

**Review of Christine Suzanne Getz,
*Music in the Collective Experience
in Sixteenth-Century Milan***

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‘Music in the Collective Experience in Sixteenth-Century Milan’ is the first monograph of the American scholar Christine Getz, the Associate Professor of Musicology, the University of Iowa. Dr. Getz has published her studies in the specialized journals devoted to the history of early music such as BACH (Journal of the Riemenschneider-Bach Institute), Explorations in Renaissance Culture, Musica Disciplina, Arte Lombarda, Early Music History, Studi musicali, the Journal of the Royal Music Association, The Strauss Companion, Barocco padano and the Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music, available in web version at <http://www.sscm-jscm.org>.

The scholar's research interests include sixteenth-century Italian polyphony and the sacred concerto. Getz deals specifically with Northern Italy in the post-Tridentine époque. Her works focus on the cultural history of the Milan Duchy, but the researcher presents also the broad social context, using the archival studies in Italy. No doubt, that the researchers of the early music and specialists in Renaissance are familiar with these studies.

The circles of the scholars which make the audience of the ‘Social Evolution & History’ journal, however, have a different background. That is why the name of Christine Getz is not known and the scholar's recent study should be introduced with special comments. I consider that the monograph *Music in the Collective Experience in Sixteenth-Century Milan* deserves attention of a wider audience.

The scope of the book is exceptionally broad and it includes the study of relationship between music and society, the public devotion and the personal role of the musician.

Getz is pursuing interdisciplinary approaches in the sense that she is developing manuscript studies, textual criticism and even iconography research (with the particular attention to the topic of the Roman and Renaissance triumph). It would be better to point out, however, that the author combines the methods of different disciplines without introduction of new methodological ideas.

In this well-carried research the author uses various types of historical sources not limiting to the music prints. Getz analyses the public and private spaces in which the music was performed and the socium of musicians and composes *per se* using the juridical documents as well as the narratives *Regestri* and the documents of the *Cancellaria dello stato*, letters, the lists of the singers and the salaries.

I think that specialists in Italian and Renaissance studies, historians will highly evaluate the author's ability to conduct the archival research.

The book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of various cultural aspects of social life in sixteenth-century Italy by examining the role of music and musicians in the context of everyday life and special public events. The author presents the picture of the Italian city of Milan at the moment of crucial and dramatic changes: starting from the fall of Ludovico Sforza in 1499.

It is common knowledge that the Renaissance and Early Modern Time music was most often experienced collectively. So it may seem that the title of the book does not say much about the content. What kind of collective experience does the author mean? The structure and contents of the book include such aspects as Forging a modern civic identity: music for the battle of Pavia – From ducal to gubernatorial ceremonial – The civic ceremonial at the Duomo of Milan – Music in the civic processions and triumphal progressions – Instrumental music and musicians under the early governors – The collective culture of secular song – Public devotion in post-Tridentine Milan.

As Christine Getz has recently pointed out in the review article: 'Over the past ten years, the widely held perception of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Milan as a cultural backwater resting upon the laurels of its Sforza ancestry has gradually been replaced by the

picture of a vibrant urban society responding creatively to the pressures of forging its modern civic identity. This radical transformation of our conception of cultural life in early modern Milan owes much to the efforts of Italian and American scholars who have challenged the time-honored perceptions, patiently sifted through the archival documentation, identified the heretofore unexplored cultural artifacts, and considered those artifacts in light of the extant documentary evidence¹.

Christine Getz is developing this new trend in the historiography. There are attempts in the monograph to analyze the social contexts in which the musicians played different roles and the contexts of power representations, which were created with the help of music, musicians and singers. The mentioned issues turn to be the case studies.

One can agree with the statement that 'As class mobility assumed greater significance in Milan and the size of the city expanded beyond its Medieval borders, music-making became ever more closely associated with public life'. It is also true that the novel structures and diverse urban spaces, sixteenth-century Milan offered an unlimited variety of public performance arenas.

That is why the book considers the relationship of the primary cappelle musicali, including those of the Duomo, the court of Milan, Santa Maria della Scala, and Santa Maria presso San Celso, to the sixteenth-century institutions that housed them. There are interesting attempts to offer a social-historical interpretation focusing especially on such topic as social role of the fabbrica.

Getz argues that the city's political and ecclesiastical authorities staged grand processions, church services, entertainments, and entries aimed at the propagation of both church and state.

In addition, the book investigates the musician's role as an actor and a functionary in political, religious, and social spectacles produced by the Milanese church, state, and aristocracy within the city's diverse urban spaces. Furthermore, it establishes a context for the numerous motets, madrigals, and lute intabulations composed and printed in sixteenth-century Milan by examining their function in the *socium*.

There is no accent in the monograph, however, on the collective 'experiencing' of music *per se* or in the different strata of the Milanese *commune*.

As it was pointed out by Getz 'in sixteenth-century Milan, music, the art traditionally associated with the court and cathedral,

came to be appropriated by the old nobility and the new aristocracy alike as a means of demonstrating social primacy and newly acquired wealth'.

We cannot, however, assume, making the conclusion, that the author has deeply and clearly analyzed all the aspects, indicated in the preface and in the table of contents and has fulfilled the tasks.

I consider to be the strongest and the most useful for the historians the final chapter of the book, in which the author examines the problem of the public devotion (using the analysis of the group of texts such as 'registri di lettere ducali 1553–62' 'libri giornalieri della cassa 1563–1569', and the private letters.

Appendix I includes the publication of the interesting archival documents. The author finally offers the valuable bibliography (divided into primary and secondary materials) and an index of the persons (Appendix II), which is also helpful.

In spite of its internal inconsistencies the book can be evaluated as a productive challenge to our perception of the role of music in forging of political and social identities.

NOTE

¹ Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music. Vol. 12, num. 1. *Le origini dell'opera a Milano (1598–1649)*. By Davide Daolmi. Studi sulla Storia della Musica in Lombardia 2. Turnhout: Brepols. 1998. *The Sounds of Milan, 1585–*
<http://www.sscm-jscm.org/jscm/v12/no1/getz.html> ISSN: 1089-747X

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