Collective "Problem-Solving" in the History of Music: The Case of the Camerata

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Introduction—The intensive effort, towards the end of the sixteenth century, to animate dramatic texts through the use of music created a need to define the unique properties of words and music and the optimum formula for wedding the two. More than the other musical expressions of the time, opera is the quintessence of this search. In the struggle to tell a story and to identify that which could be uniquely musical in the telling, the institution of opera may be thought of as the embodiment of a statement about the nature and powers of music.

Aesthetic theories and early experiments on the powers of music have an analogue in the gropings towards the institutionalization of science in the same period.[1] Both give expression to the new assertion of Will, operating on the world and attempting to define its nature. Moreover, the social circle most closely associated with the origins of opera—the Camerata—resembles the kind of "invisible college" which is the key to creativity in science.

The following re-examination of the Camerata stems from and lends support to the conviction that the crystallization of problems and their solutions in art are analogous to the development of a "paradigm" in science.[2] And as Gombrich and others have suggested, style represents

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[1] See Marie Boas, *The Scientific Renaissance, 1450-1630,* (London, 1962), esp. Chap. VIII, "The Organization and Reorganization of Science"; Joseph Ben-David, "The Scientific Role: The conditions of its Establishment in Europe," in George Basalla, ed., *The Rise of Modern Science: External or Internal Factors* (Lexington, Mass., 1968), 47-54; Martha Ornstein, *The Role of Scientific Societies in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1975), Part II; and Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1947), Chaps. III and XII. On the relationship of art and science, see Giorgio di Santillana, "The Role of Art in the Scientific Renaissance" in Marshall Clagett, ed., *Critical Problems in the History of Science* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1968), 47-54; and D. P. Walker, *Studies in Musical Science in the Late Renaissance* (London, 1978).

[2] The term "paradigm" is appropriate here in spite of the ambiguities and arguments that have followed in the wake of Kuhn's original usage. Indeed, Kuhn himself has tried to sort out his several usages, giving important weight to shared, virtually tacit modes of puzzle solutions that inhere in scientific communities. This sense of the term is employed here. Others use the paradigm concept to refer to a new way of seeing things, a "cognitive event". Expounding Kuhn's thesis, Mulkay defines paradigm as a "series of related assumptions—theoretical, methodological, and empirical—which are generally accepted by those working in a particular area," even while suggesting that "cognitive and technical norms" might serve the purpose better. I prefer the term paradigm partly because its several usages encompass several of the dimensions of the subject treated here and partly to emphasize the usefulness (already noted by Kuhn and Crane) of viewing creativity in art as analogous in many ways to creativity in science. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure*

a kind of collective problem-solving by a group of artists.[3] In turn, such agreed-upon solutions, as Crane suggests, inhere in "invisible colleges" or social circles of colleagues whose informal networks of communication nurture the paradigm and fructify it.

The Camerata: Cradle of Early Italian Opera?

Writings which attempt to downgrade the role of the Florentine Camerata as the cradle of early Italian opera seem as far from the mark as those which insist on the exclusivity of its birthright. It is likely that members of the so-called Camerata, that Renaissance salon or "academy" of amateurs, musicians, artists, astrologers, philosophers, and scientists, who met informally under the aegis of Bardi and Corsi, were largely unaware of the role that history would accord to them.[4] The goal they set for themselves certainly was not to create what the next four centuries would know as opera. Their aim was to reform the polyphonic music of the day and they believed that the best way to do so was to renovate the ancient Greek practice of setting words to music with "power to move the passion of the mind."[5] They thought of themselves not as innovating but as reviving an earlier and better way.

Recent research, particularly the work of Pirrotta and Palisca, has added much to the refinement of our knowledge of this group, and to the location of its proper place in musical history. As we shall see, "the group" was split by rivalry between its two "conveners", one of whom inclined more to talk and amateur music-making and the other to experimentation in dramatic productions with music.[6] And there was a disagreement over style between its two musical stars. Moreover, this informal academy was only one of five or more Florentine academies which dabbled in drama and aesthetics, among which the Alterati, deserves major attention because it contained the greatest number of musical amateurs. Nevertheless, one immediately discovers that the overlap in membership between the Alterati and Camerata was very high; the overlapping of memberships among all these groups "makes it hard to keep

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of Scientific Revolutions (2nd ed., Chicago, 1970), 175, 187-193, 208; Diana Crane, Invisible Colleges: Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities (Chicago and London, 1972), 29; M. K. Mulkay, The Social Process in Innovation (London, 1972), 31-32.

[3] See E. H. Gombrich, "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and its Consequences" in Norm & Form (London & New York, 1966), 9-10.

[4] See Nino Pirrotta, "Temperaments and Tendencies in the Florentine Camerata", Musical Quarterly, XL (1954), 169-89.

[5] Giulio Caccini, Foreword to Le nuove musiche (1602) in Oliver Strunk, Source Readings in Music History (New York, 1950), 379.

[6] Bardi's group, the Camerata, and Corsi's group, which was something of a workshop, were somewhat overlapping, but distinct. Strictly speaking, therefore, there is not a single group with two conveners, but an "invisible college", as will become clear in the following pages.

their contribution distinct."[7] Nor were the Camerata so naive as to think that they were reviving ancient Greek tragedy; their aim, rather, was to revive a certain style of singing which they associated with classic drama. They were primarily interested in communicating more "effectively". Certain of the members may, however, have been aware that they were developing a new style (or genre), and the infighting over who-did-what-first suggests that a subconscious awareness of their innovative role was alive in the others.[8]

The experiments of the Florentine group did make history. Ironically, the case is even *stronger* to the extent that they did not explicitly pronounce their paternity of the opera, or differed in their conceptions of how to implement their goal or they were part of a larger network consisting of other groups which were similarly occupied.[9] The Camerata, and possibly their allies, were like midwives to a sixteenth century which was pregnant with the peculiar conjunction of social, ideological, and cultural ideas and practices from which the opera emerged. Not only were the musico-aesthetic theories of the Camerata influenced by the social, ideological, and cultural context of the century but the very existence of such groups as social institutions was a product of the time. Analysis of the structure and composition of the group has a direct bearing on its thought, just as its thought has a direct bearing on the birth of opera. And the kind of artistic creativity which arose from the salon of the Camerata has a number of parallels in the dynamics of creativity in science. This should not be confused with the longstanding alliance of theoretical music with science as part of the quadrivium. Practical musicianship was not the essential part of it, let alone a recognition of commonality as far as the dynamics of creativity is concerned.

The Camerata as Invisible College—The geography of the Renaissance is dotted with groups of learned laymen and professionals who came together for serious talk. In his often quoted letter to G. B. Doni (1594-1647), Bardi's son, Pietro, tells how his father, "who took great delight in music and was in his day a composer of some reputation always had about him the most celebrated men of the city, learned in this profession, and inviting them to his house, he formed a sort of delightful and continual academy from which vice and in particular every kind of gaming were absent. To this the noble youth of Florence were attracted with great profit to themselves, passing their time not only in pursuit of music, but also in discussing and receiving instruction in poetry, astrology,

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[7] Claude V. Palisca, "The Alterati of Florence, Pioneers in the Theory of Dramatic Music," in William W. Austin, ed., *New Looks at Italian Opera, Essays in Honor of Donald J. Grout* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968), 10-11.

[8] *Ibid.,* 35-37; 53.

[9] See Claude V. Palisca, "Musical Asides in the Diplomatic Correspondence of Emilio De'Cavalieri", *The Musical Quarterly*, XLIX, No. 3 (1963). Also see Nino Pirrotta, "Early Opera and Aria", *op. cit.,* (n. 4 above), 40-53.

and other sciences. . . ."[10] Pietro Bardi goes on to mention the theorist and composer, Vincenzo Galilei (father of astronomer Galileo); Caccini, the renowned singer; Peri, singer-organist and composer; Rinuccini, the famous poet and librettist; and Jacopo Corsi, who succeeded Pietro Bardi's father as patron of the group and its creative activity. Extending the net, one can trace the links between Bardi and Galilei and the classicists Francesco Patrici and Girolamo Mei to the humanist Piero Vettori, and to an allied but rival group in Rome centering on Cavalieri, leading indirectly to Monteverdi.[11] Seated in the parlor as full participants in the conversation and as members of the audience were the nobles and clergymen of the Medici court, their officials, and the rising middle class of the city.

"Indeed," writes Caccini, "In the times when the most virtuous Camerata of the most illustrious Signor Giovanni Bardi, Count of Vernio, flourished in Florence, and in it were assembled not only a part of the nobility but also the first musicians and men of talent and poets and philosophers of the city, and I, too, frequently attended it, I can say that I learned more from their learned discussions than I learned from descant in over thirty years; for these most understanding gentlemen always encouraged me and convinced me with the clearest reasons not to follow that old way of composition whose music, not suffering the words to be understood by the hearers, ruins the conceit and the verse. . . (causing) a laceration of the poetry . . . but to hold fast to the manner so much praised by Plato and other philosophers, who declare that music is nothing other than the fable [or plot] and not the contrary, the rhythm and sound, in order to penetrate the perception of others and to produce those marvelous effects admired by the writers. . . ."[12]

[10] Pietro Bardi, Letter to G. B. Doni (1634) in Strunk, *op. cit.* (n. 5 above), 363.

[11] "Nor was there," writes Pietro, "any want of men to imitate them, and in Florence, the first home of this sort of music, and in other cities of Italy, especially in Rome, these gave and are still giving a marvelous account of themselves on the dramatic stage. Among the foremost of these it seems fitting to place Monteverdi." Strunk, *ibid.,* 365. On membership of musicians other than those mentioned above see Claude V. Palisca, "The 'Camerata Fiorentina': A Reappraisal", *Studi Musicali* (1972), 208-12. Also see Palisca, "Girolamo Mei, Mentor to the Florentine Camerata" *Musical Quarterly,* XL (1954), and Palisca, ed. *Mei's Letters on Ancient and Modern Music to Vincenzo Galilei and Giovanni Bardi* (Rome, 1960). Also see Pirrotta, *op. cit.* Francesco Patrici expressed the view in his treatise *Della Poetica* of 1586, that Greek tragedies were sung in their entirety. With the aid of the tables of Alypius, Patrici analyzed a fragment of Galilei's document on Greek music. Though not a member of the Camerata he discussed the matter with Bardi. Patrici, Bardi, and Mei were acquainted with the work of Piero Vettori, the commentator on Aristotle's *Poetics* and editor of Greek tragedies. See Leo Schrade, *Tragedy in the Art of Music* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 53-54. Most poetic theorists, however, relying on Aristotle's *Poetics,* considered the chorus to have been the only musical part of ancient tragedy. See Barbara Hanning, *Of Poetry and Music's Power: Humanism and the Creation of Opera,* (Ann Arbor, Microfilm International, 1980), 15-19.

[12] Strunk, *op. cit.* (n. 5, above), 378.

While in this foreword to his *Le nuove musiche*, Caccini established, among other things, his own affiliation with the Camerata, his flowery praise accompanied by the dedication of his version of *Euridice* to Bardi were part of a concerted campaign by Caccini to prove that he had been writing in *stile rappresentativo* since the days of the Camerata. Hence his *Euridice*, though it followed Peri's, was in a style for which he could claim first rights.[13] Yet, Peri's *Euridice* had come first, and had been performed in 1600, also to Rinuccini's libretto, on the occasion of the wedding of Maria de Medici to Henry IV. While Peri did not contradict Caccini, Cavalieri did. Cavalieri's reports to the Tuscan court about social, political, and artistic affairs in Rome during his mission in Rome, include some revealing"musical asides." After having been discharged from the job of coordinator of music at the Florentine court and replaced by Caccini, Cavalieri writes with indignation: "That I [Cavalieri] should have been set aside by Giulio Romano [Caccini], who if he lived a hundred years could learn from me!"[14] And after having seen the printed score of Caccini's *Euridice*, he writes: "I find nothing in it that annoys me. For my *rappresentatione*, which is printed, having been printed three and a half months earlier, settles all the contentions. And it will be recognized what is science and what is the difference between starlings and Partridges."[15] Cavalieri also challenges Rinuccini, who had acted "as if he had been the inventor of this way of representing in music, never before found or invented by anyone"; and relates: "I spoke to him about all this, for it seemed to me that he had done me wrong. Because this [style] was invented by me. . . . "[16]

While Rinuccini is willing to give Peri credit for having surmounted "the difficulties this style presented",[17] Peri, aware of Cavalieri's annoyance at Rinuccini, writes in the preface to his score of *Euridice*: "Although Signor Emilio dei Cavalieri, before any other of whom I know, enabled us with marvelous intention to hear our kind of music upon the stage, nonetheless as early as 1594, it pleased the Signore Jacopo Corsi and Ottavio Rinuccini that I should employ it in another guise. . . . "[18]

[13] Giulio Caccini, Dedication to *Euridice,* in Strunk, *op. cit.,* 370.

[14] Quoted in Palisca, "Musical Asides," *op. cit.* (n. 11, above), 353.   [15] *Ibid.,* 354.

[16] *Ibid.,* 353-54. Further evidence of a concern with innovativeness can be inferred from Hanning's discussion of the Prologues of the period, which, she says, were often used as "defensive expressions" by authors who were "conscious of innovating." For Rinuccini, moreover, as well as for Peri, the "novelty" of "testing" the power of music goes back to their first opera, *Daphne.* See Hanning, *op. cit.* (n. 11 above), 3-8.

[17] Ottavio Rinuccini, Dedication to *Euridice,* in Strunk, *op. cit.,* 367.

[18] Jacopo Peri, Preface to *Euridice,* in Strunk, *op. cit.,* 373. Rinuccini's interest in the "power of music" was undoubtedly affected by his association with Bardi in the 1589 *intermedi.* Hanning suggests that in addition to Rinuccini's own humanistic training and participation in the academies, he must have learnt of Mei's and Galilei's theories about Greek music from Bardi so that by the time he frequented the home of Corsi his interests were already well formed. See Hanning, *op. cit.,* 12.

While the claims of priority help to make the chronology of the first musical dramas more accurate and help to provide insight into the personalities involved, they also contribute a major point to the characterization of the group as a whole.[19] Peri and Caccini were highly accomplished singers, and Caccini was also a theorist of sorts and a most demanding and disciplined teacher of singers. While Cavalieri was only indirectly in touch with the Camerata, Caccini and Rinuccini were full-fledged members. Caccini also appeared at the meetings of the Alterati, although he was not formally a member.

Like the Alterati, whose theoretical discussions reached a very high level, the Camerata constituted not only a forum for theoretical discussions, but also a workshop, a "laboratory" for the creation and performance of music. Even if the Camerata were a mere example of such groups, it would be worthy of our attention; but, clearly, it is more than that, for *Daphne,* the two *Euridices,* and other similar works are its products. Above all, it is marked by a determination to find a new way, as far as the composition and performance of music is concerned, despite differences over how to get there.

In the parlance of the sociology of science, the Camerata fits rather closely the model of an "invisible college."[20] This concept refers to a group of scientists who share a focal problem or "paradigm" and by addressing themselves to the problem and to each other to create the kind of "continual academy" which the younger Bardi invoked as a description of the Camerata. In modern science this means shared laboratories, a system of mutual criticism, a specialized journal, a water cooler, a faculty club, periodic conclaves and the like, together with tacit understandings concerning appropriate methods of research, priority problems, and the shorthand communication which shared work implies. Science is a "community based activity" and a paradigm governs not only a subject matter but a group of practitioners. Thinking of the Camerata as an "invisible college" may be helpful.

The applicability of the idea of "paradigm" and "invisible college" in art has been noted by others. The sociology of art "requires analysis of the developments of the relations between their members, of the relations between such groups, and of the relationships of such groups to the larger social structure."[21] Of course, the idea of the salon, the coffeehouse, the café as breeding places of artistic creativity is nothing new in the history of art or of intellectual history generally. Indeed, the centrality of such meeting places for the exchange of views has often

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[19] For clarifications on chronology, see Palisca, ". . . A Reappraisal," *op. cit.,* 203-08.

[20] See Crane, *op. cit.;* also D. J. de S. Price and D. Beaver, "Collaboration in an Invisible College," *American Psychologist,* XXI (1966), 1011-18.

[21] Crane, *op. cit.,* 131.

been noted.[22] Moreover, the weaving of bonds of mutual support among artists, of liaisons between artists and dealers, and of the forging of a common ground of understanding between artists and critics has often been the cause and consequence of sitting together.[23] The idea that social circles of this kind, brought together through mutual interest, should share a common puzzle which all are trying to solve has recently come to the fore in the sociology of science, and as a result, in the sociology of art. Yet even here one has only to think of the impressionists to realize that they were coping—as an "invisible college"—with a puzzle which they, separately, and as a group, tried to solve. Gombrich notes how, in the Renaissance, new pieces of art came to be viewed as "contributions" and "solutions" to problems, and thus another analogy between work in the arts and in the new arena of experimental science should not be overlooked.[24] Indeed, as Crane notes, "the similarity between this [Gombrich's] concept and Kuhn's idea of paradigm is startling."[25]

Similarly with the Camerata. The puzzle was to discover the ideal combination of words and music such that text and music, each in its own way and in juxtaposition to the other, could be maximally effective in communicating not just sensory pleasure, vaguely defined, but the specific meanings and emotions appropriate to the text. Reading the theoretical writings of members of the Camerata, their letters, and the introductions to their compositions, one cannot but be struck by the attempt over and over again to solve this problem. No matter that they did not know exactly how the Greeks had done it (if they had). That was all the more reason to return again and again to the inadequacy of contemporary music, and to try yet another time to achieve the formula which could "move the understanding."[26] Reviewing the work and the writings of the Camerata, Grout derives three basic concerns: the solo singer; the search for forms of "natural" declamation; and the effort to use melody to interpret the feeling of the text rather than to depict graphic detail.[27]

The Camerata did not concentrate exclusively on music-drama; as is well known, the solo aria and madrigal won the greater part of the

[22] To mention but a few, see L. Coser, *Men of Ideas* (New York, 1965); Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (London, 1951); B. Rosenberg and N. E. Fliegel, *The Vanguard Artist* (Chicago, 1965); Harrison C. White & Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York, 1965); and Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos* (New York, 1954).

[23] See White and White, *op. cit.*

[24] Gombrich, *op. cit.,* 8-9.

[25] Crane, *op. cit.,* 134.

[26] In its attempt to overthrow an earlier paradigm based on polyphony in favor of a new one based on monody, one may speculate that the work of the Camerata was "revolutionary" in Kuhnian terms. For a discussion of the dynamics of the "overthrow" of paradigms, see Kuhn, *op. cit.*

[27] Donald J. Grout, *A Short History of Opera* (New York, 1947), 44.

attention of its members. But the self-same process of continual experimentation within accompanied monody also led to the variety of attempts to set dramatic texts to music, in the presumed manner of the ancient Greeks. Thus, the solo aria and the madrigal, no less than the music and text in the *stile rappresentativo*, are "contributions" to the origin of opera. However self-serving, Caccini makes this clear in his dedication to Giovanni Bardi. "His Lordship will recognize that style which, as your Lordship knows, I used on other occasions, many years ago in the eclogue of Sannazaro . . . and in other madrigals of mine at that time. . . . This manner appears throughout my other compositions, composed at various times going back more than fifteen years, as I have never used in them any art other than the imitation of the conceit of words, touching those chords more or less passionate which I judged most suitable for the grace which is required for good singing, which grace and which manner of singing Your Most Illustrious Lordship has many times reported to me to be universally accepted in Rome as good." [28]

It by no means detracts to repeat that the group was split in several ways. Corsi and Bardi had their differences over the kudos of sponsorship and the character of group activities, with Corsi tending to be more interested in actual experiments with the role of music in drama and Bardi, perhaps, more interested in theorizing; but Bardi's theorizing probably stimulated Corsi's experiments.[29] Peri and Caccini had their differences, too, and their differences provide a nice illustration of the "working out" of a paradigm. Both accepted that their main goal was to enhance communication through singing, and that modern tragedy might be effectively presented by adaptation of the manner of ancient tragedy. Peri sought to bring singing nearer to speech, allowing the text and the action to dictate to the music; Pirrotta calls this *recitar cantando*. Caccini, more concerned with the perfection of singers and the art of singing, was committed to "affective reactions to dramatic situations"[30]—the words must find expression in the music; Pirrotta calls this *cantar recitando*.[31] Galilei, influenced by Mei, tried his hand at applying the theory of the predominance of words; the results, says Palisca, were more lyrical than dramatic. Outsiders, says Pirrotta, would have been impressed by the similarities rather than by the differences.[32]

Indeed, the vocabulary and techniques used by the two men is the same, and Pirrotta remarks that this could only have been the product of their joint membership in the salon, where shared concepts arose from theorizing and socializing. The effortless and graceful singing style known

[28] Giulio Caccini, Dedication to *Euridice* (1600) in Strunk, *op. cit.,* 370-71.

[29] See Palisca, "The Alterati. . .", *op. cit.,* 10.

[30] See Pirrotta, "Early Opera. . . " *op. cit.,* 52.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.,* 45.

as *sprezzatura,* and *continuo* accompaniment (preferably self-accompan-
iment) mark the compositions of both Peri and Caccini.[33]

Palisca also remarks on the criticism of colleagues from which mem-
bers of the salon could profit. As in the "refereeing" or "discussant"
functions in scientific institutions, presentations made by members of the
Alterati were commented upon formally by "defenders" and "censors"
who were nominated for the occasion.[34] All this is duly recorded in the
minutes of the Alterati sessions.

Even the competition over "priorities" is reminiscent of the behavior
of scientists. The race to be first has to be reconciled in science with the
need and the norm of sharing. The scientist's role is above all to advance
knowledge, and knowledge advances through originality. "Recognition
and esteem," explains Merton, "accrue to those who have best fulfilled
their roles, to those who have made genuinely original contributions to
the common stock of knowledge. Then are found those happy circum-
stances in which self-interest and moral obligation coincide and fuse."[35]
Merton goes on to explain that the frequency of struggles over priority
does not result merely from the traits of the individuals involved but
rather from the institution of science "which defines originality as a
supreme value and thereby makes recognition of one's originality a major
concern. Although this kind of property shares with other types general
recognition of the owner's rights, it contrasts sharply in all other respects.
Once he has made his contribution, the scientist no longer has exclusive
rights of access to it. It becomes part of the public domain of sci-
ence. . . . In short, property rights in science become whittled down to
just this one: the recognition by others of the scientist's distinctive part
in having brought the result into being."[36] The behavior and rhetoric of
Caccini, Peri, and Cavalieri, as already noted, are relevant in this respect.
Pirrotta proposes three reasons why these men fought over "priorities",
though the reasons are not mutually exclusive. One possibility is that
they really believed they were in a race; a second possibility, not in
contradiction with the first, is that they failed to appreciate the differences
in the kinds of experiments they were conducting; and, finally, they may
each have experienced the fear of being overshadowed![37]

Attention should be drawn to the fact that the conflict centers over
priority rights with regard to a new style. Unlike individual compositions,
style is a contribution to which the composer may cease to have "rec-
ognition of the 'owner's rights." As in science, a property right with
regard to style is the mere recognition by others of the composer's "dis-

[33] *Ibid.,* 53-55.
[34] For an example, see Palisca, "The Alterati . . . ", *op. cit.,* 22.
[35] Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science* (Chicago, 1973), 293.
[36] *Ibid.,* 294.
[37] Pirrotta, "Early Opera . . . ", *op. cit.,* 45.

tinctive part in having brought the result into being." The increased awareness in the early baroque with regard to musical styles may be explained in part, though indirectly, by the tangible spirit of the scientific revolution.

The above analysis suggests that there was a sense of innovation in the air, a sense that the experimentation was leading somewhere. Pirrotta feels that Cavalieri was most aware of this, and indeed, that Cavalieri actually deserves credit for the invention of a new form of theater, all in music, an invention which expanded the already strong musical component of the literary pastoral, and accentuated its tendency to a formal organization while reducing and simplifying this pastoral form to adjust it to the particular exigencies and slower pace of a musical performance. The *recitar cantando* style was employed by Cavalieri, as it was by Peri, but it was Cavalieri's contribution—according to Pirrotta—to bring to the stage "such dramatic actions as could be developed completely in songs and music" as opposed to the use of music incidentally.[38]

The fact that Cavalieri was not a member of the Camerata suggests why "invisible college" may be a better term here than academy or salon or social circle. The flow of influence was not limited to those who attended the meetings, or to formal membership as in the Alterati, but extended to those who were part of the informal network of social and professional connections. Nor was the network limited to residents of Florence, since Cavalieri and much of the early operatic activity centered in Rome: indeed, Bardi himself ultimately moved to Rome. The same thing holds for Girolamo Mei. Not a musician, but a serious scholar of Greek music, Mei is thought to have influenced Galilei in his treatises and compositions, though he did not attend Camerata meetings. He argued strongly against polyphony, insisting that the Greeks did not sing in "harmony". He pressed for monody, arguing that only a single melody could arouse the "affections," and emphasized the necessity for distinguishing between scientific and artistic facts so that art may "exploit as it sees fit without any limitation those tones about which science has learned the truths." [39] Mei's influence on members of the Alterati, also through his letters (he was honored with nonresident membership), was similarly great and he is credited by Doni (a later member of the Alterati) with having guided his research into ancient Greek music.[40]

Thus did an "invisible college" of Florence and Rome at the end of the sixteenth century usher in the new medium of opera as an unintended consequence of its singleminded preoccupation with something else. It was determined to overthrow polyphony and to replace it with expressive

[38] *Ibid.,* 46; 49-50.
[39] Quoted by Claude V. Palisca, "Scientific Empiricism in Musical Thought," in Hedley Howell Rhys, ed., *Seventeenth Century Science and the Arts* (Princeton, 1961), 125.
[40] See Palisca, "The Alterati . . . ", *op. cit.,* 17.

music of a kind which would both carry the words of a text to the listener and express the feelings implicit in the words. Words assumed a new importance as a result, and the search for the proper juxtaposition of the words and music ensued. Although the text was accorded a predominant role, the question of exactly how music should be grafted to the text led to a renewed interest in the "powers of music." This concern of the ancient Greeks was shrouded in mystery, since it was believed that certain musical qualities called forth particular cognitive qualities and emotions. There is still much room for debate over the extent to which the group believed that they were reviving Greek drama; Palisca feels they were too educated to hold any naive version of that belief, but, rather, were seeking legitimacy for the new paradigm. A good recipe for public success, says Palisca, was a "head full of classical poetics, but an ear to the ground."[41] They were classicists in the sense of imitating the ancients.[42]

The emphasis on expression and communicability was joined with the commitment to beautiful singing. The term "aria" was much used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the notion of aria underlies the attack on the inability of polyphony to move its audience. However pleasing, polyphony was thought to be unable to communicate the emotional message of a text. Galilei's interest in vocal monody, in fact, predates his *Dialogo* and goes back to his arrangements of madrigals and other part-song compositions for solo voice and lute.[43] He is supposed to have entertained the Camerata by singing the bass part of part songs while accompanying himself with a lute reduction of the original composition, thus enhancing the music with the text and the "expressive accents of the voice." [44] The individual line gradually gained prominence in the experiments with aria-like singing. The idea of *sprezzatura,* those "intangible elements of rhythmic buoyancy and dynamic flexibility of the performance" and continuo accompaniment were technical features related to the aim of communication.[45] Caccini's set pieces are more lyrical, as might be expected from his adherence to *cantar recitando,* while Peri is more dramatic. Nevertheless, Pirrotta thinks that Peri's music is the richer in melody. Although he rarely uses repetitions, as befits *recitar cantando,* he focuses on a passion and "follows it through" seeking to express its meaning and "not just counting on the text."[46] In view of all this, it is curious, Palisca notes, that so little explicit attention

[41] *Ibid.,* 37.

[42] See Pirrotta, "Early Opera . . . ", *op. cit.,* 86-89.

[43] See Alfred Einstein, "Galilei and the Instructive Duo," *Music and Letters,* XVIII. (1937), 360-68.

[44] See Claude V. Palisca, "Vincenzo Galilei and Some Links between 'Pseudo-Monody' and Monody", *Musical Quarterly,* XLVI, (1960), 345.

[45] See Pirrotta, "Early Opera . . . ", *op. cit.,* 53.

[46] *Ibid.,* 66-68.

was devoted either in the Camerata or the more literary and systematic Alterati to the question: What kinds of texts are now best suited?[47]

While questions remain unanswered, it is evident that much is known about the invisible college from which the earliest operas derived. It is time now to ask where these ideas came from. How did it happen that creativity in music found itself a focus of attention in salons like that of Bardi and Corsi and in groups like the Alterati? Why were they concerned about reforming music? These questions require explanations from the domain of intellectual and social history. And, for all its seeming simplicity, so does the question of how the Bardi-Corsi group, with its mélange of amateurs and professionals, artists and scientists, poets and philosophers, noblemen and successful bankers happened to come together at all. The following pages will show that the nature of the group and the subject of its conversation are by no means unrelated.

Ideological Infrastructure of the Camerata. — Most historians see the beginning of opera as part of the early baroque. To be sure, their decision is not based merely on dates which have already been spoken for; it incorporates a consideration of stylistic features as well. However, to the extent that these historians treat the theoretical and cultural background of the new experiments of such circles as the Camerata, they avail themselves extensively of Renaissance and late Renaissance ideas.

The thoughts and activities of the Florentine group must be seen in this light, and it is useful to think of the Camerata as bridging the two periods. While largely reflecting Renaissance thought, their theoretical utterances were enlisted in the support of expressionism and subjectivism, in support of a movement away from pleasure derived from either elegant design or sensuous extravagance in favor of affect and emotional involvement. This particular combination of "old" and "new" reflects the social changes which took place during the course of the sixteenth century.

The affirmation of individualism in the early Renaissance and the attempt later to implement it as a conscious program in daily living led in the process to a broadening of the concept itself. The urban commercial economy began to take shape in the late Middle Ages and led first to the political and cultural independence of the middle class, and ultimately, to its intellectual predominance. The allegiance to region and locality which accompanied this process clashed with the universalist striving of the Church and its attempt to maintain a uniformity of culture. It was the insistence on differentiation — of collectivity from collectivity, of individual from collectivity, and individual from individual — that bridges the late Middle Ages to the baroque.

The ethic of "free competition" which accompanied the rise of the urban middle class in Italy inevitably led to the granting of recognition to those who "made it". The rural aristocracy adapted itself very early

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[47] See Palisca, "The Alterati . . . ", *op. cit.,* 34-35.

to the new urban financiers. Trying to enlist the support of the public for the ruling houses, the courts were bound to take cognizance of this new power and to use it to their own advantage. As a result the traditional aristocracy even in its social relationship accepts the principle of "individual achievement" on a par with the "ascriptive" basis of its own status. Thus, bankers and merchants, artists and plebeian intellectuals are fitting company, and even sought after by the princes and noblemen of the courts. "In contrast to the exclusive moral community of court chivalry," says Hauser, "a comparatively free, fundamentally intellectual type of salon life develops at these courts which is, on the one hand, the continuation of the aesthetic social culture of middle-class circles . . . and represents on the other, the preparatory stage in the development of those literary salons which play such an important part in the intellectual life of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."[48]

Laymen, Artists, and Nobles. — The route to the salons traversed by the merchant or banker is implicit in the rise of the middle class to social station and to cultural pretension, simulated and real.[49] Laymen had an important voice in the salon and their presence, obviously, directly influenced the quality and content of the discussion. The issue of whether laymen have the right to discuss art was even publicly aired. Lodovico Dolce in his *L'Aretino* (1557) raised the question and reached the conclusion that it was perfectly all right for the layman to discuss art as long as he did not propose to discuss it from a technical point of view.[50]

No less than the layman, however, the artists' presence needs explaining. The artist, too, had a long socio-economic route to traverse on his way to the salon. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as is well known, artists were typically organized together with craftsmen in guilds of glaziers, saddlers, goldsmiths, and the like.[51] Art and artists neither commanded special recognition nor were they treated with awe. Compared with the merchant guilds, they exerted little influence on the economic and social life of the society.[52] Even where greater homogeneity of craft prevailed, the nature of guild organization suggests that the artist

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[48] See Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (London, 1951), 269-71.

[49] Bardi himself came from an old established family of bankers. See, Pirrotta, "Temperaments and Tendencies . . . ", *op. cit.,* p. 171. For the historical importance of the Bardi family in the economic and financial life of Florence, see Armando Sapori, *La crisi delle compagnie mercantili dei Bardi e dei Peruzzi* (Florence, 1926).

[50] See Hauser, *op. cit.,* 386. Also Lodovico Dolce, *L'Aretino ovvero Dialogo Della Pittura,* (rpt. Milan, 1863), 13-14.

[51] See Hans Huth, *Künstler und Werkstatt der Spätgotik* (Augsberg, 1923), 7.

[52] For a comprehensive picture of the Florentine guild organization, the relative importance of the various guilds, the differences among them, their constitutions, financial positions, etc., see Alfred Doren, *Entwicklung und Organisation der Florentiner Zünfte in 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1897). Also see Abram Loft, *Musicians' Guild and Union: A Consideration of the Evolution of Protective Organization Among Musicians,* unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Music, Columbia Univ., 1950.

shared his society's view of himself as nothing more than a trained craftsman. In line with this, the acceptance of new members into the guild was highly regulated and depended less on quality than on years of experience. Children of members stood a better chance than did "ordinary outsiders." [53]

The guilds maintained their hold on the artist as long as he was viewed primarily as a craftsman. The guilds, for example, were able to control the number of artists and keep artists out of the market simply by increasing the required years of apprenticeship. This took place in fact as a protective measure in the fifteenth century when the movements from country to town intensified perceptibly, constituting an economic threat.[54] Musicians first organized when they turned to the towns for work, as available opportunities in the courts became more limited. Since the towns, too, offered fewer jobs than there were musicians in need of employment, musicians felt the need to organize in order to regulate the competition.[55] However, given the scarcity of available jobs, the new arrivals began to compete with guild members, as unorganized labor, by offering to work at reduced prices. And as time went on, complaints were being voiced about the lowered quality of work, which in most cases was attributable directly to the forces of economic competition. The distinction between individual artists is inevitable in such a situation.

With the strongly shaken position of the guilds, technical proficiency, which was never doubted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was no longer taken for granted in the fifteenth and sixteenth. Proof attesting to proficiency was often required of artists applying for work, since many tried to execute works of art without any formal training whatsoever.[56] At the same time, the individuality of artists was no longer ignored and artists then began to "specialize" and to do that which was most expressive of their personalities and technical abilities.

The shift of emphasis from technical proficiency to artistic creativity eventually led to the thesis that art, save for some techniques, was basically unteachable. ". . . i buoni compositori nascono," claims Pietro Aron, "e non si fanno per studio, ne per molto practicare, ma si bene per celeste influsso, ed inclinatione, Gratie veramente, che a pochi il ciel largo destina." [57] Such a thesis was bound to break the craft tradition even further. Moreover, emphasizing the power of the artist's personality rather than his "know how" changed the conception of art itself. The role of true art was no longer to imitate nature as it is, but to express it as it appears to be. The main contribution of the artists was now seen to be

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[53] Huth, *op. cit.,* 11.

[54] *Ibid.,* 13, 17.

[55] See Loft, *op. cit.,* 38-9.

[56] Huth, *op. cit.,* 14.

[57] See Pietro Aron, *Lucidario in musica* (1545), Opinione XV, 2nd Book. By 1545, such a statement no longer comes as a surprise.

the depiction of life in its inner reality. Indeed, the individual artist endeavored to "contribute" to the realization of this goal. Thus did the artist find his way into the salon, alongside the scientist, each "contributing" in his own way.

If the presence of the layman and the artist in the nobleman's salon needs explaining, the nobleman's presence seems self-explanatory. Yet, it is worth recalling that period when the nobility itself underwent a transformation of its "class consciousness", when hereditary nobility opened its ranks to new recruits and the fact of "noble origin" made way for the idea of "noble character." This transformation was accompanied by the rise in the status of the court poets, whose origins in the lower strata were also submerged. "Now that the words 'gentle' and 'simple' had come to signify not merely differences of birth but of education, so that a man was not necessarily gentle by mere birth and rank but must become so by training. . . . They [the salaried court poets] were no longer content to enjoy the favor and generosity of a great lord; they now aspired to be teachers of their patrons." Thus Hauser credits them with being "the true forerunners of the Renaissance poets and humanists." [58] The very presence of laymen and artists—given the blossoming of their status—constrained the conversation in this direction.

"Theorizing" the Commonalities Among the Arts.—It follows from the fact that non-artists were engaged in the discussion of art that the technical aspects of art were relegated to a lesser place. Aesthetic and philosophical problems rose to the foreground instead, and became the common ground. "Theorizing" of this kind increasingly gained in importance. It led, ultimately to the discovery of the affinity among the arts, that is, to the idea of Art as a concept cutting across the several branches of art and their technical peculiarities.

The recognition of the affinity among the arts and the importance of "theories" of art was responsible for the transfer of training from the workshop to the academy and contributed in turn to the transformation of homogeneous artistic circles into "cultured" circles, which like the intellectual court circles, admitted poets, artists, amateurs, and laymen alike.[59]

The cathedrals and the courts were the workshops for musical teaching in the early Renaissance. In addition to employing organists and choirs for their services, the cathedrals and other important churches employed choirmasters whose task was to compose music for various occasions, but more important, to train and teach the singers of the choir. Many Renaissance theorists held the position of choirmaster. Their treatises and compositions were largely connected with their positions and activities.

[58] Hauser, *op. cit.,* 211, 229.
[59] See Huth, *op. cit.,* 150.

While the importance of the Renaissance courts as centers of musical life is well known, the fact that they also served as important centers for musical instruction has been less emphasized. Musical instruction played an important part in the education of princes and courtiers. The courts, however, were not the only ones to employ musicians and train privileged sons and daughters in the musical art; cardinals and private nobles also kept musicians as players and teachers in their retinue.

Compared with the musical activities and instruction of the church and court, the musical education in the academy in the later Renaissance was more theoretical and less closely connected with the actual making of music. If an earlier period distinguished among the arts on the basis of technique, and even classified arts and crafts together when they shared techniques, this later period sought out the common elements among the arts based on shared ideas about creativity and about the function and effect of the artist. The social composition of the salon is responsible, in no small part, for the changed agenda.

The discussions about music, judging from the writings of certain members of the Camerata, were of this very sort. Regardless of the actual qualifications of the discussants, the primary concern was with musico-aesthetic questions, and the issues discussed apparently required little or no musical training. They required a theoretical grasp of art in general and of the role of music in particular. Composer, poet, and layman felt equally competent to participate. If Mei and Galilei also engaged in traditional theoretical polemics, it was nonetheless in the service of the musico-aesthetic ideas to which the group was strongly committed. Indeed, it was a curious characteristic of music reformers, the Florentine reformers included, to *state* their music theories in prefaces, letters, or even complete books discussing music primarily from an aesthetic-philosophical point of view.

These pronouncements of the Camerata revealed clearly their allegiance to the new conception of art according to which art was no longer a tool for the imitation of nature but an expressive vehicle for the feelings and perceptions of individual artists. The role of music was not to "delight the ear" but to "move the passion of the mind."

"Delight the ear" recalls a passage in Gombrich on the growing gulf between the "intellectual pursuit of art" and the craft from which it arose. "A new hierarchy is created by which true nobility in art has no need to 'flatter the eye' or to rely on surface attractions. On the contrary, such attention to a polished surface is in itself the symptom of a less aspiring mind."[60] Similarly, "move the passion of the mind" recalls a passage from Nelson Goodman who says that "in aesthetic experience emotions function cognitively."[61]

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[60] Gombrich, *op. cit.,* 8.
[61] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art, op. cit.,* 248.

Thus, in a group like the Camerata, Caccini could be held in great esteem not only as a singer but also as a composer, although he considered some of his musical training to have been a waste of time.[62] And Galilei, himself respected for his theoretical and technical proficiency, venerated and respected the theories and observations of his host who was but an amateur.[63] Indeed, a social institution on the order of the Bardi "salon" is inconceivable without a redefinition of the layman's relationship towards art and the discovery of the affinity among the arts. The latter is directly related to the importance attached to the aesthetic-philosophical discussions of art, and the former to the changed status of art and the artist.[64]

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[62] Caccini did not write much music until the age of forty when he first attempted to write in the "new style" which emphasized expressive qualities over beauty of design and craftmanship. See Alfred Ehricks, *Giulio Caccini* (Leipzig, 1908), 11.

[63] Galilei dedicated his famous *Dialogo* to Giovanni Bardi. He used Bardi's name for one of the discussants through whom he expresses his own opinions. Bardi also commanded Mei's respect, as is evident from Mei's letters addressed to Bardi.

[64] The implementation of individualism as a conscious attitude in daily living reached extreme limits toward the end of the sixteenth century. The seventeenth century again praised birth more than ability, but it could no longer retrieve the basic recognition that was accorded to individuals who henceforth could only be deprived of the rights which they believed to be theirs.

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