



Even the most inspired of musical trivial pursuitists would doubtless struggle to find a common link between the names of Bakfark, Spinacino, Capirola, Gerle, da Ripa and Gintzler. The correct observation that they were all lutenist-composers active during the 16th century would merit high points, but the five-star answer is supplied by the fact that they all produced intabulations of vocal works attributed to the great Franco-Flemish musician Josquin des Prez. A further connection has been supplied by Jacob Heringman, whose patient research and musical tastes have yielded a new recording devoted to Josquin intabulations, the first disc to explore this highly attractive corner of the lute repertoire.

Recent developments in Josquin scholarship have helped diminish the number of works thought to have come from his pen, leaving 12 masses, around 40 motets and about a dozen songs with the seal of modern academic approval. As David Fallows points out in the notes to Heringman's Josquin anthology, these are the works that 'made by far the greatest impact in the 16th century. These are the works that appear in the largest number of sources . . . and they are also the ones overwhelmingly preferred by the musicians who arranged his music for lute or vihuela'. According to Heringman, intabulations of authentic Josquin vocal pieces are among the finest of all renaissance lute compositions. He points to more typical programmes for lute recordings, filled with short pieces by

composers known to few beyond a highly specialist audience, which ‘fall between the cracks’ in record retailers’ display categories and gramophone catalogues. ‘I think the marketing question is an important one,’ he says. ‘Certainly, most lute composers, with the exception of Dowland, are unknowns. If you couple the marketing angle, which includes the current interest in renaissance polyphony and Josquin’s high status as a composer, with my passion for early repertoire and for intabulations specifically, then I think it makes commercial and artistic sense to explore these pieces.’

The American lutenist, a London resident since 1987, admits that he was uncertain about the Josquin lute repertoire at first, especially so given the large number of works attributed to the composer and the unevenness of their quality. Above all, he questioned whether intabulations could stand repeated listening by a general audience. ‘Another consideration is the recent ethos of thinking that anything derivative or adapted from the original must somehow be inferior. After looking at around 300 Josquin intabulations, I concluded that there were many undoubtedly strong pieces that could speak to a broad range of people. The great thing is that playing these intabulations makes you challenge preconceptions. It is virtually impossible when thinking about music written almost 500 years ago to avoid certain fundamental assumptions that may not be appropriate; anything that refreshes the attitude to this music is a good thing. Part of this recording project’s beauty is that it shows the music to work on many levels, from functioning as wallpaper music to throwing new light on renaissance vocal polyphony.’ He adds that knowledge of the original vocal pieces enhances a listener’s enjoyment of their intabulated forms, although the best can stand as compositions in their own right, works recreated and refashioned by skilled lutenist-composers.

Much has been made of the significance of intabulations in providing evidence, albeit often contradictory or nebulous, for the application of *musica ficta* (or accidentals in modern parlance) in vocal polyphony. Lute tablature works by showing exactly where a player’s fingers should be on a string to produce each note, demanding lutenist-composers to be specific about ‘altering’ certain cadential notes otherwise left unwritten in partbooks intended for singers. Given the fact that Josquin scholarship appears to be narrowing into this small body of accepted works, David Fallows suggests in his programme notes that a study of the intabulations offers a very useful additional source of information and fresh angles on familiar pieces. ‘They tell us what his contemporaries and successors thought of his music. The instrumental settings, because they’re in tablature, throw up questions about *ficta*. It would be interesting to work with six singers and apply all the *ficta* notes that appear in these intabulations, then do two or three different performances of a given motet with different *ficta* each time.’

Heringman points out that intabulations were primarily printed and published for domestic consumption, although many were made by leading court lutenists who were clearly outstanding virtuosos and gifted improvisers. ‘I think part of their brief probably included extemporising on well-known vocal pieces; it’s what a pianist in a bar does today, after all. Hearing Vincenzo Capirola’s versions of the *Et in terra pax* and *Qui tollis peccata mundi* from Josquin’s *Missa pange lingua* is a completely different experience from hearing those pieces sung. The most ornate of the Josquin intabulations demand to be performed at a slow *tactus*. I find it very interesting that they were written in a way that makes it virtually impossible to play them at a “singable” speed; it makes me wonder whether we perform all renaissance vocal music faster than it would have been taken originally.’

Heringman's Josquin disc is set to appear this June on the Discipline Global Mobile label, brainchild of rock guitarist Robert Fripp and home to albums by cult band King Crimson and legendary jazz-rock drummer Bill Bruford's Earthworks. 'I'm trying to target the mainstream audience without in any way compromising the product or turning the music into something New Age,' the lutenist explains. 'But I'm also aware of the fact that it does have a New-Age appeal and would be happy to reach out to that audience as well as those who are attracted to early music recordings. I wouldn't want to make any concessions to that, since I'm presenting the music for what it is and as conscientiously as I possibly can.'

He adds that it took a year's preparatory work to become completely familiar with the demands of early-renaissance lute technique and fingering, bringing him closer to the neglected repertoire of 16th-century intabulations and nurturing genuine love for an area of lute music widely disregarded by his colleagues. *[Correction by JH: I said nothing of the kind! Becoming "completely familiar with the demands of early-renaissance lute technique and fingering" is probably several lifetimes' work! The author of this article, though sympathetic, is very naughty in that he sums up what I said into his own words and then puts quotation marks around it, making it look like my words. To be fair, the culprit may have been the editor rather than the author.]* Heringman deliberately withdrew from the time-consuming business of baroque continuo playing around seven years ago to concentrate on earlier solo lute repertoire, a move clearly not driven by the promise of financial gain and lasting fame. 'I found it was completely impossible to spend 80 per cent of your time doing continuo in baroque opera productions and the rest trying to do justice to music that contemporary players would have been devoted to over a lifetime. As a bit of a perfectionist, I decided to delve into this repertoire and prove that it really isn't as dry as dust.' If Heringman's latest recording serves as the measure, his shrewd repertoire selection and laborious preparations offer considerable rewards for adventurous listeners.

DGM Records <http://www.disciplineglobalmobile.com>

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