CALL FOR PAPERS

Valorizing Clemens non Papa: Towards a Polycentric Model for Renaissance Music

An International Conference organized by the Center for Early Music Studies (Boston University) and the Alamire Foundation (Leuven)

November 6-7 2015

The Renaissance composer Jacobus Clemens non Papa—whose epithet “not the Pope” must have been a joke—ranked among the best-known, most widely distributed, and apparently most influential composers of the sixteenth century. An astonishingly prolific composer of masses, motets, chansons, and vernacular psalms, Clemens consistently demonstrates an inexhaustible imagination that seizes vividly on his texts to create soundscapes of drama and depth. In addition, his work was a staple for instrumentalists, who extended his fame through their many arrangements of his vocal music adapted for keyboard, ensemble, and most of all, lute.

But even to specialists of the period, the composer and the man behind the music remain a cipher. Unlike most of his illustrious contemporaries, Clemens does not seem to have ventured far from home. Hardly any biographical information survives; what little we know, moreover, suggests an unstable character—"a great drunkard," as one contemporary called him—who seems to have lurched from job to job. With this uncertain biography go problems of transmission: his music survives in a broad array of printed and manuscript sources, but we face enormous difficulties in determining their authority, and his considerable output has yet to receive systematic and consistent attention.

There are several reasons for this. The first is the manner in which Clemens has been positioned as part of the “Post-Josquin” group of composers—a transitional period allegedly characterized not by innovation and craft, but by an extended, formalistic application of “pervasive imitation” and playing to the demands of the commercial market, in the first boom age of music printing. Following (but never succeeding) Josquin, these composers are generally seen in histories as a “lost generation” who essentially kept the seat warm for Palestrina and Lassus. As with the music of contemporaries such as Nicolas Gombert, the aesthetic quality of Clemens’ output is grossly undervalued in this pervasive historical narrative.

Clemens is barely given a name-check in the standard reference works. Yet contemporaries did not see it this way, and we might ask if we should either. Confronting Clemens’s brilliant music from various musicological, historical, and performance perspectives forces us to question the entire hierarchization and prioritization that underlies conventional views of Renaissance music. It offers the chance to scrutinize such notions as “central” and “peripheral” traditions and source types, “greater” and “lesser” composers, singular versus plural modes of performance, the relationship between models and adaptations, and editorial practice. Understood in this fashion, Valorizing Clemens becomes not only a re-evaluation of a too-often marginalized figure, but opens paths to different ways of understanding a major period in musical history.

This two-part conference (a second conference will be organized in Leuven in 2016), organized through the partnership of the Boston University Center for Early Music Studies and the Alamire Foundation in Leuven, Belgium, will thus use the figure, musical output and historical position of Clemens as both a subject and subject area—a point of convergence, as well as a point of departure—for new perspectives on issues in Renaissance music. Moving
from magnet model (in which Clemens is the main subject of our inquiry) to a radiant model (in which work on Clemens illuminates a variety of other areas of Renaissance music), the conference will bring together musicologists, performers, historians, and art historians.

Please send abstracts for papers or panels by June 1 2015 to

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http://www.bu.edu/cfa/research/research-centers/early-music/  
http://www.alamirefoundation.org

Organizing Committee  
Victor Coelho  
Joshua Rifkin  
David Burn  
Stratton Bull  
Bart Demuyt

Possible Panels and Themes of Conference

I. Biography, Influence, Worldview
   • Can we make sense of Clemens’s fragmentary biography? How typical is his apparent record of sporadic employment? How does his apparent movement between the northern and southern Netherlands square with the nineteenth-century nationalistic historiography that still sets so much of our agenda when dealing with the music of this period?
   • What is the relationship to “periodization” and to other composers?
   • Influence—Reception—Persistence
   • Motet / chanson texts, Gospel settings, and vernacular works and their meaning to Clemens
   • Clemens’s relationship to Protestantism / psalms
   • Clemens’s imprint on northern composers, both in the Low Countries and in Germany

II. History and Methodology
   • The “Dead Branch” and the “Grand Narrative”—under-researching of music of the Low Countries
   • Periodization and “The Lost Generation”
   • Reception and recent scholarship
   • Relationships to art history (conference should involve the participation of art historians)
   • Historiographical narratives of sixteenth-century music and art
   • Clemens and the North-South divide
   • Clemens and print culture: dissemination, distribution, collectors, purchasing, ownership
III. Works, their Significance, and Performance
- Sacred and secular repertories and their singers: voice types, ensemble size
- Regional (vernacular) sources and owners
- Problems of attribution or authorship
- Rhetoric, counterpoint, details of performance (tempo, pitch, accidentals, text underlay)
- Transmission
- The role of Phalèse
- Reconstruction and editing for performance; “fauxsimiles”

IV. Instrumental Music
- Instrumental transmission of Clemens’ works
- Techniques of adaptation and translation
- Impact of intabulated versions; the creation of “new” pieces
- Memorization and improvisation
- Instrumental music and “mobility”
- The urban soundscape of Clemens

VI. Close Readings, Composition, and Analytical Perspectives
- Beyond “pervasive imitation”: style, structure, and meaning
- Compositional process and parody
- Writing down polyphony: manuscript transmission in the age of printing
- New analytical techniques, Digital initiatives