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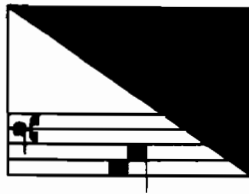
NICOLAUS BURTIUS

MUSICES OPUSCULUM

Introduction and Translation

by

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NICOLAUS BURTIIUS

MUSICES OPUSCULUM

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## INTRODUCTION

This edition of *Musices Opusculum* is based principally on the unicum printed for Burtius at Bologna in 1487. Of particular value is the copy preserved in the Biblioteca Palatina of Parma<sup>1</sup>, which contains handwritten annotations and musical examples which are included in the present edition. The Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels (MS II 785, ff. 41v-44v) contains a manuscript entitled *Tractatus pulcher* which corresponds to Book II of *Musices Opusculum*. The Brussels MS is somewhat truncated and out of order. The MS, for example, begins with Ch. 2 of Book II, while only the second part of Ch. 1 is found on f. 43v. Folios 44r-44v contain a series of contrapuntal examples which Burtius apparently had considered using to illustrate the text of Book II on counterpoint. These examples, which are written in plainsong notation in the MS, are transcribed into modern notation in the present edition. Since Burtius says in Book I, Ch. 21, and Book II, Ch. 3, that musical examples are lacking in his work because the printers did not have the necessary musical characters, it is likely that the handwritten examples in Parma *Incun. 132* and in Brussels MS II 785 belong in a complete edition of Burtius' treatise.

A reprint of Burtius' Latin text, edited by Giuseppe Vecchi, was published in 1969 at Bologna.<sup>2</sup> Another Latin edition, which collates the material of the Parma imprint and the Brussels MS, was made in 1975 by Giuseppe Massera.<sup>3</sup> A Latin edition of the Brussels MS, edited by Massera, appears in *Quadrivium VIII* (1967), pp. 33-49, Bologna.

Although the Parma copy of *Musices Opusculum* and the Brussels MS contain handwritten musical examples which are illustrations of the printed text, it is clear that the original manuscript used by Burtius is now missing.<sup>4</sup> In his imprint of 1487 Burtius states, as already mentioned, that many musical examples are not included because the printers did not have the requisite musical characters, although he had prepared

<sup>1</sup> *Incun. 132*.

<sup>2</sup> *Musices Opusculum*, in *Biblioteca Musica Bononiensis*, II, 4. This edition is based on a copy in the Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale in Bologna.

<sup>3</sup> *Florum Libellus*, in *Historiae Musicae Cultores* 28, Florence. Although Burtius entitled his work *Musices Opusculum*, he calls it *florum libellus* in his description of the treatise.

<sup>4</sup> See Massera, *Florum Libellus*, p. 48f.

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## MUSICES OPUSCULUM

A little musical work by Nicolaus Burtius of Parma, professor of music and very studious of pontifical law, begins with a defense of Guido d'Arezzo against a certain prevaricator.

Nicolaus Burtius sends best greetings to poor clerics and religious.

Many years have passed into the shadows of adolescent days since I expended much time on the discipline of music in nightly toil, and many have received a beginning and development in this study through me. Now, dearest friends, having been overcome by your loving kindness and by the exhortations of certain friends, I have set forth my vigils for you who in greater measure have the talent to proclaim this doctrine. For what is more reasonable than to dedicate ingenious works to those who are superior to all others in ability, learning, and worthy esteem? I am aware that I am undertaking a rather difficult subject and that I am exposed to the disparagement of many men, although this disparagement means little to the truly learned. But since in former times this depreciation irritated the men of highest authority, what can I expect, whom neither authority nor merit will protect? Yet I am joined to the one who sings through the psalm writer: Open your mouth and I will fill it.

And so, before I express our own views, I decided to overcome the errors and ignorance of a certain modern writer and to demonstrate to everyone clearly and fully that they are erroneous concepts. For with scoffing and entirely false ineptitudes he tries to oppose the pious Guido d'Arezzo, who is deservedly preferred through sanctity and philosophical learning. O extraordinary calumny! O impudence unheard of before today! Again and again he raves and cries out with many invectives. What are you shouting, what is tormenting you? Before I leave this it is necessary that you feel ashamed of your most nefarious error. For this man wrote a little book on the study of music<sup>1</sup> in which, when he wanted to explain what Boethius meant in his five books, he was very clearly confused and thus subverted every arrangement

<sup>1</sup> *Musica Practica Bartholomei Rami de Pareia*, ed. J. Wolf (Leipzig, 1901).

manent according to the natural order of letters preceding or following two whole tones. A small semitone also occurs between *a* and round *b* when a tritone must be removed. This semitone is called moveable because it is changed according to need. Likewise semitones are called moveable which usually divide a whole tone when needed, namely, to perfect such composite intervals as an imperfect fifth or octave. We will speak about this later on mixed song. But in plainsong a moveable semitone occurs only in tempering a tritone, and musicians cannot avoid the harshness of a tritone in any other way. They have placed this key between mese and paramese.

## Chapter 14

### *Why Guido selected only six syllables.*

Surely<sup>39</sup> one should not wonder why Guido wished to choose only six vocables for singing and not the fifteen of many philosophers, or as many as were commonly used in their time, or only four, or more or less. Since Guido was a true musician he knew that everything sung was contained in four tones or two tones and one small semitone; the first fourth was called a complete tetrachord by ancient philosophers, that is, a composition of four strings. What do you sing beyond the first fourth that is not one and the same thing? Since there are four tones from the Greek gamma to low *c*, or two whole tones and one small semitone, which form one of the three kinds of fourths, you will have the same thing if you go a little farther from *c* to *f*, also from low *f* to round *b*, and so forth ad infinitum.

Thus this hexachord of Guido not only includes one fourth-species but also two other variations of the first arrangement, although the third fourth-species begins in the same way that the first one ends. If one begins the three fourth-species in *a* he will not be able to sing them in a sequence of six letters without incurring a very great confusion of tones. An example:<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> This chapter is based on Gallicus, in Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, IV, 375.

<sup>40</sup> The example follows Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, IV, 376.

*Third to fifth* *Sixth to octave*

This block contains two musical systems. The first system is labeled 'Third to fifth' and the second is labeled 'Sixth to octave'. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The notes in the treble clef are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The notes in the bass clef are: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The first system shows the interval from G4 to G5, and the second system shows the interval from G4 to G5.

*Octave to tenth* *Tenth to twelfth*

This block contains two musical systems. The first system is labeled 'Octave to tenth' and the second is labeled 'Tenth to twelfth'. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The notes in the treble clef are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The notes in the bass clef are: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The first system shows the interval from G4 to G5, and the second system shows the interval from G4 to G5.

*Thirteenth to fifteenth*

This block contains one musical system labeled 'Thirteenth to fifteenth'. It consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The notes in the treble clef are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The notes in the bass clef are: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The system shows the interval from G4 to G5.

Note that when the cantus descends a third, a unison seeks a third or fifth, a third a fifth or octave, a fifth an octave, an octave a tenth or twelfth, a tenth a twelfth, and a twelfth a fifteenth:

*Unison to third*

*Tenor*

This block contains one musical system labeled 'Unison to third' and 'Tenor'. It consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The notes in the treble clef are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The notes in the bass clef are: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The system shows the interval from G4 to G5.

*Unison to fifth* *Third to fifth*

This block contains two musical systems. The first system is labeled 'Unison to fifth' and the second is labeled 'Third to fifth'. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The notes in the treble clef are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The notes in the bass clef are: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The first system shows the interval from G4 to G5, and the second system shows the interval from G4 to G5.

*Third to octave* *Fifth to octave*

This block contains two musical systems. The first system is labeled 'Third to octave' and the second is labeled 'Fifth to octave'. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The notes in the treble clef are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The notes in the bass clef are: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The first system shows the interval from G4 to G5, and the second system shows the interval from G4 to G5.