

Nema

NEWSLETTER

Editor: Francis Knights

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Welcome to the *NEMA Newsletter*, the online pdf publication for members of the National Early Music Association UK, which appears twice yearly. It is designed to share and circulate information and resources with and between Britain's regional early music Fora, amateur musicians, professional performers, scholars, instrument makers, early music societies, publishers and retailers. As well as the listings section (including news, obituaries and organizations) there are a number of articles, including work from leading writers, scholars and performers, and reports of events such as festivals and conferences.



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REPORTS

In search of the lost voice: the reconstruction of incomplete polyphonic masterpieces

Research into the reconstruction of incomplete polyphonic masterpieces now attracts many scholars and performers with the aim of expanding our knowledge of authors and repertoires hitherto neglected; for example, at the event ‘In Search of the Lost Voice’, a five-day Spring School hosted by the University of Padua in cooperation with the Conservatory of Vicenza (26-30 April 2021), papers, lectures and workshops were given by both musicologists and musicians internationally recognised as specialists in stylistic features and performance practice of the repertoire transmitted by manuscripts and prints from the 15th century to the first half of the 17th century.

Marina Toffetti, senior lecturer at the University of Padua, was the person in charge who conceived the project, supported by an organising committee made up of postgraduate students from the Department of Cultural Heritage of Padua (Gabriele Taschetti and Chiara Comparin) and tutors from the University of Huddersfield (Marcello Mazzetti and Livio Ticli), and Richard Freedman from the Haverford College (PA, USA) .

More than thirty students from several parts of Europe and South America were formally enrolled and had the opportunity to participate in all the scheduled activities. In addition, more than a hundred listeners connected via Zoom or YouTube to attend the conference. In the final roundtable, entitled ‘The Presentation of the Results of the Reconstruction of Missing Parts in Performance, Recording, and Critical Edition’, Niels Berentsen, Philippe Canguilhem, Richard Freedman, Marcello Mazzetti, Jessie Ann Owens, Livio Ticli and Marina Toffetti illustrated a wide spectrum of international projects and discussed different approaches and techniques for recovering works from the past.

One of the most remarkable activities was the seven-hour lab focused on the restoration of ‘Incomplete Music by Giovanni Battista Riccio’, an Italian composer, organist and violinist active in Venice during the same years in which Monteverdi worked at St Mark’s Basilica. During this practice-based activity, participants could experience first-hand reconstructing pieces from *Il secondo libro delle divine lodi ... con alcune canzoni da sonare* by G. B. Riccio (Venice, 1614), which lacks one partbook (arguably the Cantus one). The presence of an astonishing ensemble-in-residence (*Quoniam Ensemble*, led by Paolo Tognon, pictured below) allowed students to have a real-time sound-rendering of their reconstruction works – some of them are still enjoyable online.¹

The conference programme alternated papers addressing methodological issues with case studies. Marina Toffetti and Gabriele Taschetti, through a series of three interesting lectures, offered a survey of the incomplete collections of polyphony printed in Italy in the first thirty years of the 17th century: this showed that more than a third of the extant total has gaps in one or more parts, making the reconstruction of the contrapuntal texture of primary importance in order to play these masterpieces again. At the same time, the methodology that the two scholars from the University of Padua have developed consists of a mixture between the theory of restoration in figurative arts, contrapuntal and stylistic analysis on a composer (*usus scribendi*) and elements of textual bibliography applied to music prints. Chiara Comparin’s case study focussed on the restoration of the lyrics in Antonio Gualtieri’s opus, discussing different examples from her PhD dissertation, which aimed to reassess the role of this neglected composer, active in both Venice and Terraferma dominions (1574-1661). Niels Berentsen (Genève, Haute École de Musique) brought the attention of the participants back to the 15th century, exposing the project called *Lacunae Ciconiae*, which aims to reconstruct contrapuntal textures from the

¹ <https://youtu.be/GrE5E6TWgd4>.

early *Quattrocento*. The two most awaited papers were those by Richard Freedman and Jesse Ann Owens (University of California, Davis). Freedman is one of the best known faces in the panorama of digital humanities projects applied to music: thanks to his presentation, participants had the possibility to know more about *The Lost Voice Project*, which is a digital platform for stylistic analysis and reconstruction of incomplete polyphony by the French composer Nicholas Du Chemin (1549–1568).² In her paper, Jesse Ann Owens – world-renowned as a specialist in the compositional process of Renaissance polyphony –highlighted the key-role played by the composer’s skills and all the practices preceding *res facta* by using sketches and other documentary evidence, which contributed to a lively discussion on the relationship between improvisation, writing and orality.



A second round of case studies were presented by Cristina Cassia, who investigated the incomplete printed music collection in the first Cinquecento, gravitating to Pietro Bembo; and Gabriele Taschetti, who focussed on Tomaso Cecchini’s incomplete motets. Marcello Mazzetti addressed issues of compositional process and performance practice in reconstructing missing part through the analysis of specific collections from Brescia, while Livio Ticli lectured on his restoration of incomplete madrigals by Costanzo Antegnati and Lelio Bertani, and the importance of gathering evidence on performers/composers’ music skills in such a reverse-engineering process.

As stated above, research on the reconstruction of incomplete polyphony represents a very fertile field of study. The Spring School fully succeeded in bringing together many institutions and senior scholars devoted to digital humanities projects that constantly welcome young students and researchers interested in training and implementing digital platforms that deal with analyzing the repertoire, and providing cutting-edge tools for restoring Renaissance masterpieces.

Marcello Mazzetti

² See <http://digitalduchemin.org>.