

# Cambridge Elements

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## LETTERA AMOROSA

### *Musical Love Letters in Early Modern Italy*

Roseen Giles

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## *Lettera amorosa*

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**Abstract:** In early modern Italy, letters were not only written and read but, in some cases, sung. Musical settings of love letters rekindled a complex kind of vocality which was rooted in the letters of antiquity and endured in the musical subgenre of the *lettera amorosa*. Epistolary poetry served to transform, or, to echo Achillini's *lettera* set by Monteverdi (1567–1643), to 'distill' a lover's thoughts and emotions into verse, and the music that set it was equally transformative. The history of musical letters spans several centuries. It begins in the early sixteenth century with a setting of Ovid's *Heroides* by Tromboncino; returns in the early seventeenth century through the *lettere amorose* of Monteverdi, D'India, and Frescobaldi; and ends with epistolary cantatas by Carissimi, Melani, and Domenico Scarlatti. This Element traces the breadth and significance of the musical love letter with a focus on the provocative *lettere amorose* of the seventeenth century.

**Keywords:** Claudio Monteverdi, lettera amorosa, love letters, seventeenth-century music, madrigals

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