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Transformation in Intabulation*

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THE CHANGE IN RENAISSANCE lute technique that took place in the third quarter of the fifteenth century as a result of the practices of German lutenists, among them Conrad Paumann, enabled the simultaneous playing of various polyphonic voices on non-adjacent courses. Such a development in technique would seem to be the result of lutenists' awareness of the current polyphonic vocal styles in the late fifteenth century, and their desire to adapt this music to their own instrument. Indeed, intabulations of masses, motets, madrigals, chansons and lieder made up a substantial portion of the sixteenth-century lute repertory. Yet, the surviving sources of this music transmit only the lutenists/composers' final versions of their intabulations from vocal models. Many more must have existed in sketches and in preliminary versions.

On its basic level, lute intabulation requires the arrangement of music from mensural notation into lute tablature. The process, however, was

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2 Some sketches of intabulations may be found in Uppsala, Universitetsbiblioteket, Vokalmusik i handskrift 76b and 76c. The manuscripts are listed in Jan Olof Reden, Music in Tablature: A thematic index with source descriptions of music in tablature notation in Sweden, Musik i Sverige V (Stockholm, 1981), pp. 49-51. The origin and the scribes of Uppsala 76b are discussed in Thomas Gregg MacCrate, "The Manuscript Uppsala, Universitetsbiblioteket, vocalmusik i handskrift 76b," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1985). I am indebted to Professor MacCrate for making available to me some chapters of his dissertation.

more complicated since the intabulator was faced with the time-consuming process of transferring voices originally contained in partbooks and aligning them on a single stave. Some intabulators made intermediate scores to encipher vocal music, and intabulation treatises included scores to assist the student in comparing the vocal model and its intabulation. Although the use of a score does help to coordinate polyphonic voices, it was a more common practice to intabulate the voices directly into tablature, perhaps to avoid setting the vocal model twice.

The "literal" intabulation, then, is the faithful presentation of a vocal model in tablature form. By enciphering each voice separately, the intabulator strives to ensure that no note should be changed or omitted from the model unless there are compelling reasons to do so. Indeed, the

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intabulator often preserves the contrapuntal fabric of the original work even when this results in unidiomatic or technically difficult passages.

More commonly, the technical limitations of the lute force the lutenist to abandon a literal intabulation and rework what cannot be realized in tablature. Discrepancies such as the omission or premature termination of notes are thus inevitable. In fact, the lutenist's technical prowess may both determine his main reasons for arranging a particular work, and provide the means by which he can alter the linear counterpoint of the vocal original.

In the literal intabulation, only the skeleton of the music is presented. The lutenist's artistic license stimulated the addition of ornaments, and the skilled lutenists employed ornaments to help sustain the sound of the lute. Yet some instrumentalists preferred to violate the integrity of the original music with their idiosyncratic ornaments; they omitted notes or rearranged the original counterpoint in order to facilitate the fingerings. Other lutenists created an instrumental version of the vocal model by transforming certain ornaments into a network of motives independent of the original concept. Many intabulations are based not on the vocal model but on a pre-existing intabulation resulting in the creation of an instrumental variation. Finally, pre-existing intabulations became the basis for making abstract instrumental compositions, through the use of parody and paraphrase technique. In this method, bits and pieces of the original intabulation were incorporated with newly composed music. In sum, lute intabulations came to mean not just

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the mere transcription of vocal music but its recomposition, resulting in the creation of an autonomous instrumental genre.

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