In his *Book of the Courtier* (1528), Baldassare Castiglione advises the courtier to 'turn to music as to a pastime' when he 'finds himself in a familiar and cherished company where there are no pressing concerns'. Music is an appropriate way to pass leisure time, and a man of the upper class should be capable of singing to a lute and also reading music at sight, implying the necessity of a certain level of musical literacy and education. Music, he says, is especially pleasant in the presence of ladies 'whose tender and delicate spirits are readily penetrated with harmony and filled with sweetness'. At first glance, Sebastiano Florigerio's *Music lesson* (illus.1) seems to depict a situation of social music-making as described by Castiglione. In it nine figures, including two women, gather around an open altus partbook from Andrea Antico's *Motetti e canzone libro primo* (Rome, 1520). Paintings of musical ensembles are often associated with 'harmony bringing consent among the several parts'. In this painting, however, there can be no 'harmony' because the only two figures actually singing are looking at the same printed altus partbook, therefore a polyphonic performance is impossible. In fact, five of the nine figures are not looking at the printed music and seem entirely unaware of the musical activities of their companions.

The musical element that engages the largest number of characters is not harmony, but the 'tactus' or musical beat, visibly performed by the four central characters. The tactus is usually expressed by members of an ensemble raising or lowering a finger or hand to keep the singers or players together and physically enacting the passage of measured musical time. In this painting, each of the four foreground figures is in the process of lowering one of their index fingers, actively measuring the musical time passing on the printed page. Florigerio does evoke amateur engagement with music-making, but the central element is not harmony, it is musical time. This is not a painting about music: instead, the painter uses musical time as a symbol for the passage of time more generally. I will argue that in paintings from northern Italy the physical performance of tactus as a symbol for time communicated a range of allegorical associations with the human body, aging and sexuality that were intelligible to a musically informed public during the first decades of the 16th century.

The justification for this allegorical understanding of tactus lies in the writings of both physicians and music theorists. Medical theorists of the 14th and 15th centuries understood the regular rhythm of the pulse as a musical tactus of the human body. Nancy Siraisi describes a continuous tradition of medical theorists from northern Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries who describe pulse in terms of contemporary music practice (see Table 1). Gentile da Foligno, for example, claimed that music and pulse were related in two ways: first, high and low pitch related to the strength or weakness of the pulse and, second, the speed and slowness of pulse corresponded to the ‘measuring of times of motion and rest’. The human pulse can represent both pitch and rhythm in music. In these medical writings physicians bring together the ideas of previous authorities, Galen and Boethius among others, with their own practical musical experience. Following the example of these medical theorists, music theorists of the late 15th and early 16th centuries often justify...
the tactus as a kind of human pulse. Music theorists used a number of different terms for this musical tool, including mensura or tempus in Latin and battuta or tempo in Italian. Table 2 lists quotations that link the pulse with musical time. For these theorists, tactus is a musical pulse and they use medical terms, like sphugmos or diastole and systole, to describe a musical phenomenon. The ‘healthy’ pulse means an equal, steady beat, and irregularity is an indication of illness. These musical scholars, publishing in both Latin and Italian for an audience of humanists and music lovers, indicate that the theoretical relationship between music and pulse continued to be important for amateurs and pedagogues of the 16th century.

In performance of composed polyphony the tactus is a tool that helps ensure that separate voices, often notated in separate partbooks, sound together in harmony. Leonardo da Vinci discusses the temporal nature of music using the term tempo armonico for a beat of music in his famous Paragone, a comparison of poetry, music and painting. According
to Leonardo, the simultaneous sounding of different parts grants music its honourable placement among the sciences, higher than poetry because of the simultaneously sounding parts and mathematical proportions, but lower than painting because of its transience. The proportional beauty of a piece of music lasts only for one or two tempi armonici, and then is gone, while a painting is permanent and can be taken in all at the same time. Polyphonic music was often referred to as ‘mensural’ music because counterpoint, or the art of placing different musical lines against each other, requires specific durations in order to ensure that dissonance is controlled. The harmonic aspect of music is completely dependent upon the rhythmic accuracy of both the notation and the performance. Bonnie Blackburn points out that Leonardo also used the term tempo armonico or tempo di musica ‘to indicate a regular beat, which can be employed to measure the velocity of moving objects since, Leonardo says, it is more reliable than the pulse’. Leonardo implies that while the human pulse can be irregular, the musical pulse is steady. It seems that Leonardo himself used musical time as a tool in scientific investigations that required measurements of relatively short duration. Physicians, music theorists and artists of the 15th and early 16th centuries understood the tactus as a means of measuring time, which could be observed visually when a performer raised and lowered a finger or hand.

**Visual depictions of the tactus in the 15th century**

The tactus is shown in two different ways in two 15th-century sources. Both of these examples illustrate the use of tactus as a practical tool in the performance or teaching of music. In each, the tactus is associated with young boys, the most common students of music and polyphony in the 15th century, and with pedagogical situations. The earliest northern Italian depiction of tactus considered here was created for Florence cathedral between 1432 and 1437. This is in one of the ten high-relief panels sculpted by Luca della Robbia for the singing gallery. It is one of two framing images that depict singers singing from written music or text, and shows a group of three young male singers, probably choirboys of the cathedral. The ensemble sings from a scroll, showing that they are literate musicians and they mark time by tapping the tactus on each other’s shoulders, a sign that they may be performing polyphony or rhythmic chant. One hand of each singer is carefully crafted in an arched form, with the index finger extended and raised. The second image of tactus is a detail from the bottom-left corner of the woodcut
The decoration of Gaffurius’s treatise, *Practica musice*, published in 1496 (illus.2). Both lower corners of this woodcut depict young singers and a teacher, presumably Gaffurius, in pedagogical situations. The pupils in the left corner gather around a manuscript on a stand with their hands raised to mark the tactus. All of the figures’ mouths are open in song. Most of the boys are marking the tactus on their own hand, but the boy turning the page extends his right hand, possibly conducting or marking the tactus in the air. Gaffurius stands prominently behind the smallest student touching his left shoulder as well as the shoulder of the boy to his right. This image corresponds perfectly with Giorgio Anselmi’s description of tactus from his *De musica* of 1434: ‘the singer, neither speeding up the song too much nor drawing the notes out too long . . . touches one hand to the other or to the back of the student’. It is the visibility of the performance tactus that allows it to become a cultural symbol for time in music, ready to be invested with deeper allegorical meaning in secular paintings.

Lorenzo Costa’s (*c.*1460–1535) *A concert*, painted between 1485 and 1495, is the earliest example I have found of an entirely secular painting showing the tactus (illus.3). This painting is a panel which originally decorated the *studiolo* of the Bentivoglio household in Bologna. It depicts three musicians in contemporary dress singing with an open music book lying on the table in front of them. The man in the middle is playing the lute and the other two musicians’ mouths are open. Two instruments, a rebec and a recorder, lie at the edge of the table in front of them, encroaching into the viewers’ space. The singers’ hands are placed symmetrically on the table, palms down with the first or first and second fingers extended and arched. The shape of the hands is almost identical to those sculpted by della Robbia and probably also represents the tactus. The painter uses the visual symbol of hands marking the tactus as a way to signify that the two musicians, though they are not holding instruments, are physically engaged with musical performance and the temporal aspect of ‘harmony’. The instruments are offered to the viewers, invitations to enter into the musical pastime often enjoyed in this room of the Bentivoglio house.

**Tactus, pulse and aging**

In both of these 15th-century examples the idea of musical time is indicated by hands or raised fingers in the presence of notated music or instruments. Using similar symbols, tactus is linked to virile men in their middle age in a group of three paintings associated with the Venetian school *c.*1500. In illus.4a, called the *Education of the young Marcus Aurelius* or the *Three ages of man*, Giorgione uses a sheet of musical notation and the curved finger of the man in his middle age to communicate tactus. This painting belongs to a tradition of paintings, sometimes called the ‘Iconography of Age’, that was important in northern Italy around the turn of the 16th century. These works express popular conceptions of aging and decorum and usually depict men of different stages of life, often three stages but sometimes more. Part of the painter’s creative process was to determine a visual symbol for the abstract concept of the passage of time. In landscape versions, a road, representing the journey of life, winds its way between the figures depicted at different stages of manhood, often ending at the old man. Sometimes aspects of nature, such as trees in different states of growth or decay, reinforce the painters’ representation of the changing visage of a man during his life. In many Venetian paintings, especially those by Giorgione, Titian and their followers, music, often indicated or reinforced by the performance of tactus, can also represent the passage of time.
3 Lorenzo Costa, *A concert* (1485–95). Oil on poplar, 95.3 × 75.6 cm (London, National Gallery)
Nancy Siraisi shows that tactus and pulse were linked to aging and decorum by medical theorists of the 14th and 15th centuries. She even finds one writer who attempts to describe the appropriate pulse beats of different ages with different poetic metres, indicating trochee as appropriate for children, spondee for mature adults and ‘iambotrocheo’ for the elderly. She notes that, following the example of Galen, medical theorists tended to classify pulse according to different categories, including age, climate, emotion and various types of disease. A pulse, though steady and healthy, might be ‘unsuitable’ for the owner’s age or constitution. The theory that variations in pulse indicated something about the health or age of the owner remained relevant in music treatises of the 16th century. An unhealthy pulse is a poor model for the tactus because it could be uneven: Gaffurius says that ‘it is well known that the pulse rate of fevered persons, by increasing or changing, makes the relation of diastole and systole unequal and requires care by the physician.’ These music theorists, and their classicizing contemporaries in the visual arts, may also have been aware of the theory of changes in pulse rate for different stages of life. The concept of change in pulse according to age strengthens an allegorical use of musical tactus in Iconography of Age paintings, and also has implications for concepts of decorum.

In addition to painting the physical characteristics of the three ages, Giorgione positions each
character in his painting on the continuum of time according to his relationship to music. As in the Gaffurius, a young boy is placed in the pedagogical position, holding in his hand a sheet of mensural notation and a man in his prime touches both music and time symbolically, through marking the tactus. The old man is appropriately disengaged with the music, approaching the end of his time. The tactus contributes to the creation of an allegory about the effect of the passage of time on man and man’s changing relationship to time and music.

As Castiglione instructs, a good courtier ‘will know his own age, for it is indeed unbecoming and most unsightly for a man of any station, who is old, grey, toothless, and wrinkled, to be seen lute in hand, playing and singing in a company of ladies, even though he may do this tolerably well’. The amorous nature of most songs is his justification for the silence of old men because, he says, ‘in old men love is a ridiculous thing’. A painting similar to Giorgione’s, now believed to be by Vittore Belliniano, features the same three male characters, but also includes a young woman. In this version, the woman holds the sheet of mensural music and is in turn held, apparently possessed, by the man in his middle age. With his right hand he taps the tactus on her upper arm while she imitates his tactus with her own finger, partially hidden by the sheet of notation. In this alternate version of the painting both the young boy and the young woman are in the pedagogical position. The presence of the young woman emphasizes the associations between music, love and sexuality. In another Iconography of Age painting in the style of Titian (illus.4b), the woman is also included with the three
male figures, but she is outside the circle of music-making, placing her arm on the shoulder of the man in his middle age while he wraps his arm around her and demonstrates the tactus for the boy singing in the front. The link between music and sexuality is even clearer in a *Three ages of man* painting by Titian in the collection of the National Gallery of Scotland. In this landscape version of the three ages, two babies sleep together, watched over by a cherub. An old man sits in silent contemplation of two skulls, perhaps friends who have now passed on. Music and a rather overt gesture towards sexual desire are present only in the middle age on the left. What has not to my knowledge been noticed is that the shape of the man’s right hand, while holding a flute, also suggests that he is marking the tactus.

In a pair of paintings by Bacchiacca, the tactus is just one of various symbols for aging and the passage of time. In the first, *Portrait of a young lute player* of c.1522, a man in middle age sits on a ledge holding a lute and surrounded by symbols of the transience of youth and beauty, including an hourglass, a vase of cut flowers and the transformation of Daphne into a laurel tree in the background (illus.5). The hourglass, which implies the measuring of time, shows up again in a second painting by Bacchiacca of an old man sitting on a ledge holding a skull in his lap. The upper chamber of the hourglass on the old man’s left is almost empty, indicating that he is approaching the end of his life. One aspect of these paintings that has been hitherto unnoticed is the position of each figure’s hand. The man holds but does not play the lute. Instead, his right hand is arched well below the strings, with the index finger raised. This man resembles Vasari’s description of Girolamo da Carpi, a young artist and lute player, more interested in making ephemeral music than in pursuing more important matters, like painting. Although there is no music in the second painting, the old man’s left hand is placed in a familiar position upon a human skull. His index finger, separated from the other fingers, is arched but the tip touches the skull, completing the falling action of the young man’s raised finger. For further emphasis the old man’s right hand points to the skull and the completed tactus. The hourglass and the tactus, both used as symbols for time in the context of aging, allow the paintings to act as a pair and identify them as part of the musical Iconography of Age tradition. In all of these paintings, music and the performance of tactus are associated with male middle age, an indication of active engagement with time and sexuality.

**Tactus and sexuality in Florigerio’s Music lesson**

The association of music with love and the middle age brings us back to Florigerio’s *Music lesson*, created around 1540 (illus.1). Most of the figures are in their middle age. Across the top of the young woman’s bodice is inscribed the motto, ‘Mal sta acosto un bel sereno’, and her necklace plunges, between the words ‘acosto’ and ‘un’, into her prominent cleavage. Slim translates this motto as ‘It is wrong to hide a beautiful face’. I am grateful to Daniel Donnelly for pointing out the similarity between *seno* ‘breasts’, *sereno* ‘serene’ and *senno* ‘sense’. The passage of Bembo’s *Gli asolani* that is probably the source of this motto discusses breasts at length and the futility of hiding them, since the persistent or at least imaginative lover will see them anyway. Considering the placement of the motto there is no doubt her barely concealed breasts were the objects signified by ‘bel sereno’ or ‘beautiful serenity’.

Florigerio paints a statement about female decorum as it relates to music and age. The desirable young woman assumes an adequately passive relationship, allowing herself to be instructed by male teachers. If she is a courtesan, as has been proposed because of her clothing and turban, her position must be feigned because most courtesans were highly trained in music. Her ‘teacher’ taps the tactus on her shoulder, just like the smallest choirboy in Gaffurius’s illustration (illus.2) and she hides her performance of the tactus below the table’s edge, like the young woman in the copy of Giorgione’s Three Ages painting. The old woman at the top left covers her mouth, indicating her silence and forced disengagement with time, sexuality and the musical conversation. Florigerio’s painting recalls Giorgione’s *La Vecchia, col tempo* painted 30 years before. The old women in Giorgione’s and Florigerio’s paintings express two contrasting faces of feminine old age. Erin Campbell’s analysis of 16th-century art criticism reveals that women were seen to age more quickly than men and that although men displayed beauty in all ages, female beauty was fleeting. Looking at aging women in Venetian paintings, Mary Frank explains that though men were allowed to remain active and beautiful throughout their lives, women were expected to
5 Bacchiacca (Francesco d’Ubertino), *Portrait of a young lute player* (c.1522). Oil on poplar, 97.5 × 72.1 cm (New Orleans Museum of Art, The Samuel H. Kress Collection 61.75)
express the virtues of silence and modesty in their premature old age. In her discussion of La Vecchia Campbell suggests that the subject is speaking—but what if she is singing? Her curved hand gestures towards her chest and the source of the pulse, her heart, which marks the time of her final years. The banderole inscribed ‘col tempo’ was added in the 17th century, probably to clarify the meaning of this curious painting. It may refer both to the passage of time generally and, more specifically, to the passage of musical time. La Vecchia is defiant where Florigerio’s old woman is decorously detached and silent.

In Florigerio’s painting, performance of the tactus by the three men and the young woman is clearly a metaphor for sexual desire, as thinly concealed as the woman’s seno. In her article ‘Maniera, music and Vasari’, Katherine McIver asserts that for Georgio Vasari, the famous painters’ biographer, ‘music can be associated either with amorous pursuits or spiritual ways’. Vasari warns against the folly of giving ‘too much attention to amorous delights and to playing the lute’. In the Florigerio painting two young men on the left vie for the woman’s attention, one singing and looking dreamy while marking the tactus on the table. The other, right next to the woman, points to the text ‘pietade’ while beating the tactus on the bare skin of the woman’s left shoulder. The woman is not singing, but her left hand is holding the music book. The old man, probably a priest because of his hat, is clearly singing and his right hand is poised, marking the tactus suggestively over the woman’s left hand. Her bare, upturned wrist is emerging from the luxurious fur of his sleeve and their two pulses are beating against each other.

I believe that this painting is related to the Iconography of Age tradition, depicting three men at different levels of maturity in the foreground. The man on the left is the youngest, perhaps sexually uninitiated. He imprudently fritters away his time singing love songs and dreaming. The man just to the left of the woman is more purposeful and experienced, perhaps a little older. He does not waste his time with singing at all but instead makes the tactus an excuse to touch the young woman. It is ironically the eldest, the priest, who seems to be the most successful in music and in love. The priest is a clerically trained musician and possibly a composer, clearly the purveyor of ‘spiritual’ ways and probably the most capable of ‘penetrating’ the young woman with his music. If he is a priest, his sumptuous clothing and sensual contact with the woman’s bare wrist make him an object of satire. As Castiglione allows, ‘among other miracles, it sometimes seems that Love delights in kindling cold hearts regardless of years’. The woman hides her tactus, indicating that she is more experienced and musically/sexually knowledgeable than she seems. As a contemporary Venetian poet says

Never do we find a woman so rare
Nor so chaste that if she sings
She does not at once become a whore.

Music, then, is a realm dominated by priests and prostitutes.

I suggest that in order to bring the background figures into the story we must read this painting col tempo, with the foreground representing a remembered time in the past and the background, the level which includes figures that interact with the viewer, representing a narrative present. The old woman is a representative of the young woman after the passage of time. She looks back at the memory of her own beauty, which passed so quickly. She covers her mouth, the source of her voice, because at her present age she is cut off from music, sociability and sexuality. The mature men in the background are standing directly behind the figures that could be their younger selves. Although they have aged, they are still active and attractive. The younger one looks out to the viewer with the wisdom of experience, while the older one to his left, along with another shadowy figure, looks with concern to the younger man standing behind the priest. This young man looks out at the viewer and appears to be about the same age as the dreamy foreground figures during their amorous contest. Perhaps this new man is being advised of the dangerous and unpleasant results that can come from a night’s ‘music-making’. It seems that Florigerio’s painting is a parody of earlier Iconography of Age paintings. Like Vasari, he points out both the dangers of music and amorous pursuits for secular young men and pokes fun at the ‘spiritual ways’ of opulent, musical clerics.

In each of these 16th-century Iconography of Age paintings, the conceit of the tactus as an allegory for the passage of time invites the viewer into the temporal and musical space of the painting. Tactus tells us about the way that 16th-century men and women thought about and related to music, time, and the variety of ways that
they negotiated amateur performance contexts. Just as pulses were thought to change with age and sex, men and women were expected and instructed to observe different rules of decorum. Though age diminished the degree to which a man could enthusiastically engage in music and sex, a woman was grotesque if she failed to age into silence. Understanding the way 16th-century Venetian painters used the tactus to forge a link between the aging body, time and sexuality allows us to view these paintings as expressions of the complex and extensive milieu of secular musical gatherings in early 16th-century Italy.

Jane Hatter is a doctoral candidate at the Schulich School of Music, McGill University, and is writing a dissertation about music and associations between musicians in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Her research is supported by the ‘Making Publics in Early Modern Europe’ project (http://makingpublics.mcgill.ca). In her master’s thesis she explored the use of music from Petrucci’s Venetian motet anthologies in Venetian confraternities, and an article on this is scheduled for publication in a collection of essays on the motet c. 1500. Jane complements her interests in the social contexts for vocal music by singing regularly from original notation and decorously engaging in social musical gatherings. jane.hatter@mcgill.ca

I would like to thank Julie Cumming, Ruth DeFord, Bronwen Wilson and Marlene Eberhart for comments on various earlier versions of this article. I would like especially to thank Tim Shephard, who has also worked on the Florio painting and generously shared his insights into this painting, commenting on my work, and allowing me access to his own article before its publication.

5 I use the term ‘tactus’ to refer to what Ruth DeFord calls the ‘performance tactus’, the physical up-and-down motion of a hand or a finger used in performance of polyphony to improve ensemble.
7 N. G. Siraisi, “The music of pulse in the writings of Italian academic physicians (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries)”, Speculum, 1 (1975), pp.689–710, at p.689.
10 Although 21st-century musicians would not recommend relying on a musical beat for scientific measurement, it is interesting that quite a few paintings also seem to link science and measurement to music using the symbol of the hourglass. Examples include paintings from studioli, Bacchiacca’s painting of a lute player, and Giorgione’s Old woman with an hourglass and young woman playing the viola. These images can be accessed on ARTstor: www.artstor.org.
11 I am indebted to Ruth DeFord for kindly bringing these to my attention.
13 The teacher on the right has the name ‘F. Gaforus’ inscribed on his chair. His two later works, Angelicenum (1508) and De harmonia (1518), both include a woodcut with Gaffurios sitting in front of a group of students, both boys and men.
14 Quoted in DeFord, ‘Definitions and descriptions of tactus’, p.3.
16 Another painting that may show the tactus is Puligo’s Portrait of a lady with a music book (1492–1527), described by Slim as a portrait of Machiavelli’s mistress. Her hand is poised, curved over a music book. Reproduced in ‘A motet for Machiavelli’s mistress and a chanson for a courtesan’, in Painting music in the sixteenth century, p.473.
17 Another secular painting which includes the tactus is a lunette from the Liberal Arts series in the Borgo apartments at the Vatican. I believe that in this cycle, designed and supervised by Bernardino Pinturicchio from 1492 to 1495, the discipline of musica is divided into improvised and composed polyphony. He also includes elements of the Iconography of Age tradition in his portrayal of the different men at different ages and their relationship to music. I plan to discuss this image more fully in my dissertation.
Hoffman points this out in Giorgione’s Il tramonto (The Sunset) (1506–10), London, National Gallery, in ‘Giorgione’s Three ages of man’, p.238.

For example see Titian’s The three ages of man (1513–14). Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, and also Giorgione’s Il tramonto.


Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, p.77.

Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, p.77. The discussion that follows uses music as an example of decorum for the different ages of men, closely linked with the Iconography of Age tradition. Old men ‘even if they do not practice it [music] themselves will enjoy it much more when they listen to it, for having habituated their minds to it, than will those who know nothing about it . . . [for] ears that are practiced in harmony will hear it better and more readily and appreciate it with far greater pleasure’ (p.78).

Vittore Belliniano, The Concert, c.1505–15. This painting is housed at Hampton Court. To view it visit the picture library of the Royal Collection, www.royalcollection.org.uk/eGallery.

I use the term ‘middle age’ to refer to the prime of a man’s life as depicted in these 16th-century ‘Three ages of man’ paintings. This is considerably younger than the modern conception of middle age. For women this age came earlier and was much shorter, in part because a woman’s life was usually much shorter than a man’s. For more information, see M. E. Frank, “‘Donne attemmate’: women of a certain age in sixteenth-century Venetian art”, Ph.D diss., Princeton University (2006); G. Minois, A history of old age from antiquity to the Renaissance, trans. S. H. Tension (Chicago, 1987); and G. Creighton, ‘When did a man in the Renaissance grow old?’ Studies in the Renaissance, xiv (1967), pp.7–32; E. Campbell, “Unenduring beauty”: gender and old age in early modern art and aesthetics, in Growing old in early modern Europe: cultural representations, ed. E. Campbell (Burlington, 2006), pp.153–69.

This painting has previously been discussed as a representation of Daphnis and Chloe by P. Joannides, Titian to 1518 (New Haven, 2001), pp.193–4; and as a more general statement about the transience of life and beauty by P. Holberton, ‘The pipes in Titian’s Three ages of man’, Apollo, clvii (Feb. 2003), pp.26–30. It can be viewed on the National Gallery, Scotland website, www.nationalgalleries.org/collection.

This painting is discussed by Fenlon in ‘Music in Italian Renaissance paintings’, p.201.

‘Old man with a skull,’ oil on panel, 96 × 72 cm, Cassel, Museum of Art. This image can be viewed online at www.bridgemanart.com. I am grateful to Mark D. Sheppard for pointing out the similarity of these two paintings, which are the same size and are in a similar format, in his paper, ‘Musician portraits of the Italian Renaissance: negotiating the changing status of the musician in sixteenth-century Italy’, presented at the Renaissance Society of America meeting in Venice, April 2010. For more on these paintings see A. Sharf, ‘Bacchiacca: a new contribution’, The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs, lxx (1937), pp.60–6.

The young man’s hourglass is too degraded to tell if the upper chamber is full or empty.

The title and text on the title-page of Lanfranco’s Scintille di musica (Brescia, 1533) forms the shape of an hourglass with all of the sand, symbolized by musical words, fixed in the upper chamber. The lower chamber is empty, with the syllables of the hexachord forming the sides. In this image music and time are fused into a single symbol in the context of a music treatise in the vernacular, accessible to musical amateurs with time to pass in musical pursuits.

This was also pointed out by B. W. Meijer, ‘Harmony and satire in the work of Niccolò Frangipane: problems in the depiction of music’, Simiolus: Netherlands quarterly for the history of art, vi (1972–3), pp.94–112, at p.110, n.64.


This image is available in the ARTstor online digital library as well as in the catalogue of Art Resources, www.artres.com.


Tim Shephard has demonstrated, using quotations from Petrarch, that the chest was also considered to be the source of the voice. ‘Voice, decorum and seduction in Florigero’s Music lesson’, Early Music xxviii/3 (2010), pp.361–7.

Campbell, ‘Unenduring beauty’.

This reminds me of Anton Francesco Doni’s extended discussion of sex using the metaphors of ‘keys’ and ‘locks’ in his Dialogo della musica, unpublished trans. D. Donnelly of G. F. Malipiero, ‘Dialogo della musica’ Antonfrancesco Doni (Vienna, 1964). A sketch by Florigero entitled Concerto at the Uffizi in Florence has six or seven young women and two young men singing from three partbooks. They are all sprawling on what looks like a bed. The hands of many of the figures are prominently marking the tactus, either on their own bodies or on that of their companions. Image available in R. Marini, Sebastiano Florigero (Undine, 1956).


Translated in McIver, ‘Maniera, music, and Vasari’, p.48.

Marini suggests that he is a priest and Slim concurs because the figure wears a biretta, ‘Two paintings’, p.172. Interestingly, the old man in the second Bacchiacca painting, Old man with a skull, also wears a biretta, furthering the connections between decorous old age, silence and spirituality.

Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, p.77.


The priest has does not appear in the background, perhaps he has come to the end of his time.