Christine Getz  

_Mary, Music, and Meditation: Sacred Conversations in Post-Tridentine Milan._  
Hb, $45.00.

The Virgin Mary was ubiquitous in sixteenth-century Milan. There were forty-two churches dedicated to the Madonna within the city walls and three hundred within the diocese of Milan. Christine Getz’s study comprises five main chapters devoted to Marian cults in the period after the Council of Trent: the Madonna dei Miracoli at Santa Maria presso San Celso, Madonna Addolorata at Santa Maria dei Servi, the Society of Ave Maria in Duomo, the Confraternity of the Rosary, and the Madonna del Parto. Making use of an extensive array of sources (archival records of the employment and payment of singers and organists, published music, contemporary diaries, etc.) Getz charts the evolution of polyphony in services attended by the laity. Her distinctive contribution is to connect compositional trends to contemporary images and texts in order to understand how music was heard and processed by the devout.

The techniques of rhetoric taught in the boys’ schools of Renaissance Italy are key to Getz’s argument. Take Simon Boyleau’s _Modulationes in Magnificat ad omnes tropos_, written for five voices (1566). In order to appreciate how that rich vocal mix was experienced by the laity, we need to consider how, in Boyleau’s setting, the Magnificat was broken down into smaller phrases which were gradually recombined. In this manner, the pace of delivery of the momentous text was slowed, as the congregants were encouraged to hear, visualize, and internalize the Annunciation, and to identify powerfully with the Virgin. In her analysis of devotional music, Getz claims for the _Spiritual Exercises_ of Ignatius of Loyola a particular influence. As a meditational program designed by a Jesuit for Jesuits, the broader impact of the _Exercises_ on the laity is sometimes questioned. However, Getz argues that Ignatian meditational techniques were popularized via Jesuit preaching and that the _Exercises_ were moreover foundational to the churchmen in Milan who reshaped popular piety after Trent. Imagination, visualization, segmentation, and repetition were key to the teaching of doctrine and to the sounds of devotion in the late sixteenth-century city.

To music and meditation, the central interests of the book, one might add one further “M”: miracles. Several of the Marian shrines examined by Getz owed their origins to late fifteenth-century cults that emerged in response to miraculous healings and apparitions. One of the strengths of this study is that
it takes us beyond the wonder-years of Archbishop Carlo Borromeo, and demonstrates the longer history of devotional renewal before and after Trent. Another selling point is the light shed by Getz onto familial and domestic devotions. One of the diarists whose testimony underpins Getz’s study is Giambattista Casale, a merchant and tradesman, who, together with his wife, Catelina dell’Aqua, was heavily involved in the Schools of Christian Doctrine and the Confraternity of the Rosary. Catelina taught Catholic doctrine in the girls’ school of SS. Cosmo e Damiano; she also held a particular responsibility as “silencer,” or head of discipline. In 1584, Giambattista wrote that he had signed up himself, his wife, his son David, and his daughter Angela in Borromeo’s newly founded confraternity of the rosary at the cathedral; this was in addition to their existing membership of another “company of the rose.” Getz offers abundant evidence of the participation of women in the Marian cults, despite their segregation in the confraternities. She also alerts us to the existence of “musical rosaries” (i.e. published rosary books with musical notation as well as words), produced for domestic use and presented (alongside maiolica plates, almond cakes, and sweet wine) to women by women in celebration of the birth of babies. By the early seventeenth century, collections of spiritual madrigals were being published that targeted women consumers and provided Marian music to be sung in the home. The rise to prominence of the cult of the Madonna del Parto (the pregnant Madonna) in Counter-Reformation Milan further encouraged the publication of motets and madrigals that glorified motherhood.

Mary, Music and Meditation contains a wealth of scholarship of great interest to historians and musicologists alike. The appendices to the book supply nearly 150 pages of archival transcriptions, and musical examples that will serve many scholars as research and teaching resources. The book is more suggestive in its details than compelling as a whole. For all that the author is attentive to early modern rhetorical structures, she sometimes fails to weave her copious evidence into a forceful argument. There is a deal of unnecessary repetition between chapters, and the occasional awkward slip that hinders our understanding (for example, on p. 18, the miracle of origin for Santa Maria presso San Celso is dated to 1585 instead of 1485, and on p. 89 a new company of the rosary at San Lorenzo Maggiore is said to have been instituted in 1527 when Getz must mean 1627). While the quality of Getz’s own fieldwork is admirable, her engagement with other scholars, especially in the field of the history of religion, is rather patchy. I was surprised that there was no dialogue with other experts on Marian devotion in this period (for example Gervase Rosser, Robert Maniura, and Miri Rubin) and I was utterly perplexed by the
absence of Wietse de Boer’s magisterial study of Borromeo’s Counter-Reformation Milan, *Conquest of the Soul*, to which Getz’s work provides an illuminating counterpart.

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