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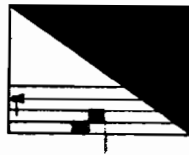
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THE LIFE AND WORKS
of
NICOLA VICENTINO

(1511 - c. 1576)

By

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PREFACE

Despite the controversial position of Nicola Vicentino among sixteenth-century musicians, no full-scale inquiry into his life and works has been essayed previous to this study. It is hoped that the present investigation will add some pertinent information to our knowledge of the musical and theoretical developments of the *cinquecento*.

The study begins with a systematic examination of the known facts of Vicentino's life. The second chapter contains a stylistic analysis of all his music. In the third chapter, his theoretical writings are examined in detail. The fourth chapter is an attempt to relate the *reservata*-problem, with which Vicentino has been associated, to Mannerism, a stylistic phenomenon, chiefly in the visual arts, which dominated the period from 1520 to 1580.

The writer wishes to express his gratitude for the help he received in the course of preparation of this work. Thanks are due especially to the Samuel S. Fels Foundation for a generous grant, to Professor A. Tillman Merritt, Curator of the Isham Memorial Library, and Dr. Nino Pirrotta, Professor of Music and Librarian of the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library, for their invaluable assistance and stimulating advice, and to Miss Mary Lou Little and staff of the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library and Miss Olga Buth and staff of the Ohio State Music Library for their patient and unfailing cooperation.

An expression of appreciation is also due to Miss Linda Kessler and Mrs. Eileen Glavas for their help in preparing the index and to The Research Council of Rutgers University for a grant that made the completion of this study possible.

Above all, the author is greatly indebted to Dr. John Ward without whose keen insight and patient criticism this study would not have been possible. Lastly, a special debt of gratitude is reserved for my wife, who not only copied all the music, but who, throughout the development of the entire work, was constant in her help and encouragement.

New Brunswick, N. J., September 1964.

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE

Nicola Vicentino was born in 1511 in the North Italian town of Vicenza, near Venice. The year of his birth can be deduced from information contained in his treatise *L'antica musica...*¹ The frontispiece of this work shows a print of a portrait of the author to which is appended the following legend: *Nicolas Vicentinus Anno Aetatis Suae XXXXIII*. Since this publication first appeared in 1555, with the writer's age clearly stated as forty-four, the year 1511 as his date of birth can be assumed to be correct. This is confirmed later in the book by Vicentino's remark that he began his work "in the fortieth year of my life, in 1550, the Holy year in the most happy pontificate of Pope Julius III..."² The phrase "in his fortieth year" refers, of course, to some period of time after the thirty-ninth birthday, but before the fortieth birthday has been reached. Simple subtraction will thus corroborate the date of Vicentino's origin as 1511.

Two erroneous dates of birth have had some currency among older scholars. The first of these, 1513,³ was probably derived from the 1557 edition of *L'antica musica...*, which reproduced the frontispiece portrait of the original edition in an exact copy without any compensating change in the author's age. To those who did not know the earlier edition, the resultant arithmetical error was an understandable one. However, since the author's statement of the year in which he began his *opus* also remained unaltered, a closer examination of the treatise would have revealed the discrepancy in time.

The second incorrect date can be traced back to Filippo Bonnanì's *Gabinetto Armonico...* which includes the statement that "such an

¹ Nicola Vicentino, *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica...* (Rome: Antonio Barrè, 1555).

² «nella mia età de gl'anni quaranta nel mille cinque ce[n]to e cinquanta, l'anno Santo nel felicissimo Pontificato di Papa GIULIO III...». *Ibid.*, foll. 10-10 v.

³ Ernst Ludwig Gerber, in his *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler* (Leipzig: Johann Gottlieb Immanuel Breitkopf, 1790-1792), II, 724, indicates that Vicentino was born in Rome in 1513. This error in the place and date of birth was cited and corrected by F. J. Fétis, «Vicentino (Nicolas)», *Revue musicale*, III (1828), 445, n. 1.

CHAPTER II

THE MUSIC

The extant musical legacy of Vicentino consists chiefly of two books of madrigals. To these may be added a few isolated sacred and secular works in both published and manuscript sources, and several incomplete compositions, including a newly-discovered *quintus* part-book of motets. Since the madrigal books were separated in publication by a span of almost three decades, they can appropriately serve as the basis for an evaluation of the stylistic features which not only differentiate the younger Don Nicola from the mature composer of the last years, but also, in a sense, dramatize the startling innovations with which the name of this musician has been associated.

THE FIRST BOOK OF MADRIGALS

The first book, dating from 1546, bears the following title-page:¹

[ornament: a stylized leaf] Soprano [ornament: inversion of the same leaf] / Del unico Adrian Willaerth discipulo / Don Nicola Vicentino / Madrigali a cinque voci per theorica / et pratica da lui composti al nuovo modo / dal celeberrimo suo maestro / ritrovato. / Libro Primo / Con gratia & privelegio. / Venetiis M^oDLVI.

The format of this edition² is that of a quarto, with the following collation: Soprano, a-d;⁴ Contralto, 3a-3d;⁴ Tenor [I], 2a-2d;⁴ Tenor [II], 4a-4d;⁴ Bass, A-D.⁴ Beginning with the second leaf of each part-book, pagination is indicated in Roman numerals, running consecutively from one to twenty-nine with these exceptions:

a) One of the compositions in this collection, a dialogue written for seven voices, necessitates the inclusion of two extra parts. A second contralto part is found in the first tenor book, and a third tenor part is included with the bass, thus extending the pagination in these books to thirty. In place of this extra page, the soprano, contralto and second tenor substitute a *tavola*, or table of contents.

¹ Only the second tenor part contains a printer's device, a crowned dragon surrounded by flames, that has not been possible to identify.

² This study was based on a microfilm copy of the original part books in the library of the *Società accademia filarmonica* of Verona, catalogue number 191 I.

CHAPTER III

THE THEORY

Vicentino's treatise,¹ first published in 1555,² appeared with the following title:

L'antica musica / ridotta alla moderna / prattica, con la dichia- / ratione,
et con gli essempli / de i tre generi, con le / loro spetie. / Et con l'inven-
tione di uno / nuovo stromento, nelquale / si contiene tutta la / perfetta
musica, con / molti segreti / musicali. / Nuovamente mess'in luce, / dal
Reverendo M. Don Nicola Vicentino. / [Printer's mark] / In Roma ap-
presso / Antonio Barrè, / MDLV.

The reverse of the title-page is adorned with a portrait in a circular frame identified as Nicola Vicentino at the age of forty-four ("Nicolas Vicentinus Anno Aetatis suae XXXXIIII"). The outer rim of the portrait bears the legend, "Incerta, et occulta scientiae tuae manifestasti [!] mihi" ("Thou hast revealed to me the puzzling and secret [aspects] of your knowledge"), a statement which is clarified in part by the inscription around the inner circle, "Archicymbali divisionis chromatici ac enarmonici generis practicae inventor" ("Inventor

¹ This study is based on the copy found in the Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, catalogue number °°M 388.73.

² A second issue of this work appeared in 1557 which agrees with the first in almost every detail except for the date on the title-page. It is quite possible that the remainder of the old text was bound up with a corrected title-page and a resetting only of those sheets which had been distributed. A comparison of the 1555 edition at Boston with a microfilm copy of the 1557 version from the Euing Musical Library of Anderson's College, Glasgow, now at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, reveals the following information in support of the above allegation:

- a) Folios 56, 72, 83, 84, 105, 129 are incorrectly numbered 54, 69, 80, 79, 106, 127 in both copies. On the other hand, only the 1555 version misnumbers folio 116 as 119, whereas erroneous indications for folios 19 and 94, as 20 and 88 respectively, are found only in the 1557 copy.
- b) The collation of both editions seems to be identical, although the folio giving the register is unfortunately lacking in the Glasgow copy.
- c) The legend under the portrait on the reverse side of the title-page gives Vicentino's age as forty-four in both the 1555 and 1557 copies.
- d) Improperly printed clef signs and signatures appear in identical places in both copies. See the malformed soprano clef on folios 23 and 37 verso, and the blurred form of the flat on folio 47 verso. Compare also the unclear and broken form of the letter F on folio 7 verso of both copies. All of these symbols reappear on other folios in their