

3 The Renaissance

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In memory of Frank Dobbins (1943–2012)

Introduction

In most surveys of Renaissance music of the past fifty years, the guiding narrative thread is one of transition from one dominant aesthetic paradigm to another, from the ‘Gothic’ north, centred on the Low Countries, to the humanist-inspired, properly ‘Renaissance’ south, centred on Italy. Within this narrative the notion of a distinctly French music assumes a subordinate position. This is a paradoxical situation, since while French remained the international courtly language for most of the Renaissance period, the music to which its poetic forms were set enjoyed a wider international currency than that of any other vernacular: thus pieces like *De tous biens plaine*, *J’ay pris amours*, *Mille regretz*, *Jouissance vous donneray*, *Doulce mémoire*, *Susanne un jour* and many others were copied and known by name throughout Europe. Before the middle of the sixteenth century, very few songs in other languages could boast a comparable vogue. To complicate matters further, the composers of these international ‘hits’ were by no means all native francophones, and of those who were, many were born in territories outside the direct control of the French crown. Thus defining French music in this period is no easy matter. During the early sixteenth century, however, the situation becomes somewhat clearer. After 1500 the classically francophone *formes fixes*, inherited from the medieval period, were on the wane throughout Europe; meanwhile French composers showed a marked predilection for declamatory clarity that surpassed their former interest in more intrinsically musical priorities. A further paradox was that this relative loss of international currency saw the rise of poetic and musical forms and idioms that came to be seen by outsiders as specifically French (as shown in the Italian term *canzona alla francese* and its cognates, which, ironically, designate an instrumental piece opening with dactylic rhythmic patterns and following closely the clear sectional structure of a song

I wish to record my debt to Frank Dobbins, first, in the formulation of certain passages of this chapter, which helped avert some omissions and encouraged me further to elaborate some of its themes; and second, his friendly and timely support at several significant junctures of our professional relationship. May the dedication of this chapter to his memory stand as a modest but fitting tribute, concerning as it does the time and place that were closest to his scholarly career and, I think, his sensibility as a person.

model). This brand of 'Parisian' chanson was thus imitated by composers working and publishing far from Paris, such as Nicolas Gombert and Thomas Créquillon at the peripatetic imperial chapel of Charles V, Orlande de Lassus in Munich and Philippe de Monte in Prague. In what follows it will be useful to keep in mind the distinction between 'music in France' and 'music setting French texts', while remembering that such a distinction would have had little pertinence at the time.¹

The period 1460–1600 saw the restoration and growth of central French power on the European political and economic stage following the conclusion of the Hundred Years War, despite the lengthy struggle between King Louis XI (r. 1461–83) and his Burgundian cousin Duke Charles the Bold (r. 1467–77). The international conflicts centred on Italy, which began under Charles VIII (r. 1483–98), were not fully resolved until the 1550s. But they prevented neither French singers and their music from dominating the chapels and chambers of royal, princely and ecclesiastical courts, nor the dissemination of their works in print and manuscripts throughout Europe. Political events and the reformation of religious thought and ceremony also had important consequences for the arts and music. The individual and congregational interpretation of the scriptures, encouraged by Luther and followed by Calvin, led to a profusion of simpler monophonic and homophonic settings of biblical psalms (translated by Clément Marot and Théodore de Beze), which were widely printed and copied for the bourgeoisie and *menu peuple* (common people) during the 1540s. The bloody Wars of Religion, which from the mid-century decade embroiled the realm in civil conflict, took their toll on all levels of French society, including princes and even kings. The thousands of Huguenots massacred on St Bartholomew's Day (1572) and its aftermath included at least one composer, Claude Goudimel, who had devoted most of his considerable skills to setting the new French psalms. A measure of political and religious stability returned with the advent to the throne of Henri IV in 1589. The tradition of strong, centralising royal power begun under Louis XI and reinforced by François I (who moved the previously itinerant court from the castles of the Loire valley to the palace of the Louvre) was thus resumed with increased vigour, and the position of Paris as the seat of that power definitively established.

The musical landscape: church and court

The key role of the French royal court within musical life is undeniable. Its prestige may be gauged from the calibre of the singer-composers it attracted, especially from 1454, when Johannes Ockeghem (c. 1425–97)

was appointed head of the Chapelle Royale. Ockeghem merits pride of place not only chronologically, for he was clearly an outstanding figure: apart from his musical excellence as both singer and composer, he was evidently an impressive administrator and valued royal advisor. His position as treasurer of the abbey of Saint-Martin of Tours (whose titular, hereditary abbot was none other than the king himself) made him probably the most powerful French musician before Lully. His long tenure as *premier chappelain* ushered in a long period of sustained musical excellence and prestige at the French court. All the same, the Chapelle Royale is perhaps best understood as part of a complex network of musical establishments throughout the realm. Charles VII and his successors preferred the Loire valley to their fractious capital, and throughout the Italian wars, Lyons was a more convenient base of operations, with the court in permanent residence there between 1499 and 1503. But wherever it was located, the court exerted a direct influence on the surrounding area. During its period of residence in Tours, connections existed with neighbouring ecclesiastical institutions in Tours itself, but also at Bourges and Poitiers. Thus in the early 1460s, Antoine Busnoys (c. 1430–92) was certainly active within the court's orbit. Later, during the Parisian period beginning with François I (r. 1515–47), links with the neighbouring Sainte-Chapelle were particularly close, owing no doubt in part to its own royal pedigree.² These links took the form of a more or less regular exchange of personnel between the two institutions, so that Claudin de Sermisy (c. 1490–1562) and Pierre Certon (d. 1572), for example, were attached to both. By contrast, Notre-Dame's relations with the crown remained uneasy, and the more august ecclesiastical institutions were often similarly jealous of their prerogatives. Recent research has uncovered much unsuspected information on the activities of regional collegiate institutions.³ There is scarcely a town of any importance that cannot boast of the presence, however fleeting, of a major musical figure. Most of Janequin's long career, for example, was spent *en province*, notably at Angers and Bordeaux; by the time official royal preferment came his way, over half of his extant output had been published.

With a few significant exceptions, throughout the fifteenth century the singer-chaplains of the Chapelle Royale tended to be French or francophone, and their number (little over a dozen singers and an organist) remained comparatively stable. During Charles VIII's reign their number included Alexander Agricola (b. 1456?; d. 1506) and Loÿset Compère (c. 1445–1518), as well as Ockeghem. Under his successor Louis XII (r. 1498–1515) there was considerable expansion: his consort, Anne de Bretagne (d. 1514), established a chapel of her own, equal to the king's in size and excellence. The membership of their combined chapels included Compère, Antoine Brumel (b. c. 1460; d. 1512–13?),

Antoine de Févin (b. c. 1470; d. 1511–12), Johannes Ghiselin (*fl.* 1491–1507), Jean Mouton (b. c. 1459; d. 1522) and Dionisius Prioris (*fl.* c. 1485–1512),⁴ and later the young Sermisy. This period was surely one of the highpoints of the chapel's history. The trend throughout the sixteenth century was for increased formalisation and specialisation. The long reign of François I marked a number of significant innovations. By 1526 at the latest, the chapel was placed under the control of a high-ranking cleric, although his direct subordinates (*sous-maîtres*) continued to be singers and composers; from that date, the singing of plainchant and polyphony was entrusted to different ensembles (the former being by a considerable margin the larger of the two), while certain musicians were specifically named as composers or even scribes. A smaller group of singers and instrumentalists was attached to the king's household or chamber, which during François's reign was established as distinct from the chapel. In some cases the association appears to have been merely formal or honorary (as may have been the case with Janequin). Although François's personal interest in music may not have matched his demonstrable enthusiasm for the other arts, philosophy and sciences,⁵ he clearly appreciated its value within courtly life, ceremonial ritual and diplomacy. Some of the later Valois were probably more enthusiastic: François's successor, Henri II, is reported to have composed, and both he and his son Charles IX (r. 1560–74) were known to join in singing with their choirs. Charles IX tried unsuccessfully to coax the most celebrated composer of the day, Orlande de Lassus (c. 1532–94), to join his service. His younger brothers, Henri III (r. 1574–89) and François, duc d'Alençon (d. 1584), carried on this lavish musical patronage. In the closing years of the century the chapel was further expanded, the leading composer being Eustache Du Caurroy (1549–1609), whose Requiem was used for the obsequies of Henri IV, Louis XIII and Louis XIV. Baptised in the Protestant faith and a pragmatic convert to Catholicism, Henri IV (r. 1589–1610) was content to leave the structure of the Chapelle Royale unchanged, but his interest in music is attested by the quality of his *musiciens de chambre*, who included the lutenist Charles Tessier and the singer Pierre Guéron.

Throughout our period, the provision of instrumental music at court had been similarly expanded and formalised. In contrast to the singers of the chapel, these musicians included a high proportion of foreigners, particularly Italians recruited from the time of the wars of Charles VIII and Louis XII. The distinction between the musicians' different functions becomes explicit under François I, who established a military band (*écurie*) consisting of loud instruments, while several lutenists (including Albert de Rippe) were paid as servants in the king's household as *musiciens de chambre*. As queen and later regent, Catherine de Médicis (d. 1589) shared her adoptive family's enthusiasm for sacred music, but inclined also towards

secular entertainments of the sort she had known in her native Florence, particularly dance. A well-documented occasion was the visit of the Polish ambassadors in 1573, which saw the staging at court of one of the first ballets, followed in 1581 by the *Balet comique de la royne*, with choreography by the Italian-born violinist Balthasar de Beaujoyeux (or Beaujoyeulx) and music in the form of *écits*, *airs*, choruses and dances by Girard de Beaulieu and Jacques Salmon. It was most likely at Catherine's behest that a set of violins (including, that is, all the instruments of the violin family) was sent from Italy to France. The Valois court also imported Italian musicians in great number to provide the music at secular entertainments. Their standing was beginning to change: for the most part, their education continued to differ markedly from that of singers, and with the obvious exception of organists, the ecclesiastical revenues available to singers were closed to them; yet certain individuals, like the blind *menestriers* (minstrels) of Charles the Bold, or later Albert de Rippe, were more admired and highly rewarded than the chapel singers. Finally, it was during the reign of Henri IV that the violin band was put on a more formal footing (partly to please his queen, Marie de Médicis), laying the groundwork for the famous Vingt-Quatre Violons, which was eventually transferred from the *écurie* to the *chambre*, further elevating its status.

The musical landscape away from court

The overwhelming presence of the church within later medieval and Renaissance society is today increasingly difficult to imagine. The second of the three estates (the first being represented by the crown and the aristocracy), it provided the only meritocratic route to social advancement for members of the third. Through a network of choir schools (*maîtrises*) it afforded musically gifted boys an excellent general education and a secure, lucrative career.⁶ Just as the wealthier nobility kept their own chapels, so did the most powerful ecclesiasts, who also employed musicians for secular entertainments.⁷

The craft of instrumental musicians was, in contrast to the polyphony of singers, largely unwritten, and had its own professional organisations: the *confraternités* or guilds, which regulated the pay and status of their members and stipulated their years of apprenticeship. The guilds were involved in state occasions and public entertainments, as when visiting nobles or foreign dignitaries were welcomed, or when the king was received on an official visit. These occasions, known by the term *joyeuse entrée*, were also a common feature of urban life in the Burgundian lands. The festivities were reported in locally published pamphlets that reflect the

role and importance of musicians at such events, and the attainment of a degree of musical literacy as a mark of breeding increasingly filtered down from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. The growing middle classes' enthusiasm for the music sponsored by church and courts is most concretely signalled by the advent of music printing in France, which occurred simultaneously in Paris and Lyons in 1528.

The Parisian Pierre Attaignant was the first to develop a more economic single-impression method of musical typography, an invention soon adapted by others. Supported by royal funding and privilege, his firm was also the first to achieve a truly international distribution based on a wide aristocratic and bourgeois readership. In 1547 Henri II relaxed his father's monopolies, opening music publishing opportunities to competitors including Nicolas Du Chemin, Robert Granjon and the lutenist Adrian Le Roy, who in collaboration with Robert Ballard established a dominant position supported by new royal patents.

For much of the sixteenth century the populous city of Lyons functioned as a second capital through the quantity and quality of its literary and musical publication.⁸ Its strategic location and safe distance from Paris engendered a greater cosmopolitanism and diversity of outlook, making it a natural home for intellectuals, freethinkers and Huguenots (owing to the proximity of Geneva). Although Lyons represents a special case by virtue of its administrative independence from royal authority and its commercial prosperity, its individuality offered a valuable corrective to the royal and centripetal view of Paris's cultural dominance.

For much of our period, and with the limited exceptions just noted in church and court, the social status of practising musicians was on a par with that of artisans. The medieval distinction between *musicus* and *cantor* (that is, those versed in music theory and its practitioners) continued to hold sway throughout the Renaissance. This was a consequence of music's position as one of the seven liberal arts taught at university, in which it was placed with the three other number-based sciences, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. With music considered a speculative branch of knowledge, it was almost *de rigueur* for theorists to profess disdain of their practising counterparts, including clerical singers of polyphony. Yet many of those theorists were composers with a university education, such as Johannes Tinctoris (c. 1430–1511), the most influential theorist of his generation, who was connected with the university and cathedral of Orleans in the late 1450s and early 1460s. All the same, the later Renaissance evinced a growing unease at a theoretical model dating back to Boethius, and the universities themselves were increasingly derided for clinging to outdated models.⁹ Intellectuals and artists responded by forming 'academies', at which questions could be debated

in a freer manner than was possible at the university. In Paris the writer Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532–89) gathered one such circle around him under the patronage of Charles IX, who granted the Académie de Poésie et de Musique its own royal charter in 1570. A crucial point of discussion, also carried on at contemporary Italian *accademie*, concerned the relation of text and music. A similar concern animated the deliberations of the Council of Trent (1545–63), in response to the Reformed church's criticisms of the textual unintelligibility of the music being composed for the Catholic Church. As in the *accademie*, Baïf and his musical collaborators Guillaume Costeley (c. 1530–1606), Joachim Thibault de Courville (d. 1581) and Girard de Beaulieu (fl. 1559–87) sought a model inspired by the supposed musical practices of ancient Greece; but, typical of the French propensity to give rhythm and metre predominance over melody and harmony, the Académie's musical fruits were very different from the rather freer Italian monody: the *vers mesurés à l'antique* presented stressed and unstressed syllables with long and short note values, respectively. The proximity of this approach to the Huguenot tradition of metrical psalm singing is striking: though it stemmed from different ideological premises, the parallel can hardly be coincidental. The metrical formulations devised by Marot for his psalm translations followed the melodies of Calvin's Genevan musicians, and their harmonisations by Loÿs Bourgeois, Janequin and others were combined with the dance rhythms of the same composers' settings of secular strophic verse (*voix de villes* and *airs*). These formulations no doubt inspired the declamatory patterns found in the *airs mesurés*.

The significance of the Académie's classicising stance for music history and its implications for musical style (in particular the move away from complex polyphony) have tended to overshadow its larger intellectual programme, indeed the deep moral purpose with which it saw itself invested, to which the king's charter repeatedly refers. In France as elsewhere throughout Europe, the late Renaissance was the last period in Western music in which music was regarded almost universally as unequivocally positive, essential for the improvement and proper conduct of individuals, for their peaceable coexistence in society and for the very fabric of the universe. Music was perceived not only as positive, but as popular: familiarity with music and its terminology was therefore more widespread in this than in any other subsequent period. Further evidence for this is the establishment in 1570 of the Puy d'Evreux, an annual competition – the first of its kind – to which composers submitted works in different categories, including motets and chansons, and whose victors included the most prestigious composers of the day, including Lassus, Du Caurroy and many others. In the following century, however, music's status as a science increasingly came under scrutiny. Although

later thinkers (particularly the *encyclopédistes*) became deeply concerned with the acoustic bases of tonality, music itself was no longer considered a tool of cognition. It may be argued that, even compared with the other arts, music never regained the position within French culture that it enjoyed in the Renaissance.

From *formes fixes* to strophic song

In the last forty years it has been established that several of the most significant French-language *formes fixes* manuscripts transmitting the song repertoire of the later fifteenth century originated in the Loire Valley – that is, in the orbit of the French royal court.¹⁰ Further, two of its major composers, Ockeghem and Busnoys, were closely associated with the court's circle. The close collaboration between two of the century's most influential composers marks out the period around 1460 as one of the highpoints of French music. It is not unreasonable to ascribe to this time and place certain key developments in French song: first, the revival of the *virelai* in an abbreviated form, sometimes referred to as *bergerette* (ABbaA). This was a particular favourite of Busnoys, and the surviving examples from Du Fay and Ockeghem count among their most memorable and distinctive songs. Ockeghem's *Ma bouche rit* and *Presque trainsi*, both *virelais* in the Phrygian mode, seem in different ways to have been extraordinarily influential, and it is quite possible that the use of the Phrygian mode in polyphony, with its attendant textual topos of mourning, is due to the success of these pieces. However, Busnoys was arguably the more immediately influential figure of the two stylistically: the songs of several other figures of the time (for example Caron and Delahaye) show remarkable affinities with his. During the third quarter of the century, this group of composers also resumed experimentation with poly-textual pieces, in which different texts were brought into relation with each other. The textual play with different narrative voices (typically opposing the courtly and the pastoral or rustic) harks back to the early motet; but the graphic obscenity of some pieces (like Caron's *Corps contre corps*) was carried on in the *épigrammes* which, alongside the strophic song and the 'popular' song with regular symmetrical strophes, supplanted the courtly *formes fixes* early in the following century. However, it should be realised that, notwithstanding these differences of tone, the evidence that 'native' popular idioms played a significant role in that transition is scant: as in the fifteenth century, references to the *menu peuple* are entirely from an aristocratic perspective, even though those popular references may themselves have contributed to the widening demographic appeal of the music observed in prints.

Until recently, the transition was difficult to pin down, owing to several documentary problems: first, the transmission of French printed and manuscript chanson sources in the second and third decades of the century is extremely patchy; second, poetry manuscripts and printed anthologies (such as the monumental *Jardin de plaisance*, published in Paris by Antoine Vérard in 1502) continued to transmit *formes fixes* poetry that had long ceased to be set to music; and finally, contemporary nomenclature (even of an apparently straightforward term like ‘chanson’) is by no means straightforward. But as Frank Dobbins has shown, a clear transitional stage is perceptible in other contemporary collections of verse and music, including the well-known monophonic ‘Bayeux’ chansonnier, commonly known as the *manuscrit de Bayeux*, probably copied for Charles de Bourbon and transmitting melodies set polyphonically by countless composers.¹¹ A shift of emphasis is also detectable with the two most prolific song composers of the following generation, Compère and Agricola, both of whom composed superb *formes fixes* settings alongside strophic and through-composed songs. The varied strophic structure with refrain of Compère’s ribald *Nous sommes de l’ordre de Saint Babouin* prefigures the later songs of Janequin and his emulators. By the turn of the century, these strophic forms (including single strophes, such as the famous *Mille regretz*) became increasingly the norm for polyphonic settings, and their affective range broadened commensurately. Josquin’s *Nymphes des bois*, setting Cretin’s lament for Ockeghem, is an outstanding example of a relatively new trend. A few songs that may confidently be ascribed to Mouton adumbrate the ‘new songs’ of Sermisy, Janequin and the younger generation found in the earliest books published by Attaingnant, starting with the *Chansons nouvelles* of 1528. As with the Italian madrigal, printing (initially in Italy, but soon afterwards in France) was to play a crucial role in the dissemination of the chanson.

This new style is far too diverse and widespread for the designation ‘Parisian chanson’ that attaches to it.¹² The variety of the poetic texts in their forms, metrical structures and use of refrains is mirrored in their musical settings. Sermisy is perhaps the purest exponent of the style in its courtly vein. The melody of *Je n’ay point plus d’affection* illustrates it neatly. The repetition of the music for the third and fourth lines of text, though not ubiquitous, is typical enough; still more common is the reprise of the opening phrase for the end, which may be lightly varied or expanded. A lighter variant of the basic form is the drinking song (e.g. *Hau, hau je bois* and *La, la, Maistre Pierre*), in which the refrain punctuates the text at intervals (sometimes in truncated form). Janequin’s style is occasionally close to Sermisy’s lyrical simplicity, though inclining to a more melismatic approach, but he far outshines him in the variety of his rhythm and brilliant

articulation of a syllabic counterpoint that is perfectly matched to the words of the narrative. A distinct category is the *épigramme*, setting single strophes whose last line introduces a *pointe* or punch-line. The narrative is often obscene, and some of the wittiest settings (such as Janequin's *Ung jour Colin*) contrive a musical representation of the (usually sexual) activity described. Strophic settings were less often associated with ribald texts; an exception is Sermisy's scatological *Je ne menge point de porc*, whose two strophes with refrain are through-composed. The *pointe* is not the refrain here but the penultimate line, in which a pig addresses a piece of excrement as he prepares to eat it. To emphasise this surreal moment, Sermisy moves to perfect time (by then seldom used), effectively slowing down the beat to stress the pig's apostrophe.

Janequin's narrative songs with their lively counterpoint and neat structures profoundly inspired the song-writing of generations of followers. The best known are *Le chant des oyseaulx* and *La bataille*, which must commemorate the victory of François I over imperial forces at Marignano in 1515; but the hunt-scene in *La chasse*, which paints a tableau including the king himself, and *Le caquet des femmes* ('The chatterbox of women') are just as accomplished. The formal mastery and sense of pacing that he deploys in these large-scale compositions are remarkable: moments of harmonic stasis, in which the music is overrun with onomatopoeia, set the scene for a sudden dramatic breakthrough, as when the quarry is finally sighted in *La chasse*. The impact of these pieces in live performance is undeniable, and they were frequently imitated: even the usually straight-laced Gombert was moved to try his hand in *La chasse au lièvre* and his own setting of *Le chant des oyseaulx*.

The later sixteenth century was dominated by Costeley and Claude Le Jeune, both closely associated with Baïf's *académie* and its *vers mesurés à l'antique*. These might be described as a typically French attempt to impose a rational framework on an inherently fluid medium; not coincidentally, however, the concern to systematise the French language itself was shared by countless authors and intellectuals of the time, from Rabelais to the circle of the *Pléiade*.

Between these early and late figures is a group of significant personalities mostly active outside France: Thomas Créquillon and Pierre de Manchicourt, both born in the northern town of Béthune but employed by the Habsburgs, and Jacobus Clemens (alias 'non Papa' owing to his dissolute lifestyle). To some extent they stand apart from the composers working in France, exhibiting the Flemish preference for more elaborate and stricter imitative counterpoint, stricter fugal sequence, stretto entries, dovetailed cadences and denser textures most markedly exhibited in the work of Gombert. There will be more to say concerning the distinction

between 'Franco-Flemish' and French, but the most gifted of these *Ausländer* – indeed, arguably the most versatile of all composers in the genre – is Lassus, who settled in Munich from the mid-1550s. Much has been written about his phenomenal sensitivity to text, which ranges from the mimetic games dear to Janequin to extraordinarily subtle references audible (or, in the case of *Augenmusik*, visible) to musicians alone. This psychological acuteness is matched by an effortless facility with counterpoint and an elfin sense of play with style unmatched by any of his contemporaries. His lyricism, figuralism and word-painting are illustrated in songs like *Bonjour mon coeur*, which neatly balances Ronsard's poem; *La nuit froide et sombre*, which depicts each antithetical image portrayed in a few lines from Du Bellay's *Ode à l'inconstance des choses*; and *Paisible demaine*, which succinctly sets an old 'Blason de Paris'. His compositions combine Sermisy's stylised elegance with Janequin's rhythmic verve and Arcadelt's allusive touches. Lassus set French verse ranging from Villon to Baïf and never fails to show his skill and originality in reworking the many musical models provided by the previous generation of composers. In turn, his songs profoundly influenced countless later settings of the same verses.¹³ Although Lassus's delight in contrapuntal mastery and emotive use of harmony appears to flout classic French sensibility, which holds that art should conceal art, his pith and lucidity mark him out as one of the greatest composers ever to have set the language.

In 1571, the publisher and lutenist Adrian Le Roy brought out a collection of solo songs with lute accompaniment, which he called *Airs de cour* (the first known use of the term). These arrangements of strophic songs, mostly composed by King Charles IX's organist, Nicholas de La Grotte, and published by Le Roy in a four-voice version in 1569, included texts that Ronsard had composed for masquerades and other quasi-dramatic festivities performed at Fontainebleau in 1564. Le Roy's monodic arrangements introduce a novel unmeasured, declamatory rhythm, rarely found earlier, though it occurs in some of his own *airs*, including *Est-ce pas mort quand un corps froid* (*Second livre de chansons*, 1564). The *air de cour* had less of a European vogue than the *chanson*, but it was still widely disseminated – the best-known instances being the publication by Thomas East of Charles Tessier's *Chansons et airs de court*, which influenced the first book of Dowland's ayres printed in the same year, 1597. Although the fashion for solo singing may have been influenced by developments in Italy, the directness and simple elegance of the *air de cour* is typically French. But that simplicity is deceptive, for the best singers ornamented the melody as lavishly as their Italian counterparts. The highly stylised attitude that characterises the genre, already evident with Pierre Guédron, was carried still further by his successors. This rarefied sophistication reflects

the tone of *airs de cour* texts, which is subtly different from that of the *chanson*. Humour, though present in the sub-generic *airs à boire* (drinking songs), seldom matches the ribaldry of the *chanson* at its most direct; more typically, allegorical descriptions of the beloved are pursued to the point of preciousness – or so it would seem, were it not for the excellence of the music. The change of sensibility indicates a significant aesthetic shift.

Instrumental music

Instrumental music remained subordinate to vocal music in France, as in other European countries during the period. The minstrel's oral traditions are only marginally represented in notated sources like the published dance books, the earliest being that of Michel de Tholoze (c. 1510). These included mostly *basses danses*, pavaues and *gaillardes*, such as were danced in courtly ballrooms and town halls for weddings and other festivities arranged for four-part instrumental ensemble, keyboard, or solo lute. The arrangers are rarely named, but they included Claude Gervaise, the bandsman Étienne du Tertre, Tielman Susato and the distinguished lutenists Albert de Rippe, Guillaume Morlaye and Adrian Le Roy, as well as the guitarist Simon Gorlier. Many of these dances were structured and strictly rhythmicised versions of *chansons*, which also provided a vast repertoire of straight arrangements. Freer arrangements of *chansons* and occasionally motets or mass sections were also published in the form of *phantaisies* and *recherchers*, and some were preceded by virtuosic preludes, which were often mere finger-warming exercises with scales and arpeggios. Several books of choreographies were printed in Lyons and even Troyes, where in 1588 Thoinot Arbeau (Étienne Tabouret) issued his treatise *Orchésographie*. In 1576 under the title 'voix de villes' Jehan Chardavoine published the melodies for many *airs* and other songs that were sung and danced on the Pont Neuf in Paris. Music and notably *chansons* played a key role in French drama, from the passion plays, mysteries and moralities of the fifteenth century to the farces, pastorals and tragedies of the sixteenth century.¹⁴ The repertoire is clearly represented in the song-books of the time, and a few examples of full scores survive (e.g. a nativity play by Barthélemy Aneau with *noëls* by Étienne Du Tertre, Didier Lupi and Goudimel).

Sacred versus secular music

Because of the social structures within which leading musicians worked, there was little distinction between composers of sacred and secular music

before the sixteenth century, even though individual composers might favour the one over the other. Thus Busnoys's sacred output is comparatively small in relation to the number of his chansons, and the reverse is true with Ockeghem; but conversely, more copies survive of Busnoys's justly celebrated *L'homme armé* Mass than of any of Ockeghem's Mass cycles, while none of Busnoys's songs matched the popularity of *Ma bouche rit*. In the following century, Sermisy, though master of King François I's chapel, published more songs than Masses or motets, while the priest Janequin hardly touched sacred genres. The enduring amalgamation of the sacred and the secular is marked by the fact that a significant proportion of the Masses, and many Magnificats, composed after 1500 were 'imitations' or 'parodies' of polyphonic chansons.

All the same, a number of points testify to the gradual split between the two. The most far-reaching event from this standpoint was the Reformation, and the reaction it triggered in Catholic countries. The rise of Reformed churches led to forms of worship in the vernacular, and a need for new musical genres suited to them. In French, this led most notably to countless settings of the Psalter, newly translated by Clément Marot and Théodore de Beze. As we have seen, the singing of these psalms in French was very popular at court, and they were set by the Catholic composers Janequin and Certon. Conversely, prominent Huguenots like Goudimel composed and edited collections of Masses for the Parisian printer Nicolas Du Chemin, and the pastor Simon Goulart made a career out of contrafacts, devising spiritual verse to fit the words of Ronsardian sonnets set by Bertrand, Boni and even Lassus. It was only from the 1560s onwards, when attitudes hardened on both sides, that the linguistic divide was perceived to mirror the confessional. Thus the entire production of Paschal de l'Estocart (a generation on from Goudimel) was conditioned by religious considerations. His *Octonnaires de la vanité du monde* set insistently moralising vernacular texts, albeit in a musical idiom strongly tinted with Italianate chromaticism. A remarkable degree of chromaticism also informs the spiritual as well as secular songs of Jean Servin and the *airs spirituels* of Antoine de Bertrand. It can hardly be coincidence that this emphasis on the devotional use of the vernacular corresponds to the emergence of new secular forms within each linguistic group – chanson, madrigal and the like.

The linguistic question aside, there is little doubt that the growing rift between sacred and secular was a pan-European phenomenon: while the Spaniard Victoria's decision to concentrate on sacred music appears to have arisen out of personal conviction, Palestrina's in Rome seems to have been more calculated. But either position would have been unthinkable forty years earlier. In French-speaking areas matters were rarely

so clear-cut, as we have seen with Goulart's practice of framing sacred texts to the very chansons that Reformed religious leaders denounced for their scandalous content! Trends in printed music, similarly, cut both ways: at first glance, the publications devoted to genre argued for the perception of sacred and secular as distinct; yet the two were often found alongside each other in collections known as *meslanges* (miscellanies), whether collective (as with those issued in Paris in 1560 and 1572) or from individuals.

Latin-texted sacred music: French versus Franco-Flemish?

To return to the question broached at the beginning of this chapter: what, if anything, qualifies as specifically 'French' in the music written in French, or in France, during the Renaissance? The problem is posed perhaps most acutely in the sacred music written for the Catholic ritual, and not just for the obvious reason that it sets Latin rather than French texts.

With Ockeghem, the Chapelle Royale – and by extension, France – could claim the most respected composer of his generation. But because barely a handful of contemporary French sources of sacred polyphony have come down to us, such knowledge as we have of the music itself comes second-hand at best, often from sources copied very far afield. Hence the impression that French sacred polyphony of the late fifteenth century is well-nigh indissociable from an international style practised by the 'Franco-Flemish' musicians who disseminated it throughout Europe. In fact, most of the principal composers active in France at the time were francophone. Long believed to have been of Flemish origin, Ockeghem is now known to have been born near Mons, in French-speaking Belgium. A survey of his sacred music is beyond the scope of this chapter, but a word is in order concerning his contribution (and through him, that of composers working on French soil) to that most lofty of fifteenth-century musical genres, the polyphonic Mass cycle.¹⁵ Ockeghem's posthumous reputation rested on a group of works of a distinctly speculative sort: the three-voice canonic song *Prenez sur moy*, the *Missa Cuiusvis toni*, designed for performance on several starting pitches, and the *Missa Prolationum*, conceived almost entirely in double canon. Such pieces may have been designed as audition pieces for the French Chapelle Royale, but compositionally they seem also to straddle the fault lines of the theoretical systems within which they are conceived. (The idea that a notated work may have several sounding realisations was revisited a couple of generations later by Pierre Moulu in his *Missa Alma redemptoris mater*, which can be performed with or without rests longer

than a minim.) At first glance, these important pieces are exceptions within his output, and they have often been portrayed as such. Nevertheless, their speculative bent is typical of the composer more generally, for in his other Masses he frequently adopts a questioning stance towards the borrowed material that serves as their basis.

Apart from their theoretical bases (or rather, precisely on account of them), the Masses *Cuiusvis toni* and *Prolationum* are exceptional in relying on no pre-existing material whatever.¹⁶ The more usual way of treating the Mass cycle was to take pre-existing material of one sort or another as a basis for a new work, the options available to the composer depending on the nature of the borrowed work. The tradition of using a line of plainsong as a compositional starting-point was already centuries old, but its application as a recurrent structuring (hence the term ‘cantus firmus’) across the five movements of the Mass Ordinary counts as one of the fifteenth century’s greatest innovations. If its invention is credited to the English composers of the generation of Leonel Power (c. 1380–1445) and John Dunstable (c. 1390–1453), its development and diversification seems to have been a largely French affair, most notably through Guillaume Du Fay (c. 1397–1474), and Ockeghem and Busnoys in the following generation. Where the English tended to present the plainsong in the same guise in each movement, their successors might ornament it differently each time, as in the *Ecce ancilla* Masses by Du Fay and Ockeghem. And it may also have been Du Fay who first hit upon the idea of using a line from an existing polyphonic song as a cantus firmus in his *Se la face ay pale* cycle, probably composed in the 1450s and based on a strophic song of Du Fay’s own. (This intersection of sacred and secular can be surprising to modern sensibilities, but it would have seemed entirely natural to contemporary observers. For one thing, God and his saints were everywhere, tangible presences; for another, medieval culture delighted in the sort of analogical relationship that such correspondences set up: thus the Virgin Mary was readily assimilated to the idealised, unattainable Lady of chivalry, subject of countless chansons of the period.¹⁷) Bold though these developments undoubtedly are, still more striking is the speed with which new ideas were not only adopted, but their implications pursued and extended. More or less from the off, composers began to quote not only from the single line but from several or, again, from the entire polyphonic texture of borrowed pieces. Most of these developments may be observed in Ockeghem’s Mass output, and whether or not he initiated them himself, the number of his surviving Masses (over a dozen, whether complete or fragmentary), most of which must have been written during his long tenure at the French court, is indicative of an influence beyond what the surviving sources suggest.

Independently of his international reputation, within France itself Ockeghem was unquestionably the dominant figure of his generation. Once again, the lack of primary sources obscures the picture; but with the exception of Busnoys (who had left France by the mid-1460s), Ockeghem had no rival in the domain of sacred music. Busnoys's *L'homme armé* Mass has already been mentioned, and was one of the most influential works of the century; and his motet in honour of Ockeghem, *In hydraulis*, composed just before his leave-taking of his colleague around 1465, was also echoed in a number of works, including, for example, Josquin's *Illibata virgo nutrix*. More obviously, perhaps, than Ockeghem's, Busnoys's music exhibits traits that might be described as quintessentially French: innate balance and sense of line, and fastidious contrapuntal technique. And of the two, it was arguably Busnoys who was the more influential. Like many of his songs, his *Missa L'homme armé* (which may well date from his last years at the French court) supremely embodies a form of mid-fifteenth-century classicism, refined, consummately sure-footed and yet capable of *coups de théâtre* as breathtaking as they are carefully staged (as the concluding section of the Agnus Dei reveals). Not only was it widely copied, but its elegant design led to a number of *homages* by younger composers, notably Jacob Obrecht and Josquin (the latter in his *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales*). Close to Busnoys in style is his probable near contemporary Firmin Caron, who was probably born at Amiens and left five elegantly executed Masses, including a *Missa L'homme armé*. (The popularity of his songs has already been mentioned.) In the 1480s and 1490s, the royal court was joined by more distinguished figures. Although born in Ghent and therefore of Flemish birth, Agricola appears to have made some impact during his tenure there. His highly individual style might be held up as a synthesis of his two most illustrious predecessors at the French court, for its textural vocabulary owes much to Busnoys, but its subversive streak is reminiscent of Ockeghem. It is possible that there existed a relationship between Agricola and Ockeghem similar to the one that had linked Ockeghem and Busnoys twenty years earlier.¹⁸

The music of both Ockeghem and Agricola exhibits stylistic traits often described as 'Flemish': a preference for convoluted, intricate lines, dense textures (whatever the number of voices) and contrapuntal sophistication. These features have sometimes been contrasted with the gradual simplification of style observed in the early years of the next century in the works of the chapel members Prioris, Divitis, Moulu and Févin, characterised by a greater clarity of texture, melodic design and form, and a preference for four-voice textures where five and six voices were increasingly the norm elsewhere (for example with Habsburg musicians in the Low Countries

and northerners in Italy). But the interpretation of these changes as evidence of a specifically French sensibility emerging from the shadow of a Franco-Flemish school is overhasty. Divitis, for example, was born in Leuven and spent most of his career in Flemish-speaking areas. His works exhibit a stepping-down of contrapuntal virtuosity comparable to that of his francophone contemporaries at the Chapelle Royale. Conversely, in the work of the francophone Mouton the propensity for clear textures is balanced by an occasional interest in contrapuntal artifice, so the 'Franco/Flemish' duality is hardly clear-cut. The difference may depend more on the formation received in certain choir schools like those of Cambrai or Notre-Dame and the Sainte-Chapelle, or from the prevailing fashion at the place of employment. To view it from the other side, the composers working in the Habsburg orbit continued in the 'Flemish' manner just noted, particularly retaining the preference for rich and dense textures; but not a few of these composers (Manchicourt, Crecquillon) were francophone. So one need hardly invoke the tunefulness and the textual and formal clarity of the new 'Parisian' chanson (a quintessential symbol of the *French Renaissance*) to explain the lack of contrapuntal artifice in Sermisy's sacred music, which is better viewed in light of trends extending beyond France to include much of Europe.

The early sixteenth century ushered in the heyday of the motet, which replaced the Mass as the main focus for composers of sacred music, and of canonic writing as a privileged locus of contrapuntal virtuosity. The simplification of style just discussed applies here also, for in the fifteenth century the term 'canon' was applied to a wide variety of techniques for transforming a single line of music by means of externally imposed criteria, of which the technique designated by the term nowadays (that is, the exact replication of a single notated line by two or more voices sounding at different times) was only one.¹⁹ After the turn of the sixteenth century the vogue for abstruse and cryptic 'non-fugal' forms of canon went out of fashion (notwithstanding the odd exception), while the strict imitative sort became increasingly popular, as in the *Chanzoni francoise a quatro sopra doi*, which consists entirely of canonic pieces (in the sense of 'fuga'), both sacred and secular. In its concentration on fugal canon this was the first publication of its kind; but it is striking that nearly all the composers represented had close links with the French court in the decade preceding the volume's appearance. Its title should not be read anachronistically, since national and linguistic labels were quite loosely applied during this period; but it plainly signals a perception of French composers (or of composers working in France) as a distinctive presence on the international scene.²⁰ The influence of Italy on courtly French culture in the Renaissance is widely documented; but it is worth noting that the traffic was not exclusively in one

direction, since at least one of the pioneers of the Italian madrigal, Philippe Verdelot, was French.

Compared with that of the preceding period, sacred music in France during the latter half of the sixteenth century gives the impression of being somewhat insular or conservative, but this perception is neither fair nor accurate. Until recently, musicology has neglected the abundant and often fine sacred polyphony of such figures from the middle of the century as Arcadelt, Certon, Maillard, Phinot and Boni.²¹ True, no French composer of the time has since achieved the iconic status of Byrd for England, of Victoria for Spain or of Palestrina for Italy, though Du Caurroy's reputation within France was nearly comparable, eliciting enthusiastic citations fifty years after his death, not least from Mersenne. The fact that Du Caurroy's music was not widely published until the very end of his life (two major collections appeared in 1609 and 1610, and Mersenne mentions several Masses that are now lost) must explain, at least in part, why his fame did not spread more widely. But his *Preces ecclesiasticae* is an impressive collection of motets, to which a modern edition has only recently done justice,²² and in Nicolas Formé he left a talented disciple who succeeded him as *sous-maître* of the royal chapel and contributed to the development of the *grand motet* that was to characterise the sacred music of the *grand siècle*. In the closing years of the sixteenth century, however, Lassus's reputation eclipsed Du Caurroy's in France as it did that of so many contemporaries elsewhere. Yet Ronsard's famous encomium of Lassus as 'nostre divin Orlande' reminds us that the composer could reasonably be regarded by native French speakers as one of their own. Not for the first time in this survey, the correlation between linguistic and national boundaries fails to do justice to the complexity of the situation. But if that situation resists convenient packaging, the fluidity of musical exchange that characterises it is one that Europe would hardly encounter again before the twentieth century.

Notes

1 Despite the breadth of the chronological span covered in this chapter, there are few monographs in English devoted to French or French-speaking composers of this period in a traditional 'life-and-works' format. Useful exceptions are David Fallows, *Dufay: The Master Musicians*, rev. edn (London: Dent, 1987); and Jerome Roche, *Lassus* (Oxford University Press, 1982). Even specialised composer-centred studies are rare. On the major figures of Ockeghem and Busnoys, see Fabrice Fitch, *Johannes Ockeghem: Masses and Models* (Paris: Champion, 1997);

Philippe Vendrix (ed.), *Johannes Ockeghem: Actes du XL^e Colloque international d'études humanistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998); and Paula Higgins (ed.), *Antoine Busnoys: Method, Meaning, and Context in Late Medieval Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

2 For the period after c. 1520, the most complete summary of biographical information remains François Lesure, *Musicians and Poets of the French Renaissance* (New York: Merlin Press, 1955), which is usefully supplemented by the impressive study by Christelle Cazaux, *La musique à la cour de*

François I^{er} (Paris: École Nationale des Chartes, 2002). The later Valois court is well treated in Jeanice Brooks, *Courtly Songs in Late Sixteenth-Century France* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

3 As in the particular case of Saint-Omer in the Pas-de-Calais, where Mouton was active in 1494–5. It should be noted that Saint-Omer was not formally joined to the French kingdom until 1677. See Andrew Kirkman, 'La musique à la collégiale à la fin du moyen âge', in Nicolette Delanne-Logié and Yves-Marie Hilaire (eds), *La cathédrale de Saint-Omer: 800 ans de mémoire vive* (Paris: CNRS, 2000), 133–8.

4 The report of the name Dionisius Prioris (Denis Prieur) and its identification with the composer 'Prioris' appears, with a full reconsideration of the composer's biography, in Theodor Dumitrescu, 'Who was "Prioris"? A royal composer recovered', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 65 (2012), 5–65.

5 See Cazaux, *La musique à la cour de François I^{er}*.

6 Recent studies of the education of choirboys include Kate van Orden, 'Children's voices: singing and literacy in sixteenth-century France', *Early Music History*, 25 (2006), 209–56; and Andrew Kirkman, 'The seeds of medieval music: choirboys and musical training in a late-medieval *maîtrise*', in Susan Boynton and Eric Rice (eds), *Young Choristers, 650–1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 104–22.

7 Two recent studies that give a fine-grained picture of the life of the jobbing fifteenth-century composer are Rob C. Wegman, 'Fremin Caron at Amiens: new documents', in Fabrice Fitch and Jacobijn Kiel (eds), *Essays on Renaissance Music in Honour of David Fallows: Bon jour, bon mois et bonne estrenne* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 2–32; and Andrew Kirkman, 'Johannes Sohler dit Fede and St Omer: a story of pragmatic sanctions', in Fitch and Kiel (eds), *Essays on Renaissance Music*, 68–79.

8 Frank Dobbins, *Music in Renaissance Lyons* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

9 Philippe Vendrix, *La musique à la renaissance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 17–20, 87–8.

10 This was first proposed in print in Joshua Rifkin, 'Scribal concordances for some Renaissance manuscripts in Florentine libraries', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 26 (1973), 305–26. A recent study of these manuscripts and their cultural context is Jane Alden, *Songs, Scribes,*

and Society: The History and Reception of the Loire Valley Chansonniers (Oxford University Press, 2010).

11 Frank Dobbins, 'Strophic and epigrammatic forms in the French chanson and air of the sixteenth century', *Acta musicologica*, 78 (2006), 197–234.

12 The first known use of the term, by François Lesure in 1951, is reported by Frank Dobbins. *Ibid.*, 197.

13 Frank Dobbins, 'Lassus – borrower or lender', *Revue belge de musicologie*, 39–40 (1985–6), 101–57; and Dobbins, 'Textual sources and compositional techniques in the French chansons of Orlando de Lassus', in Ignace Bossuyt, Eugeen Schreurs and Annelies Wouters (eds), *Orlandus Lassus and his Time* (Peer: Alamire, 1995), 139–61.

14 See Howard Mayer Brown, *Music in the French Secular Theater, 1400–1550* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); and Frank Dobbins, 'Music in French theatre of the late sixteenth century', *Early Music History*, 13 (1994), 85–122.

15 For the most recent discussion of this seminal genre, see Andrew Kirkman, *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass: Medieval Context to Modern Revival* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

16 As Kirkman has argued, however, the tendency of modern-day scholarship to privilege Masses unified by shared material should not obscure the fact that other approaches also had currency in the period. See Andrew Kirkman, 'The invention of the cyclic Mass', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 54 (2001), 1–47.

17 M. Jennifer Bloxam, 'A cultural context for the chanson mass', in Honey Meconi (ed.), *Early Musical Borrowing* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7–35.

18 Fabrice Fitch, "'Who cares who is speaking?'" An essay in style-criticism', *Acta musicologica*, 82 (2010), 49–70.

19 One must bear in mind that musicians designated both imitation and strict canon (in the modern sense) with the same term '*fuga*', whereas the Latin word '*canon*' (meaning 'rule') covered any sort of verbal instruction to the performer, including one prescribing '*fuga*' (e.g. 'Canon: 4 ex 1', which requires that the same notated part be read at four different speeds).

20 Its editor was probably Adrian Willaert, who may have come from Belgium but spent some formative years in France. Nearly all the composers represented were active at the court of Louis XII at Blois. Antico probably intended his book for the French market; it is significant

that it was pirated by Pierre Attaignant in Paris as probably the first example of an edition produced by the new single-impression typography.

21 A recent exception is Marie-Alexis Colin, 'Eustache du Caurroy et le motet en France à la

fin du XVI^e siècle' (PhD thesis, University of Tours, 2001).

22 Eustache du Caurroy, *Preces ecclesiasticae*, ed. Marie-Alexis Colin, Musica Gallica, collection 'Epitome musical' (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000).