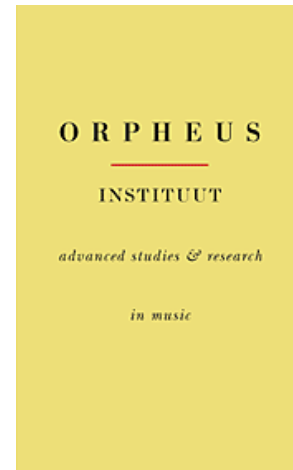


International Orpheus Academy for Music & Theory 2009

**April 6-9, 2009
Orpheus Institute, Ghent, Belgium**

ABSTRACTS LECTURES



Edoardo Bellotti

1. From "Canzona intavolata" to "Madrigale passaggiato": the Italian art of "Intabulation" in the XVIth century.

The History of the keyboard music is strongly related to the art of transcription: in the early XVIth century the French Chançon received a particularly attention by the keyboard and lute performers. From the transcription is born a new genre "the canzone da sonar" employed during the whole XVIIth century and generating the modern "fugue" . In the late XVIth century the success of the madrigal has a great influence on the instrumental music: the art of diminution has been applied to the keyboard repertoire preparing the baroque development of the "rhetoric figures". Looking at some examples from Andrea Gabrieli to Girolamo Frescobaldi it is possible to define a typical "Italian art of Intabulation" in which improvisation and composition are connected.

2. Spiridionis "Nova Instructio": an original pedagogical approach to keyboard improvisation in the XVIIth century.

The pedagogic approach at the keyboard from the XVth to the XVIIIth century was based on a concept of unity: the player learned the technical approach at the keyboard together with the rules of counterpoint, the right fingering together with the theory, the composition as a consequence of the improvisation (as already documented in important sources like Diruta's Transilvano or Banchieri's Organo Suonarino). But "Nova Instructio pro pulsandis Organis, Spinettis et Manuchordis" by Spiridion a Monte Carmelo published in Bamberg and Wurzburg between 1670 and 1674 is a unique and complete handbook in which the old traditions of improvisation and diminution are combined with the baroque "continuo praxis".

Johannes Menke

1. Models for improvising the “contenance angloise” of the 15th century.

The poet Martin le Franc praises Guillaume Du Fay and Gilles Binchois for having taken the “contenance angloise” and for using “fresh consonances”. One can hear this joy of the imperfect consonances prototypically in the quite simple settings of hymns, which are generally following the principle of Fauxbourdon. Coming from this technique and from the composed hymns can be developed a technique for improvising and composing three-voice-settings in the style of the middle 15th century.

2. Composing and improvising sound progressions around 1600.

At the beginning of the baroque era the “eccentric sound-structure” (Dammann) was established. The framework of the outer-voices was taken as the basis for the composition. In this way the proven principles of constructing a “contrapunctus simplex” were inherited so that we can observe a certain continuity between the 16th and the 17th century in spite of the obvious stylistic change. This continuity becomes apparent in the construction of sequences and in the use of famous ostinato-patterns, which obviously concerns composition as well as improvisation.

Peter Schubert

1. Practical Problems in Improvisation

Having taught himself to improvise contraponto fugato (or contraponto con obbligo as Zarlino calls it) and to improvise a canon against a cantus firmus (after Lusitano), Peter Schubert still wonders how this was carried out in the Renaissance and how it can be taught today. He will also consider improvisation of imitative music (in two and three parts), improvising a third part to a duo, and improvising in four parts.

2. From Improvisation to Composition

What does our knowledge about improvisation tell us about composition? How was the distinction between improvisation and composition articulated in the Renaissance? Peter Schubert’s talk will be illustrated with examples from Palestrina’s *First Book of Four-Voice Motets* (1563).

Rob C. Wegman

1. What is Counterpoint?

There is a curious paradox about the medieval art of counterpoint: it is at once simple and difficult. What is simple about medieval counterpoint is its pedagogy: the rules of note-against-note singing can be summarized in less than half a page, and they are easily memorized. Medieval authors often assure us that these rules constitute the “foundation” of all polyphony, thereby anticipating the *gradus ad Parnassum* idea—that note-against-note counterpoint is the most elementary stage, the beginner’s level, in a curriculum of progressive difficulty.

Still, in practical terms—in terms of singing music on the spot—it is note-against-note counterpoint that is more difficult: rhythmically diverse polyphony is much easier to learn, and vastly more fun to practice. When it comes to this, one wonders if would not have been more realistic for medieval choirboys to begin their practical training precisely with the more “advanced” stages. To invoke a linguistic analogy, is it not true that we learn to *speak* our native tongue—fluently and idiomatically—long before we are taught the rules of grammar? Is it even possible to learn a language the other way round?

What, then, was the point of note-against-note counterpoint? Why did medieval writers codify those same basic rules in treatise after treatise—and in Latin at that—if the apparent aim was to surmount this stage as quickly as possible? Was all this “mere” theory? If it was not, what did counterpoint represent, musically and artistically? My aim in this lecture is to review these and related issues, and to suggest new approaches in tackling them.

2. The *Cantus planus* Setting and the Art of Improvisation

Here is something that we would dearly love to have: a written record, some kind of transcription, of vocal polyphony as it was improvised in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The idea is a chimerical one, of course. To write down music is to interpret it in terms that must make sense on paper, and thus to turn something that was sung spontaneously into something that is elaborated with forethought. Not that this is necessarily a bad thing. Modern journals and newspapers rarely print live speeches, or transcripts of live discussions, without heavy editing. It seems no more than sensible to us now that one should tidy up grammar and sense, correct or delete misstatements, and leave out everything that seems textually extraneous—non-verbal utterances, gesture, intonation, dynamics, speed, and so on. Why should sixteenth-century musical scribes or printers have reasoned any differently?

So we should not be surprised to find that even those settings from the Middle Ages that were expressly claimed by their authors to reflect the practice of improvisation look suspiciously, indeed implausibly, polished and tidy. Still, there is a lot we can learn about improvisation even from those settings. In this lecture I will consider one tradition of written polyphony that was closer to improvisatory practices than any other, and that seems to have been practised throughout Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This tradition has received so little scholarly scrutiny that there is not even yet a name for it. I propose to speak of *cantus planus* settings, and I will illustrate this important genre with a broad selection of examples.