

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Musical Biography.

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION OF MUSIC INTO THE CHURCH.—AMBROSIAN AND GREGORIAN CHANTS.—INTRODUCTION OF THE ORGAN.—CHORAL MUSIC IN ENGLAND.—MUSIC IN CONSONANCE.—IMPROVEMENTS BY GUIDO.—MUSICAL STAVE AND CLIFFS.—TIME.—SECULAR MUSIC IN THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES.—MUSICAL CHARACTERS.—DESCANT.—SCORE.—COUNTERPOINT.—INTRODUCTION OF DISCORDS.—CHORAL SERVICE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.—FUGUE.—CANON.—CONCERT MUSIC.—FANTAZIAS.—CONCERTO.—CHURCH MUSIC AFTER THE REFORMATION.—PSALMODY.

IT appears that Music was first introduced into the service of the Christian Church at Antioch, so early as about the year of our Lord 350. The example of the metropolis of Syria was followed by other churches of the East; and, in the course of a few years, it received the sanction of public

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

INTRODUCTION.

authority. By a Council of Laodicea, holden between the years 360 and 370, a canon was issued, directing that “none but the canons, which ascend “the *ambo*, or singing desk, and sing out of “the parchment, should presume to sing in the “church.” Thus established in the East, it soon passed to Rome; and from thence to all the western countries of the then civilized world.

St. Ambrose, who became one of the great patrons of church music, instituted in his church at Milan a peculiar method of singing, which has since received the name of *Cantus Ambrosianus*, the *Ambrosian Chant*; and Pope Gregory the First, who lived about two hundred and thirty years afterwards, in order to introduce a greater variety into the service, is said to have somewhat enlarged the former plan, and to have begun a new method, called *Cantus Gregorianus*, the *Gregorian*, or, as it is frequently denominated, the *Ecclcsiastical Chant*. What the difference was betwixt these, is at present entirely unknown. The Gregorian chant, however, is said yet to subsist in the churches of some parts of Italy.

The singing, in the primitive church, was sometimes by the whole assembly of choristers; sometimes it was alternate, or, as it is called, antiphonal, the choristers being, for that purpose, divided into separate choirs; and, lastly, it was sometimes by a single person, who, after singing the first part of a verse, was then joined by the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

3

rest in chorus. In the latter method we see clearly the origin of the office of *precentor*, whose duty it is, even at this day, to govern the choir, and to see that the choral service be properly performed.

It is supposed that some very considerable improvement must have taken place in church music, in consequence of the introduction of the *Organ*, which has usually been ascribed to Pope Vitalianus, somewhat after the year 663. When, however, we consider the intricate mechanism of this instrument, at the present day, and reflect upon the low state of the arts at that time, we cannot have any very exalted notion of the organ of the seventh century.

The missionaries who came over with Augustine, about the year 596, for the purpose of converting the inhabitants of this island to Christianity, adopted a musical service in their devotions. For some time the people were delighted with so pleasing a novelty ; but, after a while, it met with considerable opposition, and was at length entirely laid aside. During the papacy of Vitalianus, one of the principal singers was sent from Rome to instruct the Britons in the Roman method of singing ; and the Cathedral Church of Canterbury claims the merit of having been the first in this country in which a regular *choral service* was performed. The true date of the introduction of music into

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

our cathedrals is supposed to have been about the year 679.

Music in consonance seems to have been known in the eighth century. Bede speaks very particularly of a well-known species of it, called *Descant*; and an ancient manuscript, deposited among the Cottonian MSS. in the British Museum, describes the intervals, and the mode of singing, in so plain a manner, that it is impossible to be misunderstood. It is not, however, ascertained in what country it had its rise.

At the commencement of the tenth century, learning began to flourish throughout Europe. In France several of the abbeys became famous for learned men; and that of Corbie in particular was so celebrated for a musical institution, that the younger monks were usually sent thither from England to be instructed in music, and in the true method of performing the choral service.

In the eleventh century an highly important reformation took place in the art, in consequence of the attention that had been paid to it by a Benedictine monk, GUIDO ARETINUS.

The difficulties that attended the instruction of youth in the church offices were at this time so great, that, in one part of his Works, he says, "Ten years were generally consumed in merely acquiring a knowledge of the *canto fermo*, or plain song." This consideration induced him

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

5

to study its amendment. It is stated, that, being one day at vespers, and singing the hymn,

“ UT queant laxis, RESonare fibris

“ Mira gestorum FAMuli tuorum

“ Solve polluti LABii reatum ;”

the idea occurred to his mind, that the syllables, UT, RE, MI, FA, SOL, LA, of that hymn, being easy of pronunciation, might be applied to an equal number of sounds in regular succession, and, by that means, remove the difficulties under which the musical scale had hitherto laboured. The scale, as it stood before the time of Guido, was not adapted to the reception of the six syllables. This therefore he changed, by converting the ancient tetrachords into hexachords, and then applying these syllables to it. He added a tone, to which he prefixed the Greek letter Γ (whence the scale is now called the *gammut*) below the lowest note of the old scale, and, by so doing, the situation of the semitone became clearly pointed out. To the first note of the hexachord he applied the syllable UT, and the rest of the syllables, in succession, to the other notes. This is the origin of what is usually denominated *solmization*.

His invention having thus far succeeded to his utmost wishes, he next extended the scale, by the addition of four other tones, from the lowest line, G, in the bass, to the fourth space, E, in the treble; which at the time was considered so high, that

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

INTRODUCTION.

from thence arose the proverbial expression, in use even at this day, to reprehend an hyperbolic speech, “*that is a note above E LA.*” The notes in this improved scale were twenty-four in number.

The clergy were, of course, the first who favoured the improvements of Guido, since they (not only at that time, but for some centuries afterwards) were almost the exclusive cultivators of the science. Nearly a whole century was suffered to elapse before these improvements were adopted in England. As soon, however, as their utility was discovered, a considerable degree of emulation arose among the different fraternities, which should excel in the composition of their respective services.

Many of the musical writers have attributed also to Guido the invention of the *stave*, of parallel lines, such as is now used in the writing of music; but this has been done erroneously, since it is known to have been in use long before his time. Guido indeed intimated that points might be placed as well in the spaces as on the lines; and he reduced the old number of seven, eight, or ten lines, to five, or rather, for the purpose of ecclesiasticated notation, to four lines.

He was also the inventor of three characters, which he placed on the lower lines, at the head of his stave, called *cliffs*. These were Γ, C, and F; the first of which indicated a progression of sounds from the lowest note in the scale upwards to E;

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

7

the second, a series from C to A ; and the third, another series from F, through B \flat to D. These cliffs were also termed *claves*, or *keys*.

Notwithstanding all the improvements that were made by Guido, and the perfection to which, from his industry and abilities, the scale had arrived, it no where appears from his writings, that any method was then known, by which the length or duration of sounds could be marked, except that very imperfect one, the cadence of the words to be sung. The invention of the method now in use for this purpose, called *time*, has been generally ascribed to Johannes de Muris, a Doctor of Sorbonne, about the year 1330 ; apparently, however, without sufficient foundation.

For several centuries the knowledge of music appears to have been chiefly confined to the clergy ; yet it must not be supposed that the laity were so entirely ignorant of it, as not to have had their songs of mirth, and ballads suited to their conceptions and character. Of these it is difficult to give any satisfactory account. The historians of the times seldom descended to what they considered such inferior particulars. Chaucer, however, who lived in the fourteenth century, informs us, that in his time the English people frequently had music at their weddings, banquets, and other solemnities ; and that even the lowest class were not without it in their humble amusements. The knowledge of the theory of music was still confined almost

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

INTRODUCTION.

entirely to the clergy ; and they were, for the most part, the composers of those songs and ballads which were the ordinary amusement of the common people.

These were various in their kinds : some were merely legends of saints ; others were metrical romances ; and others songs of piety and devotion. They had frequently, for their subject, the sufferings of the primitive Christians, or the virtues of some particular and favourite saint. Oftentimes they were exhortations from Christ himself, represented in all the agony of his sufferings, adjuring his hearers by the nails that fastened his hands and feet, by the crown of thorns on his head, by the wound in his side, and all the calamitous circumstances of his passion and death, to pity and love him.

The tunes of these ancient ballads are, at present, nearly all lost. One of the oldest now extant is that to the following words :

“ Sumer is i-cumen in,
 “ Lhude sing cuccu,
 “ Groweth seed,
 “ And bloweth meed,*
 “ And springth the wde † nu.
 “ Aive ‡ bleteth after lomb,
 “ Lhouth || after calve, cu.§

* The flowers in the meadow. † Wood. ‡ Ewe.
 || Loweth. § Cow.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

9

“ Bulluc sterteth,*
 “ Bucke verteth,†
 “ Merrie sing cuccu,
 “ Wel sing thu cuccu
 “ Ne swik‡ thu naver nu.

This song is supposed to have been written about the middle of the fifteenth century ; and the music is calculated for six voices, and is of that species of composition called canon in unison. Sir John Hawkins has inserted a copy of it in his History of Music. In Dr. Burney’s History there are the words and music of a song written on occasion of the victory gained by King Henry the Fifth at Agincourt, in 1415, and, as it is believed, very shortly after that event.

The oldest dance tune now extant is considered to be that called “ Sellinger’s Round.” This may be traced back to the reign of King Henry the Eighth, when Bird made it into a virginal lesson for Lady Nevil.

It is not exactly known at what period the *musical characters* were invented. They have, indeed, been ascribed to Johannes de Muris (before mentioned as the supposed inventor of *time*), but they were certainly not in use till many years after his death. Thomas de Walsyngham, who

* Starteth. † Goeth to vert, that is, to harbour amongst the fern. ‡ Do not cease to sing.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06426-2 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 1

William Bingley

Excerpt

[More information](#)








10

INTRODUCTION.

flourished about the year 1400, speaks of them, and says that in his day the number chiefly in use was five, the *large*, the *long*, the *breve*, *semibreve*, and *minim*; and he adds, that “of late a new character has been introduced, called a *crotchet*, which would be of no use, if musicians would only remember, that beyond the *minim* no subdivision ought to be made.”

In music somewhat subsequent to the time of which Walsingham speaks, we find that the following characters were employed: 1. the *large*; 2. the *long*, of the same shape, but in size considerably smaller, two of them being equal in duration to the *large*; 3. the *breve*, which was half the *long*; 4. the *semibreve*; 5. the *minim*, which was half the *semibreve*; 6. the *semiminim*; 7. the *chroma*, which was half the *semiminim*; and, 8. the *semichroma*.* Any of these notes, written with *red ink*, were diminished a fourth part: thus, a red *semibreve*, instead of being equal to four of the present *crotchets*, would only have been equal to three.

Each of the several measures above enumerated had then, as now, their correspondent pauses or *rests*. These were originally contrived to give

* The marks by which these characters were represented are as follow: 1.  2.  3.  4.  5.  6.  7.  8. 