Prologue: The culture of Renaissance instrumental music

In Renaissance courts and cities, instrumental music was deeply woven into the fabric and function of everyday life, and was accessible to a wide, demographically diverse swath of the populace. Domestic entertainment, civic and village events, courtly ritual, and the functional, clockwork activities of a city, court, or militia, all demanded the contributions of instrumentalists. The wide diversity of these events involved players of an extraordinary range of backgrounds and training. This set of variables – a heterogeneous talent pool of players with a wide stylistic bandwith – has proved challenging for music historians seeking to present a cohesive history of this sprawling repertory. As opposed to vocal music of the Renaissance, which was a predominantly notated tradition that circulated in print and in manuscript, instrumental music was executed and transmitted through more diverse means and techniques. To be sure, much of the sixteenth-century lute, ensemble, and keyboard repertory is preserved in printed books and, to a lesser degree, in manuscript. However, this is balanced by an incalculable unwritten body of music that instrumentalists improvised, executed from memory, or adapted *ex tempore* from preexisting vocal works and melodies. The result was a transitory and highly volatile repertory, which in turn led to its neglect in modern historical commentary. This neglect would have seemed unthinkable for those who experienced the soundscape of the time. The clamor and calm of instruments during the Renaissance – what Kendrick has called "The sonic articulation of urban space"[1] – were both widely public and inescapable, marking off virtually all important social events: civic wind players announced the hours of work and rest; trumpeters – probably the most frequently mentioned performers in any sampling of source documents – proclaimed the arrival of visitors into the gates, or signaled from ships or castle and city towers; lutes and viols performed during intervals at banquets and were the preferred instruments in the home; drums could be heard leading military formations, and along with shawms and sackbuts also charted the progress of the innumerable civic processions. Of course,

[1] Robert L. Kendrick, *The Sounds of Milan, 1585–1650* (Oxford, 2002), 373.

dancing, by far the most important social entertainment of the age, was in essence impossible without the participation of instrumentalists, whether it is the elegant shawm band playing for a courtly dance or the hefty player of the pipes in Brueghel's village scenes.

But despite the wealth of detailed and general studies on Renaissance music, patronage, and its sources produced over the last half-century, our knowledge of instrumental music of this period remains underdeveloped and incomplete. In his indispensable bibliography of printed sixteenth-century instrumental music from 1965, Howard Mayer Brown could cite Joseph W. Wasielewski's *Geschichte der Instrumentalmusik im XVI. Jahrhundert* of 1878 as the only attempt at a book-length survey of the subject. Today, Brown's observation remains unchanged, despite his own pioneering contributions to the field: our understanding of European music from about 1420 to 1600 is still almost entirely founded on the history of vocal genres in which instruments appear as accessories. The enormous and diverse printed repertory that exists for ensemble, lute, and keyboard – Brown's bibliography alone lists several hundred items that appeared between 1500 and 1600 – attests to the incompleteness of this scenario.

That so much Renaissance instrumental music was not committed to notation has made the investigation of this repertory, at least for the fifteenth century, understandably difficult. But there are ways around this problem, as we will map out in the following chapters. The reality is that any history of this music will need to develop a broader conceptual and methodological focus than we have used until now in order to include the contributions of players that were neither committed exclusively to notation, nor bound to an authorized text or style of performance. Renaissance instrumental music is the product of autonomous composition and the result of arrangement, often resulting in many extant versions of the same piece. At the textual level, the derivative versions made by many types of musicians confront the critical and philological methods that have generally blueprinted how Renaissance music history has been studied. Thus, in examining this music, one must resist the temptation to prioritize repertories – and particular versions – since so many of them are tightly interwoven with culture and function across class. The notion of redacting a single *Urtext* that can be traced back to the original composer is almost beside the point in the study of instrumental music. We must remember that so much of the vocal music was arranged by instrumentalists and popularized in notated instrumental versions. For many listeners of the Renaissance these instrumental arrangements were both the initial and

most frequent contact with this vocal repertory. In addition, through their use of many well-known dance tunes or songs and their frequent roles as musicians hired by the city, instrumentalists were also part of the popular culture of their day, an area that remains unrecognized in music scholarship of the period.[2]

Patronage, population, and printing

As a repertory that is social, institutional, ceremonial, functional, and highly adaptable, instrumental music was an essential ingredient in the daily rituals of Renaissance courts and cities. At the level of civic patronage, population and economic might were important determinants for the sustained presence of instrumentalists. Bologna, a city of only middling rank in Italy, boasted of a civic ensemble in the 1520s of six wind players called *pifferi*. By 1550, this group had grown into an ensemble of eight *musici*, a newer designation for musicians that recognized their broader training and technical skill, and also demonstrating that instrumentalists had achieved more or less equal status to the composer of vocal music.[3] By contrast, contemporary Nuremberg and Augsburg, the largest and most important cities in Southern Germany and only half the size of Bologna, accordingly supported groups of roughly half that size – a reminder that the urban centers of Italy were, in fact, consistently much larger than those of the north and replete with funding for music. Unfortunately, it is difficult to produce anything like a pie chart showing the relative expenditures of a town like Nuremberg on musicians. However, for a small city such as Windsheim, we can estimate that instrumental music absorbed nearly 20% of the city's yearly budget.[4]

Along with economics and population size, patronage strategies played an important role in the flourishing culture of instrumentalists. From the

[2] An excellent starting point is Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Aldershot, 2009). Rebecca Oettinger's *Music as Propaganda in the German Reformation* (Aldershot, 2001), 137–70, is relevant to how the instrumental repertory circulated through popular culture through her discussion of alternate methods of transmission – oral, pamphlet, broadside – and through the use of popular melodies. For a study dealing with an analogous area, youth culture, see Victor Coelho, "Bronzino's *Lute Player:* Music and Youth Culture in Renaissance Florence." In *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, ed. Machtelt Israëls and Louis A. Waldman, I Tatti Studies in the Renaissance (Milan, 2013), 650–59 & 734–35.

[3] See Osvaldo Gambassi, *Il Concerto Palatino della Signoria di Bologna* (Florence, 1989), 614–21.

[4] See Keith Polk, *German Instrumental Music of the Late Middle Ages: Players, Patrons and Performance Practice* (Cambridge, 1992), 257.

fifteenth to well into the sixteenth centuries, Italian cities and courts recruited German instrumentalists for many of the most prominent ensembles – Florence and Ferrara are cases in point – because these imports were judged to be of a much higher caliber than the respective indigenous performers. In a telling Medici document from 1443, all four members of the *pifferi* ensemble, three of them Italians, were abruptly dismissed, initiating a policy that subsequent members of the *pifferi* were to be "non-Florentine and born elsewhere."[5] Clearly, Italian centers in the fifteenth century, with increased opportunities, higher salaries, and greater prestige, provided a stimulating cultural environment, but still had to draw upon the distinctly smaller German cities for the best instrumental talent. An index of the importance placed on attracting only the finest musicians is Lorenzo the Magnificent's personal involvement in the recruiting of trombonist Bartolomeo Tromboncino and Michel Schubinger, a member of the *pifferi* at the Ferrarese Court. Although Lorenzo was unable to employ either musician, the fact that both musicians communicated with Lorenzo directly confirms that the hiring of musicians was a concern at the highest administrative levels.[6] It should be noted, however, that while German players were preeminent in the late fifteenth century, after 1500 the recruitment channels had shifted direction. The first notice of this came with Italians reclaiming prized positions in Italian centers. Indeed, the roster of Medici-employed instrumentalists under Cosimo I (1543–60), Francesco (1564–86), and Ferdinando I (1588–1608) consisted almost entirely of Italian musicians.[7] And in a clear reversal of the flow of talent, by about 1550 Italian instrumentalists began to flood into the ensembles north of the Alps. Almost all the players in the ensembles in Munich under the leadership of Orlando di Lasso, for example, were Italians.[8]

The sheer amount of surviving instrumental music of the Renaissance is, of course, the direct result of the advent of music printing, which draws a convenient historical line of demarcation with Francesco Spinacino's *Intabulatura di Lauto*, the first explicitly instrumental book published by Petrucci in 1507_1. A statistical analysis of this enormous repertory offers only very general evidence of the relative popularity, regional preferences, or cultural standing of particular instruments, but it is difficult to ignore

[5] Quoted in Timothy McGee, *The Ceremonial Musicians of Late Medieval Florence* (Bloomington, 2009), 162–63.
[6] See ibid., 184–5, for a summary of these documents.
[7] See the detailed fold-out chart of musicians appended to Warren Kirkendale, *The Court Musicians in Florence during the Principate of the Medici* (Florence, 1993), n.pag.
[8] On the musicians in Munich, see chapter 1, n. 19.

the fundamental relationship between printed books and the demands of the market.[9] Around two dozen instruments are represented in the almost 500 books of instrumental music printed during the sixteenth century, of which solo lute and ensemble music – the latter showing a clear preference for music of four parts – are the most popular performing media, comprising almost half of the total output, followed by works for solo keyboard. The raw data also provides some information about general trends in instrumental music production during the sixteenth century. Owing to the crucial compositional shift from improvisation to written notation, combined with the technological learning curve faced by printers and the highly regulated environment in granting printing licenses, it takes almost fifty years after 1500 to reach the milestone of 100 printed instrumental books. The next 100 prints, however, appear by around 1560, and the 100 after that appear by the mid-1570s. With printing, the entire production of instrumental music – building, playing, teaching, composing, collecting, consuming – has become dramatically augmented and visible.

Perspectives on Renaissance sound and context

While instrumental music is the product of natural human ability, it is also dependent on the sonic capacities of assembled materials. In fact, for most of the Renaissance, "sound" – loud or soft, plucked, picked, bowed, or blown, solo or in combination of like and unlike instruments – was one of the most important determinants for the context of instrumental music. The development of instruments in tandem with stylistic changes is thus crucial in mapping the changing soundscape of Renaissance instrumental music that occurred over approximately two centuries. Audiences and musicians of the fifteenth century viewed instruments as generally falling into the two classes of loud (*haut*) and soft (*bas*), distinguished by timbre, and in general, occupying defined roles in context. The loud category included trumpets, shawms and other winds (exclusive of recorder), trombone, and bagpipes. Instruments for soft music consisted of organs and other stringed-keyboard instruments (like clavichords and harpsichords), lutes and other plucked strings, all bowed-string instruments, and recorder. These categories, though, were not exclusive, as professional musicians

[9] For an excellent introduction to the commercial dynamics of music publishing and its supporting infrastructure, see Jane A. Bernstein, *Music Printing in Renaissance Venice: The Scotto Press (1539–1572)* (New York and Oxford, 1998), 11–28.

were constantly pressed to be flexible.[10] The blind German musician Conrad Paumann, who began his career in the 1440s, was a superb organist and lutenist (both of them instruments in the soft group), but was evidently capable of playing such loud instruments as shawm and bagpipe. Also, loud players consistently included recorders in their performance options and were known in some instances to be competent on bowed strings or even the lute. Still, in general, players of soft instruments formed one distinctive class, those of loud ones another.

Loud and soft categories persisted through the sixteenth century at the functional level: outdoor, festive, and most civic events called for loud instruments, while for intimate gatherings, domestic settings, private courtly music, and accompanying the voice, the soft cohort of solo or a small ensemble of instruments was preferred. A characteristic difference in the instrumentation of sixteenth-century ensembles was the preference for families of instruments – consorts of recorders or viols, for instance, sometimes even lutes – representing distinct voice ranges from soprano to bass. This type of ensemble was ideal for the new imitative textures of sixteenth-century music. The resulting sound quality was one of balance, cohesion, and symmetry, and instrumental music, like vocal music of this period, operated within a remarkably well-defined pitch range of around three octaves, from bass to soprano, that is consistent with the natural playing range of a conventional sixteenth-century lute.

Fundamental to understanding instrumental music in the Renaissance is connection between sound and context. Our modern perspective is skewed in that for us, the "concert" is a central musical experience. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, on the other hand, very little music was dedicated for focused listening only. Players provided the characteristics of rhythms and melodies for dancing, or provided a suitable atmosphere of sound for processions or banquets. Instrumentalists might play from a balcony or around a table, but their purpose in any case was to enhance whatever was being choreographed below or in front of them. In the city, little if any of the functional music was intended for qualitative discrimination. To be sure, we have accounts of élite musicians playing in private settings for the delectation of a select group, but throughout the entire

[10] The classic study of this subject remains that of Edmond Bowles, "Haut and Bas: the Grouping of Musical Instruments in the Middle Ages," *MD* 8 (1954), 115–40; see also Polk, *German Instrumental Music*, 13–86. In terms of terminology, the two categories, loud and soft, are most clearly distinguished in French sources, where the words *haut* and *bas* occur with some frequency. The terms are less common in English documents, and rare in those from Germany and the Low Countries.

Renaissance, most of the activity of professional instrumentalists was devoted to providing a soundtrack to one kind of event or another. In fact, throughout most of the Renaissance, the term "concert" simply didn't exist. When the word *concerto* began to appear in Italy late in the sixteenth century it had a meaning quite different – namely, instruments *in consort* – from what it means today.

The combination of voices and instruments

While it has been generally assumed that in most sacred contexts and many secular ones vocal and instrumental forces were not combined, in fact, voices and instruments interacted constantly throughout the Renaissance. The extent of this interaction has been difficult to gauge, especially in the fifteenth century, as musical sources then almost never indicated which performance forces might be called for. The issue is further complicated in that the interaction should be viewed as taking place on two levels. The first concerns the relatively straightforward question of establishing performance contexts when voices and instruments might have combined. The second is the more essential consideration. A vast swath of the music of the era was a shared repertory, for which distinctions between what might be vocal or instrumental, whether or not the work had text, are quite beside the point.

Concerning the first, the general outlines now seem reasonably clear. In fifteenth-century sacred music, voices and instruments (with the exception of the organ) were only very rarely combined. This sharp divide broke down late in the century, and soon after 1500 instrumental ensembles often performed with voices in sacred celebrations. In secular music, on the other hand, throughout the Renaissance a range of options was available. Performances of chansons (a key item of the repertory throughout the era) could be purely vocal, purely instrumental, or a combination of voices and instruments.[11]

[11] For a balanced overview of the views on performance by voices and/or instruments, see David Fallows, "The Early History of the Tenorlied and its Ensembles." In *Le Concert des voix et des instruments à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean-Michel Vaccaro (Paris, 1995), 199–201. More recently, see Christopher Page, "David Fallows and the Performance of Medieval Music." In *Essays on Renaissance Music in Honour of David Fallows: Bon jour, bon mois et bonne estrenne*, ed. Fabrice Fitch and Jacobijn Kiel (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2011), 2–8. For a study advocating instrumental participation, see Peter Urquhart and Heather de Savage, "Evidence Contrary to the *a cappella* Hypothesis for the 15th-Century Chanson," *EM* 39 (2011), 359–78.

With the second level we introduce what will be a predominant theme throughout this volume and a fundamental point regarding Renaissance instrumental music. For the entire Renaissance much of the music was a shared repertory between singers and players. Manuscript sources of the chansons of Dufay, for example, indicate that, according to the context, these songs could be performed across a spectrum, from purely vocal at one end to purely instrumental – with everything in between possible, depending on the demands or desires of the moment. Around 1500 as sacred music became less rigid in terms of performance options, yet another expansive band of repertory opened up for collaborative or adaptive options. There is no better example of the fundamental affinity between voices and instruments than the instrumental arrangements of the music of Josquin des Prez (*c.*1450–1521), the preeminent composer of the High Renaissance. Accordingly, our first case study will provide a template of the close, dependent relationship between vocal and instrumental music during the Renaissance, and the manner in which instrumentalists adapted the vocal repertory.

CASE STUDY 1

Case study 1

Josquin in the instrumental repertory of the Renaissance

For good foreign music to intabulate, do not forget the music of the great musician, Josquin [with which] music began.[1]

Josquin seems to have composed only a few pieces that were explicitly intended for instrumental performance, but his music became a cornerstone of the sixteenth-century instrumental repertory and continued to resonate in printed and non-printed repertories for many years. Instrumentalists began to be drawn to his music around 1480 and continued to adapt, transcribe, and arrange it until the 1590s, leaving behind well over 250 arrangements that are stylistically and culturally diverse.[2] Surviving instrumental sources reveal in particular a brilliant afterglow of Josquin's music in the 1540s and 1550s, reflected in a range of adaptations – literal and decorated – for lute, vihuela, keyboard, viol, winds, and accompanied song. Amateur and professionals drew upon the full breadth of his music, secular and sacred, and from all genres, Mass, motet, and chanson. As instrumental adaptations of vocal music transcended the divisions of geography, language, and even religion, Josquin's reach extended to players throughout Europe, from the perimeter of

Stockholm and Seville and the traditional centers of Venice and Paris, to Protestant England and Germany, of which the latter had a particular attraction to his music.[3] In short, an understanding of how Josquin's music was adapted for instrumental performance underscores a central theme in the complex interactions of players, singers, and composers in the Renaissance; namely, that musicians did not view vocal and instrumental repertories as separate and distinct, but as a single, central body of work in which vocal music could be arranged and translated for a range of abilities, uses, and contexts.

Two distinct profiles, solo and ensemble, characterize the instrumental source types, and they reveal that the players of each approached Josquin's music quite differently. Only a few collections for solo instruments exist prior to 1500, but none of them contain music by Josquin, and we are on safe ground in asserting that the earliest instrumental arrangements were for ensemble.[4] *Casanatense*, containing the repertory of court musicians in Ferrara from the early 1480s, includes around a half dozen of his songs out of a total of 123 pieces. Similarly, the massive chansonnier *Florence 229*, dating from the early 1490s, and the first printed collection of polyphonic music, Petrucci's *Odhecaton* of 1501, contain around six Josquin pieces each. All of these works appear in the sources without text, suggesting that they were to be performed instrumentally; their titles, however (e.g. "Adieu mes amours," "La plus des plus"), are evocative of the chanson repertory, and thus raise the equal possibility that they were not originally conceived for instruments and that their *status nascendi* was vocal.[5] Only "La Bernardina," a three-part work that first appears in Petrucci's *Canti C* of 1504, seems securely rooted as an instrumental work for reasons of its non-chanson title and through-composed formal structure.

The absence of Josquin from the few extant solo sources from this period should not suggest, however, that the solo (or duo) repertory was Josquin-free. Prior to 1500 and before tablature notation became firmly established during the first quarter of the sixteenth century, solo instrumentalists did not generally write their pieces down. The first solo source containing music by Josquin is also the first printed book of instrumental music, Petrucci's *Spinacino* of 1507, which, given the retrospective stylistic nature of this landmark publication, strongly indicates that Josquin was part of the soloistic repertory earlier.[6] Furthermore, more than a quarter of the twenty-one song arrangements in *Spinacino* are by Josquin (three are specifically indicated in the print, while three others have been attributed through concordances in other sources) marking, for the first time, Josquin as the most popular composer in an instrumental collection. To be sure,

CASE STUDY 1

instrumentalists during these years clearly drew on the more copious chanson repertoire, but evidence shows that they also performed motets. Unfortunately, we have nothing to indicate that Josquin's were then part of the instrumental repertory. In fact, the sources reveal that prior to 1500, instrumentalists drew upon a surprisingly small group of pieces by Josquin – all secular and only about a dozen in all. More familiar to them were the works by Agricola, Compère, and Busnoys, which vastly outnumber those by Josquin in chansonniers prepared between about 1480 and 1500.

In the decades after 1500, a much wider selection of Josquin's music becomes available and subsequently incorporated into the instrumental repertory. The advent of printing undoubtedly played a crucial role in Josquin's music becoming more widely known to instrumentalists, but manuscript transmission remained an important process through which instrumentalists could keep abreast of Josquin's most recent work. The Capirola Lute Book, dated *c.*1517, contains two intabulations from Josquin's *Missa Pange Lingua*, showing that its compiler had some privileged access to the sources – or the composer – of this Mass more than twenty years before it was published, making *Capirola* one of the earliest versions of the work.

Through their characteristically swift response to the new music being made available through prints, and remaining within the loop of internal manuscript circulation, instrumentalists at the beginning of the sixteenth century provided through their arrangements increased opportunities for hearing Josquin's music, especially his Masses and motets, in new demographic and geographic settings. Seven of the ten Josquin pieces in *Copenhagen* (*c.*1540) are motets, and while these works amount to only 6% of the manuscript's inventory (10 out of 163 pieces), the fact that they vastly exceed the total number of pieces by all other composers of his generation is important. Lute and keyboard players were also drawn to his motets; their arrangements of *Ave Maria, Pater noster, Stabat Mater*, and *Benedicta es* helped make these works extremely popular during the sixteenth century, and through the efforts of printers and sub-arrangers they were kept in a continuous rotation for almost fifty years. *Benedicta es*, for example, appears in versions for lute from Italy, the Low Countries, Germany, and France; it was also arranged for vihuela in Spain, for keyboard in Spain and Germany, and for ensemble in Copenhagen, Germany, and Spain. The stature of the piece was such that it was selected as the opening piece both in Newsidler's lute collection of 1574_5 and Paix's keyboard publication, 1589_6.