Donald Greig

Ars Subtilior repertory as performance palimpsest

Soundclips to accompany this article may be found at the *Early music* website:
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THE first time the Orlando Consort performed Ciconia's short mensuration canon *Le ray au soleil* was at a concert recorded by the BBC in the York Festival some years ago. Because the piece lasts less than a minute and is difficult to grasp at one hearing, we decided to perform it twice in succession. Afterwards, of the people who came up to us to talk about it, half were convinced that the first performance was 'wrong' and that we had got it right the second time, half were convinced that the opposite was true. In fact, both performances were equally 'correct', in the sense that we performed accurately the rhythmic instructions of the score. For our part, we were concerned that our performances were perceived so differently when the quantitative differences were in fact so very small (as confirmed by the recording). What was it about Ars Subtilior repertory that led to such contrasting perceptions?

This essay attempts to address that issue. It begins with an outline of the purely technical difficulties of performing music from the Ars Subtilior repertory. It then goes on to consider performance as an act of communication. The first part is thus a snapshot of one performance approach, while the second part attempts to broaden into a discussion of a model of communication that has relevance to all repertories, but which addresses something of the singularity of the music of the Ars Subtilior.

THE Ars Subtilior repertory certainly poses a real challenge to performers. Its highly intricate and rhythmically complex musical style marks

the apogee of invention and elaboration within medieval notational systems, to the extent that the music might at first sight seem almost to lie beyond performance. Willi Apel, writing in 1953, expressed his doubts thus:

Frequently these elaborations of notation are mere tricks of affected erudition, since the effects desired could be represented in much simpler ways. In other cases they are indispensable, leading then to a product of such rhythmical complexity that the modern reader may doubt whether an actual performance was ever possible or intended.[1]

Others have taken a different line. 25 years after Apel's pronouncement, Richard Crocker wrote:

It is essential to observe ... that this complexity is nowhere near as important as it has been made out to be ... it is more apparent to the performer (or modern transcriber) than to the listener, who merely hears normal progressions through a delightful haze of ornamentation.[2]

Clearly Crocker had heard this music in performance. Apel, I suggest, probably had not. Today there are plenty of recordings available to compare and contrast, some of them playing on the haze that Crocker mentions, others preferring to foreground its intricacy. In short, the music now exists again as sound. And performing and listening to that music aids our understanding of it.

The role of notation in this repertory is unquestionably important, more so than in most other idioms of music, medieval or otherwise. A glance at the manuscripts that include Ars Subtilior pieces is enough to reveal that their notation is not merely a set of instructions to the performer. Visual and acoustic display seem to be related concerns.

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Whatever its importance, however, the notation becomes far less of an issue for both singers and audience as a work is learnt through repeated performances and hearings. Scholarly studies of Ars Subtilior pieces tend to focus on the notation, and often assume that the written symbols always remain the primary source for the performer *in performance*. This is a myth (albeit an understandable one, promulgated not only in study of this repertory), and it stems from an over-simplified model of transmission: that an edition or facsimile of the music is the starting-point of the performance, the source from which the musicians work, converting its instructions into sound. That narrative is reductive but nonetheless seductive. The music may, for instance, be memorized. And even then, the singers' primary source will not merely be the memory of previous performances. Instead, during performance the singers work on what might be called the 'rehearsal text', which is a combination of the (annotated) notation (memorized or actual), the memory of previous performances, the physical experience of prior performances ('muscle memory'), and a whole set of clues and cues, both personal and general, regarding (for instance) harmonic structure, word-sense, and impressionistic notions like 'the bit that sounds like the theme from M*A*S*H', or 'the bit where singer *x* sounds demented'. The rehearsal text is thus a displaced and condensed variation of the original notation, and as such it lies virtually beyond analysis.[3] However, it is still possible to describe something of its development. What follows, then, is an account of a rehearsal process, with a focus on some of the general issues with which the performer of Ars Subtilior repertory is confronted. In what follows, I do not presume to speak for all performers, nor indeed even for my colleagues in the Orlando Consort.

I have chosen *Sumite karissimi* by Antonio Zacara da Teramo as my example partly because of its reputation as an extreme example of the genre,[4] a piece that demonstrates most of the characteristic difficulties associated with this repertory.[5] In addition, Zacara's song has recently been the subject of a provocative article by Anne Stone, and some of the ideas she raises are revisited below.[6] My main concern is with the realization of the work in sound, not with editorial issues such as variant readings, *musica*

ficta and text-underlay, even though discussion of those matters might form a major part of rehearsals. I believe that three primary difficulties arise in this piece (as within this repertory in general), and that they are the same for all fluent readers, whether they sing from the original notation or from a transcription of the piece into modern notation.

The first difficulty is that of comprehending the durations of the notes. (The pitching of notes is rarely troublesome.) A moment of quiet contemplation is usually needed—whether of the mensural changes occurring in the original notation, or of the arcane note-values of the modern transcription—before the singer can launch into a performance of the voice-part. (Modern transcription tends to strain against the logic of equal bar-lengths, and to produce seemingly ridiculous subdivisions of the beat.) This is not music for sight-reading, though it would provide excellent music for a sight-reading test.[7]

This first difficulty, that of *reading* the rhythm, leads to the second difficulty: that of *realizing* it—which is to say, passing beyond the prescription of the notation to an unlaboured performance, and singing the voice-part in a convincing, phrased manner. The danger here is that the intention to sing complicated rhythms often has the effect of sounding too deliberate, too much like dictated freedom. The effort to re-create exactly what is on the page in modern notation often sounds exactly like that—an effort.[8] The performer confronts the code, not the intended 'feel' of the musical phrasing. The result can be accuracy at the expense of expression, exactness at the expense of fluency,[9] to the extent that (as David Fallows puts it) 'only the musically literate can gather more than a glimmer of what is happening'.[10]

The third difficulty is that of ensemble. Having mastered the complex rhythms of his or her own part, each singer must now set that line against often distracting counter-rhythms in the other voices. This can be seen and heard in the opening of *Sumite karissimi* (ex.1, soundclip 1). There are two rhythmic ideas here. The first is the basic cross-rhythm played out principally between cantus and contratenor, which operates throughout the piece. Both voices accord with an underlying broad pulse, but their subdivisions of it are differently ordered (two against three). A sense of *tactus* would have helped the

original singers, where a pulse may have been tapped by each performer on another performer, creating a self-monitoring, shared beat, but the modern conventions of the concert hall replace *tactus* with conducting or, more commonly in small groups, with physical movement.[11] The second rhythmic idea is the complex syncopation that operates against the broad pulse, such as occurs in the cantus at bar 5 (and elsewhere). There are two possible approaches that the singer of the cantus might take in bar 5. One is to trust his or her internal metronome and sing the rhythms exactly as notated. The other is to use the other voice-parts as a guide, and sing the rhythms relative to those other parts' movement. The former method is more virtuoso and potentially the more accurate, but given the relative nature of each singer's internal metronome, it is also the more risky.[12]

The first approach is suggested by the original notation (illus.2), for the mensural change insists upon the relative independence of the voices, and the layout of the parts separately on the page encourages independence (illus.1). A modern edition, with its spatially aligned transcription of the temporal relationship between the voices, may encourage the

second approach, where rhythmic realization can be achieved relative to the other voice-parts. Yet neither approach is wholly beyond the reach of either performer. The singer reading from original notation may discover that the g' in bar 5 comes the merest split second after the half-way point of the *tactus* (or 'bar'); a quick check would confirm that the tenor marks that point with a change of note, a moment that could then become an aural guide. Conversely, the performer reading from a modern score might ignore spatial alignment, and rely instead on the internal metronome. Either way—reading from original notation or from modern transcription— the performer shapes the approach through rehearsal, and the success or otherwise of the result may be judged by its intangible feeling of style and grace.[13]

However the music is learnt, be it from original notation, modern notation or by rote, the original notation can sometimes serve as an important interpretative tool for the modern performer. Anne Stone, as part of a broader argument, suggests that the complexity of the cantus line in bars 4 and 5 may be the result of a simple syncopation, a process reminiscent of coeval discant practices.[14] When

Ex.2 Antonio Zacara da Teramo, *Sumite karissimi*, opening transcribed in 6/8

Su - - mi - te ka - ris - - si - mi ca - - - pud

Ex.3

Ex.4

forced into modern score and expressed within a rigid 6/8 bar-count, the logic of the line (and its local phrasing) disappears, instead confronting the performer with a problem of rhythmic rendition (ex.2). The original notation (illus.2), however, reveals two hierarchically ordered and independently coherent phrases (exx.3, 4). With that realization come implications for articulation: the most important notes are the descending $b[\flat]'-a'-g'$ (ex.4), and the phrase that precedes it becomes a lazy decoration (ex.3). The f' that ends bar 5 becomes in effect an appoggiatura. The singer can now conceptualize the phrase as two discrete units with a more obvious rhythmic pattern. (Exx.3 and 4 are not 'to scale', and the relative mensural relationship must be applied: a ratio of 2:3, or a crotchet in the first phrase is equal to a dotted crotchet in the second.)

At this point the movement of the other voices can aid the cantus. The aim is to achieve a coincidence between the highest note in the cantus phrase (the c'') with the tenor's movement to c' in bar 4. From there on, the perverse ambition is to ensure that there is no synchronous movement with the other parts until the downbeat at the start of bar 6. The overall effect is hopefully one where the cantus appears as effortless as a swan gliding across the water, even though it is paddling like crazy beneath the surface. This is not necessarily the only solution to the problem (and the phrasing of ex.3 is still up for grabs: two mirrored rhythmic phrases, or one symmetrical unit?). A good internal metronome combined with a mathematical ability to think a relationship of 2:3 helps. By the time the performance takes place, the movement has been internalized and learnt, and the purely intellectual process has ended.

2 Detail of illus.1, showing the opening of the cantus of Antonio Zacara da Teramo, *Sumite karissimi*

All this suggests an interpretation of the music in which phrasing is more important than rhythmic complexity—although this is only one of several possible approaches, one that advances the broader structures of harmonic progression rather than the music's defining rhythmic complexity.[15] The tenor and contratenor can support this approach by aligning their phrasing with the same points of opening and closing as the discant line; thus they conceive their parts as a three-bar phrase followed by a two-bar phrase. Certain techniques can be used, the most obvious of which is a very gentle crescendo towards the middle of the phrase, and a correlative decrescendo towards the end of the phrase. A legato performance also helps to integrate the parts. In concert, the performers can also provide visual cues that play a part in semantic closure for the audience: one of the singers conducting can help guide the ear to an underlying structure, as can body movement, gesture and facial expression.[16] Soundclip 2 demonstrates this approach, reinterpreting the music of ex.1. It can be contrasted with soundclip 3, where each voice-part works for itself, at the expense of homogeneity. Here the lower voices add 'front' to each note, an easy option even on an open vowel, where the singer can apply a slight glottal. By emphasizing the logic of phrasing within each voice-part and operating independently of any broader design, the singers draw the listener's ear away from ensemble, and instead towards what may seem to be perversely independent parts.

The process described here applies a series of performance codes to the notation in order to 'make sense' of the music to the listener. The trace of these performance codes is not only audible: many performers today will mark their copies using their own system. This is a further example of the process of overwriting the original manuscript to produce a palimpsest of sorts.[17] In certain cases, such as when the performer alters the beaming imposed by the modern transcriber, those instructions are in effect erased. All this underlines the fact that notation as seemingly exact as that found in the Ars Subtilior repertory may, in fact, in some respects be extremely inexact; if it were clearer, we would not be raising questions about the attack of each note, the required tone, issues of phrasing and comparative dynamics.

The notation is compromised, then, not just because it is open to interpretation, but because of its own imprecision. Studies of this music that take account of coeval discant treatises and accounts of the training of performers point to a further problem common to much medieval music. This is the role of improvisation in the development of the composition, and the performers' grounding in extemporization. The written version of the song can then be seen as a palimpsest of an original, possibly more simple set of instructions, overlaid through a process of elaboration and notational game-playing. The resultant manuscript represents a 'finished' version, but there remains the possibility that it may have been further and alternatively decorated by performers.[18]

The degree to which such licence might be granted to the modern performer depends upon a number of issues. If we perform exactly what is written, then we are clearly on safe documentary ground. The development of the performance and reception of medieval music since the more experimental 1970s has, with a few obvious exceptions, been inclined towards this positivistic approach, particularly in Britain, and it is sanctioned by current recording practices where the producer is presented with scores at the outset; the aim of the recording session is the faithful rendition of the score in acoustic form. The counter-argument to such a notationally exact approach would be that the musicologically minded early-music ensemble should be guided by the spirit of the creation of this music, rather than merely remain faithful to its reproduction from notation.[19] Should we, then, decorate Ars Subtilior pieces still further?

Looking at the rest of *Sumite karissimi*, there seems to be little space left for elaboration, so dense is the 'writing'. The tenor line, as might be expected, provides the strongest rhythmic anchor. When combined with the cantus line, it also creates the harmonic foundation. Indeed, these two voice-parts can quite satisfactorily be performed alone as a duet, omitting the contratenor part.[20] The contratenor follows the same broad *tactus* as the tenor line, though it generally prefers duple to triple rhythms. In that sense, the tenor and contratenor in combination can also be viewed as a discrete unit. Both the

contratenor and the cantus are, then, the decorative parts, the cantus with its syncopated rhythms (as discussed earlier), the contratenor with its preference for duple time against triple. In general, the cantus and the contratenor avoid simultaneous ornamentation; but on occasion such moments do occur, and the result is the organized chaos that distinguishes so much Ars Subtilior music. The piece is, then, a clearly designed composition, and might seem to require no further elaboration.

But one moment stands out in this piece: the section from bars 36 to 42 (ex.5, soundclip 4), where for the first time all three voices largely coincide in rhythm. This alignment may well signal the importance placed on the text here—20 syllables are declaimed during five bars, a high ratio in a piece that otherwise favours melisma. For the reader of the work, the focus here becomes the (relatively) dense lyrical information, particularly important in that it contains a key moment of Zacara's hidden game of self-promotion. The full text of the song is as follows; the section set in ex.5 is shown in bold:

Sumite karissimi capud de REmulo patres,
caniteque musici idem de CONsule fratres.
Et de iuMENto ventrem, de gurgiDA pedem,
de nupTIis ventrem, capud de Oveque,
pedem de leoNE, milles cum in omnibus ZACHARIAS sates.

Take, most dear fathers, the head of REmulus,
and sing, brother musicians, the same from CONsul.
And from iuMENtum the belly, from gurgiDA the foot,
from nupTIae the belly, and the head of ovis,
the foot of leoNE, when in the whole, Zaccaria, you salute.[21]

The hidden message here is 'RECONMENDATIONE Zaccaria', wherein Zacara—in a suitably self-referential manner, typical of Ars Subtilior repertory—recommends himself to his fellow musicians. The message is not to be too well hidden, or the point will be lost, concealed by cleverness. Notational display might well divert attention away from the text, but what is obscure to the eye is not necessarily lost on the ear. As soundclip 5 shows, the singer of the cantus line can, in this relatively straightforward passage, reshape the phrase to underline the hidden word [RECON]-MEN-DA-TI-[o], giving the insider wink to the listener by clearly signposting MEN-DA-TI with rhythmic stress.

If such a moment can be seen as an opportunity for elaboration in the top part, what about the other parts? Elsewhere in the piece the contratenor is often given complicated rhythms that play against the other two voices. One might expect that such a performer was a specialist, and very much in demand. One might also expect that such a singer could have had some input into the realization of the piece, perhaps using improvisatory skills to suggest an alternative performance of a notated part, perhaps singing duplets instead of triplets, and *vice versa.* Soundclip 6 shows what might be done.[22] Such suggestions are, of course, speculative; I can offer no evidence that this practice ever took place, other than the rather dubious argument that singers today experience precisely such yearnings, and are sometimes chastised for having them.[23] Nevertheless, I think it is quite possible that such a performance may once have taken place. The abstruse nature of the Ars Subtilior repertory may seem to demand a slavish adherence to the notation, calling for exactness and accuracy. But as I have tried to show, although such notation may well denote control, it may also in fact connote freedom.

For all the technical aspects of performance outlined above, there is always a further dimension of which the performer cannot fail to be aware: the

Ex.5 Antonio Zacara da Teramo, *Sumite karissimi,* bars 36–42

de iu - MEN-to__ ven-trem,_de gur - gi- DA_ pe-dem,_ de nup-IT-is___ ven-trem, ca - pud

presence of and interaction with an audience. Music is always an act of communication, and any account of the performance of music must address the role of the audience in that act. The difficulty of the performance of Ars Subtilior repertory alluded to by Apel, and its often self-reflexive nature (which suggests a particular awareness in the audience), are but aspects of the peculiar nature of this repertory that invite consideration of it as an act of communication.
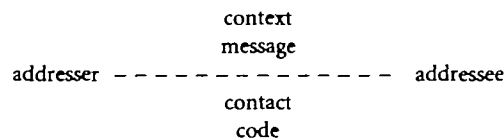
What I have described up to this point is popularly known as the performer's interpretation of the work; it relates to the degree of control that performers have over the music with which they are presented. The performer is free to impose upon the music a series of additional performance codes, ones that are often (and inevitably) drawn from his or her own musical culture, rather than from the culture in which the music was created. Even then, however, certain key aspects of the work remain beyond the control of the performer. Such aspects relate to its intrinsic properties.

All music in performance is communication, a message passed from the addresser (the performer) to the addressee (the audience). Communication is never quite so straightforward, however; for example, in the concert situation, when applause is offered, the simple equation of performer/addresser and audience/addressee is unsettled. In the case of Ars Subtilior repertory, we are dealing with a highly sophisticated form of communication in which words and music constantly engage different levels of address and self-referentiality, as noted by Anne Stone in her article elsewhere in this issue. My concern here, however, is not the various levels of readership outlined by Stone, but rather the music itself.

The extreme complexity of Ars Subtilior music has been referred to repeatedly. Together with this complexity comes a correlative demand for accuracy, most clearly articulated in pronouncements that this music cannot be performed. A more refined version of this stance was Willi Apel's assertion that it could be performed only with the help of electronics.[24] Apel's dream has perhaps been answered by musical computer software, specifically the invention of MIDI, a dream made manifest in websites devoted to Ars Subtilior repertory that contain
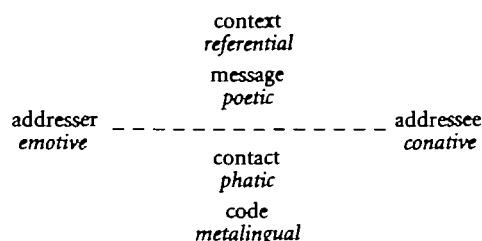
sound-files of key works.[25] But the demand for accuracy can be played out in reverse as well. Complicated music of any kind always begs the question of what it will look like on paper. Modern classical music, for example—to which Ars Subtilior repertory is so often compared[26]—shares the same sort of dialectic in its development of new forms of notation. Similarly, the transcription into modern notation of the dense, improvised saxophone solos of Parker or Coltrane demands the kind of rhythmically complex exactitude that is so characteristic of so many Ars Subtilior cantus lines. The question of what the music is doing (in, say, the case of complicated cross-rhythms or highly decorated phrases) brings with it immediately the question of its encoding.

What then emerges is an engagement with the space between the sonic event and the symbolic substitute of the score.[27] The same dialectic is at work in accounts of Ars Subtilior music that suggest that notation was beginning to become a part of performance, a moment of shared exchange between audience and performer. It thus becomes a semiotic fascination elevated to the status of a communication function. The score is now an additional visual locator that allows its reader to follow the inherent musical logic. This process can also operate in reverse, and describe the experience of the modern literate audience for whom the acoustic experience of the music is transcribed into an imagined score. In all these processes, what is taking place is a metalinguistic process, as outlined by Roman Jakobson in his classic analysis of verbal communication.[28] Jakobson sought to 'define [the place of the poetic function] among the other functions of language' from a strictly linguistic perspective.[29] He reduces any speech event to six language factors, as summarized in the following schema:

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{context} \\
\text{message} \\
\text{addresser} - - - - - - - - - - - - \text{addressee} \\
\text{contact} \\
\text{code}
\end{array}
$$

According to Jakobson, 'The *addresser* sends a message to the *addressee*. To be operative the *message* requires a *context* referred to ..., seizable by the

addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a *code* fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a *contact*, a physical connection between the addresser and addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication.' Each of these six factors relates to a linguistic function:

<center>
context
referential

message
poetic

addresser _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ addressee
emotive   *conative*
contact
phatic

code
metalingual
</center>

Each linguistic event can involve several of these functions simultaneously, and the character of the utterance is determined by the emphasis placed upon those functions. When the emphasis is upon the *addresser*, the result is an *emotive* event; but when the orientation is towards the *message* itself, we are in the realm of the *poetic*, and so on. Jakobson thus creates a typology of speech events, and a model for their explication. This model, when transposed to the musical event, provides a typology of musical forms. More importantly here, the application of this model also sheds light on important aspects of the performance situation which, in their own way, make a contribution to performance practice studies.[30]

The *message* within this model is the music itself, which remains the same for all performances (though presumably there is a point beyond which a performance of a piece renders its identity impossible to confirm). However, music itself is not denotative, does not have a *context* which can in turn be verbalized (unlike the poetry of the songs). Music is able to invoke cultural codes (a fanfare connotes the military, for example), but it cannot denote them. In written and spoken language, the primary function is the *referential* function, designed to convey information and ideas clearly,[31] but in the performance of music there is no denotative, no specific information to convey. By virtue of its non-denotative status, as opposed to written or spoken language, music must

be orientated towards the remaining three linguistic functions, the *poetic*, the *phatic* and the *metalingual*. That music is only ever about itself is a common enough idea, most obvious in descriptions of music as 'spiritual' or 'abstract', or where music is viewed as a universal language. It is thus forever skewed towards the *poetic*, concerned with itself as message.

The fifth of Jakobson's functions, the *phatic*, has a small role in the study of Ars Subtilior repertory. It refers to forms of *contact* (such as the person on the other end of the phone saying 'Uh-huh'). A contact-based analysis of performance practice would therefore focus upon the physical relationship and the codes of exchange between the performers and the audience/congregation.[32]

It is the sixth function, the *metalingual*, that distinguishes Ars Subtilior repertory. Music is rarely about the *code*.[33] But music from the Ars Subtilior period is all about codes, be it the written score, the use of direct musical quotation, or the imaginary process of encoding undertaken by the listener in response to musical complexity. In the 21st century, precisely because of the musicological context which has defined the music and set its own agenda, the performance of a piece addresses the issue of its exactness, of the extent to which the acoustic rendition accords with an actual score. The exchange between the audience and the performer in the 14th century is similarly all about verification of the code, particularly if the shared code is displayed before the performance itself.[34] It is this constant assessment of the relationship between the sonorous fact and its symbolic substitute that marks out the privileged space of the metalingual function in the performance of this repertory.

BOTH musicology and performance sometimes enter the dangerous but always engaging world of conjecture and fantasy.[35] I conclude with such a moment. Du Fay, in 1427, arrives in Bologna, compositions in hand, and meets with the local singers. He gives them his elegant, nostalgic chanson *Adieu ces bons vins de Lannoys*. They appear excited by its simplicity; for them, the piece offers a chance to demonstrate their skills, among which is, of course, their improvisational talent. Soundclip 7 hints at what Du Fay might have heard ...[36]

1 W. Apel, *The notation of polyphonic music, 900–1600* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), p.403.

2 R. Crocker, *A history of musical style* (Berkeley, 1966), p.138.

3 My use of the concepts of 'condensation' and 'displacement' deliberately invokes the Freudian model of the dream work, underlining the role of unconscious personal associations in the production of the rehearsal text.

4 'This piece may be said to represent the acme of rhythmic intricacy in the entire history of music'; W. Apel, *The notation of polyphonic music*, p.431.

5 The track is recorded in its entirety by the Orlando Consort in *The Saracen and the dove: music from the courts of Padua and Pavia around 1400* (Archiv Produktion 459 620-2).

6 A. Stone, 'Glimpses of the unwritten tradition in some *ars subtilior* works', *Musica disciplina*, l (1996), pp.59–93.

7 The role of the notation for the original performers is uncertain. Undoubtedly some of the performers would have been completely familiar with the complex notational systems employed in the Ars Subtilior repertory, since they were also the composers of the music (notably the composer-performers employed in Avignon, such as Matheus de Sancto Johanne, Haucourt and Hasprois). This does not mean, though, that all were readers of music in the modern sense. Indeed, the prevalence of solmization (as with tonic sol-fa today) suggests learning by rote, and the most important quotidian skills for such performers would have been improvisation and the performance of memorized chants.

8 This situation will be all too familiar to anyone who has been involved in a recording session, where a pop singer suggests that a note should be 'pushed'. A classically trained singer might then ask if by that he means that an anticipatory triplet semiquaver note should be tied to the note in question. Such exact prescription almost inevitably leads to a stilted performance.

9 The same issue is confronted in D. Leech-Wilkinson, 'Articulating Ars Subtilior song', *Early music*, xxi (2003), pp.6–18): the singer who focuses intently upon the exact length of a minim rest may fail to see its function as a phrase-marker, and therefore become a slave to the rhythm.

10 D. Fallows, 'The end of the Ars subtilior', *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis*, xx (1996), p.22.

11 A celebrated marginal decoration from the Chantilly Manuscript, reproduced as the cover illustration of the previous issue of *Early music*, xxxi/1 (Feb 2003), seems to show the use of *tactus* to regulate performance of a group of singers engaged in performing an Ars Subtilior item.

12 In my experience of conducted and non-conducted ensemble performance, it is quite clear that no one has a perfect internal metronome. Musicians have a tendency to speed up or slow down. This is most obvious on a small scale in the response to a dotted note: some will be slow off the dot, others fast (and this tendency can in turn be affected by slow or fast tempos). The only consistent feature of the internal metronome is the fact that every singer thinks that his or hers is accurate.

13 This statement confronts a very real problem: the lack of an agreed terminology for the analysis of musical performance. I am struck by the prevalence of studies from the perspective of cognitive science in the field of musical performance, and the correlative lack of a semiotics of musical performance.

As noted in M. de Marinis, *The semiotics of performance* (Indiana, 1993), p.47, the performance text is 'an extreme example of textuality', and its analysis a daunting task. However dull it might be, a taxonomy of the subcodes of performance (kinesics, word-stress, accent, phrasing etc.) would undoubtedly aid such a discussion.

14 Stone, 'Glimpses of the unwritten tradition'. Her argument draws upon counterpoint treatises and the improvisatory tradition of *cantus fractus, frolidatus* or *figuratus*. There are several techniques described, the most important of which in this context are displacement of a (plainchant) phrase by a beat, the rendition of phrases in contrasting metres, and elaboration of simple lines by decorative formulae. For a discussion of syncopation that invokes jazz and Stravinsky as the closest contemporary parallels, see also W. Apel, *The notation of polyphonic music*, pp.414–18.

15 I note that this interpretation supports Crocker's view of this music rather than Apel's, though this was not my original aim.

16 Regarding this point, see Y. Plumley, 'Playing the citation game in the late 14th-century chanson', *Early music*, xxxi (2003), p.31.

17 Other peoples' markings can be surprisingly distracting and often confusing, hence the convention that gives rise to another state of palimpsest: the use of pencil that can easily be erased.

18 For further examples of improvisation during the medieval period, see R. Wegman, 'Singers and composers in Flemish urban centres: a social context for Busnoys and Obrecht', *Antoine Busnoys: method, meaning and context in late medieval music* (Oxford, 1996), pp.174–214, and R. Wegman, 'From maker to composer: improvisation and musical authorship in the Low Countries, 1450–1500', *Journal of the*

American Musicological Society, xlix (1996), pp.409–79.

19 I am following here an 'authentic' model of early-music performance, perhaps still the dominant ideology within the early-music movement, and the 'standard' against which many reviews are set. According to this model, the performer balances the instructions of the extant sources with a knowledge of performance practice, and tries to 'filter out' modern instincts. (To be accused of being '19th-century' in approach remains one of the strongest insults in some rehearsal spaces.)

20 In rehearsal, it is often helpful first to isolate the cantus/tenor duet, then to add the potentially disruptive contratenor voice.

21 My thanks to Leofranc Holford-Strevens for permission to use this translation.

22 Much the same is suggested in H. M. Brown, 'Improvised ornamentation in the fifteenth-century chanson', *Quadrivium*, xii (1971), p.242: 'Perhaps performer-composers were often challenged to improvise a Contratenor against a pre-existent and self-contained two-part framework of Superius and Tenor'.

23 It is fairly common practice for low basses to put in octaves below the notated part on the final chord in Renaissance music. On one occasion, a critic chastised the performer for the action on the grounds that it could not have been notated at the time.

24 '*Sumite Karissimi* represents the ultimate degree of syncopation, and today could be performed only with the help of electronic equipment': Willi Apel, quoted in U. Günther, 'Problems of dating in Ars nova and Ars subtilior', in *L'ars nova italiano de Trecento* (Certaldo, 1975), p.294.

25 See, for example, http://www.pacificnet.net/~garyrich/subtilior/

26 See for instance David Fallows's remark ('The end of the Ars Subtilior', p.21) that 'the music of this late fourteenth-century tradition is in many ways more intricate and harder to perform than any other music before the twentieth century'; or, from another perspective, Fred Lerdahl's comment that 'I can think of only one period in the Western tradition where the [large poietic-aesthesic] gap has ever been remotely comparable to that of [the 20th] century: the late 14th century, with its isorhythmic techniques and complicated surface rhythms': 'Composing and listening: a reply to Nattiez', *Perception and cognition of music*, ed. I. Deliège and J. Sloboda (Hove, 1997), p.424.

27 I borrow the definition of notation as 'the symbolic substitute for the sonorous fact' from J.-J. Nattiez, *Music and discourse: toward a semiology of music* (Princeton, 1990), p.72.

28 See R. Jakobson, 'Closing statement: linguistics and poetics', *Style in language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge, 1960), pp.350–77.

29 Jakobson, 'Closing statement', p.353.

30 Jean-Jacques Nattiez dismisses Jakobson's schema in so far as it is not a dynamic model and takes little account of the various contexts of message exchange. From Nattiez's perspective he is correct: the model belongs very much in the tradition of the early Structuralist school, the so-called first semiology. The limits of Jakobson's model are clearly demonstrated by Anne Stone's article in this very issue. Her argument draws upon the so-called second semiology, which rejects linguistic formalism and develops a more complex model of communication premised on the theory of enunciation. The key figures in the development of the theory of enunciation are Tzvetan Todorov, Gerard Genette and Roland Barthes (particularly in his work on the text in the 1970s), and all

draw on the work of Emile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson himself in the field of linguistics (most notably in their work on shifters). For all that, Jakobson's model remains a valuable tool in the singularly undeveloped area of performance-practice studies.

31 Jakobson, 'Closing statement', p.353: 'an orientation toward the *context* ... is the leading task'.

32 See for example my own account of the shift from voices placed out of sight in the Sistine Chapel to modern performances by early-music groups that draw on 19th-century concert-giving conventions: D. Greig, 'Sight readings: notes on *a cappella* performance practice', *Early music*, xxiii (1995), pp.124–48, esp. pp.131–6.

33 Raymond Monelle is doubtful it can ever be about code. See R. Monelle, *Linguistics and semiotics in music* (Chur, 1992), p.12. To be precise here, Monelle is talking about primary codes. As music does not 'mean' anything, it cannot be about its own codes, but there are a whole set of secondary musical codes which are learned and with which music can 'play'.

34 Jakobson, 'Closing statement', p.356: 'Whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focused on the *code*: it performs a *metalingual* (i.e., glossing) function'.

35 For a further discussion of this issue see D. Greig, 'Performance Practice and Fantasy', *Mittelalter Sehnsucht?: Texte des interdisziplinären Symposions zur musikalischen Mittelalterrezeption an der Universität Heidelberg, April 1998*, ed. A. Kreutziger-Herr and D. Redepenning (Kiel, 2000), pp.265–80.

36 Compare this with the 'straight' version as sung by the Orlando Consort on *Food, wine and song: music and feasting in Renaissance Europe* (Harmonia mundi USA HMU907314), track 12.