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978-0-521-88415-0 - The Renaissance Reform of Medieval Music Theory: Guido of Arezzo between Myth and History

Stefano Mengozzi

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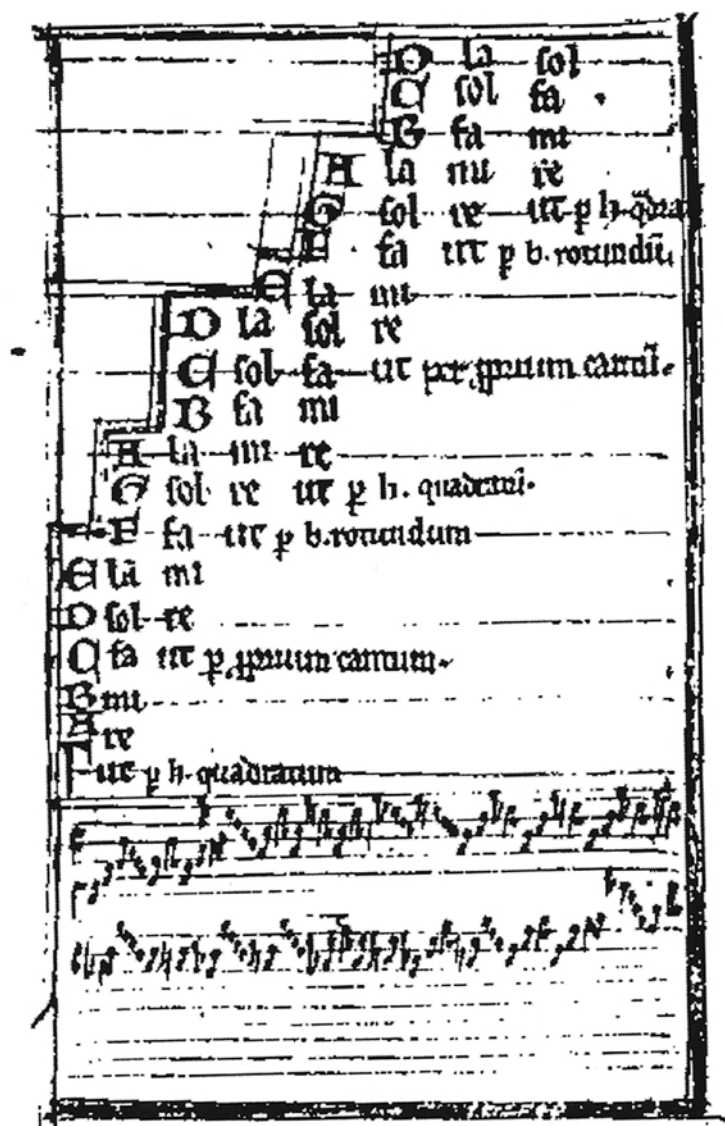
The Renaissance Reform of Medieval Music Theory

Modern scholars have often portrayed hexachordal solmization – the sight-singing method introduced by the eleventh-century monk Guido of Arezzo – as the diatonic foundation of early music. Stefano Mengozzi challenges this view by examining a representative sample of the primary sources of solmization theory from Guido of Arezzo to Gioseffo Zarlino. These texts show that six-syllable solmization was only an option for sight-singing that never imposed its operational “sixth-ness” onto the diatonic system, already grounded on the seven pitch letters. It was primarily through the agency of several “classicizing” theorists of the humanist era that the six syllables came to be mistakenly conceived as a fundamental diatonic structure – a “hexachord” built from the “tetrachord” of the ancient Greeks. The book will be of particular interest to readers seeking to deepen their knowledge of medieval and Renaissance musical thought with an eye to major intellectual trends of the time.

STEFANO MENGZZI is Associate Professor of Music at the University of Michigan. His research focuses on musical theory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. This is his first book.

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Frontispiece. An early English table of the gamut with the Guidonian syllables (from MS London, British Library, Harley 978, fol. 14r (thirteenth century)).

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521884150

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First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-88415-0 Hardback

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A mia madre e alla memoria di mio padre

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Preface

This book virtually began in the early 1990s, during my graduate school years at the University of Chicago, when I first became aware of the increasing references to the hexachordal system in analytic studies of medieval and Renaissance music. In my initial phases of research, my concern was to evaluate the role of that system in medieval and Renaissance musical theory and practice as a way of assessing the merit of interpretive analyses that took that system as a point of departure. In due course I came to realize that hexachordal theory as we know it changed considerably during its long history, to the point that the version most frequently described today may be aptly described as a fifteenth-century creation. The overarching goal of this monograph is to present and discuss the documentary evidence that led me to formulate such a conclusion.

However, another theme runs between the lines of the pages that follow, namely the process by which particular images of early music come to guide our scholarly investigations – in other words, the ways in which we construct and reinforce the historical and cultural distance between modern listeners and pre-modern music; *us* and *them*. Inevitably, a reassessment of the role of the hexachordal system in medieval and Renaissance music amounts to reconsidering the demands that that system poses on modern listeners and scholars of early music, and to rethink the relationship between modern and pre-modern musical grammars. Last but not least, this is also a case study on the nature of music-theoretical texts from the pre-modern era, on their status of cultural artifacts that inevitably convey to us much more than the musical doctrines of their time. Indeed my interest is in showing how these texts transmit musical doctrines as much as fabricate them; how they can inform and explain, but also mislead and confuse.

What follows does not and cannot pretend to be a comprehensive history of hexachordal solmization, one that would require an examination of a far greater number of treatises and musical works. My goal, rather, is to chart the emergence and the consolidation of a particular strand of hexachordal theory that has been most frequently recognized in modern music historiography. I call it the “foundational strand” of hexachordal theory, which presents the six syllables of solmization (*ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la*), not just

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as an aid for sight singing, but rather as the expression of a configuration of musical space that was itself structured in overlapping segments of six notes. My narrative concentrates on those authors who contributed to the emergence of this view either by presenting hexachordal theory in those terms, or – paradoxically – by opposing the entire hexachordal method *tout court*. Thus, influential authors such as Marchetto of Padua, John Hothby, and Johannes Tinctoris who, to my mind, were uninterested in discussing hexachordal theory in foundational terms, make only cameo appearances in this study. Ultimately, what concerns me here is the history of the idea of the hexachord as a musical structure, which needs to be investigated not only as it took form in the texts of several influential authors, but also as intimately connected with new modes of intellectual inquiry, new means of textual transmission (the printing press), and changing cultural and religious values.

Having been a work in progress for almost two decades, this monograph has benefited immensely and in many ways from the responses of a great number of friends and colleagues, as well as from my prolonged exposure to related studies by scholars (and there are more than a few of them) with whom I disagree, sometimes passionately, more often only partially, and always (as I hope) respectfully. I am indebted to my mentors at Chicago, particularly Martha Feldman, Larry Zbikowski, Noel Swerdlow, and the late Howard Mayer Brown, for nurturing my interest in the history of music theory and for patiently teaching me how to interrogate and contextualize the sources; to Thomas Christensen for several thoughtful exchanges on this and other topics; and to Reinhard Strohm for his valuable comments on a 1993 seminar paper that has now become Chapter 6 of the present book.

My warmest thanks also go to all my colleagues in the Department of Musicology at the University of Michigan for their continuous encouragement and support, particularly to James Borders for many stimulating conversations and for his comments on early drafts of this book, but also to Christi-Anne Castro, Mark Clague, Jane Fulcher, Charles Garrett, Jason Geary, Joseph Lam, Louise Stein, Steven Whiting, and John Wiley, who continue to be for me a source of inspiration and a model of professionalism. I also wish to thank the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance of the University of Michigan for supporting this project in various ways since I joined the faculty in 2001.

I am grateful to many other friends and scholars with whom I have had fruitful exchanges of opinions on this topic through the years, particularly Loris Azzaroni, Margaret Bent, Bonnie Blackburn, Jeffrey Dean, Joseph

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Dyer, Adam Gilbert, Leofranc Holford-Strevens, Mary Hunter, Dolores Pesce, Benito Rivera, Murray Steib, William Thomson, Peter Urquhart, Paul Walker, and Ronald Woodley, as well as several anonymous reviewers who have examined portions of this book and have offered insightful remarks. I feel particularly indebted to Bonnie Blackburn for kindly reading the entire manuscript and for helping me refine my argument in many ways. Needless to say, the theses expressed in the following pages are solely mine, as are any remaining inaccuracies and shortcomings in the text.

A post-doctoral fellowship awarded by the Whiting Foundation enabled me to conduct extensive research on this project in the most stimulating environment of the Franke Institute at the University of Chicago in 2003–4. My sincere thanks go to the Foundation, to director James Chandler and to the personnel of the Franke, as well as to the other post-doctoral fellows who resided at the Institute during that year, for several very special months of lively and fruitful discussions.

A small section of Chapter 7 is taken from my article “Virtual Segments: The Hexachordal System in the Late Middle Ages,” which appeared in the *Journal of Musicology* 23 (2006), 426–67; an equally short section from Chapter 5 was originally part of my “The Ciconian Hexachord,” in *Johannes Ciconia, musicien de la transition*, ed. P. Vendrix (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 279–304. My thanks go to the publishers for allowing me to include those passages in this monograph.

The online databases of the *Thesaurus musicarum latinarum*, of the *Thesaurus musicarum italicarum*, and of the *Lexicon musicale Latinum medii aevi* have greatly facilitated my research; indeed this project may have taken another two decades to complete without the information made available by those resources.

Finally, I wish to thank most dearly my wife Karin and my son Arthur for patiently enduring the countless hours of reading and writing that this project has demanded from me. To the three of us, Angelo Beraroli’s verse in praise of Guido’s syllables – *Ut relevet miserum fatum solitosque labores* – easily applies to the publication of this book.

Abbreviations

<i>AcM</i>	<i>Acta musicologica</i>
<i>AnnMusic</i>	<i>Annales musicologiques</i>
<i>AfM</i>	<i>Archiv für Musikwissenschaft</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Scriptorum de musica medii aevi nova series a Gerbentina alfera</i> . Ed. E. de Coussemaker. 4 vols. Paris: Durand, 1864–76; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1989
<i>CSM</i>	<i>Corpus scriptorum de musica</i> . Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1950–
<i>EM</i>	<i>Early Music</i>
<i>EMH</i>	<i>Early Music History</i>
<i>GS</i>	<i>Scriptores ecclesiastici de musica sacra potissimum</i> . Ed. M. Gerbert. 3 vols. St. Blasien, Typis S. Blasiensis, 1784; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1963
<i>JAMS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Musicological Society</i>
<i>JM</i>	<i>The Journal of Musicology</i>
<i>JMT</i>	<i>Journal of Music Theory</i>
<i>LmL</i>	<i>Lexicon musicale Latinum medii aevi</i> . Ed. M. Bernhard. Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Kommission bei der C. H. Beck'schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1992– www.lml.badw.de/
<i>MD</i>	<i>Musica disciplina</i>
<i>ML</i>	<i>Music and Letters</i>
<i>MQ</i>	<i>Music Quarterly</i>
<i>MSD</i>	<i>Musicological Studies and Documents</i> . Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1951–
<i>NG 2</i>	<i>The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> . Rev. edition, ed. S. Sadie. 27 vols. London: Macmillan, 2001
<i>PesceGA</i>	D. Pesce, <i>Guido d'Arezzo's Regule rithmice</i> , Prologus in <i>Antiphonarium and Epistola ad michahelem: A Critical Text and Translation with an Introduction, Annotations, Indices, and New Manuscript Inventories</i> . Ottawa: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1999

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<i>RISM</i>	<i>Rèpertoire international des sources musicales</i> . Series B III: The Theory of Music from the Carolingians to c. 1500. Munich: Henle, 1961–2003
<i>SmitsE</i>	Smits van Waesberghe, ed., <i>Expositiones in Micrologum Guidonis Aretini</i> . Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1957
<i>SmitsG</i>	Smits van Waesberghe, Joseph. <i>De musico-paedagogico Guidone Aretino eiusque vita et moribus</i> . Florence: Olschki, 1953
<i>SmitsM</i>	Smits van Waesberghe, Joseph. <i>Musikerziehung: Lehre und Theorie der Musik im Mittelalter</i> . Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1969
<i>TMI</i>	<i>Thesaurus musicarum italicarum</i> , http://euromusicology. cs.uu.nl/
<i>TML</i>	<i>Thesaurus musicarum latinarum</i> , www.chmtl.indiana.edu/ tml/
<i>VfM</i>	<i>Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft</i>