

Introduction

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Defending their decision to abandon the period-label ‘Baroque’ in preference to the ‘century’ model, the editors of *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music* indulged in a spirited prediction of

what would happen if one were to continue to project the series backwards (sixteenth century, fifteenth century, etc.)? It seems likely that here, at least, there would be a strong tendency to revert to conventional periods (‘Renaissance’, ‘Medieval’ or just ‘Early’ music). Perhaps that is to do with the market. Perhaps, however, it is also due to the fact that the sixteenth century, for instance, on its own seems too diffuse, its musical developments too static and comparatively lacking in canonical composers (with the obvious exceptions such as Josquin Desprez and Palestrina).¹

Our decision to resist the siren call of the term ‘Renaissance’, and the value judgements that it implies, in favour of an English equivalent of the commonly used Italian or French forms (*Cinquecento*, *seizième siècle*), is indeed partly to do with the market, and our determination not to add to the shelves yet another history concentrating on a restricted corpus of surviving high art music, derived from largely elite experience, mostly composed in the towns and cities of Southern and Western Europe. Much of the existing literature is focused on sound in the sense of composed music leavened with a dose of orally transmitted songs and improvisational practices. Such artificially imposed boundaries fail to take notice of other musical sounds and noise of everyday experience, such as the songs of the workplace and tavern, the cries of street traders, and the frequent intrusion of bells, all too often forgotten in the concentration upon the musical culture of church and court. But any attempt to present a more complete picture of the soundworld of the sixteenth century needs to take some account of these features, which had a more noticeable effect upon the individual soundscapes of urban environments than the notated music that has been the exclusive concern of most traditional histories.

¹ Carter and Butt, ‘Preface’, in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music*, xvii.

If that is one consideration, another is to do with the objection, familiar from the discipline of History itself, to the very term ‘Renaissance’, which is now commonly seen as too indebted to a conception that is exclusive, narrowly focused, and unremittingly Darwinian in its pursuit of perceived progress. Quite apart from the fact of its rejection by many historians, and not only those concerned with social and cultural history, it remains a truism that the traditional period labels, assigned to the emergent discipline of musicology as framed by German historians who attempted to squeeze musical developments into the mould formed by other areas of scholarship – notably, art history – work less comfortably there than in other fields. A distinct sense of growing unease over the very idea of ‘Renaissance music’ (apart from a few random remarks by Tinctoris and others, there is little evidence of contemporary perception of a rebirth) is detectable in the shifting emphases present in the titles of the standard English-language histories published in the last half-century. Following the example of Gustave Reese’s magisterial work issued in 1954, Howard Brown and Louise Stein’s *Music in the Renaissance*, a revised edition of Brown’s book of 1976, adopts Reese’s title, in what is essentially a confident assertion of the place of music within the traditional Burckhardtian framework.² By the time that Allan Atlas’ volume in the Norton Introduction to Music History series had appeared more than twenty years after Brown’s first edition, that framework had been modified – though not totally rejected – while ‘Renaissance’, now deployed in an adjectival sense, necessarily requires the explanatory subtitle, *Music in Western Europe, 1400–1600*.³ From the title page of Leeman Perkins’ history, evidently conceived as a replacement for Reese’s pioneering book (last revised in 1959), and published just one year after Atlas’, the difficulties of using the term in relation to music became even more apparent; while retaining the seductive period-label, the author also interpolated a certain distance between the term itself and the object of study.⁴ Almost all single-volume surveys of Renaissance music produced in more recent decades have nevertheless broadly followed the model established by Reese, of a history of music whose core consists of ‘composers and works’.⁵

In place of a history constructed around a series of masterpieces written by great composers, occasionally tempered by side references to oral transmission and the role of ‘improvised traditions’, it seems more urgent to offer an

² Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*; Brown, rev. Stein, *Music in the Renaissance*.

³ Atlas, *Renaissance Music*. ⁴ Perkins, *Music in the Age of the Renaissance*.

⁵ In addition to Brown, Atlas, and Perkins, see also Haar, *European Music, 1520–1640*; three notable examples which have, in different ways, sought to buck this trend are Fenlon, *Man and Music*; Schwandt, *Die Musik in der Kultur der Renaissance*; and Lütteken, *Musik der Renaissance*.

alternative, if complementary, account constituting a coherent approach based on a consideration of common rather than exceptional experiences of music. As for the rest, it may be doubted that sixteenth-century musical developments, which include the first compositions in the style of the *seconda prattica* and all that it entails, polychoral works on an unprecedented scale, the emergence of the *basso continuo*, spectacular pieces in the new virtuoso vocal manner with accompaniment, and the birth of opera, can be reasonably regarded as static. While, on the face of it, some of these developments may seem to inhabit the chronological borderland between one century and the next, in reality, the last three in particular were the natural consequence of practices and experiments that had been present for some time, and were then brought out into the open through the medium of print. Nor do we think the century of Marenzio, Palestrina, Lassus, Morales, Clemens, Willaert, Victoria, Tallis, Byrd, Wert, the young Monteverdi, Gombert, and Monte to be comparatively devoid of major composers, a somewhat out-of-date perception brought on by the traditional image of the period as uncomfortably located between the ‘true’ Renaissance of Franco-Burgundian polyphony and a Baroque inaugurated by the Monteverdi Vespers of 1610. In terms of political developments, this is a century framed by the French invasions of Italy in 1494 at one end and the Treaty of Zsitvatorok, which ended fifteen years of conflict between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, at the other, dramatically articulated by the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), which established the hegemony of Spain in the Italian peninsula, and the onset of yet further religious strife which encouraged the spread of Lutheranism and Calvinism, and facilitated the consolidation of the Anglican church. These major events, markers of the first order in a troubled century also characterised by violence and dissent, produced significant cultural consequences.⁶

Two major developments in recent historiography have had a fundamental impact on the way that a history of sixteenth-century music might alternatively be conceived, and traces of both can be detected in many of the contributions to this volume. Each of them is a product of the ‘New Cultural History’ as it emerged in the 1980s, and both have now matured into sufficiently large and diverse methodological fields to warrant the status of independent sub-disciplines of history.⁷ The first of these, ‘the performative turn’, begins by recognising that every component of the historical record – whether archaeological remains, domestic artefacts, or the texts of documents of all kinds – bears traces of once-lived actions, interchanges, and confrontations between human culture and the natural environment. These

⁶ Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed*. ⁷ See, for example, Hunt, *The New Cultural History*.

traces suggest that the materials of history – its evidential base – possess inherent dynamic agency, and so invite reanimations through contextual reconstructions as a means of rendering them readable by the senses as well as the intellect. Such ‘performances’ have many possible functions across a wide spectrum, ranging from acting as laboratory test beds for scholarly explorations of how inanimate objects might once have functioned, to their use in re-packaging heritage as a consumable, or as a means of supporting the sale of anything from tourism to video games. Whether it is live experiences of participation in immersive historical re-enactments, such as encountering Shakespearean theatre standing among the groundlings in the reconstructed Globe theatre in London, or the virtual, but equivalently emotive experiences provided by film and television costume drama or new kinds of interactive museum displays, the importance of embodied and emotional investment in making sense of the early modern past has had a transformative effect on the ways that people engage with history.⁸ This surge in popular participation in the ‘performance of history’ seems to chime with deeper yearnings in contemporary Western bourgeois culture, in which an affective identification with a richly imagined past both holds up a mirror to, and also provides some kind of bulwark against, the complexities and anxieties of modern life. And despite the intrinsic pitfalls of reconstructionism that may, unintentionally or otherwise, tend to make familiar that which ethnographer historians work hard to make strange, the performative turn, which almost inevitably entails an inter-disciplinary approach to interpretation, transforms both the aims and the practices of making early modern history.

For sixteenth-century music, the performative approach has become manifest at various levels, both practical and epistemological. The burgeoning of the early music performance movement over the last half-century, and its re-animation in live performance and recordings of once unimaginable quantities of music previously unknown to all but a handful of scholars, has been both a stimulus to, and a result of, the conjunction of analytical and practical engagements with the corpus of surviving materials.⁹ Notwithstanding the inevitable permanent conditionality of the accuracy of their representations of a lost soundworld, the ‘sounds of early music’, now so ubiquitous and recognisable, provide a near-constant living presence capable of engaging a worldwide audience of enthusiasts, for whom the sensory and emotive

⁸ See de Groote, *Consuming History*; Worthen, ‘Reconstructing the Globe, Reconstructing Ourselves’; Parry, *Recoding the Museum*; Cook, Kolassa, and Whittaker, ‘Representations of Early Music on Stage and Screen’.

⁹ One sign of this is the fact that several of the contributors to this volume are also professional performers.

dimensions of music are at least as critical as – if not more important than – its taxonomy, or even its ‘interpretation’.¹⁰ Although most people’s encounters with early music are as listeners, active participation as singers and players in amateur groups making music for their own pleasure has been a significant and persistent dimension of modern engagements with the surviving music, much of it originally created for just such sociable and non-public enjoyment.¹¹ As a result, even notated music, long considered as the unassailably central class of evidence for music history, no longer seems either neatly containable within a strictly philological paradigm, or explicable through the analytical preoccupations of later twentieth-century musical-critical processes. Indeed, this raises with some urgency the whole question of what it may have meant in the sixteenth century to ‘make music’.

As Nicholas Cook has written, ‘Most so-called histories of music are really histories of composition, or even of compositional innovation . . . It is partly a matter of aesthetic ideology, but it is also because histories of music are written on the basis of documents, ranging from scores and transcriptions to treatises and criticism.’¹² In such a world, it is inevitable that what is an essentially nineteenth-century historiographical approach to herding, taming, and classifying the notated compositions that survive from the sixteenth century, in order to construct a complete account of its music history told in the form of works, genres, composers, and ‘national’ styles, is dominant; and this holds true even when, as with a number of relatively recent one-volume-survey music histories, such priorities are temporarily interrupted for asides about non-musical matters going on in the background of the ‘music itself’.¹³ And while it would be churlish to deny the importance of the immense labours of scholarly editors ever since the mid nineteenth century, and their contributions to the re-sounding of the music of the early modern era by performing musicians today, the potentially reactionary effects of the early music performance phenomenon on music historiography need also to be considered.¹⁴ One of the results of the performative turn for sixteenth-century music is that the apparently progressive idea of studying and applying ‘historically informed performance practice’ to musical sources – an approach

¹⁰ See, for example, Butt, *Playing with History*; Bowan, ‘R. G. Collingwood, Historical Reenactment and the Early Music Revival’.

¹¹ In his editorial to the first issue of *EM* in January 1973, its founding editor, John Thompson, announced that the journal’s aim was to ‘provide a link between the finest scholarship of our day and the amateur and professional listener and performer’: *Early Music* 1 (1973), 1.

¹² Cook, *Beyond the Score*, 3.

¹³ For example, the series of ‘Intermedi’ interspersed between chapters on musical genres and national styles in Atlas, *Renaissance Music*: 21–6, 77–85, 136–44, 264–8, 325–35, 450–6, 506–9, 572–9, 654–60.

¹⁴ One of the best accounts of the history and practice of the critical editing of early music remains Brett, ‘Text, Context, and the Early Music Editor’.

that has painstakingly accrued for itself the status of a scholarly discipline – has, ironically, had the effect of reifying notated music, cementing a corpus of canonic works at the centre of a sequence of repeated histories and new performance orthodoxies.

The tensions inherent in the burden of authority carried by a works-centred approach are neatly epitomised in Alfred Einstein's monumental history of the Italian madrigal, published in 1949.¹⁵ The product of several decades of extraordinarily painstaking work, Einstein's research was based almost entirely on the transcription and analysis of surviving music (primarily printed sources), embedded within an account of literary and musical style criticism. It effectively imposed its eponymous title on a vast body of different kinds of musical materials, coagulating them into a single genre and a unitary narrative, and this remains largely unchallenged. Einstein's method of marshalling the notated record to create 'The Italian Madrigal' as an ontological entity has exercised a particularly tenacious grip over the way that the musical settings of Italian and other vernacular poetry in the sixteenth century are still typically categorised and evaluated, not least by establishing a 'premier league' consisting of about a dozen great composers and their 'finest works'. His method consists of applying far-reaching structuralising devices, modelled on those established in the mid nineteenth century for fixing the canon of post-Enlightenment music (and, later, of Renaissance art) that involved, for example, pronouncements on which music should be included and, by omission, what excluded, based on concepts of compositional integrity and 'lineages of development', in many ways anachronistic yardsticks for a hugely diverse and unevenly distributed music culture. Much of the book is ordered on the basis of chapters devoted to the works of individual composers (notwithstanding the fact that a significant proportion of sixteenth-century printed collections, and most manuscripts, are miscellanies), dividing them up into 'masters', and the lesser figures who worked in the 'circles' surrounding them. Einstein also applied what now seems a high-handed teleological periodisation to create a neat historical progression that would explain a genre that apparently had a beginning, a middle, and an end. Sub-classes of the otherwise 'serious' madrigal, such as *canzone alla napoletana*, which could not be ignored thanks to their ubiquity in printed sources, are dealt with by isolating them within a separate chapter. Finally, by emphasising novelty and the avant-garde over what the publication record suggests was a branch of musical culture that in fact mainly valued continuity, Einstein imposed a distinctly modernist frame that seriously misrepresents how music was actually circulated and used in the

¹⁵ Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*.

sixteenth century.¹⁶ This particular narrative, which has had a persistent and distorting effect on the representation of mainstream sixteenth-century Italian secular music practices, continues in the planning of concerts and recordings today, in which the experimental madrigals of Gesualdo are often preferred to the once much more widely disseminated ones of Arcadelt or Lassus.

And yet Einstein seems also to have had an inkling of the limits of a history restricted to judgements based on poetics and compositional style alone, and it may be fair to credit him with being one of the first modern scholars of the music of this period to recognise at least the potential of taking account of the performance dimension as a way of nuancing the certainties of a relentlessly analytic account of music texts: ‘a history of music which aspires to be more than a mere philology of music makes sense only if it is always able to imagine the living, perceptible, audible work and, last but not least, if the work is imagined as its contemporaries imagined it’.¹⁷ What prevented Einstein, and so many historians of sixteenth-century music who followed him, from pursuing this insight further is surely their reluctance to surrender the comfort of cleaving to ‘the work’ as the point of departure (and return), something so deeply ingrained in the training of musicologists that to dislodge it seems to threaten to bring the entire edifice crashing to the ground.

A potential answer to the closed loop which, irrespective of the critical and contextual routes music historians travel, always seems to bring them back to ‘the music itself’ may be found in the second historiographical turn: material culture. With its related attention to ‘use’ and thus to the history of embodied experience, ‘materiality’, already widely established in other branches of the humanities, has recently begun to have a significant and potentially far-reaching impact on the study of the cultural history of sixteenth-century music.¹⁸ In simple terms, a material cultural approach to music starts from the basic premise that the interactions involved in making music always entail the body in dynamically physiological action, either directly with the voice, or prosthetically through a musical instrument; but for every participant in any act of music-making, whether performer, active listener, or accidental auditor, it also involves the ear, and, in the sixteenth century, almost always the eye as well. Similarly, music occurs in an environmentally contextualised space that is mentally, socially, acoustically, and architecturally contingent. Experiences

¹⁶ A famous example is Jacques Arcadelt’s hugely popular *Il primo libro de madrigali a quattro voci*, which was continuously republished over the course of more than 100 years in fifty-eight separate editions, following its first appearance in c. 1538.

¹⁷ Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, II, 58–9.

¹⁸ See, for example, Daybell and Hinds, *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture*.

of music in the sixteenth century, just as now, were probably for most people more often serendipitous, vicarious, and thoroughly embedded within the normal fabric of everyday life than focused, reverent, and exclusive of distractions. Such is the case in this fictional dialogue designed for learning French conversation, in which two young friends happen to meet near the back of St Paul's Cathedral in London during choral evensong. Their response is an instant recognition of their own agency as participants in the musicking, displaying a rich mixture of curiosity, recognition, and embodied and emotional responses:

See whether wee may get to the quier, and we shall hear the fairest voices of all
 the cathedral churches in England.
 I thinke that the Queenes singing men are there, for I now heare her Base.
 That may be: for, to tell the trueth, I never heard better singyng.
 Harken, there is a good versicle.
 I promise you that I would heare them more willingly singe, then eat or drinke.
 I am not of your minde: for mee thinketh that I would heare them more lively, if
 I had well dined . . . shall wee go?
 . . . Beholde, the Preacher cometh;
 Shall we helpe to sing this Psalm?
 I cannot Singe except I doo learne.¹⁹

For this reason, even the traditionally privileged material objects of musical study – notated scores and the *res facta* compositions that they encode – should be understood as occupying multi-valent dimensions within an overall history of music. Music books, no less than musical instruments are, after all, material objects that are transformative: they facilitate the metamorphosis of certain aspects of something that happens and is evanescent, into a more or less stable material form (musical notation and text); and, vice versa, they provide prompts (although not necessarily immutable instructions) for reading its code back into sound through bodily actions. For example, lute tablature provides a direct interface between the writer's hand and that of the player, punctuation suggests the taking of breath, and so on. First and foremost, sixteenth-century music materials such as sets of partbooks, choir books, and table books are 'scripts for performance', presaging musical acts that can happen, both uniquely and repeatedly, within a certain cultural space and time. But such musical events and the experiences that they engender are not directly dependent on their mediation via musical literacy:²⁰

¹⁹ I.e., 'if I know the music already'; Hollybande, *The French Schoolemaister*, 126–8.

²⁰ See van Orden, *Materialities*, esp. chs. 4–7.

Early modern books containing music (in whatever form) are no more simply repositories where ciphers for temporarily-arrested performance acts are warehoused as they await re-animation by performers (historical or ‘historically-informed’) than they are compendia of culturally-neutral records of composers’ ‘works’ awaiting editing, analysis and criticism. Written music . . . is subject to the entire range of exigencies of its functional status as a representation of highly complex and culturally-contingent bodily gestures, thoughts and ideas, and open to almost endless reinterpretation through processes of transmission, reading and reception.²¹

The attention to both the performative and the material contingencies of musical objects leads directly to the need to confront and acknowledge the fact that music is primarily an activity, and only secondarily a thing. The idea that there could be a history of music that proceeds without reference to its performative state, let alone one that fails to acknowledge the fundamental premise of new historicism that ‘every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices’, seems illogical and ultimately unworkable.²² Nevertheless, this tension between the written musical ‘object’ and music as something that happens (a tension exacerbated by the unique English-language conflation of both senses of ‘music’ – sound and notation – in one word) is, however, by no means entirely oppositional. Rather, there is a complex flow between the two senses that comes into particularly sharp and interesting focus during the sixteenth century, not least because of the impact of printing on the ways that musical craft was disseminated. Shai Burstyn has suggested that the invention of commercially viable printed music publication, which started with Petrucci’s *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton A* in 1501, led to ‘two closely related phenomena . . . : the gradual objectification of musical product . . . and an emerging conception of music as art rather than as fulfilling a function’.²³ This seems, however, to be only part of the story, and perhaps typical of a historiographical standpoint that does not embrace the questions of the performativity and materiality of music as they related to everyday musical experience. For typical sixteenth-century users, music books seem to have been simply part of the apparatus necessary for the social activity of making music together, as we witness here in a letter written in 1552 by Antonfrancesco Doni to his friend Luigi Paoli: ‘You need to come over to our place on Sunday evening with the whole group, and bring the case of viols, the large harpsichord, lutes, flutes, stands and books to sing from, because on Thursday we have our play and for those two or three days we’ll be playing together for the *intermedi* and [providing] the songs.’²⁴

²¹ Wistreich, ‘Musical Materials and Cultural Spaces’, 4. ²² Veenser, *The New Historicism*, 9.

²³ Burstyn, ‘Pre-1600 Music Listening’, 461. ²⁴ Doni, *Tre libri di lettere*, 351.

Although, before about 1500, musical manuscripts may have served in part as a practical means for transmitting composed music to performers at a distance from, and with no other connection to, its original producers, this was not necessarily their primary role, nor would this potential have affected more than a handful of elite performers, skilled in the art of reading (as opposed to composing) music. The relatively rapid development of editions of printed music in their hundreds, if not their thousands, from the start of the sixteenth century was a response to the functionality of music literacy as a means of mass dissemination of compositions to performers. The ways in which the essentially esoteric and reserved skill of music-making became quickly both democratised and commercialised had far-reaching implications for society, considerably more significant than the simple extension of an aspect of the aesthetic realm beyond aristocratic or elite ecclesiastical circles. From its role in the promulgation of religious ideology in school, or its use as a means of providing opportunities for men and women to participate on an equal footing in a leisure activity in the home, to its economic impact on industries such as musical instrument building or the rapid growth of the music profession, the symbiosis between music publishing and the growth of literacy-dependent music-making was a multifaceted one.

Although the profound impact of the arrival of the printing press upon all fields of knowledge, learning, and information is generally agreed, this outcome was neither as immediate nor as wholesale as is sometimes claimed; it is now generally agreed by historians that a trajectory of gradual change is to be preferred to the story of a dramatic print revolution argued by Elizabeth Eisenstein in her complex and controversial account.²⁵ In practice, the novelty of Petrucci's 'invention' of music printing is in some respects more apparent than real; the technique of producing the different graphic elements of a printed sheet by multiple impression had long been used by printers for the black and red layers of liturgical incunabula. Apart from establishing a new benchmark for the quality of presswork, Petrucci's real achievement was that of introducing the concept of the printed book of music into the market, a step that might well have been influenced by the example of Aldus' editions of classical authors, and which was to have revolutionary consequences. Nonetheless, it was not until the widespread adoption of single-impression printing, first used in Lyons by Jacques Moderne and in Paris by Pierre Attaignant and then taken up by Italian printers some ten years later, that any sizeable constituency for printed music began to be formed. Despite the increased quantity of music titles produced in the major centres of

²⁵ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*.