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Spaces for Musical Performance in the Este and Gonzaga Courts (c.1440-1540)

As is well known, court music flourished as never before in many Italian courts during the Renaissance. In the case of Ferrara, the sustained patronage of its Este rulers ensured that, although small, its court punched above its cultural weight. But where were those courtly musical performances held? This question is not easy to answer. Not as much is known about the Este palaces of this period as one would wish, making interpretation of the few documentary sources all the more difficult. Moretti therefore proposed that the most revealing approach to this problem would be to consider the types of court occasions at which music was played. Larger, more public occasions required larger, more public locations. Some of the most important events took place in the court chapel. The grandest secular venue available to the Este court was the Sala Grande in the Palazzo di Corte, which therefore became the usual locations for the most impressive festivities. Banquets held there could combine dining, music and theatrical performances. Some of the surviving halls from the other Este palaces and villas, such as Belriguardo and Palazzo Schifanoia, are decorated with contemporary frescos showing court musicians, confirming the important role that music played in court life. Salotti provided more intimate spaces for smaller dinner parties, which often featured musical interludes performed by smaller groups of performers. Most intimate of all were camerini or studioli used for private music making. Leonello d'Este in the mid-fifteenth century owned a famous portable organ which would have been stored in such a room, while his nephew Alfonso I had his own camerino di musica to which he regularly retreated. **AB**