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## **Singing the Middle Ages: Between Scholars and Trotskyists**

Livio Giuliano (Università degli Studi di Milano)

<p><b>Resumen</b></p> <p>A partire dalla rilettura di Notre Dame proposta da Davide Daolmi, si indagano le ragioni che hanno permesso l'invenzione moderna dell'esecuzione polifonica del XII-XIII secolo, ripercorrendo gli esperimenti promossi nel corso del primo Novecento e consolidatisi, in pieno <i>early music revival</i>, verso la fine degli anni Settanta. Le scelte musicali compiute appaiono espressione del <i>mainstream</i> culturale più che dell'evidenza documentaria e tuttavia, se all'inizio le ragioni musicologiche, pur provvisorie e pregiudiziali sul Medioevo, rimangono riferimento per le prime esecuzioni, in seguito le proposte vocali del Dopoguerra hanno preferito una strada slegata dalla ricerca storica (in realtà priva di nuovi apporti) per trovare ragioni e alibi estetici in ambiti alternativi (sociali, politici, di mercato).</p>	<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>In connection with the interpretation of Notre Dame proposed by Davide Daolmi in this journal, the article analyzes the reasons that allowed the modern invention of polyphonic performance of 12th and 13th centuries, tracing experiments promoted during the early 20th century and strengthened in the early music revival in the late Seventies. The musical choices appear as expressions of a cultural mainstream more than documentary evidence: at the beginning the musicological reasons are references for the first performances (with preconceptions about Middle Age), then the vocal interpretation of the second Postwar became extraneous to the historical research (moreover lacking of any new contribution) and found aesthetic alibis in different environment (social, politic, market).</p>
<p><b>Palabras clave</b></p> <p>Interpretazione della musica antica - modi ritmici - musicologia novecentesca.</p>	<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p>early music performance – modal rhythm – 20th-century musicology</p>
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## Singing the Middle Ages: Between Scholars and Trotskyists

Livio Giuliano (Università degli Studi di Milano)

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Since its first appearance in 1969, the German record label ECM has become a market favourite thanks, in part, to its strong interest in contemporary music.<sup>1</sup> And yet, in 1989 ECM produced the Hilliard Ensemble's album *Perotin*,<sup>2</sup> with nine tracks featuring *organa* and *conductus* from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, sung entirely a cappella. This production was neither as anomalous as it might appear, nor did it contradict the label's "contemporary" brand: what made the music *new* was its sound, a sound which seemingly belied the epoch of its composition.

The Perotinus recorded by Hilliard was felt to be "current" in the years of minimalism; indeed, those Notre Dame *organa* could almost be mistaken for a work by Steve Reich, the pre-eminent composer of American *minimal music* who is mentioned by name in the CD booklet.<sup>3</sup> Nor was the restored sound merely "fashionable"; through a sophisticated "inexpressiveness" it seemed to recreate the architectural precision of ancient cathedrals. Of course, the severity of such a rationalist approach led Perotinus to a later epoch; however, the same historiographical tradition had prepared the way for the temporal split. If late nineteenth century musicology was moved for its own reasons to attribute to Notre Dame the concerns of later centuries – from the viewpoint of an evolutionistic parabola of polyphony – the late twentieth century demanded an abstract sound because it recognized in itself a sort of negation of expression, with the text treated as a structural element.<sup>4</sup>

Today, a search for "Perotinus" on YouTube places the *Viderunt* by the Hilliard Ensemble in top position. The hundreds of thousands of views suggest that Perotinus' popular *quadruplum* has become the emblematic representation of the Notre Dame School. The Hilliard ensemble's performance was so in line with its own epoch – the a cappella voices, the steady rhythm, reverb, vocal control – that it has become the yardstick against which each new rendition of Notre Dame singing is measured. Better still: the Hilliard recording is seen to coincide most closely with Perotinus' composition.

<sup>1</sup> ECM is the acronym for Edition of Contemporary Music. The Munich label is well-known for its jazz catalogue (which includes the likes of Keith Jarrett and Pat Metheny), world music, early music and contemporary music.

<sup>2</sup> The Hilliard Ensemble, *Perotin*, ECM New Series 1385 (1989).

<sup>3</sup> ECM New Series was launched a few years after Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*, 1129 (1978).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the authenticity of musical performance and the structuralist approach, see Nattiez (2002), Butt (2002) and Leech-Wilkinson (1984). In this collection, Davide Daolmi surveys twentieth-century misunderstandings regarding the interpretation of Notre Dame School of polyphony.

The filter of minimalism is, however, only one of the more recent ways, perhaps the most visible, through which the music of Notre Dame has been viewed over the past one hundred years. Exploring the different ways in which this music has been performed, requires that one come up with a profile of the listening culture, one subject to continuous and stratified constraints, one in which twentieth-century musicology, the role of the past and commercial imperatives intertwine. In these pages I will aim to provide a map – a loosely chronological one – that will present the individuals, ideologies, habits and goals of those who sang thirteenth-century liturgical polyphony. At the same time, I am aware that:

We cannot interpret medieval culture or any historical culture except through the prism of the dominant concepts of our own thought worlds” (Cantor 1991: 37).

If the image we have of the Middle Ages is the result of historiographical – but also mythical, literary and scientific – construction, as opposed to the faithful restoration of the past, it is critical at this point to consider the architects of this history. Because of a lack of interest in the creation of a school of thought that can place each choice within a system or coherent narrative, the fragmentation of opinions about the restitution of the Middle Ages has relativized taste, and exposed such ironies as highlighted by scholars of medieval studies with respect to scholars of medieval time.<sup>5</sup>

#### **1914. Notre Dame according to Ludwig and Gastoué.**

On June 8, 1914 Amédée Gastoué organized a concert at the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. The programme was structured as follows: *Pieces Liturgiques (XI<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, *L’Ars Antiqua et les Trouveres (XII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)* *L’Ars Nova*.<sup>6</sup> These were the days of the International Musical Society congress, a musical *tour de force* that, at the dawn of World War I, was intended to showcase the accomplishments of French music to the international public. It may not seem consistent that a congress with such an objective would choose medieval polyphony as one of its main themes, but

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<sup>5</sup> For musicology’s retrospective examination of medieval historiography, see Kreutziger-Herr (1998 and 2005). See also Leech-Wilkinson (2002), Busse Berger (2005), Haines (2004) and Kreutziger-Herr (2003).

<sup>6</sup> The second part of the program consisted of the following pieces: *Viderunt* (from St. Martial of Limoges), *Custodi Nos* (*triplum* for three male voices), *Quant Diex ot formé* (sacred *chanson* for choir and solo bariton), *Lux hodie, Orientis partibus* (recitative introduction and *conductus* for three voices), *Alleluia Posui* (*organum triplum*, by Perotinus), *Jhesus Cristz* (invocation in langue d’oc by Guiraut Riquier), *Agniaus dous* (sacred *chanson* for choir), *Deus in adjutorium* (with instrumental *triplum* and with a solo tenor), *On ne porroit de mauvese raison* (song of the Crusades) and *L’autrier matin* (*chanson*), (Gastoué 1914).

from the evidence of the program notes we can see that early music featured prominently during those ten days of performances and lectures. In addition to the abovementioned concert by Gastoué, performances of French Renaissance music and compositions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were also scheduled. A reporter for *The Musical Times* reviewed this important event in the following terms:

It will be seen that very little modern French music was presented during the Congress, which was from some points of view to be regretted. There is a good deal of it which is little known outside France, and it might have been illuminating to foreign visitors, especially to Germans, to hear how it was performed in the land of its origin. It seems instead to have been the desire mainly to exhibit the course of French sacred music during some seven hundred years, and no doubt much that was brought forward was far from being familiar to any of the Congressists, even to all the Frenchmen among them.<sup>7</sup>

Fervor and cultural experimentation animated Paris in 1914. Those were the years of Alfredo Casella's *Notte di maggio*, the provocations of Satie and Stravinsky's *Trois Poésies de la Lyrique Japonaise*, not to mention his *Sacre du Printemps*. A few months after the Congress, Camille Saint-Saëns would attack Wagnerian German-centrism through several articles that would later become part of the volume *Germanophilie* (Saint-Saëns 1916). It seems safe to assume, then, that *The Musical Times'* reporter arrived in the capital ready to listen to *new* French music; and, faced with the performed repertoire, while charmed by the interpretations, was disappointed. But also apparent from his review, is his awareness of being part of a tacit conflict, a cultural rather than musical rivalry that had its roots in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. He draws attention "especially to Germans", as if blaming the French for a lost opportunity to introduce German ears to their most precious jewels. While Teutonic scholars were writing a new history (albeit a history dominated by French music), the French apparently preferred to parade on the ground of early music (but who knows, maybe the Congress also wanted to claim ownership of that ancient heritage?). We do not know how Gastoué performed Notre Dame polyphony, nor what was prescribed in the score regarding ensemble, tempo or dynamics; however something can be deduced from the conductor's *Les Primitifs de la musique française* (released seven years later), whose title coincides with that of the concert presented to the congressmen.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Musical Times*, LV/857 (01/07/1914), pp. 457–9.

With regard to medieval *organa* Gastoué seemed to prefer choral performance:

Ces grands organum eux-mêmes – et, cependant, formés seulement de deux voix, – demeurent avant tout, pendant un certain temps, un procédé qu'essaient les compositeurs, mais surtout usité par les improvisateurs d'une seconde partie aiguë, qui 'organaient' ainsi à plaisir, en contrepointant dans une tessiture élevée, les mélodies [grégoriennes] exécutées par les chœurs (Gastoué 1922: 16).

Nor was he the only one. In a recently published study, Anna Maria Busse Berger presents Friedrich Ludwig as a committed Lutheran, profoundly influenced by the positivist scientific research of his time (Busse Berger 2005: 23–64). After transcribing and commenting upon almost the entire production of Notre Dame in his *Repertorium* (1910), Ludwig ennobled liturgical polyphony to the detriment of the secular *corpus*. According to him, the sacredness of the liturgical works by Leoninus and Perotinus could be evoked just by the presence of choirs without instruments. Ludwig does not say how or why the a cappella chorus could express solemnity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and this justifies Busse Berger's opinion: a son of the Palestrina revival, Ludwig remained a man of his time – starting with his philological devotion to sources – a time in which textual variants were considered the corrupted manifestation of an ideal archetype.

As, Rehding lucidly relates, musicology only became a university discipline a short time earlier when scholars on the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tried to legitimize their research through the elevation of the origins of Western music (Rehding 2000). For Willy Pastor in 1910, there was no doubt that the model of reference was Palestrina. This was not because Palestrina was the origin of music, as such, but because “the unbroken tradition that informs the origins” found in Palestrina all those elements which constituted the essence of the history of music (Rehding 2000: 349).<sup>8</sup> Expressed in these terms, one can understand how many scholars have viewed the past as a history that had to be altered and shaped, so that it could adapt to a path that runs teleologically toward the present. As noted by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, Riemann's corrections for the voice “Kappelle” during the various editions of his *Musik-Lexikon* follow this direction: pre-baroque sacred music is firstly considered entirely *a cappella* (ed., 1894), later it is combined with instrumental accompaniments in unison (ed. 1900), and finally it is intended as an integral part of the instrumental *obbligato* (ed. 1909). The scarcity of evidence, of course, allowed adjustments and adaptations to the (noble) model in construction (Leech-

<sup>8</sup> “[...] the tradition of tonal music can be traced *back* all the way to Palestrina, hence he must be identified as the locus of the birth of music. It is this uninterrupted tradition that informs the origin, not vice versa”.

Wilkinson 2002: 42).

Familiarity with Ludwig's writings, and a shared conception of music, seem to have motivated Gastoué's choices regarding the instrumental ensemble:

[Pérotin] fut le premier, en effet, qui ait écrit à trois et quatre voix; il a amplifié et considérablement augmenté, avec un rythme nouveau et précis, et un chromatisme recherché pour son temps, le *Livre d'Orgue* de son prédécesseur Léonin (Gastoué 1922: 19).

Such a statement attests to the dependence of Gastoué's beliefs on the contemporary writings by Ludwig. Shortly before, Gastoué had drawn a biographical profile of Perotinus, based on assumptions taken from studies which, though uncited, refer to Ludwig. The Frenchman does not even suspect that the attribution of the *organa* is merely deduced from Anonymous IV's words, namely: Leoninus wrote the *Magnus Liber Organum*; Perotinus, his illustrious successor, refined and improved it, making the new version better than the previous one according to an evolutionary perspective (Ludwig 1924: 202).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, in the program notes of 1914, Gastoué publicly thanked Ludwig, together with Aubry and Beck, whose research had allowed the musical restitution,

ces transcriptions sont à la fois plus conformes encore à la théorie médiévale, comme à la pratique artistique (Gastoué 1914)

Reading between the lines, Gastoué offers an excuse for the addition of an instrumental accompaniment, but is also prepared to defend himself against the possible accusations of purists: the motets of the Bamberg manuscript, and particularly the Apt manuscript, show the presence of instruments in the *tenor*. Although the manuscripts are late (especially the Apt which is from the *Ars nova*) Stainer's (1898: 15–6)<sup>10</sup> and Ludwig's assumptions (Ludwig 1902: 67)<sup>11</sup> allowed Gastoué

<sup>9</sup> Gastoué (1922:16): "[Léonin] écrivit en effet [...] le premier 'Livre d'Orgue' [...] On ne possède plus exactement, sous la forme où il l'a écrit, ce Livre d'Orgue de Léonin, mais son contenu a formé le noyau de l'œuvre magistrale d'un de ses successeurs, Pérotin, surnommé 'le Grand'".

<sup>10</sup> "In the case of *Ce jour de l'an* the words are written out in full under each part, but in many, indeed in the majority of the songs in this MS. [Canonici misc. 213], the words are placed under the upper part only, while the tenor and the contra-tenor parts have only the first two or three words written at their beginning, generally in such a way as not to correspond with the notes above them. Perhaps one is not justified in inferring from this that in every case where it occurs the lower parts were not intended to be sung at all, but to be played only, but in some cases this must clearly be so."

<sup>11</sup> "Dass weiter, auch in der kunstgerechten Ausführung der französischen und italienischen Vokalwerke unserer Epoche die Instrumentalbegleitung eine grosse Rolle spielte, ist ebenfalls zweifellos. Wir sehen die Komponisten z. B. öfter, ein Portativ spielend abgebildet; ich kann mir wohl denken, dass der Tenor auf diesem Instrument gespielt wurde, das auch die längsten Töne - des Tenor auszuhalten imstande ist und ein Sich-Selbst-Begleiten, wie die Streich- und Zupfinstrumente, gestattet. Es soll aber hier nicht meine Aufgabe sein, zu den vielen Hypothesen über die Instrumental-Praxis des Mittelalters eine neue, in der Hauptsache ebenfalls nur auf Vermutungen sich stützende hinzuzufügen."

to justify choices linked to the tastes of his time. With regard to the accompaniment of *organales* voices, his arguments were naïve:

Nous avons choisi comme instruments ceux dont le timbre nous a paru le plus proche de ceux du moyen âge, tout en obtenant le meilleur effet acoustique (Gastoué 1914).

It is patent that Gastoué already had his own idea about medieval performance practice. Unfortunately it is not specified which instruments, in his opinion, were endowed with a timbre closest to that of the Middle Ages, and in the treatise of 1922 he attributes many choices to personal deduction:

je gage que les chanteurs de pareilles pièces devaient laisser souvent à l'instrument d'accompagnement le soin d'exécuter seul à leur place le duo de ses deux claviers de déchant, sur la tenue grave des soubasses (Gastoué 1931: 222–3).

And, although not explicitly, he seems to have suggested that the instrument of choice was the organ. After all, in his 1931 review of the *Sederunt* edition by Rudolf Ficker (Ficker 1930), Gastoué would judge excessive the instrumentation adopted, probably defending his own interpretation “in line with medieval theory and artistic practice”:

Mais des œuvres comme le *Sederunt* de Perotin, nous le savon formellement, sont destinées tout juste à un quator de voix d'hommes, soutenues de l'orgue (Gastoué 1931: 222–3).

Subsequent research would disqualify the presence of organ at Notre Dame (Perrot 1965: 300–2; Roesner 1979: 174), but evidently, at the time, there was some contention among musicians, especially if they belonged to nationalities in potential conflict.

### **The 1920s. Mystical and cumbersome nationalism.**

I shall return soon to Rudolf Ficker, whose role in this story is not secondary, but first: between Gastoué's concert and the review of 1931 run the war years, during which early music was certainly not a pressing concern; later, new research would lead scholars to reflect upon the performance of ancient repertoire.

Discordant opinions resulted in conflict between various early twentieth-century musicologists, who often changed their mind from one year to the next (Leech-Wilkinson 2002: 42). It is not difficult to imagine how the Franco-German cultural rivalry was exacerbated by the disaster of war. As a result, Germany reinforced national identity in the cultural sphere, with the affirmation of their superiority in all fields of research. It may seem simplistic, but these rivalries should certainly be taken into account when Riemann defines the style of the French *organa* as *rough*, while praising Italian secular music of the fourteenth century (1888 and Riemann 1906: 41). Exacerbated by the conflict, Germans further hoisted the sails of their great nation in order to assert cultural supremacy over the rest of the world. While Gastoué's French concert, which took place a year before the war, made little impact, the same cannot be said of the concerts in Karlsruhe and Hamburg conducted by Wilibald Gurlitt. The value assigned to them by German scholars aimed to confirm the supremacy of Germany in medieval musicological research and show Europe the nobleness of German music.

A passionate student of Praetorius and reputed to be the inspiration behind the *Orgelbewegung* (the movement for organ revival) Gurlitt counted Riemann and Schering among his teachers. The two concerts titled *Musik des Mittelalters* are known to be the first public performances of medieval music in Germany. The contributions made by Ludwig and Heinrich Bessler (Gurlitt's student who wrote the program notes for the two concerts), then published in the *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* (Ludwig 1922; Bessler 1925), marked the importance of the events. The magazine, whose bulk clearly represents the academic heft that they wanted to bring to the discipline, was founded in 1919 as an organ of the *Deutsche Musikgesellschaft*, with the aim to promote and contribute to the development of German musicological research.<sup>12</sup> The program for the two concerts (the second even richer than the first) is wide-ranging: from Gregorian chant to the early fifteenth century. *Musik des Mittelalters* is the culmination of the search by Ludwig, Bessler, Wolf, Genrich, Ficker and Gurlitt.<sup>13</sup> Two *organa* attributed to Leoninus, *Haec Dies* and *Alleluia pascha nostrum*, were performed along with some of Perotinus' motets and clausulae. To the detriment of the performance's purity, as advocated by Ludwig, the instrumentation involved the use of accompanying instruments and choir. In 1925 Gurlitt would defend the performance with instruments for both sacred and secular music (Gurlitt 1925: 173), although Ludwig, in the absence of attestation in the sources, preferred to abstain from confirming the validity of this

<sup>12</sup> For more details on the *Deutsche Musikgesellschaft* and *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, see Potter (1991 and 1996).

<sup>13</sup> As evinced by the program notes, it was inevitable to make use of (French) contributions by Coussemaker and Aubry whose editions were used in the concert.



choice (Ludwig 1922: 443).

In line with Gurlitt's proposal, Rudolf von Ficker conducted the *Sederunt* in 1929 at the Burgkapelle of Vienna with a musical ensemble of considerable size and with modern instruments. Ficker took Ludwig's positions on the value of sacred music with respect to the profane to the extreme: if Ludwig was inclined to a progressive purification of the elements different to the voice, Ficker's mystical exaltation led him to imagine a set of vocals and instruments directly proportional to the immensity of God's glory. In light of Rehding's observation mentioned above, I would add that his edition that appeared one year after the concert (Ficker 1930), is definitely very *German* or very *proche* (to cite Gastoué) to the taste of the early twentieth-century large orchestral masses.<sup>14</sup> The majesty of the executions imagined by Ficker came – he said – from the observation of Gothic architecture, whose grandeur and magnificence, as represented in the *tenor's* rhythmic rigor (Ficker 1930),<sup>15</sup> had to embrace a musical realization that left the audience stunned. The use of musical instruments was justified by the pictorial representations of heavenly and earthly concerts (Ficker 1929: 494),<sup>16</sup> as Leichtentritt had already suggested more than twenty years before (Leichtentritt 1906).

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<sup>14</sup> Moreover, even the medieval imaginary of *Carmina Burana* (1935) could not do without a large orchestra, even in the knowledge of betrayal.

<sup>15</sup> "the music, in the *lofty* Gothic style of the thirteenth century, employs tripartite rhythms exclusively" (italics mine). This statement takes for granted the strict application of modal rhythm theory to a repertoire whose notation is older than the semiographic system that is well suited to that theory, an interpretation sealed and returned to the researchers by Ludwig's research. For a discussion on the modal rhythm system applied to Notre Dame's repertoire see Daolmi in this collection.

<sup>16</sup> "[...] we know, from pictured presentations and from many written records, what a vast array of instrumental forces in diverse varieties of bowed, plucked, wind and percussion instruments that period could muster."

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Sederunt". The score is arranged in systems. The top system is for the vocal parts, labeled "Knaben" (Boys) on the left. It consists of three staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of three flats (C minor). The notes are mostly whole and half notes, with some slurs and accents. The second system is for the vocal parts, labeled "Männer" (Men) on the left. It also consists of three staves with treble clefs and a key signature of three flats. The notes are mostly whole and half notes, with some slurs and accents. The third system is for the vocal parts, labeled "Ch." (Chorus) on the left. It consists of one staff with a bass clef and a key signature of three flats. The notes are mostly whole and half notes, with some slurs and accents. The bottom system is for the piano accompaniment, labeled "Vla." (Violins) on the left. It consists of two staves, one with a treble clef and one with a bass clef, both with a key signature of three flats. The piano part includes dynamics like *p* and *Fg.* (Foghorn). The score is in a key signature of three flats (C minor) and features various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamics.

From *Sederunt*, edited by Ficker (1930: 11, second system).

The *Sederunt*, edited by Ficker, indicates voice lines for men and children supported by a chorus in the part of *tenor*. The piano part is a reduction of the orchestral score that involves strings, oboes, bassoons, trumpets, trombones and glockenspiel. All is in the key of C minor, adorned with dynamics inserted according to Ficker's taste. In addition, on each note of the tenor – upon which are *organized* the melismas of the other voices – Ficker constructs an agogic and dynamic climax, which reaches its apex in the cadence that precedes the intonation of the new syllable.

Ficker's editorial work on *Sederunt* promulgates a sort of propaganda that, as an expression of an ancient religiosity and, therefore, closer to the common people (Ficker 1929: 488),<sup>17</sup> made medieval music accessible and attractive to a large portion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (Ficker 1929:

<sup>17</sup> "This collective spirit, with its striving after the superpersonal and supernatural, stamps a distinctive impress not only on the Nordic music of the middle ages, but on all great manifestations of Germanic musical culture down to the present day; contrariwise, this spirit is wholly foreign to the music of the South, accommodated to the purely individual, vital emotionality. A country like Italy could therefore never have produced a Bach or a Beethoven."

486):<sup>18</sup> such an operation updated and Germanised the repertoire so that it could be “democratized”:

They [scholars] also tailored their scholarly editions to the needs of the growing amateur performance market. Musicological work could also serve to strengthen a flagging sense of national identity following the demoralizing lost war (Potter 1996: 75).

The influence of Ficker’s *Sederunt* extended well into the fifties, as evidenced by the faithful performance of Eugen Jochum, conductor of the Bavarian Radio Orchestra.<sup>19</sup> In 1956, even the *Sederunt* of Pro Musica Antiqua (one of the earliest and best-known early music ensembles) conducted by Safford Cape,<sup>20</sup> while rejecting the combination of musical instruments and choir, nevertheless took the speed and dynamic variations from Ficker’s edition. Cape justified his essential proximity to Ficker as follows:

Sous son aspect intellectuel, elle [la musique ancienne] est universelle, et par la même métaphysique, en ce sens qu’elle n’exalte pas une personnalité à la manière du romantisme, mais elle exprime les grands sentiments du cœur humain, l’amour divin ou terrestre, la joie, la douleur sous l’espèce universelle: c’est la joie ou la douleur qui s’exprime, plutôt que *ma* douleur à moi, ou *votre* joie à vous (Gagnepain 1981: 217).

### **Until the 1950s. From Nazism to Communism: Musicology in America.**

After Ficker’s edition of *Sederunt*, there were no further publications of medieval *organa* until the 1940s, when the American Institute of Musicology released its anthologies (the success of which were guaranteed by the emergence of the phenomenon of the *early music revival*). This is not to suggest that Germany was done with medieval studies: rather, as is well known, many German scholars who had been oppressed by the Nazi regime fled the Third Reich and found refuge in America. Many, but not all: Bessler, for example, remained in Germany and supported the regime through a musicology that fostered nationalist sentiment and Germancentrism. With his contribution, the magazine *Deutsche Musikkultur*, which sought to function as a catalyst between

<sup>18</sup> “the musical scientist [...] ought, with the aid of all critical resources, to reconstruct the long-lost music of old in a form approximating that in which it was heard by the contemporaries of the age-old culture.”

<sup>19</sup>The recording of this performance, sometimes transmitted on radio, has never been released.

<sup>20</sup> *Early Polyphony before 1300: École de Notre Dame* (Pro Musica Antiqua, Safford Cape conductor), Archiv Produktion APM 14 068 (1956). Safford Cape, an American who moved to Belgium in his youth, abandoned his career as a composer to devote himself entirely to early music. This move was spurred by the research of Charles Van den Borren, an esteemed musicologist and Class President of the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts de Belgique. With Pro Musica Antiqua, Cape records for the *Anthologie Sonore* series edited by Curt Sachs, and has released various records for Deutsche Grammophon Archiv Produktion. On Safford Cape and the Pro Musica Antiqua, see Gagnepain (1981).

“culture and everyday life in the National Socialist Germany”, was founded (Potter, 1996: 78). Besseler was also the author of a successful work on the history of medieval and renaissance music (Besseler 1936).

Between 1936 and 1940, figures such as Willi Apel, Curt Sachs, Leo Sbrade and Alfred Einstein, as well as outstanding performers including Wanda Landowska and Nadia Boulanger, immigrated to the United States, transferring musicological culture and musical skills. The first great American product of medieval musicology was the seminal *Music in the Middle Ages* (1940) by the New Yorker, Gustave Reese. This compendium of the history of medieval music achieved great success. Reese (1899–1977), secretary of the American Musicological Society since its foundation, became vice president in 1934 and president in 1950. Needless to say, the Society’s interest in medieval music influenced American Musicological predilections until the seventies. Arthur Mendel informs us that:

Reese was an avid record collector, and he possessed virtually everything then available in these fields. I remember the delight with which he introduced me to the *Anthologie sonore...* (Mendel 1977: 360).<sup>21</sup>

Reese’s interest in recorded music probably did not elicit a similar excitement in his European colleagues, who were concerned with a style of research that only marginally considered musical performance. Their work was not intended for the practical realization of musical pieces, but aimed rather to study and document artistic development from the earliest evidence of polyphonic to the present time.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Reese proved to be fully cognizant of the European musicological debates that preceded him: *Music in the Middle Ages* is defined as “a faithful synthesis of nineteenth and twentieth century musicology” (Leech-Wilkinson 2002: 74).<sup>23</sup> And thanks to the recordings that were intensively used by Reese,<sup>24</sup> the study of early music had a means of circumventing the academy: the story of Noah Greenberg, founder of the New York Pro Musica, proves how applied musicology was no longer the prerogative of a group of elite scholars.

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<sup>21</sup> *Anthologie sonore* is a collection of early music recordings by Curt Sachs. The collection has subsequently been digitized and is available at < <http://gallica.bnf.fr> >.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Ludwig (1905: 620): “Der in erster Linie stehende Zweck von Untersuchungen und Publikationen über die mittelalterliche Mehr-stimmigkeit ist kein praktischer, sondern ein wissenschaftlicher.”

<sup>23</sup> “Because it has been a standard work for so long, it is easy to forget that *Music in the Middle Ages*, though magisterially done, is simply a faithful synthesis of early musicology.” Leech-Wilkinson’s derogatory words on Reese’s work, have been used subversively in this paper in order to praise the value of the American musicologist’s contribution.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Van Tassel (1978:99): “He encouraged his students to make music themselves. That, it now seems to me, must have been one reason why he always sought to add new student performances to his collection of recordings amassed for teaching use.”



On the left, Friedrich Ludwig (circa 1920s); on the right, Noah Greenberg (circa 1950s)

Greenberg radically distanced himself from the austerity of the pre-war-European musicologists. For example Ludwig and Aubry, even in the typical severe appearance of their role, epitomized the stereotype of the Old Continent's scholars. Greenberg on the contrary, was a skinny, penniless, communist-militant and a self-taught musician who, in spite of McCarthyism (or perhaps *because* of an explicit opposition to the system), embodied the image of the new American *intelligentsia*. Harold Brown, his partner in music and social struggle, became a *de facto* tireless opponent of the classical tradition. In Brown's opinion, excessively adorned orchestration concealed the music's formal architecture; musical structure being key to his analytical approach. Such was Brown's focus of interest (Gollin 2001: 35–46). Naturally, one can interpret his aversion to the nineteenth-century tradition as the musical equivalent of a political contempt for the middle class and American capitalism: in this way one can understand the passion for early music as one for a repertoire still foreign to a bourgeois audience. Although socially and culturally distant from their European colleagues, Greenberg and Brown made the research hitherto carried out by German musicologists (and made accessible to English speakers by Reese) their own:

Reese's monumental work in the music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has served, and continue to serve, as our basic and trusted guide ... In my own case, when I first came to his publications, I was a mere enthusiast; but it was the extraordinary impact of his work that persuaded me to devote my entire life to the study and performance of this music (Greenberg 1966: 324).

Founded in 1953 by Greenberg and his partners on the grounds of class struggle, the New York Pro Musica<sup>25</sup> aimed to inform the population about a musical culture that would otherwise have remained the prerogative of an illuminated elite. The organization therefore offered workshops and lessons in the various locations they visited during the tour.

In keeping with his political convictions and interests, Greenberg also paid special attention to the popular secular music of the Middle Ages, from which, he claimed, sacred music stemmed. This view had been foreshadowed by Reese in 1940 when he wrote: "There is no clear line of demarcation between sacred music and secular music" (Reese 1940: 201). The thesis, also shared by Cape (Cape 1948: 36),<sup>26</sup> is confirmed by Saul Novak in the CD booklet of *Music of the Medieval Court and Countryside* (1957),<sup>27</sup> which presents a recorded a performance of *Viderunt*, whose marked rhythmicity does not come from the severity of the modal rhythm theory, as was the case in Ficker, but from a direct link made between the sacred repertoire and that of the troubadours and trouveres.<sup>28</sup> Thirty years earlier, Ludwig had made the opposite point, applying the modal rhythm theory of polyphonic *organa* to secular repertoire (Ludwig 1903).<sup>29</sup> The precedence of the *organa* with respect to the *chansons* ennobles the former rather than the latter. Greenberg and Cape, however, reversed that derivation: it is the sacred music that borrowed the rhythm of the secular that is previous, because it is traditional (in some way, the principle was the same to Ficker).

Over time, as their interest veered towards "the folk", New York Pro Musica stopped performing Notre Dame *organa*.<sup>30</sup> Independently of Greenberg, Russell Oberlin turned Notre Dame into a recording product. Oberlin's tenor voice was performed in an unusually high register, a feature that would find a role in the work of some contemporary composers, most notably Benjamin Britten.<sup>31</sup> From the start Greenberg was struck by Oberlin's vocal skills, and introduced him to a repertoire previously unknown to him:

<sup>25</sup> The group's name calls to mind that of the Belgian ensemble conducted by Cape. For more on the two groups and their purposes, see Yri 2006.

<sup>26</sup> "Au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Pérotin incorpore à l'organum liturgique des éléments primesautiers d'origine populaire."

<sup>27</sup> *Music of the Medieval Court and Countryside for the Christmas Season*, (New York Pro Musica, Noah Greenberg dir.) Decca "Gold Label" DL 9400 (1957).

<sup>28</sup> Novak (1959): "It is in the compositions of Leonin that we witness for the first time in liturgical music the organization of time values into patterns clearly establishing the concept of rhythm. The sources of this concept are, however, secular, for it was from the word-born rhythmic modes of the troubadour and trouveres, the courtly poet singers that the rhythmic groupings of the Notre Dame composers evolved."

<sup>29</sup> As is well known, however, Ludwig was never completely convinced about the extension of modal rhythm theory to the repertory of the troubadours. Its real sponsors, Aubry and Beck, attested to the discovery; cfr. Haines 2001.

<sup>30</sup> It is no coincidence that the *Ludus Danielis*, despite being a liturgical drama, was performed as a kind of folklore show; cfr. Yri 2006.

<sup>31</sup> *On this Island* (1937) and *Abraham and Isaac* (1952) are two of Britten's works for contralto.

“Before I met Noah,” Oberlin said the other day, “I didn't even know there was such music” (Mayer 1957: 39).

From 1957 to 1959, Russell Oberlin and Charles Bressler recorded the six volumes of *Music of the Middle Ages*. Their aim was to offer an overview of medieval music from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, infused with didactic purpose. Certainly the impression that may result today from a first hearing of Oberlin's vocality is not easily categorized as *medieval* – assuming that the term “medieval” is even self-explanatory. In the second volume of the collection, *Notre Dame Organa: Leoninus and Perotinus Magister (The Twelfth Century)*,<sup>32</sup> Oberlin's countertenor voice does not suit the “Gothic style” propounded by Ficker. The pieces are therefore deprived of the colourful orchestration; without a male chorus, the high voices, included Oberlin's, are supported by a faint accompaniment in the *tenor* played on *viola*. However, since burgeoning record production had allowed the most diverse styles to flourish, it became necessary to find unusual aesthetic solutions to convey an idea of a Middle Ages that was “other”, that was different to the *sound* the audience of concert society at the time was accustomed to.

The image of a kind of Notre Dame Polyphony that was developing around high voices soon validated Oberlin's experiments: and on this side of the Atlantic, Gilbert Reaney began to favour treble voice choruses for the high parts: “though the current countertenor voices are satisfactory substitutes”. But the market could not do without a variety of timbres:

The presence of voices in all parts does not exclude the use of instruments, particularly in tenor and contratenor voices. Most reasonable here in my opinion are viols or trombones (Reaney 1956: 98).<sup>33</sup>

In the pages of the Oxonian magazine *The Musical Quarterly*, Hans Tischler praised Reaney's performance, writing that:

the record surpasses the half dozen or more available recordings of *organa* by a good margin in vitality of sound and performance (Tischler 1957: 570).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Notre Dame Organa. Leoninus and Perotinus Magister. The Twelfth Century* (Russell Oberlin), Esoteric Sound Studios EA/EAS-0021 (1958).

<sup>33</sup> Here is the full text: “It is customary to consider the tenors of Notre Dame *organa* as vocal, if support by instruments is usually given in practice, and one may admit the same in the thirteenth century motet, since the hypothesis of an instrumental tenor is undoubtedly based on the absence of text. My own opinion is that it would be well to use voices in tenor and contratenor in the fourteenth century motet as well as in triplum and motetus. The less complex lower parts could take three or four voices better than triplum and motetus, which to my mind need soloists, or two voices apiece at most. Boys' voices are to be preferred to womens' in parts that lie too high for tenors, though the now cultivated countertenor voice is a very satisfactory substitute. Where sopranos are employed, the smooth unvarying tone suited to the late medieval motet should be preserved. The presence of voices in all parts does not exclude the use of instruments, particularly in tenor and contratenor voices. Most reasonable here in my opinion are viols or trombones, with the organ binding all parts together, either literally or with some elaboration of the upper parts.”

<sup>34</sup> “the record surpasses the half dozen or more available recordings of *organa* by a good margin in vitality of sound and performance and in faithfulness to the sweep and grandeur of the original.”

### The 1960s. Perotinus in the age of the Beatles.

At the 1954 *Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts*, Peter Pears, tenor and Britten's life partner, performed Perotinus' *conductus Beata viscera* in a monodic interpretation. Referring to the long melismas sang by Quint in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, Lord Harewood observed that Quint's voice

[...] might never have been put in quite these musical terms if the composer had not heard Peter Pears, the original Quint, singing unaccompanied Perotin ... in Aldeburgh Church a year or so earlier (Kobbè 1976 [1954], 1494).

The fact that Britten used the Perotinus as performed by Pears as a model for the singing style of the disturbing specter Quint, takes us back to the "Gothic" imaginary of Notre Dame music that prevailed in the sphere of English classical music in the fifties (actually, we find in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* an influence on the English eighteenth century ghost novel): austere, dark and mysterious, the thirteenth century of Perotinus made its way into the gloomy Gothic cathedral, rather than into the more authentic Romanesque atmosphere of exuberance, vitality and earthly materiality.

In 1960, the part of Oberon in the premiere of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (with his own and Peter Pears' libretto) was given to the countertenor Alfred Deller who, in 1948, founded the Deller Consort to perform early music. Simultaneously to the staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Deller recorded and released Machaut's Mass and two Notre Dame *organa*, *Viderunt* and *Sederunt*.<sup>35</sup> In 1961 Oberlin replaced Deller in the role of Oberon, and at the Aldeburgh Festival it was Pears himself who sang Perotinus again, this time the *Viderunt*. Unfortunately we have no record of Pears' performance other than the words of Lord Harewood, but the chronological coincidence and the working relationship with Britten, makes the British composer a sort of *trait d'union* between the early music experiments that were produced in the two countries "divided by a common language."

Alfred Deller chose to amalgamate voices with instruments of shimmering timbres and thereby continued the trend found in Greenberg's *Pro Musica*: the liturgical repertoire, enriched by

<sup>35</sup> *Music at Notre Dame 1200–1375 Guillaume de Machaut "Notre Dame mass" & works of Perotin* (The Deller Consort & Renaissance Chamber Ensemble), Vanguard "The Bach Guild" BG-622 (1961).



the instruments and the clear countertenor voices, became more jovial, less austere than the *a cappella* proposed by Safford Cape a few years earlier. The same impression seems to emerge from the interpretation of David Munrow's Early Music Consort of London that, even if less rich in instrumentation, does not lack vivacity:<sup>36</sup>

What is inarguable is the freshness and excitement that Munrow brought to what otherwise have been a heavy-handed recital of what was, at the time, an obscure repertoire (Anderson 2003: 963).

In the 1960s the Notre Dame color changes in order to accommodate market requirements, and because of the desire to leave the war behind, but in no way because of the novelties introduced by musicological research. Actually, scholars' opinions lose any value as a directive – or as an alibi of sorts; a status it had enjoyed until Greenberg. The peremptory position assumed by Bowles in 1957 for which the only instrument tolerated in sacred music would probably have been the organ, is rejected (Bowles 1957). From that moment on, the commercial success of early music came to depend on the extravagance of the accompaniments, whose exotic timbre attracted the public, as much to the purchase of LPs as to the *live* performance of early music ensembles. The market phenomenon led artists to a progressive spectacularization of performance which in some respect was similar to that of commercial music.<sup>37</sup>

The exoticism of medieval imaginary as entertainment, was produced in the 60s in the United States and Great Britain and was taken up, because of the success that it triggered, by the emerging pop scene that found its heroes in the Beatles, the Beach Boys, Simon & Garfunkel, the Jamies, and – later in the early 70s – by the musicians of progressive scene: Genesis, Jethro Tull, Gentle Giant, Gong, Yes, Third Ear Band and Emerson, Lake & Palmer. Harpsichords, recorders, choral sections in imitative style populate the tracks on *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (Simon & Garfunkel, Columbia, 1966), *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Beatles, Parlophone, 1967), *From Genesis to Revelation* (Genesis, Decca, 1969), *Third Ear Band* (Third Ear Band, Bgo 1970), *Aqualung* (Jethro Tull, Chrysalis, 1971) and *Acquiring The Taste* (Gentle Giant, Vertigo, 1971). The *prog rock* and *folk rock* groups of the early 70s, in particular, contributed to the construction of a fantastic Middle Ages, which Peter Gabriel and Ian Anderson ("goblins" or "minstrels" nicknames)

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<sup>36</sup> *Music of the Gothic Era* (Early Music Consort of London, David Munrow), DG Archiv 415 292 (1976).

<sup>37</sup> The value of early music performance is still crucial in 1995, when, as Kreuziger-Herr pointed out in 1998, in the church of San Michele in Hamburg the Hilliard Ensemble had a jam session with saxophonist Jan Gabarek on tunes of medieval sacred music, wearing period costume and dispersed all over the church. The Hilliard Ensemble and Jan Gabarek continue to tour together.

epitomized.<sup>38</sup> In Italy, the trend was embraced by several songwriters, including Fabrizio De Andrè and Angelo Branduardi, whose attention to popular culture was combined with the imagery of medieval troubadours and Minnesänger. In the 90s Branduardi released a series of discs with an eloquent title – *Futuro antico* (Promenade 1996) – whose pieces are rearrangements of well-known medieval songs.

What happened at the end of the 70s was probably a reaction to this spectacularization of the Middle Ages; an intolerable counterfeiting for the purist idolaters of history and those obeisant to authenticity. The claims of Christopher Page – Gothic Voices’ conductor since 1982 and Professor of Philology at the University of Cambridge – against music *interpreted* through the use of instruments are consistent with this reaction. According to him, such a practice shows the “performers’ failure of confidence in the variety and quality of the music they are performing” (Page 1993: 460). That is to say, the inability to deal with a vocality that requires a specific education. The reference point, here, is the education that the universities of Cambridge and Oxford were offering to their students, helping to perpetuate an unprecedented vocal tradition. The Tallis Scholars, the Hilliard Ensemble, the Gothic Voices and the King's Singers are telling examples of this trend.

Abandoning the individualistic culture of self-expression that informs the performances of the 60s and that had determined until then the practice of instrumental improvisation, the purity and precision of the *Oxbridge*<sup>39</sup> style eschews the expressivity of modern performance, with the aim to restore

*l'ethos della musica mensurabilis, arte basata sulla scrupolosa calibrazione delle durate e degli intervalli, e che veniva costantemente apprezzata dai suoi devoti per l'innata avversione all'irregolarità e al capriccio.*  
(Sherman 2002: 99)

To describe the British singers’ a cappella style, Page adopts the term *clanness* (or *cleannes*) from a fourteenth century poet: “clanness is the quality of something that is pure (like a pearl) or of fine and precise workmanship (like an elaborate goblet).” (Page 1993: 466). The reference to the concept of purity is combined with the spiritual purpose pursued by the proper handling of the voices.<sup>40</sup> The insistence on the national character of this style and the (philological?) respect for a

<sup>38</sup> On the relationship between *early music* and *popular music*, see Upton (2012).

<sup>39</sup> This term refers to the rigorous and expressionless style developed in the singing schools of the chapels and the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge.

<sup>40</sup> Sherman (2002: 102): “alcuni teorici, come Girolamo da Moravia, insistono sulla completa fusione delle voci, e alcuni corpi di regole per la

music essentially pure and rigorous, draws to a close the circle of this historical excursus at its point of departure. In fact, it makes sense to associate this position – in spite of renewed terminology and a very different historical context – with the opinion of the Palestrinian *côté* in early twentieth century Germany. Therefore, the Perotin performed by Hilliard found in the American minimalist “structuralism” a *contemporary* dress that belies the immortal tendency of disemboding music: the timing is lengthened, the vocal sounds are clean, the bodies do not sweat, the voices blend, losing the perception of a physical performance.<sup>41</sup> Ludwig’s desires have been fulfilled.

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conduzione della vita religiosa enfatizzano la natura essenzialmente anti-individualistica di un’ideale esecuzione di canto piano: ‘fate in modo che una voce sia difficilmente distinguibile da un’altra’. Inutile dire che tutte queste indicazioni di comportamento devono essere lette con attenzione, poiché i loro fini sono spirituali e non estetici [...] il ‘corretto stile del canto d’insieme’ [è] una maniera di cantare essenzialmente non solistica che valorizza la fusione e la compattezza delle voci, maturata attraverso la quotidiana disciplina nella preparazione della musica per il servizio liturgico. *L’Inghilterra è un paese in cui i cantanti sono ancora preparati attraverso una disciplina di questo tipo.*” [italics mine]

<sup>41</sup> On several occasions, Page praises the ability of British singers to sight read, which allows them to handle the most complex polyphony with ease.

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**Livio Giuliano** si è laureato in Filosofia all'Università degli Studi di Milano e ha frequentato i corsi di Electronic Music Production alla NABA (Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Milano). Si interessa ai fenomeni musicali e alle arti visive nella produzione contemporanea, nonché alla musica e al pensiero medioevale. Sta conseguendo la laurea magistrale in Musicologia presso l'Università degli Studi di Milano.

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**Cita recomendada**

Giuliano, Livio. 2014. "Singing the Middle Ages: Between Scholars and Trotskyists". *TRANS-Revista Transcultural de Música/Transcultural Music Review* 18 [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/aa]



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