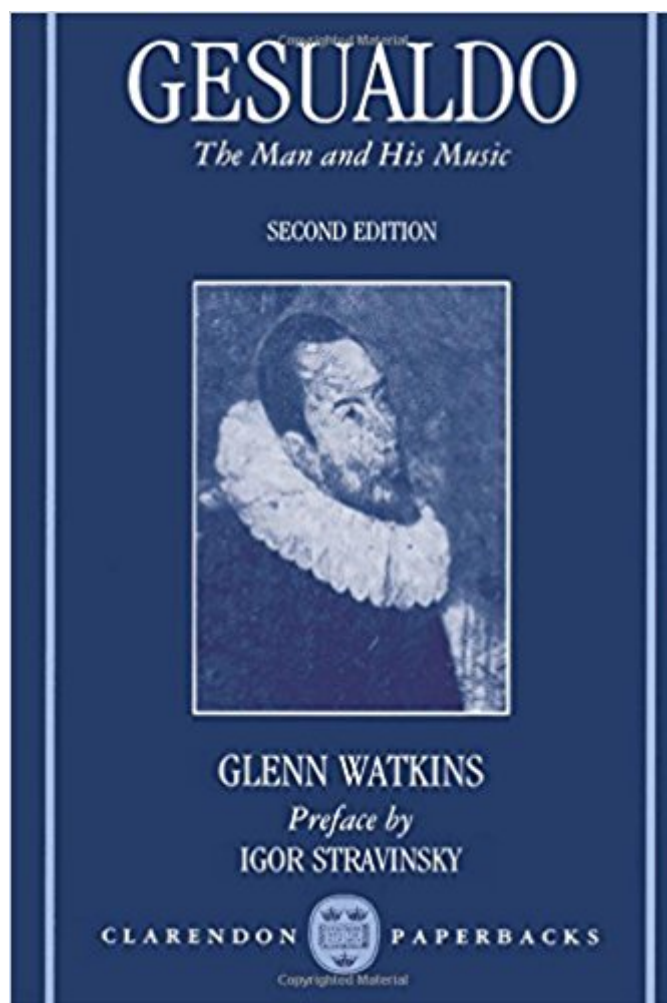


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Gesualdo: The Man And His Music (Clarendon Paperbacks)



Synopsis

Carlo Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa, is equally celebrated as the composer of madrigals of great power and tortured complexity and as the murderer of his wife and her lover in flagrante delicto. His life and compositions are not unconnected. His neurotic sensibility found an ideal outlet in the mannerist tendencies of late Renaissance music, and his works are the most extreme examples of those tendencies. Watkins's extended study of Gesualdo's life and works was originally published in 1973. Alongside detailed analysis of Gesualdo's remarkable madrigals and of the few works in other genres, it contained much new biographical material, particularly on the latter part of the composer's life. This new edition has been extensively updated, and contains a new chapter covering the research of recent years. The preface to the first edition, by Igor Stravinsky is reprinted.

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Customer Reviews

Praise for the first edition: "Watkins's book is not only a model biography and examination of the secular and liturgical music, but a mine of scholarly finds and intuitions."--The New York Times Book Review
"This splendid volume written with rare sensitivity and intelligence, opens the door to a greater understanding of the significance of a misunderstood genius."--Journal of the American Musicological Society

Glenn Watkins is Professor of Music at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

The authority on all things Gesualdo.

I bought this for a project that my son was working on. He said it was great and exactly what he needed.

Don Carlo Gesualdo (1560 - 1613) was rich, artistic, and - as the second son of a noble Neapolitan family - free to indulge his passion for music. But disaster struck: his brother died, and it was decreed that he must carry on the line. The bride found for him - Donna Maria d'Avalos - was his cousin, and the greatest beauty in town. Older and more experienced, she had already sent two husbands to their graves -one of them according to rumor, from "an excess of connubial bliss". Don Carlo, (who may have been gay) fathered a son, whereupon he his interest wandered elsewhere to music and to hunting. One day his uncle divulged to him that his attention starved wife was enjoying a brazen affair with the handsome Duke of Andria, and that whenever possible they would "invite each other to battle on the fields of love". Alerted to the fact that Don Carlo knew about the affair, the Duke tried to persuade Donna Maria to end the affair, but she proclaimed she would sooner die. Thus was the scene set for Don Carlo's historic act. One day in October of 1590 Don Carlo surreptitiously disabled his locks, then accounced that he would set out on a hunt only to creep back in the still of night with his henchmen. The chronicles go into salacious detail about what happened next: About the night-dress Donna Maria asked to be put out on the bed, about the maid posted as sentinel, and the sudden commotion as Don Carlo and his men broke down the doors to find the pair "in flagrante delicto di fragrante peccato", exhausted and asleep after their love-making. There were shots and multiple sword-thrusts, with Don Carlo unable convince himself the job was done until he had cut his victims to ribbons, and had personally skewered his wife to the floor, repeating to himself "I do not believe she is dead". He dragged the bodies out onto the stairs, along with a notice explaining why he'd killed them, for all the town came to gape at next morning. The Duke was still clad in a woman's night-dress, while his lover's "wounds were all in her belly, and especially in those parts which ought to be kept honest". Neapolitans were riveted, with as many taking the lovers' side as that of their murderer. All the local poets were spurred into song, including the great Torquato Tasso, whose friendship with the protagonists inspired his tear-drenched sonnet "On the Death of Two Most Noble Lovers". Don Carlo's nobility ensured there was no trial, and he quietly withdrew to Ferrara, where he remarried, but only to find himself "assailed and afflicted by a vast horde of demons which gave him no peace unless twelve young men, whom he kept specially for

the purpose, were to beat him violently three times a day, during which operation he was wont to smile joyfully." Don Carlo built a private chapel, completed in 1592. Inside hung a painting depicting the Virgin Mary and saints all pointing to the sinner, Don Carlo, while the fires of purgatory burnt below - out of which angels pull the figures of a man and a woman. Could these be the murdered lovers before which Don Carlo implored forgiveness? His music certainly becomes filled with an obsession with themes of guilt, sin, pity, and death - even the joy of love being mixed with a fascination with pain: 'dolorosa gioia', such 'joyous pain' being a typical outburst. Never has there been a composer with a more macabre background than this, nor yet so musically so obsessively fascinating. Stravinsky began his famous foreword to Glenn Watkins' biography of Gesualdo with the words "musicians may yet save Gesualdo from musicologist, but certainly the latter have had the best of it until now". Watkins makes a wonderful companion through the vertigo inducing chromatic spirals leading into the strange, visionary world of this dark genius. The entire book makes gripping reading not merely for the dark details of his biography but for the profound insights into late Renaissance to early Baroque period in which he dwelled. So truth indeed is stranger than fiction.

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