

18. Morir non può il mio cuore

1566

Maddalena Casulana

(ca. 1544-ca. 1590)

arr. William Melton

Casulana, Maddalena

(born Casola d'Elsa, ca. 1544; died ca. 1590)

Casulana's life began in Tuscany; she was born near Siena and studied in Florence. She then moved to the north, working in Vincenza (between Verona and Padua) during the years 1566-1583 and probably marrying there, adding the surname Mezari. As a composer she had several published collections to her credit, and Orlando di Lasso himself conducted Casulana's *Nil mage iucundum* for a royal wedding in Munich in 1568. Tributes to Casulana have come down to us (she was also known as a singer and performer on the lute) and she was conscious of her unusual position as a successful woman composer of her time. A dedication to her patron Isabella de' Medici underlined Casulana's wish

to show to the world (to the degree that it is granted to me in this profession of music) the foolish error of men, who so greatly believe themselves to be the masters of high intellectual gifts that cannot, it seems to them, be equally common among women.

Sixty-six of Maddalena Casulana's madrigals have survived. *Morir non può il mio cuore* was included in the anthology *Il desiderio* (Florence, 1566) and in Casulana's *Il primo libro de' madrigali a quattro voci* (Venice, 1568), which was the very first published musical edition by a woman. "Casulana's madrigals," noted the scholar Thomas Bridges, "show her to have been an original musical thinker, with a very personal style [...]" The text of *Morir non può il mio cuore* by Jacobo Sannazaro evokes the composer's ability in word painting, her piquant harmonies, and her assured employment of dissonance.

Morir non può il mio cuore:
ucciderlo vorrei, poi che vi piace.
Ma trar no si può fuore
del petto vostr'ove gran tempo giace.
Et uccidendol'io, come desio,
so che morreste voi,
morrend' anch'io.

My heart cannot die:
I would like to kill it, since that would please you.
But it cannot be torn from your breast,
where it has dwelled for some time.
And if I killed it, as I wish,
I know that you would die,
so I would die, as well.

Text by William Melton