

*Instruments, Ensembles, and Repertory, 1300–1600: Essays in Honour of Keith Polk.* Timothy J. McGee and Stewart Carter, eds.

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That so stellar a team of scholars collaborated on this book underlines the significance of Keith Polk's contributions to our knowledge of Western music in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, especially in the field of instrumental music of German-speaking areas and of

the Low Countries. Contributors here praise and build upon Polk's work as a meticulous researcher, using both written and pictorial sources, and as an instrumentalist who seeks to highlight — as well as promote in modern performance — this era's unwritten, improvisatory performance traditions.

Essays in part 1 shed new light on the history of four groups of instruments: trumpets, fiddles, lutes, and organs. Drawing largely upon pictorial evidence, Stewart Carter argues persuasively for the existence of "U-slide trumpets" (or "short-U-slide trombones"), which, though they predated trombones, coexisted with them for as much as a century. Timothy J. McGee analyzes how the several tunings given by medieval theorists for five-string fiddles point to two types of this instrument, each suited to its own musical genres and performing styles: one type with all strings placed above the fingerboard ("on-board"), and a second with several strings extending off to the side, independent of the fingerboard ("off-board"). The latter type was used to accompany improvised poetic recitations, prefiguring the role of the Renaissance seven-string *lira da braccio*, which he identifies as a conflation of both types of medieval fiddles. In the last two chapters of this section, H. Colin Slim brings together for consideration a family of fourteen paintings of women lutenists (on the theme of *vanitas*), dating from the early sixteenth century; and Andrew Kirkman traces the history of organs in one church in France, from 1391 to 1597, in documents that reveal physical features as well as political and aesthetic factors in these instruments' commissioning, building, repositioning, augmenting, replacing, and funding.

Essays in part 2 bring fresh perspectives about roles and performance practices of instrumental ensembles. Two authors describe the situations in three medieval European cities, while the last two essayists witness to reviving, in modern times, principles of fifteenth-century ensemble improvisation. Exploring archives to discern activities of the city band (*stadsspeellieden*) in Antwerp, Kristine K. Forney finds that instrumental ensembles were patronized primarily by lay organizations — confraternities — which hired them for the various devotional services they held in churches on nightly, weekly, and yearly bases. Religious establishments also had ceremonial occasions to which instrumentalists added their sonorities, notably in elaborate festival processions. Gretchen Peters contrasts the situation in Antwerp, where rituals and ceremonies reinforced that city's independence and the civic identity of its citizens, to that which obtained in Tours and Orléans, in France, for which these types of events reinforced the French monarchy and the allegiance to it by these cities' citizens.

Adam Gilbert and Russ Duffin take on the admirable task of providing a "how-to-do-it" of fifteenth-century ensemble improvisation. I wish that the two essays had been interchanged in the book, so we would read first the invaluable historical evidence provided by Russ Duffin — from surviving written music and coeval theoretical discussions of principles of polyphonic improvisation — along with his creative musical arrangements based on this evidence, and then benefit from Adam Gilbert's conceptualization and use of "reverse engineering," an approach from other fields that he applies to musical research. Both authors base their essays on firsthand experience in, first, generating modern

extempore performances of fifteenth-century polyphonic improvisations on a number of extant tunes historically used for this purpose and, second, preparing editions of ensemble music in this style, for modern performance. So doing, Gilbert and Duffin augment responsibly the small repertory of fifteenth-century instrumental music available to us.

Surviving repertory is the emphasis in part 3. Frank A. D'Accone parses accounts of vocal and instrumental contributions to a pivotal political event (the grand entrance of Archbishop Antonio Altoviti into Florence in 1557); Louise Litterick brings informed judgment to a controversy about performance intentions, probable date, and authorship of the chanson *En l'ombre*, among whose several attributions is Josquin des Prés (spoiler alert: vocal, 1480s, Josquin); David Fallows solves the problem with *Gentil madonna* by Bedyngham (that is, of the two voices added later, one replaced the original bass part, while the other was likely meant for an instrument, probably a cornetto); and from *Miserere mei Deus* by Josquin, Joshua Rifkin offers further evidence that *musica ficta* inflections were not always used for internal cadences.

In summary, this is an excellent resource for scholars, performers, and aficionados of music in the European late medieval and Renaissance eras.

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