

# Challenges and conundrums

New research on a little known music theory manuscript at the University of Melbourne



## Paper Abstracts

The making of Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library manuscript 244 (LHD 244)  
Jason Stoessel (University of New England)

Physical and scribal evidence shows that Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library manuscript 244 (LHD 244) continued to be used, augmented, and modified by its various owners from the late fifteenth century until the year 1600 or later. I outline scribal and physical evidence that points to the Italian origin of this manuscript of music theory, shows that it was used by Franciscans in the later sixteenth century, and reveals that it was transferred to Southern Italian Austin Friars around the year 1600. Several scribes were responsible for LHD 244's contents. A scribe using a conservative but somewhat degenerate round gothic script, possibly a member of a religious order, copied its earliest layer. This layer is a collection of music treatises, including two that are ascribed to authors active around the years 1400 and 1415, with a strong emphasis upon the rudiments of plainchant. That the paper used in this layer bears traces of watermarks similar to ones in Italian papers datable to between 1465 and 1481 suggests that its contents are retrospective in their focus. The subsequent addition by different scribes of excerpts from Nicolaus Burtius's *Musices opusculum* (first published in Bologna in 1487) and a unique counterpoint treatise describing the mid-fifteenth-century contrapuntal style, situates the next two scribal layers toward the end of the fifteenth century. Further gatherings were added using paper datable to no earlier than the last decade of the fifteenth century, although several pages were left blank only to be filled by scribes whose handwriting and topics date them to the last 20 years of the sixteenth century and early seventeenth century. Sometime after it was foliated, LHD 244 lost 32 leaves, and was rebound, possibly shortly before Louise Hanson-Dyer purchased it in Rome in 1929.

## LHD 244: The earliest layer and what it tells us

Jan Herlinger (University of Alabama; Louisiana State University)

The earliest layer of LHD 244—the folios numbered 1–60 by a later contributor to the manuscript—includes texts by three writers named Nicolaus, each previously known to historians of music theory; together, they make it possible to date the contents of this portion of the manuscript between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries.

These three texts, and a dozen or so anonymous ones, include witnesses to two obscure treatments of the nature and necessity of B flat, the only chromatically altered note in the standard medieval scale or gamut. They provide abundant information on the utility of the hexachord (the series of syllables *ut re mi fa sol la*) not just as a device for learning to sing but as a module for locating the semitone (whose presence was not always clearly indicated in medieval music) within a group of whole tones, for defining intervals, and for differentiating the eight medieval modes (analogs of present-day major and minor scales). They also include four discussions of the intervals of music, one of which provides a list of Gregorian chants with difficult intervals that should consequently be left to experienced singers, and a set of what appear to be singing exercises; such exercises are known from very few other manuscripts. A lone text on the notation of rhythm provides terminology not known from any other source. The treatments of counterpoint presuppose a texture of three voices, a rarity in counterpoint theory of the time; a table of intervals used in counterpoint covers a span of musical space whose breadth is astonishing for its (or any other) time.

The texts contained in this layer of the manuscript thus provide a significant contribution to our knowledge of medieval music theory and practice, and shed considerable light on the interests of its compilers.

## The modern reception of “Nicolaus de Capua”: From Paris to Melbourne

Linda Page Cummins (University of Alabama)

The announcement, in 2006, of the presence of Nicolaus de Capua’s *Compendium musicale* in LHD 244 marks the most recent development in the tangled reception of that writer and his text, a reception that began in 1847 when the French Minister of Public Instruction sent Felix Danjou, a historian and the organist at Notre-Dame, on a mission to Italy likened by Danjou to that of the envoys Charlemagne had sent to Rome centuries before: Charlemagne’s envoys were to recover, for Carolingians, the true liturgical traditions established by Pope Gregory the Great; Danjou was to recapture that primitive purity of Catholic liturgy and chant, now lost to France, by rediscovering “ancient and authentic manuscripts of Gregorian chant,” and by copying or making accounts of documents relating to the history, theory, and practice of medieval music. In this he was successful: he not only provided the impetus for the modern study of medieval music but built the foundation on which it rests.

In the process, Danjou discovered a fifteenth-century writer, “Nicolaus de Capua”—a priest who had compiled a collection of music theory texts written by others. Adrien de La Fage took up the “Nicolaus” banner, publishing what he called Nicolaus’s *Compendium* on the basis of a fragmented Roman manuscript; in an effort to create a text long enough to justify the *Compendium*’s substantial caption, he included texts that the scribe does not seem to have considered Nicolaus’s, supplementing these with texts from yet another manuscript. Later scholars then read their own theories into both the authentic and the spurious parts of La Fage’s text; meanwhile, another version of Nicolaus’s *Compendium* in a Venetian manuscript, identified in 1872, was virtually ignored. The version of the *Compendium* transmitted in LHD 244 clarifies the relationship of the Roman and Venetian versions.

## *Ars plane musicae* of Nicolaus de Aversa

Carol J. Williams (Monash University)

Little is known of Nicolaus de Aversa beyond references to him and his compositions in the anonymous treatise *Ars cantus mensurabilis mensurata per modos iuris* (mid to late fourteenth century) which transmits the basic theoretical teaching of Jean de Muris. Until the re-emergence of LHD 244 this was the only source for references to the Celestine monk. His treatise, *Ars plane musicae*, which opens MS LHD 244, though unique apparently, is not particularly original. It appears to be a collation of basic theoretical principles with guidelines which suggest that it may have had a function as a preface to a tonary. The basic principles cover range, including the link between the hexachordal system and staff notation, the seven intervals, the nature of intervallic dissonance, the use of accidental signs and what seems to be an early explanation of what we now call key signature. The tonary guidelines include consideration of the finals, authentic and plagal modes or tones, the *differentiae*, intonation formulae, rules for communion chants, the *seculorum* and *introits*, calling on well-known mnemonic verses which capture these rules. This is clearly not a scholarly work though there are references to Boethius' *De institutione musica* in several places. He also refers to Bernardus, presumably Bernard of Clairvaux, perhaps because of his association with the Cistercian reform of plainchant, though possibly referring to the short treatise on the eight modes of plainchant, sometimes mistakenly attributed to him. Aversa provides reference to many chants which contain illustration of his points; further research is needed on these to establish whether they can provide clues to provenance or dating. Another track to follow to enrich this study would be to check for any connection to the Avignon papal chapel through association.

## The anonymous writings on figured bass in LHD 244

Denis Collins (University of Queensland)

Near the end of MS LHD 244 the reader's eye is drawn towards a clumsy drawing of an organ whose purpose was apparently to introduce a new topic called "modo di sonare sopra la parte con facilità". There follows ten pages devoted to what we commonly term figured bass, with rules and descriptions supported by several musical examples. The discussion peters out with unfinished examples and empty pages that are followed by further miscellaneous and incomplete materials related to figured bass, descriptions of intervals and elementary counterpoint. The final pages of the manuscript revert to Latin for yet more discussion of counterpoint. Inclusion of material on figured bass within this manuscript suggests fairly wide-ranging pedagogical intentions on the part of the users of this source, though the disparate range of topics and their somewhat contingent disposition prompts a cautious approach on assessing the kinds of relationships amongst the different writings and how or if they were combined for instructional purposes. Issues particularly worth exploring are how the materials on figured bass and counterpoint in the later sections of the manuscript compare to the types of materials found earlier and also, more broadly, how they relate to other sources about music roughly contemporaneous with the later layers of the manuscript.

Image from manuscript 244, Hanson-Dyer music collection, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library, comprising more than 20 theoretical texts on musical rudiments and performance from the late 14th to the early 17th centuries.

Friday 29 May 2015, 9.30am–4.00pm

Dulcie Hollyock Room, Baillieu Library, The University of Melbourne

