

Seminars in Medieval and Renaissance Music
All Souls College, Oxford
Michaelmas Term, 2022

The seminars in 2022–23 will continue on Zoom. The seminars are all on Thursdays at 5 p.m. UK time (BST for the first seminar, GMT for the others). This mailing comes to you from our colleague Dr Matthew Thomson, who expertly hosts the Zoom meetings, as set out below. We hope you will join us.

Margaret Bent
All Souls College
Convenor

If you are planning to attend a seminar this term, please register using [this form](#). For each seminar, those who have registered will receive an email with the Zoom invitation and any further materials a couple of days before the seminar. If you have questions, please just send me an email (matthew.thomson@ucd.ie).

Matthew P. Thomson
University College Dublin

Seminar programme

Thursday 27 October, 5pm BST

Laurie Stras (University of Southampton)

Music, musicians, and community at the Florentine convent of San Matteo in Arcetri (1540-1630)

Discussants: Bonnie Blackburn and Marica Tacconi

The Clarissan convent of San Matteo in Arcetri is well known in both scholarly and non-specialist histories as the home of Suor Maria Celeste Galilei, daughter of Galileo Galilei and granddaughter of the musician Vincenzo Galilei. Brought to modern imagination by the 1999 non-fiction work *Galileo's Daughter* by Dava Sobel, the convent has been portrayed as a rather dour, unsophisticated, and impoverished house. And yet, evidence of San Matteo's rich musical life in the mid-sixteenth century has recently emerged, in one of the most complete music manuscripts that can securely be associated with an Italian convent of the Renaissance.

Copied in 1560, Brussels MS 27766, the Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript - so called because of the names of the nuns embossed on its binding - preserves polyphony for the entire year, and reveals intriguing local detail regarding liturgical practice and chant in its destination community. Its most impressive contribution is a set of twelve polyphonic Vespers antiphons for the Feast of St Clare, unique form and function in the sixteenth-century repertoire. Its provenance is confirmed by the only surviving ledger from the sixteenth century in the Florentine Archivio di Stato pertaining to San Matteo. Names, faces, and traces of relationships are found entwined in the music's elaborate cadellae, and the feasts to which the polyphony pertains are given depth and context in the ledger, which records the convent's expenses.

Triangulating information from the manuscript, the ledger, and from Suor Maria Celeste's letters - and experiencing chant and polyphony performed by *Musica Secreta* - we can start to piece together a better picture of why this convent might have felt an appropriate choice for the Galilei family. We may also understand better how family connections that weave in and out of the convent space are used to forge relationships over generations.

Thursday 17 November, 5pm GMT

Konstantin Voigt (University of Freiburg)

From Lyre to Staff – Relating Diagrams, Neumes and Diastematic Notation

Discussants: Charles Atkinson and Susan Rankin

Guidonian diastematic notation derived ultimately from a fusion of neumes, stemming from grammatical accents, with the line-diagram of the tone-system found in Boethius. This paper limns the history of neumatic notation as reception of grammar and the history of the line diagram as reception of ars musica, examining the "operative potential" (Sybille Krämer) of both types of visualization. The study shows that the operativity of both diagrams and neumes changed drastically between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. Whereas the Boethian diagram lacked any reference to melodic motion, ninth-century adaptations of it relate it to the melodies of Roman chant, temporalizing it and changing its orientation - a process resulting from the spatial orientation of neumes. Neither medium was intended primarily for "storing" melodic material. Instead, both relied heavily on the melodic knowledge of their users. This recall-based operativity of both ninth-century diagrams and neumes is substantially different from the operativity of Guidonian notation, devised as a means of storage to enable musical practice from the book and resting firmly on the mathematic/aural foundation of the monochord. Indeed, the monochord as the basis for this new operativity meant less a development of notational means than a conceptual restart in the history of notation.

Thursday 1 December, 5pm GMT

David Burn (University of Leuven)

Sixteenth-Century Symbola

Discussants: Inga Mai Groote and Christian Leitmeir

When the Passau school-master and composer Leonhard Paminger died in 1567, his sons announced a plan to publish a multi-volume edition of their father's music. The plan included descriptions of the contents of each of the projected volumes. While most of the types of piece mentioned are self-explanatory, one category, "symbola", was unfamiliar to me. What was intended? The projected Paminger volume was never produced, but one piece among his surviving music was identified as a "symbolum", which was sufficient to show that they are settings of emblems or mottoes. Yet, beyond this, the type remains obscure in existing literature: only one collection, Caspar Othmayr's *Symbola* of 1547, has received (limited) discussion, and this turns out to raise more questions than it answers. In an attempt to deal with the type more broadly, the present paper thus not only defines what symbola are but also addresses three further basic questions: How many are there? What are their features? And what functions did they fulfil?

Advance notice for HT 22

26 January, Julia Craig-McFeely (DIAMM, University of Oxford), 'The Sadler partbooks and the Merchant of Norwich: A Tudor whodunnit and its wider implications'.

16 February, Martin Kirnbauer and the project team Vicentino21 (Schola Cantorum Basiliensis / FHNW), 'Soav' e dolce – Nicola Vicentino's intervallic vision'.

9 March, Emily Zazulia (University of California at Berkeley), 'The Fifteenth-Century Song Mass: Some Challenges'.