

Lauda

(It.: 'praise'; pl. *laude* [laudi]).

The principal genre of non-liturgical religious song in Italy during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. In its monophonic form, the *lauda* also constitutes the primary Italian repertory of late medieval vernacular song, and is distinguished from most neighbouring repertories in its strictly urban, non-courtly context. The religious *lauda* endured into the 19th century, and extant repertory remains an important source of popular Italian texts and music.

1. Social context.

Changes in the form and style of the *lauda* were conditioned largely by the shifting currents of religious devotion, politics and styles of music and poetry. The *lauda* arose in the city-states of central Italy during the 13th century, and was a product of the complementary forces of mendicant (especially Dominican and Franciscan) urban missionary zeal and the emerging guild-based communes of Tuscany and Umbria. The early *lauda* took shape in close proximity to the practice and the affective rhetorical style of mendicant preaching. The roots of the lyrical *lauda* tradition can be traced to the 'Canticle of the Sun' by St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), *Altissimu, onnipotente bon Signore/tue so le laude, la gloria, et l'onore* (I-Af 338, with empty music staves). St Francis urged his followers to 'go through the world preaching and praising God, ... first one of them who knew how to preach should preach to the people and that after the sermon they were to sing the praises of God [*laudes Domini*] as minstrels of the Lord [*joculatores Dei*]'. Mendicant sermons and *lauda* singing shared many themes and goals: the creation in their listeners of the complementary devotional states of penance and praise (see the early *lauda* text *Benedictu, laudatu et glorificatu lu Patre*), and the promotion of Marian veneration, particularly in response to rampant heresies that tended, as did the Cathars, to deny the divinity of the incarnate Christ (see *Raina potentissima*). The two main contexts for *lauda* singing around the mid-13th century were both lay: Marian confraternities organized primarily by the Dominicans (particularly in response to the preaching of St Peter Martyr in 1244–5), and the great penitential processions of flagellants that were the product of millenarian hysteria, charismatic urban preaching (both authorized and unauthorized) and cities plagued by war and pestilence.

The popular devotional activities of *lauda* singing and ritual scourging assumed institutional form only after this time, however, and the lay confraternities of *laudesi* (*compagnie delle laude*) and *disciplinati* (*battuti, flagellanti*) arose in conjunction with the late 13th-century stabilization of the guild-based communal governments and the establishment of the mendicant orders in the same Tuscan and Umbrian cities. Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries relatively unbroken traditions of *lauda*-singing were maintained by both types of confraternity, but the paraliturgical services of the *laudesi* confraternities provided the *lauda*'s primary context.

The earliest known *laudesi* company was founded in 1267 at the Dominican church of Camporegio in Siena (earlier dates are no longer tenable). Most of the *laudesi* confraternities were founded in the mendicant convents of Tuscan and Umbrian communes shortly after this time, and institutional *lauda* singing was soon legitimized by the granting of episcopal and papal indulgences. In Florence, which sustained a *lauda*-singing culture of unparalleled vigour and longevity, all but one of the city's 12 companies

appeared during about 1270–1330, and were either newly formed or derived from the older Marian confraternities in which *lauda* singing had been at most an incidental, ad hoc activity. The evidence is scant for *laudesi* activity in cities outside Florence such as Lucca, Pisa and Siena, where the mid-century ravages of the Black Death may have severely damaged the infrastructures that supported confraternal institutions. 14th-century Florence remained a favourable environment for the *laudesi*, and here the once ad hoc devotion was rapidly transformed by several interrelated circumstances that converged with particular strength in Florence at this time: the proliferation of saint's day feasts in general; a dramatic rise in the number of bequests for *lauda* services (*lauda* 'vigil' or *vigilia alle laude*) on the feasts of these various saints; the professionalization and elaboration of *laudesi* activities brought on by the financial and legal obligations of these bequests; and the consequent rise of professional *lauda* singers, ornate service books (*laudari*) and a technically demanding repertory of paraliturgical songs. It is in this context that the remarkably florid *laude* in the Florentine *laudario I-Fn BR18* (see [ex.2](#)) are to be understood.

The monophonic repertory of the 14th century was performed primarily in the daily ferial services (around the time of Compline) as well as in the annual festal cycles of the confraternities, which were conducted in a host church before a consecrated altar and altar painting. Most *lauda* vigils included some combination of prayers, readings, a candle procession and offering with *lauda* singing, a brief sermon and further *lauda* singing that led to confession. By the late 14th century, the *laudesi* companies increasingly focussed upon their festal services, particularly those of a patron saint, which might involve the hiring of civic wind and brass players (*pifferi* and *trombetti*), extra singers and instrumentalists, a procession with *lauda* singing and elaborate services on both the eve and the day of the feast with the performance of special *laude* proper to the feast. During the 15th century the Florentine *laudesi* companies at the churches of Santo Spirito (the proprietors of *I-Fn BR18*) and S Maria del Carmine continued to serve the obligations of their bequests for *lauda* vigils, but otherwise devoted their resources to the annual staging of elaborate *sacre rappresentazioni* in which one or two interpolated *laude* were sung. Most *laudesi* companies had adopted polyphonic singing by about 1430, and expanded their chapels to accommodate the subsequent shifts from two- to three- and four-part singing. Beset by declining membership and economic inflation in the early 16th century, few companies could sustain the expense of polyphonic choirs, and in the vastly changed devotional environment of the Counter-Reformation the *laudesi* companies ceded their ancient devotion to the clergy of their host churches.

Lauda singing occupied a distinctive if less central place in the activities of the *disciplinati* confraternities that arose in the early 14th century. No musical sources for the *disciplinati* survive, but the texts in the extant *laudarii* reveal a penitential tone and a powerful urge to identify affectively and actively with the suffering and death of Christ and the martyred saints as a means to redemption. Cultivating an ambience of darkness, secrecy and self-denial, the *disciplinati* singers appear not to have aspired to the elaborate, professional and public character of the *laudesi* singing; but surviving documents of companies from Bologna, Florence and, above all, Umbrian cities such as Assisi, Perugia, Cortona and Orvieto reveal the integral role of the *lauda* in a variety of contexts: funerals and suffrages of the dead, Holy Week services, processions and in the privacy of an oratory in conjunction with the central devotion of ritual scourging (the latter two a legacy of the 13th-century penitential processions). The early 14th-century statutes of the Confraternita di S Stefano in Assisi call for ritual scourging followed immediately by the singing of a vernacular *lauda*, the singer of which is charged with '[moving] the hearts of the brothers to

tears more than words move the mind'. The *lauda* played a particularly important role in the *disciplinati's* Holy Week services, above all during the *mandato* (foot-washing) service on Holy Thursday. In Umbria the *lauda*, especially the narrative Passion *lauda*, underwent a distinctive transformation from *devozione* to *rappresentazione*, and by the early 15th century these dramatic *laude* were fully staged productions.

While *laude* were sung primarily during the services of *laudesi* and *disciplinati* companies throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, *lauda* singing was gradually adopted during this period in other contexts favourable to popular devotion. *Laude* were recited or sung in conjunction with mendicant sermons, particularly during Lent, and appeared with increasing frequency in private devotional and clerical settings. The great Florentine *lauda* poet Feo Belcari (1410–84) was informed of the death of his sister in a Florentine convent with a letter describing how in her final moments she 'entered into a devout state and began singing the *lauda* that begins *Partiti core et vanne all'amore*, then upon her request her close companions gathered and sang a *lauda* that eased her passage from this life'. Widespread clerical appropriation of *lauda* composition and performance began near the end of the 15th century, however, when the polyphonic *lauda* was often promoted in the context of religious reform as a substitute for more complex styles of polyphony. In Florence, the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola advocated *lauda* singing throughout the churches and confraternities of the city, and thereafter the *lauda* was cultivated almost exclusively in Dominican convents in Tuscany loyal to the friar's memory. Most of the 15th-century sources of polyphonic *laude* (see §2(ii) below) come from monastic environments in Venice or the Veneto, many of which were connected with a Benedictine reform movement that rejected more complex polyphony. Petrucci's *Laude libro primo* (1508) is devoted entirely to the works of a Venetian priest, Innocentius Dammonis, and it is likely that this and Petrucci's next *lauda* collection contain repertory performed both in Venetian convents and by lay and clerical singers in the services of Venetian confraternities (*scuole*). Petrucci's *Laude libro secondo* (1507/8) contains a number of works by Mantuan court composers such as Cara and Tromboncino, probably for use in church services, processions and private courtly devotions in Mantua and perhaps also in other north Italian courts such as Milan and Ferrara. The final creative phase of the *lauda* took place in Counter-Reformation Rome, where the composition, publication and performance of *laude* for Filippo Neri's Congregazione dell'Oratorio was conducted, once again, in a clerical environment of religious reform.

2. Repertory and performing practice.

i) Monophonic.

While there are more than 200 extant confraternity *laudarii* that transmit texts, only two survive with musical notation, along with a number of musical fragments from dismembered *laudarii*. The late 13th-century Cortona *laudario* (I-CT 91) belonged to the Confraternita di S Maria delle Laude attached to the church of S Francesco in Cortona, but its 65 *laude* (with music for 46) were probably drawn by its scribe from the general area of Siena, Arezzo and Cortona. The Florence *laudario* (I-Fn BR18, olim Magl.II.I.122) was copied during the early 14th century for the Compagnia delle laude di Santo Spirito, a modest *laudesi* company that met at the Florentine church of Santo Spirito. It contains 97 *laude* (88 with music) that would have been performed by the one or two singers this company retained into the early 15th century. Ziino (1978) has demonstrated that a group of the surviving musical fragments come from a single *laudario* which belonged to the Compagnia di S Agnese, a Florentine *laudesi* company situated in the church of S Maria

del Carmine. The paraliturgical function of these confraternity service books is revealed in their format and style: *laude* are grouped in sections devoted to Mary, a cycle for the liturgical year and, in the richly illuminated Florence *laudario*, a large *sanctorale* section. The notation in both collections is the rhythmically neutral quadratic notation used in contemporary chant manuscripts.

The only known authors of medieval *laude* are [JACOPONE DA TODI](#), Guittone d'Arezzo and a certain Garzo. The otherwise anonymous poetic repertory is extremely varied in both quality and subject matter. Many texts are didactic in intent, such as some of the older Marian *laude* with their anti-heretical language (e.g. *Madonna sancta Maria* in I-CT 91) or *laude* that narrate the events of a saint's *vita* (e.g. *Vergine donzella* in CT 91 and Fn BR18). Most employ a vivid and affective language intended to draw the participant into a devotional state of penance or praise. The subject matter is adapted from a variety of sources, including the Bible, liturgical texts and more popular devotional literature such as Iacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*. Apart from the oldest 13th-century texts, which tend to be formally diverse, the medieval *lauda* repertory is distinguished by the pervasive application of the poetic scheme of the [BALLATA](#). Originally a dance-song with a choral refrain (similar to the French *virelai* and the English *carol*), the clearly secular ballata form was adapted to sacred texts during the later 13th century, probably within the institutional framework of the new confraternities, and held fast in the *lauda* repertory to the end of the 14th century when it began to be displaced by a new array of poetic forms linked to an emerging polyphonic practice. In its strictest and most frequent form, the *lauda*-ballata consists of a two-line, end-rhyming choral refrain (repeated after each successive strophe) and a four-line, soloistic strophe made up of *piedi* (two lines of identical versification and end-rhyme) and a *volta* (two lines that repeat the versification and, usually, the music of the refrain). *Laude* rarely follow this *ballata minore* scheme strictly, however, and particularly in the Florence *laudario* one finds not only more irregular line lengths but also variations upon the longer stanzaic forms of the *ballata mezzana* and *ballata maggiore*.

Like the texts, the melodies of the *lauda* repertory range freely in style and character from chant to popular song, variously showing traces of processional intonations, dance-tunes, indigenous popular song styles, litanic, hymnodic and sequential structures, troubadour song, the modes of ecclesiastical chant and an incipient major–minor tonality. Exx.1 and 2 show melodies in two contrasting styles. *Onne homo ad alta voce* (ex.1), in honour of the Holy Cross, appears in both *laudarii* and is an example of the simpler *lauda* style: the melodic motion is conjunct, the word-setting is mostly syllabic (with occasional two- to four-note ligatures on individual syllables) and it lies within the range of any male voice. Like many of the simpler mode 1 (protus) *lauda* melodies, it sounds rather austere and exhibits some structural irregularities (the *piedi* – lines 3–4 – differ, and the *volta* – lines 5–6 – is a varied recapitulation of the refrain). A *lauda* in honour of St Dominic from the Florence *laudario*, *Allegro canto, popol cristiano* (ex.2), reflects the professionalization of the Florentine *laudesi*: it demands control of a much wider range and engages in an effusive and florid virtuosity that is characteristic of many *laude* found in the *sanctorale* section of that Florence manuscript. The overall structure is absolutely regular (strict repetition among the three pairs of *piedi*, and between refrain and *volta*), and the major-tonality melodies tend to cascade within clearly-defined octave gamuts in a manner similar to the cantus parts in polyphonic madrigals by contemporary Florentine composers such as Donato da Cascia and Lorenzo Masini.

The two main sources share 20 texts and 14 melodies, and the Florence *laudario* contains nine melodies that appear two or more times with different texts (*contrafacta*). *Ave, donna*

sanctissima is transmitted in both sources, and reveals the melodic plasticity of a repertory conditioned by oral and improvisatory traditions. Melodic intervals of a third or more might be filled in, and a variety of ornamental notes ranging from single anticipatory or appoggiatura-like notes to clusters of notes in stock formulae (abundant in [ex.2](#) and other florid *laude* like it) might be applied. Entire phrases, including finals, might differ significantly, although this is not as common as was once assumed.

It is just this melodic flexibility that argues against the application to the *lauda* repertory of rigid or artificial rhythmic schemes, such as those proposed by Riemann (*Vierhebigkeit*), Beck and Aubry (Modal rhythm) and Anglès ('modified mensural'). Rhythmic solutions to the performance of monophonic *laude* must be sought in the extra-liturgical environment of the late medieval Italian cities, where the possibilities ranged from unmeasured recitation to dance-song and flexible mensural applications. The rhythmic transcriptions in Liuzzi's monumental *La lauda e i primordi della melodia italiana* (1935) are untenable, and the facsimiles must be used with great caution. There are numerous scribal errors in both manuscripts with respect to clefs, custodes and melodic transpositions. The Florence *laudario* is especially problematic, for some time after its initial compilation the codex was damaged and the tops and sides trimmed and repaired, during which process the top staff on every folio was mutilated, the parchment restored and the music recopied. The recopied music is, however, entirely corrupt, a fact taken into account in only one recent edition (RRMMA, xxix, 1995), which proposes emended versions of these passages.

The 13 monophonic Latin songs in a mid-14th-century antiphoner (*I-Tn Bobbiese F.I.4*) are related to the *lauda* by virtue of their more popular melodic style and the use of the ballata form. The usual designation of these songs as 'Latin *laude*' is understandable but problematic given their anomalous features against the vast and relatively uniform backdrop of the medieval *lauda* repertory. As mensurally-notated songs in Latin emanating from environments unconnected with Trecento *lauda* production and lay confraternity performance (a Benedictine convent near Genoa), they stand outside the *lauda* tradition. One of these Latin songs, *Vernans rosa*, is also transmitted in *I-Fn BR19*, a 14th-century Florentine *laudario*, but is relegated to an appendix of Latin monophonic and polyphonic works and designated a 'sequentia'.

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Ex.1 *Onne homo ad alta voce*, I-CT 91, ff.55 r-57 r

Refrain

1 Oh - ne ho - mo ad al - ta vo - - - ce

2 Lau - di la ve - ta - - - ce cto - ce. **Fine**

Strophe

3 Quan - to è di - gna da lau - da - te,

4 Co - te no lo pò pen - sa - te

5 Len - gua no lo pò con - ta - - - te,

6 La ve - ta - ce san - - - cta cto - ce. **D.C.**

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of six staves of music, each with a vocal line and Italian lyrics underneath. The first two staves are labeled 'Refrain' and the last four are labeled 'Strophe'. The music is written in a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The lyrics are in Italian and describe the glory of God. The score ends with 'D.C.' (Da Capo) after the final line.

Ex.2 *Allegro canto, popol cristiano, l-Fn BR18 (Magl. II.1.122), ff.117 v-19 r*

Refrain

1 Al - le - gto can - to, po - pol cri - sti - a - no

2 del gran - de san Do - me - ni - co,

3 di tan - ti va - lo - to - so ca - pi - ta - no.

Stoppe

4 ca - pi - ta - no di mol - ti ca - va - lie - ri

5 fu sanc - to pte - ti - o - so,

6 che do - po Cri - sto l'an - no se - gui - ta - to;

7 e fu de li mi - glior gon - fal - co - nie - ti,

8 quel fiu - me gta - ti - o - so,

9 che do - po Cri - sto si - a sta - to tto - va - to;

10 per lui è su - to spat - to et ti - pio - va - to

11 o - gni per - vet - so he - te - ti - co

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