

Coelho, Victor and Keith Polk. 2016. *Instrumentalists and Renaissance Culture, 1420-1600: Players of Function and Fantasy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Reviewed by Jonathan Ligrani**

Instrumental music permeated the soundscape of Renaissance Europe, resounding from watchtowers and ceremonial processions, echoing from the walls of castles and cathedrals, directing the steps and competing with the din of dancers' shuffling feet, and occupying the intervals between theatrical acts and the courses of patricians' daily banquets. Despite the ubiquity and significance of these sounds, musicologists have overlooked their presence in the landscape of Renaissance scholarship.

In *Instrumentalists and Renaissance Culture, 1420-1600: Players of Function and Fantasy*, Victor Coelho and Keith Polk address this deficiency, bringing the work of Renaissance instrumentalists out of the historiographical margins, where it generally supports a primary focus on vocal music and notated texts. As the authors rightfully stress, this tendency is rooted in the *Urtext* model of compositional finitude which leaves aside the unwritten traditions of instrumental music, presenting a fixed, anachronistic work concept over the fluidity of transcriptions and arrangements (2-3, 212, 292-4). Toward this aim, *Instrumentalists and Renaissance Culture* joins ongoing discussions concerning extemporaneous and written composition by scholars such as Philippe Canguilhem, Rob Wegman, Julie E. Cumming, and Jessie Ann Owens, among others (Canguilhem, 2015; Wegman, 1996; Cumming, 2013; Owens, 1998; Nettle, 1974).

At the same time, Coelho and Polk contribute to the broad literature of civic and court histories regarding cities such as Mantua, Ferrara, Venice, Florence, and Milan longstanding within musicological discourse, enhancing studies of cultural meaning and social function from an instrumental viewpoint (Fenlon, 1980; Lockwood, 1984; Feldman, 1995; Cummings, 1992, 2004; Kendrick, 2002). The monograph examines instrumental music from 1420 to 1600 multifocally, spanning “an array of disparate and diverse topics—patronage, source studies, performance, pedagogy, translation, instruments, improvisation, historiography, and the music of both Brueghel's villagers and Fra Angelico's angels—under the umbrella of ‘instrumental music’” (16). Through their thematic breadth, the authors emphasize their work's extractable functionality: the book is geared toward a broader readership than the music specialist—deemed equally useful

for the performer or Renaissance scholar—and designed modularly, each chapter intended to stand alone. Further, the chapters intersperse thirteen independent case studies throughout the volume, the prose alternating between a zoomed lens and the broader establishing shots of historical narrative.

Though this method could present disjointedly, Coelho and Polk introduce guiding concepts that facilitate consistency, such as the groupings of loud and soft (*haut* and *bas*) instruments for different social and cultural environments, or the context-driven requirements of musical material and adaptability of arrangements. The potential drawback of this approach is that material from disparate sections can appear in subsequent ones without significant variation, such as similar information on dance music resurfacing in Chapter 5 (206, 100-4, 178-80), or the recurring account of Lorenzo the Magnificent's personal involvement in Florence's hiring of wind ensemble members (4, 51, 148). Despite these modest tensions, *Instrumentalists and Renaissance Culture* reveals the function of instrumental music in diverse avenues of Renaissance culture, offering valuable resources for bringing this essential aspect of life into history.

Drawing from the archival evidence of town registers, hiring documents, and payroll lists, Chapter 1 explores courtly, aristocratic, civic, and sacred institutions of patronage. It details the ways instrumentalists facilitated necessary functions of daily life and self-fashioning throughout social classes, from monarchs displaying magnificence through the number and prestige of their trumpeters, wind bands, and chamber musicians, to watchmen and signaling groups hired by cities, who gradually took on musical functions for town events. Emerging as a primary theme, the authors foreground instrumental music's institutional tether within the Renaissance, with style and genre tied to the demands of activities and spaces rather than to repertoire, and career flourishing bound to the ebb and flow of a city's prosperity. By considering style as a requirement of space and function, Coelho and Polk avoid teleologically placing style as the locus of historical change. A striking example is the flourishing of Antwerp's musical culture in the mid-sixteenth century and its subsequent waning due to the religious conflicts within the region and desolation of its economy in the latter part of the century, which had a detrimental effect upon city-employed musicians (55-8). Another of the chapter's significant contributions is the codification of a "three-part framework" (21) of instrumental groups retained by higher nobility—trumpets, wind bands, and chamber musicians—solidifying in the Burgundian court around the middle of the fifteenth century and expanding in size and additional categories throughout the time period under consideration.

Chapter 2 provides a different historical vantage point, proceeding outward from a chronological sequence of eighteen source-based studies from manuscripts and prints of various instrumental works and the social contexts in which they were generated. Through primary sources, Coelho and Polk illustrate another theme: that instrumental and vocal music shared a repertory; thus instrumental versions of vocal works were critical in the dissemination of Renaissance music generally. The authors acknowledge the disorderly appearance of a case-study approach, but emphasize its value as a more realistic presentation of coexisting features such as older and newer styles, improvisation and written traditions, and the interchangeability of instruments rather than a tidier, yet artificial structuring around genre (63–4). The merits of this method reside in the richness of the individual source studies. Noteworthy details surface, like the alignment of balanced, imitative polyphony within Petrucci's *Odhecaton* of 1501 coinciding with the shift from mixed-plectrum to fingerstyle lute playing in order to accommodate the transcription of this contrapuntal style, demonstrated in Francesco Spinacino's *Intabulatura de Lauto Libro primo* and *Libro secondo* of 1507. Further, the source history allows the authors to explain historical and stylistic developments through concrete examples. For instance, the *Casanatense* manuscript, believed to encode the repertory of the Ferrarese wind band around the end of the sixteenth century, exhibits material likely conceived with instrumental performance in mind. The authors demonstrate this through the music's forms, the difficulty in textual concordance and the omission of text, and marked differences in musical style from earlier manuscripts toward the high art music of the time (73–4). Although providing musical examples would help elucidate these stylistic points—and similar ones throughout the text—the authors have forgone them to accommodate an interdisciplinary audience (16). After locating the manuscript, Coelho and Polk link its stylistic attributes to the capabilities of the virtuosic instrumentalists employed at Duke Ercole I d'Este's court (74–5). Their source study provides institutional links to musico-stylistic change, similar to the milieu of composers supplying virtuosic material for the Ferrarese *Concerto delle donne* a century later (Newcomb 1980, 3). Though the merits of their method are clear, it places the burden of continuity on the reader, at times straining the connections between discussions and delaying the introduction of useful concepts. For example, the role of the tenorist in lute duos is described in the Spinacino source study (Ch. 2, 79, 83), though the authors refer to the practice while discussing Pietrobono and Duke Ercole's chamber ensembles a few pages earlier (Ch. 2, 74–5).

The next three chapters respectively center on the lived reali-

ties of amateur and professional instrumentalists; the ceremonial and festive contexts of instrumental music within the civic, courtly, and sacred spheres of Renaissance life; and the pedagogical differences between vocal, theoretical education, and the unwritten tradition of the instrumentalist craftsman. Through investigation and illustrative case studies, Chapter 3 elucidates the economic and social realities of professional instrumentalists possessing institutional contracts, as well as freelancers. Profiles on Benvenuto Cellini and Conrad Paumann further reveal the training systems and connections providing educational and occupational advantages, as well as specific glimpses of musicians' working lives. Chapter 4 investigates the use of instrumental music at events ranging from public street festivals to chamber music during the private banquets of nobles or accompanying the devotional singing of religious confraternities. The notion of "background music" emerges regarding the varying levels of listener consciousness within the events and spaces discussed. For example, the authors describe the transition of theatrical music in the sixteenth century from *intermedi* performed between the acts of a play—such as those accompanying the 1589 Florentine performance of Bargagli's *La Pellegrina*—to the more equalized partnership between music and drama appearing with Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* in 1607 (180-3). The authors explicate similar phenomena concerning the gradual incorporation of wind instruments into the Mass in the sixteenth century from their prior role as "external decoration" playing in balconies outside of the building (186-7), as well as the migration of dance music from accompanying the ritualized dances of nobles to supplying the primary melodic and harmonic material for printed lute and keyboard collections around the turn of the sixteenth century (178-9). These transitions might be considered alongside similar changes in performance and audience listening within the latter half of the sixteenth century, such as the madrigal's growing complexity and concomitant reliance upon virtuosic singers for execution in Mantua and Ferrara, rather than its earlier residence with the amateur singer/listener in scenarios resembling musical conversation (Macy 1996, 6-8, 17; Carter 1992, 131-2).

The penultimate chapter critically discusses the relationship between improvisation and composition, the faulty valuation of the composer with permanent artifacts, and the application of translation theory to the process of instrumental intabulations. Coelho and Polk contend that instrumental pedagogy existed outside the texted tradition of singing at cathedral schools, utilizing oral transmission and resembling the master-apprentice system of guilds (190-191). For this reason, tablature predominates in early lute prints, as it resembles the oral and tactile pedagogy amateur lute

players received (191). Similarly, the authors relate instrumental performance to a craftsman's build, selecting appropriate materials, rhythmic and melodic foundations, and weaving decorative patterns around the structure, all in real time (192). They present a further compelling idea in conceiving the processes of intabulating vocal polyphony as an "intra-semiotic translation" between two notational systems (213). Drawn from literary translation theories, Coelho and Polk argue the viewpoint of translation as interpretation, comparing the possible instrumental arrangements of vocal counterpoint and their varying levels of abstraction from the source to the different qualities of meaning a translator might choose to emphasize in rendering a text to their intended audience:

As motets and Mass movements cross into secular, domestic environments, soloistic figuration, cadential ornaments, occasional parallel intervals, unprepared dissonance, and truncations of the original usually prohibited in the writing of sacred music are permitted, producing a new "vernacular" in translation that is not limited by language or religion (218).

Their argument infuses several of the book's overarching themes: that vocal and instrumental music shared a repertory, that instrumental arrangements of vocal works were a primary source of dispersal throughout different levels of society, and that instrumental music was not a lesser copy of notated sources—rather music was centered on adaptive fluidity suiting the requirements of space and context. In weaving together these argumentative threads, Coelho and Polk add a revitalizing perspective to musicological discourse, one supported by specific and varied evidence.

Coelho and Polk emphasize a final approach in Chapter 6, "Renaissance instruments: images and realities," utilizing contemporary images—exclusively drawn from paintings—in a methodical survey of instruments, ensembles, and their usage. The placement of this study at the book's conclusion allows the reader to generate deeper meaning from the sources and methods explored in previous chapters. However, interweaving images with content in earlier chapters would have clarified references to specific artworks the authors make throughout the book. For example, images would have assisted the discussion of artworks where angelic figures play "soft instruments" in Chapter 4 (186), or references to visual evidence confirming the presence of lutenists in the processions of Venetian confraternities of the *Scuole Grandi* from around 1480 to 1600 in Chapter 5 (207).

In sum, *Instrumentalists and Renaissance Culture* generates a more complete picture of the cultural world of Renaissance Europe. The reader is left with tangible perspectives on the institutions of instrumental music, its

multivalent uses, the education and lives of its performers, and the various instruments on which they performed. At the same time, Coelho and Polk contribute to the historiographical shift away from the focus on composers of written works, unlocking the ever-present yet ephemeral art of craftsmen musicians.

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