A History of Improvisation in the Medieval Music Revival

Leah Stuttard

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

October 2023
Copyright Statement

i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices to this thesis) owns any copyright in it (the “Copyright”) and she has given The University of Huddersfield the right to use such Copyright for any administrative, promotional, educational and/or teaching purposes.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts, may be made only in accordance with the regulations of the University Library. Details of these regulations may be obtained from the Librarian. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of any patents, designs, trademarks and any and all other intellectual property rights except for the Copyright (the “Intellectual Property Rights”) and any reproductions of copyright works, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property Rights and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property Rights and/or Reproductions.
Acknowledgements

Over seven years of official doctoral student journey came to an end with the handing in of this thesis. It might be argued though that my voyage actually began at some previous point. Perhaps it was at a conference about improvisation just before I began my Masters studies in 2014 or during my undergraduate degree when I asked my dissertation supervisor, Professor David Fallows, whether we could work on the Squarcialupi codex? Or perhaps I should look further back to when I first played a medieval harp at Dartington Summer School in the 1990s? Or maybe really it was when I first heard music for the crusades by the Early Music Consort of London at the age of about 13. There are many potential starting points and even more people to thank and acknowledge.

Firstly, enormous gratitude goes to my supervisor Professor Lisa Colton who oversaw almost all of this process with a steady hand and indefatigable pragmaticism. My life would have been considerably harder had her kind enthusiasm not been a constant companion during the years that she guided me, guidance that even predated my studies because she assisted me to obtain the funding required for me to do the doctorate in the first place.

To have not one but two supervisors right from the outset has been a big privilege and help. Professor Sue Miller has provided very many practical suggestions and a great deal of encouragement from start to finish. I am so grateful for her help and also for the boost that Dr Catherine Haworth gave me in the final few months when Professor Colton was called to pastures new. Those final energising and supportive pushes to get me over the finishing line were absolutely vital, thank you both.

I was extremely privileged to receive full funding from the North Eastern Consortium for the Arts and Humanities. It was a delight and a pleasure to meet my fellow grantees in Hull and learn with them on subjects as diverse as how publishing works to the best way to organise your computer filing system. As an insight into how the professional academic world works, my experiences were eye opening and I am particularly grateful to Dr Martin Wilcox in the history department of Hull University for his candid sharing during our NECAH get togethers.
I am also grateful to the Estella Canziani Postgraduate Bursary for Research who funded trips to enable me to interview musicians in France, Austria, Belgium and England. Similarly, the Royal Musicological Association were generous in financially supporting a further visit to Germany. The University of Huddersfield School of Music and Humanities also kindly supported other necessary research trips.

In March 2020, the global pandemic hit, and I was subject to “confinement” in my home in France. Thankfully, I was in the fortunate position of having already collected most of my data, so my research did not suffer. In fact, I benefited greatly from the chance to participate in online gatherings and training that otherwise would have been inaccessible to me. This led me to meet Dr Caroline Gill, who at that time was a fellow PhD student at Huddersfield. She in turn introduced me to a group of women, the Early Birds, who still regularly get together every day at 8 am to get some work done (and have a good chat). This regular accountability and sense of community has been so helpful and productive on those many days when the slog of it felt too much to bear. Your book recommendations meant I could get some respite from the intellectual grind as well. I want to express my thanks here to Caroline for many a joyously nerdy chat and countless comfortably silent poms, and also to the other regulars, Lauren, Marilyn, Clare and Venessa. The world is indeed our lobster.

I would also like to thank Professor Leah Bassel, who is honestly the best neighbour anyone could hope for and who really went above and beyond what could appropriately be expected of someone next door; Dr Katherine Hawnt, (soon to be Dr) Elizabeth Cullinane and Dr Jeremy Llewellyn for their many kindnesses; Professor David Fallows, who has never stopped supporting me; Dr Edward Breen, who was always willing to share his research with me; Florian Fischer, who bravely helped me slog through some tricky German articles; and James and Julie Temple, whose home was a haven for me on my trips to Huddersfield.

All of my interviewees generously gave me their time and energy with many also allowing me access to personal archives of performance scores or live recordings. Other musicians engaged in conversation with me by email although in the end I did not visit them. My colleagues in the Italian medieval ensemble, Micrologus, both Crawford Young and Patrizia Bovi deserve especial mention for their reliable interest in my research as well as for the sharing of materials and time talking to me about all things medieval.
In terms of a consistent source of encouragement and support, I have been blessed with an amazing sister, Revd. Anna Stuttard, MA. She made going to university seem achievable and normal, having been the very first person in our family ever to do so. While she admits she might have a Machiavellian Slytherin side, at least she uses her powers for good, providing endless cups of tea or gin and tonics, whichever seemed more appropriate to the particular stage of the journey that I was at. Thanks for everything, ever – if I’m good for anything, it’s mostly because of you!

When I first casually mentioned that I was thinking about doing a Masters at the Sorbonne, I was unprepared for quite how enthusiastic my husband-to-be would get about the idea of me returning to studying. His excitement, belief and pride in my achievements have carried me throughout this journey. He only ever got slightly bored of my requests for hot beverages or reassurance and has always wanted to hear about my research even though I thought he couldn’t possibly be interested. Je n’ai pas les mots pour exprimer toute ma gratitude, mon chéri que j’aime.
Abstract

Western music from medieval sources, dated roughly before 1520, has been widely performed and recorded since the 1960s. This thesis focuses on one aspect of this medieval music revival: improvisation, or the spontaneous generation of musical material during performance. This topic is a source of conflict between those who believe the notation of medieval music is complete in itself without requiring any further additions to make it performable, and those for whom simply playing the notes as edited from a manuscript is not enough to restore medieval music to a living art. My research shows how improvisation is also emblematic of the way that the performance of medieval music has developed over the last 60 years.

This thesis uses a mixed methodology. Musicological analysis of performances is complemented by thematic analysis of survey data from a self-selected group of medieval music enthusiasts and discussion and citation of interview material gathered from a wide range of English- and French-speaking performers. I discuss the background of the performances and outline how theories about historical music and its revival influenced musicians. This includes ideas about authenticity and about notated and oral transmission of music. I explore how different schools of thought have expressed different beliefs about this, leading to differing impacts on the ways musicians have worked. The words of my interviewees and survey participants shed light on the current state of understanding of the concept and practice of improvisation.

The thesis concludes with three detailed case studies. These are focused on the pioneering ensemble Studio der frühen Musik and its director, Thomas Binkley; the lutenist Crawford Young; and the wind player Mara Winter. I reveal how improvisation has become an accepted and central practice in the performance of medieval music, matching the way in which musicological awareness has become ever more attuned to the presence of performer-controlled creativity during the Middle Ages. The Studio invested their creative labour in producing a new medieval musical model, one that was imbued with “Arabic” sounds and Arabo-Andalusian inspiration but did not improvise. Young devoted effort to exploring historically justifiable improvisation models, focusing particularly on the lute style of the fifteenth century where he felt there was enough evidence to make his own creativity believably medieval. His musical models were taken from existing repertoire as well as the technical manuals that explained music theory and counterpoint. His method included an emphasis on memory and memorisation, a practice of importance to music making during the Middle Ages. Winter’s approach embraced personal creativity on a broad scale. She eschewed the use of musical notation and relied on musical gestures that were based on knowledge of geographically appropriate folk music and time-appropriate music from elsewhere in Europe. She brought these together to make a new and specific, limited modal language of her own, acknowledging how personal this was to her and her ensemble, Moirai.

This thesis reveals that improvisation in the medieval music revival, although initially impossible, has become more and more present in historical performing practices as musicians have built their confidence in the freshly created medieval musical languages. It highlights the paradox of and tensions inherent in creating a ‘new’ medieval musical idiom.
Contents
Copyright Statement........................................................................................................... 3
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ 5
Abstract ............................................................................................................................. 9
List of abbreviations ......................................................................................................... 15
Notes ................................................................................................................................. 16
List of Figures .................................................................................................................... 17
List of Tables ..................................................................................................................... 20
Chapter I: Introduction ...................................................................................................... 21
    Research questions ......................................................................................................... 23
    Positionality ..................................................................................................................... 24
    Case study choice rationale ............................................................................................. 25
    Themes .............................................................................................................................. 26
    Context and background ................................................................................................. 29
Methodology ....................................................................................................................... 29
    Interviews and Survey .................................................................................................... 30
    Ethical considerations ..................................................................................................... 31
    Archival Research ........................................................................................................... 31
    Musical Transcription and Analysis .............................................................................. 32
Thesis Outline ..................................................................................................................... 34
    Chapter I: Introduction ................................................................................................. 34
    Chapter II: Methodology ............................................................................................... 34
    Chapter III: A historiography of twentieth and twenty-first century performance practices – understanding improvisation in the medieval music revival .............................................................................. 34
    Chapter IV: Studio der frühen Musik: Faking Improvisation 1960-1977 ...................... 34
    Chapter V: Crawford Young: Memory and creativity in Che fa la ramacina 2012-2017 ............................................................................................................................ 35
    Chapter VI: Mara Winter: Freedom within restriction ................................................... 35
    Chapter VII: Conclusion ................................................................................................. 35
Significance of the study ..................................................................................................... 35
Chapter II: Methodology .................................................................................................... 37
    General approach ............................................................................................................ 38
    Interview as data collection technique ......................................................................... 40
    Interview transcription procedure ................................................................................ 44
    Thematic analysis of interview data ............................................................................... 45
    Survey ............................................................................................................................... 47
    Traditional score-based analysis and contextual analysis ............................................. 49
    Use of recordings ............................................................................................................ 52
Performance transcription .............................................................................................................. 52
My analytical approaches ........................................................................................................... 54
The Act of Analysis ...................................................................................................................... 57
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 60

Historicism in performance and authenticity .............................................................................. 67
Creative procedures and processes as authentic ......................................................................... 76
Changing attitudes to and meanings of musical notation ............................................................. 80
Textuality, orality and memory .................................................................................................... 90
Living traditions .......................................................................................................................... 95
The I-word .................................................................................................................................. 99
The overlap between ornamentation and improvisation .............................................................. 105
Language as a useful set of metaphors for improvisation ............................................................ 110
Rules .......................................................................................................................................... 115
Speaking and improvisation as performative acts ....................................................................... 118
Resistance to improvisation ........................................................................................................ 121
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 122

Chapter IV: Studio der frühen Musik – Faking’ Improvisation 1960-1977 .................................. 125
A chantar ....................................................................................................................................... 131
Case study: Analytical discussion of the Studio’s recording of A chantar ................................. 134
The Studio’s ‘Arabic style’ ............................................................................................................. 139
Arabo-Andalusian structural influences ....................................................................................... 141
Improvisation and Arabo-Andalusian style ................................................................................... 144
Reasons for faking improvisation ................................................................................................. 148
How Binkley understood what the ensemble were doing ......................................................... 154
Conclusion: Faking improvisation using geographically recognisable sound signifiers ............. 158

Chapter V: Crawford Young – Memory and Creativity in Che Fa la Ramacina 2012-2017 ........... 161
Historical sources and models for Young’s improvisatory activity ............................................ 169
Visual evidence informing Young’s performance techniques .................................................... 180
Case study: Analytical discussion of Young’s recordings of Che fa la ramacina ......................... 185
Bridging into the lute solo with material from the previous song ................................................. 222
Conclusion: memory and creativity ............................................................................................. 226

Chapter VI: Mara Winter – Freedom Within Restriction ............................................................... 229
Winter’s definition of improvisation ............................................................................................. 231
Processes of improvisation for Winter and Marti ......................................................................... 234
Discussion of singing style: rimur and psalm chanting ................................................................. 254
Analysis and comparison of the performance with the performance scores ........................................ 256
Analysis of Winter’s contribution ........................................................................................................ 270
Conclusion: freedom and restriction ................................................................................................. 287
Chapter VII: Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 289
How and why did improvisation come to be an accepted practice in the historical performance of
medieval music? ..................................................................................................................................... 290
How have other participants in the medieval music revival improvised? ........................................ 291
What shape did their improvisations take? ......................................................................................... 293
How do these musicians understand what they are doing when they improvise? ......................... 293
To what extent is the term “improvisation” applicable when discussing performance practices of
medieval music? ..................................................................................................................................... 295
Other avenues of reflection opened up by my data ........................................................................... 296
Methodology ......................................................................................................................................... 298
My contribution ..................................................................................................................................... 299
Bibliography ......................................................................................................................................... 301
Discography ........................................................................................................................................ 325
Appendix 1: Transcription of A Chantar as Performed by the Studio .................................................. 329
Appendix 2: Transcriptions of Che Fa la Ramacina as Performed by Robert Crawford Young, 2012-2017 ... 337
Appendix 3: Transcription of Sigdrifa’s Spell by Ensemble Moirai .................................................. 353
Glossary ................................................................................................................................................ 363
List of abbreviations

WAM – Western Art Music

I use this acronym to refer to the music and practices of the tradition of notated music in Western Europe and North America that was the original focus of study in traditional musicology. This music was classified as having high artistic value and taught in specialist schools known as conservatoires. I define it in this way in order to provide a distinction from other types of music that are now also considered to be valid objects of study and with which medieval music often has a lot in common, for example oral traditional musics from across the globe, jazz, rock and pop music.¹

HIP – Historically Informed Performance

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Unless otherwise noted, all musical transcriptions are similarly my own.

Due to the large number of technical terms relating to various repertoires of medieval music, I have decided to include a glossary with brief explanations. Words that have an entry in the glossary are asterisked in the main body of the text and footnotes.

A list of interviews is found in Appendix 1. Interview citations only have a footnoted reference when it is unclear to which interview I am referring, otherwise surnames are used in the body of the text.
List of Figures

Figure II.1: Braun & Clarke's Phases of Thematic Analysis Flowchart ...................................................... 46
Figure III.1: Ganassi's first example of diminution .................................................................................. 102
Figure IV.1: Diplomatic transcription from MS W fol 204-204v with musical structure indicated by capital letters: following the “Frenchified” text as transcribed by Pollina ............................................. 126
Figure IV.2: A Chantar, MS W, fol 204 r ............................................................................................... 127
Figure IV.3: A Chantar, MS W, fol 204 v ............................................................................................... 127
Figure IV.4: A Chantar annotated score of the lute prelude .................................................................. 131
Figure V.1: Pulcherrima de virgine, Buxheim, with harmonic analysis (edition by Wallner) ................. 164
Figure V.2: Jacob Obrecht Nec michi nec tibi, from Perugia, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 431 (G 20) fol. 90v-91r ............................................................................................................................................. 166
Figure V.3: Comparison of models with Young's performances 1......................................................... 168
Figure V.4: Comparison of models with Young's performances 2......................................................... 169
Figure V.5: Comparison of models with Young's performances 3......................................................... 169
Figure V.6: Comparison of models with Young's performances 4......................................................... 169
Figure V.7: Dissonance analysis of extract from 2012 Antwerp ............................................................. 172
Figure V.8: Detail from Cosimo Tura’s painting, The Virgin and Child Enthroned, showing plectrum and hand position of lutenist .................................................................................................................. 175
Figure V.9: Page from Petrucci’s third book of frottole showing the reprise of “Che fa la ramacina” .................................................................................................................................................. 185
Figure V.10: Page from Canzoni Frottole et Capitoli showing melodic material from Questo vechio maledetto used at the start of Young’s lute solo .............................................................................. 186
Figure V.11: Inserted extensions in 2012 Spello .................................................................................... 190
Figure V.12: Longer inserted free section in 2014 Morez ................................................................. 191
Figure V.13: Extracts of 2012 Spello ..................................................................................................... 196
Figure V.14: Different versions of phrase cadencing on G, 2016 Mexico ............................................ 197
Figure V.15: Different versions of phrase cadencing on A, 2016 Mexico ............................................ 198
Figure V.16: Different versions of phrase cadencing on E, 2016 Mexico ............................................ 199
Figure V.17: Different versions of phrase cadencing on D, 2016 Mexico ............................................ 200
Figure V.18: Example of inserted extension ......................................................................................... 201
Figure V.19: Comparison of yellow section .......................................................................................... 203
Figure VI.20: Last four bars of Compère Che fa la ramacina ......................................................204
Figure VI.21: Compère quote in 2012 Antwerp ..............................................................................204
Figure VI.22: Section quoted by Young towards the end of Ile Fatazies de Joskin .......................205
Figure VI.23: 2012 Antwerp with allusion to Ile fatazies highlighted ............................................207
Figure VI.24: Tandernaken in 2015 Maguelone ..............................................................................208
Figure VI.25: Comparison of green section ....................................................................................210
Figure VI.26: Comparison of main orange section (cadences on G E D) ....................................212
Figure VI.27: Comparison of pink section ......................................................................................215
Figure VI.28: Comparison of three introductory sections based on Questo vechio maledetto ....217
Figure VI.29: Introductory section based on Questo vechio in 2016 Mexico .................................218
Figure VI.1: Winter annotated text performance material, Gripir’s Prophecy .............................230
Figure VI.2: Further annotated text performance material, Gripir’s Prophecy ............................231
Figure VI.3: Performance score of Sigrdrifumál ............................................................................233
Figure VI.4: Performance score, abbreviated text version of Sigrdrifumál ....................................237
Figure VI.5: Ornament annotation in transcription ........................................................................245
Figure VI.6: Transcription of timing example ...............................................................................245
Figure VI.7: Tremblement sign in transcription ...........................................................................246
Figure VI.8: Spectrogram showing vibrato ..................................................................................247
Figure VI.9: Psalm tone and Sigrdrifa’s spell “chanting” .................................................................249
Figure VI.10: Extract of textual performance score ....................................................................255
Figure VI.11: Extract of textual performance score ....................................................................255
Figure VI.12: Analysis of performance of Sections III-2 to III-6 ....................................................256
Figure VI.13: Section III-2 to III-6 showing flute and voice ...........................................................258
Figure VI.14: Flute swirling ornament rhythm .............................................................................260
Figure VI.15: Performance of Section IV, use of D♯ ...................................................................262
Figure VI.16: Vocal gestures in the performance .........................................................................263
Figure VI.17: Flute accompaniment in O speculum columbe, extract .........................................266
Figure VI.18: Flute accompaniment in O speculum columbe, extract .........................................266
Figure VI.19: Flute accompaniment in O speculum columbe, extract .........................................267
Figure VI.20: Exploring the range of the mode ..........................................................................268
Figure VI.21: Echoing the voice .................................................................................................269
Figure VI.22: Echoing previous flute material ..............................................................................269
Figure VI.23: Fillers, texture, drone ............................................................................................270
Figure VI.24: Pitch emphasis
Figure VI.25: Leading to a new range
Figure VI.26: Dissonance
Figure VI.27: Gesture 1 – F♯ (or A♯), G♯, F♯
Figure VI.28: Gesture 2 – F♯, G♯, B, (G♯, F♯)
Figure VI.29: Gesture 3 – F♯, (G♯, F♯), E♯, F♯, (G♯ or E♯, F♯)
Figure VI.30: Gesture 4 – F♯, E♯, F♯, E♯, D♯
Figure VI.31: Gesture 5 – D♯, C♯, (B), A♯, B
List of Tables

Table III.1: List of interviewees ......................................................................................................... 94
Table V.1: List of performances in my corpus ..................................................................................... 157
Table V.2: List of music with text “Che fa la ramacina” ................................................................. 181
Table V.3: Schematic representation of performances of *Che fa la ramacina* ......................... 193
Table VI.1: Text, translation and musical comments on *Sigrdrífa’s spell* ................................. 240
Chapter I: Introduction
This thesis uncovers the hidden history of the creative practice of improvisation in the medieval music revival since the 1960s. It emphasises the importance of the performers’ perspectives and voices when writing a narrative about the performance of early music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I am an improviser and a medieval musician and have participated in the medieval music revival since I first started performing on harp in the late 1990s. My musicological research is therefore deeply woven together with my own musical journey and identity.

Improvisation was something that I had always wanted to be able to do. As a young pianist, I thought it was a magical skill that only an elite, chosen few were gifted with. When I began to play the medieval harp, I was invited to accompany singers performing chants by Hildegard of Bingen, meaning I was immediately confronted with having to play without notation. At that point I finally realised that I was perfectly capable of improvising, at least, I could do it on the harp and in that particular repertoire. It was revelatory and a source of enormous enjoyment. By then, I had also taken on the challenge of learning how to play figured bass on the harpsichord, a task that included no small amount of improvising, but which, looking back, I did not classify as improvisation at all. It has become clear to me that I had quite a few preconceptions about what improvisation is.

Equipped with a Leverhulme Study Abroad Studentship, I went to the Schola Cantorum in Basel, Switzerland in the year 2000, in order to study historical performance styles and the art of performing in more detail. I took part in improvisation classes both in medieval style on my harp, and in Renaissance and Baroque styles on the keyboard. I was encouraged to memorise pieces, and to write in the style I was trying to improvise in. I realised that memory more than magic was key to the task I had set myself, that of being able to improvise polyphony in a historical style.

I came back to the topic of improvisation when I began my Masters studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. After participating in the Perspectives on Musical Improvisation II conference at Oxford University in September 2014, I was brimming with exciting ideas about what improvisation is, means and does, and ways in which I might approach the topic musicologically. In conversation with my Masters supervisor, Dr Isabelle Ragnard, I mentioned the Studio der frühen Musik (to be referred to as the Studio) and how my teacher in Basel, Crawford Young, had told me the group did not improvise. At the time Young told me this, I had not even heard of them. I remember the scornful, mocking way we treated their old-fashioned sounding performances when we listened to them together. The thing that interested me so much about this experience was the fact that their
performances *sounded* improvised. Only an insider with special knowledge of their practice could expose the fact of their performances’ non-improvisatory nature. Dr Ragnard was also interested in this and encouraged me to pursue it as a topic. This led me to questions about the nature of improvisation, about how it might be possible to recognise it, and about how its practice has developed within the medieval music revival. Improvisation seemed to me to be so absolutely essential to the performance of medieval music, I just could not understand how it was possible that this ensemble had not spontaneously created their accompaniments and preludes. At this point, I did not question the binary between improvisation and composition, or written and unwritten.¹

My Masters research led me to the conviction that the group’s creation of the “Arabic style” of performing medieval music and their exploitation of Arabo-Andalusian music was related to their imitation of improvisation, a conclusion which is now more fully explored below in Chapter IV.² From this starting point, I believed I would uncover a story about improvising in medieval music that would progress from imitation (using the aid of a frame, in this case, notation) to tentative first steps to assertive striding, as musicians gained confidence in the languages of medieval music thanks to burgeoning familiarity with these new medieval sonic worlds among musicians and audiences. My other case studies allow us to see how this initial step taken by the Studio was vitally important to the modern (re)creation of medieval music languages and styles, without which no improvisation would ever have been possible.

**Research questions**

Thinking about my own experiences with the practice of improvisation before I embarked on my Masters studies, and what I wanted to achieve in my doctoral research, I formulated research questions that I felt my chosen mixed methodologies would answer:

- How and why did improvisation come to be an accepted practice in the historical performance of medieval music?

---


² For the invention and application of the term “Arabic style” with relation to the Studio, see John Haines, ‘The Arabic Style of Performing Medieval Music’, *Early Music* 29, no. 3 (1 August 2001): 369–78.
• How have other participants in the medieval music revival improvised?
• What shape did their improvisations take?
• How do these musicians understand what they are doing when they improvise?

It in fact became apparent as I spoke to my respondents and read the results of my survey that an unexpected issue of importance was arising, meaning that a further research question was also being answered:

• To what extent is the term “improvisation” applicable when discussing performance practices of medieval music?

My interest in other performers’ viewpoints and experiences stemmed in part from the fact that they seemed to have been ignored in musicological literature. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson’s insistence on the roots of the sounds of medieval music today being found in German musicology of the late nineteenth century caused me to feel some indignation on my behalf and on behalf of all the performing musicians whose voices had not been heard in his argument. These silenced voices belonged to artists whose creative labour has been lovingly shaping the sounds of medieval music over many decades. I felt that an answer to his work would put the musicians’ voices in the foreground. From this, it should be clear that my axiological position particularly prizes performing musicians’ contributions to the discourse of what medieval music could or should sound like. These contributions take the shape not just of the audible traces of performances in concerts or recordings but also of the verbalised understandings that musicians shared with me or wrote about. A re-evaluation of what musicians can bring to the discussion is one key aim of my study.

Positionality

One of the reasons why this research and my chosen research method were possible for me to undertake is my experience of being a medieval musician on the continent as well as in the United Kingdom. By studying performance in Switzerland with a broad range of international students, I was geographically in a central location that enabled me to work across Europe and with people from many places. Since 2002, I have performed extensively throughout Europe with the Italian ensemble Micrologus, meeting some of the other colleagues I mention. I have an ongoing collaboration with Danish/Swedish singer Agnethe Christensen in Copenhagen. I lived in France for seven years from 2013-2020, working with the French ensemble La Camera delle Lacrime and

---

studying in Paris. Throughout this time, I nevertheless maintained contact with the UK, performing in festivals at York and Brighton for example, and have been involved since its inception with the only medieval music festival in England, Medieval Music in the Dales, a meeting point for UK-based medieval musicians. These experiences mean that I am uniquely placed to have a broad range of contacts in my very specific area of music making today. I have used these contacts to identify many of my interviewees. Equally, I have been able to contact musicians who were not necessarily personal acquaintances and they have been willing to let me interview them thanks to my visibility in the medieval music scene. My language skills (I am fluent in French as well as other languages) meant that I have been able to access the insights, knowledge and life experiences of some francophones who would otherwise have found it difficult to communicate these to me, making it possible for my study to be broader in outlook.

**Case study choice rationale**

My case studies have been chosen in order to show a chronological sample of different approaches to improvisation in the medieval music revival. The first is the early pioneering ensemble active in the 1960s and 70s, the Studio der frühen Musik directed by Thomas Binkley, whose imitation of improvisation I had found so fascinating. Then I consider a student of Binkley, one of my teachers in Basel and someone with whom I have since worked quite extensively under the aegis of the ensemble Micrologus, Crawford Young. Young is a lutenist who is renowned for his improvisatory skills in a very specific fifteenth-century style. Finally, I examined the practice of one of Young’s more recent students, the flautist Mara Winter, who was born in the 1980s. I have been able to consult a range of sources pertaining to these case studies including interviews I conducted myself with the musicians, or with those who knew the members of the Studio; other interviews available in written form or from radio broadcasts; performance scores; live recordings both from personal and from radio archives; and the writings of the musicians themselves both in published academic journals and on album sleeve notes or websites.

The three case studies provide varied musical material for analysis. The Studio were well known for their interpretations of medieval monophony, and I consider in detail their performance of a song from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century by a female troubadour*, available commercially. Young on the other hand plays in a fifteenth-century style, a time frame from which

---

4 I am in a similarly privileged position to Balosso-Bardin who emphasises the importance of her music-making activities to her ability to conduct her ethnomusicological work. Cassandre Balosso-Bardin, “You Are Part of the Club”: Negotiating the Field as a Musician-Ethnomusicologist’, *Ethnomusicology Forum* 31, no. 1 (2022): 124–42.
there are more historical sources to draw on in order to inform an improvisatory style that can be historically justified. Winter’s starting point was non-musical source material, the poetry of medieval Iceland. Together with her musical partner, the singer Hanna Marti, she invented a musical idiom based on the modern Icelandic oral tradition of rímur singing blended with European musical material of the medieval period from which the poetry stems.

Themes

All three detailed case studies reveal the profound creativity inherent in the medieval music revival. They also highlight some key topics. Binkley, Young and Winter all displayed a level of concern for their performances to be historically believable. This is central to the definition of a performer who is participating in the medieval music revival: they must be aiming to create musical sounds that are appropriately historical sounding for the period from which their source material stems. My interviewees attended closely to this aspect of medieval music performance when justifying performance choices, telling me about distinguishing between different possible influences on the original creator of the music, adopting different instruments according to historic time period and place, and their search for appropriate harmonic choices based on historical sources. They also explained the importance to them of seeing the original musical sources and of being familiar with extra-musical material such as treatises and literature from the relevant periods.

An important theme to come out of my discussion of the Studio is the relationship between improvisation and geography. By this I mean that a particular non-European sound world turned out to be conflated with the idea of improvisation in a performance’s reception. The importance of having a store of music in the memory was mentioned by many of my research participants as well as being central to the way in which Crawford Young approached his creative performance practice. Many participants in my research used linguistic metaphors when explaining what improvisation is and how to improvise successfully. Winter discussed her musical work on medieval Icelandic poetry as coming from a slow development process that created a musical dialect. This was based on historical music examples as well as geographically relevant musical material from the Icelandic tradition.

All musical notation is only a representation of sound in a way that is open to interpretation, and it is generally agreed that notation lacks information that a performer finds necessary in order to
turn the visual into an aural rendition. Different times and places have had different expectations with regard to the transformation of visual to aural that a performance based on notation entails. Binkley developed a theory that the information missing from medieval musical notation was due to the oral transmission of stylistic features. This theory has been passed on via the writings and teachings of his colleagues and students. The expectation that a performer would add to what is preserved in the notation might be understood as a creative imperative, also encompassing improvisation, meaning it is historically justifiable for our recreations of medieval music. This creativity is defended and described in detail by Angela Mariani. She discusses some of the themes my respondents also highlighted. Some interviewees talked about the musical additions in terms of ornamentation and embellishment. This was even described as a gateway to more complex and involved improvisation that required deeper engagement with historical materials, such as polyphonic improvisation or spontaneous creation of stylistically believable complex melodies. Some survey participants, who had more limited time and space to answer my question “What is improvisation?” than my interviewees, simply conflated improvisation together with ornamentation in their definition.

Discomfort with the term improvisation was a regular feature of my conversations with musicians and led to the creation of a further research question reflecting its ubiquity within my data. I myself have been conscious for many years of why the term might be considered inappropriate for medieval music; its first appearance as a word postdates the period by some time. In early 2013, when I released my first solo CD on which I improvise over *basse danse* tenors, I asked Young to read my CD booklet and he encouraged me not to use the word “improvis*“ or its derivatives, so I duly excised it from the text. He explained that it gives the wrong impression to a modern audience because it now has such a large range of meanings, not all of which are appropriate for application to medieval music performance. I was therefore not surprised when many respondents did not want to use the word at all. Simply making music during the Middle Ages

---

7 The Oxford English Dictionary gives the late 1700s as the earliest known use of the verb in English, as a borrowing from French (dated to 1642) which in turn had come from the Italian *improvvisare*, a word that first appeared in 1547. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “improvise, v., Etymology”, accessed 3 July 2019, http://www.oed.com/.
allowed for alterations such as changes in expressivity or rhythm and even pitch, modifying the order of modules, or even adding more material such as embellishments or extra polyphonic lines. These activities would not be seen as altering the identity of a song or piece of instrumental music, it would be perceived as simply performing the piece. Sameness could include more variation than we might be comfortable with in our literate society where creator and performer are separate and exact repetition is expected more than re-creation.  

Another reason why improvisation was a difficult term for my respondents is that spontaneous generation of musical material relies on strictly defined parameters and rules in order that the resulting performance maintains a historically believable medieval identity. Limitless freedom, which is often thought to be an essential and defining characteristic of improvisation in the twentieth or twenty-first century, is recognised as absolutely wrong when imagining the performance of medieval music. The word extemporisation and its cognates were not necessarily thought of as providing a more appropriate substitute, although Young seems to have marginally preferred it.

A minority of my interviewees were reticent about improvisation, telling me that they did not see themselves as improvisers, that they preferred composition and found the pieces they perform to be so thoroughly conceived and “written” that there is no space for extensive performer-driven creativity of the type that I will go on to discuss in this thesis. If I had interviewed more singers, I believe that I may have found more evidence of this attitude.

My understanding of the concept of improvisation in general has been influenced by the work of Bruno Nettl who defined it in terms of a continuum. This framework allowed me to admit many types of creativity as improvisation, which has proved useful due to the multifarious ways that my

9 In the Global North, there are exceptions to this with regard to jazz performance, some world music and some popular music, but Western Art Music (WAM) generally expects more exact adherence to the score.
11 The fact that singers may be less likely to improvise is perhaps related to the a cappella theory expounded by Christopher Page and other English musicologists (see Chapter III). It is also confirmed by comments some interviewees such as Guerber made.
respondents have understood and practised improvisation. Mariani’s guidebook to performing medieval music creatively has provided strong validation of my study of improvisation in the medieval music revival as well as a clear selection of repertoires, practices and topics that have relevance for improvisation in medieval music performance.\textsuperscript{13} Her definition of improvisation is broad, encompassing everything from ornamentation to spontaneous creation of modal melodies, from performances that are limited by predetermined structures or harmonic patterns to creativity based on a newly sketched out framework that she terms “fluid composition”.\textsuperscript{14}

Context and background

Trying to understand how the musicians, whose work I interrogated, engaged with creative practices in their performances of medieval music, meant investigating the context in which they were creating their art. The broader context for all the musicians with whom I spoke was the artistic and commercial world of WAM, and more specifically within that sphere, they were all taking part in the “authenticity” movement, or, as it became known, Historically Informed Performance (HIP). To contextualise their activities therefore studies by Bruce Haynes and Nick Wilson as well as the earlier brief overview given by Howard Mayer-Brown were particularly useful.\textsuperscript{15}

Methodology

The use of case studies has given me the advantage of being able to extract in rich detail very specific approaches to creativity that are nevertheless representative of an overall pattern of movement in medieval music performance over several generations of performers. This pattern is characterised by increasing confidence and familiarity with medieval musical languages and styles that has enabled improvisation to burgeon and become a central feature of professional medieval musicians’ skillsets. The wealth of data that my interviews provided helped to confirm the existence of this growth in improvisation, which would have stayed invisible without my work.

To ensure my interpretations are as valid as possible, I have used data collection triangulation, meaning I bring together several different types of data from different sources such as the written

\textsuperscript{13} Mariani, *Improvisation and Inventio*.
\textsuperscript{14} Mariani, 7.
words of my case study musicians and the musical evidence from recordings as well as the words of my interviewees. I also verified my interpretations with the interviewees once I had written up my analyses and findings.16

Interviews and Survey
In total, I conducted 25 individual interviews and two group interviews during the course of my doctoral research, speaking to 31 medieval musicians. A list of these is available in Chapter III. Of these, three were working colleagues (Pierre Hamon, Michael Posch and Crawford Young) and a fourth was about to become one (I interviewed Ian Harrison just before we embarked on a project together in late 2019). Four were former teachers (Antoine Guerber, Raphael Picazos, Bill Taylor and Crawford Young) and one was a former student (a member of the Scottish group Gaita). Two further interviews conducted during my Masters studies have also proved helpful; one was with Benjamin Bagby, my teacher at the time at the Sorbonne.

In addition to interviews, I administered an online survey to a self-selecting group of medieval music amateurs and professionals (a convenience sample).17 To encourage participation in my survey I advertised at the medieval music festival, Medieval Music in the Dales 2018, that there were CDs to be won through taking part. To attract further participants, I posted a link on various Facebook group pages. In total I received 68 anonymous completed responses from people across the globe. One of the questions in my survey, which I usually also posed in some way during my semi-structured interviews, was “What is improvisation?” This generated a broad variety of responses with some overlapping themes that I have been able to explore using thematic analysis procedures.18 I was helped in this task by the use of the software package provided by Huddersfield University, NVivo.

Interviewing my participants was quite a challenging task. Listening back to my early interviews I found myself frustrated by my inability to keep silent and give my interviewees space. This improved over the course of my data collection.19 In other cases, I failed to ask the most


17 This type of sample has the advantage of being quick and easy to do. My intention was never to make inferences about a larger population, but just to get a taste of what a broader selection of enthusiasts might know about improvisation. See Ronald D. Fricker, ‘Sampling Methods for Online Surveys’, in The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods, ed. Nigel G. Fielding, Raymond M. Lee, and Grant Blank, (London: SAGE Publications, 2017), 166.


19 This is typical of a researcher’s journey using interviews as a data collection method. See Steinar Kvale, Doing Interviews, Sage Qualitative Research Kit (London: Sage, 2007), 43.
fundamental questions such as year of birth or for a definition of improvisation. My interviewees themselves were, without exception, generous and willing participants, with several of them speaking for several hours. This created a further problem, which was the time it takes to transcribe an interview, a fact that I did not fully appreciate when I began this work. After experimenting with different ways to transcribe, including at first being absolutely literal, spelling out every hesitation and unfinished word, I eventually arrived at a more pragmatic procedure. I first listened to the interview making general notes. Then when I heard a particularly interesting topic or way of expressing something, I would rewind for some context and transcribe more exactly what my respondent said until I felt the conversation had moved on. This approach has made it possible to include detailed data from a wide range of both francophone and anglophone participants about their understanding of improvisation and their own practice in the medieval music revival; what improvisation is and what they do. As I was analysing the data and writing, I frequently returned to the original recordings to check again what was said. This has ensured validity and helped me avoid bias.

Ethical considerations
As my research involved people, I applied for and was granted ethical approval. I made it clear to my participants both verbally and in writing that they would not be anonymised. I also told them that they would have a chance to see the material quoted in my thesis and comment before submission, a recommended ethical procedure as well as being an extra validity check. My survey included clear information about my research and a request for consent on the opening pages before my questions began, in line with ethical procedures.

Archival Research
Accessing materials was a concern. In order to be able to discuss improvisation, I believed that the best-case scenario would be a collection of live recordings by the same performer of the same piece. Analyzing these recordings using transcription or computer-aided means would allow me to compare different versions and make judgements about the presence of variation. In turn this would lead to a discussion about what my findings meant for the creative process behind the performance. Accessing live recordings turned out to be problematic in different ways. The archive of French radio and television known as INAthèque has extensive material accessible at the

Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. It was relatively easy to listen to and transcribe from radio recordings on site, although no computer-aided analysis was possible due to the fact that no audio files can be made accessible on a non-library computer and no software such as Sonic Visualiser was installed on their system.\textsuperscript{21} Their material was heavily biased toward French performers. At the British Library Sound Archive, the process to access archived BBC radio recordings was slow and drawn out because not all of their material has been digitised. Where something had not previously been requested, the item would need to first be digitised before it became accessible, and this could take months. Another key issue was the fact that so much material had simply not been preserved. Despite the BBC’s stated policy to ensure the preservation of all broadcasts beginning in the 1980s, I found that many radio items broadcast in the late 1990s and even in the twenty-first century that I wished to consult were in fact not archived at all.\textsuperscript{22} Another issue was simply that so few medieval music concerts had been recorded for broadcast, particularly after the 1990s. It turned out to be very rare to find a repeat of repertoire by the same artist. Thankfully, some of the musicians I talked to had extensive personal archives and were willing to allow me to access them. In other cases, while I knew that a particular musician would make a fantastic case study that would contribute to my narrative, the lack of material formed a barrier to analytical possibilities and therefore to musicological discussion. My flexible approach to design study allowed me to adapt to the fact that I rarely had the kind of corpus that I felt would have been ideal (one exception is the selection of performances by Young to which I was granted access).

**Musical Transcription and Analysis**

My research questions entail an emphasis on the study of recorded music, including both commercial and live recordings. I have therefore considered the musicological utility and meaning of these recordings as texts. Particularly useful to my thinking were *A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History* by Timothy Day, and Leech-Wilkinson’s online book *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performances*.\textsuperscript{23} Eric Clarke wrote about

\textsuperscript{21} For more on this software and its use in my research, see Chapter II.

\textsuperscript{22} Many thanks to my supervisor Dr Catherine Haworth for locating the BBC document discussing the issue of lack of archiving of materials. ‘BBC Archives - Wiped, Missing and Lost’, BBC Archive, accessed 19 December 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/bbc-archives--wiped-missing-and-lost/z4nkvk7.

empirical analysis of music performance, including examination of recorded music.24 Technological developments mean that Clarke’s chapter is rather irrelevant now; we can easily digitise and use a variety of computer software to enhance our understanding of recorded performances, applications such as PRAAT or Sonic Visualiser.25

The combination of musical transcriptions and interview that I have found very fruitful for my work was inspired by Paul Berliner’s book Thinking in Jazz, a similar examination of a musical scene, albeit one that is much bigger than the medieval music revival.26 My methodology was also informed by jazz musicology where I found inspiring examples of comparative studies such as the close reading of Teddy Wilson’s piano improvisations by Paul Machlin and the analysis of John Coltrane by Barry Kernfeld.27 Both of these articles looked at different performances of the same piece – Wilson’s seven performances of China Boy and three performances by Coltrane of the track Straight no Chaser with Miles Davis. My transcription task was greatly facilitated by the use of the free software Audacity and Sonic Visualiser, that allowed me to navigate within the recording very quickly and easily, as well as slow down its speed without changing the pitch.28 Edward Breen’s doctoral thesis about David Munrow’s performance practice with his ensemble, The Early Music Consort of London, provided an example of a way to examine medieval musicians’ output, using extensive archival evidence as well as performance analysis.29

By considering in detail the ways in which musicians of the twentieth and twenty-first century have reused medieval sources, my work is principally concerned with discussing medievalism. Kirsten Yri’s studies of several groups, including the Studio, Sequentia, Anonymous 4, Corvus Corax and Dead Can Dance, provided me with excellent examples of how such a study could be conducted.30 Jonathan Shull’s ethnography of the ways that several American medieval musicians

25 Paul Boersma and David Weenink, ‘Praat: Doing Phonetics by Computer’, accessed 18 November 2022, https://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/. Praat was developed in Holland to help with speech analysis. For more on Sonic Visualiser, see Chapter II.
28 Refer to Chapter II for more detail.
have used living traditions as inspiration provided a model for combining data sources in a discussion of performance phenomena.31

**Thesis Outline**

**Chapter I: Introduction**
A description of my own musical improvisation journey features as the reason why I was drawn to study this particular practice in the medieval music revival. This leads me to my research questions and axiological position, which foregrounds the words and actions of musicians rather than musicologists. I also explain my positionality as an actor within the revival myself, before briefly presenting the themes my data analysis uncovered and the context within which all respondents and myself are acting. Finally, I outline some of the issues I experienced with my methodological choices before giving this summary of chapter contents and highlighting the significance of my work.

**Chapter II: Methodology**
In this chapter I detail my research process, discussing the variety of methodological tools that I used. Each tool is considered for how it has helped me answer my research questions and my sources for these tools are cited. I also give a rationale for my choices.

**Chapter III: A historiography of twentieth and twenty-first century performance practices – understanding improvisation in the medieval music revival**
This chapter presents a review of the context for the medieval music revival and includes an overview of how the authenticity movement developed. In it, I analyse the data I collected during the research process, highlighting the major themes that emerged and linking my respondents’ words and ideas with those found in literature on medieval music, performance, medievalism, orality, authenticity in early music and improvisation.

**Chapter IV: Studio der frühen Musik: Faking Improvisation 1960-1977**
My first case study explores the Studio’s rich contribution to the medieval music revival. I examine their innovative performance of a song by a twelfth-century woman poet, highlighting the features that made it sound improvised to Crawford Young, and drawing out the ways in which it was influenced by the Arabo-Andalusian model of the nūba, as Binkley himself announced in the sleeve notes to the album on which the song appeared. The reception history of the Studio’s work reveals

Kirsten Yri, ‘Corvus Corax: Medieval Rock, the Minstrel, and Cosmopolitanism as Anti-Nationalism’, *Popular Music* 38, no. 3 (October 2019): 361–78.

the link between improvisation and the use of the Arabo-Andalusian model. Finally, I posit possible reasons for the group faking improvisation. This first case study therefore provides the introductory basis for my history.

Chapter V: Crawford Young: Memory and creativity in Che fa la ramacina 2012-2017
The second case study examines the practice of lutenist Young who has made it his life’s work to recreate a historically justifiable fifteenth-century lute performance practice. I show how he uses a broad variety of historical sources not only for what he plays, the musical content of his performances, but also for how he plays, his physical technique. By comparing a number of live and edited recordings of the same piece, I link Young’s own twofold definition of improvisation as “memorised composition” or “a language of clichés, a language of cells or syllables or ... musical words”, to different elements within his performances. This leads me to posit memory as a key feature of Young’s creativity.

Chapter VI: Mara Winter: Freedom within restriction
In my final case study, I analyse and compare performance scores with a commercially recorded and edited performance based on an extract of medieval Icelandic poetry. Winter’s chief concern for her interpretation was the creation of a successful, historically believable musical language as a performance vehicle for the poetry. This language had to be formulated and fixed in such a way as to restrict creative freedom. The necessity for this finds its origin in Winter’s definition of improvisation that emphasised the need for rules. She told me that the framework given by the rules, paradoxically gave her the freedom she wanted. Here I found evidence of a confident improviser setting her own parameters for a HIP practice of her own making, using nothing more than a few verbal prompts in her performance scores to guide her.

Chapter VII: Conclusion
In my conclusion, I summarise my findings and draw the threads of my research together, providing an overview of the history of improvisation in the medieval music revival. My overall narrative tells the paradoxical story of the creation of a new medieval musical idiom.

Significance of the study
My research shines a light on the immense imaginative labour of musicians working in the medieval music revival. Improvisation in this field has never been examined before and my work recognises its value as an area of study. There remains a large amount of recorded and written material to investigate and an untapped wealth of knowledge among practitioners, whose insights have largely been overlooked until now. In considering this topic, I have brought to light how
musicians trained in WAM expanded their capabilities to include the generation of new music rather than just the reproduction of notated music. This has meant learning and participating in a very broad field of non-WAM (among my respondents this has included Hindusthani raga performance, jazz, rock, avant garde and free improvisation) as well as deep engagement with historical practices, sources, philosophy and concepts. The balance between personal and historical authenticity that musicians in the medieval music revival have constantly sought to maintain has been achieved by engaging their creativity within the bounds of their hard-won historical knowledge. My research celebrates their accomplishments.
Chapter II: Methodology
In order to uncover the creative practices of musicians working with medieval musical and lyrical materials in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I have used mixed methodological tools: ethnographic interview, survey, literature review and musical performance analysis. The different themes that emerged from my qualitative data and musical analyses have been linked to the literature on improvisation to illustrate the wider scholarly background drawn from multiple areas of musicology and ethnomusicology.

A series of newly conducted interviews with musicians involved in the medieval music revival have allowed me to reveal their personal understandings of improvisation and their musical journey. I also used interview data that I collected for my Masters research to gain insight on the contribution of the pioneering ensemble, the Studio, whose members were no longer with us. To supplement this detailed data furnished by professional musicians, I ran a simple online survey reaching medieval music enthusiasts.

Comparisons between different recordings or between performance scores and recordings meant I was able to identify differences that may have been arrived at in the moment of performance. Interview data illuminated possible reasons for these performance choices. In one of my case studies, these comparisons were between several live recordings of the same piece by the same performer, Crawford Young. In the case of Mara Winter, I compare two performance scores with an edited and recorded performance by Winter and her duo partner, Hanna Marti. My transcription and analysis of the Studio’s performance of a monophonic troubadour* song allowed me to discuss the absence of improvisation as attested to by two interviewees who were students of members of the group. All my analytical work is aimed at revealing the hidden creative processes used by musicians working with medieval materials.

General approach

In common with ethnomusicologists, I believe that performers themselves are the experts and have a lot to tell us about their own music making, rationales for their choices, and the meanings of their musical actions. This underlies my choice of mixed methodologies to expose the history of improvisation in the performance of medieval music since the 1960s. This choice has also been

---

influenced by the work of Berliner in the field of jazz. He too conducted interviews with practitioners and used their own words to help create a narrative of the jazz world and explanation of improvisation, an activity that he describes in the introduction as “mysterious”, “enigmatic”, awe-inspiring and surrounded by “mystique”. He too found defining improvisation to be a difficult task. Like him, I decided it was centrally important to understand what practitioners themselves believe, think and know about improvisation and how they define their own music making activities.

Alongside his use of interview data, Berliner included transcriptions of musical examples. Some short extracts are illustrations of ways in which creativity in improvisation can be compared and show how musicians construct their performances. Long narrative descriptions of fuller transcriptions of both solos and full ensemble playing exemplify the meanings he found in the performances that match what his research participants discussed with him. His musical examples are found in an appendix at the end of the book, a decision he made to facilitate reading of his book by the “general reader” as opposed to the “reader with musical training”. This is not a consideration in the present thesis and so musical examples freely mingle with my written verbal analyses, descriptions and explanations.

I used a variety of sources including CD liner notes, musicians’ spoken and written words, private correspondence, personal anecdote and biographical information to help me form an understanding of the phenomenon of improvisation in the early music revival. As a model for this I took the ethnographic article by Shull about medieval music performers’ use of contemporary folk traditions to inform and inspire their interpretations, a separate, though in some ways related phenomenon. Shull draws together several case studies to illustrate how the performance of medieval music has been enriched by ideas drawn from “living traditions”, not without controversy. He elucidates this procedure as the link between his case study musicians, all operating under the aegis of Thomas “Binkley’s Bequest”.

---

3 Berliner, 1–2.
5 See transcription of a Miles Davis solo, Berliner, 527–30, music example 3.3d. For a transcription of full texture, see Berliner, 727–57, music example 13.26.
6 Berliner, 11. This approach could be criticised for not fully integrating all the information contained in the performance transcription.
8 Shull, 105.
commonalities that could well be due to connecting pedagogical networks, although mine also showcase key stages in the history of improvisation in the medieval music revival.

I am unaware of other studies in this field that have made use of survey results to consider broader cultural understandings.

**Interview as data collection technique**

I used interviews to gather data that would clarify musicians’ ideas about improvisation in theory and practice. I conducted 27 interviews, two of which included more than one interviewee. This created over 39 hours of interview material. The length of an interview varied from around 25 minutes to over 5 hours, with an average of around an hour and a half. Some interviewees were originally considered to be potential case studies but eventually proved beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, all interviewees’ contributions provided material for investigation and pertinent comments are incorporated into my analysis in order to answer my research questions.

I became aware that a large proportion of my interviewees had a connection to the Schola Cantorum in Basel, either as student or teacher, or both. This was the case for 12 out of the 32 musicians I spoke to (including Bagby whose interview was conducted in the course of my Masters research). My case study musicians all had one or other of these connections to the Schola, in fact having pedagogical links in a direct line of transmission: Binkley as a teacher of Young, who was a teacher of Winter. My interviewees were all also based in Europe with the exception of Anne Azéma, who lives in the United States but nevertheless maintains strong ties with her continent of origin. Only four interviewees were not of European origin (Bagby, Gosfield, Young and Winter). Naturally, this means that there are perspectives that are not represented at all in my thesis, such as those of non-European/Europe-based musicians. Other viewpoints are less visible, particularly the understanding and practice of improvisation of those musicians who trained outside the Schola or other normative training method based on the classical conservatoire model. An investigation of the outlooks of musicians outside Europe or musicians who had different training routes could result in entirely divergent conclusions or lead to the emphasis of themes that I do not consider in this thesis.

My interview data triangulated my understanding of musicians’ performances; in other words, musicians’ words were employed to check that I had arrived at valid conclusions in my musical
My interview technique was semi-structured. This meant that my questions were mostly led by my interviewee’s answers. I did, however, aim to ask all my respondents two specific open-ended questions that were designed to prompt narrative and reflection. The first was a request that my respondent describe their journey to medieval music. This question elicited a life story narrative of various lengths from which I hoped to gain insight into how background and education might influence improvisational practices. On listening to some early interviews, I realised that I did not always ask my second question, which was a prompt for my interviewee to give me their definition of improvisation. When I did ask this question, it elicited a broad variety of replies that provided different levels of detail depending, I believe, on whether the topic had been reflected upon and verbalised by my participant previously.

Kvale is critical of the ways in which he felt researchers using interview techniques did not receive adequate training for what he described as a complex, craft-like task. He contrasted what he describes as a typical “minimal introduction”, with the years of training required by someone who intends to use interviews as a psychoanalyst or who wants to become a qualified focus group moderator. I sought to fill the gaps in my expertise and knowledge by reading about interview methodology and asking for help and tips from those who had experience. Inevitably, I learnt a lot from conducting the interviews, then transcribing them and reflecting on the value of the data I had collected and on my style as an interviewer.

In addition, I was fortunate to be able to supplement my reading and learning about interviews by going to a symposium held by the Institute of Musical Research at Senate House in London during which there were 20 short presentations from a range of presenters, including both very early career researchers and students at the end of their PhD process. There were also four short keynotes from more experienced musicologists or interviewers who had been specially invited to speak. The symposium was titled *Researching Music: Interviewing, Ethnography, and Oral History*.

---

9 For more on triangulation as validation technique in qualitative research, allowing for findings to be judged “excellent” see Sarah J. Tracy, ‘Qualitative Quality: Eight “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16.10 (2010), 843–44. For triangulation in action in a sociological music study, see Jane W. Davidson, ‘Music as Social Behaviour’, in *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects*, edited by Eric F. Clarke and Nicholas Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 57–75.


11 This symposium, *Researching Music: Interviewing, Ethnography, and Oral History*, took place in Senate House, London on 6 June 2016. The invited speakers included: Sue Onslow, involved in Commonwealth oral history project, interviews of male, high-profile leaders; Lucy Durán, professor of music at SOAS, possibility of learning from journalism. Their views and insights included: how to encourage a move away from established narratives; interview as conversation; importance of preparation. For interviewees who were not personally known to me, this final point was very useful. I focused on learning about interviewees’ discographies, listening to their work and reading anything they had published to help prepare questions and lead the discussion on their careers.
History. The broad variety of topics and approaches that this symposium exposed me to, provided a rich learning opportunity. Some cautionary tales also prepared me for common pitfalls and issues such as not wishing to be recorded or saying the most interesting things after the formal interview has finished.\textsuperscript{12} Kvale confirms that when the recording stops, this can be a moment when interviewees feel freer to bring up sensitive issues that they were too afraid or embarrassed to mention “on the record”.\textsuperscript{13}

I was also able to learn from Breen’s discussion about his use of interviews, including a description of his conversation with Martyn Hill that provided a further warning about the ways in which issues can intervene to make recording an interview difficult or impossible.\textsuperscript{14} The location and timing of this interview, chosen for convenience by the interviewee to be at his place of work, Trinity College in London, meant that there were frequent interruptions and a lot of background noise. In this case, Breen tells us that he made notes during the conversation, added more detail straightaway afterwards, and did not directly quote as Hill’s words were not available verbatim.

I too made some mistakes during my interviews. One I conducted for my Masters thesis was not recorded at all and I followed Breen’s example of making notes afterwards. Another interview was only partially recorded because I neglected to start the recording correctly at the beginning of the conversation. The noisy environment of a Parisian café for one of my recorded interviews meant that I needed extra help from a native French speaker to discern some of what my interviewee said. Language also proved to be an issue on three occasions where my interviewee was not speaking their native tongue. The train of thought and meaning of what they said in these interviews is sometimes ambiguous.

Kvale describes the research journey using interviews in terms of “hardships”.\textsuperscript{15} This negative, critical description of a research project using interviews as data collection technique is based on his own experiences and his observations of colleagues and students. The suggestion of Kvale to counteract this is to “push forward” and “spiral backward”, doing analysis and write up at the


\textsuperscript{13} Kvale, 56.


\textsuperscript{15} Kvale, 34–35.
same time as interviewing and transcribing. As I was still conducting interviews and transcribing, I used opportunities to present my work and wrote a chapter for a book, meaning that I followed Kvale’s recommendation. Ultimately, I found the interview process enjoyable and inspiring.

Transcription enabled me to reflect on my use of questions and my style as an interviewer. Early on I became aware of my tendency to fill silences. I seemed reluctant to leave space for my interlocutor to think before replying, rephrasing questions in different ways or turning one question into several questions at once. I also noted my own enthusiasm to agree with my interviewee; I am passionate about the topic of my research as something that is important and vital. My habit of constantly agreeing may have led to bias and also meant that I was not giving enough space to my respondents to find their own path and flow when answering. When I realised this, I made an effort to be less involved and to simplify my questions. However, I remain aware of my personal contribution in the process of collective knowledge formation that my interviews fostered. I believe that the data I collected is rich and informative, allowing a picture of the meanings of improvisation among medieval musicians to be constructed, even as I recognise the contingency of this picture.

I based my attempt at a phenomenological-type method for the interview I conducted with Young on a methodology I had seen used for the research behind a presentation at the Perspectives on Musical Improvisation II conference at Oxford University in 2014. I experimented with the idea that I wanted Young to tell me about the actual experience of improvising. This entailed a different kind of questioning that would delve deeper into the meanings of what Young was saying. This questioning technique was influenced by the article on phenomenological interview by Høffding and Martiny. It allowed the collection of more reflective and personal words from Young whose tendency after so many years of teaching was to talk in quite a pedagogical manner.

---

16 Kvale, 42.
17 For example, Professor Lisa Colton invited me to contribute to a book which resulted in the following publication: Leah Stuttard, ‘The Voice of Emotion: Constructing an Identity for the Comtessa de Dia in Performance’, in Female Voice Song and Women’s Musical Agency in the Middle Ages, edited by Anna Kathryn Grau and Lisa Colton, Brill’s Companions to the Musical Culture of Medieval and Early Modern Europe, volume 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 235–70. I presented my work in progress at various times for fellow postgraduate students at Huddersfield and I delivered papers about my research at the student BFERMA conference, Huddersfield, 4–6 January 2018 and at The Improviser’s Experience: Knowledge, Methodology, Communication study days held online in March 2021.
Interview transcription procedure

As part of my Masters research, I had already conducted two interviews. This had given me an opportunity to experiment with different transcription styles, firstly attempting a very comprehensive verbatim transcription including every hesitation, false start and verbal filler, then reducing the amount of detail for my second transcription. This led me to question the extent to which I was changing the data as I transcribed it, so I sought advice from Dr Lindsey Dodd, expert in oral history and Senior Lecturer in Modern European History at Huddersfield at that time. She recommended some reading that enabled me to transcribe in a simpler and more flexible way. My supervisor, Prof. Sue Miller, encouraged me to listen and transcribe only those sections that seemed most pertinent. She also told me to view listening to my interviews as a valid and valuable activity in its own right. I did indeed find that listening back provided an opportunity to learn and reflect, both on my own interview technique and about the topic of my research. For these reasons, I transcribed all my interviews, rather than engaging someone else to do it for me. The relatively small number of interviews helped to make this practical. As part of an ongoing process of knowledge construction, this activity was valuable. In order to distil the interview material into pertinent and useful data for the purposes of analysis, my process in the end involved listening to the interviews one by one and making notes about anything which seemed interesting. When interviewees were defining improvisation or discussing their understanding of their own practice, I would then take extra time to relisten and transcribe in more detail. I knew these moments would be of particular relevance to my thematic analysis in which I wanted to focus on the concept and its processes as practised and understood by musicians participating in the medieval music revival. I then made sure that my transcriptions were correct, checking against the recordings and enlisting help where necessary.

I took the opportunity at this point to generate some written work as another way of reflecting on my interviewees’ words and develop my understanding of the data. This meant I paraphrased and quoted my interviewees within a narrative context, detailing both each individual’s definition of improvisation and other aspects of what they said about spontaneous music making. This process

---

21 For interviews in French, I obtained help from a native French speaker.
helped me assemble ideas and make sense of my interviewees’ perception of the concept. Throughout these activities I was gaining a deep familiarity with my data.  

Thematic analysis of interview data

My analysis followed the recommendations of Braun and Clarke, who described a research process that enables the encapsulation of sociological data in a reliable way without requiring comprehensive training in a more complex and less flexible system such as Grounded Theory. Their technique allows the description of a data set in an understandable and valid way and provides a supportive framework into which my analytical moves could be placed (see Figure II.1). The process of familiarisation continued as I read the transcriptions, recognising some repeating themes and making links between what different interviewees had said, mentally developing a picture of repeating topics as well as the unexpected comments that were interesting for their idiosyncrasy. To capture this mental map of themes, I gathered individual metaphors and ways of understanding under topic headings (or codes as they are often referred to in the methodological qualitative analysis literature) using Scrivener to organize quotations and the narratives I had written when I was paraphrasing what my research participants had told me, fitting these into categories. Some topic headings contained data collected from several respondents who had all said similar things. Others contained only one single quote of an expression that struck me as unusual. As Braun and Clarke say, the importance of a theme does not have to be measured in terms of how often a code appears, “but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question”. My approach was therefore inductive, deriving codes and themes from the data rather than applying any kind of pre-existing framework.

I then considered broader themes which related my individual topic headings together. These themes sometimes corresponded with ideas about improvisation that were found in the musicological literature, helping me to validate them as a relevant choice. One example is that of the importance of memory to improvisation. Another is the use of linguistic terms to express understanding of what improvisation is and how it works, something that I link to the idea of

\[\text{22}^{\text{The first phase of thematic analysis according to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’, Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3.2 (2006), 87–88.}}\]

\[\text{23}^{\text{For more on different possible qualitative approaches and the need to solidify a valid technique that still has flexibility, see Braun and Clarke, 77-81.}}\]

\[\text{24}^{\text{This was my way of generating initial codes, the second phase of analysis. See Braun and Clarke, 88–89.}}\]

\[\text{25}^{\text{Braun and Clarke, 82.}}\]
building blocks or formulas, typical ideas that appear across the improvisation literature.\textsuperscript{26} Using mind-mapping techniques as I reviewed my data again, I connected my themes to three broader headings: understanding, doing and learning. These provided a bigger organisational framework for more reflection, with some themes categorised in more than one of these headings. The final step was to determine which themes integrated with the important topics relevant to my overall narrative about the development of improvisation in the medieval music revival. This involved collating what I had discovered and written about into a coherent story about my respondents’ understanding of improvisation as an activity and as a concept.\textsuperscript{27} This narrative allowed for some diachronic historical commentary on medieval music and improvisation from twentieth-century scholars, highlighting how improvisation has come to be a validated and mostly accepted part of musicians’ practice today in the revival.\textsuperscript{28} Within this narrative, I have presented the dissenting voices of those who have criticised both practice and concept from within musicology and from among my interviewees. No data set is ever without variation and contradiction. Ignoring these leads to a weak analysis.\textsuperscript{29} The final step was to allow my interviewees to comment on how I had used their words. This led to clarifications and amendments that have enriched and ratified my analysis.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{26} Third phase: Braun and Clarke, 89–91.
\textsuperscript{27} Fourth and fifth phase: Braun and Clarke, 91–93.
\textsuperscript{28} Final sixth stage: Braun and Clarke, 93–95.
\textsuperscript{29} Braun and Clarke, 95.
\textsuperscript{30} This step can be seen as allowing “intersubjective agreement” between me as researcher and my research subject. See Kvale, 121.
Scholars have not dealt previously with how musicians in the medieval music revival conceptualise and practice improvisation. Therefore, my aim has been to provide a broad overview of my data on the topic. More detail about three individual practices is found in my case studies. In this way I hope to achieve a balance between an overarching outline of musicians’ understanding across a range of ages and backgrounds and an in-depth discussion of three cases linked by a pedagogical thread (Young as student of Binkley, Winter as student of Young).

**Survey**

I was funded to interview professional musicians at the medieval music festival, Medieval Music in the Dales, in 2018. This gave me the opportunity to seek input from the community of festival goers. These are people who engage with medieval music at different levels of expertise and who thus have a potentially different and revealing perspective on improvisation in the medieval music revival. This insight would not be obtainable through interviews due to their time-consuming nature. I therefore created an online survey to collect information about respondents’ backgrounds, their interests and their ideas about what improvisation is. I chose to use eSurv, a
free online tool that met UK data protection standards and allowed an unlimited number of questions as well as an unlimited number of responses.31

I designed my survey following recommendations by Toepoel.32 The survey aimed at helping me answer the following specific research questions, all related to the broader theme of my thesis, but tailored to the audience I had in mind:

- Is the wider audience for medieval music, including amateurs, reenactors and non-performing medieval music lovers, aware of improvisation as a creative practice in medieval music?
- Do amateurs and re-enactors improvise?
- What does this depend on?
  - Type of instrument?
  - Length of time making medieval music?
  - Other interests such as folk music?
  - Life experience eg singing in a choir?
- What do these people understand by the word ‘improvise’?

The questions I posed to my respondents required a variety of different kinds of responses such as multiple-choice checkboxes, radio buttons, free form text fields or Likert-scale questions. I designed it to make sure that respondents would maintain their interest and complete the whole survey. I received 77 responses in total with nine that were incomplete and thus discounted. The low number of unfinished responses is indicative of the quality of the survey, its user interface and questions and helps to affirm the quality of the answers I did receive.33

I tested my survey with a small cohort of friends to check for legibility and comprehension as well as the smoothness of the task.34 Having made improvements following their recommendations, I produced a leaflet for distribution at the festival, advertising my survey and the chance through a

31 Found to be the most appropriate tool to employ, developed by six universities specifically for academic use. I note that at time of writing this tool is no longer available. See Rob Farmer, Phil Oakman, and Paul Rice, ‘A Review of Free Online Survey Tools for Undergraduate Students’, MSOR Connections, 15.1 (2016), 71–78.
33 Toepoel, 198.
34 This is particularly recommended in order to check how it works on different screen sizes and using different browsers. See Toepoel, 187.
prize draw to win one of 10 CDs of interesting early music if you took part. This was to encourage participation. Furthermore, I created posts on various medieval music Facebook group pages. The populations on these groups seem to comprise mainly musicologists and performers although I believe non-professional enthusiasts are also present.

In order that only the people for whom the survey was intended could participate, I directed participants to secret pages on my personal website that were inaccessible via search engines and not linked to from within my site. They spent on average around 16-20 minutes completing the survey, indicating that they were able to devote some time to the open-ended questions. The other four questions were intended to help me understand how much engagement participants had had with different musical activities both within and outside medieval music, so that I could build up individual pictures of musical lifestyles and relate this to their understanding of improvisation. This turned out to be quite an ambitious goal and, in the end, I have focused on their answers to “What do you understand by the word improvisation? Tell me what you think improvisation in music is.” This has enriched my data set and helped me make decisions about which themes should be discussed. For example, the number of mentions of ornamentation and the act of adding something to a written piece of music in my survey led me to consider the relationship of this practice to improvisation, a topic that I had not expected to cover. The respondents remained anonymous unless they wished to participate in the prize draw to receive a CD.

Traditional score-based analysis and contextual analysis

In conjunction with carrying out analysis of the qualitative data that I collected verbally from my research participants, the second major methodology I have used in this thesis is music analysis. As a musicological activity, traditional score-based analysis has attracted various criticisms since the 1980s, including that it fetishizes text and has too narrow a focus on form and structure for it to get anywhere near encompassing the meaning that music has. Analytical moves that segment
and classify to reveal structure and form, “detached observation and taxonomic analysis” as Cook epitomised it,\(^{38}\) often led to a search for musical coherence and unity as brought about by large-scale connections through repetition.\(^{39}\) This approach subscribed to hidden aesthetic ideals that invalidated many non-canonic and extra-European musics where complex musical connections are not necessarily a key concern and where a ‘neutral’ score notation is not a basic prerequisite for the heard musical object.\(^{40}\)

In a similar way to Miller in her study of improvisation in the Cuban genre charanga, I have analysed performance in its context of the medieval music revival.\(^{41}\) This was so that I could demonstrate how my case study musicians have used their creative faculties to make convincing historical soundscapes, revealing both their virtuosity and the complexity of their creations. Indeed, one of my main aims in starting out with this research was to “give voice to ... extraordinary artists” to redress the imbalance I saw in the general discourse about the medieval music revival that focused so heavily on musicologists to the detriment of performers.\(^{42}\)

Different disciplines such as ethnomusicology, popular music studies, film music studies, cultural studies and music psychology, have considered music from different perspectives including the sociological and anthropological. These disciplines have rejected the text-only approach of historical musicology and look for the more diverse meanings found within music’s many contexts. This came from the belief that if only the “musical sound structure” and not the “structure of the outside music departments often mock the technical vocabulary musicologists use because they find it exclusive or unilluminating”, Robert Walser, ‘Popular Music Analysis: Ten Apothegms and Four Instances’, in Analyzing Popular Music, edited by Allan F. Moore (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16. Leech-Wilkinson goes further suggesting musicology is not important to people because the way musicologists talk about music does not represent what people hear when they listen to music. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, ‘The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performances’, CHARM AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music <http://charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/intro.html> [accessed 5 February 2016] chapter 1.1, paragraph 12.


\(^{39}\) In Beard and Gloag’s entry on ‘Analysis’ they open by stating “Analysis is a subdiscipline within musicology that is concerned with a search for internal coherence within a musical work.” Beard and Gloag, 13–18. For a discussion of segmentation and various applications of the method to medieval musical examples, see Nicolas Ruwet, ‘Methods of Analysis in Musicology: Translated and Introduced by Mark Everist’, Music Analysis, 6.1/2 (1987), 3–36. Original published in 1966.


\(^{41}\) Sue Miller, Cuban Flute Style: Interpretation and Improvisation (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2014).

"performance occasion" is considered, or indeed vice versa, this is a handicap in any attempt to understand musical activities and events. I interrogate the social structure of medieval music in today’s world by considering how musicians understand what they are doing when they make medieval music. I therefore “overcome the music/social dualism by analysing ‘sound structure as socially structured’.”

In order to uncover the creative processes of my case study musicians, analysis of the musical content of performances has been vital. A constant referral back and forth between the musical sound object of my analysis, the performance of a piece of medieval music, and the musician’s own words was the process that enabled me to gain insight into the creative process of a performer. Analysis allowed me to detail the individual musical choices that produced performances that were judged to be aesthetically valuable by musician and listener alike. These choices can themselves be seen as the fruits of analyses, conscious or not, conducted by the performing musicians themselves. I then reveal the performers’ analytical work in my own study of the sound materials. Analysis has also let me identify different levels of performance flexibility, particularly through drawing comparisons between several performances or between a performance and a performance score. Thus, analysis makes an invaluable contribution to my history of improvisation. Ultimately, my analyses link the content of musical performances to ways of conceptualising and understanding improvisational activity, shedding light on the development of practice within the history of the medieval music revival.

---

45 While I am to a certain extent providing a kind of “aesthetic advocacy” for the creative labours of my case study musicians and all musicians engaging with medieval materials during the medieval music revival, I hope not to have fallen into a trap of idealisation or romanticisation of my subjects as warned against by Born, 217–18.
Use of recordings

In relation to improvisation, a recording is a unique window onto the musical creative moment lived by a practising improviser. It has been argued that jazz is a phonographic phenomenon, with recordings helping to create the whole culture of improvisation because musicians can learn by listening. Recordings allow us to listen more than once to the same performance. This was recognised early on as advantageous to study because it means you can become very familiar with all the nuances in the sound and you can reflect in time outside the ephemeral moment of a live performance. Recordings have the disadvantage however of making a musical phenomenon appear unnaturally fixed. Clarke in fact argues that recordings should not be uncritically accepted as “conveniently packaged performances”. Leech-Wilkinson also explores what an edited recording is in relation to performance. He argues that although we know a recording has been in some ways “falsified” through the editing process, listeners do not dwell on this knowledge when listening. “They’re made to sound like performances, and on the whole ... that’s how we perceive them.” The recordings I examine include both live concert recordings and commercially edited ones; which is which is made clear in the text. The contingency of my analyses as investigations of performances is also pointed out.

I will now outline my procedures in more detail.

Performance transcription

The first step in my methodology after identifying my corpus and listening closely and often repeatedly to the performances, was to try to produce a ‘visual documentation of sound-

---


recording’. Scholars disagree about the strengths and weaknesses of Western musical notation. Binkley, for example, is of the opinion that it is impossible to notate rhythm and, in contrast, Tara Browner would disagree: "Pitch representation is probably the weakest part of Western notation. For me, Western notation’s strength is what you can do rhythmically." Nevertheless, Western musical notation is the transcription tool that I decided to use, having also experimented with other kinds of visualisations including gestural shapes in the style of early neumes* written in over performed text, and use of the software package iAnalyse.

I acknowledge that the heard experience is distorted when it is transposed to a visual medium. This is commented on by authors in popular music and ethnomusicology. Olivier Tourny concludes that, although no ideal transcription is possible and although the notational system could still be perfected, even so, as a method of analysis, no other tool would perform better. Transcription’s advantages for Tourny outweigh its deficiencies. My aim was to describe what I heard using notation that I felt free to modify, adding clarifications and annotations that helped represent some of the subtleties of performance. For presentation of my research findings, visual representation of a musical object has considerable benefits. A chief one among them is that a transcription allows reflection to occur in its own time, rather than being bound to the musical time that flows swiftly during a performance. Visual comparison is also far easier to achieve than aural comparison, and it can be done in a detail that I believe would be impossible simply through listening. Transcription has facilitated my understanding of the creative acts of my

54 For more on neumatic notation, see Eugène Cardine, Gregorian Semiology, trans. by Gregory Casprini (Solesmes, 1982). The software package iAnalyse allows you to “synchronise the pages of a score (images or PDF) to an audio or video file. You can draw annotations (graphics, text or images) on the scores and the appearance and disappearance of these annotations is also synchronised with the sound file. A cursor that moves across the score in the rhythm of the music can be drawn very quickly.” “…synchroniser les pages d’une partition (images ou PDF) sur un fichier audio ou vidéo. Vous pouvez dessiner des annotations (graphismes, textes ou images) sur les partitions, l’apparition et la disparition de ces annotations étant aussi synchronisées avec le fichier audio. Un curseur se déplaçant sur la partition au rythme de la musique peut être dessiné très rapidement.” Although the software developer uses the word “score” (partition), this can be any kind of image including non-Western notations or graphic representations.
55 Stanyek, 105.
case study musicians, enabling recognition of patterns for example and elucidating the acts of creativity found hidden in the performances.

The act of transcribing entailed repeated close listening. This enriched my experience of the sound of the performance, opening my ears and mind to possible meanings as I cycled from very close detail to “full picture” listening using Sonic Visualiser. This digital tool made it easy to navigate within the sound file both forwards and backwards using the arrow keys on my keyboard, and also had the capacity to slow play without affecting pitch.58 I experimented with other ways to use Sonic Visualiser such as spectrographic visualisations that enable analysis of use of vibrato, or measurements of musical timing. In the end, these analytical techniques proved to be beyond the scope of my chosen case studies.59

My analytical approaches

In my case study chapter on Crawford Young, I use analysis to highlight how Young follows his historical models, which are both extant works and theoretical discussions. This allows me to argue that Young was particularly concerned to build a historically justifiable style and that he used his memory store when performing by putting what he had learnt about historical techniques into practice. I also use analysis to reveal Young’s construction methods. I looked for reuse of blocks of material across the recorded performances to demonstrate how both fixedness and flexibility were present. I present larger musical building blocks in transcription aligned above each other so that finer similarities and differences can be quickly observed.60 The texts of medieval music, as found in original notations or modern editions, are both fluid and partial, essentially

58 This software was developed as part of AHRC funded Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music, or CHARM, which ran from 2004-2009. Kings College London, ‘Sonic Visualiser’, CHARM AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music, 2009, accessed 15 February 2016, http://charm.rhul.ac.uk/analysing/p9_0_1.html.


“non-prescriptive”. By comparing performances, I have explored relationships that are horizontal and not concerned myself with searching for an undiscoverable original with which to compare my case study performances. My comparative technique was inspired by Machlin, who analysed different takes of the same piece intended for subsequent editing in the studio, as played by the jazz pianist Teddy Wilson, and Kernfeld, who attempted to discover how John Coltrane had been judged as both “mechanical formulaic” and “imaginative motivic” by identifying repetitions of small units across a well-defined corpus of Coltrane’s solos and classifying them as either rigid or flexible. Turning back to my case study, where material was innovative and not repeated, I found evidence for Young’s spontaneous use of his theoretical contrapuntal knowledge by comparing use of intervals in Young’s two-voice texture with examples taken from the medieval repertoire and with the rules as laid out by Johannes Tinctoris.

I tied my analyses to Young’s own words, categorising larger repeated blocks as “memorised composition” and classifying places where connecting musical tissue was added between these blocks as Young’s “language of clichés, a language of cells or syllables or … musical words”. This contrasts with both Machlin’s and Kernfeld’s studies that sought to understand the use of particular terminology by external observers rather than using the words of the musicians they were discussing. It is in harmony however with ethnomusicological concerns to analyse using “a culture’s own conceptualizations”; the concepts in my analysis are as expressed by Young himself.

When considering the work of the Studio, music analysis played a smaller role. Narrative description enabled simple comparison with the Studio’s predecessors in medieval music.
performance. My aim was to allow the reader to quickly perceive the differences in performance sound and style between the Studio and recordings that had appeared previously.67 I also interpret a key performance in relation to Young’s words as a former student of the ensemble. He described the reasons why he had believed Binkley was improvising, listing the characteristics of improvised performances including “development”.68 I looked for this particular characteristic and created an annotated score of the lute prelude to the song A chantar, displaying brackets around repeated motifs that develop and change, using subjective criteria for what might constitute high enough similarity for two groups of notes to be considered iterations of the same motif, just in varied form.69 In addition, my analysis identifies three techniques taken from deeper structural elements of the Arabo-Andalusian model mentioned in Binkley’s sleeve notes, which I then relate to Binkley’s words and to literature on exoticism in music.70

The last strand of my methodology in writing about the Studio was to consider the reception history of the Studio’s output. Aoyama took a similar approach in a chapter of her study of the New York Pro Musica, where she says it allows a consideration of the issues “from the perspective of the recipients of the performances”.71 The research question this allowed me to answer was concerned with the reasons for the Studio ‘faking’ improvisation. I found that the concept of improvisation is linked to an ‘Other’, which is often described as Eastern or Arabic, in various reviews of or writings about the Studio’s work. I discuss use of reception history in more detail in my Masters thesis.72

Turning to the analysis of Winter’s performance in her duo Moirai with Hanna Marti, I use some of the previously outlined analytical techniques including: splitting the performance up into smaller


68 For the full list of characteristics, see Chapter IV.

69 A similar bracketing visualisation process was also followed by Kernfeld, 19–25 and 28–37. On criticisms of semiotic-type approaches such as this one, see Nicholas Cook, A Guide to Musical Analysis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 151–82.


sections according to criteria I defined myself; detailed verbal description; identification of motifs; comparison and discussion of differences; reconfiguring of the score to emphasise structure; and verbalised comparison with another performer’s flute accompaniment that I consolidated with extracted performance transcriptions. In my full transcription of Moirai’s performance, I make use of various symbols to represent particular vocal or flute gestures that are clearly audible but difficult to represent with modern music notation, and have included a clear explanation. My approach was inspired by the taxonomy of gospel techniques as compiled by Legg.  

The Act of Analysis

When the construction of the musical object is of interest, structural segmentation and subsequent analysis can lead to identification of “three fundamental form-building processes: recurrence, contrast and variation”. This may elucidate the creative choices that a composer made, which is one possible purpose of music analysis. Beginning in the mid to late eighteenth century, writers analysed tonal harmony in a broad variety of ways, sometimes with a view to practical music making either as continuo player or as composer. The analysis was also useful for judging the quality of a piece of tonal music; David Damschroder repeats the proposition that you can get more enjoyment from listening to music if you understand “the mechanics of its construction”, a premise that persists even if its truth is difficult to ascertain. Viewing analysis as a window into an individual genius’s mental processes and therefore as a way to learn how to do something similar is typical of WAM education.

The purpose of my analysis, however, was more about understanding how the performances of my case study musicians came into being. How did the performers construct or put together what they played? What were their creative processes? Did the performances and my analytical findings match what they told me about improvisation in our interviews or in any words of theirs to which I had access such as in articles, book chapters or broadcast interviews? Is there any evidence of construction processes that might be consonant with the idea of spontaneous music making?

---

76 For a history of analysis giving extensive examples from a large number of theorists, see David Damschroder, *Thinking about Harmony: Historical Perspectives on Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
77 Damschroder, vii.
What did all of this reveal about the development of the practice of improvisation in the medieval music revival? These questions expand upon the desire expressed by Laudan Nooshin: “to understand how [Persian classical] musicians improvise at the most detailed level of the music”.  

Nooshin compares a large number of performances, breaking them down into small motifs and then longer sections that allow analysis of reuse of both musical materials and compositional techniques. As Persian classical music has largely been a tradition in which the concepts underlying the creative processes were not verbalised, she sought to explain how the internalisation of exemplary models known as *radif*, which is “the central canonical repertoire of Persian classical music”, could lead to the innovation and variation that is valued in the surrounding musical culture.

Construction procedures and strategies were inferred from my musical analyses, in a similar way to Nooshin’s much more detailed discussion in which she catalogues motifs that she identified herself in the performances of Persian Classical music that were the focus of her study. She then classified and listed ways in which these motifs are combined, repeated and extended in order to create longer musical phrases. She gives comprehensive examples that demonstrate the development methods being used and categorises them, citing use of repetition, extension, extended repetition, sequence and contraction. Thomas Owens used a similar approach, with detailed analysis of transcriptions of Charlie Parker solos demonstrating the motivic nature of the improvisations Parker played. This then meant Owens could “explain the process by which [Parker] actually put his improvisations together.”

I tended to consider musical units of different sizes in my analyses, according to my analytical needs and the material I was faced with. My musical units included whole polyphonic phrases in Young’s improvisations and small repeated units in the vocal contribution of Hanna Marti to my case study performance of *Sigrdrífa’s spell*. My purpose, like that of Nooshin and Owens, was to uncover the hidden process through which a musical performance arose.

---

80 For more on how the *radif* tradition has a learning process based on memorisation and imitation rather than explanation of concepts in words, see Nooshin, 131–32. For a comment about how improvisation is more highly valued, see Nooshin, 75.
81 She outlines developmental procedures in a visual format, Nooshin, 289.
82 Thomas Owens, ‘Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation. (Volumes I and II)’ (PhD thesis, Los Angeles, University of California, 1974). He also used Salzerian analysis to show the coherence of Parker’s improvisations.
83 Owens, 16.
I have used verbal description of performance as another part of my musical analytical toolbox. This has included the kinds of musicological technical terms that are exclusive to those without musicological training, but that will be understood within the cadre of the audience for this doctoral thesis. I also describe what can be heard in order to posit reasons for why the performances sound the way they do. Leech-Wilkinson points out that various colourful metaphors rarely relating to sound itself are necessary to begin this task.84

In writing about my subjective responses, I am hoping to “capture imagination” or “model the relationship between a work and an involved listener.”85 Guck encourages the presentation of vivid personal reactions in analyses with the justification that “diversity is desirable” because she is “look[ing] for ways of hearing or understanding that [she has] not noticed on [her] own”.86 My descriptions are thus interpretations aimed at allowing a listener to perceive what I have heard in the performances. Tovey’s descriptive and opinionated commentaries on musical works, originally printed in 1937, can be seen as an exaggerated model for this kind of analytical interpretation.87

In all of my case study analyses, I have also taken into account the social contexts of the music making, as can be seen to be important to how we understand musical performance.88 This takes the form of commentary about my own relationships to the musicians involved as well as the settings for the recordings and impetus for the creation of the performances themselves. In doing so, I reveal my own positionality, demonstrate how I am active in the creation of shared knowledge and avoid assumptions about objectivity.89 In the case of the Studio, I also consider the reception history of their work inasmuch as it enlightens their use of the Arabo-Andalusian model. This has been inspired by the work of Yri on medievalisms in music.90

86 Guck, 200.
87 See analysis of madrigals by Thomas Weelkes in Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Vocal Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), v.
88 Cook, ‘Music as Performance’.
89 For more on positionality in research, see Hanin Bukamal, ‘Deconstructing Insider–Outsider Researcher Positionality’, *British Journal of Special Education*, 49.3 (2022), 327–49.
90 See Yri’s explanations of how particular ensembles using medieval materials are understood to be creating a discourse of the medieval today. Kirsten Yri, ‘Remaking the Past: Feminist Spirituality in Anonymous 4 and Sequentia’s
Conclusion

This thesis uses a mixed methodology that integrates literature on improvisation, medieval music performance and history throughout. This is an innovative way to treat the topic of medieval music performance, allowing me to illuminate the different perspectives and practices of musicologists, professional performers, improvisation teachers and medieval music enthusiasts. Bespoke interviews with a number of professional musicians were a means to collect rich data on the conceptualisations and understandings of the practice of improvisation, including how it can be learnt and then applied in the context of historically informed performance of medieval music. Further data collection by means of a survey reached a broader public including those with less expertise and lower engagement levels who were nevertheless involved in making medieval music. This permitted more insight into the meaning that improvisation has across a spectrum of people engaged with historical performance practices.

I complemented this contextual work with close listening to specific performances by three case study performers. This led to annotated transcriptions that then allowed reflection on the musical object, and permitted me to reveal internal connections and relationships to external objects like scores, or texts such as performer’s words, reviews and other performances.

In my next chapter, I turn first to an examination of the context within which all of these actors have been working, the revival of medieval musical practice in a historically informed way, incorporating material from various commentaries on the HIP movement. I will look at why musicians have increasingly come to believe that authenticity in medieval music should focus more on processes than product and I will trace the justification for performer-controlled creativity in the idea that music notation, particularly medieval music notation, does not provide all the information necessary for a performance. The different ways that this lack has been conceptualised and solutions for it supplied, including ideas about orality and transmission of medieval music, lead to a discussion of the importance of memory and the use of contemporary living traditions such as that of North Africa. This chapter includes my analysis of the data I collected, within which I consider the work of scholars from different fields including the historical study of medieval music and performance practice, the ethnomusicology of various non-WAM traditions, music analysis and theory, jazz musicology, improvisation studies, performance studies

and medievalism studies. This will enable a picture to come into focus of the historical growth of improvisation practices within the medieval music revival.
In this chapter I look at the context in which the musicians I interviewed and surveyed find themselves: the medieval music revival of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This includes a history of the revival and its journey from general historicism to the authenticity movement. Having first introduced four key pioneering ensembles in the field of medieval musical performance, I briefly review the criticism of the notion of authenticity and the specific issues that relate to the use of reconstructed medieval instruments. I also explore how musicologists have understood the differences in the meaning of notation and the methods of transmission of musical performance between the Middle Ages and today. This leads to an examination of orality and memory with a corresponding investigation into oral musical traditions that have fed into performances of medieval music since the 1960s. Following this, my research participants’ words about the concept of improvisation and its use in their own practice are analysed in relation to my research questions about how they understand what they are doing when they improvise and enable me to probe what improvisation is in the framework of the medieval music revival.

The musicians and ensembles who took part in my research are all participants in the medieval music revival. Revivals look to restore, re-establish, and rehabilitate a musical practice that is in danger of being lost or, alternatively, reconstitute, recreate and reconstruct a musical practice that has already been lost. The latter is the case for the vast majority of medieval music that comes within the purview of my respondents’ activities.

The concept of revival as a “restoration of old things” was developed during the sixteenth century and can be found used with this meaning by the end of the seventeenth. Early antiquarians, whose interest in all things ancient, meaning the vast stretch of time spanning the antiquity of Ancient Greece and Rome right up to modernity’s dawn at the start of the sixteenth century, considered that they were “pulling musical works from obscurity and resurrecting them”. At first,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\] For more on revival in general, please refer to Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).


\[\text{\textsuperscript{4}}\] Haines, 81.
this was mostly in order to monumentalise them in book form, allowing a select few or the general public to educate themselves, depending on the accessibility of the monument thus created.\(^5\)

While early antiquarians might have been interested in old things, and in saving valuable musical objects like manuscripts or the notation of the songs within them, musicians had no qualms about modernising ancient music by adding “better” harmonies or using louder instruments.\(^6\) The play with musical interpolations by Adam de la Halle, *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, was performed in the late nineteenth century, having been published in a small run in 1822 and then again in Edmond de Coussemaker’s edition of Adam’s entire oeuvre (published in 1872).\(^7\) In 1896, the second performance was a grand affair including an orchestration of the music.\(^8\) The text as well was adapted for the audience of the time. In other words, the performance in no way attempted to present the *Jeu* in an historical way.\(^9\)

Leech-Wilkinson states that the first time medieval music was heard revived in concert was not to occur until 1914, when musicologist Amédée Gastoué (1873-1943)\(^10\) organised an event in the

---


\(^9\) Ragnard, ‘La Renaissance Musicale du Théâtre Médiéval’ paragraph 23. “The restitution of the music of the Jeu de Robin et Marion escapes the concern for historical fidelity.” [La restitution de la musique du Jeu de Robin et de Marion échappe au souci de fidélité historique.]

\(^10\) Gastoué was best known for his work on Gregorian chant which featured in the concert alongside Aquitanian* and Notre Dame* school polyphony, sacred-themed trouvadour* and trouvère* pieces and music for the papal court in Avisogn from the fourteenth-century Apt manuscript that Gastoué was to edit and publish in 1936. *Grove Music Online*, s.v ‘Gastoué, Amédée-(Henri-Gustave-Noël)’ by David Hiley and Jean Gribenski, accessed 14 April 2023, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/.
Sainte-Chapelle to coincide with the International Musicological Society’s congress in Paris.11 This was followed in 1922 and 1924 by two series of concerts focused on ‘Musik des Mittelalters’ (Music of the Middle Ages), the first in Karlsruhe and the second in Hamburg, both directed by the musicologist Willibald Gurlitt (1889-1963).12 In contrast to the earlier performances of the Jeu de Robin et Marion, these concerts were led by someone who was concerned with how music had originally sounded to an earlier audience’s ears, as demonstrated in Gurlitt’s attempts to reconstruct and revive the organ of the seventeenth century and its music.13

Ludwig published a review of the 1922 concert in Karlsruhe, rehearsing some of the horrified comments made by earlier authors on medieval music including Burney, Kiesewetter and Fétis.14 He added his own comment about the medieval music he heard there, saying that the “musical impressions … in many cases seem alien” [vielfach fremdartig wirkenden musikalischen Eindrücke].15 The strangeness of the music that was slowly being unearthed from ancient manuscripts during the nineteenth century presented difficulties to those who were trying to make sense of it. An awareness of the importance of cultural context had started to grow in the early twentieth century, and by the mid-century there was an “increasing determination to see the music in the terms of its time”.16 Leech-Wilkinson describes this as relating to a post-war trend to consider the actual evidence and arrive at objective conclusions not based on comparison with familiar music or traditional perspectives on the past.17 The fact that medieval music was found to be difficult to interpret and hard to comprehend meant that scholars were obliged to find new ways in which they could explain it. Placing medieval music back into its own context was an investigative activity that was congruent with both the attempt to understand medieval music and the scholarly trend of objectivity that grew in musicology in the middle of the twentieth century.18

15 Ludwig, 437.
So, rather than attempt to shoehorn fourteenth-century song into a grand story of musical development leading ultimately to tonality (an approach that considered medieval music by looking at it through post-romantic, tonal-language-coloured lenses and one favoured by pre-war musicologists such as Heinrich Besseler), historicism and its call for objectivity and for considering contexts, encouraged scholars to understand medieval music by looking at historical evidence.\(^{19}\)

**Historicism in performance and authenticity**

Developing in parallel to this scholarly activity, the idea of using performance techniques and instruments that might have been used by the musicians of the past and heard by original audiences had already started to gain traction in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, witnessed to by the publication of books on the subject of interpreting music from earlier times.\(^ {20}\) Justification was also found in the idea that a historical way of performing could have the potential to reveal “unexpected meanings, and unexpected beauties”.\(^ {21}\) With reference to medieval music, the historical approach has been seen as inevitable. Brown commented that music from the thirteenth, fourteenth or fifteenth centuries must be performed using historical techniques and instruments because it “can hardly be played effectively on modern instruments, or sung to good effect using the sort of vocal technique appropriate for twentieth-century opera houses.”\(^ {22}\) The idea that new insights and new understanding can be gained by making this attempt to recontextualise music, “to take a piece of music on its own terms, to perform music in its own way”, is at the heart of what the medieval music revival has been about.\(^ {23}\)

---

\(^{19}\) Besseler would be seen as subscribing to Enlightenment theories of “history as human self-development” according to Beard and Gloag, to which Historicism was a competing theoretical answer, encouraging thought about history as culturally relative and formed by contexts. Historical musicology and the idea of objectivity is clearly also influenced by positivism. See entries on ‘Historicism’, ‘Historical Musicology’, and ‘Positivism’, in *Musicology: The Key Concepts*, Second edition, Routledge Key Guides (London and New York: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2016).


This performance concept gained the label of “authenticity”, a notion that led to an eruption of controversy in the 1980s. Taruskin was at the centre of this debate, addressing the idea of authenticity in an article published in 1984 in the journal *Early Music*, which was widely read by practitioners in the revival. He gave authenticity “scare quotes”, an indication of doubt or irony, because he found authentic performances were conformist and therefore not authentic in the sense of faithful to and communicating something of the musician’s inner self. In addition, he attacked an approach to music making in the early music movement that sought simply to arrive at the most accurate and historical musical text, in order to reproduce it literally in sound, “the aural equivalent of the Urtext score”. Taruskin later decried the word authenticity as “commercial propaganda”, heavily contaminated with moralistic and righteous connotations, particularly if you draw the conclusion that its antonym, inauthentic, would be the only way to describe the style of performance used by musicians not involved in the new movement.

Taruskin’s criticisms eventually led to a rechristening of the whole movement as “historically informed performance” or HIP rather than authentic. Even so, Haynes argued against Taruskin’s claim that the word authenticity created an “invidious comparison”, finding worth in both concept and value judgement. In fact though, Haynes agreed with Taruskin in denouncing literalism, seeing it as a stylistic symptom of modernism and canonism that had infected the “received playing tradition” taught in conservatoires. He argued vehemently in fact for creativity within the confines of period style, recommending composing new pieces in old styles, and pointing out that

24 It should be noted that authenticity debates surround other types of music just as much as historical WAM. See for example Moore’s discussion of rock and contemporary folk music, Allan Moore, ‘Authenticity as Authentication’, *Popular Music* 21, no. 2 (2002), 209–23.
29 A name that was not without problems, Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer’s History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11. The former Early Music Institute at Indiana University founded by Binkley in 1979 changed its name recently to Historical Performance Institute, indicating a change from a focus on an “end” to a “means to an end”. See Dana Marsh, ‘Historical Performance Institute – What’s in a Name?’, Blog, Indiana University Bloomington Jacobs School of Music, 1 June 2015, https://blogs.music.indiana.edu/earlymusic/2015/01/06/historical-performance-institute-whats-in-a-name/.
this is how composers in former times functioned, thus making the practice today historically believable.\textsuperscript{32} He clarified that authenticity would be best thought of as located in the intent of musicians not in their actual products.\textsuperscript{33} Wilson answers Taruskin’s charges in depth, concluding that we do not need to see authenticity only as an “impossible ideal” but as an ongoing process that enables reconciliation with the world around us and sheds new light on what musicians do and what music is.\textsuperscript{34} In his book he therefore unapologetically uses the term “Authenticity” and classifies two different periods within twentieth-century historical performance trends in the United Kingdom, each having differing repertoires and goals. “Authenticity\textsubscript{1}” aimed at “making the unfamiliar familiar” and was focused on the rediscovery of the earliest repertoire and instruments (dating from medieval to early Baroque).\textsuperscript{35} This first phase that he identified lasted roughly up to the late 1970s and was a period of exceptional popularity for medieval music, as evinced, for example, in the numbers of recordings being released commercially.\textsuperscript{36} It was fed by the amateur music scene that was briefly on an even footing with the professionals; “everything was up for grabs”, in Wilson’s words, as more and more old instruments were brought back into action, instruments with which no one had much expertise.\textsuperscript{37}

Among the musicians beginning to experiment with the unfamiliar repertoire and instruments were some who went on to be founding members of the “Big Four”, pioneering and vibrant early music ensembles who all engaged with medieval music as well as other repertoire.\textsuperscript{38} These first groups to experience success and worldwide recognition in the field of medieval music

\textsuperscript{33} Haynes, 9–10.
\textsuperscript{34} The argument in the book as a whole pertains to the ways in which early music is related to the whole of society, and concerns such as making a living and how to live authentically. See Chapter 3, ‘Transcending Text & Act?’, Wilson, \textit{The Art of Re-Enchantment}, 37–53.
\textsuperscript{35} Wilson, 62. “Authenticity\textsubscript{2}” is about “making the familiar unfamiliar” and focused on later repertoires. See Chapter 4, ‘A Tale of Two Authenticities’, Wilson, 57–75.
\textsuperscript{36} Elizabeth Roche, ‘Early Music on Records in the Last 25 Years: 2’, \textit{The Musical Times} 120, no. 1633 (March 1979), 217. In her article on early music on the BBC published in the same year, she criticises the lack of coverage in strong terms and compares it unfavourably to airtime given to opera, jazz and contemporary classical music, in spite of the “early music mania” to which she attests. Elizabeth Roche, ‘Early Music and the BBC. 2: 1957 to Date’, \textit{The Musical Times} 120, no. 1641 (1979), 914.
\textsuperscript{37} Wilson, \textit{The Art of Re-Enchantment}, 62–64.
\textsuperscript{38} It is now more or less a given that any discussion of the medieval music revival will begin by mentioning their impact. See Edward G. Breen, ‘The Performance Practice of David Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London: Medieval Music in the 1960s and 1970s’ (PhD thesis, King’s College, London, 2014), 4. They were perhaps first brought together explicitly in Brown, ‘Pedantry or Liberation?’, 48–50. Haskell also juxtaposes them in his survey of the revival: Haskell, \textit{The Early Music Revival: A History}, 162–64.
performance were: The New York Pro Musica, founded by Noah Greenberg in New York in 1952; Michael Morrow’s British group Musica Reservata, brought together in the mid-1950s; the Studio der frühen Musik founded in 1959 or 1960 by Thomas Binkley, Sterling Jones, Nigel Rogers and Andrea von Ramm, whose output is explored in Chapter IV below; and David Munrow’s Early Music Consort of London, the youngest of these ensembles, created in 1967. As Page says: “Between 1960 and 1975 the performance of medieval music was dominated by [these] miraculous individuals”, referring to the charismatic directors of the Big Four.

Excitement about all the fabulous and exotic “new” old instruments being played by the Big Four, whose example was then followed by many other groups, was a fundamental part of the concert-going experience, as Fallows explains:

[Instruments] were central to all performances of medieval music in those days [the late 1960s]. Reviews and audience reactions tended to start by discussing the instruments. All early music concerts in those days happened with a picturesque selection of unusual instruments artfully strewn across the stage. The arrival of a new instrument was always greeted with glee; but the main issue tended to be that the instrument actually worked well, not how far it reflected any historical verisimilitude.

As intimated in Fallows’ final sentence, it was the use of instruments that began to lead to doubts about the influential performance style of the Big Four. They had developed a habitual manner of performing medieval music, to all intents and purposes “inventing” a new and very popular medieval music sound that other groups were swift to emulate. By the late 1970s, doubts about interpretations following the Big Four’s precedent began to be expressed with ever more urgency. Page relates a turning point: “By 1975 some musicians and scholars had already begun to wonder

41 Grove Music Online, s.v. ‘Munrow, David’ by David Scott and Gina Boaks, accessed 4 July 2019, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com. The two British ensembles were permeable to each other’s membership.
44 Munrow even trumpeted this creation with the title of his (almost entirely) solo album: David Munrow, The Mediaeval Sound, Exploring the World of Music, Oryx EXP46, 1970, 33⅓ rpm. Voices are entirely absent.
whether the so-called boom in ‘early music’ was really a musical revival, or whether it was an international fad for exotic instruments.\footnote{Page, ‘The English a Cappella Heresy’, 25. See for example Montagu’s criticism of the use of inappropriate instruments and of the construction compromises in instruments available when he was writing in 1975: Jeremy Montagu, ‘Talking Points-1: The “Authentic” Sound of Early Music’, \textit{Early Music} 3, no. 3 (1975), 242–43.} A search for evidence about the contribution of instruments to medieval performance ended up being put high on the list of musicological priorities in England.\footnote{The results of their research can be found summarised by Leech-Wilkinson, \textit{The Modern Invention of Medieval Music}, 104–50. Some of the key pieces of research that could be considered to have had the most impact on performance practice, especially due to their accessibility, are: Christopher Page, ‘Machaut “Pupil” Deschamps on the Performance of Music: Voices or Instruments in the 14th-Century Chanson’, \textit{Early Music} 5, no. 4 (1977), 484–91; Christopher Page, ‘The Performance of Songs in Late Medieval France: A New Source’, \textit{Early Music} 10, no. 4 (1982), 441–441; Christopher Page, \textit{Voices and Instruments of the Middle Ages} (London: Dent, 1987); David Fallows, ‘Specific Information on the Ensembles for Composed Polyphony, 1400–1474’, in \textit{Studies in the Performance of Late Mediaeval Music}, edited by Stanley Boorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 109–59.} When scholars looked for historical information about medieval performance practice, they found very little to support the new medieval musical sound and interpretative choices of the Big Four, but a surprising quantity that suggested the medieval norm had in fact been all-vocal performance.\footnote{For another brief summary of how Page and Fallows expounded voice-only performance as being the best documented practice during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, alongside a very personal reaction to a recording by Page’s ensemble, Gothic Voices, originally published in 1987, see Richard Taruskin, ‘High, Sweet and Loud’, in \textit{Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 347–52.} This had been hard to conceive previously due to a number of assumptions as outlined by Leech-Wilkinson in his chapter ‘The invention of the voices-and-instruments hypothesis’, as well as thanks to the excitement surrounding the exotic and novel sounds created by all the newly-reconstructed instruments.\footnote{Leech-Wilkinson, \textit{The Modern Invention of Medieval Music}, 13–87.} One significant obstacle was the quality of professional singing that was lamented in the early twentieth century for its lack of precision and condemned by Leech-Wilkinson as “execrable” on the recordings of the 1930s and 1950s.\footnote{Quoting Pierre Aubry’s introduction to his edition of motets from the Bamberg manuscript, published in 1908, see Leech-Wilkinson, 36. The criticism is of all-vocal recordings by Safford Cape as part of educational anthologies such as the Anthologie Sonore, HMV’s History of Music in Sound or Archiv’s historical series. See Leech-Wilkinson, 89.} Even after the evidence for a cappella singing of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century polyphonic song had been gathered, it was not until the music was matched with the singing talents of those trained in the peculiarly English choral singing style as fostered by Oxford and Cambridge chapels and the cathedral tradition that the hypothesis began to be believed.\footnote{Leech-Wilkinson, \textit{The Modern Invention of Medieval Music}, 86. Page points out that there are critics of undifferentiated “beauty of sound” that English vocal ensembles were making and explores a little the context in which this sound has been nurtured. Christopher Page, ‘The English “a Cappella” Renaissance’, \textit{Early Music} 21, no. 3 (1993), 461–66.} What then followed was a kind of “propaganda bombardment” that happened from the late 1970s and into the 1980s, unleashed by a group of British musicologists and scholars that Leech-Wilkinson
calls, in inverted commas, the “forum”. At this point, it is worth noting too that the entire ‘early music’ movement in England has been associated with a cultured elite that were part of an educated middle class whose upper echelons were expected to be graduates of Oxford or Cambridge, meaning there is a sociological background to what the “forum” were espousing.

The ramifications of the “English a cappella heresy” continue to be felt to this day. In fact, this controversy provides context for the activities of my research participants because it is an example of influential policing of what was or was not acceptable in medieval music performance. Its main innovative premise was that instruments did not play the extant medieval musical works, but instead must have participated in unwritten practices. This proposition was accompanied by a mistrust of anything individualistic or considered to be too imaginative.

The stimulation for the creation of the a cappella hypothesis was a concern for historicism and for performing the extant repertoire in a way congruent with how the original performers and audiences made and received the music. I now explore what this means in the twenty-first century, especially for those taking part in my study.

Commercial obligations and naive enthusiasms might have led Thomas Binkley to write in sleeve notes to an album by the Studio published in the 1960s, that they were “bring[ing] the performance of this music close to the elusive original”. However, in the twenty-first century, there is a more circumspect vision of what our imperfect attempts to revive medieval music performance practices can hope to achieve. As Potter adeptly phrases it: “perhaps the best we can hope for is a sense of responsibility to the past, an awareness that we cannot repeat or re-create it.

51 Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music*, 136. Page gives a list of record reviews that appeared in the journal *Early Music* between 1979 and 1991 that illustrate their views, including a summary of seven features to which the reviewers were opposed. 11 out of 34 of those reviews were by Leech-Wilkinson. Page, ‘The English “a Cappella” Renaissance’, 469. This controversy directly led to at least one ensemble, The Medieval Ensemble of London, disbanding, see Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music*, 139. Leech-Wilkinson is plainly very regretful about his role in this group’s demise. Fallows has also expressed to me in a personal communication his sadness that his musicological work was partly responsible for the loss of this group.

52 Page, ‘The English a Cappella Heresy’. The name was actually coined by Brown, ‘Pedantry or Liberation?’, 23.


54 Page points out “the essentially literate and punctilious nature of trained musicianship in Britain.” Page, ‘The English “a Cappella” Renaissance’, 459.

55 This statement is condemned by John Haines who writes a strong critique of the Studio using this as fuel for his fire. See John Haines, ‘The Arabic Style of Performing Medieval Music’, *Early Music* 29, no. 3 (1 August 2001), 374. The quote comes from the sleeve notes to Thomas Binkley and Studio der frühen Musik, *Carmina Burana : 21 Lieder aus der Original-Handschrift um 1300*, Musik und ihre Zeit, Telefunken SAWT 9455-A, 1964, 33⅓ rpm. See also Chapter IV for a case study examination of the creativity of the Studio.
but we can engage with it, respect it, learn from it, and perhaps recover from it something that relates to us in the present.”

Although we acknowledge the impossibility of “recreat[ing] a performance of medieval music exactly ‘as it would have been done’”, and although we would never even know if we did achieve that goal, recreation remains an attractive motivation for people who perform medieval music. I demonstrate in my case study of Crawford Young (Chapter V) just how important historical justifiability was to his entire approach to playing the medieval lute. He summarises the point of studying, and presumably also making historical music as trying to understand the style of the music you are engaged with through study and internalisation. Both Binkley’s published articles on performance practice show his deep concern for historicity, citing broadly from historical sources such as musical examples, iconography, contemporary literature, manuals on music and treatises on rhetoric. Winter talked to me about being occupied with developing a musical language that has clear boundaries in order that the historically congruent ideas contained in it will match the chosen poetry she performs with her duo partner. She expressed worries about her use of twentieth-century performance practice in Icelandic folk music as a model due to its temporal incongruence with her poetic material (see Chapter VI).

My respondents spoke about how their choices are affected by awareness of the historical context of the music they play. For Austen-Brown it was the geographical location within which a particular piece or music creator was situated that would enable her to exclude anything inappropriate from her “flavour palate”. She described balancing a search for information about the medieval context with a concern to embrace artistic choices that feel authentic to her. Guerber used imagination informed by knowledge of historical facts to recreate a possible performance context in order to justify his decision to use a harp to accompany a sacred contrapunctum* of a trouvére* song.

_________________________

59 The piece is Pater Sancte, a non-liturgical conductus* that appears as a contrapunctum* to a chanson melody by the trouvére* Gace Brulé. Diabolus in Musica and Antoine Guerber, Sanctus! Les Saints dans la Polyphonie Parisienne au
Posch expressed concern to use appropriate instruments and aesthetic, stylistic choices for the temporal context of music he performs. Pittaway and Tyler distanced themselves from modern or anachronistic harmonisations of medieval melodies, insisting on the importance of knowing what the polyphonic options would have been that were available at the time a piece was created. Pittaway emphasised this: “If I’m playing a thirteenth-century piece of music, I want to know what the thirteenth-century choices were and create a second voice doing that.” He expressed a wish to “play medieval music medievally” and in order to do this he recounted researching the polyphonic repertoire from the same period as the repertoire he was preparing for performance, basing what he plays on his accompanying instrument on those models. Pittaway maintains a blog in which he discusses these ideas. Ian Pittaway, ‘About’, Early Music Muse, accessed 10 May 2023, https://earlymusicmuse.com/about-early-music-muse/.

Lewon described to me how he would search for appropriate models to imitate when preparing performances of the monophony of Neidhart, which is transmitted to us over a period of several centuries and poses some interesting problems with regard to interpretation. His first concern was to distinguish in performance between a Neidhart monody transmitted in the thirteenth century and one written down in the fifteenth:

If I accompany a monophonic Neidhart transmission of the fifteenth century and I’m using exactly the same techniques as I would for an earlier source of a Neidhart song for instance, and it basically sounds the same, I go like, where’s time gone in that? Yeah, that’s stylistic grounds.

He referred to the differences in the polyphony and in instrument choices available from those two centuries, saying that a fifteenth-century style performance would not have been the same as one


Neidhart was a German poet or Minnesinger* who lived in the early thirteenth century. We know relatively little about him; the slender facts are outlined in the Grove article: Grove Music Online, s.v. ‘Neidhart [Nîthart]” von Reuental” by Michael Shields, accessed 24 March 2020, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. His popularity led to a tradition growing up of songs in his style that were in fact new creations of later centuries.

from two hundred years previously because “they would have adapted to the methods and instruments.”

Lyons and Marti both mentioned the relevance of being familiar with contemporary writings such as treatises. The importance of knowing musical models from the Middle Ages was emphasised by Taylor and Marti. Marti went as far as recommending the memorisation of medieval pieces in order to have as deep an embodied understanding as possible, an activity that is not only historically appropriate but also evidenced in Young’s performances.

Pittaway talked about the importance of seeing the original manuscript source in order to be able to make a judgement about any post-medieval accretions that might be found in a modern edition. Similarly, Guerber demonstrated respect for the original written version. He described his manner of playing:

I start with the melodic materials that I play at the same time [as the singer]. Very often with my left hand I hold the modal note or it has to be something very simple. I don’t make up any counterpoint ever... If he wanted to write a counterpoint, well, he would write it!

Where the song is monophonic, he explained he would not add an extra polyphonic line using the harp, but an accompaniment that sticks to the melody in the right hand, playing in unison with the singer, adding occasional ornamental fillers, while the left hand adds drone notes (the “garde modale”, or “holding of the modal note”) in between the melody notes. Lesne likewise told me that she would only add very small inconsequential things to a song’s melody because she finds that “a chanson is a holistic creation, text and melody, worked through by its composer.”

Posch questioned modern value judgements, saying that there might not be any answers, but the process takes you further towards a historical reality. This is related to Taylor’s attitude, which was

---

64 See Chapter V and my summary of the importance of memory both to the Middle Ages and to improvisation later in this chapter.
65 “Je pars des matériaux mélodiques que je joue au même temps. Très souvent à la main gauche je fais une garde modale ou il faut quelque chose de très simple. Je ne fais pas de contrepoint, jamais... S’il voulait écrire un contrepoint, ben il l’écrirait.”
66 “...une chanson est une réalisation totale, texte et mélodie, travaillée par son compositeur.”
summed up in his question: “I don’t want to be conservative and boring, but I think, shouldn’t we enjoy what they thought was high art and skill and beauty on their terms?”

Lyons is the only respondent who told me how, with the ensemble the Dufay Collective, they had deliberately avoided “any historical theoretical basis” during improvisation sections inserted into their performances of medieval dance music, before explaining that the reason for this was the musical knowledge his fellow musicians brought to the ensemble, encompassing Irish and Turkish music as well as jazz, all types of music that encourage improvisation and performer choice.

Creative procedures and processes as authentic

Having considered some of the ways that my respondents expressed their search for authenticity to me, we could imagine that the kind of engagement with the past that Potter recommended might take the form of “understand[ing] and replicat[ing] processes” rather than perfect finished products, as Mariani recommends. She agrees with Potter that our interpretations of medieval music should have a relationship with the here and now. For her, to “create a living performance”, there needs to be balance between the newness of applying processes of inventio and improvisation, and the oldness of the original sources. I now investigate how our understanding of the historical basis for using creative procedures in performances of medieval music has grown during the last century.

Ernst T. Ferand was one of the first scholars to consider improvisation in the history of WAM. He demonstrated how widespread he found practice in the “vast field of spontaneity” to be, giving many examples from the Middle Ages. It might now be said that improvisation is actually an integral part of what we imagine the Middle Ages sounded like. Romain told me that, for him,

67 Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 1.
68 Mariani, 1.
70 Treitler clarifies that improvisation is deeply embedded as a concept in how we talk about medieval music; Leo Treitler, With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How It Was Made (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1–2. See also more recent comments by Uri Smilansky and Marc Lewon, ‘Competing Ontologies of Musical Improvisation: A Medieval Perspective’, in The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Improvisation in the Arts, edited by Alessandro Bertinetto and Marcello Ruta (London: Routledge, 2021), 315.
improvising is a performance technique that is utterly necessary to produce a convincingly historicist performance of medieval music.

There is an important relationship [between Historically Informed Performance and improvisation]. In other words, it’s clear that the practice of improvisation, or at any rate the playing of music without written notation, is a basic feature of medieval [or] Renaissance music, and ... perhaps the most widespread practice of these periods. So, it's clear that if we want to be historically informed, we need to represent that too. And, of course, we also have to accept that our musical baggage and what will come out of [our baggage] is not the musical baggage of a thirteenth-century musician. So, there you have it, it’s part of this tension, this dichotomy between two things maybe. If you want to reach absolutely all the notes that a thirteenth-century musician would have played,\(^1\) in this case it would be better not to bother. And if you want to have the spirit of a thirteenth-century musician, you absolutely have to improvise.\(^2\)

The story of how we got to this point begins in the 1930s and 40s, when awareness of the techniques of discant or faburden first grew, thanks to readings of treatises and commentaries on

---

\(^1\) Romain suggested a correction here when I solicited his verification of the quotes I had used. He proposed the following as an alternative: “reenact the frame of mind of a 13th-century musician”.

\(^2\) “Il y a un grand rapport. C'est à dire qu'il est clair que la pratique de l'improvisation en tout cas du jeu de la musique sans musique écrite est quelque chose de base en tout cas pour la musique médiévale Renaissance et une pratique qui était ... peut être la plus répandue de ces époques. Donc c'est clair que si on veut être historiquement informé il faut qu'on représente ça aussi. Et il faut bien sûr aussi qu'on accepte que notre bagage musical et ce qui va sortir n'est pas le bagage musical d'un musicien du treizième siècle. Donc voilà, ça fait partie de cette tension, de cette peut être dichotomie entre 2 choses. Si on veut absolument avoir toutes les notes qu'un musicien du treizième siècle aurait fait, dans ce cas, il vaut mieux pas le faire. Et si on veut avoir l'esprit d'un musicien du treizième siècle, il faut absolument improviser.”
such anomalous medieval English pieces as *Edi beo thu* with its runs of parallel thirds. Reese’s historical overview of medieval music discusses English discant as a “method of improvisation”. Over the following decades other authors discussed various repertoires noting how improvisation seemed to be part of their creation process. For example, Zaminer commented that the *Vatican Organum* Treatise gave rules for performance that was “off the cuff” [aus dem Stegreif] and Bent stated that organa in general were based on “an extempore style of singing.”

Other evidence was also pointed out, such as the pedagogical function of the *Fundamenta organizandi* that were described by Wolff as having an “original didactic goal of a meaningful connection between composition or improvisation and practical playing”. Fallows discussed a fragmentary manuscript source that contains a catalogue of possibilities for a second voice to be added to a given three-pitch sequence that he concluded was intended as a “demonstration of how to improvise over a chant tenor”. Fully written out music has also been interpreted as reflecting improvisation practice since Bukofzer first noted that the two part version of the *basse danse* Tenor known variously as *La Spagna*, *Il Re di Spagna*, or *La Bassa Castiglya*, written down in Perugia, Biblioteca Comunale Augusta, MS 431 on fol 95v-96 and titled *Falla con misuras* “stand[s] very close to

---


75 ‘ursprüngliche didaktische Ziel der sinnvollen Verbindung bzw. Improvisation und Spielpraxis’; Christoph Wolff, ‘Conrad Paumanns Fundamentum Organisandi und seine verschiedenen Fassungen’, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 25, no. 3 (1968), 218.

Improvisation.” The conclusion Bukofzer came to seems to be based on the stereotypical nature of the figurations, some of which appear in other polyphonic *basse danses*, and on the irregularity of the cadence points, a feature he strongly relates to the idea of extempore playing, although it seems to me to be more about his own aesthetic values.

Many other examples could also be cited. With the appearance of handbooks pertaining to performance practice that have sections entirely devoted to improvisation and ornamentation for performance students, it is clear that by the mid 1980s, improvisation seems to have become a solidly recognised element of medieval music making, for which students needed guidance. These books emanated from the United States. In Britain, the situation was somewhat different, owing to English musicology’s strong emphasis on documentary evidence, as already discussed. A book on performance practice of music before 1600 edited by Mayer Brown and Sadie is scholarly rather than practical in its intended audience and appears more reticent with relation to the topic of improvisation. Nevertheless, the evidence for improvisation as a ubiquitous practice has continued to be found. A particularly important study by Wegman sets out a large body of documentary proof that in the second half of the fifteenth century discant and oral counterpoint, in other words polyphony that was spontaneously generated in performance, were extremely widespread in both church and non-religious urban settings.

Our understanding of the spontaneous generation of music in performance during the Middle Ages has grown over the last century, and it is now possible to suggest that improvisation is permissible or even obligatory for musicians in the medieval music revival. Similarly, beginning in the early twentieth century, some scholars observed that musical sources had a very different relationship to the musical sounds of performance during the medieval period than was expected by performers of their time. I will turn my attention to this relationship now.

---


Changing attitudes to and meanings of musical notation

Musicologists in the twentieth century began to notice that musicians’ faithful compliance to the musical score presented problems when it came to performing medieval music. A 1929 article conveyed that the performance of medieval music entailed obligatory divergence from the notated music, in contrast with the deference shown to the composer’s wishes, exemplified in the score, that the author observed in his own time.\(^{82}\) “It becomes evident that in earlier times the performing artists’ subjective participation in the creation of the work performed constituted, as it were, a part of the artwork itself.”\(^{83}\) By mid-century, not much had changed in performance when Horsley wrote that students seeking to create a “historically authentic performance” of music from the sixteenth century were paradoxically prevented from doing so due to their “accurate adherence to the notes of a composition as written down by the composer”, something that worked well for music from after 1750 but, in her opinion, caused most music from the Baroque or Renaissance eras to be radically misconceived.\(^{84}\) In the 1980s, McGee wrote about how the complexity of music during the Romantic era took away the “right and duty” of every performer to add to the written score, continuing by saying that twentieth-century conservatoire training instils the imperative not to add anything at all, before concluding that this conflicts with playing music from the Middle Ages and Renaissance “correctly”.\(^{85}\) These writers were highlighting what they perceived as the difference between the information contained in a score and a successful representation of that score as sound. They concluded that performers of their own time did not seem to be aware of how far that difference went and how much might need to be added to produce a suitable performance of a score from the distant eras with which they were concerned.

There is now a consensus that scores never in fact adequately transmit everything that is necessary for a performance. Wilson cites this in support of his argument for “dispositional (historical) authenticity”.\(^{86}\) Haynes, writing about later music, discussed the ways in which notation is “always under-determined”.\(^{87}\) Returning to medieval music, Mariani argued that the notation

---


\(^{86}\) Wilson, *The Art of Re-Enchantment*, 50.

itself is the strongest proof “that the repertoire has always required a certain amount of inventive, improvisatory, and compositional skill on the part of the performer.”

Binkley first raised questions about the nature of notation when he confronted the manuscripts known collectively as the *Carmina Burana* in the early 1960s. His encounter with this source led him to the reflection that “[t]he preserved notated music is only a sketch for boundless possibilities of execution in sound by a soloist or ensemble.” Binkley talks in more detail about the background to the Studio’s first album dedicated to this collection of songs in his 1977 article on performance practice. The musical notation comprises unheighted (or as Binkley says, “staffless”) neumes* that do not indicate pitch with any certainty, being more like guides to vocal inflections, giving only some indication of general direction of travel within the melody, and how many notes were sung to each syllable. They are otherwise inconclusive about relative pitch within or between neumes* and there is no suggestion at all of absolute pitch. This drove him to comment: “I had never before questioned the importance of the notation in its relationship to performance. I had to ask now, what part of the performance is being notated here and of what does the rest of the performance consist? Why is the notation incomplete?” Reese went so far as to describe the written music from the Middle Ages as “only the skeleton of the performed one”, an idea that we will see is echoed by some of my interviewees.

---

91 The two albums that the Studio produced using material from this manuscript are the previously cited Binkley and Studio der frühen Musik, *Carmina Burana: 21 lieder* and *Thomas Binkley and Studio der frühen Musik, Carmina Burana (II): 13 Lieder nach der Handschrift aus Benediktbeuern um 1300*, Musik und ihre Zeit, Telefunken ‘Das Alte Werk’ SAWT 9522-A, 1968, 33½ rpm. Binkley, ‘Zur Aufführungspraxis’, 6. Page numbers refer to the unpublished original English version of Thomas Binkley’s article. A copy of this typescript, titled ‘On the Modern Performance of Medieval Monophonic Repertory’, (unpublished manuscript, no date but before 1977) was given to me by Crawford Young. Mariani mentions that it has been passed around former students of Binkley’s for many years. See Mariani, *Improvisation and Inventio*, 94 footnote 8.
92 The usual guide to reading neumes, relevant for sacred chant, is Eugène Cardine, *Gregorian Semiology*, translated by Gregory Casprini (Solesmes, 1982). Neuming secular Latin texts was also a common practice. For more information see the introduction to Sam Barrett, *The melodic tradition of Boethius’ ‘De consolatione philosophiae’ in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols, Monumenta monodica Medii Aevi: Subsidia 7 (Kassel; Basel; London: Bärenreiter, 2013).
94 Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages*, 353. He seems to have based this idea, however, on the discredited theories of Marius Schneider and therefore Arnold Schering, Schneider’s teacher, theories which Leech-Wilkinson discounted as “quite mad”, see Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music*, 45. Horsley described the score as “blank” and Ficker said that : “the rigid note-forms of the manuscripts are only a sort of musical sketch, not a precise guide for actual performance…”. Imogene Horsley, ‘The Renaissance Attitude Toward Interpretation in Instrumental
Carmina Burana demonstrates that even if scholars had already begun to recognise the different relationship that medieval performance must have had with medieval music notations, performers themselves only faced up to this when circumstances forced them to do so.

Although Binkley was not the first to suggest that a performance of the written notes alone would not suffice, he was responsible for extensively developing the idea in writing, after he had done so in his practical music making with the Studio. He laid out the logic of his evidence base in two articles published in German. Then, through his teaching work in Basel and Indiana, embedded his ideas in the minds of his students in Europe and North America, students like Mariani, who openly acknowledges her debt to Binkley. She reconfigured the issue, shedding a more positive light on it, describing the challenge of this type of notation being due to it containing “different data” rather than “missing data”. The notation found in medieval musical sources is defined as “non-prescriptive”, music writing that does not dictate precisely what a performer should sing or play. This allows space for a performer to be inventive and her book is, in essence, a practical guide on what to do with this space. Other American scholars also refer to the nature of medieval musical notation as a “basic outline” or “barest sketch”.

Support for Binkley comes from a perhaps surprising quarter. Taruskin’s criticism of the authenticity movement, and particularly English performances of historical music, mentioned neutral accuracy, “mere freedom from error or anachronism”. In his opinion, stripping away ahistorical accretions leaving just the bare documented bones of the text of a musical work, left a hole in the performance that needed to be filled in order for there to be “authenticity of conviction”. For Taruskin, something must be added to the score in performance, something that needs to have authenticity in the sense of personal belief, in order for the performance to be valuable aesthetically.

---

95 Binkley, ‘Zur Aufführungspraxis’; Binkley, ‘Die Musik des Mittelalters’.
96 Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 31.
97 Mariani, 1.
100 Taruskin, 6.
My respondents were all trained within and embedded in the culture of the WAM tradition. This entails a strongly shared perception that in the course of their careers they have been expected to read music fluently, quickly and efficiently. It has even been remarked that musicians with this type of training are hindered in their ability to improvise.\textsuperscript{101} Scholars such as McGee have recounted somewhat controversially perhaps how the Romantic era had taken away the “right and duty” of every performer to add to the written score, continuing by saying that twentieth-century conservatoire training instils the imperative not to add anything at all, before concluding that this conflicts with playing music from the Middle Ages and Renaissance “correctly”.\textsuperscript{102} My research has uncovered some stories of musicians fighting the perceived hindrance that their training and ability to read musical notation has created, because they realised that simply playing the notes as edited on a page in front of them would not be enough to restore medieval music to a living art.

Turning now to a closer examination of how musicians in the medieval music revival have discovered, understood and come to terms with the difference in transmission styles, I will analyse how my research participants have approached the sketchy or skeletal notation and its relationship to sound during the Middle Ages. My interviewees are listed in Table III.1 along with some contextual information about the circumstances of our interview and my relationship to them, if any.

\textit{Table III.1: List of interviewees}\textsuperscript{103}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Venue and date</th>
<th>Biography and relationship</th>
<th>Student at the Schola Cantorum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austen-Brown, Rebecca</td>
<td>on Zoom, 23 December 2020</td>
<td>Fiddle and recorder player and teacher, former colleague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{103} Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were with the author on the subject of improvisation and the interviewee’s musical practice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location and Date</th>
<th>Occupation and Details</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azéma, Anne</td>
<td>café on the Place des Abbesses, Paris, France, 3 October 2018</td>
<td>Singer and director of ensemble Boston Camerata, no previous contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagby, Benjamin</td>
<td>his home in Paris, 6 July 2016</td>
<td>Singer, harpist and teacher at various institutions, former teacher at the Sorbonne</td>
<td>1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject was Thomas Binckley and improvisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baines, Emily</td>
<td>her home in Staines, Surrey, 7 March 2020</td>
<td>Wind player and academic, played in same festivals and known to each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best, Martin</td>
<td>his home in Dorset, 14-15 January 2018</td>
<td>Singer, guitarist and plucked instrument player, no previous contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biggi, Francis</td>
<td>at the hotel where I was staying in Geneva, 12 June 2018</td>
<td>Guitarist and plucked instrument player, teacher at the Haute École de Musique in Geneva, no previous contact</td>
<td>1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budzińska-Bennett, Agnieszka</td>
<td>Heilig Kreuz Kirchgemeindezentrum, Binningen, Basel, 29 January 2020</td>
<td>Singer, harpist, choir director, director of Ensemble Peregrina, known through the Schola Cantorum</td>
<td>1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemencic, René</td>
<td>his home in Vienna, 6 November 2018</td>
<td>Keyboard and wind player, director of Clemencic Consort, no previous contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Location and Date</td>
<td>Position and Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensemble Gaita</td>
<td>Medieval Music in the Dales, 7 September 2018</td>
<td>Instrumental ensemble, former pupils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gosfield, Avery</td>
<td>café at Brussels Airport, 18 September 2018</td>
<td>Wind player, director of Ensemble Lucidarium, no previous contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerber, Antoine</td>
<td>café on Rue des Pyramides, Paris, France, 8 March 2018</td>
<td>Singer and harpist, director of Diabolus in Musica (now retired), former teacher at the Fondation Royaumont</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamon, Pierre</td>
<td>his home in Paris, 7 February 2020</td>
<td>Wind player, founder director of Alla Francesca, colleague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison, Ian</td>
<td>his home in Freiburg, 12 October 2019</td>
<td>Wind player, director of Les Haulz et les Bas, colleague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauksson, Arngeir</td>
<td>his home in Staines, Surrey, 7 March 2020</td>
<td>Plucked string instrument player, former colleague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haymoz, Jean-Yves</td>
<td>a café in Fribourg, Switzerland, 12 June 2018</td>
<td>Singer and improvisation teacher, no previous contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Sterling.</td>
<td>his home in Munich, 16-17 January 2016</td>
<td>Bowed string instrument player, member of the Studio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subject was Thomas Binkley, the Studio and improvisation

Taught there in the 1970s
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location/Event</th>
<th>Profession and Relationship</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesne, Brigitte</td>
<td>her home in Paris, 31 January 2018</td>
<td>Singer and harpist, teacher, played in same festivals and known to each other</td>
<td>1970s/80s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewon, Marc</td>
<td>Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Basel, Switzerland, 29 January 2020</td>
<td>Singer, bowed and plucked string instrument player, current teacher at Schola Cantorum, friend and fellow student</td>
<td>2000s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyons, William</td>
<td>café at Kings Place, London, 13 December 2016</td>
<td>Wind instrument player, director of Dufay Collective and City Waites, former teacher at Dartington International Summer School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marchant, Katie</td>
<td>on Zoom, 30 November 2020, together with Steve Tyler</td>
<td>Wind instrument player, played in same festivals and known to each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marti, Corina</td>
<td>her home in Basel, 28 January 2020</td>
<td>Keyboard and wind instrument player, current teacher at Schola Cantorum, known through Schola Cantorum</td>
<td>1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picazos, Raphaël</td>
<td>his home in Paris, 5 March 2018</td>
<td>Singer and improvisation teacher, former teacher at Conservatoire National Supérieure de Musique de Paris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Location Details</td>
<td>Role and Background Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittaway, Ian</td>
<td>Medieval Music in the Dales, 9 September 2018</td>
<td>Singer and multi instrumentalist, known through contact at Medieval Music in the Dales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posch, Michael</td>
<td>in his office at the Musik und Kunst Privatuniversität der Stadt Wien, Vienna, 5 November 2018</td>
<td>Wind player and director of Ensemble Unicorn, former colleague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romain, Baptiste</td>
<td>home of a mutual friend, Clarstrasse, Basel, 29 January 2020</td>
<td>Fiddle and bagpipe player, current teacher at Schola Cantorum, known through Schola Cantorum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Bill</td>
<td>Medieval Music in the Dales, 8 September 2018</td>
<td>Harpist and teacher, former individual harp teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler, Steve</td>
<td>on Zoom, 30 November 2020, together with Katie Marchant</td>
<td>Hurdy gurdy player, known through contact at Medieval Music in the Dales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vellard, Dominique</td>
<td>his home near Dijon, 22 April 2018</td>
<td>Singer, director of Ensemble Gilles Binchois, teacher at Schola Cantorum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter, Mara</td>
<td>her home in Basel, 27 January 2020</td>
<td>Wind player and director of ensemble Moirai, known through contact at Schola Cantorum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concerning the discovery of a different kind of relationship between notation and performance, some of my respondents provided anecdotal stories about learning what it means to be a medieval musician and dealing with musical sources that are not as prescriptive or detailed as the WAM scores they were used to. They recounted how they discovered that recorded performances of medieval pieces differed from the notation of the same pieces of music that they consulted.

Harrison said that when he compared the performance of a piece like the Lamento di Tristano by his favourite ensemble, St George's Canzona, with the written notation, he quickly realised how creative they had been to produce a big ensemble arrangement. He concluded that: “If you wanted to perform medieval music … you had to flesh out the bare bones of the surviving notation.” When Posch listened to recordings such as the LPs produced by the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and the Reflexe series that featured musicians from the Schola, he asked the question: “Why are they playing much more than [is] written here?” This led to his understanding that medieval music “is of course just a skeleton”. Hamon told me that in early music there is an immediate sense that “not everything is written down in the score.” He described comparing a recording of Frans Brüggen playing sonatas to the notation of those same sonatas.

Other interviewees also recognised the ways in which medieval musical sources give less information than later notations. Budzińska-Bennett for example talked about the ambiguity of

---

104 For an edition of this untexted piece, see Timothy J. McGee, Medieval Instrumental Dances, Music: Scholarship and Performance (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 115. The recording can be found on St. George’s Canzona and John Sothcott, Medieval Songs and Dances, CRD Records Ltd CRD 1121, 1985, 33⅓ rpm.

105 Reflexe was a specialist early music series produced by EMI. For more on these records and a discography, see Discophage, ‘EMI Reflexe CD Discography’, Discophage (blog), 19 August 2016, http://discophage.com/emi-reflexe/. The appearance of this series is interpreted by Day as an indication of the burgeoning profitability of early music, see Timothy Day, A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History (London: Yale University Press, 2002), 117.

106 “…tout n’est pas écrit dans la partition.”
notation and how it can be “manifold in reading”, allowing you to read it in many ways that may all be acceptable. “I have to fill in the gaps, I need to ... invent the gestures”. Elmes and Webb of Ensemble Gaita talked about their experience with fifteenth-century basse danse* and the necessity to do something extra: “on the score there were just these long notes and obviously [Elmes] wasn’t just going to play those long notes.” In Taylor’s definition of improvisation, he talked about how you have to make conjecture because of not having all the information. A survey respondent succinctly explained improvisation as “adding to the bare bones of a notated piece of medieval music.” Another gave the simple definition that improvisation is “filling in the blanks with a melodic structure”.

Some musicians I spoke to interpreted the gap as something positive. Harrison told me that in medieval music performance it was possible to be creative without needing to “stick your neck out” and claim ownership, which he felt an actual composer would have to. A main fascination for him therefore was that it was not like the classical music he played on his clarinet, where you were given the notation and just had to play the notes. Instead, you had a few notes and had to add others in order to perform it. He clarified, saying:

The idea is that the less surviving material, the more you have to improvise or add your own stuff in order to make it into a proper piece of music. “Proper” in inverted commas, to make it acceptable to audiences ... to give it some raison d'être, to give it a sort of concert presence. I mean it ... just goes without saying but it runs extremely deep doesn’t it?

Because there are pieces of music and there are genres of music of late medieval and early Renaissance where, because of the whole social, liturgical, educational, the whole world view of these pieces and this music the composer gives the whole thing onto the paper...

And ... you can see, looking at the manuscripts that have survived, looking how it’s written, how it’s written down even, on what sort of paper it was written, that [in] other repertoires, the composer is leaving it unfinished.

Marti described being jealous of the harpsichordist in a Handel concert she saw as a youngster because they were playing from a single line of music and "the rest is yours". For Marti, the skeletal nature of a musical source, leaving space for her own expression, was an attractive benefit. Similarly for Pittaway, simply being given everything on the page in notation would bore him. “[In] a lot of medieval, particularly monophonic ... medieval music ... you can’t just play what’s on the page. ... I would be thoroughly bored just having a script on a piece of paper and that’s what you...
play. I need to be creative, I have to be. And so medieval music gives me all of that…” It seems possible that Binkley was also attracted to the idea that this was a music in which he could be creative, judging by the huge number of performances by him and his ensemble of monophonic medieval music that required substantial compositional labour.107

**Textuality, orality and memory**

Binkley proposed a reason for the apparent lack in the medieval musical sources, countering the a cappella hypothesis at the same time. He argued for the necessity to include “unwritten elements which are transmitted culturally and are not found in the musical text since they belong to traditional convention or cannot be expressed through notation.”108 He wrote at length and emphatically about this position, contrasting “textuality” [Schriftlichkeit] with “orality” [Mündlichkeit]. This led him to dismiss the approach of not adding anything to the written text of a vernacular monophonic song, saying that this notation “reproduces only a part of a [musical] work”, so without additions a performance would be incomplete.109 Later he wrote: “The one thing we can say for certain about the performance of that music is that the notes as we see them did not constitute the performance.”110

Arlt schematised Binkley’s proposal in more detail. In considering the transformation in how music notation relates to music performance, Arlt articulated two models of how musical transmission works.111 Both models include conventions, but in the model showing the relationship in the Middle Ages, those conventions are unknown and need to be reimagined based on other evidence such as theoretical writings, pictures, instruments themselves and practices in non-WAM traditions. He classifies this model as being “directly opposite” what is expected in modern...
practice, where the notation is called a “prescription”. Arlt has deliberately described modern practice in a stereotyped and old-fashioned way in order to make the contrast with the medieval practice and attitude to notation clearer. There is nevertheless an important kernel of truth; we rely much more heavily today on pure notational transmission than they did during the Middle Ages, although there are oral elements that are fundamental even to the transmission of canonic works in the WAM tradition, as Lawson reminds us.

Despite Arlt’s black and white vision contrasting modern day, text-driven music transmission with the oral methods of the Middle Ages, textuality and orality in medieval music enjoyed a complex, intersecting relationship. Treitler has explored this in detail in relation to the vast repertoire of Gregorian chant. Binkley understood this complexity as well, saying that early neumatic notation represents a first stage of a slow process, the “gradual penetration [of musical notation] into the realm of orality”. Indeed, this kind of notation still requires an oral tradition of face to face singing and listening to support transmission. Being face to face is one of two basic characteristics of oral transmission according to Goody.

The second characteristic is “continual transformation”. “Verbal variability” is noted as an arresting feature of oral literature by Finnegan as well. Therefore, if we accept that oral transmission played a larger role in how medieval music was learnt and conveyed than it does in WAM today, we should also accept and expect “liberties in performance”. In medieval musical

\---

114 Treitler, With Voice and Pen.
115 „...ein allmähliches Eindringen in den Bereich der Mündlichkeit” Binkley, ‘Die Musik des Mittelalters’, 74.
118 Goody, 54.
120 Arlt, ‘Secular Monophony’, 66. An alternative view can be found in relation to the Arabo-Andalusian tradition of North Africa that has an assumed unchanging longevity among practitioners. See footnote 90 in Chapter IV.
culture, these transformations or variations would have been on an individual rather than whole society level because of the presence of written documents and music literacy.\(^{121}\)

Having considered that the gaps in the information contained in notation could have been due to that information being passed on orally, from musician to musician, leaving no trace, it is now pertinent to investigate memory, an obligatory skill for successful transmission to occur. Binkley recognised memory as an aspect of orality.\(^{122}\) Zuckerman, who was concerned with the teaching and learning of improvisation in medieval music and drew on his experience with North Indian classical music to propose some possibilities, described how the transmission of music in oral traditions can only occur in the context of a trusting relationship between teacher and student, and relies heavily on keeping the learnt material in the memory rather than on a written page.\(^{123}\)

Variations and changes found in musical or poetic works passed on orally might, therefore, be attributed to the fallibility of the human capacity to memorise and recall from storage.\(^{124}\) Rice pointed out that embracing this variability actually led to the valorisation of improvisation in traditions like jazz, Hindustani or Middle Eastern musics.\(^{125}\) Zuckerman is convinced that it is only through memorisation of repertoire that “one can learn the capacity of intelligent and spontaneous improvising”.\(^{126}\) Berliner would agree, saying “In general, the development of ability in jazz depends upon honing the memory.”\(^{127}\) Memory’s importance to improvisation can be demonstrated psychologically as well, because a memorised “knowledge base” is extremely useful

---

\(^{121}\) Goody outlined this interactive process by discussing Lord’s comparisons of transcriptions of songs made in the early nineteenth century with his own transcriptions of nominally the same songs performed a hundred years later. Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, 179–80.

\(^{122}\) Binkley, *Die Musik des Mittelalters*, 74.


\(^{124}\) *Grove Music Online*, s.v. ‘Transmission’ by Timothy Rice, accessed 16 May 2023, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. This belief is not always held by people active in oral traditions who may argue for the immutability of their musical tradition over centuries, see Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusi Music in Urban North Africa*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016). There are also questions to be raised about “concepts of sameness” which differ between cultures and allow memory to be seen to be reproductive even if it is not verbatim and free of error. See Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, 88. In addition, variation may be brought about by reactions to the audience or by the impulse of a performer’s own resourcefulness, and not simply due to a defective memory. See Goody, 87.

\(^{125}\) *Grove Music Online*, ‘Transmission’.

\(^{126}\) “...man könne die Fähigkeit des intelligenten und spontanen Improvisierens erlernen” Zuckerman, ‘Improvisation in der mittelalterlichen Musik’, 71.

for an improvisation to succeed in terms of its fluency and how well it matches expectations for the genre of music being performed.\textsuperscript{128}

The importance of memory during the Middle Ages is emphasised by Carruthers in her study of the memorial culture of the medieval era, which contrasts to the documentary nature of our modern era.\textsuperscript{129} It has been remarked upon since the 1930s how rarely musicians in the Middle Ages are depicted reading from notation, or alternatively how few music manuscripts seem to be appropriate for reading from in performance, with the conclusion that memory or improvisation must be involved.\textsuperscript{130} Some manuscripts were intended as monuments or for presentation rather than for practical music making.\textsuperscript{131} Others seem to have been more about demonstrating the prestigious skill of music notation, even where the music thus written was notated so badly as to be of spurious practical use.\textsuperscript{132} There is clear evidence that medieval musicians were expected to know significant amounts of repertoire off by heart.\textsuperscript{133}

Berger explored the importance of memory in medieval music making, demonstrating how the format of music treatises sometimes resembled literary texts that were explicitly intended for memorisation and how the evidence of the extant music supports the idea of memorial activity in its creation.\textsuperscript{134} German wind players’ ability to improvise polyphonically, something that Polk


\textsuperscript{132} As well as the example of Hartmann Schedel’s music book (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Cgm 810) studied by Kirnbauer and cited in Smilansky and Lewon, ‘Competing Ontologies of Musical Improvisation’, 325 footnote 4, I would also mention Zorzi Trombetta’s notebook, London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus A.XXVI, which is quite mixed in the quality of its musical content, see Coelho and Polk, \textit{Instrumentalists and Renaissance Culture, 1420–1600}, 66–68.

\textsuperscript{133} See for example the statutes referred to in Wright, \textit{Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris, 500-1550}, 325–26.

\textsuperscript{134} Anna Maria Busse Berger, \textit{Medieval Music and the Art of Memory}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
argued for, is related to the fact that they memorised the repertoire available to them.\footnote{Polk, \textit{German Instrumental Music of the Late Middle Ages}, 166.} He also discussed how the very thorough and exhaustive list of examples that Tinctoris gives would suggest a slow or even tedious process of “repetitive drills”, in other words, memorising.\footnote{Polk, 170. See further discussion in Chapter V.}

Memory is central to Mariani’s practical handbook about making medieval music.\footnote{See for example, Chapter 3 “Notation and \textit{Memoria},” Mariani, \textit{Improvisation and Inventio}, 28–55.} The term, “\textit{inventio},” in the title of the book is linked to memory because of the necessity for a creative act in the Middle Ages to come out of the collection of stored information to which a person has access.\footnote{Mariani, 2–4. See also Alistair Minnis, ‘Medieval Imagination and Memory’, in \textit{The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Middle Ages}, edited by Alistair Minnis and Ian Johnson, vol. 2, The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 239–74.} She defined both composition and improvisation in relation to “musical expectations and vocabulary” that have been memorised, drawn from models available for imitation.\footnote{Mariani, \textit{Improvisation and Inventio}, 3.}

Memorisation was linked to improvisation by some of my interviewees. Marti explained: “You cannot write a Faenza piece knowing only one.\footnote{Faenza, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 117. Laid out in a score format, it has been assumed to be a source of keyboard music although arguments have been made for other possible instrumentations including lute duos. Arguments made for the latter have been based on the ranges found in the source, possible reasons for transpositions from vocal originals and the crossings of the Tenor and Superius lines making single manual keyboard performance too tricky. See the edition, Dragan Plamenac, ed., \textit{Keyboard Music of the Late Middle Ages in the Codex Faenza 117}, Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae 57 (Rome: Institute of Musicology, 1972). For more on the possibility of other instruments performing the music in the codex, see Timothy J. McGee, ‘Instruments and the Faenza Codex’, \textit{Early Music} 14, no. 4 (1 November 1986), 480–90.} You have to know them all, and you have to know them by heart. They have to be in your DNA, and only then, in my opinion, can you have the freedom of an improvisation.” A process of getting to know repertoire, then writing in the same style and then memorising was described by Posch. He told me that this process “takes time and practice and practice and practice”, echoing what Zuckerman said about learning to improvise in the North Indian tradition.\footnote{Zuckerman, ‘Improvisation in der mittelalterlichen Musik’.}

Having now interrogated what a deeper understanding of the relationship of medieval musical sources to performance was found to reveal with regard to transmission, and the basic central skill that this discovery supposed, it is appropriate to discuss one major impact this has had on how performers have approached recreating medieval music as a living art. In order to get closer to the way that medieval musicians learnt and passed on their music, musicians in the revival have studied how oral transmission in music works now, and even participated in this kind of music formation.
learning. This has led to the use of performance traditions from outside WAM to inform and enrich the interpretation of the notation. This use of living oral traditions as inspiration for performances of medieval music was described as “anthropological and non-historical” by Brown. Nevertheless, my case study musicians and interviewees have participated in this trend, as I will now show.

**Living traditions**

We can trace the trend back to the Studio who are credited with inventing the so-called “Arabic style”, which in interpretations of monophonic song from their later albums saw them using features of the Arabo-Andalusian nūba to help them structure innovative, long-form performances of troubadour* and trouvère* chansons, Spanish cantigas* and Latin sequences. Shull ethnographically traces how Binkley and the Studio’s pioneering work led to other medieval music revival ensembles and musicians (Sequentia with Benjamin Bagby, Altramar with Angela Mariani, Boston Camerata with Joel Cohen) considering “living musical traditions” as sources that would enable development of believable artistic models for their performances. Binkley may not have realised it, but an assumed connection between the troubadours* and trouvères* and an idea of folk music was nothing new: the association between these forms of musical performance and repertoire was first documented in the Renaissance. Mariani gives a guide to how a musician today might approach this process, including consideration of how oral transmission is already at work in what modern medieval musicians are doing through their exposure to musical models – recordings, concerts, teachers – that are operating now in the medieval music revival.

Young told me that, in his opinion, for the Studio the use of traditional musics as models for playing medieval music was a way to create “credibility or authenticity which otherwise wouldn’t be there because that was music of five or six or seven hundred years ago, so where is the authenticity?” Similarly, Massilia Sound System’s approach to troubadour* poetry is explained

---

143 A term coined by Haines to indicate that the ensemble was taking part in a colonial orientalism. Haines, ‘The Arabic Style of Performing Medieval Music’.
144 See Chapter IV. For more detail about the Studio’s use of extra-European models, see Stuttard, ‘De l’Interprétation de la Musique Médiévale’.
148 Young 2015. When speaking to me, Young displayed a strong aversion to the use of living traditions in his own practice.
by Haines: only musicians who are part of a living musical tradition can truly be “successors of the medieval art de trobar”, that is, actually authentic.\textsuperscript{149}

In reconstructing the musical setting of poetry from medieval Iceland, Winter explained that together with Hanna Marti, they had chosen to investigate Icelandic rímur singing because they wanted to use a model that could represent “some kind of modal language from Northern Europe”.\textsuperscript{150} Winter however demonstrated a certain reticence about this choice, probably because of this source’s modern origin, telling me that her thought was: “maybe we can partially use this”. She insisted that it was “not solid at all” in terms of historicism and relied simply on their subjective choices, transcribing the examples that they liked and using those as bases and starting points for developing their own musical language.

Many of my research participants told me about their experiences with non-Western European Art Musics. Hamon recounted spending six or seven years studying, learning and playing traditional and Hindustani classical music, specifically focusing on the Rajasthani double flute known as the satara and then on the bansuri, studying with Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia in Rotterdam. His interview was a particularly rich one covering many themes that rarely or never came up elsewhere such as spirituality, energy, the deep importance of proportion to the success and beauty of an improvisation and the idea of “ebullition” [ébullition] as a prerequisite for the act of improvisation. This word represents a particular state of mind and suggests restlessness, lively effervescence, churning or changing of state into something freer, like a gas.

Biggi explained that his rather unconventional training in music, something he came to quite late, included visiting an Egyptian oud player in Paris, Hussein el Masry, for lessons.\textsuperscript{151} He encouraged a strong cross-cultural element in his teaching of medieval music at the Haute École de Musique in Geneva by bringing a group of young Palestinian musicians to the school on an exchange programme. As well as being there to learn, they were requested to teach the students in Geneva about Palestinian music: “Maqam, mode, improvisation, technique”.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{149} He quotes the singer of this French reggae rap group from Marseille, Tatou, who rejects historical performance as ‘having no living meaning’. John Haines, ‘Living Troubadours and Other Recent Uses for Medieval Music’, \textit{Popular Music} 23, no. 2 (1 May 2004), 149.
\textsuperscript{150} See Chapter VI.
\textsuperscript{152} Concert Pour La Paix « Diwân », 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Px6HQWwO7M. The ensemble Diwan is representative of the results of this cross-cultural collaboration.
Lyons recounted that his group, the Dufay Collective, had been lucky enough to go on British Council sponsored tours in the 1990s to places such as Egypt, Oman and the Yemen where they were able to play with and learn from local musicians. This is similar to the experiences afforded by the Studio’s Goethe Institut sponsored tours to Middle Eastern, African and Far Eastern countries which helped to inspire Binkley’s original idea to enrich their performances with characteristics found in monophonic playing of non-WAM musicians. Lyons displayed an awareness of how the blurring of lines between historical performance and world music was potentially “a very, very dangerous arena to enter”, but that he and his fellow musicians had derived a great deal of pleasure from their musical encounters and cross-cultural activities. The danger he refers to is the controversy surrounding cultural appropriation, orientalism and the suggestion inherent in this practice that those cultures, from whose music inspiration has been taken, have not progressed or developed since the Middle Ages.

Vellard describes how his musical career began in folk music where he was obliged to do research in order to be able to “reconstruct” [reconstituer] the repertoire. From this research he was able to identify common criteria that “allowed [him] to distinguish certain laws of interpretation... that [he] adapted, that permitted [him] to find, to form [his] own personal style for early music.” He also recounted how, as an enthusiastic amateur, he listened to a lot of ‘ethnic’ musics from around the world including, among other places, Japan, Ethiopia, Georgia, and Iran, looking for universal approaches to unaccompanied singing in different contexts. This listening gave him “some clues” [des pistes] to follow as inspiration for his own vocal practice. This search for ideas was tempered by collaboration with musicology: “So that was anyway important, this contribution of traditional music at the same time as the work with Marie-Noël [Colette]... on the neumes*, and afterwards the work with numerous musicologists.” Hauksson and Austen-Brown both mentioned similar broad listening practices.

153 For information about their touring activities, see Sterling Scott Jones, The Story of an Early Music Quartet (Studio der frühen Musik): As Revealed Through the Personal Experiences of a Founding Member (unpublished, 2005). For more on the development of Binkley’s thoughts in relation to this see, Binkley, ‘Zur Aufführungspraxis’, 3–5.
154 “Il y a beaucoup de critères communs qui m’ont permis dégager certaines lois d’interprétation... que j’ai adaptés, qui m’ont permis de trouver, de former mon propre style pour les musiques anciennes.”
156 “Et donc, ça a été quand même très important, cet apport de musique traditionnel en même temps que le travail avec Marie Noel... sur les neumes et après le travail avec de nombreux musicologues.”

97
Harrison and Tyler both described participation in the English folk scene in the North East. Pittaway likened the process of creating a performance of a piece of medieval music to the one he used to follow as a folk musician. Azéma, Guerber and Posch talked about working in collaboration with musicians from Morocco, Brittany, Algeria, Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Syria. The evidence drawn from my data demonstrates that medieval music performance continues to be heavily influenced by oral traditions of various kinds.

Shull purposely avoided a critique of the musicians whose intercultural work he investigated in his ethnography of medieval music performance. There are of course questions to be asked about cultural appropriation. The conclusion reached by Shull, however, points out that there is a valuable impact that these collaborations have brought about; the opening of minds among audiences and musicians to other musics that may not be within their habitual listening practices.

The above discussion of both scholarly and performing perspectives introduces some of the issues with which performers of medieval music have grappled during the revival. The perceived strangeness of the music found in medieval codices motivated a search for ways to make the music intelligible, an aim that was viewed as achievable if the music was explored in a historical way. The importance of creating historically believable interpretations cannot be overstated; this theme runs through all my interviewees' words and all the scholarship relating to medieval music.

Questions about how it would have been then, in the era during which the music was created, inspired experiments and scholarship as well as contention. Investigations of the notation of medieval music led to differing beliefs about what the notation contained in relationship to the sound of performances all those centuries ago. Hypotheses about musical transmission and learning music in the Middle Ages were proposed, suggesting that the processes were markedly different to how this is achieved in the WAM tradition now. One camp concluded that it would nevertheless be better to shun any additions to what is found in primary sources, the hard evidence if you will. On the opposite side were adherents to the notion that the notation only contained a very limited part of the information that would be needed for a performance; the remainder would have been transmitted orally, leaving no evidence for us to discover today.

Adding to the notation then became an obligation for serious performers of medieval music.

157 Shull, 'Locating the Past in the Present', 105.
This leads me to turn to the key topic of my thesis, improvisation, which can be evaluated as a possible response to the absence of necessary information in the musical sources. As previously discussed, analyses of some written musical and documentary evidence from the Middle Ages attested to improvisation as a historical musical practice. It is therefore not surprising that musicians have filled in their performances of the written source material with improvisation, for example through spontaneous creation of an evolving instrumental accompaniment for a troubadour* song.

As a first step, I explore how my research participants understood the word improvisation and its use in their practice, and how this relates to what musicologists have said about the topic, including criticisms of the use of the term and the practice. I will also demonstrate how improvisation interacts with some of the topics already discussed.

The I-word

Improvisation is actually a word that my case study musicians were reluctant to use or felt uncomfortable about.158 Binkley thought it was not the correct term to use for medieval music because he believed the implication would be that a musician is composing in real time. For this he emphasised that you would need very clear and strong models to follow, and he affirmed that the Studio simply did not have these.159 Winter also expressed discomfort with the word, telling me that it would be better to think of a “collection of gestures” or a language with which you can “generate material”. Young told me that he thought another word would be more appropriate, especially because the concept did not exist before around 1500.160 Various other interviewees were also unsure about the term. For Lewon and his ensemble, he told me that they were moving away from using the word because “It’s [simply] part of making that sort of music [medieval monophony].” This echoes Young’s desire to use a different word like “musicating” that represents the basic act of playing and singing together.161

159 As quoted in Shull, ‘Locating the Past in the Present’, 100.
160 Young, 2015.
161 Young, 2015.
Azéma felt that she was unable to define improvisation because “performing is improvising... and medieval music is improvising constantly.” Marti made a similar point that the line is thin between interpretation and spontaneous generation of new material. She told me that my question, “What do you understand improvisation as?”, was very difficult, later going on to spell it out: “Everything is improvisation which makes it easy and difficult [to answer the question].” A survey respondent commented: “I think the rigid classical era, at least [the] twentieth century conception of it, is an anomaly – most of the time, musicians improvise.” Another described improvisation as a “basic phenomenon”.

Kaler wrote that improvisation is found in all music as performed by humans, giving two reasons: “it is impossible for a composer to completely notate or otherwise predetermine every aspect of a musical performance, and it is also impossible for a performer to play a piece of music exactly the same way every time.”162 Binkley expresses the same point: “Music is to some extent improvised, either the notes or the articulation or some other aspect. There is no repetition.”163 The idea that it is not possible for two performances to be identical replicas of each other led Harrison to comment about the improvisation of musical elements such as volume, phrasing, timbre and feeling, provoking the thought that “there are elements of improvisation at every stage”. Pittaway also highlighted this: “in front of a group, I never really sing the same thing the same way twice.”

Young pointed out that the term improvisation does not represent a concept that had its own, clear existence during the Middle Ages. This is confirmed by Wegman, who presented a solid case that the notion of two contrasted forms of music generative work, composing and improvising – sortisare and cantare alla mente are terms that Wegman gives as contemporary options for the latter – only became strongly embedded after 1500.164 He mentions that the earliest document in which this opposition appeared was a letter dated 1460.165

In contrast, the concept improvisation today has a firmly established existence. However, it has many meanings, and this is what has perturbed some respondents. Zuckerman for example

165 Wegman, 432 footnote 65.
observed that it “probably has as many meanings as there are people who try to clarify it.” Guerber was unhappy about the “ambiguity” [ambiguïté] of the word. A survey respondent also commented on how it means different things to different people. Smilansky and Lewon summarised the different ways in which the word might be understood today in relation to medieval music, some of which are more commonly held notions than others:

- As musical creativity that is simply unnotated;  
- As altering or amplifying music that is notated; 
- As application of strict rules or use of formulaic material; 
- As completely spontaneous free generation of music.  

My research participants and some scholars have even tried to propose alternative terms. Both Treitler and Labaree have called it the “I-word”, deliberately problematizing its use, particularly where they see that use as uncritical. Labaree proposed several alternatives including “musicianship”, “variability” or “mouvance*”, taking them from traditions as varied as troubadour* song and Chopin piano works. He clarified that each word represents only limited features of what can legitimately be included in the meaning of the “I-word”.

Treitler, in agreement with Wegman’s analysis that the concept did not exist, pointed out that it has no basis in medieval musical thought. He also gave details about how chant conforms to a


\[167\] For some idea of the complexity of the relationship between improvisation and notation, see Bruno Nettl, ‘Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach’, The Musical Quarterly 60, no. 1 (January 1974), 3–6. It still seems irresistible to assume improvisation where no musical notation is visible even though it has been shown to be difficult or impossible to tell the difference when listening between improvised and composed music, or improvised and memorised music. See Andreas C. Lehmann and Reinhard Kopiez, ‘The Difficulty of Discerning between Composed and Improvised Music’, Musicae Scientiae 14, no. 2 (1 September 2010), 113–29; Philip Auslander, ‘Jazz Improvisation as a Social Arrangement’, in Taking It to the Bridge: Music as Performance, edited by Nicholas Cook and Richard Pettengill (United States: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 54.

\[168\] Smilansky and Lewon, ‘Competing Ontologies of Musical Improvisation’, 315.


system of clearly defined models, conventions and constraints concerning melody and text. The very limited range of possibilities, as dictated by the restrictive mechanisms governing the generation of chant, preclude the use of improvisation to describe the act of generating new musical material. He attributes this to the fact that improvisation is a concept that is too strongly associated today with freedom and spontaneity in the creation of music, ideas that he has shown in depth to be inapplicable in this arena. The word improvisation in relation to medieval music making was not acceptable for Bent either, who described it creating an impression of “spontaneous, unpremeditated music-making”. This understanding of improvisation being purely about the novel and unheard was commented on by a survey respondent, for whom no performance of medieval music could be classed as improvisation. They said: “Real improvisation – as in making music that has never been heard before – is very rare, even in jazz.”

The idea of freedom and novelty was problematic for some of my other respondents as well. The tension between improvisation as complete freedom and improvisation as a means to generate something authentically medieval sounding, which means using internally digested and memorised knowledge of restrictive models, was present in almost all my interviewees’ discussions. The word “improvisation” caused Romain to think of “total freedom” (liberté totale) and for this reason he told me that “the word isn’t good” (le mot n’est pas bon) because “it evokes lots of things that are about genius or about absolute creativity”.

For clarification, when I asked his verification about this quote, he added that this is “therefore somewhat disconnected from the main goals of Historically Informed Performance.” Two of my respondents actually commented that they felt the word had been “hijacked”. Haymoz spoke about the history of contemporary music and in particular how Stockhausen used the word improvisation: “You used the word improvisation to do something you’d never heard before, that you didn’t know how to do before and that is out of the ordinary.” If originality is thought of as a fundamental criteria for judging musical output, then it

---


172 For more on the association of freedom with improvisation and this connection’s background in the civil rights movement and independence movements on the African continent, see Ingrid Monson, ‘Oh Freedom: George Russell, John Coltrane, and Modal Jazz’, in In the Course of Performance, 149–68.

173 Margaret Bent, “Resfacta” and “Cantare Super Librum”, Journal of the American Musicological Society 36, no. 3 (1 October 1983), 303.

174 “Le mot improvisation évoque plein de choses qui sont de l’ordre du génie ou de l’ordre d’une créativité absolue.”

175 Harrison and Haymoz, who used the word “détourné”.

176 “On a utilisé le mot improvisation pour faire quelque chose qu’on a jamais entendu, qu’on savait pas comment faisait avant et c’est inouï.”
becomes clear that high-quality improvisation should be “out of the ordinary” or literally “unheard” [inouï] as Haymoz said, and therefore utterly novel.177

Picazos described how some “improvisations” are in fact no longer improvised, but are “very, very fixed” [très très figées]. This can happen when the piece being performed is complex, meaning it has only a very limited number of solutions that can work: “the techniques are complex and you don’t have a margin of manoeuvre.”178 In these kinds of cases, the performance will most probably have been memorised, even though it can still be called improvisation. Similarly, Hamon told me how important it is in the Indian tradition to be extremely well prepared. “At the Rotterdam Conservatoire in the early years at exam time, we often played ‘by heart’ the raga chosen from the models given in improvisation by Chaurasia during lessons, and not as real improvisation, even if officially it was considered to be improvised.”179 Memorisation also features as an aspect of performance of music in Persian culture. The memorised radif is a strong reference point for musical practice, within which certain levels of freedom and changeability are expected.180

Guerber talked about his experience playing accompaniments on the harp in which he allowed himself a “kind of freedom” [espèce de liberté]. He explained that:

there are things that come [to you] that you keep, so not the second, third, fourth or fifth time that you do it in concert, but after a certain amount of time. There are things that come and it’s practical to fix them in your memory. And when it’s fixed, well, you can get away from it but it’s so practical to have a thing that works...181


178 “[L]es techniques sont complexes, et ... on a pas de marge de manœuvre.” Guerber also talked about the need to fix in the memory when the repertoire was complicated. As an example, he mentioned medieval French lais, poems with long, complex formal patterns of varying repeats. See Chapter 4, ‘Lai and Planctus’, John Stevens, Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050-1350, Cambridge Studies in Music (Cambridge; London; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 110–55.

179 “Au conservatoire de Rotterdam, les premières années, au moment de l’examen, nous jouions souvent ‘par cœur’ le raga choisi à partir des modèles donnés en improvisation par Chaurasia lors de ses leçons, et non en véritable improvisateur, même si officiellement c’était considéré comme de l’improvisation.”


181 “Il y a des choses qui sont venues qu’on retient, alors pas la deuxième troisième quatrième cinquième fois qu’on fait en concert, mais au bout d’un certain temps, il y a des choses qui viennent et c’est pratique de les fixer dans la mémoire. Et quand c’est fixé dans la mémoire, ben on peut s’en échapper, mais c’est tellement pratique d’avoir un truc qui marche...”
He went so far as to describe this as “false improvisation” [fausse improvisation]. All of these examples might even be defined as “fluid composition”, a category proposed by Mariani.182

When I interviewed Lyons, he reflected on the practices of wind players during the Middle Ages. After mentioning the memorisation of repertoires as a fundamental prerequisite for musicians at that time, he told me that he would assume the pre-preparation of a harmonic model before a group would perform extemporaneously: “they didn’t just chuck a tenor in and get going”.

Pittaway described a process of improvising an accompaniment until it was exactly how he wanted, at which point he would fix the version he had arrived at; for Pittaway this was “improvisation as a compositional technique” and not something to be done in front of an audience. This latter description might be applied to Binkley’s music making. He spoke of the musical material he presented in his article on the performance of monophonic medieval music as “the result of improvisation to a greater or lesser degree, and it looks odd… on paper, as if it were the fixed result of a drawn out cogitative process.”183 Preparation is key to these musicians’ approaches.

The use of the word improvisation for these kinds of prepared and memorised practices might be classed as incorrect due to the modern connection of novelty and liberty with improvisation. Musicologists, however, affirm that neither memorisation or the re-use of familiar musical patterns and formulas preclude the definition of a performance as spontaneously created or improvised.184 As Nettl pointed out would happen, improvisation is being considered more and more as a “group of perhaps very different phenomena”, with a concomitant beneficial broadening of the meaning of the word, like Smilansky and Lewon have helpfully suggested for medieval music, instead of remaining limited to just one facet of its entire sweep of possible significative content.185

The use of improvisation as a solution to the perceived issue of missing information in medieval musical sources has not been received uncritically. Haug’s assessment began by questioning the existence of gaps in the data contained in medieval musical notations and therefore examined the need for modern musicians to provide something extra. He suggested that improvisation is simply

182 Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 7.
185 Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell, eds., In the Course of Performance, 16. For an even more granular approach to improvisation meanings, see Bruce Ellis Benson, The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26–30,
a convenient way to complete a performance of a medieval work that seems to us to be lacking something. Labaree too talked about the “default to I-speak because it appears to fill a musical-existential void when we need it.” Page noted that the scholar-critics writing reviews of recordings for magazines like Gramophone have shown unease about any “improvisatory material that many performers (usually instrumentalists) have interwoven with the music notated in the sources of medieval monophonic song.” This reluctance to accept improvisation is attributed to the fact that trained musicianship in Britain is strongly associated with musical literacy. Page went on to clarify:

That resistance may also derive strength from a suspicion that improvisation in this context merely exploits our limited knowledge of medieval musical practices in order to establish a creative freedom for modern performers who are denied it in virtually every other kind of ‘serious’ music in the Western tradition.

I have already noted that some respondents told me they were specifically drawn to medieval music because of the perceived freedoms that the musical notations afforded them, and this scepticism is therefore a justifiable position to hold. Smilansky and Lewon have agreed that the perception that “essential elements” are missing in the musical sources has encouraged performer additions and decisions that are more pertinent to contemporary concerns than with the preoccupations of the original creators of the musical materials under consideration.

Having given some initial thought to the problems with the word and concept of improvisation that were raised by research participants, I will now turn to a practice that both my interviewees and those who took part in my survey have associated with improvisation: ornamentation.

The overlap between ornamentation and improvisation

Hibberd talked confidently about the presence of “improvised ornamentation” in medieval musical performance, telling us, however, that what this entailed in respect of specifics was unknown. By 1980, for one author on general music pedagogy, ornamentation is considered the primary

187 Labaree, ‘Living With the I-Word’.
190 Smilansky and Lewon, ‘Competing Ontologies of Musical Improvisation’, 315.
improvisatory feature found in the performance of music pre-1750 and it had therefore become a necessity for music educators to know how to furnish students with the prerequisite knowledge and skills that would enable them to embellish stylishly and appropriately. In 1990 however, Fallows published an article about embellishment in fifteenth-century song and mentions how, at the time of writing, most musicians seemed very hesitant to add ornamentation to Renaissance pieces in performance, even if they wrote or spoke about the practice. He compares this with how the music had been performed thirty years previously in the early 1960s when “embellishment was rife”. It seems that ornamentation as an aspect of performance practice could go in and out of fashion.

Bechtel acknowledged that there were more “aspects of early music subject to improvisation” but concluded that ornamentation is a “good starting point”, something that my data supports; see my interviewees’ stories about how improvisation began for them with the practice of adding ornaments spontaneously to a notated piece of music. In my survey of a range of mixed level musicians engaged with medieval music (mostly non-experts), I found that my respondents connected improvisation strongly with ornamentation. Ten out of 75 responses to my question asking for a definition of improvisation only mentioned ornamentation or embellishment, or particularly emphasised this activity by mentioning it first.

In McGee’s practical handbook on the performance of medieval and Renaissance music, the chapter on ornamentation precedes that on improvisation, although he makes it clear that the two are undeniably linked. He agrees with Bechtel that performers are absolutely obliged to learn the arts of ornamentation and improvisation. Mariani proposed several different methods to investigate the nature of medieval ornamentation, including ways to consider musical sources, treatises, variants and short, repeated rhythmic or melodic features of particular repertoires that can be described as ornamental.

Mariani also mentioned that there are some sources of written music that provide examples of an embellishment practice that might have been applicable in the course of performance, in

194 Bechtel, ‘Improvisation in Early Music’, 112. See the anecdotes of Baines and Hamon below for early experiences with creative addition to performance.
195 McGee, Medieval and Renaissance Music, 149.
196 Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 100–112.
particular instrumental versions of songs or where chant melodies are used as a Tenor. Ornamentation appears to be almost ubiquitous in instrumental notations. Hibberd investigates whether instrumental music is in fact “more elaborate than vocal music” in an attempt to define what an instrumental melody might look like and actually concludes that “there is much less difference between the two than has been commonly supposed.” However, it is simple to observe a range of possibilities for embellishing a pre-existent vocal original by looking in Plamenac’s edition of the Faenza codex, where he aligned an edition of the vocal model, wherever it was known, with the florid version found in the definitively instrumental music of this early fifteenth-century manuscript. There are also embellished versions of extant vocal music in the earlier manuscript containing tablature known as the Robertsbridge codex.

My interviewees also had plenty to say about ornamentation. In our interview, Baines auto-identified herself as “quite classical”, which I understand to refer to her WAM training involving the reliance on reading musical notation fluently that that entails. She then recounted her first contact with the idea of playing something that was not specified in notation. She discovered as a child playing in recorder ensembles that for some repertoires there was an expectation to embellish or change the written musical line: “It got me into this idea of there being more to music than scores.” It was not until her Masters studies that she considered how her early experiences with ornamentation linked to improvisation: “I’d not really thought of myself as an improviser. I thought of myself as an ornamenter, but not as an improviser... I was scared of the word improvisation. I was not afraid of improvising ornamentation. That was a clear distinction for me...”

Hamon also described the beginning of his improvisation journey: “At the start, improvisation came rather through the idea of diminution* and ornamentation.” Diminution*, a term Hamon has used here, refers to a particular ornamentation practice. Baines, Harrison, Hauksson, Picazos, Posch, Winter and Young all referred to this technique. Lyons mentioned that there are

\[\text{197 Mariani, 112–16.}\]
\[\text{198 Hibberd, ‘On “Instrumental Style” in Early Melody’, 117.}\]
\[\text{199 Plamenac, Keyboard music of the late Middle Ages in the Codex Faenza 117.}\]
\[\text{201 “L’improvisation c’est venue plutôt on va dire de cette notion de diminution et d’ornementation.”}\]
\[\text{202 Hauksson actually used the word “division” which is close in meaning. See Grove Music Online, s.v. ‘Diminution’ by Greer Garden and Robert Donington, accessed 6 June 2023, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/.}\]
tutors and treatises that provide a guide to improvisation in Renaissance music. He was referring to publications of pedagogical books from the sixteenth century that included instruction in diminution*. Some interviewees mentioned Sylvestro di Ganassi (c 1492 – mid sixteenth century), the author of several such treatises, who was a ‘piffero del Doge’ (piper of the Doge) and wrote about the recorder in his *Opera intitulata Fontegara* (Venice, 1535). Winter, Harrison, Gosfield and Posch are all wind instrument players which accounts for why they all mentioned Ganassi but not Diego Ortiz, whose focus was the same performance procedure but accomplished on string instruments (*Trattado de glosas sobre clausulas y otros generos de puntos en la musica de violones* (Rome, 1553)). Diminution* involves embellishing a plain musical line by inserting a lot of faster notes, literally ‘diminishing’ or shortening the heard rhythmic values. Figure III.1 shows the first example given in Ganassi’s treatise where the unornamented line is above one possible embellished version. He then presents ever shorter note values for this same rising series of six pitches, creating a catalogue of possibilities. This presentational order is maintained throughout the book.

---


204 There are also a number of published examples of diminutions on both sacred and secular song from the sixteenth century that can be found listed in Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600: A bibliography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).
The catalogue format was a deliberate choice to make the examples appropriate for memorisation. The final goal would be to add embellishments spontaneously, in other words, to improvise diminutions.

My interviewees were sometimes undecided about whether ornamentation could really be classed as improvisation. As we have seen, Baines seemed at first to think that ornamenting was separate from improvising. Hamon made a similar comment in which he suggested that spontaneous ornaments might not count:

So, let’s say that at first [in my practice] it isn’t really improvisation in the completely open and broad sense, but rather an ornament, a little diminution…

Equally Lyons told me that following the diminution treatises “in a prescribed manner” would be “somewhere in that middle [part of the improvisation spectrum] … where it’s not really improvisation as such, it’s ornamentation and it’s organised”. This comment suggests an understanding of the word improvisation that is bound to the idea of total liberty, a common pattern of thought as we have already seen, and one bound up with ideas about the spontaneity and lack of structure that might characterise non-WAM music as “primitive”.

Ornamentation therefore could be the gateway for musicians to liberate themselves from slavish reading of the score, opening them to the idea that they could have creative agency, within clear boundaries. It seems to be viewed as an ambiguous activity by professional musicians, who were not sure of its place in an improvisation practice, perhaps because it does not seem free enough or difficult enough to deserve that name. Certainly, the non-expert musicians in my survey seemed more likely to associate ornamentation with improvising, perhaps an indication of its place as a stepping stone towards practices that would require more expertise. I would now like to shed more light on how the performers playing medieval music today that I interviewed understand the practice of improvisation both in what they do and in the revival as a whole.

---

205 Dividing up and classifying material is a method used since antiquity to help with storing information in the memory; florilegia and tonaries are discussed with relation to this in Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory*, 52–60, drawing on the work of Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*.

206 Both Baines and Winter told me that they had studied this type of embellishment technique in detail.

207 “Donc on va dire au départ c'est plutôt pas l’improvisation au sens complètement ouvert et large mais c’est plutôt une ornementation, une petite diminution...”

208 See for example the quote from an early edition of *Grove* as cited in Nettl and Russell, *In the Course of Performance*, 12.
Language as a useful set of metaphors for improvisation

Many of my respondents used language metaphors to describe what improvisation is. A similar situation was found by Monson among practitioners of jazz. Language is familiar to everyone. It is made up of elements of different sizes, from letters and phonemes to words, stock phrases, sentences and paragraphs. There are many different languages and each has its own set of rules or grammar. To get to the point where fluency is possible in a particular language, it is necessary to undergo a long apprenticeship, one which might be consciously undertaken, as in learning a second language at school, or practically unconscious and intuitive, like learning your native mother tongue from your parents and caregivers as a very young child. Language can be used in all kinds of different expressions including lyrical verse, narrative epics or formal speeches, which all have parallels in musical performance. One participant told me how improvisation mirrors language because you can express yourself “in certain ways, not only in one way”, expanding on this to explain that “when you know a language very well, you can improvise, you can make poetry... you can be very precise, or you can tell a story with a lot of gloomy things”. This network of analogies makes language about language a rich source of common understanding with which to explain musical improvisation and gives a reason for its ubiquity within my data. Both Young and Winter mined a rich seam of linguistic vocabulary to explain improvisation. Language metaphors are in fact central to their definitions of what improvisation is. To indicate the importance of these metaphors, one scholar simply pronounced that “If you are not an improvising musician, then the best analogy to improvisation is your spontaneous speech.”

Mariani called one of her chapters “Mode: the vocabulary of melody”, exploring within it the various ways that medieval musicians’ tools to understand mode can be harnessed by performers today who want to improvise and invent modal melodies. Miller frequently used the word

211 For a viewpoint on how far linguistic terminology can be used and in relation to which types of music, including a fascinating parallel between Javanese gamelan and the use of cantus firmus in Renaissance polyphony, see Harold S. Powers, ‘Language Models and Musical Analysis’, Ethnomusicology 24, no. 1 (1980), 38–46. For more on general theorization of music as language, see Kofi Agawu, ‘Music as Language’, in Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15–39.
212 See Chapters V and VI below. In view of their relationship student to teacher, this similarity is not particularly surprising.
214 Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 56–87.
“vocabulary” in her book on improvisation in Cuban flute playing to signify ornamental turns as well as collections of short musical elements that could be referred to as “motivic”. Nettl describes various musics in terms of what he calls their “points of departure”, linking some musical traditions by their use of building blocks that form a “vocabulary” on which an improviser or composer can draw. The title of a chapter in Berliner’s monograph on jazz improvisation is “Getting your vocabulary straight”, citing trumpeter Art Farmer (1928–1999). In this chapter Berliner talked about how musicians could learn to improvise successful solos, building up their vocabulary by learning from recordings, from concerts and from classes and lessons, memorising and assimilating quotations of varying lengths variously known as “vocabulary, ideas, licks, tricks, pet patterns, crip, clichés and … things you can do.” Horsley commented that sixteenth-century diminution* treatises provide evidence that “by diligent practice a performer acquired a vocabulary of melodic figures”. Binkley mentioned this concept briefly, saying that the medieval repertoire itself and the handbooks on improvising organa provide evidence of “practically identical phrases” [quasi identischer Phrasen] appearing and reappearing, “melodic groups (‘words’)” [melodischen Gruppen (‘Worten’)] in a musical grammar, rather than “single notes (‘letters’)” [einzelfen Noten (‘Buchstaben’)]. Similarly, some respondents focused on small units of language, like Young who talked about syllables, words, phrases and sentences. For Hamon, the way a student learns to improvise is through “making a vocabulary, or rather a memory-bank of figures, of formulas”. Elmes referred to the need to diversify his rhythmic and melodic “vocabulary”. Budzińska-Bennett defined improvisation as requiring the internalisation of the constituent “parts of language”.

---

215 Sue Miller, Cuban Flute Style: Interpretation and Improvisation (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2014), 170.
216 See Chapter 7, ‘Learning the style’, Miller, 224–47.
217 Nettl and Russell, In the Course of Performance, 15.
219 Berliner, Thinking in Jazz, 102.
220 Horsley, ‘Improvised Embellishment in the Performance of Renaissance Polyphonic Music’, 4. This is also related to memorisation practices and the way that books were laid out in catalogues to aid memorisation, see Berger, Medieval Music and the Art of Memory.
221 He is referring to the Milan Ad organum faciendum treatise found in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS M/17 Sup. and the Vatican Organum Treatise found in the composite manuscript Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ottoboni lat. 3025. Binkley, ‘Die Musik des Mittelalters’, 83. The implications of the reuse of materials that Binkley briefly touches on are not fully explored.
222 “…enfin plutôt une mémoire de figures, de formules”.

111
The idea of short components expressed by some respondents in linguistic terms, ties in closely with the widespread conceptualisation of improvisation using building blocks that can be repeated and recombined, as well as varied. Marti talked about building blocks using the German word “Bausteine”, although she cautioned that a musician should not totally rely on them. My interviewees used different words to express something similar: “gestures” (Budzińska-Bennett, Winter), “patterns” (Lewon, Lyons, Marti, Tyler, Young), “modules” (Budzińska-Bennett), “figures” (Hamon, Taylor, Young), “motifs” (Hamon, Lesne, Lewon, Lyons, Romain), “licks” (Austen-Brown, Hauksson, Young) or “formulas” (Azéma, Biggi, Gosfield, Hamon, Haymoz, Lesne, Marchant, Picazos, Romain, Young). Dahlhaus noted that the use of formulas was often said to be a necessity for improvised musics. On occasion the musicians I spoke to came up with more colourful ways of describing the musical units that could be combined to make up a performance or a musical piece. For Posch, improvising is both like a “common language” and like choosing different coloured socks. “Of course I try to make something new out of the moment but to be honest the base is, what’s easy in my fingers? What’s easy in my mind? And like a big box of, let’s say socks, a big variety of socks. But I know which socks are there, and I exactly know which socks are not there and I can’t take what is not there.” With reference to the contrapuntal art of cantare super librum* [singing on the book] in the fifteenth century, Blackburn suggests that “singers probably had a stock set of figurations” to use that would work against any intervallic movement in the given voice, the Tenor.

Lewis and Piekut pointed out that studies about improvisation often assume the presence of constraints on improvisation and then proceed with the assertion that a ‘successful’ improvisation can only occur because these constraints exist. They contested that the contrast between freedom and constraint is then mapped onto problematic binaries such as low and high culture. In contrast with this, Tindemans, former bowed string instrument player with the ensemble Sequentia, wrote a very practical chapter on improvisation and accompaniment before 1300. From her practising musician perspective, she said that when you place limits on the choices you...

---

have to make, it means you are able to improvise more easily. Whether or not you believe that constraints are necessary, as Nettl contends, different kinds of restrictions are apparent in spontaneously produced musics. Nettl explained that a small number of different building blocks allow “the needs of both spontaneity and oral transmission” to be satisfied. In support of this, Pressing explained one neuro-psychological reason behind the need for restriction. As he disclosed, a model (or referent as he calls it) frees up brain processing power because fewer decisions need to be made in the moment and there is less spontaneous creation of new material from scratch. The pre-preparation of appropriate material that fits with the model “reduces the novelty of motoric control”.

This idea of motifs or building blocks is common to many musics in which improvisation is a recognisable feature. As examples of traditions where building blocks can be observed, Nettl mentions the Carnatic music of Southern India, the Persian radif, the South Slavic epic tradition, the Shona people of Zimbabwe’s music, and the taqsim genre from Turkey. Authors on improvisation have explored the concept as a way to uncover how performances are constructed. For example, Kernfeld talks about the use of motives and formulas which are repeated in different ways. For him an exact repetition in a similar context (rhythmic and harmonic) leads to a musical product which is dull and “mechanical”. When the recurrence is varied and developed, it then becomes more original and interesting. For Owens, the repeated figures in the work of Charlie Parker were a well-developed repertory of ‘licks’. Parker’s solos were therefore to some extent “pre-composed”, although no solo was an exact repetition of another one, because Parker “continually found new ways to reshape, combine and phrase his well-practised melodic patterns.”

So far, I have found examples of ways that scholars and my research participants conceptualised improvisation in terms of the small units of language, the “vocabulary” of Hamon or Berliner, or the “cells or syllables or words... that can be assembled into a sentence or into a phrase” of Young.

---

227 Tindemans, 457.
228 Nettl and Russell, In the Course of Performance, 14; Nettl, ‘Thoughts on Improvisation’, 14–15.
229 Nettl and Russell, In the Course of Performance, 15.
230 Pressing, ‘Psychological Constraints on Improvisational Expertise and Communication’, 52.
231 Pressing, 52.
232 See Nettl and Russell, In the Course of Performance, 14.
I have also linked this idea of short segments being brought together to create a performance in real time, just as you might connect words together to make a sentence, to a common recognition that improvisation can be made up of building blocks of various sizes for which musicians have many different names and analogies.

Alternatively, some respondents used terms that show their conception of improvisation as arising out of a larger collection of rules, something systematic and organised, that can be extrapolated from extant pieces of music, read about in treatises, or created yourself. A collection of rules can have many possible variants as expressed in the word dialect, which can be understood as a regional variation of a language or a set of guidelines that belongs within a wider family of languages that are similar but not the same. Winter described a “collection of gestures” but went on to say that these were part of “a certain kind of musical dialect that you learn and [with which] you can then generate material.” Hauksson also used the word dialect several times when discussing what improvisation is, clarifying that although he learnt from oud players and other instrumentalists playing what he called simply “Arabic music”, their dialect would not be appropriate to his aims as a medieval musician. Instead, he “[could] hear how their brain works in improvisation [that is, the oud players and other musicians playing Arabic music] and then apply it to the language of medieval music”. The term dialect is congruent with Winter’s understanding that there are many different and specific languages that make up the medieval musical world she wishes to evoke and, because her particular concern was to create music appropriate for poetry coming out of Iceland, the regional aspect of the word is also coherent with her aims. Mariani refers to “the language of modes” or the “formulaic modal language” throughout her chapter on mode.235 Talking to me about the functional polyphonic improvisation played by medieval wind bands using given melodies as bases, Lyons commented that: “it’s a language, it’s not like a jumble of notes that you always throw in the air and see what happens. It’s a language and it’s particular with its particular phrases and particular style.”

Winter expressed that she had wanted to “create, gather” a modal language for the Icelandic poetry. Azéma described building your own language after being “taught by your mother, by the priest, by whatever...” In Biggi’s practice, he “consider[ed] improvisation as a language structured by a grandmother”, also mentioning how it has a “basic syntax” [syntaxe de base].236 These quotes

235 Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 56–87.
236 “...en considérant l’improvisation un langage structuré par une grand-mère”.
suggest both that the language necessary for improvisation to occur is something that can be created and that it might be learnt from an older member of your family, like actual spoken language is learnt. The word syntax takes us further towards the idea of grammatical rules present in both language and music, an analogy that Picazos also used. He told me the sources demonstrate that a fundamental and basic understanding and action of musicians during the Middle Ages was to “improvise, that is, to create live something that is grammatically correct.” When asked for her definition of improvisation, Budzińska-Bennett told me that it is about “feeling free to invent, to recreate parts of [a] language that has been internalised, within a historical frame, so in an ordered manner”, in other words improvisation allows you to rebuild a language but only according to historical information.

Rules

Languages follow rules in order to be comprehensible and this can also be seen to apply to improvisation. In my survey, one participant defined improvisation as “extemporaneous composition based on memorized patterns and rules” while another expressed that even when the framework for an improvisation is loose, there are still guidelines or rules. Young learnt rules from Tinctoris’ treatise on counterpoint by practising the note against note sequences that Tinctoris endorsed. The way that a musician during the Middle Ages would go about learning how to be a musician would include memorising the “rules” [règles] for which intervals are permitted and in which order, as Picazos told me with reference to singing organum*.

He is obviously describing how he believes the rules in the Vatican Organum* Treatise would be internalised before being applied to the creation of extemporised polyphony.

Winter focused on making her own set of rules within which she could be free to be creative. Azéma reported that Binkley said “pick up the rules and stick by [them], that’s the important thing.” She went on to tell me that she agrees with this as a basis for improvisation, clarifying that the rules need to be based on the historical context and rich knowledge of the sources, both primary and peripheral, even if you are then ultimately responsible for inventing your own rules. One of Tindemans’ “general rules” is about not attempting to be imaginative in a completely

237 “…improviser, c’est à dire créer en direct quelque chose de grammaticalement correct hein”.

115
uninhibited way. She called improvisation a “trade that can be learned by setting up rules for yourself and simply sticking to them at first.”

Lyons, like Winter, told me that he was very happy to have rules: “Personally, I never feel confined by any rules that you set. I prefer to have them.” Musicians who perform free improvisation were involved in a panel discussion as part of a CMPCP Performance Studies Network conference in 2011 and two mentioned using music notation to enable further musical opportunities, something that seems counterintuitive but is similar to the idea that Winter expressed of rules empowering more freedom to be creative.

Racy referred to “binding, often unarticulated modal rules” that govern the performance of tarab. Where preservation of a style is paramount, rules are also important. Benson indicated that it is also possible to improvise upon the rules of a particular tradition by developing or altering them, an action that might be seen as responsible for “exemplary” artistic output. This might give an explanation of why some interviewees were dismissive of playing by the rules.

Marti, for example, expressed her ambivalence about “authorities”, meaning other participants in the medieval music revival who are seen to be making the decisions about what is allowed, and “traditions”, meaning performance styles of today. Her ambivalence spread to the concept of rules. She said:

I am so shocked... that so many people try to put themselves in a prison. So, they make their own rules that they learn, and they stay in this prison, and this is right, and the other things are wrong. And then their improvisation is based on that prison feeling.

In other words, she sees the rules that musicians impose on themselves as being too restrictive. She was not the only respondent to talk negatively about rules. Biggi explained that he finds a lot of the medieval music performance he hears to be unconvincing: “there is a complete lack of

---

240 Tarab is a modern style of secular Arab music from the Eastern Mediterranean world and Egypt that is focused on live performance, spontaneous modal music making and ecstatic experience. Ali Jihad Racy, ‘Improvisation, Ecstasy and Performance Dynamics in Arabic Music’, in In the Course of Performance, 104.
fantasy... We are so bound by the rules”.

Then he went on to reveal how the rules are meaningless because they have been grounded on false assumptions, in other words on interpretations of texts that we read in versions that themselves are already just interpretations.

Rules can equally be so limiting that the resulting music making may not be classified by a musician as improvisation at all. Lewon for example referred to faburden in this way, concluding that “I believe... what back then they would have considered they were doing, I think they wouldn’t have referred to it as extemporisation. I think they would have said ‘I’m playing the song the way I learnt how to play music’. You know, you have a line and then you do whatever you learned to do with your given instrument, using its possibilities and limitations.”

The balance between adherence to rules and taking freedoms within the rules is one that is important to the success of a performance, as Moore points out with reference to the audience experience of listening to jazz musicians perform a well-known classic. Observing the rules was described by Posch as an important way to judge if a student or other musician has understood the music they are playing. “There are rules, of course, and within rules, then you might be free. And there’s a lot of freedom but it’s within rules. And if you’re neglecting rules then it’s not extra special... It’s just I can hear that you don’t know this.” The balance should err rather more towards the rules than towards freedom in performing medieval music. The same is true in the performance of radif in Iran, where there is an expected balance between “creativity and discipline”.

In her discussion of the performance of medieval narrative, Azéma talked about the gestural quality of storytelling that allows more freedom than in other medieval genres. She commented that the dialogue between a singer and instrumental accompanist would include improvised elements. She clarified this by saying: “Such freedom cannot be fruitful without a corresponding and extensive commitment to historical and linguistic discipline. But when discipline

---

243 “Il y a un manque total de fantaisie je veux dire. On est tellement lié par des règles.”
244 At this point he referred me to the work of Umberto Eco saying “books talk about other books” [Les livres parlent d’autres livres]. For an overview of the problematics of interpretation as discussed in Eco’s work, see David Robey, ‘Introduction’, in Illuminating Eco: On the Boundaries of Interpretation, edited by Charlotte Ross and Rochelle Sibley (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 1-10.
and freedom are in balance, we may travel less familiar roads; uncovering material previously unperformed for modern audiences and make it accessible, real and enjoyable for the public.”

It is worth taking note of another viewpoint on rules. A non-expert survey respondent wrote that the rules are “mysterious”, which implies knowing them needs special ability or engagement. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the rules within which an improvisatory musical act is accomplished successfully are thought of as obligatory by the majority of my respondents. One research participant replying to my question asking for a definition of improvisation expressed the opinion that improvisation is “singing without rules”, but more used words suggestive of rules like boundaries, framework, guidelines, structure, expectations, received ideas, systematisation (11 out of 75). There are other ways in which improvisation can be likened to language which I will turn to now.

**Speaking and improvisation as performative acts**

Parallels between speech and improvisation, both performative acts, played a role in my interviewees’ explanations of improvisation. Young told me that the spontaneous connection of small musical units, the “syllables and words”, to make phrases and sentences can be “just like speaking, ... done at the will of and at the expression of the one who’s doing it.” Harrison drew a parallel between learning to improvise and learning to speak, the latter chiefly being taught by his parents and family, something also alluded to by Azéma and Biggi. “No one taught me to [improvise] and that's the thing... So, I mean, I did learn, I learnt to do it but I didn’t even consciously teach myself. It's like saying you know, how did you learn to speak? ... You don't consciously.”

Haymoz advocated for the inclusion of improvisation in music teaching: “It’s like when you learn to speak. You don’t learn to speak just by reading. You... hurry to improvise it.” He told me that for musical improvisation, the act of reading musical examples is necessary so you “know what you’re going to do” [pour savoir ce qu’on va faire], in other words, to get to know the style. Then in improvising “you understand what you’ve read” [on comprend ce qu’on a lu]. Picazos, one of Haymoz’s former students, went further. He explained how he finds the current musical education system within the WAM tradition “mad” [fou] for its emphasis just on reading. “It’s a bit like a child

---

248 Azéma, 215.
249 “Et ça c'est comme on apprend à parler. On n'apprend pas à parler seulement en lisant. On ... se dépêche à l'improviser.”
who is learning to speak, systematically learning written language. We would never see him in a sequence of exchange, unbridled, uncontrolled, with failures...”

He went on to emphasise this again with relation to how improvisation can teach a performer more about the piece of music they wish to interpret because they gain an understanding of the rules behind its construction.

When [a musician] improvises, they are obliged to think about the structure, they are obliged to think about the intervals, the rhythms, about what makes the music have a style, have characteristics, belong to a contrapuntal aesthetic etc. And improvisation allows [a musician] to learn that in a physical way, much more than analysis which is a process of reading, intellectualisation and verbalisation... When you know how to conjugate a verb, when you know how to create harmony, well, when you read it’s not the same thing.

The contrast between a musician who just reads and one who is also able to create grammatically correct utterances in a musical style in real time is likened to that between an amateur and a professional who has a deep and embodied understanding of how the music they perform works. This highlights how improvisation can be thought of as an expert practice. Picazos told me that it was his experience as a teacher of “écriture”, which is learning to compose in the styles of previous composers “whose musical language has marked history” [dont le langage musical a marqué l’histoire], that led him to this realisation and belief. This reveals his individual viewpoint as one informed by the desire to enable students to understand structure, harmony, melody and the underlying construction of music in a deep enough way to be able to create new musical works.

---

250 “C’est un petit peu comme si un enfant qui apprend à parler, apprenait systématiquement de la langue écrite. Jamais on le verrait dans une séquence d’échange, débridé, incontrôlé avec des ratages...”

251 “L’improvisation en soi, c’est aussi une manière pour l’interprète d’apprendre comment est structurée une pièce écrite, parce que, quand il improvise, il est obligé de penser la structure, il est obligé de penser aux intervalles, aux rythmes, à ce qui fait que la musique a un style, a des caractéristiques, s’inscrit dans un esthétique contrapuntique etc. Et l’improvisation lui permet d’apprendre ça de manière sensible, beaucoup plus que l’analyse, qui est une démarche de lecture, d’intellectualisation, de verbalisation... Quand on sait conjuguer un verbe, quand on sait accorder, ben, quand on lit c’est pas la même chose.”

using the same rules. Improvisation is therefore also a way to embody, integrate and understand a musical style and language.  

Binkley was concerned to understand the implications of rhetoric for medieval musical performance. Mariani devotes a whole chapter to the practical application of rhetorical performance advice and poetic analysis. Best and Young both exhibited awareness of rhetoric and what it means for poetry or for instrumental music. One interviewee specifically related musical performance to the idea of rhetoric and discourse, or formal speech in front of an audience. Pittaway started by giving me a simple definition of improvisation: “I am performing in front of people, solo or in a duo or in a group, and I play differently to what I’ve played before.” This was presented to me as an instinctual, automatic idea that he had already thought of before. He clarified further by email after reading this quote, saying that improvisation is “not just about playing notes that were not prepared and practiced before”. The original interview situation facilitated this further reflection:

in front of a group, I never really sing the same thing the same way twice. To me the whole medieval idea of rhetoric means the idea of performance is to convince somebody of something, to convince someone of this story, and this emotion, this meaning, that’s what it’s about. ... Sometimes, if I’m really feeling the words as I’m singing, if I’m really relaxed and I’m into it and the audience have disappeared as far as I’m concerned and it’s just me and the song... I might in the middle of a verse think, ‘oh, goodness, this means something I hadn’t known it had meant before.’ And it changes the way I sing it. It changes the inflection of a voice... And just those in-the-moment things. You’re singing all the same notes but you’re not singing them in the same way.

Pittaway’s desire to deliver a rhetorically persuasive performance is what causes improvisation for him.


254 Binkley, ‘Die Musik des Mittelalters’, 101–3. This has been picked up by Mariani and Thornton: see Barbara Thornton and Lawrence Rosenwald, ‘Poetics as Technique’, in A Performer’s Guide to Medieval Music, 264–92; Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 157–90.

255 Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 157–90.

256 Martin Best, interview by the author about improvisation, Wareham, Dorset, 14-15 January 2018; Robert Crawford Young, interview by the author about improvisation, Basel, 9-11 February 2020.
The association of improvisation with communication and being rhetorically persuasive was also important to Haymoz and Picazos. Haymoz described how he developed a learning pathway called “Discours musical” which can be translated as “Musical discourse” or “Musical delivery” or even “Musical speech”. He taught rhetoric on this course and was keen to encourage his students to take pleasure in improvising in front of an audience. He said: “you have to take possession of the place” [on doit prendre possession des lieux]. Picazos expressed this as “la prise de parole”, which literally means “taking (or capturing) of the word (or speech)”. “Speaking up” or “taking the floor” are two options for translating this French phrase more idiomatically and it clearly relates to the idea of performative delivery. Teaching improvisation is not simply a question of delivering the rules that need to be applied for a grammatically correct line to result. He explained that he also teaches his students:

an approach, a confidence in their bodies, because tuning\textsuperscript{257} is not something that is written, it’s something that you feel, it’s something that you make the other person experience. And then I try to learn how to decorate, how to manage the delivery. What makes a [musical] speech interesting or banal, or uninteresting, failed, I mean stressed or incomprehensible?\textsuperscript{258}

We have now seen how the musicians who took part in my research engaged with questions about their practice and improvisation in a wholehearted way. They articulated views and understanding that are also found in the literature about both medieval music on the one hand, and improvisation in general on the other. For some this was a drawn-out process of reflection facilitated by the interview situation and for others it was clear that the topic had already been a focus of rumination. To give a balanced view, I would like to consider now some interviewees’ responses that indicated a reticence about the activity of improving.

**Resistance to improvisation**

For Lesne, a monophonic song was “worked out” [travaillée] and she told me that it is for that reason that she does not embellish her singing. If she does add something, it would be very small,
“negligible” [trois fois rien] in fact. Chansons for her are “worked out by the composer. There is a logic that is thought through and I don’t want to add too many things.”

Vellard was similarly resistant to improvisation, even though he felt that audiences particularly loved to hear him improvise. He expressed a strong preference for the composed and related this to his activities as a composer, citing Dufay and Josquin as musicians whose works were “so written, what do you want to add?”

there’s simply “no space” [aucune place] for additions of any kind. Romain revealed that, even though he’s very happy to improvise with other groups, with his own ensemble Le Miroir de Musique (formed in 2012) he does not do much improvising because he “puts more emphasis on interpreting the repertoires” [je m’occupe un peu plus des répertoires]. He told me that they concentrate on music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, music that “particularly touches” him [qui me touche particulièrement]. His goal is to propose appropriate aesthetic criteria to their audience because he sees beauty in the concordant varied sounds of this period of music with its perfect counterpoint, “inwardness”, [intériorité], and a “kind of modesty” [espèce de pudeur] that he connected to the idea that the music is made for itself, not as a search for success but as a search for beauty. This shows a respect for the source which effectively prevents the insertion of improvisation, similar to the comments of both Lesne and Vellard, but not necessarily related to the English obsession with evidence as expounded by Leech-Wilkinson’s “forum” as discussed above.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been able to shed light on how actors in the medieval music revival including performers and musicologists over the course of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries have understood and justified the place of improvisation in the performance of music from before around 1500. This has enabled me to go towards answering my first research question: How and why did improvisation come to be an accepted practice in the historical performance of medieval music?

I have presented the medieval music revival as one concerned with the need to be historically believable even while we are unable to judge the results. Two streams of scholarly thought in relation to primary evidence have come into focus. One of these permitted only evidence-based

259 “C’est élaboré par le compositeur. Il y a une logique de pensée et j’ai pas envie de rajouter trop de choses.”
260 “C’est tellement écrit… qu’est-ce que vous voulez rajouter?”
262 This translation was suggested to me by Romain on his review of my use of this quote.
performance techniques and ideas, eschewing additions to the extant musical notations. The other, following Binkley and Arlt, posited that there is such a large difference in musical transmission methods between then and now that we should not simply perform exactly what is written, and therefore creative labour is a necessary adjunct to medieval music performance practice. Today most musicians working in the WAM tradition expect to learn new music chiefly from notation, relying less on teachers’ help as they become professionals and having gained an aural knowledge of what particular styles or genres should sound like during a lifetime of listening to recordings or going to concerts. In the Middle Ages, notation was a rare commodity and recordings did not exist. The teacher and the lived experience of music making as listener or maker were the only ways to learn new music for the vast majority of musicians. This oral model tolerates, indeed requires, much more performer agency than we are accustomed to in the WAM tradition today. We have seen that awareness of the different significance of notation in the Middle Ages has grown during the twentieth century and continues to do so. This is the basis on which improvisation has grown to be recognised as a fundamental element of musical practice in the medieval music revival. As more knowledge about spontaneous music making in historical practices was gained and as the sound of medieval music became more familiar aurally, a growth in the practice of improvisation among modern medieval music practitioners was therefore to be expected, supporting my overarching hypothesis.

At the same time, my respondents actually spoke about the unsuitability of the term “improvisation”, a topic that is supported by musicological literature, meaning that my fifth research question about how applicable the word is to medieval music performance needed to be asked. This discomfort with the word “improvisation” in fact supports the importance of historicism to my research participants due to the recognition of its anachronism and the many different modern interpretations it can have that would be inappropriate to apply to medieval music making. The proposal of alternative names for improvisation can be seen to have nevertheless permitted spontaneous creativity to form part of musicians’ toolboxes of techniques, in spite of the term “improvisation” having connotations that sat uncomfortably with ideas about historical practices.

My analysis of the theme of ornamentation revealed it as a gateway activity towards freer improvisation, one that was less likely to receive disapproval as being too imaginative and therefore not historically informed enough. Ornamentation was also a more accessible activity for a musician trained in the WAM tradition. Its position as something that precedes the ability to
improvise on a larger scale is confirmed by its prevalence among the non-professional medieval music lovers who responded on my survey.

Analysis of the use of vocabulary that explains language or speech to describe the act of spontaneous musical creation enabled me to give a detailed overview of how musicians participating in the medieval music revival conceive and understand improvisation in their own practice and the practice of others. This created a snapshot of practitioners’ general ideas and beliefs about improvisation in the medieval music revival today, providing some material that helps answer my research question number four: How do medieval music performers understand what they are doing when they improvise?

Some of the themes that have emerged from this discussion will recur in the following case study chapters, in which I will answer questions about the specifics of improvisational activity for the Studio, Young and Winter. The first case study will focus on how and why the Studio faked improvisation, linking spontaneous music generation with an extra-European sound world.
Chapter IV: Studio der frühen Musik – Faking⁴ Improvisation 1960-1977
The Studio was founded in around 1960 by the Americans Thomas Binkley (1931-1995; lute and wind instruments) and Sterling Jones (bowed string instruments), the German-Estonian Andrea von Ramm (1928-1999; voice and organetto) and the British Nigel Rogers (1935-2022; voice) in Munich, where they were all living. The group is one of the “big four”, early pioneers in the performance of medieval music, bringing new and vibrant sounds to a wider and enthusiastic public. Their discography is wide ranging and extensive. During the 17 years of their existence, they released 38 albums of medieval and Renaissance repertoire including the first recording dedicated to the composer Johannes Ciconia, an album of John Dowland, an album in collaboration with Nikolaus Harnoncourt’s group Concentus Musicus Wien, as well as 14 albums dedicated entirely or mostly to medieval monophonic repertoire. Of these, their earliest was a ground-breaking musical revival of songs from the manuscript known as Carmina Burana, previously thought to be musically indecipherable and better known in the twentieth-century Carl Orff version.

One former student of Binkley described the group’s influence as profound and lasting many decades. Another former student said: “I think things have entrenched themselves as conventions now that would not have [been entrenched] in that way without the Studio.” Not only did Binkley create the Early Music Institute (now the Historical Performance Institute) at the Jacobs School of Music in Indiana in 1980, teaching there until his death in 1995, but the group also set up the

1 I demonstrate in this chapter that the members of the Studio would not have been averse to my use of the word “faking” in relation to improvisation when describing their practice. I therefore do not use quotation marks around the word, also because it is not intended to be read as inappropriately harsh condemnation, but as fact and necessity.
6 Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4660. The group released two albums with music from this manuscript: Studio der frühen Musik, Carmina Burana: 21 lieder aus der Original-Handschrift um 1300, recorded in July 1964, Musik und ihre Zeit, Telefunken ’Das Alte Werk’ SAWT 9455-A, 1964, 33⅓ rpm, and; Studio der frühen Musik, Carmina Burana (II): 13 Lieder nach der Handschrift aus Benediktbeuern um 1300, recorded in 1967, Musik und ihre Zeit, Telefunken ’Das Alte Werk’ SAWT 9522-A, 1968, 33⅓ rpm.
8 Robert Crawford Young, interview by the author about Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik, Basel, Switzerland, 3 July 2015.
medieval music department at the Schola Cantorum in Basel at the invitation of Professor Wulf Arlt. They taught there from 1973 to 1977, educating musicians like Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby, who went on to found the group Sequentia, as well as Montserrat Figueras and Paul O’Dette. Anne Smith, who was in the first cohort to study with the Studio, emphasises the Studio’s influential position:

By the very fact that they – a successful ensemble – were teaching their concepts of reconstruction of medieval music within an institutional environment, they had potential of disseminating their ideas far beyond the recording industry's sphere of influence.⁸

It cannot be denied, however, that the Studio’s impact was also thanks to the success of their performances. Medieval music sounded different before they came along. Many of the earliest recordings of medieval music had been created to be part of anthologies intended to give educational historical overviews of the development of WAM. Medieval monophonic music appeared, for example, in a collection initially set up by the ethnomusicologist Curt Sachs, *Anthologie Sonore*. Max Meili was the singer on volume 18, *Troubadours *français – *Minnesänger*.⁹ Five songs are recorded, never with more than two strophes, a fact due to the goal of presenting as much variety as possible while being limited by the length of the 78-rpm format. The instrumental participation is limited to very brief preludes for two of the five songs. These are played on a bowed string instrument; on the record label this is called a “vièle”. In each case, the prelude consists simply of the first two phrases of the song’s melody.

The situation had not changed much by the 1950s when the New York based countertenor, Russell Oberlin (1928-2016), co-founder of the New York Pro Musica along with Noah Greenberg, was recording whole albums dedicated to medieval monophonic repertoire. One was made up entirely of troubadour* and trouvère* songs.¹⁰ He was accompanied on this album by a bowed string player, Seymour Barab (born 1921).¹¹ In the alba (dawn song), *Reis glorios, verais lums e clartatz*

---


by Guiraut de Borneill, Barab simply plays along in almost constant unison, except where Oberlin sings a cappella.

These examples do not inspire imitation and lack creativity, sticking simply to the melodic line as it is found written in the sources. They sound very bare and boring to me now, relying on an old-fashioned vocal sound for beauty and on the educational novelty of hearing music from so long ago. As Cohen remarked with reference to the Anthologie Sonore and Safford Cape’s group, Pro Musica Antiqua: “Many a lifelong hatred of early music has grown from the required-listening syllabus of a college music-history seminar”.

The New York Pro Musica (NYPM), however, were a closer antecedent both in time and geography. The ensemble was founded by Noah Greenberg in New York in 1952, just at the right time to profit from the invention of the long playing 33⅓-rpm vinyl disc. They had in fact been formed precisely for recording studio work. The group were extremely important in the early music revival and made a huge impact on the scene in the United States, mostly because of their innovative and highly successful version of the Play of Daniel. This production was spectacular and “inaugurated a new approach” using vivid colour for both costume and percussion. In comparison with the Studio, they had a different manner of working, although both ensembles interpreted similar medieval and Renaissance repertoire. For example, in their 1962 release, Spanish Medieval Music, NYPM interpret twelve cantigas*, most of them instrumentally.

---


17 Their contrasting ways of dealing with medieval music have been considered in detail by Kirsten Yri, Medieval uncloistered: Uses of medieval music in late twentieth-century culture’ (PhD thesis, University of Stony Brook, 2004), Proquest.

selection of these thirteenth-century monophonic songs relating miracles of the Virgin Mary or praising her are also performed by the Studio. In their interpretations, the NYPM places the emphasis clearly on strong contrasts with carefully orchestrated changes between instrumental colours. A favoured technique is the call and response between a soloist and a larger group, with contrasted groupings getting bigger as a piece progresses, such as is heard in their interpretation of *Cantiga XXXV*. Another example of this additive approach can be heard in *Cantiga LXXVII*, the last piece on Side 1. A bagpipe plays the first refrain and strophe once through (musically ABBA) with a simple percussion accompaniment on bass drum with finger cymbal, sounding only infrequently. This is then repeated with low strings playing the tune over the bagpipe drone, adding extra strikes of the drum. A third time adds back the tune on the bagpipes, possibly with the addition of crumhorn as well. There are tuned bells that get more frequently struck as we near the end so that there is an overall increase in the bulk of the sound as we get closer to the big finish. The logic of repeating the melody with added instruments to produce an effective build up is still very much part of the modern medieval musician’s arsenal of techniques to create a performance. This recording is where we hear the use of this strategy perhaps for the first time.

I believe that these orchestral or “big band” type approaches to medieval monophonic pieces provide a model that Binkley made use of, particularly in some of the Studio’s commercial recordings where more instrumentalists were engaged. However, the Studio went further than using lots of colourful and unusual instruments and did more than produce flamboyant and vibrant, repetitive performances of single line melodies from medieval sources.

One of the ways in which the Studio distinguished themselves from their predecessors and gained acclaim for their interpretations was through their creative additions to the monophonic pieces they performed. One form these additions take is in preludes, interludes, and postludes containing musical material that is related to the song or dance melodies they accompany only in the broadest ways; for example, a prelude might lead to the opening pitch or use the same mode. In

---


20 In my interview with Young, he suggested that this kind of jazz band could have been one influence on Binkley’s work. Young, Interview, 2015.

some cases, the interlude or postlude might be entirely unrelated, introducing a new rhythm or even using a different modal centre. Another feature that we find, particularly in preludes, is that they sound spontaneously created. In the interview I conducted with him in 2015, Crawford Young described the way in which he encountered the Studio:  

I knew [Thomas Binkley] as a teacher in California at Stanford. I had first heard his recordings, well one specific recording in a music history class at New England Conservatory in Boston in 1974... that was the Musik der Troubadours [sic] recording and the piece was A chantar where he accompanies Andrea von Ramm. I was extremely impressed because for the first time I heard someone playing lute with a plectrum and he had a lot of facility, a lot of technical facility. He seemed like a very musical and interesting and serious player. And it sounded very improvised what he was doing, modal improvisation, sort of dorian improvisation to her singing. So, I became immediately interested in that record.

Young’s description of listening to A chantar gives me a good reason to examine this performance in more detail because of the fact that it sounded “very improvised” to him. He is by no means the only musician, musicologist or reviewer to say or write this. However, evidence from people who knew the ensemble and from comparisons between performance scores and actual performances, demonstrate that the group did not in fact improvise. As Benjamin Bagby, former student at the Schola and performer with the Studio, informed me, “Tom [Thomas Binkley] wrote everything down... the singers were certainly never improvising.” Sterling Jones himself told me when I met him at his home in January 2016 that they practised “written out improvisation”, a definition which is ambiguous but appropriate when seen in the light of the overlaps between improvisation and composition.

22 More biographical detail on Young in Chapter V.
24 Young, Interview, 2015
26 Benjamin Bagby, interview by the author about improvisation with regard to Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik, Paris, 6 July 2016.
After giving some information about the song *A chantar*, I will examine in detail the performance choices that the Studio made that led to Young’s conclusion about its spontaneous genesis. I will also consider the reasons why this ensemble faked improvisation, including investigating the modern-day music from North Africa known as the *nūba*, a genre that has contested medieval roots in medieval Muslim Spain. Through an examination and discussion of reception history of the Studio’s recordings, it will be possible to see that improvisation is strongly linked to an ‘Other’, whether that be classified as ‘Arabic’, ‘Moorish’, ‘Persian’, ‘Eastern’ or ‘Oriental’, among other possibilities.

*A chantar* 28

*A chantar m’er de so qu’eu no volria* is a poem by the female troubadour (or *trobairitz*) known as La Comtessa de Dia. We have four extant poems by the Comtessa and they are all composed from the perspective of a single individual, as opposed to being dialogue poems or *tensos*, another contemporary genre that women were involved in creating. It is the only individually voiced poem by a *trobairitz* to have survived with a medieval melody, notated in just one source (see Figure IV.2 and Figure IV.3 and a transcription in Figure IV.1). 29 In the five strophes of this poem, the first-person speaker is presented by the Comtessa as unable to understand her lover’s betrayal. The poetic protagonist finds no reason in her own behaviour or self that could have led to this treachery, the thing of which she has no desire to sing: “A chantar m’er de so q’ieu no volria”; “I must sing of what I’d rather not” (line 1). At the end of the poem, the *tornada*, a place where

---


The song appears in the following manuscript sources:
B: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 1592, fol. 104.
C: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 856, fol. 371 (fragmentary).
G: Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, R 71 superiore, fol. 114 (with empty staves).
L: Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, latini 3206, fol. 120 (no attribution).
M: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 12474, fol. 204 (attributed to “una donna de tolosa”).
R: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 22543, fol. 22 (with empty staves).
W: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 844, fol. 204 (no attribution) with music, only first strophe.
a: copy of lost manuscript, Pillet-Carstens Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 2814, fol. 231.
b: copy of lost manuscript, Pillet-Carstens Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barberiniani 4087, fol. 12.
29 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 844, fol. 204 r–204 v.
poets often placed an epithet to summarise the overall meaning of the preceding poetic lines, emphasises even more the fact that this female speaker is not at fault.

---

Figure IV.1: Transcription from MS W fol 204-204v with musical structure indicated by capital letters: following the “Frenchified” text as transcribed by Pollina

---

Case study: Analytical discussion of the Studio’s recording of *A chantar*

The Studio’s version of this song is elaborate and long, lasting almost 12 minutes. Binkley opens with a 55-second-long, unmeasured lute solo as a prelude. Von Ramm then sings to Binkley’s accompaniment on the lute. Her vocal line is lightly metricised in a triple time, but the lute interjections retain the rhythmic freedom that is heard in the prelude; mostly the voice and lute do not sound simultaneously except for moments at the ends of vocal phrases. In between each of the five strophes is an instrumental interlude. These strongly contrast with the thin solo texture of the sung sections. Not only are they all very rhythmic, but the instrumentation is full in the interludes, utilising a group of contrasting instruments including Binkley on lute, Jones on bowed string instrument, an extra bowed string player, flute, shawm and percussion. Three of the four interludes are in fact dances taken from the same manuscript in which the musical material of the song is found: Paris, Bibliothèque National, fonds français 844 or MS W. The final interlude is in a different style and seems to have been either taken directly from or is in emulation of the North African *nūba*. Binkley mentions this tradition in the sleeve notes:

> The Arab Nuba has been taken as a model for the creation of the accompaniments since it is a form which seems to have changed little since the time when Arabian culture exerted such a positive influence on Western Europe. The Introduction (Mayalia) in the Nuba begins with a free section (Burguia) which presents the material of the song, its mode and the salient characteristics of its melody; this is followed by a Tuxia in which the rhythm is established. The interludes between the stanzas (Atuachi) are either formed from the same material as the song or independently conceived. In the song “A Chantar” the interludes used are pieces that occur elsewhere in the Troubadour* manuscripts.

---

31 See Appendix 1 for full transcription of the prelude as well as sung strophes with lute accompaniment.
32 Additional instrumentalists are listed on the sleeve: Johannes Fink, Fidel; Max Hecker, flute; Robert Eliscu, shawm; and David Fellow [sic], percussion. The additional percussionist is actually the musicologist David Fallows working as Binkley’s assistant; see Fallows, ‘Performing Medieval Music in the Late-1960s: Michael Morrow and Thomas Binkley’, 52.
33 Binkley comments that he “felt at that time that the dances in the Chansonnier du Roi [that is, MS W] are a collection of interludes rather than real dances”; Thomas Binkley, ‘On the Modern Performance of Medieval Monophonic Repertory’, (unpublished typescript, no date but before 1977), 6. This is the original English version of the published article ‘Zur Aufführungspraxis der einstimmigen Musik des Mittelalters - Ein Werkstattbericht’, in *Musik des Mittelmeerraumes und Musik des Mittelalters*, Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis 1 (Winterthur: Amadeus Press, 1977). A copy of this typescript was given to me by Crawford Young. Angela Mariani mentions that it has been passed around former students of Binkley’s for many years. See Angela Mariani, *Improvisation and Inventio in the Performance of Medieval Music: A Practical Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 94, footnote 8.
34 Studio der frühen Musik, *Chansons der Troubadours*. 
The model chosen by Binkley and the Studio, the nūba, is a contemporary North African form, sometimes described as Arabo-Andalusian, that can be defined as “an imposing collection of vocal and instrumental pieces” (un ensemble imposant de pièces vocales et instrumentales). Binkley is not just expressing wishful thinking here when he suggests that the nūba remains similar to how it was during the Middle Ages. There is a nostalgic belief among practitioners from North Africa that the nūba has roots stretching back towards medieval times, and the ‘paradise lost’ of al-Andalus, medieval Muslim Spain. I will return to this model in more detail after first interrogating the ways in which the Studio were able to imitate improvisation and successfully convince Young that A chantar included spontaneously generated material.

Young told me unprompted, when talking about Binkley and his time as a student with him, that:

[Binkley] was very concerned in offering an interpretation of medieval music which somehow encompassed or sold the idea of improvisation. What do I mean by that? I think he did consciously try to create an improvised sound, but in his case, it really was memorised composition. He carefully set down everything that I saw or heard of how they did it. That was also how we did it in the class. In other words, to give you an example, all of the monophonic pieces that were looked at whether troubadour*, trouvère*, cantigas*, lauda*, whatever it was... were expected to have a prelude and the prelude was supposed to have an improvisatory character, in other words in a free rhythm, start out slow, develop, build up to a kind of climax that then prepared the entrance of the singer usually and maybe also gave certain ideas that could be motifs that could be brought back in as interludes or as a postlude to the work.

This quote gives a basis for a definition of what “improvisatory” means and why A chantar seemed to be improvised to Young. Young’s list of elements that contribute to an improvisational sound can inform a discussion of the Studio’s performance. These are:

- A non-rhythmic, slow start;
- a development (of rhythm, or melody, or both? Young does not specify here);

---

37 Young, Interview, 2015.
• a “build up to a kind of climax” as preparation for the singer or other instrumentalists;
• the inclusion of “certain ideas that could be motifs that could be brought back in”.

Non-rhythmic, slow start

The prelude to A chantar is indeed non-rhythmic. Slow is a term which is relative but in the context of the whole piece, the opening is slow, a feeling which is underlined by the relative infrequency of open string chords that punctuate here, a kind of aural anchor by which to understand the progression of this prelude. These chords appear at an average interval of 4.8 seconds, the interval varying from 1 to 12.3 seconds.

Development

I have identified two different motifs that Binkley uses, both of which change and evolve during the course of the performance. The first is a falling phrase, the kernel of which is a turn C B♭ A G A, but which is sometimes curtailed to B♭ A G with or without a following F. I have called this phrase ‘a’ in Figure IV.4. The second building block I observe is a simple scalar rising fifth from D to A. In the annotated score (Figure IV.4) I have called this ‘b’. As you can see, the repeats of these two simple building blocks are not all the same; they have different contexts and sometimes include ornaments (as in a6) or repeated notes (like in b2). Phrase ‘b’ extends up to a C and a B♭, higher pitches which give a sense of tension building as the prelude progresses (see b3, b5 and b6). Similarly, the ‘a’ phrase is expanded in a4 and a6 to cover a full descending seventh. The repetition a5 has an extra inserted B♭ to make the landing on A more decisive.38

38 For ways in which building blocks characterise improvised musics, see Chapter III.
Climax

The density of notes in terms of speed increases during the prelude with the shortest notes appearing in lines four and five of my transcription (see Figure IV.4), where more ornaments, shown as small notes, also appear. The insistency of the repeated open chord of D, at shorter intervals towards the end, with its long ringing lowest pitch, contributes to the way in which the voice is “forced” to start singing.
Certain ideas or motifs which reappear later

Both the falling phrase ‘a’ and the rising phrase ‘b’ (see Figure IV.4) reappear in the lute interjections during the sung strophes. ‘a’ is usually transposed to be heard as F E D E or sometimes F E D C. In strophe 4, the high B♭ reappears and the falling phrase is extended to include both transpositions (B♭ A G and F E D).

The elements which Young identified as belonging to an improvisational style are all indeed present in the opening of *A chantar*. Another way to view how improvisation is understood today is proposed by Treitler, who argues that the concept of improvisation has been conflated with that of the eighteenth-century fantasy.³⁹ He cites the definition of “fantastic” and “the character of ‘fantasy’” from Mattheson’s *Der Volkommene Capellmeister* (1739), a style which corresponds with features we can observe in the lute’s prelude and accompaniment to *A chantar*.

This style is the freest, most unconstrained composing, singing, and playing style that one can think of, in which one can come to now these, now those ideas, where one is bound neither to words nor to melody, only to harmony, where unusual progressions, obscure ornaments, complex turns and decorations emerge, without strict observation of beat and tone, disregarding their notation on paper, without formal principal and subordinate sections, now rushing, now hesitating, now monophonic, now polyphonic, now also with hesitation after the beat, yet not without the intention to please, to overwhelm, to astonish....⁴⁰

It is striking that there are several elements discussed by Mattheson here that can be found in Binkley’s lute performance in *A chantar*. I would include the interplay of different ideas, the presence of different kinds of ornamentation, the free rhythm which both rushes and hesitates and the changes of texture.

---

³⁹ Leo Treitler, ‘Speaking of the I-Word’, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 72, no. 1 (1 January 2015), 5–19. In this article he talks about the “feckless” use of the word improvisation in relation to medieval music. He had already referred to the word’s negative “whimsical” or “capricious” meanings in the musicology of WAM, see article originally published in 1991 and republished in Leo Treitler, ‘Medieval Improvisation’, in *With Voice and Pen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–38.

We should remember that in the WAM tradition, there is a long history of pre-composing music which seems to be improvisation, stretching back as far as Josquin.\textsuperscript{41} Nettl too pointed out that traits found in improvised music can also appear in fixed, composed music:

In those musics which are said to be improvised a number of compositional techniques and devices at the microcompositional level appear to be characteristic. Among them are repetitions, simple variation of short phrases, melodic sequence, the tendency to start two successive sections with the same motive, the tendency to increase the length of sections as the performance progresses, and perhaps others. Now all of these techniques are also present in the ‘set’ or ‘fixed’ compositions of certain cultures.\textsuperscript{42}

Even though the techniques Nettl mentions here can be found both in improvised and composed music, some features that are described as “characteristic” in improvised musics are easily identifiable in the prelude to A chantar. Repetitions of motifs and simple variation of short phrases can be seen in my analysis in Figure IV.4. It is also possible to discern that the phrases are indeed tending towards getting longer, a result of the repetitions and variation previously remarked upon.

The Studio’s ‘Arabic style’

All of this evidence supports Young’s assessment that this performance sounds improvised. However, it is another feature of the Studio’s performances of medieval monophonic music that might be described as their most pervasive bequest to medieval music performance. This legacy, which has “become one of the most often-cited, and perhaps even notorious examples of the incorporation of ... ‘world music’ elements into medieval music”, is their invention of the so-called “Arabic style”, which has been widely copied and persists also into the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{43}

The Studio’s “Southern Arabic style”\textsuperscript{44} in its earliest incarnations can be described as superficial. For example, on their 1964 album dedicated to the songs from the Carmina Burana, the group

\textsuperscript{41} Or indeed, improvising music which seems to be composed. See Grove Music Online, s.v. ‘Improvisation §2: Western Art Music - 1. Introduction’ by Rob C. Wegman, accessed 19 May 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. As an example of a composed piece which seems to be improvised, he cites “Josquin's motet Stabat mater which, according to Joachim Thuringus (Opusculum bipartitum de primordiis muscis, 2/1625), was fashioned ‘in imitation of sortisatio’, and is indeed virtually unique having a cantus firmus without rests, an essential feature of polyphonic improvisations.”

\textsuperscript{42} Nettl, ‘Thoughts on Improvisation’, 9–10.

\textsuperscript{43} Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio, 18. The descriptive term “Arabic style” was given to their music by Haines in ‘The Arabic Style of Performing Medieval Music’, where he accuses the Studio of a domineering and appropriating orientalism. For an alternative, more positive view, see Kirsten Yri, ‘Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik: Challenging “the Myth of Westernness”’, Early Music 38, no. 2 (May 2010), 273–80 For evidence that the style is still alive and kicking in the twenty-first century, see Edward G. Breen, ‘Gramophone Collector: Wanderlust and Exile’, Gramophone, August 2016, 80-81, https://reader.exacteditions.com/issues/52383/page/88.

\textsuperscript{44} See sleeve notes to Minnesang und Spruchdichtung.
added instruments with connections to an unidentified and exotic East. An example of this is their version of *Sic mea fata*, which includes the hourglass shaped drum or darbuka and the long-necked lute.45 Later, they inserted an authentic Moroccan melody drawn from the first Moroccan *nūba*, *Ramal al-Māya*.46 The melody can be heard in their commercial recording of the piece *Ecce gratum*, although it had appeared in earlier live performances of *love cum Mercurio* as well.47 I was able to identify the tune as a *tawshiya al-sanāʾ* from the final culminating section of this *nūba*, and it is commonly called *Shams al-‘Ashiya* (The Evening Sun).48 The new medieval context, whether that is *love cum Mercurio* or *Ecce gratum*, provides a strong contrast with the Moroccan melody, ensuring that it is heard as independent and foreign, more like a graft than an organic offshoot. In this way, both the exotic instrumental colours and the inserted melody can be seen as artificial “Arabisms” that are in some way just incoherent surface features with no true connection to the rest of the musical content. This is what opened up the Studio to the criticism that they were domineeringly orientalist, a criticism that was also levelled at the NYPM for the exoticising elements in their performances of *The Play of Daniel*.49 This criticism betrays not only a lack of understanding of the Studio’s work as a whole, as I demonstrate in my Masters thesis and as Yri argues, but also a bias towards a formalist viewpoint about what makes good music.50

45 In the sleeve notes, Binkley says that this instrument is “still used in the Near East today”. In fact, he emphasizes that instruments are the key indicator of the influence of “Arab culture” on Western European musical performance and tells us: “The style of performance on these instruments is the result of serious study of their use today in the countries of their origin from Persia to Morocco.” See the sleeve notes to *Carmina Burana: 21 lieder*, 1964.


50 See Yri, ‘Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik’. While Locke discusses composition criticism as opposed to performance criticism, the similarities between accusations (quoted from Joseph Kerman writing on *Turandot*) of “bogus orientalism lacquered over every page of the score”, the “largely decorative” nature of exotic opera ballets, the
Arabo-Andalusian structural influences

In comparison to these early experiments with “Arabic style”, the performance of A chantar is clearly not just about jingles or superficial colours. The group took a strophic text with its simple and repetitive seven-line melody, as seen in Figure IV.1, and constructed an extended performance containing a lot of variety of texture and accompaniment. In order to do this, as Binkley explained in the sleeve notes to the album, the Studio picked up several components of the Arabo-Andalusian nūba including most obviously the instrumental prelude and interludes, or, in Binkley’s transliterations from the Arabic, introductory “Mayalia”, which in A chantar only includes the unmeasured “Burguia”, and “Atuachi” or instrumental sections.51

Another innovative aspect of this performance, in comparison with examples of earlier performances of medieval monophony, is the way in which the unmeasured accompaniment constantly varies, adding subtle colour to outline the developments of the poem’s argument. After almost every line of poetry, the lute makes an answering comment. Although this is a technique that the Studio had used on their earlier recording of monophonic songs from the Carmina Burana, here it has been further developed so that the lute really engages in conversation on an equal footing with the voice, rather than being a more separate entity.52

This interaction with the voice led me to consider how poetry is treated in the Arabo-Andalusian tradition of Morocco.53 Aydoun provides detail about the different types of poetry which appear set to music as san’āt.54 The poem texts are broadly in four categories which correspond to different historical geneses and types of Arabic or Arabic dialect, including one known as Andalou signifying a connection to origins in medieval al-Andalus.55 The music for the san’ā is usually

resultant “enormous appeal” of music that has such traits and the suspicion with which the Studio’s work is treated, are striking. See Ralph P. Locke, ‘Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East’, in The Exotic in Western Music, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 126–27.

51 For an analysis of these terms, see Stuttard, ‘De l’interprétation de la musique médiévale’, 168–70.
52 Compare, for example, Dulce solum or love cum Mercurio. Both are found on Carmina Burana: 21 lieder, 1964.
53 There are several different nūba traditions in the Maghreb. For Binkley’s terminology and its connection to the Moroccan tradition, see Stuttard, ‘De l’interprétation de la musique médiévale’, 167–68.
54 A san’ā (plural, san’āt) is the sung poem. Any vocal piece which is part of a mizān is a san’ā. A mizān is the name for the main part of one section of a full nūba; it follows on from the preludes and is made up of four phases that all progressively become livelier in rhythm and tempo. There is a mix of solo and group singing and instrumental playing in these phases. See Aydoun, Musiques du Maroc, 34–35.
55 The relationship of this dialect to the historical language spoken in al-Andalus is not straightforward, see Carl Davila, ‘The Andalusi Turn: The Nūba in Mediterranean History’, Mediterranean Studies 23, no. 2 (2015), 165–66.
shaped in consideration of the number of lines or hemistichs (half lines) of poetry being set. Aydoun describes the way in which each line of poetry is usually followed with a reprise by the instrumentalists except in two cases, just before the penultimate line of poetry is sung, and after the final line of poetry so that the immediate attacca into the next sanʿā is not interrupted. As an illustration, he gives the following as a possible structure for a sanʿā with five lines of poetry:

"- 1st line (melody A) sung.
- Identical repeat by the orchestra.
- 2nd line (melody A) sung.
- Augmented repeat of melody A.
- 3rd line (melody A) sung.
- 4th line (1st hemistich-phrase B) sung;
- taghtiya (instrumental solo, counterpoint to phrase B).
- 4th line (2nd hemistich-2nd part of melody A).
- 5th line (melody A) sung.
- leads directly into singing the next sanʿā."

This is the kind of integration of instrumental response to poetic lines that we can also see in the Studio’s performance of A chantar. Binkley does not talk about this element of Arabo-Andalusian style, which does not have a specific Arabic technical term, in the album sleeve notes, but does mention “instrumental caudae following vocal phrases” when talking about the making of two later recordings, Camino de Santiago I & II. He also tells us how hearing the Arabo-Andalusian

---

56 Aydoun, Musiques du Maroc, 33.
57 Aydoun, 34.
58 "- 1er vers (mélodie A) chanté.
- 2e vers (mélodie A) chanté.
- Reprise amplifiée de la mélodie A.
- 3e vers (mélodie A) chanté.
- 4e vers (1re hémistiche-phrase B) chanté;
- taghtiya (solo instrumental, contre-chant de la phrase B).
- 4e vers (2e hémistiche-2e partie de la mélodie A).
- 5e vers (mélodie A) chanté.
- enchaînement direct vers le chant de la çanʿā suivante."
nūba inspired him to integrate broad concepts into the group’s performance of medieval monophonic song such as the idea that “vocal phrases may be continued or extended instrumentally”. The lute’s continuation of the poetico-musical lines of A chantar does not occur between lines 5 and 6 in any of the five strophes, and this neatly matches the direct lead without instrumental interjection that happens towards the end of the sanʿā according to Aydoun’s schematic explanation.

A chantar was an experimental performance, and not every critic appreciated it. Ideas drawn from the Arabo-Andalusian nūba enrich what, on the manuscript page, seemed very simple. I would like to suggest that Binkley was looking for ways to ‘complexify’ medieval monophonic song in order to make it worthy of the high status of WAM, the artistic milieu in which he was comfortable. This is entirely coherent within the narrative of exoticism in twentieth-century WAM as described by Susanna Pasticci, who says that there is a tendency for musicians to “recognise in [their exotic] models, convergences and points of contact with the developments of their own research”. In other words, Binkley found what he was looking for in the Moroccan nūba, and that was something to fill the gaps and elevate seven repetitive lines of melody lasting little more than a minute to a performance that could be viewed as legitimate alongside other canonical WAM works. Three things in the performance of A chantar indicate that the group were using deeper, structural elements of their model now, not content with the surface colours they had previously relied on in some songs on their two earlier Carmina Burana albums. The first of these is the extension of vocal lines with instrumental responses, and it is worth pointing out that Binkley’s ever-changing lute interpolations here also have the effect of breaking the unceasing rhythmic push that had pervaded the manner of earlier song performances by the group. The second is the extended unmeasured instrumental prelude that was specially created for the song. Finally, the third is the insertion of interludes, something that the group had already done in performances such as Nu alrest lebe ich mir werde or love cum Mercurio, however here they are from different provenances and have quite different moods to the song itself, so that you have the impression almost of a suite of pieces rather than a single song.

With no other available recording of this piece for comparison, no access to performance scores and no possibility to talk to either Binkley or Von Ramm about this performance, I am unable to draw conclusions about how fixed it was or how much of it stayed the same from concert to concert. Von Ramm introduces important differences between strophes in terms of embellishments or other pitch additions or alterations (see for example in strophe 3) that can be seen in my transcription (see Appendix 1). In addition, she uses audible changes in dynamics, colour and nuance to deliver the meaning and message of the song, including speaking rather than singing the *tornada*. The lute too varies in its accompaniment quite broadly from strophe to strophe, but this could have been prepared and memorised. We are left with the imperfect conclusions that can be drawn from one commercial recording and the reception history which I will now consider.

**Improvisation and Arabo-Andalusian style**

The *nūba* is in fact not an improvisational tradition. The Moroccan musicologist and practitioner of *nūba*, Ahmed Aydoun, does not use the word improvisation in the context of explaining the *nūba*, even when talking about slow, non-rhythmic sections such as the opening prelude. Talking from an insider perspective, Aydoun has a more nuanced view of the *nūba* prelude, to which Binkley did not have access, or perhaps Aydoun recognises the fact that improvisation is a more complex term that is too open to misconstrual. Another musicologist of the *nūba* tradition, Mahmoud Guettat refers to “The wide margin of freedom to which the traditional musician has access” (La grande marge de liberté dont dispose le musicien traditionnel) in the conclusion to his book on Arabo-Andalusian music. He goes on to express in more detail that this music “implies an active and dynamic principal, the basis of instantaneous, original and spontaneous creation... Modal music...in order to be realised, calls on other means involving full and complete mobilisation of the creative capacities of the musician: the sound is enriched from the inside by an infinite variety of ornamentations and nuances, the voice holds a dominant position, the intervals are irregular, the

---

63 Arabo-Andalusian musicians may use other terminology for improvisation. Chottin recognised that, even if he used the term “free improvisation” (improvisation libre) to describe the *mawāl*, “in truth, we could only feel that [the musician] was nevertheless bending to melodic turns familiar in [Arabo-]Andalusian folklore.” (...) à la vérité, on ne sentait qu’il se plie malgré tout à des tournures mélodiques familières au folklore andalou.) See Chottin, *Tableau de la musique marocaine: Prix du Maroc 1938*, 135. These familiar melodic turns can be understood as the building blocks that are common in improvised music, see Chapter III.

sounds are mobile, the succession of structures and melodic and rhythmic motifs allow all kinds of games of personal expression.\textsuperscript{65}

While it is true that Binkley worked with the Moroccan musician, Hajj Abdelkrim Rais, to whom I presume he owed a lot of his knowledge of the \textit{nūba} and who I assume probably did not talk of improvisation,\textsuperscript{66} he would also have accessed earlier scholarship, for example from the early ethnomusicologist of North African music, Rodolphe d’Erlanger. D’Erlanger interpreted the unmeasured preludes of the Moroccan \textit{nūba} as improvised, the “Buġyah”, or as transliterated by Binkley in the sleeve notes, “Burguia”.\textsuperscript{67}

Young is nevertheless clear that he thought this performance included plectrum lute improvisation; it was obviously what excited him about listening to it. We know that Binkley said at the time that this song was performed in a way that follows the Arabo-Andalusian \textit{nūba} model and, to back up Binkley’s claim, we have seen how this song included elements such as the instrumental continuations of vocal lines that are coherent with this model. The connection between these two features, Arabo-Andalusian style and improvisation, is made explicit in the reception history of the recorded performances of the Studio.\textsuperscript{68} In considering the critical reception of the Studio’s work, it becomes clear that where writers mention improvisation, it is almost always in relation to a stylistic ‘other’, who may or may not be specified, but is referred to variously as “Arabic”, “Moorish”, “Middle Eastern”, “Near Eastern”, “oriental”, or “Moroccan”. In my interview with Young, he emphasised the connection between ‘other’ and improvisation in relation to audience understanding of the performances. When I suggested that the use of

\textsuperscript{65} “… implique un principe actif et dynamique, base d’une création instantanée, originale et spontanée. ... la musique modale...pour se réaliser, fait appel à d’autres moyens impliquant la mobilisation pleine et entière des capacités créatrice du musicien: le son est enrichi de l’intérieur par une infinités d’ornementations et de nuances, la voix tient une place prépondérante, les intervalles sont irréguliers, les sons sont mobiles, la succession des structures et des motifs mélodiques et rythmiques permettent toutes sortes de jeux et d’expressions personnels.” The importance of individual creative powers of the performing musician is placed in context by his following comments that the music “belongs to one social group, and only to that group” (propre à un groupe social et à lui seul), Guettat, 420.


\textsuperscript{68} The connection between medieval musical improvisation and ‘other’ persists, though in more neutral form. Horsley in the Grove article on improvisation, links a “more controlled, improvisatory technique [that] is hinted at in the structure of a number of surviving chant melodies” to Indian raga. See \textit{Grove Music Online}, s.v. ‘Improvisation, §2: Western Art Music 2. History to 1600’ by Imogene Horsley, accessed 19 May 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. Knighton made the link with reference to two British medieval ensembles performing widely in the 1990s: “Experimentation with other aspects of ‘early music’, such as the improvisatory approach of groups like the Dufay Collective and Sinfonye (who also draw on non-Western performing techniques), will, I hope, find an increased outlet on disc, despite the added difficulties of improvising to the red light.” Tess Knighton, ‘Going down on Record’, in \textit{Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music}, ed. Tess Knighton and David Fallows (University of California Press, 1992), 35.
“ethnic” sounds, which he associated with the ability to sell medieval music, would have a very strong impact on whether the audiences believed a musician was improvising because, as I put it, “if you hear those sorts of sounds...at the time the expectation would have been ‘that’s improvisation because that’s how they play music there’” Young agreed emphatically. In evoking an oriental ‘other’, the Studio were cementing the idea that they were improvising, so strong is the link between the two in the minds of listeners, whether audience or reviewers, as we will now see.69

Denis Arnold70 in his 1970 review for Gramophone of Carmina Burana (II): 13 Lieder nach der Handschrift aus Benediktbeuern um 1300 says “Binkley's idea that there were strong Arabic influences via Spain is quite tenable, and produces some interesting results. He sometimes adds quasi-improvisatory ritornelli for the instruments between verses of the songs” and later Arnold explicitly links extemporisation with oriental style together by referring to the “Arabic-type improvisation” he hears on this album.71 When talking about the Chansons der Troubadours album in the same magazine a year later, however, he seems to have decided that Binkley should perhaps be named composer of the preludes and interludes, although Arnold goes on to say that the arrangements which make the “sketchy form” of the song performable are necessarily derived from an improvisation, confusing the message somewhat. In any case, “the music is made to flow with the ornamental, improvisatory phrases of the true... folk singer”, a singer who is made to represent the ‘other’ that was heard in the non-Western style of the Studio’s performance.72 His eventual conclusion in 1976 when considering the album Musik der Spielleute73 is that “the results are probably not authentic – but then authenticity is scarcely possible at all.” The sketchiness of the original notation is cited as the driving force behind a need for “a technique ... [which] elaborates [a melodic outline] by improvisatory methods, using the experience gained in places where such improvisation is still practised.”74 So for Arnold, improvisation is necessarily a part of

69 Ferand also linked medieval musical improvisation to “oriental influence” in the introduction to his anthology of written out examples: Ernest Thomas Ferand, Improvisation in Nine Centuries of Western Music, Anthology of Music, no. 12 (Köln: Arno Volk Verlag, 1961), 6.

70 Arnold (1926-1986) was a musicologist specializing in music from the Baroque era. Page points out the peculiarity of musicologists forming the backbone of early music reviewing for popular magazines such as Gramophone in his article, Christopher Page, ‘The English “a Cappella” Renaissance’, Early Music 21, no. 3 (1993), 453–71.


74 Denis Arnold, ‘Music of the Minstrels. Early Music Quartet’, Gramophone, July 1976, 205,
the style of the ‘other’, of folk singers, of other geographical places (outside Western Europe by implication) or of ‘Arabic’ music. This neatly ties up with Nooshin’s thesis on the ideologically motivated view of improvisation from the perspective of Western musicology.

Other writers also linked improvisation to the music of the ‘other’. A review of a reissue of the album on which A chantar is found, appeared in the journal Early Music in 1982. The author associates “Arab practice” with improvisation but goes on to say that Thomas Binkley composed the “improvised prelude”. There is an ongoing problem with conceptual vocabulary (a review does not really give the amount of space necessary for a debate about the type of musical creativity which had occurred) but the close connection between improvisation and the ‘other’, here named as “Arab practice”, remains. A review by Jonathan Beck of the Chansons der Troubadours recording was published in a non-musicological academic journal, Romance Philology. He quotes Binkley’s sleeve notes extensively and calls the album a “much-needed corrective to the rigid and insipid realizations of Binkley’s predecessors, deluded by their erroneous perception of the long underrated ‘medieval mind’”, even giving a list of alternative, “less savory versions” to compare it with. For Beck too, the music is clearly improvised using “Near Eastern...formal patterns, harmonic structures and motifs”. For him it is a question not of “the FACT of Arabic influences, but of the DEGREE of their importance.” Haskell’s appraisal of the group in his retrospective makes the link explicit: “Thomas Binkley’s Munich-based Studio der frühen Musik revolutionised the interpretation of medieval monophonic music in the sixties and seventies by applying improvisatory techniques derived from Middle-Eastern folk music.” Another more recent musicologist to make the same association is Yri, though her argument concerns the idea that in fact Binkley was re-writing the history of Europe to include the important influence on music and European culture of the Western Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula:

These performances developed the Studio’s signature ‘Arabic style’ through the use of ‘oriental’ instruments, Arab-inflected ornamentation and embellishment of musical lines,
and the use of elaborate instrumental improvisations and accompaniments following Arab-Andalusian traditions still at work in North Africa.\textsuperscript{79}

**Reasons for faking improvisation**

There are three possible reasons why the Studio imitated improvisation. Not only was it different and distinctive, something that reaped commercial rewards for the group and the record companies they worked with, with an element of creativity that clearly appealed to Binkley personally, but it was also about the historical validity of their performances, which the use of an Arabo-Andalusian model partially enabled them to argue for. In addition, it is possible to imagine that faking improvisation was a necessity for the ensemble because of the nature of the medieval musical sources with which the Studio were confronted.

Young too made the connection between improvisation and “traditional music cultures” in positing a possible reason for the imitation of improvisation: a desire to be different.

They did it to be different from classical music. They did it to have a kind of connection with traditional music cultures, where one could more appropriately speak of improvisation. This is because the whole point of doing medieval music at that time, I’m talking about the 70s, was to do something new, different but also ethnically influenced.\textsuperscript{80}

The Studio faced a lot of criticism towards the end of their performing career as a new style of medieval music making took off in England, following the guidance of the group of English musicologists who advocated that voices and instruments should not mix and pointed out the problems with the use of anachronistic instruments (or invented ones such as the infamous dulzaina).\textsuperscript{81} Nevertheless, the Studio’s audiences had been mesmerized and many commentators on the Studio’s musical accomplishments refer to them as astonishingly fresh and groundbreaking,

---

\textsuperscript{79} Yri, ‘Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik’, 273.  
\textsuperscript{80} Young, Interview 2015.  
\textsuperscript{81} This “forum”, as christened by Leech-Wilkinson, included Christopher Page and David Fallows; see *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance*, Musical Performance and Reception (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 136. For more on the English musicological condemnation of mixing voices and instruments, see Chapter III. For more about the invented instrument, see David Fallows, ‘Notes on a Mystery: Cornamuse and Dulzaina’, *Early Music* 7, no. 1 (January 1979), 135. Leech-Wilkinson took part in the denunciation of the Studio’s style in the form of an unfavourable review, albeit of a later disc that Binkley directed at the Schola Cantorum, rather than one of the Studio’s own recordings. See Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, review *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, performed by Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Thomas Binkley, *Early Music* 10, no. 1 (1982), 121.
using words like “vitality”, “revolutionary ... adventurous” and “pioneering”. Joel Cohen was full of admiration for the Studio, calling them “radically ‘different’”. Even in the face of criticisms of the performance style mixing instruments and voices, criticisms which were particularly brutal at the time he was writing, Mayer Brown encourages us not to forget that “single-handedly the group brought back to life a repertory of music most people thought was unrevivable”. This is all by way of demonstrating that the group enjoyed a lot of success, a fact that is also borne out by the sheer number of recordings that they made. Had they not been financially viable as a prospect and had they not been able to sell records because of their popularity, the recording companies would not have continued to invest in them. Young was clear that the “ethnic thing” was a major selling point because it made medieval music different from the canon of WAM. He even drew a parallel to pop culture citing The Beatles and George Harrison’s sitar as well as the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival in California where Ravi Shankar and Hugh Masekela played.

Being different was probably also an appealing idea to Binkley who Young describes as combative, a “kind of heckler” but also very charismatic. Bagby told me that he thought Binkley depended on Jones to be “rock solid” and absolutely reliable so that he could “give this impression of being a kind of crazed improviser, which he was not.” He went on to speculate on the purpose of pretending to improvise: “I think he liked being this kind of creative spirit” and composition was not able to provide this. In addition, “I think maybe [Binkley] was afraid of being criticised for presuming to know how to compose medieval music” meaning that improvisation was a better option. This anxiety relates to a key concern for the Studio: the need for their performances to be authentic, or as Binkley wrote, rather ill-advisedly, their attempt to “bring the performance of this music close to the elusive original”.

In the 1960s, musicians playing Early Music presented it almost as historical re-enactment. They were keen to say that their performances represented how the music had been heard in the past.

---

83 See the contribution by Benjamin Bagby and Barbara Thornton in Fallows et al., ‘Thomas Binkley, 1931-1995’, 539.
85 Cohen and Snitzer, Reprise, 38–45. Cohen studied with Andrea von Ramm at a summer school in her home in former Yugoslavia in the early 1970s. Benjamin Bagby told me in our interview that he had also attended.
87 Young, Interview 2015.
Authenticity was the buzz word. Those who sought it were trying to make music that would transport the listener back in time to some idyllic earlier era full of exciting sounding instruments, catchy rhythms and modal melodies. The first groups were bent on “making the unfamiliar familiar” as Wilson coined it, unearthing unusual instruments and repertoire and revitalising the classical music scene with their discoveries. This zeitgeist meant that for Binkley and the Studio it was of vital importance to ensure their performance choices could be justified historically. This provides one reason for the Studio’s innovation of incorporating oral traditional features, specifically those of the Moroccan nūba, into their performance style, due to the possibility of that music’s direct link to the Middle Ages. As Young continued, after mentioning the “ethnic” element that the Studio had integrated:

[The whole point was to do something] with a kind of credibility or authenticity which otherwise wouldn’t be there, because that was music of five or six or seven hundred years ago, so where is the authenticity? Well, they found the authenticity exactly in these similarities, supposed similarities with other musical cultures which were contemporary and did have maybe direct lines going back a couple of centuries. And [the Studio] had contact [with those other musical cultures] through their extensive touring and … none of their audience could say anything [about them] because those people were just classical music listeners.

Improvisation also appeared to be a historically justifiable characteristic of medieval music making. The reasons for this become clear when the sources of musical notation from the Middle Ages are taken into consideration.

In the 1950s and 60s when the Studio were first setting out, the development of music in the West was widely believed to have followed an evolutionary pathway leading from primitive and

---

90 Yri notes that North African musicians hold the view that the medieval Andalusian musical forms live on in in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia; see Yri, ‘Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik’, 277. Aydoun confirms that “the music known as ‘Andalusian’ … [is] a lyrical and instrumental repertoire that has been transmitted through the centuries” (la musique dite ‘andalouse’… [est] un répertoire lyrique et instrumental transmis depuis des siècles); see Aydoun, *Musiques du Maroc*, 26. Benjamin M. Liu and James T. Monroe published a collection of ten songs which “are textually identifiable as medieval Hispano-Arabic poems” and collated musical transcriptions of these same songs from the living oral tradition; Benjamin M. Liu and James T. Monroe, *Ten Hispano-Arabic Strophic Songs in the Modern Oral Tradition: Music and Texts*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology 125 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
91 Young, Interview, 2015.
unsophisticated to developed and highly artistic. Evidence for this was found in notated sources, and the earliest notations themselves were thought to provide proof of just how far mankind had come by the modern era. The key twentieth-century perspective on early notation was one of lack. Not only were rhythmic values vague and open to interpretation in the early polyphonic school of Notre Dame*, but even pitch was unclear in the Aquitanian school* whose manuscripts may lack a ruled stave either totally, as in so-called campo aperto notation, or partially where only one or two lines provide orientation. In the field of Gregorian chant which gives us the very earliest musical notation in Europe, the information contained in staffless neumes* was described by Apel as “represent[ing] only the general contour of the melodic motion... without in any way indicating the pitches or intervals involved.” This is in contrast to the “more careful manner of writing” that appeared just before the start of the eleventh-century, now known as heightened neumes*. When one or two scratched lines appear in the sources to indicate particular pitches around which the neumes* are notated, Apel considers this to be a “primitive method of diastematic notation”. His prose is biased in favour of the “better”, later four-line stave notation, which, he points out, is proven through its very longevity, still being used today. The majority of his chapter on the notation of Gregorian chant is dedicated to the “standard system of neumatic* notation” or square neumes* as printed by the monks of Solesmes as part of their great restoration of the tradition. The gestures of the neumes* of Saint Gall are relegated to being an interesting historical moment that inevitably had to be superseded by more precise and, therefore, more useful notation.

Thurston Dart in his influential book on the performance practice of early music had opened his section on medieval music by immediately calling it filled with ‘immense problems’, concluding that the music from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries was especially difficult: “the student of interpretation finds much to baffle him in the music of this early time, and there is little point in discussing it in any great detail.” Dart was also one of a number of voices who pointed out that reliance on notation as a pure guide to performance was likely to lead to results that were unsatisfactory, even for music of a later date than this, saying: “notation, regarded purely as a

---

94 Apel, 119.
95 Apel, 100–108. He also includes discussion of rhythmic possibilities and controversies associated, see 126-132.
guide to performance, has always been inaccurate and can often be extremely misleading.” 97 This prefigures Binkley’s insistence that the notation is not the performance and that something needs to be added in order for the written page to come to life. In fact, we have already seen in Chapter III just how insistent Binkley is that “medieval musical notation in no way contains all the information necessary for a musical performance.” 98 Binkley refers to medieval music notation as consisting of “sketches”. 99 He uses the evidence of how medieval sources give varying versions of the same piece to strengthen his argument that “the written work was often really nothing more than a model for the performance.” 100

It is indeed true that medieval musical notation leaves out information to which musicians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are accustomed, and which is necessary to include in an interpretation of the notation. “What’s not on the page” is a central issue to consider for musicians encountering medieval manuscripts containing music. 101 When the Studio began their project recording the medieval version of songs from the Carmina Burana, as already noted, Binkley was confronted with unheighted neumes*, a confrontation that gave rise to questions about why the notation seemed to be incomplete. 102 Binkley was bold enough to say however that he did not see the neumes* as primitive, but rather as “an expression of nuance whereby pitch and rhythm were not very important elements”. His recognised that in order to reconstruct the sound picture “[he] had to look beyond documents”. 103 Binkley did indeed look beyond the documents, with an initial focus on the instruments. By starting with this focus, and because of the group’s privileged access to the musical cultures of far-flung places thanks to the Goethe Institut sponsored world tours they undertook in the early 60s, Binkley came to consider various extra-European oral traditions as being capable of filling the notational gap. This position is clarified by his later writing: “A performance is never identical with the written music, since the latter reproduces only a part of a [musical] work. The musical notation contains written elements whilst

97 Dart, 153. For more on this, see Chapter III.
100 Binkley, 36.
101 How to reflect on this is addressed in detail in Chapter 3 of Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio.
102 See Chapter III.
the performance presupposes oral traditions as well as including many unwritten events – and an interpretation must encompass both.”

This adds up to an obligation for the Studio to add something to what was written down in order to generate a performance. The tension between this and the equally important obligation to generate an authentic performance is what may have caused Binkley to lay no claim to his compositional additions, while remaining opaque about what the group were actually adding to the sources.

Binkley understood the missing elements, the characteristics and information that he assumed had been passed on orally, as belonging to musical style or aesthetic. He therefore developed ideas about different styles in medieval music, carefully formulating contrasts between a “southern Arabic style” and a “northern” one. He justified this approach to the “aesthetic question” as a “need to create hypothetical traditions in order to be able to juxtapose them”. Binkley consistently emphasised his belief in the necessity for contrasting styles, “the subtleties of regional performance characteristics” as he phrased it in the sleeve notes to one album. He expanded on these ideas, also giving examples of songs that demonstrate different regional styles, syllabic in the North and melismatic in the South, in a book chapter on performance practice published in 1992. The stylistic contrast between North and South was presented by Binkley again and again throughout his career in the accompanying notes to several of the Studios commercial recordings. This means that, as well as making some basic decisions about pitch and rhythm where medieval notation did not give these precisely, Binkley and the Studio worked extensively on the finer details and nuances of their performances in order to make them convincing and rich sonic worlds,


105 See sleeve notes to Minnesang und Spruchdichtung.


109 Examples in the accompanying notes to the recordings include: “Walther’s Palästinalied is accompanied here in the southern, Arabic style, while the accompaniment to his Under der Linde is northern.” Minnesang und Spruchdichtung. Souvent souspire is described as the “basis for an instrumental improvisation in the Southern style of Provence” (das Stück wurde hier einbezogen als Grundlage für die Instrumentalimprovisation im Stil des Südens (Provence)) on Studio der frühen Musik, Weltliche Musik um 1300: Le Jeu de Robin et Marion, Libre Vermell, u.a., Musik und ihre Zeit, Telefunken ‘Das alte Werk’ SAWT 9504-A, 1966, 33⅓ rpm. “The music of the Italian circle around Mastino and the French around Charles d’Anjou, King of the two Sicilies, belong to the Mediterranean cultural sector, while the English pieces originate from the northern cultural heritage. This is very significant, for these two cultural streams differ considerably”, as taken from the notes to Musik der Spie elleute: Musik of the Minstrels: Musique de Ménestrels.
worlds that felt authentic to audiences. This clarifies why the Arabo-Andalusian nūba was such a ripe source for exploitation, providing as it does an actual genuine stylistic world for the Studio to inhabit. Connect this to the way in which audiences made assumptions about improvisation due to the “Arabic” flavour of what they heard, and improvisation becomes a necessary adjunct to the Studio’s “southern Arabic style”.

Underlying all three reasons I have given above, however, is something that seems obvious but is important to emphasise. The Studio did not improvise quite simply because they were unable to. They did not have the language, the formulas or musical sonic world within which this would have been possible for them. In fact, they were responsible for creating that world from scratch. As I have demonstrated, Binkley understood the need for this definition of style in a sonic sense. To corroborate my theory, with reference to the jazz community, Berliner describes in detail that total immersion in the sounds of a musical style is a prerequisite for being able to develop an ability to improvise.110

Jones’ definition of the group’s practice as “written out improvisation” might seem contradictory, but it helps to confirm that the Studio were definitely intending to create the impression of improvisation.111 The effects were powerful enough to convince a lot of people. Young confided that he had “always thought it was ironic, because that was one of the things for which they were the most famous; their interpretation of troubadour* [song], always with the obligatory prelude which everyone always understood as being improvised.”112 (emphasis mine)

How Binkley understood what the ensemble were doing

In seeking to understand more about how Binkley might have conceptualised the Studio’s and specifically his own performance in A chantar, it is possible to turn to his 1977 article on performing


110 Paul Berliner, Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapters 1, 2 and 4 in particular. It is important to note that there is no evidence at all that Binkley was aiming to emulate jazz in his production of fake improvisations, and Jones strongly denied that Binkley was ever interested in popular culture either, although Haines, Leech-Wilkinson and Young comment on the connection they see between the Studio’s stylistic choices and the 1960s trend for all things ethnic, pointing to the Beatles’ in India, or Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones in Morocco. Sterling Jones, interview by the author about Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik, Munich, Germany, 16–17 January 2016; Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance, Musical Performance and Reception (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 97–98; Haines, ‘The Arabic Style of Performing Medieval Music’, 371; Young, Interview, 2015. See also Kailan Rubinoff, ‘A Revolution in Sheep’s Wool Stockings: Early Music and “1968”’, in Music and Protest in 1968, ed. Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton, Music since 1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 237–54, for more on how the revolutionary and counter-cultural zeitgeist impacted differently on different early music performers during the 1960s.

111 Jones, Interview, 2016.

112 Young, Interview, 2015.
monophonic medieval repertoire. This pedagogical article, which in some ways can be read as an apologia for the Studio’s work, includes discussion of many of the additions that the Studio used to make their performances of medieval song and dance so compelling. As well as interludes, postludes and accompanying, Binkley classified different types of prelude. He illustrates some with the musical notation of actual preludes that the Studio performed. The first type is a simple signal, a short prelude to announce that some music is about to happen. He compares this to later preludes from the Petrucci lute books. A second type is inextricably associated with a particular song because it quotes material from it. Neither of these appear to be the case in *A chantar*.*\(^ {113}\)\

The other two possible types are what Binkley describes as a ‘character’ prelude or a “conceptual prelude”. A ‘character’ prelude will “portray the dramatic development suggested by the text”, an opportunity for ingenuity on the part of the instrumentalist because the pitches are not tied to the melody of the following song.*\(^ {114}\) The conceptual prelude will be of considerable length to allow for musical ideas to be attached to “abstract qualities” such as emotions or ideas like mourning or evil. Interestingly, he adds that this kind of prelude “might be completely improvised or partly pre-composed, but it is not likely to be composed in detail”.*\(^ {115}\) It is possible to interpret the lute prelude in terms of the development of some of the emotions of the text as it develops through the song:

Strophe 1 The *domna* feels “deceived and betrayed” – a quiet turn around the note A including B♭;

Strophe 2 The *amics* is “haughty” – stronger sounding notes with more tremolo;

Strophe 3 The *domna* feels “astonished” and “grieves” – fast rising notes for astonishment, quieter slower notes encompassing a minor third for grieving;

Strophe 4 Both the *domna* and the *amics* are “noble”, the “finest” – well articulated rising phrase from the home pitch of D up to A;

Strophe 5 Her “worth” and “faithful heart” is repaid with “cruel and harsh” treatment – a repeated rising phrase to demonstrate worth, the repeated D to show faithfulness.

Of course, this is an entirely subjective interpretation of the progression of this prelude. Without being able to ask Binkley, it is not possible to determine definitively whether the prelude to *A chantar*.

\(^{114}\) Binkley, 34.
\(^{115}\) Binkley, 34.
chantar was created in such a way that it fits into one of the prelude classifications about which Binkley wrote.

One other type of prelude is dismissed by Binkley as being irrelevant to Western musical practice:

The final type of prelude must be regarded as appended to the major types. I no longer feel that this type is likely to have had prominence except possibly in highly organized musical institutions, for example in Spain in the thirteenth century, or in connection with the sequence* or lai* repertory. This prelude is divided into two sections, the one in free rhythm, the other metrical. In the free section is placed a figure of some kind which can be expanded, which never returns and is constantly changing, an endless melody. The metrical section introduces the rhythm to be employed in the song. Nothing beyond tonality and meter associates this prelude with any piece, for it is there to provide the instrumentalist with an outlet for his skill without submitting to the demands of the piece to follow, never looking back at what went before. This is what I feel is out of tune with Western practice, where the melodies are short and repetitive, and hence depend heavily on the disciplined nuance within a well bounded prelude to gain meaning – except of course in the sequence-lai* repertory. Where this sort of prelude is employed is Eastern practice, the context is a tradition of modal improvisation, not strophic song.116

The example of a prelude of this type given by Binkley is long and non-repetitive.117 I was unable to find a prelude performed by the Studio for a sequence* or lai* that matches this description. Even where the Studio perform a long sequence* such as Planctus David, this bipartite prelude type is not used, as preference seems to be given to the non-metrical with the rhythmic section of an instrumental introduction playing the melody of the song itself.118 Saltarello*, the first track on the album Estampie, has a prelude for two lutes which matches the two section structure, but is clearly not improvised because they play in unison in the metrical section.119 This metrical section is also very clearly linked to the melody of the Saltarello* itself which seems not to correspond to Binkley’s description which states that “Nothing beyond tonality and meter associates this prelude

116 Binkley, 35.
117 I do not believe that the example is a prelude that the Studio used in performance. Binkley, music example 21. In the published German version of Binkley, ‘Zur Aufführungspraxis’, it appears page 59.
118 This song appears on Studio der frühen Musik, Peter Abélard, Reflexe Stationen europäischer Musik, EMI 1 C 063-30 123, 1974, 33⅓ rpm.
119 Studio der frühen Musik, Estampie - Istanpitta: Instrumentalmusik des Mittelalters, Reflexe Stationen europäischer Musik, EMI 1C 063-30 122 C, 1974, 33⅓ rpm. Saltarelli* have a similar structure to sequence* and lai* in that each section is repeated twice.
with any piece”. Binkley was perhaps describing the type of prelude he knew from his contact with
Arabo-Andalusian music rather than justifying something that he himself had performed
previously with the ensemble, as seems to be the case with his descriptions of some of his other
prelude types.

Binkley is very careful in his use of the word improvisation. An early exception is from the sleeve
notes to the album *Frühe Deutsche Musik*, recorded and released very early in the group’s career,
in which he says:

The songs of the Meistersinger were probably sung without accompaniment while those of
the Minnesänger* seen [sic] usually to have been accompanied. An accompaniment to
monophonic music is necessarily improvised, and where an accompaniment is to be
employed, a decision must be reached regarding improvisatory style.120

The lack of a notated accompaniment may well have made this seem the logical conclusion; if
something is not written, it must be improvised, a common binary that is discussed in the
literature.121 Binkley’s position on this becomes more informed as his thought develops with time.
In fact, the clearest statement of Binkley’s understanding of and relationship to improvisation was
in a radio interview he gave in 1992 to John Holloway for the BBC.

Improvisation – it’s a convenient word, but it’s not the word that I like to use with regard to
this music. Improvisation implies right off the top of the head – instant composition. That
can occur if a musician is creative and has models to follow and has followed the models. In
other words, you have a model, you imitate it, and gradually you impress upon that model
your own deviation, your own musical personality, and that’s pretty much how we [the
Studio] worked. Of course, getting the model, that’s the thing. At the time we began doing
this, there were no models to follow, and we had to search out models. We would make up
models according to sort of rules – we would say, well alright, there are other places in the
world where monophonic music is played, and so let’s see how they work out
accompaniments.122

120 Studio der frühen Musik, *Frühe deutsche Musik: ‘Am Ausgang des Mittelalters’*, Kostbarkeiten aus dem
musikalischen Vermächtnis alter Meister: Gotik, Telefunken ‘Das alte Werk’ AWT 8038, 1962, Extended play 45 rpm.
121 See for example Nettl, ‘Thoughts on Improvisation’.
122 As quoted in Shull, ‘Locating the Past in the Present’, 100. A fuller version of the quote is also given in Mariani,
*Improvisation and Inventio*, 17–18.
Binkley first talks here about the kind of freeform improvisation that both Treitler and Bent criticise in the context of medieval music.\textsuperscript{123} It is clear that this concept also sits uneasily with Binkley in relation to medieval music. The issue is that improvisation requires clear models, examples of how music is made. In the case of jazz, those models have been developed over many decades and can be heard on recordings that young musicians refer to and emulate. In another case, that of Baroque continuo improvisation, the models are provided by tutor books containing notated musical examples of different progressions. Neither of these possible sources were available for Binkley’s musical reference.

The conclusion to which Binkley comes, and which we have seen here, is that the rules that need to be applied to the creation of a believable style for performing medieval music could be inspired by rules from living traditions of monophonic music. Mariani locates Binkley’s main contribution to the performance of medieval music precisely here, in his “recognition that a living musical process can serve as a model for music of the past that shared those processes, and that the shared process supports the historical credibility of the end product even if it cannot provide complete historical accuracy.”\textsuperscript{124}

**Conclusion: Faking improvisation using geographically recognisable sound signifiers**

In this chapter I have examined the Studio’s words and performances to shed light on my second research question: How have other participants in the medieval music revival improvised? The group found a successful, musically gratifying and convincing way to perform monophonic song that included Arabo-Andalusian elements, as evidenced in their interpretation of *A chantar*. This conformed to Binkley’s idea of a Southern style appropriate for music from the South of Europe including Spain, France and Italy, a deeply imagined, if conjectural, historical sound. Defined by critics in various ways including oriental or Arabic, the style’s identity was easily conflated together with improvisation as a musical generative technique. While Binkley was careful in his use of the word improvisation, it was a straightforward conclusion for audiences and critics to hear the non-metrical elements of a Studio performance and the ever changing accompaniments, and assume they were spontaneously created. Not only was the link between non-Western musics and improvisation well established in popular consciousness but also the knowledge that musical

\textsuperscript{123} Treitler, ‘Speaking of the I-Word’; Margaret Bent, “’Resfacta’ and “Cantare Super Librum’”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36, no. 3 (1 October 1983), 371–91. See also Chapter III for the discomfort several of my respondents expressed about the term.

\textsuperscript{124} Mariani, *Improvisation and Inventio*, 20.
notation contained only limited information encouraged the idea that the performers were adding to it in some way in order to create valid interpretations. The validity of the performances was judged both in relation to sounding believably historical and to being an interesting and worthwhile listening experience for a modern audience. This conclusion adds more detail to the story I tell in Chapter III answering my research questions about how and why improvisation became an accepted element in the practice of the historical performance of medieval music. Improvisation was associated with the exciting and popular performances of a majorly successful early pioneering ensemble, who also went on to teach generations of younger medieval music performers.

For the Studio, including fake improvisation was a way to evoke and emphasise the extra-European living tradition that they used as a model, the Moroccan nūba. In Shull’s ethnographic article, two of his musician case studies justify the use of living traditions as bringing an indefinable extra something to their performances.125 For Joel Cohen it is about making the music “alive”, to “give an edge” to their performances.126 For Bagby, examining how different cultures approach the singing of epic poetry can ensure his performances have “soul”.127 Angela Mariani recounted to Shull how she had become familiar with the centuries long tradition of Irish sean-nós singing by listening, and how this had enabled her to have a new perspective on a piece of medieval Irish plainchant that she was performing.128 It therefore seems feasible to imagine that a similar reason lay behind the Studio’s imitation of improvisation; Binkley was trying to ensure the group’s performances were alive and had soul. Young in fact argues that medieval musicians in the 1970s were trying to find some kind of authenticity, and Arabo-Andalusian music was seen as a means to do that: “That was going to be how we could really understand and get inside a kind of a more authentic version of medieval music, or at least monophonic music, [it] was going to be by doing that [ie involving the sounds and styles of Arabic or North African music].”129

The improvisation had to be fake because the Studio did not have any medieval musical models in which they could immerse themselves sonically. They had to create their own sound style from the evidence of music making held in silent manuscripts. This was a mammoth task and left little space or time for them to then learn how to improvise in that style. In addition, their musical training

125 Shull, ‘Locating the Past in the Present’.
126 Shull, 94 & 104.
127 Shull, 95.
128 Shull, 103.
129 Robert Crawford Young, interview by the author about improvisation, Basel, Switzerland, 9-11 February 2020.
had been of the sort that Derek Bailey concludes produces “specifically non-improvisors, musicians rendered incapable of attempting improvisation”.\textsuperscript{130} In order for improvisation to be an achievable goal for medieval musicians in the later twentieth and twenty-first century, the model creation that the Studio achieved was an absolutely necessary step. Their attention to the detail of the sound worlds they built meant that a new generation of curious musicians could listen to and explore new musical horizons that would otherwise have been inaccessible. This would start to make improvisation a more approachable endeavour for the musicians who followed, including the two who feature as the next links in the pedagogical chain that I am investigating in Chapters V and VI.

Having seen how the Studio’s recordings opened up the way for other musicians to follow, some of whom trained with the members of the group in Europe or North America, in my next chapter I look at how one of Binkley’s students focused on a historical validity that was completely founded in medieval source material. Young developed improvisatory lute performance practice that thoroughly embodied medieval ideas. He can be seen to reject the deep imaginative work of Binkley in his own search for a profoundly historical path to justifiable, performer-controlled creativity.

Chapter V: Crawford Young – Memory and Creativity in Che Fa la Ramacina 2012-2017
Crawford Young, born in 1952, is a world-renowned medieval plectrum lute player, as well as a musicologist with research interests in music from the fourteenth century, lute playing and organology. He taught at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis from 1982 until his retirement in 2017. He founded Ensemble PAN (Project Ars Nova) (recordings released between 1985 and 1995) and led Ensemble Ferrara (recordings released between 1988 and 2010, with most activity before 1999 and one single further release in 2010 after three recording sessions). He taught me improvisation when I was a student at the Schola (2000-2003). We focused on learning by memory the series of 46 pitches known as La Spagna* or Tenore del re di spagna and then an anonymous upper voice to go with the Tenor known as Falla con misuras. ¹ As students, we then used this as a model for new, written-out compositions that had been carefully reflected upon. The idea was finally to be able to improvise in the same style.

In this chapter, I will examine how Young’s early exposure to medieval music and studies nourished his ideal of the creation of a unique and idiosyncratic identity for his lute playing and teaching that was inspired by his decision to focus on historical justifiability. The historical models that Young used include notated music for instruments from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, written treatises on music by the theorist Johannes Tinctoris, as well as visual iconography. These sources all fed into the physical technique that Young used to create sound on his lute, as well as the type of music he chose to perform. Thanks to my privileged access to a number of recordings in which Young performs solo, I have been able to observe in detail how Young constructed his changing performances of a single, identifiable “piece”, a piece given the same name and using as a basis the same musical material. I have done this through comparing his interpretations as they varied over time. In February 2020, I conducted interviews with Young during which he talked to me about improvisation and described how he puts together a solo performance. We also listened together to the recordings of his performances in my corpus. This data has enriched my understanding and enabled me to highlight his own understanding of his creative process, what improvisation means for him, and how his critical facility sustains the continued advancement of his musical ideas.

Young used the limited musical material at his disposal to create varied two-part counterpoints as well as performing the melodies in unadorned or ornamented monophonic versions on occasion.

¹ For more information on the Tenor, see footnote 78 in Chapter III. Falla con misuras is found in Perugia, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 431 (G20), fol. 95v-96r, and an edition can be found in Manfred F. Bukofzer, ‘A Polyphonic Basse Dance of the Renaissance’, in Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Music (New York: JM Dent & Sons, 1950), 190–216.
He puts whole sections together in different orders, changing the number of times a section is repeated, or its position in the whole. He inserts quotations of other musical material, including previously created solo material that is not based on the same melodies that he uses in the main body of his solos. Within the sections or modules, there is a spectrum of stability which means that some are more likely to be repeated more or less exactly than others and some are liable to much higher variation in small details including rhythmic nuance and additional ornamental notes.

In his words, improvisation can be thought of as “memorised composition” and as a “language of clichés, a language of cells or syllables or ... musical words”. I believe these to be two separate ideas which correlate to the two styles I found in the corpus of solos I investigated. On the one hand “memorised composition” can be found in the more modular section that is heavily reliant on counterpoints that Young added to the basic musical material and then committed to memory. On the other hand, clichés, cells, syllables and musical words seem to be a better terminology for the freer sections in which Young utilises his knowledge of fifteenth century counterpoint and models to extend sections, increase drama and tension, explore the range of the lute or transition from one melody to the next.

Since 2007 Young has been working with the Italian ensemble Micrologus, with whom I too have worked since 2002. The group gave me access to eight recordings of Young’s solo lute performances of a piece called Che fa la ramacina from the period 2012-2017. Seven of them were totally live captures of concerts as recorded by Patrizia Bovi, the director of the ensemble Micrologus, using portable digital technology. The eighth is the commercially edited and released version on the 2014 album Carnivalesque, which was recorded in December 2012, a few months after the concert premiere of the project in Antwerp (August 2012).² For full transcriptions of all eight performances, please see Appendix 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Occasion</th>
<th>Referred to as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antwerp</td>
<td>31 August 2012</td>
<td>Festival Laus Polyphoniae</td>
<td>2012 Antwerp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spello</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>Recording of commercial CD</td>
<td>2012 Spello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribeauvillé</td>
<td>6 October 2013</td>
<td>Festival de Musique Ancienne de Ribeauvillé</td>
<td>2013 Ribeauvillé</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Micrologus, Carnivalesque: Sex, Lies and... Musical Tales, recorded at the Centro Studi Adolfo Broegg, Spello, Italy, 28 November – 2 December 2012, Micrologus 0027.14.1, 2014, compact disc.
Table V.1 lists the performances that form my corpus, which I will explore in detail after first considering Young’s biography and the influences, ideals, skills and knowledge that he brought to his performances. Young’s background and learning experiences inform his whole approach to playing the lute and for this reason I feel it is important to discuss some of his personal story prior to examining his solo performances in more detail.

Before specialising in the medieval lute, Young had been accepted at the New England Conservatory in Boston to study as a classical guitarist, having played pop and rock guitar before that. During a class in historical performance, he was exposed to medieval music and recalls with great clarity the moment when he first heard a recording by the Studio der frühen Musik:

I had a class in historical performance that was taught by someone named Ken Roth, oboe instructor I think, and he played some very obscure recordings, including the *Musik der Troubadour* [sic] recording by Thomas Binkley…³ In one song in particular, *A chantar*, the singer Andrea von Ramm was being accompanied by Binkley on the oud. And it sounded very, very improvised; it sounded very ethnic; it sounded like an oud, not really like a lute. In other words, it was played with a plectrum, and it had a kind of tubby sound with middle Eastern flavour. So that really caught my attention because it was quite different than

---

everything else we were listening to and doing up to that point. It seemed quite exotic. Then I explored a little bit, looked around what other recordings this group had done and saw that they had done quite a few.

And I think it was the following year I spent a lot more time listening to their recording of music by Francesco Landini. Some other ones as well but especially their Estampie recording was really a seminal moment in my study. I understood that it had been recorded at the Schola Cantorum in Basel where Binkley was teaching and where there were a lot of American music students in his class. Some of those people I sort of knew, they were friends of friends a little bit. So I became very interested in the work of the Studio and in trying myself to play medieval music, and also very much taken with the idea of improvising, because I had grown up doing that in rock music, pop music. Also I got interested in jazz and was learning bits and pieces around that and I had also started to listen a bit to ethnic music, in particular Classical Persian, Middle Eastern oud players, Egyptian, Syrian, different ones.

This explains how Young came to develop an interest in medieval music because of a specific recording and the novelty of the improvised, exotic sound that Thomas Binkley created on the oud. The encounter led him to find out more about the Studio and to discover that Binkley was a teacher, which attracted Young to arrange to go and study with him in 1977 when Binkley gave a class at Stanford University.

Young described some of his experiences as a student of Binkley and told me in detail about Binkley’s dismissive and sometimes belligerent attitude, which he displayed towards the questions Young posed him. He depicted Binkley’s pedagogical style as challenging:

[Binkley] was never at a loss for words. That was part of his pedagogical technique, to keep you on your toes, and to make you question things. And you know, that’s certainly a valid technique. It can either completely turn you off, and you just run the other way and you don’t come back ever again, or it might really stimulate you to search further, even if you

---

6 Robert Crawford Young, interview by the author about improvisation, Basel, Switzerland, 9-11 February 2020.
7 Young’s experience is not unusual. Various former students have commented on the humiliating experience of being “Binked”. For example, Jonathan Shull, ‘Locating the Past in the Present: Living Traditions and the Performance of Early Music’, Ethnomusicology Forum 15, no. 1 (June 2006), 87–111.
take the view of ‘I can’t believe that that’s true’. And then [you] want to prove that it’s not true and you go out and look at things.

Going out and looking at things was exactly what Young did. In the course of his research he discovered, in his own words, that “You cannot trust what anyone is telling you.”

This also turned out to be true for other aspects of the Studio’s recordings that had initially attracted Young. He expressed particular keenness on, interest in and attachment to the album Estampie* which features untexted pieces, mostly istanpitte (sing. istanpitta*) which are commonly thought of as a kind of dance, from the early fifteenth-century Italian manuscript, London, British Library, MS Additional 29987.\(^8\) I asked Young if he recallred listening to other recordings of these pieces, which are some of the most frequently recorded in the history of medieval music recording. He told me:

I don’t remember specifically if I had ever heard one before on another record by another group. I may have heard one, but nothing grabbed me like [the Studio recording]. Again because it sounded, it did sound improvised, especially the opening preludes, they sounded absolutely improvised. Then of course after talking with people who had studied in Basel with Thomas Binkley and then doing so myself, then I realised they weren’t improvised at all. Every single note of every one of those was composed ... anyone who had been through the classic Binkley Vorspiel (prelude) training was taught to be very critical of something which was not... which was a bit vague or a bit wandering or a bit unclear modally or without a kind of build up to it, you know, to kind of force the other musicians to make an entrance finally at the end of the prelude... Binkley had a definite approach, he had a very clear approach to what he thought should happen. There had to be a build up, it had to be dramatic, it had to tell some kind of a story, it had to follow a certain line of development.

The disappointment that accompanied the meeting with Binkley and then the realisation that the Studio were not improvising shaped Young’s whole approach to playing the medieval lute. In

contrast with what Young felt about the untrustworthiness of Binkley and the Studio and other lute players in the late 1970s, Young’s approach focuses heavily on historical justifiability and on knowing the sources while equally wanting to distinguish himself as a unique practitioner with his own individual, if historically informed style. I will pick out the evidence for this in what Young said to me during our interview and demonstrate further with my analysis that elements of his solos are clearly influenced by his understanding of lute playing in the fifteenth century.

When Young defined improvisation for me in the context of medieval music, he emphasised the importance of style:

> So ... we could say, well actually, what is improvisation? And I would say very simply, it is memorised composition. It is a language of clichés, a language of cells or syllables or words if you will, musical words, you know, that can be assembled into a sentence or into a phrase. And this can, just like speaking, this is done at the will of and at the expression of the one who’s doing it. It is done spontaneously, it is done extemporaneously, but it is not simply done with a complete void, or out of a complete void of artistic language. It must happen within a style and, I would argue, a very clear style, a very clearly defined style, within very clear boundaries, clear limits etc. But that means that any artist or musician working within a style, whether it’s Machaut or for that matter Bach, then they’re able to do their music in that way. And that’s where we then come into a kind of a clash or bump up against this common understanding of improvising, because if you say to most people ‘well Machaut could improvise a song or could improvise a song also with counterpoint’, they think of a sort of modern free style improvisation that really might be at odds conceptually with what they imagine he was doing. For me it isn’t, again it’s simply, if you are completely inside a style of music and if it’s his music, who else is more inside it than he? ...

> But yeah, I don’t see, to go back to the specific pieces, the estampies*, I don’t see them as improvised in that moment without any prior study of a very, very specific style. Conceived, something, in other words, that had been worked out at some point before. And again, how do you define ‘worked out’? Phrases or sentences or cells... and maybe then indeed assembled in that way in that moment.

The repetition of the words “very clear” serves to emphasise how important this aspect of improvisation is for Young, and to differentiate what he wants to achieve from a “modern free style improvisation” in which the important thing might be to express an individual’s emotion or
their personal genius. Young actually describes a performance by two students in Basel who used the Italian *istanpitte* as bases for improvisation: “they basically were following an interpretation which took each of the written pieces as a point of departure for real time extemporisation, in a very spirited lively energetic way, but a way which for me had little to do with the style shown in the actual written part of the pieces. And I felt... this is not these pieces, how the pieces historically were ever done, this is not what they were in that culture.” He went on to clarify:

If someone has tried to improvise, in other words, a modern early music performer has tried to improvise [in the style of the *istanpitte*], it has never been [worked out within a clearly defined style and limits]. It quickly becomes something very, very free and something much less formal and where one gets the feeling, you just shut your eyes, you defer to your, you know, genius within to express some kind of emotion or give expression to some kind of feeling that you’re trying to convey. And ... the sincerity of that is what people then listening to it maybe might be actually more receiving than a convincing statement of the style itself... They were exercising their rights to be geniuses so to speak. And the audience loved it, I have to say there was very enthusiastic applause. It wasn’t coming from me, although I think they’re both great musicians and good friends, but I wasn’t applauding. What I was looking for in the performance would have been a convincing stylistic answer, elaboration, extension whatever you want to call it, rather than simply deferring to genius and I’ll just close my eyes, and my fingers will take over, and whatever comes out will be valid and legit because it’s my heart, it’s my heart and soul. I think the whole exercise of studying historical music is to understand the style of each piece that one is studying and to internalise it and make it one’s own by understanding the style.

Again here, Young stressed the importance for him of playing in a stylistically historical way, in a way that is historically convincing. In the last sentence, it is clear that Young believes understanding the style is the only valid goal to have if you are playing medieval, or any other historical music. This has nothing to do with individual creativity or inspiration; each note should be justifiable from a historical source. When describing his teaching, he confirmed this expectation also for his students:

It’s just following the old teaching maxim where you tell your students if they want to play or sing in some style or if they want to make a composition on paper or something, whatever they’re doing ... if there’s something that sounds funny, that sounds out of a
certain style... I mean first of all, when they do their thing, the listener should be able to recognise very clearly, what they’re trying to do. What is the style? What is the composer? What’s the intention behind it? But then if there's anything in the piece which sounds very strange, then you immediately bring up the question, what's the model for that passage? And they have to be able to point to a model that fits what they’re trying to do and if they can show that, then all is good.

This is relevant to Young’s improvisation in the corpus of performances I will discuss, because this aesthetic approach frames all the musical decisions he made in creating those performances. His words bring to light the fact that his aim was to make a stylistically appropriate performance for a solo lute player in the specific milieu of Northern Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the clearly defined historical context of the programme within which his solo appeared.

Historical sources and models for Young’s improvisatory activity

Some key sources that are necessary for a musician to be able to understand the style of a particular temporal and geographic environment are the musical manuscripts from that time and place. Young told me how he had spent time playing through the entire contents of the manuscript known as the Buxheim Organ Book (referred to by Young simply as “Buxheim”). This important manuscript from southern Germany or Switzerland, dated to around 1460, is one of the largest sources of medieval instrumental music and as such was obviously invaluable to Young’s search for historically justifiable style. It contains music notated in a tablature format, with mensural notation for the upper voice and letter notation for the lower voice or voices, a convenient way to enable a solo player to read polyphony. It is generally thought to be a source of keyboard music. Young discussed how it contains examples of many different styles and kinds of pieces. The most prominent style he described as “typewriter music” with constant florid rapid notes in the upper voice accompanied by one or two slower moving voices. He went on to say:

11 For an example, see piece number 205, Was ich begynn 6 sive 12 notarum, Wallner, Das Buxheimer Orgelbuch, 38:264–65. This style is associated with the lute virtuoso Pietrobono, see footnote 36 below, and is common in the lute books of Francesco Spinacino, Intabulatura de Lauto, Libro primo e secondo, Venice, Petrucci, 1507.
But then you have [pieces] that are also not doing that, and they’re more about counterpoint, using different rhythmic values in all the voices, not just longer values below and these short values, incessant values above. *Pulcherrima [de virgine]* is a piece like this. It’s in two parts and a lot of the pieces in Buxheim lend themselves to being played on the 5-course lute in terms of the range, in terms of the low notes, sometimes they go a bit lower but a lot of them don’t. C could be then the lowest note so that works on a lute. But I was always looking for pieces that worked on lute in Buxheim... and *Pulcherrima* is one of those. Absolutely.

I recall from my studies in Basel that Young recommended this piece, Buxheim number 228, *Pulcherrima de Virgine* (see Figure V.1), as a good example of fifteenth century style two-part polyphony.\(^{12}\) A simple exercise Young proposed as a pedagogical tool was to analyse the intervals between the two voices numerically as a means of understanding the stylistic use of consonance and dissonance.

![Figure V.1: Pulcherrima de virgine, Buxheim, with harmonic analysis (edition by Wallner)](image)

The moments of dissonance are rare, the use of parallel sixths and tenths is widespread, and every cadence goes from the sixth to the octave, a typical cadence progression, which can be expressed simply as 6-8. In this cadence, the upper voice, or Superius, uses the pitch progression of 7-8 (for example, in bar 4 this is B-C, in bar 8 this is F#-G) and the Tenor uses the pitch progression 2-1 (for example, in bar 4 this is D-C, in bar 8 this is A-G). There does not appear to be any other source for

---

this piece, although the title suggests it was based on pre-existent vocal material, rather than being a free composition like a prelude, a type of piece that we also find in Buxheim.\footnote{See piece number 194, \textit{Praeambulum super C}, one of 16 pieces called \textit{Praeambulum} in Buxheim; Wallner, \textit{Das Buxheimer Orgelbuch} (1958), 38:257.}

Young also mentioned the two-voice piece by Jacob Obrecht (1457-1505), \textit{Nec michi, nec tibi}. It seems likely that this piece was intended to be played instrumentally, hence its interest to Young.\footnote{\textit{Grove Music Online}, s.v. ‘Obrecht (Hobrecht), Jacob’ by Rob C. Wegman, accessed 14 September 2021, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. Although the piece appears with three voices in four of the six sources, there is a convincing argument to view it as being originally a duo. See Jacob Obrecht, \textit{Secular works and textless compositions}, ed. Eric Jas and Leon Kessels, New Obrecht Edition 17 (Utrecht: Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1997), lxxv.} He explained that this two-part piece “is great for sequences with chains of sixths”. In actual fact, there are fewer pure chains of sixths than chains of repeating sequences of intervals that can be clearly heard as ascending and descending patterns of different lengths. One sequence consists simply of the intervals 3-6 repeating as it rises in pitch. Others are longer and more varied, sometimes in a pattern of up to seven two-part chords, see for example the pattern 5-4-3-3-5-6-6 in lines 2-3 on page 1 of my edition (see \textit{Figure V.2}). Taken as a whole, this piece consists of sections where cadences occur (which have their own logic and patterns) sandwiched between these interval sequences that create a distinctive balanced and flowing shape, rising and falling in pitch.
Here the piece is given the title of *Helas*. 

---

15 Here the piece is given the title of *Helas*. 

---

Figure V.2: Jacob Obrecht Nec mihi nec tibi, from Perugia, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 431 (G 20) fol. 90v-91r.
Young also mentioned a third specific model: “There's another one that I sometimes have used bits and pieces of. It's a Francesco da Milano [ricercar*], very archaic sounding work of his, because it starts on a fifth actually, very old fashioned. It has chains of sixths. Some people might think it's not by him. I'm not sure either, but it's attributed to him. It's definitely old fashioned.”
Francesco da Milano (1497-1543) was thought of very highly by his contemporaries. More of his music is extant than that of any other lutenist of the sixteenth century with almost 100 ricercars* attributed to him. He is known for the introduction of more imitative technique into this genre. On checking which precise ricercar* he meant, Young indicated that it is number 85 in the collected edition of da Milano’s works edited by Arthur Ness.

On closer inspection, I have found several ways in which Young includes elements in his performances that are drawn from these three models.

\[\text{Figure V.3: Comparison of models with Young’s performances}\]

In both these performances by Young, there is a sequence which includes a fluctuation between a fifth and a sixth, either descending (as in 2014 Morez) or ascending (as in 2016 Mexico). The extracts come from freer moments in the performance which are not directly related to the melodic materials that Young was given to use as a basis for his solo. In the Obrecht extract, we find the same pattern of sixth to fifth, but with interpolated alternative intervals which give a different shape to the flow. Young in fact extends the sequence in 2016 Mexico by adding an


octave on occasion, giving a longer pattern of 6-5-6-5-6-5-6-8.

Chains of thirds appear in both the Obrecht and in Young’s performances. Here we can see the coda that Young added in 2016 Mexico, which consists of several series of descending thirds leading to a series of descending sixths and the typical 6-8 cadence.

The use of a number of consecutive sixths, which is present towards the end of the previous example, 2016 Mexico, is found also in 2017 Perm. Francesco da Milano’s Ricercar 85 includes similar figuration at cadential points.
In *Pulcherrima*, a repeated cadence figure follows the pattern 7-6-8-7-6-8. This is the closest example I found to the very extended cadential pattern that Young uses of a long string of 7-6 movements descending towards the goal pitch, here in 2014 Morez over the course of a whole octave. In fact, the first octave in *Pulcherrima* (7-6-8-7-6-8) is a result of an extra movement in the lower voice and the cadence would have been just as valid and effective without that extra tenor note; this would result in a cadence of 7-6-7-6-8.

Not only do Young’s performances have many similarities with these three models, models specifically mentioned by him, but his models also largely follow the recommendations given by the fifteenth-century music theorist, Johannes Tinctoris [c 1430-1511?], another source that Young told me he had frequently consulted in order to create his individual but historically informed lute playing style. He recounted that when he first moved to Basel to begin his teaching job at the Schola Cantorum, he lived with Richard Erig who had a collection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century treatises:

[I was] thrust into the position of teaching ear training at the Schola and literally [made] it up as I went along, because the ear training person before me was just an alien to me, light years away ... singing chant, you know, and he was doing something with improvisation along those lines. But I couldn't have been further away from that. And so I surrounded myself with 15th century counterpoint treatises starting with Tinctoris. And I remember that first year living out in an apartment in Therwil with Richard Erig. And Richard Erig had an incredible collection of fifteenth and sixteenth century treatises and editions. I mean astonishing, really amazing. ... He was very interested, deeply interested in all sources. ... I had my copy of Tinctoris that I looked at every day out there, and my simplex note against note exercises in consonances...

The particular work that Young was looking at was the *Liber de arte contrapuncti*, dated 11 October 1477 and the broadest of the extant treatises.¹⁸

Polk examines the question of whether instrumentalists in the fifteenth century were skilled in counterpoint in his book, *German instrumental music of the late Middle Ages: players, patrons, and performance practice*.\(^{19}\) Although the evidence he discusses is indirect, its widespread provenance and the types of evidence he brings together allow him to conclude that instrumentalists understood both the function of a particular voice part in polyphony and the basics of counterpoint. Contemporary repertory and style were also familiar, with a large quantity of the former being held in the memories of instrumentalists.\(^{20}\) Referring to the period 1470-1520, exactly the time span which is of relevance also for Young’s solo lute performances under investigation, Polk affirms that the best instrumentalists were able to participate fully in contemporary musical life, playing in idioms associated with instruments as well as creating polyphony in the learned Franco-Flemish style of the day.\(^{21}\) Tinctoris’ treatise was relevant to Young because it stems from a time period of interest to him and provides a practical guide to the musical theory that can be seen to apply in the above models. It is even more relevant to my entire topic because of two contrasting terms found in book II, chapter 10 of the *Liber: resfacta* and *cantare super librum*. These terms are used by Tinctoris when he talks about how counterpoint is made, either written or in the mind (“scripto vel mente”). The written kind, he says, is also known as *resfacta* and in this sort of counterpoint all voices have to be consonant together. In the other sort of counterpoint, which Tinctoris tells us is known in a vulgar fashion as *cantare super librum*, the voices had to be consonant with the Tenor but not necessarily with each other.\(^{22}\) Polk summarises what earlier scholars had come to understand by the two terms. He agrees with Ernest Ferand, the early scholar of improvisation, that *cantare super librum*, using the same rules as *resfacta* as outlined by Tinctoris, was counterpoint that was created extemporaneously.\(^{23}\) He comments that: “this distinction [between an improvised performance made by “singing on the book” or *cantare super librum* and a composition or *resfacta*] would have been one of quality, not necessarily one of process”.\(^{24}\)


\(^{20}\) Polk, 163–66.

\(^{21}\) Polk, 166.

\(^{22}\) For the Latin text, I have referred to Margaret Bent, “Resfacta” and “Cantare Super Librum”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36, no. 3 (1 October 1983), 372–73. Polk provides a summary of its meaning, see Polk, *German Instrumental Music*, 166.


\(^{24}\) Polk, *German Instrumental Music*, 167.
Having clarified that Tinctoris’ expected his counterpoint rules to be applied both in extemporaneous playing or singing and in pieces that were fully worked out before the moment of performance, it is worth briefly outlining what those rules consisted of, especially as Young told me how involved he was in trying to assimilate them, playing the exercises daily. These “simplex, note against note” exercises are in fact the fundamental basis of all fifteenth century harmony. They assume the presence of a given voice, a cantus firmus, to which a musician would add a further voice in counterpoint, or “punctus contra punctum”. Tinctoris explained verbally in a set of eight rules, which Polk summarises as follows:

1. Only consonances are allowed.
2. The opening and final intervals must be perfect consonances, while the penultimate must be imperfect.
3. No parallel perfect consonances should occur; imperfect consonances can proceed in parallel motion although there are some exceptions.
4. Contrary or stepwise motion of the voices is preferred.\(^{25}\)

Young follows Tinctoris to the same extent as the fifteenth-century original models he cites.

\(^{25}\) Polk, 170. The eight rules are found at the start of the third part of the Liber, see ‘Tinctoris, Johannes: Liber de Arte Contrapuncti, Liber Tertius’.
The extract shown in Figure V.7, taken from 2012 Antwerp, has every dissonance highlighted. In blue are very swift passing note dissonances lasting a quarter of the value of a beat (here the beat is of minim value) and never appearing on a metrical stress. Passing notes that move as here by step were allowed to occur at any time by Tinctoris. In yellow I have marked where dissonances are used that sometimes last longer than this. This is possible because the pitch in the upper voice that is highlighted prepares the dissonance and the dissonance can then last as long as that preparation lasted. This is detailed by Tinctoris in his comprehensive rules for dissonance which guide both where they can appear within the rhythmic metrical scheme as well as how long they can last.26 The overwhelming impression in Young’s performance is of consonance, just as Tinctoris recommends.

Of more interest to Young than the verbalised rules Tinctoris provides were the comprehensive musical examples that Tinctoris gives to show how the added voice should move from one interval to another, depending on how the cantus firmus behaved.27 As Polk points out, these examples are very comprehensive and require “repetitive drills” which he considered might be thought of today as tedious.28 However, Tinctoris’ examples of note against note, consonance progressions go in a logical and repetitive order according to how the cantus firmus moves, while slowly exploring the consonance possibilities against every cantus firmus movement that can be found. This catalogue of interval progressions, each of which consists of two consonances, is summarised by Berger who explains that its rational order would have been an aid to memorising, a task that ultimately led to fluency in both composition and improvisation.29 It is similar to other examples of treatises and pedagogical texts from the Middle Ages such as florilegia, which are compilations of useful axioms, maxims and sayings that could provide inspiration for the creation of sermons, or arithmetical tables that would help merchants conduct complicated transactions mentally. Seen from this perspective, we can surmise that the Liber was part of the same tradition.30 While Young did not specifically mention that he memorised the Tinctoris note against note exercises, the daily routine he describes of playing through them as well as his emphasis during my classes with him

26 Polk, German Instrumental Music, 194–97.
28 Polk, German Instrumental Music, 170.
30 For detailed discussion of this, see Anna Maria Busse Berger, Medieval Music and the Art of Memory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 47-84.
on memorising the *Spagna* Tenor melody and the counterpoint of *Falla con misuras*, a fifteenth-century exemplary *Spagna* model, both suggest that memorisation was an outcome he looked for.

It is clear that Young was following historically justifiable routes in terms of the kind of counterpoint he created. The evidence for this can be seen in my analytical examples demonstrating similarities between his models drawn from fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century music and his performances. It is also found in the way that Tinctoris’ rules govern Young’s contrapuntal choices. Polk showed that instrumentalists were contrapuntally proficient at that time, so it is also congruent that Young would play using these rules. Berger’s demonstration that the note against note examples Tinctoris provides are presented in the same sort of catalogue that was typical of books which encouraged memorisation and Young’s description of how he used these exercises every day to help him develop a way to play stylistically appropriate polyphonic fifteenth-century lute suggest that he was memorising counterpoint rules in a manner that was also well known in the Middle Ages.

**Visual evidence informing Young’s performance techniques**

Young also spent time telling me about the other kinds of research he undertook in order to understand what lute playing had been like in the fifteenth century. An interest in the iconography of lute playing meant that he went to libraries and museums looking for sources from which he could draw historically founded inspiration. What he discovered was that the historical lute playing of his contemporaries in the 1970s was “completely different from what’s actually here in the visual sources. And again that was mixed in so much with modern ethnic practice, you know, modern oud playing of different countries.” He explained that he examined pictures of lute players from the fifteenth century, mentioning in particular the Ferrarese artist Cosimo Tura (before 1431-1495).³¹ He described this artist’s work as being very detailed, showing a particular hand position quite close to the bridge and the use of very thin plectra, neither of which he saw among lute players at the time. This gave him an opportunity to differentiate his playing style and develop his own idiosyncratic technique using a very thin feather plectrum, based on such historical illustrations as the Tura paintings. His playing manner was also associated for him with a different kind of sound, in his words, more focused, more pointed and precisely defined. He contrasted this with the way an oud plectrum sounds, for example. There is a depiction of this kind of plectrum

---

and hand position in a painting now in the National Gallery called The Virgin and Child Enthroned, painted in the mid-1470s by Tura (see Figure V.8).32

![Figure V.8: Detail from Cosimo Tura’s painting, The Virgin and Child Enthroned, showing plectrum and hand position of lutenist](https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/cosimo-tura-the-virgin-and-child-enthroned#)

His search in iconographical sources further reinforced his historical choices in terms of choices of repertoire. Comparing images of plucked instruments of the necked lute type from a time range covering the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, he saw that none of the lutes had frets before around 1400 but that gitterns often had frets, even in the fourteenth century.33 This led him to the conclusion that the gittern would have been used to play virtuosic diminished vocal lines of the type found, for example, in the early fifteenth-century instrumental source known as the Faenza Codex.34 The changes that occur in the visual depictions of lutenists over this time period were suggestive to Young of polyphonic performance: playing position going from standing to sitting, the addition of another string to enlarge the range of the instrument, and the addition of frets, all of which make the harmony easier to achieve in a controlled way.

---


33 Nomenclature for instruments during the Middle Ages was not standardised. By “lute” I assume an instrument where the resonator is made out of a number of ribs, and by “gittern” an instrument that has both neck and resonator carved from one block. For more information, see Grove Music Online, s.v. ‘Chordophone’ by Howard Mayer Brown and Frances Palmer, accessed 2 June 2021, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. For more detail on the lute, see Grove Music Online, s.v. ‘Lute’ by Klaus Wachsmann et al., accessed 1 September 2020, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/.

34 Faenza, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 117. Laid out in score format, it has been assumed to be a source of keyboard music although arguments have been made for other possible instrumentations including lute duos. Arguments made for the latter have been based on the ranges found in the source, possible reasons for transpositions from vocal originals and the crossings of the Tenor and Superius lines making single manual keyboard performance too tricky. See Dragan Plamenac, ed., Keyboard music of the late Middle Ages in the Codex Faenza 117, Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae 57 (Rome: Institute of Musicology, 1972). For more on the possibility of other instruments, see Timothy J. McGee, ‘Instruments and the Faenza Codex’, Early Music 14, no. 4 (1 November 1986), 480–90.
An important aspect of Young’s playing style is the way in which he mixes finger plucking with the use of a plectrum in order to achieve polyphonic playing. During our interview he outlined how he found it improbable, even unreasonable and against common sense, that at a certain point, lutenists simply dropped their plectra and started playing polyphonically with fingers. From this viewpoint, his combined technique forms a logical bridge between the monophonic solo style as evidenced in a lute player like Pietrobono and the polyphonic playing of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{35}

To confirm and strengthen his argument, again he pointed out that in a handful of paintings of lute players that he had consulted, the plectrum can be seen between thumb and first finger, while the other fingers are splayed out above the strings, sometimes with the little finger touching the top. “This also then is showing something which ... in my opinion, is not fantasy, doesn’t have to be fantasy because indeed it works very well to pluck especially the lower strings with the plectrum held like that, and then use your second finger or your third finger to pluck other strings above. And presto, all of a sudden you've got a lot of possibilities for playing three-part pieces.”

In addition to the evidence he uncovered in visual sources, the earliest lute tablatures as well as contemporary writings convinced Young that polyphonic playing by lutenists was already being heard in the mid to late fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{36} He explained to me how it is nevertheless still the case that the vast majority of commentators think lutenists only played single lines until the end of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{37} Then with the arrival of music printing in the early sixteenth century and the publication of lute books by Ottaviano Petrucci, lutenists can finally be unequivocally documented as playing three- and four-part music.\textsuperscript{38} Young described how he dug deeper, and found an eye witness report by Tinctoris who had written his most ambitiously large scale Latin treatise on music in the 1470s or 80s, \textit{De inventione et usu musice}. In it, Tinctoris attempted to uncover the


\textsuperscript{36} These arguments have already been made by Young in print. See the Introduction to Crawford Young and Martin Kirnbauer, \textit{Frühe Lautentabulaturen Im Faksimile = Early Lute Tablatures in Facsimile}, ed. Thomas Drescher, Pratica Musicale 6 (Winterthur: Amadeus, 2003). 13. Marc Lewon picked up on this area of discussion and concludes similarly that the fifteenth century was a period of transition when various technical possibilities may have been explored. Marc Lewon, ‘The Earliest Source for the Lute: The Wolfenbüttel Lute Tablature’, \textit{The Journal of the Lute Society of America} xvi (2013), 1–70. The Wolfenbüttel source is dated to around 1460.

\textsuperscript{37} As an example of this belief, see Peter Danner, ‘Before Petrucci: The Lute in the Fifteenth Century’, \textit{Journal of the Lute Society of America} V (1972), 5. Timothy McGee also dismisses the idea that the polyphonic instrumental music in the Faenza Codex might be played on a lute “because although it possessed the necessary range, it was not played polyphonically before the late fifteenth century.” McGee, ‘Instruments and the Faenza Codex’, 482.

\textsuperscript{38} The earliest printed lute tablatures are Francesco Spinacino, \textit{Intabulatura de Lauto, Libro primo e secondo} (Venice: Petrucci, 1507).
origins of music but also surveyed more generally the practices of his musical contemporaries, mentioning well known performers, both singers and instrumentalists. One passage caught Young’s attention:

Others do what is much more difficult [than play a single line], namely to play a composition alone, and most skilfully, in not only two parts, but even three or four. For example, Orbus the German or Henry [Bouclers] who was recently in the service of Charles Duke of Burgundy: the German was supereminent in playing in this way.39

Orbus is a way to refer to someone who is blind. This blind German musician is assumed to be Conrad Paumann [c 1410-1473].40 Acknowledged as a virtuosic multi-instrumentalist, during his appearance in Ferrara and Mantua in 1470 for example, he was described as playing “all sorts of instruments” (de ogne instrumontij).41 His main instruments however were the organ and lute. He is known to have been in the employ of Duke Albrecht of Bavaria in Munich from 1450 until his death.42 There is a significant body of musical work associated with Paumann and his students preserved in two of the earliest known sources containing music intended for instrumental performance, the Lochamer Liederbuch (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Mus.ms. 40613) and Buxheim, which Young specifically mentioned as a source for his lute playing style, as we have already seen.43 Here the literary evidence therefore supports Young’s choice of Buxheim as a source for his lute playing. Polk argues cogently for the fact that these sources are not only treasuries of Paumann’s work as it was bequeathed to his followers, but are also exemplary representatives of the practice of all players of bas instruments, the soft keyboards,


41 Young and Kirnbauer, Frühe Lautentabulaturen im Faksimile, 16.


43 A further manuscript contains a copy of Pauumann’s pedagogical tool, the Fundamentum organisandi*. This third source is early fifteenth century, Erlangen, Universitätsbibliothek 554 (olim 729); also contains fragmentary keyboard pieces. For more on the different versions of this teaching tool, see Christoph Wolff, ‘Conrad Paumanns Fundamentum Organisandi und seine verschiedenen Fassungen’, Archiv Für Musikwissenschaft 25, no. 3 (1968), 196–222, doi.org/10.2307/930226.
Young agrees with the idea that, as a trained contrapuntist, he found it likely that Paumann would have fostered polyphonic playing not just on the organ, but also on the lute. His awareness of this strong connection between the two instruments obviously led to the possibility for him to choose Buxheim as a source for his polyphonic lute style. Finally, Young is well aware of the evidence about the importance of Germany in the development of lute playing techniques in the fifteenth century, demonstrating that Buxheim is absolutely valid as a historical source for his lute style.

Thus, Young found evidence not only in written musical sources but also in visual and textual sources for his choice of playing the lute polyphonically using a mixed technique of plectrum and finger plucking that he himself developed. In uncovering this evidence, he also confirmed the relevance of his choice of musical sources, in particular Buxheim. This was all described to me relative to his search for his own personal technique and individual playing style. He said: “So anyway, that’s how the polyphonic improvisation thing started. And it was again part of finding an identity for something that I could actually teach on the lute. And also something which was historically justifiable or findable, rather than a kind of vague improvising [of] preludes or improvising some accompaniment to a troubadour* piece or I don’t know what.” The use of a specially devised and individually invented technique, unique to a particular musician’s hands and body, is something that he expressed admiration for in the work of several guitarists including Andre Segovia, Wes Montgomery and Allan Holdsworth. “It took me a long time to kind of get the technique where I wanted it, but I stand by that as a legitimate step in the development of lute playing. And it also has a lot of practical benefits.” Having invested so much time and effort on

---

44 For the classic commentary on two contrasting groups of loud and soft, haut and bas, see Edmund A. Bowles, ‘Haut and Bas: The Grouping of Musical Instruments in the Middle Ages’, Musica Disciplina 8 (1 January 1954), 115–40. The classification is supported with literary and iconographical evidence. See Polk, German Instrumental Music of the Late Middle Ages, 136–37. Early tablatures also connect lute and keyboard instruments, for example Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria MS 596. HH. 2; see plate 3 (with regard to the lute; “La mano ala viola”) and plate 6 (with regard to keyboard; “Tabula et in intavolature del canto de organo”) in David Fallows, ‘15th-Century Tablatures for Plucked Instruments: A Summary, a Revision and a Suggestion’, The Lute Society Journal XIX (1977), 18–20. The important publication by Sebastian Virdung, Musica getutscht (Basel, 1511), makes explicit in its title that it gives instructions how to transcribe any song “from the notes into the tablatures of the three instruments named here: the organ, the lute and the recorder”. Sebastian Virdung, Musica Getutscht: A Treatise on Musical Instruments (1511) by Sebastian Virdung, ed. and trans. Beth Bullard, Cambridge Musical Texts and Monographs (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 95. Danner noted that Virdung’s example, O haylige, onbeflecte, zart juncikfrawschaft marie, appears three times in Musica getutscht; as a four part vocal piece in mensural notation (that is, “the notes”); intabulated for organ; finally in lute tablature. Virdung, Musica Getutscht, 145–48 & 167–68. See Danner, ‘Before Petrucci: The Lute in the Fifteenth Century’, 13.

45 Young and Kirnbauer, Frühe Lautentabulaturen im Faksimile, 15.

research and practical experimentation, the fruits of this work can be heard in the performances of *Che fa la ramacina* which form my central case study.

**Case study: Analytical discussion of Young’s recordings of Che fa la ramacina**

In 2012, Micrologus created a new project, *Carnivalesque*, focused on the earliest appearances of stories and characters who would later form the backbone of the *Commedia dell’arte*. The pieces in the concert come from a repertoire of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian *frottola* (sing. *frottola*) that all focus on these stories and characters. They often also cite musical fragments which you might describe as being snippets of folk or folk-inspired music. In fact, the Italian poet and poetic theorist, Gidino da Sommacampagna (fl. 14th century) described the *frottola* as containing “coarse and unfruitful words” (Le frottole sono compillade de parole grosse e non fructose).

One such fragment, or rather, series of fragments, is known as “Che fa la ramacina”, or even just “Ramacina”. This snippet of “folk poetry” is both cited and alluded to in Italian song and poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It seems that there was also a dance known as “Ramacina”. Pannella gives an extract of an early sixteenth-century sermon in which the preacher warns a mother against the seductive nature of the melody as heard by her daughter at night when a young man with a “chytarino” (a small chitarra, either a gittern or lute) goes about singing “Che fa la ramacina, dolce amor, e do che fala che la non ve.” Roughly translated this means “What is Ramacina doing, sweet love, just what is she doing because she’s not coming.” By the time this priestly warning was issued, it seems that the song was already well established. The melodic phrases associated with this text became the basic material from which Young fashioned a solo lute piece. It was requested by the director of ensemble Micrologus, Patrizia Bovi, who asked Young to perform a solo based on the melody with the text “Che fa la ramacina” as a bridging piece in the programme to contrast with the large full ensemble sounds of the piece before it (*Questo vechio maledetto*) and the solo vocal piece after it (*Fate d’arera*).

---

48 As quoted in Prizer, ‘Games of Venus’, 19, and by Patrizia Bovi in the CD liner notes to Micrologus, *Carnivalesque*.
50 Pannella, 130.
51 Both these pieces appear on the commercial album and frame *Che fa la ramacina* in the same way that they did in concert.
In the CD liner notes, the piece *Che fa la ramacina* indicates the composer as Loyset Compère, and Young is listed as arranger. This is a reference to a piece of imitative polyphony by the composer Compère (c1445 – 1518) setting this text. In fact, I discovered that Young made use of a short cadential section at the end of Compère’s composition in some of his first performances. In all the interpretations that I have analysed, Young gives a statement of an unaccompanied melody made up of four separate phrases cadencing on G, A, E and finishing on D. This melody is not immediately apparent in the Compère composition, so I set about checking all the different occurrences of the text “Che fa la ramacina” in vocal pieces from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This would enable me then to identify the basic musical material that Young used in his performance of *Che fa la Ramacina*.

Claudio Gallico’s catalogue identifies all versions of this fragment of popular song written down or published in Italy between 1480 and 1530. The text is the most obvious common factor between all the musical citations because it appears with melodies that are not all particularly similar at first sight. Young commented on the limitations of the musical material that he was given to work with: “Ramacina is not a hit tune of the fifteenth century... it’s not even a song that exists ... in a coherent form.” In one case, the text is declaimed extremely simply in equal note values on just two pitches (in the anonymous song, number 2 in Table V.2 below, *Jam pris amours. Che’l corpo mi consuma,* transmitted in the partbooks, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechiano XIX 164-7). In other places the text has a more melodically interesting setting. On close examination I noted some similarities between all six versions which were not at first apparent.

---


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyset Compère</td>
<td>Che fa la ramacina</td>
<td>Petrucci, <em>Strambotti, Ode, Frottole, sonetti. Et modo de cantar versi latini e capitula</em>. Libro quarto. (1505, fol 47r); Bologna, Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica, MS Q 17 (fol 62v-63); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Française, nouv. acq. fr. 1817 (fol 28); Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magliabechiano XIX 164-7 (Superius part book 164 fol 46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Jam pris amours.</td>
<td>Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magliabechiano XIX 164-7 (Altus partbook 165, fol 49-49v); (Tenor partbook 166, fol 49-49v)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most significant shared material is a series of repeated notes that almost always appears with the words “Che fa la ramacina”, with the exception of the opening rising third in the Superius of Compère’s composition, which thereafter provides us with the expected repeating pitches. There are also similarities when it comes to the pitches on which separate melodic phrases end or on which a melody cadences. All six versions include phrases that lead to the pitches A D E and G. In versions 5 and 6 the order is the same, G A E D, although in version 5 the note lengths are extended to over twice the length in comparison with version 6; it seems unlikely that you might recognise the melody from listening. Version 3 has phrases leading to E and A which are almost identical to the phrases that finish on those pitches in version 6. Version 4 has only the two phrases which finish on G and A respectively and these are identical to the first two phrases in version 6. Only version 2 is dissimilar, using equal note values and only two different pitches. Version 1 by Compère is the most independent. The piece is the most learned, employing techniques such as imitation, diminution, pairing of voices to answer each other and cadence interruption. The anonymous composition in the manuscript now in Seville is also a setting of the text that Compère set (with some variants) for four voices using a fuller texture, mostly with all
four voices singing together. Three other pieces where we find the text “Che fa la ramacina” are clever musical collages, mixing lots of snippets of popular songs together in what has been called *incatenatura* (Italian for ‘chaining’), which is a modern term coined for the Italian sixteenth-century *quodlibet*.

In versions 2, 3 and 4, fragments of many different songs are quoted throughout, including examples from both learned and popular styles. The citations appear in different voices, contrasted sequentially or superimposed on top of each other, in a clever interplay which is clearly intended to be amusing for both singers and listeners. This accounts for the way in which the melody has been more or less ignored in version 2, for the reordering of the phrases in version 3 and for the shortening in version 4.

In version 6, the “Che fa la ramacina” text appears as the refrain in the *frottola* *, Poi che volse la mia stella* by Bartolomeo Tromboncino (1470-after 1534). This is printed in Petrucci’s third book of *frottola* *(Frottole libro tertio, 1505, fol. 18v-19r)*, as well as in the book printed by Bossinensis in 1509, *Tenori e contrabassi intabulati col sopran in canto figurato per cantar e sonar col lauto Libro Primo* (fol. 27r-v). Petrucci also published a lute intabulation by Joanambrosio d’Alza in his *Intabulatura di lauto* (1508, fol. 53v-54r). This melody has coherence and comes to a close on the pitch D, an ending that feels conclusive; this final note is practical, serving as the link between Young’s solo and the start of the next piece in the programme, *Fate d’arera*, which is modally centred on D. It therefore served well as Young’s model, featuring almost unchanged in a simple unaccompanied form in every performance, announcing the arrival of the main theme, the theme for which his performance was named (see Figure V.9).

---

This is in fact not the only base content of his solos, which all also contain an echo of the piece performed just before it in the concert, *Questo vechio maledetto*. This song appears in the book *Canzoni frottole et capitoli*, printed in Rome in 1531, folios 22v-23. The highlighted section of the tenor voice provides Young with the phrases of melody that he echoes (see Figure V.10).

---

I asked Young to explain more to me about the context of his solo performance, what he thought his job was. He said: “To improvise something around [the collection of fragments]... I didn’t like doing it because they’re pretty static little melodic fragments. In other words, it’s not a beautiful cantus firmus that has a dynamic ... and movement to it. There's a lot of repeated notes, it’s a very limited range, the tessitura is really compressed and I thought it was kind of a strange thing to do to be honest.” He went on to elaborate about some of the process of putting the performance together:

So it’s really ... minimal material to do something with. And then there's the question, what do you do with it? Do you, are you going to do something really in rhythm or not necessarily? and if not, then what? The first question also before that is, are you going to do something monophonically or polyphonically with it. And those questions were not hard to answer for me at least. The context of melody fragments seemed to be polyphonic so to go in that direction maybe after ... introducing them in a clear way so that one could just hear each of the four [phrases] in a naked version. But I wanted to then do something with it, another voice with them and maybe a bit of imitation. And occasionally bringing in maybe a third part, but basically a two-part structure, not more, because it’s hard enough to do something interesting with that. And I am a believer in two parts, a two-part
structure is really what so many pieces were based on. Even pieces that really are in three parts, when you actually look at the counterpoint, there are two structural parts and then a third part which is filling in things here and there, even if some of those things are playing in imitation with the other two parts. But I'm more of a fan of, I'd rather have two nice and clear parts than three not-so-nice and not-so-clear parts. So two-voice structure. Then I was thinking more in terms of ricercar*, meaning one has the possibility to be rhythmically free. I'm not a fan of rhythmic freedom in ... polyphonic music per se, but I do think you have that form, the ricercar*, which is very much connected with lute as an instrument, at least where ... it was really used, really cultivated already in the late fifteenth century... we have models, we have plenty of models in the fifteenth century and some of them seem to be thought outside of rhythm, or at least with a... almost really as tuning the instrument, checking intervals, rather than always in a very strict mensural rhythm.

His words correlate closely to the resulting performances which all start with the four “naked” phrases, have two-part textures and are mostly mensural with a free feeling rather than being rhythmically entirely unmeasured.

During our interview it became clear that Young used the ideas of drama, of tension and release and of breaking listeners’ expectations as ways to develop his musical material. I asked him directly to try to recall how he had put together his performance of Che fa la ramacina, a process that occurred at some point in 2012, almost eight years before our interview sessions took place. He told me that he thought he followed:

a plan of construction which has certain things in common with, back in the old days, constructing a prelude for a Binkley class, for a song ... or an instrumental, a textless piece such as one of the non-dance pieces in the London manuscript.61 And that involved having some kind of a dramatic progression or development within the ricercar*, because that's something that I think ricercare* normally also have. They aren't just randomly patched together chords, or they shouldn't be. There should be a development, something should happen.

Then I asked him to expand on two core ideas, drama and development. In response, he gave several examples of medieval pieces that represent for him excellent models from the perspective

61 Young is referring to the textless pieces in the Italian fourteenth-century manuscript, London, British Library MS Additional 29987 about which he had spoken at length during our interview.
of these ideas, and described how both notions were created and represented musically. He cited Walter Frye’s music and anonymous songs in the Ritson Manuscript such as My wofull hert as providing excellent fifteenth-century examples of musical drama because of how their melodies “evoke a kind of plaintiveness to my mind, a kind of courtly love emotion, a classic courtly love emotion, by doing a leap which we could say is a dramatic gesture. The bigger the leap, the more dramatic it is.” Guillaume de Machaut’s ballade, De toutes flowers n’avoit et de tous fruis, was given as a place where wide melodic jumps cause the Superius voice to cross the Tenor for a dramatic effect that highlights particular words. He carried on: “So that would be one way of creating drama ... It sets up a kind of tension which then has to be resolved. And you can't simply, if you’re, say ... in D, so you start out on a D on the root, you leap up to A, let's say, and then you leap back down to D, that's not a proper resolution of that. You leap up and then you slowly come down. And the more time you take coming down, the better the resolution, the greater the sense of arrival when you finally get back there.” Waiting for the resolution is what creates the required sense of drama.

In order to consider how Young’s performance used the idea of tension through waiting we can look to his views on La Spagna*, a fifteenth-century basse danse*. The fourth and last phrase is the most dramatic and why is it dramatic? Because it goes up ... it does not leap up a full octave, but it pretty quickly gets up to the seventh, to the C, and then from there marches down by step, all the way down through the mode and that is the classic way to generate tension and create drama. The more one generates tension, the greater the feeling of arrival or resolution then when one finishes. So, the longer the phrase, the more dramatic it feels because of that. And that generating tension is obviously not something that La Spagna*, the melody or the anonymous composer, invented. That goes right the way back, and that I see as very much connected to the ethic of courtly

love ... if one reads *The Romance of the Rose* for example, it's a love story but it's not about the conquest of the rose. The end is not really the point of the story. [The point] is the way of trying to get to the end, [of] going through the process which is a kind of purification. ... And so it's not 'I see, I want, I get', it's 'I see, I want, I wait, I wait, I wait, I wait, and then finally I get'. ... It's the waiting part which is the whole point. ... And also that's why in the execution of this kind of music, which is so linear, which is so much about simultaneous lines rather than vertical chords, ... to do them in a legato way where the notes are joined, where there's a long line to it, goes hand in hand with that. ... These are not separate events that one might understand them to be if one's approaching just a vertical kind of reduction of sonorities. But rather, when I play three or four notes of the *Spagna* Tenor, I know eventually where it's going, I have an expectation. I know what the mode is, and I can expect then certain things to happen and then I'm going to see what actually happens. And if it's a fun game, if it's a skilfully made example, or song or poem or whatever it is, instrumental piece, I may get some nice surprises on the way. It will engage my thought, it will demand my attention, in a worthy way. So, ... to do it in a legato way, to do it in a linear way is very, very important because it's goal oriented. The goal is somewhere up there. The interesting thing is going along on the path and that's really a fundamental viewpoint or world view of courtly culture and courtly love culture I would say.

An example of the kind of tension and drama that Young evoked can be heard in the performance 2012 Spello. A repeat of two phrases, the first cadencing on E and the second on D, seen in Figure V.11 in the top system, is delayed by the insertion of a monophonic extension (boxed in yellow) that begins on the same pitch as the first phrase. Before the repeat of second phrase, which is found in the third system, Young adds a series of sixths (boxed in yellow). These sixths echo the rhythm of the extension in the second system and create rhythmic tension by altering the metric feel temporarily from duple to triple. Furthermore, Young plays higher and higher on the lute; rising pitch is another way that drama can be created according to Young. As he said in relation to *La Spagna*, the expectation is raised in the listener that the pitch must come back down before resolution can be reached.
In a later performance, 2014 Morez, another delaying tactic is used. Young breaks our expectation that he will play a fourth lot of phrases whose cadences match the monophonic melody – G A E D – firstly by starting to pluck in an extreme range on his instrument. This very high tessitura, over an octave above the previous note played, introduces a descending sequence of out-of-phase sixths that leads to a 6-8 phrygian cadence onto A. An even longer descending row of the pattern of intervals 7-6, starting this time with the lower pitch, arrives an octave beneath the previous cadence on A. The lack of melody and the sense of stasis that Young creates and lengthens, heightens the listener’s sense of waiting for something to happen.
Che fa la ramacina 0:43
starts slowly and increases slightly in tempo through the repeated notes in each of these phrases

More closed veiled sound, quieter

F and E held
but not very audible

very high and sweet
sounding, with vibrato

Figure V.12: Longer inserted free section in 2014 Morez
These two cadences on A after a series of descending sixths are also remarkable because, unlike the material which Young plays both before and after this section, these phrases are not reused in any of the other performances. The two phrases are represented in Table V.3 as boxes containing their cadence pitch A, uncoloured because they do not have equivalents elsewhere.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012 Antwerp</td>
<td>G A E D G G D D E D G E D G E D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 Spello</td>
<td>G A E D G A E D G G D E D D ext E G E D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 Ribeauvillé</td>
<td>G A E D G G D E E D G E D D ext D D ext E G E D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 Morez</td>
<td>G A E D G A E D D E D E D G E D A A E D G E D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Maguelone</td>
<td>G A E D G A E D D E D E D G E D A A A D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 Mexico</td>
<td>G A E D G A E D D E D E D G E D A A A D D ext</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 Vantaa</td>
<td>G A E D G A E D D G A E D D G A E D D E D G E D D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017 Perm</td>
<td>G A E D G A E D D G E D D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table V.3: Schematic representation of performances of Che fa la Ramacina**
In Table V.3 I have produced a schematic representation of these eight performances. In it I have used colour to highlight where I find material that has been repeated. I have organised it around the cadence pitches that bring phrases to a conclusion. It helps to show how whole sections were added or removed, reused, repeated different numbers of times and reordered in a modular fashion. The term “memorised composition” that Young used to describe improvisation seems very apt to describe in general what is happening here.

The first uncoloured section with cadences on G, A, E and D is, without exception, a simple statement of the Ramacina melodic material, closely based as previously stated on the Tromboncino melody. It is not always played at the same octave, may be presented with some minor rhythmic differences and has different volume levels and ‘feel’ across the range of performances. In 2016 Vantaa and 2017 Perm, Young has added some ornaments, perhaps out of a wish to make it feel more impactful. In all cases though it remains a clear – “naked” in Young’s own terminology – initial statement that allows the ears of the listeners to acclimatise to the mood and dynamic level of what is to come, after the noisy bravura of Questo vechio maledetto.

On closer inspection of the eight examples, it becomes clear that a lot of this repeated material is based on or clearly incorporates the melody of Ramacina within new polyphonic contexts that were prepared by Young before the performances. This in fact leads us to a significant method for musical development that Young employs; he reuses the same material in varied ways. Young commented:

A standard formula that I would fall back on, would simply be start slow and end fast, or start with something really something very humble, very limited and then through repetition try to build it up a bit. ... [But] someone could say ‘well isn't this the later topic of theme and variations? Isn't that a much later concept? Is that really already there in the fifteenth century for example?’ And there's no easy answer to that question. Of course, if you always have a go-to formula of, as an instrumentalist, you play a vocal melody just straight as it is in the texted source, then you repeat it say with some ornaments, and then maybe you repeat it a third time with more ornaments and then you stop, or go back to the original statement. Well, that does seem to be a later mentality, especially if you go back to the simplest statement to put on as your end, right? But indeed there is a description of the lute playing of Adolf Blindhamer at the court of Innsbruck. His period of activity is basically 1500 to the late 1520s I suppose, and he was a very highly respected lute player. He was one of the best according to Albrecht Dürer. And there is a description
of his playing that says he liked to play a song on the lute first very simply and then repeat it with more notes and then play it a third time with even more notes. And that's really interesting. There's no other description of any kind of a performance like this. So that is a bit like that, a kind of build-up actually. How you build it up then, putting more fast notes in towards the end, going up higher in the range on the instrument maybe.66

Looking in closer detail at Figure V.13, extracts taken from 2012 Spello, we can see a good example of how Young used the melodic material repetitively but with variation, much as Adolf Blindhamer is described as doing.

66 For more background on this German lutenist, see Grove Music Online, s.v. ‘Blindhamer [Blindthaimer, Blyndthamer, Plinthamer], Adolf’ by Frank Krautwurst and Beth Bullard, accessed 1 July 2021 http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/.
At the start of Figure V.13, we can see that the melody is executed very simply to introduce the basic material. I have marked the cadences with the pitches on which they land. Then Young quite clearly “repeat[s] it with more notes”, adding turns and runs to fill in the gaps between phrases.
Not included in Figure V.13 after this second iteration is a section that quotes the final cadence of Compère’s composition *Che fa la ramacina*, and then a passage which has two cadences on E and D, using a simple note against note counterpoint. This is repeated with a simple monophonic extension and a sequential exploration that reaches into a high range on the instrument.

Then at the end of the performance (Figure V.13, final two systems) we come back to our melodic material for a third iteration, this time with a contrapuntal addition, which makes it “a third time with even more notes”. In Table V.3, this is the orange section in which I do not include a cadence on A, although the full four original melodic phrases are still clearly heard in the upper voice. The cadence is not present in a typical form because Young does not chromatically alter the G (see Figure V.13, penultimate system, the note just before letter A). Instead, Young arrives on the fifth D-A and proceeds to link seamlessly to the following phrase without lingering. He leads down with the lower voice, which is pleasantly surprising. At the same time, this linking of two phrases together means that the phrase lengths become less predictable.

While in 2012 Spello, we can hear Young make use of an ornamented monophonic style of playing (see Figure V.13, systems 3 and 4), the majority of the material he plays in the eight performances under consideration is contrapuntal, in a two part texture. The following (Figures V.14-17) are extracted from the performance 2016 Mexico, one which Young particularly appreciated as being of good quality when we listened back to it together in February 2020. Using these extracts, we can observe the different counterpoints that Young adds to each melodic phrase.

![Figure V.14 Different versions of phrase cadencing on G, 2016 Mexico](image)
In Figure V.14, the first melodic phrase of the *Ramacina* tune is found in three different forms. Firstly, the unadorned tune, then as extracted from two different coloured sections (refer to Table V.3). In both the pink and the orange section, the melody is barely changed at all when it reappears in its new polyphonic contexts. We simply find that a few passing notes and a cadence figure have been added in the orange section version.

![Figure V.15 Different versions of phrase cadencing on A, 2016 Mexico](image)

Moving on to the second *Ramacina* phrase that cadences on A, in Figure V.15, system 2, we can see that the melody in the pink section is not changed at all. In the orange section version, however, the rhythm is altered and there is no strong cadence onto A happens because the chromatic alteration of the G does not occur. The lower, additional voice lands on a fifth below the cadential A in the melody, but that is quickly changed to an unstable sixth that leads directly on.
Figure V.16 compares three contrapuntal versions of the third phrase of the melody that cadences on E. The melody is used with no modification as the upper voice in simple two-part parallel sixths leading to a classic 6-8 cadence in the green section (Figure V.16, system 3). Young also maintains the melody unmodified in the pink section (system 2), but allows his added voice to cross over from below and then become quite distant, arriving at a tenth above the melody, meaning that the cadence does not have the classic Superius movement 7-8 because those pitches are now found in the lower of the two voices. In the orange section (system 4), Young adds a series of conjunct descending parallel sixths preceding the cadence onto E. They function as ornament and help to disguise the repetition of the melody.
In the final *Ramacina* phrase cadencing on D, as we see in *Figure V.17*, the melody in the upper voice is modified in the green section (system 3) so that it can incorporate the characteristic cadential movement for an upper voice in two part counterpoint of 7-8 (here C sharp to D) within the 3 breve length of the phrase; in the original Tromboncino the cadential 7-8 movement is appended as an additional few notes outside those 3 breves (see also Young’s first recorded performance 2012 Antwerp). In the pink section (*Figure V.16, system 2*), the melody starts at the octave in both voices and continues in the lower voice, followed by an extended cadence. In system 4, the version in the orange section, the melodic movement is unaltered creating an initial cadence where the tenor line provides the cadential 7-8 movement (C sharp to D) and the Superius arrives on a unison. A final cadence is then appended that has the classic format of tenor voice moving 3-2-1 (F-E-D) with Superius providing 8-7-8 (D-C sharp-D). The same cadence is used elsewhere, including at the end of the pink section. It is characterised by the leap up a minor sixth to B flat in the lower voice after an initial arrival on D. In Table V.3, this formula is represented by the pale orange boxes that contain the letter D (to express its similarity with the orange section cadential figure on D). It is used extensively in 2016 Vantaa for example.
I have also noted in Table V.3 (with the annotation text) the moments when Young extended phrases before the cadence was reached. As already mentioned, this correlates with Young’s idea about the drama of waiting, and the tension created when the resolution is delayed.

![Orange phrase cadencing on E, 2012 Antwerp](image)

![Orange phrase cadencing on E, 2013 Ribeauvillé](image)

*Figure V.18: Example of inserted extension*

*Figure V.18* shows an example of Young lengthening a phrase and thereby causing the listeners to wait. This is the third phrase of the original melody of *Ramacina* in the orange section’s two-voice contrapuntal context. In 2013 Ribeauvillé, after beginning in broadly the same way as in 2012 Antwerp, Young inserts an unexpected series of descending sixths which start on a very high pitch in the lute’s range after a leap up a fifth from F to C. The leap upwards is indicative again of a desire to cause the audience to experience a dramatic increase in tension. These sixths then lead smoothly back to the familiar material of the orange section.

I asked Young if he planned his performances. His response was very firmly positive:

I definitely make a basic plan, you have to. ... It’s either you make a basic plan, or you use the plan that you’ve done before. At some point you must have made a plan. You can’t go out under the spotlights and simply close your eyes, shake your head and just wing it totally and expect there to be anything but a disastrous result where you’re just fumbling and wandering and having all kinds of problems. If you’re not staring at music... ok let’s go back to this idea of, what are you doing actually? Does the audience think that you are improvising? Does the audience think that you’re playing something by memory? The only thing they might think is “they’re not using any notation; they’re not looking obviously at any notation.” So, where they go from there, I don’t know. They might well be thinking “it’s being improvised right in this moment” and ... that might be something that was
different from what they've heard thus far in the programme. So, you might have scored a few points with gaining their attention if they're thinking “you're extemporising, you don't know what you're going to do next” because they want to see where it will go. But that kind of novelty only goes so far. If they see you're not going anywhere or you're just sitting on the same note you know, ad infinitum, they'll quickly lose interest. And they'll start getting noisy or start body language or something. So you have to have a plan.

In fact, Young told me that at first, he had made a written score to guide his performance, although by mid-2014 the entire programme had been memorised, at the request of Patrizia Bovi.

Planning therefore comes out of a desire to communicate clearly with the listeners. Part of Young’s structural planning focused on the final destination and knowing where he was going:

I make a structure in my head and I don't always stick to the structure, but it is my intention to stick to the structure. If I don't, it's because I messed up or I forgot something. But it's funny now, you know, because talking about this - ok, you picked this example Che fa la ramacina. But we could also have taken another example, for example La Spagna*, or other things, there are lots of other possibilities right? And Ramacina is different from La Spagna*. It's not a dance, it can come out of rhythm, it can be rhythmically free, which is a help but it can also be something which is a kind of curse, if you again, if you come to a kind of dead end and stumble suddenly for an idea, or where am I going with this? Where do I wanna go with this? Where did I want to end up? but having some kind of structure of where am I going to end up, obviously the end, that's the single most important thing of the whole thing so you really have to start there. You have to have some idea of where you're going to end up to set up whatever's coming after your piece or your thing. And you can usually form some idea of the lead up to the end, how you want to, you know, what you can use to get there. So in the Ramacina version that I kind of have in my head, I like to have a long descent of intervals, obviously consonances, all sixths and thirds, maybe tenths, but a long stepwise descent going back to that principle that I said earlier of resolution of tension.

I believe that we can hear the version Young “kind of [had] in [his] head”, which included a long series of descending consonances at the end, in some, but not all, of his performances. The purple sections in Table V.3 are, in particular, clear examples of what Young talks about here (2015 Maguelone and 2016 Mexico). The orange section cadence on D which ends all the other performances also starts high and descends in a series of thirds to a 3-1 (third to unison) cadence
in which the Tenor, as previously noted, has the more typical Superius movement of 7-8 (C sharp to D) and the voices come together on a unison D before the performance continues beyond the end of the melodic material with a formulaic cadence that is used with a lot of frequency throughout my corpus (both the orange box with D and the pale orange box with D in it, found in total over 20 times). The descent is therefore still present in the orange section cadence on D although I find it more obvious in the purple section due to the high opening tessitura.

The schematisation in Table V.3 highlights the repetitive and the modular but disguises the differences between the performances. Some of the sections were more open to alteration and development than others. It is informative to review and compare Young’s different performances to see where he felt freer to alter his material and where fewer modifications occurred.

Starting with this yellow section (see Figure V.19) which appears in the first three performances of my corpus (2012 Antwerp, 2012 Carnivalesque, 2013 Ribeauvillé), there is very little change from one performance to another. Some rhythmic nuances are slightly different and the lead into the final phrase varies but otherwise Young plays very similarly, betraying strong memorisation of this section, and also pointing to it having its own idiosyncratic identity. In fact, I discovered that this is a direct quotation of a section from Compère’s polyphonic *frottola*. This is another important ingredient in Young’s performances. He cites both composed material and other performance material of his own making.
In transferring the polyphonic four voice texture to the lute, Young compresses the first two bars into six instead of eight beats but then lengthens the third bar by a beat, bringing it to a static close on an open chord of G with no third or cadential lengthening figure as seen in the Altus voice of the Compère. The final series of chords are also reduced from four to three voices to fit the instrument; compare Figure V.21 to Figure V.20.

Young talked to me about this technique of reusing and quoting, calling it a “standard technique”. This idea was strengthened in his mind by his somewhat hazy recollection he had of

---

67 This is a widespread procedure also in jazz improvisation, see Berliner quoting Carmen Lundy: ‘There’s a little improvisation technique in which you learn to pull things from other songs and insert them into what you’re singing at the moment.’ Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 103.
the presence of a section of a lute ricercar* in the Capirola lutebook (Chicago, Newberry Library, Case MS VM C.25, dated c 1517) that he told me had been found note for note in a keyboard piece by Luis Venegas de Henestrosa (c1510-1570)\textsuperscript{68} who was creating music some 30 years later:

I remembered, there's a long ricercar* in the Capirola lutebook, and a chunk of it in the middle, which is not set off by any pause or anything, it's really just a seemingly random chunk in the middle, is found in a keyboard book by, I think it's Henestrosa or something, a cembalo book, in a ricercar*, in a completely different context. But someone just took a chunk of material and used it for their ricercar*. And I'm... I don't even have a theory about how exactly that happened, but the sources are like 30 years apart and one is a Spanish keyboard source and the other is from 1517 from Capirola so Italian, North Italian. And you could play the piece 100 times or listen as many times as you want and you might miss that. You might not hear that at all, and it's a fairly extended passage. But because what comes before it is completely other and what comes after it is completely other, you could easily miss it. And so I am sure there's been stuff written about techniques of making ricercare* where sections are just stolen and turn up then somewhere else, as a technique, as a standard technique. And I used that, or I can use that in this piece. I take part of Ile Fantasies de Josquin.\textsuperscript{69} I take a section, just a short section from near the end, and use it near the end of what I'm doing.

I investigated Young’s use of the piece he mentioned with reference to this technique and found the section he was referring to:

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Grove Music Online}, s.v. ‘Venegas de Henestrosa, Luis’ by Louis Jambou, accessed 8 June 2021, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. Although I have been unable to substantiate the claim that part of a Capirola ricercar* was reused by Henestrosa, I did find evidence that Capirola's first ricercar* Recerchar primo (fol. 5v-6v) has two sections which quote earlier pieces printed by Petrucci, and his R[ecerchar] setimo (fol. 41r-42v) quotes a further section of one of the same pieces. See commentary to numbers 85, 122 and 127 in John H. Robinson, ed., \textit{158 early Cinquecento Preludes and Recercars for Renaissance Lute: Many of Easy to Intermediate Standard and Including All Those by Bossinensis, Capirola, Dalza and Spinacino}, Lute Society Music Editions (Albury: Lute Society, 2018), xi–xii.

In my transcription (Figure V.23), we can see the transformation of a repeated idea from this short extract into a cadential figure using consecutive thirds to arrive on D (highlighted):

---

Figure V.23: 2012 Antwerp with allusion to Ile fatazies highlighted
The extent of the citation of *Ile Fatazies* is very small and really more of an allusion than a direct quotation. The original is actually conveniently reconfigurable to match the need Young had to use a descending series of chords at the end of his performance, as we have already seen. This is anyway of a different order to the citation of the passage from *Che fa la ramacina* by Compère, where several bars of four-part texture are adapted to the solo lute context.

Not only does Young cite or allude to other composer’s works, he also cites his own performances. In 2015 Maguelone, before he plays the unaccompanied four phrases that make up the melody of *Ramacina*, after he has echoed and repeated the melody of *Questo vechio maledetto* several times, he gets to a cadence on the pitch D. At this point in his other performances, he started the melody of *Che fa la ramacina*. On this occasion however, he plays the opening section of a lute solo version of the piece *Tandernaken al opten Rijn*. The melody of *Tandernaken* is in the lower voice and the upper voice is newly composed by Young (see Figure V.24).

---

71 This song with a Dutch text is part of an international repertoire of music that was adapted and readapted both anonymously and by named composers including a version by King of England, Henry VIII, *Taunder Naken*. See *Music at the Court of Henry VIII*, ed. by John Stevens, Musica Britannica, 18 (London: Published for the Royal Musical Association by Stainer and Bell, 1962), 58–59. There are 13 known settings from the period 1475 to around 1530. It seems that many of these versions were intended instrumentally. See *Grove Music Online*, s.v. ‘Dutch Polyphonic Song (to 1600)’ by Eric Jas, accessed 9 June 2021, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. For an early version, see Trent, Castello de Buonconsiglio, Monumenti e collezioni Provinciali, MS 87, fol. 198v-199, available at https://www.cultura.trentino.it/portal/server.pt/community/manoscritti_musicali_trentini_del_%27400/814/sfoglia_codice/22660?Codice=Tr87&CartaLink=198V, and edited in Frederick Crane, *Materials*, 65–66. This song is catalogued in Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs*, 485. For evidence that it was often intended for instrumental performance, see commentary in footnote 8 in Polk, *German Instrumental Music*, 243.

Having performed alongside Young in a programme during which he played his version of *Tandernaken* in 2009, and having recently readapted it myself in another context, I recognised it immediately. This was particularly gratifying to me as a member of the ‘audience’ when Young performed the solo in Maguelone. However, on listening back to this version, Young criticised the idea of inserting it, saying it seemed out of place: “that doesn’t fit at all, it’s a completely different mood. It was just simply grabbing something that you know, that had that modal relationship a little bit, but otherwise was in my fingers, having played it many times”. Indeed, it only appears this one time among all the performances of *Che fa la ramacina*, rejected on the grounds that it did not work as he had hoped.
Figure V.25 shows that the way that Young reaches the green phrases differs from performance to performance. In the second part of this section, the rhythm displays different solutions before
Young arrives, in 2014 Morez, at a stable version. This section does however have a strong and stable identity, without a large space for variation.
Figure V.26: Comparison of main orange section (cadences on G E D)
Figure V.26 cont.: Comparison of main orange section (cadences on G E D)
In the orange section (Figure V.26), Young applies a variety of rhythmic nuances, sometimes lengthening or shortening particularly in the first phrase cadencing on G and in the second phrase that leads to A. The rhythmic fluidity in fact was difficult to capture adequately with notation. Young also varies some of the ways that cadences are ornamented from performance to performance and allows the lead into the opening pitches of the first two phrases to be longer or shorter. The opening of phrase three with its repeated F in the upper register voice is very stable however. This section shows a balance between strong planning following the melody of Ramacina, and a flexibility with rhythm and ornamentation which means there can also be space for invention such as can be heard in 2013 Ribeauvillé. This approach permits some changes then to become more fixed; see for example, the cadence onto E which becomes rhythmically faster using more quavers in 2014 Morez, an idea that then becomes the norm. I also wonder whether in a version like 2013 Ribeauvillé, some striking changes did not result from an error being assimilated and cleverly covered. The triplets near the end seem to come out of a temporally early note creating a new rhythmic feel that Young was then able to profit from by playing in a new metric organisation right through until the end of the performance.
Except for some minor alterations in the last phrase in the pink section (Figure V.27), most noticeable in 2017 Perm, this section is the most stable. The polyphony here was very carefully worked out and its complexity meant it was harder to vary while still maintaining its integrity as rule-bounded counterpoint. The crossing of the two voices and the melodic nature of the added part, which does not stick to simple parallel motion, is what makes the counterpoint more complex here. I believe for this reason Young carefully memorised this section and stuck closely to it to ensure he would perform counterpoint that was consonant and correct.
Bridging into the lute solo with material from the previous song

Up until now I have concentrated on the section of Young’s solo performances which were indebted to Ramacina as a melodic source. In all eight performances under consideration, Ramacina was preceded by an introductory section of varying length that echoed the previous song in the running order of the concert programme, Questo vechio maledetto. This introduction, initially intended as a way to smooth the passage musically from a loud four-part frottola* played tutti with percussion to the very different sound world of solo lute, developed during the course of the different performances into something longer and more important, a vehicle for freer exploration of the possibilities of fifteenth-century lute ricercar* style. Initially lasting only 22 seconds (14% of the overall length of Young’s solo in 2012 Antwerp), in 2015 Maguelone this had increased to 1 minute 34 seconds (35% of the overall length of the solo, not including the citation of Tandernaken) and then in Young’s performance 2016 Mexico we hear another increase to 1 minute 49 seconds (40% of the overall length). This change comes out of a dissatisfaction with the coherence of his solo within its concert context that Young expressed to me during our interview. When we listened back together to the corpus of performances, he criticised the way that he introduced the Ramacina melody in his 2013 Ribeauvillé performance saying “I didn’t like that transition from the song before… it’s not elegant.” When he then listened to 2015 Maguelone, he was happier and said: “I like very much the opening quotations of the piece before. I kind of was thinking that really should, that could be more developed and be its… own thing. That … had a nice kind of organic unfolding that I like.”
In both 2012 Antwerp and 2013 Ribeauvillé (see Figure V.28), Young simply repeats the echoed phrases from the tenor voice of the song *Questo vechio maledetto*, playing them twice. To this melody he has added a counterpoint in sixths and a few small ornaments. His approach has expanded considerably in 2015 Maguelone (bottom five systems of Figure V.28). The two phrases are stated monophonically, with a second statement including tremolo effects to enrich the texture and create variety. Then Young adds a counterpoint that means the first phrase ends with something that sounds almost like three-part imitation, before the offbeat beginning of the second phrase takes us back to the *Questo vechio* melody. Then he once more plays the two phrases, this time with a simple parallel sixth accompaniment like we heard in 2012 Antwerp and 2013 Ribeauvillé. Young repeats this parallel sixth accompaniment but with the added upper voice out of phase with the *Questo vechio* melody in the lower voice. This repetitive, ever varying exploration gives rise to the description of “organic” that Young used on hearing his performance, he likened it to “A vine growing on a tree or something that keeps moving forward and unfolds in new variations.” Then, just before he arrives at his citation of *Tandernaken*, Young plays two descending sequences using the 7-6 pattern that I have already noted, a free moment that is not dependent on given material but makes use of Young’s knowledge of fifteenth-century note-against-note counterpoint as found in contemporary models and theorised in Tinctoris’s *Liber*. 
2016 Mexico is another example that Young singled out for particular praise during our time listening to the corpus together. He affirmed that this transition from *Questo vechio* to *Ramacina* was the best. I asked if he could explain further:

I mean first of all, the monophonic treatment is interesting, you know, there’s nothing like that in any of the other versions that we listened to. And it wasn’t entirely technically successful, there was one figure there that I hesitated a little bit, maybe most people wouldn’t pick it up, so there was that flaw in it. But doing something a little more elaborate monophonically with it and then going back to the polyphony and then having a long descent of sixths and thirds and tenths going down and finally cadencing on the low A, and that takes us to the A which will be the beginning of *Ramacina*, and so I liked that. I’m surprised by how much time I took to do that, but I obviously felt like I was in no rush to kind of get there and that worked out ok, I think.

In *Figure V.29* we can see the time he took playing the two short melodic phrases at the beginning. He has created rhythmic variety by filling in the second phrase with triplets that outline the melodic shape. Then he added even more notes in the second repeat of the melodic material,
coming back to the two opening pitches (C and D) in an insistent way, emphasised with rapid ornamental notes that circle round and come back. He extended the range to include a full octave using semiquavers in a high virtuosic flourish before more slowly coming back to the pitch F, the home pitch of *Questo vechio*. It is then almost as if, having discovered a way to ornament the opening pitch of C, Young has to carry on with his exploration, so he reuses a figuration as a basis for an interplay of echoes between high and low on his instrument. This game of giving the impression of two voices, even if they are not heard simultaneously, leads through a descending sequence to a 6-8 cadence still on F. The sequence is not exact and includes flavoursome nuances like the E flat, showing an aural sensitivity to the developing sounds at the moment of the performance. It is at this point that Young leaves behind the given melody from *Questo vechio* and plays a series of intervals that allow him to reach very high in the register of the lute; this is a moment where his assimilation of the style of Obrecht’s *Nec michi nec tibi* comes through most strongly. An attractive contrapuntal version of the *Questo vechio* phrases follows, an arrangement that can also be heard in 2015 Maguelone. Finally, Young allows another leap into a higher range to herald a descending figure that oscillates between a sixth and fifth until it reaches a cadential point, the B flat that can fall a semitone to A, giving us a strong 6-8 cadence. The A is then the opening note for the melody of *Ramacina*.

This lengthened introduction has much more content and ingenuity than the very simple repetitions of the *Questo vechio* phrases that we hear in 2012 Antwerp. I get a sense that Young is allowing his ear to guide what he plays, so an idea sometimes gets repeated and reused before leading elsewhere. At the same time, there is a strong basis in both prepared material, such as the contrapuntally well-defined repetition of the *Questo vechio* phrases that are also heard in 2015 Maguelone and in 2017 Perm, and in transformational reuse of ideas taken from fifteenth-century models; here I find reference to Obrecht, and counterpoint rules as Young learnt them from Tinctoris. As opposed to the “memorised composition” that characterises Young’s performance of the *Ramacina* material, it seems more pertinent to suggest that we are hearing more the “language of clichés, language of cells or syllables or words” that Young references in his definition of improvisation. The lower reliance on reuse of the given melodic material gives this introductory section very much the feel of a ricercar*. The tenuto and accelerando that accompany the ascending sequence have an exploratory feel that for me is suggestive of searching, of trying something out. The cadence just before *Ramacina* begins has an unfinished feel that creates the sensation that *Ramacina* has to begin at precisely that moment. This is coherent with what Young says about how a prelude was expected by his teacher Binkley to lead inevitably into the piece
which it preceded, somehow forcing it to begin. I tend to agree with Young that this version was the most successful in terms of making a transition from one melody, *Questo vechio*, to another, *Ramacina*, a transition which also necessitated a change in mood. The long monophonic section, rather than being too quiet, actually allowed Young to play boldly with the plectrum to match the loud boisterousness of the preceding tutti version of *Questo vechio*. His playing of the monophonic melodic line then nicely prefigured the plain rendition of the four phrases of *Ramacina*, creating a balance between the two sections that provides a sense of satisfaction when I listen.

**Conclusion: memory and creativity**

I have looked in detail here at the shape that Young’s improvisations took, helping me answer my second and third research questions about what the improvisations of participants in the medieval music revival sound and look like. The reuse of different kinds of material as citations, both from other composers and from Young’s own performances, and indeed the evidence from my analysis of the modular extracts that Young is able to vary and recombine, both speak of a well-developed capacity of memory. Following Carruthers, Young is using not just iterative rote memory, but also both *investigatio* and *inventio* in adapting and reshaping what is in his memory. This is demonstrated by his ability to reconfigure the number of repeats and the order of the modules (see Table V.3) as well as in the flexibility within these sections. The main orange section shows particular propensity to variability and change (see Figure V.26). His familiarity with Tinctoris’ rules of counterpoint as well as with actual models of fifteenth-century compositions such as *Pulcherrima de virgine* in Buxheim and Obrecht’s *Nec michi nec tibi*, allowed him to com-pose or put together (com = together, ponere = to put) not just different modules in varying orders but also to create the new contrapuntal contexts for the melodic material that provided a basis, the four phrases from the refrain of Tromboncino’s song *Poi che volse la mia stella*. This familiarity also enabled him to create the freer transitional section leading from the melody of *Questo vechio* into *Ramacina*. In this way Young does not simply reiterate exactly, but adapts and transforms materials from his memory storehouse at the moment of performing, a conclusion that is borne out by evidence such as the rhythmic transformation of material in the main orange section in the performance 2013 Ribeauvillé (see Figure V.26), a transformation that probably occurred due to an error. Although Young expressed disappointment in his performance 2016 Vantaa, the repetitions

---

that are present in this version of *Ramacina* also suggest a flexibility that allowed him to keep trying to find a better way to shape his playing while he was on stage.

A key question that I wanted to answer is whether we can classify Young’s solo performances of *Che fa la ramacina* as improvisation. Young himself is very reluctant to use this anachronistic term to refer to performances of music from the Middle Ages, before the word or concept existed. It seems clear from my analysis that “memorised composition”, the term Young himself used, is an appropriate way to understand the modular character that I observed in my corpus. The self-citation and quotations of extracts from other composer’s works reinforces the validity of this term. During sections which linked or provided an epilogue to the modules that Young repeatedly used in his performances, moments that did not use the pregiven melodic material from *Ramacina* or *Questo vechio*, Young brought a variety of techniques into play that I have traced to his familiarity with Tinctoris’s catalogue of note against note counterpoint as well as with models like *Nec michi nec tibi* by Obrecht, specifically cited by Young as an example he cherished. In these free sections, it seems to me to be more pertinent to talk about “a language of clichés, a language of cells or syllables or … musical words”, according to Young’s words when he clarified his definition of improvisation. The idea behind a section could be simply to arrive at a cadence on a particular pitch and to use a pattern of consonances that allow that to happen, such as 7-6-7-6 etc or 6-5-6-5 etc. My work here has shown in detail how Young understands and verbalises his improvisatory practice, furnishing a comprehensive response to my fourth research question: How do performers in the medieval music revival understand what they are doing when they improvise?

On listening back to his performances during our interview, he was frequently critical, and indeed, having worked alongside him for over ten years, it is typical for him to be dissatisfied with his work. This character trait spurs him on to work harder both in terms of practising and in terms of keeping abreast of historical evidence for lute playing in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As evidence of this, in 2018 he completed a doctorate, writing an organological and iconographical study of the instrument known as the cetra, a little understood plucked string instrument used during the medieval period. Young demonstrated throughout our interview sessions that the question of historical justifiability was very important to his development as a lutenist. It led to him assimilating repertoire and counterpoint exercises, much as he encouraged me to do when I was learning *La Spagna* with him. It also generated his physical technique, causing him to work with a very fine plectrum and to mix this plectrum playing with finger
plucking. This clearly has had a strong impact on the sound he makes as a player, as well as differentiating him from his contemporaries.

His reliance on memory and knowledge of the sources not only leads to a strongly historical output in terms of the sounds of his performances, but is also firmly based in historically justifiable techniques as Berger so cogently argues. Iconographical and musical sources back this up; musicians in the Middle Ages are not depicted playing from scores, neither do musical manuscripts display evidence of usage of the type we might expect if they had been referred to during rehearsal or performance. Although it could be expected that such emphasis on “historical correctness” might lead to stilted or over cautious performances, in fact Young’s particular skill is in the degree of flexibility that he is able to bring to bear on his preprepared materials. Even though Young’s performances are clearly modular, he maintains a capacity to vary ornamentation and rhythmic nuance, lengthening his memorised sections with extensions, reordering them, repeating them, adding new ideas and exploring different ranges with simple intervallic sequences. In this way his playing includes new developments and interesting quirky moments that themselves may be repeated and woven into the fabric of his performance as a new musical word in his fifteenth-century lute language. The very solid grounding of Young’s music making in historical source materials of different kinds means that the evidence of creativity I have uncovered can be accepted as justifiable in HIP, in other words, as historically authentic.

My next chapter will take a further step down the pedagogical chain to examine the output of one of Young’s students, wind player Mara Winter. Eschewing performance of notated music altogether, Winter and her duo partner Hanna Marti created an entirely new musical language to fit poetic texts from medieval Iceland. Her focus was on generating a restrictive set of gestures within which she found enough freedom to be able to unselfconsciously own her improvisatory skill, while at the same time ensuring her performance’s historical believability. The links of the pedagogical chain are taking us towards improvisation and creativity having a recognised status as a basic and obligatory technique that musicians must engage with in order to perform medieval music today.

74 Berger, Medieval Music and the Art of Memory.
75 See Chapter III for more on memory.
Chapter VI: Mara Winter – Freedom Within Restriction
Mara Winter (born 1988) is an American flautist with a diverse background in contemporary, experimental, electronics, metal and baroque music. She describes her route into medieval music as being shaped by the people she met, for example Jacob Mariani with whom she now works in ensemble Rumorum (winners of the EEEmerging and Friends prize at the York Early Music Festival Young Artists’ Competition in 2017) and Hanna Marti, whom she met at Benjamin Bagby’s medieval music course in Vancouver in 2013, the other half of her duo Moirai (formed in 2015). When I interviewed her, she had already been awarded a Masters in medieval and Renaissance transverse flute from the Schola Cantorum and was still living in Basel as she pursued further Masters studies in Renaissance music.

She expressed to me her dissatisfaction with the sound of her instrument which led to taking a break from music studies when she was younger. This is in contrast to how she described her encounter with medieval music: “I’d never heard anything like that and I just loved it, like, the sound, you know, the sound of the instruments. Everything was just so enchanting.” The fact that medieval music was “the same in spirit” to contemporary music, with a similar imaginative attitude also attracted her: “There’s a more creative approach instead of just looking at what’s on the page and playing it. You know, there’s something personal there. There was something a bit mysterious too. That was exciting to me.”

I became interested in Winter’s work when I saw her play with her duo Moirai in Paris in May 2019. After the concert I went to introduce myself and congratulate both musicians. As I was waiting to talk to Winter, another audience member asked her how much of the concert was improvised and Winter replied without hesitation that all of it was. The contrast between this confident assertion of improvisation and the caution of some other musicians I had interviewed was striking and I felt it was something that would be interesting to explore. I asked myself the question, what is it that has enabled Winter to conceive of her performance as being entirely improvised?

In this chapter, I will consider Winter’s definition of improvisation and what this means to her for her own practice, including the process she followed in her duo Moirai to create performances using the medieval poetic texts of the Icelandic Edda. Winter gave me access to several of her performance scores, including text only scores as well as one score including musical notation, which enables me to comment on how these relate to a specific performance on their album,
Blood Treasure, Woven Fates.¹ I will analyse this performance in more detail, firstly with an overview of its structure. A full transcription can be found in Appendix 3. Then I reflect on the vocal performance and how it relates to one of the duo’s stated models, the Icelandic folk tradition of rímur singing as well as to the monastic tradition of psalm chanting. I also compare it to the notated musical score, which highlights how the singer has memorised some sections while being flexible in others. The annotations that Winter made to guide her own playing on the different scores allow me to explore how the visual and textual cues relate to Winter’s recorded performance. I give an overview of the whole performance and explain some aspects of the structure in relation to the poetry. Finally, I turn to the specificities of Winter’s own playing, considering firstly possible models within the twentieth- and twenty-first-century tradition of solo wind instrument accompanying solo voice in the medieval music revival. I then outline some broader techniques and functions of what Winter plays before focusing in on smaller gestures that I have identified as being repeated in the flute performance. Overall, I will show how Winter intentionally contrasts coherence and incoherence, using this as a way to structure the whole sonic experience, introducing dissonance to create tension, but only once the basic musical language has been well established. All of these analytical examinations will serve to demonstrate how both performers seek an equilibrium between deliberate restriction of their musical material and freedom and allow me to judge how far they have achieved a balance between fixity and flexibility.

Winter’s definition of improvisation

On prompting, Winter gave me a definition of improvisation:

It is a difficult question. How can you define it? Because ... the way that we organise our minds around concepts of what is improvised and not, what's formal, what's informal, what's intellectual, what's popular. I feel like it's really hard to approach the mind space of the way somebody who lived in the thirteenth century, for example, would have thought about music. We try but I think we're still missing so many pieces. ... I just feel like too often we associate this term improvisation with something that is somehow less intellectual, or less formal than ... playing from notation.

¹ Winter kindly shared a copy of both recording and booklet with me pre-release. I therefore do not have any publication details.
OK, for me personally … improvisation is kind of the wrong word. It's almost something more like this collection of gestures, or like… a certain kind of musical dialect that you learn and then you can generate material.

So it's not free. It's absolutely not free and there are lots of rules. But it's something that happens extempore. And for me the structure and the rules oftentimes make me feel more free to make creative choices because I have these things to hang onto. And I think that there are many different languages and what's important to me is differentiating between them and going really deeply into all of these varieties, depending on what's needed. But I don't think there's like a universal medieval modal language at all. It's so specific actually. ²

Winter draws on concepts which are common in our understanding of improvisation including the idea that improvisation is made up of building blocks; here she uses the word “gestures”. She also likens improvisation to language, using the word “dialect”, another common parallel. ³ The idea that improvisation is “absolutely not free” because you have to have a very firm grasp on the language and the building blocks with which you are aiming to generate new musical material is in accordance with Nettl’s reflections on improvisation when he says that spontaneity is in fact only possible where options are limited. ⁴ Winter adds that it is these restrictions that enable her to feel freer. This echoes the thoughts of the musician from North India, Ram Narayan, as reported by Sorrell, who concludes that “the narrower the limits the sharper the focus … the really good musician is one who can find the greatest freedom within the narrowest limits”. ⁵ It is worth pointing out that generating music from formulas, motifs or building blocks is still inherently a

---

² Mara Winter, interview by the author about improvisation and her practice, Basel, Switzerland, 27 January 2020.
³ Both the concept of building blocks and linguistic metaphors have been covered as themes in Chapter III above, linking the words of my respondents to musicological work such as Bruno Nettl, ‘Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach’, The Musical Quarterly 60, no. 1 (January 1974), 13–14 and Laudan Nooshin, ‘Improvisation as “Other”: Creativity, Knowledge and Power: The Case of Iranian Classical Music’, Journal of the Royal Musical Association 128, no. 2 (1 January 2003), 278. Winter’s work echoes work done with medieval texts by Benjamin Bagby, who refers to his ensemble Sequentia’s creation of a “modal language” using not simply a scale but also a series of gestures and signs that can be “interiorized, varied, combined and used as a font to create musical ‘texts’”. Liner notes to Sequentia, Edda: Myths from Medieval Iceland, recorded at Skálholt, Iceland, 5-9 November 1996, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (BMG) 05472 77381 2, 1999, compact disc, 11.
creative act because the end result will be an innovative and new, never-heard-before sonic experience.

When I asked Winter to provide me with more information about how she went about differentiating between specific medieval modal languages, she described her approach to a particular project, her first with the duo Moirai. This project was based on the Icelandic Edda sagas, a collection of poetic texts most of which can be found in a thirteenth-century manuscript known as the Codex Regius. Although there is no surviving music from thirteenth century Iceland, Winter indicated that it was likely people made musical performances of the texts at that time, and probably even in earlier times as well. She told me: “What we wanted to do was somehow create, gather a modal language that would kind of work for the project”. It was therefore clearly necessary for the duo to construct their own building blocks and develop their own restrictions, in other words create a musical language and style, one that would be informed by historical imagination and that could then be used to “generate material” as she told me when talking about improvisation. This kind of reconstruction work with the Edda texts has already been carried out by the artists of the medieval ensemble Sequentia, founded by Benjamin Bagby and Barbara Thornton after their studies with Thomas Binkley and the Studio der frühen Musik. Marti also in fact works with Sequentia. However, Winter was quick to point out to me that although they have a similar approach to Sequentia, they did not get members of Sequentia to listen to their versions or ask them for advice. She said in fact that they were “very isolated” during the long development process. “It was important to both of us to develop a sound really not under the influence of anyone else.” Sequentia’s approach is documented in the booklets that appeared with their published discs, by Bagby himself in published articles, and in interviews with Bagby as discussed by other writers.

This is how Moirai described their process in a more official way in the notes to their album:

---

6 Reykjavík, Iceland, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Gl.kgl.sml.2365 4to.
While there [in Reykjavík], [Winter and Marti] pored through the extensive archive of field recordings documenting the Icelandic rímur tradition, collected around the country during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Rímur are a traditional Icelandic style of rhymed, melodically vocalized verses which have inherited several important features of medieval poetic diction. Marti and Winter selected certain rímur melodies from the archives which would fit, with some adaptation, to the structure of the poetry contained in the Codex Regius. They then merged the traditional rímur style with compositional traits of continental European monophonic song which would have occurred contemporaneously in Northern Europe in the thirteenth century. This blending process became the basis of further development of Blood Treasure, Woven Fates.

The vocabulary of adapting, merging and blending indicates that Moirai’s musical material was produced in an experimental way that was open to including both composition and improvisation. Musical components, longer sections or even just gestures, have differing degrees of fixity. We will see that this is suggested by how Winter talks about her written performance materials and by what she says about the act of performance itself. It can also be heard in a comparison of those materials with the recording as available on their album, Blood Treasure, Woven Fates.

The lack of written music for the texts has a further ramification. When Winter had described her performance in Paris as entirely improvised, this was believable precisely because of the fact that the Icelandic Edda sagas are medieval texts without musical notation. Winter in fact told me that the music “has to be somewhat improvised” because of this lack. The problematic connection between improvisation and lack of notation has been commonly made with regard to non-Western cultures, as Nettl put it, “improvisation ends where notation begins”. In this case, it is more that improvisation has to start because the notation of the Eddic poetry’s music never begins.

Processes of improvisation for Winter and Marti

I was interested to hear from Winter about the process she had followed in order to arrive at a credible musical style to accompany these texts. Following her own requirement, it would presumably be very specific and not just some kind of “universal medieval modal language”. In common with other reconstruction efforts, whether that of Bagby and Sequentia already mentioned or of an ensemble such as Altramar who have also reconstructed music for texts that

---

have survived without musical notation, Winter needed models on which to base her new modal language for the Edda texts. She described her musical toolbox as consisting of two sources, music from medieval cultures that had contact with Iceland at that time and the field recordings of Icelandic rímur singers. This is an obvious choice, especially because gaining familiarity with this oral tradition of singing epic poetry from Iceland is exactly the same process that Sequentia had followed for their Edda projects. Bagby describes the use of a particular model, rather than the “universal medieval modal language” that Winter wanted to avoid, as a way “to temper the limitless freedom of modal intoxication”. He too had searched for restrictions.

Winter explained that the repetitive melodies of the rímur singers that they consulted when they visited the library in Reykjavík in 2015 were “very modal, oftentimes in a very strong Lydian mode” in spite of their modern origins. She in fact seemed reticent about their use of this material, saying that they could maybe use it “partially” as a model, that it was “not solid at all”, just a personal choice and that ultimately it depended on subjective tastes. They simply transcribed the ones that they liked. She went on to describe how hard the process had been:

Winter: So then ... we had this musical toolbox right? Like, we had the field recordings, we had sources from continental Europe from around the same time period that we thought we could experiment with, and then what we had to do was make the text version for our concert programme and apply the modal materials we liked to the text.

Stuttard: Big job!

---

9 Altramar discuss how they reconstructed music for medieval Irish poems that they believe would have been sung in their article: Jann Cosart et al., ‘Reconstructing the Music of Medieval Ireland: Altramar’s Crossroads of the Celts’, *Early Music* XXVIII, no. 2 (2000), 271–82. They drew on: medieval Irish plainchant antiphons discovered by Bruno Stäblein; the practice of an Ethiopian plucked lyre (krar) player; a twentieth-century recording of Fenian lays, Celtic heroic narrative poetry sung in Scotland and the Outer Hebrides. Altramar, *Crossroads of the Celts*, Dorian Recordings D 128742 BMG, 1999, compact disc.

10 Rímur (sing. ríma) are a kind of narrative poem in Icelandic with roots in the fourteenth century, constructed of stanzas and organised into larger sections known as fits. Their content tends towards action and adventure including themes such as chivalric romance or stories drawing on ancient Scandinavian tales. They remained extremely popular as a form of literary expression well into the nineteenth century, with early named authors dating back to the seventeenth century. In various communal settings, rímur could be heard chanted to repetitive melodies rather than read. According to Deschênes, their melodies started to be collected and written down in the nineteenth century, with recordings being made from the 1900s. Ólafsdóttir, on the other hand, insists on the fact that the music had to be learnt orally from someone who knew the tradition. S. F. D. Hughes, ‘Rímur’, in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene et al., fourth edition, Princeton Reference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1201; Bruno Deschênes, ‘Recording Reviews: “Rímur”’, *World of Music* 47, no. 1 (2005), 187–88; Ragnheiður Ólafsdóttir, ‘”Pride and Prejudice”: The Preservation of the Icelandic Rímur Tradition’, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 40, (2008), 104–16.

11 Sequentia, *Edda: Myths from Medieval Iceland.*
Winter: That's why it's been five years and we didn't record it yet! [laughter] We're recording it next month. Yeah, this took forever, and it really, like, it was so many failures, and, like, a really frustrating process sometimes. It took a long time to get it. And then also to fit the instruments in.

Winter shared with me some of her written performance materials, which are in the form of both annotated texts and notated melodies with text. She described the materials as “old” and frequently mentioned how what she and Marti do now is different.

![Image of annotated text performance material, Gripir's Prophecy]

Figure VI.1: Winter annotated text performance material, Gripir’s Prophecy

We discussed a page of text that Winter had annotated in various ways (see Figure VI.1). She told me that she uses some annotations that are like graphic score elements such as an arrow indicating a transition to a different mode, here from the D mode mentioned at the start of the second block of text to G mode as written at the end of this block. In this extract, we find a star at the start of the second block of text that she told me was a visual indication for her to start playing. We can also see a “squiggly line” as Winter described it, which meant that she was to add a few notes. In addition, there are verbal instructions or reminders like “big entrance” or “FL OUT” (an abbreviation for Winter to stop playing), as well as pitch suggestions; the D F A written at the end of the first line of text. When revisiting this in detail with me, Winter expressed some surprise and even laughed at the things she had written here, saying that she would not write this kind of information in her performance materials now. In fact, she also clarified that the pitch suggestions of D F and A are no longer part of how she plays here: “I know that I don’t play that there any more, but originally I guess that’s what I was doing.”
Further down the same page, (see Figure VI.2) Winter has written “PATTERN” with another undulating line presumably showing how long underneath the text her pattern was to continue. She has added a couple of verbal notes as well about the meaning of the text and content of the story. Before the last line of the text on this page, a new narrative element begins (“NEW STORY”). This follows the section dealing with “killing [the] dragon”.

Winter clarified that she still uses this “score” (her word for it), but that she “directly go[es] against some of the things that are written now”. Unfortunately, this piece does not appear either on their album or in any accessible live recordings, and therefore I am unable to demonstrate just how different their performances might be.

Winter allowed me to access another kind of score that she used for performances with Moirai of the Eddic material. This time we find musical notation (see Figure VI.3). The score comprises an annotated vocal setting of the text from the Elder Edda. There is no written out part for the flute. Winter explained to me that the key was chosen in order for it to match the way her bone flute was tuned and pitched. This led me to produce my own transcription using the same key standard, even though this type of key signature was unknown during the Middle Ages; due to the fact that no original musical notation is available for the texts that Moirai perform here, this transcription choice also highlights the newly created nature of the music in a justifiable way. Winter also told me that the piece is “heavily improvised” and that she does not use this score any more, just text. This is the third kind of score to which Winter granted me access. Instead of the full text, just cues have been written out (see Figure VI.4.) This piece will appear on the forthcoming album, and I was therefore able to compare a performance with both sets of performance materials. The materials
are for a performance of an extract of the poem known as *The Lay of Sigrdrífa* or *Sigrdrífomál*.\(^\text{12}\)

This poem is from the Elder Edda and mainly reports the speech of the warrior Sigrdrífa (a Valkyrie, literally “Victory giver”, also known as Brynhildr) on being woken from a magical sleep by Sigurd (or Sigurðr in the original), a key character in the stories of the Edda and the larger Nibelungen Tradition.\(^\text{13}\) This text includes sections in a verseform known as ljoðaháttr that is used to “impart knowledge in the form of gnomes, rúnar, lióð, or ráð”, and as such can be classified as a wisdom poem.\(^\text{14}\) It is full of allusion to mythological beings and creatures and lists a number of magical runes that can help with different tasks, hence the track name given by Moirai, *Sigrdrífa’s spell*.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{12}\) The full, if incomplete, text as taken from Codex Regius can be found in Karl Hildebrand and Hugo Gering, eds., *Die Lieder der älteren Edda (Saemundar Edda)*, second fully revised edition, Bibliothek der ältesten deutschen Literatur-Denkmäler, VII (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1904), 316–29, accessed 29 March 2022, http://archive.org/details/dieliederderlte00hild. Translation: Patricia Terry, trans., *Poems of the Elder Edda*, revised edition, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 161–68. “Sigrdrífomál” appears to be an alternative spelling. Moirai have shortened the original text by cutting prose sections and omitting several parts of the poetry; following the numbering of stanzas in the edition by Hildebrand, Moirai perform: 1, 4, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20. Stanzas 21-37 are missed out, perhaps because these stanzas seem more Christian than pagan in outlook, see Edgar Haimerl, ’Sigurðr, a Medieval Hero: A Manuscript-Based Interpretation of the “Young Sigurðr Poems”’, in *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, trans. Antje Frotscher, Routledge Medieval Casebooks (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 48. The extract as performed by Moirai is given in their CD booklet, both in an original version and in translation. No information is given about where the edition or translation were sourced.


\(^{15}\) For more on use of runes as amulets with different purposes, see Mindy Macleod and Bernard Mees, ’Protective and Enabling Charms’, in *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 71–101.
Figure VI.3: Performance score of Sigdrifumál, page 1
Figure VI.3 cont.: Performance score of Sigrdirumal, page 4
Figure VI.4: Performance score, abbreviated text version of Sigrdrífaðl, page 1
I vini
ói Guguís
á norður vegli

→ flute interlude

Allar váru af skæurious.

Sumar hava meðurkí meun.

Nú skal tú kíssa...

Sögur eða fógu!
Hafrun því sjálfr í hug

Öll eru meir of metin!
The comparison between the two scores (Figures VI.3 and VI.4) highlighted for Winter how much more comfortable and free she feels when using the textual extracts rather than the musical notation: “You can see how panicked this version looks (Figure VI.3) compared to this one (Figure VI.4)… There’s so much more space here, you know, to be free.” Space was clarified as meaning that Winter had the ability to listen more. She could also allow silence into the performance, the literal musical space of not playing anything.

Figure VI.4 includes pitch annotations, letters which are often circled or enclosed in a square to help make them stand out visually. These appear to be reminders of where the vocal line is going to land at the ends of phrases. This did not become apparent to me until the section starting with the text “A skyldi… Á eyra Árvakrs”, the text cues that appear towards the bottom of page 1. Here a series of text phrases can be heard that alternate between finishing on a B and finishing on a G (the sharp is understood).

In the following table (Table VI.1), I have split the text into different sections in order to give an overview of the larger structure that I perceived in Moirai’s performance.16 Section I includes a variety of material in different ranges and is set apart from Section II because this second part introduces repetition in the manner of an insistent, magical mantra. Section III is then delimited by the longer instrumental interlude that precedes it, introducing for the first time some sense of a metrical rhythm. Another interlude marks out where the fourth section will begin. The two interludes on flute appear in places that are marked with a whirling doodle (see Figure VI.3, page 3), suggesting that these elements of the large structure of the performance had already been fixed by the time this score was made in 2016. Section IV, like Section I, includes varied musical material. At the end, there is a return to a high-pitched melodic shape first heard in Section I. This is aurally recognisable and memorable due to the extreme register and gives a clear sense of completion and rounding out the performance.

16 The Icelandic is taken from the CD booklet and differs slightly from the text in the notated performance score. I have assumed the former has been more thoroughly proofread.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Original text</th>
<th>Translation (from Blood Treasure, Woven Fates CD booklet)</th>
<th>Musical comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental on bone flute played by Winter. Repeating figures around high F♯ and E♯; explores mode to reach low F♯; arrives at B, the central pitch of the vocal line to follow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What bit into my armor? How have I shaken off sleep? Who has lifted from me my pale bindings? The son of Sigmund - a short time ago it was cutting the raven’s rings - the sword of Sigurðr.

I slept for a long time, long I was sleeping, long are the woes of men. Odin is to blame that I could not break the charms of sleep.

1. Restricted number of pitches, F♯, G♯, B and C♯.

2. Lengi ek svaf lengi ek sofnuð var, lóng ero lýða láe. Óðinn því veldr er ek eigi máttak bregða blundstöfom.

I slept for a long time, long I was sleeping, long are the woes of men. Odin is to blame that I could not break the charms of sleep.


4. Bjór faerí ek þér brynþings apaldr magni blandinn ok

I bring you beer, great warrior, mixed with magical power and mighty glory,
| II | 1. Sigrúnar skaltu kunna ef þú vilt sigr hafa ok rísta á hjalti hjórs. Sumar á vétttrímom sumar á valböstom ok nefna tysvar Tý. You shall know victory runes if you want to be victorious, carve them into the sword hilt. Some on the bladeguards, some on the handle and invoke Tyr twice. |
|    | Help-runes you must know if you want to assist and release children from women, they shall be cut on your palms and clasped on the joints and then the Disir asked for help. |
|    | 2. Bjargrúnar skaltu kunna ef þú bjarga vilt ok leysa kind frá konom. Æ lófum þær skal rísta ok of liðu spenna ok biðja þá disir duga. |
|    | Limb-runes you must know if you want to be a healer and know how to see to wounds. On bark they must be cut and on the trees whose branches go east. |
|    | 3. Limrúnar skaltu kunna ef þú vilt læknir vera ok kunna sár at sjá. Á berki skal þær rísta ok á baðmi viðar þeim er lúta austur limar. |
|    | Speech-runes you must know if you want that no one requite your sorrow with enmity. You wind them around and weave them around, you set them all together at that meeting where people must go to fully constituted courts. |
|    | 4. Málrúnar skaltu kunna ef þú vilt at manngi þér heftum gjaldi harm.Þær of vindr þær of vefr þær of setr allar saman á því þingi er þjóðir skulu í fulla dóma fara. |
|    | Mind-runes you must know if you want to be wiser minded than every other human. This one interpreted, this one cut, and this one thought of Hroftr (Odin), from that liquid which had leaked from Heidraupnir’s skull and from |
|    | 5. Hugrúnar skaltu kunnaef þú vilt hveriom vera geðsvinnari guma. Þær of réð þær of reist þær of hugði Hroftr af þeim legi er lekit hafði ór hausí Heiðraupnis ok ór |
|    | Repetitive in both music and text, spell-like and mantra-like. Phrases begin with F♯ G♯ B, with B as reciting tone. Similar to psalm chanting with intonation, flex, mediant, tenor and termination formulas. |

megintíri fullr er hann ljóða ok íknstafa góðra galdra ok gamanrúna.
it is full of spells and favorable letters, good charms and runes of joy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interlude 1</th>
<th>Horni Hoddrofnis.</th>
<th>Hoddrofnir's horn.</th>
<th>Bone flute, limited range in upper register; D♯ to G♯ with occasional B below and A♯ above. First regular pulse.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>1. Á skildi kvað ristnar þeim er stendr fyr skinandi goði,</td>
<td>On the shield are carved the runes which stands before the Sun,</td>
<td>Insistent binary rhythmic pulse. Very pronounced repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. á eyra Árvakrs ok á Alsvinnns höfi á því hvéli er snýsk undir reið Hrungnis</td>
<td>on Arvak's ear and on Alswinn's hoof on the wheel, which is turning under the wagon of Rungnir,</td>
<td>Alternation of two musical phrases; first finishing on B second on G♯.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. á Sleipnis tönnum ok á sleða fjötrum. Á bjarnar hrammi ok á Braga tungo</td>
<td>on Sleipnir’s teeth on the sledges’ strap-bands, on the paw of the bear and on the tongue of Bragi,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. á ulfs klóum ok á arnar nefi á blóðgam vængiom ok á brúar sporði</td>
<td>on the wolf’s claws and on the beak of the eagle on bloody wings and at the end of the bridge, the hands which deliver and on the trail of the helpful. On glass and on gold and on men’s amulets,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. á lausnar lófa ok á líknar spori. Á gleri ok á gulli ok á gumna heílom</td>
<td>in wine and in beer and on a favorite seat, on Gungnir’s point and on Grani’s breast, on the nail of the norn and the beak of the owl.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. í víni ok í virtri ok vilisessi á Gugnis oddi ok á Grana brjóstí á nornar nagli ok á nefi uglo.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude 2</td>
<td>Allar váru af skafnar þær er</td>
<td>All were shaved off, those which were carved</td>
<td>Abrupt and destabilising G♯; return to unmetered, non rhythmic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1. Allar váru af skafnar þær er</td>
<td></td>
<td>G♯ as centre of gravity, echoes phrases in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>váru á ristnar ok hverfðar við inn helga mjöð ok sendar á víða vega.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. þær ro með ásom þær ro með alfom sumar með vísom vönom sumar hafa mennskir menn.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nú skaltu kjósa alls þér er kostr of boðinn hvassa vápna hlynr.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sögn eða þogn hafðu þér sjalfr í hug. Öll eru mein of metin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| on, and stirred into the sacred mead and sent on wandering ways. |
| These rest with the Aesir, these with the elves, some with the wise Vanir, some are with humankind. |
| Now you shall choose, since choice is offered to you, maple of# weapons. |
| Speech or silence: you can make up your own mind. All harms are measured out. |

| the previous section that finished on G#, unmetered. |
| Return to familiar melody from the opening: F#, G# as introduction, B as intonation pitch, occasional C# |
| Upper fifth from B to high F# with Lydian sharpened fourth (E#). Echo of phrases in Section 1 in this pitch range |
In the following discussion, I will refer to parts of the vocal performance in terms of section number and paragraph number, for example II-3 is the third paragraph of the second section starting with the text “Limrúnar skaltu kunna...” Both sections and paragraphs have been decided by me on the basis of musical coherence or similarity of features within them or, conversely, separating features between them such as the longer instrumental interludes, as opposed to short interjections between lines of text or sentences (see commentary in Table VI.1). The section number and paragraph number are given in my transcription of Moirai’s performance, please see Appendix 3.

In transcribing Moirai’s recording of Sigrdrífa’s spell I have taken a pragmatic approach to both rhythm and ornamentation. The time values of notes were rarely in any direct ratio relationship to each other, except for during Interlude 1 and Section III which both have a sense of a metric pulse. I have attempted to give a flavour of the relationship between note lengths in the rest of my transcription so that within short time frames, longer sounding notes are notated with longer note values but over the entire course of the piece there may not be a direct relationship between how long a semibreve sounds at one point, and how long it sounds at another point in the performance according to my score.

Both Winter and Marti add ornaments and inflections to their performances that contain variations in clarity in terms of timing and pitch. I made use of Sonic Visualiser to slow down the playback so that I could hear more precisely what pitches were sung or played. This has created a resulting transcription that is occasionally more detailed than the ear can easily perceive.

In general, I have attempted to show roughly the time relationship between bone flute and voice, whether particular notes sound simultaneously and how a note sounded by one performer is heard before or after a note sounded by the other performer. Due to the vagaries of the timing and lack of metre, these relationships are not exact.

I have made use of symbols in ways that are peculiar to this transcription:

\[ V \] This appears above the bone flute stave and indicates a finger flick that creates an articulation during a long, held note. They are placed to give a rough indication of where in time it occurs with greater or lesser precision and the number of them is
also a rough idea of how many times the finger flick is audible.

This symbol appears above the associated note in the vocal stave and indicates obvious and apparent vibrato on the associated note. It can be found repeated in the same opening vocal gesture at various points throughout (see further explanation below).

Figure VI.5: Ornament annotation in transcription

Four symbols used here (Figure VI.5) to show ornaments without very clear specific pitch.

1. Often found at the end of a held note where a finger release raises the pitch briefly.

2. Shows a scoop up into the written note that is not heard as a separate distinguishable pitch.

3. This is the same except arriving from a pitch that is higher than the main pitch indicated by the note.

4. This symbol and other straight lines like it show a glissando-type effect going up to (or down from) a pitched note as indicated by the written note.

Figure VI.6: Transcription of timing example

Small notes with stems always up (as shown here on the upper line of Figure VI.6) tend to be faster and less easy to hear as individual notes than normal sized notes with stems that may
also go down, such as the semiquavers in the vocal line here. It may be the case that my detailed pitch transcription into these small notes was only possible thanks to Sonic Visualiser’s tool that slows down the playback while keeping the same pitch.

The inflection that I indicate in Figure VI.7 with a tremblement ornamentation sign reflects how I heard a deliberate, if brief, vocal vibrato that reoccurred in this gesture at various times during the performance. This was also visible in the spectrogram as created by Sonic visualiser, in spite of the temporal brevity of the pitch on which it occurs.

A spectrogram of the performance of the text “Hví brá ek svefni?” can be seen in Figure VI.8. The vibrato on the second pitch for the first word is clearly visible (see arrow indicating where this is) and differs from the way the voice is used on the other pitches we can see here.
Figure VI.8: Spectrogram showing vibrato
Discussion of singing style: rímur and psalm chanting

In Icelandic traditional music, rímur are performed using a special kind of vocal technique known as “að kvæða”. The Icelandic verb “kveða” can be understood to mean something between singing and speaking.¹⁷ We might think of it as “intoned” or “chanted”.¹⁸ In fact, the manner of performing rímur has defied definition and caused contradictions in the literature according to the ethnomusicologist Svend Nielsen, who explains that it is neither song nor speech, but “fluctuating between the two”.¹⁹ “It is not easy to get a kvæðamaður [someone who performs rímur] to describe in words how kveðskapur [the performance of rímur] compares to song”.²⁰ In the words of kvæðamaður Pétur Olafsson, “When I sing my heart grows glad. When I kveða it’s the story that matters.”²¹ This insider view from a rímur performer highlights the importance of the text and the subservience of the music in this epic narrative genre.

The manner in which the majority of the text is performed by Marti is more like chanting than melodic singing and in view of the special style of vocal performance in Icelandic rímur, this seems entirely appropriate. A comparison with the medieval manner of chanting psalms is instructive because it allows us access to useful vocabulary with which to describe what Marti does. It also demonstrates that Marti was using knowledge of a historical singing style that is well documented in medieval Europe, giving her invented singing style an informed basis. In the liturgy of the Western church, the psalms have formed the core of monastic prayers since the birth of the monastic movement in the fourth century.²² In medieval monasteries, all 150 psalms were chanted on a weekly basis using eight psalm tones. Psalm tones consist of short formulas to begin and end sections of text (each psalm verse is split into two phrases), then in between these formulas the text is intoned on a pitch known as

---

¹⁷ Amongst other meanings, see Ólafsdóttir, ‘Pride and Prejudice’, 105.
²⁰ Nielsen, 37.
²¹ As quoted in Nielsen, 37.
the reciting note or tenor. In Figure VI.9 can be found a comparison of Psalm Tone 2 with Marti’s chanting in which I apply the psalm terminology to Marti’s formulas.

![Psalm Tone: Mode 2](image)

**Psalm Tone: Mode 2**

![Sigdrífa’s spell "chanting"](image)

**Sigdrífa’s spell "chanting"**

*Figure VI.9: Psalm tone and Sigdrífa’s spell "chanting"*

The intonation in psalm chanting is usually only heard at the very beginning of the text. Where the psalm verse is particularly long necessitating a breath to be taken, then the flex pitch can be added before chanting begins again on the tenor. In Marti’s singing, there was much more flexibility around the use of different flex formulas or pitches and termination formulas in the sections where this type of chanting of the text was predominant, the majority of the performance in fact: I-1, II-1, II-2, II-3, II-4, II-5, III-2, III-3, III-4, III-5, III-6, IV-1, IV-2, and IV-3. This material is very restricted in its scope, in spite of the broad variety of ways that Marti mixes the intonation, flex and termination phrases together. The predominance of its presence throughout the whole vocal performance ensures that the experience is one of clear coherence. Marti provides occasional contrast at specific points, but this solid and stable background paves the way for the flute to be the vehicle through which broader development and differentiation is achieved.

In Nielsen’s study of the kvæðamaður, Þórður Guðbjartsson, he summarises the types of rímur performance with a description of two possible extremes on a continuum that he observed in the descriptive literature and audio sources. The first he called a “universal

---

melody” which would be a memorable tune that you could sing along with, using quite a wide range and fitting in to standardised scales, classifiable as major, minor or modal (usually Lydian). The sound of the voice was similar to a singing voice with a pure tone. The second type he named “transient performance” with the characteristics that the music was harder to retain and actually boring, staying within a small range with uneven intervals that cannot be easily matched to a scale as known in the Western European Art Music tradition. Here the sound of the voice is more like speech with a more uninhibited quality. Unlike in the first type, the different musical sections do not have particular functions (for example, introducing, finishing fully, finishing partially etc) but all sound similar and can be interchanged, although the terminating sections may sometimes be in a lower range. We will see how Marti’s performance matches this second type in some ways but not in others.

Analysis and comparison of the performance with the performance scores

When comparing the musical score with the vocal performance as recorded for Moirai’s album, I was struck by how much of Section I was exactly the same as what was written. Furthermore, at the very end of the song, the last two phrases (IV-4 – “Sögn eða þög n hafðu þér sjalfr í hug. Öll eru mein of metin.”) are also sung recognisably to the written version of the melody for this text that Winter shared with me. This written version is dated 2016 suggesting that the vocal performance was open both to memorisation and reuse as well as to change during the four intervening years. In short, even though notation suggests something static and fixed, the notation did not in fact dictate the whole of the performance and was varied as well as repeated exactly. One major difference between performance and score is the simplification of sections III and IV so that they are based on the chanting formula I have outlined above rather than exploring the different ranges of pitches that are found written out in Figure VI.3. In section II, some paragraphs were originally written in a different range (for example, II-2 with a tenor on D♯ and II-4 with a tenor on F♯) and those that were written around a chanting tenor of B are not exactly reproduced, demonstrating the flexibility of the chanting style that Marti has adopted. A further result of the general simplification is that the contrast is very strong when other material in different pitch ranges

24 Nielsen, Stability in Musical Improvisation, 38.
is heard. In I-2 the pitch is at an audible vocal extreme for Marti and this further ensures that it is memorable and recognisable on its return at IV-4.

The vocal line in I-1 has become more repetitive in the recorded performance in comparison with the score, using the chanting formulas as seen in Figure VI.9. The musical line stays within the lower range F♯ to C♯ on the words “Hverr felldi af mér fólvar nauðir?” instead of venturing higher. All of I-2 and I-3 are performed as written in the performance score, Figure VI.3.

Winter’s interventions on the other hand do not have many recognisable correspondences to the annotations in this score. Winter’s part is not written down in musical detail in the same way as the vocal line. In Figure VI.3, Winter has annotated the opening with the words, “Fl. Intro (Drone-ish)”, “NO DRONE – MINIMAL” and later, “less drone”. The same section in her other text-based score provides the three opening words of the poem and the letter B indicating the pitch around which Marti intones. Winter plays an introduction that emphasises a restricted range and uses several long, held notes that can be understood as “Drone-ish”. When Marti begins singing, Winter is absent at first, as indicated by her words “NO DRONE”, then provides only a short interjection that briefly echoes the voice, lands on C♯ then moves back to the tenor note (the pitch around which Marti chants the text), B♮. When Winter is next heard, her playing prefigures the higher range of I-2, and at the same time the higher pitch recalls the opening. Now the flute is also heard in long held notes behind the voice.

Arrows in Winter’s performance score are harder to interpret in relation to her performance in Sigdrifa’s spell. In I-2, there is a brief moment when Winter ornaments G♯ and F♯ in between the vocal phrases “löng ero lýða læ” and “Óðinn því veldr er ek eigi máttak bregða blundstöfom” that seems to relate to the arrow pointing down to the vocal line’s F♯, the last note for the syllable “læ”. On the last note of this second phrase (on the syllable “fom”, written “fum” in the score), Winter starts on the unison B with the voice (downward arrow on that note) and then gets higher to introduce the higher vocal phrases about to begin (wavy upwards arrow). Not every arrow however corresponds to something that Winter does, which is unsurprising in view of her reaction to this score.
In II-1 there are several moments that correspond between what Marti sings and the performance score. These seem to result from the formulaic nature of the chanting style rather than from having been memorised specifically. The case is different for the longer correspondence of melody on the text “ok nefna tysvar Tý”, which draws the phrase and the paragraph to a close with an unusual and striking C♯ to B♮ movement on the final syllable. Perhaps the word itself caused Marti to recall the musical phrase; “Tý” translates as Tyr, the relatively little-known Norse god of battle who lost hand and sword in his mythical fight with Fenrir the wolf.  

Winter provides very short interjections that hang around the pitch F♯ and provide a low backdrop to Marti’s chanting, present but unobtrusive. Before II-2, Winter echoes the vocal phrase and lands on B, the vocal chanting tenor. Her playing becomes slightly more elaborate in II-2, including fast fingered ornaments, but the pattern generally during this whole second section is that Winter provides a lower accompaniment centred on F♯ when Marti is singing each rune-spell (every paragraph as I have split the text) and between these she interjects briefly on a higher range around the pitch B♮. This pattern holds until II-5 which is preceded by a longer and higher interjection around F♯ and G♯, echoing the opening. Winter now switches more flexibly between low and high ranges with an effect of intensification. There is nothing in the performance score that could be taken as an indication that Winter followed when she played. The comment “play less” written at the top of page 3 of Figure VI.3 at the start of section II-5 no longer applies. Even where Marti sings the chant as written for the text “er lekit hafði ór hausi Heiðdraupnis ok ór horni Hoddrofnis”, Winter is not following the pencilled in pitch suggestions. The written instruction to play “very high” after this section, however, has been adhered to and Winter provides a long interlude that begins with high F♯ and G♯.

Neither does the textual performance score (Figure VI.4), which Winter said she preferred, give us any clearer a prediction about what Winter is heard doing in Section II. Each paragraph has its headword written in this score, with a circled pitch letter given. As the voice uses the

repetitive chanting patterns and the flute has limited variation to match that, the changing letters do not make much sense. There is no particular emphasis in either flute or voice on G♯ or F♯. All the phrases in II-2 for example, marked up with G in this score (used as shorthand for G♯), finish on B with no more G♯ than in II-1. In fact, the G♯ receives less emphasis here because one phrase in II-1 actually lands on that pitch. Even the verbal instruction “commentary” does not match any particular audible difference in how Winter plays for the indicated section, II-4. This indicates how Winter and Marti carried on developing their performance interactions thanks to their ability to be free and adapt their musical material.

In Interlude 1 that occurs after II-5, the high pitch F♯ is reached before the voice finishes. Winter’s annotation “crazy” could be interpreted in different ways. This interlude introduces a metrical pulse for the first time. We also hear an emphatic high A♯ for the second time. So this extreme range and the introduction of a regular pulse for the first time in this performance may be how “crazy” is portrayed by Winter here.

Section III follows and, after a brief, less rhythmic introductory paragraph III-1, continues with a metrical pulse grouped in twos (III-2 to III-6). This contrasts strongly with the rest of the performance. Marti uses the chanting formulae here to mesmeric effect. The rhythm ensures that this section stands out and does not seem to just repeat what has been heard previously, in spite of the melodic familiarity. As a kind of incantation at the centre of the performance and offset by two long instrumental interludes, the choice to use a regular metrical framework highlights that this is a section of the poem that has a different verse form, one with long lines known as fornyrðislag. This particular type of structure, in contrast to the “more solemn...rhythm of the catechism” that is found in the verse form structure used in Section III, allows the information in the text to be quickly imparted, so the delivery can be thought of as speeding up. Although excluded from Moirai’s performed text, in the full poem this part is introduced as the reported speech of Mímir, a water spirit who had

26 The first was heard briefly during I-3, prompted by words that greet the day and the deities, directly after the word for victory "sigr" that is at the root of the name of the mythical person singing, Sigdrífa.
27 Quinn, ‘Verseform and Voice in Eddic Poems’, 112.
gained wisdom by drinking from the well under the roots of the tree Yggdrasil. This provides a clue as to the change of verse form because fornyrðislag is found in poems where the gods are quoted or for prophecy. It has in fact also been suggested that this section was not an original part of the poem.

In Figures VI.10 and VI.11, extracted from the textual score, we find word cues and a series of letters for Winter to refer to when performing Section III.

---

30 See note 15-17 in Hildebrand and Gering, Die Lieder der Älteren Edda, 322.
This is the section that enabled me to see a correlation between the capital letters and the heard performance. These letters represent the pitches that Marti ends phrases on. This information was then clearly used by Winter to structure her playing and arrive on a perfect fifth above the final note of the sung phrase, or to leave a deliberate dissonance, as happens in III-3 on the word “fjötrum” and throughout III-6 as the dramatic tension builds and the pitch gets higher. There is a clear correlation between the abbreviated text layout in Figure VI.10 and Figure VI.11 and the sung version as transcribed from the performance on Blood Treasure, Woven Fates (Figure VI.12). I have added the pitch names as written by Winter in Figures 10 and 11.
The same basic pattern has been applied whether a line of text is interpreted with five or six accents. In places with differing syllable counts but the same number of accents, the rhythm of the chanted tenor note (here B♮) is altered to accommodate that. In between each subsection there is flexibility in how many beats Marti waits for before launching into the next, as indicated by the rests and beat counts I provide in Figure VI.12.
Winter uses her annotations to enable her to arrive on a D♯ a fifth above the voice on the last syllable of III-2 and III-3. Then in III-4 her D♯ slightly anticipates the final syllable, potentially an error on her part or a deliberate choice to create a sense of urgency. After the ends of these phrases, Marti waits before her next subsection because Winter provides a flexible quantity of breathing space by filling in with the pitches B and D♯ in varying rhythms and with different numbers of repeats, see Figure VI.13. The upbeat is what allows Winter to know when to place her F♯ above the chanting tenor pitch of B♮. The longer pause before III-6 allows for an insistent repetition of the F♯ before an E♯ that is the dissonant backdrop to the start of the chanting. The dissonance then continues with the flute playing A♯, a major seventh above Marti. This leads to an interlude that suddenly breaks with the preceding modality and abruptly interrupts the regularity and repetition, see the final two systems of the continuation of Figure VI.13.

This section provides an excellent example of how the duo find an equilibrium between moments that are fixed and moments that are free. On the one hand, the musical pattern of alternating cadence points seems fixed. The detail however within the chanting appears more fluid. The variation in the length of the gaps between each chanted phrase also suggests that Marti could do something different from performance to performance, depending on her need for breathing space for example, and Winter would adapt. This is possible thanks to the long performing relationship that the two musicians have with each other. Winter commented: “With Hanna for example, we know each other so well that it’s just [click of her fingers] very fast.” The two met in 2013 and have been working together since then.

This section is also the climax of the performance. I interpret it in this way because of how it is set apart from the rest. Firstly, the metrical content of the poem itself is different, as already noted, and the actual verbal meaning, as reported speech of a mythical being full of rich references to other mysterious beings and places, is also unique and new. To add to this, Moirai choose to separate it aurally by introducing a rhythmic pulse as well as framing it with longer instrumental interludes.
Figure VI.13: Section III-2 to III-6 showing flute and voice
Following the climactic rhythmic and repetitive Section III, Section IV begins with chanting that focuses around a reciting note of G♯. Winter is absent during most of IV-1. Towards the end of that paragraph, she begins to play a fast, swirling ornament circling around G♯ that I
have transcribed imprecisely using the same rhythmic value for each note (see Appendix 3), and not showing the exact number of repetitions. On listening closely using Sonic Visualiser to slow this section down, the ornament has a rhythmic profile approximating my transcription in Figure VI.14:

![Flute swirling ornament rhythm](image)

Figure VI.14: Flute swirling ornament rhythm

The overall effect though is of a thick tapestry of very fast notes, suggestive of great waves of movement against which you hear Marti sing. The text here talks about the dispersal of the runes to the gods, elves and mankind, so busy movement is an appropriate backdrop.\

Marti does not follow the musical notation of the performance score (Figure VI.3). While the phrase “sumar með vísom vönom sumar hafa mennskir menn” in IV-2 does mostly match what is written except for the final pitch, it seems more likely that this stems from the technique of chanting rather than from deliberate memorisation, in the same way as the concordances in Section II seem to have done. More deliberate is the exact match between written melody and what Marti sings in IV-4. As already mentioned, the echo with Section I-2 is a structural element that ties the performance together as a whole and makes it unlikely that it was coincidence rather than careful planning.

In terms of what Winter plays here, there does seem to be some correspondence with the arrows pointing to the pitches B♮ at the start and C♯ on the word “hug”. She does not however then go to the indicated pitch of B again in preparation for Marti’s next entry, but boldly stays on the C♯ a short while so the B is heard as dissonance against it. This dissonance means that the resolution onto a unison B at the very end of the performance is more strongly felt by the listener.

In the abbreviated text score (_Figure VI.4_), the interlude is indicated with a G inside a circle that has rays emanating from it. Another G in a square precedes the text “Allar váru af skafnar”. The G in the interlude is perhaps the prominent, high-pitched G♮ that signals very clearly a break with the previous section, although arrows might actually indicate that at some point Winter had been expected to finish her interlude on a G, probably a G♯. Winter finishes her interlude in fact on D♯, a perfect fifth above the note on which Marti enters. No further indications are given until the words “sumar hava mennskir menn” at the end of IV-2.

Winter is heard playing some G♮s to accompany IV-3 (see _Figure VI.15_). This pitch creates a plaintive semitone above the more frequently heard F♯, made more obvious by the high register. It is plaintive to me because of the suggestion of a minor sound world that it creates, heard simultaneously with B a minor sixth below. This minor sixth is characteristic of the minor scale in contrast to the major sound world, with some hints of a Lydian sharpened fourth, that has been the home of this whole performance. The D♯ that Marti then sings on the word “hlynr” just afterwards reinforces the poignancy of the G♮ in hindsight. D♯ is not a pitch that has been heard frequently because it does not feature as one of the pitches in the chanting formulas that Marti has used for the majority of the performance. In close proximity to the G♮ to F♯ semitone, the D♯ is even more aurally apparently. The phrase ending that contains the D♯ is a gesture that is entirely new at this point, but gets repeated once more at the very end of the performance. I have marked this micro gesture with a square bracket in _Figure VI.15_ in the two places it occurs. Hearing the major third above the home pitch of B♮ at this point, so late in the performance, enables a listener to feel resolution and clarity about the concluding modal centre, in spite of the instability that Winter had just been sowing with her dissonant G♮s.
The entire 10-minute-long vocal performance is basically made up of the gestures seen in Figure VI.16. These gestures are interchangeable in terms of their positioning within phrases, meaning that they can appear as intonations, flexes, mediants or terminations. Some are used more frequently than others. The gestures that land on C♯ and D♯ are restricted to Sections I-2, I-3 and IV-4. Several gestures can also be seen as amalgamations of other gestures. For example, among the phrase types ending on B, phrases 2 and 3 both include phrase 1. In addition, both phrases 4 and 5 mix 2 and 3 together. The free mixing of these gestures could be seen as improvisation of the kind that relies on use of modular blocks in ever changing orders (c.f. Nettl).
In summary, in the creation of the vocal line in *Sigdrifa’s spell*, Marti uses both memorisation of longer sections such as can be heard in I-2, I-3 and IV-4 when compared with the 2016 performance score (*Figure VI.3*), and a generative technique resembling psalm chanting that uses shorter gestures that can be combined in a flexible way. Were I to hear this piece in performance and compare it to my transcription, I would expect that the detail of gesture combinations would differ although the gestures themselves would remain largely grouped in the sections in the same way that they are found here in the 2020 recording on *Blood Treasure, Woven Fates*. Marti has a restricted amount of material to
handle which demonstrates the control she wields over her creative act. At the same time, the small number of gestures she uses means that she can put them together in an extempore way. She has balanced control with freedom in the way that Winter described in her definition of improvisation when she said that, even though it happens in the moment, improvisation is governed by rules that give a structure and paradoxically this framework enables her to experience a greater feeling of freedom to express her creativity.

Analysis of Winter’s contribution

Turning to Winter’s playing, it is not possible to determine whether she had memorised sections because I only have access to one recording and there is no musical notation for her part. I will outline and classify a range of accompaniment ideas that she uses with relation to function and technique. I will also pick out shorter gestures that can be organised according to their underlying melodic shape. These are not repeated always in as clear a note for note way as I found in Marti’s singing. Firstly, however, I would like to consider some antecedents for her accompaniment style.

The accompaniment of a voice singing a medieval monophonic piece now has its own tradition, one to which Winter’s playing belongs. I believe it can be traced back to the creative practice of the first ensemble I discussed here, the Studio der frühen Musik, whose director Thomas Binkley wrote about use of instrumental accompaniment in 1977, reflecting on his own group’s practice. He described three possible options: no accompaniment, accompaniment by many instruments and accompaniment by a solo or very few instruments. He gives detail about the second possibility that is striking in its similarity to what Winter does, even if this is not a performance with an accompaniment by many instruments. As well as a low rebab, kemanchas, lute and percussion, a wind instrument would play high above the others: “a nai at the top, appearing occasionally with delicate arabesques and tunes.” This resonates with Winter’s playing which is ornate and melodic at times. He gives more detail about accompaniment techniques, saying that an instrument can be either an equal partner in conversation with the singer, or play a more


\[\text{Binkley, 27–28.}\]
supplementary role. Winter appears to do both these things at different times in *Sigdrífa’s spell*. The instrument’s main style could be to articulate in imitation of the voice, or alternatively the actual pitches played might be an important counterpoint to the melody being sung, not necessarily in terms of harmony so much as use of drone or creation of tension and release at cadence points.\(^{34}\) Echoes are a feature of what Winter does but she also definitely provides drones and tension that leads to the sense of a finish when that tension is relaxed. Binkley is discussing the accompaniment of extant medieval songs that are both melodic and strophic, neither of which are the case in *Sigdrífa’s spell*. As we have seen, Marti, for the majority of her performance, uses a kind of reciting style that has similarities with psalm chanting, as well as being relevant to Icelandic *rimur*. Binkley recognises this as a possible medieval song style and gives an example of how a wind instrument might shape an accompaniment to a specific song that makes use of “recitation tones”, mixing held drones with some touches of melody leading to those drone pitches.\(^{35}\)

Winter told me about several groups that she listened to who were formative in her journey to becoming a medieval musician. One of these ensembles, Sequentia, frequently includes the flautist Norbert Rodenkirchen among their number. As this group were self-identified as an influence for Winter, I decided to investigate if any performances by Sequentia included flute and a single high voice singer. On their 2013 album, *Celestial Hierarchy*, a collection of song by Hildegard of Bingen, the twelfth-century abbess, a solo female singer (Lydia Brotherton) together with Rodenkirchen on flute perform an antiphon to St. John the Evangelist, *O speculum columbe*.\(^{36}\) In this performance, Rodenkirchen does not do anything elaborate. There are no extended instrumental interventions. The prelude is a very brief introduction of the pitch on which the singer begins. Any interjections between lines of the antiphon are kept similarly brief; mostly the flute holds the drone pitch to cover the point at which Brotherton breathes. Basically, Rodenkirchen plays held drone notes that vary in pitch, occasionally he plays several notes in unison with the voice, sometimes he plays a simple descent that leads to a drone note.

---

\(^{34}\) Binkley, 38–39.

\(^{35}\) Binkley, 67–68. This reference is from the German published version of the chapter where it is easier to see the musical example to which I’m referring.

In this extract (Figure VI.17) I have included the pitch of the drone note, held on from the previous phrase. This is played until the singer has begun and stops just after her first syllable. We can then see the way that Rodenkirchen picks out pitches from the melody line to create a skeleton or shadow ‘melody’ that leads back down to the pitch of C, a note that is again held to cover the singer’s breath before the next phrase. In this way the two performers seamlessly interlock to create a continuous texture of sound.

In a short interjection after the words “misit te”, Rodenkirchen picks up the range in which Brotherton was just singing and moves back to the central pitch of C, allowing the next vocal entry to overlap. When the performers repeat the whole antiphon after a choral doxology, Rodenkirchen plays something very slightly different (see Figure VI.18).
At another point, before the words “tu es specialis filius”, Rodenkirchen prefigures the melody, playing exactly what is about to be sung, before holding the final C on top of which Brotherton comes in. This occurs both times in a very similar way; only the speed of the pitches played by the flute varies (see Figure VI.19).

These two short examples serve to demonstrate how few the variations are between the first and second repeat of the antiphon, *O speculum columbe*. They suggest a certain level of pre-planning and control of the material, rather than a free improvisatory approach, as well as revealing the aesthetic simplicity chosen by the ensemble for this performance.

Turning back to *Sigrdrifa’s spell*, Winter’s flute prelude explores the modal scale that was chosen for this performance, expanding from the initial F♯ and E♯ first down to C♯, then staying around D♯ and C♯ before reaching the octave below the highest note (see Figure VI.20). This is then repeated in a shortened form without going down the full octave. The techniques of exploring a scale, of repeating a short gesture, of expanding the range slowly over several phrases, are all common in improvised musics.37

---

In Section I-1, the flute interjection is a simple echo of the voice (see Figure VI.21). Before I-2 Winter then echoes her own octave leap gesture that appeared right at the very start of and throughout the prelude (see Figure VI.22). The echo of the voice in I-3 is more like a reminder than a direct repeat, an ornamented exploration of the same range that has just been heard. This is not a particularly favoured way for Winter to create musical material, appearing only a few times, as Figures VI.23 and VI.24 show.
Winter does not use long held notes that vary, following the vocal line, in the way that Rodenkirchen does in his accompaniment of *O speculum columbe* because what Marti sings is not melodic in the way that a Hildegard chant is. She does though ensure that the musical texture is continuous, something that Rodenkirchen also did, and that Binkley documented in his 1977 article, which is also heard in his recordings with the Studio der frühen Musik.
Fillers between vocal utterances, texture, drone

Figure VI.23: Fillers, texture, drone
In Figure VI.23, the held pitches in the extracts change, but this is not necessarily directly related to the vocal line in the same way that Rodenkirchen’s playing picked out particular pitches in the sung melody and held those (see above Figure VI.17). It is more like the mixture of held notes interspersed with short fragments of “conversation” to which Binkley refers,
giving a particularly clear example of this in a notated lute accompaniment for a troubadour song. Binkley, ‘Zur Aufführungspraxis’, 68. This page number refers to the German published version to facilitate reference to the musical example.

In some of these extracts of Winter’s playing, we can also see another technique that she uses to generate musical material, a method based on ornamenting around a particular pitch (see Figure VI.24). This repetitive insistence on a pitch strikes me as a typical way for an instrumentalist to introduce texture and interest to their playing. I believe it comes out of the physical habits and techniques that a player has literally at their fingertips.

A further functional way for Winter to create her accompaniment is indicated in her performance score (see Figure VI.3). The wavy upwards arrow that appears after the pitch B in the vocal line on the final syllable of the word “blundstöfom” is matched by the way Winter plays in a way that leads to the higher pitch for the following word, “Heill” starting on F♯ a fifth higher. A similar thing occurs shortly afterwards, before “Heilir æsir” (see Figure VI.25). This is not indicated on Winter’s verbal performance score (see Figure VI.4) suggesting that she had fixed the idea into her memory, and that Marti continued to sing in the way that had been written. This kind of lead in serves the practical purpose of helping the singer to

Figure VI.24: Pitch emphasis

---

Figure VI.24: Pitch emphasis
prepare for the next range in which they are going to sing. It is also a logical way to fill in the “conversation” between the two musicians.

Leading to new pitch focus/range

In contrast with the harmonious way in which Winter could answer her colleague with an echo or lead her to the next musical idea, the accompaniment is also a place where deliberate dissonance and tension can be created (see Figure VI.25). This technique is not used immediately in the performance but appears little by little towards the end. There is particularly frequent dissonance in Section III. The second flute interlude that follows Section III also feels dissonant although it is not a harmonic, but a melodic dissonance formed through the introduction of G♭s and chromaticism that are out of character with all that has been heard previously. Section IV also includes more dissonances, including G♭s and chromaticism to accompany the voice, whose line remains the familiar chanting around B that by this point in the performance seems totally natural to the listener.
Dissonance

Figure VI.26: Dissonance
The purpose of this dissonance might be to alert the audience to the impending finish of the performance, to wake them up if you like.\(^{39}\) It might also be used as a way to create tension in order that the release of the ending be felt more keenly. The contrast of this new incoherence between the flute and the vocal line in comparison to the previous coherence brings a sense of musical excitement that has not heretofore been felt.

Alongside these different categorisations of the function and purpose of the accompaniment at different times, as well as the techniques used by Winter to generate musical material, there are also a number of repetitive features that I class as gestures, using Winter’s own word when she described improvisation. Some appear throughout the performance and others are limited to a particular section, helping to characterise and delineate that moment in the interpretation.

The first gesture (see Figure VI.27) is based on the simplest movement of a falling major second onto F\(\#\) in the lower range of the instrument. It is particularly exploited in Section II but reaches its apogee in the shimmering texture Winter creates to accompany IV-1 and IV-2. More often than not an A\(\#\) is included as part of a rapid ornamentation of the G\(\#\) or F\(\#\), although on a couple of occasions it is also more structural and heard for longer.

Related to this gesture is one based on a longer series of notes that are also heard frequently sung by Marti (see Figure VI.28). This is restricted almost entirely to the second section and is closely related to the vocal line whose phrases very frequently open with the same F\(\#\), G\(\#\), B gesture. Both these first two gestures are used in free alternation and provide the sense of coherence between the flute and the voice that will later be broken in an effective way as discussed above. Both performers are setting the stage with clarity, embedding the sound world that they are presenting to their listeners so that surprises and dissonances will be more clearly understood later on.

\(^{39}\) Note parallel with the way in which a fantasy world must be introduced carefully to a film audience in order to smooth the transition between outside world and fantasy setting. See discussion of the concept of suture in Dan White, ‘One Does Not Simply Walk Into Mordor: Sound and Music as Suture in the Opening Sequences of Peter Jackson’s Middle-Earth Films’, Music, Sound and the Moving Image 14, no. 2 (1 December 2020), 9–12. Here the transition is from the fantasy of the Icelandic medieval sound world created by Moirai back to normal life.
Figure VI.27: Gesture 1 – F♯ (or A♯), G♯, F♯
A third gesture (see Figure VI.29) has a tendency to be longer, although also appears in a simple form as an oscillation between high F♯ and E♭. These are the notes heard right at the beginning of the performance and the gesture recurs throughout in varying guises. The high pitch of this gesture make it stand out from the rest of the texture, so it ends up functioning as a unifying device across the whole performance, attracting the ear and reminding the listener of previous sonic moments.
Figure VI.29: Gesture 3 – F♯, (G♯, F♯), E♯, F♯, (G♯ or E♯, F♯)
Related to the previous gesture, Gesture 4 (see Figure VI.30) uses the same pitch range but finishes very definitely on a D♯. It is prominent in Section III as part of the alternation between two perfect fifths at the end of the vocal phrases, B in the voice with F♯ in the flute, then G♯ in the voice with D♯ in the flute. It is almost entirely limited to this section with just a vague echo appearing in Section IV. Interlude 2, where dissonance creeps into the flute’s line, might actually be understood from this analysis as Gesture 4 being repeated.
twice in a form disguised by the dissonant G♭s. As mentioned in relation to the prelude, this repetition technique, which can be used as a way to develop material, is present in improvised musics.

Like Gestures 1 and 2, the final identifiable gesture appears mostly in Section II (see Figure vi.31). The A♯ and D♯ stand out sonically because they are outside the predominant pitches used by the voice up to that point. Marti uses only F♯, G♯, B and C♯ in the entirety of Section II and these pitches are also very present in Section I, coming to feel like the “home” against which the higher range is heard as “away”. The flute is more flexible but A♯ and D♯ are nevertheless more infrequent. This gesture is therefore used to contrast with Gesture 2 in an interplay that feels undetermined even while the repetitiveness suggests the gestures were known beforehand, created as part of the “dialect” that Winter was seeking to construct.
Conclusion: freedom and restriction

This chapter has provided detailed answers to several of my research questions, including meticulously showing how Winter improvised and the shape that improvisation took in one specific performance. During our interview, Winter described the difficulties that she and Marti had creating this performance: “This is the piece we tortured ourselves the most over... I feel like there’s still no solution. We do something different every time.” The idea that doing it differently each time is an indication that the musicians are unable to “solve” the musical puzzle is indicative of their whole approach. Wide variety between performances meant for Winter that they had in some way failed. Success for Winter therefore meant that the musical expression would lie within a delimited range understood to be a solution. In other words, out of the limitless freedom of playing anything should eventually arise certain gestures, patterns, ranges, moments to play that consistently create the desired musical sound world. This reinforces the ideas Winter expressed about improvisation being the wrong word to use and that her aim was to formulate a structured language restricting her freedom. It also demonstrates what Winter understood by the term “improvisation” and what she was doing that might be classified as improvising or as some other generative process, in view of her reticence to accept that terminology.

The evidence that I have uncovered on close examination of Moirai’s interpretation of Sigdrifa’s spell is proof that the duo was successful in forming a restrictive language, even if the written scores for this performance demonstrate that for Winter nothing was fixed in notated form. The notated evidence allows some conclusions about how Marti approached the creative generation of her vocal line. Some elements were obviously fixed in memory for dramatic and structural effect (I-2, I-3, IV-4) while the majority of her performance used a modular chanting style that would allow for variation within what I have shown to be a limited range of options.

As already noted, it is more difficult to draw conclusions about how much might have been fixed in Winter’s memory and thereafter repeated exactly, or reused in a more flexible way allowing for change and development to occur. The gestures I have identified are less stable than the vocal gestures I found, which raises the interesting possibility that text is a key component in causing musical gestures to gain solid identities. It could also be down to the fact that words with music are easier to memorise than finger movements, having their own
syntactic meaning that fixes them in the mind in a different way. Whatever the case, the 
instability of flute gestures provides support to the idea that Winter had a series of loose 
shapes, or perhaps fingering patterns or physical movements, that could be used at 
particular times during the performance, rather than lots of memorised melodic patterns. 
The dissonant moments, functioning as they do in a structural way to increase tension 
towards the end when the language of the piece is already well established in the listener’s 
aural awareness, were probably planned in a broad way, helped by the fact that Marti’s line 
towards the end becomes simpler (see the opening of Section IV) and ultimately very stable 
(the memorised section IV-4). I feel however that it is unlikely that Winter had committed 
herself line in Section IV to memory in a detailed way.

When Winter so blithely told an audience member that her whole performance was 
improvised, this should be understood with reference to her definition of improvisation and 
hers need for rules, limits and restrictions that this definition encompasses. She was enabled 
to make this pronouncement not only because of the creative labour she had engaged in to 
create the performance of the music for the Icelandic Edda poetry, but also because as 
audience members we have ideas about what improvisation should sound and look like. 
Rhythmic freedom, non-typical modal sound world, repetition of musical formulas and 
gestures, lack of obvious notated performance score, unusual instrument, even knowledge 
about the fact that the Edda has no written music in the original manuscripts all contribute 
to the understanding of Winter’s playing as “improvised” even before she tells us it is. The 
formulaic character of the entire performance allows me to believe Winter’s assertion in 
view of her own definition. The duo did successfully create a restrictive musical dialect in 
which to bring this fragment of Icelandic poetry to life. Improvisation, which was impossible 
for the Studio and which was only cautiously accepted under different terminology by 
Young, can be seen here to have found a solid place in the performance techniques of 
Winter, the third and final link in the pedagogical chain that I have been investigating. 

In my final chapter, I will consider the overall picture of what my research has revealed 
about improvisation in the medieval music revival. The conclusion assembles my general 
findings drawn from the data I collected through interviews and survey as well as my 
analyses of musical performances. Future possible pathways will come to light with regard 
to how this research could develop.
Chapter VII: Conclusion
In line with my research questions, this thesis has revealed how participants in the medieval music revival have conceptualized, justified and practised improvisation. It has shown how musicians have linked imagination and knowledge of historical practices in different ways, building robust but flexible musical models upon which to base their creativity. They have successfully engaged in a balancing act that values two types of authenticity: the personal and the historical.

Drawing together the themes of this thesis, I will first address each of my research questions in turn before looking at how this study has opened up new avenues of enquiry. I will then draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of my chosen methodology and outline how my work has added to musicological knowledge about performance and about the medieval music revival.

How and why did improvisation come to be an accepted practice in the historical performance of medieval music?

I addressed this question in Chapter III where I was able to trace references to improvisation in the performance of medieval music in the literature over the past hundred years, demonstrating how these evolved. I revealed how improvisation did not seem to be accepted among English musicologists unlike in anglophone writing emanating from the US and reflected that this was potentially due to the belief espoused by Binkley, and continued by his students, that music notation from the time did not contain all the information necessary to create a historically appropriate performance. Scholars from England took a much more evidence-based approach that seemed to mistrust excessive displays of creativity.

It was in the early 1960s, when Binkley was preparing for a recording by the Studio of the original music from the Carmina Burana manuscripts and saw the neumes\(^*\) written above the texts, that he realised that musical notation from the Middle Ages was not necessarily going to live up to his modern expectations about what information music notation should contain. He reported asking himself why medieval notation was lacking and his answer was that musicians from the Middle Ages passed on knowledge and information via oral transmission. This meant that many stylistic features and performance choices were not recorded in written form and so are hidden and, to a certain extent, unknowable now. Binkley perceived this as a gap in the historical musical record,

---

particularly with reference to monophonic music, and to fill it he looked to the living tradition of monophonic music found in the Arabo-Andalusian nūba, copying broader structural ideas, using non-Western instruments and boldly making additions as wide-ranging as newly created preludes, postludes, interludes taken from other repertoires, and ever-evolving accompaniments. The strong geographic placement of the sound worlds the Studio constructed helped to embed the idea that they were improvising, as attested to in the reception history of their performances. However, witness evidence from interviewees who studied and worked with the Studio, as well as comparisons between performance scores and recordings, all indicate that the group did not improvise. Faking improvisation was not only a result of their desire to be different and to be historical, but also because of an inability to spontaneously generate appropriate musical material. This was due to the lack of models. A medieval musical language in which to improvise had not at that point been firmly enough established. Vellard also described not having enough aural material to work with when he was younger: “So that’s where I felt my limits. And I think it’s very good that young [musicians] ... work very hard on improvisation because it’s really now that we have a lot more context. Me, when I started, there weren’t any recordings you know?” Hamon also told me how his students today are able to achieve much more sophisticated improvisations than he did when he first began to play medieval music. He explained that along with his colleagues at the time, they had learnt to play the written repertoire of a genre like the basse danse,* but they would not have been capable of improvising one.

How have other participants in the medieval music revival improvised?

My case studies support my narrative of expanding capability for improvisation among musicians in the medieval music revival. At first, the models and familiarity were absent, and it seemed wiser to stick to exploring the surviving repertoire. The next generation were not satisfied with the invented additions in the performances that had gone before and carried on developing their practice to take account of new information about the historical practices that had existed during the Middle Ages. This is exemplified by Young’s deep concern with evidence, whether written verbally, painted or in the notated musical sources. As medieval musical language has become ever more established and familiar, this has led to the ability of other passionate medieval music professionals to affirm that they are bold improvisers, owning their own creativity even as they profess to high standards of

---

4 “Donc c’est là où j’ai senti les limites pour moi et je trouve très bien que les jeunes ... travaillent à fonds sur l’improvisation parce que c’est vraiment, maintenant on a aussi beaucoup plus de contexte. Moi quand j’ai commencé, il y avait pas de disques hein?”
historically believable performance. Harrison, another former student of Young, was very clear about the place of improvising in his performance practice. He told me: “I’m better at improvising than playing from scores. I didn’t realise that until the age of 40 or 45 or something.”

My case study of Young featured at its centre an important aspect of the psychology of improvising: memory. Young’s well-stocked memory was the engine behind all his creativity, allowing him not just to repeat note for note, but to modify and transform, recombine and synthesize musical elements of varied lengths, using the more advanced memorial activities of *investigatio* and *inventio*. Memory connects the theories about oral transmission that Binkley and Arlt expounded upon to Young’s practice and also featured as a necessity underlying improvisational activity for one of my interviewees, Marti. Integration is another way that my interviewees expressed the idea of memory. Romain included in his definition that improvisation is “playing what you have inside ... bringing out things that you’ve integrated and reordering them in a new form.” Hamon also talked about integration, telling me he encourages his students to build up their memory: “you have to get yourself a vocabulary, I mean, really a memory of figures, of formulas”. He went on to emphasise the integration, saying that the material necessary for improvisation to occur has to be “in the brain” (dans notre cerveau), “in the head” (dans la tête) meaning that the musical content that is played is almost “automatic” (automatique) because it’s also “in the hand” (en main). Physical as well as mental memory is useful and valuable. This topic’s importance is validated by authors writing about medieval music and performance, including its pedagogy, the historical practices and ways to approach it today.

My detailed transcriptions of performances, particularly those of Young (see Appendix 2), provide examples of creativity that lie within a broad definition of improvisation, helping to answer not just this research question but also the next one.

---

6 “[jouer ce qu’on a en soi ... ressortir des choses qu’on a intégré, et les réordonner dans une forme nouvelle.”
7 “il faut que vous fassiez un vocabulaire, enfin plutôt une mémoire de figures, de formules”.

292
What shape did their improvisations take?

Returning to my first case study, the Studio’s “improvisations” were in fact fully conceived in advance and then memorised. As Jones had told me, they were “written out improvisations”. The fact that they were faking, though, exposes how important they felt it was to include the impression of freedom and spontaneous creativity in their performances, embedding this idea in the collective expectation of what medieval music should sound like, and contributing to the way in which improvisation has become an accepted historical medieval musical practice. Young focused on a repertoire from the fifteenth century for which he was able to bring more solid historical evidence of music making and creativity into his musical toolbox. My close reading of his performances in my chosen corpus revealed that he used two kinds of elements in his improvisations: modules that had been committed to memory and could be altered and reordered at will at the moment of performance; and free passages using memorised knowledge of fifteenth-century counterpoint taken from theoretical writings and from historical repertoire. Winter described the drawing together of a musical “dialect” that can be seen in my analysis (Chapter VI) of her performance of Sigdrifa’s spell. The transcription provided in Appendix 3 discloses in detail the full shape of one possible version of this piece, as recorded and edited for Moirai’s first CD, Blood Treasure, Woven Fates.

How do these musicians understand what they are doing when they improvise?

Young and Winter both provided ample data to analyse with relation to their understanding of their own creative practices. Young worked hard over his entire career to research and then absorb the knowledge that would have been second nature to a fifteenth-century lutenist. He developed a concept of improvisation that was congruent with what he had learned about fifteenth-century instrumental music. His definition, honed over years of thinking and teaching, concluded that improvisation might be better understood as “memorised composition” or as “a language of clichés, a language of cells or syllables or … musical words”. This corresponds to the two types of components I identified that made up Young’s performances of Che fa la ramacina. The memorised and reused modules, some also based on material borrowed from elsewhere, such as a short section of the Loyset Compère composition called Che fa la ramacina, could be varied as well as repeated or reordered in performance. Other sections not using these blocks that had been learnt by heart, drew instead on the theoretical writings of Johannes Tinctoris and models provided by actual fifteenth-century pieces, several of which Young told me about. Young’s embodied knowledge of both counterpoint rules and original examples allowed him to create
bridging sections between or extensions to the memorised modules at will. The basis in original musical material from the fifteenth century ensured the historical aptness of what he performed.

Winter’s improvisatory practice extended beyond medieval music into experimental and heavy metal music. She had none of the reticence about improvisation that musicians from an earlier generation had shown, acknowledging both her creativity and its limits as historical practice while still ascribing to the HIP aesthetic and arguing for the fundamental historicity of her music making. My investigation revealed how Winter used restriction to deliberately temper her creativity and produce historical believability even though her medieval material was entirely poetic, and the musical content of the performance I investigated was thus her own invention. She was reticent about the use of the word “improvisation” to describe her activity, intimating that it suggested something informal or simple. Instead, her description expressed spontaneous music making within medieval music as “this collection of gestures, or like... a certain kind of musical dialect that you learn and then you can generate material”. She insisted on the fact that it could not be free and had to be based on a well-defined set of rules, just like with a language. In view of her activities in contemporary music, the boundaries she enforced and relied on were probably also a function of delimiting where her own compositional activity ends and her medieval practice starts. My analysis showed that, along with her duo partner Hanna Marti, she was successful in creating a language that limited her performance choices while still allowing enough flexibility that each performance could present a new and motivational challenge. In performance, the “dialect” was used within a clearly planned out structure aligned to the poem, designed to draw attention to important moments in the text. I concluded that memorised blocks or sections were less central to Winter’s practice than ideas of loose musical shapes, or kinaesthetic memory involving particular finger and breath movements. Winter was clear that her use of very simple verbal cues as a performance score was an enabler for her performance, making her feel comfortable and giving her space to be free, space that she clearly relished and required even within her strictly established framework.

The data I collected allowed me to see how the understanding of the concept and practice of improvisation varied across my respondent groups. For some survey participants, the link to ornamentation was uppermost in their thoughts when defining improvisation. Embellishment was seen to function as a gateway activity into other types of improvisation, with some of my research

---

participants also mentioning the more formalised ornamentation practice of diminution*. Although embellishing a melodic line was unselfconsciously classified as improvisation by those answering my survey, there were some doubts about this amongst my interview respondents, perhaps due to preconceived ideas about improvisation and freedom.

Definitions of improvisation given by my interviewees often featured the use of linguistic terminology. From syllables, words and phrases to discourse and storytelling, these metaphors explained the use of different sizes of building blocks as well as the performative nature of improvisation and the apparent madness of teaching only reading, rather than allowing the rules of a musical language to be experienced by formulating your own, original enunciations. This heavy reliance on words about language is unsurprising considering the many parallels that I expounded in Chapter III.

My data also revealed the importance of rules to the practice of improvising. For some interviewees, the act of improvisation was preceded by the creation of new rules. This was obviously very important to Winter’s creativity. Others, like Young, strove to learn the rules already apparent in original sources, both musical and as explained in treatises, in order to apply them to their own music making. Dismissing the rules was an option that a small minority of interviewees defended, arguing that our interpretations of historical texts would always be inadequate (Biggi) or that too strong an emphasis on limitations led to a literally limited, “imprisoned” performance (Marti).

To what extent is the term “improvisation” applicable when discussing performance practices of medieval music?

Many of my research participants had strong misgivings about the use of the term “improvisation” to refer to medieval music making, first and foremost due to the anachronism this entailed. This was especially the case among interviewees who had studied at the Schola Cantorum where Binkley taught in the 1970s and where Young’s views on the subject had been disseminated since the early 1980s. As a fundamental activity, its ubiquitous presence for some respondents implied its ineffectuality as a definition of a unique and definable musical activity. For others, its capacity to refer to many different things made it too broad to be useful. The most insidious issue was an often undisclosed preconception that improvisation has to entail total freedom and novelty, thus excluding the detailed preparation necessary to understand and embody models as complex as: the style of lute or keyboard practice as found in fifteenth-century Fundamenta organisandi*; the specifics of a precise genre of chant in a particular mode; the formulas and harmonic progressions
typical of a Notre Dame School* organum*; the diminution* style of Ganassi or Ortiz; or indeed the Persian radif or Indian raga. The lack of forethought and planning that people perceive in improvisation was assumed to mean that an improvised music could not be art: Nettl described this scholarly discourse as creating a “third world of music” that included jazz, folk music, any music in an oral culture or from a non-Western origin. Othering improvisation came from a desire, conscious or not, to strengthen Western hegemony, meaning it has fed racist beliefs about the connection of unlimited liberty and primitivity to improvisation as a creative act. This is however a narrow and insufficient explanation of improvisation. It rejects and denies the complexity of musical practice, simplifying musicians’ work into binaries that do not reflect the experiences they told me about when I interviewed them.

Other avenues of reflection opened up by my data

Improvisation was described by one interviewee in terms of “rightness” (justesse), the feeling in performance that what you are doing is appropriate, enlightened even, or quite simply good. Other feelings expressed in my interview data included a sensation of fun and delight. In Austen-Brown’s teaching activities, she wanted to share with her pupils “the joy that you can get from just making up your own world premiere [because it] is delightful.” Hamon commented that he took pleasure from the reorganisation of formulas. Even going wrong is “part of the enjoyment” of improvising for Hauksson. The place of improvisation can be justified by both the pleasure and the learning it brings, according to Vellard. Young wanted to have fun improvising on the La Spagna* Tenor: “You play a game because games are fun... The game in this case is to invent something which is yours.” Polk used a personal anecdote about playing horn in an orchestra alongside the Dave Brubeck Quartet to emphasise the way that the instrumentalists’ creative input to their performances in the mid to late fifteenth century was “far more rewarding” than playing an...
orchestral part “as written, in time, in tune and accurately”. The joy, pleasure and “rightness” evoked here are strong forces behind my practice and this doctoral work as well as opening up a topic that could be investigated further in the future: the emotions aroused by improvising in a medieval (or other historical) style and its value for practitioners (and audiences) today.

This leads to questions about the reception of improvisation which were beyond the scope of this research, but which would be a fruitful line of further investigation. Lewon and Smilansky summarised how today’s audiences have very little exposure to medieval music and base their expectations on ideas about what sounds make historical sense and on the kinds of music to which they had been exposed in their lives. This raises the question of the point of improvising in such an esoteric style because, as Moore points out, improvisation can only be “effective [as a] means of expression when incorporating a vocabulary, whether cognitively or intuitively understood, [that is] common to a group of individuals.” In other words, for an improvisation to be successful, the materials out of which it is formed, its grammar and words if you like, have to be part of a communally understood language. Taylor defined improvisation as: “deviation from a fixed form where the performer and the audience know what that form is” suggesting that predictability and expectation are important for recognising where the deviation happens. Posch gave a personal anecdote about when he did not have enough experience to understand a performance he heard in Syria. A musician was introduced as one of the best, but then played for half an hour in what he considered to be a boring way. “If he was from Europe, [he would have done] some kind of free improvisation, maybe you start slowly and then it makes this kind of exaggerating, more and more, maybe loud and then maybe you go back and do things [again].” When he asked about the quality of the music making, a connoisseur said: “But haven’t you heard how he went from this note to the other? It was amazing!” I couldn’t get it, because at that time I didn't know what I should listen [out for].” The issue to be examined could be found in the question: who are the connoisseurs for

improvisation in different medieval musical styles and how are they developing an appreciation for what they listen to?

While spontaneous generation of music and variation of given musical materials, improvisation, inventio and “fluid composition”\textsuperscript{17}, can all be seen to be historically justifiable processes involved in music making during the Middle Ages, modern understanding is limited. For recognition of the creative input of performers to occur, it would call for audience members to have undertaken with similar dedication a lengthy process of familiarisation and assimilation of the sounds of medieval musical materials that is required for the musicians themselves to become proficient in the practice.

Alongside the teaching activities of participants in the medieval music revival, especially Thomas Binkley, Crawford Young and Benjamin Bagby, I believe that recordings have been a significant channel through which a tradition of medieval music performance has been shaped. This could form the basis for further study that could trace the “schools” of creative practice.

Improvisation can be practised instinctively in such a way that the work releases your inner inspiration and is therefore about “letting go” (lâché prise).\textsuperscript{18} “I think it's beautiful when you're in that [process], well, that's often when it's the most touching. That is to say that it doesn't only belong to the musician, that you can perhaps lose yourself. But that there is a, this letting go ... which can also be a bit dangerous.”\textsuperscript{19} For Zuckerman, there is a contrast between preparing for and controlling his improvisation consciously and the mysterious process of “eruption of inspiration” (Auszbruch der Inspiration) that can also occur.\textsuperscript{20} He goes on to say that it is precisely the connection to something mysterious that makes music so attractive and improvisation particularly deserving of respect and analysis.

Methodology

My innovative mixed methodology encompassing sociological interview and survey alongside musicological transcription and analysis has enabled me to learn something new about the

\textsuperscript{17} Mariani, \textit{Improvisation and Inventio}.
\textsuperscript{18} Pierre Hamon, interview by the author about improvisation, Paris, 7 February 2020.
\textsuperscript{19} “Je trouve que c'est beau lorsqu'on est dans cette [démarche], enfin c'est souvent à ce moment-là que c'est le plus touchant. C'est à dire que ça n'appartient pas non plus qu'au musicien, qu'on peut, peut-être se perdre. Mais qu’il y a un, ce lâché prise quoi ... qui peut être aussi un peu dangereux.”
\textsuperscript{20} Zuckerman, ‘Improvisation in der mittelalterlichen Musik’, 70.
creative processes involved in producing performances of medieval music between the 1960s and the 2010s, and how these have changed over time.

Thematic analysis encouraged intimate knowledge of the data I collected. Themes could then be drawn out reflecting ideas around improvisation that had importance to my respondents, including both widely shared concepts and more unusual thoughts or images. The picture I present of how improvisation is understood and practiced is a snapshot of a specific community of medieval music makers in the late 2010s, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the growth of the practice since the 1960s. The richness of the contextual information that I gathered and analysed has enabled the small details of performance decisions to be situated within a larger narrative of the medieval music revival.

**My contribution**

My work here shows how performing musicians in the medieval music revival have contributed to the vibrancy of contemporary musical life in creative ways, grappling with the balance between historical authenticity and the individual expressivity that determines personal authenticity. They have developed the sounds of medieval music in embodied ways that reveal patterns of thought and practices that historical musicology would struggle to expose through examination of sources alone. Performing musicians’ study of historical sources has had practical application, allowing conclusions to be drawn or rejected according to personally authentic musical criteria and the capabilities of each individual. This has occurred alongside and in addition to the understandings and findings that historical musicology has supplied. All contributors’ efforts have increased our knowledge of the practices of musicians during the Middle Ages. The pedagogical thread that I followed in my three case study chapters exemplifies the way in which I posit improvisation, while still a controversial term, has steadily grown in acceptance as a mandatory approach to medieval music performance in the revival, an authentic process even while authentic products are elusive and impossible to evaluate. By teasing out the different creative processes of the three pedagogically related generations of medieval musician in my case studies (Binkley the teacher of Young who was the teacher of Winter), I have been able to justify my thesis’ title, unveiling one small history of improvisation in the medieval music revival.

Aside from the originality of these discoveries and the novelty of my research theme, a specific field that has never been covered before, my thesis has contributed in an original way to the manner in which performances could be studied, reflected upon and written about. The fruitful
multimodal method I have used in order to form new knowledge could be applied more broadly to performance studies, where I have not seen much evidence of associating detailed musical performance analysis with sociological qualitative analysis and context discussion.

My data are almost entirely newly created (interviews and survey) or newly exploited (live personal archive recordings, commercial recordings of medieval music including their accompanying materials, personal archive resources such as performance scores). There is still a lot more to exploit in my large dataset. I collected material from many important protagonists in the story of medieval music performance, creating a rich resource for anyone attempting to understand the phenomenon of early music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Because my interviews did not follow a strict list of questions, I was led by my respondents to a wide range of topics relating to their engagement with medieval music, not just improvisation. Their answers could provide further inspiration for research from a cultural, psychological or even economic perspective.

My study could also impact performance by allowing current and future medieval music practitioners to understand more about where they fit into the revival movement and how their precursors understood their own contributions to the creation of new models of medieval music in sound. When I shared my participants’ data as it appears in my narrative with them, they were fascinated to see how others had formulated explanations that were similar to their own ideas, validating their conceptions. Similarly, musicians could have their eyes opened and horizons broadened by discovering different understandings, or be inspired by uses of imagination they had not considered before.

I believe my work has shown just how much more there is to be discovered about creativity in musical medievalism. I look forward to watching the field grow and diversify.
Bibliography


310


323


Yri, Kirsten. ‘Corvus Corax: Medieval Rock, the Minstrel, and Cosmopolitanism as Anti-Nationalism’. Popular Music 38, no. 3 (2019): 361–78.


Discography


Appendix 1: Transcription of *A Chantar* as Performed by the Studio
Instrumental Interlude - unidentified piece, possibly of Arabo-Andalusian origin

Soprano 5

Played by all instruments

Here the spoken *tornada* begins
Appendix 2: Transcriptions of *Che Fa la Ramacina* as Performed by Robert Crawford Young, 2012-2017
Recording session for Carnivalesque, December 2012, Spello

Questo vecchio maledetto

Che fa la ranaquina 0:27

a tempo

rit.

quieter
6 October 2013, Ribeauvillé

Questo vecchio maledetto

Che fa la ramacina 0:18

very quiet
held back

faster

slower

faster
rit
quieter

quieter, bit slower

faster

getting a bit faster

small decrescendo
and rit
7 June 2014, Morez

Questo vecchio maledetto

The long gap (6 seconds) is due to Young arranging himself to sit down after walking on stage playing.

Another gap here while Young gets more comfortable

Che fa la ramacina 6:43

starts slowly and increases slightly in tempo through the repeated notes in each of these phrases

More closed veiled sound, quieter

F and E held but not very audible

very high and sweet sounding, with vibrato
Questo vecchio maledetto

rit and
decresc slow and quiet

quieter

free lead in

starts slow, gets faster

Tandernaken 1:52

rit and decresc

Che fa la ramaeina 2:11

starts slow, gets faster

quiet

quieter
Questo vecchio maleletto
slower

Che fa la ramacina 0-46
starts slowly, gets a bit faster
quieter

repeated notes aren't even

accel

rit

stronger

slower

quieter
decresc. and rit

stronger

freer

slower
arpeggiated open F chord
accompanying the final chord
of Questo vecchio maledetto

1:06

Questo vecchio maledetto

1:26

quite long silence

Che fa la ramacina

2:26

another long silence

very quiet
Appendix 3: Transcription of *Sigdrifa’s Spell* by Ensemble Moirai
Hvatt___ beit bryn-jo?  Hvi___ brá ek___ svef-ní?

Hverrr___ fól-di af mér fól-var nau-bír?  Sig___ mun-dar bárr

Sleit fyr skóm-mo hrafn hrae-lu-n-dir  hjörr___ Si-gur-bír.

Len-gi ek svaf  len-gi ek sof-núð var  lón___ e-ro lý-
á - syn-jur!  

Mál ok ma-nn-vit ge-fið ok-kr mæ-rom tveim ok læk-nis-hen-dr 

ny-ta fold.  

Björ fa-ri ek þér bryn-jings a-pal-dr mag-ni blan-dinn ok 

me-ðan.  

me-gan-tí-ri fullr er hann ljó - ðö ok lik-nu sta-fa gö-dra gud-dra ok gu-man-rú-na. 

Sig - rú-nar skal-tu kun-na 

ef þú vil -t si-gr ha-fa ok ris-ta á hjal-ti hjörns.  

Su -
béim er li-ta austr lín-mar.
Mál-rú-nar skal-tu

kun-na ef þú vilt at mann-gi þér

heif-tom gjal-di há-rm.
Þær af vín-dr þær of

vefr þær of se-tral-larsu-man á þvi þing-i

er þjó-birsku-lu fúl-la dó-ma fá-ra.

Húg-rú-nar skal-tu kun-sa ef þú vilt hevri-om ve-ra
B. Fl.

Vo.

359

geð - svin-na-rigu-ma. Þær of ré - ð þær of reist

þær of hug-bi Hroð-tráf þeim le - gi er le - kit haf-bi ð hau-si Heið-

draup-nís ek__ ð hor-ní Hod - drof-nís.

Rhythmic section in 3

B. Fl.

III-1.

07:16

V V V

V V

Rhythmic section in 3 ends

A skil-di kvað ríst-nar þeim er sten-dr fyr-ski-nan-di go - ði
Rhythmic section in 2
á ey-ra Ár-vakrs ok á Als-vinna hó-fi á jví hvé-li er snýsk un-dir reið_

Hrung-nis á Sleip-nis tôn-num ok á sleða fjót-rum. Á hjar-nar hram-mi

ok á Bra-ga tun-go á ulfs klóum ok á ar-nar ne-fi á blóð-gum

væn-giøm ok á brú-ar spor-di á laus-nar ló-fa ok á líc-nar spo-ri. A gle-ri

ok á gul-li ok á gum-na heil-lom

vir-tri ok vi-li-ses-si á Gug-nis od-di ok á Gra-na brjós-ti á nor-nar nag-li ok á
Rhythmic section ends, rhythm breaks down

ne-fi ug-lo.

Al-lar vá-ru af skaf-nar þær er vá-ru á rist-nar ok.hverf-dar við inn hel-ga mjöð

ok son-dar á viða ve-ga.

IV-2.

þær

ro

med á som

þær ro

med al-fóm su-mar med ví-som vô-
nom su-mar ha-fa menn-skir menn.

Nú skal-tu ký-ða alls þér er kos-tref bo-ðinn

hvas-sa váp-na hly-nr.

Sø-gn e-bað-gn has-fðu þér sjal-frí hug. Óll__

___ e-ru mein of___ me-tin.
Glossary
Aquitanian School
Sometimes also known as St Martial School after the name of a monastery in Limoges in south-west France, a region known as Aquitaine. A collection of early sources containing music from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, including some of the earliest polyphony (from around 1100) as well as important bodies of monophonic repertoire.¹

Basse danse
This is a form of high status, courtly dance that was fostered during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was at its height at a time that coincides with the Burgundian Court of Philip the Good (1419-1467). The name of the dance refers to the fact that this was low to the ground, in contrast to a jumping or high dance, ‘alta danza’ or ‘saltarello’. Witnesses to it include several manuscripts and an early print containing choreographies and music, the main source being Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er, Section de la Musique, MS 9085. In these choreographic sources from Northern Europe, the music takes the form of a series of undifferentiated long notes without mensural indications, known as the Tenor. The limited number of different steps each correspond to one or two of these notes. We can find these Tenor lines in elaborated polyphonic musical sources where it becomes clear that they were in fact intended to be bases for rhythmic improvisations.²

Known in Italy as bassadanza, this dance type is often found in the sources as one element in a dance that combined different steps and metres. Dancing masters such as Domenico da Piacenza (c1400-c1476) and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro (c1420-after 1484), produced popular treatises that give descriptions of how best to perform the dance steps as well as providing a number of music notations.³

Cantare super librum
Literally ‘singing on the book’, this is a series of techniques that were developed and known enabling polyphonic singing at sight from a monophonic original such as a book of plainchant. These techniques are explained in a practical way by Barnabé Janin and explored in more detail with reference to a source on counterpoint by Vicente Lusitano by Philippe Canguilhem.⁴

Cantiga
Cantiga means song and is used to designate monophonic songs from the Iberian Peninsula up to about 1450.⁵ The collection of Cantigas de Santa Maria was put together by Alfonso X

known as ‘the wise’ [el Sabio], King of Castile and Léon (1221-1284).⁶ There are around 400 in the four manuscripts that conserve them, put together by Alfonso X in the late thirteenth century. Mostly they are narrative miracle stories about the Virgin Mary, but every tenth cantiga is a song of praise to her. Two other cantiga collections also contain music, the seven extant songs by Dom Dinis and six love songs by Martin Codax.

Conductus
A genre of medieval song in Latin, usually but not always sacred, that was very popular in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Associated with both the Aquitanian* and Notre Dame* schools. Monophonic and polyphonic conductus are extant.

Contrapfactum (pl. contrapfacta)
A common medieval textual practice of writing a text that can be substituted for another text without having to substantially alter the musical setting.

Diminution, division
A practice first set out in detail in the sixteenth century in which a simple melody is embellished by “diminishing” or “dividing” the long note values of the original, through the creation of a series of shorter notes instead. The earliest formulations of the practice appear in treatises such as Sylvestro di Ganassi’s Opera intitulata Fontegara (Venice, 1535) and Diego Ortiz’s Trattado de glosas sobre clausulas y otros generos de puntos en la musica de violones (Rome, 1553), which both provide examples of ways to get from one pitch to another in a catalogue format, allowing for the memorisation of formulaic figures. The pedagogical function of these books suggests that there was a perception of need for guidance for amateur musicians.⁷

Estampie, istanpitta (pl. istanpitte)
This is a dance form that musically has a structure similar to sequence* and lai* of repeated sections that develop and grow, each using the same open and closed endings. The most famous collection can be found on folios 103v-104v in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français MS 844, also known as the Manuscrit du Roi. In Italian known as the istanpitta, another collection is found in London, British Library, MS Additional 29987. These are more complex in form and in use of mode than the French estampies but obey the same overarching rule of having repeated sections followed by open and closed endings. There is ongoing controversy over whether these written pieces were definitely intended to accompany actual dancing.⁸

Fauxbourdon and gymel
Fauxbourdon, also known as faburden or falsobordone, is a name for a fifteenth-century, usually unwritten practice that might also be understood as a kind of shorthand notational

---

⁸ For more on these dances see Timothy J. McGee, Music: Scholarship and Performance : Medieval Instrumental Dances (Indiana University Press, 2014), 8–11. and editions can be found in the same book, estampies on p57-67 and istanpitte on p71-106.
procedure in which a third or even a third and fourth voice might be added to an appropriate two voice piece by the employment of simple rules.

When applied to a given plainsong by adding a voice a third below and a fifth at the opening and ending of phrases and another voice a fourth above, the classic technique creates a harmonious three voice texture that can be described today as a series of parallel 6 3 chords with an 8 5 chord to harmonise the first and last note of each phrase. There are written out examples that serve as models to aid our understanding and pieces annotated with the word faubourdon indicating where the technique could be applied, although by no means all of the pieces to which faubourdon can be added have the designation written in the sources. The written out examples show how the texture can be varied at cadences with ornamental passing notes and suspensions. The rules are so simple that the addition of a third voice is basically automatic, requiring very little creative input. For this reason, the term improvisation may seem inappropriate for this technique depending on your breadth of definition.9

Gymel is a fifteenth-century English term for an equal voice duet. The rules for creating a gymel are described in two treatises, the anonymous Pseudo-Chilston in British Library, MS Lansdowne 763 and De preceptis artis musicae by Guilielmus Monachus.10

Frottola (pl. frottole)
Italian secular songs from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries with lyrics in various poetic forms. These are often thought of as the precursor to the madrigal.11

Fundamentum organizandi (pl. fundamenta organizandi)
These are collections of short examples of ornamented polyphony in a catalogue format intended to be used by organists, or maybe harpists or lutenists. These examples are possible musical solutions for creating a new voice above a given cantus firmus, organised by melodic progression in the pre-existing voice, and thus probably intended for memorisation. They are a pedagogical tool to help teach instrumentalists how to create intabulations of vocal pieces or new pieces based on a pre-existent melody.

Grand chant courtois, canso, High Style song
This kind of song is individually voiced, rather than being a dialogue, and deals with courtly love themes. In the South of France where langue d’oc was spoken, the songs created by troubadours are called cansos. In the North, trouvères spoke and wrote in langue d’oil and we call their songs “grand chant courtois” or “High Style song”.12 Musical settings are usually strophic and monophonic. Not all of the existing poetry has a corresponding medieval

---


melody, for example only around a tenth of troubadour poetry can be found in a medieval source with a tune.

Lai
A secular genre cultivated by the trouvères of Northern France using the same structural idea as the sequence*, but tending towards greater length, with a lot of repetition within sections that might be repeated two, three or four times. Short melodic phrases that are quite catchy and dancelike create a unique style.¹³ Not to be confused with narrative lais such as those by Marie de France.¹⁴

Lauda
Italian non-liturgical songs with a vernacular sacred text. The earliest examples are monophonic and stem from lay confraternities of the mid-thirteenth century.¹⁵

Minnesang
Secular, courtly songs from Germany cultivated particularly in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The melodies mainly survive in manuscripts dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁶

Minnesänger/Minnesinger
German poets, the creators and performers of Minnesang.

Mouvance
This concept explains the fluidity that can be seen in the transmission of troubadour songs. Both the melodies and the texts were subject to variation during the Middle Ages, through oral processes or performer and scribal choices or a mix of these.¹⁷

Neumes (adj. neumatic)
Musical symbols constituting the earliest development of WEAM notation, used to give mnemonic indications of musical expressivity and melodic shape to the texts of liturgical chant in the Western Christian church. They do not indicate absolute pitch with any certainty. The most coherent body of manuscripts with neumatic notation comes from the Swiss abbey of Saint Gall (Sankt Gallen); the oldest of these dates to the early tenth century. Neumes are also found in manuscripts of poetry such as the Carmina Burana and to accompany Boethius’

---

works. The word is used in modern church music terminology to mean the square notation of plainchant as printed, for example, in the *Liber Usualis* of the Roman Catholic church.

**Notre Dame School**

*See organum.*

**Organum (pl. organa)**

Organum (pl. organa) is a type of liturgical polyphony for two to four voices based on an extract of Gregorian chant found in the Tenor voice. The classic repertoire from the late twelfth to early thirteenth century is associated with Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. It is found in a series of manuscripts known as the *Magnus Liber Organi* or *Great Book of Organum*, a name given by the theoretical writer now known as Anonymous IV. The so-called Vatican Organum Treatise might be understood to indicate ways in which this type of repertoire can be created spontaneously using melodic formulas. The author of the treatise gives up to seven examples of how the additional voice in two-part polyphony, the vox organalis or organum voice, may proceed for possible progressions of two notes in the Tenor voice where the chant is found. These are not just note-against-note progressions as found in many counterpoint treatises of the time, but include melismas, many of which can also be found in the repertoire of the *Magnus Liber*, as demonstrated by Immel. In spite of scholars’ cautionary voices about linking improvisation and the repertoire of *organa* that we possess, I believe this type of sacred polyphony is generally thought of as “improvisational”. Indeed, as part of my practical studies during my Masters, a full semester of my improvisation class with Raphaël Picazos was dedicated to learning the style of Notre Dame *organa* in order to be able to improvise examples together. We sang many of the written works.

---


21 Found in the composite manuscript Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ottoboni Iat. 3025.

22 Immel sees the treatise as being purely an aid to written composition. Steven C. Immel, ‘The Vatican Organum Treatise Re-Examined’, *Early Music History* 20 (1 January 2001): 164–66. He mentions however that a Summer Seminar at the Schola Cantorum in Basel used the treatise as a guide to historical and practical aspects of improvisation. An article in the Basler Jahrbuch Leo Treitler, ‘Der Vatikanische Organumtraktat Und Das Organum von Notre Dame de Paris: Perspektiven Der Entwicklung Einer Schriftlichen Musikkultur in Europa’, in *Improvisation in Der Musik Des Mittelalters Und Der Renaissance*, ed. Peter Reidemeister, Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis 7 (Winterthur: Amadeus Press, 1983), 25. that came out of the summer school makes the case that arguing for or against either an improvisational or compositional use misses the point because we have no contemporary medieval criteria on which to judge whether something is composed or improvised. He prefers the terms “‘oral’ and ‘written’ composition”. Busse Berger is in agreement with this conclusion, confirming that the treatise is ordered in such a way as to facilitate memorisation, something that is necessary for spontaneous creation of a new polyphonic voice, but equally as useful for the creation of a written piece. See Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory*, Illustrated edition (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2005), 119–28.

23 See for example the concordances cited in Immel, ‘The Vatican Organum Treatise Re-Examined’, 134.
compositions from original notation, but we also used the Vatican Organum Treatise as a guide to help us learn this practice.

*Planh*
A troubadour lament genre with a text in Occitan.

*Ricercar*
In its original meaning, this was a “searching” piece that had the character of a prelude; “ricercare le corde” meant “to try out the strings”. As a term, it first appears in Spinacino’s *Intabulatura de lauto libro primo* (Venice, 1507) and is thus associated with the lute. It could be somewhat rhapsodic or imitative in character.24

*Salterello* (pl. *salterelli*)
Jumping dance with the same structure as sequence* and *lai*. Several named *salterelli* are found in the Italian manuscript also containing Italian *istanpitte*, London, British Library, MS Additional 29987.

*Sequence*
A paraliturgical Latin genre characterised by its unusual structure of “progressive repetition” in which short musical sections are repeated twice.25 It was hugely important from the ninth to sixteenth centuries when literally thousands of sequences were created.

*(La) Spagna*
A melodic line of 46 pitches used as a basis for a large number of compositions including both ensemble and solo instrumental versions.

*Tornada*
“A truncated stanza of two, three, or four verses at the end of a poem; these verses match the syllable count and rhyme scheme of the corresponding verses at the ends of the other stanzas; the verses sometimes sum up the theme of the preceding stanzas, or are addressed directly to a lady, a patron, another troubadour, or a *joglar*.”26

*Trobaritz*
A female troubadour. This word is used only once in a medieval source, the Occitan *Roman de Flamenca*, a story told in verse form, perhaps written in the late thirteenth century.27

*Troubadours*
These poets lived in the South of France and spoke langue d’oc or Occitan and flourished from the early twelfth to the late thirteenth centuries. Their poetry is celebrated as the

25 Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages*, 82.
earliest vernacular lyric in the West. They wrote in a variety of different genres and on a
diversity of different topics including political and moral themes as well as fin’amor.28

In modern performance questions about improvisation usually revolve around instrumental
accompaniment although some singers also see the variants that can be found in different
sources as invitations to treat a medieval troubadour melody freely as a starting point or
rough model rather than as a final and fixed musical text. Troubadour songs do not have any
notated accompaniment in any source.29

Trouvères
These poets lived in Northern France and spoke langue d’oil. It is thanks to them that the
erlier poetic art of the troubadours has been passed down to us as they are almost entirely
responsible for the transmission of songs in langue d’oc. They flourished from the late
twelfth century to the late thirteenth century. While only a tenth of troubadour poems
having medieval melodies, around two thirds of trouvère poems do, and there are many
more manuscripts containing trouvère music. Their topics were similar to those covered by
the troubadours although there are many more religious trouvère lyrics and we also find a
unique genre, the chanson d’histoire or so-called chanson de toile, or weaving-song. As well
as working in and coming from a courtly milieu, trouvères could be involved in civic life,
particularly in and around the Northern French town of Arras where literary societies,
sometimes with a religious element, encouraged artistic production and sponsored
competitions.30

With regard to improvisation, the same thing applies to the performance of trouvère poetry
as to that of troubadour poetry. Trouvères principally created monophonic song; Adam de la
Halle is a late-thirteenth-century exception because he also created polyphonic song.31
Performing a trouvère song with an instrumental accompaniment therefore entails adding
something that may be more or less fixed according to the performer’s skills and desires.
Melody variants in trouvère song (see mouvance*) can also be viewed as an invitation to the
singer to be freer in the treatment of the tune.32

---

29 For more information see John Stevens and Ardis Butterfield, ‘Troubadours, Trouvères’, Grove Music Online,
30 Stevens and Butterfield; Elizabeth C. Teviotdale, ‘Puy’, Grove Music Online, 2001,
32 Angela Mariani, Improvisation and Inventio in the Performance of Medieval Music: A Practical Approach (New