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The establishment of Lutheran musical practice in the sixteenth century

Musical culture in Lutheran states was undoubtedly centred on churches and Latin schools during the sixteenth century; indeed the close bonds between these two institutions ensured the growth of musical practice for over a century to come. Music was hardly the key element in Luther's reforms, but his personal belief that it was the greatest gift of God, second only to theology itself, must have influenced many of the early reformers.¹ That he saw music as intrinsically good and not just the servant of scriptural texts is evidenced by his love of Josquin's abstract polyphony and his remark that even bad fiddlers are good, since they enable us all the better to understand that which constitutes good music (*WA Tischreden* I, no. 968, p. 490). It is important to appreciate today that Luther's belief in the reality of the Devil was as strong as his belief in God, and that music was for him one of the principal antidotes to the Devil's work. The art was not just a useful adornment of liturgy and certainly not an object for aesthetic appreciation alone; it was both a powerful rhetorical medium – capable of influencing the listener in diverse, wonderful ways – and the embodiment of the metaphysical laws of God's creation. In the words of Friedrich Kalb, 'Lutheranism is not driven to search for Biblical commands or prohibitions; for music is a spontaneous activity of life, inherent in God's creation, and needs no apology' (Kalb 1965, p. 141).

Much of the Reformation's success lay in Luther's political and social astuteness. In 1524 he wrote a pamphlet on the importance of good schools for the survival of the new reformed religion; a priesthood of all believers could, after all, hardly be founded on an ignorant populace.² His musical requirements were unequivocal: a schoolmaster who could not sing was not worthy of office (*WA Tischreden* V, no. 6248, p. 557). Two school ordinances prepared under Luther's direct influence set the tone

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for music instruction during the entire sixteenth century. Melancthon's ordinance for Saxony and Bugenhagen's for Brunswick (both published in 1528)³ show music defined as an essentially practical discipline, aligned with the subjects of the Mediaeval *trivium* (grammar, dialectic and rhetoric), and something to be taught to boys of all ages and abilities during the noon hour after lunch each day (Schünemann 1928, pp. 82–4).⁴ The music should set both Latin and German texts and boys should be trained in both *musica choralis* (unmeasured unison singing which involved those parts of the chant repertory appropriated by the Lutheran church, and to a certain extent, the new but related genre of the chorale)⁵ and *musica figuralis* (measured music, essentially polyphonic in texture).

Although such ordinances recommend daily practice in music, only certain schools followed this to the letter (Schünemann 1928, pp. 92–3). Indeed it is clear that music was not always warmly embraced by humanistic academic reformers and that its status as a fundamental of education was not always as secure as Luther himself might have wished. Many ordinances required that the theoretical component of music instruction be kept to a minimum and that not too much time be allotted to music (*ibid.*, pp. 84–5). The precise status of music varied from school to school and the situation was more complex than many modern studies have assumed; then, as now, music was ambiguously related to several conflicting elements in educational thought.

Niemöller's comprehensive study of Lutheran school music in the sixteenth century has shown that the schools were subject to many cross-currents in Renaissance culture. Foremost was the influence of Humanism, which engendered a new emphasis on classical literature, the thorough study of Latin (hence the nomenclature *Lateinische Schulen*) and the cultivation of eloquence. This, humanists believed, would revitalise spirituality and improve the quality of life. In such a context music was important only in so far as it would assist in the presentation of verbal text; indeed many scholars saw it as a waste of time and objected strongly to the daily church duties of Mediaeval practice (Niemöller 1969, pp. 611–17).⁶ On the other hand, given that the Lutheran reforms abolished the hegemony of both the Latin Bible and the elite priesthood, there was less incentive to encourage boys to learn Latin and consequently the standard of education initially declined. Therefore Luther and his followers had to take great pains to restore the quality of education. Their principal move was to tighten the links between schools and churches, something which made music instruction a particularly important component of school life. It was this religious function – and not necessarily the humanistic

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education which Lutheranism also encouraged – which accounted for the growth in practical school music. Nevertheless, the new humanistic, philological emphasis on classics on the one side, and on the Bible on the other, were bound in the long run to affect the function of music, moving as it did towards an instrument of rhetoric.

While Luther still considered the theoretical component of music to be important, something to be learned ‘with the whole of mathematics’ (*An die Radherm* 1524),⁷ it is clear that he saw it primarily as a practice which, by its very magic nature, improved the moral, devotional, temperamental and intellectual disposition of the pupil (*WA Tischreden* I, no. 968, p. 490).⁸ That teachers in the more academic disciplines could also see the benefits of musical practice is suggested by the foreword of Johann Reusch’s psalms of 1552: all teaching is better engrained in the memory if set to music.⁹ Many schools retained the Mediaeval practice of singing Latin hymns at the opening and closing of daily instruction. There was also a fashion for setting classical and humanistic odes to music (Niemöller 1969, pp. 622–3). The very placing of music in the hour after lunch points to its supposed aid to the digestion and its role as a recreation and relief from academic study. As an exercise, music was often grouped with the learning of handwriting and simple arithmetic, basic skills which were often not even mentioned on the lesson-plans and which could be taught communally rather than in individual classes. Here the boys were often divided according to ability rather than age. There are several records to show that music – at least as a theory of intervals and proportions – could be taught simultaneously with arithmetic. This doubtlessly reflects the survival of music’s role as a component of the Mediaeval *quadrivium* (Schünemann 1928, p. 94). Despite its decline in academic status, practical music was, as far as religion was concerned (and religion was still the central goal of all education), the supreme tool for communicating the word of God.

The increasing emphasis on music as a practical art necessitated changes in the disposition of the teaching body. Traditionally the Schulmeister or rector was, with the help of the cantor and the other teachers, responsible for providing and training the church choirs. This remained the case in certain German states, particularly those retaining the Catholic faith and those to the west and south west, which were strongly influenced by the Swiss reformers.¹⁰ However, in those Lutheran areas where there was a growth in figural music and a consequent need for more intense practical instruction, the cantor gradually took over the role as head of music; moreover, the various fees gave the cantor a certain degree of financial independence. At the same time the growing

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humanistic orientation of education led the rector in the opposite direction, towards specialisation in academic subjects; indeed the relief from church duties must often have been welcomed. Nevertheless, the other teachers in the school were still generally involved in the music-making of church and school and the cantor was still required to teach a certain amount of academic work (Niemöller 1969, pp. 636–40). But the increasing polarity between rector and cantor (the latter now often being ranked second or third in the school hierarchy) spawned a whole series of disputes which can be traced right through to the end of the eighteenth century (see pp. 30–3 and 189–90 below).

Furthermore, with the steady expansion of the cantor's musical activity, the school authorities were increasingly concerned that music should not consume too much of the time which might more profitably be directed towards academic study. The Saxon ordinance of 1580 shows a modification of Melancthon's original plan (Schünemann 1928, pp. 86–7): textbooks in music should be concise, teaching only the essentials to acquire skill in practical music; music practice should be confined to specific days or, if carried out every day, should not last too long. That the ordinance recommends the cultivation of music by earlier composers of Josquin's generation might evidence a reaction to the increasingly bold compositional activities of the cantors. Moreover the ordinance advises the cantors not to neglect the monophonic repertory of psalms and chorales.

Niemöller has presented the clearest account of the singing duties of the school boys at the outset of the Reformation. The terminology and division of duties are often vague and confusing: the most common categories are *Currende*, *Chorus symphonicus*, *Chorus musicus* and *Cantorei* (Niemöller 1969, pp. 669–79). The *Currende* is the most common of several terms to describe the groups of poorer pupils who sang around the streets of the town. This tradition, which continued well into the nineteenth century, often led to an ambivalent attitude towards music on account of its association with beggary. While the term *Currende* might most appropriately – but not necessarily exclusively – be associated with unison singing (*choraliter*), the terms *Chorus symphonicus* and *Chorus musicus* often refer to those more talented groups who sang polyphony in front of certain houses under the direction of a prefect. These two groups – the one performing monophonic and the other polyphonic music – were presumably responsible for their respective repertories in the church music; furthermore, the *Currende* usually sang for funerals while the *Symphoniaci* performed at weddings and special occasions.

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The term *Cantorei* was more widely used throughout Germany, loosely to refer to the figural singing (and gradually also to the concerted instrumental playing) in church. The singers employed in this capacity were drawn primarily from the *Symphoniaci*, poor boys who earned their education and hospitality through their singing duties; but other boys who had particular talent in music could also be admitted to this group. Many schools supported a set number of *Alumni*, who were offered free lodging in the school on account of their musical abilities; in this way schools could be guaranteed a steady body of singers to form the *Cantorei* (Niemöller 1969, p. 667). Furthermore other teachers in the school, adults from the locality and the professional *Stadtpfeiffer* were recruited to furnish the lower parts of the choir and to provide accompanying instrumental parts.

The cantor normally directed the *Cantorei*, while the *Chorus symphonicus* was traditionally organised by prefects. With the turn of the seventeenth century the cantor began to assume a wider musical responsibility as *Director Musices*, something which gave him increased independence from his traditional place in the school hierarchy (see p. 17 below). By the middle of the sixteenth century the *Stadtpfeiffer* had also become permanent members of the *Cantorei* in many towns, thus giving the cantor further jurisdiction outside the school. Many new guilds of *Stadtpfeiffer* were formed in response to the new demands of the *Cantorei*, and these versatile players were often employed in the school to assist in rehearsals and general singing lessons.

In sum then, the boys in the Latin schools were musically employed on several levels. According to the first Lutheran ordinances, all boys had to attend singing lessons, join in the singing which opened and closed instruction and lead the congregational singing in the daily church services, Mass and Vespers (Schünemann 1928, p. 91). Of the poor boys, the less advanced sang around the town in the *Currende*, the more capable in the *Chorus symphonicus*. Finally the cantor had the choice of the best singers to form the *Cantorei*, which did not usually contain more than twelve singers (Niemöller 1969, pp. 682–3). In certain places, though, due to the consolidation of several schools into one during the early Reformation years, the cantor had to provide a *Cantorei* for several churches simultaneously. As the Nordhausen ordinance of 1583 stipulated, the cantor should rehearse figural music with the boys in groups of five, so that, in an emergency, he could furnish the *Cantorei* in two places at once.¹¹

This book is concerned most closely with the content of instruction in practical music, the conception the pupil might have gained of the

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nature and function of the art. Nevertheless it is extremely difficult to ascertain the details and sequence of instruction. We can only hope that the many surviving treatises are at least symptomatic of the ideas and methods employed. The ordinances of the first years of Lutheranism stress repeatedly that the instruction books should be as concise as possible. While most ordinances do not stipulate the specific books to be used, it is clear from those that do that Faber's *Compendiolum musicae* (1548) and Listenius's *Rudimenta musicae* (1533/1537) were the books most commonly used.¹² It is by no means certain how many of these books actually found their way into the hands of the pupils, but at the very least they would have formed the basis of the teacher's instruction.

The first significant books to be written specifically for the Lutheran lands were by Luther's close musical associate, Martin Agricola, whose *Ein kurtz deudsche musica* (1528), *Musica instrumentalis* (1529), *Musica figuralis* (1532) and *Musica choralis* (1533) seem to form a complete curriculum for the practical musician, together covering rudiments, chant, polyphony and instruments. The fact that they were written in German clearly reflects the spirit of Lutheranism, elevating the vernacular as a viable language for instruction; it might also be evidence for the initial decline of Latin instruction during the early years of the Reformation (see p. 2 above). In the first treatise of 1528 Agricola notes the need for much more concise instruction in the mother tongue;¹³ nevertheless, the ensuing text (geared towards the unmeasured *musica choralis* rather than figural music) is still quite thorough and extensive, with much information on solmisation, intervals and psalm tones.

Agricola 1532 is designed to provide the remaining information on measured notation, particularly for those who might have studied the author's exhaustive treatise on instruments (1529). Despite Agricola's continued use of the German tongue, the instruction is still very extensive, including much detail on mensuration and proportions. It opens with anecdotes on the history, power and invention of music, including fifteen poems, but the remainder of the text concerns basic rules of notation rather than speculations on the essence of music.

The style of instruction – something shared with basic primers in other subjects too (Schünemann 1928, pp. 102–3) – is a basic presentation of the material in the form of tables and explanations followed by examples. In Agricola 1532 the introduction to notes and rests is followed directly by a three-part canon (but before the necessary concept of measure has been introduced). There is little direct explication of how a rule relates to the examples; presumably the pupil must infer this for himself. Agricola

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continues with rules for clefs and ligatures followed by exhaustive examples of mensuration. The remaining chapters cover the various signs used in music, the concept of the beat or tactus ('Schlag odder Tact'), where we learn that the singer actually learned to beat while singing,¹⁴ and finally, proportions and their related signs. It is interesting that Agricola does not cover solmisation in detail in this treatise; this subject was covered in the *Deutsche musica* of 1528 (republished in a revised form as the *Musica choralis* of 1533).

With Listenius 1533 there is a return to Latin as the principal language of instruction; however, what made his format so popular was the incorporation of *musica choralis* and *figuralis* into the same text. With his table of all the notes and solmisation syllables he established a format which survived in German tutors well into the succeeding century (Plate 1).

Plate 1 Listenius 1533: table of notes and solmisation syllables (copied by subsequent authors for over a century to come)

**DIVISIO SCALÆ
Musicæ,**

Scala dividitur in literas	{	Gemina- tas & excellen- tes.	cc	aa	la	fa		
		dd	bb	fa	mi	re		
		cc	bb	la	mi	re	vt	
	{	Minores & acutas.	f	c	fa	vt		
		d	c	la	mi	re	vt	
		c	b	fa	mi	re	vt	{
	{	Minores & graves notes.	b	a	fa	mi	re	vt
		B	a	la	mi	re	vt	{
		D	C	fa	mi	re	vt	{
		H	A	fa	mi	re	vt	{
			A	F	re	vt		

**Idem planè iudicium est de octavis, quæ si
millibus constant literis, G enim à g. octava di-
sta &c. Caput**

Inevitably, examples provide the means by which the pupil may assimilate and apply the rules (but again the examples are not necessarily related directly to the subject in hand). Those for the six solmisation syllables, for instance, include canons. The canon was an extremely

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effective means of cultivating part-singing and remained the staple of singing primers well into the Baroque era.

Listenius's text is lean in the extreme, with little speculative material. He is the first writer to define composition as the separate art of *musica poetica*, distinct from the fields of *musica theorica* and *practica*. Later theorists adopt the threefold division (e.g. Finck 1556, Oridryus 1557) or merely omit to mention composition within the context of *musica practica*. In all, then, Listenius was striving to provide the barest essentials for the performance of music, something which unashamedly neglected the fields of speculative music and composition.

Faber established the basic topics of practical music (clefs and letter names, solmisation syllables, the three hexachords, mutation and 'figures', i.e. the various notational signs) which remained standard for over a century to come (see p. 56 below). His text, first published in 1548, is even more concise than Listenius, and adopts the question-and-answer style (*erotemata*) which persisted in many subsequent publications. This presumably reflects something of the way skills such as music were taught, answers being learned by rote and tested regularly by the teacher. Indeed exactly the same attitude is evident in some of Luther's own writings on teaching: in the context of the Small Catechism (1529), for instance, he employs the question-and-answer style in the doctrinal sections and stresses that the pupil (particularly the young) should initially learn both the sacred texts and their commentaries in a single version and alter not a syllable (*WA XXX/1*, pp. 268–9).

During the latter half of the century, writers increasingly adopted German as their language; indeed treatises such as Willfingseder 1561 and Gumpelzhaimer 1591 were basically German versions of Faber's text. Others, such as Fesser 1572, include parallel Latin and German texts. Few of these basic primers give any clue on what would today be regarded as musical interpretation, nor is there much reference to the affective nature of music. Holtheuser's description of the characteristics of the intervals between certain solmisation syllables (e.g. *mi-la = hart*, *re-sol = natürlich*, *ut-fa = weich*; Holtheuser 1586, ch. 2) is about the most explicit statement in this regard.

The simplicity and conciseness of Faber's influential text does not mean, of course, that more complex treatises disappeared from the field. Indeed Agricola himself published a Latin text, *Rudimenta musices*, in 1539 (an abridged version of the German primer of 1528), which covers all the details of notation and ends with an elaborate exposition on the monochord. Furthermore, his *Quaestiones vulgatiores* (1543) deals at length with

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common questions concerning the information imparted in his simpler treatises. Clearly there must have been a need for these more complex surveys of notation; some were designed for particular schools (e.g. Agricola 1543 was written for school pupils in Magdeburg), specifically for pupils who had proceeded beyond the simple rules of practical music. Schneegass seems to have had two different types of pupil in mind with his treatises of 1591 and 1592; that of 1592 is a simple question-and-answer primer written in German while that of 1591 is not only written in Latin, but also contains a detailed survey of modes, different genres of counterpoint, vocal ranges, canons, consonance and dissonance and rules for good singing. It is tempting to speculate that a series of essentially practical treatises by one author might relate to the performing divisions within the school body such as between the *Currende*, the *Chorus symphonicus* and the *Cantorei*.

The practice of including extensive musical examples grows in the latter half of the century. Willflingseder includes the canonic Agnus Dei of Josquin's *Missa Hercules*, directly after his exposition of solmisation syllables (Willflingseder 1563, p. 11); Dressler includes the Sanctus of Josquin's *Missa L'Homme Armé* after presenting the mensural signs (Dressler 1571, part 3, ch. 2); he includes other examples by Josquin and also some by Lassus and Isaac. Hofmann 1572 includes Josquin's *In exitu Israel* to exemplify mensuration. All this reflects the reverence accorded to the earlier composers, particularly Josquin, something which is explicitly prescribed in the Saxon ordinance of 1580 (see p. 4 above).

While some of the most interesting treatises from the sixteenth century are those which give us information on style and performance practice, these are the exceptions rather than the norm and may thus not be typical of their age. Nevertheless, as will emerge in the course of this study, it was precisely these writings that formed the basis of many rules of musical interpretation and performance in treatises of the seventeenth century, when the interest in voice production, interpretation and ornamentation became that much more pronounced. In other words, the earlier publications must have been sufficiently known and distributed to have been influential several decades later. Most obviously influential was the *Practica musica* of Finck (1556), a comprehensive treatise which offers extensive rules on elegant singing after the basics of notation have been covered. This, and the other influential sixteenth-century treatises (C. Praetorius 1574, Schneegass 1591), will thus be relevant within the context of seventeenth-century education (see chapter 4). Here, though, we briefly examine two eccentric treatises which seem not to have influenced the later writings.

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Excerpt

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Singer's German treatise of 1531 clearly follows the prescription that primers should be concise and not include unnecessary information. However, the content and style of his short publication are unusual for the time: his intention is to teach children how to sing, how to devise counterpoint and to acquire the necessary musical background for study of lutes, violins and 'pipes'.¹⁵ Having covered the basics of solmisation, mensuration and proportions, Singer includes five rules of concords (the vertical intervals permitted in four-part harmony). His reasons for including this elementary information on harmony are somewhat obscure:

It is further good for those youths who wish to learn instruments to know which are consonances or dissonances, that is, which notes sound well, and which not.

Noch ist den jungen die auff den instrumenten lernen wöllen güt zu wissen / welches cōcordantzen oder dissonantzen sein das ist /welche notten woll lauten / oder nicht.' (Singer 1531, fol. 6v.)

It is not clear how such knowledge was to be used: perhaps in embellishment of melody and harmony, perhaps in the improvisation of new lines. Singer further outlines the rules concerning consecutive fifths and octaves and the avoidance of the tritone. He also gives some advice – remarkable at this time – concerning the addition of *coloratura*: embellishment is good when the composer so desires, but where this is not the case, the performer should rather seek edification and sweetness in the song.¹⁶

In all Singer prescribes an education in practical music that is far more rounded than is usual during the early Lutheran years: some pupils learn instruments and for these, in particular, a knowledge of the rules of harmony is useful. However, knowledge of harmony did not become a common component of instruction books until the end of the seventeenth century. It may be that Singer was reflecting the last traces in Germany of the old concept of *musica practica*, as an art encompassing both composition and performance.

Some twenty years later Coclico published his *Compendium*, which, like Singer's treatise, also assumes a more comprehensive approach to practical music. His work is something of a unicum in sixteenth-century German writings: he believes himself to be transmitting an art (*musica reservata*) which had hitherto been a secret withheld from the masses. Claiming to be a pupil and follower of Josquin, he insists that the arts of singing and composing should not be separated and that these basically practical arts are the essence of music. Having dealt with notation he proceeds to his favoured topic, embellishment. Counterpoint to him is essentially the art of improvising against a *cantus firmus*; but the pupil should be familiar