Discovering Medieval Song

The *conductus* repertory is the body of monophonic and polyphonic non-liturgical Latin song that dominated European culture from the middle of the twelfth century to the beginning of the fourteenth. In this book, Mark Everist demonstrates how the poetry and music interact, explores how musical structures are created and discusses the geographical and temporal reach of the genre, including its significance for performance today. The volume studies what medieval society thought of the *conductus*, its function in medieval society – whether paraliturgical or in other contexts – and how it fitted into patristic and secular Latin cultures. The *conductus* emerges as a genre of great poetic and musical sophistication that brought the skills of poets and musicians into alignment. This book provides an all-encompassing view of an important but unexplored repertory of medieval music, engaging with both poetry and music even-handedly to present new and up-to-date perspectives on the genre.

Discovering Medieval Song

Latin Poetry and Music in the *Conductus*

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For Jeanice and Amelia
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Banister Park, Southampton,
St Vincent de Paul, Paris
Note to the Text

All manuscripts are cited by their full shelf-mark at first occurrence in each chapter, thereafter abbreviated according to the conventional system employed by the Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM).¹ Few issues seem to divide medievalists as much as the nomenclature of manuscript sources, and there will be many who will complain that Discovering Medieval Song prefers I-Fl Plut. 29.1 to F as the siglum for one of the sources most often discussed, now housed in Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. Such single-letter sigla worked perfectly when the subject was handling just a tiny number of large sources, but we now have to consider eight sources in Florence alone, and larger libraries – the Bibliothèque nationale de France – preserve simply dozens (not far short of a hundred, in fact), all of which require differentiation. Add to this that some single manuscripts have been given anything up to six sigla depending on which genre is being considered, then the use of a consistent set of sigla that are easy to decode on the spot without reference to the list in the Bibliography becomes essential. I just hope I have not lost too many friends in following this path.

Music examples are all edited afresh and follow the general guidelines and specific diacriticals outlined in the critical edition of the Magnus liber organi, produced under the general editorship of Edward Roesner during the 1990s and 2000s.² Although largely designed with organum in

Note to the Text

In many cases, discussion of single works is aided by the use of modern transcriptions of the music, facsimiles of the original sources or both. Occasionally, however, it is necessary to attempt to give an overview of the structure and nature of a single conductus by means of an annotated text and commentary. Here the following conventions are used: italics indicate the presence of a cauda; **bold face** is used to show a punctus organi; *italic bold face* simply indicates the presence of both cauda and punctus organi in the setting of a single word or syllable. This leaves the convention of **underscoring** to indicate various sorts of parallels between different texts or parts of the same text. Chapter 4 depends on material published in ‘Tails of the Unexpected: The Punctus organi and the Conductus cum caudis’, Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance. Festschrift Klaus-Jürgen Sachs zum 80. Geburtstag, ed. Rainer Kleinertz and Wolf Frobenius, Veröffentlichungen des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung (Berlin and Hildesheim: Olms, 2010), 161–195.

Introduction: Repositioning the Conductus

The title of this book, Discovering Medieval Song, loosely translates a line from music theory of the 1280s that describes the composition of the *conductus*\(^1\); its subtitle alludes more broadly to poetry and music in the Middle Ages, and more particularly to what might be called the ‘long’ thirteenth century, starting in the 1160s and ending sometime in the 1320s. For the study of music, this period encompasses the rise and fall of *organum* with all its subsidiary parts (*clausula*, *copula*, plainsong), rhymed offices, sequences, the development of the motet, measured notation, the emergence of polyphonic vernacular song, the work of most of the *trouv`eres* and *troubadours* and, perhaps most strikingly, the development of written tools to preserve this highly varied music in ways that make it possible for even the early twenty-first century to understand. But most of all, the long thirteenth century witnessed the growth of the *conductus*, which balanced Latin poetry and music in a way that no other type of composition attempted during the period.

Linear stories for the music of the long thirteenth century abound: Parisian *organum* emerged in the last third of the twelfth century at the hands of Leoninus, was developed by Perotinus in the very early years of the thirteenth and then was ‘superseded’ by the motet that appeared out of the *clausulae* embedded in *organum*. Polyphonic song surfaced as the result of a collision between registrally sophisticated *trouv`ere* poetry (the *grand chant*) and the mensural polyphony of the motet. However wrong these tales may be shown to be, and whichever one is told, the *conductus* seems to have limped along as very much a poor relation. Insofar as there exists any story behind the *conductus*, it is one that places the genre in the corner of the room occupied by the motet and *organum*, rather

\(^1\) ‘Anyone who wishes to compose a *conductus* ought first to invent as beautiful a melody as he can’ (*Qui vult facere conductum, primam cantum invenire debet pulcriorem quam potest*); Gilbert Reaney and André Gilles (eds.), *Franconis de Colonia Ars cantus mensurabilis*, Corpus scriptorum de musica 18 (n.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1974) 73–74; translation from Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History from Antiquity through the Romantic Era* [New York: Norton, 1930] 155). The literal translation of *invenire*, used here, does not account for such wider, creative meanings as ‘find’ or ‘discover’.

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like the unloved stepchild at family celebrations in a Victorian novel. The conductus is made to hobble along more or less at the same time as organum and then the motet, only to disappear later in the thirteenth century.

This is a very strange view, wrong in terms of content and emphasis and misleading in terms of the relationship between the conductus and other musical and literary genres. Not only does the conductus represent a largely coherent repertory of music that aligns both Latin poetry and melody in ways in which organum and motet were never intended, but the sheer volume of the corpus is staggering. The field covered by Discovering Medieval Song includes 957 poems, of which 867 survive with music. Perhaps more significantly, the conductus is preserved in no fewer than 570 sources, spanning the mid-twelfth century to the end of the fourteenth, with some even later. The geographical spread of the conductus is similarly vast with no part of medieval Europe apparently immune to the attractions of the genre. And unlike organum and the motet, which genuinely seem to have originated in Paris and then radiated out all over Europe, the conductus was cultivated across the continent, and all Paris did was to provide an environment in which the repertory could be collected and, to an extent, codified. Also unlike organum and motet, the conductus enjoyed contributions from some of the best-known poets of the age – Philip the Chancellor, Peter of Blois, Gautier de Châtillon, for example – and the composer Perotinus, more famous for his composition of the four-voice organa, ‘Viderunt omnes’ and ‘Sederunt principes’, as well as three-part works and prosulae, contributed to the repertory of two-voice and monophonic conducti as well as to the variable-voice conductus.

Much of the lack of focus on the conductus may be the result of little more than the caprices of modern scholarship. Although Friedrich Ludwig, the pioneer of research in this field, catalogued many of the sources for the conductus in his monumental Repertorium, completed in 1910 (parts of which were not published until much later), his interests – as the rest of his title suggests – lay in ‘the most recent organa’ and ‘motets in the oldest style’. The conductus – not forming part of the complex of plainsong,
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polyphony, retexting and recomposition that characterised organum and the motet – had to wait more than a quarter of a century for even a listing of the contents of some of the surviving manuscripts, and no real study of the genre has been forthcoming until now. But a more pressing reason for the relative neglect of the conductus is its different pattern of survival, perhaps indicating different patterns of medieval cultivation, which results in the repertory surviving in a large number of medieval sources, with a very few works in each manuscript. True, the so-called central sources of organum and – mostly – motet also include collections of conducti, and without these four sources (two in the Herzog-August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, one in Madrid and the fourth in Florence) our picture of the repertory would be very different indeed. But the vast number of sources, many of which contain the poetry of the conductus alone, are not only scattered all over Europe and beyond but were largely unknown to those who catalogued or commented on the conductus in the past.

Monophony outweighs polyphony in a ratio of 2:1 in the conductus repertory, and it is easy to see why scholars of monophonic music are quick to point to the importance of the former as opposed to the latter. In the case of the conductus, the argument could be pushed further, and it could be argued that the function of the monophonic conductus, and the way in which it is understood, underpins those of its polyphonic counterparts. And while Chapters 4 and 5 of Discovering Medieval Song clearly focus exclusively on the polyphonic conductus cum caudis, the rest of the book shuttles back and forth between monophonic and polyphonic types. In short, Discovering Medieval Song reflects, although perhaps not


Eduard Gröninger, Repertoire-Untersuchungen zum mehrstimmigen Notre-Dame Conductus, Kölner Beiträge zur Musikforschung 2 (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1939).


in exactly the *proportio dupla* of the relationship between monophony and polyphony, the essential structure of the surviving repertory.

Similarly, poetry and music are of equal importance. Explaining the structure of *rithmus* is as important as accounting for *discantus*, and the circulation of works without music is just as significant as their distribution with fully fledged notation. It is taken as axiomatic that a *conductus* consists of words and notes and that a surviving *conductus* text with no notated concordances was probably conceived to be sung. Of course, there must have been occasions when this was not true, and it might perhaps be going too far to agree with those who hold that *rithmus* was a style of poetry inherently destined to be sung. And it also raises the question of what a *conductus* poem without music signifies: is it simply an *aide-memoire* in which the music is committed to memory? Does the unperformed poem have value without the music? Or is the source merely deficient? There are examples of all three possibilities, and more, but as far as the working practices in *Discovering Medieval Song* are concerned, a *conductus* poem is a *conductus*. In addition to explaining how the poetry and music of the *conductus* work and how they interrelate, *Discovering Medieval Song* tries to disentangle questions of context, function and performance. With the starting point that no single explanation can account for the entire repertory, the strengths and weakness of competing pieces of evidence – some known, others new – are evaluated to give, if not a definitive view of the function of the genre, at least a set of broadly acceptable considerations for how each part of the repertory might be so viewed.

And talking about ‘parts’ of the repertory returns to the question of defining its scope. Ever since Eduard Gröninger’s first attempt to pull together all the surviving sources for the genre in 1939, the *conductus* has been caught up with the four major surviving sources just mentioned and with the concept of the ‘Notre-Dame School’, a model for understanding the music of the long thirteenth century that emerges, however, not from work on the *conductus* but from a study of *organum*. So, for example, the single critical edition of the *conductus* repertory bears the title *Notre-Dame and Related Conductus*. But unlike the case of *organum* – where the idea of ‘Notre-Dame’ really means something about origin and style – for the *conductus* it means little more than ‘preserved in one or more of the four surviving major sources’. This becomes problematic

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6 Gordon Anderson (ed.), *Notre-Dame and Related Conductus: Opera omnia*, 11 vols. [Institute of Mediaeval Music, Collected Works 10 (Henryville, Ottawa and Binningen: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1979–) [all but vols. 7 and 11 have appeared].
when other repertoires are brought into play. For example, the four offices that preserve conducti – and that reveal much of their twelfth-century function – from Beauvais, Laon, Le Puy and Sens do not share a great deal in terms of material with the works found in the ‘Notre-Dame’ sources. The same could be said of the Norman-Sicilian repertory or fourteenth-century sources from east of the Rhine that employ the term conductus as a descriptor for the work. Although this serves to distance the conductus from the repertory of Aquitanian versus, it leaves a large number of ragged ends to the repertory, perhaps inevitable when dealing with 570 surviving sources. But it does raise some interesting questions a propos such a work as ‘Novus annus dies magnus’, for example, a monophonic conductus that is found in the Norman-Sicilian repertory, the Le Puy and Sens offices and one of the earliest manuscripts of the Aquitanian repertory, but not in any of the so-called Notre-Dame sources. It is a good example of how the different parts of the repertory may hold together and – just as importantly – how they may resist explanations that link to them.

The only surviving complete edition of the repertory was conceived no later than the mid-1970s, and although in some respects it has stood the test of time (especially in terms of its critical commentaries, notes on the poetic texts and so on), understandings of how musica cum littera (the parts of the conductus that carried the text [littera]) was projected in medieval performance have moved on a good deal to the extent that, were one planning an edition of the repertory today, the fundamental premises on which it would be based would be very different. Reasons for this claim are given in Chapter 3 but are taken as axiomatic throughout the book, especially in the attitude taken to the display of music examples in modern transcription. It would be wrong, though, not to recognise the immense erudition and meticulous scholarship that characterise the editorial work of Gordon Anderson, Hans Tischler and Janet Knapp, even if ultimately the conclusions in Discovering Medieval Song vary radically from theirs.7

Work on Discovering Medieval Song was greatly advanced, indeed made possible, by a series of three large grants from the United Kingdom’s Arts and Humanities Research Council that enabled a number of related

initiatives, of which this monograph is one.\textsuperscript{8} Jointly titled ‘CPI Cantum pulcriorem invenire’ (of which the title of this monograph is a loose translation), the funding permitted the research towards, and construction of, the database that underpins so much of this book,\textsuperscript{9} three fully funded PhD studentships (the work of which is referred to throughout this volume) and the time required to research and write this monograph. Most important of all, it funded the work of three professional tenors to conduct a Europe-wide programme of performance and three CDs with Hyperion Records.\textsuperscript{10} This allowed the project to put into practice the results of the work in Chapter 3 and was based on sustained workshop practice that developed a method of declaiming the \textit{cum littera} sections of \textit{conducti} (all parts of the monophonic repertory and the texted sections of the \textit{conductus cum caudis}) that started from the structure, meaning and aesthetic of the poetry. The 46 works recorded on the three CDs are available to purchase, download or stream and form the basis for the discussion of large parts of the book. Works that form part of the recording project are identified with an asterisk (eg ‘Relegentur ab area’) in the text to aid the process of gaining access to a sonic image of the work under discussion.

\textsuperscript{8} Arts and Humanities Research Council, Research Grant, July 2010 (\textit{Cantum pulcriorem invenire}: Thirteenth-Century Latin Poetry and Music (CPI-I); AH/HO34226/1); Arts and Humanities Research Council, Research Grant, April 2014 (Medieval Music, Big Data and the Research Blend [Transforming Musicology] (CPI-II); AH/L006820/1); Arts and Humanities Research Council, Follow-on Funding for Impact and Engagement, November 2014 (\textit{Cantum Pulcriorem invenire} – Thirteenth-Century Latin Poetry and Music: Workshop, Performance and Impact (CPI-III; AH/M006425/1).
