

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Emotion in Dufay

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the early musical works of Guillaume Dufay (1397-1474) and their affective context in the world of his time is evaluated. To this end, technical elements of his musical compositions are assessed in light of key philosophical, theological, literary, sociological, historical, and theoretical evidence in the early 15th century, which allow the constitution of an affective environment around him. Amid this evidence, the late writings of theologian Jean Gerson plays a particular role in its emphasis on musical accidentals as a means to project emotional transformation. In related research domains, the relationship between music and architecture of the late Gothic period is analyzed, and a book of essays on medieval music will be published.

1- Introduction

Fifteenth-century music has been much studied in musicology, but its affective and emotional dimensions remain little understood, both in their own right and in relation to the burgeoning field of historical emotion studies. This obscurity is all the more curious in that emotional responses form such a central feature of musical reception, in medieval and Renaissance music as in other music. The project 'Emotion in Dufay' aims to bring light and structure to this emergent musicological field by studying both the content and the environment of musical emotion in the fifteenth century. Such study requires the examination of musical scores and ear-witness evidence around them, but also of extra-musical trends in literature, philosophy, society, theology, and other contemporaneous domains; it aims to establish general understandings but also to pursue distinct and fruitful lines of inquiry. A key figure in this investigation is the composer Guillaume Dufay (1397–1474), the most illustrious composer of his era, whose musical compositions abound in innovative features that

appear to be affectively motivated. Providing a historically-grounded understanding of Dufay's affectivity is a key motivation behind the project.

2- Experimental details

The project entailed a literature study in many fields outside of the realm, more familiar to me, of musicology. Extensive reading of fifteenth-century journals, chronicles, poetry, and treatises of all kinds, together with modern studies of fifteenth-century historiography, sociology, poetics, literature, philosophy, theology, and other domains, gave me a first-hand look at fifteenth-century understandings, but also the modern-day modeling, of affective life in that era. Two stand-out figures in this respect are Alain Chartier and Charles d'Orléans, leading French writers during the period of Dufay's youth and middle age, who mark a significant development in the complexity of literary self-representation during that time; their poetic subjectivity, exploring new fields of ambiguity and inwardness, offers a renewed model for the

analysis of musical subjectivity as well. Another salient figure is Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris and renowned preacher, much of whose extensive writings in the 1420s are devoted to music in a mystical and affective context. Gerson's emphasis on self-transformation, evoked in relation to specific musical practices, techniques, and ideas of his time, serves by the same token to model music's own affective agencies, in a manner relevant to the compositional innovations around him. Dufay's compositions, with their extraordinary density of innovative musical techniques, suggest parallels with Gerson's projection of music as an agent, or reflection, of affective states and transformations.

3- Results and discussion

The poetry of Dufay's music is usually formulaic, and not often considered to be of high literary quality; his creative subjectivity therefore does not seem innovative in this area. Careful study of his poetic genres and subject matter, however, in relation to their musical settings, has provided evidence of a musical subjectivity that mirrors the fresh approaches of his literary contemporaries. Dufay is shown to use what is, for his time, a unique variety of musical techniques of all kinds, with a unique complexity and variety of means, exploiting key and time signatures, accidentals, vocal placement, canon, imitation, mode, counterpoint, and other elements to striking effect. These techniques are not only musically astute, but are shown to be distinctly oriented to the specific poetry they set, in prosodic and generic but also affective ways. In addition, his compositions for different social contexts appear as composed specifically for these contexts, in view of evoking an appropriate and meaningful musical dimension, in which affectivity plays a key role. Through this study, we move definitively beyond Dufay's compositions in their traditional conception as 'objective' or 'disembodied' works of art, to rediscover them in their clearly intended function as 'artforms of situated affectivity.'

One particular result of my literature review has a re-valuing of the musical implications of the

writings of Jean Gerson, whose mystical, affective, and ethical views of human identity are closely entwined with his musical background as a learned intellectual, cleric, and preacher. Gerson highlights the transformative possibilities of the spirit in direct relation to those of music, citing the use of musical sharps, flats, and other melodic and contrapuntal signifiers as a metaphor for affective states and movements. Given that the young Dufay was active in Gerson's orbit, the composer's affectively-charged deployment of sharps, flats, and other elements suggest a vital connection to Gerson's teachings of 1420s. In this as in other respects, Dufay is shown to participate integrally in social and theological as well as musical currents of his time.

Two other developments during this year merit discussion here. In collaboration with a CESR chercheur associé, Vasco Zara, I forged a plan of research for the study of the relationships between music and architecture in the fifteenth century; we submitted a Studium Consortium application in February, and intend to do so again next year. Also, in discussion with the staff and leadership of CESR's Programme Ricercar, it has been agreed that Ricercar's 'Epitome' series will publish a volume of essays I am editing, by leading world scholars, on the intellectual cultures of medieval music.

In the course of this year, I gave research presentations for a Studium Thursday at the CESR in Tours (Nov. 2); at the Institut für Musikforschung of Würzburg University (Nov. 24); at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art in Paris (Jan. 12), and at the 'Transitions' Unité de recherche at the Université de Liège (Apr. 18); at the 'Sound and the Sacred' conference at the University of California at Los Angeles (Nov. 18); at the 'Jean Gerson écrivain' conference at the University of Montpellier (April 4); at the 'Material Cultures of Music Notation' conference at Utrecht University (April 21); and in the seminar 'La musique au XVe siècle: nouvelles perspectives de recherche' at the CESR in Tours (June 11). These activities reflect my entry, during this Fellowship year, into a rich network of late-medieval, early-modern, and other scholars in many fields, in Tours, in France, and in Europe more broadly,

which has been transformational as regards my professional career.

A highlight of the year's end was a Workshop I organized with the Studium leadership, held at the CESR, on 'The Affective Horizons of "Song" in the Long Fifteenth Century' (June 27-28). With researchers invited from France, Germany, England, and the Netherlands, and with support from several researchers at the CESR, we had intensive discussions of emotion and affectivity in early music and made valuable research connections that have already resulted in a panel submitted to the Renaissance Society of America for its annual meeting next April, and another projected for the Medieval and Renaissance Music conference in Basel next July.

4- Conclusion

My Studium Fellowship year has been extraordinarily fruitful for me, in terms of research, scholarly presentations, scholarly connections, and plans for ongoing work. It represents in every sense a reinvigoration of my research, and of my connections to other researchers, in and beyond musicology.

5- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

Publications relative to my Fellowship year include an article on 'Jean Gerson and music,' to be included in a volume of essays emerging from the 'Gerson écrivain' conference of April 2018; my volume of essays on 'Music in the Carolingian World,' to be published in the 'Epitome' series of CESR's Programme Ricercar; and a monograph I am writing on the subject of music and emotion in the world of Guillaume Dufay.

6- Acknowledgements

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