Since the reign of Charles of Anjou in the late 13th century, Naples served almost continuously as a capital under a succession of dynasties. The city was a focal point in the political, social, and artistic history of southern Italy. Naples was also a renowned center of culture, acclaimed above all for its musical traditions, which achieved unprecedented distinction in Europe and abroad in the early modern period. This essay will focus on the musical culture of Naples: its institutions (political, religious, educational, or social), the individuals prominent in its musical life, and its rich musical traditions.\\n
The prestige of musical institutions in early modern Naples reflected the hierarchy of political power, and there was no more prominent body of musicians than the Reale Cappella (royal musical establishment). The origins of this ensemble extend back to Aragonese rule; the model established in the 16th century was retained in the succeeding two centuries. From its beginnings, the Reale Cappella included vocalists and instrumentalists, who could be augmented to address musical needs for any performance. Musical events often accompanied occasions in the social and political life of the ruling court. By the early 17th century (1602), the ensemble was moved to the newly constructed viceregal palace. Documentary sources from the mid-17th century offer a detailed portrait of the Reale Cappella, including its membership and normative roles. A critical juncture in the life of the ensemble came with the rule of Viceroy

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1 The standard reference work on 18th-century musical practices is Robinson, Naples; see also Coticelli and Maione, Onesto divertimento; Coticelli and Maione, Storia; Coticelli and Maione, Le istituzioni; Fabris, Music; Croce, I teatri.

2 Fabris, Music, 15.

3 Fabris notes that the Reale Cappella grew to twenty-seven singers and twelve instrumentalists. The constitution of the body reflected contemporary performance practice: seven sopranos and four altos (all castrati), four countertenors, six tenors, and six basses. The instrumental breakdown offered a core group of bowed strings complemented by winds (trombone and cornet) and continuo players (lute, harp, and two organists).

4 Costantini and Magaudda, Musica e spettacolo; Griffin, Musical References; Prota-Giurleo, I Teatri.
Oñate (1648–1653). The Reale Cappella served the viceroy in private and in the most prominent public spheres of activity. It performed for official occasions of State, such as the arrival of foreign dignitaries, and provided entertainment to the generally exclusive audiences of the viceroy and local aristocracy. Surviving documents also note that the Reale Cappella (and at times even its individual members) performed for a variety of ceremonial events that occurred in Naples, whether of a civic or religious nature. For example, the ensemble performed for numerous festini [primarily celebratory balls featuring social dance] and public events such as the “spassi di Posillipo.” It was also under Viceroy Oñate that the Reale Cappella was consistently engaged to perform for operas staged in the viceregal palace and at the nearby Teatro San Bartolomeo.

The increasing cultivation of stage drama, most often tragedy, by Oñate and his successors has left a wealth of information that provides crucial insight into the organizational norms of this elite group. The musical leadership of the ensemble was entrusted to the maestro di cappella and his second, the vice-maestro. Drawn from the professional ranks of Naples, the maestro di cappella was nominated to the post, usually through the office of the Cappellano Maggiore [Rector of the University of Naples], and then appointed by the viceroy himself. The positions of maestro and vice-maestro were characteristically retained for life (unless one requested to leave) with the expectation that the individual in the second post would eventually assume leadership of the ensemble. Admission to the Reale Cappella as an instrumentalist or vocalist was contingent upon diverse factors and criteria that were not entirely musical. The official appointment was issued by the viceroy, yet critical roles were again played by the Cappellano Maggiore and established musicians within the ensemble—above all, the current maestro di cappella. Candidates were required to submit to practical examinations and contribute original compositions (the latter for the posts of maestro or vice-maestro), although human relations could, and often did, overshadow considerations of talent alone. The well-circulated accounts of Francesco Provenzale in the 17th century and Francesco Mancini in the 18th century provide compelling evidence of the political considerations that surrounded entrance into the Reale Cappella. Membership, nevertheless, signified a “seal of specialization, the apex of

5 Maione, “Il mondo.”
6 The spassi were public festivals that occurred in July and August along the city shoreline near the area of Posillipo on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday evenings.
7 Fabris, Music, and Romagnoli, “Considerazioni”; Cotticelli and Maione, Le istituzioni.