Introduction

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'O sing unto the Lord a new song' is the text introduced by the initial on the cover of *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music*. But our two Austin canons pictured in the initial stand with their mouths resolutely closed. Furthermore, it is difficult to square the elaborate ligatures on the roll before which the two Augustinians stand with any sort of psalmody; at the very least the music looks more like a melisma from a gradual, alleluia or responsory; the more optimistic modern gaze might even see the tenor of a polyphonic work there. And while the cleric on the right is pointing to the notation on the roll, there is very little doubt that the one on the left is indicating solmization syllables on his hand (although never described by Guido d'Arezzo, this practice was known throughout the Middle Ages as the Guidonian Hand). In many ways, then, the initial that adorns this book addresses issues raised by its contents: monophony and polyphony, psalmody and composed chant, written and unwritten, codex and *rotulus*, musical literacy, cheironomy, silence and sound.

The component parts of our 'Cantate' initial are very much the concerns of the contributors to *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music*. We are interested, of course, in following the path of music history from the middle of the first millennium to around 1400, but we are also interested in the ways in which plainsong and polyphony interact: there is always the risk in any book of this sort of treating monophony – liturgical, sacred and vernacular – as something that stopped as soon as someone sang a fifth above a fundamental, and our accounts, for example, of the role of plainsong in trecento Italy or in Parisian organum of the twelfth century, or the weight given to Machaut's monophonic songs will make clear our reluctance to fall prey to this sort of reasoning. The friction between theory and practice – perfectly dramatized by our two Austin canons – lies at the heart of much of the volume, and our chapters on liturgy and institution take us right to the centre of the question of when and when not music was composed, performed and consumed.

The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music is a totally different proposition to almost every other volume in the Cambridge Companions series. Whereas *The Cambridge Companion to Stainer* or *The Cambridge Companion to the Ocarina*, when they are written, will have their scope relatively straightforwardly defined by their subject matter, our attempt to assemble

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a companion to a body of music that spans the best part of a millennium, and most of what is now considered Europe, is an exercise fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. So while *The Cambridge Companion to Mozart* and *The Cambridge Companion to Rossini* treat the life, works and contexts of their respective subjects in clearly different ways, there is little doubt as to how many concert arias the former wrote or how long the latter spent in Naples. Furthermore, in companions with such clearly defined limits, the scope for the examination and analysis of, say, Mozart's *Requiem* or Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* is broad; by contrast, the luxury of more than a handful of exemplary analyses to support general points would have made *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music* significantly longer than it already is. We focus, then, on repertories and their contexts rather than on groups of works defined by composer.

'Composer' is of course a highly contested term. In a post-Romantic age that professionalizes the composer in a way largely unknown before the past two hundred years, it is helpful to return to the idea of composition as something that went hand in hand with singing, instruction and theorizing. In particular, coming back to the idea of composition as the placing together – as its etymology (*componere*) suggests – gives a context to the common medieval practices of reworking text and music sometimes over a period of centuries. This is no less a process of composition than the one portrayed in the images of Beethoven composing the 'Pastoral' Symphony or of Haydn composing in his best clothes. Time and time again in the pages that follow, the question of composition and authorship will surface in very different ways, and our understanding and enjoyment of medieval music will be impoverished if reworking and embellishment are treated as something on a lower plane than what we understand today as 'composition'. There is a sense then that the *canticum novum* sung by our Austin Canons might allude to almost any part of the music of the Middle Ages: all could be considered old, and all could also be counted as new.

What are the Middle Ages, and what should a *Companion to Medieval Music* include? Both beginnings and endings are severely problematic, to say nothing of the general question of periodization. One could speculate on what the successor to this volume might be called: *The Cambridge Companion to Music of the Early Modern Period* – in acknowledgement of the unease that the terms Renaissance and Reformation have generated? An answer to this question might assist with finding an end point for our study. But at the beginning of the period treated by this volume, the problem can be articulated through a number of questions: how does the formulation 'late antiquity' play into the history of music? Is there a place for the concept of the Dark Ages? What criteria might one use for answering such questions? Yet at the end of the period, there are almost more answers than questions:

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the fall of Constantinople (1453), the end of the Wars of the Roses (1485), the beginnings of the colonization of America (1492) or the beginnings of the Reformation (1517). But as these examples show, decisions about periodization are largely formed along disciplinary lines: different fields of study prefer different solutions (European history, English history, the history of colonization, and so on). And if such divisions are marked by events that are deemed of significance in individual subject areas, it might seem, there should be little difficulty in doing the same for music, although even here there are significant differences even between different areas of study: Du Fay seems fairly placed in the 'Renaissance' whereas arguments are made for considering Dunstaple 'medieval', although Reese's *Music in the Middle Ages* was unique in including the composer. Looking further afield – and this is the case in Robert Curry's chapter on medieval music east of the Rhine – the points of change may be even more marked. It of course goes without saying that Lawrence Earp's chapter on the modern reception of medieval music largely begins where the rest of the book leaves off.

It is easy to subject the question of periodization to endless interrogation and to overlook the equally important issues of geography and topography. In this regard, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music* is simultaneously conservative and path-breaking: conservative in its conventional distinction – made by the choices of chapter and author in Part II – between England, Italy, the Iberian peninsula and Eastern Europe, but path-breaking in the synoptic view of the Middle Ages provided by Christopher Page, which, among other things, looks back to third-century Carthage as the origins of the gradual, in the context of what he calls 'circuits of communication'. There is an important counterpoint in the volume between the disciplining of musical repertories that are given in Part II and an account of modes of musical transmission found in Page's chapter.

Needless to say, such an organization – regional studies in Part II and a chronological account of musical repertories in Part I – opens up the unattractive prospect of a *Hauptcorpus* identified with French mainstream repertories in Part I and subsidiary *corpora* in Part II, coupled to the implication that the French music that forms the basis of the chapters in Part I somehow represents a centre to which the music discussed in Part II is a periphery. Such a view is of course as pernicious as the analogous one that holds Austro-German music of later periods a centre with other repertories as 'national' – as if there were little or no national importance to Austro-German music or that non-Austro-German repertories had no role to play east of the Rhine. Page's chapter goes a long way towards blurring the boundaries between centre and periphery, but it would be a wilfully blind

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editor who denied that any volume such as this is to a degree a prisoner of its disciplinary and scholarly past.

And in other ways, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music* differs from previous studies in its attempts to control the music of the Middle Ages. While questions of performance, instrumental music and iconography are treated in those chapters where they belong, rather than being selected for special attention, Part III deploys the knowledge gained from Parts I and II to give a synoptic view on such subjects as the liturgy, institutions, poetry, composition, manuscripts and music theory. Thus, some repertories will appear both in Part III and in either Part I or II. This bifocal view enables the reader constantly to balance a view of the subject based both on repertories and on musical cultures.

There is always an irony about writing about music: the one thing that characterizes music – its sonic quality, whether in modern recorded sound or *musica instrumentalis* – is absent, and the closed mouths of the Austin canons in our 'Cantate' initial bear eloquent testimony here. There is a further irony in writing about medieval music in that almost the only witnesses that come down to us are essentially visual, whether in terms of the manuscripts that preserve musical repertories or those that record theoretical and other writings about music (again our initial is emblematic). And while this irony has only recently been acknowledged in literary studies in the wake of the so-called New Philology, in music the importance of the visual – the manuscript evidence – has always been paramount. Nowhere is this more clear than in the dozens of published facsimiles of medieval music manuscripts that grace library shelves, both public and private. Hardly surprisingly, then, contributors have made regular reference to the particular wealth of visual material also available to readers of *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music*. Useful collections of facsimiles are also in print (all listed in the bibliography), and may well be viewed as addenda to this volume. Particularly useful are Cullin's *L'image musique*, Besseler's *Schriftbild der mehrstimmigen Musik*, Bell's *Music in Medieval Manuscripts*, and, more important perhaps, the online *Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music* (www.diamm.ac.uk/index.html) where some of the material discussed in this volume is presented in high-quality colour images. Such initiatives are certain to continue with individual libraries presenting treasures of their own in an open-access digital format; major sources from St Gall and Montpellier have been made available during the final stages of work on this project, and more will certainly have emerged by the time of the book's publication.

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