

24. Ave Regina Caelorum (Motetti a quattro voce, 1684)

Isabella Leonarda
(1620-c.1704)
arr. William Melton

Leonarda, Isabella

(born Novara, 6 September 1620; died Novara, 25 February 1704)

She was born Anna Isabella Leonardi to a good Novarese family, and at the age of sixteen she entered the Collegio di Santa Orsola, an Ursuline convent where she would remain the rest of her life. There she may have found a mentor in the composer Gasparo Casati, master of the Novara cappella. She subsequently taught music to others, became Mother Superior in 1686, was made *madre vicaria* a decade later and finally became *consigliera* for the entire region. Casati included Leonarda's pieces in a published collection, and she would go on to write more than two hundred works, roughly half of which were solo motets. Dubbed 'la Musa novarese' by a later generation, Leonarda may also have authored many of her own texts. Her *Sonatas da chiesa*, Op. 16 of 1693 are possibly the first instrumental sonatas ever published by a woman.

Leonarda's renowned skill with rich harmonies and expressive coloratura is evident in the *Ave Regina caelorum* published by Camagni of Milan in 1684 in the collection *Motetti a quattro voci*. Despite its sacred text, scholar Stewart Carter noted 'the influence of contemporary dance music in its sprightly 6/8 metre and upbeat conclusion'.

Text by William Melton