

# The Marriage between Literature and Music



# The Marriage between Literature and Music

Edited by

Nick Ceramella

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This book is for all the literature and music lovers I know,  
but also for those I have never met.  
Nick Ceramella

“The high arts of literature and music stand in a curious relationship to one another, at once securely comfortable and deeply uneasy – rather like a long-term marriage.”

Will Self

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Rome 14 February 2022

Nick Ceramella

## FOREWORD

I first met Nick Ceramella when I was living in Rome, during my first years as a young academic. Although it was literature that had brought us together, we soon learned that we were both musicians as well. There was an instant bond through our love of literature, the Slow Food movement, and above all, music. I still like to remember our trips to Santa Sofia d'Epiro, Nick's home village in Calabria, and to nearby Bisignano to hang out with and interview luthier Vincenzo de Bonis, whose family has been making musical instruments since the 18th century. This wonderful family tradition continues to this day thanks to the fine work of his niece, Rosalba, who still builds fine instruments in the old family workshop in Bisignano.

At this point, Nick and I have been friends for over 30 years, and if we were in the same room now, we would certainly be celebrating that, and this book, with a toast or two, perhaps even in our favourite Roman *enoteca* (wine shop), L'Angolo Divino.

I elected to do my graduate work at University College London in Literature rather than Music. Since I had done so much work in the theatre, my topic – Shakespeare and Brecht – seemed to bring some unity to my work up to that point. Although I enjoyed doing my doctorate, I eventually learned that academia was not for me – researching, writing, and teaching Literature and Writing not only did not suit my temperament, it took far too much time away from researching, writing, and especially from playing music. I had given academia a decade before I realised that I was decidedly *not* following my bliss, and so I went back to being a musician. I also moved – a lot – going wherever my muse and the gigs took me. There have been many ups and downs, but I don't regret it for a moment; neither do I regret my academic training and work – learning to do rigorous research and write it up in a convincing, readable manner have been invaluable.

I have watched Nick grow and advance in his career: from editing for Loffredo, one of the oldest Italian publishing houses, based in Naples, to his work with Cambridge Scholars Publishing; from his teaching appointments at *La Sapienza*, *Roma Tre*, and *LUMSA* in Rome, as well as other Italian universities, to visiting professorships in Moscow (Russia) and Alagoas (Brazil), and lecturing at Stony Brook and Ottawa; from the many conferences he has organised, to the many works he has published concerning Shakespeare and the literature of the English Renaissance, D.H. Lawrence,

Translation Studies, and the History of English. Nick has been Vice President of the D. H. Lawrence Society of Great Britain since 2017, a position he enjoys as much as he deserves.

This present volume is not the culmination of Nick's academic career - it's not *that* big! - but it certainly is an expansive work, as full of passion as it is of knowledge, and for this he has brought together an impressive team from Europe, Turkey, Russia, Australia, and the Americas.

As Nick points out in his Introductory Essay, Music and Literature have enjoyed a long and fruitful marriage, and much has been written about it. What sets this collection apart are not only the many scholars Nick has invited to contribute, but also the unique perspectives offered by the musicians, singers, actors, and directors who present the results of their work here, many of whom, like Nick and myself, are scholars as well. Taken as a whole, it is a fascinating read across a broad spectrum of topics ranging from Ovid, Bach and Piazzolla to *The Beggar's Opera*, Bob Dylan, and Shostakovich; from George Eliot and D. H. Lawrence to Yeats and Joyce; from Scott Fitzgerald, Jack London and Thomas Pynchon to Jean Rhys, Toni Morrison, and Zadie Smith; from Spain and Portugal to Brazil, extend to Indigenous Australians, who share an enchanting spiritual connection with Italo Calvino's fantastic stories; from Wilson's and Gray's use of music to emphasise nature's voice and Neil's ecomusicological approach, which explores the relationship between music or sound and the natural environment before composing and making these sounds part of the musical fabric, to the close interweaving of libretto and music in opera.

*The Marriage of Music between Literature* offers an "innovative exploration of how music and words can merge, blur and lose themselves in each other" – a polyphony of words and music bound in a charming book of essays.

31 January 2022 Porto (Portugal)

Doc Rossi

# INTRODUCTORY ESSAY: OVERALL VIEW ON ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERWEAVING BETWEEN MUSIC AND LITERATURE

‘Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme.’

—L. Wittgenstein, 1986, 527.

This introductory essay is meant to present a paramount picture of the title topic of this volume, covering the mythical origins of the relationship between music and literature to our days. Needless to say, it is not meant at all to offer a thorough analysis of such a varied and extremely long period yet is just an attempt to fill in the ‘gaps,’ as it were, concerning general aspects and single authors and musicians who, despite their importance, are not dealt with individually in the essays forming this book. Indeed, to pay justice to that, it would certainly take more than one volume. Let me also say that as an anglicist I have concentrated on English authors and society, but without overlooking some of the main European and American musicians, literary authors, musicologists, and philosophers who have played a remarkable role in the relationship of literature and music over the centuries.

To start with, here is the key question at the root of this book: what happens when we add text to music? An immediate reply could be that music, which is abstract by nature, is contextualised thanks to the meaning of the words related to it. In effect, Music and Poetry in particular, have been regarded as sister arts since the days of ancient Greece. However, in recent years, a major impulse coming from the growth of a varied interdisciplinary research, involving new literary and linguistic critical theories and musicology, has helped to open up new ways of analysing this relationship. What has emerged is that, even if each can stand on its own, it is also true that if combined, they can be complimentary and, as is the case when literature lends words to the abstract feelings that music arouses, the latter offers a different viewpoint from literature by illustrating the words

and giving an emotional response. To put it bluntly, we may say that poetry has traditionally been a powerful source of inspiration for musicians and conversely, which together have managed to create an ancestral, unique magic circle. This is self-evident when notes and words closely interact not only in operas and songs, but also in narrative, and even in silence, whose aim is to create a dramatic atmosphere through the varying length of pauses.<sup>1</sup> This fascinating approach has led to significant progress in the development of joint studies in Literature and Music over the last three decades. Studying the present relationship in this research area has become a continuously evolving task as it moves through different disciplinary fields. A major contribution to this has been given by the International Association for the Study of Words and Music (WMA) which, coordinated from the University of Graz in Austria, holds an international conference every second year and publishes its own book series, *Word and Music Studies*.

Now we are ready to venture into a very fascinating socio-cultural landscape to see how the relationship between music and literature has grown and evolved through the centuries, starting ...

## **From Ancient Greece to the Middle Ages**

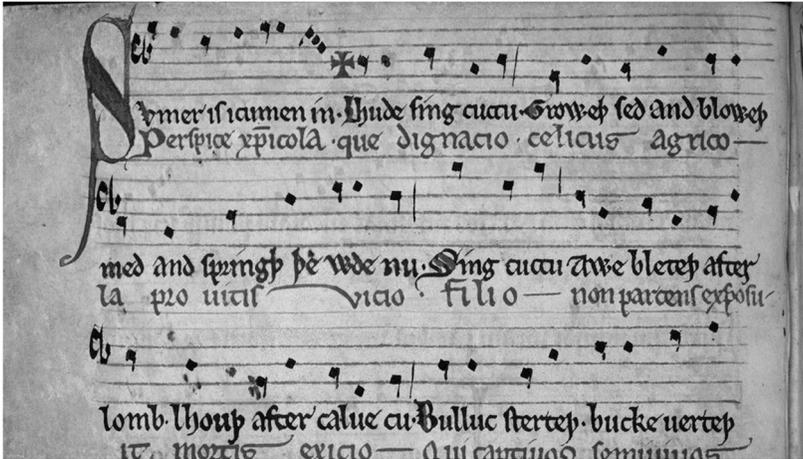
Throughout the Middle Ages, people at large agreed that man was the centre of the universe, and that the earth was at the centre of a rotating planetary system consisting of seven planets which, by rubbing against each other's atmospheres created musical pitches that combined to create heavenly harmony, or the "music of the spheres." Indeed, Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras (580 B.C.– 495 B.C.), who founded one of the most important schools of human thought in Kroton (Calabria, Magna Graecia), together with his followers imagined that this particular music and the relationship between music and words represented the future basis of what was going to develop as literary work. Among the earliest examples of this kind, which lead us back to the dawn of civilization, there is the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice; he was 'the father of songs' and the supreme musician in Greek mythology. (See pp. lxix, 224, 250, 253-4, 262). Equally significant is Homer's *The Iliad* (762 c. B. C.), opening with the famous line, "Sing, o goddess, the anger of Achilles, son of Peleus" (Book 1) where the poet

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in Sanskrit poetics on music and drama, presented in *Sangita Raknakara* ("Ocean of Music and Dance") by Sarngadeva, a leading Indian musicologist, he declares that music, or rather some sort of drone called 'nada,' developed itself in an audible but also an inaudible form.

invokes the muse of epic poetry to help him in telling the story of Achilles' anger and the war over Helen and Troy. It then followed that intellectuals began referring to music and poetry as sharing certain basic principles like timbre and metre. Quite notably, in ancient Greece, they used the term *mousiké* to refer to the three arts inspired by the muses – music, poetry, and dance. The distinction between these different modes of expression was rather vague, and sometimes made it impossible for us to distinguish the *liaison* between lyrical texts and the music accompanying them because they often faded into each other.

In medieval thinking, however, poetry and music took two different directions. The former verged towards rhetoric and grammar and the latter towards mathematics and science, though music has always been linked with the word, especially in its poetical mode. In the following centuries, music and song rose in social importance, as had been theorised by Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) in *Book 8* of *Politics*, and much later by Augustine (354–430) in *Confessions* Book 10, XXXIII, and Boethius (475–524) in *De institutione musicae*; most importantly, they all agreed on the role of music in society as a metaphor for harmony and accordance. Unfortunately, well before that had become normal practice, every form of entertainment was banned from the social scene. That occurred on the fall of the Roman Empire (476 A.D.) as a consequence of the clash between Christianity and Paganism which had a devastating effect not only on the theatre, but also on visual arts and music. It is not until Guido d' Arezzo (991 c.–1033 c.), a Benedictine monk, developed modern musical notation in the eleventh century, that music was gradually allowed to take back its salient role in society at all levels. From then onwards, conditions changed favourably so that musical activity almost everywhere around Europe improved quite rapidly. Alongside music composed in connection with religious services, there was also that originating from popular life of which one of the earliest examples, dating back to about 1220, can be found in England: the anonymous 'Summer is icumen in' (also known as the 'Cuckoo Song'). This piece, celebrating the arrival of spring, is the earliest extant song whose lyrics are written to the same music score. The singers can choose between the Middle English lyrics for the secular version, or the Latin for the religious one. It consists of six phrases distributed across twelve bars through which the voices enter one by one rather than in unison, and after reaching a prefixed point marked with a red cross in the score, they sing together in unison, or at the octave.



‘Summer is icumen in’ (anonymous original score).

Worthy of attention, among the most popular literary genres in the Middle Ages, is the poetry and prose inspired by the Arthurian Cycle, starting from the Welsh, Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100-1155) up to Sir Thomas Malory (1415-1471) who used it as his primary source. The Arthurian Cycle includes the most famous part of the Matter of Britain, representing the earliest examples in the Western World which refer to music, namely the Tristan and Isolde legend. Tristan is a master in the arts of the *trivium* – grammar, logic and rhetoric – which are the foundation for the *quadrivium*, the upper division of the medieval education in the liberal arts, comprising music, geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy. He almost always composed poems which he himself put to music on his harp, pretending to be a professional itinerate minstrel, like when he arrived at King Marcus’s court in Cornwall. His beloved Isolde learned the *trobar* art from him, just like the minstrels of *chansons de geste* (French, literally, ‘song of deeds’), who used to accompany themselves on a string instrument in the courts and on the streets. And that is where we can draw a line between ballads, narrative poems put to music, coming directly from popular tradition, and chivalric romances testifying to the power of noble families and institutions. (See subsection below). This type of literary production had by and large the great merit of guiding and promoting the European sentimental education, represented by the brave and generous fighting knight, who still loved art and convivial life, thus anticipating the writings of Machiavelli and, even more so Castiglione, about the perfect prince and “courtesan.”

## Troubadour Poetry and Dante's *Divine Comedy*

Music had an even more important function in the allegoric poem than in the chivalric romance. This is a genre, including the 14<sup>th</sup> century anonymous *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, as well as two works by Guillaume de Machaut (1300-77), the autobiographical *Le voir dit* (1360-1363) and the love poem *Remède de Fortune* (1343?), in which emphasis is placed on the importance of sounds. The latter is extant with the score composed by the poet himself, but what makes it particularly interesting for us here is that, as words may remain ambiguous, the characters reveal their inner thoughts through their singing and even the outcome of the story. Arnaut Daniel (1180-1200), an Occitan troubadour, is widely acknowledged to have opened the way to this kind of poetry, which has been put to music ever since his days. As it happens, Ezra Pound (1885-1972), an amazing expert in Medieval poetry, praised him in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910) as one of the best poets ever while Petrarch, the poet who described love as a sensual and overwhelming passion, called him “gran maestro dell’amore” (“great master of love”). (See Pound’s version, pp. lxvi).

**Dante Alighieri** (1265-1321) himself lauded Arnaut as the “miglior fabbro del parlar materno” (“the best craftsman in the mother tongue”), Canto xxvi, l. 117, *Purgatorio*, *The Divine Comedy* - 1304–1321). At the end of this Canto, when Dante asks Arnaut who he is, he answers “Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan” (“Io sono Aranaut che piango e vado cantando,” (“I am Arnaut that weeps and goes a-singing,” l. 142.) This demonstrates that in Dante’s time, singing was naturally connected to poetry, to which he often refers as song. Quite interestingly, he treats music in a different way in each ‘cantica.’ To start with, the only musical instrument that can be heard in the dark Hell is Nimrod’s horn (Canto xxxi, ll. 70-78), which does not produce any music at all. The ‘instruments’ that can be heard in *Inferno* just make blasts and thumps and not music as such; the rest is shrieks, moans, and lamentation: “Ora comincian le dolenti note / a farmisi sentire; or son venuto là dove molto pianto mi percuote.” (“Now begin the doleful notes to reach me; / am I come where much lamenting strikes me” (Canto v, l. 25-26). The only music reference is to Dante himself saying, “E mentre io gli cantai cotai note” - “And while I sang these notes to him” (Canto xix, l. 119) which he uttered to accuse Constantine of avarice, without actually singing. In *Purgatorio*, Dante often resorts to popular liturgical texts under various circumstances that can be easily referred to certain relevant melodies. Music takes a central role in the Canto II, l. 112 of *Purgatorio*, where the poet meets his friend Casella and begs him to sing for him *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona*. (See opening of

*Convivio*, III). Just before climbing the “sacro monte” (“sacred mountain”), Dante stops to listen to the song which moves them to feel the nostalgia for the joys of earthly life. Finally, whereas music in *Purgatorio* is discontinuous, in *Paradiso* it is an inherent, uninterrupted, harmonious sonority, suffusing the whole of it. By creating amazing metaphors, while sound and visual effects enhance the narrative development, Dante suggests vivid images like that of the luteist who accompanies a singer describing the joined little flames of Trojan and Ripheus: “E come a buon cantor buon citarista / fa seguitar lo guizzo della corda, / in che più di piacer lo canto acquista” / (“And as on a good singer a good harpist maketh / the quivering of the chord attend, wherein the / song gaineth more pleasantness”) (*Paradiso*, Canto xx, ll. 142-144). In the glowing Paradise, there are such sweet sounds, so different from anything heard on earth, making them impossible to memorise: “così vid’io la gloriosa rota / moversi, e render voce a voce temprà / ed in dolcezza ch’esser non può nota, / se non colà dove gioir s’insempria.” (“so did I see the glorious wheel revolve and / render voice in harmony and sweetness that may not be known except where joy / maketh itself eternal.”) (*Paradiso*, Canto X, ll. 150-154).

## Petrarch and *The Canzoniere*

**Francesco Petrarca** (1304-1374), commonly anglicised as **Petrarch**, represents a world apart from Dante. Although, his many references to the effect of music on the human spirit are particularly telling, it is unlikely that he meant all of his *Rerum vulgariun fragmenta* (“Fragments of Vernacular Matters”), a collection of 366 lyric poems in many different genres, known as *Il Canzoniere* (“Songbook”), to be set to music. However, during the period 1520-1630, polyphonic madrigalists often used Petrarch’s sonnets to illustrate how poems could be put into music. One example is “Zefiro torna” (“Canzoniere,” 310) by Claudio Monteverdi; the work of Luca Marenzio provides another. Petrarch’s influence on composers continued for centuries to come. Franz Liszt (1811-86) put to music a poem by Victor Hugo, “O quand je dors” (“Oh when I sleep”) in which Petrarch and Laura are invoked as the epitome of erotic love. Liszt adapted to music for voice, what he called *Tre Sonnetti del Petrarca* (47, 104, and 123), which he would transcribe for solo piano and include in the suite *Années de pèlerinage* (1842, “Years of Pilgrimage”). (This title refers to Wolfgang Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years* (“Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre”).) Given the purpose of our volume, it is worth highlighting that Liszt, following the Romantic trend of the time, prefaced most of these compositions with literary passages from authors like Byron, Senancour, and Schiller. This

trend has continued to our days, as shown, among others, by the American composer Elliot Carter (1908-2012), who on stressing the close link between music and words said: “How serious music would have developed without its accompaniment of verbage is hard to imagine!” (Carter, n. p., 1972). As a modernist composer, he gives an example of this kind himself with his solo flute “Scrive in Vento” (Writing in the wind) (1991) which is inspired by Petrarch’s Sonnet 212, *Beato in sogno*, a truly modernist piece in the 20<sup>th</sup> centre sense. The sonnet itself appears with Carter’s comment before his score, reading: “*Scrive in vento*, [...] takes its title from a poem by Petrarch who lived in and around Avignon from 1326 to 1352. It uses the flute to present the contrasting musical ideas and registers to suggest the paradoxical nature of the poem” (Whitall, 2010, 91). Carter’s musical adaptation follows Petrarch’s pattern of a dream state, imagining a dreamer swimming oceans and going after breezes while writing in the wind (Cf. Dylan’s famous song *Blowing in the wind*). The Italian poet as usual creates amazing contrasting images by applying some of his typical literary devices: oxymorons, conceits and paradoxes, which often draw on sensory imagery. “Beato in sogno et di languir contento” / [...] / solco onde, e ’n rena fondo, et scrivo in vento.” (“Bless with sleep and content with languor / [...] / Plough waves, build on sand, write in air”).

## Ballad

On writing about the liaison between music and literature, the ballad certainly deserves a reference of its own, however short it may be, for two good reasons: the important social and cultural role it played in the Medieval society and, obviously, the relevance that this poetical form still has in modern times. Medieval ballads were narrative poems deriving from popular tradition, which were often improvised and sung on a simple musical accompaniment that could include dance from which derives its name. Indeed, ballads originate from the French ‘chanson’ / ‘ballade’ and people enjoyed them in countries speaking romance languages before spreading to Ireland and around the British Isles. Unlike songs, which were specially written to be sung, ballads were lyrical poems put to music, and were performed in the streets, market squares, taverns, and fairs. The typical ballad is often anonymous, or has more than one author, and portrays a dramatic, exciting event often using a simple, dialogical narrative. In addition, while were more often than not an emotional expression of the singer, ballads are rather impersonal, a simple retelling of events varying from love and death, adventures, outlaws (‘Robin Hood Cycle’), battles (‘Chevy Chase’), dangerous trips. Since they were rarely written, there are

various versions of the same text, as for example “Lord Randal,” a 13<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish ballad of which there are variations, including one from Bob Dylan as well as others from countries like Germany and Italy. ‘Barbara Allen’ is another good example, undergoing changes according to circumstances and conditions. In fact, this ballad exists in numerous versions. Like very many medieval ballads, it originates in the border country between England and Scotland, belonging to the ‘Scottish Border Ballads,’ and in this case probably in the village of Allendale, hence, its title. It continued to be a very popular story for many generations to come. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the diarist Samuel Pepys makes this entry in his *Diary*, on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1666: “In perfect pleasure I was to hear her (Mrs Knipp, an actress) sing, and especially her little Scotch song of Barbara Allen.” In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Oliver Goldsmith says, in one of his essays, that the song made him weep and that its various versions are divided in their presentation of Barbara or Barbry, sometimes representing her as truly penitent for causing the death of her lover, sometimes showing her as unrepentantly cold-hearted. One of the modern interpretations of “Barbara Allen” is sung by the America folk singer Joan Baez. This shows that, although somewhat removed from its roots, the ballad has remained a valid and popular literary form thanks to the continued popularity of artists like Woody Guthrie, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen.

### *Barbara Allen*

Anon. 17C  
arr. Doc Rossi



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‘Barbara Allen’ by anonymous (1622).

## Boccaccio and Chaucer

The close relationship between music and poetical narrative in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is strongly marked by two of the greatest authors of their time, the Italian Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) and the English Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400). Music in *The Decameron* (1348-1353) offers us a precious source of information about the musical instruments of the time, dances, secular songs and religious hymns. In the Preface to *The Decameron*, Boccaccio stresses the important role that music plays in his era, saying: “And I shall also include some songs, which these seven ladies sang for their mutual agreements.” The words of the songs they sang set the appropriate atmosphere for the stories day by day, varying from cheerful to sad. Music in Boccaccio’s view is a symbol of harmonious friendship in the *brigata*, the ten people who, having self-confined themselves in a villa outside Florence to escape from a devastating plague that was spreading all over Europe, to pass the time pleasantly sing, play, and dance to popular tunes, which Boccaccio mentions through his narration. Music is part and parcel of *The Decameron* since it represents a most important aspect of daily life, though perhaps is not so present as in Dante or Petrarca. Indeed, only Fiammetta and Dioneo can play a musical instrument, the *vielle* (fiddle) and lute respectively on which they accompany the singing and dancing of the whole group in addition to various other pieces they practice on their own. Both of them have a sensual association to music, with Fiammetta singing more romantic songs and Dioneo those that we could define even as “sexy.” In brief, they represent sex and love of the group.

In the following centuries, various madrigalists were inspired by Boccaccio. The Flemish Jacques Arcadelt (1507-1568) wrote many books of songs and madrigals combined with the texts of various poets, such as Petrarch, and also Boccaccio on whose prose romance *Elegy of Madonna Fiammetta* he based a famous madrigal. The French composer Philip Verdelot (1480c.–1552?), who spent many years in Italy, and is even considered the father of the Italian madrigal, deserves particular attention for his “O singular dolcezza del sangue bolognese” drawn from a passage in prose in *The Decameron*.

Boccaccio and music have continued to represent a winning combination through the centuries to these days. The Italian author and film maker Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975), on shooting the film *Il Decameron*, acknowledged how indebted he was to the inherent function that music has in Boccaccio’s text, which naturally supports the narrative framework of his Neapolitan reinterpretation of the tales.

Concerning Chaucer, the interest he had in the music of his time is evident in most of his writings which have become an important source of information, besides showing the influence that music had on his own poetry. From the beginning of his career, he resorted to music to create the appropriate narrative environment, but the musical references are still stylised and conventional, as for example in *The House of Fame* and *The Book of the Duchesse*, or in “The Knight’s Tale,” as well as elsewhere in *The Canterbury Tales*. From the earliest steps in his career, Chaucer used musical instruments as an integral part of the narrative environment, but not as a distinguishing aspect of the characters. Indeed, as Chaucer got to know the changing real world, be it court or the streets, he began to emphasize the inter-relationship between these environments and the many instruments that served symbolic social functions, as can be seen in “The Squire’s Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*, with characters like the Squire himself with his flute. Equally interesting is this passage from the “Miller’s Tale” whose protagonist, Nicholas, an Oxford university student, shows not only particular lover’s skills with his landlady, the miller’s wife, but that he is a good musician, too:

And Nicholas had stroked her loins a bit  
 And kissed her sweetly, he took down his harp  
 And played away, a merry tune and sharp.

Everything is fine until another young man, Absalom, a parish clerk, who likes the same woman, enters the scene and seduces her with his outstanding ability as a dancer and fiddle player:

He used to dance in twenty different styles  
 (After the current school at Oxford though,  
 Casting his legs about him to and fro).  
 He played a two-stringed fiddle, did it proud,  
 And sang a high falsetto rather loud;  
 And he was just as good on the guitar  
 [...].

(Chaucer, 1968, 108)

As we can see, unlike in his earlier period, in these passages Chaucer uses musical instruments to highlight their relationship to the characters in order to stress their social function. Incidentally, this demonstrates that even if musical notation was not widely used in England in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there was folk dance, war and love ballads as well church music in the form of hymns. In short, there was a widespread and popular musical culture where

music was no longer conventional, but a mirror of the times of which Chaucer was a great interpreter.

### **Renaissance: XIV-XVI Centuries**

When the Medieval period came to its end around 1400, the Renaissance period began and lasted until about 1600, with the beginning of the Baroque age. Music historians agree to divide this long span of time into three periods. Early (1400-1470), Middle 1470-1530), and Late (1530-1600).

In the *Early Period*, musicians were obviously influenced by the late Medieval style, as is the case with John Dunstaple (c.1390-1453), one of the most famous English composers of the time. Owing to the fact that many copies of his works have been found in Italian and German manuscripts, historians have thought that his influence spread from England into Europe, especially in creating the very original new style of the Burgundian School (a group of composers particularly active in France). Dunstaple developed a most influential art known as “la contenance angloise” (“the English countenance”), a term used by the French poet Martine le Franc (1410-1461) in his *Le Champion de Dames*, characterised by the use of “triadic harmony” (three-note chords). Only fifty compositions that are attributed to him are extant, including some masses in which he uses a single melody (*cantus firmus*) instead of Medieval polyphony. There are hardly any songs in English that are considered his. On the contrary, although European musicians continued to write religious music, non-religious works were composed by the German musician Oswald von Wolkenstein (c. 1376-1445), the Dutch Gilles Binchois (c.1400-1460), who composed secular songs, mainly ‘rondeaux’ like the Franco-Flemish Guillaume Du Fay (c.1397-1474) with his many ballads and ‘virelais’, and other ‘chansons.’ On closing this early period, there are certain scores, anticipating today’s art interaction, which are true visual artworks worthy of particular notice. Among them there are two by the French composer Baude Cordier (1380-1440): ‘Tout par compass,’ an eternal canon, where he uses a circular staff shape, and ‘Belle, bonne, sage,’ a love song shaped like a heart and with some red notes (unfortunately will not be visible here in b/w) indicating a change of rhythm.



Fig. 1: Score of *Belle, bonne, sage* (XV C.) by Baude Cordier.

In the *Middle Period*, Frenchman Josquin des Prez (c.1450-1521) took a leading role as the best composer of the time. His fame is anchored to his highly virtuosic technique and his universally acknowledged mastery of expression, which was imitated up to the baroque era. Even Martin Luther and Baldassare Castiglione praised him both as a composer of religious polyphonic music, masses on popular songs, and completely secular music such as motets and “chansons.”

Concerning the place of music generally, one of the leading political figures of the Renaissance humanist movement, Thomas More (1473-1535),

who served under Henry VIII as Lord High Chancellor of England, envisaged in his famous *Utopia* (1515) a fantastic state on an imaginary island where he describes three different sorts of bodily ‘pleasures’ related to senses and health, and stresses that in between

Real pleasures they [the Utopians] divide into two categories, mental and physical. [...] However, there are also pleasures which satisfy no organic need, and relieve no previous discomfort. They merely act, in a mysterious but quite an unmistakable way, directly on our senses, and monopolize their reactions. Such is the pleasure of music.” (More, 1978, Book II, 96)

It may be surprising, but Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), whose claim to fame are his political theories, had an interest in music filtered through poetry. Amongst his verses, all composed between 1524-25, of particular notice are the “intermedi” – which he himself called “canzoni” or “canzonette” – and, as we will see below, are widely considered the precursors of melodrama. He wrote nine of them for his two comedies *Clizia* and *Mandragola*, (e. g. ‘Quanto sia lieto il giorno’ and ‘Amore’). Machiavelli was aware that he had entered an area that was new to him, yet he managed to innovate the role played by the *intermedi* by using them as an integral part of the dramatic action. Among his best poems are ‘S’alla mia immensa voglia’ and ‘Amor, io sento l’alma,’ written for Barbara Salvati, the Florentine lady described by Giorgio Vasari in his life of Domenico Puligo. His intention was that, once they were set to music, they were to be sung by Salvati herself with other singers.

In the *Late Period* of the Renaissance (1530-1600), des Prez represents a link to Italian musicians, while choirs became very popular thanks to the School of Venice which developed at the local Basilique of Saint Mark and spread all over Europe. France continued to play a leading role thanks to the foundation of the *Académie de poésie et de musique* in 1574, in the very year when King Charles IX of France died. His mother Catherine de’ Medici had certainly influenced him to give his full support, though the mastermind behind the initiative was the poet Jean-Antoine de Baif, together with the musician Joachim Thibault de Courville. We need to underline that those two artists followed the Neo-Platonic ideals aiming at the revival of Greek and Roman poetry and music, which linked morality and order as the principles to be applied to the construction of a harmonious society. At the same time, the school of Rome, very close to the Vatican, gave an impressive contribution too, thanks to Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594), who was the best and most prolific composer of church music and motets of the time. He was also known for combining the needs of the Catholic Church with the most popular music styles during the Catholic

Reformation as a response to the Protestant Reformation. His ideas were welcome all over Europe, where his counterparts were the Flemish Orlande de Lassus (1532-1594), and the Englishman William Byrd (1540-1623), who were particularly popular in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There was a lot of competition to hire them in churches and courts. Italy became the most attractive pole for their services as composers, teachers, and performers. There was a free exchange of techniques between sacred and secular music that allowed musicians to get deeply into the texts they were to put to music, which became a way to express personal feelings more freely. Worth mentioning is the English Madrigal School, which flourished between 1588 and 1627 and used direct translations of the leading Italian models. A case in point are the extremely expressive madrigals of Gesualdo da Venosa (1566-1613) which, besides setting an unsurpassable example on the Continent, represent an impeccable combination of poetry and music, expressed at its utmost level of interweaving thanks to the polyphonic structure of the madrigal. Thus, secular music like the German “Lied,” the French “chanson,” and the Italian “frottola” became independent of churches. Then, towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an early form of opera as the “madrigal comedy,” the “monody” and the “intermedi” began to be heard.

In the meantime, the love for music and poetry of Henry VIII and his daughter, Queen Elizabeth, favoured the rise of some outstanding poets like Thomas Wyatt, Edward Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, and Sir Philip Sidney. Their lyrics appeared in various publications set to music, and although none of them composed music, we can say that they intended their poems for singing. In *The Defense of Poesy* (1595), Sidney (1554-86) writes: ‘our Poet...cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of Music’ (Sidney, 2002, 7). When he was only nineteen, he spent two years studying in Venice and Padua where he came into direct contact with the new Italian movements in music and poetry. He wrote from Venice that he was studying ‘certain musical subjects.’ On 22 May 1580, in one of the rare references to his own work, he wrote to his friend, Edward Denny, stressing the importance of musical settings for his poetry: “remember with your good voyce, to singe my songes for they will one well become another” (Osborne, 1972, 540). Sidney followed a trend of the time, consisting of using poems to be adapted to existing melodies, or using the tunes to give the meter of the poem to be read. His claim to fame is a love sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* dedicated to his illicit love for Penelope Devereux, who married Lord Rich in 1581, thus recalling Petrarch’s unrequited love for Laura. The first line of ‘*In a grove most rich of shade*’ puns upon her new

name, Penelope Rich. This is set to the melody of a French aria by Guillaume Tessier, which appeared in a book dedicated to Queen Elizabeth in 1582. This is one of three *Astrophel and Stella* sonnet settings that Robert Dowland, the son of the famous lutenist John, included in his *A Musical Banquet* of 1610, which was dedicated to his godfather, Sir Robert Sidney, Philip's brother.

Another outstanding poet is **John Donne** (1572-1631) who composed mainly for the 'happy few.' Among his major poems that were put to music there is, 'Come live with me, and be my love,' which is a parody of Christopher Marlowe's pastoral ballad *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love* and Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Nymph Reply*. This is one of the few poems from Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* to be published during his lifetime, and specifically as a song. Another important theme of his poetry is religion. When he was Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, he wrote *A hymne to God the Father* whose setting to music was most likely commissioned by John Hilton. His biographer Izaak Walton (1593-1683) reported that Donne wanted it "to be set to a most grave and solemn Tune, and to be often sung to the Organ by the Choristers of St. Paul's Church, in his own hearing; [...]" He occasionally said to a friend, "The words of this Hymn have restored to me the same thoughts of joy that possess my soul in my sickness when I composed it. And, O the power of Church-musick!"

## William Shakespeare

In the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres, between the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, music played a much more important role than the bare literary texts can show. This explains why the majority of people tend to overlook the songs and music references on reading a play. Yet playwrights considered them as vital and integral parts of their works. Indeed, to attract larger audiences they often used lyrical poems of already existing famous ballads that were sometimes especially set to music. A good example of this is the Welsh song, "I framed to the harp / many an English ditty lovely well." (*Henry IV*, Part I, Act 3, sc. 1), or the four songs present in *Volpone* (1605-06) by Ben Jonson (1532-1637), including the popular 'Come, my Celia', an adaptation from the Roman poet Catullus. It is thanks to that practice that many original songs have reached us. However, people in general were not so familiar with the equally good and abundant productions of contemporary music by such eminent composers as Shakespeare's friend Thomas Morley (1557-1602), an expert in making poems into madrigals who also composed the music for the Great Bard's *As You Like It* (1600).

Indeed, **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616), the most popular playwright of the Elizabethan theatre, loved music so deeply that in his works alone, he manages to take us through the whole range of the musical world and its history, going from the philosophical “music of the spheres” to love songs or impertinent ballads. There are three hundred stage directions related to music in his thirty-seven plays, out of which at least thirty-two contain interesting musical references, be it to specific songs, which were to be sung as part of the action, to instructions on how to dance a galliard, or casual allusions to popular pieces as the pastoral song “Come live with me and be my love” by Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), which Shakespeare borrowed from his friend and quoted it in his play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In addition to this, there are witty references and puns, with obvious sexual connotations, where Shakespeare associates music to people, as in *Pericles* (Act I, sc. 5) where the King, in disagreement with his daughter’s choice of a husband, says to her: “You are a fair viol and you sense the strings.” Music is also used to relieve mental tension, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* (Act II sc. 5) when the latter orders, “Give me some music; music, moody food/ Of us that trade in love. / All say: “The music, ho!” Sensitivity and morality are closely associated in *Richard II* (Act I, sc. 3) when Mowbray, who has been sent into exile by the King, says: “The language I have learn’d these forty years, / My native English, now I must forgo;/ And now my tongue’s use is to me no more/ Than an unstrung viol, or a harp;/ Or like a cunning instrument cas’d up, / Or, being open, put into his hands/ That knows *no touch to tune the harmony*.” And here follow some of the most representative songs which, according to the critic and musicologist F.W. Sternfield, are introduced to throw light on the character of the singer, or to create an appropriate atmosphere, or also to examine closely the essence of a dramatic situation: “Tomorrow is St. Valentine’s Day” (*Hamlet*), is a common tune sung by Ophelia, which was traditionally known and continued to be used in many 18<sup>th</sup> century ballad operas. “The willow song” (*Othello*: Act IV, sc. 5) is sung by Desdemona just before being smothered by Othello. She recalls that she first heard it from her mother’s maid, Barbary, who had had a similar sad experience and sang it before dying. In fact, the song was as old as it was popular.

Shakespeare’s last work *The Tempest* was first written and performed between 1610 and 1611 and published posthumously in the First Folio of 1623. Several instruments and four songs make of it the most musical of the Great Bard’s plays. Ariel, a fundamental character in the play, is always accompanied by music when entering and exiting the stage. He is a player of pipe and tabor. Music is an intrinsic part of his nature. He sings ‘Come unto These Yellow Sands’ (Act I sc. 2), ‘Full Fathom Five’ (Act I sc. 2),