

## Seminar in medieval and renaissance music

All Souls, Wharton Room, Thursdays 5 –7 p.m.

Hilary Term 2019, weeks 2, 4, 6, 8

All are welcome.

Week 2 Jan 24<sup>th</sup>: **John Milsom**, Liverpool Hope University: **‘Polyphony, in four parts: composing, performing, listening, reflecting’**

Over the past three decades, much thought has been given to the matter of how sixteenth-century composers conceived and crafted their polyphonic works, especially ones made mainly in *fuga* (imitation). In general, however, this research has been academic and abstract; the dialogue between musicologists and performers has barely begun, even though the musical ideas and issues explored through analysis might be relevant and interesting to singers, players and directors. As for listeners, they tend to be sidelined altogether. Rarely is it asked how *any* performance of a polyphonic work, let alone an analysis-informed one, is processed by a listener, and indeed is differently processed depending on that listener’s experience, knowledge, and familiarity with the work in hand. This in turn leads to the question of what it means to ‘appreciate’ and ‘understand’ a polyphonic work, especially when issues that were arguably of central concern to the composer are barely apprehended by most modern listeners, let alone savoured by them. Might the richest engagement with sixteenth-century polyphony therefore be attained not only by performing it and listening to it, but also by considering it from the angle of how it was made?

Week 4 Feb 7<sup>th</sup>: **Étienne Anheim**, Directeur d'études, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris: **‘The musical chapel of the popes in Avignon during the fourteenth century’**

The Avignon Court of the popes, during the 14th century, was the birthplace of a new institution that would play a major role in the history of Western music, the chapel. The reform of Benedict XII in 1334 and the creation of the first "Master of the Chapel (*magister capelle*)" in 1336 marked a break with the tradition of the liturgical chapels inherited from the Carolingian model. The chapel was now a musical curial service provided by specialized musicians, if not “professionals”, trained in the best cathedrals of the north of France. The rich archives of the Avignon Court allow us to reconstruct this process. We can describe the sociology of the singers, explore the daily functioning of the chapel in the Palais des Papes and question the repertoire in use. We can thus try to understand how Avignon gave a new geographical, aesthetic and symbolic dimension to Ars Nova polyphony in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages.

This seminar will be held in conjunction with the third international study day of the MALMECC project 'Avignon as transcultural hub' on Feb 8th, St Luke's Chapel, Radcliffe Humanities Campus. Confirmed speakers include Anna Alberni, Étienne Anheim, Karen Cook, Sarah Griffin, Karl Kügle, Sofia Lannutti, Christophe Masson, David Murray, and Philipp Nothaft - for further information and to register (free of charge), see <http://www.malmecc.eu/events/>

Week 6 Feb 21<sup>st</sup>: **Roger Bowers**, 'University of Cambridge: **‘Composer biographies – the cases of John Dunstable and ‘Roy Henry’**

It may be not the most glamorous component of musicology, but the establishment of the biographies of composers remains an essential task. In the case of John Dunstable there seems at present to be a surfeit of material, much of it contradictory, fugitive, and inconsistent; there are too many John

Dunstables. In the case of 'Roy Henry' the name is idiosyncratic, and there are only two possible candidates; nevertheless, even that is one too many.

Dunstable may be shown to have been a musician engaged at the top of his profession, but of character otherwise conventional for his time. He was fortunate to merit employment by members of the top aristocracy, and by them was temporarily rewarded even with crumbs of loot falling from the table of the French wars. Meanwhile, as merely 'Mr John Dunstable, of London', a detail of his long association with William Trokyll, his parish priest at St Stephen, Walbrook, does now encourage the rehabilitation of an item of biographical information long known but lately rather disregarded; and this in turn engenders some speculation about his earlier career.

For the composer a date of death in 1453 can now be confirmed, so that he may be distinguished from a thuggishly unprincipled county gentleman of the same name who died in 1459. This Dunstable (who may in fact have been close kin of the composer) enjoyed both landed estates in Essex and on the Cambridgeshire/Hertfordshire border, and property interests in London. Also, from a position in 1427/8 on the outer affinity of a great lady, Joan of Navarre, Queen dowager of England (as widow of Henry IV), he had emerged by 1436 as a major purveyor for her – at a very high price – of some commodity currently highly desirable, most probably security.

Realistically, 'Roy Henry' can be only King Henry IV or King Henry V, of England. There is at present no 'smoking pen', and this issue can be resolved only on a balance of probabilities. Indications are that the case to be made for Henry IV is much the stronger. In view of his conspicuous concern both for the consolidation of the role of his Chapel Royal in general, and also for the welfare of its most junior members; of his receipt during 1392/3 of some personal attention from one member of the ensemble of five French singing-men who formed the core of the household chapel of his father, John of Gaunt; and of his description by a well-informed contemporary as *micans in musica*, it is not easy to see how a countervailing case even stronger can be built for Henry V.

Week 8 March 7<sup>th</sup>: **Laurence Libin**, Curator of Musical Instruments emeritus at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: '**Reconstructing medieval instruments: Why bother?**'

Too little is known about medieval instruments and their playing techniques to justify claims that any reconstruction is "authentic" in terms of design and musical qualities. Reliable evidence is lacking; iconography, written descriptions, modern "folk" practices, and the few surviving exemplars furnish only vague clues to how medieval instruments were made and played, though some types, bells for example, may be better understood than others. Each type of instrument presents unique problems, and solutions adopted in one locale may not have been widely or lastingly applied; yet we have no choice but to generalize. Even if, by chance, a new replica should sound exactly like an original did when it was new, how could we know this? As with performers' interpretations of medieval notation, instrument makers can at best aim to arrive somewhere within a broad, defensible field of possibilities largely defined by consensus rather than fact. In the face of such uncertainty, why do musicians and makers bother?

In discussion with **Jeremy Montagu**, a pioneer of England's post-War early music movement, we will explore the sources, motivations, and opportunities for reconstructing various types of medieval instruments. Examples will be shown.

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