S: Correspondence with Sherman Von Solkema re: Michael Leavitt

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SHERMAN VAN SOLKEMA
VICE PRESIDENT

February 15, 1972

Professor Saul Novak
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Belle Harbor, New York 11694

Dear Saul,

Some time has passed since the Executive Committee of the Ph.D. program in Music approved the publication of a group of student papers in the Lacunae in Musicological Research seminar series. It is thought of as a modest-format volume to be produced at the City University as CUNY Studies in Musicology No.1--to serve as a kind of companion volume to the lectures and seminar discussions which will be published by Norton this spring. It is expected that the student essays will be of particular interest to beginning doctoral students everywhere and to other young researchers throughout the country. I have consented to stay with this project and because of my schedule have asked one of our doctoral candidates--Bea Friedland--to serve as co-editor with me in preparing the volume for press.

From the beginning it was clear that if each paper could be read and commented on by a member of our faculties specializing in the subject area, the entire project would be greatly improved.

In this connection, would it be possible and would you be willing, in the next few weeks, to read "Some Problems of the Early Northern Renaissance" by Michael Leavitt, which is enclosed? I believe that a meeting with the writer of the paper would be the surest way of his getting the value of a professional reading. The set of papers, frankly, dates from 1969, and because of other student commitments cannot be given wholesale revision. Still, any comment or updating would be appropriate.

If you will let me know that you are willing, I will ask Mr. Leavitt to be in touch with you directly. We hope to have the volume ready for distribution by late spring.

Sincerely,

Sherman

Sherman Van Solkema

SVSgf
enclosure
cc: Mr. Michael Leavitt

SOME PROBLEMS OF THE

EARLY NORTHERN RENAISSANCE

by

Michael Leavitt

p. 6, ¶1 = heart of this paper

Professor Sherman Van Solkema, Jr.

SUL1000.5

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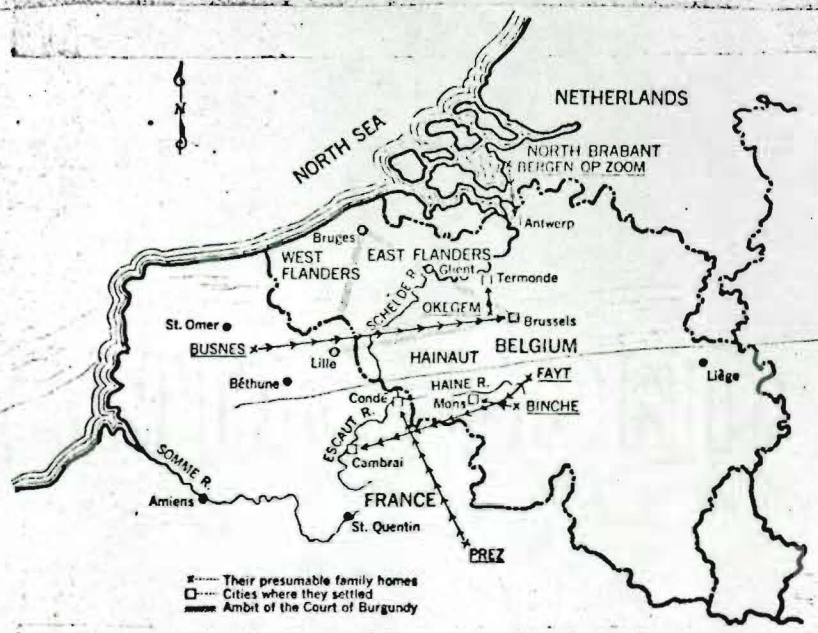
It is the purpose of this paper to explore the current state of research concerning some specific problems of the early Northern Renaissance. Primarily we will deal with the vocal music of this time. However, instrumental music was not completely unrelated and will be considered as well. Particular composers will not be treated to any great extent, for such treatment would only serve to narrow rather than broaden the discussion.

Because of the tremendous implications of some problems we will concentrate our discussion on the Renaissance Era as a whole, moving only secondarily to specific applications to the early fifteenth century.

It is not our aim to provide answers to particular questions, but rather, to ask new questions and stimulate continued discussion.

A geographical orientation is a necessary beginning. The House of Burgundy was a mobil one, and its territory and influence were wide-spread. From the last third of the fourteenth century (1367) through the first three-quarters of the fifteenth century the court was controlled by four dukes: Philip the Bold (d. 1404), John the Fearless (d.1419), Philip the Good (d. 1467), and Charles the Bold (d. 1477). While the exact boundaries of the territories assembled by these great dukes varied in this period of slightly more than a century, "the cultural sphere...under Philip the Good (1419-1467) and Charles the Bold (1467-1477) included the whole of eastern France as well as Belgium and the Netherlands."[1] The ambit of the Court of Burgundy can be seen on the map below.[2]



Places associated with musicians of the Northern Renaissance

Philip's favorite residences, the capitals of French Flanders (Lille), West Flanders (Bruges), East Flanders (Ghent), and Brubart (Brussels) provide the outer limits of this ambit. Brussels was especially important in the last half of Philip's reign and throughout the rule of Charles (and subsequently his daughter, Mary of Burgundy).

Attention should be called to the fact that although the actual range of court movement is centered in a comparatively small physical area, its immediate sphere of influence is broadened considerably because of the vitalities with Cambrai to the south and Liège to the west. The great cathedrals of these important cities supplied the musicians not only for the Burgundian dukes, but also for the papel choir. The interaction between the court cities, the cathedral cities, particularly Cambrai, and Rome, forms an orbit of considerable size.

While this matter of geography is fairly clear and is generally agreed upon by scholars, the whole question of the relationship of musicians to the Court and of the musicians to each other has long been a matter of controversy. Various lables have been used to identify the three generations of musicians in the period under consideration (ca. 1400-1500).[3]

R.G. Kiesewetter was the first to formulate the three Netherlands Schools in Die Verdienste der Niederländer um die Tonkunst (Amsterdam, 1829). These designations have unfortunately been passed down to the present day, appearing in the works of such scholars as van den Borren and Bridgman. By the three Netherlands schools Kiesewetter meant (1) the

generation of Dufay and Binchois (early 15th century), (2) the generation of Busnois and Ockeghem (late 15th century), (3) and the generation of Josquin and Obrecht (continuing into the 16th century). But these national names or schools failed to indicate the musicians' deep roots in French speech and culture. Furthermore, Belgium won its freedom and became a separate kingdom only two years after Kiesewetter's book appeared. "What this meant for music history was that the only place associated with any of the Netherlands Schools that remained in Netherland's hands was Bergen op Zoom, home of Jacob Obrecht of Bergen"[4] (see map).

Nearly a century later, in 1924, Willibald Gurlitt coined the Burgundian designation, applying it to the song, however, rather than a group of people.[5] Heinrich Besseler, in Die Musik des Mittelaters und der Renaissance (1931) speaks of a Burgundian School composed of Dufay, Binchois, and their contemporaries, but retains the use of Netherlands for later generations.[6] Paul Henry Lang's article "The So-Called Netherlands School"[7] suggests the use of the Burgundian School for the generation of Dufay and Binchois and the Franco-Flemish School for later generations.

Two last interesting facts are added to complete this unstable picture. Musicologists have long considered the Burgundian Court at Dijon to have been "the leading center for culture for all of Europe....."[8] and yet we learn from Clarke[9] that this was not among Philip the Good's favorite residences nor can we speak of it in connection with serious

music. Secondly, there is no record of court service of either Dufay or Ockeghem; therefore, to call Dufay Burgundian in one generation to distinguish him from Ockeghem in another generation is indeed tenuous nomenclature.

It should be obvious to the reader by now that the testimony given above is confusing and offers little assistance in deciding what or how to call these important musicians. They all were men of French culture in a Flemish environment; they received their training primarily at Cambrai or at Liège as both cathedrals provided singers for Flanders and Rome.[10] Clarke's case is clear: "Calling these musicians Netherlandish distorts their image to the north; Burgundian distorts it to the south. If they are French, they are also Flemish. If they are Flemish they are also French. Call them--but call all of them--'Franco-Flemish.' Or, better still let them be the musicians of the Northern Renaissance."[11] How are we, then, to emphasize their differences? Here we must turn to the important area of style-analysis.

The area of style-analysis has become increasingly important since the time of the Renaissance. Today, in contrast to former times, composers and performers have become a vital part of the academic and intellectual community, often functioning dually as scholars and theorists. "In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries [however] only a few composers of importance had any connection with academic circles. A veritable divorce took place between speculation

about music and musical life itself..... The higher education and general culture dispersed by the universities was countered by the technical apprenticeship offered in the choir schools of the great churches."[12] Much of the discussion of music, indeed, was from a speculative viewpoint; chant and polyphony were considered as were rhythmic structures and particularly, the modes.[13] A certain amount, however, was written of an instructional nature, yet this was more a reflection of contemporary compositional practice than an historical approach. Theoretical writings of succeeding periods, too, consistently lack the broad historical viewpoint so essential to style analysis.

What is generally considered today to be style-analysis --a method of analysis which enables us to define the nature of a musical style--is a rather recent development.[14] And because it is so new it offers, I believe, the greatest challenge for modern musicology. We have hardly broken the surface in seeking answers to some of the most pressing and fundamental questions about Renaissance music.[15] We have amassed an enormous, and ever increasing, body of knowledge on many diverse and important topics; we have available the music of many of the major composers (though the lacunae of the 1400's are a particularly glaring problem[16]); we have begun to collect biographical, cultural, sociological, and philosophical data; and we are able to conduct "a descriptive tour" through the music of the Renaissance. These tasks are on their way to fulfillment and have already borne vital fruit.

cite some for your reader's sake. Build reader's confidence in your work.

hey are steps, however, and only a prelude to actually dealing with the music itself. We must face now the most fundamental and virtually still unanswered question: What are the principles of musical organization and coherence in the music of the Renaissance?[17] For the answer, we must turn to the concepts formulated by Heinrich Schenker as I believe they can lead us to an intimate understanding of the musical architecture of the past.[18]

Schenker's conceptions have already proven their value in the understanding of the music of the so-called common practice period—the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But their systematic application to compositions of other historical periods, particularly the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, is just beginning.[19] Schenker believed that

> "Like a logical argument or a literary composition, a musical work is directed; its direction is determined by the very goal towards which it moves. Thus the significance of tones and chords and the functions they fulfill depend upon this goal and the direction the motion takes to attain it..... Schenker developed the distinction between chords of structure and chords of prolongation directly out of his differentiation between chord grammar and chord significance[20]... This distinction between structure and prolongation became the backbone of his whole approach. By means of this distinction we hear a work, not as a series of fragmentary and isolated phrases and sections, but as a single organic structure through whose prolongation the principle of artistic unity and variety is maintained.... The structural outline or framework represents the fundamental motion to the goal; it shows the direct, the shortest way to this goal. The whole interest and tension of a piece consists in the

— some music is.

> expansions, modifications, detours, and elaborations of this basic direction, and these we call prolongations.... In the reciprocity between structure and prolongation lies the organic coherence of a musical work."[21]

The reader, understanding the far-reaching significance of these musical concepts, may well inquire as to their specialized application to problems of the Remaissance and particularly the early fifteenth century.

yes indeed.

One long range goal will be showing how certain prolongations which are used in later (or earlier) periods of music history are used in the Renaissance Era (and its component periods). The various levels of voice-leading graphs--from the details to the fundamental structure--will help us clarify what characteristics are essential elements of a particular style or historical period. What this means, of course, is a detailed history of tonality which may involve a complete re-evaluation of what we consider style-analysis as well as a redefinition of the standard musicological and analytic vocabularies.

cannot stand by itself

Another, and more immediate, Renaissance problem is a thorough investigation of the particular tonal characteristics of the modes. Examination may reveal distinctly individualized methods of handling the different modes by composers. The use of the Phrygian mode with its peculiarities should be very interesting. What, if anything, substitutes for the lack of a dominant chord? Are other compositional elements stronger so as not to unbalance the artistic unity of the Phrygian composition? These are only a few of the

this has already been done--to some real result, has it not?

questions one could ask regarding the tonal coherence and the structural principles of the modes.

As the fifteenth century is considered the era of so-called horizontal composition, then investigation of its structural principles becomes an even higher priority. For example, is the normative interaction between the prolongations and the structure altered in a significant way? Are the structures themselves different—are they contrapuntal rather than harmonic structures? What role does the triad play, particularly in fauxbourdon? Exploration of these questions is embryonic. The reader is directed to some preliminary studies by Dr. Salzer in Structural Hearing.[22]

partially so

Cantus Firmus in mass and motet 1420-1520 by Edgar H. Sparks[23] is an extremely valuable work. Does a cantus firmus, either as a tenor or (and more common in the fifteenth century) as the basis of a melody part, elaborated on and remodeled to conform to the composer's own melodic ideals, affect structure? Who could fail to see the importance of Schenker's concepts for analysis of later parody and paraphrase compositions?

In the time of Dufay the larger formes fixes were giving way to the rondeau and, to a much lesser extent, to a monophonic type of virelai. "The change had to do with the trend toward a more pointed and concise style but also reflects a new relationship between poetry and music."[24] Do structural events at this time and in other periods re-enforce the meaning of the words in vocal music? Do they

But rondeau was increasing in size. See Ewen for examp. on rondeau from 13th – 15

coincide with poetic and musical climaxes? What relationship do the prolongations have to the poetry? What is the implication and relation of the structure to form?

Def. of "form"

The list of unanswered ~~and/or~~ or superficially answered questions and partial solutions for Renaissance music seems endless. Schenkerian analysis, I believe, offers many valuable inroads.

What evidence convinces you of this? Give your reader a clue here

Thus far, we have dealt with problems which affect our knowledge and understanding of the music and its historical position. But music does not exist in a vacuum; the end product of research should be, of course, the realization of the printed page as a performance. The late Noah Greenberg, in an article entitled "Early Music Performance Today", posed an important question: What guidance does the scholar offer for performers?[25]

The performer cannot possibly wait for scholars to come to final conclusions on many issues; concert deadlines, rehearsal schedules, and other practical aspects of music making must be considered. Such old questions as musica ficta and proper tempo, about which there have been literally decades of scholarly speculation and discussion, require immediate attention and solution from a performer's point of view. Musicians are asking such questions now; the imaginative performer has no choice but experimentation, frequently without direction![26]

Of the music of the fifteenth century we need answers to the following questions: (I) How small were the court

and chapel choirs? We know, for example, that for festive occasions their size was appreciably increased; we know also that at these pageants special music was composed. What indeed, then, was considered normal at the time? Collation of archival documentation, here, is a much needed task. (2) In the vocal music which involves the use of solo voices, with the choir singing in alternation, which sections were allotted to the choir and which sections were given to the soloists? (3) How were melodies ornamented? Ernest T. Ferand says that the period up to about 1450 was an "..... era of free, creative ornamentation in monophonic and polyphonic music wheather improvised or written," but then there is a period with an unexplained lack of ornamentation.[27] Why? Was there a general decline in technique or a change in philosophy? (4) How were instruments used in the early Renaissance periods, and when? What of their tuning and construction and particularly, what were their techniques of playing? Iconography can be of great assistance in this area.[28] (5) How were the wordless tenor and countertenor parts performed? (6) What do we know about unwritten music of the Renaissance (or other historical eras)? "It is rarely taken into account that the written music of any time represents only the top of the iceberg that stands for musical events as a whole. We are accustomed to considering music as sacred or secular, polyphonic or monophonic, vocal or instrumental, texted or untexted, but scarcely at all as written or unwritten."[29] (7) What was the role of the amateur musician and what music

did he play? Diaries, letters and other private documents will provide further insight into this question. Iconography again may be an important aid in this area.

Manfred Rudofzer wrote an article for the Musical Quarterly some years age entitled "Changing Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music" (1958). In it he suggests the following topics badly in need of investigation: (1) the pre-history of the parody mass--an historical force which lasts well into the seventeeth century, (2) the performance of the basse dance--particularly those polyphonic dances which seem unsuited for actual dancing, (3) the study of bound manuscripts as repertories before the invention of music printing, and the collation and comparative study of both related and unrelated manuscripts as a key to the musical style and the external arrangement of repertory. All of these are important areas. But his discussion of the ever-changing conceptions of historical periods is particularly significant. He observed that " ... while the artistic oeuvre of a composer does not in itself change, the meaning and import of all spiritual utterance is not the same for each generation. The appropriation of the cultural heritage and its interpretation by the present are not constants but historical variables; in other works, they belong themselves to our own past."[30] We need to formulate a history of musical thought of the past, involving not only how musicians of the past regarded themselves, but how they saw their particular past and what they felt their place was in it. I believe their own sense of

Has any progress been made in them?

history and mission must have significantly affected the music which they composed. Such a history, therefore, would be an invaluable tool for us.

* * *

During the course of this paper many topics for investigation have been suggested. We have attempted to focus attention, specifically, on problims which most directly concern the music of the period itself and our perception and knowledge of it. These topics are not altogether new. Many of them have remained with us for generations, and still beg for resolution. It is hoped that our own additional discussion will serve as a springboard for renewed interest and further research.

Too General.
Schenkerian approach
w/o evidence
Questions 1 p. 7 + 10 are still
Some have been answered

FOOTNOTES

1 The Harvard Dictionary of Music, ed. Willi Apel (Massachusetts, 1944), p. 104.

2 Map reproduced from Henry L. Clarke, "Musicians of the Northern Renaissance," Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music, ed. Jan LaRue (New York, 1966), p.73.

3 The major figures of three generations as listed by Apel (HDM) p. 105. ~~The~~ (single dates indicate years of activity in the papel choir): First generation--born ca. 1375; Reginald Liebert (1420), Pierre Fontaine (1420), Nicolaus Grenan (1421), and Johannes Brassart (1431);
Second generation--born ca. 1400; Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474), Gilles Binchois (1400-1467), Hugo de Latins (1453), Heyne von Ghizeghem (1453);
Third generation--born ca. 1425; Antione Busnois (d. 1492), Johannes Regis (1463), and Phillippe Caron.

4 Clarke, op. cit., p. 68.

5 Willibald Gurlitt, Burgundische Chanson und deutsche Liedkunst (Basel, 1924).

6 Besseler's Burgundian School parallels Apel's second generation of composers which contributes further to present day confusion.

7 Paul Henry Lang, "The So-Called Netherlands School," Musical Quarterly, , 1939, p. 53.

8 Apel, op. cit., p. 105.

9 Clarke, op. cit., p. 70.

10 It should be remembered that the House of Burgundy was always a consumer of music, not a producer of musicians.

11 Clarke, op. cit., p. 80.

12 Robert Wangermée, Flemish Music and Society in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries (New York, 1968), p. 28.

13 For a modern day re-evaluation of the modes the reader is referred to Robert W. Wienphal's article "Modal Usage In Masses of the Fifteenth Century," Journal of the American Musicological Society, 1952, pp. 37-52. The author discusses and presents a statistical analysis of cantus firmus and modal usage, (particularly the Renaissance awareness of the difference between the original church modes and the modes used in polyphonic music. Wienphal concludes that as the desire for melodic extension became stronger, the ambitus of the modes expanded and mixtures therefore resulted.)

14 Chrysander and Adler laid the foundations for the musicological method and approach in the last half of the nineteenth century.

15 The general conception of eighteenth and nineteenth century music is slightly more promising, less so, however, for early Baroque music, where instinctive musical understanding cannot be relied on to such an extent.

16 For example, there is no accessible complete edition of the works of Binchois who, after Dufay, is the most important composer of the first half of the fifteenth century. The scholar must search out three works:

1) Jean Anne Boucher, The Religious Music of Gilles Binchois (Ph.D dissertation, Boston University, 1963).
2) Arthur Parris, The Sacred Work of Gilles Binchois, I--III, (Ph.D. dissertation Bryn Mawr, 1965).
3) Wolfgang Rehm, Die Chanson von Gilles Binchois (Mainz, 1957).

Of these works, only the last has printed scores; each employs a different editorial practice; and none is easily available for scholarly use, to say nothing of performance. While this situation is, at best, disheartening, investigation of the other composers of the period is nearly impossible.

17 And in other historical periods as well.

18 The best explanation of Schenker's conceptions is found in Felix Salzer's Structural Hearing - Tonal Coherence in Music (New York, 1961).

19 The reader is referred to pertinent examples in Structural Hearing and to two articles in The Music Forum, I, 1967, edited by William Mitchell and Felix Salzer.

1) "Mode and Polyphony around 1500: Theory and Practice" by Peter Bergquist
2) "Tonality in Early Medieval Polyphony: Towards a History of Tonality" by Felix Salzer.

Volume II, which will be published this year (1969) also contains articles apropos to the present discussion.

20 Chord grammar -- the usual type of analysis in which separate designations and labels are assigned to chords relating them to different key centers (as in Piston).
Chord significance -- the study of the chord in order to reveal its meaning in all contexts, from the phrase to a section of a work to a work in its entirety.

21 Salzer, op.cit., pp. II-14.
Finding the structure of a composition, of course, is only the beginning. We must realize that within this framework there are limitless paths of detour and delay and a tremendous range of architectonic and expressive possibilities.

22 Salzer, op. cit., pp. 264-281, expecially pp. 278-280 concerning the fifteenth century.

23 Edgar H. Sparks, Cantus Firmus in Mass and Motet 1420-1520 (Berkeley, 1963).

4 Nino Pirrotta, "On Text Forms from Ciconia to Dufay," Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music, Jan LaRue, ed. (New York, 1966), p. 673.

25 Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music, Jan LaRue, ed. (New York, 1966), p. 314.

26 More modern editions which can be used for scholarly study and performance are needed. They must be accessible, preferably available also in miniature score. Further attempts to standardize editorial practice, for example in the barring of polyphony must be made. Sources must be collated and assessed.

27 Ernest T. Ferond, "A History of Music Seen in the Light of Ornamentation," Report of the Eighth Congress of IMS, New York, 1960, ed. Jan LaRue (Kasel, 1961), pp. 464.

28 The reader's attention is called to the warnings of Emanuel Winternitz on this subject. (cf. "The Visual Arts as a Source for the Historian," Report of the Eighth Congress of IMS, New York 1960, ed. Jan LaRue (Kasel, 1961), p. 113.

29 Frank Lloyd Harrison, "Instrumental Usage 1100-1450," Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music, ed. Jan LaRue, (New York, 1966), p. 320.

30 Manfred F. Bukofzer, "Changing Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music," MQ, (1958), p. 1.

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Be consistent about capitalization. Note French titles. Present usage: Capitalize 1st and nouns.

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