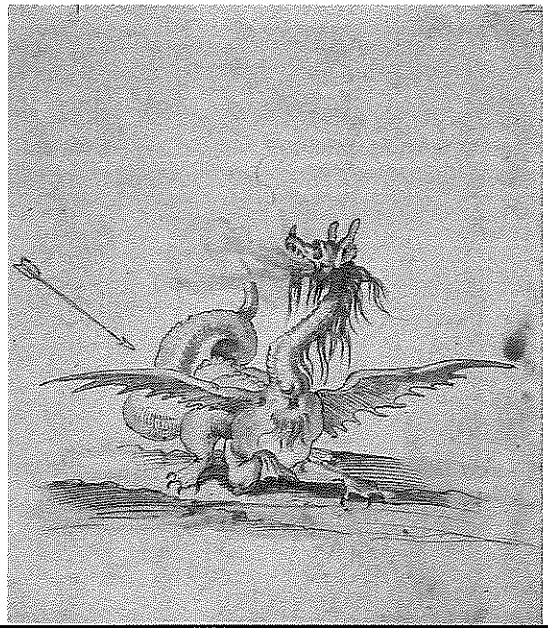
Peri's costume as Arion

INTERMEDI

Costumes for dancers

INTERMEDI

INTERMEDI



WHY FLORENCE?

1. Long tradition of musical theater – **INTERMEDI**

2. Network of academies – **CIVIC HUMANISM**

HUMANISM

Gary Tomlinson, "Renaissance Humanism and Music," ***European Music, 1520-1640***

1. Philological humanism

Girolamo Mei

2. Rhetorical humanism

Vincenzo Galilei

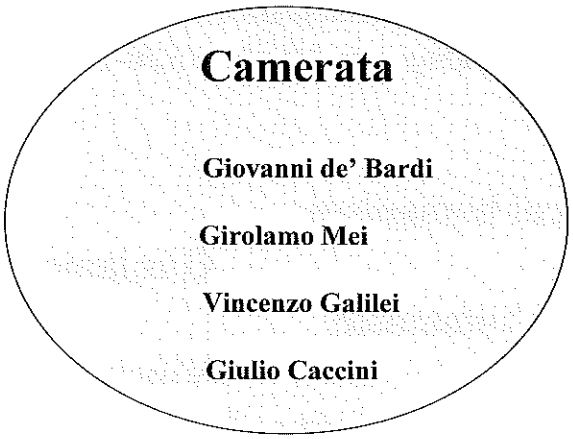
3. Ordinary-language humanism

Rinuccini, Corsi, and Peri

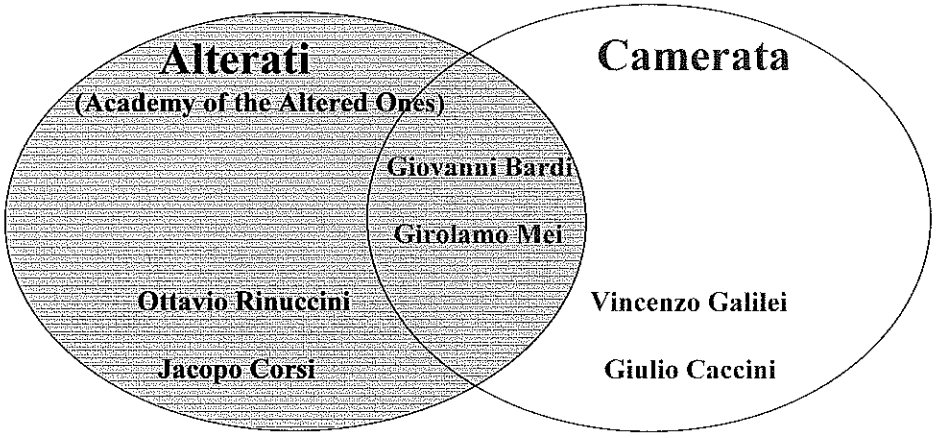
HUMANISM

"Pioneers in the theory of dramatic music"

HUMANISM



HUMANISM



VINCENZO GALILEI, DIALOGO DELLA MUSICA ANTICA E DELLA MODERNA, 1581

Do away with vocal counterpoint.

Adopt monody (melody with simple accompaniment).

Imitate nature (by following the patterns of speech)

VINCENZO GALILEI, DIALOGO DELLA MUSICA ANTICA E DELLA MODERNA, 1581

"Kindly observe in what manner the actors speak,

in what range, high or low,
how loudly or how softly,
how rapidly or slowly they enunciate their words . . .

how one speaks when infuriated or excited;

how a married woman speaks, how a girl, how a lover . . .

how one speaks when lamenting, when crying out, when afraid, and when exulting with joy."

WHY FLORENCE?

1. Long tradition of musical theater – **INTERMEDI**
2. Network of academies – **CIVIC HUMANISM**

3. Particular Renaissance worldview –
MUSICAL MAGIC

MUSICAL MAGIC

Angelo Poliziano, ***Orfeo*** (1480)

Antonio Tempesta, Orpheus Looking Back, 1606

MUSICAL MAGIC

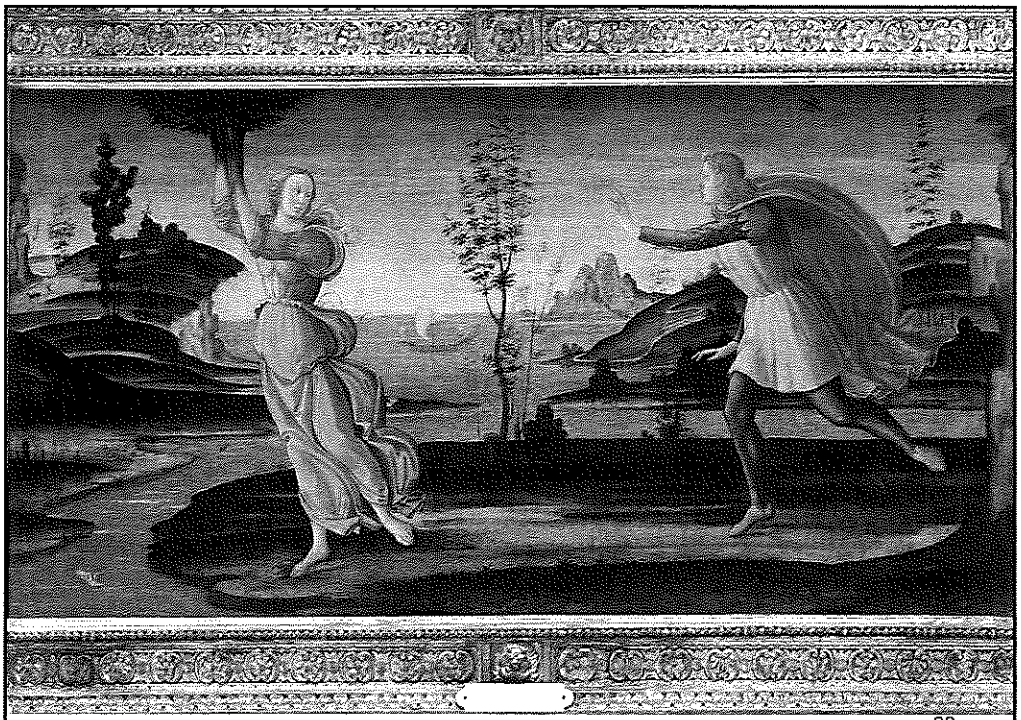
Neoplatonism

Lorenzo de' Medici (The Magnifi

Marsilio Ficino (1433-99)

"music-spirit theory"

Angelo Poliziano, ***Orfeo*** (1480



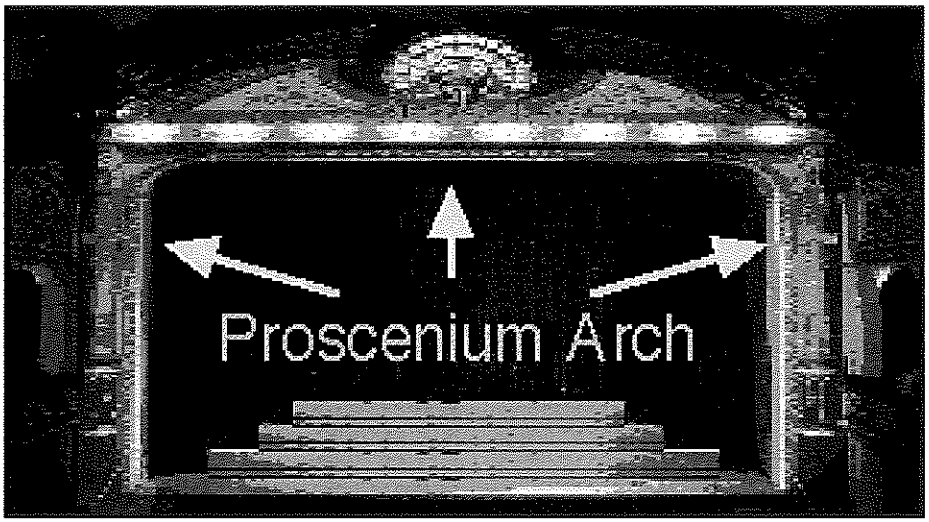
Daphne, fleeing Apollo, is transformed (Italian, ca. 1500)

Titian

Bacchus descending to rescue the abandoned Ariadne from her fate

1522-23

Peter Paul Rubens, Orpheus Leading Eurydice out of Hades, 1636-38



HOW OPERA BEGAN

AND

WHY OPERA BEGAN

Florence – why THERE?

ca.1600 – why THEN?

Roger de Piles,
Abrégé de la vie des peintres
(1699)

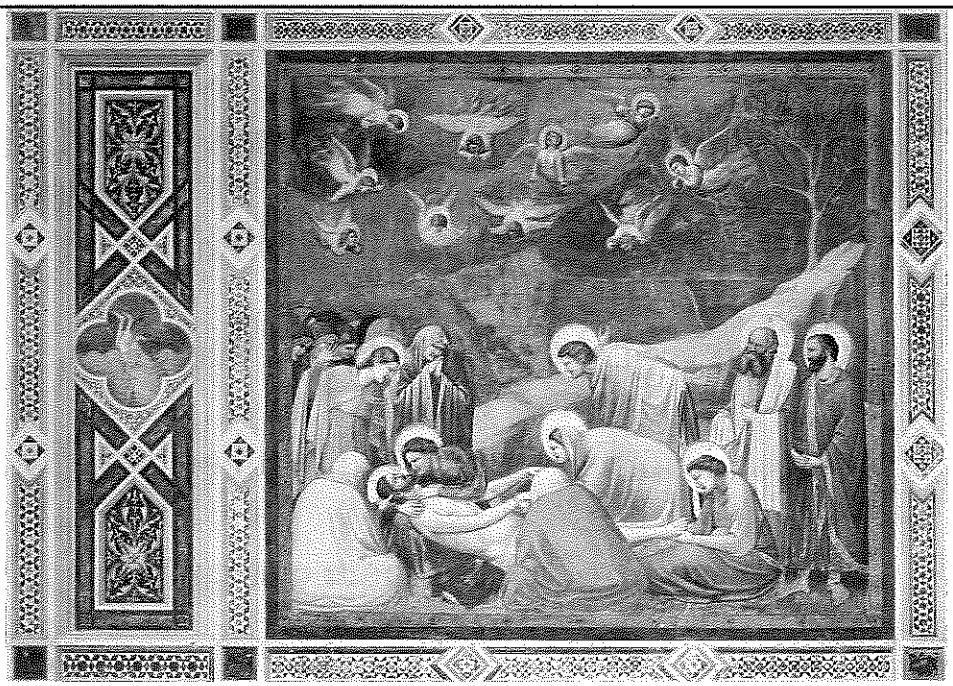
"One must think of painting as a kind of stage on which each figure plays its role."

43

Filippo Villani, **DE ORIGINE** (1381-2)

Images formed by [Giotto's] brush agree so well with the lineaments of nature as to seem to the beholder to live and breathe; and his pictures **appear to perform actions and movements so exactly** as to seem ([when seen] from a little way off) actually speaking, weeping, rejoicing, and doing other things, **not without pleasure from him who beholds** and praises the talent and skill of the artist.

44

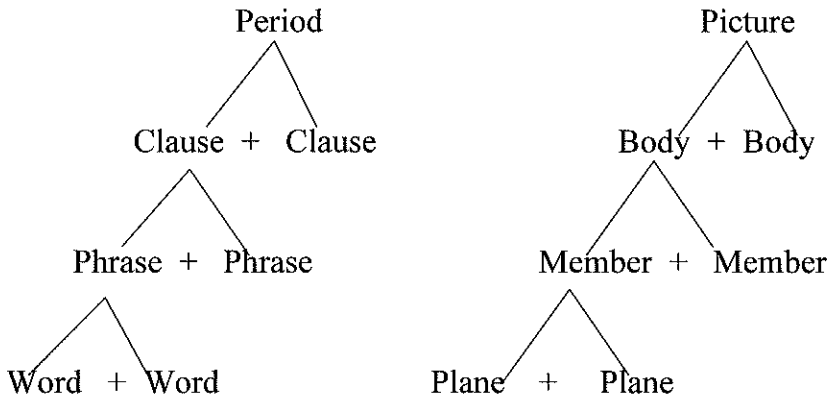


Giotto, *Lamentation* (1303-6), fresco from the Arena Chapel, Padua

45

ALBERTI'S *COMPOSITIO*

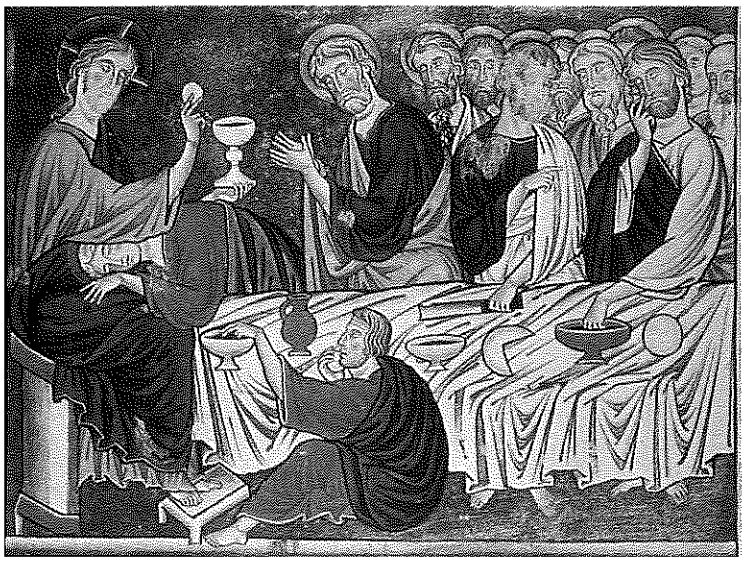
from *Della pittura,* 1435-36



Alberti: "In my view, there is no painted narrative so filled with so great a variety of events that nine or ten persons will not be capable of **acting them out** quite fittingly." *~Della pittura*

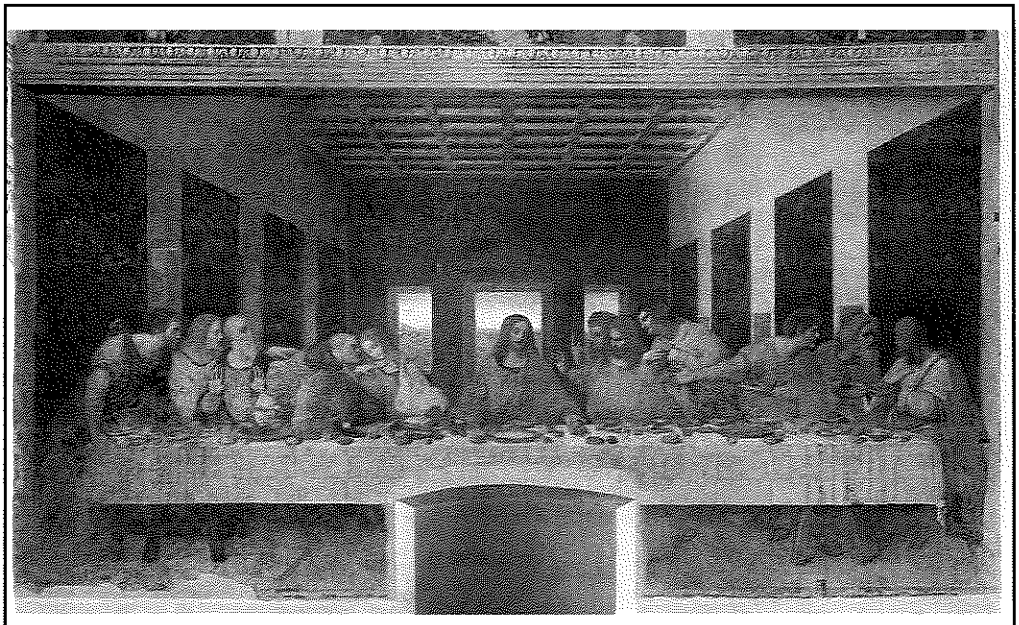
47

Mantegna, ***Entombment*** (1460)



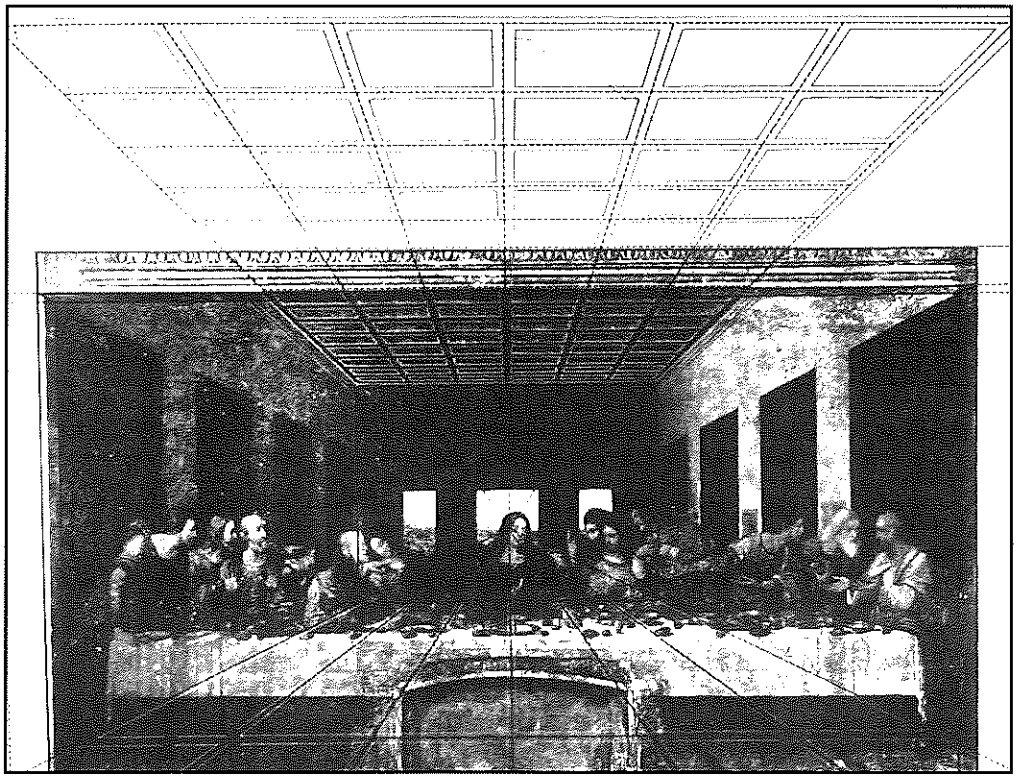
The Last Supper, ca. 1200
Psalter illumination (Musée Condé, Chantilly)

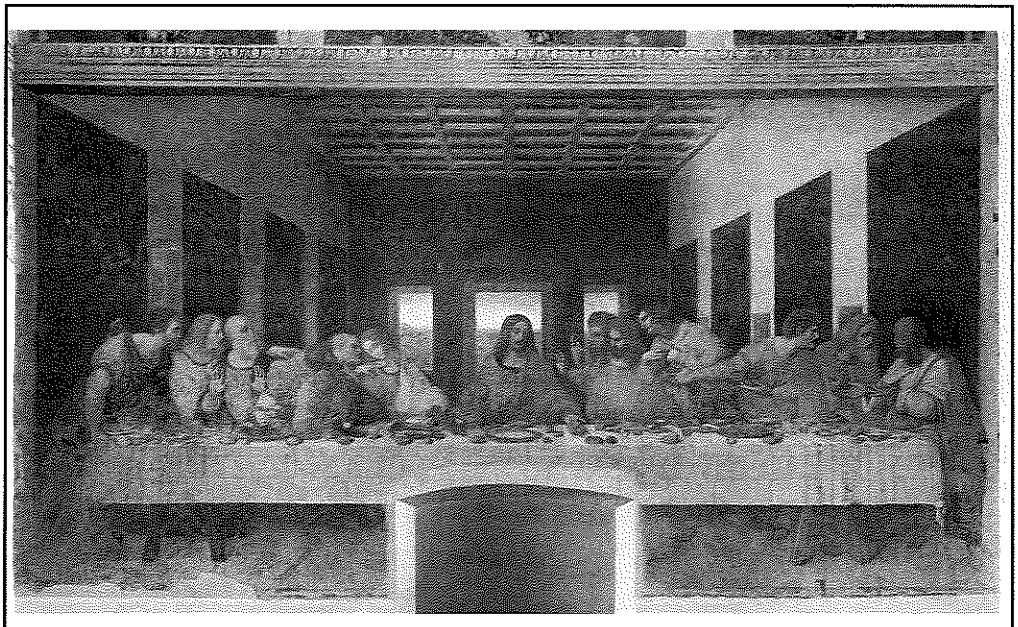
49



Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, 1495-97 (Milan, Santa Maria delle Grazie)
after restoration, 1997-2001

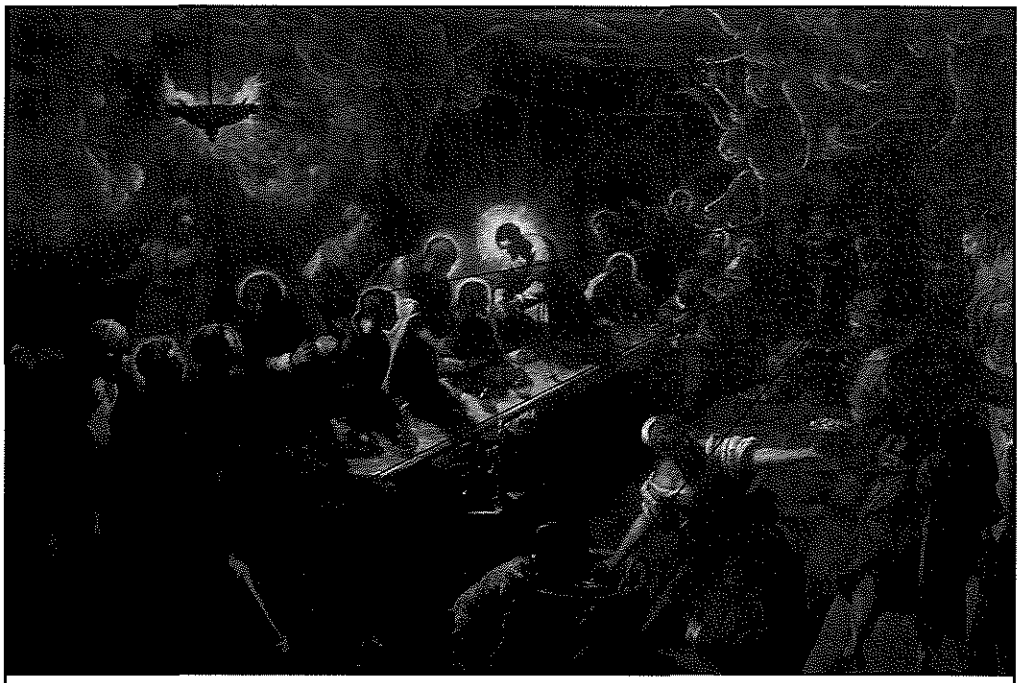
50





Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, 1495-97 (Milan, Santa Maria delle Grazie) after restoration, 1997-2001

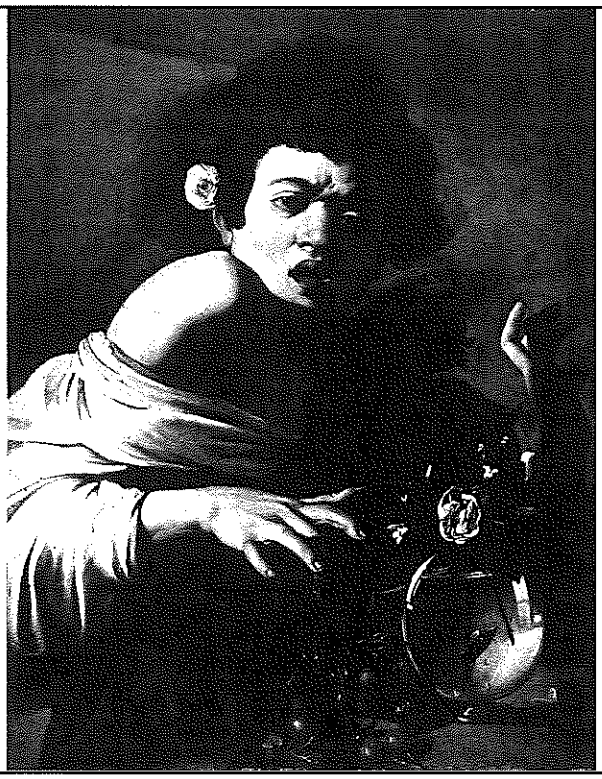
Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Last Supper*, 1592-94
(San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice)



Michelangelo Merisi
da Caravaggio

Boy Bitten by a Lizard,
c. 1597

(London, National Gallery)



Boy Bitten by a Lizard, detail

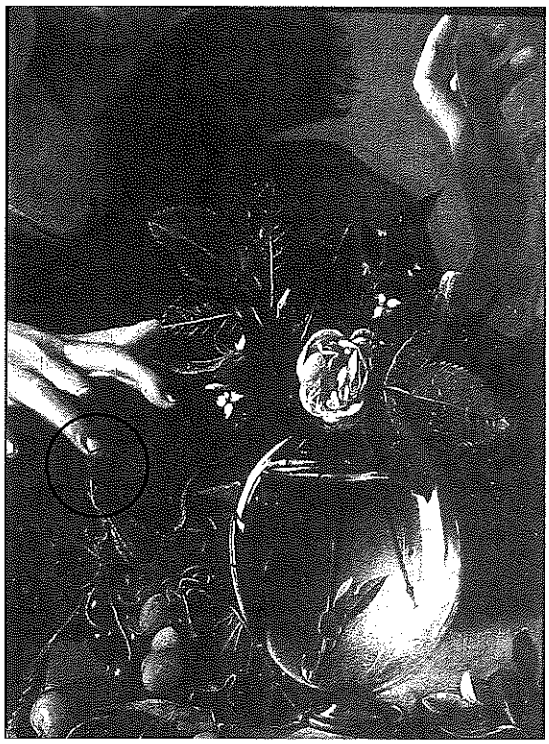
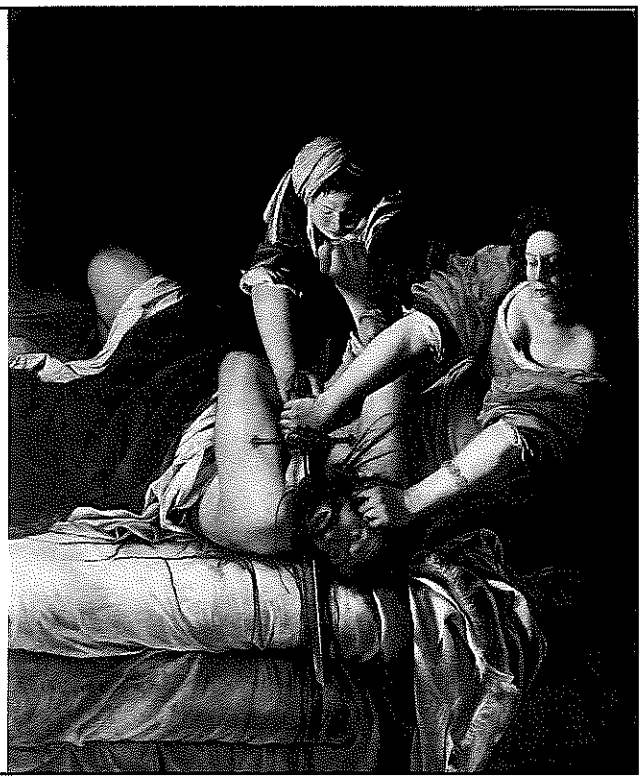


Photo © The National Gallery, London.

Artemesia Gentileschi

Judith Beheading Holofernes, c. 1620

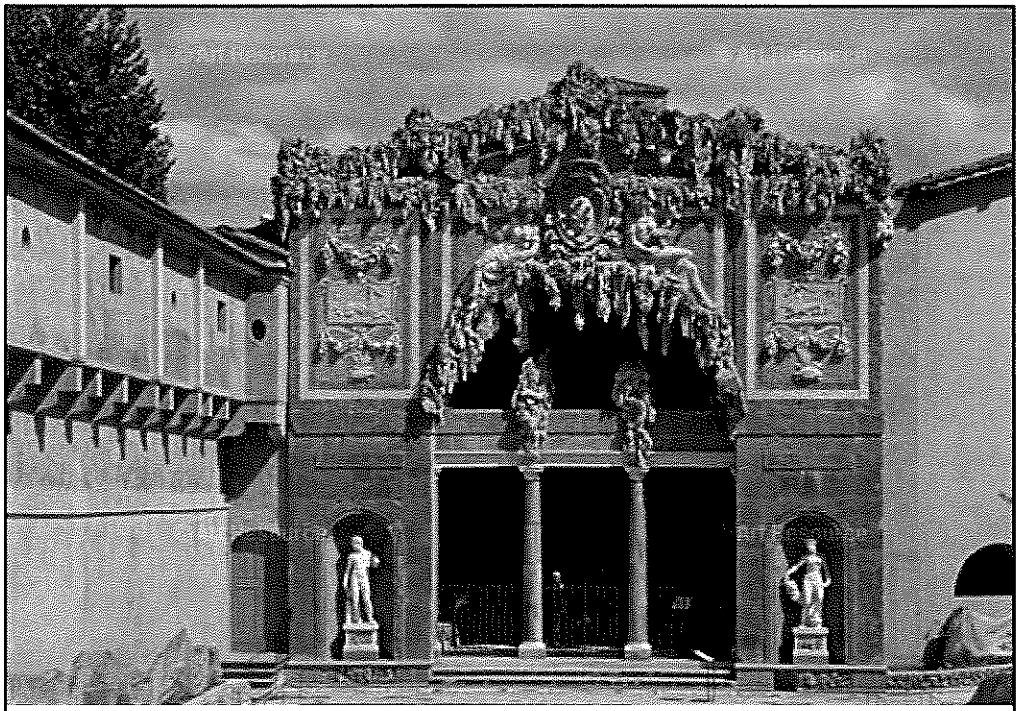
(Uffizi Gallery, Florence)



Artemisia Gentileschi

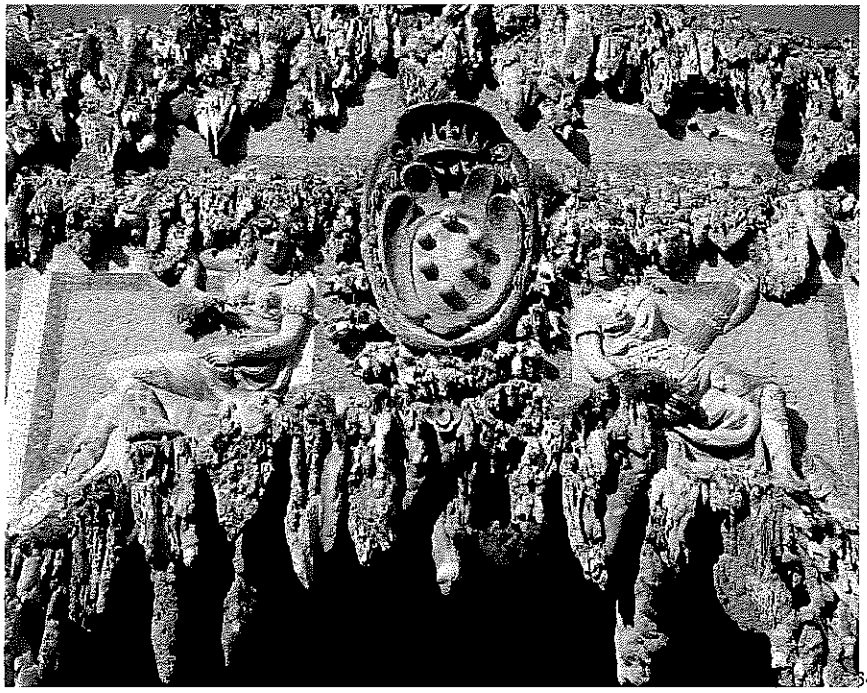
Self-Portrait as La Pittura, c. 1630

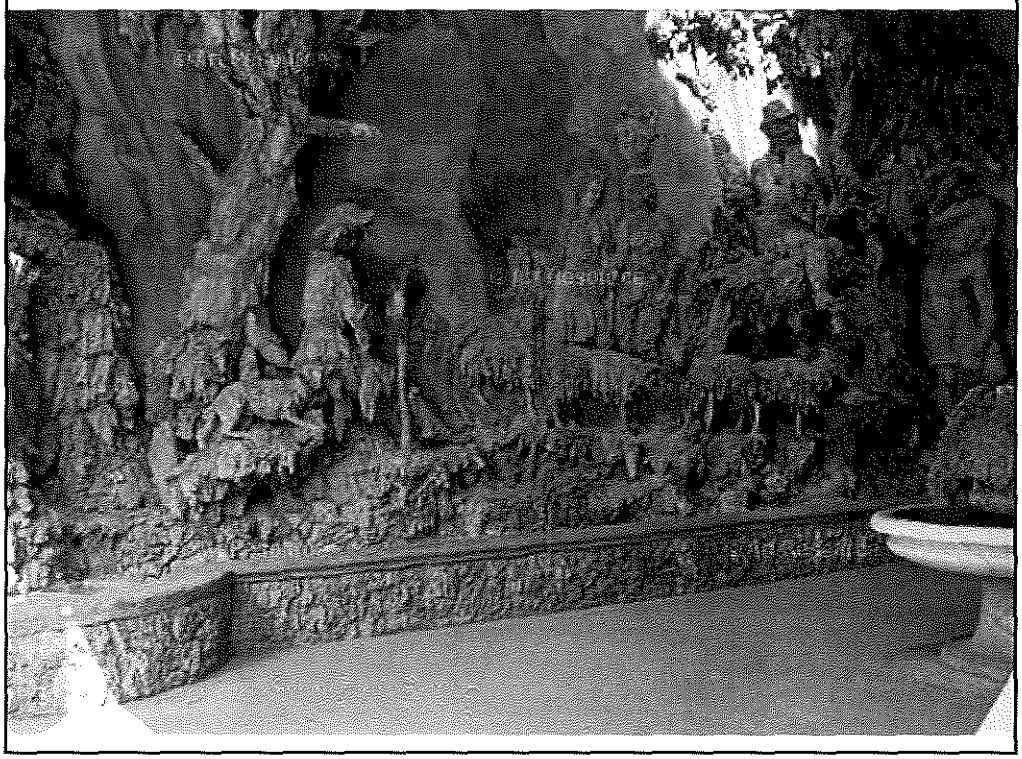
61

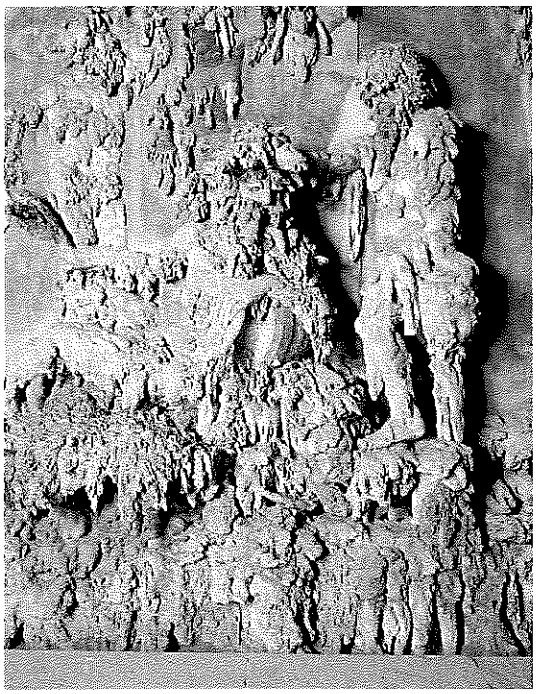


Façade of the ***Grotto grande*** or Nymphaeum (1583-93), by Bernardo Buontalenti, Boboli Gardens, Florence 62

Fresco by Bernadino Poccetti on the grotto vault







George Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944.)

"Modern theatre

grew out of the desire to see and hear

with living actors

the romantic stories and allegorical fancies

already portrayed by the painters."

Frank Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944.)

"Early opera

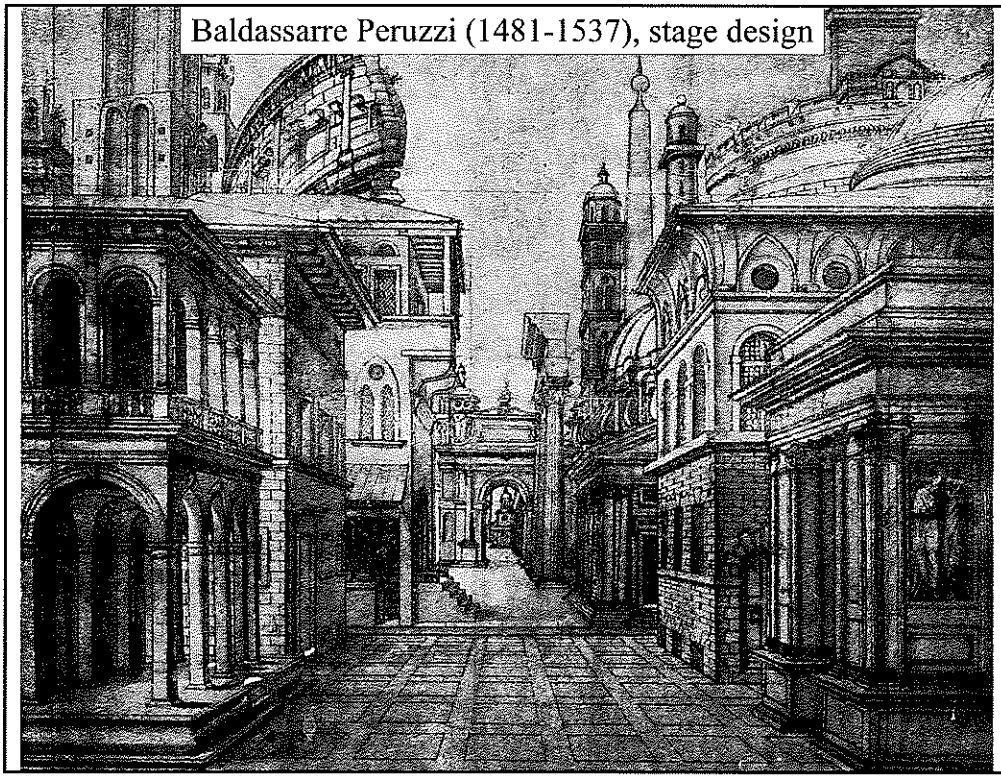
grew out of the desire to see and hear

with **singing actors**

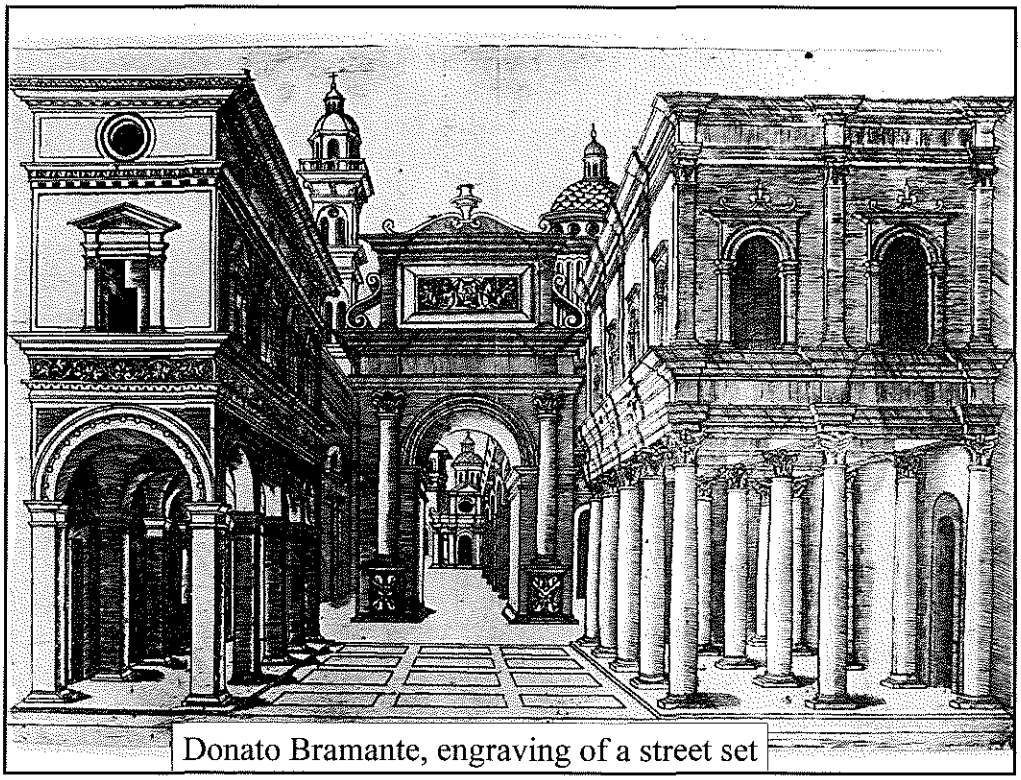
the romantic stories and allegorical fancies

already portrayed by the painters."

Baldassarre Peruzzi (1481-1537), stage design



(Accademia Carrara, Bergamo)



Donato Bramante, engraving of a street set