

## **Conference Report: The Musical Humanism of the Renaissance and its Legacy**

The stated aim of this conference—hosted by the University of Warwick in collaboration with the RMA Music and Philosophy Study Group in Venice on 2-4 June 2016—was to examine how ‘Renaissance musical humanists extended the accessibility of classical literature on music, reshaped the ways in which this literature was understood, and, ultimately, radically transformed classical conceptions of the power of music’. Given this brief, it was not surprising that conference organiser Jacomien Prins (Warwick) was able to assemble a highly interdisciplinary program of nearly thirty papers delivered by musicologists, art and cultural historians, philosophers, classicists, and literature scholars.

Such interdisciplinarity is not too difficult to come by in early music studies. In the penultimate paper, Tomas McAuley (Cambridge) compared the concept of ‘relational musicology’—an interdisciplinary approach to musicology that is interested in the social relations necessary for the production of music—to a ‘pre-disciplinary’ orientation towards the study of music in the Renaissance. McAuley observed that, though the term may be new, many early music specialists have long been practicing relational musicology and, by extension, following in the footsteps of their Renaissance forebears.

A (non-exhaustive) sampling of presentations suffices to illustrate McAuley’s claim. Michael Allen (UCLA) and Tim Shepherd (Sheffield) gave papers on musical iconography and myth. Shepherd’s study of Orphic iconography ca. 1500 as an expression of music’s power to influence the passions found a bookend in Katherine Butler’s (Oxford) discussion of seventeenth-century Orpheus burlesques, which she read as a barometer of the waning belief in music’s miraculous effects. Wendy Heller (Princeton) considered the operatic afterlife of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the seicento through Anguillara’s sixteenth-century edition.

A number of papers dealt with education. Through archival records and artistic evidence, Bláithín Hurley (Warwick) examined attitudes toward, and the practice of learning and performing music in Venice. Giovanni Zanovello (Indiana) focused on musical education in Florentine religious institutions.

Gender was the central concern for Sigrid Harris (University of Queensland), who examined Renaissance anxieties about the corrupting effects of the female voice. Samantha Bassler (Westminster Choir College) overlaid gender with disability studies and presented on the feminising effect of madness and song in Shakespearean plays. ‘Madness’ returned in Andrea Korenjak’s (Austrian Academy of Sciences) contribution, wherein she tackled the ‘legacy’ part of the conference title and explored the humanistic principles behind musical-therapeutic programmes in nineteenth-century Viennese sanatoria.

Numerous papers dealt with musical esotericism. Frans de Haas (Leiden) explicated the roots of ancient thoughts in Agrippa. Prins examined the disagreements between Cardano and Scaliger in areas such as the senses and the impact of music on the soul. Teresa Rodriguez (Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, UNAM) explored the texture of Ficino’s thoughts on divine inspiration. Some looked beyond Greco-Roman sources of influence; Ovanes Akopyan

(Warwick) and Hanna Gentili (Warburg) both touched on the Jewish thought evident in Zorzi and Ficino respectively. To this category, we can add Charles Burnett's (Warburg) contribution on the lute in the Arabic-Islamic musical theory.

Lastly, music's relationship to rhetoric and language was also a recurring topic, taken up by Isaac Louth (Princeton), who discussed the theme in Bacon's *Sylva sylvarum*; Daniel Rogers (Indiana), who revisited the concept of *imitatio* in composition; and Giuseppe Gerbino (Columbia), who analysed Platonic and Aristotelian confluences behind the different sonic pleasures derived from music and words according to Tomitano.

Musical rhetoric was brought to life by harpsichordist Catalina Vicens (Leiden/Orpheus Institute) in two excellent lunchtime concerts. She was joined by singer-harpist Patrizia Bovi (Leiden/Orpheus) in the second concert, which featured music of courtesans and other risqué songs. Videos of the performances have generously been made available online to the public on the official conference website (<http://bit.ly/296CtZI>).

As for 'musical humanism', the theme and title of the conference itself—a roundtable aimed to evaluate the heuristic value of existing scholarship on the subject. The session was prefaced by Stefano Mengozzi's (University of Michigan) paper earlier in the day, which distinguished between religious and classical authorities in the humanistic writings of Tinctoris. The roundtable itself was introduced by Penelope Gouk (Manchester), whose presentations mapped out the contributions of her mentor DP Walker to the study of musical humanism and rehearsed Tomlinson's 2006 typology of research directions on the topic.

In the roundtable discussion (and in the papers delivered throughout the conference), the plasticity of the concept 'humanism' itself was evident. It encompassed, most/too narrowly, the recovery of ancient writings on rhetoric; something like a methodology of scholarship based on classical writing; and a set of commonly shared precepts (such as universal harmony). Some participants were weary of this very plasticity—'humanism' has even been adopted by some sub-fields in musicology as a contrast against 'not-human-ism'—and questioned the value of the term; would 'classicising,' for example, not be more precise and expedient? Other questions raised: To what extent was humanism an elite, top-down phenomenon? How many people on the streets partook of its fruits? Can we productively conceive of a second-hand humanism, where the rediscovered classical texts were disseminated and experienced as inter-text in commentaries? Did this engender a 'colloquial humanism'?

These remain questions in search of answers. If a volume of proceedings is to be produced, I suspect some clarity may emerge among its contents. While not every paper critically examined 'humanism' head-on, they do elliptically touch upon some aspect of the idea. Such diffusion, though, points to the strength and source of success of the conference: the abundance of interconnections between all the papers will inevitably foster a cross-pollination of ideas and advance our understanding of Renaissance musical thought.

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