

Music at Villa d'Este

Itinerant concerts, as background music for visitors to the villa gardens, began with the villa itself. The villa was built by Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este partly on an ancient Benedictine (later Franciscan) convent and was soon recognized as a cultural center.



The *Accademia degli Agevoli* settled here in 1571 attracting many poets, scholars and artists, while numerous musicians honored the cardinal and his generosity with their compositions and performed their splendid madrigals at celebrations.

Various famous people, including singers and musicians were his train on his solemn arrival in Tivoli in 1550. Inside the garden, Claude Venard built the famous “water organ”, an unusual musical feature which has been recently restored. The most important musicians of the time were drawn to Tivoli during the d'Este Cardinals stay. **Nicola Vicentino**, for example dedicated *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* (Rome 1555) to Cardinal Ippolito. Not to mention **Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina** who was engaged by the Cardinal in Villa d'Este in 1564 and again from 1567 to 1571 when he presented him with the *I Libro dei Mottetti* (1569). Other

musicians included the organist **Stefano Rossetti**, the composers **Giovan Battista Corvo**, **Francesco Portinaro**, **Francisco Soto**, the cornet player **Bernardino** and lute player **Lorenzino**. Various local musicians also took part in concerts held in the Villa's grounds. These included **Francesco Golia** (1507-1585), **Giuliano Bonaugurio**, better known as *Giuliano Tiburtino*, a madrigalist and famous viol player, and **Giovanni Maria Nanino** one of the most renowned members of the Roman Polyphonic school, who followed Cardinal Ippolito in his last diplomatic mission to France in 1562.

Both Luigi, Ippolito's nephew and Alessandro, Luigi's nephew, patronized musicians and their work, governing the town after him from 1572 to 1586 and from 1605 to 1624 respectively. Among others, Luigi hosted **Luca Marenzio**, who dedicated the *I Libro dei Madrigali* to him in 1580. Besides **Orazio Vecchi** wrote for Alessandro and dedicated the player *L'Anfiparnaso* (1597) to him but no mention is made about his activity in Tivoli.

The early 18th century was a period of decay for the villa and once inherited by the Hapsburg family only regained its former musical prestige in the three decades after Italian Unification. All that thanks to Cardinal Gustav von Hohenloe its occupier from 1850 to 1896. Patron and according player himself, he hosted **Franz Liszt** in the villa several times from 1869 on.

The above outline highlights the importance of music in the villa's history and explains why its evocative power can add to the modern-day visitors enjoyment of the buildings, gardens, fountains and statues.

