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VOLUME I

The Life

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Prologue

One of the few points where opinion is nearly unanimous among fifteenth-century writers and modern critics is on the extraordinary quality of the music of Guillaume Du Fay and his importance. As a number of recent studies have shown, the concept of a composer was very uncommon at the time,[1] that is, someone who wrote music as his primary occupation, no matter what other skills he possessed and activities he undertook. In fact, the term itself and the verb "to compose," in the sense of creating written-down works of music, did not really exist at the time Du Fay began his career, and it is largely his generation, and Du Fay himself, who essentially began to create that concept, which was not to become common usage until nearly half a century after his death. One can see in Du Fay's career how his view of himself and the view his patrons had of him evolved. In 1467 the organist of the cathedral of Florence, Antonio Squarcialupi, writing to Du Fay, reported that Piero de' Medici considered the aged composer "the greatest ornament of our age."[2] As David Fallows noted decades ago,[3] this is the age of Brunelleschi and Donatello, Botticelli and Alberti, the van Eyck brothers, Rogier van der Weyden, and Hugo van der Goes, Charles d'Orléans, François Villon, and Alain Chartier, to name but a few, all of them known to Piero. Even taking into account the flattery intended by the Florentine ruler in thanking someone who had helped improve the choir of the Baptistery in Florence, his statement places Du Fay in the company of men whose works were more readily tangible and accessible as "art" than the sounds of polyphonic music.

Indeed, polyphonic music, including all of the surviving works of Du Fay's generation, and those of the few generations that preceded and followed his, was a very small slice of the repertory of sounding music at the time. Two other repertories dwarfed it in terms of their ubiquity and the quantity of what anachronistically we may call the "works" they contained. The first of these was the plainsong used in the liturgy. It had roots and traditions going back to the seventh century and it was heard day in and day out in some semblance of uniformity all over Europe, but it was

[1] Cf. Wegman, "From Maker to Composer," with extensive literature on the subject.
[2] FAS, Mediceo Avanti il principato, filza 22, no. 118; Kade, "Biographisches zu Antonio Squacialupi," 13–15.
[3] Fallows, *Dufay*, 1.

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still being expanded as new feasts were added to the calendars and local uses developed. Its function was well known and even taken for granted, in the same way that buildings in which it was most often heard, churches and monasteries, were used and taken for granted; even to this day, after more than two centuries of conscious aestheticizing of the past, we regard some of these buildings as artistic monuments, not just functional buildings. Much of this repertory has survived to this day; it remains tenuously alive as a functional repertory despite the changes that followed the Second Vatican Council, but is now the subject both of intense study and aesthetic contemplation by a surprisingly large number of people.

The other repertory (probably several repertories) consisted of the music performed by the minstrels that were supported, sometimes extravagantly, by the numerous lords, small and large, as well as by a number of municipalities in the late Middle Ages. This was music that was passed from master to disciple by rote and imitation, without recourse to written notation. Some of it was monophonic, with any accompaniment likely to be a drone and some percussion, both equally independent of any kind of written notation. Some, however, was probably polyphonic and approached the style of the written repertory. This music was often used as a sonic backdrop to dinners and other festivities, and for dancing, and was probably sometimes heard with the same attention and pleasure that listeners to modern vernacular music experience when they are actually "listening" to music rather than using it as a backdrop to other activity. Most of the players of these repertories probably could not read any musical notation, and in most cases the clerics who sang the chant were nearly as illiterate, and also learned their chants by rote. Still, it will not do to draw the boundaries of the music performed by literate and illiterate musicians too sharply, particularly in terms of certain repertories, which include most of the song repertory of the fifteenth century and certain parts of the ceremonial repertory. Today thousands of performers in jazz, pop, and the numerous vernacular musics cannot read music, and yet learn a large number of pieces "by ear," which they can perform with extraordinary accuracy over a period of years; many pieces in their repertories, particularly those of the Latin American traditional ensembles, can be more extended and intricate than anything we encounter in the tenors or contratenors of fifteenth-century songs. The ability to learn and perform some of these repertories "by ear" is attested by the activity of Conrad Pauman (ca. 1410–1473), who was blind, as was Francesco Landini before him and Antonio de Cabezón after him. In addition, there were probably a number of instrumentalists at the time who surely could read music. Jacob de Senleches, a priest and the composer

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of some of the most complex music of the Ars subtilior, was a harp player,[4] as was Du Fay's last teacher at the *maîtrise* in Cambrai, Richard de Loqueville, a layman,[5] and possibly Baude Cordier, if he is indeed the Baude Fresnel who served Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy, as Craig Wright has suggested.[6] The few references we have to the performances of Juan Fernandez and Juan de Córdoba, the blind Spaniards in the service of Isabel of Portugal, duchess of Burgundy,[7] would also suggest they could play composed polyphony, and the same is surely the case with Fernandez's sons, who were extravagantly praised by Tinctoris.[8] Étienne Ferrier, the senior trumpet player at the court of Savoy, is listed as a member of the polyphonic chapel at the court between 1449 and 1454,[9] and is occasionally referred to by the title *magister*.[10] The inventory of the household of Arnold de Halle, doctor of medicine, physician to Pope Benedict XIII, and canon of Cambrai from December of 1397 to his death on 17 November 1417, included eight harps, three lutes, three gitterns, one rebec, three vielles, and a psaltery,[11] which would suggest that among Arnold's colleagues in the cathedral clergy there were men who could probably perform on these instruments as well. Later in the century the concubine of one of Cambrai's dignitaries, Nicole de Fierin, canon from 1465 to 1486 and the cathedral's official from 1480,[12] was one Marie de Lamont, also known as "Marie the harp player" (Marie la Harperesse). The two remained together for a decade and possibly longer,[13] defying numerous admonitions, penalties, and fines. At his death the chapter sought to annul some of his legacies to her, but in the end backed down and allowed them.[14] One can also make a tentative assumption that there was some sort of domestic music-making at Cambrai in the homes of Halle, Loqueville, and quite possibly Fierin.

Nonetheless, the main repertory of the late medieval instrumentalists was monophonic music, almost all of it not notated, and therefore lost to us except for a small number of melodies that were eventually incorporated in one manner or another into a polyphonic work, something that makes a

[4] Günther and Gómez, "Senleches." [5] Pirro, *Histoire*, 55–56.
[6] C. Wright, *Music at the Court*, 132–33. [7] Cf. the discussion of *Or me veult* in Ch. 16.
[8] Weinman, *Johannes Tinctoris*, 45–46; Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, 58–59.
[9] CAS, Inv. 24, SA 3604, fols. 39^{v}–43^{r} and 71^{v}–72^{r}.
[10] Bradley, "Musical Life," 295–96, no. 114. [11] LAN, 4G 1360, fol. 18^{r}.
[12] CBM 1060, fol. 208^{r} (reception, 20 Mar. 1465); 1061, fol. 96^{r} (official, 24 Apr. 1480); 1061, fol. 254^{r} (death on 1 Mar. 1486).
[13] An admonition to Fierin on 27 Jan. 1477 (CBM 1061, fol. 13^{v}), refers to an earlier act of 14 Sept. 1470 (that volume of the chapter acts is lost).
[14] CBM 1061, fol. 256^{r}. Fierin died deeply in debt, to the point that his executors sought legal protection against possible creditors (CBM 1061, fol. 254^{r}).

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true evaluation of them as part of an independent repertory virtually impossible. Part of this repertory was surely also vocal, and again traces of it appear here and there in the polyphonic repertory;[15] a reflection of it may be seen in the few monophonic chansonniers that have survived.

Related to some of this repertory in terms of some of techniques used, but belonging entirely in the realm of liturgical music, was the improvised counterpoint described by Tinctoris as *cantare supra librum*, which had a long tradition by then with several "national" schools, and continued to be practiced until well into the seventeenth century. The result of these procedures (for they could be quite varied) was a king of liturgical *Gebrauchmusik* that served to solemnize the singing of "a chant" much in the way that the old organum settings did, albeit in a contemporary sounding manner. Written offshoots of this practice included the procedures known as faburden and gymel in England, as well as that known as *faulx bourdon* on the Continent.[16]

Another kind of music was also cultivated at the time: music as an exact science, which formed part of the quadrivium in the universities, together with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The numerical ratios that produced the different intervals, something that had been known since the sixth century BC and whose discovery was credited to Pythagoras, were considered to govern not only actual sounding music, the *musica instrumentalis*, but the physiological and spiritual aspects of human life, *musica humana*, and the observable motions of the heavenly bodies, *musica mundana*. The study of musical proportions was then thought to reveal something about the basic design of the universe. But this study had virtually nothing to do with actual sounding music. Still, from the thirteenth century on, university music teachers had begun writing, almost as an appendix to their main topic of investigation, treatises on the notation of rhythm, and basic treatises on counterpoint or discantus. These treatises touched upon the principles that governed polyphonic music, but rarely went beyond what we would today call elementary counterpoint. The treatises dealing with the notation of rhythm, however, could deal with extremely complicated relationships, some of which were infrequent in the composed music of the fifteenth century. Toward the end of the century, largely on account of the systematic and almost encyclopedic work of

[15] In Du Fay's case we have two melodies incorporated into the *Amen* of a Gloria–Credo pair; cf. Ch. 12.

[16] The literature on these procedures is immense and has on occasion been quite contentious. See Trowell, "Faburden," in *Grove Music Online*; idem, "Fauxbourdon," in *Grove Music Online*; Bent, "*Resfacta* and *Cantare super librum*."

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Johannes Tinctoris, the scope and nature of such treatises grew to encompass not only notation and counterpoint, but also the definition of musical terminology and even the earliest attempt to describe the affective aspects of music.[17]

Two men in fifteenth-century Cambrai took it upon themselves to write treatises of this nature, Du Fay and his colleague Gilles Carlier. Du Fay's treatises are lost, although a copy of one of them was seen by Fétis in 1824, and only small citations of them survive, from which we can assume that at least one of them dealt with the notation of rhythm and proportions.[18] The treatise of Carlier, which was more philosophical and less technical that that of Du Fay, has survived.[19] But neither man was what one might call a "university musician." Both studied music as children, Du Fay at the choir school of the cathedral at Cambrai, and Carlier at the choir school of Sainte-Croix, also at Cambrai.[20] But Carlier eventually became a theologian, while Du Fay, at least at the beginning of his career, was a practical musician, a *cantor*. The *cantores*, usually graduates of one or other of the *maîtrises* supported by numerous churches in Europe, had been for centuries the "floating bottom" of the clergy at the cathedrals and collegiate churches, charged with the musical duties of the liturgy (since many were only in minor orders at this stage). They were the *petit vicaires* at Cambrai, or the *clercs de matines* at Notre-Dame in Paris,[21] serving at the pleasure of the church authorities, and were hired, nominally, on an annual basis. At Cambrai, for example, they were hired on the eve of St. John Baptist for one year. Of course, some left or were fired for one cause or another, and others were auditioned to take their place, but their term of employment lasted until the eve of St. John Baptist the following year, at which time they could be rehired or let go. They would progress through the minor orders and eventually some would become priests. In the course of their career they would obtain a number of small benefices, a parish church here or a chaplaincy there, which allowed them to eke out a living. At Cambrai, with some exceptions, whenever one of them obtained one of the chaplaincies in the cathedral, which provided a modest but solid living, their career as small vicars, that is, as singing men, would end, which suggests that the

[17] E.g., Tinctoris, *Complexus effectuum musices*, in *Opera Theoretica*, 2:165–76; translated in Cullington and Strohm, *"That Liberal and Virtous Art."*
[18] Gallo, "Citazioni."
[19] Edited and translated in Cullington and Strohm, *"That Liberal and Virtous Art."*
[20] CBM 197, Obituary of Ste-Croix, fol. 63^{r}: "Obitus sollemnis domini Egidii le Carlier . . . qui dum erat iuvenculus fuit puer altaris huius ecclesiae sanctae crucis."
[21] Cf. C. Wright, *Music and Ceremony*, 20–27; Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 144–47.

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duties of a small vicars were viewed by many as onerous. A few of them would eventually obtain one of the nine grand vicariates in the cathedral, making them the elite of the working clergy of the church. No matter if they were ordained as priests, three of the grand vicars were intended to function as priests, three as deacons, and three as subdeacons, and it was they who performed most of the liturgy *in choro* throughout the year. But the majority of the small vicars eventually moved away from Cambrai to their parish churches, or to another church, either to work again as small vicars or as chaplains. Prior to the second quarter of the fifteenth century, few of them ever became a canon in Cambrai or elsewhere.

Du Fay's career would have been inconceivable in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. He belongs to the second or perhaps the third generation of *cantores* who were able to move up in the social hierarchy and obtain a canonicate or a dignity. The chapters of most of the cathedral and collegiate churches in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as Helène Millet's careful study of the chapter at Laon shows, were populated almost exclusively by members of the nobility.[22] A military or a clerical career was by far the most common choice for the younger sons of most noble households, and noblemen could expect a reasonably steady, if not always fast, advancement in their clerical life. By the middle of the thirteenth century another group of men was making slow but steady inroads into the ranks of the prebendaries in cathedrals and collegiate churches, children of the emerging urban bourgeoisie who had attended university and obtained a degree. The way to ecclesiastical preferment for these men was through their service as clerks to any of a number of important lords, at a time when the complexity of secular and ecclesiastic administration demanded an increased reliance on men with the skills to write letters and charters, and with the basic arithmetic necessary to keep track of and control the fiscal operations of the different households or institutions, or the legal training to serve as administrators in the court. No detailed study of the beginning of this transition has ever been undertaken, and the sense of when and how this change began to take place can only be teased out of dozens of studies of institutions, biographies, and social histories that touch upon it tangentially. The clearest image of the change itself, if not of the reasons for it, emerges in the volumes of the *Fasti ecclesiae gallicanae*.[23]

[22] Millet, *Les Chanoines*.

[23] A particularly thoughtful study, though limited to papal servants, is Partner, *The Pope's Men*, 47–110.

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Another requisite for admission to any of the ecclesiastical chapters in the central Middle Ages was legitimate parentage. Bastards were automatically excluded, and though from early on the possibility of a papal or an episcopal dispensation from the *defectum natalium* allowed men to enter holy orders and even advance to the priesthood, cathedral chapters were on guard against allowing bastards into their midst.[24] But even from Carolingian times such strictures tended not to apply to the illegitimate offspring of the most powerful lords: kings and emperors used their influence, and often their raw power, to place those of their illegitimate children who had chosen to pursue an ecclesiastical career not just as canons of cathedrals and collegiate churches, but in positions of power within the church hierarchy. But until the end of the fourteenth century such advancement was essentially closed to anyone whose immediate bloodlines did not include an important lord with actual sway upon the conduct of the ecclesiastical institutions within his domains.

In any case, the beginnings of the change in the constitution of the chapters in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries apparently did not affect the opportunities of the musicians, that is, the *cantores*, since the needs of the new institutions were for men of letters and lawyers. Craig Wright has successfully identified Leonin with Leo, a canon of both Notre-Dame and the Abbey of St-Victor in Paris in the second half of the twelfth century,[25] and has provided a very plausible identification of Perotin with Petrus, succentor of Notre-Dame at the turn of the thirteenth century. It is, I believe, quite telling that the firmer of the two identifications concerns what we would call a "man of letters," Leonin the didactic poet. It is in fact quite ironic that for several generations music historians looked in vain for him, while all that time his name and literary oeuvre were relatively well known to historians of medieval Latin poetry in France.[26] Anonymous IV mentions a number of other musicians who were known to him either personally or by recent reputation, and from his description we could assume that some of them were *magistri organorum*, that is *clercs de matines* who had achieved some renown and proficiency as musicians. Many of them are called *magister*, which means that they had university training and might have taught at the university, but almost without

[24] The basic studies on the ecclesiastical careers of the illegitimate deal, by and large, with the late Middle Ages. Among the most important are *Illegitimität im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Schmugge and Wiggenhauser; Schmugge, *Kirche, Kinder, Karrieren*; and Wertheimer, "The Ecclesiastical Construction of Illegitimacy in the Middle Ages."

[25] C. Wright, "Leoninus"; id., *Music and Ceremony*, 281–94.

[26] C. Wright, "Leoninus," 16–17, and nn. 42–45.

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exception they are absent from charter signature lists and from any documents that would place them among the administrative urban elite of Paris at the time.[27] This might indeed mean that their skill as musicians was not yet viewed as something that the ruling authorities of the cathedral considered sufficiently important to influence their being granted a prebend in the institution. In this respect it is also worth noting that, from the few versified letters we have from Leonin, it would appear that from early on he had access to high ecclesiastical and to royal patronage,[28] access that most likely came about not simply on account of his skills as a man of letters, an administrator, or a musician, but on account of family ties that are now lost to us.

The careers of the two most important French composers in the middle decades of the fourteenth century, Philippe de Vitry and Guillaume de Machaut, follow a related, if slightly different path. Their rise came through royal service precisely at the time when European rulers, particularly the French monarchs and those within their near circles, such as King John of Bohemia, needed clerks and secretaries.[29] Their service to their royal and princely masters was, for the most part, in those positions, and they obtained their preferments in churches under the influence of their secular lords. Musicians, qua musicians, in most of these courts were still part of the "minstrel class." It is also significant, I believe, that among their contemporaries, much as Vitry and Machaut are praised for their music, it is their work as poets that is mentioned most often and which, in Vitry's case, kept his reputation alive in fifteenth-century humanistic circles.[30] Their relatively exceptional situation becomes even clearer when one compares what is known about them and their careers with the galaxy of musicians of the following generation, the men whose names appear in the ascriptions in Ch 546 and ModA, and whose music appears also in Apt 16b and Ivr 115. Almost without exception they remained as part of what might be called the servant class in different European courts. Only Johannes

[27] Reckow, *Der Musiktraktat des Anonymus 4*, 1:46 and 50; but see also Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 134–55.

[28] C. Wright, "Leoninus," 23–27.

[29] The best summary of Machaut's biography now is Earp, *Guillaume de Machaut: A Guide to Research*, 3–52; in the case of Vitry a particularly thoughtful summary appears in Wathey and Bent, "Philippe de Vitry," *Grove Music Online*; cf. also Planchart, "Institutional Politics," 116–19.

[30] See Wathey, "The Motets of Philippe de Vitry and the Fourteenth-Century Renaissance"; id., "The Motet Texts of Philippe de Vitry in German Humanist Manuscripts of the Fifteenth Century."

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