

STUDI DI STORIA MEDIOEVALE E DI DIPLOMATICA

NUOVA SERIE I (2017)



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI STUDI STORICI



BRUNO MONDADORI

**A major research project on Late Medieval
and Early Renaissance music**

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in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s. I (2017)

Dipartimento di Studi Storici
dell'Università degli Studi di Milano - Bruno Mondadori

<<https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/SSMD>>

ISBN 9788867742783
DOI 10.17464/9788867742783

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Reinhard Strohm

1. *Outline*

*Musical Life of the Late Middle Ages in the Austrian Region (c. 1340 - c. 1520)*¹ (www.musical-life.net) is a multimedia online resource created by musicologists and musical performers at the University of Vienna. It was initiated in 2013 with the sponsorship of the Austrian Research Foundation (FWF) and was published online on 31 May 2016. This research project is still being expanded and will presumably be completed in 2019. Its editors and main contributing authors are Univ.-Prof. Dr. Birgit Lodes (Institute of Musicology, University of Vienna), Prof. em. Dr. Reinhard Strohm (Faculty of Music, University of Oxford) and Prof. Marc Lewon (Chair for Medieval and Renaissance Lute Instruments, Schola Cantorum Basiliensis). Other contributors are 32 scholars, a staff of editorial and IT assistants, and five performance groups specialising in early European music. Among the latter were the award-winning *Ensemble Leones* (Marc Lewon) and the group *Stimmwerck* (Franz Vitzthum)².

The website now comprises of 63 essays and ‘spotlights’ of narrative text with images and sound examples, a media gallery of c. 250 images (illustrations, facsimiles and music notation), a playlist of 125 sound examples (mostly of complete compositions), a ‘museum’ of early musical instruments comprising sounds, images and commentaries, a bibliography of over 1000 entries and a substantial glossary (in progress). The languages used are German (mostly) and English;

¹ *Musikleben des Spätmittelalters in der Region Österreich (ca. 1340 - ca. 1520)*.

² See, for example: *Hör, kristenheit!* and *O florens rosa*.

texts in other languages, as well as in middle high German and local dialects, are usually translated.

The *Musikleben Projekt* explores and communicates practices and traditions of music in the cultural life of the 'Austrian region' – interpreted as the geographic region under the control of the late medieval Habsburg dynasty and its allied ecclesiastical territories, also taking into account adjacent areas of Italy, Hungary, Moravia, Bohemia, Bavaria and the Swiss federation. The project emphasises musical aspects of social history, cultural anthropology, media and religious culture, although it also comments on musical composition, notation and transmission, on questions of literature, theatre and art history, and on performance practices of music. Many individual chapters or short 'spotlights' are dedicated to the interpretation of archival documents, music manuscripts and prints, poems, maps and art objects.

The project not only intends to communicate aspects of musical history, but also advocates new forms of cultural historiography in the field of music. The online form of publication offers numerous hypertextual links and multiple access options for users – who may, for example, just read, just listen, just compare images, or follow leads on specific queries through the various media –. On the other hand, this visually and aurally accentuated imaginary of culture acts in counterpoint with the prose narrative. The presentation stands about midway between a richly commented virtual museum and a directional narrative. The latter is, in any case, multilinear, as it discusses eleven general topics (*Leitthemen*) in approximately chronological order, corresponding to their assumed prominence in the culture. The various chapters within each of the general topics, however, often survey longer periods or focus on earlier or later time-frames.

2. *The textual contents*

Part A, *Der lebendige Ritus*, illustrates enhancements to the traditional chants, as they characterised the regional practice of the time: special chants, processions, tropes and *cantiones*, rhythmic chanting (*cantus fractus*), polyphonic singing, sacred theatre, particular forms of lay participation in the liturgy. The resistance against these developments, which culminated in the Benedictine reform movement, is a European phenomenon but had special significance for the region.

Part B, *Alte und neue Lieder*, explores the interplay of coherent tradition, derivation and new creation of song. Imitation and contrafacture enabled connections with the past in German art-song (*Minnesang*, *Spruchsang*) and the work of poets such as the Monk of Salzburg, Oswald von Wolkenstein and Michel Beheim. Sacred song was cultivated intensely, reflecting public and private devotional practice; popular song and polyphonic settings of songs served the lifestyles of the elite.

Part C, *Materie und Intellekt*, describes learned approaches to music and the theory and practice of musical instruments and composition. The quadrivial arts are a mainstay of musical intellectuality at the time, whether in organ-building and organ-playing, or mensural composition, music theory and notation. In these fields, Austrian musicians benefitted notably from earlier western European repertoires, and from the model of neighbouring countries such as Bohemia. An essay on musical iconography explores the fluctuations of artistic craftsmanship and intention in representing music.

Part D, *Herrschaft, Fest und Zeremonie*: Music played an important role in the self-reflection and public representation of rulership and the life of the courts. This is shown in festal culture, pious endowments, employment of court musicians, diplomatic relations, material and symbolic functions of ceremonial music. The reign of Maximilian I witnessed elaborate, multi-medial uses of music for dynastic propaganda and devotion. This culture formed an interregional network.

Part E, *Musik in der Stadt*, considers urban musical culture from several different angles. The urban 'soundscape', the institutional preconditions, the music transmission and book culture, the influence of corporations (including university, guilds, religious orders), and their various theatrical and festal arrangements, are known to us not only from the single melting pot of Vienna, but also – in nuce, at least – from cities such as Bolzano, Augsburg and yet others.

Part F, *Mitten in Europa*, assesses the regionality and interregionality of the musical repertoires. Dynastic and ecclesiastical political culture gave Austria an increasingly 'European' role to play in music, long before it became the centre of an intercontinental empire. The region assembled art music from many countries and could employ leading foreign specialists, as shown in manuscript transmission and archival records. Local liturgical uses and devotions formed a counterpoint. Musical contacts were particularly strong with Bohemia and Italy.

In Part G, *Musikalische Lebensläufe*, we adopt the historiographical mode of the musician's biography, connecting repertoire and general culture to individual lives of performers and composers. Not only the biographies of famous Netherlands composers such as Jacob Obrecht and Henricus Isaac appear worthy of study, but also those of regional leaders such as Paul Hofhaimer, and indeed of instrument builders, scribes, performers and music educators.

Part H, *Lernen, Singen, Spielen, Tanzen*, sums up new interdisciplinary research on the practices of music education, theatre and dance. The teaching of music to the young in monasteries, choir-schools and, increasingly, civic surroundings, provided musical performers throughout the festal year; these and related skills were magnificently employed for the public theatre. In addition, professional musicians were available almost everywhere; a special chapter (*Instrumentenmuseum*) illustrates their musical instruments. Dancing still had a controversial im-

age among theologians, but was indispensable in the secular sphere, together with its music.

Part I, *Die höfische Elite*, focuses on the era of Maximilian I, with its interactions between music practices and courtly lifestyles. The court surrounded itself with sacred and secular, choral chapel performances and instrumental music. Courtiers, including women, participated in the more private practices as singers and dancers. Humanists used musical emblems and performances to celebrate the ruler. They aimed to perpetuate his memory, but also that of his foremost musicians, for example Henricus Isaac and Paul Hofhaimer.

Part J, *Körper und Seele; Engel, Tod und Teufel* addresses some of the aspects investigated by cultural anthropology, where historical musicology has not taken firm roots as yet³. Religious devotion (especially lay devotion), bodily connotations, personal identities and anxieties were parts of life in which music often served as a vehicle for group emotion, superstition and demagogy. There seems to be an unfortunate sliding scale from the spiritual music of the angels and pilgrim's songs to racialist and anti-Semitic uses of community music.

3. Recent developments

The development of the entire project towards greater breadth and depth has led to a growing awareness of the enormous cultural diversity in Austrian musical culture as it developed in this 180-year period. It was found that the idea to begin with a narrative of 14th-century monastic culture and plainsong, to migrate then to secular environments and forms, was not just a convenient narrative strategy that reflected the available sources of information, but must have corresponded to enormous changes of cultural feeling and practice that did take place at the time. Even within one narrower theme, the history of 15th-century-song, the methodologies of discussing sacred song until c. 1480 and secular song after c. 1480 turned out totally different, probably with good reason. As the most recent contributions demonstrate, the study of ceremonial court music in Austria after c. 1480 is almost a different research discipline from a study of, say, monastic plainsong, or even urban musical life. We may well impute this developmental

³ A few musicological titles that have influenced this project: BRUGGISSER-LANKER, *Musik und Tod*; LODES, 'Maria zart'; LODES - GASCH, *Tod in Musik und Kultur*; *Musikalischer Alltag im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*; SALMEN, *Vom Musizieren in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt*; SCHWOB, *Formen der Laienfrömmigkeit im spätmittelalterlichen Brixen*; STROHM, *Late-medieval sacred songs*; STROHM, *Ritual - Repertoire - Geschichte*; ŽAK, *Musik als 'Ehr' und Zier'*.

dynamic to the culture itself – an observation that broadly contradicts conventional historiographies of central European music in this period.

Many of the over 100 newly recorded pieces of music from the period revealed new stylistic and repertorial aspects which could be related to the narrative of institutions and sources. In 2016-2017, several new studies were published, mainly by Birgit Lodes, on ceremonial court music of Maximilian's era and on civic music. These essays made increasing use of, respectively, a wider network of manuscript sources in Europe, and an in-depth archival scrutiny of Viennese church music. For example, the development of music at St Stephen's, Vienna, can now be shown in more different facets than any previous study has been able to assemble.

In these and several other areas (e.g. history of song, history of devotional culture, interpretation of the musical contents of works of art), the project is now more directly based on new primary research than could have been envisaged.

The construction of the *Instrumentenmuseum* by Marc Lewon led him to new research on the uses of instruments in these musical repertoires, an aspect which influenced the descriptions of instruments and pieces. The search for suitable illustrations of instruments, musical sources and contemporary pictorial documentation also supplied new information where archival or narrative sources were lacking (e.g. for musical practices in Styria).

The importance of this new research methodology lies on the fact that it gathers many different types of information sources about music, not only to provide a garnish to the verbal narrative, but as objects of research in their own right and thus as a stimulus to the cultural interpretation of the music.

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ABSTRACT

Questo contributo dà conto di un importante progetto di raccolta di fonti di varia natura inerenti alla musica medievale e rinascimentale, guidato dall'Università di Vienna, ma attivamente alimentato grazie al contributo di storici e musicologi di tutta Europa.

This paper describes an important multimedia online project, dedicated to a number of different sources concerning Late Medieval and Early Renaissance music. The project, created by the University of Vienna, is continuously fostered by scholars all over Europe.

KEYWORDS

Musica; Rinascimento; Asburgo.

Music; Renaissance; Habsburg; Austrian region.