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# Courtesan Singers as Courtiers: Power, Political Pawns, and the Arrest of *virtuosa* Nina Barcarola

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> Nina Barcarola, known as one of the most famous courtesans of this court, was taken to prison in the fourth hour of the night on Tuesday, one hour after Cardinal Antonio had left her and her house.[1]

On the evening of September 19, 1645, the *sbirri* (papal police) broke down the door to the Roman home of Nina Barcarola (fl. 1638–70) and pulled the famous courtesan singer onto the street, arresting her.[2] They then began a search for evidence regarding her relationship with a well-known criminal and proof of her performances of a satirical song about the newly elected pope's sister-in-law, Donna Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili (1594–1657). Nina was forced to watch for nearly five hours as the *sbirri* removed writings, books, and scores from her home.[3] The theatrical arrest

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1. Avviso 3. For transcriptions and translations of the *avvisi* cited in this article, as well as descriptions and archival locations, see the appendix below. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

2. Since no birth or death records for Nina have yet been discovered, it is unclear whether "Barcarola" is a nickname, as was common for courtesans, or her given surname. A "barcaruolo" (or "barcarolo") was a boatman or bargeman, so the surname could indicate the profession of Nina's male ancestors, or perhaps makes reference to her humble origins in general; see Florio, *Queen Anna's New World*, s.v. "Barcaruòlo." There is no clear evidence that the musical genre related to Venetian gondoliers, the "barcarola," existed at this time. In news-reporting sources authors referred to her as "Nina" after identifying her fully, which was a common practice in referring to courtesans. I have therefore chosen to call her by her first name throughout this article.

3. Avviso 2 says that the arrest lasted "from two until seven," while Avviso 3 says that it did not begin until "the fourth hour of the night." The first hour of the night was the first hour after sundown. In late September in Rome, the second hour of the night would begin around eight o'clock in the evening.

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was perfectly timed to ensure the presence of a large crowd of onlookers, as clusters of elite men, their male courtiers, and their female companions were traveling between residences for their usual evening's entertainment. The evening concluded with the *sbirri* accompanying Nina through the streets to the Tor di Nona prison, where she spent a day before being released. The inability of the *sbirri* to obtain incriminating evidence meant that Nina was able to return to her home, where she continued to entertain and socialize with some of Rome's most elite men.

Courtesans like Nina were a common feature of the social, cultural, and political landscapes of seventeenth-century Rome. The complexity of the city's social structure, characterized by the frequent turnover of popes and the absence of an official register of nobility, created a volatile social environment.[4] The cityscape was peppered with small satellite courts headed by a variety of political players: representatives of foreign powers vying for alliance with Rome, ambassadors or nuncios of other Italian courts, cardinals from important Italian and European centers, and the native Roman nobility.[5] Their constant drive to acquire and maintain familial wealth, honor, and power gave rise to dynamic and sometimes competing social networks of support and patronage. Teeming with prelates, students, *letterati*, artists, and musicians, Rome was a destination for ambitious courtiers who sought to take advantage of the highest salaries offered in all of Italy and the possibility of meteoric social rise. In this environment Nina and her courtesan contemporaries flourished, the most successful of them establishing relationships of significant support with elite men.[6]

4. On the general workings of the Roman patronage system, see Ago, *Carriere e clientele*; Reinhard, "Papal Power"; and Cole, *Music, Spectacle and Cultural Brokerage*. On the fluidity of social status in Rome in relation to the lack of a register of nobility, see, for instance, Mistruzzi, "La nobiltà"; Nussdorfer, *Civic Politics*; and Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, 247 (which notes that contemporaries understood the Roman court to be unique among European courts).

5. Mario Biagioli likens the city's rapidly changing cultural and patronage scene to a volcanic archipelago: Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, 245–65.

6. There has been very little research on seventeenth-century Roman courtesan *virtuose*. On Roman courtesans of the mid-sixteenth century, see Prizer, "Cardinals and Courtesans." For a study of prostitutes and courtesans in Counter-Reformation Rome that includes some information on music making, see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*. Musicological scholarship on Roman courtesans of the seventeenth century focuses mainly on those who were involved in operatic performance; see, for instance, Megale, "Il principe"; Megale, "Altre novità"; Salvi, "'Il solito è sempre quello'"; and Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, 212–17, 220–22, 226–27. On Roman courtesan Anna Valeria, see Murata, "Why the First Opera." On Roman Anna Maria Sardelli, who may have started out as a courtesan in Rome, see Mamone, "Most Serene Brothers," and Glixon, "Private Lives." There is more research on early modern Venetian courtesan *virtuose*; see Feldman and Gordon, *Courtesan's Arts*. On Venetian *virtuosa* Barbara Strozzi, see Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi, *virtuosissima cantatrice*"; Rosand and Rosand, "'Barbara di Santa Sofia'"; Rosand, "Voice of Barbara Strozzi"; Glixon, "New Light"; and Glixon, "More on the Life." In the existing scholarship on courtesans active in other Italian cities, the focus has also been mainly on courtesans who participated in theatrical activities or on those considered to have influenced

According to contemporary reports that detail her sensational arrest, Nina numbered among the most successful courtesan singers in Rome. Yet despite the fame she reportedly enjoyed in her lifetime, the scarcity of extant records pertaining to other parts of her life has surely contributed to her current obscurity.[7] The sources that survive suggest that she entertained and socialized with elite men in Rome for over three decades, beginning as early as 1637. Her prominent status stemmed from her close relationship with Cardinal Antonio Barberini (1607–71), who during the papacy of his uncle Urban VIII (1623–44) had enjoyed the status of cardinal nephew, one of the highest positions in the Roman social hierarchy.[8] The city's competitive environment produced myriad rivalries, especially among those at the pinnacle of power, like Barberini. Nina, as his *virtuosa*, became embroiled in his ongoing rivalry with the newly elected papal family, the Pamphili, and this ultimately led to her public arrest.

Nina's high-profile status as Barberini's *virtuosa* and her involvement in the Barberini-Pamphili rivalry help to explain why so many writers of the time picked up their pens to tell her story in the "avvisi di Roma." The *avvisi* were handwritten newsletters copied and circulated in European cities, written by authors from a range of social backgrounds and often produced by regular news services run by men known as "menati" or "gazzettieri."[9] They became the basis for dispatches sent by and to the households of cardinals, princes, and popes via secretaries and ambassadors.[10] Largely based on gossip leaking from important households and rumors circulating through the streets and in piazzas, they reported both real and manufactured news, often weighing in on politics and whipping up public concern. Scandalous events such as Nina's arrest were standard fodder for *avvisi*, subjects that were often susceptible to authorial exaggeration, overtly negative portrayals, inaccurate reporting, and political bias. As such, the *avvisi* were as much literary fiction as news. They did not simply report the daily happenings and events of Rome, but shaped the collective image of the city, spiritedly capturing intrigues and behind-the-scenes incidents in vivid detail through sarcastic, ironic, and sometimes refined language.

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the early court *concerto delle donne* traditions; see Treadwell, "Restaging the Siren"; Newcomb, "Courteseans, Muses, or Musicians?"; and Stras, *Women and Music*, 59–62.

7. Only two other scholars have briefly mentioned Nina; see Rossi, "La fuga," 323–25, and Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 223–24. For the extant documents that constitute her biography, see further below.

8. For Nina's high status as a courtesan and her close relationship with Antonio Barberini, see Avviso 2.

9. For studies of the *avvisi*, see Infelise, "Roman *avvisi*," and Dooley, *Social History of Skepticism*, 9–44. On the political nature of the *avvisi*, see Dooley, *Social History of Skepticism*. See also Hunt, *Vacant See*. Many of the *avvisi* authors were notaries, lawyers, scribes, and writers in their own right; see Hunt, *Vacant See*, 225.

10. The *avvisi* pertaining to Nina's arrest are mainly diplomatic.

*Avvisi* are among the main sources through which narratives of elite courtesans like Nina—filtered through the imaginations and biases of male authors—reached a general public.[11] The multiple extant *avvisi* that chronicle Nina's arrest—eight in total—attest to the event's social relevance. Not only do they constitute detailed sources pertaining to Nina's life and career, but they relay specific and invaluable information about the cultural and political significance and social practices of her elite courtesan *virtuose* contemporaries. Given that there is currently little scholarship on Roman courtesans of the seventeenth century, the *avvisi* are valuable resources despite the questions we might reasonably have about their veracity.[12] While I have been unable to corroborate many of the details in the *avvisi* that record Nina's arrest, other scholars have established that *avvisi* do sometimes provide truthful or at least nearly truthful accounts of events and monetary values.[13] Even where veracity is in doubt, scholars have demonstrated that *avvisi* can be profitably read as narratives of social, cultural, and political possibilities.[14] Reading these documents in this way, this article closely examines the *avvisi* reports of Nina's arrest, with the goal of uncovering some of the ways in which courtesans moved politically and socially through the intricate Roman patronage system of the mid-seventeenth century.

As a group, the *avvisi* that detail Nina's arrest coalesce to form a larger narrative about elite courtesans' relationship to power. Motives for the arrest are located at the interstices between gender, state, and personal, familial politics. The *avvisi* reveal that Nina's life and career were directly shaped by her relationship to specific sources of early modern power: the socially redemptive power of singing, the particular power inherent in embodied female vocal performance, the political power of public song, the power of male discourse about courtesans, and the political power of elite supporters that courtesans helped to acquire and maintain. Throughout this

11. *Avvisi* were intended not only for consumption by a literate readership, but also to be read aloud in piazzas for those who were less or not at all literate, disseminating the contents to a wider, socially diverse public; see Dooley, *Social History of Skepticism*, 18–23, and Hunt, *Vacant See*, 195, 225.

12. On early modern women for whom *avvisi* serve as important source documents, see De Lucca, "Strategies of Female Patronage," and Storey, *Carnal Commerce*. On courtesans and prostitutes in the first decades of the seventeenth century, see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*; Cohen, "'Courtesans' and 'Whores'"; Cohen, "Honor and Gender"; and Cohen, "Back Talk."

13. While Brendan Dooley believes that the majority of *avvisi* consist of lies and planted fake narratives, John M. Hunt's research demonstrates that *avvisi* can reveal truths or partial truths and as such are useful indicators of social reality: Dooley, *Social History of Skepticism*, 15, 17; Hunt, *Vacant See*; Hunt, "Carriages, Violence and Masculinity." Jean Delumeau and Tessa Storey also find that many *avvisi* reported events and costs accurately: Delumeau, *Vie économique et sociale*, 32–36; Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 27.

14. See Dooley, *Social History of Skepticism*, 17. For a similar approach to court testimony, see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 11; Cohen, "'Courtesans' and 'Whores'"; Cohen, "Honor and Gender"; and Cohen, "Back Talk."

article, I explore the ways in which these nodes of power affected courtesan sociability.

In each section of the article, I examine narrative accounts of the arrest, focusing on recounted details in order to explore a wide variety of courtesan performances. The *avvisi* that describe the scores removed from Nina's home and the search for a satirical song she had performed speak to the types of musical performance that she and her fellow courtesans provided for their supporters, the effects these performances had on the audience, the meanings they held for contemporaries, and the social spaces in which they took place. The *avvisi* are also full of details about the social and political performances Nina gave alongside her musical performances. I will situate my exploration of these performances within the general culture of honor that underpinned the Roman political system of patronage.[15] The concept of acting in prescribed and openly visible ways in order to maintain one's honor drove public performances of all types. Rivalries such as those between the Barberini and Pamphili played out according to the rules of this system. The culture of reciprocation fostered within the patronage system meant that public slights to one's honor called for public retaliation of some sort in order to maintain power and social status. When the public acts detailed in the *avvisi* relating to the arrest are contextualized within the culture of honor, seemingly petty rumors about perceived scandalous conduct are transformed from accounts of actions undertaken for political and social survival into accounts of social ritual.

The story of Nina's arrest adds courtesans' voices to our imaginary Roman soundscape, placing them alongside their supporters (popes, princes, cardinals), castratos, and other court and church singers. Adding them into the mix highlights the social liminality of the spaces in which music was performed in seventeenth-century Rome. It also illuminates the complexity and fluidity of the concepts of high and low, public and private, in relation to musical genres and performers. A close reading of the accounts of the arrest enriches our understanding of Roman singing culture, expanding our perception of the types of singers who benefitted from and thrived in Rome's multicultural society, and highlighting the multiplicity of gendered performance possibilities that were enabled through the cultural capital of singing. As a result, Nina's story has broad ramifications for our understanding of the ways in which music and performance mattered at the time.

15. On the concept of honor in early modern European societies, see Bryson, *Point of Honor*; Péristiany, *Honour and Shame*; Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, 30–55; Strocchia, "Gender and the Rites"; and Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays*, 115–16. For a basic bibliography of the topic, see Hunt, *Vacant See*, 158n110. On Roman *virtuose* and the culture of honor, see Brosius, "Singers Behaving Badly."

## Singing Courtesans and Social Power

> To raise his spirits, Cardinal Antonio frequently visits Nina Barcarola, who is the most famous courtesan in Rome. Besides being beautiful, she sings exquisitely, and His Eminence makes use of her *virtù* as a cover for her practice. . . . He also enjoys the conversation of the Pimpe Carrattiere, who are taken by Don Taddeo [Barberini] to his palace, and both [men] pass the time happily.[16]

One month before Nina's arrest, the Modenese agent Francesco Mantovani reported that Antonio Barberini frequently attended gatherings at Nina's home and also socialized with other courtesans, the Pimpe Carrattiere.[17] Amid the general anti-Barberini sentiment circulating at the beginning of the Pamphili papacy of Innocent X, Mantovani's apparent aim in highlighting Barberini's relationship with courtesans was to further tarnish the cardinal's besieged reputation. Yet given the widespread public anger at this time over Barberini's alleged financial transgressions, it was Mantovani's emphasis on Barberini's spending on socializing with courtesans that was intended to shock the reader, not the news that he frequented them.[18] Socializing and having sex with courtesans was common behavior for a cardinal in early modern Rome, where men chose ecclesiastical careers in order to raise the social and political fortunes of their families, not to fulfill personal religious callings. Barberini numbered among the substantial demographic of unmarried elite Roman clergy who populated their homes with unmarried male servants, a practice that significantly contributed to the high percentage of unmarried men in the city. Rome's sex ratio was around six men to four women.[19] As many as 45 percent of men in Rome

16. Avviso 1. "Don Taddeo" is Taddeo Barberini, the Prince of Palestrina, brother of Cardinal Antonio Barberini and the middle nephew of Pope Urban VIII, Maffeo Barberini.

17. Mantovani was a ducal agent working closely with the Modenese ambassador to Rome, Count Fulvio Testi, to acquire art, artists, and musicians for the court of Duke Francesco I d'Este of Modena. His *avvisi* were sought after in Rome and Modena for their "*gustoso* kind of street and Apostolic Chamber gossip": Southorn, *Power and Display*, 48. The exact meaning of the nickname "Pimpe Carrattiere" is unclear. Possible meanings for "pimpe" include women who were shrewd and calculating, or well dressed, or named Olimpia. "Carrettiere" (with an "e") was a term for a low-class cart-driver, and it may have been used as a social comment on courtesans who rode in carriages, a privilege legally allowed only for elite women. In combination with "pimpe," "carrattiere" seems to denote deceptive, well-dressed, social-climbing prostitutes who, despite their vulgarity, rode in carriages. For a more detailed investigation into the nickname, see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 175–77.

18. At this time the Barberini brothers were being persecuted by the Pamphili for their profiteering during the War of Castro, discussed in greater detail below.

19. See Nussdorfer, "Masculine Hierarchies," 621. Nussdorfer notes that in other Italian cities the demand for female servants skewed the ratio in the other direction. See also Nussdorfer, "Men at Home." On bachelorhood and masculinity in early modern Italy in general, see Cavallo, "Bachelorhood and Masculinity," 378–81.

were single, while men who married typically did so in their late twenties or early thirties.[20]

In this environment, courtesans had become an integral and necessary feature of elite male society, a role that, by the time of Nina's arrest, had been the norm for more than a century. Nina and her contemporaries, who were regular participants in elite male leisure activities, provided a variety of benefits to the elite men who socialized with and supported them, including sex.[21] Socializing with courtesans became an important aspect of the demonstration of elite masculinity at several stages of life.[22] For elite young men who were in the period of *gioventù*—lasting from puberty (age twelve) to marriageable age—courtesans were considered the ideal sexual partners.[23] During this period of life, successful sexual performance was crucial to developing masculine "virtue" (*virtù*)—understood as the active, performative side of the construction of male identity.[24] In *gioventù* boys moved from the passive sexual encounters of early youth to the active, penetrative sexual practices appropriate for an elite male. Even Jesuit priest Giovan Domenico Ottonelli—an outspoken and virulent critic of women who earned their living by entertaining elite men—defended the church's tolerance of prostitution, asserting that it helped young men to avoid the more "grievous" sin of sodomy: "The church tolerates the sin of going to whores in order to avoid a worse evil, *ad evitandem maius malum*: nevertheless, it does not approve that sin, but tolerates it while dissimulating in order to control adultery, incest, and other types of grievous sin."[25] Men who eventually married, like

20. See Pomata, "Gender and the Family," 79. According to Eugenio Sonnino, in early modern Rome there were 140 men for every 100 women: Sonnino, "In the Male City," 20–21.

21. On the types of capital cultivated by courtesans, see Gordon, "Courtesan's Singing Body."

22. See Ruggiero, "Who's Afraid of Giulia Napolitana?," 285–86. On the construction of early modern masculinity in Rome, see the various contributions to Hairston, "Gender in Early Modern Rome" (a special issue of *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*), and to Gouwens, Kane, and Nussdorfer, "History of Early Modern Masculinities" (a special issue of *European Review of History*); and Terpstra and Murray, *Sex, Gender, and Sexuality.*

23. Guido Ruggiero notes that courtesans, as free agents able to decide which men they socialized with, had the power to threaten male status and *virtù*: Ruggiero, "Who's Afraid of Giulia Napolitana?," 285.

24. On sexual practices and the construction of early modern Italian masculinity, see Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, and Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros.* My understanding of *virtù* is indebted to Ruggiero, who recognizes that early modern *virtù* is connected with honor, the latter focusing more on internal, ontological worth. He understands *virtù* as a power construct, calling it the Renaissance "regime of *virtù*," its effectiveness in practice lying in its equivocal nature, enabling it to cross gender and class distinctions. Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 185–87. I discuss the use of the term "virtù" in relation to women below.

25. Ottonelli, *Della christiana moderatione*, 2:442: "La chiesa tollera il peccato d'andar alle Meretrici, per evitar un mal peggiore, *ad evitandem maius malum*: non dimeno non approva quel peccato, ma disimulando il tolera acciocchè moderi cosi gli adulterii, gl'incesti, e altre sorti di bruttissimi peccati." Marcella Salvi points out that in this case prostitution was tolerated because it functioned as a form of control that served post-Tridentine politics: Salvi, "'Il solito è

Antonio Barberini's brother Taddeo, often continued this practice into adulthood, alongside those who, like Antonio, remained single. Frequenting courtesans in adulthood enabled elite men to demonstrate not only *virtù*, but also *virilità* (virility), a concept related to the former through its Latin root "vir" and its ability to mean "manlihood" in general as well as sexual performance specifically.[26]

In addition to the sexual benefits, elite supporters highly valued the social advantages that courtesans could provide. The gatherings hosted and attended by Nina and her contemporaries numbered among a kaleidoscope of social events that formed the backbone of Roman society.[27] More specifically, courtesan-hosted gatherings belonged to a network of heterosocial leisure gatherings that also served a specific sociopolitical function. In Rome, the papal system and the presence of Italian and other foreign cardinals, ambassadors, and their dependents created a political and social structure that was constantly in flux. The resulting ambiguity could prevent men of similar social status from doing business and forging political alliances, restricted by the requirement at homosocial gatherings for those of lower status to defer to those higher in rank. In order to alleviate potential awkwardness and possible dishonor, a common solution was to meet at gatherings hosted by women, including courtesans, to whom all male parties were obliged to defer.[28]

Besides providing an advantageous social space for supporters, Nina and her courtesan contemporaries, who survived and thrived in Rome's volatile social landscape, offered their guests the latest in leisure activities and entertainments. The most popular of these are enumerated in an account by the wealthy young Dutch traveler Cornelius Aerssen van Sommelsdyck:[29]

> There are some ladies in Rome who are called *virtuose*, who know how to sing, dance, and play instruments, and who converse reasonably well. One goes to them sometimes in company with as many as ten or twelve, and one can have a serious discussion there or a pleasant talk; and then, when one wants to go away, one places a *scudo* or two each beneath a candlestick and leaves; and if one of the company would rather stay the night, his wishes will be accommodated. Such houses are not infamous; on the contrary, they are honorable.[30]

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sempre quello,'" 380. For an overview of Ottonelli's discussion of *virtuose*, see Giacobello, "Giovan Domenico Ottonelli."

26. See Florio, *Queen Anna's New World*, s.v. "Virtu."

27. On early modern leisure culture, see Burke, "Invention of Leisure."

28. On the political function of female-hosted gatherings, see Ago, "Giochi di squadra."

29. On Sommelsdyck, see Verhoeven, *Europe within Reach*, 90, and Jabini, *Christianity in Suriname*, 44–57.

30. Quoted in Tamburini, "La lira, la poesia," 426: "Il y a quelques signoras à Rome qu'on nomme de virtuose qui sçavent chanter, danser, jouer des instrumants et qui discourent raisonnablement bien. La on va parfois en compagnie jusques à dix ou douze, où l'on raisonne et cause; et puis, quand on a envie de s'en aller en mettant un teston ou deux par teste soubz un

Sommelsdyck is clearly describing courtesans: women who, in addition to regularly trafficking in their bodies, also possessed social and cultural skills that were desired by elite supporters. He does not, however, use the word "cortigiane," a term that had been used to describe them throughout the sixteenth century. This word traditionally indicated an elevated social status in the hierarchy of prostitution, differentiating such women from lower-class prostitutes who sold only sex, not sociability, often identified as "meretrici," "puttane," or "donne di malaffari." Instead, Sommelsdyck indicates that Romans were calling courtesans "virtuose," a term commonly used for all women who were exceptionally skilled in any of the literary, visual, conversational, and/or musical arts, despite their gender and, in some cases, class inferiority.[31] From the late sixteenth century, the term "virtuose" was applied to women from a range of social backgrounds who performed in elite spaces, becoming commonly used for singing women who performed in court settings and at other elite female or heterosocial gatherings.[32] By placing the emphasis on social and cultural skills, the term "virtuose" downplayed any sexual impropriety in the women it described. As Sommelsdyck reports with surprise, gatherings at the home of a woman known as a "virtuosa" were "not infamous" but "honorable," even if she did traffic in sex.

That courtesans were called "virtuose" in mid-seventeenth-century Rome indicates a cultural desire to distance elite courtesans like Nina from their sexual trade. In part, this desire was fueled by a rising interest within elite Italian society for virtuosic female vocal performance, which explains Sommelsdyck's placing singing first in his list of a *virtuosa*'s skills. Fascination with such performances grew at Italian courts over the second half of the sixteenth century, and by the seventeenth century had created a demand for singing *virtuose* that became increasingly difficult to supply. Women who could sing expertly and accompany themselves on various instruments provided virtuosic performances at an ever-growing number of occasions.[33] These *virtuose* fulfilled various roles that, by modern definitions, would be identified as actress, opera singer, and female court singer, as well as courtesan.[34] They often shifted in and out of these fluid roles at a range of

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chandelier, on en est quitte; et si quelqu'un de la compagnie a de plus envie d'y passer la nuit, il y peut recevoir de la satisfaction. Ces maisons icy ne sont pas infames, au contraire honorables."

31. On the origins of this use of the term, see Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, 47. The masculine term "virtuosi" was similarly used for men exceptionally skilled in these arts, being applied originally to nobles and then by the end of the century to those of lower classes; see Dell'Antonio, *Listening as Spiritual Practice*, 96–98.

32. See Stras, *Women and Music*, 290.

33. The education of women from a wide range of social backgrounds—from courtesans to noblewomen—could include virtuosic vocal skills. Their musical performances differed, however, mainly in terms of the social protocol followed and audience configuration. See ibid., 55–59.

34. While in general there was a hierarchy attached to these social labels—with singer at the higher end and actress and courtesan lower down—it was usual for all singing *virtuose* to be identified by a variety of terms and to take on a variety of roles. On Roman *virtuosa* Margherita Costa,

elite gatherings and events. Indeed, Sommelsdyck's account makes it clear that courtesans could even fulfill different roles at the same gathering. While some men at the gatherings he describes took advantage of the sexual offerings of the courtesan *virtuose*, others were content with the entertainment and conversation alone. For some, therefore, courtesans satisfied social, cultural, and sexual needs, while for others they provided social and cultural entertainment alone, much like their court singer counterparts.

As the demand for the singing capital of courtesans resulted in their becoming increasingly present in elite society, some writers began to emphasize their singing skills. In the *avviso* quoted at the beginning of this section, Mantovani highlights Nina's singing skills, mentioning that "she sings exquisitely." Another *avviso* pertaining to the Duke of Créquy, the French ambassador to Rome, simply refers to the courtesans he socializes with as singers, reporting that he "made his rounds paying compliments to the singers of Rome" before leaving the city.[35] The title of a manuscript miscellany in the Vatican Library that gives an account of the public whippings of courtesans in Rome does the same: "Flogging of several singers and women of disreputable living."[36] Almost half the courtesans mentioned by the governor of Rome, Giovanni Battista Spada, in his official diary for the years 1635–43 are identified as singers either by him or in other literature from the same period, including Nina herself, who is called "cantatrice" and "canterina."[37] Similar to the use of "virtuosa" in identifying courtesans, the use of "singer" helped to mitigate anxiety about an increasing courtesan presence in elite company by emphasizing their most desirable cultural skill and distancing them from socially inappropriate behavior. Some early modern commentators discussed this openly, explicitly imbuing singing skills with a specific social power that neutralized the stigma of the courtesan's shameful sexual practices. The musical dilettante Grazioso Uberti illustrates this in the chapter on chamber music in his *Contrasto musico* (The musical

known as courtesan, singer of court and theater, and prolific author, see Costa, *Buffoons*, 2–24. On Roman Barbara Rasponi "la Castellana," who was known as singer, actress, and possibly courtesan, see Spada, *Racconto delle cose*, 159. On the relationship between actress and courtesan, see Kerr, "Italian Actress," 186–87. On the social hierarchies of actresses, see Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera*, 34–36, and Kerr, "Italian Actress," 186.

35. Quoted in Ademollo, "Gli ambasciatori francesi," 219: "la passò tutta in giro a complire con le cantatrici di Roma." (The *avviso* is held at Rome, Archivio di Stato, Processo Amodei, July 12, 1634.)

36. I-Rvat, Urb. Lat. 1647, 545r: "Frustature di diverse canterine e donne di mala vita." Here the courtesans who sing are regarded as singers and those not known for singing as prostitutes.

37. Spada, *Racconto delle cose*. Eight of the eighteen singers Spada mentions are identified as some type of singer. At least two sources other than Avviso 1 identify Nina as a singer; see ibid., 61, "Nina Barcarola cantatrice," and I-Rvat, Urb. Lat. 1647, fols. 276–79, "Caterina canterina famosa."

disagreement, 1630),[38] where his apologist for music, Giocondo, reveals that singing has the ability to mask other "lascivious practices":

> It is true that one should avoid wanton women . . . but that is not to say that one should avoid them so as not to hear their singing, but rather so as not to desire their beauty or yield to their wishes. . . . Indeed, music in such women is like an overgarment that covers all shame. Such women are named and praised for their music, their playing, their singing, without any thought for the lascivious practices that would otherwise render them odious and abominable.[39]

Here, virtuosic singing becomes redemptive, eclipsing the courtesans' "odious and abominable" selling of sex.

Uberti's identification of an exceptional ability (music) followed by the revelation that this ability neutralizes a certain socially unacceptable practice ("covers all shame") was a common linguistic strategy in writings describing courtesans.[40] Mantovani plays with this formula in his description of Nina's *virtù*, which he says is able to cover *prattica* (practice): "Sua Eminenza fà servire la Virtù per coperta della sua prattica."[41] While this passage can be translated as "His Eminence makes use of that talent [*Virtù*] as a cover for his assignations [*sua prattica*],"[42] the structure of the Italian sentence creates ambiguity as to whose *prattica* it is, allowing me to posit the reading given above: "His Eminence makes use of her [Nina's] *virtù* as a cover for

38. This translation of the title is taken from the edition by Giancarlo Rostirolla: Uberti, *Contrasto musico*. It is also adopted by Margaret Murata for her translation of an extract from the work in Strunk and Treitler's *Source Readings in Music History*: Uberti, "From *The Musical Disagreement*." The word "contrasto," however, could also be translated as "challenge," "contest," or "debate."

39. Uberti, *Contrasto musico*, 82–83: "E vero, che si devono fuggire le Donne impudiche . . . ma non si dice, che si debbano fuggire per non sentire il loro canto: ma si bene per non desiderare la loro bellezza, e per non acconsentire alle loro voglie. . . . Anzi, che la musica in simili Donne è come una sopraveste, che copre ogni vergogna. Vengono nominate, e lodate simili Donne per la Musica, per lo suono, per lo canto, lungi ogni memoria de lascivi costumi, li quali altrimente le renderebbono esose, & abominevoli." While Uberti says that "music" covers the courtesan's shame, given his references first to singing and then to playing and singing, "music" for him seems to indicate singing and self-accompanying, necessary skills for all singing *virtuose*.

40. See, for example, Avviso 1. The formula is standard in descriptions of courtesans dating back to the sixteenth century; see Gordon, *Monteverdi's Unruly Women*, 185. An example contemporary with Uberti is found in Alessandro Zilioli's biography of Gaspara Stampa of 1654, although in her case it was poetic rather than musical skills that allegedly covered her shameful practices; see Salza, "Madonna Gasparina Stampa," 230, and Stampa, *Complete Poems*, 3. This conceit was also common for other socially questionable people who participated in elite social events, such as the non-noble male literato and those who trafficked in art and culture to make their way among their betters. An example of this social type among those involved in Nina's arrest is Antonio Barberini's dependent Carlo Possenti, who became a member of the prestigious Roman literary academy the Accademia degli Umoristi; see Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 74–81.

41. Avviso 1.

42. Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 223.

her [sexual] practice [*sua prattica*]." The linguistic ambiguity of this sentence enabled a mocking, witty double reading through which Mantovani targeted both Nina and Barberini at once. While Mantovani does not use "virtuosa" to identify Nina, choosing instead to highlight her sexual practice with "Cortiggiana," he does use "virtù"—the root of "virtuosa"—to describe her exceptional ability. As a way of referring to women, "virtù" was used increasingly throughout the sixteenth century to indicate female performance in arts and literature at the highest level, requiring skills and involving performance practices traditionally considered masculine and noble.[43] Nina's *virtù* specifically reflects an intellectual morality residing in her ability to sing with agility and taste. That she could perform a virtuosic artistic task with expertise demonstrated that she possessed innate noble, honorable qualities despite her lower-class status and sexual impropriety. Her vocal ability thus rendered her fit for socializing with the upper echelons of the elite. Through his witty linguistic construction Mantovani is laying bare the conceit by which virtuosic talent covers sexual shame, exposing it as a transparent strategy for social redemption.

All narratives about the redemptive power of singing—whether they utilized common linguistic strategies or wittily unmasked them—helped to sanction the presence of courtesans in elite society, which translated into tangible social benefits for Nina and her courtesan *virtuose* contemporaries. Their cultural capital of singing also functioned as important social capital: singing's socially redemptive qualities widened the courtesan's performance opportunities and social mobility. The social legitimation provided by the terms "singer" and "virtuosa" enabled courtesans to participate in elite spaces normally reserved for female singers who did not transgress the sexual boundaries for women as overtly as they did, such as Italian court *virtuose*.[44]

43. For the use of "virtù" in relation to singing women, see Stras, *Women and Music*. For the gendered and class-based relationships between masculine and femine *virtù*, see Schiesari, "In Praise of Virtuous Women?," and Stras, "*Le nonne della ninfa*," 125–29. The relationship between chastity and feminine *virtù* is especially complex for courtesan *virtù*, given that contemporaries considered it dishonorable and shaming to a courtesan if the sexual rather than the respectable social and cultural aspects of her practice were publicly emphasized; see Cohen, "Honor and Gender," 624.

44. While court *virtuose*, unlike courtesans, maintained a chaste public image, some had sexual relationships with their elite supporters. Such relationships were often exclusive, in the manner of a traditional mistress, especially those involving singers of cardinals. On early modern mistresses, see McCall, "Traffic in Mistresses," 128. On the *virtuosa*-mistresses of various Este cardinals, see Stras, *Women and Music*, 64, 169, 175–77. On Roman *virtuosa* Leonora Baroni's relationship with Antonio Barberini, see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 321–418. On the relationship between Cardinal Sigismondo Chigi and *virtuosa* Giulia Masotti, see Reardon, "Letters from the Road." On singers who were married to mitigate against perceived sexual impropriety associated with being a *virtuosa*, see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 350; Costa, *Buffoons*, 22–23; Cusick, *Francesca Caccini*; Fantappiè, "'Angelina senese'"; and De Lucca, "'Dalle sponde del Tebro.'"

At such gatherings, by performing the role of *virtuosa* only, courtesans raised their social status and generated more opportunities of the same kind.

## Political Rivalries

> Antonio believed that the affront [of Nina's arrest] was committed against his person, and people said as much.[45]

The *avvisi* reveal a public awareness that the motives for Nina's arrest extended beyond her actions. Ultimately, the arrest was motivated by the Barberini family's longtime political rivalry with the newly elected papal family, the Pamphili. At the time of the arrest, Antonio Barberini found himself in a weakened political position, no longer a member of a papal family and suffering from systematic persecution by Innocent X, Giovanni Battista Pamphili (1574–1655, pope from 1644), that had been ongoing against all the Barberini brothers for almost a year. Antonio's relationship with Donna Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili, the sister-in-law of Urban VIII's successor, was especially acrimonious. She blamed Antonio for the death of her nephew and for the circulation of rumors about a sexual relationship with her brother-in-law.[46] Innocent spent most of his first months in office attempting to prosecute and imprison the Barberini brothers for their profiteering during the War of Castro, which they had lost immediately before Urban VIII's death at great expense to the taxpayers of Rome.[47]

Three months before Nina's arrest, on June 21, 1645, the discovery of two murdered *convertite* nuns (reformed prostitutes) in Bologna set off a chain reaction that not only provided Innocent X with ample fodder for his vendetta against the Barberini but eventually led to Nina's shameful trip to the Tor di Nona prison. The nuns' escape from their convent and subsequent murder had occurred in the month of April 1644, during a three-year period that Antonio, as papal legate to Bologna, and his "dependents"

45. Avviso 7.

46. Teodoro Ameyden reported that the phrase "becco fottuto" (fornicating cuckold) had been used by Antonio during the conclave that preceded the election of Innocent X in 1644, and an *avviso* of October 11, 1645, noted that Antonio had "spoken with dishonor about Donna Olimpia"; see Rossi, "La fuga," 315–16n1 ("habbia parlato con dishonor di D. Olimpia"). Donna Olimpia blamed Antonio for the death of her relative Gualtiero Gualtieri, whom Antonio had banished from Rome. For various theories about the reasons for the banishment, see Rossi, "La fuga," 311, and Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 220–21, 312. Gualtieri eventually went to serve in the imperial armies in Austria, where in 1634 he was killed in suspicious circumstances; see Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 221.

47. On Innocent's persecution of the Barberini, see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 30:21–22, 48–49, 55. The official papal investigation into the Barberini brothers' financial impropriety during the War of Castro, initiated under Urban VIII, was ultimately ineffectual; see ibid., 30:51–52, and Nussdorfer, *Civic Politics*, 217.

(*dipendenti*) had spent in the city.[48] Investigations into Antonio's dependents, who were suspected of the abduction and murder, immediately ensued and arrests were made. On July 17, the man whom Antonio had appointed Vice Duke of Segni, Carlo Possenti—orchestrator of the escape, concealment, and most likely murder of the nuns—was arrested in Segni.[49] In Rome, Palazzo Barberini became a main target for Pamphili fact-finding missions. Multiple times, the *sbirri* searched the palazzo for information about the purported involvement of Antonio himself, as well as that of his favorite, castrato Marc'Antonio Pasqualini, but they ultimately turned up nothing.[50] In a raid on the palazzo on July 25, however, 300 *sbirri* succeeded in arresting Antonio's secretary of briefs, Abbot Giovanni Braccesi, in a spectacular and scandalous manner without the standard consent of Antonio, his patron.[51] As Braccesi was accused only of socializing with the nuns and of helping Antonio to protect his other dependents, contemporaries believed that his arrest and his long stint in prison had been arranged solely to disgrace Antonio.[52]

It was amid this personal and political turmoil, Mantovani reports, that Barberini sought Nina's company for some respite in August 1645. Nina's rumored relationship with someone truly involved in the nun's abduction, however, Bolognese Count Ferdinando Ranuzzi, would soon be investigated, with the outcome that she would come to share the fate of Barberini's other dependents. Ranuzzi moved in the circles of Barberini's courtiers in Bologna.[53] His friendship with Possenti had led him to help the nuns to escape and reach their first hiding place.[54] Ranuzzi had left Bologna for Rome

48. Many documents use terms such as "dipendenti" and "famigliari" in reference to what appear to be types of patron-client relationship. I have chosen to use "dependent" when discussing relationships of this sort for which we have no precise details.

49. Possenti became Vice Duke of Segni in March of 1645; see Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 81.

50. On the suspicions relating to Pasqualini and the Pamphili's multiple attempts to link Antonio to the nuns' murder, see ibid., 222–24. On the similarities between the position of the favorite at court and Pasqualini's relationship with Antonio, see Brosius, "Singers Behaving Badly."

51. For a biography of Braccesi, his relationship with Antonio, and the circumstances surrounding his arrest, see Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 115–21. This public lack of respect for a cardinal was even thought by some to harm the honor of the Sacred College of Cardinals; see Rossi, "La fuga," 319–20.

52. See Rossi, "La fuga," 319–20, and Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 231, 256. After his arrest, Braccesi remained in solitary confinement until sometime after his final interrogation in May 1646. By 1647 he had been banished to Pesaro where he remained until 1654, when Innocent finally pardoned him and allowed him to return to Antonio's Roman household. See Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 283–84.

53. Throughout the *avvisi* Ranuzzi is referred to as "Ranuci" or "Ranuccio." His father hailed from one of the most noble Bolognese families, and his mother was of ignoble birth. He was a cousin to Count Girolamo Ranuzzi-Manzoli. See Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 71, 278.

54. Ranuzzi appears to have helped Possenti to abduct the nuns in reciprocation for a "sfregio" (a wound to the face) that Possenti had inflicted on Galeazzo Mariani, who had publicly shown disrespect to Ranuzzi; see ibid., 188.

soon after his involvement with the nuns, where he had purportedly developed a close relationship with Nina before Braccesi's arrest prompted him to flee. Still on the run at the time of Nina's arrest, he became part of the case that the Pamphili built against her and that eventually led to her incarceration.[55]

While the authors of all the *avvisi* speculate about Nina's alleged involvement with Ranuzzi and Braccesi as motivations for her arrest, some observers clearly believed that her relationship with Barberini was the major impetus.[56] The official reason in circulation for the confiscation of Nina's writings was that the *sbirri* wanted to search for any correspondence she might have had with Ranuzzi and Braccesi, in the hope that it might contain evidence of their crimes or of Ranuzzi's whereabouts. Yet for the author of the Capitoline *avvisi*, this reasoning seemed implausible: "because of Count Ranuzzi's close relationship [*Amicizia*] with Nina, they wanted to find out where he had gone, assuming that he would have given her continuous notice of his journey. But how could one believe that Count Ranuzzi would write and should say where he was, while mired in such danger on account of the case involving the nuns?"[57] In fact, all authors speculate as to whether the original intention had been to arrest Barberini at the same time as Nina.[58] The author of the Capitoline *avvisi* was the first to note the exact timing of Barberini's departure from Nina's house, intimating that the Pamphili hoped to catch Barberini at the scene: "one does not yet know if truly they waited until he had gone, or if it happened that way by accident."[59] Two days later, one Parisian *avviso* also reported this rumor: "Nonetheless, they say that the *sbirri* went there in the belief that they would find the abovementioned cardinal [Antonio] for the purpose of putting him in prison, but most people believe that the *sbirri* paid him due respect and did not enter the said Nina's house before they were sure that His Eminence had left."[60] Several weeks later, Mantovani outlined in detail what he believed was the original plan for the arrest: "It has been witnessed that the *sbirri* entered the house of Nina Barcarola with the sole aim of finding Antonio there, to torment him and to vilify him; and perhaps also with the intention of binding him and taking him to prison for being unclothed and without his

55. See Avvisi 3, 4, and 5.

56. The Capitoline and Parisian *avvisi* also speculate about rival *virtuose* who may have spied on Nina for the Pamphili: Leonora Baroni (Avviso 6) and the Pimpe Carrattiere (Avviso 2). On these *virtuose*, their rivalry with Nina, and motivations for their involvement in the arrest, see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 173–78. On social and professional rivalries between *virtuose* and castratos during the Barberini papacy, see Brosius, "Singers Behaving Badly."

57. Avviso 4.

58. Contemporaries believed that the Pamphili were similarly motivated to shame Barberini during Braccesi's arrest: "Word is there was an express command from the pope to lay hands on Antonio if they encountered the slightest resistance regarding Braccesi's arrest": quoted in Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 122.

59. Avviso 2.

60. Avviso 3.

habit, as if they had not recognized him."[61] Mantovani clearly believed that the Pamphili were capable of planning Nina's arrest in a manner that most effectively shamed their rival Antonio Barberini.

## The Power of Courtesan Song

> She had sung a canzone that begins "Take up, O Muse, my bagpipe" or "Take up, O Muse, the colascione," which wounds Donna Olimpia to the core. And they say that it was found at Nina's home.[62]

Letters written by Antonio Barberini's dependents were not the only items the Pamphili were looking for among Nina's confiscated possessions. Several *avvisi* report that they were also searching for a satirical song about Donna Olimpia, "Prendi, Musa," which the Pimpe had accused Nina of singing. The interest that this song generated in the *avvisi* reveals details about the song itself as well as other types of song that Nina performed and that Barberini had experienced in a variety of spaces, including her home. The *avvisi* demonstrate the power that Nina's vocal performances could hold over both Barberini and his enemies, attesting to her role not only as seductress but also as a political weapon.

Three *avvisi* mention that among Nina's confiscated items were books of "canzoni."[63] Given the source, it is likely that this plural noun was used in accordance with its most common usage at that time: simply to connote a song, or any sung text. As a courtesan catering to the elite, Nina would have performed a variety of secular genres composed to love poetry—canzonetta, aria, lament, recitative, and the genre we identify today as the cantata, a multisectional composition that could include sections in the styles of all the aforementioned genres.[64] Cantatas were typically composed on witty poems, often full of sexual innuendo, that depicted the conflicting emotions brought about by love.[65] Barberini took a particular interest in this genre and retained many singers and composers of cantatas in his household.[66]

Barberini's interest in Nina's performances of cantatas likely stemmed in part from his expectations regarding the physical effects her performances would have on him. Contemporary understandings of the physiology of sound suggest that listeners expected to experience involuntary physical reactions to the sound of the singing voice, which would correspond to the

61. Avviso 8. In Avviso 3, the author notes that Nina was arrested one hour after Barberini had left.

62. Avviso 2.

63. Avvisi 2, 3, and 4.

64. For an overview of the Italian cantata, see Holzer, "Music and Poetry," and Gianturco, "Italian Seventeenth-Century Cantata."

65. On the vogue for cantatas, their social value, and their witty texts, see Freitas, "Singing and Playing."

66. See Hammond, *Music and Spectacle*, 83–88.

emotional content of the text.[67] In early modern parlance, the audience expected to have its affections moved by the voice of the *virtuosa*.[68] Composers of the cantata often employed close harmonies and dissonances, especially to depict the pain of love, which, given the physical conception of sound, could also serve to bring to mind and body the emotional and physical sensations of love.[69] Added to these composed features were the *virtuosa*'s spontaneous virtuosic embellishments, which made every performance unique and exciting. In performance this repertoire opened up a wide range of possible experiences for a fantasizing audience. For those so inclined, it enabled a consciously carnal experience of the *virtuosa* that did not require entering her bedchamber. In these instances, the ability to provide a type of surrogate sex through song meant that the cultural capital of singing possessed by Nina and other courtesan *virtuose* could ultimately become a part of their sexual capital alongside physical sex.

An individual's experiences of the performances of courtesan *virtuose* would certainly have been colored by the level of intimacy or formality of the gathering, as by well as by the configuration of the audience. Mantovani provides insight into the types of gathering Barberini attended with Nina and his other courtesan companions. "He gifts her [Nina] a sum upon entering, sometimes as much as a hundred gold *scudi*. He also enjoys the conversation of the Pimpe Carrattiere, who are taken by Don Taddeo to his palace, and both [men] pass the time happily."[70] His description of the gathering at Nina's home, which includes a donation at the door, is similar to that of Sommelsdyck in that it appears to indicate an event open to a range of visitors. Such gatherings populated by acquaintances, at which a onetime donation to the courtesan was expected, were described by some commentators as "conversazioni." In contrast, the gathering at Palazzo Barberini that was attended by Nina's rivals, the courtesans Pimpe Carrattiere, implies a more intimate situation where onetime gifts would not be required. These gatherings were sometimes referred to as "veglie."[71] In contemporary accounts,

67. See Gordon, *Monteverdi's Unruly Women*, 10–46.

68. By the mid-seventeenth century, "moving the affections" was understood to be the main goal of musical composition. In Rome this was most clearly expressed in *Musurgia universalis* (1650) by Athanasius Kircher, who referred to compositions professionally crafted to this end as "musica pathetica": "The single purpose of *musica pathetica* is to move the various affections according to the meaning of the proposed and adopted theme": Kircher, *Musurgia universalis*, book 7, problem 7, 564 ("Cum pathetice musice unicus finis sit, affectus varios iuxta propositi assumptique: thematis rationem movere"). For a history of the early modern relationship between music and the affections, see Palisca, "Moving the Affections."

69. See Gordon, *Monteverdi's Unruly Women*, 29.

70. Avviso 1.

71. The mention of the "conversation" of the Pimpe, in its singular form, appears to refer to the actual act of conversation, not to a type of gathering. For the definition and use of the terms "conversazione" and "veglia" in relation to courtesan gatherings, see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 209–10, and Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 16. Both terms were also applied to a wide range of elite gatherings and events. For the general use of "conversazione" to

however, the use of this terminology varies, and in practice the distinctions between gatherings that were formal or intimate, entertaining or educative, were fluid. Nina and the Pimpe would have hosted a range of such events, from intimate affairs attended by close friends to more formal settings.

The *avvisi* relating to Nina's arrest provide few details in terms of the audience configuration at courtesan gatherings. They do reveal, however, that the Barberini brothers socialized with more than one courtesan at a time at what may have been a *veglia* at Palazzo Barberini. Contemporary court testimony involving courtesans also suggests that musical performances during *conversazioni* in courtesans' homes were sometimes attended by a heterosocial audience: "I remember that Clementia wanted to meet Settimia for the [purpose?] of hearing her sing, and so one evening Alberto and I took Clementia to meet Settimia."[72] Epistolary evidence reveals that elite men themselves sometimes participated in the music making: "With public scandal in the house of the archpriest of [Pontremoli?], there was a gathering of women where they danced and ate, causing such uproar that in a public bordello there could not be anything worse. And the archpriest played and led the dance, something that has brought scandal not only to that palace but to the neighbors as well."[73] This record of an elite male adult participating in musical performance raises more questions than it answers. Clearly it occurred, but how frequently and how licit it was will require more evidence. It differs from the common practice in other elite Roman spaces as described by Andrew Dell'Antonio, where the participation of elite men in musical performance consisted of assessing the performances verbally.[74] Perhaps it was common for elite men of all ages to contribute to the musicking

describe educational elite gatherings that included music, see Uberti, *Contrasto musico*, 8. For a description of the activities offered in the *veglie* held in the home of *virtuosa* Leonora Baroni and her family, see *L'idea della veglia*.

72. Quoted in Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 144–45: "Io mericordo che la detta Clementia volea conoscere Settimia per la (. . .) del sentire cantare, et cosi una sera Alberto et io menassimo la detta Clementia a farli conoscere Settima [*sic*]." The specific experiences and expectations of female audience members during female virtuosic vocal performances warrant further exploration that is beyond the scope of this article.

73. I-Rasc, Fondo Orsini 309, serie III, filza 0544, [July 1630], Paolo Giordano II Orsino to Monsignor Suffraganeo di Sabbine [Giovanni Battisti Piccolomini], 722r: "con pub.co scand. lo in Casa del Arcipret. di Pon.li si fece un adunanza di Donne dove si ballò, et si magnò con tanto chiasso che in pubblico bordello non si sarebbe potuto far peggio et l'Archip.te sonava, et era il Capo della danza cosa che ha dato non solo scandolo a quel castello, ma alli convicini." This letter is located among letters from July of 1630. I thank Lucia Marchi for her suggestion that "Pon.li" is possibly Pontremoli, a town in the Appennine mountains between Parma and La Spezia. On the association between scandal, noise, and courtesan activity, see Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 102.

74. For the changing relationship between elite men and musical practice in Rome during this period, see Dell'Antonio, *Listening as Spiritual Practice*, and Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 197–206.

at some types of courtesan gathering in Rome.[75] Or perhaps the archpriest's musical participation compounded the scandal of consorting with the sorts of courtesan who disrupted the peace with their "uproar," signaling their low-class status.[76]

Pointing to wider socialization practices for courtesan *virtuose* and their male companions are the descriptions in the *avvisi* of Antonio Barberini's socializing with his older brother Taddeo and the Pimpe.[77] The gatherings at Nina's home, while sometimes the destination for an entire evening's entertainment, were also an integral part of a broader common social activity known as "andare a spasso." While this could refer simply to strolling about the city, it mainly indicated the custom by which elite men rode about in carriages with the ultimate goal of demonstrating their wealth, power, and status.[78] By the beginning of the seventeenth century, carriage culture was at its peak, and elite men spent much of their evening traveling around in their highly decorated carriages, overt symbols of conspicuous consumption.[79] Despite a law banning courtesans from traveling via carriage, they often accompanied elite men, visiting different gatherings in groups of ever-changing configurations of men and other courtesans.[80] Common destinations for courtesans in carriages included gatherings held outdoors, such as parties in gardens or in vineyards, the latter known as "vignate."[81] It is likely that when Don Taddeo "took" the Pimpe to his palace, he and Antonio spent at least part of their evening *a spasso* with them. Presumably Don Taddeo, like other men of his status, subverted the carriage ban by procuring special permission (*licenza*) for the Pimpe to travel in his carriage, with or without his being present.[82]

*Avvisi* that report on Nina's musical activities demonstrate that courtesan music making was an integral part of *a spasso* pastimes. One of Nina's previous arrests occurred while she was singing "love songs" seated outside the

75. The display of musical skills—like consorting with courtesans—was normally regarded as an activity most appropriate for the years of *gioventù*; see Lorenzetti, "'La parte della musica,'" 27–28, and Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 203–4.

76. See Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 91.

77. Avvisi 1 and 2.

78. See Hunt, "Carriages, Violence and Masculinity," 182.

79. See ibid.

80. See Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 101–4, 188–212.

81. For descriptions of these outdoor gatherings, see ibid., 106–8. Many courtesans were arrested at *vignate*, which were often held at night. Giovanni Battista Salvati, in his comedy *La vignata* (1671), depicts this type of gathering in the countryside. I thank Craig Monson for sharing this information with me.

82. Storey provides a court testimony description of this type of permission, which was identified as "licentia": Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 120, and Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 133. Even some noblewomen allowed courtesans to ride in their carriages. Donna Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili procured such *licenza* for the courtesan *virtuose* the Costa sisters; see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 106–8.

Porta del Popolo, facing the river.[83] A Capitoline *avviso* pertaining to her 1645 arrest mentions serenatas as among the items confiscated from her home.[84] The serenata was a genre based on amorous subjects and regularly performed for a heterosocial audience in carriages.[85] According to the chapter on outdoor music in Uberti's *Contrasto musico*, such outdoor evening musical entertainments could sometimes be disrupted by brawls initiated by jealous lovers, husbands, and protective fathers.[86]

It may have been during such *a spasso* activities that Nina sang "Prendi, Musa." The only extant sources to mention this song are the *avvisi* relating to her arrest, which provide very few specifics other than the title. Yet in combination with evidence provided by similar contemporary texts, the existing details point to the probability that "Prendi, Musa" was a type of popular political song, in which a topical satirical text was fitted to a preexisting melody.[87] The texts for such songs were often pasquinades—anonymous satirical poems criticizing papal politics that Romans affixed to one of the "talking statues" of Rome, the Hellenistic statue of "Pasquino" near the Piazza Navona being the first and most famous.[88] Once posted, they were quickly disseminated throughout the city, taking on a life of their own as they reached the general populace. Scribes copied them and sold them on sheets in shops near Pasquino, while *avvisi* writers included them in their biweekly reports. They were read aloud, chanted, or sung in piazzas and streets and from carriages.[89] They were an especially common feature of the Roman soundscape in the socially volatile years around Nina's arrest.[90]

83. I-Rvat, Urb. Lat. 1647, fols. 276–79: "amorosi canti." On street music and other street performances, see the various contributions to Degl'Innocenti and Rospocher, "*Cantastorie* in Renaissance Italy" (a special issue of *Italian Studies*), which is devoted to this topic. On the roles played by female performers in street performances, see Kerr, "Italian Actress," and Henke, "Meeting at the Sign."

84. Avviso 3.

85. By the late seventeenth century, the serenata had become a heterogeneous genre, performed with a variety of musical forces in a wide range of settings, from intimate affairs in private gardens to overt spectacular displays in public squares; see Tcharos, *Opera's Orbit*, 98–152.

86. Uberti, *Contrasto musico*, 131–40. Uberti uses the word "serenata" to indicate an outdoor performance.

87. Hunt refers to these songs as ballads (Hunt, "Violence and Disorder," 297), and while they do conform to a later seventeenth-century English definition of a ballad, no similar all-encompassing term appears to have been in use in Rome during this period. Ameyden described the sung pasquinade "Papa Gabella" as a "baionata": see page 227 and note 94 below. The term appears to have roots in the noun "baia," which Florio defines as "a mocke, a flout, or a frumpe": Florio, *Queen Anna's New World*, s.v. "Baia." I have not encountered the use of this term for a kind of song elsewhere.

88. The other well-known "talking statue" was Marforio, an ancient statue of a river god located by this point in the Piazza del Campidoglio. Pasquino represented a popular Roman tradition of anticlericalism; see Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*.

89. See Hunt, *Vacant See*, 195.

90. See ibid., 201–3. Hunt notes that because of the Barberini's profiteering during the War of Castro, the Vacant See that followed the death of Urban VIII was especially frenzied and therefore especially fertile in the production of vilifying pasquinades.

Roman diarists provide enticing glimpses into the musical material and performance practices of musical pasquinades. Giacinto Gigli discusses the singing of pasquinades after the death of Innocent X during the Vacant See, the period during which a conclave of the College of Cardinals is convened to elect a new pope. He reveals that some of these pasquinades were sung to liturgical chants, including the "Te Deum laudamus," the hymn that masters of ceremonies typically sang at papal coronations and processions.[91] Other possibilities for melodic types can be extrapolated from the extant published popular poems written at mid-century by the blind Venetian street musician Paolo Britti, which indicate the intended tune.[92] While many of these were simple popular tunes that had originated with humorous texts in various Italian dialects, some were melodies that originated in elite genres, such as solo arias from both operas and chamber music.[93] Such a porous boundary between high and low genres might have existed in Rome during this period. Although the Roman resident Teodoro Ameyden does not comment in his diary on the melodies to which the pasquinades were sung, he does reveal some aspects of performance practice. In his description of performances of the popular musical pasquinade "Papa Gabella" during the Vacant See that followed the death of Urban VIII, he reported, "they perform serenatas with performers and instruments all night, with a great number of carriages singing the witty song 'Papa Gabella,' which grows every day."[94] He also noted that "the populace repeated the refrain like a chant."[95]

91. Other chants mentioned by Gigli are the "Salve regina" and the "Pater noster"; see ibid., 195.

92. These were not simply broadsheets but actual chapbook publications of which over 200 different examples survive. They were mainly published during the 1620s–1650s. Some forty publications (not counting reprints), mainly published during the 1630s–1640s, specify the music to be sung. See Bosi, "Paolo Britti," 44. Bosi describes these poems as "canzonette ridicolose."

93. Chamber vocal pieces included Carlo Milanuzzi's "Vedilo là" and "Che mi val che tu mi ami," from his *Sesto libro delle ariose vaghezze* (1628); Monteverdi's "Eri già tutta mia," from his second volume of *Scherzi musicali* (1632); and Tarquinio Merula's "Quando volsi l'altra sera," from his *Curtio precipitato et altri capricii* (1638). The two arias were from Francesco Cavalli's opera *Gli amori di Dafne e Apollo* (first performed 1640): "Gradita povertà" (act 1, scene 1) and "Ben da dovero stolti" (act 1, scene 7). See Bosi, "Paolo Britti," 46–49.

94. I-Rc, MS, cod. 1832, Teodoro Ameyden, "Diario della città e corte di Roma degli anni 1644–1645 notata da Deone, Temi Dio," 131r: "si fanno serenade con musiche ed instrumenti tutta notte con quantità di carrozze cantanti la baionata Papa Gabella, che ogni giorno cresce di stofa." See also Hunt, *Vacant See*, 202, and Hunt, "Violence and Disorder," 297. The moniker "Papa Gabella" (Pope Tax) for Urban VIII referred to his punitive taxation of the Roman people in the name of the War of Castro. Believing that the war stemmed from a personal Barberini vendetta against Odoardo Farnese, Romans were especially outraged at the reports of 2.5 million *scudi* that the Barberini brothers had skimmed from the 12 million *scudi* war budget and the 30 million *scudi* papal debt. See Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 29:383, 399; Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 13, 19; and Wolfe, "Patronage of Cardinal Antonio," 119, 128.

95. I-Rc, MS, cod. 1832, Teodoro Ameyden, "Diario," 131r: "il popolo ripeteva il ritornello come una cantilena."

Nina's song "Prendi, Musa" appears to be related to a group of similar pasquinades that circulated at the same time as "Papa Gabella" and into the Pamphili papacy. Four of these texts exist in manuscript and related songs are described in the *avvisi* and other correspondence. In the absence of a text for Nina's "Prendi, Musa," a brief examination of these pasquinades helps to establish the typical content and tone of such poems, which likely also characterized Nina's version.

The texts of the pasquinades from the Barberini pontificate begin "Tocca Musa il Colascione" (Take up, O Muse, the colascione), which also served as a refrain (see table 1, nos. 1 and 2). The colascione that the Muse is entreated to play, both here and in Nina's song text quoted at the opening of this section, was a three-stringed drone instrument of the lute family with a six-foot neck and large rounded body, commonly used in music of the lower class.[96] The first pasquinade (table 1, no. 1) satirizes the Barberini, including Antonio, whose purported sexual relationship with castrato Marc'Antonio Pasqualini is mocked in stanza 21:[97]

Che diremo di D. Antonio
ch'è di corpo assai imperfetto
ha grand naso e poco petto
piu superbo del demonio
vol grand bene à Marc Antonio
non so poi se per la musica
o per altra inclinatione
Tocca Musa il Colascione

What shall we say of Don Antonio, / who has an ill-formed body, / has a big nose and little chest. / More proud than a demon, / he is very fond of Marc'Antonio, / I do not know whether for music / or for some other inclination. / Take up, O Muse, the colascione.

The second text, which must have been sung during the Vacant See, satirizes the cardinals participating in the conclave, including the Barberini nephews (table 1, no. 2).[98] While the different structures of these two texts indicate that they would have been sung to different tunes, both use the same opening conceit—exhorting a Muse to tell a specific tale in song. As the phallic

96. See Toscan, *Le carnaval du langage*, 1054.

97. US-NHub, ICA, GEN MSS 110, box 89, folder 24, fols. 434–36. Urban VIII, referred to as "Papa Gabella," is the main focus of the text. Line 6 of stanza 21, which has more syllables than the others (an *ottonario sdrucciolo*) and is also the odd one out in the rhyme scheme, seems to give purposeful emphasis to the question of Antonio's interest in Pasqualini. Quite a few *avvisi* similarly allude to a sexual relationship between cardinal and castrato. For a discussion of this relationship, see Hammond, *Music and Spectacle*, 250. On castratos as preferred sexual partners for elite men, see Freitas, "Eroticism of Emasculation."

98. US-NHub, ICA, GEN MSS 110, box 89, folder 61, fols. 598–600.

**Table 1** Opening stanzas of a group of pasquinades preserved in manuscript at Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Italian Castle Archive, General Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts 110, box 89

| | MS location | Opening stanza | Translation | Metrical scheme |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | folder 24, fols. 434–36 | Tocca Musa il Colascione<br>e col suon da forza al Canto<br>non son humidi di pianto<br>gl'occhi più delle Persone<br>mort'è Urbano quel Padrone<br>quel Pontifice Tiranno<br>senza fe senza ragione<br>Tocca Musa il Colascione | Take up, O Muse, the colascione,<br>and with sound give strength to song.<br>No longer moist from tears<br>are the eyes of the people.<br>Dead is Urban, that master,<br>that tyrannical pontiff,<br>without faith, without reason.<br>Take up, O Muse, the colascione. | 25 stanzas<br>8 lines per stanza<br>8 syllables per line |
| 2 | folder 61, fols. 598–600 | Tocca Musa il Colascione,<br>che di tutti i Cardinali,<br>chi sia Papa di quei tali<br>vuò cantar una Canzone<br>Tocca Musa il Colascione. | Take up, O Muse, the colascione,<br>for, of all the cardinals,<br>he among them who would be pope<br>wants to sing a song.<br>Take up, O Muse, the colascione. | 65 stanzas<br>4 lines per stanza (with an opening variant of 5 lines)<br>8 syllables per line |
| 3 | folder 43, fols. 557–58 | Tocca musa il Chitarrino<br>e spiegamo in dolce canto<br>ogni pregio, et ogni vanto<br>del Ponteficio Pasquino<br>Tocca musa il Chitarrino | Take up, O Muse, the guitar,<br>and let us spread in sweet song<br>every virtue and every boast<br>of pontifical Pasquino.<br>Take up, O Muse, the guitar. | 25 stanzas<br>8 lines per stanza (with an opening variant of 5 lines)<br>8 syllables per line |
| 4 | folder 68, fols. 608–9 | Torna al canto ò musa mia<br>e ripiglia in man la Cetra<br>e ridendo insin'alt'Etra<br>di pur mal di questo Arpia<br>Torna al canto ò musa mia | Turn to song, O my Muse,<br>and retake in hand the lyre,<br>and with laughter dispatched to the heavens<br>speak ill of this harpy.<br>Turn to song, O my Muse. | 50 stanzas<br>4 lines per stanza (with an opening variant of 5 lines)<br>8 syllables per line |

nature of the instrument would have been widely recognized, the authors thereby also wittily exhorted the Muse to touch "a man's privy members."[99]

Several pasquinades that begin with a version of this line and its conceit circulated during the pontificate of Innocent X, including Nina's "Prendi, Musa" variant. Early in the month of August 1645, chroniclers reported on two satirical poems, a variant of "Tocca Musa il Colascione" and a poem called "L'Olimpiade," both of which were attacks on Donna Olimpia attributed to Antonio's dependent Possenti, who had been involved in the nuns scandal. They were purportedly found in the possession of Possenti and Abbot Braccesi.[100] While both texts appear to be lost, two seemingly related pasquinade texts penned during the Pamphili papacy are known to exist—one satirizing both Innocent X and Olimpia's son Camillo, the other focusing on Donna Olimpia (see table 1, nos. 3 and 4).[101] In both, the conceit of the original opening remains, although the language is modified.[102]

Text no. 4 in table 1, while featuring a refrain that differs in structure from the Barberini refrains, indicates the type of satirical content likely found in "L'Olimpiade" and "Prendi, Musa." The opening five stanzas presented here are representative of the overall vituperative tone:[103]

Torna al canto ò musa mia
e ripiglia in man la Cetra
e ridendo insin'alt'Etra
di pur mal di questo Arpia
Torna al canto ò musa mia

Torna al canto, e apparecchia
à dir mal di questa Vecchia
di Medusa assai più ria
Torna al canto ò musa mia

99. See Toscan, *Le carnaval du langage*, 1054. The fact that the author of Avviso 2 says that Nina sang either "la mia Piva" or "il Colascione" suggests that they could be used interchangeably on account of their phallic nature. John Florio defines "piva" as "a man's privy members": Florio, *Queen Anna's New World*, s.v. "Piva." Both were unlikely choices for elite self-accompanied singing in this period. Muses were often depicted singing with a classical lyre or with other string instruments used in accompanying elite song genres.

100. See Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 175.

101. US-NHub, ICA, GEN MSS 110, box 89, folder 43, fols. 557–58, and folder 68, fols. 608–9. Both poems mention Donna Olimpia's daughter-in-law, Olimpia Aldobrandi, who did not marry Camillo until 1647. It is possible, however, that some of the stanzas were retained from earlier versions.

102. This may indicate that the entire opening stanza functioned as the refrain. Its general content would certainly make sense after each subsequent stanza. The reference to Innocent X as "Papa Pasquino" may allude to the considerable number of pasquinades that were dedicated to the ambitious building projects undertaken during the famine of 1646–48; see Hunt, *Vacant See*, 198.

103. The term "gl'inverti" in stanza 5, literally "the inverted," was often used in relation to sodomy, alluding to the supposed unnaturalness of that sexual act.

Torna al canto, e di cantando
ogni vitio empio, e nefando
di sua stirpe, e sua genia
Torna al canto ò musa mia

Nacque questi horribil' mostro
per tenor del secol nostro
tra il bordello, e l'hosteria
Torna al canto ò musa mia

Fù creata d'adulterio
e nudità in vituperio
fra gl'inverti, e sodomia
Torna al canto ò musa mia

Turn to song, O my Muse, / and retake in hand the lyre, / and with laughter dispatched to the heavens / speak ill of this harpy. / Turn to song, O my Muse.
Turn to song and prepare / to speak ill of this old woman, / more wicked than Medusa. / Turn to song, O my Muse.
Turn to song and tell in singing / every wicked and evil vice / of her offspring and her family. / Turn to song, O my Muse.
This horrible monster was born / in the way of our times / between the bordello and the inn. / Turn to song, O my Muse.
She was conceived in adultery / and in disgraceful nakedness / between the perverted and sodomy. / Turn to song, O my Muse.

Further defamatory descriptions include "the popess," "offspring of demons," "cruel, wicked whore," "the witch," and a comparison to Medea.[104]

Further details about the pasquinades circulating in 1645 can be found in contemporary descriptions of the texts. The version of "Tocca Musa" found in Braccesi's apartment was described as consisting of either three- or four-line stanzas, structurally resembling the later "Torna al canto ò musa mia."[105] It also contained a modified refrain: "Sporca Musa, il Colascione" (Defile, O Muse, the colascione).[106] This modification, which points to an even more slanderous aspect of these texts, is similar in tenor to another recorded refrain

104. US-NHub, ICA, GEN MSS 110, box 89, folder 68, fols. 608–9: "la Papessa"; "stirpe di Demonio"; "cruda empia Puttana"; "la Strega." Donna Olimpia was the target of many slanderous texts during this period. Concern over her uncommonly close relationship with the pope, her performance of duties normally undertaken by a cardinal nephew, her active involvement in prominent architectural projects, and her transformation of the papal court into one unusually open to noblewomen filled the *avvisi*, pasquinades, and other contemporary literature, including a satirical biography by Gregorio Leti, *Vita di Donna Olimpia Maldachini che governò la chiesa* (1667). See D'Amelia, "La nuova Agrippina"; D'Amelia, "Nepotismo al femminile," 353–57, 367–71; Tabarrini, "Donna Olimpia Pamphilj"; Vassalli, "Donna Olimpia Pamphili," 164; and Hunt, *Vacant See*, 198.

105. See Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 176.

106. Quoted in Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 176.

variant, "Tocca musa al culascione" (Touch, O Muse, the big bad ass), as well as both variants of "Prendi, Musa."[107] These texts more overtly emphasize the touching of body parts. Given the scurrilous and salacious nature of the extant texts, it is not hard to imagine that in some stanzas the Muse becomes Donna Olimpia herself. Associating Donna Olimpia with a phallic, low-class instrument, and through *double entendre* exhorting her to touch or defile someone's penis (or, through wordplay, someone's "big bad ass"), would have been highly shaming and certainly would have damaged the reputation of the intended target.[108] Demonstrating the creation of personal variants, these refrain variants reveal the generally fluid nature of pasquinades in practice. Personalization of the texts enabled citizens to demonstrate their own wit.[109]

The question, however, remains: Was the "Prendi, Musa" that Nina performed a sung pasquinade, as similar texts suggest? Although the terminology used to describe the song in the *avvisi* is ambiguous, it offers some insight into the possibilities of genre. Several authors use the term "canzone" when referring to "Prendi, Musa." One Capitoline *avviso* reports that Nina herself "sang" ("habbia cantata") this canzone.[110] Another author reports that no "dangerous canzoni" were discovered in Nina's home.[111] Yet "canzone" was not only a generic term for song; it could also refer to the poetry intended to be set or sung to music. One Parisian *avviso* indicates that the Pamphili were looking for "poetry [*Poesie*] against the parish priest and the parish" in Nina's home, an unambiguous reference to text alone.[112] Searching for poetry alone supports the hypothesis that "Prendi, Musa" was a sung pasquinade, given that Nina and her companions would have known the basic melody to which it was commonly sung. If it was a pasquinade, either Nina or Barberini's other courtiers and dependents would have sung it in the streets and in carriages. Indeed, perhaps it was via the public soundscape of Rome that Donna Olimpia first learned of this version of the ballad.

Yet the very ambiguity of the term "canzone" opens up wider musical possibilities for the song. Satirical content was also popular in musical genres sung indoors, including cantatas.[113] In an indoor setting, sung pasquinades

107. Quoted in Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 176 (Monson's translation).

108. In the "la mia Piva" refrain version she is asked to touch the author's penis. Monson hypothesizes that in some texts it may perhaps have belonged to Innocent X or his nephew Camillo: ibid., 175.

109. See Hunt, *Vacant See*, 195.

110. Avviso 2.

111. Avviso 4.

112. Avviso 3. Given the contemporary circulation of pasquinades targeting Innocent X, this passage may be a mocking reference to the pope and the church.

113. See Freitas, "Singing and Playing."

could easily have been transformed into musical performances more typical for the space. Nina could have modified and embellished the original melody, creating her own version of the song for her guests, changing it to reflect any poetic variants that either she or they might have invented. Going further, if Donna Olimpia was the Muse of the opening line, it may indicate that this song text had been changed into a satirical version of a traditional poem that took a noblewoman as inspiration for artistic expression.[114] Certainly, the Venetian opera librettist Francesco Buti, to whom Mantovani attributes the text of the version sung by Nina, would have been more than capable of writing a satirical canzone of this nature.[115] It is tempting to imagine Buti penning "Prendi, Musa" during one of Nina's *veglie* with the intention that the *virtuosa* either give an extempore performance, sing it to an existing cantata that was a favorite at her gatherings, or create a more considered musical setting. As in the pasquinade, the first line could have been retained as a refrain, as this was a common compositional feature of chamber cantatas; it would thus create musical cohesion while still allowing for possible textual variants of the first line and opportunities for her guests to join in its performance.[116]

Whether Nina's performance of "Prendi, Musa" was based on a composed cantata, a spontaneously improvised setting of the text, or a personalized version of an existing popular melody, her role in the creation and dissemination of the song reveals that *virtuose* could serve as mouthpieces for their patrons' political agendas in public and private, outdoors and indoors. Armed with the medium of song, the *virtuosa* became an effective political weapon against the enemies of her supporters. She herself became an embodiment of Barberini's political capital and the vehicle through which Donna Olimpia's honor was publicly compromised. According to the social historian Elizabeth Cohen, early modern honor was mainly determined by the observations and perceptions of others: "In honor culture a person's sense of worth lies not in internal virtue—as manifested in good intentions or a guiltless soul—but in the externals of bearing and deed, and in society's appreciation of them. Public respect certifies honor; public ridicule induces shame. Virtue and vice thus exist only when visible to onlookers."[117] The shaming effect that "Prendi, Musa" had on Donna Olimpia's public honor

114. On this tradition, see Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, 28–34.

115. Francesco Buti is best known as the librettist of several operas, oratorios, and other vocal works by composers including Girolamo Kapsberger, Luigi Rossi, Marco Marazzoli, Carlo Caprioli, Jean-Baptiste Lully, and Francesco Cavalli; see Walker and Murata, "Buti, Francesco."

116. Refrain forms in the Roman cantata were often indicated by the terms "intercalare" or "streviglia," the latter derived from the Spanish "estribillo," a refrain or vocal ritornello; see Marazzoli, *Cantatas*, xi; Gianturco, "Italian Seventeenth–Century Cantata"; and Rose, "Pasqualini as Copyist," 172–73.

117. Cohen, "Honor and Gender," 617.

is most explicitly recorded by the author of the Capitoline *avvisi*: "she [Nina] had sung a canzone . . . which wounds Donna Olimpia to the core."[118]

While Nina's singing ability and her role in Barberini's political agenda allowed her to wield a certain social power over the members of the elite by shaming through embodied song, this carried with it a high probability of significant social consequences. Achieving and maintaining social worth and honor was a process, one that for the early modern subject involved constant vigilance and actions taken to protect "his face, his body, his family, his house, his property."[119] Public challenges to honor required action in order to restore social respectability. The shaming performance by Nina presented a public challenge to Donna Olimpia's honor that demanded retribution in kind. The Pamphili orchestrated Nina's arrest in a manner that would cause as much damage to her public honor as she had caused to that of Donna Olimpia.[120] The protracted arrest occurred during a high-traffic period when many were *a spasso*, guaranteeing a large audience for her public shaming. Nina's musical involvement was symbolically targeted in the physical removal of her "books of musical canzoni and all serenatas."[121] By forcibly confiscating her musical possessions, the Pamphili symbolically stripped her of the skill that covered her sexual shame and that had enabled her to attain social acceptability and public honor. The removal of her music, in combination with "all her writings [and] books,"[122] divested her of all her important sources of cultural capital, publicly reducing her from elite courtesan to common prostitute (*meretrice*). The descriptions of the arrest's effects on Nina herself demonstrate the extent to which it violated her honor. Nina, described as normally spirited, was after the arrest "weakened in her person." The incident had "taken away the spirit and vivacity that characterized her."[123] The language used here, as well as that used to describe the effect of Nina's canzone about Donna Olimpia, demonstrates that when honor is compromised it does damage to a person's interior, to his or her "spirit" or "core."

118. Avviso 2.

119. Cohen, "Honor and Gender," 617. Cohen concludes, "Thus, injury, rape, theft, derision, or defilement all may signify loss of honor and must be revenged with a counterattack."

120. On the public honor of Roman courtesans, see ibid., 610, 619, and Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 216–17. In its purpose and manner, Nina's arrest was related to certain revenge crimes that were involved in larger rituals concerning honor, and that fell under the legal category of "injuria" (insult); see Cohen, "Honor and Gender," 617. The *avvisi* use similar language to describe the shamed parties in cases involving crimes in that category. On crimes of this sort involving Roman *virtuose*, see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 362–69.

121. Avviso 3. Canzoni are also mentioned in Avvisi 2 and 4.

122. Avviso 2.

123. Avviso 4. Despite the damage done, Nina fared better than Mantovani, who in 1648 was not only arrested for writing pasquinades against the Pamphili but executed; see Hunt, *Vacant See*, 198, 204–5. I thank John Hunt for sharing this information with me.

## The Power of the Pen: Cultural Anxiety

> He gifts her a sum upon entering, sometimes as much as a hundred gold *scudi*.[124]

The sexual and political power associated with courtesan song and the women who sang it stoked the cultural anxieties that pervaded contemporary literature. As courtesan power stemmed ultimately from relationships with elite men, these relationships came under scrutiny. Unease surrounded the substantial and public role courtesans often played in the overall self-fashioning of the elite male, which included the construction of male honor and *virtù*. Lavish spending on courtesans demonstrated not only virility, but also wealth and good taste. Courtesans themselves functioned as symbols of wealth and status, similar to luxury goods such as works of art.[125] Viewing their relationships with courtesans as a part of their self-fashioning, elite men overtly contributed to the courtesans' luxurious lifestyle. This enabled the most successful courtesans to attain social capital and wealth early in their careers, which they then retained even after their looks were gone. Anxiety over courtesans' access to power spilled out into a variety of early modern writings, which mediated the image of the courtesan not only for the Roman public but also for Europe more widely.

The Mantovani *avviso* quoted here above, which emphasizes Antonio Barberini's conspicuous spending on Nina, certainly manifests some of these cultural anxieties. In general, his accounts of the arrest do so through a misogynistic lens, as do many contemporary discourses about courtesans. Such accounts formed part of a broader seventeenth-century trend of patently misogynistic discourse, as exemplified by the pasquinades about Donna Olimpia.[126] Women who exceeded the expectations of their sex by acting outside of traditional boundaries were vilified, often in an extravagant, sensual style of writing that helped to dissolve the separation between women and the carnal.[127] While Virginia Cox notes that, for many male writers, such literature provided a vehicle through which to rehearse rhetorical stances rather than express true misogynistic convictions, the damage to public reputations was very real.[128] *Virtuose* like Nina, who figured prominently in elite social

124. Avviso 1.

125. See Ruggiero, "Who's Afraid of Giulia Napolitana?," 283.

126. See Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, 177–79, 200. Cox notes that, while Italy in general saw a rise in misogynistic literature in the seventeenth century, in Urban VIII's Rome a conservative, anti-Marinist trend somewhat tempered overt misogynistic sentiment. Even so, misogynistic literature about Roman women and courtesans by non-Roman authors circulated throughout Italy and Europe, as discussed further below.

127. This poetic style was disseminated by the followers of Giambattista Marino; see ibid., 179. For further discussion of the way the Marinist aesthetic landscape impacted women's relationship to literature as both authors and subjects, see Costa, *Buffoons*, 24–25.

128. Cox finds that misogyny functioned "as a kind of 'society game' usefully facilitating relations among men": Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, 193–94.

spaces, were obvious targets, serving as subjects in the growing corpus of misogynistic literature.[129] While Mantovani's depictions of Nina were not as openly virulent as certain others, they touch on standard themes that are fleshed out more overtly in other writings of the time.

Mid-seventeenth-century Italian literature about courtesans focused mainly on deceptive practices and the concomitant gains reaped from them, including the accumulation of significant wealth. Deception, however, or specifically dissimulation (*dissimulazione*)—the more morally neutral contemporary conception of it— was considered a necessary skill for all those who created careers in the elite spaces of Roman society.[130] As noted above, Jesuit priest Giovan Domenico Ottonelli believed that the church itself needed to dissimulate with regard to the tolerance of prostitution. Dissimulation and emulation were well recognized by writers on Roman court practices as skills that successful male courtiers should cultivate. For Agostino Mascardi, *principe* of the most prestigious literary academy in Rome, the Accademia degli Umoristi, this meant hiding one's individuality and accurately imitating the conduct of those at court: "When one enters the service of the court it is necessary to absorb the styles and etiquette practiced by the majority, so as not to make oneself odious through the singularity of one's conduct. . . . The courtier becomes such a master of his own feelings at court, that he could serve as an ideal for the writers of moral science."[131] For courtesans, successful dissimulation involved emulation not only of the styles and general comportment of noblewomen but also of the language and persuasive skills of noblemen. It is this blurring of the boundaries between traditionally masculine and feminine behavior that leads historian Elizabeth

129. While misogynistic attitudes resulted in slander against prominent singing *virtuose*, they also played a part in the general decline in the participation of *virtuosa* female writers and poets in the same circles; see ibid., xvii. For a discussion of seventeenth-century Italian female writers in the context of the growing misogyny, see Westwater, "Disquieting Voice." On female writers' participation in literary academies in Rome, see Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 180–81; Cox, "Members, Muses, Mascots"; Sarrocchi, *Scanderbeide*, 11; and Bettella, "Women and the Academies," 102–5.

130. Although dissimulation was far more morally neutral than deception, some court commentators questioned the relationship of dissimulation to the truth (*verità*) even for elite male courtiers; see Peregrini, *Che al savio*, 378–89; Peregrini, *Della pratica comune*, 265; and Manzini, *Della peripetia di fortuna*, 152.

131. Mascardi, *Prose vulgari*, 48: "quando uno entra a servi della Corte è necessario, che imbeva lo stile, e la prattica osservata da i più, per non rendersi odioso con la singolarità del costume"; 97: "Il cortigiano tanto assolutamente diviene in corte padrone de' propri affetti, che può servire per un'idea a gli scrittori della scientia morale." For a brief history of the topic of *dissimulazione* in writings about the court, see Molina, "L'uomo publico," 53–55, 70. Didactic texts such as Mascardi's *discorsi* served as models for satirical works that discuss dissimulation and emulation in regard to the early modern courtesan, including Pietro Aretino's *Sei giornate* (1534) and Ferrante Pallavicino's *La retorica delle puttane* (1642); see Merolla, "Dal cortigiano al servidore"; Betti, "Trattatistica civile nel Seicento"; Panizza, "Ferrante Pallavicino's *La retorica*"; and Pallavicino, *La retorica delle puttane*.

Horodowich to suggest that courtesans sometimes represented a third sex.[132] For contemporaries, the dissimulation of the liminal third sex provoked an anxiety that is expressed in a range of texts in negative terms—as deception, the root of all its contemptible behavior.

The deceptive power of female singing, which by this period had become a timeworn trope, remained a prominent theme in contemporary writings, as demonstrated by Ottonelli's treatise *Della pericolosa conversatione con le donne* (On dangerous conversation with women, 1646):[133]

> Prolonged acquaintance [with female singers] has great power to persuade the eyes of strange and outlandish things. . . . It can happen that the sweetness of the song is such that it engenders in the hearer an immense love for a deformed female singer, and that this love then in its usual way masks completely, or almost completely, the deformity; whereby the face, in itself ugly, appears by chance beautiful, or less ugly, to the singer's fond lover.[134]

Singing thus enabled all women to enchant, deceive, and ultimately force men to fall in love.[135] Elsewhere in the same treatise Ottonelli is more direct about his concern, calling the *virtuosa* an "architect of fraud, smith of deception, mistress of lies and errors."[136]

Other writers, concerned that the Jesuits themselves were masters of deception, used the image of the deceptive courtesan in anti-papal literature. Courtesans became a metaphor for all that was wrong in the papal city. In one such satire, *La retorica delle puttane* (The whores' rhetoric, 1642), Ferrante Pallavicino focused on the power courtesans gained through their dissimulating mastery of language. Emulating the structure of the rhetoric manual most used in Jesuit education, Pallavicino highlighted the flattery, hypocrisy, and

132. Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft*, 194. Horodowich clarifies that this occurs both through their behavior and through depictions of it and goes beyond disrupting the categories of masculine and feminine.

133. The full title of the work enumerates the types of women who provide conversation, "whether those of little modesty, or the retiring, or singers, or members of academies" ("ò poco modeste, ò ritrate, ò cantatrici, ò accademiche").

134. Ottonelli, *Della pericolosa conversatione*, 445–46: "La famigliarità continuata hà gran forza di persuadere à gli occhi cose insolite, e stravaganti. . . . [P]uò avvenire, che la dolcezza del canto sia tale, che concigli nell'Uditore un grandissimo amore verso la deforme Cantatrice, e che poi quell'amore al solito suo cuopra in tutto, ò quasi in tutto, la deformità; onde il viso, per se stesso brutto, comparisca per accidente bello, ò men brutto, all'affettionato Amatore della Cantatrice." Ottonelli believed that the female voice in general held this power, and therefore also advocated the avoidance of female conversation: ibid., 34.

135. Bonnie Gordon recognizes that the association between singing and courtesans, which began in the sixteenth century, both gave song its erotic connotations and enhanced the courtesan's sexual capital: Gordon, "Courtesan's Singing Body," 188. On the courtesan's voice, see the various contributions to Feldman and Gordon, *Courtesan's Arts*, pt. 2.

136. Ottonelli, *Della pericolosa conversatione*, 400: "Architetta di frodi, Fabra d'inganni, Maestra di falsità e di errori." Here he is speaking directly about women who converse in academic settings, who include courtesan *virtuose*.

duplicity of prostitutes in order to condemn the same behavior in the Jesuits. His concern, therefore, was not with sexual practice per se but with courtesans' deceit and the avarice that fueled it.[137]

The political power that courtesans could access through their persuasive singing and rhetorical skills was likewise of great concern to a number of writers. The Barberini client Niccolò Strozzi, in his *Avvertimenti necessari per i cortegiani* (Necessary advice for courtiers, ca. 1640), expressed misgivings about the political information to which courtesans were privy at their gatherings: "as soon as you say something to such women, their arrogance and feminine inconstancy makes them desperate to repeat it."[138] Providing an example, he relates how the famed sixteenth-century Roman courtesan Imperia affected the outcome of a Vacant See by unwittingly sharing information gleaned from one lover with another.

Yet concerns went beyond the unintentional consequences of thoughtless prattle, extending to the intentional shaping of political reality through deliberately deceitful practices. In another anti-papal work, *Il puttanismo romano* (The whores of Rome, 1668), author Gregorio Leti, a Protestant convert and virulent critic of the papacy, directly satirized Nina and other powerful women active in Rome by making them the characters of his fictional narrative. Leti set the satire at a conclave where the "ladies" and "whores" of the city have assembled to elect the next pope, portraying the women as actively wielding political power.[139] Leti's female conclavists are set on restoring the political influence they had lost during the papacy of Alexander VII (1655–67) as a result of the sodomitical predilections and practices that dominated his court. The women therefore agree to elect a pope who is susceptible to their female charms, in hopes of once again using their sexual capital for political gain. Specifically, each woman attempts to use her rhetorical prowess and skill at dissimulation to convince the others to elevate her main cardinal supporter to pope—in Nina's case, Cardinal Angelo Celsi.[140] The other women accuse Nina of acting only in self-interest at any cost: "It is known all over *Rome*, that you made a conspiracy against all the rest of your poor Companions, to procure their ruine, without any hope of recovery."[141] Leti, therefore, specifically depicted Nina as wielding power—in a calculating, mercenary manner—

137. See Panizza, "Ferrante Pallavicino's *La retorica*."

138. Quoted in Woodhouse, "La cortegianía," 179: "femmine simili non prima se li dice una cosa che par lor mille anni per iattanza e leggierezza femminile di ridirla."

139. Leti's knowledge of Roman social practices was acquired firsthand. At the end of Urban VIII's papacy, when Leti was in his years of *gioventù*, he spent time in Rome in the home of his uncle, a Roman ecclesiastic; see Leti, *Il puttanismo romano*, 20. For an overview of Leti's career, see Brétéché, "La plume européenne."

140. Hailing from a noble Roman family, Celsi (1600–71) was created cardinal by Alexander VII Chigi in 1664 with the title Cardinal-Deacon of San Giorgio in Velabro. In 1668 he became Cardinal-Deacon of Sant'Angelo in Pescheria. See Palma, "Celsi, Angelo."

141. Leti, *Il putanismo di Roma, or The History of the Whores*, 36.

reserved for the highest positions in the Roman church. The dissemination of Leti's *Il puttanismo romano* throughout Europe helped make Roman courtesans an international symbol for a corrupt papacy.[142]

Negative images of Nina also circulated abroad via the *avvisi* during the 1645 arrest. While the portrayal of her by Mantovani is not nearly as brutal as that of Leti, it too emphasizes her supposedly negative attributes. Mantovani, whose focus is on the exorbitant sums attached to the gifts Nina received from Barberini, points to the avarice that drives courtesans' deceptive practices. His emphasis on the financial dealings of the courtesan targets the area in which she had significant autonomy and power. Courtesans like Nina maintained a financial freedom that was normally only available to male heads of household and widows. Even the most powerful Roman noblewomen, when married, were dependent on the whims of their husbands in terms of access to money.[143] Ultimately, courtesans controlled with whom they entered into financial transactions and how they spent that money, which resulted in a cultural unease that was commonly voiced in social narratives about courtesans. In such literature, Guido Ruggiero notes, "when it came to the economic aspects of the courtesan, attractive objects could easily become dangerous predators."[144] Popular literature portrayed courtesans as mercenaries who used their sexual prowess to create desire in foolish men, who would then lose their reason, squander their wealth, and fall into ruin.[145] Mantovani's *avvisi* contribute to this narrative by painting Barberini as the fool and Nina as the greedy whore.

As previously noted, Mantovani's interest in Nina's wealth stems from his desire to highlight Barberini's profligate spending of his ill-gotten gains from the War of Castro. The enormity of the purported sum donated by Barberini—"as much as a hundred gold *scudi*"—becomes clear in a comparison with the cost per head at the gathering of *virtuose* described by Sommelsdyck, which was "a *scudo* or two."[146] While it is clear from Sommelsdyck's description that these *virtuose* were not catering to the

142. *Il puttanismo romano* was published in at least seven editions and in several European languages; see Pattenden, *Electing the Pope*, 95. Leti also published pasquinades and dialogues between Pasquino and Marforio, some of which were included in his satirical publications, which, like *Il puttanismo romano*, reached a wider European audience; see Leti, *Il puttanismo romano*, 19–21.

143. On the finances of Roman noblewomen, see Feci, *Pesci fuor d'acqua*, and Borello, *Trame sovrapposte*. On the legal procedings initiated by Olimpia Aldobrandini Pamphili against her husband Camillo Pamphili over her allowance and living arrangements, see Borello, "Annodare e sciogliere."

144. Ruggiero, "Who's Afraid of Giulia Napolitana?," 284.

145. For the image of the courtesan constructed in popular literature, see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 25–56. For this type of literature about the sixteenth-century Venetian courtesan, see Quaintance, "Defaming the Courtesan," 205–6. In reality, scams were a common aspect of sexual commerce as a whole; see Ruggiero, "Who's Afraid of Giulia Napolitana?," 284.

146. The emphasis on monetary values in references to courtesans in the *avvisi* provides a stark contrast to the popular broadsheet literature, in which specifics about payment are never mentioned; see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 250.

most elite men in the city, his identification of them as *virtuose* and his referring to them as "honorable" indicates that they occupied a position in the social hierarchy that was well above that of the lowest prostitutes. Mantovani also affixed a sum to a gift that Barberini reportedly gave Nina after the arrest: "Now she is displaying a large silver coin [*Conione*] that is worth 500 *scudi*, and says that it was given to her by His Eminence."[147] Five hundred *scudi* was roughly ten times the yearly rent (54 *scudi*) paid by one of the more affluent courtesans for a house near the Quattro Fontane, an elite area close to Palazzo Barberini.[148] It was more than twice the yearly sum of 200 *scudi* that, according to the *avvisi* for the French court, Barberini paid to *virtuosa* Leonora Baroni per year for rent of a palazzo next to Piazza Navona, another elite area near Palazzo Pamphili.[149] The outrageous sums that Mantovani alleges Barberini gave to Nina serve to highlight his expendable wealth, making it likely that the reported value was inflated. Yet whether accurate or exaggerated, Mantovani's words should be read as an attempt to provoke a specific response in the reader: namely, disapproval of Barberini's conspicuous spending. By highlighting the lavish sums that Barberini was squandering on Nina, Mantovani links him to the foolish men in the cautionary popular literature about courtesans.

In turn, Mantovani's portrayal of Nina emphasizes her sexual practice and her avarice. He opens his first *avviso* by identifying her as "the most famous courtesan in Rome," not as a singer, as other authors did.[150] As noted above, he also laid bare Barberini's strategy of using her valuable cultural assets to cover the sexual shame of both: "His Eminence makes use of her *virtù* as a cover for her/his practice."[151] It may also be that his enumeration of the costs of Barberini's donation and gift served to highlight not only the amount Nina was receiving but also her sexual practice. By ascribing a monetary value to Barberini's donation and the silver *conione*, he was, I believe, challenging an important source of Nina's social capital: inclusion in the elite gift-based patronage system.[152]

For Nina, a courtesan *virtuosa* who catered to the city's most elite men, gifts would have been the normal mode of payment for any type of service rendered. Within the elite patronage system, even payments in monetary

147. Avviso 7.

148. See Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 294.

149. See Avviso 6. Both of these neighborhoods were populated by elite families, and neither was associated with prostitution. On the areas in which courtesans lived, see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 67–94.

150. Avviso 1. He does mention her singing ability, but only after he has established that she is a courtesan.

151. Ibid.

152. There is an extensive cross-disciplinary literature on gifting. In addition to the overview of the literature provided by Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, 36–54, I also found useful Mauss, *The Gift*, 31–45, and Kettering, *Patronage*, 131–51. Particularly relevant to Barberini's Rome is Cole, "Cultural Clientelism," 741.

amounts were conceptualized as gifts. Gift-giving "produced status, identity and credibility" for both patron and client.[153] By entering into a contract of reciprocal exchange with a client, the patron recognized the client's status and abilities as worthy of his dignity.[154] The monetary value of gifts given by patrons represented and established the social worth of the client. The gifting mentality is present in Sommelsdyck's description of gatherings at the homes of *virtuose*, where the men paid a donation as they left, as if the money were given freely as a gift, not out of obligation.[155] This would have held true not only for social and cultural services rendered, such as entertainment and conversation, but also for the body of the courtesan. The courtesan was understood to give her body freely as a gift, and in order to preserve her honor and his, the man offered a counter-gift—monetary or otherwise.[156]

Lavish gifts from elite supporters symbolized and reinforced the high social worth of courtesans, who still existed at the margins of respectability despite the significant role they played in elite society. Elite men often gifted to courtesan *virtuose* the same types of items that would be gifted to noblewomen—clothing, jewelry, or, in Nina's case, a silver *conione*.[157] This large silver coin appears to bear similarities to the medallions that some Italian rulers gave as gifts to visitors.[158] The fact that Nina had this impressive object on display, enabling it to become a topic of conversation, suggests that it held a similar symbolic value to that of a gift medallion or jewels. Given their symbolic value, expensive gifts were commonly involved in ritual public shamings of courtesans who broke the law: when courtesans were caught in the illegal act of riding in carriages, for instance, stripping them of their jewels in the street was the usual punishment, followed by incarceration.[159] Such a public act erased the signs of participation in elite society and reduced the courtesan to a mere *meretrice*. In Nina's case, the expensive, jewel-like gift from Barberini helped to restore her honor after her arrest. Her display and discussion of his gift

153. Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, 41.

154. See Peregrini, *Della pratica comune*, 130.

155. For a good summary of gift culture in relation to courtesans, see James Davidson's study on ancient Greek hetaerae: Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 109–12, 120–27. It may be that in Nina's home the donation was normally made at the end of the evening, as in Sommelsdyck's description. If so, Barberini's paying on the way in was a way of drawing attention to the exorbitant sum he was donating and perhaps of demonstrating his interest in becoming Nina's main protector.

156. See Ferrante, "Pro mercede carnali," 44–45. Ferrante explains that a gift was a "natural obligation" that a man was legally bound to honor and that a woman had a right to demand in court.

157. On jewelry as a common form of reciprocal gift from courtesan suitors, see Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 319.

158. Biagioli notes that the medallions made by the Medici, which sported the effigy of the prince, were expected to be retained like a gift, whereas a chain, worth a standard cash amount of *scudi*, was intended to be used similarly to cash: Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, 41.

159. See Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 250.

following her incarceration was a means of establishing his favor and reinforced her status as an elite courtesan. Contemporaries may also have perceived it as a reward. A Capitoline *avviso* indicated that the spate of arrests of those connected to Barberini was negatively affecting his relationships with all his dependents. "He will lose completely the friendship [*Amicizia*] of his dependents, every one of whom will fear being put in prison for having a close relationship with Antonio."[160] With supporters conceivably jumping ship at the mere possibility of arrest, Nina's loyalty to Barberini even after her shaming arrest would have warranted a large, expensive, conspicuous gift as recompense.

Mantovani's emphasis on the cost of Nina's gifts, however, seems to have been an attempt to strip her of her social worth. While in the case of elite men and women, mention of the high monetary value of gifts served to emphasize their high social worth,[161] for Nina it does not appear to have functioned in the same way. Given Mantovani's negative tone, it is unlikely that his intention was to reinforce Nina's social standing. In her case, as someone whose inclusion in elite culture was constantly being contested, reducing her gifts to the price paid for them served to undermine their symbolic social power. Their cost would have reminded Mantovani's readers of her lower-class status, as well as the sexual practice that contributed to it.

## Courtesans as Courtiers

> They claim that the offense took place after she had formed a close relationship [*amicizia*] with Antonio.[162]
>
> All was executed to mortify Antonio, and to torment him as much as possible.[163]

Mantovani's acknowledgment of the large coin, Nina's reward for her continued loyalty to Antonio Barberini, highlights the public, political nature of their relationship and sheds light on the actual roles courtesans played in the political sphere. Several *avvisi* reveal existing political practices involving courtesans that helped to fuel the anxieties expressed about them in male-authored literature. The details provided by the *avvisi* occur in the descriptions of various relationships that courtesans had with elite men.

The reported gossip about the Duke of Créquy in the *avviso* quoted above would seem to point to the political importance that the "singers of Rome" held for him. By portraying him as "[making] his rounds paying compliments to the singers," the author appears to wittily conflate his

160. Avviso 2.
161. See Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, 39, 41.
162. Avviso 2.
163. Avviso 4.

normal ambassadorial duties with his socialization with Roman courtesans, women who possessed the same diplomatic mastery of language and skills of persuasion as himself.[164] This apparent dig at Créquy seems to reflect an existing social practice. Courtesans were not just passive spectators of men's conversation, as was the fate for many Roman noblewomen. Rather, they actively participated, using their rhetorical abilities to shape conversations, to persuade, to convince, and to influence. Not only did they have access to intimate details about powerful men and their political strategies, but they were in a position whereby their ability to dissimulate and persuade could help them personally to benefit from this knowledge. The possession of these diplomatic skills is what leads Horodowich to suggest that in Venice, a city famed abroad for its courtesan culture, some of the most elite courtesans played a diplomatic role for high-profile foreign visitors.[165] Although Roman courtesans might not have served such an overt diplomatic function, the *avviso* pertaining to Créquy suggests that diplomats recognized courtesans' potential political influence, an influence that would have impelled them to cultivate relationships with such women. Before Créquy left town, he might have sought to fortify his relationships with "the singers of Rome" as he would have done with any politically important elite male. In his absence they could provide him with important information and act as allies in his political agenda.

The *avvisi* relating to Nina's arrest attest to other political roles played by courtesans. Their descriptions of Nina's and Barberini's various relationships at the time of the arrest point to similarities between the latter's relationship with the courtesan and his relationships with his male dependents. One such similarity is the use of the term "amicizia" for both these kinds of relationship, examples of which are found in the Capitoline *avvisi*.[166] Literally translated as "friendship," the word "amicizia" was used to describe a range of relationship types in early modern Italy, although scholars agree that when used with respect to homosocial male relationships it commonly indicated a type of patronage tie.[167] In the *avviso* that refers to the fears aroused in Barberini's dependents by Nina's arrest, the author's use of "amicizia" indicates a close, significant relationship, as demonstrated by his description of the relationship between Barberini and his dependents as one of "intrinsichezza" (familiarity or intimacy).

The same author also uses the term "amicizia" to describe heterosocial relationships involving Nina, a usage that was less common. He first uses it to describe her relationship with Barberini: "In Nina's name a woman was

164. See page 216 above.

165. Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft*, 198–202.

166. Avvisi 2 and 4.

167. See Burke, *Italian Renaissance*, 100–101; Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, 42; Lytle, "Friendship and Patronage"; Kettering, *Patronage*, 849; and Cole, "Cultural Clientelism," 741.

disfigured for stealing her Flemish lover, who was dear to her. And they claim that the offense took place after she had formed a close relationship [*amicizia*] with Antonio, and that the blow was ordered by His Eminence."[168] He subsequently applies it to her relationship to Ranuzzi: "because of Count Ranuzzi's close relationship [*Amicizia*] with Nina, they wanted to find out where he had gone."[169] The details that have surfaced about the use of the term "amicizia" in relation to courtesans suggest that in these cases it also signifies familiarity and the importance of the relationship. One example occurs in the court testimony of a certain Albertus Brecatius Lucrentis, doctor to several cardinals. Despite the fact that Lucrentis himself had relationships with two courtesans that involved both sex and socialization, when he was asked if he had "amicizia" with any women, he said no. He later clarified: "Although I have had dealings with women, being a man like any other, I have never had a close relationship [*amicitia*] with them, either alone . . . or in company."[170] Using the term "amicizia" in this instance refers to a relationship of significant support that was common in the social model of Roman prostitution, in which the male supporter is often described as an "amico fermo" (literally, a firm friend). In a typical *amico fermo*–courtesan relationship, the *amico fermo* not only socialized and had sex with a courtesan on a regular basis but also regularly contributed to her upkeep, providing funds for rent and household necessities. He provided social protection much as a patron would protect a client. It is clear from the context in which Nina's *amicizia* with Barberini is revealed that he was acting as her *amico fermo*. As noted above, one of the *avvisi* reports that, at Nina's request, Barberini had arranged a common revenge crime—a "sfregio" (a disfiguring knife wound to the face)—against a woman who had once stolen Nina's Flemish lover.[171] Barberini's action served to rectify publicly a perceived slight to the courtesan's honor and, in doing so, publicly demonstrated his support for her.

While a relationship with an *amico fermo* was significant, it was not necessarily exclusive, as is revealed by the descriptions in the *avvisi* of Nina's

168. Avviso 2.

169. Avviso 4.

170. Quoted in Storey, "'Questo negozio è aromatichissimo,'" 144: "Se ho ben trattato con le donne, che sono home [*sic*] come l'altri, ma non ho tenuta amicita [*sic*] stretta ne solo . . . ne in compagnia." Lucrentis's reference to "company" alludes to the practice of sharing the upkeep of a courtesan with other elite men. On Lucrentis's testimony, see also Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 222–23.

171. The word "sfregio" denoted a range of revenge crimes that challenged honor through disfigurement, whether that of one's physical person or a symbolic disfigurement of one's home and possessions. There is a possibility that the *sfregio* in question was of the symbolic kind—a house scorning—where the façade of the home is marked with ink or excrement, symbolically emulating the actual knife wound to the face. It appears that the majority of house scornings were perpetrated against courtesans and prostitutes. These crimes fell under the legal category of *injuria*. See Cohen, "Honor and Gender."

relationships with various men. In addition to her relationship with Barberini, Nina was having or had had relationships with the Fleming, Ranuzzi, and others: "There were three angry love letters, written to her by passionate lovers."[172] That Nina's relationship with Ranuzzi was also described as "amicizia" likewise demonstrates that a courtesan could even have more than one *amico fermo.* Courtesans regularly developed multiple significant relationships of support. The *amici fermi* of a courtesan usually had some type of common sociopolitical bond, ranging from ties to an elite family or ambassador to a simple friendship of equals.[173] In Nina's case, given that Ranuzzi moved in the same social circles as Barberini's dependents, it is likely that her other *amici fermi* would also have had social or political ties to her main *amico fermo.*[174]

The courtesan model of sociability, with its emphasis on multiple supporting relationships, in some ways resembled in practice the patronage model for homosocial male relationships. The exclusive relationship between client and patron characteristic of the Mediterranean patronage system was still recognized as the most coveted by court commentators active in Barberini Rome. Yet, in practice, the cultivation of multiple significant relationships of social and financial support was a necessity for the political survival of elite men in Rome, reflecting the social and political realities of the city.[175] Given the common ground between this model of social support and that of the courtesans, it is not surprising that authors used the same terminology to describe heterosocial courtesan relationships and homosocial male relationships.

The use of the term "amicizia" in descriptions of the arrest also suggests other similarities between the relationships Barberini had with his supporters and with Nina. The public actions against Nina that were orchestrated by the Pamphili demonstrate not only that she had a significant relationship with Barberini, but also that she served a public political function for him. Her arrest reveals that, like Barberini's male dependents, she played a public role in the construction of the cardinal's honor. In early modern Italy it was common for one political rival to challenge the honor of another through compromising actions against the latter's dependents.

172. Avviso 4.

173. Men in these significant relationships with courtesans sometimes still socialized and had sex with other courtesans; see Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 214–16.

174. It appears that courtesans sometimes had one main relationship of support alongside other regular but less significant relationships. Ranuzzi's exact relationship to Barberini is unclear. He was close to Barberini's dependent Possenti, and was also a relative of Possenti's former patron, Marquis Cornelio Malvasia, who had recommended Possenti to Barberini and who socialized with Abbot Braccesi in Bologna. Ranuzzi arrived in Rome in 1644, before Barberini, Braccesi, and Possenti. He may have introduced Nina to Braccesi, who was known to enjoy the company of courtesans and other sexually available women in Bologna. Perhaps Barberini met Nina through Braccesi. See Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 71, 75, 233–34, 228.

175. See Cole, "Cultural Clientelism," 784.

The relationship between the honor of dependents and that of their patrons was connected to the understanding of dependents as possessions, objects to be owned. In Rome this was explicitly articulated by court commentator Matteo Peregrini, who noted in his *Della pratica comune a' prencipi e servidori loro* (On the practices common to princes and their servants, 1634) that for the prince, "of all the riches, that most worthy of possessing is a man."[176] In his *Che al savio è convenevole il corteggiare* (That it is proper for a scholar to be a courtier, 1624), he called courtiers "animated furnishings."[177] From this perspective, the courtier was simply another acquisition in the prince's pursuit of conspicuous consumption, another object demonstrating his wealth, taste, and *virtù*.[178] The *avvisi* demonstrate that Nina, like Barberini's male dependents, was also seen as a possession that expressed the taste and status of her most important *amico fermo*. Mantovani's *avvisi* most overtly portray Nina as an expensive object by affixing monetary values to her gifts, thereby assigning a value to her.

*Avvisi* and diaries are filled with descriptions of public and private incidents involving both courtesans and Barberini's male dependents that ultimately impacted the cardinal's honor. In some instances, the damage to his honor was unintentional, a by-product of the complex and fluid social hierarchy of Rome. In such cases, these acts created a ripple effect of shame that traveled upward and ultimately impacted Barberini himself. One such incident, a public uproar originating at a *conversazione* held at Nina's home on September 25, 1637, initiated a chain of attempts by men of differing social status to safeguard Barberini's public honor. At this gathering, an "unpleasantness" ("disgusto") erupted between Cardinal Pietro Maria Borghese and Duke Mario II Sforza of Santa Fiora—both *amici* of Barberini.[179] This confrontation resulted in the arrest of four cavaliers who were dependents of Borghese. Borghese immediately petitioned the governor of Rome, Giovanni Spada, to release them so that his men would not "suffer for love of him."[180] He also asked that the reason for their imprisonment be kept secret so as not to damage his reputation.[181] Luckily for Borghese, the Barberini family also needed to save its reputation in that both Borghese and

176. Peregrini, *Della pratica comune*, 27: "di tutte le ricchezze la più degna da possedersi è l'uomo."

177. Peregrini, *Che al savio*, 50: "suppelletile animata."

178. On the conception of courtiers and singers as objects to be collected by patrons, which was connected to the burgeoning culture of collection in seventeenth-century Rome, see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 243–47.

179. See Spada, *Racconto delle cose*, 61. Borghese was the patron of singer Magdelena Lolli. On Lolli, see Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo,'" 364–70.

180. Spada, *Racconto delle cose*, 61: "patissero per amor suo." This language is similar to Barberini's alleged comment to Braccesi at the time of his arrest: "Go along cheerfully and accept a few days in jail for love of me": quoted in Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 114.

181. Spada, *Racconto delle cose*, 61: "hebbe per bene acciò non si divulgasse la causa della loro carceratione pregiuditio della riputatione di detto Sig. Cardinale."

Sforza had relationships with Antonio: "having taken into account the incident and the future danger to Cardinal Antonio as a mutual friend, His Eminence saw to it that a settlement and peace was procured between the said gentlemen."[182] This particular incident reveals just how easily the arrest of elite men's clients could cause them shame and dishonor if such situations were not contained before the wider public learned of them.

Another incident, the arrest of the courtesan Cecilia Bozzoli, demonstrated that slights to a courtesan's honor could also impact Barberini's indirectly. After a crackdown on illegal activities and ineffectual law enforcement in the summer of 1635, an overzealous police corporal arrested Cecilia while she was in the company of Barberini's gentleman Count Giulio Massa. In the case of Cecilia, the governor was well aware of the gravity of the error committed by the corporal. Immediately upon notification and before she was imprisoned, the governor let Cecilia go. Despite this expeditious intervention, however, the public arrest was enough for Massa to feel obliged to clear his name. He complained to Barberini about the incident, who in turn "felt great anger" toward both the corporal and the governor on account of the public shame it caused him.[183] When incidents involving the honor of a dependent were not completely contained or avoided, action needed to be taken to repair the damage done to the honor of both patron and dependent. In this case, unfortunately for Spada, it fell to him to rectify the slight, a task that turned out to be quite complex and delicate. While Antonio wanted to punish the corporal, seemingly with a beating, the governor was cognizant that this would cause "very serious offense to the most eminent Barberini brothers," thus further compromising the honor of other members of the Barberini family.[184] In the end, Antonio had to be satisfied with a formal apology by the governor, given in person before an audience of other elite men closely connected with the family.

Nina's arrest differed from the examples cited above in that it was born of the Pamphili's express desire to do significant damage to Barberini's honor. It also occurred when he was in a weakened political position, which made it impossible for him to manage the incident in private as he had been able to do as cardinal nephew. Instead, he suffered the public humiliation that is

182. Ibid.: "havendo dato conto del successo, e de i pericoli futuri al Sig. Card. Antonio come amico commune, S.Em. prese pensiero di procurare l'aggiustamento e la quiete fra li detti Signori."

183. Ibid., 13: "Count Massa having complained to His Eminence about the offense committed against him by the policeman, the Signor Cardinal felt great anger not only toward him [the policeman], but toward the governor as well" ("il conte della Massa doluto con Sua Eminenza dell'affronto fattoli dallo sbiro ne concepì il Sig. Card. gravissimo sdegno non contro di lui solo, ma contro il Governatore ancora").

184. Ibid., 15: "troppo gravi disgusti per gli Em.mi Fratelli Barberini." The punishment of the corporal may have mainly risked compromising Cardinal Francesco, as it was he who warned the governor about the planned public beating of the corporal and discreetly advised him as to how he might appease Antonio.

well documented in the *avvisi*. The author of the Capitoline *avvisi* recorded not only the fear of Barberini's dependents, but also that of members of the Barberini family, indicating the gravity of the situation: "[Cardinal Francesco] Barberini and Don Taddeo met yesterday at the house of Cardinal Antonio, and together with Abbot Costa they remained closeted for more than three hours. And this indicates that the blow weighs heavily on them, and that they are very afraid."[185] Four days later, the same author interpreted Nina's sudden release as an indication that "all was executed to mortify Antonio, and to torment him as much as possible."[186] A week after that, Mantovani similarly commented on the personal effect of the incarceration on Barberini: "Nor can one say how much the incarceration of this woman has wounded his soul."[187] Although Barberini no longer had the power to organize any significant retaliation against the Pamphili, he did take action to attempt to mitigate the shame he had endured. Instead of ending his relationship with Nina and thus "being deprived of the conversation of her who so lifted his spirits," he openly declared that he would continue to socialize with her, expressly "to demonstrate that he is not afraid, and that the search and imprisonment had nothing to do with him."[188] His gift to Nina, the large coin, not only helped to mitigate the damage to Nina's honor but would have been perceived as a physical representation of Barberini's public decision to continue his relationship with her.

By targeting Nina, the Pamphili demonstrated their understanding that courtesans, like Barberini's male dependents, were fair game in public acts of revenge intended to target the honor of their supporters. The Pamphili treated Nina as a physical extension or "possession" of Barberini, just as they had Barberini's secretary Giovanni Braccesi during his arrest. They counted on the ripple effect of shame that her arrest would create as a means of inflicting permanent political damage on him.

The Pamphili surely considered Nina's arrest a success, despite the fact that Antonio Barberini had not been present. It was the last in a string of public humiliations and threats that the family meted out to him before he finally fled Rome on September 28, 1645. The perceived necessity for an emergency meeting of the Barberini brothers and their advisors indicates that prolonged persecution of their family by the Pamphili had finally taken its toll. Despite Antonio's efforts publicly to defend his own and Nina's honor before he left the city, his attempt to manage the situation was one of the last things he did in Rome for many years. Nina's arrest helped to make it clear

185. Avviso 2.

186. Avviso 4.

187. Avviso 7. Mantovani uses the same type of language as that used by the author of the Capitoline *avvisi* (Avvisi 2 and 4) to indicate that the honor of Donna Olimpia and of Nina had been compromised.

188. Avviso 2; Avviso 4.

to him that it was time to flee to Paris, where his onetime dependent Jules Mazarin, the current first minister of France, would protect him and his brothers until 1653.

Nina, however, remained in Rome. While details of her later career are sketchy, she apparently weathered the political storm of 1645. Sometime between 1646 and 1648 she socialized, and perhaps developed a more significant relationship, with the Duke of Guise, Henry II of Lorraine, during his Roman sojourn. The connection between the two is described in the poem "Lamento di Nina Barcarola" by Francesco Melosio, which treats the subject of the arrest of the duke in 1648, and which Nina may have set to music and sung.[189] Leti's inclusion of her in *Il puttanismo romano* and his discussion of her relationship with Cardinal Angelo Celsi attest to her continued success during the Chigi papacy of Alexander VII in the 1660s. A record of her ownership and letting of a house in the parish of Santa Maria in Via in 1670 is her last known attestation.[190] All in all, she appears to have survived the challenging political climate and done well for herself for the better part of thirty years.

The political entanglement of Nina and the Barberini and Pamphili families in 1645 and the *avvisi* it inspired shed light on the means by which she and her courtesan *virtuose* contemporaries were able to create successful careers. The cumulative narrative fashioned from the *avvisi* depicts her in a weakened social and political state that marked a low point in her time in Rome—the tale of one *virtuosa* as a victim in her supporter's political drama. Yet the details provided in these accounts reveal the significant part that women like Nina played in early modern Roman singing culture and the part that singing women played in politics. They also speak to the possibilities and limitations of the power that *virtuose* were able to accumulate and wield within a misogynistic system. A close reading of the *avvisi* demonstrates that Nina's arrest involved gender, familial, and state politics, thereby revealing interstices between power structures and embodied female song. Nina was able propitiously to situate herself within these nodes of power, and concurrently managed to accumulate some power for herself. The question of precisely how much power she acquired remains to be answered.

Nina embodied the term "cortigiana" in its most literal meaning—female courtier. Her relationship to various sites of power more closely resembled that of male courtiers than that of the handful of noblewomen who also had a role in the public sphere, such as Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili or the

189. I-Rvat, MS Chigi, G.VII.210, fols. 463–64. See Gialdroni, "La cantata da camera," 675–79. No other documents pertaining to a musical setting or performance of the lament, or to Nina's relationship with the duke, have come to light.

190. I-Rvic, Santa Maria in Via, Stato d'Anime, 1670, vol. 28. I thank Valeria De Lucca for sharing this source with me.

women included in Leti's *Il puttanismo romano*. It is true that Nina's access to this sphere—like that of these noblewomen—came ultimately through her relationships with powerful men; yet in her case these relationships were with protectors and supporters from outside the family, the type of relationship traditionally forged and developed by male courtiers. As such they were public relationships.

As someone who trafficked in arts and culture as a means of making her way among her betters, Nina resembled lower-class male courtiers like Barberini's dependent Carlo Possenti.[191] In Nina's case, the cultural capital of her persuasive singing ability covered the lower social status that stemmed from her sexual practice. This enabled her to cultivate the support of elite men and position herself socially in a way that gave her a power over her circumstances that was not afforded to other women. Working from the highest social level of her profession, she enjoyed sufficient financial stability (unlike her prostitute contemporaries) to be selective about those with whom she would enter into a relationship. Although her established relationship with an elite protector could limit her further choices to those in his political orbit, this was essentially the same limitation faced by male clients within the patronage system. She was also able to decide how to spend her wealth, a power normally afforded only to men and to widows. And under the protection of an elite *amico fermo*, she, like male courtiers, was able to wield power over her own enemies, arranging revenge crimes enacted in her name against rivals who challenged her public honor.

Nina's voice additionally enabled her to wield power over her patron's enemies. In some ways her role in damaging Donna Olimpia's honor was simply that of political pawn. As the mouthpiece for the Barberini's political agenda, spouting words penned by men, Nina differed from contemporary literary courtesans such as the Roman *virtuosa* Margherita Costa, who, through the publication of poetry and other forms of literature during her lifetime, was able to add her own voice to public discourse.[192] Yet Nina lent the power of her actual voice to the Barberini message, wielding the physical and psychological power of song, expertly fashioning a vocal performance of a potency far beyond that of the traditional performances of communally sung pasquinades. The efficacy of her distinct vocal performance enabled her to "wound" Donna Olimpia's interior being: her honor. While Nina's performance was undertaken in the name of the Barberini, it was she who possessed the power to "wound." That she was understood to be the source of this power is also demonstrated by the manner of punishment prompted by her performance, the same type that was meted out to the male creators of pasquinades and *avvisi* like Mantovani, whom the Pamphili arrested many times. Her power to persuade and move listeners during performance placed

191. See Monson, *Habitual Offenders*, 74–81.

192. For the most recent biography on Costa, see Costa, *Buffoons*, 2–24.

her role in the delivery of public slander on a par with that of the male authors who penned the texts she sang.

Nina occupied a liminal position in Roman society, not only between the gendered spheres of private and public, but also between classes. From this position she was able to use the power of her voice to disseminate political messages across class boundaries. The lower social status deriving from her sexual practice allowed her to fulfill the role of street performer, in addition to that of female court singer. Circulating with her male supporters both on the streets and in private spaces, she could therefore as easily lend her voice to the communal performances of pasquinades as to more sophisticated solo genres. Her ability to inhabit both worlds highlights the liminality of courtesans in relation to the public and private spheres. In indoor spaces, Nina's private musicking, private sexual encounters, and development of significant personal relationships intersected with male public political agendas; in outdoor spaces, her personal relationships, based on private desires, became public and political. Ultimately, analysis of Nina's performances—both musical and social—as described in the *avvisi* affords a glimpse into the ways in which marginalized women in early modern Rome could negotiate and access power, using their liminal positions to create successful careers in highly volatile social and political environments. Forty years after Ellen Rosand introduced the early modern musical courtesan to the readership of this **Journal**, Nina's story reminds us just how much of the lives and career patterns of such women still remains to be embraced by musicological narratives.[193] Adding Nina's voice to our current conception of the singing culture of early modern Rome not only enriches our understanding of that specific place and time, but—more generally—expands and complicates more traditional narratives of our musical past. Nina's voice once again becomes a political weapon, promoting a broad, inclusive interpretation of musical culture.

## Appendix *Avvisi* pertaining to Nina Barcarola's arrest in 1645

### Parisian *avvisi*

Paris, Ministère des Affaires d'étrangers, Correspondance politique, Rome 87
The Parisian *avvisi* were intended for the eyes of Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–61), who in 1645 was first minister of France and acting head of the government for the French regent Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV, having previously been Antonio Barberini's dependent.

### Capitoline *avvisi*

Rome, Archivio Storico Capitolino, Camera Capitolino, credenzone XIV, tomo 95

193. Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi, *virtuosissima cantatrice*."

All of the Capitoline *avvisi* form part of the Fondo Orsini in the Archivio Storico Capitolino.

**Mantovani *avvisi***

Modena, Archivio di Stato di Modena, Ambasciatori d'Italia, Roma 243, Francesco Mantovani

Rome, Archivio Storico Capitolino, Camera Capitolino, credenzone XIV, tomo 95, Francesco Mantovani

The Mantovani *avvisi* are named for their author, Francesco Mantovani, an agent of the dukes of Modena. These *avvisi* (nos. 1, 7, and 8) exist in two places. One copy is currently housed in the Archivio di Stato di Modena and was sent to that city by Mantovani himself, who was the Modenese ambassador to Rome. The other copy is in the Archivio Storico Capitolino in Rome. There are a few minor discrepancies between the two copies in terms of abbreviations and capitalization, which was not standardized at the time. I present here the texts of the copy housed in Modena, recording in footnotes any differences in the Capitoline version.

Since I provide English translations for all the *avvisi*, I have chosen not to standardize the Italian, instead presenting the texts as they were originally written. I have used editorial insertions to clarify ambiguity of meaning, fill out less familiar abbreviations, and supply words that are obscured by tight bindings.

**1. Mantovani**

I-MOs, AI, Roma 243, Francesco Mantovani (unfoliated), August 26, 1645 (I-Rasc, CC, credenzone XIV, tomo 95, Francesco Mantovani, 167v, August 26, 1645)

Il Card.l Antonio[i] per sollevarsi và frequentam.te da Nina Barcarola, ch'è la più famosa Cortiggiana di Roma. Costei oltre l'esser' Bella, canta isquisitam.te, e S. Em.za[ii] fà servire la Virtù per coperta della sua prattica. Le dona all'ingresso, e talvolta arriva à cento scudi d'oro. Si compiace anche della conversazione[iii] delle Pimpe Carrattiere le quali sono condotte nel suo Palazzo[iv] da D. Thadeo, et ambidue passono il tempo allegram.te.

To raise his spirits, Cardinal Antonio frequently visits Nina Barcarola, who is the most famous courtesan in Rome. Besides being beautiful, she sings exquisitely, and His Eminence makes use of her *virtù* as a cover for her practice. He gifts her a sum upon entering, sometimes as much as a hundred gold *scudi*. He also enjoys the conversation of the Pimpe Carrattiere, who are taken by Don Taddeo to his palace, and both [men] pass the time happily.

[i] Ant.o [ii] Emy.za [iii] Conversazione
[iv] Pal.o

## 2. Capitoline

I-Rasc, CC, credenzone XIV, tomo 95, 222v–223v, September 23, 1645

Godeva presentem.te la famigliarità di Nina Barcarola, che frà le Cortiggiane tiene il primato, il s.r Card.l Antonio; et app[ena] giovedi sera Sua Emy.za stette seco fino alle due hore di not[te.] Dopo la sua partenza entrorono in Casa sua gli sbirri del Go[v.], ne si sà sin' hora se veram.te aspettarono ch'egli se n'andasse, o se pure così portasse il caso. Dalla due sino alle sette furono ricercate tutte le sue scr[ittu]re, libri, e carte da cantare, le quali sigillate, et da [lei] sottoscritte furono asportate, mentr'ella fù condotta in Torre di Nona. Mille sono stati i Discorsi che si sono fatti sopra q.ta Donna, e tale è la sostanza di quanto se n'è potuto cavare. Le Pimpe Carrattiere ch'erano favorite di Antonio, et di D. Thadeo, trovandosi in perdita del primo per rispetto di Nina, hanno spiate le azioni di q.ta et l'hanno accusata di tre Delittti. Primo, che habbia cantata una Canzone che comincia Prendi, Musa, la mia Piva ò prendi musa il Colascione, la quale ferisce sul vivo la Sig.ra D. Olimpia. E q.ta dicono che si sia trovata app[ress]o di Nina. Il 2.o che à nome di Nina sia stata sfregiata una Donna, che le rubbò un Amante famingo, et che l'era carissimo; et vogliono che il misfatto sia succeduto dopo che hà amicizia con Antonio, et che il colpo sia venuto di com[mission]e di sua Emy.za. L'ultimo che Nina habbia recevuti Biglietti dal Bracese dopo che fù carcerato; che Antonio habbia parlato sopra i med.; et che forse anche habbia dichiarati molti suoi senti[menti] in iscritto con la Donna, come q.lla ch'è capace di negozii, et ch'è spiritosissima. Intanto, le scritture, i libri, e le Canzoni sono in mano del Papa, et di Panfilio; et si dubita che q.ta causa habbia da far sospirar' più

At the time, Signor Cardinal Antonio enjoyed familiarity with Nina Barcarola, who holds first place among courtesans. And as recently as Thursday night His Eminence stayed with her until the second hour of the night. After his departure the *sbirri* of the governor entered her apartment, and one does not yet know if truly they waited until he had gone, or if it happened that way by accident. From two until seven all her writings, books, and song sheets were searched, and these, sealed and signed by her, were taken away, while she was taken to the Tor di Nona. There are thousands of stories about this woman, and this is the substance of what it has been possible to ascertain. The Pimpe Carrattiere, who were the favorites of Antonio and of Don Taddeo, finding that they were losing the former because of Nina, have spied on her actions and accused her of three crimes. First, that she had sung a canzone that begins "Take up, O Muse, my bagpipe" or "Take up, O Muse, the colascione," which wounds Donna Olimpia to the core. And they say that it was found at Nina's home. Secondly, that in Nina's name a woman was disfigured for stealing her Flemish lover, who was dear to her. And they claim that the offense took place after she had formed a close relationship with Antonio, and that the blow was ordered by His Eminence. Finally, that Nina had received notes from Braccesi after he was incarcerated; that Antonio had spoken about them; and that he had also perhaps declared many of his feelings for her in writing—for example, that she is knowledgeable in business and is full of spirit. Meanwhile, her writings, books, and canzoni are in the hands of the pope and [Camillo] Pamphili. One suspects

di uno, et che deva ravvolgersi con pessimo fine. Barberino, e D. Thadeo si radunorono hieri dal Card.l Antonio, et insieme coll'Abbate Costa stettero serrati più di tre hore. E q.to indica che li pesa il colpo, e che temono grandem.te. Se ad'Antonio non venisse altro male che il restar' privo di conversazione di costei che lo sollevava assaiss.o; questo darà fastidio non ord.io à Sua Emy.za. Oltre che perderà affatto l'Amicizia dei suoi Dipendenti che ogn'uno potrà sospettare di dover' andare in Ceppi [per] haver' intrinsichezza con Antonio.

that this case may make more than one person sigh, and that it must come to a bad end. [Cardinal Francesco] Barberini and Don Taddeo met yesterday at the house of Cardinal Antonio, and together with Abbot Costa they remained closeted for more than three hours. And this indicates that the blow weighs heavily on them, and that they are very afraid. Even if no other misfortune besets Antonio than being deprived of the conversation of her who so lifted his spirits, this will annoy His Eminence greatly. But in addition he will lose completely the friendship of his dependents, every one of whom will fear being put in prison for having a close relationship with Antonio.

### 3. Parisian

F-Pmae, CP, Rome 87, 357v, September 25, 1645

Nina Barcarolla, cognita per una delle piu famose cortigiane di questa Corte à qua[ttro di] notte Martedi fù fatta prigioniera un'hora doppò, che s'era partito dà lei e da Cas[a sua il] Card.l Ant.o, fù liberata mercordi notte, e si presuppose contro di lei, che tenesse Poesie contro il Parrochiano, e contro la Parrochia, oltre l'haver voluto sapere d[el?] conte fer.do Ranuci Bolognese, fugito di qui quando intese la prigionia di Gio Br[accese a] causa delle moniche convertite, ammazate in Bologna, nella q.al causa il d.o Ranuci [si trova] imbrogliato; gli levorno a d.a Nina tutti i libri di Canzoni in musica et o[gni] ser.a, mà non vi fù trovata cos'alcuna delle presupposte. Vogliono nullad[ime]no [che i] sbirri v'andassero con sicurezza di trovarsi il sud.o Card.le affine di metterlo in p[rigione] mà i più, credono che i sbirri gli havessero il dovuto rispetto, e che non entrassero [in casa] di d.a Nina, p.ma esser stati sicuri, che S. Em.a se n'era partita.

Nina Barcarola, known as one of the most famous courtesans of this court, was taken to prison in the fourth hour of the night on Tuesday, one hour after Cardinal Antonio had left her and her house. She was freed on Wednesday night and it was assumed against her that she may have possessed poetry against the parish priest and the parish. Moreover, she may have known of Bolognese Count Ferdinando Ranuzzi, who fled from here when he learned of the imprisonment of Giovanni Braccesi because of the converted nuns who were murdered in Bologna, in which case the said Ranuzzi is involved. They took from the said Nina all the books of musical canzoni and all serenatas, but nothing of what had been assumed was found. Nonetheless, they say that the *sbirri* went there in the belief that they would find the abovementioned cardinal for the purpose of putting him in prison, but most people believe that the *sbirri* paid him due respect and did not enter the said Nina's house before they were sure that His Eminence had left.

## 4. Capitoline

I-Rasc, CC, credenzone XIV, tomo 95, 229r–230r, September 27, 1645

E paruta strana alla Corte q.ta subita scarcerazione dopo che si er[ano] dette tante ciarle, et pare che add[esso] resti solo in vigore, [e che] tutto fosse issequito per dar' mortificazione ad' Antonio, e [per] affliggerlo in ultimo grado. In ogni caso bisogna affirmare che le spie fossero ingann[ate] perche non si sono trovate canzoni pericolose ne Bigli[etti] di Antonio, et del Bracese. Ci sono ben' state tre Amorose à furia, che le hanno scritto gli Amanti appassionati, ma che non percurano q.llo che si cer[cava]. A Pal.o hanno divulgato che tenendo il co: Ranuccio Amicizia con Nina, volevano chiarirsi dov'era andato supponendo le dasse avviso continuato del suo Viaggio. Ma come poteva vedersi che il Co: Ranuccio scrivesse et [che] dovesse mettere il luogo dove stava, mentre si trova [im]merzo in tanti pericoli per la Causa delle Monache? Oltreche il togliere Nina i libri delle Canzoni Musical[i] che si cantano, non hà che fare con le l[ette]rè che potevano [ve?]nire dal Co: Ranuccio. Insomma resta fisso app[ress]o tutti li prudenti che non si è trovato quello che si voleva, et che si hà havuto per meglio il liberarla, [che] ritenerla. E stato recercato se Antonio ritornarà da Nina, et è stato risposto affirmativam.te perche vorrà mostrare di non haver' pauura; et che la ricerca, et prigionia non è seguita in suo risg[uard]o. Stà la giovine infiacchita nella persona, et nelle operazioni, et pare che quest' accidente le habbia tolto lo spirito, et il Brio ch'era proprio di lei med.a.

This sudden release from prison has seemed strange to the court after there had been so much talk, and it seems that it will now remain in force, and that all was executed to mortify Antonio, and to torment him as much as possible. In any case, it needs to be said that the spies were misinformed, because neither dangerous canzoni nor notes from Antonio and Braccesi were found. There were three angry love letters, written to her [Nina] by passionate lovers, but they do not provide what they were looking for. At the palace they have let it be known that, because of Count Ranuzzi's close relationship with Nina, they wanted to find out where he had gone, assuming that he would have given her continuous notice of his journey. But how could one believe that Count Ranuzzi would write and should say where he was, while mired in such danger on account of the case involving the nuns? Moreover, taking away from Nina the books of musical canzoni for singing had nothing to do with the letters that could have come from Count Ranuzzi. In the end, it is clear to the wise that they did not find what they wanted to find, and that they thought it better to free her than to detain her. It was asked whether Antonio will return to Nina, and the answer was in the affirmative, because he will want to demonstrate that he is not afraid, and that the search and imprisonment had nothing to do with him. The young girl is weakened in her person and in her activities, and it seems that this incident has taken away the spirit and vivacity that characterized her.

**5. Parisian**
F-Pmae, CP, Rome 87, 378v, October 1, 1645

Nina Barcherola è uscita di prigione immune, libera e senza alcun detrimento essendo stato [causa] della sua carcerat.ne il sospetto della Corte, che potesse havere notitia dove si ritruova il Co[.] Ranuccio da Bologna, che si pretende estrasse quelle Monache, ma a lei non hanno trovato al[cuna] l[ette]ra perche effettivam.te non haveva un d.o Cava [liero] comercio di l[ette]re come la Corte pressupponeva.

Nina Barcarola has left prison exonerated, free and without any damage, her incarceration having been due to the court's suspicion that she might have information on the whereabouts of Count Ranuzzi of Bologna, who is suspected of having released those nuns, but they did not find any letters at her house, because in fact the said Cavalier did not exchange letters with her as the court assumed.

**6. Parisian**
F-Pmae, CP, Rome 87, 400r, October 2, 1645

Si presuppone, che l'affronto, che fù fatto alla già accennata Nina Barcarola quando i [sbirri] la fecero prig.a gli sia derivato dalla S.ra Leonora figlia d'Adreanella e moglie di q.to tale [Castel]lani, che ritornò q.sta estate dà Parigi p. odio si crede, di rivalità, p.che havendo la d.a [Leon]ora dal S. Card.le Ant.o p.ma di partire p. francia, e mentre v'è stata et alcune sett.ne anco doppo il suo ritorno la parte di 40 scudi il mese oltre 200 scudi l'anno p. pig.e di Casa, gli fù ad un tratto p. qual causa levata dà S. Em.a che passò poi immediate al corteggio di d.a Nina, e perciò [si attri]buisce a d.a Leonorica l'accennata carcerat.ne della med.ma Nina.

It is assumed that the affront committed against the aforementioned Nina Barcarola when the *sbirri* imprisoned her derived from the hatred, due to rivalry, of Signora Leonora, daughter of Adreanella and wife of a certain Castellani, who returned this summer from Paris. This is because the said Leonora, before leaving for France, while she was there, and a few weeks after she returned, was receiving from Signor Cardinal Antonio the sum of 40 *scudi* per month in addition to 200 *scudi* per year for rent. This was for some reason suddenly taken away from her by His Eminence, who immediately began courting the said Nina, and therefore the abovementioned incarceration of the said Nina is attributed to the said Leonora.

### 7. Mantovani

I-MOs, AI, Roma 243, Francesco Mantovani (unfoliated), October 7, 1645
(I-Rasc, CC, credenzone XIV, tomo 95, Francesco Mantovani, 250r, October 7, 1645)

Quel Buti, ch'è andato col Card.l Antonio fù il compositore della Canzone, Prendi musa la mia Piva, che tanto hà dato fastidio à Palazzo. Et[i] è certo che questa[ii] fù ricercata in Casa di Nina Barcarola. Antonio stimò che l'affronto fosse fatto alla sua persona, et così si è dichiarato. Ne si può dire quanto l'habbia ferito nell'animo[iii] la carcerazione di questa[iv] Donna. Ella intanto mostra un Conione di Argento,[v] che vale 500 scudi, et dice che li è stato donato da Sua Em.za.[vi]

Buti, who kept company with Cardinal Antonio, was the writer of the canzone "Take up, O Muse, my bagpipe" that so annoyed the palace. And it is certain that this was looked for in the house of Nina Barcarola. Antonio believed that the affront was committed against his person, and people said as much. Nor can one say how much the incarceration of this woman has wounded his soul. Now she is displaying a large silver coin that is worth 500 *scudi*, and says that it was given to her by His Eminence.

[i] Pal.o, et [ii] q.ta [iii] nell'Animo
[iv] q.ta [v] d'Argento, [vi] Emy.za.

### 8. Mantovani

I-MOs, AI, Roma 243, Francesco Mantovani (unfoliated), October 18, 1645
(I-Rasc, CC, credenzone XIV, tomo 95, Francesco Mantovani, 275v, October 18, 1645)

L'haver' toccato con le mani, che gli sbirri entrorono da Nina Barcarola con la sola mira di trovarci Antonio, di strapazzarlo, et di vilipenderlo; et forse anco con intenzione di legarlo, et di condurlo prigione per esser' spogliato, et senz' habito, come che da loro non fosse stato riconosciuto.

It has been witnessed that the *sbirri* entered the house of Nina Barcarola with the sole aim of finding Antonio there, to torment him and to vilify him; and perhaps also with the intention of binding him and taking him to prison for being unclothed and without his habit, as if they had not recognized him.

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## Abstract

This article gives a close reading of the "avvisi di Roma"—unpublished archival documents reporting on daily life in the city—that record the arrest in 1645 of famous Roman courtesan singer Nina Barcarola. Organized by

the political enemies of Nina's main protector, Cardinal Antonio Barberini, the arrest was orchestrated so as to compromise the public honor of both. The reports of the arrest reflect a growing elite interest in female vocal performance in Rome, and attest to a rise in the social value of courtesan singers. Examining details provided in these reports, the article explores various aspects of Nina's life and courtesan singing culture more generally: the public honor and social practices of courtesan singers; the positive effect of singing on courtesan honor; the types of gatherings hosted by Nina; and her politically satirical public performances. It also analyzes Nina's relationship to various areas of contemporary politics—social, state, familial, and gender. The reports reveal that, in the public sphere, Nina, like Barberini's male dependents, served as a symbolic extension of the cardinal. By introducing courtesan singers—a significant, marginalized population—into musicological discourse on seventeenth-century Rome, the article broadens our understanding of Roman singing culture in this period.

**Keywords:** Nina Barcarola, courtesans, female singers, power, gender, performance