

THE MODERN INVENTION OF MEDIEVAL MUSIC

Scholarship, Ideology, Performance

DANIEL LEECH-WILKINSON



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CHAPTER I

The invention of the voices-and-instruments hypothesis

INTRODUCTION

Anyone interested in early music, unless they are British and under about twenty-five, will have grown up with the idea that medieval polyphony uses instruments, and lots of them: in songs they play the tenor and contratenor, and often join the singer of the cantus in unison or at the octave; in sacred music they play the cantus firmus and accompany the voices singing the other parts. Equally, anyone who has kept abreast of the early music scene during the last twenty years or so will know that there has been a phenomenal growth in performances by voices alone, especially from groups based in the UK. The earlier ‘instrumental’ view, however, has continued to be practised everywhere else (and even to some extent by British groups), so that a newcomer taking an overview of concerts and recordings would certainly conclude that instruments had an important part to play in medieval music as a whole. But if such a newcomer were to go backstage after some concerts and ask the groups’ directors why they used voices alone or voices with instruments it is a fair bet that the answers would be not just different but of different kinds. The all-vocal director might refer them to some recent articles citing documentary evidence for the vocal performance of specific pieces that survive,¹ or descriptions in medieval literature that leave no doubt that composed polyphony is being sung,² in other words they would cite scholarship; but the instrumentalist might (experience suggests) be more likely to cite a long tradition of modern performance, or the lack of text in manuscripts, contacts between medieval Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, or simply the group’s training and preferences, answers whose reasoning is harder to pin down.

These different kinds of answers, the certainty of a little evidence against the conviction of a rich tradition of belief, point not so much to the rightness of one and the delusion of the other (a conclusion that

has yet to be substantiated) as to their very different histories. The vocal movement sprang quite recently from fresh evidence and a new look at existing information, and because it began within recent memory its origins in that evidence are still clear in people's minds: the evidence and its application are still closely associated, with little in the way of a tradition of performance separating the two. But for the voices-and-instruments movement that is no longer true: the origins of that approach are lost in the past; even experienced performers have only a vague idea of what the original evidence was and none at all of when it was gathered. There is a long and rich tradition of performances with instruments, and on the whole it is from this that performers take their cue, not from 'basic musicology'. But what was that tradition based on, where did it start, and when, and why? The answers to these questions were still remembered as late as the 1950s, and were partially recovered at least once since then,³ but seemed to have been almost entirely forgotten by the end of the century; yet without them in front of us we can hardly begin to treat these two theories of performance on an equal footing and to the scrutiny they deserve. An essential step towards understanding where we are with the performance of medieval music can only be taken, then, by looking back to the beginnings of modern writing on medieval performance practice in search of the origins of the voices-and-instruments hypothesis.

One might ask why this was not done when the all-vocal revolution began. Even if the fathers of the new hypothesis were more concerned to promote their new view than to question the past, one might expect the defenders of the old to look back in search of a secure basis for instrumental practices. Perhaps they did. But if so, what they found will have seemed more alarming than reassuring. For as this chapter will explain, the voices-and-instruments hypothesis was invented on the basis of a single observation about the textung of one manuscript, mixed, soon after, with a large dose of nationalistic, modernist assumption about the nature of art song. It may seem strange that these suspect origins have been so long forgotten; but then, while the all-vocal people have already begun to scrutinise their own work, questioning its origins in a peculiarly English view of singing,⁴ they belong to a self-reflective generation for whom the questioning of assumptions is a sub-discipline in itself, whereas the scholars who wrote in support of the instrumental hypothesis were not of a generation that questioned themselves, however enthusiastically they may have questioned one another. Our generation has replaced the certainty that we must be right with the certainty that we cannot be, so

that it comes as no surprise to see scholars who advocate voices guarding their backs by refusing to rule out instruments, while arguing against them. And it is interesting to see them and others making tentative moves now to rehabilitate them. What *do* you do when a position, vigorously sought and finally achieved, after a while becomes stale? The crucial difference is that this time the case is being argued on documentary evidence and not simply on the basis of taste and cultural assumption. It may not be the least of the vocal movement's achievements that this time the case for instruments will be argued properly.

This chapter, however, is not primarily intended to contribute to that argument. Its purpose is to recover the origins of the instrumental hypothesis and to examine its development and its influence on performers up to the 1950s, the coming-of-age of professional medieval music groups. It looks at the foundations of the state that the vocal revolutionaries sought to overturn. It is therefore not so much concerned with what is right, with what actually happened, as with what scholars wanted to have happened, and why. It is about the origin, in fact, as I shall argue, the *invention* of the idea that medieval music generally, and late medieval song in particular, was composed for voice accompanied by instruments. This is not just an issue for historiography. It matters now because that is how medieval music was heard and described and thought about for three-quarters of a century, indeed for the first three-quarters of a century in which it was widely perceived at all. To all intents and purposes, this was how medieval music became established in our culture; the impression it made in this form is still strongly evident in current views of the music and may never be wholly erased. If the whole picture was based on wishful thinking, as I shall argue, we need to know. Of course, further research may show the wishful thinking to have hit the historical mark. But it has not been possible to know that up till now, and thus for most of the time our discipline has promoted this music it has been making claims it could not possibly substantiate, claims that tell us only about us and our tastes and needs. It is arguable, especially in the present climate of musicology, that our tastes and needs are the proper focus of our work, and that what happened in the Middle Ages concerns 'them', not us. But in any case, whatever our position on that we (both sides) need to know what we are doing; we all need to know what we are making up and what we are not. Then we can use it plausibly within our own work.

An apology may be necessary for my going in detail through a lot of early musicology and reporting what it said. Presenting this chapter in lectures in various parts of the world has shown that the story it tells has

been almost wholly lost sight of. We need to reclaim an appreciation of what musicology's early medievalists found, and of what they claimed, if we are to understand how we were trained and why we think about the subject as we do. Put bluntly, Ludwig and Riemann – and their students and followers – formed the subject for us. We need to understand why they made it that way.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

What scholars thought about performance practice depended on the pieces they knew as well as on the documentary evidence available to them. Both were very limited until the early twentieth century when, as we shall see, the question quite suddenly came to life. Consequently the nineteenth-century histories of medieval music have very little to offer; they print few pieces and can suggest very little context for them.⁵ At the same time they did provide the starting-point for the scholars with whose work we will mainly be concerned. Riemann, Ludwig and Johannes Wolf, like Kretzschmar and Adler, the giants of early musicology, necessarily used Kiesewetter, Fétis, Coussemaker and Ambros as sources for their general view of medieval music. It is therefore worth looking briefly at what the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians knew before we try to understand what changed around 1900.

Among the earliest music historians, Charles Burney (1789) depends heavily on Martin Gerbert's collection of treatises published only a few years earlier (Gerbert 1784). Without Gerbert, Burney – like Sir John Hawkins the previous decade (Hawkins 1776) – would have been even more dependent on the atypical English sources that they knew best. But for both writers, the history of medieval music was largely a history of theorists. Burney used literary sources to provide information about the troubadours and trouvères, from which he deduced that jongleurs were 'employed to sing the works of those Troubadours who, for want of voice or knowledge in Music, were unable to do it for themselves' and that 'At that time melody seems to have been little more than plainsong, or *chanting*. The notes were square, and written on four lines only, like those of the Romish church, in the clef of C, without any marks for time. The movement [i.e., the rhythm] and embellishments of the air depend on the abilities of the singer . . . The singer always accompanied himself on an instrument *in unison*.'⁶ He also provides editions of two songs by the Chatelain de Coucy, with others from the *Roman d'Alexandre* and by Thibaut de Navarre, to which he adds editorial accompaniment. But on

the whole he can say little about performance practice: he had too few pieces and too little documentary evidence to begin to discuss it.

Johann Nicolaus Forkel (1801), though heavily dependent on Gerbert, Hawkins and Burney, attempts to divide his survey of medieval music ('Von Guido bis auf den Franchinus Gafor') into two parts, the first ('Von dem Mensural-gesang') dealing with mensural theory, the second ('Von der Harmonie') with counterpoint theory. The titles are revealing: measured song was a matter only of notation, as a reading of the theorists would lead one to believe; while the few surviving examples, for a reader of Forkel's generation, were remarkable only for their extraordinary harmony, the subject of so many sarcastic comments from Burney to at least the 1930s.⁷ But for the modern reader perhaps the most striking aspect of Forkel's second part is the enormous hole between organum and the fifteenth century, a hole that is filled only in part during the nineteenth century, mainly by Coussemaker's publication of thirteenth-century motets. The fourteenth century remains almost entirely blank until the discoveries of Ludwig and Wolf a century later. The only significant exception, one that subsequent authors reproduce again and again in the absence of any alternative, is François-Joseph Fétis' brief description in the first issue of his *Revue musicale* (1827) of the music of Adam de la Halle. Although Fétis found the parallel fourths and fifths of early polyphony horrible,⁸ Adam's rondels at least intermingled thirds, sixths and contrary motion, and he was willing to admit that while 'this is still very ill-mannered music', nevertheless 'it is a first step towards better, a necessary intermediary between diaphony proper and more improved pieces'.⁹ He was well aware of the importance of his discovery for music history: since nothing was known of music between Franco (whom Fétis believed to be active towards the end of the eleventh century) and the late fifteenth century, the rondeaux of Adam could provide an identifiable stage in the development of harmony after Guido.¹⁰ As well as printing a specimen rondeau *Tant con je vivrai*, wrongly transcribed in duple time,¹¹ Fétis offers the first description of a medieval motet (commenting that 'These motets were sung in processions'¹²) and introduces *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* as the oldest existing opéra-comique.

By far the most assiduous collector of specimens, however, was Raphael Georg Kiesewetter.¹³ Kiesewetter's aim, in a series of books and articles through the 1830s and 1840s, was to show a development in music leading from the earliest times towards the pinnacle of modern music, and in that sense the music of his own time is the real subject of his work and informs all his (numerous) judgements. To illustrate his argument

he had necessarily to provide examples of the stages through which he saw music developing, and he seems to have trawled earlier publications with unusual thoroughness, often providing his own transcriptions in place of those he found; consequently he was used repeatedly by later writers as a ready source of material, and his examples continue to turn up in histories of music throughout the rest of the century. Kiesewetter's interest was mainly in the harmonic language of music, so that questions of its performance are hardly raised, though it is clear from his discussion of instrumental music, in his history of Western European music (1834), that he saw instruments participating with voices from at least the fifteenth century. (The quotations come from the 1848 translation that made Kiesewetter's work familiar to English audiences.)

During the periods of which we have previously treated [i.e., before the 'Epoch of Josquin'], there never existed the smallest idea of a proper, artistic, and substantial instrumental music: for strengthening or supporting the chorus, i.e., the singers, cornetti, trombones, and perhaps trumpets, were mostly employed, all of which moved in unison with the voices.¹⁴

It has, moreover, been noticed by many writers, – and their observations are evidently confirmed by a perusal of the compositions of that early period [late fifteenth-century contemporaries of Paumann], which contain a great extension of the parts, and frequent change of key, – that counterpoint, particularly such as was set to familiar songs, was performed by instruments of one kind or another, whatever may have been their nature or construction.¹⁵

But he had already seen enough archival evidence to know that 'still the instrumentalists, with the exception of the organists, were totally separated from the real or proper (scientifically educated) musicians, i.e., from the singers (for the music masters were singers); they formed a peculiar sect, under the name of town-fifers, music-fifers, or warders', a point that has been picked up only in recent times to argue for the separation of instrumentalists and singers in performance.

Kiesewetter's history of the origins of opera, *Schicksale und Beschaffenheit des weltlichen Gesanges vom frühen Mittelalter bis zu der Erfindung des dramatischen Styles und den Anfängen der Oper* (1841), which is essentially a history of secular song, provides by far the richest and most varied collection of medieval music yet published, including monophonic songs taken from treatises, songs extracted from mass tenors (drawing on Kiesewetter's seminal study of the Netherlands school), troubadour songs copied from La Borde and Burney, monophonic songs by Adam taken from Bottée de Toulmon, along with a lay stanza and a virelai by Machaut; also polyphonic works by Adam and Landini taken from Fétis; Machaut's *Dous viaire* transcribed

by Kieseewetter (with his famous Ciceronian annotation ‘O tempora! o mores!’¹⁶), likewise Dufay’s *Je prens congié* and *Ce moys de may* (the latter attributed to Binchois), an anonymous song from Gerbert, Busnoys’ *Dieu quel mariage* from Petrucci, as well as pieces by Regis, Josquin, Cara, and so on. Whether or not his readers regarded these works as leading inexorably towards opera, as an introduction to medieval music they must have come as a revelation.

To this stock of published music relatively little is added before the last few years of the nineteenth century. The most substantial, and certainly the most influential publications of music were Coussemaker’s 1865 collection of thirteenth-century motets and his wider-ranging history of harmony from 1852, containing polyphonic pieces from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, which together added around seventy works to those already available; both publications included facsimiles as well as transcriptions, offering the first opportunity to study medieval music in its original form. Of the histories of music published later in the century, Ambros (Kieseewetter’s nephew and clearly much in his debt) provided the fullest treatment of medieval music but, even so, provided only a handful of examples taken from primary sources, the rest coming mainly from Coussemaker and Kieseewetter.

Although, as we have seen, a good deal of medieval music was available before the path-breaking publications of the 1890s, the focus of interest for writers on the subject changed very little after Kieseewetter. Schluter (1863), Ambros (1864), Fétis (1876), Schletterer (1884), Rockstro (1886) and Riemann (1882, 2/1884, 3/1887 and Riemann 1888) were above all concerned with the development of forms and styles, showing far less interest in how the music might have sounded. Nevertheless, their curiosity is from time to time aroused by the question, and the scattered remarks they make do allow us to begin to reconstruct the assumptions that were general before – at the end of the century – Stainer’s seminal studies, and the ideas developed from them by Riemann, changed the whole picture. For Coussemaker (1865) the notation of conductus in score, with the text underneath the system, indicates that it applied only to the lowest voice; and while he thinks it possible that the upper two parts were vocalised, he finds it probable that they were instrumental. When he considers whether motet tenors were sung or played he notes that no theorist is explicit, but thinks instrumental performance more likely on account of the provision of a text incipit only (i.e., not an underlaid chant text) and also because of the repetition of the tenor melody, but he readily admits that this is just conjecture in the absence of further evidence.¹⁷

At any rate, Coussemaker shows us that instrumental participation was conceivable in his time.¹⁸

One might not think so from reading other writers. Ambros discusses the possibility that untexted parts in organum might have been vocalised,¹⁹ a suggestion that surfaces again as late as 1905 in Wooldridge's survey of late medieval music for the original Oxford History of Music:

With respect to the number of voices employed in Machaut's form of rondeau, these might either be two, three, or four; the text, which is only to be found in one of the parts, was always given to the upper voice, the remaining voices probably singing upon some vowel, in the old manner.²⁰

It is also perfectly clear from numerous entries in his Musik-Lexikon that Hugo Riemann believed, at least until after the fifth edition of 1900, that medieval polyphony was purely vocal:

Accompanying Parts: The older contrapuntists of the 14th to the 16th century were unacquainted with *A. p.* in the real sense of the term. In purely vocal compositions, with strict or free imitations, which they exclusively cultivated, each part contained melody (was a *concerted* part). . . . The songs of the troubadours were accompanied by the minstrels on the viol or *vielle*. . . . It appears, however, that the instrumental accompaniment only doubled the vocal part in unison, or in octave, and possibly only those notes which fell upon strong beats. Accompaniment, in the modern sense of the term, appears first about 1600, and its cradle was Italy.²¹

Music, History of: Middle Ages IV: (14th–16th cents.): the possibility of various kinds of mensural determination soon led to the artifice of coupling various kinds of time in simultaneous vocal parts. . . . During the whole of this period music became more [*recte* is always] polyphonic and, as a rule, in four parts, seldom more than five, and [always] *a cappella*.²²

on Modern Times: . . . Next came [*recte* First we find] monody with instrumental accompaniment in chords . . . from this sprang the opera and the oratorio, also singing in parts with instrumental accompaniment . . . , and finally, pure instrumental music.²³

Cappella: As in old times sacred compositions were written for voices only without any kind of instrumental accompaniment (up to 1600), the term *a cappella* . . . received the meaning of polyphonic vocal music without accompaniment.²⁴

Their appearance here in what was already the standard reference work on music suggests fairly strongly that these were generally held views at the end of the nineteenth century (and if they were not before, their circulation through the Musik-Lexikon certainly made them so).

Consequently we should see Riemann's 1892 and 1893 editions of late medieval songs texted in all voices as reflecting prevailing opinion rather than (with the benefit of hindsight) as a wilful modernisation uncharacteristic of its time. In *Sechs bisher nicht gedruckte dreistimmige Chansons* (1892) Riemann transcribed six songs from a fragmentary source in Munich that had been catalogued by J. J. Maier in 1879, substituting for the original French text of the cantus a German translation applied to all voices, and transposing pieces as necessary to suit modern women's (or boys') and men's voices.²⁵ Some of these pieces he reused in the following year in his *Illustrationen zur Musikgeschichte. I: Weltlicher mehrstimmiger Gesang im 13.–16. Jahrhundert*, which includes songs by Binchois and Dunstable (attributed to Binchois), again fully texted in German (Illustration 1.1).

What is particularly interesting about these editions is that they were transcribed from original sources, not taken over from existing publications. This is significant not only because the transcriptions so clearly indicate current assumptions about medieval performance but also because Riemann had not previously worked from original notation. Indeed his 1878 textbook on the history of notation shows no signs of familiarity with any manuscript, but relies entirely on rules for notation provided by treatises in Gerbert and Coussemaker.²⁶ It seems unlikely that Riemann had never seen a manuscript of medieval polyphony before he began to transcribe the Munich fragments for Riemann 1892, and anyway facsimiles of both song and motet notation, including untexted voices, were easily available to him in Coussemaker 1852 and 1865, but what is interesting for the present argument is that while he was transcribing these songs, and was faced with three separate voices, two of which were untexted, he nevertheless found it reasonable to apply the cantus text to all three in order to make a performable edition. The same view was taken by Guido Adler and Oswald Koller in the first volume of pieces from the Trent Codices published in the series *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich* in 1900 (as in all three volumes Adler edited, 1900, 1904 and 1912). For reasons touched on in the introduction to *Sechs Trienter Codices I* and set out in detail in an article published (provocatively, one might think) in the Riemann Festschrift of 1909, the cantus text was applied to the lower voices, breaking ligatures where necessary. For Adler, as for Riemann in his early publications, medieval polyphony was vocal and therefore the text must apply to all voices. No one who knew only his later writings on medieval music (from 1905 on) would suppose that Riemann could ever have believed this, for it is the exact

O bella Rosa.

(Für 3 gleiche Stimmen.)

John Dunstable.

(Geb. v. 1590, gest. 24 Dez. 1652.)

1. Stimme (*Discantus*).
 2. St. (*Contratenor*).
 3. St. (*Tenor*).

O schön Rös-lein, schön Rös-se-lein! O schön Rös-se-lein! O schön Rös-lein!

Rös-lein! O schön Rös-se-lein, schön Rös-lein, schön Rös-se-lein! O schön Rös-lein! O

O schön Rös-se-lein, herz-al-ler-lieb-stes Schät-ze-lein! O lass dein

schön Rös-lein, herz-al-ler-lieb-stes Schät-ze-lein, herz-al-ler-lieb-stes Schät-ze-lein! O schön Rös-lein,

Rös-lein; herz-al-ler-lieb-stes Schät-ze-lein! O schön Rös-lein, herz-al-ler-lieb-stes Schät-ze-lein! O

Zürnen, dein Zür-nen sein! O lass dein Zür-nen, lass dein Zür-nen sein! Sei wieder gut dem Treu-en

Rös-lein, o lass dein Zür-nen, lass dein Zür-nen, lass dein Zür-nen, lass dein Zür-nen, lass dein Zür-nen, Sei wieder gut dem Treu-en, dem

lass dein Zürnen, dein Zür-nen sein, lass dein Zür-nen sein! Sei wieder gut dem Treu-en

dein, lass leuchten deines Lächelns Schein, deines Lächelns Schein in meines Herzens, in meines

Treu-en dein, lass leuch-ten deines Lächelns Schein, leuch-ten in meines Herzens Nacht hin-

dein, lass leuch-ten deines Lächelns Schein in meines Herzens Nacht hinein! O

ritard. Herzens Nacht hin-ein! O schön Rös-lein, lass wie-der froh mich in dei-ner, dei-ner Lie-be sein!

ein! O schön Rös-lein, lass wie-der froh mich, wie-der froh mich in deiner Liebe sein!

schön Rös-se-lein, schön Rös-se-lein, lass wieder froh mich in dei-ner Lie-be sein!

H. R. 1

opposite of the view that he and his disciples so vigorously promoted later on. The evidence of these early editions shows beyond a doubt that before about 1900 late medieval song was generally believed to be vocal in all parts.²⁷ Some time around then Riemann was converted and the voices-and-instruments hypothesis took wing. But what changed his mind, and why does it matter?

INVENTION

The answer to the second question will become clearer during this chapter, but for now an indication of Riemann's importance in the process may be seen by attempting to trace backwards, from publications later in the twentieth century, footnotes pointing to the evidence for using instruments in late medieval songs. Inexorably they converge, not on any primary sources or any documentary evidence, but on studies by Riemann, above all his *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte* of 1905. Riemann, as we shall see, was the first and most influential publicist for the voices-and-instruments hypothesis. How he was converted is also clear, for he makes no secret of his reasoning (although his motivation will need some elucidation). The evidence is largely incorporated into the story he sets out in the *Handbuch*, but it finds its clearest presentation in an article that appeared the following year under the revealing title 'Das Kunstlied im 14.–15. Jahrhundert' (*Artsong* in the 14th and 15th centuries) and whose first half sets out Riemann's new view of late medieval performance practice.²⁸ Riemann makes a potent argument, powerfully presented, out of a variety of ingredients including observations from two previous studies, Stainer (1898) and (rather grudgingly) Ludwig (1902–3), together with the materials assembled by Wolf for his path-breaking *Geschichte der Mensuralnotation* (1904), transmuted through Riemann's preconceptions about the nature of art music. To understand more precisely how his argument formed it will help to look briefly at each of these ingredients.

As Riemann implicitly acknowledges in both studies, the voices-and-instruments hypothesis has its ultimate origin in the Stainer family's work on the Oxford manuscript Canonici misc. 213. Although Riemann seems only to have known the final product of their research, *Dufay and his Contemporaries* of 1898, Sir John Stainer had already published the essentials two years earlier, in a paper read to the Musical Association on 12 November 1895 and published in the Proceedings for 1895–6. In studying the Canonici songs the Stainers were inevitably struck by the number of pieces that began with an untexted phrase in the cantus, as

well as by the frequency of untexted phrases within and at the ends of pieces; given the untexted lower voices, and the nature of contemporary (late nineteenth-century) song, it would have been surprising if they had not considered the possibility that instruments were involved. In fact to Sir John Stainer it was obvious:

From the fact that it is rather the exception than the rule that the words should begin with the music, and also from the fact that a long series of notes often occurs in the middle or at the end of a song, without any words being written under them, I think it may safely be inferred that instruments of the viol family were employed throughout; they would be in unison with the voices when the words were being sung, and, when the voices were silent, they would supply short symphonies. The existence of these preliminary and final instrumental symphonies in Dufay's compositions is of considerable interest.²⁹

He goes on to suggest that it may represent a further stage of the developmental progression proposed by Gevaert from Greek song accompanied by a lyre, via the Romans, into the plainchant antiphon (in which, Gevaert suggested, voices took the place of the instrumental introduction),³⁰ leading in turn (Stainer proposes) to the instrumental introductions in songs of Handel and Bach and 'the modern drawing-room or St James's Hall ballad'. While this may seem too ridiculous to mention now, it provides a useful reminder of just how little was known about medieval and early Renaissance music at the end of the nineteenth century, and of how important the evidence of the *Canonici* manuscript must therefore have seemed. Between the Montpellier motets published by Coussemaker (1865) and the later Netherlands composers,³¹ *Dufay and his Contemporaries* offered the largest body of music yet published. Inevitably it was read as a crucial intervening stage in the development of music.

At the end of his paper Stainer introduced a performance – probably the first modern performance – of some Dufay songs, the introduction to which offers another small clue as to why the voices-and-instruments hypothesis seemed to make so much sense:

I had great difficulty in finding out how to let you *hear* some of Dufay's compositions. It would have been a hopeless task to try to find three or four good singers who were sufficiently advanced philologists to sing the old French words; it would require a vocal quartet of Max Müllers!³² But as they were without doubt accompanied by an early form of viol (a fact which may have had an important influence on the compass of the parts), I at last determined to place the music in your hands and have it performed on three or four violas; these

instruments will probably give you the nearest approach to the old viol tone which can be found in our modern instruments.³³

It is a recurring theme of pre-war performances of, and writings on, medieval music that the music is too difficult to sing without instrumental accompaniment,³⁴ so that it is possible that in referring to difficulties with old French (in which a modern French accent would surely have been serviceable) Stainer was drawing a veil over a more serious obstacle to vocal performance. If so, one can hardly expect a writer in late Victorian England (least of all a composer of choral music) to suppose that medieval singers might have been very much more skilled than their own.

In the introduction to *Dufay and his Contemporaries* the Stainers offer more detailed arguments in favour of performance with instruments on all parts:

It is abundantly clear from our MS that some form of instrumental accompaniment was employed; to take one instance only – Dufay’s song ‘Ce jour de l’an’ – it will be seen from the facsimile that there are three groups of notes, one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end of each of the three vocal parts, under which no words are written. It is possible of course that in the case of the two latter groups the last preceding syllable of the words was intended to be carried on in spite of the intervening rests: numerous instances of this may be found in the music of the period, and Thomas Morley quotes a passage from a motet of Dunstable’s to illustrate the absurdity of the practice;³⁵ but with regard to the first group of notes, it is clear that they can only have been written as an introductory symphony for instruments, such as viols, preceding and leading up to the entry of the voices, and we shall probably not err in supposing that these instruments were employed not only for symphonies, but to accompany the voices throughout. In the case of ‘Ce jour de l’an’ the words are written out in full under each part, but in many, indeed in the majority of the songs in this MS, the words are placed under the upper part only, while the tenor and the contra-tenor parts have only the first two or three words written at their beginning, generally in such a way as not to correspond with the notes above them. Perhaps one is not justified in inferring from this that in every case where it occurs the lower parts were not intended to be sung at all, but to be played only, but in some cases this must clearly be so; if you will look, for instance, at the first song in this collection, ‘Je demande ma bienvenue’, you will see that the two lower parts cannot possibly be sung to the words of the song, even if the phrasing indicated by the ligatures is entirely disregarded. Another good illustration of the employment of instruments is afforded by Dufay’s song ‘Estrines moy, je vous estrineray’ on folio 20 verso of the MS. This song is in three parts, but the words are in the form of a dialogue between *two* persons only, and are distributed accordingly between the two upper parts, while the

third or contra-tenor part has merely the words ‘Est[r]ines moy’ written at its commencement. Here, therefore, it is clear that the contra-tenor part must have been played and not sung, and that of the two upper parts which sustain the dialogue, those portions only can have been sung to which the words of the dialogue are allotted, the remaining portions which occur while the singer is not speaking, but being spoken to, being rendered by instruments alone.³⁶

The editors go on to quote Olivier de la Marche’s description of motets being played.³⁷ On the face of it this was powerful evidence, and until Wolf published his much wider-ranging collection in 1904 no one, apart from Ludwig (who by the end of 1904 had already transcribed the bulk of fourteenth-century polyphony, as is clear from his dated transcriptions in the Ludwig Nachlass)³⁸ was in a position to see that these songs were not entirely representative of medieval song as a whole. Ludwig, however, had come to somewhat similar conclusions. He seems not to have believed that instruments took part in the cantus line – at any rate, when Riemann built on the Stainers’ hypothesis, describing in the *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte* ‘instrumental introductory-, between- and after-phrases’, Ludwig annotated the margin of his copy ‘unbelievable’.³⁹ But he certainly shared the Stainers’ assumption that the untexted lower voices were instrumental. In his ground-breaking 1903 study of fourteenth-century polyphony Ludwig was at first rather coy about his view of performance practice:

in the manner of performance, by comparison with the other voices it [the Tenor] must have contrasted very much; unfortunately, for lack of sufficient clues, we still do not know how this happened in the performance of the whole composition, whether by being purely instrumental or in another way.⁴⁰

But right at the end of the article, after warning that speculation about questions of vocal and instrumental music has frequently led scholars into madness, he becomes much more specific, to the extent that his repeated disclaimer at the end has a hollow ring to it. His views have become quite clear:

That instrumental accompaniment also plays a large role in the expert performance of the French and Italian vocal works of our epoch is without a doubt. For example we see the composers often shown playing a portative organ; I can well imagine that the tenor was played on this instrument, one that is capable of holding on the longest notes of the tenor and, like bowed and plucked instruments, allows self-accompaniment. It should not, however, be my task here to add to the many hypotheses about the instrumental practice of the Middle Ages a new one, like them based for the most part only on supposition.⁴¹

By 1903, then, Riemann would have been aware that instrumental accompaniment for these new repertoires was beginning to look like a real possibility. Although it was an English publication with a restricted circulation, he must have known of the Stainer volume by 1900, when Adler cited it in his introduction to *Sechs Trienter Codices I* and Wolf reviewed it in the *Sammelbände der internationalen Musikgesellschaft*.⁴² We do not know when he first saw a copy, but even if, as early as 1898, he had seen Stainer's support for instrumental participation in all voices, it is possible that that observation's potential for a redrawn history of late medieval music was not apparent to him until he came to work on the second half-volume of his *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte*, probably around 1903–4 (the first half-volume was issued in 1904 and was presumably completed some time before since the second appeared already in 1905). This would provide a context for his short article on two canons in the *Canonici* manuscript published in the *Zeitschrift der internationalen Musikgesellschaft* for 1904–5. But, crucially, it was also during this same period that he could first have seen the full range of music that Wolf would be publishing in his *Geschichte der Mensuralnotation* in 1904. In 'Das Kunstlied im 14.–15. Jahrhundert' Riemann acknowledges this:

Since Wolf made the individual page-sheets available to me during the printing, I was in the happy position of being able to use the contents for the second half-volume of my *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte*.⁴³

Again this points to *c.* 1903–4 for Riemann's detailed working-out of his new view of fourteenth-century song. During this period he must for the first time have come to appreciate the range of late medieval music that survives (entirely unknown to him before Wolf), the marked differences between French and Italian forms and styles, and the layout and notation of these pieces in the manuscripts. It is worth remembering that he had been writing music history of this period in one form or another for twenty-five years;⁴⁴ he must immediately have begun to think about how all this material might fit into or might alter the story he had been outlining during that time; as a musician and a thinker about music (which to Riemann was always more important than being a historian) he must have wanted above all else to understand the language of these pieces, where it might have come from and what it might lead to. He was thus bringing a knowledgeable and immensely fertile mind to bear on a mass of new and fascinating music.

What seems to have struck Riemann more powerfully than anything, even than questions of performance practice (though they proved to

be crucial to his argument), was the repertory of trecento polyphony, which was entirely new to him and to all his contemporaries apart from Ludwig, who had transcribed it for himself but had published only an overview and without music examples.⁴⁵ Ludwig's article shows his own preference for trecento music over what we now call *ars subtilior*, saying of the latter, 'how disappointing is the kernel that hides behind the shell', and then 'What a different effect, on the other hand, the Italian trecento has on us!'⁴⁶ This passage may have been another factor in the growth of Riemann's view. But in any case, the music of fourteenth-century Italy came as a revelation to him, the excitement of it palpable in the language of the *Handbuch*. Two features of trecento song struck Riemann as crucial, first that it was more nearly tonal than French music, and might therefore point more directly towards the music of the future, and secondly (and more specifically) that it consisted of simple quasi-tonal accompanying parts supporting a graceful melodic line and in that sense showed values that for Riemann were essential to art song. In setting it into context, therefore, he looks not to thirteenth-century French music, which seems to have little in common with it, but rather to English music (which he knew from the English series *Early Bodleian Music*), where the thirds and sixths Riemann so appreciated in trecento pieces could be found at an even earlier date. Hence:

Johannes Wolf (Gesch. der Mensuralnotation etc) would like to ascribe . . . the greater advance to the French. [But] English parallel discant in 3rds or 6ths or in 3rds and 6ths beginning and ending in perfect consonances (unison, octave, fifth) is after all undoubtedly at least the starting-point of the style that, through the *Ars nova*, became Continental, perhaps as earlier stressed, even the starting-point for the whole of polyphony, including the old organum.⁴⁷

It follows that French music needs to be sidelined, for, seen from this angle, there is a continuous development from early English music, through the *ars nova* of trecento Italy, to the music of modern times, a development to which fourteenth-century French music contributes very little and fifteenth-century English music much less than had been supposed. Thus:

Curiously enough, Johannes Wolf, in this the first collection of the musical art of the 14th century made available to us in a substantial quantity, has not observed that the *Italians* have not only prepared the revolution in notation that Philippe de Vitry imparted to France and the Netherlands, but moreover – something that is more important – also created the new style, which for the *Ars nova* is after all the most important thing, the style that breaks conspicuously with the tradition of organum and in composition is based on parallel motion in 3rds

and 6ths instead of on contrary motion. This result of investigating [Wolf's] collection is highly surprising, and opens whole new perspectives which could strongly reduce the role that England played at the time of the origin of the type of fully developed compositions recognised even until today as contrapuntally correct, so that Power, Benet, Dunstable etc. do not appear to be phenomena emerging especially from English musical roots. Florence thus becomes the birthplace of a style-change scarcely less important than the return 300 years later to (accompanied) monody.⁴⁸

Riemann then begins to examine trecento polyphony in detail, in a chapter boldly entitled 'Florence, the cradle of Ars nova'. Acknowledging the work of Wolf and Ludwig in making fourteenth-century music available, he sets out to show that in stressing the importance of the French ars nova they both failed to see what was revolutionary about the Italian. To lend weight to his argument he begins by making an analogy between 'the fresh pulsing life' of troubadour poetry and music, and the development of the Italian language in Dante, suggesting a line of development between two bodies of work already widely admired on to which he can peg a similar musical development; for it is easily understandable that 'the young bloom' of Italian poetry coincides with that of Italian music:⁴⁹

Certainly the Florentine Ars nova of the trecento did not take up the laborious studies of the Parisian school, as emerges clearly enough from the fact that it does not build motets over a tenor that uses just a few pitches, nor rondeaux and conductus put together in a ponderous organal style,⁵⁰ but rather appears with a whole new fundamental form and further with such security and natural liveliness that any suspicion of a theoretical starting-point is out of the question. No, this Florentine New Art is very much an authentic indigenous offspring of Italian genius . . .⁵¹

The language is reminiscent of Jacob Burckhardt, whose *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) had by 1905 already reached its ninth edition. As well as Burckhardt's repeated presentation of Florence as the birthplace of the Renaissance, Riemann here seems to be echoing especially the language of Part IV, 'The Discovery of the World and of Man', which from so many angles contrasts the Italians' new-found interest in the natural world with the medieval traditions of the Church. Riemann's use of this rhetoric may have been unconscious, for Burckhardt was by now an inextricable part of any intellectual's understanding of European culture. But by bringing music into this view, and seeing it too as progressive and anti-medieval, Riemann is able to draw on other prejudices widely shared by scholars from a similar background. Supported by the

hint that French *ars nova* music had in Vitry a purely theoretical basis, Riemann's rhetoric is of course designed to denigrate any French contribution and, coupled with his preference for England as an ultimate source for trecento style, reflects a nationalistic element in Riemann's thought that surfaces elsewhere in his writings and that is entirely in keeping with his place and time. Anti-French sentiment was as strong in Riemann's Leipzig as anywhere in Germany. It found a particular focus in the Battle of Leipzig – one of the first mass battles of modern times – which saw the final defeat of Napoleon in 1813, and had been stoked within recent memory by the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Germany had been in alliance with Italy since 1882. Riemann's historical argument could hardly have been better adapted to his surroundings. He had been building up to it for several years. Alexander Rehding cites a similar passage in the *Geschichte der Musiktheorie* of 1898:

As historical research keeps confirming, it is hardly a coincidence that *Germanic nations brought the raw beginnings [of simultaneous singing] to a certain artistic height, and that England of all places became the actual cradle of fully developed counterpoint.*

We have seen Riemann withdrawing the credit from England somewhat in 1905 and redirecting it towards Italy. But his determination to exclude French music from any kind of formative role is just as strong, for this 1898 extract continues:

The third as the foundation of harmony is something remote, something completely unthinkable for the peoples educated in the theories of the ancients [i.e., the French]. This healthy core of harmonic music could not be found through speculation; rather it was the vocation of the nations to whom this notion was self-evident, familiar for centuries, to bring order and meaning at once into the theory and practice of an art, which the heirs of the ancient culture had fundamentally ruined in their attempt to assimilate an element alien to them.⁵²

A further argument he offers deals with compositional procedure. Just as the ballata derives not from the French *virelai* but from troubadours' dance songs, so the *caccia*, he insists, is a wholly original Tuscan product, not derived from the French *chace*; it is:

a canon for two voices with or without a fundamental bass voice. The musical construction of the Florentines at this time astounds first of all through the fact that the *cantus prius factus*, normal almost without exception for the Parisian school, is very obviously lacking; thus successive voice invention is abandoned. Even in the cases where a low voice proceeds in long notes it appears not so

much as a *cantus firmus* as a *fundamental bass*. It goes without saying that the canonic voices cannot have been made one after another, but rather are worked out together.⁵³

It must be evident by now that barely hidden behind these apparently music-historical facts lies a mass of cultural prejudice. Not only did Riemann wish to exclude the French from any significant role in the formation of modern music; as a Protestant intellectual he shared a widespread distaste for the enthusiasm for the Middle Ages shown by Catholic historians. For them, the central part played by (pre-Reformation) religious belief in medieval life, gave the Middle Ages an appeal that to Protestant historians was positively objectionable. If Riemann was to find a crucial role for medieval music in his history of music then it was going to have to be found outside the music of the Church. The long-standing German love affair with Italy, which went back through Burckhardt at least as far as Goethe and Heine, together with the anti-French and anti-clerical sentiments so characteristic of his class, almost inevitably converged in his preference for trecento song over French *cantus-firmus* based compositions, especially given their very different approaches to melody and accompaniment, the one so much easier to relate to modern music than the other. All this feeds into his preference for Italy as the birthplace of secular song and, with it, of all those fundamental ingredients in Western classical music (instrumental music, tonality, abstract music) for whose fullest development, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Germans of Riemann's generation felt they could reasonably take the credit.

Before going on to deal with the tonal construction of trecento compositions and its (for Riemann) clear anticipation of later developments, he introduces another and in this context a more surprising ingredient into his argument, but one that plays a major role in showing how trecento song marks the origin of modern music. It seems clear to Riemann, in the light of the Stainers' work, that these songs are accompanied melodies, and that the accompaniment is instrumental, and in that sense they mark the beginning of song as it became known in later centuries, particularly since, for Riemann, the texting is not melismatic as it appears in the manuscripts, but rather syllabic as in later song, the melismas belonging to the accompanying instruments. This is almost breathtaking in its boldness and its ruthlessness with the manuscript evidence, though in an environment where German *Lieder* marked the pinnacle of song, and where an understanding of the medieval context had so little evidence

on which to rest, it makes much more sense than it might today (though, as we shall see, its influence is in some respects still with us).

Riemann begins his presentation of this extraordinary hypothesis by raising the difficulties that Ludwig had in approving of the extensive melismas he found in trecento vocal lines. Ludwig, Riemann tells us, wonders in his 1902 survey of fourteenth-century polyphony, about the Florentines' 'excessive extension of the individual parts through melismas delighting in notes [tonfreudige Melismen], such as never appear in French secular art'; and Riemann notes that in Wolf's published transcriptions from the manuscripts that is indeed what one sees. To Riemann, however, this is to read the manuscripts far too literally, without considering how they would have been performed. Far from being excessive vocal melismas, he believes, these are in fact '*instrumental introductory-, between- and end-phrases*' (Riemann's italics) that in performance 'wrap up the sung melody'.⁵⁴

I have pointed out many times [earlier in Riemann 1905] that even monody notations of the 13th century not infrequently contain elements that can only be understood as instrumental preludes, interludes and postludes. . . . For polyphonic pieces Stainer's recent 'Dufay and his contemporaries' (1898) includes a large number of perfect proofs.⁵⁵

. . . in any case, an unprejudiced look at the madrigals of the oldest Florentines teaches that we stand here before a richly developed form *combining instrumental music with vocal music* whose existence at so early a time one had not suspected. Whether the lower voice is at all intended to be sung seems to me questionable even if it is not impossible.⁵⁶

Taking as an example Giovanni da Cascia's madrigal *Nel mezzo a sei*, Riemann then shows how his tonal reading, combined with his rearrangement of the text, produces something that he can relate directly to the later Florentine monodists, and thus to the birth of modern music. Although he makes no reference to Kiesewetter here, it is clear that his agenda is not unlike Kiesewetter's in the *Schicksale*, using late medieval song as a step along the road to opera. An extract from Riemann's example is reproduced here as Illustration 1.2.

A quick glance soon teaches that here we stand before a new art; in the whole of the older literature one seeks in vain for such a piece, one that so clearly *rests on a harmonic basis*, so systematically disposed over *harmonic progression*. Cadences and half-cadences are found on *d, g, a, g, d, a, d, $\overset{b}{g}, \overset{a}{g}, \overset{a}{g}, d, d, \overset{b}{g}, d, \overset{a}{a}, d, f, \overset{a}{a}$* , only twice (bar 15 and bar 4 of the $\frac{3}{2}$, section) comes the typical . . . old style divergence from 3rd to 5th $\overset{c\#}{a} \overset{d}{g}$, and even there with a tension-creating effect [mit einer