Madalena Casulana (c. 1540–c. 1590), an Italian madrigal composer, is the first known woman to have published her compositions. Scholars such as Thomasin LaMay and Jane Bowers have focused on the dedication of her Primo Libro de madrigali à Quattro voci, dedicated to Isabella de’ Medici and how in this dedication, she situates herself as a female composer in a masculine profession. Using how Casulana dedicated her Secondo libro de madrigali à Quattro voci and her construction of the second book, this paper examines how Casulana continued to navigate her place as a composer in the overwhelmingly masculine world of composition during the sixteenth century. Casulana’s dedication to a prominent female patron in her first book, where she declares her ability to compose alongside men, is followed by a change of tactics with the second book, dedicated to a male patron and with no mention of the “conceited error of men.”¹ By looking at these two dedications, Casulana’s method of getting her compositions published is made clearer. This paper also considers the texts Casulana included in her second book as a way of demonstrating that she was aware of cultural and musical trends, such as including texts from Jacopo Sannazaro’s Arcadia. Through this analysis, we can understand how Casulana negotiated the publication of her compositions in the gendered society of sixteenth-century Italy, thus opening the door for later composers such as Francesca Caccini and Barbara Strozzi.

Madalena Casulana published three books of madrigals, the first two of which are known to have been reprinted.² She is known to have composed and published at least 67 madrigals.

Casulana’s first collection of madrigals was published in 1568. Her second book followed in 1570 and her third book was published in 1582. Not much is known about Casulana’s musical education, though it is believed that she studied with Adrian Willaert (c. 1490–1562) and Philippe de Monte (1521–1603).

In Casulana’s time, the gender dichotomy of the man as mind against woman as body, which included proscribed roles of behavior for both men and women, was particularly strong. These ideas, which flourished in the late sixteenth-century, can be traced back to Classical scholars such as Galen. Men were intellectual and reasoning beings, whereas women were emotional and irrational. These differences played out in music as well. Men were creative beings who composed music; women were either amateur performers or the emotional and beautiful muses for the men who created music.

Casulana negotiated this gendered world of the late sixteenth century, crossing gender barriers and succeeding in publishing her works. Without a doubt, Casulana was aware of the traditional gender dichotomy of her time: it was apparent in the political and educational systems, all the way down to the poetry that she and other madrigal composers set. Casulana had to negotiate this environment to break into professional music-making; while maintaining her identity as a woman and a composer, selling publications, and obtaining support from patrons.

One possible way in which Casulana was able to enter the world of professional music-making was through private academies in Venice. These academies in Venice were generally informal and consisted of writers, artists, scholars, and musicians who gathered to discuss their

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6 Heere-Beyer, 5.
cultural ideals through debate and performance. Casulana was a member of various academies in and around Venice. Casulana scholar Ellen Lerner writes that

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given the obstacles to becoming a professional musician, she apparently circumvented them by entering the world of salons (ridotti) and academies in and around Venice, an environment relatively more tolerant and appreciative of independent women in general and those active in the arts in particular.\]

Women were able to perform for these academies, observe the discussions, and sometimes participate. As Lerner attests, these academies, usually located in the private sphere of the home, provided women, who were largely obliged to stay out of the public eye, a place to listen to and perform music, as well as share in the exchange of ideas. In addition to that, the academies which focused on music were more informal than other types of academies, creating great opportunities for women to participate. Women frequently were connected to these academies as performers or hostesses. One example of a woman performer hosting academy meetings where music-making would occur comes from Veronica Franco (1546–1591), a renowned singer and poet. Franco “[i]nvite[d] friends to visit for . . . music at home. . . . there will be ‘musica per tempo at her house and that before . . . she hopes to take delight in the sweet harmony of her addressee’s suave discourse.” It is possible that Casulana played a similar role. Rather than just attending, she performed at various academies, hosted some of her own, and in these contexts, may have performed her own madrigals. Casulana’s third book of madrigals, *Il Primo Libro de Madrigali a Cinque Voci*, was dedicated to Count Mario Bevilacque, a member of the Verona Accademia

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8 Lerner, 99.
9 Lerner, 99.
10 Feldman, 476.
11 Feldman, 498.
12 Feldman, 499.
Filarmonica, thus providing further evidence of Casulana’s association with academies in Italy.\(^{14}\) Through the Venetian academy setting, Casulana would have been able to meet potential students, madrigal poets, and patrons, and garner their support.

Another major way in which Casulana maneuvered her way through the gendered society was through the dedication of her *Primo Libro de madrigali a Quattro voci*. Casulana’s dedication stands out in many ways. It is possible that because of this dedication, Casulana was able to get her first book of madrigals published. Not only is it the first published collection of music by a female composer, but it is dedicated to a female patron, and the dedication is worded in such a way as to situate the composer in the masculine world of composition. Casulana effectively and humbly announces her ability, and a woman’s ability, to compose madrigals alongside men. The dedication reads:

To the Most Illustrious and Most Excellent Lady, Donna Isabella de’ Medici Orsina, Duchess of Bracciano.

I know truly, most Illustrious and Most Excellent Lady, that these first fruits of mine cannot, because of their weakness, produce the effect that I would like, which would be, other than to give Your Excellence some proof of my devotion, to show also to the world (as much as is allowed me in this musical profession) the conceited error of men. They believe so strongly to be the masters of the high gifts of the intellect that, in their opinion, these gifts cannot likewise be shared by Women. Nevertheless, I did not want to fail to publish them: I hope these works will acquire so much light from the renowned name of Your Excellence (to whom I reverently dedicate them) that from this light other, more elevated minds may be kindled, in order to demonstrate with clear effect what I could not demonstrate, if not with my intent. Therefore, Your Excellence, please accept this sincere intention of mine, and if from such unripe fruits I could not obtain that praise which is the only reward for virtuous toils, let at least your generosity allow me to enjoy the reward of your favor. In this way, I will always consider these fruits, if not good, at least most fortunate. . . .\(^{15}\)

Conventions of the time demanded that composers, and other creative artists be modest in their dedications to patrons, which here Casulana does through the use of “because of their weakness,”

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\(^{14}\) Lerner, 98.

“with clear effect what I could not demonstrate,” “unripe fruits,” and “these fruits, if not good, at least most fortunate,” while turning the convention on its head through her demonstration of “the conceited error of men” who believe that women could not produce works as good as men, which Casulana believes her madrigals are, and therefore she “did not want to fail to publish them.” Casulana also states that she is a professional composer with “as much as is allowed me in this musical profession,” situating herself as a “Wom[a]n” with the “high gifts of intellect” which she can use to compose music. Casulana is declaring that women can compose music too; music composition is not something that can be done only by men. Samantha Heere-Beyer, in her thesis titled “Claiming Voice: Madalena Casulana and the Sixteenth-Century Madrigal” astutely interprets Casulana’s dedication in her first book as her “insistence to be taken seriously and treated with the same respect given to men in her profession” which “is unique, as there are no records of other women from this time who attempted to do so.” Casulana’s declaration of compositional power is all the more effective because of her humility about the works contained in the print. By dedicating the collection to a prominent woman, Casulana was able to declare her compositional power as a woman in a way that would not have been acceptable in a dedication to a male patron.

Not only did Casulana dedicate her first book to Isabella de’ Medici Orsina, but the first madrigal of the book sings Isabella’s praises, the note on which her name is sung being the highest in the whole piece, all of which Isabella, a powerful and independent woman, would likely have appreciated. The dedicatee, Isabella de’ Medici Orsina was trained in music and was an amateur performer, as well as patron. Isabella actively portrayed herself as a musician, as

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16 Heere-Beyer, 1.
17 Heere-Beyer, 1.
18 Caroline Murphy, Murder of a Medici Princess (Cary, North Carolina: Oxford University Publishing, 2008), 154.
demonstrated by her self-portrait, which depicts her holding sheet music.\textsuperscript{19} The dedication to Isabella de’ Medici Orsina may be a declaration of feminine power, while still retaining the appearance of remaining humble.

Casulana’s dedication to a female, Isabella de’ Medici Orsina, is not strange when taken in the context of other publications by female composers. Barbara Strozzi dedicated three of her seven publications to women; her first publication \textit{Il primo libro di madrigali} was dedicated to Vittoria della Rovere, her fourth publication \textit{Sacri musicali affetti} was dedicated to Anna of Austria, and her final book, \textit{Arie a voce sola} was dedicated to the Electress Sophia of Braunschweig.\textsuperscript{20} Dedication of books of madrigals to women by male composers was also quite common. Phillipe de Monte dedicated his sixth book of five-voice madrigals to Isabella de Medici Orsini.\textsuperscript{21} Antonio Molino, a student of Casulana’s, dedicated a book of his own madrigals to Casulana in 1568\textsuperscript{22} and Monte dedicated his three-voice madrigal collection of 1582 to Casulana.\textsuperscript{23}

Female patrons and dedicatees were not unusual in the Renaissance and the space they inhabited was considered more private. By dedicating her first book of madrigals to a female patron possibly allowed Casulana to write the assertive a dedication she did. Having a female dedicatee placed the book in a more private than public setting, thus making it more tolerable for a woman to professionally write and publish music. If Casulana had of dedicated her first book of madrigals to a male patron, the act of professionally composing and publishing for a woman in a more public sphere would have been objectionable. Casulana is gently pressing against the

\textsuperscript{19} Murphy, 152–153.
\textsuperscript{20} Wendy Heller, “Usurping the Place of the Muses: Barbara Strozzi and the Female Composer in Seventeenth-Century Italy,” in \textit{The World of Baroque Music}, ed. by George Stauffer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 152.
\textsuperscript{21} Einstein 502.
\textsuperscript{22} Einstein, 529.
\textsuperscript{23} Einstein, 510
boundaries of what women can and cannot do as professional musicians. With her second book of madrigals, Casulana pushes the boundaries even further.

Casulana’s *Secondo libro de’ madrigal a Quattro voci* is dedicated to Antonio Londonio, a Milanese official and well-known male patron of music and art. There is no evidence of how or why Casulana decided to dedicate her second collection to this high-ranking Milanese President of the Ministry of Finance. Other madrigal composers dedicated collections of madrigals to Londonio, including Pietro Vinci and Marc’Antonio Ingegneri. Casulana’s dedication to Londonio is not as insistent as her first dedication with its declarations about her power to compose, makes no mention of the “conceited error of men,” and contains the humility typical of the majority of dedications.

To the most illustrious Lord, my great observer, the Signor Don Antonio Londonio, President of the Magistrate Ordinary, and of the Consiglio Segreto of the Catholic King of Milan.

My illustrious Lord, these weak efforts of mine must not be considered too daring by the world, if to Your Lordship’s illustriousness, which is a clear ray of virtue, they are freely offered. Therefore, although they are not as excellent as would be fitting, the similitude that they, as virtuous works, have to your Illustrious Lordship’s character, ensures that they will be graciously received by you, no less than is a small tributary by a great and famous river. With this opinion therefore, nourished by great testimony, which on many occasions has been made by Signor Giovanni Battista Cavanago of the great quality, and the singular benignity, of your illustrious Lordship and of the delight, which you take in this profession; to you I reverently dedication them (such that they are), supplicating you to receive them with that fondness with which they come from me; and to enjoy them, if not the harmony of the music, at least that harmony which was born in me from its most noble parts, in the repose that you sometimes will take from your weighty business. With this end, I humbly kiss your hands. From Venice, on the first of May, 1570.

Your Illustrious Lordship’s most humble servant. Madalena Casulana.

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25 LaMay, “My Body Knows Unheard of Songs,” 46.
26 Lerner, 98.
In this dedication, Casulana is not overtly declaring her power to compose alongside men, but subtly. While she humbly writes that “they are not as excellent,” she also says they are “virtuous works” similar to Londonio’s “illustrious character.” Casulana also declares herself to be a composer of “noble” music. With her dedication to Isabella de’ Medici Orsina, Casulana declared herself to be a professional composer, and here she is continuing to declare herself a professional composer with a well-known reputation, composing “virtuous” and “noble” music. Her dedication to a male patron further puts her work as a professional composer into the public eye.

Casulana’s *Il secondo libro de madrigali a Quattro voci* is the only book of her madrigals in which all the parts are extant.\(^{30}\) There are sixteen madrigals in the second book, none of which are known to have appeared outside of this collection, while some madrigals from her first book appeared in other collections such as *Il Desiderio*.\(^ {31}\) None of the madrigals in the second book, unlike the first, sing the praises of the dedicatee. Most of Casulana’s madrigals are for three to five voices. Casulana generally “favoured contemporary lyric verse,”\(^ {32}\) and used many madrigalisms or text-painting techniques.\(^ {33}\) In the composition of her madrigals, Casulana frequently employs “chromatic alteration and unexpected harmonic juxtapositions”\(^ {34}\) to dramatize certain passages and create contrast. The majority of Casulana’s madrigals are

\(^{30}\) Lerner, 101.
\(^{31}\) Lerner, 102.
\(^{32}\) Bridges, “Maddalena Casulana.”
\(^{33}\) Bridges, “Maddalena Casulana.”
\(^{34}\) Bridges, “Maddalena Casulana.”
syllabic. Casulana’s settings contrast sections of homophony and polyphony, sometimes including imitation or a single voice moving shortly before or after the other voices. In terms of text choices, number of voices, the syllabic settings, and use of chromaticism, Casulana’s madrigals fit in with other, older, largely homophonic madrigals composed during the 1560s and 1570s, similar to those of Rore, Ruffo, and Lasso.\(^{35}\) Many of her texts were by poets who were popular with other madrigal composers, such as Serafino Aquilano, Jacopo Sannazaro, and Francesco Petrarch. The poetry of Petrarch was set up as the standard for madrigal poetry, particularly by Pietro Bembo, a Venetian scholar.\(^{36}\)

The poet who appears the most in all of her madrigal publications is Francesco Petrarch. The typical madrigal was formed around poetry by Petrarch or those poems similar to it in rhyme scheme or pastoral setting. Petrarch’s texts contained their own meter which enabled them to be easily set to music and were ripe with opportunities for text painting. Though, along with Petrarch, Sannazaro and Aquilano are regarded as a other exemplary madrigal writers.

The second book of madrigals is the only in which she used the poems of Serafino Aquilano (1466–1500). Casulana included three of his poems, two of which are divided into two parts and five parts respectively. Serafino Aquilano was an Italian poet and musician who worked in Milan, Mantua, and Naples, with brief stints in Venice, Urbino, Genoa, and Rome.\(^ {37}\) Aquilano adapted Petrarchian style to verses used in Italian courts by Courtesans.\(^ {38}\)

Casulana set one text from Jacopo Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* in the second book, she set two other Sannazaro texts in her other books. The madrigal is *Monti selve fontane* from the *Ecloga*

\(^{38}\) Harr, “Serafino de’ Ciminelli dall’Aquila.”
The rise in popularity of setting texts from Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* in the latter part of the sixteenth-century has recently been discussed by Giuseppe Gerbino. This trend flourished in the 1580s, with the madrigals of Luca Marenzio, a decade after Casulana set *Monti selve fontane*.

Casulana followed the trends of madrigal composition that were popular with male composers and admired by their patrons and the public at large and incorporated them into her own publications. Her style of composition fit in with her contemporaries; she set texts by the greatly admired poet Petrarch, as well as other popular poets such as Aquilano and Sannazaro. These were the works greatly admired by and popular with the public. In addition to being a talented composer with works comparable to others who were composing at the same time, Casulana most likely gained support from groups of people that she performed for in Venice as well as individual patrons who were open to supporting a professional woman composer. Through these Italian academies she gained students, patrons, and an audience for her madrigals. Casulana carefully dedicated her works to patrons without overstepping the bounds of propriety too far and in the process. Her first dedication, to a female patron allowed her to gradually move out of the private academy and home setting into a public and professional role, situating herself as a female composer in a masculine profession. With her second dedication, Casulana fully steps into the professional role of composer in the public eye, pushing gender and professional boundaries beyond what was acceptable before.

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41 Gerbino, 20.
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