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Roger North's
The Musicall Grammarian 1728

Roger North's *The Musicall Grammarian 1728* is a treatise on musical eloquence in all its branches. Of its five parts, I and II, on the orthoepy, orthography and syntax of music, constitute a grammar; III and IV, on the arts of invention and communication form a rhetoric; and V, on history, consists of an etymology. The text is edited here for the first time in its entirety with two substantial introductory chapters by Mary Chan and Jamie C. Kassler.

North's main thesis is that music is a sign of humanity's changing history and habits; hence, his treatise can be seen as a contribution to musical semiotics. But North also assigned an important role to reflection as a means of critically examining not only his own propositions and theories but those of others. Accordingly, his treatise is also a venture of exploration, a process of thinking about musical thinking.

In the two introductory chapters, the editors have attempted to capture a broader understanding of these aspects of North's work. In the first chapter Jamie Kassler places *The Musicall Grammarian 1728* within the context of its companion treatise, *Theory of Sounds 1728*, as well as North's non-musical writings and their relation to the intellectual ferment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the second chapter Mary Chan examines physical and textual aspects of the manuscript as evidence of North's processes of composing the treatise.

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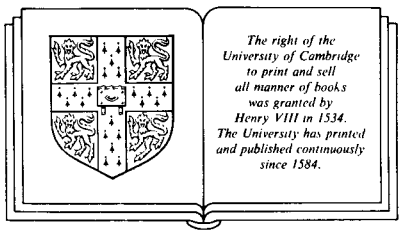
THE MUSICALL GRAMMARIAN 1728

edited with Introductions and Notes
by
MARY CHAN and JAMIE C. KASSLER



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FOREWORD

The Honourable Roger North (b. 1651?, d. 1734) has been a companionable guide to the intellectual and social ferment of the latter half of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries. Through his writings we discovered that responses to the mechanical philosophy of Descartes varied widely; that autobiographical writing may consist of a philosophy as well as deeds or events in a life; and that ethical and critical questions were as central as religious and scientific ones. In return for these benefits, we have made every effort to respect the integrity of North's texts. As in our other volumes devoted to his writings, there has been a division of labour in which Mary Chan has taken responsibility for the physical and textual aspects of the manuscripts and Jamie C. Kassler, the structural and theoretical aspects.

The editors would like to thank the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral for permission to publish an edition of the manuscript in their possession; the Honorary Librarian of Hereford Cathedral, Miss Penelope M. Morgan, for providing access to the manuscript; Mrs Pamela North for sharing her interest in North and his manuscripts at Rougham Hall; and the Australian Research Grants Scheme and St John's College, Cambridge, for generous fellowships.

Professor Bernard Martin willingly shared his knowledge of languages and classical texts by helping to identify obscure words or phrases. Professor Pierre Lazslo opened up a world of chemical analogies hitherto invisible to our eyes, thereby adding a dimension to our understanding of North. And Dr Graham Pont encouraged and assisted inauguration of the series, North Papers, published at the University of New South Wales. We are indebted also to our respective families, who with grace, good humour and considerable patience have adopted North as a member of the family during the years devoted to studying his writings.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Roger North was the youngest of ten children of Dudley, fourth Baron North.[1] He was born at Tostock in Suffolk about 1651 and was educated privately and then at the Free Schools of Bury St Edmunds and Thetford. On 30 October 1667 he entered Jesus College, Cambridge, where he was tutored by one of his brothers, John North.[2] On 21 April 1669 Roger North was admitted to the Middle Temple, London; and on 29 May 1674 he was called to the Bar. Another brother, Francis North, was almost fifteen years older and already well-established in London as a lawyer. He sent business to Roger North, who attributed his own success in the law to that brother's influence. Between 1682 and 1685 North's legal practice centred in the Court of Chancery. He held positions of Steward to the See of Canterbury (1679), King's Counsel (1682) and Solicitor General to the Duke of York (1684). After the Duke came to the throne in 1685 as James the Second, North became Solicitor General to the Queen, Mary of Modena, and in 1686 he was appointed her Attorney General. After the Revolution of 1688 and because he refused to take the oath of allegiance, North was forced to resign most of his public appointments.[3]

On 26 January 1679 a fire broke out in the Middle Temple, after which North resided with his brother, Francis, whose wife had died in the previous year.[4] On 30 November 1680 the benchers of the

[1] This Biographical note has been compiled from a number of sources, including unpublished manuscripts and letters of the North family; the unpublished account book at Rougham of North's father; Korsten (1981); North (ed. M. North 1819, ed. Jessopp 1887, ed. Jessopp 1890, ed. Millard 1984); and Wilson (1959). Other sources are noted below, and supplementary data appear in various footnotes to the edited text.

[2] John North acted only nominally as a tutor, as Roger North makes clear: '. . . a freind lent his name, as tutor, to enable my admission but I read to my self; so a little phisicks, mathematicks, the peacable side of logick[,] some musick, and no conversation were my cursus at the university' (*Preface*: f. 3).

[3] Only the most prominent of North's public appointments are listed in this paragraph.

[4] For further details about this period, see North (ed. M. North 1819). There is evidence that North resided with his brother much earlier, even though he used his rooms at the Middle Temple from time to time.

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Middle Temple invited Christopher Wren to provide a design for the new cloisters and, during rebuilding, to pass the workmen's accounts. On the same day Peter Lely died, and North became one of the executors of his will and a guardian of Lely's two illegitimate children. Between 1683 and 1684, when North was Treasurer of the Middle Temple, the Great Gateway was built which still gives access to the Temple from Fleet Street. The design for the Gateway, originally attributed to Wren, was by North himself. After the death of Francis North on 5 September 1685, Roger North moved from his brother's house into Lely's house in Covent Garden, which he leased from the estate until 1690. During this period North catalogued Lely's collection of art works for auction. He also began to sort through Francis North's papers, to write notes and animadversions on some of them, and to commence writing on philosophical subjects.[5] About 1690, he and his brother, Dudley, conducted experiments in a 'laboratory' they had set up at Wroxton, the estate of the late Francis North.

On 26 December 1690 North purchased the Yelverton estate in Rougham, Norfolk, and in 1692 began the rebuilding of Rougham Hall.[6] On 26 May 1696 he married Mary, daughter of Sir Robert Gayer of Stoke Poges in Buckinghamshire. Of the seven surviving children from this marriage, only the dates of birth of his two sons are recorded. In addition to his immediate family, North's responsibilities extended to the Lely children and to educating and overseeing the affairs of various nieces and nephews, whose guardian he had become on the death of his brothers Francis, Charles and Dudley. About 1700, North bought another estate at Ashwicken, Norfolk, and commenced improvements and agricultural experiments. In 1701, he let his Middle Temple chambers to relatives and acquaintances. Although he still made occasional visits to London, his time was spent mostly in Norfolk, where, from *c.* 1704, he acted as a lawyer for various neighbours, including Sir Thomas Coke of Holkham, Sir Nicholas L'Estrange of Hunstanton Hall and Sir Robert Walpole of Houghton. He also established a parochial library in Rougham Church which was completed in 1709.

The events of North's public life are well documented, but details of his private life until the time of his death in March 1734 are less accessible. Insofar as music is concerned, the sources of North's

[5] For a list of North's early writings up to 1703, see *Cursory Notes of Musicke* (ed. Chan and Kassler 1986: 293–308).

[6] The extensive renovation and rebuilding is celebrated by North in a manuscript, *Cursory Notes of Building* (ed. Colvin and Newman 1981).

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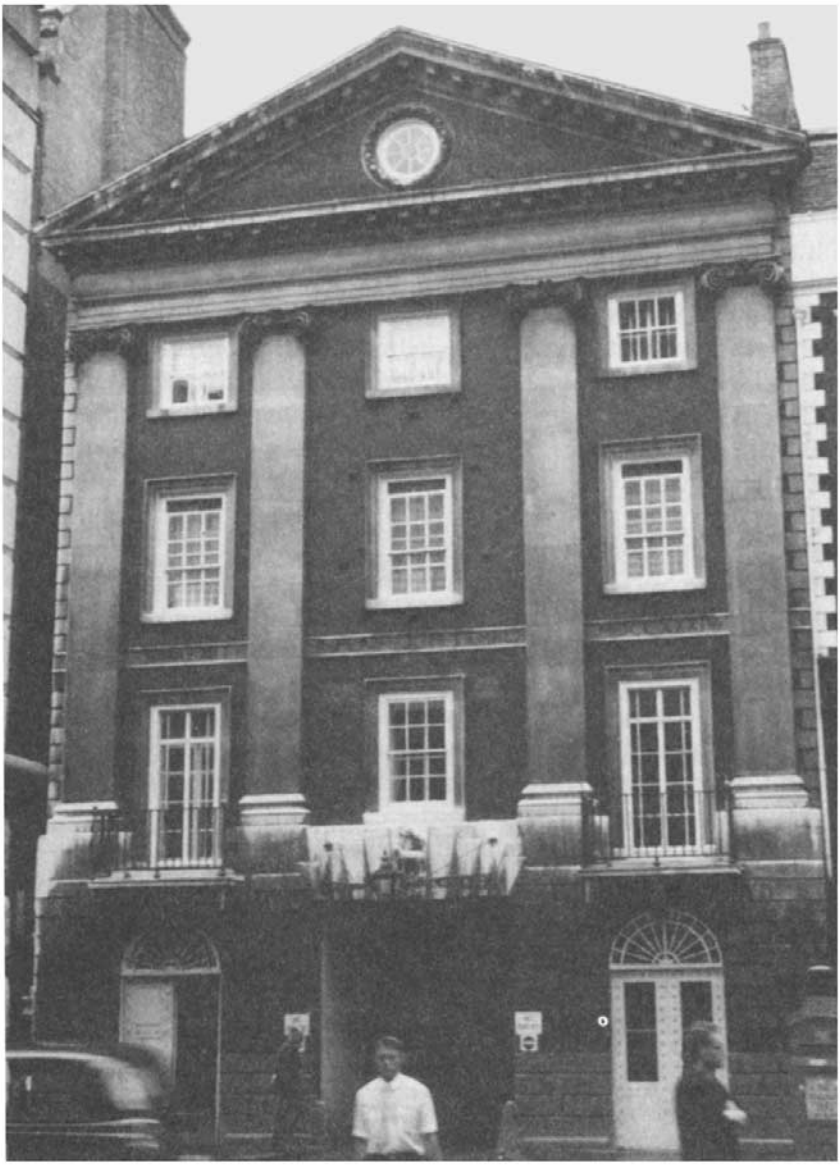

Figure 1. The Great Gateway which gives access to the Temple from Fleet Street, London, built after North's design.

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activities derive chiefly from his father's account book for the early years and from North's own writings begun *c.* 1688.[7] But North's reporting of personal events and circumstances is different in kind from that of Samuel Pepys or John Evelyn. In the first place, North was not a diarist. Then, because of political events, he was circumspect about naming names. And finally, the bulk of his writings are a record of his thoughts, not an account of his social activities. Nevertheless, from these writings it is possible to glean some information about North's activities in music, which may be regarded as of three kinds: practical, scientific and philosophical.

North's practical experience in music probably began *c.* 1660, when he had lessons on the viol with John Jenkins. These lessons lasted to 1666, during which period Jenkins introduced North to the principles of music. Contact between the two men continued into the 1670s, when North's practical musical activities included lessons on the theorbo with John Lilly; acquaintance, and possibly lessons on the violin, with Nicola Matteis; and membership in The Gentleman's Society, a music meeting that gathered at least once a week in private chambers or taverns to play music in the style of Lully. North also made a few essays in composition but, with characteristic irony, judged them worthless.[8] Family correspondence and the bequests in his will indicate that music-making continued to be important after North's marriage and retirement from London. In 1709, for example, the family had a visitor, on 27 February, a 'rare harpsi[c]ordiere'.[9] This must have been 'Captain' F. Prencourt, whose treatise on the first principles of music North transcribed and later recopied with his own animadversions.[10]

Scattered throughout his writings are many remarks on music education. These remarks are guided by ideas that are central to

[7] North family papers are housed in Cambridge (University Library, St John's College Library), London (British Library), Oxford (Bodleian Library), Hereford (Hereford Cathedral Library), and Rougham Hall, Norfolk. Microfilms of some of North's private papers are available from the Norfolk Record Office in Norwich.

[8] 'I became, as I thought, a master of composition, which was great pleasure, and I essayed some compositions of three parts, which I cannot commend. Some of two I made airy enough, which my brother, the Chief Justice [Francis], would be content to play. I was not out at song neither, for my father translated the Italian old song which his daughters had learned: "Una volta finira," &c., "Time at last will set me free," &c., and gave it to me to set, which I did in three parts, imitating somewhat I had heard of Italian: it was in f, fa, ut, three flats, a solemn key, and I thought succeeded well; my brother gave me the encouragement to ask where I stole several passages' (*Notes of Me* ed. Jessopp 1887: 83–4).

[9] Letter to North Foley, 27 February 1708/9, BL Add MS 32501: f.66.

[10] See References and bibliography 1.2: *Prencourt Tracts* and *Musicall Recollections I* [*Prencourt Tracts Annotated*].

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North's conception of human nature and that stem from the neo-Stoic philosopher, Thomas Hobbes.[11] Although North was critical of Hobbes's theory of government,[12] he returned again and again to Hobbes's theory of human nature and, particularly, his theory of pleasure.[13] For example, in advocating that children learn how to sing or play a musical instrument, North wrote:

> We know that there is a pleasure in mere action as such, witness the usual running and play of boys, who will not walk on the ground if a rail be near, but they must walk on the top of that. So sliding on skates, riding full speed upon a horse, shuttlecock, tennis (without wager), and many such things are pleasant, merely as action, and a doing of somewhat, though to no end but doing. So if a nail be to be driven, and two or three stand by, each has a mind and would be pleased to do it. Therefore it must be allowed that action itself is a pleasure, and such will be allowed to [musical] performers, which the audience cannot pretend to. Mr. Hobbes to this has affixed another, rejoicing in their own skill, which is witty, and in measure true, and also very lawful, harmless, and satisfactory.[14]

For North, however, practical music was not restricted to performance or composition, for as early as 1663 he spent time constructing an organ.[15] His interest in the technology of musical instruments was revived in February 1683, when he and other benchers of the Inner and Middle Temple invited the organ builders, Bernard Smith and Renatus Harris, to submit designs for a new organ for the Temple Church. Subsequently, the successful competitor, Smith, built North's own organ, which was set up in the long gallery at Rougham Hall. During the time of its construction in the 1690s, North began work on the physics of pipes, a subject which, previously, had been dealt with by only two authors: Marin Mersenne and Hobbes. Neither writer had understood the nature of a wave in the air and the way in which it 'fits' into a pipe. Because North drew on developments in kinematic optics and, in particular, on the work of Christiaan Huygens and Robert

[11] For a new interpretation of Hobbes, see Kassler (forthcoming), who argues that Hobbes had recourse to Stoic philosophy as a means of criticising and modifying scholastic Aristotelianism.

[12] See, for example, *Of Etimology*, essay 8, 'Notes relating to the origination of Governement, laws, and their peculiar language', section 4 of which is a critique of Hobbes (ff. 56–61v). The critique is transcribed by Korsten (1981: 217–22), who does not indicate that it is an extract from a larger work.

[13] For some aspects of this theory see the Introduction to, and notes accompanying the text of, *Cursory Notes of Musicke* (ed. Chan and Kassler 1986).

[14] *Notes of Me* (ed. Jessopp 1887: 73).

[15] *Preface*: f.2.

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Hooke, his work on the physics of musical pipes constitutes the most important advance on the subject before the work of Jacques Vaucanson in 1737.[16]

In addition to problems that we now term 'scientific', North also grappled with a question of philosophical import: how is knowledge possible? In his attempts to answer this question, North revealed the philosophical and adversarial side of his character. The former, philosophical side had been nurtured by his father, whose influence deserves careful study;[17] the latter, adversarial side was developed by his legal training and was fostered in discussions and disputes with two of his brothers, Francis and John. By nature, however, North was reticent, even shy.[18] Hence, writing became a means of critically examining the philosophical ideas of others and developing his own ideas. The chief catalyst that gave direction to his writing was Francis North's *Philosophical Essay of Musick directed to a Friend*. Although this little tract was published in 1677, it was not until some fifteen to twenty years later that Roger North wrote down his searching criticism of it.[19] From this period music became the focus of North's efforts to solve the problem of knowledge.

Older interpretations of North's work have focused on his writings as sources for performance practice and for the social history of music.[20] In our reappraisals of North's writings, we have taken a different line of interpretation, one which attempts to capture a broader understanding by including those aspects which traditionally have been omitted by musicologists. Such an interpretation is

[16] According to D. Lasocki, 'Vaucanson was the first person to write about the flute's acoustics, and indeed the only person in the 18th century' (Vaucanson 1737/1979). But the flute-type of pipe (flue pipes) was treated by North prior to *c.* 1703 in *Cursory Notes of Musicke* (ed. Chan and Kassler 1986), which includes North's first attempt at a physics of musical pipes.

[17] The character of North's father is admirably sketched by Randall (1983).

[18] At least, this is the way North portrayed himself in *Notes of Me*: 'my character, very recluse'; 'I wanted those abilities that prevail in great men's esteem, that is confidence and put-forwardness' (142); 'I could not have put myself forward, which made me sensible of my incurable unfitness for a Court interest' (180); 'being . . . bashful in nature, as well as not gifted to public oratory' (182); 'Whatever the subject or the occasion be, I had rather write than speak' (197). Behind his reticence and shyness, however, was an awareness of various 'defects', so that North wrote: 'If I should go about to observe all my indiscretions which were incidental in . . . transient businesses, I should have work enough. It was my comfort and affliction that I was sensible of them either immediately or soon after, and not only so but of my incapacity of being much wiser. This was the affliction; the comfort was, that being thus sensible argued me not a senseless sot, but one that was not wise in my own eyes, therefore within the pale of hope' (*ibid.*: 138).

[19] See Hine, Chan, Kassler (1987).

[20] The traditional approach to North's writings is exemplified by past editorial practices, which have been surveyed by Chan (1986).

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provided in Introduction I. But there is another aspect of North's work that has yet to be more widely recognized, and this aspect derives from the important role North assigned to reflection. As we have argued elsewhere, North regarded reflection as a means of critically examining not only his own but others' propositions and theories before giving assent to them. During the course of such an examination, North hoped to root out error, confusion and prejudice. Because of this reflective aim, North's writings may be regarded as a venture of exploration, a process of thinking about musical thinking. Physical evidence for this process is treated in Introduction II.[21]

J. C. K.

[21] The basis for our interpretation of North is set out in the Introduction to *Cursory Notes of Musicke* (ed. Chan and Kassler 1986); the methods for reconstructing his processes of thinking are demonstrated in the detailed studies of various manuscripts in Hine, Chan, Kassler (1987) and Chan, Kassler, Hine (1988).

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