

Rob C. Wegman
Johannes Tinctoris and the Art of Listening
(Duke University, 14 April 2006)

Tinctoris
c.1481–83

Document 1. Johannes Tinctoris (c.1435–1511), *De inventione et usu musicae* (c.1481–83). After Karl Weinmann, ed., *Johannes Tinctoris (1445–1511) und sein unbekannter Traktat “De inventione et usu musicae”* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1917), 45–46.

[1] Neque preterire in animum venit: quod exiguo tempore lapsos: duos fratres Orbos natione Flamigos: viros quidem non minus litteris eruditos quam in cantibus expertos: quorum uni Carolus: alteri Johannes nomina sunt. Brugis audiverim: illum supremam partem et hunc tenorem plurimum cantilenarum: tam perite: tamque venuste hujusmodi viola consonantes: ut in ulla nunquam melodia: me profecto magis oblectaverim.

[2] Et quia rebecum (si sonitor artifex et expertus fuerit) modulos illis quam simillimos emittat: quibuslibet affectus spiritus mei (occulta quadam familiaritate) ad leticiam quam simillime excitantur.

[3] Hec itaque duo instrumenta mea sunt. mea inquam: hoc est quibus inter cetera: animus meus ad affectum pietatis assurgit: quaeque ad contemplationem gaudiorum supernorum: ardentissime cor meum inflammant.

[4] Quo malle ea potius ad res sacras: et secreta animi solamina semper reservari: quam ad res prophanas et publica festa interdum applicari.

[1] Nor should I pass over the fact that a little while ago, I heard in Bruges two blind brothers—men of Flemish birth who, in truth, are no less learned in literary studies than they are versed in music, of whom one is called Carolus and the other Johannes—making concord on this kind of viol (the former playing the top part, and the latter the tenor of many songs) so skilfully, and so gracefully, that I truly have never found greater delight in any harmonious sound.

[2] And since the rebec can produce tunes as similar as possible to those [of the viol], if the player be a craftsman and experienced, the affections of my spirit (through some hidden kinship) are aroused, by any [tunes] whatsoever, to joyous delight in as similar as possible a way.

[3] These two instruments are mine, therefore. “Mine,” I say, that is by which, among other things, my mind rises up to a feeling of devotion, and which most ardently set my heart aflame to a contemplation of the joys on high.

[4] Therefore I would prefer to have them reserved always for sacred matters and the private solace of the mind, rather than have them used sometimes for profane matters and public feasts.

Cf. Anthony Baines, “Fifteenth-Century Instruments in Tinctoris’s *De Inventione et Usu Musicae*,” *Galpin Society Journal*, 3 (1950): 19–26, at 24–25; Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 78–79; Christopher Page, “Reading and Reminiscence: Tinctoris on the Beauty of Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 49 (1996): 1–31, at 11–17. For the date of the treatise, see Ronald Woodley, “The Printing and Scope of Tinctoris’s Fragmentary Treatise ‘De inventione et vsu mvsvce,’” *Early Music History*, 5 (1985): 239–68.



Left: viol



Right: rebec

St Augustine **Document 2.** St Augustine of Hippo (354–430), *Confessions*, X. xxxiii. Trans. after St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 207–9.

Voluptates aurium tenacius me
implicaverant et subjugaverant; sed
resolvisti, et liberasti me.

Nunc in sonis quos animant eloquia tua,
cum suavi et artificiosa voce cantantur,
fateor, aliquantulum acquiesco; non quidem
ut haeream, sed ut surgam cum volo.
Attamen cum ipsis sententiis quibus vivunt,
ut admittantur ad me, quaerunt in corde
meo nonnulli dignitatis locum, et vix eis
praebeo congruentem.

Aliquando enim plus mihi videor
honoris eis tribuere quam decet, dum ipsis
sanctis dictis religiosius et ardentius sentio
moveri animos nostros in flammam pietatis,
cum ita cantantur, quam si non ita
cantarentur; et omnes affectus spiritus nostri
pro sui diversitate habere proprios modos in
voce atque cantu, quorum nescio qua occulta
familiaritate excitentur. Sed delectatio carnis
meae, cui mentem enervandam non oportet
dari, saepe me fallit, dum rationem sensus
non ita comitatur ut patienter sit posterior;
sed tantum quia propter illam meruit
admitti, etiam praecurrere ac ducere
conatur. Ita in his pecco non sentiens, sed
postea sentio.

Aliquando autem hanc ipsam fallaciam
immoderatus cavens, erro nimia severitate:
sed valde interdum, ut melos omne
cantilenarum suavius quibus Davidicum
Psalterium frequentatur, ab auribus meis
removeri velim, atque ipsius Ecclesiae;
tutiusque mihi videtur quod de Alexandrino
episcopo Athanasio saepe mihi dictum
commemini, qui tam modico flexu vocis
faciebat sonare lectorem psalmi, ut
pronuntianti vicinior esset quam canenti.
Verumtamen, cum reminiscor lacrymas
meas, quas fudi ad cantus Ecclesiae tuae in
primordiis recuperatae fidei meae, et nunc
ipso quod moveor, non cantu, sed rebus quae
cantantur, cum liquida voce et
convenientissima modulatione cantantur,
magnam instituti hujus utilitatem rursus
agnosco.

Ita fluctuo inter periculum voluptatis et

The pleasures of the ear had a more tenacious hold on
me, and had subjugated me; but you set me free and
liberated me.

As things now stand, I confess that I have some
sense of restful contentment in sounds whose soul is
your words, when they are sung by a pleasant and
well-trained voice. Not that I am riveted by them, for
I can rise up and go when I wish. Nevertheless, on
being combined with the words which give them life,
they demand in my heart some position of honour,
and I have difficulty in finding what is appropriate to
offer them.

Sometimes I seem to myself to give them more
honour than is fitting. I feel that when the sacred
words are chanted well, our souls are moved and are
kindled to a flame of piety, more religiously and with a
warmer devotion than if they are not so sung. All the
diverse emotions of our spirit have their corresponding
modes in voice and chant, and are stirred through a
mysterious inner kinship. But my physical delight,
which has to be checked from enervating the mind,
often deceives me when sense perception is
unaccompanied by reason, and not patiently content
to be in a subordinate place. It tries to be first and to
be in the leading role, though it deserves to be
allowed only as secondary to reason. So in these
matters I sin unawares, and only afterward become
aware of it.

Sometimes, however, by taking excessive
safeguards against being led astray, I err on the side of
too much severity. I have sometimes gone so far as to
wish to banish all the melodies and sweet chants
commonly used for David's psalter from my ears and
remember being often told of bishop Athanasius of
Alexandria. He used to make the Reader of the psalm
chant with so flexible a speech-rhythm that he was
nearer to reciting than to singing. Nevertheless, when
I remember the tears which I poured out at the time
when I was first recovering my faith, and that now I
am moved not by the chant but by the words being
sung, when they are sung with a clear voice and
entirely appropriate modulation, then again I
recognize the great utility of music in worship.

Thus I fluctuate between the danger of pleasure
and the experience of the beneficent effect, and I am
more led to put forward the opinion (not as an
irrevocable view) that the custom of singing in

experimentum salubritatis; magisque adducor, non quidem ir retractabilem sententiam proferens, cantandi consuetudinem approbare in Ecclesia; ut per oblectamenta aurium infirmior animus in affectum pietatis assurgat. Tamen, cum mihi accidit ut me amplius cantus, quam res quae canitur, moveat; poenaliter me peccare confiteor, et tunc mallem non audire cantantem.

Ecce ubi sum: flete mecum, et pro me flete, qui aliquid boni vobiscum intus agitis unde facta procedunt. Nam qui non agitis, non vos haec movent. Tu autem, Domine Deus meus, exaudi; respice, et vide, et miserere, et sana me, in cuius oculis mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus.

Church is to be approved, so that through the delights of the ear the weaker mind may rise up towards the devotion of worship. Yet when it happens to me that the music moves me more than the subject of the song, I confess myself to commit a sin deserving punishment, and then I would prefer not to have heard the singer.

See my condition! Weep with me and weep for me, you who have within yourselves a concern for the good, the springs from which good actions proceed. Those who do not share this concern will not be moved by these considerations. But you “Lord my God, hear, look and see” [Ps. 12: 4] and “have mercy and heal me” [Ps. 79: 15]. In your eyes I have become a problem to myself, and that is my sickness.

Tintoris Document 3. Johannes Tintoris, *Liber de natura et proprietate tonorum* (1476). After 1476 Johannes Tintoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols., *Corpus Scriptorum de Musica*, xxii ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1975–78), 1: 68–69.

Nempe unius et eiusdem toni carmen possibile erit et planctivum et remissum et rigidum et medium esse, tum ex parte compositorum et pronunciatorum, tum instrumentorum et sonitorum. Quis enim huius artis peritus ignorat alios planctive, alios remisse, alios regide, alios medie componere, pronunciare et sonare, quamvis eorum compositio, pronuntiatio et sonitus eodem tono ducantur?

Vocum etiam et instrumentorum genera quaedam planctiva, quaedam remissa, quaedam rigida et quaedam media naturaliter aut artificialiter sunt aut efficiunt. Unde et secundum ea differentias harmoniarum, cum de fistulis et organis, tum de cytharis et aliis instrumentis loquens ipse philosophus assignat.

Quarumquidem harmoniarum aliae aliis aetatibus et moribus conveniunt, decent et expediunt, nec earum apud omnes eadem est delectatio aut simile iudicium. Remissus enim animus harmoniis remissis delectatur, e converso rigidae rigido sunt acceptae. Quod Augustinus sentire videtur in libro Confessionum dicens: Omnes affectus species nostri pro sua diversitate habent proprios modos in voce atque cantu quorum occulta familiaritate excitantur.

To be sure, it will be possible for a song in one and the same mode to be mournful, gentle, stern, or moderate, not only with respect to composers and performers, but to instruments and players as well. For what person skilled in this art does not know how to compose, perform, or play some [songs] mournfully, some gently, some sternly, and some moderately, even though they are all composed, performed and played in the same mode?

Certain types of voices and instruments, by nature or by design, are mournful, certain gentle, certain harsh, and certain moderate, or have those effects. That is why that philosopher [Aristotle] assigns differences of harmonies accordingly, speaking now of pipes and organs, then of lyres and other instruments.

Of these harmonies certain ones are agreeable, fitting, and useful for different ages and customs, nor is there the same delight or a similar judgement to all [people]. A gentle soul is delighted by gentle harmonies, and conversely stern ones are agreeable to a stern soul. St Augustine is seen to believe this in a book of his Confessions, when he says: “All the diverse emotions of our spirit have their corresponding modes in voice and chant, and are stirred through a mysterious inner kinship.”

Cusa **Document 4.** Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), *De ludo globi*, II (1462–63). Text and trans. after 1462–63 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Ludo Globi: The Game of Spheres*, trans. Pauline Moffitt Watts (New York: Abaris, 1986), 104–5.

Quando enim audimus concinentes voces: sensu attingimus. Sed differentias & concordantias: ratione & disciplina mensuramus. Quam vim: in brutis non reperimus. Non enim habent vim numerandi & proportionandi. Et ideo incapaces sunt disciplinae musicae: licet sensu voces nobiscum attingant & moueantur concordantia vocum ad delectationem.

Anima igitur nostra: rationalis merito dicitur, quia est vis ratiocinativa seu numerativa, in se complicans cuncta, sine quibus perfecta discretio fieri nequit.

Quando enim sensu auditus mouetur ad motum delectationis ob dulcem harmonicam concordantiam, & intra se inuenit rationem concordantiae in numerali proportione fundari: disciplinam ratiocinandi de musicis concordantiis per numerum inuenit.

When we hear voices singing together we arrive at this through the sense. But we measure differences and consonances through reason and study. We do not find this power in beasts, for they do not have the power of numbering and of making proportions. And for that reason they are incapable of the science of music, although they hear sounds through the sense as we do, and are moved to delight by the consonance of sounds.

Therefore our soul is deservedly called rational, because it is the power of calculating or numbering, enfolding all in itself, without which perfect distinction cannot be made.

For when one is moved by the sense of hearing to delight, on account of a sweet harmonious consonance, and discovers within oneself that the reason of consonance is founded in numerical proportion, one discovers the art of calculating musical consonances through number.

Cf. Heinrich Hüschen, "Nikolaus von Kues und sein Musikdenken," in *Symbolae Historiae Musicae: Hellmut Federhofer zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Riedel and Hubert Unverricht (Mainz: B. Schotts Söhne, 1971), 47–67.

Lapo **Document 5.** Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger (1406–1438), *De Curiae Commodis*. Text and trans. after Christopher S. Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the Papal Curia: Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger's De Curiae Commodis*, *Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome*, 31 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 130–33.

Lapus. Sunt archiepiscopi, episcopi, patriarchae, protonotarii alique paene infiniti ordines, omnes maxima dignitate et auctoritate ad Dei cultum instituti et inventi, qui cum in unum vel ad sacrificium vel ad quamvis rem divinam obeundam conierunt et, sedente pontifice maximo in augusta illa pontificum sede collocato, cuncti ex ordine assederunt ac divini illi hymni ac psalmi disparibus variisque vocibus decantantur, quis est tam inhumanus, tam barbarus, tam agrestis, quis rursus tam immanis, tam Deo hostis, tam expers religionis, qui haec aspiciens audiensque non moveatur, cuius non mentem atque animum aliqua religione occupet et stupore perstringat et dulcedine quadam deliniat? Cuius non oculi mirifice aspectu ipso pascantur

Lapo. Archbishops, bishops, patriarchs, protonotaries, and other orders almost beyond limit have all been instituted and invented, with the greatest dignity and authority, for the worship of God. When they have convened as one body to attend either the sacrifice or any other divine service, and [when] they have all sat down in order, the Pope being seated in that venerable throne of the Popes, and [when] those divine hymns and psalms are sung with different and diverse voices, [then] who is so uncultured, so uncivilized, so boorish, who again is so savage, so inimical to God, so lacking in reverence, that he, seeing and hearing these things, is unmoved, whose mind and soul are not seized with some feeling of reverence, and overcome by stupefaction, and captivated by a certain sweetness, whose eyes are not marvelously nourished and delighted by the very

oblectenturque? Cuius non aures incredibili cantus suavitate et harmonia mulceantur? Quo quidem spectaculo quod in terris pulchrius, quod maius, quod divinius, quod admiratione, quod memoria ac literis dignius reperitur, ut non homines modo, qui intersunt et quibus hoc natura datum est, sed ipsius etiam parietes templi et exultare quodammodo et gestire laetitia videatur?

Angelus. Vera narras, et, medius fidius, ipse praesens interdum ita afficio ut cogitatione abstrahar et non humana illa neque ab hominibus acta videre, sed sublimis raptus ad superos, ut de Ganymede veteres poetae fabulis prodidere, deorum mensis videar interesse.

sight, whose ears are not charmed by the incredible sweetness and harmony of the song? Indeed, what could be found in this world that is more beautiful, that is greater, that is more divine, that is more worthy of wonder, of remembrance and the historical record, than this sight—so that not just humans, who take part [in all this] and to whom this is given by nature, but the very walls of the temple seem to be elated in some way, and to exult with happiness?

Angelo. You describe true things, and when I am there, so help me God, I'm at times so affected that I am carried beyond rational thought, and seem to see neither those human things, nor deeds by humans, but rather to be present, being uplifted and seized to things on high, at the tables of the Gods, as the ancient poets reported about Ganymede.

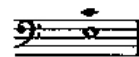
Cf. Giovanni Zanovello, "Les humanistes florentins et la polyphonie liturgique," in *Poétiques de la Renaissance: Le modèle italien, le monde franco-bourguignon et leur héritage en France au XVI^e siècle*, eds. Perrine Galand-Hallyn and Fernand Hallyn, *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 348 (Geneva: Droz, 2001), 625–38 and 667–73, at 629 and 669–70, and Rob C. Wegman, "Musical Understanding in the Fifteenth Century," *Early Music* 30 (2002): 46–66.

Tinctoris 1477 Document 5. Johannes Tinctoris, *Liber de arte contrapuncti* (1477), I. vii. 2, 4, 6. After Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols., *Corpus Scriptorum de Musica*, xxii ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1975–78), 2: 11–89, at 32–33. Trans. after Johannes Tinctoris, *The Art of Counterpoint*, trans. Albert Seay, *Musicological Studies and Documents*, v (n.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1961), 34.

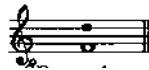
Diapente cum semitonio est concordantia ex mixtura duarum vocum diapente ac semitonio ab invicem distantium constituta, sicut mi, E la mi gravis, et fa, C sol fa ut, ut hic:



The fifth with semitone is a consonance, made by the combination of two pitches at a distance from each other of a fifth and a semitone, just as mi E la mi grave and fa C sol fa ut, as here:



Diapente autem cum tono concordantia est ex mixtura duarum vocum diapente ac tono ab invicem distantium effecta, sicut fa, F fa ut gravis, et sol, D la sol re, ut hic:



The fifth with whole tone is also a consonance, made by the combination of two pitches at a distance from each other of a fifth and a whole tone, just as fa F fa ut grave and sol D la sol re, as here:



Porro omnis sexta, sive perfecta sive imperfecta, sive superior sive inferior fuerit, apud antiquos discordantia reputabatur, et ut vera fatear, aurium mearum iudicio per se audita, hoc est sola, plus habet asperitatis quam dulcedinis.

On the other hand, every sixth, be it perfect or imperfect, above or below, was considered by the ancients as a discord, and, to confess the truth, heard by itself, that is, alone, by the judgement of my ears, it has more asperity than sweetness.

Cf. Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, "Boethius and the Judgement of the Ears: A Hidden Challenge in Medieval and Renaissance Music," in Charles Burnett, Michael Fend, and Penelope Gouk, eds., *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgement from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1991), 169–98; Rob C. Wegman, "Sense and Sensibility in Late-Medieval Music: Reflections on Aesthetics and 'Authenticity'," *Early Music*, 23 (1995): 298–312; Rob C. Wegman, "Johannes Tinctoris and the 'New Art,'" *Music & Letters*, 84 (2003): 171–88.