

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES & DOCUMENTS

URSULA GÜNTHER
General Editor

MODALITY IN THE MUSIC
OF THE FOURTEENTH
AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES
MODALITÄT IN DER MUSIK DES
14. UND 15. JAHRHUNDERTS

Ursula Günther, Ludwig Finscher, and Jeffrey Dean (eds.)

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY
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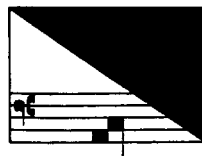
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49

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edited by

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and JEFFREY DEAN



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FOREWORD

Ludwig Finscher

IT ALL BEGAN when Ursula Günther and her late husband went skiing on the Plose near Brixen/Bressanone. On a day of sightseeing they visited—as they had done many times before—Neustift/Novacella, a monastery of Augustinian canons some 5 km from Brixen, and there discovered the convent's tourist and conference centre, which was then still new. The young abbot of the monastery, Chorherr Dr. Chrysostomus Giner, most graciously invited her to hold a conference on medieval music in this centre, not least because a great medieval musician, Oswald von Wolkenstein, had had close connections to the convent and had been buried in its magnificent church.

Neustift/Novacella proved indeed ideal for its conference facilities and living quarters, a countryside rich in historical monuments and natural beauty, a swimming pool, delicious food, and (not least) wines from the abbey's own vineyards, served beneath the gothic vaults of a cellar where discussions could continue till after midnight.

Ursula Günther and I had organized a conference shortly before at the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel (*Musik und Text in der Mehrstimmigkeit des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, Göttinger musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten, 10 (Kassel, 1984)), and she kindly invited me to join forces for a series of conferences centred on two of our main areas of interest: 'her' fourteenth and 'my' fifteenth century. Our general idea was, as in Wolfenbüttel and as in the colloquia inspired and organized by Suzanne Clercx-Lejeune at Wégimont, to assemble a group of specialists in surroundings conducive to concentrated and at the same time relaxed discussion, to have them talk about their latest researches (without papers distributed in advance), and within this small circle of 'initiates' to inspire a discussion that could eventually improve the final version of each individual contribution.

The first of these conferences took place in 1982 and was devoted to 'Aspects of music in church, court, and town from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century'. It was (if we may say so ourselves) an unqualified success, in spite of the fact that we were unable to offer funding for travel expenses (a situation that has persisted to the present). Thanks to the generosity of the late Armen Carapetyan, the papers of this conference were published in *Musica disciplina*, 38 (1984).

The second conference came two years later, and was devoted to a question that had come up in our discussions in 1982: '1380–1420: An international

style?'. Again, the papers were published in *Musica disciplina*, 41 (1987), and this time the discussion tended to drift towards performance practice. Consequently, 'Performance practice in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' became the topic of our third conference, which took place in 1987. Because of the immediate practical interest of this topic, the papers were graciously accepted by Nicholas Kenyon for publication in *Early music* (see the issues for August 1989 and May 1990, including the editorials).

By this time, a kind of three-year rhythm was establishing itself. The fourth conference was held in 1990 and turned on questions of genre; some of its papers were published in *Musica disciplina*, 44 (1990) and 45 (1991). The present report, finally, contains the papers of the fifth Neustift/Novacella conference of 1993. Its topic, 'Modality in the music of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', came up during discussions at Paphos on Cyprus, at the conference on the Cypriot-French repertory of the MS Torino J.II.9 (see MSD 45)—discussions that were fostered up to a point by my own misgivings about the concept of modality as an analytical tool for our understanding of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century polyphony. Responsibility for the topic, then, is mine.

It seems most appropriate, after thirteen years and five conferences, that Ursula Günther and Ludwig Finscher should retire as organizers of the Neustift/Novacella meetings, especially since by now we are both retired from our universities and no longer have the necessary clerical help. Annegrit Laubenthal, who for some of the former conferences already had to bear most of the burden of organization, has very kindly consented to step in and to organize what we hope will be a splendid series of further conferences on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century music. The first of these, originally planned for 1996, will be adjourned to 1997, when participants from overseas will more easily be able to come to Europe, in view of the London congress of the IMS. Ursula Günther and I hope to take part actively in both.

Wolfenbüttel
September 1995

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1 THE MODESCAPE OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE: TOWARDS A MORE REALISTIC VIEW

Shai Burstyn

IN OUR QUEST to understand the musical thinking of the Middle Ages we necessarily attempt to classify it in fairly neat stylistic categories, in order to assess an immense amount of unwieldy musical and theoretical information and to give it a logical framework and a historically credible explanation. In trying to appraise the extent of compatibility between medieval modal theory and contemporary monophonic song, we are in fact following the footsteps of a long line of music theorists like Hucbald, Guido, and, later, Marchetto of Padua and Glarean, who described, prescribed, but mainly endeavoured to accommodate a coherent theoretical approach to a seemingly chaotic practical situation. While piecing together the puzzle out of myriad bits of information, we must be fully aware of exactly what it is we are doing, lest we delude ourselves that our neat classifications truly reflect past musical reality. They do not, any more than did the classifications made by medieval theorists. We may analyse medieval music, sacred and secular, monophonic and polyphonic, in terms of the eight-mode system, as indeed did medieval musicians in their tonaries and treatises, but we should not confuse our ordering with the 'blooming, buzzing confusion out there'.

The term 'modescape' is new, as far as I know. The suffix '-scape'—as in 'landscape' and, more appropriately, in 'soundscape'—is meant to open a vista, to afford a wider perspective of the subject. In what follows I shall concentrate on several points relating to medieval modal theory in its relation to musical practice. They should be read as part of an attempt to gain a more realistic view of the modescape of medieval Europe.

The treatises of ninth-century music theorists are best understood in the context of the Carolingian renaissance: an endeavour to organize, systematize, and classify available knowledge in all fields. These music theorists, who in many cases were also practising musicians, faced a tremendous intellectual challenge: on the one hand, the chant repertory they worked with, though based on a broad common denominator, was variegated and heterogeneous, the musical outcome of different regional developments and preferences. On the other hand, the conceptual tools with which to deal with this stylistically unwieldy body of chants had, themselves, to be fashioned from whatever theoretical models that were known and considered appropriate. These were