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# Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction ix

Musical Curatives ix

“Pestilential” Music xi

Motets for Sebastian, Mary, and Other Holy Figures xii

Madrigals of the 1576 “Borromeo Plague” of Milan xiv

Petrarch’s “Standomi un giorno” xvi

Texts and Translations xviii

Songs in Times of Plague

Motets for Sebastian

1. O beate Sebastiane, *Johannes Martini*, 4vv 3
2. O beate Sebastiane, *Gaspar van Weerbeke*, 4vv 13
3. O beate Sebastiane, *Franchinus Gaffurius*, 4vv 24
4. Fiat pax in virtute tua, *Alessandro Coppini*, 4vv 33
5. Sancte Sebastiane, *Jean Mouton*, 4vv 49
6. Armorum fortissime ductor, *Adrian Willaert*, 4vv 62
7. O quam mira refulsit, *Nicolaus Olivetus*, 4vv 75
8. Sebastianus, vir Christianissimus, *Michael Deiss*, 4vv 84

Motets for Mary and Other Holy Figures

9. Stella caeli extirpavit, *Anonymous*, 4vv 95
10. Stella caeli extirpavit, *William Haute*, 3vv 101
11. Virgo Dei digna, *Gaffurius*, 4vv 104
12. O Roche beatissime, *Maistre Jhan*, 4vv 109
13. Recordare Domine, *Philippe Verdelot*, 5vv 119

Madrigals of the 1576 “Borromeo Plague” of Milan

14. Ecco il Santo Pastore, *Giovanni Battista Porta*, 5vv 131
15. Lacero tien San Carlo, *Porta*, 5vv 136
16. Santo Guerrier, *Paolo Caracciolo*, 5vv 140
17. Con qual chiave, *Caracciolo*, 5vv 152
18. L’aura serena, *Caracciolo*, 5vv 165
19. Canta Urania, *Caracciolo*, 5vv 174

Madrigals on the Death of Laura

20. Standomi un giorno, *Orlando di Lasso*, 5vv 184
21. Standomi un giorno, *Jean de Castro*, 3vv 236
22. Standomi un giorno, *Rinaldo del Mel*, 6vv 257

Critical Report	307
Sources	307
Editorial Methods	308
Critical Notes	308

# Introduction

In the fall of 1347, plague arrived at several Italian harbors after a near seven-century absence from Europe. Brought in from eastern trade routes, plague quickly spread throughout the continent, reaching parts as remote as Scandinavia and Greenland. It has been estimated that over the course of this massive three-year outbreak, the disease claimed as many as one-third to one-half of the total European population, with some towns completely depopulated. Few could have imagined at the time that plague would become the “new normal” for the next three centuries; until 1700, there were multiple outbreaks somewhere in Europe nearly every year, varying a great deal in severity.

Thanks to the work of archeologists and forensic microbiologists, we can now be reasonably certain that what the ancients and premodern Europeans called plague was a disease brought on by the bacillus *Yersinia pestis*, a pathogen separately identified by Alexandre Yersin and Shibasaburo Kitasato (though the latter was not honored with the naming) in 1894, at the start of an outbreak in Asia.<sup>1</sup> The characteristic symptom of *Yersinia pestis* is swelling in the lymph nodes in the neck, armpit, and groin (called buboes, hence, bubonic plague). This symptom matches medical accounts and artistic descriptions of plague from the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, reinforcing current scientific findings. Images of the plague protector St. Roch, for example, often show him revealing a bubo on his groin to the viewer.

Regardless of what we may know about the plague today, premodern Europeans understood and experienced the disease in a significantly different way. To them, disease was essentially an imbalance or corruption of the four bodily fluids or “humors”: blood, phlegm, and yellow and black biles. In the absence of

germ theory, plague itself was understood as an aerial miasma that was inhaled or absorbed through the pores, traveled to the heart, and putrefied the blood.<sup>2</sup> While human activities such as the improper disposal of waste could corrupt the air and generate pestilence at a local level, more devastating and wide-spread outbreaks—so-called “universal” plagues—were the result of larger planetary forces, such as earthquakes that released subterranean exhalations or infelicitous alignment of planets. All of this, though, was ultimately the purview of a punitive God who delivered and alleviated disease. This was evident throughout the Bible, in stories such as David’s, where the Lord afflicted his people with a plague after the king took a census against God’s will, relenting only after David repented and 70,000 had died.<sup>3</sup> But if God was the ultimate cause of disease, enacted through natural means such as miasma, then so too did He provide natural cures to discover and use, such as certain minerals, animals, medicinal plants, and, indeed, salubrious music.

## Musical Curatives

The songs collected in this anthology all respond—with varying degrees of explicitness—to plague. While today we may hear these works dispassionately or enjoy them as beautiful works of art, for their composers, performers, and listeners in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these songs were vital and urgent, and they were meant to *do* something to combat the disease. Most broadly, music and music-making were a means to improve physical health. Armed with venerable Galenic theories of medicine, Renaissance doctors took a variety of steps to rebalance a patient’s

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1. For an overview of the methods and results of studies in forensic microbiology from the 1990s to 2012, see J. L. Bolton, “Looking for *Yersinia Pestis*: Scientists, Historians and the Black Death,” in *The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. Linda Clark and Carole Rawcliffe (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 15–38.

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2. For one of the first and most extensive medieval medical descriptions of plague, published in 1348, see Jacme d’Agramont, “Regiment de preservacio a epidimia o pestilencia e mortaldats,” trans. M. L. Duran-Reynals and C.-E. A. Winslow, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 23, no. 1 (1949): 57–89.

3. 2 Kings 24:10–15.

# Texts and Translations

The texts are presented as they appear in the primary source for each piece, unless otherwise noted. Where there are differences in spellings, elisions, and truncations among voice parts within a single piece, the most common reading has been selected and tacitly applied throughout. Minor orthographic alterations have been made in accordance with scholarly conventions, including modernizing the treatment of *v/u* and *i/j* and expanding *e* to *ae* when the diphthong is intended. Abbreviations and ampersands have been expanded tacitly, some spellings have been modernized, including Italian *et* to *e/ed*, and punctuation has been added for clarity and to conform with modern conventions. Capitalization has been adjusted to clarify beginnings of poetic lines and sentences. Typographical errors have been corrected tacitly. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are by the editor.

## 1–2. *O beate Sebastiane*

O beate Sebastiane, miles beatissime, cujus precibus tota patria Lombardiae fuit liberata a pestifera peste.

O blessed Sebastian, most holy soldier, by whose prayers the entire land of Lombardy was liberated from the pestiferous plague.

Libera nos ab ipsa et a maligno ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.

Free us from that plague and from evil so that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

## 3. *O beate Sebastiane*

O beate Sebastiane, vere Christi miles, martyr inclyte, ut tuis precibus a peste liberata est tota Italia, sic pro nobis funde preces ad supernas poli sedes. In extremum nos perducatur et a malo nos defendat.

O blessed Sebastian, true soldier of Christ, celebrated martyr, just as all of Italy was liberated from plague by your prayers, so, for us, pour forth your prayers to those seated in heaven. May he guide us at the hour of death and defend us from evil.

Ora pro nobis, beate Martine, ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.

Pray for us, blessed Martin, so that we might be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Sancte Christofore, defende nos a peste, adsis nobis, o martyr sancte.

Saint Christopher, defend us from the plague and aid us, O holy martyr.

Pius custos et protector, Sancte Ambrosi, precibus assiduis nostrum placa Redemptorem, qui te fecit hic pastorem.

Pious guardian and protector, Saint Ambrose, with constant prayers placate our Redeemer, who appointed you our shepherd here.

Dei genitrix virgo, intercede pro nostra omniumque salute. Tuum ora filium pro salute fidelium.

Virgin mother of God, intercede for all our salvation. Beseech your son for the salvation of the faithful.

# Motets for Sebastian

## 1. O beate Sebastiane

Johannes Martini

Superius *[Prima pars]*

Altus

Tenor

Bassus

O be- a-

[O] ————— be- a- -

O be- a- - -

4

S

A

T

B

-te, O be- a- - te

-te, O be- a- - te

O be- a- - te

O be- a- - te

10

S

A

T

B

Se- ba- sti- a-

Se- ba- sti- a-

Se- ba- sti- a-

Se- ba- sti- a-

S  
ve- der for- ma, (ve- der for- ma) ce- les- te ed im- mor- ta-

T  
- der \_\_\_\_\_ for- ma ce- les- te ed im- mor- ta-

B  
ve- der for- ma ce- les- te ed im- mor- ta-

S  
-le pri- ma pen- sai, fin ch'a lo svel- t'al- lo- ro giun- s'ed al

T  
-le pri- ma pen- sai, (pri- ma pen- sai,) fin ch'a lo svel- t'al- lo- ro giun- s'ed al

B  
-le pri- ma pen- sai, (pri- ma pen- sai,) ed al

S  
fon- te che la ter- r'in- vo- la. O- gni co- s'al fin vo-

T  
fon- te che la ter- r'in- vo- la. O- gni co- s'al fin vo-

B  
fon- te che la ter- r'in- vo- la. O- gni co- s'al fin vo- la,

S  
-la, (o- gni co- s'al fin vo- la:) ché \_\_\_\_\_ mi- ran- do le

T  
- la: \_\_\_\_\_ ché mi- ran- do le

B  
(o- gni co- s'al fin vo- - la:) ché \_\_\_\_\_ mi- ran- do le

C  
-sto r'ap- pres- sa- van né bi- fol- ci, ma nin- f'e

Ses  
-sto r'ap- pres- sa- van né bi- fol- ci, ma nin-

A  
-sto r'ap- pres- sa- van né bi- fol- ci,

T  
-sto r'ap- pres- sa- van né \_\_\_\_\_ bi- fol- ci,

Q  
-sto r'ap- pres- sa- van né bi- fol- ci, ma

B  
-sto r'ap- pres- sa- van né bi- fol- ci,

C  
mu- se, ma nin- - f'e mu- se, (ma nin- - f'e mu- se)

Ses  
- f'e mu- se, ma nin- f'e mu- se, (ma nin- f'e mu- se)

A  
ma nin- f'e mu- se, ma nin- - f'e mu- se, (ma nin- f'e

T  
ma nin- f'e mu- se, ma nin- f'e mu-

Q  
nin- f'e mu- se, ma nin- f'e mu- se, (ma nin-

B  
a quel te- - quel nor



# Critical Report

## Sources

The known sources for the music in this volume are listed below, with the piece(s) contained in each source appearing after the source description. Manuscript sigla come from *Census-catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music 1400–1550*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Kellman and Charles Hamm, Renaissance Manuscript Series (Neuhausen and Stuttgart: American Institute of Musicology, 1979–88); and print sigla from Répertoire International des Sources Musicales, *Recueils imprimés XVIe–XVIIe siècles*, ed. François Lesure, ser. B/I (Munich: Henle, 1960), and Répertoire International des Sources Musicales, *Einzeldrucke von 1800*, ser. A/I (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1971–2012), hereafter *RISM*.

## Manuscripts

*BarcBC* 454. Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, M 454. Contains nos. 1–2.

*ChiN* M91. Chicago, The Newberry Library, Case MS.-VM 1578.M91. Contains no. 13.

*LonBL* 5665. London, The British Library, Add. 5665, “Ritson MS.” Contains no. 10.

*MilD* 1. Milan, Archivio della Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, Sezione Musicale, Librone 1. Contains no. 3.

*MilD* 3. Milan, Archivio della Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, Sezione Musicale. Librone 3. Contains no. 4.

*PadBC* A17. Padua, Duomo, Biblioteca Capitolare di Padua, Curia Vescivile, MS A.17. Contains no. 13.

*PadBC* D27. Padua, Duomo, Biblioteca Capitolare, Curia Vescivile, MS D.27. Contains nos. 12–13.

*PiacD* (5). Piacenza, Archivio del Duomo, Fondo Musicale, s. s. (5). Contains no. 13.

*RomeM* 23-4. Rome, Palazzo Massimo, VI.C6.23–24. Contains no. 13.

*RomeV* 35-40. Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, S1 35–40. Contains no. 13.

*TrevBC* 4. Treviso, Biblioteca Capitolare del Duomo, MS 4. Destroyed in 1944. Contains no. 12.

*TrevBC* 8. Treviso, Biblioteca Capitolare del Duomo, MS 8. Contains nos. 6–7.

*VatG* XII.4. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Capp. Giulia XII.4. Contains no. 13.

*VatS* 63. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Capp. Sist. 63. Contains no. 5.

## Prints

*RISM* 1502<sup>1</sup>. *Motetti A. numero trentatre* (Venice: O. Petrucci, 1502). Contains no. 9.

*RISM* 1505<sup>2</sup>. *Motetti libro quarto* (Venice: O. Petrucci, 1505). Contains nos. 1–2.

*RISM* 1521<sup>5</sup>. *Motetti libro quarto* (Venice: A. Antico, 1521). Contains no. 5.

*RISM* 1532<sup>9</sup>. *Secundus liber cum quinque vocibus* (Lyon: J. Moderne, 1532). Contains no. 13.

*RISM* 1534<sup>6</sup>. *Liber quartus XXIX. musicales quatuor vel quinque parium vocum modulos habet* (Paris: P. Attaignant, 1534). Contains no. 13.

*RISM* 1543<sup>4</sup>. *Symphonia quatuor modulate vocibus* (Venice: G. Scotto, 1543). Contains no. 12.

*RISM* 1549<sup>12</sup>. *Electiones diversorum motetorum distincte quatuor vocibus* (Venice: A. Gardane, 1549). Contains no. 13.

*RISM* 1568<sup>4</sup>. *Novi atque catholici thesauri musici* (Venice: A. Gardano, 1568). Contains no. 8.

*RISM* C 967. Paolo Caracciolo, *Il primo libro de madrigali a cinque voci* (Venice: G. Scotto, 1582). Contains nos. 16–19.

*RISM* C 1474. Jean de Castro, *Second livre de chansons, madrigalz et motetz à trois parties* (Paris: A. Le Roy and R. Ballard, 1580). Contains no. 21.