

## Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque

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It is in the nature of historians of Western art-music to divide their repertoires by periods; it is also in the nature of music histories to begin with some disclaimer about the dangers of such periodisation. These disclaimers conventionally go along one or both of the following lines. First, a period never has a clear beginning or end. It would be absurd to argue, say, that anything produced before 31 December 1599 was ‘Renaissance’ and anything after 1 January 1600 ‘Baroque’; rather, there are always periods of transition when new currents start to bubble to the surface and older trends slowly disappear. Thirty or forty years either way will usually suffice, and may be further enshrined in period subdivisions (Early, Middle, High, Late). So, the Late Renaissance may somehow overlap with the Early Baroque, but by the time we get to the Middle or High Baroque, the Renaissance is well and truly over. Secondly, not everything that happens in a given period will necessarily contain all (or even some of) the presumed characteristics of that period. Thus not all Renaissance music will be ‘Renaissance’ by any (narrow or broad) definition of the term, yet if the label is not to be meaningless save as some vague chronological marker, enough of the important music produced during the Renaissance period will indeed be somehow identifiable with the Renaissance in general.

There, of course, lies the rub, or rather, two of them. ‘Important’ begs all the obvious questions – to whom, and according to what criteria? – and doubly so if it is linked to period specificities. Canon-forming processes are contentious and insidious enough, especially when the value-systems on which they are based derive from *ad hoc* (or better, *post hoc*) notions of common identity. In our age of cultural uncertainty and equal opportunity for all, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify the wholesale exclusion of musical repertoires just on the grounds that they do not fit our prejudices concerning a given period, or about what ‘music’ might in fact be. More fundamental, however, is the question of how and why music might be said to belong in the first place to any period, or to any stylistic category associated therewith. A formalist, for example, might equally argue that music is an art of and for itself that will certainly have its own history (of genres, forms, styles, techniques and so forth),

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although it is a history that works essentially, even exclusively, in musical terms. The counter-argument is to view music-making (which of course broadens the field beyond music *tout court*) as a part of cultural or social practice – ‘discourse’ is another favourite term – and therefore as somehow reflective of such practice, or even as some kind of determinant thereof. Such an approach is predicated upon the notion that music has always satisfied specific cultural, social and political requirements which have influenced to a significant degree the styles, techniques and genres available to the composer. This approach also seeks to justify the academic study of music as being essential to broader cultural and historical understanding. The careful reader will note, however, that embedding music in an increasingly ‘thick’ context does not, in fact, solve the chief problem of periodisation: why a given time (age, era) should deserve a given period-label is just another version of the music problem writ large (whose times?).

Perhaps it would be easier to avoid the problem altogether. There has been a trend in the discipline of History to drop period-labels as being too value-laden, narrow, exclusive and somehow distorting: thus ‘Renaissance’ has been abandoned in favour of ‘early modern’, although the ‘modern’ part of that equation is somewhat problematic (is the Renaissance really part of the ‘modern’ age, even if an early part?). It is probably no coincidence that this terminological shift has occurred as historians themselves have sought to move the ‘important’ ground of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries away from the presumed cradle of the Renaissance, the Italian peninsula: it may be possible to speak of a Florentine, Roman or Venetian Renaissance, but it is harder to discern any similar Renaissances in fifteenth-century Amsterdam, London, Madrid or Paris. Another solution is to speak of centuries either in the English or French form (the sixteenth century, the *dix-septième siècle*) or in the Italian (the Cinquecento, Seicento). But this only exacerbates the problem of chronological boundaries – sometimes solved by having ‘long’ centuries (as with the ‘long’ nineteenth century from the French Revolution to the start of World War I, i.e., 1789–1914) – and it raises, rather than avoids, the question of whether a chronological span can be a ‘period’ in some other sense of the term. And even in History, those pesky period-labels remain surprisingly seductive, while Art History still embraces them with a vengeance.

Musicology’s use of period-labels has followed on the coat-tails of Art History: the two disciplines obviously have much in common, although the permanence and fixity of the visual art-work remains an obvious difference, and one that is, or should be, troubling for musicologists. But the tendency in the arts in general to adopt these labels seems prompted more by the fear of irrelevance: if we can somehow grasp what it was to be a Renaissance man

(woman, peasant, merchant, religious, courtier, prince) by way of the cultural artefacts of the time – if these artefacts somehow contain elements that fashion group identity – then modern dilemmas over the place of the arts in the world become more manageable. It also means that we can counter the tendency of Historians to relegate the arts to the final chapter of their period-surveys as mere icing on the political or social cake. People die, but art survives, and if we can somehow speak of the spirit of an age, then the arts, as a manifestation of the Spirit, are indelible reminders of what it was to be human in dim and distant pasts. Equally, we might feel that we can trace our own roots in art that we can appreciate, however remote its cultural contexts. The art-work offers a window onto some kind of (trans)historical soul, there to be endlessly read, interpreted and even loved.

Or so the Romantics might have us believe. The terminological slippage in the previous paragraph – art(s), art-work, artefact – will already have raised a note of caution: what we choose to call ‘art’ may or may not have been ‘art’ in its time. A *Madonna and Child* on the wall of a merchant’s house in sixteenth-century Florence is not the same as that *Madonna and Child* in a modern art-gallery; a *concertato* madrigal performed in the ducal palace in Mantua in 1605 is different from that madrigal preserved in our imaginary museum of musical works. Our Florentine merchant may have used the picture for personal devotion, to display his wealth, to instruct his children, or merely to stop a draught; our Mantuan duke may not have cared one jot about the actual music he was hearing, even if he paid some attention to its text, to the manner of performance, or just to the shapely necks of his women singers warbling so seductively. We cannot assume that rapt aesthetic contemplation is the norm in any period (even our own), or that what historians value in the substance of art is what was valued at the time. Nor can we assume, however much we might wish to, that the artistic spirit, even soul, is somehow constant, transcending time and place to speak eternal truths.

But whether the spirit of the times, the *Zeitgeist*, or if you prefer more fashionable terms (although their meaning is hardly different), the episteme or *mentalité*, is alien or similar to our own, and despite all the caveats raised above (whose spirit?), it remains perhaps the only narrative strategy powerful and plausible enough to enable us to bring sense to our historical constructs, uniting the fractured, fragmented voices that speak, or even sing, from past to present. And although the postmodern historian’s tendency is to prefer alienation – to celebrate the ‘otherness’ of our historical pasts – the art-work somehow resists such othering, accommodating itself to us as we accommodate ourselves to it. Just how one might chart a responsible path through such difficult terrain is a problem that must be posed by the present book.

## Renaissance

Historians of different kinds will often make some choice between a long Renaissance (say, 1300–1600), a short one (1453–1527), or somewhere in between (the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as is commonly adopted in music histories).<sup>1</sup> The ‘short’ Renaissance supports the tendency to identify period boundaries with cataclysmic events, the Fall of Constantinople on the one hand, and the Sack of Rome on the other, although 74 years does not seem quite long enough for a period assumed to have been so significant for the formation of the modern European mind, and unmatched in importance until the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. This view of the Renaissance also requires a somewhat jaundiced view of the Middle Ages just as our prejudices in favour of the Enlightenment have tended to downplay the seventeenth century.

Some have preferred to call the Renaissance not a ‘period’ but a ‘movement’. This has the advantage of setting geographical, national and even social limits on who might have partaken of a Renaissance, and it also introduces an element of human agency. The term literally means ‘rebirth’, and it is generally applied to a sense of revival and renewal in the early fifteenth century prompted in particular by the rediscovery of the arts, sciences and philosophies of Classical Antiquity. As Matteo Palmieri (1406–75) proclaimed in his treatise on ‘civil life’ (*Della vita civile*):

Where was the painter’s art till Giotto [d. 1337] tardily restored it? A caricature of the art of human delineation! Sculpture and architecture, for long years sunk to the merest travesty of art, are only today in process of rescue from obscurity; only now are they being brought to a new pitch of perfection by men of genius and erudition. Of letters and liberal studies at large it were best to be silent altogether. For these, the real guides to distinction in all the arts, the solid foundation of all civilisation, have been lost to mankind for 800 years and more. It is but in our own day that men dare boast that they see the dawn of better things . . . Now, indeed, may every thoughtful spirit thank God that it has been permitted to him to be born in this new age, so full of hope and promise, which already rejoices in a greater array of noble-gifted souls than the world has seen in the thousand years that have preceded it.<sup>2</sup>

Arts and letters had been great in Classical Greece and Rome, and now, Palmieri felt, they could be great again.

Palmieri had all the right qualifications to be part of a movement: he was Italian and thus purportedly a direct descendant of the Romans; and he was

<sup>1</sup> Some of the following discussion is drawn from my *Music in Late Renaissance and Early Baroque Italy*. Fenlon (ed.), *The Renaissance*, and Price (ed.), *The Early Baroque Era*, also have much of relevance to the periods under discussion here.

<sup>2</sup> Hay, *The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background*, p. 12.

living in a city (Florence) governed as a republic supposedly along the lines of ancient Greece and Rome in its greatest years, and one with a wealthy merchant-class committed to conspicuous consumption in the arts. His extolling of the 'civil life' did not ignore religion, but it kept it in its place, united with an essentially secularist impulse that saw unlimited possibilities for mankind here on earth rather than just in the after-life. His 'Renaissance', then, was secular, republican, and based on the pillars of Classical thought that, he felt, were now being restored after lying in ruins for centuries. In short, it was Humanist in several senses of the term.

The migration westwards of Byzantine scholars after the Fall of Constantinople, bearing with them Classical texts that had lain unknown in Italy, is what is conventionally regarded as having given the impulse to Humanism in the very specific sense of a grounding in the achievements of ancient Greece and Rome so as to forge a new future. The fact that this ignores the large number of such texts that were known, and very carefully studied, throughout the Middle Ages has until recently been regarded as only a minor inconvenience. More problematic, in historiographical terms, has been the presumed secular, and also republican, nature of the Renaissance. That the age became one of religious upheaval, not least by way of the Reformation, has sometimes been explained by some kind of secular impulse, but this seems misdirected. Luther may have been a Humanist (however defined) but he was scarcely a secularist. His placing the onus on the believer to cultivate faith as the only mechanism for salvation replaced an institutional relationship with God with one grounded in the individual, and challenged the authority of His representatives on earth, not least the Pope. But the Church (both Catholic and Protestant) remained a central force in lives that were more dominated by religion than later historians might wish to believe. For that matter, to see the Catholic Reformation (or Counter-Reformation, as it used to be called), which began with the Council of Trent (1545–63) and extended through the emergence of the Church Triumphant towards the end of the sixteenth century, as sounding the death knell for the Renaissance is somewhat to misinterpret the Renaissance itself.

A little more finesse has been required to deal with the republican issue. Florence may have been a republic in principle, but it was an oligarchy in fact (itself, a mode of government with Classical precedents), and with a *de facto* ruling family, the Medici. Despite periods of exile from the city, the Medici finally returned in 1530 to become dukes, later grand dukes, of Tuscany. Florence therefore succumbed to the predominant pattern of the north Italian states in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as duchies under hereditary rule, and fiefdoms of the Holy Roman Empire; by the early seventeenth century, the only republics left on the peninsula were Genoa and Venice, a fact of which the

Venetians, at least, made great political capital. Thus the nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt (in his *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* published in 1860) needed to perform a sleight of hand, turning the despotic princes of Italy (and for that matter, of the Catholic Church) into benevolent patrons, working for the benefit of ‘the state as a work of art’ (to cite the title of the first part of his book). He did so with some reason: in the sixteenth century, the Italian princes distanced themselves from the soldier-class (which is not to say that they did not fight battles) and re-tooled themselves as noble courtiers. They were aided by the chief propagandist for the cause, Baldassare Castiglione, whose famous manual on courtly etiquette, *Il libro del cortigiano* (1528), was widely reprinted and translated through the century and beyond.<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli may have provided the text by which princes might rule (in his *Il principe* of 1513), but Castiglione taught them how to behave, and prominent in that behaviour was an understanding of the arts and music.

The chief difficulties facing notions of a musical ‘Renaissance’ are of a somewhat different order. Although it was possible to view Greek and Roman ruins and statuary, and to read Classical texts in the original or, increasingly, in translation, no ancient music survived. Certainly one could read what the Greeks and Romans wrote about their music – and they said a great deal about its science and its ethical effects – but one could not hear a note of it. If Humanism in the narrow sense is a defining feature of the Renaissance, then the period-label has only a somewhat limited application to music: settings of Latin odes in a pseudo-Classical homophony adhering strictly to poetic metre; the rather extreme experiments in reviving the ancient chromatic and enharmonic *genera* conducted by Nicola Vicentino (1511–c. 1576) and a few others; explorations of different kinds of solo song that would faithfully reflect the form and content of its texts.<sup>4</sup> But alas, the best known of those experiments in monody – by Giulio Caccini in chamber song and by Jacopo Peri in early opera – are conventionally placed by music historians at the beginning of the musical Baroque, despite their obvious Humanist credentials. This is not in itself a problem: Humanism continued long after the Renaissance was well and truly over; indeed, perhaps it has never gone away. But it does make one wonder where it leaves what we call ‘Renaissance’ music today, i.e., the balanced, imitative polyphony of composers from Guillaume Dufay (c. 1400–1474) through Josquin Desprez (c. 1440–1521) to Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525/6–94). Even if one restricts musical humanism to theory rather than practice – a not implausible

<sup>3</sup> Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*.

<sup>4</sup> Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought*.

strategy – it elevates a fringe group of theorists beyond their status, and also relegates to the sidelines a great deal of what mattered to mainstream writers on music once, that is, they had made their conventional bows to the wonders of the ancient art.

Another difficulty might seem less troublesome. Dufay and Josquin were from northern Europe, and the style that music historians conventionally associated with the Renaissance is often labelled ‘Franco-Flemish polyphony’. If the Renaissance is primarily an Italian phenomenon, this requires another sleight of hand. A good number of Franco-Flemish composers, including Dufay and Josquin, did indeed work in Italy for greater or lesser periods of time: native Italian composers regularly complained of their positions being usurped by foreigners, even as they themselves usurped the Franco-Flemish style for their own musical ends. By the second half of the sixteenth century, too, the influence of the Franco-Flemings was waning as they gradually lost to native musicians their hold over the important Italian positions: Adriano Willaert (c. 1490–1562) was soon to be replaced by Gioseffo Zarlino (1517–90) as *maestro di cappella* of St Mark’s, Venice (after Cipriano de Rore’s brief tenure in the position), while in Mantua, Giaches de Wert (1535–96) was followed by Giacomo Gastoldi (1554–1609) as Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga’s *maestro di cappella*. Yet it is hard to claim that the musical style chiefly associated with the Renaissance is ‘Italian’ in any significant sense of the term save the geographical location of (some of) its major institutions and patrons.

That problem might be solved by arguing that the Renaissance was, in fact, pan-European. One might also claim that the polyphonic style did indeed share features of other Renaissance arts: the new control of musical space by way of contrapuntal imitation created both a depth and a structure perhaps analogous to the rise of perspective in contemporary painting; the careful control of dissonance brought a new order to musical harmony that might be termed classical, at least in the sense of balance; and the use of this polyphony to express a text allowed the potential for a deeper level of expression that paralleled the moves towards more immediate communication in the other arts. However, the Italian musicologist Nino Pirrotta took the debate down a different path: he suggested, instead, that Franco-Flemish polyphony, and even its Italian imitations, had little or nothing to do with the Renaissance as a broader cultural movement, for all the reasons suggested above. He saw it as essentially a ‘public’ style, suitable for celebrations of the liturgy and for civic ceremonial but not for the intimate circles of courtly music-making. He viewed it as some kind of last gasp of the Medieval musical tradition. He also suggested that it was a style better associated with Mannerism.

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## Mannerism

Pirrotta's argument might appear somewhat mischievous, and perhaps mingled with not a little Italian chauvinism. Yet it is not without a point. Native musical styles linked with Humanism did indeed exist during the Renaissance, he suggests, but chiefly in the realms of improvisation, as singer-poets declaimed their epics and sonnets to the lyre (represented in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the *lira da braccio*). Such improvisatory practices were by definition not a matter of notational record and so have disappeared save for the vague traces of their existence in contemporary descriptions and in paintings. This improvisatory, Humanist style, Pirrotta argues, surfaced as compositional praxis towards the end of the century in the Florentine 'new music' (Peri's recitative and Caccini's chamber songs) which, though now viewed as 'Baroque', was, in fact, 'Renaissance' in at least the fundamental sense of its intentional relation to Classical models.

Pirrotta's association of the Franco-Flemish style with a medievalism on the one hand, and 'the deliberate adoption of a polyphonic *maniera*' on the other,<sup>5</sup> is somewhat more controversial. Art historians have broadly adopted the idea of Mannerism as a style-period separating the High Renaissance from the Baroque, and brought on by the political, social and economic upheavals of Italy in the sixteenth century after the French invasions of the peninsula and the Sack of Rome (in 1527).<sup>6</sup> Mannerism also fits into a new orientation that is characteristic of at least one major strand of artistic development in the period: it is an essentially courtly art, where form seems more important than content, and where the appeal of the art-work lies primarily in an appreciation of how it effortlessly overcomes self-imposed technical difficulties. For example, Mannerist painting (Parmigianino, Pontorno, Giulio Romano, and some Michelangelo) revels in intricacies of design and articulation, with figures that bear little relation to corporeal reality and presented in a manner that seems to delight in complexity for complexity's sake. The result can seem disorientating, if impressive and, to be sure, rich in expressive effect.

Mannerism has been called the 'stylish style', and certainly stylishness was claimed a virtue by many critics in the sixteenth century: thus Raphael criticised Gothic architecture for being 'devoid of all grace and entirely without

5 Pirrotta, 'Novelty and Renewal in Italy, 1300–1600', p. 173. For Pirrotta's views on a more truly 'Renaissance' style, see his 'Music and Cultural Tendencies in Fifteenth-Century Italy'; Pirrotta, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, chap. 1.

6 The bibliography of Mannerism in art is vast, but a useful introduction to the issues is provided in Smyth, *Mannerism and 'Maniera'*; an overview (including literature and music) is offered by Shearman, *Mannerism*. For music, the most fervent advocacy of the term is in Maniates, *Mannerism in Italian Music and Culture*. A more measured stance is adopted in Haar, 'Classicism and Mannerism in 16th-Century Music'; see also Haar, 'Self-Consciousness about Style, Form and Genre in 16th-Century Music'.



style [*maniera*].<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the merits of grace and *maniera* were directly linked to the courtly ideals of the century as emphasised by Castiglione. The application of the term Mannerism to sixteenth-century music may be a matter of some controversy. But just as Vasari praised rich invention and the reduction of difficulty to facility in painting and sculpture, so did Zarlino admire the ‘beauty, grace and elegance’ of good counterpoint, praising Willaert for his ‘reasoned order of composing in an elegant manner’ (*un’ordine ragionevole di componere con elegante maniera*).<sup>8</sup> Certainly, an elegant *maniera* was something to be encouraged in composition. Adrianus Petit Coclico, in his *Compendium musices* (1552), called Dufay and his contemporaries ‘musici mathematici’, and Josquin and his contemporaries ‘musici praestantissimi’. But composers of Coclico’s generation were ‘musici poetici’ who ‘compose more suavely, more ornately and with more artifice’.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on ornament and artifice characteristic of mid sixteenth-century polyphony seems to bring this music into the purview of Mannerism.

The term ‘musici poetici’ used by Coclico and others in this period has a number of resonances. One is a Humanist association of modern music with the great musician-poets of Classical Antiquity (although Plato would not have approved of suavity, ornateness and artifice); another is a shift of music from the *quadrivium* (with arithmetic, geometry and astronomy) to the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic), and a consequent reorientation of theory away from the traditional Boethian *musica speculativa* to the art and craft of musical composition, a musical ‘poetics’ in the Aristotelian sense of the term. It also suggests the emergence of an increasingly close relationship between music and text that has its roots in Renaissance Humanism and also motivates one strand of the early musical Baroque. According to the Ferrarese composer Luzzaschi (?1545–1607)

Music and poetry . . . are to such a degree similar and so naturally joined together that one could indeed say, speaking of them with some mystery, that they were born as twins on Parnassus . . . Nor do these twins resemble each other only in features and general appearance; in addition they enjoy a similarity of external dress. If one changes garment, so too does the other. For not only does music have as her purpose usefulness [*il giovamento*] and pleasure, most natural features of her sister, but also, grace, sweetness, seriousness, wit, humour, vitality – the garments with which those sisters adorn themselves so charmingly – are worn by the one and the other in so similar a fashion that often the poet resembles the musician and the musician the poet. But since poetry was the first to be

<sup>7</sup> In a letter, with Castiglione, to Pope Leo X, 1519, in Shearman, *Mannerism*, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Zarlino, *Le istituzioni harmoniche* (Venice, 1558), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Coclico, *Musical Compendium*, trans. A. Seay, ‘Colorado College Music Press Translations’, 5 (Colorado Springs, 1973), pp. 8–9.

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born, music reveres and honours her as his lady, to such an extent that music, having become virtually a shadow of poetry, does not dare to move its foot where its superior has not preceded. From which it follows that if the poet raises his style, the musician also raises his tone. He cries if the verse cries, laughs if it laughs; if it runs, stops, implores, denies, screams, falls silent, lives, dies, all these affects and effects are so vividly expressed by music that what should properly be called resemblance seems almost competition. Therefore we see in our times a music somewhat different from that of the past, for modern poetic forms are similarly different from those of the past. Skipping over all those other poetic forms that have changed only in subject matter – such as canzonas, sestinas, sonnets, ottavas, and *terze rime* – I shall say of the madrigal that it seems to have been invented just for music, and I shall speak the truth in saying that in our age it has received its perfect form – a form so different from its former one that, were the first versifiers to return to life, they would scarce be able to recognise it, so changed is it in the brevity, the wit [*acutezza*], the grace, the nobility, and finally the sweetness with which the poets of today have seasoned it. In imitation of their praiseworthy style, our musicians also have tried to discover new ways and new inventions, more sweet and graceful than the usual; from these ways and inventions they have formed a new style [*maniera*], which, not only for its novelty but also for the exquisiteness of its artifice, should be able to please and attract the praise of the world at large.<sup>10</sup>

Brevity, wit, grace, nobility and sweetness were characteristic *maniere* of madrigal verse in the second half of the sixteenth century, especially in the hands of Torquato Tasso (1544–95) and Battista Guarini (1538–1612). So, too, was the search for an artful complexity, as Tasso's contemporaries said:

Tasso . . . understanding that perfect clarity is nothing but superabundant ease towards too sudden understanding without giving the listener the opportunity to experience something for himself . . . with elaborate care sought for his poem [*Gerusalemme liberata*] nobility, strength and excellent grace, but not the greatest clarity . . . He avoided that superfluous facility of being at once understood, and departing from common usage, and from the base and lowly, chose the novel, the unfamiliar, the unexpected, the admirable, both in ideas and in words; which, while artificially interwoven more than is normal, and adorned with varied figures suitable for tempering that excessive clarity, such as caesuras, convolutions, hyperbole, irony, displacement . . . resembles not so much a twisted . . . muddy alley-way but an uphill stony path where the weak are exhausted and stumble.<sup>11</sup>

Music followed suit.

<sup>10</sup> From the dedication ('ghosted' by Alessandro Guarini) to the Duchess of Urbino (dated 14 September 1596) of Luzzaschi's *Sesto libro de' madrigali a cinque voci* (1596), in Newcomb, *The Madrigal at Ferrara*, i: 118.

<sup>11</sup> From Lorenzo Giacomini's oration on the death of Tasso (1595), in Shearman, *Mannerism*, pp. 159–61.